Fallen

by Callistemon

Summary

Matt's frequent head injuries finally catch up to him, and he winds up in hospital after a series of seizures.

The problem is, the seizures don't go away. When Matt's former college girlfriend, Elektra, mysteriously shows up in New York wanting help investigating the Roxxon Corporation, Matt quickly finds out epilepsy and his Daredevil activities aren't exactly compatible. But will it stop him?

This is essentially an indulgent hurt/comfort story, as well as a celebration of Matt and Foggy's friendship.

Notes

A note on the timeline: Matt's seizures in the first story in this series, Falling (a relative short fic that I recommend reading first, although this can be read alone) take place within the second season of the Netflix Daredevil series, a couple of weeks after he's shot in the head by Frank Castle. However, I've written Frank out of the story, and thus Elektra's entrance is a little different.

Happy reading!
Another once-off

"Matthew! Wake up!" Elektra slapped Matt lightly on the cheek. "You have to wake up. The security guards are coming." She grabbed his shoulder and shook it violently.

"Wha-?" Matt slurred, trying to locate himself. Carpet bristled under his hands and head. The waft of harsh commercial carpet cleaner became near unbearable as he shifted sideways against the fibres.

Elektra grabbed Matt under the armpit and tried to pull him up onto a leather office chair. He slumped across the armrest, but then his knees buckled and he slid back to the floor. "Come on, get up. At the very least, sit up," he was ordered once more. Matt grunted as he tried to comply, attempting to push himself up with the other hand.

He finally made it onto the chair, sweaty and shaking with the exertion. Almost immediately, he felt the weight of Elektra straddling his lap. She gripped the back of his head, forcing his lips against hers. "They're coming now," she hissed. "Here's the line: you're drunk and we're a just an innocent couple making out in the offices. I'll say the rest."

Matt groaned in confusion. Elektra. Why was Elektra here? Why was he unconscious in a corporate office? There was a cocktail party, but he didn’t drink more than a couple of sips of wine. There were corridors, a secret door… They were looking for something...

Before he could come up with something concrete, two men with crackling radios and the smell of gunpowder stormed the room. Elektra let out a giggle and a shriek - the convincing sound of someone caught making out... if they were teenagers.

The guards pulled Elektra off Matt's lap, eyes narrowed in suspicion.

"Get up," they ordered Matt. There's no way, he thought. His limbs refused to comply. He tried to raise himself, but his leg gave way and he fell back into the chair."

Elektra let out another giggle, still playing the tipsy girlfriend. "He's a bit drunk," she said, "but he's very rich." She swayed theatrically.

The guard waved Elektra aside, and yelled at Matt again. “Get up. Or else.”

Matt shakily got to his feet, holding on to the armrest for balance. He shifted sideways and found the edge of a table, on which he half-leaned, half-sat. His hand bumped against his cane, which was lying diagonally on the table next to him. When did he put it there?

"Take off your glasses."

Matt complied, letting go of the table for an instant to remove them with two hands.

The guard flashed his torch in Matt's eyes to check for pupil response, hoping to discover that he was in fact not blind but one of the two people who had robbed the secret vaults within the Roxxon building only ten minutes earlier. Matt shifted nervously as the guard looked at Elektra and then back to Matt. Matt couldn’t remember exactly how he got into this situation, but he could sense that the guard was on edge and ready to lash out.

"Just a couple of drunks," the guard finally radioed back to the control room. "Go!" he yelled at Elektra and Matt, "get out."
Elektra shoved Matt's cane into his hand, and lifting his arm over her shoulders, dragged him to the door, taking the bulk of his weight.

They stumbled down the stairs and out the front door without further trouble. She shoved him in the back of an awaiting car, and he fell sideways across the leather seats. Why did he feel so tired? His head was pulsing, aching. Had he been drugged? Was he concussed again? He just wanted to curl up and be left alone. His face was uncomfortably smushed against the back of the leather seat, but it felt good to be horizontal again, so he just lay there and quickly drifted off asleep.

Matt awoke when Elektra pulled him back out of the car. He didn't know where they were, and at that stage didn't really care. Elektra took his weight again and they half stumbled across the pavement. He recognised the smells of this particular street and he realised they were outside his apartment building. He stumbled as they climbed the stairs, leaning heavily against the railing, with Elektra pulling him up by the other arm. He was trying, really, but he was too tired. “Can I sit?” he mumbled. Elektra just gave him an even harder tag, snapping, “no Matthew, come on!”

They finally made it to Matt’s apartment. Elektra gave him a slight push sideways onto the couch, letting gravity do the rest of the work. He rolled onto his back and could feel himself drifting off again, delayed only by a gnawing thirst. "Waaer," he slurried, and he soon felt a glass pressed into his hand. He tried to sit up, but quickly gave up. He managed a few sips, but ended up spilling more water on his face and chest as in his mouth. The glass started to slip out of his fingers and he braced for the smash, but just before he dropped it, it was taken from his shaky grasp. He felt a blanket drape over him and he gave a weak grunt in thanks, slipping quickly into sleep.

The next time Matt woke, it was of his own accord. His muscles ached and his head was still pulsing with pain. He could feel the fine weave of a dress shirt against his skin, although the collar was wet with... water, he concluded. He hoped.

"Good morning, Matthew," Elektra said from a nearby armchair.

"Elektra," Matt croaked, his mouth uncomfortably dry. He could feel the slight pull of a crust around his mouth, and Elektra shoved a glass of water into his hand once again. "Drink." Matt didn't need telling. Raising his head slightly, he downed the glass in one go and then sunk back onto the couch, the water sloshing slightly in his now-full stomach.

"Why didn't you tell me you had epilepsy?" she demanded.

"Huh?"

"You had a seizure while we were trying to steal the secret Roxxon ledger. We almost got caught Matthew. You put us both in danger."

"I don't... I don't have-"

"You have brochures on your kitchen bench from the Epilepsy Foundation."

"They're not mine," he lied. He pushed himself upright on the couch.

"Half of them are printed in braille."

"I mean, I don't have epilepsy. I had a seizure - but it was a one off. I've been fine since."
Elektra adopted a more sanguine tone. "When?"

"About a month - a month and a half ago."

"What happened?"

"Slight concussion. I ended up in hospital. It was no big deal. I've been fine ever since." This time Matt really was lying. He'd ended up in hospital for more than two weeks. He'd had three seizures within 12 hours after receiving a second head trauma in the space of a couple of weeks. He ended up on ventilator unable to breathe on his own and had been warned that there might be lasting effects - although as far as he could tell it was only the fatigue that remained. Until now, that is.

"This changes things," she said.

"Changes what?"

"I can’t track the Yakuza with someone who’s going to collapse at any minute. You're a liability."

"It won't happen again." Matt felt like a child being scolded for a misdeed.

"It won't, you're right." He flinched slightly as she bent towards him and kissed him briefly on the top of his head, cupping his chin in her hand. “Goodbye Matthew." And just like that, Elektra was gone.

Matt swore and threw the first thing he could find across the room in frustration (a cushion, fortunately). The muscles in his arm ached with the movement. He gradually eased himself up, and limped into his room, shedding his clothes and making his way into the shower. He tried to recall if anything unusual had happened before the seizure to cause it or the muscle stiffness. Was this how people usually felt after a seizure? The hot water seemed to help both his muscles and his mood, although he felt tired enough to go back to sleep. At least it was a Sunday so he didn't have to work. He could rest. In the end, sleep seemed like the best way of not thinking about last evening’s events and complications. Too tired to source a pair of pyjamas, he curled up in bed naked and promptly fell asleep.

Matt woke up later that afternoon, still sore, but not as tired. He got out of bed and stretched before making himself a coffee in an attempt to jolt him out of this sluggishness. He considered calling Foggy and telling him about the seizure. That would be what Foggy would want. But he didn't want a fuss being made, and it had to be a one-off. He didn't have epilepsy. He *couldn't* have epilepsy. Elektra was right - it was completely incompatible with vigilante activities.

He tried to remember what happened the previous night, but there were massive gaps in his memory. Elektra had turned up in his apartment a few nights earlier and sprouted something about a conspiracy. She needed his help as a lawyer or some such bullshit. Then she’d invited him to a fundraising party to steal – what did she say this morning – the secret Roxon ledger? It was all very mysterious. There was no denying she was a dangerous woman and he was anxious to keep his distance. Yet he had felt energised by her presence. He hadn't felt that kind of thrill since his hospital stay.

Matt unthinkingly gravitated towards the armchair Elektra had slept on the previous night. Her smell still lingered in the leather. Too sore to sit cross-legged (and while he’d never truly acknowledge it, comforted by Elektra’s smell), he closed his eyes and attempted to meditate his problems away.
By Monday, Matt was feeling normal again, save for the fatigue that had plagued him ever since his initial seizures. The tiredness had become his new normal.

He tried to ignore the part of him that was telling him it would be wise to see the neurologist again. At the very least, he should tell Foggy (who would instantly drag him to the neurologist). But as the day wore on it became easier and easier to pretend Saturday night never happened. It was a one-off, he convinced himself. It won't happen again.

"You're in a good mood for a Monday," said Foggy as they walked to Josie's that evening for a post-work beer.

"Am I?" Matt said casually.

"Have you started going out again? Y'know, on your night time wanderings?"

"Yeah," Matt smiled. "Just once."

Foggy was somewhat resigned to the fact that Matt seemed to need Daredevil to feel whole. He sighed, "be careful. You're not exactly in fighting form judging by the way you puff at the top of the stairs every morning."

"Always am."

Foggy rolled his eyes.

Foggy strode into Matt’s office the next day. “Hey buddy, you know how we were talking about turning over new leaves last night?”

“Uh, vaguely,” Matt said distractedly.

“You were going to be more honest with me about your health, and I was going to trust you to let me know if your workload was too much. Oh and we were going to be more systematic about the way we tackle cases – talking to each other and doing things that guy in the small business guide says to do.”

“Yeah, okay.” Matt still hadn’t read the book on small business management Foggy had given him. This was probably not the best time to break this news to Foggy though.

“You don’t sound very enthusiastic.”

Matt stretched and yawned. “I guess I’m just tired.”

“Still? Do you want to go home?”

“No, of course not.” Matt gave him an odd smile. “I might need a bit of time to review that book though.” He didn’t want to say yes to some whacko business theory. Matt knew very well that Foggy could often get sucked into odd fads and schemes. Foggy’s tone was a little ‘fan boy’ when he’d initially given Matt his own digital copy, which set Matt’s internal alarms ringing.

“I really think this is the answer to all our problems, Matt.”

Matt chuckled. “Me not sleeping at work is the answer to all our problems.”
“Actually, more paying clients is the answer to many of our problems,” Foggy pointed out.

“Do you think you could give Brett a call?” Matt asked desperately. “Perhaps don’t use the term ‘interesting cases’ this time though. I don’t think that necessarily translates into ‘innocent clients who can afford to pay.’ I’ll pitch in for a box of chocolates.”

“Tradition says it’s gotta be cigars, Matt.”

“Perhaps Brett would be more willing if we gave his mum chocolates though. Do you see what I’m getting at?”

“No way. Brett’s mum is the ultimate matriarch. If she’s happy, he’s happy.”


Matt tried to remember what he was doing before Foggy interrupted. He ran his hand over his braille display and realised that he hadn’t absorbed anything that he’d been reading for the last hour. His thoughts were on Elektra and Elektra alone. He had to find her. He had to find out what she was doing in New York. He’d do it tonight.

Ultimately, Elektra wasn't hard to find. She was waiting for him in her penthouse.

"I was wondering when we'd see each other again," she purred.

Matt snorted, amused at her figurative use of strong visual language. He'd forgotten how nice it was to be around someone who treated him no differently to anyone else – someone who knew about his abilities and didn't care either way.

"Feeling better?” she said. Such was the neutrality of her tone that Matt couldn't tell if it was sarcasm or genuine concern.

"Yes, thank you."

“I still don’t feel sorry for you, you know.”

“I know.”

"So have you come to beg?” she teased, taking a step towards him. Matt tried not to flinch as she touched his cheek and provocatively drew her finger down his jaw line. “Are you going to beg to join my grand plan to take down the Yakuza?”

"No, I just want to know what you found." Matt needed to retain a shred of dignity.

"Well, while you were feeling sorry for yourself, I found someone who could decode the ledger. He was a filthy NYU professor, whose taste in interior decorating was as bad as his ability to keep secrets under pressure."

"What did it say?"

"Oh nothing much. Smuggling, prostitutes, drugs… you know, the usual activities of a modern multinational corporation,” she said casually.

“You’re excited though. You must have discovered something.”
“I’ve warned you against listening to my heartbeat before, Matthew. It’s not polite.”

Matt scowled.

“Alright, alright, you can stop pulling that face,” Elektra said. “There’s a shipment by rail arriving tomorrow. ”

Matt knew her cryptic words were designed to tease and taunt. He wasn’t going to take the bait.

"So what are you going to do about it?" he said nonchalantly.

"Why? You want me to reveal my plans so you can follow in the shadows?" She walked over to the sideboard and poured herself a drink.

"No," Matt snapped. “I want to know how you're going to deal with it quickly and quietly before getting out of my city. Or preferably deal with it quickly and quietly somewhere else."

"All in good time. Now are you going to join me for a drink or do you have somewhere else to be in that cheap suit?"

Matt pulled a face and turned back to the elevator. He'd had enough of Elektra's games for the evening. He'd figure out what the shipment was and follow her tomorrow night. If indeed there was a shipment. She wasn’t lying, but her source might have been. He knew how to follow someone without detection.

The next day, Matt set up a Google alert for news articles relating to the Roxxon Corporation. Elektra seemed unusually focused on the company and if he couldn’t join her on her mysterious crusade, he’d at least try to keep tabs on the results of her activities through the press. And that’s if they were even reported. He knew it was a desperate move, but he was willing to try anything right now.

He was scrolling through the current search results when Foggy appeared at his door. Matt kicked himself for leaving the laptop screen open. He prayed that Foggy wouldn’t walk around to his side of the desk. Foggy had been exceptionally patient with Matt’s slow work output over the last month – he didn’t want to be seen abusing it.

“How are you going with the Yenken case, Matt?”

Matt used the opportunity to switch computer programs, trying and failing to bring up the Yenken case details.

“Good.” Matt couldn’t remember what the Yenken case was even about. His memory had been terrible lately. He scrambled for something to say to distract Foggy. “Um, are they going to come into the office at some point? I wouldn’t mind speaking to them in person.”

“Not them, she,” Foggy corrected. “You know the case I’m talking about, right?”

“Yeah, of course I do. Ms Yenken – she’s-”

Before he could dig a deeper hole, Foggy interrupted, jokingly whispering, “you want to listen to her heartbeat?”

“Yeah, oh, no. I just think it would be easier if we could meet in person, that’s all.”
“Karen!” Foggy yelled, and Matt could hear a frantic scuffling as Karen quickly came to the door.

“What is it?” she asked, concerned.

“Can you set up a meeting with Ms Yenken?”

“Is that all?”

“All what?”

“You know I’m in the next room, right? You don’t need to yell.” She crossed her arms just to make her point.

Matt had a pained expression on his face. He said in a stage whisper, “sorry, Karen. Foggy won’t do it again, will you Foggy.” Foggy looked a bit embarrassed. “Karen, could you set it up for Tuesday next week?”

“You don’t want to do it sooner?” Foggy asked, and Matt regretted not knowing the nature of the case.

“I just want to be thorough,” Matt said vaguely.

“It’s a pretty open and shut immigration case, but if you need time you need time,” Foggy shrugged. Matt kicked himself. It was probably just as basic as filling out a form and drafting a letter to the immigration department. Oh well…

“Thanks, Foggy.”

Matt found the Yenken files and skimmed the case. “Karen?” Matt called. He heard her scramble quickly from behind the desk.

“Yeah, Matt?” Karen appeared in the door.

“I’m just going to email you the immigration review form for Ms Yenken. Being a government form, they’ve made the PDF as difficult to edit as possible and my screenreader can’t cope. Can you fill it out for me please?”

“Of course.”

“Thanks, Kare.” That was one thing done for the day at least. He turned to the task of the letter.

Karen had only just sat down when Foggy yelled, “Karen!” (Cue more frantic scuffling as Karen jumped up from her desk)

“Coming! You don’t need to yell remember,” Karen yelled back.

“We probably need a better system,” Matt chuckled.

“Owls!” Foggy yelled in response.

“You don’t need to yell, Foggy,” Matt said in a completely normal and yet still audible voice. Of all the things Matt would improve in their tiny office, soundproofing would be number one on the list.
That night, Matt dressed head to toe in black, donning his hoodie and tucking his old black mask into his pocket for good measure. He was still lethargic and quite shaken from the weekend’s seizure. Although he had semi-convinced himself that the seizure was a (second) once off, there was a small part of him that considered what might happen if he had a seizure in his red Daredevil suit. A version of his retro black outfit would do. Besides, his task for the evening was simply to track Elektra and find out what she was really doing in New York. She’d said something about a secret shipment, so Matt headed to the railyards in the hope of hearing something.

He jumped onto a shipping container and waited in a crouch. He was there for almost an hour when he heard people shouting something in Japanese. Not long after, he heard a cargo train pull up. He jumped off the container and crept a little closer. Suddenly he heard Elektra hiss his name from across the yard. He tried to play it cool and pretend not to hear her.

“I know you can hear me, Matthew.” Of course she could. “What are you doing here?” she angrily whispered at a level still completely audible to Matt.

Matt ignored her once again, and instantly regretted it when he found himself pulled into a chokehold. He could smell the stale beer and bourbon on his attacker’s breath and the body odour of a man who had not showered in months. “Stick,” Matt hissed, and Stick tightened his grip.

“Oh, obviously all my lessons were for nothing if I can take you without even trying to be stealthy.”

Matt knew Stick had a point. He was so busy listening out for Elektra that he hadn’t noticed his old mentor approach.

“What are you doing here?” Matt demanded.

“What are you doing here?” Stick countered.

“I was looking for someone,” Matt said cryptically, not wanting him to know about Elektra.

“Oh yeah? Who?”

There was a sudden bang from the train and a shouted command in Japanese, and then the sound of gunfire. Before Matt could even react, he gave a deep moan, fell to the ground and started seizing.

Matt woke up to someone kicking him.

“Get up,” Stick growled, kicking him in the shin.

Matt groaned and rolled over on the gritty concrete. The heavy scent of ammonia gave him an extra push towards consciousness.

"The mind controls the body, Matty,” Stick lectured. “You're letting yourself get weak. The silk sheets, the $40 a pound coffee… you've got weak in mind and body, and look what's happened." He kicked Matt's leg again. "Get up."

"Doesn't work like that," Matt murmured, not quite believing his own words. Maybe the seizures were a sign of weakness. He wasn’t meditating much at the moment, and when he did, it was in a cozy armchair or couch. He could have healed faster. Instead of meditating or training, he lay on the couch and rested. Like he was told to do by Foggy and his doctors. Like a normal person. Yet he wasn't normal. Stick was right. He was weak.
Stick kicked him harder. "Get up.

Matt struggled to his feet, fearing Stick’s wrath. He moved towards the corrugated iron wall and leaned against it, breathing heavily at the effort. His legs were damp, and fuck, Matt realised the source of the ammonia. Trying to ignore the feeling of shame and deep humiliation, he growled, "how did you get... how did you know I was here?"

Stick ignored Matt’s question. "Apparently you were too busy being a pussy, falling over, pissing yourself, to help Ellie with the Hand. I wanted to leave you there and keep fighting, but she insisted we ‘take you somewhere safe’." He said the last words in a parodied sing-song voice.

“Ellie?”

“Yeah, your lover.”

“She’s not - hang on, you know her? You know Elektra? Whose hand?”

"The Hand. You're even stupider than I thought. And lazy. And weak. Go home Matty, you obviously don't have what it takes.” Stick spat on the ground at Matt's feet. Matt didn't move. This was worse than Elektra's reaction. At least she just called him a liability. Stick's words cut much closer to the bone.

Stick stepped threateningly towards Matt, who ducked aside with a stumble. His senses were unusually clouded and he ended up crashing into a wall before finding the exit. He was tired, achy and thirsty, and all he wanted to do was lie down and fall fast asleep, but he had to get as far away from Stick as possible before resting.

Matt found an alleyway that was quiet and not too offensive in its smell. He sat down on an upturned milk crate, leaning against the wall. He'd rest for a minute before making his way home. He closed his eyes and was soon fast asleep.

Matt awoke when a can ricocheted off his head. "Shit he's waking up," a small boy shrieked to his friends.

"Hey!" Matt called angrily at them.

"Drunk fuck!" They yelled back as they ran away.

Matt slunk home still feeling sore and exhausted. He smelled like stale urine and sweat. He could no longer avoid the reality. This seizure was not a one-off.

Matt woke the next morning to the vibrations of his burner phone in the pocket of his hoodie, which he was still wearing from the night before. He fumbled with it, pressing the wrong button the first time so that it beeped angrily back at him. He tried again.

“Hello?”

“Matt?! Where are you?”

“Er, home?”

“Is that a question or a statement?” Foggy snapped. Matt just sighed in response.
“Why are you answering your burner phone and not your regular one? I tried it six times! You haven’t been shot again, have you?”

Matt rubbed his brow in frustration. “Of course not. I – I don’t know where my phone is. It’s lost charge and I can’t ring it.” That wasn’t entirely a lie. Matt had taken his burner with him the previous night and left his regular one at home, but he couldn’t remember where. If it wasn’t ringing then it had to be out of battery.

“Are you okay?” Foggy smelled a rat.

“Yeah- actually, I’m feeling a little under the weather.”

“Do you need the day off?”

“Um, no… what’s the time?” Matt pushed his sheets away, and was greeted with a waft of filth from the previous night’s activities. He screwed up his nose in disgust.

“Midday.”

“Shit,” he whispered to himself.

“I was about to come round to check on you,” Foggy said. “Do you want me to come round? I could help you find your phone.”

“No, it’ll turn up.”

“Can I bring you some food or anything?” Foggy persisted.

“I- I think I might take the day off after all if that’s okay, Foggy.”

“Of course. Just – well, just call me if you need anything, okay?”

It felt terrible lying to Foggy, particularly after all his support over the last month or so. Matt struggled out of his hoodie and made his way to the shower, but not before he’d tripped over his soiled pants that he’d chucked on the floor when he got home last night. He retched at the pungent smell. His senses felt a bit raw right now.

Matt spent longer than usual in the shower, the hot water calming his aching muscles once again. His shoulder seemed to be sporting a new bruise. Maybe he’d hit something when he fell. Maybe it was Stick. It wouldn’t be completely out of character to kick someone while unconscious.

The thoughts of shame, humiliation and regret swirled round and round. How could he be so stupid as to put himself in the position where he could be seen like that. Witnessed by Stick of all people. And Elektra. There was something about Elektra. He tried to pull his vague memories into something solid. Something happened last night…it was important. If only he could remember…

After the shower and obligatory coffee, Matt shuffled round the apartment searching for his phone, finally finding it next to the fridge instead of its usual spot. Stick was right. He was undisciplined. He had to do better. He’d meditate properly this time. Rationalizing that the continued seizures were the result of his own laziness and self-discipline, Matt decided not to call his neurologist just yet. He could deal with this on his own.
Two days after his seizure in the railyard, Matt felt much better physically, although his memories of Wednesday night were still a blur. Matt could see a pattern: seizure, tired the following day, then relatively better the next, apart from a light ache and a clouded memory.

"Feeling better?" Foggy asked as he walked into the office.

"Much. Sorry about yesterday - for not calling in sick straight away. I slept in."

"That's okay. I just worry. You're still recovering, and you've not really proven yourself a good judge of when to rest. I don't mind when you do. Just let me know so I don’t worry."

Matt could feel Foggy's concerned gaze on him all day. He tried to look productive, scrolling through the documents he was reviewing as fast as he could. Come 5pm, Matt excused himself, saying that he was tired and needed to go home.

"Before you leave-" Foggy stopped Matt as he was leaving the office. "What's happening with our new client? The rich one."

"Oh I don't think that's going to work out," Matt said, inching out the door.

"Damn. So we have to return the money?"

"Ah, no," stuttered Matt, trying not to look as shifty as he felt. “She said we could keep it… uh, for our time."

"She?"

"Yeah."

"Who is-"

"Foggy, can we talk about this tomorrow?" Matt stammered, not wanting to talk about Elektra. Not right now. ‘I’m sorry, I’m so exhausted.’"

Those cryptic answers! Foggy could tell Matt was holding something back, but he didn't press him.

"Go." Foggy prompted. "Get some rest. I'll see you tomorrow."

As soon as Matt got home, he changed into a pair of black jeans and hoodie. He had to visit his costume-maker and inventor extraordinaire, Melvin Potter, to find out if there was something – anything - that could assist him with potential seizures. Maybe extra padding in his helmet or a warning system (could machines sense these things?), or perhaps a less obvious outfit so that if he was found unconscious in an alleyway, his Daredevil identity wouldn't be revealed. For some reason that last option, while the most practical, was also the most depressing. It was an acknowledgement that future seizures were likely to happen.

Matt had almost made it to Melvin's workshop when he had yet another seizure. He fell into the doorway of a now closed shop and started convulsing. His hood fell away as his head fell against the sidewalk. A string of saliva pooled beneath his face, smearing his cheek with dust from the
People kept walking by, averting their eyes instead of attempting to help. A little girl pulled on her mum’s skirt, staring at Matt’s convulsing body and vacant gaze. “Mommy, what’s that man doing? He’s acting funny.” The woman pulled her child close to her and kept walking. “Don’t look,” she told the little girl. “It’s just a drunk.” Fortunately, the next passerby recognized Matt's behaviour and called 911.

The seizure was longer than the previous two and only ended shortly after the ambulance arrived. Matt was barely conscious and couldn’t even give them his name. He batted weakly at the paramedics as they stuck a cannula in his hand. It was all too familiar. The oxygen mask rubbed against his stubble, and he tried to push that away too - a fruitless task that resulted in it being readjusted every time. Eventually he gave up and just lay there, tears of frustration welling in his eyes as he once more fell asleep.

He woke up again in the ER, surrounded by padded railings and a melange of strange smells and sounds. He tried to get up, but someone grabbed his shoulder and ordered, “you have to lie down, sir. You’ve had a seizure. You’re in the hospital. Can you tell me your name?”

Matt hit out, and there was a yell of pain as he connected with something hard. A chin. There was shouting and multiple hands grabbed him, holding him down. He tried to escape, but the grip and weight of his opponents was too strong, and he was too tired, too weak (“you're weak, you're a pussy”). They shackled his wrists to the bed, and he felt a chemical haze wash over him, adding to the existing exhaustion and confusion.

Something was clipped onto to his finger. In the haze he could just make out some of the words. They sounded muffled and far away. “This will be more comfortable,” one of them said as they swapped his oxygen mask for a nasal cannula, but it was just as plastic-smelling and itchy. He tried to rub it off on the pillow. They wiped his face with a towel, roughly mopping up the sweat and dirt that had accumulated on his brow and around the mask. He tried to get away from the scratchiness, irritably shaking his head in an attempt to move away from the towel, but they merely held his head still and admonished him for his lack of co-operation. They wiped a cool cloth across his right temple, which was accompanied by the familiar smell of medical alcohol. He instinctively pulled away as he felt the corresponding sting on his raw skin. His oxygen tube was readjusted, and he felt the clean, cool air shooting up his nostrils, battling with the cloud of sedatives. His tongue clicked with dryness as he opened his mouth trying to ask for water. The taste in his mouth was horrible.

They must have spotted him trying to communicate because they immediately asked for his name once again, but he couldn't find the words, let alone the energy to respond. Why would they give him sedatives and then ask him to speak? Where was his protector, Foggy? He tried to mime drinking water, forgetting the restraints. He pulled weakly at one of them, and they patiently explained the situation to him again. "Just rest for a bit," one of them said, pulling the blanket halfway up his chest, and Matt drifted off once more.

Claire was rostered on for the night shift. The nurse doing the handover gestured at the cubicle in the corner. “Lastly, we have a John Doe. Came in following a seizure on the street, eyes unresponsive to light. He hasn’t been able to give us his name or any medical history. There’s a small scratch on his head, but no indication of a major trauma. We’re just waiting for radiology to free up so we can do a CT.” She briefly ran through his vitals. “The other thing is that he has a number of significant scars across his torso, back and shoulder, which suggests a history of self-harm or violent behaviour. He was aggressive and disoriented when he came in, so we had to
sedate him and—"

Claire didn’t wait for her to finish. She hurried over to the end bed. Seizure, eyes unresponsive, scars, aggressive and disoriented... it was too much of a coincidence.

"Shit," Claire said as she saw Matt lying there unconscious, restrained. "Matt? Matt, can you hear me?" She gently shook his shoulder, trying to stir him. He jerked in response, but didn’t open his eyes. "Did you not think to look in the register for a recent patient with seizures who's blind?"

"He’s blind?"

"Yes," Claire said impatiently. “That's why his eyes were unresponsive to light. His name is Matthew Murdock. He came in about six weeks ago with a head injury." She checked Matt’s monitors as she spoke.

"I'm sorry, we've been really busy. We had to sedate him after he hit Paul. But it's good that we know. We can wake him up and get the doctor to reassess him."

The handover nurse watched as Claire tried to talk to Matt again, holding his hand all the while.

"Do you know him personally?"

"Not well. Just from his time here recently," she lied. "He was here for about two weeks."

"Is it going to be a conflict to look after him here?"

"No, it's fine. I don’t know him that well. But we need to contact his friend. He needs to be here when Matt wakes up. He tends to get quite agitated when he comes to."

“Yeah we noticed,” the nurse grumbled. “I’ll let you ring his friend if you already know him,” she added, eager to escape Claire’s wrath. “We’ve finished the handover so I’m going to head home. Bye.”

Claire ran her hand over Matt’s hair and said softly, “Matt, if you can hear me, you’re in the hospital. You had a seizure. I’m going to come back, but I need to call Foggy first, okay?” Matt didn’t move or respond in anyway, so Claire just gave his hand a squeeze and headed back to the nurses’ station.

Foggy yelled at the cab driver to change lanes - something that he would never usually consider doing. But Matt was in the hospital once again and he couldn’t help but feel guilty. He’d let Matt go home alone, even though he was unwell. Stupid, stupid, stupid. Frustrated, Foggy eventually yelled at the cab to stop and ran the last two blocks to Metro General, deeming it quicker than sitting in traffic.

Claire was forced to intervene when the administration officer tried to stop Foggy from going straight into the ER without proof of kinship. Claire could see the security staff approach and told Foggy to “chill the fuck down” before explaining the situation to the overbearing guards. As she led Foggy to Matt’s side, she hissed, “they’ll kick you out if you don’t behave. There’s a new no tolerance policy. It usually applies to criminal assholes, but they won’t hesitate to use it if you push them.”

Foggy’s stomach fell when he saw Matt. It was too close to the nightmare that had been Matt’s last stay in hospital. Here he was again, hooked up to monitors, oxygen and IVs, but this time heavily sedated and restrained against his will. And alone. He looked so small and vulnerable.
Foggy touched Matt’s arm, and then clasped his hand. “Matty, can you hear me? Can you squeeze my hand?” His stomach sank when Matt didn’t respond.

"Are we back at the beginning?" Foggy asked Claire. "Is he going to end up on a respirator again?"

"No, not at all. There's no evidence of a trauma – the scratch is just superficial. He had a seizure in the street and someone called an ambulance. He didn't have any ID on him and the staff here didn't recognise him from before. At first, they assumed his lack of pupil response was due to an unidentified head injury, but before they could scan his brain, he woke up agitated and hit one of the nurses. That's why they had to sedate him."

"I'll sue their asses."

"No you won't," Claire scolded. "I'm not apologising for the mistake, but we're all overworked and underpaid, and mistakes happen. We can't be expected to remember the hundreds of patients who pass through here every day. And if a patient poses a violent threat to the staff or themselves, we need to take action. You know that.” She adopted a more sanguine tone. “Look, you're here now. He'll wake up and you can take him home once we've given him the all clear."

Foggy rubbed Matt's hand and murmured, "you'll be okay. I'll take you home soon."

Claire pulled the curtains around the bed. "Foggy, I have other patients I should get back too. I'll check in on you in a bit. If you need anything press the call button."

"Wait-"

Claire stopped and raised her eyebrows, expecting a thanks.

"Where's his stuff? His cane and glasses. You said he didn’t have ID. Did he get robbed?"

"No idea,” she said brusquely. “I have to go."

Foggy turned back to Matt, still rubbing his hand. "Hey Matty, it's Foggy. I'm here, buddy. Can you squeeze my hand?" He held Matt’s hand for half a minute before muttering, “That's okay... I guess you're still sleeping..."

Foggy fretted over him for a few minutes, flattening some of the rumpled wires attached to Matt’s chest so that he could better cover him with a blanket. He sat down for a moment, fidgeting, before deciding the angle of the IV tube was probably tugging on Matt’s hand, so he adjusted that too, aligning it with the side of the bed. Then he shifted the padded inserts a little so that they fit snugly along the rails. Foggy stood there, shifting on the spot, watching Matt’s chest rise and fall with each breath. Eventually, he returned to the seat, jiggling his leg with nerves.

He got out his phone to text Karen, but he didn’t know how to word the message and gave up. He’d wait until Matt was conscious again. Best not to worry her. He put the phone away and almost immediately drew it out again. Opening the browser, he typed in ‘epilepsy’ and clicked the first entry. He’d briefly researched seizures when Matt had his first event, but he was more concerned with the lasting head injury back then. As he read through the article ‘Epilepsy 101 for newly diagnosed patients’, he realised the gravity of the situation. It looked like if Matt had had another, it was likely that he’d keep having them – at least in the short term. He sighed and put away the phone, reaching for Matt’s hand. Even if Matt wasn’t conscious, Foggy suspected that he could often still feel Foggy’s presence through his heartbeat.

They admitted Matt to an upstairs ward a couple of hours later. The doctors suspected he’d probably be okay to go home the next day, but in the meantime, the wards would probably be
quieter and less stressful for Matt once he started waking up. It would also fast track the all-important appointment with a neurologist.

It was the early hours of the morning when Matt roused. Despite previous theories about Matt's ability to fight sedatives, he seemed unusually affected by this lot.

Foggy was fast asleep in the chair next to him, hand still holding Matt's. He could feel Foggy's heartbeat through his hand. Steady, resting, grounding. He pulled at the restraints, and he felt the cannula in his hand shift in his vein. He had a chill of déjà vous as he realised that he was back in hospital, restrained and attached to half a dozen wires and tubes.

"Fogh..." he groaned.

"Matt," Foggy half-groaned back as he sat up and rubbed Matt's arm in reassurance.

"Why?" He pulled at the restraints and Foggy immediately pressed the call button. Foggy didn't bother waiting for permission. He simply unwrapped the soft cuffs from Matt's wrists himself. Matt clicked his fingers a couple of times to try and orient himself in the room. His senses were always dampened by sedation, but he could boost his echolocation abilities through the clicking sound.

"You're in the hospital. Can you sense it? Do you want me to describe the room?" Foggy recognised Matt's attempt to ground himself.

"S'okay." His voice was a little slurred. Matt licked his dry lips and Foggy grabbed a cup of water from the bedside table, holding it to Matt’s mouth. He took a small sip, holding the cup in two shaking hands.

"You were disoriented last night and they ended up sedating you and restraining you. Do you remember what happened?"

"No," Matt half-whimpered.

Foggy hated seeing Matt in this state. It was so odd to see Matt so vulnerable. He'd always been so strong, so stubborn, so unable to ask or accept for any kind of assistance. But here he was once more tethered to the bed, reliant on others and requesting Foggy's help.

"You had another seizure. Someone found you in the street and called an ambulance."

"Did people see me?"

"Really? That's what you're worried about?"

Matt didn't say anything. It probably wasn't the most pressing concern following this latest seizure, but still...

"You didn't have your cane with you… or your glasses or ID. Maybe someone stole them while you were unconscious. Do you know what you were doing at the time? It was not long after you left work."

So many questions. Matt didn't know how to respond. He vaguely remembered needing to go to Melvin’s, but he couldn't remember if he'd had the seizure before or afterwards. The holes in Matt's memory were the most distressing thing of all. But how to tell Foggy that he was in the occasional habit of venturing out without his cane and glasses, merely 'disguised' in a hoodie. Then again, Foggy would find out sooner or later when they got home and found his glasses on the bench and
cane resting against the entrance wall.
"I think I left them at home."
"You think?"
"I know."
"But you were in normal clothes. You weren't in your Halloween costume."
"I was wearing my hoodie."
"But why?"
Matt shrugged. "I needed a walk."
"Don't lie to me, Matt."
Before the argument could escalate, the nurse finally arrived. She shooed Foggy out of the way, checked the monitors, and started the all-too-familiar neurological assessment.
"Can you tell me your name?"
"Matthew Murdock."
"Can you tell me where you are?"
"Hospital."
Foggy was relieved that Matt could answer the questions so easily this time round.
"I'm going to hold your hands now, and I need you to squeeze my fingers when I say." She touched the backs of each hand as a warning before putting her hands in his.
He seemed to pass the test because she told him to rest and wait for his neurologist, Dr Millet, to visit.
"Dr Millet… is that the same one as before?" Foggy asked. He directed the question a little ambiguously at both the nurse and Matt, unsure as to whether Matt ever followed up on his doctor's appointments.
Matt nodded.
Once they were alone, Foggy scowled at Matt. There was something his friend wasn't telling him and it drove Foggy mad.
"You want to say something," Matt finally prompted.
Foggy rolled his eyes. "I thought you needed your full senses for that trick to work."
"No, it was an informed guess based on your past behaviour. No senses needed."
Matt was saved from further interrogation by a well-timed phone call about a potential case. They were in dire need of more work so Foggy stepped outside to get better reception. Almost immediately, Elektra appeared at Matt’s door.
"Foggy isn’t talking to a potential client, is he?" Matt said, recognising her smell and stance
instantly, despite his muffled senses.

"Current client actually. It’s one of my employees, and as Nelson & Murdock are my lawyers, I’m sure Foggy won’t mind answering a few questions."

"What are you doing here, Elektra?"

"I heard you were in hospital and I thought I’d pay my respects." She walked over to his IV, and fondled it, tracing the tube down to Matt’s hand, which he quickly shook off.

"Why? What’s your real reason?"

"Not everything is a conspiracy, Matthew." She sat on the edge of his bed, legs crossed. “I missed you.” She leaned towards him and whispered, “and I want to know what you were doing down at the docks the other night.”

"How do you know Stick?" he countered.

Elektra sat up straight again.

When she didn’t respond, Matt said, "tell me. When we met, was it fate? Was it luck? Or was I a mission?"

"Mission."

When Matt didn’t respond, Elektra said in a softer tone, “Stick trained me for a long time - like he trained you. He’s not a sentimental man, but he wanted you back. He wanted you to forget about law, your friends, your city… He thought I could distract you.”

“He was right.”

Elektra laughed bitterly. “No, he wasn’t…” She took a deep breath. “Because I did the thing I promised him I’d never do - I fell in love with you, Matthew. Listen to my heart if you have to. You know it’s true.”

She leaned towards him, and this time he jerked away – a difficult thing when tethered to the bed with wires, tubes, not to mention, fatigue.

“Tell me about this Hand thing,” he demanded.

“You can’t take them on if you keep falling over,” Elektra said bluntly.

“Tell me about the Hand,” Matt repeated slowly.

Elektra sighed. “It’s a secret Japanese organisation. Ancient. Deadly. They’ve been buying up properties around the city and moving unknown cargo into New York. We’ve been trying to figure out why.”

“What do they do?”

“They kill people, Matthew. They have an army of deadly assassins who are trained from birth to kill without mercy. Their leaders are near immortal thanks to powerful magic. I believe you’ve met one of them already – a man by the name of Nobu Yoshioka—”

“Nobu? You know of him? He - he died last year - a fire – um, he was burnt to death.” Because I let him burn, thought Matt with a hint of guilt.
“Oh no he didn’t. He’s very much alive thanks to their powers of resurrection.”

Matt laughed derisively.

“Don’t believe me then,” she said, tracing her finger around the pads on his chest. With a tone of forced innocence, she asked, “do these detect your powers?”

“Pfft. I thought you were smarter than that.”

Elektra sniggered. “You’re right. I am. I’m just playing with you.”

“I know. But I’m not playing.” He brushed her hand away impatiently. “Get out.”

“Come on, there’s no need to be like that.”

“Get out,” Matt growled again. “And stay away.”

Elektra could be as stealthy as a shadow when she wanted to be, but this time she evidently wanted him to know she was leaving. He listened to the sound of her shoes fade into the distance, but didn’t allow himself to fully relax until Foggy returned.

“No luck, huh,” Matt said as Foggy walked through the door.

“How did you know?”

“A hunch,” Matt said bitterly.

“It was so weird. He had so many questions, but they were all really vague. I tried to get him to come into the office to show me some of the documents he was-” Foggy stopped when he noticed Matt’s pained face. “What is it?”

“Nothing,” Matt said. “I’m just a bit worried about work, that’s all.”

“Shit, sorry. Let’s change the topic. You don’t have to worry about that right now.”

“Maybe we could advertise in-”

“Matt!” Foggy said sharply. “Don’t worry about it. We’ll talk about it when you’re back at work, okay?”

“Yeah, okay,” Matt said reluctantly. “Um, so, how was your day?”

Foggy let out a small whine. “What are you even talking about? I’ve been here with you.”

“Oh, yeah. Sorry.”

“You don’t need to make small talk, Matt. Maybe just have a rest.”

Matt sighed and closed his eyes again. Ripples of anxiety prevented him from truly resting. He still didn’t know what Elektra wanted, whether he was just a mouse in her game or whether she genuinely wanted his help. However, it was a moot point as long as he kept falling unconscious in public places. Elektra was right on that point at least.

Matt concentrated on Foggy’s heartbeat. It was slightly faster than normal, but still familiar. Grounding. Matt lifted his hand hoping that Foggy knew what he wanted and Foggy immediately grasped it, pulling his chair a little closer to the bed for comfort. This would do for now.
"Matt, I’m sorry to hear you had another seizure," Dr Millet said as soon as she entered.

Matt stayed silent, so she continued. "Is this your first seizure since your last hospitalisation?"

"Yes," Matt lied.

"I know we agreed at the end of your last admission not to keep you on anti-epileptics because you'd been seizure free following that initial string, but we're going to have to now."

Foggy stared. "You mean you haven't been taking seizure medication this whole time?"

"You knew that." Matt said, puzzled. "I thought you knew that."

"No," said Foggy indignantly. "I would have kept a closer eye on you."

"Well, at least not knowing saved you some extra worry," Matt pointed out.

Foggy made a strangled sound of disbelief.

The doctor cleared her throat. "I propose we start you on a popular medication, and see how you go. We gave you a dose intravenously last night and again this morning, but you'll take it orally from there on. I know we went through basic seizure first aid before, but now that it's recurred, we need to talk about long-term treatment and management."

Foggy asked, "what triggered this? I mean he didn't have one for ages."

"Sometimes people have seizures only once every month, or year. It can be triggered by stress, lack of sleep, illness, hormones, alcohol or other drugs, light - although light obviously isn't a factor in your case. These things all lower your seizure threshold. Have you been under particular stress lately, or have you missed sleep?"

"Um," Matt hesitated.

"I expect your circadian rhythms are disturbed by your lack of light perception. Do you have a consistent sleep-wake cycle?"

Foggy was trying his best not to butt in, and his behaviour was making Matt anxious.

"Foggy, would you mind giving me a minute alone with the doctor please." Ever polite.

"Oh, yeah sure. Privacy."

Matt exhaled as Foggy shut the door. The doctor waited for Matt to volunteer the information that he obviously didn't want to share with his friend. She was starting to glean the nature of their relationship: a platonic friendship as close as they could get. Foggy was incredibly caring, but she could tell Matt felt a little smothered at times. At the same time, she could sense Foggy's frustration at Matt's lack of self-care - a frustration that she too shared.

"I had two other seizures before this one," Matt finally said with a hangdog expression.

"Recently?"

"Two days ago and about a week ago."

"It would have saved you a lot of grief if you'd told me straight away."
"I know," Matt whispered. "I thought they might go away."

"A single seizure under extreme stress - like the head injury you suffered - might be a one-off, but it's clear that this is not going to go away on it's own. We need to get this under control, do you understand?"

"You won't tell Foggy," Matt said - a half statement, half question.

"No, doctor patient confidentiality prevents me from doing so without your consent."

Matt nodded. He knew that, but Foggy had been so involved in his medical treatment lately that the boundaries seemed blurred.

"Is there anything else you want to tell me about the seizures that you don't want Foggy to know?"

"No, I don't think so. I just need to know how to be as independent as possible." The doctor was unsurprised at this last comment. Matt evidently prided himself on his independence and was quite resistant to Foggy's offers of long-term help.

"I understand how important that is to you. You live alone if I recall."

Matt nodded. "Although Foggy stayed with me after I got out of hospital for about a week."

"I'd like someone to stay with you for awhile - just until we have your seizures under control, or at least we know the nature of your seizures."

Matt balked at the prospect of asking Foggy to move in once again.

"Would your friend, or another friend or family member be willing to move in temporarily or have you to stay? If you get stressed in unfamiliar spaces, it might be better to have someone move in."

"I don't - I don't have any family. I can't ask..."

"You can't ask Foggy for help?"

Matt nodded.

"Would you like me to talk to him? He seems fairly amenable to helping."

Matt shook his head miserably. He couldn't ask Foggy to move in again. The couch was fine for one night, but it wasn't all that comfortable for either of them over a week, or... "how long?"

"It depends on if and how often you have further seizures, the nature of the seizures and your recovery afterwards, and how you adjust to the medication."

"He would move in without a second thought," Matt said. "But I don't want to ask."

"I could arrange for you to stay here for an extra couple of days if you'd prefer, but you will still need someone when you go home for at least six weeks."

"Six weeks?!" Matt had expected her to say a week, two at the most.

"At least," Dr Millet emphasised. "That's how long it took for you to have another seizure, although the last three were in a worryingly short amount of time. This is a serious matter, Matt. I'm assuming there was no one around during the previous two who timed the seizures or helped you."
"No," Matt lied. He wasn’t about to ask Elektra for information, and there was no way Stick would have bothered with something like timing a seizure. After all, Stick’s ‘help’ consisted of kicking Matt and yelling at him to get up. Best to keep those details to himself.

"How did you feel afterwards?"

"Tired. I slept for... I don't really know."

"That's completely normal," the doctor reassured him. "Anything else?"

"Thirsty. Headache, a bit breathless... and I kind of ached all over."

"Also normal. Your muscles get quite the workout."

"I go to the gym regularly though. My muscles already get a heavy workout” (although mostly when I'm beating criminals unconscious, he thought).

"I can see that," the doctor said, smiling. "You seem very fit, and that's good. It's important that you keep exercising. And don’t feel like you need to restrict your normal activities, even though I know it can be quite daunting. People often feel quite vulnerable and frightened when they're first diagnosed with epilepsy."

"Epilepsy? So that's what I have now?"

"Yes, you've had multiple seizures now. We call recurring seizures epilepsy."

Matt was still somewhat in denial. Naming it made everything worse. He now had two labels. Was it not enough that he was blind?

"Just to return to your post-seizure symptoms. Was there anything else? Confusion, inability to form words? Some people lose control of their bodily fluids - you might urinate or vomit, for instance.

Matt frowned and said in a small voice, “I wet myself the second time. I didn’t mean to…”

“It’s not your fault, Matt,” she said matter-of-factly. “Was there anything else afterwards?”

He pulled at a loose thread in the blanket. He wasn’t used to sharing. “I was confused. And I had trouble speaking for a little bit.”

"Do you know how long for?"

"No, not really. It’s hard to measure time."

"This is why it's important that someone stays with your for awhile. They can time your seizures, time your recovery, assist you as necessary. There's a risk of falling onto objects or hitting your head, so it's good to have someone on hand just in case too. We recommend taking precautionary measures like not having baths alone, to be extra careful when cooking... I'm sure you're already hyperaware of these things as it is."

She looked at Matt, who was anxiously fiddling with the edge of his blanket.

"As I said, I'll get someone to go over these things with you in detail before you leave. The sheer amount of information can be overwhelming, I know. I also need to know if you remember experience any warning signs beforehand.”
"Warnings?"

"Some people see auras, some people lose their hearing, or hear a high pitched ringing. Sometimes people experience nausea, a change in mood, or sensations in their body - a tingling feeling on their skin, for instance."

"no... not that I can recall. It would be useful."

"Yes, it can give you the opportunity to find a safe place at least."

"So you can't stop it if you get the warning?" Matt was determined to tune into his brain's changes.

"You can take a benzodiazepine – we've given you Lorazepam when you've come in with seizures, but I'll prescribe another type for you to take home. It might not stop a seizure but it can help shorten it."

"No, I don't want to take them. I meditate. That will help."

The doctor sighed. Compliance with medications was one of the tricky aspects of treating epilepsy. Side effects were common, and patients would often stop taking the medication either due to the side-effects, or because of the cost, or often just because they had been seizure free for a period.

"You don't have to take the benzos if you don't want to. If you find meditation relaxing then I encourage you to continue - it can't hurt. But you must take the anti-epileptics. As I said before, if you find one isn't working for you, we can try another, but it's vital that you take them and don't miss a single dose. Do you understand?"

Matt nodded slowly, feeling a bit like he was being scolded.

"Now, are you going to ask Foggy if he can stay with you awhile? Would you like me to arrange another couple of days in here for you?"

"No, thank you. I want to go home," Matt said immediately.

"And Foggy? If he's going to stay with you I'd like to talk to you both at once."

Matt knew he didn't have much choice at this point. The doctor would know that he was planning to go home alone if he didn't let Foggy join the conversation. And Foggy wouldn't let him go home alone if he knew that was required.

"I'll ask Foggy," Matt said quietly.

"I'll call him in. I'll give you a couple of minutes alone to talk it over. Or would you rather me ask him directly?"

Normally, Matt wouldn't even consider letting the doctor ask Foggy something like this. He shouldn't be scared of a little thing like this. But Matt didn't know that he'd be able to get out the words at this point.

"You... if you could talk to him. Let him know that he's not obligated. Please."

The doctor left the room and Matt listened to her relay the information to Foggy, who was predictably happy to help. Of course he was. Furious at his loss of independence, Matt kicked the blankets off and leaped out of bed. The combination of tiredness and the residual sedatives in his system caused his legs to buckle beneath him. He stumbled into a nearby chair and he fell
sideways onto the floor sending his IV pole crashing into the adjacent shelving.

Foggy, the doctor and a nurse came running in at the sound, and found Matt on his hands and knees, gripping the arm of the chair in an attempt to get back up. His arm was bleeding where the IV had ripped from his arm, and the oxygen tube was half tangled around his head. He looked and felt a pathetic sight.

"Shit!" Foggy yelped, as the nurse went to help Matt untangle himself. The nurse crouched down and gently helped him into the chair. "Here, I've got your arm. Just sit in this chair for a second while you catch your breath."

Matt wasn't breathless from the exertion. He was internally panicking at his weakness, the information churning round and round in his head, his vulnerability and general anxiety. He was prepared to show Foggy that he didn't need help. That he didn't need to stay for six weeks, that he'd be fine. And yet he couldn't even keep himself from hurting himself in the hospital.

The nurse held some gauze over Matt’s former IV site to stem the bleeding, lifting it occasionally to check the wound. Matt's oxygen was replaced, but he quickly ripped it off again in anger.

Up till that point, Foggy had watched from a distance, feeling helpless and overwhelmed. But he knew that he had to help contain Matt's anger and frustration before it spilled over.

"Matt, I'm here buddy. Hold my hand." Foggy grabbed his hand, but Matt immediately pushed it away.

Matt could hear Foggy's heartbeat jump in response, and was instantly ashamed of his behaviour. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to..." he murmured, offering Foggy his hand.

"I know," Foggy replied.

The doctor asked Matt if she could stick the oxygen monitor back on his finger just for a short while. "You probably don't need supplemental oxygen anymore, but I want to check, okay?" Matt begrudgingly agreed. "I think we're done with the IVs as well, so we won't replace the cannula." Matt flexed his hand, relieved that his arms were free once more. The tape that the nurse used to hold the gauze in place pulled at the hairs and skin on his arm, and he scratched at the site in annoyance.

"Would you like to stay in the chair for a bit longer or would you like help moving back to the bed?"

"I'll stay here." Matt didn't want to suffer the indignity of any further stumbling. He'd wait until he was alone before moving again.

"Okay, if you're happy to continue the conversation from before, I'd like to talk to you both about keeping records about your seizures." As Dr Millet spoke, Foggy scribbled notes in his tiny notepad usually reserved for criminal cases. "Matt, I spoke to Foggy about your living arrangements and he's happy to stay with you once you're released."

"For as long as you need," Foggy added.

"Thanks, Foggy." Matt sat up straight, trying to look as strong and invulnerable as he could.

"My colleagues will give you a special diary that I'd like you to fill out with the dates of any future seizures, the length of the seizures, the length of time it takes to recover, and any pre- or post-seizure symptoms. Foggy, I've already spoken to Matt about post-seizure symptoms, and he can fill
Matt admired the way the doctor avoided mentioning the other two seizures.

"One of my colleagues will be down shortly to go over the diary and seizure first aid with both of you, but do you have any further questions for me?"

"No I think we have enough information, thanks," Matt said politely.

"Okay, I'll see you again in two to three weeks to see how you're going on the new medications. If you're really struggling managing seizures or having trouble with the medications, give me a call. And if you're in doubt as to whether it's an emergency, call an ambulance."

Matt tried to calm his racing heartbeat. It was too much information.

After the doctor had left the room, Foggy said "So... roommates once again, eh?"

"I'm so sorry, Foggy. I don't want to put you out. You don't have to."

Foggy held out a hand to say stop, but Matt kept apologising and telling him over and over that he could change his mind at any time.

Foggy finally interrupted him, “I’ve got hand out to say stop by the way, but maybe not- um, are your senses better yet?"

"Ish," Matt wiggled his hand. "I don’t think the sedatives have quite worn off yet. I'm still feeling pretty dopey."

"Okay, so here's the game plan,” said Foggy in his best business voice. “I'll take you home and then grab some stuff from my apartment. My parents have a small mattress that I'll borrow for a bit. Maybe I could set up a small screen in a corner somewhere."

"I can't let you sleep on the floor - not when I'm putting you out already. Maybe I could come to you."

"You have a far bigger place. Besides, the whole idea of this is to keep you as stress-free as possible. It's best for you to be at home."

Matt rubbed the back of his neck. “Okay, but if you change your mind-”

“Not going to happen.”

“But if you do-”

“Nope. Say it again. I dare you.”

“If-"

“That was a joke. I’m coming home with you whether you like it or not. Now if you’ll excuse me, I need to ring someone about a mattress.” And with that, Foggy exited the room before Matt could find something else to contest.
I should point out that the incident in the street happens more often than you probably imagine. Please don't ignore someone if they need help, even if they do look a little shabby in appearance. (Rant over)
"Get into the wheelchair," Foggy ordered when they were finally ready to leave the hospital.

"No. I'm not crippled, Foggy."

"That's not- you can't -argh," Foggy groaned in frustration. "Just get in would you, you stubborn bastard."

"No."

"Okay, let's walk at snail pace to the taxi," Foggy said sarcastically.

“Let’s.” Quietly celebrating this small victory, Matt grabbed Foggy’s arm and they shuffled downstairs.

"You know, if we're going to be living together, you probably need to learn to compromise," Foggy said as he waved down a cab.

Matt hit his head on the cab door as he got in.

"Ow. You okay? Do I need to take you back inside?"

"I'm fine," Matt snapped, rubbing his head. He couldn't figure out how he misjudged the door. "Just a bit woozy still, that's all."

Foggy deposited Matt at home and then dropped by his apartment to pick up enough things for overnight, planning another trip the following day.

Matt was asleep by the time Foggy returned with an overnight bag and a bag of pungent-smelling takeaway Thai. But as soon as the plastic lids were cracked, he emerged looking rumpled and bleary eyed.

“Hungry?”

“You have no idea,” Matt said, thinking back to the congealed hospital meatloaf that he’d refused to touch at lunch. It must have been over thirty hours since he last ate. “Oh good, he said, sniffing the air enthusiastically. “You got the one with chilli and ginger.”

“Some of your senses are still working then,” Foggy said, setting a couple of plates on the table.

“Even with a blocked nose, you’d be able to smell that,” Matt pointed out.

They ate dinner in almost complete silence. Foggy watched Matt critically as he slowly and carefully tried to spear the stir-fried chicken with accuracy. The usually neat eater soon ended up with noodles and pieces of beansprout in a ring around his plate. There was something very wrong with Matt’s senses. Matt usually didn’t have that much trouble locating food on a plate and Foggy wondered just how long the sedatives would take to completely leave his system – that’s if it was the sedatives.

Foggy finally said, “so, do you want to talk about how we’re going to do this?”

Matt hunched a little, not wanting to think - let alone talk - about the current situation. “Can we- would you be okay if we did that tomorrow?”
“What if something happens tonight?”

“It won’t.”

Foggy sighed.

Matt tried again. “I hope it won’t. If not, you have the first aid training now. If I need help.”

“Okay, that’s fine. But can you tell me what *you* want? Do you want me to stay with you post-seizure? Give you painkillers?”

“No painkillers. Maybe some water. And let me sleep.”

“And if your clothing gets, um-”

“Soiled?” Matt offered with a wince.

“Yeah. If your clothing gets soiled do you want me to change you? I don’t want to do anything you don’t want me to do.”

Matt thought for a moment. He really didn’t want to be having this conversation. It meant acknowledging reality.

Foggy anticipated what Matt was about to say, and reassured him, “I’m okay with whatever you choose. I just don’t want to do something *you* don’t want me to do.”

Matt shifted awkwardly in his seat. He remembered the humiliation of waking up after his seizure in the railyards, smelling like urine and Stick sneering at him to boot. He didn’t want to be lying in damp pants for however long he took to recover, but asking Foggy to change him… like a child…

“Maybe you could - if you just…” Matt swallowed. “Could you leave my boxers on, but- but switch the heavier things? W-would that be okay?”

“Of course, Matt.”

“And not in front of Karen.”

“Deal. Thanks, Matt.”

“Did we just do it?”

“Start and finish talking about how we’re going to do this? Yeah I think we did. Fist bump!” Foggy raised his hand and Matt met it with his fist.

They were interrupted by a call from Foggy’s dad, who was waiting downstairs with the mattress. The subsequent argument between Matt and Foggy over who was going to help carry it upstairs was cut short when Matt dropped one of the food containers on the floor. They both stopped. Matt never dropped anything – and if he did, they both knew he’d normally have caught it easily before it hit the ground. Foggy could see Matt was rattled, so he said, “you’re tired. I’m going to help dad with the mattress. I’ll help clean that up when I get upstairs.” He fled down the stairs before Matt could argue otherwise.

Foggy and his dad had no trouble carrying it up the stairs because in all honesty, the mattress was as light as it was uncomfortable (Foggy suspected he’d be springing for a bit more padding before the week was out). As they threaded their way through the door, Matt stood up to greet them, holding the container in one hand and a handful of noodles in the other. Foggy tried his hardest not
to laugh at the absurd sight. Mr Nelson gave Matt an affectionate hug, ignoring the threat of greasy noodles to his clean shirt.

“I’m sorry to hear you’ve been unwell, Matt,” Mr Nelson said as he patted his back. Apologising for his wife’s absence, he insisted they come round for Saturday lunch, prattling on about how long it’d been since they’d visited, their new widescreen television, the neighbor’s bowel screen results, and other such thrilling topics. Foggy finally interrupted his father’s monologue by subtly hinting that Matt probably needed some rest.

As soon as the door clicked behind Mr Nelson, Matt started back on the noodles, slowly scraping them into the container with an expression of intense concentration.

“Can I help?” Foggy asked hesitantly, not wanting to make Matt feel self-conscious.

Matt sighed and stood up with a slight quiver. “I’m sorry Foggy, I’m not usually this clumsy.”

“I know. You usually don’t spend the night in hospital either. It’s not a problem, buddy. Give me the container and go clean your hands.” Foggy bent over and picked up the remaining noodles, trying not to stare as Matt cautiously walked into the kitchen as if he didn’t quite know if he was going to bump into anything. More like he used to act before Foggy found out about his senses.

It was decided that Foggy would sleep in the living room next to the cupboard holding Matt's Daredevil suit (‘just to make sure you don't do anything stupid,’ Foggy joked).

“Are you sure you don’t want a screen or something for privacy?” Matt asked as Foggy made up the bed.

“From my blind flatmate whose equivalent of seeing is not deterred by something as flimsy as a screen?”

“Well it’s more for you - it’s a psychological thing,” Matt pointed out.

“I guess it’d make things a bit more cosy. I’ll ask around tomorrow. See if I can borrow one.”

“Do you mind if I use the bathroom?” Foggy asked politely. Matt was curled up on the couch and looked like he wasn’t going anywhere soon, but Foggy felt compelled to ask anyway.

“Foggy, you know you don’t have to ask things like that. For the next six weeks – unless you change your mind, of course.”

“Stop, Matt. Back it up. For the next six weeks…”

“Yeah, for the next six weeks this place is as much yours as it is mine. You don’t need to ask to use the bathroom.” With a small smile, Matt added, “now that I think about it, you’ve never asked if you can use the bathroom, so you don’t need to start now.”

“Okey donkey,”

“It’s okey dokey.”

“It’s a joke, Matt,” Foggy chuckled as he made his way to the bathroom. “Your tendency to correct my grammar obviously hasn’t been affected by the seizures.”

“That’s not grammar.”
"Exactly," Foggy called over his shoulder to a confused Matt.

"If you think about it, this is just like college", Foggy yelled from the bathroom as he set out his toothbrush and toothpaste, unloading some ragged towels from a bag.

Matt appeared in the door. 'You don't have to yell, Foggy. I can hear you whisper from the other side of the apartment.'

"Oh yeah, sorry. Not just like college then."

"You know you can use my towels. I don't want to put you out."

"And encrust them with my scratchy skin flakes? I don't feel worthy to use your indulgently soft towels," Foggy deadpanned.

"Suit yourself," Matt said with a shrug. "I'm going to bed." He stopped and turned around. "I know I've already said it a few times, but thanks for this - for your help."

"You've said it a zillion times, not a few times, Matt. And for the zillionth time in response, you're very welcome."

The next morning, Matt heard Foggy leave the house before he'd even crawled out of bed. Foggy returned a couple of hours later with some of his 'must have' items from home, as well as a small folding privacy screen, a bag of bagels and two coffees.

"Is that your ancient TV?" Matt said as Foggy plonked something heavy down on the sideboard.

"Yeah. If I'm going to stay here for six weeks, I figured it was worth bringing it-"

'-and your games?"

"You know me too well, Murdock. And because I know you, I also brought my earphones."

"I didn't tell you at college, obviously, but you know now that I can hear the sound with or without earphones, right?"

"Oh."

"It's fine," Matt said, worried that he'd upset Foggy. "I'm assuming you won't be pulling all nighter gaming sessions now that you're in your thirties and a professional lawyer and business owner."

"Er... I'll put it on silent," Foggy concluded. Matt evidently didn't know the extent of Foggy's current gaming obsession. No need to tell him just yet.

After Foggy had properly set up his sleeping nook and spread his many objects around Matt's apartment, he plonked himself down on the couch. 'What now?"

Matt sat down next to him. "It's a bit weird, isn't it."

"Yeah," Foggy chuckled. "I'm glad I know your quirks already. I'd get a shock otherwise."

"Quirks?" Matt raised his eyebrows.
"Yeah, like leaving everything in the same place."

"That's not a quirk, Foggy. It’s practical. I’d like to see you hunt for a stray sock with your eyes closed."

"Okay, your unnaturally soft towels then. Or your ability to sleep only two hours and function like a normal human being - is that a sense thing by the way?"

"Shall we watch a movie?" Matt suggested, keen to change topic before Foggy came up with anything else.

Apart from the residual static Matt could hear from the old television, living with Foggy was surprisingly easy. Living in a small space during their three years at law school had primed them for this, and there was a reason why they were still best friends.

"Are you sure you're okay to come back to work so soon?" Foggy asked on Tuesday morning as he fiddled with Matt’s coffee machine, trying to remember how it worked.

"Yeah. I complied when you told me to take yesterday off, but now I’m bored.” He walked over and nudged Foggy out of the way. “On – off,” Matt said, pointing to the switch on the base of the machine.

“Plus I want to get everything sorted for Ms Yenken tomorrow,” Matt continued after the five second coffee-machine tutorial.

"Um, that's today, Matt,” Foggy said delicately. “It's Tuesday. And you know I can take care of it if you want to stay home."

"Yeah, but what am I going to do here?” Matt said indignantly. “Just sit around ruminating over what happened on Friday night? Or perhaps the fact that my senses are still screwed, or that my life as I know it is over?"

Foggy rolled his eyes. "You're such a drama queen."

Matt gave Foggy an expression of both disgust and incredulity. "You think this is funny?"

"No, of course not,” Foggy spluttered. “I just think that you'll overcome this. You'll get better. As I’ve said before, you're the strongest person I know."

Matt gave a small huff of disbelief and disappeared into his bedroom to finish getting dressed, leaving Foggy to navigate Matt’s coffee machine alone. After a slightly burnt coffee, they walked to the office together, arm in arm.

Karen greeted them with a forced casual, "hi guys", before hesitantly adding, "I'm surprised you're back at work so soon."

Matt ignored the comment. "Do you have the paperwork for Ms Yenken?"

"Oh yes, the form is filled out and ready to go. Er, I don't know if you remember - her appointment is at 3pm."

"I remember," Matt snapped.
Karen held her hands up. "Okay, I was just checking."

Matt sat down at his desk, opened his laptop, and tried to remember what he was working on last Friday. He could have asked Foggy, but he didn’t want to seem unfit for work. Instead, Matt browsed his most recent files for clues. When that failed, he checked his emails. There was one from Elektra. He clicked on it, hoping that there would be further information about this Hand business.

The email was a disappointment. It was just one line: *I hope you’re feeling better, E.* She was playing a game, Matt was sure of it. He just didn’t know what it was. Elektra didn’t send get well messages. She was more likely to tell him to get over it than wish him well. Matt meant what he said at the hospital when he ordered Elektra to get out of his life and stay away. Yet at the same time, he still felt a strange and unforgettable attraction towards her; an attraction that clouded his instinct to run away; an attraction that almost got him expelled from law school all those years ago.

Matt deleted the email, hesitated, and then changed his mind, filing it away in an unnamed folder instead.

From his office, Foggy could see Matt rubbing his head in frustration and eventually suggested Matt do some rote document review for the day. Matt knew full well that it was Foggy’s way of suggesting he take it easy, but also knew he was not clear-headed enough to do much else.

He started to read the document Foggy sent him: “*The term of this agreement is indefinite and can be terminated by either party…*”

Matt woke up to a tentative knock on the door. "Um, Matt?" Karen said softly. "It’s 2.45. Ms Yenken is due to arrive any moment now. Are you okay to sit the meeting?"

Matt grunted. "Yes, of course. Why wouldn't I be?"

"You were-"

Foggy called from the other room, "you were asleep, buddy."

"No I wasn't."

"Those glasses don't hide *that* much."

Matt sighed. “Sorry, I guess I'm still a bit tired.”

"That's cool. Maybe you just need to do half days for a while - just until you get back on your feet."

"I'm fine," Matt said through clenched teeth.

"Yeah, yeah, you're fine," Foggy muttered to himself. “You only spent the weekend in the fucking hospital."

"I heard that, you know," Matt called.

Before the conversation could descend any lower, there was a knock at the door signalling the arrival of Ms Yenken. Karen ushered her into the conference room, and the two men followed, Matt adjusting his tie as he walked.

Foggy watched Matt critically throughout the meeting. Matt didn't say much, but that wasn't entirely unusual, although it was odd that he didn't take the lead on a case he was in charge of.
They were almost finished when Matt went completely rigid, let out a moan and then started convulsing. He fell off the chair before Foggy could catch him. Karen leaped up, rushing to Matt side and yelling at Foggy, "what do we do?"

With a quiver in his voice, Foggy told Karen to grab the blanket he'd brought in just in case, and tried to go through the first aid that he'd specifically received at the hospital over the weekend. He carefully levered Matt's glasses off his face and stuffed the blanket under his head.

"Do we need to call an ambulance?" Karen asked. She'd been briefed on what to do by Foggy the previous day, including the times when she should and should not call an ambulance, but it was hard not to be scared for Matt mid-way through a seizure.

"No, we just need to wait for him to stop."

"But he’s awake. His eyes are open."

"That doesn’t mean he’s conscious," Foggy snapped. Beneath Foggy’s calm façade he was internally panicking.

Matt stopped convulsing at that point, and Foggy said "1 minute and 20 seconds. Can you write that down?"

Karen scribbled the length of the seizure in her notebook.

"Foggy?"

"Yeah," he said distractedly, wiping the saliva off Matt’s cheek with his shirt sleeve.

"Ms Yenken just left."

"What?!"

"She must have slipped out when I got the blanket."

"Fuck."

Foggy rolled Matt onto his side and tried to rouse him. Matt had closed his eyes almost immediately after the seizure and Foggy didn’t know if this was a good or a bad thing. He was puffing a little, which Foggy took to mean he was not unconscious. Foggy shook Matt’s shoulder gently. "Matt? Matt? Can you hear me?"

Matt gave a soft grunt, which Foggy assumed meant yes. Karen fetched a glass of water from the kitchen, and Foggy knelt down and lifted the glass to his lips as Karen raised Matt's head. Matt seemed to take a small sip, but most of it dribbled down his chin, which Foggy once again wiped away with his sleeve.
Karen looked at Foggy and mimed ‘what now?’ Even with the training, Foggy felt completely out of his depth. Previously, he'd called an ambulance and they'd taken care of things. But this time it was all him.

Touching Matt’s shoulder again, he said, "it's Foggy. I'm just here. Let me know when you want to get up, okay?" Matt took that as the cue that he should be getting up and raised himself up on his elbows before collapsing back onto the ground. “You don't need to get up just yet,” Foggy reassured him. “Do you want to sleep here for a bit?” Aside from Matt’s request on Saturday, the specialist at the hospital had warned Foggy that people often sleep for a couple of hours after a seizure and it was best to just let them do so.

"I need to get another blanket for the office. Maybe a pillow," Foggy said half to himself. He felt weird just leaving Matt on the floor without covering him in a blanket. He dashed next door and retrieved his suit jacket, draping it over Matt’s torso. "I guess we just leave him here until he wakes up,” he said, anxiously picking at his fingers. “I don't know if this is right."

"Is this what they said to do?" Karen said supportively.

"Yeah."

"Well that's your answer."

Foggy sat back his chair with a soft thud and Matt moved slightly in response. "Shit, sorry, buddy. Go back to sleep."

Foggy looked at Karen, "do I just keep working? He probably doesn't want to be stared at while he sleeps."

Karen shrugged. "Your call."

"Okay, could you get my laptop? I'll just work in here for a bit."

Karen tiptoed out to get Foggy's work materials, returning with his laptop and another glass of water. "You could probably use one yourself."

"You're a star. Thanks."

Foggy tried to work, but he found himself back on the Epilepsy Foundation website, double-checking the post-seizure first aid. He'd done everything they said to do, but he still felt so helpless. He knew that Matt was likely to have another seizure, but he wasn't expecting it so soon and in front of a client... who had fled! What the hell?! He didn't want to have to break that news to Matt.

Rather than yell for Karen and risk waking Matt up, Foggy emailed her from the next room, requesting she call Ms Yenken back and rearrange a time to sign the final documents (and pay the bill!). All he needed was for Matt to think it was his fault that the woman left.

Matt woke up again a few hours later, mouth parched and his hips sore from the hard wooden floor. He shivered a little and tried to sit up. He winced as Foggy’s chair suddenly scraped against the floor. “Shit, sorry,” Foggy said, gently touching his arm. “Here, let me help,” he said, pulling Matt into a sitting position while supporting his back from behind. Matt would usually be able to get into a standing position from the floor in a graceful fluid motion, but he ended up stumbling onto one knee, then the next before Foggy wrenched him up under his arm. He swayed a little before finding and leaning on the edge of the table. Foggy seemed to be able to read his mind because before he could even ask, Foggy placed a glass of water in his free hand. “Drink this.”
“Thanks,” Matt croaked. He downed the glass of water in one go and Foggy immediately fetched him another.

"What happened?" Matt asked tentatively, even though he knew he’d had a seizure. The circumstances, however, were less clear.

"You had a seizure and fell off the chair."

"Huh. That might explain the elbow pain then," he said, rubbing his left arm.

Foggy huffed. "Yes, among other things. Do you need an Aspirin?"

Matt just stood there, still slightly zoned out.

“Matt?”

“Oh, sorry. Ah, yeah. Aspirin would be good.” Matt’s head was pulsing with pain.

As soon as Matt had swallowed Foggy’s painkillers, Foggy announced, "Come on buddy. Put your coat on. We're going home."

"No, I have to work," he muttered with a slight slur.

"Nope. It's 5.30. You're saved by the bell."

Foggy held out his arm for Matt to hold, and they slowly made their way downstairs where Foggy hailed a cab for the short ride home.

As soon as they entered the apartment, Foggy asked, "do you need to go back to bed?"

Matt thought about it for a moment. "I think I'll just sit on the couch for now."

"Do you want food?"

"Yeah. Please."

"Do you want Thai, Indian, Chinese, Malaysian, pizza...?" Feeling a little nauseous, Matt shuddered a little at the thought of hot cheese.

"I'm going to teach you how to cook while we're living together, Foggy."

"Smartass. Just tell me what you want."

"Not pizza."

"Malaysian it is."

They ordered dinner and put on a movie. As with Saturday night, Matt managed to spill much of his dinner overboard. He gave up eating only halfway through his chicken rice, and anxiously picked each grain off his pants before falling asleep on the couch.

As the credits rolled, Foggy gently poked Matt awake. “Come on, buddy. You need to go to bed.”

Matt groaned as he opened his eyes.

"Your elbow?"
"No, everything. My head. My muscles. I don’t know why, but they really ache afterwards."

Foggy leaped up and grabbed Matt's epilepsy medication and an Aspirin. "Here. Take these."

Matt screwed up his face at the medication, but swallowed both pills in one go.

In line with the pattern Matt had observed, he still felt pretty tired and groggy the next morning. But he scraped himself out of bed anyway. He had to pull his weight, particularly as Foggy was looking after him at home and taking on almost the entire combined caseload single-handed.

"Feeling better?" Foggy asked as Matt emerged from the bedroom.

"Yeah, thanks Foggy. Sorry about yesterday."

"No apologies, remember?"

"Sorry."

Foggy rolled his eyes.

About mid-morning, a couple of guys turned up at the office with a sleek black couch. Foggy leaped up and signed for it before Matt could figure out what was going on.

"Just in there, thanks," Foggy said, pointing at the far wall of Matt's office.

"What's going on, Foggy? Matt asked with suspicion.

"I got you a couch."

Matt could easily guess why Foggy had ordered the couch, but he was a little miffed at the secrecy. He waited till the delivery guys left before he rounded on Foggy. "We can't afford a couch," Matt hissed. "I'm hardly doing any work."

"Relax, Matt. It's a present from my parents."

"That's even worse. It's too generous."

"Well, it's too late now," Foggy argued. "Besides, it's not new. They just paid for the delivery. It was Uncle Chester's. He thought he was buying a genuine mid-century designer couch, but it turns out it's a replica. So you get a sleek and sexy Danish-designed couch for free. It suits your style, Murdock."

Foggy moved a small table into the space between the wall and couch, and placed a pillow, a couple of blankets, a towel, a soft pair of sweatpants, and a bottle of water discreetly underneath.

Matt screwed up his face, but before he could protest further, Foggy said, "it’s just in case. You might not have to use them, but I think we both know that it's better to be prepared than not. I'm fairly sure that at least part of your soreness is due to napping on a hard wood surface yesterday."

"Thanks, Foggy," Matt eventually whispered, knowing that his best friend was right.

"We'll get you through this, man." Foggy patted Matt affectionately and gave him a small push towards the couch. "Try it out."
Matt felt for the back of the couch, and sat down gingerly, running his hand along the seat. It wasn’t particularly well padded, but the fabric covering was silky and smooth.

“Does it meet your standards, sir?” Foggy said cheekily.

“The fabric’s so soft.”

“A step up from the wooden floors, huh.”

Matt smiled. “I’ll have to thank your parents.”

“Well you’re in luck,” Foggy exclaimed, rubbing his hands together. “Lunch at the Nelsons has been confirmed for Saturday.”

“I don’t know if that’s a good idea, Foggy. What if… you know?”

“Then you’ll have the fluffiest carpet landing you’ll ever come across.”

Matt’s jaw dropped.

“Too soon?” Foggy said nervously.

“Yup.”

Foggy had been warned about the possible short-term memory issues that accompanied seizures. He wasn’t sure how the memory deficit worked in practice until he realised Matt hadn’t asked about the meeting with Ms Yenken yet. Matt was great at hiding things, so Foggy couldn’t be sure if he knew it’d happened but wasn’t saying anything or he genuinely didn’t remember the event.

Foggy wandered over to Karen’s desk and asked in a casual voice, “did you follow up on that, er, departure case?” He knew Matt was listening and didn’t want to tip him off until they’d resolved the issue. He knew he could have emailed Karen a blunt message, but it seemed a little too sneaky for Foggy’s conscience.

Karen looked at him confused at his cryptic words. “The what case?”

“Did you get in touch with our client yesterday afternoon?”

Foggy looked over at Matt who was typing something into his computer with an innocent expression on his face. Too innocent.

Karen finally cottoned on. With a forced nonchalance, she said, “not yet. I left a message. I’ll try again if you’d like.”

“Maybe give it a few more hours,” Foggy said, giving her a meaningful look and tilting his head in Matt’s direction.

“I’ll try again in her lunch break,” Karen said with a wink.

Even with his compromised senses, Matt could tell they were acting strangely. There was something they were keeping from him.

It was with good reason - when Matt figured out what had happened he was absolutely distraught.
He blamed himself, of course.

"It's not your fault," Foggy insisted for the fifth time.

"It's hard to see how it's not," Matt retorted. "It was a simple case. And I managed to scare away the client."

"Karen’s going to contact her. You've already done all the work. Her letter and form are going to be sent to immigration once we get her signature, and she's going to get a bill which she will pay in full."

Matt kept fuming. "I'm going to ruin our practice."

"You won't. And you know what? I don't think I want a client who walks out on someone while they’re having a seizure anyway."

Matt clenched his fists in frustration.

"Can you go work on the Smith case, Matt? It'll make you feel better if you work on something constructive."

Matt noticeably unclenched at Foggy's suggestion. "You're right," he said apologetically. He hesitated, then said in a small voice, “what’s the Smith case again?"

“Sorry, I forgot to go over it with you,” Foggy said, mentally noting that Matt’s memory must be more affected than he expected. “I sent you a document to review yesterday. Do you-” Foggy stopped himself before he could say ‘remember’. “Do you want to check if you have it?”

Matt nodded and returned to his desk, finding the document still open from yesterday, but barely touched. He tried to hide his concern over the fact that he couldn’t even remember working on it by saying loudly, “oh, that’s right. The Smith case,” before forcing a smile for Foggy’s benefit.

“Let me know if you need any help, buddy,” Foggy said as he returned to his own desk and immediately Googled ‘epilepsy memory loss.’

Foggy and Karen had a giggle when they found Matt fast asleep in his chair later that afternoon. It was now an all-too-regular occurrence. "He thinks we don't know," Karen whispered. “He looks so sweet and innocent when he’s asleep.”

"Don't tell him," Foggy said. "I think it's good for him to rest. He hasn't said anything but I suspect the medication is making him more tired than usual. He never used to sleep more than four hours at a time at college, but he's slept more than me since I moved in.”

"Well, he did just get out of hospital. He must be tired."

"Yeah, maybe. We can't let him feel bad about sleeping, okay? I'll work at home on the weekends if necessary... while he's sleeping." Foggy gave a deep sigh. "How the tables have turned."

"You're a good friend," Karen reminded him.

Foggy shrugged. "I'd like to think that he'd do the same for me."
“Please be awake, please be awake, please be awake,” Foggy muttered to himself early Friday morning as he dialled Karen’s phone number. He started nervously pacing the living room when it got to the fifth ring.

“Hey Karen,” Foggy whispered into the phone when she answered.

“Why are you whispering? Is everything alright?” she replied, a little panicked.

“Yeah, it’s fine. Well no, Matt had another seizure this morning. I don’t want to wake him.”

“Already?”

“Looks like it,” Foggy replied. “He only had two days in between this time, Karen. Two!”

“What was it last time?”

“Three.”

“Does that mean it’s getting worse?”

“I don’t know,” Foggy sighed. “The doctor said it takes awhile for the meds to kick in sometimes.”

“Do you need to take the day off?”

“I can’t, but Matt most definitely will. I’m just waiting for him to wake up a bit more and then I’ll break the news. Hopefully he won’t put up a fight.”

“Take your time. You don’t have any appointments until early afternoon,” she said.

“Thanks, Karen. I’ll text you when he wakes up.”

They hung up, and Foggy tiptoed into Matt’s room to check on him. Matt had barely made it out of bed this morning when he’d seized, whacking his already sore arm against the wall as he fell. After letting him recover for awhile, Foggy had managed to get the disoriented Matt back into bed before he fell asleep, but there was no way he was leaving him alone just yet.

Hovering wasn’t going to help though, so Foggy filled in time, making coffee and checking his emails – all while keeping an ear out for movement from the bedroom. Matt stirred a couple of hours later, letting out a small groan as he rolled over onto his sore arm.

“Matt, just be careful,” Foggy blurted out as he saw what was going on.

Matt looked confused, so Foggy tried to fill in the blanks while Matt chugged down a glass of water. Foggy ended on, “so how is your arm now?”

Matt stretched out his fingers with a hiss of pain, and announced, “it’s not broken.”

“That’s a start, but do you think you need to see a doctor?”

“I’ve had way worse accidents than this.”

Foggy rolled his eyes. “Not my question.”
“What time is it?” Matt said, intent on changing the topic.

“Nine o’clock in the morning.”

“You’re dressed for work,” Matt observed, noting the familiar scent of Foggy’s ancient elephant tie.

“And I’m sorry to say this, but I’m going to leave you as soon as I’m satisfied you’re okay. Okay?”

“I’ll come to work with you,” Matt said, struggling to extricate himself from the bedsheets without much luck.

“Nope. You’re staying here for the day.”

“Fog-”

“Zip it. If you’re really bored later, give me a call. But for now, please just rest.” Foggy picked up Matt’s empty glass. “I’ll get you another glass of water.” He dashed into the kitchen and returned with a full glass. “Do you need anything else?”

“No, I think I have everything,” Matt said miserably, nursing his sore arm to his chest.

“Okay, text me if you need anything,” Foggy said, affectionately touching Matt’s shoulder.

Foggy was almost out the door when he doubled back. “Do you remember if you took your medication this morning?”

“I don’t remember even getting out of bed, let alone swallowing a pill.”

“Shit. We should count how many are missing from the packet. The last thing you need is to miss a dose.”

Matt didn’t move, so Foggy reached for the box on the bedside table, and Matt put his hand out to stop him. “I’ll do it. Go to work.”

“Are you sure? Can you work out how many doses you need to have taken – let’s see… Saturday evening, Sunday morning, Sunday evening…” Foggy counted off the doses on his fingers.

“Foggy, please. I can do it.” Matt said with a pleading whine. He felt like a child.

“Okay. Text me. For anything.”

As the door clicked behind Foggy, Matt shut his eyes, and almost immediately fell asleep. The medication count was already long forgotten.

Matt slept fitfully for the next couple of hours before the pain of his throbbing wrist and elbow surpassed his level of fatigue. He knew the injury was nothing compared to some of injuries sustained during his Daredevil activities, but somehow it hurt more. He stumbled out of bed in search of an Aspirin, having exhausted his bedroom table drawer stash. He messily sorted through his bathroom medicine cabinet before rounding on the first aid kit. Nothing.

Exhausted, sore and irritable, he returned to bed, nursing his arm as he tried to get comfortable among the pillows. Claire, he suddenly thought. Would she answer a non-Daredevil-related call?

He clumsily reached over for the phone, misjudging its location and sending it crashing to the ground. He heard a crack as the screen shattered, and he lay back on the pillows defeated. After a
few deep breaths, he reached over the side of his bed, feeling for the phone. For some reason, his ability to sense objects was still completely messed up. Just as he grasped the offending object, a muscle in his back went into spasm and he writhed in pain, pulling back onto the bed and lying there defeated once more. He ran his thumb over the cracks in the screen of his phone, examining the fracture pattern in detail. It was a beautiful pattern. Over and over he felt each fine thread - a web of broken connections.

Matt was just starting to fall asleep again when he remembered Claire. He had to contact Claire. Fortunately, the phone still worked. The cracked screen didn’t really affect him – he didn’t need to see the screen after all. However, he’d been planning on upgrading to the new model with better assistance tools, and that wasn’t going to happen with his current phone’s now very low resale value.

“Call Claire,” Matt said to the phone.

“There’s no Claire in your address book, would you like to search for Claire online?”

He’d forgotten that Claire’s number was saved in his burner, not his regular phone. Swearing, he crawled out of bed and found his burner that he’d stashed in his sock drawer. It was flat.

Matt went back to bed while he waited for the burner to charge. He toyed with listening to a podcast, but he couldn’t decide which one, so in the end he just listened for the ding that indicated the burner had enough charge to turn on.

He finally contacted Claire, and far from being reluctant to see him on non-Daredevil business, she turned up in record time. She didn’t make any snide comments about his injuries, which was entirely unusual for Claire. Instead, she wrapped his wrist in a bandage while patiently quizzing him on his seizures and tiredness.

“Keep the bandage on for awhile. Not just for the swelling - if you have another seizure at least the risk of hurting before it’s better is reduced,” she said. “Your elbow is bruised, but I don’t think there’s anything wrong with the joint. It might be wise to see a doctor if you’re worried though.”

“It isn’t that bad,” Matt lied, not wanting to visit the clinic.

“There’s something else troubling you, Matt.” Claire said softly.

“My senses are messed up,” he said cautiously. Then he suddenly blurted out, “the medication is ruining my life. I bump into stuff because my senses are dampened, my memory is shit, I’m clumsy, I can’t concentrate, I can’t think clearly enough to work…” He rubbed his forehead in frustration. “I’m sorry Claire. You didn’t ask for that.”

She listened to his tirade, a little stunned at his outburst. It was quite out of character for him to complain about medical issues like this. When he’d finished, she put her hand on his, and said, “you should go back to the neurologist. It might be the medication, or it might be the seizures themselves. Many people take days, even a week to feel normal after a tonic-clonic seizure. You’ve not had more than three days between them. It’s no wonder you’re tired.”

“A week?” said Matt incredulously.

“Yes. That’s why we need to find you a medication that works. Do you have a follow-up appointment with your doctor?”

“Yeah, um. I forget the date. I think it’s in two weeks.”
“You might want to move it up a bit if it’s affecting you this much.”

Matt sighed and leaned his head against the back of the couch.

“Do you want me to stay?” Claire said. “I have the day off, so I can – if you want.”

“I’m not very good company at the moment. I keep falling asleep.” He gave her a wan smile.

“We could watch a movie,” she said, looking at the collection of DVDs next to the television. “I’m assuming these are Foggy’s – they weren’t here last time.”

“He brought all his DVDs that come with visual descriptions,” Matt said. “Do you mind the voice-over?”

“You know, I’ve never heard visual description commentary. It’ll be an educational experience. What do you want to watch?”

“You choose,” Matt said apathetically.

“Foggy has a lot of chick flicks,” Claire said with a chuckle.

“He’s a man with a big heart,” Matt said with a smile.

Foggy returned from work to find Claire and Matt sitting up watching the end of one of his corniest movies. “You movie cheated on me!” he said, plonking himself down in the armchair.

“Sorry,” Matt said seriously.

“That’s cool,” Foggy said, giving him a confused smile. Did Matt realise it was a joke?

Once the movie finished, Claire excused herself, turning down Foggy’s offer of dinner.

“I got you a present,” Foggy announced once Claire had left.

“Oh?”

Foggy shoved something into Matt’s hands, and he ran his fingers across the braille labels. “It’s a pill box. You put your medication in each square at the beginning of the week, and then you know if you’ve taken it or not – or if there’s a situation like this morning and you’re unconscious, I’ll be able to check.” Foggy pulled something else out of his bag. “And I have more Aspirin. I noticed you were running low.”

“You read my mind,” Matt said, relieved. He didn’t know how he felt about the pill box. He put it aside for now.

“How’s your arm?” Foggy said, looking at the bandage on Matt’s wrist.

“Better since Claire wrapped it – my wrist at least.”

“That’s good. Let me know if you need me to help you with stuff like that in the future – if you trust me, that is.”

Matt was surprised at Foggy’s phrasing. “Of course I trust you,” Matt said.

“Listen, I’m going to cancel lunch with my parents tomorrow. We can just chill for the day. What do you think?”
Matt adored Foggy’s parents, but the idea of even leaving the house right now exhausted him beyond belief. He nodded. “Maybe another time. I should write them a card to thank them for the couch.”

“I think they’d like that, Matt,” Foggy said with a smile. “So, do you have a food preference?”

“I’m not hungry.”

“Did you eat lunch?”

Matt thought for a moment. His memory of the day was hazy, and he couldn’t remember much beyond Claire’s visit.

“I’ll take the silence as a no.”

“There’s some bread in the freezer. I’ll make some toast,” Matt said, levering himself off the couch.

“Stay. I’ll make it,” Foggy ordered.

“I’m not an invalid, Foggy,” Matt said crossly.

“I know. But I stood up first, so bad luck.”

“That’s not how-” Matt sighed. This was not a fight that needed to happen. “Bread’s in the freezer. Thanks, Foggy.”

Foggy returned to the couch with a piece of toast for Matt and a bowl of instant ramen for himself.

“You’re not,” Matt said in mock horror.

Foggy gave a noisy slurp as he took a mouthful of noodles.

“I thought you gave those up after college,” Matt continued.

“It’s like crack. I think it’s the MSG,” Foggy said, mouth half-full. “Besides, it’s no worse than you eating toast for dinner. You can’t get all morally superior with me, Murdock.”

Matt could tell Foggy was watching him all Saturday, and despite Matt's less than subtle hints that he should go have fun somewhere, Foggy stuck around reading and playing video games in the living room. Normally, Foggy would have had a couple of beers while playing, but Matt noticed the significant lack of alcohol in the apartment. The doctor had suggested he not drink for a while because it was known to sometimes lower seizure thresholds, but he didn't want Foggy to have to go dry as well.

Matt had spent the last few weeks nervously waiting for any sign that he was going to have another seizure. The doctor had said that some people got warnings, and he was desperate to figure out if there were any noticeable changes to his body beforehand. The combination of the medication-induced fuzziness and his post-seizure memory loss meant that he was at a loss.

He decided to try meditating himself to greater bodily-awareness. He usually meditated in the living room, but with Foggy on the couch, he settled for his bedroom. He closed the bedroom door, a little self-conscious about his activities and not wanting to be watched. Foggy called out, “hey are
“You going to have a nap?”

“No. Just meditating.”

“You still do that?”

“Yeah, it’s a good healing strategy. Relaxing too.”

“Oh, okay. Um, do you want to leave that door open?” Foggy said a little hesitantly. “Just in case, you know?”

“Ah, I guess…” This was not part of Matt’s plan.

Matt settled on a cushion behind the wall that separated the living room and bedroom, out of Foggy’s direct sight. He closed his eyes and tried to relax. He could hear Foggy shifting in the next room, the frantic clicks of his gaming control, and the odd hiss of frustration as his character died or whatever. ‘Concentrate’, Matt told himself, and went to the basics, tensing and relaxing each body part in turn before going deeper. He was almost there when he heard Foggy creeping up to the bedroom door to check on him. Matt inwardly tensed but didn’t move or react in any visible way. Foggy seemed satisfied that Matt was okay and tiptoed back to the couch, but in the meantime, his quest for equanimity was over. Matt sighed and tried again. He was just making progress when he heard Foggy open a pack of chips in the kitchen. Foggy was evidently attempting to be quiet, but it’s hard to minimise the sound of a foil wrapper being torn apart and the crunch of the first chip. Matt appeared at the door at the same time Foggy was shovelling the second into his mouth.

“Sorry, did I disturb you?” Foggy asked, mouth half-full. As he spoke, Matt heard a fleck of chip fly out of Foggy’s mouth and hit the saucepan drying next to the sink. “Do you want one?” He shook the packet at Matt.

“Er, no thanks.” The smell alone of the artificial BBQ flavouring was enough to turn his stomach.

Foggy flopped back onto the couch, and grabbed the game controller once again. “Wanna watch a movie or something? Or I could give video game narration another go.”

Matt fished around in the fridge for a carrot and joined Foggy on the couch.

“You and your healthy life choices,” Foggy moaned as Matt gnawed at his carrot. “Between your diet, daily push-ups and visits to the gym, I feel like I should probably be the one with the health problems.”

“Give it time,” Matt teased. “Why don’t you come to the gym some time?”

“I’m not a fighter.”

“Even so, maybe you should come with me to Fogwell’s some time. Even if you don’t fight, it’s good exercise.”

Foggy shovelled another handful of chips into his mouth, and Matt took that as a no.

After Foggy’s dig at his daily push-ups, Matt tried to remember the last time he exercised. There hadn’t been any daily push-ups for quite some time. Meditation hadn’t worked, so perhaps a bit of exercise might be constructive.

He ducked back into his bedroom, not wanting to make Foggy uncomfortable, and rolled out his
foam exercise mat. Getting on his stomach, he pushed up, his arms wobbling slightly with the exertion. What had happened to his fitness?

He tried again. Same thing. The third time, he barely got off the floor, dropping back onto his chest with an audible “oof”.

“You okay?” Foggy called from the couch.

“Yeah,” Matt replied, letting his head rest sideways on the mat, breathing deeply in an attempt to calm down. ‘No,’ he thought to himself.

By Sunday, Matt was itching to leave the house. He got dressed in a suit and tie and announced that he was going to church. Matt hadn’t been to a Sunday service in years, and while Foggy was surprised by this newfound piousness, there was a part of him that wondered if it’d actually be good for him.

Foggy quickly grabbed his phone and wallet. "I need to get a few things from my apartment. I'll walk with you as far as the church if you'd like."

Matt felt the urge to turn Foggy down, knowing full well that the church was not on the direct path to Foggy's place. But ultimately he was relieved. With his dulled senses and fuzzy concentration, his ability to navigate spaces was still impaired. His memory of the route was fine, but he was having trouble sensing smaller objects (AKA trip hazards) and he found it unnerving. It was like he was blind all over again.

He was the last to enter the church for Sunday mass, sitting alone in the back pew. He ducked out as soon as the service was over, eager to avoid not only his fellow parishioners, but also Father Lantom. He wasn't quite ready to have that conversation yet.

To Matt’s surprise and relief, Foggy was waiting for him on Matt's usual bench outside the church. "Hey," Foggy called. "Got the spirit in you?"

Matt smiled. “Yeah, but I’m not sure which one.”

They decided to indulge in a late pancake breakfast in the nearby diner. "A reward for us going to church," Foggy said jokingly. Matt raised his eyebrows and Foggy said, “I went there geographically. That counts if you’re a heathen.”

They sat down in the far booth just in case Matt's fellow parishioners had the same idea. "You know, for a guy who can turn on the charm like that -" Foggy clicked his fingers "-you're a bit of a misanthrope."

Matt looked cross and Foggy made a quick getaway from the bathroom. Matt's senses were compromised to the point where he couldn't get a read on the diner space. He clicked his fingers to try to orient himself, and the waitress appeared straight away. "Yes, can I help you, sir?"

Matt realised his mistake and stuttered an apology, ordering an orange juice to save face. He instantly regretted the snap decision. It’d probably be full of sugar and preservatives with little real juice.

Matt waited till the waitress was out of earshot before clicking again, this time with his hands just above the table in an attempt to be more discreet. Foggy was already making his way back to the
Matt frowned, debating whether to load more onto Foggy. Eventually, he decided that his vow of truth telling should probably be adhered to. "It's the medication. It's interfering with my senses still. I can't get a read on spaces."

"Are you sure it's the medication, not the seizures?"

Matt nodded. "I think so."

"We should go back to the neurologist. She said it sometimes takes some time to find a suitable medication."

Matt shrugged. "They'll probably all be the same," he grumbled miserably.

"You won't know till you try. Do you want to give it another week or so and if it doesn't improve we'll ask for another? We have an appointment in just over a week anyway."

Matt nodded again. He didn't hold nearly as much faith in the neurologist and medication options as Foggy and Claire. They didn't understand, he thought bitterly.

"Now for the big decision: do you want blueberry, choc chip or plain?" They both knew that Matt chose plain every time but it was a bit of a running joke anyway.

Matt smiled. "Ohhhhh.... I thiiinnk.... I'll get plain this time."

While they were waiting for the pancakes, Foggy remembered his purchase and rustled around in his pocket looking for the specially engraved bracelet.

"Here, I got you a present," Foggy said. He placed the bracelet in Matt's hand.

An expression of absolute horror crossed Matt's face when he felt three lines of engraved words: ‘Blind NLP / Epilepsy / Matthew Murdock’

"It has my contact number on the back too just in case there’s an emergency,” Foggy noted.

"I-I can’t wear this."

"What, you choose pride over waking up in the hospital without ID, drugged to unconsciousness and tethered to the bed?"

Matt looked even more mortified.

“I didn’t get you one of those massive bracelets with the bright colours,” Foggy said hurriedly, trying to allay Matt’s worry. “This one is plain silver with a thin band. No one is going to notice it unless they’re looking. Trust me.”

Matt didn’t respond, still unconvinced.

“Okay, if you don’t do it for yourself, can you do it for me? I worry about you. This way, I’ll be the first to know if anything does happen. Here, give me bracelet and I’ll put it on.”

How could Matt argue with Foggy’s guilt-inducing emotional plea?

Matt reluctantly held out the bracelet and his wrist, and Foggy clipped it in place. Matt felt the
same kind of helplessness that he felt when the nuns placed a similar one around his wrist as a child. ‘Just in case’, they’d told him. None the other children at the orphanage had to wear them, and they teased him mercilessly. The fact that he couldn’t read it made it all the worse. After he’d ‘lost’ the third bracelet, the nuns decided not to spend money on replacements anymore. It was the first real act of defiance at the orphanage and it gave Matt a huge amount of confidence and strength to know that he could resist being labelled - quite literally labelled in fact. Here he was once again, tethered to something that spelled out his disability to anyone who cared to read it, but this time losing it was not going to be an act of rebellion – it’d hurt his friend. Not only that, but Matt could feel the chain clink every time he moved. This was going to drive him crazy.

The pancakes arrived and Matt reminded himself that Foggy had devoted so much time and energy towards Matt over the last couple of months, and now he had volunteered to give up his own cosy bachelor apartment in favour of sleeping in Matt’s living room, looking after Matt’s every need. He owed it to Foggy to accept his help with grace and gratitude.

Matt slid his untouched orange juice across to Foggy. “Here, have this.”

“Thanks, buddy. You don’t want one?”

“No. Coffee is more than enough right now.” He decided to try his luck at casual conversation.
“So have you been up to anything interesting lately?”

Foggy stopped eating and stared. “Huh?”

“Have you, I dunno, dated anyone or seen, um, any interesting movies?”

Foggy let out a slight whine of confusion. “Is this a joke?”

“No?”

“Is that a question or a statement?”

“I don’t- this isn’t- I was trying to make light conversation.”

“Uh huh. I got that. The question is why?”

“Um.” The hole was too deep to dig his way out of this one. Matt tried to come up with a conceivable lie and failed.

Foggy broke the awkward silence with an answer of sorts. “Hmm… dating… well, I guess we could almost be dating, the amount of time we’ve spent together lately,” he said sarcasically.
“Let’s see… two weeks in hospital, then a week in your apartment when you got home, then a bit of a break, then the last week in your apartment again. Yep, almost dating.”

Matt’s mouth twitched. “That’s dating covered. What about films?”

Foggy laughed. “That one’s easy. I saw this one about a blind guy who dresses up like a devil and fights like a pro cage fighter. Then he gets shot in the head and ends up in hospital, and his best friend saves the day.” Matt kicked Foggy under the table, but he had a slight smile on his face at the same time. “I don’t know where they come up with these crazy ideas,” Foggy said in a tone of fake disbelief.
Matt and Foggy spent much of the afternoon on the couch watching Dr Who, trying to find the episode with the aliens that wore masks like the one Matt had been forced to endure during his first hospital stay. Half-way through the second episode, Matt turned to Foggy. “Do you have any spare paper?”

Foggy paused the video. “Yeah, I think I have some scrap in my laptop case. It’s got print on one side though. Is that a problem?”

“No, not at all. Are you sure it’s okay to use?”

“Is it to make that thank you card for my parents?”

“Oh shit I forgot. I’ll get a card tomorrow.”

“If it’s not destined for my parents, then yes, use away.”

“What’s printed on the paper that you don’t want your parents to know about, Foggy?” Matt said suspiciously.

Foggy ignored the question and fetched the paper. Matt ran his fingers over the print, hoping to figure out what it said. Usually he could read printed text almost like braille, but that required concentration and acute senses, and he had neither of those today. He gave up almost immediately. Instead, he found a pair of scissors and started cutting the paper into even squares.

“Paper craft?” Foggy said with a chuckle.

“Something like that.”

Foggy watched, mesmerised, as Matt cut each square at exact right angles without hesitation or error. Matt stopped, aware that he was being stared at. “Do you want to press play again?” he encouraged, eager to deflect some of the attention.

After he had a couple of dozen squares, Matt started folding the paper into intricate sculptural forms, and despite Foggy’s attempt to follow the gripping story of a spaceship full of dinosaurs, his attention kept drifting back to Matt.

As Matt started interlocking the small origami pieces into a larger star-like form, Foggy finally asked, "where did you learn to do that?"

“An old woman taught me when I was a child.”

“Stick’s wife?” Foggy joked.

Matt let out an exasperated groan. "When I first moved into the orphanage, there was a woman at the local blind foundation who would occasionally take me on outings. Sometimes we’d go for a picnic in the park. She used to take me to a small diner she’d been going to since she was a child and she’d always make me order a ham sandwich and a milkshake,” Foggy smiled at this slight deviation. He now understood Matt’s strange obsession with plain ham sandwiches.

Matt realised he was going off topic and clarified, “she was meant to teach me ‘life skills’ (he dropped the origami and made a small air quotes sign), so on the outings she’d give me tips and tricks on things like navigating the streets, handling money, dressing well, manners et cetera. She also taught me how to make all sorts of paper sculptures and modular origami."

"You never made them at college though."
"We were studying."

"Not all the time."

"Yeah I know." Matt sighed. "Look, I used to do this as a kid when I was feeling particularly overwhelmed. It's soothing. Everything is ordered and just so. I thought maybe it would help." He sighed again and dropped the half-finished object onto his lap.

"Can you make animals?"

"Yeah, I can do dogs, frogs, rabbits, fish, crabs... oh and cranes of course."

"Make me a dog?" he asked, handing Matt another square of paper that Matt had carefully cut up earlier.

Matt deftly folded the paper into a small dog. "I can do a dog's head too if you'd like," he said, handing Foggy the full-bodied paper dog.

"Yeah, show me."

"This one's easier," he said as he created the folds for the ears.

"If you say so," Foggy said with a snort. "I don't think I could even cut the paper at right angles, let alone make a dog."

"I'll teach you."

"Nah. I don't want to make a fool of myself."

"You've seen me wet myself, Foggy. You're not going to seem like a fool after that."

"You can't help that. You had a seizure. Stop beating yourself up."

The character on Dr Who chose that very moment to say, "stop beating yourself up," which got them laughing. "There you go," said Foggy. "Even the TV agrees."

Matt tossed the finished dog’s head onto Foggy’s lap and grabbed a carrot from the fridge. “Do you want one?” he asked Foggy as he chewed on the end.

“No, ever since you told me carrots don’t help me see in the dark, I’ve not touched them."

“Your loss,” Matt shrugged.

“You did promise to teach me echolocation though, remember?”

“What?”

“At the hospital - you said that you could teach me how to use sound to navigate in the dark."

“It’s easier just to use your phone’s torch app."

“In case you can’t tell, I’m giving you a withering look right now."

“Well, if I’m going to teach you echolocation, you need to blindfold that withering look. Do you have a scarf or bandana you could use?"

“Whatever happened to your old Devil of Hell’s kitchen mask? The black one. Can I use that?”
“Probably not a good idea. It’ll pick up your smell and if I ever use it again—”

“You’re thinking of going retro?”

“No, just - I don’t know. Anyway, the smell might distract me, that’s all.”

“My smell?” Foggy said incredulously.

Matt huffed in frustration and disappeared into his bedroom to find a blindfold.

“Hey, that’s the tie I gave you for Christmas four years ago,” Foggy said indignantly. “You can’t use it as a blindfold.”

“I’ll iron it before next Christmas,” Matt said facetiously. “I doubt I’m going to wear anything decorated with reindeer before that.”

“I’m giving you another withering look, by the way,” Foggy sneered.

Matt leaped forward, giving Foggy a fright. Before he could jump back, Matt had already wrapped the tie around Foggy’s eyes. “Shit you’re quick,” Foggy murmured.

Matt grinned, and said cheekily, “I’m giving you a triumphant look right now by the way.”

Matt pulled Foggy into the centre of the living room, spinning him on the spot once, twice, thrice, until Foggy stumbled slightly. Matt held his shoulders, worried that maybe he’d hurt Foggy. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, is this part of the training?” Foggy said, still swaying slightly.

“I just needed to disorient you.”

“You did that the moment you leapt at me.”

“I’m giving you a withering look right now.”

“Right back at you, buddy,” Foggy deadpanned.

Matt clapped loudly, and Foggy startled.


“The sound of you clapping.”

“Listen,” he said more forcefully, and clapped again.

Foggy stood there trying to work out what Matt could hear that he couldn’t. Matt led him ten steps forwards and clapped again. “Is it different?” Matt demanded.

Foggy thought about it for a moment. “I don’t- I can’t tell.”

“Remember what I explained to you at the hospital. I translate sounds into a visuospatial map of my surrounding environment. You need to construct a picture in your mind.” Matt turned Foggy around and led him to another part of his apartment. “Listen,” Matt said again.

“Yeah, yeah, I am.”

Matt clapped, and Foggy instantly said, “it sounds a bit sharper… less echoey.”
“What does that suggest?”

“Um… that we’re in a more enclosed space?”

“Yeah. Can you tell where we are?”

Foggy laughed.

“No seriously. But let’s branch out from echolocation for a bit. Listen to what else is in the apartment. Where are the street sounds the loudest? Can you feel any air currents?”

“Air currents?” Foggy said sceptically.

“Yeah, under doors, through open windows.” Matt crouched down and rolled up Foggy’s pants to his knees.

Foggy giggled nervously. “Um, what are you doing?”

“If there’s a draught coming in under a door, you’re probably going to feel it on your lower legs or feet.”

Foggy stood there trying to feel and hear the apartment. Matt seemed to have infinite patience because they stood there in silence (or at least Foggy’s version of silence) for what felt like ten minutes.

A little nervously, Foggy said, “I can feel a draught coming in low on my left… um, I can hear the fridge kind of behind me. The street sounds are mostly behind me too, but a bit more to my right. I think…. And there is a man breathing down my neck.”

Matt chuckled. “So where are you?”

“The front hallway?” Foggy suggested.

“Is that a question?” Matt demanded.

“We’re in the hallway.”

“Where in the hallway?”

“Really?” Foggy moaned. “You want me to be exact?”

“Yes, this one was easy. Go on.”

“In front of your coatrack.”

“Yes!” Matt said triumphantly. “See? It’s not that mystical.”

“That ninja shit is pretty mystical, Matt.”

“I have offered to teach you boxing, Foggy.”

“That’s not the same as dodging a bullet by doing a backflip and you know it.”

“I couldn’t dodge anything right now,” Matt pointed out a little sadly.

“Give it time, buddy. Now are we going to go again?”
Matt perked up at Foggy’s enthusiasm. He dragged Foggy back into the centre of the room. They spent a good couple of hours training until Matt concluded that Foggy probably knew the apartment too well now and that next lesson they should hit the streets. It sounded like a terrible idea to Foggy: being led around the streets by a blind guy while blindfolded would surely lead to trouble. But then he took off the blindfold and saw Matt’s face. It was bright and happy in a way that Foggy hadn’t seen for a very long time. Foggy sighed. “Okay, but can we stay away from moving traffic for at least the first five lessons?”

Matt beamed.
Matt headed off to work on Monday morning feeling surprisingly happy. He hadn’t told Foggy, but the simple act of teaching Foggy to use his senses in the absence of sight gave him a confidence he hadn’t felt since his first set of seizures. It gave him a certain level of perspective too. He had been panicking about his senses being dulled with the medication and seizure activity; yet, in reality, his senses were still incredibly enhanced compared to normal people. He just needed to be careful and patient, and perhaps use what he had a little more strategically.

“Are you all good to continue working on the Portman case today?” Foggy asked as they walked to work.

“Portman,” Matt repeated. “That’s the sharing of confidential material case, right?”

“Alleged sharing,” Foggy corrected.

“Goes without saying,” Matt said. He’d personally vetted Zane Portman (and his heartbeat) before taking the case. The man wasn’t lying when he said he didn’t do it.

Without warning, Foggy tugged Matt to one side as a woman hurried by, too engrossed in her phone to notice the man with the cane ahead of her. Matt stumbled in response to the sudden movement.

“Shit, sorry,” Foggy said, drawing to a halt. “I didn’t mean to pull you quite so much.”

“It’s fine,” Matt said, waving him off. “I wasn’t expecting it, that’s all.”

“Senses still not so sharp?”

“Actually, I was thinking about the case and forgot to focus on where I was going. I didn’t notice that woman until she was right in front of me,” Matt said, trying to play down his lapse in concentration. “It just – it startled me.” He put his arm round Foggy’s shoulder. “Thanks, Fog.”

“What for?”

“This,” Matt said, pointing at Foggy’s chest and then his own. “You. Everything. You look out for me.”

“And you me,” Foggy said, feeling humbled by Matt’s unexpected display of affection. “Come on, we have to get going if we want to avoid a scolding from Karen.” He put his arm out for Matt to hold once again, and they continued their journey, both of them now hyper alert to potential trip hazards.

Matt’s mood dropped when Karen’s first words were, “what happened to your hand?” referring to the bandage just visible beyond his shirt cuff. She didn’t say it maliciously – it was said out of concern - but it was a reminder that both she and Foggy were constantly watching and assessing him. This was also nothing new – they both worried when he turned up with black eyes and cuts - but just like the pain in his arm caused by the seizures, the attention was less tolerable now.

“I just fell awkwardly, that’s all,” Matt said dismissively, quickly escaping to his office.

He pulled out his laptop, cringing as the medical ID bracelet hit the surface with a grating metallic scrape. Angrily, he tried to tuck it into his shirtsleeve, but it slithered out again. The constant
clinking of the chain was a distraction that he just didn’t need right now. He wondered if Foggy would notice if he took it off for the day. It wouldn’t hurt anyone - he’d just put it back on when they left the office. He could hear Foggy shuffling papers in his office, so he surreptitiously unclipped it from his wrist, hiding the bracelet under his keyboard. Unshackled, he sighed with relief. Now he could work in peace.

Mid-morning, Karen and Foggy heard a moan and a thump as Matt had a seizure at his desk. They rushed into his office just in time to see him whack his already sore wrist against the desk. “Ouch,” Karen winced in sympathy.

Foggy pushed Matt’s chair away from the desk and tried to support his head, which was at an awkward angle. “I forgot to start timing,” he said crossly, looking at his watch. Once Matt had stilled, Foggy wiped the saliva from his mouth with a towel and tried to get a response. Matt was wheezing slightly, so Foggy didn’t even bother waiting for Matt to wake up before moving him to a horizontal position. He pushed Matt’s chair over to the couch, remarking on the convenient wheels, and Foggy and Karen half-carried, half-pulled Matt onto the couch. Matt shifted a little as they laid him on his side, but was still unresponsive to Foggy’s questions. After about five minutes, Karen asked, “if he doesn’t wake up do we call an ambulance?”

Foggy frowned. “Yes, but not yet. We’ll give him a bit more time. This seizure seemed longer than the other ones. Maybe it means he takes longer to wake up.”

He knelt down next to the couch and held Matt’s hand. “Matt, can you squeeze my fingers?” Still no response. Foggy looked up at Karen, who was watching Matt with her hand over her mouth, wide-eyed and worried. “Come on Matt, wake up,” Foggy begged, getting a little panicky. “Please please wake up.”

“Do you want me to call an ambulance?” Karen said hesitantly.

“No, if I want an ambulance I’ll tell you,” Foggy snapped, and Karen stepped back as if bitten.

Matt gave a small moan. “Okay, I’ll give you a bit longer,” Foggy said half to Matt, half to himself. He kept hold of Matt’s hand, hoping it would ground him.

Finally, Foggy got a specific response from Matt in the form of a meaningful grunt. Another grunt confirmed that Matt wanted water, so Foggy reached under the table and grabbed a bottle. Matt opened his eyes at the sound of the bottle being opened, which Foggy took as a good sign. Most of the water ended up on the towel Foggy had strategically placed under Matt’s head, but he seemed sated with the few sips nonetheless. He didn’t seem to be wheezing anymore, so when Matt rolled over onto his back and fell into a deep sleep, Foggy just let him be.

After covering Matt with a blanket, Foggy bluntly suggested to Karen they both get back to work. Once Matt had got through the initial postictal period of disorientation, he seemed to sleep solidly for a few hours. There was no point watching him while the pile of unattended tasks continued to grow.

“He must have so many bruises,” Karen whispered to Foggy as they walked back to their desks.

“So business as normal,” Foggy stated cynically.

“What?” Karen said, surprised at Foggy’s unsympathetic tone.

“I mean, he used to come to work bruised all the time. The bruises are just in different places now.” Karen gave him an odd look. It seemed unlike Foggy to be so dismissive of Matt’s injuries. She
knew that Foggy worried about him, and that Matt wasn’t always honest about the source of his injuries. But she still didn’t know that Matt moonlighted - or at least, used to moonlight - as Daredevil. She also didn’t know that Foggy was still coming to terms with his own feelings about this change in circumstance. Foggy didn’t agree with Matt’s crime-fighting methods and was constantly worried about his friend’s safety, but he wanted it to be Matt’s choice.

While Matt was still asleep, Karen got a phone call from someone who introduced herself as a client, but wouldn’t leave her name. She simply wanted Matt to call her back to schedule a meeting. “Do you want me to schedule it for you?” Karen asked, but the woman just left a mobile number and hung up.

“That was weird,” Karen said to Foggy.

“What was?”

“Someone called wanting to make an appointment with Matt. She said she was a client, but wouldn’t give me her name or any details.”

*The mysterious rich client*, Foggy thought, remembering Matt’s cagey behaviour a few weeks ago.

“What’s the number?” he asked, bringing up his web browser and Googling it. He scrolled through the search results. Nothing.

“You could call her back?” she suggested.

“Nah. Give Matt the message and I’ll ask him about it then.”

“He’s quite secretive, isn’t he,” Karen said in a forced casual tone.

“Is he?” Foggy responded just as casually.

“Come on Foggy, you can’t tell me you don’t suspect he has some massive secret he’s not sharing.”

“I hate to break it to you, Karen, but Matt’s not much of a sharing guy. Maybe it’s something about growing up in an orphanage and not having anyone to confide in.” Foggy hoped bringing up Matt’s childhood would somehow distract her, maybe even satisfy her.

“No, there’s something else,” Karen said slowly. “I just have a feeling. You know when you have a feeling, but you can’t quite put your finger on it?”

Foggy decided not to answer. Best not say anything. That way he couldn’t put his foot in it. He often teased Matt about being a terrible liar, but Foggy knew he was just as bad, if not worse.

A couple of hours later, Matt emerged from his office looking dazed and rumpled.

“Hey,” Karen said, leaping up from the desk. “How are you feeling?”

“Thirsty,” he said shuffling his way towards the kitchen.

“Here, let me get you a glass.”

Matt was about to protest, about to tell her that he was more than capable of getting his own glass
of water, thank you very much; but the very thought of finding a glass in his current state was tiring in itself. He leaned against the wall instead. Karen pressed a cup into his hand. “Thanks, Karen,” he said weakly.

“You know you have a bottle by the couch,” Foggy said.

“Gone,” Matt said simply.

“I’ll get another couple of bottles for you. We’ll just have to remember to fill them up afterwards for next time.”

Matt focussed on the glass of water, rather than the possibility of a ‘next time.’ It was too depressing.

“Do you want to me to take you home, or are you right to catch a cab on your own?” Foggy asked.

“What are you talking about? I have work to do,” Matt said, his words a little slower and thicker than usual.

Foggy raised his eyebrows. “Yeah? Are you okay to work?” Matt’s stubbornness didn’t surprise him, and he knew there was no convincing him once he’d made up his mind. Would hanging around the office for the rest of the day do Matt harm?

“Of course. I’ll just do something straightforward like, um-”

“Discovery for the Portman case?” Foggy prompted.

“Yeah.”

Karen interrupted, “Matt, before I forget, you had a client call earlier requesting a meeting with you. She wouldn’t leave her name, just her number. She had a European accent I think. Do you want to follow that up directly?”

Matt frowned. Refusing to leave her name sounded very much like something Elektra would do. He didn’t need the complication of Elektra right now, but ignoring her was unlikely to work out well. “My phone,” he said, wobbling into his office and feeling the desk for it.

After the mysterious client’s number was safely stored in his phone, Karen looked at his broken screen and remarked, “that’s a pretty impressive crack.”

Foggy craned his neck to have a look. “Dude, when did you do that?”

Matt stuffed the phone into his pocket. “You were saying something about the Portman case?”

“Oh yeah, um, do you want me to catch you up on the latest developments? I can show you which documents you need to go through,” Foggy offered, even though there was nothing new since Matt had worked on it this morning. Foggy was starting to better understand Matt’s need for constant memory prompts. He didn’t mind going over the cases with him, but he hated having to create reasons to do so just so Matt would accept the help.

“Thanks,” Matt said with a polite nod.

“Let’s do it in your office,” Foggy said, leading Matt to his desk and closing the door behind him.

Foggy whispered, “you know you don’t have to stay. You should go home and rest. Neither Karen or I will judge you.”
Matt frowned. “I know you won’t, but I don’t need my full senses to know your desk is piled with work. I can’t let you carry the load.”

“If it comes to it, we can always get someone in to do some temp work. Your well-being is number one.”

“Please Foggy, let me do this,” Matt begged.

Foggy sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose in frustration. Finally he said, “okay, let’s go over the case…”

Matt nodded throughout through the summary, and Foggy wondered how much Matt had actually taken in. He knew he’d probably have to check Matt’s work, especially after Matt fell asleep mid-afternoon. Being at work seemed to make Matt happier though so Foggy let it go. However, he decided to keep a list of tasks suitable for Matt's post-seizure cognition level. He figured that Matt would not give up, and so they might as well have rote work ready for him to do on the days he was not his usual sharp self.

As they left the office that evening, Foggy remembered the thank you card for his parents, and another for his uncle – the original owner of the couch. The shop on the corner had a selection with embossed covers and Matt finally settled on one with a stylised bunch of pastel pink flowers, and another with a twee basket of lavender. Foggy debated whether he should tell him about the sickly colour schemes, but eventually concluded Matt would have asked about the colour if he really cared. His parents would no doubt love anything Matt gave them anyway. He wasn’t quite as certain about his uncle’s reaction, but it’s the thought that counts, right?

“I forgot to print out the text,” Matt said on the short cab ride home.

“We’ll do it tomorrow. Although my parents would probably love a handwritten card.”

“My writing is terrible,” Matt said. “I quote, ‘it looks like a seven year old’s attempt at writing with their non-dominant hand’.”

“Yeah, well that was mean. I shouldn’t have said that, sorry. If you like, I can write the message and you can sign it.”

“Maybe you could write the one for your uncle, and I’ll do the one for your parents,” Matt suggested.

Foggy’s parents would no doubt recognise their son’s writing, and Matt didn’t want that. He wanted to make it personal, Foggy’s teasing be damned. So as soon as they got home, Matt rolled up his sleeves and set to work on the card. He sat at the kitchen table and drew heavy horizontal lines with the back of the pen so that he could feel the ruled lines, but they remained mostly invisible to the eye.

Foggy watched from a distance as Matt slowly and carefully wrote each letter along the lines, measuring the space between the marks with his index finger. It resulted in the neatest writing he’d ever seen from Matt.

After Matt had finished, he held the card up for Foggy to see. “What do you think?”

“Looks like a nine year old’s writing with their dominant hand.”

“That’s a lie,” Matt laughed.
“You can still hear my heartbeat with your diminished senses? Damn. I thought I might have had a break from your lie detection. Okay, here’s the truth: it looks like a seven year old’s writing with their dominant hand.”

“Excellent,” Matt said, stuffing the card in the envelope and handing it to Foggy to write the address.

“Hey, you’re not wearing your bracelet,” Foggy said, a little cross.

“Oh, yeah, about that...” Matt blushed with guilt. “Er, I took it off in the office because it was clinking against the desk and distracting me.”

“Really? Does it need to be tighter?”

“I’d still be able to hear it.”

“Can’t you block it out?”

“Please don’t make this into a big deal,” Matt said wearily.

“Okay, how about this: you take it off at the office, but attach it to your cane so you don’t forget it at the end of the day. Deal?”

Matt figured it was the best offer he was going to get, but before he could agree, he heard the argument from the apartment block across the street descend into something more ominous. There was a scream, a smash, a loud thud, and a whimpered begging from a woman.

“My suggestion isn’t that bad,” Foggy said, thinking Matt’s facial expression was due to the bracelet proposal.

“The man in the apartment across from us just hurt his girlfriend,” Matt said, concentrating on the sound of the woman crying and assessing her injuries. “I need to help.” He stood up and immediately tripped over the adjacent chair, landing flat on his face.

“No you don’t,” Foggy said, helping Matt to his feet. “I’ll call the police.”

Matt wasn’t completely irrational. His initial instinct was to barrel into the apartment, but he quickly realised that he could hardly get up a flight of stairs in his current state of fatigue, let alone effortlessly scale the exterior of a building and confront a violent man.

“Then do it quickly,” Matt demanded.

After the domestic violence was reported, Foggy led an anxious Matt to the couch. Intrigued, Foggy watched Matt’s facial expression change as the event unfolded, but every time Foggy tried to get an update, he’d be quickly shushed.

“Bastards,” Matt growled, angrily punching the side of the couch.

“What happened?” Foggy said desperately.

“He denied he hit her and she backed him up. She was scared. She said she tripped over a table and fell into a vase, but that’s a lie. She’s heading to the hospital now to get stitches.”

“Maybe she’ll change her mind once she’s away from him,” Foggy reasoned. “It’s a tricky situation when the perpetrator is present. I’m surprised the police handled it that way.”
“Yeah, it’s ridiculous. Most of the police are hopeless when it comes to domestic violence,” Matt spat. He was now shaking and so Foggy put his hand on Matt’s shoulder to try and calm him.

“It must be hard to listen to,” Foggy said tentatively. “You know, without going to help. Do you want to talk about it?”

“No,” Matt said in a tone that clearly signalled the end of the very brief conversation.

Foggy sighed. “Maybe I’ll make us some tea,” he said, getting up.

“There’s some whiskey in the cupboard,” Matt suggested.

“You’re not meant to-”

“Don’t care at this point,” Matt snapped. “Please don’t nag me.”

“We need to eat something if you’re going to drown your sorrows.”

“I’m not going to polish off the whole bottle, Foggy.” Matt said crossly. “One drink.”

“Okay,” Foggy said, unconvinced, but pouring two whiskeys nonetheless. “Should I order some Thai? It’s the fastest.”

“Yeah, get something with chilli though. I need something to match the day’s events.”

Foggy gave a small laugh. “I would have thought mild food would match today’s mood.”

Matt thought about it for a moment, concluding, “maybe it doesn’t make sense. Get the chilli anyway.”
Four days after Matt’s recommitment to Sunday mass, Nelson & Murdock gained a new client - a Mrs Tabitha Chase. She introduced herself as a fellow parishioner at Matt’s church and said that Father Lantom had nothing but praise for the firm. As Matt usually discussed his Daredevil work with the priest, rather than his law practice, he wondered exactly what he’d done to receive such a glowing recommendation. Nevertheless, the case was interesting and better still, didn’t involve any blood.

She explained to Foggy and Matt that she was being charged with wilful damage of property after tripping over an artwork in a commercial gallery. However, it was an accident. She’d simply been embarrassed about being scolded by the staff member and was hurrying to leave. “I didn’t even see the sculpture. It was low to the ground and I was flustered. I was looking at the exit rather than the floor.”

Matt said, “And they called the police straight away?”

“Yes. I thought it was a joke at first. I mean, who arrests an old woman for tripping over a sculpture? But then the police advised me to get a lawyer, and – well, I regret not getting one straightaway… But as I said, I didn’t think it was real.”

“We’re glad to help you now at least, Mrs Chase,” Matt said reassuringly.

“Call me Tabitha, please.”

“Tabitha, perhaps you could tell us what happened from the beginning,” Foggy suggested.

“There was an artwork made of wrapped candies. It was a large pile, loose on the ground. I took one, thinking that that was what we were meant to do.” She clarified, “there was a similar one at MoMA a while back where you were allowed to take the candy. I thought it was the same thing.”

“Were there any instructions? Any signs?”

“No, there wasn’t even a label with the artist’s name.”

“So what happened after you took the candy?”

“Well, this young man approached me and said ‘you just wreaked the work’.”

“Were those his exact words?” Foggy asked, surprised.

“Oh, no. But he implied that,” she explained.

“I need to you to remember the exact phrasing, Tabitha,” Matt said encouragingly.

She thought for a moment. “He said ‘the art is not to be touched,’ and I tried to put back the candy on the pile, and he said, ‘no, give it to me. It has to be replaced exactly as the artist intended.’ But it was just a random pile of candy,” she argued. “His tone was entirely unnecessary. He was imperious, implied that I knew nothing about art and that I’d destroyed a masterpiece.”

“And those were his exact words?”
“I’m fairly sure,” she said nodding.

“Then what?”

“Well, I gave the candy to him and he glared at me. I was embarrassed at being told off, so I turned around quickly to leave and I tripped over an artwork.”

“And this artwork was low to the ground,” Matt confirmed.

“Yes.”

“And there were no barriers?”

“No, it was directly on the floor. No plinth, not even a white line around the work,” Tabitha added.

“So it was out of the line of sight for most people?” Matt asked.

Tabitha hesitated slightly, considering Matt’s use of the word most. Matt tried again. “It was below your line of sight.”

“Yes,” she said.

“And was there any visible damage to the work afterwards?” Matt asked.

“A small mark - according to the gallery. They made a big fuss, but it was made of wax. It was soft to begin with.” Tabitha added, “I mean, they could just melt the dent away.”

“Let’s not focus on what they could do to fix the sculpture just yet,” Foggy said. “The charges are that you wilfully damaged it and you’re saying it was accidental. That’s what we have to address.”

“I just tripped. If I’d wanted to destroy it I’d do much more damage than a small dent. I almost wish I had done more damage now.”

“Don’t say that publicly, please,” Foggy said hurriedly.

“I won’t. It wasn’t a serious proposition.”

“Do you remember the name of the artist who produced the artwork at MoMA?” Matt asked.

“Not off the top of my head. But I could find out.” Tabitha sifted through her bag in search of her phone.

“We can do that,” Foggy said. “Leave it with us and we’ll do some research into the two artists and the gallery.”

“Thank you so much,” she said. “I’m so glad Father Lantom recommended you.”

As she left the office, she said, “I’ll see you at church on Sunday, Matthew.”

Once she was out of earshot, Foggy said, “I guess we both know what you’re doing on Sunday morning.”

Matt smiled. “Good thing that was my intention anyway.”

“I didn’t know you attended church,” Karen said.

“I told you I was Catholic,” he retorted.
“Yeah, a lot of people are. It doesn’t mean they go to church,” she pointed out. She realised that she might have overstepped the mark and added, “I don’t mean you are one of those-”

“I’m not offended, don’t worry,” he said with a reassuring smile. “In all honesty, I’ve been a bit lax lately. I’m trying to change that.”

“Back to the case,” Foggy said with a clap of his hands. “Matt, what do you want to do first?”

“I might give MoMA a call. And I’ll also see if I can find some stats on the frequency and consequence of art accidents in galleries.”

“That’s a good idea. I should see if the gallery has security footage.” He thought for a second. “Do you remember that girl doing a PhD in art at Columbia? She wore massive glasses and had a kind of low, purring voice?” He hesitated. “Um, you were, you know...”


Foggy chuckled. “I can’t believe you remember that.”

“She was memorable,” Matt shrugged.

“Did you – do you think she’d serve as an expert witness? Or at least give us some context so this absurd charge is dropped before it reaches the courtroom. I know squat about art, and the whole taking candy, not taking candy thing means nothing to me.”

“I’ll see if I can find a contact number.”

Karen looked at them with amusement. It wasn’t hard to work out the nature of Matt and Gladys’ relationship, particularly as both Matt and Foggy were now blushing red.

Conveniently, Gladys now worked at MoMA as an assistant curator. She agreed to meet up with Matt later that afternoon at the museum. As Matt was leaving the office, Foggy called out “do you want me to come with you?”

“I’ll be fine, Foggy. I’ll take a cab.”

“Can I just go over a few things with you first?” Foggy said with a voice that spelled ulterior motive.

Matt reluctantly returned to Foggy’s office, closing the door behind him for privacy. “What?” he whispered.

“You’re whispering,” Foggy whispered back.

“Yes. The tone of your voice suggested you didn’t want to talk about the case.”

“Not my heartbeat?”

“What did you want to say, Foggy?” Matt said, getting back to the point.

Matt was right of course, and Foggy scrambled to find something related to the case just to disprove Matt’s statement.

“Two things,” he said in a regular speaking voice. “One: find out if she knows the two artists at the gallery. Two: find out how the museum deals with artwork damage.”
“Already on my list. Anything else?”

“Wear your bracelet,” Foggy said with a forced casualness.

Matt held up his wrist, bracelet already attached. “Nothing’s going to happen.” He knocked on Foggy’s wood veneer table just in case.

It turned out that the candy work Tabitha mentioned was incredibly famous and the version she’d seen had been installed at MoMA back in 2011. Gladys explained, “Felix Gonzales-Torres makes a kind of process art that involves the viewer. He was part of a group of artists in the 90s whose work labelled relational aesthetics.”

“Relational aesthetics,” Matt repeated, trying to make sense of the combined words.

“I can write all this down for you if you’d like,” Gladys said. “It can be a bit much at once.”

“I’ll have the recorded audio,” Matt said, referring to the digital recorder on the table, “but if you wouldn’t mind writing a short statement, that would be really helpful. This artwork, how did it work? Were there guards telling people to take the candy?”

“Visitors were actively encouraged, yes. But it was optional. He did a number of versions of the work – it was called “Untitled” (Placebo). I’ll write that down for you as well because it has inverted commas around ‘untitled’ and ‘placebo’ is in brackets. Anyway, this particular work had two separate piles with a gap so that visitors could walk between them, although as far as I know, most versions have been installed in single piles. The visitor is faced with a decision: do they take a delicious candy and contribute to the gradual disappearance of the artwork, or resist the urge?”

“So it’s about desire?” Matt asked.

“You could interpret it that way. But it’s also about audience interaction and the process of change.”

“So taking a piece of candy is not ruining the artwork?”

“Not at all,” Gladys said with a good-natured laugh. “It’s designed to be participatory.”

“Do you know of a similar work by John Yellow currently on display at Marlow Gallery in Chelsea?”

“I’ve heard of it. I haven’t seen it. I’ve heard that it’s a response to Gonzalez-Torres’ work, but in his version the visitor is not meant to even touch the work.”

“What do you think of that idea?”

“It’s interesting, but it’s a bit of a one-liner,” Gladys scoffed.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Well, Gonzalez-Torres’ work contested the traditional relationship between artwork and visitor, whereas Yellow’s work reverts back to that ‘do not touch the art’ mentality,” Gladys explained. Matt hated gallery ‘do not touch’ policies, and he instantly decided he liked this Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

“There are no signs to tell visitors not to touch Yellow’s work,” Matt said. “Is that normal?”
Gladys raised her eyebrows. “It’s quite fashionable at the moment to discard labels, but it seems quite impractical in this case. I bet the gallery staff have to tell every single visitor not to touch.”

“And probably after they’ve already touched the work,” Matt added. “My client took a candy, thinking it was like the MoMA work. She was told she’d damaged the art.”

“That’s a bit unfair.”

“That’s what we’re arguing.”

“They’re suing her because she supposedly damaged the artwork?”

“No, they’re pressing charges because she tripped over an adjacent artwork afterwards.”

“I don’t understand.”

Matt explained, “when my client left, she tripped over a wax sculpture on the ground. It got chipped and they said it was deliberate.”

Gladys sighed and said bluntly, “artworks get damaged all the time. It’s part of the business. We try to avoid it where possible, but things happen – sometimes deliberate, sometimes not.”

“Do you press charges even if it’s deliberate?”

“When I say ‘deliberate’, I mean a visitor has gone to deliberately touch an artwork and they’ve damaged it, but they didn’t necessarily intend to harm it.”

“In that case, is it normal to press charges?”

Gladys shook her head. “I don’t know of any occasion where that’s occurred. The negative press just isn’t worth it.”

“Do you have statistics on how many of your artworks get damaged each year?”

Gladys was apologetic. “I wish I could help you there, but I can’t release them. It’s sensitive information. I’m sure you understand.”

“That’s fine. You’ve been more than helpful.” Matt gave a small smile. “Before we finish up, could you tell me anything about the artist who made the wax sculpture, Max Tula?”

“Never heard of him.”

Matt retrieved his phone and brought up the gallery website that still had the artwork information. “Can you see it?” he said, passing her the phone. “I keep forgetting the screen’s broken, sorry.”

“I guess it doesn’t affect your use of it much. The voice control must be handy - much better than the Nokias we had at college.”

“That’s true,” he smiled.

“You know we have accessible tours here. We have tour guides or you can do a self-directed audio tour. On our guided tours you even have permission to touch some of the art,” she said pointedly. “Let me know if you ever want to do one.”

“Sounds good. Maybe you could give me more information later,” he said quickly, trying to be polite, but needing to steer the conversation back to the art. “Getting back to the case, do you know
the wax artist?”

Gladys passed the phone back to Matt. “The work isn’t familiar, but I can look into it if you’d like. The case is really interesting and I’m happy to help. As you know, my PhD was on the relationship between art and audience in museums, so it’s right up my alley. I’m flattered you came to me for advice.”

Matt felt a bit guilty for not remembering Gladys’ PhD topic, but didn’t acknowledge it. Her PhD topic was a wonderful coincidence and one that he needed to take full advantage of.

“If you’d be willing to be an expert witness if it comes to that?” he asked.

“Totally. As I said, it’s an interesting case. I’d like to see where it leads.”

“I think that’s everything then,” Matt said, switching the recorder off. The bracelet slithered out of his shirtsleeve again. Embarrassed, he quickly pushed it back into the fold. Maybe he’d take up Foggy’s offer to tighten it.

Gladys leaned forward and said, “Would you like to grab a drink? I’m just finishing up for the day.”

Matt looked a little anxious. “I don’t know if that’s such a good idea if we’re going to use you as an expert witness.”

“We can talk about something else. Come on, I haven’t seen you in ages.” She touched his hand affectionately.

Matt mulled it over. It would be nice to do something outside his increasingly dull routine. “Okay. One drink. Do you have a place in mind?”

“I know a little bar nearby.”

Matt smiled. “Lead the way.”

The drink turned into dinner, which was punctuated by the occasional text from Foggy checking on Matt’s progress. The situation turned a little awkward when Gladys asked Matt back to her place. He stammered a polite refusal, citing complications with the legal process.

“Maybe after the case then,” she said, giving him a peck on the cheek goodbye.

Foggy was equally relieved and amused when Matt returned, red-cheeked and happy.

“You didn’t?” Foggy asked.

Matt chuckled. “Me? Never. Besides, she’s our new expert witness. It wouldn’t be appropriate with the case in progress.”

“Whatever you say, Mr Romantic Savant,” Foggy teased.

The next day, Foggy pointed out he’d got to three days seizure-free and put his hand out for a high-five.

“What’s wrong?” Foggy said, trying to decipher the expression of horror on Matt’s face. “Did you
have one that I don’t know about?”

“No,” Matt said, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. “You just jinxed me.”

“Come on, Matt. You can’t believe that.”

“Oh yes I can.”

They walked to the office in silence and stayed that way all day. Matt kept waiting for the inevitable seizure, distracting him from the interesting art case. The feeling of doom continued through to the end of the day. He needed to let off some steam, so as they were leaving work, Matt announced, “I’m going to head to Fogwell’s for a bit.” He held up his pre-packed gym bag.

“Okay.” Foggy said, surprised at the sudden announcement. “You want me to come?”

“You don’t need to accompany me everywhere, Foggy.” Matt pointed out.

“Yeah, I know. I just thought-”

“Remember you’ve tagged me,” Matt said, holding up his wrist with the bracelet attached.

“Okay, go do what you gotta do.”

Matt didn’t usually train this early. There were people around - people who stared and whispered. But he knew Foggy would question any late night outing, so he sucked it up and found a corner bag, angling his body so that his back faced the other gym users. He was still wrecked from the events of the last few months and his left elbow and wrist continued to complain, but it nonetheless felt good to expend the little energy he had. He left the gym tired, yet relieved.

As he walked home, however, he picked up more and more yells and screams from criminals and their victims alike. He instinctively hunched, picking up his walking pace to get away from the streets that he’d once felt a sense of ownership over.

He got home to find Foggy slumped on the couch, the half-eaten takeaway Chinese strewn over the coffee table. “I got you your faves,” Foggy said as he crunched on a prawn cracker. He sat up straight when he saw Matt’s stormy face. “What happened?”

Matt charged into his room and threw the duffle at his bed with enough force that it bounced off onto the floor.

“Matt?”

“I need a shower, Fog. I smell.”

“You don’t smell,” Foggy called as Matt disappeared into the bathroom.

Matt gave a deep growl of anger and frustration as he stepped under the hot flow. He felt so fucking inadequate. For the first time since he was diagnosed, Matt let himself feel true grief. Deep down grief. He sobbed audibly as he thought about all the things he’d lost, all the things he can’t do, the unwelcome feelings of fear that plague him every day. He’d become so reliant on Foggy. Foggy, who’s so kind. Foggy, who picked him off the floor and held his hand when he was scared. Foggy, who he just blew off in a rage because he’s weak and self-indulgent.

Foggy could hear Matt’s crying from the living room. He sat awkwardly on the edge of the couch, not knowing what to do. The only time he’d ever heard Matt cry to this extent was when Foggy
discovered his Daredevil alter ego. \textit{Maybe this is what he needs}, Foggy thought. \textit{Or maybe I need to comfort him… No, best leave him alone right now – he probably needs space and privacy. Or maybe he needs a hug and kind words - a shoulder to cry on.} Foggy’s internal debate continued for quite some time, until he realised Matt had been in there for well over a quarter of an hour. He could no longer hear Matt’s sobs, but the shower was still running.

He crept over to the door and knocked quietly. “Matt?” When there was no answer, Foggy tried a little louder. “Matt? Are you okay?” Still no answer. “Shit,” Foggy said loudly, hoping that Matt could hear that too and call out his usual “I’m fine”.

Foggy rapped on the door louder still. “Matt? I’m worried. Do you need help?” Foggy let out a small whine of frustration. “Um, can I come in?” He could hear consistent patter of water as if no one was actually under the flow. “Actually, I’m coming in…. you should know…”

Foggy slowly opened the door a crack - just in case - but he couldn’t see Matt’s silhouette through the shower curtain. “Fuck,” Foggy muttered as he pulled the curtain open, privacy be damned. Matt was curled up in the shower surrounded by pools of red-tinged water. His eyes were closed, his lips were turning blue and he was shivering uncontrollably. As Foggy reached over to turn the shower taps off, he noticed the water was freezing. Matt had used up all the hot water.

Foggy grabbed a towel and threw it over Matt’s naked body. He shook Matt’s shoulder in an attempt to assess his consciousness. “Matt, what happened? Can you hear me?” Foggy was trying to make sense of the situation. Had Matt harmed himself? Was he coming out of a seizure? Or maybe he’d just slipped.

Matt gave a small moan. “Where is the blood coming from, Matt?” Foggy asked, trying to find the injury. He was so busy trying not to look at Matt’s naked body before that he didn’t even think to locate the source of the blood. A trickle of pinkish water dripped down the side of Matt’s cheek and Foggy tilted Matt’s head, hoping that Matt hadn’t given himself another brain injury. Matt’s darkened wet hair was making Foggy’s mission difficult, so he decided to try and get Matt out of the shower stall first.

“Matty, do you think you could help me?” Foggy said softly. “I need to get you out of the shower, but you’re a bit heavy.” Matt put his arm out to Foggy, who took it and tried to lift him up by his armpit. “Oof. Not working.” Foggy groaned. “How about I just get another towel and I’ll put it on the floor so that you can lie on it for a bit, away from the cold shower stall. What do you think?” Matt just put his arm up again - a request for help.

Foggy finally got him sitting upright. Lines of blood-tinged water snaked down Matt’s right neck and shoulder, and Foggy turned his attention back to the blood source. He held a towel against Matt’s damp hair and he flinched at the pressure. “Can you tell me where it hurts?” Foggy said softly. Foggy removed the towel temporarily, and with a quivering arm, Matt pointed towards his right temple, just above the hairline. Foggy patted the area with the towel and gently parted Matt’s hair. It was only a small cut, although it probably going to be accompanied by a much larger bruise later. Foggy remembered his elementary school soccer coach saying ‘heads always bleed more’ following a very bloody (but ultimately minor) incident. Still, Foggy held the towel in place for a little longer, hoping to stem the bleeding.

It dawned on Foggy that the similarities between Matt’s post-seizure symptoms and concussion made it difficult to properly assess for damage. He tried to remember all of Matt’s symptoms following the previous head injury, as well as the assessment questions. “Matt, could you squeeze my hands?” Foggy asked. Matt complied with each hand in turn. “Okay, can you… oh shit, what are the other brain injury questions?” Through chattering teeth, Matt slurred, “don’t have bray
“Yeah, I know buddy. Can you scoot over here?” Foggy patted the dry towel that he’d placed on the floor outside the shower stall. Matt slowly got onto his knees and wobbled a bit as he tried to stand. “Okay, maybe we’ll skip the floor bit. Do you think you could make it into the bedroom?”

Matt nodded and they shuffled over to the bed, with Foggy taking much of Matt’s weight. “Water?” Matt croaked as soon as he’d reached the bed.

“Water? You were just in the shower – oh, you want a drink of water?”

Matt didn’t answer, but Foggy took it as a yes. He pressed a glass into Matt’s hand, and Matt awkwardly rolled over to take a sip. It must have been a seizure if Matt was getting his semi-conscious water cravings.

“Shit, you’re still damp,” Foggy muttered, trying to dry Matt while somehow maintaining his dignity. Matt was now more aware of the situation and could help a little bit, but it still wasn’t easy drying a wet man lying on a (gradually not so) dry bed.

“Towels,” Matt mumbled. He motioned towards the cupboard where the towels were kept. While Foggy fetched some fresh towels, Matt attempted to dry himself with the damp one. His right shoulder was aching so he tucked his arm close to his chest and awkwardly rubbed his torso and thighs with the other.

“I think we should go to the hospital,” Foggy said as he returned with a couple of dry towels.

“No,” Matt argued.

“They said to bring you in if you hit your head during a seizure.”

“Only small – the cut,” he breathed.

“You hit it on hard tiles, Matt. Or maybe it was the tap… anyway, it’s not a matter of how big the cut is. It’s the overall damage.”

“No.”

Foggy huffed. “Your stubbornness is going to be the death of me.” He hated his lack of say in the matter. “Here’s the deal: if you throw up or have any other signs of concussion, I’m taking you straight to emergency. Okay?”

Matt was too busy fighting sleep to respond. The fact that he was arguing meant that he was over his confused postictal phase, but by now he was usually fast asleep.

“I know you want to go to sleep, but you’re freezing,” Foggy said, trying to dry Matt’s hair without disturbing the cut on his head. “I’m going to get you some hot water and I need you to drink it. Do you even own a hot water bottle?”

Matt was drifting off, so Foggy decided to quickly dressed him. As he threaded Matt’s arms into a soft hoodie, Matt yelped due to his sore shoulder, eliciting a panicked apology from Foggy. Foggy then piled on as many blankets as he could find, tucking them behind Matt’s back so he’d stay lying on his side. Matt was still puffing a little. His breathing difficulties didn’t usually last this long and it worried Foggy.

Foggy switched on the kettle then scrabbled around in the cupboards for a hot water bottle. When
that didn’t turn up anything, Foggy heated up a bottle of water in the microwave, which he gently tucked against Matt’s chest. Waking Matt up to drink the hot water was a more difficult task. He was irritable and unhappy about being disturbed, but fortunately his usual post-seizure water cravings meant that he quickly downed it all before falling asleep with the empty mug in his hand.

Foggy debated whether or not to put antiseptic on the cut. He didn’t want to wake Matt again. It was obviously well rinsed, but he didn’t want to risk it getting infected. They’d been warned that illness and infection lowered seizure thresholds, so it was probably a false economy to not take preventive measures.

Foggy dug through Matt’s well-stocked medicine cupboard until he realised the antiseptic was in a massive bulk bottle at the front. Evidently Matt went through quite a lot of it. He grabbed a cotton wool bud and crept back into the bedroom. “Matt, I’m just going to clean your cut. Don’t get a fright,” he warned, parting Matt’s now fluffy hair to get access. The cut was still oozing a little, but the blood around it had dried, sticking strands of hair to his scalp. He dabbed a little antiseptic onto the cut and Matt swung out, almost hitting Foggy in the process. In fact, the only reason he didn’t connect was because the pain in his shoulder caught mid-swing and he gasped in shock.

Foggy leapt away from the bed. Shit. This wasn’t part of the plan. Matt hadn’t reacted like this since the hospital, and he assumed the then uncontrolled reaction was due to the hospital environment alone.

“Matt, it’s okay,” Foggy said quickly. “I just need to clean the cut.” Matt grunted in reply. “Will you let me clean it?”

“Foggy,” Matt mumbled.

“Yes?” There was a silence. Maybe it wasn’t a question.

“Can I clean your cut, Matty?”

Matt grunted his permission, and Foggy cautiously approached the bed. He touched Matt’s arm first, just to test his response, and when Matt didn’t react, he lightly parted Matt’s hair again and dabbed a bit more antiseptic on it, quickly cleaning away the dried blood so that Matt could rest.

“Done,” Foggy told Matt a few seconds later. “Go back to sleep.”

“Thanks,” Matt mumbled, and Foggy lightly rubbed Matt’s shoulder to reassure him.

Foggy didn’t want to leave him alone with the head injury and effects of the cold shower. Matt had stopped shivering now, but his skin was still quite cold. So after returning the antiseptic to its usual home. Foggy fetched a book and a pillow and perched on the other side of Matt’s bed, listening to his breaths become slowly more normal.

Maybe Matt had been right to accuse Foggy of jinxing him.

Chapter End Notes

I never intended this story to go anywhere near art, but it crept in anyway. I should point out that I have no idea what MoMA's policy on art incidents is, but I do know that most museums keep these things very very secret. You'd be surprised at how
many artworks get damaged every day.
When Matt wandered out the morning after the shower incident, he was topless and looking distinctly confused.

“Morning,” Foggy said from the couch, wearing nothing but boxers and a t-shirt.

“It feels… like a sauna,” Matt mumbled.

“I put the thermostat up last night to stop you getting hypothermia. I might have overdid it, sorry.”

“Hypothermia,” Matt repeated, still confused.

“Hey, how’s the head?”

Matt felt the lump on his forehead. “Injury-wise, I’m getting this weird sense of déjà vu,” he said, trying to remember what happened. Sore shoulder, bruised head, aching muscles, headache… “I didn’t get past the gates of Foggy and reclaim my red suit, did I?”

Foggy raised his eyebrows. “You think that’s the most likely situation?”

Matt obviously hadn’t a clue, so Foggy filled him in. “You had a seizure in the shower. You hit your head and I found you semi-conscious under the cold water. There was no adventure, I’m afraid. Although there was quite a bit of red.”

“I’m sorry, Foggy. You shouldn’t have to keep picking me up off the floor – or out of the shower.”

“Don’t apologise. The number of times you carried me back to our dorm after a particularly drunken party… well, let’s just say you still have a lot more credit on your account.” Foggy paused, gathering up the courage to say what he had to say next. “Um, so… we have to talk about what happens when you injure yourself during a seizure and I think it warrants a visit to the hospital, but you disagree.”

Matt silently opened and closed his mouth a few times, trying to figure out how to respond to this blunt request. “Well, ultimately it’s up to me. If I say I don’t need to go, I don’t go,” Matt said eventually.

“Yeah, but you’re not able to make that call after a seizure. You’re barely conscious, let alone capable of assessing your injuries. Can you remember anything from last night?”

“I – that’s not – I don’t want to talk about it right now, Foggy,” Matt said crossly. He was tired and crabby and most importantly, “I haven’t had coffee.”

“Okay, after coffee,” Foggy said plainly. Matt pursed his lips and wandered over to the coffee machine, taking his time with each step. Foggy initially thought Matt’s pace was a deliberate attempt to delay the conversation about medical emergencies, but it soon became clear that he was struggling to sense the objects around him. It looked like the combination of medication and seizures was still greatly affecting him.
Matt concentrated on each object in turn. He could smell the coffee in the canister. Good. He reached out for it, running his hand along the bench slightly before his hand bumped into the coffee. Next: a spoon. He missed the drawer knob and instead banged his knuckle against the bench. He swore under his breath in frustration. He carefully spooned the coffee into the machine, one hand on the filter for reference. The spoon clinked on the side of the canister a few times as he misjudged its location. As the coffee was brewing, he slowly felt for the mugs, getting the sense that Foggy was staring at him all the while. He could get this right, he told himself, even if he was unusually slow. But that was okay too. It was Saturday and there was no rush. Next: milk. This was easy. He trailed his hand along the bench for reference as he walked to the fridge. He was still exhausted from the previous night’s seizure, and his hand shook with exertion as he carried the milk to the awaiting mugs.

“And you want any help?” Foggy called from the living room.

“No,” Matt said sullenly. He felt guilty for snapping so he added, “thanks.”

As he placed the milk on the bench, he heard the crunch of coffee that he must have accidentally spilled while spooning it into the filter. He couldn’t do anything right. Even something as simple as making coffee—something that should have come automatically—was a hurdle. The frustration boiled over and with a growl of rage, he angrily hurled one of the mugs at the floor. There was a gasp from the living room, and after a moment of silent delay, Foggy slowly approached the kitchen.

Foggy stood there surveying the scene: the shattered mug, the coffee grains strewn across the bench, and his barefooted friend leaning on the bench, breathing heavily and on the verge of tears. “Oh look, all your problems have been solved,” Foggy said sarcastically.

Matt looked shattered himself, and he eventually puffed, “I’m sorry, Foggy.”

After a long pause, Foggy said, “don’t move. I’m going to sweep the shards up around you. You’ll cut your feet otherwise.” Matt simply nodded.

After Foggy was satisfied that he’d go the last of the shards, he said, “perhaps you should go sit down for a bit. You must be tired still after the seizure, not to mention the bump to your head. I’ll finish making the coffee.” Matt couldn’t argue with that, so he slunk off to the couch.

Neither of them spoke until they’d finished their coffees. Matt took a deep breath and said, “I know I scared you and I’m sorry. I’m deeply ashamed of my actions.”

Foggy almost laughed at Matt’s stiff apology. “That’s okay. I thought you might have grown out of your throwing things habit, but obviously not. At least it wasn’t a computer this time,” Foggy said sardonically, thinking back to a particularly memorable incident in second year law. “Maybe just stick to pillows in the future.”

Matt rubbed his forehead, trying to will away the tension. “How can I make it up to you?”

“You don’t-”

“Please, Foggy,” Matt begged.

Foggy thought for a moment. “We could resume this morning’s conversation…. and maybe follow through on those cooking lessons you begged me to accept.” Matt was getting sick of eating takeout or toast every time it was Foggy’s turn to cook, and a few days into their co-habitation experiment, he’d offered to teach Foggy the basics. Foggy didn’t care either way, but after the
successful echolocation tutorial, he thought perhaps the lessons would benefit them both.

“I pick the cooking lessons,” Matt replied immediately.

“No, it’s got to be both,” Foggy said firmly. “The first one is vital.”

Matt rolled his eyes. “I walked right into that one,” he muttered. “Okay, so what do you want clarified?”

“Last night, I found you freezing cold in a pool of blood, barely conscious. Now if you walked in on me in that situation, what would you do?”

“That’s not fair, Foggy.”

“What? Switching the roles? Why?”

“Because—” Matt was trapped.

“Because you magically get better on your own? You’re different to other people?”

“No,” Matt said quietly. Yes, he thought. He was different. He couldn’t say that though.

Foggy tried a slightly different tack. “Okay, maybe put yourself in *my* situation. I find my best friend freezing cold in a pool of blood, semi-conscious. He has a history of seizures, has ended up in hospital twice in the last two months, and ended up on a ventilator last time he had a head injury. He’d be having trouble breathing, but refuses to go to the hospital even though I can’t be sure that a) he doesn’t have a brain injury, b) he’s even capable of making that decision because he’s not entirely with it, and/or c) he might fight me if I try. Most importantly, the hospital has told me to take you to the hospital if you hit your head.”

Matt fiddled with the string on his hoodie. He couldn’t respond to that either. Finally he said, “but I’m fine now. I didn’t need to go to the hospital. It would have involved a lot of waiting round, fussing. I just needed to sleep it off.”

“But it might not have been okay. You can’t know that. And if anything happened, I couldn’t live with myself.”

“So it’s about you and your guilt?”

“No, it’s about keeping you alive and well.”

“I hate hospitals,” Matt rebutted.

“Me too. Believe me,” Foggy said, getting increasingly frustrated. “I won’t take you every time you have a seizure - you know I won’t. It’ll just be when you look like you’re in danger of a greater injury. You don’t want to hurt your brain any more than it already is, and I need my business partner smart and witty and *alive.* You need to trust me, Matt.”

Foggy switched to his business voice. “So, do we have an agreement? If I think you’re in danger, do I have your permission to take you to the hospital if I believe you’re not conscious enough to make a rational decision?”

Matt looked completely miserable, but finally nodded.

“I need to hear you say it, Matt.”
“You have my permission.” He paused. “But only if it’s an extraordinary circumstance and you’re 98% - and no less - sure I’m not capable of making the decision, not just because you want to override my decision. You need to assess me with your objective lawyer hat on, not your friend hat.”

“Deal. Now what about these cooking lessons?”

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After showering and a second coffee, they launched into Foggy’s first cooking lesson.

“So you can make spaghetti with pre-made sauce, packet mac and cheese, toast, boiled eggs,” Matt listed. “What else?”

Foggy outlined the rest of his limited culinary experience, and Matt muttered, “can you make anything that has green in it?”

“They're all green. Don't you know?”

“Ha ha.” Matt said sarcastically. “You know what I mean. Where should we start?”

“I like lasagne.”

“We'll make a vegetable lasagne.”

‘Really?’ Foggy screwed up his face. “Why do you have to ruin a lasagne by making it healthy?”

“You know I don’t cook meat at home. This will be delicious, trust me.”

Matt always enjoyed grocery shopping with Foggy, and it was even more enjoyable shopping for a collaborative meal. As Matt called out the ingredients, Foggy led him over to each vegetable in turn. “Eggplant,” he announced, and Foggy dragged him towards the lovely soft, round vegetables with the painful, spiky tops. Foggy grabbed the biggest one, and Matt stopped him. “No, that one is a bit dry.”

“But it's the biggest,” Foggy argued.

“It'll also be more bitter,” Matt said, feeling the eggplants and eventually selecting a long slender one. “This one. Its shape will make it easy to cut and layer, and it’s one of the fresher ones in this pile.” Foggy put it in the basket and Matt demanded, “now the bell pepper!” Matt carefully chose the pepper, zucchini and mushrooms, correcting Foggy each time he tried to pick one that wasn’t quite the right shape or size or freshness. In the end, Foggy stood back and let Matt do his thing uninterrupted.

He was equally picky about his dairy products and refused to buy anything other than the most expensive branded milk at the supermarket. “All the others combine milks from various dairies,” Matt sneered. Foggy just shrugged. He really didn't care.

Matt wouldn’t buy the mass-produced mozzarella and Parmesan sold at the supermarket, so they had to take the long route home via an Italian grocery shop. The owner greeted Matt in Italian and they had a long chat before Foggy, feeling left out, cleared his throat. Matt took the hint. "Sorry Fog," Matt said, stuffing the cheeses into the grocery bag. "Grazie," he called out as he left. "Prego! Alla prossima," the shopkeeper affectionately called back.
“Maybe you should teach me Italian while we cook,” Foggy said when they got home.

“And when we move onto curries next week, you can teach me Punjabi,” Matt snickered.

“Yeah yeah. Laugh at me all you want,” Foggy grumbled, unpacking the bags with a little more noise than necessary. “What do I do with this tomato? It got squished on the way home,” Foggy said.

“Pomodoro, Foggy.”

“Yeah, that’s what I said,” Foggy muttered, rolling his eyes. “Hey, at least I’ve mastered one word in Italian: zucchini.”

“We’re going to turn the pomodori into sauce so it doesn’t matter if it’s squished.”

They cut the zucchini, pepper, eggplant and mushrooms into thin strips, and Matt had to keep biting his tongue to prevent him telling Foggy to cut them ‘just so.’ It doesn't need to be perfect, he kept reminding himself.

After they’d grilled the vegetables, Matt showed Foggy how to make a tomato sauce and then a béchamel sauce to make up the various layers. “All this effort,” Foggy moaned. “Why didn't we just buy a frozen ready-to-eat one? It’s actually cheaper after you take into account all the expensive cheeses and vegetables. I thought that was the point of all this – to cut down on our takeout food expenses.”

“Because this one's better,” Matt snapped. “Foggy! Keep stirring!” he yelled, smelling the béchamel catching on the bottom of the saucepan.

“I did stir!”

“You need to keep stirring though so that it doesn't burn.” Matt approached the stovetop. “Did you turn the heat up?”

“You can tell that? I figured that if it cooked faster, we could eat sooner.”

"No wonder it's burning," Matt muttered, wiping his sweaty brow. He didn't think teaching Foggy to cook would be that frustrating.

They started layering the pasta, sauces and vegetables. At one point Foggy turned away to open another packet of lasagne sheets and when he returned, he found that Matt had rearranged his zucchini layer. “Hey! What was wrong with my arrangement?”

“It wasn't even,” Matt said bluntly.

Foggy groaned. “Such a perfectionist.” Foggy threw a stray mushroom into the zucchini layer and crossed his arms. It was clearly a test. “Ooh a mushroom in the zucchini layer,” he sang. “Oooh what's going to happen if you leave it there?”

It's cool, Matt told himself. It's okay. Once we cut it and eat it, a mushroom out of place won't matter. He gritted his teeth and spread a layer of tomato sauce over the top, grimacing slightly when he felt the out of place bump of the mushroom.

As soon as the dish made it into the oven, Foggy exclaimed, “it's so hot in here still. I'm going to go get us some beers.”

Matt had barely consumed alcohol since his last hospital stay, having been cautioned against it until the seizures were under control. But maybe it wouldn't be so bad.

"I got you that bland German beer you like," Foggy announced on return from the liquor store. He pushed one of the bottles into Matt’s hand.

“Um, I don't know-”

"Oh shit, you're not meant to drink."

"No, I don't think that's what she meant." Matt said noncommittally.

"'Avoid alcohol’ is a pretty clear phrase, Matt."

Matt rubbed his thumb along the textured bottle neck, mulling over the decision. “It won't hurt to have one, will it?"

"I don't know,” Foggy said awkwardly. “It depends if you want to risk it. I don't really like picking you up off the floor, but you definitely get the poorer deal. I'm sorry, man. If I'd remembered I would never have bought them."

"No, you shouldn't stop drinking just because of me."

"Will the smell bother you?"

Matt shook his head. "I can smell the lasagne cooking. That's better than beer." He stashed the bottle in the fridge.

Foggy took a swig of beer. "Ergh, you’re not missing out. You might as well drink water for all the taste this beer has.”

Matt chuckled. “A dig at my taste in beer under the guise of making me feel better. Nice.”

“Hey, what are friends for if they can’t tease you about your love of piss-weak beer,” Foggy reasoned. “So, what do you want to do now?"

Matt shrugged. He was used to actively entertaining Foggy whenever he was at the apartment. It seemed rude to want to go off on his own and quietly read a book.

"We don't have to do anything," Foggy pointed out. He picked at the label on his beer bottle, trying to come up with a suggestion. "Do you want to watch a movie?"

Matt shrugged again.

Foggy narrowed his eyes. "Are you doing your non-committal act because you want to do something else but are afraid of offending me if you disagree?"

Matt smiled guiltily. "A little bit. I might just have a nap if that's cool. Um, could you get the lasagne out or call me when it's ready?"

Matt disappeared into his room and curled up under the sheet. He was genuinely tired, but he also needed to get away from Foggy's open bottle. For some reason the yeasty beer smell made him feel nauseous (an aversion that might inadvertently be good for keeping him on the straight and
Foggy realised after about ten minutes that he had no idea when the lasagne was meant to be ready. He tiptoed into Matt's room and could hear him gently sleep-snuffling. Damn. Matt would be so mad if it was taken out at any point other than ready. Foggy flicked the oven light on and sat in front of the oven, looking up every minute or so from his game of Sugar Squash to check whether the surface had ‘lightly browned’ like the internet said. It was still pale when Foggy heard a noise from Matt’s room.

“Matt?” he called tentatively. Matt didn’t answer so Foggy got up to check on him. Matt was still loosely curled up on his side but was now seizing. “No no no!” Foggy said out loud as he rushed across the room. He wrung his hands as he ticked off all the first aid stages in his head. Matt already something soft under his head and there were no hard objects to injure him. Not being able to do anything was almost worst. Foggy gingerly sat down on the side of the bed, and just as Foggy remembered that he was meant to be timing the seizure, Matt fell still. The only thing I had to remember, he thought crossly. He grasped Matt’s hand and softly whispered now familiar orienting words, “Matt? It’s Foggy. You’ve had a seizure. You’re in your apartment - in your bed even. Makes for a nice change huh. At least it’s soft.”

Three hours later, Matt appeared in his bedroom doorway, looking distinctly rumpled. ‘What happened, Foggy?’ he slurred.

“You had a seizure in your sleep. The internet says that it can happen.”

He frowned, “no, I mean why can I smell burning?”

“Oh, yeah about that…” Foggy lowered his voice to a nervous whisper. “I kinda burnt the lasagne.”

“Oh.” Matt looked slightly ashamed. “Sorry about that… and thanks.”

“For what?”

“For getting me water, checking that I was okay.”

“You remember that?”

“Yeah, vaguely.”

“That’s good to know. I won’t confess my innermost secrets to you immediately post-seizure anymore then.”

Matt gave a small snort. “If it helps, I don’t usually remember anything.”

“Now that you’re awake, I have a real confession: it wasn’t the seizure that distracted me.”

Matt raised his eyebrows. “What was it?”

“I started watching a really cute video about this orphaned baby seal. They find him nestled by its dead mother on the rocks and they take him back to the sanctuary and feed him and then finally he gets old enough and they take him down to the beach and let him go and at first he doesn’t go, he
just sits there and they’re like ‘oh no, he can’t be freed’ and then he starts jumping down the beach to the water, and oh Matt… it was so sad and happy at the same time.”

“You got distracted by a video of a rescue seal?” Matt asked in disbelief.

“Well, yeah,” Foggy said apologetically, a hangdog expression on his face.

“Oh Foggy,” Matt chuckled.

“You’re not mad?”

“Well, technically, as your teacher I should have told you to take it out of the oven, so I can’t really be mad. Is it salvageable?”

“Yeah, a bit. One end is better than the other.”

“Shall we?” Matt said, limping slightly as he walked towards the kitchen. He felt achy all over.

Matt poked the top of the lasagne. “It’s not too bad,” he assessed. “Do you want to plate up?”

Foggy grabbed the plates and spatula and started cutting into the slightly-less-than-burnt side. He looked sideways at Matt who was leaning back against the counter looking pretty zonked. “Hey, I bet you don’t care about that rogue mushroom anymore,” Foggy teased.

Matt gave him a wan smile.

“My stomach,” Foggy groaned as he finished up his last mouthful of lasagne. “So much food.”

“It was good huh?” Matt was thrilled with Foggy’s enthusiasm.

“Yeah, I can’t believe I’m saying this about a vegetarian dish, but it was way better than the frozen ones, meat and all.”

“Told you. And it’s even better when it’s not burnt,” Matt pointed out.

“I’m never going to live this down, am I?”

“Distracted by a baby seal,” Matt said, shaking his head.

“Do you want thirds?” Foggy asked. They’d both had a second helping after peeling the blackened crust off the top. “I could deconstruct it further if you’d like.” He pushed back his chair and Matt winced slightly at the sound of rubber on wood.

“My stomach is distended I’ve eaten so much.” Matt rubbed his belly.

The apartment was still near sauna temperature and they’d stripped down to their boxers, modesty be damned. Foggy critically looked at Matt’s torso and said, “you’ve lost a lot of weight. You need fourths, fifths even.”

“It’s probably muscle loss,” Matt said glumly. Despite his best intentions, he hadn’t been keeping up with his regular exercise routine, not to mention the incidental exercise he used to get patrolling
the streets at night. He would never admit it, but Matt was proud of his muscles and didn’t want them to wither away.

As if Foggy knew what he was thinking, Foggy said with a laugh, “we can’t have you losing all those muscles, Matty. You managed to maintain those abs even through our final law exams. How about I exercise with you? Would that make it easier?”

“I’m just tired all the time. It’s not about motivation.” He corrected, “well, mostly not.”

“Still a few hours of daylight left. Do you want to go to the park for a jog?”

“A jog?” Matt said incredulously. “What, I’m going to tie myself to you like they do for blind runners in the Olympics?”

“Oh, I didn’t think of that. Yeah, if you want. But that restricts you to my pace.”

“What’s your pace?”


Matt couldn’t keep a straight face. “You’ve never tried jogging?”

Foggy shrugged. “Why would I? I’ve never seen a jogger smiling, so it can’t be all that fun. But if jogging provides you with some much needed endorphins then I’m willing to sacrifice myself.”

Matt considered Foggy’s offer for a moment. “I should probably get some fresh air, but I don’t know that jogging is really my kind of exercise.” He quickly added, “as kind as that offer was.”

Foggy started clearing the table, and Matt stood up with a small groan, feeling guilty that Foggy was doing all the work.

“Sit,” Foggy said. “I’ve got this.”

“Thanks Foggy.” Matt plopped back down on his seat. “There’s no way I could do anything today even if I wanted to,” Matt said, voice raised in an attempt to compete with the noise of Foggy attacking the dishwashing. “I’m still exhausted from the seizure. I thought I’d at least a couple of days rest after yesterday’s seizure, but looks like there isn’t a clear pattern to them after all. I don’t think I can take anything for granted.”

The crashing of dishes and cutlery stopped. “Sorry for jinxing you,” Foggy said.

Matt huffed in amusement. “Don’t be silly Foggy. You can’t believe that.”

Foggy’s jaw dropped. “You told me yesterday that I jinxed you… You made me feel bad – and then you had-I thought it was my fault for saying-”

Matt waved him off. “I don’t think there’s a reason for-” He stopped suddenly.

“What’s wrong?” Foggy said, turning off the kitchen tap.

Matt put his finger to his lips. After a few minutes, Matt said, “call the police. That man is on the verge of attacking his girlfriend again.” His facial expression immediately changed back to one of deep concentration.

Foggy called the police and it was a good thing too because the row quickly escalated into violence.
Fifteen minutes passed, then twenty. Foggy watched Matt intently, desperately wanting to interrupt and get an update. Finally Matt said, “they both denied he hit her. They said it was just a heated verbal argument. The police have left.”

“Is she safe?”

“She’s gone to a friend’s house for the night.”

“That’s something, I guess.”

“Until tomorrow night,” Matt grumbled. “Do you see why I do it?”

Foggy sat up straight. “You’re not thinking of going out there, are you?”

“I can’t, Foggy. I don’t think I can risk having a seizure in my suit. Plus I’m so drained and my senses are so addled that I can’t even make coffee at the moment, let alone deflect a knife.”

Such was Matt’s tone of misery that Foggy half-considered offering to be his vigilante wingman, narrating from the sidelines and dragging him into the shadows if he seized. Okay, maybe not such a practical idea.... Instead he said, “maybe we could talk to her. Offer her our legal services pro bono.”

“If she’s even willing to press charges,” Matt pointed out. “She denies anything’s even happening at the moment.”

“Well maybe she just doesn’t know her options. We could get her into a shelter-”

“And then he hunts her down, threatens her – or worse-”

“You don’t get to play this out in your head, Matt. You don’t know what’s going to happen-”

“I’ve seen it time and time again.”

“Okay, I accept you’re cynical about the law,” Foggy said bluntly. “But look at this way: you’re not going to return to your night time outings until you’re – I don’t know how to put it - confident you’re well and safe enough, so let’s do what we can do within the confines of the law.” Foggy decided now was not the time to suggest Matt never return to his vigilante activities. There were some arguments that didn’t need to happen right now.

“And how do you explain to this woman how we know about the abuse?” Matt was still playing devil’s advocate out of sheer habit.

“Simple: we overheard it. It’s the truth. I’m sure her immediate neighbours heard it – the crashing, the banging. It’d be hard to not hear the commotion if you’re in an adjoining apartment.”

Matt still looked unconvinced, so Foggy continued. “Look, if you don’t want to pursue this fine. But I do. Can you just tell me next time she’s home alone please.”

“What and she’s just going to confess to you, a stranger, when she’s already shunned the police?”

Foggy sighed. “What did I say about playing this out before it’s even happened? I don’t know what’s going to happen, but I’ll be damned if I don’t let her know that there’s assistance available. I’ll give her my card and tell her to call if she needs assistance. I’ll give her the address of some women’s shelters. Whatever I think will help.”

Matt ran his hands through his hair, stressed and frustrated.
Foggy pressed the issue once again. “You’ll tell me when she’s alone?”

Matt nodded and got to his feet with a small grunt. “I’m going to bed.”

“Already?” Foggy asked, looking at his watch. The sun was only just setting.

“I’m tired and sore,” Matt said simply. He added, “and I have mass in the morning.”

“You don’t want to disappoint Tabitha,” Foggy teased.

“That’s not why I’m going,” Matt said, a little cross.

“I know,” Foggy said in a sanguine tone. Matt gave a curt nod and disappeared into his bedroom.

Foggy yelled after him, “will I disturb you if I use headphones?”

“It’s no louder than the 18 televisions currently blaring around us, Foggy. You don’t have to ask.”

Matt regretted telling Foggy about being able to hear noise from headphones. It was the least of Matt’s concerns at the moment, even if Foggy’s video games did involve an absurd amount of gunfire and explosions. In the space of a few months he’d switched from being plagued by insomnia to an almost constant tiredness. He couldn’t stay awake even if he wanted to.

The apartment was still stinking hot, so he didn’t bother with pyjamas. He curled up in bed and listened jealously to the pop of a bottle top as Foggy helped himself to another beer from the fridge. By the time Foggy had even turned on the gaming console, Matt was once again fast asleep.

“Foggy? What are you doing?” Matt said, brushing a hand away from his face, sleepy and confused.

“Quite the sleepover you’re having, Matthew,” Elektra purred. “Does Foggy stay over often?” She was sitting on the edge of the bed, one hand on his bare chest.

“What are you doing here? Why are you in my home?” Matt said, pushing her hand away. More worryingly, how did he sleep through the intrusion?

“I left a message with your secretary to ring me back and when I didn’t hear from you I decided to make a house call. If that’s how you conduct business, no wonder your little firm is struggling.”

“That’s a ridiculous excuse for breaking into someone’s apartment in the middle of the night,” Matt whispered. “You need to leave. I’ll call you on Monday during business hours.”

Elektra ignored his demand, and said, “to be honest, I’m quite surprised you’re even here. It’s a Saturday night in New York. Shouldn’t you be, oh I don’t know, beating up petty drug dealers or something?”

“You need to leave,” Matt repeated, more firm this time.

“Here I was thinking you were still attracted to me,” she cooed, tracing the scars on his chest.

This was not entirely untrue, but Matt knew that the medication was dulling everything, including his ability to be aroused. For once it was a good thing. The last thing he needed was to send Elektra
“What makes you think I ever want to sleep with you again?” he spluttered.

“Just a feeling,” she said lightly. “This is a pretty good scar,” she mused, tracing the one on his lower stomach.

“Nobu’s work,” he said, remembering the conversation they had at the hospital. She knew what he was capable of.

“Impressive.” She gently placed his hand on her thigh where she had a large scar of her own.

“You’ve been busy,” Matt observed, running his fingers back and forth over the bumpy ridge.

“It seems we both have.” They sat in contemplative silence for a moment. Eventually Elektra said, “It’s a pity epilepsy’s not as sexy as scars. You still having seizures?”

Matt huffed in frustration. “Why did you come here, Elektra? Tell me the truth.”

She traced her finger from Nobu’s scar along the bottom of Matt’s stomach. “There he is,” she said, triumphant, as Matt’s body betrayed him. He flushed with embarrassment. It looked like his libido wasn’t completely gone.

He couldn’t give in to temptation though. He sat up with a small groan. “Leave,” he hissed, “before you wake Foggy up. I’ll call you on Monday.” He slid out of bed and holding her by the arm, he marched her to the front door. She stood there with her arms crossed, as oppositional as always, so he made an exasperated shooing motion. “It’s a shame, Matthew,” she said as he closed the door behind her as quietly as he could.

“What?” croaked Foggy from behind his screen. “Whozath’door?”

Matt tiptoed into the kitchen and turned on the tap. “Sorry if I woke you, Foggy. I’m just getting some water.”

Foggy grunted “okay,” and Matt heard him roll over and quickly start snoring once again. Thank goodness Foggy was a heavy sleeper. He’d hate to think what Foggy’s response would be to Elektra breaking into the apartment.

Matt was too frazzled to sleep, which was saying something considering he seemed to do nothing but sleep at the moment. He sat in bed, listening intently for any signs that Elektra was still lurking around. Nothing. Just the occasional drunken yell from the street, a couple of televisions still on, a couple having sex two floors below, a dog barking on a rooftop – the usual Saturday night sounds of Hell’s Kitchen.

He picked up a book from his bedside table and started to read, trying to distract himself from Elektra. This game she was playing was doing his head in, and yet there was a part of him that wanted in. He hated that. Agitated, he read the same page over and over until he finally fell asleep, hand still resting on the open book.
I almost titled this chapter 'Foggy gets distracted by a baby seal'.
Matt woke up crabby and tired. He slapped his alarm clock angrily and rolled over, pulling his pillow over his head. Eight minutes passed and the alarm sounded again. Did he really need to go to church when the bed was so comfortable?

He heard the creak of Foggy’s bed as his friend roused and shuffled to the bathroom. He pulled the pillow over his head again, trying to smother both the sounds and the guilt.

Foggy knocked on his bedroom door, even though it was left open after Elektra’s visit last night. “Matt?” he said softly, “are you awake?”

Matt gave a grunt in the affirmative and pushed the pillow off his head.

“You going to go to church?”

Another grunt.

“Cool, just checking,” Foggy said, wandering into the kitchen and switching on the coffee machine.

Matt lay there, breathing in the comforting smell of brewing coffee. Foggy eventually called out, “I’ve got a coffee here for you on the table,” which was enough to get Matt out of bed.

Foggy chuckled as Matt limped into the living room. “You have some rock star hair going on right now, Matty.” Matt ran his hands through his hair and tried to flatten it out.

“You have to wash it,” he croaked.

“You have to wash everything,” Foggy added. “Thanks to the sauna temperatures, we both stink.”

Matt huffed in amusement. “Thanks for the coffee,” he said, still crinkly eyed and a little dopey. He took a sip then plonked himself down on the couch, nursing the coffee in both hands.

“From my calculations, we probably need to get going in about three quarters of an hour, which leaves fifteen minutes for coffee, fifteen minutes for showering and dressing, and fifteen minutes for faffing around and doing whatever makes you always late.”

“We?”

“Yeah, I’ll walk you.”

“You don’t have to do that. I’m more than capable-”

“I know. I need the walk though,” Foggy added, joining Matt on the couch. “Plus while you’re at church I’ll visit the guy who did your bracelet and get him to tighten it.”

Matt reflexively shook his wrist so that the bracelet fell further up his arm. “You’re not going to insist I wear it at church?”

“They know you, but I guess – okay, well maybe we could get it adjusted afterwards. I still could
do with the walk to church though.” Foggy hesitated and added quickly, “but only if you want.”

Matt sipped his coffee, not sure how to respond. He felt comforted by Foggy’s offer to accompany him, but at the same time he wanted at least some of his independence back.

“It’s up to you,” Foggy said. “I can always meet you afterwards and we can do the bracelet, and maybe a sneaky pancake session.”

“That sounds good,” Matt said with a small smile. He planned to leave in half an hour and take his time walking to church.

Of course, Foggy was right about that extra fifteen minutes. Somehow he was still running late, even though his shower and coffee were restricted to fifteen minutes each. He rushed out the door, hair still slightly damp.

He didn’t know why he’d made navigating his way to church into such a big deal. There were few pedestrians around, and apart from tripping over a paver (which might have happened even with his full senses), he got there without incident.

He slipped into the back row just as the service started and was surprised to feel a couple of braille sheets on the pew. Evidently Father Lantom knew him well enough to leave them on that particular row. Matt picked up the paper and slid onto the seat, momentarily losing grip of his cane so that it fell to the ground with a clatter. He could hear the sound of people turning in their seats to see the source of the commotion, and he blushed red, shrinking down in his seat. He left the cane on the ground, reasoning that at least it wouldn’t fall again that way.

Father Lantom announced, “and now we pray together…” Matt bowed his head, murmuring the familiar prayer along with the rest of the congregation. It had an instant calming effect and by the time they’d reached the prayer’s end, his hands had stopped shaking and his shoulder muscles had finally started to unclench. The first reading was announced and Matt happily ran his hands over the first sheet, following the bible passage with the reader. He was touched that they’d gone to all the effort of accessing a braille printer on the basis that he’d turned up last week. After all, they didn’t even know if he’d turn up again.

He felt bad when he ducked out as soon as the service had finished, leaving the pages behind for future use. He knew he should stick around and thank Father Lantom for the specially printed readings and hymns, but he had a headache and didn’t think he could bear the friendly small talk and offers of tea, fruit cake and stale biscuits that inevitably followed mass.

Foggy was waiting for him once again on the bench outside the church. To Foggy’s surprise and relief, Matt gave him a broad smile and happily took his arm.

“Good service?”

“Yeah, they printed a copy of the readings and hymns specially for me.”

“In braille?”

“Yeah,” he said with a smile.

“They bought a printer just for you?”

“Just?” Matt said in mock offense. “I reckon they probably used the library services.”

“Still, that’s great,” Foggy said. It was a bit depressing that something as basic as being able to
access materials for mass seemed like a bonus to Matt, but he didn’t want to burst Matt’s bubble. If Matt could shell out for an expensive printer, then so could the Catholic Church.

“Now should we do pancakes or bracelet first?” Matt asked, nudging Foggy to get a move on.

Somewhere between church and home, Matt’s mood started to drop again, even with the pancake interlude. He and Foggy slowly trudged up the six flights of stairs, and as Matt threw himself onto the couch, exhausted, Foggy remarked, “now you understand my regular relationship with the stairs.”

Matt rolled his eyes. “You probably need to walk up those stairs more often then. What were you saying about going for a jog?”

“There was a condition, Matt, if you remember. You have to be tied to me.”

Matt gave him a small smile. “Not a chance.”

Foggy handed Matt a glass of water then flopped into the nearby armchair, sipping on his own glass.

“What now?” Matt said vaguely, removing his glasses and rubbing his eyes tiredly. “Do you have plans for the afternoon?”

“Well, I was thinking maybe we should try that echolocation training again.” Foggy remembered how happy Matt seemed after the first lesson, and thought it might help get Matt out of his current funk. Matt anxiously fiddled with his newly tightened bracelet. He seemed a little distant and when he didn’t respond straight away, Foggy said, “Matt? Are you okay?”

Matt sighed. “In all honesty, can’t teach you because you’re not blind. I use my occipital lobe to process spatial information through sound. You use it to see. You’re never going to learn unless you poke your eyes out.”

Foggy was confused at Matt’s sudden change in tune. “But you taught me all those other things,” he argued.

“What’s the point? You can see,” Matt said glumly.

“It was fun,” Foggy pointed out. “That’s got to count for something.”

Matt got up and flicked on the kettle.

“What’s your occipital lobe?” Foggy asked curiously.

“The part of the brain that processes vision. Matt tapped the back of his head. “Just here.”

“Huh,” Foggy said.

“You know this, Foggy. Remember? I told you about those scans they did in hospital.”

“The ones that explained your mad senses?”
“No, they showed I was using the vision centre of my brain for other things, like mapping out spaces through echolocation. It doesn’t ‘explain’ my enhanced senses. They’re just… dunno…”

“Magic?” Foggy suggested, earning a dramatic eye roll from Matt. “Well as I said,” Foggy continued, “even if I can’t learn echolocation properly, it was still fun y’know learning about breezes and sounds. Plus I feel like I’m a lot more observant now.”

“Oh… well, that’s great,” Matt said, surprised by this revelation. “Maybe… yeah, we can do it again.” He held out a teabag. “Tea?”

“Yeah, thanks,” Foggy said distractedly. “It’s weird that the visual section is at the back of our heads when our eyes are at the front, huh.”

“Then there’s the fact that the left side of our brains controls the muscles in the right side of our bodies and vice versa,” Matt pointed out.

“Ah yes, middle school biology,” Foggy said dreamily. “I forgot about that. Brains are weird.”

“You’re weird.”

“Says the Catholic guy who dresses up as Satan,” Foggy quipped.

“Point taken,” Matt said with a chuckle. He remembered Gladys telling him about accessible museum tours. “Do you want to see some art?” he asked, handing Foggy his cup of tea.

“Like now?” Foggy held up his cup.

“Yeah, maybe in an hour or so. Research – for the candy case.”

“That’s its official name now huh,” Foggy said with a smile.

“Yup.”

“Are you up to walking to the museum? Hang on, if your senses are reduced, does that mean you can finally tolerate the subway?”

It was a good question, but not one that Matt really wanted to test right now. “Let’s walk. We can even combine the training and museum if you want.”

“I’m not going in there blindfolded, Matt,” Foggy said, worried that he might be serious.

“Chicken.”

“Let’s just call it practical. What if I accidentally trip over an artwork myself? I’ll never live that down,” Foggy ranted, making Matt chuckle. “Besides, one of us has to read the labels.”

It turned out there was a lot more reading involved than expected. The museum had an exhibition of text-based art, which disappointingly had few objects for Matt to experience through his working senses.

The staff apologised to Matt for the lack of interpretation materials for this particular show, suggesting he return on Tuesday for a special accessible tour.

“Do you ever do them on weekends?” Matt asked.

“They’re not scheduled, no. But we can arrange one if you want.”
“No, thank you,” he replied stiffly, annoyed that programs for the blind were always scheduled during regular business hours, implying that blind people don’t have jobs.

He turned to Foggy. “Shall we do this?”

“Lead the way!” Foggy joked, holding out his arm.

Foggy’s descriptions always came with bonus commentary and judgement.

“Your body is a battleground,” Foggy read out. “I’d say they were talking about you, but it’s got a black and white photo of a woman’s head, one side printed with inverted colours.”

Matt chuckled at Foggy’s additional interpretation. “Yeah, I’d say it’s about Feminism rather than scars.”

“Or haywire brains,” Foggy added, but hesitated when he saw Matt’s frown. “Still too soon?”

Matt waved him off and quickly changed the subject. “What’s the next one?”

“Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art Sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female,” Foggy read.

“Huh.” Matt didn’t know a lot about art, and even less about its politics, but it sounded like the art world itself was a battleground.

Foggy continued the description. “It’s printed to look like a pamphlet or poster. It’s by the Guerrilla Girls and it has an image of a naked woman wearing a gorilla mask. But they’re spelt differently – Guerrilla Girls is spelt as in Guerrilla warfare, and the mask is the animal.”

“I do like a good pun,” Matt said. “You know, I think Karen would like this show.”

“Should I text her?”

“Yeah, why not. It can be a company team bonding event. In the meantime, is there a seat we can sit on?”

“You tired? Do you want to leave? We can go home if you want,” Foggy said protectively.

“No, just a rest. We can wait for Karen before doing the remaining exhibition.”

“Okay, over here,” Foggy said, leading him over to a bench that if not for the lack of signage, could have been interpreted as an artwork.

Karen turned up more quickly than they thought possible. “Hi guys,” she said, panting a little. “What did I miss?”

“Foggy was just telling me about the fax machine.” Matt gestured at the nearby ancient machine that was spitting out seemingly random letters on the heat sensitive paper.

“I feel like I’m at work,” she laughed. “Actually, our fax machine doesn’t even work as well as this one.”

“What about this one?” Foggy said, looking up at a canvas with plain black writing. “Tips for artists who want to sell. Generally speaking, paintings with light colors sell more quickly than paintings with dark colours.”
“Why does everyone hate the dark so much?” Matt joked.

“Apparently they don’t like ‘morbid props – dead birds etc.’ either.”

Karen read the bottom lines, “it has been said that painting with cows and hens in them collect dust… while the same paintings with bulls and roosters sell.” She turned to them. “Do you think that’s true?”

Foggy and Matt both shrugged.

“Sexism even extends to animals in paintings,” she muttered.

“If you want raw stats, there’s one over there by the Guerrilla Girls you might like,” Foggy said. Karen read it and then Barbara Kruger’s ‘your body is a battlefield,’ scowling all the while.

“Maybe this was a bad idea,” Foggy whispered so quietly that it was only audible to Matt.

“It’s fine,” Matt said, smiling. “It’s not as if the concept of patriarchy is new to Karen. She’s probably more political than either of us.”

Foggy nudged Matt in the direction of the next work. “I don’t know if I can even read the next one out loud.”

“Why?” Matt whispered.

“Oh it’s not dirty,” Foggy said quickly. “It’s just that there are no spaces between words. It’s like a massive rectangle of capital letters. Let me see,” Foggy squinted, “synonymous equivalent identical al – ergh, they don’t respect lines either – al…like, alike.” Foggy paused when Matt huffed in amusement. “Um, homogeneous similar uniform consonant – oh wait, that’s consonant… oh I skipped a line…” Foggy stopped, cross that Matt was laughing. “Shhh you.”

Karen skipped up from behind. “What’s so funny?”

“Not the work,” Foggy reassured her. “I don’t think anything called Blind Obedience could-”

Matt laughed again. “It’s called Blind Obedience?”

“You wouldn’t know anything about that, would you?” Foggy said sarcastically.

“Foggy!” Karen said, shocked.

“It’s fine, Karen,” Matt said. “In joke.”

“Oh, okay,” Karen said, confused.

Foggy sighed, “is there anything not political in this show, or is all text art political?”

Karen pointed at the far wall. “There’s that big neon ‘love’ sign.”

“Like a heart?” Matt asked.

“No, it’s text,” Karen said. “But the letters are all loopy like they’re handwritten.”

“And it’s red,” Foggy added.

“Well it could be political,” Matt said, clearly rearing for an argument. “Red lights are often
associated with—"

“Prostitution,” Karen finished.

“It’s the colour of rage,” Foggy said.

“And it’s the colour of Daredevil,” Karen added.

“Mmm…” Matt hummed, “are there any artworks we haven’t seen yet?”

“Yep,” Foggy said quickly, pulling Matt over to series of books in a case.

“Paper,” Matt muttered.

“Correct, Mr Magic Senses. It’s a dictionary. Someone’s coloured most of the words out.”

“Does it say anything?”

Foggy leaned into the case, mumbling the words, trying to string them into something intelligible.

“Excuse me, sir,” bellowed a woman from the other side of the room. “Don’t lean on the artwork.”

“Oh I wasn’t—” Foggy’s protestations were quickly halted by an elbow to the ribs from Matt.

“Ooh ahh, you got in trouble,” Karen sang, as she wandered over to join them.

They wandered round the museum for a little longer before Karen declared she was thirsty.

“Josie’s anyone?”

Realising that the now anxious-looking Matt wasn’t going to admit that he was avoiding alcohol at the moment, Foggy stepped in and suggested a coffee instead. Karen seemed surprised, but didn’t ask why. However, the coffee session was inevitably shorter than any bar session would have been and after an hour they waved goodbye.

“That was fun,” Foggy said as they walked back to Matt’s apartment. “We should do that again.”

“Yeah, it was,” Matt smiled. He couldn’t remember the last time he went out on such a chilled social outing, nor had he felt this happy for quite some time.
Shortly after they got home, they both got a text message from Karen: “Thanks for inviting me to the gallery today. I had a great time. I missed hanging out with you guys. Hopefully we’ll do it again some time soon. K.”

“Our thoughts exactly, F & M.” Foggy texted back.

Foggy rubbed his hands together with excitement. “Now for that Rajma curry lesson.”

“Which you’re going to narrate in Punjabi,” Matt reminded him.

“Heh, you know it’s been awhile, Matt.”

“Just give it a go,” Matt said encouragingly, opening the fridge door. “Oh shit, I forgot to soak the kidney beans. Great!” He slammed the door closed.

“That’s cool. Another night then,” Foggy said lightly, trying to de-escalate the situation.

“It’s not cool, Foggy. I was looking forward to this.”

“We have leftover lasagne,” Foggy said meekly.

“Which is burnt,” fumed Matt. “Because of me.”

“Matt, stop it,” Foggy pleaded. “You’re angry, I get it. But the world’s not going to end because a lasagne gets burnt or the beans aren’t soaked.”

Matt gave an angry growl and bunched his fists.

“Don’t you dare break anything, Matt,” Foggy warned.

“Or what?”

“Or something will be broken when before it was not, and nothing else will have changed. You’ll still be angry, but you’ll also feel guilty, and I’m going to have to clean it up.”

Matt glared, but unclenched a little.

“Good. Now I’m going to heat up the lasagne minus the top and bottom layers and we’re going to eat it on toast, okay?”

The absurdity of Foggy’s dinner suggestion broke through Matt’s rage. He buried his face in his hands, trying to rub away the tension.

Foggy scrabbled through the fridge, grabbing a carrot and a bottle of soda water. “You sit down at the table with these, and I’ll show you how Foggy Nelson can bastardise a meal.”

It turned out that deconstructed lasagne on toast wasn’t as bad as Matt had imagined. “You added extra cheese,” Matt said after his first bite.

“The Foggy special, I call it,” Foggy quipped, making Matt laugh. For now Foggy called it a win, but he had to come up with a better strategy of dealing with Matt’s pent up anger long term, particularly as it didn’t look like Daredevil would be taking to the streets any time soon.
I'd quite like to curate an exhibition of text-based art. Before I wrote this chapter I selected a heap of artworks based on works I'd seen before. It was only when I started writing that I realised one of them was serendipitously called Blind Disobedience.
Matt wasn’t a morning person. At college, he’d stay up till the early hours of the morning and Foggy would end up (sometimes literally) dragging him out of bed for their 9am classes. Now that they were living together again, Foggy had fallen into the same trap of being the person responsible for getting Matt out of bed in the morning. Foggy was therefore understandably suspicious when Matt woke Foggy on Monday morning, eager to get to work early.

“Foggy, get up,” Matt said, poking the blanket-covered lump.

Foggy looked at his watch with a groan. “What the fuck, Matt? Go back to bed for a few hours. The only reason to get up this hour is to see the sun rise, and I’m guessing that’s not your intention.”

“Come on Foggy, we can get heaps of work done if we go now,” Matt said enthusiastically.

“Seriously dude, you need to tell me why if you want me to get up. Are you sick?” But Matt was already trotting into the kitchen to get the coffee brewing.

An hour later, Foggy was yawning over the coffee machine at work. “You force me to get up at an ungodly hour, but you’re still not going to tell me why we had to get here at sparrow’s fart,” he grumbled.

Matt gave Foggy a small smile. “I told you already, Foggy. I’m feeling better than I have for weeks. I need to squeeze in as much work as possible before I have another seizure and I’m back to cotton wool head.” It was true that he was feeling a little sharper than he had last week. However, Matt conveniently left out the fact that he planned to call Elektra at 9am sharp so as to avoid further impromptu visits. He was nervous and wanted the extra couple of hours to psych himself up.

Of course, Foggy knew Matt too well. “Still not buying it,” Foggy muttered, pouring himself another coffee.

They buried their heads in work for almost two hours before Karen turned up. “You’re here early,” she said brightly.

“Matt’s decision,” Foggy grumbled.

“Karen,” Matt said from his office, “can I get you to find and download some information on traffic violations. Yet another government website that’s impossible to navigate.”

“Yeah, sure. Just let me turn my computer on first. What’s it for?”

“Mr Lum, our taxi driver.”

Matt checked his watch. Twenty-five minutes to go.

“You should sue them,” Karen said.

“Who?”

“The department. If the government can’t lead by example what hope do we have.”

“You sound like Foggy,” Matt replied in lieu of an answer.
He turned back to the Lum case. Disputing a traffic violation was pretty straight forward, but the stakes were high. Mr Lum relied on his taxi license for income. Before he came to America he was a respected doctor, but the medical board here didn’t acknowledge his training or considerable experience. Matt felt a strong sense of obligation to the man and he wanted to give it his all.

At 8.55, Matt brought up Elektra’s number that he’d saved only a week ago. Now that he thought about it, not returning a client’s call for a week wasn’t exactly best practice, particularly as she’d already paid them a substantial amount for doing pretty much nothing. He decided to give her the benefit of the doubt and listen to whatever bullshit scheme she was so keen to talk about, even though he was furious about Saturday night.

9am. He dialled and she picked up on the first ring.

“Hello, Matthew,” she purred.

Matt pulled the phone away from his ear. Elektra’s voice sounded oddly echoey.

“Are you there?” Elektra said after a short silence.

There it was again. He realised with a jolt that the ‘echo’ was in fact Elektra’s voice downstairs. He jumped up, kicking the chair behind him into the wall with a crash.

“Matt!” Karen yelped, hurrying into his office just as Matt was reaching for his jacket. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, fine,” Matt breathed. “Just remembered a meeting.”

“What meeting?” called Foggy from his office.

“With that client – the rich one.”

“Can I at least get her name?” Foggy’s question was cut off by the slam of the front door behind Matt.

Foggy could hear a muffled argument from downstairs, which then made it out on to the street. He rushed over to the window, shoved it open and stuck his head out. Matt was having a heated argument with a dark haired woman. It didn’t sound like the type of argument you’d have with a client, which meant Matt clearly knew her personally. That’s if she was even a client. Foggy couldn’t identify her from the top of her head, but perhaps he could sneak down and introduce himself before Matt heard his approaching heartbeat.

Just as Foggy pulled away from the window, Matt and Elektra walked around the corner to the nearest diner. By the time Foggy made it outside they were long gone.

“Fucking hell, Matt. I thought we were past the secrets,” he said angrily, hoping that Matt was still within earshot.

“What can I get you?” the waitress asked cheerfully.

“Coffee,” Matt snapped. The waitress took a small step back.
“Pancakes,” Elektra said simply. “And coffee.”

“Any particular flavour?”

“No, just plain coffee,” Elektra said impatiently.

“I-I meant the pancakes,” the waitress stuttered.

“She’ll have plain,” Matt said, eager to speed up the proceedings.

“With bacon,” Elektra added.

“Any food, sir?”

“No, just the coffee, thanks.”

The waitress hurried away and returned briefly with the coffee, keeping her head down the whole time.

“Right. So what is it you want?” Matt demanded once the waitress had left.

“Do you talk to all your clients like this?”

“From what I’ve gathered so far, you don’t even have a genuine legal problem you need assistance with. So what do you really want?”

“I want you, Matthew.”

“I already told you. I’m not interested. That ship sailed a long time ago when you tried to get me to kill a man.”

“I’m not interested in sex,” she said with a small giggle. “I was just teasing the other night. I want you to fight with me.”

“I’m not fighting you.”

Elektra groaned in exasperation. “With me, Matthew. You and me versus the bad guys.”

“I thought you said I was a liability,” he said softly, remembering her harsh words following the Roxxon break in.

“You still are,” she said bluntly. “But you fight better than anyone I know, so even if I have to drag you off unconscious, you’re still more useful than anyone I know.”

“Useful?” Matt raised his eyebrows.

“Against the Hand.”

“I hate to tell you,” Matt said with derision, “but the idea of being ‘dragged off unconscious’ is not exactly convincing me.”

Elektra sighed. “Okay, well don’t fight. Come with me though. You can identify the soldiers with that super hearing of yours so that I know when to strike.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” Matt argued. He knew as well as she did that he wouldn’t be able to stand idly by while Elektra took on a mob of ninjas single-handed.
“Okay,” she said icily, “can you at least get the ownership details of some key city blocks for me?”

“Ownership details?” Matt repeated, confused.

Elektra rattled off a list of blocks, many of which Matt instantly recognised. He replied, “I can tell you the first three were controlled by the Russians until last year. The fourth is owned by Wilson Fisk - or at least it was. His assets have been frozen, and who knows whether he’s already sold it on.”

Elektra immediately said, “well, can you find out for me?”

“I should be able to.”

“Excellent.”

“Was there anything else?” Matt said bluntly.

“I know I told you weeks ago, but I’ve missed you Matthew.”

Matt rolled his eyes. “Meeting’s over,” he said, slapping some notes on the table and exiting the diner with more speed than was probably appropriate.

Trying to avoid attention, Matt slipped into the office and quietly made his way to his desk.

“Oh no you don’t, Murdock,” Foggy boomed from his desk. He strode into Matt’s office, closing the door behind him. “What was that about?”

“I told you, she’s a client. I had a meeting.”

Foggy hissed, “do you remember what we agreed about lying?”

“It’s not a lie, Foggy.” Matt edged his way around the desk, but Foggy continued to advance.

“Come on, Matt. You’re a lawyer - you know what lying is.”

“Well what do you want to know?”

“Her name for one,” Foggy retorted.

Matt swallowed. “Elektra. Elektra Natchios.”

Foggy stared. “The sociopath you dated in college?” he said in a slightly higher than normal voice.

“She’s not a sociopath, Foggy.”

“Why are you defending her? She pretty much destroyed you in college. You almost got expelled. How can you even talk to her?”

Matt shrugged. “She pays well.”

“If this wasn’t half dodgy then why didn’t you tell me earlier?”

Matt raised his eyebrows. “Gee I wonder,” he muttered.

“You know why I’m cross, Matt? It’s not so much her - it’s the fact that you’ve been lying this
whole time. All the sneaking around, the evasions… why can’t you fucking trust me?”

“I do trust you,” Matt said meekly.

“Yeah, to pick you up off the floor unconscious, but not with stuff like this,”

“Foggy, don’t do this,” Matt pleaded.

“Okay, well prove to me that you can be open and honest. Give me the details. Has she assaulted someone? Destroyed someone else’s life? What are we defending her against?”

“Nothing like that. She wants me – us to identify the owners of some specific city blocks.”

Foggy narrowed his eyes. “Why?”

“I – I’m going to be totally honest with you right now but you have to promise me you won’t tell anyone. Not even Karen, okay?”

“She’s probably listening to this entire conversation.”

Matt heard a sharp breath from Karen’s desk. He gave a small nod to Foggy, confirming his suspicions. He gestured for Foggy to lean down and whispered, “she’s worried they’ve fallen into the hands of the Yakuza. They use the Roxxon Foundation as a cover sometimes, so I - we need to look at them too.”

“Roxxon? As in those scumbags-”

“The very ones.”

“And the Yakuza are-”

“Criminals.”

“And Elektra is the innocent party in all this? Are you sure she’s not one of the criminals?”

Matt nodded.

Foggy sighed. “And this is a paid gig?”

“Yep.”

Foggy thought it over for a full twenty seconds. “Okay,” he said slowly. “I guess it’s pretty easy work. But you have to tell me the moment you think she’s got some kind of ulterior motive. I don’t trust her, Matt. Not after what she did to you.”

“You shouldn’t trust her,” Matt said bluntly. “We have to be careful. We don’t want the Yakuza to know we’re poking around.”

“Believe me, I know,” Foggy reassured him.

“Well, I’m going to get a start on it,” Matt said, reaching for his laptop. “I’ll let you know if I need any help.”

Foggy made for the door, hesitated, and then said, “thank you, Matt.”

“For what?”
“Finally being honest – even though I had to pry it out of you.”

“Doesn’t sound like a genuine thanks,” Matt muttered.

“Next time it will be, okay?” It was a half order, half threat. Foggy left before Matt could argue the point further.

Mid-afternoon, they had another walk-in client from Matt’s church. A nephew had ‘gone off the rails’ and had been caught with a small amount of crystal meth. It was a first offence and the punishment would likely be minor, but Matt and Foggy agreed that they’d try to get him off without an official recorded offence. They recommended he enrol in a rehab program immediately so as to demonstrate he’s making an effort, and booked an appointment with the young man for the following day.

“Gee, your Catholicism is really paying off, Matt,” Foggy said as she left.

“Unintentionally, yes,” Matt said with a small smile. He didn’t know why, but he felt a little guilty that his attendance at mass had resulted in not one but two cases within the space of a week. The guilt didn’t go away, so about an hour later he ducked out of the office and walked to his church. He had to confess something, anything. It had been too long.

Father Lantom welcomed him with what Matt felt was an undeserved enthusiasm. “I haven’t read about you in the papers for quite some time, Matthew,” the priest said wryly.

Matt knew that the priest was not referring to Matt Murdock, but rather his alter ego. “I’ve been taking a bit of a break,” he said hesitantly.

“Is there a particular reason why?”

Matt ignored the question. “Father, I’d like to confess if you have the time.”

Matt skipped over the head injury and the epilepsy. He wasn’t quite ready to confront those things just yet. Instead, he poured his heart out about Elektra, temptations, his anger, his lies to his best friend, his guilt about taking so much from Foggy and returning so little, his guilt about not saving people, of listening to people but not helping. Father Lantom listened for well over an hour. Matt had a tendency to store things up, and the priest didn’t want to interrupt the flow. It was only as Matt was leaving the church that Lantom tried to find out what was really bugging him.

“You said earlier that you were having a break. Why do I get the feeling that this break isn’t by choice? Did something happen, Matthew?”

Matt hung his head and then directed his attention back at Father Lantom. “It’s not by choice.” He hesitated, and then said politely, “thank you for your time, Father, and thank you for the printed service materials yesterday. It’s much appreciated.” And just like that, he left.

Despite Matt’s unease with Lantom’s last question, he left the church lighter and happier than before, giving Foggy a big hug when he returned to the office.

“What was that for?”

“Thanks,” Matt said.

“You’re welcome?” Foggy said cautiously with a small smile on his face. “I’m guessing that
wasn’t another mysterious meeting with Elektra then."

“No. I hope you don’t mind, but I visited church briefly."

“If it results in hugs of gratitude then I encourage you to go more often,” Foggy said jokingly.

“It wasn’t the church-""

“I know,” Foggy said softly, grabbing Matt’s hand and giving it an affectionate squeeze.

As Matt made his way to his own office, Foggy noticed he was moving slower than before. It’d been a big day, and Foggy worried that the fatigue would trigger a seizure. He forced a yawn. “It’s four o’clock. What do you think about giving it another hour then heading home? We’ve been here since quarter to seven."

“If you’re tired, it sounds like a good idea,” Matt agreed.

Foggy took a quick moment to congratulate himself on his sneakiness before returning his attention to work.

Matt might not have admitted his tiredness at the office, but as soon as they arrived home, he fell asleep on the couch. Foggy crept around the kitchen, trying to make a dinner that Matt would accept as edible while also trying not to wake him up. On Saturday, Matt had pointed out that the tomato sauce made for the lasagne also made a quick and easy pasta sauce so Foggy attempted to recreate that.

He was going well until the sauce started spattering out of the pan. He swore and pulled the pan off the stove. It was burning around the edges so he added some water. The pan hissed and steamed. Matt stirred a little, but didn’t appear to wake up.

Foggy tiptoed back to the stove, turning the heat down before replacing the frypan. He threw half a box of spaghetti into the saucepan of now boiling water and swore again as a couple of rebellious strands slithered out sideways and onto the floor just in time for Foggy to crunch them underfoot. Despite the commotion, Matt remained asleep. Afraid to leave the sauce after Saturday’s burning incident, Foggy played a quick game of Sugar Massacre on his phone while he waited for the pasta to cook. He tasted the sauce, and deciding it was a bit plain, he added a can of tuna to jazz it up a bit, slopping the saucy contents into the pan with a splat. As the sauce warmed up, the fishy smell increased, and it was enough to rouse Matt.

“Why you cooking?” Matt mumbled sleepily.

“Pasta."

“With tuna,” Matt noted.

“Sorry about that. I forgot about the meat thing until it was too late."

Matt levered himself off the couch and slid his bedroom door shut to try and isolate the smell.

“S’okay,” he replied. “I’m just proud that you cooked the base tomato sauce from scratch.”

“You can tell that?”

“Of course.”

“I have a good teacher,” Foggy said with a grin.
“Aw shucks.”

Foggy groaned. “Is that the best pun you can come up with right now?”

“You think I *cod* have done better?”

“Can you grab the *plaice* and I’ll dish up. The pasta’s just *swimmering.*”

“If you give me the opport*una*ty.” But then Matt suddenly switched into anally retentive teacher mode, “hang on, you’re *simmering* pasta?”

Foggy rolled his eyes. “Matt, it was a pun. Chill.”

“You mean *krill*?”

They both snorted at the completely geeky exchange. They used to have pun battles at college and they were a bit out of practice. “Ah, I missed that,” Matt said, chuckling.

Matt was finishing the dish washing when he heard his abusive neighbour leaving his apartment. His partner was still there, cleaning up the kitchen... oh wait, she just turned on the television.

Foggy looked at Matt critically, trying to decipher the man's intense expression of concentration. "What is it?" Matt looked annoyed and waved at him to be quiet. He pursed his lips, and seemed to be in some internal debate.

Finally Matt said, "you wanted me to tell you when she was alone. The bastard just left."

"The violent neighbour?"

Matt nodded, a little irritated.

Foggy leaped up and rifled through his laptop bag.

"What are you doing?"

"Looking for those brochures - you know, for the women's shelters."

"You're really going to pay her a visit?"

"Yeah, I have to do something."

Matt looked sceptical, tucking his legs onto the couch and resting his chin on his knees.

"Wanna come?" Foggy asked, worried about Matt's self-comforting behaviour. If Matt couldn't go Daredevilling, maybe addressing the problem through the system would give him some sense of empowerment, or better still, convince him that the system can work.

Matt shook his head. "One of us will scare her; two of us with positively terrify her."

"You can't know that. Besides you're blind. Maybe that will make us seem less threatening."

Matt laughed bitterly. "No one suspects a blind guy."

"You do have a great alibi," Foggy said. "Plus we're still in our suits - it's not as if we're rocking up in hoodies."
Matt opened his mouth to say something but Foggy interrupted. "Ah huh! Found them. Let's see... brochures, business card... do you have any of your cards here, Matt?"

Matt sighed and heaved himself off the couch. "I see what you're doing," he muttered, but retrieved his wallet nonetheless.

"Let's go, buddy," Foggy said encouragingly. "Shoes are by the door, remember."

"I know," Matt replied indignantly. "I'm capable of finding them."

Foggy rolled his eyes. "Never said you couldn't, Matt."

Foggy had to try a couple of residents before one of them bought the 'I lost my keys' excuse. Eventually they were buzzed into the building and Matt directed them to the right apartment.

"Look harmless," Foggy ordered.


The woman opened the door as far as the security chain would allow. She looked them up and down, taking in their suits. "I'm not interested."

"W-wait!" Foggy said as she went to close the door. She hesitated and Matt said, "can we talk to you for just a moment please."

"I'm atheist and have no intention of converting to whatever you're preaching," she replied.

Foggy started, "oh, we're not-"

"That's not why we're here," Matt said.

"We're not Christians," Foggy added then realised his mistake, taking a quick glance at Matt who remained impassive.

The woman looked at them suspiciously, particularly after Foggy's sideways glance. "What do you want?"

"Ah, um-" Foggy stuttered, reaching into his coat pocket for the brochures

"To help," Matt said confidently. "We're neighbours and we've overheard some-"

"That's none of your business," she hissed, face growing red.

"We want to give you these," Foggy said quickly, offering her the brochures.

She glanced down then looked back at the two men, still concerned. "Why?"

Matt said, "when - if you're ready - we can help-

"Free of charge," Foggy chimed in.

Matt realised they hadn't actually introduced themselves. "We're lawyers. This is Franklin Nelson and I'm Matt Murdock, of the law firm Nelson and Murdock."

The woman just stared.
"Here's our cards," Foggy said, adding their business cards to the wad of pamphlets.

"You have options, Ms...?"

She looked reluctant to give them her name, so Matt continued.

"We can help you confidentially. We can find you somewhere safe where he can't find you – where he can’t hurt you."

She pursed her lips and then said crisply, "I don't need your help - or your pity. Good night." She closed the door in their faces.

They stood there for a moment in silence before Foggy ducked down and slid the brochures and cards under the door. Matt loudly said, "well, we tried to help," then grabbed Foggy's arm. "Come on, let's go." Halfway down the hallway, Matt stopped, listening intently. Foggy waited patiently, quickly learning when and when not to interrupt Matt's listening face.

Eventually he whispered, "she's flicking through them. We've planted the seed at least." Satisfied that they could do no more, he headed for the stairs.

"Sorry about the Christians thing," Foggy said as they walked back to their apartment.

"I knew what you meant."

"I did feel a bit like a missionary though," Foggy joked, but Matt didn't crack a smile. "The system can work, Matt. You don't have to use violence to solve violence."

Matt let out a deep sigh, but decided against arguing. As soon as they returned to the apartment, Matt muttered a "good night," and headed to bed. Foggy was deeply dismayed at Matt's lack of enthusiasm, especially after Matt had so confidently told the woman about her options to escape the abusive relationship. Foggy had believed Matt meant everything he'd said, but once again it looked like he was fooled by one of Matthew Murdock's many masks.
Foggy woke up the next morning to the lingering smell of fish. *Never again*, he thought. The kitchen in his own apartment had an extraction fan and a doorway protecting the rest of the place from pervasive cooking aromas. As hip as Matt’s loft was, it wasn’t necessarily the most practical set-up.

“I’m so sorry, Matt,” Foggy said as Matt emerged from the bedroom.

“What for?” he replied, his voice still croaky from sleep.

“The smell. I know why you don’t cook meat in your kitchen now. I swear it’s been absorbed into my pillow.”

“At least you didn’t cook with shrimp paste - or fermented anchovies,” he joked. “It’s all good. Just think, in four weeks you’ll be able to cook tuna to your heart’s content.”

“Oh yeah,” Foggy said softly. Even though his sleeping situation wasn’t ideal and he missed his own space, he’d actually enjoyed living with Matt. It’d probably be quite lonely living alone again. He continued to dwell on the subject as they walked to work together, arrived together, and spent the morning developing a strategy for the candy case together.

They’d been hoping that the charges would be dropped considering how tenuous the claim was, particularly now that they had the gallery’s security video. They speculated on the prosecution’s motives.

“The video shows a woman hurrying out and tripping over the artwork – not kicking – tripping,” Foggy reiterated. “It couldn’t be clearer.”

“Maybe they have shares in the gallery?” Matt suggested.

“You think they want the publicity?”

“Yeah, or they’re friends with the artist or artists,” Matt suggested.

“So you’re saying it’s about exposure.”

“Yeah, maybe.”

“We should get our expert witness to say the work is terrible then,” Foggy said.

“It’s all publicity,” Matt pointed out. “Exposure is exposure.”

“Do you want to talk to Gladys again and see if she knows anything about their motives? Perhaps she has a colleague who can clarify when and if museums press charges for artwork damage. There must be guidelines.”

“Sure, I’ll give her a call now.”

Matt made an appointment with Gladys for that afternoon. A small part of him guiltily hoped the meeting would continue into the night like the last one. Foggy suspected as much, and he quickly texted Marci to see if she’d care for a drink after work. It might give Matt the right nudge to pursue another date. Anything to improve his mood.
Just before lunch, Matt’s epilepsy put a spanner in the works when he had a seizure. It wasn’t pretty. He fell onto an open drawer in his office, ripping a massive hole in his shirt and leaving a nasty gash down his upper arm, as well as a sharp bruise on his forehead. To complicate matters, he also wet himself. Remembering Matt’s request not to undress him in front of Karen, Foggy quickly requested Karen visit the drug store and get some Tylenol, antiseptic, instant icepacks and a bandage, even though he had more than enough first aid equipment hidden in his office.

It turned out that Matt was equally well prepared (of course he was). Foggy found a bandage tucked away in the back of Matt’s drawer, so after quickly stemming the bleeding and ripping the shirt open a little more, he wrapped the bandage tight around Matt’s arm. He’d wait till Matt was awake and able to help before removing the shirt altogether. Removing Matt’s shoes, he unbuckled Matt’s belt and pants, feeling uncomfortable all the while. Foggy had seen Matt in his boxers more times than he could count, and after the seizure in the shower incident, there was definitely no mystery between them; but Foggy still felt a bit awkward undressing his unconscious friend. He’d rolled Matt on his side after he’d stopped seizing, which meant that he had to shimmy the pants down his legs while also lifting them in a way that didn’t cause him to roll away. It involved a lot of swearing.

After the initial discussion about changing pants two weeks ago, they’d added a pair of sweats and t-shirt to the ‘just in case’ pile next to the couch, but Foggy was reluctant to put dry sweats over the sodden boxers. They hadn’t really taken this into account. In the end, Foggy decided to leave Matt lying on a towel until he was conscious enough to change himself - which he should be already, Foggy suddenly realised.

Foggy had been so involved in the bleeding and the wet pants that he hadn’t even attempted to get a response from Matt. Right on cue, Matt shuddered. Foggy’s breath hitched thinking it was a second seizure, but it was Matt’s unconscious reaction to the pain. He gave a small whine as his consciousness increased. Usually Foggy held his hand and rubbed his upper arm in reassurance, but with his arm injured, Foggy didn’t dare risk hurting it more. Instead, he stroked Matt’s head, avoiding the budding bruise just above his eyebrow.

Perhaps it was the change in touch, or maybe the pain, but Matt seemed less with it and unable to talk when he woke up. Foggy kept prompting him, trying to explain what happened and asking him to respond, but Matt kept his eyes firmly closed. “Damn, I’ve got to call an ambulance,” Foggy said out loud, which prompted a reaction from Matt. He still didn’t speak, but he reached out to Foggy with a small moan, wincing as he moved. Only Matt could seem completely out of it and still be able to protest a hospital visit.

Foggy was on the verge of tears. He hated these decisions. He hated seeing Matt like this. He hated the person who hit him that fateful night and the mystery vigilante who shot him in the head only two weeks earlier. He hated Matt’s stubbornness. All of it.

Voice a little wet, Foggy said, “if you can’t talk to me, I need to call an ambulance. You’ve hit your head and I need to know it hasn’t hurt your brain, okay?”

“Pleash,” Matt slurred.

“I need more than that, Matty.”

“Please don’t…” he breathed. “I want … to sleep.”

“I know,” Foggy said just as he heard Karen return. He quickly pushed the door closed for privacy, stumbling over his feet in the haste.
“Um, Foggy, I have the stuff you wanted,” Karen said awkwardly though the slightly ajar door. “I didn’t know which bandage you wanted so I got three different ones.”

“Thanks, Karen. I’ll be out in a second.”

“Can I help?”

“Not just yet, thanks.” He tried to sound as calm as possible.

Foggy glanced up and saw her staring through the windows to Matt’s office. Although the desk blocked the view of Matt in his boxers, Foggy shook his head as if to say ‘leave us’, and she quickly looked away.

Foggy turned back to Matt, who was screwing up his face in pain. “Shit, sorry,” Foggy said. “That was probably really loud. Or is it the arm? Or the head?”

“All,” Matt mumbled.

“Okay, so here’s what we’re going to do. I’m going to help you over to the couch so you can sleep more comfortably, but you probably also want to get out of those wet boxers, is that right?”

Matt grunted in assent.

“You have two options. I can help you swap your boxers for some sweats, or I can leave you to do it yourself.”

Silence.

“Matty?” Foggy squeezed his hand as Matt closed his eyes again. “Matty, can you respond please so I know you’re okay.”

“Sleep,” Matt mumbled.

“Do you want to stay on the floor?”

Matt gave another grunt.

“What I do need to do is attend to your arm before I leave you to sleep.” Foggy gave Matt’s hand another squeeze. “I’ll be back in a moment.”

He quickly closed Matt’s blinds before hurrying out to Karen. He grabbed the first aid items, making a quick detour to get some steri-strips from his secret first aid supply. “Can I help?” Karen said as Foggy made to re-enter Matt’s office. “What’s wrong? What happened? Why are you being so secretive?”

“Um, I – I just have to attend to something first. He’s – he’ll be okay.” He made a pleading face at the worried Karen and closed the door behind him.

He knelt down by Matt and unwrapped the original bandage. The cut didn’t look as bad as he’d initially thought. It probably only needed a few steri-strips at the top and the rest would be fine with a bit of pressure. He apologised over and over as he cleaned the wound with antiseptic, Matt
twitching in pain each time. He apologised again when he ripped Matt’s shirt a little more to get the bandage underneath. Foggy taped the bandage in place, and tried again to get Matt to move to the couch and at the very least take some painkillers. In the end, it was the lure of water that got Matt sitting up. It didn’t take much convincing to get him to swallow the Tylenol. Encouraged, Foggy broached the boxers issue again, but Matt wasn’t interested, so Foggy spread a fresh towel on the couch and helped Matt over to it. He wrapped the icepack over Matt’s swollen arm, carefully covered him with a blanket and crept out of the room so Matt could rest.

Karen stood up from her desk as Foggy re-emerged. “What’s going on, Foggy?”

Foggy sighed. It was probably better that Karen knew. He kept telling Matt that wetting himself wasn’t something to be ashamed of, and Matt had not explicitly said not to tell Karen—just not to let her see him being partially undressed. She was going to find out eventually.

Foggy gestured for her to follow him into his office. He knew that Matt slept so heavily post-seizure that it was unlikely he’d be awake to hear them - not to mention he probably wouldn’t remember it even if he did hear - but Foggy still felt better putting another door between them.

“Sometimes when people have seizures, they urinate,” Foggy said in a half-whisper.

“That’s what happened?”

“Yeah, and Matt requested previously that you not see him undressed like that. That’s all.”

Karen frowned.

“It’s not about you,” Foggy quickly added. “He gets embarrassed, and I’m just the lucky person who makes him the least embarrassed. After all those drunken college parties, there’s not much mystery between us.” Smiling, he said, “you know, Matt once carried me home from a college party over his shoulder.”

“No way!” Karen laughed, immediately putting a hand over her mouth as she remembered Matt was asleep. She said in a hushed voice, “I mean, I know he has muscles, but to carry a full grown man and navigate with a cane… that takes some skill and strength.”

“My point is, we’re quite intimately familiar with each other thanks to college shenanigans.”

“Yeah, that makes sense,” Karen said. “He doesn’t need to feel embarrassed though. I’m not going to judge him.”

“I know, but he doesn’t like to seem weak or flawed in any way – you know that. We probably need to talk to him about this. There’s the strong possibility you’ll be here alone with him at some point when he has a seizure. Then what? It’s out of his hands.”

“I think I’d probably freeze up without you around,” Karen said seriously.

“You won’t. I thought that too at first, but you just follow the first aid instructions I gave you.”

Matt didn’t know it, but Foggy had printed and laminated seizure first aid guides and pinned one in Matt’s room, another discreetly in the conference room, and given another copy to Karen.

“Before I forget, Karen, I need you to cancel an appointment with our expert witness at MoMA. I don’t think Matt’s going anywhere soon.”

“What should I say?”
“Just suggest another time. Perhaps tomorrow afternoon. We also need to get a rug for Matt’s office. Do you know of anywhere round here where we could pick up a thick but cheap rug?”

“I’ll look into that.”

“Thanks,” Foggy said, turning back to his computer.

She hesitated. “Is that all?”

“Yeah… why?”

“I don’t know. Um, do you want a coffee or something? Lunch?”

“Ah, yeah, both of those. Whatever you can find, thanks,” Foggy said distractedly. He was still a little shaken from all the blood and drama – something that hadn’t gone unnoticed by Karen.

“I should check on him again,” he mumbled, creeping into Matt’s office and crouching next to his head. Matt seemed to be breathing normally and there was no blood seeping through the bandage. He gently pulled Matt’s hair back to check on the bump. It hadn’t grown much more but the bruise was starting to darken. Satisfied, he tiptoed out of Matt’s office and nodded at the worried Karen, whispering “he’s okay.”

Foggy attempted to get back to the case at hand, but he kept thinking about Matt’s gash. Who would have thought a drawer could do so much damage. Perhaps he could gaffer tape fabric to the table and drawer edges. That would look terrible though. He googled ‘foam corners for tables’ and came up with a list of ‘baby protection corners.’ He just wouldn’t tell Matt what the product was called. He counted the corners throughout the office – and gee there were a lot of them – then put in a bulk order for clear silicon corners and a bunch of soft edges.

Matt was still asleep by the time his fellow parishioner and her nephew arrived for their afternoon appointment. Foggy quickly closed Matt’s office door and ushered them into the conference room. He apologised for Matt’s absence, keeping the explanation as vague as possible. It was best not to tell them Matt was asleep in his office.

It meant that when Matt woke up, the first thing he heard was the meeting in the other room. He rolled over, jerking away in fright when the cold pack slipped off his arm onto his chest.

Foggy had placed a bottle of water next to Matt’s head. Without sitting up, he gratefully chugged it down, half of it spilling on his face and neck and onto the strategically placed towel.

Everything hurt and he reeked like stale toilet. He reached down to scratch the itch on his leg, and then another and another. He had to get his boxers off stat. With one arm tucked against his chest, he pulled the boxers down with one hand and hooked his toe around the elastic to pull them down the rest of the way. Better.

But now he could feel the blanket against his skin. He considered the situation for a moment: he was in his office half-naked, while one of his most pious fellow parishioners was in the very next room. The horror. He tried to sense the positioning of the blinds, but he was still feeling incredibly dopey and could barely orient himself. He had to trust that Foggy had thought to close them.

Matt sat up, feeling a spot of cold air around his arm where the shirt had torn. It was not a good sign. With his uninjured arm, he touched Foggy’s clumsily wrapped bandage and then experimentally felt his forehead where a small but very sore lump had formed. He leaned back,
seriously considering going back to sleep, but his legs were cold and goosebumpy and he didn’t want an unsuspecting Foggy (or worse, Karen) to find him asleep and half-exposed. He shuffled to the end of the couch and groped for the spare pair of sweats. Still sitting, he shimmied into the pants, and sat back again, tired and at a loss as to what to do next. He wanted Foggy, but Foggy was out there with a client, and he was stuck in his stinking office, dressed in sweats and a bloody, torn shirt. He grimly imagined what would happen if he wandered out right now. What an appearance that would be. It’d be the perfect fuel for the church gossip train.

He experienced a sudden wave of guilt. He should be working. He should be at his desk. Slowly getting to his feet, Matt wobbled over to the desk, walking into the corner and causing a folder of documents to fall with a crash.

“Excuse me please,” Matt heard Foggy say from the other room. There were footsteps then a knock, and Foggy slipped into the room, gently shutting the door behind him.

“Matt,” Foggy whispered, hurrying round to the side of the desk where Matt was leaning heavily against the desk. Foggy put his arm around Matt’s back and tried to convince him to return to the couch just until the meeting was over.

“I have to work,” Matt argued. “I have to.”

“Nope, not today. You get an afternoon off. I recommend using it to lie on the couch.”

Matt shook his head. “You’re doing everything.”

“Actually I’m not. You brought in two new clients yesterday. Two! Plus we’ve either won or successfully settled every single case since your first seizure. Despite everything, our business is doing remarkably well. But right now you need to rest.”

Matt’s stubbornness was starting to wane. He stood there, slightly swaying for a moment longer before nodding his head. Foggy helped him back to the couch, peeling off the wet towel and replacing the blanket.

Foggy whispered, “I have to finish this meeting, but I’ll come back as soon as it’s over, okay?” He gave Matt’s hand a squeeze and Matt returned the gesture.

Not long after they got home that evening, Foggy got a call from Marci. “Where are you?”

“Shit, I-”

“Forgot?” Marci offered.

“Um, I got distracted. Hang on,” Foggy covered the phone and called, “hey Matt, will you be okay if I go out for a few hours?”

“Of course,” Matt replied, surprised. “You don’t need to ask.”

Foggy frowned at Matt’s blasé response, but quickly turned back to the phone. “I’ll be there in ten. Order me a beer.”

In the end, Foggy ended up spilling his guts to Marci. He told her about the seizures, the hospital, the cohabitation (which earned a derisive laugh from Marci).
They ended up going out for dinner and Foggy deliberately ordered too much in order to take the leftovers home for Matt. “Want a break from Murdock for the evening? You could come back to my place,” Marci said hopefully as they left the restaurant.

“Another time. He wasn’t well this afternoon. I need to make sure he’s okay.”

Matt was curled up on the sofa when Foggy arrived home, surrounded more origami objects and listening to the radio. The living room was quickly filling up with Matt’s obsessively constructed paper sculptures.

“How’s Marci?” Matt said as a greeting.

“How-?”

“Her perfume. I can smell it on you.”

“Can you also smell the leftovers I got you, Mr Bloodhound?”

“Classy choices for leftovers, Foggy.”

“Yeah, I might have over-ordered,” Foggy admitted. “You hungry?”

Matt nodded enthusiastically. As he went in search of a plate, Matt said, “you know, you could have stayed out longer. I can fend for myself.”

“I know,” Foggy said simply.

“Wanna beer?” Matt asked. “It’s not the same as a night with Marci, but it’s something.”

“We’ve run out.”

“I got you more,” Matt said shyly.

“Oh, thanks, man. Are you sure the smell’s not going to bother you?”

“Quite. I have one small request though: can I have a tiny glass? Just a little bit of yours - not a whole bottle.”

“Are you sure that’s okay?”

“I can’t see how things can get worse.”

“Okay,” Foggy said, unconvinced by Matt’s reasoning. But at the end of the day it was Matt’s choice, and Foggy couldn’t really blame him for wanting a beer or any other aspect of his old life that’d been suddenly taken away.

Foggy dearly wanted to talk about adjusting Matt’s requests in regard to his post-seizure care, particularly when it involved Karen, but as he watched Matt happily sip his tiny glass of beer, he decided to leave it for another day.

“Hey, I found out they made a Vanity Fair movie if you want to watch it,” Foggy said in an attempt to fill the silence. “You know, the book I read to you in hospital-”

“-that we never finished,” Matt pointed out.

“You’re right. And let’s hope we don’t have the opportunity to either.”
Matt smiled. They’d left the book at the hospital where it belonged.

“So shall we cheat and watch the movie?” Foggy said cheerfully.

As per normal, Matt fell asleep well before the end. They’d have to watch it again. Foggy poked him in an attempt to get him to transfer to bed, but Matt just groaned and shifted further down the couch. Foggy eventually gave up and fetched a blanket from Matt’s bed instead. He was half tempted to sleep in Matt’s room on his lux silk sheets instead of the crappy camp bed, but figured they’d probably both freak out if he woke up and accidentally lay on Foggy.

Foggy tossed and turned for hours trying to get to sleep – and not just because of the thin mattress and creaky base. He didn’t mind looking after Matt, but there didn’t seem to be an end in sight. In fact, the seizures seemed to be getting worse. Two days until Matt’s neurologist appointment, Foggy told himself. Two days. He could only hope she had an amazing cure up her sleeve.
“Oh hi guys,” Karen said distractedly, not even bothering to look up from her computer.

“Morning to you too,” Foggy said, laughing at Karen’s ‘preoccupied’ tone.

Karen looked up. “Sorry.” Her eyes went from Foggy to Matt and the bruise blooming on his forehead. “Matt, how are – how’s your head – and your arm?” she said softly.


“Pfft. It’s sore,” Foggy corrected, “and he’s not going to lift anything or do anything with it other than minimal desk work today, *are you Matt*.”

“Mmm…” Matt responded noncommittally, disappearing into his office.

“Let me know if you need me to lift anything,” Karen called after Matt. She turned her attention back to Foggy. “Hey, so you know Daredevil-”

“Not personally, but I know of him,” Foggy said jokingly.

She raised her finger slightly as she read from the computer, “Daredevil makes a comeback in a sexy new suit.”

“What?!” Matt appeared at the door.

“That’s the headline. Apparently his new suit is leather and pretty kinky.”

“Can I see?” Foggy rushed over to Karen’s side of the desk. He read out loud for Matt’s benefit, “the vigilante of Hell’s Kitchen has finally returned, this time in a suit to swoon over.”

“That photo says it all,” Karen murmured. She looked up at Matt, “there’s a clear photo of Daredevil,” she explained, zooming in on the image. “He’s always had a great ass, but in leather it’s even better.”

“Does it show his face – his identity?” Matt stammered.

“No, it’s from behind.” Half to herself she added, “I wonder why he had a break.”

“Maybe he went on holiday,” Foggy offered.

“Ha! I can’t imagine Daredevil brooding under a beach umbrella. But seriously, the crime in Hell’s Kitchen has increased since – when was it – two months? Three? – since Daredevil was last sighted.” She typed something into her computer and Matt cautiously approached her desk, face impassive – trying not to give anything away. “You know, I think – maybe…. nope, it’s not Daredevil - it’s someone else, I’m sure of it. This guy is taller, less muscly.” She muttered something inaudible as she typed. “There’s a website that tracks his activities,” she told the men. “I think I can use this to-”

“Karen,” Matt said sharply, “before you start wasting your time hunting down someone who clearly doesn’t want to be identified, could you please pay attention to some of our *paying* cases?”

“Oh yeah – sure – um-”
Matt racked his brains for something that would keep her occupied and satisfy her drive to research. “The candy case – we need you to find out if there are any links between the artists or gallery and the prosecutors.”

Matt was never terribly efficient the day after a seizure - and today was no different. By the time they got home that evening he was in a horrible mood – a combination of tiredness, frustration, and worry about Karen’s probing into Daredevil’s identity. He equally sensed the Foggy’s own exhaustion and anxiety. Foggy walked slowly and stiffly as they tramped up the stairs to his top floor apartment, flopping on the couch with a groan as soon as they got inside. Matt was feeling increasingly guilty for taking up so much of Foggy’s time and emotional energy, and despite his tiredness he was determined to cook for Foggy - to give him something in return.

Foggy saw Matt pulling food from the fridge, and called from the couch, “need any help?”

“All under control,” Matt said quietly.

“Thanks, Matt.”

“I hope you like polenta.”

“I’m sure I will once I know what it is,” Foggy quipped.

“Corn meal.”

“You’re not selling it.”

“It’s Italian. I’m making polenta with mushrooms.”

“Sounds delicious,” Foggy encouraged. “You know I’ll eat anything you cook, Matt.”

Matt ducked his head and gave a small smile. Foggy praised his cooking a lot, and it always made Matt feel warm and loved.

Matt had just deglazed the mushrooms with some cheap white wine when he misjudged the location of the frypan’s handle, burning his hand on the hot metal base. He gave a growl of fury and threw the pan, mushrooms and all, on the ground.

“What the fuck?” Foggy swore as he rushed into the kitchen. Matt was nursing his hand and breathing heavily, a small growl with each exhale. Foggy screwed up his face, confused as to what just happened.

“Foggy – don’t,” Matt pleaded between breaths.

Foggy took a deep breath, trying to control his own anger. In what he hoped was a calming tone, he said, “you hurt?”

Matt nodded.

“Here”, Foggy said, leading Matt to the sink and turning the tap on, “put your arm under there.”

As Matt held his hand under the streaming water, Foggy quietly picked up the pan and attempted to wipe up the mess.
“Geez, you even got it splattered on two sides of the fridge,” Foggy said, pulling out a second cleaning cloth.

Matt didn’t acknowledge Foggy’s chatter. He hung his head as if he were watching the water run over his hand.

When Foggy was finally satisfied he’d found all the rogue splashes, he joined Matt at the sink. “Can I see your hand?” When there was no immediate response, Foggy touched Matt’s arm gently to get his attention. With a sigh, Matt pulled his hand from the stream.

“It’s only minor,” he muttered.

“It’s already blistering,” Foggy pointed out. “It’s not that minor.”

“There’s some cream in my first aid kit,” Matt said, grabbing a tea towel from the oven door and drying his hand.

“No! You can’t use that,” Foggy yelped. “It’s not sterile.”

“I think I know more about wounds than you, Foggy,” Matt snapped.

“Obviously not if you’re drying your hand with a week-old tea towel.”

Matt took a couple of deep breaths, teeth clenched. “Fine. If you can find something sterile, I’ll use it.”

Foggy dug through the first aid kit until he found some burn cream and a sterile pad, slamming them on the kitchen bench. “Put your hand under the tap again and I’ll dry it,” he instructed.

“I’m not a child, Foggy,” Matt grumbled as he returned to the sink.

“You just threw your second temper tantrum in the space of a week. Throwing kitchen implements isn’t exactly the behaviour of a mature man.” Foggy peeled open the pad’s packaging and laid it carefully on the bench. “All washed?”

Matt nodded and turned the tap off.

“Come on, I’m not going to bite,” Foggy teased when Matt didn’t move from the sink.

“I know,” Matt said indignantly, but his mouth twitched a little at Foggy’s wording.

Wordlessly, Foggy dried Matt’s hand with the pad and applied the burn cream, trying not to press down on the pillowy lump of a blister. “Hold there,” Foggy said, rooting through the kit to find an ideal dressing.

“Use one of the bandages and some gauze,” Matt suggested quietly.

“Do you have a specific bandage suggestion, because you have an impressive selection here?”

Matt shrugged. “Claire helped me order them. I honestly don’t know the difference between one or the other.”

“I hope you got customer loyalty points from wherever you shopped,” Foggy said wryly, unwrapping the softest, smoothest bandage he could find. “Give me your paw,” Foggy ordered.

Matt raised his eyebrows. “I’m a dog now?”
“Lots of things have paws other than dogs,” Foggy pointed out, attempting and failing to wrap Matt’s hand.

“May I?” Matt held out his uninjured hand for the roll.


“And a lot of previous injuries,” Matt pointed out.

Foggy bit his lip.

“Thanks, Foggy,” Matt said hesitantly.

There was no way Foggy was going to say ‘you’re welcome’ this time. Picking Matt up after a seizure was one thing; picking up objects smashed or splashed in fits of rage was quite the other. Instead, Foggy silently gathered up the plastic wrappers and stuffed them into the bin before retreating to the couch, every sound seemingly amplified by the awkward verbal silence.

With his uninjured hand, Matt opened the fridge. There was a scrunch of the leather couch as Foggy twisted around, tracking Matt’s movements.

“You know as well as I do that the fridge is almost entirely empty, Matt,” Foggy called.

“Mmm… just checking,” Matt muttered, feeling exceedingly guilty that he’d thrown all the useable ingredients on the floor. “Miracles can happen, you know - or we could have plain polenta with salt and whatever’s in my spice rack.”

“Get your coat,” Foggy ordered.

“Why?”

“We’re going to take Mr Antonelli up on his standing offer.”

They rocked up at Antonelli’s and were embraced immediately by the owner, each of them receiving a kiss on both cheeks. Mr Antonelli yelled at one of the wait staff to bring over a particular bottle of wine before he’d even seated the pair. Soon the food started arriving: a soft, round burrata, along with a plate of cured meats, followed by Pasta con Vongole, veal scaloppini, gelato, and cheese, cheese and more cheese. Evidently helping the owner of an Italian restaurant paid off (eventually).

Every time they protested, another dish arrived. By the end of the meal, the pair were ready to pop the buttons on their pants, but Mr Antonelli was still urging them to finish the many cheeses and demanding to know if it was “the best cheese you’ve ever tasted.” After Matt refused a second glass of wine, Mr Antonelli poured a third glass of wine and sat with them, requesting updates on their tiny firm and recounting his court case with his usual dramatic flair. In fact, his storytelling seemed to have got more outrageous over time: Foggy and Matt were the “brave, valiant” lawyers who saved him and his small business from “evil villains”.

Foggy ended up having to taste a series of fortified wines to make up for Matt’s abstinence, ending up pink-cheeked and quite drunk. After they’d both received a dozen more thanks and kisses from both Mr and Mrs Antonelli, the lawyers stumbled out into the street, woozy and feeling as if they were about to burst.
They were about half way home when a masked man stepped out in front of them pointing a knife and demanding their wallets. Foggy dared to take his eyes off the mugger for a second to check Matt’s reaction. Matt was standing dead still, but had an expression on his face that clearly suggested he wanted to destroy the assailant with everything he had.

“What are you waiting for, you idiot? Daredevil?” the mugger laughed. “He’s gone. We own the streets again. Comply or die.”

“Matt, come on,” Foggy murmured. “Just give him your wallet. There’s no shame.”

“Yeah, listen to your friend. He’s smart.”

Matt remained still as Foggy retrieved his wallet.

“What are you retarded or something?” the mugger sneered at Matt.

That was it. Matt swung his cane, hitting the assailant’s hand. The knife flew into the air and skittered under a dumpster - out of reach, out of sight. Then Matt brought the base of the cane down on top of the man’s head, and the mugger crumpled unconscious onto the ground. It was over before Foggy could blink.

“Come on, Foggy,” Matt said, quickly walking away from the scene. Foggy stared at the man. “Should we call the police - or an ambulance?” he called after Matt.

“Up to you,” Matt said casually without stopping. “I’m going home.”

“Shit,” Foggy said, walking quickly to catch up to Matt. “We can’t just leave him.”

“He’s about to move. He’ll be fine,” Matt said without emotion. Sure enough, as they turned the corner, Foggy looked back and saw that the man was indeed moving.

It’d been about a year since Foggy learned about Matt’s super senses. The day-to-day stuff that once seemed extraordinary often went unnoticed, but every now and again, Matt would leave Foggy speechless. This was one of those times. Even with his senses affected by the medication and seizures, Matt’s self-defence was next level in its sheer accuracy and control. He used the barest amount of energy for maximum effect. Plus Matt could tell that the guy was alive from the end of the street and anticipate that he was going to move. Matt could be pretty damn scary at times.

They walked back to the apartment in silence. Underneath Matt’s calm exterior he was jittery and upset – something that Foggy only realised once they were inside and under full light.

“Thank you, Matt,” Foggy said quietly as they kicked off their shoes at the door.

Matt put his head down and hurried into the kitchen, flicking the kettle on and feeling for the tea. When Foggy followed, he saw Matt’s hands were shaking. Without consultation, Foggy pulled the whiskey out of the cupboard and poured two glasses. “Come on,” Foggy said, making his way to the couch with the drinks. Matt hesitated, but eventually followed, plonking himself down next to Foggy. “Come here,” Foggy said, putting his arm around Matt’s shoulders and pulling him into a hug. Matt buried his head in Foggy’s chest as the tears started flowing and quickly turned into audible sobs. There were no words.
The morning after the mugging, Foggy sat next to an unconscious Matt waiting for him to rouse, dwelling on the assailant’s words: “the streets are ours again.” It was an ominous message and one that Matt was bound to act on. But not right now. Matt had seized before he’d even got out of bed, leaving Foggy to mull over the probable triggers: maybe it was the glass of wine, the nip of whiskey, the anxiety caused by Karen’s probing into Daredevil’s identity, the mugging… or perhaps there was no trigger – as they’d all observed, Matt’s seizures weren’t getting any less frequent, and there didn’t seem to be any particular reason or pattern to them.

Whatever the case, it was taking its toll. Matt looked a mess. He was still bandaged and bruised from the recent seizure and frypan incidents, he’d lost enough weight and muscle mass that Foggy could now see his ribs, and he had dark bags under his eyes despite all the sleep he was getting. Foggy slipped his hand into Matt’s to minimise the disorientation once he woke, but there was nothing else to do but wait. And so he did.

Waiting for a bloody and bruised Matt to wake up had become all too frequent for Foggy’s liking, only now the immediate injuries weren’t sustained during Matt’s Daredevil activities, but rather as the consequence of a consequence of said activities. Foggy had always had limited sympathy for Matt’s Daredevil battle wounds. Over the last few weeks, he’d tried his best to distance the situation now from the circumstances that led to the original brain injury. An unwelcome bitterness crept over him every time he thought about Matt getting shot in the head – that night Foggy had pleaded with Matt, urged him not to go out as Daredevil because there was an armed psychopath on the loose, but Matt went anyway. Foggy knew it wasn’t exactly logical that his level of compassion was tied to the cause of the injury, but then again Matt’s approach to safety and self-preservation didn’t seem logical either. Foggy had to keep reminding himself that the blow(s) to the head wasn’t directly Matt’s fault, that Matt thought he was doing good, and, most importantly, that Matt actually did a lot of good as Daredevil. But at the same time, it was hard to applaud Daredevil’s sacrifices when you knew the man behind the mask - when you knew Daredevil’s good work was coming at the expense of your best friend’s health and wellbeing. It was all very confusing.

Once Matt was conscious and responding, Foggy informed him that he had the day off. Matt wasn’t really lucid enough to protest, nor was he interested in much more than a glass of water and a deep sleep. Knowing full well that Matt would probably forget the whole exchange, Foggy sent Matt a text message then doubled up with a message in braille, which he rested on top of the phone: Gone to york [because Foggy always got the braille w and y mixed up]. Court AM, will check in at lunch. Rest. Call me yen ayake.

Foggy turned up to work jittery with nerves. He’d never defended a client without Matt before, and even though it was a straightforward case, Mr Lum (their innocent taxi driver) was someone who Matt really cared about. Matt would be shattered if the judge didn’t overturn the traffic infringement. Karen gave Foggy what she thought were encouraging words, but they only made Foggy more anxious. In the end, she ended up closing up the office for an hour and accompanying Foggy to court as moral support. Of course, when presented with the evidence Matt had carefully compiled, the judge quickly dismissed Mr Lum’s traffic infringement. Foggy raced home afterwards to break the good news to Matt.

He found Matt still fast asleep. The note and phone were untouched, even though it was a good five hours since the seizure. Foggy managed to rouse him, but Matt seemed more flat and tired than usual. He was also was surprisingly receptive to the idea of staying home for the rest of the
day, which paradoxically worried Foggy. Usually Matt would make some kind of effort to argue against resting.

Mid-afternoon, Foggy called Matt’s phone, but it went through to his message service. “He’s probably just resting,” Karen pointed out. “You said he was sleeping heaps.”

Foggy picked anxiously at his fingers. "He just seemed different. I can’t explain it. There’s just something…"

“Did anything specific happen?” Karen asked.

Foggy considered telling her about the mugging. Before he could figure out a way to do so without mentioning Matt’s incredible defensive response, however, the silicon corners for the desks arrived. Glad of the distraction, Foggy fitted the corners to each of the tables, benches and desks, and stashed the leftovers in his bag for Matt’s kitchen bench and coffee table. Unable to shake the feelings of unease, Foggy decided to work from home for the rest of the day, leaving an unhappy Karen alone in the office.

Matt was still in bed when Foggy got home. However, he was now cocooned in a hoodie so at least he’d moved at least once during the day. Foggy sat on the side of Matt’s bed and gently touched his shoulder. "Matty? Are you okay?"

Matt didn’t respond.

"Shit," Foggy said. He shook Matt's shoulder a little more roughly, and Matt let out a small groan. "You sleeping?" Foggy asked, still anxious. Matt didn't move. More loudly, Foggy asked, "Matty, did you have another seizure?" As he spoke, he realised they’d missed Matt’s neurologist appointment that had been scheduled that morning. He swore loudly in frustration. How were they even meant to treat this thing if the seizures prevented him from keeping doctor’s appointments?

Foggy ran his hand through Matt's hair in an attempt to get it out of his face. That’s when he spotted the bright yellow earplugs. Earplugs might explain some delay in response, but not Matt’s current state. He cautiously plucked the earplug from Matt’s left ear and quickly moved away just in case Matt was disoriented enough to take a swing at him. But Matt barely moved.

Foggy glanced at the bedside table, trying to figure out if he'd looked at his phone at all that day. Sitting there was the bottle of Valium the doctor had prescribed in case of repeated seizures and/or anxiety.

"Nooo...' Foggy moaned. "What have you done?" Foggy quickly poured the bottle onto the bedside table, swearing when a couple bounced onto the floor. He counted the pills and checked the label. "You've taken three," he breathed, relieved. It was still two too many, but not too many that would indicate Matt intended serious harm. Nevertheless, he decided to ring Claire just in case.

Claire reassured Foggy that Matt would sleep it off, but to keep an eye on him, which is why when Matt eventually woke up, Foggy was sitting on the end of Matt’s bed, reading notes for a new case.

"Fog?" Matt mumbled, confused. "Whas goin on?"

"I could ask you the same question," Foggy snapped. "You took three valium. Three! I couldn't wake you up. You worried the fuck out of me."

Matt closed his eyes.
"Tell me Matt, what exactly where you trying to do?"

"I didn't want to hear them," he whispered.

"Hear who?"

"The cries. People needing help. It hurts."

"Huh?"

"I can't help them. All I can do is lie here uselessly, listening to them suffer."

Foggy ran his hands through his hair in frustration and worry. He knew Matt was genuinely distressed. Eventually, Foggy said softly, "I don't think drugging yourself is the answer, Matt." He reached over and rubbed Matt's arm affectionately. "Please."

"It hurts," Matt repeated, rolling over and pulling his arm from Foggy's grasp.

"Okay, maybe this isn't the best time." Foggy gave a deep sigh then got straight into his tiny camp bed, clothes and all. Matt needed more help than Foggy had expected. The seizures were one thing, but Matt's mental health issues were a whole other layer of concern. Foggy ruminated for hours, finally drifting off to sleep a little after 4am.

The next morning, Matt was up and making coffee before Foggy had even woken up. Nice for some, Foggy thought to himself. At least one of them had got some sleep. He rehearsed what he was going to say to Matt, reminding himself to stay calm, not to yell, not to appear accusatory or angry.

Matt didn't say anything as Foggy emerged from his sleeping nook. By the time Foggy had showered and dressed, Matt was sitting stiffly at the kitchen table, reading a book with one hand and holding his coffee in the other. Nowadays, Matt was comfortable not wearing his glasses when he and Foggy were alone, but this morning, the glasses had made a very meaningful return.

A second coffee was waiting for Foggy, which he took as an invitation to join Matt at the kitchen table, finally daring to break the silence. "So… are we going to talk about last night?"

"I have nothing to say," Matt said in a clipped voice.

"You could try something like, 'sorry for worrying you, Foggy'? Or 'I admit I'm not coping and agree to see a therapist'?"

Matt kept reading.

"Matt, say something," Foggy said, trying desperately to keep the anger out of his voice.

Matt's hand stopped moving on the page.

"Sorry for worrying you, Foggy. I feel deeply ashamed." The blush on Matt's cheeks confirmed the truth of this statement.

"You don't need to feel ashamed – I understand you’re not coping and it’s nothing to be ashamed
"I wallowed in my own pity. I should be ashamed."

Foggy rolled his eyes. Leave it to Matt to feel guilty for having feelings in response to a life-changing trauma. "Again, you shouldn't feel ashamed. Just promise me you won't pull a trick like that again."

"It wasn't a trick." Matt whispered, face still straight ahead.

Foggy sighed. He knew it wasn't a trick. Why did he use that word? Stupid, stupid... "I'm sorry," Foggy said delicately. "I know it wasn't a trick - that was the wrong word. Can you just promise me you won't overdose on sedatives again? It scared me." He paused. "And you don't even like sedatives," he finally pointed out.

Matt shrugged. "People change."

"You don't like sedatives. We both know that hasn't changed."

Matt frowned. "I don't like hearing people get hurt either."

"I don't like seeing you get hurt, or you hurting," Foggy retorted.

Matt took a sip of his coffee and pushed Foggy's mug of untouched, now lukewarm coffee towards him.

Foggy took it as the olive branch it was. "Thanks," he said softly, taking a sip. A minute passed before Foggy spoke again: "would you see a therapist if I found one?"

"I don't need to see a therapist, Foggy. I do need to see the neurologist though and that's proving hard enough."

"I'm sorry, I should have remembered, I should have-"

Matt cut him off. "It's not up to you to remind me about appointments. It was bad timing."

"Have you rung-"

"The office doesn't open for another hour," Matt interrupted again.

Foggy took another sip and they sat in silence again, stewing. "Toast?" Foggy finally asked.

"Please," Matt replied with a polite nod of his head before returning to his book.

As Foggy made the toast, he was hyperaware of every sound, every movement. The scraping of butter across the toast seemed amplified beyond reason. As Foggy placed the plates on the table, they clattered slightly, and he muttered an apology. Foggy gingerly took a bite, conscious of every crunch. If Matt recognised Foggy’s discomfort, he didn’t acknowledge it, remaining stone-faced as he took small bites of his toast.

Eventually Foggy couldn’t stand the suffocating silence anymore. "You know you’re not invincible, Matt."

Matt took another bite of his toast, but his hand stopped moving across the page at least.

"You think you’re different to everyone else," Foggy continued, "but you’re still human..."
Another bite. Crunch, crunch, crunch.

“…And that means that it’s completely reasonable to experience depression in these circumstances.”

Crunch, crunch.

“…So I really think you should see a therapist. Just try it.”

Matt pursed his lips momentarily then took another bite. Crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch.

"What about your priest? You talk to him sometimes, don't you?"

"Not about this," Matt quickly replied. “This isn't a moral issue, Foggy."

"There are elements of morality. You want to help people, but you feel helpless. Maybe you could volunteer at the church or something."

Matt’s lip curled.

"Or not..." Foggy said, hands raised in surrender.

"We have to go to work," Matt announced in a tone that said 'this conversation is over.'
The least you can do

The (mostly) silent breakfast was followed by an even more silent walk to work. The silence was soon broken, however, when Matt called the neurologist to reschedule his missed appointment.

“What do you mean there are no free appointments for the next month?” Matt bellowed. Foggy rushed into Matt’s office, concerned that something expensive was about to be thrown across the room.

“I- I don’t think you understand,” Matt said into the phone, clearly distressed. “I can’t – there’s no way – I can’t wait that long. Please,” he begged. “I can’t be the first patient to miss an appointment because of a seizure – surely you have a system in place ... yes I know…”

Foggy whispered, “do you want me to talk?”

Matt frowned and waved Foggy off, returning to the call. “Sorry, can-can I just explain again. I’ve only just been diagnosed and - and Dr Millet said to contact her if the med-medication isn’t agreeing with me... yes... well, it’s not just that.... no... no... no, you don’t understand.” Matt grabbed his hair in frustration. He blurted out, “I’m having seizures every couple of days, the medication has turned me into a zombie, and I’m at my wits end.”

Foggy offered his hand to calm Matt down, but it was ignored.

“Friday? Yes, I-I can do that.... yes, please... I can come at short notice... any time... thank you, bye.”

“What happened?” Foggy asked as Matt clenched his fists, his knuckles turning white as he gripped the phone with such force that Foggy feared for its safety.

“I’m on a cancellation list. Otherwise the soonest they could give me was next Friday.”

“Not a month then,” Foggy said with relief.

“At first she said a month, but then when I explained- oh I don’t know.” Matt rubbed his forehead, digging his thumb deep into the skin. “Why would they do that, Foggy? Why would they say they have no appointments when people need them?”

“I dunno,” Foggy mumbled. “Maybe so they have spares when people really need them. You got one after all.”

“Next Friday,” Matt said to himself as he made his way to his chair, hands trailing along the side of the desk. “I don’t know if I can-” He stopped as he came across one of the silicon table corners.

“What’s this?” he said indignantly.

“It’s a soft corner,” Foggy said, trying to keep the emotion from his voice.

“Why?”

“I think we both know why,” Foggy returned.

“Why did you do this without asking?”

“Well, at the time I ordered them you were unconscious with a bruised head and a bloody arm from falling against a sharp desk edge.”
Matt took another step and tripped over the edge of the soft rug Karen had purchased the day before. Foggy yelped and rushed forward to help him, but Matt corrected himself. His cheeks were growing red - whether it was due to anger or embarrassment, Foggy didn’t know. Whatever the case, Matt wasn’t happy.

Foggy tried to distract him, reason with him. “People won’t even see the edges. They’re clear. They’re sleekly designed. It’s like they’re part of the table.”

“You’re treating me like I’m made of glass,” Matt spat. Foggy recoiled at the phrase. It was one of the first things Matt had said to Foggy when they met: ‘most people dance around me like I’m made of glass. I hate that.’ Foggy had always tried to comply, but the comparison in this case was unfair.

“I’m treating you like you’re human,” Foggy retorted. “Humans have skulls that can crack, skin that can break. If a soft corner or a rug can prevent a cracked skull then I would have thought that after everything you’ve gone through the last couple of months, you’d know just how important that is.”

“But surrounding me with soft stuff.” Matt suddenly stopped. It was Stick. He was parroting Stick’s words. He didn’t even realise he’d been doing it, and now he was yelling at Foggy, dear innocent Foggy…

“What’s wrong?” Foggy said as Matt’s expression changed from angry to one of utter disbelief. “Matt?”

“I- I think – I think – thank you, Foggy.”

“Huh?”

“For looking out for me. For- for thinking of things like this.”

“Huh?”

Matt opened his laptop, keen to bury his angry words. “Do you think you could catch me up on some work? Maybe something boring – I’m still a bit tired after yesterday.”

“Uh, yeah… sure…” Foggy couldn’t work out what just happened - the sudden change in attitude and the equally unpredicted request for help. That was a conversation for later though. “There are still some more documents to go through for the Portman case if you’re not sick of that.”

“It’s got to be done,” Matt said resolutely. “Catch me up.”

As they were leaving work that evening, Foggy received a text from an old college friend inviting him for a drink. Foggy was torn. Matt’s emotional outbursts were incredibly tiring and Foggy desperately wanted to get out of the apartment for a bit. He could imagine Matt probably wanted some space too. However, after the previous day's events, Foggy was seriously concerned about Matt's unpredictable behaviour and he worried about leaving Matt alone. Missing the appointment and not being able to make it up until next week had been a major blow and Matt had been worryingly quiet all day save for the series of swear words yelled when he tripped over the rug for the second time. Foggy decided he’d go, but only for a few drinks.
"You want to come?" Foggy asked Matt.

"No, I think I'll go home and sloth it out on the couch," Matt said with a small, forced smile.

"Okay. Call me if you need anything – or if you think you’re going to do something – you know – like last night-"

"Have fun," Matt interrupted, the forced smile stretched a little wider.

Matt slowly traipsed home alone. He dropped into his favourite Italian deli along the way and bought a pre-made meal that could be easily heated up in the oven. This is what it's come to, he thought bitterly, too lazy to even cook a simple meal.

When Matt got home, he discovered the deli owner had generously given him two serves, so he stashed half in the fridge for Foggy. Matt knew that he’d probably receive a hug for bringing home something containing meat, even if only a small amount of pancetta. He really wanted that hug, but didn't know how to ask for it directly. The purchase of meat products would have to do.

Matt changed into a pair of sweatpants and hoodie, and curled up on the couch with a book. His pitiful level of concentration meant that he had to read each page three or four times just to absorb the content. If only he hadn’t missed that appointment. A week seemed so far away. Regret and bitter disappointment plagued him until he finally gave up on the book. He sat there in silence, waiting for his dinner to reheat, angrily ruminating on anything and everything.

When the meal smelled just about ready he slowly levered himself off the couch, pausing at the fridge. He wondered if it would really do much harm to have a beer - or even half a beer. “Fuck it,” he said out loud, grabbing a bottle. It didn't seem to make the slightest difference whether he drank or not, so why bother with abstinence.

Matt slowly chowed through his meal, savouring the beer until it was lukewarm from his touch. Part of him was tempted to go straight to bed due to a mixture of boredom and fatigue, but it was only 7pm and the very thought of going to bed so early on a Friday night made him feel like a loser. He relocated to the couch and resumed reading, still hugging his warm beer like a prize.

Matt continued to struggle through the story until he overheard their abusive neighbour telling his girlfriend he was heading to the pub. Matt had no real plan, but he felt the need to at least follow the neighbour. Perhaps the man had shady friends, or maybe he was involved in some other crime that he could pass onto Brett and the police department. At the last minute, Matt doubled back and grabbed his old black mask, shoving it in his back pocket just in case. Again, no plan...

Matt felt a bit wobbly on his feet and decided against trying to scale the fire escape. Instead, he pulled up his hood and slipped down the stairs, one hand on the rail for guidance. He exited the building just as the man was rounding the corner. Matt followed the man's distinctive wheeze. It was the breathing of a heavy smoker (and an easy target, Matt thought wickedly). Matt walked as fast as he could given his limited sensory abilities, and in his haste, he tripped over a couple of grates in the sidewalk and a misplaced milk crate. Fortunately, he landed on his feet each time -stumbling but not falling. Matt was relieved when the neighbour turned into a bar. It’d taken all his concentration to get this far without falling on his face, and he could do with a rest.

The neighbour yelled an obscene greeting across the room as he entered. He probably imagined was funny. Matt frowned, glad for the excuse to hate this man even more (if that was possible).

The neighbour drank one shot, then another, a beer and then another. And still Matt waited outside.
Matt didn't really know why he was still there, listening to this stranger and his friends rambling on, cracking crude jokes and making lewd comments about every woman in the bar. He loathed these people with everything he had, and yet he stayed. It was the thrill of the chase, the sense of purpose, the buzz he got from... well, it hadn’t come to that yet. Matt clenched his fists experimentally, imagining what he could say or do. Whatever it was, it felt good to be indulging in a fantasy that everything was okay again, everything was normal.

As the men exited the bar, Matt ducked down an alleyway. He trailed the three friends until they went their separate ways. Without thinking, Matt pulled the black mask from his pocket and slipped it over his head, pulling his hoodie over the top. Right on cue, the man ducked into an alleyway and relieved himself against the wall. Before he could finish zipping up his pants, however, Matt launched himself at the man, pinning him face first against the wall.

"Fuck off," the man growled, kicking Matt in the shin from behind. Matt returned the favour with a knee up the groin. The man groaned and panted, "what do you want?"

"I know you hurt your girlfriend," Matt whispered dangerously. "You’re going to stop. Immediately. You’re going to go home, pack your bags, and leave this city. You’re not to lay another finger on her, do you hear?"

The man just kept breathing deeply as Matt pressed his arms into the raw brick wall.

"Answer me," Matt demanded.

"What I do is none of your business," the man replied, and Matt took one hand off the man’s arm to slam his forehead against the wall. As he did so, Matt’s concentration momentarily lapsed, and the man flipped around, punching Matt in the jaw.

"Did you hear me?" The man said with a laugh. "It’s none of your business!" He leaped forward to punch Matt again, but this time Matt was ready. Matt dodged the fist and elbowed the guy in the ribs as he ducked.

By this stage, the neighbour was badly wheezing and Matt was swaying slightly from the exertion. He wasn’t ready to give up though. Matt stood tall and clenched his fists, glad that at least one of his hands was wrapped, even if it was because there was painful blistering underneath.

"I know where you live," Matt warned. "If you ever so much as touch her, I’ll know."

The man just laughed. "You think you scare me? You’re the one who’s bleeding. You think you can copy Daredevil just by putting on a mask? Well you need to fucking fight like him first. Fucking idiot."

Matt pursed his lips and launched himself at the neighbour, kicking him in the stomach and causing him to fall back against the sodden alleyway wall.

"Fuck," the man said as he landed in his own piss. Matt landed another kick, this time to the man’s head and the guy crumpled. Matt triumphantly wiped his bleeding lip with his sleeve, riding on the surge of endorphins. Yes, he thought, my way works. Foggy didn’t understand. Foggy would never understand.

But he celebrated too soon.

The neighbour rolled away and crawled to his feet, running straight at Matt, who was caught by surprise. Matt tripped and fell and the man kicked him in the back once, twice, three times, before Matt managed to jump out of range. The neighbour wasn’t done yet. He ran at Matt again, and
Matt swung at the man’s head, missing the target and getting caught off-balance. Matt stumbled, landing heavily on his blistered hand. His eyes watered with the pain, and the neighbour used the opportunity to get in a few more kicks, one of which split the gash in his upper arm. Matt swore and blindly lashed out, barely able to track the man’s location. He heard a change in breath as the man advanced again, but instead of rolling away, he tried to get up. Another mistake. The neighbour easily pushed him down again, this time with the base of his shoe.

“Can you smell my piss?” the neighbour growled. “That’s what I think of you.” He stood there wheezing for a moment. “Now leave me alone and mind your own business.” And with that, he limped away from the crumpled and utterly defeated Matt.

Matt knew he should follow the neighbour and keep up the fight, but he was completely ruined. He got to his feet with a groan and limped towards home, dazed and confused as to what just happened. He didn’t lose fights, let alone lose fights with unfit chain-smokers. This wasn’t happening. This couldn’t happen.

Matt took the stairs up to his apartment slowly, leaning heavily on the railing as he climbed the six storeys. He listened at the door for a moment before turning the key, just in case Foggy was home, but Foggy was evidently enjoying himself too much with his fun, alcohol-swilling friends who didn’t pose the threat of falling unconscious at unexpected moments.

Matt quickly showered, binning the soiled bandages from his hand and arm and stashing his dirty clothes deep within his laundry basket. The blisters on his hand had burst, leaving them weeping and sore, and he struggled to figure out how to treat them. Normally he’d consider calling Claire, but he knew that the instant she came over, the universe would see to it that Foggy would arrive home and figure out what had happened. He tried to wrap his hand in a fresh bandage, but the pressure hurt too much. He slid into bed, resting his throbbing hand on a fresh towel, hoping the air would somehow knit everything together with magic healing powers. He was just starting to drift off when he remembered his medication - the medication that lead him to misplace those punches, that caused the lapses in concentration, that led to the burns. He briefly toyed with the idea of not taking the pills, but he was scared. As much as he hated the stuff, the doctor’s warnings haunted him. Sitting up with a groan, he threw down the medication and a couple of Aspirin before collapsing back into the pillows.

Matt kept his ears trained on the apartment across the road, but there was no sign of the abusive neighbour. The girlfriend was peacefully watching television, which suggested that he hadn’t turned up at the apartment yet. Another hour passed and eventually Foggy arrived home, singing to himself as he kicked off his shoes and ditched his bag and coat in his nook.

“Hey Matt,” Foggy bellowed, clearly forgetting that it was the middle of the night.

Matt half-considered pretending to be asleep, but he was happy to hear the sound of Foggy’s voice. He needed it. “Hey Fog,” he called from bed.

“Oh good, you’re awake,” Foggy said with a slight slur.

“Only somewhat awake,” Matt croaked.

“Oh, sorry.” Foggy slid open Matt’s door. “Knock knock,” he said redundantly, hovering in the doorway. Matt rolled onto his back to face Foggy, pulling his sheets over his sore hand. The lights were off in Matt’s bedroom, but he didn’t want to take any chances, particularly as Foggy had told him time and again about the LED billboard’s reach.

“Guess what?” Foggy said excitedly.
Matt couldn’t help but smile at Foggy’s enthusiasm. “What?”
“Wormwood used to be used to treat epilepsy – back in medieval times.”
“You want me to take wormwood?”
“No, silly. It’s just a fun historical fact.”
“You drank absinthe, didn’t you,” Matt said cheekily.
“Mmm… it might have been in one of those weird cocktail shots,” Foggy agreed. “But really, it’s true. Wormwood, or sometimes mushed up Mandrake.”
“As in those plants that scream in Harry Potter?”
“Huh. Yeah.” Foggy scratched his head. “I thought – maybe they – are mandrakes real?”
“Dunno. But if you want to eat something to soak up that absinthe, there’s a meal for you in the fridge. It’s even got meat in it.”
“You cooked meat?” Foggy said in surprise.
“Nah, I bought it from Mauro’s deli.”
Foggy rushed out to reheat dinner. “So what did you get up to tonight?” he yelled from the kitchen.
“Uh, not much,” Matt said in what he hoped was a casual-sounding voice. “Did you have fun?”
Foggy recounted the evening’s activities with his usual storytelling flair as he bustled around the kitchen, grabbing cutlery and retrieving another beer from the fridge. “Wanna beer?” he yelled at Matt.
“No thanks, Fog,” Matt replied from his bed. “I’ve brushed my teeth.”
Foggy chuckled. He paused briefly after the first bite to thank Matt profusely for the gift of meat. Matt smiled to himself. Meat worked every time.

After Foggy had finished eating, he returned to Matt’s room. “Can I give you a hug?” Foggy asked, still drunkenly chipper.
“Because I fed you meat?” Matt joked (well, half-joked. It was the plan after all) as he sat up.
Foggy gave him a warm hug, and Matt tried his best to return it while keeping his sore hand out of harm’s way. He flinched slightly as Foggy touched his injured upper arm, causing Foggy to apologise profusely. “I didn’t think a hug would be so treacherous,” Foggy noted.
“S’okay,” Matt said, clinging onto Foggy’s shirt. For the briefest moment, he forgot about his disastrous evening, his anxieties and pain.
Foggy laughed a little nervously at his friend’s tight grip. “Gee Matt, are you okay?”
“Yeah,” Matt said into Foggy’s shoulder, unwilling to let go. He scrambled to come up with an explanation for his clinginess. “I think – I think maybe I’m just feeling a bit isolated, you know – my senses – when they’re not as strong, I guess I don’t quite have the same connection with other people.” It was true, but not the whole truth.
“Oh, okay,” Foggy said, surprised. “That makes a lot of sense actually.” He thought for a moment. “You know you’re welcome to a hug any time. You just have to ask.”

“Mmm… okay,” Matt replied, still convinced that the meat method was easier.

“Uh, but I have to move now,” Foggy said apologetically. “My back’s going into spasm from bending awkwardly.”

Matt immediately let go with a quiet “sorry.”

“You’re going to be okay, Matt,” Foggy mused, “I know you are.”

Matt decided that now was not the time to argue the point. Nothing about his life right now was okay and he couldn’t see an end in sight. Instead, he lay back with a small sigh.

Foggy hovered for a moment then announced, “I’m going to bed. The world is spinning.”

“Okay, ‘night,” Matt mumbled as he rolled back onto his side, wincing as his hand rubbed against the sheet. He listened again for any sign of the neighbour, but the apartment was silent. Exhausted, he quickly slipped into a dreamless sleep.

Matt awoke at 3am to the sound of someone on the street tripping over something metal and incredibly resonant. The offender swore loudly as he stumbled and Matt recognised it as the abusive neighbour’s voice. Matt sat up, hissing in pain as he accidentally leaned against his sore hand. He forced himself to refocus on the neighbour, listening intently as the now very drunk man made his way up the internal stairs. The neighbour swore to himself as he fumbled with the key in the lock, crashing into the doorframe as the door eventually swung open. Matt reached for his phone, ready to call the police if anything happened, but the man only made it as far as the couch. Within minutes, he was snoring.

Matt didn’t know what to do next. He didn’t want to sleep just in case the man woke up, but he couldn’t very well stay awake all night. In the end, his body decided for him and he returned to a deep sleep.

Matt woke up early the next morning to find that the towel had somehow embedded itself in his hand. It appeared that as his burst blisters dried overnight, the fibres in the towel had stuck to the wound. He was on the verge of tears as he rolled over, careful to wrap the towel around his hand so as not to pull at the wound any more than necessary. He scrabbled around with his good hand, trying to find the Aspirin on his bedside table, but he only succeeded in knocking his phone onto the floor. He gave up and shuffled into the bathroom instead, feeling the ghosts of every punch and kick received the night before. Retrieving the box of Aspirin from the bathroom cabinet, Matt returned to his bedroom, pulling out his exercise mat with the intention of meditating his injuries away.

An hour later, he was feeling surprisingly better. Well, relatively better. He felt brave enough to separate the towel from his hand for a start, so he returned to the bathroom and held his hand and towel under running water in an attempt to break the bonds. The towel finally came away, but the pain left Matt shaking and weak. He sat on the lidded toilet, nursing his damp arm and reliving every missed move, every incorrect target and every mistake from the previous night. As the shaking subsided, Matt’s focus switched to coffee. Still holding his arm protectively against his
chest, he crept into the kitchen in stealth mode, careful not to wake Foggy.

Sound is one thing, but smell is quite another, and the smell of brewing coffee was apparently enough to lure the hung over Foggy out of his sleeping nook. Foggy stumbled out, groaning about his hangover.

“Coffee,” Foggy mumbled, wandering over to the kitchen table where Matt was nursing a fresh cup of coffee, his injured hand resting on the table. Foggy stared in horror at Matt’s raw and weeping hand. His eyes drifted up to Matt’s bruised face and back to his hand before he could even find the words.

“What- what have you done, Matt? Your hand!”

Matt opened his mouth to say something, but had nothing.

“We need to get you to a doctor,” Foggy continued.

“It’s okay. The blisters just burst,” Matt said, trying to downplay it for Foggy’s sake.

“It hurts just to look at it.”

“Good thing I can’t see it then,” Matt replied sardonically.

“Did you have a seizure last night?” Foggy said, looking at Matt’s face and trying to figure out how he’d managed to collect bruises and cuts on both his mouth and his temple. It wasn’t from a single fall, that’s for sure.

“Oh, I don’t think so.”

“How did you get all those bruises?” Foggy said quietly.

Matt took a sip of his coffee to buy himself time. “I fell,” he said eventually. Short and simple. He hoped Foggy would take the hint and leave it alone.

“Okay, you’re not going to tell me how you ended up looking like someone who just lost a bar fight,” Foggy concluded, knowing full well that the analogy hurt, “but can you at least let me take you to see a doctor about your hand? It’s already looking pretty red and I’m scared it’s going to get infected.”

Matt protectively drew his hand a little closer to his body. “I don’t need-”

“Or Claire? Can I call Claire?”

“No, you can’t – uh, maybe,” Matt hesitated. “If she’s on night shift she often gets off around now.” His hand was hurting more than he’d expect from a surface wound, and at least Claire would know how to dress it so that he could get changed without getting lint stuck in it again.

“Great. I’ll call her.”

“Uh, her number’s in-”

“I already have it programmed in my phone.”

“You what?!” Matt said indignantly.

Foggy was on the verge of cracking. “I don’t want to hear it, Matt. I have a massive hangover and
your hand looks like it’s being devoured by flesh-eating bacteria. Just let me make the call without arguing, okay?”

“What’s all this about?” Claire said bluntly as soon as she saw Matt’s hand.

“I burnt myself on the stove,” Matt replied.

“When?”

“Uh, three days ago. Wednesday.”

“And was this before or after you decided to take all those sedatives?” Matt looked taken aback, and Claire added, “I got a call from Foggy.”

“Um, I think I’m going to take a shower,” Foggy said quickly, making a quick escape. He yelled back at Claire, “maybe he’ll tell you where he got all those bruises.” The bitterness in Foggy’s voice was quite clear.

With Foggy out of earshot, Claire said, “so after you took three times the prescribed dose of Valium, you decided to take to the streets à la Daredevil and someone got quite a few punches in, is that right?”

“Mmm yes,” Matt admitted reluctantly. “And the blisters burst.”

Claire rolled her eyes, but she said in a kind voice, “are you still having trouble with your senses?”

Matt nodded.

“But you decided to go out as Daredevil anyway.”

“No – not in my suit. I didn’t plan – I didn’t mean to go out. It just happened.”

“Yeah, I hate it when I accidentally get into fist fights with people too,” Claire muttered sarcastically. Adopting a more sanguine tone, she added, “are you hurt anywhere else?”

Matt shook his head. He probably had bruises on his back, but they’d heal without problem. “Just my hand.”

“And you haven’t seen a doctor because…”

“I didn’t need to until now. I thought if I let it breathe it would heal faster, but it seems to be doing the opposite.”

“Letting it breathe,” Claire repeated. “That’s a great way of getting an infection, Matt. I would have thought you’d know better than that.”

Matt sighed, frustrated. “Can you help?”

Foggy re-emerged from the shower just as Claire was rummaging around in her first aid kit for a special dressing. She washed Matt’s before dressing it with something cold and jelly-like, grilling him on his seizures and medication side effects all the while. Matt could tell that she was desperate
to go home after her lengthy nursing shift, so he sat there meekly answering her prying questions as she worked on his hand.

As she zipped up her kit, she said brusquely, “if the pain gets worse or if you get a fever, contact a doctor,” and Foggy gave a snort from the couch. Ignoring Foggy, Matt got up from the table to see Claire off, desperately wanting to run away from everything and everyone. As they reached the door, Claire gave him an awkward hug and said quietly, “call me if you feel like things are getting too much. I don’t want to get another call like that from Foggy, okay?”

“Bye, Claire,” Matt replied, avoiding the issue.

But Claire wasn’t finished yet. As Matt went to close the door, she added, “and you might want to tell Foggy how you got those bruises. It’s the least you can do.”
**Filling the Void**

*It’s the least you can do.* Claire kicked herself for using that phrase. She was constantly frustrated with Matt’s lack of social awareness, but Matt was the master of guilt and he was carrying more than enough as it was. She almost knocked on the door to say as much, but ultimately decided to leave it up to the two men to sort it out themselves. It was probably best not to get involved.

Matt could hear Claire hesitating and stood there for a moment, listening for clues as to why she was lingering. Eventually he heard footsteps moving away from the door, and he turned his focus back to Foggy who was still parked on the couch.

“Do you want a coffee?” Matt asked meekly.

Foggy sighed and stood up. “No, I think I’ll head over to my apartment for the day. It probably needs a bit of a dusting.”

“Dusting,” Matt repeated quietly. Foggy didn’t dust.

“The mail’s probably building up too,” Foggy added.

Matt nodded. “Of course.” The awkward silence started building once again and Matt busied himself with the coffee machine to hide his discomfort.

Without ceremony, Foggy grabbed his jacket and yelled a brief goodbye as he quickly exited, his laptop bag slung over his shoulder.

Matt noticed that for the first time in weeks, Foggy hadn’t asked him if he was going to be okay on his own. Matt wasn’t sure if that was a good or a bad thing right now. Foggy seemed peeved, but that could have just been the hangover. Then again, Claire had gleaned where the bruises had come from, so perhaps Foggy had too.

*It’s the least you can do.* Claire’s parting words ran through his head over and over as he sat at the kitchen table, hugging his second mug of coffee. Telling Foggy about the source of the bruises wasn’t an option, but maybe he could cook some meat instead. A lasagne perhaps. Yes, Foggy would love that.

Buoyed by the new plan, Matt changed out of his sweats to go grocery shopping. The burst blisters had made it incredibly painful to hold anything in his right hand, so he attempted to hold his cane in his left hand instead, which left him feeling awkward and clumsy. By the time he returned to his apartment with a backpack of food (and a bottle of wine), he’d started to doubt his plan.

He was fairly good at doing things with one hand – Stick had seen to that – but it turned out chopping carrots and tomatoes with one hand completely out of action was harder than he’d imagined. At one point he even had to walk away from the kitchen for ten minutes, such was the build up of frustration. He didn’t think Foggy would take too kindly to another smashed kitchen object, even with the olive branch lasagne.

Once the saucepan of tomatoley pork and veal sauce was simmering on the stove, Matt flung himself onto the couch, exhausted. He enjoyed the cool breeze coming through the windows for once. He rarely opened them because of the sounds and smells outside, but today he needed to minimise the lingering smell of meat inside. He unintentionally fell asleep and woke up to the sound of his phone: *Gladys, Gladys, Gladys, Gladys, it rang.*
“Hello this is Matthew Murdock,” he said with a slight croak.

“How so formal?” Gladys laughed from the other end of the phone.

“It’s just habit, sorry.”

“I just thought I’d see if you’d be interested in a tour of the museum today.”

“Oh, I don’t know if-”

“I’ll be your guide,” she interrupted.

Matt thought for a moment. He could hear her breathing patiently on the other side of the phone. “I do need to have a quick chat to you before Wednesday’s trial,” Matt eventually reasoned.

“So is that a yes?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Yay. Do you want to meet me there in half an hour? Mid-afternoon the visitor numbers always drop.”

Matt hung up and realised that he had no idea how long the meat had been on the stove for. He hurried over and poked the saucepan contents with a spoon. It must have been a couple of hours at least if it was reduced to this level. He carefully took it off the stove, poured it into a dish for it to cool a little, and dashed into his bedroom to find something presentable to wear. He ran his hands over his coats, lingering on his college-era red leather jacket. Gladys had always liked the red jacket. Thank goodness Foggy wasn’t around though - Foggy used to call it the ‘sex jacket’ on account of Matt’s tendency to wear it on dates. Matt didn’t think he could cope with that kind of teasing at the moment.

Gladys pounced on him as soon as he entered the museum foyer. “You still have your red jacket,” Gladys said in lieu of a greeting.

“Hang on, it’s red?” Matt quipped, and Gladys pushed him playfully.

“Come, on, I’ve got a lot to show you,” she said.

“Can I take your right arm?” Matt asked, folding up his cane and stowing it in the back pocket of his jeans. “My usual right hand’s a bit out of action.” Gladys was one of the few people he felt comfortable with to lead him without a cane, and he latched onto her happily when she nudged him with her right arm.

“So what have you been up to since college – other than work that is?” she asked as they took the elevator to the top floor. “I think I gave you my life story the other night, but I forgot to ask about you.”

“I’ve not done much outside work,” Matt lied. “As I mentioned last time, Foggy and I have our own business so that takes up a lot of my time and energy.”

“I can imagine. It’s pretty brave doing that so soon after graduating.”

“Yeah, but we learn quickly. We’ve made mistakes, but we get a lot of clients through word of mouth now, which is always a good sign.”

“Definitely,” she said with a smile in her voice. “Top floor,” she announced as the doors slid open.
“We’ll go left. There’s a sound installation I think you’ll like.”

Gladys lead Matt towards the sound work but stopped just outside. “Wait, I want to take you in at the quietest moment.”

They stood there in silence until Gladys whispered, “okay, let’s go.” She tripped over a carpet tile as they entered the darkened room and Matt stuck his arm out to catch her.

“Great reflexes,” she gushed.

“I need them,” he replied with a shrug, enjoying the surge of adrenaline.

They settled onto the bench inside the black cube and Matt closed his eyes and let the harmonic notes wash over him. The sounds made his skin tingle and his spine shiver. It was like a massage for his brain. They remained there for a full half hour, Gladys reluctant to pull Matt away from an artwork he was obviously enjoying so much.

The other sound works were a disappointment after the first one, and Matt joked that they should have left the first one for last. “That first one’s pretty spectacular,” Gladys said. Maybe I’ll get you on as a special consultant for the next exhibition I develop. We can do some studio visits together.”

After a couple of hours of intense museum time, Matt reluctantly excused himself citing prearranged dinner plans. He was tempted to invite Gladys to dinner, but he didn’t want Foggy to think the meat was intended for anyone but him. In the end, they settled on meeting up for post-court drinks on Wednesday night and a more thorough museum tour in the future (which they joked was not a euphemism).

Foggy sniffed the air happily when he arrived home. The dining table was set with a cooling lasagne, two glasses of wine and a small loaf of garlic bread. Matt was sitting cross-legged in an armchair looking incredibly smug. He’d been sitting next to the window for more than an hour, ready to pull the cooked lasagne from the oven as soon as he heard Foggy’s heartbeat.

"What's this for?” Foggy asked, wandering over to the table to get a closer look. “What happened to your no meat rule?"

"It’s a thank you."

"For?"

"Looking out for me. For being there like-” Matt hesitated “-you’re like family."

“You are family,” Foggy corrected.

Matt gave him a shy smile.

“Now could you please dish this up because I’m drooling at the smell,” Foggy said quickly to short-circuit the awkwardness.

Matt leapt up and doled out the food. It was a bit messy with one hand out of action and his senses still muddled from the medication, but he remembered Foggy’s lecture about beauty in imperfection. In any case, it’d still taste nice.
"Matt, this is delicious," Foggy said after he’d scarfed down a first helping. “But do you know how you can really thank me?"

Matt froze mid-bite.

Foggy continued, "you can thank me by looking after yourself. If I'm going to invest time in helping you – not to mention all the emotional effort - then I need to know that you're not going to do anything that puts yourself at risk."

Matt took a silent mouthful and chewed slowly, hoping that he wasn’t expected to respond.

Foggy poured himself another glass of wine and casually asked, "so did you win?"

"Win?" Matt asked in a choked voice.

"Yeah, whoever you fought last night - did you win, or stop them… or whatever you do?"

"Do you want seconds?" Matt said, reaching for the spatula.

“Yeah, thanks,” Foggy replied offering up his plate. He took a slow sip of wine and sat back, watching Matt critically as he cut another couple of portions.

Once Matt had finished with the distraction of a second helping, Foggy said carefully, "you went out as Daredevil, didn't you."

"No, I didn't," Matt said quickly before correcting, “I didn't mean to."

"You didn't mean to what?"

"I didn't go out as Daredevil." Matt fetched last night’s clothes from his laundry basket. "Look." He held up his dirty hoodie and jeans for Foggy’s inspection.

"Matt, put those away,” Foggy said, wrinkling his nose. “I don’t get it. You went out in a flimsy hoodie again?"

"Mmm yes," Matt said with a curt nod.

"And hit your head?"

"Well, I didn't have my helmet," Matt pointed out innocently.

"Maybe that's what you need 24/7," Foggy joked, but Matt looked genuinely upset at the remark. “I’m kidding, Matt. You know that, right?’

“I don’t – I…” Matt petered off.

“Sit down and finish your meal. You need more padding,” Foggy ordered.

Matt complied, stashing the dirty clothes on the floor beneath the table. Foggy thought it strange that his neat freak friend would throw his clothes on the floor, but refrained from commenting. As if he could read Foggy’s thoughts, Matt said, “I’ll drop my laundry off on Monday.”

“I’m happy to wash your clothes when I do mine tomorrow. It’ll save you some money.”

“They know me. We have a good system worked out with sorting and labeling. I’d like to keep it just so.”
“You still don’t trust me to label your shirts,” Foggy laughed.

“Not after last time, no.”

“Fair enough. Going back to the matter of trust—” he paused as Matt winced. Foggy wondered if it was the physical injuries or if the discussion of trust was just that painful. “I have two rules I’d like you to follow if I’m going to stay here: one, you need to trust me and tell me honestly when you get hurt or you’re in pain, or tired, or anything.’

When Foggy paused for confirmation, Matt bit his bottom lip and slowly nodded.

“Two, no more getting into fist fights with bad guys at least until your seizures are sorted out.”

“I didn’t mean to, Foggy,” Matt said. “I just followed him.”

“Well, no following people then if you can’t trust yourself to not fight people.”

“You make it sound so juvenile,” Matt grumbled.

“Well it kind of is. Who was this person anyway?”

“The-” Matt paused as he heard the abusive neighbour raise his voice. His girlfriend had arrived home from work and the man was incensed, blaming her for the beating he’d received the night before an accusing her of ‘snitching.’ Although Matt and Foggy called the police as soon as they heard the yelling, her physical injuries were extensive enough for her to be taken to hospital.

Matt tried his hardest not to scream and yell. He was furious with himself for his errors the previous evening. He had no doubt in his mind that if he’d been well and fit, the woman would be unharmed right now; but instead, she was badly injured due to his mistakes and weakness.

The most Foggy could do was try and distract Matt. Although Foggy didn’t know that the bruises on Matt’s face were the result of the boyfriend’s quick fists, he could tell Matt’s distress due to not being able to physically intervene was only increasing. He had to find a solution fast.

A distraction soon came in the form of a phone call from the terrified girlfriend, wanting to take Nelson & Murdock up on their previous offer of legal representation.

“Are you happy to visit the hospital with me?” Foggy asked once he got off the phone.

“As long as I’m not a patient,” Matt said.

Claire spotted them as they arrived in the ER. “What happened?” she asked, scanning Matt for further injuries.

“We’re here to see a Laura O’Hern,” Foggy said discretely. “We’re here as her legal representation.”

“Lawyers.” Claire raised her eyebrows. “That makes more sense. I thought Matt walking in here voluntarily for treatment was a bit odd. Follow me.”

It wasn’t a terribly long conversation between Laura, Matt and Foggy - just long enough to go over the process of pressing charges and her temporary accommodation options.

“What happened to your face and hand?” she asked Matt as they were wrapping up. “Did you get beaten up too?”
Matt stood up. “I think that’s everything. Do you have any further questions?”

Laura blushed, clearly regretting her query. “I don’t think so… actually, what does this cost? I don’t know if I can afford-”

Matt interrupted, “nothing. We’re doing this pro bono.”

“But why?”

“It’s something we believe in,” Matt said with an attempt at a smile. And I owe you, he thought to himself.

As they left the hospital, Foggy said triumphantly, “see? It’s not great that Laura called because she got hurt again, but it’s good that she called. We can help her through the system, Matt.”

Foggy let Matt wallow in silence throughout the journey home. As soon as they were through the door, Matt flopped down at the dining table and poured himself half a glass of the leftover wine from dinner. Foggy followed his lead, hesitating a little before saying, "do you remember when you were in hospital that first time and you told me why you kept your enhanced senses and Daredevil activities a secret?"

Matt gave a small nod.

"And you said it was empowering to keep secrets."

Matt screwed up his face in disagreement.

"Okay, you said that it was empowering to keep your abilities a secret in that you weren't judged as a blind lawyer who grew up in an orphanage when you were Daredevil," Foggy blurted out desperately. “Or something…”

Matt didn't say anything so Foggy pushed it a bit further.

"But it’s not a secret anymore. I know about Daredevil. I think you're remarkable both with and without your extra senses. I don't – I’ve never underestimated you."

"You said you felt sorry for me."

"Well, yeah, but I didn't expect less from you because you were blind - I expected you to do things a different way, sure, but I never lowered my expectations."

"I know," Matt whispered.

"I understand why not being able to go out as Daredevil is quite a blow, I do."

"You don't. You hate Daredevil."

"I don't hate Daredevil," Foggy said impatiently. "I hate that you put yourself in danger constantly, and I also hate that you're hurting because you can't do that anymore."

"Can't do that now," Matt corrected. "When I'm better I'll-"

"What? Get another head injury? A more serious one? Remember what they said about epilepsy
coming on about 7-9 months after a head injury? Who's to say that your seizures weren't caused by a previous knock on the head. You need to think about these things."

Matt opened his mouth to argue, but Foggy got in there first. "Look, you don't know that this is going to be fixed any time soon, so what I'm proposing is that you find an alternative activity to fill the void, so to speak."

Matt snorted derisively.

"I'm serious, Matt. You evidently don't believe the law is enough, and I believe you when you say that. I see the limitations too, but I still try. We both do."

"Limitations," Matt repeated with a slight sneer, shaking his head in disbelief. "The problems are more than mere limitations."

Foggy rolled his eyes. "Okay, let's just put that argument aside for a moment. Just tell me, what are the other things that Daredevil does - that you need to feel, um, satisfied, or at least less depressed or angsty?" Foggy looked at the scowl on Matt's face, and added, "at least for now."

Matt rubbed his scalp, frustrated.

"What?" Foggy said.

"It's not something I can just replace, Foggy."

"Yeah I know - I just acknowledged that. Tell me what aspects of Daredevil that you need and we'll try and find something to fill the void." In the subsequent silence, Foggy added, "you can even put your glasses on if you feel more comfortable talking about it that way."

Somehow that broke through to Matt. He gave a small huff of amusement. He probably didn't give Foggy enough credit. Foggy knew him better than anyone else, and Matt had opened up to him without thinking time and time again. Foggy didn't respect the wall Matt had carefully constructed around him – he’d just barged through without invitation. And Foggy never seemed put off by Matt's many neuroses.

"Do you have butcher’s paper and oversized markers?" Matt teased.

"Ha ha, just answer the question, Matt."

Matt thought back to his feelings from the previous night when he waited outside the bar. "I-I like solving puzzles," he said after consideration. "Finding links between various groups, following individuals and small groups that lead to the top."

"Okay, that's understandable. You're smart, Matt, smarter than anyone I know. You like the intellectual engagement. What else?"

"It gives me a sense of accomplishment."

"You don't get enough of that from work?"

Matt started to shut off again, so Foggy quickly prompted, "go on. There must be more."

"The adrenaline - from - from..." he couldn't finish the sentence. He didn't want to admit that he enjoyed fighting.

"From hitting people," Foggy finished.
Matt went red. Foggy knew. Of course he knew.

"Um, it also uses the skills I gained as a kid," Matt added. "I get to use all my training, my full range of senses. It's not going to waste."

"It's a shame you don't have someone to spar with - someone who knows about your abilities."

"That's why I was attracted to Elektra. Stick apparently, um - she was trained by Stick too, you know."

"What?! You never said."

"I didn't know - not until two weeks ago anyway," Matt said quietly and miserably. "He sent her to Columbia to seduce me. I still don't know why."

"Oh Matt, I'm sorry." Foggy wanted to give Matt a hug, but didn't want to cut the conversation short. So he just waited for Matt to go on.

"We fell in love though, despite Stick’s intention otherwise - that's what Elektra said anyway." He picked at the edge of the bandage around his hand, pulling at a loose thread. "She knew about my senses - back in college she said she deduced it, but in reality I guess Stick told her." He sighed. "Anyway, she used to spar with me – she fought without mercy. She was super rough, you know." Matt smiled a little as he remembered the exhilaration he felt at the time.

"So part of the problem is that you haven't anyone to, er, exercise with who knows about your senses, or at least will accept that a blind man can fight better than them."

Matt nodded.

"Okay. Anything else?"

Matt thought about his recent hoodie outings and how he felt like he had to hide. "I think just the freedom to move around. You know, the other day when you said I needed to jog with a rope. I don't need that. It's for the benefit of everyone else. I have to hold myself back every day. It's tiring."

"Hypothetically, what do you think would happen if the world knew about your senses – if they knew you could move around without a cane?"

Matt shrugged. "To be honest, the cane is necessary some of the time. It's hard to concentrate sometimes. And at the moment, well, it's completely necessary in the street. I just can't..." Matt petered off.

Foggy nodded. "oh, I nodded. Can you still tell that at the moment or are your senses-"

"Yeah. I can hear your hair move," Matt said flatly.

"The other thing I know is a factor is that you like helping people," Foggy offered. "You're generous beyond belief - to people you don't know, that is. Not so much-"

"You're saying I'm not generous to you?" Matt said.

"No, Matt. I'm saying that you'll put yourself out for strangers, but you don't treat yourself all that well."

Matt frowned. "I'm not generous to you. I take and take and don't give anything back."
"You gave me a lasagne," Foggy pointed out.

Matt huffed in dissent.

"You gave me my best friend," Foggy continued. "You gave me a business partner. You were the reason I got such good grades in college - you spurred me on to try harder and believe in my own abilities. You make me a better person, Matt. That's what you give back. And that's why I'm here now."

Matt picked at his bandage again, pulling another thread loose.

Foggy pushed on, undeterred by Matt’s lack of enthusiasm. "So let's review the things you're missing: the adrenaline from fighting, using your skills and training, helping people, sleeping better at night, the freedom to do things like running and boxing without aids, exercise, and the intellectual challenge - solving puzzles and the like. Is that it?"

"I also - I think boredom is part of it," Matt offered. "I'm bored with just sitting here, sleeping, reading, watching movies, making origami. Don't get me wrong," he said quickly, "I like the company. It's just not enough, you know."

"Boredom makes sense," Foggy agreed. "The tiredness is part of it too, I'm guessing."

Matt blurted out, "I miss being fit and I hate being tired all the time. I can't concentrate. I can't even use my brain at work." He opened his mouth to say something else, then closed it.

"What?" Foggy prompted.

"I get scared." Matt hung his head as if ashamed.

"Of course you do," Foggy said, rolling his eyes. "I'd be shitting myself if I never knew when and if I was about to fall unconscious."

Matt poured himself another half glass of wine. "I miss drinking too."

"Pour me another glass too please," Foggy said with a slight chuckle. "So what are we going to do about filling the gaps?" Foggy said in his best getting-down-to-business voice.

"I'm tired," Matt said, his hand shaking as he tried to pour Foggy's wine with his left hand. "Can we do this another time?"

"Not until you come up with one thing. Just one. Then you're free."

Matt took a sip of his wine, overwhelmed by Foggy's demands. Nothing could fill what he missed.

"What about exercise. Hey, would Elektra spar with you?"

Matt spat out his wine. "Elektra? Foggy, you said not to do anything dangerous."

"I thought you said she wasn't harmful."

"I didn't say that. I would never say that. She’s not to be trusted. I know I warned you of that much." He paused. "Uh, speaking of Elektra, could you remind me to ring her on Monday to give her an update on the real estate ownership?"

"Yeah sure," Foggy said dismissively, "but let’s get back to the issue at hand. What about if I come and supervise the two of you?"
"Foggy," Matt groaned. Foggy was so innocent that he couldn’t possibly conceive of the things Elektra was capable of.

“Why not?”

Matt took another sip of his wine as a delaying tactic. He didn’t even really want the wine – it was more of a habit. It was a comforting measure of sorts. “What if she hurts me? What will you do then? Why do you think she’ll be less harmful than the thugs on the street?”

“You said she loves you.”

“She said that. Who knows what the truth is,” Matt said bitterly.

“Okay, so what about one of your dad’s old boxing buddies? Could you trust one of them to keep your secret?”


Foggy could see there was a lot more to those words than Matt was letting on, but now was probably not the time. “We’ll come back to the sparring thing later I think. You said you like the intellectual engagement. Is there anything else that could engage you? Hey, you could learn a language. They teach Chinese at the community centre down the road.”

Matt couldn’t help but smile. “I’m not learning Chinese, Foggy. I can barely remember which cases we’re working on at the moment, let alone a new language.”

“Exercise then. You said you’d teach me how to box. That’s a bit of puzzle solving in itself. Plus you’re helping someone.”

Matt got up from the table, abandoning his wine. “I’ll think about it. I’m going to bed.” And with that, he disappeared into his room, leaving Foggy to mull over possible solutions on his own. If only Matt wasn’t so damn oppositional…

The next morning, Matt escaped the church as soon as mass had finished (as per usual) and found Foggy waiting on the small bench outside (also increasingly usual). “You know you don’t have to pick me up, Foggy,” Matt said as he sat down beside his friend.

“Yeah I know, but it’s been rather nice the last few weeks, you know, going for a walk, eating pancakes-”

Matt laughed. “It’s all about the pancakes then?”

“ Mostly,” Foggy grinned.

“Come on then,” Matt said, standing up. “Let’s get out of here before I have to talk to people.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to volunteer at church? That could be your helping people thing.”

“No, I don’t want to volunteer at church,” Matt said firmly, tugging Foggy in the direction of the diner. The sooner Foggy was distracted by pancakes the better.
Over pancakes and bad filter coffee, they agreed to spend the afternoon catching up on some work. They had a court appearance the next day and the candy case was scheduled to be heard on Wednesday. They were feeling rather overwhelmed by their current caseload. As Foggy had pointed out the previous week, Murdock & Nelson weren’t short of clients any more. The main issue was servicing them.

They were a couple of hours into their planning when Matt casually said, “I met with Gladys yesterday.”

“Your ex?”

“Fog, you can’t call her that. She’s our expert witness.”

“Alright, alright… what did she say?”

“She didn’t know anything more about their motives.” Matt shrugged. “I didn’t really learn anything.”

“But she’s happy to come along on Wednesday still?”

“Yeah, as long as I buy her a drink afterwards.”

“Matt, that’s not how the law-”

“I’m joking. Well, not really. I mean, we’re going to have drinks afterwards – you’re welcome to come,” Matt said enthusiastically.

“And be a third wheel? I might leave you to it.”

“It’s not like that, Foggy. I enjoy her company, but I don’t think I really want to – I don’t think I can do anything right now, you know, in, um…”

“Ohhh… Really? Is that a side-effect?”

“It appears so,” Matt said sadly. “But we had a nice chat at the gallery.”

“AKA you flirted with her.”

“I didn’t flirt with her, Foggy.”

“Pfft. It’s your default behaviour around women. You just need to be aware, that’s all. You don’t want to lead her on.”

Matt groaned. “Nothing happened. She just showed me some interesting sound artworks, and she let me touch some sculptures. I had to wear gloves, but it was still pretty cool.”

“That had to be intellectually engaging,” Foggy pointed out, thinking back to one of Matt’s Daredevil ‘voids’ from last night.

“It’s not the same,” Matt said crankily.

“I didn’t say it was. It’s a start though.” Foggy twirled his pen absently. “Now let’s go over our argument again…”

Before they could finalise their plan for Wednesday, however, Matt had a seizure. “Crap,” Foggy said, holding Matt’s chest so he didn’t slither off the couch. He’d bitten his tongue again, resulting
in a line of bloody drool down his chin and chest. It looked undeniably grim. As soon as Matt stilled, Foggy pulled him around so that he was lying horizontal on the couch, and then fetched some water, a bowl and a teatowel from the kitchen.

“Matt, open your eyes,” he said, kneeling beside the couch. He rubbed Matt’s good hand soothingly while he waited for his friend to wake up.

As soon as Matt was conscious enough to respond, Foggy held up the glass of water to Matt’s mouth and positioned the bowl under his chin. “Here, rinse and spit,” Foggy ordered. Matt didn’t quite understand, downing half the glass of water before spluttering and spreading tiny red dots of bloody saliva all over Foggy and the surrounding furniture.

“Thanks, Matt,” Foggy said sarcastically.

Matt just groaned and closed his eyes again, immediately falling into a deep sleep.

“I guess that’s that,” Foggy said to himself. He did a remedial wipe up of the area, all the while wondering just how much blood had been spilled in this area previously. He wrinkled his nose at that thought, and quickly tossed the teatowel into the sink to soak.

Foggy picked up his laptop, planning to get a bit more work done, but he couldn't concentrate with his business partner lying there unconscious and bloody. Eventually, he grabbed a beer from the fridge and turned on his game console. He considered the strange new situation they’d found themselves in, causing him to momentarily freak out. Fortunately there were zombies to kill in a post-apocalyptic New York. He punched a lumbering figure in the head, then another and another, rescuing a small child and an injured old man along the way. It was a shame Matt couldn’t play video games really.
Foggy and Matt were greeted by an upbeat Karen on Monday morning. “Hey guys, you’re looking spiffy.” They both looked uncomfortable at the compliment, so she added the more familiar, “did you have a good weekend?”

Foggy relaxed a little. “Yeah, Matt cooked, I cleaned, he went to a museum and church, we did some court prep, he had a brief unconscious moment, I cleaned up the blood after said unconscious moment—”

Karen gasped, “are you okay, Matt? You said blood.”

“Bit my tongue, that’s all,” Matt deflected. “Uh, we also picked up a new client over the weekend.”

“A new client? Do we have enough time for a new client?”

“Domestic violence victim,” Foggy replied bluntly. “So yes we have time for a new client.”

What did you get up to, Karen?” Matt said softly, trying to make up for Foggy’s confrontational tone.

“I did some more research into Daredevil,” she replied excitedly.

“You what?” Foggy spluttered.

“There was a kidnapping on Friday night – a little girl,” Karen said. “I mean, it’s the ultimate Daredevil rescue event, so if he was around he’d show for sure. It also means that leather guy was an impostor.”

Foggy glanced over at Matt, who was trying his best to keep a neutral face. Inside he was roiling.

“Oh, did you hear about the kidnapping, Matt?” Foggy asked in a forced casual voice.

“No,” Matt said, his own voice a little wobbly.

Karen continued, ironically encouraged by their response. “You know how I said Daredevil hasn’t been spotted in months? At first I thought Fisk’s men might have taken him out, but I did some more digging and it actually coincides with the departure of that lunatic with a gun – what did they call him? The Punisher? You know, the one who shot at me and Grotto at the hospital, took out a heap of gangs, and then vanished? I don’t have the exact date pinned down yet, but Daredevil seems to have disappeared a couple of weeks after the hospital incident. Perhaps they took each other out, y’know, Daredevil versus Punisher.”

"It’s possible, I guess," Matt said.

“Maybe he retired,” Foggy suggested, “How many beatings can a man take before his joints start breaking down, eh? My cousin who’s a builder had to have a knee reconstruction after jumping off too many buildings and scaffolds at height. Perhaps Daredevil’s knee suffered a similar fate. Or maybe…” Foggy petered off when he spotted Matt’s deadly expression.

Karen typed something into her computer.

"Er, Karen," Matt said, moving towards her desk. “What are you doing?”
"I'm going to find out what happened to him. I need to know if he's okay. He saved my life!"

"He might not want to be found," Matt said. "He's entitled to privacy, Karen."

"That's why he wore a mask," Foggy chimed in.

"Yeah but what if he's holed up and injured somewhere? Or being held prisoner by the Punisher?"

"I'm sure he can take care of himself," Foggy replied.

"Foggy! How can you just brush this aside? He put away Fisk. Helping him is the least I can do."

"Karen. Leave it," Matt ordered, and Foggy added, "don't you have work to do?"

"Sorry guys, I'll do this in my own time." Then she added under her breath, "I had no idea you were so keen to ignore those in trouble."

Matt snapped, "we don’t ignore people in trouble." Karen jumped, not realising that he’d heard her last mumbled comment. She said in a small voice, “I know, I’m sorry.”

Foggy pushed Matt into his office. “You know she’s not going to stop researching until she finds out the truth," Foggy hissed.

"I know." Matt rubbed the back of his neck, distressed.

"You're going to have to tell her, Matt."

"What? No! I don't even go out anymore."

"That’s right, you won’t,” Foggy threatened. “But she's going to find out anyway. She's an incredible researcher and she won't stop until she finds out the truth."

"She can't. It’s impossible."

"Do you want to risk it? Would you rather it come from you or have her discover it in the basement of a dingy library?"

"There's this thing called the internet, Foggy. I doubt she'll be digging through the microfiche collection at the library."

"Tell her," Foggy demanded.

"I'll think about it," Matt said slowly. “I have so much to think about at the moment. I feel like my brain's going to explode."

"Or just short circuit?"

Matt scowled.

Foggy said sheepishly, "still too early to be able to joke about it?"

“Mmm yes.”
They turned up to court earlier than usual. It was Matt’s first appearance since his initial hospitalisation and he was anxious about his performance.

“You know you don’t have to do this today,” Foggy whispered as they waited to enter the courtroom.

Matt pushed his bracelet further under his the cuff of his shirt, worried that it was showing.

“Can you stop fiddling with that bracelet,” Foggy said, “it’s making me nervous. No one can see it, you know.”

Matt ignored him and kept fiddling.

“Does it need to be shortened again?”

“Maybe,” Matt said. “I feel like people can see it.”

“Even if they can, it’s nothing to be ashamed off,” Foggy pointed out.

“Easy for you to say.”

“Come on, Matt…”

“I’m not ashamed,” Matt snapped. “But people already judge me because of my blindness. I don’t want this too.”

They stood there in silence until their client appeared. It wasn’t a particularly challenging case and they were confident that they were going to win, but it didn’t stop Matt’s heart from racing as they entered the courtroom. The trial went swimmingly until they came to the closing. Matt stood up to close, but as he stood there in front of the jury, he panicked. He couldn’t remember a word of his speech. He could feel his heart racing and he started to disassociate from his surroundings.

Foggy assumed it was strategy at first. Matt had used a lingering silence more than once to great effect. But when the judge cleared her throat and urged Matt to get on with it, Foggy realised with a jolt of horror that it wasn’t part of the performance. Matt stammered an introductory sentence then turned to Foggy with a pleading look on his face.

Foggy stood up, “Uh, can I-”

“What is going on, Mr Murdock and Mr Nelson?”

“Can we-” Foggy started, then whispered to Matt, “sit down. I’ve got this.”

Matt stumbled over to the table and half-fell into his chair. The judge had had enough. She called them both up to the stand and censured them for violating courtroom procedures. In the end, Matt was allowed to leave the room to visit the bathroom (in line with their made-up excuse that he had food poisoning) and Foggy closed without him. They won the case, but the client wasn’t all that happy about Matt’s behaviour, despite Foggy’s repeated apologies. The client’s feelings weren’t Foggy’s priority right now though, and he rushed off to find Matt as soon as he could.

After some searching, Foggy found Matt outside the courthouse. He was sitting on the shadowy side of the steps looking thoroughly miserable.

“I’m sorry, Foggy,” Matt said as Foggy sat down beside him.

“What happened?”
“I- I just forgot everything. Literally my entire speech.” He gave a deep sigh. “And the worst thing was I couldn’t even make something up. I feel like there’s a web of cotton wool in my brain right now, interfering with my thoughts, my creativity, my ability to navigate… everything.”

“Four more days, Matt. Four more days and then we can get you onto a better medication.”

“What if it’s not the medication though?” Matt whispered.

“Well… Let’s cross that bridge when we come to it, eh?” It was a question that plagued Foggy too, but he didn’t admit it.

“We won,” Foggy announced as they returned to the office.

“That’s great,” Karen said with a smile. “Give me the blow-by-blow.”

“Nah, we have too much to do, don’t we Matt.”

“Mmm,” Matt agreed, ditching his bag and wandering over to the kitchenette to make a cup of tea. Before the water had even boiled, there was a thud as Matt hit the now rug-covered floor.

“Not again,” Foggy moaned as he ran over. “This is getting absurd.” It was only a short seizure, but Matt seemed reluctant to wake up properly afterwards. In the end, Foggy and Karen unceremoniously transferred Matt to his office by dragging him on the kitchen rug. After they’d half-lifted, half-dragged him onto the couch, Foggy muttered, “at least he’s lighter now.”

“Foggy, that’s a terrible thing to say,” Karen admonished.

“It’s true. You can see his ribs.”

“Is he not eating?”

“He eats. We ate a massive carb and meat-laden lasagne on the weekend, but he misses a lot of meals when this happens.” Foggy pointed at Matt’s unconscious form. “He lost a lot of weight in hospital, and I don’t think he ate very well after the first set of seizures. When he’s tired he just goes straight to bed. Plus I think he was almost entirely made of muscle before - now it’s just skin.”

“Shit. Can I help? Can I cook something that he can eat easily after seizures? Soup maybe?”

Foggy was about to automatically turn the offer down, imagining what Matt would say if he knew about this conversation. But it was actually a pretty good idea, and he suspected it would make Karen feel better. He eventually said, “yeah, if it’s not too much trouble. Thanks, Karen.”

“Does he have any preferences?”

“Oh yeah, about that…” Foggy held up his hand and ticked off Matt’s neurotic food preferences one by one as if he were a fussy child. “If you want him to eat something when he’s being difficult, it needs to have all natural ingredients, so make a real stock rather than use that powdered stuff - apparently he can taste the difference.” Karen nodded, thinking that was it, but Foggy continued. “Also, he doesn’t like meats that are heavily processed. And don’t put too much onion in the soup. He’s also really picky about the ripeness of… actually never mind, just make the damn soup
however you like. He’s too picky for his own good.”

“I can do the stock,” Karen said, her mouth twitching at Foggy’s domestic run-down of Matt’s food habits.

The rest of the day was pretty much a write off for Matt. Even after he’d had his usual post-seizure sleep, he could barely stay awake. He snoozed at his desk for a couple of hours until Foggy decided to take him home. Matt promptly disappeared into his bedroom and didn’t emerge for the rest of the evening, even after Foggy had cooked one of Matt’s favourite dinners. Foggy eventually put the plate Matt’s now congealed dinner in the fridge and went to bed himself. Before he turned out the light, he texted Karen a confirmation that her offer of soup would be very welcome.

Matt awoke early Tuesday morning, certain that he knew what he had to do. Yesterday’s seizure and the court disaster was no doubt due to the stress of the medication’s side-effects. He was sure of it. With the candy case coming up tomorrow, he just needed to minimise that stress for a day. Well, thirty-eight hours at least. He leaned over and pulled the morning’s medication from the pillbox, and then crept into the bathroom and flushed it down the toilet. Better. He felt clearer already. He stood under the shower for longer than usual, imagining that the stream of water was flushing all his fuzziness away.

He had a great day. It started off with Karen bring him a gift of soup – 12 containers of it in fact. Apparently she’d been up all night making the stock, cooking the soup, and freezing it in individual tubs ready for today. He felt slightly embarrassed that she went to all the trouble just for him, but it smelled great and he felt greatly touched by the gesture. They had a couple of client appointments in the morning, during which he stayed alert and awake – a rare occurrence of late. In fact, he felt comparatively sharp-witted all day (although he understood was probably partially psychological - he’d only missed one dose after all.) Best of all, Foggy and Karen noticed Matt’s change in mood and theirs seemed to lift in response.

However, it couldn’t last. As they were packing up for the day, Karen said, “oh hey, I thought you might be interested – I think I’ve identified the very last sighting of Daredevil.”

“Karen, not now,” Foggy said tiredly. After yesterday’s disaster, he didn’t want Matt’s mood to crash again.

“Don’t worry, I did the research in my own time.”

“Come on, Matt,” Foggy said, grabbing Matt’s coat from the stand and nudging it against his hand.

Matt was half leaning in the doorway and made no effort to move. “No, I want to hear this.”

Karen excitedly gave them an overview of her findings, concluding with “funnily enough it’s the night before you first ended up in hospital.”

Matt gave a dismissive huff. “You – you think it’s connected?”

Karen laughed. “No, silly. It’s just a coincidence… wait, are they connected? I thought you fell down the stairs.”

“He did,” Foggy interrupted. “No connection.”
“None,” Matt nodded.

Karen looked at them suspiciously. She hated it when they lied to her and it was obvious something had got them rattled.

“Right,” she said slowly. “Um…”

“We might head off now,” Foggy said in a falsely cheery tone.

As they closed the door behind them, Matt heard Karen mutter to herself, “it was a car crash, Karen. I fell down the stairs, Karen. Such fucking bullshit.”

As soon as they got home, Foggy said, “I know you think your blindness is the ultimate alibi, but she knows something’s up. You’re going to have to tell her, and soon.”

“I know,” Matt said, rubbing the back of his neck. “After the candy case. We need to be a unified force tomorrow. I’ll do it Thursday.”

“Friday afternoon,” Foggy suggested. “Give her the weekend to cool down.”

“You think she’ll be angry?”

“I was - but then again it was more about the lies.”

Matt inwardly cringed. This again. “I should have told you – by choice, I mean.”

“Yes, you should have.” Foggy said pointedly.

“How should I do it then?” Matt sang in a high-pitched voice, “hi, I’m Daredevil. I used to help people, but now I just fall unconscious all the time.”

Foggy raised his eyebrows. “Well that’s a start. Maybe leave out the sarcastic tone though… and the second bit.”

Matt repeated “Hi, I’m Daredevil” in a lower voice.

“That’s better. You sound more Daredevilly now.”

“Daredevilly?”

“Yeah, when you go all growly and dangerous.”

Matt frowned.

“Don’t pout either. Karen hates it when you pout.”

“Okay, no pouting, no sarcasm. Uh, what happens if she doesn’t believe me?”

“You show her. Do a backflip or something.”

Matt cracked a smile. “I’ll probably fall on my head.”
“Alright, I’ll start pegging stuff at you. It’s pretty impressive when you catch stuff with your back turned.”

Matt chuckled. “It’s a plan.” As he turned to walk into his bedroom, Foggy threw a pen at his back. Matt caught it with his left hand and immediately returned it. It hit Foggy in the chest and clattered to the floor.

“That’s not fair, Matt. You know I can’t catch things.”

“Just practicing for Friday. It makes for a good comparison, no?”

Matt returned ten minutes later dressed in sweats and a hoodie, his gym bag slung over his shoulder.

“Fogwells?” Foggy said from the couch.

“Yes,” Matt said with a pop on the p.

“Is your hand good enough?”

“The gym is more than my fists, Foggy.”

“I wouldn’t know,” Foggy said with a shrug.

Matt was a block away from Fogwell’s when he remembered he hadn’t rung Elektra about the city blocks. He pulled out his phone, hesitated, then stuffed it back in his pocket and hailed a cab.

Elektra answered the door in a silk dressing gown. “Matthew, this is a surprise.”

“Can I come in?”

“Sure.” She stood aside to let him in. “I can see you dressed down for the occasion,” she said, pulling at the back of his hood so that it fell back onto his shoulders.

“I thought you didn’t like my suits.”

“I don’t,” she said shortly. “Would you like a drink?”

Matt didn’t answer straight away. He probably shouldn’t have a drink. But he shouldn’t be doing a lot of things right at this moment. “Mac-”

“Macallan. I remember.” Her pulse had quickened ever so slightly, and Matt didn’t quite know how to interpret that.

He fidgeted and twirled his cane while she poured their drinks. “That isn’t the 12-year-old,” he said. The whiskey she was pouring smelled considerably more expensive.

“I thought you might like something a bit older.” She held the glass out to Matt, who fumbled for it with his bandaged hand. The burn was still quite painful. Elektra didn’t make any comment though, nor did she offer to help him in anyway – but then again, helping wasn’t really in her nature. He appreciated the consistency at least.

“Do I dare ask why you’re here?” Elektra said, pulling Matt towards the couch.
“I thought I’d give you an update on the ownership of those city blocks.”

“In your dirty sweats? Is this a Murdock & Nelson quirk?”

“Nelson & Murdock,” Matt corrected. “And they’re not dirty. I picked them up from the laundry this afternoon.”

Elektra snickered. Of course she knew. She took a sip of her tequila, waiting for Matt to fill her in. But Matt was engrossed with the glass he was holding. He ran his fingers around the impossibly thin edge, enjoying the fine vibrations. It had been so long since he’d sensed vibrations so delicate. Eventually Elektra said impatiently, “so who owns the blocks?”

“Oh-” Matt woke from his entranced state. “Yeah, see I don’t have the notes here - we’re still digging. There are forms to be submitted to various departments, each of which seem to take a week or so to turn around.”

“So why are you here?”

“To tell you that – that we’re working on it. We haven’t forgotten you.”

Elektra pulled her legs onto the couch and nudged Matt’s leg with her knee. “Is that the only reason you came?” she purred.

“Yes, well, no – yes… I don’t know.”

“Good,” she said with a smile. “You’re coming with me then.”

“Coming with you where?”

“There’s a block nearby that I think is controlled by the Yakuza. There are men going to and fro all night every night. I need you to come with me and tell me what you think’s going on.”

“That’s not why I came, Elektra.”

“I know. But you’ve just admitted you don’t know why you came. Something else led you here.”

Matt put his hood up and stuffed his cane in his hoodie pocket for the journey. It was quicker this way. Despite his cynicism about Elektra’s mission, he enjoyed the walk with Elektra. His head was feeling even clearer and he could sense the objects around him more accurately than he had all month. He felt a thrill of excitement as they approached the block supposedly held by the Yakuza. He missed this. He wanted this. But after hiding out in a nearby alleyway for ten minutes, the excitement started to wane.

Matt sighed. “There’s no one in there, Elektra.”

“There’s got to be. I’ve been watching it for a week. People are here all the time.”

“Can you see the people now?”

Elektra scowled. “Of course I can’t.”

They stood in the alleyway for a few more minutes before Elektra said, “do you think they know
we’re here?” Before Matt could answer though, she added, “they could be hiding inside. Shall we go in?”

“I’d hear them. There are no heartbeats in there, Elektra. I’m sorry.”

Elektra tried to pull Matt across the street, but Matt dug his heels in. Just as an argument seemed inevitable, a cab turned into the street. Matt hailed it down and quickly pulled out his cane. “I’ve got to go,” he apologised to Elektra. “Thanks for the drink.”

Matt arrived home with a spring in his step. He grinned at Foggy as he walked into the living room.

“Good workout?” Foggy asked, a little startled by Matt’s uncharacteristically jolly arrival.


“Thanks,” Foggy said quietly, a little embarrassed by the praise.

“Is it ready?”

“Almost,” Foggy said, getting up to check.

“Just think – this time last month you could only cook things from packets. You’ve done well, Fog.”

“Not just packets. I make a mean sandwich – you have to admit that.”

“Have you ever heard someone say ‘cook a sandwich’ though? It doesn’t involve cooking. It’s assemblage.”

“Mere details,” Foggy replied with a cheeky smile. He pulled out a beer from the fridge. “Split it?”

“No, I think the curry is enough, thanks.” Matt thought it best not to stretch his luck after the whiskey.

Matt surprised them both by staying awake right to the end of the post-dinner movie, leading Foggy to ask, “what’s happened that you’re awake right now? You’ve been in a good mood all day – not that I’m complaining – I just get the feeling something’s different.”

“Just getting in the right frame of mind for tomorrow. It’s going to go well – I can feel it.”

Foggy knew Matt was withholding information about something, but he was the last person who wanted to complain about Matt’s improved frame of mind. “Okay,” he said in lieu of all the worries flowing through his head. “I guess I’m going to bed first for a change.”

“Foggy?”

“Yes?”

“I think you’re right—”

“Naturally,” Foggy quipped. “About what this time?”
“About the gap thing. I think sparring with Elektra might help.”

“That’s – that’s great. Can I – do you want supervision?”

Matt laughed. “I don’t think that’s necessary.”

“Can I though? I’ve never seen you fight – in person that is – and I’m kinda curious.”

“Uh, sure.”

“I don’t want to watch you fight criminals,” Foggy quickly clarified. “Sparring’s different.”


“She won’t have a gun or a knife though.”

“Not a gun, no.”

Foggy swallowed. “She spars with knives?”

Matt’s expression was a bit too smug. “I tried to warn you. Night, Foggy.”

“Huh… yeah, g’night,” Foggy mumbled as he ambled to his sleeping nook. He had the feeling he’d made a terrible error.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Matt woke up on Wednesday with a crisp mind and a renewed sense of purpose. He stretched with a happy groan before loping to the bathroom to flush the morning’s pill down the toilet. There was a roar of the flush, a couple of sharp clinks of the pill against the ceramic bowl, and then it was gone. The day was his and nothing could cloud it now.

With his senses rejuvenated, Matt revelled in the detail around him. Perhaps this whole ordeal had been some kind of cruel lesson – he had to lose his full senses in order to fully appreciate the beauty in everyday things and the full extent of his abilities. He hummed mindlessly as he made coffee, listening to the water run through the fine coffee grains as the machine worked its magic.

Foggy stumbled out of the bathroom with a towel turban over his hair, his damp skin glistening in the corner of the room. He was beautiful. Matt listened with affection as Foggy shuffled round in his nook, messily sifting through his makeshift shelf of underwear, and then… nope, definitely not something Matt wanted to know. He turned his attention back to the coffee, trying to block out Foggy’s movements. How lazy and unfocused he'd become.

“First to wake. New leaf?” Foggy said as he joined Matt in the kitchen.

Matt pulled the towel off Foggy’s head. “Hey, I need that,” Foggy said, snatching back the towel.

“It’ll dry better in the air,” Matt said, pulling at Foggy’s long strands. The dampness made the hair more visible to Matt’s remaining senses, and he smiled as Foggy flicked his hair away, illuminating his entire head.

“How’s the coffee coming along?” Foggy said, drumming his fingers on the bench and looking into the water vestibule to assess its progress.

“I’ll tell you when it’s ready,” Matt said, smiling at Foggy’s blatant impatience.

Foggy grunted and pulled out the cereal instead. He crunched through the bowl while staring at Matt, unable to look away from his friend’s expression of uncharacteristic tranquillity. It was unsettling.

On the walk to work, Matt strode out at such a pace that Foggy had to keep hissing “slow down”, which resulted in a smirk from Matt each time. By the time they’d reached the office, however, Matt’s good mood had proved infectious. Foggy started whistling Gloria Estefan’s Reach, and when Matt laughed, Foggy ran into Matt’s office and serenaded him at full volume. To Foggy’s shock and joy, Matt joined in at the chorus, harmonising perfectly.

“If I could reach…”

“Reach,” Matt echoed

“Higher…”

They warbled together, “just for one moment touch the sky, from that one moment in my life.”

By the time they got to the third chorus, there was no stopping them. They changed key with great
gusto and Foggy put his hands in the air as if worshipping some greater power.

“If I could reach higher…”

“If I could…”

“If I could…”

“If I could reach…”

“Reach, I'd reach, I'd reach…I'd reach, I'd reach so much higher…”

Matt suddenly put his hand out. “Foggy, stop.”

Foggy kept going for a couple of seconds, but stopped abruptly as Karen walked into the office. She called from the door, “don’t stop singing on my behalf, guys.” Matt could hear the distinct huffs of someone trying not to laugh out loud.

“We’re not,” Matt said, but his pink cheeks suggested otherwise.

“You’re here early,” said Foggy.

“So are you,” Karen replied.

“I’m guessing for the same reason – big case, big day.”

“It’s not that big a case,” Matt said, trying to calm himself.

“It shouldn’t be,” muttered Foggy. “If the media weren’t so interested the case would have been thrown out.”

“Well, people like candy,” Matt said.

“And dissing the pretentious art world,” Karen added. “But you’re not going to distract me that easily. Why didn't you tell me you were such Gloria Estefan fanboys?”

Foggy shifted awkwardly. “Uh-”

“Foggy’s sister-” Matt started.

“Yeah, she loved that shit,” Foggy said in a lower-than-usual voice.

Karen laughed. “I don’t care that you like singing to poxy 90s pop music. I think it’s great actually.”

Foggy looked pleased. “Matt’s got perfect pitch, the bastard. He’s like the king of harmonies… when I can get him to sing with me, that is.”

Matt smirked. “Foggy thinks Andrew Lloyd Webber is worthy of my vocal chords. I disagree.”

Karen huffed in amusement and said, “I’m with Matt on that one,” but immediately regretted the comment when she saw Foggy’s wounded expression.

“We might have to agree to disagree,” Matt said to Foggy in a conciliatory tone. “And on that note, maybe we should head to the courthouse early - now that our vocal chords are nicely warmed up and all.”
“Yeah they are,” Foggy said with a renewed smile, knocking his fist against Matt’s.

As predicted, the case attracted a weird and varied audience. There was a group of “artsy-looking peeps”, to quote Foggy, and a couple of Matt’s fellow St Patrick's parishioners who were there to support Tabitha. As they waited for the trial to commence, Foggy whispered to Matt, “you know you don’t have to speak if you’re feeling unwell.”

Matt frowned. “I know. You’ve said that six times this morning already.”

“I just don’t want you to freak out like Monday.”

“I didn’t freak out.”

“Look, I know that you want to impress Gladys and you want to do things right by Tabitha. Just don’t let your pride-”

“I’m not proud,” Matt hissed, an emphasis on each word. “And I don’t need to be coddled.”

“Oh, okay...” Foggy put his hands up in surrender.

Matt adopted a more sanguine tone. “Look, I have a good feeling about this. You don’t have to worry.”

“Oh, there’s your priest,” Foggy said, twisting around for a better look. “This is turning out to be bigger than Ben Hur.” If anything was going to make Matt more nervous than he was already, Father Lantom’s presence was number one on the list. Matt listened intently as Lantom wove his way through to the small group of St Patrick’s parishioners. One of them whispered something in Lantom’s ear and Matt shook his head, trying to block out the sound.

“I keep half-expecting someone to walk in and announce the charges were made in error and the case has been dropped,” Matt mused. “This is ridiculous.”

It was a general feeling shared by most people in the courtroom that morning. They went through the steps, but it was clear that the prosecution had little in the way of evidence or argument. The artist and the gallery had a few grandstanding moments, but ultimately, Foggy and Matt calmly and systematically laid out the facts, clearly demonstrating there was no proof Tabitha intentionally damaged the artwork.

When they called a short break, Foggy said to Matt, “do we really want to put Gladys on the stand? I mean, this is a sham, Matt. Marlow Gallery wants attention and they’ve got attention. Having someone from MoMA even so much as say the artist’s name is apparently good for him and the gallery, so we shouldn’t play into their hands. We’re going to win this easily. We don’t need her. It’s not the right play.”

Matt frowned. Foggy was right, and yet, “we’ve already asked her though.”

“And I know you want to show her what you can do in the courtroom. I get it. But maybe she could see you in action in a different case – see the whole thing from start to finish.”

Matt blushed with embarrassment. He'd never admit it out loud, but a small part of him wanted to show off to Gladys. It might have even contributed to his decision to drop the medication. He cleared his throat and said, “this isn’t about me.”
“I know,” Foggy said bluntly. “It’s about Tabitha. And the best thing we can do for her is to get this over and done with as soon as possible.”

“What’s it going to look like if we don’t call Gladys?” Matt countered.

Foggy shrugged. “That we’re confident - like we should be.”

An hour later, the case was won and done. The judge was scathing of the prosecution’s decision to take such a flimsy case to court, and ordered them to pay the defendant’s costs. Foggy particularly pleased with that decision because he knew Matt would have insisted on giving Tabitha a discount otherwise. Nelson & Murdock could really do with a bill paid in full right now.

Even though it wasn’t a particularly challenging case, Matt and Foggy were swamped by adoring fans afterwards. On one side were Tabitha, her family, Father Lantom and a couple of other church goers; and on the other, were Gladys and a mob of arty people (“You can always tell they’re arty because they wear big glasses with thick plastic frames,” Foggy explained to Matt). Matt and Foggy turned down the offer of a celebratory afternoon tea, citing work back at the office, and eventually escaped the crowd.

Just as they were leaving the courthouse, they heard a “Matt!” as Gladys ran after them.

“Are we still on for tonight? Drinks?” she said with a grin.

“Sure. I – I think- do you mind if Foggy comes?”

“Not at all.” There was a jump in her heartbeat that indicated a slight lie, but she didn’t seem unhappy, so Matt gave her a broad smile and waved goodbye.

As they walked down the courthouse steps, Foggy asked in a conspiratorial whisper, “was she telling the truth? Does she mind?”

“It’s as she said,” Matt replied.

They walked along in silence for a bit, Matt conflicted over his next step. He’d promised himself that he’d only miss three doses of his medication – just until the candy case was over. But he didn’t want this clear-headedness to disappear. He had his appointment with the neurologist tomorrow, so perhaps he could just skip the doses tonight and tomorrow morning, and then start from scratch with a new medication. It seemed pointless to suffer for the sake of two last doses.

“You did so well, buddy,” Foggy said.

“What?” Matt said absently.

“I said, you did well - you didn’t miss a beat. What a contrast with Monday eh?”

Matt gave a small nod.

Foggy stopped when he saw Matt’s frown. “Are you okay?” It looked like Matt was about to say something but before Foggy could prompt him, Matt froze and fell over, slamming his head against the concrete sidewalk.

Foggy was used to handling Matt’s seizures in their office or home, but a public space was a whole other challenge. By the time Foggy had pulled off his coat and stuffed it under Matt’s head, a sizeable crowd had formed around them. People were whispering to each other and one young boy even took a photo.
Foggy timed the seizure as always, but there wasn’t much else he could do except wait for Matt to finish seizing. An elderly woman said, “you should hold him still. Stop his limbs from flapping.” Her friend added, “he’s going to swallow his tongue if you don’t put something in his mouth.” Foggy ignored them and hunched over Matt to try and hide him from the gaze of the spectators. “You’re going to kill him if you don’t do something,” the first woman heckled. She turned to her friend, “remember old uncle Bob – he had that cousin who died-”

“Can you please stop!” Foggy blurted out. “Please leave and give him some privacy.”

“Young people these days,” the second woman tutted. They wandered off, exchanging stories about encounters with “the self-entitled youth.”

Once Matt had stopped seizing, Foggy rolled him onto his side and drew out his phone to call Karen. The office was a only a short cab ride away and he could really use her help getting Matt home. Before she picked up, Matt started seizing again. “What the fuck?” Foggy said under his breath and quickly dialled 911. As it rang, Foggy muttered to Matt, “I’m sorry, buddy, you don’t get a say in it this time.”

Chapter End Notes

It looks like I might be editing and uploading this story from my phone for a bit so I'm going to make the chapters a bit smaller because it's a bit tricky to handle otherwise (the MS word app is a new kind of hell). If there are words missing it's probably because I've nudged my phone and it's deleted a block of text again. If anyone has any phone editing/posting hints please let me know.

In my head, Foggy and Matt are that daggy that they'd know the words to twee 90s Estefan. Maybe I'm mischaracterising. What do you think?
A fat lot prayers will do

Foggy half expected, half hoped that Matt would hear the 911 call and stop seizing just out of sheer stubbornness, but the convulsions continued even after the ambulance pulled up. It mounted the sidewalk, providing Matt with some of that much needed privacy. While one of the paramedics tried to get a cannula in Matt’s jerking arm, the other attached a monitor and quizzed Foggy about the seizure. “So he’s never had two in a row before?”

“Not since the initial head injury.”

“When was that?”

“Two months ago.”

“And how long are the seizures usually… what medication is he on… did he take his medication this morning… how did he lose his sight… does he usually have trouble breathing…?”

The questions kept coming even as they loaded the convulsing Matt into the back of the ambulance. Foggy glared at the group of curious onlookers with disgust as he waited for the paramedics to secure Matt in the van. He recognised one of them as one of Matt’s fellow church goers who had supported Tabitha in court. She stepped forward and touched Foggy’s arm. “What happened to Matthew?”

“Uh, we’re going to find out. I’m sorry, I have to go-” Foggy gestured at the ambulance and she let go of his arm.

“I’ll pray for him - we all will. Tell him he’s in our thoughts,” she said earnestly.

Fat lot prayers will do, Foggy thought to himself, but he nodded nonetheless.

Whatever they’d given Matt through the IV clearly wasn’t working either because he was still seizing as they wheeled him into the ER. Foggy trailed behind the emergency staff who were yelling the names of medications and statistics and who knows what. There seemed to be a debate about which medication to give Matt next. From what Foggy could gather, Matt had already been pumped with three other substances with no result.

“Are you the partner?” a man asked Foggy.

“Yes, Foggy Nelson.”

“Did he take his medication this morning?”

“Yes – I mean, I don’t know – I assume so.”

“But you don’t know?”

Foggy thought through Matt’s behaviour over the last two days. He was almost like old Matt, which meant… “I don’t know, sorry.”

Foggy looked over at the nurse struggling to hold an oxygen tube up to Matt’s nostrils while suctioning something from Matt’s mouth. His lips were blue. However bad things had got before, this seemed a lot worse. Hugging the bundle of suit jackets, laptop bags and cane, Foggy rocked on the spot, not wanting to watch but unable to turn away.
Suddenly there was a rush as someone read out some numbers and another yelled in response, “I’m intubating.” Foggy stuttered a question at one of the nurses, but she just said “come wait out here,” and led him out of the room. He stood outside, shifting nervously on the spot, not sure if he was supposed to stay out here permanently or just for whatever procedure they were about to perform.

Eventually he spotted Claire down the hallway. “Oh, Claire,” Foggy said with relief. “Claire!” he called again as he ran towards her.

Claire knew it was about Matt without asking. “Where is he?”

“Oh, in…” Foggy pointed down the hall with a tilt of his head. He followed Claire into the room and hung by the door, expecting to be ordered to leave again. However, the nurses and doctors were adorning Matt with various machines and wires and didn’t even register Foggy’s presence. It looked like Matt had finally stopped seizing, but he now had a tube down his throat and didn’t look like he was waking up any time soon.

After a brief exchange with her nursing colleague, Claire returned to Foggy’s side and explained to him that Matt would be transferred to the ICU. She put her hand on Foggy’s arm, and the kind gesture was enough to get the tears flowing. With his hands full, he tried to wipe his tears on his shoulder. Claire gave him a weird look – a mixture of exasperation and pity - and took his bags and coats, dumping them on a nearby chair. She handed him a tissue and ordered, “sit, blow your nose, breathe.” He stumbled over to the chair and perched on the edge in front of the bags. Claire crouched down beside him. “Here’s what’s going to happen next: Matt’s going to go to radiology-”

“Why?”

“They want to see if there’s anything new that triggered the status epilepticus. Plus he hit his head pretty bad when he fell so they’ll check for new damage.”

“Oh. Is that likely?”

“I can't say. They'll be doing a full neuro assessment on him when he wakes up.”

“Hang on, does that mean the seizure’s done more damage to his brain?” Foggy’s lip quivered again.

“It's possible. He got fast medical attention though, and they intubated before his oxygen levels got dangerously low. That reduces the risk of damage.” After a pause, she said, “Foggy, do you know if he’s been taking his medication?”

Foggy wiped another couple of tears from his eyes. “Um, I don’t know. Is that what triggered this?”

She raised her eyebrows, thinking that Foggy knew more than he was letting on. “It’s very possible - likely even. If he wasn’t taking his meds, you need to tell us.”

“I don’t know,” Foggy snapped. “I don’t know what Matt does or doesn’t do. You know how Matt is.” He put his head in his hands and repeated softly, “I don’t know.”

Claire stood up and had a murmured discussion with one of the doctors before making a quick exit. “I’ll come up and check on him at the end of my shift,” she said brusquely. And just like that she was gone.

The doctor called Foggy over. He’d unwrapped Matt’s bandaged hand and was prodding at the burn that was still looking quite raw and inflamed. “Could you tell us what happened, Mr-”
“Foggy. Call me Foggy.”

The doctor nodded and prompted once again, “the burn?”

Flustered, Foggy said, “um, he burnt himself cooking – he picked up the base of the pan instead of the handle.”

“You let him cook on his own?”

“I don’t *let* him do anything. He’s a grown up man who-”

“Who’s blind.”

“So?” Foggy glared at the doctor with such venom that the doctor looked away.

The doctor started again. “Okay, so he burnt himself on a pan…”

“Yes, it’s a shame too, because it smelled really good. He’s the best cook I know and – you know what – you should be really glad he’s unconscious right now because he’d be pretty offended and probably-”

“When did he burn himself?”

Foggy thought for a moment. “Uh, it would be, uh, last Wednesday – a week ago.”

“Did he see a doctor?”

“No, we put cream and a bandage on it at home. But then the blister burst and so we got it dressed by – uh, a nurse.” If Claire hadn’t told the doctor about her treatment of the burn, she must be still keeping her relationship to Matt under wraps. As much as he hated all the secrecy, it wasn’t really Foggy’s secret to tell.

The doctor snapped to attention at Foggy’s hesitation. “Where did you get that done?”

“Oh, we didn’t come here. The nurse – a friend – she came to us.”

The doctor looked at Foggy suspiciously. “It’s a fairly serious burn. It must have hurt.”

“I know. I wanted to bring him here, but he refused. He doesn’t like hospitals.”

“No one likes hospitals.”

“Yes, true,” Foggy said. He’d said the exact same thing to Matt only two weeks ago. It hadn’t made a difference though.

“These other injuries…” the doctor pointed to the scars on his chest and the healing cut down Matt’s upper arm.

“The new one – that was the result of falling on the corner of a desk drawer last week. He had a seizure. He’s had a few bad falls.”

“And the older ones?”

“I don’t know how he got them. Matt’s regular doctor has discussed it with him, so you’ll have to go with whatever’s on his charts.”
The doctor looked a bit miffed at the explanation. He directed the nurse to re-dress Matt’s hand and walked out without another word to Foggy.

“So what happens now?” Foggy asked the nurse.

“We’re just waiting for radiology,” she replied. “If you want you can sit in the waiting room and we’ll come get you when he’s transferred to the ICU.”

“No, no I need to stay with him just in case he wakes up.”

“He’ll be out for quite awhile,” she said. “Feel free to get some fresh air.”

Foggy shook his head. “I can’t.” He tentatively put his hand out. “Can I touch him?”

The nurse looked up from her bandaging. “Sure.”

Foggy slid his hand into Matt’s, avoiding the IV near his wrist. Even if Matt wasn’t about to wake up, perhaps he could still feel heartbeats. Foggy closed his eyes for a moment and concentrated on Matt’s pulse. To Matt, it was such an elemental connection. While Foggy initially thought it was creepy that Matt could hear heartbeats, he’d now come to appreciate the unique connection to others. It was soothing.

Just as Foggy was starting to calm, a couple of orderlies took Matt away. Much to Foggy’s distress, he was told to sit in the waiting room. He bundled up the laptop cases and other paraphernalia and lugged them out to the waiting room, plonking the laptops and cane in a jumble beside him. He looked around at the other people. A small boy was nursing a swollen wrist while his mother tried to distract him with an iPad. An old man in the corner was bent double in pain, his (probable) wife rubbing his back soothingly while muttering about waiting times. A pale and scrawny teenager looked dazed when one of the nursing staff woke him up. He stumbled a little as he got to his feet, revealing a massive gash across his lower back.

Foggy pulled out his phone as a distraction. Three missed calls from Karen. He didn’t have the emotional energy for that discussion right this second. He opened a news app and started aimlessly flicking through the stories. Nope, nope, nope… he sighed and put the phone away, turning his attention back to the people around him. Half an hour went by, then another. Finally, Foggy got up and asked the reception desk why Matt was taking so long to be scanned, and learned Matt had already been transferred to the ICU and the staff had just neglected to tell him.

Foggy flew up to the ICU and had an immediate run in with the staff member at the front desk who wouldn’t let him in because he wasn’t immediate family. Thankfully, one of the ICU nurses who had looked after Matt two months ago remembered the devoted Foggy and waved him through.

Foggy hovered at the door, overwhelmed by the sight of Matt swamped by so much medical equipment. Eventually he perched on the chair in the corner, rubbing his hands as he watched the various medical staff stream in and out, adjusting equipment and consulting in medical speak. They barely glanced at Foggy who was now feeling very alone.

His phone vibrated with yet another text message from Karen: “Where are you guys? Court finished hours ago. Give me a call.” He had to get this over and done with. He’d barely raised the phone to his ear when one of the nurses told him that calls weren’t to be made within the ICU. Foggy stashed his phone, but the nurse said, “if I were you, I’d take a little time to go for a walk, make that phone call, have something to eat. He’s stable but heavily sedated so he’s probably not going to be waking up for quite some time. There’s not much you can do here.”
Foggy was torn. He didn't want Matt to wake up alone. Matt was anything but predictable, and Foggy didn't quite share the nurse’s certainty when it came to Matt’s state of consciousness. Sedatives didn't have a consistent effect on Matt. Sometimes they knocked him out, but occasionally his body actively defied them (as was the case last time he was intubated). Maybe it was something to do with the chemicals that had at once taken one sense but enhanced all others beyond reason. Or maybe it was just Matt’s stubbornness. Whatever the case, Foggy suspected Matt would freak out when he woke and he needed to be there to minimise the damage to everyone involved.

After another half hour of watching Matt’s pulse rate dance across a computer monitor, however, Foggy was on the verge of a screaming tantrum. He made sure the staff had his contact number just in case Matt’s condition changed, and sped out of the hospital. It was only when he’d walked five or so blocks that he dared to take a deep breath. He shook out his hands as he tried to figure out where his feet had taken him and what he needed to do next.

At a loose end, Foggy rang his parents. There were times that even adult Foggy needed his parents’ emotional support.

"Mom?" he said, trying to speak normally.

"What's wrong?" Anna said, hearing the break in her son’s voice.

"Matt's in hospital again," Just saying it aloud was enough to reopen the flood gates. Foggy broke down in the middle of the street. People stared, and he ducked into the mouth of an alleyway for privacy. Matt's playground, Foggy thought, triggering another wave of tears.

"I'm so sorry, gorgeous," she said as his sobs softened. "What happened?"

"He had two seizures in a row and the second one just kept going and going and now he's in intensive care with a fucking tube down his throat again."

Anna didn't admonish him for his language for once. "Do you want me to join you at the hospital?"

"I'm not at the hospital."

"Oh?"

"I had to - I had to walk. Take a break. It's so hard, mom. I'm really not coping. I-I don't think I can do this."

"Darling, I don't envy you. It's a substantial burden you've taken on. It's a challenge - but it's one you're equal to. I'm so proud of you."

Foggy gave a strangled huff. "You're proud of me?"

"Of course. I know you two are best friends - and I know - well, I'd hope that if I was in your position, I'd probably do the same, but I also know how stressful and time consuming it is looking after him like this. Between Matt and your firm, it must be an enormous emotional and financial strain."

"I felt guilty for thinking that it's hard."

"Why?"

"Because he's my friend. And I should help him without feeling-"
"Angry? Sad? Anxious? Resentful?"

"Not resentful. I feel angry, but not at him. I mean, I’m angry at his stubbornness at times, but mostly I'm angry at everything that conspired to make this happen. I'm angry at his brain for doing this to him, I'm angry that I can't do more for him, I'm angry that I have to take on more work - not because I blame him for not working - he can't - I'm just angry that the situation has occurred I guess. And you're right, I'm anxious about our company. We have plenty of clients, but only one and a bit lawyers to service them. If the firm does go under, it’ll be hard for Matt to get another job if his seizures continue like this. He spends half his days recovering on the couch."

"Uncle Neville will be pleased it's being used."

Foggy laughed a little through his tears. "It's sad that it's something that I can laugh about."

"You need to laugh, Foggy."

"I was thinking that I probably need to move in with him. It was meant to be six weeks but that's two weeks away. Maybe I'll let go of my lease and split Matt's rent just until he's better... if he gets better. It just seems to be getting worse." Foggy gave a wet sigh and wiped his nose with his sleeve, glad that his mother couldn't see him. Foggy had genuinely assumed that Matt was going magically get better on the medication, but instead he seemed to be getting worse. There was no way he could move out and leave Matt to battle this alone. For all his bravado, Matt was still human, vulnerable like everyone else.

"Can you live with Matt?"

"We lived together all through college, mom. Of course we can."

"It's just that you're adults and you're both stressed-"

"Because Matt's not well and needs help. I'm the closest thing he has to family. I don't think I could sleep if I knew he was alone."

"Well, that's your answer."

Foggy sighed again. "Thanks."

"What you do though is put aside some time for yourself - time that's just yours. Matt will be okay if you leave him once and awhile."

"I get scared. There's no predictability to the seizures. He could fall and hurt himself."

"Yes, or he could be completely fine. Or you could have a breakdown because you're worrying about him so much. You're a good man, Foggy, but you're human and you're also not Matt's nurse."

"I'm his family," Foggy whispered. "Pretty much."

"I know. Now do you want me to come and visit you two?"

"Mmm... I think I'll be okay."

"Take your time on the walk. Remember, you're not alone. I'll be there in a shot if you need me."

"Yeah, thanks." He took a few deep breaths. "I'll call you when he wakes up."
"Good boy."

After he hung up, Foggy considered his mother’s question about anger. He *was* angry. Not with Matt though – the occasional angry outbursts aside, Matt had coped surprisingly well considering just how much his life had been affected. Foggy had seen Matt seize a dozen times now and each time he’d got back up with almost no complaint. He was tired and forgetful and had received bruises, cuts, burns, and probable concussions, but he still got up. Matt had even joked that the bruises were nothing compared to the ones he received as Daredevil (although Foggy suspected that it was not entirely true).

Foggy walked a few more blocks before he called Karen. He spent another two blocks trying to calm her down, and then another couple explaining why it was not necessary to visit right now. By the time he’d hung up, he felt emotionally wrung out. He stood in the middle of the sidewalk, pedestrians streaming either side of him as they rushed to get home from work. Each person was accompanied by a slight breeze – a phenomenon he wouldn't have picked up on before Matt’s training. He really didn't give Matt enough credit for his sheer tolerance of so many competing sensations.

The speed of everything around him was disorienting, so he ducked into a nearby diner. Dazed, he muttered ‘coffee’ at the waitress as he slid into a booth. It was only when she returned with the burnt brew that he realised just how hungry he was. They’d stupidly skipped lunch, which probably meant that Matt was probably hungry too, even if he was unconscious. He made a mental note to tell Matt’s doctor. Maybe hunger contributed to the seizure.

Foggy scarfed down a burger adorned with extra pineapple, egg and bacon, all the while imagining what a horrified Matt would say about the combination. He drank two more coffees before he realised he was shaking and switched to decaf.

He was the only customer and the waitress tired to make small talk with him a few times. Normally he'd jump at the chance to chat, but right now he just wanted to be left alone. He pulled out his phone and tried once again to read the news, as if global events could somehow distract from this very local problem. Eventually he realised that he'd read the same paragraph over and over for the last 10 minutes, not absorbing it at all. So he turned to Dr Google. "Repeat seizures in a row outcome," he typed. There was not much he didn't know on the sites aimed at the general public, so he clicked on an academic paper. The authors were discussing the pros and cons of intubating following multiple seizures. He didn't think of decisions like that as negotiable. The doctors tended to say, "we need to do this" and that was that. Foggy ultimately concluded that Googling Matt's condition was probably not the most constructive thing to do, so he settled the bill and trudged back to the hospital.

He returned to see Claire chatting to one of the nurses at the ICU desk. She gave Foggy a tired smile as he passed. Matt was in exactly the same position as when Foggy had left, lying partially upright, a little crumpled to the right. It looked decidedly uncomfortable. His wrists were tied to the bed, and they’d rewrapped his burnt hand with a bit more padding.

Foggy was just reaching out to touch Matt’s arm when Claire said from behind, “he’s stable.” Foggy jumped and pulled his hand away.

“You’re as stealthy as Matt, you know,” Foggy said, turning round. Claire smirked (no wonder she and Matt were friends… or whatever they were) and turned her attention to Matt.

“Are we still pretending you don’t know him?” Foggy asked.

“I don’t know him well,” Claire said flatly. “I only know him from when he came in two months ago.”
Foggy nodded. “I guess that’ll do for now. What happens if he goes back to his night time activities?”

Claire pointed at Matt and then at the ventilator and other machinery surrounding his bed. “I don’t think that’s going to be a problem for awhile. We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.”

“He went out recently. This hasn’t stopped him completely,” Foggy pointed out.

“He told you then,” Claire said.

“I guessed.”

Claire sighed. “Well, we both know he’s stubborn, which is good in a way. I don’t know many people who would try to keep their daily routine in his circumstance.”

“Stubborn, stupid, brave,” Foggy added. “I was thinking about what you said about the medication. I’ve seen a massive change in him the last few days. He’s been a lot happier. He performed really well in court, and seemed to move around more easily. He was really slowed down by the meds. He said it was like having cotton wool in his head. He was constantly asleep. I mean, he used to get away with four or five hours a night, but on the meds he falls asleep at his office desk even after a night of 12 hours sleep”.

“It’s not uncommon with a lot of older anti-epileptics.” She thought for a moment, then said, “I remember you bought him that pill box. You could check if they’re still there.”

Foggy huffed. “He’s so secretive. He’d chuck them out rather than leave them in the box.”

Claire crossed her arms and sighed. “Check anyway. It’d help. And you should go home and get some rest. He’s not going to wake up tonight – not with all the medication in his system.” Foggy looked unconvinced so she added, “it’s important to check the pill box. He’ll appreciate some pyjamas too.” She gestured at Matt’s bare chest, which was only partially covered by a blanket.

Foggy nodded and she turned to go, giving him a small wave. “You know,” Foggy called after her, “I don’t think I blame him – for stopping the medication – if he did. Maybe I should be mad, but I’m not.”

Claire nodded. “Bye, Foggy. Go home. Rest. He’ll appreciate the company tomorrow.”

It felt weird going home to Matt’s apartment alone. Foggy went straight to Matt’s pill box. As predicted, the pills were missing. He checked the trash next to Matt’s bed, even though he knew it was a fruitless task.

Wired from the day’s events, Foggy busied himself packing an overnight bag for Matt. He stuffed some pyjama pants and a couple of t-shirts in Matt’s backpack. Then he added a hoodie, a book, Matt’s overpriced earphones and phone charger. It dawned on him that Matt’s stay would probably extend beyond a couple of days so he upturned the contents onto Matt’s bed and grabbed his larger gym bag instead, tossing in a couple of pairs of sweats and a silk pillowcase-covered pillow. He considered Matt’s neuroses and threw in some unscented toiletries, the expensive green tea he liked, and a box of cookies. Foggy remembered the packet of expensive origami paper he’d bought Matt last week, and tossed that in as well. Another book wouldn’t go astray…

He dropped the bag at the front door with a heavy thud, and then took a long shower, trying to scrub away the fear sweat and hospital scents that seemed to linger beyond reason. He could still
smell it as he lay in the creaky camp bed, willing himself to sleep and panicking more as each hour passed.

Nothing much had changed by the time the overtired Foggy arrived at the hospital the next morning. There was another bag attached to Matt’s IV, but after a brief panic, the nurses reassured him that it didn't mean Matt was getting worse. However, Matt was still heavily sedated and unlikely to wake up soon, so Foggy went in search of coffee and a quiet place to call Karen about postponing today’s client appointments.

Elektra watched Foggy leave the ICU from the other end of the corridor. She narrowed her eyes as he wandered away. Elektra and Foggy had never got along. Foggy thought Elektra a bad influence and Elektra considered Foggy lazy and boring. "You're too good for that shaggy-haired friend of yours," Elektra used to tell Matt. "You just don't know him like I do," he'd always reply, ever loyal. "Foggy's generous and kind and he makes me laugh. He's different to you and me."

Elektra checked in with the ICU nurses, turning on the charm to convince them that she was Matt’s girlfriend. Elektra scowled when one of the nurses stuttered, “oh, I thought Mr Nelson was – I guess not. Come this way.”

Elektra frowned as she surveyed the tubes and wires obscuring Matt's body. “Can he hear me?”

"Possibly. It won't hurt to talk to him,” the nurse said a little distractedly as she checked the monitors. “I'll leave you to it.”

Elektra gingerly touched Matt's bare chest. "Oh Matthew," she said tracing her finger over the scars on his bare torso, avoiding the pads on his chest. "What have they done to you? What have you done? You're meant to be invincible."

She stood there in silence until she heard Foggy's voice in the corridor outside. The last thing she needed was a confrontation. She pressed herself up against the wall adjacent to the door. As Foggy walked in, she slipped out, giving a curt nod to the nurse as she left the unit.
Matt woke to the sound of Foggy reading out loud, although he didn't quite register it such at first. He could just hear the sound of Foggy. Foggy was here. He was nearby. But where? Matt tried to talk back, but it was reduced to a strangled hum thanks to the tube down his throat. What was this hell? The tube moved against the back of his tongue and he tried to open his mouth to relieve the discomfort, but something pulled at his lips, preventing them from parting. He swallowed and the tube moved once again. His stomach sank as he eventually realised he was once again tethered to a bed, unable to breathe for himself.

He tried to get Foggy's attention, pulling weakly at the cuffs around his wrists, but he was exhausted and could barely move. He lay still for a few minutes, trying to recover from the sudden activity. Everything ached. *Everything.*

He was cocooned in a miasma of fuzziness, unable to grasp the world around him. Foggy sounded muted, far away, so perhaps he wasn't even in the room. Then he heard the familiar swoosh and slight breeze of a page being turned. Foggy was reading to him. Matt feared that the panic about the tube would set in again if he tried to make any kind of sound or move his head, so he opened his eyes and pulled on the restraints again. As he engaged his muscles, a fiery pain ripped through his body. He wanted to groan, make audible the pain he was experiencing, release it, but the tube had silenced him. He could feel the familiar prickling sensation around his mouth that signalled fatigue. He didn't fight it. He couldn't. His body was too sore, too heavy. He closed his eyes and welcomed the relief of sleep.

When he woke up the second time, he felt less groggy, but could still barely move. He lay there for what seemed like hours, drifting in and out, attempting to rustle up the energy to attract Foggy's attention. He strained to hear anything that might help identify who Foggy was talking to. The words were indistinct - a melange of noises that blended in with the beeps of machines, the nurses outside, the squeal of beds being wheeled around in the corridor outside, the quiet sobs and murmurs of bedside visitors, a cry of pain from next door…

Someone pulled his head forward, wrenching him awake. As fingers prodded the back of his scalp, the dull ache in his head sharpened. He wanted to fight back, but the pain had floored him and he couldn't even open his eyes. He wasn't even aware that his head had been lowered back onto the pillow, just the absence of touch. Matt realised he could no longer hear Foggy. Isolated and confused, he slipped away once more.

His feet prickled. He moved his foot slightly and recognised the comforting pressure of socks on his legs and feet. They'd done this to him before. He'd been tied down before. But why? He tried to remember the last time he was fully conscious, but his head was so fuzzy that it was a bit like parting cotton wool. He was in the courthouse with Foggy... He'd stopped taking his medication... oh. Matt's stomach sunk. This was his punishment. He experienced a wave of hopeless despair. What did it matter if he just lay here. Everything was out of his control anyway. Matt closed his eyes and fell in with the rhythm of the ventilator. In, out, in, out.

He woke again to the gentle scrape of fingers against his shin. Foggy was peeling back one of his socks, although Matt had no idea why. Matt felt a rush of affection for the man. Foggy was still by his side. He always was. Foggy’s cold hands brushed against the sensitive sole of Matt’s foot and he twitched in response.

“Matt? Can you hear me?” Matt moved his foot again. “Oh thank God,” Foggy breathed. “I'll buzz the nurse.”
He pressed the call button and grabbed Matt's hand, who gave it a squeeze. “Thank God,” Foggy said again, and Matt wondered if Foggy had somehow found religion through this experience. Yeah right.

A nurse arrived, closely followed by the doctor. “Matthew, can you hear me?”

“He prefers Matt,” Foggy said when Matt didn't respond.

The doctor tried again, louder this time. “Matt, can you hear me?” She put her hand in his uninjured hand and instructed, “can you squeeze my hand for me?”

Matt gave her hand a weak squeeze.

“Good,” she said and Foggy muttered “thank God” again.

They performed a brief neurological exam, instructing Matt to squeeze fingers and push his toes against their hands. It was exhausting, but he was desperate to get the tube out so he forced himself to keep going. He must have passed because they explained to him that they were going to wean him off the ventilator, and asked if he understood. Matt wanted to nod, but he couldn’t bear in the sensation of the tube moving against his throat. Instead, Matt flexed his hand and they seemed to understand. Two squeezes for yes, one for no. Matt squeezed his hand twice.

Foggy was distressed by Matt's inaction. “Why can't he move his head?” he asked the doctor.

“He might just be tired,” the doctor speculated, and Matt squeezed Foggy’s hand twice. At least it would partially reassure Foggy.

They changed Matt’s ventilation so that he had some control over his own breath. It confused him. Couldn't they just take the horrible tube out?

The ventilation reduced his sense of smell, but he got a whiff of something familiar, not of the hospital. There was Foggy's body odour, but there was also perfume... the high end shampoo favoured by Elektra. Elektra must be there, hiding. Matt wriggled around, distressed, tugging at the restraints. He had to get free. He had to get away.

Foggy tried to calm him, but Matt screwed up his eyes with upset. Foggy pressed the call button, and when there was no immediate response, he said, “I'm coming back. I'm just going to get help.”

As soon as Foggy left the room, Matt managed to free himself from one of the restraint cuffs. Without thinking, he pulled the tube from his throat. The tape holding the tube in place was violently torn from his lips and he let out a cry of pain. He lay there coughing weakly and panting, tears streaming down his face as the machine's alarms started screaming. Matt put his free hand over one ear, and rolled his head to the side, covering the other with his pillow. The machine was silenced, and someone held a mask up against his face. “Just take some deep breaths, Matt. Slow, deep breaths.” Matt heard another couple of people rush into the room, which only added to his panic. There was a hurried exchange as they worked to stabilise him. A clip was reattached to the still restrained hand and he unconsciously jerked away. He still had his free hand clamped over his ear, but the nurse nonetheless talked him through his breathing until the coughing ceased. It was only when Matt learned that he wasn't going to be re-intubated that he relaxed and let go of his ear.

As soon as he did so, the nurse holding Matt’s oxygen mask used the opportunity to free her hands. “Matt, may I slip this elastic strap over your head?” When he didn't respond, she went ahead anyway.

Foggy piped up, “could we free his other hand? He gets more anxious with the restraints than
“I’m just about to do that,” she said, finally freeing his wrist. Matt winced at the sound of ripping velcro. He could hear Foggy’s heart jump a little, perhaps anticipating a greater reaction.

Matt groaned and tried to speak, but it came out as an inarticulate whisper.

“Could you try again, Matt?” The nurse lifted his mask up and Matt breathed, “water. My…” He coughed weakly and pointed at his throat.

“Your throat is sore?”

Matt nodded.

“Well, I'm not surprised,” the doctor said, but she didn't sound cross. It wasn't the first time a patient had self-extubated. They just usually didn't extract themselves from restraints first.

“We'll get you something for the pain.” Matt opened his mouth to protest but she'd already left the room by the time he'd mumbled something about not needing help.

Foggy returned to Matt's side, leaning against the bed railing. “There's never a dull moment with you, Matt. Only you could manage to get out of restraints while half-sedated.”

“Le’ra,” Matt croaked softly, his words muffled by the oxygen mask.

Foggy leaned in. “I can't hear you. Can you repeat it?”

“Lektra,” Matt tried again.

Foggy drew back in confusion. “Elektra? Your old girlfriend - oh sorry, our client.” He could keep the hint of sarcasm from his voice.

Matt nodded.

“What about her?”

“Here. Was,” Matt huffed. He gestured at the door.

“I'm sorry, Matt. She's not here.”

Matt sighed and closed his eyes. He could smell her more strongly now. She had been here, although she wasn't now. It wasn't just his imagination.

“You might have dreamt it,” Foggy suggested.

Matt kicked his bedsheets away in frustration, clumsily pushing the oxygen mask away. Almost immediately, one of the nurses returned, followed by a doctor. Without blinking, the nurse replaced his mask. Exhausted, Matt couldn't be bothered displacing it again, but he screwed up his face in protest. He felt the IV line pull a little as she added the medication for his throat and instinctively jerked away.

"Can you please stop fighting, Matt?" Foggy said tiredly.

Matt recoiled, stung by Foggy’s angry words. Fortunately, the nurse responded for Matt: "it's easy to be confused and act irrationally on all the medication he’s currently on. Waking up intubated is scary, which is why we use restraints. If you look at it from Matt's perspective, he's just woken up
with strange sounds and smells all around him. He can’t see where he is, so it must be extra disorienting.” She asked Matt, “are you feeling calmer?”

Matt nodded.

*Way to make me feel guilty*, thought Foggy.

A second nurse brought in a couple of cups and the doctor explained, ”we have some ice and a glass of water here for you, Matt. But we’re going to swap your oxygen mask for something a bit more comfortable.” The mask was taken away and Matt rubbed at his cheek.

”I’ll just get you to move your hand way,” the nurse prompted, gently nudging his hand as she looped the oxygen tube under his nose and around his ears. ”You’re doing well,” she said encouragingly and Matt warmed at the praise.

He ran his fingers lightly over the tube on his face, and then reached down to the cannula in his arm, trying to interpret the situation. He could hear Foggy’s breath hitch, evidently worried that Matt would rip the IV out.

The nurse raised the bed a little more and held a cup up up to his face. “Take a small sip first”, she instructed. He tried to take the cup from her, and she said, “do you think you can hold it yourself?”

Matt nodded. His hands shook a little but he grabbed the cup with two hands and took another sip. Satisfied, the nurse offered Foggy the cup of ice chips, ”I’ll let you dole out the ice,” and Foggy took it, pleased to be able to help.

”Do you need anything else?” she asked and when Matt shook his head, she reassured him, “we’ll check on you every five minutes or so, but if you need us, press this button.” She led his hand to the button on the side of the bed. He looked confused, so she repeated the action.

”Matt, do you understand what the button means?” Foggy said, slowly and clearly enunciating each word.

”Matt, do you know where you are?” the nurse asked brusquely.

Matt lazily prodded at the padded inserts lining the bed, but didn’t make any indication he’d heard her. Instead, he mumbled the word “soft,” and brushed his hand over the edge of the bed.

”Matt, I need you to answer me,” the nurse said more insistently, and Foggy joined in, and said loudly, “*Matt, answer us.*” Matt seemed to snap back to the now in response to Foggy’s raised voice.

”Has he ever done that before?” the nurse asked Foggy after Matt had demonstrated that he knew what the button did.

”No, not that I know of,” Foggy replied. “He’s often quite spacey after a seizure though, so maybe it’s – I don’t know.”

”I’ll let the doctor know. They’re going to do a full neuro exam soon.”

As she left the room, Foggy shook the cup of ice. ”Ice?” Matt nodded and Foggy said, ”in the water or separately?”

”Water,” Matt croaked. Foggy dropped a couple of chips into Matt’s cup.
"Sorry about what I said about behaving," Foggy said.
Matt waved him off.
"You must have been scared."
Matt paused then nodded once.
"How-" Matt winced at the pain in his throat.
"You had-"
"Long?"
"How long have you been out?"
Matt nodded.
"Three weeks," Foggy said with a grin.
Matt let out a pained groan and clutched his side.
"I'm kidding! I'm kidding. It was only a night," Foggy yelped.
Matt curled in on himself, panting as he held onto his back.
"Are you okay? What's wrong?" Foggy said, reaching for the call button.
Matt batted Foggy's hand away from the button. "Cramp," he groaned, "give me a moment."
Foggy sat poised to react, not sure if Matt's cramp was as minor as he was making out. He watched, breathless as Matt cringed and then finally relaxed back into the bed.
"You okay?" Foggy said meekly.
Matt gave a single nod.
"Good. It was just one night. Seriously, one night. They just needed to wait till you finished seizing."
Matt baulked. "Finished?"
"Yeah, you had two back to back. Your breathing wasn't great so they intubated you."
"It's my fault," whispered Matt.
"No it's not. It's not your fault. You didn't ask for this." He held out the cup again. "More ice?"
Matt nodded.
"What happened?"
Foggy frowned. They'd gone over this. "You had a seizure-"
"Yeah but where?"
"It doesn't matter."
"I think it does," Matt said forcefully.
“You don't remember?”

Matt pursed his lips, cringed as the swelling bit back and narrowed his eyes instead.

Foggy sighed. “It was a couple of blocks from the courthouse. On the street.”

“Before or after?”

“What.”

“Before or after court?”

“After,” Foggy said, confused. “Do you not remember?”

Matt closed his eyes. This was too hard.

“We won the case, Matt. We did well. You did well.”

Matt gave Foggy a small smile. “S’good.”

“You really don't remember?” Foggy said.

“Memory obviously isn't my strong suit at the moment,” Matt mumbled, eyes still closed.

"I know it sucks, but Dr Millet's going to talk to you about a change in medication. This one is obviously not working, and I told her that it was making you tired and forgetful and it's mucking up your echolocation. She took the echolocation thing really seriously, Matt. She understands you need it."

Matt nodded.

"She asked if you'd been taking your medication – actually, everyone has. It's just ‘cause sometimes people don't if the side-effects are too much. Um..." Foggy didn't want to provoke Matt by asking outright.

Matt shook his head.

"You haven't?!" Foggy gaped.

"I have," Matt croaked, “but just- had break - for court - I needed to- to..." Tears rolled down Matt's cheeks. "I couldn't think, concentrate, speak on- I needed one day without..." Matt gave a small whine.

After 24 hours of consideration, it didn't surprise Foggy that Matt had stopped taking the medication. What he wasn't prepared for was Matt’s candid admission. He jumped up and hugged Matt, swearing as he accidentally dislodged Matt's oxygen tube. “Oh God I'm going to kill you accidentally.”

Matt gave a good-humoured huff through the tears, and Foggy gently replaced the tube.

"So many things." Foggy said, also untangling Matt's IV that had become caught in the blanket.

"You're telling me," Matt whispered, still overwhelmed.

"We need to tell the doctor about the medication. It might change things." Matt looked pained, but Foggy said, "she's not going to yell, Matt. She's on your side. No secrets, remember?"
Matt’s expression didn’t change, so Foggy said, "thanks for telling me about stopping the medication. I wish you’d told me at the time, but this is better than nothing." He gave Matt another squeeze, more carefully this time.

Matt was flummoxed. He assumed Foggy would yell at him, but instead he’d just said he understood. This telling the truth thing wasn’t going as badly as expected. Relieved, Matt closed his eyes and quickly fell asleep.

He was still asleep when Claire called in a little while later.

Foggy greeted her with, “he managed to free himself from the restraints and pull the tube out himself.”

Claire raised her eyebrows. “While sedated?”

“Yup.”

She rolled her eyes. “Geez, Matt.”

“He seems okay,” Foggy added. “I mean, if he’s able to pull a move like that it's a good sign, right?”

Claire gave him a wry smile and grabbed Matt’s chart, skimming the last couple of pages.

Foggy was waiting for some kind of confirmation that yes, Matt was going to be fine, but Claire just replaced the chart and said, “I’ve got to start my shift now. See you later.”

Foggy stared blankly after Claire, surprised at her attitude that seemed to border on cool indifference. Matt never talked about their relationship - Foggy only knew that they were both attracted to each other but were determined to suffer instead. He sighed. Perhaps Claire’s indifference was just her way of coping. Whatever the case, Matt needed her for more than just stitches.

As Foggy predicted, Doctor Millet didn't yell, but she did insist Matt not stop taking the next medication without discussing it with her first, even if he stopped having seizures. Unsurprisingly, Matt agreed. She talked through the side effects that had been worrying him and suggested they start him on a newer medication.

"I'd like to keep you here for a few days though. Foggy showed me your diary and it worries me that the frequency is increasing. He says you sometimes have trouble breathing after seizures, so I want to address that." Matt turned to Foggy with a quizzical expression. Foggy had never mentioned the breathing before, had he?

Doctor Millet cleared her throat to get Matt’s attention again. "We'll start you on a low dose of this new medication and increase it slowly. Does that sound good to you?"

"This new medication," Matt croaked. "Does it make you drowsy?"

"For most people, no. But it has that affect on some people. I have a lot of patients on it whose epilepsy was uncontrolled beforehand and they've all responded well."

Matt frowned.
"We can try another if this one doesn't work, but it's up to you to tell me about any unwanted side-effects." Matt suspected his sensitivities were going to be affected by any drug, but he nodded anyway.

Foggy piped up, "we wanted to talk to you earlier but then Matt missed his appointment because he had a seizure and the soonest they had was a week later – that is, today."

Dr Millet looked a little cross. "I'm sorry about that. If you run into trouble in the future and need an appointment quickly, I suggest calling an ambulance during your next seizure. Even if I’m not working that day, you’ll at least get seen by a neurologist. It’s not ideal, but it’s something to keep in mind."

Matt couldn't wait any longer. "Can I get, um, the thing taken out-," Matt pointed at his groin and blushed, then hurriedly said "I want to go the bathroom normally."

Foggy smiled slightly at Matt’s awkward modesty. Foggy was glad Matt couldn't see it.

"We'll take the catheter out now that you're off the ventilator, yes. It'd be good to get you up and moving as soon as possible."

Foggy whispered "you don't have to be embarrassed." Matt shot him a dangerous look.

After Dr Millet's visit, they got Matt out of bed, and once they were satisfied that he was mobile, they moved him to a general ward. To Matt’s horror, he was sharing with another young man. Foggy glimpsed Matt’s expression as they parked Matt’s bed, and quickly drew the dividing curtain, relieved that at least the new roommate was asleep.

"Where are my glasses?" Matt asked immediately.

"Really? You're going to wear them in bed?"

Matt scowled and Foggy immediately rummaged through Matt’s bag for the glasses.

"Glasses, cane, phone, charger, earphones, book," Foggy said as he placed the objects on the bedside table. "Oh and I brought you a pillow."

Matt eagerly reached out for the soft pillow and hugged it. "You're a star."

"I know," Foggy said, handing Matt his glasses. Matt did look odd wearing glasses in bed, particularly as they were competing for space with the nasal cannula, but he knew better than to comment again.

Foggy remembered the origami paper and dug through the bag. "I got you a present," he said, pulling a couple of squares from the plastic packet and offering them to Matt, who grasped at the air about five inches to the left of Foggy's hand. "Sorry," Foggy said, pushing them into Matt’s hand just as Matt moved his hand towards Foggy’s. The paper crumpled and Matt’s face fell at his clumsiness.

"No problem. There's plenty more," Foggy said. Matt ran his fingers over the delicate and beautifully textured paper. "How are your senses?" Foggy asked.

"Shot," Matt replied, creasing once of the papers diagonally, his hands slightly shaking due to fatigue. He folded the paper in half again then dropped his hands onto the blanket.

"Thanks for the paper. It's lovely-"
“But you're tired,” Foggy finished. “Do you want me to go?”

“No! I mean, if you want to…. Just – I like you being here – if you want. Only if you want.”

“I'll stay as long as you need,” Foggy said.

Matt nodded and closed his eyes. He mumbled, “the window – it’s nice. Sun.”

A square of late afternoon sun tracking across the bed highlighted Matt’s left hand. He flexed his fingers and turned them over to absorb the heat.

“You cold?” Foggy asked.

Matt pulled the blanket up over his shoulders. “Mmm…” he said sleepily.

“I'll get you another blanket,” Foggy said, ever mother hen.

“Mmm no,” Matt murmured. “Just- here.” His words were slightly slurred and Foggy figured there was only about a minute’s worth of consciousness in Matt right now.

Foggy stacked the crumpled paper on Matt’s bedside table then pulled out his phone. He needed a plan for Nelson & Murdock that took into account a missing partner (and occasionally two). He googled “temp lawyer NYC” and started scrolling through the various recruitment and social media sites, trying to figure out how they'd find someone cheap but amazing within the pool of thousands of highly qualified and experienced lawyers out there. He felt incredibly out of his depth. He wasn't grown up enough to hire a second employee, and they could barely afford to pay Karen. But the alternative – well, there wasn't one.
Foggy couldn't afford to miss any more work so he reluctantly left Matt on his own most of Friday, although he dropped into the hospital before heading to the office. He returned that evening to find Matt asleep, one hand on an open book. There were a couple of small modular origami sculptures on the bedside table, evidence that at least he'd been awake some of the day.

“Mmm Foggy?” Matt mumbled as Foggy crept in.

“Sorry, I tried to be quiet.”

“You brought the olfactory equivalent of shouting,” Matt pointed out. “Chilli garlic?”

“You bet. If you're not going to eat the hospital food – and I don't blame you - I'm going to get you something you will eat.” Foggy went to pick up the plastic lid over Matt’s hospital dinner, which had so far gone untouched.

“I wouldn't do that if I were you,” Matt joked.

“Oh God what is that?” Foggy said. He stifled a laugh.

“Casserole… apparently.”

“Yeah, you can't eat that,” Foggy said, wrinkling his nose. “What about the orange juice?”

Matt shook his head. “You have it.”

“Ace,” Foggy said, peeling back to lid of the sickly sweet juice cup. Matt wrinkled his nose, and Foggy said, “oh come on, you're offended by the smell of juice now?”

“Do you know how many preservatives and sugars that thing holds?”

“Nope. Don't care either.” Foggy quickly unpacked the Thai food to distract Matt from his juice rant.

Matt slowly picked through his stir fry, putting away most of it, which thrilled Foggy no end.

“Better?” Foggy asked as Matt put down his fork and slumped happily into the pillow.

Matt nodded. “Thanks, Fog. The chilli’s definitely cleared the sinuses.” He rubbed his nose, glad that the oxygen tube was no longer there. “How's Karen?”

“Oh, she's fine I think. Seemed a bit quiet. Sends her wishes. Why? Do you want her to visit? I can ask.”

“No, not if she doesn't want to,” Matt said. “I just assumed she would though.”

“I think maybe I put her off when I told her not to come two nights ago – when you were in the ICU.”

Matt nodded, but seemed unconvinced. “Has she said anything more about - you know?”

“The guy with the underwear fetish?” Foggy laughed at the filthy look he got in return. “No, she hasn't. It doesn't mean that you shouldn't tell her though. You were going to do it today.”
“I’m not doing it in here,” Matt said. “I need a more, er, controlled location.”

“I’ll leave that up to you,” Foggy replied, tired of the repeated discussion about where and when to tell Karen. He cleaned away the containers and said, “speaking of colleagues, I bumped into Candy today – you know, she was a junior at L and Z when we were interning?”

Matt gave a grin. “Sure do.”

It suddenly clicked. Foggy yelped, “what? You slept with her too? Maaaatt… you've totally ruined what I was about to say next.”

“Say it anyway.”

Foggy sighed. “Well, she took some time off to have a baby and then the whole Fisk corruption within the L & Z ranks thing happened. She doesn't want to work for a dodgy law firm and she's not really keen on the crazy work hour culture of corporate law either. She wants to keep her foot in the career door though.”

Matt nodded, unsure as to where Foggy was going with the story.

“She's looking for some temp work,” Foggy continued. “It doesn't have to be fascinating or even consistent - just when she's needed.”

Matt finally cottoned on. “No.”

Foggy was taken aback by Matt’s flat out rejection of the idea. “No to Candy, or no to hiring a temp?”

“To both. We don't need another employee.”

“Actually we do. We can't keep hoping you're going to get magically better overnight and go back to your full time work load.”

“We can't afford her.”

“She's not asking corporate rates. In fact, for her experience, she's actually very cheap.”

“No. I can't believe you've gone so far as talking pay rates.”

Foggy squeezed the bridge of his nose. “Matt, please. Can you just for one moment swallow your pride and accept that we need someone to cover you for a bit?”

“It's not pride.” Matt scowled.

“I'm not replacing you. You could never be replaced. She'll just do all that boring stuff we don't want to do. Contracts and stuff.”

“The rote stuff I do after a seizure,” Matt pointed out. “What are you going to give me then? The boring stuff is my new niche area.”

“Look, I don't know. It's just an idea. It's an idea I need you to seriously consider. Think about it over the weekend.”

“It's still going to be a no.”

“Think about it,” Foggy repeated.
They stewed in silence for a bit when Matt said in a clipped tone, “I think I'm going to sleep now.”

“You want me to stick around?”

“Mmm no, I'll be okay. Go home.”

“Okay, I'll be back tomorrow.”

Matt put his hand out, reaching for Foggy. “Thanks for dinner,” he said, affectionately squeezing Foggy’s hand.

Foggy started heading back to Matt’s apartment when he finally realised there was no reason to stay there as long as Matt was in hospital. How odd that Matt’s apartment had become ‘home’ so quickly. Foggy changed course and returned to his now musty smelling place. He sat on the couch, thinking about Matt’s stubbornness and resistance to any kind of help. Sometimes he just needed a push. Foggy had an idea. He picked up his mobile. “Mom, I have a favour to ask…”
Matt sat in bed hugging his pillow. He was bored. Foggy had said he was returning to the hospital today, but it was already mid-morning and there was no sign of his friend. It was Saturday, so it couldn’t be due to work commitments. Perhaps the argument over hiring a temp had scared Foggy away. He checked his phone for a missed message or text, but just like the last time he checked (five minutes earlier), there was nothing. His hospital roommate snored lightly on the other side of the dividing curtain, occasionally waking himself up with a sudden loud snort. The sound was driving Matt mad, but he disliked the idea of people sneaking up on him if he donned his beloved earphones. Then again, it could be worse – he could hear sobs of pain from someone down the hallway. He wouldn't have coped sharing that room. He felt horrible for thinking something like that. He shouldn't be so intolerant of people who were sicker than him. It was selfish and unkind.

Elsa, his favourite nurse, asked if he wanted a shower. She was his favourite simply because she was the only one who introduced herself by name every time she entered the room. It was a small detail, but to someone unable to visually recognise individuals, it made a massive difference. Apart from Doctor Millet, the other nurses and doctors seemed to bleed into the same person. Men, women, all with different accents and widely varied levels of kindness and attention to detail. Elsa had thus become the exception to this nameless stream of people. She seemed new to the job. Young. Irish. Enthusiastic. He’d learned that she was in New York on a temporary work visa, that she liked feeding the squirrels in Central Park, and that her flatmate had a black and white cat called Gus.

Matt shook his head to the shower offer. He couldn't be bothered. Everything ached and the idea of getting up, wrapping his still bandaged hand in a plastic sleeve, finding his shampoo and so on, was tiring in itself.

“Come on, it'll make you feel better,” Elsa said. Apparently Matt’s melancholy hadn't gone unnoticed.

Matt ran his hands through his hair and realised just how greasy it was. His scalp itched at the thought. “Hmm yes, I- ergh.” He grunted as he swung his legs over the edge of the bed. She put her hand out to guide him, but he insisted on finding his own way to the bathroom, trailing his hands along the windowed wall to the ensuite. He was tired and crabby, and the walk was more of a limping shuffle. He felt pathetic.

He stood under the warm stream of water, enjoying the sensation on his sore back. Elsa eventually knocked on the door, interrupting his bliss. He scowled. Nothing in this place was sacred. He wanted to be back home in his own space with the privacy to shower as long as he wanted. He called back a “yes, I'm fine,” and finally got round to washing his hair, relieved and grateful that Foggy had thought to pack his special shampoo.

Elsa was right. He felt infinitely better after the shower. He donned a fresh t-shirt and sat cross-legged in bed. The sheets had been changed while he was in the shower and smelled like industrial disinfectant. He wrinkled his nose and kicked the top sheet and blanket away. As soon as he'd settled in, his mobile phone rang. “Gladys, Gladys, Gladys...”

His initial thought was to ignore the call. What in earth would she want of him now? He'd listened to her voicemails from Wednesday asking where he was, and he’d concluded she'd never want to speak to him again. But he was bored, so on the 8th ring he picked up.
“Hello, this is Matt Murdock,” he answered.

“Still so formal. This is Gladys by the way.”

“I know,” Matt replied apologetically. “Old habit.”

“So…” she lead.

“Sorry about the other night. Something came up. “

“Yeah, like you ending up in hospital?”

“H-how did you know?”

“Your secretary- she told me why you ditched our date.”

Matt frowned. Karen knew better than to share private information like that.

Gladys must have read his thoughts because she added, “I bullied it out of her. She didn’t want to tell me at first.”

“Huh.”

Ignoring his tone of irritability, she said brightly, “do you feel up to a visitor?”

“You-you want to come here? To the hospital?”

“Yes - if you want me to.”

“It’s not very interesting,” Matt grumbled.

"Maybe I’ll brighten things up a bit."

Matt smiled at the way she switched the assumption in his statement. He didn't want to be seen like this, but at least he'd rid of all the medical equipment that had been attached to him the last few days. He ran his fingers through his damp hair, hoping he looked presentable.

"Okay,” he said slowly, unconvinced that he was making the right choice.

"Excellent. I’ll be there in 45 minutes."

"That's quick."

"Yeah. See you soon"

Matt put down the phone and reached for the packet of origami paper. He was fidgety and anxious, and origami helped him cope. Why he'd abandoned it for so many years was beyond him.

Elsa came in to flush the IV cannula that remained in his arm. He winced as the liquid flowed into his veins.

"Does it hurt?" she said, worried.

"No, it's just an odd sensation."

"Tell us if it hurts. We don't want it to get infected."
Matt knew he'd be able to tell in an instant if that was the case. "It's not infected," he said. "Tell us if it hurts nonetheless."

She looked curiously at the origami nestled in Matt’s hand. "What are you making?"

Matt balanced the paper cat on the palm of his hand.

"That's so cute," she said, and he held it out for her. She turned it over in her hand, cooing at the tiny ears.

"Keep it," Matt said.

"Are you sure?"

Matt nodded. He gestured towards the growing collection of origami beside his bed. "I enjoy the process of making, rather than the final product."

"Can you make one in black and white?"

"Sure. If you get me the paper... unless there's a black and white piece in here." He handed her the packet.

Elsa realised her error. "Oh. Yes, of course." Flicking through the packet, she said, "these pieces are more patterned. They're beautiful, but no black and white."

"Get a piece with black on one side and white on the other. You'll see why."

"Sure. Can I keep this as well?"

"It's yours."

Matt had two other nurses visit over the next half hour, each requesting a specific animal after Elsa had proudly shown them her cat. He found their enthusiasm rather amusing. Their requests were also a welcome distraction leading up to Gladys' visit. He shouldn't feel as nervous about her visit as he did now. He'd take on an entire gang of armed drug traffickers without a second thought, but Gladys visiting him in hospital put the fear into him.

His hands shook as he methodically folded the paper into the baby seal one of the nurses requested. He misplaced a fold so that the corners didn't exactly meet. He scrunched it up and threw the paper angrily at the window, enjoying the hollow thunk as it bounced off the glass and skittered across the room. It wasn't as cleansing as the smash of a ceramic object, but it'd have to do (he could imagine what Foggy would say if he smashed something in hospital). Matt breathed deeply through narrowly parted lips, trying to stop the shaking.

Shortly afterwards, Gladys entered with a verbal "knock, knock" at the edge of Matt’s curtains. He turned in her direction with a smile. “Hey,” he said shyly.

“I got you something,” Gladys said.

“Coffee,” Matt said, with a theatrical sniff.

“Well, that too.” She handed him the paper cup.

“You're amazing.”

“I also have this for you.” She pushed a delicate wire and enamel rose stem into his other hand.
He placed the coffee on his bedside table and felt the individual petals and leaves of the rose stem. “It’s made by a New York designer. I know you don’t like strong perfumes so I thought this might be better than real flowers. The enamel is delicious to touch.”

“It’s incredibly smooth,” Matt agreed. “But the edges are quite sharp.”

“Like a rose I guess,” Gladys said cheerfully.

“Hmm yes, I guess. My experience of roses is limited. People tend to dislike strangers feeling their roses.

Gladys laughed. “Is that a euphemism?”

Matt grinned back, pleased with her reaction.

She perched on the edge of his bed. “What does your t-shirt say?”

“Um...” Matt felt across his chest to figure out which t-shirt he’d randomly thrown on that morning.

“That’s braille, right?”

“Yeah. It says Batman.”

Gladys snorted. “Really?”

“Foggy had it made for me,” Matt said proudly.

“But isn't a bit offensive?”

Matt furrowed his brow. “I don't think so. Why would it be?”

“I don't know. I think I was just thinking of the saying, a blind as a bat - it's often used derogatorily.”

“I’m not worried. It's kind of an in-joke. Besides, I don't think most people would even recognise it as braille and even fewer would know what it meant.”

“And most braille readers would have to feel your chest, right? In fact they'd have to know to feel your chest. It's an interesting idea.”

Matt shrugged. “It's just a t-shirt.”

He laid the flower carefully on his bedside table and returned to his coffee.

They both spoke at once. “What happened-”

“How did you-”

“Sorry,” Matt said. “You go.”

“I was just going to ask what happened. Is it to do with your hand?”

Matt bit his lip. “Seizure,” he said finally.

“Oh no. Is that your first?”

“No, but it's a recent thing. I've had a few over the last month. My hand is just a related injury.”
“Shit, that's terrible. My brother once fell on the edge of a coffee table during a seizure and needed twelve stitches.”

Matt tilted his head. “Your brother has epilepsy?”

“Yeah. It's controlled now, but it used to be pretty crazy when he was a teenager.”

Matt took a sip of his coffee and Gladys said, “but you're allowed to drink coffee? Paul – my brother - wasn't.”

“No, it's fine. I really appreciate the gesture.”

“Oh good. I was worried I'd just made a massive faux pas.”

Matt shook his head and took another sip.

“So this one was worse than usual?”

“The seizure? Yeah, a bit.”

“A bit,” she repeated skeptically.

“Yeah,” he quickly switched topics, “so tell me, have you heard anything from the gallery?”

“Marlow? Yes, they were totally milking the publicity afterwards. They grandstanded about how people can just destroy artworks freely now and so on. Total bullshit, but it got them an article in Huffpo.”

“So in a way they also won,” Matt grumbled.

“Not that much. They're twats. It may have got them publicity, but they're not popular within the art world. Anyway, enough work talk. Tell me, did you make that origami?”

Matt nodded.

“They're incredible,” she gushed, making Matt blush. “The modular ones are so complex.”

“Most people like the animals, but I like the challenge of the bigger geometric ones.”

“You should sell them. We had some in the gallery shop at one stage but they weren't nearly as impressive as yours.”

“I think that might take the enjoyment out of it,” Matt pointed out.

“Can I have one?”

“Please. Take them all. I have so many at home. Foggy jokes that there'll be no room for us if I keep up the current pace.”

“I didn't realise you still lived with Foggy,” she said distractedly as she sorted through the sculptures.

“I don't. He just moved in temporarily when the seizures started. They wouldn't let me go home alone.”

“It's probably a good idea too.”
"Yeah, he's been great. I don't know what I'd do without him."

They both considered the implications in silence for a moment. Matt vowed to ring Foggy as soon as Gladys left. He really was a godsend.

"It must have been a big seizure if you're still here. They usually discharge people once they wake," Gladys said. "When do you get to go home?"

Matt rubbed his head. He was stressed out over that very question.

"I don't know. They said something about figuring out breathing and making sure the medication kicked in. I don't really understand it myself. I'm pretty bored though."

"Glad to be of service then," Gladys said, chipper. "Do you need anything - food, errands?"

"Foggy’s got all that covered," Matt said, "but thanks for the coffee. I can feel my caffeine-withdrawal headache clearing already." He stretched with a happy groan.

"You're probably tired. My brother was always wrecked for a few days after a seizure."

"I warned you it wouldn't be interesting."

"Oh shush. I'll come again if you want, but short and sweet is probably good in these circumstances, right?"

Matt gave her a small smile and nodded. He was so relieved. He felt terrible that she'd made all the effort of travel for such a short visit, but at the same time he’d worried that she'd stick around for hours.

"Ace. I'll see you soon." She leaned in and gave him a goodbye peck on the cheek. He mumbled an awkward "bye", surprised at her affectionate goodbye.

As she was leaving, he called out, "your brother - he's okay now?"

"Yes."

"How long did it take before they went away?"

She paused for a moment, silently counting on her hand. "Your situation is different, Matt," she started.

"How long?"

"Three years-"

Matt gaped and she hesitated before finishing the sentence. "Uh, three before they stopped being regular occurrences. He had them on and off for maybe four or five years after that - mostly when he was sick."

He could feel her staring at him, her heartbeat raised slightly with worry. "As I said, your situation is different. I'm sorry, Matt. You going to be okay?"

Matt muttered a robotic "yes", then a "bye." He knew it was a possibility that the seizures could continue for years – even indefinitely – but it was so much more real when faced with a real life example.
Matt fumbled for his phone and called Foggy, but it went through to voicemail. He stuttered a message, and immediately hated himself for bothering Foggy on a day where he probably just needed some space. He curled up and tried to sleep. He wanted this to be over and time at least went faster when he was asleep. He was just starting to drift off when another someone approached the bed. He lifted his arm slightly, thinking it was a nurse coming to check his blood pressure.

“How are you feeling?” Claire asked.

He rolled over onto his back. “Bored.” But he gave her a small smile, grateful for the distraction.

Claire huffed. “I can't make any promises about my entertainment level. I'm on my lunch break so I thought I'd say hi.”

“Hi,” Matt replied facetiously.

“So do you know when you're leaving yet?”

Matt rolled his eyes. “If only. Everyone keeps asking me as if I know. I seem to be the last person to be informed of these things.”

Claire shrugged. “They might not know yet. No Foggy today?”

“He needs a break,” Matt replied. “Just me today. Bad luck.”

Claire gave a small snort and was just about to say something when Matt scrambled upright and kicked off the blankets as if ready to defend an attack.

“Matt, what the hell-”

Claire’s words were cut off as Elektra entered the room, her stilettos sharply clip clopping along the lino floor. Elektra walked straight past Claire to Matt’s bedside.


“I'm going to leave,” Claire said brusquely.

Matt desperately wanted her to stay, but it was best for everyone if Elektra didn't know of Matt and Claire’s special relationship. He nodded and gave her an unconvincing smile, although his body language said something very different.

“Flirting with the nurses I see,” Elektra said once Claire had left.

“You were here a few days ago,” he stated, getting straight to the point. “Why?”

“To see you, of course.”

“But why?”

“Why do you always assume I have an ulterior motive, Matthew?”

“Because usually you do,” he threw back.

“Don't forget I was the one who carried you back home after you had one of your episodes at the Roxxon gala.”

“Only to save your own skin.”
“And I guess I slept in that disgusting armchair of yours overnight just to save my skin too then?”

“Probably,” Matt mumbled, but he was less sure now. She had stayed over just to make sure he was okay. She'd brought him water. He’d not really considered her intentions at the time, he'd concentrated on her accusation that he was a liability.

She reached for his hand but he snatched it away. “Fine,” she said. “But you came to me the other night when you were bored out of your mind. You can't have it both ways.”

Matt replaced his hand on the bed. “It was work.”

“We both know it wasn't.”


She stepped away from the bed. “As you wish. Call me when you get bored with this ‘normal’ life of yours…”

He sat still, tracking the sound of her stilettos as she exited the building. He was shaking again. He didn't like surprises like that. Elektra’s unannounced visits haunted him now. No time or location was sacred: his bed, his office, the hospital… it had him constantly on edge.

He was still sitting against the end of the bed when Elsa entered to take his blood pressure. “You've got quite the revolving door of ladies today,” she teased in her lyrical Irish accent. “You don't seem all that pleased about it though,” she added when she realised how rattled he was.

“What's wrong?” He shook his head, and eventually she gave up and left him alone.

Foggy spent the morning moving half his apartment contents to his parents' place. He'd made up his mind not to renew his lease on his apartment. Instead, he'd stay with Matt for a bit longer - just until the seizures were better under control. He'd not told Matt this plan of course, but he knew Matt wouldn't refuse if he knew Foggy was already moving out of his apartment. He felt a bit bad guilt-tripping Matt into having him stay, but it was part of a plan that would solve a few problems at once.

As he crammed his more precious items into the spare room, he described the hospital ‘casserole’ to his mother. Horrified that 'her' Matt was being underfed, she insisted on cooking a massive dish of mac and cheese (“fattening, easy to eat, and will keep if refrigerated”). She also insisted on accompanying Foggy to Metro General once it was out of the oven.

"Did you tell him I was coming?" Anna asked as they left home.

"Of course," Foggy lied. He'd left a message saying he’d be visiting shortly, but omitted the detail about his mother. Matt would appreciate Anna being there, but if he was told ahead of time, he'd tell her not to come out of some kind of misplaced guilt. It was sometimes best not to give Matt the option when guilt was likely to override his true and obvious desires.

They entered Matt’s room and found him lying asleep on his back, oxygen mask over his nose and mouth, looking very unwell. Anna put her hand over her mouth, obviously not prepared to see Matt like that. Foggy put his hand on her shoulder and said “wait here, I need to find out what happened,” and went to find someone. He didn't understand - when he left Matt last night he was fine. They'd taken him off oxygen and the drip, and he'd scarfed down an entire chilli garlic stir-fry.
When Foggy returned with a nurse, he found his mother standing at Matt’s side, stroking his hair. He said softly, “hey mom, apparently he had a seizure – a serious one.” Anna pulled her hand away from Matt’s head as the nurse checked the monitor next to the bed and switched him to a nasal cannula. Foggy was getting used to the hierarchy of oxygen delivery systems and sighed in relief. It looked like Matt was improving at least.

Anna seemed unimpressed with Matt’s care. She muttered something about details and ‘poor boy’, and went in search of a washcloth, which she rinsed in the ensuite sink and used to wipe Matt’s face, clearing away the white crust that had gathered around his mouth.

“You can leave if you want, mom,” Foggy said. “He's not going to be waking up soon. They gave him a hell of a lot of medication – more so than usual.”

She stroked Matt’s hair affectionately, then turned to Foggy. “I see what you’re up against, sweetness. This can't be easy. You’re very brave.”

“I’m not the one who’s brave.”

“Yes you are. I don’t know many people who would take on a carer’s role while working.”

“Actually, he looks after himself most of the time. I just pick him up off the ground every couple of days.”

“That must be scary.”

Foggy gave her a wan smile. “Yes, but depressingly, it’s becoming easier.”

Doctor Millet came in to see Matt a little later and chatted to Foggy about the seizure. He followed her out of the room, waiting until they'd reached the end of the hallway - out of his mother’s (and potentially Matt’s) earshot – before speaking.

“I know it may be overstepping things,” Foggy said, “but is it possible to get the neuropsychologist – I think his name was Doctor Bellan - back for another assessment?”

“Doctor Bevan. He usually does assessments immediately after brain injuries and concentrates on more serious disabilities. I know Matt’s situation is serious, but he’s in many ways lucky to have escaped greater injury. The fact that he's still working as a lawyer, for instance, indicates Doctor Bevan’s help is not necessary.”

Foggy sighed. How could he explain what Matt had lost. “It may look like he's coping, but the fact that he stopped taking the medication suggests otherwise. And although he's physically at work most days, he's not doing much work. We need to employ a temp.” She still looked unconvinced, so Foggy tried a different tack. “I only ask because Doctor Bevan is the first person – other than his priest – who Matt seems to have really opened up to. I think it'd help. Really.”

“There are therapists.”

“I know, but it's not therapy. It's about finding a way to better cope with the changes to Matt’s life. Practical things. Matt’s blindness has got to make him eligible for extra services.” He hated playing that card, but he was desperate. “Please just ask him.”

The doctor thought for a moment. “Even if he agrees, it wouldn't be till Monday.”
Foggy swallowed. “Will Matt still be here?”

“I want to wait a few more days, let him recover again, and see if the new medication has made some kind of difference. The last thing we want is to have him go into status again.”

Foggy winced at the thought. She paused for a moment, looking at Foggy’s worried face. “No promises about Doctor Bevan but I’ll recommend it.”

“Thank you, thank you!” He bowed slightly before heading back to Matt’s side.

Matt roused with a huff. He clumsily swiped at the tube running under his nose and Anna leapt into action. “Matt, leave it.” She gently clasped Matt’s hand and rubbed it soothingly. “Come on, we’ll put it back,” she said, replacing the cannula. “There’s a good boy.”

Matt calmed at the praise, but slurred “don’t want” under his breath.

“I know you don’t, gorgeous. It’s just for a bit. It’s helping you.”

Recognising Foggy’s mother’s voice, he tried to say her name, but it came out more like “Ang.”

“That’s right, it’s Anna. I’m sorry, I should have said.”

Matt finally opened his eyes. “Where Foh?”

“He’s gone to talk to someone. He’ll be back soon.”

Matt gave small groan and closed his eyes. Anna was still massaging his hand and he focused on her touch, worried the world would slip away again if she let go.

Matt became conscious of Foggy’s approaching footsteps and slightly too-fast heartbeat.

“Hey mom, how’s he going?”

“He woke up for a short while, but he’s sleeping again.”

Matt felt he should correct them, but before he could rustle up the energy to speak, Foggy said, “and is he okay?”

“He’s – well, he knew it was me.”

“Did he say anything?”

“His words were quite slurred, but he tried to say my name and he asked where you were. Oh, and he tried to remove the oxygen – I think his exact words were ‘don’t want’.”

Foggy huffed in amusement. “That’s normal.” He leaned over and took Matt’s hand from Anna’s. “Matty? You awake?”

Matt squeezed Foggy’s hand and gave a small grunt.

“That’s a start,” Foggy said.

Matt opened his mouth to say something, but he couldn’t think of anything to say so he just let out a sigh instead.
“What’s that?” Foggy said, thinking that he’d missed something significant. Matt shook his head, but then screwed his eyes as the movement sent bolts of pain throughout his skull.

“Shit, I'll get help,” Foggy said, getting to his feet.

“No,” Matt mumbled, forcing himself to reopen his eyes.

“Matty, do you know what happened?”

Matt gave a grunt that Foggy interpreted as “tell me”.

“You had another seizure - a big one. They thought it might go on like the previous one so they had to stop it with extra medication. It means you’re probably going to be pretty tired for a bit.”

Matt mumbled, “don’t want” again. Foggy gave his mom a look that said ‘see what I’m up against?’ and she bit her bottom lip, trying not to laugh.

Foggy could hear the cracking of Matt’s dry mouth as he tried to speak again. “Hang on, I’ll get you some water.” Foggy held a straw to Matt’s mouth and watched him swallow the entire cup in one go. “Okay, now you can talk a bit better.”

“Smells ‘mazing, smells Nelson,” Matt mumbled, finally reconciling the lingering smell of mac and cheese with the current situation.

Foggy and Anna gave a small laugh. “Your priorities are definitely sorted,” Foggy pointed out. “Mom made you a mac and cheese. They tried to confiscate it because it wasn’t kept at regulation temperature or something, but we managed to convince them to let us put it in the fridge and reheat it when you’re ready. We also brought you some salad greens – y’know, for your health. Do you want some now?”

“He’s only just woken up, darling,” Anna said to Foggy. “Give him some time.”

Matt felt nauseated at the idea of having to sit up and physically do something even as simple as eating. He lazily rubbed at his eyes, and the two Nelsons simultaneously sat forward, thinking Matt was about to pull away the oxygen again. “Uh… I’m – when awake.”

“Of course,” Anna said kindly, leaning over and brushing Matt’s hair out of his eyes. “That’s better.”

“Mom, he’s not a child.”

“I know,” Anna admonished. She reached for Foggy’s lank locks. “I wish you’d let me cut this.”

“Bad luck. There's not going to be any cutting of hair – not mine, and not Matt’s.”

“S’okay,” Matt said, short-circuiting the argument that was about to follow.

Matt fell asleep again before he was awake enough to eat mac and cheese. By the time he actually got around to eating it was going on 8pm and Anna was long gone.

“Fuck, Matt, I didn’t think I could hang on much longer,” Foggy said as he finished his own plate.

“You could have had some without me,” Matt said. The fatigue was affecting his coordination, and he struggled to skewer the side of lettuce leaves with his fork. Eventually he just plucked them out with his fingers.
“Mum would kill me if she found out I ate without you. No, if you’re going to suffer, I must suffer.”

“That’s stupid,” Matt said with a full mouth.

“Noble and sacrificial, I think you mean.”

Matt rolled his eyes. “Yes, that’s exactly what I meant.”

“Anyway, there’s enough in the fridge to feed you for a week.”

Matt nodded and took another mouthful.

“Mom also said she’d make anything else you want to eat. She was predictably horrified at your weight loss, so feeding you up is her new mission. Say it and she’ll make it.”

“She doesn’t have to do that.”

“Matthew Murdock, don’t be so selfish,” Foggy said good-humouredly. “Firstly, whatever she cooks you, I also get to eat; secondly, it give her great joy to do something like this; thirdly, you need the food; and lastly, you know you want it so stop being so damn difficult.” He took a deep breath. “So what do you want?”

“Uh, that chicken dish with peppers and chorizo is good.”

Foggy pulled out his phone and texted Anna straight away. After thirty seconds, he said “done. Mum says she’ll have it for you tomorrow afternoon.”

That made Matt perk up. The hospital food was near inedible and he was admittedly quite hungry. At least he had something to look forward to in the short term. He reached out his hand, desperate for human contact. “Fog, I think you’re wonderful.”

“I know you do,” Foggy replied. “Hey, why do you have a grey rose?”

Matt’s mouth twitched. Gladys hadn't mentioned the colour. “To me it's just a rose.”
A new hat

Matt woke up to the sound of bickering. He'd woken up earlier that morning when his roommate had been discharged and was hoping to have the room alone. But no. “You shouldn't have eaten that second helping of tiramisu and that sixth glass of wine,” the woman said. “This always happens.”

“It doesn't always happen,” the man replied. “It's happened once before. Once.”

“Well most people would have learned their lesson.” She muttered under her breath, “why did I have to choose such an idiot husband.”

“I heard that you know,” he said.

*We all heard it,* Matt thought, rolling onto his side and pulling one of his pillows over his head. That didn't help either. It just muffled their voices and had the unwanted effect of focussing his attention.

Elsa touched Matt’s hand gingerly and he pulled it away as if shocked. He'd been so focussed on blocking out the yelling that he'd managed to block out everything else instead.

“Hey hey, it's okay. It's just me, Elsa,” she said. “I’m sorry, I didn't mean to scare you there.” Matt pulled the pillow off his head and rolled over. “I need to take your blood pressure and then maybe you'd like another shower. It'll make you feel better.”

Matt rubbed his forehead irritably. This again. It was like some horrible Groundhog Day. The man on the other side of the curtain said, “would you just stop the nagging already,” which only fuelled the fire. Maybe not exactly like Groundhog Day then. Matt decided these new roommates were a punishment for thinking bad thoughts about the snorer.

“Oh,” Elsa said, finally cottoning on to the source of Matt’s distress. She whispered, “if it makes you feel better, I think they're going to get transferred once a bed becomes free in another ward.”

Matt gave her a small smile.

“That's the way,” she said, chipper. “Now how about that shower?”

He growled as he sat up. He was always sore the day after a seizure, but it seemed worse this time.

“What hurts?”

Matt shook his head.

“Tell me. I'll get you something for the pain.”

“Not in here,” Matt said, holding up the hand with the IV. “Can I just have aspirin?”

“Make sure you eat something first.” She looked over his untouched breakfast. “There's some cereal, fruit salad, a juice box, some kind of pastry, conserves… I tell you what, I'll go get you an aspirin and you peck at this.” Matt raised his eyebrows at the proposed deal – it was the kind of thing Foggy would present to him.

Matt pulled the table closer, feeling the various plastic wrapped packages for the fruit salad. How bad could the fruit be, really?
On return, she handed him the aspirin and a piece of paper. “Black one side, white the other,” she said happily. “If you're still happy to make me another cat?”

“Of course.”

“Let’s do this shower then.”

The couple seemed to reunite against a common enemy while Matt was in the shower. As he closed the door behind him, he heard a whispered, “so he’s blind?” Then a scuffling as the curtains were drawn open. “Yeah he's got the stick and everything.”

“So why does he get the window? It's not like he's gonna use it.”

“Maybe he can see something still. You know Jerry - Stuart’s son? He can still see some, but he uses a stick to get around.”

“Still, why do I get to look at the wall while he gets the window?”

“We’ll ask to talk to the manager. This is not good enough.”

Matt ducked his head under the shower, hoping, no, needing the water to block out the whining. Elsa didn't bug him to get out of the shower this time, nor was she around as he got dressed and perched on the side of the bed with his fists clenched. The couple were whispering about him, trying to decipher whether he could see out the window or not. He wished they'd just ask. Eventually, he decided that enough was enough. Grabbing his cane and glasses, he donned his fluffiest socks and stalked out the door.

Foggy turned up to see an empty bed, a partially drained drip and a tangle of tubing. Matt’s cane and glasses were gone, but his phone was still beside the bed, as was his bag of clothes and books. He politely interrupted the Matt’s new roommate(s) who were evidently whispering about him. They claimed not to have spoken to Matt at all, but offered their opinion on playing hide-and-seek with a blind man. No wonder Matt had disappeared.

“I think he went that way,” the man told Foggy, pointing at the door.

“He knows that, you idiot,” his wife said. “It's not like he walked anywhere else but out the door.”

Foggy looked up at the air vents in the ceiling. They could possibly fit a human. Not yet, Foggy thought. Matt’s a rational adult and is probably just going for a walk or something. An air vent is only something to consider when the doors are locked.

Foggy checked in at the nurses station, but they hadn't seen him either. “He only just had a shower,” one of them said cheerfully.

Foggy looked at them, confused. “Aren't you going to help me find him?”

“He might have gone for a walk. I think he needed the escape.”

Escape. Don't mention the word.

Foggy did a lap of the floor then turned around and did it the other way. Nothing. He went to the floor below and performed the same circuit. Still nothing. He trotted back to Matt’s room but the
bed was still empty. The couple thought this was a thrilling chase, which only made Foggy angry.

The nurses weren't worried. “He'll come back,” the cheerful nurse assured him.

He fumbled for his phone and called Claire. She hadn't seen him, but she suggested Foggy check the hospital chapel. Of course - it was Sunday morning. Foggy felt like a fool.

Sure enough, he found Matt in the front row of the chapel. As Foggy entered, Matt tilted his head up, signalling that he recognised Foggy’s presence. There was no service, just Matt and a young family. The parents were fussing over their newborn baby, leaving the little girl to grill Matt on anything and everything. Foggy heard her say, “why do you wear sunglasses indoors?” Foggy crept down the aisle as Matt tried to answer the girl’s question. Foggy was desperate to hear the answer. He'd only gleaned Matt’s reasons for wearing the glasses - he'd never outright asked because he knew it was a source of anxiety. Matt simply answered, “because they look cool.”

“You're not cool - you're wearing a Batman t-shirt.”

“Touché,” Foggy said as he sat down next to Matt.

“You told me it was cool,” Matt said to Foggy.

“Dude, you should know by now that I have never been, and never will be cool, and that includes assessing what is considered cool and what is not.”

The girl held out her hand. “Can I see that stick?”

“No,” Foggy answered, just as Matt held it out for her.

“You'll have to get yet another cane if you're not careful,” Foggy hissed at Matt, who just shrugged in return.

She pulled at the connections, folding the cane and then letting it spring open again. “Why do you have this?”

“It helps me get around,” Matt said. "I can feel objects around me before I bump into them.”

The little girl furrowed her brow. “Why?”

“He's blind,” Foggy said.

“Way to spoil the punchline, Fog,” Matt deadpanned.

The little girl closed her eyes and waved the stick in front of her. “Keep it on the ground,” Foggy warned, one eye on the nearby vase of flowers.

The girl’s father suddenly yelled, “Tilla, leave that poor man alone. What – why do you have his stick? Give it back immediately.”

“Really, it's okay. She asked,” Matt said, but he was ignored.

“Come on, lets go,” the father said. “Give him the stick back.”

The girl returned the stick with theatrical reverence, and murmured a sincere ‘thank you’.

“You're welcome,” Matt said with a smile, and Foggy couldn't help but grin as well.
As the family left the chapel, Matt breathed a sigh of relief. “Do his hear that?” Matt asked Foggy.

“No, what am I supposed to hear?”

“Nothing. Sweet nothing... at least at normal hearing range.”

“The kids drove you nuts eh?”

“The kids, no. Tilla was a welcome distraction. I meant the couple who are occupying my room.”

“Ah yes I had the pleasure of hearing them when I was looking for you.” Matt snorted at Foggy’s tone and Foggy joined in laughing. “I always forget how much you like kids. You're a contradictory man, Matthew Murdock.”

“Why is me liking kids contradictory?”

“They make loud noises... they act erratically and jump all over you.”

“I don't think anyone enjoys the scream of a child. It doesn't mean they dislike all children though.”

“I guess,” Foggy said with a shrug. “I like that you're so good with children though. It's sweet.”

“I grew up around a lot of them,” Matt pointed out.

“Even more reason to dislike them,” Foggy teased.

“College was worse.”

“It was bad enough with regular hearing. Now that I know about your super senses, I wonder how you lasted so long. And got good grades.”

“Punishment for my sins,” Matt quipped.

Foggy rolled his eyes. “Noooo I refuse to believe that you survived college because of some kind of Catholic guilt.”

“No guilt,” Matt corrected. “The Catholicism helped. But were other reasons.”

“Your dad.”

Matt nodded.

“He'd be so proud of you now with your own business and all.”

“Our business,” Matt said before changing his tone and mumbling, “our business that’s currently suffering because of me.”

Foggy sighed. “Stop with the guilt.” He really wanted to bring up the subject of the temp, but he suspected now was not quite the time.

There was a silence and then Foggy said, “when I turning up this morning and found an empty bed with an abandoned IV pole, I thought the worst you know.”

Matt sagged.

“Why didn't you tell someone where you were going?”
Matt shrugged. “I didn't know. I just knew I had to get away. Then I found this. In fact, someone asked me if I was looking for the chapel, so I took it as—”

“Divine intervention?”

Matt’s mouth twitched. “That’s one interpretation. I think I'm just feeling a bit lost at the moment - a bit useless. Sometimes it's nice to be led. Any directions, metaphorical or otherwise, are very welcome.”

“Do you want directions back to the room, or do you want to stay here for a bit? I can leave if you want.”

“Stay.” Matt out his hand on Foggy’s arm. “Please stay.”

They sat in silence for about half and hour before Matt finally said, “I just remembered the mac and cheese. There's more in the fridge, right?”

“I thought you were praying,” Foggy said in a tone of mock indignation. “You were thinking about mom’s cooking all this time?”

Matt grinned and nodded.

“Shall we head back then?”

Matt got to his feet with a groan.

“Come on old man,” Foggy joked, nudging Matt with his elbow. Matt clung on and they shuffled their way back to Matt’s room. Matt tilted his head as they approached the door.

“What is it?” Foggy whispered.

“It's quiet,” Matt replied. Sure enough, the bed was empty.

“He’s been transferred to another ward,” Elsa whispered conspiratorially as she came up behind them.

“Thanks,” Matt said.

“Nothing to do with me,” she said, but she sounded pleased nonetheless. She turned to Foggy, “so you found him. I told you not to worry.”

“See?” Matt said pointedly. “Everyone else had faith.”

Foggy huffed, and said, “you mentioned mac and cheese?”

Matt beamed. “Oh yes!”

After a two helpings of leftover mac and cheese and the prospect of a room to himself (at least in the short term), Matt felt a lot chirpier. They chatted until Matt’s eyes started to droop. But he wasn't asleep for long. He woke up to Foggy shaking him gently. “Matty, I'm sorry for waking you but I thought you'd want to know – Father Lantom’s here.”

“Wha?” Matt mumbled, disoriented.

Foggy started from scratch. “Matt, you're at Metro General. Father Lantom is here and wants to know if you're up for a visitor.”
Matt rubbed his face and awkwardly shifted himself up the bed. “Yes, of course.”

Father Lantom was waiting patiently by the door, but walked in at Matt’s words.

“Matthew,” the priest greeted.

“Father,” Matt nodded.

“I’ll leave you two alone then,” Foggy said, quietly slipping out of the room and closing the door behind him.

Foggy made a quick exit. "I'll leave you two alone."

"We missed you at Mass this morning."

“I was tied up,” Matt said, holding up the hand that had the IV in it.

Lantom chuckled. "You haven't lost your wit at least."

"Are you here to visit anyone else?"

"No. I came to visit you," Lantom said.

"Did Foggy call you?"

"Someone in the congregation."

"How did they know?"

"I didn't ask.” The priest sighed. “I feel like I'm being cross-examined, Matthew."

"Sorry."

“You’re much loved within the community.”

“They don't know me,” Matt argued. “If they-”

“They know enough to love and care deeply about you. And to that end, I have…” he scrabbled around in his satchel. “A selection of biscuits – homemade, of course.” He placed the tin on the bedside table. “A beanie – because according to Mrs Hart it gets cold in hospital.” He handed the woollen beanie to Matt who turned the extraordinarily soft object in his hands. “Possum, I believe. It's red. I get the feeling you won't object to a red hat.”

Matt gave him a small smile and pulled on the beanie.

“And lastly, the readings from this morning’s service. Just because you missed the service doesn't mean you have to miss out entirely.” He handed the braille print-outs to Matt, who ran his fingers over the paper quickly before nodding a thanks.

"Are they going to keep you here much longer?" Lantom said after a pause.

"A couple of days I think."

Lantom whispered, "was this a result of-"

"No. Well, originally. I had a head injury and it left me with epilepsy."
"Just now?"

"No, um, the injury was about two months ago."

“Ahhh,” Lantom now understood the changes in Matt’s behaviour. "And you're here because of the epilepsy?"

"It's getting worse."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"Do you think this is a punishment? For the Devil in me? For wanting to, you know-”

Lantom pulled up a chair. "No, I don't think that.

"What if I got what I deserved?"

"Would you say everyone in this hospital deserved their illnesses, their accidents?"

"Of course not," Matt said quickly.

"Matthew, you've experienced more hardships than most people do in a lifetime, and yet each time, you overcome them. Some people would be weakened by these incidents, but you get stronger."

"I can hardly stand up," Matt said.

“We both know I'm not talking about physical strength - although I’m sure you’ll regain that in time."

Lantom adopted a more sanguine tone and said, “what happened when you lost your sight?” Matt just sat there silent and expressionless, so Lantom continued. "You had to learn to navigate differently, you had to learn to read braille, you learned to use your other senses more acutely. I still don't understand how you do what you do exactly, but I find it hard to believe it wasn't the result of hard work."

Matt gave a single nod.

"I couldn't imagine losing my sight," the priest continued. "We live in a world where visual communication is dominant. Modern technology, transport, navigation… it's all geared towards the visual. And yet you've not let your blindness stop you from becoming a formidable lawyer... amongst other things."

"This is different though. I can't stop the seizures. They just come.” Matt paused, then whispered, “I'm so scared,” as if he’d be struck down if he admitted it at full volume. He cleared his throat. “I know you say God doesn't punish like this, but what am I supposed to think?"

"Have you considered that this might be your opportunity to focus your attention. Your other activities put you at great risk and caused you a great deal of distress, both physically and mentally. You say you want to help the city, but there are other ways of helping people, Matthew."

"The law isn't enough."

"I'm not talking about the law," Lantom said patiently. "There are other ways to help. One of your fellow parishioners recently lost her sight. She's young. Like you, she's scared. She's mentioned you a few times since you've been going to mass regularly. She wants to talk to you but she's too shy. I think you could help her."
Matt knew he was trapped. He couldn't say no, but at the same time, he didn't want to mentor anyone. What if he ended up like Stick? He didn't trust himself.

"I don't think I'm qualified."

"You're extremely qualified. You demonstrate that every day." He sat back on the chair. "Think about it."

Matt shifted uncomfortably in the bed and Father Lantom waited patiently for him to settle.

"Do you want to confess?"

"Here?"

"Yes, I can hear confessions in a hospital."

"I-I don't feel comfortable."

"That's fine. Come see me when you get out - when you're ready. Would you like me to pray with you instead?"

Matt nodded, and Lantom said, "Can I take your hands?"

Matt reached out and Lantom gently clasped them. Lantom's hands were extraordinarily soft compared to Matt's, although the skin was papery and thin. Matt wondered for the first time just how old his priest really was.

As the two men were deep in prayer, Foggy tapped out a message to Karen. He was worried that he'd scared her off from visiting with that single comment while Matt was in the ICU. Matt would never come out and say it, but Foggy got the feeling he was quite upset she hadn't even called.

Karen responded with just two words: “maybe tomorrow.” Foggy was just about to belt out a reply that he'd most likely regret later when Father Lantom exited Matt’s room, giving a friendly wave to Foggy as he left. Foggy took that as a sign and pocketed the phone.

Matt was sitting upright in bed when Foggy returned, looking, well, almost happy. Foggy had often teased Matt about his Catholicism, but at this point in time he was desperately hoping that religion would help. Perhaps Matt could find solace in the church in this time of change.

“What's with the new devil hat?” Foggy said, grinning at the beanie that coincidentally had two tiny points on the top.

“Foggy, shush!”

“Ehh you're so paranoid. It looks good by the way. Matches the current colour of your cheeks.” He drew up a chair. “Mom’s going to bring in your chicken whenever you're ready by the way. Just say the word.”

“Maybe after a small nap,” Matt suggested, pulling the beanie over his eyes and wriggling down into the bed.

That evening, Foggy’s parents joined them in Matt’s hospital room for the requested chicken, pepper and chorizo dish. They’d brought in their own plates and cutlery and Foggy’s father had to drag out the shower chair as a third seat, much to their collective amusement. “It's a good thing the neighbours have gone,” Foggy said as Anna lifted off the lid, allowing the strong, spicy smell to
Matt out his head in his hands in mock horror. “They were the worst.”

“What happened?” Anna asked, dropping the serving spoon and looking from Matt to Foggy in curiosity.

Foggy recounted his experience with much theatricality, making Matt laugh out loud. As they sat around his bed, eating, Matt felt extraordinarily loved. He reminded himself of Father Lantom’s parting words, and repeated to himself, ‘I must not feel guilty for being loved. I must not feel guilty for being cared about.’
“Matthew, it's time for your shower,” a woman announced, not bothering to introduce herself in any way.

“Uh, I – no, I don't think so.”

“I don't have all day. Sit up and I'll help you to the bathroom.”

“Where's Elsa?” Matt asked.

“It's her day off. Come on,” she urged.

Matt kicked back the blankets and wriggled out of bed. She grabbed his arm, but he shook it off. “I can do it.”

“It's quicker this way,” the woman snapped.

“Huh. I don't think that's how the law works-”

“But it's how time works.” He scowled and she let out an impatient huff. “If you want to get yourself to the bathroom yourself, then fine.” Matt could hear the crinkle of fabric as she crossed her arms.

Matt suppressed the instinctual groan as he stood up and shifted to the bathroom. He could feel her watching him, so he walked as confidently as he could - probably too confidently. As he closed the door behind him, he heard an exasperated sigh from the nurse and the quickly disappearing footsteps as she left the room. Matt leaned against the wall, desperate for the dull repetition of his hospital stay to be over.

Foggy flopped on the chair next to Matt and took off his tie, unbuttoning the top buttons of his shirt.

Matt gave him a pained look. “That bad?”

“Mr Kaufman wants to know if we can stop his neighbour from playing music after 7pm. He will pay us in smoked fish,” Foggy replied.

“Really?”

“No.”

Matt furrowed his brow. “Foggy-“

“The reality is much more boring. It was just a regular Monday. We got another client from your church though. Who knew the church had so many deviants needing defence lawyers.” Foggy sat back with a huff. “What did you do today?”

“Oh you know, I had a shower then did half a dozen thrilling laps of Ward 6B,” Matt replied.
“That’s something,” Foggy said with a smile. “And you still have the room to yourself. That’s pretty good.”

Matt grinned. “Yeah, I think word got around that I’m a window hog.”

“How very selfish of you to want to feel the sun,” Foggy chuckled, recalling how much Matt had visibly enjoyed the sunshine on his bed when he’d first been transferred from the ICU.

“I also visited the rooftop with Dr Bevan. Do you remember—”

“Yeah the neuropsychologist. I remember you got on with him well. Did anything come of it?”

Matt wriggled up in the bed. “We just chatted. He’s really interested in echolocation – I think because a lot of his patients lose their sight as a result of brain injuries.”

“Did you talk about the impact of the medication on your echolocational abilities?”

Matt rubbed his forehead. “I couldn’t tell him everything of course. But he got the gist. Besides, I think this new medication is better. I can’t tell for sure because he said I’m probably still feeling the cumulative effects of the two long seizures, but I feel a bit clearer in the head today.”

“That’s great,” Foggy said, leaning forward to squeeze Matt’s hand.

“He wants me to meet Batman,” Matt blurted out.

“Who?!”

“You know, the echolocation guy – he travels round the world teaching blind kids how to navigate. Apparently he can ride a bike.”

“Can you ride a bike?” Foggy challenged.

Matt rolled his eyes. “That’s what the doctor asked me as well.”

“Well can you?”

“Never tried.”

“I want to get you on a bike now.”

“So does Dr Bevan. He says learning to ride a bike might be good for my focus.”

Foggy laughed. “Batman and Dare—”

“Foggy!”

“Okay okay,” Foggy said, hands up in surrender. “But are you going to do it?”

Matt shook his head. “I can’t risk revealing my abilities.”

“But Batman’s regular blind and he can do it.”

Matt shook his head again. “I don’t know who this guy is, but I can’t take the risk.”

“Come on, you have to do it. Maybe this guy has super senses too and can spar with you or something.”
“No.”

“Why not just meet him,” Foggy said, undeterred. “Aren't you curious?”

“Of course.”

“So why are you being so stubborn about it?” Foggy gasped, and said accusingly, “you like being the only one. You want to be the special one.”

“That's stupid,” Matt said, but he blushed slightly at the accusation. “I'm not the only one - there's Stick.”

“Your lunatic mentor?”

“I told you not to call him that. He might be a bit... eccentric, but he taught me everything.”

“Okay, sorry.” Foggy could hear the warning tone in Matt’s voice and backed off from the Stick issue. “I think you should meet him though. Please?”

Matt winced at Foggy’s pleading. He knew he couldn't say no again. “I'll think about it,” he muttered.

“Good,” Foggy said triumphantly. “Now have you thought some more about the temp?”

“Yes,” Matt said immediately.

“Yes to what?”

“Yes, let’s get Candy in.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. You're exhausted, and I…” Matt trailed off.

“You need to be able to take days off without worrying about work,” Foggy finished. It wasn't exactly what Matt was afraid to say, but it'd do.

“But…but I want to be consulted on her hours and work tasks... and we have to figure out how we're going to pay her.”

“Deal and deal. She’ll never be a replacement for you,” Foggy stressed, “but we have heaps of work at the moment and I don’t want to turn it down. I think I have a solution for the payment thing too.”

Matt tilted his head to say ‘I'm listening.’

“You know how I hate my apartment?”

Matt nodded. Foggy’s apartment smelled like stale smoke and the heating would cut out almost every week over winter.

“Well, my lease is up soon and I've decided not to renew it. I'll find a new place. But in the meantime I thought maybe I could stay with you for a bit longer.”

“Foggy, I”
“No, just listen,” Foggy said sharply and Matt closed his mouth with a snap. “The original six weeks that we agreed I'd stay with you is nearly up, but what if I stayed a bit longer? We could use the money I'd usually spend on rent to pay Candy for a day or two a week.”

“You want to sleep on the camp bed indefinitely?”

“Not the camp bed. I'd move my actual bed in. There's room - I measured it.”

“But it's not even a proper bedroom.”

“I can fashion a kind of room from some wardrobes and bookshelves - they can form the walls.”

“Foggy, no.”

“What's your objection? Do I cramp your style?”

“You – argh – of course you don't cramp my style.”

“So what is it? It's a good plan, Matt.”

“It's just – you shouldn't have to do this.”

“Do what? Care about you?”

“Move, sleep in my living room, look after me. And- and where are you going to put all your stuff?”

“I moved half of it to mom and dad’s on Saturday morning.” Foggy explained.

“Oh. That why you weren't, um…”

“Here?” Foggy finished.

Matt felt terrible. Even when Foggy was absent he was still doing stuff for him.

“It would be good to maintain the current flow of clients,” Matt eventually agreed. “I feel like you get the short end of the stick having to stay in the living room when the temp is covering me. Do you want to switch?”

“No, I like my little nook. You don't have curtains in your bedroom, so my pseudo-bedroom is much better for sleeping.”

Matt fiddled with a stray thread in the blanket. He knew the money issue was probably not the main driver behind Foggy’s proposal to move in for longer, but as much as Matt liked his independence and solitude, he was a lot less anxious with Foggy around. If he'd been alone when this recent seizure had happened…

Foggy watched his friend’s face scrunch up with worry. He reached over and grabbed Matt’s hand. “Hey,” he said softly. “We have a plan. It'll be okay.” He squeezed Matt’s hand affectionately. “I'm going to go call Candy, okay? I'd like to get her in as soon as possible.”

Matt nodded and waited for Foggy's footsteps to disappear before pulling his beanie back over his eyes. The possum beanie was his new favourite thing. It was soft and warm, plus he'd decided that pulling the beanie over his eyes was a much more comfortable option than glasses when lying in bed. Foggy had teased him about his unusual fashion choice, so he'd tended to pull it back up whenever he was around.
Matt was half asleep when he heard the familiar sounds of a nervous Karen Page by the door. He called out “K-karen?”

She shifted nervously, but didn't move from the doorway. “Hey Matt, I thought you were asleep.”

“No, just resting. Come in.”

She trotted up to the bed and stood there picking at her nails as she spoke. “How are you?”

“I'm feeling better, thank you. And you?”

“Yeah, I'm good.” More picking.

He could feel her staring and he realised he still had the beanie over his eyes. Maybe Foggy was right. Maybe he did look like an idiot. He hesitantly went to push up the beanie, but she said, “leave it – if you like.”

Her heartbeat quickened slightly and he crooked his head. He asked, “what is it?”

“Uh, nothing. You just – you remind me of someone,” she said, and he quickly pushed up the beanie.

“Oh, who?” he said casually.

“It's silly. I – I think I'm just tired.”

He could feel her scrutinising his face and reached for his glasses, but Karen got there first and pushed them into his hand. “Thanks.”

“So…. Do you know when you're going to get out?”

“Ah, maybe tomorrow.” He felt like a broken record.

“Good, that's good,” she said distractedly. More silence. “I didn't get you anything, I'm sorry.”

“Just you is enough,” Matt said, realising too late how his words could be misinterpreted. Karen just nodded. She looked around the room and her eyes lingered on the origami. “I like the cat. Why is it different to the others?”

“I made it for one of the nurses. She has a black and white cat. She's not in today so it's just hanging out with me for a bit longer.”

“Have you made many for the nurses?”

“A few.”

“That's nice of you,” she said flatly.

Matt shrugged. “They look after me.”

“Yes, that's true.”

More silence.

“You don't have to stay if you don't want to.” Matt fumbled for an excuse. “You-you sound tired. I'm pretty tired myself.”
Karen opened her mouth to say something, but she hesitated and closed her jaw with an audible snap. Matt could feel the tension oozing out of her. She wrapped her arms around her chest and stared at the needle in his arm.

Wanting to comfort her or at least alleviate some of the tension, Matt held out his hand to hold hers, but she ignored it. His face fell and she ducked her head, embarrassed.

“Are you scared of me or the epilepsy?” Matt asked outright.

Karen stared. “What- what do you mean?”

“Well, before the seizures I thought we were – we were quite close – or at least we had a connection of some sort. But since all this,” Matt waved his hand, “you’ve pulled away - distanced yourself from me. It’s almost as if you’re afraid of me. I just-just don’t understand why.”

Tears formed in Karen’s eyes. It was true that she was scared of Matt’s seizures, but she’d also always been intimidated by Matt himself, even though she adored him. He was confident, intelligent, handsome – everything that Karen felt she was not. While the epilepsy seemed to have made Foggy and Matt’s relationship stronger, she felt somewhat excluded and she’d unconsciously responded in turn by giving them space. As an employee this wasn’t a problem, but they’d been quite a close trio before the accident. They’d become more than just colleagues and so this new distance was highly noticeable.

She rubbed her eyes and muttered, “I’m sorry,” before hurrying out the door, leaving a confused and upset Matt in her wake. He kicked off the blankets in frustration and threw his pillow hard at the wall. It did nothing to alleviate his anxiety. He bunched his fists and kicked the bed end so that his chart fell to the floor with a crash.

Foggy was returning to Matt’s room with two boxes of noodles when he saw Karen stalking out the door, lightly sniffing as she went. “Karen?” What happened? Why are you crying?”

She shook her head. “I’m going home.”

Foggy put his arm out, blocking her path. “Tell me – I can help.”

She fumbled in her bag for a tissue, but before she could find one, there was a crash and a groan from Matt’s room. They both looked at the door then at each other, recognising the all-too-familiar sound.

“Shit. What did you do?” Foggy yelled as he ran into Matt’s room.

Karen choked up. “Fo-I- didn’t-“ but he’d already gone.

He almost instantly doubled back and yelled, “he’s having a seizure. Get help.” Half-dazed, Karen rushed off in search of a nurse.

Foggy returned to Matt’s side and realised he could have just pressed the call button. He pressed it three times just in case. He suddenly felt inadequate to oversee the seizure, even though he’d picked Matt up almost a dozen times before. He started lowering the bed head from an upright position, but just as he did so, a couple of nurses arrived and ordered, “leave it.” Foggy leapt away from the bed and watched from the doorway as one of them unwrapped a tube and stuck it into his mouth, suctioning out excess saliva, while the other clumsily tried to hook a nasal cannula under Matt’s nose. They seemed awfully calm. Too calm.

“Is he going into that status thing again?” Foggy asked.
The nurse said, “it's only been two minutes now.”

Foggy opened his mouth to point out that she hadn't answered his question but thought better of distracting her. The nursing staff were being awfully blasé about an incident that Foggy saw as a major medical emergency.

A third person came in with a syringe and was about to administer it when Matt stopped seizing. Foggy crept towards the bed, needing to see if Matt was really okay, but the older nurse ordered him to wait outside. Foggy meekly retreated, and was faced with a distraught Karen once again.

“Karen, please tell me what happened,” he said.

“I didn't do anything,” she replied, fingers over her mouth.

“I know. I didn't mean to- I used the wrong words. Just tell me what happened to make you both upset.”

“You think I did this – I caused the seizure,” she said angrily.

“Of course not,” Foggy quickly returned. “He's having them all the time.”

“That's not what you implied before.”

Foggy wrung his hands. “I panicked. I didn't – look, he’s had a few when he's been particularly stressed or angry or upset. I just thought with you in tears, maybe something happened.”

“Because you want to protect him,” she spat.

“I care for both of you.”

Karen crossed her arms with a huff and stared angrily at Foggy. He opened and closed his mouth trying desperately to come up with something that would resolve this situation. He still had no idea what happened to make Karen so upset. Unless Matt had finally told her about Daredevil…

“Did Matt say something to upset you?” Foggy tried.

Karen burst into tears again. “No-no - o-of course not,” she choked out. “I should go, Foggy.”

“You're not going to wait to see if he's okay?”

Karen started to shake her head, then it turned into a nod. Foggy held out an arm and eventually Karen accepted the hug, crying into his shoulder as she tried to figure out exactly how it all went so wrong.

Matt could hear Karen and Foggy arguing about something far away. It was a jumble of sounds, indistinct, indecipherable. They both sounded upset and Karen's voice sounded higher than usual. He wanted them to stop. He arched his neck, trying to relieve the pressure in his head. A muscle in his back twinged and he cried out in pain.

Someone said his name and shook his shoulder. Once, twice, three times. They wanted something. But he didn't like that voice. He tilted his head against the pillow, trying to adjust to his surroundings.

“Matt, can you open your eyes for me.”
He didn't like that voice. It took him a few minutes to connect the voice to a previous encounter. Ah, she was the mean one. He didn't want her.

He turned his head away from the mean voice and another voice joined in. They wanted something from him too.

"Matt, can you open your eyes for me!"

No, why should he? He tried to roll over, to bury his head in the pillow and he felt a tug on the side of his nostrils as the cannula pulled sideways and came loose. The mean one huffed and shoved it back in place.

No! It didn't belong. He pulled the oxygen off with a clumsy swipe and the mean one admonished him, replacing the tube with more force than necessary. The other voice grabbed his hand without warning and he pulled away with a moan.

The mean one said, "Matt, can you speak to us?" and she too grabbed his hand. He didn't sense it coming and gave a small cry of fright. He didn't want her to touch him but he couldn't get away. He stilled, hoping they'd leave him alone. No luck. "Matt, squeeze my hand," the mean one said more loudly, and Matt winced, letting out a small whine in protest.

"Give him a few minutes," the other person said.

Yes, go away. Matt wanted his hand back. It was his hand. Sometimes Foggy’s. Foggy….

"Do you know how long his postictal phase usually lasts?" The mean one asked, clearly impatient. "His carer is around somewhere."

"I'll get him."

His carer. What had happened? Matt squirmed again, determined to get away, but his limbs wouldn't obey him. He moved his left arm and something tugged at it. They'd restrained him again. He had to escape. He'd done it once. He could do it again. The bed was slightly raised, which gave him a head start. All he had to do was find the strength to launch.

He breathed out and pushed forward, rolling sideways where he met with a bank of soft cushioning. Trapped. He flopped over it as the mean one roughly grabbed his shoulder, digging her fingers into his aching muscle. He cried out and pulled away, swiping backwards with his free arm. Free. Only one arm must be restrained then. He fumbled for the restraint on the other arm but his hands just met with the IV cannula in his wrist. He pulled at the attached tubing just as he heard Foggy say his name. The tubing flopped away and Matt realised he was free. Success. Foggy was here. Success. Now to escape. He tried to sit up but only managed to slide along the cushioning a little way. This wouldn't do.

"Matt. Matty! Stop! You'll hurt yourself."

Foggy. Foggy was here. There was a hand on his arm, but this time it was gentle, the back of a hand rather than a firm grip. Foggy.

"That's the way," Foggy praised as Matt stilled. "Why don't you lie back down."

It seemed like a good idea. He wanted to sleep more than anything. Foggy was here. He could sleep. Foggy would protect him... No, wait, he was meant to protect Foggy. He had to get up. He groaned and tried to sit up, but Foggy held his upper back and gently shifted him back onto the bed.
The mean woman reattached the IV drip. Matt winced as the already sore point was tugged at once again. Foggy could see Matt was about to pull it out again, so he held Matt's hand and said, "Matt, can you talk to me please. Then you can sleep."

Sleep. Yes.

"Matt, can you say something?"

"Nngh Fohg," Matt slurred.

"Good. Do you know where you are?"

Matt paused. His jaw ached and his mouth felt like a dry sponge. "Oss-pi-al," he huffed, his tongue clicking against the roof of his mouth.

"That'll do," Foggy said. "Do you want some water?"

Foggy was here. Foggy knew what he needed. As Matt grunted a yes, the mean one said, "we're giving him fluids. There's no need for more."

"I think his mouth's dry. Can I give him a bit?"

The nurse made a tsking sound and grumbled a yes. Matt moaned in anticipation as he heard water being poured into a cup. "Hang on Matty, I just need to sit you up." The bed clicked and vibrated as the back was raised a little higher.

There was a rustling then Foggy said shortly, "I can do that." Matt recoiled at the tone, but then he heard an unimpressed huff from the mean one and Matt realised she was the subject of Foggy’s hostility.

Foggy said kindly, "Matt, I'm just going to lift your head, okay?"

Matt grunted in agreement and waved in the air, searching for the cup. "I'll hand it to you. Just hold still," Foggy assured him, but he kept searching. “Matty, just wait,” Foggy repeated calmly. A cup was nudged against Matt's outstretched hand and he took it, his hand quivering slightly under the weight. Foggy continued to hold it from beneath as Matt raised it to his mouth. One sip, two, then the whole cup. Water dribbled down his chin and he gave a small choke as he tried to apologise while swallowing.

"Okay, that's probably enough," Foggy said, returning Matt's head to the pillow. "Go to sleep. I'm not going anywhere."

Matt gave into the sleep, slipping away almost instantly. Foggy felt Matt's grip loosen as he finally relaxed.

"You're very patient," the nurse said, but her tone was more of a sneer than a compliment.

Foggy shrugged. "He's my best friend. Of course I'm patient." She looked over her glasses at Foggy, her eyebrows raised. Foggy dropped his gaze, unwilling to engage any further. He rubbed his thumb over Matt's hand soothingly.

"I have other patients to attend to," she said abruptly. "You know where the buzzer is." She swept out the door and Foggy sighed in relief.

There was no sign of Karen. Foggy cautiously unclasped Matt's hand and crept towards the door,
peering out while keeping one foot in the room. The hallway was empty save for someone wheeling the tea trolley from room to room.

He tried to piece together what had happened. Karen came out upset then Matt had a seizure - which may have been due to stress. Had it been an argument? Did it have something to do with Karen not visiting? Foggy regretted his yelled comment to Karen when the seizure happened. How could he have been so stupid? He shouldn't have forced her to come to the hospital. He'd screwed everything up.

Foggy returned to Matt's side and drew out his phone, tapping out a quick apology to Karen. He didn't expect a reply so he pocketed the phone. The noodles he'd brought for their dinner and temporarily abandoned were now luke warm, but Foggy pulled out a fork anyway, just happy enough that it was a food he could eat single handed. Fork in one hand and Matt’s in the other, he munched his way though the box, silently considering Matt’s post-seizure disorientation. It was unusual for him to be so flighty. Something had spooked Matt after the seizure - enough to cause a disproportionate panic.

When Matt woke later that evening, he announced that he was leaving the next morning no matter what.

“Shouldn't you wait until you speak to your doctor?”

Matt was playing with his box of cold noodles, digging around with a fork, but barely eating.

“This place is making me stressed, Foggy. I-I don't trust all of the nurses.”

“Did something happen?”

“Not specifically. I can't explain it. I guess not everyone treats blind adults with dignity and respect.”

“Oh.” It dawned on Foggy that Matt was referring to the nurse who’d sneered at his patience.

“You panicked after the seizure. Do you remember?”

Matt thought for a moment. “I was scared. One of of the nurses – I was scared. I thought I'd been restrained.”

“You weren't.”

Matt skewered a piece of broccoli and gnawed on the florets, not really wanting to think about it.

“I can stay tonight if you feel unsafe.”

“Don't be silly,” Matt replied. “I'll be fine. Tomorrow morning I'm out of here though.”

“One other thing,” Foggy said cautiously, “do you remember talking to Karen?”

“When?”

“This evening – before the seizure.”

“Uh, no… I wish I did.”

Foggy sat back in the chair with a sigh. “Yeah, me too.”
Fortunately, Doctor Millet supported Matt’s discharge the following day. Unlike the previous two, this last seizure had been short, and the doctor was confident Matt could handle them on his own. Elsa was still on leave so he left her cat and the rest of the origami at the nurses station (they wanted to string them up like Christmas ornaments), and he and Foggy caught a cab home.

Matt walked in and immediately tilted his head. “What is it?” Foggy said, worried.

“You've made your room.”

Foggy sighed in relief. “Oh, from your reaction I thought we had an intruder. Yes, dad helped me lug a couple of bookshelves up here, as well as my wardrobe.” Foggy watched nervously as Matt ran his hand over the ‘wall’ of furniture. “Is it okay?”

Matt turned around and grinned. “Yes. I can't believe you did all this over the weekend. I would have helped.”

“It's fine. I still have a few last things at my apartment if you really want to help.”

“Of course,” Matt said eagerly. “Anything I can do.”

The truth was that Foggy had left a couple of things at his place to make it seem less overwhelming for Matt – that he hadn't just returned to find Foggy had taken over his entire apartment. If Matt could help, then at least he'd feel more involved in the process. So far, so good.

“Okay eager beaver, maybe we’ll get them tomorrow after work.” Foggy edged towards the door. “I'm off to the office,” he said in a forced casual tone, anticipating an argument.

“Fog-”

“No, we’ve talked about this,” Foggy said quickly. “You're returning to work tomorrow.”

“I know. I was just going to wish you a good day,” Matt said cheekily.

“Oh, okay. Yes, thanks… you too.” And with that, he slipped quickly out the door.

In truth, Foggy knew that Matt could easily have come into work – even if he'd probably have spent the day sleeping on the couch. However, Foggy wanted to talk to Karen in person before Matt turned up. Matt still had no recollection of Karen’s visit and Foggy hadn't told him that Karen was upset. There was something odd going on between them and Foggy was determined to fix it.

Chapter End Notes

I never thought I'd ever write something as long as my thesis ever again. But hey, this story has just broken my word count record and I'm only about half way through. Crazy times.
Matt was cooking dinner when Foggy returned from work with a cheery “honey I'm home.” Matt laughed. Showing off, he casually tossed the spiky end of the eggplant into the trash from the other side of the room.

“You’re feeling better then?”

“You have no idea,” Matt said, tossing the sliced eggplant into a pan. “Even with the newborn across the road, it’s a luxury to be home. How was work?”

“We had Candy in today. She helped out with the abusive neighbour case – Laura O’Hern. Um-”

Matt froze. “What?”

“I think she should take the lead on the case,” Foggy said tentatively.

Matt’s expression changed immediately. “No! You said she was only going to do things like discovery and document review.”

“I know, I know,” Foggy said, looking warily at the wooden spoon Matt was angrily waving. “As I've said before, she's not a replacement for you. But she's really good at her job and we should use that expertise. More importantly, Laura seems to be more comfortable with Candy than me… I think because she's a woman.”

Matt silently added some spice to the frypan, stirring furiously. Foggy bit his lip. This was never going to be easy, but he thought the gender thing would at least convince Matt.

“You promised you'd consult with me,” Matt eventually said.

“And I am. I haven't asked her to lead the case yet. I'm asking you if we can ask her.”

“It sounds like you've already made up your mind,” Matt countered.

Foggy wordlessly dumped his laptop on the dining table and disappeared into the bathroom. He was getting sick of these arguments and Matt’s stubbornness. Foggy knew if he didn't remove himself from the room for a moment he was going to say something he'd regret. He splashed his face in the sink, stalling. Eventually, he took a deep breath, dried his face and re-entered the kitchen. Matt’s lips were pursed and he was stirring the pan as if it were some kind of battle.

“Did you speak to Karen?” Matt eventually asked.

“Karen – what do you mean?”

“You were quizzing me about our alleged discussion in hospital and then you acted all cagey when I said I couldn’t recall what happened. But I remember there was something up with her now. She was upset. You knew and you didn’t tell me.”

Foggy was silent for a moment before he said, “yes, I knew she was upset, and yes, I spoke to her.”

“And?”

“I don't know why she was upset. She wouldn't tell me.” Foggy had not only asked Karen about her
visit but had also told her that Matt couldn't recollect their conversation. She told Foggy bluntly that it was over and done with, “so leave it.”

Foggy grimaced in anticipation as he said, “you really can't remember?” Matt tapped the wooden spoon on the edge of the pan with more force than necessary and Foggy took the hint. “Hey, can I help with dinner? You must be tired.”

“I'm fine, thanks,” Matt said stiffly. He continued the dinner preparation in silence, ultimately dishing up two bowls of spaghetti with eggplant that would have been more delicious if not for the tension in the room.

The next morning, Foggy shook Matt awake. “Matt, you wanna come to work today?”

“Ngh… Foggy,” Matt mumbled before registering where he was (not the hospital). “Yes, yes, of course.” He rolled sideways off the bed and stumbled into the bathroom, narrowly avoiding a collision with the doorframe.

“You okay, buddy?” Foggy called after him.

“Yeah, I'm good,” Matt called back.

Matt seemed more chipper after a shower. However, he winced a little as he adjusted his tie, his sore muscles protesting at the movement. He could hear Foggy’s breath hitch and then calm as Matt gave him a small reassuring smile. “It'll be good to be back,” Matt said. “Ready?”

As they walked to work, Foggy told Matt about the new set up at work. “Candy’s working in the conference room for now. We’ll only be using her to cover you, so there's no point setting up anything more permanent just yet. She's going to do some work from home too – the stuff where confidentiality isn’t as much of an issue. This week I've asked her to do five days - as we agreed - but I was thinking we could have her in two days a week ongoing. I did the maths: you have two or three seizures a week and you'll miss about one to one and a half days with each one. I figure two days covers a substantial part of your workload without breaking the bank…”

Matt didn't interrupt. He nodded occasionally, taking in the changes. By the time they arrived at work, he was all caught up. Candy was already there, tapping away at her laptop in the conference room. She gave Matt a massive smile when he arrived, forgetting he couldn't see it. He held out his hand with a grin, and Foggy huffed in amusement at his usual display of charm. Karen hung back as if shy, but Matt warmly greeted her as well. Surprised, she stuttered slightly as she returned the greeting. Much to both Foggy and Matt’s relief, she appeared more relieved than hostile.

The four of them found their groove fairly quickly. Candy seemed a natural fit for Nelson & Murdock and by lunchtime, Matt wondered why he'd made such a fuss about Foggy’s suggestion to have her lead the domestic violence case. Matt swallowed his pride and told Foggy as much, earning him a supportive squeeze.

The afternoon wasn't quite as easy. They'd finally tracked down all of the owners of the properties Elektra had requested and while Foggy wanted to bring her in to discuss it in person, Matt didn't want Elektra anywhere near the office and his friends and colleagues.
“Why, Matt?” Foggy demanded.

As per usual, Matt replied, “I told you, she's dangerous.”

Foggy rolled his eyes. “She hired our firm. Our firm. I don't like the woman, but she's not going to
ninja us into oblivion if she comes into the office.”

“Ninja isn't a – ergh, forget it.” Matt clenched his hands briefly then stretched them out, releasing
the tension. He thought for a moment. “Fine. But only if I'm here.”

“Of course,” Foggy said, immediately asking Karen to arrange the appointment before Matt could
change his mind.

An hour later, Matt and Foggy were presenting their findings to Elektra in Matt’s office. She sat
there silently, hands clasped, until Foggy had finished running through the ownership details.
When they finished, she said “I'd like you to arrange the purchase of the Skinner property.”

The two lawyers sat stunned for a good ten seconds before Foggy stuttered, “you want to buy an
entire apartment block?”

“Yes,” she said slowly as if Foggy were hard of hearing.

“Why?” Matt said.

“It's a good investment. Hell’s Kitchen is going cheap. I would have thought you'd be more
interested in the commission than my reasons for purchase.”

Matt said, “we don't do conveyancing. We’re defence lawyers.”

Foggy quickly answered, “I think what Matt is trying to say is we don't have much experience in
real estate but we've got the basic theoretical knowledge and we’re quick learners.” He kicked Matt
sharply in the shin just to emphasise the point. Matt didn't even flinch.

“See?” Elektra said to Matt. “One of you is a savvy businessman.”

Matt opened his mouth to object, but thought better of it and closed it again. Foggy had just moved
into his one bedroom apartment in order to pay someone to cover for Matt. How could he argue
against the money now.

He tried a different tack. “And what if Eileen Skinner doesn't want to sell?”

“She doesn't,” Elektra said with a smile. “But that's where my two charming lawyers come in. You
might not have experience in conveyancing or property negotiation, but you're both from Hell’s
Kitchen. That gives you a certain street cred, to use a loathsome phrase.” Matt rolled his eyes at
Elektra’s posing, but she wasn't done yet. “Matthew, you only need to put on that natural charm of
yours and you'll be cashing that check in no time.”

Foggy couldn't hold back his smile at that last comment, particularly after seeing Matt’s livid face.
She was playing them and Matt hated it. Still, investment seemed like a plausible explanation for
purchasing property in Hell’s Kitchen while it was still recovering from the alien incident. It was
the reason they'd got both their office and apartments so cheap (relative to New York City, that is).

“Do you have enough to finance it?” Foggy said, and Elektra gave him a dirty look.

“It's a good question,” Matt chimed in. “I thought all your money was tied up with Roxxon.”
“It was,” Elektra said nonchalantly. “I sold my shares.”

When the meeting finally wrapped up and Elektra had left, Matt pulled Foggy back into his office.
“Why did you say we'd do it?”

“Like you haven't taken a case before without consultation,” Foggy returned.

“I apologised for that. Besides, you understand why I did that now, don't you? It lead me to Fisk.”

Foggy leaned forward against the table. “Matt, it's good money. Despite your paranoia, I really don't think she's doing it for nefarious reasons.”

“You don't know her like I do,” Matt muttered.

“I don't, but I know enough to understand your cynicism. I also know that you've been seeing her quite often lately so you mustn't hate her that much. In fact, I think you still might like her. As in like-”

“Foggy, stop.”

Foggy stood up and made for the door. “That's cool. I'm just saying don't dismiss it before you think about it.”

“Your mantra,” Matt muttered, tipping back his head so that it rested against the back of the chair.

“You tired?” Foggy asked, pleased to be able to change the topic.

“Yeah. I might finish up soon.” He felt his watch. “It's five already.”

“Yep. Go home,” Foggy said.

Matt rubbed his eyes behind his glasses. “If you don't mind. Don't stay too late though.”

“I won't,” Foggy assured him, pleased that Matt wasn’t going to let guilt override his health this time.

Matt had every intention of going home. He was exhausted and still felt a bit brain dead. He waved down a cab, but just as he was about to give the driver his home address, he changed his mind and gave him Elektra’s instead. He might be tired, but his physical needs were momentarily overridden by the need to discover Elektra’s true intentions.

“I was expecting you,” Elektra said as she opened the door.

“Of course you were.” Matt walked straight past her before turning around. “What do you want with the property?”

“I told you – it's a good investment.”

“I have no doubt it is,” Matt replied, “but that's not the only reason.”

“You're right. Sit down. Have an olive.” She gestured to a bowl on the coffee table. “I'll fetch you a drink.”

“I'm not here for a drink, Elektra,” he said crossly. “I-I just want to know what you're involving my
firm and my friends in.”

She pushed a glass of whiskey into his hand. He refused to hold it so she let go. Rather than let it smash at his feet, Matt caught it. Elektra smirked. “You do want a drink after all.”

Matt sniffed the whiskey. It was smoky and rich. He'd smelled something similar at the fancy faculty parties he and Foggy had snuck into as ambitious law students, and again at a few of Landman and Zack’s corporate parties. It was not the kind of drink offered to students and interns.

“It’s a twenty-six-year-old Edradour peated whiskey,” Elektra purred. “I thought you'd appreciate something a bit different.”

Matt placed the glass on the table and stood up straight. “Tell me why you're buying that property.”

“That building I took you to before your recent … incident”

“The empty one,” Matt confirmed.

“Not usually empty, but yes, that night it was empty. It's the centre of a geographic pattern in Hell's Kitchen. The Hand have been buying up properties that cover the area. One of them – the Skinner property – is not yet in their hands.” Elektra went through the various properties she’d had Nelson & Murdock investigate, tracing almost all of them to the Hand via Roxxon and/or the Yakuza.

Matt listened mostly in silence. He was puzzled by the massive purchases. “What’s their end game?” he said.

“I don't know yet, but I do know I can block the Hand from completing the pattern if I purchase the Skinner property. Stick says-”

“Stick? You're doing this for Stick?!”

“Not just for Stick. If the Hand gets their way, Hell’s Kitchen won't exist anymore. It's not just for Stick,” she repeated pointedly.

Matt had trouble swallowing Elektra’s tale, even though as far as he could tell, she wasn't lying. What had initially been rationalised as an investment property, was now revealed as a vital play in the fight against the Hand. Elektra was talking about saving Hell’s Kitchen from an ancient foe, but he knew her. Elektra had never displayed any interest in fighting for the greater good. She wasn’t good.

“You make it sound like you're doing some public service.” He added bluntly, “what's in it for you?”

“Not everything I do is for purely selfish reasons, Matthew. I wish you'd understand that.” She took a sip of her own drink and noisily returned it to the bench. “Come out with me. I'll show you the pattern. I'll show you what's really going on in your beloved city.”

“I can't.” Matt whispered.

“You can. I'll be there...” she hesitated, “to pick you up – if need be.”

“It’s-” Matt stopped. He was about to make an excuse. He was unfit; he was weak; he could have a seizure at any time; his senses weren't quite as acute as they were pre-epilepsy, even though the change in medication had made a massive difference… They were all lazy excuses. What's more,
he desperately wanted to go out again, and Elektra was the only one who could possibly accompany him. But it was a bad idea. He had to resist the temptation.

“I-I'll be in touch.” Matt strode across the room and muttered a goodbye as he slipped out the door.

He was just exiting the building when Foggy called.

“Hey, is everything okay? I just got home to an empty apartment.”

“Yeah, sorry Foggy. I-I just took a detour to get some dinner.”

“Oh, what did you get?”

Matt sniffed the air. “Uh, burritos.”

“It's taken you over an hour to get burritos?”

“They're good ones,” Matt said nervously. He hoped they were good ones.

“Cool. I look forward to it.”

Matt hung up and quickly followed his nose to the nearby burrito outlet. He wrinkled his nose as he got closer. “Two burritos please,” he said, quickly adding, “vegetarian.” The meat smelled suspicious, but he didn’t have the time or energy to find an alternative. He'd take the risk. Foggy wasn't as picky so maybe he wouldn't notice the slight tang of sour lettuce. Why did he respond with burritos of all things?

Foggy unwrapped the soggy burritos at the kitchen table. “Uh, where did you say you read about this place again?”


Foggy pulled open the tortilla to get a better look at the contents. “Yeah but what site?”

Matt hesitated. “I don't know - can't remember.”

“And you're sure you got the address right?”

“Yes, why? Is there something wrong with them?”

“No,” Foggy said, although his tone said otherwise. “It's just that – are you sure?”

“They do smell a bit weird,” Matt finally admitted. “I guess I could have got confused.”

Foggy sniffed the burrito and took a tentative bite. “You don't have to eat it,” Matt said, screwing his nose up slightly as he raised his own burrito to his mouth. Matt was about to take a bite – a sacrificial move if ever there was one - when Foggy said, “Matt don't. I’m sorry, but not even I can eat this. I'll make something.”

Matt looked utterly relieved and went straight to the bin to toss the offending object. “Sorry, Foggy. I don't know what I was thinking.”

“Never trust the internet, Matt. We'll look for a better burrito place on the weekend.”
“Yeah, good plan,” Matt said eagerly.

“How do you feel about a Spanish Omelette?” Foggy said, pulling a carton of eggs from the fridge.

“I love – hang on, where did you learn to make a Spanish Omelette?”

“The internet,” Foggy said smugly.

“What did you just say about trusting-”

“I know that face,” Foggy said in mock offence. “You think I can't do it.”

“Of course not. I'm so proud my pupil has branched out.”

“But you wanted to teach me yourself?”

A smile broke through on Matt’s face. “Yeah, kinda.”

“Never fear, you can sit there and yell at me if I break shell into the bowl or whatever.”


Amused, Foggy quickly switched the bottles of oil. He knew Matt would take the bait. If Foggy had to live with an anal-rettentive control freak, then he at least deserved to have the occasional laugh.
By Friday, Candy had been thoroughly introduced to Nelson & Murdock’s systems and nuances, including one of Matt’s seizures on Thursday afternoon. Much to Matt’s relief, he was alone in his office at the time. Despite Foggy’s insistence that there was nothing to be embarrassed about, Matt was still self-conscious about seizing in front of others, particularly in front of his new employee. It meant that when Karen alerted Foggy to the tell-tale sounds of Matt seizing and Candy offered to help, Foggy felt compelled to both thank and apologise to her as he hurriedly closed the door to Matt’s office behind him. He sat with Matt while he recovered and then helped him to the couch, closing the internal blinds for privacy and leaving the door ajar just in case. Of course, Candy knew about Matt’s seizures – it was the reason she’d been employed after all - so Foggy ducked his head into her makeshift office afterwards to let her know what had happened and reassure her that Matt would be okay.

Candy also observed Matt’s dazed demeanour on Friday – another thing Foggy had warned her about. Even with the new medication, the day after each seizure was still marked by fatigue and a significant drop in Matt’s concentration levels. Matt still insisted on coming to work. He told himself it was about the principle, but it was more because he tended to get bored and/or swamped by negative thoughts if he stayed home. He spent much of Friday morning sitting at his desk in a motionless haze. Foggy had suggested he read up on the owner of Elektra’s desired real estate acquisition, but by lunchtime Matt realised that he'd barely made it past the first page, and even then, he hadn't absorbed any of it.

Foggy spotted Matt’s pained face and suggested they leave the office for lunch – just the two of them. “I feel like I’m just going through the motions,” Matt complained to Foggy while they waited for their noodle soup to arrive.

“It may seem like that,” Foggy said, “but you're still here. You're trying.”

Matt unconsciously started folding the napkin into a swan. “Matt,” Foggy said softly, trying to get his attention. “We will also know you're trying if you stay home the day after a seizure. It’s not your fault.”

Matt shaped the swan’s long neck then violently scrunched the napkin into a ball. Foggy cringed.

“Karen seems awfully quiet,” Matt said, keen to change the topic.

“Yeah, I think she's sorting a few personal things out.”

Matt picked up the napkin again and smoothed it out on the table. “Has she – has she mentioned uh, the mask?”

“No, not since before you went to hospital. But you should still tell her Matt.”

“I wish I knew what made her so upset at the hospital,” Matt said, ripping a corner off the napkin and shredding it into tiny flakes. “I just can't remember.”

“Could you have told her about the mask?”

“I don't think so. It was never my intention. Someone could overhear in the hospital and I-I don't
think I'd risk it.”

“So…”

“I'll do it tonight. I'll invite her round for dinner – if that's okay, Fog.”

“Yeah, of course,” Foggy said, relieved that Matt had finally committed. “I can make another Spanish Omelette if you want.”

“Maybe I'll cook something that hints at my abilities. I'll ease her in slowly.”

“Whatever you want, man. I'm sure it'll be delicious.”

Karen arrived with two bottles of wine, one of which was alcohol free to accommodate Matt’s forced abstinence. Foggy was about to make a joke along the lines of ‘what's the point?’ but Matt looked so happy that Foggy held his tongue.

Matt was more alert now than he'd been that morning – enough to tackle a recipe that was more complex than Foggy thought necessary. He’d tried to talk Matt into making something simpler, but it was probably just as much about the pre-reveal distraction as demonstrating his abilities to Karen. Wine in hand, Karen watched silently as Matt tossed one pan while adding spices to another. She leaned against the kitchen bench, not daring to interrupt the performance but unable to look away.

Foggy groaned with pleasure at the first bite. “Matt, you've outdone yourself.”

“Yeah, it's incredible,” Karen said, finally starting to relax thanks to the two glasses of pre-dinner wine. “Where did you learn to cook like that?”

Matt just smiled and took a nervous sip of his non-alcoholic wine. It wasn't as bad as he'd expected, although it wasn't something he'd go out of his way to purchase for himself.

Matt could sense Foggy getting increasingly tense throughout dinner. He knew why. The whole point of this dinner was to tell Karen about Daredevil, but Matt was stalling. When Matt made to clear the table, Foggy had had enough. “I'll do it,” Foggy said, leaping up before Matt could protest. “You made dinner so it's only fair that I clean up, remember?”

“I'll help,” Karen offered, scraping back her chair.

“No.” Foggy’s tone was such that Karen immediately sat back down. “You two sit and talk amongst yourselves.”

Matt shifted uncomfortably in his chair, twirling his glass between his fingers.

“So…” Karen started, but she had nothing else to say. This had to be about Monday night at the hospital, she thought. Foggy had bugged her about why she was upset over and over. Perhaps this was his attempt to mend whatever rift had formed between them. It was fair enough, but these things couldn't be forced.

“So…” Matt echoed. He swallowed. Here goes… “you know how you noticed Daredevil disappeared the day before I wound up in hospital that first time?”

“Yes,” Karen said slowly, suspiciously.
“Well…” Matt stopped.

“Oh for fucks sake, Matt,” Foggy whispered from the kitchen at a volume audible only to Matt. “Get on with it.”

“I'm Daredevil,” Matt finished.

There was a silence. Foggy and Matt held their breath, waiting for Karen’s reaction. Eventually she started laughing. “Good one, guys.” She looked over at Foggy who was standing there with his mouth open. Matt was doing his best to keep his face expressionless, but he too looked surprised and a little hurt. Slowly and deliberately, he took his glasses off as a way of begging Karen to listen.

“Oh, you're serious,” she said, putting her hand over her mouth. The dates certainly matched. Matt’s injuries had long been suspicious, as were his mysterious absences and his tendency to explain his radio silences with “I switched off my phone”. She'd never bought Foggy’s line about Matt being an alcoholic, but had never come up with any other explanation for Matt’s erratic behaviour.

After a few minutes, Matt said, “uh, Karen, do you have any-”

“Give me a moment,” she cut in.

“Okay,” Matt said quietly, hesitantly.

After a few minutes she said, “but you're blind.”

The comment was at least predictable. Matt delivered his pre-prepared response, “yes I’m blind, but the chemicals that took my sight enhanced my other senses. I can’t see with my eyes, but I was given what I call a ‘radar sense’… for want of a better word. I can sense objects and movement 360 degrees around me, so in a way it’s better than sight - for some things anyway.”

“He still can’t play video games,” Foggy interrupted.

“Thanks, Foggy,” Matt said, rolling his eyes. His preparation hadn’t taken into account Foggy’s tendency to improvise.

Karen removed her hand from her mouth and said shakily, “you saved my life. That’s how the man in the mask knew I was in danger – how he knew – you knew – about the USB stick. It was you. You fought off a guy with a knife even after you fell out the window – you fell and got back up and just kept going.”

“Yeah, he’s a bit of an idiot like that,” Foggy chimed in.

Matt hissed a frustrated, “Foggy!”

Foggy smirked, but shut up.

“I don’t understand how you can fight like that,” Karen continued. “Where, how-”

“I was taught as a child.”

“Like in Kung Fu,” Foggy interrupted again. “A blind old man taught him the ancient ways of martial arts.”

Karen giggled nervously. “No, you can't be – I can't…”
“Matt, show her,” Foggy urged.

“Show her what?” Matt replied. In a flash, Foggy lobbed a ceramic mug hard at the back of Matt’s head, who immediately caught it. Karen gasped, putting her hand back over her mouth.

“That’s a dangerous game, Foggy,” Matt said crossly. “You know my senses aren’t quite up to scratch at the moment.”

Foggy ignored him. “Do one of your flippy things.”

“I’m a bit unfit,” Matt said. “I’ll probably fall flat on my face.”

“He’s lying,” Foggy stage whispered. “Oh, and he can tell when we’re lying so watch out.”

“You can what?” Karen returned.

“I can hear heartbeats, and sense fear and nervousness through smell. I can also read the level of moisture on people’s skin,” Matt explained. He’d learned from both Foggy and Claire that this news – especially the heartbeat revelation - didn't exactly go down well. He listened intently, anticipating the negative reaction.

“This – this is a lot to take in.”

“I know. But do you believe me?”

Karen pinched the bridge of her nose. She didn't know what to think. If Matt could tell when she was lying then there really wasn’t much point in saying ‘yes’.

“Ooh ooh, Matt, you show her your cable tie trick,” Foggy said excitedly. He turned to Karen, who was looking utterly overwhelmed. “Matt can escape cable ties in under twenty seconds – they’re those things that bind people’s wrists behind their backs – actually, they’re not usually used for humans, but-”

“Fog, I don’t think Karen’s interested in cable ties. I didn’t think you were either. I quote: ‘that’s great Matt, but could you read this document instead please’.”

“Look, the timing was crappy, but in retrospect the performance was pretty impressive. It might have been less annoying if you didn’t need your hands to read.” Foggy thought for a moment. “Okay, what about the costume? Show her your costume.”

“It's not a costume, Foggy,” Matt snapped. “We've gone over this.”

Karen cracked a smile at their oddly domestic bickering.

Foggy made for the cupboard behind his nook. He'd unofficially become keeper of the Daredevil costume (because really, how else do you describe a kitsch outfit with horns) since taking over that section of Matt’s apartment. Foggy slowly moved his chest of drawers away from the door, giving Matt time to protest, but Matt just sat there waiting, still listening to Karen’s bodily reaction.

As Foggy opened the cupboard door, he and Matt both went “phwor” at once as the strong smell of mould drifted out. “What the hell?” Foggy said, holding his nose. Matt jumped up and pushed Foggy away, opening up the trunk.

Matt went to touch the costume, but Foggy said, “no, don’t. It looks as bad as it smells.” Matt froze. “It’s green,” Foggy said in disgust. “That night you got hit in the head - did you put it away sweaty
“And damp?”

“Uh, I don't remember anything from that night. I didn’t get home from hospital for two weeks and then you were here and then… I guess I never thought to check.”

“Couldn't you smell it though with your bloodhound nose?”

Matt blushed. “I thought it might have been something of yours,” he said, embarrassed.

“Maaatt,” Foggy moaned.

“Don’t you remember in college – we couldn’t find the source of the smell and then on the last day we found your-”

“Matt!”

Karen suppressed a laugh and joined them at the chest. “It definitely needs a wash. Do you take it to the dry cleaners or is it a hand wash only kind of material?”

“Ha ha,” Matt said, but Foggy snorted and gave Karen a high-five. It was enough to break the ice and all three of them could feel the mood in the apartment lift. Karen suddenly wrapped her arms around a surprised Matt and gave him a squeeze. “Thank you,” she said into his chest.

“For what?”

“For telling me – for trusting me… for saving my life.”

“There you go,” Foggy said, “it wasn't so hard in the end.”

“What do you mean?” asked Karen, pulling away.

“Foggy found out in a less than desirable way.”

“The car accident?” Karen quickly deduced.

Foggy nodded. “He can you tell when you nod by the way,” he added.

“Can he now…” Karen smiled. “Matt, can you do a flip for me. Please?”

“Yeah, Matt. Ninja 360-degree flip. Do it.”

“I already told you - I'm tired and unfit and I've got a headache.”

“Daredevil doesn't make excuses,” Foggy taunted.

“Yeah, well right now I'm just plain old Matt Murdock.”

“Excuses,” Foggy said witheringly, wandering off to the bathroom.

Karen whispered conspiratorially, “you have to tell me, when Foggy says that you always know when a girl is – in his words – ‘hot’, uh, how do you do that?”

Matt laughed. “It's simple. I listen to Foggy’s heartbeat. I can tell when he thinks a woman is good looking. He thinks it comes directly from me, but it's his judgement I'm reading.”

“Huh.”
“It takes all the mystery out of it, sorry.”

Foggy wandered back in, looking scrappy and tired with his shirt now untucked. “Do I have permission to dump your green costume – oh, sorry, clothes in the sink? I can feel the mould invading now.”

Matt stole the rubber gloves from the sink and gingerly picked up the mouldy suit as if it were a bomb. He disappeared into the bathroom without a word.

Karen gushed, “Foggy, I still can't really believe-”

“ Heads up, he can hear you,” Foggy replied in a stage whisper. “Don't say anything incriminating.”

“Shit,” Karen said, “you mean he can hear conversations from other rooms?”

“Other city blocks,” Foggy said. “He's like a super spy.”

“Am not,” Matt called from the bathroom.

Foggy shrugged his shoulders at Karen as if to say ‘see’?

Once Matt had hung up his (remedially) cleaned suit to dry in the shower, he joined the two snickering friends in the living room. “What?” he asked, anxious to share in the joke.

“Nothing,” Foggy said, suppressing a laugh. He scrunched up the piece of paper he and Karen had been writing on and threw the pen at Matt, who caught it with a frown.

Karen picked up the television remote and tossed it at the side of Matt’s head just as Foggy yelled “no, not my remote!” Matt effortlessly caught it and threw a soft underhand back at Foggy, who fumbled slightly but thankfully managed to hold onto it.

“My precious,” Foggy cooed, nursing the remote close to his chest.

Karen cleared her throat. “So why pretend you're blind if you can do all this stuff?”

“I'm not pretending,” Matt said stiffly. “I am blind.”

“He can't play computer games,” Foggy repeated.

“Or read things like computer screens or facial expressions,” Matt continued. “I can’t see colours or street signs. I’m still blind. I just have alternative ways of reading the world around me.” He paused, head down. “Unfortunately, my senses have been compromised lately by the epilepsy and the medication, which has made things a bit difficult.”

“They're better though on these new meds though, aren’t you? You said they don't make you as fuzzy.”

“Yeah. It’s better, but I’m not back to my optimum self.”

“That must be tough,” Karen said.

Matt was touched by her sincerity. “Yeah, it is.” He flopped down on the couch and both Fogy and Karen could see the exhaustion in his movements.

“I-I might head off,” Karen said. “You must be tired.”
“Unfortunately,” Matt said, stifling a yawn.

“It’s been – illuminating.” Karen continued. “Thank you, Matt, Foggy, for trusting me with this.”

As she closed the door behind her, Foggy held out a fist. “Come on, buddy. Give me a bump.”
Matt smiled and met Foggy’s hand. “You did it.”

“And it went surprisingly well,” Matt said, a little overwhelmed.

Foggy joined Matt on the couch and clasped his hand – a gesture usually reserved for times when Matt was sick or distressed. “Remember Stevenson? ‘We are all travellers in the wilderness of this world, and the best we can find in our travels is an honest friend.’ The truth is a good thing, Matt. It takes practice, but it’s worth it.”

Chapter End Notes

I've always imagined Foggy would be quite proud and impressed by Matt's special skills and abilities, even if he doesn't like the application of them as Daredevil (because of the risk to Matt, as well as the way the activities come at the expense of their law firm).
Matt was midway through cooking a lazy Saturday breakfast of eggs, spinach and halloumi when he hissed, “Foggy, you might want to put some pants on.”

“Why?” Foggy asked distractedly, still staring at his phone.

“Because Karen is walking up the stairs.”

Foggy looked up from his phone and saw Matt reach for his glasses. Foggy sighed. If the glasses were coming out, then Matt was probably serious about Karen.

“It’s crazy that you know that – I’m still bowled over by your hearing.” Foggy ambled over to his nook in search for clean pants. He yelled as an afterthought, “oh, and it’s super creepy that you know I’m not wearing pants by the way.”

“Why? If I weren’t blind it wouldn’t be creepy, so why is it creepy because I can’t see?”

“Seriously, buddy, tell me how you know. Can you see my skin on fire with your crazy radar sense?”

“No, I can hear the sound of your skin against my couch. If your legs were covered in fabric, it would make a different sound. Even you could tell the difference between skin and fabric against a leather couch, I’m sure.”

“So does that mean-”

“That I knew you liked to study in just your tighty whities at college? Yes.”

“Why didn’t you say anything?”

Matt shrugged. “I guess I was just a bit jealous. You seemed so happy, so unconcerned.”

“Sorry.”

“No need. Nudity doesn’t faze me.”

Foggy was just buttoning up his pants when there was a knock at the door. As Matt had predicted, it was Karen. “Hey, sorry for dropping in unannounced. I was in the area, and thought maybe you’d like to do the echo thing?” She said it a little hesitantly, a little shyly.

Matt raised his eyebrows. “Echo thing?”

Foggy explained, “last night, while you were washing your costume-” he coughed theatrically and gave Karen a wink, “sorry, I mean your suit - I might have told her about your echolocation lessons and asked her to join me in my quest to night battle the carrot eaters.”

“Long story,” Matt said to Karen, who was looking between them with a bemused expression.

She looked Foggy up and down. “Are you going out?”
“No. Why do you say that?”

“You’re wearing your good pants.”

Matt snorted as he flipped an egg into a plate, narrowly missing the edge. “Don't make me laugh while I'm throwing food,” he said with a smirk.

“You’re feeling better today then?” Karen asked, leaning against the counter to watch Matt’s food preparation performance.

“Much. The day after the day after seems to be the best I get at the moment.” Matt picked up a fresh egg. “Have you had breakfast?”

Karen shook her head. “Did you get that?”

“Mmm yes – you shook your head. Don’t always assume though.” He held up the egg again. “Would you like one?”

“If it’s anything like last night’s cooking, then sure.”

Matt grinned and expertly cracked the egg into the frypan, throwing the shell backhand into the trash. He knew he was showing off, but he didn’t care.

“Now that I don’t have to uncover what happened to Daredevil, I was reading up on epilepsy treatment last night. Apparently weed is known to help.”

“I’ve read that too,” Foggy said.

Matt looked uncomfortable. “I don’t think it’s a good idea. I’m quite sensitive to these things.”

“He never even tried it at college,” Foggy told Karen.

“Actually, I kind of did,” Matt said with a wicked grin. “There was a time you smoked it in our dorm room. It really lingers.”

“Oh shit. You knew about that?”

Matt raised his eyebrows.

“Of course you did,” Foggy self-corrected. “Hang on, is that why you giggled all night?”

“Possibly,” Matt said.

“Sorry, buddy. I had no idea.”

“So if you were to try it, probably don’t smoke it at home,” Karen said.

Foggy looked at Matt. “What do you think, Matt? Would you be willing to try it?”

Matt shook his head. “I hate having seizures, but I suspect the effects of weed won’t be all that pleasant either with my senses and all. That was a weird night.”

“Oh well, let me know if you change your mind,” Karen said. “I have people who can hook us up.”

“Karen Page,” Foggy admonished. “Hook us up? I didn’t realise you were so badass.”

Karen laughed. “I’m not, but weed isn’t exactly hard to find in this city.”
Matt noted a change in her heartrate, but he didn’t know where to pinpoint the lie. “I don’t want to know,” he said, placing the breakfast plates on the table and wandering back to the now boiled kettle. “Anyone want some tea? I have a range of other herbals. Personally, I’m going to have a chamomile…”

That night, after a successful hunt for New York’s finest burrito (within walking distance of Hell’s Kitchen, that is), Foggy returned to his obsession of finding activities to fill the gaps left when Matt had to abandon his alter ego. From the discussion with Karen the previous night, it was obvious that while Matt hadn't mentioned Daredevil much lately, he was still missing it.

As soon as they got home, Foggy said, “did you ask Elektra about sparring?”

“No,” Matt said in a tone that clearly meant ‘leave it’.

“Okay, okay,” Foggy said, hands up in surrender.

Matt flicked the kettle on to boil and started sorting through his growing collection of tea. In the absence of alcohol, Matt had become obsessed with tea. He sniffed a small yellow container and put a pinch into a small tea strainer that Foggy had bought for him.

Foggy cleared his throat, unwilling to give up. “What about volunteering somewhere? Have you given that more thought?”

“Actually, I have - kinda. Father Lantom wants me to talk to a girl at church who’s blind. He thinks I can help. I’m meeting her tomorrow after mass.”

“That's great.” He looked at Matt’s pained face. “Isn't it?”

“I don’t think I'd be a suitable mentor.”

“Why not? You're kind, you like kids, you're smart…”

Matt spluttered, “my mentor – what if I end up like him?”

“Stick? You're not going to be training her in martial arts, are you?”

“Of course not.”

“You had another mentor, didn’t you? The woman who taught you origami and fed you ham sandwiches.”

“I guess.” Matt always discounted her influence. Stick’s training had affected his life and his way of thinking so significantly that he barely considered the things she taught her – practical things like handling money, navigating with a cane, preparing basic meals. They weren’t as exciting as Stick’s lessons, but they were invaluable nonetheless.

“Lantom wouldn’t have suggested you if he didn’t think you could help.”

“Father Lantom thinks she needs more confidence. Apparently I can show her that it’s possible to be independent, graduate from college and all that. I feel like a cheat though – I have a significant advantage over normal blind people.”
“You’re not cheating, Matt.”

“Okay, maybe cheating is not the right word, but I can't very well tell her she can navigate like I do when it’s probably not possible.”

“Maybe it's a good time to chat to Batman then. He teaches kids echolocation. He could give you tips.”

“You're a bit obsessed with this Batman guy,” Matt teased. “Honestly, I don't know what Father Lantom has in mind. I just know I'm to stay behind-”

“And be subjected to the dry fruitcake of the post-mass community tea,” Foggy said, knowing that Matt feared the small talk that accompanied such events.

Matt sighed. “Yes, that too.”

“You'll be fine. Just charm the socks off them – as you always do.” He stopped. “Hang on, so does that mean we no longer have a Sunday pancake date?”

“I'm afraid not. Not this week anyhow.”

“That's cool, I'll just go alone,” Foggy said with a tone of forced nonchalance. Matt handed him a cup of tea, which Foggy sniffed and recoiled. “What is this?”


“Matt, no. How can you- ergh. Take it.” He thrust the mug back at Matt, who took it with a smile. “You’re a strange man, Matthew Murdock.”

As per usual, Matt snuck into church just minutes before the Sunday morning service started. He could hear a few heads turn as he slid onto his usual bench. He awkwardly gathered the wad of printed braille readings and hymns Father Lantom had left for him, nearly dropping his cane in his haste.

A voice whispered, “Matthew’s here,” to which her neighbour responded, “oh that’s a relief. I was so worried.” It was Tabitha. Matt lowered his head, not wanting to be the subject of pity, but his worries were quickly forgotten as the service started. He relaxed into the first hymn. It wasn’t a large church, but the acoustics were exceptional. The chords played by the organ were so perfect that his spine tingled and his entire scalp felt like it was being massaged by the harmonic vibrations.

Matt’s anxieties flooded back as soon as the service ended. He was tempted to duck out the door and return in half an hour or so when the crowd had dispersed a little. However, he’d promised Father Lantom, and disappearing right now would seem disrespectful. No, he could do this. He gripped his cane and stayed seated. Tabitha wasted no time approaching, giving Matt an affectionate pat on the arm as she asked how he was doing. He was quickly surrounded by a number of other parishioners, each of them keen to express their well wishes. He didn’t know who gave him his treasured possum beanie, so he thanked the group for the gifts, earning another round of praise. They led him to the adjoining hall where he was handed multiple cakes and biscuits and a cup of tea that seemed to be refilled over and over before he’d even reached the bottom. He could
hear Father Lantom across the room, chatting to another group of parishioners. The priest kept glancing in Matt’s direction, waiting for the Matthew Murdock fan club to disperse.

Eventually, Father Lantom asked the group if he could borrow Matt, and finally introduced him to the ten-year-old Julia and her mother, Elizabeth. Julia was clinging onto her mother’s arm and Matt was surprised by the lack of cane. He didn’t comment, instead offering his hand to Elizabeth.

It turned out that Julia refused to use a cane, even though she’d been issued one and shown how to use it. She was terrified of going out. She’d leave the house for church, but that was only on her mother’s promise to not let her go. Matt remembered how scared he was immediately after the accident. He would move forward inch by inch, terrified of walking into things. He felt utterly isolated and vulnerable – a feeling compounded by the sensory onslaught that also followed. His father had led him everywhere at first, but he’d always enjoyed his independence so he forced himself to venture out into the void alone. It was a good thing too, because when his father died, he had no choice but to walk alone. The nuns hadn’t the time or patience to lead him everywhere. Even still, it was only when Stick came into the picture that Matt really learned to really embrace his blindness. It was a progression though, Matt reminded himself.

“Julia,” Matt said kindly, “I’d like you to bring the cane to church next week.”

“No,” she whined, “I can’t—”

“Just trust me. Bring it with you next week and we’ll talk about it. I found it scary at first too, but it’s a wonderful tool. Believe me.”

She nodded and her mother said for Matt’s benefit, “Julia just nodded.” He laughed as Julia said, “oops,” realising that habitually, she’d just done to Matt what she was now finding so hard to deal with herself.

“No problem. Humans are so used to communicating with visual cues that most people don’t even know they’re doing it. Don’t stop communicating with your body though. Even if you can’t see them in return, I’ve found people respond better to me when I engage my eye muscles, facial expressions and so on.” He wondered if this was the best information he could give her – after all, it was based on personal experience rather than anything he was taught. Telling her to express herself through visual cues could even make her more self-conscious. He took a deep breath, and said, “but that’s my own experience. I don’t want to dictate a particular way of behaving.”

After they said goodbye, Matt crossed the road to the diner and ordered his usual post-church pancakes. He briefly toyed with the idea of asking Foggy, but he needed time alone to think. Stick had been cruel in his lessons, encouraging violent behaviour and absolute thoughts, but he’d also given Matt confidence and skills. Stick had pushed him beyond his comfort zone again and again, and it had paid off. Was it possible to force this confidence in Julia without resorting to Stick’s methods? He ate slowly, ruminating over his childhood and his own early experience of blindness. It wasn’t pleasant, but he could do this.

"Nooo!" Foggy swore as the distraction of his ringing mobile phone got him an arrow to the heart. Zombies win. He put down the game control.

"Foggy Nelson speaking."
"Hey Foggy, it's Claire."

"Claire? What? Is everything okay?" Things were rarely okay when Claire had cause to call.

"Yeah. I have Matt here at Metro General."

"Shit is he-"

"He'll be fine. He's sleeping. He had a seizure and was brought in by ambulance but he'll be okay to go home when he wakes."

"Oh, uh, should-"

"Are you available to come down and pick him up? I think it would be best if you were around when he wakes up again."

"You didn't restrain him again, did you? He's terrified-"

"No, definitely not. I was there when he first came in. He was disoriented but he calmed down when he heard me."

"Thanks, Claire"

"I arranged for him to be put in a small separate room away from hordes, but-"

"He's still likely to panic," Foggy finished, shrugging on his jacket and scrabbling around for his keys. "I'll get in a cab now."

"Thanks. Just tell the clerk at the front desk - well you know the drill."

"Yeah."

Matt was still asleep when Foggy arrived at the hospital. He was dressed in his church clothes, although someone had removed his tie and jacket, which were stashed in a plastic bag under the bed. Foggy clasped Matt's hands and softly said his name, hoping that if he was even vaguely conscious he'd know for certain he wasn't alone. From what Claire had been able to tell him about the seizure though, it'd be another hour at least before Matt would want to wake up. She assured him that they didn't need the bed just now so it was kinder just to let him have his usual post-seizure sleep before attempting to take him home.

When Matt finally awoke, he was predictably distressed. He'd only just got out of hospital five days earlier and he assumed he was going to have to stay.

"I can't - I need to go," Matt mumbled, rubbing at his face.

"It's okay, Matt. We're going home. We're just waiting for Claire."

Matt started to sit up, and Foggy offered his arm to help him up. He tried to slide off the bed, but Foggy held him back. "Just wait. Claire's coming."

"Claire," Matt repeated.

"Yeah, she'll be here in a minute," Foggy said just as Claire opened the door.

"Hey Matt," she said kindly. "Ready to go?"
Matt mumbled a yes.

"Matt, can you give me your hand? I'll take out the IV and then you can leave."

Matt limply offered his hand, and Foggy held him under the arm when the movement caused him to sway slightly. As Claire was removing the needle she said, "good news. I got a doctor to look at the burn on your hand today and he said it was looking a lot better. You don't need to cover it anymore." Matt nodded, but he didn't look particularly interested.

"Thanks, Claire," Foggy said

"Mmm... thanks Claire," Matt repeated, still looking dazed.

"Pleasure." She binned the needle and snapped off the gloves. "You're good to go now."
Matt slithered off the bed and Foggy held him under the shoulder while Claire fetched the wheelchair. Matt didn't object to the wheelchair this time. He just slumped into it with another mumbled thanks, and Foggy hastily pushed it out the door.

Matt was silent in the cab all the way home, and continued his silence on the couch. Foggy made him a cup of tea and a sandwich, which he slowly nibbled over the course of half an hour.

"Better?" Foggy asked as Matt finished the last bite.

"Yes, thank you, Fog," Matt said politely.

"Good. Do you want to watch a movie or something?" Foggy stood over Matt, watching him intently.

"Mmm if you want."

"Do you want?"

"I don't know, Fog," he said irritably, rubbing his eyes. "I'm tired. I'm just happy to sit. Do whatever you were doing before you had to pick me up."

"Okay," Foggy said with a shrug, retrieving the gaming control. Matt tilted his head slightly, trying to figure out if he'd offended Foggy or not.

The title soundtrack started and Matt rolled his eyes. "Zombies still?"

"Yeah, it's a classic, Matt." He grabbed the remote and turned the sound down.

"You don't need to lower the volume for me," Matt said.

"Shhh... you'll wake the zombies," Foggy quipped and Matt shut up, smiling slightly as he slumped sideways onto the armrest. There was no way he could do anything constructive this afternoon. He felt almost like a zombie himself. But he enjoyed the company at least and was happy just to sit and listen.

"Shit, they're all coming."

"There's a pattern, Fog. One zombie, two, rest, then two, six, and when you beat them you get another rest. Repeat."

The sixth zombie got the better of Foggy and he groaned as he died. He put the controller down.

"You got that from just listening?" Foggy asked.
"Mmm yes."

"That's taken the mystery out of the game," Foggy said, pretending to sulk.

"Mystery," Matt repeated with a laugh. “Isn’t it always you who tells me that hope is not a plan?”

"Totally different context, Matt. Don’t twist my words."

Matt leaned back and closed his eyes, looking ridiculously smug. Foggy gave an exasperated “ergh” and returned to the battle of the zombies. “One, two, rest, two, six, rest,” he whispered to himself as the zombies advanced. Foggy assumed Matt had fallen asleep, but just as Foggy finished the level, Matt muttered, “I helped, didn’t I?”

“Shut up,” Foggy said playfully.

Matt said sleepily, “then my work here is done.”

Chapter End Notes

In one of the comics (I forget which one - I think it's the series where he moves to San Fran post-disbarment), Matt says something like, "my friend Foggy likes to remind me that hope is not a plan..." before launching a car off a snowy cliff at a moving train and saying, "but Foggy's not here right now." It's stayed with me. I love Matt's dark sense of humour.

Stay tuned for more H/C coming up...
What's the worst that could happen?

Matt, Foggy and Candy were mid-way through a meeting about Laura O’Hern’s domestic violence case when Matt’s phone rang. “Gladys, Gladys, Gladys…”

“Uh, sorry. I’ll get that later.” Matt fumbled with his phone to put it on silent.

“Take it,” Foggy said. “I need a coffee anyway.”

Matt gave him a thankful smile and answered the phone with his usual, “Matthew Murdock speaking.”

“Hey you,” Gladys said. “Feeling better?”

“Much, thank you. Sorry I didn't answer that message. I-”

“It's not a problem. I’m going to make this quick because I’m just between meetings. One: you owe me that raincheck; and two, I want you to help me out with a sculpture park that’s at risk of being demolished.”

“Oh, uh, sure. I don’t know much about sculpture parks though.”

“You don’t need to. I can help you there. Shall we make a time?”

“Okay, I’ll hand you over to Karen,” he walked towards Karen’s desk and she tapped a spot on the desk for him to place the phone. “She can make a time for you to-”

“Can you come out and see it tomorrow morning, maybe around eleven?”

“Tomorrow at eleven,” Matt repeated loudly, making an obvious scribble gesture at Karen. “Where is it?”

“In your hood. Hell’s Kitchen. You must have heard about it.”

“Uh, hang on…” Matt called to Foggy, “do you know about a sculpture park in Hell’s Kitchen? … Oh, wait, Gladys is saying something.”

Matt put his ear back to the phone, oblivious to amused looks exchanged between Foggy, Candy and Karen. Matt was in his element, conducting the four-way phone conversation like it were a performance.

Gladys explained that it wasn’t a formal park, but an environment in an abandoned block created by an elderly man. It comprised a series of linked sculptures made from found materials, which were then painted with whatever tins of half-used house paint he could get his hands on. Thanks to the fleeting interior design trend of brightly coloured feature walls, he had quite the colour palette.

Matt repeated the description and Foggy said, “oh, I know the one. Art from trash. It’s near your favourite Italian deli, Matt.”

Matt recalled the empty block filled with piles of metal, wood, plastic and other manufactured items. He suspected he’d crashed into one of the sculptures when chasing a drug dealer many months back. “Mmm… maybe,” he replied, not sure if he was willing to admit knowledge just yet.

Matt got off the phone with a meeting at the sculpture park and a date for Thursday night. He
It turned out that Matt was correct about running into one of the sculptures. As Gladys was leading him and Foggy around the lot the next day, she pointed out a damaged sculpture. “A lot of the sculptures have been the subject of vandalism. This was one of my favourites, but it was damaged overnight about three months ago.” Matt tried to look concerned, but he found it hard to be too sympathetic. He’d been given a sharp scratch along his jaw by the sculpture’s chicken wire exterior, and its concrete base had not been kind to his foot.

The lot had been empty ever since ‘the incident’. A retired local man, Ferdinand Breton, had started collecting various materials and turning them into sculptures. Many of them resembled hybrid animals and were painted bright colours, making the outsider sculpture park popular with children. With real estate prices in Hell’s Kitchen on the rise and the resulting pressure to rebuild, the owner of the lot gave Breton a month to move the objects or they’d be bulldozed.

“Of course, it’s the owner’s right to do so,” Gladys conceded. “In fact, he didn’t even have to give Breton notice. However, a number of us in the arts community want the sculpture park to remain. It’s rare to see such an incredible visionary environment in a dense urban area like New York City. It needs to be preserved.”

“It’s pretty dusty,” Foggy observed. “Would you want it turned into an actual park with grass and gates?”

“I think it’d depend on Ferdinand’s vision, but this isn’t a grass and soccer kind of park – it’s an artwork that’s raw and beautiful and accessible.” She smiled at a couple of children in the far corner, who were giggling as they tried to work out the animal(s) featured in a large assemblage of mainly car parts, bed springs and trash can lids.

“Couldn’t you just move the sculptures?” Matt said. “MoMA has a sculpture garden.”

“Oh, this isn’t to do with MoMA - it’s a personal project. And even if it were a MoMA thing, I don’t think it’s quite the fit for the museum garden.” Gladys smiled. “No, Hell’s Kitchen is the context for the sculptures and I think it should remain in situ.”

Matt said bluntly, “so what do you want us to do?”

“Stall the owner and negotiate a sale.”

“To whom?”

“Ah…” Gladys put her hands out apologetically. “We haven’t quite worked that out yet. Maybe a trust? We were hoping to raise some money-”

Foggy laughed. “Some money? It’d be heaps. It’s a blank slate in Hell’s Kitchen. It’s worth a fortune.”

“There are plenty of philanthropists about,” Gladys said, but she still sounded uncertain. “We just
have to increase awareness and find enough cashed-up people passionate about the cause. All we need to do is get the owner to hold off on the bulldozing for now.”

“And if he doesn’t want to sell?” Matt said, feeling a sense of deja vu.

“Pfft. Everyone’s got an amount they’ll sell for. Please can you help us?”

Foggy looked at Matt. “What do you think, Matt? We’re already negotiating one real estate deal in the Kitchen. Should we make it two?”

Matt pursed his lips. He still held a grudge against the park, but he couldn’t say no to Gladys. “I think we should look into it at least.”

“Oh, thank you! I knew you’d help,” Gladys gushed. “Can I take a selfie with the two of you to post in the Save Breton Visionary Art Park Facebook group?”

Foggy said, “I don't think that's a good-”

“Sure,” Matt interrupted. He gave her his most disarming smile. “Where do I look?”

Gladys laughed. “Listen to me tap my phone.”

They posed for all of ten seconds before Gladys said quickly, “I have to go, but I’ll see you tomorrow evening.” She gave Matt a peck on the cheek and rushed off.

“Matt, you should see your cheeks!” Foggy laughed.

“No need. I can feel the heat,” Matt replied, still wearing a goofy grin.

“Tomorrow evening, eh?” Foggy said, giving Matt a friendly punch.

“Just a raincheck on the drinks I missed after the candy case,” Matt reminded him. “Do you want to come? We’re having dinner at a new Szechwan restaurant.”

“Pfft. And be a third wheel? No thanks.”

“You won’t be. I told you – I want to keep it strictly platonic between us. I don't have the energy for anything more.”

“Sure you do,” Foggy said with a chuckle. He put on a high-pitched voice, “oh Gladys, where do I look?”

Matt ignored the dig and tapped the nearby sculpture with his cane. “These aren’t exactly safe. I might drop by the station to see if there have been any complaints to date about safety or damage. There’s no point fundraising to buy the block for the community if it’ll be locked away due to public safety concerns.”

“Good idea. I’ll come.”

“No, it’s okay. I- there might have been an incident, er, three months ago… I think it’s best if I go alone. I know what to say and what not to say, if you get my drift.”

Foggy said in a near whisper, “it was you who damaged the sculpture?”

“It damaged me back - that's why I don't have a big toenail on my left foot at the moment,” Matt said crossly. “Besides, it wasn’t a sculpture to me at the time - as far as I could tell, I tripped over a
mound of trash.”

Foggy looked at the mangled object next to them. “Oh come on, Matt. It was a lion, yellow and regal! King of the urban jungle.” He paused. “But yeah, it looks like it’d hurt. Are you sure you don’t want me to come?”

“It’s fine. What’s the worst that could-”

“No!” Foggy yelped. “I told you, you’re not to use that phrase any more. You know what happened last time.”

Matt grinned. “What’s the worst-”

“No, Matt, don’t,” Foggy pleaded, deadly serious.

Matt snorted and turned to walk away, waiting till the edge of the lot before yelling over his shoulder, “what’s the worst that could happen? I’ll see you back at the office, Foggy.”

An hour later, Foggy answered a call from Matt. "I'm just leaving the station now,” Matt said. “Do you want me to pick up any lunch for you on the way back to the office?"

"Sure, that'd be great. What are you thinking?"

"Uh, I think..." Matt got distracted by a dog that jumped up on him. The owner scolded the dog and apologised five times before walking off.

"What was that?" Foggy asked, catching only the apologies.

"Oh, a dog." Matt couldn't concentrate. "What was I-?"

"Lunch, remember? Where are you?"

"Uh, I'm..." Matt petered off. Where was he? He'd left the police station, walked a few blocks, and was now standing against a brick wall. That should tell him enough.

"Are you okay?" Foggy said, concerned. “Can you send me your location by text? Can you ask someone?"

Matt ducked his head, trying to concentrate. He could do that. He tried to stop the next person who passed, but they kept walking.

"Foggy, I..."

The phone fell to the ground and Matt soon followed, landing heavily on the thankfully already broken screen.

"Matt?" Foggy yelled into the phone, prompting Karen to run into Foggy's office to see what happened. "I was on the phone to Matt, but I think he had a seizure," Foggy yelled at her.

“Foggy, calm down,” Karen said in her best attempt at a soothing voice. “Can you-”
“Shh shhh shhhh…” Foggy put his finger to his mouth as he heard muffled voices on the other end of the line. He turned the volume up as far as it could go. A man could be heard saying, “can you hear me?” over and over again, each time a little louder. A woman was talking to emergency services, but Foggy didn't catch anything concrete at first. At one point, she must have leaned closer to Matt and his phone, because Foggy heard a relatively loud, “what happened?”

“He just fell over,” a man responded, and she repeated the observation to the operator. “He just fell over. I think he's having a seizure or something.… Yes…No… no, just passing by. Um,” she yelled a little louder, “does he have ID?”

The man answered, "I don't think I can... hang on... I can't get close enough. He’s shaking too much.”

“Hold his arm still,” someone said, and Foggy screamed, “no, you idiots!” into the phone. He swore and yelled into the phone, hoping someone would hear him, or at least see the phone and pick up. Little did he know that the phone was obscured by Matt’s coat.

Karen rang Brett in the hope of getting someone from the station to source Matt's location, or at least trace the ambulance call. However, Brett wasn't picking up, and the police station refused to give out the details of the emergency call citing privacy or 'some such bullshit' (as Karen termed it when relaying the message to Foggy).

"Why don't you ring Matt’s phone? It'll make a sound," Karen suggested.

"But then I lose the line,” Foggy pointed out. “It's the only way I know he's okay. I'm going to walk towards the station. Hopefully I'll find him.”

As he fled down the stairs, Foggy could hear sirens on the other end of the phone suddenly stop. Paramedics could be heard telling the curious public to back up, and there was a lot of scuffling as they worked to stop the seizure. They quickly found Matt's medical ID bracelet. “Diagnosed epilepsy,” one of them said. “No light perception.”

A voice announced, “I have a line.”

“How long has the seizure been going on for?” There was a rumble of responses from the spectators, all of which were unintelligible from Foggy’s end. He looked at his phone. The call log suggested this seizure was longer than usual.

Foggy listened to the subsequent exchange of medical terminology. He couldn't understand most of it, but it sounded like Matt's seizure had finally ceased.

“There's a contact on the bracelet. Do you want to call it now or wait for the hospital?” Foggy stopped and quickly hung up. “Shit,” he muttered to himself, almost immediately regretting the decision. If they weren't going to call him, he'd just missed his chance to learn which hospital they were taking him to.

Foggy puffed towards the police station, vowing to start jogging so that he could run towards future Matt emergencies without turning into a sweaty heap. He rounded a corner and saw the flashing lights of the ambulance and a huddle of people around Matt. Foggy sprinted towards the group and found Matt slowly and clumsily trying to fight off the paramedics, who were trying to manoeuvre him onto a stretcher.

“Matt!” Foggy called, pushing past a couple of spectators.

“Sir, you have to stay back,” the paramedic yelled, making Matt curl up protectively.
"It's okay, he's my partner. My name is on his medical alert bracelet," Foggy wheezed, kneeling on the ground and narrowly missing Matt's glasses, which were lying abandoned on the concrete. He lightly touched the back of Matt's hand while repeating his name. Matt visibly relaxed in Foggy's presence and after showing his ID, the paramedics started grilling Foggy on Matt's medical history.

"Excuse me," Foggy told the paramedics after a few minutes, leaning down to Matt who was trying to attract his attention. "What is it, buddy?"

"Help," Matt slurred through an oxygen mask, which remarkably he hadn't pulled off as he normally did.

"Yeah, you're getting help."

"No… you help." Matt said.

"I'm sorry, Matty, but I don't understand. You had a seizure in the street. The ambulance came. I only just got here."

Matt screwed up his eyes, clearly distressed. "Ngh… Fog." He pawed at Foggy's arm. "People… w-watch. Don't want."

The paramedics and Foggy tried to shoo the curious onlookers away. "Is that a phone?" Foggy said angrily. "Are you seriously videoing this?"

Matt started panicking.

"Delete it. Delete it now." The offending documenter tapped a few things on his phone. "Show me - show me you've deleted it," demanded Foggy, "or I'll sue your ass."

"Fog," Matt croaked.

"Yeah, what?" Foggy was still distracted by the guy with the video.

"Hand," Matt said, shakily holding it out towards Foggy.

"You want me to hold it?"

"Needle. Why?"

"Oh," Foggy turned to the paramedics. "He wants to know did you give him anything in the IV?"

The paramedics replied, "yes, Lorazepam."

"Why?"

"He was still seizing when we arrived, which suggests a longer than usual seizure. We didn't want him going into status."

Foggy nodded. "Yeah that wasn't fun," he said, thinking about Matt's recent stay in hospital.

"He's gone into status before?"

"Two weeks ago."

"I think we made the right call then," the paramedic said, recording Matt's history in a notebook.
Foggy squeezed Matt’s hand. “Did you get that, Matt? They gave you a benzo.”

"Don't want," Matt replied simply and slowly.

“Yeah, it's a bit late for that,” Foggy said.

“No hospital,” Matt ordered. “Home.”

“Can he go home? He doesn't want to go to the hospital,” Foggy interpreted for the paramedics.

"He hit his head on the concrete. It'd be a good idea to get it checked out at the hospital. He can be properly monitored there.”

"No," said Matt.

“How bad?” Foggy asked the paramedic, who replied, “what?”

“The head - how bad is it?”

“Hard to tell. He seems to be responding to commands and questions but he's slurring his words and his oxygen sats were quite low, although they're coming back to normal range now with the oxygen.” The paramedic quickly checked the portable monitor before turning back to Foggy. “He seems quite disoriented and agitated as well. A head CT would give us more answers.”

“Please, Fog. No,” Matt begged, and Foggy rubbed his hand soothingly in an attempt to calm him down.

“Disorientation and language difficulties are pretty normal post-seizure for him,” Foggy told the paramedic. “He has some trouble speaking and sometimes breathing. Plus you gave him benzos, so he's going to be knocked out for a while. He'll be happier at home sleeping if you think it's okay for me to keep an eye on him at home. I can always take him to hospital if he doesn't improve.”

“With the lorazepam in his system, you'll have to monitor him carefully for the next few hours.”

“I will.”

“You'll need to sign something to say you've refused transport.”

Matt gave a muffled grunt of assent.

Foggy helped Matt sit up as the paramedics removed the mask and cannula. “And there's your phone, helpfully hidden under your coat,” Foggy said, pocketing it. Drowsy, Matt leaned against Foggy's legs and closed his eyes. “You can't sleep yet, Matt. Wait a bit.”

They signed the paperwork and then in a small voice, Foggy asked the paramedics, “do you think you could give us a ride home? We're not far away.”

The paramedics both looked at him in disbelief. “You're kidding, right? We're not a taxi service.” Foggy cringed. “I know, sorry. I just thought if you were going in that direction at all, it might be easier than to lug him home by taxi.”

The paramedics both gave him an expression that basically said, ‘stop talking now.’

“That's cool, we'll take a taxi. Er, thanks for your help,” Foggy stuttered.
“Best of luck,” they said, loading their gear back into the ambulance.

Meanwhile, Matt was slowly crumpling onto the sidewalk. He gave a dissatisfied moan when Foggy tried to sit him up again.

Foggy crouched and said, “hey Matt, what do you think about going back to the office rather than your apartment? There’s only one flight of stairs and I can keep an eye on you while I work. Does that sound okay?” There’s no way Foggy would have suggested going back to the office a month ago, but Matt’s seizures had become so commonplace that it made sense to continue working, particularly now that the office was set up with the couch, blankets and the like.

Matt nodded.

"Let's get a taxi then." Foggy grabbed Matt’s cane, which was lying abandoned nearby. Matt was still sitting on the ground, so Foggy put one arm under his and said, “on the count of three. One, two, three... oof.” Matt leaned against Foggy as they traipsed to the side of the road. Foggy waved down a taxi and promised a hefty tip if they’d drive the six blocks to their office.

“He drunk?” the driver said, gesturing towards Matt.

“Just tired,” Foggy said, helping Matt into the back seat.

“What are you doing back here?” Karen exclaimed as Foggy dragged Matt through the front door.

"It was closer than home and I need to keep working. Matt will just have a snooze on the couch, won't you, Matt?"

They made a beeline for Matt’s office where Matt immediately slumped on the couch asleep. Foggy grabbed an icepack from their ancient bar fridge and placed it against the lump that was now evident on the back of Matt's head, holding it in place with his prototype icepack band (Foggy had recently adapted a sweatband for moments like this, allowing him to strap ice packs to whatever body part was damaged in a fall. Even though Matt had curled his lip at the prototype a few days earlier, Foggy still thought it was genius). Matt jerked in fright at the cold, but didn't pull it off. He fell asleep again almost immediately.

“Right, back to work,” Foggy announced as he passed by Karen's office.

“Do you want me to grab you some lunch?” Karen asked.

“Oh yeah, that's what Matt was about to do. Do you think you could pick up a sandwich or something that'll keep for when he wakes up? It might not be for a while - they gave him a sedative, so he'll be out for most of the afternoon I'm guessing. I just want to check on him every ten minutes or so." Foggy thought for a moment. "On second thoughts, I'm going to work in his office for the afternoon. I don't like the idea of leaving him while sedated. You know how panicky he gets - although it's hard to tell if the panic is due to the sedative or the hospital setting itself."

"This is our new normal, isn't it," Karen mused.

"It seems that way. But he can get better - we just have to find him the right medication." Foggy knew this was not exactly true, that there was a chance the seizures would continue despite medication, but he liked to tell himself that there was something out there that would work. It had to.
As Foggy predicted, Matt slept throughout the afternoon and collapsed into bed as soon as they got home. When he wandered out in his boxer shorts later that evening, he was dozy and was obviously having trouble navigating once again - probably thanks to the sedative. Foggy pulled him onto the couch before he could trip over anything.

“Hey, what’s that rash?” Foggy said, looking at Matt’s torso.

“What rash?” Matt said vaguely.

“On your stomach. It looks nasty.”

Matt felt his stomach and scratched at the raised section experimentally. “Dunno.”

“Is it itchy? I have some ointment—”

“Mmm no, it’s okay.” He scratched the rash lazily, suggesting that it probably wasn’t all that okay.

“Maybe you’re allergic to whatever they gave you in the IV,” Foggy said. “You should see a doctor.”

Matt rubbed his face sleepily and said, “no, it’s been there for at least a week.”

“At least a week?” Foggy tried to suppress his annoyance at Matt’s lack of self-care. He took a deep breath. “You need to get that seen to, Matt. It might be due to the new medication.”

Matt closed his eyes. “Not now, Foggy.”

”Do you want something to eat? I made myself pasta.”

”Yeah, that’d be great.” Matt made to get up, but Foggy said, ”stay there, I have a plate already made up for you.” Matt gave Foggy a sudden and adoring smile.

”How’s the head?” Foggy asked as he reheated Matt’s dinner.

”Sore,” Matt said simply.

”So pasta and painkillers for dinner then,” Foggy said, pulling the 100 tablet value pack of Tylenol from the first aid kit.

As Matt was tucking into his dinner, Foggy said, ”guess what?”

”Wha?” Matt said, his mouth half full.

Foggy rubbed his hands together. ”I think you have a pre-seizure symptom.”

”What?”

”When I was talking to you on the phone this morning - just before your seizure - hang on, do you remember the phone call?”

Matt looked puzzled.
"Never mind," Foggy said quickly. "I was on the phone to you, and you started sounding really vague - like you couldn't find words and you didn't quite know what you were doing or where you were."

"I don't remember. It sounds like a catch 22 situation though - I don't know if I'd even realise it was a symptom at the time."

"Yeah, but I might," Foggy said, sliding onto the couch. “If I can spot that, then I can get you to sit down or something."

"Every time I seem vague? Is that even practical?"

"Probably not, but it's something. Aren't you pleased?" Foggy stared at Matt, trying to decipher his expression of unease.

Matt sighed into his pasta. He felt vague almost all the time nowadays, and the last thing he wanted was to panic in anticipation of a seizure every time he stumbled over a word or thought. "I don't know," Matt eventually said. “Can we change the subject please?"

“Sure.” Foggy went predictable and safe: “wanna watch a movie?”

Matt inevitably fell asleep before the main characters had even been established. He'd sat through a lot of movie beginnings since living with Foggy, but the number of endings he'd caught could probably be counted on one hand. It wasn't a good movie anyway… or at least that's what Foggy would tell Matt.
“Fog, are you okay?” Matt said, tugging his elbow.

“Yeah, fine. Just having a Friday morning zone out. Why?”

“I was asking if you wanted to come with me to finalise Elektra’s real estate deal.”

“Oh, yes - yes, of course.”

“Where did you go anyway?” Matt teased.

Foggy smiled to himself. He'd been thinking how it'd be to work in a normal workplace where people were normal and had banal pastimes like bowling, pubs and quiz nights.

“Nowhere in particular,” Foggy said. Matt just shrugged and returned to his office.

Just as Matt sat down at his desk, Karen let out a panicked scream. “There’s a rat. Guys, a rat! It’s huge.”

Foggy made a gurgling noise that could be best interpreted as ‘I don’t want to know.’

“They live under the floorboards,” Matt said casually from his office. “It probably came through the crack next to the kitchen pipes.”

“They what?” Karen and Foggy said in unison.

“Can’t you hear them?” Matt said, honestly surprised. “They make a racket.”

“I’m pretty sure I’d have said something if I knew there were rats in the building, Matt,” Foggy called. “As our resident Man Without Fear, can you kill it please?”

Matt silently appeared in the doorway of his office. He stood completely still, his head slightly tilted. After about a minute, there was a flash of silver as Matt threw a pair of scissors across the room, skewering the rat through the centre of its skull.

Karen screamed again and burst into tears.

“What the fuck, Matt?” Foggy bellowed.

“You wanted me to kill it.”

“Yeah, but not – that was really, ergh…”

“You’d rather me kill it slowly through poison? That was about as humane a death as it gets. It died instantly without suffering the pain and days of internal bleeding that comes with poison.”

“Yeah, but… that was – I’ve never seen anything like it.”

Matt turned to Karen. “I’m sorry, I didn’t scare you, did I?”

Karen shook her head. She chewed nervously on a strand of hair, eyes glued on the rat. “You’re
going to throw those scissors out, right?” she said with a shudder.

“Along with the rat, yes.” Matt searched through the kitchen drawers for a spare plastic bag and scooped up the rat and scissors. Foggy and Karen both moved backwards as he tied up the bag. Matt rolled his eyes and said, “I think I’ll take this straight to the dumpster.” There was a joint sigh of relief from the other side of the room.

“Does he do that often?” Karen whispered to Foggy once she was satisfied he’d left the building.

“I’ve never seen him do anything like that.” Foggy gave a nervous giggle. “I think he was showing off.”

“Foggy!” Karen said, giving him a playful push.

“I think you mean he was being manly and heroic,” Matt said as he returned to the office a few minutes later.

“What?” Karen said.

“Foggy said I was showing off. I say I was rescuing you both from the plague.” He gave them both a stellar grin.

“I’m calling the pest guy,” Foggy muttered.

“I’m going to meet Danica and Stuart now,” Foggy said as they left the courthouse that afternoon. Foggy had set up a dinner with some former college friends and had expected Matt to come. “You sure you don’t want to join us? They’d love to see you.”

“Maybe next time. I’m feeling a bit queasy. Gladys convinced me to try some sort of fermented soy paste last night and it didn’t really agree with me.”

“Shit. Why didn’t you say you were feeling sick?”

“It didn’t bother me that much.” It was also not the only reason he was staying home. Matt wanted to give Foggy space. He was glad Foggy was going out for once. He’d pretty much sacrificed his social life to look after Matt of late, and the time apart would probably do them both good.

“Well, your upset stomach certainly didn’t affect your courtroom performance. Matthew Killing-it-in-court Murdock is back.” Foggy clapped Matt on the back.

“So you keep saying,” Matt said with an embarrassed smile. “It’s probably not going to help things going to – what’s the place you’re eating at again?”

“Korean Fried Chicken and Beer House.”

Matt smiled at the reverence with which Foggy said the name. “Yes, fried and beer. Not such a good idea on a grumbly stomach.”

“Next time,” Foggy said.

“Next time,” Matt promised, hoping that the next big food craze that caught Foggy’s eye involved
something a little less fried.

Once home, Matt set himself up on the couch with a cup of tea and a book. He was looking forward to a quiet Friday night… until the phone rang.

Matt braced himself. “Elektra.”

“Hello, Matthew. I thought you might like to come around and celebrate my recent acquisition - and your pending commission and legal fees, which…” - there was a dramatic pause - “I’ve just paid now.”

“Show-off,” Matt said. “You don’t even have the keys yet. The bill’s not due-”

“Use it to buy a non-synthetic rug for the office, or perhaps a new coat of paint. I know you identify with the shabby aesthetics, but it couldn’t hurt to make it look more like a professional business,” she said witheringly. “Anyway, are you coming?”

Matt scrambled to find an excuse. It was more out of habit than desire. “Uh, I'm busy,” he said lamely.

“You're a terrible liar. I thought you turned down that invitation.”

“I've changed my mind”. Matt couldn't work out how she knew about the dinner date with their old college friends, but he wasn't going to give her the satisfaction of asking.

“Shame,” she said. “I was going to show you what was really going on in your neighborhood”

“The geographical pattern?”

“Exactly.”

Matt thought for a moment. The outings with Elektra were pretty much the only action he currently got, and he could probably use the exercise. All of a sudden, his evening of couch, book and tea seemed insufferably dull.

He put down his mug. “I'll be there soon.”

Matt turned up at Elektra’s penthouse in his usual black hoodie and jeans to find Elektra in a near matching outfit. As if she could read his mind, she said, “I thought we could do the team outfit thing. The hoodie's a bit unflattering, but-”

“I'm sure you pull it off just fine,” Matt finished.

“Well come on,” she said, pulling him out the door.

After a while Matt said, “hey, we're going the wrong way. We should be taking a left.”

“We’re going a different way to Hell’s Kitchen – for old time’s sake.” She led him down and alleyway and jumped onto a dumpster, swinging up to a fire escape.

“Oh, you mean that time you lead me on a merry dance and then pretended to be the victim of assault so that I was nearly arrested? I’d prefer not to relive that, thanks.”
“You take things too seriously, Matthew.” She started up the fire escape. Imperiously, she called, “come on if you’re coming.”

Matt flipped onto the fire escape and followed Elektra to the roof. He barely had time to catch his breath when she was away again, laughing as she leapt from rooftop to rooftop, taking detours that would allow her to somersault and flip between solid forms with practiced ease. By the time they made it to Hell’s Kitchen, Matt had a stitch, but he felt better than he had in weeks. She laughed as he bent double, wheezing slightly. “Matthew, what’s with the dying act? You can’t be that unfit,” she teased.

Matt put his hands on his hips and arched his back, stretching out with a happy groan. “I’m embarrassed to say I am. A few more of these workouts should change that though,” he said, giving her a cheeky grin.

He followed Elektra back to street level and found themselves across the road from the same building they’d staked out previously. Last time it had been unusually empty, much to Elektra’s frustration. Matt tilted his head. Even with the Friday night NYC rush, he could hear a lot of movement in the building.

Elektra nudged him. “Do you believe me now?”

“I can hear scraping.” Matt said, stretching his hearing as far as he could. “Metal against rock and earth.” He cringed as metal and stone collided with a sharp squeal.

“What are they doing?” Elektra said.

Matt started to cross the road to find out, but Elektra put out her arm. “Not yet. Come, we'll walk the pattern first.”

Matt nodded and took her arm. He didn't have his cane, and while he was fully capable of navigating without it, it was easier for him to concentrate on the buildings Elektra was pointing out if he didn’t have to focus on every step. They paused at each building until they got to the block Elektra had just purchased. It wouldn't be settled for at least another month, so they stood on the steps outside, dwelling on the potential consequences of her acquisition. “You really think this will stop some kind of mystic - what did you call it?”

“I don't like to get pulled into Stick's bullshit, but-”

“But what?” a voice drawled behind them.

“Matty,” Stick replied in a sing-song voice. “What are you brainwashing him with this time, Ellie?”

From the apartment steps, Elektra looked down on Stick with loathing. “Like you care, old man.”

Matt stepped forward. “What do you want, Stick?”

“To see if you two are going to fight like the soldiers I taught you to be, or whether you're going to sit round playing heiress and lawyer.”

“Do we have to choose?” Elektra said crisply.

“You think you're so clever buying this tower of shit,” Stick continued. “But the Hand doesn't care about ownership. If they want it, they won’t bother with mere details like deeds and titles. And if
they do, you just left a paper trail leading directly to you and your fancy penthouse. You're playing the wrong game.”

“What do they want?” Matt asked. Stick always preferred to refer to abstract threats rather than useful facts, so Matt wasn’t holding his breath. He had to try though – he still didn’t understand the significance of the city pattern, although at least thanks to Elektra he now better understood the Hand.

“You’re not going anywhere near them until you harden up. You can’t fight the Hand by falling over, Matty.”

Matt threw a punch, which Stick easily blocked.

“See? You're out of practice,” Stick smirked, returning the favour with a kick to the stomach. Matt let out an “oof”, but didn't retaliate. He stood still, breathing the rage away. Now wasn't the time. He knew that, and yet in Stick's presence he'd regressed to petty violence at the smallest provocation.

“Come on, Matthew. He's a waste of our time,” Elektra said, pulling Matt towards the next block in the pattern.

“Weren't you working with him?” Matt said as they walked away.

“We had - differing opinions,” Elektra said slowly, conscious that Stick could hear every word. “If you've shown me anything, Matthew, it's that not everything need be solved through violence.”

Matt huffed in disbelief.

“I don't care if you don't believe me,” she said. They finished the loop in silence.

Matt dropped by Fogwell's on the way home. He was determined to build up his strength now he was on medication that made him less disoriented. What's more, he needed to blow off some steam. He'd wrapped his hands and was winding up for the first punch when-

“You think a punching bag is going to help you when the gates open?”

Stick. Of course it was Stick.

Matt stretched his neck back with a groan. “Can't you just leave me alone?”

“You need to be practicing on people, not a fucking bag. You've allowed yourself to become weak. Your mind is weak, your body is weak. You wanna know why you keep falling down? It's because you've become undisciplined, distracted-”

“What do you want, Stick?”

“You need to stay away from her,” Stick said dangerously.

“Why? Because she's not acting on your orders? Because I'm not acting on your orders? You don't like that we have minds of our own? Or is it just that I don’t buy into your crackpot war conspiracies?”
“Shut up and listen. That girl is poison. She’s on her way to the worst side and she’ll drag you down with her.”

“Says the man who ordered her to seduce me.”

“You should have seen right through that, Matty.”

A fiery hot rage surged through Matt’s body. Everyone told him what to do, who to associate with. He wasn’t allowed to drink alcohol, bathe alone, lock the bathroom door, see Elektra, prowl the streets as Daredevil. He’d had enough. Matt lashed out, this time connecting with Stick’s cheek. Of course, Stick wasn’t going to put up with that, and before Matt knew it he was pinned to the floor, blood running down his jaw.

“Stay away from her,” Stick repeated before slowly getting up. He gave Matt a small kick – so small that Matt wondered if it was Stick’s attempt at affection. “You need to try harder,” Stick said, wandering out the door as quietly as he entered.

Foggy stood up in shock when Matt slunk in the door, his chin crusty with dried blood. “Fuck, Matt. You didn't go out bashing up criminals again, did you? Haven't you done enough damage to your brain without-”

“No,” Matt said, wiping his still bleeding mouth. “It was Stick.”

“Your lunatic mentor? What, he’s back in New York?”

Matt didn't bother correcting Foggy this time. “That's the one.”

“At least we agree on that now. What happened? I'll get you some ice.”

Foggy made for the fridge, but Matt waved him off. “I've got this, Foggy.” Matt pulled an icepack from the freezer and flopped into an armchair, dabbing at his lip with a tissue before holding the icepack against his mouth and chin.

Foggy perched on the edge of the couch, watching Matt intently. “Do you want to talk-”

“No.” There was a pause, then Matt added, “no, thank you.” He leaned back and closed his eyes, before realising his rudeness. He sat up. “How was dinner?”

“Oh, it was great,” Foggy said, disarmed by the change of topic. “The menu was no surprise, of course – variations on fried chicken and beer. They both say hi, by the way. I don't think you'll get out of the next one.”

Matt smiled then winced as the cut on his lip pulled.

Foggy pulled a face in sympathy. Matt could feel Foggy's eyes on him, searching for other injuries, judging him. Eventually, Matt stood up and grunted a goodnight. The thick silence was just too much.

The next evening, he mumbled something about Fogwell’s to Foggy and disappeared out the door
with his gym bag. He fully intended to go to the gym, but first he had to pay Melvin Potter a visit.

Melvin’s first reaction to Matt’s presence was to throw a lead weight at his masked head. “At least it wasn’t a circular saw this time,” Matt deadpanned. Melvin went to grab a blade from the workshop wall, but Matt said, “just listen for a moment, Melvin. I need your help.”

“You said you’d protect Betsy. You said you’d protect her if I made you a suit. You lied.”

“I didn’t lie, Melvin,” Matt said softly. “I had – there was an incident. I got hurt. I’m getting better but I need you to help me with an alternative suit in the meantime.”

“You want another suit?”

“A temporary one. I wanted a symbol last time and you delivered. It’s a wonderful suit, Melvin, but I need something different right now.”

“You want another suit.” Melvin repeated, but this time it wasn’t a question. “You said you’d take care of things. How do I know you’re not just going to disappear on me again?”

“Because I gave you my word. I put Fisk away, didn’t I?”

Melvin looked down at his feet and swayed slightly. There was something else.

Matt cleared his throat. “Have other people been harassing you, Melvin?”

“A few,” Melvin said in a small voice. “I told them – I told them I didn’t do that anymore.”

“And did they leave you alone?”

“Yeah… for now.”

“Can I tell you what I want?” Melvin didn’t look up, so Matt continued. “I need something that will look like regular clothes if I’m found. Something like what I’m wearing now.”

Melvin looked up and down at Matt’s black hoodie, jeans and sneakers.

“Do you think you could do that for me?”

“Uh, sure. But it’s not going to protect you like your old suit.”

“That’s fine. It’s temporary. Just until I – until I get better.”

“You’re still sick?”

“Yeah, I-” Matt debated whether to tell Melvin about the epilepsy. If anyone got hold of Melvin and tortured or blackmailed him for information, his enemies would know about Daredevil’s significant weakness. “Remember how I got shot in the head?”

“Mmm hmm. It’s not easy to forget.”

“Well, I got hit in the head a few more times over the following weeks. I’m still recovering, but I should be better soon.”

“That’s good,” Melvin mumbled.

“It’s also important that the new suit incorporates something to protect my head. I can’t afford any
“This other suit won’t protect you like the old one,” Melvin repeated.

“I know, but it’s something,” Matt said. “I have another request. Do you know how people use white canes when they’re blind?”

“Yes,” Melvin said slowly.

“Do you think you could make me one that turns into billy clubs - something that can be used for combat if need be? It would have to be a hidden feature that wouldn’t be detected if it was found.”

“That’s illegal.”

“What is?”

“It’s illegal to use a cane if you’re not legally blind.”

Matt smiled. Most people wouldn’t know about that law. Of course, it also meant that Melvin hadn’t cottoned on to the fact that Daredevil was blind.

“It’s not funny,” Melvin said indignantly.

“You’re right, it’s not. But can you make it for me?”

“I don’t know.” Melvin looked down at his shoes again. “It’s not right, you know?”

“Can you just trust me on this, Melvin?”

Melvin sniffed unhappily, but eventually said, “okay.”

“Thanks,” Matt said with a smile. “I have one more question. Are you aware of anything that can detect unusual activity in a person’s brain? Say a gadget of sorts – something that can warn someone if there’s a surge of electricity.”

Melvin remained silent.

“Uh, I should be more specific,” Matt said, his calm exterior finally breaking away. He rubbed his forehead. “The electricity surge leads to unconsciousness, you see.”

“Like a fit,” Melvin said quickly.

“Yeah, like a fit.”

“Do you get them too? Is that why you need a suit that looks like regular clothes?”

Matt rubbed his forehead again. Perhaps it was better to be specific, even if it exposed a weakness. “Yeah, I get them too. Too – does that mean – do you?”

“Betsy says it’s not the devil.”

Matt laughed – he couldn’t help it. “My priest – he said the same thing to me.”

“You have a priest?”

Matt sighed. This was too personal, but he liked Melvin and the revelation that Melvin had epilepsy was probably a positive thing. At least Melvin would know exactly what Matt needed and why.
“Have you made anything for yourself – something that can warn you?”

“I see auras,” Melvin said. “Lights. They come and I lie down.”

Matt inwardly cursed. If only his body could send him a signal like that.

“I – I don’t have anything, but I could try,” Melvin offered.

“But you’ll make that suit… and the cane?”

“Y-yes, but you have to be careful.”

“I will. Thank you, Melvin. Thank you for your help and your understanding.”

Matt returned home sweaty and exhausted from his workout at Fogwell’s. Foggy was sitting on the couch with a massive pizza topped with five different meats, barbeque sauce and pineapple. The smell had filled the apartment. However, between the meeting with Melvin and his lengthy gym session, Matt’s evening had gone so well that not even the sour tang of artificial ‘smoked’ flavour could kill his mood.

“Wa’ a slice?” Foggy said, his mouth full of gooey cheese and highly processed meats.

Matt wrinkled his nose. “Not a chance.”

“That’s okay. I bought you a mushroom and artichoke one. It’s in the oven to keep warm.”

“What did I do to deserve you,” Matt gushed, dropping his gym bag and making a beeline for the oven. “You even got it from the good place,” he said, recognising the rough base.

“Yeah, but then they wouldn’t do a tropical barbeque meatlovers pizza, so I ended up going to two pizzerias. It’s been a wild Saturday night.”

Matt laughed. His favourite pizza joint was undeniably pretentious. They only used organic, seasonal ingredients. All the meat was free range and the sauces were made in-house. He could imagine their reaction to Foggy’s low-brow pizza request.

Foggy said softly, “I’m glad you came back this time.”

Mouth full of pizza, Matt said, “wha’ you mean?”

“I mean, you’ve been picked up by an ambulance on the street twice this week. I didn’t want to say anything at first because I know you like your independence, but I have to tell you, Matt, I get worried. Really worried.”

“You don’t have to worry,” Matt said, but his voice wobbled a little. He took a deep breath and said, “I get a bit nervous too, but I can’t let it rule me, Foggy.”

“Do you remember mom wanted you to get a seizure alert dog?”

“I’m not getting an assistance dog, Foggy. We’ve gone over this.”

“Just listen. Mom and dad have a friend whose dog can detect seizures. Well, she’s done it twice.”

“Smart dog.”
“Yeah, exactly. Anyway, the owner’s moving to Australia for a new job. He was going to take her, but apparently dogs have to spend three months in quarantine and he doesn’t want to do that to her.”

Matt narrowed his eyes. “This is sounding all too convenient.”

“No, I think what you mean is, this is sounding like a great opportunity.”

Matt shook his head in disbelief.

“You should check with your landlord though first – it’s not an official assistance dog, so the usual rules-”

“I am the landlord, Foggy.”

“What?” Foggy dropped his half-eaten slice of pizza.

“I own this apartment – well, the bank owns some of it.”

“You what?”

Matt picked out a piece of artichoke and chewed slowly. “You knew that… or at least I thought you did.”

“No. How did you afford to…”

“It was going cheap – the billboard, it-”

“No, I mean where did you get the money for a deposit?”

“Colleges like to give blind kids full scholarships for diversity reasons, so I-”

“They didn’t give you a ton of cash though.”

Matt clasped his hands together to stop them from shaking. “I-I don’t know why you’re cross, Foggy.”

“I don’t know why you’re being evasive and cryptic,” Foggy returned.

Matt rubbed the burn site on his hand. The skin was smooth and tight, and to Matt, it was fascinating to the touch – so much so that it’d become his latest soothing mechanism. He could sense Foggy staring at him critically, so he stopped and said, “my father left me some money when he died. Originally, I didn’t want to spend it because I – I suspect it came from – I suspect it’s dirty money. Actually, that’s a lie - I know it’s dirty.” He felt dirty even admitting it. Matt took a bite of pizza to fill the subsequent silence. He swallowed and continued, “I also had a small settlement from the waste company. Dad wanted to sue the company, but he was threatened – they threatened to expose his, uh – they blackmailed him into dropping it. The settlement wasn’t much – not nearly enough to compensate for permanent blindness – but it was held in a public trust until I was 18, and the trust had surprisingly good interest rates.” Matt was growing increasingly anxious about the silence. “Uh, Foggy?”

“That’s great, man,” Foggy eventually said, but his tone didn’t match his words.

Matt said hesitantly, “I’m not proud of the money my father left me, but I couldn’t very well give it back. When I found out about the money, I vowed never to spend it, but when we left college, I wanted a place that I could call my own. Somewhere safe, somewhere permanent. I never really
“I know. I just think you could have told me.”

“I thought you knew,” Matt said in a small voice. He thought back to when he first moved in. He hadn’t explicitly told Foggy - he just didn’t not tell him that he owned the place.

Foggy brightened. “Well, that solves the landlord permission thing. Mr Zhang in 3B has a dog so we know they’re allowed in the building.”

Matt rolled his eyes. “I’m not getting a dog, Foggy.”

“You don’t need to make up your mind just yet,” Foggy said. Matt knew that meant the conversation wasn’t over until Foggy had guilt-tripped him into saying yes.

“Hey, now that you’re the landlord, can we get some curtains in here?”

“Good morning to you too,” Matt replied, adjusting his tie.

Foggy barreled on. “Maybe after church we could go curtain shopping.”

“After church I’m meeting with Julia,” Matt said.

“After that then,” Foggy said brightly. “I’ll meet you out the front of the church. Send me a text when you finish.”

“Walk with me,” Matt said.

“What?”

“Walk with me to church. We can talk about the curtains. I don’t know where or how curtains are sold, but if you do some research while I’m at church, we can go shopping afterwards.” Matt figured supplying curtains for Foggy was the least he could do.

“I’ll go put some pants on,” Foggy said with a grin.

Matt anxiously fiddled with his cane as he waited for Foggy to get dressed. His request to be accompanied was partly motivated by his fear of hospitals. He was well aware it had been four days since his last seizure. If the last few months were any indication, he was probably due to have one any moment now. To Matt’s great relief, however, he survived the walk to church (accompanied by Foggy), the service, and his appointment with Julia without seizing. Perhaps the medications were working after all.

As Matt waited for Foggy outside the church afterwards, he texted Elektra. “Can we meet up for another roof run?”

Elektra replied almost straight away: “Wednesday.”

Matt smiled to himself and stashed his phone. If Melvin came through with the new suit, and he managed to increase his fitness levels, he’d be well and truly back in the game.
As far as I know, in the Netflix series, Melvin Potter doesn't know (or at least revealed he knows) Daredevil's identity and/or that Matt's blind. It gets more complicated in the comics, but as this story is more rooted in the Netflix canon than the comics I decided to go with ignorance. The stuff I incorporate from the comics tend to be smaller things - in this chapter, for instance, Stick's warning about Elektra and Elektra's faked assault are both drawn from the comics. I hope I'm not being too confusing.

Happy reading!
Monday morning in the Murdock/Nelson household was never a smooth ordeal. Foggy could never work out how Matt willingly got up for something as dull as church on a Sunday morning (*Sunday morning!*), but struggled to get out of bed almost every other day. He yelled from the front door, “Matt, can you hurry the fuck up?”

There was a grumble from the bedroom and Matt wandered out, hair wet from the shower and his shirt buttons undone. “If you don't hurry up, I'll ask you about that rash again,” Foggy warned (Foggy knew using health care as a threat wasn't particularly helpful long-term, but in moments like these, Foggy tended to think in terms of immediate results). However, Matt somehow found the threat amusing. The corner of his mouth twitched as he hurriedly buttoned his shirt.

“Coat, cane, glasses, wallet,” Foggy said, handing Matt each item in turn. “Candy’s coming into the office today. It’s be really nice if we could be there on time and set a good example for once.”

They were near the bottom of the stairs when Foggy swore. “I left my phone upstairs. Wait there, I'll run up and get it.”

“I’ll wait for you outside,” Matt called. Waiting at the top of the front steps, he leaned against his upright cane, listening to Foggy’s pace gradually slow as he climbed back up to the sixth floor. His attention was diverted when he heard a wave of whispering and concerned comments coming towards him.

“Is she okay?”

“Drunk at this hour. Honestly!”

“No, she's hurt.”

“Someone call an ambulance.”

“Hey lady, lady! Are you okay?”

“Hey stop!”

The smell of Elektra came into focus, accompanied by the unmissable scent of blood and sweat. Her heartbeat. There was something wrong with her heartbeat. He started down the steps just as she collapsed into him. “Ma-” bubbles rose through the blood in her throat as she tried to talk, so that it came out as a gurgle rather than recognisable words.

“Don't speak, Elektra. Don't speak,” Matt said, trying to reach his phone. He gave up and yelled at the gathering crowd, “call an ambulance.”

“Onto it,” someone called back.

"Wha' the point," Elektra gurgled. "They eh- try aen..." she struggled to take a breath, choking slightly as she tried to breath through the blood.
"Who did this to you? A-actually, don't speak, sorry. I'm going to lie you down on your side. You'll be able to breathe better.” At least that’s what Matt hoped. That’s what Foggy always did for him, didn’t he?

"No, hol’ me," Elektra clung on to his shirt with both hands, her grip weak, but her intention clear. She'd been holding the wound in her chest until that point, and Matt scrambled to replace her hand with his.

"I will, I will. I need to get you on your side though. It’ll help. You have blood in your lungs. You're going to drown if you're not careful."

Elektra spluttered a bitter laugh and flecks of blood splattered across Matt's shirt in a macabre pattern. He slowly lowered her to the ground, keeping pressure on her wound all the while.

Foggy skittered out the door with his phone, and came to a grinding halt when he saw the blood-covered Matt bending over an even more bloody Elektra, a group of spectators in a ring around them.

"Foggy, what do I do?" Matt moaned.

"You've called 911?" Foggy said.

"Yes, but she's drowning."

Elektra coughed again and struggled to draw a breath afterwards.

"What happened?" Foggy asked.

“I don't know,” Matt said. “She turned up like this. She has some kind of puncture wound and she's got blood in her lungs.”

“How did this happen?”

"I don't know, Foggy," Matt snapped. “Just tell me what to do.”

Foggy was about to snap back something about Matt having more experience with such injuries, but he took a deep breath and said, “well, you're holding the wound already. That’s good. Are there any others?"

Matt put his head down. “No, just the one. But it's - it's caused major damage.”

Elektra reached out for Matt again, moaning with the effort. He was crouching down, cradling her head in one arm and holding her wound with the other. She held onto his wrist, staring intently at him, even as her breaths became increasingly laboured. “I... tried. They...” she opened and closed her mouth a few times, unable to wrestle up the energy to speak.

“It’s okay. Don’t try to talk right now - you can tell me later. There's an ambulance coming.”

“Matt, we need to find out what happened now,” Foggy interrupted.

Matt frowned and ignored Foggy’s instruction. “Just keep breathing, Elektra. Remember, the mind controls the body.” She took another shuddering breath. A red bubble formed in one nostril and popped, splattering her lip with tiny droplets of blood. She closed her eyes and her grip around Matt's wrist loosened.

“No, no, no,” Matt yelled. “Stay here. Breathe, damn it.” He could hear the ambulance in the
As the paramedics worked to stem the bleeding and help Elektra breathe, Matt frantically whispered prayers, his hands clasped with such pressure that the skin not covered in blood was as white as Elektra's. His eyes snapped open as her heart stopped, and he started yelling at the paramedics to do more. However, her injuries were too severe and the paramedics soon pronounced her dead. Matt's yells to “try again” increased to the point where Foggy had to physically hold him back. It was only when Foggy started sobbing that Matt backed away.

Foggy's tears were more for Matt than Elektra. He'd never liked Elektra, but she and Matt evidently had a connection that he'd never understand. It fact, it dawned on Foggy that they might have even rekindled their romantic relationship, such was Matt's reaction.

Matt sunk on the apartment steps. He let out a couple of small shocked moans, struggling to understand what just happened. Foggy put his arm around Matt's shoulders, but Matt was somewhere else completely.

The police drew up soon afterwards and started questioning Matt, Foggy and the other witnesses. They'd barely asked the first question when Matt had a seizure. Foggy quickly stuck his arm out to prevent Matt from cracking his head against the stairs. The paramedics leaped back into action. One of them fetched some gear from the ambulance while another made a beeline for Matt and helped Foggy shift him onto flat ground.

"He has diagnosed epilepsy and he’s blind – no light perception. He has a tonic clonic seizure about two or three times a week. Stress is a trigger," Foggy told them pre-emptively. He'd learned that it saved time this way.

Foggy caught the eye of someone videoing the scene. They looked sheepish and put away their phone. Another couple of people were taking photos, even though the police were trying to clear the area. Nothing was sacred.

No wonder Matt’s brain went into overload. It was chaotic. The overlapping sounds of the ambulance and police radios, as well as the chattering crowd formed a dizzying soundtrack to the horrific scene. The white sheet covering Elektra was a shocking contrast to its bloody surrounds: the steps of their apartment block were dark with drying blood, and the blood-splattered Matt was still convulsing on the sidewalk while the paramedics' crouched over him trying to get IV access. As he took in the scene, Foggy started to feel slightly woozy himself, and sat down fast. He put his head in his hands and breathed, willing the nausea away.

He didn't have much time to himself before the police officers approached again. As a defense lawyer, Foggy knew all too well what needed to be said and what didn't. He wanted to at least let them know Elektra's relationship to the two of them. He also wanted to be kept informed about the investigation. This wasn't over yet.

He planned to haul Matt back upstairs once the seizure had finished, but Matt would start asking questions as soon as he woke, and then... shit. Foggy thought about where he could hide the Daredevil suit. Would Karen take it? The last thing he needed was for Matt to take to the streets just now. Foggy had no doubt that Matt would at least try.
Matt roused with a sudden exhale through his nose. It was enough to alert Foggy, who expected Matt to sleep at least another hour. Foggy poked his head into Matt’s bedroom in time to see Matt struggling out from between the sheets, clearly distressed. “Matt, Matt, it’s okay,” Foggy said. Matt stilled momentarily at the sound of Foggy’s voice, then let out a grunt and started untangling himself once more. Foggy touched Matt’s bare arm, which was enough to stop him from struggling. “Matt, you can go back to sleep again if you want. You had a seizure, but you’ve only slept for an hour. Seriously, go back to sleep.”

Matt could smell the strong copper scent of blood everywhere. It lingered in the room and his skin. It itched. He had to get it off. Second to hit him was the heady smell of both Foggy and Matt’s fear-laced sweat… Elektra’s too. The alarm bells started ringing again, and he tried to escape his bed. “Fog,” Matt mumbled. “No, Fog.” He pushed Foggy’s hand away and staggered into the bathroom, colliding with the door frame as he passed.

Foggy watched in surprise as Matt stepped into the shower, pants and all. Foggy had removed Matt’s blood-covered shirt before helping him into bed, but his pants were still partially splattered with blood, which might explain – actually, it didn’t make sense at all, Foggy concluded. “Matt, do you want to take your pants off? Uh, they’re getting wet.” What was he supposed to say?

Matt was busy scrubbing at his fingers with a nailbrush and soap. He started on his arms, leaving red raw marks in the brush’s wake. Foggy’s suggestion suddenly clicked and Matt wrestled the pants off, dropping them in a sodden mess in the corner of the shower stall. He lathered his chest again, grunting softly with the effort of staying upright. There was a reason why he slept for at least two hours after a seizure. His brain seemed to need the time to recover from the trauma, and right now, his basic instinct to get rid of the smell was competing with the post-seizure fatigue. As he scrubbed, his memories of this morning’s events gradually returned. With horror, he remembered Elektra, drowning in his arms. He stopped. “Fog?”

“Yeah, buddy?”

In a small voice, he said, “wha – what happened?”

To his dismay, Foggy soon learned that the short-term memory loss that accompanied Matt’s seizures meant that he couldn’t actually remember Elektra dying. Even worse was the fact that Matt refused to believe she was dead. Matt was so distressed that Foggy was worried he’d have another seizure.

After his manic shower, Matt wobbled out into the living room, and Foggy ordered him to sit while he made tea. Foggy could see Matt was struggling to stay awake. His head kept slipping forward, then he’d wake himself up with a jerk. “You know you can go back to sleep,” Foggy said as he placed Matt’s mug of tea on the table in front of him. “Nothing’s going to change if you get a few more hours sleep. You’re exhausted.”

Matt scratched lazily at his now stinging arms, ignoring the tea. He was determined to stay awake. He had to. There were things to do.

Foggy outlined what they had to do next – namely, go down to the police station to make a statement (a task delayed by the seizure), and then see if they could access Elektra’s body because Matt insisted he needed first hand confirmation she was dead. By the time Foggy had established a plan though, Matt was fast asleep, curled into the side of the couch in an awkward s-shape. “Thank fuck,” Foggy murmured to himself. He draped a blanket over the sleeping figure, thankful from the brief respite from Matt’s bizarre behaviour. Foggy couldn’t work out how to convince Matt that
Elektra was really dead. Perhaps the irrationality was due to the seizure. Foggy desperately hoped Matt's memory gaps and sense of logic would be restored after a couple of hours rest. But then again, when it came to Elektra, Matt was rarely rational.

Four hours later, Matt and Foggy were standing in the morgue.

“Matt, it looks exactly like Elektra,” Foggy said for the third time. “And you said it smells like her, so I don’t understand the problem.”

Matt tightened the grip on his cane. “I-I need to touch her.”

"Actually, you really don't. You held her earlier. If you touch her now, you'll mess up the forensics.” Half to himself, Foggy said “who the hell gets killed by a bow and arrow in this day and age?”

“She-she has a mole, just he-here,” Matt pointed to the back of his neck.

Foggy looked closely at her neck. "I hate this," he said. “Yeah, there's the mole.” He stood up with a sigh. “Matt, I'm sorry.” He put his hand over Matt's, who looked deeply uncomfortable. “What now?”

Matt stood stone-faced, seemingly oblivious to Foggy's desire to leave.

“Do you want to stay here?” Foggy eventually asked, hand on the back of Matt’s shoulders. Matt remained silent, and after about a minute, Foggy tried again in a softer voice, "Matty, do you want to stay here?" Matt slowly shook his head.

They walked home largely in silence. About a block away from their apartment, Matt said in a husky voice, “I should have done something. Stick warned her. He warned us. I could have helped.”

Foggy rolled his eyes. He knew this was coming. “I don't know what it is with Elektra and Stick, but they seem to cause you a fuck load of pain and grief. Someone shot Elektra with an arrow dipped in poison, Matt. An arrow dipped in poison! I don't care how good your reflexes are, I'm fucking glad you weren't there when she was shot.”

“I could have helped. I need to find out who did this, Foggy. I need to-”

“No you don't,” Foggy snapped, suddenly roiling. He pulled Matt to a stop and said through clenched teeth, “I've picked you up off the floor dozens of times over the last month. I don't want to pick up a corpse. I'm telling you, don't you fucking dare.”

“I didn't realise your help was conditional,” Matt returned.

“Well it is. I can't take care of you if you won't take care of yourself. Let the police do their job.”

“The police have no idea what they’re up against.”

“Maybe not, but at least they’re not suffering the effects of repeated head injuries already. Stay home, get better, and leave the police work to the people with the resources to investigate properly.” Foggy paused for a moment, waiting for another counter, but Matt just pursed his lips.

In a more sanguine tone, Foggy said, “come on, let’s go home. We can talk – or not talk –
whatever you want. But I don’t want to have this conversation out here.” He put his hand on Matt’s arm. “Coming?”

Soon after getting home, Matt announced, “I’m going to the gym.” He needed to find out what happened to Elektra and he was damned if Foggy could stop him.

“You're going to the gym,” Foggy echoed, his tone clearly saying he believed otherwise. “You’re going to the gym even though you’re so fatigued you can hardly stand up straight.”

“That’s right.”

“And you're not going to investigate Elektra's death,” Foggy said sarcastically.

“Why? Are you going to track me?” Matt challenged.

“Of course I’m not going to track you, Matt. I just want to know you’re not about to go out and get another head injury.”

“Just – I don’t – no…” Matt mumbled a seemingly unrelated string of words. He stood up and raged into his room, falling over as he neared the bed.

“Argh,” Foggy swore as he went to help the convulsing Matt. “That was one way to end an argument,” Foggy said out loud as he stuffed a blanket under Matt’s head. “My point stands.”

Matt irritably kicked his blankets away with a grunt. He was tired, sore and grumpy. He fumbled for the glass of water next to his bed, knocking his mobile phone onto the floor.

Foggy jerked awake at the crash from Matt’s room. He sat up, thinking the worst. A series of swear words followed, and Foggy lay back in bed. If Matt was conscious enough to swear, he probably didn't need help. There was another crash and Foggy said out loud, “I hope that wasn’t one of my mugs, Matt.”

The swearing immediately stopped, but it was replaced by furious footsteps leading into the bathroom. Foggy quickly fell asleep again to the sound of Matt showering, only to be re-awakened by the boiling kettle.

"Matt, what are you doing? It's almost 3am,” Foggy said sleepily, stumbling into the living room.

It was rare that Foggy could sneak up on Matt, but Matt was in a little world of his own. He startled, dropping his tea strainer on the bench.

"S-sorry, Foggy. I didn't mean to wake you. I didn't realise it was -"

"It's fine," Foggy said. "You don't need to apologise. Your system must be out of whack."

Matt picked up the strainer and placed a pinch of tea in the vestibule.

"Tea?” Matt asked.
"Eh, yeah, thanks. Maybe that one that tastes a bit like cloves." Foggy rarely accepted Matt's offers of tea - most of them were bizarre and smelled far better than they tasted. This seemed more like a peace offering though.

Matt felt through the various tins, finding the small cylindrical tin of chai and sniffing it to confirm. Foggy always marveled at Matt's memory of objects and places. Super senses or not, being able to remember which tin was which based on shape alone, seemed a feat in itself.

He poured the two cups of tea and they stood there leaning against the bench, Foggy blowing impatiently on his tea. "When do I take the strainer out again?" He looked at the small fish-shaped strainer bobbing on the surface. (Matt's was a small silicon devil. Foggy bought it a month ago when Matt's tea collection went from two varieties to a veritable library. Matt initially rejected the present, even though Foggy pointed out that it was unlikely that owning a generic devil tea-strainer would give Matt's other identity away. It was now Matt's favourite thing.)

Matt leaned over and sniffed Foggy's tea. "A few more minutes."

"So what are you doing up anyway?" Foggy said. "Usually after a seizure you sleep like a log."

Matt shrugged. "Things on my mind."

"You want to investigate."

Matt remained impassive, but moved the mug slightly closer to his chest.

They sipped their tea in awkward silence. As soon as Foggy reached the bottom, he said, "I'm probably going to regret this, but – I'll – I'm going to come with you."

Matt tipped his head. "Huh?"

"Let's go investigate. You like doing these things at night, don't you?"

"No, Foggy. It's too-"

"Dangerous?"

"I can't let you put yourself in danger," Matt clarified.

"But it's not dangerous for you?" Foggy said. "Don't you Dare-splain at me, Matt."

"Dare-splain?"

"Yeah, when you talk down to people and make out that only you understand the dangers of the world, and only you can save everyone."

Matt steeled himself. "You can’t fight like I can do."

"Duh. I know that. But I also know you shouldn’t go alone right now."

"I can look after myself."

"Until you have a seizure - no, don't interrupt," Foggy said, seeing Matt open his mouth to protest. "You know it's true. You're independent in every way - until you seize. If you're going to investigate whatever's bugging you, then I'm going to accompany you... just in case." Matt didn't respond straight away, so Foggy added, "however, I draw the line at any kind of sidekick costume."
Matt turned his back and busied himself washing the mugs. He couldn't put Foggy in danger, nor could he limit himself to Foggy's pace. If something did happen, the sweet and innocent Foggy couldn't defend himself. However, there was also no way he could sneak out now that Foggy had offered to accompany him. It was a smart play by Foggy. Sidekick indeed…

With his back still to Foggy, Matt said in a low voice, "If - and this is all hypothetical, you understand me? If you were to come, you'd need to follow my instructions. Not put yourself in any danger. Not try to fight or anything."

Foggy stared. "Who do you think you're going to fight?"

"No one. This is just in case."

Foggy rolled his eyes. "Okay, if there are ninjas, I won't fight them."

"And you'll follow my instructions."

"Unless they put you in danger, yes."

"No, Foggy," Matt said firmly. "You will follow my instructions."

"Let's come back to that one," Foggy said.

Matt turned around and insisted, "no, now."

"Okay, I will follow your instructions unless you're in danger."

"No – no qualifications."

"What if you have a seizure and you've told me to run?"

"Then you abandon me."

"No!" Foggy crossed his arms. Through gritted teeth, he said slowly, "I'm not abandoning you, Matt."

"Damn it, Foggy."

"What are you expecting anyway?"

Matt tipped his head back in frustration. He sighed, "I don't know. I just need to – to…"

"Get closure. I get it." Foggy paused. "You're not really expecting ninjas, are you?"

"You're a bit obsessed with ninjas."

Foggy’s lip twitched. "Yeah, a maybe a little bit. So no ninjas?"

"Probably not," Matt conceded. He really didn't know what to expect, but it was unlikely there'd be assassins waiting for him. Just in case, he’d get Foggy to wait in a nearby well-lit diner while he scoped out Elektra’s apartment. In fact, there was a 24-hour place almost opposite Elektra's apartment block. Perfect.

"Okay," Matt said. "Let's go."

"Now?"
"Yes, before the smells dissipate."

"Are you okay after the seizure – or seizures?"

"I'm not at my finest, but I don't have a choice. I’d give anything to go back to bed, but that’s not going to solve Elektra’s murder."

"Okay, I guess I'll get on my form-fitting fetish wear."

"Foggy, this isn't a joke."

"I know, I know. Just tell me what to wear."

"Something dark. Something that makes you blend into the shadows."

Chapter End Notes

I can't take the credit for "Dare-splain" (as much as I'd like to). Kirstin McDuffy accuses Matt of Dare-splaining in the comics (2014). I still wonder if I've done the right thing giving the line to Foggy - after all, it's a reference to a man-splaining, and I'm not sure it's inappropriate having a male character use the spin-off term, even though I think the parallels are there.

As an aside, I'm so excited about the Defenders. I just saw the latest trailer and it looks terrific!
We all die

Foggy never imagined that one day he'd be accompanying Daredevil on a fact-finding mission. Not that Matt was in his horns – they were dressed entirely in black so as to minimise attention. But still, the idea of breaking into a crime scene at 3.30am had to go down as one of the strangest (and potentially the most idiotic) things Foggy had done in his life.

“This is like something in a movie,” Foggy said as they stepped into the street.

“It's not a joke, Foggy.”

“Never said it was, buddy.”

Matt scowled and increased his grip on Foggy's elbow.

“So what's the plan here anyway?” Foggy asked in a forced casual tone.

Matt frowned. He didn't really make plans. He had his cane and his old black mask tucked into his hoodie pocket. He was feeling more tired and disoriented than he let on, hence the cane. The mask was more habit than anything. There was little chance that he'd hold his own in a fight right now. Nevertheless, if he needed anonymity it was there.

“Elektra's building has a 24 hour concierge,” Matt finally responded. “They know me, but that doesn't help me in this instance. I'll have to find a way past them.” He reached over and pulled Foggy's hood over his head. “Keep this on.”

They caught a taxi across town, getting out a few blocks from Elektra's apartment block. The streets were near empty. The occasional car drove past, a rude interruption to the otherwise quiet streets. As they neared Elektra's apartment block, Matt pointed at the opposite corner, "there's a diner just over there. Order a coffee and wait for me."

"No. I'm coming with you."

"I can't risk us being seen. It's much easier for one of us to sneak past than two."

"I call bullshit," Foggy said, unafraid.

"It's true," Matt hissed. "Besides, I'm used to this. Why are you making this difficult?"

"Because if you have a seizure upstairs in Elektra's apartment, it'll make things even more difficult. I don't want to have to defend you in court. It's a crime scene, Matt."

Matt pursed his lips. Foggy never let up. "Come," Matt ordered.

They stood outside the apartment block for ten minutes, Matt holding his hand up to signal 'don't speak'. Foggy bobbed up and down, trying to warm up himself. He pulled his sleeves over his hands and stuffed them into his hoodie pocket. "Stay still," Matt whispered.

"Sorry." Foggy stood upright, barely daring to breathe, waiting for Matt's next instruction. Finally Matt said, "the concierge is a smoker. His wheezing tells me he'll be out soon. That's our opportunity."

"So what are you going to do? Knock him out?"
"I don't go around knocking innocent people unconscious, you know," Matt said, offended. "Just wait. There's a makeshift ashtray on the other side of the building near the street corner. I suspect our smoker is one of the contributors, which means we'll have an opportunity to sneak in without assaulting anyone."

“What about the security cameras?”

Matt sighed. This would be so much easier alone. He explained, “the residents of this building take their privacy very seriously. Elektra would never live anywhere where cameras recorded her comings and goings.”

Matt picked up an abandoned soda can from the sidewalk. Another five minutes passed before the concierge appeared. As predicted, he walked towards the corner, head down as he lit the cigarette. He leaned against the wall and closed his eyes as he took the first drag. In a flash, Matt lobbed the can high into the air. It flew over the man's head and landed with a clatter in a nearby building's shadow. The man stood up in fright, peering into the shadows and as he did so, Matt dragged Foggy into the apartment foyer. Foggy made for the lift, but Matt pulled him towards the stairs instead. "Lifts make too much noise," Matt whispered.

Foggy was groaning by the time they got to the top floor. "Is this some kind of punishment?" Foggy asked, wiping the sweat off his face.

"You could have stayed in the diner," Matt said imperiously, even though the combination of post-seizure fatigue and dire state of fitness had made him equally as exhausted.

"Bastard," Foggy muttered.

The door at the top of the stairs was locked, but Matt took out a couple of small silver implements and picked the lock in mere seconds. He gestured to Foggy to wait a moment, standing in the open door for half a minute before gesturing him inside.

"Stay here. Don't touch anything," Matt whispered. Foggy looked up and around the cavernous penthouse apartment. It had a floor to ceiling glass window with an incredible view of the city. The gibbous moon bathed the main living space in a grey-blue light. It was sparse apart from a central couch, a coffee table and a bench scattered with a number of expensive-looking bottles of whiskey, most of them untouched.

Matt stood in the centre of the living room for ten minutes, absorbing the scene. Foggy was about to ask if he was okay when Matt moved decisively to the right, creeping up the stairs to the loft with his head down, deep in concentration. He paused mid-way up and sniffed the banister. Foggy had never seen Matt in stealth mode like this. Foggy watched curiously as Matt stopped at intervals, picking out scents or anomalies, calculating as he went. There was a stillness to his investigation – an almost meditative patience. He seemed to track something from the loft to the kitchen, crouching down and feeling a section of the tiled floor.

Finally Matt returned to Foggy's side.

"So?"

"She wasn't attacked here," Matt said quietly.

"But they said she was shot in her apartment," Foggy pointed out.

"They were wrong. She just removed the arrow here. I don’t know why though."
"So what, she got hit by a poison arrow and instead of going to a hospital, she popped home with an arrow poking out of her chest, pulled out the arrow in the comfort of her living room, had a cup of tea and a bit of r and r before walking over to our apartment and dying on our front steps? You two have more in common than I thought."

Matt didn't take the bait. He stretched his neck and said, "let's go home. I'm tired. You must be too."

To Foggy, it seemed like an awfully banal thing to say while breaking and entering a crime scene. They slowly trudged down the dozens of flights of stairs, waiting at the bottom of the stairwell until Matt whispered, "now." They crept over to the entrance doors, and waited for their smoker to return from his break. The doors slid open and he re-entered the building, allowing Matt and Foggy just enough time to sneak out behind him before the automatic doors shut.

"I don't care what you say, it was totally like a movie," Foggy said as they hailed taxi.

Matt's mouth twitched at Foggy's odd enthusiasm. "Don't go getting any ideas, Fog."

They sat in silence the entire taxi ride home. Matt ran through the possible scenarios again and again. He was confused. The visit to Elektra's penthouse had raised more questions than answers. Matt's senses were always a bit fuzzy after a seizure, and he was tempted to blame his lack of answers on the epilepsy, but really, he doubted he'd find out anything more if he returned to the apartment. No, the answers lay somewhere else. He just had to figure out where.

Matt woke to find himself still fully dressed in his black hoodie and jeans. From the kitchen came the familiar morning sound of a knife scraping across toast. He lay there unmoving for about fifteen minutes, trying to drum up the energy to do something. The morning after a seizure was almost akin to a hangover with the same killer combination of dehydration, tiredness, irritability, memory loss, and the occasional unexplained bump or scratch. Matt went to roll over and his back cramped. His breath caught and he curled up in pain, panting as he fought the cramp. Not wanting to attract Foggy's attention, he forced his breath to slow, unclenching the rest of his aching muscles as he did so. Matt used to have such control over his body, but now it seemed like a battleground. He spread his limbs like a starfish and lay there for another hour, meditating on every body part in turn.

Matt’s ears pricked up when Foggy answered the phone to Karen, who was apparently finalising Elektra's funeral arrangements for that afternoon. As he lay there, it dawned on him that Elektra would be the third client their small firm had buried in the last year. Was it the curse of the defense lawyer or just his own personal brand of bad luck? He struggled out of bed before he could dwell on that idea any further.

Foggy looked up as Matt appeared in the door, his hair sticking on end. He looked absolutely wrecked. "Hang on, Karen," Foggy said into the phone. "Can you just hold on for a minute?"

"Matt," Foggy said delicately. "How are you feeling?"

Matt grunted a version of "fine." He put his hand out for the phone. "Does Karen need help?"

"No, everything's under control. Uh, there's coffee in the kitchen."
Matt took the hint and left Foggy to it.

Half an hour later, Matt and Foggy were nursing their second round of coffees on the couch. "Do you remember that time you got her roses?" Foggy said. "I couldn't work out why you'd stopped eating. I thought you were sick."

"But I was missing meals to save up for a dozen roses for Valentine's day," Matt finished. "Yeah, I was a lovesick fool."

"Nah, you might have been lovesick, but you weren't a fool."

"She didn't even like roses," Matt added.

Foggy rolled his eyes. "That would explain the thorn embedded in your cheek the next day."

Matt gave Foggy a wan smile. "She likes orchids - *liked* orchids."

"We'll get some on the way to the funeral," Foggy said.

Matt took a deep breath. "I'm cursed."

"You're what?"

"Cursed. People around me seem to die."

"Pfft. That's rubbish. Where did this suddenly come from?"

Matt shrugged. "Observation."

"Well, I'm still alive."

"Yeah, for now," Matt said darkly. Matt balanced the coffee cup on his knee, tapping it this way and that, listening to the coffee slosh soothingly from side to side.

Foggy sighed. "Matt, we all die." He instantly regretted the comment when Matt started rubbing anxiously at his eyes. "What's wrong?" Foggy yelped.

But Matt didn't answer - not exactly. The coffee cup fell off his knee, strewing liquid and shards of ceramic all over the living room floor. Foggy forgot about his bare feet, leaping over to stop Matt from tumbling head first into the mess. It might have been Matt's third seizure in 24 hours, but this time it was Foggy who was bleeding.

It was a small group that gathered around Elektra’s grave late that afternoon – just Matt, Foggy, Karen and Father Lantom. As per Matt’s wishes, Father Lantom blessed her grave prior to burial and prayed with Matt as she was lowered into the ground. Elektra would have sneered at the Catholic service, but as priest reminded them, “funerals are for the living” and this funeral was primarily for Matt. As they finished the Lord’s Prayer, Matt started to really flag. He wobbled a little and Foggy hooked his arm through Matt’s, keeping him steady under the guise of emotional support.

Matt didn’t object when Foggy suggested they go straight home after the funeral. The three
seizures had left him completely shattered both physically and emotionally. Karen had tentatively suggested a small wake, but the idea seemed impossible now.

Matt and Foggy both had their theories about the succession of seizures. Foggy believed it due to grief, whereas Matt had it chalked up to ‘punishment’ for having five straight days seizure free. Whatever the reason, when Matt had a fourth seizure directly after the funeral, Foggy decided to call the neurologist.

Doctor Millet got Foggy to wake Matt and perform a couple of tests, which Matt seemed to pass, even while half asleep. In the end, the doctor reassured Foggy that the stress surrounding Elektra’s death had probably lowered Matt’s threshold, and while the four seizures were worrying, they’d been far enough apart to give Matt’s brain some time to recover in between.

Foggy returned to Matt's bedroom and perched on the bed, watching Matt sleep. The pillow was wet with saliva, so Foggy delicately slid a small towel under Matt's head. Matt gave a small moan, but it was an unconscious sound. He usually roused after a couple of hours, but Matt slept through a third, then a fourth, then a fifth. The last rays of sun disappeared, replaced by the eerie glow of the neighbouring billboard. The room flashed green, then pink, then red... and still Matt slept.

At the sixth hour, Foggy shook Matt's shoulder, "Matty, can you wake up please. I'm worried."

Matt rubbed his face clumsily and rolled onto his stomach.

"Do you want some water?"

Matt burrowed his head into the pillow, so Foggy just went with precedent and grabbed the glass anyway, holding Matt's shoulder and nudging the cool glass against his hand.

"Come on, Matt. You must be thirsty. You've slept for six hours post-seizure."

At hearing the time, Matt rolled over, reaching for the glass. He downed the glass of water and flopped back onto the pillow.

"Can you talk to me?"

"Mmm" Matt replied.

"Yeah, that's not words."

Matt licked his lips and rubbed his forehead irritably.

"Fog." he said huskily.

"Yeah?"

"Hng."

Foggy sighed.

"I..." he stopped, a slight wheeze obvious, "I'm so tired."

"I know, buddy."

"So tired."

"Do you have enough energy in you to eat something?"
"Tired."

"You’ve had four seizures in two days. I have no doubt you’re tired. You should eat something though."

Matt rubbed his forehead again. “Four?”

“Yeah, one more and you get a free toaster oven.”

Matt frowned in confusion.

“Sorry, now’s not the time for jokes, huh. I spoke to your doctor and apparently you’ll feel like shit for a bit, but it’s not life threatening like the ones you had directly after each other two weeks ago. However, I’m to take you to hospital if you have another one within the next fourteen hours. Oh, and you have an appointment with your doctor next week.” Foggy waited for the protests to start, but Matt just pulled his blanket up to his chin. “Uh, if I get you some soup, will you eat it?”

Matt licked his lips, "hng."

"I'll take that as a yes," Foggy said, patting Matt on the shoulder. "Stay there. I'll bring it to you."

Foggy was just heating it in the microwave when there was a crash from the bathroom. "Not again," Foggy said, dropping the spoon with a clatter.

He found Matt on his hands and knees, picking up the toiletries that he’d bumped off the narrow bathroom shelf. “Sorry,” Matt said as Foggy bent down to help.

"It's okay. There's nothing broken."

"Not again," Matt whispered, echoing Foggy's words.

"No, I didn't mean it like that. I thought you were having a seizure."

"I'm sorry," Matt said, stumbling towards the door.

"Hey, did you need to use the-"

Matt stopped and leaned against the door. He nodded.

"Do you need help?"

Matt looked horrified at the thought.

"That's cool," Foggy said, edging away. "I'll keep going with the soup. Give me a yell if you need anything..."

By the time Foggy had defrosted the soup, Matt had crawled back into bed.

Foggy limped back into the room and set the steaming mug on Matt’s bedside table before flopping onto the edge of the bed. Between the funeral, the seizures, and the cut on his foot from the smashed mug, this day couldn’t be over soon enough. "Bad day huh,” Foggy mused.

Matt sighed. "I-"

"Do you even remember today?" Foggy started to panic. The last thing he needed right now was have to tell Matt that he attended and then promptly forgot Elektra's funeral. What if he couldn't
remember her death at all and they were back to square one?

Matt could hear Foggy's heart speed up and reached out to calm him. "It's okay, Foggy." It was enough for Foggy to burst into tears. Matt put his arm out. "Here, come here."

"I can't tell you again. I can't." It seemed redundant to say it out loud, but it wasn't exactly a rational statement anyway.

"It's okay. You don't need to." Matt hugged Foggy tight as he cried into Matt's shoulder.

As his sobs died down, Foggy pulled away. "Do you remember what happened?" Foggy sniffed, wiping his nose with his sleeve.

"Elektra," Matt said before reaching out for another hug.

They clung onto each other for another couple of minutes before Foggy croaked, "you should eat the soup. You haven't eaten all day and you missed dinner last night."

"Ahuhh, that's why I'm so hungry."

Foggy reluctantly extricated himself from Matt's hug. "Here," Foggy said, pushing the mug into Matt's hands.

"Have you had anything?" Matt frowned. "Other than the whiskey I can smell on your breath, I mean."

"Geez I can't sneak anything past you. I had a sandwich with my whiskey."

"Foggy, you should eat more, you should-

"And some chocolate. Lots of chocolate… Believe me, I'm not about to starve."

Matt stayed home from work the next day, then the next, and then the next. He alternated between sleeping and sitting motionless on the couch. The tiredness and confusion that immediately followed the string of seizures had morphed into a suffocating darkness. The easiest way of dealing with the raging thoughts of regret, hopelessness and anger was to shut down completely, and that seems to have been what his brain chose to do.

After work on day three, Foggy returned home and hovered anxiously over Matt, who was cocooned under three layers of blankets with the possum beanie pulled over his eyes.

“Say what you want to say,” said Matt, his voice husky.

“I-I know you’re hurting and all, but I think you should try and get up. Go for a walk. At the very least, you should have a shower. You’re- even to my nose you’re starting to smell a bit.”

“Hmmf.”

“Please, Matt. Just try. I’m worried about you.”

Matt didn’t move.
“Can I fix you something to eat?”

Silence.

“I’ve arranged for Candy to work an extra day next week. I hope you don’t mind. I just – I don’t want you to feel pressured… of course, if you do want to come in… Uh, with the fees from – from Elektra, we can afford to employ Candy for as long as you need.” Foggy felt horrible referring to Elektra’s fees, but he’d really hoped it’d trigger some kind of response from Matt. Alas, Matt just lay there.

Foggy sat down on the side of Matt’s bed. “Is the problem that you want to go out and investigate but can’t? I know I said my help was conditional, but I shouldn’t have said that. It was something said in the heat of the moment… I don’t want this.”

There was a rustling from beneath the covers, and Matt croaked, “it’s not- it’s not that.”

“Because I could go with you again. I can help you, uh, find clues. I can’t stand to see you like this. Please, Matt. Let me help.”

But Matt had said enough. He pulled the blankets up to his nose and just lay there.

In desperation, Foggy said, ‘you know, keeping secrets is not heroic or noble. I know there was something going on between you and Elektra – something you’re not telling me. I get that you guard your secrets like some kind of protective bubble. You tell yourself it’s about keeping you friends safe when really it’s to protect yourself. The thing is though, keeping secrets from your best friend hasn’t really worked out well for you in the past. Tell me what’s going on and I’ll help. You’re not alone.” Foggy exhaled and waited for a response, but again there was none. Eventually Foggy gave up and slumped miserably on the couch with a beer and a bag of chips.

Over the course of the evening, Foggy delivered more water and a sandwich, and a plate of Matt’s favourite cookies, but the blanket-covered lump didn’t move. He’d try again tomorrow.
Matt was lying face down on a slab of hard sponge. It smelled of sweat, mould and dirt - layers and layers of grime that had built up over who knows how long. He didn’t know how he got there. There were no memories of the past, no conception of the future. All he knew was that he was tired. So tired. His bones were made from lead, pushing marks into the firm mat. His muscle had withered away so that he was just skin and bones. “Get up, Matty,” his dad urged. “Murdocks always get up.” Matt wanted to. He really did. But there was nothing in him. “Get up, damn it.” His father got angrier and angrier. The skin around Matt’s mouth prickled with the pins and needles that always signalled fatigue. It was real. He was trying. His father stamped on his left hand. There was a crunch and a pop as one of his fingers dislocated. He gritted his teeth to stop himself from screaming. “Get up,” his father yelled, livid that his son wasn’t obeying. Matt’s tears pooled on the mat, but he still couldn’t move. A boot pressed down on his back, harder and harder until Matt cried out-

A softer hand touched his arm. “Matt, it’s okay. It’s just a dream.”

Matt wriggled away from Foggy’s grasp and threw off his sweaty, stinking sheets. He perched on the side of the bed, head down, trying to control his breath.

Matt’s father had hit him once, but only once. He was eight years old. He’d finally reacted to the incessant bullying and hit the Barkley kid in retaliation. Later that evening, Matt had heard his father sobbing in bed, devastated that he’d reacted to his son’s single act of violence with violence. His father was never cruel, and ultimately, the single slap to the face hurt his father more than Matt. In fact, the incident had inspired Matt to study law. Rules were important, he concluded, because if his father could do wrong, then anybody could do wrong.

But that was one hit. It was impulsive and stupid, unlike the dream. The version of dad in his dream was brutal and sadistic. How dare his dreams sully his memory of his father. Matt shook his head as if trying to rid of the dream, slumping sideways as the dizziness took over. “I’m go- I’m… shower,” Matt mumbled to Foggy.

Twenty minutes later, Matt wandered into the kitchen, clean shaven and smelling better than he had in days. He nodded to Foggy who was sitting cross-legged on the couch, catching up on some work (even though it was Saturday). Foggy called out, “hey, there’s some rye bread – well, you can probably smell it. I boiled some eggs, and there’s ham if you want your favourite sandwich.”

“Oh thanks, Fog,” Matt croaked, and Foggy leaned back into the couch with relief. The Matt that had returned from the shower was at least communicating a little bit.

Foggy turned back to his laptop, listening to Matt slowly assemble a sandwich. To Foggy’s bafflement, Matt ate it standing up in the kitchen. Foggy tried not to take it personally – after all, Matt hadn’t eaten in days, so it shouldn’t matter where the meal was eaten. However, Foggy couldn’t help but feel a bit hurt. Even more confusingly, after Matt had slowly gnawed through his sandwich, he simply washed the plate and returned to his bedroom.

For Matt though, the sandwich was a diversion. He pulled out his now dusty meditation mat. He was falling to bits, he knew that. The control Matt used to have over his body and his mind was in part due to meditation. In this respect, Stick was right – not about the seizures, but about his lack of self-discipline. He had become lazy, and it was now showing. If he was going to get out of this funk, he had to get used to meditating daily again. He crossed his legs, closed his eyes and exhaled.
Foggy took it as another encouraging sign when Matt woke up the next day in time for church. “Do you want me to meet you afterwards? I mean, after Julia – if that’s still happening.”

“Thanks, Foggy, but I think I’m going to head to the gym afterwards.”

“Oh, okay,” Foggy said, trying to keep the hurt out of his voice. He’d been hoping they’d get back into their pancake routine.

Matt packed his gym bag, and at the last minute threw in the ringing soccer ball Foggy had bought him years ago. Designed for people with low or no vision, the ball contained a small bell that sounded when it moved. Julia might find it useful.

The ball turned out to be a great tool. Julia and Matt sat on the carpeted floor of the church community space, rolling it to each other as they chatted about what Julia had worked on over the last week. He was pleased to hear she’d been practicing with the cane around the house. However, he was shocked to learn she wasn’t learning to read braille. She’d been told it was archaic, and that screen reader software had replaced the need to learn braille.

“That’s rubbish,” he said. “It’ll affect your education. Screen readers are incredible, but they don’t replace braille as a method of learning how to read and write. To this day, I use both.” He pulled out his phone and brought up the New York Commission for the Blind website. The speed at which Matt could understand the text to speech was impressive, but browsing the internet still took far longer than searching it by sight. He paused the speech and said to Julia and her mother, “it’s pretty clunky, isn’t it.”

“How do you understand the speech at that speed?” her mom asked.

“You get used to it,” Matt said. “I can’t get used to mangled pronunciation of so many words though. When I read fiction, I always read in braille – the computer takes all the lyricism out of the text.” He recited a couple of lines of Shakespeare in his best imitation of his computer’s speech pattern, making Julia giggle.

Her mother said, “Do they even print braille books nowadays?”

“Yes, of course. New York has a terrific braille and talking book library. We could go there some time if you’d like, Julia.”

Julia nodded. “Yes please.”

“I don’t read many hardcopy books any more. I have a plug-in braille reader for my computer, which allows me to read e-books. But then I borrow most of the e-books from the library. In fact, the library also taught me how to use most of the software.”

Matt navigated his way to the youth section of the State Commission website. “Hmm… maybe just give them a call tomorrow,” he suggested. “They should offer free classes or tutoring in braille. I’m surprised that it’s not mandated within the education system, but then again, perhaps you only recognize the value of braille when you have first-hand experience.” He paused, “and if they can’t help… perhaps I could give it a go.” He stood up and bounced up and down on his toes. “Now, Julia, you can catch the ball while sitting stationary. Let’s see if you’re brave enough to move round on your feet.”
Julia made to object, but Matt said, “there’s nothing around you for at least ten feet each way. Your mom will tell you if you start to get close to the walls.”

He turned to Julia’s mother, smiled, and silently gestured to her to verbalise support.

“Yes, I’ll tell you, Jules,” her mother said.

Matt made it deliberately simple at first, getting Julia to call for the ball and slowly rolling it straight to her feet. Gradually, he started rolling it to the side so that she had to move to catch it. Her mother initially handed Julia the ball when she missed, but after awhile, Julia gained enough confidence to move to the ball. She moved slowly, cautiously searching with her feet. Matt started moving around too, encouraging her to listen more intently to her surroundings by coughing or stomping his feet instead of calling for it. By the end of the session, Julia was catching balls that Matt was deliberately ricocheting off the walls. Even when she tripped over the ball, she ended up laughing.

As they said goodbye, Julia’s mother gave Matt’s hand a tight squeeze. “Thank you so much, Matt. You’re already making such a difference. You’re a godsend.”

Matt smiled. “Not really. I’m just paying it forward – to use a corny phrase. I had a couple of mentors myself.”

“Thank you nonetheless.”

“See you next week,” Julia said happily, mindlessly tapping the floor with the cane she’d refused to use only a few weeks ago.

Warm with the knowledge he was making a difference to at least one person’s life, he headed to Fogwell’s for stage two of his attempt to get his life back on track.

He’d barely started his workout when he caught a whiff of Stick’s stale body odour.

“You happy now?” Matt said between punches. “The sale might not even go through.” Thump; thump. “We’re still waiting on more information from the executor of her will.” Thump; thump. “She died before she could secure it for you and your stupid war.” Thump, thump; thump.

“You idiot,” Stick sneered. “It was never safe with her. She had you well and truly under her spell, didn’t she.”

Matt paused for a moment. “Did you kill her?”

Stick rolled his eyes and said in a sing song voice, “no, I did not kill her, Matty.”

“Are you sure? ‘Cause last time you promised me you wouldn’t kill, you murdered an innocent child.”

“It wasn’t a kid. It was a black sky. It needed to be eliminated.”

Matt pursed his lips and picked up the pace. Thump, thump, thump; thump, thump.

After a few minutes, Stick said, “Ellie was asked to leave the Chaste.”

Matt stopped punching. “Something happened?”
“Her spirit was dark.”

Matt huffed in disbelief and resumed hitting the bag.

Stick continued, “you saw it too and yet you followed her like a senseless puppy.”

“Go away.”

Thump; thump.

“We still need you, Matty. Isn’t that what you’ve always wanted – to be needed?”

Matt stepped away from the bag, steeling himself. He turned to Stick in a move that was more symbolic than anything else. “I’m sick of all your manipulations. I will not join your stupid war. I will not buy into your conspiracies and lies. I will never trust you, so why should I risk my life on a cause that I doubt even exists? Just because you trained me for a year – training that I should note would probably put you behind bars if the authorities knew the true nature of it – it doesn’t mean I owe you anything.”

“Without me, you’d be locked up in an asylum still screaming for daddy.” Stick said the word ‘daddy’ as if it were something offensive, something dirty. “I taught you that your senses aren’t a curse – they’re a gift.”

“And in many respects I’m grateful,” Matt acknowledged. “But it doesn’t change the fact that I owe you nothing. So fuck off and stay out of my life.”

He turned his attention back to the bag, pummeling it with more force than before. The conversation was over.

An hour later, Matt wiped the sweat off his face and listened for any sign of Stick. Maybe he’d given up and left; maybe he was still in the room, hiding his heartbeat as he liked to do. In any case, Matt had had it with all the Hand conspiracy. He’d still not witnessed any evidence of this cult, despite Elektra and Stick’s warnings. He angrily stuffed his sweaty gym clothes into his bag, shook out his cane, and slowly wandered home.

It was a diminished Matt that returned to work the next day. He worked quietly in his office, speaking only when necessary. He got up briefly to get a coffee mid-morning, but apart from that, he stayed at his desk all day. Karen brought him a sandwich at lunch, which he ate at his desk while listening to the document reader.

The same thing happened the next day and the next. Matt would follow Foggy into client meetings and sit there silently, barely speaking other than politely greeting each individual.

When he had a seizure on Wednesday, Foggy used Matt’s heavy post-seizure sleep period as an opportunity to talk to Karen about his odd behaviour. “He’s been depressed in the past, but he seems to have taken Elektra’s death harder than I’d have expected.”

“You said they weren’t even close anymore,” Karen pointed out.

Foggy had given Karen a brief history of the Matt/Elektra relationship when Matt was absent after
the funeral, leaving out some of the more controversial incidents, like the time Matt returned to their dorm with hypothermia and a massive gash down his arm after Elektra tricked him into thinking she’d fallen off a cliff. She’d left him bleeding in icy water and she sped off in her shiny convertible. Worst of all, rather than viewing it as a warning of terrible things to come, the incident just seemed to encourage Matt like a moth to a flame. Foggy also left out the time he’d returned to their shared college dorm and walked in on Elektra dressed entirely in fur, standing over a naked Matt who was tied to the bed. After that, Foggy was always made sure to listen at the door before entering. If he heard Elektra, he’d hightail it to the library or cafeteria. Needless to say, Foggy was relieved when they split up – or more specifically, when she completely disappeared without even so much as a goodbye.

For all Matt’s violence and cynicism about the law, he was quite naïve when it came to people he loved. He hero-worshipped his late father, who would leave Matt alone at night from a ridiculously young age. Matt had once spoken with great affection about his father feeding him whiskey at the age of nine, and he was even proud that he had to stitch up his dad’s boxing wounds on a regular basis. His father would collect debts on behalf of the local mob boss using violence and intimidation, and it was his involvement in boxing match fixing that ultimately lead to his murder.

And then there was Stick – the mentor who abandoned Matt at his most vulnerable after beating him to a pulp over and over in his so called ‘lessons’. Elektra, who had broken his heart (and at least one bone), was welcomed back into his life on her return to New York City, even when she admitted that their original relationship had been set-up by Stick. Matt still tended to defend Stick and Elektra against Foggy’s criticisms, even though they continued to cause him grief.

Foggy glanced in the direction of Matt’s office and turned back to Karen. Lowering his voice, he said, “I think there were closer than I originally thought. I suspect he’d been seeing her quite frequently lately. The way he reacted to her death - it just didn’t add up. Plus he said he knew it would happen. They were up to something, I’m sure of it.”

“You need to tell the police.”

Foggy snorted. “Yeah right. Anyway, maybe I’m wrong. All I know is that he blames himself for her death. Apparently it’s not just because he knew something was amiss. He also claims to have a curse that strikes down the people closest to him.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Karen said with a laugh.

“Tell me about it. I think it’s his way of dealing with all the terrible things that have happened to him. I mean, his mother left him as a baby; he lost his sight in a freak accident; then his dad was murdered and he was stuck in an orphanage where an old man essentially abused him under the guise of mentorship; he got screwed over by his college girlfriend, who then somehow forced her way back into his life only to get murdered and bleed to death in his arms. It’s a miracle he’s as together as he is.”

“And in between he sought out regular beatings in the name of Daredevil,” Karen added.

“Exactly, if he’s not being punished in his normal life, he seeks it out.”

“A complex man to be sure,” Karen mused. “So does that mean you’re next?”

Foggy frowned. “Next what?”

“You’re going to be struck down by this Matt Murdock curse,” she said playfully.
“Don’t even joke about it,” Foggy warned. He gave her an odd look and returned to his office.
Mountains and Valleys

Chapter Notes

I have a courtesy fear warning in the end note.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hey, Foggy,” Matt called from his bedroom.

“Hey, Matt,” Foggy sang back from inside his nook.

“Can I ask you something?”

“Is this our new lazy Saturday communication method?”

“Mmm… yes, I’m still working up the energy to get out of bed,” Matt yelled. “I just got off the phone to-”

“Hang on,” Foggy said. “I’m getting up. This is ridiculous.”

Matt wriggled up the bed so that he was slightly upright, smiling guiltily as Foggy wandered into the room. “I just got off the phone to Julia’s mother, Elizabeth. Julia’s super excited about going to the library. It’s closed on Sunday, so Elizabeth suggested today instead. Do you want to come and meet them?”

Foggy sat on the edge of Matt’s bed. “Won’t I be crashing a very important lesson?”

“Actually, you’re going to be part of it,” Matt replied.

“Oh?”

“Yeah, you can read braille.”

“No, I can’t. I look at the dots. My fingers are useless.”

“That doesn’t matter,” Matt said with a wave of his hand. “I just want to make the point that it’s useful to have braille as a communication tool.”

“You’re not talking about the ridiculous notes system we had at college, are you?”

“Yeah, I still have them all.”

Foggy gaped. “You kept all the notes we left each other?!!”

Matt nodded and looked a bit sheepish. “You don’t mind, do you?”

Foggy snorted. “Of course not. I’ve just never thought of you as a hoarder, and I don’t see – hang on, did you keep that one that started, ‘don’t go into the bathroom…’?”

Matt smirked.
“Shit,” Foggy said, shaking his head.

“Anyway, to get back to the library…. can you please come?”

“Do you really need me there to make the point? Braille’s useful, everyone knows that.”

“Apparently not,” Matt said, sitting up. “Braille was the first thing I learned when I went blind, but nowadays some schools just set kids up with a screen reader instead. I told Elizabeth to contact the commission for the blind, and they set Julia up straight away. She’s already had a one-on-one lesson, which is great. However, I know from experience that it’s hard to relearn a whole other method of reading and writing. It’s slow and frustrating. I just want to make sure she knows how useful it is in the long run. I don’t want her to give up.”

Matt stretched and pushed back into his pillow. “Plus, I thought you might – I don’t know if enjoy is the right word…” Matt struggled with a way to articulate his desire for Foggy to accompany him. He felt like he’d been a terrible friend lately, and he wanted to show Foggy that he was more than just moping sloth. He said meekly, “we could have pancakes instead if you’d rather-”

“No, I’d love to come,” Foggy said quickly. “I just don’t want to distract.”

“You won’t.”

“Back to those pancakes though… uh, are the two activities mutually exclusive?”

Matt gave Foggy a crooked smile. “Not if I get out of bed right now,” he said, kicking the blankets away.

After their pancake breakfast, Matt and Foggy wandered down to the braille and talking book library. From the end of the block, Matt heard Elizabeth nudge Julia and whisper, “Matt’s here.” Julia grinned and yelled, “hi, Matt!”

Matt introduced Foggy to the pair, and of course the first question Julia had was “why are you called Foggy?”

Matt snorted. “I used to have a bit of a snoring problem.”

Matt coughed theatrically.

“Shhh, Matt,” Foggy said in a tone of mock offence. “My college roommate – the one before Matt – used to call me Foghorn on account of my snoring. Eventually it got shortened to Foggy and before I knew it, everyone seemed to adopt it. I don’t mind. It’s actually better than my real name.”

Julia giggled. “What’s your real name?”

“Franklin.”

“That’s a last name!”

Elizabeth interrupted, “I think that might be enough questions, Jules.” She whispered a sorry to Foggy, who just laughed it off.

Matt cleared his throat. “Shall we go in?”
Elizabeth and Foggy started towards the door, but Matt said, “just wait a second.” In a softer voice, he said to Julia, “can you point to where the door is?”

Julia looked puzzled. “No,” she said in a tone that clearly said, ‘duh’.

“Just listen,” Matt said. “What do you hear?”

Julia quickly answered, “traffic.”

“What else?”

“People talking.” She paused again, and Matt encouraged, “keep going.”

“Footsteps, uh, a baby… a truck.”

“Good. What about now?” Matt said, timing his words just at the point at which someone exited through the sliding doors to the library.

“A door!” Julia said excitedly.

“Excellent. Point to it.” Julia flung her hand out, and for the sake of appearances, Matt said, “Foggy, Elizabeth, I might have to get you to confirm this one.”

“Correctamondo,” Foggy said enthusiastically.

“Well done, Jules,” her mother said, giving her a kiss on the top of the head.

“So can we go in now?” she said, impatiently.

“Sure. Grab my hand. It’s right in front of you,” Matt said, holding out his hand.

As soon as they were inside, Matt lead Julia to one side. “Feel the panel in front of you,” he instructed. She felt the raised lines and dots. “Do you know what that is?”

“A map?”

“Yes, exactly.”

“Do you know where we are?”

Julia instantly shook her head, but Matt persisted. “Feel it. Feel the shapes.”

She ran her fingers over the lines again, but eventually drew back, pouting.

Matt quickly ran his fingers over the map and tapped a section. “Put your fingers just here,” he said. “This is the street, and this is the door. Can you feel that series of dots?”

Julia mumbled a yes.

“That means ‘you are here’.”


Foggy chuckled from behind them. He wiggled his fingers and said, “they happen to be the only letters I can read with my sausage fingers.”

Matt raised his eyebrows. “Give yourself some credit, Foggy. You can identify G as well.”
“I’m learning braille,” Julia proudly told Foggy.

“You know, Foggy knows braille too,” Matt told her. “He learned it when we shared a room in college. We used to leave notes for each other.”

“You give me too much credit, Matt. I don’t know the contractions, and I only know how to read the dots visually,” Foggy stressed. “I can write the basic alphabet… mostly.”

“Mostly,” Matt snickered. “That’s true.” Matt said to Julia, “maybe Foggy should join your braille classes. You know, Foggy once wrote me a note that said, ‘gone to get beek and lorn lhips’.”

Elizabeth laughed and Julia joined in a little hesitantly, not quite getting the translation.

Matt led Julia to the front desk, letting her feel the various braille signs along the way and translating them for her. They signed her up as a library member, but she started getting fidgety before the staff member had even got through half of the administrative information. “Matt, can you take me for an explore,” she whined.

“Uh…I think your mother—”

“Do it,” Elizabeth said to Matt. “If she wants to explore then that’s a win in itself. She doesn’t need to hear about borrowing protocols.”

“I know what we can do,” Matt said half to himself. He asked the staff member, “do you still have the tactile maps?”

“Yes, we have quite a collection. I’ll get Luvi to help you.” She waved over a fellow staff member and Julia and Matt happily followed Luvi to the map collection. Foggy tagged along behind Matt and Julia, feeling a bit vestigial.

On Matt’s request, Luvi ended up retrieving a dozen tactile maps from the stacks, laying them out across the large study tables for them to compare. Some of them were similar to the floorplan at the entrance where the map comprised simple raised lines, but others were scale models of the landscape.

“I used to love these maps as a kid,” Matt said, tracing the contours of Yosemite National Park.

Julia ran her fingers along the cliffs in the Grand Canyon map. “This one’s my favourite,” she said.

There was also a wooden model of the local area, complete with buildings, cars and Madison Square Park. The large public buildings were labelled in braille. “Julia, can you tell me what this says?” Matt said, bringing her hand to the top of the library block.

“Uh, L- uh, I don’t know what the second one is. B… I don’t know.”

“There’s another letter you know,” prompted Matt.

“A,” she said finally.

“What starts with L and has a B and an A?”

“Library?”

“Well done. So now you know where we are on this map.” He brought her hand down to the street level. “And we entered here. If we went down this street and right, it would eventually take us back to Hell’s Kitchen. Neat, huh.”
“Yeah,” Julia agreed. If Matt said it was neat, it must be neat.

She wandered back to the Grand Canyon map, leaving Foggy to look at the blocks. They were brightly coloured with highly contrasting sides. “There’s the Flatiron building,” Foggy said, recognising its distinctive triangular shape. “And there’s Metro General.”

Matt leaned over. “Where?” Foggy placed Matt’s hand on a multilayered block – a building that had been haphazardly extended over the decades. “Huh.”

“What is it?” Julia said, eager to regain Matt’s attention. She clung onto the edge of the table as she walked, still not confident with the cane alone.

They were saved an explanation by Elizabeth’s arrival. Julia made her mother touch every single map, saving her beloved Grand Canyon till last. Before she could recount the story Foggy had told her about the Grand Canyon donkeys, Elizabeth interrupted, “do you want to select some audio books to take home?”

“No,” Julia said flatly.

“If they still have the BFG, that was one of my favourites,” Matt suggested.

“I want the BFG please,” Julia said to her mother.

Elizabeth chuckled. “That was easy.”

Foggy gave Matt’s arm a squeeze and whispered, “I think you might have a groupie.”

After the library, the four of them went out for lunch. Matt took them to a neighbouring café that looked like it hadn’t changed for decades. He ordered a chocolate milkshake and a ham sandwich. Julia, keen to mimic everything Matt did, requested exactly the same. As soon as Matt ordered, Foggy let out a less-than-subtle “ohhhh,” as he realised why Matt would choose such a dingy food venue. Before he could say anything though, Matt said to Julia, “this is one of the few places I know of in the city that has braille menus. The woman who mentored me used to bring me here when I was your age.”

“What’s her name?”

“Miss Jensen.”

Flat out, Julia said, “can I meet her?”

“She died – quite a while back. She was quite old when I met her.”

Matt wasn’t the type of person who indulged in nostalgia, but there was a slight waver in his voice when he described Miss Jensen that suggested this café represented far more than the memory of ham sandwiches.

As they were leaving, Matt said to Julia, “Miss Jensen disapproved of me running around. She said it was dangerous – that I’d trip and fall. But you know what I think?”

“What?” Julia echoed.

“I think that on that point she was mistaken. I think next week we should go to the park and run around with Foggy’s soccer ball.”

Julia thought for a moment, silently wavering between ‘I can’t do that’ and ‘if Matt says it’s a good
idea then I must do it.

“I’ll bring the ball again next week,” Matt said. “We’ll see what the weather’s like.”

As Foggy and Matt started their walk back to Hell’s Kitchen, Foggy said, “You’re finally using that ball then?”

“Mmm yes.”

“You never played with me.”

“Sorry, Foggy. I found the bell a bit, er, distracting. There’s always next Sunday though.”

“Maybe, but I don’t think you need me. You’re in your element here, buddy. She hero-worships you. You’re a fine mentor.” He paused and muttered, “unlike other mentors I can think of.”

Matt sighed, “yes, well, I’m trying.”

Maybe it was the five-day stretch of being seizure-free, or the influence of Julia, or his rededication to daily meditation, but by the following week, Matt’s mood seemed to brighten substantially. Foggy also noticed a change in Matt’s attitude towards work. The sculpture park he’d initially loathed was now his new favourite cause because he realised how much it meant to the local community. More notably, however, Matt seemed to be changing his attitude towards guilty clients (under the right circumstances).

This change was particularly evident on Wednesday afternoon when Foggy received a phone call from a friend of a past client. She’d been caught stealing from the cash register at work to feed a gambling addiction, and now she was at the police station needing representation straight away. Pre-empting Matt’s rejection of a guilty client, Foggy came up with a mental list of reasons to take the case on before he entered Matt’s office.

“Just listen before you say no,” Foggy said quickly. “She may be pleading guilty, but at least she’s not lying about that. She has a gambling addiction, and while I know that’s not an excuse to steal, it is something we could help her with. We could get her into a program or something. Please, Matt?”

Matt shrugged.

Foggy gaped. “What? That’s it? No passionate speech about only defending the innocent?”

“As you said, she has an addiction. She needs help.”

“Oh, yes – yes... hang on, I’m right? Can I get that in writing?”

Matt smirked as he grabbed a piece of paper. He gestured to Foggy to give him a pen, scratched out a vague representation of words, and handed it to the amused Foggy, “there you go, Mr Nelson. Shall we go meet our new client?”

Foggy narrowed his eyes, trying to work out where this newfound perspective had come from. After their early mistake with the Healy case, most of their guilty clients had been restricted to minors who had been caught with drugs. This charge of theft was far more serious and calculated,
even when taking the gambling addiction into account. Only a few months ago, the crime would have fallen outside Matt’s (somewhat hypocritical) moral code. Since Foggy had known him, Matt had cycled through various attitudes towards society, ranging from naive idealism to violent cynicism. If Daredevil had represented his peak cynical stage, then perhaps he’d settled on a middle ground: a realism based on helping who he could help within the confines of the law and with an acknowledgement that people are never perfect. *Pfft, yeah right,* Foggy concluded. But he was allowed to dream…

Their new client burst into tears when they introduced themselves at the station. Matt looked uncomfortable and stood back while Foggy tried to calm her. When asked if she was prepared to seek help through a formal program, Matt read her answer of ‘yes’ as the truth and discreetly nodded at Foggy.

Foggy went ahead and said, “Tara, this is what we’re going to do: at the arraignment, you’ll plead guilty and we’ll apply for bail. You will enter into a formal gambling addiction program, which will demonstrate your commitment to change. It’ll help your case significantly. Okay?”

Tara nodded, and Foggy said to Matt, “she just nodded.”

“S-sorry,” she said to Matt, who curtly nodded in return.

“What do you think?” Foggy said as they left the police station. “Are we doing the right thing taking on guilty clients?”

Matt rubbed the back of his neck. “Not as our core business, but I think if we can help people change for the better, then…” Matt petered off with a sigh. “I don’t know, Foggy. I think – I think things – uh, certain events of late…” He paused and rubbed his neck again. “I - I guess I’ve had time lately to consider the fine line between good and bad.”

“What about Daredevil – would you defend him? I mean, he violently assaulted people. I know they were bad people, but it’s still assault.”

“I think it’s a hypothetical,” Matt said.

Foggy rolled his eyes. “That’s a cop-out and you know it.”

Matt shrugged. “Come on, let’s go home. We’re meant to be starting our new exercise regime, remember?”

Foggy groaned. “Ergh, I was hoping you’d forgotten.”

Matt and Foggy had made a vow to start jogging - something that was probably more in the idealistic category than the realistic. Foggy thought it’d be a good ‘Daredevil gap filler’ for Matt, and secretly considered his own participation as an act of noble sacrifice. Meanwhile, Matt secretly thought it’d be good for Foggy to get some exercise, and went along with it just to please his friend.

They walked to Central Park in their hoodies and sneakers. Matt folded up his cane and held onto the string Foggy had tied to his waist, rolling his eyes as he did so. “You’re very welcome to do your hoodie disguise thing and run unattached, you know. I’m pretty sure no one’s going to notice.”
“Enough talk, Foggy. Start running.”

They jogged along the track for a few minutes before Foggy remarked, “wow! I’m actually running. This is easy.”

About a minute later, he was bent over double, clinging onto a stitch in his side. Matt was chuckling beside him, even though his own fitness level wasn’t much better. “Shut up, Matt,” Foggy said, groaning.

Matt grinned and put his hands out as if to say, ‘what did I do?’

“Why do people do this?” Foggy moaned. “It’s fucking masochistic.” He sat down on the grassy edge, pulling the string out of Matt’s hand. “Ergh, it’s wet,” he said, feeling the damp grass.

“Exercise gets easier,” Matt said. “But it takes practice.”

Foggy breathed out through narrowed lips, still holding his side. “Yeah, I know. Maybe I should have chosen boxing instead.” After a few minutes, he said, “okay, I think the stitch his gone. Let’s try again.”

Matt pulled him to his feet and they started off again almost at a limp.

On return to the apartment, Foggy went straight to the fridge and pulled out a beer. “I deserve this,” he said, taking a few generous glugs before throwing himself on the couch with a dramatic groan.

Matt chuckled and flicked on the kettle. “I deserve a shower and a cup of tea.”

Foggy winced. “Sorry, buddy.”

“About what?”

“Uh, tea versus beer.”

Matt waved him off. “It’s fine,” he lied. “I have a new variety that Elizabeth and Julia gave me. I’m looking forward to it.” He rifled through the cupboard, pulled out a box of crackers and stuffed a couple in his mouth. “Can I have first shower?”

“Knock yourself out,” Foggy said. He had his feet up on the table and didn’t look like he was going anywhere soon. Matt handed the box of crackers to Foggy, who dug into the packet with glee.

Foggy hummed the tune to *All That Jazz* as he finished up in the shower. Wrapping a towel around his waist, he paused in front of the mirror, picking at a hair on his cheek that looked more silver than dirty blond. “Matt, I think I have a grey hair,” he yelled through the closed door. “I’m going to blame you, okay?” Foggy listened for a smart response from Matt, but there was nothing.

Foggy opened the door and said a little warily, “Matt?” He wandered out into the living room only to find Matt lying on his back, vomit covering his cheeks and floor.

“No, no, no, no…” Foggy said, running across the room and quickly rolling Matt onto his side and shaking his shoulder. “Matt, you gotta wake up.”
Foggy wrinkled his nose as he put his finger into Matt’s mouth to clean out some of the vomit. Matt’s wheezing was wet, but at least he was breathing. Foggy retched a few times at the thought of Matt not being able to spit the vomit out, and then felt guilty at his own disgust. It’d be a while before he could eat those crackers again. He pulled the towel from his waist and wiped some of the spew away from around Matt’s head, trying not to breathe through his nose.

Matt shifted slightly before letting out a weak groan. “Matt, I think you had a seizure,” Foggy said, touching his shoulder. Matt retched and Foggy jumped back instinctively. “Your mouth must taste gross, hang on…” Foggy grabbed Matt’s water bottle from the coffee table. “Here, Matty, can you drink some water for me? Rinse your mouth out first. You can spit onto the towel.”

Foggy cupped Matt's head in his hand and held the bottle to Matt's mouth. Matt made a move towards it but before he could take a sip, he slumped against Foggy's hand with a small moan. Foggy tried again, but Matt was still in his post-seizure confusion stage and there wasn’t much he could do but wait. Usually Foggy was quite patient, but this was not a usual situation.

Foggy waited a few more minutes before saying, “come on, Matty. This can’t be pleasant for you. Can you sit up for me?”

“No…” Matt moaned. “Wha-?”

“You had a seizure.” Foggy held the bottle to Matt’s mouth again. “Take a sip. It'll make your mouth taste nicer.” Most of the water ended up on the surrounding towel before Matt could coordinate the sip. “Good. Now rinse your mouth and spit it out. There’s a towel underneath you. After that you can have a drink.” Matt didn’t rinse, but at least he spat out the first mouthful, most of it dribbling down his face.

“Great. Do you think you could sit up for me? I want to get you away from this mess.”

“Whyr nake-?” Matt slurred.

Foggy groaned. “Of all the things to notice…. I was in the shower. You had a seizure and I sacrificed the towel so that you wouldn't be lying in your own spew.”

Matt finally connected the taste in his mouth with the wet around him. He slid across the room in a clumsy squirm, trying to escape the smell.

Foggy kept a hand on Matt’s arm. “Hang on. Can I just clean you up quickly?” Matt gave a small nod. Foggy grabbed a cushion from the couch and stuck it under his head. “Lie there for two seconds. I'm going to get a cloth for your face and some pants for me.” Foggy stuck the glass of water on the floor and wrapped Matt’s hand around it. “Water if you need it.”

Now wearing boxers, Foggy returned with a couple of fresh towels. “Okay, can you sit up for me?” Foggy pulled Matt to a sitting position and he slumped over himself, head down. Foggy continued, “I'm just going to take this t-shirt off first because it's a bit gross. Can you help?”

Matt was like a rag doll, and didn’t seem to understand Foggy’s request for help. Foggy awkwardly pulled Matt's tee over his head, chucked it to one side, and then held up Matt’s face to wipe it down. Foggy took in the blotchy rash across Matt’s stomach that had now spread to his chest, making a mental note to find his tube of ointment after everything was cleaned up.

“That's better,” Foggy said once Matt’s face was clean. “I'll help you into the shower later, but first: sleep. Do you reckon you could make it to the bedroom if I help you?”

Matt didn't say anything, but he made to get up so Foggy took it as a yes.
“Shit,” Foggy swore as he took most of Matt's weight, stumbling forward and jointly falling onto the bed. Matt pulled his legs up into a foetal position and immediately fell asleep.

Foggy took a few deep breaths, trying to calm down. "Shit," he said in a half-whisper. “Shit, shit, shit...” He ran his fingers through his hair as he stared at the pile of towels and vomit still in the middle of the living room. Foggy was usually the type to run retching from vomit. He'd had a hard time coping at college where many of his fellow students believed that a great night out and spewing in the university’s memorial rose garden were synonymous.

Now that he'd got Matt cleaned and into bed, Foggy’s fear of vomit returned. Tying a cloth around his face to block the smell, he grabbed a bag from the kitchen and wiped the floor with his already soiled towel. He threw a liberal slosh of strong-smelling disinfectant across the floorboards that Matt would no doubt loathe, but would at least disguise the less pleasant vomit smell.

“Sorry, Matt. You're buying me a new towel,” he muttered as he threw the towel into the rubbish bag. “And another one for yourself.” He threw Matt's own towel into the bag as well. He double bagged it, then left it at the front door for disposal once Matt was okay.

Foggy perched on the edge of Matt’s bed, watching him sleep. “What are we going to do?” Foggy said softly, running his hand through Matt's hair over and over – a calming gesture that was more for Foggy than the oblivious Matt. By the time Matt woke up a few hours later, Foggy was lying on the bed next to him, fast asleep.

“Foggy?” Matt gurgled. He gave a wet cough. “Ergh, m’mouth.”

Foggy groaned and sat up. "Do you want me to help you to the bathroom? You had a bit of a spew during a seizure.” Foggy wrinkled his nose at the memory. “You probably want to rinse your mouth, huh."

“I want to rinse everything.”

“I can help you to the shower,” Foggy said, putting his hand under Matt’s elbow.

Matt coughed weakly and winced at the sting in his throat. “Maybe just turn it on for me?”

“Of course.” Foggy leaped up and turned on the shower. Matt listened to the pipes changing pitch as Foggy adjusted the temperature. When they'd settled into a steady note, Matt slowly walked into the bathroom, trailing his fingers along the wall as he went.

“No shirt,” Matt said, patting his bare chest.

“I can help you with your pants if you want.”

“Yeah, I had to remove it. It needs a wash. Can I help you with your pants or can you take it from here?”

“I'm okay,” Matt croaked. “Thanks, Foggy.”

“No problem. Yell if you need me.”

Matt removed the rest of his clothes and stepped into the shower, leaning up against the wall for support. He rinsed his mouth out over and over, but couldn't get the taste of vomit out of his mouth. He could smell it everywhere. Exhausted, he slid down the wall until he was sitting on the floor of the shower. Resting his chin on his knees, he tried not to think about the sharp burn in his throat and chest, meditating on the water sluicing over his head.
The next day, Matt woke up in a sweat. He attempted to sit up, but something caught in his chest and he started coughing.

Foggy appeared at the door. “You okay?”

“Yeah,” Matt croaked, slumping back against the pillows.

“Doesn't sound like it.” Foggy walked over and put his hand on Matt’s sweaty forehead. “You're burning up.”

“One more thing I don't need,” grumbled Matt, weakly pushing Foggy’s hand away from his head.

“I'll text Karen and tell her you're not coming in today. You going to be okay on your own?”

“I'm not staying home, Foggy. I've got heaps of work to catch up on after-” he waved his hand “-you know.”

“We agreed that your official work status was part time until you get better.”

“No, you said that, Foggy.”

“I know you don’t like to talk about it, but we have heaps of money thanks to Elektra, and I’ll get Candy to do an extra day if necessary. Really, it’ll be okay if you miss a day or two.”

Matt pouted.

Foggy rolled his eyes. “Would it make you feel better if I emailed some discovery documents we need to read through? If nothing else, you can at least read them while horizontal.”

At this point Matt was still working up the energy to get out of bed to visit the bathroom, so he didn't argue with Foggy's proposal. He grunted as he sat up. After catching his breath, he gingerly stood up, swaying a little.

“Woah!” Foggy yelped, catching his arm. “Here, I'll help you. You want to go to the bathroom?”

Matt nodded and started shuffling his way towards the bathroom. He grabbed the wall of the bathroom, catching his breath before making his way to the toilet. Did he have another seizure just before waking up? It wasn't unheard of - he'd had seizures in his sleep before - but he wasn't usually this breathless, nor had he ever had a fever.

He shuffled back to bed, descending into a coughing fit as he lay back on the pillows.

Foggy looked at him critically. “Do you want me to call Claire? Or your doctor?”

Matt waved him off. “I probably just have a cold. I'll stay in bed today and I'll probably be all better tomorrow.”

“Okay. Text me if you need anything. Uh, I’ll make you a sandwich before I go.”

Matt rubbed his eyes. “I’ll be fine, Fog. Just go to work.”

Foggy texted Matt as soon as he arrived at the office, and then every hour after that until Matt said he was going to have a nap. “Good idea. Text me when you wake up”, Foggy replied.
Matt meanwhile had attempted and failed to do any kind of productive work. He just couldn't think. He closed his eyes and tried to meditate his way better, but kept getting interrupted by his inability to catch breath. He had a seizure early-afternoon, no doubt triggered by the stress of not being able to breathe and the raging fever. He woke up damp and barely able to move. Each breathe seemed like a conquest, and despite himself, he finally decided to call Claire.

“Matt?”

"Clar-" he wheezed.

"Shit, are you okay?"

“No, I can't... brea-” Matt shifted in the bed, trying to find a position that would best suit his lungs.

“When you say no, I know it's bad. I'm coming around. Are you at home?”

Matt coughed weakly. After catching his breath, he said, “yes.”

Claire turned up in record time, helping herself to the key that Foggy had recently hidden for emergency purposes.

Matt barely opened his eyes when Claire arrived.

“Matt?” she said nervously as she approached the bed.

“Ngh…” Matt moaned quietly.

“Fuck, you’re going blue.” She grabbed his wrist to check his pulse.

“Can’t see… blue,” he puffed.

“No shit, Sherlock.” She gently placed his wrist back on the bed. “I don’t care what you say, I’m calling an ambulance.”

Chapter End Notes

Courtesy fear warning as promised: if you get squeamish about spew, stop reading at the point where Foggy sings All That Jazz. You can pick up what happens in the next chapter (but you will miss out on some mega h/c)
Claire propped Matt up on pillows as they waited for the ambulance to arrive. His breaths came in ragged wheezes, and Claire found herself coaching him through each breath, worried that the exhaustion would overwhelm him before help arrived. She tried to get him to tell her what happened, but between the lack of oxygen, tiredness and seizure-related memory loss, he didn’t have much to say. He murmured, “Foggy… C-call him.”

Claire hung up the phone call to Foggy just as the paramedics arrived. She gave them Matt’s medical history and added, “he had a seizure last night and might have inhaled some vomit. It could be pneumonia.” This was news to Matt. Through the oxygen mask, he whimpered, “Claire,” but she didn’t hear her.

Matt couldn’t even sit up by himself, let alone walk down the six flights of stairs, so they bundled him onto a stretcher capable of descending the staircase. The sirens blared as the ambulance took off. Matt winced in pain, his heart rate picking up, until Claire requested they leave the sirens off.

Trips to the hospital were getting all to frequent for Matt. He tried to keep his eyes open because every time he started to drift off, the paramedics would shake him awake. He was so tired. He was actually glad of the oxygen mask this time, despite the smell and the itch of the elastic. He could feel the slight change in temperature, the breeze across his burning mouth and nose, cooling his fever. He imagined it as a dome of magic air and tried to convince himself that he could breathe again. His eyes closed again as he meditated on the dome, only to be woken by a concurrent jolt of the ambulance, and a hand on his shoulder as the paramedic said, “we're here now.”

As they connected him to the various monitors and IVs, he could hear Claire talking to the doctor off to one side. He wanted to call out, ask her to include him in the conversation, but it just came off as a weak grunt. He tried again, his voice muffled by the mask. The nurse lifted it slightly, saying “could you repeat that?”

Matt wheezed, “Claire,” and they called her over. She grabbed his hand.

“What are you saying?”

“I was just explaining that you would prefer not to be intubated and that you're tolerant of non-invasive respiration.”

Matt just nodded his head.

The doctor joined them, and started drilling him on the seizure. Matt said, “Claire?” and Claire took over, repeating what Foggy had said to her over the phone.

The doctor turned to Matt again. “Have you had another seizure since?”

Matt nodded.

“When?”

The doctor joined them, and started drilling him on the seizure. Matt said, “Claire?” and Claire took over, repeating what Foggy had said to her over the phone.

The doctor turned to Matt again. “Have you had another seizure since?”

Matt nodded.

“When?”
“This aft’noon” he breathed.

She turned to Claire. “I’m going to have to get a respiratory specialist and the neurologist down here to consult before I make a decision. Dr Millet is on today. She’ll be down shortly, but we’ll send him to radiology first.”

Foggy arrived just as Matt was being wheeled away for a chest x-ray. Matt could hear Foggy attempting to answer questions about the previous night’s seizure. “No, I just came out of the shower and found him lying there in covered in spew… yes, on his back… yeah, I rolled him over and scraped out as much as I could, but I don’t know how long he was lying like that… no, when I left, he had a fever and a cough, but he said he was okay. I wouldn’t have left him if I knew…” Scraped out the spew? Matt considered Foggy’s words. What had happened last night? He’d never thought to ask. Matt wanted to return to Foggy, tell him it was okay, tell him thank you, but the orderly didn’t hear Matt’s weak voice of protest from under the mask.

When he was returned to the ER, he clung onto Foggy’s hand and didn’t let go. There was a group of four doctors discussing his situation and it was all a bit overwhelming. One of the doctors said, “we’re still waiting on test results. We haven’t ruled out the possibility that this has something to do with your rash, but from what you’ve told me about last night’s seizure, we suspect you might have aspiration pneumonia from inhaling gastric contents last night. Have you heard of it?”

Matt nodded his head. Dr Millet had briefly mentioned it when he was first diagnosed. Apparently inhaling liquids was a risk during seizures. He kicked himself for not recognising it earlier.

“We’re going to take you up to the HDU. It’ll be quieter there. If it is pneumonia, most of the treatment will be supportive - helping you breathe, keeping your vitals steady, and so on - but we’ll give you some antibiotics as well.”

Matt merely increased his grip around Foggy’s hand. As the doctors left, Claire looked at Matt, arms crossed. “I can’t believe how often you’ve managed to get me to visit work during my days off, Murdock. I almost miss you turning up at my apartment. At least you came to me.”

Matt huffed, which turned into a cough.

“Sorry,” said Claire, rubbing his blanket-covered shin.

“Are you too warm? I can grab some ice.” Matt nodded, and Claire marched off to find the ice.

“I knew I shouldn't have left you,” said Foggy, worriedly.

“S’okay.” Matt said softly.

“I'm going to have to get fitter if you keep doing this to me. Only you could get me to run like I just did. I certainly didn’t have this stamina last night.” Foggy's shirt was damp with sweat, and his forehead was even sweeter than Matt's.

Matt croaked, “how was work?”

Foggy gave a small laugh. “Do you really want to know?”

“Not really,” said Matt sadly, closing his eyes. Foggy took that as a hint, and sat down, still holding Matt's hand, listening to his laboured breathing.

They soon wheeled Matt upstairs, and Foggy noticed that Matt didn't do his usual finger clicking that occurred whenever he was sick and unfamiliar with a place. Was he so used to the hospital that
he no longer felt the need to orient himself? It was a depressing thought.

The specialist agreed that non-invasive respiratory support would be best for now, and the nurses went to grab the BPAP machine which was what Foggy and Matt had previously called the 'alien mask'.

“I understand you’ve had a similar treatment before,” the nurse said. “Do you remember this system?”

Matt screwed up his face, and shook his hand a little.

“That’s okay. We’ll go over it again. We need you to be completely comfortable and calm. I’ll put the mask in place and you can just hold it yourself for a bit until you get used to it, and then we can attach it properly. Does that sound good to you?”

Matt nodded. He vaguely remembered terror he felt the last time they'd done this (not the first - his brain injury had thankfully wiped that memory). However, if it could relieve some of the tension from trying to breathe, he'd be willing to put up with almost anything.

Since Matt couldn't see the mask, the nurse placed it in his hands to feel and familiarise himself. They removed the existing mask, and quickly shaved off his day-old stubble before replacing it with the bigger mask. He could feel the soft pads fit snugly around his cheeks and chin and another on his forehead. He was confused that it didn't seem to be doing anything until the nurse said, “if you just hold this for me, I'll switch it on.” Matt slowly raised his arm, and the nurse helped him place his hand across the top. It was solid and plasticy. Matt gripped tightly, and braced for the uncomfortable pressure. He groaned as air was forced into his lungs, trying not to let go in shock.

“You don't need to push down,” she said, easing his fingers off. “Just relax. I have my hand here too. Can you give me a thumbs up if it's okay?” Matt raised his thumb. “Can I strap it in place or do you need a little more time to get used to it?” Matt raised his thumb again. The nurse called to her colleague and they lifted Matt's head forward to fit the tight straps in place. “We'll be checking on you every ten minutes or so, but if you’re struggling, the button to call us is here.” She placed the control next to his hand.

Matt couldn't work out why he got so claustrophobic with this mask, but he seemed constantly on the edge of panic. He didn't realise he was gripping the blanket with both hands until Foggy unfurled his fingers. Matt closed his eyes, relieved that he could finally rest, but the nurses immediately returned with more ointment for the rash, which had recently spread from his front to a small patch on his back. Foggy bit back a 'told you so' as the nurses smeared the ointment all over him, commenting on how bad it looked.

Finally satisfied that he was stable, Claire said goodbye, but Matt didn't have the strength to respond. Exhausted, he drifted off, thankful for the steadying pulse in Foggy's hand.

Matt woke up to a hand gently rubbing his naked leg. “Hello, Matthew,” the voice purred.

“Elektra,” he tried to say, but he couldn't speak with the airtight mask. He started to panic, fighting against the machine. Elektra's hand drifted up his leg and up to his torso where she pinched him slightly, and he jerked away in fright. Forgetting once more that he couldn't speak, he tried to ask what she was doing here, and gulped at the resistance. She ran her fingers back and fro across his
Elektra tutted. “What would Stick say if he could see you now? Letting all these people fuss over you, coddle you, while you lie here weak and vulnerable. I could do anything to you right now.” Matt’s blanket pulled as she climbed onto the bed. Straddling him, she leaned against his chest and ran a coarse thumb across his cheek. After placing a small kiss on his cheek, he heard her withdraw something sharp and metal from her waist. He panicked, wrestling the mask off and pushing her away at the same time, desperate to defend himself.

Foggy jumped up and saw Matt clawing at his mask and scratching at the blankets. “Matt, Matt, what are you doing?” Foggy grabbed Matt’s arm in an attempt to ground him, but Matt pushed it away and continued flailing, pulling at the leads attached to his chest and pushing the alien mask off his head. “Calm down. Calm the fuck down,” Foggy yelled, slightly hysterical, as the machines started beeping. A nurse ran in just as Matt temporarily stilled. He lay there panting for five seconds before launching back into action with a renewed burst of energy.

“What the fuck, Matt?” Foggy said, grasping at Matt’s flailing hands in an attempt to keep Matt from diving off the bed.

“Matt, you need to calm down for me please. Otherwise I'm going to have to sedate you,” the nurse said brusquely. The threat worked a charm and Matt stopped trying to escape. The nurse said, “I'm just going to place this oxygen mask on your face, okay?”

Matt lay there panting as she slipped it over his head. His breaths came in dangerous wheezes and he coughed weakly as he struggled to get enough oxygen. She grasped his hand and he jerked it away reflexively. “I need to put this clip on your finger,” she said brusquely. Matt reluctantly offered his hand.

“Did anything trigger the panic?” the nurse asked both Matt and Foggy.

“No, not that I know of. I was sleeping and then I heard a sound and saw him writhing and trying to pull everything off him.”

Matt looked half possessed. His hair was rumpled and sticking out in sweaty tufts, there was a ring of red around his face from the pressure of the mask, and he had a shallow scratch across his cheek from where he’d frantically pulled at the mask.

Matt could feel something slide across his calf, and he twitched in response. He suddenly dashed forward, clawing at his leg. He winced as one of the electrodes on his chest pulled at his skin. “No, no, no, you can't do that.” Foggy yelled as Matt attacked his leg. “You have an IV there, remember?”

Matt vaguely recalled the ER nurse putting a cannula in his leg after the veins in his arms proved too difficult to access. He could feel the plastic tube rub lightly across his leg. It itched. The nurse lifted up the blanket to see a trickle of blood coming from the IV site where he’d partially pulled out the cannula. “Maaatt,” Foggy moaned. “You've pulled out your IV again.”

The nurse wasn’t ruffled. “It's okay. These things happen. I'll replace it with another.” She deftly stemmed the bleeding and managed to find a vein in his right arm. Then she cleaned up Matt’s cheek before bustling out to call Matt’s doctor.

“What happened, Matt?”

Matt looked wrecked. He was slumped against the pillow, eyes half-closed. “I lectra,” Matt puffed.
“She was here.”

“She’s dead, Matt. You saw her.”

“Well, she’s alive… again,” he said matter-of-factly.

“You know that can’t happen, right?” Foggy muttered to himself “then again, I guess you believe in Jesus coming back to life.”

“She tried to k-” Matt moaned, trying to catch his breath. “T-ried to kill me.”

“Matt, I was here the whole time. No one tried to kill you. No one was even here. It was just a bad dream.”

Matt sighed and turned his head away from Foggy.

The nurse returned, closely followed by Matt’s doctor. “I don't know what happened,” Foggy said to them wearily. “I think it was just a nightmare.”

The nurse said, “Matt, do you think you're calm enough to switch back to the other mask now? It'd be best for you. But only if you're calm.”

Matt’s heart started racing again, and Foggy added, “what about if I promise not to go to sleep? I'll keep watch.”

“She'll kill you,” Matt whispered.

“I'll take my chances.” Foggy said stubbornly.

Matt had to admit that the idea of breathing assistance sounded pretty good right now, so he reluctantly nodded. “Is that an okay to the mask?” the nurse confirmed.

“Yes,” he said irritably. “But y-you won’t threaten me with sedation again or I’ll sue you-”

“Matt,” Foggy hissed.

“S’illegal,” Matt grumbled.

“What happened?” the doctor asked the nurse.

The nurse looked from Matt to the doctor in bewilderment. “No-”


“He’s right,” Foggy said. “I’m a lawyer too.”

“Uh, I’m going to get my supervisor,” the nurse stuttered and high-tailed it out the door.

“It’s true. She did threaten Matt with sedation,” Foggy explained after an awkward silence.

“S’illegal,” Matt huffed into his mask.

The doctor frowned as she looked at the two lawyers, wary of the potential lawsuit. “I can assure you that we don’t use sedation as a punishment and I have no intention of sedating you against your will.” She added in a conciliatory tone, “perhaps we could discuss it later once you’re feeling better.”
Matt was assigned a new nurse, who exchanged the masks once more. Matt tried to relax and tell himself that Elektra was indeed a dream. People didn't magically come alive again. He still couldn't remember her death, but Foggy could. The murder investigation was still underway. It was her body in the morgue. She was well and truly dead. The old IV site pulsed a little with pain, and he decided to concentrate on that instead, quickly falling asleep once again.
By morning, Matt felt moderately better - more rested at least. He had a break from the alien mask in an attempt to get him moving a bit. With the help of a nurse and Foggy, he'd got up and limped to the bathroom, washing his face before shuffling back to bed.

“Draft a letter of complaint,” Matt wheezed.
Foggy quickly replied, “what?”

“The threat – this morning–?”

“I count 2am as the middle of the night,” Foggy said in his most unimpressed tone.

“Yes, that. Sedation shouldn’t be used as punishment.”

“I know. It’s not legal, but you should have seen yourself, Matt. You tore your IV out.”

“But I would have calmed down without the threat. It was unnecessary. I shouldn’t have to feel unsafe in here. I'm sick of feeling like I have to put up with threats and mistreatment.”

Foggy leaned back in his chair. “When you put it like that… yes, it’s pretty bad practice. I think in the moment, she just panicked-”

“As did I, but I didn’t threaten either of you.”

“Do you want it on the business letterhead?”

Matt nodded. “Not too aggressive. I just don’t want it to happen to-to me or anyone else more v-vulnerable again. She didn’t realise I was a lawyer – that’s what she told the mmm…” Matt waved his hand in the direction of the nurses’ station in order to save breath.

“No lawsuit then?”

“Just the letter,” he puffed. “…for now.”

Foggy squeezed Matt’s hand. “I’m sorry you feel unsafe.”

Matt gave a small nod and closed his eyes.

Immediately after they replaced Matt's mask, Foggy cussed, “damn, I should have asked you what you wanted me to read before you were muted again.” Matt shrugged his shoulders. Foggy held out the stack of candidates. ‘Claire raided the nurses’ break room for us again. I’ll read you out a couple of options. One: Emma.” Matt raised his eyebrows. “Okay, I’m guessing not Emma,” Foggy said with a snort. “That expression is priceless, Matt.” He flicked through them. “There’s a few more Austens… hey, what about Brave New World? Alphas and Betas and test tube babies and social engineering …” Matt gave a thumbs up.

“Boring introduction…” Foggy muttered to himself as he flicked through the academic analysis of the book. “Here we go, ‘A squat grey building of only thirty-four storeys.’ Matt, it’s kinda like this place,” Foggy commented. Matt raised his eyebrows again. “Okay, okay, I’ll keep my comments to a minimum. Uh, where were we? ‘Over the main entrance the words, CENTRAL LONDON HATCHERY AND CONDITIONING CENTRE, and, in a shield, the World State’s motto, COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY’”
Matt closed his eyes, but didn't look like he was sleeping so Foggy continued. By the end of the first chapter, Foggy saw Matt's grip on the blanket relax. He stopped and stuffed a tissue between the pages as a makeshift bookmark, watching Matt for signs of movement. Confident that he was asleep, he ducked outside to call Karen.

Matt (not asleep) heard Foggy attempting to explain the situation to Karen. “Yeah, they think he has a type of pneumonia. No, he'll be okay. But he's in the High Dependency Unit. No, he's not... they're pumping him full of drugs so he doesn't have another seizure... yeah, he's a bit out of it, but you know Matt - he fights everything including sedatives.” Foggy sighed. “Yeah... no... maybe a couple of days? You could - oh okay.” Foggy couldn't seem to get a word in. “Maybe you could bring in my laptop and charger, our toothbrushes and a change of clothes for us both. Matt’s cane and glasses should be at the front door... no, probably not, but if there’s a cane lying next to his bed, it signals he’s blind... yeah, exactly... no, they don’t care...oh, and I know this sounds weird, but if there’s a red beanie lying about could you bring that too... uh, probably Matt’s bedroom... yeah that’d be great, thanks. Oh, actually another thing – sorry – he has some noise cancelling earphones around somewhere... no, not completely – they just dampen the sound... er, maybe check his bedside table drawers... yeah... yeah... you’re a star, thanks. See you soon.” Foggy re-entered the room, and Matt tried to look like he was still asleep. He heard Foggy pick through Matt's uneaten meal tray, and open the cup of orange juice before settling back into the chair. Foggy might have lost a bit of weight since living with Matt, but he still always gravitated towards the sugar.

Ten minutes later, Foggy whispered, “Matt, are you awake?”

Matt opened his eyes a crack.

“Ah, cool. Um, do you mind if I leave you for five minutes and get a snack from downstairs? I’ll be really quick, I promise.” Matt felt a pang of guilt that Foggy was worried about leaving him for five minutes. Matt gave Foggy a thumbs up, and Foggy scrambled to his feet. “Ace, thanks. Uh, do you want anything? Actually, that’s a stupid question. Forget I asked.”

Matt made a scribbling motion in the air, and Foggy looked around for a piece of paper.

“Fizzy water + coffee,” he scratched out.

It took Foggy a minute to decipher Matt’s writing. “Uh, I don’t know if you’re meant to be drinking coffee. I could ask.”

Matt rolled his eyes, and scribbled. “Please.”

“Okay, I’d kill for a coffee right now too. If you want me to get you proper coffee, as in not a hospital-made coffee, I might be more than five minutes. There’s a good place a block away that I discovered last time you were here.”

Matt gave him another thumbs up.

As Foggy left the room, Matt congratulated himself on his sly method of getting Foggy a proper coffee for himself. He was feeling a little nauseous and didn’t really feel like anything right now, but he knew it’d make a difference to his caffeine-addicted friend. Sure enough, Foggy returned armed with a plastic bag of supplies, including Matt’s fizzy water, an egg and bacon roll, and a packet of chips. “I got you a macchiato, an orange juice with no pulp, and a hippy muffin with sunflower seeds or something.”

Matt had a pained expression on his face. Foggy said, “I feel like a tease, I’m sorry. You should be
due for a break from the mask soon. Should I get someone to take it off?"

Matt stretched. His back was starting to hurt from having to sleep upright. He could do with a change. He nodded and reached for the button.

The nurse removed the mask with a condition. “We’ll try you on a nasal cannula for half an hour if you want to eat.” She gestured at the spread of food and drink Foggy had laid out on the table. “If your sats drop significantly, we might have to swap you back earlier, but half an hour should give you a good enough break.” Matt slid towards the side of the bed. “Can I help you to the bathroom?”

Foggy piped up, “I can do that,” earning a smile from the nurse.

Matt and Foggy shuffled to the bathroom and back. Matt stretched a few times before he climbed back into bed, closing his eyes as the nurse reattached him to the various machines and oxygen. Even without the mask, he felt somewhat trapped.

Foggy moved the table towards Matt. “How are your senses?”

“A little off,” Matt replied. “I think it’s tiredness more than anything else.”

“Okay, we have coffee on the left, orange juice and water in the middle, and muffin on the right.” Foggy tapped the table at the location of each items, allowing Matt to sense the shape of each item through vibration.

Matt reached across the table, and rested his hand in front of the juice. “Thanks, Fog.”

Foggy unwrapped the egg and bacon roll and practically inhaled it. By the time he finished, Matt still hadn’t touched his coffee. “You didn’t really want a coffee, did you?”

Matt’s mouth twitched.

“You sneaky thing, Murdock.” He took a sip of his latte. “Ahhh, I needed this. Thank you.”

Matt licked his lips. “Fog?”

“Yeah, Matt?”

“Are-are you sure it was Elektra? The body – in the morgue.”

Foggy stared. This again?

Matt shifted slightly so that his face was angled directly at Foggy’s. “Was it?”

“Yeah, it really was.”

“It’s just that – I – I think it’s possible that she was here.”

“Not possible, Matt. I know you’re Catholic and all, but even you have to acknowledge that resurrection isn’t a real thing.”

“Elektra said it was.”

Foggy choked on his coffee. “Hang on, so Elektra came back from the dead, visited you in hospital and told you that she was resurrected? Come on, Matt. That’s ridiculous. It’s probably just the fever.”
Matt scrubbed at his face. “No, she said – she said when she visited me, um, when I – I think it was when I was here for a night - before – a few months back.” He paused to catch his breath. “She visited me here and told me the Hand can bring people back to life.”

“Whose hand?”

“The Hand,” Matt said tiredly. “It’s a group. They can do magic... or something.”

“Magic.” Foggy rolled his eyes. “Shit, Matt, you can’t really think that’s true. She’s always lied to you – and you’ve always fallen for it. You lose all objectivity around her. There are no magic groups resurrecting people. If there were, don’t you think we’d have heard of it by now? They could charge people billions to bring their loved ones back to life.”

Matt frowned. Foggy had always been a grounding force in his life, and the point about loved ones made sense.

“Who would bring Elektra back anyway? Her father died and she’s estranged from the rest of her family, isn’t she?”

It was also a good point. If The Hand had killed her – as Matt had concluded was most likely – then why would they bring her back? She was trying to stop them from acquiring the pattern of land by buying it first. With her out of the way, they were more likely to get possession.

“Hang on,” Foggy said, confused, "just to go back a bit… Elektra visited you here, in hospital?”

Matt nodded.

“Why?”

“She said… she was concerned for me.” He pinched the bridge of his nose. The combination of a lack of oxygen and the fever was giving him a raging headache.

Foggy snorted. “And you believed that?”

Matt shrugged.

“Is that why you’ve been holding out on Gladys?”

“No,” Matt said, his wheezing getting more obvious. “I- I’m…” he coughed and gasped. “too complicated.” He groaned as he fought to catch a breath.

“Do you need help?” Foggy said, reaching for the call button.

Matt nodded frantically, and clung onto Foggy while the nurses refitted the mask. Matt could tell Foggy didn’t believe him – and Matt wasn’t sure himself. Whatever the case, there was nothing much he could do in here other than hope ghost Elektra didn’t return.

The next time Matt woke up, it was to the sound of the ripping plastic and the unmistakable crunch of Foggy cracking open the chips.

“Shit, sorry, did I wake you?” Foggy said, mouth full of chip. “You slept through someone changing your IV so I figured you were well out to it.”

Matt touched the cannula in his arm. How had he slept through that?
Just about the only good thing about the mask (other than the helping him breathe thing) was that it dampened most of the smells - the disease, the antiseptic, the bodily fluids, the hospital food, and now, Foggy’s favourite fake cheese flavouring. Matt closed his eyes again, relieved that he was protected from the artificial flavouring. Foggy resumed his munching.

Karen turned up about an hour later armed with their laptops, chargers, toiletries, a new set of clothes for Foggy, and pyjamas and a silk covered pillow for Matt. Matt somehow managed to sleep through her entrance, and woke up to Foggy and Karen whispering in the corner. He pulled one of his arms out from beneath the sheets and waved at them.

Karen tried to give him a hug, but ended up just bumping his mask instead. Matt winced, which was followed by a torrent of apologies from Karen. He was tempted just to unclip the mask. As ghost Elektra had suggested, he was feeling extraordinarily vulnerable being the object of so much attention from Karen and Foggy, but not even able to join in on the conversation.

“Do you want me to tuck the pillow under your head?” Foggy asked gently, but Matt just held his hand out for it instead. He tucked it under one arm, half cuddling, half leaning on it. Having to sit up, he was much happier having something to lean on sideways than behind his head.

“I don’t know if the beanie is really compatible with the mask, Matt. But here it is anyway,” Karen said, pressing the hat into Matt's hand. Matt rubbed the soft possum wool between his fingers. It probably wasn’t really practical, and besides, he was hot and sweaty enough as it was without wearing a woollen hat.

“I brought you a fleece blanket too. I know they smell a bit weird to you, but I figure it’d be softer on your skin than the sheets.” Matt had made the mistake of telling Karen and Foggy about his loathing of cotton sheets, and they’d made way too big a deal of it. Nevertheless, Matt had been shirtless since he arrived (partly due to the sticky ointment, and also to counter his fever) and he’d much rather have synthetic fleece behind his back than the scratchy hospital sheets. He leaned forward and they helped him slide it behind his back.

He lay back against the blanket and closed his eyes briefly in relief. However, the sheet that was covering his chest was now crumpled in his lap, and Karen saw for the first time Matt’s collection of gruesome scars and raw rash. She stared, taking in each scar in turn with an expression of horror.

Foggy could see Matt shift nervously in the bed. He knew something was up. “K-karen bought you a balloon too,” Foggy said quickly, trying to distract Karen from the scars.

“Oh yes, I nearly forgot,” Karen said. The shiny balloon was tied to her wrist and her stuttered excuse didn’t fool anyone.

Matt could sense the helium and metal object bobbing next to his bed. He always enjoyed Karen's balloon gifts, even if he couldn't see the coloured animal cartoons printed on them. She pulled the balloon down so that he could feel it. Matt ran his fingers over the printed ink lines, but couldn't quite visualise what animal it formed. “It's a dog this time,” Karen explained. Matt retraced the lines: he identified the ears, the snout, the tail. He couldn't smile, let alone say thanks, so he held out his hand instead and gave Karen's fingers a squeeze when they met his. “I'll tie it up over here if you'd like.” Matt gave a single nod.

Matt could sense a silent conversation happening between Karen and Foggy that consisted of facial expressions and minute hand movements. Foggy spotted Matt tilt his head slightly, which he’d
come to associate with Matt’s intense bodyscan-level listening. Foggy cleared his throat, “I’ll work from here today. I’ve spoken to Candy and.”

“She’s already at the office,” Karen finished.

“Oh, I thought she was working from home today.”

Karen shrugged. “It’s nice to have the company. I think I’ll head back to the office. Give me a call if you need anything.” She gave Matt’s arm a squeeze. “I hope you feel better soon, Matt.”

As soon as Karen left, Matt mimed putting earphones on. “Do you want them plugged into your phone or just on noise-cancelling mode?” Matt made a grabbing motion, and Foggy handed the earphones over.

Foggy suddenly yelped, “oh I have to show you what I made. Don't be mad, but I made you a thing just in case this happened again.” Matt was now wearing his earphones and Foggy wondered if it was a hint. “Actually, do you want to rest?” But Matt signalled to keep going.

“Ohokay.” Foggy pulled out a thick card and placed it under Matt’s hand. “It's the alphabet in braille. You point to the letters and spell out words. It's like a ouija board, but less creepy.” Matt ran his fingers across the paper. “I’ve written the letters under each braille letter so that people don't need to know braille to understand.” Matt squeezed Foggy's hand in thanks, then remembered the board and spelt it out.

“There you go! Now do you need anything else?”

Matt spelled out r-e-a-d, and running both hands over the board finally drew a question mark shape in mid-air.

“Oh yeah, I didn't include a question mark. I’m an idiot. I can write a heavy one down the bottom if you want.”

Matt spelt out y-e-s, and Foggy grabbed the board and scratched a biro mark into the top corner. Matt ran his fingers across the board again, and spelled out t-h-a-n-k-s. “Maybe I should write thanks on there as well,” he laughed. “Save you some time.” Matt touched s-o-r-r-y. “oh no you don’t,” Foggy bumped his hand off the board before he could touch the y.

“maybe I shouldn’t have done that, sorry,” Foggy said, returning the board.

Matt quickly spelt out l-o-l, much to Foggy’s amusement.

“Shall I keep reading Brave New World?”

Matt pointed to the y, but before he got further, Foggy interpreted out loud, “yes?” That would work.

Matt fell asleep again not long into chapter two. Foggy sighed and switched the book for his laptop. Between Matt’s inability to carry a full-time load and his frequent time-outs to assist Matt, he felt incredibly behind even with Candy’s help. He tried not to think about the consequences for their small law firm if Matt continued to have twice-weekly seizures coupled with these types of medical emergencies that required days in hospital.

Matt woke again in a panic. He was still feeling insecure after Elektra’s visit (he was still convinced that it could be her, even though at the same time it seemed impossible). Between the light sedatives and noise of the machine, he couldn’t locate Foggy’s heartbeat. He sat forward a
little, and even though the machine was relatively light, it was incredibly bulky and he instinctively grabbed it, thinking it was going to fall off. Foggy spotted Matt’s movement, and thinking he was about to rip it off again, he leapt at Matt, “no, don’t, Matty.” Foggy grabbed Matt’s hand and Matt jumped in surprise. The mask moved slightly on his face but wasn’t displaced, although the headphones slipped away from one ear.

The masks always rubbed the bridge of his nose, but with this mask being in place for so long, the spot was stinging uncomfortably. He winced, and a tear of pain ran down his face. “Matty, it’s okay,” Foggy said in a concerned voice. Matt was still sitting forward and Foggy rubbed his back trying to comfort him. “Don’t cry.” Matt felt around for the call button that had previously been hooked onto the bed railing. “You need the nurse?” Foggy deduced. Matt nodded, closing his eyes again as the movement cause the mask to rub again ever so slightly.

The nurse arrived and seeing Matt’s obvious distress, said “do you need a break from the mask?” Matt nodded again, more slight this time, and the nurse gently unclipped the straps from his head. Matt instinctively put his hand up to the sore spot, feeling the heat of the sore.

“Oh, that looks painful,” the nurse observed, as Foggy said “ouch”. Matt braced himself, expecting her to subject him to the usual oxygen mask, but instead, she hooked the less painful nasal cannula under his nose. “Thank fuck,” he said under his breath.

“I’ll dress it for you before we replace the mask,” the nurse explained. “I’ll help you to the bathroom if you’d like. It’d be good for you to get up and moving for a bit.”

Matt nodded. He was busting to go to the toilet, and had a particular loathing of bedpans. He slipped his legs over the side of the bed, and the nurse unhooked the oxygen temporarily then offered her arm as assistance. She guided him to the bathroom and he sat down heavily on the toilet. Delaying his return to the bed and thus the painful mask, he slumped on the toilet for longer the necessary, enjoying the relative freedom. His chest felt heavy and with each painful, wheezing breath, he could tell the pneumonia was far from gone, but at least he wasn’t burning up quite as much.

“Matt, are you okay in there?” the nurse asked, concerned. “Do you need assistance?”

Matt levered himself up again, holding onto the wall railing and IV pole. He felt his way along the wall to the sink, and after washing his hands, tried to wash his face with one hand, while leaning on the sink with the other.

The nurse could hear the sink running, and knocked on the door, “Matt, can I come in?” Matt grunted a yes, and she bustled in to find him awkwardly leaning half against the sink and half against the wall. She pulled the shower chair over, and helped him sit down before grabbing a washcloth to wipe his face and neck.

“Do you think you can make it back the bed, or do you need me to fetch a wheelchair?” she asked once they were finished.

“I can walk,” Matt panted. The nurse eyed him suspiciously, knowing from his records that he was not always the best judge of his own health. Foggy came over to help, and Matt shuffled back to the bed, half leaning on Foggy with the nurse trailing behind with the IV pole. Foggy half-lifted Matt into bed, and he lay there drawing short, shallow breaths. The nurse hooked the oxygen back under his nose, and explained that she was going to dress his sore now. He flinched at the sharp sting of the antiseptic. She applied some tape and fearing she was about to replace the mask, he turned away in silent rebellion.
“Do you want anything to eat or drink before we replace the mask?” she asked him. He wasn’t hungry, but drinking something would at least delay the inevitable, he thought.

“Drink… please,” he breathed.

“What would you like? Water, juice, tea?”

Matt closed his eyes. Even decision-making was exhausting.

Foggy recognised Matt’s expression, and suggested an apple juice. Matt knew that it’d be the overly sweetened, preservative-laden stuff, but it seemed unusually attractive at that point.

“Half water, half juice?” Foggy asked. He knew Matt so well, Matt thought gratefully.

Matt nodded, and the nurse fetched him a small cup of juice. He took small sips, his breath becoming more and more laboured as he tiredness increased. The machine next to him started beeping, and the nurse said, “your oxygen sats are dropping again. I need to replace the mask, I’m sorry Matt.”

“I don’t want-” Matt whispered.

The nurse sighed. “I know you don’t. I can imagine it can’t be comfortable, but I know you don’t want to end up on a respirator again either, do you?”

Matt lay there wheezing, a resigned sadness on his face.

“It should be slightly less painful with the tape now. And your doctor will be checking on you in less than an hour. Maybe she’ll have another suggestion.”

Matt didn’t care if he seemed clingy and needy at this point. He pawed in Foggy’s direction, “Fog?”, and Foggy took his hand as the nurse clipped the mask back on. The tape made it better, but it still hurt. It seemed absurd that he could wear broken ribs without complaint, but a small pressure sore seemed like a disaster. What had he become?

Foggy kept telling him he was brave, that he was patient and tolerant and “fuck, I don’t think I could cope as well as you.” Matt was used to people calling him brave – ever since his accident people had gushed over the way he did things despite his blindness, telling him he was brave and inspirational just for existing. Sometimes Matt wondered if he would have studied as hard if he hadn’t been blinded. His motivation was somewhat fuelled by people’s constant underestimation of his capabilities. Foggy had never before said he was brave, and he always appreciated that. But since the seizures had started, he’d adopted the cliché phrase. Matt didn’t feel brave. He felt like he was sulky, selfish and intolerant. The constant panic attacks over the mask only confirmed these feelings.

The doctor confirmed that the mask was still the best option, although she was still happy for him to have regular breaks from it. She said that she’d rather the breaks than have him reject it altogether. They gave him another weak sedative to try and put him at ease, and he didn’t fight it this time.

The next time they removed the mask, they told him they were taking him to radiology for another chest x-ray. He was hoping he could just lie there and have a brief respite, but instead they switched the bulky mask for a regular one, bundled him into a wheelchair, and pushed him downstairs. Foggy stayed behind, and Matt felt a pang of separation anxiety. ‘Don’t be weak, don’t be weak, don’t be weak,’ Matt repeated to himself, ashamed about his emotional reaction. They fast-tracked the x-ray, getting him in and out in five minutes, and he was quickly returned upstairs.
He clicked his fingers a few times when he returned to the room. He couldn’t hear or sense Foggy. “Fog?” he croaked, upset.

“I think he went to get something to eat.”

Of course. Apart from the coffee run, Foggy had spent pretty much every minute by Matt’s side, occasionally picking at Matt’s uneaten hospital food. Matt felt incredibly selfish. He was helped back into his bed, and before he could blink, the alien mask was reattached. He felt a rush of anxiety – a combination of Foggy’s unexpected absence, tiredness, stress and the immediate reintroduction of the restricting mask on return from radiology. He expected at least a little more time to himself. Stay calm, he told himself. It’s just the same as before. Accept the machine’s help. His concentration lapsed and the surrounding noises suddenly overwhelmed him: someone was crying at the other end of the ward, another patient yelled out in pain, a nearby television was playing a movie heavy with gunfire and explosions. Matt started shaking.

The nurse noticed his grip on the blankets. She touched his hand, “Matt, are you okay?”

Matt shook his head, and tried to find the clip that would quickly release the mask.

“You need me to remove the mask?”

Matt nodded, a little more frantically this time.

She pulled it off, and he gasped. His breaths were fast and shallow and the nurse tried to calm him down. “Matt, can you take a deep breath for me,” she ordered as she slipped a regular oxygen mask over his head. Matt tried to comply but the deep breath turned into a cough. He couldn’t do this. He was too tired. He didn’t want to do this anymore. Foggy obviously didn’t want to do this anymore either. Where was he? His eyes started watering with the strain, and the nurse called for help, asking her colleague if he could page Matt’s doctor.

His head was screaming in pain, and he could tell from the nurse’s heartbeat every time she glanced at the monitor, that whatever it was telling her was not good. That merely edged up his panic a little more. He’d previously made the mistake of visualising his lungs filling then emptying air with each breath – an act that only drew attention to the fact that they were half-filled with gunk. Finally, he concentrated on that tiny spot of pain on the bridge of his nose. It was enough to fixate on, and he started to slow his breathing as he focussed on the sore.

“That’s good, Matt,” the nurse encouraged, holding his hand and talking him through his breaths.

By the time the doctor arrived, his breathing was a little more controlled.

“Can you tell me what happened?” the doctor said, concerned.

Matt moaned weakly, not wanting to talk, but the nurse quickly responded, and Matt realised that the doctor was actually talking to the nurse instead.

“I think he had a minor panic attack. We had just refitted the mask following his x-ray and he panicked and wanted it removed.”

“Matt, can you tell me the problem? Is it too uncomfortable?”

Matt shook his head. How could he explain it? “S’overwhelm- whelming”, he wheezed. “Please no more.”

“I wish I could give you more of a break, but your oxygen levels start dropping when we take you
off for a lengthy period. You just aren’t getting enough oxygen on your own.”

“What about this?” Matt said, pointing to his current mask.

“Even at a high volume it’s not enough at the moment.”

Matt nodded. He could feel the prickle of sweat on his forehead. This was not good. He could feel the panic starting to swell again.

“The thing is, we can only keep you on that machine as long as you’re calm and compliant.”

Foggy turned up just in time to hear the doctor’s last sentence. “What happened?” he said, looking from the doctor to the dishevelled Matt and the nurse still holding his hand.

“Matt?” the doctor said, asking for permission to explain. Matt gave a small nod.

“He’s not tolerating the mask as well as we’d like.” Matt screwed up his face, upset at the doctor’s wording. “We’re just discussing the options.”

“Which are?” Foggy dumped his bag of takeaway dinner on the table.

“Essentially, he needs to be calm enough to tolerate the mask. He’s not getting enough oxygen at the moment on his own, and we don’t want to have to get to the point where we’re forced to intubate.”

Foggy looked at Matt whose hair was starting to stick to his forehead with sweat. He could tell Matt was terrified.

“Matt, can I help?” he said gently.

The nurse moved away so that Foggy could hold Matt’s hand instead, and Matt’s breathing calmed in response. “That’s good, Matt,” the nurse encouraged.

“I shouldn’t have left,” Foggy said, clearly upset. “I’m sorry.” He leaned over and grabbed a tissue from Matt’s table, and mopped up some of the sweat. It seemed to calm Matt even more, so the doctor took the opportunity to force the issue.

“We can’t give you too many more sedatives, but we could up your dose a little more. Do you think you could give the mask another go?”

“I know you can, Matt,” Foggy said, rubbing his hand. He whispered in Matt’s ear so softly that only Matt could hear, “you’re the man without fear, remember?”

Matt’s mouth twitched a little, and he wheezed a huff of amusement. Only Foggy could make him laugh in a situation like this. But Foggy was only half right. It was his very presence that alleviated so much of Matt’s fear. Foggy was here. He could do this.

“I’m feeling better,” Matt said truthfully. “I’ll try again.”

The doctor prescribed some extra sedatives and the nurse reintroduced the mask more slowly this time, getting Matt to hold it in place for five minutes before they attached the straps. The relief from breathing on his own surprisingly eclipsed the previous panic, and Matt wondered how he’d been so anxious before. Satisfied that Matt was once again tolerating the mask, the nurse slipped out, leaving Foggy and Matt alone.

Matt immediately reached for his earphones. “Here, let me do it,” Foggy said, holding one of the
muffs up to his own ear. “Oh, I think there’s a problem with the connection, It’s just static.”

Matt gestured for Foggy to hand them over, and thinking Matt hadn’t heard him the first time, Foggy repeated, “they’re broken. It’s just static.”

Matt nodded.

“Hang on, you mean to say you’re listening to static deliberately?”

Matt rolled his eyes and nodded again.

“Fuck you’re weird,” Foggy said. “When you get that mask off, you’re going to explain to me why.” Foggy placed the muffs over his ears. Matt closed his eyes in relief. Every movement hurt, and the very act of raising his arms above his head was a battle in itself. Matt tapped ‘thanks’ on Foggy’s ouija board.

“Matty?” Foggy ventured after about five minutes, and Matt turned his head to indicate he was listening. “Um, would it be okay if I let go for like ten seconds just to grab my food?” Foggy said it in a tone that made it sound like a completely unreasonable request, even though he hadn’t really eaten a proper meal in 48 hours. Matt released Foggy’s hand and he hungrily unpacked his takeaway Chinese, arranging the boxes on Matt’s adjustable table in front of him so that he could eat with one hand and hold Matt’s with the other.

“I brought you some,” Foggy said, with his mouth half-full. “I’ll see if I can put it in a fridge somewhere until you’re released from the aliens.”

In lieu of a smile, Matt gave Foggy’s hand an affectionate squeeze. There was nothing Matt could ever say to capture just how thankful he was for Foggy’s company right now. Fortunately, he didn’t have to try. The squeeze would do.
It was another 24 hours before they gave Matt a real break from the mask. They switched him to a bulky high-flow nasal cannula every couple of hours, which, while still uncomfortable, at least allowed him to talk. His breathing had finally started to get easier, and thanks to the physiotherapy he was able to cough up some of the gunk in his chest.

“This is one of those rare occasions where you should be thankful you’re blind,” Foggy said, as the physio helped him hack up some more phlegm. “Nothing that colour should come out of your body.”

“Better out than in then,” the physio said, disproportionately chipper. He was pummelling Matt’s back, trying to loosen the mucus.

“I never knew being hit repeatedly in the back could be so exhausting,” Matt said as he slumped back in bed afterwards.

Foggy snorted.

“Don’t feel like you need to stay here,” Matt said, rubbing his face. His face was prickling with fatigue, even though he’d spent most of the last few days asleep.

“It’s no problem,” Foggy said, not bothering to look up from his laptop.

“Seriously, I’m about to have another nap, and if you’re working, it may be easier to concentrate in the office. It can’t be nice here – all the smells and the noise-”

“Matt, it’s the weekend.”

“Oh… so why are you working?”

“Who says I’m working?”

“You’re doing that grunty thing you always do when you’re concentrating on a difficult case.”

“I do not grunt.”

Matt smirked.

“Okay, smarty-pants, help me.” Foggy chuckled as Matt’s expression turned into one of concern. “That swiped the smile off your face.”

“I’ll try, but my brain is mush at the moment.”

“That’s cool. It might just help me saying it out loud.” Foggy quickly explained the case and how he was having trouble finding precedents.

Matt clicked his fingers. “What was that case, ah…” he snapped his fingers again.

“You might have to start from somewhere more specific, bud.”

“In second year criminal law. It was, oh you know…” Matt clicked again.

“I really don’t.”
“Foster v. Browne – was it Browne? Some colour…” Matt petered out and tipped his head back in frustration.

Foggy tapped Matt’s suggestion into the search engine. “Foster v. Greene?”

“Yeah.” Matt said, slapping his blanket triumphantly.

“It’s not a precedent, Matt. They’re very different cases.”

“I know-”

“So-”

“So there are some similarities,” Matt insisted. “Similar principles at least.”

Foggy hummed, “maybe. I guess it’s more than what I’ve come up with so far.”

“Have you asked Candy?”

“No.”

“She has more experience than us. Ask her. I mean, we’re paying her the big bucks for that reason.”

“Pfft. We pay her anything but big bucks. We’re lucky to have her,” Foggy said.

“Mmm… you know, even when I’m better, with the amount of work we’re getting, we could always keep her.”

Foggy smiled. Only a month ago, Matt was insisting that they didn’t need help. At least he was willing to change. “One thing at a time, Matt.”

“Yeah, okay.” Matt pulled at a loose thread in his blanket. “Do you need any more assistance?” He desperately wanted to be more involved.

“No, the grunting will cease now, I promise.”

Matt gave him a small smile. “It’s cute, you know?”

“What is?”

“The grunting.”

Foggy rolled his eyes. “Stop while you’re ahead, Matt.”

“You’re right,” Matt said, releasing the thread. “I’m going to sleep now. Don’t feel like you have to stay.”

“I’ll stick around for a bit longer, but I might sleep at home tonight if that’s okay.” Foggy looked at Matt critically. “Will you be okay on your own?”

“Yeah. I think yesterday’s panic was stoked by the fever… and the fact that I couldn’t breathe.”

“Understandable.” Foggy gave Matt’s hand a squeeze, only letting go when he was certain Matt was asleep once more.
Matt and Foggy had got to a point in their friendship where Matt’s greasy hair, exposed rash and stress-imbued body odour didn’t faze either of them. However, Karen was quite a different matter. So when she turned up unannounced early Sunday morning, Matt scrambled to make himself more presentable. He quickly smoothed down his hair and pulled the sheets over his bare chest as she entered the room.

“You’re looking better,” she said, plonking a gift of a fruit salad on Matt’s bedside table.

“I’m feeling better,” he croaked.

“And you can talk,” she said shyly.

“Yeah, they’ve been alternating between this” – he pointed to the bulky nasal cannula – “and the mask every two hours. This one is obviously better for talking, but I feel like I have a hurricane in my sinuses.”

She laughed and Matt looked both pleased and surprised at her reaction.

He held out his hand just as he’d done last time he was in hospital – an act that had ultimately resulted in tears and a seizure. Matt still couldn’t remember the incident, but his words lingered in Karen’s mind. ‘Are you afraid of me, or the epilepsy?’ he’d asked forlornly.

This time Karen didn’t hesitate. She took Matt’s hand, grateful for the second chance.

Matt said earnestly, “you know, I can’t help but notice that since I told you about my – about everything, uh, we seem to be closer again. There was a point where you seemed to drift away from us… from me. It was almost like you were scared.”

Karen let out a nervous breath. This was her opportunity to fix her past mistake. “Not-” she was about to say she wasn’t scared, but Matt would know that was a lie. She squeezed his hand affectionately. “I was scared. I mean, I still am scared. But that’s not on you. It’s nothing that you did. When you shared your secret, I felt – and I still feel very – um, flattered is not the right word, um, honoured? No, I feel – I guess I feel loved. Loved and included and trusted.” She cleared his throat. “I haven’t felt loved and trusted in a while.” She looked at him, waiting for his response. Matt tilted his head as if trying to digest this information, then he broke into a broad smile. He let go of her hand and gestured for her to give him a hug.

“Thank you,” he whispered. Silent tears dripped down Karen’s face, and Matt pulled away. “I didn’t mean to make you cry.”

Karen sniffed and wiped her tears with her sleeve. “They’re not sad tears, Matt. Not this time.”

Matt looked a bit puzzled, but pulled back into a smile. “Okay.”

“Can I come back and visit tomorrow – after work?” Karen’s voice wobbled.

“Yeah, sure. I’d like that.” He smiled and squeezed her hand.

“Okay.” Karen wiped her face again. “See you, Matt.”

“Bye, Karen.”

Karen ran into Foggy at the end of the hallway. He spotted her blotchy face and red eyes. “What
“What happened this time?” he said. “You didn’t fight again, did you?”

“No,” Karen said with a smile. “It’s just rare that you’re given a genuine second chance.” She dashed down the stairwell before Foggy could ask for clarification. He sighed. Why did he have to be friends with the two most cryptic people in the world?

Foggy could barely contain himself as he entered Matt’s room. “Guess what?”

“What?” Matt replied, smiling at Foggy’s excitement.

“Actually, let’s wait till you get downstairs.”

Matt shifted up the bed. “What do you mean?”

“I have a surprise.”

“I can’t go outside, the-”

“Already cleared it,” Foggy interrupted. “They’re finding a wheelchair for you as we speak.”

After an argument over the wheelchair, which was quickly resolved when Matt couldn’t get further than the hallway without feeling dizzy, Foggy wheeled Matt downstairs.

“It’s a shame you’re blind,” Foggy chirped. “I can’t tell you to close your eyes ahead of surprises.”

“Is that the only reason?” Matt said sardonically.

“Shhh…” Foggy said, tapping Matt on the shoulder.

As soon as they’d reached the small hospital courtyard, Foggy’s mother leapt upon Matt. She gave him a hug to beat all hugs, dislodging Matt’s oxygen in the process. “Oh, gorgeous, I’m so sorry,” she said as he tried to push the tube back under his nose. “Foggy only just told me you were in hospital.” She glared at Foggy, who stepped back with his hands up.

Matt tilted his head slightly, listening to the excited puffs and jangling tag coming from Mr Nelson’s feet. “Is that a dog?” Foggy’s father stepped forward and placed the dog in Matt’s lap.

“Her name’s Daisy,” Foggy explained. “This is the dog I told you about. Mom and dad are looking after her until she gets a permanent home.”

Matt frowned. He knew Foggy would try something like this. He stroked the small, excited dog’s soft fur. She was silky and had a ruff of long hair around her neck, almost like a mane. She gave him a single lick on the hand and Matt withdrew it quickly, wrinkling his nose in disgust.

“I think that means she loves you,” Anna said.

“Who’s this gorgeous thing?” said a voice from the hospital door.

“Hey Claire,” Matt said softly.

Claire walked over to say hello to Daisy, cooing over her and accepting the dog’s many licks. “Whose dog is this?”

“We’re fostering her until she finds a more permanent home,” Anna said.
“Do you want-” Matt started, but he was cut off by Foggy.

“We were kind of hoping that Matt would take her,” Foggy said. “She’s been known to predict seizures in the past.”

“She’s not a trained service dog though, is she?”

“No, but apparently some dogs naturally predict seizures.”

“Yeah, I’ve heard of that,” Claire said. “That’d be pretty useful for you, Matt.”

Matt looked pained. He didn’t like the pressure or the attention. “I don’t think I could look after a dog,” he croaked. He broke into a cough that left him doubled over in the chair.

“You should probably go back upstairs,” Claire said, taking Matt’s wrist to feel for his pulse. She crouched in front of him and whispered, “how did you get down here in the first place?”

“Foggy,” Matt wheezed.

Claire turned to Foggy with her eyebrows raised, and Foggy shrugged apologetically. Swapping the dog for a still-warm dish of Anna’s home cooking, Foggy wheeled Matt back to his room.

“What do you think?” Foggy said once Matt was back in bed.

“I think you’re trying to emotionally manipulate me,” Matt replied slowly.

“Well, yeah. Of course. Did it work? Do you want her?”

Matt sighed. “I can’t think right now.” He was struggling to breathe again and his words were coming out haltingly between wheezes. He could sense the nurse hovering next to him, the mask in her hand.

Foggy smiled. No outright ‘no’ this time. “No problem. You’ve met her now at least.”

“Are you ready for the mask again, Matt?” the nurse asked. He pulled a face and reluctantly nodded.

Foggy squeezed Matt’s hand. “Matt?”

Matt struggled awake. He unconsciously went to rub his eyes, but his hand bumped the mask instead. He moaned in confusion.

“Shit, sorry. I shouldn’t have woken you. I thought you might want to talk to your priest. He and Julia and Elizabeth are here. They missed you at church this morning.”

Matt closed his eyes. He didn’t want visitors. He was tired and anxious and self-conscious. He felt for the braille ouija board and was about to tell Foggy to send them away, when Foggy said, “you’re probably due for a break from the mask if you want to talk to them, but I thought I’d check with you first.”

He could hear Julia down the hallway near the nurses’ station, happily chatting to Father Lantom.
“What does this one say?”

“Ah, that’s something you’ll have to ask Matthew. I don’t read braille. I just get these printed for him each week.”

“How can I have them too?”

“I think we can do that, yes.”

Shit, Matt thought. I can’t turn them away. Without opening his eyes, Matt pressed the call button.

Matt was helped to the bathroom to wash his face before the three visitors were allowed in. He tried to smooth his greasy hair down, but it seemed to be doing its own thing, and insisted on sticking up in little horns instead. Foggy knocked on the bathroom door. “Matt, do you need help?”

Matt grumbled something about his hair and Foggy took that as a yes. “You look fine.”

“Did I ever tell you that I can tell when you’re lying?” Matt whipped back.

Foggy rolled his eyes. “Okay, you look like someone who has spent the last four days in hospital.” The honest truth would probably also acknowledge the red ring around Matt’s face from the mask, not to mention the mystery rash. “Are you going to put a t-shirt on?”

“Yeah, as long as I can get help getting past this.” Matt held up his hand with the IV. He then went on to mumble something about stickiness and the t-shirt getting dirty, but Foggy cut him short.

“Matt, it’s just a t-shirt. I’ll wash it.” Foggy looked at the forlorn figure slumped on the shower chair. “You don’t sound great. I can send them away if you want to rest. You don’t have to feel bad. They should’ve called rather than springing this on you.”

Matt hung his head. He was tempted to send them away. But he could hear Julia still outside chatting away to Father Lantom about school, and he sighed and it turned into a weak cough. He waited until he’d caught his breath before mumbling, “’s’okay.”

Dressed and rudimentarily washed, Matt smiled as his visitors walked in. He could hear the tap of Julia’s cane.

“Julia,” he croaked. “Come over here.”

She slowly walked ahead of her mother, tentatively moving towards Matt’s voice. There was a metallic crack as her cane struck the bed, and Julia felt her way along to the head of the bed.

“You’re using your cane,” Matt observed.

“Yup,” Julia said proudly. “Just like you.”

“Good girl,” Matt smiled.

“How are you, Matthew?” Father Lantom asked.

“Getting better,” Matt said truthfully.

Matt was handed a couple of sheets of printed braille. “I brought you the readings from today’s service.”

“I’m going to get them too,” Julia told Matt.
“I take it you’re working hard on your lessons then,” Matt replied.

Julia screwed up her face. “It’s hard.”

“Yeah, but think about how nice it’ll be to follow the service.” Julia gave an unconvinced hum, so Matt followed it up with, “or other books.” He pulled a massive braille book from his bedside table and placed it on the bed in front of her. “The library posted this to the hospital for me. Neat huh.”

“Yeah,” Julia said mindlessly, leafing through the heavy pages. “How do you sleep in here? It’s so noisy.”

Matt huffed in amusement. “With difficulty.” He could hear the television blaring *Two and a Half Men* down the other end of the hallway. He hated that show. He turned his attention back to the room only to notice Julia mumbling the words along with the television. He tilted his head, trying to judge the distance to the television. She shouldn’t be able to hear that far.

“What did you say, Jules?” Elizabeth said.

“Nothing,” Julia replied, head down. “Matt, can you tell me what this says?” She pushed the book towards him and he read the paragraph out loud, halting every five or six words to catch his breath. “What’s sherry?” she asked.

“It’s a kind of fortified wine,” Foggy said.

“Oh. Matt, can you read more?”

“Ah, maybe we should leave you two to it,” Elizabeth suggested. “We’ll get a cup of coffee and come back in half an hour.”

Elizabeth, Father Lantom and Foggy made a quick escape, leaving Matt and Julia alone. Matt debated whether or not to ask Julia about her hearing range. However, it would also open himself up to questioning from her. His head ached just thinking about it.

Julia closed the book with a thump. “Can I sit on the bed?”

“Uh, I guess. Can you get up here?”

“Easy.” She leaped up without effort.

“That was quick.”

“I’m strong,” Julia said without any hint self-consciousness. “I can lift my mom.”

“Your mom?” Matt puzzled. Elizabeth had to be about 130 pounds.

“Mmm hmm… How much can you lift?”

“I don’t know,” Matt lied. At his peak, he could lift 600 pounds, but now he struggled to lift even the equivalent of his body weight.

“I think you do,” Julia said, although it wasn’t a judgement – just a statement of fact. “How much?”

Matt was a little thrown by Julia’s blunt response. “I think around 200 pounds at the moment. I’m a bit unfit.” He racked his brains, trying to figure out how to distract her. “Hey, do you like origami?”
“I guess.”
“You don’t sound very enthusiastic,” Matt said.
“I can’t see it anymore.”
“But you can feel it.”
“It’s not the same,” Julia said sulkily.
Matt closed his eyes. He didn’t have the patience today.
“Matt?” Julia said in a small voice.
“Yeah?”
“Are you okay?”
“I’m just tired, that’s all.”
“Can I hold your hand?”
“Oh, sure.”

She put her small hand in his, feeling the callouses, the scars across his knuckles, the burn mark that was still shiny and taut. “Why is your hand so smooth here?”
“I had an accident and my skin is still healing.”
“What kind of accident?”

Matt sighed. It wasn’t just that children asked so many questions, they also didn’t seem to have any kind of filter. “I- I accidentally burnt myself.”

“How?”
“Are you sure you don’t want me to teach you origami?”
“Teach me? Okay.”

Matt exhaled with relief. “I think there’s some paper in my duffle bag. Do you think you could fetch it for me? I don’t have the energy.”

“Okay,” Julia said, the uncertainty clear in her voice.

“It’s on a shelf against the wall. There are a couple of drawers and under that some open shelves.”

Julia didn’t make an attempt to move, so Matt prompted, “what’s the easiest way to find the shelves?”

“Follow the wall?”
“Yes, exactly. Take it slow if you need to, and use your cane.”

Matt leaned back into the pillow, grateful for the momentary break. He listened to her cautiously drop from the bed, follow the bed to the wall, and... “ow,” she yelped.
“What is it?”

“There was a metal thing on the wall.”

“Are you hurt?”

“It – it gave me a fright.”

Matt could imagine what Stick would say if he’d reacted to a small metal knob in the same way as Julia. _I’m not Stick though._ “You’re almost there,” Matt encouraged.

There was a soft _thwak_ of the cane against the drawers. “Good,” he said. “Now, if you feel below the drawers, there should be a canvas bag on a shelf. Check that it’s zipped up before you lift it, and just bring the whole thing here.”

Julia made a speedy return to the bed, jumping up with the bag.

“That was easy in the end, wasn’t it,” Matt said.

“Mmm hmm…”

Matt felt around in the bag until he found the plastic packet of origami tucked within the covers of a book. He handed her a piece of paper. “Now, firstly you’re going to fold the paper diagonally.” He grasped her hands in his, and showed her the fold. “Good.”

Five minutes later, they’d folded a frog. Julia ran her fingers over the various folds as Matt got out a second piece. “What do you want this time?” he asked. “There’s a dog head that’s quite easy.”

“I want a harder one.”

“What about a Labrador?”

“Okay.”

The Labrador took considerably longer. Julia got frustrated with the complexity of the folds, and Matt eventually ended up losing his patience and finishing the dog for her. As he handed it to her, she said, “another!” Matt considered pressing the call button for the nurse. He was feeling dizzy and shaky, and as much as he liked Julia, she was just too much right now. He could hear Foggy, Elizabeth and Father Lantom returning from the cafeteria, and he leaned back into the pillow, willing them to walk faster. “Matt?” Julia said quietly. “Are you okay?”

“Uh, no… I – I need…”

Julia had no idea what was going on. She hadn’t been told about the seizures, only the pneumonia. So when she heard Matt groan and the scrunch of paper as the Labrador was crushed in his hand, she assumed he was still awake. The entire bed shook as Matt seized, and Julia leaned forward to find Matt’s hand, struggling to figure out what was going on. Matt’s arm whacked against hers and she recoiled. Slipping off the bed, she barely considered her fear of navigating. She ran her hand along the bed for bearings, and then made for the door, wildly waving her cane in front of her and screaming, “help.”

Foggy, Elizabeth and Father Lantom came running at her call. A nurse got to her first, and said, “what’s wrong, honey?”

“There’s something wrong with Matt,” she sobbed. The nurse saw the three adults approach and
left them to look after Julia, slipping past her to check on Matt. Foggy followed the nurse into the room, but Elizabeth stayed outside with Julia and Father Lantom, hugging Julia as she wept into her mother’s skirt.

When Matt started to come to, it was to the sound of Father Lantom murmuring a prayer. The words wouldn’t come into focus, but the pattern of speech and tone were familiar, soothing – a sharp contrast to the lingering scent of antiseptic and disease. He was unable to locate himself. While the disorientation would normally induce a panic, the combination of Father Lantom’s prayers and fatigue meant that he was content just to sleep.

Matt was torn from the peace by the distant sound of Foggy’s voice. He was talking to Julia and Elizabeth. Matt gave a small moan, and Father Lantom stopped. A woman held his hand, and said, “Matt, can you hear me? Can you open your eyes for me?”

This again, Matt thought.

“You had a seizure. You’re in the hospital. Can you say something for me please?”

No.

“Matt can you open your eyes for me.”

Leave me alone.

“How long does it usually take for people to wake up?” Father Lantom asked.

“It varies,” she replied. “Matt, can you squeeze my hand for me?”

Matt shifted slightly with a groan and his breath caught painfully. His chest hurt, everything hurt. It was too hard.

“Matthew,” Father Lantom said, taking his other hand and rubbing it with his thumb. “We can wait. I know you’ll let us know when you’re ready.”

Foggy left Julia and Elizabeth after explaining very rudimentarily what had happened to Matt. He ducked back into the room to see Father Lantom leaning over Matt reciting something, and the nurse standing back, watching with discomfort.

“What’s going on?” Foggy said. “Has he woken yet?”

“He’s taking his time,” the priest answered. “I told him we could wait.”

"The respiratory specialist will be here in a moment," the nurse told Foggy. "We can't use BPAP if he's disoriented, so."

"He's not going to be intubated again, is he?" Foggy asked in a panic.

"I doubt it. He’s improved a lot over the last few days, but as I said, the specialist will be here in a moment."

The specialist decided that the high flow cannula was sufficient for now, and Matt was left to sleep the seizure off in peace. Julia and Elizabeth left shortly after the seizure, but Father Lantom settled
in to wait for Matt to wake up of his own accord.

“He thinks the world of you, did you know?” Foggy said to Father Lantom. “He doesn’t usually take advice from others, but you, he listens to.”

The priest raised his eyebrows. “I think you underestimate your own influence.”

Foggy huffed. “He usually crashes through and does whatever he wants regardless of my advice…. and then he feels guilty.”

Father Lantom gave a wry smile, “ah yes, guilt. It’s the curse of the Catholic boy, I’m afraid.”

“Uh, the church thing seems to help – with this,” Foggy stuttered, waving his hand. “You know, the changes.”

Father Lantom nodded.

“And the mentoring too. He gets worried about not helping people, uh….” Foggy petered off as he realised that he was getting into dangerous territory. Unless… “Does Matt tell you everything in confession?”

“That’s not something I can divulge.”

“Yeah, of course… sorry.” Foggy blushed red.

“You should accompany Matt to mass some time.”

“Oh, I’m an atheist.”

“Don’t worry, I’m not trying to convert you. I think it may help you understand Matthew’s relationship with God though.”

Foggy rubbed the back of his neck. He didn’t have a religious bone in his body, but he still didn’t want to lie and tell the priest he’d come when really, he had no intention of attending church whatsoever.

Foggy felt awkward in Father Lantom’s presence, particularly as the priest was happy just to sit there by Matt’s side in silent contemplation. Foggy couldn’t go a few minutes of inaction before his fingers itched to find his phone or some other distraction. “Uh, if you’re happy to stay here, I might just duck out and get some fresh air. He panics if I’m not around when he wakes up, but if you’re here, I think he’ll be fine. Is that okay?”

Father Lantom gave him a broad smile. “Of course. I’d be glad to.” As Foggy grabbed his jacket, the priest said, “Foggy, if you’d like to go home and rest, I’ll stay here. As you said, he should be comfortable with me.” Foggy hesitated, and Father Lantom continued, “I dare say he’ll understand.”

“I’m sure he will. I just – I worry.”

“Understandable, but when he wakes up, I’ll be here; and when you see him tomorrow you’ll be rested. It’s okay to take time for yourself. It’ll be best for both of you in the long run. They have your contact details in case of emergency.”

“Uh, yeah, okay. But call me – if- if anything happens, or he freaks out.”

“I will,” Father Lantom replied, giving Foggy a reassuring smile.
It was a break that Foggy didn’t realise he needed until he’d collapsed on the couch. The last five days had been intensely stressful. Even though he’d slept at home the previous night, he’d got home at midnight and left the house as soon as he’d risen. Now, with time alone to himself, he started to really consider the commitment he’d made to Matt. Three and a half months ago, he’d moved in for a week after the initial injury; and just over two months ago he’d moved in for six weeks, which had now rolled into an indefinite situation. He was so sure that Matt would recover quickly - that he’d bounce back like he normally did, but now Foggy wasn’t so sure.

He grabbed a beer from the fridge and slumped back on the couch, too tired to do anything other than lazily swipe at the coloured candies on his phone – a mindless exercise that at least stopped him from thinking too deeply about the situation.
At Matt’s insistence, Foggy spent Monday at the office, although he returned to the hospital at five on the dot. He waved a letter as he entered Matt’s room. “The hospital responded.”

Matt sat up. “To the complaint?”

“Yeah. It’s full of the predictable ‘we’re not admitting blame’ stuff. They’re apparently looking into the incident and as a gesture of goodwill and to make you feel more comfortable, they’re upgrading you to a single room and giving you free access to premium television.”

“Huh.”

“Yeah, they obviously don’t know you’re blind and in the HDU where you get a single room anyway.”

“Actually, I think I’m moving downstairs to a general ward tomorrow.”

“Hey, that’s great,” Foggy said. “You get to use one of the two things. And hey, maybe premium television comes with audio description.”

“Or you could just watch it with me,” Matt said hopefully.

“Deal. Do you know when you’re getting out of here yet?”

“No,” Matt said glumly. “They’re still giving me antibiotics, and now they’re also switching me to another anti-epileptic – they think the rash is a side-effect of the current one.”

“It’ll be good to get rid of the rash though.”

“Yeah, but what horrible side effects will the next one have? The rash is uncomfortable, but it’s nothing compared to the head fuck that was the first one. I don’t want to go back to one that makes me sleep all the time.”

“Maybe the next one will control the seizures,” Foggy said pointedly.

“Mmm… maybe.” Matt didn’t sound convinced.

Foggy could see the Matthew Murdock spiral of despair starting to form, so he quickly changed the topic. “Mom wants to bring in more food.” Matt rubbed at his chin. “Er, she kinda wants to visit too. I hope you don’t mind,” Foggy said, critically analysing Matt’s reaction.

“S’okay.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, of course. She doesn’t need to cook for me though.”

“Think of it as you doing her a favour. She likes mothering you. Plus, it’s your birthday tomorrow.”

“Huh.” Matt hadn’t even thought about his birthday. He’d lost track of days in the hospital.
“It’s a shit that you have to be in here.”

Matt shrugged. “It’s just a day.”

“You and your weird pleasure denial. Nope. You’re going to get a cake, hospital or not.”

Sure enough, Matt was transferred to a general ward the next day, and as promised, he was given a single room with premium television (although premium only referred to the content, not the accessibility features). He also had Elsa as a nurse once again, which pleased him no end. She clucked over him, and even gave him a piece of cake after discovering it was his birthday.

He woke from his morning nap to find Anna Nelson waiting patiently by his bed, holding a dish of mac and cheese. “You seemed to enjoy it last time,” she explained. “It’s not the healthiest of all dishes, but it might put a bit more meat on you.” Matt pulled at his blankets self-consciously. Everyone seemed to have an opinion on his weight at the moment.

Matt made an effort to eat as much as he could while Anna watched on critically. He gave her a small apologetic smile as he put down the fork, barely half-way through the plate. “I might have to revisit this later, I’m sorry, Anna. I don’t have much of an appetite at the moment.”

“That’s okay, gorgeous,” she said, replacing the container’s lid. “You don’t need to eat anything that you don’t want to. I’ll find someone who can put this in the fridge.”

Matt sat back confused. He thought that eating was expected of him – it was part of the deal. He adored the Nelsons, but he felt like the relationship was a bit of a dance at times – a routine for which he didn’t quite know the steps.

Gladys also visited, and gave him a tactile Bradley watch that used magnetised ball bearings to mark the time. Matt was uncomfortable with accepting the gift, particularly as he initially interpreted it as her wanting more than just a friendship, but then they chatted about the sculpture park and the success (so far) of the campaign, and his worries were somewhat allayed. Romantic relationship or not, they at least had a friendship.

Matt barely had time for an afternoon nap before Karen turned up with a selection of home made cakes, followed closely by Foggy.

“Hey Karen, I didn’t know you’d be here. You were at the office when I left to get this.” Foggy held up a small white box with a gold ribbon.

“Hello to you too, Foggy,” Karen said with a laugh. “I’m here to visit Matt on his oh-so-special-day.”

“And test my taste buds,” Matt said with a smirk.

Foggy looked at the selection of cakes on the bedside table. “If eating cake is a test, it’s definitely one I’ll pass.”

“You have to identify all the ingredients in each cake,” Matt said. “That’s the test. Karen doesn’t believe that I can do it.”
“Spoiler alert, Karen. This guy’s a freak when it comes identifying food.” Foggy sat on the edge of Matt’s bed. “Catch me up.”

“Actually, you’re right on time,” Karen said. “We’re only at number one.”

“And Foggy just brought number six,” Matt added.

“Matt, you took all the surprise out of it.” Foggy moaned in mock annoyance.

Matt chuckled. “Well, next time, don’t try to hide something in a cardboard box. I’m a freak, remember?”

“Enough about freaks,” Karen said, carefully lifted the cake out of the box and onto the bedside table.

“Let Matt read the message first.”

“What?” Matt reached for the cake.

“Oh, yeah, maybe wash your hands before you do that.” Foggy cursed himself for not thinking the plan through properly.

Matt grinned and eagerly pushed back the covers.

“You could wait till later if you want,” Foggy said guiltily as Matt slowly unhooked the oxygen and slid out of bed, leaning heavily on the IV pole as he shuffled his way to the bathroom.

“Don’t touch the pole with your reading hand on the way back,” Foggy yelled after him. He muttered to himself, “although you can probably radar sense the germs or something.” There was a muffled snort from the bathroom.

After scrubbing his hands, Matt made a beeline for the cakes. He sat on the edge of the bed and went to touch one of Karen’s more elaborate creations: a cream-covered sponge. Both Karen and Foggy instinctively yelled, “no!”

Matt laughed, which quickly turned into a cough that left him gasping for air.

“Fuck, we’ve killed him,” Foggy said, trying to thread the oxygen back under his nose. “Do you want me to get someone? I’ll go get someone.”

Matt caught Foggy’s leg and shook his head, closing his eyes and calming his breath. He breathed as slow as he could for a minute, his lungs making torturous wheezes. Finally, he started chuckling again.

Karen put one hand hesitantly on Matt’s leg. “Uh, Matt? Are you okay?”

Matt nodded. “I- I-” he coughed a couple of times and stopped to regain his breath. “I know which cake is which,” he croaked. “Your reactions,” he gave a few wheezy chuckles.

“Joke’s on you, buddy,” Foggy quipped. “We didn’t almost die in the process. Now did you cough on that hand? Because if you did, you probably need to wash your hands again.”

Matt’s smile faded.

“Joking. But maybe we’ll treat the icing as decoration only.”
Matt reached over to the right cake, and read the braille icing message. He rolled his eyes. “Foggy, that’s so corny.”

Foggy put his hands up. “What? It’s true.”

“What does it say?” Karen urged.

They both said at once. “Happy birthday, Matt, my superhero.”

Karen clasped her hands and cooed, “you guys are so cute.”

“But that’s enough of that,” Foggy said, advancing on the cakes. “Who’s got the knife?”

Matt managed to not only pick the ingredients in each of Karen’s cakes, but also tell her the quantities. He even identified all the items in the rogue spice cake, where Karen had added pepper and coriander alongside the usual ginger, nutmeg, cinnamon, and cardamom.

When they got to Foggy’s bought cake, he said, “now this is the real test. The bakery makes some pretty big claims about the quality of the ingredients. You, my friend, are their greatest challenge.”

Matt rolled his eyes at Foggy’s dramatic introduction to from what Matt could tell was a fairly ordinary cake – apart from the icing, of course. He pulled the oxygen away from his nose as he took a bite (it reduced his sense of smell and thus taste), and chewed slowly. Eventually, he replaced the cannula and sat back with a smug expression on his face.

“Well?” they both said in unison.

“I feel a bit damned now. What if I say they used rancid almond meal?”

“As a hypothetical?” Foggy said hopefully.

“See? That’s why I can’t say anything. That voice.”

Foggy took a bite, chewed thoughtfully then concluded, “well, I think it’s great.” In a smaller voice, he said, “isn’t it?”

“Yeah, it’s wonderful. Thanks, Foggy.” Apart from the rancid almond meal and the cheap compound chocolate, Matt thought to himself.

“Do you believe me now?” Matt asked Karen after they’d eaten themselves well past their limit.

“Oh, I never doubted your sense of taste,” she said. “I just wanted to make cake.”

Matt raised his eyebrows.

“Oh, I doubted you, but the second one wasn’t a lie. Sheez, how can I get a lie past you?”

“Pacemaker,” Matt replied instantly.

“No other way?”

“Not really. Maybe just after a seizure when I’m completely out of it. Or if there’s so much surrounding noise I can’t hear your heartbeat.”

“So, hang on,” Foggy said indignantly. “All those times you urged me not to eat bacon maple ripple cheesecake because of the risk of a heart attack, you were really just worried that I’d get a
pacemaker and then you wouldn’t be able to pick my lies?”

Karen hit Foggy on the shoulder. “You can’t ask that.”

“I can’t believe you think I’m that selfish,” Matt laughed. It turned into another cough that left limp against the pillow. After he caught his breath, he held out both hands for an affectionate squeeze. “This is nice – the three of us – it’s just like old times. Thanks, guys.”

Matt was shaken awake in the middle of the night. “Matthew, wake up. I need to talk to you.”

Matt pushed away, confused.

“Matthew, it’s me, Elektra. I need you to wake up.”

Matt rubbed his eyes, still half-asleep. “You’re dead,” he said matter-of-factly.

“No, that’s the thing. I’m not – well, we’re not.”

“Go back to sleep,” Matt mumbled.

“No, you’re not. Come on, Matthew. Sit up.” She pulled at his arm and he jerked away, suddenly awake.

“No,” he whispered. “No, no, no.” He pulled the oxygen from his face and scrabbled at his IV.

“Shhh… don’t freak out.” She put her hand on his and he stilled. There was her pulse, strong and steady.

Matt sat there, head down, taking in everything he could. She smelled like Elektra, sounded like Elektra, but… “you’re dead.”

“Was dead – apparently.” She said in a been-there-done-that kind of tone.

“Were you here before – three or four nights ago?”

“I wasn’t – or maybe – me but not me…”

“Elektra, what’s going on?”

Elektra let out a small giggle. “They resurrected me.”

“Who?”

“The Hand.”

“How… why?”

“They wanted to weaponise me,” she whispered. There was a hint of excitement in her voice. “But here’s the thing: I split.” She giggled again.

“Split what? Why are you laughing?”
“I split in two. There are two of me. I trailed the other me here the other night. She tried to jump you. I stopped her.”

Matt felt the bed around him. This wasn’t real. It couldn’t be. His hand brushed against the call button, and Elektra yelled, “no!”

Matt jumped.

“I’m sorry,” Elektra whispered. “I didn’t mean to scare you. It’s just that – well, I don’t know what to do. I want to come to you sooner, but you’ve been guarded pretty well over the last week.”

“Guarded? I’m in hospital, Elektra. It’s never stopped you visiting me before.”

“I’ve never been resurrected before,” she countered.

“So, you what – you woke up and-” Matt rubbed his face. “You just woke up?”

“Pretty much. I don’t think they were expecting two of us though because they freaked out. The other me attacked and killed a few of them and I used the opportunity to slip out while they were distracted.”

“Does Stick know?”

“Probably. You know how he is.”

Matt frowned. If this was true – if this wasn’t some kind of embedded dream – then it changed everything. “What are you going to do now?”

“I- I don’t know. I can’t really remember dying, but I do remember the importance of that city block. Did you set up the trust?”

“Elektra, you died. The sale’s still in limbo, but you can’t just reclaim it or any of your assets. You’re dead. The executor has already started distributing your assets.”

“So you received the money I left you?”

“Yes, thank you,” Matt said, holding his hand out to Elektra. “I didn’t expect that.”

“I didn’t expect to return either.” She sat on the edge of his bed, and massaged his hand. She said meekly, “can I have some of it back?”

Matt huffed in amusement. “Of course. You can have it all back.”

“I have another request.”

Matt chuckled, but it came out as a sickening wheeze. “Name it,” he croaked.

“I need you to help me hunt down and kill my other self.”

Chapter End Notes

When I nutted out my initial plan for this story (it must have been six months ago now), I wanted a split Elektra. At the time, in the Netflixverse (or whatever you want
to call it) there were no hints out there as to what Elektra had become post-Daredevil. Of course, now that the trailers are out, we have a slightly better idea, and I really wanted to get to *my* post-DDs02 Elektra before the Defenders came out. I don't know why exactly - maybe to establish difference? Anyway, it's interesting timing.

Thanks for all the commentary and feedback, lovely readers. I find myself being subtly influenced by many of your comments.
“When can I see my doctors?” Matt said as soon as Elsa entered the room.

“Good morning to you too, Matt.” Elsa replied, although there was no malice in her voice.

“Sorry. I just – I need to go home.” Because my former girlfriend has just come back to life... times two. He’d probably be scheduled if he told the truth.

“I can understand that. It can’t be nice cooped up in here. They’ll be doing their rounds shortly. In the meantime, can I interest you in a nice refreshing shower before I hook you up to the antibiotics?” Matt could hear a rustle of plastic as she hung a bag on his IV pole. Matt wrinkled his nose.

“Is that face an objection to the shower or the antibiotics?” she said good-naturedly.

Matt shook his head. “Just – I’m tired, that’s all.”

“I can grab a wheelchair if you want that shower, although it’d be good for you to get up and walking.”

“It’s not that kind of tired. Well, it is, but it’s another kind as well,” he said quickly. “A shower sounds nice, thanks.”

He sat slumped on the shower chair as the water sluiced over his head and back. He couldn’t stay here in the hospital, not now, not after last night. He wouldn’t have believed it if not for the smell of Elektra that lingered in his room. Resurrection! The very thing Foggy had been teasing him about had actually come true.

By the time Elsa had coaxed him out of the shower, Matt had come to the conclusion that this was something that no one else should know about yet. Not Foggy, not Father Lantom, not the police. If it was true - if it really was Elektra and she had an evil double lurking around - then he needed to find Stick. There were few things in life that Matt wasn’t willing to tackle by himself, and this was one of them.

But how to find him? Matt had been so intent on avoiding Stick for the last year that he had never really considered how to contact him. He’d come out of the woodwork sooner or later, but knowing Stick, it’d probably be at the least convenient time.

On their rounds an hour later, Matt’s doctors told him bluntly that he was too sick to go home. Now Matt wasn’t a complete idiot – just getting to the bathroom was enough to tire him. Plus, as the doctors had pointed out, he was still being given IV antibiotics and breathing assistance. It didn’t stop him from putting up a fight though. It also meant that when Foggy dropped in mid-morning, he was met with a sulky, frustrated Matt.

“I need to go home,” Matt said flat out.

“I know you want to,” Foggy said.

Matt scowled. Everyone seemed to respond the same way. “No, I really need to go home.”

Foggy leaned against the bed and patted his leg. “They’re not keeping you here for fun, Matt. They’ll discharge you as soon as you’re okay to go home.”
“I told them I could take the antibiotics at home, but they said no. I want you to write another letter.”

“Matt, the letter before was for a genuine complaint. This is just you wanting to go home. It doesn’t make sense to take IV antibiotics home with all the needles and the-” Foggy waved his hand at the IV pole “-all of this.”

“Claire could help.”

“Have you asked her?” Foggy said, crossing his arms.

“Not yet.”

“Huh. Well let me know how that goes,” Foggy said sarcastically.

“Don’t just dismiss this, Foggy.”

“I’m not, Matt. I know how much you hate it in here, but in case you hadn’t noticed, you’re still on oxygen and we’re definitely not taking that home with us.”

Matt pulled his beanie down over his eyes and curled up on his side, pulling his blankets right up to his chin.

“Right,” Foggy said, unimpressed. “I guess I’ll leave you to wallow in peace.”

Matt just grunted.

“I’ll come back after work. Text me if you have a food craving,” Foggy said as he walked out the door.

Matt coughed weakly and nudged the oxygen away from his nose. Maybe he didn’t need it. Maybe they were all overreacting and he could just go home. He lay there for fifteen minutes before the headache started to form. He coughed and his head lit up with pain. He groaned and rolled over. It was psychosomatic. It had to be. Reaching for a cup of water, he misjudged its location. It tipped over, rolling off the table and skittering across the floor. He slumped back into the pillow and closed his eyes, his hand still resting against the damp table.

He woke up to Elsa humming by his side. “There you are,” she said as he opened his eyes. “I thought you were going to sleep all day. It’s Elsa, by the way. Do you know where you are?”

Matt licked his lips. They were chapped and sore.

“Matt, you had a seizure. Do you remember waking up before?”

Matt shook his head. “No,” he croaked.

“That’s okay. You had a good snooze afterwards. Now can you tell me where you are?”

“Hos-hospital.”

“Good. And the date?”

Matt shook his head. “Can I get something – my head. Headache.”
“Sure,” she said starting for the door. She called over her shoulder, “but when I get back I want at least the month and year, okay?”

The Tylenol Elsa gave him didn’t seem to do anything. To make matters worse, someone had taken his possum beanie. It shouldn't have been such a big deal, but he was feeling so elementally shitty that it seemed like a disaster. If it wasn’t enough already, Claire chose that point to drop in during her break from the ER.

“You don’t seem too good,” Claire said in greeting.

“I had a seizure,” Matt said wearily. “I feel like someone’s peeled back my skull and kicked me directly in the brain.”

“Is it a bad time to point out that you can’t peel a skull?”

Matt scowled. “I want to go home.”

“Surprise me,” Claire replied, crossing her arms.

“I was going to check myself out this morning, but Foggy told me I was an idiot.” Matt said, testing the water.

“Foggy is very wise. You should listen to him – not that you’ve ever done that before.”

“I've listened to you before – I got that armour you suggested.”

“And how’s that working out for you now?”

“Are you saying I was wrong to listen to you, Claire Temple?” Matt said, a slight twitch to his mouth.

“You would have stopped fighting completely if you’d really listened.”

“I told you – I’m never going to stop.” He coughed and winced as the headache sharpened. “As soon as I’m better-”

Claire leaned in and said firmly, “Matt, you don’t get it. You’re never going to be completely better.”

Matt’s jaw dropped.

“Oh come on, you really think you’re going to be out there like before at full fitness?”

“Yeah,” Matt tried to sound confident, but his voice wavered.

“Matt, your brain is scarred, your lungs are scarred, your entire body is scarred. That night that I found you with air in your chest – well, you did damage then. Every time you had a chest injury, you probably did more damage. This latest illness hasn’t helped either. Yes, you can increase your fitness, your muscles, your health, but you’re not invincible. Your body can’t keep taking hits without consequences. Your body's telling you to quit.”

“I don’t want to quit,” Matt said quietly.

“You’re a smart guy, Matt Murdock, but you have these blinkers – and – and I just don’t know
how to tear them off. It makes me angry because you have so much *else* to offer.”

She pinched the bridge of her nose. “I have to go – break’s almost over.” She hesitated when she saw his stricken expression before muttering, “take care,” and hurrying out of the room.

A day passed, then another, and another. Matt was bored out of his mind, yet he was also too tired to do much other than sleep and lie listlessly in bed. Foggy visited every day bringing distractions in the form of companionship and food, but it wasn’t enough. Every morning Matt harassed the doctors to release him and every morning they cited meaningless statistics and told him to be patient. A few times Matt traipsed down to the chapel where he sat until someone came to retrieve him. Claire didn’t return, and Matt did his best to forget her blunt assessment.

Five days after Elektra’s visit, the doctors released Matt with strict instructions to rest. “They obviously didn’t know about the six flights of stairs,” Foggy said as Matt wheezed his way up to their apartment, stopping a few times along the way to catch his breath. As Matt sat on the bottom step of the fifth floor, gathering the energy for the final flight, he frowned and said, “Foggy, is there a dog in our apartment?”

“Oh, yeah. I forgot to tell you-”

“No you didn’t,” Matt interrupted. “You didn’t *forget.*”

“Okay, okay, I didn’t tell you. We’re looking after Daisy while mom and dad are doing stocktake. They’re working ridiculous hours and they asked if we’d take Daisy because, you know, you’ll be home. She gets lonely if she’s left alone. Dogs are people too.”

Matt swayed a little, and Foggy grabbed his shoulder to steady him.

“How, are you okay?”

Matt mumbled a yes and put his finger out to indicate he needed a minute.

“If it’s making you stressed, I can always return her. I just thought you’d appreciate the company, and I’m kinda curious to see if she picks your seizures. Aren’t you?”

Matt nodded. After a five minute rest, Foggy hauled Matt to his feet and they continued up to the apartment. Daisy flew at Matt’s knees as soon as they entered.

“Fine then,” Foggy said to the dog. “She likes you better than me already, Matt.” Foggy crouched in front of Daisy. “If only you acknowledged I was the one that bought all the dog food.”

After dumping Matt’s stuff and getting him settled on the couch, Foggy said, “right, well I’m off to work. I’ll be home early, but if you need anything text me. There are some cans of food on the bench. Oh, and if she needs to pee, dad and I set up a doggy grass box on the roof. I can leave the door open if you like.”

Matt raised his eyebrows. “Doggy grass box?”

“Yeah, don’t overreact.”

“I’m not,” Matt countered.
Foggy wasn’t worried though. By the time he left for work, Daisy was perched on Matt’s lap, her eyes narrowed in happiness as he rubbed her chest.

Foggy returned home to the smell of cooked chicken. “What’s this?” Foggy said, lifting the lid of the pot on the stove.

“That’s Daisy’s dinner,” Matt said from the couch. The dog was still sitting on Matt’s lap as if they hadn’t moved all day.

“Poached chicken?”

“Yes, exactly.”

“What happened to the food I got her?”

“That wasn’t food, Foggy. I’m not giving her tinned fat and bone and—”

“No!” Foggy held up a hand to stop. “I really don’t want to know what else is in there.”

Matt huffed a laugh. “Besides, the smell made me retch.”

“And what happened to your no cooking meat at home rule?”

“Daisy’s a carnivore, Foggy. She needs meat, but we don’t.” Matt adopted a high-pitched voice and said to Daisy, “aren’t you? Carnivore. Yes, you are.” She quivered with excitement and ducked her head under Matt’s hand for another pat.

Foggy couldn’t help but smile. The plan was working.

“Can I have some?” Foggy said, looking into the saucepan again. There were carrots and celery floating on the top, and brown rice on the bottom. It was human food. Matt had cooked human food for the dog.

“No, I ordered non-meat ingredients for us,” Matt said, gesturing towards the bags of home-delivered groceries on the bench.

Foggy peered into one of them. “Spinach, tomatoes, carrots, tofu… Matt, this is unfair.”

Matt smirked and gave the dog a generous hug.

Later, while Matt and Foggy sat down to a vegetarian curry, Foggy watched Daisy jealously as she hoovered up the organic chicken casserole. “Fog, don’t stare at the dog while she’s eating,” Matt said tiredly.

“What? I can’t help it. I want what she’s having.”

Matt sighed and put down the fork. “Go on,” he said. “If you want it, it’s there on the stove.”

Foggy scrambled to his feet, paused and said, “I can’t. Damn it, Matt. I’ve associated it with dog food now.” Foggy picked up the fork and returned to his curry. “I suppose she’s going to sleep in your bed too.”

“No, dogs sleep in a basket in the laundry.”
“How in earth did you come up with that rule? We don’t even have a laundry.”

“The bathroom then.”

Foggy raised his eyebrows. “Sure she is,” he chuckled.

The test of Daisy’s seizure-alert skills came later that night. Half way through an episode of Doctor Who, Daisy jumped off Matt's lap and gave a few small barks before jumping back up and pawing at his lap. Matt and Foggy tried to calm her down, but within minutes, Matt had a seizure.

Foggy paused to say, “good dog,” as he tucked a towel behind Matt's head. Once Matt stopped convulsing, the dog watched intently as Foggy rolled Matt onto his side. Foggy talked to the dog all the while, diligently explaining the steps, even though he knew the dog didn't understand a word of it. In any case, Foggy appreciated the company.

Daisy stood guard next to Matt’s head while he recovered. When he was conscious enough to be lugged to bed, Daisy followed closely and jumped onto the bed without invitation. Foggy didn’t have the heart to tell her to get down. By the time Foggy checked on them half an hour later, Daisy was curled into Matt’s chest, fast asleep.

The next morning, Matt emerged from bed, rumpled from heavy sleep. He had Daisy under one arm. “Dogs sleep in the bathroom huh,” Foggy laughed.

Matt smiled guiltily. “I think she’s convinced me otherwise.”

Foggy poured a second coffee, and carried them to the dining table. “Sit,” he ordered.

“Thanks, Fog.” Matt said. He placed Daisy on the ground with a groan and she immediately ran up the stairs and scratched on the rooftop access door.

“Shit, I forgot.” Foggy ran up and opened the door ajar. “If we keep her, we might have to put in a doggy door,” Foggy said as he returned to the table. “That’s kinda what I wanted to talk about.”

Matt took a sip of his coffee and waited for the inevitable.

“Do you remember what happened last night?”

“No, but I had a seizure. My muscles are telling me that much. Why? What happened?”

“Nothing bad,” Foggy said quickly. “Well, the seizure, I guess. But it wasn’t a bad one.”

Matt gave a small frown. As far as he was concerned, they were all bad.

“It was Daisy, Matt, she predicted it. Can you remember her barking?”

“No,” Matt croaked.

“Well, she did. She barked and went all frantic. She did it, Matt.”

“Huh.”

Daisy chose that moment to fly back down the stairs. She waited at their feet, wagging her tail.
Foggy leaned over and gave Daisy a pat. “You’re a good dog.” He said to Matt, “I know you’re resistant to the idea, but if she can predict them consistently, it’ll probably prevent a lot of injuries. You can prepare yourself and lie down or whatever.”

Matt picked Daisy up and sat her on his lap, rubbing her mane-like neck. “If your parents don’t want her, then yes, I’ll keep her. I-I think even if she didn’t predict them, I’d still keep her.” Embarrassed by this admission, he hugged Daisy to his chest. She gave him a small lick as if she knew that she’d just been adopted.

Foggy smiled as Matt nuzzled his head against Daisy’s. “Great. I guess I’ll look into that doggy door.”

Just as Matt was beginning to think that he’d dreamed the entire Elektra affair, she turned up at his apartment. “I was wondering when I’d hear from you again,” he told the silent figure near the rooftop entrance.

“You have a dog,” Elektra said as she padded down the stairs.

“Her name’s Daisy.”

“That's a ridiculous name.”

Matt rolled his eyes. "Well I didn't choose it, and she doesn't seem to care."

"I thought you didn’t like dogs.”

“I didn’t want a seeing eye dog,” Matt corrected. “I never said I disliked dogs.”

“She’s cute. She's not really your style though.” Elektra went to pat Daisy, but Matt moved the dog to the other side of the couch. “Don’t be like that, Matthew. I’m not going to hurt her.”

“How do I know that you’re not the supposed Elektra double who’s trying to kill me?”

“You don’t,” Elektra said.

“I still don’t know if I believe in this whole double thing anyway. It seems like a fine excuse to kill people then pretend you’re innocent later. You’ve always been a bit split.”

Elektra shrugged. “Can I have a cup of tea?”

Matt huffed a laugh at her banal request. He half-limped over to the kettle, and sorted through his teas until he found his favourite. “You know, Foggy got me a kettle for my birthday that boils to optimum tea temperature.”

Elektra raised her eyebrows. “I didn’t realise you were such a connoisseur.”

“I’ve been avoiding alcohol because of the seizures. Tea has been – well, I can’t say replacement-”

“It’s a pretty poor replacement,” Elektra agreed.

“– it’s more of a distraction.”
The tea was made in silence. Matt listened to Elektra’s heartbeat all the while, listening for a skip or any hint that she was an imposter, but it was steady and familiar. Matt handed Elektra her mug and collapsed back onto the couch with a grunt.

“When I proposed fighting the other me, I wanted old Matthew, not this—” she waved her hand towards him.

“I’m sorry I got pneumonia,” Matt said sarcastically. “If only you’d warned me you were going to come back from the dead and need help battling a spectre.”

“That’s not—”

“What you meant? Save it.” He took a tentative sip of the hot tea, and reached for Daisy, who nestled into his thigh. “Have you been in contact with Stick?”

“No, I have no idea where he is.”

“What about the other you? Have you seen her since the hospital?”

“Once. I kept my distance. She’s looking pretty wild now. I- I think you’d be able to tell the difference.”

“Between good you and bad you?”

“Yeah, I’m still adjusting to this whole good thing. It’s – I find it… unnerving.”

Matt snorted, disturbing Daisy, who looked up briefly in annoyance before tucking her head back into her tail. “I missed you,” he said quietly. “I missed running with you.”

“We can do it again,” Elektra pointed out. “If you can run.”

“I might need a week or so. And I need to pick up a new set of clothes from a friend before I do anything else.” Matt was very aware that Melvin had probably thought him missing in action again. Elektra stood up, abandoning her half-drunk tea. “I should go.”

Matt sat up straight, “already? Can I – do you have a phone number I can contact you on or something?”

“I’ll return,” Elektra said simply, and quickly exited via the roof.

"Hey, don't you want some money?” he called after her, but she was already gone. Matt abandoned his tea and lay down on the couch, pulling the dog into his chest.

Foggy returned from work to an empty apartment. Matt's cane and classes were still by the door, as was Daisy's leash. There was a skittering sound from the roof and Daisy dashed down the stairs, jumping up at Foggy's leg. "You're a bit excited today," he said, giving her a pat. Foggy walked up to the roof to find Matt hunched on a crate, his beanie over his eyes.

"Matt? Are you okay?" Foggy said tentatively.

"Yeah," Matt croaked. He cleared his throat and tried again. "Yeah, I'm just getting some fresh air."
Daisy took a running jump onto Matt's lap, nuzzling her way under the blanket draped across his legs.

"It's pretty cold. Do you want to come downstairs and yell at me while I cook?"

Matt gave a shiver. "Or we could get food delivered. There's someone a few blocks that way," Matt said, pointing to his right, "who's talking about – and I quote – the best pho he's ever had." He tucked his goosebumped hand back under the blanket.

Foggy huffed a laugh. "Not cooking is fine by me. But is that what you're really doing up here? Listening?"

Matt nodded.

"And that's why you're looking so miserable," Foggy deduced. "Come on, man." Foggy put his hand out to Matt. "Come inside. You can have a hot shower and we can eat pho and put on a loud and highly distracting movie."

Matt looked unconvinced by the proposal, but he nonetheless bundled up his blanket and the dog, and slowly followed Foggy downstairs.

By Friday, Matt was feeling surprisingly sprightly, but Foggy insisted that they stick to their original plan: no work until Monday. So Matt decided to visit Melvin instead.

He’d originally planned to leave Daisy behind, but she pretty much forced her way out of the apartment door. As he neared the workshop, Matt picked up the leashed dog and stuffed her into his duffle bag, apologising all the while. As he entered the workshop, he could hear Daisy’s tranquil breaths through the canvas.

“Hey man, I thought you weren’t coming back,” Melvin said.

“I know, I’m sorry. I- I wasn’t well.”

“There’s no past tense about it. You sound terrible.”

“I’m working on it. Do you have anything for me?”

“Oh, yeah,” Melvin said, suddenly excited. “Check it out.” He handed Matt a black hoodie that on first touch seemed completely unremarkable. “Put it on.”

Matt gingerly lowered the bag to the floor and slipped the hoodie over his head. It didn’t have as much give as his normal hoodies. “There’s a special lining that should stop a knife. I can’t promise anything though.”

Matt nodded.

“And the hood, here, I’ll show you.” Melvin pulled the hood up over Matt’s head and pressed the edge. Parts of the hood solidified, forming a tessellated armour that unfolded and fitted neatly over his head and upper face, just like his Daredevil mask. “This button activates and deactivates the mask. Again, it’s not as good as the old one, but it’s something.”

“It’s great, Melvin. Thank you.”

“That’s not all,” Melvin said with an excited huff. “If there’s a sudden fall, the hood forms a kind
of airbag. It’s not very bulky, because I don’t want it interfering with the mask, but it should prevent injuries from falls.” Melvin rubbed the back of his head where there was a swollen, hot lump. “I should probably make one for myself.”

“You hurt?” Matt said, concerned.

“Just a small bump,” Melvin dismissed. “Now I have my pièce de résistance,” he said, grabbing a stick from the bench. “I don’t know how long your current cane is, but this is probably shorter.”

“My current cane?” Matt said, concerned.

“Yeah, you’re blind aren’t you?”

“No, I think you have the wrong idea—”

“You’d be pretty stupid to use a cane if you weren’t. Why not choose a walking stick or an umbrella? They’re much easier to fake.”

“Yeah – yeah I guess.” Matt was expecting the usual, ‘how do you do it?’ questions, but Melvin just continued unfazed.

“The thing about canes is they’re usually thin and light – the opposite of a billy club. But then I did some research into GPS canes. Have you heard of them?”

“Vaguely,” Matt said. “As a concept.”

“They’re quite thick at the top, which lets me hide cabling within the top section. It’s light but strong, and it should hold your weight even when you do that crazy jumping off buildings thing.” Melvin handed him the prototype.

The cane was a single stride long, rather than Matt’s usual double stride. It had a thick grip but tapered into something not that much thicker than his own cane at its widest. It was noticeably heavier and probably wouldn’t be practical for day-to-day use.

“You have the GPS features as well up here.” Melvin tapped the grip and the cane announced the location. “Have a play with it.”

Matt pulled at the join that was about a third of the way down the shaft. The cane separated and the bottom two thirds slid into each other telescopically to form a second short stick.

Melvin guided Matt’s hand. “Here’s the trick: if you hold this section down while folding the cane, you get access the cable.” Matt looked puzzled, and Melvin explained, “you wanted it to seem like a normal cane, right?”

“Yeah,” Matt said, overwhelmed by the thought that had gone into Melvin’s invention. “But Melvin, this is remarkable.”

Melvin ducked his head. “Oh it’s nothing. I- I like the challenge.” He stopped, “uh, Mr Daredevil, your bag is moving.”

Matt started. “Oh yeah, that’s my dog.”

“You have a dog? Can I meet him?”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea. I-” Matt didn’t want his identity being compromised by Daisy, but if Melvin knew he was blind then that was already a pretty big identity giveaway.
Melvin was already unzipping the duffle. Sitting alongside Matt’s normal white cane was the very excited Daisy, who gave a couple of enthusiastic spins as she was released.

Melvin gave Daisy a pat, then grabbed Matt’s regular cane. “May I?”

“Yeah, sure.”

Melvin shook the cane straight and measured it against his prototype. “Should I make mine longer?”

“No, in most situations I hold the cane lower down, so the current length is fine. Thanks, Melvin.”

Melvin handed Matt a pair of reinforced pants to match the hoodie, as well as the two folded canes. “Let me know how they go. And – and take care, okay?”

“Always do,” Matt said with a smile, attaching Daisy to the leash and stuffing the clothing and new cane into his bag. Matt stopped at the door and said in slightly lower than normal, menacing-but-not-too-menacing kind of voice, “the blind thing – it’s just between you and me.”

Melvin laughed, unperturbed. “Yes, Mr Daredevil, of course it is.”
“Matt, it’s a sunny Saturday and you’re cooped up inside.” Foggy knocked on Matt’s bedroom door. “Come on, Matt. Even to my nose you’re starting to smell.”

Matt emerged from his bedroom with an offended look on his face. “I had a shower last night, Foggy.”

“Okay, okay,” Foggy said. “That was an exaggeration. But it got you to come out of your bedroom. The doctors said you need to exercise and build up your crappy lungs.”

“What’s the point?” Matt said grumpily. “I get healthy and then I just sit here, waiting for another seizure, waiting to not help people.”

“There’s the law. We help people every day, Matt. Innocent people, just like you wanted.”

Matt clenched his teeth. “You don’t get it, Foggy.”

“Yeah, I think I do. You want to do things your way and now that it’s not working your way, you won’t accept any suggestions or help from anyone else... and the world’s about to end. Is that about it?”

“It’s not about getting my own way,” Matt said, pushing past Foggy and padding towards the coffee machine.

“Okay, so why won’t you come outside and exercise with me? I know it’s not the same as jumping across rooftops in a Halloween costume, but maybe we could go for a jog.”

Matt huffed in amusement. “A jog?”

“Okay, maybe not a jog. But let’s take Daisy to the park. She needs the exercise too.”

Daisy gave a couple of enthusiastic spins at the sound of her name.

“Good dog,” Foggy said to Daisy, giving her a pat. “You’re like the ultimate diplomat.”

Of course, Foggy didn’t realise that Matt had made the walk across Hell’s Kitchen the previous day to get his new suit and cane from Melvin. Nor did he know about the subsequent hours Matt spent playing with the cane at home.

Excited about his new toy, Matt grabbed it from his bedroom just as they left for the park.

“You have a new cane?” Foggy asked.

“Yeah, it has GPS,” Matt said, pointing to the touch pad on the handle.

“What about your in-built GPS?”

“That only works within the Hell’s Kitchen. It’s more of a HKPS than a GPS,” Matt pointed out
with a snigger.

Foggy looked critically at the cane. “Did the hospital give it to you?”

“A friend,” Matt said cryptically.

“That’s kind of them,” Foggy said with a sideways glance.

Matt could sense Foggy’s scepticism, and added, “it’s on loan. It’s a prototype and I’m testing it for him.” He tapped the top and it announced their location. “I haven’t taken it outside yet. This will be its first test run.”

“That’s cool,” Foggy said, seemingly satisfied by Matt’s explanation.

They slowly walked to Central Park. Every time Daisy stopped to pee on a post or similarly unremarkable landmark, Matt and Foggy would tap the GPS locator just for the novelty of it. A few times they compared it to a navigational app on Matt’s phone and were thrilled to discover that the cane was actually more accurate.

“It’s great, Matt,” Foggy said. “Your friend’s going to make a fortune.”

Matt shook his head. “Unfortunately, there’s a very small market for these things. My friend – uh, he likes to tinker, that’s all.”

At the edge of the park, they released Daisy from her leash and she instantly tore off across the grass. They both swore and ran after her, yelling her name. She skidded to a halt and ran back to them at full speed.

“Fuck,” Foggy gasped. “I thought we’d lost her forever.” All three of them were panting.

Matt crouched in front of Daisy with his hand on her collar. “What do we do, Foggy? Should we let her off again?”

“Well, she came back when we called. I think she’ll be okay. Maybe she really did need a run.”

“She’s smart,” Matt said pointedly. He let go of Daisy’s collar and stood up, holding his breath. This time she didn’t run off. Instead, she looked up at them both, wagging her tail with glee. “Look what I taught her last week,” Matt said, placing his foot against his other leg’s mid-calf to form a triangle shape. He called for the dog and she leapt through the gap.

“You taught her that just this week?” Foggy said in disbelief.

“Thursday afternoon. It only took an hour.”

“And hour?! We could probably teach her how to make coffee at this rate.”

Matt laughed and bent down to ruffle Daisy’s fur.

They decided to trust Daisy not to run away again. She stuck to their heels as they strolled through the park, making only the occasional detour to a tree or fellow dog.

They’d walked for about half an hour when Matt stopped suddenly.

“What?” Foggy said. He looked at his friend’s intense expression of concentration, and then
quickly scanned the park for the source of alarm. He finally spotted it: at the nearby icecream cart, a man was slipping a hand into a woman’s handbag while she waited to order.

Foggy put his hand on Matt’s. “Matt, don’t.”

Before Foggy could blink, Matt flicked his cane so that the bottom section disconnected and flew towards the pickpocket’s hand, hitting it with a solid *thwak*. The thief let out a gasp of pain and doubled over, his hand held close to his chest. By the time he looked up, Matt had flipped the cane back together and was standing straight, a smug look on his face.

“Matt!” Foggy hissed. “What is that a prototype of exactly?”

“It’s a cane, I told you,” Matt said. “It—it can do other… things though. As I said before, my friend – he likes to tinker.” He gave Foggy a grin.

Foggy rolled his eyes. “Do I want to know?”

Matt shrugged. “Maybe. Probably not.”

Foggy huffed in amusement. “You’re ridiculous, you know that? Come on, let’s get out of here.”

Matt felt rejuvenated by the park incident. When he got home, he chugged down a glass of water and went in search of his exercise mat. He unrolled it, disturbing a layer of dust and a dead moth. “Huh,” he grunted, trying to think back to the last time he even attempted sit ups.

Foggy came running at the sound of Matt’s flimsy sit-up attempts. “Shit, I thought you were seizing,” Foggy said as he watched Matt struggle off the floor.

“Do I groan during a seizure?” Matt said, honestly surprised. Daisy took the opportunity to leap onto Matt’s stomach and he gave a pained “oof” as her paws dug into his ribs.

“Yeah, but not consciously. Apparently, it’s to do with air escaping your lungs or something.”

Matt raised his eyebrows. “I really don’t have a clue what goes on during a seizure. Maybe it’s for the better.”

“Maybe it is.” Foggy grabbed Daisy and tucked her under his arm. “I’ll keep her out of the way.”

“No, don’t take her!” Matt said a little too loudly. He lowered his voice and added, “sorry, I mean we should train her just not to jump.”

“That’s novel,” Foggy snickered, putting Daisy down again.


Foggy stared. “Oh, that was heaps easy.”

“As I said, Foggy, she’s smart.”

“I guess I’ll leave you two to it then.”

Matt struggled through five sit-ups before he attempted a push-up. Just as he’d groaned his way through his third push-up, he was interrupted once again.
“Matt?”

“You don’t have to yell, Foggy.”

Foggy ignored the comment and said, “how attached are you to that thrift store painting?”

“What thrift store painting?”

“The ugly one you got for a dollar that’s hanging pride of place over your sideboard.”

“It’s got an interesting texture,” Matt replied.

“When was the last time you touched it?”

There was a silence.

“Matt?”

“Uh, the day I hung it I think.”

“Can I replace it with something that doesn’t look like shit?”

There was another silence and Foggy started to worry that he’d offended Matt.

Matt sighed. It was a small price to pay for Foggy’s ongoing help. “Yeah, but no movie posters, okay? I don’t want it looking like a dorm room.”

“Oh.” Foggy rolled up his Blade Runner poster and stuffed it back into the tube.

Matt emerged from his room, wiping his sweaty forehead. “I could get Gladys to recommend something that looks good and feels good,” Matt said.

“Bet she’d like that,” Foggy teased.

“That wasn’t a euphemism, Fog.”

Foggy chuckled, “fine. Ask her. But please use those exact same words and report back on her reaction.”

Matt was standing on the edge of a deep hole. He felt in his pockets for something to throw into the abyss. Phone, wallet, keys… best not. He turned around and nudged his cane into a pile of rubble. It hit something solid: a chunk of concrete. Returning to the hole, he aimed for the centre and listened for the moment it hit the bottom.

“So this is what The Hand were digging then,” Elektra said softly, seemingly appearing from nowhere. She smelled like blood and there was something sliding across her skin, wrapping itself around her neck and chest. “How deep is it?”

Matt gaped. “What is that-”

“Did you know I can do things with electricity now? I can fry your brain if I choose to. Or maybe just trigger one of your episodes.” She moved closer. Matt tried to stand his ground, but the thing
around her neck hissed and he stumbled backwards. She laughed and said, “or maybe just do this...” She pushed his chest with such force that he almost made it to the other side of the hole. *Almost.* The air got cooler and cooler as he fell deeper into the earth. Falling, falling...

Matt woke up gasping for breath.

Hearing his cries, Foggy thundered in, half-naked. “Matt, what’s wrong?”

Matt rolled onto his side and started coughing uncontrollably. “My chest,” he wheezed, pressing his fists into his ribs in pain.

“Do you need me to call Claire? Or take you back to the hospital?” Foggy said.

“No!” Matt yelled. He curled into himself even tighter and started sobbing. Daisy leaned against Matt’s back, looking anxious and giving his pyjama top the occasional lick.

Foggy took Matt’s hand. “Tell me what I can do.”

Matt hiccupped. “You can’t, Foggy. You can’t.” He tried to take a deep breath, but it caught and he started coughing again. “Where...”

“You’re at home. I’m here, Daisy’s here.” Foggy patted the bed next to Matt’s hand and Daisy jumped over Matt’s torso to the spot. “Here,” Foggy placed Matt’s hand on Daisy’s soft fur. It had the desired response. Matt’s wheezing breaths slowed and his muscles started to unclench.

“What was that?” Foggy probed. “What happened?”

Matt pressed his head against Daisy’s warm body, collected himself and said weakly, “I’m sorry for waking you, Foggy. I’m fine now. Go back to sleep.”

Foggy sighed, not believing for a minute that whatever he’d just woken up to could be called ‘fine’, but it was 4am on Sunday morning and Foggy wasn’t up for an argument. He gave Daisy a small pat and stumbled back to his own bed.

As Foggy sipped his Sunday morning coffee, he spotted Daisy nudge Matt’s sliding door aside, slip through the crack and skitter up the stairs. She soon returned to the kitchen and stood by her food bowl, her tail wagging furiously.

“I know you’re awake, Matt. Daisy gave the game away. She wants breakfast,” Foggy called, pleased that he’d finally found a way to tell if Matt was sleeping or just lying there pretending to sleep (as he had a bad habit of doing).

There was a pause, then Matt croaked, “could you feed her... please.”

“Are you going to church?”

Foggy heard a groan then a creak as Matt got out of bed. He wandered out with his hand in his hair, eyes still closed.
“Are you okay after last night?”

Matt rubbed his face then finally opened his eyes. “Yeah, just tired. But I should go to church.” He sat down heavily at the table, and rested his head on the surface. “I love Julia, but I don’t know if I can deal with her energy today.”

“You don’t have to go. You can always aim for next week.”

“No, I’ll go.” Matt sighed and sat upright. “Maybe I’ll take Daisy with me.”

“Are dogs allowed in church?”

“Good question. Probably not.”

“I could meet you afterwards with Daisy. In fact, we could walk with you to church too if you’d like. I might have underestimated just how much exercise a dog needs.”

“Yeah, that’d be perfect, thanks.”

Matt and Foggy turned up to church with an excited Daisy. They were earlier than usual, and many of the parishioners were still milling outside. The two men were immediately pounced upon with hugs and handshakes. Many of Matt’s fellow churchgoers had heard of Foggy and his involvement in Tabitha’s case, and both he and Matt were treated like heroes.

Foggy was asked repeatedly if he was staying for mass, and every time he cited Daisy as a reason not to. Eventually news filtered back that Father Lantom had given permission for Daisy to attend the service. Not wanting to invent another excuse, Foggy started towards the church gates, but Matt grabbed his arm. “Fog, stay,” Matt said quietly. “Please?”

Matt’s request was so genuine that Foggy reluctantly agreed and fifteen minutes later, he found himself in the back row of the church alongside Matt, Daisy, Julia and Elizabeth. Matt gave him a small smile, and whispered an apology as the service started. “This wasn’t planned, Foggy.”

Foggy sighed. “If it gets you out of bed on a Sunday morning, there must be something to it.”

Matt crouched next to Julia with his hymn sheet. He knew this song well and could help Julia follow it in braille. As he sung, he guided her fingers across the words until she recognised the pace. He stood up and belted out the rest of the song. Even though his lung function was limited, he still had a magnificent singing voice. Foggy didn’t join in with the hymns, nor the prayers. Instead, he watched Matt with fascination. There was no denying it, Matt looked unusually calm and at peace.

Even though Father Lantom had a reputation as a progressive priest and his sermon was surprisingly interesting, Foggy found the prayers and readings incredibly problematic. By the third reading, Foggy couldn’t help himself.

Father Lantom read, “it is to your credit if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, where is the credit in that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval.”

“That’s explains a lot,” Foggy muttered. He glanced sideways at Matt who was trying his best to ignore Foggy’s comment.

The priest continued, “when he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.”
"You could take a leaf," Foggy whispered at Matt.

"Shh!" Matt hissed sharply and Foggy recoiled at Matt’s sudden expression of rage.

When Matt stood to receive communion, leaving Foggy and Daisy together in the back row, Foggy took the opportunity to slip out of the church. He sat on the bench outside with Daisy on his lap, and waited for the service to end. It was a furious Matt that emerged fifteen minutes later. "What was that about?" he yelled.

"What?"

"You disturbed the service with your snide comments."

"Geez, Matt, relax. I just thought it was ironic, you know – actually it was more hypocritical than ironic -"

"No, I don’t know," Matt said, his fists clenched. "This was a mistake. You should never have come."

"You’re telling me," Foggy muttered. "I didn’t want to come in the first place. You said you wanted me to come. I didn’t even want to. I wouldn’t have…"

Matt’s breath caught and he ended up clinging to the church fence as he descended into a coughing fit. Foggy helped him over to the bench to catch his breath. Matt sat for a minute, head in hands. Eventually he croaked, "I’m – I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have asked."

"Church is your thing, Matt. It’s not mine. Can we just forget it and go back to meeting for pancakes afterwards?"

"Yeah, thanks, Fog."

"Now, do you want me to take Daisy home or are you going to keep her for your session with Julia?"

"I’ll keep her, thanks." Foggy started across the road, and Matt called, "sorry, Foggy." Foggy just nodded and kept walking.

Matt’s plan for the session with Julia was to practice navigating around the church, but Daisy proved more distracting than helpful. After Julia tried to pick up Daisy for the seventh time, Elizabeth took the dog into another room where she joined Father Lantom for a coffee and a chat.

Matt took Julia into the centre of the church. "Julia, focus. Now click your tongue like this." Matt clicked and listened to the sound waves bounce off the church surfaces.

Julia repeated it. "What’s this for?"

"Do it again and be very quiet afterwards. Listen to your surroundings."

She clicked and concentrated deeply, holding her breath to better hear.

"Keep breathing," Matt said. "You’ll have to learn to block it out."

"I can hear cars and mom and some people talking outside."
Matt stopped, surprised. He vaguely recalled a comment she'd made in the hospital that suggested her hearing was better than normal, but he struggled to remember the context thanks to the subsequent seizure. "You can hear your mom from here?"

"Yeah."

"Could you hear that well before you were blind?"

"No, but they said that when you go blind your hearing gets better."

"Not better -" Matt corrected.

"It seems better? I think they said something about concentration."

In the other room, Matt could hear Elizabeth chatting to Father Lantom about Julia's boundless energy.

"How did you lose your sight?" Matt said, realising he’d never bothered to ask.

"A spider bit me."

Matt raised his eyebrows. "A spider?"

"Yes. It really hurt."

"I bet."

"And I had to stay in hospital for ages – like you."

"I- I don't think I was there for long."

"You were away for two Sundays," she pointed out.

"Oh, this time." He'd assumed she was referring to his own accident as a child. They'd released him after a few days, even though he was struggling to cope with the sensory onslaught.

He said softly, "Julia, it might not be wise to tell everyone about your hearing. People – they might not understand."

"I already told mom and the doctor."

"Yes, that's fine. And I think your hearing will help you greatly with navigating and ... other things. But, er, I think it might – you might find it easier in the future if people don't know." He wavered. Maybe it would be better if people knew. What was he imposing on the child?

Matt led her over to the church entrance before he could second guess himself any further. "Try clicking here. What do you hear? Can you judge what kind of space we're in?"

She gave a few clicks and quickly said, “the entrance.”

"How do you know that?"

"Duh, I've been here heaps."

Matt laughed. "What else gives it away?"

"There's no carpet. And I can feel air from outside."
"That's good. What about the sound. Is it different?"

She clicked again. "It's um, not – I dunno." She thought for a moment. "It'd different from out there. That one echoed whereas this one is more, um…"

"That’s okay. It’s hard to describe. As long as you can tell we're in a different space, that’s what matters. Let's go to another area."

He led her back into the main church space. "Click again."

"It's echoey," she said. "And I can hear vibrations over there." She pointed ahead of her.

Matt gave her a small clap. "Great. That’s the church organ. You can hear the vibrations from the metal tubes. Every material has its own acoustic signature, and you’ll learn to recognise them in time." He was surprised she picked up on the metallic vibrations already. She'd evidently absorbed more than both of them realised.

They compared the various areas of the church: the apses, the adjacent community room, and finally the room where Elizabeth and Father Lantom were finishing up their coffees.

"I learned how to click," Julia told them proudly.

Matt smiled. "You learned about echolocation," he corrected. "You learned to listen to the sound waves bouncing off the objects around you." He explained to Elizabeth, "by clicking her tongue, Julia can learn to 'see' spaces, or rather hear spaces. Over time, I’ve learned to use ambient sounds to read spaces, although occasionally I click my fingers. Julia has the capacity to reach that level, I’m sure."

Elizabeth smiled. "I've often wondered how you're so confident getting around."

"That and practice. I ended up with a lot of bruises as a child," Matt said with a cheeky grin.

"Julia's going to practice this week, aren't you?" Matt said to the small girl who was now kneeling in front of Daisy, stroking her back.

"Mmm hmm."

"And if anyone comments about the clicking, explain to them why you click, but don't stop doing it no matter what people say." Matt suspected that the clicking might not go down so well at school.

Matt mulled over Julia's hearing as he left the church. Was it possible that the doctors and scientists were wrong, and that hearing could objectively improve after vision loss? A spider bite sounded as traumatic as his own accident. If it wasn't the poison that improved their hearing, perhaps it was the shock itself.

Matt was about to turn right to head home, but at the last minute turned left to the park. Foggy was right – he needed the fresh air, and more importantly, Daisy could probably do with another run.

Soon after entering the park, they encountered a rogue A-frame sign in the middle of the path, and Daisy automatically led him sideways to avoid it. Matt smiled to himself. If Daisy continued to lead him like this, he might not have to concentrate on navigating quite as much. He listened fondly to Daisy's claws tapping rapidly against the concrete. He was already in love with the small dog.
He released Daisy from her leash and sat on a park bench, listening to her run frantic crop circles on the grass. Another small dog joined her and he could hear them rolling and tumbling as they played in the sun. The other dog's owner sat next to Matt. "It's a shame you can't see them. It's quite the dance."

Matt forced a smile. "I can hear them. That's enough."

The owner took the hint and moved on soon after that. Daisy jumped onto Matt's lap and they sat there in the Fall sun until Daisy started panting from the heat. Just as they were about to leave the park, however, Matt heard the familiar 'for show' tapping of Stick's cane. Matt didn't think he'd ever be pleased to hear Stick again, but here he was.

“Stick.”

“Matty,” Stick replied, tapping his cane with each syllable. Straight out, he added, “you're too soft on her. She's never going to learn.”

“Huh? Elektra?”

“Julia, you idiot.”

"You know about that?"

"Of course I know about that. Elizabeth Carpenter, unremarkable medical secretary from LA, gets headhunted by a major firm in the New York who are willing to pay thousands of dollars in relocation costs for her and little Julia. You can’t really believe that would happen. Who do you think led her to you?"

Matt stood there, opened mouthed. He finally spat out, “what?”

“I thought it might give you something useful to do while you're not fit and fighting. But apparently not.”

"She's just a kid, Stick. Leave her alone."

"Then pick up your game, Matty. That's the deal."

Matt gripped his cane tight. Was there nothing in his life that could be just his?

"So you know about her enhanced hearing?"

"And strength. She hasn't learned to use it yet. That's where you come in. Help her find her true abilities."

"Pfft. So she can fight in your war?"

"Yeah, you got a problem with that?"

Matt laughed bitterly. "You know I do. But there's another problem right now. Have you heard-"


Matt screwed up his face. "No, I mean Elektra. Who's Erinyes?"

"Elektra's other half. That's what she's calling herself."
"So it’s true? There are two of her?"

"Yeah, and it's your fault."

Matt huffed. "My fault? How do you figure that?"

"Whatever spell you cast when she died –"

"I didn't cast any spell. I don't even know how to do magic."

Stick groaned, "you idiot. You loved her."

"Yes, in a way."

"That's the spell. She died in the hands of someone who loved her. It cleansed her soul – resulted in a second Ellie, a **good** Ellie." Stick snickered as he said the word ‘good’.

Matt frowned, trying to figure out these supposed rules of resurrection. "So hang on, if she died alone, she would have just come out bad?"

"Something like that," Stick grumbled.

Frustrated, Matt said, "how in earth is having a good Elektra a bad thing?"

"I knew you wouldn't understand," Stick said witheringly. “Don't go near Erinyes, Matty. You're not ready. She's not worth it."

Matt gave a bitter laugh. "You actually sound like you care."

"Fuck, Matty, you need to get over yourself. It’s not about you. " Stick took off at a lick, calling over his shoulder, "and lose the dog. It's not your style."

Matt scooped Daisy up and held her close to his chest as he left the park, murmuring "don't listen to him. He's just a deluded old man" in her ear.

Matt had only walked a few blocks before he was accosted by Elektra. He placed Daisy on the ground and said in a hushed tone, "I just ran into Stick. Have you seen him?"

"The bastard," she said. "He knows what's going on and he's avoiding me while my other self is going on a killing spree."

"You found her?"

"No, she's elusive, Matthew. She's hiding somewhere nearby though – I can feel it." Elektra shivered.

Matt leaned in and whispered, "come on, let's talk somewhere more private." He could smell coffee at the other end of the block. “There's a café around the corner.”

Daisy hid under the table as Elektra and Matt ordered. "Coffee, thanks," Matt said to the waitress.

"What kind? We have single origin or our own house blend," the waitress said.

"Uh, whatever you recommend."
"And would you like a latte, cappuccino, espresso, macchiato, flat white-"

"I don't know," Matt said, frustrated. "White."

"A flat white?"

"Uh, yes."

"Two please," Elektra said, and Matt baulked. He'd never known Elektra to be so polite, even when she had an ulterior motive.

"And do you want anything to eat?"

"The salad," Elektra replied.

"Do you have pancakes?" Matt said.

"We have our menu – oh, sorry, I'll read the menu... We have organic stoneground sourdough with smashed avocado and Persian feta, then we have dukkha-encrusted sea-"

"The first one," Matt interrupted, eager to get this over and done with.

He chuckled as the waitress moved away. "Smashed avocado," he muttered to Elektra, shaking his head. "I hope they remove the pip first." He stopped and said, "sorry, let's get back to your other half. Stick reckons she's calling herself Erinyes."

"Erinyes," Elektra repeated with a small smile. "The infernal goddesses."

"What?"

"The maiden daughters of night, born from the drops of flowing blood."

"Elektra, I-"

"The Erinyes, that under earth take vengeance on men, whosoever hath sworn a false oath." She looked at Matt’s confused face and added, “Homer's Iliad. I did a minor in Greek history, remember?"

Matt raised his eyebrows. "So, your other half is seeking vengeance?"

"Probably," Elektra shrugged.

"You say that a bit too casually," Matt pointed out.

"I want to find out who murdered me too."

"What about your father's murderers?"

"Oh, I killed them long ago," Elektra said, nonchalant.

"Of course you did," Matt muttered.

They paused the conversation when the waitress delivered their coffees. Elektra wrapped her hands around the cup, enjoying the warmth. She smiled. "Erinyes. It's rather poetic, don't you think?"

"Poetic? Elektra, for your good half, you're really not doing a good job of caring about potential death and destruction."
"I’m the better half of me, not you, Matthew. You know that my better half was never all that good."

Over their smashed avocados, salad and flat whites (which Matt had to admit were pretty good), they tried and failed to come up with a plan. "Stick told me to stay away from her. He said I wasn't fit enough."

"You're not," Elektra said, forking a piece of frilled lettuce.

"There's something he's not telling me though."

"There's always something, Matthew. He keeps the truth to himself. If he keeps us in the dark then he holds all the power. That's the way he's always been."

"Secrets," Matt said half to himself. He remembered trying to justify all his lies to Foggy. "Secrets empower the holder."

Matt slipped a piece of toast to Daisy, who was sitting quietly between his feet.

"You're spoiling her, Matthew."

Matt gave her a guilty smile. He scrunched up his napkin and threw it on his plate. "Come on. Let's get you a cell phone. My shout."

Elektra threw her napkin at his head. "My money."

Matt snorted and threw the napkin back at her before getting up to pay.

Matt let Elektra guide him as they walked to the nearest phone shop. He knew she wasn't real and that this 'good' Elektra was probably only a temporary blip in whatever reality he was living, but he still felt himself falling under her spell again. Not real, he repeated to himself. Not real.

Chapter End Notes

Phew! This is the last Elektra resurrection-related chapter I wanted to publish before the Defenders came out. Got in just in time...

I'm going to marathon the Defenders now... yay!
Matt woke up to the sound of a wet coughing coming from the next room. Matt rolled over and coughed himself, and it was echoed in the other room.

“Foggy?” Matt called. “Are you okay?”

“No,” Foggy croaked.

Matt padded towards Foggy’s nook, but before he could duck into the entrance, Foggy yelled, “no! Don’t come in.”

“Why?”

“Because if I get sick it’s a shit, but I’ll get over it. If you get sick it’s a disaster.”

“You make me sound like a hypochondriac, Foggy.”

“No, you idiot. It’ll lower your seizure threshold. Plus, you only just got out of hospital, so if you get sick you’ll probably end up back in there.”

Matt gave an unimpressed grunt. “Okay, I won’t come in, but what can I get you? Coffee? Cold and Flu meds?”

Foggy coughed again. “Ahhh, I feel like shit,” he whined. “Maybe some Tylenol?”

Matt rummaged around in the first aid kit and sped back to Foggy with a glass of water and the pills. “What else?”

“I’ll be fine, Matt. Go to work. I’ll text Candy and see if she’ll come in and cover me today. If not, I’m sure Karen can catch you up on the cases from the last few weeks.”

“Fog, are you sure?”

“Yeah-” Foggy started, but his words turned into a hacking cough. “Ergh,” he gasped. “I know I can’t complain-”

“You can complain,” Matt said. “You can also demand I get whatever you want to eat and drink. I think you’ve earned it.”

“Fine then. I demand that you bring me back some alcohol wipes when you return home so that I can disinfect everything I’ve touched.”

“Foggy, you don’t-”

“No, Matt. Disaster. It will be a disaster. Just get the wipes, okay?”

Matt wandered off to have a shower, grumbling something about alcohol wipes not working anyway just as Daisy skittered down the stairs from the roof. As if she knew he needed comforting, she went straight to Foggy and took a flying leap onto his bed. “Good dog,” Foggy said, ruffling her fur.
Matt was slipping on his jacket when Foggy called, “hey, are you taking Daisy?”

“No, I thought you might enjoy her company,” Matt said.

“I can’t pretend that I wouldn’t, but it’s more important that you have her with you, particularly if I’m not around to pick you up off the floor.”

Matt sighed, but knew Foggy was right.

“I hope I haven’t transferred germs onto her,” Foggy added.

“I’ll wash my hands,” Matt replied. In his opinion, Foggy was making too much of the germ thing.

Matt enjoyed the walk to work thanks to Daisy’s company. Unlike the previous day, the tiny dog trotted alongside Matt, content to follow his lead. The sidewalk was awash with commuters, so it was probably an act of self-preservation rather than anything else. As they walked into the office, Matt said to Daisy, “and this is where I work.”

Karen stood up from her desk, stifling a laugh at Matt’s earnest chatting. “So this is the famous Daisy,” she said, crouching by her desk with her arms out. Matt dropped the leash and the dog flew at Karen. “Gosh, she has energy.”

Matt chuckled. “That’s for sure.” He started for his office and called over his shoulder, “no Candy today?”

“Oh, yes, about that,” Karen said slowly. “She can come in if she can bring her baby. She couldn’t find a sitter at late notice. I said I’d ask you and get back to her.”


“Uh, Matt, I don’t-”

“That’s a joke, Karen. I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

His feet scuffed against the edge of a basket next to his desk. “What’s this?”

“Foggy got it for you – well, for Daisy. We figured she’d be accompanying you to work, so… you know.”

Matt grinned and patted the basket. Daisy jumped onto it, did a couple of circles and curled up contentedly.

“And just like that she’s calm?” Karen said with a small laugh.

“Mmm, yes it appears so.” He turned on his computer. “Now, what have I missed?”

The day was ridiculously busy. And that was even before Matt added work into the mix. Between the hourly calls to Foggy (even though Foggy told him it was ridiculous each time), the novelty of the dog, and the very act of trying to engage his brain, Matt was feeling very overwhelmed.

Then there was the baby. She was almost a year old and was on the verge of crawling. She slept for the first hour in the office, but then demanded play time, food, diaper changes and other noisy
endeavours. Matt was like a moth to the flame, drifting towards the baby at every chance.

“Have you ever considered having children?” Candy asked, as Matt bounced a giggling Mia on his lap.

“Oh no, not for me,” Matt said.

“That’s a shame. You’re good with children.”

“Other people’s children,” Matt said. “I don’t feel qualified to have one of my own.”

“It’s not to do with qualifications, Matt. Didn’t you learn about the birds and the bees-”

“Of course,” Matt said, his cheeks reddening. He handed Mia back to Candy. “I have a meeting.”

He straightened his tie in preparation, just as Gladys arrived to discuss their next move regarding the sculpture park.

Gladys was immediately distracted by the dog, who greeted her at Matt’s office door with a spin. “You didn’t tell me you have a new gal in your life,” she quipped, giving Daisy a pat.

Matt smiled. “I’ve only had her for a week. I might have to teach her to be a little less insistent with her greetings.” He felt for his office chair. “Please, have a seat.”

He handed Gladys a wad of documents. “With the owner refusing to sell, we have to move quickly before it gets bulldozed. You’ve done a good job of raising public awareness through the press,” he said with a smile. “So, with the community on our side, we could put in an urgent protection status request on the grounds of cultural heritage preservation. Those documents outline the requirements for consideration and the application form.”

Gladys flicked through the sheets before sighing and resting them against the table. “This is geared towards historical sites, isn’t it?”

“Yes, but if you believe that it has unique cultural merit, then it’s worth a try. There are precedents. The thing is, I can fill in most of the form, but I don’t have the expertise to write about its artistic significance.”

“Oh, I can do that,” Gladys said quickly. “And I have colleagues who can contribute as well.”

“Excellent. The sections you need to fill out are already marked. I’ll complete the rest this afternoon, and if you send me your statement by mid-afternoon, we can send it to the planning office by close of business today.”

“Today?” Gladys said in disbelief.

“Yes,” Matt said, a little surprised at her lack of urgency. “The month is almost up. He gave you a month to clear the block and I doubt that he’ll hold off.”


She stood up, and Matt said a little nervously, “Uh, I have a favour to ask from you.”

“Yes?”

“I need to buy some art.”
Gladys laughed. “I thought it was going to be something horrible by your tone.”

Matt looked a little sheepish. “Sorry.”

“Let me guess: you want something that feels nice but also looks nice, is that right?”

Matt laughed. “Yes, exactly. When I described it that way to Foggy last night, he teased me.”

“Philistine,” Gladys joked.

“Indeed. Can you help?”

“I can. There’s an exhibition just about to open this Thursday in Chelsea that I think you’ll like. How can I describe it… sculptures for walls? Or tactile paintings? Something like that. I’ll give them a call and see if they’ll let you touch the works.”

“A gallery in Chelsea… sounds expensive.”

“She’s an emerging artist. I think the prices are pretty reasonable. What do you think? Are you free Thursday? I could swing by here after work and we could wander down.”

“Oh, sure,” Matt said, completely unsure. “Do you mind if Foggy joins us? I’m kind of buying it for him – he hates the painting in my apartment. He can’t get past the fact that I bought it for a dollar.”

Gladys huffed in amusement. “Of course. Although now I’m curious about this other painting.”

Matt chuckled. “Don’t be.”

As soon as Gladys left, Matt rang Foggy to check on him, and spilled the news about the gallery opening. Even through the croakiness, Matt could hear the excitement in Foggy’s voice.

Matt returned home with two massive shopping bags filled with comfort food, lozenges, cold and flu tablets and, despite his better judgement, alcohol wipes. Juggling his cane, the leashed dog, his laptop bag and the shopping, he struggled in the door and dropped the bags at the entrance with a crash.

“Ngh, wha-” Foggy grunted from his nook.

“Sorry, Fog,” Matt whispered. “Go back to sleep.”

“No, I’m awake,” Foggy croaked.

Matt smiled to himself. He could hear Foggy’s snores from street level. He’d forgotten how horrific Foggy’s snoring could get when he was sick. One time at college, Matt had got so desperate for sleep after a week of Foggy’s illness, that he’d dragged a blanket into a storage cupboard and curled up next to the mops and buckets.

Daisy jumped into Foggy’s nook to say hello, then made a beeline for her dinner bowl. “Okay, okay,” Matt said to her. “Let me put this away first.”

Foggy padded into the living room, rubbing his forehead.

“I thought you were worried about germs,” Matt said.
“I am, but I’m wearing a mask,” Foggy said, his words muffled.

“You’re wearing a t-shirt around your head,” Matt corrected.

“You can tell it’s a t-shirt?” Foggy said in wonderment.

“It smells like your t-shirt drawer in your old apartment. Therefore-”

“Ergh, my brain can’t cope with this information right now,” Foggy grumbled.

“Take it off, Fog. It’s not going to make a difference. You’re probably post-infectious now anyway.”

Foggy sighed and untied his makeshift mask before collapsing on the couch. He coughed lazily into his shoulder and Matt immediately zipped over with a glass of water and a mound of medications, cough drops, tissues and sprays.

Foggy huffed in amusement as he shuffled through the boxes. “You’ve gone way overboard here, buddy. I only needed Tylenol and some cough drops.”

“I wasn’t sure what you had so I just bought everything the pharmacist recommended.”

“Yeah, well, I think they were taking you for a ride.”

Matt pursed his lips, unhappy about Foggy’s insinuation that he was a weak target. Matt rushed back into the kitchen, got out a variety of pots, and started furiously hacking away at some vegetables.

“Wotcha making?” Foggy asked.

“Dinner,” Matt said flatly. “Do you want some tea or something? A blanket?”

“No, no, I’m fine, Matt. Why don’t you sit for a bit? You’re not sounding so great yourself.”

Matt waved him off. “It’s just lingering fatigue. I’ll sit when this is on the stove.”

An hour later, Matt proudly presented Foggy with specially made chicken noodle soup with the alphabet noodles spelling out “get well soon” along the bowl’s edge.

Foggy didn’t know what to say. It was sweet, but more in keeping with something a parent would give their five-year-old child, rather than a grown man wearing a Slayer t-shirt. Matt hovered while Foggy took a sip. Foggy could tell that he was desperate for a reaction, any reaction. “This is wonderful, Matt. Thanks. Just what I needed,” Foggy said with a smile.

Matt gave him a grin and rushed back to the stove to serve himself a bowl, adding a generous sprinkle of chilli flakes at the last minute.

As he scraped the bottom of the bowl, Foggy said, “what happened to that no meat at home rule?”

Matt swallowed a lump of carrot and said, “I was thinking maybe the rule doesn’t have to be hard and fast. After all, it was my rule, not yours. This is your place too now.”

Foggy shrugged. “It’s okay. You’ve expanded my repertoire of vegetarian cooking pretty well. I don’t miss cooking meat that much.”

“What about last week - the fuss about Daisy’s food?”
“I was just teasing, Matt.”

“Oh,” Matt said in a small voice, embarrassed that he’d taken the criticism to heart.

Matt doted on Foggy all evening, leaping up and down to prepare hot water bottles, water, medications, and (as his pièce de résistance) a hot toddy.

Foggy was getting a bit sick of the mothering until the hot whiskey drink came into the picture. “Oh, I’d forgotten about these,” Foggy said with his nose in the mug, remembering the moment Matt introduced him to the concept during a particularly nasty flu season at college. It was apparently something that Matt’s dad used to make. Foggy didn’t know how he felt about the idea of a child being given whiskey, but he knew that it was dangerous territory to say anything vaguely critical about Matt’s father. Regardless, it was delicious.

Foggy took a sip and groaned, “oh my God that’s so good. I can feel my body healing already.”

Matt sat down with his own mug and Foggy bit his bottom lip, not wanting to bring up the alcohol issue.

“Fog, you’re busting to say something,” Matt eventually said.

“No, I’m not – I mean it’s nothing.”

Matt raised his eyebrows.

Foggy frantically searched for something to say. “Daisy,” he started, but petered off into a nonsensical mumble.

Matt sighed and took a sip of his hot toddy.

“How was Daisy today?”

“Fine,” Matt said with a shrug. “I need to train her not to jump up on clients when they arrive but apart from that, she seemed pretty happy.”

“Uh, so… what – I know you don’t like the idea of a guide dog – but what do you thinking about seeking accreditation for Daisy as a seizure alert dog? I mean, she’s fine in our office but she can’t come to court. Having a walking warning system might make you more – um, more confident… maybe…”

Matt gave Daisy a pat. “I thought about it, but it’s not easy. She has to pass training and there are strict behavioural rules.” He swapped his mug for the dog, hugging her tight to his chest. “I think I just want her as a pet, Fog.”

“One that doesn’t jump on clients though,” Foggy added.

Matt smiled. “Exactly.”

The next day, Foggy was woken mid-afternoon by a call from a frantic Karen. “Foggy, I’m sorry
did I wake you?” She blurted out.

“No – I mean yes – but it’s okay,” Foggy croaked. “What’s wrong?”

“Matt had a seizure.”

Foggy sat up in bed. “Shit. Is he okay?”

“Um, I have him on his side. He was already on the couch.”

“The Daisy warning system?”

“Yeah,” Karen said, flustered. “But Foggy, I don’t know what to do next. He’s not waking up.”

“Karen, breathe,” Foggy said calmly. He walked her through the steps and stayed on the phone until Matt had regained consciousness and then promptly fallen asleep.

“You did it,” Foggy said afterwards. “That wasn’t so hard, was it?”

Karen gave a nervous laugh. “I - I guess not. It’s scary.”

“Yeah, but he’s got good care.”

“The only thing is – um, I don’t know how to say this, Fog, but when Matt had stopped shaking, Daisy tried to pull him off the couch.”

“Huh. Off, or just onto his side?”

“Oh, um I don’t know. She was pulling his arm over and I-I just assumed that she was trying to drag him onto the floor, but it was his left arm – the arm away from the edge of the couch.”

Foggy smiled. “When Matt had his last seizure, she tried to do that too. Unfortunately, she struggles with the weight of a full-grown man. But she tried. She must have watched me roll Matt over, and so she’s learned to do it.”

“But you’ve only had her for a week.”

“Yeah. What can I say? Smart dog.”

“You’ve never had a dog before. It’s more than - uh, don’t worry. I’ll – how are you? Sorry, I forgot to ask.”

“I’m okay. It’s just a cold.”

“Foggy,” Karen said, exasperated. “You don’t need to downplay it just because Matt-”

“It’s a minor cold, Karen. Not even a man cold. And Matt pretty much bought me an entire drug store last night, and then made me chicken soup from scratch. He’s like an overprotective parent.”

“Unlike someone else I know,” Karen said in amusement. “I think it’s wonderful that you both care for each other so much, but make sure you look after yourself, Fog.”

Foggy rubbed his eyes. “Give me a call if you’re worried about Matt. In the meantime, I’m going to take your advice and have a nice healing nap.”
When Matt stumbled through the door that evening, Foggy was lying on the couch in just a pair of boxers and a tee-shirt. Daisy ran straight at him and took a flying leap onto his stomach. “Oof,” Foggy grunted. “Ow. Those paws!”

He sat up and Matt and Foggy said in unison, “how are you?”

They both huffed in amusement, and Matt said, “you first.”

“Better,” Foggy said. “I reckon I’ll be okay to return to work tomorrow. You?”

“So-so,” Matt said. “Daisy saved me a few bruises at least. I can’t remember it, but apparently I was warned early enough to lie down on the couch.” He rubbed his forehead clumsily. “Can I get you anything?” He swayed slightly as he spoke, clearly tired.

Foggy stretched with a groan. “I have everything I need and more.”

Matt gave a small nod, but stood there nervously, torn between wanting to do something for Foggy and desperately needing to lie down.

“Matt, go to bed.”

Matt cringed. “Is it that obvious?”

“Yeah. Seriously, I’ll be fine.”

Matt gave him a small grateful smile and shuffled to his bed.

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By Thursday, Daisy had been trained to stay in her basket when clients arrived. They’d also shifted her basket to a spot under Matt’s desk after she kept trying to curl up on his feet.

When Gladys arrived that evening to walk Foggy and Matt to the art exhibition opening, she laughed at Daisy’s hiding spot. “It’s cute, but she kind of blends into the shadows so you just see these disembodied eyes.”

“It can’t be that bad,” Matt said.

Foggy stood at the door to Matt’s office, arms crossed. “It’s a little bit creepy, I agree.”

Matt frowned and gestured for her to come, picking her up and hugging her close to his chest. “Don’t listen to them,” he whispered to her. “They’re just being mean.”

Foggy rolled his eyes.

“It’d be different if she weren’t the colour of a shadow. It wasn’t a jibe.”

“Colour? What do you mean?”

“If she had more white fur. Hang on – you’ve never asked what colour she is, have you?”

“I assumed orange and white. Like a Daisy.”

Foggy chuckled. “More like a skunk. She’s mostly black but she has a small white patch on her
“It looks a bit like a face with horns,” Gladys said, looking at Daisy’s back.

Foggy quickly looked at Matt, expecting a reaction, but Matt kept his face expressionless and just kept stroking the dog. “I thought it looked like a dog. Two ears, snout,” Foggy said, tracing the outline.

“We should probably head off,” Matt said shortly.

As they were heading down the stairs, Matt said, “so why the name Daisy?”

“Who knows. Mom and dad’s friend was a movie nut, so Daisy’s probably a character in an obscure arthouse movie.”

“We’re a little bit early,” Gladys explained as they neared the gallery.

“Oh, I thought you said 5.30pm.”

“The opening starts at 6, but I asked if it was possible to have a preview so that you can touch the artworks. You’ll have to wear gloves though.”

“That’s fine,” Matt said. They stopped outside the gallery, and Matt scooped Daisy up and deposited her in his tote bag.

Foggy stared. “Matt, what are you doing?”

“Dogs aren’t allowed in galleries, are they?”

Gladys said, “mmm… maybe. You could say she’s a guide dog.”

Matt huffed. “I’m not doing that.”

“Although she does predict seizures,” Foggy pointed out.

“Really? Matt, you didn’t say,” Gladys said, giving Matt a tap on the arm.

Matt shrugged. “She’s a pet. A pet with benefits.”

Foggy groaned, “that’s so not appropriate, Matt.” He made a move for the door. “Come on, are we going in or not?”

The three of them donned gloves and felt the wall-mounted sculptures. The artist had been particularly excited about a viewing of this nature, and walked around with them, discussing the methods of construction and her inspiration. Eventually, Matt pulled Foggy aside. “Which one?”

“One what?”

“Which one should I get?”

“I don’t know. Whichever one felt the best I guess.”

Matt bit his lip. “Okay, I liked the pointy topped one,” he said, gesturing to his right. “And there was one that was quite symmetrical.”
“This one?” Foggy led Matt to the work in the corner that had stripes that clashed with the angles of the physical form. Matt nodded, and Foggy said, “this is my favourite too.”

“Describe it to me,” Matt said.

“Uh, it’s got red and orange and brown stripes that kinda go horizontal, but not quite. They make your eyes a bit glazy.”

“Glazy? Is that a word?”

“It’s like some kind of illusion. It’s pretty cool.”

“Are you going to go glazy at home? I don’t want you tripping out every day.”

Foggy laughed. “It’s not like that. It’s cool. I mean, not as cool as my signed Blade Runner poster, but if you want it, get it.”

Matt looked conflicted.

“What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know. It seems kind of unnecessary. Shouldn’t I be putting the money into the business instead?”

“I don’t know. Where is the money coming from, Mr Moneybags?”

“My savings,” Matt said quickly, not wanting to mention that his ‘savings’ was largely Natchios money – money that he’d tried to return to Elektra in full, but she refused all but a small portion. “I haven’t worked much and you’ve-”

“Matt, we have more than enough right now. Elektra’s fees will keep us going for a long time. If this is some Catholic thing-”

“It’s nothing to do with my religion. It’s just…” Matt tried to figure it out himself. “I guess I feel guilty.”

“Of course you do. It’s your natural state. If you weren’t feeling guilty I’d be worried.”

Matt lowered his head and said, “I can’t help but think about my father, struggling to pay rent, bills, groceries. This seems so- so bourgeois.”

Foggy was a bit taken aback by Matt’s frankness. He touched Matt’s arm, who raised his head in response. Foggy said, “you know, he’d be so proud of you, Matt. He wanted a better life for his son. That’s why he pushed you to do well at school.”

Matt shrugged. “I guess.”

There was a screech of the door as the other guests started to arrive. Daisy shifted in response to the noise, and Matt reached into the bag and gave her a reassuring pat. He sighed. “I’ll get it.” He waved in the direction of Gladys before hesitating and saying to Foggy. “Are you sure? That one?”

Foggy rolled his eyes. “I’m sure. Buy it so I don’t feel bad about drinking their wine.”

“It’s from a box,” Matt whispered. “They just decanted it into bottles out the back. I can hear them.”
Foggy chuckled. “You ruin everything, Matt Murdock. I wouldn’t have even noticed.”

Gladys joined Matt and Foggy in front of their chosen sculpture. “This one?” she said.

Matt nodded. “H-how do I-”

Gladys rubbed his arm, trying to put Matt at ease. Apart from the times she’d visited him in hospital, he’d always come across as so confident. The commercial gallery had finally broken his façade. “There’s no mystery to it,” Gladys said. “Come on, let’s talk to the gallery owner.”

Once Matt had purchased the artwork, the gallery owner went to grab Matt a glass of wine. Knowing how awkward her epileptic brother used to feel when it was automatically assumed everyone drank alcohol, Gladys whispered to Matt, “orange juice, sparkling water or wine?”

“Oh, um, just water,” Matt stammered, and Gladys leapt up to head the gallery owner off.

Once Gladys and Foggy had their wine, and Matt his fluted glass of water, they clinked Matt’s purchase. It was now noisy in the gallery with people milling around, greeting each other and catching up on the local art world gossip. Matt realised from the conversations he overhead that the art barely came into it. Foggy was into his second wine when Matt murmured, “hey, Daisy’s getting a bit restless. I think I’m ready to go.”

Gladys used their exit to make a quiet getaway herself, citing nerves about the emergency cultural heritage assessment hearing for the sculpture park scheduled for the next day. “I’m worried,” she said, jiggling up and down on the spot.

“Don’t be. It’ll be quick. You speak well. I know you do. You know the significance of the site so well and you have authority,” Matt gave her what he hoped was a reassuring smile. “It’ll be fine. You’ll see.”

Matt was woken at midnight by a call from Elektra. He whispered angrily into the phone, “Elektra, what are you doing calling me in the middle of the night?”

“I need to talk.”

Matt groaned and rolled onto his back. “What about?”

“I’m on the roof. Can I come in?”

Matt sat up straight. “No! Stay there. I’m coming up.” He jumped out of bed and threw on a hoodie and socks before creeping up the stairs to the roof, listening for any break in Foggy’s snoring.

Elektra was waiting for him on the edge of the roof. Matt scowled as he padded over. “This better be good, Elektra.”

“I found out who killed me,” she said.

“Who?”

“It was Stick and his merry men. The Chaste.” She spat out the last word.
“Stick killed you?”

“No, I think it was Stone. But it was definitely the Chaste.”

“Elektra, I-“

“I was trained by them, Matthew,” she said, pacing a few feet back and fro. “Hell, I even fought for them. So much for loyalty.”

“It can’t be,” Matt said. “You must be mistaken. Stick didn’t agree with your methods, but he’d never hurt you.”

“Didn’t you say he killed a child?”

Matt sighed and rubbed his forehead. “Is your evil half going after Stick?”

“Erinyes? Probably.”

“We have to stop her.”

Elektra laughed. “I’m not stopping her. Did you not hear me? The Chaste tried to kill me. Why would I take on a spirit of vengeance intent on killing her murderer and his affiliates – our murderer?”

“Ergh. This is too weird,” Matt said, running his hands through his hair. “Promise me you won’t do anything stupid.”

“You’re one to talk, Devil of Hell’s Kitchen.”

“Shhh!”

Elektra rolled her eyes and without further ado, she jumped across to the neighbouring building and disappeared down their fire escape. Matt sat on the milk crate, head in his hands. He’d said over and over that it wasn’t his war, that he wanted nothing to do with the Chaste, but if this Erinyes was going after Stick, then he had to help - or at least warn Stick.

As he sat there racking his brains, he kept one ear out for Elektra. He heard her zig zag her way across Hell’s Kitchen as if searching for something. Then he heard it: Stick’s voice. A mocking, “Ellie. I was wondering when you’d figure it out. I’m disappointed you took this long.”

“Shit,” Matt said to himself. He quietly slipped down the stairs, pulled on his new ‘suit’ Melvin had made for him, and whispered a “stay” to Daisy. He sped back up to the roof and leapt to the adjoining building before using his new cane’s metal cabling to swing to the sidewalk. Sprinting through the nearly empty streets, Matt pulled up just around the corner from the Elektra and Stick, who were arguing in front of the sculpture park. They were on the verge of violence.

Stick stopped and rolled his eyes. “Matty, go home.”

Matt stepped out from behind the corner and strode towards the two. “No. I’m not going to let you do this.”

“This between me and Ellie.”

“It’s not. I care about both of you. I don’t want either of you to get hurt, even if it’s true…” Matt hesitated. “Is it? Did you – did you kill Elektra?”
“Yeah, and if you hadn’t been stupid enough to love her, she wouldn’t have split and you’d have no qualms about me killing her again.”

Elektra cleared her throat. “I’m right here, you know.”

“Pfft.” Stick angled his head away to suggest boredom.

“Elektra, let’s go,” Matt said, gesturing for her to follow. “He’s not worth it.”

She waved Matt off and said to Stick, “I’m not going to fight you, old man.”

“Good. Because we have something more pressing to fight.”

Matt realised with a jolt that something was stalking through the sculpture park towards them. He angled his head, trying to grasp who or what it was.

“Shit,” Elektra said, drawing out a short knife.

Stick sneered, “that’s all you got?”

“Unlike you, I don’t carry a two-foot-long sword on a night time stroll through New York.” She didn’t take her eyes of the approaching figure.

Stick started towards the park, and Matt said, “wait. Not in there. Please.”

Stick paused momentarily and turned back towards him for effect. “Go home, Matty,” he said.

Matt swallowed. Last weekend, Stick had a similar thing. He’d said, ‘You’re not ready. She’s not worth it.’ Since when did Stick tell him to bow out of a fight? Angry, Matt stepped forward, his billy club cane ready.

Before Matt could figure out how to divert them away from the sculptures, however, Elektra strode towards the mystery figure, stopping just short of the sculpture park entrance.

“Erinyes,” Elektra said, crisp and clear. Erinyes didn’t respond; instead, she shot something at Elektra, who ducked and laughed, “you going to kill me? You?”

Erinyes let out a roar and threw a knife, which Elektra once again avoided. It skittered across the road and came to a stop at Stick’s feet. He quickly pocketed it and advanced towards the park, passing Elektra and dodging another of Erinyes’ mysterious projectiles.

The projectiles were like electrical sparks, Matt thought. Impossible. He concluded that he was probably tired and misinterpreting an object, but then one of the sparks hit a sculpture and the current zapped through the metal, causing Matt to stumble slightly in fright.

Steeling himself, Matt followed Stick into the park. The old man ducked and weaved, trying to get close enough to take a swipe at Erinyes. Elektra joined them and was almost immediately hit by a spark. She cried out and stumbled into a sculpture, which creaked and groaned before crashing to the ground. She scrambled to her feet with an “ergh”. Elektra mumbled “why does she get the extra powers,” and Matt huffed in amusement despite himself.

There was a crash as a few more sculptures were toppled and Matt cringed. He had to concentrate. He couldn’t think about Gladys or tomorrow’s hearing. He took cover behind a sculpture as a spark flew towards him, scraping his cheek against a piece of rogue wire. He couldn’t believe he was back here being injured by these sculptures again, particularly after spending almost a month
trying to protect them from demolition.

Matt waited for the right moment then launched himself at Erinyes, kicking her in the chest. She barely stumbled. Taking advantage of her momentary incapacitation, Stick attacked Erinyes from behind, but she didn’t even seem to react to the gash left by Stick’s sword. Instead, she elbowed Stick in the head and sent a series of sparks at all three in turn. Matt and Elektra hid behind a sculpture until Matt whispered, “now” and they launched themselves at Erinyes from different angles. But before they could reach her, there was a wail of sirens in the distance, and Matt lost concentration for a millisecond – long enough that he failed to sense the spark flying towards him until it was too late.

“Matthew, wake up,” Elektra hissed, lightly slapping his cheek.

Matt tried to respond, but his mouth couldn’t make the words. He retched slightly at the smells around him, unable to filter his sensory input in his post-seizure state. Rotting food, urine, rats, grime… it was too much. Elektra rolled him over just in time for him to throw up, the vomit adding to the vile miasma of smells.

She whispered, “Matthew, can you get up? We need to get out of here. The police – they’re searching the area.”

“Ngh, no,” was all Matt could manage. He rolled his head sideways, surprised at the odd sensation beneath his head. Everything around him was an assault apart from the soft cocoon around his head.

Elektra hauled Matt to his feet and half-carried him down the alleyway. “Come on, Matthew. Move your legs,” she urged.

Matt was struggling to figure out what was happening and where he was. The mention of police should have been enough to motivate him, but his disorientation was such that it barely registered. Eventually Elektra stopped, hauled Matt over her shoulder and stumbled towards his apartment. She expected him to struggle but he just hung there, limp against her body.

Matt woke up again when Elektra threw him onto his bed. There was a light skittering across the bedroom floor as Daisy greeted them both. Matt groaned and put his hand out for Elektra. “Wha-”

“Shhh… you’re home,” she said. “You need to take this top off then go to sleep.”

“Whyru being nice?” Matt mumbled, struggling out of the now putrid hoodie.

Elektra sighed and helped him pull the hoodie over his head. “Because apparently I’m the nice half. It’s a bit boring isn’t it.”

Matt huffed. “Good is hard. Be good.”

“I have no idea what that means,” she said.

“Mmmm…”

There was a rustling and a cough from the other room and Matt gestured to Elektra to hide under
the sheets. He pulled the sheets over them both just as Foggy wobbled to Matt’s door. “Matt, are you okay?”

“Ye-” Matt cleared his threat. “Yeah, fine. Go back to bed, Fog.”

He and Elektra stayed absolutely still until they heard the creak of the bed and a subsequent light snoring. Elektra slipped out from beneath the sheets, but Matt pawed at her arm. “Stay. Please.”

She paused, her heartbeat beating a little faster.

“Not like that,” Matt said. “Just, stay. Sleep.” He patted the bed next to him.

Elektra sighed and lay down, leaving a good distance between them. Matt placed his hand on Elektra’s arm and quickly drifted off.

“Matt,” Foggy said softly from Matt’s bedroom door. “Come on, wake up.” Foggy took a couple of steps into the room. “Matt, come on, get up. You’re going to be late for work.”

Matt grumbled and rolled onto his back. He could smell Elektra, but when he put his hand out, it was just Daisy lying next to him. She’d left him. Again.

Foggy gasped. “Matt, what happened?”

“No-nothing.”

“Shit. Did you have a seizure? Do you remember? Is that what happened?”

“Uh, yeah… I think…” Matt went to rub his face and pulled away suddenly as he came in contact with the scratch on his cheek. “Oh,” he breathed, trying to remember what happened last night. He’d met Elektra on the roof and then he – did he follow her? He must have. He smelled like rancid alley way. There must have been something else… and then he was home. With Elektra. Matt licked his lips and immediately retched as he encountered some dried vomit from the night before.

“Oh shit, no,” Foggy yelled as he grabbed the nearby bin and shoved it in Matt’s face.

“I’m fine,” Matt grumbled. “I-I think I was sick last night.”

“I thought you said you were fine.”

“No. No, that was after…” Matt said, closing his eyes again. “I don’t know Foggy. I can’t remember.”

“You have a scratch-”

“Well aware,” Matt interrupted.

“Do you remember-”

“No.”
Daisy, as if sensing Matt’s frustration, crept onto his stomach and sat there, staring at his face.

Foggy put the bin down beside the bed. “You going to come to work today?” Foggy said, the worry evident in his voice.

“Can- can I come in later?” Matt said, making a slight attempt to sit up.

“We have the heritage committee hearing this morning,” Foggy reminded him.

“Shit.” Matt put his hand up to his forehead and groaned, “why did I have to have a seizure before this hearing of all things?” Reaching for the water and a tissue, Matt mopped up the crust around his mouth before expertly lobbing the tissue into the bin. “Ergh,” he said after a sip of water. “Oh – my mouth.” He wriggled out of the bed and heard Foggy’s breath hitch as he did so.

“Why are you wearing jeans?” Foggy asked, but Matt just ignored him, padding towards the bathroom in search of toothpaste. But Foggy was not one to give up. “What’s going on, Matt? Did you go out last night? Is that where you got the scratch?”

“I don’t know where I got the scratch,” Matt snapped. “I can’t remember, okay?”

“But you went out,” Foggy confirmed.

“I woke up in bed. I had a seizure.”

“But you weren’t in the apartment,” Foggy said, raising his voice. “I might sleep soundly, but I would have heard Daisy.”

“I went up to the roof,” Matt said. “I spoke to someone on the roof.”

“Who?”

Matt dropped his head, and took a few deep breaths. “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you.”

“I don’t care. Tell me.”

Their heads snapped up as Matt’s phone started ringing with “Gladys, Gladys, Gladys, Gladys…”

Matt scrambled for the phone and immediately heard a sniffle from the other end. Hesitantly, he said, “hello, Gladys?”

“Oh Matt, the sculpture park… it’s gone.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, The Defenders was a bit of a diversion. I took a small break from this fic to write a cheeky Defenders story called Acquainted with the Night
I also have a WIP with the rather unoriginal title Born Again
“What happened?” Matt asked Gladys, gripping his phone so tight that his fingers were turning white.

Gladys blurted out, “It was destroyed overnight. Almost all the sculptures have been knocked down. We could probably reassemble some of them, but its worth was as a whole, in that site. There’s no way it can be considered for cultural significance now. I can’t-”

“Hang on, hang on,” Matt said, head in hand.

“What is it?” Foggy whispered, but Matt waved him off.

Matt said, “Gladys, are you at the park now?”

“I’m catching a taxi there now,” she replied. “One of the neighbours called me. Said there was a commotion, then when the police turned up, the vandals had gone.”

Matt stuck his phone between his shoulder and ear and started pulling clothes from his wardrobe. “I’ll meet you there,” he said. “Bye.”

“What?” Foggy said.

“The sculpture park was vandalised overnight. I’m meeting Gladys there. Coming?”

“Yeah, yeah of course,” Foggy said, now a little flustered. “Do they know who did it?”

“Not sure. I guess we’ll find out.”

“I’ll call Brett,” Foggy said.

Matt pulled on a fresh pair of pants, wrinkling his nose at his body odour. The combination of sweat and residual alleyway was an olfactory assault, and it only added to the killer post-seizure headache. He wandered into the living room, shirt still unbuttoned and Foggy said, “you’re not going to have a shower first?”

“Uh, no, I said-”

“Matt, it’s not an emergency. There’s no delicate way of putting this: you smell, and you have blood on your face.”

“Oh.” Matt touched his cheek. There was a slight roughness to it where the blood had dried.

“Are you okay to do this?”

“I don’t have a choice,” Matt said, the tiredness evident in his voice.

“Of all people, I’m sure Gladys would understand if you need to delay.”

“I promised.”
Foggy sighed. “I know I can’t stop you, but how about this: you have a shower, we visit the park, we briefly discuss our next moves, then you come home and rest.”

Matt considered the offer for a moment. He could easily go back to bed and fall asleep right now, such was his fatigue. “Shower first,” Matt said and started towards the bathroom. Foggy called after him, “and then you can tell me the identity of the mysterious roof person,” earning a scowl in return.

“Matt Murdock and his secrets,” Foggy muttered as Matt turned on the shower.

Foggy used the shower time to make a sneaky coffee for them both, which, after showering, Matt gratefully threw down while buttoning his shirt with the other. “Thanks, Fog,” Matt said, giving his friend’s arm an affectionate squeeze.

Much to her displeasure, they left Daisy at home. Even though it was a decision made for practical reasons, Matt was equally unhappy about their separation. Over the last week, Matt had got used to the rhythm of her claws on the concrete beside him, and now he missed her and her natural instinct to lead him when necessary. If Foggy noticed Matt’s tighter grip and slight limp during their short walk across Hell’s Kitchen, he didn’t comment.

Gladys was standing at the entrance to the park with a sizeable gathering of local residents as well as the sculptor, Ferdinand Breton. Strangely enough, it was Ferdinand who was the least upset of the group. As Matt and Foggy approached the group, Ferdinand was finishing up an interview with a local journalist. “I never made it with a museum in mind,” he drawled. “There was lots of junk about and this here empty block had rubbish and weeds, and so I thought to myself, why not build a kind of zoo out of all the trash – turn it into something more interesting, y’know?”

The reporter asked, “are you going to mend the sculptures?”

“Nah, they’re gone now. And the block was going to be turned into housing anyway. A lot of folks lost their homes in the incident so we need to rebuild. And as I said, I never really had any intention. I had fun, and people seemed to like it.”

Pulling him off to the side, Gladys gave Matt a hug. “The media seems to be taking more attention to Ferdinand’s sculptures now than when they were whole,” she whispered.

“I’m sorry to hear about the park,” Matt said. “Any news on the perpetrators?”

“Not yet. The police have blocked access while they search for evidence.”

Matt could hear people within the park, searching through the rubble. “I don’t know what they expect to find if it was made from trash,” he said wryly.

“It was assembled,” Gladys said, a little offended. “It wasn’t just loose bits of rubbish everywhere.”

Matt threw his attention back to the park. One of the forensic officers called out to a colleague, “come here, I found something.”

There was a crunching of footsteps and his female colleague said, “looks like a stick blind people use.”

There was a click as the cane was pulled in two. “Yeah, but a fancy one. It looks like it has GPS or something.”
Matt paled. It wasn’t possible. He walked towards the park entrance in the hope of somehow identifying the cane, and Gladys called out, “Matt, they’ve blocked it off, remember?”

Matt nodded without turning around. The officers were now making snide comments about art. “I could do this,” one of them said laughingly.

“My five year old could do this,” the other said.

“Your five year old can weld?”

“No, but you know what I mean.”

“Should we bag the GPS stick as evidence?”

There was a pause and the other said, “nah, it was probably part of a sculpture. Take it to the station. Someone might have reported it missing or stolen.”

Matt’s heart was beating overtime. Could it be… could he have played a part in this? The last thing he remembered was Elektra on the roof, but the seizures were notorious for leaving massive gaps in his memory. For all he knew, he’d just destroyed the very sculpture park that he’d been trying to save.

Foggy came up and touched his arm, and Matt flinched in fright. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you,” Foggy said. “I assumed… never mind. Are you okay? You seem a little out of it.”

“Y-yeah. Just – I – we worked hard on this. Well, it was mostly Gladys. I’m trying to get my head around it I guess.”

“I think you should go home and rest. The police haven’t got any leads yet, and there’s nothing you can do now. I- I might have mentioned the seizure to Gladys, and she totally understands.”

Matt pursed his lips, but he couldn’t argue with Foggy’s reasoning. He reached for Foggy’s arm and whispered, “but let’s do it quick. I just overheard the reporter ask about us. The last thing I want to do right now is a press interview.”

Foggy returned to the apartment with Matt to pick up his laptop. As soon as the door closed behind Foggy, Matt scrambled around the apartment, trying to find Melvin’s cane. There was no doubt about it: it was missing. Matt flopped down on his bed with Daisy and instructed his phone to call Elektra.

“What happened last night?” he demanded.

“I left because I thought you were hiding me from your miserable friend, Matthew. What would he think if he found us in bed together this morning?”

“I don’t mean that,” Matt said, irritated. “I mean, what happened that I woke up covered in blood and stinking like sewerage and I just found out that my cane was found in the sculpture park?”

“Sculpture is too generous a term,” Elektra sneered.

“No games, Elektra. Tell me what happened.”

“At one point it was me versus Stick, then you and me versus Stick, then finally the three of us versus Erinyes.”
“Erinyes?! In the park?”

“Yes. You don’t remember?”

“The seizures do a good job at wiping my memory.”

“You got zapped and it seemed to cause a seizure. Stick almost seemed pleased about it. His exact words were, ‘well, I told Matty to stay away. He didn’t listen. Never does.’ That smug bastard.”

“My cane-”

“There were police. My only focus was getting you away from the scene. If I left it there, I’m sorry, but what was I to do?”

“I’ve been working for almost a month on that park – trying to save it from being bulldozed.”

“Yes, with one of your many ladies.”

“It’s not like that, Elektra.”

“What?” she said in a forced innocent tone.

“Argh, just tell me what happened. What do you mean by ‘zapped’?”

“She can generate some kind of electric current,” Elektra said. “It’s a bit unfair really. I want a special power.”

Matt rolled his eyes. “Powers are overrated. Besides, you fight better than anyone. And you’re strong.”

“But I can’t shoot electric sparks at people.”

“And for that I am glad,” Matt said dryly. There was a pause, and he said, “come around? I’m at home. I’ll probably be napping all day.” He closed his eyes in preparation, and drew Daisy closer, scratching her under her ears.

Elektra thought for a moment. “Maybe later.”

Matt was serious about the napping. He’d planned to visit the police station at some point in the day, but he drifted off as soon as Elektra hung up. He stayed asleep until mid-afternoon when there was a jolt of his bed as Elektra sat down on the edge.

“’lektra,” Matt groaned. “You broke in again.”

Elektra shrugged. “It’s not really breaking in when you keep the roof door unlocked. Besides, your vicious guard dog is lying up there happily sunning herself. You’ll be safe.”

Matt huffed a laugh, and reached for her hand. They sat there brooding in silence for a few minutes before Matt said, “thank you – for last night – for bringing me home.”

“Stick was right, you know,” Elektra said.

“What?”
“You shouldn’t have come.”

“You were going to kill each other,” Matt said, sitting up.

“It’s a game, Matthew. He wasn’t going to kill me.”

“He did once before.”

“Actually, it was Stone,” she reminded him. “I know they’re both part of the Chaste, but if Stick really wanted me dead, I wouldn’t be sitting here with your right now.”

“What now?”

“Well, Stick’s on the warpath and he’s going to need all the help he can get to kill Erinyes.” She said her other half’s name flatly, but there was a slight waver in her voice.

Matt said softly, “you must feel conflicted.”

“No, she’s not me, Matthew.” She picked at the bedspread with her free hand. “I’m not really me either.” She slumped slightly at the thought.

Matt slowly leaned in and placed a chaste kiss on her forehead. She relaxed a little and Matt gave her another kiss, this time on the lips, cupping his hand behind her head. Elektra crawled onto the bed and their kissing quickly turned into an almost violent display of affection. Matt ran his hands underneath Elektra’s top and shuddered, overwhelmed. Elektra ripped at Matt’s shirt, and a button pinged off and hit the glass of water next to the bed, making resonant ‘ding’ that merely fuelled Matt’s fire. Elektra started on Matt’s belt, but just as she’d released the buckle, Matt put a firm hand on her chest. “Stop,” he said.

Elektra screwed up her face. “W-why?”

“This isn’t – you aren’t – I can’t, I’m sorry.”

“Matthew, what’s wrong this time?”

Matt bit his lip. To be honest he didn’t know. It wasn’t his libido any more – the new medication had restored whatever the previous two had taken away. It wasn’t because Elektra always led him astray either – this Elektra had demonstrated a genuine kindness that the original Elektra never did. Matt had to keep reminding himself that she couldn’t be real, even though it wasn’t something you could say to a living, breathing human.

Instead, he slid out from beneath her and got toys feet. “Would you like a cup of tea?”

Elektra sat up. “Tea? It seems like a miserable consolation prize.”

“Yeah, well, that’s what I’m offering,” Matt grumbled.

“You instigated it, Matthew. You wanted it.”

“I know, and I’m sorry. It was a mistake.” He scrubbed at his face. “I screw everything up.”

Unlike Foggy, who would immediately refute a statement like that, Elektra just said, “yeah, pretty much.”

Matt snorted. “Thanks, Elektra.”
The first thing Foggy said when he returned home was, “you had another visitor.”

Matt raised his eyebrows.

“There are two mugs on the coffee table,” Foggy said.

Matt immediately went on the defensive. “I-I-”

“Matt, relax. You can drop the deer in the headlights thing. You can have whoever you want around.”

Matt shifted on the couch. “But you wanted to know who was on the roof last night.”

“Yeah, I did. I worried. But I was thinking – it’s your life. If I wasn’t living here, I wouldn’t even know about the roof thing, and you’d have the privacy to go about whatever Matt Murdock does in the middle of the night.”

Matt looked confused, so Foggy elaborated, “I worry that I get a bit up in your face at times. So if you don’t want to tell me, you don’t have to.”

“Okay,” Matt said, and went back to his book, one hand on the page, and the other patting Daisy.

Foggy huffed, “damn it, Matt. That was your cue to say, ‘I want to tell you.’”

Matt frowned. “But you just said I didn’t have to.”

Foggy ran his hands through his hair. “I know. Argh, you don’t have to. I just thought that maybe you’d want to.”

“I don’t.” Matt said flatly.

“Was it Stick?”

“No, it was Elektra.”

“Ha ha,” Foggy said sarcastically. “Who was it really?”

“I told you, it was Elektra. I also told you this morning that you wouldn’t believe me if I told you.”

“That’s because she’s dead, Matt.”

“No, she’s not.”

“Fuck. This again. We’ve gone over this over and over again. Elektra. Is. Dead.” Foggy shook his head. “I mean, what do I have to do to get you to accept it? Exhume her body?”

“She came back,” Matt said, doing his best to keep calm.

“That’s not possible. You should hear yourself. You sound insane.”

“Some might say it’s impossible for a blind man to be Daredevil, and yet here we are…”

“Yeah, but you’re an incredible athlete, and your senses are kind of within the realms of possibility,” Foggy said, ignoring Matt’s huff of disbelief. “Bringing back someone from the dead is not.”
“I didn’t think so either until-”

“Matt, you’re Catholic. You were already open to the idea of someone returning from the dead.”

Matt put his face in his hands, trying to control his anger. Without notice, he reached down and threw one of the mugs at the wall with a frustrated roar. There was a sudden skittering of claws across the room as Daisy ran to hide in Matt’s room.

“I thought you’d matured over the last few months, Matt,” Foggy said. “But I guess not. You can clear that up yourself. I’m going out.”

Foggy was half way out the door when he paused and said, “that was the mug I got you as a graduation present by the way,” before slamming the door behind him.

Chapter End Notes

Do I have any readers who are outsider art/ visionary environment fans who get references in the name of the sculpture park artist, Ferdinand Breton?
Following their fight, Foggy didn’t return home until after midnight. He was gone again in the morning before Matt had even got out of bed. Matt was glad. He was furious with his best friend, and didn’t want to talk about the fight or anything else. He’d told the truth, and Foggy had accused him of lying anyway. It wasn’t fair.

Matt stewed in bed for a good hour before crawling out of bed and half-heartedly attempting to meditate. Eventually, he gave up and walked Daisy to the precinct to claim Melvin’s cane. They accepted his explanation - that it was a second cane and that he’d left it at a bus stop - without question, which only made him feel more guilty about the sculpture park’s destruction.

From the precinct, they walked straight to the park. As Daisy ran crop circles on the grass, Matt parked himself on his favourite bench to ruminate on Foggy’s words: *I thought you’d matured… but I guess not.* What would Foggy know about maturity, Matt thought. Matt was forced to grow up far faster than Foggy. Hell, Foggy didn’t even know how to make a bed until he shared a room with Matt at college. *‘Matured,’”* Matt spat in a low voice.

That’s when he heard the familiar voice of Elizabeth Carpenter. “There’s Matt,” he heard from the other end of the lawns. Matt’s initial instinct was to run away, but after Julia let go of her mother’s arm and virtually ran across the grass in Matt’s direction, he warmed to the idea of company. At least Julia saw him as mature.

“Matt, Matt!” Julia called. “It’s me, Julia.” She tripped on a dip in the grass, tumbling forward with a thump. Without complaint, she pushed herself up and continued towards Matt, but with a little more caution this time.

Matt laughed. “Did I just hear you running?”

“Yeah,” Julia said with a smile.

“Two months ago you wouldn’t move a foot on your own, and now you’re running. You’ve done so well, Julia. I’m so proud.”

Julia giggled and felt for the seat Matt was perched on. She tugged on his arm. “Where’s Daisy?”

“When I take her to the park, I put a bell on her collar so I know where she is. Can you hear it?”

“Yeah, there.” Julia picked up Matt’s hand and pointed to where Daisy was snuffling through the bushes.

“Good work,” Matt said, before calling Daisy’s name. She tore across the lawns and jumped into Matt’s lap, her body wiggling furiously as she greeted Julia.

Elizabeth caught up to them. “Hi, Matt. Hi, Daisy. I hope we’re not interrupting your peaceful Saturday afternoon.”

“Not at all,” Matt said, a genuine smile on his face.

Elizabeth joined them on the bench. “We were practicing the clicking thing you taught Julia.”

“It doesn’t work outside,” Julia said.
Matt smiled and said to Julia, “oh, but that’s where you’re wrong. It works very well outside. You just have to listen.” He whispered the last word for effect.

Julia dug her cane into the ground, and said sulkily, “I did.”

“Shhhh…” Matt said. “Listen.”

They ended up walking the park together, listening to the sounds of the water, trees, birds and other materials. After enjoying ice cream by the duck pond, Julia handed Matt her ice cream wrapper and asked, “can you make me an origami Daisy?”

Matt tried to ignore the lump in his throat. He forced a laugh as he said, “the flower?”

“No, silly,” Julia giggled. “Daisy dog.”

“Uh, I can try. He tore off the edge of the wrapper to make a square and considered the dog’s shape for a moment. Then he placed Julia’s hand over his. “Follow what I’m doing.” He stopped with each fold, explaining what he’d just done and letting Julia touch the emerging dog. “Her ears need a small fold. Do you think you could do that for me?”

Julia nervously felt each ear before folding them over. “Is that right?”

Matt ran his hand over the small dog. “Perfect.” Julia beamed.

Matt stifled a yawn, and Elizabeth said, “we should probably head home.”

“Aw, mom. I want to stay.”

“We’ll have a chance to hang out after church tomorrow, don’t forget,” Matt said, standing up.

Julia let out a small defeated huff and kicked her legs rhythmically against the base of the bench. “Okay,” she said reluctantly.

Matt could hear Foggy moving around in their apartment before he’d even entered the building. He was tempted to turn around and go somewhere, anywhere, rather than face Foggy and his accusations again. Daisy was wagging her tail so that it slapped against the apartment steps. For her, the return from the park tended to signal dinner time, and Matt could hear her little stomach rumble in anticipation. “Okay, okay,” he told her.

He and Foggy greeted each other with an awkward, “hey.” Neither of them brought up the previous night’s fight. Foggy was sitting on the couch playing a video game, so after feeding Daisy, Matt took his book and a cup of tea to the dining table. Matt could track Foggy’s game success by his breathing and heart rate. There was a building tension and increase in heart rate and then Foggy swore, “noooo!” Foggy dumped the controller on the table, took the last swig of his beer and said, “I’m going to have a shower. I’ve got a date.” He disappeared into the bathroom before Matt could comment.

Once upon a time, Matt treasured his solitude, but he’d felt lonely last night, despite his anger at Foggy. Matt absently tapped the table as he considered other potential companions for the evening. Elektra was out of the question – he’d come too close to falling for her again yesterday and he
didn’t need that temptation right now. Gladys was probably still mourning the sculpture park, and
he couldn’t handle the guilt. He pulled out his phone. “Call Karen.”

When Foggy returned from the shower, Matt said, “I’m going to dinner with Karen tonight.”

Foggy raised his eyebrows. “Oh?”

“As friends,” Matt said.

“As you should. You’re her employer, Matt.”

Matt rolled his eyes and headed off to have a shower himself. When he got out, Foggy was gone.


Matt arranged to meet Karen at Josie’s, but when she turned up, he was waiting for her outside,
looking a little lost. She discretely whispered “is there a reason why we’re meeting here? I thought
you weren’t drinking.”

“I miss the ambiance.”

Karen snorted. “Okay,” she said with a small laugh, and took his hand as they walked inside.

“Did you miss us?” Matt said to Josie as they drew up at the bar.

“You wish,” Josie said, but her tone was kind.

Matt drummed nervously on the bar. “Uh, Kare, what are you drinking?”

“Just a beer.”

“And a light one for me.” Matt said to Josie. He could hear Karen’s breath change in surprise at
Matt’s order, but at least she refrained from comment.

As they reclaimed their favourite table, Matt said, “this is nice – being back here.”

Karen took a swig of her beer. “It’s a shame Foggy couldn’t come. He loves this place.”

Foggy would no doubt be upset if he knew they’d visited Josie’s without him. A small catty part of
Matt wanted Foggy to feel disappointed. Serve him right for not believing him. Instead, Matt said,
“he’s on a date, so I dare say he’s thinking about things other than Josie’s.”

Karen gave his arm a small punch. “Matt, ew.”

Matt chuckled, a smug grin on his face. “Any dinner ideas?”

“What do you feel like?”

“Maybe not too fancy. Casual, cheap, delicious.”

Karen bit her lip and then smiled. “I know a place.”

An hour later, they were sitting in an Indian restaurant, enjoying a spread of curries. Karen chewed
thoughtfully as she stared at the ceiling lights mirrored in Matt’s glasses. “I wish you could see this
“I can – if you describe it for me,” Matt said.

“It’s literally dripping with fairly lights of every colour and shape. There are chillies and stars and baubles.” She stopped and said, “what is it like for you?”

He tilted his head down and listened for a moment. “There’s a lot of heat coming from the ceiling. Buzzing from the lights. And there’s a filament in one of them that’s about to go, just… there.” He pointed to his right. And sure enough, there was a pop as one of the larger bulbs blew and went out.

Karen laughed. “That’s amazing.”

Matt gave her a small smile. “Th-Thank you.”

“What for?”

“People often describe the visual environment to me, but they never ask me what I experience.”

“Would you tell them the truth if they did?”

Matt paused. “Probably not. Although being able to tell you the truth is… nice.”

Karen reached over and gave Matt’s hand a squeeze. “Secrets can be toxic,” she said.

Matt leaned forward and said in a low voice, “so are you going to tell me your secret?”

Karen didn’t try and deny it. There wasn’t much point trying to lie to Matt Murdock. “Maybe. Not tonight.” She gave Matt’s hand another squeeze.

After dinner, Matt offered to walk Karen home but she just gave him a hug and said, “I’ll see you Monday.” Matt gave her a small awkward smile as her heart rate increased slightly. She obviously felt it too – the undeniable connection that neither of them were willing to act upon. “Night, Matt,” she called over her shoulder as she walked away. Matt stood rooted to the spot for a good five minutes, listening to the rhythm of her footsteps that suggested a small spring in her step.

He sighed and unfolded his cane. With the distraction of Karen gone, the headache that had been irritating him for the last hour flared up and he pinched the bridge of his nose to collect himself before starting on the short walk home.

He’d barely walked a few blocks when he heard a group of young men following him and snickering. “He won’t even see it coming,” one of them whispered, and there was a guffaw from one of his friends. Matt rolled his eyes, but picked up the speed. He didn’t want to take on a group of burly youths - not right now.

“Hey mister,” one of them called.

“Hey, blind guy,” another sung.

Matt figured that they were probably just stirring and they’d lose interest if he ignored them. But at the same time, the situation made him unusually anxious. He heard the sound of a cash register being opened and closed nearby. There was a bodega ahead. Maybe he’d just pop in there. Before he could decide though, he fell over and started seizing. It was so brief that the youths didn’t even notice the convulsions, but it nevertheless had the effect of rendering Matt unconscious.
One of them laughed, “he was so scared he fell over.”

“Why don’t you look where you’re going next time,” another laughed, kicking Matt hard in the head and the chest before feeling in his jacket for Matt’s wallet. He flicked through it. “No cash. Just cards.”

“We could still use ‘em,” another called, crunching up to Matt and giving him a couple of solid kicks in the arm and chest. “Where’s his phone?”

“Try the other pocket,” a third guy suggested.

The first guy felt in his jacket again and drew out Matt’s smashed phone. “It barely lights up. It’s shit.”

“Mal can switch the screen.”

“Not worth it. The phone’s as old as he is.” He threw the phone at Matt’s chest and it bounced off and skittered a few feet from Matt’s still body. “Loser,” he said, giving Matt a final kick, just as someone came out of the bodega. “Hey,” the woman yelled, “what are you doing?” The youths ran away with Matt’s wallet.

Matt started to rouse just as the woman reached him. She put her hand on Matt’s arm. “Hey mister, are you okay?” Matt just groaned in response. She flicked on the torch app on her phone for better light and saw the blood on Matt’s forehead. “Call an ambulance,” the woman ordered the bodega owner, who had heard the yelling and had come to sticky beak. Half-conscious, Matt tried to roll over but he felt a crunch of his ribs and gasped in shock. “Don’t worry, mister, there’s help coming,” she said. Matt tried to tell her he didn’t want it, but the words weren’t coming. He made a few inarticulate grunts and then gave up. It was easier just to lie there.

When the paramedics arrived, they quickly spotted his medical ID bracelet and when Matt struggled to find the words to answer their questions, they quickly bundled him into the back of an ambulance. A month ago, Matt would have tried to resist, but he’d reached a point where it seemed like no matter what happened, no matter what he did, he ended up back in this same position. No longer caring, he lay there blankly, meditating on the sound of the oxygen hissing through a mask.

Claire happened to be on duty that night. She swore under her breath when she saw the paramedics wheel him in. “Blind adult male with a history of epilepsy. Based on his disorientation, he might have had a seizure. Attacked by a group of young men, resulting in trauma to his head, chest and arm.”

“Because we live in a great society,” the other paramedic muttered.

Claire said, “yeah, I know this guy. He’s been in here before.” As the doctor asked Matt the usual neuro exam questions, Claire said to the paramedics, “do you know if there were any witnesses who could ID the bastards who did this?”

“The police are talking to the guy who called it in - a nearby shopkeeper,” one of the paramedics said. He was about to continue, but his partner gestured for him to get back to work. It was Saturday night after all – the busiest night of the week for those in emergency medicine.

The doctor ordered a series of tests and then whipped off to the next patient in the overflowing ER, leaving Claire to tend to Matt alone.

“Hey Matt,” Claire whispered, grabbing his hand.
“Hey Claire,” Matt whispered back.

“Here, I’ll switch this for you.” She swapped the oxygen mask for a nasal cannula. Matt winced at the movement.

She leaned against the bedrail. “So what happened?”

“Don’t remember.” He pursed his lips as he scanned his body. “Arm’s broken. Near wrist.”

“Anything else?”

“Ribs,” he breathed. “Seizure. M’head hurts.”

Claire felt around his skull. “You have a pretty major bump on the side here, and another one on the back. I take it you fell on the sidewalk?”

“I think so,” Matt said uncertainly, before closing his eyes.

“Before you go to sleep again, can you help me take off your jacket and shirt so I can look at your wrist and chest?” Matt groaned but made an effort to lean forward. They untangled his arms, Matt gasping in pain with each movement. His wrist looked swollen, but it was unlikely to be anything other than a simple fracture. His chest, however, was red with the marks of the assailants’ boots. Claire couldn’t imagine how Matt was feeling right now, beaten without the chance to fight back, but she resisted the urge to ask him directly.

Stuffing Matt’s bloodied shirt and coat in a bag under the bed, she said, “I’m going to clean up this wound on your head, but can I call Foggy for you first?”

Matt automatically replied yes, but then hesitated. There was a reason he shouldn’t. He struggled to recall why exactly. There was a fight, then a date. Yes, a date.

“He’s busy. I sleep now,” Matt mumbled.

“Good idea,” she agreed, pulling a blanket over Matt’s now bare chest. “You’re not going to leap up and attack anyone if I leave you to get a suture kit, are you?”

“Not my style,” Matt muttered.

Such was his tiredness that Matt slept through Claire stitching up his head wound. She ducked her head in every fifteen minutes or so after that, but Matt made no sign of waking. He eventually woke himself up when he coughed, which caused every bruise and break in his body to flare up. He scrunched his face up in pain and grumbled “leave me alone” to the empty cubicle. Claire heard a moan from Matt’s bed and found him struggling with the blanket. “Hey, hey, Matt, don’t…” Claire grabbed his uninjured hand and gave it a supportive squeeze. “Matt, it’s Claire. Calm down. Do you know where you are?”

Matt mumbled, “hospital.”

“And do you remember what happened?”

Matt winced. “Seizure… was attacked.”

“That’s right. You’re going to be taken to radiology in a bit, but would you be okay with me taking some photos of your injuries beforehand? It helps when you press charges – if you want to. You will press charges, won’t you?”
Matt bit his lip. This wasn’t a situation he’d ever expect to be in: beaten by unidentified petty criminals and left in the gutter.

However, as a lawyer, he knew that the system only worked if people used it, and he felt a certain obligation to go through with the charges, even though being photographed was the last thing he wanted right now.

“Who knows if they’ll even find them, let alone find enough evidence for a conviction,” Matt said slowly, his words still a little slurred. “Even if I could remember what happened, statements from blind people never hold up in court. We can’t ID people through sight, and for some reason it’s the only sense they’ll accept as identification.”

Claire considered this briefly. “Maybe there’s security footage. Or a witness.”

Matt closed his eyes. “Maybe.”

Much to his relief, Matt’s head CT indicated the boots didn’t do any major damage, but the x-ray confirmed Matt’s ‘x-ray fingers’ diagnosis of a fractured wrist and ribs.

The guy who set Matt’s arm cast cheerfully asked him to pick a bandage colour, and was met with a scowl most horrid. “White it is,” he said with a smile. Matt didn’t want to be near anyone vaguely happy and was glad the guy was at least a quick worker.

It turned out that there wasn’t much rest to be had. No sooner had his wrist been set, the police turned up wanting a statement. “I’m not in my best state right now, officer,” Matt explained, trying to get them to leave him alone and also not wanting to explain that his post-seizure memory of the event was pretty fuzzy. “I’ll come down to the station to make a statement on Monday.”

“No sooner had the police left, Matt said to Claire, “can I go now?”

“Can I convince you to stay for a few more hours at least? Just get some rest and pain relief.”

“Pfft. Rest? In here?”

“Please, Matt. Stay a few hours and then I’ll convince the doc to spring you.”

He sighed and rubbed his face, which was prickling with exhaustion. He was torn between wanting to get far away from the hospital, and not wanting to move. “A few,” he eventually agreed.

When Matt started bugging Claire to release him a few hours later, she came back with a counter proposal: “if you stick around till the end of my shift, I’ll offer you door-to-door service. I’ll catch
a cab home with you and make sure you’re okay.”

Matt scrunched up his face.

“Don’t give me that look, Matt.”

Matt tried to relax his face a little. “I don’t want to put you out.”

Claire huffed, “it’s not for you. It’s for me. Seriously, I’ll sleep better knowing that you got home safe.”

Matt couldn’t be bothered arguing anymore. Nor did he argue with her when she topped up his painkillers. Although Claire was pleased he was at last accepting help, she couldn’t help but worry over this new apathy.

“Matt?” Claire gently stroked his head, not wanting to touch his injured chest or arm. “Wake up.”

“Mmm?”

“My shift’s about to finish and you’re about to be sprung. You just need to sign the discharge forms, okay?”

“Oh. Okay.” He grunted in pain as he tried to sit up.

“You don’t need to get up just yet. Someone will bring you the forms and help you fill them in.”

It dawned on Matt that this would be the first time he didn’t have Foggy to fill in all his forms for him.

“Do they have them in braille?” he said.

“Not the discharge forms, but we’ll help you fill them out.”

Matt looked cross. “Where are my glasses?”

Claire hesitated. “They’re just here, but…”

“But what?”

“They’re broken. You must have fallen on them. Or maybe those bastards broke them.”

Matt looked stricken.

“I’ll find you a new pair. We have a heap of abandoned sunglasses in the staff room. Do you have a preference?”

“No.”

“Okay, I grab a pair after the shift handover.”

Half an hour later, Matt was wearing a pair of budget aviators after vetoing Claire’s initial suggestion (“But you look good in diamantes,” she’d argued). He initially refused to get into the
wheelchair, giving his usual ‘I’m fine’, excuse, but after his ribs screamed in protest to his first few steps, he capitulated and let Claire bundle him into the wheelchair.

“Needs better suspension.” Matt said though clenched teeth as they crossed the bumpy entrance. Even with the painkillers, his arm was throbbing and his chest and head felt like they were on fire.

Claire snorted. “I’ll give you a customer feedback form to fill out.”

The cab driver unhelpfully watched Claire help Matt into the back of the car. Matt insisted on holding onto his folded cane with his good hand - it was a comfort thing more than anything else. Between his occupied right hand, and his left arm in a sling, the transfer from the wheelchair to the car ended up being an embarrassingly complicated manoeuvre. Matt could tell Claire wanted to say something, perhaps scold him for his stubbornness, but was thankfully holding back tonight. Instead, she gently supported him under his uninjured arm, and helped him slowly wiggle his way into the back seat.

It was a similarly awkward extraction. Matt almost cried when he realised he couldn’t even pay for the cab thanks to his missing wallet. “I’ll pay you back, Claire,” he said earnestly.

“It’s nothing,” said Claire. “The most important matter is getting you upstairs. The bastards didn’t take your keys, thank goodness.”

They slowly shuffled their way up to Matt’s apartment and Claire helped Matt into some clean clothes before ordering him to bed. As if she knew Matt was hurt, Daisy refrained from jumping on Matt this once, and instead sat at a respectful distance, dusting the floor with her tail.

“Here’s some water and some jasmine tea,” she said, placing two cups on Matt’s bedside table.

“You’re a goddess,” Matt said, breathing in the sweet jasmine scent.

“Goddesses don’t need to sleep, but I do,” she said, smiling. “Do you need anything else before I head home to bed?”

Matt winced as he tried to reach for his clock. “Um, just the time.”

“It’s 7.30am.”

“I guess Foggy really did get lucky last night then,” Matt said softly. “At least one of us did.”

Claire surveyed him critically. He was acting oddly, even by Matthew Murdock standards.

Clare gave his good hand a squeeze. “You’ll be okay. Just promise me you’ll make that police report on Monday. You of all people know how important it is to have these things on record.”

“I will. Night, Claire. And thanks for - everything.”
Chapter 41

Marci was used to Foggy asking her on dates whenever he needed information from a fellow lawyer or needed a shoulder to cry on, so she was understandably dubious when he swore his intentions were ‘pure and innocent’ (his words). She refused to play along until he confessed to his ‘nefarious plans’ (her words). Eventually, he capitulated and admitted that he needed to escape Matt for a night, and Matt probably felt the same way – an explanation that more than satisfied her curiosity. In true Marci form, she declared she wanted nothing to do with Matt and Foggy’s relationship (although she did soften enough to at least ask how Matt was going). They had fun, nothing more, nothing less.

Come morning, Foggy thought he’d slip home, shower and wash his clothes before Matt returned from his usual Sunday church service. He hadn’t told Matt that the ‘date’ was Marci because he didn’t want to hear Matt’s opinion of her again, but knew that Matt’s bloodhound nose would no doubt recognise her scent on him if Foggy didn’t take action.

Foggy whistled happily as he walked through the door, suddenly stopping when he noticed Matt’s cane and keys by the front door. Foiled. Foggy thought about trying to sneak into the bathroom without being noticed, but there was no sneaking past that man unless he was unconscious… Foggy felt a pang of guilt as he realised it was a possible scenario.

“Matt?” Foggy called softly, approaching Matt’s bedroom door. “Are you awake?” Foggy listened for any sound, good or bad. “Matt, can I come in?”

Foggy slid the door open without waiting for a response, just as Matt said “no,” from beneath his blankets.

Foggy could just see a tuft of messy hair sticking out above the blanket line. It didn’t move. Daisy was on top of the blankets, nestled into Matt’s side. Without getting up, she wagged her tail against the human lump. Thump, thump, thump, thump, thump…

“Hey, is everything okay?” Foggy said kindly. “You’re not at church.”

“Forgot,” Matt grunted, still not moving.

Foggy narrowed his eyes. Matt never forgot. Unless…

“Did you have a seizure?”

Matt didn’t respond.

“Matt? I need to know you’re okay.”

“You slept with Marci.”

Foggy snorted. “Nice try, but you can’t distract me that easily. Please tell me you’re okay.”

“I’ll be fine,” Matt snuffled. “Leave me alone.”

“Geez, Matt,” Foggy snapped. “You’re really difficult at times, you know that?”

There was a silence, then Matt said softly, “yes.”

Foggy shook his head in angry disbelief and stormed off to have a shower. He decided to leave the
apartment before he could say anything that he might regret (although he stopped briefly on the way out to dump some biscuits in Daisy’s bowl when he spotted her standing over the bowl, wagging her tail expectantly). Foggy thought about texting Marci, but quickly decided against it. Her response would be predictable.

Curious as to whether Matt’s mood was a continuation of their fight or something else altogether, he texted Karen, “how was your dinner with Matt last night?”

Karen returned, “don’t you guys live together?”

Oh yeah. Foggy swore and texted back, “he was still asleep when I left home.”

“It was great. Good food. Good conversation. The usual.”

“Great,” Foggy typed. He hesitated, wondering if he should ask if anything happened to turn Matt into a grouchy mole person, but didn’t want to alarm her. Instead, he found himself calling his parents. After establishing that no, he didn’t need a reason to call his parents, and yes, he needed to call more often, and yes, he was looking after himself, he found himself invited to Sunday lunch.

Matt was surprised that Foggy left him alone so quickly. He was dreading the inevitable cross-examination that would occur when he found out that Matt had been attacked, ended up in hospital, and had not called him. It seemed like a good, selfless idea at the time, but Matt knew Foggy often felt differently about these things - things like not calling Foggy after ending up in hospital after an assault. The relief quickly turned to a heavy, guilty weight as Matt realised it was only a temporary escape.

Not long after Daisy had scarfed down her biscuits, she returned to Matt’s bed and nuzzled into his side. Comforted by the dog’s presence, he drifted off again, and only woke early afternoon when his phone dinged with a message from Claire, checking if he was okay.

Matt texted back, “A bit sore. Had worse. Thanks for your help last night.”

“No problem. I’ll always be there, remember. And don’t forget to make your statement tomorrow.”

Matt composed half a dozen replies, deleting each one in turn before deciding not to answer.

He was bursting to go to the bathroom, and desperate to wash away the smell of hospital. He grunted each step of the way, letting out a deep sigh of relief as he sat down on the toilet. Slowly, he peeled off his oversized tee-shirt – the only thing he could find that could easily accommodate both his cast and restricted movement. Claire had left a bunch of plastic bags to wrap around his cast, and he swore as he fumbled one-handed to seal it over his arm. By this point, he was so tired that he was ready to go back to bed. The only thing that stopped him was the thought of the inviting picnic chair Foggy had placed in the corner of the bathroom after Matt’s shower incident. He hauled the chair into the shower, and plonked himself down under the warm water. He stayed in the shower until his fingers resembled prunes and the hot water started to fade out.

Now for the hard part… He limped out of the shower and gingerly dabbed his body with his towel. The combination of his post-seizure muscle aches and fractured ribs and arm meant that lifting his arms was near impossible, so he gave up on drying his hair. It could dry on its own. He dragged the chair out of the shower to sit down while drying the rest of him. Drops of water were quickly pooling at the base of the chair, and Matt hoped it would magically evaporate before Foggy came home to a disaster of water on the bathroom floor. Once he was mostly dry (largely thanks to the
bathroom’s heat lights rather than the towel), he got to his feet with a groan and shuffled off to find some better smelling clothes.

Matt was no stranger to broken ribs, but this time it seemed to hurt more. Probably psychological, he thought grimly. He fished out a wide elastic bandage he’d used for previous rib injuries, and wrapped it round his chest, breathing a shallow sigh of relief at the support. He should have done this last night.

Just as he’d wrestled into a fresh set of clothes, his phone signalled another message from Claire: “Use the sling. At least for a couple of days.”

Matt was slightly intimidated by how well she knew him at times. He’d quickly abandoned the sling, stuffing it into his bedside table drawer. It was itchy and hurt his neck. Instead, he threaded his aching wrist into his hoodie pocket.

He shuffled into the kitchen to make coffee and forage for food, listening for Foggy all the while. He was still torn between not wanting to tell him and getting the inevitable task over and done with. The anxiety about confessing was mixing with the existing worry about the previous night’s event. What could he have done differently? Could he have confronted them earlier? What should he say to the police tomorrow? What should he tell Foggy?

Matt was tempted to turn on the radio as a distraction, but he also wanted to hear Foggy return home before he walked in the door. It was the one thing he could control right now. Sitting down with a piece of toast and coffee, Matt ruminated in silence. He found himself reaching for his phone a few times, wanting to call Foggy and tell him to come home. Yet each time he talked himself out of it, finding excuses like ‘there’s no need to worry him yet’, or ‘there’s nothing he can do’, or ‘he’ll be mad.’ The hours rolled on, Matt’s half-eaten toast grew cold, his mug filled and emptied three times over. Foggy was still not home.

By the time Foggy returned from his parental smothering, it was getting dark. The apartment was deadly quiet, but Matt’s cane and keys were still there and his bedroom door was pulled closed with only a slight gap to let Daisy in and out. With anyone else, he would be able to assess if they were up by whether the light was turned on or off, but that’d never been the case with Matt. Foggy remembered his initial reaction to Matt’s tendency to study in the dark at college. Again, it made no difference to Matt whether the light was on or off (although Matt had subsequently told Foggy that he could hear lights buzzing), but it didn’t change the fact that there was something a little intimidating about turning the light on to a moving, breathing person studying in the corner of the room.

The only sign Matt had been out of bed was a faint smell of toast and coffee. This was not something Foggy would have noticed before moving in with Matt, but his senses had grown sharper thanks to Matt’s echolocation and sensory training. Foggy considered knocking on Matt’s door, but he figured Matt had no doubt heard him return home and if he wanted to speak then he’d come out in his own time. Foggy was worried and a little bit cross about this morning’s interaction, but a conversation with his parents about Matt’s care requirements had put things into perspective. They both needed space, and perhaps this was Matt’s way of asking for it.

Matt had planned to talk to Foggy. Really he had. But by the time Foggy had returned home, Matt had retreated to bed. Faced with the choice of telling Foggy what had happened and deferring the conversation till tomorrow, he chose the latter. It was easier… for now anyway. He could hear Foggy scuffling round in the kitchen, open a bottle of beer and return to the living room. There was a light crack as Foggy plugged his wireless headphones into the television, and the subsequent sound of trashy Sunday night television still audible through the headphones. A few hours later,
Foggy sighed and turned the television off, and as he made his way to bed he hesitated slightly at Matt’s door, torn between wanting to check that Matt was okay and giving Matt space.

Matt could hear a slight hitch in Foggy’s breath before he kept walking and collapsed on his bed. “Brush your teeth,” Matt whispered ever so slightly, and to his shock Foggy got up with a groan and brushed his teeth. Maybe telepathy works, Matt thought to himself. He closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep with his uninjured hand draped over Daisy’s back.

Matt got up earlier than usual to visit the police station to make a statement - that’s what he told himself anyway. He was not avoiding Foggy. It was nothing to do with not having to explain his broken arm and subsequent silence. Not a chance.

He felt a bit rank not having a shower, but he couldn’t be bothered going through the rigmarole of the plastic bag and the pain of unwrapping his chest. Matt browsed his shirt collection until he found one of his larger shirts that he rarely wore because it was so baggy. To his relief, the combination of the large shirt size and his recent loss of muscle meant that it just fit over his cast. He held his still throbbing arm up to his chest then decided maybe Claire was right about keeping it elevated and fished the sling out of the drawer. Grabbing his cane and second-hand glasses, he waved to Daisy to stay put, then gently closed the door, desperate not to wake Foggy.

Brett accosted him almost immediately after he entered the police station. “Murdock. I was just reading the weekend’s reports. How are you doing?”

“I’m fine,” Matt replied gruffly.

“Your face says otherwise.”

“My face?”

“I guess you can’t see the bruises.”

Matt felt the side of his face where he was kicked by one of his assailants. It was still slightly swollen, but the heat had mostly left the area.

“I’ve come to make a statement as promised.”

“Right. My colleagues aren’t in yet, but if you don’t mind talking to me, I can take your statement. Saves you waiting.”

“Oh, sure.”

Matt tried to keep a neutral face as he recounted the little he could remember. The physical damage was nothing compared to his feelings of embarrassment, helplessness and shame. Once he finished, Brett confirmed that the hospital had supplied images of the assault, and the incident had been caught on a nearby security camera. It was just a matter of IDing the perpetrators now.

“You’re not going to release the footage to the media, are you?” Matt suddenly said in a panic.

“We already have. Two of the muggers are identifiable in the video, and you know yourself that this is the easiest way to identify young individuals in this day and age.”

“But you haven’t released my name. You can’t.” Matt started to hyperventilate.
“Matt, calm down. We haven’t released your name or any images beyond the video clip.”

“Can you identify me there?”

“It’s dark. You’re pretty much just a shadow in your dark clothes. The only identifying feature is your glasses, but that’s only something people close to you would notice. I see you have some new ones anyway.”

Matt was visibly shaking. He’d appeared in the media wearing those glasses during the Fisk trial. If they wanted to, it wouldn’t take the media long to join those dots.

“Matt, you need to sign this statement. Matt… Matt?”

Matt snapped back to it and fumbled for the pen, which Brett eventually picked up and nudged against his hand.

“Where?” he mumbled, and Brett led his hand to the signature box. Matt needed Foggy right now more than ever, and was kicking himself for not telling him last night when he had the chance.

As he stood up to leave, Brett said, “take care, Murdock. We’ll let you know if we find them. And thanks for giving us a statement. It can’t be easy."

Matt slowly walked in the direction of the office and stopped to get a takeaway coffee. It was only when they handed him the paper cup that he realised with one hand out of action, he couldn’t hold the coffee and navigate with his cane at the same time. He shuffled meekly out of the way of the caffeine-starved customers, and in doing so bumped against an empty chair. He gingerly sat down and sipped at his coffee, wanting only to finish it and get out of there. A passing staff member said, “excuse me, sir. These seats are for dine-in customers only.” Matt raised his head and the staff member gasped slightly, “oh it’s you. Are you okay? I just read in the news about those bastards. Feel free to finish your coffee here. Again, I’m sorry. In fact, wait here, I’ll get you a free muffin.”

The waiter quickly rushed off before Matt could ask exactly what he’d read. Matt abandoned his coffee in a panic, pushing his way through the queue of customers and ignoring the pain in his ribs as people pushed back.

His phone rang. “Foggy, Foggy, Foggy, Foggy…”

Matt fumbled with his phone, nearly dropping it in his haste to answer. Instead, his cane fell to the sidewalk with a sharp thwack. A passerby stopped and picked it up for him as Matt stuttered ‘F- Foggy?’ in to the phone.

“Matt, where are you?”

“N-near the office. I’ll be – be there s-soon.”

“Good,” Foggy said in a sharp tone that suggested that nothing about the current situation was actually good. “Daisy and I aren’t far away. When we get to the office, you can tell me all about what happened on Saturday night.”

“F-Foggy wait…” Matt responded, but Foggy had already hung up.

With shaking hands, Matt shoved the phone back in his pocket and reoriented himself. Office. Turn left. Straight on. Cross the road. Turn right.

He heard other commuters whispering as they walked past. “That’s the guy on the news…” “Poor thing…” “I hope they catch the bastards who jumped him…” “Little pricks…” “Who does that to a
blind guy…” “Apparently he had a seizure too…” “No, he’s a lawyer…” “Yeah, he put away Fisk…”

Matt picked up the pace, making it to the office in record time. There was no one in the office yet, and Matt deduced that Foggy must have been calling from home. Matt stumbled into the kitchenette, poured himself a glass of water and took it with shaking hands to his desk. He quickly drew out his computer and searched for the news article in question. The search results revealed a community in outrage. There were news articles and opinion pieces calling for mandatory sentencing for assaults on vulnerable people, all of them identifying the victim as ‘Matthew Murdock, a blind lawyer from Hell’s Kitchen’. So much for Brett’s claim that he wasn’t identified. Some articles even delved into his medical history, even though Matt was sure it was sourced illegally.

Matt started hyperventilating again. This was worse than any injury he’d ever had. He was publicly humiliated, Foggy was mad, and everyone now knew he had epilepsy. He picked up the first thing he could find – a stapler – and threw it hard at the wall. A mug followed and he was about to throw his braille reader when he stopped and forced himself to breathe. He dropped the reader to the desk with a clatter, muttering, “what’s the point.”
It usually doesn't work out for you

Foggy had spent the entire walk to work thinking about what to say to Matt. Every time Foggy thought they had come to a point where Matt was being genuinely open and truthful with him, he’d pull a stunt like this. Foggy’s feelings were complicated further by the fact that he was equally mad with himself for not checking in with Matt last night. How good a friend was he if he hadn’t even noticed his best friend and flatmate had been violently assaulted?

To make matters worse, Foggy rocked up in time to witness the end of a seizure. He walked in to hear the all-to-familiar sound of Matt in the clonic phase, and Daisy evidently recognised it too because she ripped the leash from Foggy’s hand and dashed into Matt’s office. Swearing, Foggy managed to catch Matt just before he fell off his chair. Matt had obviously bitten his tongue again because red saliva was dribbling out of his mouth, adding to the already horrific sight of the purple bruises covering one side of his face. Any plans to yell at Matt for not telling him about the assault quickly left Foggy’s head. Matt’s reasons for not sharing – whatever the fuck they were - seemed insignificant right now.

Matt stopped seizing just as his phone rang. “Karen, Karen, Karen, Karen…” Foggy ignored it, but then Foggy’s own phone started ringing in his pocket almost immediately after Matt’s stopped. Karen must have read the news too. Foggy couldn’t retrieve his phone without moving Matt, so he let it ring out. Karen was due at work any time soon now anyway. Sure enough, just as Foggy had helped Matt onto the couch and was wiping off his bloody mouth, Karen walked through the door. She was in tears as she rounded the office door, and gave an audible sob as she saw Matt’s bruised face.

“What happened, Foggy?”

“He had a seizure,” Foggy said as if it weren’t already obvious.

“You know what I mean. What happened on Saturday night, after I left him to walk home on his own?”

“Oh God. It wasn’t your fault, Karen.”

“I should have walked with him. What did he say happened? Why didn’t you tell me yesterday instead of sending me that upbeat text?”

Tears started to form in Foggy’s eyes. Daisy, who was now sitting up on the couch keeping watch over Matt, leaned over and gave him a sympathetic lick. Foggy whispered, “I didn’t know.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, he didn’t even tell me,” Foggy snapped. “I found out the same way as you – the same way as everyone else in New York – I had to read about it in the news this morning. He left the house before I even got up.”

“Why?”

“Who the fuck knows,” Foggy returned before taking a deep breath and adopting a more sanguine tone. “Please, Karen. I don’t know what’s going on. I only know as much as you. I didn’t even get a chance to speak to him here – when I arrived he was seizing.”

“Stress?”
“Probably. You know how he is about his blindness. And he’s even weirder about his epilepsy - keeping it a secret and everything. I keep telling him it’s nothing to be ashamed of, but it never gets through. He’s not going to take this well.”

“What should we do?”

Foggy looked down at the now sleeping Matt. “Firstly, I’m going to call his friend, Claire. If Matt can’t talk to me, maybe she will. She works at the hospital, so maybe she knows something.”

Claire gave Foggy a brief rundown on what happened, but provided not much more than what the media had reported. She didn’t seem surprised that Matt hadn’t told Foggy what happened, saying, “come on, you know as well as I do that Matt’s actions don’t always make sense.”

“But why didn’t you call me?”

“He said not to disturb you. You were on a date.”

“That’s not- that’s not a reason,” Foggy squeaked. “You should have called me anyway.”

“Foggy, you know as well as I do that that’s not how patient confidentiality works. I shouldn’t even be talking to you about him now.”

“But you know me, and- and I’m his medical care proxy.”

“Take it up with Matt,” Claire said. “Can you just make sure he looks after himself and doesn’t do any heavy lifting or - god-forbid - fighting for the next little while. His ribs and arm are one thing, but he can’t risk another blow to the head.”

“If only it were that easy,” Foggy moaned. “Thanks Claire – for looking out for him, and sorry for pressuring you earlier.”

By the time Matt woke up, Karen had fielded half a dozen calls from the media, all wanting a statement from the Murdock half of Nelson & Murdock. The story had struck a chord with the community, and everyone wanted the wounded duck’s side of the story. Each time Karen parroted, “no comment,” sometimes having to repeat the phrase six times over, and on two occasions she ended up having to hang up on the insistent reporters. She didn’t tell Foggy that last fact though.

When Matt emerged from his office a few hours later, Karen rushed to his side, gently saying, “are you okay? Here, sit down.” She pulled up a chair.

“No, no, I’m fine,” Matt mumbled. He wobbled and put his good hand out to balance himself against the chair.

Foggy rushed out of his office and gave Matt’s back a supportive rub. “How are you, buddy?” Foggy said, his voice syrupy sweet.

Matt was used to them being kind and caring post-seizure, but they were acting weird. It took him only twenty seconds or so to remember why. He started hyperventilating again, and Karen pushed him into the chair. Foggy knelt down next to him and rubbed his back. “Breathe, Matty. Breathe. Slowly…. Slower… It’s going to be okay.” Karen and Foggy exchanged looks. They both felt
utterly helpless.

Foggy picked up a worried-looking Daisy and placed her on Matt’s lap. She leaned into Matt’s stomach as he stroked her back obsessively. Once Matt had calmed down, Foggy went into practical mode. “Look, I’m not going to pretend I don’t know why you’re anxious. And I’m not going to ignore it or dismiss it either. I understand-”

“You don’t understand,” Matt retorted.

“I understand why you’re upset. You’re right, I don’t know what it’s like for you, but I understand that we need to work with you to figure out how to make this better for you.”

Matt went to rub his face, but his ribs caught with the movement and he gave a pained gasp and leaned forward, hand against his chest.

Foggy put his hand out, thinking Matt was about to keel over. “What is it?”

Matt shook his head.

“They didn’t break your ribs on top of your arm did they?”

Matt nodded.

“Shit, how are you even…” Foggy petered off as he recognised the redundancy of the question.

Matt sat up and breathed out through narrowed lips, trying to manage his pain. Once he’d gathered himself, he muttered, “Nelson & Murdock is toast.”

Foggy stared. “Why do you say that?”

“No one wants a lawyer who’s going to seize in the middle of a hearing.”

Foggy shook his head. “That’s absurd, Matt. You might as well say ‘no one wants a lawyer who can’t see the facial expressions of the witnesses and jury.’ And we all know that’s not true.”

“It’s not true, Matt,” Karen echoed.

“This is different,” Matt said.

“How?”

“I don’t have any control over the seizures. You’ve seen it - I get stressed and bang, down I go.” Matt stamped a foot on the ground to emphasise the point, and Daisy jumped off his lap in fright. He put his hand out to encourage her back, but she’d already retreated to the safety of her basket, her little head peeking out from beneath the desk.

“And yet we’ve won almost every case that we’ve taken on since you were diagnosed,” Foggy pointed out. “We have clients. Financially, we’re in a better position than we’ve ever been-”

“That’s just thanks to Elektra though,” Matt argued.

Foggy shrugged. “Her money’s no less green.”

Karen piped up, “do you want to make a statement to the media?”

Foggy flashed Karen an icy glare, and rubbed Matt’s back as he started to panic. “Matt, calm
down. You don’t need to do anything you don’t want to.” He thought for a second. “And if you
don’t calm down you might end up having another seizure.” At Foggy’s words, Matt experienced
another wave of anxiety.

Foggy looked at Karen. “Do you think you could get the Xanax out of his desk?”

“No, Foggy,” Matt huffed. “I don’t want it.”

“It’ll increase your seizure threshold and calm you down.”

“No, no, no…” Matt started shivering.

“Do you want me to cut it in half?” he said. “Just take half a dose.”

Matt hesitated then slowly nodded his head. How worse could things get anyway. “Should be some
Advil in there too,” he mumbled.

“Good, Matty,” Foggy encouraged. He turned to Karen, “could you grab some water? There’s a
glass on his desk still.” Foggy kept rubbing Matt’s back as he downed the Xanax and Advil.
“Good. Now do you want to lie down again?” But Matt just pulled a face.

Foggy bit his lip. “Why don’t we nut out a general response to anyone who inquires about the
situation.”

Matt paused then croaked a weak, “okay,” just as there was a knock on the door. The three of them
froze, while Daisy whipped across the room and sniffed underneath the door, her tail wagging.

“You put a closed sign up, didn’t you?” Foggy whispered to Karen.

“Yeah.”

“We’ll just ignore them then,” Foggy said quickly before Matt could go into meltdown mode
again.

There was another knock, and Daisy let out a shrill bark. Matt hunched at the noise, and Foggy ran
over to grab Daisy, who immediately decided it was time to play chasies.

“Fuck,” Foggy said, as she slipped through his fingers. “Matt, can you call her?”

There was another loud knock, and then, “is anyone in there? It’s Mark Fletcher from the Bulletin.
We’d like to talk to Mr Murdock.”

Karen looked at Matt, then Foggy, then the door before whispering, “what do we do?”

Matt bit his bottom lip and called out with all the confidence he could muster, “we’re closed. If you
want a statement, email the firm.”

Foggy stared at Matt. It wasn’t the response he was expecting, but then again, Matt’s responses to
things weren’t exactly consistent.

The reporter wasn’t going to give up that easily though. He continued, “during the Fisk trial, Mr
Murdock spoke out against mandatory sentencing. After Saturday’s assault, does your firm still feel
the same way?”

“Email the firm and they’ll forward you a statement,” Matt repeated, his voice now low and
authoritative. “Now please leave.” There was a pause then the sound of footsteps moving away from the door.

Matt whistled an exhaled breath. “I guess we’re writing that statement,” he said softly, still tracking the reporter’s progress out onto the street.

“And hopefully Mr Fletcher won’t recognise your Daredevil voice,” Foggy said.

“Foggy!” Karen hissed, hitting him on the shoulder.

Indignantly, Matt started, “I don’t have-”

“You do,” his friends interrupted simultaneously, and Matt recoiled.

Foggy cleared his threat. “Anyway, back to the task…”

Throughout the brainstorming session, Foggy only mentioned inquiries from clients, even though they all knew the statement was primarily aimed at the media. As a proactive and practical measure, the drawing up of a statement seemed to calm Matt substantially (although it probably also had a lot to do with the Xanax).

The phone seemed to ring constantly all day. Everyone from Foggy’s parents to media outlets around America seemed to want an update. Brett called to give Matt the latest in the investigation and also apologise for his name getting leaked to the press. He blamed himself for not reading the news before taking Matt’s statement, but in a way, Matt was glad he didn’t find out in the police station. He probably would have ended up back in hospital.

Keen to avoid possible unannounced visits by the media and the inevitable questions from clients, Matt decided to work from home for the rest of the week. Foggy knew Matt well enough that he knew when to point out his overreactions and when not to. Propped up in a soft nest of supportive pillows on the couch or in bed, Matt spent the next few days channelling his remaining energy into his work - a much-needed distraction from his personal woes. He tried to call Elektra as a further distraction, but each time it rang out. A couple of times he even limped up onto the roof in a vain attempt to hear her or perhaps even attract her attention, but if she was nearby, he couldn’t hear her and she definitely didn’t make any attempt to contact him.

Every day, Foggy would return home with of bunches of flowers, fruit and cake sent to the office by concerned clients. Matt seemed distressed at the mention of each gift, and so by Thursday, Foggy decided just to leave them at the office.

As if fractured ribs weren’t bad enough, to his horror and discomfort, Matt also developed a cough mid-week. His throat was scratchy and he consumed half a packet of Foggy’s lozenges in a day in a desperate attempt to calm his cough. They were horrible sugary things, but miles better than the painful jolts to his ribs that accompanied every cough.

By Saturday, Foggy had had enough and gave Matt an ultimatum: if Matt didn’t ring Claire or see a doctor today, he’d drag him kicking and screaming back to the hospital (Foggy might have also added something along the lines of, “I don’t care if you’re the Devil of Hell’s Kitchen…” for dramatic effect).
Matt knew there could be no arguing with Foggy once he got into one of his “I’m worried” spirals, and he capitulated. The doctor would involve leaving the house, so Matt rang Claire, who came around immediately.

Foggy hovered by the couch, watching as Claire sorted through her first aid kit for a thermometer. Matt picked at his hoodie, suddenly self-conscious. He eventually mumbled, “um, Foggy, do you think you could get me some stuff from the shops?”

“Oh, yeah, sure,” Foggy said, taking the hint.

Once Foggy had left the house with the stir-crazy Daisy and a list of Matt’s ‘healing’ foods, Claire started her quizzing.

“Why are you wearing this?” Claire said, unpeeling the bandage Matt was wearing around his chest.

“It helps with the pain,” he wheezed.

“It also constricts your breathing and puts you at risk of pneumonia.”

“But I always do it,” Matt said.

Claire stared. “Really?”

“My dad used to do it when he got rib injuries.”

Claire rolled up the bandage. “Like father like son, eh? Well, we used to tell people to wrap their chests, but now the recommendations have changed.”

Claire held out the fastened roll. “You can have this back as long as you promise me that you won’t use it for this purpose again.” Matt rolled his eyes and went to grab the roll, but she quickly moved it out of reach. “Is that a promise, Matt?”

“I promise,” Matt sang, playing along.

Claire handed over the bandage, and pulled out a stethoscope. She listened to his chest and told him to cough for her.

“That’s exactly what I’ve been trying not to do,” Matt grumbled.

Claire sighed. “Unfortunately, if you hold it in, you also put yourself at risk of pneumonia.” She sat down on the edge of the table and said in a more sanguine tone, “I’m sorry, Matt. I should have explained all this to you at the hospital. You’ve had so many similar injuries in the past that I assumed you knew.”

Matt shook his head. “It’s not your fault.”

“I gather you’ve been resting on the couch all week?”

“Or bed.”

“But usually you’d ignore the injury and run around chasing bad guys?”

Matt adopted a hangdog expression. “Usually.”

Claire signed. “As ill-advised as that is, it may well have saved you from ever getting pneumonia.”
All that movement and regular would have helped, even if you did tape your chest.”

“So I’m sick because I rested,” Matt mumbled bitterly.

“Don’t twist my words, Matthew Murdock.”

“Did you just full name me?”

“Yep. It’s good that you rested like a normal person, but unfortunately it looks like you have pneumonia again. From the sound of it, it’s pretty bad too. Your fever’s not too bad, but your lungs sound terrible.”

“But I don’t feel as bad as I did last time.”

“It’s not,” she reassured him. “And you had a different variety last time.”

“Can you get me some antibiotics?”

She sighed. “I can’t keep pilfering the hospital’s stores, particularly when this is a condition that you got as Matt Murdock. You need to get the antibiotics legally. And because it relates to an assault, it should go on record. I can make you an appointment at a nearby clinic if you’d like.”

“No, I’ll do it,” he said softly. “And I’m sorry for asking - for putting you in that position.”

“I know. How’s your arm?”

“Fine. I can barely feel it.”

Claire tutted, “I’ve never known anyone to underplay their injuries quite as much as you, Matt. Now do you need anything else or am I free to go? I have a shift starting soon.”

“I’m fine. Thanks, Claire.”

“No problem,” she said, packing up her gear. “If you have trouble getting an appointment, come visit me in the ER and I’ll try and fast track the process.”

Matt nodded.

“And even if it hurts to cough, don’t hold it in no matter what. Just hold a pillow to your chest for support instead.”

When Foggy returned from the shops, he called to Matt from the front door, “what did Claire say?”

“I shouldn’t have rested,” Matt said sullenly.

“Pfft. I’m fairly sure she wouldn’t have said that,” Foggy said, dumping Matt’s requested oranges, ginger, parsley and lemons on the counter. “Do you want one of your gross lemon, parsley and ginger waters?” he said, already pulling out the knife and the citrus press.

“Mmm… no, not just yet. Thanks, Fog.”

Foggy joined Matt and Daisy on the couch. “Is there anything else you need to do?”

Matt tried to imagine leaving the house and the very thought made him feel exhausted. He rubbed Daisy’s ears distractedly, and said, “I think I’ll see how I go today and if I’m still feeling sick tomorrow I’ll make an appointment at the clinic. I’m feeling a bit better now.”
Foggy looked at him critically. “Okay, but if you die in the night, it’s not my fault.”

Matt let out a huff of amusement that then turned into a bout of coughing. Without the bandage, it felt even more torturous. He remembered Claire’s advice and grabbed a pillow from beside him, holding it to his chest in a vain attempt to relieve the pain. Foggy filled up Matt’s glass of water, and nudged it into his hand.

“Seriously, man. You sound like you’re dying. Are you sure Claire didn’t tell you to go to the hospital?”

Matt shook his head. “She said I could if I wanted. But it’s not necessary right now.”

Foggy looked at him with suspicion, and when Matt returned nothing but an innocent-looking face, he said, “well, don’t leave it till it’s too late. That usually doesn’t work out for you.”
Unsurprisingly, Matt didn’t get magically better overnight. On top of everything else, he had a seizure just after going to bed, probably in part triggered by the stress of the chest infection. The combined effects left him barely able to stand the next morning, which meant that he reluctantly gave church a miss for the second week in a row. He croaked out an apology to Elizabeth and Julia mid-morning and promised to be well by the following weekend.

By Sunday night, Matt finally admitted that he was struggling and let Foggy take him to see Claire in the ER.

“Did you see a doctor like I suggested?” she said as soon as she spotted them.

Foggy looked at Matt with a frown. “Matt?”

Matt tried to look nonchalant in the subsequent silence, and Foggy and Claire’s speechlessness was almost worse than a lecture. He hunched a little in the chair as Claire took his temperature and vitals. She gestured at the triage nurse, and after receiving the okay, took Matt to a cubicle where she ordered him onto the bed. The doctor’s assessment was more blunt than Claire’s and Matt found himself subject to a sudden barrage of tests.

After returning from radiology where it was confirmed that yes, Matt had pneumonia again, Claire hooked an oxygen tube under Matt’s nose. He immediately ripped it off. “No Claire, I just want to get antibiotics and go home. None of this. I don’t need this.”

“Matt, I hate to tell you but that small clip on your finger tells us otherwise.”

Matt shook the monitor off. “Not anymore.” He swung his legs round to get up, but was caught in another coughing spasm.

Claire handed him a pillow to brace himself, and waited for him to catch his breath before saying, “it won’t be for long. But you need IV antibiotics.”

“Can’t I just swallow them?”

“The doctor has prescribed IV ones. You’re sicker than you realise, Matt.”

“Maybe if you’d gone to the doctor yesterday-” Foggy started.

“Shut up, Foggy.” Matt snapped. “I don’t need a lecture.”

Claire said, “it’s likely that the doctor would have said the same thing yesterday considering your other health conditions.”

“My blindness isn’t-”

“I’m talking about the epilepsy and fractured ribs.” She shook her head. “Honestly, Matt. It’s not like I met you yesterday.”

“Matt, please just lie down and accept the help.” Foggy stepped forward and touched Matt’s arm. “Please,” he pleaded.

Matt started coughing again, and Claire used the opportunity to swoop in and fit the nasal cannula while Matt was distracted. It was slightly askew when Matt finished coughing, but he was
completely exhausted and so when Claire hesitantly adjusted it, he gave up and let her.

“Good. Thank you,” she said pointedly. “Now can you sit back for me in the bed?”

Matt reluctantly shuffled back into the bed, and lay back with a groan. “Good, now give me your arm.” Claire found a promising-looking vein and inserted a cannula, saying, “at least your veins are easier to access now.” Matt couldn’t be bothered asking why, even though he suspected she wanted him to. He winced at the sensation of the needle in his vein, and she gave his hand a reassuring squeeze once it was in. “I’m just going to hook you up to some fluids before I grab the antibiotics, okay?”

Matt nodded, thankful that someone bothered to tell him exactly what the liquid draining into his veins was for once.

Matt closed his eyes before Foggy could say whatever was on the tip of his tongue, knowing full well that Foggy respected Matt’s unspoken indication that he didn’t want to talk.

Foggy plonked himself on a chair and caught up on the latest trending BuzzFeed listicles. At one point he snorted, and Matt opened his eyes. “What?”

“Strange animal friendships,” Foggy explained. “There’s one between a goat and a monkey.”

“Do I need to know?”

“Probably not, but that’s the point of these websites, isn’t it?”

“Never seen them,” Matt mumbled, closing his eyes again.

Claire finally came back with the antibiotics. “Sorry for taking so long. There was a trauma patient that I needed to take care of first.”

Matt waved her off. “It’s fine.”

As she hooked him up to the antibiotics, Claire said, “I have good news or bad news depending on the way you look at it. There’s a bed upstairs available for you now, so you don’t need to stay in the noisy ER.”

“I can’t stay,” Matt said, alarmed. “I’ll go after I finish this.” He held up the arm with the cannula.

“You need multiple days of that,” she said pointedly. “Plus respiratory support.”

“Can I speak to the doctor please?”

Claire sighed. “I’ll get him to come over as soon as he’s free. But it won’t be for a while and by that time the bed might be gone and you’ll have to spend more time in the ER amongst the noise.”

“I’ll take my chances,” Matt said, his argument somewhat undermined by the sudden bout of coughing.

Claire pressed a pillow into Matt’s hands and said, “hold this to your chest, remember.”

Once he and Matt were alone, Foggy said, “you know, I really wish you wouldn’t refuse treatment. I just end up having to pick up the pieces when you get worse. What happens tomorrow when you have a seizure and end up in an emergency situation? You know you have breathing issues already after seizures. Pneumonia is only going to make it worse. I want to go to work without worrying about you home alone. And more importantly, I want you to be back in our office so we can work
on cases together.”

Matt looked stung. “So this is my fault?”

“I didn’t say that. But you have a choice right now: stay here and get better where people can monitor you and give you the best medical support; or go home and potentially get sicker so that you not only prolong your illness, but also risk ending up back here on a respirator or something.”

“How do you know the regular antibiotics won’t help?” Matt challenged.

“I don’t. Neither do you. But it’s not a 50-50 situation. It is more likely that staying here will end up with a better outcome. Yes, you may not like it, but if you want to get better sooner, I’d personally take that chance.”

“What if people find out?”

“What, that you’re sick? That there are consequences to idiots kicking you in the ribs?”

“What, that you’re sick? That there are consequences to idiots kicking you in the ribs?”

“There are still articles—”

“So what? There are articles about your accident as a kid. No one thinks worse of you for it.” Foggy looked at Matt’s hands. They were always a tell. His broken arm was tucked into his hoodie pocket, but he was clenching his other fist tight, evidently stressed.

Matt argued, “you don’t hear them. People talk about me in the street—”

“Yeah, well, I don’t want to hear people talk about you in the street when you die of pneumonia.”

“Stop being so dramatic, Foggy.”

Foggy rolled his eyes, and muttered, “me, dramatic…” He leaned against Matt’s bed, and said in a tone usually reserved for professional negotiations, “can we go back to the issue at hand please. Basically, you don’t want to stay here because you’re scared of what people will think, is that right?”

“I don’t like hospitals.”

“Okay, you don’t like hospitals. We’ve had this discussion before, buddy. No one likes hospitals. Luckily for you, they don’t like keeping people here unnecessarily so they’re going to spring you as soon as possible - which isn’t now, by the way.”

Matt’s argument was getting weaker and weaker. “It’s not fair to highlight my absence from work as a reason.” Matt said, genuinely hurt.

“I think it’s entirely fair. I want you back at work as soon as possible. I want you to get better so I can go to work and channel all my concentration and energy into our paying clients without worrying about you. But most of all, I want my friend to come home well and happy. That’s fair.”

“It implies that I’ve done you an injustice by just being sick – which isn’t my fault in case you hadn’t noticed.”

Foggy let out a frustrated growl. “You know very well that’s not what I mean. I’m happy – beyond happy – to support you when you’re sick. That’s not in question. What I’m unhappy about is you not giving it your best effort to get better as soon as possible. And in this case, it means staying here and getting antibiotics pumped into your veins. You need to put aside your petty neuroses and
“Fuck” Matt said under his breath.

“What happened at the court?” Foggy asked.

“Have I presented a convincing case?” Foggy said gruffly.

“Unfortunately.”

“Can I go tell Claire you’ll take the bed?”

“Yes,” Matt said quietly.

“Good.” Foggy narrowed his eyes, surprised at the sudden resolution. He backed out of the cubicle, wondering if Matt would still be there when he returned. Foggy wouldn’t put it past him.

To Foggy’s relief, Matt was still there when he returned, and was soon transferred upstairs thanks to a sneaky intervention by Claire. Once settled in his new room, Foggy dumped a bag on Matt’s bed. “Pyjamas, toothbrush, headphones for your weird static obsession…” Foggy announced, handing Matt each item in turn.

“You brought an overnight bag? You knew I’d have to stay?”

“What, you can’t smell the toothpaste or whatever with your super nose?”

Matt’s subsequent scowl said otherwise.

Foggy rolled his eyes. “No, I didn’t know you were going to stay, Matt. It was just in case. I knew you wouldn’t have brought anything, Mr Pessimistic Optimist.”

“What did you call me?”

“You’re a pessimistic optimist,” Foggy said, pulling the final item – a book – out of the bag and dumping it on the table with a thud. “You think the worst of everything and everyone on an everyday basis, but somehow always think that there will be an eventual positive outcome, even when it doesn’t even make sense. Why else would you have sustained your alter ego for so long?”

“That makes you an optimistic pessimist then.”

Foggy snorted. “How so?”

“Well you’re all sunny and positive about the day to day things, but then you repeatedly tell me that I’m going to die.”

“I’m never going to live that down, am I?”

“Nope.”

“At least there’s one thing to be positive about now.”

Matt tilted his head. “What?”

“Private room. It looks like that complaint has resulted in an ongoing private room deal.” Matt frowned, and Foggy sighed, “'c'mon, Matt. It’s not that bad.”

“There’s a woman screaming that she wants to die in the room below me and there’s someone else vomiting blood in the room above me,” Matt stated. He paused and said, “you didn’t happen to
pack my beanie per chance?” The conversation was clearly over.

Within half an hour, Matt had a seizure. Foggy stood back in relief as the nursing staff took charge. Matt’s recovery from the previous night’s seizure had been long and painful to the point where Foggy nearly called an ambulance (and in retrospect he wished he’d done so). Tonight’s seizure was no different, but at least this time he had assistance. The staff ended up cutting the seizure short with medication to avoid further damage to his ribs, and there was a short-lived drama when Matt’s oxygen levels dipped dangerously low. Matt appeared to be in a great amount of pain when he finally roused, but thankfully dropped off to sleep almost immediately, wheezing into an oxygen mask.

Foggy was well aware that Daisy was home alone, and he was also hoping that he could go home for the night rather than spend the night sleeping in a chair. However, he decided to stick around for a little longer so that Matt didn’t wake up from his post-seizure sleep alone, confused and attached to all manner of irritating wires and tubes. After the seizure, they’d stuck monitors to his chest, and those wires in particular always Matt made anxious.

Matt’s first word when he came round was “no” – something that hardly surprised Foggy. He rolled his eyes, and jokingly said “yes,” but Matt didn’t seem to listening much to Foggy’s relief. Matt groaned at the combined pain of the pneumonia, fractured ribs and post-seizure aches, his face contorting as he tried to climb out of bed.

“Matt, buddy, don’t get up.” Foggy said, gently pushing him back against the pillows.

“I-I – need-” Matt coughed and winced as it hit his ribs.

“I can get you anything. Just stay still. Breathe. Do you need the nurse?”

Matt shook his head. “No, I need to go.”

“Where?”

Matt tried to remember why he felt such urgency. It was something about Elektra – or was it? He waved his hand. “Uh, away.”

Matt tried to breathe for a few moments, then let out a low, “ohhh,” at the pain. He grabbed his chest and screwed up his face. “No, no, no,” he muttered, clawing at the pads on his chest.

Foggy leaned over and hit the call button.

Foggy smiled when he saw it was Elsa, Matt’s favourite nurse. Foggy explained, “he’s in pain, and kind of confused.”

Matt moaned to no one in particular, “take it off,” brushing the oxygen mask down to his neck and screwing up his eyes in upset.

Elsa moved the mask back over his nose and mouth and clipped the pulse ox monitor back onto his finger. “Matt, can you tolerate-”

But the combination of tiredness, post-seizure disorientation, and fever had overwhelmed Matt. His stoic façade crumbled as he pushed the mask away once more with a loud sob. “Don’t want anymore,” he cried, tears running down his cheeks.
Foggy stared. He’d not seen Matt like this since the night of the initial head injury. Sure he’d cried since, but this was more on par with the behaviour of an overtired five year old.

Elsa was first to respond. “That’s okay, Matt. We’ll try something else.” She removed the mask and unfurled a nasal cannula. “Can you hold still for a moment,” she said gently as she hooked it under his nose. Matt didn’t pull it off, but his crying only got louder. He held his chest against the sobs that were racking his body, wincing as he bumped his cast hard against his chest. The oxygen tube became shiny and wet as his tears and nose ran. Matt didn’t even seem to register Elsa’s offer of a tissue.

Elsa tilted her head at Foggy and gave him a pointed look, prompting him to comfort Matt. He put his arms awkwardly around his friend, and Matt briefly buried his head in Foggy’s shoulder before pushing him away. “No,” Matt said firmly before dissolving again into a fretful teary mess. Kicking the blankets off, he tried to brush away the IV as if it were a pesky insect. Keen to distract Matt and prevent him from pulling out the cannula in his arm, Foggy tried Matt’s hand, only to have it pushed away.

Foggy looked at Elsa with desperation. “I don’t know – how do I-” He was on the verge of tears himself, upset that he couldn’t help his incredibly distressed friend.

Elsa said softly, “Matty, can I help?” The unexpected use of ‘Matty,’ made him stop and hiccup a “no”, before a fresh lot of tears flowed. “Can I get you something for the pain?”

Matt licked the pooled liquid from his upper lip and shook his head, but then it gradually turned into a nod. Unsure as to what he wanted, Matt tried to curl up, but the awkwardness of the raised bed, and the various items attached to him got in the way, and he let out a wail of frustration, ripping the wires off his chest. The machine started to beep, but fortunately, Elsa quickly silenced it before Matt could react further. Elsa hesitated, wanting to get the pain medication and a thermometer to measure his temperature, but also not willing to leave Matt in this state. She pressed the button next to his bed, hoping her colleague was free.

“Does he get like this much?” Elsa asked.

“No, never,” said Foggy. “This is completely out of character. I mean, he gets disoriented after seizures, but not like this.”

“Matty,” she said, using the name that seemed to calm him momentarily before. “I’m going to get you something for the pain, but I feel like there’s something else going on.”

Matt was now curled in a foetal position in the flat half of the bed. The tears had stopped, but he still looked distressed. Another nurse joined them before whipping off to find some Tylenol and the vitals trolley.

It turned out that Matt’s temperature had significantly risen since he was admitted. Elsa said in her soft Irish voice, “Matt, you’re probably feeling pretty crook right now because of the fever. The doctor should be here any moment and we’ll try to bring it down. Okay?”

Matt didn’t answer. He’d closed his eyes again and was breathing with small moans at each exhalation.

Foggy ran through all of Matt’s potential triggers. “Do you need your headphones? Or is it the sheets?”

Matt coughed and tried to curl up tighter even though his ribs groaned in protest.
Foggy retrieved the headphones anyway, flicked on the noise cancelling function and nudged them against Matt’s hand. He uncoiled slightly and lifted his head to allow Foggy to fit them, but when he dropped back onto the mattress, they dug into his head, resulting in a pained moan.

“Sit up, Matty,” Foggy suggested. “It’ll be easier to breathe.”

Matt let Foggy and Elsa help him to sit up the bed. After a minute of pained gasps, his breathing slowed and he seemed to finally relax. By the time the doctor arrived, Matt was coherent enough to answer the usual neuro exam questions with ease.

After the doctor left, Foggy put his hand on Matt’s arm and asked, “are you going to be okay alone for the night?”

“What’s the time?” Matt asked, still a little bit confused.

“It’s almost midnight. I promise I’ll return in the morning before work. I’m just conscious that Daisy’s home alone.”

“Go. I’m sorry for keeping you up.”

“You didn’t. It’s fine. Can I get you something to wipe your face first?”

“What do I have on my face?” Matt’s mouth felt disgustingly crusty, and he roughly wiped around his lower face with the sleeve of his pyjama top, dislodging his oxygen tube and giving him a slightly lopsided, childlike look.

Foggy wrinkled his nose at Matt’s use of his pyjamas, but felt a surge of warmth towards his perplexing friend. “Do you want me to help you to the bathroom? I’ll grab a proper washcloth.”

“I could get a nurse to help me. You should go home.”

“I want to do this, Matty. Help me help you?”

As they shuffled to the bathroom, Matt wheezed, “they drugged me.”

“They gave you a benzo when you had a seizure.”

“Oh.” Matt hadn’t quite put two and two together in his feverish state, but it made sense now.

The nurse came in to take Matt’s vitals again and ended up taking over from Foggy, who obediently accepted Matt’s repeated urges to leave.

With a Foggy shaped hole in the room, Matt curled up as best he could in the annoyingly half-raised bed and accepted the sleep-inducing fuzz that accompanied the sedatives they’d given him. As a result, when Matt opened his eyes again, Foggy was magically at his side. “You’re still here,” Matt said, confused.

“It’s 7.30am,” said Foggy with a huff of amusement. “You must have slept though.”

Matt pushed the blankets off, suddenly realising how hot he was. The sheets were sticky with sweat and he felt disgusting.

“Please say you brought more pyjamas,” Matt wheezed, waving the bottom of his damp pyjama top in an attempt to cool down.

“And some toiletries, and your super indulgent silk pillow,” Foggy said with a smile.
“You’re amazing.”

“Yeah, I know. Oh, and I brought you this-” Foggy nudged a cup against Matt’s hand. “I watched them squeeze the oranges myself.”

Matt looked like he’d just won the lottery.

“You have me for a full half hour before I need to go to work,” Foggy noted. “Need anything else?”

“A full body-shaped ice pack.”

“Is it that bad?”

Matt nodded, and Foggy leaned over and pressed the call button.

“No, I want you all to myself,” he argued, trying to bat Foggy’s hand away.

Matt’s temperature had indeed gone up, and their precious half-hour was consumed with nurses and doctors amending his treatment. They tried to coax him into trying the alien mask for a few hours to help relieve the effort of breathing with fractured ribs, but he flat out refused. He was cranky and resistant and he didn’t think he’d cope mentally with the mask-induced claustrophobia right now.

Foggy’s departure was soon followed by a visit from Claire, who was knocking off from her nightshift. She refrained from any sarcastic comments when she saw the rise in temperature on his charts, merely acknowledging that he must feel like shit. Matt couldn’t disagree with that. The fever had made him irritable and unhappy so he was quite glad when she left.

No sooner had he fallen asleep again, however, when Father Lantom turned up unannounced. “I hope you don’t mind me just turning up like this, Matthew,” he said as he sat down next to the bed.

“It’s a bit of a surprise,” Matt acknowledged. “I don’t really feel like I’m in a state to receive visitors.” He could feel beads of sweat on his forehead and upper lip and the back of his new change of pyjamas was already soaked. He hated to think what he looked like.

“You heard?” Matt said softly, assuming Lantom had read of Matt’s assault in the news.

“I heard that you were hurt last week, yes. It explained why you weren’t at church last Sunday.”

“Sorry-”

“There’s nothing for you to be sorry about,” Lantom said quickly, cutting Matt’s apology short. “I thought you went home afterwards, but then when you didn’t turn up at church again yesterday, I worried something had happened.”

“Pneumonia.”

“Again?”

“It seems so. This time it was a result of the injuries I sustained last weekend.”

“How do you feel about that incident? Are you angry?” Lantom asked quite bluntly.

Matt was taken aback at the leading question, but attempted to answer it nonetheless. “I think I should be angrier. I feel-” he hesitated, not wanting to admit his true feelings. “I feel ashamed. And
embarrassed.”

Lantom waited in silence for Matt to continue.

Finally Matt added, “and I know objectively I shouldn’t.”

“But you feel like your other self should have been there to stop those boys from beating up that man who had a seizure on the sidewalk,” Lantom finished.

Matt hadn’t really connected the two things before that. He’d felt ashamed and embarrassed that he couldn’t fight back. He was also frustrated and angry that he couldn’t go out to find them afterwards in his suit. However, he hadn’t considered his feelings beyond that. He’d often thought of his Daredevil alter ego as separate to Matthew Murdock. Daredevil was allowed to do things and express emotions that Matthew Murdock dared not entertain. He missed the freedom as much as he missed helping people. And yes, he did wish Daredevil could have helped him that night, even though it was an absurd thought.

“I miss it,” Matt finally said. “Not just helping people either. I miss the challenge, the physicality, being able to run and jump and hit people – I know I shouldn’t be telling you this, but I do. I miss hitting people.”

Lantom leaned back in his seat. “We prayed for you yesterday.”

“You shouldn’t have.”

“Why? Because you think you don’t deserve it?”

Matt wanted to say yes, but he knew that wasn’t the answer Lantom wanted. “Thank you,” Matt said.

“You’re loved in the community. Don’t you forget that,” Lantom added. He retrieved a wad of paper from his satchel. “Here,” he said, handing the paper to Matt. “The readings from the last two weeks. I thought you might like to study them.”

Matt quickly skim read the first page, and placed it on the table for later.

“And this.” Lantom handed him a tin.

“Tea?” Matt said.

“And cake,” The priest handed him another three containers. “Coffee and walnut, gingerbread, and some kind of tropical mystery cake.”

Matt looked confused.

“Mrs Baxter. She likes to experiment.”

“Ah…”

“This one’s actually rather good though. I hope she wrote it down.”

Matt prised off the lid. “Pineapple, coconut, cinnamon, nutmeg…” he listed. “I can pretend I’m on a tropical island somewhere.”

“Why not,” Lantom said, getting to his feet. “I’ll let you rest.”
“Father,” Matt said, a little nervous.

“Yes?”

“You said you can take confession in hospitals. Um…” Matt fidgeted with his blanket.

“I’ll just close the door. It’ll give us some privacy,” Father Lantom said, pulling something out of his robes and sticking it on the door’s exterior. Matt heard the click of the handle, and the priest returned to Matt’s bedside. “Let’s begin.”

Matt had another seizure that afternoon, even though they’d managed to bring his temperature down a bit. The subsequent x-ray showed that the seizure had caused more damage to one of his ribs, which was putting further pressure on his lungs.

“Two hours,” the doctor said once Matt was lucid. “Just try the mask for two hours. That’ll give you a decent break, open up your lungs and hopefully help with the pain.”

Matt lay in bed, holding a pillow to his chest in a desperate attempt to relieve the pain. He was more concerned about the fact that he’d been wheeled to radiology and back without even realising it. It constantly surprised him how deep his post-seizure sleeps were. He was about to say no to the mask again, when he recognised Claire’s heartbeat from the hallway. She poked her head in and noticed a glimmer of recognition on Matt’s face. “Sorry,” she said. “I’ll come back. It’s Claire, by the way.”

“No,” Matt said. “Please stay.”

Claire looked from Matt to the doctor and then the nurse. She shrugged at her colleagues and the doctor gestured at her to continue. Anything to change his mind.

“They want me to use that mask – the horrible one,” Matt wheezed.

“Then you probably should.”

“But there’s gotta be an alternative.”

“What are the alternatives?” Claire asked the doctor, and the doctor ran through a few other treatment options, none of which sounded very much like options to Matt.

Claire leaned against Matt’s bed. “I guess the question you have to ask is what is likely to get you out of here the soonest. If the doctor says this is the best option, then I’d go for it… unless you want to stay in here, that is.”

“I’ll try the mask,” Matt said immediately. “But only for two hours.”

Foggy turned up that evening with his parents to find Matt seemingly asleep with the alien mask.

“Shit,” Anna swore, looking at the mask, then the line of yellowing bruises down his face, and then his half unbuttoned pyjama top that exposed some of the bruising on his chest. “Sorry, I mean… What did they do to him?”
Matt’s eyes fluttered open and he gave a muffled grunt of recognition. He groped for the call button and got the mask switched for a nasal cannula. Anna grabbed a washcloth from the bathroom and said, “Matt, gorgeous, let me wash your face.” Matt felt a little guilty for enjoying Anna’s mothering. After all, he was 34 and she wasn’t even his mother. However, there was a part of him that melted whenever Anna went into mothering mode, so he lifted his head and let her wash the sweat from his face. Anna noticed that Matt practically purred at the touch, so she rinsed the cloth and ordered him to give her his hands to clean too. He looked visibly more relaxed afterwards, even though it seemed the most minor of gestures.

“You’ve got quite the collection of flowers and cards,” Foggy’s father, Edward, observed. “Admirers?”

“People who pity me,” Matt said.

“That’s a negative way of putting it,” Anna said, and Matt immediately regretted his grumbling.

“Right,” Foggy said, clapping his hands together to break up the awkwardness. “Mum baked dinner for you, Matt.”

“So I can smell,” Matt said with a smile. “It smells delicious.”

Anna said delicately, “Foggy tells me you’ve been off your food again, so you don’t have to eat it now.”

“Is there enough for all of us?”

“Well, yes, I guess so,” Anna said. “But don’t you want some for tomorrow?”

“Actually I’d really like to eat with the three of you, if that’s okay.”

As Anna went to wrangle up some plates, Foggy leaned into Matt and whispered, “what happened that they switched you to the alien mask? Is it getting worse?”

Matt shook his head. “They said it might help.”

“And?”

Matt pulled a face. “Dunno.”

Foggy gave his hand a squeeze. “Okay. Keep me posted, yeah? No secrets.”

Matt nodded. He shifted to the side of the bed with a grunt and waved his hand about for the IV stand he was forced to drag to the bathroom. “Fog, can you solve the secret of this IV stand?”

“Shit, sorry.” Foggy unjammed the stand from behind Matt’s bedside table and wheeled it to his outstretched hand. “Your senses are screwed again?”

“Mmm whatever they’re giving me is strong.”

Foggy gave Matt a nudge. “Well, here’s my arm if you need to get to the bathroom.”

“Thanks, Fog, but I think I can find the bathroom,” Matt said sarcastically.

Foggy cleared his threat. “Uh, you want to hang a little more to your right.”

“I know,” Matt said, a hint of irritation in his voice.
Matt shuffled out of the bathroom just as Anna returned, plates in hand. Edward followed a minute later with four cans of soda from the vending machine.

“A feast,” Foggy said, rubbing his hands.

The Nelsons didn’t stay long. Matt listened happily to the conversation, smiling at all the right moments, but he didn’t really join in. Every breath seemed like a conquest and it was much easier just to observe. Foggy’s parents gleaned as much and after they’d scraped the plates (and promised to put Matt’s mostly untouched plate in the ward fridge), they made a move to leave. Just as they were walking out the door, Edward said, “Anna, the thing. Give him the present.”

“Of course. Silly me, I got distracted with-” She petered off, but Matt knew what she meant. She pulled a package out of her handbag and removed the cellophane. Nudging it against his hand, Matt reached out and touched the softest thing he’d ever encountered. His mouth formed an O as he took in the fabric. “It’s a pashmina,” she said. “I know how tricky it is to get layers on and off with a drip in your arm, so I thought you could use this. You can drape it over your shoulders. Can I?”

Matt nodded and Anna placed it around his neck. “Do you like it?”

“This is too generous, Anna,” Matt said, feeling the ends between his fingers.

“Nonsense,” she said with an embarrassed laugh.

“Looks good too,” Foggy said.

Anna smiled at Matt’s rapt expression and gave him a small peck on the forehead. “Remember to give me a call if you need anything, food or otherwise.”

Matt nodded and waved a goodbye to the three Nelsons before wrapping the pashmina tightly around his chest, enjoying the soft weave against his neck. First it was the possum beanie, then the silk pillow and the soft blanket, and now the pashmina. Somehow his hospital stays had resulted in a surprising number of beautifully tactile gifts. Maybe Foggy was right. Maybe he needed to be more positive about the small things.
Despite his fear of the alien mask, Matt had to admit that the pressure was a relief to his tired lungs, so when the doctor suggested he sleep with it for a few hours overnight to give him a proper chance to rest, Matt surprised himself by agreeing.

When he woke, the ward was quiet save for the occasional cough or moan, suggesting it was the middle of the night. He recognised the familiar heartbeat next to him only moments before Elektra put her hand on his.

“Matthew, I hope you’re getting loyalty points for all these hospital visits,” she said softly.

Matt shook his head, and felt for the quick release clip on the mask and winced in anticipation of the consequences. The machine started beeping and Matt wiped his sweaty mouth with his sleeve with an “ergh” before croaking, “visiting hours r’over.”

“For people who don’t have the imagination to get past security maybe. It was child’s play.”

“Why’r you here?”

“To visit. You need to stop being surprised that I care, Matthew.” She perched on the edge of his bed. “What’s wrong this time?”


Before Elektra could answer, there was a sound of quick footsteps entering Matt’s room as the nurse came to check on the machine’s alarm.

“Sorry,” Matt croaked. “I had a moment of panic. It-it must be more than two hours. Can I – can you swap it back to the tube please.”

The nurse checked his chart before hooking the nasal cannula around Matt’s ears and nose. She ignored his eye roll as she took his temperature and blood pressure for what seemed like the zillionth time that day. She silently scribbled a few notes and left without another word.

“’lektra,” Matt said softly as soon as the nurse was out of hearing range, and Elektra slid out from beneath the bed. He patted the bed.

“Matthew, you can’t be serious.”

“Just – I’d appreciate the company. Please.”

She climbed onto the bed and Matt shuffled over a little to make room, every movement sending shock waves of pain throughout his body.

“Did you know that the French doctor, Emmerick Maury, recommended the très magnifique wines from Côtes du Rhône be prescribed for pneumonia,” Elektra said, leaning her head against his shoulder.

“Bien sûr, bien sûr,” Matt huffed in amusement. “I don’t believe that for a moment.”
“It’s true. He said the wines contain natural antibiotics and are rich in calories.” She lightly touched his stomach. “You’re fading away, Matthew.”

Matt moved her hand away from his painful torso. “I can’t pretend I wouldn’t rather wine to whatever they’re dripping into me at the moment,” he said. “I’ll ask my doctor what she thinks in the morning.” He smiled and curled into her as best he could. Comforted by the company, he quickly drifted off to sleep.

The next morning, Foggy greeted Matt with, “what’s this I hear about Mr Murdock and the mystery woman found in his bed?”

Matt stretched and rubbed his face, still half-asleep. “Mmm… nurses like to gossip.” His eyes were still closed and he didn’t look like he was making much effort to properly wake up.

“Huh.” Foggy hoped that Matt would be a bit more forthcoming, but he wasn’t going to push it this time.

“Sorry, Fog, m’tired,” he said, pulling his blankets higher and snuggling into his single silk pillow.

“Yeah, that’s cool. I brought you a muffin and a coffee. I’m going to leave them on your table, okay?”

“Thanks,” Matt mumbled into the pillow. With a cranky huff, he scratched at his cheek, pulling the cannula away from his skin. It annoyed him beyond belief.

Foggy watched Matt with concern, worried that his irritable behaviour was about to give away to something else. When Matt finally stilled, Foggy said, “I guess I’ll come back after work. - unless you’re expecting another lady caller, that is.”

Matt ignored the jab. “Say hi to Karen for me.”

“Do you want her to visit?”

Matt opened his eyes. “Only if she wants to.”

“Okay. I’ll drop a hint.”

“Mmm thanks,” Matt grunted, closing his eyes again.

That afternoon, Matt was completing his fourth lap of the ward when he heard a familiar snuffling coming from his room down the hall. “What the-” he said out loud, and picked up the pace, pushing his IV pole ahead of him as a surrogate cane.

Foggy was perched on the end of Matt’s bed with Daisy, who was hiding in Matt’s gym bag. Daisy somehow knew Matt had entered the room though, and the bag started squirming. “Oh my God, Foggy. What were you thinking?” He closed the door behind him and raced over to the bed.
“She missed you,” Foggy said in a low voice. “And I thought it might make you feel better.”

Matt slid onto the bed and unzipped the bag. Daisy threw herself at him, a squirming ball of fur and excitement. “Ow,” Matt said, wincing as she pawed him in the ribs.

“Daze, come here,” Foggy said, gesturing at the dog. She ran the five steps to Foggy then took a flying leap back to Matt, too excited to stay still.

“What have you unleashed, Foggy,” Matt laughed.

Once Daisy had calmed down a tad, she started her intense sniffing, sticking her nose into every part of Matt and the bed. “Come here,” Matt eventually said, patting his lap. “I want to pat you. Be calm.” She sat on his thighs and looked at him adoringly as he stroked her ears.

“She’s been sleeping in my bed the last few nights,” Foggy said. “She was getting desperate.”

“No way, she loves you just as much as me.”

“You two are like soul mates,” Foggy said with a huff and a shake of his head. “Honestly, I’ve never seen anything like it.”

Matt suddenly stopped and whispered, “quick, someone’s coming.”

Foggy grabbed the bag and Matt quickly zipped Daisy in. Pissed off, she struggled to get out, pausing only briefly when Matt said, “shhh.”

Foggy put the moving bag on the ground, and the bag started shifting sideways as Daisy worked around the restrictions. “Shit,” Foggy said, “um, bathroom.” He picked up the bag and raced into the ensuite, quietly shutting the door behind him. Matt could hear a small whine, before Foggy turned on the taps to disguise the sound.

There was a sharp rap at the door, and Matt recognised the voice of Elsa.

“You were meant to do seven laps,” she said on entry. “Are you tired?”

Matt nodded. “I’ll finish them later,” he said.

“Do you need anything?” she asked.

“No… thanks,” he said quickly, keen to get her out of there. “I- I’m going to have a nap. Um…”

“You want me to pull the door closed?” she concluded.

“Yeah, thanks.” Matt gave her his most disarming smile and she blushed and nodded before hurrying out, embarrassed.

Matt listened to her footsteps disappear down the hall before calling, “Foggy, it’s safe.”

Foggy crept out of the bathroom, Daisy under his arm. “Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea,” he said.

“No, no – it’s made my day.” Matt patted the bed and Foggy dropped Daisy back onto the blanket.

“Well, as long as you keep your ears out, we can stay longer. There’s no rush to get home.”

The three of them were watching a movie when Karen dropped in. She gave Matt a hug then let out
a shriek as Daisy leapt out from beneath the blanket. “Oh my God. You didn’t! Is that even allowed?”

Foggy held up the duffle bag and Karen shook her head. “No one would guess you two were responsible business owners,” she said.

“Hey,” Foggy said in mock offence. “A bit of respect for your bosses please.”

Matt silently patted Daisy throughout the exchange, a small contented smile on his face. “Anyway, how are you, Matt?”

“Feeling better,” Matt croaked. He tried to quieten his wheezing for Karen’s benefit, but his breath caught and he ended up hacking up some of the gunk in his lungs. He gasped and held a tissue up to his mouth. “I’m sorry,” he whispered. “Bad timing.”

Karen gave one of her signature ‘I don’t believe you’ sighs, and waited for him to catch his breath. He leaned back against the pillow with a small “oh,” as his head started to spin.

Foggy reached out and touched Matt’s arm. “Matty, do you need help?”

Matt put a single finger up to say ‘just wait.’ Daisy snuggled closer into his side, distressed at Matt’s discomfort. His breaths gradually became less tortured and he put his hand to his forehead, both exhausted and embarrassed.

“Do you need to rest?” Karen asked. “I can come back another time.”

“No, no… I – this is just – I’m fine.”

Foggy rolled his eyes at Matt’s signature phrase. He and Karen exchanged looks before Foggy jerked his head as if to say, ‘it’s okay’.

Karen cleared her throat nervously. “Maybe these will help.” She handed Matt a packet of origami paper, two boxes of tea and a helium balloon.

“Five treasures tea,” she said as she tapped the larger box of tea. “I don’t know how it tastes, but it’s different. And just in case it’s too different, I bought you jasmine as well.”

Matt smiled in thanks. “What’s on the balloon this time?”

“A devil.”

Matt raised his eyebrows and Foggy muttered, “here we go…”

“What?” Karen said.

“Matt thinks people will guess his alter ego if he owns anything with a devil on it.”

“But you’re wearing devil pyjamas,” Karen pointed out, confused.

Matt instinctively felt his pyjama top, even though the print was indistinguishable to the touch. “Foggy?” Matt said, frowning.

Foggy shrugged and said in his most innocent voice, “what?” He gave Karen a wink and she stifled a laugh.

“You told me they were plain pyjamas,” Matt said.
“Yeah but I have to look at them. Better that they look interesting.”

“You took advantage,” Matt said, genuinely hurt.

Foggy rolled his eyes, “okay, Mr Sensitive. I’ll buy you some boring plain ones tomorrow.”

“So should I be giving the balloon to someone else?” Karen said.

“And frame that poor person as Daredevil?” Foggy said in mock horror. “Karen Page, you devil!”

“Okay okay, you’ve made your point,” Matt grumbled.

Karen and Foggy stayed till the end of the movie, then left with a now docile Daisy zipped up in the bag. While Matt had enjoyed the company of his two and a half visitors, he was relieved to be able to rest.

Matt had barely closed his eyes when he heard the familiar tapping of Stick’s cane along the hallway. “Shit,” Matt said out loud. “I really don’t need this right now.”

Stick entered the room and replied, “bad luck.”

“Why are you here?”

“To warn you.”

Matt groaned, "what about this time?"

“Elektra. She’s been playing guard dog on the roof since you got here. Well, except for whatever you two got up to last night.”

Matt scowled. “So what’s the problem?”

“She says she’s protecting you.”

“I don’t need-”

“She’s probably just luring Erinyes here though.”

“She’s not like you say she is, Stick.”

“Idiot.”

A nurse entered the room to connect a dose of IV antibiotics, and the two men fell silent. The nurse looked from Stick to Matt and back to Stick, taking in the old man’s ragged hair, the bloodied bandage around his hand, and the massive scratch down the side of his face. The silence only grew more awkward and she sped up the process, fumbling with Matt’s cannula as she rushed to finish the job and get out of there.

“You like being coddled?” Stick sneered after she’d left the room.

“If you bump into Elektra, can you tell her to come talk to me,” Matt said in reply, refusing to take the bait.

Stick gave a non-committal grunt.
Matt picked at the blanket. “You never told me what your intention was with Julia.”

Stick wandered over to Matt’s barely touched dinner tray and picked at a piece of overcooked pumpkin. “Tastes like shit,” he said.

“Well I don’t come here for the food,” Matt quipped. “Come on, Stick. No more deflections. What do you want with Julia?”

“I told you – you’re going to train her.”

“Why?”

“She’s got gifts. You know very well why she needs to be trained. Don’t be so selfish, Matty.”

“Yeah but why me? Why not you?”

“You want me to train her?” Stick shrugged. “I could take over I guess. She could do with a more rigorous method.”

“No!” Matt surprised himself with the volume of his voice, and said in a more normal tone, “I mean, I’m happy to train her. I just want to know why me? What’s your endgame?”

“When the war comes-”

Matt exhaled loudly and impatiently. “Stick, enough with this war bullshit. I’ll train her but not to be a soldier. She’ll realise her abilities, but I’m not going to teach her to fight.”

“You could have a sidekick,” Stick pointed out.

Matt laughed derisively and ended up in a coughing fit that left him clutching a pillow with curled fingers.

“Or she could just be given the opportunity to defend herself, Matty. I’m guessing you understand from experience how important that is.”

The jab hurt. Matt automatically put his hand to his ribs. “Self-defence,” he said. “And that’s it. She’s not going to be a soldier. She’s a child.”

“Best time to learn,” Stick drawled.

“Leave her alone,” Matt warned. “I’m committed to training her. I told you that.”

“Good,” Stick said, and made towards the door. “See ya round, Matty.”

Matt sunk into the pillows, relieved at Stick’s quick exit, but at the same time wanting more information about the whole Julia scheme. The former trumped the latter so he just grumbled a “bye.”

Matt could hear the relief in the nurse’s breathing when she came by later and found the mysterious visitor gone. This time she introduced herself as Paola. Matt repeated her name with a thankful nod, noting her general movements and scent for future reference. She smelled like fake sugar, spearmint, cardamom, garlic, roast pumpkin, spinach, antiseptic, damp wool, and a slight scent of dog. A dog owner who tried to cover up the smell of her lunchtime spiced pumpkin salad with sugarless gum, Matt concluded.
Paola fussed over him, taking his vitals and plumping his pillows. When he accidentally knocked his glass of water onto the bed, she switched the sheets without complaint and helped him find a new pair of pyjamas (this time without the devil print). She waved off his repeated apologies and changed the topic. “At least your temperature’s down a bit,” she said. “That’s good. Are you tired?”

Matt nodded. “Who knew visitors were so exhausting.” He could sense she wanted to say something – probably about Stick. People’s heartbeats always seemed to tick faster around Stick.

“You don’t have to accept visitors if you don’t want to. Your doctor’s still recommending you spend two hours with the mask every so often, so that’s a good excuse to rest at least. Do you want to give it a go?”

Matt could hear the mucus in his lungs crackling away. The mask seemed to push the mucus it to the edges and give him more space to breathe. And of course, the promise of breathing was enticing. He nodded. “Just let me get my earphones first though please, Paola,” he said, preparing himself mentally for the mask.

Matt awoke when a small hand tugged at his pyjama sleeve. He struggled to orient himself as Elizabeth hissed, “Julia, come here. He’s asleep.”

“No, he’s not. I just heard him move.”

Furious footsteps crossed the room and pulled Julia away from the bed. “Come on, we’ll come back another time.” She took Julia’s hand and tried to lead her out of the room, but Julia shook it off. “No,” she said, stamping her foot.

“Julia, I swear to God-”

Julia giggled. “You took the Lord’s name in vain. You’re in sooo much trouble.”

Matt opened his eyes, determined to halt the exchange. He removed his earphones and put his hand out towards Julia.

“Julia,” Elizabeth said.

“No!”

Elizabeth sighed and said impatiently, “Matt’s got his hand out.”

“Oh.” Julia made her way back to the bed and met his hand. “Hi, Matt,” she said, all the anger out of her voice. There was a pause and she said, “have you lost your voice?” Matt hit the call button for the nurse, but as they were waiting, Elizabeth explained, “do you remember when you got bitten by the spider and they put a mask on your face to help you breathe?”

Julia said “yes” in an uncertain voice.

“Matt’s gotta have one too, but his is a bit different. I don’t think he can talk with it.”

Matt reasoned that everyone else could see him, so Julia might as well too. He leaned over and put her hand on his face. She patted his cheeks and felt around the mask. “Oh…” she said, finally understanding.
“Thanks, Matt,” Elizabeth said and he nodded in acknowledgment.

Paola came in and said, “more visitors! I guess you want a break from the mask.”

Matt nodded and it was switched back to the cannula again. He gave a hacking cough as he leaned back against the pillow. Paola handed him some water and he cautiously took a few sips. “Ergh,” he croaked. “Sorry.”

“It’s no problem,” Elizabeth said.

“No problem,” Julia parroted.

Paola huffed in amusement at Julia’s happy face. “I’ll leave you to it.”

With the nurse gone, Julia jumped up on the end of the bed only to be admonished by her mother. “Get down from there. We’ve invaded poor Matt’s space enough.”

“It’s okay,” he said.

That’s when the questions started. Matt tried to answer them best he could, but he didn’t want to mention the assault. He didn’t want to scare Julia after she’d come so far confidence-wise.

“Does it happen often?” Elizabeth asked Matt. “You know, attacks on-” She didn’t finish the sentence, but Matt knew what she meant.

“To some people yes. To me, no.” He thought about Stick’s comment. She deserved to be able to defend herself. “I think Julia should learn self-defence.”

Julia perked up at that. “Like Kung Fu?”

“Um, sure,” Matt said.

“Like Kung Fu Panda?”

“Uh…”

“It’s an animation,” Elizabeth explained. “Julia must have watched it six dozen times when she could still see.”

Julia swiped at the air with flattened hands. “Yeah,” she said in a gruff voice.

“Julia, I have a special quest for you,” Matt said.

“Yay!” She bounced up and down on the end of Matt’s bed.

He leaned over and rifled through his new wallet. “Here are some notes. Do you want to know how I know they’re $1 bills?”

Julia kneeled in front of him. “Mmm hmm.”

“I turn the corners down, like so.” He led her thumb over the folded corner. “The other notes are folded differently so that I can tell them apart.”

“Oh.”

“Now, here’s the quest: I want you to get me a soda from the machine at the end of the hall.”
There was a silence and Matt continued, “you’ll be able to hear it. It buzzes. Now, the money slot is on the right hand side and is shaped like some lips. Thread the notes through one at a time.”

“Okay.”

“And the I want the drink that’s number 33, which is easy because three is at the top corner of the grid of buttons. How many times do you press it?”

“Two,” Julia said.

“Good. Now go get ‘em, Kung Fu Panda.”

“Yeah!” Julia leaped off the bed and navigated out the door, her cane giving the door a good whack on the way out.

“Phew,” Elizabeth said. “Thank you.”

“She’s keep.” Matt put his hand out, listening to Julia’s progress.

“What?”

Matt chuckled. “Oh nothing. She just encountered the chairs mid-way down the hall.”

“I should check on her,” Elizabeth said, making towards the door.

“No – no, she’s fine. It’s the best way to learn. She’s doing this herself and is free to make mistakes – and fix them - without the feeling she’s being watched. The worst that could happen is that she walks into someone frail. However, the good thing about the cane is that everyone tends to give you a wide berth.”

“Oh, okay.”

“She’s keeping you busy then?”

“Like you wouldn’t believe. Look, I’m sorry for surprising you like this. We were shopping and she was on the verge of a tantrum and then this old guy with a cane tripped over Julia’s cane – I tell you what it was a weird coincidence-”

Matt’s mind immediately went to Stick. It wasn’t so far fetched that he’d deliberately trip over Julia to get their attention.

“And then I realised we were nearby, so I thought visiting you might be a good idea. I didn’t think I’d be disturbing you quite so much.”

“It’s fine,” Matt said, before adding, “but maybe next time give me some warning.” He felt a little ashamed of the request, but the series of unexpected visitors had left him overwhelmed and anxious. He was a private man, and hated feeling as if he was constantly on display and accessible to staff and visitors alike.

“But sure,” Elizabeth replied, equally embarrassed. They sat there in silence for a moment. Matt could hear Julia’s cane hit the vending machine, then a murmured, “where are the lips?”

“Were you serious about the self-defence?” Elizabeth asked.

“Unfortunately, yes. But you know, all kinds of people get mugged all the time in this city, not just people who are blind. You could probably learn it at the same time,” he said with a smile. “Oh – I
just heard the crash of a can. The quest is almost complete.”

Elizabeth laughed. “If you’d told me two months ago that Jules would be off doing things like this, I’d have thought it was a joke.”

There were hesitant footsteps in the hallway as Julia realised she didn’t know how far along the door was. “Matt? Mom?” She said in a small voice.

“In here,” Elizabeth called, and Julia crashed her way through the door before proudly handing over the can.

“Well done. You’ve just conquered level one point one.”

“One point one?” Julia moaned. “How many levels are there?”

“Ah, that knowledge is contained in another quest,” Matt said, making up the rules on the fly.

“Ooohh,” Julia whined. “I want to know now.”

“Kung Fu Panda learned his skills slowly.”

“No he didn’t.”

Damn Hollywood. Matt countered, “well, that’s how I learned and that’s how you’re going to learn. Okay?”

“Okay,” she said, clearly unconvinced.

“We’re going to have to continue another day though, because the next quest isn’t available yet.”

“Like a recharge?”

“Yes, exactly.”

Elizabeth added, “and Matt needs to recharge too. We might head off.”

“No!” Julia said, jumping onto Matt’s bed. “I want to stay here.”

“Actually, your mom’s right. If I rest now then I’ll be a lot more fun when we next see each other for quest 1.2.” He could sense Julia was about to object so he added, “you’ll be receiving the instructions in the post along with a treasure map. How are your braille lessons coming along?”

Julia gave a non-committal hum.

“Well, you’d better get home and practice,” he said, and he could hear Elizabeth chuckle under her breath.

“Okay,” Julia said dramatically, slipping off the bed. She stopped and said “mom, the present.” She whispered the last word.

“Oh yes, do you want to give it to Matt?”

“Yes,” she said, holding out her hand.

“It’s nothing special,” Elizabeth said.

Julia waved the present in Matt’s general direction. “Come on, you can do better than that,” Matt
said. “Listen for my horrendous breaths.”

Julia eventually nudged the box of chocolates against Matt’s arm. “Thanks,” he said, feeling the embossed cover.

“Praline,” Julia said. “Mom says the letters are gold.”

“Thank you very much. This is much better than hospital meatloaf.”

“Say bye to Matt,” Elizabeth whispered to Julia, taking her hand.

“Bye, Matt. Don’t be sick next time,” she called over her shoulder.

“Julia!”

“It’s true. He’s always sick.”

Matt rolled his eyes. Children were too blunt. He pondered what to do with her next time. Matt wasn’t sure just how appealing the quest idea was, but as they were half-way down the hallway, he heard Julia gush to her mother, “a treasure map! Like a pirate.”

Matt smiled to himself. The small things, Foggy had said. Yes, this could be a small thing. He readjusted the pashmina. Many small things.

Paola spotted the two visitors leave and returned to Matt almost immediately, conscious that he was tired and struggling. She handed Matt a couple of Tylenol pills and said, “she’s cute,” referring to Julia.

Matt nodded. “Energetic too. M’mentoring her.”

“That’s quite a commitment.”

“Mmm… but rewarding. It’s not an entirely unselfish act.”

Paola nodded before realising her mistake. “There’s a big sister program in my neighbourhood that I’m part of. I don’t contribute nearly as often as I like though thanks to work commitments.”

“Shift work,” Matt said. “I have a friend who’s a nurse and her work schedule is all over the place.” He paused and whispered jokingly, “although I think she does it deliberately to stop me from just dropping in unannounced.”

Paola chuckled under her breath. “I’m not going to keep you from resting any longer. I can put a ‘do not disturb’ note on your door if you’d like.”

“I didn’t realise that was an option,” Matt breathed. “Yes please.”

“Good. I’ll leave you be,” she said, quietly closing the door behind her.

It wasn’t until the promise of the ‘do not disturb’ sign that he realised just how on edge the string of unannounced visitors had made him. He wondered if they’d consider making it a permanent installation. He tried to imagine Foggy’s reaction to such a request and felt a pang of loneliness as he thought of Foggy and Daisy sitting together on the couch. He’d only been away from home for a few days, but time worked differently in hospital. It felt like weeks. Matt hugged his silk pillow to his chest and curled up best he could, imagining the pillow was a living, breathing Daisy instead.
The following afternoon, Matt woke to the sound of Foggy tapping away at his keyboard in the corner of the room. There was the occasional frustrated grunt or whispered sentence as he searched for information that would help a particularly tricky case. Eventually, he gave up, snapping the laptop together with a sigh.

“What’s the case?” Matt said, and Foggy startled.

“Shit. I thought you were asleep.”

“Mmm kinda. Half asleep. I’ve been half asleep all day.”

“Hard to know with your blinds down,” Foggy joked.

Matt pulled his beanie up so that his face was no longer obscured. “Sorry.” He rubbed his eyes and stretched, wrinkling his nose at his own body odour. “Sorry,” Matt said again, pulling the sheets up and over his bare shoulders to obscure the smell.

“Don’t apologise. I’d be sweating too if I had temperatures like yours. No one’s judging, Matt.”

Matt doubted the truth of that statement, but it wasn’t worth arguing about. “What’s the case?”

“Another tenancy case.”

“They just keep coming,” Matt said.

“Money and greed. They’re not going to stop, Matt. Unfortunately, the cases don’t pay terribly well either.”

“Tell me if I can help. I feel useless in here, and I am a bit, but I might be able to do something rote.”

“It’s fine. We have Candy. Everything’s under control.”

Matt bit his lip.

“Gladys paid the bills on behalf of the save the park group today, which is a relief. I thought she might try and back out now that it’s gone.”

“We can’t take the money, Fog.”

“Uh, yes we can, Matt. We had nothing to do with the destruction and we – well, you – did a lot of good work.”

Matt opened his mouth to protest and Foggy said, “just wait. Hear me out. The legal fees were fundraised, so it’s not coming out of Gladys’ purse. And if you’d pick up the phone, you’d know that the few sculptures that remain have been bought by a museum and are being moved there for prosperity.” Foggy put his hand on Matt’s to stop him from picking a larger hole in the blanket. “Why aren’t you answering her calls? Did something happen between you two?”

“Have you seen Kung Fu Panda?”

“What?”
“It’s an animation-”

“I know what Kung Fu Panda is. I just don’t know what it has to do with Gladys or the park.”

“Can you see if it’s available on the fancy premium television?” (It turned out that not only was the private room a standing offer, but so was the free ‘premium television’ – a bonus that Matt had shown little interest in until now. It seemed the hospital would do anything to sate the two lawyers.)

“Yeah I can – but, I don’t understand why?”

“Julia wants to be like Kung Fu Panda.”

Matt could hear Foggy struggling to figure out what to say next, and offered, “I know. I don’t understand either. That’s why I thought we should watch it together. You can tell me why-”

“Let me get this right. You got taught Kung Fu-”

“No, Foggy. Not Kung Fu.”

“Okay, what do you call it?”

“It doesn’t have a name.”

Over annunciating each word, Foggy said slowly, “for this purpose, what should I call it?”

“Martial arts?”

“Right. So as a blind kid, you got taught Kung- I mean martial arts by a blind mentor, and now you want to do the same with Julia.”

“No. I never said that. Never. I would never.”

“You just said-”

“I said she wants to be Kung Fu Panda.”

“Oh,” Foggy said, feeling a little foolish.

“I do think it’d helpful for her to learn self-defence though.”

“Are you sure that’s all it is?”

“Yeah, that’s it.”

“So it’s not about teaching her to be Daredevil junior then,” Foggy joked.

Matt looked distraught. “Foggy, I would never - you know I wouldn’t.”

“Shit, sorry. I was joking.”

“She’s just a child,” Matt said in an almost pleading tone.

Foggy hesitated, then said, “so were you, Matt.” Matt went to protest and Foggy added, “I’m just saying it’s okay to feel pissed off that you were subjected to that kind of training as a kid.”

Matt gave him a fake smile. “So can you find Kung Fu Panda or not?”
“You’re the master of avoidance, Matt,” Foggy muttered, grabbing the remote and flicking through the menu in frustrated silence. After ten minutes, he sighed and said, “sorry, no pandas.”

Matt’s face dropped.

“I’ll look online,” Foggy said.

“It doesn’t matter,” Matt replied.

“It does to Julia. This is important homework.”

Matt snorted. “That was a quick turnaround.”

“What can I say? I kind of want to know all the fuss is about now.” He grabbed his phone. “Netflix… log in… Kung Fu… shit there are heaps of ninja pandas.”

“Sequels?”

“Yeah. But if we watch your movie, can we also watch Kung Fury?” Foggy read the precis: “a Miami detective imbued with ninja superpowers travels back in time to kill Adolf Hitler and the Nazis in an arcade game-style war.”

“No,” Matt said with a laugh.

“Oh come on. You know I’ve been looking to level up on my visual description skills.”

“Mmm okay. After the panda though.”

Matt fell asleep about fifteen minutes into Kung Fu Panda, and Foggy pressed pause, deeply relieved. It was the kind of movie Foggy had to pre-watch before properly describing, particularly if Matt was going to use it as some kind of teaching tool. “The things you make me do, Murdock,” Foggy muttered, pulling out his earphones and tuning into Kung Fury instead.

Chapter End Notes

Small confession: I haven't actually watched Kung Fu Panda so I'm just guessing the panda learned his skills overnight (as they usually do in Hollywood). However, I have seen Kung Fury and highly recommend it.
Threats

Matt’s repeated requests to leave hospital kept being undermined by his daily seizures. Dr Millet prescribed a second anticonvulsant in an attempt to raise his seizure threshold, but they kept coming. He felt like he was stuck in a horror loop. The pneumonia was in part triggering the seizures, the seizures were compromising his breathing and on one occasion caused further damage to his ribs, which in turn impacted on the pneumonia. And pretty much everything was causing fatigue, pain and confusion.

To make matters worse, Elektra still wasn’t answering his calls following the small drama that was being caught curled up in Matt’s hospital bed overnight. She’d been absent ever since. Matt wished that she’d at least send him a message telling him she was alright. He didn’t trust the Chaste not to attempt a second murder. In the absence of distractions, he mulled over the possibilities over and over, driving himself into a frenzy of concern.

His anxiety was compounded further by the news that two of his assailants had been identified and charged – news that he learned directly from a reporter who snuck into his room unannounced. He was recovering from yet another seizure at the time.

When he awoke from his usual post-seizure deep sleep, a voice Matt didn’t recognise said, “Mr Murdock, I was wondering if you could answer a few questions.” Matt rubbed his eyes, confused. “Mr Murdock, what are your thoughts on the apprehension of two of the youths who put you in here.”

Matt licked his cracked lips and felt for the jug of water on his bedside table. The reporter poured him a glass and handed it to Matt, holding it out in front of him until he realised Matt couldn’t actually see it. “Sorry,” the reporter said, thrusting it into Matt’s knuckles. Matt looked confused, but his thirst overrode everything else, so he accepted the glass without argument. Once Matt had emptied the glass, the reporter repeated his earlier question.

Matt listened in silence, trying to gather his thoughts in the haze. “Who- who are you?”

“Patrick Mansell from *The New York Bulletin.*”

“Who let you in here?”

“No one. I just walked in.”

Matt shifted uncomfortably, trying and failing to suppress a small groan as he attempted to sit more upright in the already raised bed. There was a furious scribbling as Patrick took notes on Matt’s appearance and behaviour. Matt realised with a shock that his pyjama top was partly open and quickly pulled his sheet over his chest.

Matt gathered himself, taking a few measured breaths in an attempt to think through the post-seizure disorientation and splitting headache. Channelling his best court voice, he said, “here’s what’s going to happen, Mr Mansell. You’re going to walk out this door right now without further question. If you want a statement you can email my office. What you’ve just done is highly unethical and is a breach of my privacy. Do you understand?”

“If you could just answer my question-”

“No. I just walked in.”

Matt paused and thought for a moment. “Or will I get my partner to start legal proceedings?” Matt felt for his phone, cursing his shaking hand for undermining his threat.
“How do you spell Mansell?”

Matt could hear a slight increase in the reporter’s heart rate, but the reporter didn’t move. Matt sighed and hit the call button. Paola appeared at the door, “Matt, it’s Paola. What’s the matter?”

“Sorry to put this on you,” Matt said, “but do you think you could call security?”

“I’m just leaving,” the reporter said, quickly slipping past the nurse and hurrying down the hall.

Paola asked Matt, “what-what did he do? Who-”

“No need,” Matt said, rubbing his head. “He’s left now.” He pinched the bridge of his nose. “Shit,” he said to himself.

“What happened… if you don’t mind me asking?”

“He said he was a reporter from the Bulletin. Wanted a statement in relation to the assault.”

“Just then?”

Matt nodded and scrunched up his eyes. “Could I get something for my headache?”

“Of course. I’m going to put a call down to security first though. Will you be okay for a minute?”

Matt mumbled a yes.

When Paola returned, Matt was on the phone to Foggy. “Yeah, I know. I told him to email the office for a statement… no of course not… I don’t care… It was a threat, that’s all. I know… we’re not… I know it was stupid, Foggy. I just – I woke up and he was there and I panicked. Worst possible timing… I don’t know – hang on.” Matt put the phone down and asked Paola, “what time did I have the seizure?”

She looked at his chart. “1.10pm.” She paused and said, “it’s now 3.30.”

Matt gave a nod of thanks, and repeated to Foggy, “it was 1.10pm… no, I’ll be fine… no… you don’t have to – argh… okay… okay… okay, see you in a bit.”

Matt put the phone down with a roll of his eyes. He was too tired for this.

“I have your medication,” Paola said, nudging the cup against his still shaking hand. “Security apprehended the reporter downstairs. I suspect he won’t be doing that again, but they’ve offered to put in additional security measures just in case. I think someone’s coming up to talk to you in a bit.”

“Don’t you have a reception or visitor log?”

“After reception, visitors are meant to check-in at the nurses counter on each ward, but that rarely happens. Most people just go straight to the room.”

Matt threw down the painkillers and chugged the entire glass of water. Paola poured him another and he took a few extra sips, mulling things over. “How did he get my room number?”

“He told the people at reception he was your cousin.”

“I don’t even have a cousin,” Matt said. “My patient records clearly say no relatives, hence Foggy being my proxy.”
“The staff at reception won’t be providing your room number to visitors without your express permission from now on.”

“But they did before?”

“Yes.”

Matt sighed. He felt even more vulnerable now.

Despite Matt’s insistence that Foggy stay at work, once Foggy actually arrived, he was thankful for the support and company. The hospital apologised for the breach, and Foggy had ripped into them about safety and security while Matt sat there in silence, relieved that he didn’t have to talk through his headache. Matt gave Foggy a weary but thankful smile afterwards, mumbling something about making it up to him later.

Somehow word got around about Mansell’s stunt, and within a couple of hours of his visit, the story had popped up on online news sites, along with the news of the two youths’ arrest. Matt made Foggy read them out loud, which Foggy inevitably punctuated with swearing and frustrated huffing.

“Are you sure you don’t want to sue the asshole?” Foggy asked.

“I don’t want to drag it out. Mansell’s already been tried in the court of public opinion. That should be punishment enough.”

“Wait…” Foggy said, skimming a new article. “It says he’s just been fired from the Bulletin.”

“So he should be,” Matt grumbled.

“Are you okay? I probably should have led with that earlier but I was too busy raging about Mansell.”

Matt gave a slightly strangled laugh. “I feel like I should be less okay than I am now. Maybe it’s shock or maybe it’s just a shitty continuation of a shitty event, but I feel oddly ambivalent. Does that make sense?”

Foggy shrugged. “Honestly, I can’t even imagine how you’d be feeling right now. If you freak out later, let me know. I’m always here.”

“Thanks, man,” Matt said. He beckoned to Foggy, who eventually cottoned on to Matt’s shy request, giving him a warm hug. “Thanks,” Matt repeated into Foggy’s shoulder.

Foggy eventually drew back and said, “right, should we nut out the statement now?”

Matt made a face.

“It’s like ripping off a bandaid, Matt. I could do it myself, but I figured you’d probably want to be involved.”

“I do. I’m tired though.”

“I know. I have the previous one here on my laptop. We just change a few things and bam. What do you think?”
Matt groaned. “Okay.”

“What about your current condition? A few of the news articles have made it sound like you’re dying.”

“I don’t know, Fog,” Matt said with a sigh. “Just say improving or something.”

“They know you’re in hospital. There’s not point in pretending otherwise, Matt. And don’t forget whatever we say in the statement might be referred to in the assailants’ sentencing.”

“Say I’ll be released soon,” Matt said.

Foggy frowned. “Okay,” he said, his tone saying otherwise.

After half an hour of Matt’s cynical and grumpy alterations, Foggy read the final draft out loud.

“Can I send it to Karen now? She just sent me an email saying that a few media peeps have called the office wanting comment.”

“Sure,” Matt said, his eyes now closed. “M’gonna have nap now,” he mumbled.

“Do you want me to stay?”

“M’fine, wha’ver you wan.”

Foggy packed up his laptop, and gave Matt’s hand a pat. “I’ll be back tonight, bud, okay?” But Matt was already fast asleep.

Despite his promise to Elizabeth and Julia, Matt was still very much stuck in hospital the following weekend. On the Saturday morning, as he struggled to regain full consciousness after yet another seizure, Matt’s phone rang with Elizabeth Carpenter, Elizabeth Carpenter, Elizabeth Carpenter ...

Matt had passed the nurse’s basic response test, but he was now in that grey zone between the completely confused state and the tired yet mostly coherent state. He usually slept like a log through this bit, but for some reason he was fighting the slumber. Matt put a shaking hand out towards the ring tone. Foggy rolled his eyes and answered the phone.

“Hi Julia, it’s Foggy… no, Matt’s unable to come to the phone at the moment. I’ll get him to call you back, okay? Uh, maybe ask him then… No… yes… I’m sure he would, but it’s best to ask him, rather than me… yeah… probably not till this afternoon…okay, bye… yeah, bye… bye.”

“Matt, Julia wants to visit,” Foggy said somewhat redundantly. Matt groaned into his mask, his breath causing it to cloud. “I hope that’s not an accurate representation of your mentorship,” Foggy joked. “Never mind,” he mumbled. He had no idea if Matt understood much of what was said in his post-seizure confusion. Sometimes he’d follow basic instructions, and if the seizure was minor he might respond with words, but as for more complex ideas, Foggy didn’t know. Even if Matt did understand, he certainly didn’t remember it. Matt looked like he’d now crossed into sleep anyway. He was lying still and his breaths had become more even, despite their ragged edge.
Foggy put his feet up on the edge of the bed and flicked through the television channels. “Here’s another positive,” Foggy said to Matt. “They have back-to-back episodes of Boston Legal.” He sighed, “although it’s no fun picking holes in their strategies without someone else to discuss it with. Hurry up and get conscious, Matty.”

When Matt woke up proper, Foggy was waiting with some water and a washcloth. Matt kicked at the mattress, trying to shift up the bed. “Ergh,” he said, panting.

“Matty, here. I have some water,” Foggy said, pulling the mask up and holding the cup to his mouth. Matt grabbed the water with two hands, but between the shaking and the awkwardness of his cast, he ended up spilling half of it on his pyjamas. “Shit, here’s a straw,” Foggy said, directing it towards Matt’s mouth.

A few silent tears made their way down Matt’s cheeks, and Foggy started to panic, thinking there was going to be a repeat of the previous week’s hysteria. But Matt just wiped them away and croaked an apology. “You don’t need to apologise, Matt,” Foggy said softly. “It’s okay.”

Another couple of tears spilled over at Foggy’s words. “This is – it’s hard. I can’t.” Matt struggled to articulate how he felt. He wiped away the tears again, and said, “you know, when I broke my ribs last year, it didn’t seem to hurt this much. All those stab wounds and black eyes… I don’t know how this hurts more. At least then I was in control.” He mopped up a couple more tears with his sleeve. “Now… I have no control over any of this. I feel so… uh, trapped. And the tiredness – it doesn’t end. It’s just there, squashing me.” He reached for the water again and took a few more sips. He coughed weakly, and lay there wheezing for a few minutes, while Foggy searched desperately for something to say.

“I - I thought I knew tired,” Matt continued. “All those times I stayed up all night in the mask, constantly active, only to go to work the next day, and then back out that evening… this is worse. I – I just don’t know how it can be possible… so tired.” He closed his eyes for a moment.

Foggy opened his mouth to speak, but Matt opened his eyes and added, “fuck these sheets hurt.” He held his hands out for the water once again and with Foggy’s help, took a sip. “I can feel the needle in my vein, and the change in temperature as the liquid goes in. I can hear the lights they leave on all the time, as if it doesn’t affect me. And this mask. It rubs, here, and here, and here.” Matt pointed at his cheeks and nose. “I can feel the hairs on my cheeks grind against the plastic, causing dozens of tiny sites of irritation and inflammation.” He paused. “Sorry, I’m having a whinge.”

“No, go on. It’s good for you,” Foggy urged, just glad that Matt was finding an outlet. “Is that why you freak out with the mask? Because it hurts?”

Matt nodded. “I can hear it so loudly. I – I don’t know how to describe it – it kinda changes the space around me. And the alien mask – it’s even worse - I can feel and hear it inside me, uh, I guess it’s – it’s like it’s moving stuff… battling me. It’s so loud.”

“I didn’t realise,” Foggy said in a small voice. “You can keep going if you want. Whinge away.”

“Okay, I can hear the nurses gossiping about the patients, including me.”

Foggy looked horrified, “anything bad?”

“Sometimes. But you know what they say - no good can come from listening behind closed doors.” He waved his hand. “Or something like that.” Foggy didn’t need to know that the nurses thought he and Matt were secretly married, and that some of them found Matt’s eyes creepy, which was
apparently a shame because otherwise he was hot. A few nurses had even made snide remarks about his fear of the oxygen masks. If only they knew what he could do with his mask of choice, he thought bitterly.

Matt closed his eyes with a small moan. “Right now, there’s a guy next door jerking off in bed while the nurse tends to the patient next to him. I’m assuming the curtains are drawn, but still…”

“That’s awful.”

Matt shrugged. “I’ve heard worse.”

“I’ll get you a softer blanket to sleep on,” Foggy offered.

“You know they don’t like me doing that.”

“Who cares. You shouldn’t have to feel like you’re sleeping on sandpaper.”

Opening his eyes again, Matt angled his head towards Foggy and said earnestly, “the pillow you brought in is enough. I have pyjamas and socks and the pashmina. As I said, I’m having a whinge.” He gestured for the water and choked down another half glass. After regaining his breath, he asked, “what’s the time?”

“Midday. Oh, Julia called earlier. She wants to visit.”

Matt rubbed his forehead anxiously.

“Matt, you don’t have to see her if you don’t want to. There’s no rush. It’s not like you can teach her how to be Kung Fu Panda in hospital.”

“Our sessions mean the world to her,” he said. “She’s come such a long way so soon. She has – has, um, potential.” He left out the bit where Stick had threatened to train her himself if Matt didn’t rise to the challenge. The bit about her extra senses could also wait.

“Well what about tomorrow instead?”

“But then I’ll have had another seizure and so on and so on…”

Foggy bit his lip. It wasn’t a point Foggy could refute based on the previous week’s pattern.

Matt pulled the mask away and grumbled, “is there a reason I have this instead of the tube?”

“Uh, dunno. Call them.”

Matt pushed the call button and sunk back into the pillow. The nurse had barely crossed the threshold when Matt said, “please can I swap this for the tube?”

“I’ll call the respiratory specialist. I think he wanted-”

“No, I want it swapped,” Matt insisted. “I can’t – I can’t have it.”

Foggy looked apologetically at the nurse, and said, “can you swap it and then wait for the specialist?”

“Uh, I’m not meant to. The flow rate ne-”

“I’ll leave then,” Matt said, dramatically pulling off the clip on his finger then digging at the
cannula in his arm. Before Foggy or the nurse could react, Matt had pulled out the needle, and blood was now dripping down his arm and soaking into the sheets.

Shocked by the blood, Foggy yelled, “Matt, stop. You’ve made your point.”

“I don’t need this shit. No one listens. I don’t want it.” Matt batted Foggy’s arm away and slid out of bed. Leaning sideways against the mattress, Matt licked his lips and swayed dangerously. He looked drunk.

The nurse approached Matt with caution. “I’ll switch you to the cannula and I’ll call the specialist down here straight away,” she promised. “Can you just get back into bed please.”

“Matt, come on,” Foggy said, putting out his hand. “Let me help.”

Matt pushed Foggy’s hand away. “No. I – I want to leave - sign myself out.”

Foggy looked down at his own hand that was now wet with Matt’s blood, then down to the floor where blood from Matt’s IV site was now dripping. Some of the drops splashed onto his legs, creating a macabre sight.

“Matt, if you want to leave, it’s within your rights,” the nurse said, “but you there are forms to sign. It’s best if you lie down and wait for the doctor. You can talk about discharge then.” The nurse tried to speak with a calm voice, but her heartbeat was racing, which only fuelled Matt’s anxiety.

“Please, Matt,” Foggy whispered. “Don’t do this. Not now. We’ll get them to listen, but this isn’t the best way to do it.” He grabbed a couple of tissues and said softly, “can I- can I just put pressure on your arm. It’s bleeding.” Matt flinched slightly as Foggy took his arm, but didn’t pull away. “Good. That’s good, Matt,” Foggy said, not wanting to spook him. “Now can I help you sit down while we wait for the doctor?”

Matt was feeling nauseous. He could feel a rush of pins and needles in his cheeks and he guessed he was moments away from keeling over. In between his laboured breaths, Matt grunted an okay, and the relieved Foggy helped him into bed. It was just in time too, because he had a seizure almost immediately.

The nurse buzzed her colleagues, conscious that Matt no longer had an IV line for medication.

“That was an own goal, Matty,” Foggy murmured as the mask was replaced.

Foggy pulled the nurse aside once Matt was in his post-seizure sleep and said, “look, I’m sorry about that. I don’t think it’ll happen again. He was upset, that’s all.”

She crossed her arms and looked unimpressed by Foggy’s attempt at an explanation.

“He- he gets upset after seizures. He gets uncomfortable. I think he just wanted to be in control of something.” That was it, Foggy realised. That was Matt’s odd attempt at regaining control. “He can be a bit irrational at times,” Foggy added. He thought about all the blood and the spilled water and the fact that Matt also ended up wetting the bed during his seizure. “Oh and sorry about the sheets.”

“It’s my job,” the nurse said brusquely. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I have other patients to attend to.”
Matt could hear his breath echoing within the mask, rasping, painful. He shifted in bed and his ribs gave a groan of protest. He shook his head irritably, which caught Foggy’s attention. “Buddy, hi,” Foggy said, his voice sickly sweet.

“What-?”

“Just relax. Go back to sleep.”

“Mmm.” It was a great suggestion, he thought. Matt let himself drift off again.

When Matt woke up the next time, the mask was gone and he could smell the combination of freshly starched sheets and laundered pyjamas. He pulled at the sleeve.

“Don’t worry, they’re plain,” Foggy said, walking towards him. “No devils, although there are some adorable pyjamas with Daisy-like dogs that I think you should consider.”

Matt grunted in response. He licked his lips, tasting the metallic tang of cracked skin.

“Can I get you some water?”

Matt put his hands out in reply.

“How about I hold it and you sip this time,” Foggy suggested, keen to avoid another change of sheets.

Matt patted his face, feeling a different, more bulky tube under his nose. “What’s this?”

“You were struggling to breathe after the seizure, but I know how much you hate those masks. I asked for a second opinion and the new respiratory specialist suggested this instead.”

“But it makes you anxious,” Matt said, listening to Foggy’s heart rate pick up.

“No- no, you… oh never mind.

“Thank you – second opinion… thanks, Fog,” Matt rambled.

“Pleasure. Here, have some water.”

After Matt had downed the glass, he pushed aside his sheets, prompting Foggy to yell, “no, wait.”

Matt looked confused. “Fo-fog, why?”

“Can we talk about this?”

“I’m just going to the bathroom. What’s there to discuss?”

“Oh, nothing.” This was one of the few times Foggy was glad of Matt’s memory failures. It looked like he’d forgotten his decision to check himself out against medical advice.

Foggy stood up. “Do you want a hand? Just be careful – they ended up using a vein in your leg for
the new IV. You don’t want it to catch on the blankets.”

Matt patted his arm where the cannula used to be. It was now wrapped in a bandage. He decided not to ask.

He shook as he sat up. “Woah.”

“Oh. Yeah they gave you something to halt the seizure. It was your second today so they figured best to nip it in the bud.” Foggy thought for a moment. “Do you remember?”

“Fog, I need to go.” Matt said, delicately levering himself to the side of the bed, teeth clenched as he braced himself for the pain. Foggy made it round the other side of the bed just in time to catch Matt as he slithered onto the floor. “Huh,” Matt grunted, straightening himself on quivering legs.

“Do you need me to get someone?”

“No,” Matt croaked. He cleared his throat and tried again. “No, thank you.”

“At least let me help you,” Foggy said. “Lean against me.”

Matt scrunched his toes and released a few times in a desperate attempt to reawaken his legs. “Thanks,” he said, taking Foggy’s arm and shuffling his way to the bathroom.

When Matt re-emerged from the bathroom, Foggy cautiously asked, “how are you feeling?”

“Like someone who’s had two seizures on top of broken bones and pneumonia,” Matt replied. “And who’s been drugged.” He lay back in bed, awkwardly threading his foot with the IV under the sheets. “What were you asking me about remembering?”

“Julia called.”

“I can’t – not today.”

“I know.”

“So was that it?” Matt said shortly. His head ached and he wanted everything to just go away.

Foggy swallowed. Matt deserved to know. “You wanted to leave. You got quite upset. I’m not sure if you remember…”

“I don’t think I need to. I always want to leave.”

“Yeah, I guess,” Foggy said, relieved Matt didn’t want the details of his temporary rebellion.

Matt allowed his head to sag against the pillow. “They gave me a lot,” he said, a slight slur evident in his voice.

“Yeah, I know. I’m sorry, bud.”

Matt closed his eyes. “Can I – are my earphones around?”

“Yeah, here.”

Matt made a gesture that clearly meant ‘give them here’. As he placed them over his ears, he said, “have you been here all day?”
“Yes. Since, uh, I think 8am.”
Matt closed his eyes. “I’m sorry. You should go home.”
“No it’s fine,” Foggy argued.
“I’m going to sleep anyway.”
“I know,” Foggy said with a shrug.
“I was okay on my own during the week.”
“I know. But I’m here anyway.”
Matt licked his cracked lips and pulled the blankets up. “I’m sleep,” he mumbled, clearly half way there already. “Thanks, Fog. R’sta…”
Foggy smiled at Matt’s unintelligible last words. “You’re welcome.”

Matt jumped as someone touched his hand. The combination of sedative and earphones meant that he had finally managed to isolate himself in a little bubble. The problem was, when the bubble burst it was all the worse.

“Sorry, Matt,” said Elsa. “We need to take you to radiology. See if your chest’s any better.”
Matt struggled upright and they helped him into a wheelchair. “Where’s Foggy?”
“Ah, he went out for a bit. He mentioned you have a dog called Daisy.”
“She likes exercise,” Matt said, as much for his benefit as for Elsa’s.
“My sister’s name is Daisy.”
Matt gave an approving hum. “I like the way you say her name.”
She chuckled, halting when the orderly entered Matt’s room. “Marty’s going to take you down.”
Matt hated x-rays. He could feel the shimmer of the machines as he was pushed into the room. He gritted his teeth as they got him to stand up with his arms out to take the scan. Didn’t they know it was painful enough already?

When he was returned to the ward, Matt just lay there expressionless as the doctors debated what to do about the situation. The second seizure had caused one of his ribs to shift slightly, which should have been more of a blow, but Matt was just over it. He tried to block out the doctors’ words, meditating on the rib that he could sense was out of place.

“Matt, are you awake?” Dr Millet asked.
Matt opened his eyes with a grunt of annoyance. Open, closed… it only made a difference to them.
“Matt, out of those options, what do you want to do?”
“I don’t care,” Matt said, his voice dull. He hadn’t been listening and that suited him fine.

“Shall we start with the first option then?”

Matt regretted not listening now. “I – can you-”

“Repeat it?”

“Mmm, yes.”

“As a non-invasive option, we were thinking of starting you on a new medication.”

“Change again?”

“No, it’ll be in addition to your current one.”

“Does it make me drowsy?” Matt said, his words already a little slurred.

“It’s possible. But your seizures make you drowsy too. The new medication will only be temporary. We just need to give your lungs and ribs a chance to recover. There’s a chance your ribs could do further damage to your lungs with these frequent seizures.”

Matt closed his eyes as he considered the suggestion.

“Matt?”

“I’m thinking,” Matt snapped.

“That’s fine. I can come back.”

Matt rubbed his eyes. “No,” he said irritably. “I’ll take it. M’tired, that’s all.”

Dr Millet ordered the medication and left without further ado. Her intern stayed behind briefly and said to Matt in a tone usually reserved for children and puppies, “have you thought about seeing a therapist?”

Matt replied, “I’m going to sleep.” He grabbed his earphones and jammed them on his head, his anger evident. As soon as the intern was out of the room, Matt pulled out his phone and rang Foggy. It rang out, so Matt left a message: “Fog, I- can you bring Daisy to the hospital again please? I need – uh, yeah. Let me know either way.”

“You need fur therapy,” Foggy announced, unzipping the duffle bag slowly in an attempt to contain Daisy this time.

It didn’t work. She flew at Matt and he squawked, “oh, that’s – ow.”

“You okay?”

“Yeah, those paws.” Matt rubbed his thighs where Daisy’s paws had dug in.

“Oh God I know,” Foggy said with a laugh. “It’s as if she knows where my nerves are.”

Daisy was now lying upside down amongst the blankets, enjoying a belly rub. “Maybe we could get her some padded socks,” Matt suggested.
“Don’t be mad, but I already got her a winter coat.”

“I didn’t think of that,” Matt said. “How do we walk her when it snows?”

“I guess we all get cold and wet.”

“I guess,” Matt agreed. “Do they make raincoats for dogs?”

“Yeah, I’ve seen dogs even wearing rain hats.”

“No, I don’t think she’d like that,” Matt said seriously. “She has sensitive ears.” Foggy snorted and Matt said, “what? She does.”

Foggy turned on a movie so that Matt could rest. With Daisy curled up in his lap, Matt fell asleep within minutes. Foggy rubbed his arm. “No, you can’t fall asleep, Matt. You’re the only one who can tell when people are coming.”

“No – no one’s coming,” Matt mumbled.

“Yeah but they might. C’mon, Matt. I won’t be able to sneak her in again if we get caught.”

“Alright, alright - oh, someone’s coming now.”

Foggy scooped up Daisy and hurried into the bathroom just as Paola came in to check on Matt and give him his new medication.

Matt heard the rattle of pills in the tiny cup and touched each one. “What are they?”

Paola followed his finger. “That’s your regular anticonvulsant, and that’s the one they added last week, that’s Tylenol, that’s for your stomach ache, and that last one is your new medication.”

“A lot,” Matt grumbled.

“And I’m about to give you your antibiotics. It is a lot, but it’s only temporary.”

Matt could hear a small whine from the bathroom and hoped that it was only audible to his ears. He talked fast while she unravelled the antibiotics tubing. “Have you been a nurse long?”

“Mmm about fifteen years.”

“And do you enjoy it?”

“Yes, mostly. I mean, it’s hard work, but it’s rewarding.”

“Helping people,” Matt said.

“Exactly. I hear you’re a lawyer.”

“News travels,” Matt grumbled, unimpressed with the continual gossiping.

“There’s a note on your file.”

“Oh.”

“When you had the initial brain injury and the neuro assessment, they recorded your profession.”

“If it helps, I’m not one of the sharks – at least, I try not to be.” He flashed her one of the smiles
Foggy always described as ‘distracting’.

“I don’t judge,” she said.

“You can if you want.”

Paola huffed a “no.” She hovered for a moment. “I need to connect the IV now, so if you could just hold your foot still.” Matt pulled a face as she tugged at his sock with her cold hands.

There was another muffled whine from the bathroom and Foggy turned on the taps to drown out the sound.

“Is there someone in there?”

“Yeah, Foggy. Uh, he came back. Don’t worry about him.”

“I’ll just finish up and leave you to it then,” she said, smiling. “And don’t forget you have four more laps of the ward to complete today.”

“Have I done three already?” Matt said, surprised.

“First thing this morning,” she replied. “We need to provide you with a chart of some kind. We have a white board, but that’s not very helpful for you.”

“Is it magnetic?”

“I expect so.”

“If you find some small magnets and some tape, it’s easy to create a readable chart.”

“I never thought of that,” she said. “How clever. I’ll see what I can find.”

As soon as she left, Matt slid out of bed and slowly padded over to the door, pushing it shut. “It’s safe,” he whispered.

“Oh thank God,” Foggy said. “Daisy was going nuts at the sound of your voice.”

Once Matt was settled back in bed, Foggy said, “what’s wrong with your stomach?”

“Huh?”

“She said were pills for your stomach ache.”

“Oh, yeah. They think it’s the antibiotics. It’s no big deal.”

Foggy raised his eyebrows. “I think it is. Is that why you’ve been turning mom’s offers to cook?”

“Let’s just play the movie, Foggy,” Matt said, keen to change the topic.

“Shit,” Matt breathed when he woke up the next day. He felt like gravity had increased ten fold.

“Morning,” Elsa called on answering the call button.
“I-I think there’s something wrong,” Matt said.

“What’s wrong?”

“I – can you help me to the bathroom?”

“Sure,” she said warily. “But tell me first what’s wrong.”

“I – I feel heavy, and my head hurts – more than usual. And… I feel like I - I’m…. under water.” He might as well have been. It was like all his senses had reduced to the level of a normal person.

“The doctor will be doing the rounds shortly, but I can give you some Tylenol for the headache. Do you think you can make it to the bathroom if I help you?”

Matt put his arm out for assistance. He didn’t want to commit to a ‘yes’. He wasn’t sure if he could make it that far even with help. He clung onto her arm as they shuffled slowly to the bathroom.

“Golly. You are feeling crook, aren’t you,” Elsa said, well aware of Matt’s usual efforts. “Will you be okay on your own for a minute? I’ll grab you that Tylenol.”

Matt grunted a yes. He sat on the toilet, too tired to stand, and his eyes soon started to droop.

He jolted awake at the sound of knocking. Elsa called, “Matt, do you need help?”

Matt swallowed. He did, but he wouldn’t.

“I-I’m okay. I’ll be out in a minute.” He pulled himself upright and felt his way to the sink. “Oh,” he groaned as the world started to spin.

“Matt? Are you okay?”

After a silence, Elsa said, “Matt, I’m coming in.”

She found him leaning against the wall next to the sink, white as a sheet and clinging to the safety bar. “Here, sit down,” Elsa said, pulling over the shower chair. “Do you feel dizzy or lightheaded?”

Matt was just concentrating on staying conscious. He could feel pins and needles in his cheeks and mouth and the ground was tilting sideways.

“Do you want a drink of water?”

Matt shook his head. His teeth were audibly chattering and his breaths were coming in pained gasps. “Need… lie down.”

“I’ll get you a wheelchair,” she said. Matt tried to call her back, terrified of the loss of contact, but the words couldn’t come.

She helped him back into bed and he lay there slack jawed as she took his vitals. “No wonder you’re feeling crook,” she said, reading the monitor. “I’ve paged the doctor for you, Matt. I just need to switch you to a mask. Can you lift your head?” Matt didn’t make any attempt to move, so she lifted it for him, pulling the elastic strap behind his head.

There was a flurry of activity as a series of doctors and specialists streamed in and out. Matt didn’t move, afraid that the world was going to spin out from beneath him if he even so much as shifted a finger. The doctors wouldn’t accept his lack of responsiveness though, going so far as to shake his already sore shoulder when he couldn’t answer their questions. He gave a pained moan, which
triggered another round of debate. Such was Matt’s state that he didn’t absorb much of the discussion until-

“His proxy – what’s his name?”

“Foggy Nelson,” someone responded.

“That’s right. Can you get him to come in please.”
Foggy arrived at the hospital in a panic. People stared as he dashed along the corridor towards Matt’s new ward, red and sweaty from running up the stairs when the elevator took too long. He gasped out Matt’s name at the nurses’ station, and half ran towards Matt’s room. Before he could talk to Matt, however, one of the doctors accosted him at the doorway and started peppering him with questions. Throughout the conversation, Foggy’s attention kept drifting and he couldn’t help glancing sideways at his friend’s motionless body every ten seconds.

Matt knew Foggy was standing nearby, but he might as well have been at the end of the hallway such was his current state of hearing. Hoping that he was within Foggy’s field of vision, Matt tried to get his friend’s attention, but words wouldn’t come and his limbs remained stubbornly glued to the bed. “Can I give it a go anyway?” Matt heard Foggy say to the doctor, approaching Matt’s bed before the doctor could even respond.

“Matty,” Foggy said, grabbing Matt’s hand, and rubbing his palm with his thumb. “Matt, can you say something for me?” Matt moved his fingers in Foggy’s hand – a slight and almost imperceptible movement, but one that Foggy picked up on right away.

“Yeah, that’s good, bud. Can you talk to me?”

Matt tried to form a word, but it was as if his mouth had gone on strike. He could feel his breath, crackly and short through his open mouth, but it sounded unnervingly muffled and far away. The supplemental oxygen that usually sounded like a hurricane up his nose was now barely noticeable. The usual burn of the sheets had gone, as had the scrape of the needle in his hand. While the pain in his ribs had diminished, his head ached more than ever, but it too seemed far away - as if the pain wasn’t really his.

“Can you just open your eyes for me then, Matty?”

Matt couldn’t work out what was going on. He thought his eyes were open. Weren’t they?

“That’s okay. Maybe later,” Foggy said, his voice wavering. He took a deep breath and said, “Matty, I don’t know what’s going on or if you can understand me. Because you’re not talking and your responses are inconsistent, they’ve deemed you incompetent to make decisions. That means I need to make a couple of decisions on your behalf. Can you help me make them?”

Matt tried to give Foggy’s hand a squeeze. Once again, it ended up as only a minute movement in his fingers, but it was something at least.

“Good.” Foggy wiped a tear from his cheek. He tried to steady his voice as he said, “they’ve speculated this might be a weird reaction to the new medication, so they want to take you off it. But they also have a theory that you might have had a different kind of seizure, so they want to do some diagnostics. The procedures won’t hurt. In the meantime, they want to give you another medication. I think you should try it, but I understand if you don’t want to,” Foggy let out a shuddering breath. “This must be scary for you.”

Matt lost concentration at some point in Foggy’s speech, but couldn’t figure out how to say so.

“Can you give me one squeeze for yes, you want the different medication, and two for no?”
It took a while for Matt to figure out what his friend was asking. He could hear the sounds, but he struggled to make sense of them as words. Foggy went to pull away just as Matt gave him two squeezes.


It took Matt another minute to digest the second question. He squeezed twice.

Foggy sighed. He was worried this would happen. Foggy struggled with the ethics of knowing – or at least strongly suspecting – Matt was aware of his decisions, but wanting to override them nonetheless with decisions he thought were more sensible. “I think you should, Matt. Please? They don’t know what’s wrong with you. We need to figure it out. They said the tests don’t hurt. I know you’re probably sick to death of all the tests and stuff already, but” – Foggy sniffed and swallowed a sob – “I-I don’t know if I could live with myself if-”

Matt squeezed once, not wanting to hear any more.

“Good, thank you, Matty. I’ll be back in a second.”

With Foggy’s hand suddenly gone, Matt slowly scrunched his fingers into the bottom sheet, trying to cling onto the spinning bed. He was afraid he was about to be flung off. It was combined with the paradoxical feeling that he was sinking into the mattress, being swallowed up as his limbs got heavier and his body weaker.

When he returned five minutes later, Foggy spotted the tiny movements of Matt trying to clutch at the sheets. He intervened, unfurling Matt’s fingers. “Come on, give me that hand. You can hold onto me instead.”

Matt tried to say Foggy’s name, but once again, nothing came out.

As Matt drifted in and out of consciousness, Foggy was his anchor. Matt couldn’t hear Foggy’s heartbeat, or feel the familiar whorls of his fingerprints, but he knew it was his best friend nonetheless. For that he was grateful.

After four hours of holding Matt’s hand, Foggy was busting to go to the toilet. Even though he was almost entirely unresponsive, there was something about Matt’s behaviour that suggested he was probably still semi-conscious and needed him there more than ever. For the fifth time in a week, Foggy called his mother. “Can you come to the hospital please,” Foggy whispered into his phone. “It’s Matt. I don’t know what’s happened, but he needs company and I need to pee… no, that wasn’t a joke… I wouldn’t – I would never … I don’t know…. No, he’s not eating, you don’t need to… mom, don’t. He might be conscious… no, I said might… argh! Don’t freak out, just listen… yeah… look if he is conscious, he needs someone around… of course he recognises your voice, you know that… no, can we just talk about it when you get here? Please… yeah… thanks, see you soon.”

Foggy had barely hung up the phone when Claire poked her head in. She took in Matt’s still body and the new array of machines around him. “Foggy, what the hell happened?”

“Oh thank god. Can you hold his hand for two minutes?”
“Yeah, I – why?”

“Bathroom,” Foggy said as he danced away, thighs clenched.

When Foggy returned, Claire was leaning over Matt, whispering. She stood up as he came close.
“Do they know what’s happened?”

“Nope.”

“How are they treating him?”

“They’re doing tests or something,” Foggy said, waving a hand. “They did some scans. The guy that saw Matt during the initial head injury – Dr Bevan or something - did an assessment.”

“And?”

Foggy shook his head. “I don’t know. They get some responses from him. I wonder if it just got too much and it’s his brain’s way of coping with the stress. Yesterday he was describing all the sensations that are amplified in this place. It got me thinking you know.”

“I know he’s unique and all, but I don’t think stress would cause this,” she said, looking at Matt’s limp body. “This is a guy who will puncture a lung then get back up and fight.”

“And that’s exactly how we ended up here,” Foggy said.

Claire shook her head. “I’m as frustrated as you, but now’s not the time.” She leaned into Matt again and whispered, “come on, Matt. You’ve got to get up, you hear?”

“Will that help?” Foggy asked genuinely.

Claire turned and stared. She was about to say something sarcastic along the lines of “what do you think?”, but Foggy looked absolutely ruined with worry. “I don’t know, I’m sorry.” She gestured towards her hand that was clasped in Matt’s. “Do you want him back?”

Foggy looked relieved. “Yes.”

Anna turned up not long after Claire had left. She rushed towards them and gave Foggy a massive hug before standing back and gesturing towards the door. “Well, what are you waiting for?”

Foggy thought it easier to play along than mention Claire’s visit (which would inevitably involve having to explain who she was, followed by a dozen typical mom questions). He whipped off to the bathroom again, leaving his mother to keep Matt company. When Foggy returned, he found Anna stroking Matt’s head and chatting away. “Mom, what are you doing?”

“I think you’re right, gorgeous. He’s listening.”

Foggy leaned over Matt’s head, “Yeah, apparently something’s going on up there. I don’t know if he understands what’s going on.” He stood up, arms crossed. “He seemed to respond to my questions about treatment earlier, but there’s been nothing since. I wonder if I just imagined it,” Foggy babbled. “I wonder if I should call his priest. Their talks always seem to soothe him.”

“If you think it’d help,” Anna replied.

They stared at Matt in silence until Foggy said, “you smell like deli meats.”
“Oh, I forgot.” She tried to reach for her bag, but she didn’t want to let go of Matt’s hand. “In my handbag, I have some food for you.”


“How does he eat?” Anna said, distracted. “He needs to eat.”

“Uh, I think they have ways. When he was on a ventilator they gave him stuff through a drip. It’s okay short term apparently.”

“What if-“

“Don’t go there, mom. Please.”

Anna went back to stroking Matt’s fringe. “Such a lovely gentle boy. I can’t believe there are people out there who want to do him harm. I hope they catch the little shits.”

“Mom!”

“Well, they are. Assaulting an innocent man like that. Knowing he’s blind. Honestly! And what are the police doing about it? Nothing. I know he was controversial, but Daredevil would never let something like this happen.”

Foggy wondered what Anna would say if she ever found out Matt was the famous vigilante of Hell’s Kitchen...

It was the following evening before Matt made any meaningful response, croaking out an approximation of Foggy’s name.

“Matty, you there?”

Matt repeated, “Foh-“

“Oh thank God,” Foggy said. “Hang on, I should tell someone.” Foggy got up to leave and Matt let out a horrible noise of protest. “Woah. Yeah, okay. I’ll stay. Just let me do this…” Foggy leaned over and pressed the call button. He hoped he’d never experience that tortured sound again.

Matt regretted speaking almost straight away. People demanded answers to questions. They wanted him to squeeze hands and point toes, and do all sorts of other things he just couldn’t gather the strength to perform. From there on, they returned more frequently to demand things of him, even though Matt ignored almost all of it. Worst of all, they’d taken Foggy’s hand away and Matt couldn’t work out how to get it back. Matt repeated Foggy’s name again and again until he’d exhausted his reserves, but “Foggy” wasn’t the answer to any of the questions.

Eventually, Foggy’s hand returned and Matt clung on as hard as he could, determined not to let him go again.

“It’s okay, Matt. You don’t need to dig your nails into my skin,” Foggy said. “I won’t leave. Karen’s looking after Daisy. She’s in good hands. I’m not going anywhere.” Foggy chatted on for what seemed like hours, a far away buzz that calmed Matt and somewhat lessened the dizzying spin of the bed.
For Matt, the passing of time was tracked through glimpses of conversation, the poking and prodding of doctors, and other such disturbances. His sense of touch and hearing was reduced to the point where the hospital seemed absurdly quiet, and the sheets didn’t grate against his skin. He merely existed in space, unmoving. It’d almost be peaceful if it weren’t for the world spinning around him.

Matt eventually awoke to a cacophony of sounds. His hearing was back. The bed had stopped moving. He felt weak, but his limbs seemed practically buoyant in comparison to before. The hospital gown he was wearing scratched painfully against his skin and an array of metal strands attached to his scalp lit up as he moved his head.

He could hear the gentle snores of Foggy beside him. Matt licked his lips and lifted his head, immediately flopping back down and swallowing the nausea away. He gripped Foggy’s slack hand, and his friend struggled awake. “Matty, what is it?”

“Fog.” Matt licked his lips again. “I…” Matt struggled to figure out what to say.

Foggy prompted, “do you need something?” He looked around the room. “Water? I can get you water.”

Matt suddenly realised how dry his mouth was. “Mmm…” He put out his hand and it bumped against the thick tube under his nose, jerking it out of place. Matt closed his eyes in impatience, but Foggy didn’t seem to notice. He just bumped the tube back and held the cup to Matt’s mouth.

“Shit, hang on. I need a towel.” Matt felt the scratch of a towel on his neck, blocking the stream of water running down to his chest. “Maybe I’ll get you a straw.” He hit the call button, but the straw was the least of the doctors’ concerns. Instead, Matt was subjected another string of questions, demands and prodding. Before Matt knew it, he was being helped to the bathroom by two nurses side-by-side.

Dr Millet arrived not long after. “Matt, you gave us quite a scare,” she started. No one knew exactly what had struck Matt. There were theories about the new medication, an allergic reaction to something, the epilepsy, some kind of stroke, the chest infection, but there was no definitive answer. By the afternoon, Matt seemed back to full cognition, even though he was left exhausted. After an assessment by the neuropsychologist Dr Bevan, they told him they were moving him back to the regular ward.

“Foggy, I don’t understand. Where was I?” Matt said when he was parked back in his old ward.

“You were in the High Dependency Unit.” Matt pulled a face, and Foggy added, “you weren’t speaking or moving, Matt. They had no idea what had happened.”

“I was tired.”

“You were more than tired.”

“No, I mean. I was so tired I couldn’t move. And my senses were almost gone. I have no idea what happened either.”

“Well, don’t do it again. It scared me half to death.”

Matt huffed. “I’ll try my best not to.”

“The good news is though that you’ve not had a seizure in a couple of days.”
“Days? How long – how long was I up there?”

“Three days - well, two and a half I guess. Two nights.”

Matt closed his eyes as he tried to digest this information.

Foggy pursed his lips. “Anyway, you’re back now. And I have some bad news: it means you don’t get out of doing your seven laps of the ward anymore.”

“Now?”

“Yeah, if you want. I’ll walk with you.”

Matt half-leaned on Foggy as they looped around the ward. Matt managed three before he declared he only had to do half because he’d returned to the ward in the afternoon. If Matt was going to make rational arguments like that, Foggy wasn’t going to reject them. “I’m sure they’re not going to pull out the whip,” Foggy said. “I’m just glad you’re back, buddy.”

Despite the temporary set-back, Matt’s pneumonia seemed to dramatically improve over the next few days. He had a seizure just after returning to the regular ward, but then he had a couple of seizure-free days, indicating that his run of daily seizures was probably at an end.

Matt’s mental health, however, was at an all-time low. In the days after Matt’s mystery illness, Foggy would turn up after work to find Matt lying there, awake but unmoving, his beanie over his eyes, pashmina wrapped tightly around his shoulders and neck, and headphones over his ears.

Foggy tried to coax him into activity. “What about origami? Karen got you some really nice paper.”

“My hands feel puffy.”

“Do you want some of mom’s lasagne? I can warm up a piece now.”

“Not hungry.”

“Dr Bevan left a tactile game of Snakes and Ladders.”

“It’s for kids,” Matt grumbled. “And it smells gross.”

“We played it at college.”

“Yeah, with vodka shots,” Matt shot back.

“That was a crazy night,” Foggy said wistfully. “Hmm… what about I read something. Claire found us some more Penguin Classics.”

Matt rolled onto his back. “Which ones?”

Foggy flicked through them. “Emma – I think you vetoed that in the past. Uh, 1984.”

“Too depressing.”
Matt was fidgety. He was counting down the hours until Foggy finished work, but after Foggy called to say he had a late meeting with an important client, Matt nearly cried. He curled up in bed for an hour before his back started to ache again from inaction. “Ergh,” he grunted, sitting up. He pulled the oxygen tube from his face and slumped out of bed, feeling for his cane. He’d been using his IV pole as a surrogate cane for his daily laps around the ward, but he’d found that carrying his white cane on the more intrepid trips to the chapel on the ground floor was a necessary precaution. The overenthusiastic orderlies tended to push beds and wheelchairs at a cracking pace, expecting pedestrians to get out of the way quick smart. With the cane visible, at least they slowed down.

Once he’d hunted down his cane (which someone had unhelpfully moved to the shelf that housed his many bunches of flowers), Matt pushed his beanie up and out of his eyes, grabbed his disgusting second-hand glasses, and slowly wandered down to the chapel. He had the chapel to himself, which was exactly the way he liked it. He sat slumped in the front row for nearly an hour, enjoying the relative quiet. The chapel had extra soundproofing in the walls, which made it an ideal haven. Matt was disappointed in himself for continually checking the time instead of concentrating on prayer, but all he really cared about right now was passing time in peace until Foggy visited.

Matt’s thoughts were interrupted by the squeal of the door, and hesitant footsteps down the aisle. He hunched a little lower, not wanting to engage with anyone. The change in posture hampered his breathing, however, and he coughed weakly into his sleeve, the sound seemingly amplified in the otherwise quiet space. The person sat right next to him and he shifted uncomfortably before recognising the familiar scent of his friend. “K-karen?”

“Hey,” she said softly. “Sorry to disrupt you. I can go if you’d like.”

“Not disrupting. I’m just sitting,” he said, uncurling a little in her presence.

“Foggy said he was staying late, so I thought you might appreciate the company.”

“Yes, thank you,” Matt said with a small smile. “It gets a bit monotonous in here.”

“I bet. At least you get to move around.”
“I’m not meant to be down here now,” Matt whispered conspiratorially.

“The nurses know,” Karen said. “I think their words were, ‘he snuck out – he’s probably in the chapel’.”

“I’ve lost my stealth factor,” Matt joked.

“You’re not exactly top of your game at the moment, Matt. I wouldn’t worry too much.”

“I know. Shall we return to my cell?”

“Drama queen,” Karen moaned.

“Hey, that’s Foggy’s nickname for me. You can’t both use it.”

When Foggy turned up after his meeting, he found Matt and Karen sitting cross-legged on Matt’s bed, midway through a game of Snakes & Ladders. “No fair,” Foggy said. “You won’t play with me, but you’ll play with Karen?”

“There’s a spare player token, Foggy,” Matt said.

Karen added, “you have to start at the top though.”

“What?”

“Them’s the rules, Fog.”

“You just made up the rules, Matt.”

Matt shrugged. “My bed, my rules.”

“Just you wait till I get stabbed by another piece of glass, Murdock. I’m going to get bed owner rule revenge on you.”

“I’ll take the risk,” Matt smirked.

After Karen and Matt ended up at the bottom of a snake far too many times, Foggy surprisingly won the game. Matt pouted and demanded a rematch with a new set of rules. After half an hour of endless snake loops, they ended up ordering Chinese food to Matt’s room with the promise of a handsome tip to the delivery person. By the time his two friends left, Matt was full and happier than he’d been in weeks.

The relative brightness carried on to the next day. Matt still felt flat, but he’d discovered the nurses on his ward were pretty good at convincing him to be more active, which seemed to in turn lift his mood. When he returned from his physiotherapy session, feeling miserable at his loss of fitness and mobility, Paola managed to cheer him up with stories about her spaniel. Hearing stories of Rufus’ misbehaviours made Matt realise he hadn’t given Daisy enough credit. Yes, she had a terrible habit of jumping up on him, but she hadn’t destroyed anything.

“I can make a spaniel,” Matt said, reaching for his book that had the origami paper tucked in the back. He held out the packet. “Select a colour,” he said.

She flicked through the packet. “They’re such lovely patterns,” she said. “I can’t decide.” She thrust the packet back at Matt. “You choose.”

Matt flicked through the sheets, feeling each pattern in turn. “This striped one with the swirls I
think. It’s got the curls of a spaniel’s long fur.”

“Perfect.”

Matt folded the dog with precision, although he was slower than usual. He placed the paper Rufus on the palm of his hand and gestured to Paola to take it.

“That’s amazing, Matt.”

“It’s just years of practice,” Matt replied humbly.

“I have to tend to other patients now… uh, do you think you could make another one for my nephew?”

“Sure. It’s not like I’m going anywhere,” he joked.

Matt threw himself back into the origami making. He’d once again forgotten how soothing the activity was, and he chastised himself for wallowing in his own misery for so long. It was a meditative activity and by the end of the day, he’d amassed yet another collection of modular sculptures.

It meant that when Dr Bevan turned up to chat late afternoon, the conversation immediately turned to the origami. “That’s why mentors are so important,” Dr Bevan said on learning about Miss Jensen, who taught Matt origami as a child. “I hear you’re mentoring someone yourself.”

“Foggy,” Matt deduced. He needed to have a chat with Foggy about sharing more than the bare minimum of information with his doctors.

“Yes, he mentioned how beneficial it was to you.”

Matt just nodded.

“Would you be interested in mentoring someone else? She’s a bit older than your current mentee-”

“No,” Matt interrupted. He swallowed. “I’m sorry. With all this” – Matt gestured at the oxygen under his nose as a tangible representation of his current health woes – “I’m struggling with my commitment to my current mentee at the moment. She needs my full attention and regular meetings. I’m not giving her either.”

“That’s okay. I thought I’d ask.” Dr Bevan thought for a moment before adding, “would you be interested in coming into one of my group sessions for a one-off? You could talk about your experiences. I have a number of patients who’ve experienced vision loss following traumatic brain injuries. They might benefit from hearing your story. From what I hear, you’re quite the orator.”

Matt looked uncomfortable. “No, I don’t think so.”

“What about just sitting in on one? You don’t have to talk.”

Matt felt like he was being talked into a corner. “I’ll think about it.”

“Great,” Dr Bevan said with a smile.
As soon as Dr Bevan left, Matt called Elizabeth and Julia, reminded of the fact that he’d missed yet another Sunday meeting thanks to his mystery illness. Julia had just finished school, and within half an hour Julia was sitting on the end of Matt’s bed, practicing her braille. Her heavy workbook was propped up on the bedside table, which they’d moved over the middle of the bed.

“There are so many letters,” she said, struggling with a word.

“Show me,” Matt said, reaching over to the book. He felt for her finger and ran his finger over the adjacent text. “Porthole,” he said. “That’s a tricky one.”

“Porthole,” Julia repeated, feeling the raised dots. She kept reading out loud, stumbling over the odd word, but mostly reading smoothly.

When she got to the end, Matt said, “that’s great. Have you been introduced to contractions yet?”

“Mmm sorta… I don’t like them.”

“It’ll be quicker,” Matt said.

“It’s tricky,” Elizabeth said. “She’s got to keep up with all her school content while also learning to use new forms of reading and writing.”

“It is tricky,” Matt agreed. “I remember struggling my first year. I was fortunate to have my father’s support – just as Julia’s lucky to have yours. Dad forced me to do my homework every night – no excuses. I had no time to feel sorry for myself.”

“I thought you grew up in an orphanage.” Elizabeth caught Matt’s expression and added, “sorry. I didn’t mean to-”

“It’s fine,” Matt said, forcing his face into what he hoped was a neutral expression. “My father died the year after my accident.”

Julia, who was unusually silent during the exchange chirped up, “my dad’s dead too.”

Matt gave an almost imperceptible wince, and cleared his throat to distract from his awkwardness. “I-I’m sure he’d be very proud of you right now, learning a whole new way of reading.” Foggy had said a similar thing to Matt a few times and it never failed to make him feel better.

“No,” Julia replied. “He didn’t really like anyone-”

“Maybe we should move onto a jollier topic,” Elizabeth interrupted. “Uh, after our previous conversation, we couldn’t find Kung Fu Panda with visual description, but we found a couple of Disney films, didn’t we, Jules?”

Matt could sense Julia slump at the thought. He said, “do you remember my friend Foggy?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, he’s a genius at describing films. He could describe it for both of us.”

There was a silence and Elizabeth prompted, “Julia? What do you say?”

“Dunno.”

“I would have thought you’d be excited,” Elizabeth said.
“S’not the same.”

“You’re right. It’s not,” Matt said. “It never will be, but don’t make the mistake of wallowing in self-pity. It only punishes you.” It was an order aimed at himself as much as Julia. “There are alternatives. As I said, Foggy narrates video for me – he tells me what the characters are doing on-screen. His performances are something else. If you ask Foggy nicely-”

“Ask me nicely what?” Foggy said, walking through the door.


“Can you do Kung Fu Panda for me?”

“Narrate the movie, that is,” Matt added.

“Oh,” Foggy said, both surprised and pleased. “Sure. Uh, I should probably practice first if I’m going to give it my best.”

“You don’t need to practice, Foggy,” Matt said. “You’re always great.”

“Ah, that’s because I practice.”

Matt’s jaw dropped. “Really? You watch things twice – just – just for me?”

“Ye-yeah. If it’s something important.”

Elizabeth looked between the two friends, trying to work out what was going on.

Matt gave a small smile, remembering Foggy’s attempts to postpone the watching of Kung Fu Panda the previous week. “You don’t need to practice, Fog. Just- just give it your best. I’m sure you’ll be great.”

“Well, I should at least do some warm up vocal exercises.”

“Now you’re making stuff up,” Matt laughed.

As the end credits to Kung Fu Panda rolled, Julia clapped her hands and said, “again!”

Foggy looked over at Elizabeth who was trying not to laugh. She mouthed “no.” Matt put his thumbs up at Foggy (even though he was doing to Julia exactly what he always hated other people doing to him. Means to an end, Matt figured.).

“You should record your narration, Foggy,” Elizabeth said. “It was incredible.”

“Ah, that was just the practice round. Wait till I watch it again.”

Matt shook his head in amusement, a crooked smile on his face.

Elizabeth stood up, “Come on, Jules, we should probably head off.”

“Foggy, can you do Frozen?” Julia asked.

“I’m sure I can. It’s about a haunted snowman, right?”

Julia giggled. “No, silly.”
Elizabeth touched Julia’s arm. “Come on, gorgeous. Next time.”

“Okay,” Julia said brightly.

“What do you say?”

“Thank you, Foggy.”

“And?”

“Thank you, Matt.”

“No problem,” they both returned in unison.

As soon as they were out the door, Foggy said, “I guess we’re going to be watching a lot more kids’ movies then.”

“Sorry,” Matt said.

“It’s cool. She’s cute.”

“It’s good for her to know that she’s not completely missing out,” Matt pointed out. “I wish you were around when I was a kid.”

“Me too, buddy. We’d probably be brothers. Mum would have adopted you in a second. Well, legally adopted. You’re now an honorary Nelson after all.”

“Anna was here,” Matt said quietly.

“When?”

“When I was tired – you know. Up there,” Matt said, gesturing in the direction of the HDU upstairs.

“Yeah, you remember that?”

Matt nodded. “I remember you. You were there the entire time. You have no idea what that meant to me.”

“Oh dude, you can’t say stuff like that. I’m going to cry.”

Matt tried to cover up his own welling tears, stuttering out, “er, there’s an antidote that’s about to be delivered to my room in the form of hospital beef.”

Foggy wiped his eyes with his shirt sleeve. Smiling, he said, “hey, do you remember the time you cried over the overcooked college cafeteria beef?”

“It wasn’t the beef, Foggy,” Matt said.

“Oh, wasn’t it? I just assumed you were sensitive to overcooked meat – I mean, you’re the most picky eater I know.”

“I wouldn’t have survived the orphanage if I were that sensitive to overcooking,” Matt said, pulling a face. “In fact, that was dad’s default cooking style too. I’m picky now because I can be.”

“Huh. So what triggered the tears?”
“Raw onion - someone was chopping onion out the back.”

Foggy shook his head. “And all these years I went out of my way to protect you from overcooked beef.”

Matt looked amused. “I’m grateful nonetheless.”

They were interrupted by the dinner delivery. As Matt predicted, it was overcooked roast beef with some greying beans and carrots that were practically disintegrating. “I-I don’t need the main,” he said. To Matt’s nose, the fruit salad smelt reasonably edible.

“Leave it then,” the orderly replied without even looking up.

Foggy was about to butt in, but Matt pre-empted him and whispered, “Foggy, it’s fine.”

Once the orderly was out of earshot, Foggy asked, “why don’t you request a vegetarian meal?”

“No point. I don’t eat them anyway. Collectively, the Nelsons keep me fed enough. I’m guessing the cheese and spinach smell coming from your bag is our dinner.”

“Sure is. I’ll get the plates.”

Matt gave a happy stretch as Foggy arranged the dinner for two atop Matt’s bedside table.

“I didn’t know you could make spanakopita,” Matt said after a first mouthful. “It’s amazing.”

“Dude, when would I have the time to cook? I’ve been in here with you pretty much every waking minute I haven’t been at work.”

Matt’s face fell and he awkwardly poked at his food.

“Sorry, that came out the wrong way. This was a gift from Mrs Papadopoulos.”

“I thought we’d stopped being paid in food.”

“We have. This wasn’t payment for services provided. It’s for you. She said it’s very healing.”

“Pity food.”

Foggy gave a frustrated groan. “It’s not pity food, Matt. It’s people wanting to help and show their support. As a kid, didn’t your neighbours ever drop around food when you and your dad had the flu or something?”

“No,” Matt grumbled. “I didn’t really have those kind of neighbours.”

“Yeah, well, take it from me. It’s not pity food. It’s food infused with love and support from our community.”

Matt put his fork down and rubbed his forehead.

“What did mom say about being negative about all the flowers you received?”

Matt sighed and took another bite just to give himself something to do.

“I wish someone would donate another strawberry rhubarb pie,” Foggy mused before shovelling another mouthful of spanakopita into his mouth. He waited for some sort of positive response from
Matt. It didn’t come.

Foggy put down his fork. “You know, wallowing like this and worrying about what other people think only punishes yourself, Matt. You’ve got to accept that people care about you and just be thankful instead of feeling like you don’t deserve it.”

Matt rubbed his chin, the stubble bristling uncomfortably under his fingers. He’d just told Julia a similar thing, and yet he’d fallen into the trap himself. He closed his eyes momentarily and said, “you’re right. I’m sorry, Foggy.”

Foggy coughed. “I’m – what?” He caught Matt’s glare and stopped.

They finished their dinner in silence. After Foggy cleared up the plates, he said, “so, do you want to play another movie or something. Or I could read some more Vanity Fair?”

“Mmm… no, thanks. I’m feeling tired. I think I’m going to have a sleep instead. You go home. You probably need some waking time at home.”

“I didn’t mean it like-”

“I know.”

“If this is guilt-”

“It’s not.” Matt closed his eyes as a signal that he didn’t want to argue any more.

“Okay, Daisy probably wants a walk anyway.”

“Mmm hmm… thanks, Fog.”

“That’s cool. I guess – I guess I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“Yeah,” Matt said, his voice now thick with sleepiness.

Not really sure what to think, Foggy crept out of the room and scuttled home. Daisy greeted him at the door with a series of crazy spins. There was a box of shredded tissues on the floor, and Foggy groaned at the tiny dog’s rebellion. It wasn’t as if she was being neglected - Daisy was accompanying Foggy to work every day, and Karen usually walked the dog back to Foggy and Matt’s apartment after work and fed her, so that Foggy could go straight to the hospital. Since being adopted by Matt and Foggy, however, Daisy had come to expect almost constant company, and she was making her displeasure at being left alone for a couple of hours well known. Still, Foggy was just thankful for her company - last time Matt had been in hospital, the apartment had seemed almost hostile in its emptiness. The box of tissues was a small price to pay.

Foggy took in the smell of poached chicken. On the stove was a pot of cooling chicken thighs, and a note from Karen on the kitchen bench: ‘Daisy was out of dinner. I’m not sure exactly what Matt cooks for her, so I just went for the easy chicken thigh option. She seems to like it.’

Foggy showed Daisy the note. “Look how much you’re cared for.” He glanced over at the white flakes littering the floor, and back down at the happy dog, who was wagging her tail with love and affection. “Argh. I can’t be mad with you,” Foggy said. “Come here.” He picked her up and she looked into his eyes with adoration. “Damn. You’re too cute for your own good.” With Daisy under one arm, Foggy grabbed a beer out of the fridge and pushed the door closed with his foot. He retired to the couch with a heavy sigh, ignoring the mess of tissues.
Foggy woke to the sound of trashy late night infomercials. Daisy was curled up in his lap, warm and comforting. “No wonder Matt likes you so much,” Foggy said sleepily, transferring the limp Daisy to his bed. Tired from the drama of the past two weeks, Foggy got into bed half clothed, falling asleep within minutes.

Chapter End Notes

Porthole is notoriously tricky to read in braille. Here it is:

PORTHOLE

I was bowled over by all the comments on the previous chapter. It was a pretty heavy chapter, so I wasn’t sure what to expect. Thank you all for your enthusiasm and encouragement.
“Matt,” Foggy whispered. “Matty, are you awake?”

Foggy leaned against the end of bed and waited for a response, but Matt just lay there, his mouth slightly open.

“I guess not.” Foggy slumped into the creaking vinyl chair, regretting his decision to leave the office early. Almost immediately, he stood up again and leaned over Matt’s head. Matt looked pale and his breathing seemed more laboured than yesterday. Come to think of it, he’d also been taken off supplemental oxygen the day before, but the nasal cannula was back. Foggy rubbed his face hard and then stood there, one hand on his hip, the other over his mouth. It was too much. Every time he thought Matt was getting better, he seemed to slip backwards.

Elsa smiled at Foggy when she came to check on Matt. “He’s just recovering from a seizure,” she explained. “Short one. Nothing much to report, but we did have to reintroduce the oxygen. He was struggling.” She noticed Foggy’s worried expression and said, “he’ll be right in a bit.”

“I- I thought maybe he was getting worse again.”

“Not at all. He’s probably going home tomorrow. He seized just after receiving the news.”

“The seizure – it’s not going to delay his release, is it?”

“Not in itself. We’ll see how he is when he wakes, but the doctors are satisfied that his pneumonia has improved enough to leave hospital. He’ll be much happier continuing his recovery at home.”

“That’s for sure. Uh, what happens if he had a seizure and can’t breathe at home though? We don’t have any of this stuff.”

“If you have any doubt, call an ambulance,” Elsa replied. Foggy stared, and she hurriedly added, “his oxygen levels always dip during a seizure. We give him oxygen because it’s on hand in hospital, but most of the time, the dip is only short and he recovers pretty quickly. It’s not necessarily harmful.”

“Not necessarily?” Foggy repeated.

“It’s something that you might want to talk about with Matt’s doctors if you’re worried.” She gave him an encouraging smile and added, “but from what Matt tells me, you have everything under control.”

“Oh.” Foggy looked at Matt and then back at Elsa. Matt wasn’t really the type to share details of his personal life. It was nice to know that one of them had confidence in Foggy’s caring skills at least. He gently touched the back of Matt’s hand and then grasped it. Over the five months since his initial head injury, Matt’s hands had become softer. The callouses and rough edges from all his fighting and injuries had lessened, leaving only light, textured scars in their wake.

Of course, the scars drew curiosity from pretty much everyone who saw them, Elsa included. “Did he get into a lot of fights as a young ‘un?”
“Yeah, something like that,” Foggy said without looking up. “His dad was a boxer.”

“Like father like son, eh?”

“Yeah, I guess,” Foggy said with a small chuckle. “At least Matt didn’t try to make a living from it.”

“It’s a bit hard when you’re blind I imagine.”

“He’s a great lawyer. He puts up a good fight in court… verbally, that is.”

“I’d like to see that.”

“Mmm… well, he’s had a bit of a break from court lately with this whole incident. You could always ask him. He’ll probably go all red-faced and stuttery though.”

“Oh, I don’t want to embarrass him.” Elsa double checked the monitors that had been temporarily reattached to Matt. She seemed happy with his condition, so she gave Foggy a small nod and left him to it.

“We’ve got to get you back in court, Matty,” Foggy said to his unconscious friend. “I’ll give you two weeks.”

As proposed, the following day (and two weeks after Matt visited the ER with the intention of briefly picking up some antibiotics), the doctors finally declared Matt well enough to return home.

When Foggy arrived at the hospital to help Matt with the discharge papers and accumulated personal items, he was surprised to find Matt waiting patiently in a wheelchair. “I thought you were allergic to these things,” Foggy said sarcastically.

Matt shrugged. “They’re quite useful,” he said, shifting his weight back so that he was balancing on the large wheels.

“What? No!” Foggy yelped, torn between wanting to grab the wheelchair’s handles and not wanting to spook Matt.

Matt tilted sideways so that he was now on one wheel and Foggy gave another shriek. “Matt, stop it!”

Matt grinned and dropped back to the ground with a crash. “Ow,” he said, clutching his ribs, “I’d forgotten about the terrible suspension.” He added to himself, “I really should fill out that customer feedback form.”

“Show off,” Foggy grumbled. “Imagine if you’d fallen. You’d have to stay here for another two weeks.”

Matt rolled his eyes. “Optimistic pessimist.”

“Pessimistic optimist,” Foggy returned.

“I don’t even know what that means,” Matt said.
“I don’t know either. Now sit still, I’m going to load you up.” Foggy dumped Matt’s bag, pillow and a mound of other things he’d collected during his stay. “Do you want the flowers?”

Matt shook his head. “I’m not the best person to buy flowers for,” he said. “Maybe the woman next door would like them. She hasn’t had any visitors as far as I could hear.”

“Isn’t that a bit mean though? You’re essentially saying ‘I have too many flowers, so I’m going to give them to poor you instead’.”

“Here, take my stuff,” Matt said, pushing his bag aside and getting out of the chair. He unfolded his cane with a flourish and carried a couple of bunches next door.

“That was easy,” Matt said on return. “I explained I couldn’t see them and would she like them instead.”

Foggy pushed the wheelchair back and fro, impatient to leave. “Okay, Mr nice guy. Get into your chariot. Karen and Daisy are waiting downstairs.”

Karen has a car?” Matt said to Foggy as they exited the building.

“Yeah, Ben Ulrich’s.”

“How did- actually, I don’t want to know.” Matt clung onto his things with tense fingers as they crossed the bumpy entranceway. Sure enough, waiting at the curb was Karen in a bashed-up sedan. Matt could hear Daisy scrabbling at the window, desperate to say hi.

She leapt out of the car as soon as she spotted them. “Hey Matt, how are you feeling?”

“Fine thanks,” he replied, a little awkward.

“That’s Murdock for ‘I feel like shit, but I can’t admit it’,” Foggy clarified.

“Yeah, I know that, Foggy. It’s not like I met him yesterday,” Karen returned.

Matt struggled out from beneath his bags and pillows. “Are you two finished?”

“Yeah, uh, hang on, I’ll stick your bag in the trunk,” Foggy said, grabbing Matt’s things. Karen helped Matt into the back seat, trying desperately to hold back an overexcited Daisy.

Karen yelled at Foggy as she ran around to the drivers’ seat. “Just stuff it in. It doesn’t need to be perfect. Then we’ll be on our way!”

“You make it sound like we’re going on a vacation,” Matt said.

Foggy called back, “you’re spot on, Matt. We are going on a vacation.”

He slammed the trunk closed and Matt winced. As Foggy slid into the passenger seat, Karen gave him a ticking off about the noise (“…with his sensitive hearing and all…”).

“This is just like family vacation, huh,” Foggy chuckled. “Mom and pop in the front arguing, the kids in the back… oh come on, don’t give me that face, Murdock.”
“What face?” Karen asked, angling the rear vision mirror to get a better look.

“You know, that look where he scrunches his face and looks both adorable and scary at the same time?”

“Oh, yeah, he is too,” Karen giggled.

Matt fumbled with the door. He could find the handle, but not the lock.

“Hey, what are you doing?” Foggy leaned back and tried to catch his friend’s hand.

“I’m getting out,” Matt snapped. “I don’t know what the hell you two are up to but I want to go home. I’ll get a cab.”

“No, no, no, you can’t do that. We have a villa by the ocean for a week. We’re going to the seaside, Matty… oh shit there’s the look again. Quick, Karen, drive before he really does get out. And he will, moving car or not. He’s an impulsive idiot like that.”

Matt stopped scrabbling at the door. “You kidnap me and then insult me. I don’t have to put – hang on, what do you mean the seaside?”

“Recuperation. Doctor’s orders.”

“Yeah, rest at home. She never said to go on vacation.”

“We both know that you’re not going to completely rest if you go home, so at least this way you have two full-time enforcers.”

“No, this is not happening. Take me home,” Matt growled.

“Turn left here,” Foggy said to Karen before turning back to Matt. “We’re leaving New York City now. Face it, you’re stuck with us.”

“We thought you’d enjoy it, Matt,” Karen said kindly.

“So why didn’t you ask me, or at least warn me beforehand?”

“You’ll enjoy it eventually,” she corrected. “Uh, there are snacks behind the driver’s seat if you want them and a bottle of water and a couple of special pillows we got you on the other seat.”

“Karen, how long is the drive?” Matt’s voice was soft, but there was an unmistakable dangerous edge.

“Have a nap,” Foggy said.

“I don’t want a nap,” Matt retorted.

“Okay, then can you please pass the gummy bears.”

“Uh, sure. Where are they?” Matt scrabbled around in the back of the seat, pulling out half a dozen plastic packets and feeling the contents before tossing the oily, gelatinous bears at Foggy. “How much candy did you bring?”

“Enough,” Foggy quipped, opening the bag with a sigh of joy.

“Errgh, how can you eat something that smells like that?” Matt wound down his window and stuck
his nose out over-dramatically.

“Karen?” Foggy shook the bag at her.

“Don’t mind if I do,” she said daintily, and Matt could hear the nauseating sound of gelatine squelching against teeth. Combined with the smell of the artificial flavouring, the sensory onslaught was too much. He took a deep breath and ducked his head back inside, grabbing the pillow and curling up against the open window.

Matt mapped their journey out of the city through smell. Eventually the scent of heavy industry made way for ones more foreign. He could smell grass, trees, and animals with the occasional noxious stink of fertiliser. They passed a roadstop and Matt sniffed at the combination of gas and waffles. He caught a whiff of the sea, but they didn’t stop. Eventually, Matt gave up guessing and let himself fall asleep, Daisy already sleep snuffling on one knee.

Matt woke up to the olfactory onslaught that was a gas station. He yawned and stretched while Daisy jumped up excitedly at the window. “Where are we?”


“Where’s Karen?”

“Paying for the gas.”

Matt scrabbled at the door, and Foggy said hurriedly, “you’re not going to run away in the middle of nowhere-”

“No, I just want some air. Daisy probably needs to pee too.”

“Oh, okay. Here, I’ll get the door.” Foggy leaped out and helped Matt out of the car. After sleeping slumped against the door for who knows how long, Matt’s ribs were complaining and his head ached. He wobbled slightly as he slid out. Foggy quickly grabbed Daisy’s leash as she threatened to pull Matt over with her enthusiasm.

“Grass,” Matt said, trying to get a purchase on his surroundings.

“Over here, bud. Take my arm.”

They found Daisy a good pee spot and Foggy returned to the car, unsure about gas station protocol. “You’re such a New Yorker,” Karen laughed when she realised why Foggy was so anxious. “Where’s Matt?”

“He’s with Daisy,” Foggy said, squinting towards the grassy patch. Matt had his head down and was talking on the phone.

Karen looked from Matt to the adjoining roadhouse and then to Foggy. “Feel like a snack? It doesn’t look like Matt’s about to run away and I could do with a break.”

Foggy shrugged. “Sure. I’ll tell Matt.”

When Foggy interrupted to inform him about the food plans, Matt looked furtive and blocked the receiver. “Sorry, Fog. I’ll join you in a second.”

“Who are you talking to?”

Matt didn’t hesitate. “Elektra.”
Foggy raised his eyebrows. “Sure, bud, whatever you say. Come inside when you’re ready.”

Matt gave him a small nod and resumed his call, inwardly laughing at Foggy’s reaction. “He doesn’t believe me,” Matt said quietly into the phone. “In some ways I don’t blame him.” Short of having Foggy and Elektra in the same room together, Matt didn’t think Foggy would ever believe him. “I told you, I have no idea where they’re taking me…yeah, I’ll let you know…some gas station in the middle of nowhere…no…no, please don’t… I dunno, maybe a week…yeah, yeah…see you soon. Bye.”

Matt hung up and stood there gathering his thoughts, his phone against his chest. Elektra had finally called him after almost two weeks of unanswered calls and text messages. She was in a lather and had demanded she tell him where he was. Apparently Stick was right – Elektra had been guarding the hospital, worried that Erinyes would attack. For what reason Erinyes would attack him, Matt didn’t know. Good Elektra or bad, from what he could tell, he’d never done anything that should bear the wrath of a vengeful Erinyes.

Daisy jumped up against his calf, cross that he wasn’t paying her his full and undivided attention. “Okay, okay,” Matt said, pulling her towards the roadhouse where Karen and Foggy were seated at a sunny outdoor table.

“Sorry,” Matt said, suddenly aware they were waiting for him.

Foggy patted the bench beside him. “No problem. Sit down, buddy.”

Karen laughed when both Foggy and Matt ordered pancakes for lunch, unaware of the significance of the friends’ bonding food.

As Matt picked at his plain pancakes with syrup and bacon, Karen teased Foggy about not being about to drive.

“I’m a New Yorker. I don’t need to drive,” Foggy pointed out.

“I’ll teach you.”

Foggy shook his head. “No need. I’m never going to live anywhere where I’ll need a car.”

“Really?”

“Well, maybe. But I’ll cross that bridge when I come to it.”

“You could teach me,” Matt piped up.

Foggy and Karen laughed.

“We’ll have to wind down the windows… maybe remove the windscreen, but I could do it,” Matt said earnestly.

“No,” Karen said, still laughing.

Foggy looked at Matt’s face. “Matt, no.”

“Oh, you’re serious,” Karen said, her laughter easing.

Matt tucked into his pancakes, unhappy with his friends’ response.

“What if you had a seizure?” Foggy whispered.
Matt’s mouth twitched as he cottoned on. Foggy wasn’t worried about his blindness. Matt whispered back to Foggy, “Daisy will pick ‘em.”

Foggy chewed slowly on a piece of pancake. “I am curious,” he said, mouth half-full.

Karen looked between them. “No, you two... No.”

Matt snickered and sat back with a happy groan, his stomach full of greasy roadstop food.

As soon as they were back in the car, Matt started with the questions.

“How can we afford this?”

“Gift from one of your church peeps,” Foggy said over his shoulder. “She owns the place and rents it out occasionally. She heard about your incident and suggested you might like some time recuperating. She initially gave it to us for a month, but I said we could probably only spare a week away from work.”

“What about the office?”

“Candy’s there all week. She’s got our numbers if anything happens. And there’s this thing called email. Don’t worry, I’ve sorted it all.”

“I don’t have any clothes apart from pyjamas.”

“I’m not an idiot, Matt. I packed your clothes, books, a selection of tea ... I even brought your swimming trunks.”

“I don’t own trunks.”

Karen laughed, “It’s okay, Matt. I bought you some trunks.”

“But I packed them,” Foggy pointed out with a cheeky grin.

“Where are we going?”

“The beach.”

Matt gave a frustrated huff. “You know what I mean. What town?”

“Oracle Cove,” Foggy said. “Just relax. You’re taking all the fun out of it, Matt.”

“I deserve to know where you’re taking me.”

“You have your phone and I brought your special GPS cane. You’re not going to get lost.”

“You brought my-”

“Yup.” Foggy turned around to see Matt’s mouth hanging open. “Just don’t do anything stupid, okay?”

Matt sunk back into the seat, suddenly at ease. Reading his change in mood, Daisy took the opportunity to sneak onto Matt’s lap, doing a couple of circles before curling up in a ball.

Foggy smiled and turned back to the front. “So, who knows any car games?” he said, earning
concurrent groans from Matt and Karen.

Chapter End Notes

Occasionally I re-read certain parts of this story for consistency, but I recently re-read this entire story from start to finish. It's epic. Thank you so much to all of you for sticking with me this long!

Also, ICUMI, Marvel just announced the return of Vincent D'Onofrio for DD season 3. Given the reference to Born Again in the final scenes of The Defenders, I guess it's not all that surprising, but I'm excited! I think the comics do a really good job at mystic beasts and magic, but it hasn't translated all that well onto the screen. The more grounded baddies like Fisk seem to work better IMHO. Anyway, that's enough of that. I hope you enjoyed the chapter. More on Oracle Cove shortly (probs within the next week)

Lastly, I just finished a post-season Defenders fic which rather predictably (for me) celebrates Foggy and Matt's bromance. If you're interested, it's called Born Again.
Foggy poked Matt from the front seat. “Buddy, wake up…. Matt… Matt!”

“Argh, what?” Matt said, batting Foggy’s hand away.

“We’re here.” Matt looked confused, so Foggy added. “We’re at our humble seaside villa. You can keep sleeping here if you’d like, or there are proper beds inside.”

Matt rubbed at his crusty mouth. “No, I’m good.” He felt along the door. “How do I get out of here?”

“There’s a bit of a ding on the side. You have to open it from the outside.”

“That’s convenient,” Matt grumbled to himself.

Foggy helped Matt out of the car, and they slowly walked up the steps to the villa. It smelled a little musty having not been used for a month or so. Foggy opened a couple of windows. “Ah, that’s better. Smell that sea air, Matt. If that’s not going to cure you, nothing will.”

“It’s so loud and quiet at the same time,” Matt whispered.

“The sea?”

“I never knew it was so loud.”

“I always forget you’ve never been to the beach.”

“I just assumed that water was water, but we don’t really get waves like this on the Hudson.”

“T...
feed Daisy. I brought a week’s worth of frozen chicken. I’ll grab it now.”

“Fog-”

“You’re not busting your ribs again,” Foggy interrupted.

“Fo-”

“No! No arguments. You’re not lifting anything.”

“I was going to say could you get my phone from the back seat,” Matt said quietly.

“Oh, yeah… yeah, sure.”

As he waited for the water to boil, Matt did a quick reconnaissance of the villa. It was nice enough. There was a whiff of fresh paint, but it wasn’t too irritating. Foggy’s gummi bear breath alone would take care of that. The carpeted floors were impressively quiet under his feet compared to his creaky loft floorboards. There were vases of dusty plastic flowers on each of the bedside tables and cheap chipboard frames on the walls. A large vase of shells sat atop a table in the twin room and Matt dug his hand in, intrigued by the textured patterns.

“I was thinking we could share this room and Karen could take the double,” Foggy said as he came up from behind.

“Yeah, of course. If you don’t mind sleeping with someone with a raspy breath.”

Foggy rolled his eyes. “Do you want the window or the door?”

“Door.”

“That was easy,” Foggy said, dumping Matt’s stuff on the nearby bed. “Shall we do that walk? The tea can wait. You can even collect some shells of your own while we’re at it,” he added, looking at the shells Matt was still clutching. Matt looked sheepish and gently returned them to the vase.

Once Karen had returned, they ventured out for the evening, following the concourse that stretched along the beachfront. Matt smiled at the sound of Daisy’s claws tapping on the concrete. He’d been looking forward to this – to walking with her again. Despite his earlier opposition to the forced vacation, he found himself surprisingly relaxed.

“Apparently there’s a heap of seafood restaurants up ahead,” Foggy said.

“I can smell them,” Matt said. He lifted his chin, enjoying the sea breeze ruffling his hair. “Warm,” he said simply.

“It’s a nice change from New York,” Karen replied. “I’m dreading winter. I had to wear three pairs of stockings last year!”

“I know. I could sense the static electricity,” Matt said. He tilted his head, listening to the building up ahead. “Should we stop here?”

“I don’t think they serve food. It’s just a bar. You probably don’t want to… um…”

“There are lots of people taking selfies and narrating Instagram captions, so I’m guessing the view’s pretty good. Come on,” he said beckoning to the others.
“Phwor, it’s not cheap,” Foggy said, flicking through the menu. “Least expensive beer on the menu it is.”

Matt gave Foggy a small smile. “Get a cocktail, Foggy. My shout.”

“I’m not getting a cocktail.”

“They smell delicious,” Matt said. He pointed over his shoulder with his thumb and said, “the pina colada that woman has is made from fresh juice.”

“I haven’t had a pina colada since high school,” Karen laughed.

Matt tilted his head with a bemused expression. “You drank pina coladas in Vermont?”

“Yeah, teenage girls can drink sugary cocktails anywhere.”

When the bartender arrived a minute later, Foggy blurted out, “a pina colada please.”

“Me too,” Karen said.

“Me three,” Matt said before hesitating and saying, “is there an alcohol free version?”

“A virgin pina colada, sure.”

“I’ll have one of those.”

Foggy snickered as the bartender walked away.

“What?”

“Virgin,” he chuckled.

Karen shook her head with a bemused smile. “What are you, twelve?”

“Yeah, essentially,” Foggy replied, completely unfazed.

When the cocktails arrived, Matt sniffed longingly at his friends’ alcoholic version. Foggy wordlessly pushed his towards Matt, who gave him a grateful smile and took a tiny sip. “Pretty good,” Matt said, sliding it back.

“But you got two umbrellas and an extra cherry, Matt,” Karen pointed out.

“Which Foggy’s about to eat,” Matt said, pushing his own glass towards his friend.

Foggy plucked the gaudy cherries from the top and with his mouth half-full, he explained, “Matt doesn’t eat anything red.”


Matt laughed. “He’s joking, Karen.”

“We have a deal. He gets the olives, I get the cherries.” Foggy smacked his lips and gave a squawk. “Oh, can we get a photo?”

They spent the next ten minutes perfecting the sunset selfie, which they sent to Foggy’s parents as proof that Matt was getting better. “Do you want to send a copy to Claire?” Foggy asked Matt, who quietly shook his head. Matt couldn’t say why exactly, but it didn’t seem appropriate.
Despite Foggy and Karen’s protestations, Matt paid for the overpriced drinks and they kept wandering down the foreshore towards the restaurant strip.

“What about this one?” Karen said, stopping outside the second restaurant and browsing the menu.

Foggy said, “Matt?”

“No,” Matt replied.

Karen looked at them with a single raised eyebrow. “Um-”

“When it comes to seafood, Mr Bloodhound here is the best guide we can get,” Foggy explained.

Matt gave Karen an apologetic shrug, and she simply replied, “oh, okay. Where are we going then?”

Matt wordlessly kept walking, and eventually stopped outside a small, unremarkable-looking restaurant.

“Are you sure?” Foggy said.

“Yeah, very.”

“It’s pretty small and all the outdoor tables are full,” Foggy pointed out.

Matt shrugged. “We can wait. It’ll be worth it.”

The owner took one look at Matt, then his cane, and then small dog, and quickly smuggled them inside to the one spare table. He slipped a cushion under the table for Daisy, along with a small container of water.

“Too easy,” Foggy said as they settled in. He started reading out the menu to Matt, but was quickly interrupted.

“I’ll have what that woman is having, um, three tables behind you.”

“What’s that?”

“Some kind of fish with a lemony, buttery sauce.”

“Hang on, I’ll do a sneaky fly by.” Foggy got up and wandered past the table. The dish didn’t look particularly remarkable, but Foggy trusted Matt’s nose.

When the waiter returned to announce the specials, Foggy said, “we’ll both have the dish that the woman is having, uh, over there… red top, black hair.”

“The lemon flounder,” the waiter confirmed.

“Me too,” Karen said.

Matt angled his head up towards the waiter, and said, “do you have any wine recommendations?”

“Matt!” Foggy whispered, but Matt motioned for him to stop and proceeded to order a bottle for the table.

“I just want a small amount with my meal,” Matt explained once the waiter had left.
“So you ordered a bottle?”

“Yeah, all the more for you and Karen. I’ll pay for this. Consider it my way of saying thanks.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I’m sure, Foggy.”

Foggy leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms.

The tension lessened when the wine arrived. As Matt sipped conservatively on his half glass, Foggy and Karen hoed into the bottle with gusto. Before the fish had even arrived, it was almost all gone.

When Matt got up in search of the bathroom, he discreetly asked the waiter for another bottle for the table so that the fish would at least have the matched wine as intended. Matt had barely touched his wine, saving it for the fish, so by the time dinner was up (which they all declared absolutely delicious, including Daisy, who happily ate morsels smuggled under the table by Matt), Karen and Foggy were well and truly tanked.

Foggy belted out his greatest musical hits the entire walk back to the villa, at one point trying to scissor kick off a concrete bollard. It would have ended in blood and possibly some tears if Matt hadn’t quickly intervened. As soon as they were through the door, Karen fished out a bottle of wine from the car. Feeling slightly smug in the knowledge that he was going to be the only one without a hangover the next day, Matt flicked on the kettle and carefully selected his tea.

“You’re now the good one,” Foggy slurred at Matt.

“I’m the sober one. Are you sure I can’t interest you in some tea?”

Foggy hiccupped, gave a small giggle, and said, “is it the caterpillar fungus one?”

Karen wrinkled her nose. “What?”

“Matt won’t allow meat to be cooked at home, but he will brew caterpillars,” Foggy said to Karen. He turned to Matt and theatrically wagged his finger. “Caterpillars are people too, Matt.”

Karen snorted and spilled some of her wine. “Shit,” she said, running over to the sink. Matt threw a damp cloth at her and she shrieked, “Matt!”

“Use it to clean the wine,” he said.

“Oh, yeah,” she giggled.

“Look, it’s in the shape of Daredevil,” Foggy said, standing over the puddle.

Matt rolled his eyes and flopped down on the couch, nursing his steaming cup of jasmine tea close to his chest. He soon fell asleep, still clutching the tea-filled cup. Karen snickered as Foggy tried to extract the tea from Matt’s grasp without waking him up. Fortunately, the level of activity Matt had performed that evening was enough to tucker him out.

“He can’t sleep on the couch,” Karen said as Foggy draped a blanket over Matt and Daisy (who was curled into his side).

“I don’t want to wake him,” Foggy whispered, quickly covering his mouth to smother a hiccup. He giggled, “it’ll probably be quieter in here anyway.”
“I’m never drinking again,” Foggy declared the next morning.

“Me neither,” Karen said, her forehead resting on the dining table.

“I feel great,” Matt said, carrying three cups of coffee to the table.

“Smug bastard,” Foggy said. “We’re meant to be looking after you.”

Matt gave a bemused smile. “If it makes a difference, I’ve enjoyed it so far.”

“Even though you spent the night on the couch?”

Matt shrugged. “I’ve become quite used to sleeping upright the last few weeks. In fact, it’s probably still good for me.”

“We got you those special pillows for that reason. You don’t have to punish yourself by sleeping on the couch.”

“Thanks,” Matt said meekly. He took a sip of his coffee and said, “so what are your plans for today?” Foggy and Karen both groaned, and Matt said, “I’m interpreting that as ‘nothing.’”

A couple of hours and many coffees later, the four of them wandered down to the beach. Even though it was October, they’d driven south far enough that it was invitingly warm. The three New Yorkers weren’t really the outdoorsy type and were consequently so pale that they were almost fluorescent. Karen had bought a massive pump pack of sun cream for the occasion, and they found a large beach umbrella in the villa laundry, which they lugged down to the beach along with some chairs, towels, and pretty much all the beach paraphernalia they found around the house.

“Did you really need those plastic things?” Karen said, watching Foggy drop and then trip over a lurid yellow castle-shaped bucket.

“Sure. It’s part of the whole beach experience. Matt’s never been to the beach before, so he has an entire childhood of sandcastle building to make up for.”

“You went to the beach twice as a kid,” Matt pointed out.

“Yeah, well, I made some epic sandcastles those two times, buddy. You’ll see. The Nelsons are sandcastle naturals.”

“I’ll take your word for it,” Matt said.

Foggy tapped Matt’s hand that was tight around his elbow. “Hey, you’re making bruises there, Matt.”

“Sorry. I’m just getting used to it. I can’t read this environment. It’s all open and the sea is so loud.”
“So you keep saying,” Foggy muttered.

Matt stopped. “That wasn’t a criticism, Foggy. It’s just an observation.”

“I know, sorry” Foggy said softly. “You really can’t tell where you’re going?”

“Not really. I mean, I know we’re going towards the sea, but—” Matt tripped on the sand, essentially finishing the sentence. Daisy whipped past, and then ran a couple of mad loops around the trio, kicking up the sand. Her movement helped a bit. However, the lack of wind, combined with the heat, unfamiliar texture, and uneven surface (not to mention his still somewhat compromised senses thanks to his illness) meant that Matt was feeling quite overwhelmed.

They continued to stagger towards the shore until Foggy declared he couldn’t go any further and dumped his entire load on the sand.

Karen gave a sigh of relief and threw herself down next to the pile. “Ergh, I can feel the wine leaching out of my skin.”

“You and me both,” Foggy said, wiping the sweat from his brow. “Where’s Daisy?”

“Behind you,” Matt said.

“Cool, can you order her to dig a hole for the umbrella?”

Matt pulled a face. “Um… I could try?”

“I think he was joking, Matt,” Karen said, rifling through her bag until she found her bottle of water.

Matt gingerly knelt down on the sand and started scraping back the sand with his uninjured hand.

“You don’t want to get sand in that cast,” Foggy said, wrinkling his nose. “It’ll be like sandpaper inside.”

Matt paused and sat back on his haunches with a heavy sigh.

“Here’s the spade,” Karen said, nudging it into Matt’s hand.

Matt waved the fluorescent green plastic spade in the air. “This flimsy thing? It’ll snap even with my energy levels.” Matt clicked his fingers at Daisy. “Daisy, dig here.” He scooped up couple of handfuls of sand to demonstrate and to his surprise and joy, Daisy joined in. Before long, she’d dug a hole more than deep enough for the umbrella.

“I wonder if she’d put the umbrella up for us too,” Foggy said lazily.

Matt rolled his eyes and reached for the umbrella, but gave a tell-tale wince as he stretched out.

“Fuck, no, sorry… here, let me…” Foggy said, grabbing the umbrella from Matt.

Matt gritted his teeth. “Foggy, you have to let me do things.”

“I do. Apart from when you make pain faces.”

“I don’t make pain faces.”

“You just winced.”
“Yeah, well, everything hurts right now.”

“So, don’t do the things that hurt more. You don’t need to.”

Matt pursed his lips. “Fine. Do the umbrella.”

“We’ll do it together. Help me kick the sand in around it the pole.”

The two of them filled in the hole around the umbrella in silence, and Karen finally snorted and said, “aw, look at you two making nice.”

Matt gave a small huff of amusement and put his fist out to Foggy. “Alright, I’ll indulge you this one,” Foggy said, bumping fists, “but I want another one once the umbrella’s actually up.”

“Phew,” Foggy said, when the three of them were finally settled in their beach chairs under the shade of the umbrella. “Who’d have thought beach going was so epic.”

“Epic is a bit of an exaggeration, Fog.”

“Not when you feel like I do, Matt. That said, I almost feel like a beer now.”

“What happened to your vow of abstinence?”

“Meh,” Foggy said, waving his hand. “Hair of the dog.”

“Not me,” Karen said, getting up. “I’m going to see if the sea can wash the hangover away.” She took off her t-shirt to reveal a skimpy bikini, and Foggy instantly looked away, embarrassed. “You two coming?”

“Uh, I-I might just sit for a bit,” Foggy stuttered, “keep Matt company.”

Matt opened his mouth to tell him he was fine alone, but quickly closed it, knowing full well what Foggy’s heartbeat was doing. He gave Foggy a cheeky grin and said, “I’m going in too. Coming?”

“Uh, sure, I-I guess, y-yeah.”

Matt removed his glasses and struggled out of his singlet top and shorts, wincing when his ribs protested. He pulled at his new swimming trunks. They were a little too big for him. He’d lost even more weight over the last two weeks so that his ribs were now highly visible.

“Here, Matt,” Karen said, putting out her hand. He took Karen’s outstretched hand and they walked down to the water’s edge. Karen shrieked as her toe touched the water. “It’s freezing.”

“Ooh,” Matt said, sucking in his breath. Still holding hands, they inched forwards until they were up to their waists.

Karen suddenly ducked under and came up with a small moan. “Matt, your cast’s waterproof, right?”

Matt nodded.

“Then duck under. It’s the best way. It’s like ripping off a band aid.” Matt gave her a bemused look, and she urged, “do it!” Matt took a deliberately dramatic deep breath, ducked under, and came up with a scrunched up face. He coughed a few times due to the sudden change in temperature and
deep breath, but gave Karen a broad grin afterwards.

“It’s better though, right?”

“Yeah,” Matt agreed. He called over his shoulder, “come on, Foggy!”

Foggy walked down, his arms self-consciously crossed over his stomach. He ducked under almost immediately and crouched down, his head just visible above the water. “Matt, I can’t believe I’m only just asking you this now, but can you swim?” Foggy asked.

“Yeah, learned at summer camp one year.”

“You went to summer camp? How did I not know that either?”

“Dunno. Long story. I’m glad I did though. I ended up in the Hudson last year. Now that was cold.”

“You just ended up in the Hudson,” Foggy said, his eyebrows raised.

“Not deliberately.”

“Yeah, I figured.”

“Fisk’s men had kill orders so I threw myself out the dockside warehouse window to escape the bullets.”

Karen and Foggy stared. Matt’s mention of Fisk definitely just killed the mood. They were quickly distracted from the awkwardness by Daisy swimming out to join them.

Foggy started towards her. “You idiot dog! You’ll drown.”

“She doesn’t look like she’s drowning,” Karen pointed out.

Foggy scooped the tiny dog up and handed her to Matt. “Go to daddy.”

“You two!” Karen said with a laugh. “You’re like a married couple. Anyway, I’m going in. Do you want me to take Daisy?”

“Mmm yes, thanks,” Matt said, handing her the soggy dog who was now all claws.

Without the wind, the surf was almost flat. Matt lay back in the water and floated upon the gentle waves, angling his body so that he barely had to move to stay afloat even with the heavy cast. With the water just covering his ears, he could hear the shift of crabs underneath the sand, the occasional flash of a fish, and Foggy’s hands waving back and forward underneath the water. Eyes closed, Matt drifted peacefully for who knows how long until Foggy lightly touched him. He startled and realised that he’d drifted out of his depth, panicking slightly as he reoriented himself.

“Matt, it’s okay,” Foggy said. “Here, grab my shoulder. Shall we go in? It’s getting a bit cold.”

“You go in. I’m fine,” Matt said, trying to save face.

Foggy grimaced. “I’d rather stick with you when in the water for now. You know, just in case you seize.”

Matt gave a small nod, feeling guilty for making Foggy hang around in the water for so long.

“Right. Uh, let’s go find dry land then.”
Despite Foggy and Karen’s vow to never drink again, they ended up drinking beer on the sunny deck late that afternoon. Feeling a little left out, Matt excused himself to have a nap. He curled up with Daisy and a book, quickly falling asleep. When he awoke and wandered out a few hours later, Matt discovered that far from missing a party, Karen and Foggy were hunched over the dining table catching up on some work.

“What’r you doing?” Matt said, rubbing his eyes.

“Nothing,” Foggy said, snapping the laptop case closed.

“You’re working,” Matt said. “I just want to know what on.”

“Just doing some boring admin for a current case. You don’t need to worry about it just yet. Your job is to rest and you did some great work today, Matty.”

“Don’t talk down to me.”

“Grumble, grumble,” Karen teased.

Matt scowled and wandered over to the kettle to fix himself some tea. He leaned against the bench, arms crossed as the kettle boiled, his face stormy.

“Hey, so what do we want to do for dinner tonight?” Foggy said with a tone of forced cheeriness.

“We could always go back to the same place as last night,” Karen said. “I could have ordered anything on that menu. It looked delicious.”

Foggy looked at Matt. “What do you think, Matt?”

Matt shrugged. “Don’t care.”

Foggy exhaled theatrically, and tried a different tack. “Could you make me a cup of tea too please?”

“Oh, sure. What would you like?” Matt said, his expression of frustration clearing.

“Whatever you’re having – as long as it isn’t caterpillar fungus.”


“Yeah, that’d be lovely, thanks, Matt.”

That night’s dinner was considerably less alcoholic than the previous one. They returned to the same restaurant, but shared a single bottle between them rather than two, which was still enough to get them jolly, but not too much that they didn’t recognise the perils of continuing the drinking on their return home.

As Matt made a post-dinner tea for the three of them, Karen said, “so, Matt, tell us about this summer camp where you learned to swim. You said it was a long story.”
“It’s not very interesting,” Matt warned.

“Meh, not everything has to be interesting. We have time,” Foggy said. “An entire week, in fact. Spill. Tell us how the boxer’s son from Hell’s Kitchen ended up at something so suburban as a summer camp.”

“I won a colouring competition.”

“Was this before or after-”

“After. Apparently they liked my ‘creative use of colour’.” Matt smiled and added, “the judges didn’t know I was blind.”

“What did they say when they found out?”

“Not sure. I know the Sisters at the orphanage weren’t happy though. My school friend who posted off our entries was a bit peeved that a blind kid had beaten him too. The Sisters didn’t know I’d entered and they definitely didn’t want me to go, even though it would be free. They said it was because I was in their care and they couldn’t take the risk, but really, I think it was because it was run by an evangelical church. I had to beg and beg. In the end, Sister Margaret intervened on my behalf, and argued that it might curb my ‘unruly behaviour’.” Matt gave them a wicked grin.

“Something tells me you weren’t quite the quiet, innocent altar boy that I thought you were,” Karen said.

“Innocent!” Foggy snorted overly dramatically. “Matt, was this before or after Stick?”

“After.” Carefully choosing his words, Matt added, “I might have gone through a bit of a feral stage post-Stick.”

“Might?”

“Okay, I did go through a feral stage. Really feral. Looking back, it’s pretty understandable. I was taught all these skills and was treated almost like an adult by Stick, and then he just disappeared. I was left with a lot of pent up energy and anger. Plus I was still treated like glass by the Sisters, which was frustrating in itself.”

“Um, who’s Stick?” Karen asked.

Matt threw a balled up tissue across the room for Daisy to fetch. It was more a distraction for him than the dog. Daisy happily grabbed it and whipped back to the couch, depositing the now soggy tissue in his lap. Matt wrinkled his nose, but threw it again anyway.

“So you went to the camp,” Foggy prompted, sensing that Karen’s question wasn’t about to be answered.

“Yeah, the people running it were a bit freaked out at first. They were scared I’d hurt myself or get lost. They excluded me from virtually every activity apart from craft – and even then they were worried about me using scissors, glue… basically anything other than feathers and felt.”

“Bet that didn’t go down well.”

Matt chuckled. “You’re telling me. I was pretty pissed off.” He teased Daisy with the tissue, tossing it back and fro between his hands while Daisy darted side to side with delight. Foggy and Karen exchanged looks, but waited patiently for Matt to continue.
“Fortunately, they were pretty good listeners and I managed to talk my way into doing some more of the physical activities. From there, it was just a matter of showing them that I could do just as much as the other kids… just sometimes with different methods.”

“And the swimming?”

“Oh, yeah, the swimming. It all started when I argued that I should be allowed to kayak. They were on the verge of saying yes, when they realised I hadn’t earned my swimming badge yet.” Matt gave a wry smile. “For good reason too.”

“You couldn’t swim,” Karen finished.

Matt nodded. “So they taught me.”

“Just like that?”

“It wasn’t instant, Foggy.”

“You’re like some kind of physical activity savant. I’m pretty sure it’d be instant.”

“It was a few hours. The changes in sound was the most challenging thing.”

“A few hours,” Foggy said, shaking his head in disbelief. “It took me years of horrible chlorine-stinking bacteria-infested indoor pool visits to even get past the doggy paddle stage. A few hours!”

Karen interrupted Foggy’s rant with, “so did you get to kayak in the end?”

“Yes. Although it wasn’t quite as exciting as I’d hoped. I prefer land to be honest. There were some lovely birds in the area and we’d go on birdwatching hikes – or in my case, bird listening hikes.”

“I can’t imagine you hiking, Matt,” Karen said.

“Why?”

“I-I guess I still think of you as a suit-wearing lawyer.”

“But he’s Daredevil,” said Foggy.

“I know that, Foggy,” Karen said irritably. “I’m just saying… oh never mind.”

“I do trip over the occasional tree root, if that’s what you’re asking,” Matt said.

“No, no,” Karen said. “That’s not…”

Matt sighed. “Anyway, it was a really good experience. Stick might have taught me how to fight, but the camp taught me how to stick up for myself through non-violent means. A ‘no’ is merely the starting point for negotiations.”

“Ah, the budding lawyer,” Foggy gushed.

“The one thing I couldn’t talk my way into was the archery.”

“I bet it wasn’t through lack of trying either,” Foggy snickered.

“The thing is, of all the activities at camp, archery was one of the few things that I’d previously
mastered.”


“Stick,” Matt replied, balling up another tissue for Daisy.

“Shit,” Foggy said. “Do I want to know? No, probably not. Oh, maybe. Do I?”

“I don’t know, Fog,” Matt said with a bemused smile.

Foggy was trying to ignore Karen’s less than subtle facial expressions aimed at him and him alone. She was obviously desperate to know about Stick. However, Foggy didn’t want to disturb Matt’s uncharacteristically frank storytelling by dwelling on his controversial mentor, so Foggy moved the conversation away from Stick, saying, “did you go back the following year?”

“I wanted to, but there were no funds, unfortunately. The Sisters tried to get me there. To their credit, they recognised just how good the summer camp had been for me.”

“Ah, so that’s when you became an altar boy,” Karen teased.

“Not quite,” Matt laughed. “But it did help. I can’t say it totally cured my feral behaviour, but it definitely curbed it. Anyway, in the end, the Sisters found a short summer camp for blind kids and there was a bursary that allowed me to attend for free. But it wasn’t the same. It was very structured and safe – as it needed to be for most of the kids.”

“But they didn’t challenge you enough,” Karen said.

“Mmm… it’s hard to know. My experience of blindness is different to that of others. At the time, I hadn’t had much interaction with other blind kids and I was surprised at how fearful and dependent a lot of them were. My training and enhanced senses aside, I think I benefited early on by having a dad who pushed me, and at the orphanage I was left to my own devices a lot of the time, which was both good and bad. As a result, I was pretty independent in many respects, and, I’m afraid to say, I had an ego to match.” Matt gave them an awkward smile. “Looking back, I’m embarrassed that I felt the need to show off by continually going off on my own to explore. I must have scared them. The camp was helpful in terms of improving my braille skills and other boring everyday things, but I missed having the opportunity to run wild in the forest.”

“I feel like I need to start sponsoring regular summer camp spots for blind kids now,” Foggy said.

“Well, yeah. Although it depends on the kid,” Matt pointed out. “I reckon Julia would thrive in that environment.”

“You should suggest it.”

Matt nodded. He considered the idea for a moment then said, “I should call her. We’ve missed yet another session this weekend.”

Foggy tapped his watch. “Not now. It’s late.”

“And I’m going to bed,” Matt said, easing himself off the couch. “Tha-thank you for this, you two. I’m not saying you’re allowed to kidnap me again, but I-I think I needed this.” And with that he disappeared into the bedroom, leaving his two friends speechless on the couch.
“Matt, calm down and stay in bed,” Foggy said, holding onto Matt’s arm. The sun was only just rising above the horizon and they’d been woken up by Daisy whining and clawing at Matt, indicating an impending seizure. Matt was quite naturally panicking. Daisy’s warning system had its benefits, but it also caused Matt a counterproductive level of anxiety.

“Unless you want me to wet the bed, I have to go to the bathroom, Foggy,” Matt barked. “Let me go.” Matt shook Foggy’s hand away and slid out of bed.

“Okay, but can I come in? I won’t look. I’ll just catch you before you crack your head open on the tiles.” But Matt had already disappeared into the bathroom, nudging the door closed behind him. Foggy yelled tiredly, “okay, just don’t lock the door then.”

Matt was out within twenty seconds and stood in the hallway for a moment. His hair stuck out at angles, still rumpled from sleep, and one leg of his pyjama pants was hitched up to his knee. He put his hand out for the wall, grazing his knuckles against the textured plaster as he over-estimated the distance.

Foggy recognised the slightly dazed behaviour that he’d spotted on a few other occasions prior to seizures, and quickly led the now compliant Matt back to his bed. Once he was lying down, however, with Daisy still pawing at his thighs, Matt bit his lip in worry and his breaths started coming in slightly wheezy panicked gasps.

“It’s okay, Matty,” Foggy said, holding Matt’s hand. “Tell me about that bird listening you did at camp.”

Matt shook his head. “No, I don’t want – I don’t want this. Not now. No-”

Foggy looked at the medication on Matt’s bedside table. “Do you want a benzo? It might help.”

Matt shook his head vehemently. “No, I don’t want this,” he repeated.

“That’s cool,” Foggy said calmly. “What kind of birds were they? At the camp. You went bird watching-”

“Fog, I can’t-”

“Were there...” Foggy racked his brains to come up with a probable bird. “Uh, were there owls?”

Matt opened his mouth to refuse participation in the conversation, but then paused and minutely nodded.

“What else?”

“I-I-” Matt paused and rubbed at his face, almost immediately stiffening as the seizure hit.

Daisy ducked under Matt’s arm and jumped up to his head, staring intently at his face. As the seizure went into a second minute, she gave a small whine. “What is it, Daze?” Foggy said absently, looking between Matt and the timer on his phone. She gave another whine, and Foggy said, “it’s okay. He’ll be okay… or, shit.” Foggy looked at Matt’s face that was quickly draining of colour. He put his ear over Matt’s mouth to try and assess his breathing, but it was hard to tell just what was going on. Foggy picked up his phone and was keying in 911 when Matt stilled. “Thank
fuck,” Foggy said out loud, swiftly rolling Matt onto his side. Matt’s breaths were wheezy and strained and Foggy fingered his phone, trying to figure out whether the ambulance was necessary. Daisy nuzzled her head into Matt’s chest. “Hey, be careful, Daze,” Foggy said, trying to move her away from Matt’s sore ribs, but Daisy wasn’t having a bar of it. She went back to nuzzling Matt before giving him a lick on his hand and then another on his wrist. Foggy realised she was trying to wake Matt up. “Okay, let’s do this together,” Foggy said to the dog.

Between Daisy’s licks and Foggy’s encouraging words, Matt eventually roused, but his breathing was still laboured and painful-sounding. “Can you sit up for me, Matty?” Foggy said, gently pulling at Matt’s shoulder. “Come on, bud. You’ll breathe better if you sit up.” Daisy gave Matt an encouraging lick on the hand, and he moaned something unintelligible in response. He was still breathing in small gasps, which in Foggy’s opinion hadn’t ruled out the ambulance option.

“Come on, Matt. I don’t want to hurt your chest,” Foggy said, trying to keep his tone upbeat, but he was stressed and his façade was thin. Over the last few weeks, he’d really not missed being responsible for helping Matt through his seizures. “Shit,” Foggy said to himself as Matt’s breathing got worse. Foggy burrowed his arm under Matt’s back as gently as possible and pulled him up with the intention of shoving pillows under Matt’s back, but Matt gave a small cry of pain at the movement. “I’m sorry, Matty,” Foggy said, tucking his straggly hair behind his ears. “I need you to help me.” He held Matt’s hand, and said firmly, “you need to help me sit you up. Then I’ll leave you alone.”

“Wrrrr,” Matt grunted before coughing weakly.

“Yeah, I’ll get you water. I’m going to sit you up first though. On the count of three, I’m going to help, okay? One, two, three…” Foggy pulled Matt forward with a small boost from Matt. Daisy decided to ‘help’ by grabbing Matt’s pyjama top with her teeth and pulling. “Daisy, no!” Foggy hissed and Daisy let go, looking utterly hurt. Matt sat limply upright with Foggy taking most of his weight under his shoulder while he piled the pillows behind Matt’s back. He slumped like a rag doll as Foggy lowered him back into the mound of pillows. “Good work, Matty. Now for the water…”

Once Matt’s breathing had improved, Foggy left Daisy curled up next to Matt’s hip and went to make a morning coffee. Matt’s seizure had been a less-than-enjoyable alarm clock. The smell was enough to rouse Karen, who emerged from her room bleary eyed. She croaked, “how come you’re up so early?”

“Matt had a seizure.”

Karen stood up a little straighter. “Shit, is he okay?”

“Yeah, I think so. He’s sleeping now.” Foggy sighed, “same deal, different place.”

“Do you need any help?”

“No - no, thanks. Um, don’t feel like you have to get up. It’s not exactly social o’clock.”

“Mmm… you’re right.” Karen rubbed her eyes. “Wake me if you need me,” she said, disappearing back into her room.
Foggy took a sip of coffee, then decided Karen was probably onto something and returned to the bedroom. Matt was sleeping with his mouth open, but the wheezing had thankfully lessened. Daisy raised her head in acknowledgment as Foggy passed Matt’s bed. She gave a small contented sigh and rested her chin on Matt’s leg. Foggy echoed the dog’s sigh as he climbed back under the sheets, pulling them over his head in an attempt to block out his racing thoughts.

Foggy woke to the sound of Karen making coffee. He looked at his watch. Three hours he’d slept. Matt was still in the same position Foggy had left him, and Daisy was lying there with her eyes open, curled into his side. Normally she would have been bugging them for breakfast by now, but she seemed to change her priorities whenever Matt seized.

Foggy debated whether or not to wake Matt. Even though he’d had plenty of time to recover, he still seemed deeply asleep. He probably needed it too. Matt had likely done more over the last two days than the previous three weeks combined. In the end, Foggy decided it was probably more important that Matt take his medication than sleep so he started the painful process of waking the post-seizure Matt.

Matt was unsurprisingly unimpressed at being disturbed. He pushed Foggy’s hand away and tried to roll over, groaning as his sore muscles protested. Daisy once again decided to help, giving Matt a lick on his hand, and then another on his neck. Matt gave a small squawk at the latter, opening his eyes in shock. Daisy wagged her tail and did a small spin on the edge of the bed.

“Oh,” Matt said as he struggled to orient himself. “Where-”

“You’re in the holiday villa, Matt. The seaside. You had a seizure.”

Matt rubbed his face then frowned.

“What’s wrong?”

Matt drew the back of his hand over his dry lips and croaked, “uh, w-water, is there?”

“Yeah, just here.” Foggy pushed the glass into Matt’s hand. “You need to take your medication. I have Aspirin here too if you want it.”

“Mmm please,” Matt said, his hand out.

"Do you want to eat something with the Aspirin?"

Matt shook his head before messily shoving the pills into his mouth and chugging down the glass of water.

Foggy hovered anxiously as Matt lay back against the pillows. “How are you feeling?”

“Sore,” Matt replied, his hand against his forehead. “I’m glad I’m here – not in hospital.” He placed his hand on Daisy's back and she reciprocated by leaning into his side.

“Me too, bud. Uh, do you want anything?”

“Mmm... I’m gonna sleep,” Matt said, closing his eyes again.
“Yeah… yeah sure,” Foggy said, eyeing him carefully. He still didn’t completely trust Matt to share injuries or ailments.

Once Matt had fallen asleep again, Daisy decided to take time out from her Matt-side vigil to harass Foggy for breakfast, dutifully returning to the bed as soon as she’d finished. It meant that when the straggly-looking Matt emerged from the bedroom a couple of hours later, Daisy was a small ball of pent-up energy. After watching the dog leap from one end of the couch to the next, do a double loop of the living room, and then a flying leap onto the back of the couch and a roaring figure eight through the entire villa, Foggy whispered to Matt, “I think I might take her for a quick w-a-l-k-i-e-s if you don’t mind. Karen’s gone for a walk somewhere. She said she’d be back in a few hours, so you’ll be on your own – if that – I - I hope you don’t mind.”

Matt waved his hand, “go ahead. Daisy’s about to implode. It’ll be less messy outside,” he joked.

Daisy was initially quite resistant to leaving Matt, but seemed to forget her attachment once they’d rounded the corner. Foggy found a small fenced park for her to whip around and watched her make friends with a dog about twenty times her mass. When a second similarly sized dog approached, she looked a bit freaked out, and slowly edged away, her tail between her legs. “Come on, Daze,” Foggy called. As he clipped her leash back on, he said to her, “we’ll come back later.”

She threw herself at Matt as soon as Foggy opened the front door. “Oof,” Matt said as she rammed into his stomach, causing him to spill some of his coffee over his t-shirt.

“Shit, sorry,” Foggy said, seeing the mess.

Matt pulled his t-shirt off. “That’s why I wear black,” he replied.

“You have a bruise, Matt,” Foggy said, leaning in for a closer look.

“Where?”

“Your chest. Did you bust a rib again during the seizure?”

Matt concentrated, listening to the minor creaking that suggested that his ribs were not entirely healed, but getting there. “No, they’re healing nicely.”

“Maybe you bumped something when you ran to the toilet.”

Matt cocked his head as if to say, tell me more.

“When Daisy warned you about the coming seizure, you ran to the bathroom… I understand why, but you freaked me out. The floor tiles aren’t exactly friendly to the head.”

“Sorry,” Matt replied.

Foggy wanted to pursue the matter further and clarify what they needed to do next time, but at the last moment, decided that today had probably been stressful enough for them both. Instead, he forced an upbeat tone and said, “any plans for today? Do you want to go to the beach?”

Matt rubbed his eyes. “Yeah, uh, not right this moment, but – but later, yes - the fresh air might be good.”
That afternoon as they slowly made their way down to the shore, Matt noticed that despite his post-seizure sensory deficit, he could actually sense the beach landscape better than the day before.

“I can read the sand now,” Matt said to Foggy.

“What do you mean?”

“The wind – it allows me to read the sand formations more accurately than yesterday.”

“That’s great.”

“I think if I was completely well, I wouldn’t have a problem either way. My senses are still compromised,” Matt said honestly. He stopped and put his hand out for the chairs Foggy was carrying. “Shall we sit here?”

Matt pushed his toes through the sand as he sat on the beach chair, listening to the meditative roar of the waves. “I think we should make a sandpit on the roof,” Matt said to Foggy, scrunching up his toes and feeling the grains of sand run down the top of his feet.

Foggy gave a small huff of amusement as he realised what Matt was doing. “Yeah, the feeling of sand through toes is divine. We could get you a box for under your desk for those particularly stressful cases.”

Matt gave a huff of amusement. “What, like a kitty litter tray?”

“Hmm… you’re right. It’s probably not the best look, and Daisy might get the wrong idea,” Foggy conceded. “We’ll just have to go to the beach more often. Vacations aren’t so bad after all, huh?” Foggy looked at Matt for confirmation, but Matt was too busy digging his feet into the sand.

Matt didn’t stay at the beach for long. Soon after Karen joined them, Matt excused himself, saying that he was going home for another nap.

“Take Daisy,” Foggy insisted. “And call me if she does her warning thing.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Matt said tiredly.

Matt was chatting on the phone when Foggy and Karen returned a few hours later. Foggy could hear him chuckling away from the bedroom, unexpectedly animated.

“Who was that?” Foggy said casually when Matt joined them in the living room later. Matt stole a carrot stick out of the salad bowl Karen was preparing, took a cheeky bite and chewed it slowly. Finally, he said truthfully, “Elektra.”

“Ha ha,” Foggy replied.

Matt shrugged.

Karen, sensing an impending argument, said chirpily, “Matt, do you think you could make one of your amazing dressings? I got lemon, chilli, parsley, olive oil, um, what else?”

“That should be enough,” Matt said, wandering over to the utensil drawer in search of a lemon squeezer.

“We were think of watching something seaside themed,” Foggy said. “Any movie preferences?”
“Nothing too depressing,” Matt replied.

Foggy quickly said, “of course not.” Over the past months, it’d become clear to both of them that the frequency of Matt’s seizures was tied to his mood. It was no secret that Matt was already prone to depression, but in in the aftermath of a seizure, he tended to get more dismal than usual.


Foggy raised his eyebrows. “I was thinking something more like Finding Nemo or Blue Crush whatever sequel they’re up to now. Jaws is – well, let’s just put it this way: I’d rather not think about being eaten next time I enter the water, thanks.”

Matt stretched with a low groan, scrunching his face as he tried to orient himself.

“Morning, sleeping beauty,” Foggy called from the kitchen.

“Shit,” Matt said to himself as he realised he’d spent the night sleeping on the couch once again.

“You feel asleep exactly five minutes into The Horror of Party Beach. We tried to wake you afterwards, but you weren’t having a bar of it.”

Matt shifted uncomfortably on the couch. “Sorry.”

“You don’t have to be sorry. It's not like it's your fault. Coffee?”

“Mmm thanks.” Matt rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. “The seizures, they make me so tired afterwards. I just don’t understand.”

“How are you feeling now?”

“Better than yesterday. I might have a quiet day at the beach.”

“Well, we weren’t planning on going hiking,” Foggy pointed out jokingly.

“Are there hikes in this area?”

Foggy gave a huff of amusement. “Seriously?”

“Yeah. After our discussion the other night, I feel the call of the wild.”

“Huh. Well, I dunno. I guess there’d be something out here with all the openness.”

They spent the next couple of hours researching hiking trails in the region, and settled on a fairly easy trail along the ocean.

“Tomorrow,” Matt said.

“Tomorrow,” Foggy agreed.
After a day lounging (and at one stage napping) on the beach, Matt felt considerably more energetic. “Any dinner plans?” he said to Foggy as he peeled off his singlet top to brave the surf.

“There’s a carnival amusement park thingy beyond the restaurant strip. Karen and I were thinking of checking it out. We could go tonight if you’re interested. She said she’d be back from her weird spa facial thing around 5pm.”

“Sure,” Matt said, rolling his shoulders before starting towards the water. He called over his shoulder, “carnival - is that like rollercoasters?”

"Yeah, I think so. Uh, are you going to be okay with those waves, Matt?” Foggy called as Matt waded up to his calves. “They’re pretty big.”

“I’m fine,” Matt called without stopping. “What’s the worst that could-”

“Don’t say it!”

Matt laughed. “What’s the worst that could happen?” The words had barely left his mouth when a massive wave slammed into him, throwing him backwards and drawing him under the water. Daisy whined and ran in after Matt.

“Shit,” Foggy said, running after both Daisy and Matt.

Matt struggled to the surface and spat out a mouthful of water, shaking his head to try and loosen the water in his ears. His hair lay slick down to his nose and he looked completely waterlogged. Foggy waded out and grabbed his arm, pulling him closer to the shore and picking up Daisy along the way. “Shit, Matt, are you okay?”

Matt just laughed. “Yeah.” He scraped the hair out of his face. “Phew, those things are strong.”

“You didn’t hurt yourself though?”

“I got a fright,” Matt said, “but I’m intact.”

Foggy pulled him back towards the beach, but Matt said, “no, I’m going to stay in. It was exhilarating!”

“Okay,” Foggy said slowly, his eyebrows raised. ‘Exhilarating’ was not the word he’d expected. Foggy let go and Matt cautiously waded out to the now smaller series of waves. Foggy looked at Matt then back to the beach, depositing Daisy on the shore with a firm “stay” before swimming out to join Matt. He hated to think what would happen if Matt seized in the water alone.

Foggy watched with fascination as Matt pushed off from the bottom, joining a wave as it passed through, angling his body perfectly so as to be effortlessly carried into shore. Matt stood up as the wave petered out. “That was great!” he gushed. He waded back to Foggy. “You don’t have to be so anxious, Fog. I barely have to do anything. It’s all about streamlining your body. I’m not going to hurt myself.” Foggy didn’t respond, so Matt said, “try it.”

It took Foggy a few tries before he managed to be carried more than a meter. When he finally got the whoosh that signalled he’d successfully joined the wave, he understood just why Matt was so thrilled.

They spent the next hour perfecting their body surfing, eventually crawling out completely
tuckered. They lay in the sand at the edge of the water and the waves lapped gently at their legs. Daisy flopped down between them, her fur now sandy and matted from the salt water.

“Foggy, thank you,” Matt eventually said. “This is glorious.”

“Oh… pleasure. I-I wasn’t sure how it’d go down to be honest.”

“Me neither. I think I needed this – the space.”

“New York is very crowded,” Foggy agreed.

“No, the mental space. I-I got so caught up in the city’s crime, seeing the bad things at the expense of the good, and thinking it was the only way to improve things.”

“It, as in Daredevil?”

“Yeah.”

“Does that mean you’re hanging up your suit?”

“In case you haven’t noticed-”

“I mean for good.”

Matt shook his head. “I don’t know. I was thinking though – we’re doing good things as N&M, I feel like I have the capacity to make a difference to Julia’s life… I dunno, when the head injury happened, I was concentrating almost all my energy into one thing – I thought it was the only solution, but – but maybe there are many.”

Matt sat up cross-legged in the sand, and said intensely, “I was reading the book of Matthew yesterday.”

“The what?”

“The bible, Foggy,” Matt replied. “Anyway, it made me realise that I need to scatter my seeds. Some won’t grow because they fall among stones or thorns, but others will fall on good ground and yield a good crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. What it means is, even if I do don the mask again, I should hedge my bets and do a bit of everything: law, mentoring-”

“And punching people in the face,” Foggy interrupted.

“It’s not that simple and you know it,” Matt argued. “Anyway, it’s a moot point right now. I can’t go out like this,” he grumbled. He reached out to Daisy, who crawled into the slim shadow beside Matt’s thigh. “We’re going to have to give you a bath,” he told her, thinning out some of the dreadlocks that were forming on her usually fluffy chest.

Foggy rolled onto his stomach with a satisfied groan. “Shall we head back?”

“Yeah.” Matt struggled to his feet and tried to in vain to brush off the excess sand, moaning, “we all need a wash. This stuff gets everywhere.” He itched at the edge of his cast, feeling the individual grains of sand rub between the soft foam and his skin.

Foggy squinted up at Matt, “you know, when you get that cast off in a few weeks, half the beach will probably fall out.”

Matt chuckled softly and muttered, “sand on the roof. What was I thinking?”
Karen returned from the day spa to find Foggy lounging on the deck with a beer, lazily throwing a grimy rubber ball for a hyperactive Daisy.

“Close the door, close the door!” Foggy whispered hurriedly.

Karen slid the door closed behind her. “Why?”

“Matt’s meditating.”

Karen raised an eyebrow.

“Daisy has a bad habit of jumping on him when he meditates, so my task is to distract her,” Foggy elaborated.

“Back up - Matt meditates?”

“Oh – yeah. Since he was a kid. I assumed you knew that.”

Karen shook her head. “From what I’ve gathered, I know very little about Matt Murdock.”

“I know the feeling,” Foggy muttered, reaching down and wrestling the ball from Daisy’s mouth. He tossed it into the middle of a thick bush. “Oops,” he said, and watched as Daisy ploughed headfirst into the prickly undercover. She returned to Foggy’s side with tiny leaves and a couple of twigs embedded in her fur. “We only just washed you,” he moaned to the wagging dog, pulling a few leaves from Daisy’s fur before giving up and throwing the ball again.

Foggy turned back to Karen. “Matt claims meditating heals him.”

“That’s great. He needs a bit of that at the moment.”

Foggy shrugged. “Yeah, but it doesn’t undo everything.”

There was a clear bitterness to Foggy’s words, but with Matt within (his) hearing range, now was not the time to pry. After an awkward pause, Karen said, “hey, I’m going to get a beer. Do you want another?”

Matt arched his back in a stretch as he ended his meditation. He scratched at his bare chest, surprised at how cold his skin felt to the touch. It was easier to concentrate without the scratch of fabric on his skin, so he thought he’d take advantage of the local heat, but perhaps it wasn’t that warm after all.

Matt wandered out to where Foggy and Karen were chatting merrily over beers. Karen was sitting in a deckchair with her feet up on the picnic table. “Matt!” Karen called happily, gesturing him over. She pulled him in, hugging him around his thighs in affection.
“What was that for?” Matt said, his mouth quirked in amusement.

“Nothing. You just looked like you needed a hug.”

“Oh… thanks.” He stood there awkwardly for a moment before clearing his throat, “uh, Fog, you didn’t happen to pack any clean hoodies did you?” The one he’d worn from the hospital reeked of the industrial-grade antiseptic, which wasn’t exactly the comfort he was seeking.

“You could start with a t-shirt, buddy,” Foggy said, taking in Matt’s bare chest, short shorts, and glassesless face.

Matt’s face fell. “Please, Fog.”

"Sorry,” Foggy said, scrambling to his feet. Matt’s expression was too pathetic to ignore. “It's been so warm – uh, they're in the car. I brought another bag with some hoodies and a jacket. I'll grab it.”

Once retrieved, Matt sat on his bed and went through the second bag with interest. Foggy had packed a couple more books, a smart casual jacket, his favourite hoodie that he’d owned since college, and, curiously enough, his new hoodie from Melvin. Matt lifted it out gently, not knowing just how sensitive the trigger for the 'airbag' was. After all the knocks to his head, Matt was tempted to get Melvin to install airbags in all his clothing. He shrugged it on and felt immediately comforted by the weight.

He was about to make his way out to the others when his phone rang. “Elektra, Elektra, Elektra, Elektra…”

“Not now,” Matt whispered into the phone. “I told you, I’d ring you tomorrow…. No, of course not… any sign of Erinyes?” Matt sat on the bed and listened to the latest list of her vengeful double’s victims. “Elektra, just stay away from him… yeah, well, you don’t know that. Stick’s got his own agenda. Just wait for me to return and we’ll-” Matt stopped as he heard Foggy’s footsteps enter the carpeted hallway. Matt whispered, “hang on” into the phone before shoving it into the duffle.

Foggy cleared his throat. “Hey dude, you coming out or what?”

Matt forced a smile. “Yeah… coming. I’m just…” He waved his hand at the duffle. “You know, going through my stuff.”

“Sure, sure,” Foggy said. “There’s no hurry.” Satisfied, Foggy wandered back into the living room.

Matt felt for his phone. “Elektra,” he whispered. “I have to go. I’ll call you tomorrow…. Yeah… bye.”

Once Matt emerged from the bedroom, Foggy gave him a wicked grin, “ready for the carnival?”

“The carnival?” Karen repeated.

“You said-”

“Yeah, but I didn’t think, um…” Karen looked at Matt. Foggy she could understand, but Matt? He didn’t seem the amusement park type, and yet he was smiling enthusiastically.

“Daisy probably has to stay here,” Foggy added, gesturing at the dog who had strangely decided to sit on Matt’s foot. “I think she’d be too short for the rollercoaster.”
Karen grinned. “Okay. Let me get changed.”

“Phworp,” Foggy whispered to Matt as Karen closed the door behind her. “Those essential oils. What do they do at these spa things? The smell must be insane for you.”

“It does smell like she’s bathed in them,” Matt agreed, flipping open his GPS cane and playing with the hinges. “Still better than a New York dumpster though.”

"Yeah, well, only you bathe in New York dumpsters, Matt."

"I didn't bathe in it, Foggy. And it was only one dumpster."

"Details," Foggy said, waving his hand dismissively.

Matt huffed and gave the end of the cane a small flick so that the bottom half shot out and hit the tennis ball that was lying across the room. The ball ricocheted off the opposite wall, and landed directly in front of a thrilled Daisy.

Foggy shook his head and muttered good naturedly, “show off.”

“How are you with roller coasters, Matt?” Karen asked as they entered the carnival.

“I expect I’ll be fine,” Matt replied with a slight smirk.

“He can double backflip spin through the air and land on his feet,” Foggy pointed out.

“I know that,” Karen replied with a roll of her eyes. “I’ve seen him leap off multi-storey buildings.” She turned to Matt, “I meant with your injuries.”

Amused by his friends’ slightly possessive exchange, Matt attempted to straighten his face to no avail. “Again, I should be fine,” he said, smiling. They passed by the ghost train which was blasting out shrill screams and booming laughter. Matt added, “I might not enjoy the haunted house so much though.”

“Noted,” Foggy replied. “So, roller coaster first?”

As the roller coaster drew to a stop, Matt realised Foggy was uncharacteristically quiet. “Fog, are you okay?” Matt said, his hand on Foggy’s back.

“Give me a moment,” Foggy whispered.

Karen and Matt supported a woozy Foggy away from the roller coaster.

“I’m sorry, guys,” Foggy said, leaning over as Matt rubbed his back.

“Don’t be sorry,” Matt said. “Rollercoasters aren’t for everyone.”

Karen cleared her throat. “Yeah, my brother spewed.”

Matt and Foggy both yelled simultaneously, “Karen!”
“Sorry - now’s not the time – you’re right,” Karen said, looking at the ground.

Foggy finally stood up. “I could do with a beer right now.”

Karen stared. “Really? You nearly keel over and your response is beer?”

“Sure is. It’ll settle my stomach.” He placed his hand on Matt’s shoulder and said dramatically, “Matt, my nosey friend, sniff out the beer.”

Matt immediately pointed to his left. “There’s a bar over there. It smells pretty stale though.”

“Beer’s beer,” Foggy said, walking towards the bar, a slight wobble in his step. Matt skipped to catch up and held Foggy’s elbow, pleased to be the steady one this time.

After a round of beers (and in Matt’s case, a light beer), the three of them emerged refreshed and ready to reengage with the amusements.

“Dodgem cars are probably not great for your ribs,” Foggy said. Matt reluctantly nodded.

“The carousel has an annoying squeal,” Matt pointed out.

“And you probably won’t appreciate the view anyway,” Foggy added.

Karen pointed at the Avalanche ride. “What about this spinning–”

“I’m just going to stop you there, Karen,” Foggy said, his hand out. “Spinning and me, nope. Not after the roller coaster.”

Karen looked disappointed. “Okay, what about the sideshow games?”

“Ooh, ooh, Matt,” Foggy said, tapping Matt’s arm excitedly. “This is where you shine.”

“What do you mean?”

“You can’t tell me that you don’t know where to place a dart so that it perfectly bursts a balloon.”

“Uh…”

“Or that you can’t land a ball in a hoop.”

“Uh…”

“Or toss a ring over a bottle.”

“Um, yeah?”

“C’mon, Matt. Don’t be all coy,” Karen said, giving his arm a small push.

Matt chuckled and took a step back. “I’m not. It-It’s just – I’ve been walking around all night with my cane.”

“Yeah, you gotta get a better disguise, man,” Foggy deadpanned.

“Guys, I want to pop in here,” Karen said, waving them over to a novelty and costume stall.

“You’d look good in this nose, Foggy,” she said, jamming a bright red foam ball onto his face.

“And you’d look good with this hair,” he replied, plonking a bright blue wig of curls on her head.
Foggy stopped as he spotted the wall of novelty sunglasses. “Hey Matt?” He spun around, looking for his friend. “Matt!”

Matt appeared by his side, silent and stealthy, and Foggy jumped a mile. “Shit, don’t scare me like that.”

Matt gave him a sweet smile. “Sorry.”

Foggy handed him a pair of glasses. “They’re like your old ones.”

“Exactly?”

“Yeah, red lenses and everything. Or they have them in blue - or yellow. How about yellow? You could be lizard man.”

“No, I like red,” Matt said quietly.

“I noticed,” Foggy muttered, but Matt had already made his way to the cash register. He paid for the glasses and left the second-hand aviators from the hospital on the counter.

Foggy and Karen exited the shop awhile later with a bag each.

“What’s that?” Matt said, nodding at Foggy's bag.

“My Halloween costume, and a pair of goblin ears for you just in case your mind – which you will because Julia’s totally going to make you dress up,” Foggy said.

Karen said, “oh, you’re taking Julia trick or treating? That’s cute.”

Matt pulled an expression that suggested he wasn't really looking forward to the task. Keen to wipe the pained look off Matt’s face, Foggy reached into the bag and pulled out a pair of glasses. "I got the yellow version of your glasses."

“And I got the blue ones,” Karen said, fitting the glasses on her face and squinting up into the overhead floodlights.

“Oh come on, Matt,” Foggy moaned. "Don't pull that face."

"I'm not pulling anything," Matt said coolly.

"We won't wear them if you don't want us to," Karen said quietly, pulling the glasses off and stashing them in her bag.

"It's not..." Matt petered off, not knowing exactly why he found their glasses so disconcerting. He forced a smile, "wear them if you want."

But Foggy and Karen had gleaned something was troubling their friend, and the glasses stayed in their bags.

"Let's do the sideshow stuff," Foggy said brightly, eager to distract from the awkwardness.

They divided the six darts between them. "Go for the balloon on the far left, second from the bottom," Matt whispered. "It's the one most likely to pop."
Karen stared. "How in earth-"

"Just – don't ask," Foggy cut her off.

Karen’s first dart didn’t even touch a balloon, let alone pop it. Her second throw was an improvement. She hit the balloon in the centre, but the tips were blunt and she’d not thrown it with enough force to pierce the deliberately underinflated rubber.

Foggy managed to throw his first dart so that it flipped around and hit the balloon with the back end. Matt choked down a laugh, and Foggy elbowed him playfully with a hissed, "shhh, you." Foggy’s second dart was much like Karen’s: it just didn’t have the force behind the throw.

"Here, hold my cane," Matt said loudly to Foggy when it was his turn.

The carny joked, "I hope I'm not about to be stabbed." Matt ignored the comment, while Karen gave the carny a withering look on Matt’s behalf.

"Foggy, point me," Matt said with a small quirk of his lips. Foggy rolled his eyes at Matt's pretence, but indulged him anyway. Unsurprisingly, Matt threw the dart with such force and accuracy that the balloon popped. Karen clapped and gave Matt a congratulatory pat on the back.

"Lucky throw," the carny drawled. "Choose your prize. We have a pink mermaid, a blue whale-"

"Karen?" Matt said, cutting off the bored-sounding stallholder.

"You should get the shark," she said.

Matt shook his head. "No, what do you want?"

Karen clapped her hands. "Really?"

Pleased with her enthusiasm, Matt gave a single nod.

"The monkey please."

The carny unhooked the oversized animal from the roof of the stand and handed it to a grinning Karen.

"You still have a second throw, Matt," Foggy said. Matt pretended to reach out to Karen as a way of moving directly opposite the second easiest target and in turn, Foggy made out that he was directing Matt's hand. To ham it up, Matt deliberately angled his head away as he threw the dart. He was unable to resist a smirk when the second balloon popped.

The carny pursed his lips, evidently trying to work out if this was some kind of trick. "Are you sure you're blind? That doesn't look like a regular stick." He pointed at Matt's special GPS cane, eyeing the computerised handle.

"I think you should get the shark," Foggy said to Matt, ignoring the carny.

"The shark please," Matt said triumphantly, and the carny reluctantly pulled down the two-foot-long toy. Matt fumbled the object, and passed it to Foggy. "For you."

Matt’s skills came in handy at the laughing clowns too. "Which compartment does it need to go into?" Matt whispered at Foggy.

Foggy tapped on the glass. "This end one."
Matt smiled and held the ping pong ball at the clown's mouth, letting the ball go at exactly the right moment.

"Did I get it?" Matt said loudly.

"Sure did, bud," Foggy said, playing along.

On Karen's encouragement, Matt chose the novelty badminton set, which the stallholder seemed to find amusing.

With their arms full of prizes, the three friends decided it was time to head home. "Is there even enough room in the trunk for all this shit?" Foggy said, the shark slung over one shoulder as they wandered back to the car.

"Shhh..." Matt hissed, stopping suddenly.

"Oh no," Foggy moaned, recognising Matt's expression of intensity.

"What?" Karen said, before letting out an "ohhh," as she cottoned on.

Before they could say anything, Matt was off, snapping his cane in two and pulling his hood over his head as he ran.

"Matt, come back," Foggy called. "Matt!"

Foggy ran after his friend, rounding the corner in time to see Matt mowing into a group of three men, while a terrified looking woman backed into the wall. Matt landed a fast kick to one man's knee, knocking him off balance so that he fell against a parked car. The alarm went off and Matt momentarily stumbled at the sound. The car's lights were flashing in time with the noise, highlighting the tessellated mask over Matt's face that Melvin had designed for just this purpose. One of the men took advantage of Matt's momentary lapse in concentration to throw a punch, but Matt blocked it with his broken arm, the assailant's hand cracking against the cast. Matt bit his lip against the vibrations. With his good hand, Matt whipped out his specially designed cane, whacking the man in the head. The man crumpled on the spot.

The third man started towards Matt, who effortlessly flicked the cane in his direction. It disconnected, the bottom half hitting the assailant in the chest with such force that he was thrown backwards. Matt gave it another quick flick and the cane zipped back into place. With the three assailants on the ground, the woman took one terrified look at Matt and ran off down the street.

"Let's go," Foggy whispered at a level too low for normal hearing. Matt was standing in the middle of the three men, breath heaving, his fists still bunched and ready.

"Come on, let's go," Foggy repeated, more urgently this time. He could hear Matt’s heavy wheezing from the end of the street and worried he was about to crash.

Matt slowly started towards his friends, speeding up as one of the assailants started to groan. Once they’d rounded the corner out of sight, Matt pressed the trigger on the hood making the mask collapse. He felt his forehead to make sure it was tucked out of sight.

"Where in earth did you get that hoodie?" Foggy hissed, taking Matt's arm. But before he could answer, Matt's heavy breathing caught and he started to cough. “Shit, Matt, we have to get you home. Karen, do you think you could get the car?”

Matt shook his head. "They're going to get up soon," he said between wheezes. "We'll go together."
It's only a few blocks.”

Matt was still coughing when they returned to the villa. Foggy saw him to the couch and fetched a glass of water, pushing Daisy away when she tried to climb onto Matt's lap. “Daze, give him space.” Matt put his hand to his ribs as he tried to stop the coughing. “Did you hurt your chest? Do I need to take you to the hospital?” Foggy asked, pushing Daisy away once more.

Matt shook his head. "Just-" he coughed. "Just the exercise," he said, before coughing again. "Could you make some tea," he breathed, "the round tin."

"Sure," Foggy replied.

"Matt, can I do anything?" Karen asked, hovering nearby.

Matt shook his head. He closed his eyes as he tried to calm his coughing.

Karen stuttered, "it-it was good of you, Matt."

"Don't encourage him," Foggy called from the kitchen.

"Oh come on, Foggy. What would have happened if Matt hadn't intervened just then?"

"I don't know. We could have called the police," Foggy said crossly.

Karen put her hands on her hips and stared Foggy down. "And then what? Just watch on as she gets assaulted?"

"No, we could have talked them out of it. They didn’t need to be knocked unconscious," Foggy said.

"I don't think you're qualified to judge,” Karen continued. “You don't know. You could never know."

"I know that Matt's already hurt and needs to recover from previous injuries," Foggy snapped, waving a teaspoon angrily in the air.

Karen gave a huff of disbelief. "You think he doesn't know that? It's not for you to decide, Foggy."

Matt gave a particularly nasty cough, groaning as he tried to catch his breath afterwards. Karen and Foggy both stopped yelling and moved towards him in concern. "Finally … quiet," Matt breathed in relief.

Foggy opened his mouth, but Matt got there first. "No – stop it. No more. Shut up the both of you."

Karen looked taken aback, but quickly swallowed her hurt and sat on the couch next to Matt without another sound. Her supportive presence spoke words.

Once the tea was brewed, Foggy handed the cup to Matt and announced, "I'm going to bed." Matt sighed and prepared for another night on the couch.

After listening to Matt cough from the living room for a straight two hours, Foggy got out of bed with a sigh and traipsed out to the couch. Matt was still sitting upright, wide awake, his eyes reflecting the moonlight streaming in through the curtainless windows.
Foggy offered a hand. “Come to bed, Matty. It can’t be comfortable sitting up.” Matt gave a minute shrug of his shoulders, and after a moment’s deliberation, accepted Foggy’s hand.

“I’ll disturb you with my coughing,” Matt warned as they shuffled back to their bedroom.

“I don’t care,” Foggy replied truthfully. “Listen to my heartbeat if you must.”

Come morning, the tension over Matt's impromptu Daredevilling had diminished, although Foggy was quieter than usual. In the two hours Matt spent on the couch the previous night, Foggy had made a kind of peace with Matt’s decision. He hated that Matt had once again risked his health and well-being, but Karen was right – they couldn't have just watched on and done nothing.

After making coffee in near silence, Foggy slid cups of freshly brewed coffee across the table to Matt and Karen. "Thanks," said Matt meekly, not sure whether Foggy was still angry or not.

"Pleasure," Foggy replied, returning to the kitchen to scrounge up some toast.

Matt cleared his throat. "Do you want me to make some eggs?"

Foggy recognised it as an olive branch and smiled. "Yeah, that'd be great, thanks."

Matt scrabbled through the fridge for ingredients. "What's this?" He called holding up a plastic package. "Some kind of cheese?"

"Fetta," Karen said, getting up. "Do you need help?"

"No-no, please sit. I've got this."

Matt dished them up perfectly cooked scrambled eggs with fetta and rocket.

"Geez, Matt. You should be a chef," Karen said, after the first bite.

Matt looked pleased. "I could cook tonight if you want. We could get some fish – after our hike, that is," he said, nodding at Foggy.

Karen raised her eyebrows. "Hike?"

"Oh yeah, we didn't tell you," Foggy said to Karen, "um, Matt got – how did you term it, Matt? The call of the wild?"

Matt quirked his lips in a crooked smile. “More or less.”

The hiking trail turned out to be a very well-graded path along the cliff-tops with plenty of benches and poles for Daisy to sniff along the way. It was smooth and easy for Matt to navigate, but it wasn't quite the 'wild' experience the three of them expected.

"I should take you to Vermont," Karen said when Matt complained about the lack of trees.

"Okay," Matt said brightly and Karen swallowed. She'd not expected Matt to agree to another
holiday, let alone in Vermont.

"Or we could go hiking closer to New York," she quickly suggested.


Matt outdid himself on his fish dinner, starting off with a Sicilian-style Kingfish carpaccio, then stuffed cuttlefish, and a lightly braised flounder for mains.

As Matt served up the main course, Karen said, "where in earth did you learn to cook like this, Matt?"

"The internet," Matt replied matter-of-factly. "I like food so I listen to a lot of cooking programs."

"Yes, but stuffed cuttlefish?"

"Well, Foggy helped with the cuttlefish."

Foggy chuckled. "I washed them, Matt."

"Which is very important," Matt said seriously. He sat down and took his first bite, savouring the taste. "I've actually been wanting to try these recipes for a while, but I don't cook meat at home, so I've been waiting for this opportunity."

"If I'd known that we'd be eating like this, I'd have kidnapped you long ago," Foggy joked, already half way through his meal.

Matt waved his fork at Foggy, and said, "tomorrow night I might try the seafood risotto I've been meaning to make then."

Karen grabbed her glass of wine. "To Matt, and his glorious cooking."

"To Matt," Foggy echoed.

"To you two, and your support over the last five months. I wouldn't have been able to do it without you," Matt finished, clinking their glasses.

Matt spent the best part of the following morning hunting for shells along the southern part of the beach. Daisy trotted alongside him, stopping occasionally to jump on the small crabs that dared emerge from the wet sand. Matt found a couple of rock pools at the end of the beach and crouched there listening to the various creatures moving around in the warm water. After a few hours, Daisy started hysterically barking at a massive crab. It snapped its claws at her threateningly, which only increased her level of excitement. Eventually, Matt picked her up and carried her away from the rocks, predicting she was about to get bitten.

Matt returned to Foggy and Karen with a t-shirt full of shells, including one that was still housing a tiny crab.
“You should throw it back in,” Karen called from beneath the beach umbrella.

“I just wanted to show you,” Matt said proudly, placing it in Foggy’s open hand.

Foggy twisted the shell around, trying to get a better look. “It’s cute, but it probably wants to sit in
the cool sand rather than your hot sweaty t-shirt, buddy. Can I release it back into the wild?”

Matt shrugged and poured his shell collection into one of the plastic buckets before flopping down
under the umbrella and chugging down an entire bottle of water.

“It’s so hot,” Foggy said, wiping his brow. “Do you want a swim?”

Matt shook his head. “I’m quite happy here out of the sun.”

“Karen?”

“No, I’m enjoying just being near the water, thanks.”

Foggy shrugged. “Suit yourselves.”

“You haven’t asked Daisy yet,” Matt pointed out. The dog was now lying in the sun, panting but
looking incredibly happy.

“Call her into the shade, Matt. I don’t think it’s healthy for her to be quite that hot.”

“Daze,” Matt called, patting his thigh. Daisy raised her head as if to say, what? And then went back
to her baking. “I think that’s a no,” Matt said, amused. “Oh well.”

As Foggy ducked into the water, Karen started narrating a trashy gossip magazine to Matt.
“There’s an article on celebrities in bikinis,” she said. “Top ten body shockers,” she read out loud.

“It doesn’t say that,” Matt said with a frown.

“It does. It’s got pictures and everything.”

He reached over and felt the page. “Damn. Too shiny,” he said. “If you’re telling the truth, that’s
awful,” Matt said.

“Yeah,” she said ambivalently and flicked to another part of the magazine. “Oh here’s one. David
Tennant tells all on the doctor.” She looked up. “You two like Doctor Who, right?”

“Foggy’s the fan. I think he likes describing it to me more than anything else. He gets super
dramatic and starts waving his arms around a lot. It can take a lot not to laugh.”

“I need to witness that,” Karen said, chuckling. She flicked through to the back. “What about the
crossword. Are you any good at those?”

“Yeah, hit me up,” he said. They’d filled in a quarter of the crossword when Daisy jumped up at
Matt, whining and barking frantically, sensing an impending seizure. “Not here,” Matt said,
panicking. “Not here. I have to go.” He got up and stumbled in the direction of their villa, ignoring
Karen’s yells to stop.

“Foggy, help,” she called, and Foggy ran up the beach, catching up to Matt who was standing
disoriented in the sand, Daisy continuing to jump up at him.

“Matt, come back to umbrella, quick.”
“No, Foggy, I have to get back. Away.”

“We’ll lower the umbrella. No one will see you. It’s warm, safe and the sand is soft. Please Matt, it’s all concrete footpaths back to the villa. Sand is much softer.”

Foggy helped the panicky Matt back to the umbrella and he lay down on a towel. “Matty, tell me about the birds you heard at camp,” Foggy said softly, remembering that it seemed to distract Matt from his panic last time.


“What birds did you hear? Were there owls?” Foggy made a mental note to research a more diverse list of regional birds for next time.

“Owls- owls, yes,” Matt said, recognising what Foggy was trying to do.

“What else?”

“Uh,” Matt wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. “Uh…” But that was all he had before the seizure hit.

“Shit, was that the last of the water?” Foggy said to Karen, gesturing towards the bottle Matt had finished.

“Yeah, I’ll run up to the store,” Karen replied, lowering the umbrella for Matt’s privacy then dashing up the beach, purse in hand.

The seizure was short, but the effect of Matt’s chest infection was still making itself known and he struggled to breathe properly afterwards. Foggy sat him up, hoping that the change in posture would help, but readying himself to call an ambulance if Matt didn’t improve. After a short while, however, Matt’s breathing seemed to calm and he croaked out a request for water.


Matt grunted the water request again, and Foggy lifted the umbrella, searching for Karen who had now been gone almost five minutes. “Here she comes,” Foggy said. “Karen’s got water for you.” Foggy waved at her to hurry up, and she ran across the sand, scrambling to open the lid as she went.

In all, it was a relatively unremarkable seizure, and the sand turned out to be a surprisingly good surface – soft and malleable. Unlike the couch at work that often ended up damp with spilled water, the sand also absorbed Matt’s clumsy drinking skills post-seizure.

As Matt slumped back into the sand, Foggy said softly, “That’s good, Matt. Go to sleep.” He draped a towel over Matt’s torso and stroked his head, remembering how much Matt seemed to enjoy Anna’s touch in hospital.

Daisy once again proved her allegiance by not moving back into her beloved sun. She transferred to a hollow next to Matt’s chest and guarded him attentively. As with his previous seizure, Matt slept far more than his usual two hours, but they were on vacation time and there was nothing to do and nowhere to be. Nestled in the warm sand, he slept the afternoon away.
That night, with Matt exhausted from the seizure, they decided the risotto could wait. They ordered in pizza for dinner and put on another trashy vacation movie. Karen gave visual narration a go, but ended up giggling at her own inability to describe body movements. She eventually gave up, and Foggy took charge once again.

Matt predictably fell asleep twenty minutes into the movie. Foggy sighed and stopped the narration. Almost immediately, Matt woke up and said, “wha-what’s happening?” Foggy rolled his eyes and muttered, “anyone would think the sound of my voice sent you to sleep,” but he resumed his narration nonetheless. Soothed, Matt fell asleep again, his breath subtly changing as he drifted off. “I guess I have to continue,” Foggy said to Karen, who had her hand over her mouth, stifling a laugh. Foggy liked to pretend he was being inconvenienced, but secretly he revelled in the fact that he, and only he, could help Matt in such a way.

Chapter End Notes

We'll be heading back to New York / work / Julia next chapter. I included the vacation as a relief from the craziness of Matt's assault and pneumonia ahead of the busy conclusion, but in my first draft it was only half a chapter. I think I needed the escapism of writing about holidays. I might have to write a separate vacation off-shoot later (would anyone be interested in reading something like that?). Also, I was hoping to get to the Halloween chapter last month, but it wasn't to be. Stay tuned for some post-Halloween Halloween. As always, leave a comment if you can. I love 'em.
“We need to tie one hand behind his back,” Foggy said to Karen.

“That’s ridiculous. You only need one hand to play badminton,” Karen replied.

“Yeah, but it’ll throw him off balance.”

“You could tie my legs together,” Matt joked.

Foggy shook his head. “I feel like we’re dangerously near kink territory now.” He sighed. “It’s not fair, Matt. How do you get the shuttlecock to go where you want it?”

Matt smirked. “I listen. You two rely too much on vision.”

Foggy rolled his eyes and tapped the shuttlecock in Matt’s general direction. Matt effortlessly sent it back so that flew directly at Foggy’s racquet. Foggy took a frantic swipe and the shuttlecock soared over the neighbouring fence, landing on their back lawn.

“All you had to do was lightly hit it, Fog,” Matt said before pausing to listen for signs that the neighbours were home. Deciding that the coast was clear, he dropped the racquet and lithely leaped over the four-foot dividing fence. On his return, he did a quick somersault as he pushed off the top of the fence, landing lightly on his feet while trying to not to laugh at his friends’ rapid heartbeats.

“It’s a bit mangled,” Matt said, ignoring the obvious silence from his friends. He smoothed out the cheap plastic, trying to clip the cone back into place.

“Oh well, that puts an end to that,” Foggy said, not sounding sorry at all. “Can we make that sandcastle now? It’s our last day and we still haven’t made one. A promise is a promise. We did your activity, now you have to do mine.”

Matt huffed in amusement. “You never had to play, Fog.”

“I wanted to – until you turned out to be some kind of badminton savant that is. It’s only fun when your opponent is evenly matched.”

Karen was standing on the deck, amused by the exchange. She laughed, “what did you expect, Foggy? We watched him intentionally spear a rat through the skull with a pair of scissors from across the room. I don’t think I can be surprised anymore.” She shook her finger at Matt, who was smirking at the memory. “But don’t you dare interpret that as an endorsement of your rat-killing methods, Mr Murdock,” Karen said theatrically.

Matt shrugged, but looked pleased nonetheless.

Matt also turned out to be a savant at sandcastle building. When Foggy got possessive about his turrets, Matt decided to build a castle extension, incorporating a moat system, shells, and undercuts that seemed to defy gravity.

“What’s that?” Karen asked Matt, pointing to a flat section with high walls.

“The arena,” Matt said, sitting back on his heels.
“For battles?”

“For the crabs,” Matt explained.

Foggy abandoned his turrets and craned his head to see what the fuss was about. “What’s this I hear about crabs?”

Matt sighed and without speaking, dug aside some of the wet sand beside the sandcastle, picked up the two tiny crabs buried underneath, and plonked them into the arena. “Crab arena,” he said, pointing at the creatures scuttling over to the single narrow strip of shade.

“Matt, I-I don’t think they’re enjoying themselves,” Foggy said hesitantly. “Don’t get me wrong, bud, it’s cute, but-” Foggy paused, not sure how to put it.

“It’s a bit mean,” Karen finished.

Matt laughed. “I’m not going to make them battle to the death. It’s just-” he stopped as Daisy flew at the crabs, tumbling headfirst into Matt’s carefully constructed sandcastle.

Foggy eyed Matt carefully. “You totally knew Daisy would go off her nuts at those crabs,” he said. “And you made no attempt to stop her.”

Matt pulled the wiggling Daisy off the sandcastle and extracted the two crabs, plonking them back in the hole from which they’d come.

“Battle re-enactment. Crabs versus the uberhund,” Matt said plainly, returning the now hyperactive Daisy to the ground. Encouraged by Karen’s laughter, Daisy pounced on Matt’s ruined sandcastle again, digging into the soft sand.

“I’m going to have one last swim,” Matt said, standing up with a stretch. While Foggy was distracted, Daisy leaped over to his part of the castle, destroying the carefully constructed turrets. “Damn dog,” he grumbled. “I worked really hard on those fortifications.”

Karen’s nominated activity for their final day of vacation was for Matt to finally teach her how to make a seafood risotto. It didn’t matter to her that he’d never made a risotto with anything other than vegetarian ingredients. He slipped out with Daisy to visit the fish monger while the other two were showering and changing post-beach. It was partly an opportunity to put through his now daily call to Elektra and partly a chance to buy seafood without Foggy retelling the ‘we drank the eel’ story.

Matt returned with three large crabs and a manic Daisy pulling crazily at the end of her leash.

Foggy laughed. “Crabs? Really? Anyone would think you were obsessed.”

“Daisy is,” Matt replied, dumping the bag in the sink and releasing the overstimulated dog. “I’m making a crab and pea risotto.”

“Crab and pea,” Karen repeated, evidently unconvinced.

Foggy nodded in support. “Have faith, Karen,” he said.

“Daze, you’re not having crab,” Matt said crossly, nudging Daisy away with his foot. He redirected his attention to Karen, “believe me, it’ll be delicious.” And of course, it was.
They left Oracle Cove the next morning, returning to a chilly and overcast New York near nightfall. Matt slept most of the journey, waking only once they’d entered the outskirts of New York City. He cringed at the increase in ambient noise, burying his head in a pillow while he refocussed. Foggy heard the rustling from the back seat and turned around to find Matt hunched over with his hands over his head.

“Matt, are you okay?” Foggy lightly touched Matt’s exposed hand.

“Yeah-yeah,” Matt croaked, slowly unfurling. “Just waking up.”

“We’re almost home,” Foggy said, stretching in his seat.

“At least it’s Sunday night traffic,” Karen pointed out as they pulled up at the traffic lights. She tapped absently on the steering wheel. “We’d still be two hours away from home if it were a week day.”

“There’s an argument for flying,” Matt said.

“Yeah, well we thought it’d be easier to kidnap you by car than plane,” Foggy returned.

Matt buried his head in the pillow again and Foggy took the hint, turning back to Karen. “Work tomorrow, huh?”

“Ergh, don’t remind me. I mean – yeah, boss. Love my work,” she joked.

Matt dumped his bags at the door and immediately hurried to the bathroom. As he reached the door, however, he stopped and bunched his fists, sensing something unfamiliar in the corner.

“Matt, what’s wrong?” Foggy said, looking around the room for the source of Matt’s alarm.

Matt’s shoulders slumped as he realised what the object was. He wandered over to the sculpture on the wall. “You picked it up,” Matt said, running his hands over the wall sculpture he’d purchased a month ago.

“Yeah, the exhibition finished and the gallery offered to drop it into the office. Dad helped me hang it.”

“Does it look good?”

“Yeah. A definite improvement on the thrift store painting.” Foggy watched Matt slowly explore the peaks and grooves of the painted wood. “Uh, I know it’s a delicate topic and all, but maybe you should give Gladys a call. I think the gallery dropped it off as a favour to her.”

Matt shook his head.

“What happened between you?”

“I-I can’t – Fog, don’t get involved.”
“Okay,” Foggy said, his hands up in surrender. “I should know better than to get between Matt Murdock and his ladies. I’m going to unpack my stuff and get to bed.”

Matt didn’t delay getting to bed either, but after snoozing all day in the car he couldn’t sleep. Now that he was back home, all the problems that had been plaguing him seemed to return. It’s not that he hadn’t thought about the assault or the subsequent media coverage, or his health issues, or the itch of inaction that he just couldn’t scratch. The problems just didn’t seem as real with the geographic and psychological distance of Oracle Cove. No wonder people went on vacation.

Matt woke up to the sound of Daisy slamming through the dog door to the roof. He listened intently as she skittered across the rooftop towards … there was someone up there. He struggled out of bed and padded up the stairs to the roof, sucking in his breath as he encountered the cold New York air.

“Elektra, we talked about these unannounced midnight visits,” he croaked.

“Nice to see you too, Matthew,” she replied. She was holding Daisy and stroking her under the chin. Matt grabbed Daisy and clung onto her possessively. “Don’t worry, she still loves you best,” Elektra teased.

“I’m going back to bed,” Matt said, turning around and heading back to the apartment stairs.

“I missed you,” she said, and he stopped. “You never went on that beach holiday to San Sebastian with me, Matthew.”

“That’s because you disappeared,” he replied without turning around.

“Yes,” Elektra said wistfully, her attention split.

Matt was tempted to ask her inside. He hesitated, trying to decide what he wanted and how it differed from what was best. “Uh, give-give me a call in the morning,” he eventually said. “We can talk then.” He locked the dog door as he returned inside.

Matt drummed his fingers on his desk, frustrated with his sluggish brain. It was his first day at the office for almost four weeks. He was trying desperately to concentrate on the document at hand, but his mind kept slipping back to Elektra. After last night’s visit, he’d left three messages for Elektra, but still hadn’t had a response. The two of them had spoken on the phone almost every day while he was away, and the sudden silence irritated him.

Under the guise of making a pot of tea, Matt put the kettle on and sauntered over to Karen. He asked in a forced casual voice, “any calls for me today?”

Without looking up, Karen replied, “no, were you expecting a call?”

Matt bit his bottom lip. “No,” he said evasively, turning back to the kettle just as Karen opened her mouth to probe further. He could hear her breath change as she hesitated and closed her lips again. He wordlessly poured the water into his tiny personal teapot and wandered back to his office, shutting the door behind him. As he poured a cup of tea, Matt could hear Karen’s altered breaths as
she strained to hear what Matt was doing. He ran his fingers over his phone before violently shoving it into his drawer and returning to the painfully dull document.

Foggy was up extra early the next morning putting the final touches on his Halloween costume. He carefully combed his hair around the fleshy rubber horns he’d purchased at the carnival, swearing as he nudged one of the horns out of place.

“Matt,” he called from the bathroom. “Do you have any suture glue?”

Matt rushed into the bathroom, his hair rumpled and his pyjamas lopsided. “What’s wrong? Did you cut yourself?”

“No, no, no,” Foggy said quickly. “My horns – they just won’t stay put. I figured you’d have glue of some sort…. That is a thing, right? Or am I just making it up?”

“It’s a thing,” Matt said. “I-I just don’t think it’s a good idea to glue horns to your head. It’s–it’s strong.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right,” Foggy said, returning to his wobbly horns. “Sorry for scaring you.” Matt didn’t move and Foggy eventually stuttered, “oh shit, sorry. You need to use the bathroom.”

Matt gave him a serene smile. “When you’re ready.”

Foggy bit his lip when Matt later emerged freshly shaven and dressed in his usual suit and tie. There was no point denying it: Foggy was utterly disappointed. Yesterday, he and Karen had tried to implement an office-wide Halloween dress up policy, which Matt shot down immediately. It’d got nasty when Matt had pointed out that the costumes looked unprofessional. Foggy had retaliated with a comment about Matt’s near constant five o’clock shadow being unprofessional, to which Matt parroted Anna’s common criticism about Foggy’s hair length. In the end, Karen negotiated a truce, with Matt agreeing to dress up after work, and Foggy agreeing not to bug Matt to dress up during the day. “Wasn’t that easy?” Karen said sarcastically as the grown men retreated to their respective offices.

As they walked to work, Foggy described the various costumes people were wearing out loud for Matt’s sake.

“That guy’s wearing brown ropes,” he whispered. “Maybe it’s a Stranger Things thing?”

Matt’s lip twitched. “The living vines you described as poo?”

“Yeah, those ones. It seemed like a night time costume don’t you think?”

Matt shrugged. “I don’t think there’s ever a good time to wear poo.”

“Oh my God, Matt,” Foggy said, stopping in his tracks. “There’s someone dressed as Daredevil.”

“What? Where?”

“Two o’clock. Across the road.”

Matt stilled, listening for who knows what. Then he shrugged and kept walking.
“That’s it? A shrug?”

Matt stopped and turned in Foggy’s direction. “What am I supposed to do, Foggy?”

“I don’t know. Freak out?”

“And what, sue for impersonation?”

“Oh come on, it’s yours, Matt. It’s your symbol. Don’t tell me you’re not a little bit cross.”

“Do you want me to be?” Matt snapped before accelerating away from Foggy towards the office.

Foggy ran to catch up to Matt. “What if he gets mistaken for the real Daredevil?”

Matt snorted derisively. “With that little muscle mass? Unlikely.”

Foggy decided not to ask about Matt’s apparently muscle reading radar, and tried to clear the air by calling out the costumes once again. “There’s an Iron Man… Ghostbusters… Harry Potter… Captain America… Punky Brewster… Harry Potter… some kind of ghost…”

Every client who walked through the door that day complimented Foggy and Karen on their costumes, always doing a double take at Matt as they tried to figure out if his costume was just too subtle to identify. At four on the dot, Foggy promptly packed up his bag and announced, “we’re going home, and Matt, you’re going to change into something that isn’t a boring suit, sweats or pyjamas, and then we’re going trick or treating with Julia.”

“Then you’re meeting me at the Halloween party at Vinorama to make up for the fact that I have to mind the office alone for the next few hours,” Karen said hopefully.

Matt looked pained, and Karen said, “c’mon, Matt. You only need to stay at the party for an hour. It’s tradition.”

“Just because we did it once, doesn’t make it tradition,” Matt argued.

“This is our opportunity to make it a company tradition though,” Foggy pointed out.

“Please, Matt,” Karen said with a pout.

“You know he can’t see that face,” Foggy told her.

Karen straightened her face. “Really? Your radar thingy can’t do expressions?”

“Really,” Matt said. “And I’ll think about the party. I’m tired, and- and it’s been three days since- since…” Matt swallowed, not wanting to even say the word ‘seizure’. “I just don’t want to push it,” he concluded.

It was more than enough to get Karen to back down. “Oh, yeah. That’s cool, sorry, Matt.”

Matt still hadn’t decided on a costume by the time Julia and Elizabeth knocked on his door for their scheduled trick or treating. With Elizabeth holding Julia’s cane behind her, the little girl greeted Matt with a growl and a shriek of “karate chop,” as she hit him just above the knee. Completely
startled by the manoeuvre, Matt braced himself too late, letting out a small cry as Julia connected with a particularly sensitive nerve. Elizabeth gave a horrified cry and pulled Julia back, admonishing her. Once he got over his initial shock, Matt started chuckling, which earned an unseen glare from Elizabeth.

“Don’t encourage her, Matt,” she pleaded.

Matt took a breath. “I know, sorry.” He rubbed the back of his neck and said, “Julia, you need to use your force for good.”


Julia said meekly, “sorry, Matt… are you hurt?”

“I’ll survive,” he replied, testing his sore leg. She certainly had the force behind her. Was it a lucky aim or had her skills already advanced to the point where she knew exactly where his leg was?

Foggy poked his head into the hallway to see what all the fuss was about and gave a spluttered laugh as he spotted Julia’s costume: black jeans, a long black top and a knotted piece of fabric over the top half of her head.

“I like your costume,” Foggy said, and Matt cocked his head at his friend’s smug tone.

Matt said, “what- what is it?”

“I’m the Devil of Hell’s Kitchen,” Julia said proudly, adopting a stance that was, in Foggy’s opinion, far too close to Matt’s ready-to-fight pose.

“No more hitting,” Elizabeth warned. “Remember, the Devil of Hell’s Kitchen only went after the bad guys.”

“That he did,” Foggy said enthusiastically, looking at Matt with a sly grin. Matt was trying to keep a neutral face as he digested the information. “You know what, Matt? You two should have matching costumes. Devil and Devil junior.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea, Foggy,” Matt said through clenched teeth.

“Why not? You worried that people will think you’re the real Daredevil?”

“No, of course not, that’d be absurd. I’m blind,” Matt said crisply, his tone warning Foggy not to go any further around the oblivious Julia and Elizabeth.

“There’s your answer,” Foggy said enthusiastically. “Take your cane and no one will be confused.”

“Yeah!” shrieked Julia, giving an excited jump on the spot. “Please, Matt? Please can we be the same?”

Half an hour later, the four of them were pounding the pavements with Julia and Matt in matching costumes. Matt had found one of his old black long-sleeved tops, although it now swamped his skinny frame. It’d be hard to link the buff Devil to Matt with his current muscle mass. At the last moment, Matt realised just how cold it would be outside without his old levels of activity, so he shrugged on his armoured hoodie. However, the addition of his old black mask was more than enough to reference the former Devil of Hell’s Kitchen costume.
Foggy and Elizabeth chatted as Julia and Matt walked along in front of them holding hands. Matt was whispering instructions to Julia, encouraging her to take charge navigating. Buoyed by her kickass costume, she moved forward with more confidence than they’d seen in her so far.

The two of them got lots of remarks on their costumes, ranging from “oh that’s so cute” to Julia, to “I often wondered how he saw out of that mask. I like your sense of humour,” or even a few times, “I often wonder what happened to that guy. He saved my ass.” Each time, Matt just nodded and smiled. He knew it was probably foolish to dress up like this, but he rather enjoyed hiding in plain sight.

After a couple of hours of trick or treating, Elizabeth looked at Julia’s bulging sack of sugary treats and suggested it was time to call it quits and grab a pizza.

“Matt, we’re due to meet Karen in a quarter of an hour,” Foggy whispered.

“She can come to pizza,” Matt said, pulling his phone out. “I’ll call her.”

“She’s going to freak when she sees your costume.”

Matt put his phone back in his pocket. “Really? Um, I guess you could go ahead without me. I’ll come by later.”

“No, you can’t get out of the party that easily, Matt,” Foggy warned. He sighed. “Go ahead and call her.”

Karen didn’t freak out, but her heart rate definitely increased when she entered the pizza joint to see the masked duo playing a game of ‘ear spy’ (as Matt had termed it). He could sense Karen standing at the door watching them play. He gave her a reassuring smile and she hurried over and joined them at the table.

“Ear spy something that starts with ‘r’,” Matt said to Julia.

“Rats,” Julia said, and Karen, Foggy and Elizabeth all yelped “what?”

“Nope,” Matt said just as the cash register popped open.

“Register,” Julia yelled.

“Yep,” Matt said. “Give me a fist bump… hold your hand up and I’ll bump it… oops, not quite... yeah, that’s the way.” They finally connected. Matt turned to Foggy. “Gotta give you one too for your costume, buddy” he said, holding his fist out for Foggy to meet.

“Back up to those rats,” Foggy said. “Are there really rats?”

“It’s New York, Fog. There are always rats,” Matt pointed out. “But none in the kitchen if that’s what you’re asking.”

Julia shook her head and groped for her glass of soda.

As the pizzas started to arrive, Matt asked Julia, “how are you with a knife and fork?”

Julia shrugged. “I dunno.”

“She’s getting there,” Elizabeth said. “We tend to eat from bowls and avoid things like peas.”
“Ah yes,” Matt said with a small laugh. “My arch nemesis. Institutional kitchens love serving peas. The orphanage kitchen used to serve the peas in a separate bowl for me or mix them into instant mashed potato. Oh how I hated them.”

“You made that incredible crab and pea risotto last week though,” Karen piped up.

“I had to learn to like peas as an adult,” Matt explained.

Foggy nodded. “It’s true. He wouldn’t touch them at college.”

“They were always soggy and overcooked,” Matt pointed out, sliding his hand along the table till he encountered the large plate of pizza.

Karen chuckled. “You don’t know how bizarre it looks, Matt. The man in the mask eating pizza in a busy restaurant.”

Matt gave her a nervous smile and took a bite of his pizza.

“When we came in, the owner said that if Matt were the real Devil of Hell’s Kitchen, we’d eat for free,” Foggy told Karen. “I think he was joking.”

“No, he wasn’t. There was an arson attempt awhile back,” Matt said, his words muffled by the mouthful of pizza in his mouth.

Foggy chuckled, “oh, okay. I gotta make friends with the real Devil of Hell’s Kitchen then.”

“Friends with benefits,” Julia said.

Elizabeth looked horrified. “Oh no, honey. Not-no, you can’t say that. Um, how about another ear spy – uh, ear spy something beginning with b.”

“Baby,” Julia said, pointing towards the gurgling baby at the next table.

“Yeah,” Elizabeth said, now at a loss as to what to say.

“That was easy,” Julia said. “Foggy, you do one.”

“Oh, I don’t think I’m good at this. Uh, uh, ear spy something beginning with c.”

Julia yelled, “cats!”

“Uh, no, but I’m thinking I shouldn’t be so worried about those rats now,” Foggy joked.

“Chewing,” Matt said as he swallowed the last of his slice.

“Yes, yeah, I guess it wasn’t very challenging,” Foggy dismissed.

“No, it was good, Fog,” Matt said with an encouraging smile. “There’s a lot of that going on in here.”

After all the pizzas had been chewed through and they’d said goodbye to a tired and slightly sugar-frazzled Julia and her smiling mother, Matt let Foggy and Karen drag him to the Halloween party.

“Ha! There’s another Daredevil over by the Jukebox,” Foggy said as they sat down at a table.

Matt collapsed his cane and snapped the elastic around it with a crack. “Same one?” he said, trying
to keep his voice unremarkable.

“Um, no. This guy’s costume’s fancier. I think the other guy just drew some lines on a red onesie.”

Matt drummed his fingers on the table for half a minute before ripping off the mask and replacing it with the glasses he’d stashed in his hoodie pocket.

“Oh, come on, Matt,” Foggy moaned. “You promised you’d dress up after work.”

“I did. And now I’m back to Matt Murdock.”

Foggy rolled his eyes. “Fine. What-”

“Why did you take the mask off?” Karen interrupted as she returned from the bar, three bottles in hand.

“You know what? I’m tired, and I don’t think all this is such a good idea,” he said, waving his hand in the direction of the beer. “We can do this another time – when-when it’s quieter.” He slipped off the stool, and opened his cane with a sharp crack. Ignoring Foggy and Karen’s pleas to stay, Matt stalked out of the bar.

Foggy was nicely tipsy when he wobbled up the stairs to their apartment. Three drinks, he and Karen had agreed. Three drinks made them practically teetotallers on Halloween in their opinion. Three drinks didn’t stop Foggy from getting the key in the lock, but it did make him initially oblivious to the bangs and cracks around him. It was only when Daisy let out a wild yap and banged on the roof access door that Foggy realised that the cacophony was coming from their roof.

He took the stairs two at a time, pushing against the dog door first only to find it jammed shut. There was another crash from the other side of the door, and Foggy banged on it, “Matt, if you’re out there, open the door.”

He ran down the stairs and checked Matt’s bedroom. Nothing. The bathroom. Again, nothing. Matt was the one wreaking havoc then. Returning to the top of the stairs, Foggy yelled at Daisy to get out of the way and took a run at the door, crashing hard into the solid wood and crumpling to the floor. “Ow,” he said, rubbing his arm. He thought for a moment. There was a hammer in Matt’s living room cabinet, which had been used to hang the artwork. Foggy scrambled down the stairs again, grabbing the hammer and returning to the top. He stood in front of the door, the hammer in two hands. Daisy gave a series of high-pitched yaps. “Shhh, the neighbours will complain,” Foggy told her crossly.

To himself, he said, “okay, Nelson. You can do this.” He brought down the hammer on the handle and it pinged off first go. Foggy pushed at the door, but it looked like his plan had just resulted in a firmly locked door without a handle. “Fuck you, Matt,” Foggy swore. “If you’re up there, let me through the door.”

“There’s got to be another key around here somewhere,” Foggy said to himself. “If I were Matt Murdock, where would I hide a key.” Foggy stood in the living room, scanning the area for ideas. He was about to search the tea canisters when he noticed a key dangling from underneath the kitchen shelf. “Since when…?” Foggy muttered, snatchng the slightly rusted key and rushing back to the door. It fit. Foggy pushed against the door and stumbled out into the fresh air just as the
banging stopped.

Matt was crouched by the roof wall, his armoured hoodie over his head. He’d caught the escaped Daisy, and had her protectively tucked under one arm. Foggy looked from Matt to the woman who stood on the other side of the roof, staring at a point behind the water tower with her fists up in a defensive pose. Foggy gasped, “Elektra?” and the woman momentarily turned in his direction with a scowl.

“Foggy,” Matt croaked. “You need to-”

But he was cut off by a shriek from wherever Elektra had been looking. There was crack, quickly followed by a fast-moving spark that hit the roof wall with a bang.

“Shit,” Foggy said, looking at the blackened spot on the wall, and then back to the spot Elektra was focussed on. Foggy hissed, "Matt, what's behind the water tower?"

Matt leaped over to Foggy’s side and pushed him back into the apartment’s entrance vestibule. “Leave, it's not safe,” Matt growled, handing over the frantic dog. “Get far away from here. Now.”

“No, Matt. Is -is that really Elektra? Tell me what’s going on,” Foggy called after him as Matt ran back into the fray. “Matt, come back!” Daisy ripped free from Foggy’s arms and leaped back towards Matt, narrowly avoiding a spark. Foggy took a deep breath and ran out after the dog.
I just realised that it's a year since I published my first fan fiction, which just happens to be the first story in this series. It's become a major obsession of mine, encouraged by all the people who read, comment, like etc. the stories. So thank you all. It's lovely to share my love of the Daredevil character with others. Enjoy the battle!

Daisy sprinted over to Elektra and stood there barking frantically at the water tower. “Get away, you stupid dog,” Elektra hissed, trying to kick Daisy away with her foot. Foggy scrambled after the dog, ignoring Matt’s yells to stop. Just as Foggy reached Daisy, Elektra pushed him out of the way and a spark landed just where he’d been standing.

“Thanks,” Foggy said weakly, grabbing Daisy and nervously edging his way back to the door. But his path was blocked by an old, wrinkly-skinned man wielding a massive sword. “Uh, hi, um, I don’t want to hurt you,” Foggy stuttered. “I just want to-

“Foggy, move,” Matt yelled, and Foggy high-tailed it back to the top of the stairs, narrowly escaping another spark. Foggy stood against the wall, holding a whining and struggling Daisy. He knew he should follow Matt’s instructions, but he was unable to look away.

Elektra jumped off the side of the rooftop and flipped behind the water tower. The old man followed with his sword ready, launching himself at whatever was behind the water tower. Seconds later, Elektra was thrown back through the air, landing with a thud. “Fuck,” Foggy said, thinking she must be dead (Again? Still?) with a fall like that, but Elektra rolled quickly to her feet and got ready to relaunch the attack.

“Matthew,” she whispered, making an over-emphasised gesture to go around the other side of the tower. Matt nodded, ignoring Foggy’s squawked “no!”

Matt ran around the tower, ducking as a spark flew towards him. Two more sparks quickly followed, and Matt rolled under the tower to escape. Foggy edged sideways, trying to catch a glimpse of what was going on.

Foggy’s wish was granted as a ghoulish figure flipped onto the water tower. Black ribbons snaked down her bony arms and legs. She could almost be Elektra’s twin, but her features were sharper than Elektra’s with dark bags underneath her eyes. Her hair was ragged with knotted lumps protruding unevenly across the top of her head. She laughed as she spotted Foggy, sending a stream of sparks at him, which he narrowly avoided by ducking into the apartment vestibule.

There was a metallic crash as Matt leaped at her from behind, kicking her legs out from beneath her and receiving a retaliatory blow to his thigh. He blocked a swipe of her sai with his new cane, but before he could land another blow, she flipped sideways to the ground.

Elektra wasted no time in attack. She drew her own sais, and the other woman laughed. “You know you can’t beat me. You are me,” the woman sneered, sending another spark flying. Elektra
screamed as it hit her arm, her face screwed up in pain as she nursed her elbow. Ducking another spark that came her way, Elektra steeled herself and growled, “then why did you rename yourself Erinyes?”

Matt briefly engaged Erinyes again before rolling away to the edge of the vestibule where Foggy was hiding. Matt yelled, “Stick, watch out,” as a spark flew at the old man. Stick put his hand out and the spark stopped a foot from him before flying back at Erinyes at speed. It popped and disappeared moments before it hit, and Stick cringed as if it’d somehow hit him even from that distance. Erinyes cackled and lunged at Stick, blocking his sword strikes with her sai.

“That’s Stick?” Foggy asked the wheezing Matt.

Matt nodded, putting his hands on his knees as he tried to catch a breath.

“What’s going on, Matt? What is that thing, and what’s Elektra-”

“Foggy, you need to listen to me,” Matt said quickly between breaths. “You need to get away from here. It’s too dangerous.”

“Not until you tell me what’s going on,” Foggy said stubbornly, groaning in frustration as Matt leaped back into the fray. Matt ducked and somersaulted under the sparks, waiting until Erinyes was distracted by Stick and his sword before throwing the bottom of his cane so that the cabling wrapped its way around Erinyes’ torso. She let out a shriek and the ribbons around her legs started to move, slithering onto the ground and heading towards Matt, Stick and Elektra.

Matt hesitated, confused as to what exactly was moving. Foggy whispered, “they’re snakes,” for Matt’s benefit. Matt gave a small nod of recognition before stepping back and away from the advancing reptile. Erinyes took advantage of the distraction, spinning lithely on the spot and ripping Matt’s cane from his hand. She kicked the cane away so that it skittered under the water tower.

Stick quickly swiped at his snake, slicing its head off with such force that it flew at Erinyes, hitting her in the breast. Elektra drew a knife from her boot, throwing it at the snake so that it punctured it through the skull. Foggy watched in horror as Matt, now weaponless, dodged the snake’s advances, blocking an attack with the cast on his wrist. Stick didn’t seem to make any effort to help, focussing on Erinyes instead.

Foggy was about to run down to the kitchen to grab one of Matt’s ultra-sharp kitchen knives when Daisy broke loose from his grip, running at the snake. With a single shake of her head, the snake was dead in her mouth. She dropped it at Matt’s feet and gave a quick spin before looking up at him expectantly.

“Good dog,” Matt whispered, giving her a quick pat, before turning his head and hissing, “Foggy, for fucks sake get her out of here.”

“She just saved your life,” Foggy returned.

Meanwhile, Stick had managed to land a blow, slicing a massive gash across Erinyes’s chest and earning a spark to the leg in return. He stumbled backwards on his injured leg, leaning against the roof wall while he tried to get the feeling back in his foot.

Matt and Elektra both attacked at once, and Foggy got an inkling as to why Matt continued to consort with Elektra even though he knew she was dangerous and had time and time again hurt him. Their collaborative attack was akin to a dance. They kicked, swiped and vaulted with such
grace, with such instinctual synchronicity, that Foggy found himself watching with his mouth open in awe.

Erinyes pulled out her sais once again, swiping deftly at Matt’s chest. One of the blades connected, but instead of slicing Matt right through, the sai grated against the surface. Matt grinned like a man possessed, kicking the weapon from her hand and landing a well-placed punch to the cheek. Elektra pulled her own weapons from her back and jabbed at Erinyes’ chest, nicking only the side of her chest thanks to Erinyes’ well-timed sideways leap. Erinyes let out another roar and the ribbons on her arms began to animate, slithering towards her three assailants with an additional one for Foggy.

Foggy had been watching from the sidelines this whole time, knowing full well there was nothing that he could do other than distract Matt. But now, with the snake coming towards him, he was part of it, like it or not. Daisy attacked Matt’s snake, killing it expertly before she leaped over to Foggy’s. She didn’t quite get the right grip this time and it flailed around before she dropped it and tried to bite it again. Furious, the snake reared up and Foggy yelped, “no!”

Matt paused, distracted by Foggy’s outburst, just in time for a spark to hit him. He fell to the ground and immediately started convulsing, the only saving grace being the hood that inflated around his head to soften the blow. Foggy looked from Matt to the snake to Erinyes, trying to figure out whether helping Matt would end in all their deaths. As Foggy scrambled towards Matt, Erinyes laughed and a few more snakes slithered out of her hair, both of them quickly slithering towards Matt and Foggy. Stick yelled, “hey mouth breather, use this,” and threw a small, but still dangerous-looking sword over to Foggy, who caught it by the handle (much to his surprise). Foggy slashed at the snake, beheading the creature just as Daisy finished off the second.

As Stick and Elektra stepped up the fight, Foggy tried to drag the still convulsing Matt away from Erinyes without injuring him further. He kept glancing up, watching as Erinyes’ movements become quicker and more targeted. It was clear that she wasn’t playing anymore. Stick lunged, impaling her in the stomach and giving the sword a quick twist. “Elektra, finish her,” he growled, throwing her his sword. She deftly caught it and with a single swipe, slashed clean through Erinyes’ neck. Her head bounced onto the rooftop with a heavy thud. Elektra looked at the head with wide eyes before crumpling to the ground. Erinyes’ body turned to a grainy haze and whirled into Elektra’s open mouth and nose.

“What the?” Foggy stuttered, barely believing his eyes. He turned back to Matt seeking something more normal, more grounded, even though his friend was the very reason he was exposed to all this supernatural craziness. “Five minutes,” Foggy said out loud, avoiding Matt’s shaking limbs as he sought to check his pulse. “Shit, I’m going to have to call an ambulance.” As if he could hear the threat, Matt finished seizing almost immediately. Foggy rolled Matt onto his side just as Stick sauntered over.

“Shouldn’t you be checking if Elektra’s okay?” Foggy asked Stick, glancing over at Elektra who was still lying unconscious on her back.

“No need. She’s alive,” Stick drawled. He passed. “At least whatever iteration of Elektra emerges now. I still haven’t ruled out killing her.”

“What?”

“Just kidding,” Stick said, but his tone indicated otherwise.

Foggy shook Matt’s shoulder. “Matt, can you hear me?” Foggy fumbled with the tessellated mask over Matt’s face. Matt had made it retreat after the carnival incident by pressing something. If only
he could figure out how…

“He’s out to it.” Stick said, twirling the sword with an air of boredom.

“Yeah, I know that,” Foggy said, looking at Stick with a withering expression.

Stick tipped his head in a manner Foggy had always associated solely with Matt. “Matty will come around. He did last time.”

“Hang on, Matt’s fought that thing before?”

“I warned him,” Stick said gruffly. “She knew his weakness. He shouldn’t have fought her. But Matty’s stubborn. Couldn’t make him stay away if I tried.”

“You got that right,” Foggy muttered.

After watching Foggy wrestle with the mask for another minute, Stick leaned down and touched a small node in Matt’s tessellated mask, causing it to collapse.

“Thanks,” Foggy said, tucking the loose elements into a pouch within the hood.

“The kid loves his gadgets,” Stick said, and for the first time, Foggy detected a note of affection in Stick’s voice.

Foggy cleared his throat. “I’m just going to check Elektra. Can you- oh never mind.” Daisy was sitting in the small of Matt’s back, waiting, watching. Better her than this Stick guy.

Foggy stood up to make his way over to Elektra, but Stick was blocking the most direct route. Foggy opened his mouth to say, “excuse me,” but closed it again, taking in Stick’s pearly white eyes, wrinkly face and bony frame in silence.

“Do I look the way you expected?” Stick asked, clearly enjoying Foggy’s unease.

Foggy wordlessly walked around Stick, kneeling beside Elektra to check for injuries. There were a few cuts, but nothing serious apart from the lack of consciousness. Foggy rolled her into the recovery position, and stared at her, still not sure if he could believe that the woman lying there was the same one they’d buried only recently.

Foggy looked up to see Stick kicking Matt in the leg. He was muttering, “get up. Get up, Matty. Get up.”

“What are you doing?” Foggy yelled, running over and pushing Stick aside.

Stick stumbled theatrically, chuckling, “no wonder he’s got so soft with friends like you.”

Foggy ignored the old man, kneeling by Matt’s side once more and taking his hand. “Matty, can you hear me? Squeeze my hand.”

Foggy looked up at Stick. “Do you reckon you could help me carry him inside?”

Stick rolled his eyes. “I suppose.”

“And then we’ll come back and get Elektra,” Foggy added less enthusiastically.

“You don’t want to bring Elektra inside,” Stick warned.
“Why not? She’s hurt.”

Stick tilted his head and gave his sword another twirl. “You really don’t know anything, do you, kid.”

“I know that when people are hurt I should help them. I don’t like Elektra - never have. But liking her doesn’t factor into it.” Foggy grabbed Matt under his arms. “Oof… can you take his legs?”

Stick returned his sword to his back and lazily motioned at Foggy to hand Matt over. Foggy stared as Stick slung Matt over his shoulder and singlehandedly carried him down the stairs.

Foggy started, “uh, the bedroom’s-” but Stick walked straight into Matt’s bedroom without hesitation. Foggy darted down the stairs after them just in time to see Stick throw Matt unceremoniously on the bed. Daisy jumped up and settled near Matt’s head, looking at Foggy with doleful eyes.

“You’ve been here before,” Foggy stated.

“A few times,” Stick drawled. “Still has his silk sheets I see.” He made a face that left Foggy in doubt exactly what Stick thought about Matt’s obsession with bed linen.

“Could you-”

“Get Elektra,” Stick finished. “Yep.”

With Stick out of the way, Foggy returned to the job of getting Matt to wake up. He didn’t know just how worried he should be. The seizure was longer than usual, so it made sense that he was taking his time waking up. However, Foggy still had no idea what zapped him. Foggy spotted the lump of Matt’s phone in his pocket and pulled it out. “Call Claire,” he said.

The phone announced it was locked. Foggy apologised as he used Matt’s thumb to unlock the phone. “I promise you this violation of privacy is for a good cause,” he told his unconscious friend.

Claire answered the phone with a rushed, “hey Matt, is everything okay?”

Foggy could hear music and the babble of excited voices in the background. He cleared his throat. “Um, sorry to call so late. It’s Foggy, calling from Matt’s phone.”

“Shit. What’s happened?”

“It’s complicated.”

“Always is with Matt.”

“Yes, well, he had a seizure and he’s not waking up. I’m worried that something’s wrong.” Foggy squeezed Matt’s limp hand, hoping he’d be proven incorrect. Nothing.

“Call an ambulance. How long has it been?”

“Hmm ten to fifteen minutes? It was a long seizure, but usually he does something by now - move or groan or something.”

“Call an ambulance-”

Foggy pinched the bridge of his nose. “Urgh, the thing is, um, it was kind of a result of being zapped.”
“Zapped,” Claire repeated and Foggy could practically hear her eyebrows rise.

“By this monster woman. More like a spectre… um, and there’s an unconscious woman here who it went into when she killed it.”

“Foggy, is this some kind of Halloween prank, because if it is-”

“It’s not, Claire, it’s really not. Please, Claire,” Foggy begged.

She sighed. “I’ll be round soon. I’m in Harlem so I’ll be a little longer than usual. Is his breathing okay?”

“Yeah, surprisingly. A bit wheezy, but that’s to be expected. He was leaping around like, well, like Daredevil- - like-like old Matt- you know what I mean - only moments before he was zapped. I dunno, maybe it’s endorphins or something.” There was a silence on the other end of the phone, and Foggy added, “but-but I’ll leave the medical stuff to you.”

“See you soon, Foggy. And remember, if he looks like he’s struggling in any way, don’t wait for me. Call an ambulance.”

“Mmm, yeah,” Foggy said. “Bye.”

Stick returned with Elektra over his shoulder, offering his two cents worth as he descended the stairs: “you coddle him. He doesn’t need that hospital shit. Weakens the body.”

“Put her on the couch,” Foggy called, ignoring Stick’s criticism.

Matt’s hand twitched and Foggy looked down to see a pained expression on his face. “Sorry, Matty. I didn’t mean to yell. Can you squeeze my hand?”

Stick sauntered over to Matt’s bed. “Matty, you gonna get up or what?” Matt immediately animated, groping for something beside him and trying to sit up.

“It’s okay, Matty,” Foggy said softly, his hand on Matt’s shoulder. “You can stay lying down if you want.”

Foggy glared at Stick, “he’s had a seizure. He usually sleeps for a few hours afterwards.”

Stick rolled his eyes. “Pathetic. He needs to meditate and build up his strength. He’s become sloppy and undisciplined.” He gave a huff of discontent and wandered out of the room.

Foggy sighed with relief. He rubbed Matt’s shoulder, “Matty, I’ve got some water for you. But first, do you have any injuries I should know about – blood, broken bones…?”

“He’ll have a cracker of a bruise on his chin tomorrow,” Stick called from the kitchen. Matt squirmed again at the sound of Stick’s voice.

“Ignore him,” Foggy whispered, helping Matt take a few sips of water before he completely zoned out again. “That’s good, Matty,” Foggy said as Matt curled up on his side. “Daisy’s here. Go to sleep.” Usually Foggy would insist that Matt talk to him before going to sleep, but with Stick around, Foggy decided that it was less complicated just to let him be.

Foggy returned to the living room to find Elektra lying awkwardly on the couch, one arm tucked under her back. Foggy rushed over and straightened her, muttering something about empathy and care.
Once Elektra was arranged on her side, Foggy stood up to see Stick leaning against the kitchen bench, already half way through a bottle. “Hey, that was one of my beers.” Foggy said, glaring at Stick and hoping he could at least sense some of the animosity even if he couldn’t see his expression.

“I was wondering how Matty’s taste could have improved all of a sudden. His beer usually tastes like piss.”

“Yeah, I know,” Foggy said with a chuckle that surprised himself. Foggy straightened his face. “So what now? You come in here, bring all this drama, drink my beer, then what?”

“You’re welcome,” Stick said, finishing the beer and opening the fridge for another.

“Welcome for what?”

“For saving your ass.”

“You can’t just bring danger to me and Matt and then save us from it.” Foggy walked over to the fridge. “Urgh, I need a beer too.”

Foggy popped the top and took a swig with a relieved, “ahhh.” He ruminated for a moment before asking, “what was that thing?”

Stick looked bored. “Long story.”

“Well, we have at least two hours,” Foggy pointed out.

“You do. I’m off just as soon as I know Elektra’s not going to kill you both.”

“Is that likely?”

Stick shrugged. “Never done this before.”

“Riiiight.” If Foggy didn’t have years of experience dealing with Matt’s evasiveness, he wouldn’t have had the patience for this conversation. As it was, Foggy knew what worked with Matt: it was best to tease one bit of information out at a time. He’d try the same strategy with Stick.

“We buried Elektra,” Foggy started.

“Not for long,” Stick replied.

“Matt told me she was back, um, it must have been a month or so ago. I didn’t believe him. I mean, who would believe something like that. It’s absurd.” Foggy let out a laugh, stopping abruptly when he saw Stick’s face.

“That other woman – thing- whatever it was – it-it looked like Elektra,” Foggy said.

“Did she?” Stick replied between gulps. “That’s nice.”

Foggy ignored his jab and continued, “then she disappeared into Elektra’s mouth like a ghost. Does that mean Elektra’s possessed?”

“Possession is for storybooks and fairy tales.”

Foggy put his beer down with a sharp crack and said firmly, “okay, so what happened?”
“I told you, I’ve never done this before.” Stick grabbed the remaining two beers from the fridge and loped up the stairs to the roof. “Call me when she wakes up,” he yelled over his shoulder.

“Bastard,” Foggy muttered under his breath, knowing full well that Stick had to be able to hear as well as Matt.

A short while later, Stick appeared at the top of the stairs. “She’s waking up,” he announced. Foggy jumped up from the end of Matt’s bed and nervously approached Elektra, mindful of Stick’s earlier words.

Elektra gave a small groan as she struggled upright. She rubbed her eyes then looked around. “I’m at Matthew’s place,” she said to herself. She ignored the nearby Foggy, instead focussing on the old man on the stairs. “Stick, what are you doing here?”

Stick gave a small shrug. “Making sure you don’t kill anyone else today. These guys think you’re within the realms of redemption. I think-”

“I don’t really care what you think, Stick,” Elektra sneered. “Now are you going to kill me or not.”

Foggy looked between them with wide eyes. “Hang on, when you say kill, you really mean hug, right?”


Elektra gingerly got up, holding one of her hands that was swollen from a particularly painful blow.

“Uh, do you want some water?” Foggy said, taking a step towards the kitchen. “I’d offer you beer, but Stick drank it all.”

Stick started down the stairs, his footsteps deliberately drawn-out. He stopped just beyond the living room rug as if it were some kind of invisible barrier. Slowly and carefully he took out a pair of dark glasses. Foggy just wanted to yell, ‘get on with it,’ but he bit his lip, waiting for Stick’s assessment.

After a minute of silence, Stick said to Elektra, “be good. And stay away from Matty.” And with that, he walked out the front door.

“So…” Foggy said to Elektra, rubbing his sweaty hands on his pants.

She stared. “Why do you have horns on your head?”

“Oh, I forgot about those,” Foggy said, feeling his scalp and delicately peeling away the horns. He’d have to thank Matt for his advice on suture glue later. “It’s Halloween today. Do you remember?”

Elektra gave him a withering look and looked back at the kitchen. “That glass of water you mentioned?”

“Oh, yeah. I’ll grab it.” Foggy scampered into the kitchen, filling up the glass with shaking hands. When Stick had ‘joked’ about killing Elektra, it’d put all sorts of ideas into Foggy’s head as to what had just happened and what would happen once she woke up. Even though Stick gave Foggy the creeps, he felt a lot safer around Stick than whatever Elektra might be. Foggy swallowed and
poured a second glass, taking a small sip before returning to Elektra.

“Matt has some first aid stuff for that cut,” Foggy offered, watching Elektra press experimentally at the gash on her arm.

She sighed. “Where’s Matthew?”

“He had a seizure. He’s sleeping now.”

“Another one,” she said, shaking her head. She lightly placed the glass on the table and got to her feet. “I should go. Tell Matthew – um, tell him thank you. I’ll leave his life once and for all this time.”

“Wait!” Foggy paused, “I mean hang on a second. Don’t you want to tell him in person? It’s just- it’s- he-he won’t believe me. He gets these ideas in his head – you know, he refused to believe you were dead, and then you came back. It confirmed all his whacky theories. You can’t – you won’t hurt him again. I won’t-”

Elektra put her hand up to stop Foggy from continuing. Relieved, Foggy took a deep breath. He wasn’t making sense, but none of this made sense.

Foggy cleared his throat and asked, “how-how did you become not dead if you don’t mind me asking?”

Elektra sighed again and looked past Foggy’s head to Matt’s bed. Matt was curled up with Daisy, oblivious to this whole saga. Foggy put his hand out as Elektra started to walk towards the bedroom, not certain that Elektra’s intention was good or otherwise. He quickly drew it away when Elektra shot him a death glare.

Far from threaten Matt, Elektra just sat down on the bed and gently stroked his cheek. Foggy looked away, embarrassed to be privy to such an intimate moment.

Elektra eventually returned to the living room where Foggy was waiting with a pen and paper. “Write him a note at least,” he demanded. “Or are you too cowardly to say goodbye even with a pen?”

Elektra gave Foggy a dirty look. “I don’t care what you think of me. I’ll do it for Matthew and Matthew alone.” She sat down to write the note, staring at the paper for a few moments before looking at Foggy who was staring at her intently. “Do you mind?” she said icily.

Foggy rolled his eyes. “I don’t care what you write as long as you write something.” He walked over to Matt’s stationary drawer. “Here’s an envelope. Seal it afterwards if you wish.”

Elektra sealed the envelope and placed it on the table. “As my lawyer, I’d appreciate it if you’d keep my existence to yourself.” She took a brief look at Matt through the bedroom door and made her way to the door.

“Bye,” Foggy called to her back, but Elektra didn’t bother replying.

“You’re welcome, Foggy,” he muttered in a parody of Elektra’s accent as she shut the door.

No sooner had Elektra left when Claire turned up dressed as a bunch of grapes. “Nice costume,” Foggy said as way of a greeting.

Claire gave him a small smile and said, “where is he?”
“Oh, yeah, sorry, he-he woke up.”

“He did?”

“Yeah.”

“You could have rung-”

Foggy scrubbed at his face. “Could you take a look at him please. The thing that got him I-I just don’t know what it was or what it could do. I need to know he’s okay.”

Claire took a look at the distressed Foggy and softened. “Tell me what happened,” she said, heading towards Matt’s bedroom.

Claire gave Matt’s hand a squeeze. “Matt,” she said softly. “Matt, I need you to talk to me.” She gave his shoulder a small shake and Matt groaned. “Matt, can you talk to me please.”

Matt whispered, “Cla.”

“Yeah, that’s right. You had a seizure. Do you know where you are?”

“Foh,” Matt replied.

“Yeah, buddy. I’m here. Do you know where you are?”

Matt rolled onto his back with a groan. “Home,” he croaked.

Claire gave his hand an encouraging squeeze. “Good, Matt. Do you have any injuries that I should be looking at?”

Matt’s face twitched as he concentrated. He sniffed and mumbled a “no.”

Claire looked at him critically. “Can we take this hoodie off?”

Matt gave a grunt of discontent, but put his hand out as if to say, help me. Claire and Foggy peeled off the hoodie and Claire said, “what about the top?”

Matt rolled his eyes and put his hand out again. Foggy sucked in his breath as he saw the swollen red mark on his shoulder and the blotchy line across his chest where Erinyes’ sai had run. Foggy felt the hoodie. If it could deflect a knife, reveal a mask, and have an inbuilt airbag hood, it was probably… “your friend who made the cane – he made this hoodie am I right?”

Matt nodded, and Foggy further deduced, “and it’s the same guy who made your Daredevil costume.”

Matt nodded again before closing his eyes.

Claire felt along the red line. “Any old ships?” she asked.

“Old ships?” Foggy probed.

Matt replied sleepily, “no. Just a bruise.”

“Fractured ribs apparently sound like old ships,” Claire explained to Foggy.

“Oh. Well, that’s good – uh, good that there are no ribs – ships.”

Foggy gave her a small smile and cleared his throat. “Matt do you remember what happened tonight? Anything?”

Matt frowned. “Uh, Maybe? Gotta go bathroom,” Matt croaked, levering himself up and shuffling to the bathroom, slightly hunched to minimise the pain. When he returned he was just in his boxers, which revealed another large bruise to his thigh.

Claire wandered into the bathroom and rummaged around in Matt’s first aid kit. She returned with a small jar. “Arnica for the bruises,” she ordered. “And you should ice them.”

“I’ll get the ice,” Foggy said, jumping up.

Matt gingerly climbed back into bed, lying back on the pillow just as Foggy returned with the ice. He sucked his breath in at the cold, grimacing as the three ice packs were placed in turn.

“You need more sleep?” Foggy asked, but Matt had already closed his eyes.

“He’ll be fine,” Claire whispered to Foggy as Matt breath evened as he drifted off to sleep. “You still have to tell me why you rang me in such a panic though. I could do with a glass of water if you have one.”

They sat at the kitchen table, nursing glasses of water, while Foggy tried to describe what he’d seen. His retelling was punctuated by comments from Claire like, “you know how crazy that sounds,” “snakes? Real live snakes?” and “so you actually met Stick?” He pointed out Matt’s new hoodie, describing the airbag that softened his fall.

“It’s incredible,” Claire said. “This inventor - whoever he is - should be selling them. I see so many head injuries from falls.” She twisted the fabric under her finger and thumb, and said softly, “I just hope it doesn’t mean Matt thinks he’s invincible now.”

“I don’t think he’s ever thought of himself as invincible. I think – I think he’s just hopeful. Stupidly hopeful. And lucky. I mean, he almost got bitten by a snake but he essentially punched it in the face with his cast.” Foggy shook his head and said with a small chuckle, “and that’s after he blocked a punch last week with the cast. I’m pretty sure the assailant has a broken hand.”

Claire rolled her eyes. “Do I want to know?”

“Probably not. I just hope he doesn’t keep busting bones.” Foggy sighed. “You know, you seem awfully cool about this whole thing. I mean, I tell you about magic snakes and weird monsters that can trigger seizures, and you – you just – well, you believe me.”

“I’ve seen way too much weird shit over the last few months. I feel like the only thing that could surprise me now is Matt declaring he’s giving up the fight.”

Foggy laughed. “Unlikely. He’s chomping at the bit. The only person he could spar with just exited his life. If I don’t find an alternative.”

Claire put her hand out. “I think I know someone. Leave it with me.”
Red headed

Matt awoke to the gentle snores of Foggy beside him, fully-clothed. He groaned as he sat up, gritting his teeth against the dizziness. Foggy didn’t wake, so Matt quietly edged off the bed and padded into the bathroom to brush his horrible-tasting, fuzzy teeth. He emerged half an hour later, showered and feeling cleaner, even if he still felt like his head was stuffed with cotton wool. His skin felt itchy and sensitive so he ditched the t-shirt and wandered out to the living room in his boxers.

Foggy had a coffee waiting. He was still dressed in his Halloween outfit, the stench of his stale fear-laced sweat at odds with his oddly calm demeanour.

“Hey,” Matt said, plonking himself down at the table.

“Hey.”

“Um-” they both started at once, before stuttering out an apology.

“You go first,” Matt said, taking a sip of his coffee instead.

“I’m sorry,” Foggy said plainly, and Matt tipped his head, confused. Foggy cleared his throat and tried again, “I’m sorry for not believing you about Elektra.”

“You had an opportunity to talk to her then?”

“Yeah, before she ran off… uh, she left you a note.” Foggy got up and retrieved the sealed envelope from the coffee table. “Here,” he said, nudging it into Matt’s hand. Matt sniffed the envelope and placed it on the table for later.

“So, uh, what happened? I remember – I remember…” Matt petered off, unsure as to where to start.

“With the crazy snake lady, and Elektra and your nutty sensei?”

Matt quirked his lips. “Yeah.”

“Well, in short, Elektra killed snake lady.”

Matt put down his coffee mug with a clatter. “She killed Erinyes?”

Foggy screwed up his face. “Mmm kinda.” He thought for a moment, then said, “I don’t know how to describe this to you, uh, Eri-er-”

“Erinyes.”

“Yeah, her. She turned into a kind of mist-” Foggy snapped his fingers together, trying to figure out a better way of describing it.

Matt eventually helped him out with a gentle, “I’m familiar with mist.”

“Yeah, I know that,” Foggy said with an edge of irritability. “She turned into a sort of grainy mist and then went into Elektra who was unconscious by then – she-kind of went up her nose.”

Matt scratched the back of his head. “That’s weird.”
“No shit, Sherlock.”

Matt picked at the corner of the table, levering off a splinter and depositing it on a nearby plate. Head down, he said, “how-how did she seem afterwards – Elektra – did she seem, uh, normal?”

“She called me a waste of space and told me she didn’t care what I thought, so yeah, normal for Elektra,” Foggy replied, crossing his arms for effect.

“Yeah, that sounds right.” Matt sat back, relieved. He took another sip of his coffee then said, “Stick – you met him finally.”

“Yeah, he’s a total bastard - but that wasn’t a surprise.”

Matt ignored the jab. “What did Stick do after Elektra’s halves were reunited?”

“What do you mean halves reunited?”

Matt waved his hand to hurry up. “Just answer the question and then I’ll answer yours.”

“Uh, well, Stick didn’t do much,” Foggy said. “He kicked you while you were unconscious, then told me not to bring her inside. But I insisted so he carried her to the couch – after he’d carried you inside though.” Foggy gave a small chuckle. “That guy is strong.” Matt rolled his eyes and circled his finger, trying to get Foggy to get to the point. Foggy stuttered, “sorry. Uh, then he drank all my beer, told me he was sticking around until he was sure she wasn’t going to kill us, and then left almost immediately after she woke up.”

“Oh.” Matt fingered the envelope. “And you said she left too.”

“Matt, I’m sorry. Whatever you have with Elektra, I will never understand – I-I know that… but she’s not good for you – you say it, I say it, and even Elektra said it. She said she was leaving forever, uh, and I insisted she stay to say goodbye in person. When she wouldn’t do that, I demanded she leave a letter.” Foggy gestured at the envelope in Matt’s hand. “I dunno. I just worried that you wouldn’t believe me. Ironic huh.”

Matt was rubbing the envelope with his thumb, seemingly distracted.

“I’m going to have a shower,” Foggy said. “You probably want to read that.”

When Foggy returned, the letter was still lying unopened on the table. Matt had his head in his hands, his fingers combed through his hair.

Foggy cleared his throat. “You okay, buddy?”

Matt sat up with a grunt. “Yeah – yeah just tired. The usual day after, you know.”

“I have to head into work today, but I texted Candy and she’ll cover you today.”

“Mmm, no. I think –I think I need to be around people.”

“Sure,” Foggy said, relieved. Usually he’d try and dissuade Matt from dragging himself into work the day after a seizure, particularly a night time one, but he didn’t want to leave him on his own after the events of last night. Every time Elektra walked (or bled) out of his life, Matt seemed to fall into a chasm of grief. Foggy couldn’t bear to see Matt disappear again.

Foggy called from his nook, “while I’m getting dressed, can you tell me about Elektra – this splitting thing?”
Matt tried to recount exactly what happened, and when he got to the bit where Stick believed it was Matt’s fault, Foggy became incensed. “It’s your fault because you loved her?”

“And she died in my arms,” Matt clarified. “Or at least I think that was part of it – that’s Stick’s theory anyway.”

“Shit. So if she didn’t die in your arms she’d what… be alive in a different way?”

“Apparently. Stick says he was being resurrected as a kind of weapon, but when she split, Erinyes pretty much killed off half the Hand.”

“That’s handy,” Foggy chuckled. “But really, you believe all this stuff? You’re like the most sceptical person I know – why do you believe all this extreme stuff from Stick?”

“I-I – just- I don’t…” Matt gave a small shake of his head, unseen by Foggy who was still dressing in his nook. “Anyway, that’s what happened… I think… and now you’ve met Stick, uh, yeah…”

“If you want me to say he’s a good guy, I’m not going to.”

“I-I don’t want that.”

“He did seem to care about you in a weird treat-em-hard kind of way though.”

Matt looked wistful. “Yeah, I know. It’s complicated.”

“Always is with you, buddy,” Foggy replied. “Stick and I agree on a couple of things though.” Buttoning up his shirt, Foggy walked out of his nook in time to witness one of the most perplexed expressions he’d ever seen on Matt’s face. Foggy snickered and continued, “one: you’re too good for petty criminals – fighting them, that is... and two, your taste in beer’s terrible.” He laughed at Matt’s open mouth. “Now go get changed, Murdock. We have clients to take care of.”

As they walked out of their apartment block, Matt said, “I can’t believe Daisy killed those snakes.” He stopped to pat her. “You’re a good dog,” he told her in a cutey voice.

Foggy bent over to give Daisy a pat as well. “Yeah, she saved you, Matt – and me. Although, uh, do you think they were real snakes?”

“Did they turn into mist too?”

“No, but she conjured them. That’s not-”

Matt gave Foggy a pat on the back. “Can I just give you a bit of advice? Don’t think about it too much.”

“Yeah, but-”

“Why don’t we play the game of pick the hangover instead,” Matt suggested, giving Foggy’s arm an affectionate squeeze.

“Uh, sure. You sure you want to walk? Those bruises… and you must be tired from-”
“Fog, I’m fine. I’m better than fine, in fact.” Matt gave Foggy a reassuring smile.

Foggy looked at Matt curiously. “This Elektra thing’s been weighing on you, hasn’t it,” he deduced.

“Yeah, a little bit,” Matt said.

“And you’re not sad that she’s gone?”

Matt pursed his lips. “Let me- let me digest that and get back to you.”

“Hmm okay, just tell me if you need an ear, okay?”

Matt nodded and they continued the walk with the distraction of ‘pick the hangover’. “There’s a guy to our 1 o’clock,” Foggy whispered. “Walking with a limp. Still wearing his Halloween costume. Walk of shame?”

Matt chuckled. “No way. That guy had zero luck last night.”

“Ew, Matt. You can tell?” Before Matt could answer, Foggy laughed, “what am I saying, of course you can tell.”

Matt shrugged. “If it helps, I don’t like knowing either.” After a couple of seconds, Matt tugged at Foggy’s arm, “woman across the road, uh, about to come in line with us,” Matt said under his breath.

Foggy put his hand over his mouth in sympathy. “Oh yeah, she looks green even from here. Oh! Do you remember Claire coming around last night?”

Matt thought for a moment. “Vaguely. Could have been a dream though.”

“Claire appears in your dreams?”

“No, you know what I mean – the memory’s so vague it could be a dream. Anyway, what was your point?”

“She was dressed as a bunch of grapes.”

Matt huffed in amusement. “Grapes? That’s weird.”

“Not as weird as mystical snakes,” Foggy muttered.

Matt licked his lips and tried to look calmer than he felt. “Was the seizure that bad that you had to call Claire?”

Foggy gave a non-committal whine. “It was more the trigger. Who knows what the flying sparks were. Anyway, she said you were fine - and you are. Oh, and she said she might be able to find an exercise partner for you.”

“Hangover,” Matt whispered, “coming towards us now. Oh, watch out!” Matt discretely pulled Foggy away from the man as he lurched and vomited into the gutter.

“Good save,” Foggy said, holding his breath. He looked over at Matt, who was now holding his chin high, evidently unwilling to continue their conversation about Claire. “Are you okay, Matt?”

Matt gave a minute shake of his head. “Tired. The sooner we get to the office the better.”
As soon as they entered the office, Karen chirpily asked how their evening had been, to which Matt bluntly responded, “seizure.”

Karen looked a bit taken aback. “Oh. I guess it was good that you went home.”

“Yeah, lucky,” Matt agreed.

Karen’s gaze concentrated on Matt’s bruised chin before she gave Foggy a look that more or less said, ‘should I believe him?’. Foggy gave her his best ‘it’s Matt Murdock, what do you expect?’ smile in return and Karen let the matter be.

All day Foggy kept an eye out for any sign Matt was cracking, but he seemed fine, albeit a little tired. Matt fell asleep mid-morning in his office chair, and again late afternoon, but apart from the post-seizure fatigue, he seemed relatively chipper.

Even once they were home, Foggy couldn’t stop glancing warily at Matt. In fact, Foggy was so distracted that he burnt the garlic he’d been frying for the pasta sauce. Seemingly oblivious, Matt sat idly on the couch listening to Foggy chop and stir, a dazed expression on his face. Despite the two naps, the previous night’s seizure had well and truly exhausted him. It was only when Foggy handed Matt the bowl of pasta that the silence was broken. “Smells good, thanks, Fog.”

“Matt Murdock’s simple tomato sauce,” Foggy replied. “Good for lazy people like me.”

“No lazy,” Matt said, taking a mouthful. “And you don’t need to keep watching me either. I’m fine.”

“I know,” Foggy said, sighing. “I just – do you remember what happened when she died? I was afraid you’d go into a similar spiral of despair and I – I worry, that’s all.”

“I’m fine.”

“I know. Always fine,” Foggy teased. “Ooh ooh, I nearly forgot. I have a surprise for you,” Foggy said, nearly spilling his pasta in his haste to get up. Daisy gave a small expectant spin, “not this time Daze,” Foggy said with a laugh.

“Always hopeful,” said Matt, leaning down to give Daisy a consolation pat.

Foggy clicked something into the DVD player and sat down, wiggling with excitement. There was a cooing noise as the menu screen appeared, and Foggy scrolled down to accessible options before pressing play. “David Attenborough’s *Birds of North America,*” the television announced.

Matt groaned, “you’re making way too much of that camp story,” but the grin on his face told Foggy otherwise. Foggy wondered what Matt would say if he knew Foggy was now using bird spotting as a way to calm Matt down in the time between Daisy’s alerts and the seizures.

“You’re staring at me again,” Matt warned half-way through the documentary.

“I’m just enjoying this moment… and accepting that our next vacation is going to involve bird-spotting.”

Matt raised his eyebrows. “You make it sound like a bad thing.”

“Not if it gets you on vacation. You-“
“Shhh…” Matt interrupted. “The red-headed woodpecker. There was one at camp.”


By the weekend, Foggy decided the threat of the post-Elektra darkness was well and truly over. If anything, Matt seemed happier than he had in a long time. So much so, in fact, that he agreed to go out to dinner with a group of old college friends on the Saturday night (but only after being reassured that the venue didn’t have the combination of the words ‘fried’ and ‘beer’ in its name).

Rosy-cheeked and a little tipsy, they climbed the stairs to their apartment afterwards, Foggy tripped on the stairs, and giggled, “in my defence, it’s very dark in here.”

Matt pulled him to his feet. “Let me lead you, sir.”

Foggy swung his arm over Matt’s shoulder as they entered the apartment, pulling Matt over to the couch, where they collapsed in a tired heap.

Foggy closed his eyes. “I missed this.”

“Mmm?”

Foggy sighed. “Maybe it’s the company, but it just reminds me of college, you know. Going home-”

“Drunk,” Matt said pointedly.

“Two wines isn’t drunk,” Foggy replied in mock offense. “I meant the company. You and me, all innocent-”

“We were never innocent, Fog.”

Foggy gave Matt’s arm a playful punch. “I was totally innocent. And so were you… weren’t you? Were you pulling any of your tricks on campus?”

Normally, Matt would have taken exception to Foggy’s use of the word ‘tricks’, but he just Matt shook his head. “I just called campus security if I heard anything.”

“Huh.” Foggy thought back to all those times Matt would suddenly rush out of the college dorm, phone in hand, only to return a minute later looking frazzled and distracted. No wonder Matt had trouble sleeping.

Keen to divert the subject, Matt put his hand on Foggy’s. “I missed this too. Everything’s just been so crazy lately. I forget – uh… I forget how nice it is just to be with other people.”

“You going to church tomorrow morning?”

“Yep. I don’t think Julia would forgive me if I missed another week.” He rubbed his eyes and stretched his back with a satisfied groan. “I should probably go to bed, huh.”

“Probably. After all, you have a mighty treasure hunt to supervise.”
Matt arrived at church early the next morning to set up the points highlighted on the hand-drawn treasure map he’d sent Julia from hospital almost three weeks earlier. During the service, Julia busied herself with the map, running her fingers over the bumps and raised lines in excitement. She leapt to her feet as soon as the service ended. “Treasure!” she shrieked, earning a few disapproving looks from their fellow parishioners.

“Inside voice, Jules,” Elizabeth reminded her, but she couldn’t help but smile.

While Elizabeth and the rest of the church goers dribbled into the community room for their usual post-service tea and cake, Matt led Julia outside. “Where are we on the map?” he prompted.

Julia quickly traced the lines of the church to the front entrance. “Here.”

“Now, I’m going to give you your first clue, and then you get the next clue when you get to the control.” He handed her a card written in braille.

She slowly sounded out the words. “A big tree at your knee.” She repeated the clue and said to Matt, “but there are lots of trees.”

“Yes, but have you noticed that the tree symbols on the map are different sizes?”

Julia felt for the circles that denoted trees. “Yeah,” she said slowly, “ah, this one?”

Matt felt for the point under her finger. “That’s definitely the biggest. The question is, where is it?”

There was a silence, and Matt prompted, “orient your map so it’s facing the way you want to go.” He turned the map ninety degrees and said, “that might be easier.”

Julia ummed and erred for a moment before taking off to her right, following the concrete path to the corner. She paused and felt the map again before stepping off the path, her cane outstretched. It bumped into the trunk of the old tree and she felt the trunk. “What now?”

“What was the clue again?”

“A big tree at your knee,” Julia said and immediately felt the trunk at knee level. Sure enough, pinned onto the trunk was the second clue. “This door is good for a- a-”

Julia stumbled on the next word, and Matt whispered, “it’s a q.”

“Q-u-i-quick escape,” Julia finished.

She felt the map, leaning her cane against the tree so she could use two hands. “There are lots of doors,” she said, tracing the church outline again and lingering over each door symbol.

“If you wanted to leave church early, which door would you take?”

“Oh- oh!” Julia grabbed her cane and sped back to the church entrance. She let out a squeal of glee as she encountered the third clue hung around the brass handle. Her enthusiasm didn’t wane throughout the hunt, racing from clue to clue. At the twelfth clue, she read, “the latte table.” She let out a huff. “That’s easy.”
She navigated her way to the kitchen table where Father Lantom had shared a coffee with so many of his parishioners. She felt around the top until her hands bumped against a box. “Open me,” she read. She reached in and pulled out Matt’s phone.

When Matt had originally approached Elizabeth about purchasing Julia an accessible smartphone, she’d flat-out rejected his offer. Elizabeth eventually gave in when Matt told her he was upgrading, suggesting that Julia take his old model instead. Matt had not planned to upgrade yet – the smashed screen had dramatically affected its resale value, and while he was tempted by some of the accessibility options on the newer models, he could just imagine what his father would say about buying an expensive new model when the old one worked just fine. However, with Elektra in the wind, a healthy bank balance thanks to the money Elektra insisted he keep, and a worthy recipient for his hand-me-down phone, Matt decided to splurge.

“It’s yours now,” Matt said after Julia had turned the phone over in her hands, thinking it was another clue. “I have all the accessibility features turned on for you already. And there’s a small amount of credit on it.”

Julia’s eyes widened. “It’s mine?” She squealed and ran towards Matt wrapping her arms clumsily around his middle. “Thank you!”

Matt blushed. “It’s nothing. It’s got a smashed screen so it’s no good to anyone but us. No one’s going to steal it,” he laughed. “Here, I’ll show you how it works…”

“How did she like the phone?” Foggy asked from the couch as soon as Matt got home.

“You’d think I’d given her the moon,” Matt smiled, catching Daisy as she leapt at his knees.

“Told you,” Foggy said, pausing his video game and tossing the control aside.

“Well, you never know. The phone might distract her,” Matt said, returning to their previous week’s argument.

“Is that Stick talking or you?”

“Me,” Matt said firmly. He threw himself onto the couch, “maybe a little bit of Stick?”

“Is that a question, Matt, or just your way of saying yes without saying yes?”

Matt frowned. “Stick can’t dictate how I mentor Julia. That’s up to me.”

“Does Stick know about the mentorship?”

“Of course he does,” Matt replied. “You’ve met him.”

“You don’t tell me anything to do with Stick. I don’t magically know these things, Matt.”

“Fine,” Matt huffed. “Stick somehow set up the mentorship without me or Julia or Elizabeth knowing. I don’t know how or why, but it happened.”

“He set up the mentorship,” Foggy repeated. “What, like he tricked them into moving across the country?”
“Yeah, something like that.”

Foggy rolled his eyes. “You can’t believe that, Matt.”

Matt spluttered, “you didn’t believe me about Elektra either. See? This is why I don’t tell you stuff.”

“No, you don’t tell me stuff because you like having secrets. But this-” Foggy stopped, sighed, and then adopted a more sanguine tone. “All I’m saying is you don’t need to follow Stick’s rules on life, and while I know he taught you a lot, you shouldn’t believe everything he says.”

Matt opened his mouth to argue the point, then closed it. It was possible that Foggy was right.

“And even if he did somehow magically pulled strings and everything just fell into place, you don’t need to follow his rules. You’re kind, generous and loving. Stick – well, Stick kicked you while you were unconscious, which says a lot about his character. Let’s just leave it at that.” Sensing Matt wasn’t about to admit Foggy was right any time soon, Foggy picked up his video game controller and returned to the battle of the zombies.

Matt fiddled with Daisy’s collar, trying and failing to come up with a response. Eventually, he gave up all together, blurtling out, “I’m going to take Daisy to the park. Uh, I’ll be back in an hour.” And with that, he rushed out the door.
Chapter Notes

One thing I've learned over the last week or so is that stitches really, really itch. As in, I-want-to-claw-the-bloody-things-out itch. How in earth would Matt with his super sensitive senses cope with stitches? I have a couple dozen in my shoulder still, which is why I've taken a bit longer than usual to post. Too many distractions...

Happy reading!

“Matt, calm down,” Foggy said after watching Matt practically inhale his morning coffee. “Karen never makes early Monday morning client appointments. We have plenty of time.”

"Uh, I've got to go to the hospital first thing, don't forget," Matt said, quickly rinsing his cup. "My cast's coming off." He wiped his hand on the teatowel, screwing up his nose at the slight scent of mold.

"I totally forgot. Gee that came around quick."

"Did it now," Matt muttered.

Foggy brushed the grumbling aside and said, "hey, if it's coming off, can I finally sign it?"

"No, Fog, I'm not twelve."

Foggy rolled his eyes in frustration. "Fine. Do you want me to come?"

"Mmm no, Claire's sticking around after her shift." Matt shrugged on his jacket, grunting with annoyance as the cast caught on the sleeve. He was looking forward to wearing his slimmer-fitting clothes again.

“Huh.” Foggy was a bit miffed that Matt had asked Claire instead. Matt had been acting strange and distant ever since their brief conversation about Stick and Julia the previous day. As far as Foggy could tell, the conversation wasn’t terribly controversial, but he worried Matt was keeping something from him again. He opened his mouth to say as much, but Matt got in there first.

“It’s okay, Fog. I’ll only be an hour,” Matt said. His reassuring comments were just as much for himself as Foggy. He breathed out slowly and deliberately. “It’s just outpatient treatment,” he said, grabbing his keys and rushing out the door before he could talk himself out of the hospital visit.

Matt wrinkled his nose as he stepped inside the hospital. He stood in the foyer trying to work out where to go, trying to swallow away the churning in his stomach. By trying to block out the myriad sensory onslaughts and associated memories, he struggled to make sense of the room. He felt utterly disoriented.
Just as he was just about to turn around and leave, someone limped up and said in a frail voice, "can I help you, sir?" Relieved, Matt concentrated on the woman in front of him: elderly, keen, wearing a couple of badges that jingled as she shifted on the spot.

"Ah… I'm waiting for a friend..." He swallowed. "Are-are there any chairs where I can wait?"

Her breath changed, pleased that she could help. "Yes, yes, just over here. Can I take your arm, dear?"

Matt nodded, "yes, thank you. Thank you very much," and she lead him over to a bank of chairs. As he waited, he could hear her meeting and greeting lost visitors. He learned she was a volunteer and, in addition to helping out in the foyer, she knitted beanies for patients in the oncology ward. Of course she did.

Matt was eavesdropping on the gossip exchanged by the reception staff when he was surprised by a slightly breathless Claire, who was still wearing her scrubs. "Matt, I'm so sorry. I hope you weren't waiting long. I-"

Matt waved her to stop. "Did you know that Alison met Chris Hemsworth at Syrup nightclub on Saturday night. And Elisa is sleeping with one of the doctors in cardiology," he said in a sing-song voice.

"Matt, you can't do that," Claire hissed, although Matt could have sworn she was smiling.

Matt’s smirk faded. "Okay, let's go do this thing. I want my wrist back."

Matt took Claire’s arm and they walked up to radiology. "It's all healed," Matt grumbled. "I don't know why I need to get it x-rayed again."

"Unless you want to explain to the doctor that you have x-ray fingers, you're getting that x-ray."

Once the scans showed that Matt’s wrist had indeed healed (despite his repeated use of his cast as a weapon), Claire took him to orthopedics to get the cast removed. As they sat in the waiting area, Matt became increasingly agitated. In an adjacent room, he could hear the sound of a saw mowing through a cast. He cringed as the blade went through a particularly thick area, the pitch increasing as the motor worked harder.

Claire couldn't stand the fidgeting any longer. "What's wrong, Matt?"

"Hate hospitals."

Claire sighed and crossed her legs.

After half a minute’s silence, she changed tack. "What are you going to do after your cast's off?"

Matt shrugged. "Work out. I'm unfit."

"You don't sound very excited."

"I get bored without ... uh, without the challenge of other people to – you know…"

"Foggy mentioned – er, the other night - he mentioned something about you sparring with an old girlfriend," Claire said cautiously.

Matt gave a curt nod. "Used to. Is that why you told him you could find me an exercise partner?"

He said the last two words witheringly.
“Exercise partner? Is that what we’re calling it?”

Matt shook his head. “That was Foggy’s term, not mine.”

Claire huffed in amusement. “I have a friend. Well, not really a friend. He's a guy I know who hangs around the dojo.”

That got Matt's attention. "What dojo?"

"I've been learning self-defense."

"Did something happen?"

"Yeah, a guy called Vladimir-"

"You know what I meant," Matt interrupted.

Claire brushed her fingers through her hair and considered her words. "I felt it was wise to learn to defend myself now that I'm friends with multiple people who like to seek trouble."

Matt’s face fell. "Claire, I'm sorry you feel unsafe. I never meant to-"

"Not another word, Saint Matthew. It's my decision. Anyway, do you want to hear what I was going to say?"

“Sorry – go ahead.”

“This guy – he’s a terrific fighter. I reckon he’d give you a run for your money."

“Hang on, so you didn’t mean exercise as in some sort of aerobics thing?”

Claire rolled her eyes. “Give me a bit of credit, Matt. Do you really think I’d sign you up to an aerobics class?”

The corner of Matt’s lips quirked. “No, I guess not. But this guy - whoever he is - I can’t have him know-”

“Wear your mask. He’s seen weirder things. But if you do decide to trust him, I don’t think he’d tell anyone. He can be a bumbling idiot, but he exists within your world-”

“My world? What do you mean?”

Claire leaned in and said almost inaudibly, “he’ll tell anyone who’ll listen that he’s the ‘sword enemy of the Hand’.”

“What?” Matt shifted in his seat so that he was sitting on the edge, facing Claire. He whispered, “how does he know about the- h-how-”

“He slayed a dragon or some shit – or so he says.” She sighed. “He’ll tell you soon enough. Look – just come along, I’ll introduce you. You can spar and hopefully it’ll fill – what did Foggy call it? I think he used the word void.” Matt didn’t look convinced, so Claire added, “and as I said, you can wear the mask.”

“I’ll think about it.” Matt sat back in the chair, still stunned about the Hand revelation. He associated knowledge of the Hand with Stick and Elektra alone. He knew about the Chaste and their war against the Hand, but he’d never met them. How many others knew about this shady
organization? And how did Claire come to find out about the Hand?

“Claire, you said multiple friends who seek out danger,” Matt said slowly, an eyebrow raised.

“Yeah?”

“Who?”

Claire smiled. She’d baited him. Now all she had to do was reel him in. “Come to the dojo, Matt. I’ll introduce you.”

Matt chewed his lip.

“And don’t do that, you’ll make yourself bleed,” she said, putting her hand on his knee to stop.

“Matthew Murdock?” the technician called from the doorway. Matt instinctively grabbed the hand on his knee, and felt Claire flinch under his grip. As they walked towards the treatment room, he kept his face neutral, but Matt wasn’t quite as good at hiding his emotions as he thought he was. She held off on the snide comments for now.

“You comfortable?” the technician asked once Matt was sitting in the plastic covered chair.

“Yes,” Matt replied, but the pained twitch of his lips betrayed his true feelings.

Matt closed his eyes as the saw started up, and his free hand clawed into his thigh. The blade started grinding into the cast, and Matt lasted all of three seconds before he yelled, "no, stop.” Matt panted, "I'm sorry, I can't do this," sliding off the chair and rolling down his shirt sleeve.

"Matt, sit down,” Claire said. "What are you going to do - keep it on forever?"

"I'll figure something out.” He felt for his coat, and tried to thread his arm through the sleeve, eventually giving up with a huff and draping the coat over his arm instead. “Where's my cane?”

“Shit, Matt. You’re not keeping the cast. I'll get you some earplugs.”

“It vibrates.”

“Oh come on. After all your other injuries, this is suddenly too much?”

“Yes,” Matt snapped.

Claire turned to the technician. "Do you have earplugs?"

"We have some ear muffs. But they're kids size only." Claire huffed. "Matt, wait here." She added to the tech, "and don't let him leave." He recoiled at her warning tone.

She returned five minutes later with earplugs, earmuffs, a small cup with a pill rattling around, and a glass of water. "Sedative, if you want it," she said, rattling the paper cup.

Matt rolled his eyes. "Just the earplugs.... uh and the earmuffs."

"We have a waiting room full of people," the tech said gruffly. “We need to do this quickly please.”
Matt quickly shoved the earplugs into his ears and fitted the muffs over the top. Claire took his free hand as the saw started up again. Matt screwed up his face but apart from the initial flinch, he managed to sit still, concentrating on Claire's heartbeat instead of his own racing pulse. His entire body was racked with vibrations and he could smell a slight friction burn.

Claire tapped Matt's arm when it finished and gently removed his headphones. "That wasn't so bad, was it" she said. “You're going to have to tell me about the beach you’ve been storing in your arm though,” she joked. “What’s with all the sand?"

Matt opened and closed his mouth twice before he stiffened and started convulsing.

"Oh God, not now," Claire groaned, pulling the nearby table away from Matt’s flailing hand.

"I'll get help," the tech said, pressing a call button. "You're not on shift."

"I'm not waiting," Claire snapped. She found the suction tube on the nearby shelf and held it in Matt's mouth. Another nurse rushed in and pulled a nearby cart to Matt's side, clipping a pulse ox to his finger and plugging a nasal cannula into the port on the wall. "He's gone into SE before," Claire said to the other nurse. "Can you take over suction? I'll get a vein just in case."

"Let me. You can’t be treating him off shift."

Claire have a frustrated huff. "I work just down the corridor in the ER and I’ve treated him before. I know his veins.”

The nurse looked on unhappily as Claire attempted to find a vein, swearing as Matt's limbs contributed to shake.

The tech returned with an intern, who said "how long?"

"Four minutes," Claire replied, taping down the IV cannula. "He has epilepsy not controlled by medication. Recently admitted for pneumonia. Admitted after SE a few months back. His seizures are usually only a couple of minutes long."

The doctor decided not to risk Matt going into status epilepticus and ordered a dose of lorazepam. Matt’s seizure ceased moments after the drugs were administered, and the group lifted him into the nearby bed.

"Take him through to the ER," the doctor ordered.

Claire closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "Do you have an empty treatment room? It's better for him to wake up in a quiet area. I'll stay with him." She braced for the bureaucratic response.

"We can't let you do that. You're not on shift."

"Dr Lun, is it? I've seen you in the ER." And I have decades more experience, Claire wanted to add, but didn’t.

The intern nodded.

"You know how noisy the ER is then. Matt is particularly sensitive to noise after seizures and gets very agitated. It'll be much better for him if he's in a quiet room."

Dr Lun looked at the on-shift nurse. "Can you supervise?"

"As long as there are no other emergencies," the nurse said. "336b is free. We can take him in
there."

"Thank you," Claire breathed, giving Matt's hand a squeeze.

The technician used the opportunity to swoop in and quickly clean and wrap Matt's withered-looking wrist in an elastic bandage. In the drama, his arm had been forgotten.

They wheeled Matt across the hall and Claire held his hand while they waited for him to wake up.

"His sats are coming back up," the nurse said.

"That's good. He's still recovering from the pneumonia, so I worried…” She brushed the hair out of her face. “I worry, let's just leave it at that.” She looked at his security tag. “Steve, is it?"

"Yes, sorry," Steve replied. "You are?"

"Claire," she said, pulling her tag out of her scrubs pocket. “Usually in the ER. I offered to accompany Matt to get his cast removed. This wasn't really part of the plan."

Steve looked at Matt's cane and glasses that Claire had dumped at the end of the bed. "This the guy who got beat up?"

Claire pursed her lips. "Assaulted, yes."

"Poor guy."

"Don't let him hear you say that," Claire warned.

She leaned into Matt and shook his shoulder. "Matt, are you awake?"

"The benzo probably didn't help," Steve said.

"Mmm he's going to be pissed off when he wakes up and finds out he's been given meds."

She gave Matt's shoulder another shake and he responded with a moan. "Matt, it's Claire. You're in the hospital. Matt huffed and squirmed uncomfortably.

"Matt, can you talk to me please."

It took Matt a couple of minutes to understand Claire's commands. Eventually, he licked his lips and mumbled, "Claire"

"Yeah that's right. You had a seizure just after you got your cast off. Do you remember?"

"No," Matt croaked. He put a shaking hand up to the cannula under his nose and pulled it away from his face. "Don't want."

"Yeah I know. I'll take you home soon. You can rest for a bit first."

"You should wait till he's stabilized," Steve said.

Matt didn't protest. He closed his eyes and fell asleep again, and Claire used it as an opportunity to refit the cannula.

"Don't feel like you need to stick round," Claire told Steve. "He'll sleep for a few hours."

Steve looked at Claire then down at the sleeping Matt. "I'll check on you in ten minutes or so."
An hour into Matt's post-seizure nap, his phone rang with a low "Foggy, Foggy, Foggy, Foggy..."

"Shit," Claire said, patting Matt's jacket in search for his phone. Soon after it rang out, Claire's phone rang.

"Hey Foggy.... yeah, I know. He's fine. He had a seizure.... yeah, I know. He's still asleep." Claire spotted a minute movement from the bed and lowered her voice. "I'll take him directly home.... no, it's fine.... no, by the time you get here we'll be heading home." Claire sighed. "Fine. We're in the orthopedics department. Check in at the desk."

Foggy turned up a record twenty minutes later, sweaty and frantic.

"It's okay, Foggy," Claire said, smiling as he stumbled in the door.

"This is different," Foggy said, looking around. "Quieter than the ER."

"Don't get used to it," Claire said. "It's a temporary privilege."

"He got the cast off first then," Foggy said, nodding at Matt's bandaged wrist.

Claire bit her lip. "I think it might have been the trigger."

"The trigger?!"

"Yeah. He said the sound and vibrations..." Claire shrugged as she petered off.

"Shit." Foggy sighed. "So much for trying to convince Matt there’s such thing as a quick visit to the hospital."

"If he hadn't panicked... argh, what am I saying," Claire corrected. "He's not to blame."

"Should we sneak him out before he realizes where he is? We could just put him in a cab."

Claire crossed her arms. "Not when he has to sign a bunch of paperwork. Look, he might panic, but it’s not as if he’s being admitted." She took Matt’s hand and started peeling off the tape. "I’ll remove the IV now, but I still need to tell him we gave him a dose of lorazepam-"

"You didn't" Foggy yelped.

"It was the doctor’s call. He’d been seizing for more than four minutes, Foggy. Would you rather he go into SE?"

"No, of course not. It's just - you know he hates it." Foggy rubbed his forehead. "You know," he repeated softly.

When Matt started to wake up again, he predictably panicked. Foggy ended up hugging him just to keep him from kamikaze rolling off the bed in his half-sedated state.

A few tears ran down Matt's cheeks as he realized where he was.

"We're going home, Matty," Foggy said. "We'll leave soon, uh..." he looked at Claire for help.

Claire started towards the door. "I'll get Steve. We should be able to leave straight away."
Five minutes later, they led the traumatized Matt out through the foyer. The elderly volunteer greeter waved them a goodbye.

"You know her?" Foggy asked, noting the familiarity in the woman's voice. Matt shrugged. There seemed little point trying to explain.

"Are you okay from here?" Claire asked after they'd bundled Matt into a cab.

"Yeah, thanks Claire. More than you signed up for, I know."

Claire shook her head. "I promised him that whenever he needed me, I'd come. That was long before the epilepsy but my offer stands." She said the last four words with emphasis, knowing full well that Matt could hear her from the back seat.

Claire leaned into the cab and said conspiratorially, “Bye, Matt. I’ll see you at the dojo.”

Matt licked his lips. He tried to come up with something smart, but the words just weren’t flowing. He raised his hand and slurred, “bye, ‘laire.”

“What this about a dojo?” Foggy asked excitedly as he slid into the back seat.

“Oh, uh,” Matt frowned and rubbed his forehead, trying to think back to their earlier conversation.

“Tell me later,” Foggy said, patting Matt on the knee. “You just have one decision to make: your cosy bed or the office couch. Which one would you prefer?”

Matt rubbed his forehead again. “Where’s Daisy?”

“At the office. If you want to go home, we can go via the office and pick her up.”

Matt leaned his head against the cool window. His body ached and he could smell the hospital embedded in his clothes. He itched at his arm, pawing at the spot where the IV had been.

“Matt?”

“Uh, home,“ he slurred. “I want to shower. I stink.”

“Fair enough. Do you want to grab Daisy on the way?”

Matt shook his head against the glass. “Too much trouble.”

Foggy rolled his eyes. “It’s not too much trouble.”

Matt pulled away from the glass and opened his mouth to argue, but Foggy just pulled him into a hug. “Come here, you idiot,” Foggy said. Matt flopped onto his shoulder and stayed there for the rest of the cab ride.

Matt was cocooned in his sheets when Foggy returned home, his hair fluffy from multiple washes. Thinking Matt was asleep, Foggy tiptoed back into the living room only to be stopped by a grunted, “Fog.”
“Yeah, Matt?”

Matt rolled onto his back and stretched out. “How was work?” he croaked.

“We have a new client – the owner of the Thai restaurant on the corner.”

“Does that mean we can’t order from them anymore? I kind of feel like Thai.”

“I think we should be careful about accepting payment in Pad Thai,” Foggy pointed out.

“Mmm…” Matt yawned and unconsciously rubbed his wrist.

“How’s your arm?”

“Light.”

“I bet.”

Matt unwrapped the bandage supporting his weak wrist and ran a finger around it, feeling the dry, flaky skin. “How does it look?”

“Like one of those withered relic hands you’d see in a Catholic Church… or maybe one of those strands of egg you get in stir fries.”

Matt pulled a face. “Thanks, Fog.”

Foggy rubbed his hands together, “so Pad Thai – or what’s the one with the egg?”

Matt rolled his eyes. “Pad See Ew.”

“That one,” Foggy said, pointing at Matt theatrically. “Anything else?”

Matt slowly sat up, prompting Daisy to finally come out from beneath the blankets. “Uh, something with chilli,” Matt croaked. “It might get my senses back on track after whatever they gave me at the hospital.” He shifted over to the side of the bed and gingerly stood up, prompting Foggy to step forward, worried Matt was about to fall.

“Oh, that’s better,” Matt said, relieved that the sickening dizziness had finally lessened.

“They’ve left your system?”

“Mmm… mostly,” Matt ran his hand along the wall as he entered the bathroom – a cautionary measure more than anything.

Satisfied that Matt wasn’t about to keel over, Foggy dialled the Thai restaurant and ordered Matt’s favourite basil chilli dish, sighing with relief when the owners didn’t insist on covering the meal.

“…although they did sneak in a bag of spring rolls,” Foggy told Matt when they unpacked the meal half an hour later.

After guzzling a spring roll, Foggy said, “so tell me about the dojo thing.”

“Oh…” Matt scratched his head. “I-I think Claire might have to remind me.”

Foggy held up a strand of egg. “Hey Matt, it looks like your arm.”

Matt gave him a withering smile and held up a forkful of noodles. “Hey Foggy, it looks like your
“Ha ha,” Foggy said, spearing a piece of chicken and chewing it loudly. Matt screwed up his face in disgust.

“Okay, okay,” Matt eventually said. “Claire told me she knows someone who can fight.”

Foggy chuckled. “You know you sound like a badass Irish-American boxer when you say the word, ‘fight’.”

“Foggy, do you want to hear what Claire said or not?”

Foggy hung his head. “Sorry.”

“She said that he fights well, and – this is the weird bit – he knows about the Hand.”

“As in Erinyes?”

“No, Erinyes wasn’t part of the Hand.”

“But you said-”

“She was created by the Hand – well, the Hand resurrected Elektra.”

Foggy giggled into his noodles.

“What?” Matt demanded.

“It’s so ridiculous, Matt.”

Matt angrily skewered a shrimp.

“Oh come on, don’t get angry,” Foggy said. “You just – you have to admit it, it’s all a bit absurd. If I hadn’t seen it with my own two eyes, there’s no way-”

“Don’t trivialise it, Foggy.”

Foggy raised his eyebrows. “So-rry,” he sang. He waved his fork around and prompted, “so, this guy knows about the Hand and he can fight…”

“Yeah, and Claire seems to trust him. But- but I don’t know. I have trouble-”

“Trusting people. I know.”

“I trust you,” Matt said.

“Yeah, mostly,” Foggy said, narrowing his eyes. “There’s something you’re not telling me about Julia though.”

Matt shoved the entire shrimp in his mouth and chewed slowly. Foggy grinned and crossed his arms, waiting for Matt to finish. He couldn’t delay forever.

“Fine,” Matt said when he’d finished his mouthful and taken a long drink of water. “Julia has heightened senses and strength.”

Foggy stared. “Wha-what? Like you?”
“Not quite the same… I don’t think.”

“So, there’s you, and Stick, and Julia… who else?”

“It’s not a club,” Matt said, poking the lump of noodles in front of him.

“But that’s why Stick arranged the mentorship, right - he wants you to help her?”

“It’s a bit more complicated than that,” Matt started.

“I know. But that’s nice, don’t you think? You’re paying it forward – although in a better way.”

Matt rolled his eyes. “Nice?”

“Hang on, you’re not teaching her how to ninja, are you?” Foggy whispered.

“Ninja’s not a—”

“Please tell me you’re not turning her into mini Daredevil,” Foggy interrupted. “Does she know? Does Stick mentor her too? Do you two do backflips off the pews?”

“Foggy, stop.” Matt held up his hand. “She doesn’t know about Daredevil, and as far as I know, she hasn’t met Stick. However, I think it’d be a good idea for her to learn self-defence.”

“Like Daredevil.”

“Foggy, are you even listening?”

“You haven’t denied it.”

“Look, I told you the truth about Julia. I don’t want to talk about it any further.”

Foggy went in for the kill. “Are you going to meet Claire’s friend?”

Matt could feel himself getting backed into a corner, and realised he was gripping his fork like a weapon. He unclenched and placed it carefully on the table. “No more, Foggy. I’m tired.”

“Okay,” Foggy said innocently. The conversation might have been put on pause for tonight, but it was far from over.

Foggy swore as he rifled through the bathroom cupboard, looking for his comb. When he’d moved into Matt’s apartment, they’d split the bathroom cupboard into two halves with Matt’s immaculate arrangement of toiletries on the right, and Foggy’s disaster zone on the left. It was modelled on the arrangement they’d had in college where Foggy’s half of the dorm could look like a bomb had hit it, but only - only - if it didn’t cross the half-way line into Matt’s pristine space.

Foggy’s eye kept returning to Matt’s comb. He knew Matt didn’t like sharing his comb, but would he really notice? Foggy ran his fingers through his hair, willing it to do something other than point up. Most people whinged about Monday mornings, but it was always Tuesday mornings that seemed to go awry for Foggy. He sighed and reached for the comb. Just as he touched it, Matt called from the kitchen, “Foggy?”
Foggy jumped a mile. He cleared his throat and tried to sound casual. “Yeah Matt?”

“You’re good with ethics and stuff,” Matt called back.

Foggy wandered out into the living room where Matt was sitting cross-legged at the table. Foggy prompted, “and stuff?”

Matt waved him off. “I haven’t finished my morning coffee yet. Give me a break.”

“Okay, what’s the stuff you want to know?”

“Julia. She wants to learn martial arts.”

“No, she wants to be Kung Fu Panda,” Foggy corrected, earning a pleading look from Matt. “Sorry, not the point,” Foggy said meekly.

“I have the skills and knowledge to teach her self-defence. Whether you like it or not, those skills are not only going to keep her busy and challenged, but they’re also going to help her practically – you know, just in case someone attacks her.”

“You’re trying to justify teaching a little kid how to fight, is that it?”

“I knew this was a mistake,” Matt muttered, running his fingers through his hair.

“But I asked you anyway,” Matt said, giving him a hopeful smile.

“Are you sure this isn’t about wanting a mini-me?”

“Do you really think I’m that narcissistic?”

“I don’t know. You’re bored, you want an extra challenge… you know, you could just hook up with Claire’s friend instead.”

“Stop mixing the two issues.”

“Okay, okay.” Foggy sat down at the table. “Here’s what I think: if you are intent on teaching Julia Kung Fu-”

“Martial arts.”

“Matt, I don’t care what it’s called. Just listen.” Foggy paused for effect and then said slowly, “if you’re intent on teaching Julia how to punch things” - Foggy bit his lip to stop himself laughing at Matt’s face - “then you’re going to have to tell both Julia and her mom about Daredevil. That way, they know exactly what they’re getting into.”

Matt’s jaw dropped. “You know I can’t do that.”

Foggy shrugged. “You asked me.”

“Yeah, but I didn’t think you’d suggest I risk getting both of us debarred – or even imprisoned.”

“I know.” Foggy stood up and looked Matt up and down. He was wearing nothing but boxer shorts, his red possum beanie, and a pair of socks. “That’s quite the fashion statement, Matty. Are you
coming into work today or do you need a day to recover?”

“I was just getting changed,” Matt said, lazily scratching his chest before chugging back the rest of the coffee. As he wandered into his bedroom to get changed, he called over his shoulder, “your comb is on the edge of the sink… where you left it yesterday.”

Mid-morning, Matt appeared at the door to Foggy’s office. “What about if I tell them I can hear better than normal – and leave it at that?”

Without looking up, Foggy said, “whatever you want, Matt.”

Matt gritted his teeth and returned to his desk.

As they packed up their laptops later that afternoon, Matt called to Foggy, “what about all my senses then?”

“Whatever you think’s best, Matt,” Foggy replied. “What would I know?”

As they sat down to their dinner of leftover Thai, Matt said, “How about I tell them about my senses and that I learned to box ‘cause of dad.”

“If you think that’s best,” Foggy said nonchalantly.

Matt scowled and shovelled a fork full of noodles into his mouth.

As Foggy was making coffee the next morning, Matt wandered out into the living area, a towel around his waist, and his hair still wet and sticking up on end. “What about if I tell them both about my senses and Stick? Nothing about Daredevil or the Hand. Just the martial arts side of things.”

“We’re going to Claire’s for dinner tonight,” Foggy replied.

Matt screwed up his face. “What?”

“We. Are. Going. To-”

“Yeah, I heard you. But when – when did you do this? Why – you’re not even friends – she should have come to me.”

Foggy shrugged, but he couldn’t keep the smirk off his face. “Believe it or not, we have a shared interest. That’s enough.”

“You had no right to arrange this.”

“Because you’d rather wallow in your own self-pity than do something that would make you happy.”

“No, it’s about protecting me and you and everyone I care about. The more people that know, the more dangerous it is.”
“From the sound of it, he’s not just anyone, Matt. Anyway, you don’t have to commit to anything. We’re going along as Claire’s friends – Matt and Foggy. You can decide what to do from there.”

Matt spluttered something indecipherable and stormed into his bedroom, making Daisy skitter out of the way in fright.

“Come here, Daze,” Foggy said, crouching down. “Daddy’s in a mood.” Foggy smiled as he heard a muttered, “what does he think she is, a human child?” from Matt’s bedroom.

As the cab pulled up outside the dojo, Foggy said, “I dunno. It looks kinda dodgy.”

Matt raised his eyebrows. “More dodgy than Hell’s Kitchen?”

“You’re right. Let’s do this.”

As they were half way up the stairs, Matt stopped. “Wait.”

“What is it?” Foggy whispered, turning to Matt. He gave a small groan, “shit, that’s your intense face.”

Matt shook his head. “What’s my intense face?”

“When you’re eavesdropping.”

“I’m not-”

“What do you hear?”

“Claire. Uh, I think the ‘friend’ is actually her boyfriend,” Matt said, trying to keep his tone neutral.

Matt listened again, and could hear Claire say, “you’ll get sauce all over your new t-shirt. Give me some space, Luke.”


Matt shook his head. “He has the worst lines too.”

“So what’s wrong with Claire having a boyfriend?” Foggy gave Matt a cheeky poke. “You’re not jealous are you – oh, oh that’s it. You want a monopoly on Claire.”

“Don’t be stupid, Foggy. She’s free to do whatever she likes.”

Foggy spotted a slightly redder tinge to Matt’s cheeks, but chose not to push it. It was a victory just to get him this far. “Come on, you’ve done enough eavesdropping for the night.”

The door was answered by a young woman who introduced herself as Colleen. Claire emerged within seconds, wiping her hands on her apron. “Matt, Foggy, I’m glad you came.” Claire said, before introducing the man towering behind her. “This is Luke. Luke, this is Matt and Foggy.”

Foggy looked nervously at Matt, desperate to tell him that it was completely reasonable not to spar with Claire’s friend. Luke looked like he could flatten Matt with a single blow.

“Don’t hold that against us,” Foggy joked nervously.

Luke gave a wry grin. “I’ll try not to.”

“Uh, so this is Colleen’s dojo,” Claire said. “Not a usual place for dinner, but it has enough floor space for all of us.”

Matt counted the places at the fold-out table set up at the edge of the dojo. There was one extra place.

Claire said, “Danny will be here soon… I hope.”


“Ohh…” Foggy and Matt both breathed at once.

Luke cut through the awkwardness with a “do you two want a drink? We have beer, wine, juice, water…”

“Beer,” Matt and Foggy said in unison.

Claire and Foggy both hesitated at once at Matt’s request. They exchanged looks before Foggy gave her his best ‘what are you going to do? It’s Matt Murdock’ expression.

“Two beers coming right up,” Luke said, looking curiously between Claire and Foggy.

After Luke, Colleen and Claire headed back into the kitchen, Foggy whispered to Matt, “I’m so relieved that you don’t have to fight Luke. I thought-”

Matt gave an amused huff. “Me too.”

“Don’t get me wrong. You’re a great fighter, but if the reports are true – if Luke Cage really is unbreakable with the strength of sixty men – then…” Foggy winced as if imagining Matt being mushed into the dojo floor.

“I know,” Matt said. He tilted his head and smiled. “It looks like the dragon slayer is coming.”

Foggy laughed. “There’s no way you can say it with a straight face.”

The door opened and the blond-haired man bounded in. “Say what?” he said with a smile.

“Uh, we haven’t met,” Foggy said, holding out his hand. “Hi, I’m Foggy Nelson.”

Matt immediately put his hand out too. “Matt Murdock. How do you do.”

The man looked between Matt and Foggy, taking in their business suits and ties. After a short, but awkward pause, he reached out and shook both their hands. “Sorry, I’m not used to being so formal. I’m Danny Rand.”

Danny went straight from the hand shake to giving them both a playful pat on the shoulder. He gave an exaggerated sniff in the direction of the kitchen. “Gee, it smells amazing. Doesn’t it just smell amazing? Can I get you guys a beer?” He bounded through to Colleen’s living area before Foggy and Matt could even respond.
“Uh, so he’s something,” Foggy said, trying not to laugh.

“Mmm hmm…” was all Matt could manage.
Teach me to fight

Chapter Notes

Happy new year! I've got a slightly longer than usual chapter for you this time. I hope you enjoy it.

“Matt, you sit here,” Claire directed, “and Danny, you’re here.” She pulled Danny into the adjacent seat. Foggy chuckled at Matt’s expression. It was the same face he always pulled at the Nelson family Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners when Anna would direct Matt to a space on the communal table. Foggy had never been able to put his finger on what the expression actually meant – he’d assumed it was something specific to his mother, but that wasn’t the case here.

“Foggy, you sit here,” Claire said, directing him to the empty spot on the other side of Luke. Foggy hesitated, not sure if leaving Matt with Danny at the opposite end of the table was really such a good idea. Danny seemed more than a little bit nuts. Then again, Matt wasn’t exactly normal either…

“Sure,” Foggy said, forcing a bright tone. He plonked himself down next to Luke, who finished one beer and immediately picked up a second.

Foggy needn’t have worried about Matt. After an initial standoffishness, Matt seemed to relax and Foggy watched him laughing with Danny and Colleen. “So, Foggy,” Luke said, “when you’re not doing your day job, what do you and Matt do?”

Foggy glanced at Claire who was sitting opposite, and then back at Luke. How much did Luke know about Matt? Claire raised an eyebrow at Luke, but it could just have been in reaction to his attempt at small talk.

Foggy stuttered, “uh, well, work keeps us pretty busy. We have a dog, so we walk her a bit. Matt likes to cook, and uh, work out, yeah, that’s about it.”

Luke looked at Foggy as if to say, ‘dude, you’re fucking boring.’ Foggy busied himself cutting up a piece of pumpkin. His life wasn’t boring – Matt made sure of that. But six months ago, Foggy could have told Luke about his weekly dance sessions, hanging out at Josie’s, or the latest video games he’d played and conquered. Right now, he was still stuck on level 6.1 of the passé zombie game, and the dancing, well, it had well and truly been abandoned since Matt’s head injury. There just wasn’t the opportunity.

Foggy distracted from the awkward silence by saying, “this is delicious, Claire.”


Luke raised his eyebrows and gave a small nod. The other end of the table went silent and Claire cleared his throat, “if he wants to, that is. No pressure.”

“Man, that’s a great idea,” Danny said. “You could be like Master Izo.”

Matt gave a small shake of his head. “Master Izo?”
“He’s incredible. He’ll take on anything and win – martial arts, that is. He has a bit of a gambling problem and – uh, and drinking – but apart from that, yeah, he’s amazing.” There was a silence, and Danny added, “oh and he’s blind. I didn’t mention that. Did I mention that?”

“Yeah, I’ve heard of Master Izo,” Colleen said. “It’s hard to know what’s truth and what’s myth though.”

Matt turned to Foggy and gave him a quizzical tilt of his head. He could hear Foggy’s heart racing, but couldn’t work out why.

“Matt, do- uh, have you heard of Master Izo?” Foggy spat out.

Matt took a sip of his beer, seemingly oblivious to the five pairs of eyes trained on him. “Yes, I’ve heard of Master Izo,” Matt eventually said.

“How-”

“He trained Stick,” Matt interrupted. There was no going back now.

“Who’s Stick?” Danny asked.

Matt ignored Foggy’s snickers. “He’s blind… like m-Master Izo.” Matt could hear the change in Foggy’s breath that suggested he desperately wanted to fill in the gaps. He took another sip of his beer, stalling. “He-he trained me – when I was a kid. Taught me a few things.”

Danny clapped Matt on the back. “So you can fight too! Ace!”

“Well, I- I- I can’t really-”

“We should spar,” Danny interrupted.

“No-no, that- I can’t-I’m really unfit, and I’m not really all that good-”

“He’d love to,” Foggy finished, earning a scowl from Matt.

“Well that’s all sorted,” Claire said, standing up. “Who wants dessert?”

Matt was quiet the whole taxi ride home. As they traipsed up to their apartment, Foggy said, “you mad?”

“No,” Matt said lightly. “What makes you think that?”

“Just… well, I asked you about Master – Master, er-”

“Izo.”

“Yeah. I thought you needed a push.”

“I did.”

“And that’s okay?”
Matt gave a small laugh. “Yes, Foggy, it’s okay. I offered the information in the end. You were right. I needed a push.”

Foggy screwed up his face in confusion, and let out a small whine of despair.

“It’ll be okay, Foggy,” Matt said, misinterpreting Foggy’s exasperation as worry. “What’s the worst that can-”

“No!” Foggy yelped, and Matt doubled up in laughter. There was a scuffling and the sound of a lock clicking. “Oh, sorry, Fran,” Foggy said as their elderly neighbour came to the door.

“My apologies, Fran,” Matt echoed, giving her a polite smile.

Fran closed the door without a word. She was always good at demonstrating that silence could be more effective than words.

“Shit,” Foggy giggled, fumbling with his keys.


“Not much… not as much as Luke.” Foggy threw the keys at Matt and giggled again as Matt effortlessly caught the terrible throw.

Matt huffed in amusement. “Come on,” he said, pulling Foggy inside and heading straight into the kitchen to pour him a glass of water.

“Thanks, man,” Foggy said, downing the glass and wobbling over to the sink for another. He leaned against the kitchen bench, “Claire said I could learn self-defence. Colleen’s going to teach me.”

“I could teach you, Foggy.”

“No you never did. You protect me, but I want to be able to hold my own.”

“You do wicked things with a baseball bat.”

Foggy rubbed his eyes. “Matt?”

“Yeah?”

“This will be good for you. Danny- fighting – exercise … you gonna tell them about Daredevil?”

“Mmm mmm,” Matt said, shaking his head. “They know about Master Izo. They didn’t seem to question my ability to fight as a blind guy… which makes for a nice change,” he added. “Admitting I’m a vigilante is a whole different thing.”

“But Luke is-”

“I know. Just… just one thing at a time, yeah?”

“I’m proud of you, Matty.”

Matt stepped back as if Foggy were about to strike. I’m proud of you, Matty was Stick’s favourite phrase – although he only ever said it before he rattled off an insult, or on one famous occasion, before he threw Matt off a roof.
Misreading Matt’s discomfort as merely a resistance to compliments, Foggy elaborated, “you use secrets like ammunition, but so often the main person who gets hurt is you. I’m glad you shared tonight.”

“Motion to strike,” Matt blurted out. The response was arguably childish in the context, but Matt just wanted Foggy to stop talking.

“Shut up, Matty. Can’t you just accept praise for once?” But Foggy couldn’t help smiling. “Motion to strike,” he repeated, shaking his head. He gave a small hiccup. “I have to sleep now.”

Foggy wobbled off to bed, leaving Matt standing alone in the living room. Sensing Matt’s unease, Daisy, jumped up at his leg and Matt scooped her up. He hugged her close, burying his face in her fur. “I missed you tonight,” he said into her fur. She squirmed a little at the pressure and he relaxed his grip, returning her to the ground before stalking off to bed.

The next day, Matt was having regrets about his great reveal. Matt blamed it on the beer. His near abstinence over the last five months meant that even one beer got him tipsy. Telling the table about his fighting skills seemed like a reasonable idea last night, but now it seemed reckless. Danny seemed to tell anyone who would listen about the dragon, and could easily be a bit loose with Matt’s secrets.

“Foggy, do you think Danny’s trustworthy?” Matt said, as his friend emerged from his nook, rumpled and sleepy.

Foggy groaned. His head hurt and Matt was about to spiral into one of his caverns of doubt. “Do I believe he slayed a dragon?”

“Not that bit – just – just I don’t know if I should have told him about my abilities.”

Foggy rubbed his forehead. “Matt, can we have this conversation not now.” He stumbled over to the coffee machine and peered into the vestibule.

“I have one here for you,” Matt said, pushing the mug across the kitchen table.

“Thank God.” Foggy sat down with a thud and pulled a wagging Daisy onto his lap. After a few sips, Foggy said, “so you’re starting tonight?”

Matt sat up straight. “Yeah, that was the plan.” His mouth quirked into a small smile.

“Good,” Foggy mumbled. “That’s good.”

Late that afternoon, Matt received a text message from Claire. “Make sure you wrap your wrist properly, and no punching until it’s stronger.” Matt rolled his eyes and re-pocketed the phone.

Another text pinged through. “And don’t roll your eyes.” Matt chuckled and dictated, “me? Never.”

As soon as six o’clock came around, Matt grabbed his duffle and Daisy’s leash and headed for the door.
“Matt, Matt, wait!” Foggy called.

“Mmm?”

“You’re not taking Daisy, are you?”

“Yeah, why not?”

“Did you ask Colleen?”

“No, but I assumed… yeah, you’re right.” Matt ruminated for a moment before reluctantly holding out Daisy’s leash for Foggy to take.

“Will you be okay without her?”

Matt looked offended. “Of course I will.”

“I mean, you haven’t had a seizure in days. What if-”

“I mustn’t give in to the fear, Foggy,” Matt quoted, earning an exasperated groan from Foggy.

“I could come.” Foggy bit his bottom lip, worried that Matt would take it the wrong way.

Matt raised an eyebrow. “Are you sure this isn’t just about wanting to watch me fight?”

“Of course it is, duh,” Foggy said. “I don’t think I got to properly appreciate it the other night when there were sparks, snakes and blades being thrown around. I’m curious. I want to watch.” He sighed. “Look, if Colleen says yes, we’ll stick around. If not, I’ll take Daze home with me. Deal?”

Matt gave a curt nod, and then bounced a couple of times on the balls of his feet. “Come on if you’re coming,” he said, reaching for the door.

Foggy practically ran back to his office, grabbed his coat and hurried back to the now open door. Matt had already started down the stairs, and Foggy couldn’t help but smile at Matt’s excitement as he ran down the stairs.

Of course, as soon as they entered the dojo, Matt hid his enthusiasm behind his carefully constructed cool façade. His face straight, Matt said to Danny and Colleen, “how do we want to do this?”

“Let’s warm up,” Danny said, and Foggy settled down in the corner with Daisy and his phone, feeling a bit like a parent at a child’s gym class.

As Danny and Matt started their warm up, Colleen tried to coax Foggy into joining them.

“I don’t have any spare clothes,” he said, pointing to his suit.

“I’m sure we could rustle something up. There’s a lost property box brimming with gear you could use.”

Foggy wrinkled his nose at the thought. “I- I might wait till next time. But thanks.”

Colleen shrugged and wandered back to Matt and Danny.

It wasn’t a particularly spectacular work out. Matt was holding back, still concerned about his secret. Despite Matt’s reputation for recklessness, he’d wrapped his right wrist and had casually
mentioned to Danny that he’d only just got a cast off (although he failed to tell him about the broken ribs, pneumonia and epilepsy). Between the reference to the broken wrist and Matt’s blindness, it seemed that Danny was holding back too.

After a couple of hours at the dojo, Foggy looked up from his phone at the sound of Danny’s enthusiastic, “that was great, Matt. Shall we do it again tomorrow?”

Matt looked pleased. “Uh, okay.” He turned his head in Foggy’s direction and tilted his head up as a way of saying ‘what do you think?’

Foggy stood up and stretched his legs. “Good idea. I might not tag along tomorrow though.”

“I could teach you a few things,” Colleen offered, but Foggy still looked unconvincing. “Okay, well, if you change your mind-”

“I’ll call you,” Foggy finished.

As they descended the stairs, Matt hissed, “Foggy, I thought you wanted to learn self-defence.”

Foggy shrugged. “It seemed like a good idea last night, but I think it was the beer talking. It seems more complicated than my body can handle. I just can’t get it to do those kinds of things, Matt.”

“You need to practice,” Matt said earnestly.

“No, you don’t get it. You’re athletic. You have amazing balance. You have the ability to get to crazy levels of gymnastic strength. Me, not so much.”

“But Claire’s doing self-defence,” Matt argued.

Foggy gave a small growl of frustration. “Yeah, but Claire looks athletic too.”

“You pin too much emphasis on looks, Foggy,” Matt grumbled. “Maybe if you just tried it-”

Foggy snapped, “I don’t want to argue about this. Let’s just find a cab, okay?”

Foggy was uncharacteristically quiet that evening and again the next day, so much so that Karen snuck into Matt’s office that afternoon and whispered, “is everything okay with Foggy? He seems kind of off… or sad. I dunno. There’s something wrong.”

“Um…” was all that Matt could answer. It was something about the dojo, Matt suspected. He just couldn’t work out why. After Karen left his office, Matt called Danny and rescheduled that night’s sparring date.

“Hey Matt, don’t forget your gym bag,” Foggy said as they left the office.

“I rescheduled,” Matt said casually. “Friday.”

Foggy touched Matt’s arm. “You okay?”

“Yeah, just a bit tired. I thought it’d be good to spend some time with you instead.”
“Matt, we live together and work together,” Foggy said. “If you want to go off and do what you do, I won’t be offended.”

Matt pursed his lips.

“Stop listening to my heartbeat, damn it,” Foggy snapped. The emotions he’d felt the previous night had surprised him. Foggy supposed it was selfish to be a bit jealous of Matt making new friends. The opportunity to spar and exercise with others was exactly what Foggy wanted Matt to do. It was what Matt needed to do. But still, there was a nagging feeling of bitterness there - a feeling that Matt no longer needed Foggy - that Foggy didn’t have Matt all to himself.

Daisy gave a quick spin at their feet, eager to get going. Matt threaded his arm through Foggy’s. “Come on, I have a new recipe I want to teach you.”

Once the stuffed eggplants were in the oven, Matt wandered back to his room, unrolled his exercise mat and attempted a set of sit-ups. Foggy dashed into Matt’s room, thinking the groans were the start of a seizure, only to find Matt lying on his back, hands over his stomach and looking very defeated.

“You okay, Matty?”

“Yeah,” Matt panted. “Unfit.”

Foggy bit his lip. Maybe this was Foggy’s chance not to be left behind after all. “Teach me,” he said.

“To do three half-assed sit ups?”

“Yeah, why not.”

Matt sat up with another groan. “Okay. Maybe get out of your work clothes. Uh, grab a towel.”

Five minutes later, the two of them were groaning into their measly attempts at sit-ups. “You used to do how many a day?” Foggy said as he lay there, completely floored.

“Fifty to a hundred.”

“And you found the time when?”

“Well, this was before Daredevil. I slacked off a bit as I spent more time on the streets.”

“Slacked off,” Foggy repeated with a roll of his eyes.

“Okay, now for push ups,” Matt said, flipping onto his front.

“Watch your wrist,” Foggy pointed out.

“Mmm yes,” Matt said, tucking his healing arm behind his back. He pushed off with one hand and ended up flat on his face.

Foggy stifled a laugh.

“Shhh… I used to be able to do those,” Matt said, looking sheepish. Daisy trotted down the stairs from the roof and after spotting the two men on the floor, ran at them with glee. “Ergh,” Matt spat
after Daisy’s well-timed face lick. Matt wiped his face with his hand and then with the sleeve of his t-shirt. “Maybe we could do some standing exercises instead away from Daisy’s tongue.”

“Okay, but can we do ones that don’t hurt,” Foggy groaned as he struggled to his feet.

“No pain, no gain,” Matt quipped.

“Hey, you know what doesn’t hurt? Beer and video games.”

Matt gave Foggy a sly grin. “How’s that hangover headache from last night going?”

Foggy sighed. “Point taken.”

The exercises soon became part of Matt and Foggy’s daily routine, and the following Saturday, Foggy even agreed to accompany Matt to the dojo for a lesson from Colleen. Matt had never known Foggy to be so shy before. Foggy apologised each step of the way, even though, as much as Matt could tell, he was doing rather well for someone who had never attempted martial arts before. Foggy had a keen eye and while his reaction times could be improved, his aim was spot on – a consequence of playing a lot of baseball as a kid, Matt reasoned.

They deliberately hadn’t asked Danny. This was meant to be Foggy’s time – or at least that was Matt’s secret plan. What they didn’t realise was that Danny had a tendency just to drop around whenever he felt like it… which was often.

“Hey, you didn’t tell me you were coming,” Danny said on entry.

“All the subtlety of a sledgehammer,” Matt mumbled to himself. He straightened up and called to Danny, “Foggy’s getting a lesson.”

“Cool. Can I help?”

Colleen flashed Danny a look. Whatever he’d learned at K’un Lun, it hadn’t included the reading of social cues.

Danny advanced on Foggy. “You should hold your leg like-”

“Danny!”

Danny stopped. “What?”

Colleen groaned. “Could you and Matt make some tea please.”

“Oh yeah, sure,” Danny said brightly.

“Sorry about that,” Colleen said to Foggy once they’d left the room.

“That’s cool,” Foggy replied with a smile. “Maybe it’s time to call it a day. Is he always like that?”

“Worst mansplainer I know,” Colleen said with a sigh.

“And he just drops in whenever?”
“Pretty much. I tried to get him to stop so he bought the building.”

Foggy glanced towards the door through which Danny’s monologue could be heard. He was loudly explaining to Matt how to make tea. Foggy looked back at Colleen, “does that make you uncomfortable?”

“A little,” Colleen admitted. “But that seems to be his reaction to everything at the moment. He’s like a child with a credit card.”

“Well, let me know if you need contract advice,” Foggy whispered.

“Oh, it’s nothing like that,” Colleen said. “I can hold my own.”

“I know. But it’s open offer. Don’t hesitate if you need help.”


The four of them sat in a circle on the ground to drink their tea, and Foggy found his legs going to sleep within a minute of sitting cross-legged. He shifted slightly, trying to wake them up. How did the others do it? Matt was sitting up straight, daintily sipping his tea, and Foggy could tell he was still desperately trying to make a good impression. From what he could glean from Danny and Colleen, being trained by someone who had been trained by Master Izo was highly respected, and Matt felt he had to live up to the reputation. The sense of honour had also helped Matt break out of his shell a little, and Matt hadn’t held back nearly as much during their second sparring session the previous night.

“What do you think, Matt – should we attempt another round?” Danny said as he finished his tea. Matt tilted his head at Foggy as if asking for permission.

“Go on, Matt,” Foggy encouraged.

Matt scrambled to his feet. “Okay.”

Even with Matt’s reduced fitness levels, he could hold his own. Where he lacked strength and fitness, his tactical skills were still there, and Danny found himself pinned to the floor within five minutes. “What is your style?” Danny puffed as Matt pulled him to his feet. “It’s not all martial arts.”

Matt said with a sly grin, “I’ve heard it described as old-school jujutsu with a little New York Irish boxer thrown in for good measure.”

“Boxer?”

“My dad was a boxer.”

“That explains a bit,” Danny said, stretching out his back. “Anyway, I’m glad you’re unfit. You’d be formidable at full fitness.”

Matt puffed out his chest a little. “Thanks. You too.”

Danny hesitated. “Uh, could you teach me that somersault thing you do – you know, the one you did to get out of the chokehold? They didn’t teach me that move in K’un Lun.”

Matt laughed. “Sure… although I should warn you, it took me a decade to learn that one.”

From the sidelines, Foggy raised his eyebrows in surprise. He knew Matt had trained, but there was
always the assumption that Matt had more or less picked things up immediately. Maybe Foggy had misjudged him.

After church the next day, Matt broached the idea of self-defence lessons with Elizabeth while Julia was completing yet another pirate map challenge. “There’s a dojo in Chinatown,” Matt said quietly, not wanting Julia to overhear. “They have group and private lessons. I happen to know the woman who runs it, and she’s terrific. She’s more than happy to accommodate Julia. In any case, I can accompany her as a kind of translator. I know how to describe moves.”

“You said you learned martial arts after you became blind.”

“Yes, it’s possible.”

“It sounds hard. I don’t know if Jules has the patience-”

“She does. In fact, it’ll probably improve her concentration. As a kid, it really helped me focus. Think of it as an extension of these Sunday sessions.”

Elizabeth still wasn’t convinced. “How-how much is it? It sounds awful, but between all Julia’s new expenses and New York’s rent, I-”

“It’s fine. It’s covered.”

“Matt, I can’t let you do that.”

Matt shook his head. “It’s not me. The school offers a certain number of scholarships via a local philanthropist. I spoke to him last week. He’s happy to sponsor Julia if she’s committed.”

“I don’t know – she’s already quite physical when she gets into a mood-”

“She gets angry a lot,” Matt deduced.

“A lot.”

“This will help,” Matt said. “Colleen teaches a way of thinking that includes respect for others. It’ll also give her an outlet to channel some of that frustration. Does she get much exercise?”

“Very little. She was complaining just last week that the school makes her sit out of gym class. When I spoke to her teacher, he said it was because they didn’t want her to hurt herself.”

Matt pursed his lips. Those kinds of exclusions made his blood boil. “Keep at them. It’s discriminatory to exclude her. I can approach them as your legal representative if you’d like.”

“No- no – I’ll talk to them first. Thanks.”

Matt nodded. “In the meantime, the martial arts classes should help. She’s got too much energy to be cooped up. And as I said, it’ll be good for her spatial awareness. She’s a quick learner. Her echolocation skills are already excellent so this will let her better understand her own body while interacting with others.”

“If you think it would help.”
“I do. The winter term for beginners starts next Tuesday.”

Elizabeth smiled. “Tuesday it is. Do you want to break the news to Julia?”

“No, you do it,” Matt said. He was well aware that he’d come to represent the ‘fun stuff’ in Julia’s training. He wanted Julia to treasure her mother just as much.

As Matt suspected, Julia pretty much had a meltdown of joy when her mother broke the news. She jumped up and down saying, “thank you, thank you, thank you,” before adopting her clichéd ‘Kung Fu Panda pose’ in celebration. Matt and Elizabeth couldn’t help laughing, which only made Julia repeat the motion, pleased with the attention.

“Julia’s going to attend Colleen’s dojo,” Matt informed Foggy as soon as he returned home.

“Ah, so you found a way to avoid telling them about your skills then,” Foggy said from his cosy spot on the couch.

“That’s not what it’s about, Foggy. Stop being so cynical. It’ll be good for her to learn with others.”

Foggy shrugged. “That’s true.”

Matt looked uncomfortable for a brief moment, then straightened. “Hey, should we try and break our record of eight sit-ups?”

Foggy groaned. “Don’t we have Sundays off?”

“Nope. Come on, let’s do it.” Matt bounced up and down on the spot enthusiastically. “Operation Foggy and Matt get fit.”

Foggy rolled his eyes. “You dag.” He slid off the couch. “I guess I have to break in my new purchase.”

Matt tilted his head as Foggy grabbed a nearby shopping bag. “You bought an exercise mat,” Matt said with glee.

“Yeah, if I’m going to do sit ups, I want a bit more padding.” Foggy unrolled it and sat down with a heavy ‘oof’.

Matt paused for a moment, “oh, sorry. I’ll get mine.” He dashed off to retrieve his own mat and reappeared in the doorway with a massive grin. “This is fun.”

Foggy rolled his eyes again. “You and I have very different ideas of fun, Matty.”

After they’d smashed their sit-up record with a massive twelve sit-ups each, they lay there, happy and sweaty, enjoying their humble victory.

“Things are getting better, aren’t they,” Matt said.

“Oh, Matt. You know you can’t say stuff like that.”

“Optimistic pessimist,” Matt said, giving Foggy a poke. “Besides, I thought the jinx was only
when I said what’s the worst that can—"

“No!” Foggy sat up and covered Matt’s mouth before he could finish. Matt snickered and sat up on his elbows. Foggy said, “I guess your seizures are getting less frequent. That’s good. You had four days between the last ones.”

“Yep, and we’re exercising.” Matt poked at Foggy’s stomach, laughing as Foggy scrabbled to get away. “I can feel a bit of muscle in there, Fog.”

“I don’t need to hear your heartbeat to know the truth of that statement,” Foggy said, poking Matt back. “My stomach still has the consistency of a marshmallow.”

Matt gave a happy sigh. “You’ll get there. We both will.”

The following Tuesday evening, Matt accompanied Julia to the dojo with the promise to drop her home immediately afterwards. Julia blew Matt away with her natural skills, moving with unexpected grace and accuracy.

Afterwards, Colleen came up to them for a chat, praising Julia for her efforts. “Could you keep up, Julia?”

“Yup. Matt told me what to do.” Julia bounced up and down on her toes in a move reminiscent of Matt’s own expression of excitement.

“That’s great. I guess I’ll see you next week. Practice those transitions. We’ll be building on them next week.”

“Come on,” Matt said to Julia, his hand on her shoulder. “We have to get you home.” He untied Daisy from the corner where she was patiently waiting on his gym bag, and they walked out the door to find a cab.

Matt pulled up his hood with a “brrr”. He touched Julia’s shoulder to check the thickness of her sweatshirt. “Do you have enough on? Do you have a jacket you can put on?”

“I’m okay,” Julia sang.

“Okay, stay close,” he said. “There should be some cabs on the next block.”

“Mom says cabs are slower than trains,” Julia said.

“They are. But the subway is also very noisy.”

“I stuff tissues in my ears,” Julia said.

Matt laughed. “I might try that some time.”

They were halfway along the alleyway when Matt paused. Someone was following them. He gave Julia a tug. “We need to walk a little faster,” he whispered.

“Why?”
“Just do it.”

Julia bit her lip, trying to figure out what had Matt spooked. She gripped his arm a little tighter and his breath hitched as he read her fear.

They were twenty feet away from the main street when Matt heard a couple of heartbeats heading in their direction. He breathed a sigh of relief. Witnesses, he thought. He shook his head. Maybe he was being paranoid. He’d seen the worst of the streets as Daredevil. Not every pedestrian meant him harm.

They were about the pass the two heartbeats when the figures stopped. Matt kept his head down and kept walking, tapping his cane a little louder against the road to better pick up his surroundings.

It’s fine, he repeated to himself. There’s nothing to indicate the strangers mean them harm…

“Stop,” one of them barked.

Julia stopped, but Matt gave her a tug to keep going. Daisy gave a low growl and threw herself against the end of the leash, trying to get at the man.

“I said stop.” The man stepped to one side, and the other two closed in, forming a ring around them. “Give us your wallet and you can pass.”

Julia let out a small sob and Matt momentarily panicked. If he were alone, there’s no way he’d capitulate, but Julia’s presence changed everything. He fumbled in his bag, trying to find his wallet amongst all the loose objects, wishing dearly that he could teach these men a lesson the Devil of Hell’s Kitchen way.

As Matt scrabbled around in the bag, Daisy managed to wriggle out of her collar and flew at the man who had ordered them to stop. He pulled out a knife and swiped at her, narrowly missing her left ear. The anger rose in Matt throat and he didn’t pause to think twice. Matt let go of Julia and knocked the man’s knife out of his hand with his cane. The blade flew into a mound of garbage by the alley wall and Matt huffed in triumph, kicking the man square in the chest before rounding on the other two. One of them stepped towards Julia, and Matt let out another roar of rage, flipping sideways and kicking the man in the face before turning back to the third man. Daisy had her jaw around the third man’s leg, valiantly defying his attempts to drive her off. Matt kicked the man’s other leg out from beneath him before stamping on his head with a satisfying crunch. The first man, meanwhile, was struggling to his feet, but Daisy wasn’t having any of that. Using Matt’s knee as a launching pad, she flew at the man’s face, giving the man a nip on the nose before jumping to the ground and starting on his ankle. Matt backed her up, punching the man in the head so that he slumped unconscious onto the stinking asphalt.

Matt stood there panting for a moment until Daisy jumped up at his knee. “Good girl, good girl,” he said distractedly, patting her head. He still wasn’t quite able to digest Daisy’s extraordinary performance.

A small voice broke Matt out of his daze. “Matt?”


“No,” she said, but it was more like a question than an answer. “What just happened?”

“Oh, the bad men won’t be threatening us anymore,” Matt said, putting it simplistically. He approached Julia nervously, not wanting to spook her. “Can I take your hand?”
“Yes,” the small voice said, a minute waver present.

He wiped his hand on his jeans and grasped her hand. “It’s okay,” he told her. Her fingers traced his swollen, grazed knuckles, making him flinch. “Uh, can I let go of your hand for one minute while I replace Daisy’s collar?”

“Yes,” Julia mumbled.

“Daze, come,” Matt said, crouching next to the wagging dog. Oddly, Daisy seemed to enjoy whatever that just was.

“Okay, Julia,” Matt said, forcing himself to remain calm “Give me your hand. Let’s go.”

Julia was silent most of the cab ride home. As they reached the outskirts of Hell’s Kitchen, she said, “can you teach me to do that?”

Matt froze. He expected fear and crying, not awe. “Wait till we get out of the cab,” he whispered in a voice he knew was only audible to their super senses.

Julia fidgeted for the next six blocks. As soon as they drew to a halt, she sprang from the cab. Matt grabbed her hand and crouched down beside her. “You can’t tell anyone about what just happened – what I just did,” he whispered.

“Why not?”

“Because people don’t understand.”

“Why not?”

Matt swallowed. Why was it so difficult to explain things to children? “Just believe me, it’s easier this way. Only a few people know: Foggy and Colleen are two of them. You can’t talk to anyone about it.”

“Okay,” she said, but she didn’t sound overly confident.

Matt frowned. He knew it probably wasn’t terribly ethical, but he ventured, “if you promise not to tell, I will teach you.”

Julia jumped up and down. “I promise,” she whispered. “Thank you.” She crouched next to Daisy and stroked her back. “Thank you Daisy,” Julia whispered to the dog. “You are very brave.”

Matt chuckled. “She sure is.”

“How did she know what to do?”

“You know, I have no idea,” he said truthfully.

“Oooh! Ooh! What’s got four legs and blind?”

Matt stifled a groan. This joke again. He supposed he had to play along. He sighed and said tiredly, “what?”

“A no eyed deer.”

Matt forced a laugh. “You only get to tell me that joke once,” he warned.
“Oh. Okay.”

“Come on, let’s get you inside to your mom.”

“Can we get pizza?” she said.

“Nice try. Maybe another time,” he said, taking her hand again and leading her up the stairs to their small apartment block.

As he walked back to his own apartment, Matt debated whether or not he should tell Foggy about tonight’s events – not just the fact that Julia now knew about Matt’s skills, but also that Daisy was some sort of doggy warrior. At that thought, he crouched down and patted Daisy before continuing on.

As he crossed the road to his apartment block, he heard the all-familiar tapping behind him. “What do you want, Stick?”

“Just to congratulate you on your valiant fight.”

“You’re still stalking us then,” Matt grumbled.

Stick ignored the implication, and stated, “it seems you have a sidekick now.”

“I’m only teaching her self-defence,” Matt warned.

“Not Julia – although I must confess that she has great potential as a sidekick. No, I meant your pooch here.”

Matt’s mouth twitched. “Yeah, she was pretty good.”

Stick took a step forward and said low and triumphant, “now that the cat’s out of the bag, are you gonna teach Jules to fight like the warrior she’s destined to be?”

“That’s between me and Julia, who is my mentee, not yours.” Matt took a deep breath and forced himself to relax his hand around his cane. ‘I’ve told you, Stick, she’s not a soldier. She’s a child.”

“You and your romantic ways,” Stick teased.

Matt ignored him and kept walking towards his apartment, only unclenching once he’d closed the door behind him. Matt had the feeling that he’d look back on tonight as one of those major life-changing events, alongside the accident that left him blind, his father’s murder, his introduction to Stick, the day he met Foggy, his first act of vigilantism, and his recent brain injury. Things had irreversibly changed and there was little he could do about it.
Good moves

As Matt quickly climbed the stairs to his apartment, he realised Foggy wasn’t alone. He could hear Foggy’s parents chatting in low voices. Matt threw off his hood and smoothed his hair, trying to look more presentable. The knuckles on his left hand were bleeding, and he wiped it on his pants, hoping that it didn’t look too bad. As he got to the landing, he picked Daisy up with his left hand, holding her under her chest so that his knuckles were obscured by her fur. He took a deep breath and unlocked the door.

“Matt, gorgeous,” Anna shrieked as soon as he entered, swooping in for a hug and kiss. She drew back and looked him up and down. “You’re looking much better.” She turned back to her husband, “don’t you think he looks better, Ed?”

Edward huffed in amusement at his wife’s enthusiasm and said, “how are you, Matt?”

“I’m feeling a lot better, thanks.”

“Foggy tells me that Daisy’s enjoying her new home,” Anna said, giving Daisy a small pat on the head.

“I think so,” Matt said, trying to keep hold of the writhing, excited Daisy. “She’s proved a godsend in any case. I haven’t had a single fall since she arrived.”

“We were so worried the last time you were in hospital,” Anna said. “Are you eating enough? Foggy, is he eating enough?”

Foggy groaned, “mom, Matt’s a grown man.”

“I know, I know, but indulge me this.”

“Anna, I’m eating very well, thank you,” Matt said politely, giving Daisy a squeeze with his elbow to try and calm her excitement. “Would you like a cup of tea or coffee?”

“Oh no, no- we’re just leaving. We were in the neighbourhood and we thought we’d drop in. But we need to get home.”

Foggy moved towards the front door and his parents took the hint. Anna took the opportunity to land another kiss on Matt’s cheek and secure a promise that the two men would come to dinner the following week.

“Phew!” Foggy said, shutting the front door behind them and leaning on it dramatically. He looked at Matt, who was still clinging onto the struggling Daisy. “What’s wrong with Daze?”

“Nothing,” Matt said cagily. “I’m going to have a shower.” He turned back towards the bathroom and let Daisy loose once he was certain his hand was obscured from Foggy’s gaze.

He was halfway through shampooing his hair when Matt heard Foggy shriek, “Maaaatt!” Matt turned the taps off immediately, his hair still white with foamy shampoo. He ripped his towel from the rail and leapt out of the bathroom, leaving a trail of water in his wake.

“What’s wrong-” Matt started as he ran into the living room. He stopped as he recognised the second heartbeat in the room. “What are you doing here?”
“Continuing our conversation from downstairs,” Stick replied. He wandered into the kitchen, calling over his shoulder, “hey cloudy, do you have any of that good beer?”

Foggy opened his mouth to correct his name, but closed it when he saw Matt meaningfully shake his head. It was clearly deliberate.

Matt brushed a migrating lump of shampoo off his forehead and wiped it on the towel around his waist. “The conversation was over.”

Stick opened the fridge, snatched a beer and opened it with a theatrical sigh. “Good move, Matty.”

“Come again?”

Stick took an audible glug of the beer and smacked his lips before drawling, “I don’t know how you found him, but teaming up with Iron Fist – it’s a good move.”

“You-you know Danny?”

“I know of the Iron Fist. I serve the Iron Fist.”

“You serve Danny?”

“You’re not listening to me, kid.”

“Well, you’re not exactly explaining things very clearly,” Matt said, wiping another lump of shampoo that was dripping down his temple.

“Matt’s right,” Foggy chimed in and both Matt and Stick paused in shock at the interruption. “Tell us what the Iron Fist is to you, Stick. Why do you serve him?”

“Yeah, tell me, Stick. None of this cagey shit.”

Stick managed to include enough concrete information among the ‘mystical bullshit’ (as Matt called it) to satisfy the two men. “So you reckon Danny was telling the truth about the dragon,” Foggy said with a small whistle.

“And the Chaste - you all serve Dan- the Iron Fist,” Matt confirmed.

“Yup,” Stick said. “When the Iron Fist is doing his job, at least. Right now he’s more concerned with a small piece of plastic than protecting K’un Lun.”

“That’s not fair,” Matt said.

“What would you know about priorities, Matty. You wasted all your training on petty criminals.”

Foggy gave a grunt of agreement.

“See? Even Foggy agrees with me.”

Matt scowled. Stick’s use of Foggy’s real name was strategic. He was currying favour.

“Look, kid,” Stick drawled as he leaned back against the kitchen bench, “train with Iron Fist. Remind him who he is, why he’s here. Learn from him and in turn, teach him. You’re a natural fighter, Matty. He might be stronger, but you have grace and balance – as does Julia.”
“I told you to leave her out of this,” Matt warned. Foggy looked quickly between the two men, worried about Matt’s escalating anger.

Stick obviously sensed Matt’s darkening mood too, and instead of goading Matt like he so often did, Stick tossed his empty bottle in the trash and made for the door. “She’s important, Matty, remember that,” he said as he slammed the roof access door behind him.

“What’s wrong with the normal entrance,” Foggy wondered out loud.

Matt stood there, his head down, tracking Stick’s progress away from the building. Foggy whispered, “Matty, are you okay?”

“Mmm,” Matt said, standing straight as if woken from a spell. “Yeah, why?”

“You’re bleeding.”

Half an hour later, Matt was sitting cross-legged on the couch, his hair dry and shampoo free, and his knuckles coated in antiseptic. He was nursing a cup of tea, having finished telling Foggy about the mugging. Daisy was curled into Matt’s thigh, and at each mention of her name, she’d look up, knowing she’d be rewarded with a pat.

“So Julia knows about Daredevil now,” Foggy said.

“No,” Matt said slowly, as if talking to a child. “She knows I can fight purely based on what she witnessed tonight.”

“But Elizabeth doesn’t know about the mugging?”

“I told Julia not to tell,” Matt said. “I don’t- I didn’t know what to do.”

Foggy scratched at his stubble. “I really wanted a pet as a kid.”

Matt gave a small shake of his head. “Huh?”

“I really wanted a pet. Mom and dad said no, because, well, Hell’s Kitchen.”

Matt’s mouth quirked into a small smile. He’d had the exact same argument with his dad as a kid.

Foggy continued, “I found a baby bird lying on the path one day. It wasn’t moving, but it was still alive. So I took it home. I made a nest for it in a box lined with an old t-shirt. I ripped a couple of feathers off an old Halloween costume and added those too just so that it would feel more at home.”

Matt didn’t know where this was going, but he smiled encouragingly. Making a feathered nest for an injured creature seemed like a very Foggy thing to do.

“Over the next few days I fed it pieces of bread and it seemed to grow in strength. On day three, I came home to find shit all over the desk and carpet, but no bird. You have no idea, Matt,” Foggy told his chuckling friend, “this tiny thing made such a mess.”

“Where did it go?”

“Well, I finally found it perched on top of the cupboard. When I moved my desk chair over to the cupboard to get it down, it flapped over to the window and smashed into the glass,
falling directly into the box nest.”

“Dead?”

“No, just stunned. Anyway, I got a bunch of tissues and tried to clean the carpet, but I ended up
smearing half of it into the fibres.”

“Gross.”

“Yup. And then mom tries to come into the room.”

Matt sat up straight. “Shit, what did you do?”

“Barricaded the door.”

“Cause that isn’t suspicious at all,” Matt laughed.

Foggy huffed in amusement. “Yeah, I don’t know what she thought I was doing, but she left me to
it. The bird by this stage was starting to get active again, so I put my mesh trash bin over the top of
the box.”

“Oh no,” Matt said, his hand over his mouth.

“We were halfway through dinner when I heard it scrabbling against the mesh. It was so faint that
you could probably only recognise it if you were really listening for it, you know?”

Matt knew. He gave a small nod, and Foggy continued, “by this stage. I was freaking out. I was too
scared to tell mom and dad, but I knew things couldn’t go on as they were. I didn’t sleep that night.
It was banging around in its enclosure and cheeping. I opened the window a bit to disguise the
noise as traffic, but that just kept me awake more. When mom finally came in search of the
mysterious bird noises, it was a relief to be caught out. That secret actually hurt to keep.”

“That was your moral tale?” Matt said, his eyebrows raised. “You’re equating the keeping of a
baby bird to the anonymity of Daredevil?”

“No, I’m just saying that I hate keeping secrets. I learned that early on with the bird. It hurts. It
weighs on you like nothing else - that and guilt.”

“Did you keep the bird?” Matt asked.

“Nah, mom threw a fit. Told me I could have caught some horrible disease. She got me a fish that
Christmas, but that died within two days. I gave up on pets after that.”

“You have Daisy,” Matt said, picking the dog up and depositing her in Foggy’s lap.

“Daisy the wonder dog.” Foggy gave her a rub behind the ears. “I wonder where she learned to
attack muggers.”

“Movies? Your zombie games?”

Foggy adopted a high-pitched tone. “Matthew Murdock, are you saying I’m a bad influence on the
dog?”

Matt laughed. “I don’t think dogs can see television.”

“Maybe she rolled in some chemicals as a puppy.”
Matt gave Foggy a playful punch.

“Watch out, Matt. With a few more lessons from Colleen, I might just be able to take you,” Foggy joked.

“I’m quivering in my boots,” Matt returned. He scratched lazily at the back of his neck and shifted to the edge of the couch saying, “hey, do-do you want a beer?” He tried to be casual about it. He’d decided that alcohol consumption didn’t correlate with his seizures, but his drinking of alcohol still seemed to make his closest friends uncomfortable.

“Uh, sure?” Foggy deposited Daisy on the couch. “But you need to eat. You can’t run on your beating-people-up adrenaline alone.”

Matt tried to keep his face neutral as he padded over to the fridge. He had no idea how Foggy knew about the Daredevil buzz. Did he also know about Matt’s habit of drinking alcohol to ‘come down' again?

Once they’d ordered a couple of dishes from their local Thai place, they settled on the couch with a couple of beers while Foggy flicked through potential movie options. “You never saw Kung Fury,” Foggy said as he went through his saved list.

“I’m not in a hurry either,” Matt said.

“Oh,” Foggy replied, slumping against the couch. He’d practiced Kung Fury a few times in preparation. "When are you next meeting up with Danny?"

“Tomorrow… I think.”

“Can you please tell him and Colleen about your epilepsy? It’s only fair.”

“They’ll treat me differently.”

“I really doubt that. What’ll happen is that if you do have a seizure at the dojo, they’ll probably call an ambulance not knowing that it’s business as usual for you.”

Matt bit his lip. It was a risk. He knew that. It was just easier to put it off. He was enjoying pretending he was back to normal, at least during these sessions.

“I wear my bracelet,” Matt countered.

“You take it off when you get into your gym clothes though.”

“That’s because it might get caught on something. And-and I always take Daisy. I can always tell them if she alerts me,” Matt said, reaching for the dog. Daisy stretched with a yawn and scrambled up Matt’s chest to her new favourite sleeping spot: nestled in Matt’s hood at the back of his neck.

Foggy sighed and got up to grab a second beer. “Okay, whatever... but if you unnecessarily end up in hospital again, I don’t want to hear the whinging.”

“You sound like your mother,” Matt called from the couch.

“Yeah, well, I’m starting to think that she’s right about a few things.”
Matt didn’t tell Danny and Colleen about the epilepsy. He knew it was a good idea, but every session, he told himself next time. But still, a week went past without incident, then another and another. He was attending the dojo three times a week including Julia’s sessions. Julia was thriving in the martial arts classes, and she’d often stay back for another half an hour with Matt and Colleen (and sometimes Danny) to go over the moves one-on-one. They all agreed she was extraordinarily talented, and Matt was secretly very proud that he was training up another blind martial artist.

When Matt did finally have a seizure at the dojo, he was fortunate enough to have Claire on-site, which also meant that Claire finally saw Daisy in action as a seizure alert dog.

Danny and Matt were sparring at one end of the dojo one Saturday afternoon, while Claire and Colleen worked up the other end. There was a loud crash as Danny slammed Matt into a pillar, and Colleen and Claire simultaneously yelled, “guys, can you keep it down.”

They both hung their heads, but their barely audible chuckling gave the game away. Danny pulled at Matt’s t-shirt, “hey, hey, try the chokehold thing again. I’ve been practicing.”

“Okay,” Matt said, his tone clearly one of scepticism.

Sure enough, Danny didn’t have the skills to get out of Matt’s chokehold.

“I swear you’re getting stronger,” Danny said when Matt finally released him.

“I am - thanks to you,” Matt said. “These sessions have been good for me.” Daisy gave a shrill bark and ran over from her usual spot on Matt’s gym bag, jumping up frantically at Matt’s knees. “Shit,” Matt said under his breath.

“What’s wrong?” Danny asked, watching Matt’s face pale. Matt spun around on the spot, trying to figure out what to do.

“Cla-claire,” Matt said, hurrying over to the other end of the dojo and pulling her aside. “Um, I’m about to-”

“Have a seizure,” she finished. “Is that what Daisy’s telling you?”

Matt nodded.

“That’s cool. Lie down. I’ll stay with you.”

“No, you don’t understand,” Matt whispered. “The others - they don’t know.”

“Matt, they know,” Claire said, the frustration evident in her voice. “They read about the assault and your epilepsy in the news.”

Matt trembled. “I-I-“

“Lie down,” Claire ordered, and Matt dropped to the ground. He rubbed at his eyes.

“Matt-” Claire started in a calmer tone, but before Claire could finish asking him when his last seizure was, Matt collapsed from his seated position, seizing.
Matt awoke on his side, his head propped up on a folded towel. Daisy was nuzzling into his chest, and she gave his arm a small lick as he started to wake.

“Hey, Matt,” Claire said, rubbing his hand. “Matt, you had a seizure. You’re at the dojo. I’m going to stay here with you until you properly wake up. Can you talk to me?”

“Does he lose his voice?” Danny asked, crouching next to Matt’s head and looking at him curiously.

“Danny, can you give us a moment please,” Claire said, to keep the impatience out of her voice.

“Oh yeah, sure… sure…”

“And lower your voice,” she said softly.

“Mmm okay,” Danny whispered, backing back and crouching against the nearby pillar.

“Matt, can you squeeze my hand,” Claire said.

Matt slowly wrapped his fingers around her hand, and she said, “great. That’s good, Matt. Can you talk to me now.” She rubbed his hand as she waited for the disorientation to clear.

“Ngh,” Matt grunted.

“That’s good, Matt. Can you give me some words this time?”

“War,” Matt slurred.

“War?” Danny yelped as he got to his feet, the sudden noise causing Matt to curl in on himself.

“Danny!” Colleen whispered. “Can you please go away.”

Danny made a zipper motion across his mouth and returned to his position against the pillar.

Claire returned her attention to Matt. “You want water, Matt?”

“Mmm,” Matt hummed as he slowly and clumsily rubbed his face.

“I’m going to have to get you to sit up for me first,” Claire said, but Matt was like a rag doll. He reached out, and Claire met his hand with her own. Matt gave a small, frustrated moan, and Claire whispered to Danny. “Could you help me sit him up?” Danny sprang into motion, keener than keen to help.

With Colleen on one side and Danny on the other, Claire brushed Matt’s hair out of his face and helped him take a few sips. “Slowly, Matt,” Claire warned, worried that he’d end up inhaling water instead of drinking it. Matt’s head drooped forward as the fatigue won. Judging Matt was seconds away from his usual deep post-seizure sleep, Claire quickly asked, “do you need anything else?”

“Slee”, he mumbled.

“Yeah, that’s understandable. I’ll stay here with you, don’t worry.”

Matt still wasn’t absorbing much of what was going on. His only aim was to sleep, and as soon as they laid him back on the soft dojo floor, Matt fell into a deep slumber.
“Man, that was intense,” Danny whispered.

Colleen swiped at him and he jumped back. “What was that for?”

“Shhh…”

Danny gave a small shrug. “What? He’s asleep.”

Colleen pulled Danny into the kitchenette and hissed, “he’s highly sensitive to noise. Just be quiet for once.”

Danny raised his hands in surrender. “Okay, okay.”

“Maybe you should go do something else for a bit,” Colleen suggested. “Claire says Matt’s not going to wake up for a few hours.”

Danny gave a small, frustrated huff. “I want to see if he’s okay.”

Colleen bit her lip. “Okay,” she finally said. “Just – just don’t talk, okay?”

Danny rolled his eyes, but didn’t say anything just to make his point.

When Matt woke from his post-seizure nap, he had little time for Danny’s string of questions. Claire literally batted Danny away to keep him from overwhelming the fatigued and still quite disoriented Matt.

The next time Danny and Matt met up, however, there was no escaping the questioning. Danny was particularly interested in Daisy, asking, “so is that why you have the dog?”

"Yeah." Matt jumped up and down on the spot, stretching his neck side to side in an attempt to warm up.

"How does she know?"

"I don't know," Matt said dismissively, desperately wanting to get on with the work out.

Oblivious, Danny kept going. "Did you train her?"

"No, she just knows."

"That's pretty cool."

Matt just nodded. "Uh, do you want to try that chokehold again?"

Danny grinned. "Yeah."

Matt couldn't work out if Danny was lonely or bored when he started turning up at the Nelson & Murdock offices, and occasionally their apartment. Each time it was unannounced and it was starting to irritate Matt.
"What's wrong?" Foggy asked Matt one night when they were working late over a case that had gone to appeal.

Matt groaned and rubbed his face before reaching for his glasses. "Danny."

"What about him?"

"He's coming up the stairs."

"I thought you liked Danny."

"Yeah, to spar with. He's..." Matt searched for an appropriate word. "He's suffocating."

Foggy chuckled. "Yeah, he's pretty intense." Secretly, Foggy rejoiced. He'd been worried that Danny was about to take his place as best friend to Matt Murdock. Apparently not.

Danny crashed through the door carrying a bag of pungent takeout Chinese food. "Hey guys, I saw your light was on so I thought you might need some fuel."

Matt leaned back in his chair. "Uh-"

"Great," Danny said, dumping the bag on the desk.

"Hang on, I'll just move those documents," Foggy said, sliding the paper out from the greasy bag.

"I'll grab the bowls," Danny said, completely oblivious to the lawyers' lack of enthusiasm.

Foggy whispered, "I saw your light was on? I didn't realise he was such a creeper."

"I don't think the leisurely life of a billionaire matches his energy levels," Matt whispered back.

Danny bounded back into the office, carrying a bowls and cutlery. He dumped them on the table with a clatter, apologising for the noise when he noticed Matt wince. Daisy emerged from her basket under Matt's desk and sniffed the air, wagging her tail with enthusiasm. Danny picked her up and gave her a massive hug. "Dazzle," he said affectionately before plonking her back on the ground and tussling her fur.

Danny always seemed to order enough food for an army, and could put away far more than a normal human could. As he slurped at his noodles, Danny said with his mouth half-full, "so what are you working on?"

"An appeal," Matt said, his tone a little crisp.

"Oh." It was obvious Danny's question was one of politeness rather than genuine curiosity.

Once the food was gone, Danny gave a groan of happiness and rubbed his belly.

Foggy looked at Matt, who was anxiously picking at the edge of his desk. After a brief but awkward silence, Foggy said, "Well, uh, thanks for dinner, Danny."

"No problem," Danny said. But he didn't make any attempt to clear off.

Matt cleared his throat. "We might-"

Danny interrupted, "hey, do you want some tea? I saw your tea in the kitchen. I'd love to try the caterpillar fungus." He started out the door.
Matt cleared his throat. "Uh, yeah, go ahead. We might-"

"Oh shit," Danny said, stopping in the doorway and theatrically slapping his palm against his forehead. "You probably want to get back to work."

"Yeah," Matt said with a forced smile.

"That's cool. I'll be quiet. You want one?"

Foggy and Matt shook their heads. "We-we need to concentrate on the case," Matt ventured.

Danny whispered, "maybe I should go. Do you want me to go?"

Matt looked exceedingly uncomfortable in the subsequent silence, not wanting to upset Danny, but unable to figure out a way of telling him to go away. Finally, Foggy said delicately, "maybe we could catch up at a later date – when we're able to chat."

"Yeah, okay. See you tomorrow night, Matt?" Danny said, referring to their standing Friday night sparring date.

"Yeah, see you tomorrow," Matt agreed, once again forcing a smile.

As soon as Danny was out the door, Matt groaned and mimed banging his head against the table. "But hey, we got a free dinner out of it," Foggy said, laughing at the ridiculousness of it all.

"Sorry, Foggy. I might have a chat to him about dropping into the office like that."

"You said he spent most of his life so far in a remote monastery," Foggy said. "He just needs to learn social cues. Be nice."

"Always am," Matt said, twirling on his chair before plucking his earphone from the desk and returning it to his ear. "Come on, let's finish this so we can get home."

"Can Daisy do anything else?" Danny asked Matt the next evening as they warmed up.

Matt flipped upright from his handstand and said, "what do you mean?"

"Can she sense other things? You know, like lies, or shady characters?"

"I think all dogs have that intuition," Matt said. He scratched his chin. He'd shaved for court that morning, and it always got itchy about now. It made him a little bit irritable than usual, and after a few more questions from Danny, Matt eventually snapped, "are we going to spar or just stand around talking all evening?"

Danny looked a little hurt, but stuttered, "yeah, yeah, sure."

After sparring, Matt felt a bit better thanks to the exercise-induced endorphins in his system. He apologised to Danny. "I'm just a bit stressed at the moment," Matt explained.

Danny said, "oh, is it the case?"
Matt pinched the bridge of his nose. "Did you hear about the kidnapping?"

"Uh-"

"In Hell's Kitchen. The little girl. She's- well, I heard a scream last night. I-I wanted to help, but..."

"But what?"

"I called the police," Matt said, turning around so that Danny couldn’t see his expression. "They didn't get there in time. I wish – I wish I'd done something. I wish I'd gone myself."

"You must hear a lot of crime going on with your super ears," Danny said slowly. "Since I've returned to New York, I've intercepted god knows how many crimes."

Matt turned back to Danny. "Really?"

"Yeah, don't you?"

Matt dipped his head. "Well, I-I can't really – my cane – people expect-"

"You're blind. Yeah, I guess – uh, why do you keep the cover? What do you think's going to happen?"

"It's easier this way," Matt said immediately.

"Is it? If it stops you from helping people-"

"I help people," Matt snapped.

"You just said-"

"I used to – more, before I got-"

"Sick?"

"The epilepsy."

Danny said, "have you ever tried meditating?"

Matt rolled his eyes. "Of course I've tried meditating. It's not going to fix the brain injury though."

"You never said it was a brain injury. What happened?"

Matt traipsed over to his bag and pulled out his hoodie. "I should go."

"No, wait. Don't you want a drink or something?"

"I should go."

"Just tea. It doesn't need to be alcohol."

"Foggy's waiting for me at home," Matt improvised. It was probably true. "I should go." He picked up Daisy's leash. "Come on, Daze."

An hour later, while Matt was waiting for the water to boil for the pasta, he received a text from
Danny. "I've worked out your secret," it said. Matt nearly dropped his phone.

"Call Danny," Matt yelled at the phone. "D-Danny, what do you... stop... just stop and listen would you... no, of course I'm not... well, you're wrong... no... no... I fell down the stairs, I told you... I did tell you... well, you're just going to have to believe me." Matt stopped pacing and combed shaking fingers through his hair.

Foggy emerged from the bathroom. "What?" he whispered, seeing Matt's red face.

“Not now,” Matt mouthed back, his eyebrows furrowed.

Foggy shrugged. After quickly scanning the nearby area for mugs and other breakable objects, Foggy ambled over to the fridge and pulled out a couple of beers, pretending not to be interested in the conversation.

“Mmm... you're different though. I can't... no... leave Claire out of this," Matt growled. “We need to talk about this in person... no that's not an admission.”

Foggy plonked himself on the couch and held out a beer. Matt waved him away, and Foggy shrugged again, sliding Matt's beer onto the coffee table instead.

Matt rolled his eyes. “Fine,” he huffed. “But you're not to tell anyone, Danny. Not a single person. No, no, that's not necessary... fine.” Matt pinched the bridge of his nose. "Shit," Matt said under his breath. He stamped his food on the ground as he threw his phone hard at the couch cushion, making Foggy recoil.

"Danny's coming over," Matt said to Foggy, his expression dark. "He knows I'm Daredevil."
"He knows you're Daredevil," Foggy repeated. "What, you mean he guessed?"

In lieu of an answer, Matt grabbed the beer off the table and took a generous swig.

"Uh, Matty, you might want to slow down there," Foggy said cautiously, recognising the warning signs of Matt's 'about to throw something' mood. He regretted providing Matt with a very throwable and potentially very messy glass object.

Matt threw himself onto the couch and leaned forward, his forehead cradled in his hands. "Ergh, why now?"

"You must have seen it coming," Foggy ventured.

"No, Foggy. There was nothing inevitable about it," Matt snapped.

"Yelling at me is not going to fix it either."

Matt sat up with a moan. "Sorry, Fog." He put out his hand as a gesture of goodwill, and Foggy gave it a squeeze. By now, the water was boiling fast on the stove so that drops of water pinged onto the splashback. Matt sighed, "I guess I'm making pasta for three."

"I don't get why you're freaking out so much," Danny said in between massive mouthfuls of pasta. "You're Daredevil and I'm Iron Fist. Why the secrets?"

"You wouldn't understand," Matt said. He closed his eyes, trying to ignore the slurping sound of Danny chewing with his mouth open. He might be a dedicated fighter, but his table manners needed work.

With his mouth full, Danny replied, "you keep saying that, and yet, I worked out your secret on my own, didn't I?" He paused to wipe a drop of sauce from his chin with the back of his hand. "I know I don't know much about grown up stuff, but I'm not as stupid as you think. I slayed the dragon-"

"Not the dragon again," Matt groaned.

"Danny, to be fair, you had a significant heads-up," Foggy said, gesticulating with his beer bottle (the necessary third for the evening). "You know first-hand how Matt fights. His style's pretty unique. It's not hard to match it to footage of Daredevil."

"Jujitsu cross New York Irish boxer," Danny said, repeating Matt's offhand remark from weeks earlier.

"Plus all that flippy stuff," Foggy noted, smiling into his pasta.

Matt pushed his pasta around his bowl. He'd barely taken a bite. "You didn't tell anyone, did you?"
“No one,” Danny replied. “Does anyone else know?”

Foggy looked at Matt, who was looking entirely reluctant. "Uh..." Matt hummed. "Uh, Claire, Karen-"

"Your secretary?"

Matt swallowed. "Ye-" his mouth was dry and he choked on the word. "Yeah," he said after another mouthful of beer. "And Stick."

Danny shrugged as if to say, 'of course'.

Matt finished his beer and got up for another. Danny twisted in his seat, watching Matt's every move. He stammered, "uh, so Matt, are we good?" Even Danny - normally oblivious to hostilities - could read Matt's stormy mood. Matt silently returned to the table with three beers, sliding two of them towards Foggy and Danny.

“Matt, come on,” Foggy finally moaned, “what's with the silent treatment? Danny knows. Get over it. It's not as if you were keeping your skills a secret from him.”

Matt frowned.

Foggy leaned towards Matt and said in a low voice, “come on dude, can you please just go back to showing off your skills? Show Danny your bottle top trick.”

Danny clasped his hands in excitement. “Ooh what's the trick?”

Matt rolled his eyes – a gesture missed by Danny and Foggy thanks to the very meaningful return of his glasses. Matt sighed, "okay," and popped the lid of his beer bottle so it pinged off the kitchen bench onto the fridge and then into the trash.

Danny whistled. "That was so cool. Oh my god, that's amazing, shit.... here, can you do mine?"

Foggy and Matt both snorted at Danny's unabashed enthusiasm.

Matt gave Danny a tentative smile. “Do you want seconds?” It had not gone unnoticed that Danny had practically hoovered up his pasta (although Matt, predicting as much, had pre-planned, adding three times as much pasta as he normally would).

“Yeah, yeah, thanks,” Danny said. “Oh, man, that was so good. You should open a restaurant, seriously.”

“That would take all the fun out of it,” Matt said, willing his cheeks to cool down. He piled the rest of the pasta into Danny’s bowl and held it out. “Too much?”

“Nah, man. I’d eat that pasta forever,” Danny gushed. Matt ducked his head, but there was no disguising his smile. It seemed they were good after all.

The following morning, Matt grumbled to Foggy, "I think this is the closest I've had to a hangover since my first seizure."

"Well, you were chugging them down last night, Matt. Anyone would have thought you were
nervous about something." Matt made a playful swipe in Foggy’s direction, who leaped aside with a laugh, saying, “did I tell you Colleen taught me how to dodge?”

“Good,” Matt said gruffly. “Coffee,” he mumbled, padding into the kitchen.

“Do you want to get pancakes instead?” Foggy asked hopefully.

Matt rubbed his eyes. “Uh, have you ever had smashed avocado?”

“Smashed what?”

“Come on, I know a place.”

Matt took Foggy to the café he’d been to with Elektra many months before. “I’ll have a flat white please,” Matt said to the waiter before they’d even sat down.

Foggy looked at him confused. “Matt what?”

“Two flat whites,” Matt said to the waiter before whispering to Foggy, “believe me, that’s what you want.”

Foggy skimmed the menu. “Matt- uh, there aren’t pancakes on this menu.”

“I know. I thought maybe we could branch out a little. We can celebrate the successes of Nelson & Murdock with an overpriced, overcomplicated, but delicious breakfast. But first you’re going to have to read the menu to me." He sighed and muttered under his breath, "I loathe whoever invented the laminating machine.”

“Okay,” Foggy said uncertainly. “Where’s this sudden urge to celebrate coming from?”

“Nowhere. I think – I think I might just be… happy.”

Foggy picked up a teaspoon just so that he had something to drop. “Nooo… Matthew Murdock admitting happiness?”

Matt chuckled. “It’s not that ground-breaking, Foggy.”

“I thought you were holding out until after the seizures had stopped.”

“It looks like that might not happen… for a while,” Matt said. “In the meantime, Daisy is doing a good job of preventing falls.”

“And you’re exercising,” Foggy added.

“And I have Julia... who I’m taking to the library this afternoon. I worry that I’m placing too much emphasis on the martial arts at the expense of other things, so we’re going to hunt for some junior crime fiction.”


“Yeah, she says she wants to be a lawyer… like me.” He remembered desperately wanting to be like his own mentor when he was that age. He hero-worshipped Stick, blind to his many flaws. Matt swallowed, trying to clear the knot in his chest.
Foggy smiled. “The mentorship is going well then.”

“Yeah, apart from the fact that I still haven’t worked out why she’s so important to Stick.”

“You’ll figure it out, Matt. You have guts standing up to that man. He respects you for it too.”

Matt’s mouth twitched, “he does. He’ll never admit it, but he does.”

Their flat whites arrived and they toasted to Nelson & Murdock before ordering their overcomplicated breakfasts. Foggy decided to try his luck ordering pancakes, even though they weren’t on the menu. Eventually he gave up and went for another sugary item, stammering, "uh, I guess I’ll have the waffles with orange blossom syrup, poached rhubarb, pistachios and P-p-"

"Persian floss," the waiter finished.

"Smashed avocado please," Matt said. He'd become overwhelmed with choice by the time Foggy had read the third item on the menu, and decided to stick with what he'd enjoyed last time.

"Geez, Matt," Foggy said after the waiter had left, "what is this place? Now I understand why you put on a collared shirt just to go to breakfast. I-I don’t feel qualified to eat here."

“Says the man whose career goal is to have designer chairs no one knows how to sit in,” Matt replied.

“Yeah, but this level of fancy is so not Matt Murdock… how did you come across the place?”

Matt shrugged. "I just followed my nose," he said truthfully. He wasn’t sure how to interpret Foggy’s comment about him not being suited to such a ‘fancy’ cafe. It was one thing for Elektra to make fun of his upbringing, but Foggy was quite another.

"Your nose is pretty reliable," Foggy admitted, taking a small sip of his coffee. "This coffee... wow." Foggy looked up to see a wave of anxiety cross Matt’s face, and quickly said, “come on, Matty, put out that fist.”

Foggy matched their fist bump with a theatrical explosion sound. If Foggy could perform such a déclassé move in a what he called a ‘fancy’ café, then no wonder they were friends. Matt heard the chef swear as he stabbed his thumb with a knife trying to de-pip an avocado, which made him smile. At the end of the day, it was all pretence. His thoughts drifted to Elektra. She’d thrown a pomegranate seed at him on this very spot, and they’d unashamedly flirted with each other - an easy banter that ran counter to their fraught relationship. Keen to avoid falling into that trap again, he’d not tried to contact her since the great battle. The note she’d left remained unopened in his bedside drawer.

“Matt!”

Matt sat up straight. “What?”

“You were off with the pixies,” Foggy said. “I just said your name three times.”

“Oh, did you? Sorry.”

“Where did you go?”

“Oh, um,” Matt cleared his throat, “um, just thinking about tonight’s session with Danny.” He leaned forward, “I hope he doesn’t take last night’s, uh, reveal as an invitation to wipe me out.”
“Do you want me to come – you know, as a witness?”

Matt huffed in amusement. “No, I think I can hold my own.”

“Yeah you can,” Foggy sang, holding out his fist again. “Now give me another bump.”

When Danny faced up to Matt at the sparring session that night, it was Danny who was nearly wiped out. Matt had still been unconsciously holding out on him, but with his secret revealed, he no longer felt like he had to hide. The fury and energy Matt released was intimidating, so much so that Danny had to ask for a break more than once.

“Geez, Matt,” Danny said as they shared a pot of tea afterwards. “You really let the devil out today.”

Matt gave him a wry smile.

Danny surveyed the skinny man. Matt had bulked up a little in the last few weeks, but his physique barely resembled pictures of the original black-suited Devil of Hell's Kitchen. Danny asked, “You ever think about donning the suit again?”

“Yeah, of course. I-I have tried, but the epilepsy complicates things. I got beat up the first time – but that’s because the medication I was on screwed with my senses in a major way.” Matt would never forget the feelings of shame and disappointment that haunted him after he lost a fight with his chain-smoking abusive neighbour.

“And I rescued someone last month… although I was still recovering from pneumonia so I ended up coughing all night afterwards,” Matt said, thinking back to the seaside incident. “The mugging a few weeks back was the first time I’ve felt good going up against real opponents – although I’m still very aware that my senses are still a little compromised-”

“You felt good?”

“Yeah, I- I like it. Not what the criminals are doing – it’s more-I-I like to help, you know?”

Danny nodded. “I know.” He thought for a moment, “hey, if you’re not going out because of the seizures and Daisy can predict your seizures, why don't you just take Daisy with you? You could take her in a backpack. She’s small enough.”

“No,” Matt said outright.

“Why not?”

“I can’t put her in danger like that. It’s not her choice.”

“But you said she helped out with the mugging.”

“Yes, but if anything happened, I’d hate myself.” Matt thought back to Daisy’s response following the mugging. She didn’t seem traumatised – far from it. But he couldn’t risk it. If anything happened, he’d never forgive himself. Matt shook his head. “No, I can’t.”

“What about if I come with you?”
Matt squirmed. The thought of having a chatty Danny in his ear while patrolling the streets made his head hurt. “Thanks, but no thanks,” Matt said.

Danny shrugged. “Okay. Let me know if you change your mind.”

Matt nodded and took another sip of his tea.

Matt rolled onto his other side for what seemed to be the hundredth time that night. Daisy gave a small groan as Matt pulled the sheets free from under her, eventually moving to the other side of the bed in protest. The dog circled on the spot twice and settled down with a heavy exhalation. Matt pulled the sheet over his head, but there was little point. There was no way he’d be able to sleep with the racket on the corner. A group of men were hassling women as they walked past, each slur causing Matt’s chest to tighten in anger.

Danny’s words - “ever think about donning the suit again?” – floated through his head. Eventually, he’d had enough. He leaped out of bed and pulled out Melvin’s specially designed hoodie, jeans and cane, fitting his old black mask underneath for good measure. Daisy jumped up and followed him up the stairs to the roof, despite Matt’s repeated order to stay. He was about to leap to the adjacent building when Daisy jumped at Matt’s stomach, scrabbling with her little paws at his hoodie pocket. “Get down,” Matt hissed, but Daisy managed to get a grip and slithered into the pocket. She twisted around and stuck her head out of the end, looking up as if to say, “what are you waiting for?”

Matt hesitated. This was a bad idea, Daisy or not. He threw his focus back to his apartment. Foggy was snuffling lightly in his sleep. He’d be cross if he knew what Matt was considering. But he wasn’t heading off a biker gang or the Hand, Matt reasoned. No, it was just a bunch of idiots on the street corner. He might not even have to fight – he could just tell them to stop abusing women. With that thought, he took a running jump onto the adjacent roof and using Melvin’s cane, he dropped down into the shadows behind the group of men.

“Hey guys,” Matt said, his voice low, “do you mind keeping your thoughts to yourself? A bit of respect would be nice.”

The group snickered. “You should keep your thoughts to yourself, dickhead,” one of them replied.

Gripping his folded cane, Matt took a couple of steps forward. There were more snickers from the men, particularly when Daisy stuck her head out of Matt’s pocket.

“Oh look, he has a pet rat,” one of the men laughed.

Matt quickly whispered, “stay,” to Daisy, lightly pressing his hand against his pocket to reinforce the command.

“Get out of here,” Matt growled, but the men weren’t afraid. They merely formed a line in front of Matt and Daisy, grunting threats of abuse.

One of them stepped forward, clearly signalling he was about to take a swing. Amateur. Matt smiled as he ducked the man’s clumsy swipe. The man took another swing, and Matt lithely jumped aside, this time laughing. Incensed, the guy ran at Matt, throwing all his weight behind his fist. Matt flipped backwards, clearly enjoying himself, and without anything to stop his momentum,
the assailant stumbled forward into a light pole.

His friends snickered, and one of them said to Matt, “them some nice moves”. The assailant lurched to his feet and started towards Matt, but one of his friends said, “come on, bro, let’s go. This guy’s playing with you.”

They made to walk away, but Matt yelled, “wait!”

They stopped and turned around.

“I don’t want to see you here again,” Matt growled. “And if I ever hear you yelling abuse at women again, I’ll return the punches, and you really, really don’t want that.”

“Oh come on, grandpa. We were just complimenting her.”

“Yeah, maybe she’s never been told she has nice tits before,” his friend chimed in. “Chicks love compliments.”

“Yeah, gives them confidence,” another said.

“They’re not compliments when they’re read as threats,” Matt said softly, but the danger in his voice was clear. “Don’t do it again.” There was a grumble of discontent, but the men wandered off without challenge.

Matt wiped his sweaty hands on his hoodie and clicked his cane back together, taking a brief moment to celebrate his victory. He whispered “good girl” to Daisy, ruffling her fur. At least Matt knew he could trust her to stay out of fights if it came to that. “We’re going to have to get you your own special overcoat,” he said, feeling the slightly thinner, but denser fur that made up the very identifiable white patch on her back. She gave a small shiver of excitement and licked him once on the hand. “Ew,” Matt said, wrinkling his nose, but he gave her another affectionate rub behind the ears nonetheless.

As Matt snuck down the roof access stairs, Foggy rolled over with a grunt. “Matt, is that you?”

“Yeah,” Matt whispered back. “Go to sleep.”

“You okay?”

“Yeah, just grabbing Daisy from the roof.”

“Oh. Okay,” Foggy croaked, pulling the blankets up around his neck.

Matt allowed himself to exhale. It would be okay. He tiptoed into his room and fell asleep before he’d even extracted himself from his jeans and hoodie. Of course, an hour later, Matt woke up in a sweat. He’d forgotten how disgusting it was to wake up in his various Daredevil suits until now. If he were to do this again, he’d have to be more disciplined. Kicking off his too-warm clothing, he rolled over, enjoying the cool of the sheets against his skin. Daisy edged over and curled up in the small of his back with a sigh. Matt smiled. It felt like a huge weight had been lifted off his chest. He quickly fell back into a deep and blissful sleep.

“Hey, what happened last night?” Foggy asked as Matt wandered into the kitchen the next morning.

“With Daisy?”
“Yeah,” Foggy said, looking at Matt through narrowed eyes.

“She was on the roof,” Matt said. “I think she was kept up by some guys at the end of the street.”

“Oh, I didn’t hear.”

Matt sighed and flicked on the coffee machine. “We should get a timer for this thing,” he grumbled.

“We could just get a new one,” Foggy pointed out. “Nelson & Murdock is earning enough at the moment. It could be a Christmas bonus.”

“No, we should invest it back into the company.” He gave Foggy a wicked smile and said, “we could get a new photocopier.”

Foggy groaned. “No way, I only just figured out how to use the old one.”

“You’re one up on me then,” Matt quipped. He tilted his head, listening to the buzzing coming from the coffee machine. He suspected that it was going to die any day now and the decision to replace it would be out of their hands. “M’gonna have a shower,” Matt mumbled, heading back towards the bathroom.

“Good idea,” Foggy said, wafting his hand theatrically in front of his nose. “You smell like you’ve been to the gym, dude.”

Matt ignored the jab. The less he said the better.

Matt didn’t go out for a few nights after that. He had a seizure the next afternoon, which essentially wiped out his energy for next couple of days. Instead, he started sewing Daisy a coat of her own out of fine neoprene. If he decided to do this long term, he’d pay a visit to Melvin to get a proper suit made up for her, but for now, a camouflaging coat would suffice.

“What are you doing?” Foggy said, peering over Matt’s hands.

“I’m making Daisy a water-resistant coat.”

“Why don’t you just buy one?”

“I tried. They didn’t have anything that I wanted.”

Foggy plonked himself on the couch to get a better look at Matt’s tiny stitches. “Where did you learn to do that?”

Matt patted his knee and Daisy jumped down from the nest she’d made in Matt’s hood, standing patiently as Matt fitted the half-finished coat over her head. “Good girl,” Matt said, giving her a rub behind the ears before pulling the coat off and recommencing the sewing. Daisy jumped onto the back of the couch and curled up in Matt’s hood again, warm against the back of his neck.

Matt licked his lips and said, “Sunday school crafts.”

“Oh. What does this have to do with the bible?”
Matt shrugged. Keen to change the subject, he said, “hey, can you describe a panda for me?”

“Uh, sure, why?”

“Julia wants an origami panda. I looked up some patterns online, but I can’t seem to figure out the folds.”

“Are you trying to make Kung Fu Panda or a real panda?”

“Uh, I guess the Kung Fu one?”

“Yeah, so they don’t really look the same,” Foggy said, a smile on his face. He’d not seen Matt so perplexed in a while. “Panda’s – well, let’s just say that they don’t really have a martial arts physique. They look like dumplings with limbs.”

Matt nodded.

“Let me see,” Foggy said, pulling out his phone. “There’s a Kung Fu Panda template – you print it out and it’s a cut and glue kind of situation.” He looked at Matt, who still looked a little puzzled. “Are you trying to visualise a panda?” Foggy asked.

“Yeah, kinda,” Matt said.

“We can print it out tomorrow at work. I’ll probably get the paper glued to my forehead if I try and assemble it, but Karen could do it.” He paused, trying to decipher Matt’s expression. “If you want, we can go to the zoo. I don’t know how precise your sense radar thingy is…”

Matt gave Foggy a wan smile.

“Yeah, well, it’s an idea,” Foggy stuttered. “Think about it. You could take Julia too. You said that she has, uh, senses-”

“They’re different to mine,” Matt interrupted.

“She could hear the birds though,” Foggy said.

Matt gave Foggy a more genuine smile. “Yeah… yeah, I think she’d like that.” He picked up the coat again and kept stitching.

There was something wrong, but Foggy couldn’t quite put his finger on it. He watched Matt sew in silence for another minute. Eventually Foggy cleared his throat and said, “uh, I might start dinner if that’s okay.”

“Sure, thanks, Fog,” Matt said somewhat absently.

One night later that week, Matt heard suspicious sounds coming from a couple of blocks south. He was out of bed in an instant. This time, he barely thought twice about taking Daisy. After donning his special hoodie and black mask, he fitted Daisy’s handsewn coat. He crouched down so that she could crawl into his pocket and flew up to the roof. Pausing for only a moment to confirm the location, he threw his cane at a nearby fire escape, swinging down to ground level with Daisy curled up in her ‘pouch’.
The noise turned out to be merely a spat between two corner dealers. Small fry, Matt thought to himself. It only took a blow each to get them to flee. Matt could sense a twitchiness in them both that suggested fighting a masked and hooded man wasn’t their biggest priority of the evening.

Matt gave Daisy an encouraging pat for once again obeying his order to stay in his pocket, and turned his attention to potential threats elsewhere. He was wired and ready for a fight. Moreover, he wanted a challenge. He rolled his shoulders, trying to rid of the frustration.

Matt was about to turn back home when he heard a sobbing coming from a couple of blocks east. It was followed by a hissed, “shut up, you brat.”

Matt ran across the road and sprinted down the alleyway shortcut, listening to the sounds of a young girl sniffle, “I want my mom.”

“Well, I don’t want to be doing this right now,” the man replied. “Glorified babysitter I am.”

There was a light vibration, and the man picked up his phone, “yeah, Turk? What do you want?”

He groaned and said, “really? Can’t you just lower the ransom?” Matt concentrated, trying to let the other side of the conversation in. There was something about filming, and the kidnapper said, “she’s just a kid. All we need to do is make her cry and that’s enough.” He sighed. “Can we just try it with the crying first?”

Matt pursed his lips. That was enough evidence for him. He picked the lock on the front door and snuck inside the building, listening for other guards. Nothing on this level. They were cocky.

Matt lifted Daisy out of his hoodie pocket and whispered, “stay.” Daisy gave a small whine of discontent only audible to Matt. He touched her head in reassurance. He didn’t want to put her in any more danger. The hoodie pocket was too exposed for his liking and in any case, it cramped his style.

Matt stalked towards the stairwell. Someone was waiting at the bottom of the stairs. There was a strong smell of gunpowder, but also the reek of strawberry bubble gum. A rhythmic crack, crack, crack could be heard as the guy mindlessly chewed on the gum. Matt crept forward, stopping at the top of the stairs and waiting for the right moment. The guy blew a bubble and it popped in his face, and Matt took the opportunity to leap on him from above. Matt covered the man’s mouth to stop him from alerting others, wrinkling his nose as he realised the smell of artificial gum would linger on his hand for days. Holding the man’s throat until he slumped forward unconscious, Matt then continued along the hallway.

The uneven breathing of the small girl could be heard coming from the room just ahead. Matt tested the handle. Locked. But it was an old lock, simple to pick, and Matt had it open in seconds. Amateurs, he thought with a smile.

The kidnapper stood up as soon as Matt entered the room, drawing his gun and only narrowly missing Matt’s chest. Matt momentarily faltered as he heard Daisy’s skittering paws running down the stairs. The man took another shot, and Matt ducked, rolling forward and taking the man’s feet out from beneath him. The man hit Matt hard in the shin with the barrel of the gun, but Matt barely felt it, such was his concentration. The man swiped at Matt again just as Daisy leaped over the man’s chest. She grabbed his sleeve in her mouth and used her momentum to drag the kidnapper’s hand away, giving Matt the opportunity to kick the gun from his hand.

Matt clenched his fists, worried about Daisy. Yet he needn’t have worried. She knew where she was needed. She leaped onto the mattress where the little girl was huddled against the wall, silent tears running down her face. Daisy nuzzled into her side, and after an initial flinch, the little girl
nervously touched the tiny dog’s head. Matt heard the little girl’s pulse slow ever so slightly as Daisy licked her hand, gazing at the girl with pure devotion.

As he turned back to the kidnapper, Matt’s anger welled up and he pounded his fists into the man’s skull over and over until he heard an audible sob coming from the corner. Matt stood up, his gloves bloody and his breath coming in heavy puffs.

“I’m—I’m sorry you had to see that,” he breathed. He put his hands out and said softly, “I’m not going to hurt you.” The little girl curled into Daisy, evidently not believing him for a second.

“You’re going back to your mom, okay?”

“Okay,” came the little voice.

She stood up and he held out his hand. She looked at it reluctantly, and took a step back. Matt said, “you can hold, uh, Lady if you’d rather.” Best not use Daisy’s real name. The little girl pulled Daisy into her arms and followed Matt up the stairs and outside. He put his finger out to say ‘shhh’ as he pulled out his burner phone and called Brett’s personal number. In his best Daredevil voice (to quote Foggy and Karen), he reported their location, leaving the little girl only when he heard the sirens just around the corner. “I’m going to leave your side, but I’ll watch until you’re safe, okay?” Matt said quickly, bundling Daisy into his pocket and swinging up onto the fire escape. To his great distress, the little girl started crying again.

Matt crouched on the edge of the building listening to Brett quiz the little girl about her rescuer, and Daisy took the opportunity to squirm out of Matt pocket and crawl up to his shoulder. With his black mask underneath, Matt flipped back the hood and she jumped into his favourite spot, leaning her little snout against the back of his head with a contented sigh. A warmth spread through his body. He was back.

Once he was satisfied the little girl was safe, Matt ran all the way home, scaling the fire escape with an ease he didn’t think he’d feel again. He obviously needed to build up his muscles, strength and fitness, but it didn’t seem impossible anymore. Wired with endorphins, Matt snuck into the kitchen to grab a beer to come down again, shedding his clothes as he went.

Daisy trotted after him and he gave her a liver treat in reward for her help. Dragging the man’s sleeve aside was unnecessary, but he couldn’t ignore Daisy’s value in calming the little girl. He gave her a small pat and wandered back to his room, hugging the cool beer against his chest. He slept well that night, deep and peaceful.

The peace wasn’t to last, however. The next day, Daisy started scrabbling at him only half an hour before an important client meeting. He stuttered out a “Fo-Foggy,” and hearing Matt’s strangled tone, Foggy dashed into Matt’s office.

Foggy’s heart sped up slightly as he spotted Daisy’s pre-seizure behaviour. “Matt, it’s okay,” Foggy said, putting an arm on Matt’s shoulder. “It’s okay. Lie down.” Foggy led the now fast breathing Matt to the couch, and helped him remove his tie. “You know it’s worse if you’re nervous,” he said.

Matt swallowed, closing his eyes and trying to relax his breathing. He didn’t have time for this.
He’d hoping to ride the Daredevil high a little longer, but a seizure would inevitably put an end to that.

“Tell me about the birds you want to hear at the zoo,” Foggy said calmly. “You’ll probably hear some of the camp birds.”

Matt let out a non-committal grunt.

“Do you reckon there’ll be owls?”

“O-owls are nocturnal,” Matt whispered.

“Okay, no owls,” Foggy said. “What about-” Foggy stopped as Matt let out a groan, stiffening as the seizure hit. Foggy hit the timer on his phone, keeping watch as one minute passed, two minutes, three minutes, four… “shit,” Foggy said, getting up. “Karen, we might have to call an ambulance.”

Karen dialled 911. “Hi, uh, my boss- friend is having a seizure and it’s nearing five minutes… yes, uncontrolled… normally, uh, two to three minutes-”

She stopped as Matt stilled. “Oh, the seizure stopped. I think – hang on,” Karen covered the speaker and asked Foggy, “do we need help still?”

Foggy shook his head. “I think it’ll be fine.”

“I think he’ll be okay,” Karen told the operator. “No… yes… yeah, we’ll call if we need help, thanks,” she finished for Foggy’s sake.

“Thank goodness,” Foggy whispered. He brushed his hair out of his face as he crouched next to the unconscious body, tilting Matt’s head a little to try and help with his breathing. The longer seizures came with a corresponding longer recovery and so Foggy waited a few minutes, his hand in Matt’s, before trying to get him to respond. Daisy was less patient, licking Matt’s wrist in an attempt to wake him up. Foggy was tempted to push her away, but if he’d learned anything about Daisy, it was that she seemed to have an uncanny connection to Matt and his needs. In the end, Foggy gave her a small pat and left her be.

Matt roused with a moan of pain. His muscles weren’t happy. As he rolled over, his back cramped, causing him to cry out.

“Matt, Matt, Matt, calm down,” Foggy said, distressed. “What’s wrong?” He tried to grasp Matt’s hand, but Matt was only focussed on his back, clumsily trying to sit up. “Shit, Karen, maybe we should call an ambulance.”

Matt gave a sob, his eyes watering from the pain, his face contorted in agony and confusion.

“Matty, tell me what’s wrong,” Foggy said. “Do we need to take you to hospital?”

Matt’s lack of response worried Foggy even more and he nodded at Karen, who picked up her phone once again.

“No,” Matt gasped. “Argh, it…” Matt rolled onto his stomach and dug into his back.

“You have a cramp,” Foggy concluded, finally putting two and two together. Matt grunted a confirmation, and Foggy said, “what do I do?”
Matt shook his head and slumped into the couch as the cramp dissipated, although each breath was still accompanied by a small moan.

“Matty, can I sit you up?” Foggy asked. “I have water, Aspirin, and Daisy’s here.” Daisy nudged her head under Matt’s hand at the sound of her name.

Matt grunted and tried to raise his head, slumping back into the couch with a pained moan.

Foggy whispered, “Karen, could you-”

“Yup,” Karen said, looping her arm under Matt’s armpit and helping Foggy get Matt upright.

“Here,” Foggy said, holding a bottle up to Matt’s mouth and placing a couple of pills into his hand. Matt’s arm shook as he raised his hand to his mouth and the pills slipped from his feeble grasp, pinging across the floor. Matt gave a tearless sob and Foggy said softly, “don’t worry about it, Matt. Here are some more.” Foggy held the pills up to Matt’s mouth this time, holding the bottle for him as he downed the entire container in one go. Matt’s head slumped forward as he started to drift off again, and Karen and Foggy slowly lowered him onto his side. “Do you need anything else?” Foggy asked, but Matt was already asleep.

Foggy looked at his watch. “Shit, the Kauffmans are going to be here in five minutes. Uh, Karen. It’ll look terrible if I leave the meeting, but perhaps you could-”

“Check on him every five minutes. On it,” Karen said.

Foggy took a deep breath. “We can do this,” he said to himself. He shook out his hands, and after crouching next to Matt to check his breathing, Foggy left the door ajar and raced into his office to find the Kauffman files.

Immediately after the meeting finished, and an hour into Matt’s post-seizure nap, Matt’s phone rang with a ‘Danny… Danny… Danny… Danny… ’ Usually Foggy would let Matt’s phone calls go to voicemail, but Matt and Danny had a sparring session planned for that evening, which now needed to be cancelled.

Before Foggy could get in a ‘hello’, Danny blurted out, “did you rescue the kidnapped girl?”

“Oh, hi Danny, it’s Foggy.”

“I thought-Matt-”

“Yeah, it’s Matt’s phone. Uh, he’s kinda busy right now.”

“Did he have a seizure?” Danny asked matter-of-factly.

Foggy looked over at Matt’s pale face. “Yeah, so-”

“I guess we’re cancelling tonight then,” Danny replied.

“Yeah, sorry,” Foggy said, relieved that Danny seemed so understanding. Danny’s reactions to things ranged from completely juvenile to monk-like chilled. Foggy never knew what to expect. “Uh, what were you saying about the kidnapped girl?”

“Oh, um, there was a little girl that was kidnapped last week. Matt heard the kidnapping and called the police, but – uh, I don’t know how much you know about the case-”
“The minimum,” Foggy said.

“Yes, so the police were too late, and Matt was beating himself up that he didn’t help.”

“That sounds like Matt.” Foggy wandered into his office and typed in ‘news, kidnapping.’

“Anyway, she was rescued last night - get this, by Daredevil.”

“What?” Foggy squinted as he scrolled through the results, looking for the best source. He clicked on the Bulletin website and sure enough, there was a picture of a silhouetted figure crouched atop a building, the horns visible above his head. The caption read, ‘a reader caught this photo of Daredevil surveying the scene immediately after the police arrived.’

“He wouldn’t,” Foggy said under his breath. “The suit’s still in the cupboard.”

“Do you think it’s a copycat?”

“Hang on.” Foggy put his phone to his chest and called, “Karen, come here.”

Karen rushed to Foggy’s desk and gasped when she saw the picture. “Is that—”

Foggy zoomed in on the picture. “Hang on, there’s an extra crescent immediately above the head… and those horns… they aren’t horns… I think-I think they’re ears.” Foggy strode into Matt’s office and stared at Daisy, who sat up at the interruption, her ears pointing up in interest.

“He didn’t,” Foggy said to himself. “Uh, Danny, I have to go. I’ll get Matt to call you when he wakes up.”

“Sure. Is everything okay?”

“Yeah, Matt and I just need to have a little talk, that’s all.”

Matt slept longer than usual, and to Foggy, it seemed like an eternity. Foggy tried to fill in the time working on the Kaufmann case, but he couldn’t concentrate. He ended up sitting on the floor in Matt’s office, leaning against the couch and holding Matt’s limp hand.

“Fog,” Matt eventually croaked.

“Hey, Matt,” Foggy said in a near whisper. He unscrewed a bottle of water, and nudged it against Matt’s hand. “Do you need help sitting up?”

Matt grunted a no, and eased himself up onto one elbow, chugging down the water and catching his breath only once the last drop was gone. He struggled upright and slumped heavily against the couch back. “Urgh,” he groaned.

“The seizure was longer than usual,” Foggy said, joining Matt on the couch.

Matt reached for Foggy’s hand. “What’s wrong?”

“What-”
“Your pulse – it’s too fast.”

Foggy got out his phone. “You can’t see this,” Foggy said, “but it’s a photo under the headline, ‘Daredevil makes a timely return’.”

Matt bit his lip. “My suit’s in-”

“The cupboard, I know. The thing is, these aren’t horns.” Foggy ran his fingers over Daisy’s ears. “They look exactly like Daze’s ears.”

Matt slumped. There was no point pretending. “Yes, I went out last night… with Daisy.”

“But you didn’t tell me,” Foggy said.

“I didn’t. I should have- I just thought you’d be mad-”

“This again,” Foggy groaned. “How many times do I have to tell you, it’s the secrets and lies that piss me off, Matt. I’m mad you didn’t tell me.”

“But not that-”

“You rescued a small girl who’d been missing for a week. You singlehandedly did what the police didn’t or couldn’t… whatever.” Foggy’s voice softened. “No, Matt, I’m not mad about that.”

Matt rubbed his thighs, trying to rid of some of the muscle pain.

Eventually Foggy said, “but if you’re going to do this, we have to come up with a plan.”

“A plan?”

“Yeah, hope’s not a plan, remember. We need a plan for when Daisy senses a seizure coming on and you’re in an alleyway somewhere beating up some people who would love to take advantage of your seizure. You need a way to alert me.”

“A plan,” Matt repeated, his mouth quirking in a small smile.

Foggy had had two hours to work through anger, disappointment, opposition, then a somewhat complicated level of acceptance. It was inevitable really. Matt’s return to the streets at least meant he was improving health-wise, even if the activity was risky. But with the epilepsy, everything seemed to come with a level of risk.

Foggy put his hand around Matt’s back, and Matt rested his head sideways against Foggy’s shoulder, shifting his weight away from his more painful right side. Foggy whispered, “welcome back, Daredevil – or should I say Daredevil and Devildog?”

“Devildog,” Matt huffed into Foggy’s shoulder. As if she knew they were talking about her, Daisy jumped onto the couch and lay down with her chin resting against Matt’s thigh.

“We’ve got to get her a better costume,” Foggy said. “Something that protects her. I mean, I’m sure you know what you’re doing…”

“I’m working on it,” Matt mumbled, closing his eyes. “Believe me, I’m working on it. I didn’t expect…” He stopped and sighed. If Foggy wanted to establish a ‘plan’, they must be finally moving past their long-term stand-off over Daredevil. The arguments didn’t need to be rehearsed. Instead, he gave Foggy’s hand a squeeze and said sleepily, “thanks, Darerescuer.”
“Okay, you’re going to have to come up with a better name for your sidekick if we’re going to do this,” Foggy joked.


Foggy chuckled. “Maybe we’ll workshop it when you’re more awake. Come on, let’s get you home. It’s late.”

Matt groaned as Foggy extricated himself from the couch, and again when Foggy pulled Matt to his feet.

As they sat in the back of the cab, Matt mumbled, “Dareretriever.”

“It makes me think of a Labrador.”

“Dareoggy… Darehelper.”

“Matty…” Foggy sighed.

As soon as they got home, Matt made a beeline for his bedroom, flopping onto his bed shoes and all. Foggy heard a small voice call from the bedroom, “Daresaver.”

“Go to sleep, Matty,” Foggy called back. When he was confident Matt had drifted off, Foggy pulled out his thesaurus app and searched for something better than Matt’s half-assed suggestions. If he was going to do this – if he was going to be Daredevil’s occasional sidekick rescuer - he wanted a name better than Daresaver.

“Sidekick,” Foggy said out loud, testing the word. “Huh.” What in earth had he just committed to?
Almost a year and 240K+ words later, I've finished (with a bonus dodgy drawing of mine to boot). Thanks to everyone who read, commented, enjoyed, kudos'd (is that a word?) this story. I've had a lot of fun writing it and have really enjoyed the comments people have left. Please please leave a comment xo

Also, this isn't finished just yet. As I noted in some of my replies to comments, there will be a third story in this series. I'm not done with the super trio Matt, Daisy and Foggy just yet, but I needed to draw a line under the Elektra/Erinyes storyline.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!