

# Caught in the Dark

a *Daredevil* fanfic

by Rodo

for *argentum\_ls*

MATT MURDOCK WOKE with a panicked start. His head was swimming, his nose clogged with the sweet, chemical smell of chloroform, and his muscles were aching. It took him a moment to gain his bearings, and when he did, he wasn't surprised to find himself in a bad situation. His instincts often worked faster than his mind. Especially when his mind was clouded by... something. Maybe the chloroform, maybe something else. There was a small spot on his neck that felt as if he'd been bitten by a mosquito, but which might be an injection site. And so he tried to calm himself and take stock of his situation, one sense at a time.

His body was a mess. That much wasn't new. He'd been busy lately. No cuts, but more bruises than he could count. His right shoulder hadn't been at a hundred percent since he went up against the new Russian outfit in town and he remembered it hurting every time he tried to lift his arm or throw a punch recently. Right now, he could try neither – he was handcuffed to what seemed to be the legs of the chair he had been deposited on. Both of his hands had been secured, and his legs were tied up as well. Overkill, for a blind man. He wasn't wearing his Daredevil getup, so either whoever had captured him knew who he was, or they were overly cautious. Either way, Matt let his head fall backwards and took a deep breath. His nose still wouldn't clear properly, but he could smell a faint, stale whiff of dusty wood underneath the chloroform.

He huffed. It reverberated through the room he was kept in, breaking an eerie silence that was rare in New York City. It was a big room, he concluded. Probably an abandoned warehouse, with the smell of wood stemming from old palettes. The lack of background noise implied they were far from the apartment buildings and roads that were busy, even at night. Abandoned, because it sounded empty and was missing the telltale low frequency hum of electricity and turned-on light bulbs. In the distance, he could hear the slow, lazy lapping of waves against the docks, and if he concentrated, he could detect a hint of the

brackish water of the harbor in the air. Outside the warehouse, there were two heartbeats. Guards, Matt guessed.

And then there was the heartbeat right behind him. Slow, steady. Unconscious. It belonged to someone familiar, but Matt had no idea why he, of all the people in New York, was chained up with him. Matt groaned, and the heartbeat next to him began to accelerate. How the hell had they both ended up here?



*A few hours earlier*

“You can go home, you know?” Karen Page told Matt. It was dark outside already, the light no longer warming Matt’s desk as it filtered through the window of what had once been the bedroom of Foggy’s parents, now repurposed as a makeshift legal office following the Nelsons’ retirement to the sunny shores of Florida. “I’ve got this. And I don’t have a hobby taking up my attention in my free time. This *is* what I do in my free time.”

Matt felt her gesturing towards her paperwork: documents on shell companies upon shell companies, about half of it in Cyrillic, which neither of them could read. But Karen was resourceful when it came to using online dictionaries.

“I don’t have any other plans for the evening,” Matt argued. Unlike Foggy, who had been more than happy to leave them in favor of arguing about wedding arrangements with Marci’s parents, which told you just how boring poring over the financial files of the Russian mob was. Foggy hated Marci’s parents. *Marci* hated Marci’s parents. But they were still better than painstakingly translating one more document about shuffling around the ownership of a loft between six different companies from the Cayman Islands as if you were playing a very expensive card trick on the IRS.

“I know,” Karen assured him with an amused huff. “But you need all the sleep you can get, Matt. Get some rest. I’ve got this.”

Matt let his fingers roam over another line of braille, yet another nondescript name of a non-existing company making non-existing financial transactions. Karen really was better at this than he was. That was half the reason she was the Page in *Nelson, Murdock and Page* – the other being that somewhere along the way, they had ceased to be a duo and become a true trio – Nelson and Murdock no longer worked without Page.

“If you’re sure...”

“I am,” Karen assured him “You brought Cristina’s case to us. If it hadn’t been for you, she’d still be trapped with Alexei. Now we just have to make sure he will spend the rest of his life behind bars.”

Matt heard her uncap the highlighter pen before she marked another line on her documents. She was better at this than he was. Much better. Matt sighed and stretched his limbs, then winced when he took it too far. Alexei’s men had been professionals, and it would be another couple of days until his shoulder was fully healed. He really did need sleep or time to meditate. Nevertheless, he still felt guilty abandoning Karen to work she wouldn’t have if it hadn’t been for him, especially since Foggy wasn’t here to pick up the slack.

But in the end, Matt said his goodbyes after making her another cup of instant coffee in the Nelsons’ kitchen before strolling back home through the relatively peaceful streets of Hell’s Kitchen, hoping to catch a full night’s sleep for once, or at least carve out some time to rest. He was tired, and maybe that was why he didn’t react fast enough. Or maybe being Matt Murdock, not Daredevil, lulled him into a false sense of security. It was a nice evening, not too warm and not too cold. The scents of people’s dinners wafted through the air in rhythm with the movement of his cane. Whatever it was, it was his own fault. One moment, everything was normal, and the next it wasn’t.

The measured steps behind him suddenly turned into a jog, and it took longer than it usually would for his body to fall into a state of alarm; a second too late. The cloth was pressed onto his face from behind before he could mount a proper defense, and when he tried, his busted shoulder protested. He had just enough time to notice the heavy breathing of his (male, tall) assailant and the van pulling up next to them before he lost consciousness, cursing his own carelessness.



Matt’s companion woke up more gently than Matt had, but his heartbeat still jumped as he jerked his head around and struggled against the restraints. Matt heard the jingling of chains and small puffs of shallow breaths.

“Hello?” The word sounded uncommonly timid and scared. “Is anybody there?” The question was a reminder of the darkness surrounding them, which Matt was only tangentially aware of.

“Mahoney?” he asked, even though he had known the answer before Brett Mahoney woke up. He was close enough to smell and hear. No, what had been bothering Matt was the question of why someone would bother abducting not just one but both of them.

“Murdock?” Brett asked after a few moments, huffing in disbelief. “Is that you? Where the fuck are we?”

“I don’t know,” Matt answered. “Some warehouse, I think, going by the sound. Can you see anything?”

“It’s pitch black, Murdock. Right now, I can see just as much as you do.”

Matt took a breath and laid his head back. He flexed his arms again, testing the soundness of his own restraints. There was a little give on the right back leg of the chair. With enough strength, he might damage it enough to break off – but his shoulder wasn’t in top form, and it might ruin his wrist as well. Still, his chances were better than Brett’s.

“What happened to you?” Matt asked. With any luck, Brett had noticed more than he had.

Matt heard Brett shrug at his back. “I was at my mom’s, dinner with Sami and Seema. Then I went back home and someone jumped me. One minute, I was walking, the next there was a van pulling up next to me and someone dragged me inside. Drugged me with something, so I couldn’t see a thing. You?”

“Yeah,” Matt said. “Pretty much the same.” He would recognize the van, he thought. Thinking back there had been a slight hitch in the engine, and it had smelled a little damp. But that wasn’t exactly the kind of description you could use to figure which of the thousands upon thousands of vans in New York City had been used to take them.

“You owe me for this, Murdock, whatever this is.” Brett said, then tried to get out of his hand cuffs again. The metal chair he was sitting on really did sound more solid than the wooden one Matt sat in.

“Why? I have no idea why we’re here either.”

“Yeah, but it’s gotta be you and Nelson who’re the reason we’re in this mess. One of your cases. You poked the wrong bad guy. Again. It’s always you.”

Matt sighed. “I’d wager a police officer has more than enough of his own enemies.”

“But none of them would have the crazy idea to chain me up next to you.”

Well, maybe he had a point. But Matt couldn’t think of which of their enemies would have beef with Mahoney as well. They were acquaintances. They’d worked together against Fisk. But mostly, Brett worked on his cases and Matt, Foggy, and Karen worked on theirs. Mahoney was prickly enough about associating with attorneys, the natural enemies of the proper police officer, that neither Matt nor Foggy wanted to put more of a strain on their relationship than was strictly necessary.

“They’ve chained you up too, haven’t they?” Mahoney asked.

Matt nodded, then remembered that they were in the dark and back to back. “Yes.” After a deep breath, he added: “I don’t think there’s anything to do but wait to see what they want.”

Brett groaned and Matt stretched his neck again. He hated being tied up.

“I’m tempted to tell them whatever they want to know,” Brett said. “I’d rather be chained up with anyone but you, Murdock. No offense.”

“None taken,” Matt replied. “But think of it this way: they could have taken Foggy instead.”

The thought alone was enough to elicit another deep groan from Brett and Matt felt himself smirk. He could see why Foggy sometimes enjoyed needling their acquaintance a little too much. But before he could act further on this very inappropriate impulse, his ears picked up the sound of three sets of footsteps approaching. Brett didn’t notice him tensing, thanks to the darkness.



Karen Page stretched her neck, then searched another string of Cyrillic script on her laptop. Before she knew it, it was four minutes later and she woke with a start, disoriented and exhausted. She was loath to admit it, but it was time to go home. Matt had left hours ago; Foggy had been gone for even longer. She might be used to working long hours, doing boring research while grinding away at one article or another, but even she had to admit that it was time for a break, and not even coffee could help with this one. Sometimes, sleep was the only cure for tiredness.

But before it was time to go home, she checked her phone for one last time, out of habit. When she saw a new text message, she was genuinely surprised. She doubted Matt was either at home or awake, and Foggy was likely still busy arguing with his future in-laws. Some informant from her days at the Bulletin? She opened the text, and her heart seemed to stop for a moment.

*We’ve got your friend if you want to see him again tell the devil that we want the girl*

For a second, she was back in that chair, with Wesley sitting opposite her. With Wilson Fisk threatening her friends. Matt. Foggy. She tried Matt first, but he didn’t pick up. No reason to worry, she tried to tell herself. If he’d gone out as Daredevil after all, he wouldn’t have taken Matt Murdock’s phone. Or maybe he was busy, taking a shower. Or maybe he

ignored his phone, like every other sane adult who knew how to cope with modern society's expectation that you were always reachable. Karen sent a message to Foggy next, but he didn't reply either. She felt herself almost hyperventilate before she made a conscious effort to control her breathing and think rationally. It took her a while to calm down enough, but she got there eventually. She looked at the text again.

Your friend... Foggy was supposed to spend the entire evening with Marci (and her parents). Matt would be harder to get a hold of, but he'd been tired, more tired than usual... it was most likely Matt, Karen decided. He was more likely to get into trouble, and better at getting himself out of it if he had to. That fact alone did more to calm her down than her breathing exercises. She'd seen Matt fight often enough to know that he could take care of himself, even if he ended up black and blue in the process. He'd survived a building collapsing on top of him, after all.

Karen tried Foggy again; a call, this time. She was almost ready to chew on her nails when he finally picked up.

"Please tell me this is important," he said. Then, in a whisper, he added, "I really need a good excuse to get out of this nightmare."

Karen breathed a sigh of relief. At least Foggy was safe. Safe and happily ignorant that their lives might once again get derailed by a storm of crime and violence. Only this time, they had both walked into it with their eyes at least somewhat open. Matt had brought this case to them, and for the first time, he'd been open about how he'd come across it. They had all agreed to help.

"I got a text," Karen began, then paused for a moment, trying to find the right words. "I think something happened to Matt."

Foggy was silent. Karen could only hear the distant sound of barely subdued arguing over the phone.

"Wait a sec," he finally said, and Karen did. Then she heard cursing. "I got one too," Foggy finally said. "I just thought it wasn't anything important, so I didn't even open it. Jesus... Yeah, Marci, I think I have to go. Something to do with work. No, Matt can't handle it. It's... look... yeah... you still there, Karen?"

Karen hummed.

"I'll go to the police," he told her. "You be safe. Bye."

"Bye," Karen said, and hung up. But she had no intention of just sitting around and doing nothing. Instead, she grabbed her purse, closed her laptop, and left the office.

It wasn't hard to figure out which route Matt would have taken. He only lived a few blocks away. Hell's Kitchen wasn't that big, after all, and he wasn't Superman. He couldn't

transform in a conveniently placed phone booth the moment he heard someone in trouble, rushing to save them. Unless it had been an emergency dire enough that he would have intervened even without a mask, Matt would have walked straight home, and Karen followed his route. She paid no mind to the nice evening. She only had eyes for anything out of the ordinary, part of her mind acutely aware of the gun she carried in her purse. Every sudden noise made her jump, such as the loud laugh from a group of young men on the other side of the street, and she instinctively walked next to the buildings rather than the curb, as if any car driving past was an accident waiting to happen.

It was the most tense and uncomfortable walk she'd had in a while, probably since back when Fisk had gotten out of prison. She'd jumped at shadows back then, too. A part of her hoped she'd find nothing: arriving at Matt's place, only for him to open the door sleepily in his pajamas, the text having been nothing but a bad joke. The rest of her knew better, and it was that part of her that would have the right of it.

She was about halfway to Matt's when she spotted something white next to the curb that she couldn't place. She kept looking, and realized it was a cane, just like the one Matt carried – the one that was easily foldable so he could pretend he wasn't blind or jump across rooftops without breaking stride.

Matt would never have just dropped it. He'd been taken; there was no doubt in Karen's mind. She cast her eyes about for CCTV cameras, and spotted one next to a bodega on the other side of the street, filing away the information for the police.



“Anything from the lawyers?” The voice was unfamiliar, the English fluent with an accent somewhere in the vicinity of Eastern Europe. Clearly the man in charge, talking to one of his underlings. He and his men had stopped in front of the two heartbeats that had been waiting outside the building.

“No,” the man replied. He spoke like a native. New York born and bred, like Matt and Mahoney.

Someone sighed, probably the man in charge. “Pity, but they have a little time yet. Let's see what our guests have to say. Maybe they'll be more help than the lawyers. And who knows. If we're lucky, the Devil himself will make an appearance. Don't let your guard down.”

Matt heard the guard nod, then someone flipped a switch and electricity surged through the wires on the ceiling. He heard Brett sigh with relief.

“Finally, some light.”



“I wouldn’t be too happy if I were you,” Matt said. The fact that Brett didn’t respond immediately told him that he understood his meaning. They were about to get company, steps moving towards them. A door opened before Matt had a chance to ask Brett if he saw anything that might help them get out of this situation.

The tension in the room rose immediately, and Matt focused most of his attention on the man walking towards them, flanked by two of his underlings. He was tall and sounded muscular, wore expensive, tailored clothes, by the sound of it. But nothing more. They hadn’t met before.

“Good evening,” the man said once he came to a stop beside them. “I wish I had another option, but I’m afraid I didn’t. If you would be so kind as to help me, we might be able to resolve this issue and you will be back in your beds before the night is out.”

A lie. This man had no intention of letting either of them go, Matt knew.

“You do realize you abducted a cop, right?” Brett asked.

The man sighed. “Of course. Unfortunately, you’re one of the few people around known to associate with the Devil of Hell’s Kitchen, Detective.”

“The others being *Nelson, Murdock and Page*,” Matt concluded, shaking his head internally. What a mess had he gotten himself into now?

“Just so.”

“Look,” Brett began, clearly exasperated. He’d never much liked the Daredevil. “I don’t know anything about the guy. He just shows up sometimes, usually with someone tied up or beaten to a pulp. I don’t know anything about him besides the fact that he’s a nut job who likes to dress up in a Halloween costume and go beat up bad guys. I never even asked why he does what he does, let alone for his social security number.”

“So you say. But I’m sure there is more. There always is, with the police.”

Brett huffed and Matt rolled his eyes. Of course there was, but there wasn’t anything Brett could tell the man about Daredevil that he didn’t already know. Matt had made sure that Brett didn’t know anything, and while he’d failed to keep his double life from Foggy and Karen, he’d succeeded with Brett.

“And you, Mr. Murdock? Can you tell me something about the Devil?”

Matt moved his face sideways, trying to aim for the general direction of the man’s face and failing, like a regular blind guy who had barely regained consciousness would. “He has helped our firm with some of our cases, but beyond that, we don’t know anything about him.”

The man sighed and the fabric of his suit – he wore a suit, probably – rustled at the neck. Making a show of looking at the ceiling, Matt guessed.

“Maybe we should have taken the girl,” the man concluded, and Matt tensed. Not Karen. Suddenly, he was far less unhappy about finding himself in this mess. “The Devil saved her twice. But he’s saved many people, and you were the easiest target. Have faith, Mr. Murdock. I have no doubt that the Devil will come and save you, too.”

Matt couldn’t help the sarcastic laugh that escaped his mouth. These people really had no idea who they had chained up in their warehouse. He flexed his arms again. The anger coursing through his veins meant he felt the pain less, but there was still no way he could get out of the restraints. God, he hated being chained up, more helpless than his blindness had ever made him.

“You better hope he doesn’t,” Matt told them, a mad grin on his face, more Devil than Matt Murdock.

“I think you overestimate the man’s abilities,” the man said. “But until we can ask him our questions directly, we have no choice but to hope that you might be able to help us. Where is Cristina?”



Foggy Nelson sighed. Had someone told him years ago that he’d miss the days when Brett Mahoney was the desk sergeant at the 15<sup>th</sup> Precinct, Foggy would have laughed. Now, though, he would have done anything to deal with Brett. The guy behind the counter looked to be all of fifteen years old and acted as if it was his first time working the night shift behind his desk. Maybe it was. It would explain his inability to deal with the angry couple currently arguing their cases with all the fervor of two people who looked about to tear each other to pieces. The other officers around seemed equal parts amused and alert, ready to step in if things escalated even more. But that didn’t help Foggy, who hadn’t come here to work, for once.

“Excuse me,” he said, raising his voice in a way that drew everyone’s eyes to him. He usually reserved that voice for some especially tough cross examinations in court. “If this is going to take much longer, would you mind stepping aside so the rest of us don’t have to waste our time standing in line in a police station when we could be home with our families?”

Behind him, a tired black man named Emmett murmured in agreement. He’d come to report a theft. Some thugs had knocked him over and stolen his backpack. The police officers and the arguing couple, on the other hand, looked at Foggy as if he was an alien. Foggy didn’t back down, he just stared back.

“Alright,” the fifteen-year-old stammered, motioning for the arresting officers to take the couple away, probably to cool off a little in the holding cells. Foggy stepped up to the counter and fixed the desk sergeant with an expectant stare. “How can I help you, Mister...?”

“Nelson,” Foggy replied. “Franklin Nelson. I’d like to report a possible abduction.”

The desk sergeant nodded. “Name of the victim?”

“Matthew Murdock, my partner.”

“And how long has he been missing?”

Foggy took out his phone and looked up the time stamp on the message, then did the math. “At least two hours, probably longer.”

Now the sergeant frowned. “Look, Mister... Nelson. Are you sure your boyfriend got abducted and didn’t just go to a bar or play a prank on you or something? People do that sometimes.”

Foggy let out a long-suffering sigh. “Matt isn’t my boyfriend, he’s my partner. We run a legal practice together, and both me and our other partner got a threatening text message. Matt isn’t picking up his phone. He left work hours ago.” At this point, Foggy opened the message and slid the phone onto the desk so that the sergeant could read it. That seemed to get the sergeant to take him a little more seriously, but still not seriously enough. “Listen, Matt’s blind,” he added, hating to play the B-card. “We’re friends with Detective Sergeant Mahoney, he’ll tell you that I wouldn’t just bother you on a whim. Matt’s missing, and the police need to look for him.”

The desk sergeant nodded in the same way he would nod if Foggy tried to tell him about the unicorn he just saw on 53<sup>rd</sup> Street. This was getting ridiculous. Communicating all relevant details to the sergeant seemed to take ages, and Brett apparently had a day off for once. Time seemed to flow like molasses while Foggy dictated names, addresses and as detailed a timeline of the evening as he could manage and the sergeant typed like he’d never used a keyboard before.

“And who’s ‘the girl?’”

Foggy didn’t have to look at the message. There was only one current client that would qualify as a “girl.” Mrs. Mendez and Mrs. Chao had both entered menopause before people started worrying about Y2K and Sam O’Reilly had five children, one of them currently in Rikers. “A client of ours.”

“And what’s this client’s name?”

Foggy would rather not say. “Cristina Bogdan.”

“And where is she?”

“That information is covered by attorney-client privilege.”

“But it might matter for the case,” the desk sergeant argued, even though it really didn’t. At least Foggy hoped so. Cristina had gone through enough. She didn’t need the NYPD asking her stupid questions. But mostly, the fewer people knew where she was, the safer she was. If this really was Alexei, she’d be dead the moment he finds out where she is. Or worse.

“Should the NYPD require Miss Bogdan to make a statement, I will arrange for her to do so. Until then, her location will remain confidential.” Because Fisk had taught Foggy not to trust the police, or at least any policeman he didn’t know personally.

The desk sergeant sighed. “Alright. We’ll do what we can,” the sergeant promised, then motioned Foggy to step aside, apparently done with him.

Days like this were the reason Foggy didn’t have high hopes for the help of the NYPD. And so he took out his phone again the moment he stepped out of the precinct, picking Brett’s number out of his contacts. But apparently Brett was asleep or busy and didn’t pick up. Normally, Foggy would have left it at that. Normally. This was an emergency, and so Foggy did something he wouldn’t usually do and called Brett’s mother instead. She picked up after the fourth ring, voice rough from sleep (and too many cigars).

“Bess Mahoney, how can I help you?”

“Hi, Mrs. Mahoney, this is Foggy Nelson. I’m sorry I’m calling you this late, but it’s a bit of an emergency. Is Brett in?” Foggy knew – from his mother who had been told by Mrs. Mahoney – that Brett sometimes liked to stay at his mom’s for convenience. She still kept his bed made and cooked dinner. Nothing to sneer at if you were a busy police detective, but a bit embarrassing if you were a professional in your thirties.

“No. He left after dinner,” Mrs. Mahoney said before she yawned. “Is everything alright?”

“Yes, don’t worry. I just really need to reach Brett. It’s about a case.”

“I’ll try calling him,” she promised Foggy. “And tell him to call you.”

But Brett never did. Either he didn’t pick up his mother’s calls either, or he was more angry with Foggy than usual. Whatever the case, it seemed he and Karen were in this on their own. There was no way the NYPD could do more than question Alexei Petrov based on a hunch and an anonymous text from a burner phone. Hopefully Matt, wherever he was, was doing his thing and they were worrying about nothing, for once.



“I suppose you’re Alexei,” Matt said, drawing the man’s attention to him where he’d previously been focused on Mahoney. *Good*, Matt thought.

“And I suppose that means you know the answer to my question,” Alexei replied. Matt could almost see him before him, trying to pass for a rich New Yorker, with the expensive tailored suit and manners. But underneath it all, he was just another Russian mobster. At least Vladimir hadn’t had any delusions of grandeur. Matt could respect that.

“I don’t know where Cristina is,” Matt told him. It was true, technically. She was staying at a women’s shelter where the friend of a daughter of Foggy’s mother’s friend Jeannie worked. Which could mean she was staying in Jersey, for all Matt knew. He didn’t have the brain power to keep track of all the people of Hell’s Kitchen and their relationships the same way Foggy did. These idiots really had captured the wrong attorney. Not that Foggy would have told them anything either.

Alexei snorted. “And I suppose you don’t either, Detective?”

“I’ve never even heard of any Cristina,” Brett said. It was true, but unlike Matt, Alexei had no way of knowing for sure.

Instead of questioning them further, Alexei moved backwards and then slowly circled them. He hummed to himself, considering his options – or more likely, trying to make both Matt and Brett sweat in anticipation of what came next. Then Matt heard him signaling his two goons. Moments later, Matt felt himself whirled around and dragged backwards, still chained to his chair, feet dragging on the floor. He was facing Mahoney now, a couple of feet between their chairs, a Russian mobster behind each of them while Alexei stood a little to the side.

“I have a feeling you’re not telling me the truth,” Alexei drawled.

“Cristina is our client,” Matt admitted, because pleading ignorance wouldn’t get him anywhere. “But I don’t know where she’s staying. We’ve just been trying to get in contact with the FBI on her behalf, but the FBI keeps rebuffing our calls. They hate us, ever since we helped get Fisk locked up a second time.” Which was bullshit – the trying to reach the FBI part, not the fact that the FBI didn’t exactly appreciate being reminded of what they considered an embarrassing episode in their institutional history.

“You really didn’t make any friends there,” Brett said, backing Matt up.

“How do you stay in contact with her then?” Alexei asked.

“A burner.”

Alexei snorted. “And you, Detective. Do you still maintain you don’t know a thing?”

Matt heard Brett tense and the chains strain as he tried to fight against them. “Not a thing. You can beat me as much as you want, I can’t tell you something I don’t know.”

That got a laugh out of Alexei, one that tried to be all upper crust but still carried a whiff of sharpness and Siberian prison cell. “Yes, Detective. I know all about your

reputation. An honest cop, even when half the force was in the pocket of one gangster or another. A servant of the people. Yes, I can see that beating you wouldn't get me anywhere. But what you think of as a strength can also be a weakness."

Another flick of a hand, and a punch hit Matt square in the jaw. Then a second flew, hitting him in the stomach and driving the air out of his lungs, right on top of an old bruise that hadn't quite healed yet. For a moment, Matt lost himself in the pain, then his senses sharpened again, as if everything suddenly snapped into focus – the sounds, the smells, the noise. His brain concentrated on the three men in the room. One held Brett, one held Matt, and in between them, Alexei let his fists fly. He smelled of a cologne that was even more expensive than the suit, the watch on his left wrist didn't fit quite as well as it could, and the muscles in his right arms tightened for another punch. Matt was ready for this one. It hit his ribs.

"Tell me, Detective, how long do you think your friend can take this?" *Longer than you think*, Matt thought. If there was one thing he was good at, it was taking a punch.

"I don't know anything!" Brett yelled. "You fuckers leave him alone!"

Matt could hear him struggle against their captors, but it was no use. Another punch hit Matt in the jaw again. He'd look terrible in the morning, if he managed to get through this. Foggy would fret.

"And you, Mr Murdock? Are you sure you don't want to tell me where Cristina is? She loves me, you know. We're going through a bit of a rough patch, and she's just doing this to get back at me, that's all."

"Yeah, right," Matt mumbled around a mouthful of blood that he spat to the side. "Keep telling yourself that."

Another punch, this one angrier and right to the liver. It hurt like hell.

It seemed he hit a nerve.



*Two weeks ago*

Crime never slept. But Daredevil had to, which was why he couldn't nip crime in the bud whenever it started sprouting. Usually, it took Matt a little while until he caught up with the crime syndicates that kept growing in any void that presented itself. New York was a petri dish for them, or so it seemed. The perfect environment for crime. It had been months since Wilson Fisk had decimated his enemies, and almost as long since he'd gone

back to prison. Which had opened a lot of opportunities for the people who'd managed to survive his sweep.

One of the groups that had moved into the void was a new Russian outfit. It wasn't related to the Ranskahov brothers, as far as Matt could tell. The low-level thugs he tended to overhear from his perch just referred to their boss as "the boss," which was unhelpful. They had taken control of some of the southern docks, but that wasn't where their headquarters were, just where they moved their cargo – everything from drugs to contraband caviar. Figuring out something more had taken longer than Matt had hoped – long nights of stalking lowlifes and listening to their chatter for any hints, until one night, Matt had overheard something useful at last.

"Not this one," one of the men at the docks had said. "It's a present for the boss's girl."

The other men had groaned when they heard that.

"What is it this time?"

"We don't have to know," the one who was seemingly in charge had barked. "Now get a move on. And you, deliver this one at once!"

Nobody had argued with the commands, not even the man who was to deliver what smelled like an old oil painting to his boss's mistress. The man had dutifully put the box in the back of a van, then driven off towards his destination. Matt had followed at a distance, tracking the van over rooftops and running until his lungs and legs ached, even if traffic had been kind to him. He had arrived at what turned out to be a relatively fancy high rise for the area, recently finished and built after the previous building had been demolished in the Battle of New York. Matt had listened as the man heaved the wide box into an elevator, stepping out on the top floor. There had been two guards on the floor, guarding the door to the penthouse the painting was delivered to.

The two guards were still there the next night when Matt returned. There was only one person in the apartment – the boss's girlfriend, most likely. Her heartbeat was slow and steady as she sat in front of the TV, half-asleep.

The problem was the guards. The corridor sounded narrow and the door seemed to be the only access point to the apartment that Matt could detect. There was nothing he could do but take his chances and hope that the element of surprise was on his side. And so Matt stepped into the elevator, facing the doors and readying himself to pounce the moment they opened.

Which was what he did, but his two adversaries were professionals, built like linebackers. Matt's first punch hit the left guard square in the jaw. He followed up with a hit to the solar plexus so that the guy doubled over, but by the time Matt could turn his

attention to the second guard, the man was ready. He grabbed Matt's fist and twisted his arm sharply. The pain that coursed through Matt's body would have been crippling, had he not gone through far, far worse already. Taking barely a second to reorient himself, Matt surprised the man with a left hook and a hard kick in the knee. To the guard's credit, he merely grunted as the leg buckled out from under him. At this point, the first guard had recovered enough to attack Matt from behind, but Matt was faster, stepping aside and elbowing him in the face. The first guard crumbled, unconscious, and the second one followed a couple of blows later, leaving Matt standing alone in the corridor, breathing heavily and trying to regain his bearings.

The fight had been quick but brutal. Now that the adrenaline was subsiding a bit, the true extent of the damage to the shoulder hit him; the second guard had been strong, and he'd known what he was doing. Nothing irreversible, but Matt knew he'd be wincing for weeks. He flexed his shoulder, then hissed when he twisted the muscles and ligaments.

The good news was that there was nobody else – no other gangsters rushing up the emergency stairs because they'd been watching the security cameras or because he'd triggered some sort of alarm. The two guards would be out for a while, leaving Matt enough time to search for information on the mysterious boss. He opened the door and crept inside like a silent shadow. The apartment was large, at least by New York standards, and the lights were out, except for what he figured was the living room.

“Are you here for me or Alexei?”

Matt stopped in his tracks. Her heartbeat was still steady, which was why he hadn't worried about her, thinking she was still asleep. Unnaturally steady. He wondered what prescription drugs he'd find in her cabinets if he looked. She was pretty, he could tell, standing a couple of feet away from him at the entrance to the living room, shrouded in a long, silky nightgown that caressed her tall, willowy form. Matt cocked his head.

“You are the Devil, aren't you? I've read about you in the news.” She sounded a little uncertain now, and Matt realized her accent was different from that of the men who led him here, but he still couldn't place it.

Matt nodded.

“I can help you,” she promised. “If only you help me get away from him. *Please.*”

There was so much emotion in that word, even her sedated heartbeat picked up. It was pure desperation, nurtured by what he later learned was two years' worth of subtle torment at the hands of a man who was both volatile and charismatic, who fancied himself in love with Cristina, a lowly prostitute saved from destitution by a romantic hero.



“He’s obsessed with me,” Cristina confessed to Matt, sitting down on her expensive couch and crying in her pillow while CNN droned on in the background. “His idea of me. I never know what he’ll do. Sometimes, he gets these outbursts of anger, and it’s the scariest thing I’ve ever seen. I just want to get away from him, but he won’t let me go anywhere alone.”

“Does he hit you?” Matt asked, balling his fists.

Cristina shook her head. “But I know the type. He will, eventually.”

Matt didn’t doubt her. He’d heard enough men apologize, saying it’ll never happen again, professing their eternal love, only to beat their wives the next time the dinner was burnt, the next time they laughed at the wrong joke, or mentioned having talked to a man they didn’t like.

“I’ll help you,” he promised. “The two guards are still out. You should go and pack.”

While she did, Matt inspected the apartment. He couldn’t find anything but evidence of Alexei’s expensive taste. The paintings hanging around the place might have been used to launder money, but Matt had no proof of that. He could only hope that losing the object of his obsession might provoke Alexei into making a mistake.

It took Cristina not even five minutes to throw everything she wanted to keep into a suitcase. Clearly, she’d thought about running away before, often enough that she knew what she wanted to take and where it was. In the end, she merely shrugged a long coat over her nightgown and slipped into a pair of boots before reaching behind the painting closest to the door. Matt observed her silently while she removed a small, square object from its hiding place.

“It’s files,” she explained. “Alexei’s files. They’ll help you. I copied them, just in case.”

“You could go to the police,” Matt suggested, but she shook her head emphatically.

“No police. I don’t trust them. *Please.*”

Matt sighed. The police would have to get involved eventually. Until then: “I know a lawyer,” he told her.

Which was how Foggy and Marci found a former prostitute on their doorstep in the middle of the night with a hard drive full of files and a story about how the Daredevil had saved her from the Russian mob. Matt had listened as an exasperated Marci and a resigned Foggy had made her a cup of tea and arrangements for her to stay safely out of trouble while *Nelson, Murdock and Page* dealt with her case.

“We’ve taken on more dangerous men than some wannabe Russian crime lord,” Foggy had assured her. “Just leave everything to us.”



Even beating the shit out of a helpless hostage seemed to get boring eventually, and when neither Matt nor Mahoney had given up any information, Alexei had switched course and retreated with his men, leaving both of them alone in the darkness again. Matt had listened as they'd left, noting that he hadn't heard a car. Wherever they were, it wasn't far. Another warehouse?

Brett's breathing was hitched. Alexei had beaten him too, just to make a point. Not nearly as savagely as Matt, who felt as if there wasn't a part of his body that didn't ache. Well, his toes, perhaps. The shoulder was the worst, but even that was more bruises than anything. Everything was still functional, technically. If only he could get out of these restraints...

"You okay, Murdock?"

Matt hummed.

"You sure? It looked like they got you pretty good."

Mahoney worried, that was a novelty, for sure. "Yeah," Matt said. His voice was hoarse and probably not as convincing as he would like. "Don't worry."

"You're a blind man who sits behind a desk for a living. I'm a policeman. Worrying is my job in situations like this."

"My father was a boxer," Matt argued. "I think I might know more about taking a punch than you do."

"I don't think that kind of thing is genetic."

Matt had to laugh and immediately regretted it. His cracked ribs really needed a break. If he got out of this, he wouldn't be able to go out for a while. Foggy would be happy, at least. Well, it would put a temporary end to evenings at Josie's as well, so maybe not. With longing, Matt thought of his warm bed with its silk sheets, of sitting around the Nelson kitchen table with Foggy and Karen. And, for a short moment, of Elektra's embrace. He shoved the memory aside, like he always did these days. Maybe it wouldn't hurt so much, one day.

"You'd be surprised," Matt drawled.

Mahoney sighed the deep, frustrated sigh of someone who had dealt with Foggy and Matt one too many times. He stayed silent, and Matt wondered what thoughts he entertained. Did he think about ways to escape as well? Did he think about his mother?

"Just out of curiosity," Brett finally began. "Do you really not know anything or are you just really good at playing dumb?"

Matt considered his answer for a moment. How much should he tell, and how much keep to himself? “Cristina is a client of ours. She gave us information on Alexei and we’ve been trying to figure out how much of it is of any use, what we can ask for in return. Full immunity and a residence permit, for a start, witness protection, if possible. I don’t think he knows she gave us anything or he would have taken apart the office.”

Matt could hear Mahoney lower his head in exasperation. “Why do you always get into situations like this?”

Matt cocked his head, even though he knew Brett couldn’t see a thing. “Because somebody has to. He’s a piece of shit, and nobody else was going to help her. Would you have preferred it if we’d just left her with a guy like this?”

Mahoney huffed. “Of course not. That’s what the police is for. Trust me, we’ve been trying to get information on Petrov’s outfit as well, but the bastard is slippery. And he’s got a damn good accountant.”

*They all do*, Matt thought. “At least Cristina is safe. If Alexei has an informant in the police...”

“He doesn’t. We’ve cleaned up our act since Fisk.”

“You don’t know that,” Matt argued, even though he’d argued for Brett’s position with Cristina. He was a lawyer, after all. “Not for sure. And more importantly, Cristina doesn’t. If she is going to help with an investigation, she needs to do so on her terms. She hasn’t had the best life, or the best experiences with the police. If she wants to make sure, we’ll do our best to help her. We’re her lawyers, after all.”

A moment’s worth of silence settled over the warehouse. Then Brett started to laugh. It started as a chuckle, and then grew into full on laughter, filled with dark amusement.

“You’re really something, Murdock,” he huffed between bursts of laughter.

Matt frowned. “How so?”

“Here you are, beat within an inch of your life, and you’ve still got nothing better to do than argue a case as if we’re sitting in an interrogation room back at the precinct.”

He couldn’t help it – Matt laughed as well. Despite the pain, despite the shitty situation, despite the fact that it wasn’t even that funny. It was the stress, a part of his brain explained. And funnily enough, the laughing helped. They calmed down eventually, breathing easier and feeling lighter. The change in atmosphere was almost palpable in the darkness. It felt as if Matt could taste it on his tongue, if only he tried.

“You do know where she is, don’t you?” Brett asked, and Matt’s mood darkened again.

“No,” Matt answered. “But I know who does.”

After a beat, Brett muttered “Nelson” with world-weary resignation. Matt nodded automatically, but didn’t bother to answer in a way Brett could perceive. Of course it was Foggy. And no matter how much Brett might complain about him, they’d known each other since they were kids; he’d never rat out Foggy just to save his skin, even if it wasn’t against his principles to put a crucial witness in danger. They were well and truly fucked if they didn’t find a way out of this mess soon.



“Jesus!”

The cry drew Karen back to reality. Foggy was standing in the doorway to their improvised office, pale as a sheet and more crumpled than he’d looked when he’d left the office earlier that day... no, yesterday.

“Are you alright, Karen? Did they hurt you?”

Karen blinked, not comprehending the question. It took her sleep-deprived brain a couple of moments to catch onto his meaning. After she’d found Matt’s cane, she’d gone back to the office, knowing that there would be no sleep for her until she knew he was safe, no matter how tired she was. She had needed to do something, and so she’d tried to channel her restlessness into research. It had gotten a little out of control at some point, she realized as she looked around herself. The files that had been stacked into neat piles when Foggy had left were spread out over every surface imaginable, including the floor, marked with post-its. It looked haphazard, if you didn’t know the system. At some point, her jacket must have dropped to the floor, and she vaguely remembered stumbling against the shelves and ignoring that one of Foggy’s law books had tumbled to the floor. To Foggy, it must look as if someone had ransacked the place.

“Oh, no, Foggy. I’m fine. I’ve been working, that’s all,” she assured him with a tired, nervous smile.

“You don’t look fine,” Foggy argued under his breath. “Working? On what? I thought you’d be worried about Matt. That’s why I came. I figured you would be here rather than at home.”

Foggy knew her too well. “That’s what I’ve been working on,” she explained, gesturing widely at the papers scattered everywhere. “Once I found Matt’s cane, I knew he was in trouble, and the message made it pretty clear who took him. Then I remembered that we had all this information on Alexei and I thought, well, he has to keep Matt *somewhere*, and we have a list of all the properties he owns, so I—”

“Karen,” Foggy interrupted, holding up a hand. “Slow down. You found Matt’s cane?”

“Yeah, on the corner of 43<sup>rd</sup>. There’s a security camera that—”

“We need to tell the police,” Foggy said, fumbling his phone out of his pocket, ready to dial.

“I’ve got something better,” Karen promised. “I think I’ve narrowed down where he might hold Matt.”

And so she explained how she had first sorted out all the properties not in New York, and then sorted the ones in New York according to location and type of use. The empty apartments uptown and the restaurants and delis were mostly money laundering operations, tangential to the way Alexei ran his business, and either too busy or with too much security to easily and stealthily bring in an abducted person and hold them there. Karen doubted a man like Alexei would have chanced getting caught on a security camera, only to then drive out of Manhattan, past even more. No. Matt was still close, Karen was sure.

“It has to be one of these three buildings,” she explained to Foggy. Two were warehouses near the docks, the other an old brownstone, empty and awaiting renovations. “That’s where I would take him, if I were Alexei.”

Foggy had followed her explanation with sharp eyes, still clutching his phone. He looked at the three sheets of paper, three properties, but Matt could only be in one of them. Karen scratched her head in frustration, her hair feeling like it was rapidly turning into a rat’s nest.

“The problem is I can’t narrow it down further. If only I could do that, we could help Matt.”

Foggy nodded and pursed his lips, then he lifted his phone again.

“Do you really think the police will act on a vague suspicion based on confidential information we’re not even supposed to have?” Some of the files contained confidential information, after all.

“No,” Foggy admitted. “At least not tonight. We’ll tell them where you found Matt’s cane later. They can check the security footage, maybe the camera caught something. I think I know who might be able to help us, though.”

And so Karen bagged the papers while Foggy called a cab, and a couple of minutes later they both piled into a cab that drove them out of the Kitchen. Karen kept checking the road behind them to make sure they weren’t followed. Their destination was a nondescript brownstone. If Karen hadn’t known what was inside, she wouldn’t have guessed. That was the point, she supposed. Women who ran away from abusive partners rarely wanted to

signpost where they lived. The door was guarded by a square, middle-aged woman who really didn't want to let them inside.

"It's the middle of the night," she argued. "And I don't know you." She was clutching her knitting in her lap, and the sharp metal needles looked more threatening than they had any right to. Foggy's best non-threatening smile was no use.

"Please," Karen said. "Our friend has been kidnapped. We've been working to help Cristina. Can you ask her to come speak to us at least? I know it's late, and we won't take long, I promise."

"No unknown visitors, especially not at night."

Karen sighed, then took her phone out of her pocket, alongside her old press pass. She put both of them on the table, and Foggy followed suit, pulling out his ID. "You can take our phones, and you show Cristina the pictures – she knows us, she'll vouch for us. And if she doesn't, you can call the police."

The woman stared at Karen, but Karen wasn't backing down. In the end, the woman did as she was asked, under protest. She was still grumpy when she returned with a sleepy but alarmed Cristina in tow. She didn't let them talk alone either, something Foggy wasn't happy about. He was used to getting to talk to his clients alone, not under the watchful ear of an ill-tempered woman with sharp metal in her hands. But he adjusted. Foggy was good at that.

"Martina said someone is missing?"

"Our colleague, Matt," Foggy said. "We got a message threatening us to reveal your location, so we know it was Alexei – don't worry, Matt doesn't know where you are, and even if he did, he'd never tell. We've already reported it to the police, but Karen thinks she might know where Alexei is keeping him. She's used your files to narrow down the possibilities."

Which was Karen's cue to fish the files out of her handbag and hand them to Cristina, who frowned at them.

"Are you sure I'm safe?"

"Yes," Foggy assured her. "We made sure we weren't followed on our way here."

If someone had told Karen a couple of years ago that she'd be able to confidently avoid being tailed, she'd have laughed in their face. Back then, she'd wanted a normal, boring life away from her past. But New York had had different ideas, and Karen found this life suited her much better, even if she still didn't like having to be on her guard as if it was second nature. As she watched Cristina, she wondered what would become of her, in the end. She wanted a normal life too, but if her impressive work collecting dirt on the guy who had

held her captive for years was any indication, she might end up finding out that a normal life wasn't for her either.

"This one," she said, tapping on the page with one of the warehouses, the bigger one. "I overheard Alexei talking about roughing up one of the Mexicans there once. The other one, he uses mainly for smuggled luxury goods, I think. I don't know about the other building."

Karen smiled. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Foggy do the same. She'd been right about Cristina – she was crafty and had more of a spine than most seasoned criminals.

"Thank you!" Foggy said. "You've been a great help. Now we've got something to bring to the police."

"You're friends with the Devil," Cristina pointed out. "I'm sure he'll help your friend. There's no need to worry."

At that, Karen and Foggy exchanged a glance and their smiles froze a little. Cristina didn't notice, since she was busy yawning, but the woman guarding her back narrowed her eyes in suspicion, Karen saw from the corner of her eye.

"It's a little more complicated than that," she tried to explain, but Cristina wouldn't hear of it. She went back upstairs and Karen and Foggy hurried outside. The night was still nice, as nights in New York went. It was a little surreal; everything seemed right with the world, while in their world, nothing was right at all.

"What do we do now?" she asked Foggy. Usually, this was where Matt would get to do his thing.

"First, I'm calling the police. Anonymously, from a phone box, because I'm not sure the sergeant is going to listen to anything I have to say anymore. And then we're going to the docks. If the police won't get their ass in gear, we've got to do *something*, right?"

Karen frowned, then nodded. "What can we do, though?"

"I don't know," Foggy said with a shrug. "Something. You've still got that gun, right?"

Karen patted her handbag in lieu of an answer. Usually, it made her feel safe. Today, she wondered if she had to use it again. She hated thinking about it, but if push came to shove, she would. This was Matt, after all.



At night, the warehouse looked like any other as she and Foggy approached on foot; neither of them thought riding up to the front gate in a cab was a good idea. Not that there was anyone around who could have spotted them. The place was eerily quiet. Not in an unusual way, just in the way that all industrial areas were when everything was quiet and

nobody was around. There was no police, despite their call. Hopefully, it was just taking the cops a little longer to process the information and put together a team. Foggy had been a bit too vague, Karen thought. He'd talked about seeing guys with guns being suspicious. If he'd called in an active hostage situation, there would probably already be a S.W.A.T. team around, breaking down doors and bashing in skulls.

"Right, this is it," Foggy said, nervously shifting his weight from one foot to the other. The moonlight was too dim to make out his face clearly in their shadowy spot next to some of the containers, but Karen was almost sure he was chewing on his lips nervously. "I don't see anything. Do you?"

Karen let her eyes roam around, but everything was quiet. The darkness didn't help, but she didn't exactly want to take out her flashlight in case there were people lurking around in the dark. Then she spotted it.

"There," she whispered, pointing towards the far corner of the warehouse. "There's a car, do you see it?"

It was hard to see in the dark shadows – there were other large, squarish objects around, dumpsters, crates, containers – but if you strained your eyes, you could make out that the shadows seemed a little denser and harder. There was also a sliver of light escaping from under the large warehouse doors.

"What do we do now?" she asked. She didn't want to go storming into a warehouse with who knew how many armed bad guys, with just her handgun and Foggy. She doubted his amazing negotiation skills were enough to talk down a bunch of mobsters who had just been caught in the middle of a crime.

"I've got an idea," Foggy said, and walked off, feeling his way around the side of the warehouse. Karen followed close behind him. "Can I have your flashlight?"

Karen handed it to him. Then she watched as he let the beam roam around the building's side, looking for something, Karen didn't know what. Before she could ask, Foggy crowed in triumph. The light had found its target – the building's electrical panel. Now Karen knew what he was planning.

"We can't save Matt unless the police come, but we can help him help himself," Foggy explained while he pried open the cover. Then he unceremoniously shut off the building's electricity.

If Karen had expected anything dramatic, she would have been disappointed. She heard no screams, no shooting, nothing. But maybe they were just too far away.

"And now?"



“Now we wait,” Foggy said, tugging Karen back towards their original vantage point next to the containers with a view of the front door.



Alexei had returned, eventually, flanked by two of his men. Matt could hear another two talking quietly next to the entrance, one comfortably cradling his gun while the other was having a smoke. Matt wondered what came next. Would he beat up Brett to get Matt to spill the beans? Or would he threaten their loved ones? It was hard to tell, and Alexei seemed to enjoy long silences as a form of torture. It was Brett who broke first.

“What do you want? We already told you that we don’t know anything.”

Alexei cocked his head. “And I am inclined to believe you,” he said. Not a lie, and probably not good news either. “Which means I only need one of you as bait. Who do you think I should keep?”

Matt said Brett’s name at the same time as Brett said his. It would have been funny, if it hadn’t been their lives on the line. Alexei, who had no such compunctions, laughed. Even his men seemed a little surprised at the sound, as Matt heard them tense – even the ones by the door.

“You don’t even know who you’re supposed to be bait for.”

“Does it matter?” Matt asked. “If it takes you this much time to decide, it doesn’t really matter which of us it is. Take Detective Mahoney. Killing an NYPD police officer is going to get you into more trouble than killing some lawyer.”

Alexei smiled, Matt was sure of it. Amusement still radiated off him in waves. “The Devil of Hell’s Kitchen,” he explained, as Matt’s heart dropped. “He’s the one who took my Cristina from me, and he’ll be the one to give her back to me. You’ve both got a connection to him, you’ll both do. He seems to be the type who will come to save his associates, eventually. And when he does, I’ll be waiting.”

Except he wouldn’t come. Matt was already here. His only chance was to make it out of here alive somehow... if they took him elsewhere, he might have a chance. He needed to get out of these restraints. Hopefully, they’d think shooting him by the river would be more convenient than dragging his corpse there to dump it. He tensed his muscles, still aching all over with every breath. At least his legs weren’t too bad. If they decided to kill him right on the spot, however, he was fucked, and so was Brett. But it wasn’t like he had that much of a choice.

“He won’t come for me,” Brett said, putting on a brave face. “I barely know the guy.”

Matt wanted to sigh and roll his eyes. Brett was determined to ruin their only chance of getting out of this mess with his heroics, it seemed.

“And I’ve never met him,” Matt argued, which was technically true. Nobody had ever seen Matt Murdock and Daredevil in the same place, for obvious reasons.

Alexei chuckled again. “I don’t think I’ve ever had two people argue about who gets the privilege to die for me before. Well, not people who weren’t married, in any case. Or maybe there’s more to you two than I initially thought.”

This time, Matt did roll his eyes, while Brett scoffed.

“I’m a police officer. It’s my duty to protect a member of the public. Even one as annoying as Murdock.”

Matt didn’t really have an argument against that. He just shrugged. “I don’t think Detective Mahoney deserves to die here.”

“For a blind man, you’re quite brave, Mr. Murdock. Or maybe it’s because you’re blind. You can’t see how terrible this world can be. Maybe that’s why you can still believe that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Very well, you’ll get your wish.”

Alexei motioned for the men who flanked him to get Matt under Brett’s protests. They cut the ropes around his legs and opened the handcuffs, but held onto his arms too tight for Matt to free himself. While he heard Brett struggle against his own restraints as if his life depended on it, Matt didn’t resist as he was dragged to his feet, the muscles in his back and abdomen protesting at the sudden strain. While he tried to gain his bearings, Matt heard Alexei step closer, close enough to feel his breath on his face. He didn’t say a thing, he just stared at Matt, presumably still smirking. Then he jerked his head, and the men started dragging Matt away—

—and then they stopped. Matt was so distracted by the pain to his ribs that it took him a moment to realize why. The buzzing noise of electricity powering light bulbs was gone. They were in the dark.

“What the fuck?!” That was all the man on Matt’s right could say before Matt jerked his arm free of his hold. He whirled around quickly and did the same to the man on his left. The danger was making him forget all about the pain again, even if his body wouldn’t thank him for it later.

Taking out the two men was child’s play – the warehouse didn’t have any windows that could let in the moonlight or the ambient light pollution that crept into every corner of New York City. They were helpless. One punch, and the first was down for the count, the other, Matt choked until he lost consciousness. Normally, his heartbeat would have barely

picked up speed. Now, he was breathing heavily. He didn't have time. He had to get Brett out of here. And he had to take care of Alexei. There were still the two men by the door...

Alexei barked an order in Russian before Matt could cut him off with a punch to the chest that reverberated through Matt's shoulder in waves of dumb heat. Then he punched him again, this time with the left, and again, and again, remembering each and every blow that had wrecked his own body earlier. Matt only stopped himself when Alexei was well and truly out for the count.

"What the hell is happening? Murdock?"

"Here," Matt croaked, followed by a cough. He went back to the two unconscious guards and retrieved the keys to the handcuffs. There were a couple on the key chains, and it took him a while to figure out which were the right ones. But first, he untied Brett's legs.

"The light's out again," Brett explained. "Where are the Russians?"

"Unconscious," Matt explained, keeping his voice low and trying key after key. "Except for the two at the door. One of them went to look for the fuse box, and the other is still at the door, so keep quiet."

There. The first cuff was off, and Mahoney flexed his arm with a relieved sigh. Matt went to work on the next one. They had to move fast. The man at the door had a gun. If the other one got the lights back on...

The second cuff was off, and Mahoney stumbled to his feet, arms waving about uncertainly, like a blind man in an unfamiliar place. He made one uncertain step forward, then another. Then his foot met Alexei's shoulder.

"Come on," Matt whispered. "We need to get to the door."

He grabbed Mahoney's hand and dragged him forward. Every step was agony. Matt gritted his teeth against the pain, then stopped, because his jaw felt no better. Just a couple of steps, he told himself. Just one guy, then they were out. He could do it. He'd done harder things. He tried to be quiet, but Mahoney didn't, so even though the last conscious Russian in the warehouse couldn't see them, he heard them coming. Matt heard him raise his gun, aiming in the darkness.

"Wait here," he hissed at Mahoney, then he gathered what remained of his strength and charged one last time. He hit the gun hand first. A shot went off, harmlessly hitting the roof. Then he went in close, closer than he usually liked, one hand around the Russian's throat. The man struggled against Matt's hold with his free hand, but without being able to see, there was nothing he could do, but grab at Matt's face. It hurt, but so did everything else, and Matt had everything to lose. In the end, the Russian collapsed at his feet, gun tumbling to the floor.

“You can move now,” he told Mahoney, no longer quietly, but as he tried to open the warehouse door, his body finally refused to obey. Matt stumbled against the door with a grunt, bruising his shoulder even more.

“Murdock?”

“Sorry. Just move towards my voice. I’m next to the door.”

“How the fuck do you know that?” Mahoney asked, finally walking forward carefully, arms outstretched and feet moving a couple of inches at a time like a particularly slow zombie. Matt sighed. It was inevitable, he supposed. There was only so much he could explain away by being blind and used to the dark, and being able to bring down four Russian gangsters while being seriously hurt was not one of those things.

“Later,” he promised. “Or do you really want to do that now?”

In the distance he could hear sirens as somewhere, the last Russian found the fuse box and electricity started buzzing through the wires again. All of a sudden, Brett’s steps became sure. Matt heard him take the gun on the floor, then he jogged the last steps to where Matt braced himself against the door. He grabbed Matt’s arm and hauled it over his shoulder.

“I’ll hold you to that,” Mahoney grunted, then kicked open the door. The police sirens were growing louder, heading towards them. Around the corner of the building, Matt heard the last man hesitate, then disappear back into the shadows as Brett stepped from the warehouse with a gun in his hand. And from the other side of the empty space at the loading bays, two familiar sets of steps hurried towards them. Matt smiled.



Foggy watched as Matt sat at the back of an ambulance, huddled in a blanket and being fussed over by an EMT. At some point, the harried man had taken out a light to check Matt for brain damage, panicking when there was no reaction in his pupils. It had taken an intervention from Foggy and Karen to reassure him that that was completely normal for Matt. What wasn’t normal was that Matt looked like someone had put him through a meat grinder. His face alone was swollen and bloody, and the suit he wore was destined for the trash. He’d never seen Matt look this terrible when he went out as Daredevil, except for that one time he’d found him bleeding out on the floor.

“So, Mahoney, care to explain what the hell happened in there?”

Foggy turned around and saw one of the police officers from the response unit talk to Brett, who didn’t look that bad, but only if you put him next to Matt. In the background,

his colleagues were bagging and tagging the Russian mobsters while a bunch of CSI types rolled in with their full body plastic suits and equipment.

“It was Daredevil,” Karen said hastily. The frown on Brett’s face didn’t escape Foggy’s notice. “We saw him leaving the scene when we arrived, right Foggy?”

If they were forced to say this in court, under oath, it could fall under perjury. “Yeah,” Foggy said. “It was Daredevil.”

The officer shrugged and went away. He still had to put out an APB on a missing suspect, after all. When he was gone Karen shot Foggy a look. It said “Somebody had to deal with this and nobody else was going to, so deal with it.” Foggy would, but before he could he was distracted by the sound of Matt Murdock trying to weasel his way out of his blanket.

“Matt! Stop!”

To Matt’s credit, he did. For a second. “I just want to go home, Foggy. It’s been a long day.”

“Dude, there is no way you are going home,” Foggy said. “You were abducted, tortured and maybe drugged. You’re going to do what the nice EMT says when he gets back and then you’re going to go to the hospital and you’re going to stay there.”

“Foggy...”

“Foggy is right, Matt. You’re going to the hospital, for once. You’d agree if you could see yourself. Just, do us a favor, this once. If you don’t, I’m going to call Sister Maggie and let her chew you out,” Karen added, and that seemed to do the trick. Or maybe Matt finally realized that there were limits to his ability to play the tough guy or that the hospital had far better pain meds than the local pharmacy.

“Alright,” he finally said, shrinking back into the blanket. “It’s just...”

“We know,” Foggy said.

And that was all there really was to say, Foggy thought. Tomorrow would be busy. He’d have to talk to the police on Cristina’s behalf, contact her to tell her that Alexei was in custody, submit the files as evidence, and... oh God, he’d completely forgotten about Marci. She must be out of her mind with worry right now. Foggy should call, but he really wanted to enjoy the comparable peace and calm of an active crime scene and six emergency vehicles with their crews and lights on for a little while longer.

“You still owe me an explanation, Murdock,” Mahoney reminded them.

Karen, Foggy, and Matt exchanged a glance. Matt hated it when people found out, Foggy knew. Other heroes might operate openly, but Matt had always had the mask. He’d gotten better about it lately, but he was still careful not to give himself away.

“I’m Daredevil,” Matt simply answered, to Foggy’s surprise, then he cocked his head, and when Brett was about to ask another question, he held up a hand to silence him. A

second later, the EMT returned from examining one of the Russians, looking at them as if he was missing something. “Can we talk about this later?”

“Jesus, Murdock...”

A devilish grin spread on Matt’s battered face. “Not quite.”

*Fin*