Shine Against Me

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Summary

Logan and Marie talk about pornography... and then things get crazy. W/R

Notes


Feedback: Makes the Muses (and Prince) wanna party like it's 1999! The good, the bad, the ugly, welcome. Flames may be publicly mocked.

Notes: Don't look at me... I have no idea where this came from other than to say it hit me out of the blue during my daily three miles. (Gah! Anything to make the miles go faster) and by the time I hit the last mile, the bunny was firmly attached and I spent way too many late nights writing, trying to shake them loose. They were very insistent. Nudie magazines. Computer files. Erotica. Voyeurism. Sex clubs. Power tools...

This one is a post X3. It's on the lighter side, but the intimate conversations take place against a longer/deeper story arc. There is a plot and a method to my madness. A very huge thank you to doctorg, whose amazing work grabbed me out of lurkdom and kick-started my muses like whoa. She kindly offered to kick the rust off and beta this craziness. It was just supposed to be quickie but it mutated... I'll be slappin' this baby with my usual warning — to the power of ten. (Uh, have you seen the summary?) It is seriously adult in theme and content. You have been warned! This fic is told in 'slice of life' moments. Some are short (like a page) some are long (like twenty pages) If they're super short, I'll try to post two together or post two days in a row, depending on how the breaks fall.
Faith

Shine Against Me

It had taken some doing, but the old gamekeeper's cottage at the edge of Xavier's estate was finally livable, although exactly how livable was still a subject of much debate. The crumbling structure had been Logan's pet project for the better part of a year. The work had been slow going, mostly because he'd wanted to do it himself and there were only so many hours in the day. The school and the team came first, but little by little, the cottage became less a dilapidated heap of stone slag and more a home.

In truth, Logan needed both the space and the work to keep his mind occupied. He was not a joiner by nature, and making a place for himself among people again had been hard. Swinging a hammer felt good. The monotony was pleasantly numbing and it felt good to tear something down and rebuild it, stronger and better than it had been before. The irony of that was not lost on him either.

With Charles, Scott, and Jean gone, the lion's share of the work had fallen to Ororo, and reluctantly, to him. Now, a year after that terrible loss, things were finally beginning to stabilize. Storm had taken over running the school. They needed a doctor on staff and Hank had returned to help them through the first rocky year without Charles. They'd picked up a few new faces as well, most notably an annoying Cajun who still rubbed Logan wrong most days. Enrollment was back up and Magneto and his merry little band of freaks had been blessedly silent. Kitty, Bobby, Jubilee and Piotr were coming along pretty well. Still a bit green around the edges, but at least they had a little seasoning now.

And then there was Marie.
Logan couldn't even think about her without it bringing a rush of warmth and the hint of a wry smile to his face. She was coming along too. The others had never quite gotten over the fact she'd taken the Cure, but now that it had proven to be only temporarily effective, they'd begun to come around. That had happened right about the time the gloves went back on. Assholes. Marie was still very much an outsider, but things were better now than they'd been for a while, and Logan had never been too sure that being an outsider was really such a bad thing to begin with.

She didn't seem overly bothered by it. Perhaps it was her odd friendship with him that kept her from true loneliness. It was deep and intimate yet as strangely platonic as it had been since she'd first climbed in his truck a lifetime ago.

Marie approached the small cottage with a bounce in her step. It was always good to see Logan. He slept out here most nights now and she missed talking to him, even if it was just in passing. Today there was no door to knock on, so she raised her hand to rap on the jamb but he beat her to it.

"C'mon in, kid."

Marie took a moment to appreciate the view. He'd stripped down to his jeans and boots and was busy removing lathing strips with a crowbar. Plaster dust floated in the air, sticking to his sweaty body. There were bits in his wild dark hair and dust on his shoulders and clinging to the moist sheen at the small of his back. The sight took her breath away and made her shiver, despite the summer heat.

"Thanks, sugar. How did you even know I was here?" She was quiet. Not Logan's ninja-quiet, but she'd been on the team long enough to learn a few things, and she still had enough of him in her head that she moved well through natural woodland terrain.

"Smelled ya," he tossed over his shoulder, not even bothering to look her way while he pried at a particularly stubborn board.

"Um, okay." Out of the corner of his eye, he caught her sniffing her hair.

"Smelled the food," he clarified, setting the crowbar aside. Normally he'd catch her scent first, but he was hungry and the bag smelled like fried chicken, cornbread and peach pie. Of course, he knew that already. Marie had lost a bet to him. That's why she was bringing him dinner. The team often played poker together, but not usually for money. Suiting up in the leather wasn't exactly the kind of job that brought home the big bucks.

Usually, they'd all write down something they were willing to do and they would toss that in the pot instead. Jubilee had offered her services as a personal shopper. Bobby offered to make it snow in July. 'Ro offered to chase away the rain one gloomy afternoon. He'd offered up an oil change. Marie had thrown in a home cooked dinner, her mama's recipe for fried chicken and cornbread. She was a little put out when she lost. Marie was good at poker but he was better. He'd wanted that dinner. He'd wanted her to cook for him even more.

He felt the sweat trickle. It was hot, thirsty work. Logan wondered what she'd think of how the place was coming along. The cottage had a sound roof now, working plumbing, and electricity. That was handy for the power tools, though he still preferred candles for light in the evening. All the weight-bearing exterior walls had been finished, but the rest was in complete chaos, except for the large deck out back. He'd finished that first.

Logan now slept on a low makeshift pallet amongst the construction materials in the living room and Marie couldn't help but smile at the two boxes pushed together under a tarp at the edge of the open space. He'd always travelled light. Those two small boxes represented all he had in the world. He
was in the middle of ripping down yet another crumbling old wall. Plaster dust covered everything. He looked sweaty and thirsty. No surprise there. It was hot. Summer in New York with no central air? He was lucky he didn't have heatstroke.

Her attention still on the wide naked chest rippling with muscles as he worked, she absently deposited the food on the kitchen island and rummaged through one of the bags before pulling out a cold beer and tossing it in his general direction. She was aware his unique senses would compensate.

Plucking it from the air without even looking, he cracked it and stepped back to appraise his handiwork. He was opening up what had been the bedroom wall.

"Whatcha think, darlin'?"

"That if you take out much more of that wall, anyone coming up the front walk will have a straight line of sight through the front window to your bed." Her eyes twinkled. "But who knows. Maybe you're into that?"

He chuckled. "Nah. I'm puttin' the bed up in the loft eventually. Still open, but a better expectation of privacy. Was thinkin' of makin' it all open down here."

"Sounds good." She opened a beer for herself. He didn't say anything, despite the fact she was still a little short of the legal limit. He didn't much care. She was older than the Canadian limit and she looked good with a long neck in her hand.

"You think?" He was curious. She'd been giving him her opinion on the process from day one. No reason to break with tradition now. Usually she just sort of nodded along with his plans, but occasionally she spoke up. She'd been emphatic about a window in front of the kitchen sink and had told him in no uncertain terms, if he ever planned on entertaining a woman here, that it definitely needed a better bathroom; not opulent but at least functional. A bathtub. Not just a shower. That had been a blow to the budget, but nothing a few rounds in the cage couldn't fix. It had delayed things a few more weeks, but he was making progress once again now that his weekends weren't spent hammering random assholes into the ground.

"I like it. Nice and open. It's got good flow. Or it will when you've got that wall down. You shouldn't demo all the lathing throughout though. It's pretty."

"Pretty?" The Wolverine didn't do pretty.

Marie shrugged. "I like old things, but hey, it's your home. Do what you want, sugar."

"Always do," he said with a wink.

She rolled her eyes. "Want me to make you a plate while you wash up?"

Logan nodded, shaking off the worst of the dust as he brushed the bits of plaster from his hair. They both headed to the kitchen. Marie's steps faltered for a moment and following her gaze, he suddenly realized why.

The latest edition of Playboy lay face up on the bar, the glossy cover shining in the late afternoon sun next to a bottle of good bourbon and the cigar he'd bought to smoke tonight; his plan for unwinding this evening painfully clear.

Shit.

It wasn't that he was embarrassed, but she didn't need to see that.
Logan reached out one thick arm and turned the magazine face down on the counter. He could feel Marie's eyes on him.

"Sorry, kid. That ain't respectful." He turned his back and began washing his hands in the sink, grateful for something to do that didn't involve looking at her pink face.

The lingering remnant of old fashioned chivalry touched her, making her smile as she broke out the food she'd brought and began to plate it up. "Don't worry about it. It's fine. I mean, I don't have a sex life except with myself so it's not as if I'm any stranger to pornography, though Playboy's not really my thing..."

Her cheeks burned scarlet as she realized what she'd just said. Her oral filter had always been damnably absent with him.

Logan swung around sharply, mouth slightly open in shock before it quirked up at the corner.

"Oversharing! Sorry! Forget I said that…"

"No chance in hell of that, darlin'." His eyes glittered.

She plated the food a little faster. "Nothing to see here, move along…"

She thrust the plate of food in his general direction. His eyebrow rose.

"You're not stayin'?" He'd been a bit amused by her discomfort but now he just felt cheated. There weren't too many people he liked spending time with and she was obviously poised for flight. Running again. Too bad. He'd been hoping to sit on the back deck with her and crack a few beers. Something easy. A warm night, a few cold beers and some good conversation with a friend.

"Um. No." She was going to go die of mortification. Marie forced a bright smile. She was the Rogue for God's sake. She could brazen it out. "I can't. I've got a hot date."

"With who?" It better not be that Cajun prick.

"With myself, sugar," she teased, throwing him a kiss and a saucy wink, and bouncing out the open front doorway before he could say another word.

The mental image her words called up was every kind of hot.

*Jesus.*

Logan scrubbed a hand over his face.

That particular fire didn't need any more fuel.

He took the plate of food out back and tucked in. There was a certain satisfaction in eating a meal she'd prepared, though it was a very different sort of satisfaction that occupied his thoughts long into the night.

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Up next: **In A Big Country.** Logan and Marie get in the wind. There are some conversations you can only have on the open road...
In A Big Country

Marie liked going on pick-ups with Logan. Things were better now with the others than they'd been shortly after she'd returned from taking the Cure, but it was still awkward to be alone with them for long periods of time. They'd never really forgiven her. They saw her desire for the Cure - her desire to neutralize her mutation - as a betrayal; a rejection of them, their cause and of herself, too. It was a deep wound that was still healing.

In contrast, it was easy to be with Logan. It always had been. Even hours of silence didn't make her feel uncomfortable. He didn't give a shit what the others thought about either of them. Their treatment of Marie pissed him off, but he'd never been one to let anyone dictate his behavior. He'd simply made a place for her in his life and anyone who didn't like that could go fuck themselves as far as he was concerned.

Logan was good company. He was usually rude and irascible, but also prone to surprisingly deep conversation between his moments of surly silence and biting sarcasm. In the right mood — and with the right person — he told a good story, and he also appreciated a well-timed joke, the dirtier the better. Marie approved.

Logan was driving, as usual. Marie had a map in her hand and a cherry Slurpee between her knees. The sweet, syrupy scent wasn't doing much for him, but he could appreciate the way it had turned her tongue red and her full lips a deeper shade of rose.

Marie had her nose buried in the map, oblivious to his scrutiny. Logan didn't do GPS. He stayed off the grid as much as possible. While Marie could appreciate his reasons for doing so, she fully embraced modern technology, though her phone and Ipod were, at present, stowed away in her bag. She wasn't about to waste this opportunity. She'd rather talk to him, or even just sit with him in silence. She missed too much with her earbuds in— and she had to put up with his pithy comments about her eclectic taste in music.

The scenery sped past and the quiet stretched out comfortably. Marie had one foot up on the sun-warmed dash and she was humming along off-key to an old Johnny Cash song on the radio as the miles rolled by. Her finger traced the map, slowly tracking a red line up the page.

"North on 87 almost to the border, sugar. Then west on 11 to Mooers. Maybe another hour or so with the way you drive."

*Lead foot*, she'd teased.

*Nah, adamantium*, he'd shot back with a wry smirk.

They passed a billboard advertising Richard and Kitty's Roadside Adult Video Shop. Highlights included parking for big rigs, video booths and a new shipment of Fleshlights.

"Nice." Marie rolled her eyes. "Richard and Kitty? Not too subtle, are they?"

Frankly, he was a little surprised she got the joke.

"Didn't take you for a prude, darlin'."

She giggled. "I'm not. I just don't get the allure. First of all, who drives around needing to come so bad that pulling into a place like that seems like a good option? And second, that's a pretty private thing. I'm all for orgasms, but I can't really see how having one in a building full of random strangers..."
would be satisfying or relaxing in any way."

Of course she didn't get it. She was a good girl.

_A good girl who was all for orgasms, apparently_, his unhelpful libido supplied.

He shrugged. "Life on the road can be kinda lonely."

There was an unreadable look on her face. "Have you ever….?"

"Nah. Not my style." He didn't need to pay for it. Women threw themselves at him wherever he went. When he felt the itch, all it usually took was stopping for a beer somewhere. It typically wasn't long before some sweet thing was crawling into his lap.

"Been tempted?"

"Nope." A low growl of amusement rumbled in his chest. "But I could turn the car around if you're curious, baby."

"Thanks." Her laugh was belly deep. It made her eyes warm and sparkly and put a flush on her pretty face. "But it's not really my style either."

"What is?" He kept his eyes on the road, as if he'd only been asking about the weather. "We know it's not Playboy," he couldn't resist adding, enjoying her blush more than he should.

"Come on, Logan. That's pretty personal, don't you think?"

"Darlin', you've got me in your head, and a coupla days back you saw a porno about four steps away from my bed. Does it get any more personal than that?"

"Yes," she said truthfully. But there was no way she was going near any of those kinds of details.

"Then if you're still at center ice, what's the problem?"

That just made her laugh. "Fine then. It's not really magazines for me. I like it at the touch of a finger."

His eyes widened and his head swung around sharply as his fingers tightened reflexively on the stick shift. He'd only been teasing her a little. He never imagined she'd say something like _that_. That was little crass for her, not that he minded. But still.

"OhMyGod! Not that! The internet! Geez! I don't like anyone knowing my personal business."  

"Fair enough."

"And magazines are a little old school." Plus buying them embarrassed her. Admitting that probably wouldn't help. There was that old adage about being too young for pornography if you were too embarrassed to buy it, though it wasn't so much embarrassment as it was that it was just intensely personal. The world didn't need to know what turned her on. She was still working that out for herself.

"Thanks a lot."

"Hey, the classics never go out of style, right?"

"There's somethin' to be said for a good pinup girl."
"It's more the erotica side for me. Usually, anyway. Words not pictures, though other things get a look-in occasionally."

He digested that, feeling heat begin to prickle under his arms and at the small of his back. A different sort of heat was beginning to gather lower down.

"What about you, sugar?"

"Me?"

"Pictures or words?"

"Oh. Heh. Pictures."

"No dirty movies?" She was surprised.

"On a communal television in a school filled with all kinda kids, when some of 'em don't ever sleep?"

"I see your point." She put that fucking red straw between her lips and sucked. Logan felt himself begin to get hard even though it had been completely asexual. It's just a Slurpee. Get your shit together, Wolverine. "Maybe when you get your house finished," she teased, sticking that damned red tongue of hers out at him.

"Somethin' to look forward to." He snorted. "Gonna start layin' the floor when we get back. You wanna help?"

"You just don't wanna spend all afternoon on your knees by yourself."

At any other time it probably wouldn't have been a huge deal, but on the heels of their previous conversation, her comment sent a hot blush sweeping down her neck and chest.

"Not my style either," he said with a wicked grin that only made her blush more.

"Oh my God! You're beyond help." She smacked his arm. "But yeah, I'll pitch in if you spring for the beer."

"Deal."

Up next: **Like A Virgin.** The Rogue spends a little quality time with the Wolverine. It begins with hardwood and ends with something neither of them expected...

For the curious: Richard and Kitty's roadside porn shack is real — or at least it was a few years ago when I passed it on a road trip (though I've relocated it to the East Coast for the purposes of this story). Wish you all could have seen the billboard. It was cheesy, rude, hilarious and just on the acceptable side of indecent.
Like A Virgin

It took four weekends to finish laying the floor. It wasn't overly large, but the cottage was old and not terribly square, and twice they'd been interrupted by Storm and Hank who'd needed Logan up at the school.

Logan and Marie sat in the middle of the wide expanse of finished floor, sharing a beer between them and enjoying their handiwork. The wide rustic planks were beautiful. Solid and rugged but with a natural charm all their own.

"We did good, kid." He tweaked her ponytail. "Even if you are afraid of the power tools."

"Hey, if I cut something off, it's not going to regenerate." It hadn't stopped him from teaching her how to use every tool it had taken to get the job done. She was a quick study and good help. She had a mouth on her, but it had only made the job more fun. Her sense of humor was delightfully wicked.

"True. But you know I won't letcha get hurt."

She knew.

"Looks nice." Marie took the beer from Logan's fingers and necked the bottle. "What color were you thinking?"

"I dunno. Natural, maybe. Whataddya think?"

"I'm not sure. That's a lot of one color." He'd left the natural support beams exposed and he had plans for a cedar ceiling and she knew he intended to make most of the furniture himself. "Maybe walnut or espresso? Something rich and dark to show off the rest?" Something in his chest turned over at her words. He chose not to examine it too closely.

"Maybe." He took the beer back from her and drained it. "Want somethin' stronger? I was thinkin' we earned a bourbon out back with our feet up."

"Sounds good."

They settled into the deck chairs and he pressed a drink into her hand. The sun had set already but Marie could see he'd been working out back. He'd cleared a place for a fire pit and gathered a pile of stones to build it. The lake lay a short distance beyond the fire pit, lapping gently in the breeze. Fall was coming. The idea of sitting with him out here by a roaring fire was nice. Cozy.

She had a lazy smile on her face.

"Whatcha thinkin' about?"

"Sitting with you by the fire." She waved her hand in the general direction of the fire pit. The delicate silver rings she wore glittered coolly in the moonlight.

"Still too hot," he said, stripping off the flannel and wiping his face with it before sitting back in the chair and putting his feet up.

Wasn't that the truth? Marie's mouth watered and it had nothing to do with the fine drink in her hand or the sultry summer evening.

Logan's jeans were covered in dust, dirty at the knees and the hair on his head and forearms was
sprinkled liberally with sawdust. His white tank was sticky and moist. It clung to his skin the same way Marie's little black tank clung to hers. She didn't wear gloves at his place. She didn't feel the need to and it was just dangerous with the power tools. He liked that she was thinking about sitting by the fire with him.

"I like it here, sugar. I like sitting by a fire, too." He was watching her face. She'd gone within, remembering a happier time. Maybe camping with her parents or bonfires with her friends before her life had changed course forever.

"Me too. I like the heat and watchin' the sparks drift up into the sky. S'peaceful."

"Yeah."

"And it's what people do, right? Sit around with a bunch of buddies, drinkin' and tellin' lies 'bout how often they scored and lamentin' that special one who got away." He felt a sudden bolt of discomfort. He'd meant it as a joke, but it had landed a little too close to the mark.

Marie snorted. "Well, I don't have any sex stories to tell. Sorry." She actually was. The idea of trading intimate stories with Logan had a certain... appeal.

"Well, I don't have a buncha good buddies to tell any lies to, so I guess that makes us even. I probably wouldn't know how, even if I did. We're just two outcasts sharin' the night. Nothin' wrong with that." His white teeth flashed in the darkness. He had always been able to put her at ease, seemingly without effort. "Besides, you said you had sex with yourself. That counts. Plenty of fodder there for a good story."

Sweet Jesus. That was the understatement of the century. He was playing with fire. It was fun now, but he had the sense it could get out of control very quickly. The thought somehow wasn't as terrifying as it should have been.

Marie blinked slowly. He couldn't possibly have been serious. It was too ridiculous to even contemplate.

"That's it. I'm cutting you off, sugar."

He chuckled. "S'my deck. My booze. Sorry, baby. You're shit outta luck." Lifting the bottle from the deck beside him, he refilled both their glasses. "You wanna go first or should I?"

Marie choked on her drink.

"Guess it's me then." He took a sip of the amber liquid in his glass. "There was this woman-"

"Logan!"

"That's what she said," he smirked.

"Shut up, already!"

"Fine. You go first then."

She sighed. He was like a dog with a bone. She knew he wasn't going to let this go. "Okay. Marie once had a boyfriend named David. She kissed him and he almost died. Then she got a new boyfriend named Bobby. She kissed him too, only he dumped her for her touchable friend Kitty so he wouldn't die. Bobby and Kitty had sex. Lots and lots of crazy monkey sex. Marie had her imagination and an overpriced piece of silicone, but no actual sex. The end."
Logan was shaking his head at her sass and trying not to think too much about silicone in that context. It was a losing battle. Her intimate confession didn't really surprise him. She was a sensual person, passionate and incredibly tactile. He should have realized she would compensate for the lack of physical contact. He forced back the pictures her words had painted in his mind's eye. "You and Bobby never…?"

"No. I wanted to but by the time I got back, he'd already fallen for Kitty."

"That sucks." He meant it, but a selfish part of him was also relieved. "What about after? You'd had the Cure. It worked for a while." She could have had anyone. Anyone she wanted. Waiting for her answer was painful. He'd had no right to know. He'd had no claim on her then. He didn't really have one now, either. They had a deep bond because of what had happened before, and they had a close friendship that had broadened and grown out of the ashes of Jean's death, but she was not his. Not in that way.

Marie shrugged. "I tried to be that girl, sugar. I wanted to be her, even. There were men and bars and dancing and even some kissing and groping, but I guess when it comes down to brass tacks, it has to mean something or I don't want to. There's not a whole lot up here," she tapped her head, "that's just Marie anymore. I guess I didn't feel like giving up any of those Marie pieces to someone who didn't matter." She took a deep drink. "Now aren't you glad you asked?"

"I am, actually."

"You're just a glutton for punishment, aren't you?"

"Hell, yes." His eyes twinkled. "But we're not talkin' 'bout what I like. It's still your turn…"

She rolled her eyes. "I don't have any sex stories to tell."

"Yes, you do," he said softly.

"I'm not telling you about that!"

He shrugged. "You know I do it."

"You don't hear me asking about it though, do ya?" They were both very aware she hadn't said she wasn't interested.

"I'd tell you if you wanted to know." The words were quiet. Honest. They were coming dangerously close to the crossing the line between friendship and something more. She could never tell with him if he was actually interested as a man, or if it was some strange sense of duty he felt because he'd promised to look out for her. The Wolverine version of a come-to-Jesus birds and bees talk for an untouchable girl.

She took the easy way out and made a joke of it. "I don't need to ask. I've got you and five other men in my head, sugar. I don't think there's anything you could tell me about that subject that I don't already know. Granted it's from the male perspective, but it's not rocket science."

"Well, damn." He wasn't really kidding. He'd never thought about it like that. "So tell me about the erotica then." He generously refilled both their glasses.

"I see what you're doing there." She was pretty buzzed. An afternoon of hard work and a couple of drinks on an empty stomach was making her feel all floaty and loose.

"Ain't tryin' to hide it." He took a drink. "Why words and not pictures?"
"Because I have a very active imagination and there's nothing I've ever seen either in magazines or on film that even comes close to how hot it is in here." She touched her temple.

"Hell. I think I need another drink to put the flames out." He tossed back another, smiling at her as she giggled.

"What kindsa words?"

"Oh no. We are so not going there." She was not about to tell him what she read about to get herself off.

"Why not?"

"You don't hear me asking what kind of pictures you like looking at, do you?"

"Leggy brunettes with a nice rack," he said; his voice as even as if he'd just told her the time.

Despite how it sounded, Marie knew a challenge when she heard one. Especially from this particular man.

"Okay, then. Let's try this on. I don't just like to read erotica. I also like to write it."

He dropped his glass. The wet creep splashed onto his pants, wetting his thigh and running under his seat.

"Shit!"

"I guess I win."

He glared at her.

"You made that up." She didn't smell like she was lying, but he was having a hard time wrapping his mind around that one.

"Nope."

"Prove it."

Marie dug her phone from her back pocket and he watched her fingers tapping away before she hit send. "There. Texted you my penname and a website. Knock yourself out, cowboy." She was probably going to regret that in the morning when she was sober, but right now it felt pretty good. It wasn't often one got to see the Wolverine at a disadvantage.

Logan wasn't sure what to do with that information. The first course of action would probably be to buy a laptop. Screw being off the grid. He could make his mind up after that, though there wasn't even the smallest sliver of him that didn't want to read what she'd written. In general, he wasn't really big on personal restraint. If it felt good, he did it. Repeatedly.

She stood and immediately groaned as her tired, aching body protested. It had been a mistake to sit down so soon. She should have walked back the school and showered first.

"What?"

"Oh my God, my ass! I am SO sore." All that bending and stooping and squatting. It was worse than 'Ro's advanced yoga class.
He chuckled. "Want a massage?" That time he was clearly kidding and they both grinned.

"You know, if I could move I'd kick you, but your healing factor would just fix that, too."

"Yep. Thing's a real bitch sometimes. All that hard labor and I feel great."

"Now you're just rubbing it in."

"You sure you don't want that massage?"

"What? And deprive you of your need for that Playboy later?"

Well, that was the truth. He certainly wouldn't be interested in that if he'd spent the evening rubbing his hands all over every luscious inch of her, but admitting that seemed like one step too far.

He flashed his teeth at her. "It's Hustler this month."

Marie snickered and then groaned again as she swung her leg over the lounge chair and grimaced, steeling herself for the long walk back to the mansion.

His amusement dissolved at the first scent of her pain. "Hey, kid. Go inside and have a hot bath. There's a clean shirt on the back of the bathroom door. You know where the candles are. I'll stay out here." It was on the tip of his tongue to tell her to just stay over, but he knew his limits. Wrapping a naked Marie in his scent and putting her in his bed when they were both drunk was probably only going to end up one way. "I'll be sober enough by then to give ya a ride back."

She considered that for a moment. "You promise?"

"Yeah, I promise."

"Okay."

It wasn't until she hobbled inside that he realized she'd sounded a little disappointed by his answer.

Up next: **Round and Round**. In which Marie loses a bet and Logan gets to have his cake... and eat it, too.
Round and Round

It was more than a week before Logan saw Marie again down at the house. She'd lost to him at poker and this time she owed him dinner and a fancy dessert. He was out on the deck with a beer in his hand when she arrived. The box she carried had his stomach growling in anticipation. She was a good cook and even better company.

He saw her with new eyes now, changed forever by what he'd read — and his visceral reaction to it. He was still trying to wrap his mind around what she'd written. Reading it had made him hard. Made him come. Made him see her differently. It was a welcome change. She was still young, but she had some very compelling, adult thoughts that had radically shifted his perspective.

He'd needed some time to let that settle. In fact, he could probably use more of it. It wasn't that they'd been avoiding each other. He'd run into her at the school a few times and had sat across the table from her playing poker a couple of nights back, but this was the first time they'd been alone together and free to talk about the intimate words she'd shared with him. The faint color in her cheeks told him she was thinking about it too.

Good.

She was probably wondering if he'd read any yet. She should know better. He never did anything by half measures.

Logan knew he couldn't just jump right in. Despite his propensity to be painfully direct, it was the kind of conversation that needed to be eased into, maybe after dinner and a few beers on the back deck. The last thing he wanted to do was make her uncomfortable. Especially here.

He acknowledged her with a nod as she came up the path. He could wait. Patience and hunting went hand in hand. Reading those words had flipped some sort of switch inside him. What had been affectionate and familial was now electric. Predatory.

She fidgeted a little under his intense gaze. It gave him an inward stick of satisfaction that was spiked heavily with pleasure. She was not unmoved. He could tell she felt it too, even before he'd said anything, but he kept his tone light as he greeted her. Like he hadn't just had a very intimate walk through her head. From sweet and sensual to dirty and rough. She'd let him see it all.

The change in their energy was profound.

"Hey, kid." As she grew closer the wind shifted, bringing with it a mix of scents that made his mouth water. "Smells real good."

"Chicken fried steak, biscuits and gravy, black eyed peas and…?"

He sniffed. "Somethin' chocolate."

"Bite your tongue, sugar. That's my mama's better-than-sex chocolate cake. Show some respect."

Heh.

He should have known she wouldn't tuck tail and run. Meek wasn't in her nature. She was here on his deck with mischief in her eyes and a little wild in her smile as she teased him. Her choice to make him that particular dessert hadn't been arbitrary. She liked winding him up. There weren't too many people who could throw down with the Wolverine and hold their own.
Amusement rumbled in his big chest. "Better than sex, huh?"

"Yep." Marie nodded. "You can give me the full report tomorrow." She sounded half disappointed and half relieved. He knew they needed to talk, but maybe she needed a little more time.

"You're not stayin'?" The day seemed suddenly less bright.

"Can't. Hank roped me into helping him take a group of the advanced students to the observatory. I just can't say no to that guy." Her voice was warm with affection. She genuinely liked big blue and it showed. However warmly she felt about Hank, Logan could sense it was more about needing a little time and less about helping a friend.

"More for me, then." He tried for a lightness he didn't really feel. He wasn't going to push. Not about this. He wasn't that big of a dick. "Let me get that for ya, darlin'."

He moved to take the box from her. She let him, but took the precariously balanced cake back off the top and followed him inside. Looking around, she was a little surprised. Logan was an efficient, skilled craftsman and it was strange to see the space looking exactly the same way it had the last time she'd visited a week ago. No new work had been done. He hadn't even put the tools away after they'd finished the floor. Her eyes slipped around the large open space. It was exactly the same - except for the new slim laptop sitting on the bed.

Just the sight of it sent a hot rush of blood to her face. It tingled under her skin, surging wildly as she realized how he'd been spending his downtime.

After driving a sore and tipsy Marie back to the mansion last weekend, Logan had found a bar and done some fighting. And then he'd found a shittier bar and done some real fighting. He had bought a laptop with his winnings on the way home and then he'd gone straight down the rabbit hole. Marie had written a lot. And he had consumed every word. The state of the house said that it had been to the exclusion of everything else.

"Whatcha been doing, sugar?"

Because it clearly hadn't been renovation.

"Readin'." His eyes glowed. Her face flamed hotter.

"Stop right there."

His eyebrow went up.

"I have not had enough alcohol to have this conversation with you right now."

"Raincheck?"

"You bet."

Pleasure curled low in his belly at the warmth in her words.

She turned to go.

"You better not be runnin'," he tossed at her back.

"I'm not." She actually even sort of wanted to have that conversation with him. She wrote erotica. He'd read it. Hell, he'd inspired most of it. There was definitely a lot to discuss.
"Good. 'Cause I know where ya live."

Marie giggled. "Enjoy the cake, sugar."

"Will do."

Up Next: **Rock the Casbah.** Drinking. Dancing. Flirting... and Marie gets her answer about the cake…

For those of you who like a heads up, the next couple of chapters are on the shorter side (under 1000 words - short, in my book) but they set up all kinds of good things to come. Ha! See what I did there? I'll try to post one every day instead of one every other day, RL permitting. Even though it's a slow burn, there's a method to my madness. We're picking up steam and heading for critical mass. The chapters will get longer and, uh, dirtier. It's me, after all. Heh.
It was several weeks before Logan caught up with Marie again. They still hadn't had their talk, but he understood it wasn't really her fault. Midterms had the skeleton staff stretched thin. Nights off were rare. On top of that, everyone was busy helping and planning for the approaching holidays. Xavier had always made a big deal out of it, mostly because there were so many students whose parents didn't want them home during the break.

Marie was in the thick of it, helping out wherever she could. She knew how it felt to not be wanted at home and she tried to help ease that burden when she recognized it in someone else.

Things were still awkward between her and the others her age, but the little children adored her. Logan couldn't really fault them for that. Kids knew special people when they met one.

He was in the library when Marie literally ran into him.

She bounced off his wide chest, rubbing her nose with a gloved hand. "Ouch!"

"Where's the fire, darlin'?" She smelled like pure sweet woman and…. brandy? He sniffed again. Yep. Peach brandy, definitely. She smelled good and looked better; like sex incarnate. Dark jeans, her favorite Frye harness boots and a black blouse that was just sheer enough for him to be able to tell she was wearing a leopard print bra.

Jesus.

Her bronze dangly earrings kept drawing his attention to her slim neck and her shiny lip gloss was making his blood pressure climb. He had a strong urge to bite her. Hard.

"I think I left my phone in here and I'm my way out." She hadn't had a night out to blow off some steam in weeks.

He smiled at her. "Out? Looks like you're already lit pretty good."

"Couple of shots. Nothing too crazy. Just a little warm up for the main event." She nodded again with a sexy little shimmy and then raked her hands playfully down his chest. "I wanna go dance."

Holy hell. She was all kinds of fun right now.

"Where ya off to?"

"Some new club downtown with Jubes and Gambit."

"Gambit? Jesus, darlin.' You better watch yourself around him. He's a dirty bastard." He'd know. He'd been out on the town with Gambit too. A wake of wet panties had followed. That old swamp rat could sweet talk just about any woman into his bed. "He just wantsta get into your pants."

Marie rolled her eyes. "Mine and everyone else's. I hardly think he's singling me out. That boy's not real particular from what I hear."

"You hear right." He was pretty sure that Cajun asshole wouldn't be pleased to hear Marie call him a boy. That made him smile a little.

"Don't worry about me, sugar. I like my men with a few more miles on them, you know?" A little more upstairs. Her gaze left his eyes to flicker lower to his belt buckle. A little more downstairs….
Focus, Marie!

"Good to know."

She gave him a hard look and then ruined it by giggling. "Hey! You never told me about mama's cake. Better than sex? Everyone says so."

"No offense to your mama, darlin', but everyone's a fuckin' liar. Either that or you all are doin' it wrong. It was damn good, but not better than sex. Or at least not better than the kinda sex I liketa have."

Her full mouth rounded into a soft 'oh'.

He kissed the top of her head and then swatted her backside. "Have fun, kid."

He was out the door before she could even pick her jaw up off the floor.

Up Next: **Cum On Feel the Noize.** Enter Jubes. And her mouth. Marie has a few choice words of her own in return…
"Honestly, chica. You aren't missing that much. Really." Jubilee was emphatic.

"That's because you can do it whenever you want." Marie's voice was testy and her tone was a little sharp. She loved Jubes, but sometimes she was better in small doses. They were both making an effort these days, though they hadn't quite recaptured the easy camaraderie they'd shared before she'd taken the Cure.

Jubilee understood her desire to touch and be touched, but she still felt betrayed by Marie's desire to suppress her mutation, as if the act of doing so was some kind of personal attack or political statement. Still, they were trying, and Jubilee was nothing if not entertaining.

"The grass is always greener? Come on. Half the time they shove it down your throat and it's all you can do to breathe and keep from gagging."

Logan made a face. He hadn't meant to eavesdrop. He thought he was safe on the edge of the quad, under a tree where he was blissfully smoking a nice cigar, but damn if their voices didn't carry on the still afternoon air. Especially that little yellow one. Christ, she was annoying. Like some kind of deranged pixie on speed.

He knew Marie talked with her friends like this sometimes, but he sure as hell didn't want a front row seat. While the idea of Jubilee having sex didn't bother him, the idea of her advising Marie on the subject sure as hell did. What the fuck? Talk about the blind leading the blind. He stood up and turned to go, eyeing Marie's open window with a black scowl.

"I dunno, Jubes. I've always been pretty curious about that kind of sex."

Logan's steps slowed, his sensitive ears listening more intently now. He hadn't expected to hear that come out of her mouth.

"Curious as in...?"

"Well, I think maybe with the wrong person it could be like you said. But I think with the right person, it could be good. A way to really connect, you know, emotionally. Plus I just think it's hot."

Jesus fuck.

"Emotionally? Like they're even thinking just then?"

"Maybe."

She sounded defensive now.

"That's definitely a fantasy, chica."

"It's a kiss I could give, Jubes." That admission was soft, but had some real steel underneath. Goddamn kid was killing him. She really was.

"Ah. The latex. Gotcha. Puts a whole new spin on the safe sex thing, huh?"

"I guess."
"Word to the wise: flavored is the way to go there. The others taste like ass." She stopped and giggled. "Not, you know, actual ass...but spermicide is just icky. No bueno. Trust!"

"Jubes," Marie chided, half horrified and half amused.

Jubilee ignored her. "Seriously! You can't get your sexy mojo on if you're cringing at the taste and trying not to hurl. Major mood killer. You also shouldn't have to do that just because it's, like, the last strawberry left at the deadly skin buffet, you know?"

Logan winced.

"It's not a have-to. It's a want-to. Something I think about probably far too much."

Christ. He should walk away. He should walk away right now.

"Roguey, you big perve!"

"Pot kettle black, sweetie. You're the one who was giving me tips, remember?"

Marie was laughing a little now. That was better. It was easier for him to think about that than her longing for—

Logan shoved that thought away violently, but it was far too late. The image of Marie on her knees with his hands buried in her long, silky hair was burned into his mind.

"Right. About that. Younger guys are definitely at a disadvantage there. Most of them don't know what they're doing and the ones who do are still too excited about having an actual girl that close to their dick to last."

"Not a problem. You know I like older men."

Jubilee snorted. "I know. But you definitely want a younger guy for your first time, Roguey."

"Is that right?"

Logan's lips twitched in amusement. That was Marie's sarcastic warning voice. The one that said she was about half a minute away from giving Jubilee one hell of a smackdown.

"Sure. The older ones can usually only get it up once a night, and if they've been drinking they can't get it up at all. Whiskey dick. They'll pretend they're hot for you in the morning, but that's just them waking up hard because they have to pee. The young ones, though... they can go hard — all night long — even after you've had your mouth all over them..."

There was a long silence.

"Chica?"

"Sounds... good." Marie's voice was strangely flat.

"Oh my God. Are you actually tearing up?"

"Just shut it for a while, huh?"

"Sorry, girl. I was just—"

"I know. Let's just drop it, okay?"
"Sure."

Logan melted away into the trees. Surprise and titillation had given way to something deeper as Marie's unexpected tears betrayed a deep longing for intimacy and touch.

They occasionally spoke candidly about sex, but it had never been like that. She'd never shown him that raw nerve. He didn't think she'd meant to show it to her friend, either.

His heart felt heavy.

Sometimes it felt like he was a thousand years old.

And sometimes it felt like time was standing still.

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Up next: **In the Air Tonight**. Marie owes Logan a little chat about a certain erotic subject. The Wolverine isn't in the mood to be put off any longer...
"You still owe me a conversation, darlin'." Enough time had passed now that the longer Logan and Marie waited, the more awkward it got.

"Cheese and rice!" Marie jumped and the book she was reading tumbled to the floor with a soft thump. "You tryin' to scare the life outta me?"

"Nah. Just like rilin' ya up." It made her eyes flash in a way that he particularly enjoyed—a compelling blend of wildness and playful retribution.

She stuck her tongue out at him and curled back up on the loveseat, instinctively inviting him to sit with an absent-minded pat as she tucked her feet back under her. That automatic response of hers always got to him. People generally didn't want him close, and if they did it was because they wanted something from him. A fight. A fuck. Sometimes both. Marie genuinely enjoyed his company and that was a rare thing, indeed.

As he sat, his weight dipped the cushions and he enjoyed the easy way she cozied up against his side. Her smile was warm and welcoming. He noted with satisfaction the soft rise and fall of her chest as she breathed in his scent and snuggled closer without realizing it. "What's up, sugar?"

"Just checkin' in. You haven't been down to the house in a coupla weeks." It was difficult to see, and feel, her pressed up against him without thinking about the intimate conversation he'd recently overheard between her and Jubilee. He tried, unsuccessfully, to put Marie's curiosity and longing to put her mouth on a man from his mind.

It didn't help that he'd read her stories. Now he not only knew what she fantasized about and what she liked; he also knew—in graphic detail—just how she liked it. Or rather how she imagined liking it. Logan couldn't help wondering how closely her fantasy would resemble reality, given the opportunity.

Maybe it was on her mind, too, and that's why she'd stayed away. He wasn't sure how he felt about that idea. She knew her scent gave away a lot. That had never kept her away before, but everything was different now. He was definitely on board with her thoughts about him heading in that general direction, but he didn't want that to keep her from coming to him.

Quite the opposite.

"I'm not avoiding you. I'm avoiding alcohol."

"Huh?" He wasn't following.

"I got very wasted with Jubes and Gambit. It'll be a while before I feel like tying one on again, sugar, and that conversation is definitely going to require that I have my drunk on, at least a little."

That made more sense. He'd been worried maybe her talk with Jubilee had stirred up something serious. He was glad it was just that.

"Fair enough." He stroked her hair softly. "Come by though and we'll have a different conversation. That ain't the only one I wanna have with ya. I miss ya, kid."

"Aww…"
"And I can't decide about the appliances - black or stainless," he added, just to shine her on a little.

She smacked his chest.

"You're hopeless," she mumbled as he tucked her into his side and wrapped his arm around her.

"I reckon so." Something in him settled as she put her head on his shoulder. It was intimate, but sweet rather than romantic. She craved touch and he liked giving her as much as he could get away with. "But what does that say about you, huh?"

"Me?"

"Yeah, you. You know what I mean." She did. It was his way of acknowledging he knew her writing was largely about him. For someone so 'hopeless', he'd sure inspired a lot of explicit stories.

"Well, nobody's ever accused me of havin' good taste, sugar. Especially in men."

He grunted in amusement.

"I like it just fine." A statement that was probably as close to open as the two of them had ever been regarding this particular subject. It wasn't quite an overture, but it wasn't exactly platonic, either.

Things were changing. With every day that passed, and every conversation they had, the lines they'd drawn in the sand were moved. Redrawn. Reshaped to reflect the No Man's Land they'd stumbled into. More than friends but not yet lovers. The words she'd written on a page didn't guarantee that happening. Sometimes fantasies were better left ephemeral.

Reading them had made Logan feel differently. He knew her in a way he didn't before. Not physically, but emotionally. Giving him that glimpse into her head was a big deal. Experiencing her intimate dreams and desires had changed him. The resulting orgasms had, too. Neither of those things could be undone. They had to find a new way forward.

"Yeah?"

"Yep." He gave her a little squeeze with the arm he had around her. "An' when you're ready, we needta talk about whatcha wrote."

"I know." There was a smile on her face but trepidation in her words and her brows had drawn together. Classic Marie-signs she was deep in thought.

"You don't gotta be scared, kid."

"I'm not. Just worried it'll screw this up." She sighed softly and melted into his side a little more.

"Nah. S'all good." He stroked her hair one last time and stood.

"Glad to hear it." Marie picked up her book from the floor as he turned to go.

He stopped at the door. "Whatcha did? That took some guts. S'good you took that bull by the horns." He couldn't. He'd resolved long ago not to push her into anything physical, even if parts of him were wild to possess her in ways most men couldn't even imagine. It had to be on her. "I'm glad ya did. Glad you wanted me to read that. Just don't be weird about it, huh?"

She smiled. "I'll try."

"Makes us more even."
"Even?"

"You got a lotta me up there from before." She had so much of him in her head. "Now I have somea you."

"Even," she whispered, understanding now.

"Even."

Even was a good, solid word. They couldn't go forward until they were even. It wouldn't work if they were unequal. The balance of power couldn't be weighted too heavily in his favor. It had been like that for a long time and it made him uncomfortable. Made him feel like he was taking advantage, even when he knew she wanted it. That was changing now. Slowly. And for as painful as it was, it was also a good thing. Heavy, but good.

In the wake of his departure, Marie felt the need to lighten the mood a little. Logan was already down the hall when she yelled through the wall, "Stainless!"

She knew he'd hear.

His answering chuckle told her she was right.

Up next: **Appetite for Destruction.** The return of Jubes (and her mouth). Jubilee has a peace offering. Marie has a fantasy. Logan has, uh, coffee... ;)

"Hey! What's shakin', bacon?"

"Geez, Jubes!" Marie set the coffee pot down with a rattle. "Let a body wake up a little first, huh? It's too early for sneak attacks."

"I wish Remy could hear you say that. He thinks I'm hopeless at being stealthy. I freely admit that I could climb that man like a tree, but we both know he's so full of crap his eyes should be brown instead of red and black."

"Ew!"

Jubilee crossed the kitchen and eyed the battered Mr. Coffee with a critical expression. "Forget that nasty stuff. Coffee should never, ever come from a can." She nodded to the old coffee maker that was spitting a little on the counter as it brewed a new pot. "You'd think with as loaded as the Professor was, he could have at least sprung for a Keurig somewhere along the way. I mean, really! How the hell are we supposed to suit up and save the world without being properly caffeinated first? That's all kinds of wrong."

It all came out in a big rush. God. Did she even breathe? Marie wondered just how many coffees Jubilee had already downed this morning, but she still laughed in spite of herself.

"Jubes, is there a point here somewhere besides your freakish need to mainline espresso?"

"Abso-friggin'-lutely. And it's a talent, not a need. But whateves." She pressed white paper cup into Marie's hand. The steam was fragrant and smelled divine. "I brought you a peace offering. A pumpkin spice latte with extra whip."

"Mmm... Thanks." Jubilee had long ago drunk the Starbucks koolaid. She was fully indoctrinated. It was hard to fault her shameless infatuation with overpriced coffees when she came bearing them as gifts, however. Marie took a sip and sighed with pleasure. Maybe Jubes did have a small point about good coffee. "Peace offering?"

"For the other day...? I know how I am, my mouth should be a registered weapon of mass destruction, but I didn't mean to make you cry, you know? We're compadres, amigos! Besties. Makers of cookies, epic practical jokes and—"

"Trouble?" Marie teased, taking another sip.

"Well, yeah." The firecracker's eyes sparkled with mischief.

Both of them were on the wild side, reckless and prone to making impulsive decisions that frequently began well and ended... messily. The difference was that Jubilee just sort of found herself in difficult situations at random and was often surprised by the outcome. The Rogue chose to be there, knowing full well what was coming. Logan was loud in her mind at those times.

*If you wanna play rough, you gotta be tough.*

"S'all good, Juby. It's just sometimes it gets to me."

"Sorry, girl."
"It's not your fault."

"Don't take this the wrong way, chica…. but maybe if you just told him?"

"It's not like that and you know it."

"I guess with age doesn't always come wisdom, huh?"

"You said it, sister."

"Maybe you need a new resolution this year?"

"Maybe."

"Or he does."

"Amen to that."

"We still on for watching the ball drop in Times Square?"

"You bet." Marie wordlessly claimed a stool, her heel hooked on the bottom rung as she wrapped her hands around the warm paper cup.

Jubilee picked at a muffin from the basket on the island while Marie drank her coffee. The silence was easier than it had been in a long time.

"So, what exactly did you mean when you said you probably think about oral too much?" Jubilee had never been good with long silences. Her brain raced too much not to fill them with idle chatter. The feeling was even harder to suppress when she had a burning question.

"Jubes…"

"Hey, you're caffeinated now, so get on it with. Inquiring minds wanna know."

"You can't work that one out for yourself?"

"Hey, your 'too much' and my 'too much' might be two entirely different things. Just sayin'."

Marie considered that.

"I was just thinking about it, actually."

"You were not."

"Yep. As I was fixin' to pour my coffee. Word of honor."

"What you could possibly find inspiring here? It's not exactly Nine and Half Weeks territory."

Jubilee scanned the kitchen with a look somewhere between apathy and condemnation before settling at the island.

"I was sorta thinking about coming in while he was pouring his coffee... Not here, here. His place or my place."

"If you had a place."

"Hey, it's a fantasy, right?"
"True. Carry on…"

"So I was thinking maybe it's like the mornin' after we just... you know, and—"

"Bonus points for imagining you could even walk after a pounding like that. What? Don't give me that look. We both know there's no way he'd be able to keep the animal in if you ever gave him the green light to Nookietown, but go ahead, girl. It's a fantasy, like you said…"

"You forgotten he heals?"

"Hey, that's him, not you, babe."

"You forgotten what my skin can do?"

The truth hung between them starkly. There was nothing Logan could do to her that she couldn't heal afterwards with just the lightest of touches... provided she wanted to. The idea of feeling the physical echoes of their lovemaking the morning after appealed to a girl who had been denied touch for years. Maybe a part of her needed tangible proof that someone had wanted her, deadly skin and all.

Jubilee turned that one over. "Oh my God!" Her eyes were wide. "That's..." for once, she was speechless.

"Don't judge. You know as well as I do that when you can't have something, you want as much of it as possible."

"Damn, chica. That's pretty full-on. I guess you're The Rogue for real now, huh?"

Marie wasn't so sure. In some ways, she felt like she'd always been The Rogue, even before she'd manifested. It fit better every day. "Always." There were some things still too personal to share.

"So exactly how does your morning after fantasy fit in here? Because I'm still not seeing how we go from bad coffee to oral?"

Marie snorted. "That's kinda the point. I come in and catch his eye while he's making coffee in just his jeans, and I sort of just slip up next to him and tug his buckle and whisper to him: 'Can I? With my mouth?' And then I do. Right there against the cabinets. Fast and a little wild."

"Whoa."

"Yep. Rock his world, bigtime. The coffee he just poured would still be steaming when I handed it back to him. I was thinking it would be crazy hot and kinda sweet to see him leaning back against the counter, looking mostly satisfied — but kinda surprised, too."

Jubilee was a little surprised as well. The Rogue she knew was a little wild, but not like that, and she rarely gave up such personal details. She wondered what other secrets lay hidden under the surface.

"That would definitely, definitely blow his mind... among other things."

"Hey, it's just a pipedream. There's no reason to get excited."

"Not get excited? You have met me, right?" Jubilee's voice grew uncharacteristically soft. "It doesn't have to be only him, you know. There are lots of fish in the sea and most of them would kill for that kinda wakeup call."

"Imagination is one thing. Real life is totally different."
"You didn't do that for the Bobsicle?"

"What? No! There's only one man I want to do that with." With not for. It was a subtle distinction that was entirely lost on Jubilee.

"Damn, girl. Doesn't that torch ever get heavy? It's gotta weigh a fuckton by now."

"Sure. Maybe someday I'll change my mind. Or at least grow up enough to let that dream go and think about that kinda stuff with someone else."

"Fuck!" In the adjacent mudroom, Logan slammed the door of the electrical box shut with a low growl.

"Logan?" Storm's voice was half concern and half censure. She didn't approve of his language, but a man with metal in his body and his hand in an ancient power box was making her jumpy.

Logan grimaced. 'Ro couldn't hear the girls talking in the kitchen next door, but he could as clearly as if they were standing right beside him.

Goddamn women. He needed some space before he clawed something. Or someone. The firecracker was first on the list. Storm's hovering wasn't endearing her to him much, either.

"This old box is a shit show. Gonna hit the hardware store. Need some parts and I was goin' today to check out appliances for the house anyway."

He mentally added a coffee pot to the top of the list.

Up Next: She Drives Me Crazy. You can only push the Wolverine so far before he snaps...
Marie heard the door to her room open. "Ugh. Go away. I have the plague."

Logan strode in with a tray and kicked the door shut behind him. "So? Ain't gonna hurt me none."

He set the tray down beside the bed and helped her sit. She had the flu and looked miserable. "Here, darlin'. Drink this."

Marie sniffed at it feebly. "What is it?"

"Dunno. Some shit Hank whipped up for ya. Smells like lemons." And medicine. "He said it would help." She'd been down four days and it looked like it had been pretty rough.

"If I drink it would you go away and just let me die in peace?"

He chuckled. "I might."

It took a few minutes for her to drink down the steaming mug. The heat helped open up her head and the lemon soothed her throat. Whatever was in it, she felt all warm and drifty and pleasantly detached from her body.

"I have to pee," she finally said. "And I want a bath." She was too unsteady to stand in the shower. "And it really sucks that I missed going out on New Year's with Jubes. We were gonna do Times Square. I hate being sick." She felt awful and she could smell herself. She couldn't imagine how bad it must be for Logan. "I stink." She really wanted a bath but was pretty sure she was too shaky to make it there under her own steam. All she'd been able to manage for two days was crawling to the bathroom to pee.

"Nah. It ain't that bad." She smelled unwell, but she also smelled like herself, just more strongly. It wasn't wholly unpleasant. "You want me to get someone to help ya?"

"No. I'll manage. Everyone's afraid of my skin. The only person who could do it is Hank and I really don't want him seeing my, uh, naked parts."

"He's a doctor." Logan was actually pretty proud for getting that out of his mouth because what had gone through his head was 'Damn straight. You're mine and nobody sees you naked but me.' But it wasn't the time or the place, and maybe it never would be, so he just gave her a soft smile. "There's me."

"Ah, no."

"It's nothin', kid."

"It's a big thing."

As it turned out, they were both right. With a minimum of fuss and blushing and a borrowed pair of gloves, Logan had her in and out of the bath, dressed in new pajamas, and tucked back into a freshly made bed in under half an hour. The bath had roused her slightly, but the medicine had kicked in and she was a little loopy.

"Better now, darlin'?"

"Yeah. Thanks."
"I'm gonna take off then." He needed to get in the wind. Taking care of her intimately felt good, felt right, but it wasn't without repercussions. He was wound too tight.

He'd washed her, bathed her, and dressed her, pushing her arms into her clothes like a child. He didn't leer at her, but he's a man. He looked. Full breasts. Raspberry nipples. Dark curls between her legs. A flash of hidden pink inside. Miles of milky white skin. He'd definitely looked.

"No. Stay and talk with me a little," she pleaded.

"If you want." She'd be out soon anyway. Her eyes were already heavy.

He sunk into a chair by the bed and stretched out his long legs.

"What's on your mind tonight, sugar?"

Sex.

Wet, soapy, vigorous bathtub sex with water sloshing on the floor and pink, wet skin that was slick and soft and tight.

"Nothin'."

Pebbled, aching nipples under his fingers and against his chest. Her round ass in his hands. Teeth marks. Laughter. Lust so sharp he could taste it.

"Nothing?"

Coming deep inside her in hot, wet spurts. Those sweet, delicate folds stretched obscenely on his girth while she shook and screamed and dug her nails into him.

"Kitchen counters. Tile or polished concrete? Both 'er good." He was grasping.

Shouts echoing off the tile, wrinkled toes and fingers, and his come trickling down the inside of her leg when all was said and done. Christ. He was gonna lose it any minute now.

"Granite. Something dark to set off the maple cabinets."

"Pricey stuff." He couldn't stop thinking about what he'd seen. The glimpse of rose pink he'd caught between her legs as he knelt to towel her dry. How soft she had been under his touch.

Jesus. She was killing him. The scent had been even more enticing than the view. He'd wanted to follow his nose, to press his face against the source of that warm, seductive scent and make her come on his mouth.

"Pricey, yeah. But worth it. And the kitchen is small."

Legs open wide. Body twisting. His fingers pressed deep to feel her shudder and clench as she rocked back and forth against his tongue. A sharp pull in his hair as a rough shove of glossy fingers and a firm suck pushed her over.

"Hmph."

Her sultry voice, rising on a wail and breaking on his name.

Oh fuck.
"You didn't ask me what I was thinking about," she said into the thick silence.

A rumble shook his chest. "Whatcha got on deck tonight?" He couldn't take much more of this. Her scent was all over his hands. So thick and sweet and maddening. If he was alone, he'd put one to his face and the other in his pants.

"Playboy. Or is it still Hustler?"

*Shit.*

He did not have the patience for this right now.

"Penthouse. But just for the letters," he shot back. He was trying, he really was, but he felt like a pyromaniac with a match who'd been told to behave.

"Bet you won't need that tonight."

"Marie-" she was not wrong, but this was skating too close to the line of taking advantage for his comfort.

"I'm not drunk or high or out of my head with fever. I'm just a little under the weather, so you can take that guilty conscience and claw it in the ass."

He chuckled. There was his girl. All fire and sass and…. softness when it came to looking out for him. "Yes, ma'am."

"Do you even read the letters?"

"I did this time," he said cryptically.

"Why?"

He shrugged. "Comparison." There went the match, struck brightly in the darkness.

"Oh." He waited while her foggy brain worked that one through. "OH!"

"What you wrote was better." By a hundred thousand miles. He was going to light the world on fire, and soon after it would burn down around his ears. He really needed to leave.

"Thanks."

"It's just I'm not really up for that conversation tonight, baby." He was up for something. It just wasn't conversation.

He needed to come, hard and loud.

"Me either. I'm just glad it's not weird. I just wanted to test it out a little."

"No problem."

"See, it's not so bad with the words, is it?"

"Nah. Though I seem to remember you sayin' somethin' about other things gettin' a look-in as well from time to time." A flame to tinder. There it went. He was so fucked.

"I did. That's right."
"You gonna tell me what you meant by that?"

"You curious?"

"Hell, yes." Curious and stupid. All the blood had left his brain.

"Audio files mostly."

"Audio files?" He'd not expected that. "Like recordings of people havin' sex?"

"Or having sex by themselves. Either way."

"That's—"

"Weird, I know."

"Hot. I was gonna say, hot." Hot? He was on fire.

"I'm not sure why, but listening to those kinda sounds really lights my flame. Once I even came without touching myself at all." That came out in the softest whisper. Okay, maybe she was a little out of it, after all. She'd never have admitted that otherwise.

*Oh, God.*

Logan's eyes were hooded and dark and there was something in them she'd never seen before. Something hungry and wild and on the very edge of controlled.

"Ah, Christ." He scrubbed a hand over his face and fought down a thousand inappropriate responses. Even as he did, a piece of his heart went out to her. She was clearly desperate for touch, strung so tightly that even the sound of sex was enough to send her over. Another, more base and selfish part of him was reveling in the wonder of that little confession. It spoke to the passion locked within her. Her skin was so sensitive. Few women could orgasm without physical stimulation. Sex with her would be incandescent.

He forced that thought down hard.

"Logan?"

"Yeah, kid?"

"I lied before. I do know why. It's because when it's just the sounds, I can close my eyes and make it be anyone. Anyone I want." His eyes, so black and wanting, flicked to hers.

She did not look away.

A different sort of growl than she'd ever heard rumbled low in his chest.

He stood up so fast the chair fell over backwards.

Marie's eyes widened. The size of his erection was obscene.

"I needta go."

If he stayed, he was going to climb into her bed, pull down those sweet little panties and make her scream.
"Logan?"

"Now."

He wasn't kidding. He turned on his heel and melted away.

Up next: **Nasty.** The Wolverine, rude, crude, and honest...
Weeks passed before Marie got the chance to talk to really talk with Logan again. She found him by the fire pit, a cigar in his hand as he stared up at the moon from under his old straw cowboy hat. The bottle of bourbon beside him only had a few inches left at the bottom.

It was late. Midnight had come and gone. The night was cold and clear. The still, quiet world glittered with silvery frost that made the serene place feel otherworldly. Logan had built a huge fire. The flames danced wildly, on the edge of out of control, licking up into the night sky, a hungry riot of red and gold.

She dropped onto the opposite bench, grimacing as the frosty seat made her shiver hard enough that her nipples drew up into tight points under her thick coat and scarf. "God! It's cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey out here!" Her eyes danced. "How they hangin', sugar?"

Logan blew a stream of smoke into the sky, his face hidden by the brim of his hat. "Go 'way, kid. I ain't in the mood."

Her sharp eye assessed the situation. She knew Logan and his moods pretty well. He was surly and mean, but tonight his brooding was closer to grumpy than outright rage. Marie considered her options and then shrugged. "Well, I don't give a shit. I can't listen to another minute of Jubes telling me how amazingly hot Remy's cock is and how good he is at using it. She's completely dickmatized." Remy had finally gotten into Jubilee's pants and Jubes couldn't be happier. Marie, on the other hand, had reached her saturation point. Jubes had a tendency to overshare on a good day.

Logan snorted.

"Go ahead and claw me if you wanna, but I'm stayin'. That would be less painful than hearing chapter and verse of Jubes' sex life."

"Can't be that bad. Could even be fun under the right circumstances."

She couldn't tell if he'd said that just to be contradictory because he was in a bad mood, or because he was trying to get a rise out of her.

"Maybe you want to hear about how Remy tastes and how he likes his cock sucked and how he likes her to suck his fingers after he's just—" Marie stopped mid-word at the look on Logan's face.

"Jesus."

"Sorry. I'm a little drunk still. It took three shots just to drown out the worst of it. When I finally escaped, I thought maybe a walk would help clear my head and then I saw the glow of the fire. It really was on the edge of scary big."

"Fine. Stay. But I'm warnin' ya, I'm in a pissy mood."

"Grump away, sugar. I couldn't care less. You can say whatever you want to as long as it isn't about Remy. Because I swear to God, if you do... I will take this glove off and touch you until you scream."

Fire licked up his spine. He knew she didn't mean it the way it sounded, but it had come out sounding damned good.
"You're welcome to try," he said offhandedly, the cigar clamped between his teeth. He was on the edge.

"What's eating you tonight?"

He gave her a hard look.

"Fine. Don't talk if you don't want to. I was only askin' to be polite. I'm all talked out anyway."

Perversely, that made him want to answer when he'd had no intention of doing so.

"There was this woman."

Marie rolled her eyes. "There always is." Wherever he was, there were always women. It was a part of what made things between them so confusing. Sometimes it felt like he was interested in her as a woman, and other times she felt like an obligation; something he'd promised to take care of. He flirted with her, sure, and they were very close, but there had always been women. He'd never bragged about it, but he'd never hidden it either. It wasn't in his nature to hide what came naturally. He rarely acknowledged them to her, however, and that he did so tonight made her aware he was much closer to the edge than she'd first thought.

"It was after the fights."

"You were fighting tonight?"

Tonight. Last night. A lot of nights since he'd bathed her and tucked her into bed. That had woken something in him that he didn't know how to put out.

"Yeah." He'd needed the outlet. Needed to feel the heavy concussion of flesh impacting flesh and the satisfying crunch of bone. He'd wanted the sweat and the pain and the bloodlust of the crowd... and the adoration of jaded women who only wanted him for the fleeting pleasure he could give them. And the physical relief they could give him. It wasn't pretty, but it was the truth.

It was her turn to give him a hard look. She'd been asking him forever to take her along when he fought and he'd steadfastly refused. It was unusual in that he almost always gave her what she asked for. Except that.

"Anyway," he said, with more than a little vitriol, "I'd asked her if she wanted some air."

Which was Loganese for: We hit it off at the bar and decided to take things out back to get better acquainted.

Marie hated that it annoyed her as much as it turned her on. Logan was a very sexual person. He liked sex, and had a lot of it. She liked the idea of him wanting that much sex, she just wished he wanted it a little closer to home. It was confusing to be both jealous and aroused by his confession.

"Charming."

"She thought so." An arrogant smirk pulled at his sensual lips.

"I didn't come all this way in the cold to trade one cock story for another."

He grunted. He'd never much liked it when she was overtly crude.

Marie huffed. Tonight that was just too damned bad for him. She'd had enough.
Logan stared at her. She was nothing like those other women. It wasn't that he wanted her to remain pure and untouched forever. On the contrary, they were closer now that she'd gotten a little life all over her. He liked the miles she'd put on. What he didn't care for was the distance, the jaded cynicism without the underlying tenderness she usually had for him.

The tip of his cigar glowed red and Marie smiled, aware he was taking in a deep breath of the calming tobacco. She'd always taken a bizarre pleasure in the knowledge that she could get under his skin like nobody else.

"Things were goin' pretty good," and by pretty good, he meant hard and fast up against a wall with her nails in his back and his fist in her hair, "Right up until we were interrupted. She didn't wanna after that."

"It wasn't some jerk from the cage again, was it?"

He chuckled, pleased that of all the ways she could have responded, her first thought was to be sure he was safe. That felt good, even if her scent also said she was itching to slap him for being such an ass.

"Nah, it wasn't like that. It was just the little barmaid on her smoke break."

"Come on, you can't really blame her for not being into it after that."

He shrugged. "Didn't bother me none."

"Well, if it were me in that situation, I would've—" she stopped mid-word, suddenly aware if she ever had that chance with him, she wouldn't have cared about anything outside the circle of his arms. She would have kept going even with an audience; not because she was desperate to be with him, but because she knew what they found together would be incendiary.

A blush rose, sweeping through her hotly. It suddenly occurred to her that she'd even written a story like that. He'd likely read it. She'd never used names or identifying details, but Logan was a sharp man and it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that a great many of her stories were about him.

"You ain't that kinda person, kid." He was emphatic.

"I- I don't know about that. I think it would depend on the man I was with. I'm not big on restraint if I want something. You know that. If it felt right, I'd do it." She'd always been that way. Her plans to visit Alaska. Running away from home. Crawling in his trailer. Even sitting with him now. When her heart said leap, she leapt, even if she hadn't looked (even a little bit) first.

"The watchin' or the bein' watched?" He was being deliberately obtuse. The idea of taking Marie like that was making him hard. The idea of someone else taking her that way was making him want to inflict pain. He smiled darkly. "I ain't shy. Both do it for me."

"Logan!"

"I warned ya, darlin'. S'on you for stayin'."

Her full mouth thinned into a line of displeasure but he noticed, with some amusement, that she didn't leave. Her face said one thing, but her scent was saying something else. He was surprised, and more than a little turned on. Normally he'd have just let it slide, but the animal was still riding him hard. Fighting and women usually took the edge off a little, but not tonight. Tonight her flash of vulnerability only engaged the predator and his desire to play, to push a boundary he normally steered well clear of.
"Watchin' or bein' watched?" he said again, just to see the fire in her grow hotter. It was all just words anyway. What was the harm? She wasn't ready to initiate anything. He wasn't sure she even wanted to. Not really. He wasn't even sure what he'd do if she did. This strange limbo they were in was driving them both crazy.

"I wouldn't know, seeing as how I haven't done either," she replied tartly. "Sounds fun though. I'll have to give 'em both a whirl and get back to ya."

Shit. Too far. She was all bristly now, despite what her scent was telling him. More disturbing still was that he was enjoying it.

They fell quiet, the frosty silence only broken by the popping and sputtering of the fire.

"Which do you like better, sugar?"

Heat rolled through him. He thought she'd retreated. It was a miscalculation on his part. She was only rallying the troops for round two. His brow arched. He knew it wasn't right, that he shouldn't be fucking around with this particular line in the sand, but he couldn't stop himself.

Something dark burned in his hooded eyes. "Watchin'."

"How come?"

A low growl resonated in his chest.

Marie realized she must be a little more tipsy than she thought, because baiting the Wolverine in this mood was probably one of the more stupid things she'd ever done, and that list was pretty long already.

A dark look of pleasure spread across his face. "'Cause it's like watchin' porn, but better." While Logan appreciated the convenience of modern pornography, it lacked the layers that someone with his unique physicality and enhanced senses enjoyed.

"Better how?" She was definitely skating on thin ice, but she couldn't quite seem to stop herself. She could feel her heart beating wildly. There was little doubt he could hear it.

"Hotter. More for the senses to enjoy." His teeth flashed in the dark. "You said you liked listenin'. Imagine if instead of a tinny recordin', you were hearin' it live. Then it's not just in your ear, it's all over. That bass rumble of the voice vibratin' over your whole skin and makin' you shiver. Feelin' the grunts insteada just hearin' 'em. Seein' 'em writhe. Smellin' the musk."

Her eyes were very round and her scent had gone from interested to, Oh hell, yes! Just the tickle of that glossy heat in his nose was making it hard to keep the wildness contained.

"I... that, um..." He thought he'd pushed hard enough that she'd tuck tail and run. She would if she had any damn sense at all. "That sounds good, actually. Really good."

Ah, Christ. She'd always been a little hellcat. 'Rogue' suited her very well and he realized she was growing into that woman a little more every day. He was a little melancholy, too. It meant a little more of Marie, of the part of her that was truly his, was slipping away.

The more she thought about it, the better it sounded. Marie probably wouldn't have admitted it to him without the burn of tequila in her blood, but the idea was really beginning to turn her on.

"Yeah?" Nodding and blushing but very interested now. That was unexpected and he couldn't help
but respond. "There's places to go for that kinda thing."

"What? Like Richard and Kitty's roadside whack shack?"

That time the amusement touched his eyes, too. "Nah, kid. Not a dirty hole-in-the-wall like that. There's swanky places for that stuff too."

"What, like a sex club?"

"Yeah."

"You go to sex clubs?" She was shocked. Shocked and... fascinated.

"Darlin', I'm a hard man on a hard road. There ain't too many places I haven't been."

"Why?" He wasn't the sort of man who needed to pay for it. She'd been out with Logan many times. He just had that thing, that aura of power women could just sense. The way they threw themselves at him was kind of embarrassing. Especially because she felt it, too.

He chuckled. "Same reason as everyone else." Her eyebrows were almost at her hairline. "S'fun." Logan caught her eye. "You're askin' a lotta questions. Seem pretty curious."

"I, um..."

"I'll take ya if you wanna go."

"What? With you? To a sex club?" Marie wasn't entirely sure she hadn't entered some altered reality where Logan thought of her as a woman and not a friend.

"Sure, why not?" He couldn't pretend his motives were entirely altruistic. The idea of watching Marie watch a sex act was already making his blood run hot... but he was thinking about her too. If she really was going to be incapable of physical human contact for the rest of her life, she'd need an outlet like that. Better her first tentative steps in that world happen with him at her side than scared and alone down the road. He honestly hoped it would never come to that. He had his own ideas about the future, but he wasn't so selfish that he wouldn't give her that experience if she wanted it.

"To do what?" She was feeling dizzy and her voice was too high.

"To watch." Just watch. He could manage that much. Probably.

"Uh..." She just could not pull it together. Marie couldn't help but imagine he must think she was an idiot.

"Afraid you might like it?"

"Afraid I might kill someone."

"By watchin'?" he scoffed. His tone was teasing, but she was painfully aware he was putting down a very clear boundary. He'd take her there to watch. Not to do anything else.

"My skin..."

"Ain't a problem. There's a no touchin' rule."

"No touching? In a sex club? Doesn't that sort of defeat the purpose?"
"Heh." Her confusion pulled him back from the edge, from the darkness just a little. "No touchin' without permission. You could walk in without a stitch on, and nobody would lay so much as a finger on ya unless you let 'em." He let that sink in. "Course, I wouldn't recommend that." He put the claws out with a black smile, turning them so they gleamed in the firelight.

"Oh!"

He put the claws in and licked the trace of blood left behind on his knuckles absently.

The urge to kiss him, to taste that little copper flash on his tongue rolled through her hard and strong. She looked away before he could see it.

"So, whatcha say, darlin'?"

"I say you were right. You're in a mood tonight. I'm gonna bounce."

"Suit yourself, baby."

He smiled as he watched her melt away through the trees, very aware she hadn't told him no.

Up next: **Girls Just Wanna Have Fun**. The Wolverine threw down the gauntlet. The Rogue picks it up…
Marie was back at Logan's a few weeks later. She hadn't meant to come. It had happened without conscious thought. All she'd wanted was some air, some space from the claustrophobic feeling the mansion and its residents sometimes inspired. These days her feet seemed to be on autopilot, and what had started out as a walk across the grounds to clear her head had ended up at Logan's door.

She'd seen him several times up at the school over the last few weeks, although that atmosphere didn't much lend itself to talking freely. She missed the way he was with her here. He had a fire going inside and a warm light spilled out of the windows invitingly. The scent of wood smoke was heavy in the still air and the damp afternoon had chilled her to the bone. The tight grip of winter had eased. This was the first thaw, the first significant upwards bump in temperature they'd had in a long time. Winter probably had a few last snowfalls and cold snaps for them, but the dripping dampness signaled that spring wasn't too far away.

"Hey, kid. You gonna come in or stand on the porch all night?" Logan's voice rumbled through the closed door.

"I don't know."

"There's pizza and beer in here. Just sayin'."

That didn't surprise her. She'd gone with him earlier this week to choose a television and was well aware a pizza and beer night would soon follow.

"Flames-Rangers game too?" Her desire to watch it was what had indirectly led to her little walkabout this evening.

"C'mon in and find out for yourself."

Rolling her eyes, Marie let herself in, toed off her muddy boots by the door and sat down on the floor next to Logan. He had a very nice flat screen TV and no couch. It made her smile. There was an exquisitely thick, massive bearskin rug, however. Dark and silky. She'd asked him about it a week ago.

"Where did you get this, sugar? It's gorgeous."

He'd given her a hard look. "I don't buy furs, darlin'." He was insulted by the question. "I hunt."

Her sensual enjoyment of the soft pelt went a long way toward soothing his ruffled feathers. She'd stroked it lightly at first, and then seduced by the sleek feel, she'd sunk her fingers in deep, humming out her pleasure. Her cheek had followed her fingers; a slow sensual glide that eventually became a full-body stretch as she indulged in the shamelessly tactile sensation of the thick fur against her skin. The resulting tickle had made her laugh aloud. He'd chuckled at her sheer hedonism, but it had also made his blood burn.

"Grizzly?"

"Nah. Kodiak. They're a little bigger and a heap meaner. I don't normally hunt bears. S'too much meat for just one man, but the bastard triedta take my kill." He'd enjoyed that fight. He could feel the smile on his face even now, remembering how hard he'd had to work at winning. He'd skinned it and paid for it to be tanned the last time he'd been up north. The tannery had mailed it to the mansion more than a year ago. And there it had sat, waiting for this moment.
It felt good to sit on it with Marie now. It was hardly the first time he'd imagined her on it, though a great many of those were less platonic than this friendly meal.

There was something about the feel of the pelt against his skin that brought his more primal instincts to the fore. Perhaps it was due to the violent way he'd acquired it. He'd fought and bled and eventually triumphed over a worthy challenger, proudly roaring his primacy into the coming night. It felt good under him, too. Thick and soft with a lingering spice that spoke of freedom and wildness and places untamed and untouched by men.

Wolverine's thoughts were tangled with his own, a wild snarl of lust and possession. The images in his head were not soft or gentle. When he had her here in his mind, it was without rules or boundaries. The limits set by men had no place between them. Their joining was elemental. Savage. Sometimes brutal. In his fantasies, she was just as wild; meeting him as an equal, a partner in his fierce possession of his mate.

In Logan's mind, she was always naked here. Smiling at him, those red full lips wet from his kiss. Her hair was down, big and messy around her face. He'd never been very good about controlling that urge to put his hands in her hair. Her skin was flushed with pleasure and her body was warm and soft under his as they moved together.

The Wolverine's vision was more crude, but no less honest. His mouth, slick and glistening with her scent. Her mewls and grunts of pleasure as her skin slid against his, slick with sweat and saliva. His body thrusting heavily into hers from behind as his orgasm rose. It was not the first one. Trickles of pearly fluid dripped down her spread thighs as she moaned and thrashed under him, forcing herself back on him. She keened and shook as he filled her again. And again. And again.

The images flashed so sharply in his head that it was difficult for Logan to shake them away and stay in the present. The fur carried both their scents now and he felt a deep contentment as she sat beside him, absently stroking the soft pelt. He'd been thinking of this moment even as he'd skinned it. Such a simple pleasure. The pair of them enjoying it together. It was strange when life so precisely matched imagination. He slid one of the pizza boxes over her way with his foot.

"Mmm... smells good, sugar. Meat lovers'?"

"Yep. Molson and Sam Adams in the fridge. Bring me another while you're in there."

"Subtle." She retrieved the beers and sat back down. Logan smiled inwardly as she opened the box and took the biggest slice. He'd never seen someone so small eat so much. He liked it. Clearly that appetite was indicative of the size of her other appetites as well.

She seemed off tonight. He couldn't put his finger on it, but there was something there in the way she moved and the expression on her face. "What's up?"

Marie shrugged. "Same-old same-old." She took another slice. "What's the score?"

"One-nothin', Rangers."

"That sucks. Did I miss any fights?"

"Yep. A real good bloody one. Haven't seen one like that in a while. Game stopper." His teeth flashed.

"Really? Dammit. I just can't catch a break tonight."

He let that slide. He knew Marie well enough to know she wouldn't tell him anything if he pushed.
too hard right out of the gate. It had to be in her own time. The next time there was a break in the action, he got the beers and they watched in silence for most of the second period. She finally started talking beyond monosyllabic grunts towards the end of the game. Her scent was off and he put her somewhere between restless and mopey.

"What's up with you tonight, kid?"

"Nothing."

"Don't do that. That ain't how we are." She'd always been a straight shooter with him. It was waning as she got older. She held back more, held her cards closer. The tighter he held onto it, the faster it seemed to slip away.

He thought that would just earn him another moody shrug. Instead she rounded on him, fire in her eyes. "Is it? Is that what you give me? The truth, straight up - no chaser? 'Cause it sure doesn't feel that way from where I'm sittin'."

He was a little surprised that she came out swinging, though it made him curious rather than defensive. What the hell was going on with her?

"Hey. I've never lied to you, even when the shit I haveta say ain't the shit you wanna hear." He blinked, aware she was still waiting for an answer. "I give ya what I can," he said quietly, thinking of all the times he'd edited his response because she wasn't ready to hear it.

"Well thank you, Saint Wolverine for anointing me with the holy crumbs from your table."

"Why dontcha tell me what ya really think. Christ." Somewhere along the way she'd started fighting like a woman who'd worked up a good head of mad and not a pissed off kid. He marked it with an internal stick of satisfaction, even if the words themselves pissed him off.

"Sugar, you don't want to know what I really think." He'd been running from that for years. Marie flinched inwardly. That wasn't really the truth. He knew how she felt. Or he'd had a pretty good idea, once upon a time. Back then he'd wanted something else with someone else. Now she had no idea what he wanted - or what he knew. All she knew was that being with him felt good, made her feel warm inside even when it hurt. Like it did tonight.

"Try me." He saw the flash of insecurity on her face and pressed harder, aware on some level it wasn't what either of them really needed. "That whatcha want? Go ahead, kid. Here's your chance. Throw down. Put all your cards on the table. Let's see whatcha got." I fuckin' dare you. He barely managed to keep from roaring the words at her. His heart was beating fast. He'd thought this conversation was a long way off. Maybe years.

Marie was silent, staring at him with wide eyes. She didn't like being put on the spot any more than he did. Her mind was reeling. Wasn't this what she'd been waiting for? Her shot to show him she wasn't that little girl anymore? And yet, she couldn't make the words come. She wasn't sure if that meant she wasn't ready to own up to them, or if she wasn't ready to accept the consequences after she did. Until she could work that out, it was probably better to keep them locked away. Even if he was willing, it might end badly and then she'd lose the only real stability she'd ever had. That was a lot for someone like her to risk.

The silence was painfully loud.

It stretched longer. A minute. Three. Five.

"That's what I thought," he said softly, draining his beer. His first assessment had been correct. Not a
kid anymore. Not ready to lay her soul bare, either. It made him feel tired. He'd been on this road a long damn time.

"Sorry," she offered.

"You don't hafta be sorry. I shouldn't have pushed ya." Not ready-not-ready-notready. That engine was picking up steam again.

"Not that."

"What?" He felt the engine falter a little.

"I'm shitty company tonight. I should have just turned around and gone back instead of inflicting myself on you. It's not your fault. It's mine. I'm just still wound up about something that happened earlier today."

Talking to him usually helped her feel better when she was unbalanced, but this was new, more intimate territory and she felt unsure and embarrassed about sharing it with him. Things were changing between them. He was still her best friend, but lately there was something else. Sometimes it felt like his indulgent Uncle Logan routine was slipping, giving her glimpses of a very different man underneath.

"You okay, darlin'?"

"Yes. No. Um... I'm not sure...?"

"Hey, you can talk me about anythin', you know that." The scent of her embarrassment was strong in his head. "Birds-n-bees, PMS, you name it..."

Marie rolled her eyes at his teasing. "I got my period and the accompanying lecture from my mama when I was eleven, thank you very much."

"Eleven?" The idea that she'd been physically able to have a child for a decade was hard for him to wrap his mind around. How was that even possible when she was barely more than a kid herself?

"Yup. Mother Nature - and the Boob Fairy - both came early to the D'Ancanto household."

"Boob Fairy?"

"From nothing at all to more than a handful the summer before seventh grade. It wasn't pretty."

"Jesus." There was an image he didn't need. He shook his head. She was wrong, too. More than a handful? Not quite, but then he had big hands.

"It gets better. I'd been doing my best to minimize things with tight tank tops under baggy t-shirts all summer. When Mama finally realized what had happened, she didn't even take me bra shopping straight off; she just gave me a few of hers since I'd clearly bypassed the whole training bra stage. They were those old-timey pointy style ones, you know?"

A chuckle rumbled in his chest. "I know whatcha mean." While he could understand her discomfort, he had a particular appreciation for that sort of vintage pinup style.

"It was really startling. From the appearance of nothing to full-on Madonna in her Vogue years in a day, literally. I think I lived in hoodies for a year, even after Gran took pity on me at Thanksgiving and took me shopping for bras that didn't make me look like a pinup girl." That she would choose
that word made him feel uncomfortable, like she was looking into his head. Maybe she was on some level. Or maybe it was just coincidence.

The mental picture was beginning to get to him, regardless. Twined with the images from her erotic stories, it was disturbing rather than prurient. This conversation needed to move along. "What lecture did she give ya?"

"You know the one. Always carry extra tampons. Boys only want one thing. Sex is wrong unless you're married and if you touch yourself, you're gonna go to Hell."

"I'll save ya a seat, darlin'."

Marie giggled.

He whistled softly. "That's a lot to lay on someone still in elementary school."

"I know, right? You can imagine how things went when I manifested." That was another of the things they never talked about. He knew she'd kissed a boy and put him in a coma for three weeks and that she'd run away shortly after, but she'd never told him the nuts and bolts of what had transpired between those two events. She hadn't been too forthcoming about what had happened on the road, either.

"Mmph."

Given what she'd just shared with him, it wasn't too hard to imagine how it had all gone down. He felt bad that she'd had to be so tough so young, but he liked the strong woman she'd become because of it. "But all that was a long time ago and none of it excuses my behavior tonight. I was just..."

"What happened that got ya all riled up?"

"You really wanna know?" That was her serious voice. What could she possibly be that worked up over? His curiosity was beginning to slide towards concern.

"Do I look like the kinda man who asks shit he don't want an answer to?" That was especially true tonight. The color in her face and the trepidation in her scent had him fully engaged.

Marie huffed quietly. Logan and his economy of words was well known. Generally he didn't even bother. He had a whole vocabulary of grunts that covered everything from 'you bet' to 'go fuck yourself'. That he'd chosen to open himself to her said a lot, but she wondered if he was really ready for her to do the same.

Nothing had been the same since the night on his deck when she'd texted him her penname. Now when he looked at her, she wondered if he was thinking of her stories. Sometimes it was obvious that he was. She supposed that was only fair. Sometimes when she looked at him, all she could think about was how his hands had felt touching every bit of her the night he'd bathed her. It had been tender rather than salacious, but it had been thorough, too.

And just when they'd begun to get their equilibrium back, he'd opened Pandora's box on a frosty night as a bonfire licked hotly into the darkness. Watching. Being watched. And a shocking invitation to a sex club that had disturbed and aroused her. That night she'd slipped a hand under her in the small confines of her bed, thinking about his hands on her body as she arched and shuddered and bit her lip to keep from calling out his name. The tension thrummed between them even now, reclined as they were on the thick, warm fur.

Marie's brows drew together. There was so much locked away behind her teeth. She was desperate
to let it out. To let him know a part of her she'd never shared.

"It's kinda a lot, sugar."

He recognized that tone. She was testing the waters. Seeking his guidance and approval. Wanting him to take charge. To take control. To tell her to tell him what was on her mind.

"Up to you, baby," he said instead, trying to chain his slipping control.

It had to be on her.

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Up next: **Welcome to the Jungle**. Marie makes an intimate confession. Logan's invitation gets a response, but not the one he was expecting…
Marie nodded and took a deep breath, determined to get the words out before she lost her nerve. She wasn't worried Logan would judge her. He had a colorful past and was surprisingly understanding about most things; fender benders, misdemeanors, errors in judgment that generally ended in phone calls in the wee hours of the morning asking for advice - and on rare occasions - help. Hell, he was the kind of man who'd probably take a whispered confession that she'd killed someone in stride, with a nod and a grimace and at: Here's whatcha do, kid... While this wasn't remotely as serious, it was difficult to talk about all the same.

"It all kinda started because I wanted to watch the game tonight. I went down early to the lounge to see if the TV was free since almost everyone was still on the field trip with Hank and 'Ro and I walked in on Jubes and Remy gettin' hot and heavy on the couch."

Jubilee had been straddling his lap with her back to Marie, and Remy's mouth had been busy on her neck, nipping and kissing and murmuring heated little fragments of broken French that made Jubilee moan and clutch him closer. His hands were moving rhythmically under her long skirt and they were both rocking a little. Neither of them had noticed her standing at the edge of the doorway with a bowl of popcorn in her hands.

Logan nodded, wanting to encourage her to go on without interrupting the flow.

"They were oblivious and I should have left as soon as I noticed them, but then I remembered what we were talking about by the bonfire that night — about watching — and I..." A blush swept down her cheeks and neck, her lip caught in her teeth as she hesitated.

"You watch a bit?"

She nodded, looking away.

"You like it, baby?" His voice was soft and husky, a growl lurking just under the surface.

Marie nodded again, flushing deeper. "Yes and no. The idea, yeah. But it was Jubes and that was weird, so I closed my eyes after a few seconds... but I didn't leave." God, her mother was right. She was going to Hell.

Logan smiled at her loyalty to her friend — and at her naïveté. "Then what?"

"Then breathing. Little murmurs that weren't quite words. Wet kissin' noises. The creak of the leather as they shifted... and then he made this sound," she shuddered. The memory was powerful and she felt her body throb and her nipples pull up tightly as gooseflesh rose on her arms. She tried not to think about Logan possibly noticing her reaction.

"What kinda sound?"

"A soft grunt and a chuff of air. It was deep and sexy, but quiet. Almost involuntary. Raw. I felt that sound over my whole body. It made me instantly—" she stopped abruptly, shuddering again and looked away, embarrassed.

She didn't have to finish that thought. He knew what it had made her do because it had just happened again. The scent of her desire filled his head, tickling along his skin. She'd grown wetter, softer, more open. In response, he'd grown harder, thicker and more firm. There was a certain symmetry there that was difficult not to appreciate. Or act upon.
He was also aware it was the sound itself and not the man who'd made the sound that had affected her so deeply; definitely a good thing for Gambit's overall longevity. It made him wonder what kind of reaction she might have to a man she actually had feelings for. He tucked that thought away for later.

"Was she on top?"

Marie nodded, wondering how he knew that. "She was when I closed my eyes, yeah. Straddling his lap." Her voice was a whisper. "Why?"

He shrugged casually, but a dark fire was burning in his eyes. "That's the kinda sound a man can't help but make when a woman sits down on him and takes him in deep, darlin'.'

Hot and tight and creamy, a sudden plunge that envelops her lover so fast that he can't quite stop himself. A slick clasp that's so good, so much and so deep that it all but forces that sound out as he nudges her cervix and she tightens up all around him. It was different when a man was on top, controlling that first thrust into the slick, glossy heat. Sometimes he still made noise, but it wasn't usually torn from him in quite the same way.

All the air seemed to have been sucked from the room. Marie was suddenly sweaty and shaky, not quite sure where to rest her gaze. Logan didn't seem to have that problem. He was staring at her intently, those predatory eyes of his missing nothing.

"Oh..."

He smiled. "You get caught?"

"Yeah. I mean, I think Remy felt me rather than heard or saw me."

"What?"

"Jubes says she's pretty sure he's an empath, so I guess maybe he felt what that sound did to me." She'd wanted the floor to open up and swallow her. She kind of did now a little too.

"Hmph." Logan was no longer amused. He could feel a growl building. An empath? A lot of things suddenly made much more sense now. Fuck Remy for keeping that from the team. It had been a couple of years now and this was the first he'd heard of that particular gift. Slippery little motherfucker. Always had an angle and a different story for anyone foolish enough to ask.

"Yeah. I know, right? Then he said something incredibly dirty that I won't repeat. I thought he was talking to Jubes at first, but when I opened my eyes, he was looking at me. Right at me. But still kissin' on her. I don't think she even realized." Marie supposed he could have been talking to both of them. The erotic, crudely muttered patois could have applied to either of them, but the smug little leer that accompanied it said it was just for her.

"Fucker." It was more a growl and less a word.

"You're not gonna offer to go kick his ass?" she teased at the black look on his face.

His mouth twitched. "Don't need to. You're more than capable of that if you wanna." She flushed with pride. "Besides, I never announce an ass kickin'. Plausible deniability for you. No premeditation for me. And a black eye and a bruised jaw for any dirty bastards who should keep their fuckin' eyes and filthy mouths to themselves." He was only half kidding. He and the Cajun were going to have words. Definitely.
"I appreciate it, sugar, but if I thought he deserved it, I'd have given it to him with both barrels. It's on me too. I stayed when I should have bailed."

"Nah. S'on them. Goin' at it in public implies a certain invitation to look."

"Did it for you?" His eyes flicked up to hers. "With the barmaid?"

Well, now. He hadn't expected that. He shrugged. "I didn't mind it."

"Didn't mind it or liked it?"

He thought about that. "Both. Either." He had the sense she was testing him, feeling him out. Seeing how honest he would be with her. "I liked her eyes on me, yeah." She caught the subtle, smug lift of his lips. "She liked it real good too." Especially after he'd winked at her over his shoulder and positioned his body to invite a closer look. "I put on a good show." He knew women responded to that raw predatory power and he was not above using it to his advantage when it suited him.

She seemed to consider that.

"Is your offer still open?" He had to hear how fast her heart was beating.

Heat rolled through him. "Now which offer would that be, darlin'?" He had no intention of making this easy for her.

"You and me. Watching. Somewhere swanky."

Not a half bad attempt. She'd at least held his eyes.

"Not good enough. If you can't even say the words when it's just us alone, you'd probably be too shy to enjoy yourself there like you should," he said honestly. "It's okay if you are, kid. Ain't no shame in that. It ain't for everyone." He wanted it to be for her though. Wanted it so bad he could feel his blood burning.

"This place have a name?"

"The Red Door."

She leaned forward and put her hand on his forearm. Even through his flannel shirt she could feel the latent power in him and his unique musculature under her fingertips, warm and solid. She wet her lips and took a deep breath.

"Logan, sugar? I want you to take me to The Red Door. I want to sit with you and watch n'listen to people makin' each other feel good — really good, not just an act. I want to drink a little too much and laugh too loud and probably ask you a million embarrassing questions. I want to feel a little scared and a lot excited and maybe more than a little turned on. I want to see you a little turned on too." His eyes widened slightly at that. "I want to laugh and talk and just have fun, and I want to do all of that sitting next you, feeling safe and... normal, like any other person out for a good time, even if I'm blushing like crazy."

_Goddamn._

"I like it when ya blush." It was real. Honest. She didn't playact with him because she didn't yet know how. She was a world away from the jaded, cynical women he usually passed an evening with, and he knew there was only a small window of time where she'd be this way; standing at the edge of embracing her strength as a woman, on the precipice of sexuality and experience, not yet
fully aware of the power she would find there and its effect on men.

"So if any of that sounds good, I'd like to go with you... If you want."

"I want." And he did. More than ever, because damn if her little speech hadn't blown his hair back. He clearly needed to adjust his idea of 'not ready'.

Her eyes met his, her gaze unwavering. "Is that along the lines of what you expect from the night?"

"I don't expect anythin', darlin'. I just want ya to be comfortable and have a good time."

"Is- is that the real truth?" There was something in his eyes, something dark and glinting that hinted otherwise. She wasn't wrong to ask and that she recognized it made him feel a little better about making the offer to take her to begin with.

"I hope you can be open to it. Show a little skin. Feel easy about it. Take the night as it comes, seein' what lights your fire and what don't. I won't lie. I like gettin' to be the man sittin' with ya while you're figurin' those things out. There's somethin' there that really does it for me." His teeth flashed. "But then I've always been a possessive bastard when it comesta you." She'd felt like his from the moment she yelled out to him in that shitty bar in Laughlin City. "Watchin' somethin' hot. Gettin' hot. Watchin' you get hot. Drinkin' and laughin' and havin' a good time? All of that sounds real good, darlin'. You'll be safe with me, okay?"

"Okay."

"Just like that? You took longer decidin' what kinda beer you wanted tonight."

She laughed. "Just like that. I've been thinking about it for a while now."

"I guess it's unanimous then." There was a slow smile tugging at his lips.

"Definitely." Her eyes glittered with mischief as she looked him up and down. "Two thumbs and one third appendage way, way up, sugar."

"Jesus, kid," he muttered, running a hand through his hair with a rough laugh. "I don't mind ya lookin', but you don't call a man on it unless you're prepared for him to do the same."

"Really?"

"Really."

"I'll remember that... for next time," she said, giving him a saucy wink as she watched him adjust himself and sit back with another slice. She might have even waggled her eyebrows and blown him a cheeky kiss.

Marie was still in there, but the Rogue? The Rogue was definitely growing on him.

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Up next: Dust in the Wind. Logan and Marie share an intimate moment in the woods.
Marie had been actively avoiding Logan for days. It bothered him, partly because he couldn't work out why, and partly because it simply hurt. Busy was one thing, and she was usually pretty good about telling him when she needed space. This avoidance was something else.

He'd heard her in the forest this afternoon and he thought she was finally coming up to the house, but instead she gave his property a wide berth. That had him up and off the porch before he registered he was moving. He tracked her easily through the woods to a large clearing by the shore of the small lake. The sun was shining but the wind was fierce and cold, buffeting even his heavy body. The lake was choppy with white caps.

He saw her emerge from the tree line, wearing the long green coat he remembered from that first night in Laughlin City and carrying something in her hands. Her slight form was easily manipulated by the wild power of the wind. Each strong gust rocked her back a step but she stood resolute. She turned her face toward the lake and the force of the wind off the water blew her hood back. Her hair streamed behind her like a banner.

She jumped a foot when he silently appeared at her side.

"Geez, Logan! Warn a girl, wouldya?"

"Hey, kid. Whatcha doin'?"

A blush rose on her cheeks and she fidgeted, shifting uncomfortably from one foot to the other. "It's kinda personal."

That stung. He shrugged. "Okay, then." He turned to go, face hard and stoic, his body rigid with rejection. She'd never dismissed him like that before.

He was surprised when she caught his arm and he allowed her to pull him to a stop. "Hey, I didn't mean it like that. You can stay if you want." He was unconvinced. "I'd like you to, really. But if you do, you have to help and not just watch."

Well, now that caught his interest. "No hints?"

"Nope. Either you want to or you don't. Your call, cowboy."

He didn't even hesitate.

"I wanna."

Her expression was unreadable. Had he made the right choice? He wasn't sure. She didn't seem upset or angry at him and if she wasn't, then he was really confused about why she'd purposefully avoid him. Was this about things changing between them? The sex club? Something else?

Marie knelt at his feet and a flood of erotic images, charged by the memory of several overheard conversations, ran full-tilt through his brain. On her knees in front of him, head bowed, lip caught between her teeth... For one insane moment he wondered if she was kneeling to—


His jaw clenched and he drew in a slow breath, trying to calm the wild rush roaring under his skin as
he watched her put the small sack down and reach for the clasp.

Unaware of Logan's momentary struggle, Marie opened the bag she'd been carrying. She removed a handmade paper kite and unrolled it before handing him a thick spool of string with heavy duty handles. As she tucked the bag into her deep pocket, he noticed the arms of her coat were a good inch too short. Nothing stays the same forever.

"If you want to bail, now's the time, sugar."

Distracted by trying to wrangle his base thoughts into submission, he realized he hadn't taken the spool from her outstretched fingers. He hadn't been expecting this, but something about her was still not right and he wanted to see where this was going before he opened his mouth. Fuck only knew what might come out right now, anyway.

He took the spool in answer, watching her face while she searched his eyes before she finally shrugged and bent to prepare the kite for its inaugural flight. The kite was simple but beautifully crafted. She'd painted it with swirls of cobalt, violet and a deep crimson that made him think of blood. The colors were rich and vibrant but the overall impression was of sadness. Picking up the kite and shaking out the tail streamers, she took the spool from his hand.

"You ever done this?"

He shook his head. Not that he could remember.

"Okay then. You watch me this time. Next time it's you." She waited for his nod and he had the feeling if he hadn't, she would have sent him away. He paid attention to her hands and to what she was doing; where she rested the kite, how much slack she drew and how much distance she put between herself and the kite. He had no desire to look like a fool in front of her when his turn came.

She was suddenly in motion. It seemed like magic, like she'd only taken three or four quick steps and the kite was in the air, ten feet and then twenty. He could hear the hiss of the streamers and the snapping and popping of the kite as it was buffeted by the powerful wind. It came back down in a graceful swoop and she gathered it up and brought it to him.

"Now you."

Feeling a little foolish, he took the kite and spool from her. Walking a little distance away, he set the kite the way she had and pulled out what he hoped was an appropriate amount of slack as he walked backwards. She was nodding, so he must not be doing it too terribly wrong.

Now'r never, bub.

He moved. Quickly. The kite was up. He was elated for one brief moment and then it rocketed back to Earth. His second and third attempts were much the same. It made him feel uncomfortable and angry. He didn't like to fail at anything, especially in front of her.

She appeared at his shoulder, her hand on his arm, pulling his ear down to her lips even though they both knew she really didn't need to for him to hear her. "There's a moment, just when the wind catches it. It wants to go up. You're letting it go then. You're surrendering when you need to fight."

They both smiled. It might possibly be the only time in history that someone had ever uttered those words to him and meant them.

"The wind is wild, unpredictable. It wants to take the kite but it needs resistance. The wind needs something to pull against that's anchored. The kite needs both to fly."
Were they still talking about kites? He wasn't sure.

"Try it again. This time, when you feel the wind grab it, don't give it more slack. Let the wind fight
you for it. When you feel the pull, hold it tighter. When it starts to buck and judder, let the string slip
between your fingers. Just- just a little. The wind wants to work for it. Once it takes it, you'll know."

He nodded, feeling slightly uncomfortable because her husky directions were starting to make him
hard. She gave him an appraising look and he was thankful she couldn't read his mind.

"When you're ready..."

Set the kite. Wait for the grab. Don't give it up too easy. Feel the string slip. Not too much... He was
still just thankful the fucking thing hadn't crashed in the first few seconds when he felt a hard jerk on
his arm. The second jerk was even stronger and the string burned where it slipped quickly through
his fingers. It was up and rising fast. Elation roared hotly through him and the intensity of it surprised
him.

Marie was running to him, her face lit up like a Christmas tree. The wind had snatched away her
words, but he could clearly read her pleasure. She was breathless when she reached him. "More,
sugar, more! Don't stop!" The line burned through his hand again. Her words made a very different
sort of heat burn much lower. She stopped at his side as the kite went higher still.

"You're a good teacher, darlin'."

"Cooking and kites. At least there are a few things I do well." He was focused on the kite and missed
the flash of sadness in her face.

"Now what?"

"Now you play with it, cowboy."

He almost swallowed his tongue.

Her laughter was genuine. "Don't arch that eyebrow at me. You asked for this."

"Yes, ma'am."

She touched his arm through his sleeve, spreading out her fingers to feel the bunch and flex of his
muscles as the wind grabbed the kite.

"You've got it just right. Any higher and it gets hard for a beginner to control. The wind will let you
play with it, control it even, if you don't let it have too much head."

Jesus, she was burning him up.

"Watch." Leaving one hand on Logan's arm to feel the tension, she wrapped the other around the
string and pulled. The kite danced, swooping in a wide circle to the left. She pulled again, and the
kite made an arc through the sky in the opposite direction. The string thrummed as she let it go.
"Now you..."

He had no idea how she could make it move so easily. His strength was a hundred times that of hers
and the pull on his arms was tremendous. It must be finesse and not brute strength, otherwise the
wind would yank the kite from her fingers. He pulled and the kite moved, swirling and dancing. He
heard laughter and was surprised to find it was his own. Above the wind, he could hear the wild
whipping of the streamers and the bright snapping of the kite's body.
"Shit. S'gonna break."

"No it won't. The wind wants it but the kite's strong. It's made for this. They're just playin'." Marie shaded her eyes and looked up. "You're better at this part than I am. My arms get tired too quickly."

Pleasure rolled through him. Her approval always did that for him. Even in the small things.

"Here, kid. You have a turn." He handed it over and stood at her back as she took it with a quiet smile.

She moved closer and took his hand in hers.

"Touch it."

_Ah, God._ His mouth went dry.

Guiding his hand to the string so he could feel the movement, she let a good thirty or forty feet out and the kite rose quickly, the line humming with tension as the wind grabbed it, dragging it across the sky. It sang for her, swirling and spinning, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, sometimes in slow lazy circles.

Instead of staring at the kite, Logan dropped his hand and observed Marie's face, surprised to see envy there as she watched the wind move the kite and felt the pull in her arms. She was walking slowly now, away from the lake and toward the trees. Something about that particular spot must have called to her because she sat, not seeming to care the grass was wet and boggy. He sat too, curious.

"Up now," she said quietly and she relaxed her hold on the spool. It whirled wildly in her hands, making a sort of buzzing noise as the line paid out faster and faster. She slowed the wild careening as it neared the end, just a few circles of string left, looped and tied to the spool with a firm knot. "It'll snap now if you're not careful." He watched as she let the last few turns out slowly until it was just an empty spool with the string wrapped twice and tied securely with a strong knot. "Here... feel it now."

She passed back the spool. He was surprised by the pull. It was more powerful now, wilder with less quick lateral movements.

"S'stronger," he said quietly. It felt good. Wild. She'd left her hands on his arms to share the sensation and he liked that, too.

That made her smile. "It sure is."

"How much line is that?" He could barely see the kite now as it danced along the edge of the clouds.

"Just a short one today. Quarter of a mile. At the beach you can do half a mile, easy."

A chuff of air left his chest. "Gonna take you an hour to reel it in."

"I'm not worried." She shrugged. "This is the best part. Feel it. The wind has it completely now. Touching it all over. Rough and gentle with no rules or constraints. Pushing it higher, making it do what it wants the kite to do, letting the kite just take it all, because that's what it's been built for. The wind's so wild up there. Strong and timeless. There's no control now. Only surrender. Just flight and life and freedom. It's beautiful." There were tears in her eyes.

He had the sense, again, that she wasn't talking about kites anymore. Not at all. That maybe not a single word of what she'd said to him this afternoon had been about kites. And he nodded, because his throat was suddenly tight.
She reached into her coat. A sudden flash of silver caught his attention and his eyes widened as she palmed a butterfly knife and deftly opened it with a quick flick of her wrist. Who the fuck had taught her to do that? Before he could even register what she was doing, she reached up and cut the string.

"Wait!"

She just shook her head, watching as the small dark speck soared violently upwards and disappeared into the clouds. He stared at her, first in shock and then with compassion. Her eyes slipped shut. Tears leaked under her lashes. The deep look of longing on her upturned face was painful to see and he understood in that moment why this was private for her. Touch and freedom lay at the heart of it. They gave rise to desire and longing and release and finally catharsis as she let it go. That's why the painting on the kite evoked sadness. It was a physical act that felt good, euphoric and pleasurable at first and then symbolic at the end, cutting ties, the loss of hope and the quiet, violent longing for touch.

She wanted to be free.

Oh, darlin'. "Keep your eyes closed, huh?"

She nodded, still under his fingertips as she felt him brush the tears from her cheeks with his thumbs. A brief touch. Too quick for her skin to hurt him. He hugged her close for long moments and then she could feel his hands on her shoulders and his breath, warm in her ear.

"Come and find me up at the house when you're done here."

She nodded again, thankful he could read her desire for space. Since she'd manifested, she had given herself this gift every February when the others were exchanging flowers and candy. And kisses. With the passage of time, this ritual became more important as her childish desire for a boyfriend's kisses became a woman's deeper longing for a lover of her own.

Marie wasn't sure how she felt about sharing the familiar ritual with Logan. She'd enjoyed it, watching his pleasure and sharing her own. It wasn't a traditional exchange, but was all she had. It made her melancholy. She wanted more and was very aware it was unlikely to happen. In another way, it made her feel... not happy, exactly, but content. She had a very deep connection with a person she loved very much. It wasn't sexual or romantic, but she'd shared something special with him today, something personal and intimate, and that felt good.

Today it was enough. Someday, though, someday very soon this strange limbo they existed in wasn't going to be enough and she was afraid of what she might find on the other side. Today had been a hard day, good but difficult. Fear outweighed sadness. Fear and her quiet enjoyment of his pleasure.

The wind was cutting through her and the idea of warming herself by Logan's fire was enough to push her to her feet. Her eyes opened. Something silver glittered against her coat. Surprised, she looked down, following the delicate chain around her neck to the pendant hanging against her chest. When had he put that there? A flawless piece of frosty red sea glass rested against her heart, glowing brilliantly in the late afternoon sun. It was simple and beautiful and Marie realized that Logan too had wanted to mark the passing of this day in his own gruff way. No words. No big gestures. Just a kite, a little piece of sea glass, and the pleasure of a shared afternoon.

It was the best Valentine's Day she'd ever had.
Up next: **Wind of Change**. Nothing stays the same forever. The Rogue reminds the Wolverine that he owes her a night at The Red Door, and she's in the mood to collect...
Logan saw her boots first. Rolling over, he looked up at Marie from the floor of the garage, his hands busy inside the bike's engine. He took a moment to enjoy the view; pretty wrap dress, cropped leather jacket, white scarf shot through with silver, her hair up in a messy bun and gloved fingers wrapped around a white paper cup that smelled of coffee and chocolate. She looked good and smelled better, and it had nothing to do with the steaming cup in her hand.

"Hey, kid."

Marie couldn't help but smile at him. There was a beer near his elbow, three empties on the workbench and he had a smear of grease above his left eyebrow and an expression that said he there was no place else he'd rather be.

"Whatcha doing?"

His brow arched. "Fishin'."

She giggled at his teasing and toed him with her boot before bending at the knees to crouch down next to him. She peered at the engine. "Spark plug?"

The luscious scent got stronger and his concentration shattered. He dropped the tool and cursed as he grated the skin off one knuckle.

"Shit!" Logan sucked at it as it healed, frowning as the scent and taste of blood and engine grease mingled with the heady scent of the woman crouched near his head. Christ, she smelled good.

"Well, you've bled on it, so at least it will let you fix it properly now."

He cracked a smile. "Who taughtya that?"

"Scott."

"He ain't wrong."

It was probably one of the nicest things he'd ever said about Scott and it chased away the sad smile from her face. She and Scott had grown closer after Jean's death and she still felt his loss keenly.

Logan pushed himself to his feet and grabbed a rag to wipe his hands. Marie straightened, brushing at her skirt before she half leaned, half sat against his bike. He wondered, with a touch of wry amusement, if she had any idea how proprietary that gesture was. You didn't touch a man's bike like that unless you belonged to him too.

Hell, maybe some part of her did know. She met his eyes and stroked the glossy tank with an appreciative fingertip; a long, slow glide up over the swell and down the sleek side, rimming the gas cap for good measure. Tight maddening circles that drew a rough, dirty growl from him. She may as well have been stroking him. It had the same result. His mouth actually watered. The desire to put his hands on her and drag her to him rose, sharp and hot. She stretched out her legs, crossing her ankles before taking another sip of coffee and looking up at him from under her lashes.

She seemed like a woman with something on her mind.

Fair enough. He had a few things on his mind, too.
He should have taken a step back, grabbed that beer and put some distance between them, but he'd never been one to listen to the voice of reason. Especially not with that scent in the air between them. He moved closer instead.

"What's up, darlin'? This about the dinner you owe me tomorrow? I was thinkin' pot roast. Maybe with that real good bread you make. The sweet one. Dessert too. You know how to make chess pie?" It was by far the easier of two cravings to discuss.

"Are you ever not hungry?"

"Nope. Gotta big appetite." Understatement of the century. She was lighting all sorts of fires in him today. The beast within was ravenous, though it wasn't the thought filling his belly that made hunger burn brightly from behind his eyes. He looked but said nothing. That wasn't a conversation either of them were ready for.

"Well, no, this isn't about dinner. Yes, I'll make the pot roast and the pao doce. And yes, anyone who knows all the words to Dixie can make a chess pie, sugar." She winked at him. "But I was thinking maybe baked Alaska. I've always wanted to try that."

"Next time."

Marie rolled her eyes, aware there would more than likely be several next times. She couldn't always figure out how he was doing it, but he typically seemed either to win her markers outright or to acquire them from the person who had. He'd spent one afternoon building a new greenhouse for 'Ro to earn back the marker she'd won. She'd lost three to Hank that he'd somehow reclaimed and Jubilee had told her Logan had straight-up bribed her for the marker she'd won.

In the interest of self-preservation, Bobby had thrown his down on Logan's pile of chips and all but fled from the table directly following their last game. Honestly, the man was a menace. But it was kind of sweet that he liked her cooking enough to bother. He was too proud to ask her to cook for him and too damn stubborn to accept her charity, but he had no problem redeeming a marker. He didn't like to be in anyone's debt. Even hers.

"Whatcha got on deck, darlin'?" She had that look that said she wanted to talk and she better get to it quickly. He didn't have much patience left. Not today.

"I was wondering..." Her cheeks got pink. It was a good look on her. That long slim neck and full red pout were definitely doing it for him, too. "The Red Door, sugar. You owe me a date."

"I do." He'd been waiting for her to ask, wanting to be sure she was sober and completely aware of what she was asking of him.

"Well, I'm in the mood to collect."

That he knew all too well. It was stamped all over her right now, in the way she looked and smelled, in the sinuous way she moved, even in the way she held herself. And then there was the way she'd planted herself on his bike, shifting and stroking and— Fuck.

"Soon."

"When?"

"Next weekend work for you, baby?" He gave her a dirty little leer just to watch her laugh.

"What's wrong with this weekend? I know you don't have any plans beyond pot roast, chess pie and
tiling the kitchen backsplash." He'd somehow roped her into helping with that too.

Logan shook his head. "Can't."

"Can't or won't?"

"Both."

"You change your mind?"

"Hell, no." He had the opposite problem. He wanted it a little too much right now. Taking Marie to a sex club was probably going to stretch his control pretty thin as it was. There was no way he could take her there smelling as good as she smelled right now. That was hard enough without the environment of a sex club amping things up.

It was more than chemistry, it was biology. The scent tickled his brain, made him want to bite her, to rut and thrust and feel her open and receptive under his body while he filled her to overflowing with rivers of come. He wanted her scent all over him and he wanted to overlay it with his own.

There were subtle changes in her behavior too. She was more confident, more open and flirtatious. Her body was looser, her drawl a little thicker, her touches lingered and were more sensual. Men responded to it, it wasn't just him, although he felt it more keenly than most.

"What is it then?"

"Marie—"

"The truth, straight up. That's our deal, right?"

"It is, yeah." His face softened slightly. "S'just this one ain't real pretty. Maybe you could just let me have this one." His voice was low and husky now, quiet but not gentle.

"Like you just let me have one when I asked you to take me to the club that first time?" He hadn't cut her an inch of slack. "I don't think so, sunshine. If we're gonna go to a place like that together, we've got to be straight with each other."

"You might not like whatcha hear. Fair warnin'."

"I'll take my chances."

Finally he just shrugged. "You know how I am."

"Stoic, surly and prone to growling and clawin' things when you're pissed?"

He chuckled. She was not wrong. "My senses. How they are."

Marie nodded. She remembered. He'd poured himself into her twice, and when it was over, everything had just been... more. Like a dial turned up past the comfort zone. The lights were too bright and sounds too loud. She could feel the rough rasp of her clothes against her skin, every little nerve ending raw and wild. Scents and tastes had overwhelmed her. It was a cacophony of the senses; a wild riot skittering over her skin and under it. It had taken some getting used to. He rarely said anything about it, and sometimes she forgot that's how it was for him all the time. "I remember," she said softly.

The water under that bridge was deep and swift. He acknowledged it with a nod.
"I just needta wait a few days. You smell too good right now."

"Good?" Marie wrinkled up her nose. "I could take a shower," she teased.

"Wouldn't help."


"Fertile." That was all the explanation that was needed.

Oh, God.

Her teasing smile faded and she blushed to the roots of her hair. "Um. Okay."

"Sorry," he said, meaning it. It embarrassed him. Even now. All of it, the healing. The senses. The strength. The claws. He didn't like talking about it. Especially not this aspect, which made him feel more like an animal than the claws ever did.

"Me too. I didn't realize I made you uncomfortable. You've known me for years. Why didn't you say something sooner?" The thought that she'd inflicted that on him a dozen times a year for half a decade made her feel awful.

"Hey, it ain't like that. It ain't a bad thing. S'natural. It's not usually a big deal. You always smell good to me, kid." His expression softened. "Even when you were young and scared in a dive bar, and in need of a shower and some clean clothes."

"Logan!"

"Heh. It ain't gonna get you out of dinner tomorrow, either. I want that pie."

"If you're sure."

"It's nothin'. Really. Just makes me- Wanna follow my nose? Hot? Feel like I'm splittin' outta my skin? "A little more possessive, and you know that ain't easy for me when it comestarted you." He'd never made any bones about that fact. Something in him had recognized her as his from the moment she'd yelled out in that bar in Laughlin City.

"It's all right. I get it."

He wasn't sure she did. Not really. "I wanna take you. I do. It just ain't a good idea to mix that possessive streak with drinkin' and watchin' somethin' that'll make our blood run hot in a crowd. That's all." Logan was impressed with himself. That came out sounding a whole lot better than it felt inside; a wild crimson swirl of something that was becoming increasingly difficult to keep chained, scent or no.

Her eyes danced. "I suppose it would probably be best if the evening didn't end with someone getting impaled."

Out of the mouths of babes.

"Or clawed," she added mischievously.

Jesus. That Rogue really was going to be the death of him.
Up next: Hungry Like the Wolf. The Wolverine and the Rogue prepare for a night at The Red Door...
Hungry Like the Wolf

Author's note: Sorry for the posting delay. I have no excuse! I freely admit blowing off the final vetting of this chapter for a hot date with a girlfriend I hadn't seen in forever. Hey, the dessert was dead sexy! That counts as hot, right? Heh. (Chocolate custard with rivers of warm fudge for those who wanna know.) We talked about work and school and men and sex and writing… Damn good evening, in my book. Onward!

Marie smiled as she made her way to Logan's door, passing his truck and the bike on her way up the gravel drive. Both were shiny and clean and she felt a start of warmth. Her best friend's father had once told her to never go on a first date with a man who wouldn't clean up for her or who didn't wash his vehicle first. She was thankful for whatever lingering sense of old-fashioned chivalry prompted Logan to make the effort. They both knew it wasn't a real date, but it still made her feel good. Special.

There was an unexpected knock at his door. Logan jerked it open and growled, "What?" before he saw who was standing there. She was early. Or maybe she'd changed her mind about going? She was dressed in jeans and a hoodie and had a bag slung over her shoulder. In her hand was a feather she must have found on the walk over. She was twirling it absently in her fingers. It fell forgotten into the wind at the look on Logan's face.

"Um..." Marie's eyes widened at the tone of his voice and at the view. He was shirtless, in jeans with damp hair and he had shaving cream on his face. His voice had been impersonal and sharp, a tone he normally reserved for other people. Never her.

"Heh. Sorry, darlin'. Didn't realize it was you. Can only smell the shavin' cream." He toed the door open with his bare foot in invitation and disappeared back inside. "You're early." More than an hour. He was supposed to pick her up at the mansion at seven. His brow arched as he walked back into the bathroom and called, "What's with the bag? It ain't a sleepover."

Marie giggled. "I was kinda hoping to get ready here. Jubes' radar is up and she's way too interested in what I'm wearing and where I'm going tonight. I sorta wanted to avoid the third degree about all of that."

Jubilee was flighty, but she could be remarkably astute when she chose to apply herself. It didn't help that Remy was on a pick-up with Hank tonight. There was nothing to distract Jubes, and under the circumstances, being the subject of her intense focus was a little disconcerting. Especially when what Marie wanted was to fly under the radar as quietly and as covertly as possible.

"Suit yourself. Be done in a minute." He was standing in front of the bathroom mirror, running a razor under the water with one hand and spreading the shaving cream along his chin and neck with the other.

"Can- can I watch?"

His gaze swung to hers, trying to work her out. Prurience or something else? Both?

"I used to watch my dad shave on the weekends when I was a little girl. I miss it. One of the few good memories, you know?" Her eyes sparkled. "Plus, now I think it's just sexy as hell."

Both, then.
He nodded. "Sure, kid." He couldn't recall sharing this intimacy with anyone in the last twenty years. It was strange, in some ways more personal than sex. The intimate care of his body. It was a little uncomfortable, but he liked it. He liked feeling her eyes on him. And he liked that she wanted to look probably more than he should.

Marie dropped her bag and flopped down on his sleeping pallet, smiling at the new black t-shirt still in the plastic packaging next to his belt and socks before her gaze wandered back to him. She watched, entranced by this private act of a stoic man who so rarely gave up those pieces of himself. His head tilting this way and that. The glide of the razor on the corded muscles in his neck. The way his throat worked when he swallowed. His movements were swift and efficient, the strokes smooth and practiced.

It was over too soon.

He didn't actually shave all that much, just a little around his mouth, over his chin, and along his neck. He rinsed his face and rubbed a towel over his neck and chest, preening for her just a bit. He knew what his body did to women and he wasn't above using it to his advantage.

"Mmm..."

Throwing down the towel, he left the bathroom. "So, I pass muster then?"

Marie looked up at him from the bed as he threaded his belt through the loops of his jeans. The act was strangely hypnotic and she felt a strange and almost overwhelming compulsion to sink to her knees in front of him. She cleared her throat with a grin. "You definitely have my vote for the King of Sparta, sugar."

He chuckled. "You say some shit, you know?"

"Yep." She grinned at him.

Logan rubbed a hand over his mouth and chin. "Don't know why I bother." Except they both knew why he'd bothered tonight. "The five o'clock shadow will probably be back before we even leave."

"It suits you." She rose up on her knees, the desire to stroke a fingertip over his freshly bare chin was strong.

He saw her check the impulse and moved closer. "Go ahead if you wanna. You won't hurt me."

Her touch was hesistant, just the brush of the pads of her fingers over his lips and chin. She smiled, not because of the smooth, soft skin under her fingertips, but because she'd managed the touch without hurting him. She did it again, this time allowing herself a little more pressure and letting her fingers trail down his neck before pulling away.

Logan caught her covered arm but didn't move away. "Tickles," he grunted.

"You're ticklish?"

"Ah, no." Shit. "No I ain't." Much.

"You are!" The tips of his ears turned red and Marie was completely charmed.

He growled at her and was surprised when she threw back her head and laughed.

"You know that doesn't work on me, right?" At least not the way he probably intended.
"Jesus. Get goin' already." He sat down to put on his socks and boots. "Unless you were thinkin' of lettin' me watch you shave?" The deadpan delivery was perfect, but she caught the little twitch of his lips.

Marie rolled her eyes at him, grabbing her bag and heading for the small bathroom. "In your dreams, cowboy."

"Mmph." Wasn't that the damned truth?

Logan smiled at the closed bathroom door and then winced at the sound of Marie singing - badly - in his shower as he finished dressing. Lord love her, but that girl couldn't carry a tune worth a damn. He was finished and ready to go before she'd even turned the water off. Grabbing a beer, he sat down to wait, flicking through the channels absently as the sun began to set.

It felt strange having her here like this. Their energy was different than it had ever been before, though he was aware part of it probably had to do with his anticipation of the evening. It was startling to realize he was enjoying the wait and the knowledge she was grooming herself under his roof, taking care with her appearance and her attire for him tonight, much the same as he'd done for her. His fingers brushed over his mouth and chin as he thought about her wonder at the small change in his own appearance. He lit a cigar and sat back, soaking in the strange sensation.

In all the years he could remember, he'd never waited on a good woman to get ready for a nice evening out, and yet the quiet satisfaction he took from it wasn't wholly unfamiliar. Maybe he'd been lucky enough in the years he'd lost to have a woman worth waiting for like he was waiting for Marie tonight. He hoped so.

Normally he didn't pay much attention to her clothes, but tonight he wondered what she'd wear. He'd specifically not said anything about it because he was curious to see what choice she'd make all on her own. Demure? Sexy? Slutty? Covered from head to toe? A bit of skin? He hoped she wouldn't do that thing some women did with their makeup where they made their eyes black and dark and painted their lips the same shade as their skin. Marie had gorgeous full lips and he preferred them rose pink and wet, like she'd just been kissed good and hard.

Tonight he let his mind wander to places that he'd steered clear of for years. It wasn't the first time she'd used his shower, but it was the first time he allowed himself the sensual pleasure of listening in to every breath and sigh and splash and letting it fuel a fantasy without guilt or shame coloring the experience.

Hard nipples under a warm spray. The scent of his soap on her skin. Iridescent bubbles following the path of least resistance and inviting his hands and mouth to follow. His forehead on her breastbone. Her fingers in his hair, holding him to her breast. It didn't feel like any sex he could ever remember wanting and he had no idea what that meant.

Steam and scent became a pleasurable friction as slow and sweet gave way to something with a sharper edge. Her lip in his teeth. A feminine grunt as he pushed inside in one unforgiving stroke. All in. His growl at the hand on his ass, pulling him deeper. Her legs open to him. Her body, too. Sweet and slippery; a glide and viscosity a world away from the hot cascade of water slicking them both. Hands pinned to the wall and the cold tile at her back… and then her front. And then laughter because he was too big and she was too damn petite to make that work smoothly on the first try.

Later, a firm hand on her jaw. The crash of their bodies and a hard relentless press. Not playful now. Urgent and needy. Her thighs around his hips again and her heel digging into his ass as he pounded her against the wall until they both came. His hand between her legs after. Not to soothe. To feel what he'd done. Proof it hadn't been just another dream.
Logan wondered if Marie had any idea how many times he'd stood there in that same, small enclosed space; head bent with one hand resting on the wall and the other between his legs as thoughts of her played behind his closed eyes while the hot spray beat against his broad back. Sometimes it was just that. Just longing and a simple touch. Sometimes it was a rough, wild slide through a clenched fist that ended in grunts broken by a chain of filthy words and the heavy spatter of semen on the shower floor.

Was she thinking about him now as her small, white hands slid over her body and between her legs? Her admission that she wanted to see him aroused tonight by what they saw together certainly suggested that possibility. The stories she'd written seemed to back that idea up in a way that made him want to forget about what was good and right and sink into the Wolverine's unapologetic animal nature. No rules. No boundaries. No guilt. Just instinct. And blissful, primal freedom.

Christ. He didn't even know what to make of that. It was terrifying. And ruthlessly compelling.

She was here, now, naked and vulnerable. He'd been naked behind that same door only minutes ago. It amused him in a perversely macabre sort of way. They seemed to always be just slightly out of step. Right from the beginning. Maybe what she wanted from him tonight would change that a little. The anticipation had him tightly wound.

Logan got up, built a fire for later and poured himself a drink. It was only half past six, but he was restless and a little on edge. He pocketed his keys and dug his wallet from his jeans, checking to be sure he had enough cash for the evening. He knew he did. He'd checked earlier, but it gave his hands something to do.

The condoms he'd put in his jacket pocket weighed heavily on his mind. It had just been automatic at first. Wallet. Lighter. Cigar. Phone. Condoms. Only, tonight promised to be anything but usual. He knew he shouldn't have done that, but he couldn't make himself take them out either. Jesus, he was really fucked in the head. He was aware he shouldn't be doing any of this and yet he knew he wasn't going to stop. He was looking forward to tonight and whatever it brought for them. He'd promised to keep her safe. Beyond that was anyone's guess.

The soft click of the bathroom door was barely audible, except if one was listening for that specific sound among all others. She stepped out, still in the process of finishing the final details. His eyes flicked to her and he felt the floor fall away.

Simple. Understated. And hot as fuck.

Her hair was up, smoothed back into a high ponytail. Supple black suede pants molded themselves to her lithe frame. She'd topped them with a satin corset in a verdant shamrock green. He'd never seen her wear anything that revealed so much of her skin before. It laced up the back and the black ties nipped in her slender waist, hanging enticingly and drawing his eye to the sweet curve of her ass. Her boots were black and sexy; not platform fuck-me heels, still stylish but low enough that she could fight in them if she had to.

That was his girl right there. Hot as hell and ready to throw down if it came to that. She hadn't noticed him looking yet because her attention was on smoothing a long, black opera glove up her arm. Those were his favorites, soft and silky. One arm was still milky white and naked and he realized he found the sight more exciting than the most graphic hardcore images. It was that juxtaposition that finally jarred him into action.

Crushing out the cigar, he rose to his feet, staring raptly as she put on the other glove and meticulously stroked the fit right. Watching her stroke her skin like that was maddening. There was something very erotic about watching her put on those satiny gloves. She turned to face him. Face
made up like a vintage pinup girl; cat eye liner and red lips, wet and dewy. He felt his mouth curve into a smile.

He wanted to kiss her. To turn her in his arms and put his mouth on that gorgeous alabaster flesh; a strong bite right there at the nape of her neck. His brain, his every instinct, was screaming at him to mark her. He crushed that down and said instead, "You look real beautiful, darlin'." He grinned wider. "Hot as hell, too."

She flushed with pleasure. "Thanks, sugar. You like?" She twirled slowly for his inspection. "I wasn't sure if it was right..." The only thing really out of her comfort zone was the new corset. The rest of the clothes were from her closet.

"It's right." Much, much too right. As for the club, anything goes, but she'd managed to choose something tailored to his specific tastes. He wondered if she'd done that on purpose or if it had merely been coincidence. "I like it real good," his voice was low and smoky. "I'm proud to have ya on my arm, darlin'." Proud and damn lucky.

Her smile was warm and genuine, full of real affection and he felt it down to his soles.

"You look nice too." He still looked like himself, but he was wearing a new shirt and his good boots. He'd taken the time to clean them up nicely, and paired with a black button down and his favorite leather jacket, he had her pulse jumping.

"Thanks." He couldn't seem to take his eyes from her, either.

"Of course, I like you best barefoot in jeans and nothing else but that endearing swagger, but I'll manage somehow."

"Hmph." Logan snorted, unsure if she was truly teasing, but he was amused and pleased to see Rogue peeking through. He was beginning to miss her now when she was quiet too long.

"It's not too much skin?" And that was Marie, back again.

"S'fine, darlin'. You don't gotta worry."

"If you're sure."

"Baby, you know me. I don't do subtle. If it wasn't fine, you'd sure as hell know it."

Her full-throated laugh was silvery and sensual. "I suppose you're right."

"Generally am."

"Oh!" she said, dashing back to the bathroom. Her heels clicked on the floor. The feminine sound made him smile. She was back a moment later. "I almost forgot."

"In her hands was a black satin ribbon on which she'd strung the sea glass pendant he'd given her. "Could you put this on for me? It's too hard with the gloves." Satin on satin on alabaster. His jaw clenched.

Nodding, he took it from her. "Sure, kid."

She stepped close and turned to put her back to him, brushing the long silky fall of her ponytail aside to bare her slim neck for him.

He very nearly bit her. It was a close thing. He couldn't keep the growl of approval back and didn't even try. It rumbled low and deep as he tightened the satin around her throat. Brushing a thumb
down her delicate nape, he stepped away before he did something he couldn't take back. This was her night and he wasn't about to fuck it up before they'd even walked out the door.

The effect was pitch perfect. It wasn't quite a collar, but it was suggestive enough to hit a few of his major triggers. His gift hung in the delicate hollow of her throat and it appeased something in him to see it there, marking her as his.

He cleared his throat. "You ready?"

"Yeah, I just need my coat."

She turned from him to get it and he took a moment to enjoy the view. He was surprised to realize that her body had changed. When he'd seen her naked in the bath he'd been looking at the parts rather than the whole. He saw it clearly now. Her baby fat was gone, her face more slender and angular. Her body was leaner, more sinuous and leggy. Her breasts were a little smaller. She had a fighter's build now, toned and strong. Even the way she moved was different, confident and graceful.

Her mutation wasn't the only thing that made her dangerous. She'd put in a lot of hard hours training between the time she'd taken the Cure and the time her mutation reasserted itself. She wasn't that scared kid anymore. Somewhere along the line she'd slipped from a girl to a woman and he'd missed it. It was profoundly disturbing.

He followed her, helping her into her coat. It was the first time he'd ever done that and it made her blush. The shearling aviator jacket had been a gift from him two birthdays back. It was the perfect complement to her outfit, especially after she wound a sheer green scarf around her neck and looked up at him through her lashes.

Sweet Christ, she was sex and danger and innocence wrapped in leather and smiling at him with excitement shining in her eyes.

He was so fucked.

Up next: Rebel Yell. In the midnight hour, she cried, "More, more, more!"
Logan opened the door of the truck for Marie. It was the first time he'd ever done that in all their years together, and like that moment when he'd first helped her into her coat, the change from their usual routine made her blush. Something in him had switched over. It made her feel strange and unsure, and very aware these little changes were likely indicative of a much deeper shift. Everything was different now.

And yet, everything was still very much the same, too. He was still himself, just... more.

She knew this night would change things between them. There were probably going to be repercussions that she hadn't even considered, and she'd been thinking about this a lot. Even being with him in the cab felt odd. Not quite right; like some vestige of the past that didn't quite strike the right note anymore.

"Logan?"

"Yeah, kid?" He slid into the driver's seat and closed the door, reaching for his keys.

"This doesn't feel right."

Surprise followed by intense disappointment flashed across his face before he could school it into stoic impassivity. "S'ok, darlin'. You're in charge tonight. Nothin's gonna happen that you ain't ready for. We can just go to dinner instead if you wanna." It hurt more than he thought it would and that surprised him. He'd hadn't realized how important an adult evening with her had been to him until it had been ripped away.

"No. Not that. I still wanna go."

"Then what?"

"I just meant the truck feels... wrong somehow? It's a night of firsts, isn't it? I was thinking maybe the bike instead?" He was mildly annoyed with her for phrasing that so poorly now that he knew what she was really after.

"Oh?" His brow arched at that idea, however.

A ride on the bike with him fell into the same category as watching him fight always had; a flat denial and a hard look that said there would be no further discussion.

"I figured I might as well swing for the fence since I'm already on the field tonight."

She'd surprised him again. He'd been looking forward to talking to her on the way there. Something more suggestive and openly sexual than their usual conversations. A warm-up for tonight and the things they'd see and experience together. He was sure she'd have questions. Probably a lot of really probative ones knowing her. She seemed to live to find the chinks in his armor. He had a few of his own questions, too. The bike wasn't really conducive to talking, though he wasn't sure that would really matter. He didn't imagine he'd be too articulate with her hands on his body and her thighs wrapped around his hips.

"Go big or go home, huh?" How like her to inadvertently land on the biggest chink of all.

"Exactly."
"Gonna be cold later." It was nice now. The temperature had been on the upswing this week, pushing into the mid sixties during the day but falling to the low forties in the evening. More snow was coming next week. Winter wasn't quite finished with them.

She was surprised he hadn't said no outright. "You'll live." He chuckled at her sass. "And I'll take my chances."

He looked into her eyes, searching. Finally he just shrugged. "If you wanna." She was right. It did feel wrong. Too small somehow in a way that wasn't at all about the physical space.

Marie was elated for a moment before something else occurred to her. "Do you? Want to, I mean." She put her hand on his arm. "The truth now, sugar."

He nodded.

Letting out a deep breath, he turned to face her. "Yeah, I do. For a while now." To be frank, there had never been a time when he didn't want that. But wanting something and it being okay to have it were two entirely different things.

Marie blushed when he got out, walked around and opened the door of the truck for her. He'd never let her see that part of him before. To be honest, she wasn't sure he even knew that part of him was still in there. That's definitely not how he'd been in her head. There were women. Lots of them. But he didn't go on dates.

It was awkward. She stood by the bike, unsure what to do, feeling a bit like a scared rabbit chased down by a predator, heart slamming, frozen, and not quite sure what move to make next. "So how do we...?"

He looked her up and down, head tilted. "First, tuck your scarf inside your jacket so it doesn't get caught in the back wheel and kill ya." She complied with a sheepish, apologetic smile. "Second," he swung his leg over and the bike dipped under his considerable weight. It made her wonder what it would be like to be pinned under his powerful body. What would a thrust with that kind of weight behind it feel like? She shivered under his intense gaze that seemed to know everything and miss nothing. "You get on and-"

"Wait. You're not gonna try to make me wear a helmet?"

"I'm not your your father." He shrugged. "Last I checked, you could vote and drink so that decision's yours, ain't it?" Her eyes were very wide now. "If you don't see yourself as an adult, how is anyone else supposedta?"

Wow. Okay. You could have knocked her over with a feather. Every time she thought she'd found her footing with him, the sand shifted under her again. She hadn't meant it quite the way he'd taken it. She'd been more curious why his usual assertive protectiveness hadn't been more vocal, but there was a kernel of truth in what he was saying.

"I- I don't want to wear one."

"Reason? And it better not be 'cause you don't wanna mess up your hair."

"Not that I have to answer to you..." She smiled, thinking. "But I zip myself into the leather pretty regularly. We do some pretty hairy stuff. People, scary people with powers, try to hurt us, really hurt us all the time and nobody makes me wear a helmet for that. Correct me if I'm wrong, but that seems like a whole lot more dangerous than a short ride into the city, sugar."
"Fair enough. And you ain't wrong." As long as she'd reasoned it out, he had no complaints either way. "And we both know I'd just heal ya if it cameta that."

"I know," she said softly. "But I'm not reckless with myself just because of that, you know? I don't think of you like some kind of safety net."

"You should," he said seriously. That's what they were to each other. A safe place to fall. Emotionally. Physically. Pretty much everything but sexually. Logan wondered if that part would ever change. He knew there was a time she'd wanted it to. He wasn't sure anymore, despite the conversations he'd overheard in the last few months. A tidal wave had obliterated that bridge a long time ago.

They were close now; a deep relationship that defied explanation. What would happen if they fucked with that dynamic too much? Their connection was intense — volatile and messy even without sex. There was a very real chance they could both lose what little peace they'd found in this life. The condoms felt heavy in his pocket, but it didn't change his desire to push the boundaries with her a little. They couldn't stay in this limbo too much longer. It was hurting them both.

"I love that you want to. I just hate what it costs you to do it."

"Paid it gladly, both times. I would again, as many times as you needed, kid."

"I know. But I don't want to be that."

"Be what?"

"Just another person who takes things from you."

Something warm flared in his chest. "No chance of that." Not now, and not in the larger sense as well. He was taking someone barely legal to a sex club and she thought she was the one taking and not giving? That was just so Marie. She filled him up with good things all the time.

"I'm taking plenty tonight," she pointed out. "First your bathroom, and now a bike ride, and let's not forget the rest of the evening while we're adding things up."

"Plannin' on takin' a little more, huh?" The idea pleased him immensely.

"Oh yeah." Her expression was somewhere between cocksure bravado and acute embarrassment.

He smiled darkly. "Darlin', you might be the one callin' the shots tonight, but it ain't just for you. I want it, too. For me." He let her make of that what she would. He had no plans to elaborate.

"Oh." Her eyebrows were practically at her hairline.

Heh. Good.

"So," he cleared his throat. "That sweet little ass a'yours goes here." He patted the seat behind him. "Feet go there." He indicated to the pegs, grunting as she slipped behind him. "Hands around my middle. High or low, up to you. As long as you keep 'em north of the Indian, we're fine." That damned buckle! She rolled her eyes at his teasing but he didn't miss how her breath had caught. "You might wanna tuck 'em up under my jacket so they don't freeze once we get goin'."

He felt her small hands move up his sides and slip under his jacket experimentally. "You mean right here?" she squeezed his sides softly and felt him shudder. His body was so warm and solid under her hands; thick bands of muscle, full of tension. "Right on this I'm-not-at-all ticklish skin, sugar?" She
was itching to wiggle her fingers like crazy, but torturing him wasn't likely to endear herself to him and she didn't want this first ride to also be her last. She'd behave. For now.

"Marie." It was a warning that had a little edge to it.

"Yes, sir." She had no idea why those words elicited another shudder, but it shook his powerful frame. "Now what?"

He sat up, reaching back with his hands to pull her into him before his palms slipped down her thighs, pressing her legs into his and against the bike's lean lines. "You ever ridden a horse?"

"Y-yeah. Um, yes." *Sweet baby Jesus.* She was touching a whole lot of him. That had been the general idea, but she was suddenly understanding why they'd never done this before. It was overwhelming. And really, really hard to keep in the flirt-y-but-friends realm. Logan was between her thighs. She could feel his solid heat. He felt and smelled so good. It made her want to push her face against his throat and lick him. Her head spun.

"Well it's pretty much the same with bikes and men, darlin'. The harder you squeeze, the better the ride." Satisfaction burned through him at the playfully scandalized look on her face. "Heh."

She recovered quickly. "Does that also mean they both misstart on occasion, both have a temperamental tendency to choke up, and both quit working when they run out of gas?" Pressed up against his back, she felt the rumble in his chest as well as heard it.

He was really starting to have a thing for that Rogue; her nimble mind and her wicked mouth. The little fingers just shy of his belt buckle were doing it for him pretty good, too.

"Not every man runs out of gas, baby."

He planted a foot and leaned up to kick-start the bike, effectively cutting her off with a grin before she could make some suggestive crack about a pump that never ran dry. That girl could make anything sound dirty. He approved. Especially because in this case, it was all too true. Settling back on the bike, he waited a moment for her to insinuate herself against his back once more.

"Tighter," he palmed her thigh. The touch was sensual. More a caress than true direction. He'd never touched her like *that* before. Like a woman.

Like a woman he wanted to touch again.

"Logan?"

Another firm stroke in response. "Just move with me, darlin'. And don't let go."

Words to live by.

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Up next: **Crazy Train.** The wheels are in motion and they're gaining momentum. Even if they come off the rails, it's gonna be one helluva ride…

*I know, I know. Get on with it, already, right? I promise the next chapter [and the half a (smutty)dozen that follow] are actually going to be at the sex club... ;) Also, I'm totally taking suggestions for rockin' 80's songs. Share 'em if you got 'em!***
Crazy Train

The ride was wild, exhilarating. Xavier's school was remote. They whipped along the back roads, full of hope and expectation. By the time the bike reached the city, Marie was euphoric. Logan enjoyed her pleasure as only a man with enhanced senses could; the thrumming excitement in her tense body, the quickened cadence of her sweet breath in his ear, the wild slamming of her heart against his back and her silvery laughter on the night wind. The scent of joy, clean and sweet, filled his head.

He felt her hands squeeze him lightly to get his attention. He slowed, letting the roar of the engine subside into a rough purr.

"Does it still feel like this for you?" Was it still as good twenty years on as it was at first?

Logan knew instantly what she meant. Wild. Free. In the wind and unrestrained with a world of open possibilities in front of them.

"Every time."

There was a soft beat of time where they both savored the old memory his answer had invoked. He liked even more that she'd asked, that she respected his privacy in that way. He knew damn well she could have looked in her head for that answer easily enough. It made him feel safe. He thought again about the things she’d given him through the years and the things she gave him still. A tingle of excitement skittered under his skin at the thought of what they might give each other tonight.

They navigated the busy streets, weaving deeper into the industrial district. Logan rolled the bike to a stop outside a nondescript warehouse. A valet appeared seemingly out of thin air. They dismounted and Logan tossed over the keys.

"Same place tonight, Mr. Logan?" Logan didn't like not knowing where to find his bike if he needed it in a hurry. He had been very explicit about that in the beginning. Now they had a system. Aaron always parked the bike in the same place and had the hostess bring Logan the keys, though he was certain someone who was that untrusting probably carried a spare set just to be sure. Aaron didn't really mind. A lot of their clientele had strange requests. This banality barely registered.

"Yep. Take it for a quick spin first if you wanna, but you scratch it and I'll scratch you, huh?"

The young man nodded, chuckling at their long-running joke. "Yes, sir." Slipping on the bike, he disappeared with a grin and a hearty wave.

"Logan?" Marie was confused as they stood alone on a deserted street. There was nothing at all inviting or exciting about where they'd found themselves. "I'm confused. Even the whack shack looked better than this."

"Heh. Anonymity, darlin'." Chuck wasn't the only one who understood the benefits of blending into the crowd. "It don't look like much on the outside. That's the point. It's not supposed to be easy to find. S'one of those word-of-mouth kinda places." In point of fact, it was exactly that. The Red Door was an exclusive club that catered to an upscale, mostly mutant clientele with a taste for wild, edgy sex and a deep desire for privacy. "It's just through here." He lead them down an alley and entered a plain, rusty, gray door. Marie followed, wary but curious and surprisingly calmed by the large hand that appeared at the small of her back.

The door swung inward to reveal a large open space. It was all concrete and metal, the feel industrial
and cold, though the ambient temperature was quite a bit warmer than she was expecting, probably to facilitate a lot of naked skin. It was already making her unzip her jacket. There was an old fashioned freight elevator located in the center of the space; the kind with a hand-operated iron grill. It was flanked by two sculptures, one glass, one metal. At the far end of the long room was a teal blue door, behind which Marie could hear muted hum of music and the steady driving rumble of deep thumping bass.

Directly to their left was a sleek granite counter manned by an ethereally petite woman with shockingly fair skin, short, spiky, white-blond hair and eyes so pale they were barely tinged blue. She was wearing a severe grey suit and a truly wicked pair of black stilettos. In front of her was a slim silver laptop and a smart little phone the same pale icy blue as her eyes. Her scent was mercurial and Logan had never been able to figure out if she was a human with a mind like a steel trap or a mutant with a perfect memory for details. She knew everything about everyone, from their names and account numbers to their favorite drink to the kind of sex they liked to have and who - or what - they liked to have it with. There were times he thought the laptop might be just for show. She was that good.

"Good evening, Mr. Logan."

"Willow." The name fit her. Strong, flexible, and he bet it stung like a son-of-a-bitch if she lit into you. She was the kind of woman you didn't fuck around with. She liked his easy charm though, and he was always respectful, even when he was making wickedly indecent proposals with his eyes. He was probably the only man who dared. She was frightening. Definitely not his usual preference, but he'd always liked strong women. There would be none of that tonight, however. Logan's hand slipped from the small of Marie's back to draw her closer, but he didn't introduce her and she was glad. She wanted to be as low key as possible. The less people who knew her name here, the better.

"Two for tonight?"

"Yep."

"Is the account we have on file for you still current?"

"Sure is."

Her fingers flew over the keyboard. It had a significant positive balance, though she already knew what it was to the penny. Logan didn't do credit or plastic. It was always cash, usually a lot of it paid at one time and he worked his way through it at his leisure. He wasn't a regular client, but he was certainly memorable. Once every few months, he came in, blew a few minds and left the staff talking for weeks.

His body was terrifyingly beautiful, his physical stamina was wildly impressive and he handed out orgasms like newspapers on a Sunday morning. Any one of those things would be enough on its own. That particular trifecta catapulted him into the legendary class, and that was without taking into account what happened on the top floor afterwards.

He was abrupt and direct, but he had a playful streak under that brooding surly exterior and he treated the employees respectfully and tipped well. He occasionally liked to pick a fight, usually with someone who deserved it, but every client had their faults and Logan was sharp enough to never throw the first punch. He was definitely a man worth the occasional trouble he caused.

"Will you be requiring your usual room tonight? I can check if it's available."

*Usual room?* Marie's ears perked up at that.
Logan felt Marie tense slightly under his fingers.

"Not tonight, honey."

Willow kept the surprise from her face. Normally Logan called in advance, preferring to go about his business with a minimum amount of contact, aside from the occasional bit of teasing and a smoldering glance or two. He was one of the few men who'd ever tempted her to break her stoic reserve. He'd also never brought a woman here before. He was a staff favorite and she knew it wouldn't be long before that little tidbit made its way around tonight.

The girl on his arm was pretty. Younger than she imagined he'd be into, given his history here. Definitely an innocent if the wide eyes and high color were any indication. Nothing like the women he usually went for. Willow's delicate features remained perfectly placid, even as her mind whirled.

"Where shall I have the hostess bring your keys?"

"Second floor." His lips twitched with amusement. Willow's expression might not have changed one iota, but her scent said she was very surprised. Logan rarely bothered with the lower floors.

"Whatcha got on deck tonight?"

"Naamah and Blaze in the East Chamber. A new human/mutant hetero pair in the West Chamber. Very sensual. Mostly vanilla with some interesting hints of D/s. Excellent opening acts for both. Breathplay and shibari, respectively." Logan was nodding. Marie felt very lost and distinctly out of her element.

"Sounds good." He almost smirked as Willow's eyes widened slightly. He'd never so much as seen a crack in her facade before.

"Good?" She couldn't have been more shocked if he'd said he wanted her to order up some popcorn and find a copy of Mary Poppins for him to watch while she painted his nails.

"Will there be anything else you require this evening, Mr. Logan?" A copy of Alice in Wonderland, perhaps? She had the feeling the girl at his side was about to take quite a tumble down the rabbit hole. Eat me. Drink me.

"Fuck me."

"That'll do me." He turned to look at Marie. "Unless there's somethin' you want, darlin'?" He stopped just short of waggling his brows at her.

Marie blushed to the roots of her hair and shook her head. She had no idea what to even ask for, although something told her the tall, svelte, blonde woman had probably seen and heard it all. That thought gave her flagging bravado a shot in the arm. She intended to embrace this experience with open arms, to meet him as an equal on this new battlefield.

"I'll let you know if there is, sugar. Shall we see if they have a Playboy for you?" This time it was Logan's eyes who widened. "No? Alrighty, then. Lay on, Macduff..."

He didn't say anything but he chuckled at her sass.

Willow watched the exchange raptly. The little slip of a girl teased him like that? Who was she to him? They were throwing off some serious sparks so she didn't think she was just a friend. Pity about that. It made the fantasy better to imagine him unattached. "The passcode tonight is KNOT. Please let me know if there is anything else we can do for you."
"Thanks, honey. You have a good night, now."

Marie's eyes flicked to the elevator and she realized that there was a very modern keypad set into the wall by the old iron grill. She was curious. And she wanted to check out the sculptures, too. Aside from the blue door, they were the only other source of color in the entire gray space.

As they walked away from the counter, Marie looked at him out of the corner of her eye. "Usual room, sugar? Care to share?"

He shrugged. "I get a room here sometimes, kid."

_Kid?_ Willow was almost out of earshot but she couldn't quite believe what she was hearing. Usually her job was pretty boring. There wasn't much that was new to her after four years working the front desk, but that had shocked her in a way something deviantly kinky never could. Affection from _Logan_? Prurience, sure. Lust, sure. But true affection? Willow suddenly, desperately, wanted to be the girl worthy of such feeling from a man like that.

Marie's mind was spinning.

"You pay for things here... besides the cover?" Marie could imagine him hooking up with a woman here. Maybe even more than one at a time, but the lingering pieces of him in her head were very clear that paying for sex wasn't his style. It made her burn with curiosity.

Logan nodded.

"What kinds of things?"

His brow arched. "Baby, when you have enough miles on ya to have a similar answer to give me in trade, we'll talk. Until then, it's for me to know and you to find out." He was aware she thought he tomcatted around a lot, though it wasn't nearly as often as she imagined.

As they'd grown closer, he'd pulled back some, partly because he knew Marie wouldn't like it and partly because they all paled in comparison to the woman he really wanted, although every now and then he came here and really cut loose. He needed the release. It was easy enough to find a willing partner or two - or three - upstairs from among the other patrons. He usually fucked himself into a pleasure-soaked coma and then retired to a private room where he paid a woman to cover herself from head to toe and hold him while he slept. There was no way he was telling Marie that.

She pouted playfully and he was very tempted to kiss that teasing little mouth of hers, mutation be damned.

"C'mon." He guided her towards the waiting elevator.

Marie shivered, aware that the elevator was hardly as innocent as it looked. Once she stepped inside, nothing would ever be the same again.

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Up next: **Love In an Elevator.** Going up...

Thanks for the awesome response to the last chapter! Y'all gave some inspired song recs. I'm currently writing some citrusy foreplay (I'm sure you're all shocked. heh). Anyone got an 80's song rec for that? I need a little inspiration and I feel like *Pearl Necklace* is maybe a little too on the (ahem) nose... ;)

Logan and Marie were mid way to the elevators when the blue door opened and half a dozen young men came through it, raucous, wild and more than a little drunk. Two of them ogled Marie obviously, but only one was stupid enough to stop and hit on her. She instantly moved a step closer to Logan and he was a little surprised. She hadn't done that in years. Not since her first semester of combat training. That she did so now made him very aware how unsure of herself she was.

She could handle herself competently in a simulated war zone, co-pilot the Blackbird, and kick some serious Brotherhood ass with a sparkle in her eye and a steady confident hand, but this? Intimacy and open sexuality? All of it was new enough to her to throw her pretty good. Part of him liked it, while another part of him was realizing how very much further she had to go before she'd be ready for someone with his carnal appetites.

"Hey, sweet thing. You look good enough to eat. You wanna dump the old man and come upstairs with me? I'll show ya a real good time. I bet a sweet little thing like you tastes better'n honey." He made a rude gesture with his tongue. Clearly one of the boys had a death wish.

The snarl was out before Logan could stop it.

"Jesus, dude. Are you growling? What the fuck?"

Marie looked the young punk up and down, bolstered by the firm, solid hand at the small of her back. "First of all, that's not how you talk to a lady. You can keep that nasty talk to yourself. Second, it would take an act of God to pry me away from him tonight. And third, you don't have near enough miles on you to be remotely interesting to me, or any other self-respecting woman. Maybe in twenty years — after you've learned some dadgum manners." Her tone implied his knowledge of women was painfully inadequate in other areas, too. She turned back to Logan. "You ready, sugar?"

"Sure am." Logan could feel his lips twitch as he looked over at the little fuckwit who was still reeling from the sharp side of her tongue. Logan had been on the business end of it many times. Marie was a passionate, volatile woman. It packed a punch, for damn sure. "Beat it, bub."

He turned his back on the boys. The dismissal was plain, even at six-to-one odds. That he dared to do it earned their grudging respect. He was proud of Marie for standing up for herself. It had been a long damn time since she'd needed him to fight her battles, though he could feel her trembling and her scent was somewhere north of acutely embarrassed, tempered with a healthy dose of pissed.

"You can keep her, pops." Stupid punk was whining to his friends and mouthing off. Loudly. "Man, what a cunt." Marie felt Logan tense at her side. "But maybe that's his thing, huh guys? Fucking bratty little Lolitas. I wonder how old she was the first time she sucked his dick?"

Shit.

Logan turned around. The slow movement was wholly predatory.

Shit-Shit-shit!

"Sugar?" She put a hand on his arm.

"S'fine, darlin'. Just be a minute."

Willow was moving from behind the counter now, but not fast enough.
"I'd tell ya you owe the lady an apology, son, but she ain't done nothin' bad enough to deserve talkin' to you again. You shoulda listened to her. She ain't wrong."

"The fuck she's not," he slurred. He was clearly inebriated enough to not quite recognize the danger he was in. His friends did, and were making a real effort to drag him out. "You don't know what the fuck you're talking about, you dirty old bastard."

"That right? Well, one of us is goin' home to rub one out under his mama's roof and one of us is goin' upstairs with the hottest woman who ever walked into this place. I'd say someone knows what he's doin' and it sure as hell ain't you, boy." Enraged by the unvarnished truth, the young punk got away from his friends and threw a wild punch. Logan caught it in his fist, tweaked a pressure point and the kid went down like a ton of bricks, screaming like a little girl. "I don't remember givin' you permission to touch me, bub."

Across the room, Marie smiled. He put people down in his self defense class like that all the time. Perhaps not with that much force or enjoyment, but he wasn't at all out of control. Marie relaxed and let herself enjoy it a little more. It wasn't often one got to witness karmic retribution in action.

Willow’s heels clicked to a halt just beside the shocked group of boys who were apologizing profusely and trying to drag their fallen buddy away.

"Willow, honey? You need any help takin' out the trash?"

"Thank you, no." The scent of ozone was strong as her body phased from flesh to a being of luminous energy. Well, that was one question answered. Logan could feel the electrical charge tingling in his bones and took a step back, releasing the now whimpering boy into Willow's less-than-tender care. She reminded him of one really big taser. Goddamn. That sure was something, though he had too much metal in him to really appreciate the beauty of it. "Please accept our deepest apologies for this inconvenience." Her voice was different now, a resonant hum that set his teeth on edge. "Consider your evening on the house and I assure you the offending party will be dealt with so this never happens again."

"Fair enough."

Logan turned back around. Marie was waiting where he'd left her, rooted to the spot as she watched him approach. "Um. Thanks?" The hottest woman who'd ever walked in here? Surely he hadn't been serious.

"No problem."

"I'm a little surprised you didn't, you know..." she moved her hand in a way he understood was meant to mimic the way he released his claws.

"Nah. Not worth it. He's just a drunk asshole who needed a lesson in how to talk to a lady." Though if this had happened last week when she'd smelled ripe and ready to take his seed, there probably would have been a pretty decent chance he'd have stuck that little fucker good. He knew his limits.

"You know, when I was thinking of this night getting my blood pumping, it wasn't quite like this..."

A chuff of amusement escaped his lips. "We'll get there." The look he gave her made her knees weak.

Logan saw her eyes swing to the blue door. "What is that place?"

"The kiddie pool."
"What?"

"This place has five floors, darlin'. This floor is just a regular club. That's where Willow sends the
dipshits and the babies who are too wet behind the ears to go upstairs. It probably has some kinda
real name, but that's how I think of it."

"Ouch."

"Yep." His tone said he didn't have much sympathy for anyone who fell into either category.

"What about the other floors?"

"Well, I ain't supposed to tell ya, but I've never been real good at followin' rules." His knuckles
stroked the small of her back. It should have scared her but instead she moved into the unconscious
touch. "The second floor is for the live shows."

"Live shows?"

"Dancin'. Strippin'. Touchin'." He moved closer, putting his lips by her ear, not because he was
embarrassed, but because he knew she'd be more comfortable. "Fuckin'." He all but purred the word
in her ear and his eyes warmed as he saw her shiver.

"And-and the others?"

"Third floor's a buncha open little rooms with everythin' under the sun happenin' at any given time.
Clothin' is optional and you can watch or participate as the spirit moves ya." Her eyes were really
round now. "The fourth floor is like the third, except it's just one huge space instead of a lotta small
rooms."

"Like- like an orgy?"

He thought about that a minute. "Maybe a buncha little orgies, yeah."

"And the fifth floor?"

"All private rooms with red doors."

"What's behind the red doors, sugar?"

His teeth flashed. "Anythin' you can imagine and afford to pay for, darlin'."

"That's where you like to go?"

He met her eyes. "Yes."

"Care to elaborate?"

"Do ya always gotta push?"

She rolled her eyes. "You knew going into this I'd have a million questions."

"Not before we even got in the elevator." That made her laugh. "All the rooms have themes," he
finally offered. Not cheezy, overdone theatrics. They were top shelf, high class all the way down to
the last perfectly recreated detail.

"Which one do you like? Let me guess... Graceland? Hunka-hunka-burnin' luuurve with red velvet
and sequins? Disco glam with a big sparkly ball, gold lamé curtains and mirrors on the ceiling, circa 1970's Vegas?"

"Jesus." He rolled his eyes. "That the best you can do?"

"Deflecting. But how 'bout Camelot? Arabian nights? Gothic? Egyptian tomb? Some Neanderthal's dirty cave, all primal and wild with a fire pit and a pile of furs? Sex dungeon with carabiners in the ceiling a la Fifty Shades?"

Something glinted in her eyes. Interesting.

"Fifty what?"

"I'll tell you later," she teased and he laughed aloud as they stood in front of the elevators. "You're really not gonna tell me?"

"The Nagasaki Room," he said quietly. Some people thought the name in poor taste. He disagreed. He'd lived it. He should know. He went there to break himself, from ash to serenity and back again.

"Oh." It wasn't at all what she'd expected.

"You owe me an answer now, kid. What room would you pick?"

Marie was suddenly aware of what a personal question she'd just asked. "Um..."

An exact replica of his room at the school, that first night she'd tried to wake him from his dark dreams. Only this time she'd like it to end differently, without a chest full of adamantium, but still with some part of him thrust deeply inside her.

"Still waitin'."

He clearly wasn't going to go anywhere until she told him what he wanted to know. She passed on her first choice because there was no way she was going to tell him that. "Hmm..." What to say?

"Lies have a distinctive stink."

Damn the man. He was always two steps ahead. She skated as close to the truth as she dared.

"The cave," she said softly, feeling a sweeping flush move down her neck and chest as she pictured his bearskin rug. Entwined with him on a thick pile of furs before a fire; a primal joining, sweat-slicked skin under her fingertips and his taste in her mouth.

That was not at all what he'd expected. A bolt of heat struck him powerfully hard, touching off something better left buried. He felt the Wolverine rattle the bars and he glanced over at Willow, who had returned to the front counter. She was out of earshot but still watching them with those curious, pale eyes.

Not trusting himself to speak, he extended a finger toward the keypad.

"Logan, wait."

"What?"

"I wanted to look at the sculptures first, if that's okay?" It didn't surprise him in the least. She loved art and had dragged him to museums several times over the years.
"Sure, kid." He let out a deep breath, glad to have things move onto safer ground. He needed to stop thinking about her milky skin in the flickering light of the fire while he covered her like an animal, rutting between her slim thighs until she called out his name. He forced himself back to the present.

The two pieces of art couldn't have been more dissimilar. One was a beautiful Chihuly, rose-tinged-pink rippling glass in overlapping waves, like an opening flower or a seashell. It was smooth and glossy, slick enough that it looked wet. So many words came to mind when she looked at it. *The sea, flowing... wet...open...a pearl... lips...*

Logan watched her watch the sculpture, aware the exact moment she realized what it was. A woman in her pleasure, folds slick and open. A female orgasm. The brass plaque under it read: *The Flower.*

"Oh..."

He heard her soft intake of breath and smiled.

The other was a tall spike of metal, somewhere between the Eiffel Tower and the Empire State Building. It was modern; abstract and wild, an amalgamation of various oxidized metals, painstakingly fused into an angry structure that looked like one solid piece rising well above their heads but was really composed of tens of thousands of tiny spikes of metal. Nails. Construction refuse. Pens. Ice picks. Rebar. Snips and slivers of other projects. Knives. Saw blades. Drill bits. knitting needles. Screwdrivers. It had welding spatter on it; drops and dribbles of melted metal that were suggestive of another kind of splatter entirely. It even smelled metallic and sharp, like that strange sensation of licking a dime. The plaque read: *The Spire.*

Marie was very aware that Logan was watching her.

The meaning had been clear to him since the first time he'd stepped into the Lobby a few years back, but he'd never taken the time to look that closely at the art until now.

"You know what it is, darlin'?"

"An erection," she whispered, barely audible enough for even his acute hearing to catch it.

"A cock," he said, his voice low and husky. "You can say it." Her blush went all the way down and he didn't think he'd ever get tired of watching that.

"Logan!" she chided softly.

He moved them back a step so they could see the sculptures together. "Both together, see? Soft and hard. They both change. One grows thicker, harder, more intrusive. The other gets softer, wetter, more receptive."

Her eyes were wide and round. It wasn't exactly new information, but he'd never talked to her like *that* before.

If this was a taste of the evening to come... Marie closed her eyes and her whole body shuddered slightly with embarrassment and pleasure. The hand he had at her back pressed more firmly, steadying her for a moment before he moved away.

"S'nature. Yin and Yang. The perfect complement."

"Excuse me." A handsomely dressed couple stepped between them, eying them curiously as the female punched in the code and the light flipped from red to green. The man grabbed the grill. Logan was surprised that he'd been so caught up in Marie's reaction that he hadn't even heard them
approach. "I do hate to interrupt her lesson, but shall we hold it for you?" Both of them had their eyes on Marie, not lewdly, but definitely with a prurient attentiveness.

"We'll catch the next one," Logan said pulling her close.

"Such a pity, isn't it, darling? That blush is delicious." The man nodded and the grill clanged shut before the elevator rose out of sight.

"Oh my God!" Marie's scandalized tone made him want to laugh. "They were..."

Interested.

"They sure were, baby."

Marie looked from the Flower to the Spire and back to Logan again. The word cock rolling off his tongue was still echoing in her brain. "I'm pretty sure that my blood's pounding for the right reason now."

"Same here."

They stared at each other for long minutes, saying nothing. Just watching and feeling the tide turn. Finally, she gave the smallest nod.

He reached for the keypad.

Her eyes sparkled mischievously as she looked him up and down. "Going up, sugar?"

Christ, she'd always been a little vixen.

His eyes glittered back. "What'd I tell ya about callin' a man on it, baby?"

That she shouldn't do it unless she was prepared for him to do the same. Oh, God.

She was suddenly very aware of the weight and power in his body as he crowded her slightly before growling, "Marie, darlin'? Get in..."

Up Next: **Love Bites.** Logan stops the elevator between floors to get a few things straight with Marie. The Wolverine decides to add his two cents… and down the rabbit hole they go.
Logan reached across Marie's svelte body and momentarily stopped the elevator between floors.

"Logan?"

"I shoulda asked you before. I needta know what kinda experience you're lookin' for tonight." He'd planned on having this conversation in the truck on the way over, but that's not quite how the night had unfolded. Instead she'd wrapped those long legs of hers around his hips and they'd rumbled along, enjoying each other and the scenery whipping by, and all the things he should have said and done had gone straight out of his head the second she'd squeezed him tight and whispered, 'more' and then 'faster' into his ear. Goddamn. He'd nearly laid the bike down.

"What?" It was practically a squeak and it made him wonder how smart bringing her here actually was. Probably not very, but then he'd never been good at restraint in general.

"Watchin' or bein' watched. What's your pleasure?"

Her mouth went dry. Surely he didn't mean...

"Not that." Jesus. He was burning up. "Lotsa people come here just to feel other people's eyes on 'em. They like it. Showin' off. Feels good bein' wanted."

"Not to me. Not like that. I just want to watch. The only eyes I want near me are yours." He tried to ignore the hot stick of satisfaction following that little confession.

When he'd made the offer to take her here, he hadn't imagined her dressed like that. While it was fairly conservative compared to the attire of the average female patron, she wore her innocence like a banner and that was going to garner all sorts of unwanted attention.

"That lady was right. You look delicious. It's gonna be a steady stream of people askin' permission to touch ya."

"It is?" She wasn't convinced.

"I would."

"Really?"

"Hell yes."

"I don't want that. Not from strangers. If I could just watch alone with you, that's what I'd choose." It was possible, but he knew what would happen if he took Marie to one of the rooms with a red door and arranged for them to watch a private sex act together. His control was nowhere near that good. It was possible he wouldn't even be able to keep a lid on it in a crowd, and he wasn't about to manipulate her into anything she wasn't ready for. Hell, he wasn't even sure he'd do if she came to him of her own free will. Not here. Not tonight. Not with the deck so stacked against her.

"I can fix it for ya, if you want."

"Fix it?" Logan nodded. "What are you gonna do, pee a circle around me so that everyone who comes by knows I'm the property of the Wolverine?"

"Somethin' like that." She'd been teasing but it actually hadn't been all that far from the mark.
"Okay."

"Just like that?"

"I trust you."

She shouldn't. Not with what was running through his head. But it pleased him that she did.

"C'mere then." He pulled her close by the tails of her scarf. "Take your coat off and turn around."

What was he going to do, put his coat on her instead? That idea felt a little Mayberryish for someone like Logan. She did as he said, trembling a little as she felt him step closer behind and brush her hair aside. She caught his slight intake of air as all her creamy skin came into view. Her insides felt like jelly. The warm heat of his breath tickled her neck and her eyes widened when she realized he was lowering his head.

"You gonna give me permission to touch you?" he whispered silkily, pulling the iridescent loop of her scarf from her neck with one thick finger.

Marie nodded, her throat suddenly too tight to speak.

It felt like forever before he lowered his mouth that final distance. He breathed her in, tongue flicking along his lip, so close he could almost taste her.

She felt his teeth where her nape joined her shoulder, lips pulled back so her skin couldn't hurt him. Just there, on that spot below the black ribbon he'd tied earlier. The pressure increased. "Mmmm..."

It slipped out before she could stop it.

A growl rose in his throat and he suddenly bit down hard.

"Ow!" She jerked from his grasp but he didn't let her go far, checking the motion with an iron grip on her hips as she thrashed in his teeth. The sudden pain of the stinging bite quickly became something else, something slippery and hot; a creamy rush she couldn't stop even if she wanted to. She pressed her thighs together, very aware of the warm wetness between them. Logan jerked against her in response and the bite became wilder. Sharper. The urge to move back into him and rub against his big body was strong. His tongue came next, bold and strong as he flattened it and dragged it sensually over the mark he'd just made. "Unnngh....." It was hot and wet and made goose bumps rise over her whole body. The fleeting touch was quick enough that it didn't trigger her skin, but not nearly long enough for either of them.

He made a low sound she'd never heard before; a primal growl that was unapologetically male.

When she looked back over her shoulder at him, his hazel eyes gleamed golden. The Wolverine was very close to the surface. She'd only seen that look a scant handful of times; and only then in the heat of battle. Never like this, smoldering with something beyond the edge of human words.

"L-Logan?"

"It's still me, kid." But only just. He stepped back to look at his handiwork, rubbing a thumb over it for good measure. The indent was deep. He hadn't meant to break the skin, but his canines were sharper than most and he'd been unable to resist the wildness that had risen up in him at the feel of her in his teeth. The taste of her in his mouth flavored with a hint of copper made it very difficult to keep control. Satisfaction curled through him, thick and heavy. It pooled between his legs, a sultry
persistent throb. In a few minutes, the stinging indentation on her skin would rise up into a vivid red wheal, branding her as his. He liked the idea of that far too much.

"You bit me," she said, reaching for the easier words because what she'd really wanted to say was, 'Do it again.'

He seemed to hear it anyway.

"I did and you liked it." And fuck if he hadn't wanted to do it from the first moment she'd walked in his door tonight and asked to watch him shave.

"So did you."

He didn't deny it. "Everyone who sees it'll know you're mine." The stark honesty of his words shook them both. "It should stop all but the most determined."

Wait. What? Had he done it because he'd wanted to or merely to keep the others away? Everything with him was always so confusing.

"You licked me." She couldn't even wrap her head around that.

"You needed lickin'." She shuddered again and not just because nobody had ever licked her before.

"Why?"

Because he wanted to.

That reply probably wouldn't be smart. Focusing on the words, on answering the way a man would, was helping push back the animal. It was clawing at him, driving him to put his mouth on her and taste her again. To push her down on the floor and rip away the satin and leather so he could lick and bite and spread that luscious scent over them both. He shoved the wildness back, panting a little with the effort. It didn't help. He could taste her in the air. A sweet musky tease that made it all too easy to imagine pushing her legs apart and tasting her the way he really wanted.

"'Cause this club is for people like us. Mutants mostly. Some humans. It should keep anyone with feral senses away. It ain't the best scent to ward off another male, but it'll do for tonight."

"Not the best scent...?" In a flash, she suddenly realized there was another, much more intimate scent that would undeniably mark her as belonging to him. Sweet smokin' Jesus. She turned unsteadily in his arms.

The golden light was back in his eyes. "Do I really need to tell ya, darlin'?

Marie shook her head 'no' and bit her lip, pushing down her glove and silently offering up her arm in response. He smiled at the goose bumps on her milky white skin and carefully, deliberately, wound the scarf back around her neck, arranging it to show off his bite.

"Me too, only one really big one instead of a thousand little ones." He wasn't going to push her, but he wasn't about to deny the beast his due. He damn sure wanted her to know what she did to him. He knew what he did to her. It sat smoky-sweet on the back of his tongue, even now.

Ah, God. The world felt very spinny.

She risked a quick look and was aware he'd probably notice. He did. She saw a flash of teeth that didn't quite give the impression of smiling and she was confused by the sudden urge to sink to her
knees before him. Her mouth watered. He made no move toward her but he didn't shield himself from her view, either. He welcomed her eyes on him. The restrictive denim hid nothing. He was rock hard.

Her fingers twitched with the unconscious desire to touch him and his jaw clenched as he fought the Wolverine for control.

Marie cleared her throat softly. "Wow. That's quite a-

A warning growl rumbled in his chest.

"Compliment," she finished, trying for a brazenness she didn't really feel. She felt vulnerable. Wild. Reckless and on the edge of something she didn't quite understand. It scared her and drew her closer with each breath. Her heart beat wildly in her breast, yet as naïve as she was, something inborn told her to stop pushing him. They were too close to the flashpoint.

"I was gonna go with 'quite a comment on my sanity' but I like yours better."

Her answer was to smooth her glove back up before lifting her fingers to touch the mark he'd made on her neck. He closed his eyes, shaken that had been her response.

"Don't touch it," he said gruffly, pushing her hand from her neck with a rough shove.

He was going to lose it if she did.

Shock and surprise he could deal with. Even the sweet rush of desire. But approval? That was the slipperiest slope when it came to her. It always had been.

Setting her from him, he took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Christ, he needed a drink. "Don't put your coat back on, darlin'. Let 'em all see it." He touched the mark again, a fleeting brush of his thumb that denied her skin the pleasure of his power. He tried to ignore her shiver. It was a losing battle. His voice dropped. "I know you're nervous, but it's just a buncha regular folks havin' a good time watchin' somethin' hot. You'll be safe with me. You just keep your chin up and walk in there like you fuckin' own it." He swallowed. "They'll look, yeah... because, goddamn, baby." She was perfection. "But they'll keep their distance if you wear it real proud."

She nodded and he started the elevator again. They rode in silence for long moments.

Finally, Marie spoke. "Did you mean what you said to that jerk, downstairs?"

That he was going upstairs with the hottest woman who'd ever walked into this place.

The door opened and he slid the heavy grill aside before placing his hand possessively on the small of her back.

"Yeah, kid. Every word."

Up next: Under Pressure. Marie and Logan wind up in a private alcove and another line in the sand gets blurred…
Logan felt Marie tense under his palm as they stepped from the elevator into the club. The atmosphere was dark and womb-like, lit indirectly with warm amber lights that cast deep chocolate shadows in the long hall. Music pumped around them, competing - yet strangely harmonious sounds - from the East and West chambers. Everywhere the scent of spice. Arousal colored everything. People in twos and threes and little clusters, talking and drinking and laughing. Aside from the exotic scent and the electric presence of the feral man at her side, at first blush it seemed quite similar to one or two of the other upscale clubs she'd been to with Jubes and Remy.

Or it was until a striking woman passed by. She was wearing a glittering collar, black satin toe shoes with a red sole, and nothing else. It was her transparent iridescent wings that held Marie's attention, more so than the small breasts with dark nipples and her strangely faceted eyes. And the fact that there was a handsome, swarthy man holding the end of her leash. It appeared to be made from the same black satin ribbon that bound her toe shoes to her lithe legs. Logan looked twice too and felt his lip quirk into a grin. He expected to find the same look on Marie's face and was surprised to see a much different expression reflected there.

"Kid?"

"I think I need a drink," she said woodenly, half wondering if she might also need a paper sack to breath into. She was standing at the edge of the abyss.

"You okay?"

Their eyes met.

Marie shook her head. "No."

Logan was a little surprised by her reaction. There was a sliver of disappointment, too. But tonight was not about him. He pushed it down deep. He'd expected the Rogue to come out of the elevator swinging, chin high and blazing like a lioness on the hunt. He had not expected a hesitant, wide-eyed Marie. Frankly, he'd expected more and he mentally adjusted his expectation of the evening downward a few notches as he guided her into one of the many cozy, private alcoves lining the hall.

Her scent jacked up as she noticed a glass bowl tucked discretely away into a niche in the wall. It was lit softly from below and held colorful assortment of condoms in all varieties, individual packets of lubricant and other random goodies, from massage oil to finger cots, ready for whatever the occupants of this small space might imagine to do to each other.

"You wanna go?" he asked softly, wondering how smart it was to have brought her here to begin with. She was a good kid and a nice girl. He should have known better, but she was also the Rogue; a wild young woman on the threshold of understanding the vast power her ripening sexuality would bring. This might be a little advanced for her now, but he knew her better than anyone. Someday the untouchable girl before him would appreciate what he'd tried to give her here tonight.

Leave? "No." She swallowed, nervously fidgeting with the seam on her glove like she did when she was really wound up about something. He knew her tells. "I just…"

"Too much?"

"No. Not really." Her voice grew softer. "I… I like it…" The sensual vibe, the open sexuality, the shameless hedonism of it all. She approved. Heartily.
That had his brows jumping halfway up his face.

"It's just…." She took a deep breath. "I'm scared."

Most people would have tried to placate her with hollow words. *You'll be fine. You'll like it. Just give it a chance.* Logan touched the shiny fall of her ponytail instead, his eyes intent on hers. That spark of awareness was between them like always, making things even more awkward.

"Scared'a what?"

He was surprised when she slid her arms around him and hugged him, resting her cheek against his broad chest like a child. It was sweet rather than sexual and spoke to the deep trust between them. He liked it, even though made him more uncomfortable than an overt pass would have. He was not her father. He understood she'd needed that feeling of safety and security from him for a long time, but things had been changing for a while now. They were at the edge of something that shook them both. He suspected it was that, rather than anything she'd seen, that had her trembling against him.

"Come on, darlin'. Talk." He hugged her tighter, tucking her head under his chin.

"I feel weird."

"Weird how?"

"Like I should be worried that I'll do or say something embarrassing or that I won't like what I see or hear…. or find out about myself tonight," she felt him squeeze her gently at that soft admission, "Or that you won't like it, either." He opened his mouth to protest but she stopped him with a touch. "But it's not really any of that."

"No?"

"No. Mostly I'm just worried tonight will change things between us…. and not in a good way."

Another man might have said: *It won't*. Logan spoke the truth instead. "You can't be a kid forever. Little girls grow up. Things are gonna change. Ain't no way around that." That she'd asked him to take her here tonight told him she was as ready for things to change as he was, even if the change made them both uncomfortable. "But whatever you find out, whoever you turn out to be when you're done figurin' this shit out, you'll always be my Marie."

She didn't lift her head from his chest. "You promise?"

"Yeah. I promise." He felt her smile against his chest and knew she was thinking about that night on the train too. "How you feel about sex ain't gonna change that." It was just a side of her he didn't yet know. Maybe he'd never know it. Maybe it was enough to help make it safe for her to know it for herself. He'd promised to take care of her and he intended to do that until this stupid body of his finally gave up its last breath.

It was on the tip of her tongue to ask him if that included her wanting sex with him, but she chickened out at the last moment. "You Marie?" she asked. "What does that even mean?"

"Means you're mine to take care of, like I said."

He felt her face fall a little before she pasted on a bright smile and pulled away from him. She was profoundly grateful for however he wanted to be in her life. "Thanks, sugar." Not many people had men like him in their lives. Friendship and loyalty that was deeper than blood. They had a visceral, intimate bond that defied explanation. Why wasn't that enough? She should be more appreciative
instead of wishing he wanted a different kind of connection with her.

Logan caught her arm before she could step from the privacy of the curtained alcove to the more public environment of the club, and moved closer to her. The energy crackled anew between them and this time it wasn't at all paternal.

He could still taste her – could still feel the wild burn of the Wolverine in his blood. It was difficult to shunt him aside. She needed to talk now and that part of him simply wanted to put his hands on her ass, drag her to him and rub that sweet wet place against his crotch until she understood the inescapable truth in a way no words could ever drive home.

More maddening still, he could tell she heard the wild call in her blood, too.

She had answered him. It was in the slight deference in way she stood. The tilt of her head. The subtle arch of her spine. The flutter of her fingers. The welcome in her intoxicating scent. It was there in her very breath. The cadence changed for him, sweet tremulous expectation. And, Christ, that sound she made when he put his mouth on her… Her body cried out to him. Nature demanded an answer. Every part of her screamed she was ready… and yet, still, she hesitated.

He heard that, too. And so he pushed aside his need. She needed his understanding now, and his guidance rather than his passion.

"Hey, you don't gotta make that face. It ain't like that." It wasn't obligation he felt. It was love. He still wasn't sure what kind, but that's what it was. It couldn't be anything else. "There's lotsa ways to take care of someone, kid." Physically. Emotionally. Sexually...

That got her attention.

"You changing the deal on me?"

Logan huffed in amusement. "That deal's been changin' since day one."

"It has?"

"Sure." He'd always tried to give her what she needed. As she'd changed through the years, so had that connection and the things he was willing to do - or not do - for her. "Nothin' stays the same forever. All anyone can do is roll with it."

"Is that what tonight's about?"

"Mosta it is about you. I wantcha to get what you need outta tonight. Have fun. Go a little crazy. Give me a hard time. Whatever. But some of it's about that, yeah." And some of it was about him. About what he needed.

"Defining new boundaries?" God, he was so close. She could feel his body heat and smell the tobacco on his skin. Nobody ever willingly stood this close to her. Not with this much skin exposed. It made her very aware of the bite on the back of her neck. And of the slick wetness between her legs.

"Somethin' like that."

"Like what," she whispered breathlessly.

His low chuckle broke the spell. "Dunno. I have no fuckin' idea how this night's gonna end." That was the pure, unvarnished truth.
"Me either." She punched his arm. "But that's half the fun, right?"

Logan rolled his eyes. "If you say so."

"But you're saying you're up for it if things change a little?"

He grunted. "Letcha on the bike, didn't I?"

"You did."

"That not clue you in?"

"Oh!" There went her eyes again, wide as saucers.

"Relax, darlin'. Tonight we're just two friends out for a good time." This situation was rapidly getting out of hand. He wanted things to change, sure, but not all in one night and he didn't want her to have any expectations that would lead to disappointment later. "Baby steps, huh? This night is not gonna end up behind a red door for either of us." Even if she wanted it, the Wolverine was much too close to the surface.

The Rogue twinkled at him from behind her eyes. "Your loss, sugar."

"Mmph."

Marie understood what he'd left unsaid there and she was glad. She was excited he was ready to let her grow up a little, but she wasn't remotely ready for things to change so much so fast. Right now it was enough to know that he'd still be there for her no matter what happened tonight. Nothing had been settled between them, and she was still nervous as hell about what this night might bring... but now it felt good, exciting instead of like a hard lump in her stomach.

She gave a little shimmy. "It doesn't matter to me anyway, sugar."

"Yeah?"

"I said I wanted a cave and furs by the fire." Her eyes flashed at him. "Last I checked, caves don't have red doors..."

"Jesus," he muttered, shaking his head and reaching for the curtain. She wasn't the only one who could use a drink.

"Where you goin', cowboy?"

It was the tone in her words that stopped him rather than the words themselves.

"Waterin' hole." He didn't really want to lose the taste of her from his mouth, but he needed something bracing to help chain his slipping control.

She giggled. "Uh-uh. I'm not done with you yet..."

"That right?" He liked her sexy, playful tone all too much. He turned to face her, even though he knew he shouldn't.

"Why don't you take your hand off that curtain and find out?"

The Wolverine's not giving up any intimate details unless he gets some in return...

*Sorry about the posting delay. AO3 wouldn't let me post a few days ago and then RL got insane. You can expect the next chapter shortly. :)*
"Logan?" Marie's question stopped his slow egress.

"Yeah, kid?"

"You ever been in one of these little alcoves with someone before?" When he hesitated, her eyes glittered with triumph. "The truth, straight up. No chaser." That was their deal. Up to a point, anyway. She was dying to know what he paid for behind those red doors upstairs, but one could only push the Wolverine so far.

"Yes," he said simply, hoping it would be enough. It wasn't. He could tell by the look on her face that it wasn't. "No details."

"Fine by me. I don't wanna know what you did with her." She giggled. "Or him," she teased. "Or them. Whatever." She waggled her brows at him.

"Fuck's sake," he growled, half annoyed and half amused at her playing.

Her nimble fingers dipped into the bowl of pretty sex aids and he felt a prickle of sweat begin to gather. The little foil wrappers gleamed like colorful bits of confetti between the bright packets of lubricant and other assorted items. She fingered them, lifting one from the bowl. "Hmm… coconut." Her eyebrow rose and she tossed it back in favor of another. "Cherry… well, that's fitting." It too rejoined the bowl. "Vanilla." That made her laugh. There was nothing vanilla about tonight. He saw her reach for a glow in the dark condom and huffed softly in exasperation.

"There a point here somewhere?"

"Just wondering if you used anything from this bowl of goodies, sugar."

The curtained alcove suddenly felt small and airless. She would ask him that, the minx. She clearly expected a reply if the look on her face was any indication. Her scent slid from nervous to the spicy tang of mischievousness. The silence grew longer, heavier and more oppressive.

Just when she didn't think he'd answer her, he leaned forward, his big hand sifting through the bowl until he found what he was looking for.

He pressed it into her fingers. The gold foil gleamed against the black of her glove, the words jumping out at her. Extra large. Ribbed. Lubricated. A second packet followed. Black and red this time. Deep Throat Mints: Wintergreen.

Her brazen confidence waivered as her knees went a little weak at the mental picture that pair of items suggested. Her mouth watered and everything went a little fuzzy around the edges.

"Breathe, kid."

She drew in a deep breath through her nose and let it out slowly, giving him an unreadable look. He wondered if maybe he shouldn't have risen to her bait for about half a second until she grinned at him and tucked the condom inside the top of her green corset. "Always prepared. Isn't that what you taught me?" And damn her if she didn't wink at him before opening the mints and trying one.

"Jesus fuck, Marie."
"Mmmm…. tingly."

The cool wintery scent of wintergreen triggered that old memory and Logan struggled to keep it together. This place was too private. He needed a change of venue and a stiff drink. Soon.

"That's the general idea, darlin'."

Pursing her full lips, she sucked in a slow breath through her mouth, shivering at the cooling sensation on her lips and tongue. She could only imagine what that delicious tingling would be like on more sensitive body parts. "I can see why you liked it."

"Brat." He swatted her butt and grinned, amused by her antics. That night they'd both used the mints on each other first and the condom had followed for the penetrative sex afterwards, but that was one detail too far. He was already dancing all over the line and they hadn't even made it to the show yet.

Marie, however, seemed determined to obliterate the line entirely.

"Maybe I do want some details, sugar. You do owe me a sex story, after all."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yep. From that night on your deck, remember? I told you all about David and Bobby and the stories I write…"

*And the overpriced piece of silicone,* his unhelpful mind supplied. Did she use it and think of him? Gasp and squeeze down on it and call out his name? Jesus.

"But I don't remember you givin' up any details in return."

She was right. His brain had pretty much stopped at *I write erotica* and then she'd gone and had a soak in his tub and whatever he'd planned on saying in return had suddenly taken a back seat to visions of milky white skin and iridescent bubbles that covered nothing. Fuck all. His patience didn't extend to his fantasy life.

"Marie—" he warned.

"Cat got your tongue, sugar?"

"Mmph." Not a cat. A Rogue.

"Well, we know she was here…" she dropped to a crouch in front of him. Not exactly on her knees but close enough to ring his bell. She didn't touch him. She touched herself instead, running those gloved hands lightly along her sides and over her thighs. She actually had the audacity to blow him a cheeky kiss as she sucked in another deep breath to enjoy the minty tingle on her tongue. The scent of wintergreen spiced the air along with their growing arousal. "And given the other thing you pressed into my hand…"


Marie rose and faced him before putting a booted foot on the wall just outside his hip. His eyebrow rose. She giggled. "Hmm… maybe not. Maybe it was more like this…"

She slowly lowered her foot and then turned, presenting him with her back and then bending forward ever so slightly as she looked back at him mischievously over her shoulder.

Bared neck. Naked shoulders. Slender waist. The soft swell of her hips. Long legs encased in buttery
soft suede. A feast for the senses.

The amused look had faded from his sharp features, replaced by a much more predatory expression. He was still silent, but his eyes were wild.

"That's it," she said softly. "That's how it was..." From behind with her face turned away from him so he could imagine another woman in her place.

He nodded. Once. The cozy little alcove suddenly felt much too small.

Jesus. She should know better than to present her ass to him like that. Swaying before him with that little shimmy that bypassed everything and went right to the primal part of his brain. Something in him snapped.

"Hands on the wall," he growled.

Her eyes were wide as dinner plates, but she complied with the raspy order instantly.

As she bent forward just that small distance, it put even more focus on her buttocks and hips. He bit his lip and tasted blood, hot and coppery on his tongue. The Wolverine surged against the chokehold keeping him chained.

He kicked her feet apart with his boot and stepped up behind her, still not touching her, but close enough that she could feel the heat and energy rolling off him in waves. He leaned in and put his hand on the wall above hers, caging her without so much as a single touch.

Like that. That's how it had been with the woman that night — her hands braced so he could go hard. One of his hands on the wall for leverage. The other on her hip to keep her right where he wanted. No words were necessary. Their respective positions said it all.

Marie met his eyes over her shoulder and they flashed gold at her, wild as she'd ever seen him. Shit. You didn't play around with someone with that much sexual energy and expect him to rein it in at a moment's notice.

She canted her neck to appease him, deference without submission, as she slowly pulled her hair to the side, revealing the mark he'd made before turning to face him. They stared at each other, breathing erratically as they both tried to calm the wildness in their blood.

"How many?" she teased to break the spell. Better for the moment to slide into something playful than something neither of them were really ready for. Not yet, but soon.

He blinked, slowly coming back to himself. "Partners or orgasms?"

She laughed at the crude question and flushed red. "Logan!"

"Heh." He waited while she gathered her courage to answer him. He knew she would. It didn't take long.

"Orgasms."

"Two." Just enough to take the edge off before he went upstairs and lost himself completely.

"Yours or hers?"

"Mine."
She was bright red now, but it didn't stop her from answering him back. "How many did she have?"

"Dunno," he said honestly. "Didn't count 'em."

She was momentarily struck mute by the stark honesty in his cavalier answer. "Well, that implies there were enough to lose track of at some point, so I'd say you made a decent showing, regardless. And God knows, I'll never look at wintergreen the same way again...

He grunted and the expression on his face was priceless as she ducked under his outstretched arm.

"Hey, you shouldn't dare the Rogue, sugar." She turned and put her hand on the curtain. A firm hand on her hip stopped her slow retreat.

"Not so fast, darlin'." He shouldn't be doing this. He knew it and yet he couldn't seem to stop himself. "Your turn."

"My what?"

"You don't get an answer tonight without givin' one up in return." He gestured to the bowl. He'd told her what items he'd used. Now it was her turn.

"Oh, please. You know I've never—"

"Hell, darlin', I know 'you never'." Both their bodies were screaming that she'd 'never'. "You still owe me an answer, though."

"Is that right?" She was staring at him intently now.

"If you want any more outta me tonight, then yeah. That's the deal."

She thought that over.

"Alright. I'll play."

Good girl.

He nodded. Just once.

"Pick then."

"Pick?"

"If you felt like takin' a walk on the wild side, what wouldya pick to play with?" Between them, the bowl gleamed with possibilities.

"Sugar, anyone who would even consider being up close and personal with my skin is already walkin' on the wild side, but fair is fair, after all..."

Logan grunted at that and crossed his arms over his chest while he waited for her to inspect the contents of the bowl.

"Stubborn," she giggled, looking over at his scowl.

"Deflectin'," he shot back, frowning as he watched her pick up a small packet of edible body glitter.

"No?"
"Fuck no."

"The Wolverine doesn't glitter?"

That shit not only got everywhere, it tasted bad too. But he wasn't about to admit that. Not only was it oversharing, but her clever mind would find a way to use it against him eventually.

He said nothing, but she enjoyed the little tic in his jaw all the same.

"I was only kidding about the glitter. This is more my speed, sugar." She fingered a small tin of honey dust, tickling her cheek with the feather included for applying it. He should have guessed. She'd always had a bit of a thing for feathers. Her skin was extremely sensitive. He'd always just thought she liked the feel of them. What he'd seen as a sensual quirk of hers was rapidly becoming sexual.

She gave her cheek one last stroke before pressing it into his palm with a blush that went all the way down.

God, he loved her brazen sass when that side of her came out to play. "S'got potential." He gave her an appraising look. "That it?"

In answer to his amused taunt, she was tempted to pull a condom from the strip of three she knew he carried in his pocket, but she thought better of it the last minute.

"And this, of course." Her eyes flashed playfully as she fished the gold foil packet she'd tucked into her cleavage a moment ago and pressed it back into his fingers.

He chuckled at her sheer audacity. The foil was warm from her body, redolent with her scent. Logan repressed a shudder. He could feel the warmth between his long fingers and the urge to press it against his lips was strong.

"Mmph."

Her eyes widened as he slipped the condom and the honey dust into his pocket with a wink instead of tossing them back into the bowl.

"Well now, cowboy. What's a girl supposed to make of that, I wonder?" The Rogue's sassy smile lit up her face.

"Heh." He tweaked her ponytail. "Nothin'. Girls don't get a say. Women, however…" His breath whooshed out as she elbowed him in the ribs.

They laughed, but they were both aware that was part of the underlying tension between them. She was in that no man's land; not really a girl, but not fully a woman either. Marie understood that youth and fertility had power and that men, especially men with heightened feral instincts, responded strongly to it. She was twenty-one, not seventeen.

He was the father she'd lost. The big brother she'd never had. The best friend she'd desperately wanted. The safe harbor she'd needed. The only one who wasn't afraid to get close to her, emotionally or physically. That was a lot to risk for two people who had pretty pathetic track records, romantically speaking.

The spark had always been there, from the first moment in Laughlin City. It was still there, but now it felt different. Exciting instead of just scary and uncomfortable.
They were standing together on the edge.

Logan opened the curtain and they pushed off into flight.

Up next: **Dancing in the Dark.** From the alcove to the West Chamber. Or maybe that should be from the frying pan into the fire? Logan and Marie settle in for the show…
Logan stopped in the hall, his eyes on Marie.

"Where to, kid?"

"Isn't this your show, sugar?"

"Heh. Nah. S'up to you. Willow said Naamah and Blaze in the East Chamber and a mixed couple in the West Chamber."

"I don't even know what that means."

"Mixed? Human and mutant, darlin'."

"Hmm…" Her face was thoughtful. "If you were me, what would you pick?"

He shrugged. "Depends on whatcha have a taste for."

"A taste for…?" her voice trailed off.


"Oh." She considered his words. "You got any wisdom to offer here, Mr. Regular Room?"

"Heh. Watch it." He drew in a breath and let it out slowly, considering what he wanted to say. And how to say it. "I've seen Naamah and Blaze before. Good show. Blaze is a little bit of a thing. Short dark hair, pale skin. Curvy. Naamah's tough and lean. Looks like some kinda demon, red skin, yellow eyes and black horns comin' up here." He touched his forehead and moved his hand up high over his head.

"Wow."

"Yeah. I dunno about Naamah, but Blaze is a little firebug. When she gets goin', blue and white flames engulf them both."

"Sounds… hot."

A chuckle rumbled in his chest at her obligatory joke. "Yep. But they're both girls." His voice dropped and he put his lips by her ear. "So if you wanna see..." Penetration. He didn't say it, but the pause implied it. "A man and a woman—"

"I do." The words were quiet, but emphatic. "With you."

There was that heat again, racing under his skin. Shit.

The urge to bite her was back too. He settled for rubbing his thumb over the bite on the back of her neck. It was red and raised now. It looked like a brand. He wondered if that's how it felt.

Her smile was positively predatory now.

Ah, fuck. He was going to enjoy this.

"You ready for that drink now, kid?"
"You bet, cowboy."

Jesus. She all but purred the words at him before she turned and walked away.

He followed her, enjoying how the black laces at the back of her corset swung in counterbalance to the sway of her hips. The look she tossed him over her shoulder said she could feel his eyes. And that she approved.

Her flare of bravado was fleeting. She hesitated in the archway as she took in the view through the indigo voile curtain.

Logan steadied her with a touch; a solid, warm palm on the small of her back. "Hey. It's just a buncha folks watchin' a show n'havin' a good time. S'nothin' more than that." She still hesitated. He leaned in and put his mouth by her ear. "You're safe with me, darlin'." Under his hand, he felt her body unspool as the tension bled out. He stroked her back with his knuckles, an instinctive response to her unconscious show of trust. She leaned into the caress, a trusting response of her own, given the danger that lay dormant in the knuckles at her back.

He parted the curtain and led her inside, enjoying the expressions ghosting over her features as her eyes swept the large, circular room. A raised dais dominated the center of the space. The wood was glossy and dark. Tables surrounded the platform, radiating out from the center. Semi-private, curtained booths ringed the periphery of the room. There was a sleek frosted glass bar by the archway. The clear shelves behind the counter were lit from below, showcasing the various bottles of spirits. It looked more like a piece of art than a working bar.

Everything was done in tones of deep midnight, rich indigo and vivid cobalt. It was like stepping into the night sky. Pinpoints of fiber optic lights twinkled overhead in the artfully painted ceiling; the milky way on a cloudless night. An eclectic mix of carefully chosen textures added to the effect; crushed velvet, the exotic sheen of silk, smooth navy leather, brushed stainless steel accents and cold, slick glass. Long purple shadows swallowed the patrons furthest from the dais. The light was brighter in the center of the room, illuminating a lone dancer slinking around a silver pole on the stage.

Logan guided Marie to an empty table. Tucking themselves away in a private booth and knocking back drinks while watching something erotic was a little too much like playing with fire, given his current state of mind. He knew she'd probably be more comfortable there, but even his predatory patience had limits. Marie didn't seem to notice. Her attention was on the dancer.

A soft-spoken woman dressed in simple black came to take their drink order. She almost blended into the background.

"Would you like a drink this evening, miss?"

The server had to ask twice before Marie heard her.

"Yes, please. Do you have any small batch, private label bourbon?"

"We do. Basil Hayden, Knob Creek, Four Roses and Woodford Reserve."

Logan wondered if she'd tried enough of them to have a preference. Basil was the most delicate, easiest for a novice to appreciate. He preferred a spicier bourbon with caramel notes and a long finish.

"Sugar?"
The touch of deference to his greater experience was even better than the idea of Marie with a sophisticated palate. She wanted his direction. Fuck all. Inexperience shouldn't be an aphrodisiac. He felt the Wolverine stir.

"Woodford."

Marie turned to the server. "The Woodford. A double, please."

"And for you, sir?"

"Same. Bring the bottle back with ya to the table, honey." Whatever they wound up watching and talking about later, he did didn't want an interruption every time one of them needed a refill. Not with his tolerance for alcohol being what it was. That probably wasn't the smartest decision, but then again he was past the point of giving a fuck tonight. Restraint had gone out the window about the same time Marie had turned and presented him with her sweet, round ass.

"Yes, sir." The server vanished as quietly as she'd arrived.

Their drinks appeared a few minutes later, along with a bottle. Logan was watching Marie. Marie was still watching the dancer on the dais. She was exotic. Long and lean with mocha skin and wild kinky hair that surrounded her face like cloud. Her lips were wide and full. Her eyes were an acidy yellow-green; the pupils a black vertical bar that gave her beautiful features a reptilian feel.

It was the way she moved that was so compelling. She slinked around the pole; her body seemed to be able to articulate in ways no human ever could — a sinuous slithering that was both sensual and disconcerting. She was strong and freakishly flexible as she coiled and writhed to the earthy beat. Her nude body was toned and hairless with small, firm breasts and puffy nipples. Her feet were bare. There was a little golden bell on her ankle that jingled softly as she moved.

"Wow." The nudity didn't even make Marie uncomfortable. It seemed secondary to the beauty of the dancer's undulating movements.

Logan smiled into his drink. That was a good sign. "Like it?"

"I sure do. She's gorgeous."

Well, now. He hadn't expected that, though he wondered how much of her answer had to do with the stiff drink she'd just put away and how much had to do with the men in her head. As she'd gotten older, he began to be more and more curious about how the people she'd absorbed had affected her developing sexual tastes and if maybe that wasn't at least part of the reason she'd been a bit of a late bloomer. He couldn't imagine what sifting through all of that must have been like for her. At times, he'd barely managed to keep his own shit together and he didn't even remember most of his life. Logan refilled both their glasses generously.

"Heh."

"Jubes has been after me to take a pole dancing class with her at the gym for months. I've been blowing her off because I couldn't imagine how shaking my butt in hooker heels would be a decent workout, but now I think I might give it a try. That girl looks like she could kick all our asses."

"Mmph. She could try."

The Wolverine's surly answer made her laugh. "You mean you wish she would."

The dancer was close to finishing her routine. She was breathless now and as she opened her mouth
and panted a little, Marie could see her tongue was slender and forked.

"Darlin', how many men you know who'd put somethin' in a viper's mouth they wanted back?"

"I don't know... Isn't there like some kinda scale for that sort of thing? The danger factor on one axis inversely proportional to how hot someone is? That flexibility's even giving me ideas."

"Heh. Nah. The danger don't really factor in. Either you wanna or you don't. Simple as that."

"The danger doesn't factor in?" He could see why a girl with deadly skin might ask that question, however teasingly she delivered it. Logan's chest felt tight. There was hope all over how she asked that.

"Nope. Sometimes the danger just makes a hot woman hotter. But ain't really about the danger. It's about the woman. The rest is just details."

Logan wondered if he'd said too much. Probably, but he wasn't gonna lie to her. Not about that.

"So if you want her, you want her — no matter what?" Like if she had poison skin? she thought. Or was engaged? her mind added unpleasantly.

"Yep." He almost qualified that with, 'As long as she ain't a kid,' but that wasn't entirely truthful. Occasionally he omitted certain details, but he never flat-out lied to her. The truth was the Wolverine had wanted her at seventeen. It had nothing to do with her age and everything to do with the connection they'd had right from the beginning. He hadn't given a shit she was just a kid; a thought that was profoundly disturbing given his appetite for sex and violence. "Ain't it that way for you? You either wanna or you don't?"

"It's not that easy." She definitely had wanted to with Logan. Right from the beginning. She definitely hadn't wanted to with Remy, despite his considerable effort, buckets of charm and pretty-boy looks. She'd wanted to want to with Bobby. That's where it got confusing. "I'm not sure. I think sometimes what the heart wants and what the head wants are two different things."

"That's why I go with my gut. Less chance of fuckin' somethin' up that way."

Marie snorted into her drink. "Oh, please. You've made plenty of decisions with your head." He raised an eyebrow. "Just not the one on your shoulders..."

"Mmph." His face was his usual stoic mask, but above that hairy jaw, his eyes were dancing.

Around them the audience broke into applause as the dancer took a bow and blew a kiss to the crowd before leaving the platform.

"Elapidae, everyone! Wasn't she amazing?" An announcer had taken the stage with a cocky swagger and a smooth tongue. Behind him, the pole had retracted into the ceiling and the lights had changed from the cool green spotlight illuminating the stage to a more diffused central glow. "We've got a real treat for you tonight and an opening act bound to intrigue..."

Up next: **Cherry Pie.** Marie wears her innocence like a flag. Logan isn't the only interested party...
Cherry Pie

Marie turned back to Logan, intent on finishing their conversation and was surprised when he rose. "Let's getcha a water, huh?" She was small and had already made a pretty good dent in her bourbon. She was going to need to pace herself a little. He intended this evening to last well into the small hours.

That made her laugh. "Sugar, you've gotta be the only man in here not tryin' to get his date tipsy."

"Nah," he teased. "You just got a mouth on ya when you're drunk, kid." And a propensity to speak her mind. Sometimes more than she should, and definitely more than was good for his sanity. And God help him, he liked it.

"Got one on me when I'm stone cold sober too, cowboy." Her laughter was rich and warm.

She followed him to the bar, still not feeling like she wanted to be left alone with this much skin showing. It wasn't a lot by most people's standards, but for her it was a big deal. A baring of more than just skin, it was revealing a vulnerability in a way she never had before, and that was a fear that went far deeper than what her deadly skin could do. It probably wasn't her bravest hour, but it was what it was. He'd always made her feel safe. Tonight was no exception.

As Logan leaned in through the crush to order, the man to Marie's left watched her, his mouth quirking up under his full beard as he pushed his lean, muscular body away from the bar and turned her way. He was rugged and a little wild. Late thirties, early forties, maybe. His brown shoulder length hair was tied back haphazardly. There was a hint of gray at his temples and in his beard along his strong jaw that gave the impression of experience rather than age. He had a tattoo on his forearm, peeking out of his rolled up shirtsleeve.

His eyes were light and sharp, like the sea in winter. Marie felt the weight of them on her, and turned to look. In the darkened atmosphere of the club, it was impossible to tell if they were gray or green or blue. His pupils were slightly elongated, but it was more his demeanor and the way he moved that made her think of a big cat on the prowl.

He tipped his hat respectfully. "Ma'am." The slow, Mississippi drawl made her smile in spite of herself. It had been a long time since she'd heard a voice like that; one that immediately reminded her of home. She felt a surprising warmth in her chest as a rush of memories welled up unexpectedly. She hadn't been home - like that - in years. Sharp and sweet. Old ghosts and happy memories of a life long abandoned. The 'ma'am' wasn't a sign of her age, but a sign of respect from a country boy whose mama had raised him right. Marie responded in kind automatically. Her mama had raised her right, too.

"Sir."

That boyish grin was back again, revealing two dimples in his cheeks under his beard. He didn't run into too many Mississippi girls this far north of the Mason Dixon line.

"Jackson?" he inquired, a thoughtful finger on his lip. It was rude, but with his senses, he'd been unable to keep from overhearing her earlier conversation or from drinking in the sweet smoky cadence of her words. She was a fine looking woman. Wide-eyed innocence trussed tight in a pretty green corset. He approved.

"Meridian."
Him, too. Didn't that beat all? He probably knew some of her kin. He wisely kept that reply to himself. He wasn't intimidated, but he didn't want to make trouble for her, and her man had that hard look that said he and trouble were old friends. The girl smelled good. Lush and sweet with a hint of... wintergreen?

The man's scent overlaid hers only superficially. Interesting. Who was he to her that he called a woman like that 'kid'? Not her lover, that much was certain. At least not yet. She was green as fresh grass. The accent tickling his ear had made him look twice, but he found his interest drawn back by the details, and by the intelligence sparkling in her wide, brown eyes. She had a good laugh, too. Throaty and rich. And ample breasts, made for a man's hands. There was a dusting of fine freckles on them that held his interest a heartbeat too long.

Logan's eyes narrowed at the interloper.

The man had already turned back to the bar, but he looked back over his shoulder at Marie. "You enjoy the show now, y'hear?"

"Go fuck yourself," Logan growled.

"Logan! He was just bein' polite." It was impossible to explain to someone what hearing your own accent reflected back felt like so far from home. Especially when that childhood feeling of safety and security was long gone. She could go back, but it would never truly be home again.

"Bullshit." Logan snorted. The man's words might have been polite, however his scent was anything but. Under the earthy musk of interest was a pitchy spice that said quite clearly that Logan wasn't the only man with feral instincts in the house tonight. Fucker. It was that, more than the words, that had made Logan bristle.

The bearded man's gaze swung from Marie to the rough man at her side, his sense of playfulness fading to cold assessment as he took her man's measure. He couldn't really blame him for the growl. If she was on his arm, he'd probably do the same, though he'd never be stupid enough to bring a woman like that into a place like this without claiming her fully, first. What was her man thinking? She wore her innocence like a dare. The bite on her neck barely gave him pause, but he wasn't free to hunt tonight. His dance card was full. His lip curled, flashing a bit of teeth at her man that was in no way a smile.

His boyish charm came back as he gave Marie one last look. "Ma'am." He set his drink down, touched two fingers to the brim of his hat and melted away into the plummy shadows.

"Asshole," Logan growled under his breath as they made their way back to the table.

Marie arched a brow at him. "You or him, sugar? He was just bein' nice." Logan chuckled at her naiveté.

"Trust me. There was no way what he was thinkin' was anythin' close to nice."

She laughed a little at that. "So you read minds now, too?"

Logan snorted and tapped his nose. "Don't have to."

"Please. He probably just heard my accent and wanted to say hello."

"Yeah. Right." Lord love her, she really didn't get it. "I toldya you'd have 'em comin' outta the woodwork tonight."
"Oh, come on." She was still a virgin at twenty-one. There was hardly a line of suitors knocking down her door.

"Darlin', you forgotten where we are? People who approach you here are only lookin' for one thing, and they're gonna assume if you're in a place like this lookin' like sin incarnate, that you're willin' to at least entertain the question when they ask if you wanna play."

"He just said hello. He was bein' sweet."

"Not that sweet. Your innocence is like catnip to a man like that." Irresistible. His choice of words was deliberate. He was too much a predator not to recognize it in another. The man's scent was broadcasting several things clearly; he was a mutant, a feral one at that, and he was definitely interested in Marie, despite his casual nonchalance.

Her face felt warm. It wasn't a rebuke so much as a lesson. He could see she got it now. Good. She'd do well to listen to him. He knew what he was talking about.

Marie was still thinking about it after they sat back down. Was a familiar accent really all that it was? If she was honest with herself, she supposed the interest of the leonine man felt good, provided she experienced it from the safety of Logan's personal space. He was quite handsome in a rugged sort of way and he'd had that underlying streak of wildness she'd always responded to. Definitely the sort of man she'd have had a drink with if she'd been by herself. What did that mean? And was Logan right? Was the man's interest really about more than their shared birthplace?

He hadn't really flirted with her and she'd barely said two words to him in return. But at the same time, she'd liked how it had made her feel for Logan to see another man, a man like that, take an interest in her, even if it was largely nonverbal. There was power there, but it was unfamiliar. She was ready to see herself in a new way and she was ready for Logan to see her in a new way, too.

"God." She felt foolish and her face was red and hot. She understood the draw of youth, but next to the sexually sophisticated women around her tonight, she felt inadequate in comparison. "I can't imagine how I must look."

Christ, if she only knew. It was because of the blush, not in spite of it. "Nah. Looks good on ya."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Like a virgin snowfall. Every man who looks atcha wants to be the first to leave a mark, darlin'." He was no exception. It made him feel frighteningly possessive.

Logan thought she'd blush more. He was surprised when she turned those piercing eyes on him instead. "I'm not sure I see it that way. What you said? That's not really about me exciting anyone. That's just about some guy wanting to be the first to, ah, plant a flag. He doesn't really care where he plants it, or who he plants it in, as long as he's first."

He frowned. Was that what she thought he was doing here? The thought of being present tonight, sitting with her while she experienced this erotic self-discovery, wasn't much different. The idea of being the man with her while she discovered those things excited and aroused him. It wasn't about being first, though. It was about being first with her. He'd never been with a virgin, at least not one he could remember. The idea itself wasn't titillating, but the idea of being a part of Marie's initiation into the world of adult pleasure was frighteningly compelling.

Her brows knitted together at the look on his face. "What?"

"Nothin'."
"I call bullshit."

"I just don't wanna be one more asshole with a flag, kid." That was hers to give, not his to take.

He was surprised when she threw back her head and laughed. The full-throated sound seemed to settle directly between his legs. "Are you kidding me? I'm practically covered in little Logan flags — and all of them make me smile."

"What the fuck?"

"You were there for a lot of my important firsts, sugar." A lot of them were pretty heavy so she didn't list them; her first time absorbing a mutant, first time touching a man, first real hug, first real emotional adult connection…. but he'd also taught her to how to fight, how to play poker and pool, how to do tequila shots, how to hotwire a car, how to drive a stick shift, how to kill man, how to defend herself, how to strip an engine — and a weapon. How to lay a floor and replumb a bathroom and build a deck. The list was endless. "I'm kinda excited about sharing this one with you… you know, if you're up for it." The serious look in her eye slid towards something else. Something hot and a little wild.

"What'd I tell ya about callin' a man on it, darlin'?" he teased. He wasn't actually hard, but their intimate banter felt good. Felt right.

Marie opened her mouth to respond but as she did, the lights went out, plunging the room into darkness…

Up next: Take On Me. Logan wishes Marie could appreciate the show's carnal delights the way he does, with all his enhanced senses. And then he realizes she can, all it would take is a little touch…

Okay, y'all. I'm writing Logan and Marie's first time together. (Smut, and a lot of it. Hey, it's me, right?) Any song suggestions for that? Gold star to anyone who can guess the working chapter title. I'm putting out a call for smutty song inspiration because you know it's gonna be more than one chapter of sexytimes, right? Think of it like a smut station: KPWP playin' all your favorites. Less talk... more nookie... ;)}
Take On Me

The darkness surrounded them, feeding the sense of expectation and excitement. Logan's keen senses easily caught the sound of movement on the stage. He could see just fine in the low light and smiled as he watched the props being set up and the couple taking their places. Marie sat at his side, still with anticipation and holding her breath.


A nude woman lay on sturdy wooden platform. It was low and smooth, perfectly suited to her sinuous form. A virile man with dark, unruly hair and a chiseled body knelt at her side. He was wearing only a pair of low-slung jeans and a knowing smile. The woman's long red hair spilled off the platform, a river of fire to the slick wood under the man's knees. A crimson silk blindfold covered her eyes.

He had a rope in his hand. More was coiled carefully, precisely, beside him on the floor. He was slowly dragging it down her skin. It made her shiver and her pulse speed. His was steady, rhythmic; his breathing carefully controlled.

They were both aroused and excited. Logan could smell it. Whether it was from what they were about to do or the fact they were going to do it with an audience present, or both; it was clearly affecting them. Blood and breath and expectation beating a sensual tattoo against his sensitive ears.

Logan put his lips to Marie's ear. "You hear that?"

"Hear what?"

Shit. He'd wanted her to be able to experience this like he did. With all his senses. He wanted her to be able to hear the gasps and feel the sounds against her sensitive skin, to catch every little movement with quick eyes and to smell the musky scent of their rising pleasure. To taste it in the air the way he could.

"Them. His breathin'. Her heartbeat." He knew she couldn't. He was a fool to think she would.

"Not all of us have your gifts, Logan." She rolled her drink in her palm, nervous and excited about what she might see tonight now that the proper opening show had started.

"You could if you wanted."

"What?" She turned away from the stage to meet his eyes.

"You could have 'em if you wanted." He let that settle a moment. "A little touch is all you'd need to take me in."

Her breath caught. "Oh."

She had imagined the possibility of many different outcomes for this night of firsts with Logan, but that had never been among them. To take him into her? Like that? It was a different sort of penetration than she'd considered, and wholly thrilling. She had not expected the offer. Such a decadently intimate exchange. Her heart thumped wildly at the very idea.
"Won't hurt me none and it'd make it better for you."

"You sure?" She didn't want to cause him pain, but there was a tremulous excitement in her voice that she couldn't hide.

Logan didn't respond verbally. He took off his jacket and rolled up his shirt sleeve instead, baring his thick forearm. He set it on the table between them, palm up in invitation.

He felt the sultry heat of her body as Marie leaned in, almost brushing against him but not quite. "You gonna give me permission to touch you, cowboy?" Her breath was sweet in his ear, warm and smoky from the bourbon.

Ah, Christ. He felt himself start to get hard. It was dark, but she'd notice it any minute now if she looked.

He nodded.

She shook her head, feeling her power as a woman stir, given a healthy shot in the arm by the fiery alcohol warming her insides. "No. Say it. I want to hear you say it."

Jesus fuck. She was burning him up. "Touch me."

He had expected her to slip off a glove and run a fingertip over his skin. He was not at all prepared for her to lower her head and nip sharply at his fingertip before ghosting her full, soft lips down his arm. They stopped on his pulse point. He felt her smile against his skin when his pulse raced under her lips. There was no hiding that.

The connection didn't open right away. It took a little while these days. Even after years of working on it, control still eluded her, but she had a good twenty seconds now before the pull began if she really concentrated. Tonight he could tell she wanted to make it last. There was no hiding that, either.

Her breath was hot on his skin. Those full, red lips pressed lightly against the inside of his wrist. The waiting was maddening. For one wild moment, he even imagined he felt the warm, wet flicker of her tongue... and then that electric tingle raced under his skin, a heady buzz lighting up all his senses before the draw began to pull at him.

She lifted her mouth almost instantly.

"You didn't get enough," he rasped. He wasn't even dizzy. Just rock hard from the buzz and the feel of her lips on his skin.

"I don't want to hurt you." She didn't, he knew, but her pupils were already blown wide. He was like a drug inside her. Ah, fuck. _Fuck._ That predatory feeling rose, hot and sharp.

He snorted. "Take more." It wasn't a request. She tried to turn his hand over and put her lips against his knuckles but he stopped her. "No." The unique musculature and metal covered bones under her fingers felt heavy and exciting. She could taste him on her lips. "Not there. They might come out….

It was entirely possible his claws would spring out reflexively if her mouth was on him when the pull started again. Logan didn't want to hurt her and he wasn't sure he could control his reaction, or even retract them if they did emerge. Sometimes when that red haze took him, it was a while before he could regain enough of himself to force them to his will. And, Christ, it had never been like _this_. He was feeling wild and strangely out of control. He had decades of carnal experience on her and yet one simple touch had reduced him to ash.
This time she nuzzled her cheek into his palm, clearly luxuriating in the pleasure of physical touch before she pressed her lips back to his pulse point.

Logan counted to twenty-three, feeling the blood pound under her lips and between his legs before that sweet fire licked under his skin, rippling and drawing. The world faded away until it was just her lips on him and the delicious satiation of rushing into her, unchecked. It was not unlike the physical rush of an intense orgasm; he was pouring himself inside her, just in a different way.

It felt fucking good. And then he realized he could hear her.

She was speaking against his skin. Counting.

One Mississippi… Two Mississippi….

Chuckling, he stopped her at five, dizzy and breathless, but still quite able to stay in the chair despite his spinning head. He wasn't entirely sure how much of it was due to what she'd taken from him—and how much was due to how she'd taken it.

Goddamn.

She was awash in sensation. The last two times he'd touched her, what she'd gotten was predominantly fear and regret, underscored by a deep pain that had no words. This time it was different. Warmer. Wilder. Playful with a hungry edge. A beautiful light inside her. "You okay?" she managed to push out, her concern for him overriding even the wild tumult of Logan's considerable gifts pulsing fiercely under her skin.

"Fuck yeah. Got a real good buzz goin' now, darlin'." That was the damn truth. It took a lot of alcohol to make him feel like this, and she'd accomplished it with a simple touch. It wasn't fading fast either, the way it did with bourbon or whiskey.

She'd forgotten what a rush his power was. So big and full inside her. Wild and exciting and familiar, too. "Mmm…. Thanks, sugar." She giggled, raking her gloved hands down his chest with a saucy wink. It felt so different with him. Fuller. Richer. Probably because his well was considerably deeper than most, but also because the Wolverine dwelled there, too. His energy was beautifully, unapologetically savage. "You fill me up real good." There was no mistaking that innuendo. Her hands lingered on his chest and then fell from him to press to her own body in amazement. "I love how you feel inside me."

Holy hell.

She'd clearly gotten a healthy dose of the Wolverine's disregard for social convention along with a shot of enhanced senses. He could see the golden glimmer in her eyes.

"Shit," he murmured, grinning back at her, quite unable to bring himself to be sorry for something he enjoyed so damned much.

"Yeah."

"You good?" He didn't need to nod towards her head. She knew what he meant.

"Hell, yes. Mmm… I feel so..." her hands wandered down her body, from her rib cage to her belly, pressing back against the fullness inside her. She had no words to express the feeling, but the way he watched her hands run over her body seemed to telegraph her meaning well enough, if the look on his face and the low rumble of approval in his chest was any indication.
They'd momentarily forgotten the show. A few sets of eyes had left the performers and were openly watching the two of them with more than a little curiosity.

A gasp from the woman on the platform drew back most of the wandering eyes, theirs included. The man on the stage was slowly, artfully, binding the woman with an intricate series of loops and knots. With every wrap of the thin hemp rope, the woman's heart beat faster.

"You hear it now?" he rasped into her ear. With his gifts coursing inside her, they both knew he didn't need to be so near to be heard. He wanted to be close. Needed it, maybe.

Beside him, she nodded in the inky darkness, a smile turning up the corners of her mouth, enjoying his breath on her neck and the warmth of his big body next to hers.

"What's that scent?" she whispered softly.

"Dunno. Describe it." It could be anything. This place was a veritable cornucopia of smells.

"It's....." she closed her eyes and breathed in deeply. He did the same, wondering what had caught her attention. "..... wild... fecund. Like wet soil. Sort of musky-sweet? It kinda, I don't know, tickles... in here." She opened her eyes and tapped her head.

His teeth flashed in the darkness.

"That's arousal, darlin'."

It was spicy and earthy and made that place deep in his brain itch and burn. Sometimes it was intense and amazing. Other times it was annoying as fuck, like a splinter in his mind, driving him crazy. There were very few scents that had the power to make him completely lose focus. He couldn't concentrate at all when Marie was fertile. The Wolverine was much too primal not to respond to Nature's fierce demand; virility and vitality and that gloriously sweet promise in her scent, announcing her readiness to receive him. When she peaked, it was maddening. A fever in his blood. Hell, even the scent of her distinctive shampoo, cedarwood and lemongrass, was enough to distract him on the rare occasion he ran across someone else who used it.

"Oh, God."

"It ain't hard to tell 'em apart. Women are sweeter. Lighter. Fresher, like new grass. Musk and salt and sweat and honey."

"And men?" Her face was hot and her blood felt fluttery under her skin. Wild. Powerful. She was embarrassed, but also curious. It was exciting to talk with him like this. Not just like a woman, but speaking openly about topics he rarely discussed.

"Men are different. Scent's more base. Darker. Peaty. Yeast and moss and earth. Sorta salty-electric." Ejaculate had a distinctive scent that sent a very clear message to any creature with feral senses.

"Is—is it always like this?" She shivered, drawing in another delicious lungful of air scented with desire and underscored by leather, the lingering trace of tobacco smoke and the faint, woody scent of Logan's shaving soap. There was something underneath that, a scent she had no vocabulary to describe. Something that simply registered as male. It was primal and compelling, and reminded her of the day she stood on the beach in Cape Cod and watched a violent winter storm roll in. Salt and rain and power. She felt that same energy from Logan now. Another shudder went through her and she felt her nipples draw up, hard and aching.

"Nah. It's slightly different on everyone. Different but still, ya know, good. Some more'n others."
Fuck not letting her know how he felt about that smell on her.

He inhaled deeply, wanting more of her distinctive scent. The base notes were familiar, musk and honey. But to him she also smelled like fresh snow and sunshine and the toffee-vanilla finish of good brandy. Smoky-sweet with a fiery kick that followed. Marie was cautious, but the Rogue took no prisoners. It was a one-two punch that did it for him every time.

The unspoken implication was there; that he knew what she smelled like aroused… and now they were both aware she knew that scent on him, too. He could see that knowledge burning brightly in her eyes.

"I like it," she offered quietly.

Satisfaction pooled hot and low in his belly.

"Which part?" Fuck every line they'd ever drawn in the sand.

"All of it." It wasn't just the scent. She could feel the sounds against her skin. Her eyes saw more, even in the low light. With her senses so heightened, she couldn't imagine what an actual physical touch would be like right now, let alone an openly sexual touch. She was already quivering in her skin.

"Good." He barely suppressed a shudder. That approval always got to him.

"I forget that it's like this for you all the time," she added softly into the charged silence.

"It ain't."

"I don't understand."

"Kid, you only gotta little taste of somethin' a hell of a lot bigger than five-Mississippi."

He could tell he'd shocked her again.

Good.

He smiled into the darkness in anticipation, tasting her excitement on the air and eager for what was coming.

Up next: I Want It All. Now that Marie's had a little taste, she wants more...
I Want It All

It was much harder to focus now. Marie felt effervescent, like the bubbles in champagne. Wild and floaty. There was a darker thread too, pulling at her. Savage and hungry and impossible to ignore. It had settled low in her belly and made her want to press her legs together.

The woman on the platform moaned, tossing her head and straining against the intricate rope webbing. Her hair was like fire, lit from above. Every so often the man would stop and stroke it before returning to his work. Around and around. Through and over. Tighter and tighter.

Loops and twists formed easily under his fingers. The rope crawled across her skin. His movements had a beautiful rhythm, slow-slow-quick. Smooth and staccato together, a complex dance. He touched her between movements and between the ropes. Tender caresses, careful not to pinch her skin as he wove the ropes over and under and through, smiling when he flicked her with the tail end as it grew shorter and shorter.

On the stage, the man paused, looping the rope and pulling it taut before he bent in and sucked at the woman's nipple. His mouth let go with a soft pop and beside Logan, Marie shivered in the chair. The man returned to his work.

"What's he doing?" Marie asked, leaning in towards Logan, her voice a husky whisper purring against his eardrums. The ritual was too deliberate for it to not be something specific.

"Shibari."

"What's that?"

"S'Japanese word. It means 'to tie'."

Her mouth twitched. "Looks like there's a little more to it than that, sugar."

"There is. It's an art of erotic spirituality. Tyin' someone not just to keep 'em from movin', but to do so elegantly and beautifully. With purpose." He glanced over at her, wondering what she made of the show.

"It looks like bondage." He raised a brow at her. "Hey, I've seen pictures."

That drew a soft chuckle from him. "That's a part of it. Erotic bondage. The point isn't pain, or even pleasure. It's beauty."

"Beauty?"

"It's collaborative. Look at her. He's not doin' it against her will. She's offered herself. Her body is the canvas. He's the artist. The rope's his tool of choice and the designs he maps on her skin are his creation. The knots are carefully placed on her pressure points. He's makin' her skin sing." Beside him, Marie bit her full bottom lip. "If he knows what he's doin' — and knows his partner well — then the pressure will be damn good. Just where she needs it to make her fly. She wants him to take her someplace beautiful."

"Hmm…" That sounded good. Really, really good.

"Texture. Contrast. Trust. The rope against her skin. It'll leave marks they'll both enjoy after," he murmured quietly. Marie shivered again.
"Tell me more."

"There's more to it than that, more'n just physical. If he's really good at it, he can make it be euphoric for her. Like a runner's high, you know? Take her totally out of her head. For him it's the rush. Adrenaline and power."

"So it's the visual, coupled with the power exchange?" He could tell she didn't really understand.

"And the physical."

Logan studied her, curious about her reaction. Given their past conversations and the incident with Jubilee and Gambit, he thought she'd be more into the show unfolding before them. The rigger was surprisingly talented. The girl was half out of her head with pleasure and they were just getting started. Marie seemed only mildly interested, however. Her focus was on him and their quiet conversation rather than the couple on the platform. Interesting.

Logan tried to look at the performance objectively, seeing it as she might. With his senses, he found the lighting and the music mildly distracting, but the show itself was above average. The girl was tall and thin with long limbs like a doll; a crimson fall of hair against alabaster skin. Even the natural hemp looked a deep taupe against the expanse of creamy white. The contrast was beautiful. The man appeared to be in his late twenties. His hair was black and he had a few hours' worth of dark stubble shading his square jaw. His body was lean and strong and his hands moved confidently.

Logan's enhanced senses told him it was more than just an act. The two performers were deeply caught up in what was happening between them. They were both aroused, breathing erratically and sweating. Maybe Marie didn't find the man attractive? Or maybe it was the act itself? Still, though it might be unfamiliar to her, this was quite tame compared to some of the edgier erotic stories she'd written. He understood that not all fantasies were as good in reality as they were in theory, but he didn't think it was that, either.

"Don't like it?" he finally offered into the long silence. He honestly couldn't tell. Her scent and body language were giving him conflicting information.

"Uh…" She hesitated.

"Don't be shy. I wanna know," he said softly. He wanted this experience to be enjoyable for her. He was also interested in what it would reveal to him about her sexual likes and dislikes. That was virgin ground for them both.

"It's not that I don't think restraint is sexy. I do."

That was reassuring.

"But?"

"It's just the red hair really isn't doin' it for me. Sorry, sugar."

Well, fuck. That hadn't even crossed his mind. He didn't dwell on memories of Jean, but he could see why Marie might not be so into the idea of seeing a man with his general physical characteristics putting on an erotic show with a woman who could easily be Jean.

Shit. Now he felt like an ass.

"You don't gotta be sorry, darlin'." He wasn't playing now, or even teaching.
Marie caught the quick grimace ghost over his sharp features.

"There's no reason to feel bad. It's not your fault. I'm tryin'. It's just that she keeps taking me out of the moment."

"Nothin' wrong with that. You shouldn't hafta try, kid. It either comes or it don't." He refilled her glass. "You wanna take off? Find somethin' else to watch instead?"

"There's another show after this one, right?"

"Yeah. The mixed couple. This is just the openin' act." Typically that meant no penetrative sex, but this wasn't exactly the kind of place that had hard and fast rules.

She considered that a moment. "Then I want to stay here, sitting in the dark with you and listening to you tell me more about shibari." That was far more erotic to her than what was happening on the stage. Logan so rarely revealed any of his sexual self to her.

"You sure?" His voice got even softer. "He's not finished with her yet. He's still workin' up to it, but in a little while he's probably gonna make her come."

Jesus, that blush went all the way down.

Marie took a deep drink, but she met his eyes and nodded.

"Yeah. I think I mostly get it — in theory — but I'm not really sure I understand the 'why'."

Ah, Christ. He was going to ride that goddamn compelling innocence of hers to fucking perdition. He didn't even feel guilty about it. He was enjoying himself.

And so was she.

"You askin' for a lesson?"

The Rogue stared back at him. "You offerin'?"

He could feel the Wolverine rising in him, responding to the blatant challenge in her voice.

Logan reached forward and gently pulled the long, sheer scarf from her neck. It slid over her skin, an iridescent whisper, stirring her scent and imparting her warmth against his fingertips. "Give me your hand."

Her pulse throbbed, fast and unsteady under her skin as she wordlessly held out her left arm.

"Take your glove off." He was slowly twisting the scarf in his hand, creating a thin, dense green rope.

"Logan…"

"Off, darlin'," he repeated silkily. "It needsta be against your bare skin." She still hesitated. "I'll keep ya safe."

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Up next: **Pour Some Sugar On Me.** Marie and Logan play an erotic game. Lines are crossed. The Wolverine reels.
Marie's eyes fluttered closed but she slid the glove off, meeting Logan's gaze again as she folded it once and laid it carefully on the table between them like a flag of surrender. The delicate silver rings she wore gleamed in the low light. A tiny one on her pinky, hammered metal that caught the light. On her ring finger, an old family heirloom. Her great-grandmother's wedding ring, elegant and simple. A line of tiny diamonds across a plain band of white gold. She had a heavier silver wrap ring on her thumb, shining in the darkness.

That one was his favorite.

He knew from memory she had five on her other hand, three thin hammered bands on her middle finger and two on her pinky. A secret only the two of them knew about. He was the only one who saw her without her gloves these days. The rings also added a layer of detail to a fantasy he had all too frequently; her touch on him. Those small, capable hands on his skin. Rings shining and smooth against his flesh. Her hands in his hair... and on his body... and between his legs.

"Be careful."

Logan nodded once to acknowledge her soft warning, but to her surprise, he made no move to touch her naked arm.

Marie had told him she thought she understood the notion of erotic restraint — in theory. She just didn't understand the 'why'.

"The 'why's' easy, darlin'."

"Tell me."

"You ever wish you could be taken outta your head?"

"All the time," she confided breathlessly. She was never alone.

He knew that would be a compelling, salient selling point for her.

"If the rigger knows what he's doin', he can take you to that place if you let him. Rope drunk, they call it," his voice had dropped. It was huskier now. The conversation was affecting him, too. "Somewhere beyond thought where it's nothin' but euphoria and sensation."

That sounded too good to be true.

"Have you ever done that?"

Logan shook his head. "Never trusted anyone enough to be that helpless." The admission was quiet but carried a hard edge. "But done the riggin'? I lived in Japan a lotta years, kid."

Maybe that's what he did in the Nagasaki room upstairs? Her mind whirled with possibilities.

"So that's a 'yes'?"

He still didn't make a move toward her bare arm. It was making her a little crazy. What was he waiting for?

"It's more'n aesthetic. The pressure of the ropes and the placement of the knots is very specific," he
offered instead. He took a slow sip of his drink and her breath caught in her throat as he set the glass down and deftly manipulated the end of her scarf into a simple slip knot. His eyes never left her face. That he had enough skill to do it so fluidly without looking spoke to the breadth of his experience.

He slowly, deliberately, dragged the loop over the skin on the inside of her wrist, an echo of how she'd touched him earlier. It was the same place she'd put her mouth on his wrist.

She sucked in a quick breath, a stifled sound of shocked pleasure.

"It's about sensuality." He slid it over her skin again, smiling as she shivered. She was very responsive. "'N'vulnerability." This time he let it tickle up her forearm and back down. "Strength, too." With a practiced motion, he slid the simple noose up over her hand and tightened it in small increments. He adjusted the knot's angle on her wrist and then pulled. The pressure increased by slow degrees. First a little. And then a lot.

A touch that was not a touch.

Marie could feel her pulse pounding wildly under the simple loop. She never would have guessed he could make her gauzy sheer scarf feel like an iron shackle. Or that something so simple could be so wildly erotic.

His fingers moved. The following coil lay next to the first, snug and precise, increasing the pressure exponentially. She was very aware of the blood flow in her hand now. It was beginning to feel heavier. How long before it started to tingle? Or go numb? It was only a small leap to imagining what that delicious pressure might feel like all over.

"Trust," he continued, his words pitched low. "Power." The inflection was slow and hypnotic. Her fingers twitched. He smiled. Below the noose, her skin was beginning to grow deeper in color as the moments ticked by. "How aware are you of your hand now?"

It wasn't a question that required a response. He just wanted to make her think about it. And she was, if the look on her face was any indication.

The implication was clear and deliberate. He could make her aware of any portion of skin he wanted, simply by how he arranged the rope and applied pressure. Her breasts. Her thighs. What would a rope between her legs feel like? Or around her neck? The room swam a little. So much sensory input would make it impossible to focus on anything else. Freedom from the prison of her mind. It was almost enough to bring her to tears.

Holding Logan's eyes, Marie moved her wrist experimentally, pulling against the steady pressure, and felt the delicate bones of her wrist shift slightly.

"Careful, darlin'. This ain't the right rope to be playin' that sorta game." Too much give. Not enough structure.

"But if it was the right kind of rope?"

Jesus. She always had to push.


With a playful light in his eye, he tickled the shivery bit of skin on the inside of her elbow with the softer, floaty end of the scarf that he hadn't yet twisted into a slender green cord.
"What happens now?" she asked, feeling the world begin to spin out of control.

"Now the lesson's over, darlin'." He let didn't let her go completely, but the pressure on her wrist eased a little. Her hand throbbed pleasantly.

"And if it wasn't a lesson?"

He searched her face and considered what he found there before carefully answering. "Then we woulda had a real deep conversation long before the rope ever touched you, baby."

"About?"

"About where you wanted me to take you."

God, she was melting. He knew it too, the bastard. Marie blushed to the roots of her hair, but the Rogue, the Rogue wasn't about to let him call all the shots.

"And what about you, sugar?" she purred. Christ, that sound went right between his thighs, as sure as any touch.

"What about me, kid?"

She drew her hand back sharply, forcing him to put pressure on the strip of green sliding through his long fingers until they reached equilibrium. The length of iridescent green cord quivered tautly between them.

"You feelin' the rush yet, cowboy? Adrenaline and power, was it?" Her eyes sparkled.

For a moment he wavered, but he thought better of answering her with the unvarnished truth at the last minute. He wasn't going to put any of his shit on her. They had time. If anything ever happened between them, it would be because she initiated it, not because he took it. Tonight was about her. He'd flirt, sure. Definitely more than he should, and probably way more than was healthy for either of them…. but he wasn't going to push this somewhere that couldn't later be explained away as two tipsy friends having a wild night on the town. He kept his answer carefully ambivalent, as all his responses had been tonight.

"You've seemed to make it your life's mission to drive me demented, baby. You think this is the first time I've thought about tyin' your sassy ass up?" His tone implied his mental picture possibly also included a gag, a bridge, and a long fall into a cold body of water.

She punched his shoulder with her free hand and then winced as the noose pinched her wrist painfully with the unexpected shift in position. Logan let it go immediately.

"Shit."

He was not in the right headspace to play these sorts of games with her tonight.

"It's fine." She moved to massage away the ache but he pushed her hand away, carefully loosening the knot and unwrapping her wrist, as was his right. It was his rig, simple though it was.

"This is a part of it too," he murmured softly.

"The unwrapping?"

He nodded. "And what comes after." Those words didn't need to be expanded upon. There were two beautiful pink impressions in the creamy skin of her wrist. It took more of his monumental
control than he cared to admit to keep his mouth off them. "Put your glove on." A mark like that, his mark, was one temptation too many.

She did as he asked, smoothing the silky black fabric back up her arm.

"I get it now," she said quietly, taking a healthy sip of her drink.

"Good." They fell quiet.

It was Logan who finally broke the silence. "Do you still feel it?" Was her skin throbbing under that damned black glove?

Marie bobbed her head, not quite trusting her voice. The satin of her glove shifted against her oversensitized skin, making her very aware of that part of her body. It was a mark of his pleasure, not of protection like the teeth on the back of her neck.

"'S'like a secret." Logan's thumb ghosted over her wrist, directly over the hidden mark.

"Nobody knows but me," she whispered.

"And me."

Marie shivered. "And you."

"Now imagine it was all over, not just under the glove? Or some place with more nerve endin's than a wrist? Or that I'd used a finer cord — silk maybe — and you were still wearin' it under your clothes..."

"God."

"Or maybe they're gone, but whatcha feel ain't just the lingerin' sensation of the ropes."

Her eyes were very wide. She made a soft sound, not even a word. A gasp. Her spicy scent suggested pleasure rather than surprise.

"Could be you feel what happened between the ropes."

"Between?"


"The whisper of claws, warm and smooth and sharp."

Logan jerked in the chair.

The Rogue smiled.

"Fuck."

Fuck indeed.

Up next: **Push It.** The Rogue has always been a little wildcat. She can't help pushing the Wolverine.
You can't know how much room you have to play until you find out where the hard edges are...
Push It

When the opening act was over, Logan was surprised to find that Marie had enjoyed watching the man on the platform untie his lover more than the show itself. It spoke to her deep desire for intimacy, rather than a shallow longing for the physical release of sex, and yet her comment about feeling his blades on her skin had shaken him.

That she could even imagine it at all told him there was a purely physical element somewhere in the mix. One he hadn't realized was quite so pronounced. It certainly spoke to a level of sexual sophistication that he hadn't expected from someone with such limited experience. It was a thrilling prospect and one that chipped away at his hard earned control.

Still, while it was clear she found the idea of erotic restraint compelling, she had seemed uncomfortable, rather than aroused, as the woman on the stage had come, twisting and writhing in the ropes. Feeling her discomfort made him uneasy too. It skated too close to the line of despoiling something pure and good. He had no problem sharing any number of sordid pastimes with her as long as she joined him on the other side of that dirty line of her own free will, but he didn't like the idea that he was responsible for putting her in a situation where she might feel pressured.

"You okay, darlin'?"

"Yes." Her eyes were bright and clear as he refilled her glass.

He gestured to the stage. "Too much?"

"No. Not really. Just different than I imagined."

"Different how?"

"Just different than it felt when I saw Jubes and Gambit that time. I liked it, but that was strange enough when it was just me watching."

He understood what she wasn't saying. She found the crowd inhibiting. This time she'd been more aroused by their conversation than by the action on the stage.

"You wanna go? S'okay if you do."

"No." She blushed at how quickly that had come out and ducked her head as Logan chuckled softly. "I like being here with you."

That was a whole different animal than I like what we're watching. It wasn't quite laying all her cards on the table, but it was enough of an admission that it had the Wolverine rattling the bars.

"Me, too." Too fucking much.

Before he could elaborate, a woman approached their table, her eyes on Marie.

Logan grimaced. Christ. Another one? This was getting ridiculous.

Marie was clearly taken by the grandeur of the woman as she stopped in front of them. She had a sleek cap of mottled feathers instead of hair and powerful wings that fluttered silently, like an owl. As long as he'd known her, Marie'd had a compulsion to pick up and stroke any feathers she found and he could tell she was a little awestruck by the woman. She was less an archangel and more a
valkyrie. Her eyes were large and golden and while she wasn't classically beautiful, she was striking.

The bird-woman noticed Marie's attention and smiled at her with expectation. "May I touch?"

"No." Marie's voice was firm and final. It surprised him. She wasn't hiding behind him this time.

"Not you." The stranger turned her strange, unblinking gaze on Logan and plucked a downy plume from the underside of one of her massive wings. "Him." She held out the feather invitingly.

Well, shit. He'd definitely read that situation wrong. She hadn't been eyeing up Marie as a potential partner, but as a rival for his attention.

"In that case, HELL no." Marie took the feather from the woman's outstretched fingers before Logan could even reject the token. "He's mine."

*Whoa.* Logan's eyes flicked to Marie's face. The husky growl slipped out before he could stop it. It wasn't shock. It was pride. Possessiveness spiked with a healthy dose of pleasure. This was what he'd expected earlier. A lioness. The Rogue in all her glory. She owned every bit of it now — not the little glimpses he'd gotten before, but the full measure. Strong and wild and as fierce as he'd ever seen her.

"Is that true?" The woman's condescending expression seemed to imply she couldn't believe a child like her owned a man like that.

Logan just sat back smugly, saying nothing.

The Rogue was not silent. "Every last bit of him, sugar."

The woman's scathing glance switched back to Logan. "Your loss." She flounced away with a shake of her head; a flutter of wings and feathers ruffled the wrong way.

"Damn," he breathed into the awkward silence.

"Sorry." This time it was a glimmer of Marie in a sea of The Rogue. "I didn't think." It had just come tumbling out. It felt too right to even be embarrassed about it right now. She probably would be later when the adrenaline faded, but right now, she was feeling good and more than a little wild.

"S'fine."

"I don't know..." she shrugged. "Nobody owns the Wolverine."

"Somebody does tonight."

God, she hadn't even thought of that. No doubt the word that the Wolverine had allowed himself to be publicly claimed would spread like wildfire through this place.

"Just tonight?" she managed, saluting him with the glass and a cheeky wink.

Jesus, he loved The Rogue.

"Nobody owns The Rogue, either, darlin'," he shot back. He didn't care what the rest of the people here thought about him. The only person whose opinion mattered to him was hers, and she seemed frighteningly fine with it.

She touched the bite on her neck with one gloved finger. "Somebody does tonight..."
Another growl rumbled out before he could get a lid on it, and for a moment, his eyes gleamed golden at her across the table.

She might not know exactly what she was doing to him, but the look on her face said she had a damn good idea, and that she was loving every moment of it. It didn't surprise him. Tonight was about testing her wings and clearly she was enjoying her newfound power. He enjoyed it, too. There had always been a spark. Tonight they were playing with fire. And it was damn good.

He caught her eye. For a moment, everything faded into the background and it was just the two of them, acknowledging the silent shift between them.

The lights dimmed again and he heard Marie huff quietly.

"What?"

"I can't see."

"Five Mississippi wore off already?"

"Most of it, yeah. I still have a little of you in me." God, those words. She had to have chosen them deliberately. "I still feel a little wild, but the extra senses are gone."

He frowned at that, wondering if she'd only been as assertive as she'd been because of the lingering trace of him inside her. "Mmph."

"It's not that."

Sometimes it annoyed him that she could read him so well. "Hey, if-"

"Hush up, sugar. It's all me. Whatever I got from you, it's not what's coming out tonight." His expression was wary, with more than a touch of disbelief. "This has been building a long time. What I took… that just makes me feel more safe to be the me I've been keeping inside for too long. It's time."

He nodded. This wasn't about them, it was about her. It was time for her to begin stepping out of the boundaries that had held her back for too long.

His body stiffened in the chair when he felt the feather tickle up and down his forearm, following the path her lips had taken earlier.

"Kid?"

She swirled it over his pulse point, making his sensitive skin crawl. "Mmm…"

"You want more?" It was a question, not an offer. This time she'd have to ask. He couldn't in good conscience lead her further. It had to be all on her this time.

"Yes." God, she was killing him with that damned feather. She'd moved on from his wrist to his knuckles. He could feel the blades pricking at the back of his hand. Her owning the tool of another woman's attempt at seduction was getting to him too. There was a sophistication there he hadn't expected.

"Then ask me."

Her breath caught but she met his eyes. Her gaze was wild but steady. "Logan, sugar? Can I please have more?"
Christ, that did it for him. He liked it when she said 'yes' and 'please' and he really liked it when she said his name like that, all whispery and breathy as hell.

He might have made her ask, but he wasn't above pushing a little now that she'd joined him on the other side of the line. Instead of offering her his arm again, he opened another button at his throat and canted his neck in challenge, chuckling as her eyes widened.

*He couldn't possibly…*

Her eyes narrowed. It wasn't smart to dare the Rogue.

She moved closer with the feather and he growled under his breath at her. A playful warning. He could tell from the sparkle in her eye she was thinking about earlier tonight; his admission that his neck was ticklish.

She'd run her fingertips over him then and he expected her to do the same thing again now. His body was already beginning to coil in anticipation of her removing that glove and touching his throat like she'd done earlier. Hell, her wrist would probably still be carrying his mark. It took considerable effort to remain still in the chair with that gauntlet thrown down in between them.

His breath rushed out of his lungs in surprise as instead of pulling off her glove, she leaned in closer, dragging the flat of her impertinent little tongue up his neck. It was an impossibly slow tease, a wet glide from his collarbone to that shivery spot just under his ear. Breathing him in. Tasting him. Testing the rough drag of his stubble under her tongue.


Christ, those lips. Big and soft, so close and warm… The arm he had around her slid up to cup the back of her head, holding her to him.

*Eleven. Twelve. Thirteen.*

Her eyes were closed in pleasure but he could see her brows furrow as she concentrated, trying to make it last as long as she could, to hold back the overwhelming tide from rushing into her too soon.

*Fourteen. Fifteen. Sixteen.*

The buzz electrified his blood.

*Seventeen.*

Fuck. Too soon. Too soon. She nipped him with her teeth and the pull began as she laved away the sting with her clever tongue.

This time, she didn't pull away.

This time, she knew what was coming and she wanted it. Wanted to feel him inside her, filling her up. That delicious pressure pulsing and throbbing under her skin.

Four Mississippi…. Five Mississippi… Six…

By eight, the world was beginning to go hazy around the edges.

Nine…

He swayed in the chair. "Marie," he warned.
"Enough," he growled, pulling her mouth from his skin, but still keeping her close; shaking off the gray as the world threatened to go dark. Christ, she was so powerful. She shouldn't be, a little bitty thing like her. But she'd damn near put him on the ground just now. It made him feel better, not worse. Despite her youth, she was his physical equal in every way.

Her eyes were wild. She was panting hard, lit up from the inside. Full of him. Full of power. Full of hunger for things she'd never tasted, except for the stain bleeding from the memories in her head. "Sorry," she breathed, still trying to separate herself from the heady rush of him coursing through her.

She could feel him so strong in her mind. An echo of his thoughts and feelings; a tangle of pride, desire, lust, tenderness and overriding it all, apprehension. A clear feeling that this was too much too soon.

She agreed.

"Sorry," she said again, softer this time. "I'm so sorry. I couldn't..." it had been too good to stop. She'd always been afraid of that. It wasn't that she was afraid of touch. She was afraid that once she opened herself to it, as starved for it as she was, she wouldn't be able to stop. It had happened once with Bobby, too.

Once that tiger was out of the cage...

It was a thousand times more intense with Logan. Not just because of who he was and how she felt about him, but because what he filled her with was every bit as volatile as that tiger. And just as wild for escape.

She flushed.

"S'alright. M'fine." His head was spinning, but he could feel his mutation compensating, the heat and the full flush of power rising under his skin as his body began replenishing what she'd taken. It was slower than usual and left him feeling good, relaxed and more than a little drunk now that there was less healing to compensate for the large amount of alcohol he'd consumed. He wasn't used to pacing himself.

"I'm sorry." She was having a hard time focusing. All around her the scents and sounds from the other patrons were grating on her senses. She didn't have his decades of experience blocking them out. "I didn't mean to..."

"Yes, you did." He didn't mind. In fact, he loved that she wanted him like that. That it was so big and good and so much that she couldn't control it. He wasn't very good at keeping his need inside the box either. He was sitting with her at a sex club, for Christ's sake. They were both skating a fine line tonight. "You did and I liked it." Fuck the line. He wasn't about to let her feel bad for something they'd both enjoyed.

Her eyes met his, serious now. "I never wanted to hurt you."

"I know." He touched the stripe in her ponytail. "But ya liked it and you wanted more. Nothin' wrong with that."

"Except I could have killed you."

"Nah. It'd take more'n that. I'm good. Real good as a matter of fact." His lopsided grin became
something else. Something more serious. "It's just 'cause it's new. Your first time takin' it into you that way when you're in charge. You can't expect to control something so—"

"Scary."

"Powerful," he corrected. "When it's still so new. Give it time." He was more than willing to help her there, but now was not the time for that conversation. He caught her hand with his. "You think I didn't have a learnin' curve with these?" He raised a fist casually.

"Mmphf." Hearing his grunt of derision coming from her made him smile.

And then he frowned as she winced when the woman to their left laughed excitedly and clapped her hands as the lights flicked out in advance of the main show starting. Marie had taken even more of him this time, the overstimulation would be even more intense.

"C'mon."

Logan picked up the bottle and rose.

"I don't want to go," she whispered, catching his hand. She wanted this, with him. Now. Here. Tonight. To watch something sexy with him at her side and that delicious wildness pounding in her blood. Her touch and scent telegraphed that to him clearer than any words.

"We ain't leavin'. Just relocatin'."

He put her in one of the leather booths at the back of the room that was recessed into the wall and half shrouded by heavy velvet curtains. That pseudo-privacy would test his frayed control even further, but it would help block out the rest of the distractions while still allowing her to enjoy the show with the gifts she'd taken from him.

To be honest, he preferred it to the table as well. Crowds were always an assault on his senses.

He knew she'd like this better, too. It wasn't quite the same thing as watching a private show, but it was damn close. They couldn't see any of the other patrons now, just a clear line of sight to the stage as the room plunged into total darkness. The energy between them was different this time. Less tentative. More electric.

The small enclosed space was better in some ways but more difficult in others. The air was still and quickly filled with the scent of her; desire and relief and pleasure over the leather of the booth and the bourbon on the table between them. She wouldn't miss the desire spicing his scent either. Not now.

"Thanks, sugar."

"You bet."

She snuggled up next to his side, breathing deeply, still obviously trying to work out the boundary between him and her. He understood how it might be difficult to define where she stopped and he began with so much of him inside her. He had to be strong in her mind.

"You okay up there?"

She nodded. It was good but confusing. There was so much. A riot of conflicting emotion underscored by an almost primal need, not to own her but to protect her — from what, she wasn't exactly sure. She couldn't even begin to name the raw feelings swirling in him. It was a savage tumult. A part of her was glad. She wasn't ready for the enormity of what was waiting for her. Not
yet.

Tonight was just about testing the waters.

Together.

He turned and blinked at her slowly, feeling his mouth twitch. "You licked me."

He thought she'd blush. She didn't. She grinned at him instead. "You needed lickin', sugar, and you know better than to dare me like that."

His chuckle was low and dirty.

Of course he knew that.

That's why he'd done it.

But for now, he let it be.

They both needed to pretend a little longer.

Up next: **Hysteria.** The real show begins. Marie and Logan are unprepared for the fallout from what they see…

*Need I say we're heading into very adult territory here? (Though frankly, if you're not into that, I can't see how you'd still be with me after 27 chapters of it.) Heh. You have been warned!*
Hysteria

A single light shone down, illuminating a still figure in the darkness for a brief moment. A woman stood at the corner of the platform, head bowed; a spill of long inky hair hiding her face. Her skin, like milk. Luminous in the darkness. It was a stark contrast to her hair and satiny black lingerie; bustier, panties, thigh high stockings and fierce black pumps.

The light winked out, plunging the room back into darkness.

A flutter went through the crowd. There was no music. No sound, save for the girl's slow, even breathing.

The light came again, this time illuminating the far side of the platform. A man sat in a sturdy leather armchair, leaning back with his legs spread slightly in casual repose. Boots. Jeans. Belt with a plain silver buckle. A crisp white button down shirt under a worn leather vest, sleeves rolled up to reveal muscular forearms with a sprinkling of golden hair. His face was shadowed by his hat, revealing only a square bearded jaw. It wasn't a cowboy hat. It was the kind gunslingers wore. All that was missing was the piece strapped to his strong thigh. The man radiated power and danger, even without the allusion to men who lived and died by the gun. He had an aura of primal energy that made the space feel very small.

The light snuffed out, once again swallowing the room in shadow.

When the light came again, it lit a pair of empty, gleaming heels where the woman had been standing moments before. One lay tipped on its side, as if she hadn't been able to crawl out of them fast enough.

The light went out.

It came again from above, golden and warm. Brighter this time, but still only lighting the small sliver of space around the man in the chair. He'd moved. His wiry bulk had shifted forward slightly, his forearm on his strong thigh now as he leaned in. He was smiling into the darkness, his sharp focus on something just outside the circle of light.

Again the room was plunged into darkness.

It took a few moments for their eyes to adjust, but both Marie and Logan could see her, charcoal against shadow. Moving toward him. Slowly. Seductively.

This time when it light came, the man's hat was gone.

Logan felt Marie startle against him.

It was the leonine man from the bar, hair down around his face now, brushing his shoulders. A little wild, like a mane. His full, trimmed beard only added to the effect. His face was a study in predatory focus. Those strange pupils of his were open wide, looking past the pool of light to watch his prey in the gloom.

The room went dark again.

When the light returned, the woman was kneeling between the man's spread knees, swaying lightly. Not touching him, but waiting for direction from the feral, dominant force sprawled lazily in the chair. His feet were bare this time.
Marie sucked in a deep, shuddering breath. There was something about that image that sent her blood skittering under her skin, hot and wild.

The fact that she had a connection to the man on the stage, however tenuous, made it all the more exciting. The good Southern girl in her was a little shocked — he'd seemed so nice. The Rogue was intrigued and aroused, as if she were getting a glimpse of what it would have been like if she'd responded to his unspoken invitation at the bar. It was as if he'd invited her into his bedroom to see just what she was missing.

Her hand stuttered on the tabletop and Logan didn't miss the way her thighs pressed together at the man's casual display of power. There went her pupils, blown wide as her scent became a thousand times more alluring. She was engaged this time in a way she hadn't been before. And so was he. This is what he'd hoped for her tonight. That she'd open herself to it — and to him. That she'd embrace something inside of herself that she'd been hiding from for too long.

A possessive growl rumbled low in Logan's throat as he pulled her against his side more firmly and shifted his body, moving just slightly in front of her. Marie was enthralled by the performance and didn't realize what he was doing. She simply took pleasure in the fact he wanted her close while they watched this intimate act unfold.

The man on the stage kept up the appearance of being solely focused on the woman in front of him, but nodded almost imperceptibly in Logan's direction. Acknowledgement from one predator of the claim made by another.

The man in the chair had noted the Mississippi girl's empty table and his sharp eyes had found her ensconced in the alcove easily enough. He rarely acknowledged the audience at all, but tonight he felt the added thrill of the Mississippi girl's eyes on him. She was ripe with innocence ready to be claimed. It excited him in a way overt sexuality could not. She was not his, but perhaps tonight he would give the girl her first true taste of adult pleasure. And later, when she went home and took off those intriguing gloves, maybe what she saw tonight would be playing behind her eyes when she put her slim, white hand between her legs. Between his thighs, he felt the first stirring of his own pleasure.

The darkness came again.

Beside him, Marie shuddered in anticipation. Logan pressed his nose against Marie's hair and inhaled, feeling his own blood rise.

The light returned. The man's hands were on the woman now. Her smoky eyes were downcast, nude full lips curling into a slow smile. That first touch. His fingers at her throat; a thumb on her pulse. Gentle, but knowing. A wild tattoo beat under his fingertip.

Work-roughened fingers skated down, feeling her swallow and tracing the delicate sweep of her collarbone before stopping on the wide expanse of naked skin on her back above the corset. His eyes gleamed as he used just the lightest pressure to guide her over his knee.

There was a beat of time where the earth stood still. His hand skimmed down, past the ties at her narrow waist that hung so deliciously over the smooth curve of her bottom.

Marie was riveted, waiting with tremulous expectation. The position suggested a spanking, but even she, as innocent as she was, thought that would be too soon. Too easy.

As if he'd heard her thoughts, the man's touch gentled. Instead of the swat the position implied, his caress slid over the swell of the woman's smooth backside, exposed below the silky thong. His short
nails glided over her creamy skin. Not hard. But enough to make her shiver and leave pink trails and gooseflesh in their wake. His other hand rested on her neck, stroking lightly.

Logan put his mouth to Marie's ear. "How do you think that hand on her throat makes her feel?" For as much as he wanted this night to be for her, it was about him, too. There were things he wanted to learn.

"I don't know…" Safe? Testing the word in her mind didn't make it any less frightening to speak aloud. She imagined Logan's hand on her neck. "Safe?"

Logan pulled her closer, surprised and pleased by her response.

The man on the stage closed his pale eyes briefly, jaw clenched. Perfection.

The Rogue just smiled.

Up next: Animal. A slow, erotic descent into pleasure and a visceral reaction too strong to deny…

(A short one, I know… but the next one is twice as long, and trust me, you'd rather have it this way than have me break the next part somewhere in the middle…) Heh. My LoganMuse was definitely NOT on board with that plan!
Logan and Marie watched as the man on the stage slowly, leisurely, slid his hand up the woman's throat and into her long, shiny hair. He made a strong fist and pulled her up. Not hard or rough, but with passion as he brought her face to his. They shared a wet kiss before he guided her back over his knee and stroked her nape.

Marie didn't realize her fingers had stroked her own neck, brushing over Logan's bite. Logan saw the small gesture and wet his lips, unconsciously searching for any lingering taste of her left on his mouth.

The next touch was rougher; a sharp, staccato smack. Marie jerked in her seat. The woman hummed with pleasure. His hand fell again. And again. It was definitely more than playful. Intense without inflicting real pain. Rough but not violent.

Marie could hear their breathing change, their heartbeats begin to speed in unison. The swats echoed off the harsh surfaces instead of being absorbed. She could smell the leather of the chair and the spice in the man's scent as his body heated with exertion. The leather creaked pleasantly in counterpoint to the sharp sound of his palm striking her flawless skin. It left large, beautiful fiery-red handprints.

When the woman began tensing, anticipating the next swat, the man changed tactics, deftly slipping his fingers under the silky fabric between her legs to touch the slick moisture gathering there. He used his thumb for that, too, before slowly licking away the glossy sheen with a lusty smirk. A smack. A caress. A dirty push of his fingers, first two - then three. Another smack. The drag of his nails. A bite. Always changing it up. He chuckled aloud when he playfully pinched her ass and she squealed in surprise, throwing him a flirtatiously dirty look over her shoulder.

Marie enjoyed their lively sense of fun. The woman was spirited and the man was surprisingly playful in the most engaging of ways.

Their energy was different than the previous couple. Less underlying tension. There was affection but not love, and a sultry mischievousness that was heavily centered in the physical. They were playmates, not soulmates. That sense of lightness made the seductive descent into watching the carnal act easier for an innocent like Marie, who despite her adventurous nature, still had some firm lines in the sand.

Darkness descended.

An exquisite cry broke the silence. Marie's mind whirled. God! What had he done to her? The rapid shifts from light to dark were purposeful. It took even those with enhanced senses a moment or two to adjust, allowing the couple on the platform brief slivers of time when the two on stage were perfectly hidden.

This time, the light brought a rush of heat and a blush to Marie's face. The man's wide thumb brushed the woman's full, wet lips and then he pushed it inside for her to suck. Was his thumb salty? Sweet? He'd been drinking Southern Comfort at the bar. Was her tongue swirling around it, inviting him deeper? Marie squirmed against Logan.

Fuck. There was a flash of teeth in the darkness that was not quite a smile, but a sign of pleasure nonetheless. Marie's growing restlessness was slowly pushing Logan closer and closer to the edge.

The man pulled his thumb from the woman's mouth and slid it down her neck and chest, leaving a
wet trail. He scratched his way back up before slipping his fingers inside the cup of her bustier, pinching her nipple hard enough to wring a delicious sound from her.

Logan clenched his teeth as he watched Marie's hand cup her own breast lightly before it slipped down to press against her middle, as if it could hold the riot of wild feelings at bay. He could tell she hungered. Strongly. Deeply. Aching for touch. To feel what the woman on the stage was feeling.

Logan had wanted that for Marie—and for himself, too. Tonight was just as much about watching each other as it was about watching an erotic show. This one couldn't have been more suited to them. Little visual cues that made it more intense for them both. The corset. The buckle. A slim brunette kneeling before a feral man. It was all too easy for Logan to imagine himself in the man's place with a different brunette on her knees, inflaming all his senses. In truth, his mind had been there many times before.

Marie's pink cheeks and sultry scent told him she was thinking about it too, casting herself as the woman on the stage. Her face was so open and expressive. There was no mistaking which man she was picturing in her head. Not with her fierce, exultant claim still ringing in his ears. It excited him and made him a little apprehensive, too. She was deeply invested and he hoped what played out on the stage and in her head wouldn't ultimately be too salty for her or push her too far down an unfamiliar path.

A look passed between the couple on the platform and the bearded man nodded slowly, once, and stood. He planted his feet wide as the woman purred against his groin, rubbing her cheek against him silkily before pulling back to watch his eyes as her hand crept up the inside of his thigh and reached for his belt.

This time when the lights went out, Marie whimpered softly.

Logan did not miss the flutter of Marie's fingers or her quick glance at his buckle. Fixing the details in her head to make her fantasy better, he hoped, aware Marie had likely imagined the darkness would conceal her furtive glance.

When the spotlight returned, Marie flushed to the roots of her hair. Her skin felt hot, fluttery and twitchy. The angle was perfect for her to see everything. It was as if the feral man was putting the show on just for her. Perhaps he was.

The man was not at all shy. Even half hard, he was magnificent and there was something wonderfully dirty about a barefoot, aroused man exposed in a pair of unzipped jeans. Marie found herself smiling as the woman hefted the heavy column of flesh in her palm and stroked him from base to tip, imagining a similar touch on a different man. The image easily sprang to mind with such an explicit visual firing her fantasy. She enjoyed the little shiver of pleasure the man couldn't quite contain, too. He was powerful but not immune to the woman's intimate touch, or to his body's instinctive response to such openly erotic stimulation.

Could she make Logan's body do that? Draw such a visceral reaction from so stoic a man? Their eyes met and he seemed to be able to read her mind. The Wolverine missed nothing. Marie's eyes darted back to the man on the stage. He was the safer place to look by far.

He was beautiful, thick and natural, rising proudly now from a nest of golden brown hair that was dense and a little wild. When the woman pushed up his shirt a little, Marie could see the trail extended up his abdomen. It made her want to follow it with her tongue. It also made her wonder what else was hidden under his clothes. She was starting to resent not being able to look her fill, unfettered. She felt hungry and restless. Logan's solid, strong presence at her side only amplified the feeling. In her mind's eye, every touch and gasp took on a different meaning, painted in her head in
shades of them. Logan's touch. Her gasp. It was difficult to concentrate between her awareness of him and the earthy scent of his arousal filling her head.

The man's face was hard, unreadable. His hand was fisted in the woman's hair. Marie's eyes were drawn back irresistibly to his thick erection, her eyes wide and her breathing deep.

She wet her lips.

Logan brushed his mouth against her ear. "That the first time you've seen one?"

Her low, throaty laugh surprised him.

"No. I could touch Bobby in his ice form."

Logan shook his head, eyes sparkling. "Sounds… chilly."

"I can say with certainty that's not the kind of goosebumps I was hoping for." That drew a quiet rumble of amusement from both men. "I definitely prefer the flesh and blood version."

Logan grunted. On the stage, the man's dimples were hidden in his beard.

Darkness fell. Into it came a rough masculine purr. The sound of a man in his pleasure. Marie hummed too, caught up in the story playing out before them. She flushed, catching her lip in her bottom teeth, a little embarrassed by her visceral reaction, but too aroused to stop. All of them could feel it. There was a sense they were gaining momentum, rushing toward a deliciously inevitable conclusion.

The light returned, falling on the man's upturned face. One hand remained tangled in the woman's dark hair. The other stroked her face, brushing her full lips stretched wide around his girth and caressing her throat as she swallowed greedily around him. Dominance without possession.

The man was beginning to make low chuffs deep in his chest. Not a human sound at all. It was savage and compelling, pounding in Marie's ears and vibrating against her sensitive skin like a touch. The sound drew an instant reaction from her, a new slick rush of desire and a full body shudder she felt down to her toes. "Oh….." It was less a word and more a sound; that first sharp intake and then the expectant feel as she automatically held her breath, waiting for what came next.

Fuck. That sound. Innocence twined with fierce hunger. Longing that demanded attention. The man on stage couldn't help but look, an answering groan on his own lips. Nature commanded it. He was unable to resist the compulsion. He held one woman's eyes while the other pleasured him. He never did that. Never. That eyeful of young sweetness was smashing his rules to hell. He could feel the sweat trickling down his belly and when the girl wet her lips with the unconscious desire to taste him, his eyes slid shut and his head fell back as he let himself imagine that Mississippi sugar swallowing him down.

His touch became less gentle, communicating his need to his playmate. A wave of feral lust rose and his hips began to thrust. The mouth between his legs grew rougher, wetter and more pliant. Lips and tongue and… teeth. He grunted hard, dragged too close to the edge by a slip of little girl and an instinctive desire to answer her primal call.

"So rough!" Marie exclaimed softly. She turned her head toward Logan, meeting his eyes. They were hooded, black with desire and more than a little wild. He wasn't watching the show. He was watching her. Her scent was driving him insane. His body was telling him to cover her, to rut and thrust and bite. "That— that's okay?"
"Fuck yeah." He nodded curtly. "Hurts good." A feral smirk appeared on his mouth, showing her a flash of his canines. "I liketa bite, too. Sometimes sweet and slow ain't enough to burn away the fire."

The darkness came again. Logan felt Marie shift against him. He heard the rasp of satin and felt the warmth of naked hesitant fingers hovering just over his lips.

"Can I?"

_Hasta be her choice. All on her._

He opened his mouth in answer, letting her feel for herself. His canines weren't really longer than average, but they were much sharper. She touched his lips and then his teeth, her fingertips pressing the points experimentally. His tongue encouraged her finger deeper, and he sucked softly, rhythmically, almost without thought. Salt and sweat and want bloomed on his tongue. The buzz followed, warning him of the impending pull and he released her. Grudgingly.

She ducked her head, flushing more when her eyes fell on his lap. He widened his legs a little and let her take a good long look. His blood pounded, a fierce throbbing just there under his buckle. A wet spot would probably be visible soon. He was intensely aroused, weeping need in a steady trickle now. In a way it was more explicit than what was happening on the stage. Certainly more intimate. When she licked the finger he'd just sucked, it took all he had to remain seated, his hands clenched at his sides.

_Jesus, fuck._

Marie's mind was in turmoil. What would he do if she touched him? She wanted to. Her fingers twitched with it, but something held her back at the last minute. Logan swallowed a fiery mouthful of bourbon. "Put your glove back on," he growled. His eyes flashed gold when he said it and even The Rogue knew better than to push him when he was like that.

The light began to flicker like a strobe, revealingly only little flashes of the couple on the stage.

Her fingers on the buttons of his vest.

His teeth on her neck.

Her nails digging into him.

The flickers grew faster — the glimpses they revealed more intimate. There was a feeling of acceleration. Adrenaline and lust and sex and skin.

His mouth on her breast.

Her nipple pulled sharply in his teeth.

His fingers buried deep.

When the light returned, warm and steady, the woman was in the chair and the man was standing, naked and wild before her. His body was tawny, muscular and fit. A powerful chest and shoulders and a light furring of caramel hair on his forearms and legs. A darker tangle at his groin. He had several scars. A warrior's body. Marie could see the tattoo on his arm fully now. An unexpected spray of orchids in sepia and white. Some woman, somewhere, had touched him deeply. A second, smaller, tattoo sat over his heart, a black desert frog and trident. A SEAL, then.
Marie imagined him in bed. She wondered if Logan was imagining facing him in the cage. Either way, a violent catharsis of emotion and a physical resolution to the tension winding them all too tight.

The bearded man could feel the weight of the Mississippi girl's stare. Her hunger beat at him. He preened for her a little, savoring her eyes on him and flexing lightly, making his muscles jump and ripple under his golden skin. He palmed his cock, stroking the thick length slowly just to hear her soft intake of breath. It would be warm and sweet against his skin.

He pounced on the woman, a purr rumbling in his chest as he lifted her up and sat her on the back of the chair with a devilishly dirty grin. He was enjoying himself. He licked her neck and they kissed, his hair a rough tangle from her fingers as they parted. He looked like a wild thing as he got between her spread legs, pulled down her bustier and licked and nipped at her. It was dirtier, more erotic than if he'd pulled it off of her entirely, patience and propriety long gone.

"Mmm…"

Logan's hum of approval earned him a wry smile from the Rogue.

"You like that, sugar?"

"Fuck yeah." It was on the tip of his tongue to tell her she'd like it too. Instead, he bit down, tasting copper and shuddered at the sparkle in Marie's eyes. For all her innocence, she seemed very aware of what he was truly thinking. Perhaps it was because she had so much of him inside her now, or perhaps they were simply, finally, in tune.

On the stage, the man showed the woman off a little, holding her leg up and scraping his teeth down the length of it before pulling off her stockings with his teeth and biting into her instep with a playful growl. Palming her small breasts in his large hands, he smiled as he bent to her. It was good... but there was a more alluring scent below. He followed his nose, nipping the inside of each knee as he opened her legs and pulled aside the scrap of lace to lick and suck. Marie bit her lip. The woman moaned, making little sexy noises in her throat as she squirmed.

The man had stopped playing. He grabbed her hips hard, holding them where he wanted while he worked her, purring against her as she wailed.

Logan's expression said he liked that, too. Marie's mouth went dry.

The lights went out.

Marie shivered against Logan, leaning forward in anticipation. Her lips were parted and she was breathing through her mouth now. Last time she had been passive. This time she couldn't wait to see what would happen next. Everything about her telegraphed her readiness; her scent, her posture, her breathing and heartbeat. Slick and ready and open.

Christ.

Logan put his claws out on the hand opposite her, using the pain to ground himself.

Marie moaned softly with the reemergence of the light. Logan jerked in his seat as the sound crawled over his skin.

The couple had moved. The man had tipped the woman over the back of the chair, his rugged features twisted into a snarl of unfettered lust as he kicked the woman's legs apart, ripped her panties to the side and shoved in hard.
"Unnh!" The low needy sound broke from Marie as she grabbed Logan's hand tightly. It was too much. It wasn't an erotic touch, it was a lifeline. He had always been protection and safety to her and she turned to him now with big wet eyes, tremulous and shaking.

It was too much here, like this. Too open. Too revealing. Too close to what had happened between them in the alcove. She'd never imagined feeling like this just from sitting with him and watching…

Her eyes were drawn back to the couple on the stage. The woman's back arched in welcome, her hair spilling wildly as she tipped forward with the force of his initial entry. Her feet were leaving the ground with each powerful thrust of his hips. Sweat shone in the small of her back. The man pulled out and stroked the thick, glistening length of his erection before crudely licking his palm and wiping his wet fingers over his nose and mouth.

Marie's eyes were wide with a question she was too embarrassed to voice.

"Hasta taste them together," Logan whispered into her hair. Her whole body shook against his.

The rhythm of the thrusts was getting to them both. Hard, deep powerful movements that forced guttural feminine grunts from the woman every time he bottomed out. Then a pause. A look exchanged. A smirk. Another savage thrust. A pause. The thrusts grew quicker and harder until the woman's individual grunts became one long, loud, sustained cry.

The man shoved in deep and stilled his sweaty body.

"Why'd he stop?" Marie asked, breathlessly. They were clearly not finished. She was still feeling acutely shy, but her curiosity got the better of her, despite the feelings overwhelming her.

Logan's ears were still ringing from the woman's throaty cry. He chuckled darkly. "To give her a breather, darlin'. She don't have his stamina."

That lay there between them, a gauntlet unwittingly thrown down. She wondered if Logan would have to stop for her? The Rogue said no. Shouted it inside her head until it was all she could hear.

"God."

"Feels good, too, when ya get goin' again after. Little break like that makes everythin' more sensitive."

The man was moving again. Sharp, hard thrusts with random intervals between, longer at first and then slowly getting shorter as he gained momentum. The rhythm was different now as they hurtled toward something none of them could stop. The woman keened, an earthy obscene sound forced from her by her lover's unapologetic physical mastery of her body.

"Hurts good," Marie whispered, understanding now.

Logan only nodded, unable to speak. He was too close to the edge.

The feral man pawed at the woman now, moving roughly, without his earlier playful edge, lost to instinct and his need to make the woman come.

Everything seemed to crash in on Marie at once; the explicit eroticism of the act, the scent of Logan's arousal and the answering musk of her own, the wild thoughts in her head and the visual behind her eyes of a different couple making love with absolute abandon, all control gone, all walls torn down. Everything exposed.
Logan felt Marie squeeze his hand and he drew her into the protective shelter of his body. She was trembling, wide-eyed and breathing erratically. Someday, the Rogue would not have limits. Today, she did, and he was aware she'd reached them. He hushed her, a wordless croon, soft and low.

The feelings swirling in her were too big, too wild and they frightened her. Caught in the eddies, she'd been pulled into the rapids. The water was deep and the current too strong to fight. Marie wanted, desperately, and yet, she was afraid. She watched from the safety of Logan's arms, her head under his chin and his iron strength bracketing her, supporting her through the final moments.

The man had a handful of flesh at the woman's hip, kneading roughly as they mated fiercely. His other hand grabbed her throat and he licked her neck, a sensuous path that made Marie shiver. She gasped at the hard bite that followed, her own neck still tender where Logan had put his mouth on her earlier.

The woman's hands scratched at the leather as her voice broke on a rising scream. The man inhaled sharply, pulling in the scent of the woman underneath him as well as the even more alluring scent of the girl watching from the shadows. He bared his teeth, grunting as the woman's body squeezed him in strong, protracted contractions.

Fuck. Fuckfuckfuck. Close. Close now. But he wanted her to see.

The golden man lifted his shaggy head at the last moment and caught Marie's eye, hiding nothing as he came with a primal beastly roar that shook the room, not even remotely human.

His body shuddered, pushing deep as he rutted. He lost himself then, his eyes finally closing as he filled the woman with his seed in hot spurts that left him breathless and weak. Another battle with nature that could not be won.

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Up next: Hurts So Good. The aftermath... *Come on, baby, make it hurt so good. Sometimes love don't feel like it should. You make it hurt so good...*
"God," Marie breathed reverently into Logan's neck, shaken by what she'd seen and done, by how she felt and by the depth and breadth of what the bearded man had let her see in those final helpless moments. She was surprised and disturbed that he'd done that, and that she'd responded to it so viscerally. It felt a bit like how she'd always imagined it would be to lick a light socket. A rush so intense it shorted everything out in a shower of sparks and a jolt of power too strong to be contained.

To have that intimate connection with someone and to hold his eyes while also feeling that deep throbbing inside her as he gave himself to her in hot, shuddering spurts was almost more than she could wrap her spinning mind around. Marie couldn't help but imagine Logan looking at her the same way as he poured into her, holding nothing of himself back. What would that be like? They'd had walls and boundaries for so long. The idea of total freedom was as terrifying as it was compelling.

Her own body was humming with desire and she could feel Logan all around her, his body rigid, every muscle bunched and hard with tension. She was would equally as tight. She wanted to come, needed it, but she couldn't. Not here. Not even in this secluded little alcove. It didn't feel so safe now that the bearded man had invaded it with his intimate stare.

It was all too much, like some wild carnival ride that she couldn't get off of that kept spinning faster and faster. Her fingers tightened on Logan and she nestled deeper into the safety of his big solid body. He was warm and strong and safe. Feeling him that way made the rest of the world recede a little.

"I gotcha, darlin'." Logan's long fingers were still entwined with hers. It felt familial rather than prurient. She hadn't needed him that way in a long time and it felt good that it was still there for her, even now.

He didn't ask her if it had been too much. He could tell from her trembling and the way she'd pressed her face into him that it had. It sobered him, pulled him back from the edge. He'd wanted to open her mind a little tonight, not blow it completely. He was directly responsible for her discomfort and the weight of that settled unpleasantly in his belly, even as his body screamed for release. The Wolverine was somewhere in the mix too, making him more unstable, woken by the luscious scent of lust and need and innocence, and by the vulnerability in the small form clinging tightly to his chest.

The light winked out.

In the shadows, Marie could see the woman turn in the man's arms and he kissed her, smiling lazily as he collapsed into her embrace, catching his breath with a wide grin. They slid together easily in a decadent, sweaty tangle of limbs as their skin crawled with pleasant little aftershocks. The man took his time, unhurried and indulgent as he savored those intimate moments with his lover. A kiss to her sweaty temple. The brush of his fingertips along her spine. Her hand lightly cupping the heavy droop of spent flesh between his legs. The flash of a white smile in the darkness and his low purr of masculine contentment touched Marie in a way that his deep grunts of pleasure could not. A true moment of naked intimacy.

The leonine man pulled the woman up gently, making sure she had her balance before parting from her, though Marie didn't miss the flash in his eyes as they flicked down to the pearly trickle slowly running down the inside of his lover's thigh. Proof of their pleasure, and of his virility, too. The woman dropped his hat back on his head with a quiet laugh and they walked toward the edge of the stage, fingers linked and swinging hands like children on a dirt road back home.
Marie whispered a quiet 'thanks, sugar' into the darkness.

Logan rumbled a 'welcome' into her ear and across the room, the man touched the brim of his hat and Marie swore she caught a softly murmured 'ma'am' as the couple disappeared from view.

The trip home was a blur. Marie had a vague memory of Logan's sure hands zipping her into her coat before settling her onto the bike and pulling her close. The temperature had dropped. The bite of the wind was icy on her face but her body felt hot, tingly and wild, like a wildfire raging under her skin. She plastered herself to Logan's back and said nothing as he kicked the bike to life and guided her hands up under his jacket.

That felt different, too. Her fingers had the urge to move this time, but not to tickle him. This time she ached to sink them into the heavy bands of muscle and pull him close, to rub against him and dig her fingers into him and to feel the weight of his body pressing her down. She wanted to map his skin with her hands the way the woman had done to the man on the stage tonight. To open her legs and body to him. To make him shudder and hear the rough sounds of his pleasure and the softer rumbles of his satiation. To let him finally see all that she'd kept hidden for so long. Understanding burned brightly in her. How blissfully freeing to have her partner provide direction and the boundaries in which she was free to express herself.

A part of her was disappointed the night hadn't ended with her and Logan behind one of those closed red doors. Another part of her was glad. If they ever did give into this thing between them and make love, she didn't want it to be with any of his mutation filling her up. She wanted to feel it. To not heal instantly as he pushed in deep and took what was his. She wanted to be all of herself, only herself, with him. At least the first time.

The Rogue was curious and hungry for all the physical delights she'd been denied for so long. She wanted to explore how their mutations might work with and against each other to heighten their pleasure. That would be something new for them both, something they could explore and define together.

The bike roared under her. Fueled by what she'd seen tonight, Marie gave in to the fire in her blood and let her imagination run free, pressing herself against Logan's strong back and breathing him in deeply as the black highway disappeared beneath them.

Logan rolled the bike to a stop outside the school. Marie dismounted, stammering a little as she looked for the right words. "I— I..." Her cheeks were flushed and her body was loose and languid. Without the air rushing by, stealing away her scent, he immediately understood why. She smelled ripe and heavy with satiation.

While his lips curled knowingly, his blood burned. She wouldn't be the first woman to enjoy the rumbling of a heavy bike between her legs. He had thought he'd felt her shudder a few times on the ride back, but had chalked it up to the biting cold. Now he knew differently, and Christ, knowing she'd reached orgasm pressed against his body made him even more frantic for his own release.

He forced his voice into a carefully neutral tone. "You good, kid?"

"Very." That husky admission was out before she could stop it, sultry and low. He chuckled, but his fists clenched tight in reaction. She flushed a deeper pink and avoided his eyes. "I mean, yes. I'm fine. Thanks. I had a good time tonight."

That got her the raised eyebrow but what he really wanted to do was bend her over the bike and shove himself inside her over and over until her voice was husky like that from screaming her pleasure to the night.
Logan forced down the reply such a charged comment begged him to make, and he tweaked her ponytail softly. He had to fight to keep his touch light, casual. "It was fun, darlin'. Best time I ever had there, hands down."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah." He didn't elaborate. Their shared eroticism tonight was far more arousing than all the dirty things he'd ever done, and that list was long and filthy. The Wolverine had few limits, sexually or otherwise.

Marie squirmed a little under his intense scrutiny. His mouth actually watered. God, he would probably smell her a county over. He knew that under her suede pants her panties would be slippery and warm, drenched from what she'd seen tonight and the number of times she had come on the bike, shuddering against his heavy body. His hand twitched with the urge to delve into that glossy heat, to spread the scent and slick of her over his fingers, and to bring it to his mouth. To hold her eyes while he licked the taste of her from his hand.

The scent was maddening, clouding his brain. It was difficult to think beyond how she'd feel around his fingers, fluttery and hot. Under her clothes, she was ready for him. Slippery and open. One finger wouldn't be enough for either of them. She'd need two. He'd use three. Open her up. Push her legs wide. Hold her down and make her come again and again. He needed to feel her squeeze down on him and to spread the new gush of wetness down his thick length to ease what was coming next. Logan shoved his hands in his pockets instead.

It didn't help. His fingers brushed against an unfamiliar texture, and it took a moment to place it. The feather the woman had tried to give him earlier. With that memory came another, inextricably tied. Marie's voice, clear and certain, claiming him. The memory of her tongue on his neck, bold and unapologetic.

Fuck.

He handed the feathery plume over wordlessly, thinking it would help. He couldn't stand any more physical stimulation right now, but the sight of her twirling it absently in her fingers was a hundred times worse. Her expression was painfully transparent now that the physical tension in her body had been released. He could see exactly what she was thinking and the imagined pleasure of using that feather with her that way made his skin crawl with lust.

"Are we good, sugar?"

He understood that she needed reassurance after what they'd experienced together tonight. "Real good." Whatever happened, she'd always be his to protect, but he needed to go. Right now.

"Sorry I freaked out a little there at the end. It was just a lot. So big and so much."

"S'fine. S'good havin' ya close. Nothin' wrong with workin' out where the hard edges are, kid." He took in a deep breath, trying to calm the fever raging in his blood. The chain keeping the beast leashed was slipping through his fingers. It wouldn't be long now.

She leaned in and gave his whiskered cheek a quick kiss. "Thanks, cowboy."

He had to stifle the low growl welling up in his chest. His lungs were filled with her, adding a razor edge to his desperate need. "You bet."

Marie stood there awkwardly, shivering in the silence.
Logan leaned up to kick over the bike and winced. He was painfully hard. His hand hesitated on the throttle of the bike, gripping tightly as he warred with himself. He knew better but the Wolverine didn't play by anyone's rules but his own. "How many times?" he rasped. "On the bike," he added at her look of confusion.

That damnable blush was back as she realized what he was asking.

"Three."

"Christ," he muttered, jaw clenching as he adjusted himself with a grimace. "Wait until tomorrow to come get the shit you left down at the house, huh?"

She nodded. Her pink face showed the interpretation she had put on his words. She had come. He desperately needed the same release. She thought he didn't want to be interrupted tonight, when the truth was even rawer than that.

He didn't trust himself to let her go twice.

Up next: **True Colors.** More than friends but not yet lovers. The Wolverine and the Rogue struggle to find a new way forward now that everything is different.

Author's note: I know, I know! I can hear the howls of displeasure from here. "No sex at the sex club, you evil little tease! WTF?! That's just not right!" To that I say a resounding, "Well, yeah! Y'all didn't really think it would be that easy, did you?" Heh.

You guys know me, though. The amount of time we spend in Nookietown is directly related to how long it takes us to get there. I assure you, my LoganMuse is doing his damndest to be sure you're not disappointed. I think this story is going to wind up near the 50 chapter mark (I have currently written 40 of those chapters) and I'm fairly sure a certain growly badass is going to insist on a return trip to the Red Door that ends much differently before all is said and done. Heh. It is me, after all. Onward!
"I hate this shit."

Logan stood with Marie in front of a massive wall of paint chips. He held a list in his hand. The blocky masculine scrawl read:

*Kitchen - green*
*Head - blue*
*Downstairs - light brown*
*Loft - dark brown*

"Come on. It's not that bad."

"The fuck it's not."

Things were still strained between them after everything that had happened at The Red Door. They hadn't talked about it much beyond Marie sharing she felt a little weird and Logan's flat response back: 'Don't.' It somehow seemed worse now — and painfully inescapable — here in the white, brightly-lit paint aisle of their local hardware store.

This was the first time they'd been out together since that night, after a week of avoidance, awkward silences and stilted conversation. Finally, this morning, the Wolverine had showed up at her door, thrown down the bag she still hadn't come and collected, and ordered her out of bed at an ungodly hour. She and Jubilee were still sleeping off their Friday night drunk when he threw a jacket at Marie and told her that she had five minutes to get ready or he'd put her in his truck, TARDIS pj's and all.

Maybe his way was better, she mused, reading the colors on the swatches to avoid another awkward conversation. He'd always been direct. He didn't usually want a long conversation, but he was right to make them face this sooner rather than later.

She'd insisted on coffee first and she sipped it slowly, feeling slightly ridiculous standing there with him. He'd barely given her time to pee, change and brush her teeth. Her morning hair was big and a little wild. The quick finger-comb in the truck had done little to tame it, but every now and then he'd catch it in the corner of his eye and smirk a little at her. That was progress, even if it came at the expense of a bit of her pride.

It felt slightly ludicrous to be standing there with the Wolverine doing something as mundane as buying paint. He was a fighter and a killer; the deadliest weapon in their arsenal. But he was a man, first. He rarely let the others see that part of him and she knew her presence with him now was significant, despite their lingering awkwardness.

Logan stood before the wall, shaking his head in exasperation.

"Who the fuck needs this many colors?" He grunted, thrusting the list at her. "You do it. You're the artist, kid."

"Hey, it's your house, cowboy." He bared his teeth at her, which only made her think about how they'd felt under her fingertips and against her nape. Neither of them moved. Stalemate. "Fine. Together then."

"Mmph."
"Sugar, that better be the grunt of 'Yes, ma'am. I aim to do just that'. Or it's gonna get ugly. Clean-up on aisle…." she glanced up at the sign. "Four."

"Don't dare the Rogue?"

The last time a dare was involved, she'd licked him. Would there ever be a time when a conversation with him didn't make her think of that night?

"Nope. Don't wake her up before eight on a Saturday unless Gerard Butler is downstairs in a kilt declaring his undying love or you come bearing a big plate of greasy food and a little hair of the dog."

"Jesus. That pansy? You could have at least gone with Chuck Norris so I didn't hafta disown ya." He chuckled at her sass and then frowned at the wall of colors. There was no 'blue' or 'green' or even 'brown'. "Christ. Mango Chutney? Butterscotch Sundae? Graham Cracker Crust? Who thinks this shit up? We paintin' here, or havin' lunch?"

She had to admit, some of them were pretty bad. "Hey, if you think I'm gonna paint your entire house, then it's lunch for a month of Sundays. To start."

"Deal." He didn't even hesitate and she realized she'd set that bar much too low. Dammit. She punched his arm and then winced as the metal underlying the heavy muscle popped her fingers. Despite the twinge of discomfort, the familiar camaraderie felt good. They were slowly finding the way forward. It was new and a little scary, but good, too.

"Heh. Serves ya right." He sighed and took a sip of his own steaming coffee. "Let's do this, huh?" Despite his griping, Logan had some surprisingly strong ideas about the interior of his home. He tended towards rich warm colors that reminded him of the forest in fall; warm ochers, vivid reds, burnt oranges, deep greens and strong browns that gave a comfortable, homey feel. He didn't like bright white, or that industrial gray that gave a sterile, institutionalized feel. Marie could empathize.

"Okay. First off, I'd suggest leaving the kitchen until after the counters are in. The wall color will depend on that."

He nodded, grunting his assent.

"I think you're right on the money with brown downstairs. A good neutral like that'll make the walls disappear and feel like the forest is all around you when you look out the window."

"Sounds good."

"I'd suggest a deep chocolate for that section of the wall flanking the fireplace and a warm, mid-tone brown for the rest. If the color is too light, it'll distract from the view, especially at night, and the deeper color will show off the river stone hearth around the fire."

"Heh." He handed her a paint chip that read Muddy Mississippi and they shared a smile.

"That'd be good for the fireplace wall." She pointed out two others, Cigar Bar and Cowboy Hat. "Either of those would work downstairs."

He selected Cigar Bar, naturally.

"What do you think about extending that color up into the loft and doing an accent wall up there instead of a different brown?"
"I dunno."

"The color would flow better that way and nobody'd see the pop of color up there with the shoji screens drawn." Marie smiled inwardly as he drifted towards the reds and oranges. She knew her Wolverine. "Maybe burnt orange?" That would look good with the screens he'd designed. Ebony wood with rice paper panels and a few Japanese maple leaves for interest and to reflect his love of nature and of Japan. It would glow warmly in the light of the hurricane candles he preferred, too.

He bypassed Pumpkin Butter and Monarch Wing and settled on Bourbon Bottle. "Not the way I normally kill a gallon of the stuff, but I reckon it'll do."

She giggled. "See, it's not so bad."

She was right, but he'd never say so. "Mmph."

"Blue for the bathroom?"

"Yeah, but not…" his voice trailed off, but she knew what he meant. Nothing evocative of the tank from his nightmares or the wall of water that had swallowed one of their team at Alkali Lake.

"Sure." She kept her voice light. "What about a deep teal instead?"

"Teal?"

She handed him a chip. "Mermaid Tears?" he scoffed.

"Fine then." She chose another by color without looking at the name.

"Sensual Jade?" His eyebrow rose and she blushed, thinking about all the sensual details they'd shared. Had she really told him she'd come three times on his bike on the way home? Marie could hardly look at him, even now, without imagining what had played out behind his closed door that night after he'd left her. "You're turnin' pink, darlin'."

"Stop that." She rolled her eyes at him, only half teasing.

He plucked a deep, smoky teal from the wall of chips and handed it to her, wordlessly.

"Sea Glass?"

He fingered the frosty drop of sea glass at her throat. It was the first time he'd ever acknowledged the gifts they'd given each other that windy February afternoon. And the first time he'd touched her since they'd returned from the sex club.

She shivered lightly. It felt different now. More electric. She could tell he felt it too. He'd lingered a beat too long in the hollow of her throat and then jerked his hand away with a nonspecific grunt and a swallow of hot coffee big enough to make him curse under his breath as it burned his mouth.

It was too much in this brightly lit place with nowhere to hide from the fire in his eyes. Marie stroked the pendant and then tucked it away under her scarf, wanting to feel it against her skin, and because it seemed to be charging them both with something better left alone.

"Hey, I thought you liked sea glass," he finally offered as they made their way to the counter.

"I do."

"Good." He took another sip of coffee and she was jealous of his ability to continue to enjoy a hot
beverage immediately after burning the crap out of his mouth. That just wasn't fair. "Paint first. Then food, huh?"

"Steak and eggs?"

"Deal."

~ooOoo~

"God, that was good." Marie put her silverware on her plate and eyed Logan's last strip of bacon.

"Hmph." He tore it in two, handed her half and swallowed his down with some strong black coffee.

"Mmmm…"

"You put away enough fried potatoes and grease to kill your hangover, kid?"

"Yep. I'm back among the living. Might let you stay that way now, too."

"Heh. Fair enough."

The paint chips were spread across the table. They'd been discussing the plan of attack while they ate. Now, Logan's hand rested on the one called Sea Glass, but his eyes were on her necklace, shining softly between her breasts in the early morning light.

She touched the frosty pendant with a shy smile. The fiery red was one of the rarest colors. "Thanks for this, sugar." She'd never acknowledged the gifts they'd given to each other that day either. "How did you know?"

He shrugged. "You told me you liked it once."

"I did?"

He nodded. It had been years ago now. A random comment he'd filed away. That she'd forgotten their conversation made him feel better, not worse. She wasn't a young girl with a crush anymore, memorizing their every exchange in painful detail. Though to be honest, he wasn't sure it had ever been just that. But neither of them had been ready for the promise of what lay between them. He wasn't sure they were ready now, either. But they'd both grown past the roles they'd originally defined for themselves.

What had happened last weekend at The Red Door had been about breaking more than just traditional boundaries.

"Why sea glass?"

"What?"

"Why that and not somethin' fancier?" In his experience, most women liked diamonds or pearls.

"I like the idea of it mostly."

"The idea?"

"Most of it's made from slag that glass foundaries dumped into the sea at the end of the day back in the 1800's. Some of it comes from shipwrecks." She smiled at him, but her eyes softened. "This piece could very well be older than you, sugar."
"Mmph." Something tightened in his chest.

"Some of it's just old bottles tossed into the ocean. I kinda like the idea that something beautiful can come from a thing most people think is trash. That something thrown away and—and broken can be made more beautiful by rolling with the hard knocks of life, rubbing against the sand and grit until it becomes flawless. There's a good lesson there, I think. I'd rather have that next to my skin than gold or diamonds."

He sucked in a deep breath and let it out slowly. Her answer had shocked him.

"I like that real good."

He was coming to realize that while they'd always talked, she'd held things — important things about herself — apart from him. She'd shown him the girl and kept the woman locked inside because something in her told her they both needed it. That she was beginning to reveal these personal details about her private heart felt good. He understood the metaphor was larger than a piece of glass. It encompassed both of them. It was elegantly drawn and the complexity of it surprised him a little.

There was much more to her than he'd previously realized and he wondered, not for the first time, what a girl like that saw in a man like him over the long haul. Sure, the protection and security had probably been pretty appealing in the beginning, but she didn't really need those things from him anymore and yet here she was. In his truck. In his life. In his business all too often. In his heart and mind. In his dreams. His fantasies.

In everything but his damned bed.

"I like old things."

That amused him, but under it was something deeper than a pithy, offhand comment. Something must have shown on his face because her scent changed, sliding towards spice and honey. She didn't say anything, but she looked like she wanted to.

He wondered if she ever would.

A memory rolled over him, sharp and hot. Her wrist trapped in the noose he'd made of her scarf and the words she'd given him that bound him just as tightly. Her response to his shibari lesson had been to imagine how his claws would have felt on her skin. Not his mouth. Not his hands. His claws.

Jesus Christ. The Rogue had matched him at every turn. Even innocent as she was, in the throbbing darkness of that place, she'd teased him and licked him and then claimed him before them all.

And here? Now? At this table? She just looked at him with those big, burning eyes and said nothing.

Nothing.

Her scent spoke, however, and it was all he could do not to brush her wild hair aside and bite her again.

There was a long, charged moment where they simply watched each other with new eyes. One Mississippi. Two Mississippi. Three.

There was a little wild in her smile, like always. And a shadow in her eyes that told him she wasn't yet so uncomfortable with the No Man's Land they were in that she was willing to risk what they had for a shot at something more. Not yet.
Their shared past flickered in his head; a string of lighthouses leading him from the darkness. Marie arguing with him on a snowy road, trading names in his truck, wrapping her fingers around his tags, welcoming him back with a warm hug, standing at his side in the leather. Hell, laying floors and drinking beers and talking under the stars until they began to fade from the sky…

He shoved up from the table and went to pay the tab with a grunt.

The waiting was hurting them both.

Up next: **Here I Go Again.** A nighttime exercise turns into something neither of them anticipated as Logan and Marie wind closer and closer to the breaking point...
Marie usually got partnered with Logan during training exercises. None of the others really wanted to be with her voluntarily. Even now. Despite the strides she'd made rebuilding her relationships, they'd never really forgiven her for taking the Cure and she was always the odd one out, especially when it came to exercises meant to hone their powers.

She didn't really mind anymore. She liked being partnered with Logan. He always made her feel safe and he was smarter and more fun, too. And he liked breaking the rules as much as she did. They worked well together now, both as partners and as friends. Swinging a hammer next to him for a year had only intensified their bond.

This evening Storm had them running night drills on the property instead of in the Danger Room; a variant of evade capture, mutant style. The last group to be captured won. Winners got bragging rights and two tickets to their choice of show, limited to anything playing at Madison Square Garden in the next six months. Marie had to give it to 'Ro, she knew how to motivate them. A light spring rain had dampened everyone's spirits, but that was the point. Shitty things happened when it was raining too. They needed to be prepared.

Paired off in twos — Bobby with Kitty, Gambit with Jubilee, and Piotr with Storm — they disappeared into the forest to see if they could evade capture by Hank, who had a formidable brain and his own set of cunning animal instincts.

Logan crammed his straw cowboy hat down a little further on his head and hunched his shoulders against the rain.

The hat was a familiar old favorite. "I've never seen you wear that hat on a mission before," Marie hissed as they ran through the undergrowth, putting as much distance between them and the others as they could.

"Fuckin' hate rain runnin' down the back of my neck."

Marie cinched her hoodie a little tighter. "I hear that, sugar."

They stopped a couple of miles in. Logan wasn't even winded but Marie had a stitch in her side and was panting hard. He was tempted to touch her, to pour a little of himself into her, but he needed all of his senses about him tonight. These kinds of drills always made him edgy.

Their trail had been random, stopping and starting and crossing over itself to confuse anyone who followed. Scouting around, Logan found a fallen log at the top of a small rise and they wriggled under it, covering most of the small opening with moss and ferns. It was even relatively dry, despite the gray drizzle.

"Not bad," she breathed quietly.

"High ground, out of the elements. Can see a good ways all around. S'a good spot." He moved closer to share his body heat with her. The musk of the wet earth, the cozy cramped space, the pliant length of her pressed up against his body from shoulder to knee like they were curled up safe in a den; it was all disturbingly soothing. A man wouldn't take such comfort in that feeling, he knew. But it didn't change how it felt, how the animal felt. It was distracting, too. She was sweating from the run, amping up her natural scent of spice and honey and earth. His proximity was beginning to arouse her. He could smell her grow slick and ready for him. It was an unwelcome distraction he
couldn't afford now. He didn't play games with her safety. "You good, kid?"

"Yeah." She pressed closer, tangling their legs and pulled the leaf litter and moss over them both before settling down against his side and trying to slow her breathing. He radiated warmth and strength and confidence. Her breathlessness wasn't entirely due to the run.

"Good. Now shut up. Hank's hearin' is almost as good as mine."

An hour passed. And then another.

The forest was silent and still. There was only the drip of rain and their slow, even breathing.

"I think we lost 'em, baby."

Marie turned her head to whisper in his ear, keeping a careful distance from his skin and hating how hard it was to focus with him this close. Their lives could depend on what she was learning now. She shouldn't be thinking of how his body felt and how much she wanted to feel him shift and cover her, to feel the press of his hips against hers and his weight pushing her down into the soft loam.

As close as they were, she could see the pulse beating strong and steady at the base of his throat. God, she'd licked him right there. He'd liked it. She could still remember how he'd felt shuddering under her tongue. She wanted to feel it again. Here. Now. To open his pants, put her mouth on him and drink down his pleasure. To feel his heartbeat on her tongue and to savor his most intimate taste.

Something about this wild place was calling to her, bringing up things she wasn't even sure she should want. Things that embarrassed and aroused her that she'd stashed down deep. The urge to strip and roll naked with him here in the dirt and mud, to get on her knees and feel him behind her, spreading her legs. A strange compulsion to feel him shove her onto her belly and bite her neck while he took her roughly on the ground. To rut and bite and scratch and cry down the moon with his come in her belly and the taste of blood on their lips.

Logan could see it all, flickering in her eyes. A dark smoldering heat that made it hard to breathe.

Christ. She was killing him.

He forced down a growl. "You should know better than to look at me like that right now."

"I know," she said softly, putting her head on her arms and closing her eyes. "I'm sorry. I'm trying."

"Try harder." The words themselves were stern, but Marie could hear the warmth in them and the unspoken suggestion to save those looks for later.

Biting her lip, she shook the erotic thoughts away and tried to focus on what was happening now. "If this were real. How long would you stay quiet?"

"A day. Maybe more. Depends on who's lookin' and why. Once you got a good place, s'more dangerous to move. It's different for you. You gotta eat. Drink. I can be still as long as I have to. Drinkin' dew or rain'. Suckin' on moss. Eatin' bugs. It ain't what I'd order up, but it's worth knowin'." He could kill damn near anything that came looking for him, but even he had limits. Pride always took a back seat to survival.

He talked to her then, about as much as he could remember when it came to how to hide and track and evade capture. Hard things. Scary things. Embarrassing things. Disgusting things. Things a person could do to survive if they had to, if they were desperate. Things he'd done. He told her everything. Gave her all of it. Someday it might save her life.
The sky cleared. The stars came out. They kept talking, tangled up together in their cozy, makeshift den. The moon rose. For a long time they simply laid together in silence, her head resting on his chest as the night pressed down on them like a blanket of stars. With all the tension between them lately, they both savored the unexpected peace they'd found, the soft rise and fall of his chest under her cheek and his hand in hers.

It was Logan who finally spoke into the silence. He wanted to stay longer but Marie didn't have his healing. Curling up on the wet ground for hours on end wasn't good for her and he was too close to the edge to let her take his mutation into her again right now. He knew that would only end up one way.

"Guess we better head back."

"Sure." She kept her voice light, but it was difficult to let him go.

They wriggled out from under the fallen log and got up, brushing themselves off before reaching out to knock the worst of the remaining forest debris from each other. Marie reached up and pulled a few leaves from Logan's wild hair. He made a point of leaving the leaves in hers and she couldn't help but wonder if Logan was struggling with his own primal fantasies of taking her here in this wild place. They started walking. Marie noticed Logan was still on edge, as if he were half expecting Hank to burst from the trees at any moment.

"You still bringin' dinner down to the house tomorrow, kid?"

"I lost again, didn't I?"

"Heh. Yep."

"It's not fair. How can I have so many brains up there and still lose at poker every time?"

"'Cause I play to win, baby." And because there was no way in hell he wanted Marie cooking for that idiot Cajun, not even now that he was putting it to Jubilee. Logan had never been very chummy with him, but things were less pleasant now that they'd had words.

"Got any requests?"

She saw his teeth flash in the dark.

"Venison steaks with baked potatoes, fried okra and pecan pie." His smile grew wider. "God, I love that. I could eat my body weight in pecan pie."

"Is it the taste or the density?" He had a unique metabolism. His healing factor burned calories at an enormous rate. He could put away an incredible amount of food.

"Neither. It's the texture of that shit the pecans are in. All gooey and sweet."

The way he said it shook something loose in her brain. "So you're saying you like it because it reminds you of oral sex?"

Logan tripped.

Marie flashed him a smirk of her own from inside the hoodie.

"Jesus, kid."

"Penthouse tonight?" she whispered with a laugh.
"No. Gonna read one of yours tonight."

Marie stumbled.

"Heh."

She punched his arm.

"I can see why you like the words," he said as they emerged from the trees.

"Why's that?"

"Because when it's just the words, when there's no picture to distract me, I can make it be anyone. Anyone I want."

Marie stopped walking abruptly.

Logan plowed into the back of her.

He caught her quickly, afraid of what might happen if they wound up on the ground together again. The resulting wet tangle of awkward limbs broke the tension, and he steadied her as they separated.

They both thought of that moment the leonine man had steadied the woman after they'd caught their breath, and for one wild moment, Marie thought Logan might kiss her.

He set her from him gently instead.

"Just call me Grace," she teased, trying for an easiness she didn't really feel.

"Marie, baby?"

"What?"

"Two pies tomorrow." His expression was positively wicked. He knew she could feel it too— that spark. It was growing, getting wilder, harder to control. Her scent and body language told him she was on the edge. She had claimed him in a room of people but never alone, never when it was just the two of them and the inescapable truth.

They both knew that whatever happened tomorrow would be more intimate than simply sharing a meal. The promise in his eyes made her skin crawl with pleasure. And then she frowned.

Logan followed her line of vision and a frown appeared on his face too.

All the lights in the mansion's kitchen were on. The team was back and had clearly been there for some time.

They strolled in, wet and covered with leaf litter and mud.

"Oh my God! There you are, chica! We thought you bailed." Jubilee bounced out of her seat.

Marie looked around. It looked like the exercise had ended in everyone returning for sundaes.

"How'd everyone do?"

"Bobby and Kit-Kat got caught first." They both blushed. It was obvious they'd been distracted.

"Then Piotr and 'Ro. Me and the Cajun thought we had it locked, but no Wolvie and no Rogue
when Hank brought us in. That was hours ago. Did you two motor, or what?"

"Jubes. Look at us." They were wet and filthy. "We've been evading capture. I've been learning how to not get dead. We were talking."

Gambit opened his mouth.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you, bub." Logan gave him a hard look and he shut his mouth with a showy, gallant little nod that made Logan's blood pressure climb. They hadn't been the best of friends even before Remy had talked dirty to his girl while fucking Jubilee on the couch. The swamp rat was still pissy with him about their resulting conversation. It had taken the bruises a while to fade, too.

"You did it, girl!" Jubilee eyed her. "I'd hug you, Roguey, but this is Prada and you're all icky." She slid the chocolate ice cream down the bar instead. "Congrats on winning, though. Adam Lambert's gonna be playing at the Garden in three months. Hint. Hint." Marie rolled her eyes.

Logan rolled his neck with a pop. He wanted a hot shower, a soft bed and a stiff drink. Not necessarily in that order.

"I needa drink."

"Soda's on the table, Wolvie."

"A real drink." Logan smirked as Gambit's fingers stiffened around his can of Coke. He glanced over at Marie. "Dinner tomorrow, kid."

Two pies, sugar.

She held up two fingers and he grinned. "Yup. See ya."

"What's with you flashing the Wolvster the peace sign, chica? That's like the textbook definition of lost cause."

Marie just shook her head. "Nothing, Jubes. Now where's the fudge?"

_________________________________________________________

Up next: **She's Like the Wind.** 'She rides the night next to me. She leads me through moonlight, only to burn me with the sun...' Things heat up and a night on the back deck changes things forever.
Marie and Logan sat on his deck, sharing a pie between them, passing a fork back and forth and occasionally feeding each other a bite. Yesterday had been cold and blustery. This evening was unseasonably warm. Marie couldn't help but wonder if Logan had called in his marker with 'Ro, but she didn't want to spoil the mood by asking.

"S'good pie, darlin'."

"Better than sex?" she asked with a cheeky smirk.

"Nope. But I can taste you on the fork. That's closer."

"Geez, Logan."

"Just bein' honest, baby." He chuckled. "Besides, you like it." A blush crept down her neck. "And I like it too." Things had slowly been growing more intimate between them since their weekend at The Red Door, but neither of them had made any effort to define or discuss what was happening. They both just seemed content to let it be what it wanted to be in its own time.

Marie stood up. "You want a coffee?"

"Yeah. Lemme help."

He followed her inside, smiling at the way her fingers trailed over the granite countertops. They were a rich, dark chocolate with flecks of butterscotch, platinum, and olive. They'd been a surprise. He'd finished the floors too. She was right. The deep walnut color would set off everything else nicely, once he finished building it.

"They really are gorgeous, Logan." He really liked watching how she stroked the glossy granite with her fingertips. It was a sensual touch. The surface was smooth and solid and cool. He liked it. It was the antithesis of Marie, who was warm and soft and slight. He definitely had fantasies about what he'd like to do to her there. He'd been doubly sure to make the base of the island extra sturdy, and not just because it needed to support the heavy slab of stone. He had a metal skeleton and plans to hopefully make use of the island for things other than cooking.

His arms pinned her in, one on either side of her while she made the coffee. "My skin…"

"Doesn't scare me. Never has." The choice ultimately had to be hers, but he wasn't above giving her a taste of how it could be. He knew she could feel his breath on her neck, just there where he'd bitten her that night at The Red Door.

She turned in his arms and searched his face before slowly put her hands on his shoulders.

His hands found her hips, feeling her soft skin through the fabric of her silky skirt. He found it impossible not to think about the fantasy he'd overheard her telling Jubilee that morning so long ago. Her hushed words about how she wanted to press her lover against the cabinets, right there by the coffee pot and love him with her mouth… She was naturally sensual. He felt it even now in the way she moved, shifting with and against him ever so slightly in reaction to the change in pressure of his fingertips on her slim hips as they breathed each other in.

He took her scent in, inhaling deeply. Excitement and desire. She could feel his muscles bunch and flex under her hands. Their bodies naturally drifted closer until her hips were pressed to his.
There was no ambiguity on either of their parts.

It was intimate and sexual— a true romantic embrace.

Neither of them moved. Not for long minutes.

The world had stopped. And into the charged silence came a sound. The very specific sound of a woman in her pleasure.

They moved apart. Logan was glad for the space. He found it difficult to go at Marie's pace. To let her lead what happened between them until she finally chose him for her own. He was ready for things to change, but it had to be because she was ready. He knew she wouldn't tell him no if he pushed her, but he also knew that wasn't right. To assume he knew when she was ready felt a little too paternalistic for comfort. It needed to come from her.

The sound moved them both.

"What is that?"

Their coffee abandoned, Logan led her outside with a grin and sat down on the deck, pulling her down into the warm, charged space between his spread legs. "Listen."

It came again, a sinuous moan and then a sharper cry.

"Is that what I think it is?"

He nodded. "Now that it's gettin' warmer again, it happens almost every Tuesday around this time. Sound carries on the water when the night is real still." He breathed in the scent of her hair and felt his body grow tight. "I think it's that little gazebo across the lake."

"Do you know who it is?"

"No. And I don't wanna know."

When he first heard it a year ago, he was afraid it might have been Marie. Then he thought maybe that's where Gumbo took his conquests. The idea that it might be Bobby and Kitty just killed it for him. He could find out if he really wanted to. A trip across the lake and a few deep breaths would tell him easily enough, but he was better off not knowing.

"It's probably just some of the older students sneaking away."

"Maybe." The man's prowess made Logan think otherwise. Logan's breath made her shiver. "Whoever he is, he's pretty good. Always makes her come a couple times before he lets go." The words were quiet and crude and honest.

Marie's face heated in the darkness. "Mmm...." The sound was out before she could stop it.

Logan wasted no time taking advantage of her little hum of approval.

"Wanna listen with me, baby?" He wouldn't have asked if she hadn't put her hands on him back in the kitchen, first. That's why it had to be on her. He knew the minute she gave him an inch, all the fucking miles after that were his.

She was instantly, shockingly wet.

She felt Logan's chest rise as he inhaled. He tensed behind her and then he growled, soft and low. "I
think you'll like it."

Marie nodded, feeling a thousand butterflies take flight in her stomach.

Logan braced his back against the edge of the newel post and pulled her more solidly against his chest. Her head rested on his shoulder and he drew up their legs, putting one of her hands on each of his knees and then adjusting the fit tight. The silky layers of her wrap skirt draped over her legs, but he'd pulled her close so her backside was pressed firmly against his groin. He was already starting to get hard. She'd be able to feel it any minute now.

"Logan…"

She was excited, but apprehensive too. A little afraid of the size of the feelings thumping madly in her chest and rushing wildly under her skin.

"Just listen, baby." He stroked her side lightly with his knuckles but didn't touch her anywhere else. "Just let it be this tonight." Just let it be something he could control.

The moans came again, first at erratic intervals and then closer together until they were on top of each other.

"What do you think he's doing to make her sound that way?" she breathed, entranced.

It was an invitation he didn't expect and one he sure as hell wouldn't refuse.

"Tastin' her. Lickin' her. That's what I'd do."

"Oh, God…." Her knuckles were white where they gripped his knees. And then much more softly, "How?"

The question caught him off guard, but pleased him nonetheless. She was ready for more now. Finally.

"Neck first. Bite her there. Suck her skin." He could tell his answer had surprised her. She'd anticipated something more graphic.

"Then…?" she prompted when he hesitated.

Fuck it. If she was going to ask, he'd sure as hell tell her.

"Nipples next, baby. Good hard sucks she feels deep down inside. Play with 'em 'till she's squirmin' all over and risin' up under me 'cause she needs it so bad." Her sharp intake of breath told him that was closer to what she'd been expecting. "I want her drippin' when I settle between her legs. A real good taste." He could tell he'd shocked her a little that time.

The cries from across the lake became a continuous keen that rose up sharply and then ended without warning.

Marie felt Logan smile against her neck. "What is it?"

"I can hear him." His hearing was excellent. Marie wouldn't be able to hear it at this distance, but he could easily. "He's laughin'. Pleased with himself for makin' her come."

Marie shivered in his arms. "Mmm…." This time she was glad he hadn't offered to give her a taste of his mutation so she could hear the little whispers, too. It was much more erotic to hear it through the filter of Logan's unique senses.
"His mouth and chin will be wet."

"Pecan pie," she whispered and he smiled. Marie nuzzled against Logan's jaw and spread her legs a little, unconsciously imagining him between them. "Beard burn." They both groaned quietly at her words because it had suddenly become a lot more personal.

Now it was more than just something happening across the lake. Now it was right here, on this deck too. She closed her legs, pressing them together against the ache forming between them at that graphic mental image. Logan shut his eyes and breathed deeply to keep from pushing his erection against the small of her back. Every time he dragged in a breath, his head spun. She smelled so damn good.

Another low cry broke the still spring night.

"Logan?" There was a question in her voice.

"Fingers," he breathed into her ear.

"Is that what you'd do?" He smiled because this time she was engaged enough to ask. He hadn't volunteered.

"Yeah. He has to touch her. Feel what he did to her. She'll be soft and wet, but he needsta open her up now, get her ready to take him, especially if he's big."

The earth seemed to tilt wildly.

He could feel Marie trembling against his chest. Her head was beginning to toss a little and she was pressing the outside of her legs to the inside of his, seeking pressure and resistance. Oh, darlin'. Just a little bit more…

The cries and moans were coming faster again until they became one sustained cry of pleasure that rose on a scream as the woman across the lake tipped over the edge again.

Marie's hands had moved. This time she dug her nails into his thigh and the urge to lean forward slightly and bite her neck hard was almost overwhelming.

"Can you hear him?"

"What?" Logan was distracted, fixated on putting his mouth on her, right there where her neck met her shoulder. Not just to give her pleasure, but to taste her and mark her, too.

"Can you hear him now?"

Pulling himself back into the moment, Logan closed his eyes and listened.

He chuckled. "He's cursin'."

"Cursing?"

"OhfuckJesusplease," he intoned softly, not without some heat of his own infusing the words.

"Oh…” Marie felt like she was melting.

For the first time a man's voice, sonorous and low, carried across the water.

"Sugar?"
"Her mouth on him, baby."

The male voice rose sharply. Marie's eyes asked the question her voice could not.

"Good strong suck, maybe. Or grabbin' his ass and takin' him real deep when he don't expect it. Could be lots of things."

"Tell me." Breathless, but not so shy now.

He knew she'd be able to feel his deep shudder. "Coulda saw her touch herself while she was suckin' him... or felt a little scrape of her teeth, maybe. Tip'll be real sensitive now. Drippin' some. Hard suck right there'd do it."

Marie swallowed. "Would it for you?"

"Fuck, yeah. Especially if she's holdin' his eyes while she does it."

"Why is that better?"

"S'hotter. Ain't just somethin' she's doin' for him. Shows him she wants it, too."

This time she was too aroused to blush. "God!"

"We'll hear her again in a minute."

"We will?"

"Yeah. He'll make her stop soon. Before it getsta be too much."

"Isn't too much a good thing?"

His chest rumbled against her back. "Later, yeah, but not at that moment. Most men have a refractory period." Most but not all.

"What's that?"

"I'll tell ya later." He smiled into the night. "If it's too good, he'll come too soon and he won't get to be inside her like he wants."

"Is that better than her mouth?"

"Yeah. He wants it. He's earned it. She's his and he wants her to feel it too." Their breathing had changed; shallow and fast. They were both sweating now. Hot and sticky; moist slippery heat weeping from them both under their clothes.

This time it was a sharp feminine cry that sang out over the water. An exultant male grunt followed quickly on its heels.

"Sugar?"

"Pushed in deep," he whispered, feeling the sweat trickle down his back. "One smooth stroke. Hard. All in. He wants her to take all of him."

Marie's hips were beginning to rock now and her hands twisted in her long skirt. The friction was agonizing.
The sounds over the water were different this time; a blend of voices, masculine and feminine. They were lower. More guttural. More need. Less civility.

"Hear the difference, baby?"

"Yes." Her heart was beating so fast. "It's wilder."

"Yeah. More powerful. More out of control. Good 'n hard now. Deep. Those little knees up high, rubbin' against his sides. Wants her to take all of him. He hasta feel it. Hasta make her feel it. Needsta feel her come first so she feels like his."

The voices were becoming rougher. More staccato.

"Please…"

Marie was begging now. Needy and wild. Logan pulled her closer. "That's it, darlin'. C'mon…"

"More….Please! More!" Logan squeezed her with his thighs, increasing the friction as she rocked against him.

"That's what she says to him. Beggin' him. Needin' him to fuck her hard. Over and over again—"

"Moreharder-yes-ohGod!" The words were for the anonymous woman across the lake. And for herself. Marie bucked hard against him and flew apart in his arms as the couple across the water came together loudly.

Marie shook. Her whole body trembled. Pleasure washed over her in thick waves as she jerked in Logan's embrace. Her legs were pressed together and Logan was using his body to cage hers, to add to the pressure and make it better. Stronger. He bit her hard, right at the nape of her neck through the fall of her hair. The pleasure spiked higher and she cried out, her own sweet sound travelling back across the water.

It all rushed out of her at once and he felt her body go slack and limp against his.

He smiled up at the moon.

"Now what?" Her voice was very small.

"Baby?"

"Them," she whispered, still trembling.

Logan pulled her closer. That was the easier of the two questions. He didn't know how to answer 'now what?' with regard to what had just happened between them.

He didn't listen in again. The anonymous pair deserved at least a little privacy and he knew the answer already. "Love words now. Smilin' 'n kissin'. Restin' a bit while they come down. If he's lucky, she's holdin' him tight. Rubbin' his back and touchin' him real soft. He won't wanna leave her, but if he used a condom, he'll needta pull out and take it off so he don't lose it in her."

Marie shivered. "And if he didn't use one?"

Logan fought to keep from thrusting against her. He was still intensely aroused and it showed in his reply. "Then the come will feel real good for 'em both. Wet n'slick. Soothin' too, especially if the end was a little rough." He couldn't help but rock against her, a slow grind, and his fingers twitched. "If the woman is real sensitive, sometimes he can make her come again, rubbin' her with his fingers
while he's still buried deep. It's good for him too. He'll be real sensitive after he's done. Feelin' her tighten back up around him is damn good."

"More," she whispered.

"If they're real close, she might clean him with her mouth at the end. Taste them together and kiss him after so she can share their taste with him."

Her whole body shuddered. "That's okay?"

"Okay?"

"Not too... slutty?"

He shook his head. "Nothin' two people do outta love is bad or wrong, baby—" His breath caught. His body was still wound impossibly tight.

Marie pulled away and turned in his arms. "You didn't?"

"Not yet. Later. After you go." She wasn't ready for the kind of touch he needed. Not yet. They'd never even kissed. She'd only made a small overture; barely opened the last closed door between them. She still needed him to go slow and right now he was feeling anything but slow and sweet. He wanted to rip into her, to bury his face in that slippery scent and feast until she screamed and pulled his hair, to thrust and bite and slam his need into her as he howled his pleasure into the night.

"Penthouse?" she said with shy grin.

"No. Just you, darlin'."

"Logan?"

"Yeah?"

"Close your eyes."

He complied, wondering what she was up to and hoping it wouldn't take too long. He couldn't wait much longer. His blood was burning too hot.

He felt her shift and leave him. Heard the rustle of her clothes as she stood, brushing herself off and smoothing down her skirt.

Her shadow moved over him. He could feel it blocking out the moonlight. He felt her lips brush the side of his jaw where his whiskers protected him from her skin. It was chaste and very sweet. "Thanks for tonight, sugar."

"Anytime."

"I mean that. It was the best night I ever had."

"I mean it too. Anytime." He felt rather than saw her smile. She'd asked him to close his eyes and he had. If he had to look in those satiated eyes now, he was going to lose it.

She pressed something into his hand. "I'm gonna go now. I want to walk back alone, okay? You—you go inside."

His eyes opened. He drew in a breath. He knew what was in his hand. The scrap of lace was warm
and damp and slippery against his palm. The intoxicating scent drew an involuntary growl from his chest.

"You go inside now." She said again, more confidently this time. She couldn't give him everything tonight, but she could give him enough.

Up next: I Touch Myself. Not sure this one needs much of an explanation!

(Though hopefully it'll still be something a little different than what you're expecting…) Heh. Onward!
There was a pounding at Logan's door. It was barely light outside. Not even dawn yet.

"Somebody better be dyin'."

His sharp hearing caught the tail end of Marie's soft laughter.

"C'mon in, kid."

She came in and kicked the door shut, settling a tray of coffees on his makeshift nightstand and hopping onto the low sleeping pallet. Logan groaned and hid his face under the pillow. He'd only been asleep an hour or two. His erotic interlude with Marie on the deck had stoked the fire in him pretty high. It had taken a long time for it to burn low enough for him to finally sleep. Damned healing factor. Sometimes that thing was a real bitch.

"Wakey, wakey, sunshine….

She ripped the pillow away, her eyes widening as Logan pushed himself upright and the crisp white sheet slid down low around his lean hips. Aside from his magnificent chest, she could also see a naked hairy leg, half of one very bitable buttock and a very interesting spear of dark hair that led down from his belly to disappear under the sheet. He didn't make any effort to hide a single thing from her curious perusal. The sheet slipped lower. He wasn't shy. Her cheeks heated and her gaze flicked up to his face. His hair was wilder than usual, sticking up at odd angles as he sat back against the rumpled pillows.

"Do you even have a refractory period?" She moved to sit cross legged on the bed and looked at him expectantly.

His eyes widened slightly. "That's a helluva opener, darlin'."

"It sure is, sugar." She was having a hard time keeping her eyes off him. His chest was impressive with its dark furring of hair that kept drawing her eye down. He still hadn't covered himself with the sheet. It wasn't quite the full monty, but it was damned close.

"I thought you didn't know what that was."

"I Googled it this morning while I was waiting in line at the donut place." She dropped a bag between them. "Glazed, cream-filled donut holes for me." He made a face. Too sweet. "And kolaches for you. The sausage and bacon ones."

"Hmm. Might letcha live after all."

"Oh, and coffee. Yours — black and strong enough for a spoon to stand up in it." She wrinkled up her nose at his preference as she handed it over. "And a yummy delicious mocha with extra whip for me."

"Candy coffee," he grunted. He didn't even consider it coffee. "That ain't coffee. It's dessert masqueradin' as coffee."

"Avoiding the question is not answering the question, you know." She took a drink, savoring the rich sweet flavor. "So, refractory period?"
"No."

"'No' you're not going to answer or 'no' you don't have one?"

"Don't have one," he said around a mouthful of kolache. "These are damn good. Thanks."

"Welcome." Marie thought about that a minute. "That's unusual, isn't it?"

"You don't have one either." He just thought he'd point that out.

"I knew there was a reason I liked being a woman."

Logan chuckled.

"But yeah, it's unusual. Connected to the healin' most likely."

"That means we could go again and again, right?" She had the most adorable blush. Something had changed between them last night. She couldn't put her finger on it, but she knew he felt it too.

A year ago, he'd have choked on his kolache. Now he just smiled and took another sip of coffee. "Yep."

He watched her turn that one over in her head. She licked the sugary glaze from her naked fingertips and caught his eyes. "How many times last night after I left?"

Well, now. That was interesting.

"Seven." There was just a touch of arrogance in that one word. She could hear pride too and maybe the slightest hint of embarrassment. She felt a touch of it too as she realized the panties she'd given him last night were probably still somewhere in the sheets. Had he smelled them? Tasted them? Rubbed their lingering dampness where his body wept too? Caught them in his fist and stroked himself with them? Come on them? She'd wanted him to do all those things.

"Hmm…" She popped another donut hole in her mouth, chewing thoughtfully. "My record's twenty."

Logan choked on his coffee. "Jesus!" He'd not been expecting her to say that. It was the intimate nature of her confession not the number that had shocked him.

"Well, there were two or three more little ones after that, actually. I stopped counting officially at twenty."

"Twenty?" his eyebrow rose. "All in the same night?"

"Yeah. But not like all in a row. It took several hours. It was just like seven or eight after the first go round and then I thought, well damn, that's almost ten and once I got to ten, I thought twenty seemed impossible… but also like a good, round – fun – number to shoot for. There was a lull in the upper teens when I got tired but then it picked back up again. I was pretty worn out by twenty."

"I'll bet." He waggled his eyebrows at her. "When was this?"

"Last summer."

"Hmm… and you told me you had no good sexy stories to share that night on my deck. Remember?"
"Um…" she was flushing for an entirely different reason now.

"Hey, I'm just sayin' that woulda been a damn fine one."

"I'll remember that for next time." She took another sip of her drink. "You know it's not like twenty all the time, or anything, right? It was just that once. It's usually more like three or four."

He loved how she said that like it was no big deal. She obviously had a high sex drive. Perhaps they were more equally matched there than he'd previously realized. It also made him a little pissed at the universe for giving someone that kind of capacity for pleasure and then wrapping it in untouchable skin. That really sucked for her. No wonder she wrote erotica. She'd need an outlet.

"Shows you're a sensual person. I like that. I like it a lot, baby." Parts of him were definitely liking it a whole lot. "I've gotta high sex drive too. Not twenty times high, but I'll try to keep up." He laughed when she hid her face in her hands, but the intimacy felt good. Right. "The twenty… was that with some kinda toy?" Now he was really curious.

Her blush got darker but she still answered him.

"Nope. Just me and my imagination, sugar. I told you, nothing hotter than what I've got up here." She tapped her temple. "Well, that and the image of you in jeans and boots ripping down the lathing with a crowbar. That did it for me."

"Really?" Now that he hadn't expected.

"Oh yeah. Bigtime."

That made him smile. "Naughty girl." He wondered if she'd been on her stomach with her hand under her or on her back with her legs spread wide. The panties she'd tucked in his hand last night suggested the answers to his intimate questions might not be as far away as he once imagined. "Stomach or back?" The words were out before he could stop them.

"Stomach," she whispered.

"Christ," he growled. That was the Wolverine, awake. "Pillow under ya?"

She nodded. "Is that weird?"

Logan shook his head, allowing himself the pleasure of imagining the way her body might move riding a pillow and how that might translate to riding a man. "Nah. S'sensual. I like thinkin' of you that way."

"What way?"

"Needin' it like that. Wantin' more than just gettin' off," he replied, hoping it wasn't too salty of an answer.

"You do?"

"Yeah."

She took her time thinking that over. "Good." Logan could see a bit of the Rogue sparkling in her eyes. "As for toys, they're okay, but I'm not a big fan of vibrators in general."

He digested that, finishing off his coffee. "Sound put ya off?"
"No. They make me come too fast and then I'm too numb to go again, even when I really want to. Where's the fun in that?"

"Damn straight. That's my girl."

His girl. They both liked the way that sounded.

Marie stuffed his empty bag inside hers and tucked the two empty coffee cups inside as well before dropping the bag to the floor and flopping down next to him. She felt happy. Giddy. Full of light and life and hope.

She closed her eyes and snuggled down into the bed, rubbing her face against his pillow. She'd had quite a few naps in this bed over the last year, but this was the first time he'd been in the bed with her.

"Your bed smells different." Her words were low and soft.

"Good different or bad different?"

"Good. Definitely."

"It's me. It's my scent." His most intimate scent. He'd spilled himself in the sheets the first few times, not wanting to dilute the scent of her on the scrap of lace she'd tucked into his fingers as he held it to his face. When he'd finally relented, their combined scents — his over hers — had sent a fresh wave of intense arousal coursing through his blood. God... the scent of them together was atomic. His body had responded and he'd reached for himself again. And then again. Thick pearly streams of come over her little green panties. Christ. Logan shook away that memory and ran his hand from her shoulder to her hip, squeezing gently. That low sexy growl was back, rumbling deep in his chest. He guided her hand under the covers. The sheet was still slightly damp between them. "Seven times," his words were husky and warm.

"I like it." He was surprised when she met his eyes instead of blushing. "I really, really like it." Her first inclination had been to strip and climb in the bed so that scent would be all over her skin.

Her answer shouldn't have surprised him. She was a sensual creature. He moved closer but didn't make a move to touch her. It had to be her. Finally, finally she leaned in, bringing those big eyes and full trembling lips closer.

Still, he waited.

Her mouth hovered over his, so close they were sharing the same breath.

"Go on."


He felt the whisper of her lips on his and then she pulled back, blushing.

"Again."

Her kiss was less tentative this time, her lips warm and soft against his. They left a lingering warmth this time when she drew away. It still wasn't a full surrender, but it was enough. For now.

"C'mere, darlin'."
"My skin…." He was naked with just a sheet protecting him. She had on long sleeves, pants and socks, but all that exposed skin still made her nervous. She still couldn't believe she'd kissed him.

"I ain't worried about it. S'fine."

His fingers slipped through her hair to cradle the back of her head and this time he touched his mouth to hers, a firm gentle pressure that made the world spin. He lifted his head before her skin could register the touch, pleased, and then did it again. This time flicking his tongue against her lips before pulling back. The next time the kiss was deeper, wet and slow. He was cocky and unhurried, as if death wasn't waiting for him if he held on too long. He felt the connection open and the first prickle of fire along his nerves and lifted his head just enough to whisper against her lips, "Mornin', darlin'. I sure do like startin' the day with you in my bed."

"Me — me too." She was still reeling from his kiss.

"Damn fine way to christen this bed as well."

That made her feel all warm and melty inside. "Hmm... I thought that happened last night."

He chuffed in amusement. "It don't count if you're by yourself."

"It should if it's seven times with no refractory period."

He swatted her backside with his big hand, smiling when she yelped and sat up.

"Well, wouldya look at that? First kiss and first spankin' in this bed and the day's barely started. Looks to be a mighty good one."

"Mmmm…." She'd liked the kiss too much. It felt wild. She felt wild. Out of control. It was overwhelming, like at the club when she'd hung on too long because she just couldn't stop herself. There was no way she'd hurt him like that again and kissing on him while he was naked in a bed that smelled of his pleasure was too big a temptation. She was playing with fire in a dry, grassy field on a windy day. It wouldn't take much for it to get away from her and burn them both to ash.

She settled back down next to him instead, staring at the cedar planks on the ceiling with his hand on her belly. He'd done a good job with that. It looked really nice. She forced herself to think about that and not about rolling back over and kissing him again. And again and again and again. That he didn't immediately come after her and do just that himself told her he probably had some idea of what she was wrestling with. Instead, his hand rubbed in slow, soothing circles over her belly. It was intimate without being openly sexual.

"Darlin'?"

"Sorry. It's just a lot."

"Hell, kid. Never be sorry for feelin' somethin' so big and so much you need a little time to get used to it. There's not a damn thing wrong with that."

"Thanks. It's just…"
takin' what I want without really givin' a shit 'bout anyone else. Usedta people just gettin' what they want outta me, usin' me for a good, hard ride and—"

"But—"

"There ain't a 'but' in there. You got somethin' in you for me that's big and wild and beautiful. I'd fight like hell to protect it, and if waitin's what it takes, whatcha need now, then that's what I wanna give ya."

"Why?" She sounded truly baffled.

"Because we both know what's comin' and I wantcha to be ready for it when it does because I won't hold anythin' back."

His words shook her deeply. "I know," she said softly. She'd always known it would be like that between them if they ever gave into it. She was young but not stupid. Nobody knew the Wolverine like she did. Marie knew better than anyone what loving him and being loved by him would mean over the long haul.

"I wantcha to take whatcha need outta me now, baby. Whatever you need, as much as you need." His eyes flashed gold at her. "Because I'm sure as hell gonna take what I need outta you when you're ready. So be sure. Once that switch is flipped, there's no goin' back."

A wave of heat suffused her body. He felt her shudder under his palm. "Are you trying to scare me?" Her scent was leaning more towards arousal than fear or he'd have backed off a while ago instead of speaking the unvarnished truth.

"No. I'm tellin' you how it is. Once he's had a taste of you, I'll never get him back in the cage. I can barely keep him in now."

She touched the points in his wild hair and the points on his teeth and let her hand come to rest just over his heart, where it was protected by the sheet. He understood what she couldn't yet say aloud. The Wolverine was hers too.

Marie dropped her head to his chest and whispered against his heart. Words so quiet he couldn't quite make them out. She pressed a kiss there when she was finished and he had the sense she was making a deal with the Wolverine. Binding them all with touch and breath and soft whispers with promises of what would come in time.

They lay close after, hand in hand, just enjoying the change between them as the sky began to grow lighter.

It was Marie who broke the silence, as usual. She seemed to have more words in her overall. More often, Logan was simply content to be in her presence in silence.

"What do you have planned for today, sugar?"

"Got some more kissin' planned. Then I needta pick a floor for the loft. Carpet or hardwood?"

She knew he was just teasing. About the kissing and the carpet. He hated carpet and had told her in no uncertain terms that everyone else would hate it too if they could smell all the nasty things that had been spilled on it or soaked into the pad under it the way he could.

"I vote cork."
"Cork?"

"It's a personal weakness of mine. I've always wanted a cork floor. Someday I'll have one. Until then, maybe I can live vicariously through you."

"Why cork?"

"It's softer than wood under foot. Warmer in the winter. Cooler in the summer. It's sustainably harvested and easy to clean. It's a good sound barrier. Plus it's just pretty. What's not to like?"

"Hmm. Doesn't sound half bad but I was thinkin' hardwood. Maybe hickory or teak."

Marie snickered.

"What?"

"I don't think this place needs any more hardwood, today. There's plenty down here already…"

Up next: **Sweet Child of Mine**. From Johnny Cash to ZZ Top… the classics provide a backdrop for Logan and Marie's growing intimacy. Tailgates. Kitchens. Dirty lyrics and dirtier talk… It's all fair game now.
Logan and Marie sat on opposite ends of the tailgate of his truck in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by the night. The stars were brilliant overhead and they were far enough from the light pollution of the city to see the Milky Way. It reminded Marie of the painted ceiling of The Red Door, but everything these days seemed to remind her of that night.

"You good, kid?"

Marie nodded, smiling as Johnny Cash crooned into the darkness, filling the easy silence. Sometimes they came and talked the night away. Sometimes, especially after the more difficult missions, they sat in silence just breathing in the stillness and letting the peace wash through them.

"Ya know, they're beginning to notice now, sugar."

"Notice what?"

"Us leavin' together after missions."

Logan nodded. He'd seen the looks too. 'Ro's concern. Remy's accusation. Pete's knowing smirk. Jubilee's frank curiosity. Hank was somewhere between interest and regret. He'd always had a bit of a thing for Marie and there'd been a few years where Logan had wondered if maybe she might lean big blue's way. She'd always tended towards older, feral men. "Yeah. Bug ya?"

Marie rolled her beer between her palms, swinging her leg absently. "Not really, no."

Logan took a pull off the bottle between his legs. "But?"

"But what, cowboy?"

"Thought I heard a 'but' in there somewhere."

Marie sighed, face tilted up at the sky. "Maybe a little one."

He grunted. He wasn't the most talkative man on a good day. After missions, even less so. "They pressin' ya for answers yet?" Nobody was stupid enough to ask after the Wolverine's private life. At least not to his face.

"Not yet."

"Reckon it'll be soon now."

They all lived in each other's pockets. Even the remote gamekeeper's cottage was still too close.

"Me too."

"And you don't know what to say?"

"It's not that."

"Mmph." She knew his grunts. That one said: Tell me more.

"I just think maybe we should get to figure out what this is before we hafta explain it to everyone else."
"You know what this is," he said quietly. That's why she was on the other end of the tailgate. Forever wasn't a decision to be made lightly.

"Mmphf."

Logan's head jerked once. He knew her sounds too. That one said: *I sure as hell do.*

The silence stretched out again, broken only by George Jones, Bob Wills and Hank Williams. Marie hummed along with Randy Travis and ruined a perfectly respectable George Strait song by singing along. Badly.

Logan's lips twitted. Even that was growing on him.

"Need another beer, sugar?"

"Nah. Still good with this." He lifted the bottle of bourbon sitting between his legs. "Get one for yourself though, huh?" He liked her a little drunk. She tended to touch him more. And to speak her mind more, too.

"You tryin' to get me drunk?"

"You're already drunk."

"True." Her husky giggle rang out. "But you like it," she accused, opening another Shiner and tucking one leg back under her, leaving the other free to swing back and forth. Logan could feel the slight movement of the truck under him, rhythmic and steady. She had a hard time being still after missions. He could relate, although he tended to expend the tension in other ways.

"Yep." He didn't elaborate. Mostly he liked that she was less careful. Less hypervigilant of her skin.

She was quiet a while, picking at the label on her beer.

"You still owe me a sex story, you know."

She'd waited until the perfect moment to spring that on him. A large sip of the fiery bourbon went down wrong and he coughed, cursing quietly under his breath.

"Marie," he warned.

"You do," she insisted.

"That right?"

"Yep."

"I call bullshit."

"Well, I call bullshit on your bullshit." She laughed at her own retort and her playfulness made something warm flare in his chest. "You owe me."

He wondered what she was really after.

"Nah. Toldya that night at The Red Door." In the alcove she'd pushed him for the details of what he'd done the last time he'd been in there with a woman. A condom. Wintergreen mints. A hard fuck from behind. She'd gotten her details, and then some.
"No you didn't."

He raised an eyebrow.

"You didn't say a damn thing, sugar. I guessed. That doesn't count."

Logan opened his mouth to refute her and then realized she was right.

"Dammit." He hated owing anyone a debt. Even her. It was important to him too that he repay her honesty and openness with his own. That was a two way street he wanted to keep open. "You really wanna hear about me with another woman?" Things were different now. He couldn't see that holding the same titillation for her as it once did.

She thought for a minute and then frowned. "Well, no." He could hear the irritation in her voice. At him? At herself? Their situation in general? He couldn't tell.

"Whatcha lookin' to get outta me tonight, baby?"

Marie sighed. "I don't know." She was fidgety. Unsettled. "Things are different now without Charles and— and the others." He did not miss her small hesitation as she tripped over the rest of the friends they'd lost. "The Alpha team is a big deal. It's harder to come down after missions now when there's more on the line, you know?"

Logan nodded. There was more on the line for him, now, too. She was an asset at his side in battle, confident and strong, but also his greatest liability. Keeping her alive came before everything else.

"I like this time here with you. Out here like this just you and me with the night flowing around us. It helps bring me down after." She took a deep swallow off the bottle. "I guess it's just taking a while tonight."

"Restless?" It wasn't a big leap. She'd hardly been still since they got here.

"Yeah. Still kinda just buzzing under my skin. Keyed up and rarin' to go, you know?"

"Sure as hell do." A buzz? He fucking wished. A buzz would be an improvement over how he felt right now. He had a full-on roar sizzling in his blood that would burn for hours still.

"What do you do to come down, sugar?"

"Ain't pretty," he grunted.

"I don't care. Tell me." Little flash of the Rogue in her just then. Not too many people could get away with barking an order at the Wolverine. Fewer still he'd actually answer.

"Fightin'. Fuckin'."

"Some things never change, huh?"

His jaw clenched and he fixed her with a hard stare. "You really wanna go there?"

Logan was a little lost when she apologized instead. "Sorry, sugar."

"For what?"

"For not being ready for what we both need tonight."
He knew she wouldn't have said it straight out like that if she hadn't been a little drunk and he wasn't sure how to answer back. He wasn't going to push her, not about that, but he wasn't going to tell her it was okay, either. Not when it was ripping them both to shreds.

Logan shrugged, settling for ambivalence. "It is what it is, baby."

"You wanna go, sugar? Throw down? I'm not afraid to take you on."

Her willingness to offer him a different physical resolution drew a dark chuckle from him. It was sweet, but painfully naive. "You know what's gonna happen if I put my hands on you tonight."

She knew. She kept her distance after missions. So did he. They were both too volatile afterwards. "So tell me about the fucking, then," she said, bold as brass.

"Ain't nothin' to tell. I'm only fuckin' myself now. Same as you," he snapped, more roughly than he'd intended. He'd had a lot to drink too.

"So tell me about that, sugar." His eyes widened briefly. "You told me you would that night on your deck, remember?"

He did. "Hmph."

"You said you'd tell me if I wanted to know. So, I'm askin'."

"You're playin' with fire, kid."

She took her glove off, the unspoken gesture was very clear. She could defend herself just fine no matter how riled up he got. "I'm not afraid of you."

That got her a raised eyebrow and a laugh that warmed his eyes, too. "Baby, you're not thinkin' that one through. It'd be fuckin' great for me. Mellowed me out real good last time…. better'n fightin' or fuckin' ever did, but you don't want what I got. The last thing you need is more wildness in ya right now."

He had a good point.

"Five Mississippi?" she teased.

"Infinity Mississippi, darlin'." His well never ran dry.

She thought that over and nodded. "So talk to me instead. Tell me about you."

Logan understood in that moment why this was safe for her. It wasn't about other women or even his fantasies of her. It took nothing from her and put nothing on her. No jealousy. No expectation. It was something intimate and private that was solely about him.

It was more than owing her a debt; more than one story exchanged for another. She was asking him for more now and he wanted to encourage that. He didn't mind talking about it. Sex didn't embarrass him. There was a vulnerability inherent in solo sex that made it a little uncomfortable, but she was only asking for the words, not a live demonstration. At least not yet. And that she was asking about it at all pleased him. At this point he was willing to give her whatever she needed to move things along.

"Sugar?"

"Thinkin'," he offered.
"About?" She killed the last of her beer and scooted into the bed of the truck so she could lay down and stare up at the night sky. She felt very spinnny and only part of it had to do with how much she'd had to drink.

"Worried some 'bout offendin' ya." Most of it was pretty crude.

"Really? After everything of mine you read?"

That surprised him a little.

"Ain't the same." It wasn't real. Not in the same way.

"Maybe not, but it's not that different either."

"I guess. But how much of that could you say to my face?" They'd never really sat down and talked about what she'd written. He knew they needed to. Maybe this was a sign she was more ready for that discussion than he had previously thought.

"Honestly, I don't really know. But I kinda think maybe we should try sometime."

Logan understood she was putting a firm boundary down. She didn't want that tonight. Tonight she wanted something else from him.

He nodded. "Just givin' ya fair warnin', kid. It ain't pretty."

"It is to me." Sure, even words now. They were quiet but the ring of truth in them was undeniable, and it shook him deeply.

"It ain't always the same. Sometimes I just wanna get off. Sometimes it's more."

"It's that way for me, too."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

He continued when she didn't elaborate, reading the unspoken cue. She didn't want to talk about herself as much as she wanted to know about him.

"Sometimes I like it real slow. Take my time. Get a good slow burn goin'. Back off from the edge a few times until I can't no more. I ain't real big on fantasy, but if it happens, it's usually then."

He looked over to see her reaction. She still wasn't looking at him but she was nodding a little and the color in her face had more to do with the three beers she'd put down rather than any discomfort over their conversation. She didn't smell embarrassed or uncomfortable. He'd have stopped there if she had.

"Sometimes it's just mechanical. More like relief than pleasure."

"I thought there was no such thing as a bad orgasm."

"Heh. Did you hear the word 'bad' come outta my mouth?"

She giggled and then fell silent again and he could tell she was waiting for him to continue.

"Sometimes I'm so fuckin' hot, I just wanna get off good n'hard."
She wasn't nodding anymore. Her scent still spoke to prurient curiosity, however. "What do you think of then?"

"Filthy shit," he returned evenly. There was an edge to his voice now. His own line in the sand. One he wouldn't cross without a clear invitation.

"Like?" And there it was. She always pushed.

Tonight he pushed back.

"The usual bullshit. Girl on girl. Fuckin' two women. Tits'n ass. Just usin' a mouth to get off." Her pupils blew wide at that one and her body jerked slightly in the bed of the truck. Shit.

"More."

"Dirty shit I've done. Dirty shit I wanna do again. Shit I haven't done yet." He gave a dark smile. "I ain't no Boy Scout. Hell, I probably did it and just don't remember."

"For example?"

He'd never had a virgin. He just shook his head. He wasn't going there even with an invitation.

"What about the Wolverine?"

Logan deliberately misunderstood because he didn't want to go there, either. Not now. Maybe not ever. The Wolverine's carnal thoughts still shocked him at times. "He don't think. He just wants."

Marie disagreed, but she could tell he was primed for a fight. She was surprised he'd shared as much as he had.

"Hmm…"

"It's different after missions."

"For me, too."

"Pillow not enough then?"

Her face flamed in the darkness. "No."

"For me it's different. Crystal clear. Focused and sharp with that wildness still roarin' in my head and burnin' in my blood. No fantasies then, either. Just little flashes of whatever I need to—"

"Get off?"

He shook his head.

"To keep myself together." He could tell he'd shocked her and the moment of emotional vulnerability made him swing back the other way with his next words. "S'real physical then. Fuckin' hard into my fist, just spit and sweat and comin' until I can't goddamn move."

"Wow."

"Too much?"

"No. But I'm totally not going to be able to think of anything else the next time we wrap up a
mission, you know that, right?"

"Heh. You mean like how it is for me now every time I get on my bike?"

The Rogue just laughed and reached for another beer.

~ooOoo~

A week later, ZZ Top blared loud from the stereo, spilling out the windows into the spring sunshine. Logan watched with amusement as Marie's body moved with the beat while she painted the kitchen. He'd finally settled on a rich olive, a few shades deeper than the greenish flecks in the granite that reminded him of the coat she'd been wearing the first night they met. He was especially thankful for her help with this particular project. He liked working with his hands, building things, fixing things, but he hated painting with the fiery passion of a thousand dying suns. It was one of the reasons he'd left that job unfinished. He simply didn't have the patience for it and he wasn't too keen on the smell, either.

Marie couldn't carry a tune worth a damn, but she was belting out the lyrics and shaking her cute little ass while she cut in around the cabinets. Logan was sitting on the floor where he intended to put a kitchen table eventually. He had a notebook open in front of him and was making a list of materials for the lumberyard with one of those rectangular carpenter's pencils.

"She was really bombed and I was really blown awaaaaaaayyyyy….." The tip of her ponytail was bobbing along as she sang. "Until I asked her what she wanted, and this is what she had to saaaaaayyyyyy….."

Logan grunted in amusement. "Hey, kid. You know this song's about a blowjob, right?"

Her brush stopped.

"I sure do." She cocked her head at him, eyes sparkling. "Is it giving you ideas, sugar?"

God. She'd all but purred the words at him. That was new. While they'd both finally acknowledged the thing between them, it still hadn't gone beyond kissing and cuddling. Putting her panties in his fist that night had been a bold step for her, but it was like once she'd acknowledge the shift, the awareness of the change was enough for her. She was flirty and touchy-feely, but most often it was in a more casual way that drove him slightly crazy. He understood she needed time to adjust and right now she was more comfortable talking about intimate topics than trying any of them out, but the wait was painfully difficult. He managed to keep it in check with Marie, but the others had borne the brunt of his frustration more than once.

"As if I needed a song to inspire those kindsa thoughts." He tapped the pencil on the paper. "Got plenty of 'em already." Too many.

"Glad to hear it." She twirled the brush in the paint. "It's sure giving me ideas…." Wiping the angled brush on the edge of the can, she turned back to the wall. "But my boss is a real slave driver. He wants this project finished today so, I guess you're out of luck....." she teased.

Logan glanced over and chuckled when he saw she'd painted 'Mmm.... Logan is yummy' on the wall in huge green letters a foot high. They'd be painted over eventually when she finished cutting in and rolled the rest of the paint on with a roller, but the idea that those words would always be there warmed something inside him that had more to do with affection and less to do with carnal desire.

"Nice."
"You like that?"

"You know I do."

"Are we talking about my painting skills or blowjobs?"

"Pick one."

She snorted.

"What are you working on over there?"

"Kitchen table ideas. The space makes me think round, but I'm not sure." She was quiet which meant she had a strong opinion. Interesting. "You gonna tell me whatcha think?"

"A round table has no head and no foot. A man should be able to sit at the head of his own table."

She wasn't teasing now.

That was just so… Logan caught her gaze. "I like that. Thanks, kid." Her youthful appearance made it easy to forget she had unfounded depths and the unique perspective of a plural memory. Sometimes what she had to say was remarkably profound. "Rectangle it is."

"With two long benches. Not chairs all around."

"Benches?" It was tempting. Two benches and a chair for the head and foot would be easier to build than six chairs.

"Yep. That way you can squeeze in as many little butts as you need to without cramming the table with chairs."

Little butts? He didn't think she was talking about the students at the school. The blush across her cheeks told him he was right. The idea that she could picture him as a father shook him. He wasn't quite sure what to say. She'd gone back to painting so she didn't have to look him in the face. He could only smell the paint, but he'd lay good odds she was embarrassed by what she'd said in an unguarded moment.

"I'll take it under advisement."

She just nodded, relieved he hadn't pressed. She hadn't meant to say that. She hadn't even realized it was in her mind to say.

"I was thinkin' a big slab of hickory for the table. Maybe with walnut butterfly joints."

"Hickory's more variegated, right?"

"Yeah. More variation than oak or ash. Harder than pine. More durable." He threw a lopsided smile at her back. "I build things to last, Marie."

"The hickory then," she said quietly. "Light and dark together. I like that."

He had the sense she had been talking about more than just the table. But then again, to be fair, so had he.
Up next: Livin' On A Prayer. Take my hand. We'll make it, I swear… Marie and Logan hit the road and wind up somewhere unexpected.
Marie ran into Logan in the garage. There was something about the way he held himself that made her look twice. He seemed a little different; perhaps touch more animated than usual. She could see a crack or two in his normal stoic reserve. "What's that look for, sugar?"

He wasn't surprised she'd noticed it. She'd always read him better than anyone.

"Order's in at the lumberyard. Took a couple of weeks because they had to special order the hickory, but we're good to go. Big thick slab. I'm on my way to pick it up now. You comin'?"

"Sure." He knew she'd say yes. She loved to escape with him, even if it was just for the afternoon. "Is it far?"

"'Bout an hour. Just on the other side of Pawling."

"Just let me grab my purse."

He rolled his eyes. "Just get in the truck, baby. You don't need it."

"No way. I've had it drilled into me by the best, sugar. Even if you're sitting next to the biggest badass you know, you don't ever put yourself in the position to be stranded without cash." He huffed because he was the one who'd taught her that. "Or tampons," she added just to watch him shake his head.

Sometimes he wondered if it was her life's mission to drive him completely demented. She seemed to accomplish it with very little effort.

"Fine. Go. But I'm gonna leave your cute ass here if it takes more'n five minutes."

She sprinted away and was back before he'd finished unhooking the bike trailer from the hitch. He opened the door for her and she climbed inside the truck with a quiet smile.

"What?"

"It seems like every time I'm in a truck with you, we're heading north." She scooted across the bench seat to press herself up against his side. He settled his arm around her. They were still taking things painfully slow, but she rarely passed up a chance to cuddle up next to him. "Maybe we'll make it all the way to Anchorage one of these days."

"What's in Anchorage?"

Her eyes glittered. "Adventure."

He snorted. "Not enough of that 'round here for ya?"

"Not that kind of adventure. The you-and-me kind of adventure, sugar."

"Oh. Heh." He gave that some thought. "Maybe this summer. Mosta the kids'll be back home. House'll be mostly done by then. It'd be a good time."

"No," she said quietly.

"No?"
"No. It has to be when there's snow. Like — like before." She squeezed his hand, stroking his knuckles and forearm absently. He knew she liked the way they felt. The solid heaviness seemed to both settle and excite her. "Only this time you wear your seatbelt and the black leather brigade doesn't come and pull us away before things have a chance to get interesting."

"Works for me, darlin'."

"Does it?"

His face softened and he pressed a kiss against her temple. "Yeah. It sounds good. Sounds real good."

"Do you ever wonder what would have happened if fate hadn't intervened and we'd just kept on driving?"

He nodded. The words were tight, though. Pipedreams and guilty pleasures. Heavy on the guilt. And the pleasure. "No Sabretooth. No Magneto…" he kept it on the lighter side.

"No Jean." She said quietly.

So much for the lighter side. They still hadn't talked about Jean and he knew she was still carrying some deep hurt about how that had played out.

"No Bobby."

"No Alkali Lake."

"No Cure." He'd been hurt by her choices, too.

They both fell silent. There was a lot still there under the surface. Places they hadn't yet gone. Things they hadn't worked out or worked through. Everything was still new and fragile but Logan felt like they needed to work through the physical stuff, bond her to him that way first, before they took on some of the thornier conversations.

"I was just wondering if you ever played 'what if'. That's all. As strange as it sounds, I wouldn't wish away anything that's brought us here to what's happening right now. Just — just so you know that." Her smile was soft and genuine. "But sometimes I really do like the 'what ifs'."

"Me too." He squeezed her leg and left his hand on her thigh.

Each lost in thought, they drove in silence for a while until Marie's eyes fell on a road sign advertising a new flavored coffee; Southern Pecan Pie. She snickered.

"What?"

"Southern Pecan Pie? I think they've got your number."

"Damn straight." He chuckled. "Hey, that reminds me of somethin'."

"Oral sex?"

He snorted.

"No. Well. Sort of."

"Oh? I'm all ears now. Lay it on me."
"After what happened on the deck the other day, hearin' what we did, I was thinkin' on whatcha said about listenin', so I gave the audio thing a try."

"What audio thing?"

"That thing you said you liked. Listenin' to people gettin' off with each other."

A blush spread across her face and down her neck. He followed it with his eyes.

"Umm…"

"Don't be embarrassed, darlin'."

"Why not?" She tried for casual. It would have worked except her voice was about two octaves too high.

"'Cause it got me off real good too. I can see why ya like it."

"Logan!" Her blush was fierce now, but he hadn't missed the way she'd melted into his side.

"Heh." He knew she liked it. Her scent didn't lie. "It's different than I'm used to. More up here." He tapped his head. "Less physical… but definitely hot."

"But still good?"

"Hell, yes."

"How many times good?" she teased.

Logan just chuffed. "You know, now you've got me curious. I've never actually tried to see how many times I could go." He'd lived on the edge for a long time. He was a man who liked to push his limits. He'd never tried that one, though.

"Oh, to be a fly on that wall," she mused, only half kidding.

"Open invitation. Any time," he replied, without really thinking about it.

"Really? You'd let me watch that?"

He sensed her shift from playful to serious. She was testing, he knew. "Yeah." There were other things he'd rather do more, but he'd give her that if she wanted it. He watched her blush deepen. "But we both know what'd happen after if you did."

"After?"

He gave her a pointed look. "You know he couldn't have you there like that and not make you his after," he said tightly. Marie was aware Logan had issues with the parts of himself he couldn't control.

"I know."

"I'm not gonna tell ya no, kid. Not anymore. You gotta right to ask for whatever you want. But you needta know he wants things too. So do I. He's not gonna ask nice and I can't promise I always will, either. So you best be sure you're ready for what's at the end of that road before you put us on it, huh?"
"I will."

"Good." He shook his head and then smiled, wanting to lighten the mood, but keep it in the same vein. Logan pulled her closer and rubbed his stubble against her just to feel her shiver. "So what is it about the audio you like, darlin'?"

Marie was quiet. A little uncomfortable but not completely unwilling to answer. Logan was different than anyone else she'd ever met. He didn't seem to have modern notions of propriety or civility, especially when it came to intimacy and sex.

He was a force unto himself. Raw and wild and unpredictable, like the untouched wilderness he loved to lose himself in. He was strong. So strong. There was a timelessness in him that had nothing to do with when he was born and more to do with what lay in his heart. Sometimes Marie thought that it growled from deep inside of him, driving him the way a storm drives the wind before it. Other times it seemed as soft as the beat of a butterfly's wings. He was passionate and uninhibited and he had an openness that was sensual and incredibly endearing, for all its crude candor.

That sense of limitlessness was very compelling to a person who'd been saddled with some very rigid physical limits because of her skin.

"C'mon, baby. It's just us here."

His hand squeezed her thigh again, stroking gently. Rhythmically. She could feel the heat of his heavy palm through her jeans.

"It's because it's up here, like you said." She tapped her temple.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Because if I turn out the lights and crawl into bed with my laptop and my earbuds, if it's just one voice, just a man's voice, then it's almost like I'm not alone."

It was a very intimate revelation and instead of inspiring prurience, it made his chest feel tight. Everything in her sang out, not just for physical touch, but for companionship. She was lonely. It made his heart hurt that all she'd had for so long was a cold bed and the solitary echo of another person's pleasure. He knew how it felt to live at the edge of the light, to never have the warmth and companionship that seemed so effortless for other people because of who and what he was.

"Ah, darlin'." She was killing him.

"I like it best when there's no words. Just sounds." He turned that over in his mind. "You're right. It's mostly up there in my head, mostly mental, but sometimes..."

"Go on," he encouraged when she hesitated.

"Sometimes when it all feels too empty, I bring a toy." He understood she meant her bed as well as her body. "When it's just the sounds and no words, then I can make sounds too and I can be making them with anyone. Anyone I want."

Her words painted a very graphic image and he responded. Strongly.

A low growl vibrated his chest against hers. "This anyone got a name?" He wanted to hear her say it. They'd been dancing around it for months.

"It's always been you, Logan. From the first time I saw you in Laughlin City. Right from then."
The growl got louder. His hand slipped from her thigh to catch her hand. He guided it between his legs and pressed it there. Not rubbing. Not to thrust against. Just to let her know she wasn't alone. She'd affected him profoundly as well, and not just between his thighs. His chest was pounding too.

"Feel what you do to me, baby."

She could feel the heat even through her gloves. It was the first time she'd ever touched him so intimately. He was big and warm and so hard it made her dizzy.

He moved her hand to his chest and she could feel the fierce beating of his heart.

"Since Laughlin?" she asked quietly.

"Yeah, kid. Since then."

Up next: **Black Velvet**. Logan and Marie are back on the deck again, together under the stars. This time, the Wolverine's got something a little different in mind...
"I can't believe I lost again." Marie was trudging up the trail to Logan's deck carrying a familiar box.

Logan threw another log in the fire pit, sending up a wild dance of sparks, and turned to face her.

"Evenin', darlin.'" She was casually dressed; boots, jeans, and a fitted long sleeved t-shirt the shade of an orange parking cone. The retina-searing color did nothing to distract from her sinuous curves. A cropped jeans jacket and dangly earrings rounded out the look. It wasn't quite Little Red Riding hood, but it was close enough for him to feel a bit like the Big Bad Wolf.

The spring evening was perfect for a fire. The days had grown warmer, but the evenings were still cool enough that the crackling flames felt good.

He sniffed. The box didn't smell like it usually did tonight. There were no mouthwatering scents. No aromas of freshly baked bread or rich, savory spices. He could smell her though, clean and citrusy sweet with a hint of something herbal, and under it all a sultry spice that announced just how much things had changed. She'd always smelled good, but she'd never smelled like *that*.

Taking the box from her, Logan set it aside and waited for her to come to him. When she did — and only after she reached for him first and turned her face to his — he anchored his hands on her hips before kissing her slow and deep as her arms wound around his neck. He got to thirty-six before he felt the first tingle as her power began to draw him inside her, and broke the kiss reluctantly.

Grinning, he leaned in for another. And then another. When he finally lifted his mouth, she was breathless and one of his hands had wandered from her hip to her ass. He gave her a playful squeeze moved his hands back to her waist.

"Mmm…"

"Y'taste good."

"Tamarind candy." She'd had one on the way over.

He licked her neck before arching that brow at her. "Not the candy. Just you." The Wolverine nipped her for good measure. He would have his say, as well.

She nuzzled his throat in response, quick little brushes of her nose and lips. That was new. She was too careful — still pretty skittish, but that was slowly changing. She was finally beginning to initiate little touches and that pleased him, but these brief little moments of touch were far more fleeting than they needed to be.

Her mutation took a little while to kick in. Usually it was around thirty or forty seconds, but a few times it'd been closer to a minute. It was beginning to take slightly longer each time now but he hadn't said anything yet in case the sudden awareness made her feel self-conscious enough to undo all the progress she'd made. It helped when she was distracted or relaxed. It almost always flipped on faster when she was anxious or upset.

Despite how quickly things had heated up between them on the deck that night, they still hadn't done more than kiss and cuddle. Logan didn't think she was uncomfortable with touch as much as she was afraid of what came after. Being mated to the Wolverine wasn't something that could be undone. It wasn't a decision that should be made by a child or a girl with a crush, or even by a woman whose judgment was clouded by desire and lust. Logan wanted an equal. The Wolverine needed one. The force of his indomitable will would crush anything less. She had to be sure.
Marie had taken his warning to heart. This was her time to take what she needed from him. When she was ready, when she had claimed him for her own, then and only then, would he take what he needed from her.

He thought perhaps it was her deep understanding of his feral counterpart that kept her kisses chaste and her touches light; intimate but not a prelude to sex. They still spoke candidly about sex, but she seemed to know instinctively that they had passed the place where chains could bind the Wolverine. It was simply safer this way. All or nothing. Playing in the middle of that road would be dangerous for them both. He didn't want to hurt her and he wasn't sure he could live with himself afterwards if he did.

It was just one of those things that required time and patience.

Her stomach growled and he lifted his head and chuckled. "Whatcha got on deck for dinner tonight?"

"I was thinking about making sushi tonight but then I thought maybe we'd christen the newly finished fire pit with a real cookout."

"You know how to make sushi?" Something tickled at the edge of his mind. He hated that feeling. It was like his brain was reaching for something he should know but was no longer there.

"Yep. My gran grew up in Hawai. She learned from one of her Japanese friends." Of all the people in her family, her grandmother was the one most unsuited to Mississippi living. She'd been a Navy nurse in the Pacific theater and had met a soldier and fallen in love. She had followed him home to Mississippi and had stayed there; despite it being just a little too small for someone who'd once enjoyed a larger slice of a more diverse world. Gran had always been her favorite and the only one who'd approved of her plans to visit Alaska. Marie missed her every day. "She taught me when I was eleven. Not all the fancy sushi or sashimi, but I can do inari sushi and I make a mean California roll, although I call it a Mississippi roll instead, for obvious reasons."

"Heh. That mean it's got 'gator insteada crab?"

"Hey, now!" She swatted him.

"Eh, make it for me next time," he said with a smirk.

Marie rolled her eyes. "I can't lose every time! That's just... not right!" Losing was painful, but it was hard to hold a grudge when both she and Logan enjoyed the outcome so much.

"If you say so, darlin'. In the meantime, whatcha got for us tonight?"

"I thought we'd go Girl Scout old school tonight. Sausage dogs cooked over the fire, chips, baked beans, potato salad — gran's recipe — and s'mores for dessert." She smiled up at him. "Well, and cold beer. That's not out of the Girl Scout handbook, but I'm willing to make an exception this time because I love the taste of you when you're drinking one."

She felt him shudder slightly under her hands. The notion that she could affect such a guarded man so deeply made her feel powerful. It was a heady thing to have sway over someone like him.

"Jesus." He took a deep breath. "Standin' invitation. Any time."

"Good to know."

He was thoughtful as he opened a beer and took a sip that invited her to come and taste for herself.
"I've never had a s'more."

"You'll like them."

"How do you know?"

"Because they're sweet and gooey and melty and they make your hands all sticky and yummy. They're impossible to eat without the licking of lips and fingers." She was looking at his mouth.

"Well, hell. That's got the better-than-sex cake beat right there."

"I kinda thought you might feel that way."

They walked down to the fire pit. He let her go first so he could watch her ass.

Marie smiled when she saw the three new wooden benches he'd built. "These are really nice, Logan. Are you sure they should be outside?"

"They're nothin' special. Just pine. A test run for the ones for the kitchen table." He pointed to the closest one. "That one has butterfly joints, that one over there's got biscuit joints and this one has dovetail joints. I was just fuckin' around tryin' to work out what I liked best."

That he'd chosen benches at all made her heart jump a little in her chest. He'd never acknowledged what she'd said about them that afternoon, but the fact that he'd chosen to build them anyway spoke volumes. And damn if she wasn't still staring at his mouth. It was beginning to make him sweat.

"I didn't know you knew how to do all that." Laying a floor was one thing, but building furniture was an art. She pulled a red and white checkered cloth from the top of the box and covered one of the benches before starting to unload the food; bottles of catsup, mustard, and relish followed a bag of jalapeno chips, a package of hot dog buns, and a thick parcel wrapped in white butcher's paper that was likely the sausages.

"It's as much of a surprise to me as it is to you, baby. It was the same with the laptop. How can I forget my own name but remember the damned home row and biscuit joints? That's fucked up."

"Body memory, maybe." She rubbed his back through his dark fitted shirt. "I know it's frustrating. I'm so sorry." She pressed a kiss to his chest and then his lips. He waited for the flicker of her tongue and was disappointed when she pulled away. "Wanna trade? I'll take your Swiss cheese memory and you can have the poison skin."

"It ain't poison. Don't say that." He pulled her closer, nuzzling at the soft skin under her ear. She liked his stubble. It always made her shiver. "It's perfect. White and soft and all mine. I like it this way. S'fuckin' sexy. When we touch and I feel that tingle start... It gets me so damned hard. I like it real good. Like how ya get when you pull a little of me in ya, too."

"Really?"

He hated that she'd taken the Cure and he was selfishly glad that it ultimately hadn't worked, but that was a conversation for another night. He had something else in mind for tonight. "Oh, hell yeah." His stomach growled loudly.

"Sounds like you brought your appetite tonight, sugar."

"Yeah." He nodded, the hint of a dirty smile touching his lips. "Both of 'em."
She just laughed. "Then make yourself useful and hunt up some sticks for the sausages."

"Yes, ma'am." When she was cooking was the only time she felt truly at ease giving him orders. That odd quirk of hers amused him. Although she had no problems being sassy with him, underneath it all she was usually pretty demure. When food was involved, however, she snapped commands like a drill sergeant. He strolled off into the trees.

Marie hadn't quite been honest with him about the food. She'd downplayed it a bit. By the time he got back, there were vegetable shish kabobs sizzling on the metal rack over the fire pit. A plate of garlic butter shrimp was skewered and ready to go. A pot of baked beans with hickory smoked bacon and cheddar cheese was beginning to bubble at the edge of the fire and she was breaking out the marshmallows, graham crackers, and chocolate for later.

"Smells good." He handed over the sharpened sticks and pulled a bottle of Black Maple Hill out of the box, his eyebrow arched in silent question. Nice. That was some damn fine bourbon.

"That's for after the Girl Scouts go to bed."

He chuckled. "Were you really a Girl Scout? Like with the little uniform and everythin'?"

"You bet your ass. Highest cookie sales in Troop 406 three years running." A little frown touched her face and she turned away. Some of those girls she'd grown up with were the first to turn on her after her mutation manifested.

"Baby?"

"It's nothing."

"It ain't nothin'."

"Just an old bruise. I haven't thought about those girls in a long time." Her sultry smile was back. "They are not part of my plans this evening." She opened the paper wrapping the sausages. "What's your pleasure? We've got beer brats, spicy jalapeno sausage and drunken kielbas."

"What's that?"

"Polish sausage marinated in Jack Daniels."

"I think I just had an orgasm."

"Just one, Mr. No Refractory Period?"

"Jesus, kid." He grabbed a sharpened stick and stabbed a drunken kielbasa. "Gimme a chance. The night's young…"

He had the gall to wink at her before walking his dog over to the fire and thrusting it into the flames. It sizzled in the heat.

He could sympathize.

Up next: **Eternal Flame**. Logan's a man with a plan and a lot on his mind as dinner winds down and they settle in by the fire for something a little more intimate than beer and brats...
Dinner was good. The s’mores were better. Logan was definitely a fan, though that had more to do with the way Marie's scent changed when he sucked her sticky fingers into his mouth and licked them clean with his strong tongue than it did with the dessert itself. Her impertinent little tongue sucking on his fingers had him riding the edge of something he wasn't sure he could rein in if it got loose.

There was something about the combination of the meat and the open fire and the cocoon of darkness with his woman's soft warmth pressed close that drew the Wolverine perilously close to the surface. He enjoyed her company too and it felt good to be with her in a place without walls and doors.

After dinner, Logan removed the cooking rack from the ring of stones and built the fire up higher. It popped and crackled, sending vermilion sparks into the night sky. Marie was sitting next to him on the bench, a beer dangling between her fingers with her legs straight out in front of her. Her feet were just a shade too close to the fire so she could feel the heat on her soles. He liked that. Marie might be cautious with her skin, but she didn't exercise much caution in the rest of her life. Case in point, her taste in men.

Logan nodded. "I like to feel the heat too, darlin." She looked over at him. His feet weren't near the fire. Electricity crackled between them. She thought he might kiss her and she was surprised when he sat back and lit a cigar instead.

She inhaled deeply, soothed by the sweet tobacco. She liked it. The scent was as quintessentially Logan as the crisp smell of the outdoors that always seemed to cling to his hair and clothes and the minty spice of the shaving cream he used.

When he tucked the lighter back in his pocket, he pulled out a piece of notebook paper folded in quarters and handed it over with an unreadable expression.

Marie accepted the crinkled dog-eared page with a curious smile. It looked like a page from the notebook he used when working on projects for the house. She wondered if it was a sketch of the kitchen table or maybe a supply list. The loft and the bathroom hadn't been painted yet. He hadn't built the floating shelves he wanted along the walls or hung the shoji screens he'd built to section off the loft. He hadn't decided what kind of bed he wanted yet and he still didn't have a couch or the leather chair he'd been making noises about.

"What's this, sugar?"

"An attempt at levelin' the playin' field," he said cryptically, blowing smoke up into the night sky.

"What does that mean?"

"Just read it, darlin'."

Marie opened the crinkly note and smoothed it out on her lap, smiling at Logan's bold blocky scrawl. She sat closer to the fire, the orange glow backlighting the thin paper and throwing the black writing into vivid relief. It wasn't a list. It was three quarters of a page of solid text. A word in the middle caught her attention and dragged her gaze up the page.

Cock.
Her eyes flicked over to him but he remained impassive, waiting for her to read it.

She felt hot and dizzy and the feeling intensified after she read the first line and realized what he'd written. There were no euphemisms, no pretty words. It was a man's fantasy, uncensored. Crude and graphic but not explicit. It was simply honest. It wasn't in him to say it any other way.

He noted with some satisfaction that her hands were shaking slightly by the time she'd finished reading it. She'd pressed her legs together too, and her scent had gone from warm and sultry to creamy and wanting. It made his blood throb.

It had started out as just an idea to break the ice tonight, but as he put pen to paper, he found that it was harder than he realized. There was something uncomfortably revealing about taking something so personal and shaping it to be seen and understood by a wider audience. Even though he knew only Marie would ever see it, it was still damn difficult to write. He couldn't seem to make it come out the way it felt in his head. It was more than just wanting. There was lust and passion and tenderness… and probably far too much possession for it to be right. But it was what it was, and he wouldn't apologize for it.

"Really? In the truck after you picked me up?" her words were shy and soft, with just a touch of wonder.

"Yeah, kid." It sounded worse put that way. More stark. More like taking advantage. That's not how it felt inside the confines of his own head and heart. It was rough and wild but it meant something profound. A feeling so big he didn't have the words to articulate it. "It ain't as good as yours."

"I disagree." The style was different — less softness, less polish, but it was devastatingly honest and incredibly erotic. Not despite its crude simplicity, but because if it. It was raw and powerful and reading it had turned her insides to jelly.

He ignored her protest. "I was thinkin' maybe if it wasn't just you out there, then talkin' about whatcha wrote might not be so hard." He was glad of the steady drag and exhale of the cigar's rich sweet smoke. It calmed him. And he was very grateful to whatever wild hair had given him the idea to write down a fantasy for her. He understood her reluctance now in a way he wouldn't have before unless he'd done it himself. Make no mistake, he still wanted that intimacy, that conversation, but he could appreciate now the magnitude of the private glimpse she'd given him into her head.

"I don't mind the hard conversations. I actually kinda like those the best."

"You do?" That put a new spin on things. He usually felt like he was pushing her too far too fast. That she might welcome his intrusion had never once occurred to him.

"Yeah." Marie's heart went out to him. She couldn't believe he'd done that for her. He wasn't the putting pen to paper sort of man. "You're really a good guy, you know that?"

A black smile lifted the corner of his sensual mouth. "A good guy wouldn'ta thought about a single one of the things on that page."

That was the unvarnished truth.

That irresistible mouth of hers on him, right there on the bench seat of his truck. His jeans open but not off. The scent of him on her hands and breath. His mouth between her legs after, with her foot on the ceiling next to the cab's interior light and her fingers in his hair, pulling hard. Something about her had made him want to sink to his knees in front of her and press his face into her belly right from the beginning, but that sweetness hadn't lingered long.
Soon it was her lush young body bent over the counter in his camper, her hands gripping the faucet for leverage as he pounded into her. The scent of her virgin's blood on his body, on his cock and fingers and lips. The scent of his come on her, trickling down the inside of her leg. No cleaning up after. Rubbing it into her skin so his scent would be all over them both while they curled up together in his nest of downy blankets and furs. The mark of his teeth on her throat and at the nape of her neck, a red stinging weal to match the ache between her legs so she'd go to sleep feeling like his. Waking up with her burrowed into him, arms wrapped around him tight, so he'd feel claimed in the same way.

"Is that what you thought when you read what I wrote? That it was wrong?" Her breathing was shallow and there were two spots of color high in her cheeks. Her own first response to him had been similarly primal, and she hadn't been adept enough of a writer for it to sound much different than his first effort.

"No. 'Course not. That's different."

She had written a lot. More than a hundred stories. The first ones were the most revealing. She didn't yet have the skill to make them anything other than what they were; wish fulfillment and the burgeoning sexuality of a young woman lost in a sea of foreign minds, desperately trying to come to grips with being untouchable. They were wild and raw and achingly revealing.

Logan had recognized himself in most of them, especially those first ones, though she'd never used any names. The woman was different from story to story too, though he recognized little glimmers of her in most of them as well.

There was one where he took her over the bar, fresh out of the cage, her green cloak shrouding them. Another where she came to his room and woke him from his nightmare only to be impaled by something other than his claws. There were darker ones, ones where she was wild for him and he took her like an animal, hard and rough and made her bleed and shake and scream his name. Others where she made him submit and took her pleasure from his prone body, torturing him with her silky flesh until he burned. There was even one where she fucked him in the cage in front of everyone so they could all see that she was his.

Several centered around her curiosity for one particular part of his body, one might even call it worship. Her hands, her mouth, her breath and touch driving him wild until he begged her to release him.

She seemed to have touched on almost everything. Soft and sweet. Romantic. Tender. Playful. Dirty. Being restrained. Spanked. Teased. Sex while on her period, when she was drunk, when she was high. On her back, on her knees, on her belly, on her side with her leg wrapped around her lover. In a bed, on the floor, against the wall, in the shower, outside in the rain, rolling in the dirt. Even a few where she welcomed her lover deep inside while she was heavy with his child, round and full of life and love.

It had blown his mind.

There were some with no actual physical sex at all; ones with phone sex or watching her lover stroke himself to orgasm or inviting him to watch while she did the same. There was one where they watched another couple making love. Heat pooled low and heavy at the memory. That one called to his blood, growing deep and low in places best left silent.

Some he recognized as his own fantasies. She'd written a handful of his personal fantasies about her. The rest were his fantasies about Jean. The style there was different, disturbing and painful. She'd clearly been punishing herself, delving into private places and showing the beautiful redheaded
goddess in a way that was — to him, at least — obviously fantasy. No woman was that perfect, though he understood from her words that she truly believed he saw Jean that way.

Those had changed over time, too. The last one in that series had been dark and twisted; about how the man had never truly known the redhead or ever allowed her to know him, and how she'd never really wanted all of him, just the violent wild parts untempered by his tenderness and honor. It had only been the animalistic parts of herself she hated and feared that had chosen the darkest parts of him. That series of stories had disturbed him deeply on many levels.

There were some that were clearly not him, boys her own age or mutants with powers obviously not his own. Though she'd changed the details, he'd recognized both Scott and Hank. She even had a few with two partners or partners of the same sex. Most young people her age had the ability to explore their sexuality in the real world. Marie had explored hers through the written word. It touched him deeply that she trusted him enough to let him see that journey - even the parts she probably felt were ugly and sordid.

Not everything had turned him on. A lot of it he read simply to understand her better. Some of it had made him laugh aloud. She was quirky on a good day, and painfully innocent about the mechanics of some things, despite the memories in her head. Some had made him angry, had sickened him or disturbed him enough to push away the laptop and the bottle and go and find a bar with a cage so he could bleed off a little of the blackness.

Most of it had aroused him to some degree, sometimes so sharply that he'd opened his jeans right there and masturbated to orgasm with his head thrown back and her images playing behind his closed eyes as he spilled over his clenched fist like an excited kid.

The breadth and depth of the content had shocked him, as did her taste for a rougher sort of joining than he imagined a young girl might fantasize about. While he felt guilty because that was probably due in no small part to the sheer amount of him that she'd had in her head, he couldn't quite bring himself to wish it away. They were very suited. Perhaps she'd always had that propensity within her, but she seemed to have a taste for what he liked and how he liked it.

There was a primal thread running through most of her work. Sometimes it was unspoken, or simply a line or two that indicated something deeper instead of a whole story devoted to the subject, though there were plenty of those as well. Taste and scent featured heavily. Oral sex, usually her mouth on her lover and not the other way around. There were several times she'd mentioned tasting herself on her lover's body.

Those got to him every single time, as did the ones where they marked each other, either with scent or something more tangible; marks left by nails or teeth or bruises from hands that gripped too tight. Even ribbons of come, painting her body like starlight. Nothing seemed taboo in her sexual imagining. Biting featured quite prominently, the full gamut from playful nips to stinging bites that broke the skin and made copper bloom in her lover's mouth.

Not much of it was hearts and flowers. There was almost nothing that was traditionally romantic. No red roses and champagne and soft, staged seduction. It was real. Honest. Sweaty and gritty and emotionally revealing. Sometimes brutally so. From sweet and tender to raunchy and dirty. But nothing contrived. Nothing fake. It was compelling and hot as fuck.

Over time, her stories had become more complex, more sophisticated. He got the sense what she wanted hadn't changed so much as her ability to imbue the story with a certain feel; artistic license that put another layer between the reader and the real truth. The themes were less obvious but her work still retained the same sense of raw sensuality.
A lot of it seemed to center around the intimacy between the two people in the moments preceding or directly following the sex. The build up. The aftermath. Those after-moments featured heavily, and Marie rarely shied away from those things that in his experience, most women were eager to gloss over or pretend didn't exist.

The wet spot. The vulnerability. The openness. The trickle of a man's ejaculate running down his woman's leg when she got up from his bed. The scent and feel of the previous night's lovemaking the following morning, slick thighs and a little gush that eased a slow push into sore flesh. Conversations about birth control. The way a man felt a woman's eyes on him as he peeled off a spent condom. A thousand little intimacies she'd never thought she'd have. Things she clearly dreamed about experiencing for herself.

She was sensual by nature, but the body always longed for that which it could not have. She craved touch and companionship and the very idea that those things might never be hers only drove the fire higher, made her more desperate to experience them with every sense left to her.

On some level, he'd always been aware that her plural memory was there, but he'd never really considered how much it had changed and influenced her. In a lot of ways, she was much less innocent than he'd imagined. Her body might not have physically performed the act, but she had the memories. Not just of casual sex, but of love. Intimacy. A thousand private details people only ever learned sleeping in the same bed over time. He wasn't the only one in her head.

On one hand, it was disconcerting. On the other, it balanced them, balanced the weight of what he carried in a way that nothing else ever could.

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Up next: **Broken Wings.** They've been dancing around it for the better part of a year. Logan and Marie finally talk about what she's written…
Marie and Logan stared at each other, the firelight making their faces glow orange against the starry black sky.

There was an ocean of words locked away between them that neither of them really knew how to share. It wasn't that they wanted to avoid the conversation so much as it was they didn't know how to have it without things changing too much too fast.

This conversation had been nine months in the making. She'd shared her stories with him last summer. It was late spring now. It was time. Past time. The longer they waited, the more awkward it would become.

Logan had read most of the stories more than once, some of them several times, looking for little details that might help him understand the side of her she'd always held apart. Some he'd read again and again simply because they were his favorites and they turned him on. It was a way to ease the long wait, too. To understand something of her sexuality, even though their relationship wasn't yet sexual.

Marie worried the crinkled paper between her fingertips, the silence between them only broken by the popping of the fire and the shift of the logs as the burned. "Say something, sugar."

"Somethin'," he grunted.

That earned him a smile. "Maybe it's time to break out that bottle? I seem to remember thinking I might need a little liquid courage for this conversation."

"You still think that now?" he asked, returning from retrieving the bottle.

She knew what he meant. Things were different now after The Red Door.

Logan opened it and offered it to her. He always did that. Wanted her to drink first. He liked tasting her on the bottle. She knew he liked it in the same way she liked watching his stubbled throat work as he swallowed. They both had their little tells.

"Yeah." She took a sip and passed the bottle back, sighing as the smooth caramel finish warmed her from lips to belly.

"You scared?"

She rolled her eyes at him. "Not of you." She'd never been afraid of him. Man or animal, he'd always made her feel safe.

"Mmph. Embarrassed then?"

"A little. But, you know, in a good kinda way. Not like shame. Like a lot nervous, but a little excited, too."

She didn't smell afraid, just nervous underscored with desire. He'd have stopped long before now if that had been the case. "There's nothin' to be ashamed about in whatcha wrote."

"I know." She took a sip and then another, rolling the bottle between her palms. "It's just that the more weeks that went by without you saying anything about what you read, well, I thought…"
Marie swallowed and then smiled brightly. "You know what? Never mind what I thought. And thank you for this," she fluttered the paper in her fingers at him. She still couldn't believe he'd done that.

"Welcome," he grunted. "But you ain't gettin' off that easy. I wanna know whatcha thought."

"Isn't it obvious? That you'd think I was some kind of freak for writing all that stuff."

"But you still shared it with me," he pointed out.

"In my defense, I was drunk when I did."

"Mmph. Would you still make the same choice?"

She sighed. "Yes."

"Good."

"I..."

"Go on."

"I wanted you to read them." Her soft whisper was fierce. She wanted him to see her in a new way. And for him to know that she saw him in a different way, too.

"I did."

"All of them?"

He nodded.

"Which one did you read first?"

It was an easier question to ask than: 'What did you think of them?'

"King of the Cage." She winced a little at that. That was far and away the most violent, graphic story. Probably one of the most honest, too. "Title jumped out at me. Read the others in order after that."

"And?"

"And what?"

"You know what I'm asking."

"You wanna know if I liked 'em. If they shocked me. Surprised me. Turned me on. Pissed me off." His voice grew husky. "Got me off."

"Yeah."

"All of that."

"Good."

He raised an eyebrow.

"Which one, sugar?"
"Which one what?"

"Got you off."

"That number ain't in the single digits, kid." He tried to say it easy, to let it roll off his back, but her eyes were on fire for him and he was feeling the heat himself.

"Which one gets you off the best, then?"

He considered that for a long moment.

"Don't ask unless you're ready for the answer. Might not like whatcha hear."

"I'll take my chances." She'd written them. She knew what she was asking.

"Mmph." He took the bottle from her and savored a few sips before he finally answered her. "That one. Winter."

His answer surprised her. That one was probably the most domestic story of the group. And also the most raw. It was the one with the most disturbing feedback, too. For a lot of readers, it had skated too close to the line of abuse — from accusations of pedophilic overtones to outright allegations of statutory rape. That one had a slew of negative comments, all of which had surprised her.

It was a simple story about a man who'd picked up a young hitchhiker on the road and had taken her to his cabin for the winter. Their sexual relationship had begun even before they'd reached their destination and the girl had been heavy with child by the time spring had come. It had a lot of domestic scenes and simple, everyday intimacies. It also featured a lot of fairly explicit and somewhat dominant sex with a young, inexperienced partner, and later a lot of sex where the focus was on the woman's ripe body as it swelled with the life he'd given her.

Logan watched her face, searching for signs of disapproval or disgust. It hadn't been an easy answer to give, but Marie deserved to know the truth. How deep the sexual darkness in him ran. If she was considering joining herself to him, she should know it all. That one was one of his. A fantasy he felt so guilty about he'd never even masturbated to it until the night he'd read her words on the screen. He wanted her to understand the darker nature of his sexuality. To appreciate what awaited her. He wanted to be tender, but there was something in him that needed the more animalistic side, too.

"Any other favorites?" she asked, taking the bottle back from him.

"That one where they hook up after meetin' in that fancy bar and they barely make it upstairs. She wants it bad. Fucks her against the door of his room."

Her whole body shivered. "Mmm…"

"And that one in the music room too, where she asks him what he wants and then gives it to him, right there on her knees with his hands in her hair and his back against the door."

It was an interesting cross-section from a diverse group of stories, but the three he mentioned all had a similar thread running through them. Immediacy. The sex, whether passionate and sweet or raunchy and wild, happened quite soon after the man and woman met. There was no long wait. Marie wasn't sure how to feel about that.

The expression on her face was unreadable.
"Darlin’?"
"I'm sorry."
"For what?"
"Needing time."
"Ya lost me."

"The stories you chose. All of them… there's no waiting. She's ready right away."

"Maybe. But it ain't why they do it for me." At least not consciously. All of them touched a primal nerve for different reasons, but maybe she had a point. The waiting was hard and it was wearing on them both.

"Why then?"
"Dunno. They just do. Possessive bullshit, maybe. Who knows."

"I think I do."
"Yeah?"

"The one in the nice bar- that one’s about meeting her when she's his equal. Not a girl or someone he has to protect. She's someone he can take from and give to right away."

"Mmph." That was a little too close to the mark. He didn't regret meeting Marie in the way that he did. Those elements, her youth and their collective pain and intimate history had forged an unbreakable bond. Still, there were times he wished she was older, even though he knew that if she had been, he’d probably have left her on that road and never looked back.

"The music room one is like that, too. Give and take. She gives him what he needs."

"Maybe he just likes that she cares enough to ask."
"Maybe."

"Or maybe he just likes gettin' his dick sucked."
"Logan!"
"Heh." He chuckled, his eyes sparkling with mischief.

"That one, Winter, that one's about—"

"I don't wanna talk about that one, kid." That one was about possession, pure and simple. Virgin blood on his cock and a winter of keeping her filled with come until she grew swollen with his seed. Bound to him for all time through a child made in love, safe and warm and content in the home he'd built for her and their family. Those things made him uncomfortable even now.

"It's okay if you do."
"Mmph."

"It's not so different from what you wrote here." She smoothed the page between her fingers, eyes
touching the words reverently before flicking up to meet his.

"I guess it's not." He held out his hand and she passed the paper to him, watching his face as he read the words. "I knew you sharin' what you wrote was a big deal, but I didn't realize how big until I tried writin' this for you."

Her eyes softened. "Thanks, sugar. Thanks for saying that."

He folded the paper back into quarters, uncomfortable with what was revealed there, and then he tossed it into the fire with grunt.

"No! Logan!"

"What?"

The alarm in her voice set him on edge and he had to grab her arm to keep her from reaching into the fire. She struggled against his hold as the page glowed orange and then curled in on itself, a whisp of blackened ash as it rose into the night.

He was surprised to see tears in her eyes.

"Why did you do that?" her lip trembled. "That was a beautiful gift and now it's gone forever."

"Didn't imagine it would mean that much to you." He kissed the tears from her eyes. "Sorry, kid. I wasn't thinkin'." It had never even crossed his mind that she might actually want to keep it.

"That was the best gift I've ever gotten."

"Bullshit." Words on a page. How did that even compare? He'd given her plenty of other gifts over the years. Things that were worth a lot more than that. Things he'd paid for with pain and blood and the stinking desperation of more fights than he could remember.

"It's not bullshit. That was a gift from here." She touched his heart. "A piece of this. Of the truth. Of our past. Of that part of you that you're only just now beginning to let me see. It did shock me a little, but I liked it too. It turned me on. I wanted to read it again tonight. To be in your head and imagine it and..."

"Say it."

"And to touch myself. To use the words— your words— to make myself feel good." She was blushing, but her voice hadn't wavered.

"I'll write you another," he said thickly, hating the idea of spending another painful few hours putting his thoughts down on paper, but now that he knew what it meant to her— and what she intended to do with it— it was a price he was willing to pay.

"You bet your ass you will."

"Heh." He enjoyed the Rogue, especially when she was assertive with him.

"You take requests?"

Now that he hadn't expected.

"Do you?"
"Only from you. Tell ya what, do this for me, cowboy, and I'll write anything you want."

"Anythin'?"

"Anything."

"Done deal."

"What do you want me to write about, sugar?"

"You remember what you said to me that night at The Red Door?"

"I said a lot of things that night."

"Yeah, but only one of 'em was about feelin' my claws on your skin between the ropes."

"Oh, God." She couldn't believe he'd said it flat out like that.

"I wantcha to write about that. About us doin' that. I wantcha to use my name. And yours. Tell me what you want. How you imagine it. How you want me to be with you when it happens."

"When?"

He smiled. "When you're ready, darlin'. We'll get there."

Up next: **Hit Me With Your Best Shot**. Things heat up as the cracks really begin to show. Both of them are stubborn, passionate people who've never really been the sort to pull a punch, verbal or otherwise…
Marie couldn't believe Logan had asked for that particular request. His claws on her skin between the ropes? She knew he'd enjoyed their impromptu shibari lesson, but he was never that cavalier about his claws. That he was so open with her now about them spoke volumes. Not only was he finally letting her see a side of his nature that he'd always shielded her from, he was beginning to give her little glimpses of the Wolverine, too.

It was exciting but also terrifying. She was going to have to rise to meet that challenge and embrace things in herself — wild, scary, powerful things, to do so.

"God." He had to hear how fast her heart was beating.

"Don't share that one with anyone else." His voice was low but not soft.

"I won't."

He wasn't particularly thrilled that her other stories were online either. She wrote under a penname, but he still didn't like that other people — strangers — could read her work. At first he'd imagined a bunch of horny guys getting off to her stories and was surprised to find most of her readers were women. He understood it was her exploration of her own sexuality and that was generally a process one didn't undertake alone. It wasn't the typical route, though he knew it was as normal and healthy as fumbling in the dark with boys her own age, but he still didn't like it.

"What about you, kid?"

"What about me?"

"Got any requests?"

Her face glowed. "Yes. But I'm more interested in reading your fantasies, not just something you think I want, you know?"

He did, but her answer wasn't really what he'd been hoping for. "C'mon, baby. Help me out a little here. You know it ain't exactly easy for me."

She thought that over. "Something primal," she said softly.

Shit. Those were the ones that made him the most uncomfortable, the ones he had the hardest time sharing.

"Mmph."

She always pushed.

He was beginning to understand that was her way of moving them forward.

"Those are the ones I like the best."

"Why?" He understood that kind of edgy, intense sex could be deeply compelling, but it seemed a little advanced for someone who'd barely been past first base. She was a good girl. A nice girl. That she'd welcome that kind of touch above all others still didn't seem quite real.

"Because they make me feel like yours." Her answer stunned him. "And I like that you share that
part of yourself with me. Let me see something private that you don't share with many people."
"Many? I don't share that shit with anyone, baby. Never have. Some of it I'm still runnin' from."
"Why?"
He just shrugged. "Because some of it's pretty fucked up. It shouldn't get me off, but it does. And
when I finally give in and fall into that place, it consumes me. That ain't how I wanna be with you."
Her eyes didn't leave his. "Well, that's how I want to be with you."
"Marie—"
It was a warning she ignored. "You couldn't tell that from what I wrote? You don't think I was
scared of you reading it and thinking I was fucked up? Or just plain crazy? Or— or dirty or slutty for
wanting it like that?"
His eyes glinted at that. No way was he going to ever let her think that about herself. Such open
sexuality was a gift. Few people ever embraced it with the kind of joyful sensuality inherent in her
writing.
"There ain't nothin' dirty or slutty 'bout you, baby. You're nothin' but beautiful to me. Whatcha wrote
— I kinda thought mosta that stuff was just you workin' through what was in your head. Maybe
explorin' some of those ideas in a safe way. More like a 'what if' than a practice run for the real deal."
Marie was taken aback. "And what if it wasn't? What if me sharing that with you was my way of
saying I do think about doing all of those things, sugar? And I think about doing them with you."
"All of them?" His voice was sharp.
She backed down a little. "Well, not the ones about— about Jean, obviously." Those she just needed
to purge from her head. She ignored his black growl. "And I admit a few of them were just kinda in
the 'what if' territory." Logan looked triumphant until she added, "I'm not really into girls, or guys my
own age, and threesomes kinda scare me unless it's you, me and the Wolverine."
Logan's eyes widened.
"But the rest of them, yeah."
"In the mud and the blood and the cage?" He came straight after her, swinging hard. It wasn't in him
to pull a punch.
"Everything," she said simply.
Her answer made him profoundly uncomfortable. "Fuck," he muttered, taking a healthy pull from the
bottle between his legs. He wasn't entirely sure she knew what she was offering.
"You don't want that?" She seemed a little surprised. "Because, sugar, I don't know many men
who'd turn down a virgin willing to try just about anything." She might not have much carnal
experience, but she was aware of her power as a woman. She was young and fertile and sexually
curious… and on the cusp of being ready to share all of that with a man she loved and trusted deeply.
"Ain't that," he grunted. "You got any idea where this'd go if you're not puttin' limits on it?"
"Whoa. Back that truck up right now, cowboy. That's not fair to put that on me. You need to own
your own limits, or lack thereof, and not count on me to put the brakes on to keep this from going
somewhere that makes you uncomfortable."

He snorted.

"Ain't me I'm worried about."

"Sugar, between us we got feral senses and deadly skin and deadly claws and half a dozen years of wantin' each other built up like bonfire waitin' for a daggum match. I think a certain amount of collateral damage and 'holy shit, what the hell was that?' is kinda implied, you know? I'm looking forward to it and I hoped you were too."

"Jesus Christ." It was times like this he was reminded she was wise beyond her years. And at the same time, painfully unaware of how far down the rabbit hole they might ultimately go.

"I think maybe you're confusing inexperiencence with innocence."

"Mmph." She was probably right.

"And when it comes right down to brass tacks, there's nothing you can do to me that I can't heal from."

He remembered overhearing her tell the firecracker that once. It was as difficult to hear this time as it had been before. Raw. Vulnerable.

"Marie—" That was his hard limit, right there.

"Let's face it, sugar. There's nothing you could do that I couldn't stop in a second if I really wanted to anyway." She let that hang there because he wasn't a man used to physical limits, especially those imposed by other people. "So are you really afraid of hurting me? Or are you afraid of letting me see what y'all really want?"

Logan closed his eyes, stripped uncomfortably bare with a few simple words. He'd thought he would be the one pushing her out of her comfort zone, but he hadn't realized that would go both ways, or that her comfort zone was not at all where he thought it was. He was okay with the raw, sexual stuff, but when it came to the Wolverine, that was something else entirely.

His jaw clenched. He'd assumed this was largely about Marie discovering more of herself. He hadn't really considered that he might learn more about himself as well. It stung his pride a little, even as it curled thorny tendrils of needy hunger into dark corners; dragging things out of him that he'd never imagined would see the light of day, much less be shared with someone he cared about.

"Sugar?"

"Big words from someone who's never even had a man."

Marie shrugged. It smarted, but she knew him well enough by now to know why he was lashing out. Any time something hit a little too close to home, Logan's first instinct was to circle the wagons and shut down, closing himself off and then going on the offensive.

"Maybe. But that doesn't invalidate how I feel. Just because I'm a virgin doesn't mean that I don't have a catalogue of crazy dirty stuff in my head."

"Fair enough. But how much of that is really you and how much is—"

"Everyone else?" She tapped her temple unnecessarily.
Logan nodded.

"That's a good question."

It was. "Yeah."

"I'm not sure I have an answer. At least not one you'll like."

"Try me."

"I've been trying to answer that for a while myself."

"Is that what the writin's about?"

"The erotic stories?"

"Yeah."

"No. They grew out of something else."

"Something else?"

She nodded. "When I first came to the school, Charles suggested that keeping a journal might help me focus, to separate everyone out in my head."

"Makes sense. It help any?"

"Yeah." Looking back over her early journals was painful. It was a little scary to see how crazy she'd sounded back then, a confusing swirl of the men who'd poured themselves into her head. David and Erik and Logan and later others, Bobby and John and Pete… It was embarrassing, too. Magneto had forced her to take in his power, but along with that had also come a lot of very private things about his intimate relationship with Charles. Secrets she'd kept to protect the Professor. Things that had taken time to work out and work through.

She had memories of loving and wanting the man who'd raped her mind. It was a complex and thorny situation that had taken years to deal with.

"Kid?"

"Thinking."

"About?"

"About how crazy I sounded back then," she said honestly. He should know what he was getting into, too. "I was a bag of snakes. Still am, kinda."

"Back atcha."

That made her smile.

"But as I worked through all that to find my own voice, some of that included sexual thoughts, too. Mine and theirs. And that felt kinda good."

"Good?"

"Cathartic."
"Hmm."

"After a while, I didn't need the journal so much. I'd made peace with everyone in my head, but I was a hormonal teenage girl with deadly skin and memories in my head that told me exactly what I was missing. The erotic stories helped with that."

"Mmph." He didn't ask if she had his dirty thoughts up there. He'd read her stories. He knew she did. In technicolor. "You still writin'?"

"Less than before, but yeah. I still need that."

"Haven't seen a new one in a while," he commented. "Bother you that I can read 'em in real time now?" He didn't like the idea that he might be limiting one of the few outlets she had.

"No. I wouldn't have shared them if it did." She took the bottle from his fingers. "But I sometimes wonder if you're still reading—"

"Still am."

"—and if you are, what your reaction is."

That drew a dirty chuckle from him. "Don't take a rocket scientist to work that one out." She giggled. "Though sometimes I wonder if you're windin' me up on purpose."

"Sometimes I am."

"That ain't nice." There was a warning in his voice now.

She took a bracing drink and passed the bottle back. "Sometimes I don't feel nice."

That drew an instant growl from him. "You lookin' to push me over the edge?"

It sure as hell felt like she was trying to get a reaction from him with stories specifically designed to push his buttons. A couple of them had been pretty pointed. The last one had been a continuation of an argument they'd had in the garage. He'd been in a shitty mood; fuse already short because of the long wait, compounded by an engine that was refusing to cooperate. Marie had stalked in, hips swinging, and he'd simply not had the patience to deal with her sassy mouth and luscious scent. He'd told her to shove off. She'd ripped a strip off his hide with her sharp tongue. Sparks to a powder keg. It was volcanic. They'd argued loudly, both out for blood. He'd thrown a wrench. She'd stormed off and he'd felt like an asshole.

Marie had gone home and written a much different outcome to the afternoon. One that had ultimately ended with him slicing off her dress with his claws, pulling down his jeans, and fucking her hard and fast over the tank of the bike until she screamed.

Her ending was infinitely more satisfying than throwing a fucking wrench.

Christ. Reading it had sent him into a tailspin that started with a two day bender and ended in a cage in some shitty dive bar. He'd almost killed someone that night. And then he'd come home and fallen into bed, blood still burning under his skin in a way that no amount of fighting could ever fully bank.

She was definitely trying to get a reaction out of him now. "You tryin' to push me?" he growled, when she didn't immediately answer. He needed to hear her say it.

Marie blushed, caught out. "Maybe a little."
"Baby, I like readin' what gets you hot, what gets you off—" he was deliberately crude. "But if you want somethin' outta me, have the balls to say it straight out. This little girl bullshit's got no place here." She sucked in a deep breath and he could tell it hurt. It should, because he was right. His next words were softer, but no less honest. "I'm ready to give ya whatever you need, whatever you ask for. But it hasta be on you."

Her brows drew together and her eyes flashed at him.

"Shouldn't it be something we decide together? It doesn't seem fair to put it all on me."

"I don't give a fuck about right or fair. I've put all my cards down, baby. The next move's up to you."

Up next: **Wanted Dead or Alive**. This time it's Logan who's after something specific… and Marie's fine with going along for that ride.

*Heh. Any guesses?*
Wanted Dead or Alive

The miles disappeared under the wheels of Logan's truck. Outside the window, spring was in full bloom. The world was lush and green again. Tight chartreuse buds had softened and opened. Cascading flowers rich with pollen seemed to catch Marie's eye wherever she looked. It made the blood tickle in her veins as she recognized a similar ripening in herself. She looked over at Logan. It would be soon, now. She could feel it peaking inside her.

"You know, I'm beginning to think you like this, sugar."

"Hmph."

He would not ever enjoy shopping. It was a necessary evil only, fine tobacco and motorcycles notwithstanding.

"What are you after today? Woodyard again? Paint? Appliances?" He had a TV now. Flatscreen. And a new fridge and oven. Stainless. Interestingly enough, a modern espresso machine had appeared recently. Also stainless. Even a couch. Logan had finished the hickory table and benches and a thick slab of natural maple had become a coffee table. Still no mention of a bed.

"Chair," he grunted.

"I thought you were making those?"

"Still am, but I want a leather one, too."

Marie's whole body shuddered at that. Logan just smirked. The last time they'd both been looking at a leather chair had been at The Red Door. A feral man had flipped a dark-haired woman around and fucked her over the back of it, hard enough to make her keen.

"Oh!"

"Heh."

She smacked his arm. "You got anythin' specific in mind, sugar?"

Her scent slid towards musk and spice.

"Do you?" The words themselves were banal but his tone was positively filthy.

Once, such a comment would have drawn a deep blush from her. Now she just grinned and her eyes sparkled with carnal promise. "Always."

"Christ." He ran a hand through his hair and sat back a little in the seat, widening his legs a little to ease the dull throb in his groin. He hadn't pushed her toward physical intimacy, but he'd stopped shielding her from how her words, and the long wait, had affected him.

The Rogue just smiled, enjoying their easy camaraderie as she felt the last grains of sand slip through that internal hourglass. It marked her readiness to let go of her fear and come to him, willing to accept all he had to give and to choose him as her own. It was exciting, but left her a little melancholy, too. The sun was setting on something beautiful, but she had hope that it would rise on something extraordinary.

He put an arm behind her on the back of the bench seat, wanting her aware of his physical presence.
He wasn't sure if she was conscious of doing it, but she moved closer to him all the same. So responsive, to even the most subtle direction. When she finally came to him, she would be an amazing lover. A true mate in every sense of the word.

"You're quiet today," he observed.

"Just thinkin'."

"About?"

"Sunsets and hourglasses."

He'd long ago accepted her grasshopper brain rarely gave the answer he expected. It was one of the things he liked best about her. She was one of the few people who could truly surprise him. It delighted the predator in him, who found most people boring and predictable.

"Interestin'." It was. Time was clearly weighing heavily on her mind today. "Endin's and beginnin's?" he ventured quietly. He hoped so. He wasn't sure how much longer he could wait.

"Something like that."

"So nothin' about leather chairs, huh?" The casual comment was light. Easy. He wasn't really up for a heavy conversation today. The last few weeks had worn his patience thin.

"Oh, I didn't say that..." her smile was positively wicked.

A few miles rolled by where she felt pretty smug before Logan broke the easy silence.

"Saw you wrote a new story."

Marie flushed with equal amounts of embarrassment and pleasure. She'd been wondering if he'd say anything. "I did."

It was far and away the most explicit thing she'd ever written. A simple story inspired by the ZZ Top song that had been playing that afternoon she'd painted his kitchen. It had started with a motorcycle ride and ended with an intimate gift between new lovers.

"You really want that?"

"I want everything." It was an easier answer to give than: I want all of you. Though he seemed to hear it anyway if the way he jerked slightly in the seat was any indication. Her voice was soft. Gentle with hope rather than brassy with defiance. It touched him in a way that playfulness could not. Acceptance from her had always been the biggest chink in his armor.

Logan stared at her so long that the truck drifted over far enough for the rumble strips to growl loudly under the tires. Shit. He steered the truck back between the lines with a low curse.

His eyes were back on the road, but his thoughts were somewhere else entirely.

"You still tryin' to push me?"

This time she just smiled. "Not on purpose."

"Then why that? Why now?"

Marie felt like she was running towards the edge of a cliff; suspended in the moment, that gathering
place just before she stretched out her wings and either caught the wind just right and soared magnificently or failed utterly and shattered on the rocks below.

"I dunno, sugar. You ever just do something because it feels right even though it defies reason and common sense?"

He nodded, stroking her nape with his thumb as he thought about that day on the snowy road so long ago. "Just once, kid."

~ooOoo~

The actual shopping for the chair was as painful as Logan imagined it would be. An irritating, fussy little man with zero sense of self-preservation kept trying to sell him a house full of furniture he didn't want or need, while a hundred TV's blazed in the background. The girls from Sex in the City were having an annoyingly graphic conversation about oral sex.

It didn't help his frayed mood for that to be the backdrop while he and Marie wandered through the sea of leather furniture. Still, it wasn't enough to dampen his enjoyment as he watched her gloved fingers skate over the smooth leather when she found one she particularly liked. It reminded him of the way she'd stroked the tank of his bike that afternoon in the garage when she'd asked him to take her to The Red Door.

He could tell what they'd seen there wasn't far from either of their minds.

She stopped before a formal leather armchair, high backed with carved gryphons on the legs and brass tack detailing. It was all wrong for the humble, rustic home he'd built, but the oxblood leather was exquisite. He couldn't resist stroking it either. He shook his head and they moved on.

A sturdy modern chair caught her eye next. It had clean lines and smooth dark leather the color of fine tobacco. He sat in it, stretching out his long legs with a sigh of contentment while she looked at him with a critical expression. It was only one of a handful he'd liked enough to sit in.

He got up and shook his head.

"Sugar?"

"Nah. Ain't right."

"I dunno. Looks pretty right to me."

"Ain't a bad chair. S'comfortable."

"But?"

Slowly, deliberately, he came around to the back of the chair and pulled her in front of him, her back to his front. She knew immediately why it wasn't right. The back of the chair only came to mid thigh. The angle was all wrong. His hand found her hip and he put his lips to her ear as he squeezed lightly with his fingers. "S'too low, darlin'."

"Too low?" She wanted to hear him say it. He was too tall to flip her over the back of it and fuck her the way the feral man at the club had taken the woman that night. Strong thrusts that had made her feet leave the floor. Her hips tipped on the fulcrum of the chair and pinned there by his iron grip. His body, thick and hard, sliding into hers until she shuddered and called out to him.

"Mmm. Yeah. Too low for what I want it for."
"Snoozin' by the fire?" She couldn't help but shine him on a little when he didn't give her the explicit answer he knew she wanted. He did it on purpose. She was aware it was his somewhat-less-than-subtle way of encouraging her to open that last closed door between them. He was more than willing to talk to her candidly about sex in general, but he flatly refused to discuss sex with her specifically. Whether it was because he couldn't or wouldn't, she wasn't sure.

Marie tried to turn in his arms but he wouldn't let her.

"No."

He very deliberately rubbed his thumb over her neck where he'd bitten her that night. She swayed against him, eyes closed, and then lifted her chin defiantly and met his eyes over her shoulder.

"I don't take orders from you, cowboy."

Ah, there she was. The Rogue was never far from the surface these days. He approved.

"Yes, you do…" he whispered huskily, nipping at her lightly for her insolence, before kicking her feet apart roughly with his boot. He stepped up behind her like he had that night at The Red Door, only this time he pulled her hips to his crotch. Not lewdly, but with enough force that she got his meaning even without the words.

It happened just that fast, her panties slick and wet, standing there in the middle of the store with Carrie Bradshaw and Samantha Jones nattering on in the background about downtown delights and how good it could be when a man really knew how to use his mouth. Logan growled against her throat.

He knew he'd made his point. They were both aware that if he leaned in and ordered her to put her hands on the back of that chair and present him with that sweet, round ass of hers, that she'd do it in a heartbeat. He wondered if that was her game. Trying to make him crack before she came to him of her own free will. Good luck with that, sweetheart.

"We both know you take orders real good…" He stroked her hip with frank appreciation. "But we ain't there yet, so don't push me like that again, darlin', unless you're ready for what comes after."

Unlike that night in the alcove when he hadn't so much as touched her, today he was pressed right up against her back and he felt her full body shudder at his low, gravelly words.

"God!" The more he talked, the wetter she got. The smug expression on his face and the flash of gold in his eyes told her he knew it, too. It was slippery and warm and felt sexy when she moved. It made her so aware of her body and doubly aware of him.

"So if you're done tormentin' me with your smart mouth and that goddamn luscious scent, let's buy a fuckin' chair already."

He wondered if she'd be pissed at him. He was rarely so high-handed with her, but he'd long reached the end of his rope. The Wolverine would garrotte him with it soon enough and then all hell would break loose. He was surprised when she giggled instead.

"What," he growled, more roughly than he intended.

"A fucking chair."

That made him chuckle, too. In point of fact, that's exactly what it was.
He didn't let go of her hips. They wandered the store, standing together before each chair. They found one at the edge of the showroom that was heavy and sturdy. The distressed leather was the color of rich bourbon. The back was just a little high for her until he told her to rise up on her toes. Ah, Christ.

Perfection.

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Up next: **Desperado.** Two words. Aural sex. Yep, that's what I said. Heh. Logan and Marie spiral closer to the point of no return…

*Okay, y'all. Imagine the Wolverine and the Rogue getting wild at The Red Door and give me your best dirty 80's song recs. Go!*
Logan thought the tension would ease when the chair was loaded in the back of his truck, but as the tailgate slammed on it, things only seemed to spiral tighter. The chair had been bought with a specific purpose in mind, and taking it back to the house along with the Rogue, who was being suspiciously restrained at the moment, probably wasn't the brightest idea.

"Lunch?" he offered. That was their usual standard operating procedure when he was forced to endure a morning acquiring things for the house. Shopping first and then a lunch that generally included a few beers with a whiskey chaser or two to wash away the taste of that unpleasant task. "Muldoon's?"

"God. How many meat pies can one man eat? Maybe Carl's Perfect Pig? I could go for a Shiner and some ribs. I need something to sink my teeth into, sugar." Marie's eyes sparkled.

"Christ. You always gotta push." Her answer pleased him nonetheless. She only ever ate ribs with him, and even that had taken her a few years. It meant her gloves coming off and watching her lick her fingers between bites. He wasn't sure he had it in him today to watch that. He also knew there was no way in hell he was going to tell her no.

As it turned out, Muldoon's might have been the better choice. The ribs and poke greens were excellent, but there were two wannabe country girls at the next table who were using the earlier episode of Sex and the City as a springboard to discuss their own, frighteningly comprehensive, experiences with oral sex. By the time their food came, Marie felt like she knew more about their sexual history than their OBGYNs ever would.

"Mmph." Logan was clearly reaching his saturation point as well.

"I hear that, sugar."

"There's a damn big difference between a bein' a country girl and bein' a whore in boots," he muttered under his breath, sucking at a rib bone in a way that made her both jealous and melty. She saluted him with her glass. "I guess you'd know, cowboy."

He did. His proclivity for wild women with a taste for indulging in raunchy casual sex with rough men was well known, but he didn't care for the critical frisson of disapproval in her tone. He understood why it was there, but she didn't own him and he wasn't about to let her judge him for choices he'd made before she was willing to step up to the plate and take a swing or two herself.

Hell, he was still waiting. She'd made a very public claim on him at The Red Door, but hadn't yet followed through. Logan wondered exactly what she was waiting for, and simply shrugged in reply. He wasn't about to defend his actions. He made no excuses for his temperament.

The women were only a means to an end. There to sate a physical need, like food or sleep. They didn't engage his heart or mind. It was a strange place to draw a line, to share his body but nothing else, but it was the best he could do to balance the two warring sides of his nature.

The voices from the next booth rose again and both Logan and Marie were treated to an enthusiastically graphic recounting of the time the blonde's lover made her come so many times with his mouth that she passed out.

Marie snorted in disbelief. Logan just shook his head. He'd experienced that phenomenon a time or
two from the male perspective, but he wisely kept that information to himself. The Rogue was unstable enough these days without pouring gasoline on that particular fire.

For Marie, the crass description brought to mind the images from that night at The Red Door. The woman had been bound on her back, her legs spread and secured by the beautifully knotted ropes so she was unable to close her thighs against the onslaught of her lover's mouth. Her husky cries had made it apparent that she had no desire to deny him regardless of her position.

Marie had found it easier to watch the couple on the stage than Logan's face. That was one intimacy too far with a man not yet her lover. She felt the same sense of awkwardness now, listening to the girls at the next table talk so graphically about that particular sex act.

She rolled her eyes.

More attuned to Marie than the conversation flowing around them, Logan noticed her silent commentary.

"Too much?"

Marie shook her head. "It's not really that." She felt a little detached, distanced from the conversation for more than the obvious reasons.

"Don't like it?"

She understood he was asking about the act itself, rather than their commentary on the act.

He saw her shrug lightly. "I can't say from personal experience, but I don't suppose I've really given it all that much thought, to be honest."

What? In his experience, most women preferred that kind of sex to pretty much everything else.

"Why not?"

"Uh, isn't it kinda obvious?" The alcohol she'd just consumed had made her bold, and more than a little drunk.

"No. Enlighten me." He tried to think back to the erotic stories she'd shared with him. Oral sex had featured prominently, but it had typically been the woman putting her mouth on the man, not the other way around. At the time he'd chalked that up to her curiosity about an unfamiliar body and perhaps an exploration of the power she might find in such an act, rather than a personal preference, but now he wasn't so sure.

"I don't really think about it all that much. Even if my lover was willing to brave the whole deadly skin thing…" He grunted in displeasure at that. She ignored him. "It just doesn't seem that practical. Other things, yeah. Regular sex, for sure. Tights for me and a condom would probably work. But not…. that."

"Why not?"

"It's totally impractical, for one. And how sexy does a dental dam sound?" She made a face.

"Nobody uses those in the real world."

"How do you know?" It's not like she had a lot of experience to draw from.

"Have you?" Used one? He shook his head. There was no reason for him to and they both knew it, but he got her point well enough. The triumphant light in her eyes irritated him nonetheless. "See?
We all have to accept our limitations, sugar."

Logan was completely floored by her critical, intimate assessment. "Limitations?" he growled, annoyed with her lack of vision more than her naïveté.

"Why spend time dreaming about something I'll never have? For example, you probably don't spend much time dreaming about being captain of the swim team."

That earned her a short, clipped bark of laughter. A soft chuff of derision followed. "Darlin', you're only limited by your imagination."

"And by my lover's ability to stay conscious," she added tartly.

It was on the tip of his tongue to tell her he could do a hell of a lot in the fifty or so seconds she had before her skin kicked in now, but he took a drink instead. She was clearly primed for a fight, and even if she wasn't, he wanted to steer clear of anything that gave the impression of an overt come-on. This minefield was dangerous enough already. She was already pushing him and it was a battle of wills he intended to win. He wasn't going to take her. She had to give in. To come to him of her own free will. To choose him and own that choice in a way that left no room for argument. He wanted an equal. Not a child.

"Mmph."

"See? You know I'm right."

That was one challenge too far for a man so close to the edge.

He fingered the scarf at her throat with purpose. "Not everyone thinks inside the box. Or even has a fuckin' box of limitations, kid." He spread the gauzy folds of the scarf open, covering one creamy shoulder, bared by her simple, scoop neck blouse. He ran the tip of one finger over the soft slope pointedly. Twenty seconds. Thirty. A minute ticked by. And then another. There was no need to rush. The soft sheen of gossamer threads protected them both. It could be a fingertip. Or a hand. Or lips. Or a tongue. The moment her eyes widened in awareness, he removed his finger, chuckling darkly. "Don't sell yourself short."

Or him, either. But he hadn't had near enough alcohol to say that aloud.

His brain was clouded with thoughts of exactly how he'd like to use that scarf. Generally when he thought about them having sex, they were both naked. Between his mutation and the time she had before hers kicked in now, Logan was fairly certain they could make sex work without anything between them but a condom, but the scarf still made an appearance from time to time.

His favorite was the one where he reclined naked against the pillows and spread the sheer fabric over his hips as Marie straddled him, rubbing and rocking and grinding while he watched. She'd be bare and flushed and wild as hell with his hands on her breasts and her hair flying all over. He'd easily be able to feel her wetness through the filmy fabric. She'd be able to look down and see him through it, pressed up against his abdomen, dripping for her as she used his body to get off. He imagined the friction of it between them would feel good for them both. Make them both more sensitive for what came after. Fucking good foreplay, in his book.

Marie didn't know what to say. The world had just shifted under her feet again, leaving her off balance and defensive. His smug little smirk rubbed her the wrong way and she lifted her chin defiantly. It was childish to argue, but she needed words to fill the void before she did something very foolish. With him she could take a bit of refuge in 'the girl' just a little longer. He'd understand,
even if he didn't like it.

It wasn't exactly an act. It was safe, but the boundaries of that role were much too small now. They chafed in a way they never had before and she knew they had just days left, perhaps hours, before that time was behind them both forever. She just needed a little more time.

"I'm not sure I'm missing all that much anyway." That part was true. That's not what she dreamed about when she lay alone in the dark, thinking about him. It was never his mouth between her legs. It was the weight of his body. A blunt stretch and the feel of teeth on her neck... and his skin, warm under her palms. His scent in her head and his breath, growling and hot against her sweaty skin. It was his body inside hers and his come in her and a fading cry of pleasure ringing in her ears. Salty flesh and a sweet night.

This time, it was Logan's eyes that widened. "Come again?" Sometimes she sounded so goddamn young. And it was wrong, so very wrong, that her innocence lit a fire in him every fucking time. He wanted to show her everything. To initiate her into the world of adult pleasure. To show her what it meant by 'it hurts good'. To teach her that a little pain sometimes made the pleasure sharper. Wilder. To give her sweet and slow and rough and primal and every beautiful, filthy flavor in between.

"I dunno." She was blushing, worrying at her glove folded on the table and refusing to meet his eyes. "Even if it wasn't a moot point, it seems like it would be too... tickly?"

Her obvious inexperience reminded him of the depth and breadth of her innocence. It pulled him back from the edge. They might not be at The Red Door anymore, but she was still trusting him to keep her safe, even from the part of him that wanted to teach her just how good it could be, honor be damned.

He smiled knowingly, as if he was privy to a secret she had yet to discover. His expression held a touch of amused indulgence and it made her want to slap him. So she was a virgin and she'd only ever absorbed men? It wasn't as if she had a frame of reference with which to make even a credible guess at what receiving such an intimate kiss might be like.

It did look tickly. And squirmy. And in the limited experience she'd had viewing hardcore pornography, the women always seemed to wriggle and thrash, like it wasn't quite enough. It hadn't escaped her attention they always seemed to call out to be fucked afterwards anyway, so why not just skip that step and get to the part that really interested her?

Logan's demeanor wasn't patronizing, but his easy sexuality and the obvious disparity between their levels of experience suddenly pissed her off. Innocence and youth had a power of its own. On top of their earlier shopping trip and the beer and bourbon she'd just put away, it was a volatile mix.

"Maybe a tickle isn't enough for me, cowboy. Maybe I'd rather feel the weight of a man, to feel full and taken and to be fucked like he means it."

Logan wasn't smiling anymore. "Jesus," he muttered. A crack appeared in the glass cradled against his palm. He set it down with the overly precise motion of a man clearly on the edge.

Marie clapped a hand over her mouth, instantly contrite. "Sorry! You know how I get when I've been drinkin'."

"Honest?"

"Shit," she mumbled, draining her glass. The room spun. She really needed to slow down. It wasn't typical for her to drink so much so fast, especially outside of a night on the town, but the subject
made her uneasy and the liquid courage helped. She caught the low rumble of amusement deep in his chest.

Marie ordered a water and sipped it slowly as the annoying girls in too tight dresses, and boots that had never seen a dirt road, sashayed out into the sunshine in their Prada sunglasses and WalMart lipgloss.

Her words were hesitant as she watched Logan's beer dangling from his long, thick fingers. She wished she'd been brave enough to have this conversation at the sex club while they watched the leonine man push the woman's legs apart and lower his hairy face between them. She had come with an obscene cry that had rolled over Marie's sensitive skin like a touch, drawing another gush of desire from her untried body.

"Do you like it, sugar?" There were glimmers in her head of his memories that told her he did, but they were hazy and indistinct.

Logan recognized the challenge in her words, despite their soft delivery. He understood she was asking him personally about the act itself, not the conversation they'd overheard or the show they'd seen. "Yes," he said simply. Sex didn't embarrass him.

"Why?"

"Answer ain't pretty."

"I don't care," she said belligerently.

That annoyed him too. She couldn't be tired of him treating her like a little girl and still run to that place and take refuge in it when things got too uncomfortable. He wasn't about to play that game. Be a girl or be a woman. This middle ground shit was bad for them both.

"Look. I don't mean to be an ass, but there's a whole part of it that's pure animal for me. Scent and taste are a big part of that." He saw her pupils blow wide. Shit. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Ah, fuck it. "I like givin' pleasure."

"And getting it," she added with a cheeky wink.

He thought she'd be embarrassed, but instead he found himself a little charmed by the random glimpses of the Rogue today; small flashes of the woman she was slowly becoming as she grew more comfortable with that part of herself. While he didn't want to wish away these platonic days with her, he hoped she worked through whatever it was in her head that was holding her back sooner rather than later. They were both coming apart at the seams.

"And takin' it sometimes, too," he added with a dirty grin, quite unable to keep the Wolverine from playing with the Rogue now that she'd joined the party.

He closed his eyes and cursed under his breath as her hand reached up and stroked that spot on her neck where he'd bitten her.

Her other hand reached across the table and found his. When she finally spoke, her drawl was soft in his ears.

"Soon."
Up Next: *Need You Tonight*. We're at that point where the long slow burn has become a painfully uncomfortable scorch. Things need to change. Logan needs more before the Wolverine takes that choice from them both...
The long ride home tempered things.

They barely spoke, each lost in thoughts of the future. The chair in the back only seemed to ramp up the uneasy feeling that had been growing for weeks. Marie's naked fingers beat an impatient tattoo against her knee. Logan recognized it for what it was. Leaving her gloves off had been an act of defiance. She did that when she was pissed. It was a warning. Like the bright colors some animals flaunted to advertise their poisonous nature to all predators who dared come near.

Touch me if you dare.

On an empty stretch of country backroad, they passed an unidentifiable crush of blood and fur that was gory enough for Marie to close her eyes and look away. She was surprised when the truck drifted to the side of the road and Logan turned it back around toward the sad, twisted lump.

"Sugar?"

"S'still alive," he said tightly. The slow twitching under the skin was all too obvious to a man with his acute senses. It didn't help that he knew what that kind of death felt like. The difference was he'd gotten up and walked away after a handful of hours so horrific he only recalled them in his darkest dreams. That wasn't going to happen today for the poor creature crushed by some uncaring motorist, but he could at least make the passing quick and painless rather than a lingering hell of razor sharp pain, the way it had been for him.

It was less an act of kindness than one of desperation. He hoped that someone would do that for him one day— that just once it could be blissfully quick rather than a sideshow of horrors.

He pulled the truck up behind what Marie guessed had once been a shaggy wild dog of some sort. It stunk of death and pain, fur matted with blood and the sharp pulpy bits of splintered bone.

Logan put his hand on the door without looking at her. "Stay in the truck."

Like hell.

She got out anyway, kneeling with him at the animal's side. It was so far gone it didn't even try to snap at them. It merely turned its one good eye toward them and begged soundlessly for release from the suffering.

Logan shook his head and raised his fist, rubbing one hand over his knuckles before the claws sprang free with a metallic hiss. This wouldn't be the first creature he'd put out of its misery, but it disturbed him in a way that killing a man didn't. Snuffing out a life like this felt too much like putting his claws into that wild part of himself. Ending the existence of something that deserved to live free, unmolested and without pain.

Beside him, he felt Marie shudder and draw in a shaky breath.

"Shh…." Marie's soothing, gentle voice calmed both wild things. She put her fingers on his knuckles between his claws and he allowed her to slowly lower his hand to his knees. "Shh…. sugar. Shhh. You won't need those now. It's okay."

It was very definitely not okay.
Her voice was so soft and something in it eased the ache in him. She'd always had a strange way of making him feel better. He put the claws in. "He's gone now. Look." She pet the shaggy head with her other hand, stroking the bloody fur reverently as it heaved a last shuddering sigh and went still under her gentle caress, slack and relaxed without the pain knotting it in agony. "It's alright now. It's alright," she crooned, and he looked at her out of the corner of his eye. Her face was in profile and he could see in the shine of her eyes that she was barely holding it together.

Marie'd always had a soft spot for wild things, from feathers to fur. He included himself in that group, too. The real truth was that the Wolverine was a bigger part of him than anyone of them knew, save her. He was largely an animal walking around in a man's skin, only conforming to the laws of men when it suited him, and even then, not very well.

He left her kneeling by the dog while he removed the blanket wrapped around the chair. The leather was distressed anyway. What was another scuff or two? She didn't speak as he moved the animal's broken body to the blanket and wrapped it gently before lifting it to the back of the truck and securing it carefully for the ride home. Marie followed slowly, leaning heavily on the side of the truck.

"Sugar?"

"Gonna bury him back at the house." He wasn't paying attention to her as he dug under the seat for a bottle of tepid water to wash off the worst of the gore. The stench was overwhelming. He couldn't look at her feeling so raw and exposed. He passed the bottle over to her without a word, eyes still fixed anywhere but on her. Blood on her hands, too. He didn't want to see that, either.

She was slow getting in and Logan didn't put two and two together, lost as he was in his own thoughts, until they hit a pothole and she gasped quietly.

He knew instantly what she'd done and his anger was tempered only by his concern for her. "Dammit. You okay?" He'd mistaken the tears of pain for tears of grief. Or maybe there was some of both. It was hard to tell with the stench of the dog stuck in his nose.

Marie nodded through the big, wet tears on her face. "Yeah. I'll be fine." Her words were clipped.

"You sure? I could touch you." Heal whatever damage she'd suffered by pulling the life of that pitiful dying creature inside her.

"Wouldn't help. It's not that kind of pain."

That was somehow worse. A wound he couldn't heal. Logan's lips thinned into a line and his fingers tightened on the wheel until his knuckles were white.

"Why'd you do that?"

"So you wouldn't have to," she said simply.

She looked at him then, a real look. Right in the eyes. Nothing tempered. Nothing hidden. Love and pain and openness so deep it unsettled him to the marrow of his metal bones.

Her nose was red and running and her face was blotchy, and in that moment the truth and beauty of what she was to him and how she truly felt about him with the force of a sledgehammer. He was woefully unprepared to receive such pure emotion from her without the boundaries and barriers they'd become accustomed to over the years.

What she'd done hadn't been the petulant act of a willful girl, but the selfless act of a woman deeply
in love. Logan was so stunned, so moved that he couldn't even bring himself to chastise her. He watched, with gratitude and a touch of awe, as she seemed to gather herself and smile at him through her tears.

"Don't worry. I'll be okay soon. It's starting to fade already."

"Marie—" he stopped himself then, unable to articulate how he felt. He hated that she hurt, but he damn sure wasn't going to wish away such a profound gift. That she wanted to spare the man who always healed from everything the pain of one more wound was hard for him to wrap his mind around.

"Shh…" She put her bare hand on his for a brief moment and squeezed. "I didn't want you to hafta carry that, sugar. It'll fade from me in a way it never would have for you." There was a truth there, too.

She took her hand from his and turned her watery gaze back out the window. Things were still strained, but she didn't protest when he wrapped his arm around her and pulled her close. She simply nestled into him and put her head on his shoulder.

"Soon." It came out on a sigh.

The Wolverine just nodded and held her closer.

~ooOoo~

Marie didn't help him bury the dog. Logan wouldn't allow it and she seemed to understand that he wanted to do it alone. Maybe some lingering part of him in her head told her so, or maybe she didn't feel the need to lay the body to rest now that a part of its spirit resided within her.

Hell, maybe she just wanted a hot shower. He couldn't really tell. She was a hard read these days, prickly one moment and alarmingly selfless the next. A bold vixen making his blood burn and a shy virgin a heartbeat later, flushing and stammering and leaving him feeling like a slavering beast, licking his chops and eyeing her like a prize treat. He kept hoping the next flash of the woman he so desperately needed her to be would be the one that stuck.

Marie was nowhere to be found after he returned from the forest with a shovel and the blood-stained blanket. The dog didn't need human trappings. Logan had returned him to the earth, to nature. To freedom.

He took a long, hot shower, wishing he could wash away the uneasy feeling crawling under his skin as easily as the dirt and blood. It swirled down the drain, leaving nothing but fresh clear water behind. That seemed wrong too, somehow. No trace left behind. Is that how his passing would be?

Putting a hand on the cold tile, Logan let the water beat down on his wide shoulders. It felt like he was carrying the weight of the world on them today and he wished, again, for the sweet release he knew he'd find in the arms of the woman he loved—if she could just be brave enough to reach out and take him for her own.

Scrubbing a hand over his dripping face, he shut off the water and got out, throwing the towel he'd used to dry himself back in the general direction of the bathroom as he padded naked to the small pile of clothes in a box by the low sleeping pallet that had been serving as his bed for the last year.

Christ. Had it really been so long?

He counted backwards and was surprised to realize it had been even longer than that. It was a
weakness of his, not noticing the passage of time the way the others did, until something disturbing forced him to face it in some inescapable way.

When he reached for his clothes, he found one of Marie's scarves draped over the edge of the box. He held it to his face, swallowing a huff of frustration as her lingering scent made him start to grow hard. He set it aside and sat heavily as his mind wandered. Dressing slowly gave him time to think; the banal motions automatic after all these decades. He was almost glad he didn't remember them all now. They seemed to stretch into one unending sameness and the realization of how close to the edge he'd become was inescapable.

Marie was going to need to make a choice soon, and if that choice was to be a girl for a while longer, he was going to need to leave. Logan could see that clearly now. They couldn't continue on the way they had been. Not anymore.

A sound drew his attention upward and he realized with a start that Marie was in the loft. The house smelled so much like her now he hadn't even noticed she was there. Goddamn, he really was slipping.

He climbed the stairs slowly, wondering who he'd find up there this time. Rogue? Marie? Some unstable blend of them both? That seemed to be the norm these days. He didn't have the patience to deal with it today. Not after what had happened, but concern for her well-being kept him moving. Slow, silent steps that brought him to her side regardless of the personal cost. Isn't that what she'd done for him today? How could he give any less?

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Up next: Every Rose Has Its Thorn. The last of the boundaries have been ripped away and a brutal exchange reveals how close they are to the breaking point. One can only push the Wolverine so far before he snaps...
Marie was laying on her back in the middle of the newly-laid cork floor, staring at the orange accent wall she’d recently painted. *Bourbon Bottle*, Logan remembered, thinking of the day they had chosen the color together. He looked at her with a critical eye, noticing that she’d showered too. Her hair was slightly damp and the stench of death and blood was gone, replaced by hints of ginger and lemongrass. The salty tang of tears was somewhere in the mix too, but her face was fresh and her eyes clear and bright. She smiled at him, raising a hand in invitation as she greeted him softly.

"Hey, sugar."

Logan lay down next to her on the floor in the empty space, wondering idly if she’d watched him dress just now. He wasn't upset, just curious. His money was on yes. Marie was impulsive and inquisitive. The shoji screens he'd hung were open and all she'd have had to do was turn her head to have seen him below. From this vantage point, he could see almost the entire downstairs. More than a year of work at a glance, and she'd been there at his side every step of the way. Another realization that sent his thoughts spinning.

"Hey, kid," he returned, blowing out a deep breath that smelled strongly of her and faintly of paint and cork. "Feelin' better?"

"Good as new. You?"

He merely grunted in reply.

"Floor looks good." She tried again.

"Yeah."

"Feels good, too."

"Yep. Good call." Were they really going to make small talk about the house? Now? "I like the orange. It makes it feel warm and cozy up here."

He guessed they were.

"Mmph."

"It's almost the same color as your new chair."

Hmm. Then again, maybe not.

They both turned to look down at it. He'd set it by the fireplace, close enough to put the bearskin rug underfoot. Or under her knees if she were kneeling in front of him while he sat in it. He wished they were there now. Slow and easy. Dirty and rough. Teeth and lips and tongues. Fuckin' *anything* but this intimately platonic hell.

She saw the flash of gold in his eyes. He didn't bother trying to hide it. He didn't have the energy or desire to curb a damn thing. Not anymore. He was at his limit. They'd found the Rogue's limit that night at The Red Door when she'd watched the feral man come. Today he'd reached his, and he wasn't sure she was up for being the safe harbor he needed, at least not the way he'd been for her that night. She was still running scared. If he leaned on her now, she'd break.
"You thinking about it too?"

"Thinkin' 'bout what?" He wasn't really paying attention, wrapped up as he was in his own thoughts. "Sex."

His head swung around and he blinked at her slowly, half wondering if he was hallucinating this whole thing. "Huh?"

"Sex, sugar." She was blushing a little, but her voice was steady and even. "You were thinking about us having sex, right?"

His expression said that was probably the stupidest thing he'd ever heard and his jaw clenched at her teasing — because they'd both done fuck-all but think about sex for months now — but it somehow managed to hit just the right note and leveled him out a little. It was direct, but it wasn't too serious or too overtly sexual.

He knew it for what it was, a tentative overture that was the opening bars of a much needed discussion about sex without the pressure of an actual attempt at seduction on either of their parts.

"Nah," he shot back, just to make her laugh.

She rolled her eyes and shifted to lay perpendicular to him, resting her head on his taut belly with a sigh. Logan was struck anew by how comfortable she was with him now. How easily she touched him and accepted his touch, and how right it felt to slip his fingers into her silky hair. They'd come such a long way.

And had so much further to go.

That she was finally ready for this conversation boded well for the future, although a very real part of him wondered if it was too little too late. Part of him was thinking about rolling her under him and feeling her knees come up to welcome him deep. The other part was making a mental list of items for the saddlebags of his bike. He couldn't exist in this limbo any longer. She needed to choose for them. Open the last door between them or walk away from it all together and give him some room to breathe again.

"I don't mean it that way. Geez."

Now that caught his interest. "Yeah?"

"I mean the mechanics." She was nervous. Fidgety. Worrying something between her gloved fingers, but he couldn't really see what it was, and honestly didn't much care.

"I thought your mama had that talk with you when you were eleven, baby. You really need me to tell you how it works?"

"You know what I mean." She swatted his thigh. It was the wrong tack to take. She thought he'd chuckle. He didn't. He bristled instead.

"Hell, darlin'. We watched a man fuck his lover together, and laid in that bed downstairs and talked about the physical limits of our bodies and how many times we could make them come. I've read your stories and you've read mine, and you came against me three times that night on the bike." Her eyes were wide but he charged on, unable to stop now that the dam had broken. "Not that long ago, you laid in my arms on the deck and came so hard the panties you pushed into my hand after were fuckin' soaked…. and now you want to talk motherfuckin' mechanics?"
Marie was taken aback by the heat in his words. He wasn't holding back a damn thing now. Her face flamed at their history laid out so brutally, without a care for either of their tender feelings.

"Well hell, sugar. Tell me what you really think, huh?"

"I can't play this game with you anymore," he said tiredly. He drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly. He didn't roll away though, or even stop rubbing her hair between his fingers. It was a significant detail, but neither of them noticed.

"Who's playing now? You're the one who's refused to talk to me about sex."

"What the hell? We talk about sex all the fuckin' time."

"We don't talk about *us* having sex."

"And just why do you think that is, huh?"

"Because you think if you don't that I will."

His eyes narrowed. That wasn't the reason at all. Or at least not the entire reason. "Worked, didn't it?" He knew he was being shitty. There was a little truth to what she was saying. But that wasn't all of it.

"So you tell me then, cowboy. I'm all ears."

She turned over to look at him, scooting down to pillow her cheek on his thigh. His eyes were hooded and dark and that muscle was jumping in his jaw.

"Cause I'm fuckin' tired of you hidin' behind the little girl act every time you get spooked. You ain't a kid. Haven't been one for years. But you still trot out the pigtails and cry into my shirt and sit on my lap and we both pretend all of that doesn't make hard as hell. So yeah, I'm fuckin' over it."

For a moment he thought she might cry, but they'd needed to clear the air like this for so long. It was painfully overdue. Her eyes narrowed at him instead.

"You done, sunshine?"

"Probably not."

They both smiled a little at that.

"Good. 'Cause I'm not either. And for what it's worth, I'm over it too. I don't want to be that little girl on your lap anymore. I want to be the big girl on your lap with that hard cock of yours so deep inside me that I'll never get you out again."

His mouth hung open a little at her candor. That was all the Rogue, right there. All up in his face like he'd been in hers a minute ago. Giving it just as good as she got it.

"Jesus." That had blown his hair back.

"I didn't mean man/woman mechanics, you stubborn jackass. I meant you and me mechanics."

His blank look said he wasn't following. "What?"

"Hello? Naked deadly skin?"
Logan was shocked. He thought the wait was about her being afraid of embracing the Rogue and possibly her concern over joining her life to his... when she'd actually been worried about hurting him? Typical Marie. Who else would worry about hurting the unkillable man? It touched him and at the same time, the futility of needlessly twisting herself — and him — into knots over it made his temper flare.

"That's what you wanna talk about?"

His indulgent tone pissed her off.

"Right. Because whyever would I wanna discuss the details of my lover staying conscious while we —"

"If you say 'fuck' I'm gonna put you over my knee and paddle that sweet ass until it's cherry red," he growled, disturbed by the spike in her scent and the accompanying shiver at his warning. That threat had certainly fallen on deaf ears. She was adventurous, but Christ. Walk before you run, at least.

"So you're not going to fuck me?"

Damn her if she didn't sound disappointed by that.

"Dunno how I'll be with ya. Or if." She still hadn't made up her mind. "You talked a pretty big game that night at The Red Door, but I'm still waitin' for the follow-through."

"Maybe I just want to work a few details out first."

"Like?"

"Like how we make love without me killing you."

He realized in that moment that she was completely serious. That this wasn't some game to wind him up, or to coyly tease him from the safety of a persona she knew he wouldn't touch. It instantly blunted his intense frustration. He'd honestly had no idea it was such a huge deal for her. Clearly she wasn't as comfortable with him as he'd first thought. Or maybe it was that their easy physical intimacy didn't immediately translate into sexual intimacy for her.

"Sorry," he said, meaning it, and wondering where to go from here.

"For what?"

"For not realisin' that the skin thing's still a big deal for you."

"It's not for you?"

"Truth?"

She nodded, too shocked for words.

"Nah. It's never been that big of deal for me."

Marie sat up, wide-eyed and thunderstruck.

"What?"

"It don't bother me none. Sure, I thought about it. Mostly about how that buzz kickin' in gets me fuckin' hot. And how I don't wanna give ya more'n you can handle of me up here." He tapped his
marie and gave her a pointed look. "but after what happened at the sex club, even that don't really worry me none now."

marie was still just sort of sputtering.

"i think maybe you feel like you gotta have it all planned out and special equipment to hand or that you gotta be covered from neck to toes or somethin'. you've built up your mutation in your head to be this real scary thing that you gotta be hypervigilant of every minute of the day, and that just ain't the truth, darlin'. least not with me."

"i— i…." she still couldn't get it together.

it didn't seem to bother logan.

"hell, even chuck thought it was about that. 'bout you bein' worried you'd hurt someone. but it wasn't really that at all, was it? after bein' on the road, it was you bein' worried that if someone could touch ya, really touch ya, you'd be vulnerable, and it'd be you who got hurt in the end."

that touched a nerve and she suddenly found her voice. "that's pretty rich coming from you. how often have you let yourself be vulnerable in the last twenty years?"

he knew her well enough to understand she was on the offensive now because she was unsure and frightened by the truth, not because she was actually angry with him.

"i'm here now." that simple, quiet truth seemed to take all the wind from her sails.

"sugar—"

"look. i get it, all right? you need that wall to feel safe from the world. but you don't need it with me, baby. i ain't gonna hurt ya."

for a long moment, he thought she might up and run. she had that look on her, flighty and a little wild around the edges. she searched his eyes for a long moment, but seemed to find what she needed there. with a sigh, she laid her head back down on his thigh.

"i hope you're right."

"i am."

"and the sex?"

"i expect we'll do it just like everyone else. just a man and a woman layin' down together, darlin'."

"my skin…"

"s'fuckin' sexy and i wanna see and touch and taste as much of it as i can."

"logan."

"what? you got nearly a minute these days before i even feel the buzz. so i gotta pull offa you or pull clear now and then?" marie was slightly taken aback by his candor. the wolverine didn't sugarcoat it for anyone, not even her. "sounds kinda fun. all that stoppin' and startin'? you'll like it. doin' it like that'll make you want it, bad. makes everythin' more intense if you gotta wait for it a little."

she shivered at that.
"You sound pretty sure."

"No reason not to be."

"I don't know—"

"Look, if we hafta stop and put on some clothes then we'll do that if we need to. But maybe you should stop borrowin' trouble, baby. Just roll with it and let it happen insteada gettin' all wound up about it."

She thought that over.

"I'm scared."

"I know." He looked at her face, so earnest and desperate to believe what he was saying. She was scared, he knew, but he also knew this first time would set the tone for what came after. It might make her more comfortably initially if they both covered up, but Logan felt strongly that placing those kind of limits without knowing if they needed them was the wrong precedent to set.

"I don't want to hurt you."

She was still worrying something in her fingers. It was beginning to distract him.

"You won't. That buzz gives us plenty of warmin'. Feels damn good, too. We've both gotten real good about knowin' just how long we got before you start takin' me in."

Marie found his eyes again. "You know, I think that's pretty easy for us to say now when we're not in the moment. But I almost took too much that night at The Red Door... and that was just—" she hesitated.

"Say it." He needed her to own that.

"Sugar, that was just my mouth on your neck. How's it gonna be when it's a helluva lot more intimate than that?" She had a point. He nodded, but she still felt the need to drive it home. "Is it still gonna be so fun when you're close? You gonna wanna pull clear then? When you're so close to coming you can't even think? When the Wolverine is all riled up and wild as hell?"

"Mmph."

Her eyes were fiercely triumphant. "Because, cowboy, when I'm ready, I'm gonna burn your world down. Make you come so hard and long and loud that there's no goddamn way you'll ever doubt my follow-through again. Not with your come and sweat on me and in me, marking me. Making me feel like yours."

A feral growl snarled in his chest and he sat up in one fluid, predatory motion and wrapped his big hand around her throat. Possession, pure and simple. The Wolverine stared at her across the distance of his outstretched arm.

The Rogue stared back, not cowed. Not submissive, but every bit and wild as fierce as he was, and just as close to the edge. Strong fingers in delicate black satin wrapped around his throat in answer. His pulse beat a wild tattoo against her palm. Dust motes glittered in the late afternoon sun as they sat locked together for long minutes, with wide eyes and pounding hearts.
Yep. I totally did stop it there. heh. Feel free to tell me how ya feel about that. ((grin)). All that does is rile my WolverineMuse up more… (and when he's all lit up, he generally only wants one thing...) ;)

Up next: **The Final Countdown**.

```
We're leaving together,
But still it's farewell
And maybe we'll come back,
To earth, who can tell?
I guess there is no one to blame
We're leaving ground
Will things ever be the same again?

It's the final countdown...
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"Logan?"

The Wolverine didn't take his hand off Marie's neck, but the fierce growl had become a rumbling sort of purr.

"Sugar?"

Logan blinked, slowly, coming back to himself a little. "Yeah?"

"I'm gonna need a little time to let all this settle."

"I know," he said tiredly, letting his hand fall from her throat. He wasn't surprised she wanted a little time to wrap her head around what he'd proposed. He lay back down with a sigh, one arm tucked under his head. She settled back against him, using his belly as a pillow and picking at the seam on her glove. Still nervous then. He had the urge to light up a cigar from his small cache of good stock and to take a long walk in the still woods. Not quite the embrace he needed, but soothing nonetheless.

"Sorry."

"You don't gotta be sorry, kid. It is what it is. We gotta roll with that too, you know?"

"Thanks. It's just a lot, you know? A whole new way of thinking about it."

"I guess." It was really only new to her. He'd pretty much been imagining them both naked in bed together from the beginning. A part of him wished she'd stop thinking and let it come. Just let it be whatever it was supposed to be, but he understood and appreciated that she was willing to take in — and hopefully consider — what he'd said. That tempered the disappointment, but did fuck-all for the burn in his blood. He wanted her. But he wanted her willing.

"Logan?"

"Yeah?"

"Did you think we'd have sex that night at The Red Door?"

He hadn't expected her to ask that. He looked down at her, searching her face for his own answers. "I was prepared to tell ya no if you asked."

His reply knocked her back a little. "Wow. Cocky, much?"

"Heh. I thought we might do a little more than we did, yeah. But I didn't wantcha comin' to me outta that. Least not the first time." There was a bit of a dirty leer on his face that she found both endearing and exciting.

"Out of what?"

"Bein' wound up by watcha saw that night."

She understood what he wasn't saying. That he wanted to be wanted for himself, not because something she'd seen had made her hot.
"Would you have really turned me down?"

"I liketa think so, darlin'. I dunno though. Like you said, once the Wolverine's riled up…" He looked away. "I just dunno," he repeated, aware she could probably hear the contempt in his voice.

"Stop that."

"This where you tell me you ain't scared of him?"

"No. This is where I tell you he makes me hot. Always has."

"Jesus, kid." He chucked, though. "Did you?"

"Did I what?"

"Think we'd wind up behind one of the red doors that night?"

A blush crawled up her neck. "A little, maybe. At first."

"Just at first?"

"Yeah."

"What changed your mind?"

"You really wanna know?"

He nodded.

"I knew the minute I put my mouth on your wrist that we wouldn't be going upstairs."

Logan wasn't quite sure how to take that. "Didn't like it?"

"Liked it too much."

"Then what's the problem?"

She turned over to look at him. "The problem is you heal, sugar. And when I have that much of you in me, I heal too."

"So?" He was kind of thinking that might work out pretty good. She was small and he was… not. It was probably gonna hurt some, even if he took his time to make her ready her first. It wasn't the first time he'd imagined it that way, using her mutation to make the first time better for her.

"So I don't want to heal, sugar. I want to feel it the morning after. I want to wake up feeling like yours, feeling every last bit of what we did together and to know it wasn't just another dream."

Logan didn't even try to stop the low growl of approval that image inspired and he suddenly realized why she was so wound up about being covered the first time.

"Christ!" he ground out, rolling away from her to lean against the wall.

Distance. He needed a little distance because he was as close as he'd ever been to pulling her under him and taking what he wanted. And if she didn't stop fiddling with that thing in her fingers he was going to lose his shit. He welcomed the small annoyance. It gave him something else to focus on. Logan knew better than to reach out and touch her though, because once he did, he wasn't going to
be able to stop.

"What the fuck you got over there that's so goddamn interestin'?"

The gruff question startled her and it fluttered from her fingers, the gold foil shining between them in the bright sunshine. Thick black words, boldly announcing what was inside.


_Fuck._

The condom he'd plucked from the bowl that night stared up at him. She must have slipped it out of his jacket pocket on the way home. That got to him. That she wanted it, to hold it in her hand, the thing he used to cover himself, and think about using it with him. _Jesus_. He sucked in a sharp breath and lifted his head to meet her eyes. The blush was back, and this time, it went all the way down.

He grunted as she picked it up. Just seeing in it her fingers made his fire lick through his veins and pound madly between his legs. He almost couldn't hear her over the rushing in his ears. The sight of it in her hands telegraphed many things, primarily signaling her intention to use it in the near future to take him inside her body. An irrevocable claim.

"I was kinda hoping to talk to you a little about this too, sugar."

Logan nodded once, trying to wrap his head around the idea that Marie had been waiting for him up here with a condom in her hand. That she'd chosen this place — the space he'd intended for the bedroom — sent a very clear message.

"Sure, baby." He pushed back at the wildness in his blood, aware this moment was setting the tone for all that would come after, as well. He wanted her comfortable in this place above all others. Wanted her to feel safe to bring anything to him and to know he'd move heaven and earth to give her what she needed, even if it meant fighting his nature to do so. And tonight, he fucking was.

"I wanted to maybe float something by you."

"Whatcha got on deck?" Her warm scent spoke to a nervous excitement.

"Wondering what you thought about maybe not using this."

He bit back a grunt of surprise as she gave the condom back to him. It carried her warmth. The edges were bent and worn and he wondered how many times she'd held it and thought of touching him intimately. Thought of this moment, screwing up her courage to ask him about it, knowing that he'd probably make it difficult for her. Logan winced, thinking of some of the things he'd said earlier. They'd needed saying, but he hadn't exactly been gentle in the delivery.

"Because, well, I don't want to. Not with you. We don't need it, at least for the usual reason. I've been on the shot for a while now. Plus, I've been working on my control and I know it's not quite even a minute, and I can't even always promise that much, but—"

Now he wondered if part of the reason she'd waited so long was to gain those few extra seconds before asking him what he thought about it, and he felt like even more of an ass.

"If you wanna."

"You— you're not scared I'll hurt you?"
"Nah. Not even a little. I dunno if it's such a great idea for you, though."

"For me?"

"I don't want to hurt ya, darlin'. You're gonna need it real slow the first time. You'll needta get usedta me. Inside. That's gonna take time."

"Oh." Her eyes were wide, but her scent said she liked what she was hearing.

Cocking his head, he looked at her with a thoughtful expression.

"How big's your toy?"

"What?" Her voice was about two octaves too high.

"Your toy. The silicone one?" Her face flamed and he chuckled, holding out his hand to her with three fingers pressed together. "Take my hand." She wrapped her hand around the thick triad of digits, looking at him with a question in her eyes. "Bigger or smaller than that?"

"Smaller," she squeaked out. "A lot smaller."

"Okay—"

"Shorter, too."

"Shorter?"

"Than what I saw downstairs a few minutes ago."

He grunted in amusement at the softly whispered confession. Her eyes held a touch of mischief, though. "Gonna need a lot longer than a minute then, baby. Otherwise it'll hurt. Maybe bleed." He was bigger than three fingers.

"I don't care if it hurts if it means I get to feel you without anything between us." Strong words. Not a whisper now. "I want you in me and on me and I want to wake up feeling you between my legs and smelling like you all over."

"Jesus fuck."

He stalked to the other side of the empty loft, giving her a clear path to the steps and stood there, losing ground to the wildness with every breath he took.

"I just wanted to see if you thought it was possible."

He nodded. It sure as hell was.

"Can we try?"

He nodded again.

"Do you want to?" She didn't want him to do for her. She wanted him to want it as well.

"Now?" he bit back a little more sharply than he'd intended. He was a man on the edge.

"Soon."

"What the hell does that even mean?" A day? A week? A month?
"Means I need to do some thinking about all this. And maybe you do, too, sugar."

She was right. That was a definite game-changer.

"Mmph."

He watched her go down the stairs, trailing after her at a safe distance. Logan stopped at the hearth. Marie continued to the front door, pulling his old cowboy hat off the rack and putting it on as she turned to go. She called out to him over her shoulder.

"We good, sugar?"

"Real good."

She put her hand on the door, a soft goodnight on her lips.

"Kid?"

Almost out the door, she turned back a little, her forward momentum slowing but not stopping entirely.

"Liked whatcha saw?"

A smile teased at the corner of her mouth. "I could stand to see it again, cowboy."

"Soon," he shot back with a smirk of his own.

Yep. I totally did it again. Heh. Like I said, this chapter was the *countdown*. The NEXT chapter is, ya know, what comes after that. The complaint line starts over there by that hairy dude who's sporting a one claw salute. ;)

Up next: **In Your Eyes.** I reckon I don't even need to say it. Y'all know what's comin' next…

*Also, please be advised that pretty much from here on out, we will be departing lemony and heading deep into the citrus grove. I can't imagine if that bothered you that you'd still be here after 45 chapters of it, but I thought it was worth saying again. We're about to kick it up a notch. BAM! lol*
In Your Eyes

The sulphury bite of a match hissed into the darkness, casting a pool of warm orange light on the small table. Logan lit the wick of a short, fat candle and replaced the pillar of hurricane glass with a sharp tinkle. Lost in thought, he let the match burn too low and he cursed as it singed his fingers. He shook his hand sharply to snuff it out, wincing at the acrid scent that followed as he threw it into the fireplace.

The flames crackled hungrily, popping and snapping as the pitch in the dry logs sputtered and burned. The night pressed in around him, the sounds of the house familiar now to his ear. The creak of the floorboards under his feet. The subtle ticking of the water heating in the small tank in the closet. The rustle of the wind in the trees outside and the rattle of the glass in the windows as it buffeted the small house. It was at the same time cozy and empty.

He'd had a long walk tonight after Marie left, a melancholy introspective ramble through the trees. No trail to follow. No particular path in mind. Just the hum of the forest and thoughts of a girl still green on the vine. Logan thought of the wild dog he'd buried too, though even his random path gave the fresh grave a wide berth; some strange blend of respect and discomfort.

Thoughts of Marie were strong in his mind, as was her intimate request to make love to her without any barriers between them. The condom she'd given back to him was in his pocket. A small foil sliver that carried the weight of the world and clouded his thoughts.

Still, he recognized the place where they'd flown kites together than afternoon. Further in, he'd passed the place where he had hidden with Marie under a fallen log during a training exercise, talking until the moon rose high into the night sky. On the way back, he came through the stand of small saplings where he'd cut sticks to skewer their food to be cooked over the fire pit. The deck, too, held good memories as it came into view. Sultry summer nights and the smoky satisfaction of good bourbon and better company. Her scent and flavor and memory was deeply infused all around him.

The house was the same. Fixtures and finishes, sweat and laughter. She'd poured as much of herself into it as he had over the last year. Every part of it bore her intimate touch. The only thing that didn't yet carry her physical stamp was his body.

Logan took a deep breath and let it out slowly as he threw a few more thick logs on the fire so it would last well into the night. It was late and the house felt cold to him in a way that had nothing to do with the fire burning in the stone hearth.

His hands went to his belt. The metallic clink of the buckle sounded loud in the quiet as he flicked it open and drew it slowly from his jeans. He was setting it on the small table in the circle of warm light cast by the candle when the door opened and Marie stepped inside.

That gave him pause right there.

She'd never entered without knocking before. She'd never come to him this late before, either. She'd often stayed into the small hours of the morning, but in Logan's experience, barring emergencies, there was only one reason a woman came to a man at this hour of the night.

He stood rooted to the spot, blood rushing wildly in his ears while stared at her slender back as she slowly closed the door and locked it. For a moment he almost thought she might run, but then she turned and took a step towards him, meeting his eyes boldly. The hair on the back of his neck stood up. He looked at her then, really looked. Her face held an expression he'd never seen before. She'd
changed too. She was wearing a soft brown wrap skirt and boots. Her ivory blouse was sheer enough that he could see something lacy underneath. She was still wearing his old cowboy hat and a leather jacket in deference to the evening's chill.

She closed the distance between them and slowly removed the hat, her eyes demurely on the floor now, before placing it carefully on top of his discarded belt.

An unmistakable sign.

Still, he said nothing. Logan stood there staring at her, half wondering if he wasn't imagining the whole thing. Need pulled every muscle and tendon in his body taut, stretching him to the breaking point.

Leaving the hat on top of the belt, she took that last step. She was so close now that he could feel the heat radiating off her body, the swirl of her skirt whispering against his legs. Her color was high and he could hear her heart thumping wildly. She was hesitant and yet fiercely determined.

She took a deep breath, lifting her hand to cup the side of his face with her naked palm. The touch was tender, her thumb stroking against his skin before she trailed her fingers along his hairy jaw, testing the texture of his heavy stubble first with her fingertips and then with the backs of her knuckles.

Logan's eyes flicked down to the hand on his cheek and then back to her face. He blinked slowly, that feeling of sliding down the rabbit hole more pronounced than it had ever been.

Marie slowly brushed the soft pad of her thumb over his lips, her eyes on his mouth as she moved closer still and pressed her lips to his. Her eyes drifted closed. His remained open. Watching. He felt the warm brush of her lips and then the softest flicker of her tongue, those little fingers still tenderly cupping his jaw.

She withdrew, just enough to catch his eyes once again, trying to read him. Would he stop her? Say something? Pull her closer? Logan did nothing, he simply stood there, held fast by shock and disbelief and a feeling so full and encompassing that it defied explanation. The small pause and momentary distance reset the clock on her skin as she reached for him again.

She cupped his jaw more firmly, curling her fingers under his ear while she pressed a kiss to the opposite side of his face, on the smooth skin just above his heavy muttonchops. Slender fingers tightened on his neck as her kisses slid lower, over his jaw and down his throat. Some protected by his hair, others not. For long moments, Logan simply accepted the intimate touch with quiet reverence. Even the Wolverine was humbled and still; a moment of clarity so pure it struck them both silent.

The soft kisses became more passionate as she realized he wasn't going to stop her or push her away. Logan's eyes slid closed as he finally gave himself over to the moment. His arms wrapped around her, big hands splayed wide over her back. A sign. Approval. Acknowledgement of her claim. She had finally come to him and chosen him for her own. She felt so slight in his arms, trembling under the spread of his fingers.

Her mouth left his neck before the buzz started and for long minutes they simply embraced each other and the knowledge of what was coming in the hours ahead. It was new ground for them both. They were used to the intimate exchange of words. Tonight there were none. Everything that needed saying had been said. Tonight it was simply touch and breath and two hearts beating wildly with everything they had denied for years.
For now, Logan was content to let her lead. He knew they had precious little time while he could still give her that and he wanted her to feel confident in her decision. Sure of her place with him before the Wolverine took that choice from them both.

They parted and she slowly shrugged out of her coat. Not provocatively. Not to tease. Softly, with joy shining out of her. Her hands were steady as she reached for the buttons on his flannel shirt. One Mississippi. Two. Three. Logan's gaze dipped down, drawn away from the smile in her eyes by the erotic hint of lace he could see under her blouse. It was a pretty top with a vintage feel — long fitted cuffs with a row of mother of pearl buttons that glowed in the soft light of the fire. Something she'd chosen specifically for this night. It invited a slow seduction from the man, or the whisper of sharp claws from the animal.

He crushed down the feral spire of primal heat that rose sharply under his skin. The Wolverine could go fuck himself tonight. Logan wanted her for himself, first.

Marie pushed his shirt from his shoulders with a shy smile that fired his blood more than an explicit come-on ever could. Her eyes touched his bare arms and the swell of muscles under his tank, but she didn't move. He caught her hands and put them on the hem of his undershirt, silently urging her to strip it from him. She hesitated at first and he could hear her heart speed wildly while she gathered her courage. That was a lot of naked skin all at once.

Logan waited. Watching. Surprised to find himself savoring these last few minutes as they shed their too-small skins and embraced something that was too big and wild to be neatly contained by lines in the sand or promises of what-if.

Marie drew his tank up and off, letting it trap his heavy arms above his head for a long moment while she looked at his body with frank appreciation; the way a woman looks at her lover. Her eyes raked over him hungrily, from the wild points of his hair to the thick furring on his chest. The sleek ripple of muscle. The pulse beating erratically in the hollow of his stubbled throat. The wide spread of flat, male nipples. The wavy hair under his arms and the narrowing of his waist where it disappeared into his worn jeans. Tight abs and ripped obliques and a tracing of thick veins that made her wonder if his cock would be the same. Thick and hot and hard. Powerful. Full of virile blood and savage primacy that called to an answering wildness in her own blood.

Their next kiss was wetter. Deeper. Slower. Logan kept his word, aware she wanted to be only herself with him tonight. He tried to fix that in his mind. She was trusting him to keep her safe. It wasn't romance she wanted from him. He'd wanted naked skin and she was trying to give him that, even though she didn't want her mutation drawing any of him into her. Tonight she wanted him inside her in a different way.

For now, it was a simple matter of lifting his mouth from hers and his hands from her skin for a brief moment before taking both again. Her tongue was as bold and impertinent as ever, moving against his now. Tasting him. Inviting him deeper. She suckled his tongue, giving him little nips between deep kisses. A wet slow glide of skin that made him wonder how he was ever going to pull himself from the slick clasp of her body later.

He'd been thinking a lot about her request to feel him inside her with nothing between them. He wasn't sure he could give her that. Not without pouring himself into her in every way. The buzz felt good. The rush of flowing into her was even better. Even the discipline it took to keep the Wolverine chained for the last two centuries seemed to pale in comparison. He wanted to try though, for her.

Her eyes were shining as she touched him, her hands on his waist. They both thought of that night on the bike and how her hands had been. Playful before the club. Needy afterwards. They were like that now, too. The heavy spice in her scent told him it wasn't tickling she had in mind tonight. She
explored him with soft hands, seemingly unaware he was caressing her too, roaming touches over every bit of her that he could reach.

Logan welcomed the breather he got as they parted long enough for him to slowly unbutton the long row of tiny buttons at both of her wrists. His fingertips brushed her skin lightly there and he enjoyed her shiver as only a true predator could. They were both thinking of that night at the club and of the imprint of pleasure he'd put on her there with the cord he'd twisted from her scarf. He let his thumb linger, rubbing her wrist before circling it in the shackle of his strong fingers, but a reminder of that night was all he was after. Tonight was not a night for games of that nature.

He bent to toe off his boots and socks, ducking his head so she wouldn't see the flash of gold in his eyes and know how close he was to the edge. He knelt at her feet to remove her boots and felt the touch of her hand on his head, fingers sliding warm against his scalp as they pushed into his hair. He pressed his face against her soft belly and closed his eyes, breathing deeply. Her touch seemed to convey that she understood what he was feeling and she didn't fear it. She welcomed it.

Soon the growling wildness between them was too loud to ignore. His hands slid under the edge of her skirt to the zipper of her boot. The purr of metallic teeth and the rending of supple leather made him shiver as he thought of her body opening to his touch in a similar way. The sound was loud in the silence, almost pornographic against his ears as they bared themselves to each other, bit by bit.

Logan was slightly disappointed at first to feel tights under her boots. They were sheer and iridescent, but still not what they had discussed. Maybe she was right to be at least a little covered, though. He had imagined them both naked in his bed many times, but his version had also included a condom and the idea that she might welcome the rush of his power under her skin to heal the discomfort of his initial entry.

Maybe they both had unrealistic expectations.

Logan wondered if maybe finding a middle ground might be the best way forward, though he wasn't quite sure what that might be.

He hesitated. The Rogue did not. Her fingers under his chin drew him up until he regained his feet. At first glance, she seemed too small to stand in the face of the fierce hunger curling through him, but she was not cowed or trembling. She stood resolute, waiting for him to join her on the other side of the line, strong and proud and fierce in her ownership of this moment.

Not a child. Not a girl hiding from what she felt. A woman claiming her mate. Choosing the life and the future she wanted.

He reached for the buttons at her throat, inwardly pleased that she needed to anchor her hands on his shoulders. With each one that came undone under his fingers, the roaring in his ears grew louder. Her eyes were on his face. His were on the skin slowly being revealed.

Full wet lips interrupted his progress, stealing kisses as he worked. He smiled against her mouth, but didn't stop until the last button came free. Marie looked down as he parted her blouse. The sea glass pendant he'd given her hung over her heart and she heard his soft intake of air as he bared her skin to his gaze for the first time and pushed her blouse from her shoulders. It wasn't a furtive glance or a tortured fantasy or the shame of looking at her naked body in the bath while he bathed her limp, feverish form. He wasn't taking a damn thing from her tonight, it was freely given. His appreciation of her body empowered her.

The lace of an ivory camisole clung to her full curves, a whisper of gossamer that hid nothing. Not the shape of her breasts or the wild beating of her heart or the raspberry nipples standing up for him,
aching to be touched. Soon. Soon. She was bare beneath it. His mouth watered and his big hands tightened on her slim waist as her fingers slid down his chest to the button on his jeans.

Logan managed to tear his eyes from her breasts to watch her open his pants. She didn't stroke or tease first. The momentum had them now, and both of them seemed to know they were past the place where touching each other intimately through a barrier was in any way enough. They needed bare flesh. He stopped her only long enough to pull out his wallet with the strip of three inside. He tossed it on the makeshift table beside the low sleeping pallet before stepping out of his jeans.

Her eyes held a question, and his, an answer.

*Just in case.*

She stilled for a moment and then shuddered as she looked at his naked, aroused body, thick with need and heavy with lust. He knew why a moment later as the sweet, musky scent of her arousal filled his head.

Pulling her flush against him, he kissed her mouth first and then her neck. As her head fell back, his mouth moved lower, licking and biting and sucking from one proud crest to the other. Impatient fingers explored her creamy skin, pushing aside the stretchy lace but not removing it entirely.

A good hard suck, just like he'd told her that night on the deck. She whimpered against him, the muscles of her back tightening under his palms as her fingers threaded into his hair. Greedy for more, his hand slipped under the lace and plucked softly, rolling her stiff nipple between his thick fingers. He'd been too lost in his first real taste of her to keep count in the back of his mind. The buzz tingled through him and he pulled away, breathing hard.

He set her from him, holding her at arm's length and met her eyes. His were wild, dark with desire and the agonizing burn of hope. He held her gaze for long moments, waiting. Wanting to give her one last chance to be sure this was truly what she wanted. It wasn't something that could be undone in the cold, gray light of dawn. He might be able to let her go now.

Her head moved, just the hint of a nod. When he hesitated, she nodded again, decisively, and the warm acceptance in her face rocked him down to his metal bones. It was done.

Logan wrapped both hands around her neck, thumbs on her jaw and pulled her mouth to his. The touch was dominant but also soft, and telegraphed both reverence and happiness twined heavily with desire. They were finally where they'd wanted to be for so long.

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Sorry, y'all. I had to break it here. Otherwise it'd have been 6500 words long. Trust. You do not want me to break up the next bit. lol On the up side, my SmutMuse seems to be on the rampage. I think this is going to wind up to be a bit longer than the 50 chapters I'd planned. (Dammit!) My WolverineMuse was adamant. He feels he deserves some *epic* smut because of the long wait – and I agree with him. We'll see where we land, but after Logan has his turn, the Wolverine wants a go, and then there's the Red Door after that… And something tells me the Rogue is gonna need a turn, too…

Prepare to pucker up, y'all. There is a metric ton of citrus comin'!

Up next: **End of the Innocence.**

*Just lay your head back on the ground
And let your hair spill all around me*
Offer up your best defense
But this is the end
This is the end of the innocence…
End of the Innocence

Now that the last door was open between them, Logan and Marie couldn't stop touching. The sweep of his big hands on her collarbones. Her breasts in his palms. His lips on her nape and her ribcage and her wrist. The press of their bodies together. Her mouth on his chest. Her hand on the small of his back. Intimate, tender caresses they'd dreamed of giving and receiving for years.

Her fingers explored his nipple and followed the trail of hair down his chest to the thick tangle at his groin. The tendons in Logan's neck stood out in vivid relief as she stroked him; trailing her nails gently through the dark hair at his base before tracing her fingertips down the thick shaft.

She held him in her palm at first, getting a feel for the weight and heft before she favored the tip with a few soft strokes of her thumb. She took a heady delight in the way he jerked in her grasp, unable to keep from thrusting lightly into her hand.

It went far beyond the simple pleasure of erotic friction on oversensitized flesh. It was something uniquely her. Nobody had ever touched him like that; with a blend of awe and tremulous excitement, like it was something precious to her and not just two people spending themselves against each other in the dark. Everything with her was different. The slight tremble in her touch spoke to innocence but her eyes were shining with heat. He could feel her trying to pull back a little to get a good look at his naked body, but he was simply unable to let her go.

It was easier than they had both expected to overcome the challenge her skin presented. Both of them were too distracted to keep count now, they simply waited for the tingle that preceded the draw and parted for a moment or two to keep her mutation from taking him into her. Sometimes it happened every few seconds, sometimes longer; half a minute, a minute… even longer on a few occasions. Neither of them paid attention. They were too caught up in the rhythm itself.

When the low sleeping pallet bumped their legs, Marie drew his hands down to the tie on her soft wrap skirt. It fell away with a silky rustle, pooling at their feet.

His eyes flashed gold at her.

The erotic view shocked him into stillness. It wasn't tights she was wearing. It was stockings that ended in a thick band of creamy, iridescent lace at the top of each milky thigh, leaving her naked above. Her camisole covered her from breasts to hips and was edged in delicate lace, but it was sheer enough that he could easily see she was bare under it. The shadow of her soft, dark hair tormented him. His mouth watered and Logan had to wrap a hand around his base and squeeze to keep from embarrassing himself.

Christ. Oh Christ.

He understood, now, how she intended to give them both what they wanted. Skin on skin where it mattered most, but not so much that it was certain to overwhelm them both.

Logan spun her in his arms and pulled her body back against his, pushing the wild fall of her hair out of his way before putting his mouth on her neck and biting hard. Possession, pure and simple. She moaned, letting her head fall back to his shoulder. Her fingers gripped his thighs while his hands roamed her breasts and belly before sliding up under the edge of her camisole. He stroked the soft skin around her navel, tracing patterns on her skin while he nipped at her throat, laving the mark he'd made with his tongue while he brushed his fingers lower until they met soft hair.
He didn't tease her open or delve inside to feel the sweet welcome that already glazed her thighs. Not yet. He wanted her on the bed for that in case she lost her feet when he did. She was already trembling.

When the tingle came again and they parted, Logan sat at the foot of the bed and held out his hand to her in invitation. The Wolverine protested, the urge to pull her down and pin her under him while he rutted and thrust burned brightly, a hot stick in the back of his mind that he was unable to completely ignore. Logan knew that while Marie wouldn't stop him if he did, and that she might even like it, it wasn't what she needed — what either of them needed now.

Fingers entwined, she settled herself on his thighs, a knee to either side of his hips. He kissed her fingers and then let them go, pleased when she rested them on his shoulders. His hands slid from her knees to toy with the lace at the top of her thighs, tracing the seam of flesh and gossamer before they anchored on her bare ass and gave an appreciative squeeze that drew a groan from him.

Marie's gaze was focused downward, on the thick erection jutting up between them. It throbbed against his belly, leaving little glossy smears as it jumped under the weight of her stare. Logan's breath hissed through his teeth as she touched him again, a soft sensual caress that made his heavy body shudder under her. He bit back a growl at the sight of her small, white hand stroking him. The delicate silver rings she wore sparkled in the firelight and the smooth feel of them where he burned was every bit as good as he'd imagined.

He caught her mouth in a kiss before the buzz tingled through them both, forcing them to part briefly. This time he guided both her hands back to his shoulders and slid his hands down her body, pushing up the hem of her camisole so he could see, too, as she swayed enticingly above him.

Strong white thighs spread over his lap, the thin barrier of her stockings giving her the ability to keep from having to rise up off him completely. Soft dark curls with a flash of pink hidden inside. The shine of wetness on her inner thighs. The scent was maddening, fogging his brain.

When he brushed his knuckles over her curls to the moist skin below, she gasped. Smiling, he did it again. And then again, applying a little more pressure with each pass. When she began slowly rocking her hips, he flipped his hand over and pressed his entire palm against her crotch. Christ, she was so soft and sweet here, and the little sounds she was making in her throat and the needy buck of her hips told him she was hungry for more.

Their eyes met and he hoped she could see the powerful emotion there, clouded as it was in a rising tide of feral lust.

Chaining his slipping control, he held her eyes and slowly slid a finger inside her, one thick knuckle at a time. They both groaned. Hot and slick. Tight, his brain shouted. Tight. That knowledge was important. He needed to fix it in his head, an anchor to keep from losing himself completely in the rising pleasure. Fuck. So tight. He was going to hurt her, he knew. The man recoiled at the idea of causing her pain. Virgin blood on his cock. The Wolverine howled, surging against the chains.

A second finger. She keened. He wanted her on her back before he added a third. He slipped his fingers out of her and sucked them clean. Marie blushed and he watched it sweep down her neck and chest. Just when he thought that might have been too crude, she swiped her thumb through the now steady trickle at his tip and brought it to her mouth, humming out her approval to him as his flavor bloomed over her tongue.

She liked it.

Her nimble fingers returned to him again, gathering another taste. And then another. He stopped her
then because he could see in her eyes where this was going and he was going to lose it if she put her
mouth on him now. He was too tightly wound. A sound broke his throat, a soft whine rather than a
growl, articulating something to her that he couldn't express in words.

The buzz forced them apart before either of them could respond. Marie recovered first, and for a
moment he was grateful her focus seemed to be drawn from his groin, but then she widened her legs
and sank down, trapping his erection between them and painting him with her wetness as she slowly
rocked against him with a tentative roll of her hips.

His eyes slipped closed, teeth bared in the darkness as his head fell back.

Fuck. That was so good.

Big hands on her bare ass encouraged her to do it again. Logan let her lead, wanting her to feel in
control of what was happening, and of her skin, while he still could. He forced his eyes open,
needling to see her moving on him despite the pleasure swamping him.

It was easy for her this way. At the first little tingle, she just rose up on her knees for a moment and
then sank back down to move against him again, little hands gripping his wide shoulders and sliding
up his neck to tangle in his hair as she rocked. Sometimes he just let her undulate against him.
Sometimes he let her hip go and slid his hand between them to touch her softly or to rub her
drenched opening with the silky tip of his erection, mingling their wetness and scents and stimulating
them both. When she began to shake, he shifted them and slowly lowered her to the bed, leaving her
legs splayed wide around his powerful hips.

This would be harder for her, he knew. Now she had to trust him to pull away instead of being able
to do it herself, but they both needed more. The little teasing touches were not enough. Even the
steady sensual grind was more torture than pleasure now.

Logan's hands returned to her body, mapping her skin as they slowly drifted down between her legs.
So soft. He couldn't get enough of her here. First one finger and then two, moving with purpose
now. Not just to enjoy her body, but to drive her toward the release they both needed her to have.

Soon her eyes started to drift closed and her back began to arch. He tried to time it just right so that
he wouldn't have to pull his hands away when she needed them most. He put one big palm on her
belly, applying pressure just above her pubic bone with the heel of his hand. When he added a third
finger and thrust deep with the other hand, she bit her lip and convulsed, moaning as she came, hard.

Logan could feel her thighs shaking against his sides, her legs flexing as she twisted and then went
limp. He smiled softly as he gentled his touches to help her come down. He couldn't wait now. The
scent was too enticing not to follow.

His mouth was warm and wet, licking and nipping at her as he kissed down her body. Hips. Thighs.
That luscious sweetness between. Inside and out. He lapped away the gush of wetness, smiling
against her as she gasped at the heat of his mouth and the feel of his tongue inside her. Without
stopping his ministrations, he caught her eye, knowing she was remembering their earlier
conversation at lunch and her confession that she was quite underwhelmed by the idea of this
particular act. She clearly didn't think that anymore, and he chuckled against her — an amused
rumbling that made her smile and sink her fingers into his hair.

He hadn't forgotten what she'd said about needing more than a soft tickle, and he adjusted his touch
accordingly, making sure to favor her with strong sucks and firm flicks of his tongue, returning to
those places that made her breath catch and her body squirm against his mouth. Her soft sighs and
quiet murmurs told him she liked it, but she was restless under his touch until he pushed his fingers
She moaned loudly when he did and he understood in that moment what she'd been unable to articulate at lunch. Some women needed penetration. Perhaps she'd simply been empty too long. Or maybe she needed to feel physically invaded by her partner to differentiate it from the softer touches she gave herself.

She responded strongly and he only had to part from her a time or two because of the buzz before she was twisting and shaking in the throes of another powerful orgasm. His groan of pleasure rose to meet hers as a new gush of slickness poured from her. This time, he didn't lap it away, aware they'd need it for what was coming next. The tingle came again and he had to pull his fingers from her before she'd come down completely.

Marie protested weakly, still mostly submerged in a deep well of pleasure. She watched through heavy-lidded eyes as he knelt up between her spread legs and gathered her wetness on his fingers before slicking his length, fist ing it a few times, lost to some primal force he was unable to resist.

She reached for him as he moved over her and positioned himself between her splayed legs, rubbing his tip between her slick folds, more an apology for what he knew was coming than a focused attempt to give either of them pleasure.

Logan was surprised when Marie caught his jaw in her hands and brought their faces together, so close they shared the same breath; his mouth open just above hers. He waited for the tingle, feeling their bodies part one last time and her hands coming back to his face before he sank deeply inside of her. Neither of them made a sound, but he could tell from the tension in her body and by her sharp intake of air that it had hurt. She breathed through it, holding his face to hers, wanting to give and receive more than what was between their legs.

Her eyes were soft. Misty. Full of warmth and acceptance that moved him profoundly. He could see their future there. Fighting and laughing and loving. Lazy afternoons and passionate nights. His unborn children. And a love so deep and consuming it scared the shit out of him because now that he had it, the idea of losing it was unthinkable.

The erotic tingle raced under his skin and he pulled out, smiling down at her as her hands fell away with a whimper. They both looked down. The smear of red electrified them both. Virgin blood on his cock. On his sheets, too. A growl rumbled deep in his chest and he hovered over her, impatient to be back in the sanctuary of her body.

He dipped down to drop a tender kiss between her legs, licking at her softly. The Wolverine needed things tonight, too, and no matter how thick the chains the man bound him with, he would not be denied the coppery taste of this first claiming.

Marie cradled his head to her breast, pushing her fingers into his hair as he moved back up her body, kissing her deeply while he slid back inside. A good solid thrust that seated him deeply. His blood pounded wildly in his ears and he wondered if she could feel his heartbeat inside her. She winced, but her body accepted his more easily this time and he stayed still inside her as long as he dared before withdrawing to push back in.

He thought she'd be the one overwhelmed but it was Logan's eyes that fluttered shut and then squeezed tightly closed as his mouth opened against hers in a silent cry of exquisite pleasure. She felt so good under and around him as he began to move with slow, deep strokes.

Her face, transcendent with pleasure, was enough to hold back the tide of his own desire for the moment and it was like a game at first, something new for them both to figure out. The timing.
waiting. A roll of his hips at just the right moment, only to pull away and leave her wild for him. Little hands gripping tightly at his back and sides. Grabbing at his ass when they really got going, only to have to pull away just as she began to shudder.

They made the most of the waiting, too. Little slivers of time apart. He took a moment to appreciate the sight of her, spread out on his bed; sweaty and flushed and smelling of him and sex. Her lips were red and slightly swollen from his kisses. Her body bore the marks of this night, bruising chains of kisses across her breasts, beard burn under her jaw and between her legs. The impression of his teeth on her neck. They both knew she’d carry the marks of his fingers on her hips when they’d finished. He’d been tender, but with each thrust, he’d lost a little ground to the wildness until it was roaring loudly in his head.

The buzz fired them both. This time, a curse as he pulled out. What had been sweet and playful now felt like the pacing of a wild creature within a too-small cage as they waited the heartbeat or two before he could plunge back in. When she’d grown used to the feel of being stretched on him, she lifted her knees, inviting him deeper. He pulled a pillow underneath her ass and adjusted his hips so that with every thrust he slid against a spot inside her that made her cry out. He could feel her begin to flutter around him.

Close. So close now. Fuck. *Fuckfuckfuck.*

The goddamn enticing tingle came again and he was tempted to keep pounding into her but he knew he couldn’t. He somehow found the strength to pull clear and wrapped his hand around his cock, squeezing as he panted through the urge to come. Marie writhed under him, desperate for her own release.

This time, he thought. Neither of them could last much longer.

Bracing one hand beside her head, Logan pushed back in and then took her other hand in his, almost mindless at the feel of her; that slick clasp and her hand gripping his face tightly as she looked into his eyes. He could feel the tension coiling in her and her back arched. The tingle came unexpectedly and he growled as he pulled out, teeth bared and breathing hard as he stared down at her with dark, wild eyes.

Marie hovered on the edge, body humming sharply with need and she keened with frustration as he withdrew from her body. Her hand slipped down between her legs, frantic for the feel of him inside her, and the openly erotic sight of Marie touching herself took the choice about when to come right out of his hands.

The first spurt striped across the dark curls between her spread thighs and the pink opening below. He shoved back in with a low grunt, pushing deep and shuddering through the rhythmic clenching of her body as she arched and came around him. Her strong internal muscles gripped him hard as he throbbed and pulsed again and again and again until he was trembling against her, catching her soft cry in his mouth.

She gave a great, shuddering sigh as he collapsed into her arms. He could hear and feel the contentment there. It was reflected back in his own gaze as he slid down and her hands cradled his head against her breast and softly stroked his hair as they caught their breath.

For long minutes, even her stubborn mutation was beautifully silent. Neither of them noticed. There was nothing but bliss and breath and warmth. The feel of her soft body under his and the gentle caress of her hands on his back. No words were spoken and none were needed. For the first time, they’d spoken with their bodies and it was breathtaking.
The new lovers shifted only enough to slip a sheet between them as Marie's eyes began to drift closed and her breathing evened out. She didn't have his stamina and Logan knew she needed to rest. He'd been tender but not gentle. He was big and she was small and it had been too long of a wait. He'd needed to fill her again and again and to feel her come and come and come before he was satisfied. He knew he'd need to feel it again, soon.

The firelight flickered over her, the platinum stripe in her hair glowed a warm amber in the low light and the spill of her chestnut hair tickled over his chest, shining darkly against the rumpled white sheet. The bed smelled good; of him and her and sweat and pleasure… and contentment. His eyes began to close, too, and even the Wolverine was quiet and still.

The house felt right now.

Not like a place where he slept.

Like a home.

____________________________________________________________

Up Next: **Waiting for A Girl Like You**. The aftermath.

_Y'all know me and my propensity to explore those intimate moments when people are real and open with each other. I'm sure none of you are surprised that I couldn't resist writing the morning after… ;)_Also, _the smut bunnies are multiplying like whoa. I'm totally gonna need more than 50 chapters to do them justice. Onward!_
Waiting for A Girl Like You

The house was cool when Logan woke. There was fog outside and the chilly spring morning had settled wetly around them, creeping in silently to condense on the windows and moisten the still air scented heavily with sex and contentment. Beside him, his Mississippi girl was snuggled deeply into the heavy blankets, her eyes fluttering softly under the fanned sweep of her dark lashes as she dreamed.

Logan was tempted to touch her, curious to see if her skin was on or off while she slept, but he didn't want this first morning to be anything but slow and easy. There would be many other mornings to come to unravel each other's intimate secrets.

Marie was sleeping deeply, her nude body tangled in a sheet on the far side of the bed. They'd woken in the predawn hours, drawn into consciousness by the warm sprawl of tangled limbs. Both of them were used to sleeping alone, unfamiliar with the soft breathing and quiet comfort of curling around someone in the darkness.

It felt good. Right. They'd whispered and touched and the soft sleepy caresses had become urgent and searching as the need to join their bodies rose sharply. He'd been less gentle, driven and focused now that the dam had finally broken after too long a wait. Logan had needed to feel all of her that time. Every bit of her skin. And he'd needed for her to feel every bit of him, too. Her camisole and stockings lay pooled on the floor, pulled from her in a moment of passion and carelessly discarded in their urgency.

She still hadn't wanted her skin to take in any of his mutation. They'd managed with one of her gauzy scarves and a condom that he'd ripped away in the final moments so he could shove deep and pour into her with a string of rough grunts as she arched and seized.

They'd fallen back asleep afterwards with his body wrapped around hers and the sheet reluctantly pulled between them, but she'd stirred and eventually rolled away. Clearly her issues with her skin were not going to disappear overnight but Logan was glad she'd been able to bare all of herself to him, even if it had been in the dying light of the fire.

Beside him, Marie shivered and snuggled deeper into the covers and Logan realized that he was going to need to be more aware of her comfort. He rarely felt the cold and almost never bothered to make a fire in the morning unless there was a good foot of snow outside. He merely put on more layers. Shaking his head, he slipped silently from the bed and pulled on a pair of old jeans. Nature called and he needed to rebuild the fire.

His motives were hardly altruistic. He wanted her naked, not wrapped up and shivering. She was his sanctuary and he wanted her to feel that same sense of belonging in this place with him, safe and secure and free to let go and just be at peace in her own skin. That was what she gave to him. Hell, it had been that way with her right from the beginning. He couldn't say why. They just fit, somehow.

The fire was crackling in the hearth and he was padding through the kitchen when she finally stirred. "Mmm....." She stretched luxuriously and he wondered if she always did that or if she was just sore after the night they'd shared. "Mornin', sugar."

Logan leaned a hip against the island and nodded her way. He didn't want to make assumptions or pressure her by appearing too eager to rejoin her in the bed, despite the overwhelming urge to lie down with her in the warm nest of blankets. "Mornin', kid."
He watched as she rose from the bed, gloriously nude, and she fidgeted a little under the weight of his stare as it flicked from her face down over her body, lingering on the marks he’d left. Flushing, she pulled his flannel shirt off the newel post at the bottom of the stairs and slipped it on. "I need…" her eyes flicked to the bathroom.

"Sure."

That answered that. He'd wondered which woman he'd wake with this morning. The Rogue would have flirtatiously showed off the marks boldly instead of covering them up. And she'd have likely invited him into the bathroom to watch, as well.

Logan was finished making the coffee when Marie emerged, smelling of wintergreen toothpaste and of him. Her morning hair was still big and wild. He liked it. That she hadn't tried to tame it spoke to their newfound closeness. She hovered at the door of the bathroom for a moment, unsure, until he held out his hand in silent invitation.

This was new ground for them both. He thought they might fall into it easily now that they were finally lovers, but it was still an unfamiliar intimacy. Marie'd never had a lover and Logan didn't do 'morning afters'.

She came to him, sliding under his outstretched arm and wrapping herself around him as he pulled her into his side. Turning her face to press a kiss just over his heart, she rested her cheek on his chest and closed her eyes with a soft hum of contentment. An answering purr rumbled in his own chest. It was better when they were like this. Touching. The awkwardness of a few moments ago melted away.

"Sleep good?" He felt her smile against his chest in answer.

"Mmm hmm."

"Sore?"

"Yes." He winced a little at that until she added, "I like it. It's even better than I hoped it would be. I feel… well, I feel kinda silly sayin' it." He encouraged her with a squeeze. "I guess I feel more like a woman now."

"You were a woman before," he said, bristling a little. He did not just debauch a child. He didn't.

"I know. I guess I mean I feel more like your woman."

The thick arm around her got tighter.

"Grrr…" That growl was out before he could stop it.

"Is it like that for you?"

"For me?" He wondered if she meant did she feel more like his to him now, or did he feel more like hers, or some blend of both.

"You were doubting my follow-through." He could feel the Rogue now in her sassy smile as the soft caress of her fingertips became more bold. "You feel like mine yet, cowboy?"

The stark truth came out, unchecked.

"Kid, I've been yours since you called out to me in that shitty bar." He'd just been killing time since
then, waiting for her to figure out if she felt the same. She melted into him at that and they held each other long minutes, parting only when her skin prompted them to do so.

Her face was thoughtful. "Can I ask you somethin'?"

"Sure. Anythin'." She had a right to ask for whatever she wanted now.

"You ever wish I'd been older when we met? That I'd been someone you could take from and give to right away?"

Logan lifted his head and met her eyes, nodding. Her face fell a little. "Not like you mean, though."

"No?"

"Nah. Not like- 'yeah, I wish you'd been older so I could have had ya right off'. Not like that. Sometimes I think about what that might be like, havin' you with a few more miles on ya, yeah." He could only imagine the glorious creature she'd become when she fully embraced the wildness inside of her. He squeezed her a little tighter and ran his hand down her spine to settle on the small of her back. "Somethin' to look forward to, huh? We'll get there, kid. But I wouldn't go back and change it, if that's what you're askin'."

"Why not?" She seemed genuinely surprised.

"'Cause I never woulda let you in my truck." He'd have left her there and never looked back. But leaving a kid to freeze? Or worse? Even jaded as he was, that just wasn't in him. "You got in under my radar and had me jammed up real good before I knew it. I tried runnin', but it was already too late."

"That's why you gave me the tags before you left." It wasn't a question. Her voice was soft with wonder.

"Yeah." His eyes shone wetly.

She kissed him tenderly and let him pull her close and tuck her under his chin while he pulled himself back together a little.

When his breathing had evened out again, she shifted against him and met his eyes. The Rogue was there, shining out at him.

"I watched you in the cage. If I had been older, would you have fucked me after that last fight?"

"Jesus Christ," he muttered, brows going skyward. Clearly, she still intended to push. Pleasure rippled through him.

"Tell me, sugar." He felt the sting of her nails, prodding him to answer and her body language shifted from affectionate to sultry and wanting.

If she dragged him over that line, she better be prepared for what she'd find there. He was a man on the edge. It wouldn't take much to tip him over it. When she nipped at his lip, he broke.

"Fuck, yeah." His eyes flashed gold at her.

"How?"

"How what?" He was beginning to be distracted by the sweet press of her body.
"How would you have fucked me?" His mouth lifted from her neck in surprise.

"What?"

"How? From behind in the dirty bathroom? On my knees in the cold alley out back? On my back in your truck?"

He chuckled darkly as he bent his head back to her neck. "I never fucked anyone in my truck. Too much intimacy." He couldn't get in the wind if they were still there, clinging to him afterwards and wanting things he wasn't prepared to give.

That stopped her.

"What you wrote to me — that first fantasy, the one you burned — that was us in your truck," she said softly, with more than a little amazement.

"Yeah." He pulled away. "Knew you were different right off. Why the fuck you think I tried to get the hell away so damn fast?"

"Wow. I never—"

Marie froze and turned bright pink.

"What is it, darlin'?"

Her face went from pink to deep red and she squirmed against him and then looked down, helplessly. Logan looked too, brushing open the sides of the shirt she was wearing to see what had stopped their intimate exchange.

A small watery trickle of stale semen was dripping down her inner thigh.

Logan chuckled at her flaming face. "No reason for you to be embarrassed, baby." He wiped it away with the tail of the shirt. "I'm the one who put it there."

Marie giggled and felt another warm gush that left her shivering. Logan just grinned and caught the translucent drip with his thumb. It didn't surprise him. He usually came in copious amounts, something he'd always attributed to his mutation. Catching her gaze, he smeared the drip over her full bottom lip and then kissed her, slow and deep until the tingle forced them apart.

"God."

"Heh."

"You taste so good, sugar."

"Back atcha, darlin'."

"Hmm…"

"What?"

"I guess a big plate of crow is on the menu for breakfast, huh?"

He smiled against her hair as his hand slipped between her legs to touch her softly. "You still think it's tickly?"
Her laughter was low and dirty and delightfully warm. "Gawd, sugar! I don't even have any words for what that was."

"Heh." Logan opened the shirt she was wearing a little more, noting the still oozing bite on her neck and the smaller purple marks across her throat and chest. There was a bruise in the shape of his teeth forming on her breast and she had beard burn under her neck and between her legs. "You sore here, too?" He petted her soft opening with his fingers but didn't penetrate her.

"A little." He thought she'd draw back and was surprised when she leaned into him and pulled him closer. "Please don't say you're sorry."

"You hear sorry come outta my mouth?" Logan could tell he'd shocked her a little. The truth was he liked seeing her body like that. There was something about feeling her shake and thrash in his teeth that satisfied him on a primal level.

"Sugar?"

"You asked me to," he said simply. "Gave you what you wanted. I trust you to know your mind—to know whatcha need outta me. I always wanna give ya that." He knew he'd said the right thing when she dragged his hands to her breasts. "You needed to feel it. I needed to do it. You weren't wrong to ask for that, baby. And there sure as hell ain't anythin' wrong with me givin' it to ya, however you need it."

That was one home truth he needed her to take down deep.

"I get it, now." There was a question in his eyes. "It hurts good. I get it, now."

His smile was predatory; sharp, white teeth flashing in the early morning light.

"That's just the tip of the iceberg, kid."

"Good, because I want more. I want more right now."

Feedback is love. It also ramps up my (sadistic!) WolverineMuse like whoa. ;)

Up Next: These Dreams. Marie's got something specific in mind now that they're finally out of the fantasies in their heads and firmly in the real world. Logan's definitely up for that. Heh. Any guesses?

Also, it's official. The smut bunnies have moved in and set up camp. Brace yourselves. We'll be here a while!
"How 'bout in the bath this time? It'll help." Logan knew Marie was sore. Maybe too sore to take him again so soon.

"No."

"No? Whaddaya—Ooof!"

Marie's eyes were glittering as she pressed him up forcefully against the island and slid her hand over the hard ridge at the front of his jeans.

"Not the bath. Here. Like this." Her little hand was stroking him more insistently now. "I want to. With my mouth..." Hopeful fingers skated up his belly and then down into the front of his pants, cupping him in her palm. "Please..."

Christ. She even begged sweetly.

Logan's eyes closed and he sucked in a deep, steadying breath. He'd forgotten about her morning after fantasy. This was even better than what he'd overheard that day. It was more than just the idea of her mouth on him, it was her owning the moment, showing him what she wanted and then taking it. Those wide eyes and blowjob lips had been his fucking downfall since Laughlin City. He wasn't about to tell her no. Not anymore.

He nodded and noted with a start of warmth that she'd waited for his assent before sinking to her knees. It wasn't something she was doing to him or for him. It was something they were doing together. Something she wanted. The way her tongue peeped out to wet her lips told him in no uncertain terms just how much she wanted to put her mouth on him, and that aroused him more than the idea of the act itself. Her pupils had blown wide and her hands were shaking with excitement as she reached for him.

He thought she'd go right for his fly and was surprised when her nails trailed down his thighs and she looked up at him through her lashes. God, that made him shiver all over.

"I wanna see you. Take these off."

"Yes, ma'am." It was an order, however breathlessly given, and he complied with a lazy grin, wanting to empower her as much as satisfy his own curiosity. She squirmed impatiently when he took too long to slowly flick the button open and drag down the zipper with exaggerated languor. She could almost hear each individual tick of the metal teeth. Marie was biting her lip and breathing erratically by the time he hauled himself clear of the denim.

"Oh!" Her soft intake of air pleased him. She liked what she saw.

Marie smiled, her eyes flicking up to his for only a fleeting moment before they skimmed back down to where he was exposed. The musky scent of sex was strong on his skin and he breathed it in deeply, feeling it creep into the shadowy part of himself to drag the Wolverine from his lair.

"Darlin'," he warned, not wanting to derail what was happening in any way, but also not wanting to her to be unpleasantly surprised. He would taste strongly of them both. He liked it, but it might be a little too earthy for her.

"Hush. I want this."
"But—"

"Now. Like this."

"Christ!" It was a word that ended on a growl.

"Take your jeans off and give them to me." His eyebrows rose and she chided him when he didn't move fast enough to suit her. "Now, sugar."

He shoved them down and kicked them over, chuckling as she put them under her knees. "You wanna go somewhere softer?" His eyes swept over the room and settled on the new chair beside the bear skin rug.

She shook her head and pushed him back against the island with a blush and a sparkle in her eye that clearly conveyed her mood with zero ambiguity. Buckle up, cowboy.

He waited, erection bobbing slightly with every beat of his heart while she spent long minutes looking before finally wetting her lips and running her fingers up the back of his thigh. He jumped, like a horse on a twitch.

"Touch yourself."

He did, smoothing the fresh drops of precome over the tip with his broad thumb; then long lazy strokes from base to tip. "Baby…"

"More."

"Umph." He did, but it was somehow both too much and not enough.

"God. That turns me on so much."

His hand moved faster, rougher, and his head dropped back. Choking the tip now, an aggressive touch that revealed the depth of his need. "Baby, please… I'm gonna come…" He eased off, panting. "Touch me, darlin'."

She rubbed her cheek against him and his whole body quivered. The first suck had him gripping the edge of the counter with white knuckles.

"Like that?" she breathed, releasing him.

"Yeah." She did it again. "More."

Her mouth kissed and flickered, following the now steady trickle to his base and she pushed her tongue into the dark tangle of hair, searching out the pungent taste of them together. Finally, he couldn't stand it any longer and guided her mouth back to the tip, urging her to take him in.

It was messy and wet, and whatever she lacked in skill she made up for in shameless sensuality. Loving him wholly without reserve; licking and kissing and rubbing her face all over him between sucks until his legs were shaking and the points of his claws had emerged between the knuckles of the hand not wrapped in her hair.

There was something he should remember, something important, but he couldn't think what it was and then he was coming with a roar, so hard the world turned inside out and his vision went a throbbing, brilliant white as he felt her swallow around him again and again.

He lost his legs after, sinking to the floor in front of her, too satiated to even be shocked by the
intensity of what had just happened. Through heavy-lidded eyes, he watched her smile and rub a hand over her belly. Her quiet enjoyment of his come inside her was clearly evident. Her eyes shone with joy and wonder. "Mmmm…"

"Goddamn," he panted.

"You taste good."

He marshalled his senses and pulled her mouth to his for a kiss so he could share the earthy taste.

When they parted, she was flushed and breathless. "We need to do that every day."

"Heh."

"I mean it, sugar. Every day. Before we even get out of bed." She didn't sound at all like she was kidding and he wasn't sure if he was more surprised by that or by the fact she seemed totally unaware that she was already imagining waking up beside him every day.

That certainly boded well for his future plans. His big, stupid-ass smile faded as he watched her face fall and then her brows knitted together.

"Baby?"

She frowned, looking down and then tugging the shirt more firmly around her. "Mph."

"Somethin' you didn't like there?" He hoped she wasn't feeling guilty or slutty for so enthusiastically enjoying the more carnal side of their relationship.

"They're gone."

"Gone?" It took his sex-addled brain a few moments to figure out what she was talking about.

"Healed," she said, opening the shirt so he could see. The marks he'd left had vanished. Her soft skin was a perfect canvas of creamy white, unmarked and unclaimed. The Wolverine roared to life, gnashing his teeth and straining against the chains.

"Sorry," he offered, feeling pretty shitty for being so far gone that he didn't even notice the warning buzz or the draw of her skin as she pulled him in. All he'd felt was big soft lips and an orgasm so intense he could barely stay upright until it was over. That she wanted him like that blew his mind.

"I'm not angry at you, sugar. That I can make someone like you shake and whimper feels good. Really good." He understood. It was the first time she'd really felt the power she wielded over him. "It's just— just a little sad, I guess. I liked how they felt."

"Baby—"

"I could still feel you inside me." Her face grew softer. "I wouldn't change what we just did for the world. And I wasn't joking about needing that. A lot. But I kinda miss seein' you all over me."

His grin was entirely predatory. "Hell, darlin'. I can put 'em right back onya."

"Mmmm….."

Sweet Christ. That fiery, inviting look in Marie's eye was calling to the wildest parts of him. Logan wasn't sure she was ready for that, and equally certain he couldn't hold the Wolverine back from her much longer, even with the powerful release she'd just given him.
It wasn't about sex. None of this had been about just a physical act. It was so much deeper. The tangible expression of something that had been growing between them for years. Not just a claiming or a surrender; a dialogue. Trust. Vulnerability. Love. Possession. Compassion. Understanding. The poetry of touch and the shedding of all the layers and rules that had bound them for too long.

"Now?" The hopeful note in her sultry voice made him smile.

"Hell, yeah. Now." She laughed as he pulled her to her feet. "What?"

"I could get used this, Mr. No Refractory Period."

"Heh."

"It's a good thing you heal, sugar." Her tone implied she had so much pent up in her that she might kill a lesser man even without her skin in the mix.

"Yeah?"

Her touch was pointedly erotic as she stroked her fingers down his chest to the heavy flesh between his legs and wrapped her fingers around him. "Oh, yeah."

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All aboard! The Sexytimes Train will be making (ahem - multiple) stops in Nookietown, Smutsville and Primalburg... I'm sure you're all SO surprised by this turn of events. Heh.

Up next: Wild Thing. The Wolverine joins the party. (Need I say more?) ;)


Sorry y'all. Usually I get up on Saturday, make coffee and then edit/post the next chapter of Shine. Today I got up and went to see DOFP because that's the way my muses (and the bunnies) roll… Heh. Onward!

"You want somethin', little girl?" Logan's eyes flashed at Marie and she shivered at his deliberately provocative words.

"I sure do."

"Tell me."

She parted from him for just a moment to reset her skin, a small movement that was quickly become automatic for them both, and then she wound herself around him sensuously. "I want to feel your weight on me." She pushed her face into his neck. "Hold me down. Use your teeth." The last of it came out on a breathy whisper.

"Fuck," he breathed, shuddering under the force of the Wolverine roaring in his blood, hot and strong.

She pulled away from him and met his eyes. He could see the Rogue in hers, flashing with fire and the promise of good things to come.

"Where's that condom? The one from the club?"

That surprised him. She was rarely predictable. He generally enjoyed that aspect of their relationship and found it even more exciting during sex.

"Coat pocket." Her eyes followed his gaze to the coat on the hook by the back door just a few steps away. "Got somethin' particular in mind, baby?" He watched her retrieve it and allowed her to lead him back to the bed.

"Yep," she returned, sitting on the bed and leaning in for a quick suck on the sensitive tip before she looked back up at him. "I want you to show me how to put this on. And then I want you to fuck me 'til I scream."

"Christ," he muttered, taking it from her fingers. "That whatcha thought about holdin' this in the dark all those nights?"

She nodded.

"I wanna hear you say it."

"Sugar…"

"Say it."

"I need you to fuck me. Hard." She stroked him, eyes darkening as he grew thicker and firmer in her fingers.

"I need to feel it. I need you inside me."

He wrapped his hand around hers, guiding her movements along his shaft. "This whatcha need, baby?"

To his amusement, she threw back her head and laughed. "No. Half the world has one of these, sugar." Her touch grew playful. "I need you."

A growl of approval rumbled in his chest.

She took the condom from his fingers. "I love it best with nothing between us, but this lets me have all of you the whole time. No pulling away." And none of him in her head, either. She didn't need to say it. He knew. Marie squirmed, already thinking about him inside her. "I need you so much."

Logan nodded. Christ, she smelled good. "Too long a wait, darlin'? All those nights in that empty bed, needin' to be filled?"

"Yes," she whispered breathlessly, tearing the wrapper open.

"Now ya need it bad. Needta be fucked hard. Deep. Over and over." She was still wearing his shirt. Between that, the condom, and the rhythmic movements of their bodies, they might not even need to consciously part at all.

She was too aroused to even blush. "Show me," she demanded, feeling the slip of the condom between her fingers. Her head was full of men and memories of their varied — and sometimes shocking — sexual preferences, but she wanted to know how Logan performed this simple intimate ritual. Memories were a pale imitation of the real thing. She'd lived in her head long enough.

Show her, hell.

Logan shook his head. "Stand up."

Marie stood, leaning into him for support as he slipped a hand between her legs and swiped two fingers through the fresh rush of arousal. He caught her eye and slowly used the wetness he'd gathered to slick the head of his erection.

"God." Her voice was shaking with need.

"Hold it there," he said softly, indicating the tip of the condom, "... then roll it down." What was usually a chore to be hastily dispensed with became an intimately erotic lesson between new lovers. "More here." Logan helped her adjust it. "I come a lot. Needsta have somewhere to go." He'd never articulated that to a partner before.

"Mmmm… you sure do." Her approval was evident in the sparkle in her eye and the thick, ripening scent of her desire that further clouded his brain. She stroked the fit right with his help and he shivered against her small frame. He felt the sting of her teeth on his neck and her breath soft in his ear as her fingers trailed down his muscular chest to stroke him again. "When you're close, take this off. I need to feel you come. In me. On me. However you want…"

"Fuck." His jaw clenched.

She smiled. This time, the answering flash of gold in his eyes didn't fade. He led her to the bearskin rug before the fire and they sank down together on the luxuriously thick pelt.
"Darlin'." His voice broke on a growl. It wasn't so much a question as a plea for consent before the Wolverine decided for them both.

"I'm here, sugar. Right here on this soft fur you killed for us." Marie knew who she was talking to. It wasn't Logan who'd gutted a rampaging bear. Slowly, deliberately, she raised a hand and wrapped her slim fingers around his throat. She could feel his pulse slamming against her palm. "Anything you want to do, I want to do, too."

She could see the relief flicker in his eyes and knew they were beyond words now. He was falling into that place where the man was consumed by the more primal side of his nature.

That side was watching her intently. Head cocked. Chest rising and falling as he breathed her in deeply, underscored by the soft, musky scent of the hide under their bodies. The memory of the pain as the bear ripped into him with its wicked claws was sharp and hot, dragging him further down into the beautiful, freeing blackness.

His fingers found her throat and he pulled her face to his. She could taste Logan in the beginning of the kiss for a fleeting moment before he became submerged in the spice of the rising wildness.

A hand now, sliding into her hair and along her scalp. It tightened into a fist at her nape, a delicious pressure that was just firm enough to keep her right where he wanted. His mouth trailed wetly from her full, panting lips to her throat.

The rough scrape of his stubble on her skin made her nipples draw up tightly, but it was the way he pulled her head back by the fist tangled in her hair to bare her throat to him that made her shiver. She could feel the wildness in him; a pure male force driven by instinct and unfettered lust.

His mouth was wet and hot and he was not at all hesitant to use his teeth or his formidable strength. She could feel the coppery sting on her neck and breasts and it unleashed some primal female force she'd been suppressing for years.

The Wolverine tossed her back, none too gently, onto the sleek fur. It was warm under Marie's back, heated by the nearby fire. The glow cast them both in a warm amber light that made his eyes burn a fierce gold and threw the sharp angles of his powerful frame into vivid relief. He pulled her to him by her ankle, spreading her legs with strong hands. They dug into her flesh as he pushed her knees to her chest and pinned them there before looking his fill. The rough handling excited her in an elemental way that went far beyond anything she'd ever explored in fantasy.

This magnificent male animal had no patience for hesitation or shyness. His woman was spread before him in their soft nest of furs and the scent of mating was upon her. He breathed in deeply, bringing in as much of the luscious scent as he could before following it to the source for a fat lick that made his mate whimper and writhe. The deep growl in his chest only seemed to make her more frantic as she bucked against his restraining grasp.

She succumbed to an overwhelmingly instinctive urge to roll to her knees, drop her chest to the pelt and spread her thighs wide in invitation. No hesitation. No embarrassment. Just hunger and longing and too many years of needing to be claimed in the most base way possible.

It was an ancient invitation, and one he was unable to resist. The Wolverine wasted no time. He grabbed her hips, dragging her to him and slammed into her with a rough grunt. She gasped as he sank deep, pushing up against her cervix with the first thrust. There was no rhythm. No warning, save the exquisite withdrawal. Just heavy, concussive thrusts that shunted her bare breasts and flushed cheek back and forth across the thick pelt.
Her fingers dug in for purchase, but there was nothing to be done but to ride it out as he spent himself against her; a violent tempest that made her thighs quiver and her body ripple with pleasure. She could feel him working behind her. Felt his hot breath on her neck and his fingers tighten in her hair. The crash of their bodies and the wet slap of skin drove them higher. Her mews and grunts inflamed him. They grew in volume. Cries of pleasure became screams that faded to whimpers each time he forced her over the edge.

The bruising grip on her hip and the hand in her hair controlled how fast or slow she slid over his hard cock. They were both sweaty and panting. Her hair spilled in a wild tangle over her outstretched arms. When she turned to look over her shoulder, his lips were skinned back over clenched teeth and his eyes were molten gold. Hot and fierce.

She felt those same teeth a moment later, sinking into her neck as she came again, her hoarse voice rising on a raw wail. Ripping off the plastic skin covering him with a grunt of pure disdain, the Wolverine shoved back in, enjoying the purely carnal view of his erect flesh glistening with the proof of his mate's pleasure before he pinned her under him and filled her with pulse after pulse of hot seed.

She collapsed under him and he slumped onto the pelt at her side, panting with exertion. Her cheeks and chest were pink and flushed and her eyes were unfocused. Her whole body shook and quivered with little aftershocks. He nuzzled her face with his, licking a bead of sweat from her temple and sighing contentedly as he sank lazily back onto the pelt. He stroked his spent flesh and then rubbed his damp palm from her breastbone to her navel with a flagrant grunt of satisfaction.

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The shirt she was wearing had protected him from her skin during sex, but didn't really allow for curling up with him afterwards. She stared up at the cedar ceiling, a soft smile on her lips. Her body wasn't exactly responding to her commands anyway. It was utterly boneless, sweaty and limp as his semen dried on her skin by the warmth of the fire.

Something in his head, a forceful presence he didn't care for and didn't currently give a shit about obeying was telling him not to pull her close like he wanted to do. He defied the man and curled his fingers around a silky sable and platinum strand of her hair. He needed a connection to her, however tenuous, as they came back to themselves.

It happened by slow degrees. They'd waited for this moment for too long. Neither of them were in any hurry to discuss what had just happened or to rush the moment in any way.

He was still lounging on his back when Marie finally stirred and rolled to crouch sensuously between his spread legs. Her hair tickled his skin. She nipped at his instep and then his knee, giggling at his playful warning growl before slinking up his body to take him in her mouth.

She held his eyes for a long moment before silently cleaning him with gentle swirls of her tongue and soft sucks that drew the last of his seed from him with a shiver. She took his hand and guided it to the back of her head, wanting that connection to him, that physical direction even now during this most intimate of tasks.

Where the man might have protested, the Wolverine simply accepted the tender care of his mate as the natural order of things. When he could move again, he'd groom her too. Right now, he felt too good to rouse himself beyond pulling her close when she was finished. Her desire to feel his physical domination pleased him, too. Of course she should seek that. Mating was new to her. She was young and curious and needed a firm hand now. Soon enough she'd embrace all that she was and burn them both to ash.

She flopped down at his side, smiling. He watched her fingers drift over the new marks he'd put on.
her skin and she sighed contentedly, unaware of his quiet observation.

It took Logan a while to make the words rise to the surface.

"Hey, you good over there?"

"Better than good, sugar."

Her voice was husky voice from screaming. His ears were still ringing. She had not been quiet in her pleasure and his own bellow of completion had been just as fierce. He didn't respond in words, simply stroked a possessive hand over her body.

"We're gonna need to do this every day, too."

"Mmph." He grunted in amusement.

"I mean it."

He knew she did.

Every day.

He could live with that.

Up next: Funkytown. Logan and Marie have a whole house to christen. The bear skin rug is just the beginning…

And the Smut Train just picks up steam… ;)}
Funkytown

Author's note: Sorry, y'all. This week kicked my butt. Onward!

The Wolverine and his woman didn't leave the cabin for five days. They hadn't worn clothes for the last two, beyond a creatively positioned scarf and a pair of black motorcycle gloves that still carried her scent.

They were resting in the new chair. She was in his lap. He was still leaking from between her legs.

"Goddamm, baby."

"I can't believe that didn't break the chair."

"Damn sturdy," he agreed with an amused grunt, rubbing a thumb over the edge of the seat where she'd gripped it in those final brutal moments. The scratches she'd left were a nice addition to the distressed leather. His hands left the leather and began to roam her body in a way that suggested he was interested in more than simply recovering from round one. "Wanna go again?"

"Maybe," she panted, still a little breathless. "Depends."

"On?"

He allowed Marie to shove him from the chair to the bearskin rug and chuckled with amusement as she put a foot on his shoulder and pushed him back to kneel before her.

"On if you can make me come this way first before I pass out." She was sleepy, but still in the mood for sex, provided he did all the work.

He nipped at her arch and she squeaked, jerking her foot out of reach of his sharp teeth. "Heh. I dunno. Way I heard it, you don't like this none. Too tickly, was it?"

"Dammit, sugar." She poked him in the chest with her toe, pinching at his chest hair and he grabbed her ankle in a flash, imprisoning her in his unbreakable grip. He let her feel his strength for a moment and then turned her loose.

"Knees over the arms of the chair. Now," he prompted when she didn't move fast enough.

"God!" Her whole body shivered when his voice dropped like that; sex and whiskey and smoke and the promise of everything good that they'd been denied for so long. She obeyed, spreading her legs for him.

"Good girl." He petted her softly, aware the touch was much too light. He enjoyed teasing her.

"Mouth or hands?" Her hips were already trying to chase his fingers.

"Both," she pouted.

"What's in it for me?" He bit her thigh, licking at her with his tongue but deliberately avoiding putting his mouth on any of the places he knew made her wild. Logan was curious what she'd offer up. She was generally up for anything, he wanted to do, but was still a little shy about making suggestions of her own.
“Anything you want.”

He let her give the easy answer, this time. They'd just had a conversation about sex that included the word 'anything'. Damn good, in his book, even if she was still hesitant about letting him know what she wanted.

"Anythin’?" He was still teasing her. Little nips and licks. The warmth of his breath.

She caught her full bottom lip in her teeth and nodded, eyes dark with pleasure.

"My turn in the chair after. Wantcha to ride me. Hard." Her breath caught.

"Mmm... I might need a little Mississippi in me for that, cowboy." She didn't have his stamina.

His teeth flashed at her. "Got all the Mississippi you need right here, little girl."

~ooOoo~

"I'm surprised this worked." They were soaking together in the tub, her back to his front as they shared a beer back and forth. "I didn't think the water would be viscous enough." It wasn't one hundred percent effective, but it was close.

As much as they had both hoped her skin would short out or that all the prolonged skin to skin contact would widen the interval of her control by leaps and bounds, there were no magic fixes to be had. Her skin still pulled him in if he held on too long.

To be honest, Logan was kind of glad about that. That year the Cure had silenced her skin had been one of the most painful chapters in their rocky history. If she couldn't embrace herself, how could she ever accept the darkest parts of him?

But for as much as he loved her skin mutation and all, Logan also enjoyed the ability to touch her freely. Sometimes he just wanted to feel her close and not have to worry about how much of him she might pull inside her head in an unguarded moment. Sometimes it was about just wanting to have sex where they didn't have to be so careful in the moments close to orgasm. More often they simply wound up in the tub, soaking and talking or laying together in silence.

Marie still had more words in her overall, and now that he could use touch to show her how he felt, he found himself communicating a lot that way instead. It was more comfortable. He'd never been a man of many words, though she seemed to pull more out of him than most people. Right from the beginning. A direct line to his heart, she liked to say.

It was a direct line to something, though Logan wasn't too sure it was his heart. Or even his cock. She seemed to see into him, right into that wild place, and to like what she found there staring out at her.

"Bathroom looks good," he finally offered, not in the mood for a deep conversation.

They'd taken a break from christening every available surface in the house to paint the small bathroom a deep, smoky teal. He'd wound up wearing quite a bit of it when she came after him with the brush for pinching her butt while she was perched precariously on the counter painting above the light fixture. But he was stronger and faster and in the end, they'd wound up in the shower covered
in paint. Her breasts were blue and so were his hands and it had taken quite a bit of scrubbing to make themselves presentable.

They'd found smudges of teal paint for two days afterwards.

She'd smiled every time.

~ooOoo~

It was the boots Logan noticed first. Her favorite. Brown Frye harness boots that had seen dirt roads and back roads, fight bars and bar crawls, and more skirmishes with the Brotherhood than either of them wanted to count. A time or two she'd even worn them to bed just for the hell of it.

Nothing else. Just the boots.

The worn, scuffed toe was currently tapping on the garage floor next to his head. Girl was a born hellraiser. Looking up from where he was working on his bike, he couldn't help but appreciate the view it afforded him. He'd always liked that wrap dress. And the fact that the Rogue preferred to go commando every chance she got. Logan had long held that naked was a hell of a lot sexier than the skimpiest barely-there panties. He wasn't much for patience. Never had been. He tended to jump in with both feet and get life — and everything else — all over him.

"Darlin'," he greeted with a husky rumble, watching her drag a finger over the glossy tank provocatively. Oh yeah. That definitely had his attention.

"Sugar."

God, that drawl had always done it for him.

He rolled to his feet, crowding her against the bike's heavy frame with his own.

"Ya know, you don't touch a man's bike like that unless you're prepared for him to touch ya back, baby."

"Oh? Is that the rule?" she teased, blinking up at him — her face the picture of playful girlish innocence before it slipped into something else; something wilder that made his eyes flash gold. Her eyes devoured him, from the grease on his hands to the sweat on his skin to the tight white tank and worn jeans. She licked her lips and purred at him. "I thought the rule was don't touch a man's bike like that unless you're prepared to touch him the same way…" She stroked the bike again for good measure.

He didn't think it was to drive her point home so much as to drive him a little crazy. It worked. Everything about her said she wanted it. Right here. Right now.

"Hot." He hauled her to him by the hips.

"No. Cold."

"Huh?"

She laughed. "Cold." Marie raised her hand and a small flurry of ice crystals stung against his sweaty skin before they melted, trickling down his neck and chest. "Impromptu trainin' session in the Danger
Room just now, sugar." Well, that explained the peppery scent of ozone and the wild in her smile. She liked kicking ass. "I borrowed a bit of Bobby's powers," she explained, answering his unspoken question.

Logan turned her in his arms and bent her over the bike as he stepped up behind her and ran a large hand over the curve of her hips with frank appreciation. "I don't wanna talk about the little ice prick." He nudged her feet wider with his heavy boot.

"Me either. That's not the kinda prick on my mind right now, cowboy."

"Heh."

"I just thought I'd let you know that I had enough juice left to ice the lock on the door and frost the windows s'all."

Logan was amused. His lover was mostly the Rogue today with just a hint of Marie to soften some of the harsher edges. The Rogue wouldn't give a good goddamn if anyone saw them. In fact, she might even like it.

"That right?"

"Yep."

"S'hundred fuckin' degrees outside."

Marie arched her back and met his eyes over her shoulder, fingers sliding over the swell of the tank. "Better hurry, then."

~ooOoo~

"This one, baby?"

"Ugh. No. Too hard."

"Ain't whatcha said earlier in the truck. In fact, I think what I heard was, Harder. OhfuckyesHARDER!" Logan murmured the words into her ear as he pulled her up from the bed in the middle of the showroom floor. The little sleeping pallet hadn't met their needs for long.

"Oh my God. You're beyond help."

"Yeah. But you like hearin' me talk dirty. Gets you goin' real good."

"So does kicking your ass."

"Open invitation, any time." She giggled. He threw himself back on another bed, frowning as he sank in deeply. It was like being eaten alive.

She flopped down next to him. "Mmm…" The overstuffed pillowtop enveloped her small form, distracted her from giving him the sharper side of her tongue in the sassy way he enjoyed.

"No way."
They made their way around the floor, trying various mattresses at Marie's insistence. Logan was less than enthusiastic.

The same irritating, fussy little man who'd sold them the chair was shadowing them as they shopped. Logan couldn't decide if it was because he was interested in trying to overhear a bit of juicy conversation or in the commission he'd make once they finally decided which mattress they wanted.

"Come on. Try this one, sugar. Memory foam. What do you think?" She was wiggling from her side to her back as she scooched over to make room. He lay back, unconvinced something comprised of foam would be able to support his metal skeleton, and found himself pleasantly surprised.

"Ain't bad."

High praise from the Wolverine and she knew it.

"I dunno, sugar. I hear they're amazing for sleeping and crappy for sex."

"That right?"

She heaved experimentally next to him. He raised an eyebrow. "No bounce."

"No noise, either." He rubbed his knuckles absently. "No springs to cut."

He was hard on furniture, beds in particular.

"Hmm…"

He sat up and shifted to brace himself with one hand as he leaned over her and jostled them both. The bed absorbed the movement. Whoever had told her this bed sucked for sex, clearly hadn't been someone with a metallically reinforced skeleton.

"You're right, baby. No bounce. Just... traction." The tone of his voice was positively filthy. Her body would take the full force of every thrust. She wouldn't be bounced all over the bed as the momentum of his adamantium-laced thrusts shunted her into the headboard.

Her eyes burned hotly as she worked out just what that would mean. How easy it would be for him to keep her pinned under him, immobile. How when she was on top, her knees would sink in, allowing them to be even closer as she ground down on him. Her pupils blew wide and he shuddered lightly as her scent bloomed from ginger and lemongrass to pure sex.

Logan very nearly bit her.

The fussy little man was torn between telling them off for the obscene conversation they were having with their eyes and biting his tongue to close the deal. Just watching them look at each other made him sweat. He could not for the life of him understand what a man that like was doing with a girl who looked barely legal, but then, he'd never really seen the allure of women, anyway.

In the end, he chose the money.

Cash, laid down in a thick stack of bills. Some of them still smeared with blood from the fights.

The small man all but clutched his pearls and managed to squeak out an, "And what do you do for a living?" while he counted the stack of money with shaking hands.

Logan grunted dismissively. "I fight."
"In the ring?"

Logan's lip curled, showing a little teeth that was not at all meant to be a smile. "In the cage." His tone carried an implicit invitation.

"Sugar," Marie chided.

The man looked her over. "He that brutal outside of the cage, too, sweetie?"

The Rogue stared back at him, a dirty smile playing on her sultry lips.

"Yes."

All of them shivered for different reasons.

Up next: **Paradise City.** *Take me down to the paradise city, where the grass is green and the girls are pretty... Take. Me. Home.*

There's still a lot of home left to christen...

*Any guesses? ;)*
"Smells good, kid."

Logan came in the back door, hanging his beat up cowboy hat on the hook and pushing Marie up against the kitchen island to steal a kiss or two before she sent him to wash up.

That was one of the things he liked best about living with her. Not that she cooked or that he regularly came home to the house smelling delicious, but that when he stepped in the door, it felt good because she was there.

"Whatcha makin' tonight?"

"Fried catfish with hush puppies and fresh slaw."

"Sounds damn good."

They no longer needed the veneer of the poker games now to share the intimacy of a home-cooked meal, but it was still fun to play from time to time. She still usually lost and he felt no guilt for dictating the menu on those nights. Tonight, however, was just an ordinary Tuesday.

"Beer's in the fridge. Get me one while you're in there," she called, grinning at him over a pan of golden catfish.

"I see whatcha did there."

"You're getting slow, old man."

"Yeah?" He took a long swallow off his beer and settled down at the table. He'd learned early on to stay out of her way when she was cooking. If she wanted something, she'd sure as hell let him know it.

"Yep. I made dessert, too."

He sniffed. Something chocolate. "The better 'n sex cake?"

Marie laughed at the hopeful note in his voice.

"Maybe." Her eyes danced. "Though I think it needs a new name."

She plated up their food. She liked serving up a nice dinner and he enjoyed how it felt to have someone care enough to want to prepare a meal for him and to share their day with each other while they ate it.

"A new name?" He stole a bite of catfish and cursed as it burned his fingers and then his tongue. "You don't think it's better than sex no more?"

"Sugar, the only way that cake would be better than sex is if you let me smear it all over you first." She'd been teasing, but a light went on in his eyes and was reflected in hers a few moments later. "You think that would work?"

"Hell, yeah."

"Where?"
"Back deck."
"Now?"
"Get the cake."

~ooOoo~

An hour later, they were back inside eating stone-cold catfish and grinning like idiots.
"You smell like chocolate, kid." Chocolate and sex, but he wasn't complaining.
"So? You have frosting in your beard."
"Least I don't have any up my—"
"Logan!"

He just chuckled at the scandalized expression on her face. She'd come a long way in the last few months and was much more comfortable both in her skin and sharing her sexual desires, but every now and then he could still make her blush and he enjoyed the hell out of that. His Marie was still in there under the Rogue's grit and the leather.
"Heh." His grin got bigger.
"Whatcha smilin' about over there, sugar?"
"S'Tuesday."
"All day."
A gruff chuckle rumbled in his chest. "Just wonderin' if they heard that."
"If who heard what?"
"The couple in the gazebo across the lake. It's their night, but I reckon we beat 'em to the punch... 'n your voice carries, baby." He loved how she just let go with him. Nothing held back. She liked what he did and she sure as hell let him know it.
"Oh. My. God!" Her face grew even pinker.

The Wolverine sat back in silence. His smug expression said it all.

After dinner, he washed up while she made the coffee and they found their way back to the table. Marie's thumb rubbed absently over three deep gouges at the edge of the tabletop as they talked.
"Sorry about that."
"Sorry?" She wasn't following.
"For fuckin' up the table."

Neither of them had expected what had happened that morning. She'd been making bread while he
put the final coat of wax on the table. It had just been a bit of playful morning sex. One minute they'd been fooling around and the next, things had gotten completely out of hand. She'd smelled so good to him — peaking that day — and the next thing he knew, the Wolverine had joined the party and the Rogue was egging him on and then the claws were out and her skin was on and all bets were fucking off.

The marks had faded from their skin soon enough, but the ones he'd left in the table were there for the duration.

Marie reached across the table and took Logan's hand in hers. "You know, when I was three and still not the last bastion of grace that I am now," Marie smiled at Logan's grunt of amusement and kept going. "I smacked into the corner of our dining room table at a full run and was so angry at the table for being in my way, that I bit it. Hard. Right on the corner. Left a perfect set of little teeth marks deep in the wood."

"Heh." He could absolutely see her doing that. Girl had a temper on her, for sure. Apparently, she'd always been fiery, even as a small child.

"Daddy was furious. It was Ethan Allen." At Logan's blank look, she added, "Probably a couple of paychecks' worth of table, if you know what I mean."

"Shit."

"I got a hiding, for sure, but later it kinda grew on everyone. A story told and retold every time we gathered around it, ya know? Thanksgiving. Christmas. Naughty little Marie and a mouth that was always still gettin' me in trouble for one reason or another through the years. As I got older, sometimes I'd catch mama rubbing it with her thumb, remembering."

"S'real sweet, darlin'."

"Sometimes I wonder if she still does that, you know? Remembers me that way. How I was before."

"Hey…" He drew her into his arms and she gave him a watery smile. "Ain't nothin' wrong with how you are now."

"I know." Her voice was soft. There was a new certainty in her words that he'd never heard before. "These last few months with you have been amazin'. I feel better in my own skin than I ever have."

"But?"

"There's not really a 'but' in there. It's just sometimes I think we have to lose things or give up things to have room for different, better things."

That struck a chord with Logan, too. "Mmph." He'd lost more than most. Found more than most, too, and was ready to kill or die to defend it. He knew she felt the same. She was growing more comfortable with the Rogue every day. A little wilder. A little freer.

"It's the miles that make the man, sugar."

The Wolverine said nothing, but he squeezed her hand and pressed a kiss into her hair as he watched her fingers reach out and trace the deep gouges he'd left in the glossy tabletop.

"I love these. One day when we've filled these benches with little butts and raised them and it's just you and me alone at this table again in whatever place we've found ourselves—" They both knew the school wasn't the right place for them forever. "We're gonna touch these marks and remember the
morning we put them here."

He smiled at that. A lot of women had wanted him over the years. Marie wanted to make a life with him. It still stunned him, even now. "I like that real good."

"But I swear to God, that's one story about Naughty Marie that better not be retold if you ever want a repeat performance, cowboy."

"Heh. Giddyup." He slapped her ass and she blushed all the way down.

~ooOoo~

"SHITFIRE!" There was a crash and a feminine yelp and the muffled crunch of breaking glass. "GODDAMN SONOFABITCH!"

Logan's eyes flew open and he charged down the loft stairs, claws out and ready to go. Blood pounded in his ears, a wild roar that brought his every enhanced sense to the fore.

"Kid?" He sniffed, eyes alert and darting from one end of the dark, open space to the other. Not a thing out of place. Moonlight streamed in the windows but there was no sign of Marie. "KID!"

His sharp hearing caught the sound of struggling in the bathroom along with more cursing and what sounded like a shriek of pure rage.

"Dadgum!" Her accent was always stronger when she was riled up.

"Baby?" Four big strides had him at the door and he immediately ducked as Marie's favorite Yankee candle flew past his head and shattered against the far wall.

"Peckerwood! DIPSHIT!"

She smelled angry rather than scared. He put the claws back in but kept the defensive stance, wondering what the hell was wrong with her. She was fiery and unpredictable on a good day, but what kind of inciting incident could there be in the middle of the night, for christ'sakes? He couldn't smell anything out of the ordinary, besides the remains of the lavender candle.

Logan raised his arm to block a direct hit from her curling iron and missed the bottle of perfume that shattered on the tile behind him. The pungent scent of vanilla lemongrass made his eyes water.

"Jesus! What the fuck?!!" he roared.

"I am gonna murder you!"

"You can try," he grunted, annoyed by the drama and the heavy scent that was making him lightheaded.

Marie appeared at the bathroom door, naked and wet from her hips down. Logan was momentarily distracted by long creamy legs with a flash of dark hair between.

"My FACE is up here," she spat, glaring at him as his eyes swung upwards. She was the picture of pissed-off female. He probably shouldn't have been aroused by that, but he was — there was no hiding that, even if he had been wearing pants - and that clearly pissed her off, too.
"Well, the rest of you is naked and heavin' and sexy as hell. Bitch all you want, sweetheart, but I'm sure as fuck gonna look if you're gonna put it out there."

"God! You ARE a fuckin' caveman."

"Damn straight. I looked at my own crazyass woman and got hard. Better string me the fuck up for that transgression, huh? Jesus. What. The. Fuck, Marie?"

"I fell in!"

"Fell in what?"

"The dadgum TOILET, sugar."

Logan was stunned for a moment and then almost laughed but the touch of murder in her eyes stopped him.

"What?"

"Hello? I didn't ask you to put the seat down half a dozen times just to hear myself say it. Christ on a cracker!"

"I thought that was like an urban myth or somethin'. That the worst that could happen was, ya know, like a bare ass on cold porcelain."

"Nope."

Shit.

"Why didn't ya just look first?"

"You are making this so much worse for yourself. You know that, right?"

Logan shrugged. "S'fair question, ain't it?"

Her eyes narrowed. "Because I was sleepy and distracted."

"Distracted?"

"Yeah, distracted, sugar. I'm tired. I had to pee and I had a freakin' river of you runnin' down my leg." Logan winced a little at that. They'd gone one round under the stars down by the fire pit and then three more upstairs in the loft. The new mattress had been worth every penny. She was probably swimming in him. He liked that more than he probably should, and the look on her face said there was no way she'd missed the flash of gold in his eyes just now.

Well, he sure as fuck wasn't apologizing for that.

Stalemate.

"Won't happen again," he finally allowed.

"Thanks."

"Plus it's just a damn good excuse to piss outside."

"God!" Marie rolled her eyes. "Doesn't all that knuckle-draggin' hurt?"
"Nah. They're adamantium." She laughed in spite of herself. Logan's particular brand of twisted humor was hard to resist. It was macabre and tended toward the profane, but was definitely there.

Raising an eyebrow, he stepped around the glass and disappeared back upstairs before reappearing with the down comforter from their bed. She was still standing in the bathroom doorway, surveying the damage.

"Where you goin'?"

"Gonna sleep on the deck. Smells like a goddamn cathouse in here." Between the sex and the broken perfume bottle and whatever else she'd destroyed in the bathroom, he could barely breathe.

"Well, you'd know, cowboy."

"You would too." He smirked at her, thinking of that night at The Red Door.

He stepped over a big chunk of candle and opened a few windows to air the place out before heading for the door.

"You're really goin'?"

Logan eyed the wreckage with a critical expression. "Yep. Shit ain't my mess."

Marie waved a hand in the general direction of the feminine parts he still really couldn't keep his eyes away from. "This is."

"Fair enough. You want help cleanin' that up, call me. I reckon you'll be finished with the glass and ready for a shower about the time I'm finished with this." He grabbed a cigar from the pocket of the coat hanging nearby and shoved it in his mouth, saluted her smartly and stomped out the back door with a snort of masculine amusement.

Up next: Sledgehammer. Now that they're more comfortable with each other, they're ready to kick things up a notch. The Rogue starts something the Wolverine can't help but finish…

This is a wild one. Y'all have been warned!
Marie was watching him across the room, drink in the air as her hips swung to the driving beat. Logan could tell he'd surprised her. The Wolverine didn't do holidays. She knew better than to even ask.

When she'd said she was going to the school's Halloween party as a World War II nurse, he'd just shrugged it off and voiced his appreciation for a naughty nurse costume. She'd shut that down firmly.

"It's a school party, sugar. I teach here now! Since when did Halloween become synonymous with Slutoween, anyway? Geez. My costume is gonna be authentic. A nod to my gran who served. I can't help but wonder what you must have looked like in uniform, though."

"Which one?" he'd grunted under his breath. From Union blue to futuristic black. He'd run the full gamut between, and then some.

"All of 'em, cowboy. I like a man in uniform." Her eyes had flashed hotly. He'd known she had thing for the black uniform, but he'd thought it was the leather and not the uniform itself. Interesting.

Logan's eyes had slid over to the discarded heap of black leather on the floor by their bed. "Or outta uniform."

She hadn't even blushed. Just thrown back her head and laughed. "Back atcha." Her uniform had been on the floor next to his.

Fair enough.

Logan hadn't been able to get the look in her eye out of his head since that night. He'd thought about wearing the Union blue just to rile her up, but she'd lost family in that war and the wool fucking itched. It was the basic olive fatigues and combat boots that felt right when he'd swung by the military surplus anyway. He'd been wearing one uniform or another for two centuries. He wondered what that meant. There was a part of him that missed the familiar weight of his old tags. That was disturbing, too.

The look in her eyes was worth every bit of the unsettling internal dialogue. She knew. There'd been a flash of softness and clarity first, a moment of understanding and gratitude before the lust shifted her warm brown eyes to a smoky ebony.

She was gonna burn him alive, he could tell.

She took her time. Let him watch her dance for a while. Slinging her hair under the jaunty nurse's cap. Shaking the ass he loved so much in that crisp white uniform. Stockings with a seam up the back. She looked tough and strong and resourceful and he found that a thousand times more exciting than the cheap, revealing costumes around him.

Logan was a man who had a deep and abiding appreciation for slutty, but sexy was something else entirely. And if he knew his girl — and he did — he'd bet good money that whatever she was wearing under that uniform would bring a grown man to his knees.

The Rogue would be pleased to know she'd made him sweat. He knew damn well who was eyefucking him from across the room. It was somehow both subtle and obscene at the same time. The costume might have been a homage to Marie's gran, but the wicked promise in her eyes was the Rogue's pure Southern fire.
He thought she'd tease. Give him some impertinent line about dishonorable discharges or foxholes. He was completely unprepared for the Rogue's full frontal assault. When she was done playing with him, she stalked over, one hip at a time, and stood on her toes as she pulled his ear to those full red lips, full of sin and expectation. She spoke only three words.

"I. Need. It."

And fuck her if she didn't smirk at him when he jerked slightly. It was only the smallest of movements, but it might as well have been a full body shudder and she knew it.

Goddamn, he was gonna enjoy this. She sure as hell would too. He wasn't an officer or a gentleman. Hell, he was barely a man at all, and the 'game on' expression in her eyes said she was looking forward to whatever he served up.

Logan put his beer down and walked out, knowing she'd follow. And that his high-handedness would rile her up a little. He enjoyed adding fuel to the fire because she always burned so sweet.

He headed for the small staff bathroom in the east wing. "You not gonna take me home, soldier?" she purred, loitering at the fork in the hallway that led to her old room with Jubilee. She hadn't actually moved out, but she rarely slept there these days.

"Nope."

It wasn't the first time she'd expressed an interest in going a few rounds with him there, but he wasn't in the mood to rewrite history with a playful romp in her old little bed. Her sultry teasing had roused a darker hunger in him and the fire in her eyes dared him to follow through.

Marie should know better. Or perhaps she did and the Rogue wanted what was coming. That was far more likely. She was testing him more and more every day. Wanting more of everything he'd held back for so long.

He stopped, staring at her for a charged moment before wrapping a big hand around her slender throat and drawing her close. The tender brush of his thumb over her lips was gentle, but she could feel the leashed strength in the fingers on her neck as he leaned in and nipped her sharply before putting his mouth to her ear.

"Your room don't have what I want."

Against his palm he could feel her swallow.

"And that would be…?"

"A mirror big enough for you to see everythin' I'm gonna do to you."

To you. Not with you. It was a deliberate word choice that telegraphed the direction of his thoughts as clearly as the commanding hand wrapped around her throat. He had a naturally dominant personality, but he generally didn't make a show of dominating her pointedly during sex unless the Wolverine was in charge.

She whimpered softly, her need evident in her sultry scent and her body language. He smirked. That was enough to light a fire under the Rogue, who very much enjoyed that aspect of his personality. He might be the one in charge, but her expression said he wasn't going to stay there without her challenging him every step of the way. It was a game suited to both their volatile natures.

He didn't say another word until they were in the small bathroom with the heavy oak door locked at
his back. She was wild in her need, rubbing herself against him sensuously as she wound her arms around his neck and pushed her fingers into his hair. Her kiss was urgent and vital and he enjoyed the hell out of it, but this was his show and he waited until she realized he wasn't allowing her to lead the hungry, reckless charge. She shuddered when she did, breaking the kiss to peer up at him breathlessly.

That's what he'd been waiting for. That moment she realized what she really wanted was for him to tell her what to do and to trust that he knew how to give her what they both needed. It was a fine line to walk, even with his decades of experience. The Rogue was desperate for all that he could show her while at the same time, chafing a little under his direction. She was a vibrant, turbulent lover. Exciting and provocative in turns, but with an underlying tenderness that gave even their basest encounters depth and meaning beyond what they did with their bodies.

Catching her eye, he peeled off her gloves and carelessly dropped them at his feet. Being around the others without them still made her nervous but she didn't need them with him. They'd developed their own shorthand. A language of touch. Seeing the gloves come off never failed to make him hard because he knew she'd be touching him soon after.

"On your knees."

He didn't direct her or push her down, or even raise his voice. He didn't have to. He didn't make her do anything. He made her want to do it which was a thousand times more compelling for them both.

"Mmm…" She sank to her knees, dragging her hands down his body as she went.

They both felt the power shift. He had what she wanted. It throbbled between his legs and roared between his ears. Being wanted by such a fierce creature made his blood sing, hot and sharp under his skin. Their joining had unleashed a wildness in her that was growing by leaps and bounds, an elemental force that was terrifyingly beautiful. Seductive. Consuming. Dangerous. He couldn't get enough.

"Take my cock out." Low and rough. His sex voice.

She bit her lip, partly in concentration as she worked the unfamiliar buttons on the fly of his vintage fatigue pants, and partly because his low, husky words were making her dizzy with lust. There was something about seeing him exposed in an open pair of pants that really raised the tempo. The contrast between the tactile sensations of smooth hot skin, crisp wiry hair and worn olive fabric was a treat for a hedonist like Marie, who was still easily overwhelmed by the marvel of touch.

He slid between her fingers as she tested the weight and heft of him in her palm.

"That what you needed, baby?"

"Yes," she breathed, reverently. Wantonly.

"Show me."

She did. With her hands. With her mouth. With the sway of her body and the soft sounds she made as she kissed and sucked. He pushed his hands into her hair, roughly guiding her mouth where he wanted it. She'd be annoyed later when she realized he'd knocked her cap to the floor and ruined her artfully shaped finger waves, but right now she was so deeply submerged in her own desire that she didn't even notice. All she wanted was more of him. More of that beautiful primal darkness that he was only now beginning to let her see.

"Mmmm……" she moaned around him and he couldn't help thrusting into her throat with a grunt of
his own before he pulled her mouth off of him.

"Stop."

There was a wicked light in her eyes. Wicked.

"Too close to the edge, sugar?" She wasn't at all cowed by his less than gentle treatment. In fact, her tone was clearly urging him on for more of the same. She was lit up like a pinball machine and the rich earthy scent of her desire was making his mouth water.

He didn't bother to answer her. He just stared down at her red, swollen lips and wrapped a strand of her hair around his finger, rubbing it softly between his fingers. "Open your dress. Take your tits out. I wanna see 'em."

She shivered at his crude words but felt a new rush of dampness trickle between her legs. He knew it, too. Her fingers undid the prim placket of the dress slowly enough that she knew she was in danger of having it sliced from her. She liked to push his buttons, too.

When the dress was open to the waist, she ran a hand over her breasts, glorying in the small catch in his breath as they came into view. She'd chosen a vintage inspired satin corset in virginal white. It seemed the antithesis of this raw moment, and also somehow beautifully right. It was a first time, of sorts. Just not the one typically defined by white lingerie.

In the back of her mind, some unfettered part of her wondered if he'd make her bleed tonight. The idea frightened her as much as it turned her on.

His eyes deepened to a smoky gold as she slid a hand up her ribcage and cupped a breast, lingering over the swell of her nipple before dipping her fingers inside the corset's lacy top. "You like that, cowboy?"

He ignored that question too, staring down at her like the Big Bad Wolf and the look on his face said he wanted to devour her in one big bite.

"Pull the cups down. Show 'em off." He wanted her breasts on display like an offering. He wet his lips as she ripped the cups down and rubbed her hard nipples back and forth with her thumbs. "Pinch 'em hard, like I would."

His cock twitched between them as he watched her stroke and tease.

"Stand up." His voice was more growl than words.

She stood, obedient but hardly submissive. The sparkle in her eye challenged him even now and she didn't once look away from his intense gaze.

He bent her over the counter and flipped her skirt up over her hips, biting back a curse. No panties. Just a garter belt and stockings with that fucking seam up the back that rang his bell but good. He used more pressure with the hand he had at the small of her back, pinning her where he wanted as he slipped his other hand between her legs.

"Fuck. Look at that…"

She was dripping, thighs glazed with lust. There was no denying it. She'd never been this wet. Something about this was doing it for her, too.

"Unnnhhhh….. please!" She was begging for it now, unashamed and as wild for it as he'd ever seen
her.

He chuckled darkly, pulling away his hand and stepping back.

"You still think this is about you, baby?"

Geez. Does this one even need a teaser? Okie dokie, then…

Up next: I had another title in mind originally, but upon reflection, Danger Zone seemed more appropriate:

Revvin' up your engine  
Listen to her howlin' roar  
Metal under tension  
Beggin' you to touch and go...

The Wolverine shoves off the deck and into overdrive.

Gold star to anyone who can guess what this one was originally titled. ;)

Feedback is love.
If the counter hadn't been holding her up, Marie would have lost her feet. Her body swayed with lust so thick it fogged her brain and made her crotch throb.

Logan caught her gaze in the mirror and licked his glistening fingers.

"Stand up and touch yourself."

"Oh, god….

"Now." He smirked when she complied without hesitation. "Pull your skirt up so I can see you do it."

No words from her now, just a whimper that fired his blood more than any sassy reply could have. Christ, he loved how she looked with her hand between her legs. Her hips were starting to move and she was beginning to moan a little.

"So wet," he breathed, tongue flicking out to catch her scent on the still air. "Feels real good, don't it." It was not a question. "Fingers in deep. Wanna see you fuck down on 'em."

She held his eyes in the mirror the whole time, cheeks bright red, chest rising and falling from her panting breaths. His thick fingers caught her slender wrist and dragged her hand from between her legs moments short of orgasm.

"No!" she gasped, finally finding her tongue.

"Yes," he growled. She thought he'd step up behind her, kick her legs apart and fuck her hard now.

She was wrong.

He turned her sharply, pinning her wrist above her head against the cold oak door, staring deeply into her eyes for a long charged moment, and then he turned her wrist loose. He smacked her ass for good measure and then sunk to his knees in front of her.

"God!" she gasped out as his fingers slid under her skirt and pushed in deep.

He asked at her. "Not a sound or they'll hear." She was so far gone he doubted she was even aware of the others right now. He shoved his fingers in hard and curled them just right, big thick knuckles pressing right where she needed. She bit her lip to keep from keening aloud. "Not a sound or I'll stop." Right now, that was probably a bigger deterrent for her.

Normally he loved to hear every vocalization. Tonight he wanted her obedience — and her silence. He lifted the restraining hand he had at her hip to guide her wet, glossy fingers into her mouth, ordering her to suck her own fingers to keep quiet. "Suck."

"Unnngh…." She was staring down at him, eyes dilated and unfocused.
"Don't look at me." She blinked in surprise and he nudged her chin up. "Watch yourself in the mirror."

"Oh!"

"Gonna shove you against this door and lick you. Make you come real hard. Wantcha to see what I see. How you look to me." It was more than pretty or beautiful. He didn't have the words to articulate what it was to him, but he could tell she understood.

He growled as he felt the impact of his words on the soft body under his hands. She quaked. She looked at herself in the mirror. He kept his eyes on her face and gave her hip a hard squeeze that made her wince to underscore his next order. "Don't look away. Wantcha to see it all."

He put his head under her skirt. His mouth was hot and wet between her legs as he pinned her to the door and took what he wanted.

Her face looked as hot as it felt. She could see his head buried between her thighs, skirt rucked up around her waist, his strong hands flexing against the crisp, white cotton. Her fingers slid from her lips and her head fell back with a soft thunk against the door as she reached for him.

He made her watch the flush spread over her skin, her mouth falling open as he sucked down hard. Made her witness her hands tangling in his hair as she pulled him even closer and he growled against her, dipping his tongue in between the thick fingers working her. He put her leg over his shoulder, spreading her even wider and pinning her against the door, open and exposed.

She came with a silent shout, convulsing around his fingers and pulsing against his mouth in a wet gush that drenched his lips and chin. If it wasn't for the strong hand bracing against her, she'd have crumpled to the floor.

Before she'd even caught her breath, he had her bent over the counter and was kicking her feet apart, rubbing the dripping tip of his cock between her legs. "Wider."

The rough sound was barely recognizable as a word and she complied instantly, spreading her shaking thighs in invitation.

He shoved the entire length of his heavy cock inside her and bottomed out in one forceful thrust. She would have screamed if he hadn't just made her come. As wet and ready as she was, the thick girth was still uncomfortable and she squirmed at the blunt stretch, even as she shoved herself back at him, wanting more.

He gave it to her. Hard. Deep. Teeth on her shoulder and eyes locked in the mirror inches from their faces as he slammed into her over and over. They both watched her breasts bounce and her hands scrabble for purchase on the cold marble as her breath fogged the mirror with every pant. He was relentless. Something about a bare ass and stockings and that prim little dress and her gloriously wanton behavior had unlocked something he couldn't hold back and couldn't stop.

Her face was luminous with pleasure. His was twisted into a harsh grimace as he held her down and rode her with absolute abandon. She matched him, heaving and twisting and shuddering through another strong orgasm. It was silent, like the last, but he could feel her walls squeezing him and the animal gnashed his teeth and nearly roared in triumph that he could hold out a moment longer than the powerful creature pinned beneath him — but then the pleasure had him too.

Blinding, brilliant white waves of it that made his vision hazy and spiked hotly from his cock to his brain with enough force that he felt the top of his head lift away and his toes curl in his boots before
his body's rhythmic, primal pumping of his seed eclipsed everything else. It all faded away, even the need for air and the awareness that the body under his was not indestructible.

He shoved in deep for the first few shots and then pulled out for the rest, wanting to see his come spurt against her pretty white skin. He wanted to smell himself all over her. Rub it in. Lick it off. Claim and own every last molecule of the woman in his arms.

They caught their breath bent over the counter, still staring at each other in the mirror. It told the end of the story that was a little hazy for them both. Small feminine handprints where she'd braced herself and then the smudges and smears when he'd really gotten wild and she'd clung to him with one hand and pressed the other to the glass next to her face. A front row seat to the most intimately revealing moment they'd shared to date.

Her lip was bleeding where she'd bitten it to keep from screaming and from the way her hips felt, she'd have bruises there, too—from his hands as well as the lip of the counter. She could feel the sting of his teeth on her shoulder and her nipples throbbed from her touch as well as his. Inside was a deep, wet ache that was violently, disturbingly, achingly satisfying.

He made her feel like a goddess—some female equivalent to his primal, male force. But he also made her feel like an equal. A partner. Someone he could be himself with. Someone he trusted with all his broken pieces and rough edges and even the soft places he didn't want to admit that he even had.

"Fuck," he said, rising on shaky legs and helping her stand. Satisfaction smoothed the harsh lines of his face, but there was still concern in the set of his mouth.

"You keep your Mississippi to yourself, sugar, or when I can walk again, I'll kick your ass."

"Heh."

"Gawd." She felt deliciously naughty with his come trickling down her skin. "Finish it," she said quietly.

"You sure?" He wasn't sure she was up for the rest.

"Hell, yes. Do it." The Rogue lifted her chin defiantly, daring him to continue.

He searched her face and finally nodded. "Clean me up. Use your mouth."

She needed his strength to steady herself as she knelt, but her eyes were warm and sparkling as she bent to her task. "Mmm…"

"When we walk outta here, I wanna smell myself on your breath and taste myself on your lips."

She lifted her mouth and winked at him. "Which ones?"

"Heh."

Tucking him away with a soft kiss and a little flourish, she buttoned his fly and rebuckled his belt. She hummed in her throat, a happy sound, tones round with satiation and lethargy.

"Stand up."

He helped her stand on unsteady legs and braced her against the door, leaning in for a slow, wet kiss as he put a hand between her legs. "Push."
Against his body, he felt her belly tighten and the resulting gush against his fingers. He held her eyes as he rubbed it into her soft flesh, growling in pleasure at the rightness of that scent on her skin.

She reached up to push her breasts back inside her corset and he slapped her hands away with a growl. "S'for me to do."

"By all means, do me, sugar." She threw back her shoulders with a sexy shimmy that made her breasts bounce. He chuckled.

Christ, he loved the Rogue. Kissing each pert crest in turn, he pulled her corset back up and pressed his forehead to her breastbone for a long moment before lifting his head and slowly buttoning her dress.

"Fuckin' good one."

"Amen to that, cowboy. Gawd! If I'd known it could be like that, I'd have jumped you years ago."

"Nah. Years ago, a ride like that woulda scared the shit outta us both." He was right. It had happened in its own time and they were all the better for it.

"And now?"

He set her on the counter while he tended to his own appearance. "Now you ain't a little girl afraid to tell me what she wants. Now you know whatcha need and I don't feel like an asshole for givin' it to ya."

She brought his hand to her mouth and kissed his knuckles softly before meeting his eyes. "Good. Because I'm gonna need more of it like that, for sure. I've never come so hard in my life."

"I know," he smirked. His words were light, but understood what she meant. It was less about what he'd done to her and more about feeling safe to reveal their wild selves to each other. That's what had made it so damn hot.

"What about you?"

"You gotta ask?"

Apparently she did, because she was staring at him expectantly for an answer.

"Darlin', I've never lost it like that. Even when it ain't me drivin' the train, even with as wild as he is, he's always there enough at the end to keep from crushin' ya after. This was somethin' else. I dunno what. Just—"

"Right. It was just right," she said softly.

He couldn't disagree.

He helped her down and she smacked his arm as she caught her reflection in the mirror. "My hair!"

"Heh."

"Hey, I worked a long time getting it just right!"

"S'more realistic now. What's more authentic than a nurse and a soldier passin' an evening together, huh?"
"Well, it worked for my gran."

Logan nudged her aside while she was repairing her hair the best she could.

"Scoot."

"What?"

"Need the sink."

"You gonna wash off that authentic lipstick mark on your cheek, sugar?"

"Nah." Normally, I wouldn't give a shit, but I figured you wouldn't want me goin' back out there with my fingers smellin' like pussy."

"Oh my god!" Her face felt hot.

"Heh. There it is." Miles of the Rogue who was willing to live out their every dirty, kinky little fantasy and one last mile of Marie, who still blushed on the way home afterwards.

God, he loved the hell out of that.

He dried his hands and pulled her close, taking her hands in his and kissing each fingertip in turn. The lingering, musky fragrance made him smile as he slowly pulled her gloves back on.

Marie's tender smile became the Rogue's wide, sultry grin. "My fingers smell like pussy too, cowboy."

"Heh. Yep. And nobody'll know it but me."

Up Next: **Fields of Gold.** The final chapter! Things wind to a close and we end where we began, in a cozy cabin built for two…

Confession time- I haven't even finished writing this chapter yet and unless I somehow develop the power to stop time, it's unlikely it will be ready until next weekend. Sorry, y'all. My RL has been epically insane. Universe, please take note that I have adopted a new mantra: NOT MY CIRCUS. NOT MY MONKEYS.

Now before you go freaking out— yes, the story is ending, but it's not really over just yet. There will be a (multi-chapter) smut-tastic epilogue that takes place at the Red Door. The bunnies were very insistent (helped along by my WolverineMuse who was emphatic about including the events at the Red Door)... however, they were equally emphatic about ending the story here first. You can consider the rest a dirty little coda. Heh. I haven't written that yet, either, so after I finish the final chapter, there will probably be a short break while I attempt to write smut like the wind. Sorry about that, but for reals, these 17 hour days are kicking my ass like whoa. #zombiegirl #sleepingin
Fields of Gold

Author's note: Sorry about the delay, y'all. My life is still exploding. The universe clearly did not feel I had enough on my plate and decided that my car needed to break down on the way home from work this week. Boo. On the up side, I ditched all responsibilities and went to a milestone birthday for a good friend tonight. Drinks! Cake! Sat across from a tow truck driver. Karma, hey? Where was he a few days back when I could get nobody to tow my car?! I did ask for his card and his direct number, too— thus insuring my car will never break down again. Heh. And so it goes… Onward! (With a double length chapter to make up for the wait!)

Logan arrived at the house just before dinner to find a box on the porch with his name on it and a note taped to the top. Fuck proper etiquette. He ripped open the box first and read the note after, still clutching the Nerf gun in his hand with an amused grin.

Marie’s loopy scrawl read: Sugar, I’m hiding inside with a weapon of my own. First one to make a headshot gets to make all the rules until dawn. Game. On.

She was better than he thought she’d be, but in the end, he lost on purpose because the curiosity was killing him.

As it turned out, the Rogue was far more imaginative — and a helluva lot dirtier — than he’d previously given her credit for. There wasn’t a thing tame about her. And lucky for her, there wasn’t a damn thing tame about him, either.

The sun rose on a pair of sleeping lovers. Her skin still carried the marks from the silken cord he’d used to bind her so beautifully. She’d wanted a shibari lesson and the whisper of claws on skin. He’d given her that and more.

They’d broken just about every rule of man and god, a few laws of nature, and the coffee table.

~ooOoo~

It began with a gauntlet, playfully tossed down. Catch me if you can, sugar. She had enough Mississippi in her that it was a challenge. She hit him with a surprise left and ran. He chased after, grinning even as the wildness surged, inevitable as the tide and just as unpredictable. Glimpsing her moving fast and low between the thick trunks was the last thing Logan consciously remembered; the rising moon’s light reflected flicker-bright off her platinum hair as it streamed out behind her.

Logan came back to himself much later, disoriented a little but grounded by the twin scents of rich, peaty earth and the heavy musk of good sex. His woman lay in his arms, sleeping. His coats, denim and leather, covered their naked, entwined bodies. Sleep, true, deep blissful sleep could silence her mutation. Her warm breath stirred the hair on his chest and he smiled at the silky tickle of her hair against his skin.

He recognized the warm, cozy nest. They’d once spent an evening hidden under this fallen log, talking late into the night. That they’d wound up here again didn’t surprise him. She’d wanted to
revisit this place and had been pretty specific about what she wanted to do here; wild, primal sex. Teeth and claws and mud and blood and every shred of humanity cast aside as they both embraced the wildness within.

He'd needed to be his other self to give her what they both wanted. He remembered every scratch and bite and grunt. He just hadn't been the one driving the train. She'd met that unapologetic male energy with a beautiful savagery all her own.

Rubbing a strand of her soft, fragrant hair around his thick finger, he marveled again at the change in her. To claim him for her own, she'd had to embrace all that she was. It had been the making of her, spilling over into all aspects of her life. She'd always been headstrong and sassy. Underscoring it now was a quiet, unshakable confidence that had come with opening herself to the wildness within.

She was the Rogue now, down to the marrow of her bones. Fierce. Strong. Equal measures brave and reckless. Ruthless in defense of those she loved. Quick to anger. Slow to forgive. Passionate. Tender and violent… and loyal to the end.

It had happened so slowly that he hadn’t seen it until the thick of battle. Fighting all around. Blood and pain and the acrid stink of fear and thermite. The ground shook with concussive blasts and as the wind shifted clearing the smoke, he saw her standing there just for a moment. Not afraid. Not cowering. Her hair whipped around her face. Chin set. Eyes glittering. Focused. Powerful.

He understood that this was just the beginning. Her power would continue to grow. It wasn't the intensity that made the others uncomfortable so much as her enthusiasm for embracing it. She had stepped over that line cleanly and never looked back.

And it had begun with a single nod that night she'd come to him and stepped out of her too small skin and into something neither of them had expected.

He'd overheard the firecracker grilling her about the loss of her virginity not long after the others had become aware that things had changed between them. She’d fired back that she hadn't lost a damn thing. That it was the claiming of a life that included sex and touch and intimacy with the one man she loved above all things.

Her fierce, unguarded words had struck them all mute.

He knew then that it hadn't begun that night in the cabin. It had started long ago, on a snowy road when two broken people had taken a chance on each other.

~ooOoo~

Logan and Marie were sitting at a small table, knocking back longnecks in a roadhouse bar; watching the rest of the team drinking and dancing as they celebrated a decisive victory and the fact that they'd all still been standing when the smoke cleared. Marie and Logan weren’t joiners by nature, but they both understood the importance of family and pack dynamics.

She was sweating from the crush of the bodies and the unexpected thrill of a turn on the floor with Logan; a Texas two step that had left her breathless and grinning from ear to ear.

"I didn't know you could dance, sugar."
He grunted. "Hell, anyone who can fuck good can dance good, darlin'."

"Cocky, much?"

"Yep. Course, an enthusiastic partner helps, either way."

"God. You're beyond help."

"Didn't hear you disagreein' earlier, baby."

She winked at him. "That's 'cause my mouth was full, cowboy."

He chuckled at her teasing and dropped an arm around her, pulling her close. She was strong, but not unaffected by the battle they'd waded through tonight. It had rocked them both. He hoped she'd never become so accustomed to it that it ceased to touch her. She'd had him in her mouth in the lower levels before they'd even changed out of their uniforms and he'd made her come with his hand between her legs in the truck on the drive over to the bar. They'd needed that connection right away, a precursor to the life-affirming sex they'd have later when they could return to their bed in the loft and lock out the world.

Marie was soothed by the slow stroking of Logan's knuckles up and down her spine. Steady. Rhythmic. Intimate without being openly sexual. It drew a couple of stares from their teammates, who still didn't quite know what to make of the two of them. Together.

"Your birthday's comin'," he mused aloud, thinking of her face tonight when she got carded. "Whatcha wanna do?"

Neither of them were big birthday people. Logan didn't really see the point and didn't remember his own birthday, anyway. Marie had never really been comfortable being the center of so much focused attention. He wasn't sure about the Rogue. She was unpredictable on a good day.

Last year he'd suited up and taken her to the Hammerstein to see the Moscow Ballet perform the Nutcracker. The previous year it had been the Rockettes at Rockefeller Center. The year before that they'd been in New Orleans on a mission and had wound up at an over-the-top burlesque show full of beautiful transvestites and glittering drag queens. He hadn't really enjoyed any of the performances, but in a low moment, she'd once told him that she had taken ballet lessons for years and that she hadn't danced since her mutation manifested. The sadness etched in her face had made a lasting impression.

The year she turned eighteen, just before she took the Cure, she'd used a fake ID to sneak into a bar with the little firecracker. They'd gotten drunk and wound up doing a sexy bump and grind on the bar together. It had turned into a striptease that had nearly gotten them both arrested. Everyone had been scandalized. Logan had just grinned, glad she was dancing again. Someday he hoped she'd put on the toe shoes and dance for him.

"Kid?"

"Thinking."

"Mmph." That was her 'I don't want to tell you because you're not gonna like it' voice. "Out with it."

She finished off her beer and glanced up at him under her lashes before looking away. "I was kinda thinking about maybe having the team over to the house for dinner. A proper christening now that all the work's done."
He could hear the nervousness in her voice and that was so unlike her it made him look twice. "Table's already been christened, kid," he teased to lighten the mood.

"Shut up," she hissed, swatting at him with an indulgent grin.

"That really whatcha wanna do?" The idea of sitting down with Remy and Bobby at his own table sounded even worse than another trip to the ballet.

She shrugged. "S'in my genes, sugar. Down home cookin'. Sweet tea in mason jars. A house full of people drinkin' and laughin' and sittin' on the back porch under the stars until they start drifting away by twos into the night. I was also thinkin' it might help."

"Help?"

"With the way they look at us."

"Mmph."

Jubilee had been the first and most enthusiastic flagwaver, much to Remy's displeasure. Hank had congratulated them warmly, but his scent had been tinged with sadness. Logan wasn't sure if it was because he longed for what they'd found or because he'd secretly been a little sweet on Marie. He'd probably never know the answer to that. The good doctor played his cards close to the vest. Kitty was reserved with Marie and skittish with him, and Bobby still glared at them both, even now. A typically male response. He still felt possessive even though he'd been with Kitty for years.

Marie suspected that Pete had known about them all along, even before Jubes had blabbed it to the world. She'd always wondered if it was him in the gazebo all those nights. He'd never admitted it. That unshakable Russian fatalism was hard to crack, but once or twice she'd caught a gleam in his eye that suggested her hunch may be right. Storm had welcomed the news with her usual grace and a few suggestions that made even the Rogue blush.

"Sugar?"

"I think I can manage not to stab the ice prick for an evenin'."

"It was a long time ago, you know? If I can let it go, then you can, too." Bobby's betrayal had cut deeply, but she'd grown beyond it. Children make mistakes, and they'd all been kids back then.

"Ain't that."

"What then?"

"Kitty's a good girl, but someday he's gonna grow up and realize what he lost. That nobody's ever gonna come close to you."

Marie was glad Bobby was out of earshot. The Wolverine's pity would piss him off more than the lingering anger over the way she'd been treated.

"Honestly, I don't care. As long as you feel that way, that's all that matters to me."

His eyes glowed warmly, a moment of unspoken communication, and then he smirked. "You're just sayin' that so I don't gut him or that fuckhead Cajun."

"Is that a yes?"

The Wolverine just snorted and pulled her closer.
Logan and Marie stood on the porch together, watching the last of their guests melt away into the darkness. His Mississippi girl shivered against him, their breath visible in the crisp autumn air. He'd enjoyed the evening more than he thought he would, but that last small bit of remaining tension left him as the last of the taillights disappeared from view and she pulled him inside with a contented sigh.

The warmth of a houseful of people lingered in and around them. Memories of good conversation and wry smiles and the plummy tones of hearty laughter left them both full and sated. Savory spices and the rich buttery aromas of decadent desserts mingled with scents of their recently departed friends and the fresh bite of the cold night air.

Abandoned plates and cups littered the small space; a testament to Marie's cooking. Their guests had returned for seconds and thirds, washed down with endless cups of sweet tea, strong coffee and more adult beverages as the evening wore on. It had been a night worthy of the Wolverine and the Rogue, and a surprise to their friends who'd never imagined either of them at ease in a domestic setting.

Still, they were hardly tame. There had been a lot of innuendo, pointed looks and ribald conversation. Hank's attention to the marks on the table had caused the Rogue to blush sweetly. The others hadn't noticed, but their significance had not been lost on the Beast. The Wolverine was not the only one among them with claws and a feral libido.

Logan and Marie spoke quietly as they tidied, pushing in chairs and picking up the dishes as they went. Logan washed while Marie dried and tucked them away, smiling as she hung the pots on the rustic rough-hewn rack Logan had installed and then lowered so she could reach it.

From their comments, it had been apparent that their friends and teammates had not expected such an inviting space. From the candlelight Logan preferred to the handmade furniture to the rich colors and natural textures chosen by them both, the house was a clear blend of the two wildest members of the team. The bearskin rug had drawn comments about its acquisition and invited touch as well as few impertinent remarks that had brought the Cajun perilously close to another black eye. The wall Logan had left with the original plaster and lathing had drawn its fair share of comments as well, and an uncharacteristically soft smile from Marie who remembered that he only kept it because she'd once told him she liked it.

Some stories Marie had obviously enjoyed sharing with the group. The floor they'd laid together. The funny paint names. Other stories had been too personal to share. The Playboy she'd walked in and seen sitting on the bar. The dog they'd found the day they had bought the leather chair. The marks they'd left in the table. Logan's eyes lingered on Marie now as she cleared away the food and wiped away the crumbs from the table. She seemed to feel Logan's eyes on her, her mouth curving into a secret smile as she traced over the three deep gouges. He joined her there a moment later and she felt his knuckles trace her spine slowly. Intimately.

It still surprised him that she moved into his touch automatically and that what she found there went beyond the thrill of physical contact or carnal lust or even the contentment and safety she'd found with him since the very beginning. He wasn't the sort of man to ruminate on such things often, but even he knew how rare it was to be wanted for yourself — not for what you could do, or give, or because of what he was. It was who he was that made all the difference to her.
Marie tidied as she went and Logan followed, blowing out the lights behind her until at last the space was only lit by the fire in the stone hearth. Leaving behind the vibrant smoky teal of the bathroom, they ascended the loft stairs smelling of toothpaste, shedding their clothes as they climbed.

The loft had been off limits to their guests. They'd left the shoji screens drawn. Neither of them had been willing to share that private space. His hand covered hers as they slid the screen aside, revealing their sanctuary. The warm orange wall glowed richly and the cork floor was silent under foot. Logan had built the bed and dresser, but they'd purchased an ebony lacquered cabinet lined with satin to house their expanding collection of toys. From honey dust and feathers to silk cords and sheer scarves, it was an eclectic assortment that spoke to her curiosity and his centuries of experience.

They tumbled into bed with grateful sighs, enjoying the closeness and warmth and silence, just the two of them again, even though they were still buzzing a little from the friendship and the drinks. Moonlight streamed in from the skylight, falling on their entwined bodies and shining brightly on the pale platinum streaks in her hair. They were luminous in the darkness and Logan couldn't resist petting her, pushing his fingers into her hair to stroke along her scalp and wind the heavy fall around his wrist as they talked.

Her hands were drawn to him, too. She was wearing thin, silky thermals because both of them were too tired to navigate her skin after the long evening. He was naked and her hand was between his legs, palming him with a lazy sensuality while they discussed the party.

"Thanks for tonight, sugar."

"For not guttin' the iceprick for monopolizin' my leather chair all night?"

She giggled and swatted his arm. "Come on, now! He wasn't that bad."

"Mmph. I guess I can let it go this once. Sittin' in that chair's probably the closest he'll ever get to sex with ya."

"Logan!"

"Heh. S'just now his stink'll be on it for days."

"His stink?" Her voice held a touch of amused indulgence that made his chest feel warm.

"That cheap shit he wears. Eau de douche."

He could feel her belly quiver as she laughed against him. "It's Armani! But you're right. It never did much for me, either."

"No?"

"Nah. For me it's always been leather and wintergreen..." her fingers squeezed him lightly. "The sweet scent of tobacco and the sharp tang of adamantium. Peat and yeast and the musk of good, clean sweat."

"Like that, do ya?"

"Just a bit," she teased, inhaling deeply as she nuzzled his neck. She licked the rough stubble on his throat and then curled deeper into his side and put her head on his chest.

"Good," he rumbled out, pulling her closer still and tangling their legs.
"I liked having everyone over, too. It felt nice. Cozy. I just meant thanks for tonight. I didn't want to, you know, overstep there."

The confusion in his voice was clear. "Overstep?" His hand froze in her hair.

"For asking to invite everyone to your house."

"Why ask me? You don't need my permission, kid. S'your house too. Always has been."

She picked her head up at that. "Sugar?"

"It was just a project at first. Somethin' to get me out of the Mansion. I ain't a joiner. Never have been. The only good thing that place has goin' for it is you."

She shifted restlessly against him and he could tell she wanted to disagree, but he continued before she could jump in.

"It wasn't a conscious idea— us here, like this— at least not at first." She would understand he meant them together. Lovers as well as friends. "It was a pipe dream, mostly. Then you started helpin'. Puttin' as much of yourself into this place as I did... and with all the sparks we were throwin' off each other I got to thinkin' maybe, ya know, someday..."

"You did?"

"You never noticed that I never once called this my house? Not once."

Her brows drew together in thought and he could tell she was thinking back over the last two years. "You know, you're right." It had always been the house— never my house — when he spoke to her about it. He could see that revelation had rocked her back.

Logan nodded. "But then we were just kinda in limbo and I thought that I'd just finish it for ya so you'd have a place to go even if you didn't wanna share it with me that way." The tender look in her eyes told him she understood what he couldn't say. That if she hadn't wanted him like that then he'd have given her this sanctuary and disappeared back into the transitory life he'd known for so long. Her fingers twined with his and her scent shifted towards sadness.

"Oh, sugar..."

"None of that, huh?" The last thing he wanted — ever — was to make her sad. "I was all set to just, ya know, keep on marchin' with that plan and then you said somethin' that afternoon we finished layin' the floor that got me thinkin' that maybe things might break a different way after all."

"Yeah?"

"You said it should be rich and dark to show off the rest."

"I did. I did say that." Her soft smile said she remembered that afternoon well. Sharing a beer back and forth while they surveyed their work. She'd made that deceptively simple comment and later that night told him she wrote erotica. He didn't think those two events were unrelated. He was right.

"That's when I got to thinkin' that maybe that'd work for us, too. You got a beautiful warmth in you, darlin'. I kinda thought maybe it'd work out that you'd wanna shine against me the same way. The light to my dark."

Her face softened. "That's beautiful."
"S'the truth." He simply shrugged. "I knew I was right when you wanted hickory for the table after all the choices I floated by ya." Especially on the heels of the 'little butts' comment she'd made in an unguarded moment. That afternoon had been a watershed moment in more ways than one.

She nodded, allowing him to pull her back down against his chest. "The light and the dark together. Yours and mine, both."

He grunted his assent. "I just didn't think it'd take you so damn long."

"Sorry. Are you mad about that?"

"Truth?"

"Yeah."

"A little, yeah. I'm not a patient guy, kid. That night at the Red Door almost broke me." And the following torturous months were some of the longest of his life.

"I think it broke me a little, too."

"Heh. Good."

He felt her smile against his shoulder. "It wasn't ever a question of loving you. You know that right?"

"What else could it be?"

"I've always loved all of you, sugar. Every bit. It was embracing all of me that took time. How could I expect you to walk with my heart if I hadn't learned how to do that myself first?"

His mouth open and shut a few times. He wasn't sure how to respond to such stark honesty. She stripped herself bare for him and very much expected the same naked vulnerability from him in return. It wasn't easy. They both had growing to do and that realization stung a bit, even now.

"Sometimes it's easy to forget you're just a kid."

She sighed softly. "I haven't been that since Laughlin, sugar. You know that."

He knew. "You know what I mean."

She knew, too. "I do." Her innocence and youth had been sacrificed on the altar of all the minds and memories she had within her own head. Inexperience and naiveté were two entirely different things and they'd both needed to make their peace with that.

The conversation had grown heavy again and so he nuzzled into her hair, his voice teasing now. "Too bad it didn't help you none at poker, huh? I won a lotta meals off you back then."

The Rogue stirred. "Hmm… how do you know I hadn't been lettin' you win all along, cowboy?"

His rough chuckle rumbled his chest against hers. "A win's a win, baby. Don't matter how, long as you do. Way I figure it, she wanted it or you did. Either way's fine with me."

The impossibly male answer made her laugh and then bite him sharply. The Wolverine licked her in return and then wrapped his hand around her slender throat, pulling her face to his. They breathed together in the darkness.
She broke the long silence first. "I'm different now."

She was. They both were. Different. Better. Ready to be what they both needed to step forward into the unknown.

He acknowledged that with a slow nod. "Nothin' stays the same forever."

"It really doesn't." Her voice was meditative and slow, and he knew she was only half here, the rest of her back in those memories.

After a few moments she sighed, and seemed to refocus, cuddling in closer to his side. "So then...our house," she said, as if she needed to hear it out loud, tasting the words on full, red lips.

"Yep."

She traced her fingers through his chest hair, and he could tell she was still processing it. "Who we were then, and who we are now."

He rumbled his agreement, his own big callused hand coming up to clasp hers. "And who we're gonna be."

He could feel her smile against his skin. "I like that," she said softly.

The Wolverine did, too. Felt it down to the marrow of his metal bones.

His hands tightened on hers for emphasis. Neither of them needed more words. The future was written around them in the home they'd built together, brick by brick, choice by choice. A silent testament to the passion and volatility of their wilder counterparts, a continuation of an unspoken dialogue they'd begun on a snowy road years ago.

The moonlight had shifted, leaving their faces in shadow now as it made a slow egress down their bodies to paint the whorls and flecks of cork floor in tones of silver and slate.

Everything was always in transition. Waxing and waning, a push and pull that was both violent and gentle in turns.

Years. It had taken years for them to be able to close their eyes under the blanket of stars and sleep as they were meant to. Human animals, but animals at the core of their true selves. And there was a simple rightness that echoed for them both in the clarity of that moment. Strong male arms around a soft female body. Safe from the elements and surrounded by a den built together to welcome what came next.

They had shed their too-small skins and emerged as something new, still fragile but vital and strong; their sharp broken bits beautifully joined.

Mates.

The End

Author's note: Okay, I lied. It's not really the end. Think of it more like intermission before the interlude at the Red Door. Two chapters? Three? No idea how many more are (ahem) coming. Haven't written 'em yet. Hah! Give me a week or two to bang something out. This 'final' chapter is
so hot off the press that I haven't even thought ahead to what the Red Door chapters might be called. Now taking suggestions! Bonus points for any 80's song that references the color red – or sex clubs. You never know what'll spark the bunnies…

I will say now that if my WolverineMuse gets his way (and let's face it, we all know he totally will) it's going to be epically smutastic – to the power of ten. You have been warned! Y'all can consider what happened at the Halloween party a warm up for the main event. At least, that's the current plan. I'm gonna have a little powwow with the bunnies just as soon as my cake coma wears off…

Feedback is love!

Up next: **YOUR GUESS IS AS GOOD AS MINE! ;)**
Lady In Red

Author's note: Sorry, y'all. I'm still chasing my own tail here between the epic crazy at work and a home reno project that's grown exponentially. Confession: This was finished last weekend but my beta's been on vacay. I will gladly throw her under the bus! ((grin)) Hopefully this double length chapter will keep ya goin' until I can finish (read: write!) the next part. Onward!

The Wolverine heard his woman before he saw her. Her boot heels rang sharply on the concrete floor of the garage. He turned his head. She was wearing his cowboy hat and a sweet little red sundress, lit from behind by the late afternoon sun. God only knew what she had on under it. Probably nothing. No gloves either, which meant she'd come from their house and not the school. He wondered what was on her mind.

The inattention cost him a chunk of knuckle to the old Indian he was in the process of restoring. "Fuck," he hissed, sucking the blood from the newly healing skin as he sat up for a better look.

"Looks good, sugar." Her eyes lingered on the bike, noting the changes since she'd last seen it. He'd mounted the tank and the headlight and was now working on the brake assembly.

His eyes never left her. "Sure does."

She tossed him a beer that he narrowly missed catching because he was still looking at her legs.

Marie snapped her fingers. "Up here, cowboy."

"Gettin' there," he grunted, touching her lightly behind the knee before he stood up and brushed his knuckles up her spine. "Takin' the scenic route." When he kissed her she tasted like Molson and Marie.

He chuckled when she grabbed his ass and gave it an appreciative squeeze before hopping up on the tailgate of his truck next to the open toolbox. She made room for him between her knees and pulled him close for a moment, resting her head on his shoulder with a soft contented sigh before she pushed him away.

"Make up your mind, kid. You're givin' me whiplash here." He squeezed her thigh with his free hand, not moving closer but not retreating, either. She was in a strange mood and the Rogue's fire burned brightly in her eyes. Definitely a woman on a mission. He drained the beer in four long swallows and set it on the tailgate.

"You'll live. At least for now." Her smile sharpened. "Watcha doin'?"

"Fishin'," he deadpanned.

Marie threw back her head and laughed. The rich sound was infectious and made his lips twitch too.

"You know, you told me the same thing that afternoon I came in here and asked you to take me to the Red Door."

"Yeah?" All he remembered was the way she'd stroked the tank of his bike and her luscious scent, fertile and ripe.
"Yep." She met his eyes. "I was wondering what you thought about a repeat performance."

She wasn't quite sure what he'd think of that, but she hadn't expected to see all the amusement leave his face. His expression was intense.

"Don't ask me for that unless you're prepared for what comes after."

"What comes after?"

"I can't do that again. Not like it was before. Not now."

"Who says I want that?" His eyes widened slightly. "I'd be disappointed if you kept your hands to yourself this time, sugar," she purred, raking her fingers down his chest with a little shimmy that made his jaw clench. "Let me break it down for you, cowboy. I'm inviting you, this time."

"That right?"

"Sure is."

"Invitin' me to do what, exactly?" She could see the points of his claws beginning to emerge and she wondered what was going through his head.

"To watch a show. Just watch. And maybe fool around together after. I'm not interested in anyone but you touchin' me, sugar."

"Good. I'd kill any man who tried." He didn't even raise his voice. It was a pure statement of fact.

"Any man? What if it was a woman?"

"Don't go there unless you're ready for the answer."

"Try me."

He merely grunted. The answer was complicated. He couldn't deny that he had fantasies about her with another woman. What man didn't think about his woman's mouth between another woman's legs at some point? However the more primal part of his nature was wildly, violently opposed to the idea. The Wolverine was wholly and intractably about monogamy and having her smell of no one but him. Period.

"Sugar?"

His smile sharpened and that playful light crept back into his eyes. "You sayin' you wanna suck a pussy for me, darlin'?"

The deliberately crude words got their intended reaction. A bolt of heat struck her so hard that if she'd been standing, she'd have swayed on her feet. Marie felt her face heat and shifted restlessly on the tailgate.

"Logan!"

"Heh." He smirked at the expression on her face. "Don't look at me, kid. S'on you. Ain't me drivin' this train."

Her gaze sharpened and she suddenly seemed less a rabbit run to ground and more the predator stalking her own prey. " Damn straight." The Rogue hooked her boot around the back of his calf and pulled him closer, spreading her thighs to accommodate his heavy frame. He was close enough now
that she could feel his body heat through his jeans. She could smell him, too. Sweat and man and engine grease and that crisp scent of the outdoors that always clung to him.

"Whatcha lookin' for here, baby? Because if it's just about scratchin' a dirty little itch, we can do that in the Danger Room without bringin' anyone else into it." The Wolverine didn't give a shit about computer generated 'people'. No scent. No heartbeat. No blood pounding with fear or lust. They were beneath him. The idea had caught the man's interest, however. He'd read her stories. There were a few he wouldn't mind revisiting in that environment.

Marie understood what he wasn't saying. A romp in the Danger Room wouldn't put anyone else in physical jeopardy the way a return trip to the Red Door would.

"It's not that."

"You after somethin' wilder?" There was an edge to his voice. He gestured to his chest and then hers. "This not enough?"

Her other leg wound around the back of his thigh and she pulled him flush against her crotch, still leaning back on her hands, looking up at the harsh lines of his face.

"Sugar, everything I want is right here. We could get in this truck right now, drive away and I'd never look back."

"Mmph." Her scent said that was the stone cold truth. She was a soft touch about a lot of things, but when it came right down to brass tacks, she was a slash and burn kinda girl. No prisoners. No regrets, either.

"You're right, though. I do want something wilder. But I want it with you. I want to know what you did there. I want to do it with you." She wanted to make sure she had all of him. To know all of him.

He suddenly understood. This was less about wanting a walk on the wild side and more about staking the ultimate claim. It was possession, pure and simple. She wanted all of him.

That he understood all too well.

They both knew she had him then when the growl of approval was out before he could respond in words. "Grrr....."

"Mmm... Is that a yes, sugar?"

"You best be sure, darlin'. It ain't somethin' I can turn on and off. Once we're there and he's engaged, we're all along for the ride until he's good and done."

Her scent bloomed at that, slick and full and luscious; creamy against the fly of his jeans.

"That a yes, baby?" He dropped his hand and squeezed her thigh, leaving behind dark fingerprints and dirty smudges as his fingers trailed higher, pushing up the hem of her sassy fire engine red sundress as he went. It matched her ruby red pout. Full rosy lips curling up into a sultry smile.

Her breasts heaved. She was still leaning back, her palms braced behind her on the bed of the truck, but her legs were wrapped around his hips and he could feel the heels of her favorite boots digging into the back of his thighs. She was beginning to rock against him a little, rubbing that gorgeous scent over the bulge at the front of his jeans. He leaned in, enjoying her soft gasp. She was bare under that little dress and he knew the buttons on his fly would hurt good.
He flicked the brim of her cowboy hat higher so he could keep eye contact with her as he moved closer still. "Still didn't get an answer, baby. Least not one from your mouth." He nipped her sharply. "We goin'? Yes or no?"

She giggled, shivering at the rough bristly stubble on his face. "Hell, yes." She was mildly annoyed that he'd turned her invitation around on her. "I'll let you know when."

He grunted in amusement at that. Staying one step ahead of her was increasingly difficult and he enjoyed the hell out of that challenge.

"As for the rest? I'll be waiting."

"Waitin'?"

"For your follow-through, this time. You talk a big game, but maybe you're all hat and no cattle."

He chuckled. "Guess we'll find out soon enough."

"Sugar, I'm gonna blow your mind."

Of that, he had no doubt.

The white eyelet lace edging her dress tickled the back of his hand as they both looked down at the possessive mark he'd made on her creamy thigh. His big paw had left a dirty handprint that practically screamed Property of the Wolverine. His fingers inched higher under her skirt.

"Don't you dare get this dress dirty, cowboy." She said it like a challenge.

"Heh." His eyebrow rose. "You always gotta push."

"Yeah," she said, smiling up at him through her lashes.

She was completely unprepared for him to pull away abruptly. She was forced to unclasp her legs or risk falling to the floor of the garage. He took advantage of her momentary instability and wrapped one big hand around her upper arm, just below the sleeve of her dress.

He could tell he'd caught her off guard because he felt the draw of her skin ripple through him as he jerked her off the tailgate. It was forceful but not violent. He spun her around, her back to his front, letting go of her arm and pinning her against the unforgiving metal of one frame with the heavy metal of another. The empty beer bottle wobbled and fell with the force of the impact, smashing on the floor with a sharp crunch that made her flinch.

Logan knew it was almost not right, but he also knew she liked these kinds of games as much as he liked the freedom to use his weight and power to his advantage.

He put his hand on her throat. This time, she was in control enough of her skin that the draw didn't begin right away. The more they played these impromptu erotic games, the better she got at controlling her skin. She'd only gotten a bit of Mississippi inside her this time.

"Pull up the back of your skirt," he growled into her ear.

"God!" She complied immediately, tugging hard at the fabric that was trapped between their bodies with desperate fingers. The edge of the tailgate dug into her hips as his considerable weight pressed into her from behind. She could feel the rough denim against the smooth skin of her buttocks and thighs.
Logan took the opportunity to slide his hand into the front of her dress to cup a breast. He'd been right. She was completely bare beneath that little dress. He pinched her nipple with a knowing grin. She should be rewarded. God knew he wanted to encourage more of that in the future.

He pushed his hips against hers, aware the indirect stimulation would be maddening. She whimpered and tried to spread her legs and bend forward even more but he grabbed her arms instead, chuckling as she squirmed, body looking for more friction. From him. From the tailgate. Anything. She'd be touching herself if he hadn't trapped her arms.

Pulling her back into him, he ground against her ass. "Y'like that, baby?"

"Yes...."

Christ, the lush scent of her want was killing him.

"Got your attention now?"

His skin tingled where he was touching her and he was forced to let go and readjust his grip to avoid the draw of her mutation. It left another set of smudgy prints on her wrists to match the ones on her upper arms, neck and thigh. He wet his lips with the unconscious urge to bite her. Hard.

"Unnngh..." Her skin flipped on just for a second and the buzz electrified them both. The force of his wildness rushed into her and she rumbled a feminine growl back at him. "Rrrr...."

"Heh." That sound got to him every time. He let her wrists go. "Hands on the bed of the truck." He followed her in, putting his hands to the outside of hers. Not touching her skin at all now, but very aware of the sweet ass rubbing against his crotch as he caged her in. The button fly hurt good for him, too. Christ, he was hard. He could feel the blood pounding in the thick stand of flesh trapped between their bodies.

She wiggled against him, smiling as he groaned. He might have the upper hand, but she wasn't without power of her own.

He could tell what she wanted. What she expected. It was unlikely they'd even get caught in the two or three minutes it would take for him to rip open his pants and fuck her hard until they both came. If she'd been fertile and peaking today, he'd probably have been unable to resist, but she wasn't, and for as much as they both enjoyed dirty little quickies, he also enjoyed his role as her teacher.

Her appetite for pleasure was every bit as voracious as his own. She was curious and playful. Her inexperience was both an aphrodisiac and a shackle, firing their blood even as it held them back from the places they longed to explore. He enjoyed pushing her, and teaching her; challenging her to new and dizzying heights of pleasure. She had few hard limits and he relished finding the edges where the Rogue's brazen wantonness stopped and his sweet Marie began. The lines were all over the place. She was delightfully unpredictable.

"Please tell me you have a condom," she panted. Her control was too spotty today. It would be better for them both if they didn't have to think about her skin in their rush to pleasure.

"I do." Strip of three in his wallet, like always.

"Then whatcha waitin' on, cowboy? Giddyup before we get caught!"

He slapped her bare ass for her insolence and enjoyed the following dirty handprint on her skin as well as the red mark that followed.
"No."

"No?" The confusion in her voice was as sweet as the frisson of disappointment in her scent.

"This ain't your rodeo, darlin'."

"You want something else?" He saw her eyes dart to the truck's cab and then the bathroom and then the little office in the corner of the garage. It had a door that locked, too. Her scent grew even thicker with lust and he rubbed against her in spite of himself. Her gaze fell on the open toolbox at their feet. Plenty of smooth solid tools with thick round handles. The Rogue was an impatient lover. Always pushing him to keep the lead. "What do you want?" She was clearly up for whatever he had in mind and he almost felt bad about wasting that opportunity, but it was a different lesson he had in mind for today.

"Wantcha to shut up and listen."

His head reared back as she turned her face and tried to bite him. He wound a hand into her hair and kept her still while he put his mouth to delicate whorl of her ear.

"I wanna talk about the Red Door."

He felt her shiver hard against him and she nodded.

"Your idea. Your show. My rules." She shivered again and he wondered if her thighs were slick yet. "That make you hot, baby?"

She bit her lip in answer, still willing to play his game for now.

"I wantcha to wear your tallest, dirtiest fuck-me boots and the shortest, sluttiest black skirt outta the firecracker's closet."

"God!" That would be positively indecent. Jubilee was smaller than she was and a skirt that fitted would be much shorter stretched over her own ample curves. Her chin lifted defiantly. "So I take it we're not going on the bike? Unless you're looking to get arrested on the way there?"

He snorted in amusement. "S'your show. You can get us there however you like, kid." The gleam in her eye said she was going to make him sorry for tossing that back at her. Christ, he hoped she'd try. Half the shit he said to her was tossed out there just to see what she'd do with it.

"Just the boots and the skirt, cowboy?" Her voice shook with fear and excitement and he wondered if he said 'yes' if she'd do it just to show him up. Probably. Which made him proud and excited even as his stomach roiled with the desire to kill anyone who dared to touch what was his.

"Nope." He shook his head slowly and took a moment to lick a long slow stripe up her neck. "Wanna see ya in that sheer black blouse with the leopard bra under. Black gloves. Wrist length. Leather." The black satin ones were his favorite, but there was something about leather on her that sent his libido into a whole different gear.

"No panties?"

"Not unless you want me to cut 'em off before we leave." That earned him a fiery glare. She liked expensive lingerie, when she wore any at all. She liked the bladeplay, too. Just not the cost of replacing the things he shredded. He was not a patient man.

"What's a girl supposed to think of that, I wonder? You wanna show me off?"
He couldn't help but notice the shiver that sent through her. Interesting.

"Darlin', they can look. They just can't touch."

"And you, sugar? You gonna touch me?" She rubbed against him pointedly.

"Not now." He stepped back and almost laughed at her screech of outrage as she turned around on shaky legs to glare at him. "I gotta bike that needs fixin'," he added, just to wind her up that much more.

"And what if I do the touchin'?" She hopped back up on the tailgate and opened her legs suggestively, trailing her slim white fingers up her thigh and pulling the hem of her little red dress up as she went.

He raised an eyebrow, wondering how far she was willing to take this game of chicken. Her eyes darkened as the handprint he'd left on her thigh appeared, a stark contrast against her pale skin.

"Go right ahead, kid. We both know that ain't whatcha really want." He ran a palm over the obscene bulge directly under his showy buckle. "Got that right here."

He stepped between her spread knees. She shot him a look of triumph that became a pout when she realized he wasn't going to touch her. At least, not the way her body was screaming for.

"Heh." He rubbed a thumb over the fingerprints on her thigh and then her wrist before catching her eye.

"What?" she huffed petulantly, her body shifting uncomfortably on the hard metal seat. She ached to feel him over her and inside her. The weight of his body. The scent of his skin and breath. The burn and stretch of penetration and the thick heaviness that wound tighter and tighter as he rutted and thrust and teased until she snapped. The boneless lethargy that followed. Feeling him shudder and spend himself against her. Watching his face slide into vulnerability after. She craved him. All of him. Everything.

"Marked ya real good." Neck. Breasts. Thighs. Buttocks. Wrists. Arms. Not so much as a smear on her dress, though. Generally he didn't give a fuck about the rules, but occasionally bending them was more fun than breaking them outright.

Her eyes narrowed. He'd followed the letter of the law rather than the spirit. And she'd enjoyed every damn bit of it. He knew it, too.

"I marked you too." Her eyes flashed at him provocatively and she trailed a fingertip over the slippery iridescence drying on the front of his jeans. Jesus, he loved her like this. All prickly and defiant, spitting like a feral cat.

Logan took her hand in his and lifted it to his mouth, intent on savoring even that faint lingering taste. He chuckled when she jerked her hand away, depriving them both of that sensory experience.

Sliding a dirty hand up under skirt, he grabbed her ass and pulled her flush against him. Hard. He couldn't tell from the expression on her face if she wanted to bite him or kiss him or both. Where their volatile, wilder counterparts were involved, there was a fine line between fighting and sex.

"I know ya want it," he rumbled against her skin. "Bad." He rocked against her and they both shuddered. "I do too." There was no denying it in the worn jeans he favored, even if she wasn't pressed up against his erection.
"Then what the hell's the problem, cowboy?"

"Not a damn thing." The look of genuine confusion on her face blunted the sharper edge of his desire. "I wantcha to feel this way. Hot. Wet. Needy. I wantcha to think about it all day. How much you want it. How slick it feels when you walk 'cause you're so damn wet. That heavy feelin' in your belly that tells ya you need to be fucked good n' hard."

"God!" Her eyes were big as dinner plates, pupils blown wide.

He pulled her closer. "I wantcha to think about this." He thrust against her hard enough that they both saw stars. "I wantcha to think about my cock. How good it feels when I make ya come on it over and over 'till ya need some Mississippi in ya to keep on goin'."

"Ooohhh…" Her lashes fluttered shut and her mouth fell open in a soft pant and Logan wondered if he could make her come this way, just with his voice and the agonizingly indirect friction, but that wasn't what he wanted. Not today. Today he was after the burn. The wait. The buildup.

"I wantcha to want so much ya can't think about anythin' else but havin' me between your legs. When you bend over, I wantcha to think about me behind you. When ya sit down, I wantcha to shiver because the impact ain't enough. Not without me under ya. When your clothes move on your skin, I wantcha to think about my hands on ya. Holdin' ya down." He moved closer, so she could feel his breath on her skin. "Holdin' ya close."

"Sugar, please…"

He chuckled into her hair. "Trust me, darlin'." She stiffened a little against him and he backed off because he didn't want to make her come. Not now. Not yet. "You'll like it this way. The waitin' makes it better. Makes it so ya come harder than you ever thought you could. By the time I come find ya later, you'll be so wild for it that I bet I could make ya come just from spreadin' your legs and blowin' over that hot, wet skin."

"Unnh…" Her whole body shuddered.

He stepped back. "None of that now, baby. Wait for tonight. No touchin' yourself, either. I wantcha wild for me. So hot for it you'll do anythin' I want." His voice dropped. "Anythin'." The bass rumble made her shiver.

Good. She should feel that way. 'Anything' covered a hell of a lot of ground between two creatures as wild as the Wolverine and the Rogue.

She turned and he let her, her face staring up into his with a light in her eyes that he'd never seen before.

"What about you, cowboy?"

"Me?"

"You gonna think about me all day, too?" she purred. "How your eyes squeeze shut when you first push in? How sometimes it's so good you shake after? How wet you make me? How tight I am, still." His jaw clenched. "You're the only one who's ever touched me that way. Who's ever come in me. I love it so much."

"Say it again."

She knew what he wanted to hear.
"You're the only one for me, sugar. The only one."

"Fuck," he breathed, as caught up in the game now as she was.

She laughed and her eyes drifted down his body to the erection straining under the worn denim. "That's gonna hurt later."

His brow lifted. "I'll heal."

She giggled again, and before he quite knew what she was doing, she'd swiped her fingers between her legs and run the wet, glistening digits over his nose and mouth. "Heal from that, cowboy."

A growl ripped through the air. He shuddered as he drew in a breath so completely saturated with her scent that the world went a little hazy around the edges as the Wolverine joined the party. Logan couldn't help opening his mouth and panting, tongue flicking out to savor her as deeply as possible. His eyes were on fire, gold and wild.

"I want you thinkin' about me all day, too. Both of you."

"Gonna make ya pay for that later, little girl."

The shards of brown glass crunched sharply under her boots as she sashayed away. "You damn sure better, sugar."

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Up next: No idea! Haven't written it yet. Heh. I'm flying completely without a net here. ;)

Now taking suggestions for what y'all wanna see go down at the Red Door. My Wolverine muse has some pretty damn specific ideas, but he's always open to a dirty suggestion or two. What kinda erotic show will the Wolverine and the Rogue watch this time? Will anything happen between them before? After? Shall I include Willow again? Will the Feral Mississippi Man make another appearance? If you have a bunny, now's the time to fling it!
Author's note: So, yeah. My WolverineMuse has been a surly, uncooperative pain the ass these last few weeks. I would apologize for him, but he makes no apologies for his temperament. I have plenty of bunnies biting. Just not for THIS particular story. WTF is up with that? Pfff! I finally caved and sprang for a sampler of Alaskan ale in an effort to wrangle/bribe him into, uh, cooperation. (The Wolverine does NOT do submission, but apparently he's open to… coercion… under the right circumstances.) The Freeride APA Pale Ale was a bit of a disappointment (too green/fruity for this dark beer lovin' girl) but the Amber Ale and Summer Ale seemed to do the trick for him - and for me. ) Onward.

The Wolverine's heavy boots beat a soft, familiar cadence on the porch. The smooth, weathered boards surrounded the small cabin nestled back in the trees. The home he shared with Marie was a welcome sight after five days on a close-quarters mission with the Firecracker and the Popsicle. It had been pretty routine in all respects. Long. Mostly boring. Too much surveillance and too little action to suit his personal tastes, rounded out with the usual puerile bullshit and trash talk to kill time, with a bit of heat at the end when it all hit the fan. Serious, but still on the 'amusing' side of the shitstorm spectrum.

They'd had a safe-house for a base of operations this time. Logan wasn't even sure it counted as a full-blown mission if there were still regular showers, hot coffee and cold beer. The company had left a lot to be desired, however. Even if one discounted Drake and Lee, two days in, they'd been joined by a second team led by some young jerkoff; a brash, impetuous kid who liked fire, the limelight, and the ladies a little too much. There's a fine line between a cool demonstration of showy powers and 'ohfuckFIRE!'

Flame on, asshole.

Logan was not impressed and hated these joint training missions that 'Ro was so fond of springing on them in the name of cooperation and flexibility. Fuck that noise. The mission had similarly flamed out spectacularly. No casualties, but heavy collateral damage.

Traumatic, even, if one counted being forced to spend five days sharing a small bathroom with Jubilee. Logan had survived by keeping to himself, sleeping outside despite autumn's crisp chill, and by a few truly filthy texts from Marie. They had done more to sustain him and keep him warm than the bottle of shitty tequila he'd found stashed in a hall closet.

He'd had to coax the first few out of her, but he should have known better than to bait someone who'd spent the last few years perfecting the art of writing erotica. Talk about lighting a fire that couldn't be banked. Even the hairier parts of the skirmish at the end of the mission didn't really take the edge off — not even when the world, or their little corner of it, had literally burned down around them. All that did was stoke his personal fire even hotter.

Logan was surprised Marie hadn't met him in the hangar. When she hadn't turned up after the debriefing, he went looking for her. It was unlike her not to seek him out on his return. Even though she knew he healed, she still liked to reassure herself he was in one piece, especially when they weren't paired together. She was still unpredictable, perhaps more than ever now that she'd truly
embraced the Rogue, but they rarely missed a chance to reconnect after a long mission.

He was unzipping his uniform jacket as he slipped in the back door. At least the uniforms had gotten better over the years. No more ridiculously uncomfortable bodysuits. He'd never liked those. Thankfully, that old adage - nothing stays the same forever - also applied to their uniforms. Now they were more like military inspired biking leathers, with kevlar plackets for the members of the team that didn't heal or shift to ice or metal. More functional. Easier to move in. Easier to blend into a crowd, too.

Logan tossed his jacket on the couch and rolled his neck, feeling his muscles shift stiffly under the white tank. The flight home had been long and the debriefing even longer. He was restless and needed to move. Grabbing a beer from the fridge, he tossed the cap on the counter and took a few deep swallows, allowing the silence and serenity of their home to sink into his bones as he stood there and breathed in the peace surrounding him.

It centered him in a way the beer could not. "Baby? You home?" His voice was rough from disuse. He'd hardly said a word in days.

"Hey, sugar." Her sultry drawl drifted down from above and curled around him, slow and sweet in his ear. "Up here." His eyes flicked up to the loft and he wondered if maybe she hadn't come meet to find him because she'd been waiting for him in their bed. He was definitely on board with that plan.

Abandoning the beer, he took the stairs two at a time. While he hadn't exactly expected a rose strewn bower, he was mildly annoyed at the lack of a greeting of any sort, never mind his fleeting fantasy of finding her posed provocatively or waiting in the bed, dressed in something specifically designed to make him hot and stupid. In fact, the room looked exactly as it had when he'd left and there was no sign of Marie.

"Darlin'?"

"In here." Her voice floated, muffled, from the closet. She appeared at the door, a soft smile on her full lips as she took him in with her eyes, reassuring herself he was unharmed and in one piece. That flash of concern, first, before the flash of heat made his chest tight. The sight of her in a leopard print bra and panties edged in black lace made other things tighten as well.

_Goddamn._ She was probably grinning like a Cheshire cat, but his eyes weren't on her face. Miles of smooth, white skin. Hair tumbling down all around her shoulders, shiny and a little wild. And Christ, those luscious breasts pushed up on offer…

He took an aggressive step forward.

"Stop."

It was her tone and not the word itself that held him in place. His brow arched. He was willing to indulge her, for now. Her attitude and attire suggested he was going to enjoy the hell out of whatever she had in mind.

"Fuck," he breathed. "Y'look good. C'mere, kid."

"Back atcha, cowboy. But you sit that fine ass down. I'm not quite ready yet."

"Yes, ma'am." He sat, chuckling in amusement at her sass. "Don't put on anythin' you want left in one piece after," he warned. He could already feel the points of his claws digging into the backs of his knuckles. "N'hurry the fuck up, huh?"
"Impatient, are we?" Marie reappeared at the door, holding something black and silky in her hands. He wasn't really paying attention. His eyes were on her breasts and then on that magnificent ass as she disappeared back into the closet.

"Fuck, yes." He could hear rustling and then the distinctive purr of metallic teeth. He hoped she'd taken his warning to heart. In the right mood, he enjoyed slicing things from her body, but generally not when he was this close to the edge.

"Is that right? Well, I hear a little waitin' makes it better." She was still making him pay for that afternoon in the garage a few months back. Another agonizing metallic rasp vibrated in his sensitive ears. "Or so I've been told…"

"Heh." That was one lesson she'd learned damn well. "Baby, you got about ten seconds before—" He stopped mid-word when she strolled out of the closet, shoulders back and hips swinging.

His eyes followed the thigh-high leather fuck-me boots up her toned legs. There was a creamy expanse of thigh visible between the top of her boots and the hem of an impossibly indecent black skirt. Alabaster breasts bound in leopard peeped from the deep v of her sheer blouse.

"Jesus fuck," he muttered, sitting back to take in the view while she pulled on her wrist length leather riding gloves. He felt like there was something he should remember, but all his blood had long since left his brain. There was a rushing in his ears and all he could focus on was how much he wanted to touch her and how fast he could get them naked enough to shove inside and hear her voice break on his name.

"You ready to go?"

"Go?" The words didn't even penetrate. "Fuck, yeah. I'm good to go…" he reached for his tank.

"Leave it on."

That got her the raised brow and he wondered what she had in mind and how long he'd be able to let her play before the the chains that shackled his wilder counterpart snapped entirely. He could already feel them slipping.

"C'mere." It was an order, however softly delivered.

She stalked closer, but the look in her eye said she did it because she wanted to, not because she was in any mood for compliance.

"I missed you, sugar." One step. Another.

"Mmph."

Christ, those boots were fucking killing him. She rarely wore them. They were too high to fight in. In his experience, women wore boots like that for one reason, and one reason only. The last time they'd made an appearance she'd asked for a shibari lesson. He'd agreed. The lesson had come much later, after she was naked. He'd ordered her to keep the boots on, though. It had begun with an intricate corset of ropes he'd tied with a complex series of knots trailing beautifully down her spine, and it had ended with the whisper of claws, warm and smooth and sharp.

While he was away, she'd texted him a photo of a recent purchase. Black Japanese silk cord. No words. Just the artfully twisted hank, gleaming on their bearskin rug in the firelight. It was pure erotica. Nothing graphic, but a powerfully charged image that had lingered in his head and left him aroused for hours.
He'd texted back an extreme close up video of the claws extending from his left hand. Just the knuckles and the blades. Nothing else. It was barely a handful of seconds long, but wildly pornographic, given the context and subtext of their wordless conversation. Roundaboutly, a tribute and a warning, as well as a promise of good things to come.

"C'mere, kid." His tone said he wasn't going to ask again.

She hummed softly, slinking closer in anticipation. The flare of his nostrils and the rise of his chest as he brought in her scent was swiftly followed by a flash of gold in his eyes. His body jerked slightly, and the heat behind his gaze blazed hotter.

Ohfuck, yes. Fertile today. Not peaking. Not yet. A day or two away, maybe, but that thick luscious scent filled his head and made his blood pound wildly.

"Christ," he growled, reaching for her; hands firm on her ass as he pulled her in. The impact of her soft form crashing into his unyielding frame made them both shudder. When she was peaking, he was almost unable to control the animal's instinctive response to his mate's fertility. Slick and open and ripe was an invitation he could not decline or delay. Though Logan had a small modicum of control now, he wasn't the slightest bit inclined to use it. A growl rumbled low in his chest as he dragged in more and more of that intoxicating scent. "Fuck," he rasped against her skin, pushing his face into her neck as he rubbed up against her, using the hands he had on her ass to rock her back and forth over the hard ridge straining against the restrictive leather.

"Mmm..."

He was reaching down to pull up the sinfully short hem of her skirt when he realized she wasn't writhing to grind on him but to struggle away. They played that game sometimes, too, and the idea that she might invite being overpowered right now lit a fire in some savage place that wasn't about to be appeased by anything other than her full submission.

"Logan!" She shoved at his chest and he held her tighter, enjoying the way she struggled against him. Her scent said she was enjoying it too. It was that sense he was listening with and he missed the determined look in her eyes. When he didn't immediately comply, she let him have it. No tingling buzz of warning, but the sear of her mutation at full-throttle, crawling under his skin, a delicious scorch that demanded respect and could not be ignored.

They broke apart, breathless, panting for different reasons. The world was spinning a little and his wildness glittered in her eyes. Seeing it there racheted his own libido up a few notches.

"Goddamn," he muttered. If that was her opening volley, he couldn't wait to see where they'd eventually wind up.

"Do I have your attention now, cowboy?"

"Had it before."

"Both heads, this time?" She'd had the animal's attention from the moment he'd caught that scent, but she wanted his rational mind, too. Higher brain functions were definitely required for what she had in mind tonight.

"Heh. All three of 'em." He rubbed the heel of his hand over the bulge at the front of his pants pointedly.

"I like the way you think, but hold that thought for a minute. I have plans for you tonight."
His tongue wet his bottom lip and gave the distinct impression that he had plans as well, and his included eating her alive with sharp, white teeth. The look on his face made her shiver. He saw it and grinned predatorily, even as she slipped away and propped a hip in the doorway leading downstairs.

Interesting. If she wanted him to chase her, he was more than ready. Through the house. Through the woods. Through the lower levels. Hell, any fucking place. They both knew that was only going to end one way. She was calling to the beast and he was willing to oblige.

"Plans?"

Christ, her tits looked good in that bra. His mouth was watering and he was still really only half paying attention to her words. He was reading her with all his senses and some of them couldn't be silenced or forced into submission even if he wanted to.

She snapped her fingers, a testament to how perfectly the fine leather fitted. "Hey. Up here." The crisp sound brought his head up sharply.

"Can't blame me for that. When a woman wears somethin' like that, she wants a man to look."

"Oh, I hope it's more than look, sugar." He started towards her again and she put up her hands in the universal 'stop' gesture. "Slow your roll there, huh? A woman also wears something like this for other reasons…"

"That right?" He was openly leering, a dirty smirk on his face.

"Yep." She undid another button on the blouse, putting even more creamy cleavage on display.

"Like when her lover orders up a specific look for a night at the Red Door."

His eyes flicked to hers, hot and wild. "Marie," he warned as that memory flooded back. She couldn't possibly be serious.

"Growl away. You can't tell me you're not in the mood." Everything about him, from his bearing to his countenance to that casually dominant stance, screamed just how in the mood he was.

"Jesusfuckingchrist!" he spat. He didn't even try to censor his immediate, volatile reaction. "Tonight? Like this? You aimin' for blood or tryin' to get someone killed?"

"Be serious! Of course I don't want that."

His eyes darkened dangerously. "S'in the mix somewhere though, ain't it?" They both remembered the first time he'd killed for her in battle. They'd barely made it into the relative privacy of the nearby trees before falling on each other with a feral intensity that shocked him even now. Logan wondered if she'd felt the same heavy feeling in her belly that he had. Shame? Guilt? Remorse? Whatever it was, it was never enough to actually stop what came after. Still, he reasoned that he'd never ended someone who didn't need ending. He enjoyed the hell out of what came after though, and she did, too.

But it wasn't something they talked about.

He wondered if this was maybe a toehold for a later conversation.

She shrugged. "Maybe, but that's not what I'm after tonight."

"Coulda fooled me," he grunted, feeling decidedly uncomfortable, probably because the idea of owning her and being owned by her and having the freedom to show that off to the world in
whatever way he wanted felt a little too good. He'd always been a possessive bastard, and she knew — she fucking knew — what that scent did to him. "Takin' you there with that scent on ya? Jesus, Marie! What the fuck?" That was just asking for someone to get gutted.

"I want wild, sugar. I want crazy. But nobody'll get hurt. It's early, still. It's not… I'm not—"

"Peaking?" he added, with more than a little heat.

She was right. She was fertile now but not ovulating. He understood what she was asking. He was on the edge. Not over it. Not yet. But soon. A day or two, at most.

"I want to go there with you. Now. Tonight. Like this."

Like this. He knew what she meant. He could feel it too, the distance. The frustration. The wildness lingering from the mission crawling through his blood. The desire to join with her after a week away underscored heavily by the instinctive, primal drive to impregnate his mate. Charged as they were, whatever happened would be incendiary.

"No," he said, but they could both tell he was wavering.

"Yes," she soothed, knowing that she'd already won. The Wolverine looked out at her through Logan's eyes. He was already on her side. It was only a matter of time now. "You won't hurt me."

That earned her a short, clipped bark of amusement. "Ain't you I'm worried about, darlin'." It struck him then how far they'd come. How far he'd come.

"I won't let you hurt anyone."

She had the power to stop him, that was true, and he wouldn't change that for the world, but it still made him bristle. However much he loved her, it still stung his pride a little that of all people, it was this slip of a girl who could bring him to his knees. It came out as a growl, low and deep. He was across the room in three long strides and wrapping his fingers around her slender throat a heartbeat later.

Anyone else would have submitted, or at least dropped their gaze in deference to what was clearly a display of power and possession. The Rogue just threw back her head and laughed, eyes sparkling at her lover. He belonged to her, too. She wasn't afraid of him. "So that's a yes?"

He nipped her sharply and lifted his head, eyes blazing. "Get your coat."

Up next… well, it doesn't have a title yet, but you can be sure it's gonna be smutty as all hell. Heh.
Red Red Wine

Author's note: My WolverineMuse is still giving me a run for the money. Bastard! (Is it wrong that I still like him when he's surly and irascible? Maybe especially then? Heh.) My apologies for the delay in posting. My beta went on an impromptu vacay and then I got sucked into some craziness at work. I'm not sure when the next chapter will be finished. Every time I sit down to write the Red Door bits, other (ahem - smutty) bunnies jump in line. I'm sure you're all surprised. lol Still, there are worse things than an overabundance of smut, hey? ;) Hopefully this double length chapter will hold you a while. Onward!

The Rogue made him wait again when they got downstairs. This time Logan was too keyed up to sit in a chair having a beer while she primped. He knew she'd done it on purpose. As if he needed to be wound any tighter?

Hell, she wouldn't even let him change. Apparently whatever plans she had for tonight included his uniform. After seeing the look in her eyes when she'd all but ordered him to keep the tank and the leathers, he didn't even want to change, despite the lingering scent of char and smoke. He paced impatiently in front of the fire, killing off the beer he'd abandoned earlier and opening another.

Just five minutes, she'd said, that fine ass swinging as she disappeared into the bathroom. He'd snorted. She never took just five minutes and frankly, he wasn't in the mood to indulge her right now. At least not with this. Logan had the distinct feeling that the meager amount of patience he had left needed to be held in reserve for later. He wandered back to the mantle, shoving something in his pocket with a grunt as he paced.

The beer probably wasn't helping, but it tasted good. Cold and crisp on his tongue, chasing away the acrid hint of ash in the back of his throat. He checked his watch, glaring at the bathroom door. Four minutes and counting.

She'd had makeup on already, so he could see little point to this beyond seeing how far she could push him before he snapped. Clearly, she wanted a wild night, and while the idea of it appealed to him too, there was a fine line between on the edge and over it.

"Marie," he growled, irritation spiking.

She giggled. Fucking giggled. Heat flared through his blood, forcing him to grind down hard on the urge to cross the room and rip open the door between them.

Marie came swishing out a moment later, posing in the doorway for full effect. Logan froze, jaw working as he swallowed. "Turn around."

She did, spinning slowly for his pleasure, eyes down in deference and then flicking back up to his.

"Fuck." He wasn't even aware he'd spoken aloud until he saw her lips curl up into a smile. She wasn't retouching her make up, but removing it entirely. Fresh face. Pink cheeks. He could even see the youthful smattering of summer freckles over the bridge of her nose and across her cheeks. Played up against the darkened sweep of her lashes and that full mouth, red and wet, she barely looked seventeen, if that. Total jailbait. And that mouth? That face with those clothes? God. He could barely think straight.
"Holy Jesus, Marie. You tryin' to get me arrested?"

That specific look was clearly a deliberate decision on her part. Another layer to their games. She'd obviously been planning this for a while and he wondered what else she had in store for him tonight. The blast of heat was volcanic, burning away the last of his resolve. If she wanted to play, they'd play. Fuck propriety and society and every other rule that shouldn't be broken. They couldn't get to the Red Door fast enough to suit him now.

"See somethin' you like, old man?" she purred, amping it up even more.

"Hell, yes."

The combination of wide-eyed innocent and sexy that leaned heavily towards slutty shouldn't turn him on so damned much, but it did. There was something about her youth and fertility that appealed to his more base animal drives, but the rest hinted that she'd be able to keep up with his more sophisticated carnal appetites, as well.

Holy shit. That Lolita chick had nothing on the Rogue.

How like her to directly confront something everyone else hinted at but was afraid to say. The Rogue was completely fearless, shamelessly giving him both the untried girl who'd climbed into his truck on that snowy road, and the adventurous woman she'd become in the years since.

"You like little girls, mister?"

Ah, fuck. She always had to push. Even now.

"Just one," he returned evenly, "Though she ain't so little any more." He was looking in her eyes now, not at the ample curves on display.

A real smile shined out of her then, something honest and sweet. Something apart from the game they were playing. He saw it and nodded, feeling a different kind of warmth curl through him. True affection and genuine love. It lay at the heart of it all and made the rest of their games possible. It was a touchstone, a moment of equilibrium before they sailed over the edge together.

"What do you want tonight, cowboy?" The temptress was back. Her finger trailed down her neck and teased between her breasts. He wet his lips because, fuck, she smelled so good and he was already thinking about how she'd taste under his mouth. "The good little girl? The shy virgin who needs you to show her what to do?" Her fingers wandered to her nipple, pinching hard enough that her breath caught. "Or the bad girl? The girl who saw you in that cage and wanted to lick the sweat off you. To get down on her knees and show you just how much she liked what she saw."

Her stark honesty shocked him for a moment. She was setting the tone for the night, that much was clear.

"Mmph." He shrugged. It wasn't really a choice at all. "Bad girl," he rasped out, voice low and smoky. His sex voice. The one that made her quiver. "S'her turn. I went with the virgin last time. And for the record, you ain't ever been shy, baby."

That observation pleased her.

"So, the bad girl, huh?"

"Fuckyeah," he breathed, alight with possibility.
"You almost don't even sound guilty for wanting that." Her eyes were dancing as she teased.

"I ain't." Not anymore. "But I got a big appetite tonight." He reached out and tweaked her other nipple. "So try and keep up, huh?"

~~ooOoo~~

A few minutes later they stood in the driveway, breaths making silvery puffs in the crisp night air. Logan hung back, uncharacteristically, waiting for Marie to choose as they stood between the truck and the bike. Her Jeep was still up at the school.

When she turned to look at him for direction, he merely grunted. "S'your show, baby. You invited me." He had no intention of making a damn thing easy for her. He was curious, too, to see what her choice would reveal about her plans for the night. There were pluses and minuses to both rides.

His Mississippi girl shivered as a strong gust of wind creaked through the tall trees. "Brrr!" Her eyes slid from the bike to the truck.

"Heh." The cold never bothered him. He always ran hot.

She caught her bottom lip in her teeth for a moment. "Even if it wasn't damn cold out here, I suppose there's less chance of you getting arrested in the truck." She knew her appearance was pushing the limit tonight.

"True. Better chance of gettin' my dick sucked, too." His voice was even but she could see his teeth flash in the darkness. He did love winding her up.

"Logan!"

"Guess the bad girl's joinin' us later, then?" he said coolly. He knew how to push her buttons and the Rogue rarely disappointed.

Her eyes narrowed. "If you're lucky, sugar." He watched as she came up beside the bike and ran her hands over her hips with a little shimmy. "I don't know about the bike, though."

She smoothed the clingy skirt down, tugging a little at the impossibly short hem. While she was clearly feeling the power she had over him tonight, he could also tell she was a little uncomfortable. Good. It was more fun to debauch the innocent than the jaded. He merely raised a brow.

"This skirt I borrowed from Jubes is seriously like one really deep breath away getting us both arrested, but then again, you do know how much I enjoy a good ride..."

He bit back a grunt of amusement. "I remember." She'd come three times against him on the ride home that night.

Shooting him a dirty look over her shoulder, she swung a leg over the bike, straddling the powerful machine suggestively and put her hands on the handlebars. "So, what do you think, sugar?"

Eyes on her ass, he loomed closer, crowding her as stepped nearer still and put his mouth to her ear. "Baby, you're hot as hell with those sexy legs spread wide and somethin' big 'n hard between 'em..." His hands were firm on her hips, squeezing. "But that's cheatin'."
"Cheating?"

"Yep. I don't want you comin' tonight until I make ya." She shivered against him. "Or until I say you can," he added just to turn the screws. He knew the Rogue chafed under his direction at times, but he also knew she came harder and felt safer when he gave her firm boundaries. She liked the hard edges as much as the room to play.

"Gawd." Her drawl echoed her scent, thick with honey and spice and a sweet languor that tickled along all his senses.

"You ain't followin' the rules too good, either."

"Rules?" she managed to push out, hips swaying and beginning to rock as his hands roamed from her ass to her quivering thighs and back to her heaving belly.

She wanted it. Bad.

"I said no panties." His fingers dipped in and wrapped around the back of her thong, pulling it up tightly. She rose up on her toes and then sank down into the sweet press with a decadent groan. Biting back a growl of approval at his mate's open sensuality, he eased off for a moment and then began a rhythmic pull/release that nestled that strip of silky leopard just where she needed it, the snug friction making her squeeze her eyes shut and her knuckles turn white where she gripped the handlebars.

It wasn't nearly enough though, and he chuckled as she whined and bucked her hips impatiently.

"Sugar…"

"More?"

She nodded, lip caught in her teeth.

Too bad for her. Logan pushed himself into the mental headspace needed for playing these kinds of games with her and he bit her sharply, jostling against her.

"No." Hooking a finger under the thin ribbon of leopard at her hip, he pulled it clear of her skirt and with a flick of his wrist, extended one claw and cut it decisively in two. He ignored her startled gasp of protest and fished out the other side, letting his claws gleam in the moonlight before slicing that one, too. Chocolate eyes sliding hungrily down his claws pushed him right to the edge. A flashover.

One rough tug was all it took to yank the scrap of lace and satin from her body. A prize, held aloft, swinging slightly between them.

"Unngh…" Her body shuddered.

Just as he’d hoped, it was too much friction that didn't last nearly long enough to do anything but burn and tease.

Logan's thumb found the moist gusset almost without conscious thought and he rubbed it between his fingers with a grunt, jerking slightly as an answering need sang brightly through his blood.

Beside him, Marie shivered as the cool night air teased over hot, wet flesh. The Wolverine grinned, wanting her to be as aware of that ripe slickness as he was. That bit of silky lace may as well have been a red flag before a bull as far as he was concerned.

"Need somethin', baby?" Her eyes narrowed, but the pupils were still blown wide with pleasure as her hips rolled in the air. That brought a hiss to his lips. He could stand to see more of that.
"Yes." Her answer was not hushed and he liked that she voiced her need aloud to the night, uncaring who might hear.

"Say it. Tell me." He considered slapping her ass to drive the point home, but ultimately he didn't because he thought she might enjoy it too much. He wanted that intense need to be an uncomfortable ache for her, too. Christ knew it was for him and they hadn't even left the fucking driveway.

"Empty."

"Huh?" It took her so long to answer that he was momentarily distracted, rubbing the silky fabric in his fingers down her neck and between her breasts, spreading that glorious scent all over her. He wanted to do more than that, but figured if he held that scrap to his face and let the taste of her bloom over his tongue, rich and sweet, that the Wolverine would have her right here, bent over the goddamn bike. And while the thought appealed, so did taking a walk on the wild side with her at the Red Door.

They were both primed for it now.


Between her legs, the leather seat gleamed enticingly in the moonlight, the silver glow highlighting the peaks and valleys created by the decorative stitching. He could see the mischievous intent etched on her face before her knees began to sag. He caught her around the waist. "None of that now, baby."

She hummed in frustration, even though he was aware she knew he'd never let her get away with that. It was far too easy.

"Wouldn't mind watchin' that some other night, though." His voice was thoughtful and more than a little dirty as he shoved her ruined thong in his pocket with a grunt.

"Yeah?"

"Fuck yeah. Drive upstate after the fights one night. Build a bigass fire. Get a few shots in ya, order you to strip and then watch you grind all over this seat until your purrin' puts the fuckin' pipes to shame."

Pressed up against him as she was, he could feel what his words did to her. Her heart sped wildly and though there was a flush of color in her face, her gaze didn't waver.

"Slip and slide, cowboy. And screw your orders," the Rogue spat, just to get a rise out of him. "I'd leave your hat on and my boots—and this bike would smell like me for-fucking-ever. And ever. You'd never mount it again and not think of me shuddering on it while you watched with your dick in your hand."

"Deal." It was more a snarl and less a word.

Logan dragged in a deep breath and let it out slowly, trying to bind the Wolverine, who'd risen sharply in response to the Rogue's challenge. The closer she got to peaking, the more unpredictable she became and he realized that he'd pushed her a little too far. He wanted her on the edge not over it. Not yet.

He needed to bring her down a little, bank that fire so it was a glow instead of a raging inferno. At
least for now. When they got to the Red Door, all bets were off.

Watching her fingers skate over her body gave him an idea how to focus her on what was happening between them tonight without putting that emphasis directly between her legs.

First, a little something to get her attention.

He swung a leg over and got on the bike backwards, facing her, and sat down, forcing her legs to widen to accommodate the sprawl of his heavy thighs.

Laughter bubbled up from her, silvery and warm. "Whatever you're up to, I don't think it works that way..."

"Heh."

"Unless you're thinking of a different sort of ride altogether...?"

All the warning he had was her hand on his shoulder to steady herself and then she was in his lap, hard, thighs spread wide and he could feel the slick glide of her; that wet, naked flesh slipping so easy over the leather encasing his cock. Up and down and that little circle of her hips that fucking sent him.

"Be good." He slid her back, thighs still carrying the weight of her body but with enough room between them that he could at least think now. "There's one more thing we needta do, first."

"Condom?" she purred and he could tell she was half hoping he'd give in and just let her ride him to screaming orgasm right here under stars.

"Heh. You wish. Gimme your wrist, little girl." Hell, she looked the part. May as well play it up for them both.

"What if I don't want to?"

Now she was just teasing. He could tell the difference, but her defiance would not go unanswered.

"Then I'll spread you wide, shove my fingers in ya, hard, right here— and fuck ya with 'em 'till you're pantin' and and squirmin' all over my goddamn lap. Then when you're beggin' for it, I'll pull 'em out, lick 'em clean and smoke a cigar while you freeze your cute, half-naked ass off out here, rippin' your fuckin' hair out and tearin' a strip outta my hide with that sassy tongue of yours for not lettin' you come."

Her eyes were as big as dinner plates. "Oh!"

"Now, gimme. Your. Fuckin'. Wrist."

He could tell she hadn't yet made up her mind. Interesting. Some nights she chose disobedience just to be willful. He hoped tonight wasn't one of those nights. It made him want the Red Door more than ever. But then, maybe that was what she'd been after all along? She was getting too good at these little games.

"This wrist?" She brought her hand up between them and tapped his sensitive nose, squeaking and jerking her hand away as he snapped at her fingers with sharp, white teeth. "Or this one..." They both looked down at the hand she had resting on his thigh. He didn't think she'd do it, but he should have known she wouldn't make a damn thing easy for him, either. That was what made playing with her so damned much fun.
The Rogue didn't even hurry. She slid her hand between her legs, teasing her gloved fingers up her thigh and swiping them through the glossy welcome so slowly that Logan could feel the blood throbbing in his temples by the time she'd finished.

He saw the glitter in her eyes as his nostrils flared, dragging in that sweet musk in dizzying lungfuls.

Eyes blazing, she offered him that wrist silently, fingers glistening darkly in the moonlight. She may as well have roared her dare into the night.

Mutant? Hardly. Fucking valkyrie is what she was.

He knew what she was trying to do and he was not going to break. No fucking chance of that.
"Behave," he growled. Sometimes when he said that he actually meant it, and this was one of those times.
"Hey, you wanted the bad girl…"

"I always wanted the girl — period. Good. Bad." His lips twitched. "Crazy as shit." She giggled as he pushed a hand into his pocket. "Whatever. I like 'em all," he muttered, withdrawing a length of black silk cord he'd cut from the hank on the mantle earlier and brushing it slowly down her neck.

That shut her up. Her eyes were very wide now and her hand hovered between them, trembling slightly as she watched him smooth the cord between his strong fingers. He worked slowly, the knots and loops forming easily under his experienced hand. The motion was controlled and unhurried, drawing her into a slower rhythm, but it was not without a certain energy of its own.

Expectation and promise buzzed between them as the knot in his fingers slowly took shape. A head. Wings. A second set of wings. She was smiling by the time the dragonfly was finished. The sleek black silk shone with a soft luster in the moonlight.

This time, Marie offered her wrist without hesitation. Logan nudged the edge of her glove down to nestle the cord against her bare skin. Right there where her pulse was pounding.

He held her eyes while he worked. Three coils in all, laid down side-by-side, wrapping her wrist snugly. It wasn't enough to cut off the blood, just enough to sensitize her skin and make her aware of every little movement. Every time the pretty little dragonfly fluttered in the wind, she'd feel the tug on her wrist and think of him, reminded that she already carried his mark.

"Beautiful," she whispered.

She could have meant the dragonfly itself, or the artistry he so casually displayed, or the care with which he bound her flesh. She could have meant the sentiment or the physical sensation or the unspoken dialogue they'd just shared.

But he knew, as surely as if she'd given him the words.

It oozed from her every pore and he simply nodded as he stood and slowly walked her back off the end of the bike. They remounted together and he kicked the engine to life, spitting gravel under the tires as they shot into the night.

The dragonfly twirled in the wind, a claiming that tonight they'd shout from the rooftops.
Up next: No freakin' idea, other than it's gonna start in the lobby of the Red Door. Who knows where it will go from there? ((grin)) I'm thinking my WolverineMuse and I are gonna need to go a few rounds and work that out. Heh. Soon!
What I Am

Author's note: Sorry, y'all. I have been epically, miserably sick. Boo. Apparently hot toddies aren't my WolverineMuse's drug of choice. Heh. (Pro tip: maple infused bourbon is the way to go there.) Also, I'm fairly certain it's against the laws of the universe to attempt to write smut when the world is one big Nyquil flavored blur... I actually slept instead of burning the midnight oil and I might have also binge-watched the entire last season of the Walking Dead. (OMG, talk about lighting a fire under the Holding Ground II bunnies.) Is it just me, or does Daryl/Beth have some crazy Wolverine/Rogue overtones, or what? For serious, what the hell is it with my muses and the older guy/younger girl vibe? In any event, I am back among the living. (Yay!) and I have a few days off coming up, so who knows. I might actually finish this story one of these days! Onward!

"Hey."

Logan stopped Marie with a soft word in the alley outside the nondescript rusty gray door that led to the club's sleek, monochromatic lobby.

"Sugar? Second thoughts?"

Fuck, no. He had the opposite problem and smelling the slip and slick of her where she'd rubbed up against his pants on the ride over only made it worse.

"Ain't that." He could use a drink. Preferably something with a little more bite to it than a cold beer. "Just be sure, huh?" He leaned against the wall, aware she could probably see the flash of gold in his eyes, despite the poor light in the alley. "Once he's had a taste of you, we're all along for the ride until he's good n'done."

"Mmm…"

"Be serious," he growled. That she wanted that, welcomed it even, still had the power to rock him back.

She bit her lip, posing a little against the wall in a way that made her seem impossibly young, but wise intelligent eyes stared back at him sure and clear. Suddenly she shifted, hand on her hip, confident and fiery and tapping that little foot at him in a way that turned him on as much as it pissed him off. How the fuck did she do that? He'd wanted to give her an out though, just in case, even though he desperately hoped she wouldn't take it.

"Do I look like a woman who doesn't know what she wants?"

It was the touch of amused feminine exasperation in her voice coupled with the tapping of her toe that made him chuckle.

"No, ma'am." He stepped closer and the teasing look on his face bled into something else entirely; something that clearly made her very aware how big and imposing his energy could be in the right mood. Even in those fuck-me boots, he had a good foot on her and a solid two-hundred pounds of barely leashed Wolverine. "You look like a dirty little girl lookin' for someone to teach her a lesson."
"Ya know, cowboy, you seem to know a lot about little girls."

"Dirty girls," he corrected with a feral flash of his teeth. Sweet Jesus, he didn't think she'd try to take him down the rabbit hole so quickly. They weren't even in the fucking club yet.

"I dunno. You up for the job, old man?"

Instead of provoking him, that just made him chuff with amusement. "Baby, you'd chew up and spit out anyone else who even tried." He was not pandering. It was the truth and it pleased her.

She was the Rogue now in fact as well as name, wild and vital; reckless with the impetuousness of youth and feeling her power tonight as a mutant and a woman and as the fierce creature who'd caught and held the interest — and the heart — of the Wolverine.

"Before or after you gutted them?"

He just shrugged. He made no excuses for what he was or how he felt.

Two men, clearly a couple, came strolling down the alley before she could answer back. The night wind brought the sound of heavy boots and the soft expectant patter of dirty words mixed with the scents of leather and cannabis and menthol.

Instead of backing away as any sane man would do given Marie's appearance tonight, the Wolverine rested a menacing hand on the wall above his woman's head and put his broad back to the interlopers with a dismissive sniff. He knew exactly what it looked like, little bit of underripe cherry pie caught up by some roughneck asshole, but something told him Marie hadn't chosen her look tonight by accident and he didn't want to disappoint.

"Hey, lovetta? You need some help?" The prettier of the two men called out to her. His lipgloss shined wetly in the darkness, though the oiled hairless physique he had on display said he clearly spent a lot of time pumping iron. Still, even Greek gods could be sliced into little bitty chunks.

"Fuck off." The Wolverine never did anything by half measures.

"I'm fine," Marie called and he smiled at the note of anxiety in her voice. Maybe not quite as confident about her ability to rein him in as she initially thought. Heh.

"You don't look fine, honey."

"She looks like fucking jailbait," the other spat roughly, throwing his cigarette to the pavement. That one had mutant pride prison ink that said he'd done serious time and a sleeveless biker vest with SGT AT ARMS stitched over the breast pocket. It struck his colors and also announced quite plainly that the man might be alone with his lover now, but his band of unruly brothers was likely somewhere close.

The Wolverine just smiled. He liked a challenge.

"I'm totally legal." Bit of an edge to her now. Interesting.

"Maybe somewhere, sweetie, but probably not in this country." Lipgloss again. Annoying as fuck, but he definitely got a pass. It was interfering assholes just like that one who kept underage runaways safe on the streets. The irony was not lost on him, however irritating he found it right now.

"You deaf, bub? Get lost." See? He could be polite.
Marie peeked out from behind his shoulder.

"Thanks boys, but I got this. It's just a little pre-game warm-up, if you know what I mean? This ain't my first rodeo with the cowboy, here."

"Oh! You go, girl. Love the boots, too." Marie blew lipgloss a kiss. The Sergeant just rolled his eyes and Logan wondered how many times he'd been the muscle behind lipgloss' big mouth. For that, he got a pass, too. Lipgloss turned to his partner, flinging a wrist in their direction as they left. "Why don't we play games like that anymore, huh?"

"Soon, pet." The gray door slammed closed behind them and left Logan in the relative silence of the dark alley with Marie, who was clearly determined not to be silent tonight.

"Ya know, that was kinda sweet right up until that pet comment. Ick!" Logan just shook his head, amused to brush up against one of her hard edges so soon in the evening. "You gotta admit he had killer abs, though—" The growl was out before she'd even finished her inflammatory little comment. Had to have been on purpose, because she was grinning like a Cheshire Cat.

"Grrrr."

"Oh come on, sugar. You know I like my men with a few more miles and a lot more damn hair." That redeemed her, slightly. And she was obviously determined to amp things up between them without actually causing a fight with anyone, which he also grudgingly appreciated, given his proximity to the edge tonight. She stomped her feet. "Now let's get going, huh? I'm freezing my ass off out here."

"No."

"No?"

"You lookin' to meet back up with the Brokeback boys at the desk for another little pow wow?"

"Wow. A pop culture reference from the twenty-first century? There's hope for you yet." Logan ignored her goading. "Hell, maybe we can all share a tea party in the elevator on the way up," he grunted, his thoughts on the matter perfectly clear. He was not in the mood for more of that particular game. His eyes traveled down her body and he smirked at what he saw there. Her aviator jacket was open and her blouse and that fucking leopard print bra hid very little. "Heh. Ya look cold, kid."

She made a face at him and then grinned without shame. "That was kinda fun before, huh?" Obviously she was in no mood to be steered off course tonight.

"Pre-game warm-up?" Logan returned evenly, raising a brow at her as she jiggled about in the brisk night air a little longer and then ducked under his arm, heading to the door.

"One of them," she tossed back just as evenly, giggling a little.

"You're not followin' any of the damn rules," he rasped into the night as they approached the door. "That ain't gonna end well. Just sayin'."

Marie shrugged. "You're the one who wanted the bad girl," she grinned as if she'd won, and then her eyes found his, warm and dark and as feral as he'd ever seen them. "I wouldn't be so sure about the rules, though."
"That right?"

"Maybe it's his rules I'm playin' by tonight."

That flash of gold was back in his eyes.

"He don't have no rules." Not like she meant, anyway. Not consciously. The animal's thoughts were a snarled crimson mess of disjointed primal urges and instinctive responses, and where she was involved, there was a strong thread of possessiveness and an equally vital thread of want. Hunger so keen it had long ago surpassed desire for need. He needed her like freedom and air and the hunt.

"What? Sure he does."

"Not like you mean."

"He does," she insisted. "You just don't listen the same way I do."

"Enlighten me."

"Later. Inside. I need central heat and a stiff drink, first."

"Fair enough."

~ooOoo~

Willow, the ethereal woman behind the glossy counter was a vision in blood red silk tonight. The lush color was so vivid it almost glowed against her freakishly fair skin and hair. The rich sanguine silk was a striking contrast to her icy blue eyes, so pale they were almost colorless. As always, her slim silver laptop and sleek little phone sat beside her, the only modern technology visible in the plain concrete room. The LEDs winked, glowing softly against the smooth stone.

"Good evening, Mr. Logan." She nodded to Marie. "Ms. Rogue. It's good to see you again."

That brought Logan's head up sharply. He hadn't introduced Marie last time. Willow was good with details but not clairvoyant. Her familiar greeting was all the warning he got that the evening was about to take a radical departure from what he'd expected.

"Evenin', honey."

"Is the account we have on file for you still current?" The question was not directed at Logan and he had the distinct sense of feminine collusion. Given the two women involved, it was equal parts thrilling and terrifying.

The Rogue's eyes flashed mischievously. "It sure is."

The Wolverine's eyes shot to Rogue's, and while he didn't say anything, Willow could see the energy shift between the lovers. A pang of envy stuck her sharply, painfully. Oh, how she wished to be the Rogue tonight. To be let into his private world. To be trusted by a man like him. What a beautiful gift to be allowed to know the Wolverine's secrets. To share his vulnerabilities and reveal her own. She must be quite something, his Rogue.

Willow struggled to keep her face impassive. She has glimpsed only a small sliver of his sexual self.
She knew what the Wolverine did upstairs behind those red doors and she'd had a hand in arranging the details for tonight. Rogue's directions were very specific and only made her more curious about the true nature of the Wolverine's desires. He was a puzzle she couldn't work out, and for a woman with a mind for details, it was tantalizingly frustrating.

She was good at her job. Reading people. Anticipating their needs, their desires. Maneuvering them. Manipulating them, however subtly. Knowing their personal kinks was only a small part of that. The Rogue had allowed her a small look into their private world and instead of her usual icy detachment, for once she felt almost giddy at being a part of planning an erotic evening. She imagined Logan wasn't a man easily surprised.

And it was probably as close to she'd ever get to knowing his secrets.

Willow looked at Logan. "Will you be requiring your usual room this evening?"

She'd obviously asked the question for the Rogue's benefit, because that thick Mississippi drawl was answering back before he'd even opened his mouth.

"Not tonight." Her tone implied never again, though she knew better than to issue the order aloud. She obviously intended to be a part of whatever he did here from this point forward and Willow wondered if they'd find a new 'usual' together or discover another kink entirely.

She had clearly blossomed under his tutelage. The timid rabbit had been replaced by a lioness. The idea made her smile inwardly and then frown as her unique mind raced down a different track.

Lions and tigers and bears! Oh, my!

"Very well, Ms. Rogue." Willow put a small envelope on the counter and slid it across. "As you instructed." She almost smiled at the look on Logan's face.

He raised an eyebrow at his woman. "See ya been busy, kid."

"I sure have." The Rogue palmed the little plain envelope and slid it into her coat pocket with a wink and a smile that was full of sin and promise.

In all the years he'd been here, he'd never seen Willow slide over an envelope. He'd seen a number of other items; from the banal to the bizarre— from key cards and car keys to artfully crafted sex aids, illicit substances and even an inhibitor collar once, but never an envelope.

"Whatcha got on deck tonight, honey?" He addressed Willow, because it would have given his woman too much satisfaction to ask the question of her outright. If she wanted to play, they'd play. Who had more patience than a predator?

"A rare treat tonight in the East Chamber. A beautiful series on knotting in three masterful performances, manual and oral followed by penetration." The Wolverine actually shuddered at that and Willow, a being highly sensitive to all energy, could feel the power rolling off him tonight. She'd never seen him so close to the edge, that glitter of gold shining in his eyes. Keeping her voice neutral, she swallowed and noted the slight smirk that told her he'd caught the small waver before she schooled her features back into impassivity. "An equally impressive show in the West Chamber. Living art on the canvas of the human form. Spectacular opening acts for both. A mixed form mating and an Argentine Tango, respectively."

"Mmmm…." The Rogue's vocalization was more of a purr than a hum of approval and Willow was surprised to hear an answering growl from Logan. It was a primal a sound as she'd ever heard; and she'd had the pleasure of seeing him in action a time or two in the public rooms upstairs. He was
magnificent. She'd never heard a sound like that though; like it came up from the soles of his feet. It shook her to the marrow of her bones.

"Will there be anything else you require tonight?"

The Rogue shook her head, eyes on her man, already drawn into the possibilities of the night. Now Willow understood why the Rogue hadn't wanted to know what shows the club was offering tonight while she arranged the details of their evening. She wanted to be open to what might come of giving the Wolverine free rein to let their night take shape organically, fueled by the explicit acts unfolding before them and their own reactions to it. It was a surprisingly sophisticated response for one so new to the world of adult pleasure.

She supposed it was one small piece of the puzzle as to why the Wolverine had chosen the Rogue above all others.

"We're good, thanks. Unless you want somethin', sugar?"

"Nothin' you can give me down here, darlin'." His posture was predatory, still, but his smirk was dirty as all hell. Both women shivered at the pure sex in his voice, but Logan only had eyes for the Rogue.

"The passcode tonight is BITE. Enjoy your evening."

"Will do. Thanks." An automatic answer, those Southern manners pushing through even as the couple made their way to the elevator flanked by the two sexually charged sculptures.

They never saw Willow’s private smile, or her fingers fly over her phone before she turned to greet the next guest.

Marie punched in the code, watching as the light flipped from red to green and tugging a little nervously at the short hem on her skirt. Logan chuffed softly in her ear, breathing in her scent deeply and feeling the Wolverine strain against the chains that bound him. The close confines of the elevator would be a challenge.

"You ain't gonna ask to stop and look at the art tonight?" His eyes slid down the towering jagged lines of The Spire. It was phallic without being graphic and he couldn't help but remember the last time they'd stood here together at the edge of the cliff.

It felt a little like that tonight, too. A different set of possibilities awaited them somewhere upstairs, but they were still stepping into the unknown.

Up next: No freakin' idea. We'll see…

So, guesses as to where they go and what they do? East Chamber? West Chamber? Somewhere else? (Elevator? Alcove? Red Door?) OMG, my Wolverine is making a serious case for some epic smut… You have been warned!
The close confines of the small space electrified them. It was Marie who leaned in and stopped the elevator this time. Waiting. Watching. Knowing with every breath he took of her that he was slipping closer to the point of no return.

"You know, I never asked you what you wanted from tonight, cowboy."

Logan snorted. "Ain't it obvious?"

Her smile was positively wicked. "Oh, no. You're not getting off that easy. Not after you put me through the wringer last time, making me ask you to bring me here the way you did."

"Darlin', I didn't make you do jack shit. Still don't." He leaned back against the far wall, head cocked. "You do it 'cause you wanna." He took a steadying breath. "And 'cause you've always liked windin' me up."

"Yeah," she agreed, slipping off her coat and enjoying the way his eyes flashed hungrily. "And 'cause I'd been wanting to talk dirty to you for years."

He felt a twinge of amusement at her playful comment, but there was a serious thread underneath.

"Wasn't dirty. Just honest."

That was closer. More right, somehow. It was naked honesty they'd craved even more than the slip of naked bodies. The last of the walls crumbling down until they were finally real with each other. Revealed. Stripped bare. Vulnerable and open and ready to stop hiding from the truth and just let the thing between them be.

"I like that." Her voice was uncharacteristically soft.

"Good," he grunted.

"So, what's your pleasure tonight? Watchin' or being watched?"

He shuddered at his own words used against him so precisely. The Rogue always went for blood. Wetting his lips as the possibilities flashed before his eyes, he shrugged. "Dunno. Depends."

"On?"

He looked her up and down like the sweet morsel she was, openly appreciating the view. She'd definitely had a specific mood in mind tonight. On the surface, she looked like a little girl playing dress-up. A closer look revealed a much more adult game being played.

"On how far down the rabbit hole you wanna go." And on what was in that fucking envelope. His
curiosity bordered on painful. She knew, too, so he didn't ask just to push her buttons. Instead, he shifted to brace his arms on either side of her. Not touching, but certainly close enough for her to feel trapped.

"All the way down, sugar." Her chin came up defiantly. "That is why you picked the bad girl, right? 'Cause they wanna go all the way. Whenever. Wherever. However." She blew softly in his sensitive ear. "And where the body goes, the mind follows…"

"Jesus Christ," he growled, inflamed by her teasing and by the truth of her words. She was not wrong.

"Tell me," she urged. "Be honest with me now the way I was with you."

"I wanna find some of the hard edges, kid. Check out some of the lines in the sand we always stayed the hell away from." She was nodding. Her appearance suggested she was on the same page there. Wanting to explore some of the places they'd steered well clear of when she was seventeen and eighteen and nineteen...

"More."

"Last time we were in here, I bit ya. Hard."

She whimpered at the memory. "You licked me."

"He licked ya." He waited for that to sink in. "I still get off to that. Even after all the shit we've done together, when I reach down and close my eyes— I come back here."

"Here?"

"Here. The feel of ya in my teeth that first time. That sound you made when I put my mouth on ya."

"And then I put my mouth on you."

"Heh. Got me real good, girl. Give ya that." One Mississippi.. two Mississippi… She'd blown his damn mind. "Last time you said you didn't want nobody's eyes on you but me." He moved closer, looming over her small frame now. "That still whatcha want?"

Something wild flashed in her eyes. "I don't care who watches now. I love what we have and I want the world to know it."

God, those words felt good. Deeply profound and yet also exciting. He could feel the Wolverine rising. A growl rumbled in low in his chest. "Mates." The husky word just felt right. It was more than belonging or simple possession.

"Mates," she echoed, touching the dragonfly at her wrist.

He leaned in and he could tell she thought he was going to put his mouth on her, but he pushed the button that set the elevator back into motion instead and stepped away with a chuckle when she pouted.

"So whatcha got on deck tonight, kid?"

The elevator slowed and then bumped softly under their feet. The door slid open and he shoved the grill aside.

"Mmm… East or West chamber, cowboy? You got a preference?"
"Yeah." He did.

"Does he?"

Winking at him, she slung her jacket over her shoulder and stalked out into the club like a boss.

~ooOoo~

Logan followed, shaking his head at her smart mouth. This is what he'd imagined last time; the Rogue in all her glory. Strong. Confident. Sultry.

The womb-like atmosphere of the club surrounded them. It was different from how it had looked before. Instead of amber lights and chocolate shadows, it was like stepping into an enchanted forest at twilight. Thick, rough trunks lined the hall and above them a heavy network of leafy branches twined together to form an organic canopy. Random lights twinkled between them like fireflies. It smelled fresh, earthy and fecund like a forest after a heavy rain.

A soft wind blew and Logan smiled as Marie turned her face into it and stepped back against the trees to take it in. Music came from both directions, different and yet still complementary. A deep rhythmic thrumming that made him want to move against her.

Logan could hear other people between the trunks and in the alcoves lining the walls; half hidden by the strange, thick forest that seemed to have sprung up from the floor, like magic. There was earth and moss under his feet. Grass. Stones. Not a garden walk with an obvious path. This was wilder. Lush and overgrown, like a forest that had overtaken an ancient, crumbling city. He wondered if this was the byproduct of someone's gift, or if it was simply an expertly executed concept.

Other patrons moved between the trees. He could smell them, skin and sex and hunger. He could smell Marie, too. Ripe and lush and ready to receive him. Logan followed her into the trees, putting the claws out on one hand, hoping the pain would ground him. It didn't. It only served to sharpen the hunger. And when she saw the silvery flash, his woman's eyes glowed hotly and he felt the chains binding his wilder counterpart begin to sing with the strain of keeping him leashed.

Still, letting go now would be too easy. He wanted the struggle. Welcomed it, even.

"Darlin'—" She wasn't leaning provocatively against a tree, but peeking at him from behind one. So reminiscent of their games back home that he was momentarily struck mute. The desire to chase her burned bright and hot. Christ only knew what would happen if she ran from him here.

"Hmm… I wonder what 'living art on the canvas of the human body' means. Body paint? Or maybe a master calligrapher — erotic kanji written on the skin?"

That was a damn fine idea. "I was thinkin' maybe somethin' with tattoos, but I like your idea better."

"You would," she teased. "So is it gonna be that or the shibari?"

"Shibari?"

"The masterclass on knotting? Isn't that what Willow said?"

"Heh." Logan chuckled. "That ain't the kinda knot she was talkin' about, kid." The touch of wide-
eyed innocence was even better than a Marie with enough sexual sophistication to know what Willow's suggestive summary had actually meant.

"Hmm… I guess you better enlighten me then, sugar. If you're up for giving me a lesson, that is."

Christ, she was the perfectly blend of innocence and fire. Coupled with her fresh face, he could have very easily been having a taboo conversation with the little girl who'd crawled up in his truck so many years ago. It was uncomfortable and yet also, wildly thrilling.

"I'm up for whatever you need, girl."

"We'll see."

That made him snort with amusement. "You ever seen dogs fuckin'?"

Marie shook her head. "Not unless Remy counts," she shot back, making a face at that old memory.

"Heh." Logan moved closer because he wanted her to feel the words against her skin, not just hear them. "While they're humpin', the base of the male's cock swells up, tyin' them together."

"Oh!"

"There's probably some kinda scientific word for it, but it's just nature lockin' 'em together while he comes n' comes. Keepin' 'em locked together after, too."

"God."

"S'primal thing. Breedin' not just fuckin'. The male keeps comin' for a while after, fillin' her up more and more and the knot keeps her close so she can't get away or fuck anyone else. So it's his seed that takes root."

"Whoa. Okay, but that's dogs, not people, right? You're telling me people are watching dogs hump in the East chamber?"

Her question was very telling, not just about her level of experience but also her lines in the sand. "No. But some people have canine or lupine mutations, kid. The knottin' thing's a part of that sometimes. 'Specially in the ones who can shift back and forth."

"Werewolves."

Logan shook his head. "Nah. That's just some bullshit word that ignorant scared-ass humans gave 'em. They ain't werewolves any more than I'm the fuckin' Jabberwocky or you're a succubus. Those are just meaningless titles used to describe somethin' those fuckheads don't understand. We're just, ya know, people."

"Holy shit."

"Hey, some of us can go all night. N'others got a different bag of tricks."

"Holy shit," she said again, still clearly shocked by the explanation as well as the casual comparison.

"Mind blown, huh?"

"Yeah." She took a deep breath, and he could see her brows draw together in thought. "So when Willow said the warm-up was a mixed form mating…"
"Probably a couple who can shift back and forth between human and lupine, yeah. This place is pretty well known for showcasin' unusual powers durin' sex."

"Whoa."

"That's two 'whoas' in under a minute. Too much, even for a bad girl, huh?"

She didn't answer him. Instead, she gave him a sharp look. "That's his choice, isn't it? What he wants to see?"

There was a long moment where Logan considered how best to shape his reply, but there was no room between them now for lies or half-truths. "Yeah. But not tonight. I can't watch that with you so close to peakin'. I'd—" Something so primal would make the animal rise too violently. He'd kill someone.

"Hmm…" She had an unreadable expression on her face.

"What's that look for?"


"Mmph."

"Another night, then?"

He gave her a searching look.

"S'fine if you don't wanna. That kink ain't for everyone. It's pretty raw. Wild. Teeth and dominance and—"

"Seems tailor-made for the two of us, sugar."

"Another night," he said quietly. He was too close to the edge already. Too unstable.

"Deal." Her face disappeared and she melted away between the trees but he could still hear her easily and god knows, he could smell her a county over. "So, I guess we're headed due west then, huh?"

Her soft footfalls said she hadn't waited for an answer. Sure of herself this time in a way she hadn't been before. Fearless.

Reckless.

The Wolverine's low growl of approval rumbled into the night as he followed her. A disembodied feminine laugh filtered through the trees.

The game was on.

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Up next, still no flamin' clue! Haven't written it yet. Heh. But I have Monday off from work and my WolverineMuse has some pretty specific ideas about what should happen next…
The music drew them in, clearly audible through the trees. Rhythmic, tribal percussion. Clapping. Bells. An unfamiliar stringed instrument that vibrated powerfully in the charged air.

Logan and Marie emerged from the shadowy forest into the West chamber. That too had been altered since their last visit. It was still draped in tones of indigo and midnight, the Milky Way twinkling above in a fine nexus of fiber optic filaments. This time, a mysterious fog swirled around their feet and different lights shone around the exterior of the room, making the walls bleed a violent crimson. They shifted into the vermilion sear of a spectacular sunset; effectively stopping time at that fiery moment the sun sinks below the horizon.

On the stage, a pair of dancers moved to the powerful beat. The male was bare-chested, wearing a pair of thin white pants with a braided orange rope for a belt. It was the woman, however, who stole the show. She was nude, her body a strange configuration of dusky flesh and bronzy-black scales. A series of smooth graduated plates ran down her spine, extending down into a long, wickedly frightening scorpion tail. The familiar hooked curl of the barbed stinger swayed to the exotic beat, a deadly metronome keeping perfect time.

The pair moved in tandem, strange motions that were more than a dance but less than a fight; retreating and attacking, ducking under controlled kicks and roiling with fluid motion that appeared to fly in the face of physics and anatomy. The female used her tail to great effect, for balance and offense, coiling and swinging and striking at the male as they flowed, using every inch of the raised dais in the center of the room. It was mesmerizing. The music drove their rhythm, dictating the style and energy; low moves across the floor, crawling, sweeping, and then darting up with twisting flips that seemed to defy gravity.

Logan and Marie made their way to the bar, ordering drinks while they watched the deadly pair. The man was wiry and muscular with long dreadlocks, an aquiline nose, and a stylized scorpion tattoo in vivid green curling across his chest. The woman was lean and tall, her black hair escaping her long ponytail in wisps that clung to her sweaty skin. Her breasts were small with dark nipples that were pulled tight, but it was her stinger that drew their attention rather than the sleek skin on display.

It was Marie who broke the silence first and Logan noted that this time she was more comfortable watching the stage. "That looks like somethin' more than just a dangerous dance, sugar."

"It is," he replied, downing a shot and ordering another before the burn had even reached his belly.

"Care to share with the class?"

"It's capoeira, a Brazilian martial art."

"And how do you know that?"

"Done my share of fighin' south of the border, kid. Buenos Aires. Rio. Sao Paulo." The Wolverine stirred at the memory. Hot, humid nights with the drums pounding in his ears and that wildness rioting in his blood. A bizarre cocktail of strange scents and strong drinks and rippling, sweaty bodies; some in the cage. Some after.

"Tell me more."

"S'about leverage. Power. Speed. Quick, complex moves."
"Not that."

He understood then she wanted personal details from his time there and not a lesson in an unfamiliar martial art. He nodded curtly. "Not here."

His eyes slid to one of the alcoves lining the wall. Hers followed. He was less inclined to conversation with the Wolverine riding so close to the surface, but he was willing to give her what he could before he lost himself to the wildness completely.

Signaling the bartender, he made short work of ordering a bottle and then turned to snarl at a large breasted blond with a taste for expensive leather who was clearly intent on approaching them. She was brassy and obvious and the idea of such easy prey asking permission to touch either of them made his skin crawl.

He didn't care if she was interested in him or his woman. He was in no mood to share and the violence in the low, threatening snarl was sufficient to ward her off. In contrast, the primitive sound had the opposite effect on his own woman. She quivered, but not with fear, and moved closer. The urge to sink his teeth into her was powerful enough to make the world go hazy around the edges.

Wrapping his fingers around the neck of the bottle, he caught Marie's eye. "Move your ass, darlin'." His patience was wearing thin.

In the semi-privacy of the alcove, Logan set the bottle on the table between them, drawing Marie's gaze from the stage to trace down the bottle of amber liquid.

"What's that?"

"Cachaça." The word rolled off his tongue and licked into her ear. KaSHAHsuhhh... "S'Brazilian and strong as shit. Go easy, huh?"

He cracked it and passed it over without taking a sip so he could taste her undiluted on the bottle when she passed it back. Watching her little fingers encased in black leather wrap around the bottle made his cock throb.

It wasn't his favorite spirit, but it was one of the little details she'd been curious about earlier. She held it under her nose first. "Smells like tequila." And then the bottle was between her lips. Her eyes watered and he could tell she felt the burn all the way down, sweet at first and then it bloomed into something else, smoky and a little wild. "God!" But because she was the Rogue, she took another sip, bigger this time, and grinned at him. "It's... earthy."

"Yeah. The shitty stuff tastes like dirt and costs about the same. They make it from sugarcane. S'got lotsa names. Tiger Breath. Heart-Opener. Fightin' water."

"Ah," she said understanding. "So all those wild nights south of the border started with this?"

"Started. Ended. Shit'll kill ya even with the healin'." That made her laugh. He took the bottle from her and drank deeply. It did fuck-all to stall the burn in his blood.

"More," she crooned, soft and low. Damn her. She knew what that slow drawl did to him.

"Fightin' there's brutal. No rules. Dirt under your feet and rebar at your back, cagin' ya in. More fuckin' bribes crossing palms than cheap drinks. Bare tits and tight bodies wherever you look."

It was a crude, honest assessment. He was losing too much ground to the wildness to say it any other way. He thought she might bristle, but she wet her lips instead and leaned in to breathe into his ear.
"Mmm… you like that or he does?"

Sex and violence and no law but his own?

"Fuck yeah. Both of us." He took another pull from the bottle and passed it back. "Don't remember too much, though. S'mostly one big Cachaça-fueled blur that smells like blood, feels like hell, and tastes like lime and pussy." He smirked at the look on her face. "You asked."

"You're one uncouth son-of-bitch, sugar." Her tone suggested she wasn't entirely displeased.

"You like it. Wilder I am, the wetter you get." He put a hand between his leg and pointedly rubbed his thumb where she'd slicked him with her essence earlier on the bike, such a sweet slide over the smooth leather.

"Fuck you." She saluted him with the bottle and a dirty wink. There was no arguing the truth with the Wolverine.

"Soon."

The unwavering surety in the quiet word made them both shudder.

With a smirk of her own, Marie withdrew the envelope from her coat. She tapped it against her rosy lips provocatively, watching his eyes gleam in the darkness before slapping it on the table between them like a dare while she took another drink.

Logan raised a brow. "Gimme that." He took back the bottle, purposefully ignoring the envelope. No way was the Wolverine going to lose this crazy game of chicken. At least, not without the proper incentive. He took another bracing swallow from the bottle. "Too much more of this and you're gonna need some Mississippi in ya to keep goin'. Unless that's your plan."

It wasn't a question.

He didn't expect an answer and didn't get one. The Rogue knew how to push his buttons. The Wolverine just grinned into the plummy gloom. He liked to play with his prey before going in for the kill.

~ooOoo~

The drums reached a fevered pitch and the room plunged into darkness.

The Wolverine wasted no time in going on the offensive.

"Touch yourself," An order, rasped into the soft whorl of her ear. He almost laughed when Marie jerked in her seat, but he knew she'd rise to the challenge. "Do it," he prompted when she didn't immediately comply. "Fuck that good girl bullshit. Gimme the bad girl. Whenever. However. That's whatcha said."

He didn't need to tell her where to touch. She knew. The Wolverine never did anything in half-measures. Those little gloved fingers slid between her legs.

He could see her clearly, even in the blackness, but he knew she was blind and that made it even better. Her lip was caught between her teeth and her eyes were closed. That hand was working
between her legs though, and he hadn't expected that. The Rogue was rarely predictable. Still, that couldn't go unanswered.

"Inside," he demanded. The urge to penetrate her with something — anything — was overwhelming. "Use three fingers." Two would be more comfortable for her, he knew. But with the glove, three would hurt good.

She whimpered, which told him she'd complied. He counted to twenty-three, the number of seconds she'd left her lips on his wrist last time, before pausing to take one last moment to appreciate the view. The fingers of her other hand were splayed wide on the table. Her hips were beginning to move and she'd clamped her thighs around her wrist, but the Wolverine was in no mood to let that fire rage without throwing some gasoline on it.

"There she is." The bad girl. "Hell, darlin'. Even if I ordered you to use the bottle here, I'd expect you to do it." Her hand stopped moving.

Her breathing changed and she shuddered. First round to him, then.

"Stop." Another order, just to shine her on.

"No." He could tell she was close.

"Bad girls don't say no. Just yes," he fired back.

"I'm gonna make you pay for this, you know." A casual threat but not an idle one. He could hear how fast her heart was beating.

"I reckon so."

"You mean you hope so." She pulled her hand away, smugly. The glisten on her fingers was maddening, but it was the glorious scent clouding his brain that made him want to howl.

He ignored her, mostly because she was right. "Wipe your fingers on the bottle, kid." He'd said it to shock her and it worked. But only for a moment.

The Rogue held out her fingers between them, sure and confident, even in the inky darkness. "You sure you wouldn't like this better? But then, you haven't asked permission to touch me, have you, Wolverine?" She pulled her hand back and swirled the tip of her finger slowly around the lip of the bottle before she fisted the neck in a firm grip that made the muscles in his belly clench.

She always had to push.

Tonight he pushed back.

"He don't ask, darlin'. He takes."

Her whole body quivered.

The room was beginning to grow lighter. He caught her eye.

"Nothin' smart to say to that?" he observed, taking a pull from the bottle and crudely licking his lips after.

She shook her head.

He was almost disappointed until he realized the envelope was gone.
"Fuck," he muttered, feeling as if their little game had suddenly been turned on its head.

The Rogue just smiled as the first strains of music tickled his ear. "Hush, sugar. Show's starting."

Up next: not a damn clue. Heh. But I have a list of song titles, here, and a WolverineMuse who's all fired up and ready to raise hell…

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