Fray

by englishmajor226

Summary

The day they reach Eden, Laura and Logan find the lookout abandoned. They are alone now, and while Logan has escaped his original fate from X-24 and the Reavers, he must viciously cling to the last threads of his health while taking care of Laura. Meanwhile, fifteen years in the past, Logan finds Rogue after over a decade of absence, while the world around them falls apart.

Notes

Gentle warning: Violence, swearing, flashbacks to adult relationships and adult acts that might have occurred in those relationships. So yeah, hang in there with me.
Part One

Chapter One: Now

The haze of the summer scorched the rocky terrain. The Bronco was encased in a film of dirt. A low, cicada-hum filled the air. He was submerged, heavy and sinking, just beyond the surface of himself. The inner ache was familiar now, the feeling of his body rejecting everything, and it viciously waited for him to stir once more. The pain was hulking and brutal, a caged, angry thing. The door was still there, too, in the corner of the dark spaces of his mind. It had been for a while now, cracked light outlining a rectangular passageway. It was the door he desperately wanted to open.

You should. Open it. Go on. Do it.

The buzzing got louder, and his vision grew from dark to red to orange. He breathed in and the voice was gone, the door fading from his mind. The discolored black of the leather interior, marred with time, was the first thing he sensed. The years of use and the smells that came with it, yellowed pages and dog hair and upholstery, flooded his nose. Over those old scents, recently his new one. And obviously hers. Hers.

And then his lungs convulsed, and the pain came back. The horrible gasping pain of the poisonous metal, compounded with the fresh gashes in his chest. Pain that seared, sizzled, crackled and snapped, his mind incapable of thinking around it like he always used to be able to do, his body willfully refusing to carry out the old instructions from his DNA. Not healing. No healing. His body was through with it, finished as he was with this sick, warped game.

Struggling to breathe as the coughing fit ceased, his eyes finally worked open to see the specks of dust floating hazily in the shafts of light above his body. The sun was directly above him, and he stared into it. His scent. Hers. The taste of blood and metal and sweat.

Laura. Charles. Laura. Charles. That grave in fucking Iowa. Now, here, wherever here was.

Jesus Fucking Christ.

Logan groaned, summoning his arms to do his bidding, willing his heavy body up, slowly. As soon as his body folded in half, trying to sit, a new swell of searing from his abdomen had him seeing stars. Vision in and out of focus. Fuck, it was hot. The heat. The pain. The grave. The door.

He stumbled out of the truck, wincing and breathing hard. Across the way, he could just make her out. Her small, lithe frame, staring up at something. She shouted, too, words he couldn’t quite understand, the meaning slipping off of the syllables too quickly for him to realize. As he looked up, he saw the lookout tower, he saw the sunlight. He saw time itself. And then, nothing.
I love criticism and praise and anything in between, and I plan on posting once a day, so the feedback always helps me get better. But also, be forewarned. This is my first X-Men Fic. I mean, I've written a ton of fanfiction in my life, and I'm a college English instructor nowadays, but I am beta-less at the current moment. This is also my first shot at writing Logan. So be merciful. This shit ain't easy, bub.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The thick blades of the helicopter’s rotors sliced through the humid air. The roar of the Blackhawk overhead filled their ears, the sound descending from the sky. Thick plumes of smoke rose up from the tiny village, as an orange rain began to fall. The toxic, chemical smell burned through his senses, clouding his head. Everywhere, people were screaming. Naked children ran through the streets, people speaking languages he couldn’t comprehend. Everything was on fire, people were on fire, and even as he tried to help whatever victims he could carry or usher to the nearby foliage, he smelled the lack of hope. He felt his body race to catch up, quickly stitching his flesh that burned, smelling of napalm. He reached for a small boy on the dirt road, offering his arm, but the boy’s skin slipped off his hand like a glove….

Logan woke with a start and a hoarse yell, his body seething. He was covered in sweat, the tepid room hazy around him. He coughed, gagged, couldn’t quite breathe as he sat up, trying to regain consciousness. Slowly, the dream, the memory—whatever the fuck it was—slipped away, and the room faded from the toxic orange flooding the Vietnam jungles to the sick, muted yellow of the room he found himself in. The ceiling fan tossed the damp air around the room. The bed sagged under his weight. Sheets stuck to his skin, as he noticed the telltale spatter of red.

He retracted the adamantium instantly and put a shaky, bloodied hand to wipe the unruly hair from his forehead.

What year? What year was he in now? 2015, his mind slowly responded, aching from the effort. Where? Where the fuck was he? Mexico. In Mexico with Storm, waiting for Charles, another, slower part of his brain repeated, like a young child anxiously stuttering a memorized address.

Before he had even made the conscious choice, he was stalking over to the bathroom and flicking the shower on. The pipes moaned and rattled before lukewarm water rained down. His breathing slowed, but the steam still rose off of his body, the obvious evidence from a fevered, sleepless night.

If this kept happening, Logan thought he would snap. He was no stranger to nightmares, none at all, but this brand had a new sort of acidity. They were memories, somehow he inherently knew his, the memories that had been missing for the greater part of three decades. After Japan, after Nagasaki and Mariko, these sort of visions had been flooding back, tangled up and spiraled, wavering in terror and intensity.

He fingers felt the rough grit of lime scale on the handle as he snapped the water off and stepped out, toweling off and finally facing himself in the mirror, gripping the edges of the sink. Even after the shower, the heat from the room had summoned beads of sweat from his temple. He looked up at the faded glass of the mirror, and his own eyes eerily stared back.

Logan knew it wasn’t the first time he had witnessed children die. The narratives were convoluted, but the background details always gave the timeline away. There had been internment camps. Nigerian villages. North Carolinian townships, fatherless and neglected from the strain of war. The dream of Vietnam surprised him. Lately the memories had been from further back, before electricity. They were images of corseted women, some of them starving, holding naked infants, suffering while the opposing sides of America fought.

Before electricity. Fuck.

He suspected that deep down, perhaps even immediately after Stryker, he knew he was this old, but
it was not something he liked to be reminded of. And these dreams, these visions, only made things harder.

Something had changed, something had expired and was now rotting in the world. He had willfully remained ignorant, first in the northwest territories of Canada and then later in Japan. It was no surprise, then, that he had been blindsided by what had happened during that time in the United States. The Mutant Registration Act had passed; the dangerous ones had been rounded up. In his absence, Trask had happened. Inhibitor collars. The prison camps at Guantanamo Bay. And then, of course, the X-Mansion.

A swell of guilt rippled under his skin. Fucking coward. Something suddenly went tense. The Wolverine didn’t like to be degraded by the man, and snarled angrily against the bars of his cage. He had protected himself. He had done what he needed to do. Except that, the man interjected, while he had, others had suffered.

The X-Mansion was gone, converted into an experimental laboratory overseen by Trask Industries. When Charles and Erik had approached him in the airport two months ago, the mansion was already no more, long since destroyed, but they still had the Blackbird. When it wasn’t in use it resided in an abandoned warehouse about an hour out of town in the northern Mexican desert. Mexico was where the most mutant rebels resided. Charles and Erik were quickly in the process of recruiting as many as they could.

For two months now, Storm and Logan had been commissioned to stay here, and they currently found themselves in Yécora. They moved restlessly, finding everything from letted rooms to abandoned houses to reside in, fading in and fading out of small towns, maintaining something of a fluid home base around the vast perimeter of the Blackbird. Logan hated this role, and had been pacing, itching to do more. These towns, this desert, were overwhelmingly desolate. He had never felt uneasy by the vast expanse of isolation before, but now, with a supposed mission in front of him, the open sky and flat land felt suffocating. There was some solace in having been given the time to know Storm again, after just shy of a decade of absence, but a part of him also realized these missions, whatever Erik and Charles were trying to do, was all happening far too late. The X-Men were disbanded, the remnants of what had been fractured.

The gnawing feeling of guilt recoiled in his stomach again, just as his cell phone from the bedroom sang in the air, a jarringly loud tone to his sensitive hearing even on the lowest volume setting. He padded over to the bedside table, hair still wet, as he read the text message.

News. From Storm. Logan didn’t always immediately receive word directly from Charles. He knew he was not entirely trusted yet on this new team, no matter how many times he had formerly donned the black leather suit.

Minutes later, Logan was dressed and downstairs. Storm and he never met at the same place twice, but always agreed on where to meet the day before. This time it was a tiny, cramped bar, one of the few in the area. It was surprisingly full of patrons, all of them likely trying to escape the overwhelming humidity. The putrid scent of sweat and coffee beans and Tecate and stale air hung all around him.

He found her in the corner, sipping bitter coffee. As ever, Storm was cool, collected, present. Age had only just found itself a place in the corners of her eyes, but otherwise, Logan had not been surprised to see she hadn’t changed all that much.

He slid into the chair next to her, trying to appear less obvious as he compacted his tall frame into the tight space. One more day here, at most, his instinct whispered. People wouldn’t have noticed yet, but yet in this case was probably far too soon. As he sat, Storm stared at him intently. She took a sip
from the mug once more, set it down more gently than the ceramic seemed used to being handled, and spoke.

“Hank McCoy is dead,” she said, a hardened mask carefully prepared on her face. He knew instantly she had been preparing this demeanor, this cool exterior. Logan was not ready, however, and offered the tiniest visible flinch at his news. Hank. Dead. Inside, his gut twisted.


“Mob. Human Majority. Dragged him out of his home in upstate New York and onto his lawn,” Storm’s voice broke at this, wavered. She didn't want to have to explain, and he didn't want her to. His hand moved instinctively, barely grazing her own. Storm looked down at his closed palm, a bit shell-shocked, and her mask slipped more. Meanwhile, an anger had begun to swell inside him, gaining strength, an anger that he did not yet fully understand.

“Fuck,” Logan cursed again under his breath, casting his eyes downward. “And Charles…?” Logan began, before Storm intervened.

“Charles is coming back to reassess. Erik is staying in the field,” she said, regaining composure. Quietly she withdrew her hand just slightly from his, sensing his tension and giving him the space she thought he needed. Logan breathed out unsteadily, leaving his hands on the table, well aware there was no way to use them that could make any sort of difference. The metal sang under his skin uselessly, longing for release.

He sat quiet and still, waiting. He knew there was more. He could smell it on her.

“Logan, he's still not coming back alone,” Storm stated evenly.

“How do you mean?” he asked, prepared this time for the worst.

“They’ve acquired more help. That’s the decent part in all this mess.”

“Ok,” Logan said.

“Logan,” Storm breathed, finally bringing her eyes to his. They locked briefly, an unspoken language between them.

“Yeah?” he asked, before he had even known he had spoken.

“They’ve finally located Rogue.”

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, I feel like anybody could probably guess this chapter would end this way. I’m not that fresh and/or revelatory of a writer. Sorry for the slight delay and the changes for the intent of the story from yesterday. I had to brush up on my research and make sure I was right about some of the Trask details and accompanying timeline. I think it’s right, but if you noticed errors in my depiction of the original timeline, please do not hesitate to let me know. Thanks for all the support so far. It’s so encouraging and helps a wishy-washy writer like me keep at it. Until tomorrow, friends.
Hi guys! Just a bit of clarification for those who asked. This fic is following two stories right now. The chapters labeled “Now” are happening in 2029 with Logan and Laura and the chapters labeled “Then” are happening in 2015 with Logan and Storm (and *cough* Rogue *cough*) in Mexico. Remember though, it’s really all the same story, the same lifetime, the same Logan. Everything that happened to him in 2015 that you’re reading about he’s already experienced and still remembers in 2029. (Sorry, dudes, he’s a few steps ahead of you there. :P) Hope that makes sense. Don't worry though! It will eventually all come together!

Chapter 3: Now

Logan limped behind Laura slowly, the mountainside shrouding them in the half-blue tones of early night. The effort to get up, to walk, was no easy feat, but he had come to the detached realization earlier in the day that the wounds in his chest were finally starting to stitch themselves together, slowly, nerve by nerve, tendon by tendon. He was clueless as to why, but there it was. It would take several more days, but his body was being pigheaded, stubbornly managing to keep him alive. The cough remained, though. The inner ache…that stayed. It hurt to walk. Hell, it hurt to stand, but Logan had spent the majority of the day sleeping in the back of the Bronco while Laura bided her time. She had tried, uselessly, to find a way up the steep mountainside, and at some point, the roar of the engine and the jostling had woken Logan only enough to understand Laura had found some dirt road on the other side of the bluff so that they could avoid the cliff. By the end of the day they had both finally found themselves staring at the cabin, at the lookout tower, at Eden.

It wasn’t much. Two buildings, as far as Logan could tell, long-since abandoned. Laura had been cautious to get out of the car at first, but now her pace quickened ahead of him as he struggled to keep up. The summer wind had a colder bite to it up here, and as it whipped through the bluff, it kicked up the dust in the clearing. The light changed then, the sun lost behind a stray cloud, and a shudder overtook Logan. He stopped walking, muscles tense, as he finally lifted himself enough out of his own deep fog to realize the subtle signs of foreboding that he had at first clearly missed. The smell had been on the breeze. It had changed everything.

Extra tire tracks in the dust under his boots. Splintered wood around the doorknob leading into the cabin. The faint smell of sulfur, gun smoke, maybe no more than a day or two old. And then, on top of it all, the faintest smell of blood. Not his, not hers, but someone else’s. He already knew. No one was here now, but a lot of people had been. Recently.

Logan tried to call out to Laura, but she was already almost at the cabin door. It wouldn’t have mattered anyway; his voice refused to work.

“¿Dónde están?” Laura questioned, trotting up the steps to the cabin.

“Laura-” Logan attempted. His voice felt like gravel. He was slower, but he was almost to the door now.
“Hay cosas aquí! ¡Prisa!” she shouted.

“Kid—” Logan began again, limping up the steps and then lingering at the battered door frame. Laura had stopped a couple paces inside. They both stood frozen. The place had been ransacked. There were overturned beds, mattresses stripped. Backpacks were strewn everywhere, provisions, supplies littering the floor. Scattered board games, shattered glass vials. Bullet holes ravaged one side of the wall. And there, a small splatter that worked its way across one of the window sills. Blood, the kind he had smelled. She might have been willingly ignoring her senses before, but now he knew she could smell it too. See it. Know it for what it was.

Laura suddenly stalked further inside the place, before he could put a hand out to stop her. She fumbled through the broken furniture, looking under beds, through packs. The more seconds that passed, the more desperate she became, her movements frantic and sloppy. Logan stood—managing that was enough right now—and watched with unease. He knew, and he suspected she knew too, that no one, dead or alive, would be found here. The search was hopeless. Logan did his own rummaging, but for him they were for the right words, when the cold, stark realization seemed to hit Laura all at once. She threw down a random box, wiped the sweat from her head, and snarled. Immediately two claws sang as they sprang alive and they found their way into the wooden beam beside her.

She stood like that for a moment, breathing heavily through her anger, before she murmured something from under her breath. “Aquí. Here. Estaban aquí. They were here,” she whispered. It was then she turned her head to look at Logan, tears in her eyes. Logan’s stomach churned. His surroundings spun as his restlessness mounted. It was a look that haunted him, and suddenly Charles’ face filled Logan’s mind. Distant and pained as he murmured, before his last final breaths let him go. Boat. Sunseeker.

Laura removed her hand from the wall, splinters of wood flying everywhere. Logan straightened a little from where he had been leaning on the frame, turning away to face the mountain air. He and Laura were creatures that sensed everything, that felt everything. They were what they were. Words were secondary, and they didn’t come easy.

He was surprised to hear Laura following him though, and in moments her smaller presence was by his side, a handful of inches from him. The anger had left her. She was exhausted, he could see that now, as she stood quiet and motionless beside him. He hesitated, lingered, stalled, and it was in that moment he could have sworn he heard another voice, her voice. A sharp tsk in the air.

“You need to do something, sugar. Say something to her, it whispered.

Logan breathed in, the bile rising in his throat.

And how would you know? He thought, bitterly. I’m fucking here, alone.

But even as this thought crossed his mind, the presence had faded as soon as it had emerged, gone with the slightest shake of his head. Before he even realized what he was doing, he lifted out an arm, hesitantly, and put it around Laura’s thin shoulder.

“I’m sorry, kid,” he heard himself saying. Laura easily leaned into him then, and his grip on the child’s arm tightened reflexively. Vultures flew overhead. The forest hummed with noise. A little time passed like that, but nothing else was said. And no other voices came on the night wind. Anyway, it seemed enough for Laura. And that was good. Because it had to be.

Meanwhile, the last of the sun was setting. Darkness was waiting on all sides. And his internal clock
that ticked so awfully slow now quivered as it moved another minute hand forward. Logan shifted his position slightly, releasing his arm finally, so that he could look down at the smaller mutant.

“Laura, I need you to go in one more time, and help me find what supplies we can salvage. Understand?”

The small girl straightened, the steely resolve etched once more into her features. She looked up at him and nodded, before tucking her hair behind her ear with one hand, the blood on her knuckles already drying.

“Anything left over,” he heard himself saying once more. “Anything we can use. And, tonight, we don’t… we don’t have to sleep in there. The car’ll do.”

She nodded once more and put a little more distance between them, the sound of dusty boots scuffing on creaking floorboards. He breathed out steadily, another fucking moment ticking on. He turned back to the cabin, resigned to his task. It had all meant something. He knew it had. He only hoped it was enough.

Chapter End Notes

My Spanish is elementary at best. Google is helping me. Let me know, native speakers, if something looks a bit wonky. And, again, thank you for the amazing support. <3 Logan’s an interesting and perplexing character to write, but I’m starting to really enjoy the challenge. Happier times on the way for chapter 4. Also Rogue. Y’all want some Rogue? I feel like we (including Logan) need some Rogue. (*prays to the fanfiction gods® please dear lord let me get her right)

Also, a quick personal note- my little family is headed to Texas for a long weekend to visit some friends, but I’m hoping to somehow bribe the spouse into driving most of the way tomorrow so I can hide in the third row of my car and write a couple of chapters ahead of schedule, as our child will most likely be watching Paw Patrol on the iPad and will want little to do with me because that's literally heaven for her. But if my regularly scheduled posts become spotty for a few days, you know why. Thanks, bubs.
A cranky husband, a cranky toddler, a few laps in the swimming pool, a couple of good IPAs, and a whole lot of writing in the middle of the night because I might be mildly obsessed. Sorry this took me a few days, but it’s longer than my usual, so I hope that helps make up for it a little. We’re headed home tomorrow, and I hope to have 5 up by Tuesday. After that, back to posting every day. Enjoy!

Chapter 4: Then

Swallows sang in the open air. The beer bottle’s glass sweated as he held it between two hands. The sun warmed the ground under his boots, the heat forcing him to shed his jacket. It was a clear, bright day, and it should have been what he needed, but his whole body remained restless. He was near the very outside perimeter of the mansion’s veranda, and verandas didn’t suit him. The lawn felt too neat, the hedges too clean. But it was outside, closer to something he was more familiar with, and the house had felt suffocating this afternoon. There were more people here now—more children, more adults—many he didn’t know. And of the ones he did know... there was history. He took another steady draw of the lager, the amber liquid quickly disappearing from the bottle. It wasn’t near strong enough to chase away some of these thoughts. He wished, not for the first time, he had brought more Molson. He’d have to go out soon and buy more, along with a decent bottle of whiskey.

Suddenly: light notes of mint and nectar and earth hovering over the undertones of small boot heels on gravel and the sweet brush of silk swiping against cotton. Marie’s chorus. He couldn’t help but smile a bit behind his beer. Logan didn’t turn around and instead let her approach him, staying in his place on the veranda’s stairs, still facing the deep rich green of the evergreens that lined the edge of the clearing below.

“Hi Logan,” Marie said casually, coming around to sit beside him on the steps that led to the lawn and gravel path beyond. She respected his space as well as her own as she sat next to him, but he was pleased to see her place beside him didn’t suggest they were anything close to strangers, either. It always struck him a bit to be reminded that Marie was just as cognizant and aware of space and the fluidity of boundaries as any feral he had ever come across. She was always present, always aware of everything anyone did or said without their mouths. Jesus, he missed her more than he thought he had.

“Hey, kid,” he said, before another sip of beer. They had made their introductions after he had returned from Canada, but he hadn’t had a real conversation with her since. It was good, real good, to see her like this. She was alone, for one. “Skipping class?” he added teasingly, finally turning just slightly to look at her, arching a brow in her direction.

Rogue offered up a small smile, resting her elbows on her knees. Something inside of him felt warm at the small upturn of the corners of her lips. His eyes darted over her quickly, just once, to take better inventory. She was the same, mostly. Dark hair, pale, creamy skin, most of it covered, dressed in her usual, careful style. Long, dark hazelnut gloves worked their way up her arms. She held herself well, no evidence of any real emotional or physical hurt, not, at least, since the last time he
had been here. For a moment, Logan’s eyes lingered on the platinum streak in her hair.

“Break between classes. Sorry, not so rebellious today,” she said, keeping her gaze on him, always able to hold her own in his presence.

“You might have to take that up with the girl I met after a cage fight, hitchin’ her way through Canada,” Logan offered playfully, a smirk invading his features before he could stop it.

Rogue flashed a small smile in his direction again, as Logan took another sip of his beer, polishing it off and setting it down at his feet.

“How’s it been, anyway? To be back from there?” Rogue asked, looking at him intently now. Logan realized quickly that, unlike the others, she hadn’t asked him if he had found whatever he had been looking for. Smart girl. Logan inwardly sighed a little, suddenly wishing he had something more for his hands to do now that he had polished off the Molson. She had let him keep his secrets, but she still left him with a hard, complicated question to answer.

“Ah. Not so bad. The place’s fine.” It was as close to honest as he could get. He appreciated many things about Westchester, but…others…he could have done without.

“Not always, though, right?” Rogue offered, biting her lower lip for a moment. Logan looked up once more at her at that. Rogue had been here for over a year, and he got the sense that she seemed content.

“What are you getting at, kid?” he asked, curious to find himself prodding a bit more than he typically cared to, but he couldn’t seem to help himself with Rogue. He wanted to know.

“I just, well, I don’t know,” Rogue stammered. “Sometimes I don’t think this place... it’s not meant for all of us,” she murmured.

Logan breathed through his nose, considering what she had said. “It’s all so bad?”

“No... well, no,” she blushed. “I just, I guess I’ve been a bit jealous of you, you know? Flyin’ off whenever you want, without worry. Out there is not as friendly, but I knew who I was. I mean, I knew I wasn’t them, you know? And that was it. I was what they weren’t. But here, um, we’re all the same, in a way. So here I just have to be, well, the rest of me.”

“Just Marie,” Logan said, before he could think. What she said made sense, in a way so honest he wasn’t willing to face up to it. Rogue blushed a bit at the name, unused to hearing the sounds of it on another’s lips. There was a bit of silence as the August heat lingered between them. Logan cleared his throat.

“You know you’re not married to the place, right kid? The door’s open, and it’s right there,” Logan said, gesturing a hand to the field and the line of pine trees below. A flash of Marie out on the open highway, maybe on a bike, or on the back of his bike, thighs cradling the roaring body of the engine, flashed across his mind, and Logan had to shake his head to purge the thought.

“I know. I don’t want to leave,” Marie was saying, although he noticed the way she crossed her legs as she spoke, carefully folding her inner-self up a bit more. “I guess I’m just...venting a little. I’ll be ok,” she said with a strength that made him almost believe her.

“Good,” Logan murmured, turning to her. He had the strangest urge to brush a hand through her hair. He always did, and he had, once, after the torch. Instead though, he stood, offering her his hand to pull her up with him.
“That needs to be how it is,” he added, flashing her a genuine smile.

---

The desert heat danced and swayed around them, and Logan’s brow began to sweat. Storm was usually never that affected by the weather as the rest of human or mutant kind seemed to be, and Logan typically had an easier time withstanding harsh extremes, but he had a feeling this climate was finally getting to them both. Additionally, the news of Hank’s death, along with the impending arrival of both Charles and Rogue, had shifted the mood from restless to desperate. Storm’s frustration arrived in the form of becoming all the more careful, hypervigilant about the coordinates and the safety measures needed to ensure a secure and stealthy arrival of the Blackbird. Logan, on the other hand, just grew more uneasy, edging on irritable. Logan had also slept like shit, and this time it wasn’t because of any damn nightmare.

He paced between Storm and the communicator she held to a random patch of desert a few paces ahead, a clear view of the sky. They were standing outside of the warehouse that stored the Blackbird when it wasn’t in use. Cracked and missing window panes, the gray paint chipping off in places, the smell of mildew. It certainly wasn’t Westchester, but, for now, it worked. Logan looked once more to the sky. The time was almost twenty minutes past its scheduled arrival. “Storm, you sure the coordinates…?” he gruffly began, but before he could finish, he instinctively straightened. He could taste the shifting drafts of air, the dust picking up. They were close now.

Logan had learned that Charles, with the help of Erik, had been trying to locate all of his previous students. In the past two months Logan had discovered that finding out what had happened to the dozens of young adults that had passed through Xavier’s halls sometimes meant having to bitterly add to the growing death count Charles, Storm and Logan mentally kept, but sometimes, on rare occasions, this led to recruitment. The search for the students who had actually served as X-Men, for however briefly, had been especially paramount, but Logan had been told the search for Rogue had amounted only in failure over the last several years. Logan should have, like the rest of them, been left to assume the worst, but that was something Logan just couldn’t bring himself to do. For one thing, it didn’t feel like Rogue was gone, and for another, he hadn’t put much faith in their substandard search process, especially since the takeover of Cerebro, where easily locating mutants was practically impossible.

In the end, he had always been left with the feeling that, if Rogue didn’t want to be found, she wouldn’t be. It was a bone-deep awareness about the girl, even if it defied the most recent information Charles had on her. Of course, the last Logan had seen her, she was full of questions and self-doubt. She had taken the cure, and was mostly estranged from the school and the people who had previously called her friend. Logan shifted his position in the dust slightly. Logan had maintained his friendship with her, but that was also after Jean. He had left for Canada shortly after, and he hadn’t come back. But, everyone knew the cure hadn’t worked, that it had eventually worn off. Rogue’s inability to touch must have also returned.

Erik had discovered a few months ago that she had been working with some of the mutant rights factions up north. It was a hard thing for Logan to picture, but the new information Storm had matched up with Magneto’s initial findings. Logan had been told Rogue willingly volunteered to come forward, that she had vital information for their cause, and that she had also been there, at least in some capacity, the night that Hank had been murdered on the lawn of his home. One, if not all of these pieces of information, sent a small quiver down Logan’s spine. None of it sounded like her. None of it sounded like Marie. Of course, it didn’t really matter how he felt though, because she was headed their way directly, Charles at the helm.

Logan had finally stopped pacing, and fixated on a sliver of sky where he could sense the Blackbird
approaching from, despite the fact it was most likely in stealth mode. The ground was humming now, pebbles slightly shifting in their places, as the air in front of them suddenly morphed, painting itself in tones of black and grey as the powerful aircraft transitioned out of its surreptitious defense mode and prepared to land, kicking up the dust and dirt, shrouding the Mexican sky in a dirty orange.

As the Blackbird made contact with the ground, Logan heard his own heart thump in his chest. He could always hear it, but was usually able to tune it out with ease. But this time.... *God damn it, Rogue.* He hadn’t thought about the girl in a couple of years, because it didn’t suit him to think about her. To think about her was to linger, to remember, to *wait.*

*C'mon, I’ll take care of you.*

*You promise?*

*Yeah. Yeah, I promise.*

Logan swallowed hard.

Logan and Storm both stepped forward a little, waiting for the boarding ramp to gently descend. Charles emerged first, carefully operating the chair down the incline. Logan was a bit dampened to see that the younger man that looked so much older than him seemed worn down, a bit spent. Logan offered him a respectful nod regardless, though, but let Storm greet him.

“Hank…” Storm murmured, her voice emotional and wary. Charles’ exterior softened at her grief and he nodded gently. “My dear, I’m afraid it’s worse than we could have imagined,” was all Logan heard, before Charles stopped speaking and started communicating in a different way to her, impervious to Logan’s hearing. *Logan, I trust you can see Rogue off the plane and take care of the jet’s safety checks* arrived in his head, along with, *It’s good to see you again, friend.*

Logan sighed, turning back around, only to find her walking down the boarding ramp, a purpose to her step and a resolute look on her brow. She was covered in a dark grey monotone uniform, not so different than the old X-men models, complete with the same-color gloves. The suit clung to her frame, those suits always did, and they revealed that she was thinner, the curve of youth gone from her body. Her hair was up, taught and high, the telltale platinum streak pulled up carefully with rest of the dark brown. He could tell she was fit, strong, even, but the lack of softness also made her appear older and a bit wary, as if she was bracing for bad news. Nevertheless, she was remarkably, undoubtedly, without any sort of question or pause, a *woman.*

She looked up and made eye contact then, as the chocolate brown of her eyes gave away only the slightest sign of being taken aback at the sight of him. Logan was sure Charles had filled her in on his presence here, so he moved on to assuming her surprise was because of Logan’s appearance. That’s usually how people responded if more than a decade had passed since they’d seen him. She stopped a few paces short of him, another quick look once up and down, and spoke.

“Logan,” Rogue offered.

“Hey, Rogue” he said, with a small smile that betrayed him momentarily. She was in one piece, alive. That seemed reason enough to be thankful. Meanwhile, he tried to pick up something else in her scent, but couldn’t. *It was…the inside of the Blackbird? The nylon of her suit? The leather of her boots?* Nothing more.

“You’re…the same,” she finally said, confirming the initial hint of surprise. “Of course you’re the same,” she added, and Logan found the hairs on the back of his neck rise slightly.
“Yeah, well,” Logan grumbled. “Hasn’t been that long.” Little over a decade? Junk change, kid, he thought coyly, but he couldn’t help but notice his arms suddenly crossing themselves, a potent feeling of vulnerability rising within him. He wasn’t in the mood, especially recently with the influx of distant memories, to be reminded of his mutation. Meanwhile Rogue’s face smoothed into what seemed like defiant indifference, and what little warmth he realized he was desperate to receive was gone.

“Long enough,” she retorted, a slight edge to her voice. Then with a small nod, she walked past him to catch up with Charles and Storm. He whipped around silently to follow her with his eyes, realizing he was chained to his spot, given orders to carry out his job with the Blackbird, which had ensured that Logan would have no way of knowing the intimate details of the rest of the others’ conversation, for at least the initial part of it.

Logan suddenly found his movements sloppier and more disordered, as he quickly boarded the Blackbird and sent the digital readout to the debriefing room where Storm would eventually find it on her laptop in the Bunker underneath the warehouse. The Bunker had been created, or found, Logan wasn’t so sure which, before he had joined the team. It acted as a safe house of sorts, a place where they could freely talk. It had minimal provisions and a place to sleep if need be. He expected it was where they would likely stay tonight, particularly with Charles here. The Professor was rarely in Mexico for long, his unending search ever present in his mind.

Logan had increasingly started to feel that this mission, or this desperate attempt at one, had all sorts of flat and sharp notes in it, and Rogue’s sudden presence had spiked that feeling. Since meeting Charles and Erik in the airport, it had been like this. Half-truths. Half-lies. The beginnings of stories. He was certain if he asked Charles about any of it directly that Charles would respond with his usual candor. None of what Charles was asking him to do should have felt subservient or off-putting; ten years ago Logan had also been in charge of doing the Blackbird’s safety checks once it had been grounded, as he was often useless when the craft was airborne. But Logan was sure he was intentionally being left out of things, now.

Logan assumed initially it was about regaining confidence in him, and, that, if it came down to it in a fight, Charles would trust him to stand up, take the beating, and do the right thing. But there had been no fighting. So far, no combat of any sort. Of course, Logan knew he was most effective when solving problems that came at him within a ten-foot radius, but Logan had a sharp mind too, especially when it came to tactical strategy. And no one had been asking for his opinion, on anything much more than scouting out locations for Storm and Logan to hide out in. Meanwhile, Rogue, Marie, whoever she was, had been here mere moments and had seemed to elevate herself through the unstated rankings he still struggled to understand. This…woman…whoever the hell she was…and that was just it…who the hell was she? Where had she been all this time? Why had she not come forward? How old was she anyway? Logan did the math in his head…what, thirty? Thirty one?

Logan paused a minute at the control panel, considering this. A typical person did a whole hell lot of growing up between eighteen and thirty, and while the math told the truth, like all significant partings, until this moment Logan had subconsciously yet dutifully kept the Marie he had left behind in Westchester synonymous with the Marie he envisioned still existed out there in the world. To do so was partially juvenile, he realized, but ten years, before this moment at least, had seemed like no time at all. Now, it seemed like everything. Meanwhile, he found himself trying to look for the Marie he’d known, the Marie he discovered in the back of his trailer over a decade ago. She seemed to be missing entirely.

Long enough, she had said.

Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck.
After finally finishing up with the Blackbird, he stalked over to the freight elevator which led to the underground Bunker. The Bunker was made up of a small hallway with only handful of sterile, indiscriminate rooms and two smaller washrooms. The main room, the biggest, was a space predominantly used for planning operations. A small rectangular stainless steel table could be found in the middle, a sink and a small refrigerator placed on one side, stocked with what little provisions they had. The other two rooms were for sleeping, mattresses with steel frames on either side. It was nothing pretty, absolutely utilitarian in its approach. Storm’s laptop was always with her, and beyond their phones and an extra satellite phone, that was as sophisticated as it got. Logan and Storm sometimes stayed in the Bunker, but Logan hated being underground, and even though it was useful to have, he found himself disliking the place immensely. The freight elevator jostled under Logan’s weight as it descended to the bottom floor, and he felt his muscles tense, harden. His irritable mood, now flecked with disappointment in finding a changed Rogue walking off the Blackbird’s boarding ramp, was a recipe for him to feel intensely coiled, ready to spring.

As soon as the elevator made its way to the bottom, the voices traveled to Logan’s ears from the hallway. He removed the metal latch and unfastened the doors, the conversation between Charles, Storm and Rogue becoming impossible not to hear.

“After the uprising, we fled in different directions,” he heard Rogue saying. As Logan rounded the corner, within seconds he would be in view from the doorway. “We were underground for a long time, hiding. We would have been in communication, Charles, if we felt we could….”

“We?” Logan asked, standing in the door frame of the room. He was swift enough to see Rogue’s eyes shoot up to him quickly before shooting back down. “Who’s we?” Logan pressed.

“Hello Logan,” Charles said. “Please, take a seat.” The man had gestured to the seat next to Rogue on her side of the table. Logan stalked over and sat next to her. He turned to his right, staring directly at her. Meanwhile, Charles continued on.

“Rogue informs us that for the last several years she has been working closely with the Occupy Wall Street team, through when Angel lead the division.”

“OWS, I thought that was Blink’s gig,” Logan offered, without taking his eyes off Rogue. “Didn’t they break the people out of one of Trask’s camps a couple of years ago?”

“No,” Rogue finally responded. Logan’s eyebrows rose at this, waiting for her to turn to him, but she still wouldn’t. Instead, she kept her gaze on Charles. “We were Zucotti park in ’11. My team helped organized the march,” she murmured. More and more, Logan didn’t like the sound of this. Everyone knew about Zucotti. In Logan’s mind, it had been an idiotic approach, tactically speaking. It was intended to be a peaceful protest at Westchester after the school had been taken over, but it had ended in immense disaster, causing the deaths of several mutants. The reason it had ended horribly, Logan thought, was because of the naiveté of the people who had planned it.

“You team?” Logan asked cautiously.

“My former team.” It was then Rogue finally looked at him, eyes wild and dark and unchecked. It set Logan on edge.

“Logan, I’m not sure you understand. Rogue comes to us as more than just a past ally. She holds essential information regarding the Mark X’s design. Her team was compromised retrieving it,” Charles added, a solemn tone to this voice. Logan looked from Rogue to Charles back at Rogue.

“Former team?” Logan asked, trying to soften his voice out of respect. Rogue offered the slightest nod. Logan let out a long, tired sigh. God damn. They were dropping like fucking flies.
“Hank was elemental in the mission. He knew about the plans, and our job was to extract them. We were, of course, too late to save him though,” Marie stopped, a strange note in her voice Logan couldn’t quite figure out the tune to.

“We hadn’t anticipated Human Majority’s… insistence. Their power. The mission was compromised by then, but the plans…” Marie stopped. Logan watched her thin, gloved hand snake upward to tap on the pale skin of her temple, right where it met her hairline. A ghostly shiver worked its way down Logan’s spine. The Rogue he had known hardly ever talked about the people she pulled in, the voices in her head. And it seemed like this Rogue, whoever she was, had a hard time with it too. For some reason, it made Logan’s tension ease just slightly, and he found himself empathizing with her for a moment. Rogue’s power, always the last defense: partially because she could be deadly, but also because of what it did to her. A strange, unwelcome thought suddenly trampled through his mind. Was he up there still too?

“It was our last resort, of course,” Rogue murmured to a silent room. “I did what I had to do.”

Something about this last statement sent alarm bells off in Logan’s head again. She was lying about something. The scent of deception was instantaneous and heavy, as if she had been suddenly doused in gasoline. It had something to do with Hank, something to do with Rogue. But Hank was dead. Logan quickly glanced at Charles, wondering if the man and his ability to read minds was eight steps ahead of Logan’s own senses. If Charles did detect duplicity, however, he didn’t look it. The man was calm, expressionless, even as he was—

“Logan?” Storm was asking him. He looked to Storm and back to see Charles staring at him. Pay attention, he heard Charles mentally reprimand him.

“Sorry, Storm,” Logan said. “Tell it to me again.”

“What’s the location set for tomorrow on the opposite of the perimeter?”

“The plan was one more day in Yécora, but I don’t have a good feeling about it anymore,” Logan said, eyes settling back on Rogue. “I’d recommend the Bunker tonight, and then head west tomorrow morning. Straight off.”

“Good. That settles it,” Charles said, moving his chair outward from the table. “Perhaps we should retire for the evening. I’m assuming you must be exhausted, Rogue. Storm, I am assuming you can show Rogue to the room you will be sharing? And Logan, I may require a bit of your assistance.”

---

It had been a couple of hours, and Logan had no intention of sleeping. After seeing Charles to bed, which he did more and more of, especially in the Bunker, Logan had stalked back to the main debriefing room again, uncaring of who he might find there, intent on Tequila. He and Storm weren’t monks, not even close, and as always, they kept a stash of something in the Bunker, an all-too-often and realistic way to deal with the awful news they had been receiving lately. Logan was happy to find the room empty, and after rustling around in the file cabinet he found what he was looking for. While being underground helped, the bunker was still warm and lacked air-conditioning, like most places in Mexico. He had already shed down to a wifebeater and jeans. His usual, anyway.

He padded back over to the table on the side he and Rogue had been sitting at before, bottle in hand. He could give a shit about using a glass, not only because they had few to spare, but because it would take half a bottle of direct delivery of Tequila for him to feel anything anyway. He slipped off the cap and knocked a bit back, letting the liquid burn and sizzle on the way down. With that first swallow, he finally let himself face up to the fact he had been avoiding all day: Rogue was back.
Marie wasn’t.

It was a hard thing to admit, but there it was. And whatever relationship he shared with her in the past seemed lost in the Mexican dust. A cloying thought took up residence in his mind that he had a hard time thinking around: what had that past relationship even been? Had he been a friend? A teacher? A father-like figure? Logan shuddered at that last thought. No. At least, he sure as hell hoped not. And what about now? What had happened to her, and why the fuck was she keeping things from them all? Logan obviously knew she really didn’t owe him anything, but didn’t she owe something to Charles? What was her long game, keeping Charles in the dark? And who the fuck was she trying to protect?

Half the bottle appeared to be missing before he heard her, the Tequila delaying his senses enough to barely give him more than a second’s warning before he looked up and saw her lingering in the door frame, the same place she had found him a few short hours ago.

“Hey,” Rogue murmured. She had stripped down to just the pants of the suit and a thin, black tank top. Logan noted the lack of gloves, all that creamy skin gracing the air. Her hair was also down now, and Logan noticed for the first time it was shorter, the longest tendrils barely brushing the arch of her collarbone.

“You need something?” Logan managed gruffly, gripping the bottle tightly, unashamed for her to see what the night had led him to and just how much booze it took for Logan to feel practically anything.

“No,” she said. Rogue was silent as she walked across the room, sitting down opposite of him at the table. She hadn’t asked to join him, but Rouge already knew he wouldn’t protest. Marie, always aware of what we were saying when we weren’t talking. Logan quietly tipped the bottle in her direction, offering it to her, but she shook her head slightly. “It looks good. I would, but…not now,” she finished. Logan smirked a little at that.

"Suit yourself."

“Charles told me you were in Japan,” Rogue said, after a few seconds of silence.

“Home for a while first, then Japan. Tokyo for a bit, but Nagasaki, mostly,” Logan responded, his words running together just the slightest bit. The liquor had stopped burning on its way down and had started to feel smooth. At this point, finally, his healing factor wasn’t catching up so damn quick to him, and the room felt fluid, curving in around them both, as if the rules of physics had ceased to exist.

“Japan… that’s a bit different for you,” she said, her voice even.

“Yeah well, at first it wasn’t voluntary,” he murmured, looking at her. “Then, it was.” Images of that fucking hole in Nagasaki flooded his mind, followed by friendlier memories, the sight of the coastline, the water lapping at his feet, the curve of Mariko’s lips. Logan had always assumed Japan had been about learning patience, learning to let things go, but since the return of the memories, he wasn’t so sure. He seemed destined to run right back into the past, over and over again. He looked over to Rogue once more. He was in a fucking loop.

“Were you there, then, in Japan, when the school…?” Rogue began. It took Logan a second to catch up, realizing what she meant.

“No. Not yet. But I was by the time I found out about it a few years later,” he said carelessly. He felt her stiffen slightly at that. If she was upset with him for being absent, he could understand that. What
he didn’t get was this newfound strange allegiance to the north, this rebel-like brand of loyalty. He, at times, had fought just as hard alongside the X-Men for their survival, but the Rogue he had known had never blindly followed anything so faithfully, particularly when it meant joining up with a team that might end up getting themselves, or others, killed. Especially up north, he knew some of the mutant rights factions were sloppy. Rogue wasn’t. Or shouldn’t be. The thought suddenly reminded him of the lingering smell of deceit in the air he sensed earlier, and with the Tequila finally disintegrating the remains of inhibition, he pressed her.

“Why aren’t you telling them everything, Rogue?” Logan asked. She looked up at him sharply then, and he could practically hear the olive branch that she had initially extended to him snapping between them.

“I’m telling the truth,” she recoiled, her voice quiet, threaded with caution. Also not a direct answer to the question. “And Charles would know if I wasn’t.”

“Half-truths,” Logan offered, tipping the bottle once more in her direction.

“You have no idea what you’re talking about,” she said carefully, putting her hands at her sides.

“Hey, I’m just calling them how I see them. Or smell them,” Logan said, setting the bottle down a little too forcefully and readjusting his position in his chair. It was harder to stay seated now, the liquor intent on setting a fire in his blood. “These are my people to protect.”

“Your people?” Rogue’s eyebrows shot up, her face flushing with a pale, pink anger. It would have been cute, had he not been so annoyed. Or drunk.

“Yeah,” Logan said stubbornly, trying to contain the wild parts of him that Rogue so easily, so quickly, tested. He was getting to her in equal measure, though. He knew he was.

“You don’t have the first clue about what’s been happening, about what they’ve been through,” she motioned around the room angrily. “You haven’t been around long enough to know,” she said.

“Haven’t seen you hanging around the X-Men either, Rogue,” he retorted. At this, she stood angrily. Her feet started carrying her to the door, but he followed, blocking her way out. He pressed. “And I’ve been around long enough. In fact, too fucking long. A long fucking damn time, and I know when someone gets sloppy. Hank is dead.”

It was like he had slapped her. A contorted look of pain appeared on her face, clouding her eyes for a moment.

“That’s it, isn’t it? Somebody fucked up. Somebody on your team fucked up, and Hank paid the cost.”

“You weren’t there,” she said, the threat rising in her words.

“Hank was our last contact up north. You could have been here, helping us, but somehow, you thought you couldn’t contact us, contact me, before this fucking moment? Before-”

“You weren’t there,” she practically snarled, stepping closer into his space. His skin felt hot next to hers. This Rogue was dangerous, stronger than he had suspected. And all that skin, so close to his. He wasn’t afraid of it, of her, at all, but he knew an exhibition of strength when he saw one. She could kill him if she ever felt inclined, one of the few who probably could.

They stood entangled like that for a moment. She was centimeters from his face. He could hear her heartbeat. Her breath. Feel her essence. And, then, there it was, closely guarded, but there. Nectar.
Logan’s look on his face must have softened, because Rogue leaned back just slightly, breathing hard. She suddenly looked younger, more tired. She sighed.

“Logan, things have changed. It’s…not like it was,” she murmured.

“You don’t think I know that?” he asked tiredly; the spite had flown away from his words.

“I’m not sure. Everything, everyone, is less safe,” her voice seemed to break a bit at this, and Logan started regretting his earlier frustration. He stepped toward her a bit more.

“The world’s never been safe, kid,” he murmured, instinctively reaching out his hand and running a finger quickly and reflexively down a platinum lock of her hair, meanwhile pushing away images of some of his most recent and horrific returning memories. He felt Rogue wince a bit at the old nickname, but she also did nothing to stop him. She closed her eyes for a moment, then opened them once more, staring at him intently.

He heard Storm in the hallway first before he saw her, but still let her approach.

“Logan, Rogue,” Storm murmured, and only then did Logan’s hand return to his side. “Yeah, Storm?” he said, turning to the other woman. He noticed Rogue backed up a few paces, filling space between them. “I just received word from Erik. There’s a lot of conflict happening near the border, so we’re leaving Mexico tomorrow morning, right away. They’ve granted us clearance for South Africa.”

“So we’re finally leaving this dump, eh?” Logan said, looking up at her. South Africa was one of the friendliest nations to mutants at the current moment. Most likely they would meet Erik there, and reassess.

“That’s the plan,” Storm said. Logan looked back between the two women, and around the expressionless, sterile room.

“Good,” he finally said. “I fucking hate Mexico.”
Chapter 5: Now

The kid’s heartbroken, darlin’.

She’ll survive. She’s tough, like you.

Tough. Yeah, right. Look where tough’s got me.

Don’t go feeling sorry for yourself, sugar. You’ve got a job to do now.

But I’m tired, baby. I’m so fucking tired.

I know, sugar.

I know.

A steady weight pinned him to the seat. As his eyes slowly blinked open, the light from the cracked door in his mind grew darker and the Bronco’s dimly moonlit interior once more came into focus. Logan’s eyes felt heavy as they glanced downward to see Laura’s brown hair, almost indiscernible from the dark that surrounded them. She had initially been leaning on his shoulder, exhausted from the work of pilfering the cabin, but now her head was resting on his leg, using him as a feeble pillow. He couldn’t have been comfortable, but neither was she. Pins and needles shot down his right leg, the extremity having gone just as quickly to sleep under her. Having his nerve endings fall asleep was a feeling he was still getting used to; his healing factor had always corrected that form of discomfort in the years before now.

As he remembered that Laura, too, now had adamantium lurking inside her skeleton, even if it was just her claws, his gut seized up in guilt. Maybe the bonding process hadn’t been as severe, but it had been butchery, all the same. And, of course, her troubles didn’t stop there. Even if Laura never saw another day of violence in all her life, she was destined for a troubled, unordinary future. Maybe an unending one.

If the supposed death of her friends had bothered her, Laura no longer showed it. She had settled into another even silence, although she did now answer his questions with simple, short responses, half of the time in Spanish. She was willful, but not obstinate, and she silently carried out the task of going through her friends’ things, carefully and intuitively picking out what she knew they would need. Action figures were discarded, board games set aside, as Laura picked out battery-powered lanterns and sleeping bags, medical syringes and lighters. She knew what she needed to take to survive and everything else, except for a couple of those damn comic books she dutifully carried around with her, she was willing to spare.

Outside, the world was shrouded in black. An owl flew quietly above them, crickets sung, the wind blew, but Laura’s steady breathing hovered above it all. Logan straightened up a little, looking over at the girl once again. She was thinner than he had seen her in days. Her hair hung lank on her head,
her jeans muddy from the mountainside. There were blood stains on her clothes. A sharper, more knowledgeable part of his consciousness—the older him, the younger him, he wasn’t quite sure anymore—continued to shout: They had to get out of here. They should have left hours ago. They needed to cross the border. They needed to go home.

*Home.* But then what?

Logan knew their inventory. They had managed to scrape together a few canteens of water, some beef jerky and protein bars, a couple of blankets, some spare packs that hadn’t been destroyed. Not enough to last another day. But they had a little over nine thousand dollars left, and that was enough. Enough to get started.

But started doing what?

*You’ve got a job to do now.*

Logan closed his eyes, before another cough overtook him. It started inoffensively enough, but it grew in intensity, lungs searing in pain. In a few quick moments, Laura awoke, sleekly and silently jumping away from Logan, giving him an intense, strange look.

“Sorry,” he said groggily, after struggling to regain his voice.

“You are still healing?” Laura whispered in the dark. She wouldn’t let her gaze leave him, and it irked him slightly.

“Yeah, kid,” Logan said, half-lying. Meanwhile, he moved to blindly search for the keys on the dash.

“Didn’t mean to wake you up. Lay back down. There are blankets in the back, if you need them. We’re getting out of here,” Logan decided the moment he said the words, head still pounding from the pain in his chest. He shed his button-down, throwing the shirt in the back. They’d need new clothes, more food, shelter, and soon.

“¿Donde?”

“What?” Logan looked over at her aimlessly.

“¿Donde? Where will you take me?” Laura asked more loudly. Her eyes were wild, her body stiffer.

“Canada, kid,” he said, mildly annoyed.

Laura looked at him then, long and hard. “…¿Planeas mantenermé?”

“Gotta talk in English, Laura. Inglés, or, whatever. Comprende?”

“Where will you go?” she asked solemnly. Logan had found the keys, but stopped momentarily, and turned to stare back at the girl who was so very much like him.

*She thinks you’re going to drop her off somewhere, and bolt.*

*Not now, Marie.*

The girl was tense, coiled up. She seemed almost ready to jump out of the car, if need be. After all this time, it seemed, she was still ready and waiting for someone to betray her. Two days ago, that might have been Logan himself. And now…now.
“Nowhere to go anyway, so I thought I’d stick with you. That ok?” he asked. The darkness flowed between them, the sounds of night hovering all around. Even in the black, though, Logan could feel a small, careful smile starting to appear on Laura’s face.

“Si.”

---

Later on, the Bronco quietly slowed to a halt on the deserted road. The only evidence was there was no evidence, although Logan assumed a telltale white obelisk was off to the side of them somewhere, dutifully marking the divide. Logan knew how to cross in a car undetected, had done it so many times he might as well have done it blindfolded. But that, he reminded himself, had also been in the old reality. Logan calmly realized, since the jump, he hadn’t been back this far north. A funny feeling tickled the back of his throat as he stared ahead, tall pinewood trees lining the road. Laura, realizing they had slowed, looked at him hesitantly. Logan just tilted his head forward a bit. Laura looked back at the road knowingly. Ahead of them, Canada.

---

Following a pile of new clothes and boots for each of them, five pounds of shaved ham, two loaves of bread, three tubes of Pringles, eight Tootsie Roll pops, a bottle of Jack Daniels and a pair of reading glasses slowly rolled their way to the end of the Walmart check-out line. The sound of smacking gum, the burn of florescent lighting, and the sheen from the clerk’s bleached blonde hair all seemed jarring and bright against the dark world Logan and Laura had just come from. The clerk noticing the eclectic nature of the goods on the conveyer belt, slowly turned her gaze from the merchandise making her way toward her to Logan and Laura, and blinked.

“You got cigars?” Logan asked gruffly, his fingers twitching a bit. Laura had buttoned up her jacket and he had done the same with his shirt, but he knew they both looked terrible. They had found themselves idling outside of the Estevan Walmart at two in the morning a few minutes ago, and Logan hoped that the world had gone to shit enough for someone not to call the Canadian Center of Child Protection on them both.

“Any vegetables, Logan?”

She just lost the only family she knew. I’m not gonna force her to eat a bunch of fucking celery.

But, you’re responsible for her now, right?

Right?

“Sir?” the woman asked. Logan looked up then, the woman clearly waiting on him.
“Yeah?”

“Do you want plastic bags?” she asked, gesturing to the white ones next to her.

“Yeah, why wouldn’t I?” Logan asked, frustratingly.

“Ten cents a bag.”

“Yeah, whatever,” Logan grumbled. As the clerk began bagging the rest of the junk food and clothes, Laura started collecting the bags as she finished each one.

“Two hundred and thirty-four dollars, eighty cents.”

“Jesus fuck,” Logan cursed. Goddamn fucking inflation. He shoved back a particularly cruel, very old memory of himself flicking ten cents on the counter for a Coke in some diner a zillion years ago, while the woman’s eyes widened and she leaned back just a little, once more looking from him to Laura and back. Laura coolly smiled behind her pink and blue sunglasses.

“You take American money?”

“Umm, yes sir. 2% upcharge for the exchange rate.”

Logan grabbed three grubby hundred-dollar-bills and put them on the counter. “That about cover it?”

---

Logan slept for the next two days in the motel room. The place had been nothing nice, maybe the cheapest in town, but he wasn’t about to pay for anything fancy any longer now that their income was fixed. The room had a couple of beds and a shower and a TV, and that was enough. That first night, the water pouring over him in the shower, Logan had looked down to see that his skin had finally stitched itself back together, although the scar would be horrendous. He barely gave it another thought, though, as he could manage little else but putting on a clean shirt and jeans, before dragging himself into the bed closest to the door, not even bothering with the blankets.

Laura sat on the other bed, watching him as he did so.

“Stay put,” he heard himself saying to her, face muffled by the pillow.

“What am I going to do?” she asked, looking around the room.

“TV,” Logan gestured over to the boxy-looking device that had to be at least thirty years old. “Stay inside though. Keep your head low.”

“Mierda,” he heard Laura mutter on her breath.

“I heard that,” Logan mumbled, through closed eyes.

--

His dreams were surreal and wild. They flickered, sporadically jumped, sped up and slowed down, cruelly lingering in the worst moments and flying through the better ones. The beaches of
Normandy, his skull cracking, the pain immense and heavy at being sent back, the slightest flicker of a green coat, contrasting brightly with the red seat of a train, the Canadian wilderness in wintertime, the earth quaking under his feet, claws embedded deep into the wall, trying to move…

Logan shot up with a start, breathing heavily as his eyes darted this way and that. He wheezed heavily in the afternoon light. On the television, a soap opera played softly. Snacks littered the room, the half-empty bottle of Jack he had downed the night before sitting on the peeling paint of the desk. And…Laura?

Logan got out of bed, prowling quickly around the room.

“Laura?” he asked, headed to check the bathroom. The door was open, no one inside. His heartbeat quickened, a shot of adrenaline speeding up his movements. Instantly he was back at the other bed, rifling through the covers, looking for her pack, any sign of her. How could they have known their route? How the fuck would he be able to track her? How long had it even fucking been-

Just then, the twisting of a key in the door knob, and Logan froze before Laura aimlessly entered the room from the outside, backpack in hand, sunglasses still on. She stopped immediately, as she felt his bulky frame seething in anger, but still looked up at him calmly.

“Where the hell were you?” Logan growled, rounding on her. Laura, by contrast, didn’t seem the least bit threatened. She dropped the bag next to the door, and walked across the room to flop down on her own bed.

“Me aburrí. Caminé alrededor del edificio,” Laura said carelessly.

“Laura, English,” Logan barked. Laura frowned a bit, her eyes growing darker with anger.

“Sería más fácil si usted acaba de aprender español. Eres tan terca. Y viejo,” Laura said crossly, hands forming into fists. Logan glared at her. His Spanish was shit, but he knew an insult when he happened upon one. He must have scowled just long enough at her, though, because her mood evened out again. She crossed her legs on the mattress, dirty boots and all. “You were sleeping. I walked around.”

Logan growled lowly at her again, before striding over to the window near the door, peering out into the light through the blinds. The parking lot was practically empty, the sky overcast. The muddy Bronco sat in the nearest parking spaced. With one quick, fluid move, he drew the shades again.

“We’re not in the free and clear yet, kid,” he said to her cautiously. “We may never be.”

Laura said nothing as she watched him walk over to the desk, his exhaustion suddenly back in his bones, and picked up the bottle of whiskey.

“Deberías comer algo,” she said, looking at him fixedly. “You need to eat something.”

“No, I don’t,” Logan muttered.

“No. No tengo que comer tan a menudo. Su factor de curación no funciona. You should do more than drink,” she offered, finally kicking off her boots as she did so.

Out of spite more than anything, Logan looked at the little girl for a long moment, before purposefully taking a large drink of the stuff, although it was hard not to cough as it burned his throat. Laura glared at him.

“Headed for the shower. Do not leave again,” he growled. Laura sighed a bit as she stood restlessly,
walked to the other side of the room, and flopped into the only chair. Logan noticed that she purposefully picked up one of her X-Men comics, so that he could see her do it. Logan’s head pounded a bit heavier as he watched Laura bury her nose in one with some ridiculous version of his own face printed on the cover. He rolled his eyes, about to turn around, when he noticed a flash of platinum and brown hair again and a pretty face on the back of the comic book. Logan truly leered at the comic book and at the younger mutant then, his stomach lurching as he found his way into the tiny bathroom, shutting the door forcefully behind him.

--

Later that night, he awoke to the sound of rain. The street light casted long, eerie shadows into the room, even through the binds. Profiled on top of the orange light, Logan could make out Laura’s form, still sitting in the chair. Her knees were to her chest, her head resting on her folded elbows. She was awake, he could tell. Logan inwardly groaned as he sat up, the rumble of thunder moaning in the distance reflecting his mood. He realized, slowly, for the first time the stiffness was more due to sleeping too much on an uncomfortable bed, than because of the lingering pain from the wound in his chest. It was as good as it was going to get after what had happened at the Munsons. He understood that now.

“You ok, kid?” he asked.

Laura turned to look at him then. She hadn’t been crying, but her face was twisted into an emotionally pained expression.

For a while, no one spoke. The rain created a chorus outside, pinging on the Bronco’s hood and smacking the asphalt outside their door. Distance remained between them, but both of their feelings of anger from earlier had dissipated. She ran hot, but she often cooled easily too, as soon as the threat was over. *Fuck,* she was just like him. Logan, sighed, sitting up better, and once more caught sight of the comic book Laura had been reading to spite him earlier. He picked it up slowly, at first as if it was going to burn him, before slowly and then more casually flipping through the pages.

“I had people too, you know,” he found himself saying. Laura perked up a bit at this, releasing her legs, and turning to him again.

“The X-Men?” she asked.

“Yeah, for a while. The X-Men.”

Laura looked at him for a long moment. Another rumble of thunder.

“What happened to them? ¿Por qué ya no eres así?” she pressed, pointing to one of the frames on the page.

Logan didn’t answer, as he felt the thin page she pointed to, the ink feeling rough on the pads of his fingers.

“It wasn’t like all this, you know. Most of it was *nothing like this,* but, uh,” he started flipping through the pages again quickly, trying to find something he remembered, something to cheer her up. Then, there it was, in all its artistic glory: the Blackbird against a blue frame, gracing the illustrated, cloudless sky. Logan pointed to the jet in the panel then looked back up at her, hopefully.

“The pájaro negro?” she asked excitedly, mood turning upward, a smile blossoming on her features.
“Yeah,” Logan said, relieved, as both of them now sat staring at the page. “Pájaro,” Logan attempted. Laura’s smile widened even more.

“I hated flying. I fucking hated it. Some things, kid, just aren’t meant to be in the air. You and I are one of them,” he said, looking up at her. She returned the stare, nodding at him seriously in agreement. Logan briefly wondered if she had ever even been in a plane.

“What else? ¿Qué más?” she asked him.

“Well,” Logan said, through a small cough again, closing the comic book and handing it back over to her. “It was complicated, and I wasn’t always around, but the X-Men, we were, you know, like a family. Sort of.”

“Una familia,” Laura murmured, looking down at the comic book with a melancholic smile. Slowly she brought her eyes back up to him.

“Yeah,” Logan said, “Like that.”
Chapter 6: *Then*

As the Blackbird roared to life and the machine’s control system came on line, Logan tightened the buckle that would keep him in his seat. He had managed to stay on the ground for a couple of months now, and he had liked it that way. But the allure of leaving Mexico had been enough to make himself get on the plane, and now here he was, a fucking sitting duck. His tension oozed through his pores, he knew it, and while Storm and Charles might be more acquainted with his hatred of flying, he tried to willfully relax his muscles in front of Rogue. It didn’t help that he was also now strapped into some ridiculous, antiquated X-Men get-up for flying, all of it head-to-toe leather. These suits had never been comfortable, particularly for someone of his size. In a fight, they were even worse. Stiff, and hard to move in.

Up ahead, Storm manned the panel, running through the coding mechanisms that would help them travel undetected over the Atlantic, hopefully without running into any trouble. Charles was by her side, and while Charles knew how to fly the plane, could probably fly it without operating the computer system at all, Storm was the real pilot. She could fly the fucking thing in the dark, through anything, and when there was no enemy or outside threat zeroing in on them, she flew it as steadily and as gracefully as she could, taking both Logan’s stomach and nerves into consideration. Meanwhile, Rogue had trailed behind Logan onto the plane, and now sat, calmly, in the seat next to him in the second row.

Logan hadn’t slept. Part of it had been the result of the lingering feelings of anger and frustration from his earlier altercation with her, but he realized now that restlessness was also to blame. Whereas Logan’s tension had grown from the moment yesterday when Rogue had stepped off the plane, the woman sitting next to him seemed steadily more at ease. Logan hadn’t missed the fact that hair her hair fell down her back now, free and soft, and the initial tension that had hung to her body yesterday was diminishing. Even when they had been boarding the Blackbird, he had sworn he had heard Rogue laugh gently at some intelligent joke Storm had made. It seemed that being among the last of the X-Men had lessened the steady squall brewing in Rogue’s mind, for now, at least. Thinking back to last night, Logan wasn’t sure if he had helped that process along or had stalled it. With his luck, probably the latter. *Fuck tequila.*

The whole goddamn interior of the jet began to vibrate as the Blackbird ascended slowly, and then sped up, and Logan caught Rogue stealing a glance at him, a strange, small smile on her face.

“Don’t,” Logan snapped defensively, practically growling at her. The plane’s steady hum drowned out the best parts of his hearing. There was nothing to look at, and with them rocketing forward several hundred miles per hour, he couldn’t smell anything. Everybody smelled like nothing. Every one of his senses felt useless. Nothing aboard the whole goddamn plane felt right or natural to him.

“You still hate it, huh?” Rogue said quietly, a bit amused.

“I said, don’t,” he warned again, snarling slightly. Rogue seemed not the least bit threatened though, and was now smiling at him wildly. *And while we’re at it, fuck schadenfreude too.*

He thought he heard a slight chuckle come from the front seat, most likely from Charles, and Logan scowled even more. Charles wasn’t one to go snooping about Logan’s mind, but Logan was sure he
had amped up the volume on that last thought a little too loud.

“It would have been better if you slept,” Rogue said after a minute or two, her concern more thoughtful as the thousands of feet between them and the ground grew.

“Yeah well, never been too good about that,” Logan grumbled. “And how did you know I didn’t sleep?”

“Just a sense,” she said, through shrugged shoulders. The playful look stayed in her eyes, though, dancing back and forth, and suddenly she seemed younger. Logan would have savored it if he had his damn wits about him.

“Anxiety and irrational thought spike when you don’t sleep, you know,” she added, for good measure.

“Must make me a fucking basket case then,” Logan murmured, hands finally loosening his grip on the arm rests as the plane leveled out.

“You should try meditating during the day,” Rogue added. At that point, Logan looked directly at her, mildly insulted and more than a little confused. Cold and now warm. Her scent this and that. It was enough to keep throwing him off her trail.

“You giving me advice now?” he asked grumpily.

“Just helpin’ where I see fit.” Then, out of nowhere, there it was: that twinge of a southern accent. Logan’s gut twisted. She hadn’t once shown her Mississippi roots since he’d seen her again, but now it was there, mild and good, like the wet grass after a long, summer rain. “I think it might work for you, sugar.”

“Sugar?” Logan’s eyebrows almost disappeared into his hairline. Rogue instantly blushed, turning a bright shade of crimson as she realized the slip she had made.

“Sorry. Old habit,” she murmured, before she turned away from him. Old habits may very well be the case, but she had never, not once, called Logan that in all their history. Logan cleared his throat, facing back ahead, as they both fell into silence then, lost in past worlds. Meanwhile, the Blackbird rocketed east, toward the Atlantic, toward Africa.

---

It had long since been established that South Africa had steadily become a safe haven for mutants over the last decade or so, after Apartheid had finally ended. As Trask industries rose to power, for whatever reason South Africa had blindly offered its opposition to the concept of mutant registration, to mutant camps, and to inhibitor collars, and it was now rumored to be one of the few places left where even the most obvious mutants could walk around freely, without threat of persecution. Logan was starting to understand that at one point or another in his past he had been to Africa, but Charles and Erik had frequented South Africa more than once, and recently. Cape Town especially was a place to reconvene, to speak freely. Storm had mentioned that the growing trouble with the border wall between the United States and Mexico had been the reason they had left, but with the information Rogue likely had, the only way they’d be able to discuss what she knew without threat of detection would be under the relative safe haven of the southernmost point of a foreign continent.

The Blackbird now took up residence in a mutant-operated airplane hangar, and upon making arrangements beforehand, they had been safely transported to a mutant-friendly zone of Cape Town
that had been recommissioned for the purpose of supposedly protecting mutants from the typical zealots and fanatics spawning from the human rights groups. The zone was also run completely by a mutant government, although Charles had eluded to the fact that their resources were beginning to wear thin. As they passed through the armed gates, Logan noted that his unease did not wane, even if they had seemed heavily and sophisticatedly armed. Deep down, the more of the world Logan saw beyond the Canadian Rockies and the safe, gentle shores of Japan proved that something sinister, something dark and unchangeable was happening. Gone was the freedom, in the United States particularly, of being able to walk around undetected and without threat, with as many mutant monitors there were plugged into every street corner of every major city. Most mutants left in the more populous parts of northern America lived in some form of walled-off ghetto community, now. Humans also had the means of capturing mutants, and some of the strongest and most powerful mutants Logan had come across were now dead.

He glanced over at Rogue as the armored SUV slowed, the car carefully pulling under the veranda of a very large, once very ornamental hotel. He suspected that Charles had pulled strings to get them here safely, but as they slowly exited the vehicle and the sliding doors opened, Logan could not hide his shock at the stark and complete juxtaposition this place was from the unfriendly, inhospitable confines of the Bunker. There’s no way it operated as hotel any longer, as it was known to be a mutant compound, but the plush carpet and brightly lit lobby could have fooled him. It wasn’t a place Logan would easily call home, but it would certainly do in the interim. The plan was that Magneto would meet them in four days’ time, and hopefully by that point they would know the extent of the information Hank had left with Rogue.

Logan causally noted as they traveled up the elevator to a series of well-kept rooms that Rogue’s was next door to his own, although he only had the energy to murmur a “see you soon, kid,” before stumbling into his own room, exhaustion finally having his way with him. As he found his way inside, he was greeted by clean sheets, and the cool, artificial scent of air conditioning. Logan groaned as he heaved his heavy body onto his bed, the mental anguish of a long flight and a litany of more thoughts and feelings than he was used to experiencing falling down into bed with him. As he lay there and his breathing steadied, however, it was then he realized that he could hear Rogue’s soft movements through the wall that separated them.

Through the drywall and framing, he picked up on the small sounds, all the tiny noises that were inherently Rogue. The slip of her pack being unzipped, the swipe of fabric, most likely her gloves coming off. The snap and fizz of her opening a beverage, then the gentle hum of the radio. Logan imagined her stretching, hair down, it’s dark hazelnut shade contrasting with all that creamy, white skin. He realized that he was taking some sort of sick pleasure in knowing for the next couple of days at least he’d be able to hear her every move. Just tell yourself it’s so you can ensure she’s safe, came a sly, little voice in Logan’s head. Logan selfishly sloughed off the thought though, even as all of the sounds started chirping together, forming a soft lullaby of sorts. It was to this, and without much thought to anything else, that Logan finally slept.

---

He wasn’t sure what time it was when he awoke, but the sun was low in the sky. Slowly groaning as he turned over, checking the alarm clock, he realized it was late afternoon, and he recognized, guiltily enough, that he had been sleeping for a long time. Yawning loudly, and moving to sit up, he perked up his hearing, instantly listening for her. The tick of a clock, the hum of the AC unit. But no Rogue. Dutifully moving to the edge of the bed, he set his nose on the job, trying to pick her out
from all the other scents. Only Storm, he realized, headed down the hallway. Quickly, and without much thought to his decorum, he pounced on the door, opening it swiftly, startling the other woman so much her hand flew to her chest.

“Jesus, Logan,” Storm managed. She was all cool skin and the welcoming smell of honey and lavender, although he could also hear her heart beating more quickly.

“Sorry, Storm,” he managed gruffly, his voice rough from sleep. “Where’s Rogue?”

“She’s in Charles’ room,” Storm said, putting a hand to her head, rubbing her temples. Logan must have made a move toward crossing the hallway before Storm scolded him lightly.

“Uh uh, hey, that’s none of your business right now.” When Logan glowered at her, she just gave him a curt, pointed look. “Not trying to tell you what to do, bad boy. It’s just that they need their privacy. Charles is in the middle of trying to help her extract the data.”

“The data?” Logan questioned.

“The design plans, from Hank,” Storm said, gently reminding him.

Shit. He had forgotten all about them. He was fucking rusty as hell at this whole X-Men team member thing.

“How long will that take?” Logan asked, pressing.

“Don’t know, but the last time I talked to Charles after the first attempt, he talked about multiple… sessions.

“Multiple sessions? How long have I been out?” Logan asked, suddenly becoming restless in the doorway. Storm still stood out in the hallway, and he could tell she wished to be done with this little skirmish.

“You’ve been in there for a day and a half,” Storm sighed. “And there’s a lot in Rogue’s head, Logan. It’s going to take some time.” That shut him up. Of course he knew that about Rogue. Of course he did.

“Yeah, you’re right. Thanks, Storm,” he said. And then, as an afterthought, he yelled down the hallway a little too loudly, “You need me to do anything else?”

“You’ll know if I do,” she yelled back. “In the meantime, don’t leave the building. Focus on enjoying the amenities.”

---

As the afternoon wore on, Logan became restless. He had taken a long prowl around the place, and found it decently stocked with food, water, and other mutants he didn’t want to quite deal with. The old restaurant that had been a part of the hotel had been converted into a cafeteria, most of the tables shoved to the side to foster a sort of free-for-all kitchen. He was also happy to catch sight of a gym and training room. There was an indoor pool too, not that Logan had much interest in it. Outside, the street bustled, and a part of Logan wished nothing more than to disappear onto the city streets, setting out to find the nearest bar. He had, however, been given strict orders to stay put, and with Rogue still locked in Charles’ room, Logan wasn’t going anywhere.
Back upstairs, the animal in him caused him to pace. It had been a couple hours, at least, since he had awoken, and the hot shower had done little for him. His ears desperately searched for a sign of her walking back from across the hall, to no avail. Logan’s knuckles itched. Apart from the occasional nightmarish memory, he had stubbornly kept the claws sheathed, and he realized that he had never quite been in as helpless as position as he was now to use them. The Wolverine felt even more caged, constricted. Logan was a being that needed release, at least every now and then, and the situation looked grim.

At least in Mexico, there had been a couple women. Logan wasn’t necessarily proud of that, but they had been looking for a short, quick fuck, and he was more than willing to comply. It had satisfied the Wolverine, at least momentarily, as he had run his hungry hands down mocha skin and through dark hair while they screamed, even as he quickly and with little regard to their own pleasure found his release. The sex had barely been enough, but he’d surprisingly managed to stay out of most bar fights, and, of course, after he slunk back to whatever hole in the wall he had been staying at, Logan had been grateful that he and Storm had rarely stayed together in the same place, in order to avoid further detection. Ultimately, Logan understood by now that to deny the feral, innermost parts of him only led to his own home-grown brand of private chaos. If he’d been anywhere near the wilderness he would have at least fucking hunted something down.

And now Marie, walking into his life, smelling and acting like she did. She was a gorgeous person, Logan had always known this, but now, now, something about her had stuck and it wouldn’t unstick. She wasn’t to be trusted entirely, he repeatedly and routinely reminded the Wolverine. She was hiding information, potentially important information from them all, no matter how fucking tempting the red lips of her mouth curved upward were or how her trim physique rippled under clothing, practically begging him to run his tongue down her body…

The fourth hour passed, and Logan left his room again, intent on the training facility. He was desperate to do something physical, and as much as he didn’t want to make friends with anyone, maybe he could find someone to spar with. At the very least, he could run through his memorized kata, if only to find balance, or to release some of this potent, visceral energy.

Downstairs was less populated now, and regrettably he found the sparring space practically empty. Just like the restaurant, most of the decade-old exercise equipment and weights had been shoved to the side, and large training mats sat in the middle of the floor, ready to cushion the fall for the mutants he needed them. The notion had his muscles brimming under his skin. To bring someone to the ground, to throw his weight and force into another being. The blood sang in his veins.

Logan shook his head, once more intent on control. Obediently, he refocused himself, determined to run through the kata and keep himself in check. Restraint, balance, focus, control… and it was then he saw her, through the clear windows separating the gym from the indoor pool. Her small, lithe frame in the water, her lean arms slicing through the rippling surface as she did laps back and forth across the pool. She had somehow made her way downstairs right under his nose.

The sight of her stirred up some relatively recent memories of the girl he had once known. He had forgotten Marie liked to swim. Cooking and swimming, she had once said, brightly revealing a little portion of her own identity to him in the mid-afternoon sun. One for control, the other for release. Logan knew Marie wasn’t lying about either. She was bossy in the kitchen, to the extent of annoyance, but he had also received the hard-earned result of her efforts: at least two or three times he had tried her food in the X-Mansion back in the day, and it had been as close to heaven as Logan would likely get. And for the swimming, well…it just made sense. To swim was to feel everything, the water pulsing and flowing and moving around you, coursing over each and every muscle taught muscle. It was to feel free and effortless and without burden…
Jesus, get a hold of your fucking self, he inwardly scolded.

He found himself padding over to the pool area through a propped-open door, his bare feet from the intended effort to spar slapping against the wet tile underneath him. He could be silent if he wanted to be, but now was not the time. The room was hotter and more humid in here, he realized, but for a brief minute it was enough simply to admire her. She was swimming hard, intent on her laps, and she shifted between a forward and backward stroke as she made her way back and forth. Her hair was up, but no cap. He could hear her heart pounding, the quiet breaths she took when her lips emerged from the water for the briefest of seconds, sucking in more air, and then back under again. She was fluid, one with this element that had long since been a mystery to Logan. Logan arched an eyebrow at her, arms crossed as he watched. There was no question about it; Marie was fucking beautiful in the water.

Finally, she seemed to sense his presence. She stopped mid lap, emerging from the surface and smiling at him. He was surprised to see the quick upturn of her mouth, but still offered a quirky smile back, as she began to swim toward the edge of pool where he stood. She undid her hair from its bun as she made her way to the edge, resting her arms on the tile near his feet.

“You coming in or you just plan on standing there?” she said, a playful look on her face. Yet again, Logan noticed that her mood had lifted even more so, and it was the most like Marie he had seen Rogue since before he had left all that time ago.

“I don’t swim,” Logan said simply, knowing she already knew this.

“Suit yourself,” she smiled, throwing his own words from a couple of days back at him. She was about to turn around, to continue her laps, when Logan felt a compulsion to get her to stay where she was.

“Looks like you’re done with the professor,” he murmured. She turned back to him, her smile dampening just slightly.

“Yeah a little while ago. One more session and he thinks he’ll have what he needs,” she said, and then, gesturing to the water around, she added, “This helps after. Clears my head.” Logan gave her the slightest of solemn nods. It was the same reason he sometimes went looking for a fight.

“I haven’t been in water this clean, let alone a pool, in years, though” she added. “It’s amazing.”

“I bet. The water all around ya’, feeeing weightless,” Logan murmured, lost momentarily in a harmless memory from a handful of decades earlier, the water of a clear Canadian lake surrounding him on all sides.

“I thought you didn’t swim,” she said, throwing a careful look his way.

“Not anymore,” he said, leaning over the water and looking at it more cautiously. “I’d sink like an anchor.”

“Have you even tried it, you know, since?” she asked, skeptical of his wariness.

“Tried drowning a couple times. Wasn’t for me,” Logan said matter-of-factly.

“I don’t remember you regaling me with those particular tales,” she said, as Logan realized she was making her way over to the ladder.

“Happened early on. Didn’t know about it until recently,” Logan said, without thinking. She turned to look at him from the ladder, pausing momentarily, before climbing out. Logan had to suck in a
breath, and hold it.

She was only in a one-piece meant for serious swimming and not for flaunting a lean figure, but nevertheless the muscles of her taut stomach were evident under the wet fabric. Her skin, luscious and pink, was speckled with drops of water, and she practically glowed. It was also more bare skin on Rogue than he had ever seen in his life. He realized, partly, that despite her deadliness, she was much more comfortable in her own body now. More so than Logan thought she might ever be.

If Rogue noticed he was ogling her, she made no move to show him that she knew it. Despite being dripping wet, she coolly and casually moved over to a table close by and grabbed a towel, and made her way over to him once more.

“You’ve figured out more about your past?” she said, as she ran the towel down her arms, drying off.

“More or less,” were the only words he could find to say.

“Anything juicy?” she asked, teasing him slightly, while droplets of water evaporated on her skin. She was breathing a little hard still from the water and the wet tendrils of her hair snaked down her front, barely grazing her chest.

“Logan?” Marie said again.

“Yeah, umm, the wars,” Logan murmured, before he could think about what he was saying.

“Wars? As in, more than one?” Marie asked, a sudden more serious look on her face.

Fuck. The last thing he needed was Marie knowing how fucking old he was.

“Uh, yeah,” he murmured, giving his head the slightest shake, a new, interesting idea taking hold in his mind. “Speaking of kicking ass,” he added, even as Marie snorted at him a little, “You wanna spar later? It’s been awhile,” he said through a devilish smile.

A small grin appeared on her face as she ran her fingers through her wet hair, “Are you asking me to fight you?”

“Spar,” Logan corrected, but he had secretly loved her question. “Like I used to teach all you kids in class.” Rogue wrinkled her nose at this a little, but let the knock about her age slide.

“That was a long time ago,” she said, half-serious.

“Hope you haven’t forgotten what you learned,” he taunted.

“Not quite,” she said evenly, her eyes narrowing, detecting the challenge

“Consider it the way I clear my head,” he nodded. You in?

A new hunger appeared on her face as she weighed her options.

“Maybe,” she said. “Depends on how willing you are to lose, sugar.”

Logan’s eyebrows shot up at this, before his eyes also narrowed, a new fire boiling in his blood. He’d let her have it, alright. Just wait.

The next morning she walked into the training room wearing athletic pants that hugged her ass, a sports bra, and a high braid that worked its way down the back of her head, platinum hair woven in with all the rest. Her taught stomach was out on display, and Logan had a hard time remembering to breathe.

“Jesus. You planning on killing me, Rogue?” he asked friskily, arms crossed, but smile wide. The remark had not been so much about the miles of uncovered skin she currently sported but more about how strikingly fit she was, but he would leave it up to her to guess. She simply smiled diffidently, before slinging around her pack, grabbing a couple of items from inside.

“Of course not,” she said. He watched her as she quickly slipped into a long-sleeved dri-fit athletic shirt and then smoothed on a pair of thin black gloves.

“That’s all I can do for you, sugar,” she said, setting her pack down and walking onto the mat. “As for the rest…” she pointed to the flawless skin on her neck, face, bare ankles and feet, “Just watch yourself.”

Logan huffed a bit at this, but he was glad to see she was barefoot. Particularly after Japan, Logan preferred sparring that way. The less clothes on while sparring, the better, in his opinion. Following his own advice, he stripped off his shirt, not sure if what he was doing was a message to her that he wasn’t afraid of her skin, a warning of his own strength, or maybe all of those things rolled up into fucking one. Either way, he knew what women thought of his body. He wasn’t an idiot, and he wasn’t a fucking boy scout, either. With all the shit that came along with his mutation, this was the healthy silver lining. Marie didn’t say anything, but he knew when a woman was admiring his physique.

“What style?” she said spiritedly after couple of stretches. “Jujitsu, karate… maybe boxing?” Logan laughed at that last one.

“Maybe let’s not make it so complicated,” Logan answered, a bit skeptical. “Let’s just see what you’ve got, first.” Logan noted proudly how she quickly got into the correct position, right foot just slightly in front of left, feet firmly planted on the ground. He did the same, and they began.

He took a couple of mild swings at her first, which she quickly dodged.

“You’re faster than you used to be,” Logan remarked, swiftly doing some of his own dodging, as a high kick from her bare foot nearly grazed the side of his head.

“Thanks, sugar,” she said, grinning widely, quickly blocking an attempt by him to take her to the floor. They danced back and forth like this for a while, and he felt like they were back in his class, him holding back much of his strength, letting Rogue set the pace. It was the tiny hints she gave away, though, that were starting to interest him. He realized her skill and expertise were both exceptional, far better than they had been twelve years ago; however, as time wore on she also got a little antsy, despite all of her grace. He would usually chalk this up as a sign he was sparring with partner who, for whatever reason, was trying to hold back some of their power for a longer stretch of time, but this was Marie…

Finally, there, he saw an in. She was distracted by a couple of younger mutants who had just made their way in the gym when he struck low, swiping her legs out from under her, mere centimeters away from making contact with the bare skin of her ankles, before putting her back on the ground. It
was the roughest he had been with her so far, maybe ever, and he was happy to see she was smiling ear-to-ear, exhilarated.

“You don’t fight fair,” she breathed, pushing one gloved hand up from the mat, getting up slowly. His eyes quickly darted to the two young punks who were currently ogling her, and he let out a short growl in their direction before turning back to Rogue.

“Hey, I’m pretty sure I taught you to never fight fair. Your enemies sure as hell don’t fight fucking fair. And you know that I know- holy shit!”

He had relaxed his own stance while he was talking, and immediately felt a roundhouse kick to his own calf. He partially toppled over, one knee saving him from falling on his ass.

“How the fucking hell?” he grumbled. He looked up to see her still grinning, and he playfully grinned back from where he knelt on the floor. “Now that’s more like it, darlin’,” he praised her.

“Darlin’?” she asked, offering her gloved hand to haul him up. “That a new nick name?”

“Well,” he groaned, cracking his neck, the subtle sound of metal clinking together, as he stood back up. “You ain’t no fucking kid.”

They sparred for a bit longer, testing each other’s endurance. Logan was pleased to see Rogue keeping up, spotting weaknesses in his position where she needed to, taking hits where she could. Logan intentionally kept it light enough, but found himself working up to a bit more of his own strength the harder she hit back. He sensed the session coming to an end soon, and he decided, perhaps intuitively so, to let them end up in a grid lock after he had lightly grabbed her wrist as it had been in the air and turned her around, her back to his, him holding one of her arms behind her.

He applied a little pressure, just because he could, and for a moment the wolverine savored her submissive position and scent and intimacy such a move provided him. He was inches away from the bare skin of her throat, a steady jugular beating just beyond the surface. He fought back the urge to sink his teeth into her. Realizing he had the upper hand for too long though, he began to let her go. But, before he could realize what was fully happening, she snarled at the continued pressure, suddenly throwing her body backward to get out of the lock and easily tossing his entire weight off of her, enough to where he fell backward onto his back, body whistling in pain as it forcibly made contact with the floor, mat or no mat.

His body already knew the truth as his mind was catching up. She had been toying with him from the beginning. Somehow, some fucking way, she was just as strong as he was, if not stronger. Which was physically impossible.

“Rogue, the fuck was that?” he said, more astonished than angry, watching her as she stood there, embarrassed. This time, she made no move to help him up.

“Sorry,” she grumbled, clutching one arm at the bicep with her gloved hand and then releasing it quickly, before grabbing her bag and leaving through the door, without so much as another word.

---

It wasn’t long before there was a knock on the door, just as he was finally about to climb into the shower. He huffed, breathing out slowly, running a quick hand through his hair and then over the stubble on his chin. His body quickly mended the sore muscles, but his mind had been thrown, still practically on the ground in the spot where she had tossed him so easily like a rag doll. So Rogue
had some sort of inhuman strength, but she hadn’t back when he had known her. Another secret. Logan knew the main trait of Rogue’s mutation was to temporarily adopt other mutants’ powers when she touched them, pulling in their thoughts and memories too. The memories stayed, that she had revealed to him forever ago, but, for her to retain the powers, he knew she would have had to hold on a lot longer than anybody he had ever witnessed her touching, included himself.

He heard the knock again, and he reached out an arm to stop the water, threw on some jeans, and made his way over to the door, opening it to find her standing there. She had showered and changed into a white cotton t-shirt and her own pair of jeans. It was a remarkably innocent look, as if she hadn’t just thrown a man three times her size and at least three times as heavy to the ground.

“So, who’d you kill?” Logan asked blankly.

Rogue sighed. “Can I come in, at least?” she asked, a little annoyed. He opened the door a bit more, and she walked inside quietly. He saw her look around slightly, inspecting his room a little. She wouldn’t find much. Among a pack with a few spare changes of clothes and a straight razor, Logan owned hardly anything now.

“It was another mutant, obviously,” she finally said, turning back to him. Logan’s eyebrows raised at that. He intended it as some sort of tasteless joke, but it was clear he had been right about her. So if she holds on long enough to hurt, she gets their powers temporarily. If she holds on long enough to kill, she keeps them. God fucking damn.

“When we were underground, another faction felt it best to try to betray our location,” Rogue started. “We had to fight them off along with earlier prototypes of the sentinels, and, at one point, I was left to do…what I do…” she trailed off, looking at him meekly. “It was earlier on, after, you know, it came back,” the skin in question had turned a bit pink in embarrassment, and he sensed that she was ashamed of what she could do now. “I didn’t know what I was doing, back then.”

“Well, hell, darlin’, that’s one heck of a useful mutation. And the strength…that’s an invaluable thing during a fight,” he said. He hoped the thing he was eluding to was that it didn’t very much matter to him how strong she was. She could knock him on his ass whenever she damned well pleased. He’d welcome it. “You tell Charles yet?”

“No,” she said, finally sitting on his bed. Logan noticed the move, and found himself standing uncomfortably by his own bedside. Freshly showered and smelling wonderful, Rogue had just accidentally ensured that the whole damn bed would smell like nectar and mint for days. His chance of sleeping was fucked.

“Why not tell him?” Logan finally asked.

“Well, for one, he probably already knows, and for another-” she abruptly stopped talking, as if she had just realized the words she was about to say. Logan senses sent off alarm bells again.

“What?” he pushed, realizing how much he had bristled at her hesitancy.

“Never mind,” she said coolly, all of the sudden detached from the conversation. Logan’s previous frustration from the first night he had talked to Rogue suddenly came back.

“Now don’t go pulling that shit again. The secretive shit. It already doesn’t make sense,” Logan said, pacing a bit in front of her.

“What doesn’t?” she asked, dodging his initial threat as if she was still sparring with him.

“Zuccotti. OWS. Mutant Factions. It isn’t you.” Logan looked at her a little more sternly.
“Is it so different than what the X-Men stood for? What they did to make mutants lives better?”

“What the X-Men stand for. We’re not all dead. At least not yet. And I always thought we had a little more class.”

“You mean more money.”

“No, I don’t. And you know I don’t give a shit about that,” Logan retaliated.

“I know… It’s just-” Rogue began.

“-Zuccotti was a nightmare,” Logan interrupted

“You don’t think I know that?”

“And you went into that mess, knowing it was likely doomed? That, instead of saving people, you were recruiting them to be sitting ducks. That you were risking their lives, all in the name of a protest?” He felt Rogue get a little angrier, but she stayed level-headed. Meanwhile, Logan had no idea why all of this what flying out of his mouth, although he assumed it was partially because he had been astonished to know Zuccotti had happened after first hearing about it in the first place. Particularly now that he knew Rogue had been involved.

“I was with a smaller team, and we were called in to plan last minute protocol.” There was that team again. Something about that irked Logan, too.

“So this team of yours… is it the same team you took on the mission to get the plans from Hank? The former team?”

“Logan,” she warned.

“So they all died somehow. And I’m assuming, since you’re not blue and bulky, you didn’t actually kill Beast, and that happened some other way, in the end,” Logan said, knowing he should have shut his mouth about five minutes ago. Rogue seemed to bring out the worst in him, always riling him up. Or did he just rile himself up in front of her? Whatever the reason, the fragile friendship that had started to crystallize again over the last few days felt in danger of cracking.

“Logan, drop it,” she said quietly, but with force. Unlike last time, the anger, or whatever emotion she was feeling, was much more closely guarded. He let it go, realizing how close he had been to some part of the truth, but also had close he had been to really upsetting her.

Some silence passed between them, but still she didn’t leave.

“How long?” he murmured after a while, finally choosing to sit on the bed next to her, a careful two feet of space between them.

“What do you mean?” she asked, toying with a fraying thread on the comforter absentmindedly, avoiding his gaze.

“You know what I mean,” he said. How long had the cure lasted? How long had she been able to do what she always longed to do?

“It’s not something… I’m proud of,” she murmured.

“Why not?” Logan asked.

“Like I said, back then, I didn’t know what I was doing. It didn’t matter in the end anyway, did it?”
she said, the fraying thread still between her fingers. Logan’s eyes settled on the strip of creamy white skin where her gloves ended and the sleeves of her T-shirt began.

“Was it worth it?” Logan finally asked. Her lips quivered at this, finally looking up at him, while the vision of Marie touching anything without gloves ran on a loop in his head.

“Yes,” she said, holding his gaze, the telltale sheen of something just before tears in her eyes.

“And now?” he asked.

“I still…can’t control it, Logan. I’ve tried, but I can barely control…” she stopped, gesturing to her head, “…and I lost…a lot that night. In New York.” Logan felt pulled by a new strange sense of guilt, but it wasn’t the only feeling rising to the surface. He felt pulled in several different directions with Rogue. His instinct warned him to be suspicious, the Wolverine was becoming steadily more aroused by her proximity, and part of him just felt, well, bad for her.

“I’m sorry, Marie,” he said quietly. She blinked at him through just one or two tears, and as she did so his arm moved on its own, lingering just beyond her for a moment, before carefully swiping the warm pad of his thumb across her lips, so quickly and lightly that nothing came of it but a small shudder from Marie.

It was then, as they were both lost in the connection of what happened, that he realized he had asked much of her this morning, and she little of him. Wanting the conversation to end differently, he offered up a small, sacred piece of information, something relevant, sturdy, something he hoped she could depend on.

“Nazis,” Logan murmured.

“What?” That got her attention, pulling her out of her inner-most thoughts once more.


“Logan…” she said, a frantic desperate note in her voice. It was information that would be hard for anyone to hear, but now that he started, he was going to tell her all of it.

“Maybe even further back than that. My best guess? Mid-nineteenth century.”

“Oh, sugar…”

“We’re fucked up, Marie,” he said assuredly. “In ways the world can’t fucking comprehend. And, in my experience, what they can’t understand, they always, always, get rid of. That’s why we need you with us darlin’, why we need the whole you with us, past and all.”

The verge of tears that Marie had been on had subsided now, her expression steadily growing more hardened.

“Because, eventually,” Marie said, resounded and once more steely-eyed, as much as she had been the day she walked off the jet. “They will come for us.”

Logan’s face sombered a bit as he let the truth they both had realized some time ago sit between them.

“And when they do,” Marie added, a dark look quickly flickering across her features. “They’re going to kill us all.”
Two days later, in Charles’ room, Rogue and Logan once again found themselves face-to-face with Magneto. Logan noticed that, very much like Charles, he seemed older, more resigned and tired in his features. Certainly less threatening, now void of helmet and cape. They sat around a small table together, all of them, Storm, Charles, Erik, Logan and Rogue. Now, the last of the remaining X-Men.

“We have known for a considerable time now that the humans have been giving mutants drugs in the American ghettos in order to exterminate the X-gene in their potential children, and grandchildren,” Charles said evenly. “But we had no idea of knowing that most of the American human population has been receiving doses of the very same thing.”

“So it’s eugenics, now. Dear god,” Storm said, her voice even, but just so. Meanwhile, Logan glanced at Rogue, from across the table, but she didn’t look up.

“But the far more insidious news, I’m afraid, lies in the Mark X’s design,” Erik added.

“You mean the sentinels?” Logan asked, knuckles suddenly aching from a sort of imagined, phantom pain.

“Not the version some of us at this table are familiar with,” Erik added, looking at Rogue directly now. “The humans had been using the original prototype as a police force of a sort, punishing those they deemed criminals, but ultimately maintaining some semblance of normal law.” Logan again stole a glance at Rogue, wondering how conscious she had been of the information she had been delivering before her meetings with Charles here at the hotel. Based on what she had said a couple of days ago, however, he would bet she knew far more than she had let on.

“The new design,” Charles added solemnly, “seems to…adapt, as it best sees fit.”

“What do you mean, ‘adapt’?” Storm asked, worry threaded in her voice.

“It seems to be able to take on other mutant abilities in order to fight off others,” Rogue finally responded for the first time, and the small group looked at her knowingly.

“And why would it do that?” Logan looked at Rogue to ask her directly now, anger rising in his voice. “What purpose would that serve? They’ve already got most of us rounded up into camps, world-wide. They can take away our powers with inhibitor collars. What else would they need to do to us?” Rogue looked back at him, and he realized she already knew he was aware of his answer. They all were. Rogue said nothing though, glancing down at her own gloved hands, a look of pain on her face. Logan’s heart thudded a little more loudly.

“Why the answer is simple, Wolverine,” Erik added, looking at Logan, then to everyone else sitting at the table. “One purpose only: mass exterminations. In a word, genocide.”

---

Annndddd, that is about as “fun” as it gets, at least from me. Well, until we get to the
other kind of fun. ;) Thanks for being patient with me this week. I’m finishing up teaching a summer comp class and the process of grading research papers is kicking my ass harder than Rogue kicked Logan’s. ;) Next chapter up in the next couple of days! :D Thanks again for all of your feedback and love and support.
Now

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 7: Now

The TV blared in the background. A sliver of brown liquid loitered at the bottom of the glass bottle, the smell of aged oak and anise. The comforters were rumpled, clothes strewn about, the trash piling up. Over it all, a heavy stagnancy lingered in the air.

The wrinkles on Charles’ face, blankets pulled up around him, muttering something about it not being too late for Logan in the dark. The drops of blood pooling around the old man’s mouth. The dead kid in the hallway.

As Logan lay on the bed, his brow furrowed. He closed his eyes briefly, willing the memories away, locking them behind doors and shoving them in boxes as quickly as he could. After a while, his eyes darted over to Laura in the chair, who was once again bundled up into a ball, fast asleep.

Enough of this.

Enough of what?

This. You gotta get up now. You gotta face it.

What the fuck should I do?

Drive. Go north.

To what?

To whatever life you can give her.

---

The dark, paved road cut its way through the mountains as the Bronco ascended into the Canadian Rockies. On either side, a dense forest of tall pine trees dwarfed them. The windows were cracked just slightly, letting the cool northern breeze rush through the interior. Laura gazed lazily out the window through her sunglasses. Logan kept a steady grip on the wheel. They had ridden like that, in relative harmony, for hours.

His wounds had healed, and Logan found even his lungs had settled into a steady respite for the last couple of days, the telltale spatter of red as he coughed into his hand ebbing. He wasn’t foolish enough to believe that it was gone for good, but, for the moment, he tried to savor the peace this afforded him. Logan had noticed that a stillness, almost an unearthly, eerie calm, had started descending on them both the farther north they drove.

So far, Logan had been impressed with Laura’s patience on the road. The small music device that Laura had acquired had died days ago, and now she had little to entertain herself with except a map, an envelope full of cash, and the same two X-Men comic books, which by now were dog-eared, waterlogged and blood stained. The radio let out the tinny croon of some old Waits tune, but he
doubted that was much to Laura’s liking.

Logan was not entirely sure of where they were headed, but rather let his instincts take the helm, his senses feeling out the current of the mountainous terrain, making occasional turns until they were on a lonely stretched of forested highway. He wasn’t quite ready, he realized, to actively think about the last time he had been this far north and what it had meant, but he did find himself casually flipping through the knowledge of the tiny, northern Alberta towns that he had frequented over a lifetime ago. Of course, another part of his brain realized all of this knowledge could be in potential jeopardy, being that most of it was from before the jump, before his reality had become splintered.

Logan knew that eventually he would have to find Laura some semblance of stability. She was incredibly resilient, but still awfully young, and they couldn’t keep running forever. Logan distantly hoped that at least some portion of Canada was the safe haven Gabriella had promised, but Logan had buried his head in the sand so deep for so long that he had no real knowledge to corroborate Gabriella’s claims. Eden had existed in some form, she had been right about that, so maybe there were mutants left out here somewhere, going about their lives. Logan, however, felt no particular urge to run into any. They could make their way on their own, at least for now, with the threat of the Reavers growing more distant each day. Logan no longer had the feeling they were being hunted, and, if he were maintaining some aspect of honesty, he knew that finding a remote, somewhat permanent location was almost all he was capable anymore of doing, mutants or no mutants. He had barely been planning days in advance before he had discovered Laura in the trunk of his limo a few weeks ago. To plan months, maybe years in advance had been something he had dutifully left behind in the rubble back east. He was weak, tired, on the verge of something he didn’t want to understand. Besides, after everything Laura had gone through, Logan thought the girl deserved some sort of real chance at a normal life, something outside of a lab, a battered limo, or a farmhouse caked in blood.

A chill traveled down Logan’s spine at this last thought, before, again, he desperately buried the memory.

“The place we’re going,” Laura asked him sometime later, “what will we do there?”

“Lay low for a while, and if everything stays quiet, settle down somewhere,” Logan muttered a response. He figured she’d eventually need more schooling. He was beginning to understand that Laura’s knowledge of English was good, handy and tactical, but far from perfect. He also knew she could read and write in both languages, but as he looked back over to her attentively, he wondered about math, history, all the rest. She needed a large helping of social etiquette as well, and that judgement was coming from Logan, who was far from the epitome of chivalry and good manners. Plus, for all Laura knew about combat, Logan was beginning to realize there were other things, personal things, he needed to teach her about who she was, about what she would likely have to face. It was knowledge he would be absolutely certain he wouldn’t leave her without, especially if he wasn’t always around to impart it on her. Logan swallowed at that last thought, a bitter taste in his throat.

“Settle?” Laura tried to clarify, confused by the word he had chosen.

“You know,” Logan murmured. “Stay put, at least for a while. Somewhere remote, but still close enough to a place where maybe I can find some work. Maybe even get you set up in school.”

“School?” Laura queried, her interest perking as she sat up a bit. He blindly hoped the concept wasn’t completely foreign to her.

“Uh, like classes, grades. Learning,” Logan pathetically offered. Laura scrunched her nose a bit at this, the inferred austerity of such an institution suddenly making her wary.
“¿Qué? Learning what?” she asked.

“Well,” Logan hesitated. “All the rest, I guess. Math, history, whatever knowledge those sons of bitches kept from you in the lab.” He looked over to see her small hands clutching her bag, practically feeling her unknown, unsteady future cautiously curling out in front of her.

“You’re gonna have to learn how to live in this world, kid. To grow up in it, to be an… effective adult,” Logan ended lamely. Before he could help himself, he thought of Charles. Logan had never been one to inspire the want and will to learn in others, but the Professor had. Logan was often surprised Charles had let him teach, and Logan often wondered if it was just so Charles could keep him around for his other useful abilities. Logan knew he had been a mediocre instructor at best, with the exception of maybe being in charge of a sparring class every once in a while. A ghostly image of a hallway at Xavier’s school infiltrated his mind momentarily, before he quickly shut the lights out on it.

“Effective?” Laura struggled with the word, peering at him questioningly.

“Uhh, yeah. You know. It’s about being useful,” he blundered. Before he could quite comprehend what she was doing, Laura suddenly sat up and unsheathed her claws on one hand, staring at them with a strange, satisfied smile.

“Useful,” she said, looking up at him for approval.

Logan’s eyes darted from the road back to her, taking in the insidious metal jutting out of her small hand and the trickle of blood escaping from between her knuckles. It was then that Logan experienced a strange, foreign twinge of something that felt a little like empathy and a whole lot like dread. The sight of Laura’s blood set him on edge in a way it hadn’t before, in a way he didn’t like. It didn’t matter how fast she could heal afterward.

“Cut it out,” he said curtly. She frowned a little then, as she slowly withdrew the claws.

“You need to stop doing that to yourself. Especially if you don’t have to,” he grumbled, fumbling for a spare t-shirt in the back of the truck with one free hand and then tossing it her way. Laura unsteadily held the fabric in her hands for a few moments before she started wiping the blood away, a disappointed, confused look blooming on her features. Shit. Logan realized quickly that in the moments of giving in to a stray, protective impulse, he had unintentionally made her feel ashamed. A fucking familiar feeling if there ever was one. Logan sighed.

“Listen, kid, it’s not that you can’t ever use ‘em,” he said, looking back her way. “And I know better than anyone that they sure as fuck can come in handy, in all kinds of ways, but…you know they have consequences. Not something to take so lightly. Understand?”

Laura’s face softened slightly but still stayed on the side of somber as she gave him a little nod.

“Consecuencias,” Laura murmured, considering this. “You mean, like how it hurts?” she asked, this time only mimicking the claws springing free on one hand. Logan practically winced at her blunt acceptance of such a fact.

“Yeah, there’s that. But I mean more what you can do with ‘em.”

“You mean… hurting people?” Laura asked, a little more consideration in her voice.

“Yeah,” Logan muttered, suddenly wishing this unintentional, fucked-up lesson was through.

“Sometimes, it might have to happen,” he said, exhaustion in his voice. “But you gotta be… more…
than the instincts inside you. More than what…they made us. And that means learning patience, balance, got it? It also means schooling.

“What about you?” Laura asked, after some time.

“What about me?” Logan shot back at her guardedly, hands tightening on the wheel.

She gave him a bit of a knowing look, but didn’t answer, obviously sensing his standoffishness. He wasn’t naive enough to think she was clueless about how fucked up he still was, but it wasn’t something he wanted to get into with her now. He noticed her eyes grow a shade or two darker as she crossed her thin arms around her a little more tightly.

“Listen, Laura, we’re gonna do things real careful and slow in this new place, wherever we end up, alright? And you can rest assured I ain’t going anywhere anytime soon. Sorry, kid, you’re stuck with me for a while longer, and now that you are, I got things to teach ya. But you gotta follow my rules if you want to hang around, comprende?”

Laura smiled a bit at his miserable use of Spanish, and then nodded her head in agreement.

--

The black of night began to descend on them later on in the evening than it did in most places, and Logan was once again reminded of what it was like to live in northern Canada. It did eventually begin to set, though, and the further north Logan and Laura ventured, the less road stops and convenience stores they encountered, let alone places to turn in for the night. Logan wasn’t one for technology, but once more he wished Gabriella’s phone hadn’t been left behind in the Midwest. There was no way of knowing if they’d reach a place soon or not. And while Logan was willing to drive through the night if he had to, something about the darkened stretch of highway they currently found themselves on made him wary, cautious. For once, Logan regretted navigating solely on instinct.

As the sun poured out of the horizon, the color left everything. Dark smudges of grey and blue shaded what was left, the trees throwing deep shadows on the road. Logan felt his senses naturally heighten. His eyes were shit nowadays, the reading glasses often resting on his nose to help with anything he had to look at close up, but, at least for the moment, his hearing, his sense of smell, remained in-tact. They were about the only things left on him that still fucking worked, and as the Bronco drove needle-straight now deeper into the forest, his senses keenly and vaguely hinted at a looming sense of foreboding.

He realized, quickly, that Laura had picked up on his wariness, and she too became rippled with tension. She looked at him questioningly in the darkened cabin of the Bronco, not necessarily anticipating him to answer, but waiting for a sign on what to do, how to feel. Logan said nothing though, and kept stubbornly driving.

Finally, the headlights illuminated an upcoming turn to the left, the first of its kind Logan had seen in about an hour. He intuitively pressed a foot to the break, and the Bronco slowed. He had seen a small, faded billboard advertising a local bed and breakfast, and he wondered, vaguely, if this was the drive up to it. He looked to Laura, who he could tell was both exhausted and antsy. Sitting too long in the same place was hard for any kid, let alone a feral one. The least he could do was try to find her a decent bed to sleep in, instead of once more having to spend the night in the Bronco. It was this thought in mind that he made the decision to turn, the intention to edge up the driveway a bit and look for signs of the bed and breakfast.
Almost immediately, however, the road ahead of them narrowed, winded, and steeped upward, just narrow enough for him to be unable to turn around without careening off the side of the cliff. Instantly Logan realized this had been a bad idea, and he quietly scolded his intuition for pushing him in this direction. Realizing there was no sign of life, Logan began to wonder why there was any road at all. Finally, after what felt like forever, he was able to detect the gravel road widening slightly. He stopped, putting the car into reverse and backed up a bit, cocking the wheel to the right, when there it was, right in front of them. The headlights illuminated a series of low cinderblock buildings a few yards ahead, derelict and abandoned.

The feeling of adrenaline and fear and something more sinister shot through Logan, as the hair stood up on his arms. Two Rivers Research Facility. *Jesus fucking Christ. It was still here.* He had relied on his instinct to take him this far, and this is where his fucked up intuition had led him, caught between two very real, but very distinct timelines. Even in an alternative reality, he had found it, tucked away on some lonely road, on some empty highway in northern Alberta. He had landed right back on the fucking doorstep. *Except that you haven’t,* he reminded himself, *because, in this timeline, you have never been here.*

He turned to Laura then, whose alert was on high. She was pale, eyes wide, waiting for somebody or someone to spring. She had assumed Logan had thought he had saw something between or inside one of the abandoned buildings, and although Logan wanted to explain, he found himself speechless to do so. Meanwhile, memories violently rattled their cages, clanking against locked doors.

“Sorry, kid,” he finally choked out. “Shouldn’t have come up this way.” She jerked her head up to look at him, before whipping it back straight ahead. The sense of trepidation still hung in the air, and he knew Laura felt it, despite her lack of context. They both stared at the light shining off the closest cinderblock building for a moment, gnats flitting in the beams, the dark falling in on all other sides. Logan’s hand shook as he put the Bronco into drive and started down the hill the way they had come, while flashes walked the fields and specters hung back in the dark.

--

Forty more minutes down the main highway, on nothing more sophisticated than another gravel turn off the road, the Bronco slowly rolled into a sleepy motel tucked back a few hundred meters in the woods. Logan was quiet as he killed the engine and shut off the lights, but it wouldn’t matter. Laura had been sleeping, but at the slight shifting of noises she stirred, her small body bristling once more with tension. Her eyes searched out his in the dark, a mild look of concern.

“S’okay, kid. Sorry to wake you,” his voice rough in the dark. Laura relaxed, blinking sleepily as she moved to open the car door. He noticed she kept closely behind Logan as they grabbed their packs and checked in.

Once in their room, Laura was asleep within minutes. Logan watched her for a moment, her long lashes brushing cheeks, her breath even and still. Logan sighed steadily, padding as silently as he could back over to the desk. He loosened a stale cigar from the pack he had picked up a day earlier outside of Edmonton, and headed toward the door. He didn’t intend on sleeping tonight, resigned, instead, to keep close watch over her.

*Where you runnin’ off to, sugar?* The voice taunted him, as he quietly closed the door behind him.

“Nowhere,” he murmured to himself.

*You so sure nowhere is where you wanna be?*
Outside, the only sound of importance was the lighter’s spark and the steady, crackling flicker of a
flame lighting the crisp, rolled paper. The smell of tobacco wafted upward, long trails of smoke
coiling into the starless sky. Logan paced their door for a long time afterward, wary, the sound of
boots crunching under the loose gravel, protecting Laura against nothing but ghosts.

Chapter End Notes

Another bigger chapter in store for you for 8. Gonna take a few days, but I’m already
steadily working on it. Thanks for the feedback, as always.
The news of the updated Sentinel designs had shaken them all. Marie was anxious, more willing to vocally advocate for what some mutants had been taken to calling “the cause,” whereas Storm grew more absent, overseeing the repairs and upgrades to her precious Blackbird, while Charles was often locked away in his room with Erik, deciding the best course of action. Meanwhile, Logan watched them all, their worries and emotions orbiting around him. In more ways than he would care to admit, he kept incredibly close tabs on them. He knew their locations at all times, tracking their comings and goings, their scents memorized, zoning in on the speed and tempo of their pulses. There was little else he could do, he realized, other than pace, wait, and prepare for the worst.

As the news spread that Charles Xavier and the last of his few precious X-Men were here, the compound grew steadily more crowded, as more leaders of more mutant rights factions increasingly flooded into Cape Town. They were practically walking over people in the hallways now. He could sense the unease of the Wolverine as the population within the compound doubled, and then tripled. It was hard to focus through the noise, for one. For another, Logan grew nervous at the presence of so many powerful mutants in one centralized location. It was Warfare 101; never have so many people with so much influence and control convene all at once in the same place, lest you be attacked. Had any of these people fought in any major war beyond the one they currently found themselves in, they would know better. Logan also understood what most of the people here wouldn’t admit or were too ignorant to know: despite their lack of flashy powers, humans were better at warfare. They had been doing it a long fucking damn time, centuries before the X-gene manifested itself in anyone.

Logan had been advocating to Charles, almost to the point of outright annoyance, that they would need to leave soon and seek out a smaller compound. Some place up north during winter would provide better cover, he had argued. Logan knew that Erik, particularly, found this plan repulsive. Magneto contended that they had no actual confirmation that the new Mark Xs had even been built yet, but Logan knew not to be optimistic. Whenever and wherever Hank had procured the plans, they must have already included or at least now contained outdated information. The longer they sat here, the more jeopardy they were putting themselves in. Charles, at least, seemed to be aware of this fact, and Logan was relieved to see that Charles, for the first time in a long time, appeared to be listening to him. Charles also seemed uneasy with the growing numbers at the compound and now wanted a plan ready so that they may mobilize. Storm had been recently sent out on a solo mission, upon discovering that Blink was also in Africa. She had been integral in several of the mutant rescue missions, and was one of the more powerful and useful mutants to have around. The move, however, had left Logan without his original partner in this mission, and Logan realized his relationship with the only woman left associated with the X-Men grew more tense because of it.

Sparring with Rogue was steadily becoming the preferred form of release, and the only way he could ease the pressure between them. Rogue was a complicated creature, and when they weren’t engaged
in hand-to-hand combat, Logan was either frustrated with her resolute loyalty to the “cause” or so fucking hard by her sultry, red mouth that he couldn’t see straight. Whatever the fuck he was feeling for Rogue was complicated, snarled in confusion and longing, but ultimately still threaded with a vague sense of distrust. Their arguments often got heated, him pushing for more information and she retaliating. After these skirmishes, Logan often found Rogue swimming, which had become a sort of safe haven for the woman, particularly since she knew it was the one place Logan wouldn’t go. Everyone knew you jumped in the lake when the bees swarmed too close.

But the physicality of fighting helped them both. His muscles, typically taught with anxiety, loosened under the continual use. The sight of Rogue’s sweat on her temple, the sheen on her skin, was also a thing to behold. With more mutants in the facility, Rogue often covered up more than Logan suspected she would have normally, but during their fights she wore less, back down to some pants or shorts and a sports bra, as their intricate dancing and knowledge of how to block and move just centimeters away from bare skin evolved. Seeing her like that, stripped down to her core and in her element while fighting, did something to Logan he couldn’t quite explain. While on the sparring mat, it was still inevitable that they brushed skin from time to time, but all of this had resulted in no response, and not for the first time Logan had vaguely wondered if her mutation was somehow, at least in some small way, psychosomatic. When she concentrated on something else, it took longer for her to do any damage. Logan cared for and nestled that little fact away some place important in his mind.

Their sparring, if you could even call it that anymore, had also warped itself into something more convoluted and visceral. Logan could hold his own just fine, being quicker, more skilled and knowledgeable in all forms of martial arts and hand-to-hand combat, but he knew for certain now that Marie was stronger than him, even if she continually held back. He began to become obsessed with trying to get her to hit him, moving beyond the steadfast rules of sparring. He pushed her, goaded her into throwing harder punches. He was probably the farthest thing away from masochistic there could be, but he was becoming steadily more curious how strong Rogue really was. Obviously he knew she wanted to avoid causing him pain, which he couldn’t give a shit about, but he also suspected Rogue held back because she simply wasn’t sure yet how to use her strength in a way that benefitted her. She had never been trained to do so. So over the next two weeks that passed, Logan intentionally developed a plan to move slower and clumsier. He knew to abstain from just trying to stand there and let her hit him. For one thing Marie wouldn’t allow herself to do it, and for another whatever hit Rogue managed on him deserved to be earned, at least in her mind. But Logan still broke the rules here and there, along with also taking up the devious task of fucking up her concentration over not hurting him by pummeling her with questions too, throwing her off balance even more so.

“Do ya think,” he said, as he just barely dodged a blow to his back, “If you were all riled up and in the right mood, you could flip over a car?”

“Shut up, Logan,” was her typical reply.

It wasn’t just a morbid, selfish curiosity either; Logan had very practical reasons for training Rogue and getting her to open up. If they needed her in the upcoming battles, which would inevitably happen, it would be valuable if she could use her strength to its fullest potential. And then, of course, there was the most important reason: Logan also needed her to stop holding back from everybody, particularly herself, if any sort of real trust between them was to happen.

One morning a few weeks after arriving in Cape Town, Logan and Rogue were both breathing heavily, moving quickly on the mat, sweat beading on skin. Logan noticed that this morning they had attracted a crowd of onlookers. It wasn’t the first time they had done so, and Logan found he didn’t very much like the attention. It wasn’t that he didn’t get turned on by a crowd; he’d been a
cage fighter for fuck’s sake. But unlike the drunken crowds in places like Laughlin City, these buffoons mainly just gawked and stared awkwardly, strangely enthralled by the one-sided violence and maybe, he guessed, the physical attractiveness of his sparring partner. Also, if this was a goddamned war they were supposed to be preparing for, he wasn’t so sure why everyone was just fucking standing around. Sometimes, to break them up, he’d bark orders at them. Get on the goddamn mat and practice. Today though, as he ducked and weaved, he realized Rogue was more apt to want to punch him, probably because of the argument they had had last night, and he could care less about the punks on the sidelines. Logan intentionally made his movements more predictable, hoping Marie would get the fuck over herself and clock him right.

“So… you’re an idealist, then?” Logan asked through heavy breathing, trying to once more talk her into distraction.

“What?” Rogue asked, dodging his own attempt to take her to the floor.

“Last night, all this loyalty shit, you an idealist then?”

“What’s so wrong with that?” she said, breathing hard.

“Nothing. Just wasn’t the girl I knew,” he said, realizing he’d struck pay dirt with that comment. With that, her eyes narrowed, and he hesitated just long enough for her fist to make contact with his left shoulder. He stumbled back a few feet, but that was all. Fools’ gold.

“That was pathetic,” he told her flatly, pausing for a second.

“That was pathetic,” he told her flatly, pausing for a second.

“Too bad,” she said, through another breath and a small smile.

“Hit me harder,” he challenged, rounding on her to engage again. He realized, during these sparring sessions, that he was royally fucking with the inner animal and his core instincts. The Wolverine knew better than to fake punches and to stand there and take hits, but he also liked being this physically close to Marie, savoring the smell of her skin and the feel of her sweat, taking an especially sick, deviant pleasure in how fucking rough it all was. Ultimately, her strength was mouthwatering to him in just every way possible. They were, in many ways, evenly matched.

“I am,” Rogue said, wiping the sweat from her brow, before finally hiking a leg up to make contact with his left arm. Again, he lost his footing for a second, before regaining it.

“Liar. Harder,” Logan growled, not being able to help smirking a bit at the innuendo as he easily moved out of the way of another attempt.

“I don’t wanna hurt you,” she said, her typical line.

“You can’t. I’ll fucking heal, Rogue,” he said, although he cursed his instincts as he involuntarily and intuitively ducked a punch that would have surely sent him flying across the gym.

It was then suddenly that Logan’s periphery senses detected a change in the room, and he took his focus off of Rogue. A mutant whose name he should have remembered but couldn’t recall for the life of him had just come barreling through the doors, and now he talked in a rush of low tones and whispers to a small group of spectators. Instantly the group disbanded, headed for the door, and like that, fucking dominos. Just as Logan noticed how the effect rippled through the gym as various people stopped training and started whispering to each other before bolting for the door, Rogue’s side kick made forceful contact, now with his right shoulder. This time, a soul-sucking, snarling pain overtook him as he heard the crude snap of dozens of tendons and ligaments, as Rogue effectively dislodged his humerus from his shoulder socket, adamantium bones and all.
“Jesus mother fuck!!!” Logan said through gritted teeth, as he staggered back several feet, but somehow managed to stay standing.

“Oh, fuck, sugar. Shit, that looks ugly. I thought you saw me coming. Um, sorry?” she said, eyes wide, as she walked over to him. He looked at her sharply, a wild and primal anger at being hit overtaking him momentarily, before his rational brain worked through the pain and reminded him that he had asked for it. He realized she was discreetly massaging her own foot while she stood, most likely from the direct forceful contact with the adamantium, and for a moment Logan took some sick pleasure in seeing her discomfort, too.

“I don’t think anyone’s done that since the fucking metal,” he choked out, although he could already feel his cartilage and repairing muscles working quickly to force the bones back and to thread up the tissue around it. It hurt like fucking hell when it all snapped back into place, metal scraping against itself. If it had not been for the adamantium, she would have snapped his collarbone with a kick like that. And Logan had known she was still holding back.

Rogue looked at him more intimately now, feeling guilty as hell. The look of longing helped to dissipate any lingering anger he felt.

“It’s ok, darlin’,” he said, swallowing back the swell of nausea from the pain as he stood to his full height once more. “I asked for it,” he breathed. He looked at her for a moment more, before subtly nodding his head at the last of what had been happening around them, the remaining mutants gathering their things and talking hurriedly before heading for the door. She finally looked up too, noticing the shift. Something big had happened. Most likely important news. By the time she looked back at him, his shoulder had healed, but the pain still scorched his skin, radiating downward.

“Better go get the Professor,” he muttered.

--

After just coming back from a larger meeting with several leaders of the mutant factions that had arrived, the X-Men had their answers. The news: a powerful mutant named Bishop had been captured and had been taken to Camp X-Ray at Guantanamo Bay. The real news: a Mark X Sentinel had been the one apprehended him.

“Why didn’t they just kill the sorry fucker then?” Logan grumbled, leaning against the wall near the door after they had made their way back to Charles’ room. Rogue shot a poisonous glare his way, obviously annoyed, but Logan only returned a smirk.

“We believe that this was a test to see if the designs were effective,” Erik said, tension laden in his voice. “Nevertheless, this changes everything.”

“How?” Rogue asked, unafraid to go head-to-head with Magneto if need be. Logan found himself, despite the discouraging news, smirking yet again, proud of her spunk. “How does this change things?” she added, a new worry in her voice, looking fairly suspicious of the three other men that surrounded her. At that, Logan’s smile lessened slightly.

“We have less time, for one thing,” Logan muttered from his place by the door.

“Logan’s right. We’ll have to move quickly if we’re to leave South Africa before autumn is over,” Charles added.

“Leave? Why?” Rogue pressed. Logan saw that she turned around the room desperately now. She
knew she was outnumbered, and not for the first time Logan wondered what Storm would have to say. Not only because of her gender, but also because Storm typically stayed calm, collected and was not easily swayed by troubling news.

“We have made contact with several prominent mutants in North America who have been rumored to be living in a small compound. It was our hope to settle there for winter and reassess,” Charles explained, ever poised and even in his tone.

“Plus we’re sitting ducks here,” Logan muttered unenthusiastically.

“This new information is… troubling to say the least. We need more supplies, time to plan tactical strategy and to optimize what we can do as a team together,” Charles explained. “Logan has had a few ideas on the subject that are quite promising.”

Rogue whipped back around to Logan so quick Logan almost flinched. She looked at him severely, just as another shot of pain radiated down Logan’s arm, his muscles twitching slightly. Logan merely offered a half-hearted shrug in reply.

“So we just… go into hiding up north then, and, as we do, countless more die?” Rogue asked, no longer able to keep the emotion out of her words. Logan winced a little at this, but was intent to get her to see what he already knew was happening, cause or no cause.

“We’re not ready, Rogue. We may never be,” Logan murmured, walking over to her spot and putting an arm on her now-covered shoulder. Rogue sloughed it off in anger almost immediately, but it was enough time to feel that her muscles were stiff. There was also that god awful sense of betrayal in her eyes. *Shit.*

Logan knew Rogue was passionate about the cause. At first Logan had chalked this up to some strange amount of guilt over taking the cure, but he had started to realize her concern went beyond that early mistake. Unlike Logan, Rogue would throw herself into the fight until the whole world burned, no doubt, desperate to set things right. Logan was willing to fight, but he was intent on having their team survive also.

“With all due respect, Professor,” Rogue said, trying to temper her voice and corral her anger. “It seems since I’ve arrived here all we have been doing is reassessing. What about action? If we cannot demonstrate our humanity, how can we possibly hope to win? If they can’t even see us as human—”

“We are *not* human,” Erik scolded her, and Logan found himself silently snarling, flashing his teeth a little at the fucker. Charles might feel differently, but Logan trusted Magneto as much as he trusted a tank of gasoline near an open fire.

“We must find a way forward,” Charles said after a bit of silence, “Sparing as many lives, human and mutant, as we can. Which unfortunately means, in this case, Rogue, heading north for the winter and mobilizing in the spring.”

“This ain’t about winning. It’s about surviving,” Logan said quietly to her.

“You’ve already given up, haven’t you?” she said quietly to Logan, her words pained, but measured carefully once more.

The room went quiet for a bit, the silence awkward, until Logan realized that Charles was speaking to Rogue telepathically. At whatever the Professor had told her, her face softened slightly, and then she left the room calmly without making a big fuss about doing so, her scent trailing behind her.

“Logan, I’ve just told Rogue a few things, one being that while Storm is gone and especially with the
influx of new mutants, that you are to share a room with Rogue. I’m sorry, my friend, I know you are one for privacy, but it can’t be helped any longer, I’m afraid. We’ve moved you both to a suite, so you’ll still have your own rooms but certainly a shared living space, but, given your natural gifts and proclivities, you should be… prepared.”

--

Out in the hallway after their little meeting was through, he found her. She had lingered outside of Charles’ room, and he was happy to find that she wasn’t necessarily all that angry any longer, although he could tell she was still processing the information, a little wary and flustered. The pink lingered in her cheeks and a few strands of her hair, still pulled up in a high braid from their sparring earlier, had become loose. He could tell the conversation had exhausted her.

“Hey,” he grumbled softly, walking up to her.

“Hey yourself,” she murmured back, taking part in their relatively new habitual greeting with her usual reply.

“You wanna go somewhere?”

“Like where?”

“About time you had some Tequila, right?” he asked, hoping it was the right thing to say. It sure as fuck looked like she needed it.

“Not much alcohol ‘round here, I’m afraid” she murmured, glancing up and down the hallway at the place that all of them were steadily growing sick of, despite its apparent luxuries.

“Not here, out there,” Logan gestured behind him to the elevator.

“Yeah, ok,” she said simply.

--

The bar Logan had staked out a couple of weeks ago was small, dimly lit, and served a certain type of mutant. Logan had been called many a thing before, “tough” and “hard” and “animalistic” among them, but he still looked like a fucking man, so he was usually the prettiest one in the place. Well, until Rogue walked through its doors, that was.

“Lovely,” Rogue murmured under her breath, tucking back a stray strand of hair behind her ear as she took in the scenery. Two horribly abnormal mutants sat in the corner, hard whiskey in hand, while another tended bar. The décor wasn’t much better. The wallpaper was falling off in long strips along one wall, the floor was damp with something, and some of the chairs had been repurposed with duct tape.

“You actually judging?” Logan queried, toying with her a bit, as they found their way over to the vacant bar.

“No, I just-” she attempted, before he interrupted her again.

“They speak English in this fucking joint, ok? And that’s good enough for me.”
“What’ll be, Wolverine?” a large, portly, mostly green-colored man with a Nigerian accent said from behind the counter. Rogue simpered at the mutant bartender’s use of the nickname, but sobered a bit when the larger mutant glared at her.

“Tequila, Oladimeji. Shots,” Logan looked back her way with a small grin on his face, when, yet again, he felt the pain radiate down his arm where she had popped it out the socket this morning. “Better make ‘em doubles,” he added, still staring at Rogue. “Limes ‘n’ all.”

“You in the habit of ordering for other women?” Rogue sassily shot back, taking a seat next to him at the bar.

“I do when they don’t know what’s good for them,” Logan responded bluntly, loving the feeling of getting under that fatal skin of hers. Meanwhile, Rogue huffed a little at his remark.

“A feminist, through and through,” she added snarkily.

“Hey, I’m all about equal rights, about every which way you wanna dice it, but, some things, for some people, are just…the way they fucking are. Natural.”

“Natural,” Rogue said, toying with the word on her mouth. “Yeah? Like what?” Logan’s expression darkened as he threw her a predatory glance and she stiffened a little, finally taking his meaning. For a second no one spoke, the things they hadn’t said clear between them. He deliberately lightened after a bit, once more pulling in the Wolverine.

“Wouldn’t you like to know,” he added playfully, before she rolled her eyes once more.

At that point, Oladimeji came back with the double shots, two wedges of lime on a fairly dirty plate, and some salt.

“Ok, here we go,” Logan said, pulling the drinks and condiments towards them. “You know how to do this, right?”

“I wasn’t born yesterday,” she said, before she gave her hand at the base of her thumb a long, languid lick, before shaking some salt on it and licking it again, tongue running along skin. Fuck.

“If you were born in the eighties, and I mean the nineteen eighties,” Logan finally quipped, sucking on his own hand for a moment before taking the salt from Rogue, “You were born yesterday.”

“Don’t get creepy,” Rogue added, handing him his glass.

“Bottoms up,” he said through a grin, and they both knocked back their drinks at the same time. The liquid still burned on the way down, the tequila not near as good as the shit he could get back in Mexico, but he hoped it would still do the job.

As Rogue sucked on her lime, Logan turned back to Oladimeji.

“Two beers, bub, and don’t give us that piss water you pass off on the newbies,” he growled. Oladimeji grunted something noncommittal in response, but still put two decent pale ales in front of them after a second or two. Logan offered a slight nod in approval, and after a moment he was ushering Rogue over to a table near the back of the bar, where they could talk more quietly.

“So,” Logan said, the feeling of the tequila softly floating through his head, realizing it was working a bit quicker than he would have thought. “What’s up with you?”

“With me?” she asked, suddenly a little stiffer.
“Yeah,” Logan said. Rogue bit her lip a bit, and then took a long swig of her beer.

“I don’t like the plan,” she finally said matter-of-factly.

“Yeah, I’m gettin’ that,” Logan muttered.

“It feels like giving up,” she added for good measure.

“We haven’t even started fighting yet, Rogue,” Logan shot back, yet again indulging in his beer.

“That’s my point,” she added. Logan considered this as thoughtfully as he was capable of doing.

“Rogue, what you were talking about in there… changing the way the world sees us… We were fighting that battle fifteen years ago. That’s about all the X-Men used to do, and that ship has long since sailed, darlin’.”

“So then what?” Rogue questioned, a new terseness in her tone. “We fly to Canada or Russia or someplace remote, as countless mutants die?”

“They aren’t killing us yet.”

“You know they will.”

“But not yet,” Logan reminded her. “We have time. We need time.”

“We’re putting others’ lives in danger so we can sit pretty up north,” Rogue stubbornly continued. “We’re sacrificing our kind.” Logan recoiled at her use of the word.

“Our kind? You’re starting to sound a bit too much like Erik,” Logan murmured. “Like a fucking Brotherhood bumper sticker”

“Don’t be silly,” she retaliated.

“What about practicality? About being resourceful, realistic?” he asked.

“Realism. That’s what’s gotten you this far, has it?”

“Sure as hell ain’t been anything else,” Logan remarked, taking a long swig of his beer, polishing it off, and gesturing for another.

“Sugar, talk yourself around the truth all you want, but you’re an idealist, same as me. You pretend to be so detached, so noncommittal, and here you are, yet again, running around with your precious X-Men.”

“Our X-Men. Remember, you’re on our team again. And we know when to fight and when to not. I wouldn’t risk my neck for half of these jokers anyway.” Logan threw his eyes around the room and out onto the street. At this, Logan was surprised to find Rogue’s anger intensify.

“That’s your line, is it? You’ll take the X-Men, but not the rest. Is it all so bad to have to count yourself among us?”

Logan stopped himself from refuting, and instead simply sat up in his chair a bit.

“You want to be normal,” Rogue practically whispered, eyes narrowed. Logan actually growled a little in retaliation.
“I thought you just had me pegged as a mutant idealist,” he retorted.

“You’re a hypocrite,” Rogue accused. At this, Logan almost laughed. You’re smarter than whatever’s holdin’ ya back, kid, he thought.

“What I want to know, darlin’,” he started, trying to pick his words carefully. “Is why you’re always tryin’ to find a reason to rail against me. Because it seems like all we do is go ‘round and ‘round and end up right back where we started again. You wanna talk about hypocrisy? Go live as long as I have and try not wishin’ to God you were normal, Marie. Or, better yet, remind me who was the first one standing in line to make themselves human, not all that long ago?”

“Watch it, cowboy,” she warned. Logan sighed, practically jerking the new beer out of Oladimeji’s hand as he did so, caring little that the other mutant was now actively eavesdropping on their conversation.

“We can’t keep doing this, baby,” he said, before taking a heavy pull of the beer, wishing suddenly he had ordered a whiskey.

“What are we doing?” Rogue asked evenly.

“I’m trying to figure you the fuck out, and you won’t let me.”

“And why do you want to do that?” It might as well have been a playground taunt in how she delivered the question, but Logan knew better than to take the bait and offer up some sort a knee-jerk, amateur response. The intent behind her words was real. She still wasn’t trusting him, or herself.

“Because…fuck,” he said, stopping, taking another swig of his beer. As he set the glass down, he tried to keep calm. “Look, whatever you did, that’s on you. I know you fucked up, big time, or you wouldn’t be acting like this. Paradin’ around like some martyr, feeling fucking guilty as hell, drinkin’ the kool-aid, not ownin’ up to whatever you did. And I don’t really have a right to judge, but…you know I give a shit about what happens to you, Marie. We go back a long while. And you can’t just throw your life around like it’s worthless for some cause, no matter what.”

“Stop,” Marie practically whispered.

“Stop what?” he asked.

“Just...stop,” she said calmly, but her eyes were steely, a warning if there ever was one. Another failed attempt. His expression must have made Rogue feel a little guilty, because she filed down her sharp edges a bit, softening.

“Another round?” Rogue asked coyly, the double meaning hanging in the air as she did so.

“Shit, darlin’. Do I have a fucking choice? Whatever. Yeah. Let’s do it.”

--

The conversation had lightened after a couple more drinks, but Logan’s mood had steadily declined. Two beers in, and Rogue had dismissed herself. He had realized half-heartedly after she had left that this was the first time he had ever gone drinking with her, and he sorely regretted that he had fucked it up. He had always envisioned the event happening drastically different, maybe after a birthday celebration back in Westchester and maybe their clothes would have come off and maybe he’d bite her bottom lip and maybe he would have fucked her up against a wall, deadly skin be damned. At
least, that’s how the fucking fantasy had always played out.

She was getting to him, the vixen. Despite it all, she was getting to him. Those muscles and the way they flexed when she knocked the shit out of him. The way she smelled or moved or breathed or thought. Even as annoying as all her self-righteous, save mutant-kind bullshit was or how frustrating she could be when the conversation came screeching to a halt before he could figure her out, and she was still getting to him.

Logan sighed, intent on another drink. He had been here a handful of weeks off and on and he was already a favorite customer, knowing full well that whatever measly salary— pocket money, really—he was being offered was barely enough to afford his drinking habits. He hated being tied to someone, even if that person was someone he respected enough as the Professor. Logan wondered for the umpteenth time why he had signed up for this gig in the first place.

*Because she’s right. Sometimes, you’re a straight-up sucker for some justice league bullshit.* He hadn’t seen Rogue in years and after three weeks she had already figured him out, had his number. Why, with all his supposed impressive super senses, couldn’t he do the same to her?

Logan staggered a bit over to the bar after a while. Not for the first time, he found himself adjusting his right shoulder a bit more, as if something were still out of place. Little shots of pain still flew their way down it, particularly when Rogue was around, he grumpily realized, and that wasn’t normal. He could mentally recall painful experiences, yeah, but to feel this sort of pain physically, hours after it had happened? With the exception of Japan, that was a fucking first. He dutifully took up blaming Rogue, but only because he had no other reason.

“‘Nother?” Oladimeji asked, from across the bar’s divide.

“One more for the books, bub, then close it,” Logan said. He grumpily looked around the bar as he waited. She had been right about the place; it wasn’t a pretty thing to behold. Mutants with extreme mutations, mutants who were purple or who had fucked up appendages or who were missing an eye. Once more, Logan thanked his lucky stars he looked relatively normal. For the first time in a while, his thoughts settled back again on Hank, and his frown deepened.

Rogue had to have killed someone she shouldn’t have. Or betrayed someone in some way. He was almost sure of it. She had put lives in jeopardy at the very least, probably over some stupid mistake that shouldn’t have mattered. The guilt, the attitude, all of it had to be about that. As for the rest, as for the fucking cure, Logan also vaguely, not for the first time, wondered if there had been another… person involved.

*Was it worth it?* he had asked.

*Yes,* she had said.

Logan swallowed hard. Despite his possessive tendencies, jealousy wasn’t necessarily his favorite flavor. Not when it tasted like this.

After the last drink, he stumbled out of the bar, and he realized Oladimeji had done right by him. His healing factor was just behind him and he could feel it desperately working, trying to catch up, but he figured he had about a good five minutes of this sweet sort of drowning before he began to sober. He knew his senses were fried, the input scrambled, and he was fine with it. He managed to get back to the compound, only because it was a short walk and only because the place they were staying was so fucking obvious. The term *sitting ducks* sluggishly crawled across his mind once more as the elevator slowly ascended, and another shot of pain traveled down his shoulder. *Goddammit, Rogue.*
He first stumbled to the door of the room he had been staying in, and, realizing his key wasn’t working, he looked about purposelessly for a minute or two. It took a few useless tries on a few other rooms until he found the correct room a few down, loudly opening and closing the door behind him, not giving a shit who heard. The room was dark, but he could tell all the furniture was in a different spot, and he wondered if he had made a mistake…

“You’re back?” he heard, and Logan turned around to see her standing there. Damn it. He had completely forgotten about sharing rooms. She was dressed modestly in a tank and pajama bottoms, but…fuck him to hell…he noticed immediately she wasn’t wearing a bra. The curve of her breasts, the upturn of her nipples through the sheer fabric. He would have taken an oath of celibacy right then and there if he could have just put his mouth to one nipple, biting down gently and then sucking hard…

“Logan?” Rogue asked again.

“Yeah?”

“You ok?” she asked, and he knew she was realizing he was drunker than his healing factor typically allowed.

“You were with someone, weren’t you?” he asked bluntly.

“Excuse me?” she said, blinking at him.

“After the cure?” Logan tried to clarify. They stood like that for a moment, still in the dark a few paces between where he stood and she did.

“Yes,” Rogue finally admitted tiredly. “I was. Not that that’s any of your business,” she grumbled, her thin arms crossing themselves.

“But it wasn’t that ice prick,” Logan said. “And it wasn’t about being touched. It was about somethin’ else, somethin’ real.”

“I-” Marie began, before stopping. Meanwhile, her scent lingered between them, the scent of chamomile tea and tooth paste, but also something that ran deeper, something natural and close and wet…

“But it’s not part of the reason you fucked up, is it?” Logan continued, knowing his guess was dead-on just by her scent. But it was in his mind on a loop now, replaying the idea of some idiot who didn’t know what he was doing, his hands traveling down her touchable skin, the feeling of her warmth…

Fuck. Fuck,” he said, growling.

“What?” Marie shot back, growing steadily angrier at his intoxication, his inability to collect his scattered thoughts.

“I hate, fucking hate, that someone else put his hands on you first,” he blurted out, before he could stop himself. All of the sudden it was like all the air had been sucked out of the room, everything hot and still as he realized what he had just said, what he had admitted to her. Fuck tequila.

“What?” Rogue was asking softly, her voice barely above whisper.

“You heard me, Marie,” he said, swallowing his pride.
“But I thought….Jean…” Rogue whispered.

“Yeah, Jean. Jean. She was there, she was beautiful, and you were too young back then, for me to….to do what I wanted.”

“What you… wanted?” Rogue asked.

“Yeah,” he growled possessively, some of the thoughts he had stopped himself from thinking years before now rushing forward.

“I was deadly then, like now. I would have dropped you to the floor,” she said, gaining some of her composure back as she spoke.

“Like I fucking care about that,” Logan muttered. As he spoke, he realized the feeling of intoxication was already slowly lifting, as his healing factor made up for lost time, while a different sort of feeling overcame him.

“You should,” she said more defensively.

“Don’t go playing the victim card,” he growled, intuitively stepping closer to her, close enough for him to hear every little movement, every little sound her body made. “There are ways around it,” he said, and he felt her take in a sharp breath of air as her heart thudded loudly in her chest. “You know there are. And I swear to God I would’ve found a way, Marie, had I wised up enough to have found the fucking chance.”

He was so close he could feel the heat rising off her skin. And then the room was spinning again, as even the slightest hint of her arousal flowed over him. It was overwhelming, intoxicating, the sweetest fucking thing he had ever sensed, and then his head was pulsing and he was swaying on the spot.

“Easy there,” she whispered, practically into his ear, mistaking his unsteadiness for the alcohol instead of what she was doing to him. Rogue grabbed his forearm to steady him, and he noticed for the first time she was wearing gloves. Silk.

“You don’t need these ‘round me,” he said, fingering the silk a bit, rolling it between thumb and index finger.

“Yes, I do. Or do you not remember what happened last time we touched?” she said. _The feel of your soft hair under my chin, the way your body felt up against mine._ Logan shook his head a little and ignored the comment, still woozy from the aroma.

“Let’s…get you to bed, sugar. You could use the sleep,” she managed to say.

“Hey,” he said, impulse making him stop and hold her gloved arm a little tighter.

“Hey what?” she murmured, turning to look at him again.

“This guy you…knew. Did he care for you? Look after you?” Logan asked, honestly. His hope diminished a bit to see Rogue’s eyes darken more at that question.

“I thought he did. Or, he did for a time, and then he didn’t,” she said, as Logan felt another wave of jealousy, now laced with a new brand of anger.

“Huh. If I’d’ve been there and saw he’d done wrong by you, I would’ve sliced his fucking head off,” he muttered.
“I’m sure you would have sugar,” she said through a small smile. “No half-measures for you.”

--

The light coming in through the window toyed with him a bit before his eyes lazily lifted open. He was in a new bed, all the scents were different, until he caught wind of the humidity in the air from a recent shower in the other bathroom, the smell of mint in the shampoo. There was the fragrance of coffee too, freshly brewed, but also dissipating, meaning she had taken it to go. There was the scent of freshly washed denim and the leather of her boots, also fading smells. Marie wasn’t around, and it was one of the few times he was grateful for it.

He groaned a little as he sat up, still woozy from a hard night. *Still woozy…the fuck was happening to him?* Logan stalked over to the bathroom and ran the water under his hands, the warm liquid dutifully massaging his joints. As he looked up, catching his reflection in the mirror, he realized he looked like shit. He needed a shower and a shave, that was for fucking sure.

Slowly, some of the hazy memories of last night came knocking on his door. He remembered falling into bed as she had politely said goodnight, desperately trying to keep up whatever defenses she had constructed before she had walked off that plane three weeks ago. But he had sensed it, her arousal, and the memory of the scent shook him to his core. He only wished he had been a bit more sober and not so fucking clumsy.

But part of what he had been feeling had only started making sense to him last night. Sure, Marie was beautiful and sultry and so temptingly fuckable, and he had had his fantasies, but the Wolverine didn’t typically mind which woman was in them, as long as there was one. On the surface, it made a little bit more sense: Rogue had been the only close company of the female persuasion he had been keeping lately. And it was no wonder with all those fucking sparring sessions. But… *the first man to lay his hands on you?* Logan shuddered a little at the thought. What… like some kind of feral, possessive animal? Virginal blood and all that fucked-up bullshit? The Wolverine sang out in approval even as the man recoiled at the thought.

There was no helping it now, though. The cat was out of the bag about how he felt, and he would be damned if he’d go around meekly ignoring what had happened, no matter how many barriers Marie tried to keep around her. It only would make things worse between them to disregard it all, and Marie wasn’t some little girl whose emotions were too fragile for him not to share a little with her. She could handle herself; at least, he sure as hell hoped she could.

Freshly showered, shaved and clothed, Logan exited the hotel room, feeling a bit better and looking more like his usual self. He was intent on finding her, if only to prove he wasn’t a fucking pansy, and was happy to see that she was in the cafeteria, coffee in hand, a look of relative peace on her face.

Logan took the seat across from her, and she smiled a bit at him. He smiled back.

“How’s your hangover?” she teased.

“No hangovers, darlin’,” Logan partially lied. “Healing factor, remember?”

“You suck,” she said over a smirk. Logan just shrugged his shoulders, a bemused look on his face.

“So,” Logan said, intent on making her blush, riling her up, whatever he could to get some of his pride back, “What’s the name of that dumbass who got it wrong with you so I can go kill him?”

“You’re more than a little messed up, you know that, right?” she shot back.
“Yeah, I got it. What’s this fucker’s name?” he asked again, and Marie sighed a little, setting down her coffee.

“Henry,” she said softly. Logan just blinked at her for a second.

“Henry?” he asked, almost not believing her. The name sounded stiff and antiquated as his mouth made out the word. It also wasn’t a name he knew, or at least he thought he didn’t, which for some reason set him more on edge.

“Don’t you start your teasing, or I’ll hit you into next week,” Rogue warned, although he was comforted to see the playful, knowing look still in her eyes. Enough time had passed then, and Marie was over whatever damage this Henry had done to her. Henry also seemed to be entirely unrelated to what had happened with Hank, whatever the fuck that was about.

“So, what could Henry do, to make up for that lame-ass name? Levitate? Fly? Make a woman come just by fucking looking at her?” Rogue blushed at this last one, and Logan smiled wickedly.

“No…no,” Rogue said firmly. “He couldn’t do…anything,” she finished, a bit lamely.

“Wait, wait…you’re telling me Henry was a fucking human?” he lowered his voice a bit on the last word, throwing her an accusatory look across the table.

“We’re all human, you dimwit,” she retaliated.

“Tell that to Magneto. Or to the United States military,” he added. Rogue’s smile fell a bit at this, and he silently cursed himself for failing to keep the mood light.

“So, regular old Henry, eh? Henry the Human. What about all of your gung-ho mutant rights shit?”

“I’m not…some sort of purist. And stop patronizing me,” Rogue warned.

“Ok, sorry. But this Henry, he ain’t real high up on your list anymore, right?”

“No. Absolutely not. But it’s... complicated,” she said evenly, through narrowed eyes.

“Aren’t all good stories?” he goaded.

“You’re pretty stuck on yourself, considering what a tottering mess you were last night,” she said coolly.

“I meant every word,” he shot back, and at this she blushed again. Strike two, baby, he thought friskily.

“So, you really…regret…not?” Rogue trailed off.

“Baby, had I known any better back then, I would have fucking feasted on you,” he said through a vicious smile. There it was again, the red blooming in her cheeks, reddening her lips and making her look all the younger for it. He had her. With this, he fucking had her.

Just as Logan was about to triumphantly add another point to his mental scoreboard, however, he felt the world shift. Rogue’s coffee cup shuddered. The water of the pool Rogue loved rippled just so. The mats they sparred on lifted slightly. And then his veins hummed a warning song. Danger. Threat

“Logan, you better not think that just because—” Marie began, before he cut her off.
“Shut up,” Logan said, suddenly standing, fingers barely holding onto the lip of the table, listening carefully.

“But—”

“Shut up,” he said again, quickly. Where was the sound? Where was the sound? Down the street, several blocks away. Desperately, Logan threw out his hearing as far as it could stretch, trying to catch the vibrations, the tremors. And there it was, the sound of asphalt cracking, buildings burning, people screaming.

“We need to leave, now,” he said, his voice threaded with tension.

“Logan, what?” Rogue asked, even as she instinctively stood with him, eyes wide but body ready, belief and trust of his senses etched into her every feature.

“We need to get to Charles and get to the Blackbird, now.

Just then, the ground beneath them literally did shake, and they suddenly both heard Charles’ urgent, harried voice in their head. Logan, Rogue, get to the Blackbird! Erik is with me. Five minutes, or we leave without you.

Instantly, Logan was headed toward the lobby and Rogue followed hurriedly, just as others were starting to look up from their breakfast and notice their silverware shuddering on the table in front of them.

“But Storm?” Rogue hesitated, grabbing his arm and stopping him for the briefest of seconds, as Logan’s senses screamed in warning. He shook his head slightly, and started moving again.

“She’s in Libya. She’ll find us. Now let’s go, now. Run!” Just as he said so, they could both hear the screaming outside. The lobby quickly poured out of their vision as they ran through the revolving doors, down the stairs, and into the sun-scorched street.

Beyond, further up the way, people had started running. High up behind them, something, Logan couldn’t quite make out what, was hovering, its head alit. Rogue ran closely behind him as they fled, and Logan quickly calculated the hangar was at least half a mile away. Then the sky was on fire, and then a building was on fire. The streets became more congested with every passing second, cars slamming into each other, screams and shouts blinding his hearing as people rushed out of buildings. And suddenly just up ahead, from seemingly out of nowhere, men heavily armed and in riot gear began pouring out from vans right in front of them, blocking their path.

“Behind me, now!” Logan shouted. He snarled as his claws tore through his hands, the blades singing triumphantly in the open air as ribbons of his own blood fell onto the concrete beneath them. Rogue quickly slipped further behind him, knowing what it would cost him, realizing it was the only way, just as it began raining bullets, the metal quickly and effectively pummeling his torso. He held his arms out reflexively for a moment, before throwing his fists, claws dutifully following, up into the first sorry motherfucker he could find.

What happened next felt like one of his unrealized and nightmarish memories. The blades reverberated loudly as they gouged and slashed, the feeling of beating hearts shuddering and ending the lives of those whose organs his claws easily carved through. Logan took down whoever was in his way as they both still ran, trying to maintain their speed. He stole one more glance behind him to realize whatever the fuck that thing was they were running from was steadily gaining, and that’s also when Logan noticed that yellow was now raining from the sky, ugly plumes of smoke billowing up. Chemical warfare, a different, more experienced part of his mind told him. The acid rained down
yards behind where they had just been, a ruthless weapon intent on killing mutants and human soldiers alike.

“Logan!” Rogue desperately shouted, as he ripped his claws out from another soldier, effectively disemboweling the sorry bastard, a splatter of fresh blood left in his wake.

He looked to Rogue, and in one quiet moment, he realized the ugly truth. There was no way they could get to the hangar in time and survive. As he looked around desperately for a building, anything to hide out in, more gunfire rang out and the screaming started again. He ran toward Rogue, pulling her close to shield her, as his eyes barely caught sight of the smoky, blackish purple window in his periphery. He turned them both then, retracting his claws and rolling them through the opening, the portal hungrily swallowing them up milliseconds afterward.

Instantly, they landed hard on the steel floor of the Blackbird just as it began shuddering to life, humming as it transitioned into stealth mode and made its way up into the air. Logan’s body was still exorcising bullets as quickly as it could, the sound of metal clinking to the floor, but he realized through a hazy fog that he had lost a lot of blood.

“Logan, Rogue!” Blink shouted, as Logan whipped his head around to realize what had happened. Despite his best attempts to shield her, Rogue had a nasty cluster of three gunshot wounds in her chest, and she had lost consciousness.

He scrambled over to her. There was still a pounding in his ears as he critically sought out and found her heart still beating, although he heard it starting to shudder, threatening to slow. He lifted her small body then, placing her in the chair and strapping her in using his teeth to tighten the harness, as the Blackbird roared to its maximum speed.

“I’m so fucking sorry, kid,” he muttered under his breath, words pained as he braced himself and finally took her hand, their bare skin making direct and profound contact as he cradled her a bit more to him. Logan was instantly thrown back into the memory of last time, on top of the fucking Statue of Liberty. Unlike then though, there was no pause, no trick of the wind, as Rogue’s skin quickly and ruthlessly pulled him in. Logan tightened his grip, even as her power began greedily taking more, every new and disgusting memory that he had rediscovered in the years since they had last touched, each dark and deep truth he would have happily died before he subjected anyone else to experiencing, most especially her.

Chapter End Notes

Whew. Y’all…ok? I had to drink about eighteen cups of coffee today and put on my Wolverine socks to face the music and finish this one. These “Then” chapters are super fun to write but they are behemoths to edit and post.

My hopeful plan is that things don’t slow down with writing this, even as the fall semester gets underway and the number of college students I teach increases tenfold. Nevertheless, I’m hoping to have this sucker done in the first few weeks of the semester, by mid-September hopefully, because after that shit gets too crazy to regularly post anything. Regardless, I was thinking of writing a little sequel-y thing after this monstrosity is finished. Maybe some smaller one-shots that are fluffier and less angsty, just to satisfy random whims and urges I have.

Oh, and thanks again for all the feedback and love. Y’all make my heart melt.
PS- The phenomenal writer Lachlanrose owns all rights to thinking up the idea of Logan and Rogue doing Tequila shots. I just stole the keys to the liquor cabinet for a bit. (And, seriously, if you haven't read her stuff for some strange, convoluted reason, go now and directly do so.)
Chapter 9: Now

The wooden floorboards creaked under Logan’s weight, no matter how quietly he tried to make his way into the kitchen. The morning light hung lazily about the sparsely furnished living room, and the kitchen, if you could even call it that, was small and cramped. Logan was barely able to wedge himself between the L-shaped counter and the cabinets along the back wall, but did so anyway, fumbling around to start a pot of coffee. The old appliance sputtered and gurgled, but still dutifully went about its task. For a long moment, Logan simply watched the russet liquid drip into the pot, the slight breeze from the open window that looked down onto the street below rustling the plastic blinds.

Meanwhile, he could hear Laura breathing in the next room, steady and even. He could guess that she still would have been exhausted from the long ride north. Laura typically woke at the drop of a hat, just like Logan did. Perhaps it helped, he thought, that she finally had a little bit of her own space, at least for the time being. When they had staked the place out a handful of days ago, Laura had hesitantly hovered just beyond the little room, which could have only been around eight feet long and a few less across, as if it were some ethereal, magical thing. It had a window, at least. It was also thinly furnished like the rest of the place, a twin bed and nightstand among the rest.

“This ok?” Logan had asked hesitantly, standing back a few paces behind her as she silently walked around the room, running her small hand over the little windowsill. Logan had hoped she’d agree, because in this town it was the only space that had been for rent. Her eyes were wide as she turned back to him and nodded slightly. Logan had noticed last night the horse figurine and the two thin comic books now had a place atop the chipped white paint of the windowsill. Other than a couple of other outfits they had picked up along the way, she owned little else.

Logan took to inspecting the fridge for milk, which he realized was almost completely bare. They had put the few things that had made the journey with them, but it was now pretty much devoid of any real food. A couple of long necks in the fridge, a little orange juice. As he moved to look in the cupboard, he inventoried a mostly empty can of Pringles, a half-empty tub of Folgers and a few stale cigars that he haphazardly had thrown in there that first night they made it in. Shuffling the contents around, he finally happened upon a couple of the mismatched mugs that had come with the place they were renting. He pulled a chipped white one out, the faded red words I’d rather be in Canada on the side of it. He smirked a little as he turned back over to the coffee pot, unable to actually take steps in a kitchen this small and grabbed the pot off the burner even though it was only half-way through, impatient. He filled his mug up, the steam wafting, as he once more limped as silently possible over to a worn, brown armchair, one of the two places to sit in the living room, stifling a fresh cough as he did so. Logan had been pleasantly surprised yesterday when he had happened upon an actual print copy of a local weekly newspaper. Snagging his glasses off of the coffee table and settling them on his nose, finally, for the first time in a long time, he paged his way through the week-old news in relative peace.

Laura and Logan were modest people, and they didn’t need much space, but he knew this little upstairs apartment could only be temporary. For one, it was still partially in town, even if it did only cling to the outskirts of Hay River. This particular town hadn’t even been their actual destination, but
Laura had liked the picture of the waterwheel on the sign as they driven by. Laura hadn’t known what a waterwheel was and had asked about it, and Logan had found himself begrudgingly explaining basic hydraulics to her, much to Laura’s enthusiasm. At any rate, that seemed a good enough reason as any to stay put.

They were on the edge of the Great Slave Lake now, in the Northwestern Territories, farther north than Logan had ever wandered in his days running the cage-fighting circuit, closer to the Arctic Circle than anywhere else. Hay River was situated on the river by the same name, which fed into the lake about a mile north. There was water, deep and blue, everywhere, with miles of evergreens now a rich emerald in the August sun. It was a little, sleepy town, but it had a grocery store and a couple of schools and a small hospital, which seemed enough. It was warm and inviting here now, but Logan didn’t have to guess that winters this far north would be harsh, but hopefully not unmanageable. They were, quite literally, on the edge of the world.

In the meantime, they had heat and running water and electricity. Logan had been alive long enough to know that, at some points during his existence, these basic necessities of modern life could be thought of coveted luxuries. The landlady, a widow who had introduced herself as Kay, was a short, aging indigenous woman who ran an antique shop on the bottom floor of the building. The place they were renting had been nothing but a storeroom for many years, but had been converted into a living space after her husband had passed. She had told him this matter-of-factly, and for some reason Logan found himself taking to her. She seemed resilient and practical, her strong Chipewyan accent unapologetic. But mainly, Logan realized it was because she hadn’t asked many questions of them. And he had to give the older woman credit, to watch the old Bronco roll up to the shop, a tall, hulking man with some spectacular scars and his daughter who was fluent in Spanish following close behind him.

Laura had stood near the swinging glass door, lingering at the edge of the incredibly cluttered shop. On all sides, dusty VHS tapes and old camera recorders, tin lunch boxes and brass lamps, most things Laura had never before encountered in her life. The scents were also stacked on top of one another here, practically buckling under the weight of their age and volume.

“You have a moving van arranged?” Kay had asked, noticing the lack of furniture, luggage, and mostly all personal belongings.

Logan had looked back to Laura and the girl only barely shrugged her shoulders.

“Uh, no ma’am. We um, we’re hoping to make a change. Blank slate, and all that, up north.” She looked at Logan with interest then, and while Logan had anticipated to see suspicion in her eyes, he found none. Her own pair of readers rested on her face, the grey strands coiled up into a bun with the rest of her stark black hair. For a second she looked behind Logan, noticing Laura was currently fixated on a pile of dusty books in the corner.

“You can take a couple, sekui, if you like,” gesturing to the books, before settling her eyes on Logan once more. “Free. Seyaz ts’ékui, my daughter, read a few of them a long while ago to help her with English. Young adult fiction. A bit scary, but it seems she isn’t one to be afraid,” she said, looking at Laura. Logan’s eyebrows raised just slightly and he coughed a bit before looking down at the book Laura had brought over to the counter. He didn’t recognize it, but a small shiver went down his spine all the same at reading the title. *A Series of Unfortunate Events.*

After being handed the rental agreement to sign, Logan still noticed it was on carbon copy paper, which he hadn’t seen in decades. If he had been hesitant to use his own name, his fear eased up a bit, realizing there was no way this woman kept digital records. He finally scribbled *James Howlett* in a barely legible, noncommittal way on the form.
“That about it then?” he had asked, looking up at the woman again. She had been staring at him profoundly, but oddly not in a way Logan found off-putting.

“Yes, nághaye. Good.”

He knew there would be some talk relatively soon, there always was in small towns, about the new residents renting the tiny place on the north side of Hay River, but as he thumbed through the dwindling cash, now in Canadian dollars at least, and forked over the first month’s rent and security deposit, he glanced back at Laura’s tired eyes and her now paler skin, realizing it was time. They had reached the point where they would have to stop running.

He would need to find some steady work soon anyway. Logan now remembered that, before cage-fighting, he had worked for a lumber yard a greater part of a century ago in northern Canada, but Logan knew that most of these yards were closed now, the work done by more sophisticated machinery. Also, there was the plain fact that Logan no longer could simply rely on his physicality to earn a living anyway, as his condition seemed stubbornly stagnant and intent on keeping him miserable. On a sly mention to Kay, however, about being decent with a hammer after noticing a sagging ceiling panel, she had already called around and strung together a couple of small fix-it jobs about town. Logan wasn’t necessarily surprised; these small towns up north always had that way about them. Most of these people had little and were always on the brink of struggling, but they were also good about looking out for each other. That’s how these little towns, so far away from anything convenient, tended to survive up here. Logan’s goal, if he could pull in enough money, was eventually to find some place a little bigger, a little farther out of this town or someplace like it. Logan realized the odd handyman jobs probably wouldn’t be enough, but it was still a start at something permanent. And there the word was, heavy and foreign in his mind. Permanence. Even the plans of the Sunseeker hadn’t had the ring of that word, and its weight mildly disturbed him. Logan had never been one, even at his most domestic, to stick to any given place for very long. It was probably well past time, however, particularly because doing so, out here, at least, would hopefully mean that Laura was safe—far away from those looking to hurt her.

The coffee had long gone cold in his hands, the newspaper still fairly unread in his lap as he had been wading in deep thought, when Laura yawned sleepily and walked in from the short hallway. He noticed that over her pajamas she wore his brown workman’s coat, almost like it was a morning robe, the sleeves far too long on her, even rolled up. Logan had been keeping track that the last few mornings she had taken up wearing it, and he wondered briefly if the reason was because the coat smelled like him, something familiar in a place that wasn’t. Whatever her compulsion for doing so, though, the act of her wearing it in the morning was steadily becoming part of a larger morning ritual Logan found himself almost enjoying.

“How do you say ‘blue’?” she finally asked, pushing the bulky sleeves of his coat up on her thin arms.
“Azul,” he said assuredly. She had begun quizzing him on the road somewhere around northern Alberta, and he had humored her by memorizing a couple of words.

“How do you say ‘heat’?”

“Caliente. Ah fuck, no ah, calor,” he corrected himself.

She peered once more at him, but now was unable to contain her smile at his fumble, his glasses sliding further down her small nose as she did so.

“What about food?” Logan asked.

“Comida?”

“Yeah, that. We need some. Wanna go into town today?’”

She began nodding enthusiastically.

“We can get a couple of other things too. Some things to set up shop here for a bit longer. And maybe a charger for your little music player, if they have one?” At this, Laura’s smile widened even more so.

“Si! Really?” she asked.

“Yeah, kid,” Logan said, through a small smile. “Why not?”

--

The light of the store was bright and unnatural, as Logan became increasingly overwhelmed at the brightly colored and incredibly complicated packaging of the food. He wasn’t so great about eating himself, typically choosing not to if anything about the process was at all inconvenient, but Laura seemed to be hungry constantly, and he had no idea how to satiate the little animal half the time. While there was no possible way she could eat anything that would adversely affect her health, thanks to a handy dose of healing factor, he assumed some things might make her feel fuller over others. He highly doubted the answer to the problem was potato chips and Twinkies, but he was damned if he was gonna figure out how to shop, let alone cook, for both of them just quite yet. Grabbing two empty shopping baskets from the end of the aisle, he shoved one basket into Laura’s hands.

“Just…get some things. Fill the basket. And Laura…not all junk food, ok?” she looked up at him at that.

“Junk food?” she asked, pretending to not understand his words, a mischievous glint in her eye.

“You know what I mean,” Logan sighed. “Just…make sure to pick out some stuff that actually grew on trees. Or vines. Or what the fuck ever. Meet you at the front in ten.”

While Laura tottered around the produce, Logan found himself prowling the other part of the store, intent on the housewares aisle. Staring up again at the myriad of choices, he started haphazardly pulling things off the shelf and into his basket. Shampoo, dental floss, better toothbrushes for them both. And then, with one more lingering moment of hesitation, he added shaving cream and a decent
He was on his way to the liquor aisle when he spotted Laura again, having wandered away from the food. Logan glanced at her basket from afar and realized Laura had done a fairly decent job. Since being out of the lab, she seemed to flock to certain tastes, mostly salty things, but he was relieved to notice that she also had picked out a jar of olives, red seedless grapes, peanut butter and strawberry jam. Now though, she was staring at hair combs and brushes, plastic clips and ties.

As he met her up at the front after Logan had stocked up on some cheap beer, Laura held out a little set of four purple, sparkly hair clips up in the air toward him, silently asking for his permission to include them with the rest. “How much?” Logan asked, a bit annoyed, but the look in her eye was getting to him. It wasn’t a necessity, but neither was the beer.

“Dos dolores,” she said.

“Yeah, ok,” Logan grumbled, before they both headed to the checkout line.

“Xahto,” the girl behind the cash register greeted them, looking at Laura and smiling. It wasn’t the first time someone up this far north had mistaken Laura for being native to the region, and Laura looked back to Logan a bit helpless.

“Uh, yeah, hello,” he said, unloading the basket and putting things on the conveyer belt. The girl behind the counter was pretty, young, with dark black hair and hazelnut skin, and he could tell Laura was admiring her, particularly taken with her silver, dangling earrings. She smiled a little bit more at Laura before switching to English.

“Find everything ok?” she said, as she started checking them out.

“Yeah, we did. But, hey, do you sell chargers, like for this?” Logan asked, as he dug Laura’s dead music player out of his pocket.

“Haven’t see one of those in a while. But we have converter chargers, just down there,” she pointed to a line of them on hooks just above the candy a few paces away from the conveyer belt.

“Thanks,” he muttered. As Logan went to grab one, he heard Laura meekly slip the pack of clips onto the counter for the clerk to ring up.

“These for you or for your dad?” she joked, looking back toward Logan. Logan grumbled something incomprehensible while fumbling looking for the correct charger. Laura turned to look at Logan for a moment longer, a small frown forming on her face at the word “dad”, before turning back to the older girl, pointed to herself and smiling once again. The girl ran them through and automatically gave them right back to her. As Logan finally picked out the right charger, along with heaving the rest of the items onto the conveyer, Laura fiddled with one of the clips, taking it out of its packaging and snapping the flimsy metal back and forth.

“Do you... want some help?” the older girl asked. She looked up to Logan for approval and he just shrugged his shoulders and nodded slightly. “Want me to show you how?” she asked Laura again. Laura nodded quietly, another small smile on her face. In less than a minute, the older girl had moved from behind the counter and had fixed the clip in, the sparkly purple looking a bit foreign as it caught the light and glittered in the natural dark brown of Laura’s hair.

“There,” the older girl said, standing back to assess her handiwork. She turned to Logan, smiling again. “æaxenét’i. Your daughter is beautiful, yes?” she asked him and he realized Laura was looking up at him hesitantly.
“Uh, yeah,” he finally said, his voice feeling like gravel as he shuffled the plastic bags in his hands. “Very pretty.”

Later that night, Logan listlessly watched ads appear on the small television screen, beer in hand. It was late, too late, but since arriving in Hay River and his exhaustion from always driving subsiding, his sleep was shit again. Laura had gone to bed hours ago, and Logan once again felt a little surge of gratitude that she had her own room and he didn’t have to stalk about outside to give her privacy. He had awkwardly stood at her doorway, like he had the last couple of nights, but she had just smiled at him assuredly as he closed the door behind him. He noticed the strip of light underneath the door had been illuminated for a while, and he had assumed she had been reading. She had been every night since they arrived, but, after a while, even the lamp light had gone out.

He had eventually found his own way to his room, flopping down on the bed, watching the ceiling fan circulate. His room was only a little bigger than Laura’s, just large enough that a full bed was wedged in the corner, and for a while, he listened to the air dance back and forth.

He wasn’t sure how long it had been, but he had felt the room grow hazy and his vision was drifting in and out of focus when he heard her scream. He shot up, and before he could think he was bounding toward her room and throwing open the door. He was standing in the doorway, breathing hard, to witness Laura sitting up in bed, claws out, tears in her eyes. The sheets around her were rumpled, tattered in places and speckled with blood. It was like his whole fucking life, staring back at him in confusion. Logan swallowed hard as he steadied his breathing, realizing nothing onerous had actually happened. She looked around wildly for a minute though, breathing heavily herself, before finally focusing in on him, now actually waking up.

“Daddy?” she asked through tears, a confused expression on her face. Logan’s eyes widened a bit as he stared at her.

“It’s me, kid” was the only thing he could manage to say.

“Pesadillas,” she whispered, and then, gaining better understanding of her surroundings, she withdrew her claws instantly, looking around, a little embarrassed. He sighed and walked into the room then. Meanwhile, Laura picked up what was left of the sheet, and frowned.

“She’s ok, kid. We’ll get new ones.” Her face hardened a bit then, looking up at him still, both of them unsure how to do this, what roles to really play.

“You… wanna talk about it?” he asked after a while, finally sitting on the foot of the bed.

She shook her head a little at first, but then, whispered, “It was about…mi madre.” Logan stiffened at that. From his limited knowledge, it was unlikely that Laura had known the poor woman Transigen most likely captured, afterward being forced to carry Laura against her will. A shiver went down Logan’s spine as he closed his eyes momentarily, forced once more to deal with looming memories.

“But…you didn’t know her, right?” he finally asked awkwardly.

“No. But I…still dream about her sometimes, si?”

Logan nodded a bit, knowing full well what that felt like.

“I have nightmares, too, kid,” he admitted.
“Si, I know. You shout sometimes. In your sleep,” Laura said slowly. Logan silently cursed the fact she was well aware of this knowledge, but moved on.

“Well, you know then, it’s not likely gonna get better. I ain’t gonna sugarcoat it for ya kid. You’re like me, which means you’re probably gonna have to see a lotta people die before you do, understand?”

“Like Charles?” Laura whispered. Logan’s heart thumped heavily.

“Yeah, like Charles,” Logan murmured.

“Like mi madre too,” she said. Logan said nothing, because there was nothing he could say to temper it. It was the truth.

“What about la mujer?” Laura finally asked, timidly.

“What do you mean?” Logan questioned, although his muscles were already coiled, tense and ready for what was coming next. Meanwhile Laura’s book taunted him from her bedside. *A Series of Unfortunate Events.*

“The woman. En el comic?” She pointed to the windowsill, but she didn’t need to. “With the pretty hair?”

Logan closed his eyes, taking a long, steady breath.

“Nothing for you to worry yourself over, kid.”

“But she’s gone now, too?”

“Yeah, she is,” Logan barely said. Laura sighed sadly before casting her eyes downward and biting her lip a bit more.

“You need something else?” Logan finally asked.

“No,” she said simply.

“You sure you’re good?”

“Si,” she said. Finally, he stood, coughing a bit harder into his arm. The sudden jolt had done it to him. Before he found his way to her doorway, however, he heard her small voice, and that same gnawing word, again.

“Daddy?” she asked. Logan stopped, hand on the door frame.

“Yeah Laura?” he said, turning back around.

“Eres un buen hombre bajo todo,” she said quietly. Logan caught every other word, but he realized that maybe what she had muttered wasn’t meant for him.

“Thanks, kid,” he said simply, before quietly closing the door behind him.
The Bronco struggled a bit as it made its way tiredly up the gravel road. Logan drove carefully, intent on finding the right address at the edge of the lake based only on a roughly sketched, hand-drawn map. As Cicadas filled the air with their humming, the sun had started to set and now the sky glowed a warm orange, like it usually did before twilight. Logan and Laura had stuck around Hay River for the past couple of weeks, and as August had turned into September, the evenings were cool enough to where Logan was sure to keep thicker jackets in the car for them both, healing factors be damned.

Logan had been told school for Laura wouldn’t start until nearly a month from now, the end of September, and he knew she was getting restless in the little place without anything else to do. During the times Logan left for another repair gig, he would leave her downstairs with Kay. Laura hardly ever spoke to anyone in town, let alone the older woman, but they somehow seemed to get along just fine. Laura was often content to look through old junk for hours, sometimes hanging on to a random record or collectible to proudly show Logan once he returned home. Logan often half-heartedly feigned surprise or praise, even though usually the old stuff made him feel uneasy. Mementos to a time that had passed were always dangerous; the potential of memories acting like vortexes much more likely

Finally, during a conversation with Kay after picking up Laura about a week ago, Kay casually mentioned the presence of a lake house that had been for sale for a long while, although it was in need of extensive repairs and no one much up this way had the kind of money around to properly remodel it. Logan didn’t either, but something about the mention of the house had made him curious, which is why he had dragged Laura along on this weekend expedition, hoping, at the very least, the journey into the wilderness might do them both some good.

“How do you say ‘green’?” Laura asked, pulling her eyes off the hand-drawn map and looking over to him.

“Verde,” Logan grumbled, partially annoyed she was breaking his concentration while navigating.


“Glasses?” Again, he answered. “Gafas,” he smirked at this last one, realizing he got three right in a row, maybe in all-time first.

“You’re giving me the easy ones,” he accused, looking over to her and momentarily forgetting why he was supposed to be in a grouchy mood.

“You need easy ones,” Laura quipped, dramatically rolling her eyes in a way a girl nearing twelve only could. “You forget the hard ones.”

“Alright, then,” Logan began, ready to initiate the new development in the game he prided himself in thinking up the other day. “What’s eight times three?” Laura shot him a look. She much preferred playing teacher over student, but usually she came around and answered the question anyway, even going to the point of a few nights last week of writing out multiplication tables on her own.

“Twenty-four,” she said.

“Three times four?” he asked.

“Easy,” she said as she smiled widely. “Twelve.”

“Eight times seven?” Logan smirked, knowing he had thrown her a harder one. Laura bit her lip a little, and then another smile as she figured it out.
“Fifty-six,” she said.

“Good.” Logan looked to her, a little proud. She’d soon be doing algebra with the rate she was kicking math’s ass.

Then, just up ahead, as the lake came into view, and the house did as well, Logan’s hope grew. It stood just at the edge. It was a decent size, he guessed two or three bedrooms. The white siding needed pressure washing, but it was the deck that impressed him. The front of the house opened up to it, and the deck stretched toward the water, long and wide.

As Logan pulled the car into the gravel drive, they both got out quickly, Laura eager to be in nature once more and Logan intent on giving the house a closer look. He saw Laura make a beeline for the water, and he shouted out after her as the sun set in front of them on the lake.

“Don’t wander off too far, Laura. And don’t get wet. I don’t wanna deal with muddy boots and shit.” She waved him off with her hand, but her back was already toward him as she waded closer to the lip of the lake. Meanwhile, Logan turned, taking in the place slowly, offering his respect while he looked it up and down.

It was better than he thought it would be. By first glance, he could tell the foundation was sturdy and the siding wasn’t rotting. He noted, solemnly, that it would likely need a new roof, and he was sure the inside was outdated. But it had potential. Logan steadily ran a hand over his face, the new stubble on his chin something he couldn’t quite get used to. He had shaved for the first time in over a year, resolutely back to his signature look, although he had grumbled a bit vainly at the obvious flecks of gray that still adorned the mutton chops. The intent behind the change was simply a plan to look a little more put together for work, just so he didn’t scare off potential clients. But Laura had a field day the morning he had walked out of the bathroom smelling like shaving cream and feeling more than a little self-conscious. And all day he had grumpily regretted doing it, as he became more and more annoyed with the goofy grin she kept throwing at him every time he looked up at her.

“Wolverine,” she had whispered happily when she first saw him.

“Don’t fucking kid yourself,” is all he had said, but, for a brief minute, he wondered who he was reminding.

Logan looked back over to the house, chewing on its potential. He was months, possibly years away from affording the place—he was crestfallen when Kay had regretfully mentioned that it was upwards of forty thousand dollars, even in this condition—but Logan couldn’t help thinking about how it was just remote enough to feel secluded and unencumbered, and just close enough that Laura could make it to school relatively easily and safely, even during the winter. Slowly, Logan began plotting out the nascent beginning of a remodeling plan in his mind, mapping out a timeline and mentally doing the math of the remodeling costs.

After some time had passed and it grew darker, he tired from the mental work, and was resigned to stand on the deck, resting a bit after climbing the stairs. He leaned on the wall of the house, watching the last of the sun set in the distance. It took him a while to make out Laura below, but he could see she was idly whapping some reeds down by the water with a stick she had found.

A place like this might help the wilder things in them both, Logan realized. She had dutifully followed his rules, playing extremely nice and not once voluntarily using her claws for anything since their conversation in Alberta. He knew though if he were being completely honest, that denying what she was and completely forbidding her from ever embodying the spirit within would also be the wrong thing to do. Out here, at least, maybe he could teach her how to fish, or even to hunt. Something to relieve the tension she would undoubtedly face, something to help her become all
of what she was likely going to be.

In all of this, Logan finally, for the first time in a long time, saw a potential future. A future at peace. As he stood, smiling a bit at the thought as the last of the light fell out of the sky, it was then, after weeks of absence, the voice was suddenly in his head again, the rectangular door bright and fiery in his mind. His smile instantly faded.

*And what if it doesn’t last?*

Logan said nothing, closing his eyes, taking a steady breath, trying hard to shut her out.

*You’re still dying.*

“Stop it, Marie,” he said, closing his eyes.

*You’re dying, Logan. Or had you managed to forget again?*

**Chapter End Notes**

I uploaded this thing for a hot minute this afternoon, not realizing I had copied and pasted an earlier draft, which was, of course, lacking a pivotal scene essential to the whole damn chapter. Now, it’s right. My deepest apologies if you read the first version. That’s what happens when you start waking up at 5am to write nowadays because you can’t wait to get back at it. Your head gets fuzzy. ;)

Ya’ll know what I’ve got planned for this weekend. Gonna try to get 10 to you by Monday or Tuesday. Thank you so much for the support so far. I was feeling a little vulnerable after writing some tough scenes in 8 and you guys made me feel so, so much better.

Have a good weekend!
Chapter Notes

It's not much in the way of an offering, but this chapter is dedicated to the woman who lost her life in Virginia over the weekend, all because people hated too much. If X-Men teaches us anything, it's that we need to accept, and to love, people who might seem different than us. Read on, my friends.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 10: Then

“I met a young woman whose body was burning
I met a young girl, she gave me a rainbow
I met one man who was wounded in love
I met another man who was wounded in hatred
And it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard
It's a hard rain's a-gonna fall.”

–Bob Dylan

I get it now.

Do you?

Yeah, it makes sense. You did what you had to do. What other choice was there?

I guess so.

This Henry or whatever the fuck his name is is a real pain in the fucking ass though, even if you do have him on lock down.

Tell me about it.

I think I might have to go and punch the shit out of that fucker. You know, mentally speakin’.

Logan?

Yeah?

I’m glad your back with me. You were almost gone, you know, from before.

You know it ain’t real, kid.

I know.

The real thing’s around though, if you’re interested.
He’s not gonna understand. Particularly now.

He doesn’t know the whole story yet, that’s all. He’ll come ’round. I mean, when you tell him he’s gonna flip his shit, but he’s always been on your side. And, believe me, he’s way more concerned about all his memories and crap you’re gonna have to sift through.

Been there, done that.

But now you got decades of ‘em. It’s different. And he’s always been sort of a paranoid asshole about that shit.

Heh. You’re right. ….Logan?

Yeah?

Keep me company for a while?

Always, darlin’.

--

The candle burned down to the holder in the window, the sun hanging low in the sky. Outside, the dirt floor of the cabin. A couple of the children hung about on a muddy porch, all of them dirty and mostly unclothed. Not keeping track of the time and instead keeping track of the enemy’s scent, he had wandered, strayed too far. Upon looking up, he had seen them, realizing his mistake. The children swarmed him, filthy hands fishing. Kids around these parts knew that sometimes Union soldiers still had provisions on their person, even this far south.

“Mister! Mister! Ya got food? Ya got food?” He tried to slough them off when he looked up and saw a woman, maybe their mother, maybe not. She was haggard and skeletally thin, most of her teeth missing.

“We ain’t got nothin’ for you to take,” she said. His eyes shot over to the empty pig sties on the side of the house, last summer’s garden dried up with the cold snap.

“Wasn’t looking for anything, ma’am,” he said. “Just got turned around tryin’ to find my way home.”

“You get along then,” her voice wavered, and he realized she was angry, but mostly afraid. Too many soldiers had their way with women like this, sometimes while the kids watched. A hard fucking fact of war. “Get back up north and rid us of the likes of you.”

“Ma’am, I-”

“Go now! Leave us be.” She stared up at him with hard, hateful eyes. Empty eyes.

You heard me.

Leave.

Logan awoke with a hard gasp, choking on air as he shot up in bed, looking around wildly. It was the clearest fucking memory from that far back he’d ever had, and his world was now spinning, everything blurring in and out of focus.
“Easy does it,” he heard a woman’s voice say, and he looked up to see a calm face and white hair.

“Storm?” he said, confused again on the where and the when and the how.

“What year?!” he growled, and, at that, her look grew more concerned.

“Logan…”

“Year!”

“2015,” she said quietly. As he finally got a hold of his breath, he calmed, and the haze slowly lifted. He was steadily realizing it really was Storm and they were in a med bay, of sorts. It looked shockingly like—was it?—but no, it couldn’t be. It was similar, but wrong.

“Where?” he finally croaked, as a new shot of pain once more radiated down his right arm. *Rogue.*

“An underground military bunker in Canada, like we had planned,” Storm murmured, still looking at him with extreme caution. As his mind slogged through the details, the memories, the scene of Cape Town burning before his very eyes came back to him. Plumes of yellow smoke and gunshots ringing in the air, and her small body convulsing as she struggled to breathe. *Marie.*

“Where is she, Storm?” he asked as he tried to swing his legs around, intent to get off the bed. A wave of nausea instantly overtook him.

“Logan,” she stammered.

“Is she alright?”

“She’s fine. Woke up hours ago. She’s with Charles, now. Probably trying to… work through some of it.” Logan winced at that.

“Fuck. How did they apprehend us?” he heard himself asking.

“Logan, how about you just take it easy for one second and—”

“Storm!” he growled.

“The Mark X’s new design,” she said, eyes troubled and haunted by god knows what she had seen. “They can track mutants from continents away now. They figured out we were all gathered together, and that was enough for them.”

“Those fuckers were killing everyone, even men on their own side.”

“I know.” Logan finally looked Storm in the eye, properly seeing her for the first time.

“Everyone else ok?” he muttered.

“Yes. Thank God for Blink. I met her at the rendezvous point about a day before the attack. I’m not sure …” Storm began.

“We would’ve died,” Logan said flatly. “Or, at least, Rogue…” he stopped again, falling silent. He didn’t need to finish. They both knew that they had been, once again, dangerously close to the worst.
The place even fucking smelled like Alkali. Upon arriving in the underground compound military barracks in northern Alberta, Erik had taken the Blackbird back south to look for other remaining mutants. Now they were stranded here, Storm, Charles, Blink, Logan and Rogue, with a handful of other mutants Logan didn’t know the names of that kept the compound operational. On the surface, the place was impossible to find without coordinates, and this far into the Canadian Rockies, considerably hard to track. To find them here would be like finding a needle in a haystack. Once more, Charles had done his homework.

Regardless, however, Logan quietly cursed himself for suggesting that they make base camp this far north for the winter. Despite it being considerably bigger than the bunker in Mexico, it was significantly more haunting. The place was a dank, antiquated military compound Logan assumed had been built from the earlier days of the Cold War, and it might as well have been Alkali’s twin sister. There were medical labs in it for one, and Logan shuddered to know for what purpose they had originally been for. They mostly remained blocked off, but the bedrooms were no better, cold and dimly lit like the rest. It was a maze of low lighting and concrete walls and dusty glass. Steel beds with factory-grade bedding, a couple of communal showers with only cold water. He felt like a fucking lab rat in here.

But they had just been victims of a vicious attack, a world-wide coordinated initiative to finally engage with and reprimand any mutants’ rights groups they had considered a threat with their newly-minted Mark X’s. Logan was steadily realizing how lucky they had been to survive. Without Blink, without the Blackbird and its freshly installed upgrades. If Storm had been a day later or even Blink had lingered a couple seconds longer…Logan once more shut down that line of thinking. After talking a bit more with Storm, she had led him in the direction of his room and the men’s shower.

After showering, Logan saw that he had been supplied with basic military-style uniforms and sweats. All of their personal belongings, what little they owned, had been left back in Cape Town, and, not for the first time, Logan pondered about how easy it really was to strip away a person’s humanity. Take away all that defines them, and see how they writhe.

After dressing and pacing around the place, he finally was reminded of what he had tried carefully not to think of. Charles’ thoughts was alight in his head once more, and instead of feeling threatened by the invasion, he felt relieved by the presence of the Professor’s voice, calm and bright, in his mind.

Logan. Rogue is done meeting with me for the moment and is willing to talk, if you feel comfortable doing so.

By the time he found her, she was already back in her room. The bedrooms were identical, and she was seated on the same industrial steel bed. A large sweatshirt adorned her small frame, but he noticed her legs were bare, one idly hanging off the edge of the mattress, while she held a steaming mug of coffee in one hand and a map of something in another. She was supposed to be looking at it, he assumed, but instead her gaze was fixed on a random spot on the floor, and she was lost in thought. She seemed to be far off, but, at least, as far as he could tell, there were no insidious symptoms. No snarling, no prowling. None of the things his mind had cooked up in him to fear.

“Hey,” he muttered, leaning on the door frame, almost as if they were back at Xavier’s and he was idly popping by to say hello before a class of hers. She looked up at him, a small smile on her face,
and the echo of the thought was gone.

“Hey yourself,” she murmured.

“So, what kinda trouble have you been up to?” he asked.

“The usual kind,” she murmured again, the same small and sad smile. Logan sighed.

“I’m sorry, Rogue,” he said, breathing out. No reason to dance around the subject like a fucking prancing bear.

“It’s fine, Logan. You saved me.” She said this matter-of-factly, without a hint of melodrama. Smart woman. She knew the truth damn well enough for what it was.

“So…no cursing, no growling, no feral-like instincts?” he asked, trying to keep his voice light, but the fear behind his guesses suddenly feeling very real.

“Oh, I wouldn’t necessarily say that,” she teased a little, while he inwardly, and outwardly, cursed.

"Damn,” he offered, crossing his arms and shifting on his feet a little.

“I’m just…” she paused, stretching her neck a little as she did so, “letting the senses happen to me, for now. Although, I gotta say, it’s awful to smell every single thing in the air, especially in this place. After I came to, I almost lost my lunch. I’d forgotten what that’s like, to be so aware of it all…” she paused, a little lost, before looking at him. Logan just stalled, unsure of what to say, unsure how to make it better.

“Glad to see I didn’t kill you,” she added after a little time, a darker look overtaking her features.

“Gonna take more than a little shock from you to do that. Besides, I knew what I was gettin’ myself into,” Logan remarked.

“You shouldn’t have had to in the first place,” Marie said, putting down her coffee. 

“Baby…” he said, without thinking, striding into the room a bit further before stopping. He wasn’t sure what he wanted, suddenly hesitant of what to do with his body. It wasn’t a very fucking familiar feeling for the Wolverine.

“It’s fine… it really is, Logan. Yeah, some of it’s confusing, but some of it’s…nice." Logan’s eyebrows shot up at this. “Nice?”

“Things had faded since last time. You’re back now,” she said, probably more to herself than anyone else.

“I’m not sure I wanna know what that means,” he grumbled.

“Let’s just say you’re still there to keep me company when you’re not around.” Logan swallowed hard, wholly disturbed by the notion. 

“Jesus, Marie. I never knew it was like that. I thought it was just an influx of memories and thoughts and powers and shit.” While most of him was deeply disturbed by what she was saying, another part of him noted they had never, ever talked this candidly about what had happened between them when she took him in. Logan idly wondered if it was simply a symptom of the last few weeks and them getting to know each other once more, or if there was something else in the recipe to her candor that he should have been picking up on.
“It is all that, too…but…it’s layered. Complicated, but not all bad.”

“Having me up there has got to be a bad thing,” Logan muttered. Marie only shrugged her shoulders, unmoved by his self-pity.

“It’s like that with everybody. I’ve been dealing with this for a long time, Logan. I’m not perfect at handling it, but I’m better than I used to be, particularly with Charles around to help. I have a way of… containing them all… if necessary. But you’re sorta fun to have around.” At this, her smile returned.

“What is that supposed to mean?” he asked bluntly.

Rogue smiled a little, offering him a knowing look, but said nothing.

“Fuck. Now I’m competing with myself.”

“You’re not competing with anyone…although… he does want me to tell you he thinks you need to get over your fucking self,” she said, through another grin. Logan’s frown only deepened.

“His words, not mine,” she clarified again a bit through the joke, but on realizing his mood was still somber, her face grew a little more serious.

“What about the rest?” he asked quietly.

“What do you mean?”

“You know. The rest...” Logan trailed off.

“I haven’t gotten that far. Those things are… still a little overwhelming. Charles is gonna help with that.” Logan once more bristled at the thought of Marie going anywhere near the memories he had collected in the years they had been apart.

“You can’t just… lock it all away somewhere? Forget about them and throw away the key?” he asked.

“No keys, no doors,” Marie said shaking her head. “It’s more like... a cloud in my mind when it’s new. And I can’t really see the world clearly again unless I walk through it.”

“Shit,” Logan sighed. Marie seemed to finally read his grieved expression, and settled for a change of subject.

“So this place is pretty miserable, isn’t it?” Marie looked over to the nearest concrete wall. “Wouldn’t be my choice for a paint color, that’s for sure.”

“It ain’t great,” Logan agreed. “But at least we’ll be doing more than ‘sittin’ pretty’ it seems. Did they tell you about the extractions yet?”

“Extractions?” Marie asked, suddenly curious. “Charles didn’t mention those.”

“Yeah, some of the ghettos up this way have recently been… militarized. Apparently they look… a little more like internment camps nowadays.”

“Jesus...” Rogue murmured. Logan saw the crestfallen look on her face, but knew there was nothing he could really do or say to fix it.

“You were right, Rogue,” he admitted aloud. “About it being worse than I thought.”
“I…understand now why you thought you had more time, though,” Rogue said quietly. Logan swallowed, waiting for the next inevitable question to come.

“And the report from Cape Town?” she asked quietly. Logan knew he couldn’t lie. If any of his heightened senses at all were still lurking about in her, she would directly smell deceit on him anyway. A nice little card trick of his mutation, if there ever was one.

“I don’t know all of it. Just what Storm told me, but it’s bad.”

“How bad?”

“It was a multi-front initiative. It was a Mark X behind us, one of several, I guess, and they targeted the zones where the most mutant rights groups were situated. They can smell us continents away now.” Logan wondered if she would be upset by this news, considering her attitude about the topic from the past few weeks. Instead, however, her breath was even and steady, a cold, hard look in her eye.

“So it’s starting,” she simply offered.

“Yeah.” Logan admitted. “Yeah, darlin’. It is.”

Surprisingly enough, the next few weeks passed by in relative peace, and they hadn’t speak about what had happened between them since. Logan shouldn’t have been surprised that Rogue was trying to do most of the work without his help, but since their candid conversation upon arriving here Logan felt a bit like he was losing ground again, unsure of where he stood with Rogue. Additionally, the idea of another version of himself in her head was… disturbing… and Logan couldn’t help but to resort to a little masochism wondering about it, particularly late at night when he was alone. Was the fucker always around, talking to her? Did he know everything that had happened to Marie in the time Logan had been away? Did he know about Henry? The rest of her secrets? And what about the more personal, intimate things? Did she just lock him away when she got undressed, or needed privacy, or—fuck him to hell—touched herself? Or did it even matter to her, as friendly and warm as they seemed to be with each other, for that version of himself to be around all the time because he simply wasn’t as threatening or real, only existing inside her head? Logan found himself experiencing wild, juvenile envy about it all, hating whatever fucked up version of him got to be with Marie constantly, unencumbered. Lucky fuckin’ sonofabitch. Meanwhile, Marie had been in the debriefing room with Charles almost every day. This was also starting to put Logan on edge. He knew there were a multitude of new memories to sift through, but the sheer time and energy it seemed to sap from both of them had Logan feeling increasingly guilty and irritable.

The good news was that Logan had received a new outlet for this anxious energy over the past couple of weeks or so, for which he was grateful. Once again, he and Storm had begun the process of going on brief scouting missions, this time to seek out possible means of extraction in the various death camps cropping up in Canada. Both excursions they had been on had been local, so far, putting Storm and he back in the military barracks in a matter of a few hours with the help of the Blackbird that now occasionally returned to their home base.

The missions, however, had a darker, disturbing side to them too, and it seemed that, in its typical fashion, history was intent on repeating itself. The focus on maintaining mutant ghettos seemed to be fading in popularity worldwide, and, more and more, the ghettos were becoming “militarized.” This, in Logan’s mind, seemed to mean that they were killing off any weak mutants, branding all those
who were kept alive, and stripping what little semblance of independence they had away. The effect was eerily similar to the old memories of Nazi Germany, and, not for the first time, Logan had the urge to sink his claws into anyone who was facilitating this kind of hate. Unfortunately, though, there was nothing around to kill, and supplies were limited. The plan was simply to spring as many people as they could, one camp at a time, and this was only made possible at all because they had Blink.

During a rare meeting where Charles and Rogue were actually present, they had begun to target a utility plant turned mutant ghetto now turned death camp, which also housed a research facility of some kind. The last part of it, anything with the word “research” in the title, made Logan’s stomach churn, especially when he learned that both women and children were living inside the camp as well.

“Two Rivers is only about a hundred miles north of the barracks,” Charles said evenly. Rogue had just glanced at Logan after this news, and he gave her a grim look back.

“Logan and Storm will do some initial scouting, but, in two weeks, our plan is to extract. Logan, I am sorry, my friend, but you will be bearing the brunt of the dirty work of this mission. Your healing factor, as well as your other… gifts... will be integral.”

“It’s about taking out as many guards as possible, as fast as possible,” Logan grumbled as he leaned against the farthest wall. “I get it, Charles.”

“Rogue, you will be accompanying Logan inside. While Logan provides the distraction, Storm will be downloading the software virus that will disable the camp’s security system, unlocking the cells.”

“And from there, Blink does her magic?” Logan asked. Blink shot him a look from the far wall, and Logan smirked. Logan found himself taking to the woman, because she was, like him, extremely keen on surviving. She was also fast and capable as hell.

“It’s easier for mass entrance through the portal. If I go one by one, I’ll never get them all,” Blink clarified.

“And where will we be portal’ing them to?” Logan asked. “Not near enough room ‘round here, and certainly not enough provisions around for all the little mouths to feed, especially with winter on our doorstep,” Logan remarked. At this, Rogue shot Logan a dirty look, for a moment briefly embodying the mutant-with-a-cause persona he found on her in Mexico, to which he just shrugged his shoulders. It was the fucking truth, and she knew it.

“Erik has been in contact with a larger mutant compound even further north where they will be safe.”

“And the Mark X’s, Professor?” Everyone turned to look at Rogue. It was the question nobody wanted to ask, but everyone had on their minds.

“If the sentinels arrive, we save as many lives as we can, but Blink takes us back, straightway. There would likely, however, be grave casualties. We are hoping that is a possibility that does not come to light.”

--

Another week passed, and then the snow started. Logan felt it in the wind first out on their most recent scouting mission. It was how the air suddenly decided it wasn’t enough for itself, and the wind started singing in restlessness. The snap in the air, particularly this far north in Canada, was ultimately how he knew it to be, being well accosted to the climate, although anyone could have told you October in northern Canada meant winter. The snow, meanwhile, had made the barracks even
colder. Each room had portable heaters, but, being so far underground meant little else in the way of basic comfort. Logan was built for such conditions, and it bothered him little, but he wasn’t thoughtless enough to not understand that no one else felt similarly.

The afternoon after it had started, he had found Rogue in her room, miserable and shivering in a coat and two blankets, a wafting cup of coffee in her hand.

“That healing factor of mine finally wearing off?” he asked, half-joking. The way she shook had actually disturbed him, and while he would have gladly offered his body for warmth, Rogue’s mood had been even icier than the ground outside lately. And with as many long and grueling sessions she had had with Charles not likely to subside any time soon, he knew better than to get walloped because of a snarky, if not honest, offer like that.

“Fuck off, Logan,” she said seriously, as she shivered.

A couple of days later, however, the climate shifted slightly, and the place warmed a bit. Logan was eager to board the creaky freight elevator to go outside, even though there was likely more than a foot of snow on the ground. He was suited up for such an endeavor with a pair of decent boots and a warm coat, even gloves, when he found Rogue in what they had taken to calling the “living room,” which was just another briefing room that they had shoved a few extra mattresses in along with the coffee maker. It also, most notably, had a record player somebody had found in the storage facility that actually worked, although Logan had thumbed through the records to find the choices less than satisfying.

“Wanna go on a walk?” he asked her. She was flopped listlessly on one of the mattresses, in less layers, but looking no less miserable.


“It’s not like its literal hell outside, Marie. It’s just snow,” but Rogue still threw him another uneasy look.

“Tell that to Dante and his ninth circle,” she quipped. Logan rolled his eyes.

“Point taken, but let’s go, darlin’. It won’t be so bad once you’re finally out there, and our resident weather lady tells me it’s clear, which means it will feel down right pleasant. Besides, I’ll help ya get all bundled up.”

A half an hour later, they were out in the white expanse of snow, the mountains arching up around them, the pines tall and sturdy under the brilliant and clear blue of the sky. Logan took a moment, breathing in deeply before exhaling, the cold air illuminating his breath.

Meanwhile, Rogue’s nose had gone pink from the cold, but she seemed fairly comfortable. She was bundled up tightly in a dark gray scarf and coat that was a little too big on her, but her hair was free, wild and clean and bright in the cold sun. Logan also went without a hat, mainly because he wasn’t in the habit of wearing one and he didn’t need to anyway. It was only hovering just below freezing as it was, and, in the sun, it was remarkably warm, given the circumstances. They walked for about a half of a mile or so in relative contentment, Logan helping her over rocks and sticks and other various obstacles, bringing out a rarer more gentleman like side of him. For as strong as she was, Marie was still naturally a bit clumsy, a fact that inwardly pleased Logan. After a while they finally stopped to take in another spectacular view, standing in a shallower patch of snow, breathing in the mountain air.

“So you grew up somewhere out here,” she said softly, after a bit of time. It wasn’t a question. She
hadn’t brought up a single word about his past yet, and this little remark took Logan by mild surprise. Logan had only one or two memories that far back, and they were often the hardest to access.

“It is strange being back here with you. In this place,” Logan offered.

“Where we met,” Rogue said, grinning a bit.

“Yeah, you a little spitfire trying to get me to cart you around, headed God knows where-”

“Didn’t see you objectin’ all that much, in the end-” she playfully offered.

“Like you left me much of a choice,” he said, turning to face her head on. She was smiling, and then the smile became more knowing, almost devilish.

“What?” Logan asked.

Her grin grew even wider.

“What?” Logan asked again, a bit more annoyed.

Then, completely out of character, she moved her hand up to his temple, barely running her fingers through his hair, a swipe that, even with a gloved hand, sent a quiver through him.

“I just noticed, sugar. Must be the way the light’s reflecting off the snow. Grey. In your hair. Just barely a couple strands of it.” Logan’s eyes widened a bit, unsure of what to think of the accusation.

“No fucking way,” he finally settled on, defensively.

“I swear to God. It’s there, sugar,” she said, and now Logan wished she’d wipe that grin off her face.

“You’re pullin’ one over on me,” he said, eyes narrowing, even as an odd, foreign feeling of self-consciousness flowed over him.

“As soon as I get you in front of the mirror, I’ll show you,” she said, and then looking up at him again, she added, “Anyway, it suits you.”

“Well, fuck. Must have been from dealing with your stubborn, contentious ass for the last few weeks.”

Rogue grinned for a moment more, before her face began to fall, the memories of their time in Africa visually dampening her spirits.

“Seems the fight’s left you, since Cape Town, that is,” Logan murmured after a bit, looking at her again.

“Well… I’ve a lot more on my mind,” she said softly, still holding his gaze.

“You found your way through that cloud yet?”

“Workin’ on it,” she said, finally looking down at her snow-covered boots.

“Anything interesting?” he pressed. Logan was dying for information, and would have done just about anything for any sort of hint on this front. As she considered his question, for a second he began to regret asking her, but then he was surprised to see her eyes lighten a bit, when he had been expecting her to become lost in some terrible memory of war or something far worse.
“You loved ‘Let It Be’.”

“What?” Logan asked, surprised.

“The song. ‘Let It Be.’”

“Bullshit,” Logan retorted.

“You know I’m right,” she said through another smile.

“I hate the Beatles,” Logan grumbled, shifting in place a little bit.

“You hated the Beatles, but you loved that song.” The past tense threw him for a minute, before he realized what she was getting at. The old him, before it had all left. Less Logan, more James.

“You hated the smell of turpentine, but loved the smell of diesel exhaust and freshly opened Polaroid film.”

“Rogue, what’re you getting at—”

“Even though you hated wearing one, and avoided doing so in almost every circumstance that you might have been forced into, you looked surprisingly, remarkably good in a bowler hat.” Logan frowned even more at this, caught incredibly off guard, kicking his boot in the snow. Suddenly, the game didn’t seem so fun.

“Marie…” he said softly.

“And there’s no way you could’ve saved him,” she practically whispered. At this, he looked up to her once more sharply.

“Saved who?”

“The little boy, in Vietnam,” she said softly, and his whole body stiffened. Logan closed his eyes momentarily, before opening them.

“It’s really fucked up that you know about that,” he finally said.

“I know,” she whispered, before looking again at the ground.

“Saved who?”

“And I still don’t have shit on you,” he murmured, staring at the way her hair clung to her coat in places, the pink from the cold gracing her features.

“Most of it…isn’t worth knowing,” she finally said. He instinctively moved forward then, taking a gloved hand to her chin and bringing up her face to look at him.

“I couldn’t disagree more, baby.” With that he leaned in close, his mouth just lingering beyond her ear. “All I wanna know about is what makes you tick. There ain’t one single part of you I don’t wanna get my hands on to figure it out, either, and that’s the goddamn truth.” And then, there it was, the deeper understanding that ran hard and dark through them both. She was absolutely in synchrony with him, just enough of his instincts left in her to speak the same base language. She looked at him, peering right into his goddamn soul, before leaning in, breathing in his scent, and tilting her neck just slightly, the thin, delicate skin of her neck exposed. It was all too fucking much, and the animal rose up within him, and before he could understand what he was doing he gently and evenly pressed his lips and teeth to the exposed skin of her neck, biting just slightly. She sighed in pleasure, and he was fucking gone.
For a few seconds, nothing happened but the feeling of her soft skin on his tongue, but then the world seemed to be falling away from him, his head dizzy.

“Sugar…” she warned, but he could only growl in response, using his tongue to lap up and soothe the bite marks, still able to feel her pulse in his mouth, the warm scent of her arousal, her sex... him flowing into her.

“Logan!” she said more loudly, and it took everything in him to finally rip away. He was barely standing, woozy on the spot, black dots in his vision and the light-headed feeling of being poured through a pitcher still seething through him.

“Fuck, darlin’,” he said, feeling exhilarated and wild and good. He came back to himself, to the man, then, and as he looked at her, he realized there were tears in her eyes. His heart sank.

“Hey. Hey. C’mere,” he said, pulling her close to his chest. She leaned into him easily, like she had always belonged there, as he buried the bridge of his nose into her soft hair.

“I’m sorry,” he could hear her murmur, through another few tears. “I’m sorry for all of it.”

“It’s ok, baby,” he mumbled into her hair. For a while he held her like that, boots wet in the damp snow. “We’re gonna figure this thing out, Marie,” he finally said, his grip tightening slightly on her. “I swear to fucking God we will.”

--

The night was dark and still, as a snap and a hiss opened the portal around them, and they walked through, boots suddenly meeting the grey of fresh, darkened snow. Logan looked around to Rogue once more, double-checking again on the safety of her well-being, as they all finally turned their gaze forward, glancing over the snowy drift from where they had arrived, several hundred feet away from it all. Just beyond though, in the cradle of two bluffs, Two Rivers sprawled out in front of them, a series of low, cinderblock buildings, a grim and angry growth on the edge of the world.

The extraction was planned for tomorrow night, and Charles had decided that Logan, Rogue and Blink would go on one last scouting mission to ensure they had flagged all exits and entrances on every single building. By this point, Logan had the place memorized, at least from the outside, but understood Charles’ continued unease. Logan had, however, been mildly nervous for Marie to make the trip, because this would be the first time she had scouted the territory, mainly due to her long and grueling sessions with Charles, although he had occasionally wondered if there was some other reason Charles had never sent Rogue before this moment that Logan wasn’t aware of. Nevertheless, Logan was remotely thankful that the series of buildings were relatively quiet tonight. No disturbances at all, so far. There were, of course, a hundred snaking lines of barbed wire fencing that connected all the buildings though, and as Marie glanced down at the snarling series of buildings, she frowned deeply. He knew it was a fucking maze, and even though the last couple of nights he and Rogue had extensively plotted and memorized how they would position themselves tomorrow, finally knowing it for what it really was was another matter entirely.

Logan realized he was already far too in his own head, running through the various potential memorized escape strategies, noting where the guards usually stood, took smoke breaks, analyzing how many people he could take out in the shortest amount of time tomorrow night as Rogue and Blink did their work helping people escape, before his hearing picked up on a cargo truck steadily approaching from the east. He felt Marie grab his forearm tightly before he finally refocused his attention, eyes back on the front building once more. Weeks after the jolt, and she could still hear it
“Let’s go,” Blink said warily, as the sound of the truck got louder.

“No… just keep low,” Logan barely whispered. If these were new detainees, he needed to calculate how many, and adjust the new estimate of the number of prisoners resided inside of Two Rivers for Charles and Erik.

The large army truck backed itself into the gravel front entrance slowly. They all watched as two guards exited the main building and the drivers got out of the front, undoing several locks on the back of the truck bed. Suddenly, Logan anticipated what and specifically how it was going to happen, and he instantly regretted having asked for them all to stall. As the guards steadily unloaded the cargo, mutants of varying ages, some of them mere children, filed out, all of them in handcuffs, all of their necks glowing yellow with the hum of inhibition collars.

The guards prodded the people along, quickly organizing them into two lines, and Logan swallowed hard. He had been around long enough to know that two lines in this sort of instance only usually meant one thing: a line for those who would be kept alive, and a line for those who would be killed. He instinctively touched Rogue’s covered hand.

“Marie-” is all the warning he managed to give before they got to work.

Just then, the guard on the right side steadied a handgun in front of the first mutant, a young man, in the right line, while the other guard readied a long knife in front of the left line. As one of the drivers divided more mutants into two lines behind them, the left guard suddenly grabbed the first woman in line by the upper arm, and the metal of the blade greeted her skin as her blood ran and a gruesome “M” started to form on the side of the woman’s face. She screamed, as gun shots rang out in the air in the next line, and the younger male mutant dropped to the snow lifelessly. That’s when everyone else started screaming.

Marie had tears rolling down her cheeks before she managed to turn away, hatred and grief stiffening her. Logan watched only for a few seconds more before he also took his eyes off of the scene below. As countless people were either killed or disfigured, judged quickly for their utility and use for inside the camp, the feeling of helplessness burgeoned. Logan knew there was no fucking way they could save these people now. Not without giving up their own lives, which, he realized grimly, he refused to do. They needed more time, more reinforcements.

Logan turned, looking at Blink knowingly: “Take us back, Blink. I think we’ve seen enough.”

--

As the portal opened and they found themselves fifty feet underground again in the military barracks, Rogue looked to Logan, a heartbroken, bitter color in her eyes. She said nothing as she walked away from him, in the direction of her own bedroom, without speaking. Logan said nothing as well as he swallowed hard, turning once more to face fiercely forward, to the truth of it all. The rage in his own blood sang with need; he wanted to take the life of something so desperately, he almost couldn’t stand it.

Instead, he found a bottle of half-consumed whiskey in the living room, and took to it. His muscles were still sore with tension, the never-ending stiffness in his right arm flaring with each step he took.
Logan knew now that this mission, successful or not, was going to be a fucking bloodbath. There were likely to be casualties on both sides, but Logan simply understood, at the end of it all, that Rogue would have to, need to, survive. He couldn’t be as careless as he had nearly been last time.

For a while, he simply took his position leaning on one of the stainless steel tables in the living room, still standing and drinking directly from the bottle, little interest in anything else. Nobody else found him there for a long time, until he heard the quiet, but solid, footsteps of Marie, bare feet lightly padding the concrete just beyond him.

“Sugar?” she asked quietly. Logan turned, just to make out she was in an oversized t-shirt, and little else. She was gloveless and uninhibited, and Logan noticed her hair had grown in the weeks he had seen found her again, falling softly now right above her breasts.

“You got room for me in that bottle?” she asked, finally taking her place next to him, leaning on the table as well.

“Always,” he murmured, offering her the liquor. She took a long, languid sip of the stuff without once sputtering, handing it back to him a moment after swallowing it.

“It was so much worse than I imagined,” she said evenly, her eyes grey and dark. The tears were gone, but only just so. For a moment, Logan only responded by taking another pull from the bottle.

“It’s one thing knowin’ it and another seein’ it,” he muttered, without accusation.

“How have you done it all this time?” she murmured, as he passed the bottle back to her, and she intuitively took it from his bare hand into her own.

“Baby, some of those things you’re seein’, I was missing in my head for long while,” he said, truthfully.

“You still lived with the memory of it, before Stryker. Day in and day out. For decades,” she offered.

“That stuff though...Humanity’s always been warring with each other. Committing atrocities. It’s the way of it, sensin’ threats and exterminating them.”

Marie’s look darkened a bit at that, and she said nothing.

“That voice in your head agreeing with me on that one?” he asked, a little too severely. Despite his tone, Marie almost offered a bitter laugh at this, closing her eyes momentarily.

“I knew you were going to eventually ask,” she said, folding her arms around her defensively.

“Logan, you know...he’s not, it’s not, really there,” she finished awkwardly.

“How do you mean?” he asked.

“I mean— and he’s gonna give me hell for sayin’ this— but he’s not...all of you. It’s an imprint, more like how a memory works, if a memory could talk and have a fucking attitude. But he doesn’t breathe, he doesn’t actually...live.”

“Really now?” Logan said, still unconvincing, his voice a bit more predatory, too drunk now to notice or care.

She hesitated for a moment, frowning a bit, before standing up straight. “Hey. I almost forgot. I have
a present for you. I nicked it a bit after we got here, saving it for the right occasion.”

And suddenly she was fumbling around in a metal cabinet, putting on a record he hadn’t seen before when he had originally grazed over the stack. As the needle lapped up the grooves Logan noticed it was an old Bob Dylan album, and then “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” started crooning from the speakers.

“Holy shit, Marie,” he said, eyes wide, the smallest smile on his face. “You’ve been holding out on me.”

“Like I said, the right occasion,” she murmured, a somber note in her voice, before walking back over, arm extended as she offered the whiskey to him again.

“That bottle’s pretty low,” he said simply, glancing down at the glass and thin line of amber liquid left dancing back and forth. “You still gotta likin’ for that, it seems. That from the shock, still?”

“No,” she murmured. “That’s just me, baby. I got southern roots, ‘member? It comes by me naturally,” she said, her southern drawl barely grazing the sounds of her words once more. She took her place next to him again, but she suddenly felt much closer, one long, naked thigh practically brushing up against the uniform he was still wearing. He noticed the shift, setting the bottle down behind him and turning to her, effectively pinning her against the table.

“What’re you doing, sugar?” she said quietly.

“I’m lookin’ at you,” he murmured, through steady, even eyes.

“That all?” she barely whispered.

He growled as he leaned in and roughly took her into his mouth. His tongue ran over hers as he nipped her bottom lip, his body responding by pushing her up harder against the table behind. She moaned a bit into his mouth, hands instinctively wanting to explore him, when he felt the power begin to take them both. He broke the kiss momentarily before he had her full, wet lips on his once more. He growled again, grabbing her thin waist and all at once hoisting her onto the table, as he continued to kiss her roughly. Her strong, capable thighs cradled him as one of his hands tightened in her hair, the other traveling up the length of her thigh, pushing back the hem of the t-shirt. He wanted to throw her up against the fucking wall and bury himself inside her, feeling her body throb around him. He wanted her to shout his name as he made her come, drinking her up, lashing out with his tongue.

Her power sent a warning jolt through them both, a loud, hard quake, and he broke away again, increasingly frustrated. As he looked at her, he realized, through it all, she had tears in her eyes. He tried to tighten his grip on her, but it was then she pulled away, just slightly. He stopped, the animal in him suddenly confused, and hurt. He tried to get a hold of his mind, reaching back toward the human part of himself, finding the words to speak.

“Marie…what?”

“We can’t..” she whispered, still a bit breathless. All he could focus on was how red and wet her mouth was from him, how her nipples looked underneath the sheer fabric. She was still upset, though, and he shook his head a little to get a fucking grip on himself. A bit more slowly, he moved a hand to cradle her head again, but once more she slipped away a little, and his hand dropped. That’s when the paranoid questions started filling his mind.

“This about you?” he breathed, his hands falling into her lap at the new unease. “Cause that’s not a
good enough excuse. It takes longer to kick in…. I got whole seconds sometimes. I need a little practice, maybe, but-” She had already been shaking her head though, and he sighed, obviously frustrated.

“This about the feral stuff?” he asked a little more quietly after a bit of silence, suddenly feeling more than a little self-conscious and paranoid about the answer as Marie blushed again. “Because I can try-”

“No. No. Or, it’s not in the way you think, sugar,” Marie said, finally finding her voice. It was a bit ridiculous, her still sitting on the table, his hands barely around her, trying to understand what the fuck was going on. Again, a sense of hope, and then the sting of a letdown. Their whole fucking relationship in a nutshell so far. He warmed a little, though, when in his ear she added, “If you have me, I want all of you having me. But…” she dropped off, and something deep inside him started hurting at the word if instead of when.

“It’s about claiming you, isn’t it?” When she didn’t respond and looked at him a bit meekly, he knew for sure. ”Jesus, Marie, you know about it, don’t you? You know… if I had you, there’d be no end.” It wasn’t her skin that had stopped them a few days ago on their walk, although it hadn’t certainly helped. For her, perhaps, it was the cold: the barren, twisted future that loomed before them, the light dying quickly.

“You gotta understand, sugar, I’m not afraid of something lasting a long while…” she closed her eyes momentarily, “My whole life, even. But when you talk about something like that you only see it the one way. On a straight, singular line. You always have,” she whispered, and her hand cradled the side of his face for a brief moment before she let it fall.

“What other way is there, Marie?” Logan asked, suddenly suspicious again, his tone even and careful.

She said nothing as she stared down at his strong hands still in her lap.

“Marie?”

“I know what I’m gonna do now,” she finally said, that steely, resolute look back in her fucking eyes, and Logan realized that his Marie from the snow was gone.

“What do you mean?” Logan asked again.

“Tomorrow, I’m gonna watch all of those sorry fuckers who did this burn.”

Chapter End Notes

Annnndd, I'm spent. All I did was write this weekend. It was glorious, but now I gotta go catch up on my life. Give me a few days for the next one, if that's alright. Just as a heads up, we're nearing the end of Part 1. Should be through by Chapter 12.

Fun anecdote: I've periodically and accidentally started calling everyone around me either "bub" or "darlin'." Also my interest in alcohol has ticked up a few degrees. Writing so much from Logan's perspective is starting to do weird things to me.../

Thanks as always for all the love and support. Y'all are really awesome people.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 11: Now

Logan fumbled around in one of the shallow drawers in the kitchen, looking for something to write with. They had picked up a few more things here and there in the last couple of weeks after settling into Hay River, enough apparently to not be able to find shit when he was looking for it. Finally, after a bit of time, he snagged a marker from the bottom of the drawer that would do the trick, turning back to the task at hand.

Smoothing out the already-wrinkled brown paper of the lunch sack, he carefully wrote “Laura” in his blocky, untidy scrawl. Then, frowning a bit at the name, he added the last name “Howlett” underneath it. Now, the look of how both names fit together stared back at him. He had ensured registering her name at the school only went as far as the building. These towns were so small they lacked the organizational structure of whole districts, and Logan was hoping they’d keep it that way. He had already gone through the hassle of driving a couple hundred miles out west a few days ago to set up forged Canadian birth and vaccination records for her, based in part on some of the information they had in the Transigen packet Laura had carried with her this whole time. As Logan forked over the money and was handed the fake documents, he instantly knew they were substandard at best, but he hadn’t been able to afford something better. A fed who was good at his job would be able to tell it was a fake, but Logan figured it would be enough for a couple of part-time receptionists manning the front desk at a rural middle school. And he had been right.

As he looked down at the rumpled paper bag again, Logan frowned a bit more. He had no real clue if parents did this for their kids anymore. God knows his experience was limited. Other than the school of life, the only educational institution he had ever been around was Xavier’s, and a four-course, nutritionally balanced, and usually hot lunch every day was a far cry from a peanut butter and jelly sandwich on somewhat stale bread. The learning curve was going to be steep. He fucking sucked at this.

He could hear Laura in her room getting ready, knowing that she had been in there far longer than it normally took her. Kay had been nice enough to help Logan get her ready for the school year, and, on the same day Logan had gone to pick up the forged paperwork—regretfully lying to Kay and calling it an errand to pick up more tools—Kay had driven Laura into town and had helped pick her out a few more clothes at the department store with the money Logan had given them. It wasn’t much more, but she had a few new things at least. Better shoes. Logan had been a bit put off that Laura had insisted on keeping the jean jacket from Oklahoma, but Kay—God bless the woman—hadn’t asked questions as she had dutifully scrubbed out the bloodstains from the cuffs.

“She’s a wild kid. Falls down a lot and scrapes her palms,” he still had said.

“Ač nátsyí, nághaye,” she had quietly murmured back. “It is her way.”

Finally, after what had seemed like forever, he heard the flick of the light and the door opening, and Laura padded into the kitchen. Logan took note that her attention to her appearance had been a bit more careful. She had on a new pair of jeans and a blue shirt with the words Chase your dreams! on it, and Logan noted that she also wore a purple clip in her hair they had bought a few weeks ago from the grocery store. And, of course, that damn jean jacket from the casino in Oklahoma. Logan noticed, however, despite the new ensemble, Laura still looked uncomfortable.
“Para la—uh—el almuerzo,” Logan began, trying to use a little Spanish to cheer her up. “Para el almuerzo…ah fuck it… peanut butter and jelly ok?”

“No me importa,” she grumbled as she put her pack on the counter and stalked over to the freezer. Logan frowned as he watched Laura moodily take out a couple of Eggos, shutting the door loudly behind her. He stood back a bit then, crossing his arms slightly, the animal in him instinctively giving Laura space, but other than that unsure of how to handle Laura’s mood. Although she was quiet often, abject sulking wasn’t usually her thing.

“You nervous?” he finally asked, knowing full well that, just like him, if she was not in the mood to share she wasn’t going to.

“No,” she said, popping the waffles into the toaster and turning around to wait.

“Then what?” he asked. Laura just sighed again, steadily breathing out of her nose. Finally, biting her lip and staring at the crumpled brown bag with her new name on it lying on the counter between them, she asked, “Why are you making me go?”

Fuck. He fucking knew it. Logan tiredly ran a hand through his hair, a bit frustrated.

“Jeez, kid. You were excited to go a few days ago. What changed?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” she muttered, shrugging her shoulders as she nervously fidgeted with her jacket sleeves. The waffles had popped up from the toaster but remained ignored in the appliance.

“Look, Laura, it’s for the best,” Logan said, loosening his posture a bit as he leaned against the counter with both hands, staring at her evenly. “You gotta chance at something real, something normal, at least for now. You gotta go,” he said resolutely. Laura frowned a little, but offered no more push back.

“Remember the rules, right?” he asked more solemnly.

“Don’t kill anybody,” she said. “And no claws.”

“Yep. I don’t care what kind of problems you run into. Unless Transigen and the fucking Reavers all pop out of the woods and start mowing people over, no claws. Or they will find us,” he added.

“Y tú?” she added quietly.

“Gotta couple of jobs set up for this morning, but I’ll see ya this afternoon,” he said, grabbing his coat that had been folded over the closest armchair. He stared at her for a moment as she stared at the floor.

“I don’t want you to leave me there,” she finally murmured, so softly Logan’s own hearing barely picked up on it.

“Hell, kid,” he muttered. “There’s no need to make it into something bigger than it is. You’ve been through worse.”

--

As the Bronco pulled up to the short, one story building though, Logan immediately started doubting if their life and times slicing Reavers’ jugulars before Hay River was actually worse than
the scene before them. Kids were everywhere, and a group of middle-aged women stood between
the entrance of the building and the spot where the Bronco had just pulled into. Logan could
instantly hear their conversation dropping off as he killed the engine, and they stole a glance at the
car. There were seven or eight of them, far too many. Always in fucking packs, women. Except for
the ones he liked. An image of Marie alone on Xavier’s veranda involuntarily floated through his
mind, before he quickly shut it off.

“Te están mirando,” Laura was saying. “They’re staring at you.”

“At us,” Logan grumbled.

“No. Tú,” she said evenly, turning back to look at the women. Logan bent his head down a bit and
peered from behind Laura through the passenger window. Shit. She was right.

“How do we scare ‘em off, do you reckon?” he asked, only half-joking, knowing he was eventually
going to have to get out of the goddamn car.

Laura arched a single, very Logan-esque eyebrow at him, and devilishly looked down to her hands
with a knowing glance, before turning back to him. They both grinned

“Heh. That would do the trick, but we gotta actually stick it out in this place longer than a month or
two,” he murmured. Laura exhaled deeply.

“Si… then vamos,” she said pulling the handle to exit the Bronco. Logan felt a swell of pride for her
steadily increasing determination. She was finally realizing there was no way out of the situation and
was now choosing to take it head on. ‘Atta girl. Logan also opened his door, walking around the side
of the car a bit hurriedly to catch up to Laura as they headed toward the gaggle of women and the
entrance to the doors beyond.

Laura was brave as hell, ruthless too, but Logan noticed as they walked closer to the school, Laura’s
hand grabbed his, tightening quickly around his scarred knuckles. Fuck. He sure as hell didn’t look
it, but every single day that passed, he wondered if he was growing soft. The fucking kid was killin’
him.

Meanwhile, Logan cursed their good hearing as they both picked up what the other adults assumed
they couldn’t as they walked toward the group.

“There they are.”

“She’s starting the sixth grade, isn’t she?”

“No mother, from what everyone is saying.”

“He’s so tall. You think he was in the army?”

“I heard he was a Navy Seal back in America.”

“Helluva good physique, for his age.”

They shut up as Logan and Laura finally walked passed. Laura glared up at the women as they did
so, but Logan ignored them, keeping his stare straight ahead, focused on getting Laura to the door in
one piece. More and more children had started picking up their pace to get into school on time.
Meanwhile, though, as flashes of primary colors and the tinny sound of lunchboxes whirled around
them both, Logan knelt so he could look Laura directly in the eye. She stared back at him solemnly,
her eyes dark and knowing.
“Kid...” he said, trying to find the words. They were already talking in another way, their way, but he wanted to leave her with something to hold onto today. Logan sighed.

“Don’t let anyone fuck with you,” was all he could add. The best he could do.

“Si, papa,” she said, nodding once, before she turned, hands gripping the straps of her backpack on her shoulders, her stride more determined and unwavering as she headed to the front doors, and Logan was assured that she would set the whole fucking world on fire if it got in her way.

He stood slowly, keeping watch the whole time as she disappeared behind the door. Finally, turning around, he saw that all the women were staring at him once more. Maybe because he felt weird about the whole thing, or maybe because he was desperate for a bit of recklessness, he dug down deep, calling up some of his old, timeless swagger, and threw them a predatory smirk as he walked by. He smelled arousal on at least a few of them as he passed, and he grinned, sure to take some pleasure in realizing he still had it in him to make a few of them silently pine, helpless from his power over them. Serves 'em right.

Logan had deliberately set up several jobs that day with clients, knowing he was likely to be on edge. Despite his lies to Kay a few days ago, he had picked up some supplies in the past few weeks, intent on making the work last. In his days before Stryker, and certainly long before Westchester, he had done a bit of carpentry and masonry work for various jobs. Logan was grateful that, despite the jump in time, his muscles remembered some of the movements as he worked with the tools, even as his mind fumbled around with the details.

And so, he had spent more and more of his time sawing, plastering, hanging drywall and installing ceiling fans, and he found the work oddly peaceful. It didn’t take rocket science to figure out that Logan was a physical being. If he couldn’t fight and destroy things in his wake, and it was obvious with each passing day his body wasn’t so keen on doing so anymore, maybe he could spend a little time patching things back together. Making shit work again.

He had done two relatively light jobs this morning, racking up a couple hundred bucks, and he found that whatever strange dread had resided after parting with Laura on the school’s doorstep was beginning to fade. Johnny Cash was now on the radio, and in a rare move he turned the music up. The windows of the Bronco were almost always rolled down this time of year. It was a bright, clear day and by the afternoon he suspected it would be truly warm verging on hot, a rarity for late September. Knowing what sort of severity the winter ahead would likely bring, he’d take a decent day if it was offered to him.

For the third and final job of the morning, Logan made his way to the southern part of town, relying on a map in the passenger seat, still a bit unfamiliar with the streets this far south. Wrapped up in a decent mood, Logan noticed a little too late that the already small houses in town were getting smaller, a bit more neglected and run-down as he drove past. Logan usually could have cared less, but as the Bronco rolled up to a small, practically dilapidated thing, Logan was learning that in these cases he had his work cut out for him. It was supposed to be a patch job, but in houses like this, one smaller problem usually led to another larger problem, and so on. And he wasn’t a fucking construction engineer. He breathed out, grabbing the bag and leaving his jacket in the Bronco. Logan’s boots were heavy on the concrete, weeds stubbornly coming up through the cracks. He noticed straight off that part of the siding on the house was giving way, and Logan smelled the
vague, indiscriminate whiff indicative of termites. As he got closer to the door, Logan had the urge to turn around. This had trouble written all over it.

However, trying to keep his word and honor Kay’s offer to help by setting up this string of work, Logan summoned up a little courage, the sort he had seen in Laura this morning, and pressed the doorbell, trying to quiet all the warnings his senses were pummeling him with. At first, he heard nothing. No rustling about, no footsteps. Logan waited on the stoop for a moment, before knocking briskly on the door. Still nothing. Just as he was about to turn around and make his way back down the stoop, the door cracked just slightly, and he was able to make out a face of a young woman with blonde hair who had recently seen the ugly side of some violence. A black eye, a cut on her forehead, lips swollen. Shit. He regretted his decision to stick around instantly.

“Yes?” she said meekly, still refusing to open the door the whole way.

“Uh, miss, sorry to bother you, but I’m here for the drywall…problem?” he inquired.

“What?”

“You might know Kay…she set it up,” Logan offered unenthusiastically. Finally, familiarity struck the young woman’s features, and she weakly smiled, her twisted lips turning upward into something that was a bit more grotesque than welcoming. Someone had beat the shit out of her, and recently.

“Oh yes, right… that was today. Sorry. Ok. Come in,” she said, before shutting the door to take the chain off of it and letting him in. His unease grew as he walked inside. The place smelled of alcohol, a smell he knew so well he could follow it blindly to the end of the earth. Magazines and newspapers littered the floor, and the TV blared in the background. But the worst was the dust and suspected asbestos, and upon entering the house, he could feel his lungs seizing up.

“Can I get you something? Water?” she asked, suddenly a little more alight with concern as she watched him cough violently. Logan heaved heavily as the air fucked with his lungs, but he was already shaking his head. The last thing he wanted to do was take something from this woman.

“Ah, no ma’am,” he finally croaked. “Just…where’s the damage at?” She flushed a bit at this, but still led him to the dining room. A busted wall came into focus, and again, Logan didn’t like the look of it. For one thing, it was more than a one-hour or even a one-day job, a lot larger and more pronounced than what had been described to him originally. For another, this house stunk of domestic abuse, if not something worse. Logan had been around a long time; he knew terror when he saw it.

He coughed once more into his hand, noticing new blood and wiping it discreetly on a handkerchief he had taken to carrying around with him when she had her back turned. Finally, he set the work bag down on the table, fumbling around for a tape measure.

“You got kids, sir?” she asked, and he noticed she was reaching for a half-empty bottle of cheap vodka in the kitchen, pouring it into a plastic cup, hands shaking.

“Uh, yeah,” he muttered. “Just the one, though.”

“Boy or a girl?”

“Girl,” he said, suddenly uneasy in divulging any more information. The woman was inoffensive enough, beyond her evident day-drinking, but whoever had caused the harm was sure to be lurking somewhere ‘round here. Meanwhile, the young woman had come over just a little too close next to him, plastic cup in hand, as Logan measured the size of the hole in the wall.
“You keepin’ her safe?” she asked, and Logan bristled, turning to see her complete disregard for personal space.

“Uh, ma’am…”

“Angelica,” she said slowly.

“Yeah, this job looks like a lot of work. I sure as hell don’t have everything I need to complete it. If it’s alright with you, I can refer you to some contractors,” he kept talking, even though he knew not one damn contractor in the area, “Maybe if I come back…” she stopped him then, putting one hand on his forearm instinctively. It wasn’t a come on. It was a fucking cry for help.

“Please don’t leave,” she asked desperately.

“Excuse me?” Logan asked, his voice low and cautious.

“He’s already here,” she said, whipping around to the front door just as Logan heard a car in the driveway rolling up. *Fuck.*

A man was shouting at the top of his lungs outside, something incomprehensible, before Logan and Angelica looked at the same time to the front door, which they both knew had been left unlocked.

“Ang! Angie! Who the fuck’s car is that out there in the street?” It was then a man in his late twenties burst in on them like that, Logan tall and brooding in the dining room, the younger woman still holding Logan’s arm tightly. Logan noticed she pivoted a little, slipping behind him somewhat. The man’s eyes got big for a minute, before a leer evolved on his face.

“And just who the fuck are you?” he said, already rounding on Logan.

“Here on repairs,” he said, his muscles tense and coiled with unease. Just then, the usually dormant Wolverine poked his head up into the air, the promise of violence on the wind.

“Yeah, the fucking handyman. You’re the new asshole in town all the guys down at the bar have been talking ‘bout,” the man said, before walking close to them both, turning to the woman.

“You call this guy to come over?” he accused.

“No, honey, I set it up through my mom’s friend.” She finally let go of Logan’s arm, and moved a bit closer to the guy, but he wasn’t listening to whatever she was saying.

“Fucking figures, you trying to pull the wool over my eyes, always whoring around behind my back,” he spat, now pacing the kitchen manically, wiping his nose on his dirty sleeve. *Crack, maybe methamphetamines,* Logan’s senses whispered in his ear. Logan stifled another cough for as long as he could, before it finally overtook him.

“Can you fucking quiet down old man? I’m trying to have a conversation with this bitch,” Logan stood back from where he had been slightly bent over, sneering as he did so, claws singing underneath his skin, awakened and ready.

*Now’s not the time, sugar.*

He growled a bit as he stood straighter, unsure of what to do.

*Logan. Laura. Think of Laura.*

“Maybe I-” he began, before he was interrupted.
Logan got in the front seat of the Bronco, slamming the car door shut as he did so. His hands gripped the wheel, once more peering at the dump in front of him. He already had memorized the plates of the rusty Mustang sitting in the driveway, along with the address.

*And what are you gonna do about it, sugar? You got-*

“Yeah, I know, Laura.” The fact of the matter was, there was nothing he could do, other than report the asshole to the cops, and that’s a phone call he would definitely be making. But it was the first time in a long time that he hadn’t responded the way he would have normally. Without Laura, he would’ve killed the fucker than gotten the hell out of Dodge. But now… it had taken him so long to get themselves set up, and— mentally sending his regrets to the woman inside— he wasn’t about to destroy it all in the name of some old thrill in seeking justice. He didn’t even fucking know the lady, couldn’t explain the entire situation if he tried.

As he exhaled slowly and started the car once more, suddenly the cheap cell phone he had bought a couple of weeks ago started incessantly ringing. Logan answered.

“Mr. Howlett?”

“Yeah?” Logan asked, increasingly wary.

“We have your daughter, Laura, here at school, and she has been suspended for the rest of the day. We need you to come and pick her up immediately.”

“Christ, what’d she do?”

“Mrs. Gundalson will explain once you arrive.”

“Who’s Mrs. Gundalson?”

“The principal, Mr. Howlett.” With that, the call ended, and Logan made a right turn instead of his planned left, cursing under his breath as he did so.

---

Logan found Laura sitting in the hallway, on a bench by a row of lockers. Laura was wearing a scowl, one leg tucked up by her chest. The purple clip was now dangling in her mussed hair and there was a dirt smudge on her face, but she was, of course, unharmed. He couldn’t say the same for the other sorry son of a bitch. The blonde boy next to Laura had a split lip and a bruising purple face and held a bag of ice to his head. It was obvious that they both had been instructed to sit there, but the boy was trying as hard as possible to lean away from Laura, as if she were some sort of rabid animal about to snap.

“Wait there,” he told Laura sternly, but she barely looked up at him. Five minutes later, he also found himself in the principal’s office, trying to figure out what had really happened. The woman was stout
and stern in a maroon suit, and had a glare that could have likely brought a fucking sentinel to its knees. She curtly explained to Logan that the skirmish had occurred during recess, after some sort of game of kickball had gone savage, although the principal hadn’t been around to see it happen and wasn’t so sure who had started what. But the end result was pretty clear.

“So, she clocked a kid. Why are you sending her home?” Logan had asked the woman across the desk.

“We take physical violence around here very seriously, Mr. Howlett, especially for students who lash out on the first day.”

“I thought she was provoked,” Logan said, eyes narrowing.

“And that means she gets to respond with physical violence?” the woman countered. Logan paused at this, jaw falling a little, entirely and completely thrown off by this line of ethical questioning.

_Ooh, I like her. She’s tough as nails._

_Shut up, Marie._

“Children provoke each other constantly, Mr. Howlett. Especially middle schoolers,” she said again, folding her hands, elbows resting at her desk. “Laura’s going to need to learn how to control her anger. We can’t have kids coming home with concussions on a daily basis.”

“A concussion?! I thought she punched him,” he asked.

“Exactly,” the woman said, offering him a stern look that made even Logan squirm a little.

After Logan and Laura had been dismissed, they said nothing as Laura opened the passenger door of the Bronco, tossing her bag inside and climbing in the front. For a moment they both sat face-forward, Logan weary and Laura fuming.

“The first day, Laura,” Logan finally grumbled as he turned on the engine. “The first goddamned day. It better have been self-defense.” Laura said nothing, however, crossing her arms and looking out the passenger window instead, out rightly ignoring him.

“Hey, look at me,” Logan growled, snapping his fingers in the air between them. Laura dramatically turned toward him, eyes on fire. “Listen, kid. I just got chewed out in there by that lady and it was fucking terrifying, so you’re going to tell me what the hell happened.” Again, steely silence. Logan outwardly groaned. It was like looking in the goddamn mirror sometimes with this kid.

As they drove home, Logan’s frustration began to fester, fueled in part by how powerless he had felt while on the job, along with suffering from Laura’s refusal to tell him anything the entire car ride home. Laura was already out of the car and was kicking the door shut with her foot as Logan killed the engine, parking it out front of the antique shop. Logan got out and limped behind her, determined to get some fucking answers, when he noticed she was headed to the door of Kay’s shop and not to the private entry off to the right that led up a second set of stairs to their apartment.

“Laura, again, what the fuck made you wanna hit him?”

“What was I supposed to do?! You said no claws,” she finally grumbled, pausing at the shop door and turning back to him.

“And I’m sure as hell glad I did. Jesus Christ, Laura, what were you gonna do? Gut the fucking kid? Disembowel an eleven-year-old?!” Laura only offered a smoldering glare in return and then opened
the door, realizing the power she had over him. Now that Kay was in earshot, she had effectively killed that part of the conversation. She was calling sanctuary on his ass.

“Home early?” Kay questioned, looking up from her store ledger at the two of them spilling into her office, practically spitting at each other like cats.

“At school, un niño, un cabrón…” she said to Kay, spitting on the floor in front of her feet, much to Logan’s distress, before rounding on the older mutant once more. “Usted dijo…you said, don’t let him fuck with me.” Logan guiltily crossed his arms at this, as he watched Kay look to him and then back to Laura.

“Ok, you two. Enough,” she finally sighed, dragging over an old leather stool from behind the counter, patting its cushion and gesturing for Laura to sit. Laura did so moodily, while Logan grumpily paced the dusty floorboards in front of the counter.

“Laura, what happened?” she asked calmly.

“She was playing kickball with some boys, and things got way too out of hand—” Logan interrupted.

“You said—” Laura started again.

“—I know what I said. But, Jesus, you gave the kid a concussion. Can’t you just … make friends with a couple of the girls your age? You know, have tea parties and all that shit?” That’s when Laura straight up growled at him, and he had to stop everything in him from snarling back.

“Laura,” Kay said, shooting a look at Logan that obviously communicated she wanted him to shut his trap and let the girl talk. “What did they say that made you so angry?”

She got quiet, fingers messing with the patches of fraying leather on the old stool.

“I was better at them at it. What do you call Kickball. Se enojaron. They were jealous. El niño called me a name, so I punched him. Puñetazo,” she said these words sharply, like a slice of a knife, while she ruthlessly mimicked punching the kid once more, one fist hitting an open palm.

“What name?”

“What name did he call you?” Kay asked quietly.

“Half-breed,” she said. Logan suddenly felt another sort of anger burn within him, as he gave Kay an almost accusatory look.

“A racial slur around here. She looks a little native, nághaye,” she said to Logan, adding, “Athabascan, even.” Logan was increasingly becoming torn between wanting to finish the job and kill the little racist fucker with the split lip and feeling guilty for giving Laura such a hard time for defending herself.

“What’s wrong with how I look?” Laura asked quietly.

“Nothing, sekui —” Kay began, but Laura had already whipped her head around to Logan

“Do they know I’m a mutu—” Laura started to ask, but Logan glared at her so severely that she shut up, although she shot him a look back. The silence hung in the air for a bit, before Kay spoke once more.
“There are many reasons for people to hate, sekui,” she said slowly, before looking up to both of them, her gaze a little too knowing for Logan to really feel at ease.

--

Introduction Essay

Write a paragraph introducing yourself to the class. This is your time to share your story! Tell us about your family, your friends, and what you like to do. Be ready to share with the class tomorrow. We’re excited to have you here!

My name is Laura. I am 11. I don’t know my mom. My dad is a repairman, but he used to help save people. I don’t have any brothers or sisters. I like to listen to music on my ipod.

Logan picked up the piece of paper from the little desk he had recently bought her, realizing that was all Laura had written. The little monster was now despondently watching Dawn of the Dead in the living room, after she said she had finished up with her homework. Logan looked at the instructions again, frowning. He knew she was a sharp kid, dedicated even, but adjusting to the world around her and making friends didn’t seem to be in the cards for her just yet. Logan glanced around her room. He didn’t come in here often, allowing her to have her own space, but he did notice that, whether it was her nature or her age, he kept a tidier room than she did. There were a couple of magazines around, the books she kept borrowing from Kay’s piled up on the floor next to her bed. The sheets had been replaced twice already, but the claw marks in the wall closest to the door were still there. That hadn’t been the result of a nightmare; she had been awake for that little tantrum, and he knew he’d have to patch, maybe replace, the wall soon or Kay would likely have their heads. Logan stared at the claw marks once more, two angry tears in the faded flower wallpaper, revealing the framing of the wall underneath. Finally, he set down the essay on the desk in quiet frustration, definitively making up his mind on what to do.

“Let’s go, kid. Off the couch,” Logan said, walking into the living room.

“Donde?”

“The lake,” he said simply. She finally took her eyes off the television, looking at him.

“But it’s dark,” she offered.

“So?” Logan asked, shrugging before grabbing jackets for them both. “Last time I checked you can see in the dark just fine.”

--

The water was a dark, smooth mirror. The lake house stood a ghostly white behind them. They had been out this way a few times now, and it had become their place of sorts, despite the fact the house still stood empty, belonging to someone, belonging to no one. He had gestured to Laura with a quiet tilt of his head to follow him up the stairs, and now they stood on the deck, looking down on the lake quietly.

“Papa, why are we-”
“Shhh,” Logan said back, looking at her. “I need you to stop thinking for a moment, Laura. For now, I need you to listen. Just… become your senses.”

Laura looked at him quizzically, before she turned back to the view of the lake. Finally, he could feel her letting go a bit as the sounds overtook them both, a chorus only they could hear.

There was laughter in the distance, kids miles away along the side of the lake. The crackle of the fire, crickets chirping, the water rippling, the smell of smoke in the distance, the dewy scent of lake water, mildew, the humidity hanging in the air, the milk thistle dying. All of these sounds: a chorus song. They both could always hear them, but usually it was a matter of tuning them out. Now the overlapping noises cradled them both, nestled in the dark night.

“You hear it all?” Logan finally murmured, looking once more to Laura.

“Si,” she whispered.

“That’s life, kid. Pulsing through everything. And—in a way—you’re lucky… to get to hear it all. Most people, they don’t get that,” Logan trailed off, taking in the sight of her. Laura bit her lip a little, quietly staring off at the surface of the lake.

“And this anger you’re feeling…that rage?” Logan added. Laura looked at him then.

“It’s a double-edged sword, kid. And they put some of it in you, and the rest you come by naturally. You’ve got this thing inside you, and sometimes it’s screaming so loud you can’t stand it, demanding blood, but you can’t let it out. You gotta learn to control it, Laura. All of it. I know at school you gotta pretend a little. I know you have to. But…I want you to try doing something like this… when that thing inside ya gets too loud, or needs more space. Try listenin’ to the sounds the world’s making, and let that thing become you, if only for a few seconds. It’s…like meditating…or at least our fucked-up version of it,” Logan finished.

Laura looked up to him then, realizing the extent of what he was trying to get across to her. She finally glanced out across the water once more, then turned back.

“Gracias, papa,” she whispered.

“You’re welcome, kid,” he said, before turning to face forward again, a guilty, sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach.

The truth was, throughout his entire fucking life, he hadn’t been able to find anything to stop himself when the animal really wanted out, even in moments of peace. They were what they were, and at times, what they were was bloodthirsty, starved, desperate for a kill. But Laura didn’t need to know that yet. And there was nothing he could say to change it.

--

Down in the military barracks, fifty feet under the ground in the middle of October, the cold was finally getting to him. The anticipation of the mission had tightened its grip on everyone. After hours of struggling to get to sleep, Logan had finally fallen into a light doze, before he heard the opening of a door, and his ears pricked at the noise. He relaxed a little though, hearing and knowing her sound and weight of her soft footsteps by heart. When he turned she was there, lying on top of the covers next to him in the dark, inches away. She was shrouded in the same t-shirt from earlier, but now she
wore gloves.

“Marie, what’re you-” he started, but couldn’t seem to finish.

“Couldn’t sleep.”

Logan looked at her evenly in the dark, trying to stifle something black rising up in him. He had never seen Marie from this angle, and it did her all kinds of justice. He wanted to watch her from this angle, hair falling softly on the blankets, constantly, all the time, for fucking forever.

“You still mad at me?” she whispered tiredly in the dark. Logan exhaled.

“No, darlin’. You don’t owe me anything. I’m not anything you signed up for.”

At this, she frowned, but said nothing.

“Rogue, whatever you have planned tomorrow,” he finally reached out and instinctively brushed a lock of hair from her face. “Remember these are extractions. We’re not trying to bring down the whole of the Canadian military-”

“Let’s not talk about that. Just…keep me company tonight?” Logan stiffened at her words.

“Marie…”

“I know, sugar.”

I know.

Logan awoke with a start, sitting up so fast his body protested immediately, coughing and sputtering, his mind still woozy from the dream. Or had it been a memory? It was an old one, whatever it was, a dark one, the kind from the old Marie, from before she had….before…

Before what, sugar?

Before what?

Fuck his nightmares. Fuck them to hell. And fuck the unrelenting voice in his head, the nagging, leering softness of the subtle drawl in her words. He was talking to ghosts, to nothing. Along with his body, he was now losing his fucking mind.

Why would you think that, sugar?

“Because you’re dead,” he said simply to the dark.

Logan-

“Twice, Marie. Twice.”

And he was already out of bed then, fumbling around for a shirt. He realized he had fallen asleep with his jeans still on, and it was only a little past ten at night. He had passed out after a miserable coughing fit shortly after Laura went to bed, and he hadn’t been asleep for more than thirty, shitty minutes. He growled in frustration, finally leaving the bedroom, intent on alcohol. Sniffing around the fridge, he realized there was none.

“Shit,” he said aloud, and then, as his mind grew more anxious, he stomped down the back stairs to Kay’s shop. She was still there, thank god, cashing out for the night, sipping tea.
“Headed out,” he said.

“What? You alright?”

“Fine, can you just… stick around a while longer? Just keep an ear out for Laura if you can? No more than an hour.”

Kay stared at him through her readers, the steam off the tea rising up in white coils beside her.

“If you’re seeking trouble, you’ll only find it, nághaye.”

“No helping it, Kay. Trouble fucking loves me.” And then he was putting on his coat and slipping out the door into the night, glad to be rid of that apartment, rid of the weight of his own crushing responsibility, and rid of her goddamn voice.

--

He had picked up a fifth of Jack from the liquor store and had drank it on the way over. He walked down the street, hand gripping the bottle in the brown paper bag tightly. The alcohol sung in his bones, but his blood boiled. It still took a lot, but a whole lot less than it used to, to get him drunk, and he was well on his way. As came up to the establishment, the only bar like this in town, he tossed the empty in a trashcan and opened the door. Logan found the fucking asshole sitting in the corner with his friends, drinking. Exactly where he wanted him. A shop bell rang at his entrance, and they turned to look at Logan, hulking and seething in front of them all. The air left the room, the whole place quiet.

“Can I have a word, outside?” Logan asked, looking directly at the man who Angelica had called honey.

“You don’t know when to stop. Hey guys, this is the asshole everyone’s talking about,” he said, to a couple of his hunting-gear buddies, and they started snickering.

“Yeah, my wife won’t shut up about him. Not sure why, now. Look at him. Looks like he’s been carved up with a Swiss Army Knife,” another one of his comrades joked for a few laughs. Logan’s snarl deepened, and he took a step toward them all. Once more, the man from earlier stood up, and Logan realized the man wasn’t scared yet. In his mind, Logan was the outnumbered one.

“What’s your name, bub?” Logan growled.

“Dwayne.”

“Dwayne, eh? Dwayne, you wanna come outside or tell me right here why you fucking get off on beating the shit out of women?” That did it. A couple of the men’s faces fell. So, at least from some of them, this had been a little secret that Dwayne had been keeping.

“You got no right coming in here and throwing accusations around like that,” another man, Logan noticed was significantly bigger than Dwayne, spat, standing up. A fucking bodyguard. Perfect. The man walked a few steps closer, and Logan grinned.

“Yeah, that’s it, come closer. I dare you, bub,” he taunted, and the man did so. Just as he was an arm’s length away from him, Logan grabbed his left hand and yanked it behind his back, throwing the man’s head hard against the table while stomping the knee joint on the man’s right leg, and the man fell to the ground in agony. He spat on the floor next to him, sweating, as he looked up at the
rest of the crew. He had already noticed Dwayne was packing, but now the handgun was at the ready, pointed directly at Logan’s temple.

“I’ll blow your brains out if you don’t get the fuck out of here, man,” he said. Logan stopped, seething, before stalking off through the door and into the street, knowing the guy would likely follow him. It was then he heard the fucker again… opening up the door and following him outside, hand still waving the gun around.

“And that bitch deserves what she got,” Dwayne yelled after Logan. “She’s a fucking cunt.”

Logan whipped his head around, nothing now but pure and raw instinct. A sick pain shot through him as his claws tore through one hand. He threw his fist up into the fucker’s gun, and, with a flick of his wrist, the metal fell apart and to the floor like a bunch of ribbons, and Logan saw he had taken a couple fingers with it, too. Dwayne started screaming, and that’s when Logan quickly retracted his claws, cursing inwardly in pain, and grabbed the guy by the mouth, effectively throwing him up against the wall outside of the bar, not giving a shit who saw.

“Shut the fuck up,” Logan snarled.

“You’re a goddamn freak,” Dwayne managed to spit out, and Logan’s hand lowered to squeeze his throat, bloody knuckles right underneath his chin, taunting him.

“A goddamn lethal freak, you motherfucker. Stay the fuck away from that girl I met today, you hear me? Or you’ll wish you had. And if you breathe another word about me and what I can do to anyone, and I mean anyone, I’ll fucking decapitate your head from your sorry ass.” The man struggled to breathe, before Logan let him sag to the ground. Logan turned around, breathing hard, glad to see no one else had been outside to witness that little procession now that it was over, before he stalked off down the darkened street. In the background, the chorus of sounds still resonated in the air, the spark of fire, the milk thistle in the wind, and the animal within him sung in vicious joy. When provoked, you respond with violence. This: his fucking night song.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the generous encouragement and feedback. Chapter 12 should be up by the end of the weekend. Happy Friday to you all! :D
Chapter Notes

The end of this chapter will mark the end of part one (of two parts).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 12: Then / Now

Then

The fire threw wild, orange light into the study, casting flickering shadows about the room. It was just how she imagined it would be. The long hallways, the paintings, the thick Persian rugs. All the things about the man who made him who he was. Logan hadn’t been like this. He was rough around the edges, just like he was inside. Hank McCoy, however, seemed to embody a perfect dichotomy.

That’s how she found him: the door opened, sitting in one of the high back armchairs, sipping tea. As if, outside, the world wasn’t burning.

“Rogue,” he said, eyes still on the fire in the hearth. No matter how light she kept her footsteps, she had lived with Logan long enough to know that Hank would have heard her. The Logan in her head had stopped articulating warnings, had essentially ceased all communication with her years ago, but she got a sense of his lingering presence from time to time, and she knew he was still there, listening, watching, waiting.

Outside: the world’s rage boiled over. The riot had swelled, grown into something ugly and unbearable. There were shouts, screams, bricks shattering glass and the acrid smell of tar. Trees were burning. Inside, the fire danced in the hearth, catching Hank’s face in the light. He looked older, like everyone she had ever known, wary.

“Hank,” she managed to breathe.

“They’ve sent you to kill me?” he asked. Helpless tears rolled down her face. He knew. Of course, he knew.

“They’re already here,” she whispered.

“I know, but we still have time. Sit,” he said, gesturing to the other open arm chair. Her limbs shook as she did so, summoning the courage to at least have the decency of facing him.

“They’ll all die otherwise. Yes?” he murmured, looking at her.

She silently nodded.

“He knows me. He knows them.”

Hank sighed, taking the fragile tea cup in his large, blue hand. He sipped it slightly, then set it
“I know you’ve been coerced, Rogue. I know that your life and the lives of those you love hang in the balance. I know you’ve thought of ending it all, just to be rid of it. I also know you’ve been trying to fight against it, feeding them the most useless information you can. But that part’s over now, isn’t it?”

She looked up to him, tears still burning her eyes. There was nothing she could say. He had said it all.

“I want you to listen to me, and do exactly as I say. There might be a chance.” She looked at him, really looked at him, eyes dancing with questions.

“Take the plans and give them to Charles. Find him.”

“They keep close tabs,” she murmured. “They know how to find me.”

“Good. Inform them of every step you take. Betray us if you have to. You need to maintain the semblance of your loyalty, but you’ll also have Charles. He’ll know. Just barely, but you can be a step ahead.”

“Hank...” she said quietly.

“But...when the time is right, you can make a difference. Congregate them, and eliminate as many as possible. But it has to start with you. Right now.”

“Good people will die,” she murmured.

“Good people are already dying, Rogue. Charles needs the plans. I am sorry, my dear, but there is no other way.”

“I can’t...” But in one second he was standing over her, blue hand hovering just beyond her own.

“May I?” he asked. She nodded slightly, more tears falling, and he took hold of her wrist, grasping it tightly. And then she was seething, crumpling to the floor, the influx of new senses and memories crippling, overwhelming, but there, still, nestled among it all: the plans.

Hank managed to stay standing, but he was bent over in pain from the touch. As she slowly got up from her knees, she suddenly could hear everything. Like before, like with Logan.

“Hank...” she said helplessly, but he was already headed toward the door. “They’ll kill you.”

He turned back to her, sighing as he did so.

“You still don’t understand, do you, my dear? If they suspect you, it’s over. If I don’t die, they all will.”

A grandfather clock was roaring in her ears. Branches on fire scorched her nose. Just then, the click of a door, the heavy weight of his shoes in the dry grass, his face calm and resolute. And then, the swarm. The sounds of blades, bats, guns, ropes, the entire bloody procession. It went on and on and on. At some point, she started screaming, just to drown out all the rest.
She watched as he bucked and weaved, a beautiful, animalistic signature to his movements, the blood flying as he pulled his claws out of bodies, ending life after life, the metal singing. He inhaled in every time before throwing his fists forward, and when he anticipated a blow, he dodged, danced, all instinct and intuition and truth. He was painted in their blood by now, a living, seething canvas. As Logan and Rogue ran, more guards flocked to him, all moths drawn to the same flame.

They were drowning in the hallways of Two Rivers, the flashing red lights illuminating them both, swimming in the piercing sounds of alarms. He was ahead of her, protecting her, taking out as many guards as he could, both of them trying to get to the mainframe.

Finally, they reached the metal cage where the database was housed. Logan mowed down the grate easily, before another guard came at him, and she nearly missed being entangled in the tussle by climbing through the wire and wreckage. She grabbed the computer hard drive that had been slung around her neck, jamming it into the mainframe. She quickly picked out the skeleton key password on the touch screen, and went to work. Logan had moved further down the hallway to where Blink would be ready. Guards were darting this way and that, but, just as they anticipated, Rogue could have been invisible. The man who could cut through anything upstaging the girl with the quiet, deadly skin.

*Hey, we’re both lethal, kid,* the Logan in her head added.

*You bet your ass we are,* she said back.

The screen lit up, and, impossibly fast, the virus Storm had designed freed itself and started wreaking havoc. It now flew into the cloud, undermining the computer’s security system.

*Atta girl.*

Just then, she heard metal give way, the click of a hundred doors being opened at once. People began shouting, a shred of hope in some of their voices. *I’ve done it Charles,* she sent out to the Professor. Almost on cue, she could hear Blink’s portal cracking down the first prison block, the portal snapping open and closed again and again in a snarl of purple and black as Blink weaved between stray guards and started extracting prisoners. Charles and Storm were still overhead in the Blackbird in the sky, poised for phase two.

*Good job, kid. Now, make the call.*

Her phone was already out. It was a number she had committed to memory.

“Trask Industries. Certified informant identification number please.”

“4695388,” she said softly.

“Connecting.”

“Rogue, what do you have for us?”

“Two Rivers. Charles Xaiver and the rest of the X-Men are extracting prisoners on foot.”

“Our team will convene there with drones and Mark X’s at 2300 hours. Good job, Rogue.”
Rogue turned to find Logan’s claws slice through another guard outside of the mainframe, and she saw the other behind him by the time it was too late.

“Logan!” she shouted, but then she felt the sting on the back of her neck too, the pins-and-needles feeling of the metal inserting into her spine, and she dropped helplessly to the ground, consciousness fading.

--

Logan’s vision went in and out of focus as he groaned, attempting to sit up a bit and instantly regretting it. As he looked down, blood. His blood. And pain. The hell? Then, he could feel that fucking paperweight on the back of his neck, and, intent on pawing at the inhibitor collar to get it off, he reached back just in time to feel a smooth, bare hand grab his wrist. Looking up dazedly to find its owner, he saw her kneeling over him, a cut on her forehead and a slightly bruised eye, but, remarkably in one piece.

“Wha? Marie?”

“Don’t touch that thing. These fuckers can inject you with a poison that will leave you dead in five minutes if you fiddle with them too much. That’s why they work.”

Logan’s eyes widened, not so much because of that piece of information, but because his brain was finally registering the fact that Marie’s bare hand was still holding onto his wrist and they were both still conscious.

“Fuck, they got you too?” he managed to say, as he moaned again trying to straighten.

“Yeah. Listen to me, don’t sit up right now, baby. Lie back down. I’m going to try to ease the bleeding.” Then, before he knew it, she was stripping off the top half of his uniform and tearing off his shirt underneath.

“Dear god,” Marie managed to say, and Logan propped himself on his arms to see his chest was pebbled with mostly unhealed gunshot wounds. His body had rid itself of the bullets, but the collar had effectively cut off the rest of the healing before the job was finished. Meanwhile, Marie had gathered a bunch of medical gauze and was tearing it into long strips.

“Pick the worst wounds and apply pressure to slow the bleeding,” he muttered, as some old bit of intuition from his days fighting alongside normally-healing humans in every major conflict on earth came back to him.

“I know what I’m doing, sugar. I just never thought I’d be doing it to you,” she said, finally using some gauze and applying pressure to the nastiest exit wounds. Logan gritted his teeth, trying not to pass out and stay relatively still while her bare hands freely roamed all over his bare skin for the first time, touching him and checking him for further damage. He must have lost a lot of fucking blood. He was lightheaded and a sudden bout of nausea threatened to overtake him.

“Marie,” he managed to choke out.

“I think you might’ve torn a few muscles on your side, and if you could break a rib you would have.
It’s bruising pretty bad right here,” she said, feeling along the left side of his chest, where his abdominal muscles met his ribs.

“Marie!” he said forcefully.

“What?” she asked, a mounting frustration in her voice.

“It’s just… that’s a whole hell lot of your touch all at once that I ain’t had the pleasure of experiencing before. A lot to process,” he managed to say. With that, she instantly blushed, removing her hands for a moment before going back to applying pressure.

“Sorry,” she murmured. “Only trying to help.”

“I know,” he groaned, trying once more to sit up again.

“Easy,” she said, holding onto one shoulder as he leaned his back more against the cinderblock wall he must have had been originally throw by.

“I feel like shit,” he muttered.

“At least it’s not worse. The guards are definitely just regular old Canadian military. They’re new at this, and they don’t know shit about mutants. If they had been thinking they would’ve done more damage to you after they slapped that collar on. I don’t think they even knew you could heal.”

“Where are we?” Logan asked.

“One of the med bays off the second prison block. It’s one of the only rooms with a locking mechanism the virus I implanted didn’t reach. Honestly, I don’t know how they found it. But they had some spare time, I guess. As they install, the collars knock you out for a few minutes. Enough time that they were able to throw us in here. I think they thought we were stray prisoners.”

“At least they didn’t kill us. How many of the actual prisoners got out?”

“Both blocks,” Marie responded, smiling a little at their success.

“Good,” he murmured.

“Charles has been in communication. Blink’s a little busy seeing them to safety, but they’ll be back to fetch us. If we live long enough...” she trailed off, staring down at his blood on her hands.

“Hell, Marie, it ain’t that bad. I’ll survive. And where is everybody else? All the guards?”

“Well you took out a fair few,” she said, finally wiping the hair away from her face, smearing some of her own blood from the cut on her forehead with the back of her hand. “I doubt there are more than ten of them left.”

“I can’t tell where anyone’s at,” Logan grumbled. “I can’t smell or hear for shit now.”

At this, Rogue oddly smiled a little once more. “Welcome to being human, sugar,” she murmured.

“I think I recall you tellin’ me we already were,” Logan joked a little, despite a new wave of pain coming from his chest. She had been right about the ribs.

“Well, something like that,” she said. Marie smiled a little as she looked down at him, running her hand through his hair at the temple like that day in the snow. Only this time her hand lingered, a more deliberate touch. Logan closed his eyes, breathing in slowly.
“Dear lord, that feels amazing. The fact that you can even do that…” she blushed a little, as he continued. “I know they ain’t too popular, but fuck if that thing doesn’t have a silver lining. At least on you.” Rogue smiled a little more sadly, but continued to keep her hand in his hair, stroking his temple softly.

“How do we get these things off us anyway, in the end?” he asked.

“They all have unique pin numbers. The medical director of each camp memorizes a series of them, and he enters them into a portable reader to unlock them if they have to.”

“Shit, baby. You’ve done your homework. But I probably killed that sorry son of a bitch who knew the codes,” Logan muttered.

“A powerful telekinetic can unlock them too without unleashing the poison. We’re lucky; Charles is probably one of the few people alive who can do it,” she said quietly.

“But we have to get to him first,” Logan grumbled. It was then he moved up a bit more, and she tsked him slightly, pressing a thin hand to his warm chest to get him to lay down more.

“Stop… hurting yourself. You really don’t know how to behave when you’re injured, do you?”

“No. Not really. This is like fucking Japan all over again,” he grumbled.

“What?” Rogue asked quietly.

“There were… a few days in Japan when I wasn’t healing at all. Some fucking microbug. Had to rip the thing outta my goddamn chest. Almost died,” he muttered bitterly.

“I didn’t know that,” she whispered, looking down at the spot where his heart was beating, although he couldn’t hear it like he normally could. He couldn’t hear hers either, he realized, and it made him feel unsteady.

“Yeah, well, I wasn’t planning on telling you,” he stopped. And then, after a pause, he added: “Just like you weren’t planning on telling me about the tip off.”

“What?” she said, stiffening a little.

“Before we got bagged. You tipped off Trask. You’re calling them all here.” He saw her sigh in mild frustration.

“Hell…he was right. You did catch me,” she murmured under her breath.

“Who?”

Marie only waved to her own head.

“Oh yeah. I almost had forgotten about that fucker.” She rolled her eyes slightly, but continued to look vaguely guilty.

“So, why, baby?” he asked carefully, fighting back another swell of sharp pain.

“I had to. Charles needed the Trask’s Canada medical division in one place at the same time.”

“And what? You just had some of the higher-up’s numbers on fucking speed dial?” Logan persisted. It was then, she stopped, keeping her gaze focused downward and biting her lip uncomfortably.
“Shit,” he murmured under his breath.

“What?” she asked.

“That’s it,” he said.

“What’s it?”

“You’re a goddamned double-agent, aren’t you?” he asked, through narrow eyes. Marie instantly blushed five shades of red, taking her hand off the bandage she’d been holding.

“You make it sound like…James Bond or something,” she murmured. *Fuck, so he was right.*

“How long?” Logan asked. Still, she said nothing.

“How long, Marie?”

“Since Hank,” she murmured. Logan desperately tried to wrap his head around the information. Since Hank. Since he had met her in Mexico, then. How had she been involved? And how the fuck had she made those sort of connections?

“How did they know to trust you?” was the question he finally settled on asking.

“That’s…more complicated…” she trailed off, still now unsure of how much to share. “I was…coerced, in the beginning.”

“Fuck, Marie. *Fuck.* All those meetings with Charles?”

“Planning this, mostly,” she responded.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Logan practically whispered, now sitting up fully, not giving a damn if it caused him pain. He noticed most of the blood was slowing anyhow, even if he did still feel lightheaded.

“Charles forbid it. Storm didn’t know, either. If we were ever compromised and you knew something…”

“You think I would have actually let them torture it out of me? Do you know me at all? *Shit,* Marie. And Hank-”

“I don’t want to talk about Hank,” she snapped, her eyes darkening.

“Ok,” he said simply, letting it go, the truth of it all still hanging between them.

“I have no fucking clue who you are,” he added after a while.

“Oh, don’t be so dramatic. Of course you do,” she said.

“Well, I sure as hell don’t wanna know how you got mixed up in that shit.” Some silence ate away at them both, as he looked back at her solemnly.

“How long until they get here?” he finally asked.

“The drones that are going to try to apprehend the Blackbird will be here in 20 minutes. We picked a remote location on purpose.”
“Mark X’s on their way too?”

“Yes. Fifteen of them. But they don’t know about Blink. They think we’re helping the prisoners escape on foot,” she explained.

“Holy fuck. What are we gonna do? Charles planning on nuking ‘em?”

“Well, kinda,” she said, glancing towards the ground. “A contained, partially-atomic blast Charles has been saving for the right sort of party.”

“He never fails to deliver, does he? And what if they hadn’t extracted all the prisoners?”

Rogue frowned a bit. “There were…debates about that. In the end, I only agreed to call if I knew they were all out.”

“Hell,” he murmured, when, suddenly the sound of gun shots rang out and Logan was so quickly standing on his feet he almost fell over again. Marie was at the door, looking through the tiny pane of glass that had a view to the outside.

“Who are they shooting, Marie?” Logan asked.

“The guards,” she said warily. “Someone’s shooting the leftover guards.” Logan seethed, sweat forming on his forehead just from the effort of standing.

“I guess someone’s here early to the party,” he muttered, and she turned around to look at him, new fear in her eyes. “What do we do?” he asked.

“We need to stall them. Charles needs more time. We’re supposed to meet Blink at the portal in Block A in ten minutes or…”

“He’ll bomb the place anyway,” Logan finished.

“I tried communicating to him again, but I’m no telepath. If he’s not actively listening for some reason…”

The footsteps got closer, and there was frantic shouting outside of the door.

“And they think you’re on their side, right?” Logan murmured.

“Well, sort of,” she said, looking up at him, knowing there was no more time to explain.

“So, we play along…until we don’t,” he muttered. Her look grew more solemn and she nodded just slightly, before turning to face the door once more.

As the sounds got closer, he noticed she had reached out instinctively, taking his hand in hers. He reflexively wrapped his fingers around it, and it felt warm and good and right. They stood like that for a moment, staring at the door, that rectangular shaft of light coming through the glass pane, before breaking apart seconds before it opened.

Suddenly the room was flooded with new soldiers in gas masks and riot gear, and the world blurred. Logan unsheathed his claws reflexively, knowing damn well the wounds wouldn’t heal afterward, driving his fist up into one of the men, before turning, realizing they had already grabbed Marie and that she was helpless to resist, her strength gone.

Two men pounced on Logan, and he fought hard to shake them, slicing an arm off one of them. Suddenly the man was screaming, a geyser of blood where his arm should have been, before another
man drove the back of his gun straight into Logan’s temple. The metal of his skull held, but the room danced. As he struggled to come to himself again, another man shot a couple bullets at him, one directly hitting his calf and his legs crumpled beneath him.

They had him on the ground now, a boot dangerously close to his head, dozens of more guns pointed directly at him. From his hazy vision, he saw a soldier hold Marie’s arms behind her back roughly. Logan struggled at the weight of the men who held him down, growling as he did so.

Finally, Logan could make out a few more people filing into the place, but this time they were impeccably dressed, and one man was in a white lab coat.

“Rogue,” a man said, donned in a pinstriped suit in the center of them all, one that Logan didn’t recognize. “Where are they?”

Marie said nothing, looking sharply at the ground in front of the man’s feet, willfully diverting her gaze from Logan. He could feel her burning up from here.

“Rogue, we’ve been around the whole perimeter, and there are no prisoners to speak of. Let alone any X-Men.

“Your lookin’ at one of them, bub,” Logan growled roughly from the floor. The boot that kept his head on the ground lowered slightly, and he felt the terrible pressure in his brain get worse. Pinstripes turned to him then, leering.

“Yes…the mighty Wolverine. Your reputation outdoes you, I’m afraid,” he said. “Somehow Rogue managed to apprehend you.”

“She’s pretty strong,” he threateningly taunted from the floor.

“And also for some reason gave up that strength to put an inhibition collar on herself,” the man said, obviously skeptical.

“We were detained by guards who thought we were strays,” Rogue said calmly to the room.

“Fine…you offer us the Wolverine, but no Charles Xavier, no Ororo Munroe, no Erik Lensherr. I’m beginning to wonder Rogue, have you gone soft for these people?”

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” she spat. “I’ve been working for Trask covertly for over seven years, supplying you with information.” Logan’s mind struggled to work properly. What had she said? Since Hank. So, she had been wrapped up in this longer than a few months. Much longer.

“Both blocks are empty,” the man in a white lab coat said. “Except for a few juvenile mutants in the medbay in Block A.”

Just then, he saw the quickest of glances from Rogue, her eyes knowing and intense. Fuck. Just like this med bay, the doors must have stayed close. So they hadn’t gotten them all out.

“Rogue, I’m just going to assume there is more you’re willing to share and you’re being…hesitant. It’s that or you have wasted our time, which is indefensible.”

“Charles is in the sky, that’s all I know,” she said quietly, evenly. The greying man in pinstripes sneered, and turned back over to Logan.

“Lift him up,” he said. Logan anticipated what was coming, and there were a few precious moments where he braced himself.
“Do it,” he ordered to one of the soldiers, and then one of them was driving a knife up into the right side of Logan’s chest, missing his heart by a few centimeters. The pain cracked and sizzled, his vision fading for a few seconds as he angrily yelled, muscles straining as he writhed against the men who held him down.

“You sure that’s it?” the man in the suit said, looking back at Rogue.

Rogue’s face was completely, absolutely blank, eyes dark and opaque. As the man turned to her, she said nothing, and then he was giving the order and the soldier was twisting the knife again, and Logan knew it was now nicking vital organs. He felt his blood pressure lowering, felt his body struggling to maintain its pulse, the taste of iron blooming in his mouth. The man in the suit leaned down next to him, smiling insidiously, before he nodded once more to the soldier and the knife twisted again. Logan's scream turned into a harsh growl as he gritted his teeth severely, before managing to spit a spray of blood in the fucker’s face.

He sneered at Logan, taking off his glasses and wiping them on his sleeve, before standing, looking back at Rogue. Meanwhile, the soldier had left the knife still embedded in Logan’s chest. Logan’s vision was going black around the edges, and he could feel his consciousness beginning to slip. Marie was still standing in the same spot, but he could tell her muscles were taught. And then, it all clicked into place. He knew what she was going to do.

No.

“Still nothing, Rogue?” the man was shouting. “Should we bring the children in here and-”

Just then, at lightning speed, Rogue kneed the man hard that had relaxed his grip on her, getting enough access to whip her hand free. Logan watched as, in one swift move, she yanked the collar off from the back of her neck, wincing as she pulled its needles out of the top of her spine, then she had dodged to the left, using her bare hand to grab the man in the white lab coat by his uncovered wrist. Instantly, men were on her, but she now easily shoved them off. Gun shots rang out, flying into her left shoulder, and she screamed out in pain, but she had already dropped the medical officer with her deadly touch, eyes alight now with his knowledge. Throwing her body into another soldier that sent him flying across the room, she seized the portable reader off the body in the white lab coat and punched in a code. Just then, Logan felt his own collar unsnap, and his body flew to work, strength and vitality coming back to him in one, overwhelming rush.

Marie watched as Logan ripped the knife out of his chest and began mowing men over as fast as he could, even as a rain of new bullets poured down on him. He growled, carving them up, as some of the people fled in different directions, realizing what Rogue had unleashed on them all. She staggered over to him then, a searing pain still in her shoulder, but managed to find him in the fray.

“Med Bay A, now!” she shouted, and then they were running out the door, flying to the other side of the prison. Behind, she heard boots running after them and, above, the roar of a jet.

*Logan! Rogue! Hurry! The Mark X's have targeted the Blackbird. We need you on this plane now!*

They turned the corner and they were now in Block A, and she practically slammed into the door of the still-locked room of the med bay, trying to focus as the man she had taken in screamed inside of
her head.

*Shut him up for me!* she shouted to the inward Logan, as she sifted through the memorized codes from his consciousness, looking for the right one.

The man’s screaming finally subsided, and a sweat had formed on her brow as she typed in the correct number. She could still hear Logan behind her fighting a fresh swell of armed gunman off, trying to offer her cover.

*He’s contained now, but, Marie...*

*I know.*

*Baby, you have minutes.*

*I know, sugar.*

She was inside the room now, and she turned around wildly to see three children. A girl, the youngest, no older than six, was unconscious on a cot. Two older boys sat huddled in the corner, looking terrified. They all had the mark: an angry, violent M carved red onto the side of their faces.

“Logan!” she cried, and he was already inside, scooping up the unconscious girl in his arms. She motioned toward the door at the other two, helpless to grab their hand or touch them in any way.

“Let’s go!” she shouted.

They silently looked at each other for a moment before they got up and followed her, and now they were careening down Block A, rows and rows of empty cells, the doors still open, flying past them, Rogue and the two younger boys finally catching up. In front of her, she saw Logan cradling the soft, brown curls on the back of the girl’s head as he ran, her thin, limp arm slung over his broad, muscular shoulder, and Marie’s heart broke.

Meanwhile, inside, something dark had started seizing up, a thick black web that had started sticking to her lungs.

*Marie.*

*I know.*

Ahead of them, finally, the portal was snapping open in a purple and black snarl, and, around them, the walls of the building started to shake. Logan was already helping the kids through, before climbing through the portal himself. That’s when she stopped, planted to the ground, just beyond the divide between his life and her own.

Logan whipped his head back to her, a wild, questioning look dancing in his fierce, golden eyes.

“Come ON!” he roared.

“No,” she said simply.

“Marie!”

“It’s done, baby,” she said, her voice struggling, while the world, the awful, awful world they lived in fell apart around them. Outside, she could feel the air tighten, the heavy metal falling toward the earth, the promise of destruction on the wind.
“You knew…” he finally breathed. She said nothing, closing her eyes momentarily before opening them again, letting the last of her guard fall away, finally showing him everything she was.

“You knew it would come to this. That’s why, last night, you wouldn’t…” he stopped, voice breaking.

“I love you,” she said, fiercely, just beyond the rift. “You hear me? I love you. Always have.”

“Marie, baby, don’t do this,” Logan begged, but, as he reached for her again, she took a step backward, while also pressing him back through the portal from where he had tried to reach her. She was stronger than him; he couldn’t stop her.

“I’ll see you in another life, sugar. A better one.”

“No. Baby, baby-”

No.

Alarms screamed around them, the rumble of boots closed in on her, the walls cracked, and she looked at him one last time before the portal snapped closed, and they were all gone.

Now

The autumn breeze that rustled the leaves outside flew in through the open window of the lake house as he worked. Despite the chilly temperature, sweat dripped from his brow, a drop here and there seeping into the wooden floor boards underneath him. He was in the process of replacing them, stripping the old and laying down the new, one by one, piece by piece. Suddenly, he heard her in the doorway, and he looked up, wiping his forehead as he did so.

“You bored?” he said through a slight grin. He had been dragging Laura to the lake house almost every weekend now, after he had set up an agreement with the bank, who currently owned it, to remodel it as a sort of occupational hobby. He claimed it was about getting better at his craft, but, secretly, he liked putting work into this place. It wasn’t his, but it made it feel something close to it. The bank had apathetically agreed, seemingly unbothered by his scraping around the place, especially if it was going to raise the value of the home.

“You bored?” he said through a slight grin. He had been dragging Laura to the lake house almost every weekend now, after he had set up an agreement with the bank, who currently owned it, to remodel it as a sort of occupational hobby. He claimed it was about getting better at his craft, but, secretly, he liked putting work into this place. It wasn’t his, but it made it feel something close to it. The bank had apathetically agreed, seemingly unbothered by his scraping around the place, especially if it was going to raise the value of the home.

“Sort of,” she finally said, picking at the chipping paint of the front doorway.

“Go explorin’,” he said through a smirk, finally standing and stalking over to grab a beer from the three or four he had brought with him in the cooler. He popped the top off, as she rolled her eyes.

“I already did that,” she said unenthusiastically.

“I don’t know what to tell ya, kid. Couple more hours here, at least,” he said, before taking a long drink of the lager.

“You could always help me,” he said after setting down the beer, looking down at the mess on the floor. Laura sighed, before turning back to the outside.

“Don’t you dare think of driving that Bronco off somewhere,” he shouted after her, and she stopped, turning back to him, smiling a bit, before wheeling back around.
“And Laura, stay within sight of the lake house, ok?”

“Si, papa!” she shouted, waving her hand up at him.

He wasn’t sure how much time had passed, but down on the lake he could feel the ripples lapping and the geese honking across its surface. The old radio he had bought would incrementally fade in and out with music as he worked. His hands had started aching after a while from the continual grip on the hammer, and he stopped once more after some time, rubbing his right shoulder, the one that she had once done some damage to, what felt like lifetimes ago.

He thought of her, then, and it was the first time in a long time that he didn’t shut down the memory. He let it float by lazily in the fading light, before he finally stood, hearing something that sounded like rustling down by the stairs. It was good timing; he was finishing up and he could round up Laura to leave to get home in time for dinner.

“Hey Laura, what’s five times five?” he asked playfully, walking through the threshold between the house and world beyond.

“Come on, kid, that’s an easy one,” he said, wiping his hands before looking up. But there was no one there. And the noise had been…?

“Laura?” he asked, looking around a little bit more, his voice growing more cautious.

“Laura?”

The lake, the shore, the house, the car. Nothing but the breeze, nothing but the cool wind, kicking up the dust in the near-dark.

Chapter End Notes

Me (practically whispering to reader): Now would be a good time to go watch Days of Future Past: The Rogue Cut, if you haven’t in a while.

Reader: Please don’t say you’re doing this.

Me: Oh, we’re doing it. It had to happen.

Reader: You…frustrate me.

Me: I can give you my Google Play password, if you need it.

Reader: …

Me: I know you own the Blue-ray anyway.

Reader: Fuck. You.
“Mind your watch, my baby... 
Night's not over yet.”

- Say Anything, “Baseball, but Better”

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Part 2

Chapter 13: Then

2023 - Eight Years Later

--

Marie.

...

Marie.

...

Darlin’.

Wha? What, Logan?

Time to wake up now.

I don’t…want to.

Enough of this.

Enough of what?

This. You gotta get up now. You gotta face it.

I can’t.

You gotta job to do. That ice prick’s in the building. So is Erik. They’re not far off. They need you.

No one needs me.

Liar. Don’t start it with the self-pity.
I just want to stay here. With you.

How many times I gotta tell ya? It ain’t real, darlin’.

Real enough.

You deserve more.

You’re enough.

I can’t be with you baby, although you don’t know how goddamn much I wish I could. Every fucking day. But I can’t.

But…all this time… you’ve been there, kept me sane during, during… the worst of it. He hasn’t.

I know. But he probably thought you were dead. Or maybe he’s dead.

He can’t die.

Oh he’ll die one of these fucking days. He better hope he’s dead, at least, or he has some explaining to do.

Logan….I’m scared.

I know. But it’s time to wake up, baby. They need you.

They need you.

Wake up.

Marie.

Wake up!!

--

She was on the edges of a vivid dream, she thought, as the Blackbird regained its speed after the attack, the dark hazy world screaming around them. For a long time, she thought she was dead, or in some kind of purgatory, another star in the installation of one of Dante’s outer circles. She had existed this way for what felt like months, until, one black night, he had come back to her, the man inside her head, and they began to speak quietly in her own mind, shrouded in darkness. For years, like this, as she was medically brought in and out of comas, the experiments while she was conscious so intolerable at times that she could barely take it. But he had been there, keeping her alive, keeping her sane, refusing to let her slip into that uncharted current, that drifting oblivion.

And out there? What had been bad had only slipped into something unbearable. Bobby had died getting her out, and then everything was a whirlwind, the Blackbird, seeing Charles and Erik, the attack on the jet. A state of firm shock had a tight grip on her, but as the Blackbird descended to the temple below, an uneasy feeling of reality took hold. Before she got off the plane, she already knew.

As they walked through the solid doors of the temple, the light danced in the room, the colors odd and irregular, so very much unlike the dark they all knew. The people around her had witnessed the sort of shadow the world now harbored, but Marie’s dark had been the one you can only experience
through closed, unconscious eyes. Each step made her quiver, as she turned the corner and there he
was, in all the chaos, still alive, still a bright, steady pulse in a galaxy that threatened to be snuffed
out. Always the vigilant Wolverine, the refusal to die, the refusal to give in, even though he had
earned his right to a shred of peace decades and decades earlier.

His appearance was mildly shocking. Of course, he looked even more hardened, they all did. But she
noticed the grey on his temples had bloomed, the lines on his face slightly more pronounced.

*Fuck, he looks older, at least for him. Fucking war did a number on him,* the Logan in her head
murmured.

The Logan in front of her was asleep, somehow absent, lost in the past, but his brow was furrowed
in concentration, or frustration. She noticed, too, he was strapped down to the table, his knuckles
dried with blood, and that’s when her glance slid up to Kitty. The other woman was struggling to
hold on, and Rogue realized immediately what had happened.

*They want you to take over,* he whispered. *They need your power, one last time.*

*They’re using me.*

*So? He needs you. They need you. Take it from her, Marie.*

Kitty crumpled to the floor when Rogue clasped her hand, the pull not taking near as much effort as
it usually did, and Rogue realized that Kitty was likely dying, her weak spirit now filling Rogue’s
consciousness. Then Marie was leaning down, reaching over, the power of what she could now do
strong in her capable hands. So strange, to hold someone in place, to hold someone in the past. She
cradled time itself between her two palms, with Logan’s mind nestled in between them. She could
feel him there, and he was strong, so strong, and resilient. It was like holding a heavy weight while
being suspended in mid-air. No support, no bracing or solid foundation underneath them.

As the night wore on, people began dying. Storm’s presence suddenly ripped away from them, then
Bishop’s. Dutifully, Rogue held on, trying as hard as possible to keep him grounded in the past. And
then, he started shouting in pain, convulsing on the table. His mind also bucked wildly, trying to free
itself of the jump, of the torn reality he was experiencing. She held him there still. His claws ripped
through his hands again, and then he was choking, suffocating somehow, and she still held him. She
was silently crying when she heard the floor start to rumble, the room tightening, Logan still gasping
for breath, his mind growing lighter, parts of him falling away. The sentinels were here, and still she
held him. The last moments, their deaths, or their rebirths, she held on, until the life that they had
known fell away and it was him and it was her in a black hole, a dead star, slowly compacting
everything and everyone down into a flat, black sphere, a decaying universe. And still, through it all,
she held him.

--

For eight years: the world burning. Bombs falling from the sky, shards of metal and glass glinting off
the sun from the wing of the Blackbird. Women being injected with serums that would render them
barren, because they carried a recessive X-gene. Storm’s face falling into grief as he held her close,
both of them having barely escaped a children’s internment camp, with no one left to rescue. For
eight years: day by day, life by life, until what little semblance of humanity they had left in them
corroded, drying up into something bitter and wrong.

And then, the new plan. Kitty would hold him in the past, keep him there, and they would alter
history. But then…something had changed. Someone else had kept him there, her ivory hands lingering just at his temples. She was on the brink, hovering just beyond the edge. It was her, he could have fucking sworn it. But what that meant…Logan stopped the thought in its tracks, and Charles opened his eyes slowly, staring at him in concern.

“Dear god,” the professor said quietly, staring back at Logan. “Your memories are as sharp and clear as they were all those years ago.”

Logan said nothing, feeling a small frown on his face form. He sat in a chair opposite of Charles’ desk of his office. What he couldn’t get over was how quiet everything seemed. A small clock ticked in the corner. The sound of light laughter outside the door. Fucking footsteps. All normal sounds that Logan couldn’t quite figure out. Since finding Charles in his office, he had been in here for hours, the new, bright world around him calling from the outside, a call he wasn’t sure yet he wanted to answer.

“Your thoughts of Rogue…” Charles murmured. Logan stiffened.

“Yeah,” he muttered. “I think someone found her, somehow. Something must have happened to Kitty. They made the switch. I don’t know why, but I remember feeling it.”

“It probably kept you in the past, which enabled us to finish what we began,” Charles said solemnly. They said nothing for a moment, letting the truth sit between them.

“You thought she had died,” Charles murmured. Again, Logan said nothing, arms crossed.

“But Logan, if you’ll permit me, I believe understanding what happened will take several sessions, and, trust me in this regard, I want to be sure I have the whole story. But there is…much…to sift through. Also, as soon as possible, the faculty will need to know what has happened here today, what happened then.”

“Why?” was the first word out of Logan’s mouth.

“For one, you are an entirely different person than when you retired for the evening yesterday. People will notice soon, and begin to ask questions.”

“I don’t…feel any different. How the hell am I different?” he asked.

“You’re still you…. but now have impossibly different memories and experiences that have helped to shape your perspective.” Logan frowned, but still said nothing.

“And what happened with Jean and Scott… and then with Rogue—” Charles began, before Logan immediately cut him off.

“I’ve put them out of my mind for a long time, Charles. A long time. It was about survival,” he said plainly.

“And I trust you understand… that now everyone is different. That now, they are different people, especially those born after the time I found you when we first met in the early seventies.”

“Yeah, I got it,” Logan bristled.

“I can restore some of the previous memories of what you experienced after DC.”

“I’d rather not. Got enough memories for a couple of lifetimes, professor. And it doesn’t seem like I had a lot of fun after that anyway.”
“That is partially my fault, my friend” Charles said, a deep frown contorting his features, and Logan was reminded of the other Charles, the one before the jump. “By the time we went looking for you, someone had found you first.”

“Don’t sweat it Charles,” he muttered. “It’s in the past now. Apparently.”

“Some of the experiences were the same, but as I am reading your thoughts, for as many memories that have a similar shape, some are wildly variant from what they used to be.”

“Yeah, well, I’ve seen some shit,” Logan said caustically. Charles offered a small smile at this, and for a moment the other man’s lightness broke through Logan’s steadily souring mood, and Logan offered a small grin back.

“Indeed you have, my friend,” Charles murmured. “But it’s good to have you back.” Logan frowned for a moment, recalling memories he had left dormant for years in the time of war. To place himself back in the world of Westchester, in the world of the X-Men restored to everything they once were, was an odd feeling indeed. It was the first time in a long time he had permitted himself to think about them all, and then, as these thoughts persisted, another gnawing fear rose to the top.

“How’d I end up here, Charles?” he almost whispered.

“She wasn’t there with you, Logan,” he said solemnly.

“That’s not what I asked,” Logan countered, a bit bitterly.

“It’s the question you wanted answered, though,” Charles said, without pretense.

Logan exhaled, the frustration coming back to him, and he suddenly was filled with the urge to stand. He did so, and began pacing the room a little.

“Can you just…give me the rest of the day? Tell ‘em if you have to, whatever you think is best, but I think I’m gonna go for a ride, see some normal shit. Take in a bit of the scenery.”

“The concept of normal, my friend, is entirely relative,” Charles said, looking back up at him. “But that is a completely understandable request. If it’s alright with you, we’ll come back together tonight as a faculty, and tell the rest of them then.”

“Looking forward to it,” Logan grumbled.

“For now, Logan,” Charles added with a knowing glance and a small smile, “Go enjoy the world’s beauty. You’re the one that saved it.”

--

The garage was the same, in the same eerie way the whole fucking school was, and while most of it was becoming steadily more off-putting, when he happened upon the shiny, polished metal, the surface gleaming and winking at him in the light, he felt grateful that some things hadn’t changed. He smiled to himself, running his hand over the smooth surface. She was well cared for, this machine, a beautiful thing to behold. And then the beauty became power as the growl and rumble of the engine purred under him as he gripped the clutch, in the way only a classic, combustion engine could, and then the Davidson V-Rod was flying through the forested, winding roads of upstate New York.
Deafened by the roar of the engine in his ears, he drove for a long time, his path winding and without direction. He hadn’t seen the fucking sky this clear in years. It was a bright blue, all the color filled into the world again. The pollution, in the old place, had been unbearable at times, particularly for Logan’s senses. Through the crisp air of a good day, the wind flying around him, Logan steadily gained a greater sense of control, as he leaned into the curves, and took the edges hard, the powerful engine and his uneasy mind working as one.

The thing about a bike, Logan knew, was that it was a bike. That was all. Maybe the style or the body changed, but the mechanisms were all the same. It did the one thing. Nature was similar that way, too. No matter the pattern of the wood, the circles for each passing year infused into the timber, a pine tree’s sole purpose was simply to grow, reach toward the sky. To achieve this, it didn’t need to be filled in on the state of the world. It survived or it didn’t, letting the inevitability of its existence just be. Logan knew the animal inside him was the same. It was what it was. Entirely predictable in its movements, needs and wants. Always demanding the same, simple things, no matter what the rest of him was doing. Rest. Eat. Kill. Fuck. In all of his years alive, his instincts hadn’t changed.

But as for the rest of him? The part that Marie had so determinedly said was human? For the rest…

It had been a fucking trip seeing Jean. The last time he had been that close to her he had been ending her life. She had had an ethereal, eerie quality that seemed to haunt her, a solemnity that spoke to a past she no longer was a part of. Scott, too, had been a shock. Those people had been ghosts to him for a very long time, twenty years almost, and something about them didn’t quite seem real, even as they spoke and breathed and walked out of Charles’ office and down the hall this morning. But, as for Marie…

He had subtly been tracking her scent and the sounds she had made all morning before he had left, while in Charles office, sensing her move through this room and that. Her scent was different, somehow, still nectar and earth, but it was now inlaid with a hundred other things that hung like mysteries in the air. But there was nothing ghostly about her. She was real, warm and heart beating steady in her chest. He could sense her fears and anxieties as she moved through her day. He realized after some time listening to her that she was teaching classes and had also taken a break for coffee, and then the crisp sound of her taking a bite of a small apple for lunch. So very much like the Marie he had encountered that day in Mexico, the Marie he had known.

And the fucking platinum in her hair. How had that happened? Had it been him, up there on lady liberty’s torch, giving life back to her? Had he been there in that hole in the wall in Laughlin, feigning apathy as he let her climb into the passenger seat? Charles had laid that question to rest though, Logan reminded himself. She hadn’t been there. But what about the rest?

I love you. You hear me? I love you.

Logan closed his eyes. That was too fucking much. He had spent years replaying what he had thought had been her death in his mind, what had happened in that med bay, what he could have done differently so she hadn’t felt the need to selflessly offer up her own fucking beautiful life to save his sorry excuse for one. Over and over again, the way she had looked when she had happened upon the children, her strength throwing off the guards as she ran, the world burning in her eyes, the veins in his heart combusting for her as she gave it all up. She hadn’t let him have her that night in the barracks, so afraid that his taking of all of her body, effectively claiming her, would leave him all the more heartbroken. She had been wrong about that, though. Logan, despite the animal inside of him, was still a man. A human being. And it had been a fucking tragedy.

Logan slowed the bike for a moment, deciding to turn off the main road and kill the engine. He hopped off it, suddenly no longer comfortable with the loud noises it was making, and he felt a little
manic as he stalked around the side of the empty backroad. He could feel himself panicking slightly
and, for a moment, he closed his eyes, listening to what the world around him was saying. The tall
pines, the moss on the ground, the scents and sounds harboring him, the wolverine finally drinking
his fill.

She had held him in time. He fucking knew it. What had happened on that fucking table? Where had
she been since? Why hadn’t she come back to him? Had she saved him? Had she watched the
sentinels tear down the door, stared right into the faces of those fuckers? How many had suffered the
pain of dying again, and again, to hold him there, in the past? Had she died? As the forest stood tall
around him, quiet and still, Logan already knew he had come back from something, something close
to the brink of death. He might have actually died in that fucking river. But now, he was alive. And
what did that mean?

He thought of the school again. It was Xavier’s, but it also wasn’t. Coming down that hallway, down
the stairs, the place bustling, full of students and laughter and life, he had felt relieved that it had
worked, but it was also a funhouse mirror, where everything looked wrong, even if it felt the same.
That wasn’t his Marie in there, clasping that prick’s hands in hers as the morning light littered the
hallway. The Wolverine growled in disagreement, and he once again ignored the animal. It didn’t
matter if she had been alive long enough to see him in the last few hours of a timeline that was now
done with. Marie, *his* Marie, had still died that day at Two Rivers, choosing to stay while he could
do nothing but leave. And his thoughts, his memories of her, were the only sort of quiet requiem she
was likely to get.

---

Logan had made his way back to the school eventually, a steadily growing hunger in his gut, and he
realized he hadn’t remembered the last time he had eaten anything. The dining room was quiet, and
he got the sense that the students were about to start their last round of classes. He sniffed around the
place for a bit, a little crestfallen to see most things were between meals and there wasn’t much
available in terms of food, but the aroma that had called out to him in the first place was dutifully
promised.

He sat near the window at a smaller table, quiet and still, and took his first sip of the hot, strong
coffee. It was the first time he had something like this in at least three or four years. The aroma
flooded him, the mark of the espresso beans bold and pungent in his nose, and he settled into the
mug for a bit, the steam rising up to greet him. Of the few kids that were idly moving about, no one
seemed to bother him. He wondered if they were avoiding him; God knows, to them, he probably
looked like a dazed idiot today. But to have a moment without the tension, the constant looming
threat of attack, was miraculous. And he planned to relish it.

Just then though, over his steaming mug of coffee, distracted in his contentment, he had missed the
warning signs of her approach, and he found himself staring right into her chocolate eyes. She was
standing next to the table, holding books in her hands, her streaming long hair falling softly over her
shoulders. She wasn’t a girl, hadn’t been for a long time. She was older than when he had even seen
her last, then he had ever seen her really, by several years. She had to be approaching her late thirties
now, but she was still all long brown hair and doe eyes and a beautiful physique. As always, fucking
gorgeous.

“Hey,” she said quietly, seeming concerned.
“Hey yourself,” he said before he could stop the words, and winced at his token response. She didn’t seem to notice though, taking the seat opposite of him. They sat there like that for a while, Logan peering at her beyond his coffee mug he kept close to his chest. She still hadn’t shaken that mild look of concern, and maybe, now that he was really looking at her, also vague annoyance.

“So, spill,” she finally said. Logan said nothing in response.

“What’s got you acting so strange? And where have you been for the past five hours? Scott and I had to cover your classes,” she said, moving her hand up to tuck a strand of platinum hair behind her ear, the soft pads of her fingers running through the silken locks. *Fuck.* This was going to be harder than he thought.

“Havin’ an off day,” he murmured through gritted teeth as his grip on the mug tightened.

“That’s not a very good excuse,” she grumbled.

“Yeah, well, I’m not in the mood for giving excuses right now.”

“What’s the matter with you? It’s like…you flipped off a light switch or something,” she was saying as she shifted her body uncomfortably in the chair.

“You so uncomfortable in the dark?” he asked bluntly. She looked at him strangely, while he was helpless to offer her a too-knowing glance in return, and she stiffened a bit. He knew he was confusing the hell out of her, but he didn’t feel like trying to explain. She’d know soon enough anyway, at least part of it.

“No. It’s just…today you’re so…”

“So what?”

“Far away,” she said, with a small frown. “Grumpy. Brooding.”

“Baby, you have no fucking idea,” he muttered before he could stop himself. Her eyebrows shot up at this remark, as she stared at him alarmingly.

“What?” he grumbled, suddenly all the more frustrated.

“Baby?” she asked.

Ah, fuck. Old habits did die hard. Unenthused with how uncomfortably she reacted to the nickname, he only offered her a moody shrug of the shoulders in response.

“I’ve gotta go,” she said, sighing and suddenly gathering up the books she had set down on the table again, the note of annoyance still in her voice.

“Where?” he asked. Again, she shot him a look like he had finally fucking lost it. She gestured to the books she was holding in her hands.

“Literature won’t teach itself,” she offered.

“Literature?”

“Yeah. It’s Tolstoy today. We’re working our way through the Russians, remember?” she asked, before shaking her head a little bit. “But you knew that…or did you forget about our deal?”

“Deal?” he asked. She offered an eye roll in response.
“You’re always trying to back out of these things. You promised to read *War and Peace*, if I paid you in pecan pie. You know. The kind you like. My mother’s recipe?”

He looked up at her then, the world blurring at a concept so fucking sweet he could barely breathe. Marie, making pies for him? Marie, alive and well and reading weighty books? Marie, standing in front of him, teasing him gently? The shock of it all, of today, he realized, was very quickly wearing off. She was so like herself sometimes it was terrifying.

“You still swim?” he murmured, before he knew better to shut up.

“What?” she asked, glancing down at her watch idly.

“You swim, at the pool here?” He didn’t know what had made him ask the question, but now he was dying for the answer.

“No. I mean, once in a rare while, but you know I’m not much of a swimmer,” she said, now seeming to quietly accept his strange mood. He kept staring at her, and he felt her grow uneasy. She gestured to the hallway.

“Literature calls,” she said.

“So we’re all a bunch of academics now?” he grumbled, realizing, like a damn addict, he didn’t want her to leave. She frowned a little, then offered a slight shrug of her shoulders.

“We work at a school. We teach. These kids have got to learn something. Speaking of, are you doing your last history class tonight or you just going to be lazy and have Scott teach it? Because his knowledge of the Byzantine Empire is shit.”

Logan couldn’t help but smirk at her sass, and he realized it was the first time he had done so since the conversation got started.

“Thinking of switchin’ disciplines,” he finally muttered.

“To what?” she asked.

“These kids could use some sparrin’ lessons,” he said.

“What are you talking about? We don’t let the kids spar.”

“We used to,” he said blankly. Again, her furrowed brow, the questions apparent on her face.

“No, we didn’t,” she said resolutely, before sighing, patting the books in her arms once more before heading for the hallway. “Get some rest, Logan,” she shouted after to him. “It looks like you need it.”

--

Logan sat through the first part of the meeting, mostly reticent. They were congregated in Charles’ office, Logan, Rogue, Storm, Scott, Jean, Charles, Peter, Kitty, Bobby. All the X-Men restored to their fucking glory. Logan had taken his usual place during meetings from so long ago leaning on the wall nearest the door so he could bolt if he needed to. He stared at their faces one by one, minimally disturbed at all these people alive and well all in the same room. Rogue stood over by Bobby, but
they weren’t making any sort of physical contact, likely because her gloves were off for some reason. *That asshole has always been afraid of her,* he thought, and then he fought back the foreign, bitter feeling of jealousy, shaking his head a bit as he did so.

Most of the meeting was tedious and a bit dull. There was talk of curriculum planning, of attrition rates. The population at the school had been in a steady decline, and no one seemed to have a very good clue as to why. They also appeared to have conflicting solutions, Storm arguing the need for a better advertising campaign, and Logan chuckled at this from his spot toward the back.

“Something funny, wiseass?” Scott asked turning to look at him.

“Since when did we advertise? It’s not like these kids pay tuition,” he offered back.

“It’s about letting them know we’re out there, Logan,” Storm said solemnly. He looked to her, and instantly it was her face from the time before, tears in her eyes, as he turned to embrace her in her grief for the world that was constantly burning. A shiver went down Logan’s spine. He felt the need to clear his throat.

“Fair point, Storm,” he finally murmured, dropping it.

After a while the subject tapered off, and, lastly, Charles settled his gaze on Logan, and Logan nodded curtly back offering his approval to get started.

“Friends, the last thing I have to share with you is… significant. And it involves Logan,” he said. He saw Rogue instantly look up to him, and for a moment he locked eyes with hers, hazel and brown meeting, as Charles continued on. “Cyclops, Storm, Jean, you grew up knowing Mystique, were taught about her…heroism in school. Trask Industries was effectively dissembled after Erik’s blunder in DC.” They seemed to all nod at that, like it was a well-known fact, straight out of one of Logan’s student’s history books. Again, Logan felt the unease growing. For him, that had been…what? Yesterday? Maybe the day before? *Shit.* Marie had been right. He needed some fucking sleep.

Charles went on, and Logan only half-listened. For the most part, he let Charles speak, offering up a nod here and there for agreement, trying to maintain his noncommittal exterior. After only a few minutes in, though, most of the people in the room were actively staring at him with increasing alarm and concern, and he felt himself becoming uneasy under their gaze. He hated this kind of attention.

“So, you’re saying…he’s not…who he was?” Scott was asking.

“That’s correct, Scott,” Charles said.

“And we were also so close to something… impossibly terrible,” Storm murmured. Logan’s attention peaked at this comment, a new wave of cynicism overtaking him at Storm’s choice of words.

“You *were* in something terrible, Storm. You and me and Charles, for most of it. And, for a while, Rogue,” Logan murmured, and he could see her look up to him again, her eyes darkening as she stared at him. He stared right back at her blankly, too tired to offer the decency of anything verging on reassuring or comforting.

“And Jean and I?” Scott asked.

“Dead long before things got started,” Logan grumbled.

“Shit,” Scott said, and Logan couldn’t help but tiredly grin a little at Scott’s humor.

“And I know, to you all, it sounds impossible to believe, a legend or fairytale at best, but I have
recently begun witnessing the memories from Logan’s mind, and let me assure you, what happened was very, very real. We live in a time of peace, now, where humans ultimately champion us, because of his efforts.”

“Yours too, Charles,” Logan murmured, reminding the man for whom this had all happened fifty years previously.

“Thank you, my old friend,” Charles offered in return. The others all stared at the two for a moment, Logan’s and Charles relationship suddenly appearing far more mature and evolved than it probably had been the day before. There was some silence, before another question hit the air.

“But, professor, what I don’t understand is…. if it had already happened to you, why wait to tell us?” Everyone turned around at that comment, and Logan realized that it had been Rogue to ask the question.

“I only knew part of the story, Rogue. And it didn’t seem…ethical…to deny the former version of Logan the decency of living his life. If you were all waiting for another one to appear, wouldn’t you have treated him differently?”

As they all tried to wrap their minds around this fact, Logan shot another look at Rogue.

He could tell she was becoming visibly upset. Oddly enough, she seemed to be the only one. For most of them it wasn’t a world they had ever experienced or known, and they had listened like children at a nightly bed time story. It was real, Charles had urged them, but even hearing it out loud Logan knew it felt fictitious. A tall tale. A story that might have not happened, actually now, Logan reminded himself, never had happened. But Rogue seem disturbed deeply by the news. He had no fucking clue as to why, although her inner rage and passionate urge for justice reminded him momentarily of the Marie he had known back in Africa.

As the meeting finally adjourned, everyone but Charles filed out silently. Scott clasped a hand on Logan’s shoulder, and Storm had offered Logan a brief hug, which he found himself appreciating. He was accustomed to the smell of her especially, fighting alongside of her for so long, and it felt good, familiar, to have it in his near vicinity again. He sighed then, determined on getting a head start out the door before the rest of them could. He was growing steadily more resolved on some getting some rest and hoping to hell his former self had squirreled away some whiskey somewhere, because it had been a while since he had had that, too, when he heard her footsteps quickening in the hallway, brushing past Bobby and all the rest, intent on catching up to him.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

“Logan, wait!” Rogue said, before she caught up to him, grabbing his wrist with her bare hand, and a shock of surprise flew through him. He stared down at her hand, unbelieving, before he looked up at her cuttingly. It was almost as if she had burned him, but of course, that wasn’t right, because her skin wasn’t working. As her eyes widened in response to his reaction, she let her hand drop helplessly.

“You can control it?” he asked cautiously, before he could help himself. He saw her blush, the rosy color working her way up her pale cheeks, and he winced at what the sight of it did to him. The others walked down the hallway awkwardly around them, Bobby waiting for her frustratingly for a moment, before stalking off down the hall alone.

“How?” she finally asked. Logan breathed out, too exhausted and drained to offer up any sort of meaningful response.

“Be more specific, Rogue,” he said a bit moodily.
“How did you know that I used to not be able to… control it?” she whispered barely enough for even Logan to hear her. “No one knows that but Charles.” Logan felt his eyebrow raise characteristically to that response. Well, that was fucking different.

“Did you not hear Charles just tell you the story, kid? A lot of things ain’t the same,” he said. He felt her stiffen at this, folding her arms around her uncomfortably, the nickname making her look all of a mere seventeen again. As she seemed to realize the unease his quip had made her feel, a new swell of anger blossomed on her face.

“You think you know me so well?” she murmured, a fire in her eyes.

“Baby, I helped write the fucking book on you,” he said simply, before walking off without another word.

--

It was the sword placed from on his mantel that Yashida had given him. It was the books on the shelves, stuffed with titles he didn’t recognize and wouldn’t likely care to read. It was the dog tags, the fucking dog tags, that he had thrown to Stryker’s feet a lifetime ago, suddenly reappearing, hanging idly off the closet door knob. He stared at them angrily for a moment when he had first noticed that, not daring to touch them.

It was the odd inconsistencies like these that sent his head spinning. All similar things just slightly out of place, some things he wouldn’t have picked for himself and others he would have. It was like another man had been in here with his things, living his life for a while. And, hell, had been so bloody long since he had owned anything, and now, it was all wrong. Who the fuck was this guy? Suddenly, Logan was reminded of being fresh out of Alkali, missing everything all over again, a blank slate. And, on that thought… he unsheathed his claws, double checking that they were still there, staring at the glinting metal, wholly unfazed. Well, some things had gone the same fucking way, at least. He retracted them instantly, intent on rummaging through the couple of cabinets in the place until he found what he was looking for. Finally, in a drawer in his desk, a small bottle of whiskey, half-empty, and a few fresh cigars. That’s more like it, you stupid fucker, he thought to whatever Logan had been mulling around this room last night. He didn’t even bother to wipe the left-over blood from his hands as he knocked some of the liquid back, and it burned harsh and good in his throat. He stood like that, for a while, breathing in the night air.

It was really messed up to think so, but Logan realized he felt homesick. Fucking homesick for a world so broken and ugly it was practically perverse of him to miss it. But, there it was, the truth hanging heavy in his mind. It had been a broken world, but it had been his world. That had been the world he had met Marie in, the world where they had shared those few fucking short weeks together in Mexico and Africa and Canada, the one he had fought so damn hard to save, the only world that had mattered. And now, it was gone.

But you did it, sugar. You saved them all.

Just like that, her voice, as clear as day in his head. Logan whipped around wildly, turning and finding nothing. The Rogue he had met today was still downstairs he guessed, from how far away her scent was. This, this was something entirely different.

“Marie?” he said aloud, to nothing but an empty room. There was no response, just his head spinning from the booze, his breath coming in hard, his senses heightened. A few moments passed like this, before he sighed, running a hand through his hair. He had to be insane, and sleep deprived. Fucking
figured. Logan was wise enough to know that he would always likely be tense, always poised and ready for the next fight to finally be his last.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this took me a long-ass time to get to you. I didn’t do any writing for a few days, a little bit because the last one took it out of me emotionally for some time, but mainly because I had to think about everything for a long while, working through the various events in DOFP, trying to understand and consider how Logan would have responded to seeing Marie, particularly given the eight year gap in the chapters. Needless to say, this one didn’t come easy. But I hope you enjoyed it! Thanks for all the love and support so far.

And, hey, I just noticed! It's this fic's one month anniversary. 65,000 words in a month ain't too shabby. I'm proud of myself!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Chapter 14: Now**

The contraption coughed and spat, and before it could start sputtering bubbles at him, he opened the damn thing, the heat throwing clouds of steam and—was that fucking smoke?—into the kitchen. He snarled a bit, hitting the thing with his boot, cursing under his breath.

That’s where Laura found him; hurling profanities at the dishwasher and physically abusing the thing. He whipped around like he had been caught robbing a bank, as he frustringly gestured to it.

“This thing is a piece of shit,” he growled, giving it one more light kick of his boot for good measure. Meanwhile, in the sink sat piles of plates, crusted bits of food stacked up high. It had been a few days since either of them had washed a dish, and it was becoming a fucking problem. Logan sighed, grabbing a hand towel off the counter and flicking on the faucet. Laura, meanwhile, was just about to sneak off back to her room, when he caught her.

“Uh uh, kid. This is your mess too.” She turned back around to look at him, before he handed her the dish towel. “I wash. You dry.”

A few minutes later, with one of the sink basins filled with warm soapy water, Logan was vigorously scrubbing a plate while Laura dried off a mug from the growing pile of wet, warm dishes sitting on the counter. He stifled a cough with the crook of his arm momentarily, before attacking the plate once more. If he was being honest, the hard work felt good, the warm water rushing over his oftensore hands welcoming. Another thing humans occasionally got wrong in their never-ending quest for convenience. Sometimes, it did a restless brain good to do it the old fashioned way.

“So,” he finally asked, glancing up to Laura. “You practice your Kata today like I told you to?”

She nodded a little bit, and he realized Laura was in one of her quiet moods. It had been a few days since the first day of school, and while she hadn’t been sent home again, he got the sense she was thoroughly miserable. The Kata, he thought, would help, running through the memorized physical movements, relying on your muscles to do something more than just get you from point A to point B. However, with quiet Laura who rarely shared her opinion, the jury was still out on if it was helping.

Logan, however, intent on getting her to talk, kept asking questions.

“So whatcha reading, lately?” he asked, as the dishes in the sink dwindled and her clean stack grew. It was obvious one of them was more intent on finishing the job than the other.

Logan knew what the answer was, at least partially. Nowadays, she was practically using Kay’s shop as a library of sorts. Sometimes he’d catch her quietly picking a dusty, neglected book for sale off the shelf, before sliding one that had been missing for a few days back in. If Kay had a problem with this, she never voiced it, and Logan noticed, upon seeing Laura with a different, familiar title every few days, Kay would smile a bit knowingly. He knew Laura’s English was growing in leaps and bounds because of it, but, it was doing little in the way of helping her make friends.

She smiled a bit, the first time he had seen her do so in a couple of days, hopping off where she was
sitting on the counter, and pulled out the book from her pack. Jane Austen’s Persuasion.

“That’s about…what exactly?”

“A woman is engaged, but they get separated for many years. They come back together again. Enamorarse una segunda vez. Another chance.”

The water was still running and hitting Logan’s hands, but he ignored it, staring at her carefully.

“That’s a little, uhh, sophisticated for middle school, don’t cha think?” Laura just shrugged her shoulders.

“I like it. It’s romantic. Like un cuento—what is the word people here use?—a fairy tale.” Logan looked at the young girl who was using a lot of grown up words and dancin’ around a lot of grown up ideas, and a terrifying fear instantly struck him.

“Uhh, and you um, know about… romance…and all that?” Laura’s eyes got a little bigger when she realized where he was going with this, and she started shaking her head vigorously.

“No, no- I mean, SI! Si, papa. You don’t have to explain anything to me. Entiendo,” she said hurriedly. Logan awkwardly cleared his throat, fucking relieved. He hadn’t even thought about having to explain that shit to her. God knows how she knew, or if she knew the whole story, but he was quickly realizing he had dodged a fucking bullet on that one. At least for now.”

“You know,” he finally said, snapping off the water and picking up another towel to help her dry the dishes now that he was finished, “You could put down those books down sometime, try making a few friends, now that you’re at school.”

Laura looked down a bit, quietly picking up another glass to dry from the counter and setting it back down once again.

“No one talks to me,” she murmured, holding the dishtowel a bit uselessly in her hand.

“None of the girls?” he asked cautiously.

“No. Tienen miedo. They’re afraid,” she said quietly.

“The boys?” Logan asked, blindly hoping for a different answer.

“Ellos tambien…” she drifted off. Logan sighed a bit, throwing the dish towel over his shoulder, crossing his arms after he did so.

“Well, have you tried...you know...actually talkin’ to them?”

“Que? About what?” Logan sighed. He was the last, literally the last, person who felt qualified for this conversation. Again, he mourned Charles’ absence and the professor’s way with students.

“Uhh, ask ’em ‘bout themselves? Say hello?” he lamely offered. She looked up to him a bit skeptically. Logan thought better for a moment, but then still decided to ask.

“Your friends… at the lab,” he murmured.

“Mi familia,” she corrected him.

“Yeah, well, how did you talk to them?” he asked her. She offered another slight shrug of her shoulders.
“Fuimos similares. We were the same…” she trailed off. Logan kneeled a bit to look at her more closely, an intentional non-verbal move that showed he cared, he was listening. He wanted to fix this.

“You might have things in common with these folk too. Just… different things, you know? How about your books?” he asked.

“Que?”

“They might read the same things. Or maybe some of the other, easier stuff you already read. Ask them about it,” he said, realizing it was a thin suggestion at best. She, however, glanced up at him a bit more hopefully.

“We all need a few people, kid. It can’t be just me. You’re gonna eventually need people your own age to talk to, huh? People who understand what you’re going through right now,” he offered.

“Si,” she murmured.

“You try tomorrow, eh? Ask ‘em about a book they’re readin’,” he said, extending his hand to take the dish towel from her.

“Si, papa,” she said, smiling a bit more, handing him the damp towel. He took it from her, throwing it over his shoulder along with the other.

“Hey kid,” he said, and she stared up at him again.

“Yeah?” she asked.

“You’re my daughter. You know that? I won’t let anyone mess with ya, if it came to it.”

She looked up at him quietly, but then started smiling widely at his admission, and he offered her a genuine smile back.

--

Logan woke coughing violently in the front seat of the darkened Bronco, lungs in abject protest and agony. He sat up helplessly, chest heaving in pain, and when it was over he groggily noticed a spatter of blood speckled the steering wheel of the parked car. He groaned, struggling to breathe, as he wearily looked around the cabin in the pale twilight, trying to figure out where he was.

And then, it came back to him: that bloody fucking scene. Staking around the place, tension and panic growing, helplessly tracking her scent. It had been winding, sprawling this way and that but then it had stopped, just near the side of the lake house where he had thought he had heard her. Logan had stood in the wet mud, heart pounding and lungs on fire as he circled the spot like some wild, rabid dog. The scent was there, and then it was gone, like someone had lifted her straight off the ground into the air. That night, his mind was manic, body in overdrive as he scoured every inch of the lake well into the night, walking its whole perimeter and ending up back at the house again, none the wiser.  The whole time he had been at it, his mind screamed Transigen at him over and over, but now the paranoid questions that came along with that truth filled him as he blindly searched the lake. How had they taken her right under his fucking nose? And, if they had taken her, where would they have gone? How could he find them? Would they head back to Mexico? Back to the US? As the questions and the string of endless possibilities swirled around him, his head danced with the lack of a steady flow of oxygen as his lungs struggled to keep working, his body exhausted from
the mindless searching. The Wolverine was out for blood, desperate to sink its claws into the nearest
ingthing and rip the jugular out of a throat, but Logan needed his rational brain if he was going to find
her. It was steadily becoming a fucking riddle, but, if it led to a fight, well, he’d find the will to give
the fuckers hell one last time.

Even as he had madly driven back to the apartment, ripping the place apart for any small sign, his
mind was already settling on the most likely course of action, a truth he couldn’t almost bear to face:
someone here had to have figured out who they were and that same someone had ratted them out.
Logan and Laura’s path north had been too winding, too unpredictable, and Logan knew that
Transigen was a blacklisted company in Canada. It was almost impossible for them to operate here,
even undercover. And why would they? Laura was a liability, yes, but for a behemoth corporation
like Transigen, it seemed unlikely that they would spend so much time and energy in a country
where their work was illegal looking for a single failed experiment. At that last thought, Logan’s
heart thudded heavily.

He had waited outside of that shitty little house that night, waiting for that fucker to come home. The
Mustang had finally rolled its way up into the drive, and he knew the man was drunk. As Dwayne
carelessly stumbled out of the car and up the path, Logan was silently behind him in an instant, a
hand to his mouth, extending his claws just enough to show the man he wasn’t fucking around. Even
in his diminished condition, Logan easily overpowered Dwayne as the other man kicked and
shouted, and Logan quickly and instinctively plunged his right set of claws into the other man’s foot.
As Dwayne began to scream, Logan quickly covered his mouth with a hand towel turned make-shift
gag as he threw the fucker to the browning, patchy grass in the narrow alley between the houses,
effectively limiting Dwayne from going anywhere.

“You scream, I torture you,” he breathed roughly, his body heaving, Dwayne’s eyes wide.

“Who the fuck was it?” Logan finally managed to say, his hulking form still looming over Dwayne.
Meanwhile, the smaller man was trying to drag himself further down the alley, while also trying to
brace his foot and stay the heavy flow of blood. Logan snarled, grabbing him by the throat and
throwing him against the side of the house. Dwayne still squirmed underneath his grip and Logan
made the snap decision to throw his claws into Dwayne’s right shoulder. Dwayne screamed one
more into the make-shift gag.

“Shut the fuck up!” he growled. “You try and go anywhere, you keep screaming, you fucking move,
I cause you more pain. You understand? Now, listen to me …who the fuck did you tell?” Logan
asked, before ripping the gag out of the man’s mouth so he could speak.

“I don’t-” he breathed heavily. “I don’t know what the hell you’re talking about man.”

“You had to say something to somebody…” Logan spat, but even as Logan said these words, he
could tell from his senses, as much as he didn’t want to admit it, that this sorry piece of scum was
telling the truth.

“The other guy,” Logan said suddenly, effectively switching his tactics. “Your body guard…who the
fuck was he?”

“Carl? He ain’t from here. Up for late-season hunting, he’s from outta…outta town.”

“You tell him anything?!”

“No man!” Dwayne practically shouted before grimacing again in pain. “Couldn’t have anyway. He
got of town real fast man, real fast that night…” Again, Logan sensed the truth on him.

Motherfucker.
“Now, you’re gonna listen to me bub. You listenin’? Good. I’m willing to let your sorry piece of ass live if you give me everything on this fucker. You hear me? Everything you goddamn know about him.”

After the conversation had ended, Logan had thrown more threats this way, he had left him there on the side of the house, not giving a shit if the fucker bled out in the grass or not. After slamming the door of the Bronco, he breathed heavily, wiping some of Dwayne’s blood out of his eyes, cradling his own hands in pain, his knuckles bloody and yellowed with infection. For an instant, Laura’s smile flew across his mind, before he shut the lights out on it, just like he had everything else. He couldn’t think about her. Not right now, not like this. The only thing he could think about was finding her.

He had driven all through the night and into the next day, tearing a path through the Canadian Rockies headed for British Columbia, to Kelowna, where he now knew the other man lived. It was a thin lead at best, but it was something. And, if that didn’t work, he would head directly for Transigen in Mexico City and start mowing fuckers over until he got some answers. The drive to Kelowna, however, had been over eighteen hours, and early in the next evening exhaustion finally caught up with him. Logan had barely been able to pull over to the side of the darkened highway and kill the engine before his weary body demanded rest.

As he finally, really woke up, he was already cursing at himself and searching blindly for the keys in the dark. As the Bronco groaned as it started up to life once more, it was then that the dark, sinister reality came back to him. You lost her. If they had just kept moving, had he not been such a sick, miserable son of a bitch, they could have flown to a different country, and he could have kept her safe. And then, of course, there was the other odious truth, especially if the Carl lead shed any sort of light: he was a fucking animal, and, because he couldn’t control himself, it had led to Laura’s capture.

Logan only prayed her ability to heal, her ability to fight, would lead to her continued survival. And if they somehow had gotten to her, had hurt her or worse in any sort of way, he was already resigned to kill every mother fucker in the place. And, if he was too late, he’d kill them all anyway before sending himself straight to hell.

Chapter End Notes

Nothing like a little light torture/suggestion of suicide to start your week off right! :D Sorry ‘bout that. 15 will be up in a couple of minutes too, and it’s way lighter in tone. A nice chaser for this shot.
Then

Chapter Notes

Take Note: Please mind the “sexually explicit content” tag that has been taunting you throughout this entire story is officially “active” now, and content that is adult and sexually mature in nature is possible and/or highly probable from here on out. You have been warned.

Also, this chapter is long. I recommend tucking in a bit with a mug of something warm before you start this one.

That is all. :P

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 15: Then

Logan awoke to the sound of brisk knocking outside his door. He groaned from the bed, face in a pillow, twisted up in blankets. It sounded like a goddamn machine gun, firing off the way it was. He had been here a handful of weeks, and his sleep had been shit. Last night, after a lot of booze and a whole lot of moping, he had finally passed out at around four. He didn’t move, but he knew from the various alarm clocks screeching in other bedrooms in the hall that it couldn’t be past seven or eight in the morning. Too goddamn early.

Again, more knocking, harder this time.

“Go’way,” he finally shouted, although his voice was muffled from his place in bed.

“Logan!”

He groaned again, but on hearing her voice and knowing for certain it was her, he finally resigned himself to lift his head from the pillow and look around tiredly.

“Logan, seriously! Get your ass out here!” He finally grumpily stumbled out of bed and stalked over to the door, whipping it open in one fell swoop.

“What?!” he rumbled.

Rogue’s eyes widened as she took in the sight. He usually slept nude or with very little on, but the poor girl and everyone else walking down the hallway was lucky enough that he had passed out with his jeans still on. He was shirtless, however, unshaven for a few days now, his hair probably sticking up this way and that, disregarding gravity. Definitely the archetype of something feral. He saw her eyes fly up his torso, and he smirked a little in victory. If she woke him up like this, at the fucking crack of dawn, she sure as hell was gonna get what she asked for. All of it.

“Uh, you have class. Fifteen minutes,” she said, coming back to her senses, and beginning to bolster the irritation she had momentarily lost.
Logan sighed moodily. He knew he had been a mediocre employee at Xavier’s at best in the last few weeks. He often just didn’t show up for his classes, sometimes giving notice and sometimes not, much to the rest of the faculty’s frustration. He also had made a habit out of coming and going, leaving for stretches of days at a time on Scott’s Harley. When he was here, he was usually in his room. Needless to say, but it had been a rocky climb back up into something normal.

“What’s it on?” he muttered, almost incoherently, his hand still leaning on the door frame, physically denying her entrance into his room from the hall.

“United States history,” Rogue said, annoyance of his complete disregard of responsibility growing in her voice. Rogue’s anger was something he was always sorta amused by, also finding it sexy on her, but this morning he was in not much of a mood to find anything attractive.

“A lot’s fucking happened in this country. Which bit exactly?” he griped, leaning further on the doorframe.

“Revolutionary war,” she grumbled. “Battle of Monmouth.”

“Sorry. Can’t help you. Wasn’t alive yet,” he quipped. He was in the process of swinging the door shut when she stopped it quickly with her hand, surprising him with her relative deftness, as she pushed it back open with a scowl. He took a couple of awkward steps backward to not get hit in the face with the door, and then glared at her accusingly.

“That obviously doesn’t get you out of it,” she rounded on him. “You think we’d let the kids just hear your version, anyway? That’d be one fucked up way to teach them. Besides, they need a holistic perspective.”

“Charles said I didn’t have to,” he grumbled, crossing his arms petulantly as he stood a bit awkwardly in the middle of his fucking bedroom.

“Oh, some excuse. What else you plan on doing then? Living off the poor man’s generosity?” Logan snorted at that one.

“Hey, you know I’ll do just about anything to earn my keep. And he ain’t poor, Rogue. That’s pretty much the point of all this,” he gestured unenthusiastically around the place.

She stopped, then, some of the fight leaving her as she bit her lip thoughtfully, her stare morphing slightly from outright annoyance to mild irritation verging on concern.

“Why you lookin’ at me like that?” he asked.

“You can’t just…wallow. Lie in bed all day,” she finally said.

“I’m not…wallowing. And who said it was ok for you to keep coming around my door bothering me in the first place, huh?”

“We’re friends. We’ve been friends for years,” she said quietly.

“You were friends with him. And, poor guy, has he always been at your beck and call, always answering the goddamn door when you knock on it, putting up with your dictatorial ass?”

She stopped, frowning a bit, the hands on her hips slightly falling. *Fuck.* He knew he’d taken it too far. She stood there, in those trendy little dark-wash denim jeans that hugged her ass and that white cotton t-shirt and black, sleek blazer, suddenly lookin’ all meek and hurt, crestfallen. God, she could kill him with a look like that. Logan sighed, rubbing his eyes warily.
“Look, sorry, kid. I just... *Jesus.* Ok, how ‘bout no to the history class but yes to you meetin’ me on the veranda for lunch later, eh?”

“You wanna... eat lunch?” she said, looking mildly confused by his sudden shift in mood

“That’s what friends do, yeah?” he finally grumbled. A youthful and innocent pink suddenly blossomed on her pale cheeks, standing in direct defiance of the nascent beginning of the lines of laughter near her eyes. How she had the ability to look seventeen and a woman at least twenty years beyond that at the same time was fucking beyond him.

“I guess,” she finally said. “It’s just that we don’t usually-”

“Don’t usually what? Eat?” he retorted, interrupting her.

“No. Nothing,” she sighed. “Sounds great. A lunch date it is then,” she said a little too curtly, obviously still frustrated. Logan winced a little at her choice of words, but stepped forward a bit, practically walking into her to back her out again into the hallway, a blatant, non-verbal display of dominance.

“Good. You bring the food, I’ll get the rest,” he said, before shutting the door closed a little too quickly behind him.

--

He found her out lounging in the mid-day sun. She was sitting on the steps at the edge of the semi-circle of the veranda, leaning on her arms stretched out behind her, staring up at the sky and taking in its warmth. Students peppered the grounds, and it was one of those fall days that felt cool in the shade but hot in the sun. Logan quietly approved of her choice of spot, watching her as she lazily took a bite of sandwich. It was peanut butter and jelly, he could smell it from here. It should have been such a juvenile thing, such a sandwich for a grown woman’s lunch, but Logan realized it somehow still fit her. Freshly showered and dressed, Logan had taken the bike to pick up a six pack, and now his grip tightened around the cardboard holder in his hand as he was struck with an old memory that had taken place in the same spot a lifetime ago. He hadn’t meant it to be when he had asked her—the veranda had always been his favorite spot at Xavier’s—but this suddenly looked like a life on replay. He finally approached her, clearing his throat slightly to announce his presence.

“Hey, kid,” he said, walking down a step or two and sitting next to her on the stairs, setting the six pack between them.

“Oh, thank god,” she said, looking down at the beer.

“I was hoping you wouldn’t be opposed to a little day drinking,” he said with a chuckle, easily snapping off the cap with a thumb and handing her a glass bottle. “Although I’m not sure how well it goes with your little sandwich you’ve got there,” he said as he gestured to her lunch.

“Don’t worry,” she said, setting her food down and rustling about in the pack that sat behind her. “Pastrami for you,” she offered, holding out the reasonably larger sandwich in front of him.

“Bless you, darlin,” he murmured, taking a swig of his beer first before accepting the sandwich from her. The beer, the sandwich: both of them their quiet peace offerings to each other.

“So, was your morning bad just because of me or did something else happen to exacerbate things?” he asked. She looked up to him as she held the bottle, the glass just lingering below her red bottom
“No, wasn’t just you,” she smiled, as she finally took a sip. “Besides, I can handle your grouchy moods just fine.”

“That so?” he asked, as he could feel one side of his mouth pulling up into a smile.

“Oh yeah,” she smirked. “I guess…it’s just, sometimes, I don’t know...” she trailed off.

“What?” he asked.

“I guess I just miss the old you.”

“Ouch, kid,” he joked, the truth of it sting a bit. She sighed a little guiltily, but continued on.

“Sorry, but I thought you deserved the truth.”

“Well, maybe you don’t know me all that well yet. Maybe I’ve got things in common with the guy? And, besides that, it’s not like I signed up for this shit,” he said, although, after thinking about it for a moment, he corrected his answer slightly. “I mean, well, I guess I did, technically, but only because I was the only one who could make the trip.”

“Now that sounds a bit more like you,” she said.

“How?” he asked.

“Oddly selfless, for all of your tendency to act tough and mean.” He stared at her for a moment, eyebrows raising at her blunt honesty. He wondered, not for the first time, what the depth and the extent of their relationship had been in this timeline.

“So, other than his gallantry, what did this joker have goin’ on for him that makes you miss him so much?” he teased, and she blushed a little.

“Umm, well, he liked music,” she said a bit awkwardly.

“Ok,” Logan said. “But doesn’t everyone?”

“Alright, yeah. Duh. Ummm, he liked folk and rock, mostly. Stones, Dylan, but he’d take the Clash too.”

“Good, that’s better,” Logan said optimistically. “Sounds like I’ll have to raid his CD collection.”

“CD collection?” She looked up at him, grinning brightly at his slip. That fucking smile. Got him every damn time.

“Ah, fuck. Whatever. I get ‘em mixed up. Whatever it is they’re usin’ right now. iPods. Tapes. 8-Tracks. Records are preferable,” he added after a bit of thought.

“I have a record player,” she said, smiling at him again. “Pretty good collection too.”

“That so?” he asked a bit more softly. For a moment he was a thousand worlds away, until he realized she was waiting for him to say something.

“Ok. Uhh, what else?” he asked, taking a swallow of his beer.

“Motorcycles.”
“Yep. But hell, darlin’, that’s sorta cheating. You’ve seen me on one practically every day since I’ve been here.”

“Yeah, you’re right, now that I think about it. Umm…Cigars. Good liquor.”

“Hell yes,” he said. With that, he noticed a mischievous look move across her face as she grinned.

“Cream in his coffee,” she added.

“Bullshit,” he countered. She smiled widely now at him.

“I was only joking. Tryin’ to throw you off. Good catch,” she said, her hair gleaming in the sunlight, and the whole adorable thing was almost too much. He could tell, the more alike the former version and the current version of Logan were in her mind, the happier she became, and whatever got her looking like that was reason enough for him to feel grateful.

“He also liked order,” she said, after a bit, and Logan raised a suspicious brow at her growing perceptiveness. “He kept his room neat, tidy, probably a little more so than someone might think a-”

“-a feral would?” Logan finished her sentence for her. She blinked at him for a second.

“Yeah,” she said, finally blushing a little bit.

“Hey, all mutants come with stereotypes. I don’t hang with many of ‘em, except for Big Blue, and we both know he runs a tight ship. So you might be wrong about that one.”

“Probably…” she said, setting down the beer and taking a moment to clasp her hands together, stretching in the mid-day sun, her posture becoming more easy and loose by the minute. He watched her stretch helplessly, before she continued on. “And, let’s see, what else? He liked nature. The outside called to him, all the sounds the world could make. And, hmmm, what to call them, he liked…the times in between.” She looked over to him a bit more carefully for a moment.

“Yeah?” he asked, not quite giving her the affirmation she wanted anymore, still knowing everything was the same between he and his doppelganger. This was a bit more intimate now, information he wouldn’t have been as likely to give up.

“Like…the time before something else,” she continued, trying to sound it out. “Twilight, or the way a door would look partially open. Maybe the way lungs feel before they take another breath. I think that’s why he liked being out on the road so much, you know? Between what had happened and what was going to…” she trailed off, a bit wistful.

Logan was openly staring at her now, only having to blink once before he understood.

“So… all that shit at the Statue of Liberty still happened, huh?” She turned her head quickly back over to him from where she had been glancing down at her boots, mildly alarmed with surprise.

“What?” was the question she asked sharply.

“You’ve got him in your head, don’t you?” he asked carefully. She closed her eyes deliberately for a moment, before opening them to face him once more.

“Yes. I mean, it was a long time ago, but-”

“Even though you could control it?” Logan interrupted her once again, curiosity overcoming him.

“It’s not…” Rogue began, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. “Back then it was a bit more…
unwieldy. Plus I was unconscious, and I always have less control of it when I’m sleeping. Or tired, or stressed…” she trailed off. Logan couldn’t help but glance down at all that touchable skin, noticing she had taken off the blazer she had worn earlier and now was in nothing but jeans and a sheer t-shirt.

“Hmm,” was all Logan offered in response as he mulled over this new version of Marie.

“Yeah. I didn’t know any of these guys back then. I had just met you all…or just met them all…before it happened.”

“I see,” Logan murmured. “So whatcha said that first night?”

“All true.”

“Huh.”

“So…” she said, after a bit of silence lingered between them. “How did you even know, about the Statue of Liberty?”

“Because it happened to us too,” he murmured simply, finally choosing to stare deliberately into her brown eyes.

“To her?”

“Yeah kid, it did.”

“Shit,” was all she offered, and Logan smiled a little at her candor. After a couple beats of silence, he spoke again.

“Look…maybe we should stop talking about ‘em like this. It’s just…a little too weird. And it ain’t too helpful. Hell, it seems I’ve got enough things in common with the guy anyway. Maybe just try callin’ it ‘me’ and ‘you’, ok? Because that’s really all there was, or, all that’s left,” he said a bit wearily, as, at the same time, Logan pushed down a vision of Marie wiping blood away from her forehead in the med bay before gently rubbing his temple. The truth was, he just didn’t want to talk about her to her right now. He didn’t want to talk about her to anyone.

“Ok. Fair enough…” she trailed off. “So, did you go around calling me kid no matter what age I was back then too?” she asked, trying to lighten the mood and playfully swatting at his arm a little. He stole a glance at her ungloved hand and then back up to her, feeling simultaneously relieved and strange that she felt so easy in touching other people.

“I… well, yeah,” he said, a bit sheepishly now.

“I’m nearly forty,” she remarked, smiling at him once more, not quite a protest of the nickname, so much as she seemed to find it all a bit ironic. Logan just shrugged his shoulders.

“You were seventeen when I met ya. And god knows I got several more decades on you than that. So that was it, for a long while. Well, until South Africa,” he said, before he could stop himself.

“South Africa?” Rogue questioned, interest peaking. As Logan peered up at her, he realized that once again he had driven them into dangerous territory.

“Uhh, you knocked me on my ass in a sparring match. You dislocated my shoulder,” he said through a small laugh, although he realized, as innocent as the words were, his tone was coming out all wrong.
“I dislocated your shoulder?” she asked in total disbelief.

“Yeah,” he said, through a smile. “I still fucking feel it sometimes, although I don’t know how the hell that’s possible, the timelines being different and all. After that, everything changed…” he trailed off.

She looked at him, a bit confused by his meaning, and then the whole world fell away as the quiet realization swept over her, even if that had been the very last thing he had intended. Shit. This, partially, was one of the reasons he had been keeping his distance up until now. It was so easy, so dangerously easy, to fall into his old habits with Marie again. The Marie from Westchester, the Marie from the war, this Marie here. The same goddamn woman that drove him crazy, kept him up at night, made him so hard half the time he couldn’t see straight, no matter how many times he made himself come with the image of her in his head. He needed to get a fucking grip.

“You …” she asked, eyes widening, before stopping, unsure of what to ask, what to say.

He offered her a slightly pained look as his eyes met hers, before looking away, polishing off the rest of his beer.

“We...?” she attempted again, and Logan suddenly felt the need to stand.

“Logan,” she said more intensionally, standing too, the empty beer bottles planted around their boots on the ground.

“Look, kid, I ain’t crying my heart out over it,” he said defensively, the instinct to get the hell out of there so strong in his muscles it was practically pulling at his entire body to move. “It was…a long time ago.” A truth, but also a fucking lie. He hated doing that to her, but there it was.

“I- I don’t know what to say,” she murmured, scuffing a boot on the ground.

“Like I said. Don’t sweat it.”

---

It wasn’t like he had put up posters and shit. But here they all were, lined outside the gym like it was prohibition and it was a fucking speakeasy they were tryin’ to pay their way into. Somehow, someone had gotten word that Logan was starting a “Fight Club,” although Logan hadn’t been the one to name it that, and the news had spread like fucking wildfire. All he had done was suggest to Charles that some of the older kids, and there were far more older kids here nowadays than younger ones, might need to eventually rely on a little hand-to-hand combat, powers aside, if the world ever got a little rocky again. It had taken a few quips and subtle remarks sandwiched around the times he had visited the professor in his office, Charles trying to understand the full extent of the world Logan had just recently left. Charles had finally, after some persuasion, given Logan the ok, and now, here they were, all these gangly kids, begging to be taught. Logan realized, a little too late, that he had his work cut out for him.

He had recruited Peter to help him out, because the man knew something or two about sparring and hand-to-hand combat, in the previous world and in this one. He had asked for mats, too, which Charles had easily provided, and now the bleachers had been folded back into the wall and in their place sat the mats, brand spankin’ new and neat, on the gym floor. As he walked in, he gave a low whistle, smirking at Peter and glancing back out to the kids in the hall.

“How you wanna do this, Logan?” he asked.
“Uhh, bring ‘em in two by two, I guess. Give ‘em the basic rules, and then it’s all diagnostics from there on out. Just see what they got. Put the decent ones,” Logan hesitated, shooting a glance around the room, “over in that corner, and see what else they know. I’ll take the kids that need some…help. After tonight, we can work on trying to get something a little more organized together.”

“You focused on a certain style? Ninjutsu, karate?” Logan snorted a bit at the idea of any of these students knowing the intricacies of any sophisticated form of martial arts and offered a slight shake of his head in response. “Maybe…in time. Now, just see what they know.” Peter smirked, cracking his knuckles. He knew Colossus would be all over this idea, and had been helpful getting it to work. It wasn’t necessarily a class, but a club was enough to be a damn fine start. Maybe the name had a better ring to it than he thought.

Slowly, one by one, Logan saw each kid through the doors of the gym. He realized, warily, there were over fifty kids outside, and with each pair of sneakers he told the kid to kick off before stepping on the mat and with each swat of the arm, block of the wrist, he grew steadily more discouraged. These kids knew shit about sparring, let alone fighting. What the fuck had happened to the world?

About half-way through, he realized there were only a handful of students standing over in the far corner where he had told Peter to put the decent ones, and “decent” was a bit of a fucking stretch. Logan inwardly grimaced as one of the last students filed her way in, a petite, dark-haired girl of only about thirteen and Logan assumed less than ninety pounds, headphones in her ears, pink dyed in her hair, and bubblegum in her mouth. She was reading something too, and when he cocked his head to get a better look at what it was, his own, illustrated face was staring back at him.

“What…the... fuck?” he asked, looking at comic than up to the girl and back down to the comic book again, before snatching it from the kid’s hand.

“You’re famous,” she said through a pop and snap of her gum. As his eyes widened at the ridiculous, overdone drawings, the title The Uncanny X-Men splashed on the front cover, Logan grew uneasy. Trying to shake off the feeling, he tossed the comic to the floor and motioned to the mat.

“Ok, kid. Ear plugs or whatever they are off, spit the gum out, and no shoes on the mat,” he said. She only looked at him with a smirk before getting ready. He didn’t have a watch on, but he realized that it was much later than he intended for this to go when Marie had entered the gym, offering him a smile and a slight nod of the head. She usually worked after class on the next day’s materials, and that typically took her until nine or so, Logan knew from using his senses to keep track of her most of the time. Despite the late hour, though, she held a ceramic mug of coffee in her hand, and once more smirked a bit as she took a sip, leaning against the wall nearest him in the gym. It was obvious that she was thoroughly amused by the idea of Logan’s “Fight Club,” and had come to watch the last of the entertainment.

“Ok, kid. Ear plugs or whatever they are off, spit the gum out, and no shoes on the mat,” he said. She only looked at him with a smirk before getting ready. He didn’t have a watch on, but he realized that it was much later than he intended for this to go when Marie had entered the gym, offering him a smile and a slight nod of the head. She usually worked after class on the next day’s materials, and that typically took her until nine or so, Logan knew from using his senses to keep track of her most of the time. Despite the late hour, though, she held a ceramic mug of coffee in her hand, and once more smirked a bit as she took a sip, leaning against the wall nearest him in the gym. It was obvious that she was thoroughly amused by the idea of Logan’s “Fight Club,” and had come to watch the last of the entertainment.

“Ok, come ‘round here, kid,” as he pointed to a particular spot on the mat where he wanted the little thing to plant her bare feet. He was also barefoot, in athletic pants and a token wifebeater, but not much else.

“You know zenkutsu Dachi?” he asked, trying to throw the young mutant off balance with a terminology question about basic Karate stances, too frustrated and tired now to baby the shit out of the last few. To his surprise, she knowingly grinned, instantly standing with better posture and putting her feet apart at the appropriate length, before whipping a foot out into the first position, raising her hands into tiny, well-formed fists.

“Thank fucking god,” he murmured, and he could feel Marie smiling at him a little wider from the wall. They went through a couple of basic sparring sequences, realizing this little one at least knew
when to block and how to move. She was a quick thing too, and Logan instantly felt bad for whatever fucker was gonna stand in her way when she was full-grown. When they were done, she gave a little bow, and whispered, “Domo arigato sensei.”

He offered her a small smile before murmuring, “Do itashi mashite. Oyasuminasai.” You’re welcome. Have a good night.

After she was off the mat, he whistled over to Colossus, who was finishing up with his batch of students.

“That little one would be one to watch out for,” he motioned to her as she made her way out the doors. “Yeah, that’s Mirage. I could’ve told you that when she walked in here.” It was then, as he looked around the place, Logan noticed several of the students had stuck around, even though he had at one point dismissed them all after getting a sense of their capabilities. Logan stood uncomfortably for a moment, staring into their young, eager faces.

“Well, if we already worked with ya, you can leave,” Logan said, but no one made a move to do so. “Uhh, again next week, same time,” he added, but still, no one moved. Logan looked to Peter questioningly.

“Uh, I think there was a rumor goin’ around today that they’d get to see some sort of kick-ass fight tonight or something, at least a decent spar,” Peter murmured. Logan snorted at that, looking back at the crowd of kids.

“How we supposed to get better when we don’t know what to aim for?” some little punk asked. Even though he was mildly annoyed, Logan managed to throw Marie a knowing glance, and she just shrugged her shoulders at him, a grin on her face, and took another languid sip of her coffee.

“Uhh…good point I guess.” He glanced up at the taller mutant. “You wanna do this, bub?” Peter’s smile went wide, massive arms still folded across his chest.

“Fuck yeah, Logan,” he said. With that, they were already getting into position, to some excited whispering of the kids.

“Hey quiet in the dojo, or…the gym…or whatever the fuck we’re calling it,” he said. “Your job is to watch, ok? Watch how the hits happen, but most importantly how the blocks happen. Ultimately, most of this is about self-defense. And this ain’t a real fight; nobody’s getting hurt. That ain’t what sparrin’s about,” he said, shooting another casual glance at Marie.

“None of that metal shit, Colossus,” he muttered, getting into position.

“Wouldn’t dream of it, Wolverine. Respect the rules of the dojo, right?” he said back, and Logan grinned.

In a real fight, Logan would have needed his claws. Colossus was bigger than him, and Logan couldn’t say that about that many guys he went up against. That’s usually when he had to play dirty. In a spar, however, obviously all that flew out the window, so Logan would have to rely on his knowledge and his instincts, which hopefully would a be a decent match against Colossus’ sheer strength.

It started innocently enough. Logan instinctively read off Peter that the other mutant planned to run through the basic punches, and Logan the basic blocks, until they intuitively switched after about five or six sequences. No one used their full strength, and they took it slower than they normally would have, Logan intent on letting the students see the full range of movement and perhaps even, for the
more adept ones, mentally anticipate some of the hits in their own heads before they happened to the
two in front of them.

At some point, however, Logan discovered one of Colossus’ fighting weaknesses. Peter favored his
right arm, and showing that you preferred any arm over another was a token taboo in most skilled
masters of martial arts. Logan was left-handed, verging on ambidextrous nowadays, which usually
worked to his advantage because people were always anticipating he was going to throw with his
right. But to read a favored arm so easily in a sparring partner was...a delicious thing to behold.
Something in him started getting the idea that Colossus himself needed a little sparring lesson in
cloaking your weaknesses, and so he started moving quicker, anticipating the hits easily. Peter
seemed to notice the change, a quirky smile on his face, and then picked up the pace too. He went in
again with his right to uppercut Logan, but Logan dodged left, throwing more strength than he had
intended to swipe at Peter’s leg, bringing Colossus down to one knee. No fucking easy feat. It hurt
like hell to throw force into the other mutant to even knock him off balance, and Logan knew if he
could bruise, he would have.

A few of the kids clapped when he made the move, and he found himself simpering just a little. Just
as he was about to throw Marie a cocky grin, however, Colossus struck. This time it was with his
fucking left and with just as much force as Logan had just shown him, and, distracted by the pretty
girl in the corner, Logan didn’t move out of the way in time. Peter’s hit was to his right shoulder, that
fucking shoulder, and it knocked the wind out of Logan, making him stumble back a few feet.
Somehow Peter knew that was Logan’s weak spot nowadays, and he had fucking taken advantage
of it. A few people started cheering louder, and Logan bristled at the burgeoning enthusiasm of the
crowd. He didn’t like where this was going. Logan stood back up easily enough, throwing his
shoulder into a few circular motions even as his joints screamed in pain. Logan knew he’d have to
end this soon before it got too out of hand; he didn’t want the kids getting the wrong idea. He
performed a complex triple sequence Colossus wasn’t sure to have anticipated based on knowledge
and experience, with a little more than an ethical use of his strength to take the man down on one
knee again. Logan stopped, breathing hard, offering a hand to help the man up.

“Better call it there, Pet-shit!”

Peter’s right leg whipped around to wipe the feet out from under him, an odious clank of metal
striking metal, and Logan fell to the ground, hard.

“What the hell, Pete!” he said, growling from the floor.

“Sorry, Logan,” Peter grinned. “Got this thing about having the last word.”

--

He groaned as he made his way down the hallway. Marie walked next to him, and she kept
throwing him little concerned stares that were starting to piss him off.

“So he pulled a couple of good ones over on you, huh?” she finally said, realizing and seemingly
disregarding that Logan’s pride was probably the only thing on him still wounded.

“No, he didn’t,” Logan grumbled. “I’m just...a little rusty.”

“I thought you were fighting in a war,” she teased as she paused on Xavier’s staircase, smiling back
down at him from a higher step before Logan scowled at her, brushing past.

“Yeah, well, the last couple of years we were mainly just, you know, hiding out. And you gotta love ‘em, but neither Charles or Storm was very interested in keeping up with sparrin’ too much.” Rogue laughed a little at this, and he looked up at her, feeling a strange smile forming on his mouth. “Besides, Peter wasn’t fighting fair,” he added as they made their way to the upstairs hallway.

“Since when does the Wolverine care about fighting fair?” she teased, and he stopped for a moment and turned to look at her oddly. A bright and vivid memory of her with a braid in her hair, having the same conversation on a different sparring mat lit up his mind. They stood like that for a few moments, awkwardly stalling now outside of her bedroom door. Logan finally cleared his throat.

“Yeah, well, see ya in the morning, kid?” he murmured. Something about dropping her off at her door had him feeling awkward, even if he was just tryin’ to be friendly. It felt…chaste, leaving her here like this. And wrong.

She looked up at him, eyes a little dark, leaning against her own shut door. “Yeah, I guess so,” she finally muttered, and as he turned to leave, she spoke again.

“Logan?”

“Yeah?” he asked, hesitating slightly before turning back around to face her.

“It was good today, to see you working with the kids again,” she practically whispered.

“No, I just… you’ve got more of a knack for it than you think,” she muttered. He took a step closer to her then, just a hairsbreadth away from something that would have been considered an intimate proximity.

“Not sure I’d agree with you,” he said quietly. He was close enough now, real close enough, to take in her scent. Still there, that sweet nectar and mint and that fertile scent of earth, and he breathed in a bit too deeply, practically woozy on the spot. He could hear her heart beat a bit more quickly in her chest, a steady thud that he swore suggested…

“Logan?” she asked quietly.

“Huh?” was all that he could get out. Her eyes were dark and heavy. Her pale skin stood out in the dim hallway, and she fiddled with the edge of her jacket she had been holding, rubbing the hem of the fabric back and forth a little.

“Was it a good thing, we had going for us, back there?” Logan looked at her intently, before being sucked into another fucking vortex, a stream of more memories of Marie’s pink nose, her laughing in the cold, and then her up on that table, the taste of whiskey and anticipation on her breath the night before it all fell apart.

“Yeah. I think, for however short it was,” he said evenly, before gently taking out a hand and brushing a platinum streak of her hair back before withdrawing it. “It just was the rest of the world
that was fucked up, kid.”

She looked up at him intently in the dark, and said nothing. He realized then that he was having a hard time reading her. There was something there, something important, brimming just beneath the surface of her, but fuck if he knew what it was. Arousal? Frustration? He was having a hard time focusing, the way she looked so much like herself…

“Well…thanks… for sharing,” she murmured, before she backed up a step, hand suddenly fumbling for the door.

“Well, Rogue,” was all he managed to say before she was inside and the door shut quickly behind her.

Later, in his room, he could still hear her. He always could with her next-door, but he had tried hard the last few weeks to tune her out. Tonight, however, it seemed everything she did, every scratch of her pencil, brush of her hair, sip of her drink, was greatly amplified in volume. She stayed up for a long time afterward, reading he guessed, from the occasional crinkle of faded paper, her flipping another page. Logan meanwhile had flopped onto his made bed, giving in after a while and just tuning in to Marie’s station. She smelled like mint-brushing her teeth—and of sandalwood—putting on perfume but more likely lotion. He then heard the click of the lamp, the lights going out.

Finally, he allowed himself to think of the vortex he had experienced. Logan usually did a good job—damn fine one if anyone was askin’—of shutting off memories. He always had imagined locked boxes, mainly because for so long he couldn’t find the keys to open any of them. However, even after he had rifled through most of the contents once the memories had come back to him, some he had managed to dutifully lock back up again. He gathered that he hadn’t been that terrible of a man in the past before Stryker, but Logan hadn’t always agreed with some of the decisions James had made, not even close. And then, as his life moved forward, being a part of the X-Men had caused him to experience joy, but also painful things, terrible things, and he had fallen into the habit of deliberately forgetting once again. He had tried to also do this with Marie, just as he had years ago with Jean, but for some reason Marie wouldn’t stay put. The way the light hit the room or a random smell in the air, and there she was again, clear as day in his mind: the vortex. And it was driving him crazy, because, now, another Marie was usually already staring up at him. Two versions of the same woman, both beautiful, both driving him to drink.

Memories had been something different to her, he remembered her once explaining. What had she called it when she had taken her drink of him after Cape Town? Like walking through a cloud. He had always pictured a white fluffy cloud, like the one you might find occasionally drifting by on an otherwise clear day. But now, he doubted that’s what she meant. Clouds had a way of going grey, getting stormy, throwing out signals that they were all in for nasty weather. A thunderstorm, a hurricane, a fucking black hole. How did you possibly walk through that?

--

A few days later, he found her in the dining room, reading another book. As he walked toward her, he couldn’t help but notice the way she cradled the spine, as if it was something precious. She sat with one leg tucked up under her, and she looked comfortable, at peace. He savored the little scene for a moment, before walking up to the table, and, using the spine of his own closed book he was holding, he parted her open one down the middle, slowly bringing her novel from where it had been in front of her face back down to the table she sat at.

“Excuse you-” she started, before he interrupted her.
“You owe me,” he smiled playfully.

“What?” she said, looking up at him from her seat at the table. Just then, he threw his yellowed, dog-eared paperback copy of *War and Peace* down, the doorstop of a book thumping heavily on the table between them as Logan took a seat opposite of her.

“No way,” she said, skeptically.

“You bet your ass I did. You could just turn that skin of yours on and steal a few thoughts of mine to know it’s true if you want.” She blushed a little at that, before steadily regaining her composure, straightening a bit in her seat.

“I’ll settle for a quiz,” she said, a more mischievous look in her eye. “So, what’s it about?”

“The Russians’ war with Napoleon,” he said with ease.

Rogue rolled her eyes. “You could have googled that,” she said flatly. Logan was surprised to find himself slightly hurt by her disbelief in him actually reading it. He hadn’t been moping the entire time since being here, that was for fucking sure.

“You think I sit around googling shit all day?” he retorted. Rogue simpered a little at this.

“Ok, wise guy, if that what it’s about, then what’s it *really* about?” she asked.

Logan rolled his eyes a little bit at her corny question, but he still found himself thinking quickly on his feet. The rest of the truth was that, after his memories had slowly returned to him in the old timeline, Logan realized he had read the book several times over the course of his life. This was, in part, because books about war obviously spoke to him, but it was also because, hell… he’d been alive a long fucking time, long before most forms of technology they all used now, and for the vast majority of his life all he *had* were books. And he made his way through most of the books out there, at least the classics, although he wasn’t about to admit that to her. It certainly wasn’t a truth the Wolverine went around vocalizing very often. Yet there she was, all hopeful doe eyes, waiting for an honest answer.

“It’s about instinct,” Logan murmured. Rogue’s eyebrows raised in surprise, but he saw her trying to hide it by grinning a little as the irony settled between them.


“Mind your teasin’, kid,” he said, crossing his arms in vague discomfort. “I ain’t wrong, and you know it. It’s about, well… Human beings behave irrationally sometimes, in ways that don’t make much sense up here,” he said, tapping his forehead gently. “It’s not just you who’s at war in your own head, darlin’, although you may have it worse than most. We’re all warrin’ with ourselves. And, to get it right, sometimes, we gotta dig deeper. Listen to that innate thing inside of us, and trust me, we all have it to some degree. I like that about the book. And the ending…it ain’t happy, it ain’t sad. S’real. I like that too.”

Marie’s mouth hung partially open, before she quickly shut it. She sighed, resigned, smiling a little at him before murmuring, “Top marks.” Logan grinned devilishly, as he leaned in toward the table between them.

“Now about this pecan pie of yours…what’s it got in it?” he asked.

“Ah, um well,” Marie cleared her throat slightly, more than a little thrown and still trying to recover. “Pecans.”
“I gathered,” he said through an evil grin.

“Butter, sugar, eggs. My mama also used Karo syrup,” she murmured, now closing the book in front of her, fiddling a bit with one of its frayed corners, suddenly unsure of what to do with her hands.

“Sounds real good,” Logan practically hummed.

“You cook the filling beforehand on the stove, you know? Before it ever gets to the oven. People don’t always realize that. The butter and sugar and Karo, even a little cornstarch to condense it. It all sorts heats up, caramelizes, gets thick and sticky.” Logan was still listening, but the way the words were slinking out of her mouth, a slight southern draw alongside them, salivating at the thought.

“Sticky, eh?” he asked, grinning. Marie had a quirky little smile tugging at the corner of one lip, before she straightened a little.

“Well, you’ve schooled me in Tolstoy. If you’re so interested in learnin’ a thing or two on cooking, meet me in the kitchen tonight. Unless you’ve also already mastered the skill of baking pies too, wherever you came from.”

“Hardly, darlin’,” he said, giving her a small wink.

“‘Round eleven ok? The faculty kitchen?”

“Ain’t eleven a lil’ late?” Logan asked.

“I’m all grown up, remember? I stay up late all the time.”

“I know you do. I can hear you reading most nights. I’m next door,” The words were out of his mouth before he could think about what it might mean to utter them. A deep red flew up her cheeks as she realized what he was actually saying.

“He…or you, the old you, never told me that.”

“Welp,” Logan said, stretching a little, leaning back in his chair. “It was a secret he was likely keepin’ from you, baby, for some reason.” Marie’s eyes narrowed at this, and she stood.

“Eleven, the kitchen. Be ready to get sticky, baby,” she said with a little smile and wink, before walking off, his eyes on her whole way out of the hall.

---

She had a little apron on, over some shorts and a sheer t-shirt, and house shoes on her feet. Her long hair was up, but falling down and loosely tied, and she was cradling a glass of— holy fuck was that bourbon?—in her hand. He could smell it, and even from the kitchen doorway he knew it was expensive. Logan couldn’t remember the last time he had a decent glass. He studied her for a moment, stock still and completely quiet, as she peered into a couple of cabinets and grabbing a box here and setting down a can there on the table, all the while humming the tune of some slow, sad song playing from the speakers in the background.

“You’re right, you ain’t a kid,” he finally said, leaning on the door frame. She turned to find him there, and she smiled that fucking beautiful smile. There was a little flush in her cheeks and her posture was loose and easy as she walked her way over to him. He met her half way, and now they lingered next to the kitchen island. The place was deserted. The faculty kitchen was hardly ever
used, meant almost entirely for late night snack fests and the occasional game of poker. It was, however, in traditional Xavier fashion, completely stocked with every ingredient you could ask for. Logan picked up the bottle of mostly still-full amber liquid, and let out a low whistle.

“It’s the good stuff. Charles flies it in,” she said, eyes on his hands on the bottle. She took another little sip from her glass, the ice clinking together softly.

“A.H. Hirsch Reserve. Holy fuck. They don’t even make this shit anymore. Or at least they didn’t where I’m from,” he looked back up at her red lips lingering on the edge of her glass.

“I can tell you’re dying to try it. Here,” she said, raising her own glass and extending her arm from the space between them. “Take mine.” He smirked a little, reaching out his hand and taking the cold glass from her, their fingers grazing as they did so, nothing happening but the exchange of the condensation on her fingers to his own.

“Damn, that’s still so strange,” he said, before taking a long, deep sip of the stuff. It tasted like toffee and anise, but it also had the taste of Marie’s lips, a speck of mint and honey. He closed his eyes for a moment, savoring it.

“So…” she said, watching him take the sip, before casting her glance downward. “You never touched her then?” Logan looked up at her carefully, and quietly noted that the glass he had taken from her definitely wasn’t her first drink. He stared at her a bit longer than he probably should have, glass still cool in his warm hand.

“I wouldn’t say that,” Logan finally said, smirking a bit, as once more he brought the glass to his lips, taking an even larger swallow. If the little vixen had started before him, he was determined to catch up.

“I’m sure that’s meant to be sipped,” she said skeptically, taking a look at the mostly empty glass.

“I’m thirsty,” he growled, finishing it off. Her eyes lingered on him for a moment, before she looked around the kitchen island at all the ingredients she had set out, now more determined on her task.

“Ok, let’s get started,” she said, turning around, and he couldn’t help but stare at her ass in those tiny shorts, that little apron tie dangling off the back of her waist. He growled a little, but shut his trap when he realized she was still talking.

“I already started on the crust, that takes a while and I had some time to kill, so now, we get to making the filling.” She moved gracefully around the kitchen, flicking her wrist to start the gas stove, carefully holding the glass bowls as she set them down on the table, twirling this way and that, preparing what she needed.

“You move pretty naturally around this kitchen,” he couldn’t help but remarking, as he fetched her a glass and filled up both with more than a splash of bourbon.

“Yeah, of course,” she said, measuring out a pour of sugar in front of her. “I’ve been making pies for thirty years. A good many of them right here in this place.” Logan genuinely smiled then, before offering her a fresh glass during a lull in her prep work.

“Thanks,” she said, taking it from him.

“Anything I can do to help?” he offered.

“Oh, no. Not during this part. This, my friend, is for professionals only,” she said, and Logan found himself inwardly wincing a bit at her choice of words.
“Explain it to me then. Talk me through what you’re doing,” he said. This was mainly a selfish request. For one thing, this was Marie’s territory, exclusively her space, and everything in him knew it. He wasn’t about to go and try to disregard that by insisting he help. However, without anything more to do, he could feel something in him steadily growing taught and a bit uneasy. At least, with the more bourbon the graced her pretty red mouth, the more that southern drawl came out, and Logan couldn’t get enough of that.

“Well, there’s a trick to it,” Marie was saying. “Making a pecan pie, it’s not quite caramelizing, but it’s pretty dang close. It ain’t such a far cry from making a roux.” She was pouring the ingredients after whisking them together into the sauce pan now, except for a couple she kept close to the stove, ready to use when she needed them. “It’s about timing,” she continued, stirring the sauce pan in long, unhurried strokes with a ladle. “About feeling it out. You got add the right thing at the right second, or it becomes something it’s not. You need to know how long to wait, to let it simmer, before you let it go.

Logan must have made some sort of noise, because she looked up from her stirring, finally coming back to herself, and flushed.

“Sorry,” she said, still pink as she walked back over to the island and to him. “Cookin’ does this to me. And I might have started a bit early on the bourbon.”

“Hey, baby, did you hear me complainin’?” he asked, offering her a small grin. Right now, he noticed the kitchen island was a firm barrier between them, she on the cooking side and he leaning on the counter on the other, and Logan didn’t like it. Any barriers between them, Logan was starting to hate, but, in this room, in this space, in this life, he wasn’t sure where to stand yet, how quite to be.

“So, uh, where’s Bobby tonight?” he asked, before another generous gulp of his bourbon. He’d been saving this question for the right moment, and now seemed as good a time as any to ask it. Meanwhile he noticed she flushed even more, dancing on the ball of one foot back at him, yet again looking both vibrant and refined, sexy and intelligent all in one goddamn glorious package.

“Oh, uh, I don’t know...” she trailed off, undoing the little tie at the back of her waist, slinking off the apron and setting it on the table while the filling still simmered on the stove beyond. Logan frowned a bit at the move. He liked the little apron, and he couldn’t help thinking it was a damn shame she had taken it off.

“I thought you two we’re going steady,” he pressed a bit.

“Going steady? You sure show your age sometimes; you know that?” she teased. He said nothing, still peering at her. As she looked up to him, realizing he was still waiting for his answer, she rolled her eyes a bit. “Oh, don’t look so bothered. He’s just my...you know. We hang out sometimes,” she finished. It was a remark, Logan thought instantly, a seventeen-year-old would make, not a woman nearly approaching forty. He glanced down to the empty glass she was holding and instantly was around the table refilling it.

“So you’re not together?” he asked, carefully choosing his words now as he refreshed her glass. They were only a couple of feet away from each other now, and he surreptitiously breathed her in for a moment. He warmed further at the fact that she was already shaking her head in response to his question.

“That’s not... a thing I do,” she stated. Logan cocked his head at this, a little thrown by her remark. He had never quizzed the old Marie on her values regarding matrimony or the ethics of long-term partnerships, so he hadn’t known what she had thought, but he got a sense she would have given a different answer. Every time there was a remotely difference between the two versions of this
woman, Logan felt a little more off-balance.

Marie seemed to notice his surprise, and offered a brief, stilted explanation. “It’s just…two people forever and ever, til death do us part and all that…egh.” She said. For some reason, Logan’s unease grew a bit.

“What’s so wrong with that?” he asked. Marie only offered an almost apathetic shrug of the shoulders in response.

“Monogamy not for you?” he tailored his question, trying to feel out what she meant.

“Monogamy’s alright. I get the idea of sticking with one person for a while. It’s just…nothing really lasts; you know? In the end…” she tapered off and something in Logan felt heavier.

“For as much romantic literature as you read, you’re quite the cynic,” he was saying, as she took the tie out of her hair, and it fell gently around her shoulders. She sighed a bit as she did so, wrapping the little band around her wrist. The move had meant something; Logan just wasn’t sure what.

“So you too, uhh, when you hang out sometimes, do you-”

“Fuck?” she asked, looking him directly in the eye.

Logan nearly about swallowed his glass. Hell, that word on her pretty little mouth. The Marie he had known would have never been that forward. Or, had she been? The girl or the woman? This woman? Who could fucking tell anymore?

“Well I figured you would know that sugar, with your good hearin’ and all,” she teased, and Logan’s eyes widened more. The fact was that he had been waiting to hear that, if only so he could get the hell out of his room when it happened, but he hadn’t heard them at all. Not once.

“I…well, I haven’t really…” he trailed off. Marie just grinned all the more widely.

“I know, I’m teasing you. But yes, I slept with him. Off and on, for a while at least.” Logan’s frown deepened.

“Off and on?” Logan asked, trying to get to the bottom of this awful thing.

“He goes off on missions, long ones, for weeks at a time. But, it used to be, when he came back, if he was in the mood and I was in the mood…”

“Alright, I get it. You can stop now,” he practically barked, grabbing the bottle of liquor from the island and pouring himself another refill.

“Sorry. Just banter… between friends right?” she murmured, looking up at him coyly. Outside, the crickets were chirping in the night, and inside, the boiling pan behind them steadily bubbled.

 “…right,” Logan murmured, his bottom lip twitching a bit. She waited a beat, glancing down for a moment, before coming back to his gaze.

“And you and…Jean?” she said. The name hardly even registered as he was trying to understand what she was asking. He hadn’t spoken with Jean but once or twice since he’d found himself here, and he didn’t quite take her meaning.

“Jean?”

“He was…uhh, you were--sweet on her. I think. Or maybe something more. Who knows?” she
asked, clicking a couple of nails on the edge of the island she was holding onto a bit, and Logan realized she was trying to steady herself, preparing for the answer. Logan rolled his eyes.

“Oh, hell, baby. Jean was, well, whatever Jean and I were, that’s over and done with.” She only blinked at him for a moment, but then he heard some sort of increase in pressure, steam rising, and he tilted his head in the direction of the stove.

“Looks like that needs tendin’ to, darlin’,” he said, before taking another sip.

“Ah, shit,” she said, putting down her glass and going back over to the stove. With a quick movement of her wrist she brought down the flame, then removed the pan from the heat entirely.

“Sorry,” he heard her saying as he watched her work. “You’ve got me a little… tipsy. In fact, come over here, why don’t you? I could use your help pouring this.”

She grabbed a large glass bowl of whipped eggs and walked back over to where the saucepan on the stove. Meanwhile, he had walked over to her, now just slightly lingering behind where she worked.

“Grab that saucepan by the handle and pour it into the bowl,” she said, but as he went to grab it, he also heard her say “Grab the handle toward the top,” but his hand was already making contact with the scorching metal further down toward the base, and he whipped his hand away again, muttering a “fuck” under his breath as he sucked the side of his hand at the base where his index finger and his thumb met. The skin was hot from the burn and salty from his sweat, but also sweet, tasting a bit like caramelized sugar from where the mixture had splattered onto the handle.

“Sorry, baby,” he murmured, before taking the pan again, this time much higher up. She offered the bowl, and he steadily poured in the liquid, and she was already whisking the mixture as he did so.

“Good, not too much at once. See, sugar? You’re a natural,” she said, adorably excited for his progress, while, inside, at the name “Sugar,” the Wolverine practically purred.

He set the saucepan down, and followed Marie as she took the bowl back to the island, both of them on her side now. Her movements were languid, a bit slowed, but so were his, both of them swimming in bourbon as they were by now.

“Good, now, the best part,” she said, and Logan watched as she lifted the pecans out of their packaging with her bare fingers, and put some of them into the mixture. This Marie knew how to use her hands, and well. It was obvious she felt everything all the time, and held nothing back. Logan watched her work gracefully, running her hands through the pecans, and as he paid closer attention he noticed the little nicks and scars, a few miniscule discolorations, tiny battle wounds most people had from living a life with ungloved hands.

“Hold the bowl steady for me?” she was asking, and the room danced as he came up behind her, placing his hands firmly on the bowl. His head looking over her shoulder, nose inches from the soft skin of the nape of her neck. He stood there, that close, for one long hard moment, drinking in her aroma. As he lingered there, the scent suddenly and drastically changed, and it was everything and more he had picked up on the other night, that earthy and sweet fragrance of her arousal rocking him back, making him dizzy, and he couldn’t abstain from a quiet, low growl in her ear.

“Logan…” she was whispering.

“Yeah?” he asked. She had set down the whisk and taken one of his hands in hers, before turning around to face him. She was inches away now, and her touch was almost too much, too unbearable.

“You’re still burned, sugar?” she asked quietly.
“Wha?” he managed to say.

He looked down to see the dark pink mark still there on his skin at the base of his finger. He stared at it indifferently, as if it wasn’t a part of him, because she was now idly massaging his hand.

“You ok?” she murmured.

“Swell,” he said, still drunk on her fragrance. And then, just ever so slightly, she ran her fingers deliberately in the spaces between his knuckles. He drew in a sharp, deep breath, helpless to her touch, and then her fingers were intentionally lingering there, adding pressure. It was all he could do but shut his eyes and breathe.

“That…good?” he heard her say.

Logan only issued a low growl. She was drawing small circles around the skin, applying more light pressure, and he was going lightheaded, weak in the knees. He had never known anyone to do that to him before, in this life or the last, and he was fucking hard because of it.

“What…does that feel like?” she barely whispered.

“S’just sensitive, there, is all.”

“Like...a pressure point?” she pushed. Her curiosity was fucking killing him.

“Somethin’ like that,” he said, barely managing to hang on, the animal inside of him screaming to put his hands on her, to bite and to lick and to fuck, but something in him hesitated, unwilling to do so until he had something more from her, some other sort of affirmation.

Her fingers moved away from his knuckles then and once more swiped the stubborn pink burn on the side of his hand. It still stung a bit, and the move mixed with the feeling from earlier caused a pleasure-filled pain to course through him.

“You’re still so different,” she said, staring down at the mark on his hand intently.

“Thought we were pretty much the same, Marie,” he murmured. She let out a quiet, breathless laugh then. He looked up at her, a question in his eyes.

“Marie? See? It’s like now you… know me, or something. Just like that.” Finally the rest of the woozy feeling fell away, as his look darkened to something more predatory, his hands moving to hold her possessively around her hips.

“So what is it, baby?” he rumbled.

“What?” she barely breathed.

“What you want from me that you couldn’t get from him?” he muttered, and the look in her eyes blackened, the soft brown he had come to know disappearing. She looked down a bit, still running a few fingers over his large hands still firmly on her hips, biting her lip in pause.

“Tell me,” he said simply.

“Can you… show them to me?” she finally asked.

“Show you what?” he toyed with her. If she was going to ask for that, she had to utter the whole fucking sentence. “Say it.”
“Show me the claws,” she said a bit more firmly, voice now steady and even.

“Tell me why,” he murmured, wanting more.

“Because… seeing you vulnerable like this is a fucking turn on, because, usually, it’s you making me feel—” and she then stopped because they were unsheathed on one hand, gleaning off the still-bright kitchen lights, a few drops of blood blooming at the base of his knuckles, a couple rolling down the front of his hand. Her eyes widened in surprise, fear, or awe, he wasn’t sure.

“I’ve never seen them up this close,” she murmured, eyes dancing. “They’re beautiful.”

“Fucking lethal is what they are,” he muttered bitterly, and, just as she reached out to touch one of them at its base, he retracted them again, the sound ringing in the air between them. It was something intimate, something he hadn’t ever admitted to himself he wanted, but something he was unwilling to offer her tonight. For that, he would have to lay himself completely bare. Meanwhile, her face was singed with frustration, the look in her eyes burning for more.

“Did she ever see them like that?” she asked, completely forgoing all use of “you” and “I” when talking about their former selves, the rules of it all worn thin.

“No,” he said quietly.

“What did she do then? Or what did you do to her?” she asked. Another question, another longing need to see into that former life.

“Not near enough,” he said through gritted teeth, his grip on her tightening. He still hadn’t moved the other hand from her hip, and now the one from where he had shown her his claws was back on her too, the blood drying on his knuckles.

“Tell me, show me, what you wanted to do, sugar,” she said.

“Kid, you better know what you’re asking for before you do,” he threatened, his voice low and rough.

“Try me.”

And that was it. He could feel the rest of the inhibition slip away, and he pulled her unbearably close, his mouth lingering just outside of her ear.

“Fuck, baby, you got this scent on you, you see? God’s sending me straight to hell for the thoughts in my head, you paradin’ around in all that touchable skin, pretendin’ to be in charge in this kitchen, all with that fucking scent on you.”

She breathed hard against him, barely whispering. “What’s it like?” she breathed. A low growl rumbled in his throat.

“Earth. Musk. The scent of you beggin’ for me to make you come, pleadin’ for me to push my fingers up inside you, have you shaking…” he murmured, happy to oblige her now in giving her what she wanted.

“I need to fucking see you,” he growled frustratingly, and he could feel her sharp intake of air as he moved to peel the thin little shirt off of her, along with undoing the pretty bra underneath. She stood before him then, pinned between his hard body and the counter and he savored the view of her full, perfectly round breasts. Even through the fog of his lust, however, he sensed something was unexpectedly off, and he realized slowly she was suddenly looking a little vulnerable at being so
exposed, slightly hesitant in a way maybe a younger woman wouldn’t be. A disturbing thought if there ever was one: this gorgeous woman doubting herself.

“None of that,” he murmured into her ear. “You’re fucking beautiful, Marie.” He kissed her then, nipping at her bottom lip gently as he did so, before he moved to the side of her neck, sucking on the skin there lightly. Her body liquefied under him as his hands then ran over her breasts, toyed with one nipple until it was hard, rolling it gently between his forefinger and thumb. Hungry for more and wanting better access, he easily had her up on the edge of the counter now, knocking over abandoned ingredients from their cooking lesson. The whiskey that night, the bourbon now, her up on a table. Did it fucking matter anymore?

He took his first taste of her breast, lapping up her nipple in this mouth, rolling his tongue over it, sucking long enough on it to grow sore, and then sucking harder, his teeth grazing the pebbled skin. She cried out at his mild torture, and he growled in approval. She was breathing hard and heavy, her hips clutching him. He knew she was wet; he could smell it, feel it through the two thin layers of clothing, all that was left separating his mouth from her warmth.

“You needed somethin’ you hadn’t had before tonight,” his voice low and guttural, and he wasn’t sure who he was talking to anymore. “A hard taste, a good long suck, right here…” The pad of his thumb was already placed on her heat, and then he was moving past the lining of her shorts, putting them to one side, slipping a finger inside that moist warmth. She gasped a little in surprise at the invasion, and he grinned, taking in the pleasure of her shock. As he moved in and out, her inner walls tight around him. Finally, he pulled the digit out again, a wild thought in his head, even as something broke in her voice, a soft whine at the sudden emptiness inside her. He stared at her evenly before bringing his finger to his mouth. Her eyes widened, not so much surprised at his forwardness as she was from the scene of it all, of him, tasting her. He was then back in her, quickly adding two more thick fingers. She moaned, clutching her hips around him as he moved in and out of her a little harder now, thumb working around the shorts and occasionally flicking and toying with the bud between her legs. He could tell she was close, on the brink of something, but then it wasn’t enough for him, not like this, and he easily picked her up from off the counter. She whined a little again, but still cradled her thighs around his waist as he gently brought her to the floor.

She began pulling at the edges of his own shirt, and he helped her by ripping it off with ease. Her eyes slid over him carefully, drinking her fill, taking in each sculpted muscle, before she cautiously lifted her hand, running her fingers gently over the muscles of his abdomen. A shudder from him turned into a growl. He wasn’t fucking done with her yet. He moved over her, gently pulling off the little shorts, leaving her naked and bare before him. His tongue was already lazily running its way down her body again, his mouth wet on her warm skin, licking and nipping at her breasts, the hollow curve of her stomach. Along her hips. Her thighs. Now: the spaces in between.

Her body practically came off the floor as he ran his tongue found the most sensitive spot between herself, while a couple fingers drove up into her once more, and he gently sucked and nibbled at that sweet spot between her legs before moving his tongue lower, tasting her warmth, drowning in the flavor of her.

“Logan,” he heard her murmuring his name, and something in him smoldered about how it sounded like that on her lips. Another hard, long suck, and then she was shaking, coming around him, and the animal in him eagerly lapped up the sweet glaze of her, just like the bourbon, savoring the taste. She breathed in and out unsteadily, riding the last of her orgasm, as he lifted his head, moving back up to kiss her, deliberately sharing the taste of her between them. She kissed him back hard, rough, running her tongue along his bottom lip and he found his hand moving upward to cup her face, fingers in her hair, before nuzzling in her neck, growling with a thick, heady need. She was already pawing at his belt buckle, trying to undo the rest of him. Shedding the what was left of his clothes, he
watched her as her eyes widened, his thick length on display, tip already dripping with want. Pure, raw masculinity, unsheathed.

“Condom?” he barely murmured.

“No need,” she said breathlessly. He didn’t exactly know what she meant by this, but he trusted her word. He paused, the head of him teasing her already-slick folds. She shivered as it passed over her, while he rubbed gently against her opening.

“Logan,” she whimpered again, rocking her body upward, trying to catch him inside her.

“Wider,” he growled. As she spread her legs more, he stopped toying with her, willfully pushing his full length inside, hard and heavy, caring little now about how tight the stretch around his thick girth was for her, drowning in the hot, wet feel of her surrounding him. It didn’t matter if he was using her now. They were using each other, he realized, adrift in some dark fantasy of the other version of themselves that seemed to be just out of reach, lost somewhere in the black of night.

“Jesus fuck, baby,” he managed to say, as he saw stars, a galaxy of night, white pinpricks searing through black. The animal impulses in-more-take screamed within him, and he pulled almost completely out, before shoving his whole length back into her again. He gave it to her like that, hard, deep, fucking her with wild abandon, even as his knees sung in pain against the hard marble of the kitchen floor. At one point, his teeth made contact with the skin of her shoulder and he bit down, unable to stop himself. She screamed in a mixture of pain and pleasure, but then, just as he was about to lose himself, she stopped meeting his thrusts under him, using all of her strength to turn him toward the floor, and she was on top of him, creamy thighs and slick heat compressing around the base of his cock, moving on him in the dark as she lost herself in him once more, heat pulsating around him, clenching unbearably hard, down, and then he was bucking up, pouring into her body, rumbling wildly as he shot thick, white ribbons inside her.

They simply lay there for a few minutes, minds off in the distance, not quite intent yet to get up off even the hard marble of the kitchen floor. Her head was on his chest, which rose and fell with his breath, and then she subtly moved her fingers to clasp his free hand. She cradled it for a moment, a strange feeling between them, before she noticed the blood from earlier dried on his knuckles, and she put her mouth to them. He exhaled deeply as she murmured something incoherent against his hand, before gently licking away the rest of the red. He deliberately didn’t ask her what she had said, knowing it wasn’t quite for him to hear. Outside, the night lay heavy around them, and, inside, Logan heard the occasional click of the oven regulating its temperature, still on.

Chapter End Notes

Annddd….I didn’t mean for it to happen this quick, but then I wrote the kitchen scene and everything fell apart from there. It felt right, so I wrote it, even if it was a bit wrong. *smirks* And, who knows, there are often serious repercussions to jumping into something too quickly. (But not too serious. I promised ya’ll sweetness and light in the “then” chapters, remember?)

Chapter 16 shouldn’t take too long to get to you, my friends. Already working on it.
Chapter 16: Now

The house was nestled on a quiet street, deep in the suburbs of town. Even in the early grey light just before dawn, it was obvious that it was a well-kept neighborhood, each side of the tree-lined drive flecked with sleepy bungalows. There were swing sets. Dogs. Fucking picket fences. As the Bronco’s tires rolled quietly up to the address and then backed up a couple of houses, Logan double checked the numbers he had scrawled out on the back of a receipt. He had committed it to memory anyhow, but now, with the doubt there was anything left in him that was working properly, he had also written it down. This couldn’t be it. And, if it was…


*He’s got kids.*

“I know,” Logan murmured to himself.

*You gonna kill a man with kids?*

“Fuck, baby. Half the people I’ve slaughtered in my life probably had kids,” he muttered.

*This isn’t a good idea, sugar."

Logan shot a glance across the road to a neighboring house as he detected movement. An older, greying woman in a bathrobe and house shoes shuffled down to the end of the drive to fetch yesterday’s mail. Magpies sang in the distance. Crisp leaves that had already turned yellow and red were starting to fall. There were fucking pumpkins carved on the porch. As the light grew from grey to pink to orange, the background sounds picked up in intensity. Bacon sizzling. Hair dryers humming. The rumble of a school bus.

The timing was all off, everything was wrong. He knew he would have to come back, later in the day or at night. There was no way he could apprehend Carl here in broad day light without drawing more attention to himself, and, obviously, he wasn’t about to storm in the house and scare the hell out of a couple of kids and a wife to get to the son of a bitch. As Logan finally turned over the engine of the Bronco, muttering “fuck” to his steering wheel, it was then he saw a tall woman walk out of the house with a small child, kneeling down to tell the girl something before zipping up the little one’s jacket in the cool, morning air. Logan sighed frustratingly, moving to put the car into drive and leave. Another done-up jacket. Another zipped backpack. Another kiss goodbye. Borrowed images.
Borrowed time. Another day Laura would have to endure on her own.

The plastic plant in the corner of the cramped lobby shuddered, the fan throwing the air about the room, occasionally disturbing its dyed leaves. Logan walked in to hear the rumpled crackling of plastic being drawn back, and he found an achingly young brunette, twenty at most, stuffing an entire Twinkie into her mouth, before turning her attention to her smartphone, partially leaning over the counter as she did so. The florescent lighting abused the faded tile on the floor, and the restlessness in the air was palpable.

Logan had deliberately driven about ten miles out of town, and he now found himself on the fringe of Kelowna, near highway 33. The motel was a small, one-story sprawl with a sagging roof, a place probably originally intended for truckers and loggers, now seeing a slump is business due to the industry’s automation. He had carefully pulled the Bronco off the main road into the mostly empty parking lot, taking in the chipped teal paint and faded door sign. Logan had rubbed his eyes with a spare hand, knowing that he needed more sleep, but, even if he intended to stay here for a few hours, he wasn’t intent on it. In the background, the steady stream of sand, time pouring out from one bulb of the hourglass into the other. Eyes bloodshot and body weary, he had stalked into the motel lobby, his anxiety thick and heavy as he glanced down at the woman-recently-girl, half-lying on the counter before him.

“I need a room,” he gruffly said, finally getting her attention. The woman looked up, a quirky smile on her face as she brought her chocolate brown eyes to meet his. On the bottom of one lip was a smear of white frosting, and it was only after she languidly drew one finger along it to wipe it off that she responded.

“How long?” she asked, a little too knowingly. Logan had already known the motel, desperate for business, had probably had turned into one of those places that now easily rented by the hour.

“Until I leave. At least until the late evening, I s’pose…” He trailed off, his grip tightening on the strap of the pack he had slung over his shoulder.

“You alone?” she asked, a flash of something devilish in her eyes as she glanced behind him through the glass door and out toward the empty Bronco beyond.

“Uhh, yeah,” he muttered, but she was running her eyes over him, lingering on muscles and scars alike. Logan cleared his throat, which only caused her to smirk a little wider. Here she was: another woman looking at him like he had all the answers. Like life started or ended with a short, hard fuck in an alleyway or under a cold, sputtering shower. His muscles bristled with tension. He was already sick of her shit and just wanted the hell out of the lobby, especially with those fucking eyes on him.

“How much?” he heard himself gruffly asking.

“For the room or for something else?” she asked. Damn it. He had walked right into that one.

“Room,” he growled, already whipping out his wallet, fumbling through the notes.

“Eighty,” she said, glancing back to the phone, already losing interest.

“Any liquor stores close by?” he murmured as he put the money on the table, and she cocked an
eyebrow at him again. They both knew it was ten in the morning. Not that it mattered to either of them.

“Yeah, just down the street,” she said, handing him a traditional metal key and plastic green keychain attached. Logan peered at it for a moment, before taking it from her. “Lucky number seven,” she said.

“Thanks,” he muttered, before snatching the key from her, turning for the door.

“If you need anything sir, I’m here all day,” she said, in a practically sing-song voice. He closed his eyes hard for a moment, before walking out into the autumn air.

--

On the television was a smear of blurred images and colors, running along in front of him. The light was making its way through the blinds, now lower in the sky. The plastic bottle was in his hand as he tipped it back, sitting on the bed. And as the hours moved, his mind stayed blank. Without her, without Laura, hell, even without Charles…all of it boxed up and put away. Like the room he found himself in, his mind felt empty, nothing else much left. The air was warm and stiff, the tick of the clock heavy in his ears.

_You sure you wanna be drunk going into this?_ He heard her again, and he outwardly growled.

Another swallow the stuff, another locked box rattling in his mind.

_Logan._

“Just get the fuck outta my head, woman,” he said bitterly, his grasp tightening on the bottle.

_Logan._

“Marie,” he said, his voice breaking, almost pleading now.

_It wasn’t your fault._

He shut his eyes.

_Liar,_ he thought bitterly, downing the rest of the first bottle and reaching for the spare, flicking the plastic cap off easily.

---

_A hallway from Xavier’s ruptured in front of him, the whole ground quaking. Kids dropped like flies around him as he struggled to move. He felt wood and plaster give way as he drove his claws into the wall to steady himself. And then there it was, the partially open door in front of him, trembling and seizing, the afternoon light escaping through the crack, as he made his way closer, a shaking, bloody hand just hovering over the door knob…_

Logan awoke in a teeming haze from his spot on the bed, mind still drunk enough off of the cheap whiskey he had been drinking all day. He was slow to catch up, but as he glanced to the darkened
window, he could hear the smattering of rain outside. He blindly reached for his watch that he had taken off and sat on the little table beside him, bringing it up close to his face for his eyes to be able to read the time, having left all of his pairs of readers back in Hay River. Just past seven at night. Shit. It was already a little past the time he meant to go back and stake out the place again.

“Fuck,” he murmured, fumbling around for this jacket, grabbing what the mostly-empty second bottle and stuffing it into a deep pocket.

He was out then, in the pouring rain, rooting for the keys to the Bronco. He was soaked by the time he climbed inside, breathing a bit heavy. He ran a hand through his wet hair before reaching once more for the bottle. For a minute, he simply watched the rain make indiscriminate patterns on the windshield, drowning in both the cheap liquor and the sound of the deluge. Then, there was a shadow of movement in his periphery, and, as he glanced to his right, he saw the profile of the woman from the lobby earlier inside in a parked Toyota, straddling some lucky bastard, both of them pouring themselves into each other in the darkened front seat of the sedan. For one long, unending moment, while the rain hammered outside, Logan hazily watched the strangely intimate scene just beyond him, watched as she gave up all she had, gave up the whole world, gave up everything and nothing with one swift, fluid motion of her hips. The moment ended though, and he pushed everything further down inside him before starting up the old, stammering car, driving off into the inky, wet night.

--

“Carl, don’t you start this with me tonight.”

“Well if you stayed outta my shit, Linda, maybe it wouldn’t be a problem.”

The clank of dishes being plopped into the sink. The running of a faucet.

“All I did was call the guy. A little…bit of encouragement. Jesus, it’s just like you to do this. Always the same. Just go down to the warehouse and find what you say you’re looking for.”

“And this is where you tell me I’m not enough, right? Never fucking enough for you, all your nagging-”

“-Carl-”

“-how about you just leave me alone for one goddamn minute?”

“Fine.”

Hurried footsteps, headed for the front door. The sound of it opening.

“Linda! You walking out on me again? Linda!” Logan stiffened as he made out the tall woman from earlier, slamming the front door behind her, stalking off in the rain to the parked Volvo in the driveway. He sat up a little more as she started the engine, backing up. Inside the house he continued to hear swearing. With her gone, he might be able to go in there, see what he could get out of the guy.

Not with the kids still awake.
He checked. He could hear the sound of kids watching some inane cartoon in their bedrooms. Still up. *Fuck.*

*Follow her, Logan.*

*Why?*

*Just go.*

He was starting the engine before he realized he was dutifully carrying out Marie’s orders like a fucking puppet, but as he pulled behind the Volvo onto a busier street, he finally admitted it wasn’t a half-bad plan. At worst, it was something to do until the kids went to bed. A best, maybe she’d go somewhere, accidentally give away something important, show him what he had missed.

He assumed the woman would head for a bar after that little scuffle, and Logan was surprised to find after a few minutes of driving in the rain that the Volvo was turning into a crowded diner maybe a couple of miles from where she lived. As Logan parked the Bronco on the other side of the street, he watched her slam the door behind her, running out into the rain once more, coat and umbrella apparently forgotten in her haste to escape her life for a while. Through the windows, he could see her make her way to one of the few vacant booths to sit down, before dropping her head into her hands.

Logan found himself getting out of the car before he knew what was good for him. He was crossing the street in the rain, then pulling open the door of the diner, to find it bustling in that typical way of late evening, a couple of pretty waitresses flitting back and forth between the busy tables. An older couple sat in the corner sharing a shortstack, and an older man sat at the counter on a swivel stool, nursing coffee. At a booth, two kids fought like cats and dogs, brandishing forks at each other like weapons. It was a family joint, still early enough in the night to not catch the drunks looking to sober up, and there was no alcohol to speak of in the place that Logan could smell. He saw her, hair and clothes damp from the rain, now with her own cup of coffee and an otherwise vacant booth.

He intended to take a seat at the counter, but something in him hesitated as he made his way over to her side of the diner. He could tell from here, her once sleek blonde hair was just starting to see its vibrancy fade. The skin on her hands showing the telltale lines of middle-age. She was an older mother, maybe late forties early fifties, almost too old to have children still in grade school, Logan thought, when, just as his lingering had gone on too long, he heard her speak, looking up to him.

“Well, just sit down, then.” Logan finally shot her a look from where he was standing just beyond her booth.

“Excuse me?” he muttered.

“Instead of just standin’ there like a buffoon, sit down,” she gestured to the vacant side opposite of her. Logan waffled for a moment, unsure of what to do.

“You’ve been keeping tabs on my family most of the day, anyhow, so we might as well just get to it,” she said, and this close up he could hone in on a mild southern accent that suggested she was hundreds of miles away from her place of origin. This far north, it just wasn’t a set of sounds you heard. Logan sighed, knowing he had been caught red-handed, *somehow,* and resigned to sitting down. Maybe he was drunker than he thought.

*Ya think?*

*Shut it, Marie.*
Logan looked to the woman again as she pulled out a pack of cigarettes, the classic kind, nicotine rolled tightly in paper. Something about it oddly warmed him, with all the electronic vaporizers these days. Something else about the scene was still off, though, and he reminded himself that, as often as it had happened back then, he hadn’t seen anyone smoke in a diner in North America in over thirty years.

“Want one?” she asked.

“Uhh, no,” he said, glancing around to the waitress taking the family’s order a couple of booths down.

“Don’t worry,” she said, lighting the cigarette and throwing him a small smirk. “They know not to cause a fuss about it. Owner puts up with it from me. He knows sometimes…this is what I need. Hard to go anywhere else.” Logan said nothing. This evening, this whole goddamn day, hadn’t gone anywhere close to how he had planned it, drinking aside, and now everything was moving too quickly for him to understand how the fuck he was supposed to react.

“You scared the shit out of him, you know,” she said, flicking the cigarette slightly as grey ashes peppered the ashtray that had somehow appeared for her out of nowhere. It was a move he hadn’t see in decades, the social graces and strategy that came with smoking a cigarette over a conversation.

“What?” he asked, still trying to clear the fog he found himself in.

“I don’t know who the hell your mama was, but my guess is she didn’t do right by you,” she muttered. At that remark Logan looked up to her.

“You’re not from around here,” he said carefully.

“No. Not originally. Roots in Birmingham… Alabama,” she added, before bringing the cigarette to her lips.

“Yeah, been there,” Logan muttered.

“Really now?” she said, through a upturn of her lips.

“Yep,” he said, motioning now for the waitress to bring him coffee.

“America’s gone to shit, from what I’ve heard. I was smart enough to get the hell out of there while the going was still good.”

“Listen, lady-” he began.

“-Linda,” she corrected.

“Yeah, Linda, I need to talk to him, you know, your husband,” She said nothing as she arched an eyebrow at him, another long draw of the cigarette.

“You know… you really beat the crap out of him. He needed eight stitches in his head. I’m paying for physical therapy on his knee, now, because of you,” she murmured.

“What did he tell you?” Logan growled, slowly realizing what she was really saying.

“That you’re a scary son of a bitch. Strong. Metal claws. Most likely a mutant,” she said, an odd, bemused look on her face. Shit. So Carl had seen him. In his goddamn rage, Logan had been so fucking careless.
“Who else did he tell?” Logan growled.

“Now, don’t get started with that. None of that investigation crap. I can make your job easy for you right now. He didn’t tell anybody else,” she said, giving him a cautious, knowing look.

“And why should I trust what you say?” Logan asked. She gave him a long, slightly pained stare, before sighing, snubbing out the last of her cigarette as she did so, and lighting another.

“Because your daughter’s missing, and you can’t afford not to,” she mumured quietly, before looking straight in his eyes, the teasing note in her voice from earlier gone.

“Excuse me?” he barely whispered

“Your daughter…” she trailed off. Logan paused, wondering if this was another sort of screwed up nightmare of his, when something in the blue of her eyes told the rest of the story. He knew that look anywhere, had seen it in Jean and Charles a hundred times: when his thoughts were their thoughts. She was reading his mind.

“Fuck. Fuck. You’re one of us. That’s why Marie told me to follow—” he said, before abruptly stopping.

“Marie? So that’s her name?” Linda asked, and they both knew they weren’t talking about his daughter anymore, before the conversation died as the waitress came back with a mug for him, and no one said anything as the younger woman filled his mug and then left. They sat there in silence for another moment, before Linda sighed, starting again.

“Look, Logan, right? Carl doesn’t know his left from his right. You beat the shit out of him, his hunting trip ended early. I’m sorry, but that’s the end of the story. And, as much as he’s a lazy sonofabitch, I’d like my kids to have their father around for a while longer, so I’d prefer you not gut him like a fish tonight, ok?” Logan just stared at her for a moment, the truth of what she was saying threatening to inundate him. This was a lost cause. And, if he wanted to go on not believing it, the scent on her told him she was telling the truth.

“You bet your nose I am,” she said, after his last thought.

“So… coming here was a fucking dead end,” he muttered. At this, her face softened.

“I’m sorry, honey,” she almost whispered.

Logan quickly ran over the likely scenarios in his head. If he was going to go south, he would need to leave as soon as possible. The Bronco had been giving him hell lately, as old as it fucking was, but if he filled it up, maybe stopped and checked the oil on the way out of town…The Transigen headquarters was in Mexico City, and that was…what, a four-day drive? Maybe three if he didn’t sleep?

“You think Transigen’s got your daughter?” he heard Linda say, and he looked up at her quizzically.

“You know it?” he asked, unable to hide the hope in his voice.

“It’s just… Carl used to—” she said, beginning to trail off.

“Used to what?” Logan practically barked, suddenly suspicious once more.

“He… worked for them, or, rather their subsidiary up this way. Up north.” Logan almost snarled at this, now turning on the woman in front of him he had already intuitively began trusting, leaning
over the table predatorily.

“Weren’t you just trying to convince me for the past couple of minutes that Carl wasn’t a fucking rat? And, hold on, why the fuck would you marry a guy who worked at a company who was experimenting on your own kind?” At this, Linda looked somewhere between disturbed and mildly disgusted, before she was already countering back.

“My own kind? Honey, just listen’ to yourself talk. There’s none of my kind left. And turn your ears on! I said Carl’s as dumb as a box of rocks. It was a factory job, throwing packages onto trucks. By the time I had figured it out, he was laid off anyway,” she grumbled into her mug.

“Hell,” Logan muttered, running a hand over his face, sitting further back on the vinyl cushion of the booth.

“They put it in the food, you know,” she said, with a tilt of the head toward the diner counter.

“Excuse me?” he asked, not quite taking her meaning.

“That’s why there aren’t many of us left. It’s in the food,” she said, with an disturbingly apathetic shrug.

“Like poison?” Logan asked, still trying to understand what she was getting at.

“No, like corn syrup. It’s in every processed food you can think of. Transigen has a contract with Canewood. You know, the corn people? Transigen biogenetically engineered a therapy to snub out the X-gene in our DNA, our children’s DNA.” Logan’s eyes widened, mind briefly traveling back to the dozens of conversations he had back in Westchester. All the long, winding debates about why they were all disappearing. And then, Logan’s mind immediately flew to the white frosting on the woman’s lip from earlier.

“Yeah, like Twinkies and shit,” was all Linda muttered. Logan glanced back up at her, his look hardening.

“So, did Carl tell you that?” he asked, suspicion still threaded into his voice.

“No. He had a boss of his over for a dinner party one evenin’ and he got a little too handsy on the couch while Carl was in the basement playing poker,” she said, sliding out a fresh cigarette.

“As far as I know,” Linda said, continuing on, “They didn’t engineer the chemicals there or anything, they just helped put it in the food, distributed it throughout Canada.”

“So…this subsidiary… they still operational?” he asked, as something in him, a flicker, a spark, a glint, burned brighter.

“I don’t really know. Like I said, he’s out of that business. But probably. Transigen hasn’t operated here out in the open for decades. But as of last year, Carl still had buddies throwin’ packages onto carts up north at the subsidiary’s headquarters.”

“What’s the name? The subsidiary?” Logan asked, jaw tight, tension doubling inside of him. Linda once again sighed, a pained look crossing her features as she brought her icy blue eyes to meet his.

“You’ve been in a bad way, haven’t you?” she murmured.

“Stay outta my thoughts,” he warned. “Tell me, Linda. Where?”
“You already know,” she said quietly, looking down once more at the lukewarm coffee between them.

Logan’s eyes widened, and then, without much mental prompting at all, a random image of the day Logan met Pierce floated through his mind, the day before everything had gone to shit again. His business card. Two names, two companies. Partnerships, one apparently operating legally still in Canada and one not.

*Alkali Transigen.*

*Alkali.*

Something in the world froze then, as Logan watched a couple of kids across the way pour more syrup onto a stack of pancakes, the viscous liquid mixing with the melted butter, trickling off the side of the plate. Around them, the sound of forks clinking together, the sound of people chewing, drinking, swallowing. Logan’s stomach turned over, a bitter taste rising in his throat.

“Fuck,” he said.

“From the things your mind is showing me,” Linda muttered, with another flick of the cigarette, “That about sums it up right.”

--

The bell on the door rang as he stalked back into the lobby, and she straightened from where she had once more been leaning on the counter. It was pitch black out there now, and she shot his hulking frame a leery look, before she realized it was him again.

“Checking out?” she asked, something a bit like fear and a bit like lust edged in her voice and in those goddamn eyes as he stalked over to her, the animal on edge, dangerous and dark.

“Not quite,” he growled, suddenly stomping around the counter, flinging the key on the desk as he did so. In a quick second, he was up close to her, an arm sneaking around her thin waist, the feel of bare skin underneath a shirt that was far too short nearly sending him to the floor. *Too fucking long,* the Wolverine grumbled. He was a breath away from her now, taking in her scent—*too sugary too much vanilla*—his senses screamed, and he ignored them, as his hold on her grew tighter, her body easily folding into his.

There was sharp intake of air from her as he brought his mouth to her ear, his breath lingering on her pale neck, and then he smelled her arousal all around them both, a fucking overwhelming intoxication.

“What’s your name?” he finally breathed into her ear.

“Madison,” she said breathlessly, his grip tightening around her, idly grazing over the curves of her waist, mouth lingering just at her earlobe.

“Madison,” he said, the word sounding all wrong on his tongue, but nevertheless taking in another gulp of her arousal.

“Look at me,” he demanded, and, like nature, like it always was and always would be, she did as she was told. She backed up a bit, although he realized her fingers still lazily traced the sculpted muscles of his torso, eyes cast a bit downward.
“In the fucking eye, Madison,” he growled, his voice rough and harsh.

“Yes?” she asked. Instantly, he whipped a hand out, grabbing the wrapper still on the desk from earlier, and held it out for her.

“I don’t care if your boss doesn’t give you a decent break and you feel like you have to eat out of the vending machine. I don’t care if you fuck your boyfriend in his car while you’re on the clock. I don’t care if you want me to fuck you hard, right here and now, having you from behind over this fucking counter. Doesn’t matter. Just… stop eating this shit. It’s poison, you hear me?” he asked, voice wild. Only then did she look up at him questioningly before he tossed the wrapping to the trash, letting her go in one frustrated push. She was breathing heavily, her wet arousal ringing in his ears, as he stepped back through the door, back into the night. In one brisk moment he forgot her as he turned his direction toward Alkali and toward its haunting memories, a scorned lover waiting for his dutiful, inevitable return.

Chapter End Notes

Got literally all of my family visiting for Labor day, so I don't have my typical weekend available to me to write, so it might take me a few more days than usual for Chapter 17. It's gonna be long though, full of yummy things, so there's that. :)

I was blown away by all the love I received for the last chapter. Thank you, so much, for that. Sometimes it ain't easy writing this stuff, as much as I enjoy doing so, and you guys totally keep me at it.

Enjoy your weekend!
Chapter Notes

Umm, this gets pretty sexually intense, in mildly non-traditional ways, particularly towards the end. It’s nothing so completely wild that I haven’t seen it in popular fic between this ship before (haven’t ALL the options been explored?), but still obviously heavy on the citrus. My intent, at least in this story, is to progress the characters’ relationship, but…you know, it’s there. I’m starting to get the impression that all you beautiful Rogan shippers are ok with that, but, uh, you’ve been warned.

This chapter is also super long. Sorry about that. It sorta got away from me. :P But there are lots of places to stop if you need a breather.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 17: Then

“Holy FUCK!” He stumbled back a bit against the desk, struggling to remain standing, hands scrambling behind him, gripping anything he could find.

She took all of him, fucking all of him, in that hot red wet mouth, licking and sucking, and he was on the verge of something he wasn’t sure he could come back from. He was murmuring a stream of raspy swears as she brought him to the edge of oblivion, that naked body before him, on her knees, long hair falling over those goddamn glorious breasts.

“Oh, God. Fuck, Marie! Fuck,” he swore as she pulled him in harder, somehow deeper, taking more, while her hand squeezed the base of him, and he saw stars.

And then, she was off of him, drawing him out, and staring up at him with an evil, mischievous grin.

“That feel good, baby?” she smirked, all eyes. The sudden cool air on his cock sent a shiver down his spine as she waited…one second, two seconds, three seconds. She was going to fucking end him.

“Hell, woman!” he shouted exasperatedly.

“What? You want me to keep going? You like seeing me on my knees?”

He could only offer a low growl in response.

“Better hold onto something, baby,” she warned, and then she was assaulting him all over again, pulling him in even deeper into that hot, wet mouth, drinking him, and he could feel himself hit the back of her throat.

“Ahh god. Fuck!” Her hands gripped the back of his thighs, but it wasn’t enough to steady him as he was losing himself in her, and he threw out his claws behind them and rammed through the wood of the desk, holding on like hell.

“Baby, I’m gonna…holy fuck! Marie!” His mind seethed, thoughts dizzy, pulsing in rage or lust or
pain or nothing. She sucked and swallowed, and he began shuddering hard, helpless, and he felt himself pulsing in her throat, pushing down, coming in spasms of white, hot light.

By the time he came to, she was already gently lapping up the rest, and the animal purred inside of him, even as he pulled his claws out of the table, sliding them back in with a painful tinge, still partially leaning on the desk for support. She was standing then, leaning into him, placing gentle kisses onto his neck as he snaked an arm around her waist, breathing hard still, both of their skin glowing with the telltale sheen of well-earned sweat.

“Morning,” she finally said, breathing into his ear.

“You’re gonna pay for that one,” he muttered through closed eyes, exhaling once more before looking at her with a smirk.

“I’m not sure what you mean, sugar,” she teased, voice as sweet as honey, but eyes ablaze with mischief.

“C’mere,” he growled, grabbing her by the waist and easily picking her up as she lightly laughed, legs straddling his torso, and he reveled in the feeling of the slick wetness between her thighs, still dripping from when he spent himself inside her last night and earlier this morning, mixing now with her new arousal from what they both had just experienced. He plopped them down on the tangle of sheets on his bed, his body partially eclipsing hers as they lay on their sides in the full light of mid-morning.

“You’re gonna be the death of me,” he finally murmured into the nape of her neck.

“Hopefully not,” she playfully whispered back.

“You’re a fucking natural at that,” he said, and he could feel her smile before she turned around a bit more to face him.

“It’s easy with you,” she said simply.

“Easy?” he asked, through his own grin.

“Oh, you know what I mean. You just… you know yourself. You fit in your skin. I like that. You know what you want.”

“Damn straight I do,” he said devilishly, before he reached down to squeeze that tight, glorious ass. She grinned back at him, before she leaned her forehead into his chest.

“Also…” she said, before trailing off a bit, a hot flush in her cheeks.

“What?” he urged, bringing a hand up under her chin and tilting her head up slightly to look at him.

“I like how it feels to take you in like that, and the taste of you when you come. It’s good. Sweet. Earthy.” Logan’s eyebrows raised as she said this, a little stunned and already more than half-hard again by her candor.

“Fuck, baby. You start talkin’ like that, you’re gonna hafta deal with the consequences,” he said as he tightened his grip around her.

“You just don’t stop, do you?” she asked friskily.

“Healing factor, darlin’,” he said through a smug smile.
“You know that’s **insane**, right?”

“Fucking handy, is what it is,” he said, and she smiled again before turning around and he pulled her closer to him. He nuzzled into her neck, letting his instincts have their natural way with her for a few moments, growling indiscriminately in contentment as he held her body close.

They had spent the last few weeks like this: fucking, and doing little else. What had happened that first night, those strange moments in the kitchen before and after they were together, they hadn’t spoken of again. Logan considered it only a matter of time, but there was nothing in him right now that didn’t savor this physical connection, this raw and visceral inundation of his senses, particularly after several cold, hard years without anyone much for company. Besides, Marie was a work of art in bed, experienced but sophisticated, curious and passionate but also poised, and he couldn’t get enough of her. The rest, what it meant, what it might be doing to them both, he had set aside, unwilling and unable to take it all apart to see how the pieces might fit together yet to make a greater picture.

He settled into her closer then, but he stiffened a bit as he laid keener eyes on the marks on her neck and shoulders, the tiny scratches, the small bruises, hell, the **fucking teeth marks**. The base, most-inner part of him loved them on her, his mark on the woman he considered his, but another part of him grew increasingly more concerned as he took in the physical result of their time together over the past few weeks. The bites and marks were **still** the result of him keeping an extremely tight hold on the Wolverine, and, not for the first time, he questioned the extent of his own humanity.

“Hell baby, I’ve marked you up good,” he finally murmured, bringing his mouth gently to the worst of the offenses, apologizing silently through a brush of his lips on her skin.

“Hmmm,” was all she said, snuggling a bit closer to him. Logan doubted she knew the full extent of what it all meant. Just by glancing at her, any other feral would understand the bites were his signature on her. Without even making much of a conscious effort, his body had tried desperately, dutifully, to mark her, to claim her. But…that certainly wasn’t something they had outwardly discussed. Even now, it felt like dangerous ground.

“Bobby’s gonna have a fit over these new ones,” he found himself saying, still pressing his lips to her skin, before taking his teeth and gently lining them up with the latest round of marks.

“I’m not his to worry about,” she murmured. Logan withdrew his mouth and raised a brow from behind her.

“Tell him that,” Logan muttered. Bobby had been gone for the last several weeks, and hadn’t actually been home since Logan and Rogue had gotten around to fucking.

“Honestly, I’m more worried about walking around today without wincing,” he realized she was saying. Logan frowned a bit more deeply at this, turning her slightly to better face him once more.

“Hell, baby, if I’ve been too rough—” he started.

“It’s okay, sugar,” she reassured him through a whisper, and suddenly a hand was in his mussed hair, and the feel of her nimble fingers on his greying temple was almost too much.

“You can always just turn on that skin and take a drink of some healin’,” he murmured through closed eyes as she massaged his temple, running a hand down behind his ear and to the side of his neck. The fact that Marie could most likely turn her skin off and on was knowledge he didn’t quite have for certain, but something he was curious about nevertheless. He didn’t know the full extent or context of how Marie could control her power, and it was something he was determined to
eventually learn about her, something to get to the root of.

“No,” she said, and he felt himself frowning again. “No way. Besides, I like it. It feels good. A good kind of sore, you know?”

“Can’t say that I do,” he said through a small smirk, running a hand through her hair now, and she offered him a slightly apologetic look back. They lay like that for a while, before Marie seemed to sense some shift of the light in the air, and turned back around to the clock on his bedside table.

“Shit,” she said.

“What?” he asked.

“I’m gonna be late,” she muttered, moving to sit up. He instantly pawed at her, drawing her once more into a supine position close to him. No way in hell he was letting her go just yet.

“Five more minutes,” he grumbled. “Shower here to save time.”

“Baby, I only had about five more minutes before you made those gouges in that desk over there,” she said, before they both quickly shot a glance at what was left of the cedar piece of furniture in front of his window. Logan silently hoped he wouldn’t have to explain himself too much, and that Charles would just write it off as an occupational hazard of employing the Wolverine.

“Don’t leave yet. Fuck those kids,” Logan snarled, grabbing her ass once more.

“You’re terrible,” she said through a playful smile.

“And you fuckin’ love it,” he countered smugly.

“And how would you know?” she asked.

Logan just tapped his nose for a moment, all the while smiling self-assuredly. She grinned as she playfully tried swatting at him, but before she could really do anything he grabbed her bare wrist, and she slowed, staring up at him. They shared a look, a moment too slow to be real and too quick to be frozen, hazel eyes on brown, before he moved in toward her, kissing her slightly, just barely nipping her bottom lip. He could still taste himself on her mouth, and he thought of the bite marks again. His.

“Shower awaits,” she finally whispered through his smile, and before he could reach for her again she quickly moved up out of the bed toward the hallway, completely and gloriously naked. Whatever initial, irrational reservations she had that first night had quickly dropped away, and Logan was grateful, because about all he was interested in doing was seeing Marie naked as often and as completely as possible.

“You need company?” he shouted after her, instinctively sitting up himself at the promising thought.

She turned her head back to him, hair flowing out from behind her, as she fiddled with the doorframe to the bathroom a bit, all the while smiling widely.

“Well, come on, then,” she finally said, with a wink and a little tilt of her head.

--
Logan rolled himself out from beneath the engine of the truck, sitting up on the rollerboard, wiping the sweat away from his forehead. It had been a long, seemingly endless morning without Marie. With three classes in a row to teach, she was ultimately off limits to him for a block of several hours, and Logan found this stretch of time in the morning the most unbearable. Additionally, he had a particularly long and grueling session with Charles in his office this morning, as the professor searched for and stirred up memories from some of Logan’s darkest and longest days in the war, after things had really gone to shit. Spending close to two hours in Charles’ office, Logan had afterward found himself making his way to the garage, which was becoming more and more of a sanctuary of sorts, part of his morning ritual as anything else. Logan had recently bought a truck with some money he had been squirreling away, an old Ford F-150 that had good bones, but was in need of several major repairs. Mentally spent and often disturbed from handing over his past to Charles, working with the engine of the truck had become something of an antidote, and Logan found the more he fiddled with the beastly contraption, the more at peace he felt. What had Marie called it? A good kind of sore. Maybe this kind of work was something like that.

He had set up in the fifth and final garage bay, and had opened up the garage door to the brisk fall wind. It was early November now, and the weather had turned what Marie had called “down right cold” over the past few days, although Logan didn’t particularly mind and found Marie’s distaste of the chill in the air amusing. This was another reason Marie’s absence felt less here. There was no need to make sure she was comfortable, and now he welcomed the outdoor air and the open space the open garage afforded him. Especially as of late, Logan had found himself avoiding spaces he felt were too-enclosed, especially since after the jump, and Logan was beginning to increasingly suspect that this other version of himself might have spent a greater period of time locked up in a cage or at a lab, maybe even under Stryker’s supervision, than his experience the first time around.

A growl from his stomach suggested it was nearing lunchtime finally, and he realized he had been under the truck workin’ on the damn thing quite some time. Rogue had lunch off, often a full, round two-hour break that had been dutifully taken advantage of in either of their bedrooms most days, satiating an altogether different sort of hunger. He stood up then, wiping the oil off his hands with a towel, thinking a second shower and some late breakfast might do him some good, when Logan found Bobby in the open doorway to the last bay of the garage, staring at him.

Shit.

Logan cleared his throat, throwing the hand towel down on the work bench and crossing his arms as he stood before the younger man, offering him a slight nod of his head.

“Hey, kid,” he grumbled. Bobby was leaning on the doorframe, but there was nothing about his stance that was casual or relaxed.

“You wanna take a wild stab at why I’m here?” Bobby finally said, straightening a little.

Logan sighed. “Well, I ain’t seen ya work on an engine a day in your life, so I’m guessin’ this is about Rogue.”

“The whole school knows,” he muttered coldly, walking into the garage then to face Logan head on. He was only a couple of paces away now, the two men standing there in the cool November wind, the open hood of the Ford just beyond them. Honestly, he had to hand it to the kid. Bobby obviously knew that Logan was practically twice his size and over triple his age, adorned with an adamantium skeleton and who could heal instantly to boot. To face him on was to challenge him, and even while he felt the tension building and would be quick and ruthless in defending Marie if he had to, Logan realized he also felt the slightest twinge of something that seemed a lot like guilt. Bobby had been seeing Rogue before Logan was thrown into this new timeline, and, if the roles were reversed, and
Bobby had started suddenly fucking his girl, Logan would have gutted Bobby without much of a second thought.

“So? What do ya want from me, bub?”

“I want to beat the shit out of you,” he grumbled, voice terse and on-edge. Logan uncrossed his arms then, standing up to his full stature. Bobby didn’t have to be feral to understand that men had been killing each other over women since the dawn of time, and there was no mistaking Logan’s subtle threat in drawing himself up to his full height.

“You don’t even know her,” Bobby added, voice thin and volatile. *Fuck*. Marie had always played it off like Bobby and she were fuck-buddies, nothing more, but now Logan was getting strong vibes of something else entirely. Even if Marie had been telling the truth, it was obvious Bobby had procured a different sense of what their relationship had meant.

“And how do you know that I don’t?” Logan cautiously asked, playing his cards carefully. Bobby was an asset to the school, even if he did have a tendency to be kind of a stuck-up asshole, and Logan wasn’t really intent on fucking him up too bad, if only because of Charles’ potential disappointment with juvenile in-fighting. But, hell, if Bobby wanted it to come to blows, Logan was more than happy to oblige him.

“How long have you even been here, a month, two at most? You think that’s how long it takes to get to know someone? Rogue’s fragile, intricate. It took me *years* to convince her I might be worth her time. And then you waltz in here and days later she’s sleeping with you?”

“I’m not sure we agree on the state of Rogue’s fragility, bub. She seems pretty sturdy to me,” Logan remarked.

“You don’t know her like I do,” Bobby retorted. At this, Logan growled. He had seen every glorious inch of her this morning, she had had him in her mouth only a few hours ago. He begged to differ. But, even as Logan’s eyes narrowed at the younger mutant’s threats, he knew Bobby partially had a point, even if Logan wasn’t keen on listening to him. The fact of the matter was that it bothered Logan to no end that there were secrets that Marie didn’t quite seem ready to give up to him yet, and as far as Logan could tell both versions of her had always been that way. Bobby snidely remarking on this fact to Logan’s face, however, was not helping.

“Trust me, I know her,” he grumbled, now holding one fist with his other hand, subtly massaging his knuckles in an obvious sign of warning.

“You know a different version,” Bobby kept going. “Rogue’s been through a lot, Logan, and most of what she’s been through didn’t involve you.”

“Hey, she makes her own choices, right?” he retorted.

“Does she?” he spat back, and Logan found himself stepping closer to Bobby, towering over him, now inches from the other man. Immediately, Logan felt the temperature around him drop as he stared into the bastard’s white-blue, dead-looking eyes.

“Look, bub, I know this didn’t go your way, but it’s what it is now,” he growled in anger. “And you better watch your fucking insinuations. I didn’t force her to do jack shit. She’s a grown woman for Christ’s sake. She didn’t do anything with me that she didn’t want to already do,” he snapped back.

*Just drop it, baby.*

And there it was again, as clear as fucking day. The voice. Logan looked up a bit at it, sniffing the
air, and then the tension broke between the two men, and Logan sighed, standing down intuitively, knowing this was a fight that he didn’t quite have in him. At least, not today.

“Let it go, Bobby,” he said, tiredly. Bobby’s eyes widened a bit as Logan’s sudden change in mood, before sneering once more as he stalked off without another word, and the temperature warmed a bit, despite the cool November wind.

Logan breathed out harshly, murmuring a “fuck” under his breath for good measure

---

He found her drenched in the sunlight of the classroom, packing up the last of her things from teaching. He had made his way back upstairs, had showered once more, intent on turning the day back around, even stopping in the dining room to snag a Honeycrisp apple on his way to her classroom, which students were now filing out of. As Logan let them pass, however, he toyed with the apple a bit apprehensively in one hand, the conflicting thoughts and confusing emotions from the morning threatening to bubble over. Of course, she was fucking beautiful as ever, adorned in a silky hunter green dress, nude stockings and black oxfords, and for a moment Logan was besieged with the image of making love to her up against a blackboard, throwing up her skirt and taking her hard against the monochrome surface, despite the fact that Xavier’s school had switched to hologram projections years ago and there were no blackboards in the classroom to speak of. As he finally made his way into the now-empty room though, the tension spiked inside him again, as he finally noticed that she was also wearing a sheer black scarf. He had missed it on his first view of her, as camouflaged as it was with her hair she was wearing down today. Logan’s frown deepened a bit as he casually walked over to her, quietly setting the apple down on the desk in front of her as he did so.

She saw the apple first and looked up to him, every line on her face turned up into a genuine smile. It would have been a beautiful thing to witness, but the sight of the scarf had turned the initial relief from seeing her again into a murky sort of confusion. For one thing, she looked an awful lot, an awful lot, like the old Marie. For another, it was looking more and more like an attempt to cover the worst of the bites he had left on her, and, from her response to his questioning her about it this morning, that didn’t add up.

“Do you even know how school goes anymore?” she was asking through a small smile, picking up the apple carefully and running her thumb over the speckled skin. He stood back a bit, once more taking in the sight of her like this, thoughts flitting from their conversation from earlier this morning back to the confrontation he had had with Bobby less than an hour ago.

“So... how much work does it take?” he found himself asking her, still maintaining a foot or two of distance between them.

“What?” she asked.

“You said it came back on if you were tired or stressed,” he replied, a bit too gruffly. “So how much work does it take to keep those powers off?”

The question in her features turned a bit sharp as she began detecting the tension in his voice, even as she still held the apple in her hand. She frowned a little, finally setting it down gently on the desk once more, before returning to putting the rest of the books in her satchel.
“A fair amount,” she finally muttered, before closing the bag and clutching the strap close to her. Something in him went a bit dark, as he thought of the way she had touched him this morning, running a lazy hand down his neck. A fair amount. What the fuck did that mean?

“Like, you constantly have to think about it?” he asked. Meanwhile, neither of them yet had turned to leave like they usually did, quickly heading to his room or her room, typically wanting to get the most out of each other as they possibly could.

“Well, sort of,” she said evenly, obviously uncomfortable now. “More like…you know when you have a song stuck in your head you can’t quite get rid of and you do all you can to stop singing along?”

“Yeah?” Logan asked tersely, not liking where this answer was going.

“Instead of trying to purge it from your mind, try keeping it there. Try playing it constantly, to the sound of skin please stay turned off, because if you start to forget the tune, people die,” she finished a little bitterly.

He only grumbled a bit in response, and then, after another curious thought hit him, not caring if he was offending her anymore, he added, “Do you let go, turn it on, when I’m not around? When you’re by yourself?” he asked. Marie shrugged her shoulders a bit moodily before responding.

“I guess I do. I let the song fall out of my head. I stop concentrating so hard, if that’s what you mean,” she said flatly.

“So…while we’ve been together, you’ve meanwhile been doing a whole hell lot of “concentrating” the last few weeks?” he asked.

She looked at him a bit strangely for a moment, before she began to take his meaning. He was torn between guilt and lust and confusion, and, on top of everything else, an inexplicable burgeoning anger, not so much at Marie, but at the truth of it all. Something about being able to touch Marie, as fucking amazing as it had been, was now beginning to feel wrong somehow. He was once again stricken with thoughts of the old Marie, the young Marie, walking into Charles’ office, desperately searching for confirmation that the cure was real from the news story she had witnessed on television. The fact that she could kill someone with a simple touch made her lethal, made her seem strong to the Wolverine. Did turning all that off, denying who she was in some small way, being able to control it, make her stronger or weaker in that regard? What was he asking of her really, then, to touch her so languidly in the morning sun? To have her suck on him good and long and hard, with that fucking song always in the background? Suddenly, the comments from Bobby earlier floated back across his mind. What had he said? Rogue is fragile, intricate.

Logan stepped closer to her, trying to pick up her scent, trying to guess what she was thinking, and he felt her stiffen a little at his enclosing proximity.

“Scott’s teaching in here in less than ten minutes,” she managed to say, glancing over to the door that was still wide open.

“So?” he said, moving to run his hands over the silk of the green dress.

“So I’d like to keep my job,” she said, voice now on the edge of frustration. “Someone’s got to take what they do in this place seriously.” He blatantly ignored her dig, instead moving to pick at the sheer black fabric of the scarf between a thumb and forefinger.

“Why this today?” he finally asked, knowing that she was uncomfortable, partly, because he was
guessing she knew she had been caught. There was a flush on her cheeks, anyhow, but even still he took a little pleasure in toying with her guilt. Even while one part of him questioned why the hell he was fucking with a good thing, another part already knew the answer. *Because the Wolverine is sick of being held back so tightly, and he’s vying for control in any way he can. Fuck Bobby for trying to make a claim over his mate. Fuck Marie for trying to hide his mark. Fuck the universe for making Marie feel like she couldn’t be completely and totally herself, alive and vibrant on this spinning piece of rock in space.*

“What we do… is our business,” she was saying, and raw instinct once more flared inside of him. Thinking of Bobby again, Logan suddenly regretted ever doubting putting his mark on her this morning. More people needed to see it, know it for what it was. *She was his.*

“You know, I put those there for a reason,” he grumbled, mouth now just barely lingering over the worst of the marks, through the sheer lining of the scarf.

“That so?” she asked, sensing perhaps, in part, what he was up to, what was happening to him, and still daring him to keep going. *Fucking tease.*

“Yeah,” he muttered, a hand lazily traveling up to linger over the fabric of one breast.

“And what reason is that?” she asked, voice breathy and restless. *Because you’re mine,* he thought, but stopped himself from saying.

“Because some people need a louder reminder than others,” he griped, pulling back from her a bit, gathering the scarf in one hand.

“Reminder of what?” she pressed.

“Of the fact you’ll never be anyone else’s but mine.”

“Of how the world’s working right now,” he said, brow furrowing, before he slowly pulled the scarf off her neck, unfolding it, and laying it out flat over the inner part of her wrist, and then he was nipping at the pale skin through the fabric indolently, toying with her.

“You know, darlin’, you don’t always need that kind of…concentration,” he muttered through the fabric. “If you need a moment to…breathe. Stop all that pretending.”

“Excuse me?” Marie muttered, voice harsh with budding lust but also a blooming anger.

“There are a lotta ways,” he continued, unable to shut up now, scarf still over his hand as he traveled up her arm with it and back to her neck, other hand now sneaking between her thighs, just lingering between her legs before pressing hard, applying pressure and force to that warmth through the silk lining of her stockings. He could feel her squirm under him. She didn’t want this, but he was going to give it to her anyway.

“Logan,” she said angrily.

“You could just let go, Marie. Turn it off, take a fucking risk,” he muttered, pressing her up against the teacher’s desk, she helpless to his strength, as he pushed his hand upward, feeling the beginning of a fresh wetness between her legs. He smirked, loving that he was turning her on even though she was pissed at him, even if she wanted free. He added pressure, moving slightly against the fabric of a lining too thin, and she only muttered something incoherent in response.

“That feel good darlin’?” he growled, mimicking her tone and words from earlier when she had taken him out of her mouth, taunting his need to fill her.

Logan held the scarf up to her bare neck then, and purposefully and sharply bit her once more
through it, abstaining from anything close to gentle as his saliva dampened the fabric, while his fingers continued to play with the wetness between her. She moaned a little against him, but as soon as she did so he stopped, removing his hand from where it had been quickly, and the scarf puddled to the floor between them. She whimpered a bit, before exhaling frustratingly.

“That’s for this morning,” he whispered sharply into her ear, stepping back. “And…for trying to cover these up,” he added, quickly running a thumb along the side of her neck, and Marie was unable to stop from wincing in pain from where his teeth had agitated and broken her skin from the new bite.

Just as they broke apart, Scott was walking into the classroom, looking at them both strangely, even through his glasses. Logan knew Scott was quickly realizing he had just missed something deeply private but still apparently on public display via the open door.

“And just what the fuck are you staring at, Cyclops?” Logan grumbled, before he turned back to Marie to see her glowering at him, her cheeks still flushed from arousal and frustration

“I think I’ll eat on my own today,” she murmured, before she quickly turned on her heel and stalked off, brushing past both men without another word.

---

Logan had spent the afternoon brooding while Rogue taught more classes, sifting through the tumultuous influx of thoughts, some of them indulgent and self-loathing—Why was he so fucked up? Why couldn’t he act like a fucking normal human being? Why the fuck had he been born this way? —but most of them centered on Marie. He realized he had acted rashly, based on nothing more than a hunch, and he had unfairly judged her. But his anger had not so much lessened as it had simply morphed into something more generic and vague. The fact of the matter was, he wanted Marie closer to him. She had graciously offered up her body, but it wasn’t near enough. He wanted to know every single fucking detail about her, and right now, this instant. He had been haunted by what Bobby had said, about it taking years for her to warm up to Bobby, and Logan was starting to worry it wasn’t because the man could freeze himself at the drop of a hat.

He hadn’t been able to find her after she had finished teaching, although Logan realized that there had only been a few minutes between the last class and a last minute faculty meeting that had been called. Still though, he despondently strode in twenty minutes late, loudly closing the door behind him, before leaning against the back wall.

“Nice of you to join us, Logan. Finally,” Scott said, but then continued on with what he was saying. The conversation about enrollment had begun to present itself as priority number one at most meetings. The fact of the matter was that there was simply less students around, and, apparently, everyone at Westchester was starting to realize this wasn’t a public relations problem. It seemed, on whole, the number of mutants, particularly those younger than about fifteen or sixteen was rapidly dwindling at the school. Logan listened half-heartedly as they batted ideas around as to why, but Logan found himself still caring little, as wrapped up as he was in his own problems. She was across the room, trying now not to look at him, still in that fucking dress, the little green number that-

*Logan, please pay better attention,* Charles mentally commanded of him, and Logan growled a little under his breath.
Stay outta my head, Charles, he thought.

That is extremely difficult, my friend, when you're projecting your personal frustrations all over the room so very loudly, he mentally stated calmly, and as Logan looked over to the professor, Charles raised his eyebrows to make a point, before addressing the group once more as a whole.

“Scott, why don’t we send Storm and Jean out to collect numbers, interview parents? I think we may need to work with other leaders across the country to further understand just what we’re dealing with here,” Charles stated.

Scott turned to Charles oddly, and only at the other mutant’s reaction did Logan pay better attention.

“Charles… I just suggested that,” Scott murmured. There was a pause for a moment, as Charles frowned slightly. “Ah. Please forgive me, Scott. It’s been a very long day,” he paused, looking over to Logan once more and Logan couldn’t help but find himself cringing a bit under the professor’s stare. “Scott, I think it’s time to call it a night, don’t you?” Charles finally asked.

---

Logan caught up with Marie in the hallway and followed her as she trod back to her room, keeping in time with the brisk pace of her stride, intent on making things right.

“Logan,” she addressed him a bit moodily, as she fiddled with the her key.

“You look tired, darlin,” he muttered.

“Yeah, well, it’s been a long day,” she said back, as she opened the door. She hesitated a moment, looking up at him from where he lingered by her side, and then stared blankly into her room, before sighing.

“Well, come on in, then,” she murmured, and he followed her inside her room, dutifully shutting the door behind them. He loved coming in here, and secretly delighted in Marie’s little place, because he was now considering it one of the few spaces that seemed to offer up never-ending hints about the woman he was struggling to get to know. It was tidy enough, but there were books everywhere. A Bosch painting hung on the far wall, a record player sat in the corner, albums from good bands, bands he liked, scattered around it, having been recently played. There was a warm, cozy maroon quilt on her bed, the one he now knew her grandmother had done for her, and all around the place, carefully positioned everywhere, were tiny cranes carefully crafted of origami paper. The first time she had welcomed him inside, he had gently picked one up, it no bigger than the size of his finger, eyebrows raising in a small question.

“I like to do things with my hands,” was all she had said through a blush, and he had flashed her a knowing smile.

Now, he gently fiddled with one of the paper cranes on the desk, wishing today had been more like that day, before setting it back down. Marie, meanwhile, had shed the scarf from earlier, but was now kicking off her shoes, massaging her neck a bit as she did so before going to a half-empty bottle of Shiraz, pouring a generous glass for herself, and Logan noted that she hadn’t offered him any.

“That meeting ended strangely,” he finally muttered.
“Were you even paying attention to what was going on in there?” she asked, before taking a seat on the edge of her bed while he slumped into her office desk chair, knowing full well it was important to give her a little space.

“Yeah. Well, sort of,” he admitted.

“Then why aren’t you more upset by the news?” she asked, fingers cradling the glass of wine as she took a long sip.

“What news?” Logan asked, a little frustrated now that they were still talking about something wholly unimportant to the reason he had wanted to speak to her in the first place.

“That we’re disappearing?” she said, before another drink of wine.

“Oh come on, darlin’. That’s a little dramatic, ain’t it?” he said.

“Is it?” she shot back. Logan sighed, wearily running a hand through his hair.

“So, there are less of us nowadays. S’mother nature, baby. It’s probably not the first time there’s been a drought. I’m sure at other times the numbers surge. And besides, what’s the use in worrying about something we absolutely have no control over?” Marie bit her lip at this, toying with the glass in her hand as she stared at him oddly.

“What?” he asked, suspicion in his voice growing.

“It’s just...” she said, tapering off.

“What?” he pressed.

“This is real, Logan. This is all really happening. To you, to me, to all of us,” she finished. He blinked at her for a moment, before he realized what she was getting at.

“I know that, Marie,” he said through a gruff whisper.

“Do you?” she pressed.

“Hell, baby! I’m trying,” he protested.

“I know it’s not all death and destruction and sentinels, but what’s happening here... it matters,” she finished.

“What are you saying, Marie?” he asked quietly.

“Exactly what I’m telling you,” she whispered.

“Yeah, I got it, but you’re saying somethin’ else too. Or did you forget?” he asked, tapping his nose again like he had this morning, even if that did feel like fucking forever ago. She paused for a beat, before continuing on.

“You were horrible today,” she murmured into her glass of wine, before taking another long sip. Logan couldn’t help but to roll his eyes a little.

“Oh hell baby, that was nothing. Just a little light teasin’,” he began, before she cut him off.

“Not that,” she said quietly.
“What then?” Logan asked, unable to help the growing irritation in his voice.

“… that I am ‘pretending’?” she said, jogging his memory. Shit. Had he said that? In his little jealous outburst this afternoon, he had completely forgotten what he had actually accused her of when he was talking about keeping her skin turned off. He had honestly just been tryin’ to rile her up, get her all hot and bothered…but then, as he thought about it, he wondered, too, why the fuck he had put it like that.

“Hell darlin’,” he started, sighing from his seat near the desk. “That was just… I don’t know why I said that. It must be fucking left over, still from the past. There was this cure, you see, and you took it, and you always just wanted to be fucking normal and you had every god damn right to feel that way-”

“Please be quiet,” she whispered.


“I need you to shut up about your past,” she said a bit venomously.

“Baby, I-” he began.

“Why do you want so much for me to be like her?” she whispered so quietly a person with normal hearing would likely not have heard her.

“What?” Logan said, now completely on edge.

“Skin on?” she quietly murmured. “That’s the old Marie. Your Marie.”

“So this is where it’s all going? You really wanna start in on all that? Because I don’t think I need to ask you about who the hell you were talking to that first night, just after I got done fucking you long and good and hard on the goddamn marble floor?”

She blushed the shade of her wine, before Logan let out a sigh.

“I just want you to be your fucking self, Marie. Whoever the hell you are,” he added grumpily.

“What’s that’s supposed to mean?” she asked again.

“What’s that’s supposed to mean?” she asked again.

“Nothing, it’s just…maybe you could try sharing a bit more, you know? That’s what I was gettin’ at, I think, with your skin. Because you’re walkin’ around with all those fucking walls up…”

“Well maybe if you tried listening better, I’d say more,” she retorted.

“I’m trying Marie,” Logan once again found himself saying.

“No, you’re fucking me,” Rogue snapped, setting down her empty glass in one fell swoop, a new sort of anger flaring in her voice. “There’s a difference.”

“That ain’t fair, darlin’,” he growled, and he was standing again, despite himself.

“No. You know what’s not fair?” she asked, the beginning of tears in her eyes, and she was now standing too. “Having to live with the knowledge every day that you are this close to killing someone. One slip, one slip, Logan, and I end your sorry, miserably long life. But I do it for you, I do it for everyone, because touch matters to me. Because I need it. And I know you need it. And for you to walk into my life and make light of something that you don’t understand? Fucking classic.”
“You don’t know me all that well then, either. You forget I can take it, Marie. I can handle you. You can’t kill me,” he said through a raspy whisper, knowing he was partially lying as his eyes grew dark as they lingered on her body.

“You don’t understand,” she murmured sadly, and he saw the longing in her eyes and then he knew what she wanted to do to him, and he knew he wanted it too, because, now, he determinedly strode over to her, grabbing her by the shoulders and kissing her long and hard and deep. She ran her hands down his back, and then he broke the kiss just long enough to find himself whispering, “Make me understand. Just let go for a second. Fucking turn it on, Marie,” and then the kiss began to heat, that telltale earthquake rising up between them both as he began to feel the pull, that fucking power, and he was leaving himself, giving himself in yet another way to her, but he still didn’t let her go, determined to let her choose when to end it. This was only meant to be a light pull, he knew it even as it was happening, not near as long as when he had given life back to her at the Statue of Liberty or that night early on at Xavier’s or even after South Africa. But now, maybe due to the wine or the anger or maybe just not wanting to quite let go, she was timing it wrong, and he felt too many of his senses and memories leaving him, and then it was taking everything in him just to keep standing anyway, gripping the desk for support.

“Holy fuck,” she said, stealing his words, as she finally ripped away from him, looking up to Logan wildly, full of vitality and vindication and force, even as he still swayed on the spot she had left him in. “I’d forgotten,” she murmured, staring at him, and then he saw her eyes darken.

Uh oh.

“Satisfied?!?” she practically snarled, beginning to quietly pace her side of the room. Her mannerisms had changed on a dime, suddenly oddly reminiscent of his own, but there was also no doubt in Logan’s still-pounding head that she wasn’t still somehow her entire self, the part she never showed, the part she kept locked away with all the rest. And she was still angry as hell.

“Marie…” he said half-heartedly, still a bit woozy from the jolt, trying to bolster his strength.

“Just shut up. You needta look at it, right? This is you, lover, or at least a part of you, in me. You like seeing that?” He just stared at her, becoming more and more disturbed, as he watched his bite marks from earlier today obediently disappear from the side of her neck.

“Listen to me, James…” she said, before she stopped for a moment, a sudden clarity in her eyes, even as new tears sprung from them before continuing, “James Howlett. James…that’s the name, the fucking name your mother gave you, isn’t it?”

Fuck, fuck, FUCK. They had been idiots, playing with fucking fire.

“Baby—” his voice broke as he tried to reign her in, calm her down.

“No. Listen to me. I control my mutation because I choose to. Because I am strong enough. So you better muster up some fucking faith in me real fast, cowboy. And don’t you dare, don’t you fucking dare insinuate for one second that I’m somehow pretending to be something I’m not because I choose to keep it turned off to protect those I love. And if you pull anything like that over on me again let me remind you that I can drop you to the fucking floor anytime I goddamn please. So unless it’s for some kind of fucked-up crazy sexual kink you want to satisfy, you fucking masochist, I keep the skin off. Understand, sugar?”

That last remark did it to him. He felt the animal in him shake off the rest of the jolt, as his own anger rolled up to greet him. That, in point of fact, was one of his twisted fantasies, and to have that knowledge suddenly flung about like it meant nothing had him seeing red. Fucking masochist my
“You’ve got a filthy little mouth on ya all the sudden darlin’, you know that?” he snarled.

“And whose fucking fault is that?!” she shouted, scowling.

“Get the hell over here,” he barked, and, when she dug in her heels and crossed her arms petulantly, he was on her in a second, pushing her roughly backward a couple of steps as he kissed her hard, now holding her firmly against the wall even as she writhed under him. As he fought for control, he realized she was stronger than she usually was, and he felt a level of responsiveness that hadn’t been there before as his instincts took center stage inside her. They were savage with each other, rougher than they ever had been, and he was biting her earlobe and she was pulling at his hair and his hands were ripping at her dress, desperate to get her out of the fucking thing. She pulled back for a moment, head leaning against the wall, a smoldering look in her eyes.

“Just man up and use the fucking claws already,” she taunted him. He snarled at her before finally sliding a single claw partially out of his left hand, and, easily and with absolute precision, he shredded the beautiful green dress, stockings and panties all before easily picking her up and throwing her pseudo feral ass harshly down on the bed and savagely assaulting her again. He ran his hands roughly down her body, pinching a nipple hard before taking the other in his mouth, but then she was rearing up under him, ripping off his wifebeater and clawing at his torso, before she took the skin of his right shoulder in her mouth, and fucking bit down on him as hard as she possibly could. He snarled in pain and frustration, holding her down more tightly in the bed, fighting to still keep control over the Wolverine as the animal sneered at her attempted dominance, wanting her silent, submissive. “Just quit it, woman,” he couldn’t stop from growling, and she only threw him an evil smirk back that shook him a bit, and then she was over him, straddling his hips in the moonlight, her body so goddamn gorgeous he could hardly stand it. They existed like this for a moment, before she cocked her head slightly, an odd look on her face in the light from the window. Something about her, all wild hair and longing and desperation, broke the savage need for control within him, and he felt himself coming back from wherever he had been so close to going to.

“What? You don’t like it this way sugar?” she asked, a bit too viciously.

“I like you any way you wanna be, baby,” he muttered tiredly, hand still firmly on her thigh. Something in his voice broke the spell for her too though, as she stared down at him for a moment, swaying a bit from where her legs cradled his waist. She blinked once more, and then looked around blindly, as if she was just realizing where she was at, what she was doing.

“Oh, god. Oh, fuck, Logan,” she said, still blinking back tears, her hand flying to her mouth, and he realized a little of his blood from her bite from earlier was still smeared on her bottom lip.

“Baby,” he heard himself say, sitting up quickly and throwing an arm out to steady her just in time.

“You’re in my mind. I can’t get you out,” she said alarmingly, openly crying now.

“Marie,” Logan said a bit helplessly.

“She gave it all up for you. She was there, she…she…” Marie said through sobs, and that sent alarm bells ringing through Logan’s mind. *Fuck.* So she had seen more than he thought. Enough to get them both into some real fucking trouble. They were both guilty. Too goddamn prideful and stubborn to comprehend what they were really doing, how they were hurting each other in an effort to understand.

“Marie,” he said again, trying to get through to her, holding the back of her head gently to him. “Just
breathe, baby. Throw those walls up. You know how. Just do it.” She was breathing heavily for a moment, and then a moment more, and then something in it all regulated, and he heard her heartbeat slow down, now keeping a normal, steady rhythm as she stopped seething. For a while they sat there like that, in the middle of her bed, as he felt her come back to herself. Finally, after what seemed like hours but could have only been a few minutes, she sat back at bit, looking at him through wide, apologetic eyes.

“Well, that was a fucking mistake,” she finally breathed.

--

They had found each other several times in the night, desperately trying to apologize through the act of sex. Most of it had been slow and careful, and this feeling had stretched itself into the early hours of the morning. Marie had finally gotten up after falling into a light sleep after he had held onto her, gently and quietly spending himself inside her in the morning light, all the while murmuring in her ear. She now had moved to the small kitchenette, and Logan could hear her fiddle with the coffee pot for a while, even though he was still in bed, eyes closed, taking in the scent of sex and left over Shiraz and freshly ground coffee beans. He hadn’t admitted it to her, but ever since the jolt last night his head had still been pounding, the feeling of lingering pain foreign and disconcerting. Logan thanked the world for small favors that it was a Saturday, at least. At some point, he opened his eyes and more closely watched Marie make the coffee. She wore a beautiful silk Kimono-inspired robe with intricate black and red patterns that Logan deeply appreciated, even if he did like seeing her naked best. Logan kept his eyes intently on her as she finished with the task of making coffee and came back with two steaming mugs of the stuff, nursing one and setting the other on her desk beside her as she sat in the chair, now facing him. Smelling the fresh coffee, Logan sat up a bit at the lingering promises in its aroma.

“I think one of the problems is this place,” she finally said, looking at him. Despite what they had said with their bodies last night, they hadn’t spoken of the jolt or their relationship since it had happened.

“Yeah?” he asked.

“All of this history here. Yours and mine. I can’t parse out my memories of you and him in here, and, now of me and her...” she finished quietly. Logan inwardly winced. He wasn’t ready, not at all, to talk about the memories Marie had most likely witnessed last night.

“Well, why don’t we get outta here for a while, then?” he found himself asking.

“What...leave?”

“Yeah, just for a while,” he said. Marie set down her coffee on the desk and looked over to him once more.

“How about classes?” she asked. Logan smiled a bit, taking a moment to appreciate Marie’s ever-dutiful loyalty to her responsibilities, all her causes.

“Kitty can cover ‘em until Christmas,” he said.

“Christmas? And what about fight club?”
“Peter can handle it,” he said. He could tell the wheels were churning in her head as she thought about what he was saying, and he knew from the lightness in her eyes she was now seriously considering it.

“Well, I haven’t had a break in I don’t know how long,” she muttered. “How would we do it?”

“I think my truck’s finally workin’, so maybe a drive?” he asked.

“Where?” she said, although now she was outrightly smiling at the prospect of getting the hell away from this place and what had happened last night, and Logan realized he was too.

“Hell darlin’, wherever you want,” he said, and she smiled a bit more, an idea blossoming on her features.

“How about someplace warmer?” she asked. “Some place with a little more...southern flair?”

“Hmm,” he murmured, finally padding out of bed, completely naked and coming over to her. “Sounds real nice,” he leaned down and whispered into her ear before nipping it gently and then kissing the top of her head.

“Now hand over that fucking coffee, darlin’, because you’ve managed to give me the worst hangover I’ve ever had, at least in this century,” he murmured, and she looked up to him apologetically before handing him the spare, steaming mug.

--

They took their time, stopping where they wanted, when they wanted. Logan was grateful now he had been working on the old F-150 so dutifully, because what would have been an easy, one to two-day drive took them six, and he was glad to see that the truck didn’t complain once. It was a good pace for them both, he realized though, and, on the open road, they quickly learned several new, important things about each other. While navigating, Logan liked using a road atlas and taking shortcuts that he sorta just winged; Marie dutifully owed her allegiance to her phone and Google maps. Marie loved Elvis; Logan hated him. Marie sent a quiet little prayer up to whoever might be listening before meals, even though Logan knew she only believed in God in the vaguest sense anymore. An old southern Baptist habit, she had muttered when he had caught her doing it. Logan admitted to being agnostic verging on atheistic one morning, and Marie had just nodded her head gently in knowing acceptance. Logan had a secret thing for marshmallows; Marie loved yogurt covered raisins, much to Logan’s horror. If they had to get fast food, they both liked Wendy’s and hated McDonald’s, but they liked roadside diners best. Marie felt nauseous if she read too long in the car, much to her frustration. My whole damn life. What kind of person who likes to read would be cursed with something so horrible as that? she had complained and Logan had simply grinned in response, but Logan also hated not being the one to drive, especially since he had discovered Marie was much more prone to road rage than he was. Marie had also caught Logan quietly murmuring along sometimes to a song if he liked it while he drove, and this essential fact, now paired with Marie’s realization that Logan could carry a decent tune if he felt so rarely inclined, was something she tormented him endlessly for.

Mostly, however, they talked, Logan’s left hand always steadily on the wheel, Marie’s feet usually up on the dashboard, lazily looking out across the changing landscape through sunglasses, despite the November weather. Upon witnessing an autotruck try to move into his lane for the first time,
Logan cursing its bulky frame and driverless exterior as it did so, they discussed automation and its impact on jobs in America. Logan hated technology, but Marie was receptive. They both found ethics and philosophy interesting, but they also discussed history and science and even a little politics, although neither one of them religiously stood behind either political party.

And, as they finally drove deeper into the south, about when they crossed the state line into Alabama, Marie, stiltedly and with some lingering inhibition, started talking about where she had come from. She had grown up in Meridian, Mississippi in the deep south of Lauderdale county. A large naval base lay outside of town, she had explained, and her father had served in the navy for over twenty years, while her mom had stayed at home. She had been an only child too, something Logan wasn’t so surprised to hear about her. Rogue had fallen out with her parents long ago, and neither of them were planning to drop by for a visit, but Logan knew the town Marie had left behind had meant something to her, and she hadn’t been back to see it for a very, very long time.

The weather warmed the further south they drove. And as the weather changed, so did the culture, and Logan noticed Marie started delighting in the old reminders and telltale signs they weren’t up north any longer. The accents changed for one, and Logan took pleasure in the fact that Marie’s accent was more apt to make an appearance when she was around other people who had one too. He saw Marie let go bit by bit, letting some of that responsible, somber exterior that her years had given her fall away to show a bit of the sassy, southern spitfire underneath it all. In particular, little reminders of her life from over twenty years ago that excited and enthralled her, brought it out in her especially, and Logan was often helpless in entertaining her random whims and urges. They were just outside of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, when Marie grabbed Logan’s leather jacket by the arm as he was driving, ushering him to pull off at the next stop.

“Oh, oh Logan, stop!! Let’s stop! It’s a Piccadilly!” she had exclaimed, after seeing the telltale blue road sign advertising what was on the next exit.

“What the fuck is a Piccadilly?” he asked, shooting her an incredulous look even as he merged into the right lane to pull off at the next stop. Marie’s childlike excitement was fucking adorable, and he wasn’t about to let it go to waste. Marie blushed a little, and then continued on.

“Uhh…you umm, it’s a place to eat. My favorite, when I was a kid. You pick out the food you want, like a cafeteria, but it's all southern cooking. They only have ‘em in the south,” she said, biting her lip.

“Sounds real good. ‘Bout dinner time anyway,” he said, giving her an encouraging smile, and she grinned back as they made their way off of the interstate.

“Your eyes are bigger than your stomach. That’s what mama would always say. I’d pick out too many things to eat, and could never eat it all. Except for the pie.”

“Pie, eh?” Logan smirked, and she bashfully grinned at him once more.

“Sweet Potato Pie. My mama would tell me it was Pumpkin, just so I’d eat it, but it was definitely sweet potatoes, through and through. It’s good,” she said.

“I bet it is,” Logan smiled again, and then she blushed more, a quirky look on her face as they pulled up to the restaurant in front of them.

About an hour later they found themselves tucked away in a deep booth, practically finished with the meal, as Logan watched Marie longingly staring down at a fluffy, warm buttered roll, one of the last things left on her plate, even though she made no move to pick it up and take a bite.
“I can’t do it,” she said, looking down sadly at it.

“Eyes bigger than your stomach?” he joked, as he snatched the warm roll off her plate.

“Hey!” she protested.

“Were you really gonna eat it?” he asked, through a bite. “You’re missing out,” he added, just for good measure. She looked down a bit gloomily still. “I’m already gonna have to jog for a couple of hours on a treadmill somewhere to work this meal off,” she said. Logan just rolled his eyes at her. He didn’t usually see Marie get excited much around food, but he had secretly loved that this meal had done a one eighty on her.

“So, you wanna stay in town here tonight?” Logan asked, already having polished off the roll before taking another sip of his Coke. This was a family place, and Logan had noticed that as they had eaten their meal it had grown more crowded, more children and mothers and fathers than anything, the families incrementally taking up most of the booths and tables around them now. Although Logan had enjoyed the food, because of the family atmosphere, there had been no alcohol in the joint to speak of, and he was already mentally planning on making a stop at the liquor store before checking into a motel. They had fallen into the habit of drinking good whiskey most nights to the sound of sweet conversation before sex, and it was a tradition Logan had a mind to continue.

“Yeah, why not?” Marie murmured, fiddling with her fork. Around them, the noise was increasing, the place picking up.

“Getting a bit busy in here anyway,” Logan murmured. He knew neither of them liked crowds much, and, just as he was going to suggest they leave, having already paid for their meal at the counter, a voice interrupted them.

“Excuse me?” Logan and Marie looked up to see a blond woman, maybe slightly younger than Rogue by a handful of years. She held the arm of a little girl with blonde curls, no more than six, and in the other hand she held a baby carrier. An older boy was bouncing around in the background as well, and the woman looked put together, but tired.

“Yeah?” Logan asked, and he could feel himself moving out of the booth, already anticipating the woman’s question.

“I’m sorry to interrupt, but we were wonderin’ if y’all were finishin’ up. This place is packed, and I’m just lookin’ to set my stuff down before we get in line,” she said wearily. Marie still was silent as she stared at the young woman, and then the little girl, who was now staring intently back at Marie, blinking at her through large, blue eyes.

“Yes, ma’am, we were just about finished,” Logan was saying, standing awkwardly now around the children, but Marie hadn’t moved.

“Rogue,” Logan said, offering his hand to get her to take it. Marie finally looked to Logan then, shaking her head just slightly, and then finally moved to leave the booth

“Sorry,” was all she muttered to the woman as she got up and brushed past.

“Much obliged,” the woman said kindly, huffing in effort a bit as she sat down the baby carrier on the table where Logan and Marie had just been picking at the leftovers of Sweet Potato Pie.
Marie was quiet on the trip to the liquor store, choosing to stay in the truck while he had gone inside. After returning, spotting a motel and intent on driving over toward it, he heard Marie mutter a “turn left instead” in the fading light.

Just like that, she gave him directions and he listened, and as the sun finished setting, a cool blue settled over the landscape. They were out of town now, and the next direction she gave them put them on a gravel road, before turning onto an open, darkened field. He finally parked, killing the Ford’s engine, and both of them sat back and stared at a dilapidated structure in front of them. Logan at first assumed it was a forgotten billboard, until he realized it was too large. And then, it clicked.

“You used to come here?” he asked, turning toward her.

“We’d make our way up to Tuscaloosa for football games. And also, the drive-in theatre;” she said, gesturing to the screen in the distance. She laughed a little, staring at the weeds in the field and the old wooden posts that dotted the landscape from where Logan supposed the speakers had once been hooked up. “It was old back then. I took you out this way on a hunch. I can’t believe anything is still here,” she said. Logan noticed that she folded her legs up closer to her. It was a childlike move, one he remembered a younger Rogue doing a hundred times, and something about it made him feel odd as the light died around them.

“You ok?” he finally muttered across the truck’s cabin.

“Yeah,” she said, sighing a bit before she turned to look at him. “You gonna open up that bottle of whiskey or just make eyes at it all night?” Logan smirked a little, looking at the whiskey between them. He tossed the bag aside and screwed the cap off easily enough, before handing the bottle to her for the first sip. She gratefully accepted the offer from him, taking a long pull from the bottle before handing it back his way.

“Was this still a good idea, coming down south?” he finally asked, before indulging in the liquor too.

“Yes. At least, I think so. It was gonna happen sometime, and…I wanted to show you…” she drifted off. Her eyes looked far away, lost somewhere beyond the field in front of them, and Logan again remembered the little girl at the restaurant who wouldn’t stop staring at Marie.

“So you gonna tell me what dinner was all about?” he said after some silence.

“Hmm?” she said.

“Back in the restaurant?” he asked.

“Oh,” she murmured, before dropping off again. She was quiet for a long time, now pressing her boots to the dash in front of her, but he didn’t push her for an answer. He knew she would respond; she just needed to do it in her own time.

“It’s… nothing much. I just…seeing that woman. With those kids,” she finally said. Logan raised his eyebrows at her, before taking another drink of the whiskey.

“Sometimes…it just hits me, and I get a bit…I don’t know…” she trailed off.

“You…wanted kids?” he asked carefully. He knew what they were doing here, in this car, was important, because this was way more than Marie had ever shared with him, in this timeline or the last. He wasn’t about to fuck it up by saying the wrong thing.
“I mean, I didn’t ever actively try, you know, but Hank broke the news to me a few years ago, when I was a bit…younger,” she said quietly.

“Hell,” he offered. “Is it because…?” he tapered off, unsure of how to put it, but she had already taken his meaning.

“Probably. I remember him saying something about an ‘epithelial threat,’ so I’m assuming so. I’m older anyway now, so…not likely gonna happen.” Something in her voice had Logan feeling disturbed, a taught, heavy feeling in his chest weighing him down.

“You thought, at one point, you wanted them though?” he asked, still careful, but still intent on trying to figure out how she really felt.

“I dunno,” Marie said, through a shrug of her shoulders, taking another swig and wiping her mouth on her hand before setting the bottle down between them. “I mean, I like kids. I teach older ones all day. So…maybe. In a different life, perhaps? One that wasn’t so…”

“Complicated?” Logan suggested.

“Yeah…” she said, trailing off, then resignedly shrugged her shoulders once more. He then knew what she was going to ask before she did; it wasn’t that hard to anticipate, really, from the way she bit her bottom lip and looked up at him cautiously, but the words were still strange and provocative on her lips. “How ‘bout you? Did you ever want kids?”

Logan swallowed hard, before grabbing the bottle between them. Marie was probably not aware of it, but it was the first time anyone had seriously asked him a question like that, and even though an answer had already begun to form in his mind, the words were harder to summon.

“Uhh, well. You know… part of me had an idea of it for a while…probably because of some of the feral shit… a woman ripe with child and all that…” he said haltingly. He looked back over to her, her wide chocolate eyes almost indiscernible in the dark, and he wondered when he had started baring his goddamn soul for this woman, even if it did feel right. He felt Rogue’s surprise hit the air between them as he gave his answer; what he had said was obviously not the answer she had expected.

“But…” Logan added, putting down the bottle, hands now grabbing the steering wheel of the parked car for no other reason than to give his hands something to do. “If they turned out like me…”

“You wouldn’t want to pass you mutation to your child?” she interrupted, her tone even and careful, like his had just been when the focus was on her.

“Well, kinda. I mean, there’s no denying that having any sorta mutation would be a hard life for ‘em, even in this rosy future, but, with my… particular sort… hell. No matter what, it’d be lose-lose you know?”

“How do you mean?” Marie barely whispered.

“Uh, well, if they turned out like me, they might be doomed to live forever, and I wouldn’t wish that on anyone. But if they didn’t turn out like me, then…”

“You might outlive them,” she murmured, and the eerie, ugly truth of it all settled between them. He had never said that out loud before. To anyone.

“But, that’s not quite true, is it?” she said, turning to face him more directly from her side of the truck, stealing a glance at his greying temples as she did so, deep in thought.
“What?” he muttered.

“Don’t you think, one day, you’ll die?” she asked. Logan looked at her evenly as she spoke the truth he had always somehow known deep inside of him, despite his fears.

“Hell, baby, probably. I’ve come close a couple of times, and I get this sense…you know? I ain’t… some kind of god; I’m just good at patching myself back together. So, yeah, I know, eventually one day I’ll probably meet my maker.” Something dark passed over Rogue’s face as he said this and she sat back in her seat once more.

“I don’t like thinking about that,” she finally muttered.

“It’s the fucking truth though. At least, I hope it is,” he grumbled, once more reaching for the half-empty bottle, taking a swallow and settling his gaze on the faded, partially torn screen in front of them both.

“What’s it been like, to live that long?” she finally heard her whisper, and he looked over to her once more.

“I don’t… really know. I don’t remember. I mean, I got memories now…but, it’s still in two parts.”

“You mean this timeline and the last?” she asked.

“Ahh, no. Although I guess there is that. I mean, uh, now and before… Stryker.”

“…and that was James?” she said delicately.

“I guess so. Hell if I really know, though,” he muttered. She moved in a little closer to him now, finally moving to run her fingers down his arm gently.

“And when did you stop being Marie?” he asked, tilting the focus back her way. She considered this for a moment before answering.

“Well, I guess after my parents threw me out. For a while, I couldn’t face it. The name, I mean. The name they had given me. It felt wrong, after what happened, but she’s still in my head, along with all the rest of them. That girl,” she said, and then through a small, sad laugh she added, “She scares the shit out of me sometimes.”

Logan quietly laughed a little at this. “How’s a sassy gal from the south all that scary?”

“It’s easy to be tough, Logan. That doesn’t take much effort.” Logan looked up to her a bit strangely, trying to understand what she had meant.

“I don’t know if most people would agree with you, darlin’,” he said to her.


“But… digging deep, throwing open the hood and inspecting each little part, trying to understand what’s broken in order to figure out how to get it to work again? That’s harder.”

Logan considered the cold truth of what she was saying, and then muttered, “Hard to work on things when you got whole parts of yourself chained up real tight or completely walled off so you can just pass as normal,” he muttered into the bottle.

“Hell yes,” Marie said, finally taking her legs off the dash and turning to him once more.

“You ever let him have control?” she asked carefully, eyes as dark as the night now around them.
Logan was a little taken aback by her candor, and it was with this look that he realized, yet again, Marie knew far more about him then he was likely to ever really comprehend.

“Not often,” he finally grumbled, and he realized the whiskey had made his words smooth and easy, and there was no way he would have been this open without the alcohol now coursing through his system. “Cage fightin’, maybe. And, before, right after Stryker.” He dropped off then, unwilling to share any more. He hoped and prayed Marie didn’t know the full extent from what she had took in of him. He had been practically, literally living like an animal right after Stryker, all senses and little else. Logan couldn’t imagine the tests they had done on him, the suffering he must have endured, because it had cost him years of bitter survival, biding his time for the man to make his way back to him, his humanity slowly returning, and, even though it had been a shitty little trailer and a rusty bike, he had fought like hell for even creating that little semblance of normality for himself. Ultimately, Logan knew, deep down, that had it not been for the Wolverine, he would have likely not made it, healing factor be damned. “But usually, I don’t let him anywhere near the wheel,” he finished.

“A lot of effort,” Marie finally murmured, “Keeping that chain wrapped around your wrist so tightly all these years.”

“Trust me, baby, you don’t wanna see what happens if I don’t,” he grumbled. Her eyebrows raised a bit in suspicion at this.

“You think he’s all that bad? You think… he’d hurt me?” she asked cautiously, although he realized she had already made up her mind regarding that answer, and Logan, despite his occasional distrust of the Wolverine’s nature, knew the animal was in silent agreement with her too.

“No…” he finally said carefully. “Well, I don’t know. I don’t think so, but… he doesn’t really… think, Marie. It’s all senses, instinct, need. Empathy ain’t much a thing he’s concerned with.

Marie sighed a little, resting her head on the back of the chair, before glancing down at the dwindling bottle between them.

“We’re both pretty fucked up, you know that? I mean, we’re alright, but we’re really fucked up,” she finally said. Logan couldn’t help but softly laugh a little at that.

“You’ve been drinking, darlin’, but if we were talkin’ about who’s more fucked up, I think I’d win the bet,” he said, finally moving to run a hand down her hair.

“Not so sure,” she murmured, before closing her eyes carefully, savoring the feel of his hand on her. She sighed a moment through closed lids, before she looked back up at him. “I’m sorry about the other night, sugar,” she added.

“Wasn’t all your fault, darlin’” he muttered, now wiping the pad of his thumb just over her lips. “We just held on a little too long. Next time, it’ll be different.”

“Next time?” she asked, stirring a bit more at his comment, but he was already shushing her.

“That’s enough talkin, don’t you think?” he said a bit coyly, before reaching for her.

“But…” she started again, and he was already interrupting her.

“Get your ass over here,” he muttered, and she complied, now straddling him in the driver’s seat of the Ford as Logan snaked one hand toward the side to lean the driver’s seat back a bit to accommodate them more comfortably. It was a position they’d fit into a hundred times over the course of the last few weeks, but each time he ran his hands up her waist it felt oddly new because
for years and years and years it had only been a part of a silent longing, a fantasy. His hands made his way up her flannel shirt, cupping a breast as he did so, before he realized she had come up to hold his wrist, and he frowned a little as she brought it out between them in the moonlight.

He knew what she wanted. *Fuck.* He sure as hell knew what she wanted, and he felt the rest of the inhibition fall away with the metallic hiss between them as he unsheathed them for the third real time since they’d been together in the pale moonlight floating through the cabin.

Their eyes met, before she cautiously reached out a hand. She looked back up to him, a question in her eyes, and he gave her the slightest of nods, before she pressed the pad of one finger to the dull side of the middle blade of his hand, gently running up the length of it, and a shiver shot down his spine.

“They’re warm…” she murmured. Gently, she moved a finger to the base of one blade to wipe away the blood from where it had pooled at the seam of where adamantium met skin.

“I *hate* that it hurts you,” she said softly.

“I’m used to it,” he muttered. She closed her eyes for a moment, before she was moving her hands once more around the base of his knuckles, now etching a path between them.

“Careful,” he murmured, but his eyes were now closed, taking in the feeling as it quickly was turning into something frighteningly pleasurable. She ran two fingers up one now, and he shuddered hard. At this, she looked up to him sharply.

“Can you feel that?” she asked, her voice breaking a bit with the question.

“Uhh, yeah. *Yes,*” he hissed, surprised as she was by the answer. “Keep doing it,” was all that he could add, the dopamine now flooding every neural impulse in his brain. The sensitivity was so fucking complex, all the hate and hope and longing there, the power and strength wound tightly in his hand. He had wondered for a long time, far too long, what it would be like for a women’s touch to linger there. Now, he knew.

“What’s it like?” she asked softly.

“It’s…ah, it’s… *fuck,*” he said, attempting to tell her and failing with the rising flood inside him. It was intimate in a way he couldn’t quite believe or accept, in a way he couldn’t come back from. In a way that showed him that she had opened up to him, and he to her, and she was here, in front of him, loving the part of himself that he couldn’t face.

“You’re beautiful, sugar, you know that?” she said, now leaning forward, whispering into his ear. “Marie,” he breathed.

“No. I’m telling you now,” she said, fingers still lingering on the blades. “Every single part of you. You hear me, baby?” He could only growl in response.

“I wanna do more with these, eventually,” she whispered. “Maybe not now, but…soon.”

“Like what?” he couldn’t stop himself from breathily asking.

“Grind up on them until I come. I wanna see myself on them, like you like seeing your come on me, on my skin,” she whispered again, toying with his ear.

“*Fuck,* Marie.”
“You know how many times, how many goddamn nights, I’ve thought about that?” she kept talking. “I know what you think, who you are, sugar.” And then she went for his belt buckle where he was already hard underneath her.

“And don’t, for a second, doubt the good inside of yourself, baby. You hear me?”

He was muttering inhuman words now, because she hadn’t withdrawn her hand from his claws. With the adamantium still out, there was little he could do to touch her and they both knew it. He was at her goddamn mercy to do whatever she pleased in this position, but, unlike the night a few days ago, it had little to do with control and everything to do with trust. He didn’t know how she managed it, but she taken him out, taken off her jeans, and she was now hovering over him quietly, lingering above his length, ready and wet. She took him in one with one smooth glide then, and the cabin of the car around them fell away. This was something she was giving to him, letting him have for once in his life. Being tough, being dominant was easy, but to let yourself be a victim, to remain vulnerable enough to let another person in, to see, that was the hardest part. She had been fucking right.

--

The next few weeks passed by lazily. They had made their way to Meridian, but hadn’t stayed long. They had snuck into her high school after dark one night and had looked around, but mostly they hopped from motel to motel, eating where they pleased, fucking where they wanted. The air, meanwhile, had finally turned cold as November fell away and December arrived, even though they were far south now. The past few days particularly Logan offered Marie his leather coat, realizing she hadn’t packed anything heavier than a jean jacket when they had left Westchester a few weeks ago, as excited as she was at the time to be some place warmer. The days kept passing, and they hadn’t talked about going back, mainly because it wasn’t Christmas yet, and also because Logan knew to go back would be to face it all: the world, the future, both of them in a space that wasn’t entirely their own.

Logan understood, somewhere deep down, something about the nature of his relationship with her was changing. His Marie, this Marie, was real and vibrant and alive, and he couldn’t get enough of her. Slowly, the memories of the past, of that other time, began to fade even more so from his mind as he discovered more about this woman, and at some point he had left the comparisons he had kept making between them behind on the Mississippi roadside.

After an exceptional bout of lovemaking in a random hotel they had splurged on just north of Jackson, however, Marie had grown restless, unable to get comfortable. The little vixen had demanded several intense rounds of fucking after a long day on the road, and he found himself unable to keep his eyes open every few seconds, even falling into a light doze here and there. She, however, was tracing patterns onto Logan’s back, but it was not something she was idly doing. She wanted him awake, and, after a bit of time, realizing he wasn’t bound to sleep peacefully until he satiated whatever need she still had, he turned to her.

“I think now’s a good time,” she muttered.

“For what?” he asked tiredly.

“For you to tell me about her,” she said. His eyes widened in the dark as he realized what she was exactly saying.
“Marie,” he murmured a little frustratingly. Any other moment in the last few weeks would have done just fine, but a part of him also realized what she meant. Logan doubted he would have shared before that night in Tuscaloosa, let alone before this trip had begun. Mid-December was quickly turning into late December: it was time.

“Listen. I have…” she closed her eyes for a moment focused inwardly on something he couldn’t see, “Only glimpses, and that’s all. And it’s not fair. It’s bothering me, now. I want to know.” Logan sighed again, before running a thumb along her collar bone, one of the endless spots on Marie that he so very much adored.

“She was …strong,” he finally murmured.

“Strong?”

“Yeah, uhh, and I’m not talkin’ about emotions. She could throw me across the room if she wanted to. She picked it up from somewhere… absorbed somebody’s power.”

“Hell,” Marie muttered.

“Yeah,” he said flatly. “And, I didn’t know it for most of the time, but she was working as a double agent.”

“What?” she asked, and it was obvious what he was telling her was starting to sound more like something out of a crime novel than from his real fucking life.

“Yeah,” he said flatly. “And, I didn’t know it for most of the time, but she was working as a double agent.”

“What?” she asked, and it was obvious what he was telling her was starting to sound more like something out of a crime novel than from his real fucking life.

“She, uh, got mixed up in some bad shit, apparently, after the cure,” he said.

“The cure? You mean, what you were talking about that night before we left…”

“Uh, yeah, but before things got really bad, they had invented this serum, you see, that could… stop powers. And she couldn’t control it like you could, so she took it. Got a lot of shit for it from a lot of people too,” he grumbled, thinking specifically back to Bobby’s reaction. One of the few reasons he found himself not taking kindly to the fucker.

“But, it came back?” she was asking.

“Yeah. Yeah, it did. And she got mixed up with the wrong people after that. Although I never knew that part. The how.”

“Why?” she asked.

“I was gone.”

“Where were you?”

“Canada, mostly. Japan. Not there,” he said, now a little too bitterly. He thought of Marie’s stoic face in the underground bunker in Mexico after the night with too much tequila, where she had accused him of that very thing. There was silence as this fact settled between them, before Marie propped her head up on one hand, eyes intent and focused.

“How bad?” she finally murmured.

“What?” Logan asked.

“How bad did the world get?” she whispered quietly. Logan hesitated for a moment, as some of the worst of the memories, the last few years, came back to him. How much to tell this beautiful woman,
who had only really known the world to idolize mutants, at least in some way or another? How to convince her of what he had seen, knowing now that it had never really taken place? Another image of Marie, the old Marie, covering her mouth in the darkened snow as she, Logan and Blink watched countless people be shot at point blank flickered across his thoughts, and it took a moment for him to shake off the chill. Honesty, then. It was what those people, those children, deserved.

“They fucking branded us baby. Branded us. Concentration camps. Inhibitor collars attached to the back of our fucking necks that cut off what we could do,” he stopped, his words now lost in a distant memory.

“I saw that. That day,” she said, quietly.

“Yeah?” he managed.

“Yes,” she said, through a sigh. He said nothing as he looked at her intently.

“And… she died then?” Marie asked gently. Fuck. Logan could barely take this.

“She was as good as dead,” was all he could say. There it was: the bitter fucking truth. She was silent for a bit, before she lay back down staring up at the ceiling fan above them, watching it turn circles about the room. The same motions. Everything repeating.

“You loved her,” she finally said to the dark. It wasn’t a question. Logan sighed, as he moved a hand across her bare stomach, from where the world had stolen her ability to create life, a right she should have dutifully owned as a woman, further up then, to heavy breasts, then tracing her full red lips. Finally, he spoke.

“There are some things in this world, Marie, that words don’t do a very good job explainin’,” was all he said. She turned then, taking him in intently.

“And now?” she softly asked.

“It doesn’t matter, baby. She ain’t here. You are.”

She kept staring at him though, and then he realized what she was really asking him.

“Logan,” she began before he stopped her.

“Hell, baby. You know...this thing… it ain’t just physical for me, darlin’. And it has nothing to do with her.”

“Sugar,” she managed, eyes wide as she took in what he was saying.

“You don’t have to say anything you don’t wanna, but all I need to know is, you in this thing for real?” he finally asked.

“Yeah. Yes, you idiot. Of course,” she said, he realized she was blinking back tears.

“For good?” he asked cautiously.

“For as long as I’m alive, sugar,” she murmured quietly.

“Good,” he growled, and then he was on her, summoning up an energy he didn’t know he could possibly still have. He was kissing her roughly, body straining against her as she melded into him. And something about her submissiveness, the subtle curves of her form around him and what she had just admitted had him quivering, and he could feel something in him slipping, his hands run raw
from holding that chain so tight. And now, her commitment to him, her need to be his for good…. the Wolverine was relentless.

He said nothing, but stopped for a moment, breathing out frustratingly, and he knew he was losing not only his ability to describe what was happening inside of him, but also losing his access to words themselves.

“It’s okay sugar,” she said, staring up at him with that intense and deep ache, and he knew and she knew.

“Marie,” he finally choked, now breathless.

“I’ll be fine. Just...let go,” she whispered. And he could already feel his control slipping, the tightness coming undone as the man was him and he was the animal, as he turned her over and he was rough and gentle and everything in between as he bottomed out inside of her in one quick push, her walls surrounding him, flooding his senses, and she was moaning in pleasure, and rode the waves of confusion and lust and black. He sensed everything and nothing, bodies close, all friction, growling, snarling to her, everything he held back, all that he tried not to be. He rode her hard, rutted into her, mumbling incoherently, the Wolverine incapable of any real language, but still they spoke. She intuitively responded to him, meeting his thrusts, growled back in his ear. She moaned in pleasure, scratching down his back, almost too quickly for his skin to stitch itself up, and his teeth drew blood from her neck to get her to understand, to get her to stop, so she would know her place, so she would know that she was his and his alone. Mate. Mine. Logan was lost somewhere just beyond knowledge, beyond reach, as he felt the pleasure rise up inside of him, and the animal had a hand up to her neck, and they were both screaming as he poured himself into her, wild spasms, and even after it was through the Wolverine stayed firmly in control, moving to clean her, to wipe away the sweat and the tears and the cum and the blood and he was gone and she was gone and there was nothing else in the dark, quiet of night.

--

In the morning, Logan woke to Marie’s phone ringing. He listened to the sound of its incessant annoyance, before he heard her groan a little, reaching for it blindly to shut it off. As his mind rose out of sleep he opened his eyes lazily. He instinctively moved to snake an arm around her, but before he could move to hold her tighter, he remembered what had happened, at least, up to a point. What had he done to her? Was she ok? Were they ok? But before he could turn to face her, to make sure she was really in one piece, now he realized the hotel telephone on the bedside was ringing.

“What the hell?” he murmured under his breath, finally rising out of bed partially to answer. It had to be, what, no later than six, seven in the morning? Fuck.

“H’lo?” he said lazily. He was greeted with Scott’s terse voice on the other end, and it took a second for Logan to even register that it was Cyclops he was talking to.

“Logan?”

“Yeah?”

“Logan…we need you both back here.” Logan was about to complain, until he sensed a strange note in the other mutant’s voice. Logan could feel Marie, now truly awake, holding his arm tightly as she
listened in, sensing something was off, too.

“What is it, Scott?” Logan asked as his muscles tightened even under Marie’s soft, gentle grasp.

“It’s… Charles. We…we think something might be wrong.”

Chapter End Notes

And with that, I leave you for a couple of days, as tonight I am forced to drive to Des Moines, Iowa with my family to see Paw Patrol LIVE tomorrow. I love my child, but please dear god someone shoot me. If you start to think your weekend is going bad, just imagine me doing that. You should feel better about yourself pretty damn quick. :P I’ve got a draft of the next chapter already but after I return home from that torture I will make it pretty and then post it.

Thanks again for all the support, friends. Writing this story brings me so much joy, in ways that words, as much as I love using ’em, cannot express. <3
Chapter 18: *Now*

Electrical impulses. Sparks triggered in the brain to the nerves to the muscles, the neurons firing along. Movement wasn’t so complex until you thought about it, the dozens of chemical reactions taking place to even lift a finger. Maybe that was why, Logan thought, he hadn’t summoned up the will to move. He hadn’t even set eyes on the lake yet, but he knew, deep down, something was wrong.

The feeling had started when he had decided to pull the tired, faithful Bronco off the road quietly onto a bed of pine needles in a relatively decent clearing. Logan knew it was another two or three-mile hike from the roadside to the lake, but he didn’t want the Bronco going anywhere near it. The engine fell quiet and then died as Logan sat there, scarred hands still tightly gripping the leather of the steering wheel, watching his now visible breath flow out in the quickly fading heat of the Bronco’s cabin. In front of him there was only wilderness, a thick snarl of dense pine and oak and cedar and larch. Even in the Bronco, he could smell it, among the fading scents of dying shrubs, wax current and juniper and chokecherry. The wind was kicking up, and there it was: the nitrogen dioxide, the telltale hints of crystallized water. Since Logan had parked the car, he realized it had begun to snow. As tiny intricate patterns of ice pressed themselves gently onto the windshield of the Bronco, Logan helplessly watched the lingering warmth of the car melt them into liquid in the dew of the growing light. Snow was something he had been desperate, eager, excited to show Laura. And now, here it was, snowing, and here he was, without her.

Logan had driven blindly north through the night, the light thrown across the black pavement racing toward him as he sped down roads ascending once more into the Canadian Rockies. He hadn’t slept more than six or seven hours in almost four days. *Almost four days since she had been missing.* Jesus. Exhaustion began eating at him early on, and he cursed his stubborn, fading health as his eyes struggled to stay open. Finally, Logan had unsheathed a claw and had shallowly scraped it across one thigh, carefully avoiding his femoral and anything that would cause him to overly bleed, the stinging pain forbidding sleep. It had worked in keeping his eyes open, and as he got closer to Alkali, rising paranoia did the rest of the job. Was he going to get any closer? Was coming back here part of the search to rescue her or some masochistic urge to settle a score that had already been settled, but then undone, with the jump in time? How the fuck was he going to go up against dozens and dozens of people like this? He had a handgun, adamantium claws that were only effective in a range of about eight feet, and a spent healing factor that wasn’t likely to do him any more good. And, meanwhile, the lead was still thin. It had felt so promising when he had left Kelowna, but now… *now.*

Fucking electrical impulses. The snow had picked up and was falling in sheets, and he knew if he didn’t leave soon, he wouldn’t be able to manage the hike up to the lake all that easily. Instead of getting out of the car, though, his muscles had him reaching once more for a plastic bottle of whiskey that he had thrown up on the dash earlier. One more nip then, before he set out. Before, *maybe,* he didn’t come back.

*Te amo, papa.* That was what she had said, her voice small and light, two evenings before she had disappeared. He hadn’t even thought of the memory again until this moment. Her voice, calling in the night. Laura, his own blood. A young girl in a red coat bouncing a ball off a dilapidated motel
wall, stopping as the limo’s tires had driven up into the parking lot. The girl he had tried to leave behind in the smelting plant with the Reavers under the scorching Mexico sun. The girl he sloughed off, screamed at, his temper boiling in rage at every turn at her damn insistence to stick with him, so much of himself mirrored back in her face, in her movements. But then, he had lost Charles, she had lost the others. They both drove away from North Dakota with no one but each other, and the very things he saw within her that had reminded him of himself had become the reasons he now sworn to protect her. Until now. Until…. he had fucking squandered it. Lost it. Again.

Laura, the second person in the world he remembered murmuring those words to him. Te amo. I love you. It was probably because he was near delirious from the lack of sleep, his mental defenses no longer working properly, but in the quiet moments of the past few nights, memories of them both had begun whispering to him once more. Marie’s gentle hush, the feel of her massaging a sore notch in his spine. The worried look, the telltale concern, as she discovered another small scar from a wound that hadn’t healed quite right. And then, after it had all ended, Laura, the fierce creature, that fiery spirit, willing and ready to bring the world to its knees if she needed to. Marie had died that day in Westchester, and then Laura had…moved something within him. Something he had considered long since departed along with the woman he had loved. He hadn’t dwelled, hadn’t thought…and yet. Laura had done it. Laura had done it.

And now, here he was, back at the beginning. Nothing more than an animal, at the mercy of the pine and the juniper and the snow and his fucking instincts. Alone. But, then again….

“Marie?” he impulsively whispered to the darkness.

…

“Marie,” he said again, his voice trembling.

…

“God damn it. I know you’re there, baby,” he growled.

…

Nothing. Nothing but the thoughts in his own damn mind.

“Fuck. Ah, fuck!” he shouted, throwing a fist hard into the Bronco’s steering wheel. And then he was desperately reaching for the bottle, polishing off the rest of the liquor, and then fishing for it and found it dutifully waiting for him as ever, at the very bottom of his coat pocket. His hand shook as he brought it out. The metal glinted in his outstretched palm, winking at him as the early dawn light reflected off of its surface. It rolled lightly across his scarred hand, hands that had forcefully brought so many electrical impulses, so many biological choruses to so many brutal ends. Death was not something quiet, something that was gently snubbed out. A life, any life, was ruthless, demanding to exist, and it was only with force and a perverse sort of power that you could end it. His life, too, was like any other. It would take more than most.

He had discovered the adamantium bullet in his room after the jump, and knew it for what it was. It had traveled with him, after Westchester, after Mexico, after Oklahoma, into Hay River. Devotedly it followed him, an obedient companion, an ugly reminder. Logan could feel the Wolverine inside drowsily snarl from the spot where the animal lay, offering up a quiet, mild disgust; the very thought of suicide was unnatural, nothing the tired animal could understand, despite all the same hurt the Wolverine felt at the grief of what they had both lost. But the man… It wasn’t the first time Logan had dreamt of ending his life. Hell, he had tried, even, when he was younger and more stupid, all to no avail.
What did it feel like, to be lost somewhere in the void between humanity and not? How did it feel to lose those you most loved, over and over again, drifting somewhere far off in space, on the verge of a dead star? He hadn’t been meant to love. Wasn’t built for it. *A brand that sticks.* And yet, it had found him. For precious, brief stints of time, it had found him.

With this in mind, he put the bullet back in his coat pocket and resigned himself to open the car door. It was the sound of a telltale crunch as his boots pressed down into the rapidly accumulating snow, as he climbed out of the Bronco and slammed the door shut. He turned, staring back at the old thing for a moment, giving it its due. The car had witnessed Charles’ burial from afar. Had witnessed the moment Laura had seen Logan collapse, eager for something to end out on that open highway. And then, later, when he and Laura had made their way on their own, all the way to Hay River. How many countless trips to the grocery store, to Laura’s school, to the lake house, that damn place Logan had been so blindly intent on making his own?

He took one last look at the Bronco, bidding it farewell with a slight nod of his head before he set off quickly in the silent snow, headed for Alkali, headed for something, for nothing, a potential end, another lead, the last answer, or perhaps, maybe, a final resting place.

---

The dam was out of view for most of the hike, nestled as it had always been on the base of the lake. Through another steep climb up a hill, though, Logan had really gotten his first decent view accidentally. He had stopped for a moment, leaning up against a tree while he suffered through another goddamn coughing attack. He had been apathetically staring at a spattering of fresh blood blooming red on the freshly-fallen snow, when he looked up, and saw it.

Alkali, remade. Suddenly restored, as if the X-Men hadn’t fought so hard to destroy it, as if Jean hadn’t sunk to her grave in the lake’s watery depths. The sun was truly rising now, but with the snow still falling and the sky overcast, the dam was nothing more than a grey smudge on a white landscape, the rest of the color drained out of the frame.

The feeling that something was not right had not subsided, and upon seeing the dam that very same feeling intensified. If this was still a processing plant, it sure as hell didn’t look like one. It looked like a fucking dam, which was what it was, and if Linda had been describing the same spot correctly like she had insisted there must have been *somewhere* for ignorant assholes like Carl to park their cars.

For another, Logan was picking up a similar feeling to what he had felt at Two Rivers when he had accidentally happened upon it with Laura several weeks ago. A ghostly quiet. An eerie calm. It was as if the place knew Logan’s same secret: that, even though it still existed, it should have no longer.

Begrudgingly, his tired mind began rehashing his shitty excuse for a plan, as he started again towards the base of the lake, still intent on staking the place out. He knew the facility like he knew his own mind, not only from his time with the X-Men here but also after the worst of his memories returned to him, seen mostly through the Wolverine’s eyes as he had been experimented on. He knew the only way covertly inside from this direction would be through the spillway doors, and he hoped they still worked. The spillway mechanism farthest to the right, Logan realized, was still fairly accessible from his side of the lake, and it wouldn’t take much effort to climb inside its long, sprawling tunnel. After that, he wasn’t sure what the hell he was going to do, but he was hoping to maybe set off a couple of alarms, get somebody to notice him, mow a few people over, then make himself scarce as he staked the place out to look for any sign of Laura or a hint of where else she might be. He’d torture as many fuckers as he had to for any new scrap of information.

As he reached the base of the dam, however, it looked even more deserted. A rusty ladder clung to
the side of the wall, and Logan tested his weight on it before wearily reaching his way upward to the closest spillway about a hundred meters up. As he gripped the edge, he now climbed into the nearest spillway, an open mouth eager and intent in swallowing him whole. He found the same grates under his feet as when the team had made their way through the same entrance almost thirty years and another timeline ago, and the sound echoed the same as he walked further down the tunnel, but the light was all wrong. The feeling completely foreign.

He was eager to find some sort of surveillance equipment, some sort of clue the base was inhabited. Maybe not the kind of security systems he had seen all that time ago with Stryker, but something. However, as Logan made his way further down the tunnel, it looked more and more evident to him that no one was watching him from inside. No scanners, cameras, sensors, anything discernible that he could see.

It didn’t take long to reach the spillway doors, his way forward abruptly ending, and as he stared up at the hulking circular metal frame, he finally accepted that it had been a mistake coming here, a waste of his fucking precious time. Parts of the structure were entirely rusted over, and it was obvious they hadn’t been used in years. The door off to the side Logan was hoping to enter through was also entirely missing, maybe had never been there in the first place, and he realized there was no possible way in on this side of the dam. Just as he was considering somehow scouting out a path toward the top part of the dam, to reach the old facilities that had been attached, he heard a sound, another heartbeat, another set of lungs breathing, another pair of boots on the grate, walking toward him.

As he turned quickly around, he was just beyond his knowledge, beyond his comprehension, as he took in the sight of her. There she was, the precious thing, walking a couple of steps further and stopping at the half-way point in the tunnel, simply staring at him. There was no way, no fucking way—you must be hallucinating—and yet, he could smell her, hear her.

“Laura?” his voice betrayed him, unbelieving, and yet so desperately hoping to believe.

She wore the jean jacket, the grey t-shirt with that fucking ridiculous unicorn on it, and those boots, and only after he spoke, did she seem to recognize him. She took him in oddly, slowly, as if coming out of a confused daze, and he found himself instinctively walking over to her small frame in three determined strides, before stopping and kneeling down to her cautiously, a hurt, terrible look dawning on her face as she realized who he was.

“Daddy?” she finally said.

“Hija,” he barely whispered. Daughter.

“You’re here?” she asked, hesitantly, and her small hand reached out warily to cup the side of his gruff face, thin, smooth fingers lingering over beard and scars alike. He couldn’t help but lean into her warm palm, and he could hear the pulse of her steady heartbeat, smell the adamantium in her forearm. She had to be real. God, how did she escape? How was she fucking here, alive?

Something dark set about Laura’s eyes though, as a single tear rolled down her cheek. Then the hallway seemed to be spinning, falling away, and it was just these two lost in a truth, or a lie, or just a world that no longer mattered around them.

“You lost me, papa,” she said bleakly.

“I know,” he barely whispered. “I’m sorry.”

“You said you would take care of me…” she murmured.
“Laura,” his voice broke, unable to truly understand. *What was she saying? Why was she acting this way?*

“Just like *la mujer,*” she whispered.

“What?” Logan asked, caution growing in his voice.

“You lost me, just like Marie,” she said bitterly, her lips now forming into a sneer.

“Laura,” he murmured and as her look darkened further, Logan instinctively moved away from the girl, standing up abruptly. Laura took a couple of steps forward threateningly, as Logan inched backward, unable to abstain from growling instinctively as the Wolverine detected the growing threat in front of him.

It was then, though, he watched his daughter dematerialize in front of him, gone in a puff of smoke, and his claws were out as he whipped around, sensing the change in the air, and another person, another presence moved over and around, quickly wiping his legs out from under him and landing him hard on the grates of the spillway.

Logan looked at his chest to see a spear just hovering a hairsbreadth away from his heart, and as he rose his gaze, following his way up the length of the spear to its owner, he saw a young woman with long black hair looking down at him, a predatory, wild color in her eyes. He simply breathed for long moments, struggling for his lungs to not seize up once more, and then the look the woman wore softened as she stared down at him.

“Sensei?” she barely murmured. He closed his eyes for a moment, focusing on breathing properly, even as she removed the spear. Just then, she was in front of him, taking part in a traditional Japanese bow as Logan wearily heaved himself into a sitting position.

“You’re here,” she murmured through the beginning of a smile, after she rose to stand once more.

Logan said nothing as his mind struggled to catch up.

“Watashi no chikara o shiyō shite mōshiwake arimasen, Sensei. Watashi wa anata ga shin’nyū-shada to omotta. Anata wa hijō ni kotonatte mieru.” *Forgive me for using my powers on you, teacher. I thought you were an intruder. You look so very different.*

Then, it all made sense. There was only one person Logan knew who was Cheyenne but who also spoke fluent Japanese, who could kick his ass in Karate and whose power it was to create visual apparitions of her enemies’ most deep-seated fears. Laura hadn’t been real, only a manifestation of Logan’s nightmares, a symptom of her power. The real mutant standing before him was a girl when he had last seen her over three years ago, their vicious round of hand-to-hand sparring in Fight Club bringing him to his knees that day, right before everything had really gone to shit. Now, the girl was gone, the mutant in front of him clearly and obviously a woman.

“Mirage?” he croaked. She extended a hand then, helping to bring Logan to his feet, now smiling wildly.

“Sensei Logan… welcome.” Logan’s mind was still trying to catch up to the events happening around him so quickly, but his body began to feel an odd warmth flooding through him. The Wolverine whispered the words in his ear before he could even realize what it meant. *This is what you need. Help.*

“Why are you here, Dani?” he finally asked, massaging his neck as he did so.

“This is the newly established headquarters,” she said flashing him a wicked smile.

“No. Not anymore,” she said, through a savage grin. Logan raised his eyebrows in suspicion, as he stared at her, still a bit unbelieving.

“Sensei,” she said, another knowing smile on her lips. “Welcome to Alpha Flight.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this chapter’s a little on the short side, friends. It was originally part of something longer, but I had to split it in order to add a couple more chapters to the story to keep things paced correctly. Chapter 19 will be on its way before the weekend, I’m hoping. Thanks for all the love for the last chapter! That one took it out of me, and getting such lovely feedback was so darn encouraging. <3 Hope the week is going well for you all.
It was late afternoon when he found her. She was asleep on their bed, breath even and deep, her favorite book still cradled in a grasp that her fingers had relaxed from. *Teaching a Stone to Talk.* It was her absolute favorite. The X-Mansion had that feeling to it right now, that sort of sooty, crisp scent that told him the heat was running, while outside a fresh dusting of snow covered the ground, the air cold and sharp. Marie had fallen asleep in a pair of dark jeans and a caramel-colored cashmere sweater, and he knew, just by looking at her, her drifting off had been an accident. Logan simply leaned in the doorway between the living room and the bedroom for a moment, taking in the sight of her in their bed, at peace.

He had been downstairs in the gym, going through his daily *Kata* and then running through some sparring prep work for Fight Club. He had had the place entirely to his own, and Logan found himself liking it that way. He took time afterward, showering and changing in the locker room before making his way upstairs once more. It was remarkably quiet in the X-Mansion this morning, with Christmas eve upon them. Jean and Scott were off in the Caribbean somewhere, taking a well-deserved break. Hank was overseeing Charles’ care at the moment, and Storm was running things. The rest were home visiting families, which left Logan and Rogue to themselves, save for a handful of students who had nowhere to go home to this time of year. The semester had ended last week, and the past few days especially had been lazy in that holiday sort of way, where you indulged in too much chocolate and, after a while, began to feel slightly restless. Logan certainly had felt a growing sort of agitation from being inside a bit too much lately, and long hikes out in the snow, sometimes with Marie’s company and sometimes not, depending on how cold it was, along with his daily *Kata* always helped. Marie had left him to it this afternoon, having already risen earlier to commence her daily yoga and workout routine while he had slept the morning hours away. He wasn’t sure what she had been up to while he was in the gym, but now, he knew. He smiled warmly at her, as he watched her chest rise up and down with her breath at a steady, peaceful pace.

They had a series of rooms now, in an empty wing at Xavier’s that they had made a home out of. They had a living room, an office, a bedroom and a small kitchen to boot, and for the last two years they had been living like this, since their time in Mississippi. If Logan had had any preoccupations about sharing his space, sharing his things, they had fallen away astonishingly quickly. He had realized early on that the middle of the Venn diagram that made up both of their tastes had a wide middle, and he had found most of their things mixed well together. Their album collection had doubled in size, but neither of their music palates really offended the other. The Kinks went along well enough with Daft Punk like Tom Waits went along well enough with Wolf Mother. Logan had intimate knowledge at the current moment that one of his Sex Pistols albums was still on the record player, but it had been Marie who had chosen it to play in the background last night while she had lay longways on the couch, head resting in his lap while she read a book and he had nursed a whiskey. There was Yashida’s sword, Marie’s yoga mat, a little carved wooden turtle Logan had brought back from a trip to Japan for her, a comfy blanket thrown over the back part of the couch because Marie was often inexplicably cold. Bosch and Pollack hung on the wall, along with Wilco
and Bob Dylan tour posters. There was a TV that rarely got turned on, save to watch a random movie. Marie liked tearjerkers, Logan the occasional thriller. The dog-eared paperbacks were now mixed in with the brilliant leather-bound, his and her taste in literature blending. Paper cranes still littered the place. Marie liked fancy coffee, Columbian and Ethiopian mainly, whereas Logan would’ve settled for whatever brew he could get his hands on, but he was grateful for Marie’s slow drip and French press creations.

Their bedroom, too, was an intimate expression of both of their likenesses. It was typically tidy, both of them decent at picking up after themselves. Marie’s grandmother’s quilt was still present, laying on the end of their bed over a more expensive downy duvet provided by the Xavier fund. The bed was a king, and although Logan hadn’t ever slept in anything that nice or big in his life apart from various hotel rooms on missions, he was grateful of this fact, because they both had taken full advantage of it most of the time. Beyond their sex life, though, the bed, any bed really, had originally been something they both had been sheepishly worried about in the beginning, slightly hesitant about sharing it for its actual purpose night after night. My skin can turn back on when I’m sleeping. I tend to stab people when I have a bad dream. Neither scenario had happened, though, in the two years they had been at it. Logan simply assumed that having another presence there while sleeping was enough to settle the anxieties in them both; at least, he hoped that was the reason why.

At that thought, Logan walked over to the right side of the bed, his side, and gently lay down next to her, his front to her back. He was completely silent as he made this move, intent on not waking her, and for long moments he lay still, lingering, before he could no longer help himself and gently ran two fingers through her streaming hair that lay out behind her on the bed. It was soft and long, it always had been, although Logan had begun to notice an impossibly subtle and random strand or two of gray here and there running alongside the beautiful brown. He doubted Marie would have cared or fussed over it if he pointed it out to her, but he never had, as it was a secret he liked to keep to himself, one that he loved about her. Certainly he had more grey show up in his own hair over the last two years, and while he had felt himself setting more of his own vanity aside, having this knowledge about Marie made him feel all the more better. Somehow more… deserving of her. Certainly more on par. They weren’t the same age, not even laughably close, but, somehow now it felt as if their lifelines ran a little closer to one another, maybe even woven together, no longer so hopelessly frayed. At least, that’s how Logan liked to picture it.

Rogue had turned forty-two last month, and while she wasn’t one to keep her age a secret, her appearance sure as hell did the job for her. It wasn’t just that she had always taken good care of herself, but it was something that ran deeper. A fiery passion for life, Logan assumed, and, anyway, if she was hesitant about getting older, she never seemed it. He loved this about her, too. What a fucking sap he had become. Logan smirked a bit at this thought, before throwing it aside as he nestled his face into the dark warmth of her hair, taking in her aroma more deeply. For a while, he lay like this, listening to her heartbeat, and, like a child might do, focused on matching his breath with the pace of her own. After a while, however, perhaps intuitively so, she finally stirred, her breathing changing as she moved under him. She turned his way drowsily, before smiling at him. She had a faint sleep line on her cheek, and he grinned as he ran a thumb over it lightly.

“Hey, lover,” she said quietly.

“Hey yourself,” he murmured, closing his eyes momentarily as she ran a hand down the side of his face, massaging his jaw line a bit through his signature facial hair.

“Must’ve fallen asleep reading,” she murmured, finally glancing down at the book she still part-way cradled in her hand. “When did you catch me?”

“About an hour or so ago,” he said.
“You’ve been watching me sleep for an hour?” she asked through raised brows. Logan just shrugged his shoulders apathetically in response, not even remotely inclined to feel guilty about such a thing.

“What time is it?” she asked, before she gave a small yawn.

“A little past two,” he said, although his guess was from the sun in the overcast sky and not because he was looking at the clock.

“Oh gosh. Jeez. That’s what I get for staying up late,” she said coyly, shooting him a guilty look.

“Not sure that was entirely your fault,” he smirked, before moving over her to press his teeth lightly to her shoulder.

“Wasn’t entirely your fault either,” he heard her say sassily. It wasn’t new for them, letting the Wolverine take over occasionally. Logan had routinely tried to voluntarily embody both personas at once during lovemaking, but so far he had failed in these thought experiments. Still though, usually due to Marie’s encouragement, he sometimes gave the Wolverine what he wanted, letting the animal take the reins when Marie specifically asked. Logan, at first, had felt a bit…well, put out by it all, but upon letting Marie have what she wanted, sometimes distant, blurry memories of those nights would resurface, and he always made her tell him about it in the morning, no matter how uncomfortable it was for her sometimes to recount the experience. Three gouges in the headboard, occasional broken furniture here and there, tears practically commonplace in the sheets. He knew Storm by now probably had a separate itemized line for Logan and Marie’s rooms, and while some things were routinely replaced, some damaged things stayed—like the headboard—small reminders of the extent, and complexity, of their relationship.

“Did we break anything last night?” he asked at this thought, and she turned around to face him more fully.


“Now?” he asked, frowning a little.

“Christmas party for the students tomorrow. I’m in charge of the meal,” she said, working out a kink in her neck with one hand.

“Meal?” he asked.

“The whole meal. We’re so understaffed right now,” she said through a groan. With the knowledge that she probably would be gone for a while cooking today then, he reached for her again.

“Not yet. Come closer,” he said, pulling her to his body. “I missed ya, baby.”

“We saw each other this morning, and last night...” she trailed off.

“That’s not fair. Like you said, I wasn’t around for last night,” he muttered.

“You mean... you don’t remember it...at all?” she asked, a funny expression on her face. Logan cocked his head a bit at this in confusion. They had talked about it before it had happened. She had asked for it, and she had been with him long enough now to know his memory, let alone his consciousness, was typically never around for the fun.

“No, not really. Why you askin’ all the sudden?” he questioned, before moving over to work his mouth up the side of her neck, massaging gently as he did so, taking over the job from her hand.
“It’s just…I don’t know. Sometimes he can be so…”

“What?” Logan pressed, murmuring into her neck.

“Gentle,” she said. At this he leaned back once more, truly surprised.

“Gentle?” he asked. “Are you fucking kidding me?”

She just shrugged her shoulders, smiling at him oddly.

“Well, what’s the fucking point of that then?” he asked.

“Hard to explain,” she said softly, that quirky little grin on her features still, before she stared at him a bit more closely, and he realized her eyes had settled on where his collarbone met the base of the muscles in his neck.

“Hey,” she said, pulling him a bit closer.

“What?” he asked.

“I didn’t catch this last night,” she said. Fuck, Logan thought, as her hand gently traced over a small, light scar. That had been happening lately, the scars. Small ones, nothing major, thin lines left over from where he had healed during missions where he had cut it a little too close. He usually never pointed them out to Marie, but she always had a way of finding them, as intimate as they often were with each other.

“This a new one?” she asked warily, running the pad of her finger over it once again.

“S’nothing,” Logan said, sloughing it off. “Mission from last week,” he finished a bit lamely.

“You mean the one with the bad tip?” she asked. Marie had been absent for that particular mission, opting to cover classes for Jean and Scott instead, and he thanked his lucky fucking stars she had. Everyone had survived, but the mission had been a complete and total fuck-up.

“Things got a little rougher in the lab we were staking out than I might’ve originally said,” he murmured, moving up to cup one breast, trying his best to distract her.

“A little rougher? What, did you guys end up in a knife fight with the lab assistants?” she said, staring at the scar once more.

“Something like that,” he grumbled, but, as he noticed her still-furrowed brow, he reassured her once more.

“Hey, darlin’, stop your worrying,” he murmured, bringing a hand up under her chin to tilt her head upward, her eyes now meeting his own instead of lingering on the scar. The deep brown of her irises were wide for a moment more, before she finally sighed, relenting as she pressed her forehead to his chest and he leaned into her easily, resting his cheek on the top of her head.

“I don’t like it,” she grumbled into his chest.

“I know, kid,” he murmured. She laughed a little at his occasional but usually rare use of the old nickname, and he smiled a bit. Good. That had been the point. To distract her.

“So what do ya plan on making for the youngsters?” he asked, desperate for a change in subject. At this, Marie seemed to perk up once more, now moving to sit up at his reminder of the tasks ahead.
“Bread pudding. Squash casserole. Sweet potatoes with marshmallows, I think, if I can manage it all,” she said. That last one had Logan perking up as well, as he once more threw her a smirk.

“Marshmallows? Is that so?” he asked slyly.

“Oh, don’t get that look in your eye, sugar. You’re not setting foot in my kitchen,” she said.

“Why not? I make good company,” he teased, grinning. They both knew Logan was notorious for distracting her while she cooked, or sneaking bites of her food here and there, much to Marie’s frustration. She only shot him a narrow look in response.

“Listen,” Logan compromised. “How about you make me a coffee while I’m down there, I pay you for it by kissing you long and hard, and then I make myself scarce while you get to the serious cookin’?” She smiled at him a little more, even as she swung her legs off her side of the bed, stretching as she did so.

“Hmm, maybe. Coffee this late though?” she asked, looking back at him over her shoulder.

“Funnily enough, even though I don’t remember shit right now about last night, I’m just about as tired as you are. Must’ve earned this feeling somehow,” he said. And then she was grinning ear-to-ear at him again.

“Hell yeah you did baby. Especially when you had me up against the wall,” she tilted her head to the corner behind him and Logan followed her gaze to see the telltale mark of three new holes in the drywall.

“Hell, woman, I thought you were saying he was gentle,” he said.

“In the beginning,” she toyed, throwing him a wicked smirk.

“Aww, fuck,” he muttered, turning to stare at the wall again. “Does he always gotta bring those out?”

“I think he was just trying to hold on to something,” she said, grinning widely.

“Hell,” he remarked.

“Ok. Coffee,” she said, finally standing as she gave into his bargain. “But then, you scoot.”

---

“James Howlett, step away from the food unless you wish to be flambéed.”

When that name came out, he knew he was in trouble. Logan had stuck around a little longer than he had bargained for, but the smell of simmering butter and baking cookies had caused him to intentionally wear out his welcome. Plus, Marie was in that sexy little lacy apron, and he couldn’t ever get enough of that. Now having finished with the baking, Marie was currently surrounded by a myriad of vegetables and oils and spices, delegating tasks to a couple of the students that had offered to help, and she was fucking sexy as hell, all power and knowledge, using that knife to slice up squash so effortlessly between those nimble fingers…

Eyeing a plate of sugar cookies near where she was working, he found himself moving closer, and,
before he could help himself, he snatched a still-warm cookie shaped like a reindeer off the plate.

“I swear to god, baby,” she warned, a fiery look in her eye, and yet he still brought the purloined cookie to his mouth, biting off its head and savoring the flavor of butter and sugar on his tongue.

Marie had already grabbed the sharpest knife she could find from off the counter and started moving toward him threateningly, with the most Logan-esque snarl he had ever seen before on her face, and that *included* the handful times right after her skin had stolen his mannerisms.

“No need to get violent, darlin’,” he joked, although he found himself instinctively backing up, knowing better than to stay within stabbing range of Marie and her kitchen knife.

“Out, you brute!” she said, now using the knife to point to the door.

“What if I’m bored?” he asked, before washing down the cookie with another sip of his coffee that was now only lukewarm. Despite the bargain he had made with Marie, that was the truth of it. There was little else to do, even in a house as big as this one.

“Well, make yourself useful then,” Marie finally sighed. “I was gonna do it, but now you can. Take that sandwich,” she said, still using the knife as a pointer, “Over to Storm’s office. A little bird’s told me she’s been working all day and she usually doesn’t know when she needs a break.” He smiled at his woman for a moment more, before offering her a smug salute. She rolled her eyes at him as he picked up the plate, nodding once before leaving the good smells of Marie and her cooking behind as he made his way through the X-Mansion, intent on making good on his delivery.

Storm had been taking on copious amounts of work with Charles’ fading health. Planning the master schedule and syllabus, overseeing the steadily growing concerns of parents, the ones who were at least still invested in their children’s education, and, hell, she was even in charge doing payroll. While Scott was dutifully still headed up the various scattered, but often waning, X-Men missions, all activities that happened above the basketball court had been placed in Storm’s hands. Although Logan had helped out far more than he had when he first arrived here after the jump, his time was still mainly his own, and he knew this was simply not true for Storm. Considering this more, Logan decided to make a pit stop at his and Rogue’s rooms, setting down the plate with the sandwich on it to fumble around in the liquor cabinet in the living room, finding a bottle of the good stuff before making his way to Storm’s, the bottle under his arm, balancing a couple of clean glasses in his other hand along now with the plate.

He found her in her study, where she had been practically living lately, eyes glued to a haloprojection that seemed to be showing dozens of boring Excel spreadsheets.

“Hey Storm,” he muttered, as she finally looked up.

“Logan,” she said, through a thin smile, before running her hands over her face.

“Working? On Christmas?” he said, shifting the things in his hands slightly as he walked further into her office.

“It’s Christmas eve. And the spring semester’s not gonna plan itself,” she grumbled, as Logan sat down the plate at her desk.

“With love…you know… from Rogue,” he muttered, and she smiled at him.

“What, no love from you?” she teased, until she saw what else he had and her face got oddly serious.

“You shouldn’t speak so soon,” he playfully lectured her, setting the heavy glass bottle down on the
desk in front of her before unstacking the glasses for them both.

“Bless you,” she said tiredly, as Logan opened the bottle of whiskey and poured her a generous splash, and then some for himself. He watched the woman for a moment inhale the smell of the alcohol, before taking a generous sip. He smirked a little through his own glass as he leaned against the desk by her. One of his favorite things about Storm was when she loosened up a bit, and usually that was due to Logan’s urging and a good bottle of liquor as a gift. It was funny how some things stuck. In this timeline and the last, they were by all accounts very good friends. His surliness to her optimism, her light to his dark. It was what had kept them going when they were practically living on death’s door in the previous timeline, and now they’re relationship was something he valued in a place that was dwindling with people, both students and faculty alike.

“So…what’s the damage?” he finally asked, not really keen on knowing the answer, but also realizing she probably needed unload on someone and that, for right now at least, he wasn’t wanted elsewhere. Logan wasn’t about to forget the intensity in which Marie had been brandishing her kitchen knife.

“We’re down to thirty-six students,” Storm said.

“Jesus. What else?” he asked. Storm sighed, setting her down her glass and rubbing her temples slightly, and Logan was already topping her glass again with more whiskey. She sighed, “We’ve already combined history and philosophy, math and physics, and class sizes are still ridiculously small. I just feel bad. There’s not enough for Bobby, Kitty, Peter, the rest of them to do. I feel like we’re all just…twiddling our thumbs around here, wasting Charles’ money,” she finished exasperatingly.

“Shit, ‘Ro. I don’t know what to tell ya,” he said, before taking another sip of his drink. Logan already knew that it was true that they were seeing fewer and fewer students walk through Xavier’s doors, although now it seemed like there was a growing general consensus that the mutant population was dwindling worldwide. Logan personally had not met a mutant under the age of fifteen in the past two years, and no one still seemed to know why. Cyclops and Storm were dead-set that some onerous force was responsible for wiping them all out in a sort of quiet, deliberate way, and while Logan wasn’t necessarily prone on disagreeing with them, after what he had seen in the previous timeline, through recon after recon, tip after tip, they had found nothing that suggested anything remotely evident of foul play. Yet.

“Do I want to ask how the latest reconnaissance mission went?” Storm finally murmured. Logan knew full well that Storm already knew what had happened, Scott having likely debriefed her immediately after they had returned, but it was obvious that she was asking for Logan’s perspective, divorced as it was from Scott’s detailed, but often emotively detached reports. Scott recalled events with his mind; Logan, with his body.

“Uhh,” Logan still found himself mumbling, suddenly wary on revealing the whole nasty truth to her. Scott might have had a point on this last one, Logan realized as he fumbled around for his words. “You know that we figured out it was a bad lead a little too late. There was a lab there, but it was just routine experimental work. Illegal genetic engineering, yes, but more to learn how to duplicate rare genetic diseases. They still put up a hell of a fight though. The security systems these days… remind me of some straight up medieval torture device bullshit,” he finished, mind flying to the way Marie had traced her fingers over the scar this afternoon that he had earned from the mission.

Storm only gave another sigh. “Nope, that definitely doesn’t make me feel better,” she grumbled before immersing herself once more in the projections in front of her.
“Hey,” he said, intuitively placing an arm on her thin shoulder before grabbing her glass and forcing it into her hand once more. “Maybe… let it go, just for today,” he murmured. And then she was looking up at him, and he noticed her eyes, those eyes that could throw a fucking hurricane into rotation over her enemies, were glazed over with the nascent beginnings of tears.

“Storm, what?” he began, before she interrupted him.

“Charles’ appointment with the oncologist didn’t go well,” she said, before breaking her stare at him, glancing once more down to the glass in her hands. Shit. If Storm had been busy, Hank had been bombarded, between spending most of this time in the lab constantly looking for answers, developing potential drugs and flying in various leading but also discreet specialists in the field, including surgeons, oncologists, psychiatrists and psychologists. Dr. Hank McCoy was brilliant, but he didn’t have a degree in every single medical field available to him, although Logan knew if Hank had found the time, he probably would have. “It’s definitely not a brain tumor, or a brain infection,” she finished.

“But… there’s still a diagnosis, isn’t there?” Logan was asking, intuiting the truth once more as he refilled their glasses.

“They do,” she said. Storm had obediently held back her tears, but still rubbed her eyes. “I was waiting to tell the rest of the faculty, you know, until after Christmas. And the students sure as heck don’t need to know yet.”

“Tell me,” Logan found himself quietly saying, and when she hesitated further, he pressed her. “Storm, cut the bullshit. I can handle it,” he said. If anything, their former and present friendship had been founded on a mutual trust, and she knew it.

“Alzheimer’s. Moderate to severe decline,” she whispered.

“Fuck,” he cursed under his breath. Logan had suspected a diagnosis along these lines, had discussed it with Marie at night on far more than one occasion, but hearing it out loud was another thing entirely. “And what about the—” he began, before she interrupted him.

“The seizures?” Storm finished for him, throwing him a knowing look. Logan wasn’t a doctor, but he knew enough to know seizures weren’t typically indicative of this particular brand of disease. Charles had been drifting in and out of focus lately, and sometimes Logan would walk into his office to find the professor shaking slightly, eyes rolling back in his head. It sent every instinct inside of Logan on edge, because even though they seemed to be moderately light in intensity and Charles was able to recover from them easily enough, every time they happened Logan had noticed the shift in the atmosphere, almost as if the atoms were changing, as if the air wasn’t safe to breathe anymore. The seizures weren’t all that terribly often and no one else seemed to have noticed the shift, so he had kept that piece of information to himself up until now. But at Storm’s acknowledgement of them, Logan’s mood darkened considerably.

“There’s no medical explanation for them, at least not yet. But I just keep thinking, his mind, it’s too powerful, you know? Under such duress, maybe it’s screaming out for help in anyway it can.”

“Storm,” he said cautiously.

“They don’t want him around anyone. They’re starting to think…well,” she trailed off.

“What?” he pressed.

“Nothing, Logan. Nothing. Just… keep doing what you’re doing, eh?” she asked through a heavy
sigh. He looked at her concernedly, but he knew, at least on Christmas, to lay off. He’d get to the bottom of it eventually, of that he was sure. Meanwhile she was talking again, and Logan paid better attention once more.

“I would have never guessed it, even five years ago, but you’re some really important glue, you know that? You help hold this family together,” she said softly, offering him a terse but still genuine smile.

“Well, Rogue would say y’all might be rubbing off on me, as much as sometimes I wish you squares wouldn’t,” he said through a small smirk.

Storm only smiled back at him, before murmuring, “A wise one, your woman.” Logan growled slightly in approval.

“I choose ‘em right,” he said, moving to stand from where he had still been leaning on the desk. “You know, once I wise up and finally get around to it.”

--

Logan had checked on Marie again to still find her in the kitchen, although her mood had improved considerably. He had said nothing as he walked over to her and kissed her briefly, even though she was holding a five-pound bag of flour, before leaving the kitchen once more and wandering back to their rooms. He had resigned himself to writing out lesson plans. Fight Club was still Fight Club, but it had also evolved into full-blown classes three days a week, and Logan was intent on ever at passing on and tailoring his knowledge of martial arts for any student who was interested, and that was the majority of the thirty-six students left, apparently. Logan’s fingers firmly gripped the pen he held in his left hand, pressing hard onto the lined paper of the notebook in front of him. Marie knew better than to tease him for using a pen and paper to make lesson plans, even as she trended towards tablets and various screenless computers for her own planning, despite her collection of books. But Logan couldn’t type for shit on a touch screen, discovering it had made his hands ache more often than not, and voice technology made him feel like a goddamn fool. Besides, in Logan’s mind, it didn’t feel real unless he wrote it down. Finishing up the last sequence, drawing arrows back to the last page and asterisking an important combination he needed to remember to teach Mirage the next time he saw her, that’s when he noticed a chocolate cupcake appear at the table on a porcelain plate next to his notebook. Immersed as he was in everything, he had missed her coming into their rooms, let alone the office itself.

“Happy birthday,” she murmured. He turned around in his swivel chair, incredulously looking up at her, before smiling. Marie had flour in her hair, a smudge of chocolate frosting on her cheek. Her hands had been freshly washed, he could smell the mint in the soap, but she was still wearing that sexy little apron. It was obvious she had just recently finished up in the kitchen, and had come directly back to him when she was done.

“I don’t have a birthday,” he said.

“Oh, of course you do; you just don’t know when it is. But, I figured, it’s festive around here right now, so now’s a good time to celebrate as any. Besides, it’s ‘bout to be a new year, and you had to have a birthday sometime in the past twelve months,” she said, wiping her hands a bit on her apron as she did so, even though they were already clean. He realized then she had been planning this for quite some time, and was a little nervous in telling him about it, and the whole adorable thing had him
once more deeply appreciating her. He glanced over to the delectable looking cupcake, and then back up at her. He was suddenly stricken with the strong urge to lick the chocolate frosting off her cheek.

“What? Not gonna eat it?” she asked, through a small frown, before looking back at him.

“In a bit. Right now, I’m hungry for somethin’ else,” he said, rolling a little closer to her in his chair and trapping her between his two legs.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” she grumbled, even though she was still smiling.

“You smellin’ like shortenin’ and powdered sugar? No fucking way I’m kidding,” he said, snaking his hands around the backs of her thighs.

“You always wanna get down to it after I’ve been cooking,” she said through another demure grin, as he gently placed a kiss on her navel through her soft sweater and apron.

“It’s like two meals in one,” he murmured into her flat stomach, before standing himself. He was on her neck, then, bringing her closer and licking up the side of it to behind her ear. Hints of sage and cinnamon and coriander. And…was that nutmeg?

“Delicious,” he managed to say. Meanwhile, he realized she was taking the apron off, and now swatted him playfully with it, before tossing it aside.

“Hey, my birthday, right? A Christmas birthday? Doesn’t that mean I get double the presents?” he teased. She laughed at this, before holding him at arm’s length again so that she could look him in the eye. “You know, I did actually get you a present. Other than the cupcake,” she said with a grin.

“Really?” he said, cocking a brow in response. This was new for them. They both knew they weren’t really gift people. For events or special occasions Logan and Marie were far more likely to travel or go somewhere. Still, something about the gleam in her eye had Logan excited, in all kinds of ways. “Can I have it now?”

“Nope,” she said, widely grinning. “Wait for tomorrow. But…for now…ah hell, I was gonna take another shower first, but I also knew to be prepared in case that didn’t happen,” and then she hesitated, before slipping off her sweater, and then moving to slough off her sheer tank top. Underneath, she was adorned with the prettiest charcoal grey lingerie he had ever seen on her, embroidered with cream roses that matched the shade of her skin at every seam.

“Well, ain’t you a sight for sore eyes,” he murmured, the heat between them growing, and she flushed a little. He was already unbuttoning her jeans as he picked her up and walked her into the bedroom. As he laid her down on the bed, he finally discovered a matching pair of panties and growled approvingly.

Logan wasn’t necessarily a lingerie kind of guy, but every once in a while Marie would pick out something new and probably expensive, and damn if she didn’t look beautiful in lace and silk, the texture of it meeting the smooth planes of her stomach, gracing the notches in her ribs. He realized, then, that the Wolverine was also letting out a growl in endorsement, and he deliberately shook off the animal’s insistence at being with her.

“He wants out, but I ain’t sharing you with anyone tonight,” he muttered into her neck.

“Good,” she said. “Stay with me.” He growled again in agreement.

“Got any sort of Christmas wish you want fulfilled?” he finally murmured, asking while he still
could, intermittently planting kisses along her collarbone.

“IT’s your birthday,” she whispered.


“Mmmmm,” she only said, as he kissed his way down her stomach.

“Cut them off,” she finally said after some time.

“You sure? They look expensive,” he muttered.

“You wouldn’t have thought twice about that last night,” she teased, and then he let out a predatory growl, not one to be outdone, as he unsheathed one claw on his hand and easily slit through the delicate fabric, leaving her naked before him.

Her arousal wafted upward easily around them both, dizzying him. He felt himself hold the chain on the animal tighter as he moved downward, lingering now just in front of her warmth, before giving her a long and steady lick. She moaned, before he grinned wickedly, moving back up her body. “Screw you,” she said, and he only snickered a little.

“How ‘bout the other way around? Touch yourself,” he said, his eyes darkening as he took another hit of the smell of her arousal, all hints of joviality disappearing from his voice.

“Logan,” she said hesitantly.

“Do it,” he growled, and he realized somewhere deep down that he needed this, needed to regain control over them all, especially after whatever had happened last night. Logan was also still fully clothed, and he intended to keep it that way, at least for a while.

“God,” she murmured, even as she lowered her hand downward, toying with herself. She moaned a little as she found her center, pressing her thin fingers there.

“Good,” he whispered headily, “But I’m sure you can manage more than that, after all that multitaskin’ I saw you do today in that kitchen.”

“You’re terrible,” she said, and he grinned wickedly against one of her breasts because she was already sliding a finger inside herself, while his mouth returned to her nipples. He broke contact from the hard, long suck he had going after a while though, as he realized she wasn’t giving herself enough of what she really needed.

“Oh another,” he muttered, and she obeyed, to his growl of approval.

“The animal ever ask to see that?” His question was a taunting rasp in her ear.

“No,” she barely could reply.

“That’s right,” he said. “Because he doesn’t see what I see. He fucks you long and hard, but he doesn’t know you like I do.”

“No,” she breathily murmured, as then she moaned beneath him, her own touch truly beginning to undo what semblance of humanity she had been clinging to.

“That’s it, baby. Take ‘em in deeper,” he slurred, but after a moment he heard the frustration in her voice, as her other hand grasped at his shirt.
“Logan…” she moaned.

“What?” he asked seriously.

“I need…” she barely breathed, her hips moving up desperately to make contact with his own.

“What? That not enough for you? You wanna take more?” he rasped. His eyes met hers and she began to slow as she stared up at him, and he quickly grabbed her wrist.

“Don’t you dare stop,” he threatened, even as he slid his hand closer up and added his own thick finger to hers, now both of them moving in and out of her.

“You listen to me, baby,” he muttered, mouth now lingering at her ear. “You listenin’? I let him out to play to satisfy both of your fucked-up whims, but you both better not dare for a second forget who’s in charge,” he warned, teeth once more hovering over her neck as he forcefully added a second finger to her two. “Fuck. So wet,” he growled a moment later.

“Hell, sugar,” she said, voice strained, and he knew that it was still not as much as she really wanted, not near enough, although he also knew she was far too close to her own orgasm to reason.

“That’s it,” he growled. “That’s it. Come for me, baby,” he urged, before finally biting down hard and deep into her as she writhed under him, and she was gasping for breath, clawing at him with her free hand, losing herself in her own pleasure, and then they both felt her convulsing around them. For a moment, nobody moved, until he worked his way lower to give her one more long, languid lick up her center. She shuddered as he did so, feeling the aftershocks of this effect, and it was only after she finally began breathing normally, that she shot him a scowl.

“You’re evil,” she snarled. He could only chuckle a little in response.

“Christmas is hours away, baby,” he growled into her ear. “I don’t gotta be a saint just yet.”

--

The Christmas party had gone by uneventfully, which was to say successfully in a school inhabited by mutants. Charles had spent the last couple of weeks more or less himself, and had even stayed up past his typical hour tonight, playing chess with Hank long after the students had gone to bed. After Hank and Storm had assisted Charles upstairs, they had both joined Logan and Marie in the grand sitting room, talking for a long time afterward, the mulled wine warm on everyone’s tongues. It was good, Logan thought, to see them all laughing so much, and Logan realized there had been a sort of quietly increasing anxiety in them all, over the last several months especially. As Marie let out a tipsy giggle, he smirked and shot a glance at her. She and Hank were in a knee-deep discussion of the various literary motifs of Shakespeare, specifically Hamlet, and Logan had only been half-listening.

“Ophelia, pregnant? I just don’t see it,” she said, even as she grinned at Hank.

“I can assure you, my dear, it’s quite true,” he said, through another sip of wine. Marie had shot Logan an apologetic look, being wrapped up as she was in conversation with Hank for over an hour, but Logan shrugged his shoulders, smiling. When she was happy especially, Marie was a delight to be around. He might be a possessive bastard, but he didn’t mind sharing that with a few other people now and then.

“But to take her own life like that? Drown herself?” she said a little more seriously.
“I assure you all the literary flags are there for the reader to accept as canon. For example, if you take a look at act three…” Logan had rolled his eyes playfully as they continued talking, finally stalking back toward the kitchen to hunt down another helping of sweet potatoes, when he found Storm quietly making her way upstairs once more.

“Is there anything else you need, ‘Ro?” he asked, stopping in his place in the middle of the foyer. She paused, looking down at him, and he could see that she was tired, just a hint of lingering sadness in her features, and he was reminded once more of the news she had shared with him yesterday about Charles.

“No, I’m ok, Logan,” she said, sighing. “It was a good party, wasn’t it? For the kids?” she asked.

“All in all, no one got arrested, so a success for you, maybe a let-down to them,” he grinned. “Although there’s always New Years.” She smiled back and then began climbing the stairs once more.

“Have a good night, Logan,” she said, and Logan couldn’t help but call after her, “It’ll be ok, Storm.” She stopped once more sighing. “I hope so, Logan. Merry Christmas.”

Logan found himself frowning a bit, food forgotten as he silently made his way into the sitting room again, now to find Marie alone.

“Where’s Hank?” he asked.

“’Retired for the evening.’ His words,” Marie said. She had been staring into the dying fire, a small smile still on her face, before taking another sip of mulled wine. He liked the smell of it on her. It was cinnamon and cloves and currant, and her lips were just barely tinted a deeper red because of it. “Just me for company now,” she added, looking up to him, her eyes bright. He padded over to her lazily, moving her feet up off the overly cushioned leather couch so he could sit on the opposite end, before placing her feet in his lap.

“That’s a real good meal you made, baby,” he said approvingly once more, hand gently massaging one of her feet as he did so.

“You think everyone liked it?” she asked, and for a brief moment he saw a flicker of that young girl again, a bit unsure of herself, still in need of a little approval.

“I think they much as said so, a few hundred times over,” he smiled a bit tiredly. “You wanna put out the fire and head up soon, or-?” And then he stopped, seeing her face illuminate once more with excitement.

“Oh! Logan! I almost forgot. Damn this wine for making me forget. Your present!” she said, whipping her feet around to stand, and then she was pulling on his arm, to get him to stand too. “Oof!” he said as she suddenly jerked him forward, pulling him down the hallway, her energy coming back to her in leaps and bounds.

“Marie, wha?” he asked, even as she was babbling in front of him. “You know how hard it is to have something delivered by tractor trailer without you hearing all the fuss? Why do you think I insisted that you listen closely to Dark Side of the Moon loudly for subliminal messages with those noise-cancelling headphones?” she said, and then she was throwing open the doors of the garage, pulling them both through, and there it was under the bright lights, winking at him like an old friend, filled with all the magic this world could offer. A 1948 Harley-Davidson FL Panhead.

He stood there, eyes wide, staring at it for a moment like it would surely disappear if did anything
“Holy fuck,” he finally murmured under his breath, cautiously now stepping toward it, forgetting Marie for a moment as its beauty pulled him in like a tractor beam.

“It’s right…right? This is it, isn’t it?” she said, unable to hide the excitement and anxiety in her voice. Logan ignored her for a moment, carefully running his palm over the smooth, black surface, the metal practically humming under his hand. It was goddamn perfection, this bike. He finally looked back up to her, eyes wide.

“How did you know?” he asked, and although he probably sounded like a six-year-old, he didn’t care.

“Not all the memories you pass to me are bad, sugar,” she said through a blush of her cheeks, looking down. He stared at her with nothing short of pure awe in his eyes, stealing a glance at the bike again, before looking back up to her once more.

“Come here, right now, woman,” he growled, and then his hands were in her hair and on her waist as he pressed her to him, kissing her deeply and his tongue running over hers before impressively biting her bottom lip. “No one’s ever done anything like this for me before,” he said, looking at her with dark eyes, “Ever.” She smiled widely at him.

“I’m not gonna ask how much it cost,” he added through a sigh, turning back to look at beauty once more.

“Nope, you should definitely not ask that. Although, I have been saving,” she said, then smiling a bit as her gaze met his, she added, “Wanna give it a whirl?” Logan looked back down longingly at the beautiful machine, before an image of a tired Storm on the X-Mansion’s staircase floated through his mind. First thing’s first.

“Hell, baby you know I sure as hell want to, but…,” he trailed off, smoothing her hair a little as he did so. He had yet to tell her the news, taking a page from Storm’s book and waiting until the party was through and Marie was more relaxed, but he knew she’d kill him if he found out he had waited much longer than that. He had planned to tell her upstairs in a little while, but they were so close to the outdoors anyway. And although there were no windows in the garage, he could smell it in the air regardless.

“It’s snowing,” he said, through a small smile.

“So?” she asked.

“So I thought you might wanna go for a walk,” he said.

“Out there? In the cold?” she asked, suddenly looking a bit confused.

“Yep,” he said. She looked once more around, sighing.

“You and your late night impromptu walks. You’re lucky I love you so much, or you’d be on your own,” she said.

“Ain’t that the fucking truth,” he mumbled, taking her hand in his.
The snow was only falling in a gentle, lackadaisical way outside. It wasn’t too blustery, nor too cold, Marie had even admitted, but as the night whirled around them, something felt off in the quiet wind, and Logan sensed a bleak sort of foreboding in the air that he hadn’t picked up on earlier as they walked farther into the woods that lined the edge of Xavier’s property. Perhaps it was the weight of the news he bared, or maybe it was just a part of the growing paranoia, a raw anxiety that had been smothered temporarily by the Christmas cheer but now he felt steadily returning. Whatever it was, it was back though, and something in him had him digging in his boots, refusing to walk further into the black night with her.

“This’ll do,” he murmured, grabbing her hand in the cold.

“Logan, what?” She began, before he cut her off.

“Gotta tell you something baby, and you ain’t gonna like it,” he said, and she gripped his hand tighter, looking up to him with a careful question in her eyes. He knew she knew what this was about. There was no way she wouldn’t have been able to guess.

“Well, go ahead then,” she said quietly.

“It’s about Charles. Storm told me,” he muttered. “Thought it only decent to tell you after the party.”

“What is it, then?” she asked carefully, trying to keep her voice even. “Cancer?”

“Not quite. Alzheimer’s. The quick and nasty kind,” he muttered.

“Shit. Shit, Logan,” she cursed, eyes wide as she looked at him again. “What are we gonna do?” she barely whispered.

“I think the same thing we have been doing, I guess. We’ve got Hank workin’ on it, so…” He trailed off, but Marie wasn’t really paying attention to him anymore; instead, her gaze was now focused on a spot just off his right shoulder.

“Soon enough they’ll be no one left to teach anyway. They barely need us as is,” she spoke the truth boldly and Logan didn’t know what to say in return.

“Don’t think that far ahead,” he finally settled on.

“How can you not?” she asked, looking up to him once more.

“Because,” he said exasperatedly, “I’ve learned that, if you do, things tend not to go the way you planned.” Marie bit her lip at this, and he could practically feel the swell of quiet anger at the world rising within her.

“Do you think… we’re obsolete?” she finally murmured, her breath visible as it rose up into the cold night air.

“What do you mean, darlin’?” he asked quietly.

“I mean… society doesn’t feel animosity towards us, and we run into little trouble unless we go looking for it, but…we’re still going extinct. And…if Charles…” she dropped off for a moment, swallowing hard before beginning once more. “What would we do here anymore? I mean, how do you fight when you have no one else to fight against, or fight for?” her voice was empty and still, and he disturbed Logan deeply. It was the saddest question he had ever heard Marie ask, his Marie, so intent on believing in a just cause, always faithful a decent world was out there on the horizon, if still out of arm’s reach.
“Stop that. That talk, baby,” he found himself admonishing her. He didn’t want to hear what she was saying no more than he wanted to believe it. She said nothing back to him, instead giving him an honest, open, and fearful look, which was so much worse.

“Look, if all this ends, we move on,” he said warily.

“To what?” she practically hissed in the cold.

“We’ve got each other,” he muttered, but an icy feeling had started to settled within him.

“For how long?” she barely murmured, and he stiffened a bit more.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“You know what I mean,” she said more forcefully now, eyes once again lingering on the scar on his chest. Suddenly Logan felt a rise of anger too at her acknowledgement of the things he refused to think about.

“Marie, stop it,” he said, even as she looked at him severely. She was still frowning, and he found himself clutching her hand tightly to try and once more shake her out of it.

“Come on. Enough of this. I meant to tell ya and I did. So, we’re done with it. Let’s do something, huh? Go somewhere. That ’48 ain’t gonna show itself off without a little bit of help.”

--

It started as nothing much, a peculiar feeling, maybe. A tickle, verging on something more annoying. He cleared his throat a couple of times, genuinely surprised, the foreign and strange sensation of coughing finally truly waking him up, his eyes now opening wearily to take in the cold and darkened room of a bleak January morning.

What year? What year was it now? 2026, revised timeline, he told himself slowly, mind once more aching from the effort. Where? Where the fuck was he? Westchester, in bed with Marie, he responded, and everything in him growled approvingly. He coughed a little once more, before turning toward his left and finding her doused in a thick pile of downy white blankets, hand clasped tightly to the hem of one, holding it more closely to her bare shoulder. He knew by her breathing pattern that she was also awake, but barely just.

“My turn today,” he said groggily, his voice feeling like gravel.

“Charles always wants it to be your turn,” she muttered from her cocoon of blankets, finally shifting slightly to rub her eyes.

“Yeah, well…” he said, drifting off.

“I’m starting to get the feeling he only trusts you,” she murmured, finally looking up to him as he groaned getting out of bed. As he moved to stand, he stretched his neck and shoulder a bit in the soft grey light as he did so. He yawned, turning back around to find Marie staring at him.

“What?” he said, shooting a questioning glance at her.

“Nothing. It’s just…you’re beautiful,” she murmured quietly.

“Heh,” he said, rolling his eyes, before leaning back down in bed and kissing and nipping her ear.
gently, before whispering into it. “This won’t take long. Don’t start your day until I’m back,” he muttered.

After he had showered and dressed, Logan woozily stared back at his reflection momentarily in the bathroom mirror. He knew he needed a shave, but didn’t have the time or energy right now to do so. Just then, the tickle in his throat was back and he found himself involuntarily coughing again, and even though he swiped a hand towel from the bathroom to stifle it, he heard her stir once more from the bedroom. After it was over, he stood up straight again, albeit a bit groggily still, before slinking out guiltily from the bathroom. She was sitting up in bed now, long dark hair gracing the top of her beautiful breasts, but the look on her face was serious, solemn.

“I don’t like the sound of that,” she barely whispered, clutching the blankets in her hands as she did so.

“Just the start of a cold, Marie,” he said indifferently, before moving towards the bedroom door.

“You don’t get colds, sugar,” she murmured, and he only offered a shrug of his shoulders.

“’Bout time I caught up then, huh?” he grumbled, and her frown deepened.

“Remember what I said,” he muttered, pointing at the bed she was in, willing her not to move out of it. “I expect to find you here when I get back.” She finally smirked a little at him, before laying back down in the mess of blankets, intent on getting warm once more.

“Yeah, yeah,” she said with a wave, before creeping a hand to pick a book off the bedside table she was currently reading. The Gene: An Intimate History. Fucking perfect.

--

They took turns daily assisting Hank in the med lab with Charles now, but Logan found himself in here the most often, Charles specifically requesting his presence on a routine basis. Logan was not a nursemaid by any stretch of the imagination and had far from the appropriate amount of bedside manner, hadn’t even known Charles the longest out of the bunch, but Logan had begun to silently assume this had something to do with the jump in time and the intimate amount of knowledge both men shared about what had happened, everything that had been. In addition to this fact, Charles, lately, had been, well, difficult to be around, if only because sometimes his moods and murmurings were so goddamn disturbing, and Logan realized he was one of the few with skin thick enough to listen to the professor ramble and wasn’t as vastly disturbed by it all. Logan took Charles as he was, just as Logan did with everyone else, and maybe this, come to think of it, was the reason Charles found himself preferring the older mutant’s company over anyone else’s.

Logan’s cold had persisted this morning, and he struggled to not cough in front of Hank as he sat with the professor, trying to chat him up while Hank set out everything he would need to take Charles’ blood. Hank had been intent lately on trying to find a medicine that might more effectively counteract the effects of the degenerative brain disease in Charles’ mind, but so far had been relatively unsuccessful. Logan coughed quietly once more, involuntarily succumbing to for a moment, even as he tried as hard as possible to abstain from doing so.

“He’s sick, Hank,” Charles said, looking up to Beast once more.

“S’nothing, Charles. Just a cold. Don’t sweat it,” Logan muttered, but Hank still shot a concerned, fleeting glance down at Logan, which Logan carefully and blatantly ignored.
“How’s he doing, Blue?” Logan finally asked, intent on changing the subject.

“A good day today,” Hank murmured, glancing once more at Charles as he extracted some murky liquid from a nearby vial.

“I would appreciate if you two didn’t talk about me as if I weren’t here,” Charles said sharply and Logan suddenly felt like a child being reprimanded by a parent for coloring on the walls.

“Sorry, Charles,” he muttered, running a hand through his hair tiredly.

“Is it alright if I leave you two, for a moment, to prepare a few things? A couple of vials of blood today, Charles? Logan, if you don’t mind?” Beast asked, already turning on his large heel to exit the main quarters of the med bay.

“No problem,” Logan murmured, looking back over to the professor. He was disturbed to see Charles’ brow now more intensely furrowed, as if the professor was experiencing signs of deep distress at Hank’s exit.

“Charles, do ya need Hank to come back in here or-” he began, before Charles interrupted him, suddenly grabbing Logan’s wrist tightly to the point where it was uncomfortable.

“You must get me out of here,” Charles whispered severely, turning sharply back to look Logan directly in the eye. Logan’s discomfort suddenly spiked, as his nose told him that the man meant every damn word and meant it as the truth.

“Charles, I don’t think you understand,” he found himself trying to say.

“James…” the professor muttered underneath his breath.

“Charles,” Logan rebuked.

“I am a hazard…” he began, before Logan cut him off.

“No, you’re a professor. And Westchester needs you,” he said evenly.

“You found yourself out there…on the island,” Charles murmured, and Logan realized now the professor was somewhere far off, vanished in the vast expanse of his own mind.

“We lost so much…” Charles added. Logan said nothing, trying to understand, trying to find a reason, or maybe an excuse, to believe in the professor’s words.

“They were right upon us,” he muttered.

“Who?” Logan found himself asking.

“The Sentinels, you fool. You, unconscious. Rogue and I, helpless, seconds away from death…while you drowned…” he trailed off. Logan had abruptly stiffened at the professor’s words, but then Hank was back entering through the double doors of the med bay. Logan realized, a little too late, that now Cyclops was with him. Scott and Jean had returned home a couple of weeks ago, and Logan was more grateful for this fact than he’d care to admit. He had recently found his peace with Scott because the truth was, shit didn’t get done in this place without both Storm and Scott around to take the lead.

“How’s it going in here?” Scott asked, although it was obvious to Logan that Scott, feral-less as he was, could still sense the unease in Logan’s posture.
“Fine,” Logan finally murmured, clearing his throat once more as he stood.

“You’ll be back tomorrow, I presume?” Charles said, surprising Logan with a new clarity now with which he spoke. Something about it was extraordinarily haunting, and Logan couldn’t quite shake off the bad feeling.

“’Course,” Logan heard himself saying.

“There’s something there…I know there is,” Charles muttered to no one.

Logan looked quietly to Scott, and then to Hank, before they all worriedly glanced back at the professor.

“When…that’s the real question….when would you know to do it?” Charles murmured to the air, before falling into silence once more.

---

As he came back to the room, Pink Floyd was on the record player, but the record had ended, the occasional click of the needle skipping as it idly turned to the tune of nothing. The light in their room was still muted, and Logan was a bit put out to see the bed empty. As he paid closer attention, however, he could hear their shower running, and he moved toward the bathroom. Logan took a moment to inhale the steamy air that had risen up from the hot shower, a gentle relief for sore lungs. He found himself pulling off his clothes, intent on joining her. As he got closer, though, he began to notice that something felt wrong, like a sharp or flat note in the song of Marie’s essence that shouldn’t be there, and Logan frowned. As he opened the glass door to the tiled shower he found her standing under the hot spray, a look on her face that seemed far off, distant, as the water beat down on her, her long brown hair dripping wet, water tracing droplet patterns on her beautiful skin. He instinctively grabbed her by the arm, murmuring a “Hey” as he did so, and as she looked up to him then he noticed she had been silently crying. As he quickly pulled her tightly to his taller, muscular frame, she easily leaned into him, the warm water now pouring down on them both from the faucet overhead. He heard her let out a quiet, desperate sob, and he murmured an “It’s alright, kid,” into her wet hair. She was kissing him then, long and hard and desperate, and he took her roughly up against the shower wall, even as the water hit their bodies, the steam wafting upward, long trails of condensation billowing up around them both.

--

He wasn’t with her the first time it happened. It was a Tuesday afternoon, she was teaching, and Logan had been down in the gym training Mirage one-on-one, working through a set of complex movements and sequences. As he blocked her quick uppercuts and roundhouse kicks, the sweat dripped from his temple, and it felt good to bob and weave, anticipating what was coming next and sometimes not, both of them part of an intricate, steadily-paced dance that only a spar could provide.

It was quick, rude, instant. All of the sudden the whole gym seized up, the room convulsing and writhing in tension as a high-pitched tone pulsed through the place, and the right kick Mirage was about to deliver fell apart with her as she dropped to her knees instantly, both hands at her head before she seemed frozen in place, unable to really move. Logan staggered back a bit as an agonizing pain exploded in his own mind, and although he still managed to remain standing, all of his movements had slowed, as if long, thick ropes had been attached to his limbs. It lasted no more than
minute, and then the grip the earthquake had on their brains relaxed, and they fell backward a bit, both cruelly discarded by what had just ripped through them. As Logan struggled to breathe, he found Mirage on the floor, groaning in pain. He was down at her side in an instant, checking her pulse to find it irregular and weak, but there. As she looked up to him, a fearful confused pain in her eyes, he saw a single, thick drop of blood falling from her nose.

“What… was that?” she said weakly, still in pain, but Logan had looked up sharply, his senses screaming along with the entire mansion, the moans and shouts ringing throughout the halls. Whatever it was, it had happened everywhere, to all of them. Marie. He looked back to Mirage for mere milliseconds, before she gave him a quick nod of the head, wiping the blood from her nose as she did so, and he was staggering out of the room, finding his strength dutifully returning to him again as his body quickly began stitching himself back up. Back up from what though? He could practically feel the neurons in his brain healing as he flew up the stairs towards the classrooms, and he found her there, leaning against the wall outside of her own classroom, breathing heavily. She had dropped her mug of coffee and her books, the russet liquid now seeping near the sole of her boots, splattered onto the creamy pages of Othello, bits of ceramic mug shattered all over the floor. There was sweat on her temple and she was clasping her head in pain, but she seemed to be in one piece.

“Hell, baby, Marie, you alright?” he said, breath coming in stiltedly and heavily, as he held her tiny face in his hands. She silently nodded, grimacing, as if trying hard to concentrate, and he realized she was trying to get the words out. “Students, here. I need to help them. You, go,” she managed through gritted teeth.

“No,” he said, as he brought her closer to his seething chest. He could feel her shaking her head underneath his grip on her.

“Baby…it’s ok. Getting better. You…can still walk. You're the only one right now. Charles. Check on Hank and Charles,” she managed to say, and with another tight grip on her shoulder, checking her pulse one more time to find it regulating and steady, he left her there in the hallway again, running past people who were leaning on furniture for support, some crumpled on the floor, but he still heard each set up lungs breathing, everyone’s heart still at it. They were all still alive.

In the med bay, Charles’ chair had tipped over, and the old man now lay unconscious on the floor, although Logan sensed Charles’ vitals were stable. Hank was still on the ground and Logan raced over to them both, easing the older man up to lean him against the farthest wall as Logan knelt beside him. Logan finally looked to Hank, who was still gripping his head in pain, blood also dripping from his nose. Like an atomic blast, the worst of it had been centered around the point of origin. Charles.

“He’s alive. It was a seizure. Worse,” Hank managed to say, growling under his breath as he did so. Logan looked up to the other mutant then, the language between the two clear as day.

“Logan,” Hank muttered. “Before they come, look at me.” Logan did so, taking his attention off of the professor once more, as he watched a dark shadow pass over the other mutant’s face. “Not again…” he struggled, trying to summon up all of his words. “Understand me? This… cannot happen again.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the beautiful feedback for the last chapter. Four chapters left, and I've got rougher drafts of all of them written. I feel...really weird about this story coming to an
end. Anyway, the next chapter should be up on Monday or so, I'm hoping. Thank you guys again for all the love and support.
Chapter 20: Now

The wind sang through the derelict tunnel as he looked up to Dani, desperately trying to understand. His body still ached from having the wind knocked out of him, and his mind still rang out in grief upon having seen the apparition of Laura. Dani, however, wasted no time, as she pulled a small touch screen out of her jacket pocket, punching a long stream of numbers into a key code. Then, a concrete wall with no seams to speak of was moving out of place, an opening appearing from nowhere.

“Follow me. We need to get you to Jean-Paul,” she said, before quickly turning on her heel and disappearing through the open doorway. Logan struggled to catch up with her, limping as he did so, attempting to keep his breath regulated and even. The halls were sprawling, eerie and familiar in such a way that Logan could practically feel the metal in his hands singing, as if they knew they were closer to their own birthplace. If Alkali had been a foreboding setting before, now it had corroded into something on the verge of collapse. The place smelled like mildew and mold. Most of the walls had deteriorated, water seeping through some of the web of cracks and divots in the concrete. After another turn down an empty hallway, Logan finally found himself muttering, “You plannin’ on renovating or…?” Mirage didn’t look up to him, but murmured from ahead, “We’ve pretty much only been here long enough to mop the blood from the floors.”

Meanwhile Dani had picked up her pace even more so, and Logan found his lungs were giving in, all of it too much as he wearily stopped and leaned against a concrete wall, spent.

“Hey, wait a second,” Logan croaked, before he was coughing heavily again. Mirage had whipped around, shocked to see him leaning up against a wall as he was, and was back at his side in an instant. Mirage harbored a look of surprise quickly turning into pity on her face, that fucking look he hated, even as Logan continued to heave.

“Sensei,” she began, before he held out a scarred hand to stop her from speaking. He noticed that she had shot him another worried glance as she took in his the damage to his knuckles. Logan might not have been in his prime when Mirage had been his student, but he certainly, absolutely had not looked, or felt, like he did now. Three years of altercations and a failing healing factor had taken small thin scars he had sported at Westchester and had created a snarl of long and deep raised scars, tracing a path over most of his chest and upper arms. The one from that fucking clone had been the worst, and he was grateful Dani couldn’t lay her eyes on that. But he had also picked up the limp after a broken bone in his leg had not set properly when Charles and he had been detained on their way to Mexico. And the slow poisoning, the infection that now laced his blood and bones alike? Well, the worst of that had begun happening when he had been driving in El Paso, while he slowly tried to drink himself to death. Plus, he hadn’t slept in four days. To her, he must have looked like the fucking grim reaper.

“Stop. Before we go further,” Logan finally said, regaining is ability to speak as the coughing subsided. “Look, I trust you, Mirage, but this is all happenin’ a little quickly. And I don’t know who you’re taking me to. I need more information, you understand? Who exactly are you working with?”
“Jean-Paul,” she responded.

“I know. You said. But who, or what, is a fucking Jean-Paul?” Logan asked warily. Dani sighed, planting the blunt end of her spear down on the floor as she did so.

“His other name is Northstar. He and his sister, Aurora, made up the original Alpha Flight team. They were practically disbanded when I sought them out two years ago. I headed north, after the students were released…” she trailed off for a moment, nodding her head a little out of respect for Westchester. None of this was surprising Logan. Mirage would have been the one to join up some other cause protecting mutants as soon as she could, even if she had only been fifteen or sixteen at the time. She was a soldier, like he was. The similarities in their likenesses spoke to each other, and that was one of the reasons Logan had taken her under his wing after he had found himself in Westchester after the jump. *Mirage, always fighting.* “Anyway, we’ve had a couple of mutants we have found since join us. Which is going to be incredibly important if we are going to succeed in the next mission—” she was saying.

“Whoa, slow down, kid. *What* next mission?” Logan asked, and she stopped, looking up to him seriously now.

“To get the children back,” she said simply. Logan’s eyes widened, as he realized they both understood who she was talking about.

“You know about the children?” he barely murmured.

“We approved their asylum,” she said, a small smile on her face. For some reason, the new upturn of Dani’s lips, however, irked Logan. It was all starting to seem like too little effort from Alpha Flight, far too late. And Logan was in no mood to cozy up to rational, sensible thought at the current moment that might have suggested otherwise.

“But why the fuck did you wait so long to find them? If you knew they already existed?” Logan snapped. If Dani was taken aback by his growing frustration, however, she didn’t show it.

“Sensei, you must understand. We knew there was illegal activity happening in Mexico, but we weren’t sure of the extent and nature of it all. Our resources are still extremely limited. We had been solely focused on taking down the northern Alkali-Transigen distribution center in Canada, and by the time we received the call from their caretakers, the children were already making their way north,” she said, looking up to him. “We had cleared entry for them safely, had procured new social identification numbers and names, for some had even found families, but no one ever showed up at the extraction point just north of the border. We thought they had been slaughtered, but our drones recently discovered a smaller processing plant in the northern United States where we think they’re being held.”

“You think *or* you know?” he asked.

“Our hacker has procured video footage from inside the facility. We know they’re there,” Dani said.

“Alive?” Logan asked, barely looking at her.

“Yes, Sensei. Obviously.” Logan was getting restless now, as he dragged a boot across the grate, the animal growing more impatient in this hellhole by the minute.

“Laura…” the word fell from his lips before he could stop himself.

“Who?” Dani was asking, looking up to him strangely once again.

“Wait. The professor’s still…?” she managed to say, and Logan realized what he had made her think. It took everything in Logan just to shake his head slightly.

“No. I’m sorry, Dani. We got tangled up with some nasty shit with Transigen. But Laura survived. She… Well, she’s…..”

“Like you?” Dani guessed, already putting together what he was still struggling to convey.

“Yes. I took her north, settled up near the arctic circle. But then…” he said, unable to go on for a moment.

“She disappeared into thin air?” Dani guessed again, but at her accuracy Logan straightened instinctively, a growing suspicion once more singing in his bones. Mirage wasn’t a feral, but she was an empath, and it was obvious now that she was easily reading him like an open book. That’s one of the reasons she made such a damn good fighter.

“You can trust us, Sensei. We just got word that Transigen has dumped their contract with the Reavers. We also have reason to believe they might have a teleporter working for them now. Yet another traitor…” she said through a sneer, spitting quietly to the ground near her feet. Logan’s thoughts flew to Caliban suddenly, and he grimaced.

“Don’t be so sure any mutant is acting on their own volition when they’re working for Transigen,” Logan growled. “You never know the whole story, kid.” She stared at him solemnly for a moment, partially chastised by his words, recalling, perhaps, the nature of their relationship in the time before. Teacher, and student.

“Where are they holding them, Dani?” he finally asked, and the frown Logan had put on Mirage’s face deepened.

“South Dakota. Just outside of Sioux Falls,” Mirage said simply. Logan stood back up to his full height, willing his body to move again.

“You listen to me, kid. I need you to give me the coordinates right now,” Logan growled. “I’m sorry I can’t meet the rest of your Canadian sweethearts, but every second here is a waste of my-”

“-Sensei, you cannot do this on your own,” she interrupted.

“Dani, I swear to god-”

“Sensei, kiku. Listen. To be a good fighter you must listen. Like you taught me, yes?” Logan sighed, relenting a bit as he did so, and finally let her speak.

“The plant has multiple buildings and each of those have several floors. It’s a maze of labs and factory lines alike. We have been planning this extraction mission every day for over two weeks now. It’s going to be quick and effective. Taking out the plant, extracting the children, dissembling more of what used to be Alkali-Transigen. And we do so in seventy-two hours,” she explained, gripping her spear more tightly, and he found himself almost envious of the way she still held all her power, all the vitality and volatile rage of youth strung through her every fiber.

“No. Absolutely not. Tell Jean-Paul-whatever-the-fuck-his-name-is to move the mission to tonight, tomorrow at latest,” Logan snapped.
“Sensei Logan…”

“Tomorrow, or I’m going on my own,” he growled. “Listen, Dani. You haven’t seen the *fucked up shit* these kids have been through. If they’re holding them alive, what they’re going through… might be worse than death. You’re wasting precious time. Call in all your fucking reinforcements, and call ‘em in now, if you have any left.”

“We do,” she said, and he could tell he was winning her over, finally convincing her of the need to act more quickly. Maybe, just maybe, she then could convince those higher up.

“Then call ‘em in, Dani. Convince whoever you need to there’s now a personal, *significant* investment in this. You’re right. I won’t resort to sloppy extraction tactics, but you seem to have plenty of time on this one. Now take me to this Jean-Paul bastard so he can run me through all the shit,” he said. Mirage nodded resolutely, turning to make her way once more to head down the hall again, before she stopped, hesitating slightly as she turned slowly to Logan.

“Kanojo wa anata no yuiitsu no chidesu ka?” *She is your only blood?*

Before he could help himself, his mind was returning to images of Laura carefully pressing a ballpoint pen to paper, dutifully returning home that first night to write more on her essay, responsibly finishing her homework. He thought of her cramming more tubes of Pringles into their shopping basket. He thought of her joy of reading, her temper, the way she got under his skin and stayed there.

“Yes,” Logan finally said. “And I’m going to get her back.”

---

It was the changes in the sounds that always gave them away. *Los cambios.* It was the switching of the staff, the night shift ending and the day shift beginning. It was the way that some of them held their breath around her cell. It was the sympathy she could practically smell on them. These weren’t soldiers. They were people. She now knew they were under-trained. She now knew they were understaffed. The white, cold, cinderblock room was not so different from where she had been held before, but everything else was.

Laura had been here three days. Three days *papa* had been on his own. But, not for much longer. The guards set on monitoring them moved like animals always did, *como presa*, oblivious to the types of things Laura understood to be true about the world. In the end, the prey always yielded. It was always just a matter of when.

--

Logan now found the animal within him pacing in front of a closed door, despite the man being dead on his feet. Whatever metal compounds Stryker used to build this place were more than effective or he was finally starting to lose what was little left of his senses, because Logan couldn’t hear shit from what was being discussed from behind the door. Jean-Paul, Aurora, Dani and two other mutants he hadn’t caught the names of were there: Alpha Flight in its entirety. Their few numbers made Logan nervous, particularly when he had watched them all file into the room after terse, brief introductions.

Finally, the door opened and he was being asked to come in. As Logan walked inside, he realized what had been called a command center was nothing more than a couple of stainless steel tables
shoved together with three or four old, albeit souped-up computers on them. If anything, it reminded Logan of the bunker back in Mexico where Storm and he had kept watch over the Blackbird, what felt like a century ago.

An older, clean-looking man who might’ve been an optimist had he seen better days stepped forward, now formally introducing himself as Jean-Paul. His sister said nothing and did not stand, and he found Dani over in the corner, pacing slightly. The other two sat at computers, totally ignoring his presence.

“Logan,” Jean-Paul said, “It’s an honor to have one of the infamous X-Men under our roof.”

“Yeah, well, it’s not my first time here,” Logan said, arms once more crossed as he shot a glance around the place, before standing near the table in front of him.

“Of course. Yes, I forget. I apologize. And I want to personally extend my condolences to what happened at Westchester. Dani tells me that Charles was under your care for a time… but no more?” Logan, once again, could only shake his head. Northstar let out a sigh of frustration as he did so.

“A great loss, although we assumed he had died shortly after the event anyway. In fact, we hadn’t had news that anyone had survived at all,” he said carefully, looking over Logan and his blood-stained clothes once more.

“How did you take over this place anyway?” Logan found himself asking.

“We’ve been tracking Transigen up north and their distribution practices for over a year. We discovered that they were working with Canewood and what they had done to the food, and we had been quietly bolstering the means to dissemble them.”

“They ain’t just operating up north,” Logan added.

“We know that now,” Jean-Paul responded. “We discovered what was happening here, above ground in the utility plant above the dam. We… inhibited… their work, and upon discovering the underground tunnels of labs in the dam, we thought it was best to stake a claim over the territory, especially if we are to take up more missions against Transigen.”

“Ain’t a bad idea, even if this place is in need of some work,” Logan grumbled, before rubbing his eyes tiredly, coming back to the matter at hand. “Why are they keeping the children alive, Northstar?”

“We don’t know that, Logan. Although our most recent footage from our hack shows they are relatively unharmed.”

“And Laura?”

“Yes. Dani mentioned her to me. I don’t know yet, Logan, our most recent footage is several days old. But if Transigen took her, she is likely there. And if she is, we will rescue her along with the rest. That, I can assure you.”

“Yeah, I meant to ask you about that. There are five of you. How is that enough for an extraction of this scale that you’re planning?”

“The X-Men used to do it with less,” he said through a small smile. “And Dani tells me you were just threatening to go it alone.” Logan sighed heavily.

“Well, my life ain’t worth much right now. But I wouldn’t gamble with anyone else’s,” Logan
grumbled, although he realized it was a thin defense at best. The truth was that he needed help, probably more than even Alpha Flight was able to give to bring down Transigen. Meanwhile, Jean-Paul continued on.

“Well, like you guessed, we have reinforcements. We have already called in two fringe teams to help us, hopefully with them arriving this evening, especially considering your…revised suggestions to our agenda.”

“And they plan to just up and leave wherever they are and get here that fast?”

“They will for us, yes. I have not told them why, but there will be no doubt when they discover you are the reason.” Logan’s brow furrowed at this.

“Last thing, JP. I hope you know, I ain’t applyin’ for a job. I’m retired. I’m grateful and all, but I’m here to get Laura back, and then we’re gone,” he said wearily, and he could tell Northstar was evaluating Logan’s tired, haggard frame once more.

“Of course, Logan,” he said simply.

A few minutes later, Dani was leading him to a series of relatively decent rooms that served as living quarters, this part having been cleaned up quite a bit over the rest. Logan discovered fresh cots and bedding, showers, and new military grade grey cargo pants and a fresh white shirt.

“Sensei, you’ve been instructed to rest,” she said, smirking at him slightly. A smile just barely tugged at Logan’s mouth, quietly appreciating the girl he had once known, had once had the pleasure of training.

“Thanks Mirage.”

She nodded her head, before adding, “We’ll wake you in a few hours and brief you then.”

Later on, the hot shower helped massage his aching muscles and he stood there for several long minutes, refusing to move as it beat down on him. His head was mostly empty now, devoid of the worst of his thoughts. He fell down into bed easily enough, his muscles and bones and body finally giving in. He lay there, heavy like a stone, chest rising and falling as the dull ache in his lungs relaxed its sharp grip, as finally sleep, illusive, mysterious sleep, avidly waited to greet him.

--

Three days. Six o’clock sharp. Meal time. A tray through a slot, as usual. But the man who delivered her meal yesterday had looked at her strangely, maybe with something verging on compassion, and she knew he was one who had not been adequately trained like a soldier should be. Presa. The doors were solid, but an empathetic hand was all she needed. She let out a fake, sad sob right before the tray was passed through the slot. He heard her, that wavering voice. “Everything okay in there?” it asked. She sobbed again, and then the door was open mere millimeters, and she sprang forward. She screamed as her claws sang through the air and she forced all of her strength upward into the man who had been foolish enough to be kind, up into his jugular and then she kept going, adamantium easily slicing through brain and bone. A shower of blood rained down her as she purposely slid underneath him, unsheathing a foot claw and slicing his femoral just for good measure before fleeing in the direction of Rictor’s cell as the alarms sounded, ringing in her ears.

No dejes que muera. The man’s death was necessary to sustain her father’s life. Her papa. He depended on her. Relied on her. He needed protection, and she had a promise to keep.
That night he dreamt of Alkali, but it wasn’t the Alkali he had known. It was the one his consciousness couldn’t recall, but his body was now remembering. He was all animal then, having been subjected to various forms of torture, enough that the man had retreated deep within himself and had left the Wolverine to deal with the trauma, the pain, the tests. Images of these experiments haunted his dreams now, and he witnessed the animal growling out in pain, in loneliness, not understanding where the man had fled to, why he had gone for so long, even as the animal pulled his body through day after day after day, surviving now for them both…

Logan had woken with a start, sweating and breathing heavily. He looked around, anticipating and bracing for another coughing fit only to be reprieved, although he knew it couldn’t be far behind. He realized absent mindedly that his claws were out, and they hurt more than they ever had, the metal now having to force its way through scar tissue and infection every time they appeared, whether or not he had voluntarily summoned them forward. He gritted his teeth as he sheathed them, breathing steadily through the pain. He was still tired, but now he was a few hours away from that exhaustion that left him practically outside of himself. He stood carefully, before moving to the small sink in the tiny bathroom and washing the blood from his hands. He splashed some water onto his face, before picking up on the static of an old, classic CB walkie-talkie, a sound he hadn’t heard in years.

“We have a bird on the horizon. Landing in seven minutes,” a man’s voice said over the device. Dani’s voice responded with a simple “copy.” Then, her knock.

“Yeah,” he finally muttered and she let herself inside, seeming a little more settled with his appearance, particularly after a shower, shave and a couple hours’ sleep. Still no fucking prince charming, but perhaps not death warmed up either.

“They’ll be here in a few minutes,” she said quietly.

“Who’s they?” Logan asked roughly.

“Backup,” she said through a small smile. “There are a couple of fringe groups in the States and Canada that operate remotely, trying to find mutants, offering what little support they can if anyone wants or needs it.”

“Do they lend their services to you often?” he found himself asking.

“Well, no. And anyway, they are the ones that usually decide when to come and when to leave. Their group members keep changing too. It’s an evolving entity. Most activists like these act on their own or in small groups.”

“How do you know you can trust them?” Logan’s thoughts briefly flashed back to the Brotherhood and Magneto, most likely dead wherever he was.

“Trust is a luxury, Sensei. And we don’t have the resources to argue. We get help where we can,” Mirage admitted to him quietly. “Particularly since Westchester…”

“I get it, Dani,” he muttered. He noticed she still had a question in her eyes, however, and he looked to her again, mildly frustrated.

“What?” he barked.

“I apologize, Sensei. But I’ve been wondering…how did you possibly escape?” she asked. “With
Charles?” Logan closed his eyes momentarily, keeping his mind dutifully blank.

“The seizures don’t work as well on me. Didn’t quite finish the job,” he muttered. Just then, her radio was whistling with static again.

“Bird landing in less than five,” the voice said. Mirage once more held the walkie-talkie to her lips and murmured a “copy” before looking to him once more.

“Would you like to help me go meet them? I’m in charge of in-takes. From there, we can lead them all to the mission briefing. You made quite a case for yourself. The mission will now commence in twelve hours.” Good, Logan thought. The sooner he was out of here, the better.

“Ok. Yeah, I guess. Why not?”

--

It felt good to be outside again, Logan thought, as he and Mirage stood next to the heliport platform, waiting for the chopper to show up. Something in the wilderness, all those natural sounds and scents did his body good. The snow that had fallen early this morning was less than a foot, no big deal to most Canadians, and as the sun broke through a line of clouds, it warmed the landscape and lake beyond them, making everything feel white and clean. Dark green pines in the distance sported snow as well, and the clear blue sky was welcoming up above. To be outside of Alkali, out of that awful place, was more than a relief, even if he had only been here a few hours.

He heard it before he saw it, the thick blades of the military helicopter, kicking up snow and making the precipitation dance around them. He hesitantly looked back to Mirage, trying to calculate her mood. Only one helicopter? Was this typical? He was hoping, praying for a fleet of them. He looked back to the platform that lay about thirty feet beyond and was surprised to find the helicopter already touching ground, its doors now sliding open, and Logan was disgruntled to see that only a handful of people were exiting the aircraft. He saw, too, that the machine’s rotors had no intent of slowing down, the pilot obviously planning on taking off again until all boots were all on the ground. How many people were there? Three? Four? Were they even mutants? Everyone looked pretty fucking normal. How the hell were they gonna do this?

Logan watched as the last person jumped down from off the helicopter, a thin woman adorned with a cargo jacket and heavy black combat boots. As she moved to slide the heavy door shut, the helicopter was already taking off, a brilliant black bird stretching its awful, powerful wings upward, lifting up into the blue, and that was the last normal moment Logan could recall before the whole world turned upside down.

The air became ground and the ground became the air. The pines had uprooted themselves, hanging all wrong in the sky. The sun must have spilled onto the snow, because now it was seeping underneath his boots. Time itself seemed exposed, as the woman turned, and her loosely braided dark hair flew out from behind her, the platinum strands braided in with all the rest winking in the bright winter light.

The last time he had seen her he had been holding her body, blood seeping from her nose and ears, as he listened to her heartbeat slow to nothing in the pale sunlight on the floor of their bedroom, while a hundred paper cranes watched silently from their perches above.

“Mirage...” Logan growled, his voice wavering as he quickly glanced to Dani. But Mirage had a strange, hesitant look about her as she gave just the slightest shake of her head. No apparitions. No
trick of the light. No voices on the wind.

The woman had frozen half-way down the platform as her gaze finally settled on him, less than twenty paces between them now. The brown of her eyes almost steel colored in the blinding white light. His scarred hands in tight fists at his sides. A tendril of platinum hair escaping her braid as she shook her head slightly in confusion or desperation, his feet planting more firmly to the ground to save him from falling to his knees.

“Logan?” she finally asked, a hint of a whisper, voice breaking in disbelief.

Marie.

Chapter End Notes

Aaannndd I’ve been holding onto this secret since chapter two. I’m excited to finally share it with you, my friends. <3 More details to come. I ain’t leavin’ you hanging! Chapter 21 up by the end of the week.
“Yeah, well, ok. On top of the security deposit and two months’ rent? How much is that gonna cost me?” Logan asked into the cellphone receiver, leaning on his desk in his office. Marie was standing in the doorway, looking like she wanted to set him on fire, aggressively motioning for him to hang up and follow her, wildly pantomiming like she was trying to land a fucking plane.

“Hell, that much?” he murmured after hearing the price, running his hand through his hair and ignoring the woman in front of him. She scowled at him again, pointing behind her, and mouthing the words *Logan. COME. ON.*

“Alright, lemme think about it. I’ll call you back,” he said grumpily, clicking the end button on the phone and looking at Marie exasperatedly.

“You said you would *help.* Jean can’t make *all the kids’ shit* levitate into the moving vans,” she snapped, turning on her heel and heading for the door.

“Jesus, ok,” he said sighing outwardly, before following Marie into the hall.

The place was turned upside down from the efforts of moving the students out. There were boxes everywhere, furniture shoved to the sides of the hallways. Marie and Logan had spent the last two weeks arranging to find homes for those students who were without one, moving them to schools overseas or up north, while the other students found their way back to their families and into more traditional settings. Peter was pulling more than his weight, and Logan settled on a large box in the hallway, pulling it up into his arms. A scrawny kid no more than fourteen named whose name he’d forgotten shot him a wary glance from his open doorway a few feet away. “This yours, uhh….?” Logan stumbled.

“Doug,” the kid muttered.

“Uh, yeah. Doug. Sorry. Look, kid. Don’t let it all get ya down. This is a temporary thing, yeah?” Logan said.

“That’s what you think,” he mumbled. Logan groaned as he heaved the box outside toward a nearby moving van.

“Jesus, what you got in here, piles of rocks?” Logan grumbled.

“No, video games. There are fourteen separate gaming systems in there from various decades. Be careful with them,” Doug said rudely.

“Hell,” Logan said, before once more swallowing a cough as he brushed past a still-annoyed Marie who currently was carrying several desk lamps. He knew she was in a bad mood. With the departure of the students, their jobs had effectively ended as they knew them. It had been Storm’s idea to close Xavier’s doors, a quick, temporary solution to get the students far out of the radius of Charles’ mind while Hank tried to figure out the best course of action. Additionally, what had happened in January
had also made the news, and now Westchester was suffering from a public relations problem. The FBI had come knocking on their door twice, mainly there wanting to assess Charles’ condition, and although they had a decent working relationship with most governmental agencies in the States, the whole confrontation had left Storm more than slightly anxious. Meanwhile, now that they knew the seizures were dangerous, Hank had Charles on a heavy course of drugs, mainly variants of diazepam, to keep the seizures from happening. And while this eased the worst of the fears that accidentally Charles would hurt anyone else, Logan had sided with Storm to close the school. Rogue had too, of course, but she was more heartbroken over it all. Logan taught because it made sense to do so if he was going to live at Xavier’s. Marie taught because she loved it.

As Logan heaved the box onto the van outside in the frigid cold of early February, Logan managed to stifle another cough. The scrawny kid looked at him warily for a moment from the sidewalk, before turning around to go back inside. Logan sighed tiredly. He had been at this job all fucking day, and he needed a fucking break if he was gonna keep pretending he felt fine. The “cold” that he and Marie had taken to calling it had not gone away in the month or so since it had started. And if Hank had noticed, he hadn’t said anything, most likely because all of the mutant’s attention had been settled on Charles, but with every passing day he knew he was irking Marie. He tried as hard as he could to muffle, stifle, and practically suffocate himself to keep the cough at bay, because every time he did suffer through an attack, Marie would shoot him a worried, pained look that Logan would have gladly suffered from a heavy bout of amnesia like he had with Stryker to forget. The look verged on pity, and it was fucking killing him.

He hadn’t quite convinced her yet, but the plan was to get Rogue out of here as soon as humanly possible too. He trusted Hank’s medical know-how to keep them safe, but those were all short-term solutions to a long-term problem. In the end, they needed different jobs. Teaching aside, even the X-Men missions nowadays were far more likely to happen on the pages of a comic book than in reality. Are we obsolete? Marie had asked. At the time, Logan wasn’t sure. Now, it sure as hell was looking like it. The simple fact of the matter was, the professor was slowly dying, and all of his ideologies about protecting mutants were quietly dying right along with him.

--

Later on in the evening, afternoon clouds rolled in. The wind had picked up, shrouding everything in grey, as the rumble of the last moving van started, pulling out of the circular drive in front of Xavier’s. The rest of the adults had filed out to see the last of the students off, and as they all watched the truck make its way down the long drive, they all stood there, lingering. Storm, Scott, Jean, Bobby, Kitty, Peter, Rogue and Logan under the mansion’s entryway, Hank still being up with Charles inside. The snow was falling softly in the drive now, and Rogue leaned into Logan tiredly, resting her head on his shoulder. He put an arm around her, breathing her in for a moment, as he shot a forlorn look at Storm and she frowned slightly back to him. The last of the X-Men, now alone

“Well, this is depressing,” Scott murmured to nobody.

“Hell yes,” Peter said, switching his weight from one foot to another.

“Alright everybody,” Storm said resolutely after some time, looking at them all. “Inside. It’s cold, and I’ve held off this weather system as long as I can. But I’m tired and I’d like a break,” she said before walking back to the doors behind them.

Finally, Rogue sighed as she looked up to Logan. “Takeout?” she asked, and he offered her a small smile back. “Sure, kid,” he said, squeezing her shoulder a bit more in assurance.
An hour later Logan and Rogue were eating sushi out of paper cartons in the otherwise empty dining room. Logan had propped his feet up in a spare chair, while Marie dipped a piece of *Unagi* into some wasabi with her chopsticks, sighing as she did so. Marie had also warmed some sake for them both, and they were now generously helping themselves to it. The rest of the crew had disappeared to somewhere else in the mansion, probably to get flaming drunk. At least, Logan thought that’s what they should be up to.

Logan cradled the warm ceramic cup in his hands, and once more took a sip. He shot Marie a glance, and he could tell she was now fiddling with her food more than eating it. They had pretty much finished anyway, and he knew Marie was just trying to give her hands something to do. Finally, however, she set down the chopsticks and murmured the words, “We need to talk.”

“Dear lord, woman. You know better than to start a conversation that way,” Logan said, frowning slightly before setting down the small cup on the table.

She offered him an apologetic smile, finally picking up her own sake. “Ugh, you’re right. Sorry,” she muttered.

“So, spill,” Logan said from the other side of the table, although he knew what she was going to say before she said it.

“I don’t wanna leave,” she murmured into her drink. Logan frowned a little, sitting up straight and putting his boots back on the ground again.

“You know it ain’t safe here,” he said quietly.

“We can’t abandon Charles,” she said.

“Rogue…” Logan began, falling into the habit of using her other name almost always when she was scaring the shit out of him.

“He’s on the diazepam. The chance of another seizure is…small. And if we go, who’s going to stay?” she said softly, a look of deep despair melting around her brown eyes.

“Hell, baby. You know all this already. Hank’s almost finished arranging long-term care with a couple of mutants with healing factors he’s calling in. They’re modifying Cerebro for Charles. It’s the deal we made with the government,” Logan said.

“I hate that,” Marie hissed. “It feels like we’re locking him in there or something. It’s horrible,” she finished. Logan said nothing for a moment. The truth was he felt similarly, but they had all been at a loss of what to do. They had discovered Charles’ seizures had a remarkably large radius, and short of killing or hurting anyone else, it was one of their only options.

“You have a healing factor,” Rogue said softly.

“But you don’t,” Logan said through narrowed eyes. “And we can’t risk me just hoping to get to you in time. So unless you plan on leaving me here by myself, what you’re saying doesn’t make any fucking sense.”

“Of course I’m not going to leave you here, sugar.” Despite her words, Marie’s tone was icy.

“Then it’s settled. We leave,” Logan nearly growled back in response. At his anger, Marie stiffened.

“I’ll make up my own mind, thank you very much,” she said caustically.
“I know you will, Rogue. That’s what I’m so fucking worried about,” Logan practically barked, and the effort of doing so sent him spinning into a coughing fit once more. It was awful, and he struggled to breathe as the physical effort of the day caught up with him. The whole time, Marie looked at him through angry, bitter eyes. Not a hint of pity on her face this time. As his lungs finally settled down, he groaned, running a hand over his face to find Marie still shooting daggers at him.

“What?!” Logan asked nastily.

“Nothing,” she whispered, setting down her sake a little too forcefully and standing, before sleeking back her hair and putting it up with a spare band she had on her wrist.

“I’m gonna go work on my uppercuts,” she said.

“This late?” Logan asked. Despite their bickering, he never wanted her in a separate room from him for long, especially with knowing what Charles was now capable of.

“Yes, this late. Looks like I have the whole gym to myself from here on out anyway,” she snapped.

Logan growled quietly as she brushed past him, but he didn’t move to stop her. Instead, he drank heavily from his little cup of sake, knowing he would have to switch to something stronger, and fucking soon.

--

After a while of sitting there stewing, Logan moved to clean all the shit up from dinner. He walked the cups back to the sprawling, empty kitchen, carefully and dutifully washing out the tokkuri, the warm water and soap feeling good on his hands as he did so. He snapped up a dish towel from a nearby oven and slowly and rhythmically dried each of their cups. As he opened the cabinets, he was greeted with stacks and stacks of plates, hundreds of place settings polished and ready to be used. Logan simply stared at them all for a moment, hands still resting on either cabinet door, before he exhaled deeply and set their dishware in with all the rest, closing the cabinets, shutting off the lights to the kitchen, and walking out.

Whiskey was on the docket tonight, maybe scotch if he could find some, but Logan made a mental note that it was probably best to drop by the med bay first. He had taken up the habit of using his senses to check in on everyone periodically, especially over the past couple of weeks. With the students gone, Logan found that it was far easier to do this. Downstairs, the dutiful heavy thud of Marie’s taped fists making contact over and over again with the punching bag, her breath coming in fast and steady. Up another floor, he heard Kitty and Bobby going at it, and with a scowl he mentally lowered their volume down. Logan could tell Storm was probably pacing in her office from the rhythmic sound of her footsteps, but he also heard the rim of a bottle clink against a glass and he smiled softly at the notion of her drinking, mentally sending her a silent atta girl.

Scott and Jean were still outside, they had been since the kids had left, but they were not outwardly talking, which wasn’t unusual, such was their way. Then there was Peter, poor Peter, who was currently listening to jazz with what could only be a pair of expensive headphones in his room as clear as Logan could hear the music. And Charles, well, Logan knew just by his steady breathing he was already asleep, the valium and other drugs he was on often making the older man tired and mentally distant, which they all hated to see happen, but hadn’t found a way around it. Finally, he picked out the sounds of Hank, the brush of him taking off his glasses, and sighing through a tired growl. He was still working, the fucking addict, and Logan intended to tell him to call it a night.

Logan entered the med bay quietly, knowing full-well that Hank’s hearing was just as good as his own and not feeling the need to announce his entrance, as Hank would have likely heard him
coming up here a few minutes earlier anyway. Logan found Hank at his desk on the other side of the med bay, pouring over paperwork.

“Hey, Blue,” he said.

“Logan, my boy, how are you?” Hank responded, albeit tiredly. Logan smiled faintly at the nickname. They both now knew that Logan had over a century on him, easy.

“Been better,” he finally muttered. “How’s Charles?” Hank peered at Logan over his glasses that he had set back on his face upon Logan’s entrance, as Logan plopped down in a chair across from Hank’s desk.

“Stable. Tired,” Hank said. “His memory comes and goes,” he added, after a bit of thought. Logan blankly stared at the neatly organized desk, settling his gaze on a small hourglass set on the left corner. Neither mutant said anything for a bit of time, and right about then Logan had wished he had indulged in the whiskey first, as he began to suspect the real reason he found himself up here tonight. He was worried about Charles, he wanted Hank to relax, but those had little to do with why he had strolled through the doors at a late hour. Hank seemed to inherently know this, sense it on him, and finally, after some more silence, offered Logan a bit of a nudge.

“How’s that ‘cold’ of yours?” Hank said carefully, adjusting the papers in front of him, even though they were already in a neat stack as it was.

“Rogue’s giving me hell for it,” he muttered. The simple fact was that Logan had not thought long or hard about what was happening, because if he did he could take a pretty good guess as to what the answer might be and what it might mean. He also realized, however, that Marie was becoming steadily worried, and as much as he tried embodying strength and health and bravado in the day-to-day, sometimes, not all the time, but sometimes, his body felt like it was fucking falling apart. And the problem was that, as much as Logan tried to evade Marie’s watchful eye during these subtle moments of weakness, it was practically impossible to do it all the time.

“You got any clue as to why, Hank?” Logan finally said, through gritted teeth.

“Without a proper examination, Logan—” he said.

“-which you ain’t gettin’,” Logan interrupted.

“I understand that, my friend,” Hank grumbled. “It’s just scientists don’t typically rely solely on guesswork before offering up a diagnosis.”

“Well, how ‘bout your best hypothesis, then,” Logan murmured, as he saw Hank look to a thin scar that had appeared on Logan’s forearm during the past year after a fight turned rough.

“How long has it been since you started not healing fully from your wounds? A year or two now?” Hank asked. This surprised Logan. He wasn’t so much of an idiot to not guess it was all connected, but he was routinely impressed with how fucking perceptive Hank was. As a feral, Hank naturally would be, but unless he had some full-on rage happening, which Logan rarely saw, he found himself half-forgetting Hank was a feral mutant most of the time due to Hank’s unyielding civility.

“About that long,” Logan grumbled.

“Well, then, I think the answer might be more apparent than we think,” he said quietly, and then there it was. *The pitying look.*

“Quit fucking around with me, and give it to me straight, Hank,” Logan nearly growled.
“Old age,” he said calmly. Logan’s eyebrows shot up at this, a little taken aback by the bluntness of his remark, even if he had asked for it.

“Excuse me?” Logan asked caustically.

“I’m not joking around, my boy. I’m not sure exactly what your Hayflick limit would possibly be without tests, but I’m assuming your telomeres are finally deteriorating,” Hank said.


“From what you’ve shared of your memories with the professor before things…deteriorated with Charles, we have your year of birth pegged somewhere in the eighteen thirties, Logan. That means you’ve got a two hundredth birthday coming up.” Logan squirmed in his chair. He hated being reminded of this fact. Fucking hated it. He didn’t feel that old, but he assumed that was most likely the silver lining of Stryker’s experiments on him in the eighties. A reliable ol’ dose of amnesia was good for that. Being reminded that he was, indeed, not the forty-year-old human being that he looked like was never a pleasant experience, however, because it had him feeling less than human, and it also made him feel weird, strange when he thought of Marie. He knew he was probably a little perverted, but fuck.

“Yeah, I’ve seen some shit,” Logan heard himself saying. “What’s your point, Hank?”

“Logan, look. All human cells divide, over and over again, but eventually they divide enough times that the buffers that protect our actual genetic code in our cells, the telomeres, slowly get shorter until they disappear, leaving our genetic code subject to… wear and tear. That’s why, typically, as we age, our eyesight fails, we become weaker, we lose the melanin in our hair,” he said, shooting a glance at Logan once more.

“Come again?” Logan asked.

“Why our hair goes grey. The genes that made up those characteristics start to fade, and in your case, such as with all of us, the X-Gene is no exception to the rule. It’s just another blip in your genetic code. Your body doesn’t know the X-Gene is special, although it’s ironic, because your healing factor probably inadvertently kept your telomeres intact a lot longer than they normally would have been around. But in the end your X-Gene is just another gene where your DNA is concerned, like your eye color. All human cells have a limit of how many times they can divide, even yours. Eventually I would assume your healing ability…well, it will sputter out, leaving you…err, more human. Prone to illness, and prone to more often experiencing the usual consequences of physical violence, as in slowed healing,” Hank finished. Logan simply blinked at him for a moment, comprehending what Hank was saying, but just so.

“Shit. So I got some missing telomeres. Maybe. And, so, I’m not sick?” he asked carefully. The fact of the matter was aging was one of the scenarios Logan had already come up with in his mind, and it was the worst one. If he was sick somehow, he could be cured. If he was aging, well, he was fucked.

“I wouldn’t say that…” Hank said, glancing to Logan’s knuckles and the adamantium that lay hidden beneath, and that’s when Logan’s stomach churned with a new sort of dread.

“Fuck. Ok, you can stop. I was wrong. I don’t wanna hear this shit,” he said, suddenly standing.

“Logan…” Hank said, before he interrupted him.

“Thanks for the, uh, info Hank. You know to keep this between us, right? Storm, Rogue, any of them, they don’t need to know about this shit. They have enough to worry about,” he grumbled.
“Of course,” Hank said quietly, before, gripping a pen a little more tightly, he added just as Logan had reached the med bay doors, “And Logan?”

He stopped, mildly annoyed, turning back once more to the other mutant.

“Yeah?” he growled.

“Remember, without tests, it’s just a theory,” Hank said carefully.


“I will do my best.”

--

Goddamn fucking shitty DNA shit telomere fucking whatever they are MOTHER FUCKERS, Logan thought, as he fumbled in the liquor cabinet for at least a half-full bottle of whiskey. He needed booze, and then he needed Marie. Now. *Fuck* giving her space. *Fuck* her martyrdom. *Fuck* her ever-loyal urge to serve those in their time of need. *He* needed her. He’d convince her alright that it was not safe to live here anymore, and, if not, he’d pick up her sorry albeit fine piece of ass and strap her, *tie her the fuck down*, in his god damned truck and get far enough away from this cursed place before she could ever get the chance to run right back here to try to save the world *for the hundredth time*, even if she screamed her pretty little head off the whole fucking way to Canada or wherever they ended up.

Logan found what he was looking for and indulged generously, taking a long pull from the bottle, before stalking off in the direction of the gym. He knew already she was still giving it to the punching bag, and she’d been at it for well over an hour. The trainer in him knew she should stop for her muscles’ sake, but the man who found himself hopelessly in love with the stubborn-ass woman knew that, emotionally, she needed this. He stood there watching her for a moment from the gym entrance, watched the muscles under her flawless skin flex and move as she came at the bag with another sequence: *kick, dodge, uppercutoff, uppercutoff, kick, dodge, hit*. It was a blend of a few different forms of martial arts, impressive and sexy, and, he felt his anger start to morph into something else as he watched her move with grace and beauty and power.

“You’re really givin’ that bag all you’re worth, aren’t ya?” he finally murmured from the door, before taking another swig of the bottle in his hands, cursing all sense of propriety now.

“You…better…believe it…!” she breathed, before hitting the bag again. He could tell she was already losing energy, though, heart beating erratically and breath coming in a little too hard. Logan finally walked over silently, before resting his hand on the bag, steadying it from swinging and partially blocking her ability to keep at it.

“Let go,” Marie said, although he noticed that she took advantage of the moment’s break to wipe the sweat from her temple.

“No,” he said. She stared at him, a bit perplexed, before her expression turned to one of anger again.

“God damn you, sugar. I said *let go,*” she rumbled.

“No,” he said again. “Time to stop this,” he muttered, before setting the bottle down at his feet and stalking over to her. He moved a hand to the back of her neck, bringing her closer to him. He could feel her muscles straining against him as she fought for control, putting a fist to his chest, and then his
grip tightened, pulling her closer, until she finally relinquished her strength.


“Exactly,” he growled.

“I’m all sweaty,” she pouted, looking back up at him.

“What the fuck is wrong with that?” he asked. “That’s one of the best ways I like you.” He lingered over her lips then, just barely hovering there.

“Stop,” she insisted.

“Stop what?” he teased.

“Stop making me stop being mad at you,” she said quietly, and he smirked at this, before growling at the blooming arousal in her scent and her looming proximity as he pulled her in for a rough and long kiss, the taste of liquor on his tongue spilling over onto hers. As he began to hold her more tightly to him, however, she whipped a hand up to get out of his control, and he grabbed her wrist tightly, almost too hard. She stared up at him, a knowing, wild look in her eye, and they both knew what he wanted. It was the same look she gave him when she wanted to play with his claws. He wanted more than the usual, more than they normally gave each other.

“I can’t, baby,” she said tiredly. He looked at her carefully, through dark, terse eyes.

“It’s been a fucking terrible day, darlin’. I’d like to feel… less,” he rumbled.

“I’m not sure you have as much to give, sugar,” she muttered, and his hand gripped her wrist a bit tighter.

“That’s bullshit, and you know it,” he snarled, pulling her closer to him so he could kiss up the length of her forearm, and then he was pulling at her thighs to get a better grip on her ass, before swinging her around and landing them both hard on the mats on the floor.

“Here?” she breathed, even as he was peeling off his own clothes.

“No one else around. Not that I give a fuck,” he muttered, before he turned them so she was on top of him, pulling off her shirt to get her down to nothing but her sports bra. He ran his hands over her abdomen, felt the smooth, taught lines of her stomach, all that bare skin, exposed.

“Do it,” he muttered to her.

“Why?” she asked, a bit helpless, even though he knew he was already close to convincing her.

“Because I wanna feel a little fucking careless. Cause I wanna stop giving a shit about every other fucking thing …” he muttered, and she sighed.

“It’s a good thing I trust you,” she said.

“Don’t I know it,” he murmured, even as he could feel her skin hum to life. They routinely took and gave from each other in all kinds of physical ways, but they only did this rarely, mainly because of how dangerous it could be. There was something riveting about it though, fucking hot and wild about having to break apart every few seconds, and they both knew that Rogue, and she was Rogue then, was wilder, less inhibited, when she finally had the chance to let go. They were both better about stopping from her taking too much of him than that first fateful night, anyway, and although
Logan was sure there was probably a safe word or some shit, he didn’t want to know what the hell it was. He roughly pulled her closer to his body, moving on top once more, just as the connection opened up between them, and he snarled as he bit her bottom lip, tearing away after a couple seconds of her drawing him in.

“You ok, baby?” she asked through a breathless whisper.

“Yeah, _fine_,” he growled, even as his head danced. He felt his body loosening, giving into whatever this was.

“I don’t know about this,” she murmured. He scowled at her even as his hands work to rip away the rest of her clothing.

“Quit it, Rogue,” he snapped.

“But-” she tried again.

He growled loudly, biting where her jaw met her neck to shut her up, even as her skin buzzed once more. After a few seconds he felt the touch open up again, and he intentionally lingered for several more moments before breaking contact, and then he was nipping and biting his way down to her breast, taking her whole nipple in his mouth roughly.

“You want it dangerous, sugar?” he heard her raspy murmur up from above, and he knew he had passed some of his wild, desperate energy to her. _Good._

He growled roughly in response, before moving up once more to lick the side of her neck.

“You wanna take out your frustrations on me?” she pressed, her voice verging on viscious, but he was too fucking gone to care. He only snarled, tugging at her ear with his teeth.

“Do _it_,” she said, and then he gave her no warning as he shoved several fingers inside of her as she writhed under him, and he held on again a few seconds longer than he should have, but she didn’t move or turn it off either, as they both felt some of his power being sapped away, a heavy burden taken from him as Rogue let out a low growl. As he pulled away for a moment, he smirked knowingly back at her wild, dark eyes. _God, he fucking loved her like this._

Then she was moving upward, biting into his own flesh as her teeth tore at his skin, the feeling of pain that sharp from her mark during lovemaking foreign and strange and good, even as he instinctively felt the need to get her to back down.

“Don’t think ‘cause you got a few seconds of me in you, you know what’s good for you…” he rumbled.

“Woulnd’t dream of it, sugar,” she teased, releasing him as her skin warned them both again.

He kissed her roughly once more, a unique distinct signature to the way his lips met hers, before taking her hands and raising them up above her head and clasping them together.

“Keep your hands there, how ‘bout? Try it. Try holding back with a little of that animal inside ya, and see how _fucking hard_ it is,” he muttered into her ear.

Then he was moving lower and she moaned, and he grinned greedily as he saw the glaze on her thighs, her pleasure moist and sending a sweet chorus into the air even as he lowered himself, his tongue exploring idly, languidly running along her folds.
“Too slow,” she growled, and he snarled back.

“I’ll decide what’s too fucking slow and what’s too fast, woman,” he said sharply, and then he was again intentionally making her moan and writhe with his unhurried, light pace for several long minutes. He could feel her try to break free of her own hold, and he whipped an arm out to steady her, to stop her from doing so.

“I said keep ‘em there,” he snarled, before finally applying more pressure, sucking at the coiled center and releasing ever so slightly as her skin drove them apart and she whimpered at the break in contact, but then he was diving back into her, adding the pressure of his fingers to keep her good and begging. After a few moments, he felt her begin to convulse, and she moaned as she came, and he lapped at the fresh results of her orgasm, her body still quaking underneath him as he licked the inside of one of her thighs.

And then, it wasn’t enough, and he was above her again, tongue on her lips, sharing her taste before he thrust his entire length within her. She screamed into his mouth, as her hands struggled to stay above her head, and he stayed like that for a moment, all of him shoved into her hot, wet heat. The skin buzzed, got louder, but still he didn’t move.

“Sugar…careful,” she paled with him, breaking the kiss momentarily.

“I know what I’m fucking doing, Marie,” he growled, and then he moved out of her for just long enough to kill the threat before slamming his thick length all the way into her again, even as he felt the pull happen way more quickly once more. That was part of the reason this game was so fucked-up and good and wrong. Sometimes her skin took less than a few seconds to really pull anything in, sometimes more than a minute. He reluctantly pulled out, his thoughts dizzy and lightheaded as he felt the animal shaking it off once more, before willingly pushing into her again, despite the fresh influx she likely received from his mind.

“Sugar!” Marie hissed.

“Just… let it happen, darlin’,” he murmured. They both knew she could handle it, handle him inside her. Logan knew her fears weren’t about her ability, they were about him and his fading incapacity to be who he used to be. And he was fucking sick of it. With that, he began establishing a rhythm, driving into her hard again and again, and she broke her hold to move her hands along his chest and shoulders, holding onto him out of desperate purchase.

“Fuck! Logan! Baby, like that!” she growled as he fucked her harder, slamming them into the mat, forgoing any sense of decency, willfully purging the pity from her face from earlier as he made her forget her name, made her forget every fucking human thing she had ever known about herself. Every time the jolt summoned him he released himself lightly before thrusting roughly into her again. And, eventually, the feelings in him built, and he forgot about the buzz entirely as he began to feel himself come.

“Logan,” she murmured into him, as he began to spend himself inside her.

“That’s right, baby. Take it,” he somehow managed to say through gritted teeth, and then he was pouring into her in every conceivable way, filling her with his mind and body as he came, and then she was moaning a stream of curse words as she took in the feeling of his own orgasm he was giving her through her skin, minds blending as her body involuntarily responded to the sensation of his own pleasure, her walls clenching around him in an agonizing gratification. He held onto her tightly, letting it both take them over the edge together, and even after it was through he was hesitant to let her go. They simply breathed hard for a few moments, before he gently moved off to one side, taking up his place next to her on the mat. The threat of her skin was no longer, and he realized that
somehow she had managed to shut it off once more.

“Holy hell,” she finally said, still breathing hard.

“Too much?” he managed.

“No, I just…” she said, looking over to him through dark brown eyes. “That’s only happened a couple of times. To feel you come. To know what that feels like...fuck,” she muttered, as she rolled closer to him, resting a hand on his broad chest.

“Bad?” he managed to ask.

“No. Good, but a bit scary. Intense,” she murmured, as her grip on him tightened. For a several long moments no one spoke as they settled into each other, returning to some semblance of their human selves.

“Sugar…” she finally said after a few moments, and as he turned to her he realized she was biting her lip in hesitancy.

“Yeah, darlin’?” he asked tiredly.

“It’s just…” she lingered.

“Spit it out, Marie,” he said.

“I saw….I mean, you’re that worried of how I’ll think of you? That I’ll think less of you because of a few scars?” she asked. Fuck. He hadn’t meant for her to see that.

“I dunno,” he muttered, laying back on the mat once more and casually glancing up to the ceiling, even though he could feel her pulling herself closer.

“You gotta start listening to your senses and get out of that paranoid head of yours,” she whispered, and that’s when he looked back at her, eyes widening as she pegged him with a precision only Marie could manage. “I would never think less of you. And if...I’ve seemed too worried, it’s because I fucking love your sorry ass and I can’t do this without you anymore. You understand? You can change all you want on me and that’s not gonna go away,” she said quietly. He swallowed hard, the emotion of all a little too much for him as he could only growl in approval, before nuzzling into her neck, kissing her and licking at the bite he had planted there earlier.

“Mine,” he finally managed to say, and Marie sighed as she felt his warm tongue on her cooling skin.

“And you win,” she practically whispered. He backed up a little and cocked his head in a small question.

“We’ll make sure Charles is safe,” Marie mumbled, “And then we’ll leave. I think...I get it now.”

---

In the morning, Logan woke to Marie already rustling about. He could hear the crisp flip of pages, the sound of coffee slowly dripping into a basin. He opened his eyes slowly in the morning light, feeling lightheaded, weak, and a bit empty. Just the sort of feeling he had wanted.

He sat up slowly to find Marie walking over with a cup of coffee to him. All around the room there
were piles of books on the floor, and there was obviously some sort of organization system going on that was probably beyond normal human comprehension.

“What…are ya doing, kid?” he asked groggily, taking the warm mug from her. She smiled as their fingers brushed before she stood back, taking in the sight of what he was sure was his mussed hair and sleepy disposition, all with that goofy beautiful grin still on her face.

“Figuring out what to take and what to leave,” she said brightly, as Logan lazily took a sip of his coffee.

“You’re in a…good mood,” he said, and she grinned once more at him as she picked up her own mug, and closed her eyes as she took in its aroma. “Everything smells so good, tastes so good. I feel great,” she said, smiling widely.

“Heh. That makes one of us,” he muttered through another sip. At this, Marie’s smile fell slightly.

“I didn’t give you too much of a hangover, did I sugar?” she asked.

“Hell no, baby. I wanted to feel like this, I guess, or I wouldn’t have asked that of ya last night. I’m just surprised you’re feeling me in ya still,” he finished.

“Well, you hung on for quite a long time,” she said, and as he began to frown she added, “It’s all okay though.”

“Good,” he murmured. Marie sighed as she turned to glance around the room, looking at all her odd stacks and piles of books once more.

“We can’t take all of these with us,” she said a bit sadly.

“I wouldn’t part you from your books,” he murmured.

“Nah. It would be highly inconvenient to take them all. Besides, I’ve read them all anyway,” she said, shrugging her shoulders, before she had a quirky grin again on her face, setting her coffee down and moving to the bed, straddling him in her little robe.

“You sure I haven’t brainwashed you into doing this?” he asked, running the pad of his thumb across her lips.

“No,” she said. “I make up my own mind.”

“I know you do,” he said, moving his hand down to play with a lock of her hair, idly running it through between thumb and index finger.

“You wanna go to Canada,” she said quietly. It wasn’t a question, and after last night Logan knew better than to guess how she knew that.

“After looking at the prices of rent around here, yeah. Just an idea,” he said.

“Laughlin city perhaps?” she smirked. “We could reenact the entire experience you’ve told me so much about.”

“Hell no, that place was a hell hole. Or, at least, my version of it was,” Logan said, through a smile.

“Maybe we drive till we find a place we like,” she said quietly.

“Sounds real good, baby,” he muttered, hands still lingering on her body.
“So does this mean we’re officially retired now?” she asked.

“Heh. Probably not. Knowing what I do about you and your righteous ass,” he said, moving his hand lower to grip her thigh. She smirked at him, but moved away from his grasp. “Uhh uhh. Not now. I’m putting you to work,” she said, before standing. She snagged an apple off the desk and threw it at him, and he caught it with ease.

“Eat something. I need you up and at ‘em,” she replied.

Later on after he had showered, he still found her surrounded in the piles of books, trying to decide which ones to take and which to leave. He offered her a grin, as he pulled a shirt over his head. She looked up to him, a pained expression on her face.

“This is going to be harder than I thought,” she mumbled.

“You’ll figure it out. I’m gonna go see about finding a trailer in the garage to hitch the bike to the truck to take with us.”

“You wanna take the bike?” she asked, her eyes bright again.

“Hell yeah, baby,” he said. “No one else gets the pleasure of riding that bike but me. Well, and you,” he added, and Marie smiled once more, as she clutched a Jane Austen novel in her hands. *Persuasion.*

“I’ll leave you to it,” he said, tapping the doorframe as he did so. As he was about to turn, however, he heard someone mucking about in the open door leading into the mansion, and he was able to pick out the scent easily enough. Scott.

“I heard the news,” he said from his place by the door. “You outta here?” Logan exhaled. He knew he was going to have to have this conversation eventually, but he wondered just how the hell Cyclops had found out so quickly.

“How the fuck did you-” he asked, before the other mutant cut him off.

“Jean,” Scott said simply. Logan exhaled once more, finishing up the final strap and standing up straight.

“I mean, we’re not leavin’ now. It’ll take Rogue days to sort through our shit. Just thought I’d make myself useful out here, see if anything would work to haul this bike up north,” Logan said, and then, peering down at the trailer and realizing it wasn’t quite his property, he added, “Uhh, if it's okay I
take it."

Scott snorted a bit, but was already nodding his head as he walked further into the garage. “Don’t worry. I won’t charge you for it or anything. Hasn’t been used in a few years anyway. So, up north, you say?” Scott asked.

“Uh, yeah. This country ain’t what it used to be anyway. Rogue doesn’t wanna go south, and it’s my old stomping ground and all,” Logan murmured. Something about the conversation was starting to make Logan feel a little uncomfortable. They were doing the right thing. Weren’t they? Scott peered at him through his visor, and even through the lenses Logan could tell the look was even, but friendly.

“You always had one foot out the door, anyway,” Scott remarked, and as Logan’s face was about to turn into more of a scowl, he clarified.

“Hey, that’s not a dig. It’s just your way. Look, I’m not like you, but I get it. And besides…I think, in the end, it’s for the best. Storm and I talked pretty late into the night last night, and I think she’s finally facing the music. With the enrollments as low as they were… hell, after graduation in May we would’ve been down to nine students. We both think it’s best to end things, at least for now.”

“Hell,” Logan said quietly. “So… what will you all do?”

“The modifications to Cerebro are almost done, and once they are, Jean and I have plans to stay, maybe Storm too, to look after the professor from a safe distance, but the others are making arrangements to go.” Logan considered this, realizing it was the most likely conclusion all along.

“And Hank?” he asked.

“Couple of mutants with healing factors that make yours look like a piece of shit are already on their way, so I imagine he’ll stick around for a while, before finding other work. They…don’t think Charles has more than a year or two left in him anyway.”

“Hell,” Logan muttered, before looking solemnly up to Cyclops once more.

“Look, Logan, you were a pain in my ass most of the time, but…” Scott muttered, hesitating slightly before continuing on, “But I was wrong. You got some real grit. And, you know, you are one of us. We consider you family.” Just then, Scott reached to extend a strong and steady handshake, a smile barely touching his lips, and then the world fell apart.

A searing, horrible pain in his head, worse than ever before. It felt like a hole in the earth, the world ripping in two, a giant, terrible thing reaching out from its depths to swallow them both. Logan shut his eyes in abject agony for a few blinding moments, and when he opened them he was met with Scott’s face contorting into something terrible and raw, as Scott stood frozen to the spot, every muscle thrashing in pain.

No.

Logan shouted, growled, staggering backward slightly, as he felt his brain teem, panicking, trying to rebuild whole parts of his pre-frontal cortex as he stumbled stubbornly forward. His claws were out and he threw himself into the hood of the nearest car to keep standing, all with Scott’s frozen face on him, that haunting stare, before they both were hit with another intense wave, another seething tide, a broken, mangled screech. The metal on Logan’s bones ached as his muscles grudgingly lurked forward, step by step, as the earth still shook around him, a rumbling quake. He left Cyclops there, then, knowing there was only one person he could possibly save. Upstairs. Go upstairs and find her.
One minute, two minutes, three. Every moment he thought the seizure might end, might finally give way, it stubbornly pulsed on and on, so much longer than the last.

He stumbled into the hallway to the sound of heartbeats shuddering. It was a painfully glacial pace, slow, difficult. He staggered upstairs, and then he found himself standing at the mercy of their doorway, still cracked open from where he had left it, the yellow midmorning sun illuminating its outline. The door rattled, throbbed, shook in front of him. Four minutes. Five minutes. Six.

_Marie. God, Marie._

He retracted his claws on his left, reaching painfully upward, hand on the door as he fell to his knees to finally, _finally_ push it open, and his heart reeled.

Marie was writhing on the floor in pain, body at an awkward, broken angle, as books lay scattered around her. There was blood flowing from her nose and ears, and as he crawled across the floor toward her, the intensity grew. Seven minutes. Eight. _Too long. Too fucking long._ He bared down as he reached out a shaking, bloodied hand, attempting to get to her, screaming out in pain as finally the seizure relinquished its hold on them both, and he collapsed three feet away from her.

He breathed heavily as he willed his body to scramble over to where she lay, and he was touching her all over, ripping off her robe, making contact with her skin everywhere he could.

“Come on, kid. _Turn it on._” he muttered, as his fingers struggled to find a pulse, his ears listening to find the slow shudder of a heartbeat expiring.

_Thud. Thud_ ...............thud...............thud............

“No. Baby…. _baby._ No. _God damn it, Marie. TURN IT ON!_” he screamed, cradling his face to hers, and then they were suddenly years away, on the torch, decades younger, and he was holding onto her, willing the life back into her body, making her realize, making her see, but unlike that night, there was no pull, no nascent beginning of pain. _Heartbeat. Where was the fucking heartbeat?!_

............... “No, no, no. Baby, _baby_,” he muttered, before growling loudly as he put two fists over her heart now, pumping it for her, desperate to get it moving again. He pushed, and then breathed air into her lungs. Pushed. Air. Pushed. Air. Nothing. _Nothing._ He didn’t know how long he continued like that, tears rolling down his cheeks until he finally stopped, swaying gently above her until he could do nothing but bring her to him, cradling her against his chest. He murmured her named again and again into her hair, and he knew she was leaving him again, her lips already going cold, her body settling down, her essence flickering. They were in the middle of a torch hanging in a dark, starless sky, and he watched helplessly as the light burned out.

--

He wasn’t sure how long he held her like that, her soft hair pouring out of his hands as he clutched her to him, on the cusp of a bitter, desperate ache. Meanwhile, sirens were ringing, the sound of helicopters overhead, but still he refused to move, refused to give up the only part of him that meant something anymore, the only part that was inherently good.

_They’ll be in the building any minute._
Logan perked slightly at the sound, looking down confusedly at the dead woman in his arms, and then back to the air once more. Oh, yeah. Her.

Enough.

“Enough of what?!” he snarled.

*This. You gotta get up now. You gotta face it.*

“No,” he breathed.

*They’re almost here. And you’ve got a job to do.*

He knew the sirens were blaring. He knew that, soon, there would be boots on the ground. SWAT, most likely.

*It’s done, baby.*

“No,” he said to her hair.

Enough.

He snarled, seething, before clutching her lifeless body to him as he picked her up off the floor, and gently lay her down in their bed. He ran a finger through her hair, as the world, the awful, awful world they lived in fell apart around them. Outside, he could feel the air tighten, the guns loading, the orders of *Fire at will* being shouted into transceivers, the promise of destruction on the wind.

“I love you, kid. You hear me? I *love* you. Always fucking have,” he murmured over her. He kissed her forehead fiercely, and then he was staggering backward, out of their room and out of the life they had created for themselves as if it were only full of dead things, all those forlorn birds and sad books carefully crafted from paper, waving their soft goodbyes.

--

The disparate images bled into his frame of vision. Pete, Kitty, and Bobby dead in the hall. As he raced toward the med bay, Storm, Jean and Hank dead on the floor, bodies broken at awkward angles. Charles was on the ground, scattered vials and shots and medicine around him, but, as Logan heard his faint but steady heartbeat, he realized Charles was still alive.

He sneered, looking down at the old man. The animal inside wanted to rip Charles apart for what he had done, wanted to leave him to die at the very least, but, something deep down curbed his rage. *Fire at will.* That’s what they had said, wasn’t it? *Fire at will.* A new, bitter resolve began rearing up inside him and then he found himself wildly reaching for anything that looked like medicine, grabbing a med kit and throwing shit in it, and then he was picking Charles’ fragile body up off the floor, practically stumbling down the stairs back to the garage door as the phrase tumbled over his mind again and again. *Fire at will. Fire at will.*

Over his fucking dead body.

Charles was mumbling incoherently under his breath and Logan’s heart thudded heavily when he saw Scott sprawled on the floor of the garage as they passed by. *Dead. Everyone dead.* Inside, he
could feel the depth of the biting cold, growing more numb by the minute even as he lay Charles down across the thin back seat of the truck, throwing the kit in the back with him.

Sirens screaming, cop cars, ambulances wailed as the truck roared to life and he sped out of the open garage door in the back of the mansion, and only as the rubber of the tires made contact with the asphalt of the long, winding forested road did he realize the hitch was still on, and his motorcycle and the few boxes he had already packed for Canada rattled in the truck’s bed behind him. He swallowed everything, pushed it deep down, erased the feeling of her, as Charles shallow rasps filled the back seat, while the dog tags idly swung back and forth from their place on the rearview mirror where he had strung them this afternoon, winking as they caught the gleam of the fading winter light.

---

They were running out of money. They had been for a while. Charles’ bank accounts had been frozen long ago, and what little money Logan had been saving had steadily dwindled down to almost nothing. For months and months on end they had been spiraling downward, out of control, and Logan now knew he had to do something other than desperately run away. He had to start planning. He needed to come up with a way out.

He had found the abandoned smelting plant just south of the border after a decent tip in a bar in Mexico that only sold Tecate. He had set Charles up there, had recruited help in the unlikely form of Caliban, but while they sat on their asses, Charles’ condition continued to dwindle. He needed more medicine, and he needed it soon. And they needed more money.

The used car lot in El Paso wasn’t much to look at, and he drove the truck up a bit hesitantly now. It was the same address that had been printed on the back of the advertisement, but now Logan felt skeptical of the information. Finally, out of a makeshift trailer on the outer ring of the lot, an older man in a crumpled suit strolled up, cigar hanging lazily out of his mouth.

“Looks like you got a pretty bike yer wantin’ to sell,” he said, after Logan had moved his way out of his truck and slammed the door behind him.

“This piece of shit I drove it here with, too,” he murmured. “How much?” Logan asked.

“Hell…” the man said, walking to the dusty Panhead and giving it a once over before offering a low whistle.

“Five grand for the truck—you’re right, it is a piece of shit— but…the bike, whew, maybe twenty.” Logan closed his eyes, grumbling inwardly. He knew the Panhead was worth at least another ten thousand. It was dirty, sure, but it was still in flawless condition. He should know. He hadn’t touched it in months, but he also wasn’t in a spot to make fucking demands.

“It’s settled then,” Logan murmured.

“Hell, man, whatcha plannin’ on driving home in then?” he asked. Logan pulled the advertisement out of his jacket pocket, pointing to the vehicle on the back right side.

“This still available?” he asked. Again, the man let out a whistle.

“It is, but that’s a $100,000 vehicle right there, easy. Unless you plannin’ on whipping out another couple Harley’s from nowhere, you better have a pretty stack of cash in those pockets.”

“Not to buy. I want it on lease. In fact, I don’t want the cash from these two going toward it at all,”
Logan said, gesturing to the Panhead and Ford behind him, before looking back up to the dealer sharply.

“Lease, eh?” he said, before idly gesturing Logan to follow him into the trailer.

An hour later, he watched one of the dealer employees pull it up to the drive, its long, sleek body a liquid black in the midday sun.

“Whatcha plannin’ on doing with this beauty, then?” the man asked, as he handed over the keys.

“Driving it,” he muttered, shooting a dead, blank look at the Chrysler Limousine.

--

Caliban was grating on his frayed nerves, the fucking idiot. Like he needed reminding of any of that shit. The guilt was always worse out here anyway, in the desert, and while Logan knew somewhere deep down he sure as hell was paying for a couple of lifetimes of previous transgressions, the way the wind kicked up the dirt made him want to fucking shoot a bullet into his brain. The days had turned into weeks, the weeks, months, and now years. Two years. His abused lungs ached in pain, but he forced the cough back down as he snarled, storming out of the warehouse and pulling on his jacket as he did so, slamming the door of the limousine shut behind him. That night, women, fucking women, pulling down their tops. And later, the call, the limousine taking him through the rain, puddles of standing water, to a derelict building, the neon sign spelling out The Liberty Motel flickering next to a nearby overpass.

He drove up hesitantly, the sound of a ball smacking against the wet pavement. As he pulled in, he got out wearily, before he finally locked eyes with her, a small girl in a red jacket that was a bit too big on her tiny frame. She stared at him intently, a charge, a challenge, a plea on her face. Logan could only stare back for a moment, hesitating slightly, as, in her irises, the world burned.

--

The soft feel of the sheets and his scent was the first thing she sensed. She fucking loved that scent. They had made love that night in bed after the gym. It had been sweet, tender, everything the gym hadn’t been, but it was also exhilarating with the wild rush with his senses still lingering in her. She had taken him in, nipped his neck, swam in the tiny sounds and subtle movements. God, she loved him.

And then, something changed. The smell of the sheets died, and instead her senses seemed to be infested with the taste of iron or copper, something metal. She realized, then, that her head was pounding, aching, and she could feel something stitching itself up back inside her, as if she had been made of two parts, two selves, and they were finally coming back together.

Marie opened her eyes, the faintest hint of dying light coming from their bedroom window, as she looked back and forth wildly. Why couldn’t she breathe? Just then, she spat blood from her mouth, gasping for air, as her lungs finally took in a deep, shuddering breath.

And then, it hit her. The seizure. The pain. The light. The door.

She shakily moved her hand to her face and pulled it back to feel the sticky wetness of blood. It smelled like hers, but also distinctively like his.
“Logan?” she asked, but the room was empty, even as she noticed their things still scattered and tossed about here and there. And then she heard people, boots stumbling forward. “Alive. Someone’s alive!” she heard a man shout from outside the hall, and then there were tears forming in her eyes, before her hand flew to her mouth as she tried to muffle a confused, irrepressible sob.

Chapter End Notes

More fairly soon. I’ve had chapter 22 written for the last two months, but I need to go make it pretty and polished, and I’m gonna try to take my time with it because it is precious to me. (But knowing me it will still be up in a few days because I have an addiction. Lolz). Thanks for all the love lately, peeps. I’ve been a little emotional as of late as this story comes to a close, and all the support lately has given me all the good, important feels, and, most importantly, the bravery to finish it. <3
Chapter 22: Now

Marie had started thinking about time. She had read Einstein. She knew that the notion of minutes and hours depended entirely on the perspective of the person counting them. It was General Relativity. Time was a pinwheel. You gently pressed your lips to it, just barely kissing its metallic feathers, and you blew. Only then did it spin.

She had always viewed life linearly, even as she and Logan had discussed the multiple timelines, the dual nature of both their lives and their perceptions of each other. But what if she had been wrong? What if their lives were not lines at all, but merely points, all existing in one or infinite dimensions? Multiplicity wasn’t an idea that scared her; Marie was a blend of many minds as it was. Maybe it was all happening at once. Maybe, just maybe, even right now she was giving up her life to save his at Two Rivers. Maybe she was watching Logan slowly take a sip of his morning coffee, his hair mussed from their lovemaking the night before. Maybe they were apart, aching for one another, but they also were together, right now, in the future, in the past, somewhere, happy and safe and in love.

It had been a comfort to her, this theory. At least in the beginning.

Marie stared blankly forward as she leaned her head against the steel frame of the helicopter. It was impossible to speak over the thrum of the rotor, but considering how exhausted as they all were and how little they all knew each other, it seemed appropriate. The chopper was also freezing, and Marie held her arms closer to her thin body. She was in a cargo jacket, but lacked a parka she knew she was going to soon need. In her headset they had given her after she had strapped in on take-off, Marie heard the pilot’s static scratch of a voice, “Bird descending in seven minutes,” and over a transceiver she heard a woman’s voice say, “Copy.” Marie sighed, closing her eyes wearily.

For two years now, she had searched, all to no avail. She had traced Charles’ bank accounts as far as they would go. She had traced Logan’s too, but the trail dried up early on, which didn’t really surprise her. She knew Logan would have made himself scarce if he was protecting Charles. After her own resources ran out, however, she began following countless mutants’ rights groups, trying to find a mutant with telepathic powers strong enough to track him. That’s when she had discovered the secrets behind Transigen. She often found herself a part of these groups, working on occasional missions to try to bring down various distribution centers up north. She had been in Canada for over a year now, helping, searching, hoping. So far, she had come up empty.

That’s when the doubt started. The paranoia. Marie knew that Logan was getting sick. She knew, too, that he wasn’t likely to get better. Even in the most fundamental parts of life, in veins that ran their course, she knew time was cradled in the difference. In the spaces in between. It had still caught her off guard, sometimes, those hitches in breath, those clicks of seconds. Irrevocability had graced the grey-tinged coarseness of his hair, but also the elasticity of her own skin. All cellular promises eventually got broken. No matter how hard either of them tried to stay whole, in the end, all bodies were careless, breaking from the inside out.

Maybe they always had been leaving each other.

Marie opened her eyes once more, glancing over the frozen landscape with a slight frown. It had
recently snowed, and now an eerie, unending blanket of white shrouded the pines as the trees crept up the mountainside, but then, as the helicopter cleared another pass, the pine trees, the snow, all of it abruptly stopped, and the still grey surface of a lake opened up to them, and she realized the helicopter was slowly descending. Of all the memories she had from Logan’s mind, these were, of course, always the worst. The dam. The lake. The labs. Alkali. She had been mildly disturbed to hear that Alpha Flight had set up base here, even if it made tactical sense. However, the briefing on this latest mission had disturbed her more deeply. The idea of using children was haunting, morally distressing on the best of days, and she had felt compelled to help. But now, on the lip of Alkali, she wondered if she had done the right thing.

“Two minutes and we’re on the ground. Take off the headsets and prepare to land. Remember, the bird comes back in 48 hours for whoever’s left, no matter how the mission goes,” the pilot said gruffly, and then everyone was jostling around, undoing their harnesses, but Rogue didn’t move.

She listened to the helicopter make the last of its descent, already bracing herself from the likely cold that was bound to triple in intensity once the door opened, and as she felt them touch down she experienced an overwhelming sense of dread. She didn’t want to be here. She hesitated as the others moved around her, lingering still as she looked around the empty cabin.

“If you’re getting off, you need to do it now. And, if you are, slide the door shut behind you,” the pilot said gruffly, and, willfully making up her mind through a frustrated sigh, she jumped out, boots making contact with the frigid ground as she used her strength to shut the door, hair snapping in the wind. The roar of the helicopter was in her ears as she exhaled, the cloud of her breath escaping her lips as she turned, and then, he was there.

Multiplicity. Life lines. The debris of memory. The idle rhythm of frozen breath. Another age exhausted, the numbers piling up. To stop everything from happening at once, they measured out their lives and called it time. Marie’s heart thudded heavily as point and line converged. Their eyes met, and suddenly whole worlds, galaxies were crashing into each other. God. He looked so, so much older. The pain in his eyes was unmistakable, and she realized that, whatever he had seen, it had been too much. She found her legs involuntarily pulling herself toward him, helpless to his magnetic force, his gravitational pull.

“Logan?” Marie whispered desperately, but as she took one more step forward to him, he took the slightest of steps back, staggering slightly. He said nothing as she noticed tremors in his hands, his breath deep and uneven, as he slightly swayed on the spot where he stood. She watched those hazel eyes, those same eyes, look about the platform wildly, as if Logan did not believe what was in front of him. And then, just barely under his breath, he spoke.

“I heard your heart stop beating,” he whispered sharply.

“So you were there,” she murmured, and something heavy fell through her with this understanding. Marie could practically feel the involuntary anxiety and panic rise within Logan then, and she found herself closing the distance between him, drawing him close. He did nothing but bow his head and lean into her shoulder, but as she ran a hand through his hair, stroking it gently, she felt the slightest of shudders ripple underneath him.

“It’ll be ok,” she whispered in his ear, voice shaky, even as another part of her mind wondered if it would be. What had he seen? Dear lord, what had he seen?

Marie finally stood back from him, feeling the warmth of tears stinging in the cold wind, before she finally took a deep, brave breath and faced the other mutants still awkwardly standing around them both. Her eyes caught Mirage’s gaze, and she managed a smile.
“Dani, it’s good to see you again,” Marie said genuinely.

“Rogue,” Mirage said through a smile. “I knew it. The names were never officially released, but they said the body count was seven. Seven. I had no idea you were working with the new Canadian mutant initiative.

“I wasn’t, at least, not in this part of the country, until last month,” she murmured, before her gaze once more crept over to Logan. He continued to stare at her if she wasn’t there, wasn’t real, tired eyes blinking slowly. “I’m assuming we were all about to be briefed?” she added.

“That was the plan,” Dani said looking from Logan to Rogue again. “But… if you need time…” Dani trailed off. Marie gave her a sharp nod in agreement, and then Dani was throwing her a spare walkie-talkie that Marie caught with ease.

“We’ll call you in when we need to brief you. Two hours, easy.” Marie slowly turned back to Logan, still sensing his unease, his disbelief, and quietly murmured to him, “Take us somewhere private, baby.”

---

As Marie closed the door behind her, they once more found themselves in the room he had just caught a few tired hours of rest in. The keys to the Bronco were still on the fucking desk. His wallet lay open, a Canadian ten peeping out of the billfold. On the cot, a light spatter of blood from the nightmare Logan endured, and, in front of him, her. Logan’s desperate attempt to regulate his breathing was leaving him, as a feeling of claustrophobia set in. He stared back at her with a mild paranoia, a panic, as his mind still struggled to figure out the catch, the cruel joke. Nothing sounded right. Nothing was registering correctly. He was about to fucking lose it. As the man struggled to stay in control, he found himself pacing in front of her, a manic feeling rising alongside the animal within him.

“I tried to save him,” Logan was saying defensively. “I tried. I took him to Mexico. I hid him, and for a while, we were fine, well, not fine but, uh, then Transigen was hunting us, hunting Laura. We didn’t stand a chance,” he said, and then he was coughing again for a moment, before he anxiously ran a hand through his hair.

What the fuck was he doing?

“It’s okay, sugar…slow down,” she said, keeping her tone careful and even as she watched him pace back and forth.

“Why are you here?” he finally asked sharply, a slight accusation in his voice as he stopped his pacing and faced her once more. Her eyes widened as she stared back at him.

“I….woke up. I could feel it baby,” she said, putting a hand to her temple. “Your powers in me, stitching me back together. The place was ransacked, soldiers everywhere…” she stopped, looking a little tired herself all of the sudden. “They had orders to kill him on sight,” she whispered.

“Well, he hurt a lot of people, Marie,” Logan managed to say.

“I know that,” she said, through a small frown. They both stood there for a moment, breathing a bit heavily, while a tension, an awkward weight hung between them. He allowed himself to look closely at her for perhaps the first time since he had laid eyes on her, taking her in. She stood with one arm clutching the other, a boot scuffing the ground. If she had aged, it was only slight. But the rest… the same strand of platinum hair, the same bridge of her nose. The same fucking curve of her face. Yet
another version of this woman to stomp into his life, after she had already left him. Another fucking ghost.

“I tried to find you,” she finally said, and she had fresh tears in her eyes. “I tracked down his bank accounts. Yours, for a while. But every time I’d get a hit, you had moved on. And then…the trail disappeared. I thought…well, I didn’t even know if you were alive anymore,” she said, glancing down to the floor.

“You were out there, looking for me? All this fucking time?” he asked, and then, he could feel a hot wetness on his face, and he stopped his pacing, breathing heavily. Logan finally looked at her again, a blank look in his eyes. “But…. you died. You’re dead.”

Marie looked up to him sharply once more, realizing perhaps why he couldn’t accept what was in front of him. Then her eyes grew darker, as a determined, fiery look crossed her features.

“Come here,” she said, tears in her eyes. When he hesitated, she added a “God damn you, Logan,” and she deliberately strode over to him then, clutching him hard against her, tilting her neck just slightly, granting him access for him to smell her, breathe her in, and then it was her scent, that fucking scent, cradling him, nestling itself in the grooves of the worst of his doubt. Earth. Nectar. Mint. Marie. Then, the rest of Marie’s chorus: all those tiny sounds her body made that he had memorized decades ago, the steady thrum of her pulse, her lungs quietly breathing, and her heartbeat. Thud. Thud. Thud. Steady, and real.

“You see?” she asked, pulling back a bit, as silent tears fell down her face and she made no move to stop them. “Use the gifts you were fucking born with, baby. You smell me, hear me, feel me here?” she said through a harsh whisper. He closed his eyes tightly for a moment, as the thoughts were running rampant through his head, trying desperately to hold onto himself, to not become lost in the moment that was slowly unraveling before them. Because, if it was real, oh god, if it was real…it’s real.

“Marie,” he murmured into her neck as he moved closer to her, desperate for more of her. He breathed in deeply, that was the only moment he got, before she was leaning upward to kiss him, and kiss him hard. The feeling almost had him dropping to the floor, the intense, longing rush of her touch wildly igniting synapses, all those connections he had thought had long since been snuffed out. He finally kissed her back then, but then her hands were running up his shirt and before he even realized the full extent of what he was doing he grabbed her wrist forcibly, bringing it out in front of him in warning.

“Baby…” he managed to breathe, still through closed eyes.

“What?” she whispered, and when he opened his eyes to meet hers they were wildly searching him for clues, until, as a frown appeared on his lips, she understood. She scowled a bit at him, but didn’t move an inch.

“Don’t you dare,” she whispered, even as tears once more sprang to her eyes. “Don’t you dare feel sorry for yourself. Stop that right now. I won’t have it.”

He still didn’t yield though, and only looked at her seriously once more, grip still firm on her soft wrist. She looked down to truly take in his scarred, marked hand then, before giving him her clear, unafraid stare once more.

“You don’t think I know everything’s changed?” she hissed at him. “That nothing is the fucking same? For months, no, years, baby…” she trailed off, overwhelmed with it all, but the way her voice broke had him giving in, had him growling as an infinitesimal fraction of confidence coursed through
him as he released his hold on her wrist and moved to bite her bottom lip roughly, desperately. His hands were on her body then, pushing away her jacket to get to her, fingers running over the sheer lining of her shirt, and even over the fabric he could feel the prominent notches in her ribs.

“Too thin,” he murmured, before leaning back a bit to look at her again through a slight frown.

“Yeah, well, I think from the look of both of us it’s been a rough fucking year,” she muttered. His lips tugged up in the smallest grin at this for a moment before frowning again as her hands once more went for the hem of his shirt. He finally let her have her way with him, though, and he closed his eyes and shuddered slightly as her soft, nimble fingers made contact with the worst and most recent of his scars, the one he had received from the farmhouse on that fateful, terrible night.

“Do I wanna ask about this one?” she murmured quietly.

“S’deserved. That one’s for not gettin’ to Charles in time….,” he softly breathed.

Marie looked up to him painfully, but didn’t ask him to elaborate. It wasn’t the time for it. He knew somewhere, deep down, they both needed this. It wasn’t just the time that had passed, that unending lonely void. They had always said things with their bodies, sometimes more than with their minds. If she wanted to know him again, like the way he needed to know her, she needed to see every fucking scar, welt, and ridge. They both knew it.

There was a quick, sharp intake of breath on her part, as she moved the shirt up and off of his chest, and he opened his eyes once more to see her still facing him bravely, refusing to deny or shy away from the pain he had most likely suffered, from what had happened to him. Who he was, here, right now.

It was a torturous process in every kind of way, as Marie worked her way up his body. The gunshot scars in his arms, the buckshot that had pelted his chest. Long, trailing scars, scars of knife wounds running along his back. She was silent as she traced them all, quietly accepting each one as she went, and then, she was planting kisses where she could, worked her mouth up the side of his collarbone and then to his neck, placing a the last of the kisses on his cheek, his bottom lip. He also felt her hands take his and then she was massaging his knuckles, so very much like that first night. She took in those scars silently, too, before placing her mouth gently to them.

“It’s the adamantium, isn’t it?” she whispered into his knuckles. “It’s making everything worse.”

“Yeah,” he barely breathed, and the sound of truth had a crisp sharp bite to it as it hit the air. Finally, she let him go, and she let his hands explore her once more, even as he lowered them both gently down to sit on the cot, her legs now straddling his waist.

“Fair’s fair,” she murmured, before taking off her jacket and removing the thin tank top. She was still as gorgeous as ever, all fair skin and even, sturdy muscle, and then he was peeling off her sports bra, needing to take all of her in, every single inch, no stone left unturned. Her breasts were soft and the same, but as he felt her body he noticed the tiny beginnings of stretch marks, here and there, thin, shallow lines, and then, further down, on her still-toned mid-section, four thin red surgically straight lines, one on her left, one on her right, one right next to her navel. He stopped, stiffening a bit.

“And these?” he asked, his voice even and careful.

“Ah, laparoscopic….hysterectomy…” she trailed off, and he glanced up at her sharply for a moment, eyes wider.

“Hell, kid. Are you ok?” he said, as a new swell of profound guilt rose within him. What else had he
fucking missed? She smiled at him, her voice fragile and on the cusp of something sad, as she murmured, “Fine now.” And then he knew she wasn’t going to tell him all of it. That that story, like probably so many more he had missed, would have to be earned.

“Looks like you’re not the only one who’s earned a few scars, sugar,” she smiled slightly, and then, he swallowed heavily, cradling her to him as he turned them to lay her down on the narrow cot, and she was already peeling off her jeans, and he could sense her, moist and wet. Her scent had everything in him reeling, the room woozily dancing before him. *Fuck. How the fucking hell was he going to recover from this?* As she leaned up to kiss the side of his neck, impatient, he still found himself hesitating.

“Baby…it’s been…” he trailed off, unsure of how much he should say, how much it really mattered. “Since that night after the gym?” she guessed knowingly, looking up to him once more. He closed his eyes for a moment and let out a quiet, “Yes. Been a little too fucking busy.

“Me too,” she said softly.

“Marie,” he said, trying again, trying to get the words right so she would understand. “I can’t…if we do this… I can’t lose you again, or I’m done. Hell, I might already be done. Losing ya, kid,…it was already fucking killing me,” he muttered.

“Then don’t lose me,” she said simply, her eyes dark, and he noted the challenge in her voice, the desperate charge she was giving him. His grip on her tightened as she moved to fumble his belt buckle.

“You gonna just lay there staring at me some more are you gonna help me? Didn’t I just admit I’m rusty at this?” she asked. He still didn’t move to help her though, muttering a “I think you know what you’re doing, kid” and she smiled at his playfulness, a spark of the old Logan taunting her, and then the levity of it all was coming back as they shed the rest of their clothes like they shed their inhibition, and then he was inside her in one, fluid motion, and everything around him melted, all the edges blurred.

She rose up to greet him, sliding her nails down his back, as it took them a few staggered moments to establish a pace, relearning what they already knew about each other, until they found it, their old rhythm, as Logan became increasingly grateful for small favors. He thanked fucking god his strength was still relatively intact, thanked god that his cough seemed to be kept at bay, even as his lungs still ached. Sex too, though, felt different, and he realized he was more in tune with himself somehow, more prone to feel aches and tiny pains a normal person would have, the way her nails dug into his skin or the way her teeth grazed his neck after his had already found and sucked on the pulse in hers, and he was glad she was giving into it, melting into him and letting herself go, far beyond being too fucking gentle. There was a long way between dying and being dead.

It wasn’t supposed to be a monumental thing, he realized. Maybe it had the potential to be, eventually, but as much as they both sought and found pleasure in one another, something in Logan understood this was about establishing some sort of baseline, giving themselves something to hold on to. Even as he held her, biting down hard as he spasmed inside, filling her body, there was a deliberate, intentional need to understand one another again at the heart of every movement.

Afterward, she lay there on his chest for a long time, her face rising in and following with his steady and even breath, as her hands lightly lingered over the most recent scar. Logan breathed out a little, trying to relax, but he realized that bit of peace that being with Marie should have afforded him was still out of reach. A different sort of pain still ached deep within him; everything was not alright. He had intentionally had avoided the subject up until this moment, but now, they were here. Somehow
together again. And she needed to know.

“Marie?” he asked gently, stroking the soft edges of her hair that lay nestled close to his face, his vision slightly out of focus with everything this close up.

“Yeah?” she whispered from his chest.

“We need to talk about Laura.”

---

Alarms were wailing as she flew down the hall. All the doors were the same, an endless row of white rectangles, but she could smell Rictor from a few doors away, pacing in his own cell. She could feel the tremors in the earth, the signs he was sending out, the rush of it all, as her blood pumped loudly in her ears, everything on fire.

She was at his door then, easily jamming her claws into the lock and ripping through the metal framing, his door of course made up of different material than hers, and as she whipped the door open, Rictor was looking at her, a small smirk on his face.

“Laura,” he said, through a knowing smile. She shoved the badge she had nicked off the dead guard into the other mutant’s hands.

“Salva a los demás. Voy a volver para el científico. Mata al resto!” she shouted.

He grabbed it from her, cocking a brow at her once more, and then she was off, running through the hallways again. *Esto estaba funcionando. This was working.*

She turned down another hallway, scrambling to a stop as she found three more guards. She braced herself, planting her feet in a fighting stance like her *papa* taught her, and snarled.

There were screams and hisses of air as she sliced, spatters of blood flying onto the walls before she easily mowed through the door she needed, the door she had been seeking. He had been writing notes, despite the screaming alarms, and as she crawled in through the mangled doorway, he calmly looked up to her, putting his pen down slowly.

“Laura,” he said simply. “You’ve found a way out. Only a matter of time, it seems.”

She knew her *papa* had lied that night at the lake, but she knew why he had. He was trying to protect her, but Laura had seen the truth blazing in his eyes. His words said one thing, the rest of his body another. There was something sinister, something *malo* in them both, however good *sus corazones* were, however decent they tried to be. It was singing in her right now, and she realized she was bloodthirsty, intent on the kill. The sounds of the lakehouse were all fine and good on quiet nights under the stars, but they were also *cuentos de hadas*, the things of stories. In front of her stood a very bad man, *un monstruo*, and the reality was that he needed to die.

She was swift, ruthless as she lunged through a scream, quickly slicing his jugular, a fresh spatter of blood streaking across her face. He sat there, eyes wide with surprise, as a soft gurgle escaped his neck. Laura sneered, muttering “*Nos vemos en el infierno*” under her breath before she spat at the floor near her feet, the saliva tinged red from the blood spattered on her lips. Just then, however, all the scents pouring in from the hallway changed, and she looked up just as Delilah sent out a mental warning through her mind.
Laura, mas! As she whipped around, she realized Delilah was right; there was just more. Mas. More guards, more guns, more handcuffs waiting to contain her. It was then she felt the wild thing within in her rise up, as it whispered the insidious, hungry truth into her willing ear. Matarlos a todos. Matar a todos los bastardos. Hacerlos morir. Kill them all. Kill all the sorry bastards. Make them die for what they did to you, to your papa, to Charles.

A new round of bullets flew through her back as she growled, using the force from the floor to propel herself up, stabbing, gutting, kicking and flying through them all, blood drenching the halls, sticky and wet in her hair, as she desperately clawed her way to the others, to the outside, to her papa, and to that fairy tale all the stories she read had called home.

---

A quiet stream of static emitted from the receiver from the desk as Marie ran a hand through her hair. They both sat on the small cot now, facing forward towards the door, as the faucet dripped in the background, the quiet groan of the heat coming on.

“Holy hell,” Marie finally said.

“I know,” Logan said, through gritted teeth. They were still in partial states of dress, but were now at least relatively decent, if any other of the mutant militia thought it was a good time to drop in for some stupid reason.

“I mean, it makes sense. If Alkali, this place, once had your genetic code,” she murmured.

“That’s what Charles had said,” he muttered, and Marie looked up to him. He knew that she knew he didn’t want to talk about Charles yet, and she let the remark go.

“So… all this time, she’s been alive? Even… when we were at Westchester?” she asked carefully. Logan sighed a little. He really didn’t like thinking about that part.

“Yeah, I guess,” he trailed off for a moment, and then he added through a sharp whisper, “How did we not know about Transigen though?” Marie exhaled slowly, sliding a hand over his forearm and gently stroking his skin. Logan noticed that, since they had found themselves in this room, Marie was touching him in one way or another constantly. She simply refused to let go, and Logan was growing more and more comforted by her constant touch, even as he wondered how much of it was for him and how much of it was for her.

“I think I can answer that question, at least, if you really wanna know,” she finally said, tucking a lock of her now-loose hair behind her ear with her free hand. Logan’s eyes widened a bit in surprise as he looked over to her again, her answer to a question he had meant to be semi-rhetorical surprising him. Marie shot him a bit of a nervous glance, toying with her own red, swollen lip a bit from where he had kissed and lingered on her mouth only a short twenty minutes before.

“Don’t… get pissed at me, baby, but I did some digging… through your memories,” she muttered. “I was trying to find any sign, any hint of where you might have gone, and although that led me nowhere, I did get somewhere.”

“Which ones?” he asked quietly.

“What?”

“Which ones led you somewhere?” he asked, and he could see that she relaxed a little when she
realized he wasn’t really angry with her at all, just curious. He doubted he had ever been truly angry at Marie for having to sift through his memories when she had touched him with her skin on, and if he had come off gruff and surly due to this news, it was typically because he hated the idea of her having to deal with the weight and baggage of the stuff.

“Well…” she said softly. “I already knew the old ones. I mean, maybe I picked up one or two new ones here and there after the jump when we would…you know…” she trailed off, and Logan found he liked the way the flush crept up her ivory cheeks and the old, familiar feelings it was stirring inside of him. He liked it a lot.

“But… the night in the gym…and then, at least I think the morning after, when you tried to save me…hell, when you did save me,” she said, pausing for a moment, “I got a lot of new ones, sugar. A shit ton.” And then, there it was, that old swell of guilt rising up, even as he tried to immediately squash it, tried to desperately remind himself that, just as she had saved him in the past life, he had saved her in this one, and that a bucket-load of shitty memories was more than worth it.

“Well, baby, I’m sorry,” he found himself still muttering.

“It’s okay, sugar. I don’t know why I have to keep reminding you, but I’m not seventeen anymore. I know how to handle it. I know what to do,” she looked at him assuredly, and he offered her a small smile back before she continued on. “Remember when we went down south, that night we…promised some things?”

Logan frowned a bit. He sure as fuck did remember that, at least, everything leading up to when he had let the Wolverine loose. Logan had always considered those their vows, and because of it that night was one of the few goddamn memories he couldn’t seem to intentionally forget, and it was the one that had passed idly by in his mind the afternoon Laura had disappeared.

“Of course I do,” he said quietly.

“Well, remember when you told me about her that night, about the old Marie, and you said she was double agent, right? But you didn’t know…how did you put it, you said you didn’t know the how of it?” Logan’s eyebrows raised in part suspicion and part curiosity, as he tried to understand where she was going with this. Before what had happened at Westchester, Marie as he knew her in this timeline very rarely brought up the old Marie, as he rarely brought up the old Logan. To do so, they both had realized, only seemed to open up old wounds and cause confusion.

“Yeah…so?” he asked softly.

“Well, first off, after she had taken the cure she ran into that guy named Henry-”

“Henry?” Logan blinked for a moment, before he recalled the conversation in Capetown just before the Sentinels had arrived.

“Henry?” Logan blinked for a moment, before he recalled the conversation in Capetown just before the Sentinels had arrived.

“Yeah, Henry. She didn’t know it then, but when she met him, or maybe shortly after, he started working for Trask Industries. He didn’t even know she was a mutant back then. At least, that’s what she told me,” Marie finished, glancing up to Logan a bit guiltily. Logan’s eyebrows shot up at this, genuinely surprised by the information. It was one of the first times anyone had been able to surprise him in a long while. Well, except when Marie had stepped out of that fucking helicopter. And when Dani had conjured up an image of Laura. And when Laura had punched that kid in the face on the first day of school. These women were going to be the fucking end of him.

“What she told you?” he managed to say.
“Err…this is going to sound really weird, but, uhh, she and I…had a little chat,” Marie said, still looking a bit embarrassed as she toyed with her hair, smoothing it over a shoulder with her hands.

“And how the hell did you do that?” he asked. She looked up to him intently, then, and he noticed now her own eyes were the ones full of questions.

“I was actually going to ask you for that answer. When I take you in, I just get back what you gave me, which means… Well, why didn’t you ever tell me you had ever her in your head in the first place, sugar?” she whispered softly. Again, Logan’s eyebrows shot up at this as he tried to process what she was saying.

“I-I didn’t know that what it was. I thought I was fucking crazy, like I’d lost a bit of sanity after the jump. And, it wasn’t until after…after I lost you that she…” Wouldn’t shut up and leave him to off himself like he wanted, was the phrase that came to mind, but instead he went with, “That she started talking more. And then, after Westchester, I really did think I had just fucking lost it.” Marie once more bit her lip as she considered this carefully.

“You’re not crazy, baby. I know having voices in your head is typically my modus operandi, but I’ve had a lot of time to think about it, and I think the jump’s what did it. I think she held you there, and some parts of her just…stuck around afterward. I doubt that would’ve happened if Kitty had stayed on the job, but I think I tend to leave… an impression,” Marie finished quietly. Logan sat back a bit on the cot, running his hand over his face for a moment, considering this. An impression, an echo, an afterthought… that was exactly what it had felt like.

“Hell,” he murmured to himself more than anybody else.

“Anyway, let’s just say old Marie helped me figure out that somebody back then definitely was coercing mutants to be spies. And, no big fucking surprise, Transigen bought what was left of Trask in the seventies after they went belly-up in this timeline, so the same fucking shit was going on, they were just way more quiet about it all. Coercions. I think they conned several telepaths to help influence the government to let the shit happen, and where that failed, money seemed to take care of the rest. And this Henry fella? In this timeline at least, his boss’ boss paid off the higher-ups at the CIA, helped write dirty contracts with the American government,” she mumbled

“Shit, baby,” he muttered, looking at her once more, and he couldn’t help himself as he felt the slight tug of his lips turning into a bit of a grin. He’d bet money that Marie, the little spit-fire, stuck it to the bastard. “Should I even ask what ya did with that information, then?” Logan slightly teased, and Marie was now grinning too.

“I paid a few favors to a mutant rights group first, and then we took him out and all of his friends in high places. And, while I hope he was the same son of a bitch that fucked with the old Marie, even if he wasn’t, the sorry asshole won’t be coercing anyone again anytime soon. Not in Canada at least. Or in the US,” she finished.

“Fuck darlin’,” he muttered through another smirk. “You’ve been busy.”

“What? You thought I just was good for sitting around teaching literature all day?” she asked.

“Ahh, no. But from what I remember you weren’t all that mission-hungry,” he murmured. Logan recalled that Marie had often opted to stay behind on the rare missions that did crop up, and he had mainly chalked it up to another difference, another strange quirk that separated the old Marie from the new one.

“That’s because I thought most of them were pointless, because they didn’t need us. And boy, was I
wrong about that, in the end. Besides, I’m good at intel. Always have been. I know how people think. You should give me more credit. I think I would’ve made a fan-fucking-tastic double agent in this timeline, too. And, anyways, I can still kick some fucking ass if I have to,” she said teasingly, before wetting her thumb with her tongue and running it gently over his lips and murmuring, “And what I’m hearing, you were still running around kicking ass too.” It was supposed to be a playful quip, but at this last though, however, Logan’s smile fell slightly.

“Sure as hell a lot good that did,” he grumbled. Marie frowned a bit more at that, considering what he was saying, as she moved to cradle one of his large hands between her palms once more, gently running the pads of her fingers along his knuckles.

“I’m sorry I didn’t know… about the kids,” she said more solemnly. “I stuck around Canada because I was for sure that you’d go there. You always hide out in Canada. All your memories suggested that’s where you’d be. I shouldn’t have relied on them so heavily, I guess. Although…you did end up here, in the end,” she finished.

“You know, Laura had to drag me kicking and screaming most of the way up north. A stubborn one, that girl,” Logan said through a small smile.

“Sounds familiar,” Marie murmured, a new grin forming on her own lips.

“You know, I guess I just thought I’d be safe, that far north. We were at the fucking edge of the world, Marie, and I think, well, I think she might’ve been happy there, but…” he drifted off, thoughts once more settling on the one thing he still needed to make right.

“Hey. We’re going to get her back,” Marie said intently, a fire burning in her eyes. There was a bit of silence for a moment, as Logan exhaled deeply.

“Kid fucking grew on me, that’s the problem,” he finally muttered, and Marie was smiling again, as she leaned into his shoulder, sitting back on the cot with him.

“Tell me more about her,” she said. “You haven’t said all that much, and right now she just sounds like a mini feral version of you.”

Logan chuckled a bit at this, squeezing Marie’s thigh a little as he did so.

“Well, that ain’t that far off the mark, darlin’. But, uhh, she’s, well, hell, she’s an eleven-year-old, you know? Quiet a lot of the time, but then she’ll fly off the handle, get fucking angry as hell sometimes over some pointless shit. Did I tell ya she gave a kid a concussion the first day at school? I mean, the little racist fucker deserved it, but…. Heh. Like I said, stubborn as fucking hell.” He realized Marie was now grinning widely at him, a devilish look in her eye.

“Please, continue talking about how she’s not exactly like you,” she teased.

“Oh, come on now. Don’t fucking start,” he laughed, his mood was lightening as he realized Marie wasn’t just humoring him, but really did want to know more, really did want to understand the person that had pulled Logan through the worst of her own absence, the worst of his own grief.

“Well, uh, she was trying to eat me out of house and home, but she’s a petite lil thing—probably the damn healing factor—and she speaks Spanish faster than anyone else I’ve ever met. She was trying to be patient teachin’ me a bit of it, poor thing, and I was teaching her math, you know, startin’ with multiplication and workin’ on up to the harder stuff…” he trailed off then, as he realized Marie’s look had grown a bit more serious the more he spoke about Laura, the more evident it became that the kid had wormed her way into his fucking broken heart and had made a place inside of it.
“I wish I had been there to see some of that,” she murmured. He breathed out steadily while he gently tucked a white lock of Marie’s hair behind her ear.

“The best part, though? She loved some readin’, just like you. Started her off to brush up on her English, and then, well…it got her good, baby,” he smiled a bit, a little lost in the memories of the books stacked up in her room, pouring out of her backpack, just as Marie’s had been.

“You love her like a daughter,” she murmured, and he came back to them once more, looking up at her.

“Hell baby, weren’t you listenin’? She is my daughter,” he said quietly.

“No, I know, but… but I mean, you love her like you’ve always had her,” she said, through a sad sort of smile. As she did so, an image of one of the first few nights he and Laura had found themselves in Canada came back to him, when he had acted like a jack-ass in the motel room, chugging whiskey, but then later on to when the rain had fell hard outside, and he felt the crisp, worn pages of the comic book, settling on the image of the Blackbird. What had she called it? Pajaro Negro. But also…familia. Family.

“Yeah,” he finally said, looking down at his hands slightly, before staring back up once at Marie. “Guess so.”

They stared at each other oddly for a moment, before the noise of the static grew over the receiver, and they both whipped their heads around in its direction instinctively.

“Logan or Rogue. Come in. Over,” it said. Marie was across the small room in an instant, her thin hand grasping the receiver.

“Yes, Dani. We hear you. What is it? Over,” she said.

“Uhhh,” was the response and Logan shot a worried look over to Rogue.

“Dani? We can’t hear you. Over,” Marie said again.

“It’s cause she ain’t talkin’, kid,” Logan said warily, and he realized he was standing too, striding over in just his jeans to the desk and Marie.

“Yeah, sorry. Umm, there’s been a situation with the children. Over,” Dani’s voice said. Again they quickly and sharply glanced at one another before Logan was grabbing the receiver from Marie and bringing it close to his mouth.

“What the fuck happened, Dani?” he growled into it.

“…Logan. Our delayed video footage showed the children somehow sprung themselves, and we think by now they’re currently trying to apprehend the last few of the guards. Over.”

“Hell,” Marie whispered.

“Then fire up the fucking jet or whatever you got that’s fastest and get us there, Dani,” he growled. “We’re headed outside.”

“Logan…wait.”

“What?!” he growled into the receiver. A bit of static hung in the air, as Logan impatiently waited for the response.
“Xander Rice is dead. Laura stabbed the fuck outta him... over,” Dani’s voice muttered. Logan’s eyes widened as he looked to Marie, whose stunned expression was now sliding into another wicked grin.

“Oh, I’m gonna love this girl,” she said, before she grabbed her jacket off the chair, throwing Logan his t-shirt. “Let’s go fucking get her.”

---

The next half-hour or so passed in a blur. Print outs of the briefs were shoved in their hands, and they had suited up Alpha Flight style, which was to say they wore what they wore. Two helicopters had already taken off with some of the team, but Marie and Logan found themselves in a larger air force plane that seemed to have some fairly impressive modifications to it, because as it rocketed forward into the sky Marie could feel the g-forces. It was still a far cry from the Blackbird, but Marie couldn’t help but feel a little guilty as some of that old, mildly sadistic pleasure rose in her when she saw Logan grip the paper brief he had been holding tightly, looking just as nervous as he always did when he was in the air. Marie smiled a little, as the convergences of similarities and differences between this man and the Logan she had left in Westchester kept hinting to be known. Marie had already caught him bringing up the paper brief more closely to his face as he had tried to quickly read it when they had been waiting for their clearance to board the aircraft. She had turned to him and he whipped it back down, not wanting to get caught in the act of not being able to see the words properly. She couldn’t help but contain her small grin, because this was a difference she sorta liked, and images sprung to her mind of Logan sitting on a couch with a cup of coffee over a newspaper with readers perched on his nose, maybe with Marie sitting on the opposite side with her feet in his lap, too. She smiled a bit more at this thought, and then she noticed Logan was scowling, thinking she was teasing him about flying. And then they gained more altitude and even Marie’s own stomach did a flop, and she realized now Logan had discarded the brief entirely, clutching the sides of his seat in his typical anxious fashion.

“You know, I hear meditation’s good for flight anxiety, baby,” she said through a small quirk of her lips, and he practically snarled back at her.

“Remind me to smack your ass for that quip when I’m down on the ground where I fucking belong,” Logan only grumbled.

Marie smiled once more. The fact of the matter was that until Logan had spoken about Laura, Marie hadn’t been entirely sure how exactly Logan had wanted this thing to go between them. He had still been hesitant, slightly removed with the knowledge Laura was still missing. Even as they had shared their bodies with each other, Marie knew there were truths, dark, necessary truths about them both they hadn’t yet discussed, and they would need to, eventually. But the way Logan had talked about Laura was in a way Marie had never heard him talk about anything ever before, except for maybe herself in their good years. But the fact of the matter was that how he talked about Laura was still different. Laura was his blood, his child, product of lab experimentation notwithstanding, and it didn’t take much for Marie to guess that that fact would run deep with Logan and the Wolverine. Marie was far from jealous, and in fact it had been the depth in his voice, the richness of his words, that Marie herself realized she never wanted to be without either of them, and that she wanted to, needed to witness everything they ever did or said again. And Marie hadn’t even met Laura yet.

Marie smiled faintly at this, but then as the report that they were nearing the base in Sioux Falls came from the pilot, her mood grew more somber as a new sort of worry kicked in. There were three buildings at the old military base turned distribution plant, and the children were being held in
various rooms of them all. They had news all three buildings were in the process of being compromised, and that Laura had apprehended Rice in building A, but Marie still hoped they weren’t too late. There were too many variables to consider, so many possibilities. They knew Transigen’s resources were thin here, although nothing was stopping them from calling in a new insurgence of soldiers. There was also nothing stopping the children from having already fled. Both of these scenarios haunted her. She realized now, how desperately she wanted there to be children. She wanted them alive, and not only because they symbolized hope, but also because Transigen was barely hanging on by a thread, and if the death of Xander Rice was indeed true, well, Laura probably didn’t realize it but she had most likely just cut the last bloody artery keeping the company in power.

Marie realized that Logan’s tension was also building within him, as he uncomfortably squirmed in his seat, rubbing his hands nervously. If he had been standing, he would’ve been pacing, and Marie knew the animal was closer to the surface than Logan would have likely cared to admit.

“Hey,” she said softly, turning to him in her seat.

“Hey yourself,” he muttered, without even realizing he had fallen into their old bit.

“All this is a little reminiscent isn’t it?” she asked.

Logan snorted, suddenly good and distracted for a moment, just like Marie wanted him. “Hell, baby, I already told JP that I’m retired after this. The only mission I ever wanna go on again is trying to hunt down a decent box of Cubans this far north.”

“Sounds like my kind of adventure,” Marie teased, and he cocked a brow at her with a little smirk on his lips as she knew he was trying to parse out exactly what she meant, before the pilot’s voice came over the planes intercoms again.

“We’ll be on the ground in two minutes. No one’s asked us for landing clearance, and there’s a lot of commotion on the ground outside building A where Laura was being held. Parts of building B and C also seem to be on fire,” the voice said. Marie shot Logan a bit of an anxious look she couldn’t quite help as they both felt the jet began to quickly descend, their previous banter now forgotten. It could be either good news or bad news why they hadn’t been asked to report their presence or explain why their unmarked jet was landing at the military base, even though Alpha Flight had fabricated clearance orders to make it to the ground.

Rubber met pavement as the landing gear touched down, and Marie could make out a plume of smoke from one of the buildings as they deplaned. Neither Logan nor Marie had opted to carry any weapons with them, such were the old ways of a classic X-Men mission, but Marie noticed the others did, heavily armed as they were.

“Split up,” she heard Jean-Paul saying. "Helicopter 1 takes building B and 2 takes C. The plane crew takes building A,” he finished, but Logan was already deliberately headed in the direction of A before Jean-Paul had given the order, and as Marie ran to catch up to him, a chill shot through her as she began making out the adult bodies of mostly men sprawled on the ground outside of the two-story building. But any children? She kept morbidly searching for smaller figures on the ground as now they could hear the alarms from inside the buildings going off in their ears. All the bodies on the ground were soldiers, military it looked like now they were close enough to notice, and it was then Marie realized many of them had been stabbed through the head and neck, although some of them were also missing limbs. A new sort of tension was building in Marie, and she almost missed Logan suddenly darting off to the left away from Jean-Paul and the others, and Marie knew to follow him. She trusted his senses, and whatever he had picked up on had to be important. Just then, they both heard shots being fired, and Logan was running along the side of the building, and then he stopped
abruptly and Marie almost ran into him as they both turned the corner.

Around the far side of the building, only one more man was standing, but there were dozens more on the ground. Marie saw a thin girl practically crouched in front of him, facing the guard with an intense, fiery growl in her throat. Marie could sense Logan’s body going rigid as the guard tried to shoot at the little thing, before Laura pounced on the soldier. The man screamed, wildly whipping around to get her off his shoulders, before Laura unsheathed a… was that a fucking foot claw? and stabbed the sorry bastard in the heart with her foot before finishing him off with a claw to his neck as they both fell roughly to the ground. Logan was brimming with tension, but for a moment simply watched the scene play out, seeming to instinctively know better than to interfere at this point. Laura was already getting up again anyway, seething as she cracked a neck joint with a loud snarl while a couple of bullets fell out of her shoulder, and then she roughly wiped a fresh spray of blood off her face with the sleeve of the faded blue of her t-shirt, the words Chase your dreams! sprawled across the front. Marie’s eyes widened as she turned to Logan momentarily before quietly muttering a “Holy fuck.”

---

Logan watched as Laura mutilated the last of the guards. He could still make out her smell, even as covered as it was in the smell of other people’s blood, a heavy tang of iron looming in the air. From somewhere far off he heard Marie’s walkie-talkie statically ring out, “All children alive, most in building B. All three buildings apprehended, all guards dead, in addition to 5 personnel, 58 dead in total. Most of them stabbed to death. A couple electrocuted.”

Logan whipped his head back to Laura, who was still seething as she wiped a smear of blood off of her face and stood up straight. He realized she was squinting then, taking in the sight of both adults in front of her, breathing heavily in confusion. But then, something in her senses must have clued her in, because she was shouting “Papa!” a knowing smile breaking on her lips. Logan’s heavy heart thudded forcefully inside of his chest as he found himself deliberately striding over to the smaller girl, Marie temporarily forgotten at his side, and just as he knelted next to her, Laura tackled him, almost knocking him over with all that force and strength. She flung her thin arms around his neck, and he could hear her heart still beating wildly from exertion. “Papa,” she said again, nuzzling into his chest slightly and breathing in the scent of him, as Logan tried to summon the right words, even as they refused to come. A little time passed, and then he realized she was whispering, “I’m sorry. I had to kill them…” and he held her a little closer to keep the guilt within her at bay, as he finally muttered, “Ya did what you had to. Ya did good, kid. Real good.” She smiled widely at him, and he moved to wipe a bit of blood out of her eye. “You’re a real mess, you know that,” he said finally, voice heavy and stilted, and as she shrugged her shoulders, she finally caught the eye of the woman still standing a few feet behind them. Laura looked over to her, then back to Logan, eyes wide once more.

Logan turned to find Marie standing a bit awkwardly now, boots on the cracked asphalt, and he realized that the woman was nervous in a way he hadn’t seen on her in an awful long time. He coughed a little then, standing from where he had been kneeling as he did so.

“La mujer?” Laura asked, eyes wild and bright as Logan gave her the slightest of nods.

“She came to help me rescue ya kid, but we should’ve known that maybe you didn’t need a whole lotta help with that,” he mumbled, and Laura smiled once more before letting go of his hand to carefully make her way towards Rogue, and Logan could sense Marie’s feelings of anxiety build a little, breath coming in a little faster and heart beating a little more wildly as Laura approached her. He watched as Marie bent down a little to look Laura in the eye.
“Hi, Laura. It’s nice to finally meet you,” Marie said softly. As Marie took Laura in, Logan caught her stealing a glance back at him before turning back to the smaller girl, and he realized that Marie was quickly noticing and assessing the similarities between father and daughter, her nerves now easing as she saw so much of himself in the younger mutant.

“La mujer con el pelo hermoso,” Laura was saying, as she lifted a small hand and gently patted Marie’s hair. Marie smiled quizzically before looking at Logan then, and Logan cleared his throat.

“Uh, yeah, with the pretty hair,” Logan said, and Marie shot him a glance at his surprising knowledge of that much Spanish. Then Logan added, “Uh...del comic. Rogue,” he said simply.

“Or Marie, if you want,” she said a bit stiltedly, even as Laura was running a hand down Marie’s braided hair once more.

“Bonita. Can you teach me?” she asked excitedly.

“Uh, yeah. Yeah I can,” Marie was saying, confidence growing by the second, and then Laura’s small, blood-stained hand was in hers, gripping it tightly.

“You can cook too, si? Papa said that you could,” Laura said, and Logan could tell Marie flinched a little at Laura’s use of past tense, although she was nodding her head through another smile.

“Yes,” she said. “I sure as heck can.” Laura shot Logan a look, but kept her hand on Marie, still making sure the woman was real and alive.

“See, papa? Now you don’t have to learn how to. Ella te ha salvado. Right?” Logan felt a small quirk of his mouth as he understood Laura’s real meaning, before glancing down to the two of them once more.

“Yeah kid,” Logan said quietly. “That’s right.”

Chapter End Notes

One more chapter left. I can’t believe I actually made it this far, but there you have it. Let’s take this puppy home, shall we?

Thank you, as always, for the beautiful comments and feedback. Y’all have become an amazing source of joy and happiness for me.

(PS: The line: “There was(is) a long way between dying and being dead” is not mine. A version of the line actually originally appears in Wolverine by Chris Claremont and Frank Miller. I consider this a little dorky tribute.)

Thanks again for reading, bubs. <3
It was dark, but the snow had tapered off. The roads had already been plowed outside of the sleepy building, as the tires quietly rolled over the compacted snow to a stop in front of Kay’s darkened antique shop. The rumble of the Bronco growled and then sputtered out as Logan killed the engine, exhaling slowly as he did so, before he finally turned to look at Marie once more.

Her skin was pale and white in the black of night, dark hair disappearing behind her, the brown of her eyes opaque and indiscernible. Laura had fallen asleep some time ago, laying lengthwise across the small bench in the back, and because of this both Logan and Rogue had fallen into a comfortable silence of their own. But as the Bronco turned off the main highway, quietly rolling into a sleeping Hay River, Logan had grown steadily warier. He studied Marie closely now as she glanced up at the small two-story building in front of them, eyes taking in everything, and not for the first time on this trip north he wondered what she was truly thinking. He finally took his attention off of Marie and glanced at Laura once more, and Marie followed his gaze to the young girl still dozing in the back seat.

“Guess you have to wake her,” she murmured, through a small smile. Logan nodded, sighing a little as he muttered her name a bit louder than they had been speaking, and the girl’s eyes were already groggily blinking awake. Realizing the car had stopped, however, Laura sat up a bit more quickly. Taking in the sign of Kay’s darkened shop, she smiled widely.

“Home,” she whispered to herself, and Logan and Rogue couldn’t help but stare at each other once more.

--

Logan absently noted his hand was shaking as he went to unlock the door, glancing back slightly to both of the females waiting for him to do so. They had very little on them, Laura just a plastic bag that contained a few things they had bought her on the trip up, Logan the clothes on his back, and Marie an army duffle that contained everything she owned. Logan had not necessarily been surprised to discover that Rogue rarely stayed in one place for more than a few weeks, and so her belongings were a far cry from the piles of books and things she used to have with her, practically everything left behind in Westchester. Logan had smiled a bit when he saw the pack; it reminded him of Laughlin City, almost eerily so. As Logan fiddled with the keys, he also noted that Laura’s energy was returning to her, excited as she was to get inside. He opened the door then, and instantly the familiar smells of he and Laura enveloped them all as they trudged upstairs to the tiny apartment. As Logan opened up the second door, wearily dropping the keys on the kitchen counter, Laura sprang past them both and went inside, intent on her room and flopping down on her bed in an overjoyed exhaustion.

“It’s the same, papa!” she called out from her room and Marie smiled a bit as she looked to Logan, before they both glanced around the place. Logan was relieved to see that things weren’t terribly out
of order, although a few things lay overturned from when Logan had raced back to the apartment, sniffing out clues upon realizing Laura had disappeared. Still though, most things were where Laura and Logan had left them that morning before they had made their way to the lake house that fateful afternoon, blatantly telling of what a quiet, lazy weekend it had been, but also even more reminiscent of the modest, small life Logan had tried to start for them both. His reading glasses were still sitting on the coffee table, unfolded, draped over a book he had been perusing that day on how to properly replace floorboards. His workman’s coat, the one Laura liked to wear in the mornings, still hung over the opposite chair. Two empty mugs still lay nestled in the sink. There were a couple of old, partially scratched DVDs of *The Princess Bride* and *Lost Boys*, borrowed from Kay’s, still stacked on the little player by the TV. And there was more: Laura’s house slippers that Logan had bought her in the hallway, a box of cigars on the TV stand, a couple of rainbow sparkle pencils in a cup on the kitchen counter, and, of course, Laura’s backpack still in the hallway, a couple of Canadian history worksheets partly rumpled but ultimately finished and sticking out of the open flap of her pack, ready for the school day on Monday that Laura had inevitably missed.

Slowly, Logan turned back to Rogue to get a read on her. She was staring intently, of all things, at the homework sticking out of the backpack. This graceful, strong woman, lean and poised, still adorned in her combat boots and her cargo jacket and braided hair, army duffle still slung over her shoulder. Marie, his Marie, here, in this crappy little apartment, staring at their things, now a part of a world that had been entirely and hopelessly devoid of the possibility of her mere days before. It was almost too much, he realized, her right now, the scent of this woman slowly filling this space. She was still hesitantly lingering near the entryway, he noted, her thumb brushing over the chipped paint of the door frame, and then he realized that neither of them had said anything yet, and he certainly hadn’t done anything to officially invite her in. Logan awkwardly cleared his throat, his nerves getting the better of him once more.

“Uh, I know it ain’t much, darlin’. It’s temporary, until I saved enough…” he mumbled.

“It’s beautiful,” she whispered solemnly. Just as he was about to offer more in the way of explanation, however, Logan finally sensed Laura had come out to hover in the living room, quietly taking in the scene. The younger girl smiled at Rogue’s approval, and then Laura was striding across the living room, taking Rogue’s hand in hers, as Rogue’s boots creaked quietly under the floorboards, just as Logan’s always did, and something deep within Logan shifted slightly, settling.

“This way, Marie,” Laura was saying, and she was dragging Rogue now to her room. Logan stood back near the kitchen counter, a bit amused by this procession as Rogue shot him a guilty smile as they passed. Laura stopped dramatically in the doorway to her bedroom, though, and issued him a “Lo siento, papa. ¡Sólo niñas!” and then she was shutting the door behind them. Logan smirked a bit at Laura’s chess move, but as he heard Marie’s genuine gasp at all the books, he felt more inclined to share Rogue for the moment. He exhaled, stalking over to the fridge and thanking God to find a few longnecks in the back. He grabbed two, popping the tops off both. He set them on the coffee table, and put on a record from the modest and small collection he had started, Keely Smith tonight, and then settled into the chair in the living room, idly waiting for whatever plans Laura had for Marie to come to a close. It took longer than he thought, and for a long while, he simply listened to their conversation, the sweet murmurings of “I love this book” and “Did you know that Louisa May Alcott also wrote *Jo’s Boys*?” and “I think Jo really did love Teddy” on the air, mixing with slow swing music coming from the record player. He noticed that, after some time though, things from Laura’s room got quiet. He could hear Laura’s steady and even breath, and he could tell Marie was still awake. He waited, still, as his thoughts drifted.

He hadn’t talked to Marie about coming with them, or about moving in. She’d simply gone with him, as if it were plain and simple logic, a math problem they both inherently knew how to solve. Still though, as he noticed Marie’s bag by the door, everything she owned nestled away inside of it, he
felt his heart lurch. There were some things that needed to be said, and soon. He needed to be clear. He needed to tell her out loud what he wanted, but also what she might be signing up for.

He sat there, nursing the beer in the dark living room, lost deep in thought, when he heard Laura’s door gently open and shut again. Finally, he looked up to find her lingering near the entrance of the living room, watching him from afar.

“Sorry. I waited a while before I thought it was ok to sneak out. I’m not sure if she slept the whole time they had her. We were talking about *Little Women*, and she just fell asleep on my shoulder, practically mid-sentence,” she said through a tired smile. “I didn’t know whether or not to take off her boots. They’re still on.”

Logan found his lips turning up into a smile as he shrugged his shoulders. “S’alright. Let her sleep. Kid’s been through a lot,” Logan muttered, before standing and walking over to Rogue, handing her the spare beer.

“Yeah, she has,” Marie muttered, staring back at the door to Laura’s little room before smiling as she took the Molson from Logan, sipping the beer, before setting it back down on the counter, fiddling slightly with the label.

“She likes you,” Logan offered, stating the truth simply. Marie looked up to him then, another quirk of her lips.

“You think?” she asked quietly.

“Yeah, I do,” he murmured. They stared at each other some more, which seemed to be the only thing they had been doing since they had reunited, and he realized they were wholly unsure of how to act yet, how to be around each other again. For years, countries had separated them, and it felt like lifetimes had passed.

“Logan, I-” she began, and then he was cutting her off.

“Can I stop ya for a second, kid?” he murmured, setting down the bottle again. She stared at him steadily, her eyes dark, her look verging on leery as she waited for his next words.

“Hell, darlin’. I’m sorry if I’m fucking this up. I just realized I never actually said...” he mumbled, glancing downward momentarily before his eyes slid upward to meet hers again. “You’ve got a place here, with us, if that’s something you want,” he muttered.

“Of course—” she was already saying, before she stopped, realizing he wasn’t done yet.

“But... you gotta know something, Marie,” he said, and he could tell she now didn’t want him to go on, didn’t want him to say it out loud, and yet he knew he had to, had to do it, if this was going to work, because he knew that eventually, they would have to both face it. “I don’t want ya to sign up for something that you might regret. Because... all of this,” Logan breathed, closing his eyes for a moment, before exhaling a bit angrily and opening them again. “You know it won’t last.”

She stared at him darkly now, a look of total and complete pain taking over her features, and Logan’s heart struggled to work.

“I wish... *fuck.* I’m such a greedy bastard, but... I wish there was more, that I had more to give you. *God,* you deserve so much more,” he stumbled over his words, voice shaking under the strain of what he was finally admitting to her, both knowing he wasn’t talking about the size of the apartment or the modest things Logan owned.
Finally, tears. They escaped and ran down her cheeks, and then he was moving closer to her and murmuring a “Hey, now,” and wiped the warm drops from her face with the pad of his thumb. She grabbed his hand then, gripping it tightly, and he instinctively pulled her close, and then she was melting into him, laying her head on his chest as he kissed the top of her head. They stood there like that, and he couldn’t help but close his eyes, clutching her tightly to him, as they slightly swayed to the mournful swoon of “I’ll Get By” on the record player, the floorboards still creaking underneath them, the sound of the heat kicking on once more.

“How long?” she finally, barely whispered. He sighed, the grip on her tightening just slightly.

“Don’t know, kid. Not yet though,” he whispered into her ear. A few more tears, a few granules of sand slipping through the hourglass, as he quietly shushed her, breathing in the scent of her hair, more unending moments of her heartbeat thudding against his chest. Finally, after some time, after the record had ended and had turned itself off, he felt his resolve slowly returning to him. It was too much right now, all of it. He couldn’t focus on what he knew he couldn’t fucking change. Even after all this time, it just didn’t make sense to do so. There would be more time, later. More time for that, all later.

“Enough of this,” he finally said, releasing her a little from his grip. “I didn’t even give you the whole tour yet,” he joked, and she laughed a little through tears, as she wiped her face. Then she was letting him lead her by the wrist into the other small room with the full bed, the blankets still made from the morning he had left. He ushered her inside, closing the door gently behind them both. He turned to see her shrouded in moonlight, gorgeous and mournful and waiting.

He strode over to her with a growl, the tension of the last several days flowing over them both, as he kissed her roughly with a strength he had been saving. He deepened the kiss even more so, his tongue running up against her own as he toyed with her bottom lip, and then they had turned around and he had pushed her up against the wall roughly. Her lips were now making contact with his neck, hands in his hair, and he growled a bit more, even as she was tugging off his shirt, undoing his belt. He shed her coat easily enough, yanked at her shirt, until she was only in a bra, and she was now kissing a hot trail down his stomach, lips lingering just above the cusp of his jeans.

“Hell, Marie,” he groaned as she toyed with him, and then, just from behind the wall farthest from them, the wall that neighbored Laura’s room, they heard a small sound. They both instinctively froze to listen, although Logan immediately realized Laura was only shifting in her sleep, her breath too deep and even for her to actually be awake. Marie glanced back guiltily over to Logan, and he found himself chuckling slightly in response.

“God. I feel like I’m sneaking around like a teenager. Is this what parents have to worry about? Making too much noise?” she whispered through a smile, and Logan’s lips turned upward slightly at Marie’s use of the word parents.

“Might need a bigger place eventually, baby,” he smirked and she smiled up at him. “She can hear well, although, tonight, I think we have a free pass. Kid hasn’t slept in four days. She’ll be out cold for hours,” he said through another smirk.

“Hours, huh?” Marie asked, cocking her brow mischievously as she regained a bit of her confidence.

“Hell, baby. I was trying to distract you from all that shit I said earlier, but I think you need to remember that I’m not—holy fucking god!” Logan practically shouted, because Marie had stripped him of his jeans and now was taking him all in her mouth, his body practically crumpling beneath her as he spun them both so he could lean partially against the wall.

“Fuck woman!” he growled, as he hit the back of her throat, and she released him momentarily to
usher a teasing “shh” under her breath. He practically snarled at her, but then he was fucking helpless to her again. Her mouth was wet and hot, traveling up his length with her tongue more before taking him all the way in again, and he was muttering a steady stream of curse words under his breath.

It went on and on, and at some point he realized she wouldn’t stop unless he forced her to, and wanting in infinite measures to get her back, he growled, grabbing her by the shoulders and lifting her upward, carrying her over to the bed and easily throwing her down on it, even as she giggled slightly. He peeled off her jeans easily enough, wanting to drink her in, consume her in every possible way.

He roughly thumbed her nipples, and she stopped her giggling, as he took one in his mouth for a few moments, drawing it out only with his teeth, before he did the same to the other. She whimpered now in pleasure, before he was kissing his way down her body, again stopping for a moment to deliberately kiss one of Marie’s scars. And then he was down, bringing his mouth to hover just beyond her sweet wetness, breathing in deeply, her arousal thick and heavy in the air, flooding his mind like the fucking heroine it was.

“God, I’ve fucking missed you,” he muttered, before giving her a long, languid lick and she moaned softly, taking another breath. She grinned for a moment, before whispering coyly, “Do I taste the same, baby?” He friskily growled at her, and then took another long, deep lick, pausing for a moment to roll his tongue over her center, smirking as he heard her sharp intake of breath, and then he moved up her body once more.

“You tell me,” he said, and then proceeded to kiss her deeply, both of them sharing the taste of her, before he was moving to the nape of her neck, planting kisses there too.

“Logan…” she was murmuring again, just as he was about to make his way downward once more.

“Mmm?” he murmured into her ear. He noticed then she was breathing a bit heavily, and he could tell her heart was beating faster than it already was. She was nervous. Why?

“What is it?” he asked quietly, pulling away from her a bit. Her eyes were round and dark and full.

“What?” he asked again.

“Mark me,” she said darkly. He looked at her once, eyes encompassing her every angle.

“Break the fucking skin, baby. I wanna feel it, not just in the morning. Days afterwards.” He stiffened only the slightest at this, as he could feel the Wolverine growl deep down inside at the honesty of her words.

“I staked a claim over you a long time ago, darlin’,” he muttered, even as his mouth lingered over her jawline.

“I need to know… this isn’t going away.” At that, he could feel his smile dampen, as once more their conversation before hovered over them.

“Everything ends, kid,” he murmured, lifting an arm from the bed and gently running a hand through her hair. Her eyes had glazed, but she didn’t cry. Instead, her resolve strengthened.

“But… like you said. Not yet,” her voice was fierce, volatile.

“No, not yet,” she murmured, through a small sigh. He didn’t like hurting her, even to mark her,
especially not while he was so clear-headed, but he was also about ready to do anything for this woman. He’d set the fucking world on fire for her, if she asked for it.

“Break the skin, huh?” he whispered.

Marie nodded, looking at him intensely. “Hard,” she muttered.

“Have it your way,” he murmured, but he was still found himself shoving two fingers inside her with his spare hand, toying with her warmth, intent on distracting her slightly with pleasure.

“Hold onto somethin’ baby,” he growled, but her hands were already threaded in the sheets and she was already moaning as he bit down roughly, canines sinking into skin, that metal taste, the distinct signature of her blood blooming in his mouth, and she was writhing beneath him in a mixture of pain and pleasure even as he was already applying his tongue, licking at the wound, the animal purring at the sheer, primal nature of it all. And then he realized he was fucking dripping with need at the sight, as hard as he’d ever be, the way she was giving in to all of him making him seeing stars, making him understand that he had needed it, too.

“You ok?” he barely managed to breathe.

“Yes,” she hissed. He wanted nothing more than to plunge into her, fill her completely full with him until she screamed, but he once more got a grip on himself, intent on giving her what he had planned on. He moved lower, then, back down to her moist, wet heat, and he realized the bite had aroused her, as dripping wet as she was, and she was opening herself wider to him as he gently sucked at that bundle of nerves between her, biting down slightly, applying pressure with a good, long suck. Then she was moaning his name loudly, before her breath caught in her throat and he pulled up to see her whipping a hand to her mouth, and he grinned a bit, murmuring, “relax,” and then he was back at her, undoing her, relishing in her want and wetness, licking and swallowing her taste, and, then, after, taking his time to clean her, both of their bodies loose and fluid.

As he moved up her body once more she turned them, and then she was sliding down on him, encompassing him and taking him in slowly, too fucking slow, and she was moving, the moonlight highlighting every curve, an angel, a ghost, a fucking miracle, as her strong thighs gripped him and his hands clutched her tightly, intent on leaving bruises. He breathed out steadily, bearing down on what was left of his sanity, even as he sensed a cloying feeling rising within him. The animal wanted out.

He turned her sharply, even as a flickering sensation, a sense of back and forth, overtook him. He hadn’t let the animal loose in years, but he realized that whatever chain he had been looking for wasn’t there anymore, and he now understood that vying for or even relinquishing said control lay abandoned. He growled as he held her down, seating himself inside her fully once more, but even as he moved inside her, the man traced a thumb over one of Marie’s surgical scars, still concerned for her emotional wellbeing, while the Wolverine let out a primal rumble, angered by the idea someone had hurt her and he hadn’t been there to protect her. The man also distantly noticed, appreciated even, Marie in his room among his things, tangled up in his bedsheets, but then a soft moan escaped her lips and instinct had its grip on him once more as he moved faster, taking her hard, rough, hitting that place deep inside her again and again, while she tried to stifle a scream. Then her walls were clenching down on him hard, as she pulled them both over the edge, and even then, as he snarled as he filled her, hot and white and full, he could feel himself present, still conscious somehow, even as they were spent, breathing hard together, even as he nuzzled into her neck, licking at the blood left over from the bite where he had marked her, even as he whimpered softly as she traced a scar on his arm from a bullet, the wounded, tired animal in him content on giving her whatever she needed, whatever she fucking wished for.
“You still with me, baby?” she asked, unsure, or perhaps, sure, but wanting to make certain.

He growled a little, only barely able to nod his head slightly. And then, as the haze lifted and his clarity slowly returned, he murmured an “Always.” She smiled gently at him, her hand threaded in his hair as she softly stroked his temple, the warm aftershocks of coming insider her still rippling through him as he kissed her forehead roughly, before gently moving to her lips once more, feeling empty and full all at once. It was snowing softly outside again, but the click of the heat was coming on, and the world felt settled and tilted, sturdy and fragile, the unknown stretching out wild and terrible and beautiful, a starless sky, limitless and yet infinitely expanding around them both.

---

Four Months Later

As his eyes lazily blinked open, Logan was met with the early bright light of the lake house. It was the smell of pine trees, clean air, fresh paint. As his vision came into focus, he was met with the mostly empty room, a couple of the boxes they hadn’t unpacked yet stacked near the wall. Outside, he could hear dripping sounds, a telltale chorus of snow steadily beginning to melt, the beginning of spring almost upon them. It was the time before it really started, the time in between, and Logan found himself simply listening for a moment, relishing in the sound.

He grumbled contently before he turned over in bed to find the left side empty, however, the comforter rumpled and cool. He frowned a little, as he idly swiped a hand over the empty spot in the bed, when he heard more rustling in the kitchen. As the smell of bacon now overlaid the other scents, he thought momentarily that Marie must be cooking, but as another clank came from outside the door he realized it was probably Laura in the kitchen and not Marie, because Marie never made that much noise when she cooked. He smirked a little at this thought, yawning before getting up slowly, to stalk over to the bathroom attached to the master on the first floor. He ran some water through his hair, throwing on a t-shirt and sweat pants before padding out into the living room, to be greeted with Laura and her kitchen experiments to his right, and the living room and then the large bay windows opening up to the deck and the lake beyond to his left. He could see Marie sitting in one of the deck chairs, idly staring out at the lake. Logan was silent as he watched her watching the lake for a moment, before turning to face his daughter, still now determinedly stirring a giant bowl of pancake batter, although much of it had been slopped onto the polished wood of the kitchen counter.

“You made bacon?” he asked, attempting to sneak over to her side of the kitchen island to snag a piece

“Uh uh!” Laura scolded him, in a typical Rogue-like fashion. “Marie made it. You have to wait. And first!” Laura pointed to a little row of pills lined up on the edge of the counter, waiting for him. Logan rolled his eyes, but still dutifully swiped all of them off the counter, popping them into his mouth as Laura slid him a glass of water across the island, which he caught with ease, lifting it up to his lips to swallow them down. They had him on a steady course of maintenance drugs, mainly anti-inflammatory medication, nothing close to undoing what had been done, what was still happening, but drugs to help ease the severity of the worst of the symptoms, and they had helped made life, well, bearable. Logan’s stomach grumbled again, and he found himself frowning slightly as he turned to stare back out at Marie.
“¿Marie está bien?” he asked quietly.

“Si. Viendo la salida del sol.” Laura gestured with a spatula to the windows once more, to the mostly-risen sun. Logan sighed a bit, resigned to go check on Marie, but first turned back to Laura.

“Café con leche, hija. Para Marie,” he said, gesturing with his eyes back to the deck. Laura nodded and smiled, grabbing a spare mug and taking the coffee pot off the warmer, filling it up, before topping it off with a little half and half, and then intuitively grabbed another mug and filled it with black coffee for him. He smiled back at her, stalking over behind the counter to kiss her head, muttering a “gracias” as he did so. He picked up his coffee, and then he cocked one brow as he added, “Hey Laura. 84 divided by 6?”

“Easy,” she said, smiling widely, wiping a bit of flour from her cheek. “Fourteen.” Logan grinned at her, as he grabbed the weekly newspaper off the kitchen counter.

“Bien,” he murmured, taking a sip of his own coffee, tucking the newspaper under his arm and then picking up Marie’s mug and walking to the door that led outside.

“Te amo, daddy!” Laura shouted after him.

“Right back at ya, hija,” he shouted, before using his foot to push the already-cracked door open more to the deck, hands full as they were.

It was a cool morning, and a subtle mist had settled over the edge of the lake, indicative of the slow, stubborn onset of spring. The sky was filled with pink and orange and tinges of blue, and Logan realized why Marie had come outside. It was a beautiful morning. His gaze, though, hopelessly slid downward to the prettier sight in front of him. She had on silky pajama bottoms, a sheer top and her signature robe, but she was barefoot, and Logan found himself appreciating this particular detail. As he made his way up behind her, though, he also realized that she was clutching a pair of his reading glasses in her hands as she stared out at the lake.

“Trade you,” he murmured quietly, as she finally looked up to him gave him a small but genuine smile. Logan could tell her eyes were distant, deep in thought as she had been. He pressed the coffee mug into her hands, and she reluctantly handed over the glasses, which Logan flipped open, settling on his face. She smiled again at him, but he found himself still worrying about her, even as he took another sip of his coffee.

“Where were you?” he quietly asked.

“Sorry….” she said, coming back to herself a bit more. “For leaving you alone this morning, I mean. I didn’t want to miss it, and I didn’t want to wake you,” she said. Even though she answered a different version of the question than he had intended, perhaps purposefully so, Logan found himself quietly accepting the answer, as he took in a breath of the crisp northern air.

“Snow’s gonna finish melting soon,” he murmured.

“Really? Oh, god, I hope so,” she said, and he grinned a little through his mug at Marie’s ever-present contempt for the cold, even as she found herself living this close to the artic circle.

“What? You don’t like endless winter?” he asked through a widening smirk.

“Ah, no. Well, I guess if it’s with you, I do,” she said through another faint smile, before sighing, sitting up to stand. He whipped out an arm to help her to her feet, and her hand lingered on his afterward, even as she moved to slightly straighten the glasses on his face.
“Laura’s got pancakes in there,” he murmured.

“I know. I set her up to make them,” she said through a knowing grin and a sip of her coffee.

“Uhh,” Logan said, turning back to the window and the mess Laura was inevitably making, “I think she might need a little…help,” he smirked.

“You should have a little more faith, sugar,” Marie murmured.

“Ahh, I do. In you. And your cookin’,” he muttered, stealing a grab of her ass before she swatted him away, his lips still curled up into a smirk. “But she’s got too much of me in her,” he murmured, glancing back through the windows to where Laura was scooping way too much batter on to the skillet.

“Gotta practice to get better,” she said. “Besides it’s not like she’s gonna burn the house down,” Marie added, but as she glanced back at Laura as well and the fresh plume of unexplained smoke puffing up from the skillet, Marie’s eyes widened and she added through a grin, “Let’s go help her.”

Fifteen minutes later, they were standing around the kitchen counter, eating pancakes. Melted butter was sliding off the fluffy shortstacks as Laura’s sticky hands made a grab for the syrup once more. Logan, already noticing the pool of syrup Laura’s pancakes were currently swimming in, stopped her though, murmuring a “No way. Too much already.” Laura pretended to scowl at him, before offering him a sugary smile and taking another forkful of pancake and dunking it in some of the extra syrup off Logan’s plate. Logan turned to Marie exasperatedly, pointing silently at the girl, but Marie only shrugged her shoulders at him, smiling widely as she copied Laura’s move, dunking her own bite into the last of the extra syrup on his plate. Logan growled playfully at Marie, getting her back by leaning in quickly to kiss her neck, breathing in the lingering hints of maple and butter as she swallowed her bite and laughed a bit. Marie couldn’t seem to help herself as her lips brushed the side of his cheek in return, although Logan noticed she quickly leaned back once more, blushing and stealing a quick glance at Laura, only to find a wide grin on the girl’s lips, knowingly and sweetly staring back at them both.

End.

Chapter End Notes

Welp, I just wanted to take a second to thank anyone who took any time out of their life to read and/or to offer their support in any way. That, my friends, means the world to me. I hope you got something out of reading this story, because I know I sure as hell got something out of writing it. In the end, I just wanted to say that I am so, so grateful to have found this ship and the community of readers and writers who dwell here. You’re very special people, and you’ve made this whole experience an amazing, inimitable one for me.

The future: Plans for a longer AU fic focusing on a younger Logan and Rogue (because I’m kinda tired of researching canon, lolz), plans for a shorter sequel to Fray, different in tone and structure but still following Logan and Rogue and Laura, and also plans for a couple of one shots, some set in the Fray universe and some not. I’m gonna take a short break from writing before I seriously start on any of these projects, however, just to go
read some of the beautiful work on this archive.

Well, that’s all from me for now. Thank you, again, for everything. Seriously. Y’all make the world a brighter, better place. <3

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!