The Way Back To You

by Baamon5evr

Summary

Erik doesn't leave Charles alone on that beach in Cuba. Ten years and a whole lot of alcohol later, Charles finds himself in the same position again.

[Story follows the events after First Class then goes through and after Days of Future Past as Charles falls apart, puts himself back together, has a few kids, brings his dream to fruition and finally gets on the same page with Erik, (not necessarily in that order)]

Notes

This fic is partly an excuse for me to mention all of Erik's numerous children and focus on those relationships, but also after watching DOFP recently, I have discovered how much I actually love Angry & Bitter!Charles. I have also recently let go of my vehement hatred of Mpreg, so I figured why not combine them. Fair warning, this is a dialogue light fic. Erik and Charles' relationship, while permeating the entire fic and the overall mood that Charles thinks in, I don't get into the nitty gritty of rebuilding that relationship until chapter four. I wanted to put Charles as a character before Cherik as a relationship, but fear not, if you
stick around, we'll get into it.

The first chapter has a bit of a vignette style as we go through the ten years between XMFC and DOFP. I try to keep it as close to canon as possible though.
Chapter Summary

Charles learns that Erik didn’t leave him alone on that beach, but the new addition to his life doesn’t stop his demons from haunting him.

When Hank first tells him, Charles gives it just as much reverence as he believes it deserves at the time, which is none.

It’s obvious that Hank has made a mistake somewhere. Some tests had come back showing irregular results and Hank, being a man with a curious mind, jumped to ridiculous conclusions. Because it is ridiculous. Charles has spent his entire life secure in the simple and constant fact that he is a male individual and being such, one thing that is definitely not in the cards for him is pregnancy. He has never been crazy enough to want it to be anything different, but Hank, wonderful, inquisitive and silly Hank, who turned himself blue trying to get rid of his oversized feet, would be the only person in the world to suggest that the impossible was in fact possible.

Charles doesn’t do what he wants to, which is laugh in Hank’s face. He feels a slight surge of guilt, believing Hank is overworking himself trying to hold the house together after… after. He has been taking care of Charles and trying to cure himself and helping keep a lid on Alex and Sean. When Charles started to feel ill, he didn’t initially want to burden Hank with that as well, but it became quite impossible to hide it when he rolled his infernal wheelchair into the kitchen one day, took one whiff of the eggs Sean was making, and promptly vomited into his own lap. Surely, that would be a gratifying memory for years to come. Hank ordered tests and Charles was ready to hear any number of things. He largely attributed it to his spine injury, but here Hank is, telling him he is pregnant. Instead of laughing, Charles gives him a look, asks him to run the tests again, tells him to come to him when he has a reasonable result, and rolls back to the elevator so he can get intimately acquainted with his bed (and the bottle of whiskey that now has a permanent spot on his nightstand).

Hank spends the next two weeks trying fruitlessly to convince Charles that he is pregnant. Charles persists in his valid disbelief and would’ve kept on going that way too. He didn’t much care why he was ill, to be honest. What he wants is to stay in bed with a liquor bottle close by so he can drown his sorrows. It’s funny, he never quite appreciated his mother’s habits until now. If they’ve done nothing else, his useless legs, erstwhile lover and absent sister have allowed him to understand his mother more than he ever did when she was alive.

Charles does not concede to Hank until the baby makes himself known. It is small at first, a nagging in the back of Charles’ head that he can’t place. It’s so faint and formless he doesn’t quite believe it exists, but it grows louder and louder every day, a wordless presence that is so bright, the splendor of it nearly has him choking on the poison inside of himself. Because the presence is inside him, not outside, not in the faint distance, it’s part of him.

And so, he throws his whiskey bottle in the trash and wheels himself to Hank’s lab with all the trepidation of a man going to face his own execution.

~*~*~
None of the boys ask who the other father is. Charles is grateful that he doesn’t have to say it out loud. He’s not quite sure what it would do to him to hear the truth outside of the confines of his own mind.

~*~*~

David has Erik’s eyes. It’s one of the first things Charles notices about his son as he holds him. David’s heterochromia has given him one grey eye and one green eye, but somehow, they both look like Erik’s.

The pregnancy had not been pleasant. Secondary mutation or not, he is still a man and a paralyzed one at that. His healing back had felt like it was collapsing under the new weight inside him and there was nothing he could do because alcohol was out of the question and any strong painkillers would hurt the baby. On top of that, he had spent weeks on bedrest, oscillating between debilitating illness that saw him constantly with his head in a bucket and raw pain wracking his body, or being unable to hold consciousness for more than four hours, sleeping his days away stuck in cruel remembrances of happier times.

He’s been thinking about his parents more and more with his pregnancy. He’s certain they wouldn’t have been thrilled about it. A telepath for a son is one thing, but a freak against the most basic law of biology? Distasteful would be an understatement. And Kurt? He would have a field day, and that was saying nothing of Cain. Even Raven would probably be freaked out about it at the very least. But there are times, brief moments when Charles is wondering if he will be a good parent, that he remembers his father rubbing his aching temples with patient fingers to soothe away his telepathy-induced migraines or his mother gifting him with rare smiles of grief-tinged fondness at one of Charles’ academic accomplishments and he wonders what he truly ever knew of his own parents. Probably as much as he thought he knew about Erik and Raven and he had been wrong about them too, otherwise they wouldn’t have left.

He cradles David in his arms tightly, his impossible boy. This child who, while he gestated inside of him, Charles had vacillated between being disgusted at his existence and conflicted over having irrefutable proof that, once upon a time, Charles and Erik were in love and they were happy and hopeful. Or at least Charles was. He can’t remember now what impressions he got from Erik about their relationship. Maybe Erik was just using him the whole time as a convenient ally to have against Shaw, a telepath who could literally shut his greatest enemy down so Erik could shove a coin through Shaw’s, and consequently Charles’, head.

But that doesn’t matter. David has nothing to do with that, Charles realizes as he stares down at him, brushing his fingers over the light dusting of dark brown hair. David is innocent, so very small and fragile and trusting. His life is literally in Charles’ hands. That is scarier to him than anything he ever has or ever will face. He could break this poor little thing so easily without any intention of doing so. And yet, he can’t fathom sending him away to an orphanage or finding some lonely, kind couple to raise him because David is his and he is Erik’s. Charles fell in love with him the second he saw his innocent, familiar green-grey eyes.

“I won’t leave you, my darling boy. I will never leave you,” Charles tells him. He doesn’t know if that’s a promise he should make. Who says his son needs a depressed paraplegic weighing him down? But Charles is all he has, so he’ll try to be enough.

~*~*~

He considers telling Erik about David.

Erik is a hard man to find nowadays. He has Shaw’s helmet and Emma, who shields his group, and
Azazel, who keeps them moving. It would take extended hours in Cerebro and days of migraines after, which would lead to Charles projecting his misery throughout the mansion. Not the best thing to do when there was an infant there whose mind was still shaping itself. Charles casting anything untoward in the baby’s head could threaten that development, and any threat to David, including ones coming from Charles, cannot be taken lightly. Finding Erik with Cerebro might not even work. It doesn’t seem worth the effort. David isn’t alone. He has Charles, he has Hank, Sean and Alex. He also has Erik’s last name as well as Charles’. One day David might ask about that, and what will Charles say?

“I just didn’t feel like dealing with your father’s BS, so I never got to telling him about you.”

He’s sure that’ll go over well. There is also the tiny fact that Erik is becoming known as an international terrorist. Inviting him back to the mansion where his child lives feels counterintuitive to keeping him safe. Who knows what trouble Erik will bring back with him, threatening the lives of everyone at the manor?

All that is separate from the matter of whether Erik would be a good father. Charles doesn’t really have a doubt about that. Erik didn’t like to talk about his past very much, especially that hazy time between when he escaped Auschwitz and he and Charles met, but he knows about his wife and daughter. There were small moments after Charles opened up to him about his childhood that Erik would impress his memories of little Anya into Charles’ head. He saw moments when Erik would read to her, sing her lullabies, use his powers to entertain her, or just carry her around with him all over like his little accessory. The love he had for the little girl was undeniable through the memories, as was the grief he felt at her death. Charles doesn’t know if he can handle the guilt he will surely feel about keeping Erik’s child from him when he has already lost one, but he still feels all his reasons are valid.

David is four months old when Erik is arrested for the assassination of the President of the United States. Charles is so relieved to have the choice taken out of his hands that he doesn’t bother to confirm whether it’s true or not. The bullet curved, Erik must be involved somehow. That is evidence enough to convince him not to willingly put himself and his son in the line of fire with that man again. David doesn’t deserve to be an innocent bystander in Erik’s battles. Charles will never let that happen to him again.

~*~*~
He decides to open the school because he needs to move on, he needs to live his life. He has no other choice.

He gathers students. Bright children with brighter gifts who are so frightened of themselves and the world. It makes Charles’ chest ache that they look to him for guidance, mess that he is, and they seem to find it. Their parents and loved ones think him a savior, a lifeline in the middle of the sea. These children depend on him almost as much as David does.

David, who Charles took one look at when he was born and knew he would be a mutant and so he isn’t too surprised when one night, David’s mind latches onto his in his sleep with such intensity that it very nearly causes Charles to be locked out of his own head completely. He manages to wrestle control of himself back and tries to make David understand, as much as a two-year-old can understand, what appropriate cerebral contact looks like. He has to place mental shields on everyone in the manor after several mishaps where David unwittingly crashes into the brains of students like a wrecking ball and then panics once he’s there, almost ripping their minds to shreds in his desperate attempt to escape the confines of a head that isn’t his.

Charles must lock him in the bunker for two weeks while he tries to get a handle on David’s
telepathy. The efforts leave him drained, but it’s for his son, so he persists in trying to hammer techniques into his little brain. Eventually, he decides it won’t take. David is just too young to grasp the concepts Charles needs him to for him to gain control. He locks his ability away deep inside him until they both can handle it.

Charles can hear insidious thoughts in his ear, a voice accusing him of being arrogant, of playing God, of turning his back on his fellow mutants, being a weak coward who would force yet another family member to hide. The voice sounds disconcertingly like Raven. Charles feels shame beyond equivalence.

The night he locks David’s powers away is the first night he picks up a whiskey bottle since he realized he was pregnant. The brown liquor slithers down his throat with the warm embrace of an old friend.

~*~*~

The school only lasts two more years after that. They never quite recover from the scandal caused by the encounters between David and the students. It startles the parents enough that many pull their children from the school, even though Charles was able to set those affected back to rights. It hurts, but he understands.

Then the draft for the Vietnam War starts.

Sean is drafted. Alex is too, along with several of the older students as well. Two of the teachers Charles hired, one human and the other mutant, are drafted and the two men run off to Canada together. He can’t blame them, but a school isn’t much of a school without students and teachers.

Sean is terrified of the prospect of going to war and Charles can’t bring himself to reassure him. He’s never seen a battlefield personally, but Erik’s memories of it are present in his mind, so Charles thinks he ought to keep his mouth shut. Alex is strangely silent about it all, only saying, “Hey, it’s not the first time we’ve seen battle, is it?”

He says it flatly, but Charles hears an accusation in it. Maybe he was just fishing for it, or it’s the arrogance Raven always accused him of raising its ugly head. It makes his fingers itch to wrap around the neck of a bottle.

“Why do they have to leave?” David asks him later when Sean and Alex are packing.

“Because men with more power than us say they must,” Charles says with a bitterness he doesn’t attempt to hide, because he’s never lied to David (at least not explicitly, he doesn’t count lies of omission).

“But you’re powerful, Papa,”

“But that kind of power.”

The four-year-old doesn’t ask him to clarify, and Charles is grateful. The little boy steps closer to his wheelchair and wrinkles his nose just the slightest. He wonders if his son can smell the liquor wafting off him. He had dreamt of his first time with Erik last night, their desperate bodies grinding against one another in a motel room. Charles had woken up to a gunshot ringing in his ears and yet he had felt almost aroused, which was saying something considering how much work it takes to get him going nowadays. Another thing Erik took from him. He needed a full bottle to chase the memory away.
He clutches David close in his lap when Sean and Alex drive away and hopes he’s not squeezing too tightly, but he doesn’t ask if he is and doesn’t loosen his hold either.

He shuts the school down not long after that.

~*_~*~

When Sean dies, Charles doesn’t go to the funeral. He can’t sit in front of Sean’s extensive family who are all grieving and stare at the empty casket and believe that there was nothing he could’ve done, because that’s not true. He could’ve had Sean and Alex and the other draftees stay, and when the police or army officials came looking, he could’ve used his powers to make them leave. But he didn’t and he couldn’t for the life of him think of why. If he goes to that funeral, Sean’s parents will look at him and they will accuse him of playing a part in their son’s death. They will be right. So, he stays in bed and gets wasted and sobs into his pillow until his throat feels like it’s been rubbed raw.

Time slips by strangely in his drunken haze. The alcohol throws Charles’ telepathy out of whack, makes it unbalanced and fuzzy. He thinks of it akin to a person with tinnitus. Sometimes his power rings through his head with perfect clarity, sometimes it’s too loud and other times too soft. It gives him a headache. He drinks more to try to ignore it.

At one point when he wakes up, David is curled up in bed with him, tears staining his cheeks as he stares into the distance. Charles wipes his face and holds him close, lets him cry into his chest.

He thinks it’s the first time he’s hugged him since Sean and Alex left a year before, but he can’t remember for sure.

~*_~*~

Hank says the serum will let him walk again, says he’ll be able to keep up with David now and do all the things he’s been missing. The younger man is so desperate to make Charles feel better. He’s noticed the constant smell of liquor over the past years, has noticed Charles drifting away from him and David, retreating into himself. David is six and doesn’t understand what’s happening, but Hank does, and his pitying thoughts towards Charles is almost worse than David’s confusion.

Charles wishes he was stronger, that he could be better for David, but he wasn’t a whole person when he had him in the first place. Most days he’s surprised he is capable of love at all. Because he does, he loves his son with all that’s in him. It is because he loves him that he cannot do what would probably be best and leave him in the care of someone better adjusted than him.

He gets a crazy thought of finding Moira and planting the idea of David in her head. She would love him, mutant or not, and David would have a mother, which would be infinitely better than the two fathers he has: one a cripple carrying on the family legacy of alcoholism and the other a terrorist imprisoned for killing the beacon of what could’ve been a time of peace and prosperity in this country.

Unexpectedly, he remembers what Erik told him their last night together.

*Peace was never an option.*

He suddenly wants to smash his liquor bottle in that devastating man’s face. He thinks it would make him feel a lot better.

~*_~*~
David hates him or is, at the least, embarrassed of him. And why wouldn’t he be?

Charles can hear the thoughts of the parents and children when he picks David up from school (because he’s always too drunk or high, too unfocused to teach him at home and Hank hasn’t the time). They think he’s a drug addict or an alcoholic, which, top marks, right on both of those. They think he’s a hippie, which he supposes Erik would’ve said he was, or a naïve pacifist if nothing else. They think he’s a bad influence on his son, and they would be correct.

He caught David sniffing a liquor bottle a few weeks ago, cringing from the taste of the amber liquid on his tongue. Charles had snatched it from the eight-year-old, shouted at him until it hurt and then ordered him to his room. David had given him a wounded look before complying. It made him think of Kurt and all the times he terrified Charles. Just the idea that Charles was anything like his wretched, abusive stepfather had driven him to drink until he could feel better about the mild fear his son had of him. He passed out before he ever reached that feeling.

~*~*~

Though Charles hasn’t restored David’s powers, he has made sure to hone his son’s shielding skills, and so rarely does anything he doesn’t want Charles to hear slip through, but sometimes Charles can hear David missing him, the old Charles. He knows that means he’s horrible now because he wasn’t so great from the very beginning. Even as an infant, Hank, Sean and Alex picked up more slack than Charles was willing to admit. Sometimes, he can hear David wondering if Charles loves him or even knows anything about him at all and it hurts.

David is such a sweet boy, the best child one could ask for. He is wicked smart and empathetic. He loves helping others and has a sense of deep sympathy for broken things. There isn’t a stray in the world that David wouldn’t want to adopt. Beyond that, David is so eager to please. Charles knows it’s partly a product of his neglect. David tries to stay out of his way, cleans up after himself and does things he thinks will make Charles smile. He learned the entirety of Dr. King’s “I Have A Dream” speech so he could show it off to Charles in hopes of approval. He taught himself to play “Claire De Lune” on the piano to impress him. He gets Charles thoughtful gifts every birthday and Father’s Day. Sometimes he curls up in bed with him unbidden on some of Charles’ worst days.

Despite the disappointment pervading the boy’s thoughts, he never vocalizes it because he loves Charles more than he ever deserved. He should probably just talk to him about it, but he fears he’ll say the wrong thing, so he doesn’t.

This is all Erik’s fault, he thinks not for the first time. It’s been festering in him for years, this hatred and anger he has for Erik now, a great big ball of venom that has no outlet to be released upon.

Erik left him on a beach in fucking Cuba with two hostile navies on one side and a hostile Communist regime on the other, bleeding out and paralyzed from a bullet Erik put in his back after Charles had allowed himself to be a party to murder and feel a man die in his head. To add insult to injury, Erik took his sister, the person Charles has spent the longest time loving and protecting, and left Charles with a child so he could go play at being an activist when he was really nothing more than a fucking terrorist and now he’s in prison. Raven is nowhere to be found and Sean is dead, and Alex is gone and so is the school. If Charles thinks hard enough, that can be Erik’s fault too.

If he were in the mood to be fair, he’d remember that he told Raven to leave and implied Erik should too. But then, when has Erik ever done anything just because someone told him to, much less Charles? If he wanted to stay, he would’ve stayed. If he cared about Charles, or knew him at all, he would’ve realized that Charles wasn’t thinking straight on account of the coin Erik shoved through his head, the bullet Erik lodged in his back and the ugly fucking helmet Erik was wearing
tearing into the psionic scars in Charles’ head from the coin. Charles was in pain. He needed time to breathe and think, and he couldn’t with Erik there, so he needed him gone. Only for a moment though, a couple of minutes, a day at the most, not forever. Erik should’ve known that. Charles would’ve known. So, fuck fairness.

It eats away at him, eats out the good and leaves only the rot so Charles has nothing to offer anyone else, much less David. Then he thinks of how bright David is and he hates himself for not giving him his best efforts, so he drinks. He thinks of his relationship with Erik and wonders how it could’ve been as wrong and hateful as Charles has made it out to be if they could create David. He wonders about the good that he saw in Erik and that conflicts with how much loathing he feels for him now, and he has to drink more. He thinks of Raven and how he failed her, his mother’s benign neglect, his father’s untimely death, Kurt’s hard fists, Cain’s harsh words, Sean’s body not laid to rest properly, and Darwin suffering the same fate before him.

He thinks of all the small and large rejections that he thought he buried and forgot about but resurface with extreme prejudice now: that ex-girlfriend that cheated on him, that ex-boyfriend who thought Charles was too desperate and clingy, that ex-professor who touched him too intimately, all those people who harshly rebuffed him because of his telepathy and he has to drink.

Added to that is all the guilt, despair and heartache of those around him thinking about the husband or brother or cousin who is deployed and hasn’t written in weeks, the bill that needs paying, the child they desperately want, the wife who is pulling away, the boyfriend who is cheating, the landlord who is swindling them, the sibling that hates them, the neighbor that hurts them and the parent who doesn’t love them and it is too much.

The woes of the world weigh on his soul and his mind. Everyone around him is desperate to be saved and growing more and more desperate and hopeless the longer the war drags on. Charles is forced to listen to their cries on a loop, feeling himself be dragged down into a pit of all their despair, fear and grief. There is no relief. Even in sleep, the voices haunt him, seeping into every part of his being. And when it isn’t the terror from outside, he jumps awake from the sound of a gunshot ringing in his ears or, just as equally painful, some loving word or declaration from a time long since passed. So, he has to drink, or he will go insane.

He remembers days spent wishing his mother would break out of her drunken haze and notice him, love him, reassure him, parent him, to no avail. He’s doing the same to David and he hates himself for it, so he takes more of the serum, and wonder of all wonders, the voices go away and the nightmares do too. He’s pretty sure he passes out from the ferocity of it.

When he wakes up, David is at his side, tear tracks on his face and a look that tells Charles that he knows everything. Every deep, dark secret or desire he’s ever had, David knows it all. He wonders if Erik had felt this deeply uncomfortable about having Charles use his telepathy to know so much
about him before they said a word to each other. All the things you wished to hide were laid bare for judgement and there was nothing you could do.

David moves closer and stares at Charles. He stares back.

“I understand now,” David whispers as if to speak louder would shatter some invisible barrier between them. Charles never wanted there to be a block between him and his son, but there are ghosts lingering and words unsaid, and he has Erik’s eyes. Charles must look away.


“Do you still love him?” Charles hesitates and nods again.

“But you hate him too.” He doesn’t hesitate this time.

“He did this. He’s why everything is the way it is.” Charles shakes his head now, because even though he hates Erik with just as much fervor as he loves him, he doesn’t think he can stand the idea of David hating him.

“The way things are is my fault. He isn’t here, I am. I’m…” Charles trails off in a bitter laugh.

“I wish I was stronger for you, my dear boy. You deserve better than me. So much more than me.” David doesn’t respond. He grabs his father’s hand and squeezes it.

Charles tries not to cry in front of his son. It’s embarrassing enough that David’s seen into his mind, and who knows what all he saw there. What shameful things does he now know that’ll make his weak, druggie, alcoholic father even more of a pariah? But David doesn’t say anything. He falls asleep across Charles’ lap still holding his hand and once he’s sure he’s sleeping, only then does Charles allow the tears to fall.

~*~*~

He knows that David needs help to control his telepathy (and his telekinesis and other psionic abilities) and he can’t be it. It would take a while before he’d be clean and in control of his abilities enough to help and in that time, David could scramble, dismantle or fry the brains of anyone in a 20-mile radius. He isn’t keen on locking his son in the bunker again until he can get his shit together either.

That’s how he meets Elizabeth Braddock. Her abilities are close enough to David’s for her to be the perfect teacher for him. She is obviously surprised to see how low the young Harvard graduate has fallen. He is far removed from the promising professor and geneticist he once was. She doesn’t comment too much on his poor appearance other than saying he is hobo chic. He doesn’t feel much the latter, but the former is accurate. He let himself go. He’s lost a concerning amount of weight. His grown-out hair would be stylish if he ever washed and combed it properly and his beard is a product of the same neglect, not a conscious fashion choice. He usually grabs the first thing his hands touch in the morning, not caring what he wears. He doesn’t leave the house for anything other than dropping David off at school and picking him up anyway, so what does it matter?

David is elated at having someone new in the house. He and Betsy become thick as thieves quickly and Charles wonders again if he made a mistake not giving David to some lovely, accepting heterosexual couple who could’ve raised him normally. Either way, heaven knows David has been lacking in female role models. Male ones as well, to be honest. Hank does his best though.

It does put a smile on Charles’ face to see how excited David is by his new teacher and everything
she shows him, how accomplished he looks whenever he gains some measure of control and how genuinely he desires to share it all with Charles. So, Charles drags himself from bed and watches David from the patio. He is present and smiles at all the right times and doesn’t bring a liquor bottle with him. He feels the glow of David’s approval, and hopes the charade is enough to give his son even a glimmer of the affection and attention he deserves.

~*~*~

It all feels like a bad acid trip, Logan showing up and claiming to be from the future and his whole spiel about stopping Raven and breaking Erik out of jail. He has to leave David with Betsy, a woman he respects but doesn’t know all that well after only five months, so he can break his ex-lover and the father of his child out of an underground prison in the Pentagon with the help of his best friend, an indestructible time traveler and a teenaged kleptomaniac. A prison that’s kept him contained for ten years. He feels like an idiot, but he goes anyway, because even though every fiber in his being is crowing about how much he hates Erik and everything he stands for, his traitorous heart thuds hopefully in his chest. It’s been ten years since he’s seen anything of him other than a picture, and he can’t help the anticipation he feels along with the anger and nervousness.

David sees him off with an uneasy smile and he wonders just how much of his conflict his son reads in him but pushes it away. He hates thinking about what a disappointment he is in David’s eyes.

~*~*~

He considers telling Erik about David when they’re playing chess on the plane. The blood rushing in his ears, the ball of excitement and anger and the thrum of hate hate hate has dulled with exposure and Charles can think relatively straight now. He ultimately keeps his mouth shut. The silence between them is finally companionable, if slightly charged, after their little spats. Charles doesn’t want to ruin it with a fight, not with how much he aches with having missed just this simple interaction with Erik.

Plus, a part of him, the part that still throbs painfully from Erik hurting him, wants Erik to hurt too, even if it’s only in Charles’ head that he does, and so he doesn’t say anything.

~*~*~

Erik’s fingers are dancing along his spine as they stand against a wall in the lobby of a Parisian hotel watching Hank and Logan procure rooms. His fingers get close to the scars from the bullet, but he doesn’t quite make contact.

“Stop it, Erik,” Charles mumbles as the lobby fills with the soft chords of “Superstar” by the Carpenters.

Long ago, and oh so far away

I fell in love with you before the second show

Your guitar, it sounds so sweet and clear

But you’re not really here

It’s just the radio

“Hmm?” Erik hums with innocent absentmindedness. Charles doesn’t believe it for a moment.
“Why are you doing that?”

“Can’t you guess?” Charles rolls his eyes in response.

“What’s the point? It won’t change anything between us, won’t fix anything at all,” Charles states, cutting past whatever veiled banter or coy flirtation Erik thinks they are going to have. It isn’t 1962, and Charles isn’t going to act like it is.

“Maybe not. Most probably not,” Erik replies, resting his chin against Charles’ shoulder. He doesn’t remember Erik being this tactile before.

“So…”

“So, I’ve spent the last ten years in solitary confinement. Ten lonely years.” Charles bristles a little at that. So that’s what this is, Erik just wants to use him again.

“Go procure a prostitute if you need to scratch a neglected itch. Won’t be difficult to find one here, I’d wager,” he scoffs.

“That would be a waste with you here.”

Charles grits his teeth. Erik nestles closer so his mouth is up against Charles’ ear. He can only imagine what they look like, Erik pressing his body up against Charles’ side, looking as if he is whispering sweet nothings to him. They look too intimate to be just friends in a public place like this, that’s for sure. Music is blaring outside from various nightclubs and people are stumbling around celebrating Victory in Vietnam Day. There are so many strange people out tonight, he hopes that they will be dismissed as a part of the whole menagerie of it. Just another peculiar attraction that one can only find in Paris. Erik presses a soft kiss to his neck and Charles shivers.

“Erik…” Charles trails off warningly, allowing the smooth tone of Karen Carpenter to fill the air with her sad remembrance and longing for her lover.

*Loneliness is such a sad affair*

*And I can hardly wait to be with you again*

*What to say to make you come again*

*Come back to me again*

*And play your sad guitar*

Charles wishes any other song was playing. He takes a moment to lament the chain of events that’s led him here, in a hotel lobby in Paris standing next to Erik listening to sad love songs while the other man tries to… seduce him? He doesn’t even know.

“I missed you,” Erik admits, his voice holding such emotion that Charles must rear back to stare at him and gage his expression.

His face is open and expressive in a way that brings back their early days: when they trusted each other, when they could love each other without it hurting, without there being an undercurrent of anger, mistrust and hatred. It makes Charles shudder to think that Erik can still have that inside of him after all the horrid acts he’s committed, not killing JFK aside. Within that, it’s unfathomable to him that Erik can somehow look at him, broken as he is, and want him, miss him, maybe even love him still.
If he was thinking with his head, he would accuse Erik of manipulating him in some way, chastise himself for being weak after years of drowning in the muck and mire of what Erik’s love, or the lack thereof, did to him. But his heart is thumping hard in his chest, pushing him to reach for Erik in the hopes that he will somehow make him feel whole again, feel like himself in a way he hasn’t in the decade since they’ve been apart. He shakes his head and places a hand on Erik’s chest with the intention of putting some distance between them. He opens his mouth, trying to let his better judgement take over, but he snaps it shut after a few seconds. He can’t make himself push the other man away and say no. Erik reaches up and takes the hand Charles has put on his chest and moves it, so it rests over his heart. Charles can feel it beating fast under his fingers.

“Charles?” Hank calls from the desk, cutting through the tension.

“Am I still getting the four rooms?” He asks.

There is a look of disdainful judgement on his old friend’s face. Charles cannot blame him. Hank has been the one trying to pick up the pieces after Cuba, but he is also one of two people in the world who is most acutely aware of Charles’ weaknesses, he can hardly think his friend is surprised about what’s happening. Charles looks back at Erik and gets slightly lost in his eyes, still so open, still so expressive, so raw and needy and… Erik has been in a jail cell for ten years for a crime he didn’t commit, because Charles was so afraid of being hurt by him again that he just wanted him gone. Not dead, never that, just away. Erik, who has never been the forgiving type, doesn’t seem to blame him for it. He still wants him, and Charles is just so… tired. Exhaustion has set into his bones so deep that he doesn’t have the wherewithal to fight anymore, nor to be angry or hurt. He wants some peace, even if it’s only for tonight. He can regret it later.

“You’d better make that three rooms, Hank.”

~*~*~

He feels like the most foolish man in the world when he sees Erik pointing a gun at Raven. Almost ten years on a bender, and you’d think he’d have wised up to the man Erik truly is. Yet he can still be surprised, betrayed and heartbroken by him. That is the most foolish thing of all.

Erik says he’s securing their future and it’s a slap in the face. He had said that to Charles in bed the previous night. Charles had been curled up on his chest, sated after Erik had taken him three times that night. Hard and then achingly slow and then hard again. He had felt broken open by the end of it, physically, emotionally and mentally. He’s pretty sure he cried and said stupid things about how much he missed and loved him. Erik had soothed away tears, said they would see Raven, and everything would go the way it was meant to, said he would secure their future no matter what. Charles had had an inkling to tell him about David then, but he wasn’t in a fit state to bring their son into conversation. Besides, he reasoned, it could be a distraction from what they had to do. Little did he know.

He wonders if Erik planned this betrayal the whole time, if while he was fucking Charles, he was plotting out how to stab him in the back at the same time. Maybe he just needed Charles in bed so he could redirect his focus from figuring out what he should’ve known already, the lesson the past ten years was meant to impart on him: inevitably, Erik was going to disappoint him.

~*~*~

David doesn’t say anything to him when he gets back home from Paris. Maybe he sees something in Charles’ face or, heavens forbid, his head that makes him give him a wide berth. They talk before he leaves for DC though.
“You’re going to see him,” he says without asking.

“Perhaps. I’m more focused on Raven.” He had only ever told David about Raven sparingly, but enough for the boy to know she was his aunt, Charles had loved her dearly, and they had hurt each other. When he was younger, the stories made David yearn for a sibling. Charles could think of nothing worse.

“Just… if you do see him, don’t let him get in your head again.”

Charles stares after David as he walks off, and not for the first time, he wonders just how much his son saw in his head and what he thinks of him. His telepathy is back, he could check now, but he’s too afraid to know the answer.

~*~*~

Erik drops a baseball stadium on him and, honestly, Charles doesn’t know why he would be surprised about it. It’s just the sort of ridiculous and reckless thing that Erik would do, levitate a stadium across the city so he can trap the President of the United States and try to kill him and the whole cabinet on live television without thinking of the collateral damage he might leave in his wake. Raven stops him and becomes a national hero while Charles makes it home with cuts and bruises, and a slightly lighter chest. He doesn’t know why. Maybe it’s Logan’s assurances that the future is brighter.

When he gets home, David throws himself into his lap and hugs him hard. He’s shaking a little and Charles gets a flash of his memory of watching the TV, hearing Erik’s speech and seeing Charles beneath the wreckage of the stadium, his terror that Charles was dead. He hugs David tighter and does his best to ignore the flare of hate hate hate in his head when the boy thinks of Erik’s face.

They probably won’t ever see him again, at least not for a long time, but even though he betrayed him and dropped a baseball stadium on him, the idea of David hating him still makes his heart clench. David abruptly pulls back from the hug to stare at Charles.

“What is so great about him? He hurt you, he left you. Why do you still care?” He demands to know, his voice filled with incredulity and anger. Charles softens a little and brushes his fingers through David’s brunette hair.

“I don’t know, my dear boy. I wish I did,” he answers truthfully. David is not placated by the answer but doesn’t question its veracity.

“You didn’t tell him about me, did you?”

“…no, I didn’t.”

“Good.”

Charles’ heart is a mess as David stalks away.

Everything would be easier if he could just figure out what he feels for Erik, but that’s like trying to thread an elephant through a needle. On the best of days, he feels twenty contradictory emotions about that man, so he can hardly provide his son with clarity on the subject. Not when he is so confused himself.

~*~*~

When he starts to vomit, he chalks it up to withdrawal. He put his body through the wringer, it needs to acclimate.
Weeks later, he’ll reflect once more on how much of an idiot he was to fall into bed with Erik Lehnsherr again.
Chapter Summary

Charles puts his life back together as he learns that, once again, Erik hasn’t left him completely alone.

Withdrawal is hell to go through, but Charles expects nothing less.

It isn’t just the physical symptoms of coming down from years of binge drinking and substance abuse, not to say those symptoms aren’t hell in their own right. His muscles ache in a place so deep he didn’t know it existed, and that was to say nothing of his back. His body spasms and shakes, his nerve endings feeling like they are on fire. He stays in bed sweating from fever and yet freezing cold, exhausted and yet unable to sleep, hungry, but throwing up most things he eats. He’s agitated and irritable and restless one second and depressed and bawling his eyes out the next.

Then his telepathy comes crashing through and that adds another layer of misery for everyone in the manor and the towns closest to Graymalkin Lane. The voices are so loud, and Charles can’t block them out. With the withdrawal compounding on it, he gets multiple hallucinations and goes through a few episodes of psychosis where he projects all manner of frightening scenarios to his housemates. He is stuck in the minds of war vets for a while and projects Hank straight to the frontlines of Vietnam. There is a woman trapped in endless loops of miscarriages and infant deaths and he projects her sorrow into Betsy. He feels most guilty about David. There is a child who sees a scary film. Charles injects her terrors into David, creating a sloppy, inhumane ghoul with yellow eyes who eats telepaths, and has the boy running around the mansion scared and alone for days with Betsy and Hank no help, busy living their own walking nightmares.

Betsy locks him in a room in the bunker after that so she can monitor his psionic activity. She regulates him where she can and shields the house from his projections where she can’t. The first week is the worst but for a month he weather it. Weathers it through the occasional seizure and the tremors, the nausea and disorientation and nightmares and anxiety. There are a few times when the urge to just drink or take the serum are only combatted by Betsy putting him to sleep and other times when he seriously considers if he would be able to just kill himself and end this, but those thoughts don’t ever get very far.

David visits him almost every day. Charles can tell when he is there, can feel the press of his mind against his. It is soothing and comforting to Charles, but he knows that it’s a two-way street and David must feel his pain. He tells him to go most times, but David always refuses. He usually stays an hour, telling Charles about his day to distract him from the pain, or just sitting with him so Charles knows he isn’t alone.

At the end of it, Charles comes out the other side not able to walk, but with a rudimentary control on his telepathy again, enough that Betsy lets him out. He still has slight tremors and he doesn’t feel 100%, but he’s functional and ready for the real work on himself to begin, as terrifying a prospect as that is.

~*~*~

Charles never once gave the idea of therapy more than a passing glance because, despite the fact
that as a man of science and of the mind he should see the merits of it, he’s also a man with an ego that can be bruised at admitting he can’t just up and put himself back together. But he can’t, he proved that well enough. Betsy becomes a valuable resource in this and a friend as she talks him into looking into on-site rehab.

“I know a pretty good place. It’s run by mutants, a telepath I know. Madelyne can be a bit much, she’s not shy about rooting around in your head and making you face an issue rather than talking around it, but that’s the whole point of rehabilitation, isn’t it? Why check in if you’re not going to give it your all?”

“You’re speaking from experience.” Betsy smirks humorlessly.

“I’m a recovering addict, you know. It’s why I never said anything. Nothing as conventional as drugs or alcohol, but I was addicted to killing.” Charles rose an eyebrow at that, partly in surprise and partly in silent curiosity.

“I grew up in Saigon and I had to kill to survive.”

“Oh, I didn’t know you were from Vietnam.”

“Why would you? I never told you. Besides, Hank’s the one that interviewed me. Pretty sure you were too drunk to handle that part.” Charles looks down in embarrassment even though Betsy’s voice holds no judgement. She shrugs a little.

“Hey, it’s just a fact. And I was right about you in the end, you are trying to come around. Anyway, I spent a good amount of time with my father's folks in England, but a majority of my teenhood was with my mother in Vietnam. I told myself that if I took lives in the course of doing what was right, then I shouldn’t feel guilty for a part of me liking it. At least it meant other people wouldn’t have to. Like I was... like I was saving innocent souls. But that’s a lie. That’s lazy, guilt-dodging bullshit. I was an addict. I did it because it made me feel good, made me feel better about myself but it hurt everyone around me. I had to realize that I needed help. I needed to put pride aside and change.” She pauses to give him a knowing look there before continuing.

“The truth is this: I came here to this school to teach David because I’m trying to make amends for all the lives I’ve taken by maybe helping to create some good. I hoped if I stuck around long enough, the school would reopen, and I could give some back. Now, you can start giving back too, putting good in the world. You just have to break yourself down a bit more and then pull yourself together again. Won’t be easy, but it’s worth it.” Charles simply nods in response. He’ll try just about anything at this point. Rehab and therapy is hardly the most outlandish choice.

Betsy takes him to the rehabilitation center and checks him in.

Charles is antsy being away from home in this strange place with strange people, humans and mutants, who want him to talk about his experiences, his feelings, his faults and flaws and thought processes so intimately when they hardly know him. On one hand, it feels strange to give so much of himself to these people, and on the other, the fact that they are strangers makes it easier to lay bare every distasteful or dark part of himself and not be afraid of being abandoned for it.

The director of the rehab becomes his personal therapist. Madelyne councils him. She doesn't think he’s as hopeless as he sometimes believes himself to be. She tells him that telepaths like them have a tendency to rely on their ability too much to hear what they think they need to hear instead of listening or communicating actively and healthily. She tells him their telepathy is a strength, but cannot be allowed to become a crutch so much so that they cannot operate in society without it, but they shouldn’t be afraid to embrace themselves either. She encourages him to make amends with
those he’s wronged and find joy in things outside himself before sending him back home a couple
months later.

David, who Charles hasn’t seen due to the rehab’s strict no visitors policy, looks a bit taller than
when he last saw him nine weeks prior, but that could just be because of the wheelchair. All the
same, his son sports a wider smile than Charles has seen on his face since he was much smaller,
and he hugs Charles tightly. He doesn’t say anything, but Charles can hear the excited thoughts
running past his mind of missed you missed you missed you tinged with happiness. Charles hugs
him back tightly and thanks his lucky stars that David is still putting up with him after everything
he’s done. His son is the first person he must make amends with, and he intends to do all he can to
ensure he does so.

~*~*~

David attaches himself to Charles like he hasn’t since he was five years old. Charles had thought
David would be at least reticent to try to fix what was broken between them, what Charles broke,
but he is excited to have his father back. With both of them retaining their telepathy now, they have
an awareness of one another that goes far beyond the physical. David is now a constant presence
thrumming in the back of his head and vice versa. It’s comfortable to have him there, and
sometimes they hold whole conversations across town even though Charles tries not to distract him
from his classes. Sometimes David asks for help with schoolwork in the middle of the day if he
can’t quite grasp a teacher’s explanations and Charles helps. He would start home-schooling David
if he thought it would earn him any points to separate him from his friends.

That is not to say there aren’t arguments and times when David shuts him out completely, giving
Charles a taste of his own medicine. It hurts every time David slams his mental doors in his face,
doesn’t let him see in his mind anymore. There are moments when his son gravitates to Hank or
Betsy and others when he is angry and short with him for seemingly no reason, but he weathers it
because it’s his fault. On Charles’ end, there are times he pushes David out of his head because
there must be boundaries between them. There are some things David shouldn’t see, and it rankles
his son who believes that he’s seen Charles at his worst and knows almost all he’s been through, so
they should have no secrets. Charles tries to employ the strategies the rehab recommended and
explain why that thinking is wrong and mostly fails, but Betsy proves a boon when they can’t quite
communicate with one another properly.

“Two such powerful telepaths, you’d think you would’ve learned to use your words by now,” she
would say.

So, yes, things are not perfect, but they are sliding into something like normalcy and Charles is
reaching a place of equilibrium and peace within himself. He can see his future being a brighter
one. He will reopen the school, he will continue to rebuild his relationship with David, his
friendship with Betsy will continue to grow and he will continue to make amends with Hank for all
the shit he put him through. Maybe one day he’ll get to see Raven again, talk to her properly.
Perhaps he’ll even get to finally level with Erik once and for all. Maybe introduce him to David.
He’s been thinking of it more and more since rehab. It provided a lot of free time for introspection
and Charles can admit to himself that he’d like to see Erik again, to see Raven too, if for no other
reason than to get to talk properly about everything, but he pushes it away because it’s not a
pressing issue at the moment. He has to focus on his sobriety and David now.

That’s when a meteor crashes through his newfound peace.

~*~*~
The first time he feels ill is around David’s 11th birthday party. He can hardly believe it’s been a year since he gave David his powers back. Between meeting Betsy, everything with Logan, Erik and Raven and getting clean, it feels like a lot longer than a year has passed. It’s the first birthday party he’s thrown for David since he closed the school and is sober enough to manage such a large-scale endeavor. It feels particularly special for these reasons.

He and Betsy have been working hard to throw the big bash together without alerting him. He’s been shielding his thoughts about it for weeks. He’s only told the parents of David’s friends so he won’t catch the other children’s thoughts about it. They were all surprised to see him at the school for more than two minutes, surprised to see him looking alive and human and not like a drugged out corpse. The wheelchair also throws them for a loop. Some of their minds hum with approval at his recovery, others with judgement still for his past behavior and yet another few with pity or sympathy at his wheelchair. He lets them draw their own conclusions and keeps his interactions short and cordial.

He puts his money to good use and rents out a travelling fair and buys a cake entirely larger than needed considering the guestlist numbers 50 at most. He shaves his face clean and trims his hair fashionably, but leaves it long. His skin glows healthier than it has in years and he lets Betsy convince him to go on a shopping spree for the occasion (though it’s mostly him giving running commentary on her many outfit choices). Even though he is now clean and more presentable than he has been in ages, the effort of putting the whole thing together has taken a toll on him and he’s been feeling fatigued lately, nauseous, vomiting multiple times. He wonders if he’s been overdoing it. He’s only been clean for four months now. The effects on his body are still not completely gone. He has the odd tremor still, other times his control slips and the voices become too loud, he’s been feeling bloated lately, putting on weight, but that’s to be expected being back in the chair and eating healthily now.

It is all worth it though to see that utter shock and awe on David’s face when they pull up to the fair grounds and all his friends and classmates are there to greet him and sing “Happy Birthday”. The look he gives Charles nearly brings a tear to the older man’s eye, but he simply hugs his son and prepares for a day of fun and leisure.

Hank pushes him around after David, who doesn’t let Charles leave his side for long, trying to convince his father to join him on the rides. Charles declines to most of them, encouraging David to join his friends instead. He does join him on the roller coaster and promptly must wheel to a trashcan to vomit afterwards. David hovers worriedly by his side and Charles laughs it off.

“Never did like roller coasters. Apparently, the disdain is mutual. I’m fine, darling. Join your friends and leave this old man to his own devices, why don’t you?” David gives him a once over but runs off.

Charles doesn’t think anything of it then. Or the day after, when he wakes up with the same nausea, or the next when his back starts to ache. If his body is punishing him for years of abuse, he only has himself to blame.

It isn’t until a week later when he becomes aware of a different presence in the back of his mind that he realizes the truth.

He rolls down to Hank’s lab with trepidation and mild disbelief.

“Charles, everything alright?”

“I… I think I might be pregnant.”
He has no clue how to tell David. David still refuses to talk about Erik. He’s so averse to his other father’s existence that he slams down on his mental shields painfully hard if the man’s face so much as crosses Charles’ mind, as if to reprimand him for thinking about him. Things are going good between them, he doesn’t want to ruin it. Hank’s pungent disappointment and disapproval is more than enough for him, he doesn’t need David’s as well. Betsy is little help. She tells him to grow some balls and get it over with in her usual blunt manner and then begins prattling on about how the pregnancy will affect the school relaunch schedule and what will happen when the twins come.

Twins.

Erik never does anything by half, let it be known.

Charles can feel the two distinct presences despite their formless nature. They have, for lack of better phrasing, different flavors that distinguish them from each other and so even though it’s still too early to see through imaging, he knows that in five months there are going to be two new babies in the manor.

With sobriety has come clarity and he regrets a lot of things now. He regrets telling Raven to leave. He should’ve explained to her that his aversion to her that night in the kitchen had nothing to do with her being blue and everything to do with not wanting to see her naked, especially because, though he always tried to ignore it, he was privy to some of her less than platonic feelings towards him. He knows she would never admit it now, not after everything that’s happened and he knows it was mostly a result of thinking they were the only two mutants in the world, but he should’ve handled it with more maturity than he had. If he wasn’t so afraid of losing her after rejecting her in that way outright, he wouldn’t have let her think he was rejecting her for who she was and ended up losing her anyway.

He has also played back everything that happened on the beach over and over again and he regrets not explaining to Erik why he shouldn’t kill those men in a better way. Telling a Jewish man, a survivor of the death camps no less, that the soldiers getting ready to kill them were just following orders wasn’t his finest moment, nor was getting into a physical confrontation, but he was never the best verbal communicator despite everyone’s perception of him and the helmet screwed with him in ways he couldn’t foresee and hopes is never replicated.

Overall, he regrets not calling them back. He regrets not telling Erik about David, even if he wouldn’t have let Erik take him anywhere. He should’ve told him in Paris or DC or before he was arrested. Now he is pregnant again and he doesn’t know where Erik is again. He tries to find him with Cerebro more than once. Several times he feels the brush of Erik’s mind before he’s shut out. The last time it happened, Charles had just managed to caress Erik’s mind, felt impressions of regret, reluctance, guilt, anger and resolve before he was cut off. The way it felt makes it clear that somehow Erik got the helmet back or some other version of it. Figures. When Charles wants nothing to do with him, time travelers will force them together and when he does, Erik disappears on him. There haven’t even been any reports of a reformation of the Brotherhood or Erik causing havoc, so Charles is unsure why he’s gone full radio silence on him this time, unless he’s planning something big that he doesn’t want Charles to know about.

“Hey, Papa,” David says, coming into Charles study and startling him from his thoughts.

“Yes, love?”

“Can you help me with my homework?”
“Of course darling, bring it here.”

Charles sits with him for long minutes, not letting his mind drift to anything besides the math work. It provides a welcome distraction from his troubles. However, David spends the time getting increasingly distracted.

“What’s wrong?” Charles asks after David flinches again.

“You don’t hear that? There’s something there, but I can’t grasp it. What is that?” David projects the impression he is getting. Charles knows immediately it’s the babies. David’s brows furrow.

“Babies? What babies?” Charles stares at him a moment and then sighs.

“The babies I’m going to be having soon,” he replies, deciding to just get it over with.

“You’re… you’re pregnant?” Charles nods silently. David’s mind is racing. He goes through a sea of emotions: confusion, alarm, happiness, confusion again, excitement, puzzlement, uncertainty, trepidation.

“It isn’t him, is it?” David asks.

“David…” The boy shoots up to his feet and stares at Charles a moment before he starts pacing back and forth.

“That was a dumb thing to do, being with him. Why did you do that?” Charles blinks in surprise at the admonishment.

“David—”

“Everyone always says adults are supposed to be so much smarter than kids, but if that were true, you would’ve never been so stupid and selfish!” The boy condescends.

“David Brian Xavier-Lehnsherr, that’s enough!” Charles says firmly.

“You—”

“No. You listen to me. I am your father. I haven’t always been at my best, but I am still your father and you will speak to me with more respect than that, do you understand me?” David huffs a little, but nods.

“Yes. I apologize for my rudeness.” Charles sighs and rolls over to David, patting his lap. The boy reluctantly sits.

“I’ve made many mistakes in my life, not a few of them regarding your father, but Erik is your father. Nothing will change that.”

“He shot you. He left you. He could’ve killed you. He could’ve killed me before I was even born.”

“He didn’t set out to hurt me and he didn’t know about you. Perhaps if he did, things would’ve gone very differently. We both made mistakes. Regardless of that, your relationship, if you ever get a chance to build it, should be independent of my relationship with Erik. And as far as blame goes, I’m guiltier for all that’s happened in this house the last ten years between you and I than he could ever be.”

“Why are you defending him? He almost killed you in DC too. He tried to kill the President.”
“I never said he was perfect. I’m just saying it’s not as simple as Erik or myself being evil or good, or even right or wrong. It’s complicated in ways I can’t even begin to express to you. Not for anything so trivial as you being a child and me lacking belief in your maturity to understand, but because it’s hard for me to understand it sometimes as well. People are such complicated beings, even with the ability to read minds, it doesn’t mean I understand human nature much better than anyone else, so I can’t expect you to.” David huffs again, unmoved by his father’s words. Charles runs his fingers through the boy’s hair, trying to soothe away some of the tension.

“Bear in mind most of your impressions of him is from what you saw in my head when I was at my most wounded and vulnerable. I wasn’t exactly the most reliable narrator at that time. I’m sure everything I thought of him then was tinged with my own anger and pain. But all that hurt, that was just the end. There were beautiful moments between us, moments that led us to fall in love and make you and these babies. I don’t regret that. I do want Erik to come back.”

“Papa—”

“I want these babies to have both their parents and you deserve both of us too.”

“I don’t need him or want him. Don’t you see? He’s going to ruin everything again. We just fixed it and he’ll break it,” his son exclaims, tears gathering in his eyes.

“Oh David…” Charles pulls him closer and presses a kiss to his forehead.

“I want to fix everything that’s broken between us, him included if the time should come. It won’t be easy, but it won’t be like it was before. It can’t be. I will never put you through that again, I promise you that.”

David remains unconvinced. Charles lets out a shaky breath. He remembers how thrown off he was when David first got his telepathy back and he saw deep into Charles, was able to understand who he was better than anyone ever had or ever would. It has made him fearful of what David thinks of him, but that one experience has colored David’s entire perception of Erik. Nothing Charles had felt then was outright false, but it was certainly skewed by his hurt and didn’t capture any of the good parts.

“If I show you him as I truly saw him, without the influence of the drugs and the alcohol, do you think you can understand then? I can’t promise there won’t still be hurt in the memories I show you, but you’ll see what it was truly like.”

David pulls back and looks at him uncertainly.

“You won’t push me out?”

Charles smiles sadly. He tries not to let David catch any of his thoughts regarding wanting to shut him out, but he can’t shield everything. It makes him feel guilty about hurting David. When he was younger, he hated the feeling of being rejected from anyone’s mind, it felt like they were rejecting him, but he can also understand Raven a little better than he could before. Some things are just not for others to know. Still, he holds his hand up to David’s temple, asking for permission. When he nods, he lets David see it all, see how Charles truly sees Erik. The anger and the hate that he had felt before are still there, but everything is tinged with a wistful, nostalgic overtone now. Every memory of a smile, a kiss, a whispered secret, a triumph or meaningful connection is laden with feelings of love, warmth, acceptance, friendship, and contentment.

After he is finished, David silently stares at him, his mismatched eyes wet with unfallen tears.
“Do you understand now?” Charles asks softly. David doesn’t answer. Charles watches him curl back into his chest, tucking himself under his neck and wrapping his arms tighter around Charles’ waist. He doesn’t know what that means, and he doesn’t ask. He doesn’t want to push David too far, but he hopes this can be a start of a resolution.

~*~*~

David doesn’t comment on Erik after that, apparently now content to ignore his existence all together. Sometimes, Charles can hear his conflicting thoughts, his simmering anger clashing with his daydreams of what his life would’ve been like if Erik had stayed and he had both his Papa and Dad raising him (or Vati, David thinks, that’s what Anya called him) before David pushes the fantasy away. It’s clear the boy doesn’t want to think of Erik, or Anya or his grandparents or anything else related to the Lehnsherr side of his family tree that he saw in Charles’ head. Charles elects not to push him about any of it.

He starts to wish then more than ever that Erik was there. That seems ridiculous to him, because everything that happened in 1962 aside, David is right. Erik did drop a baseball stadium on him and tried to kill Raven, but if he thinks about that night in Paris in their hotel room, he can remember with perfect clarity just how fragile Erik was, how vulnerable. Ten years in almost total isolation without his powers available to him hadn’t broken the other man, but it certainly put some cracks in him that he allowed Charles to see. They didn’t argue, didn’t talk about their past or the unspoken tension between them. Charles wasn’t the only one out of sorts at the end of it. Erik wouldn’t stop touching him, and not just in a sexual manner. He held him close the whole night, kept pressing kisses to his face and his shoulders, nuzzling into his neck and whispering endearments and assurances and generally being more tactile and needy than Charles had ever seen him. Charles had let him, had preened under his attention and felt more of his anger dissipate than he was willing to admit at that time. He had said them sleeping together wouldn’t fix anything between them, but he needed that night, needed something to pour all his feelings into without letting it continue to fester inside him. It just came out with a lot less violence than he was anticipating. Now he’s stuck in some nebulous middle with Erik, but everything else in his life is hurtling forward.

His stomach is growing larger by the day. David throws himself into the pregnancy with gusto. He’s excited to be a big brother and starts waiting on Charles hand and foot. He would be annoyed if it was anyone else. Truthfully, he is slightly annoyed still, but this is a better reaction than he was hoping for, so he lets it go. They are so close now that David has even begun sleeping in his bed with him.

Charles is resistant about it at first, but as with his previous pregnancy, it’s not always easy. The nausea has mostly abated now, which is earlier than it even had with David. He has to use the bathroom a lot more with two babies pressing on his bladder but has managed to thankfully avoid any infections and doesn’t need to take any extra medication. It’s a scare when he is six months pregnant that prompts David to practically move into his bedroom.

He is asleep at the time, dreaming, unsurprisingly, of Erik. It is a dream this time, not a nightmare. They are in the hotel room in Paris laying down facing one another. Erik is staring at him, not saying anything, just staring with a ghost of a smile on his lips. Charles reaches out and brushes stray locks of hair off his forehead. He knows it’s not real, but he can feel the texture of the auburn strands on his fingertips, can feel the warmth radiating off his skin, can feel the brush of his breaths against his palm. Erik moves his hand down to Charles’ swollen stomach, something they’ve never experienced together in real life and probably never will. His hand is a solid weight, caressing their unborn children and tears prickle at Charles’ eyes. This is one of the side-effects of telepathy that could be a pro or a con. His dreams are always so vivid, almost recollections more
than anything else, and beyond that his perfect recall makes everything feel so real. It’s easy to get
lost in his dreamscape sometimes. It’s always made his nightmares particularly grueling to endure.

“Where are you?” Erik, (no, not Erik, Dream Erik) asks. Charles lets out a humorless chuckle.

“Where am I? Where are you? You’re the one who’s always leaving, not me.”

“You could’ve made me stay.” Charles scoffs a little.

“I could’ve made you stay?” He repeats incredulously.

“It’s your power, not mine. I didn’t have the helmet on. You could’ve convinced me of anything,”
Dream Erik says. His voice is smooth and deep as he brushes his knuckles over Charles’ cheek. He
shivers at the too real feeling of goosebumps forming on his skin and struggles for a moment to
remember this is just a dream.

“I couldn’t—”

“You took over my body to move the debris from yourself.”

“You dropped a part of a baseball stadium on me. I couldn’t breathe,” Charles points out dryly.

“It would’ve been easy to tweak something around just that little bit,” Dream Erik continues as if
he hadn’t spoken.

“I didn’t mean I physically couldn’t. What would’ve been the point? I don’t want to force you to
stay, I want...’ Charles’ voice breaks and he stops speaking, looking down at his distended
stomach rather than Dream Erik’s eyes.

“Tell me,” he hedges.

Charles wants to tell him. He wants to lay himself bare and let the pieces fall where they may. He’s
so desperate to just tell Erik every and anything. It’s been weighing on him for too long, ten years
too long.

But this is not Erik, he reminds himself.

“Does it matter? You said it yourself, human nature is too complicated for anything to be binary.
Good and evil, love and hate, real and fiction, there are so many fine lines between it all. I’m here,
you’re here. Everything else is just... confetti.” A laugh startles its way out of him.

“Confetti?” Charles repeats with amusement.

“Yes. It can all just fall away.” Charles shoots Dream Erik a sad smile.

“Not everything can just fall away,” Charles points out, placing a hand over where Dream Erik is
still holding his stomach. They are silent for a long while before Dream Erik speaks.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” The vulnerability in this mental creation’s voice mirrors Erik’s that
night in Paris so much that Charles feels like a spear has been thrown through his chest.

“I was... you saw how I was that night, in this room. You saw how much I needed you, needed
something to keep me grounded, to let me know all of this was real and I was out of that prison
where I was alone and couldn’t feel my powers, couldn’t talk to anyone worth speaking to. You
know that. You know that because I know that.”
“I know,” Charles nods, feeling his eyes grow misty.

“If you had told me about him then, I would’ve stayed.” Charles lets out a sharp breath before speaking, his doubt seeping into his words.

“Would you have though? Sometimes... sometimes, I wonder if David would’ve been enough for you, if these babies would be enough. I wasn’t... I wasn’t enough.”

“That is not what it was.” Dream Erik protests.

“Wasn’t it? You thought I was a naïve, innocent child who would lead our kind straight to death and ruin. I suppose in some ways you were right. I let Sean and Alex and my students go straight to their deaths when I could’ve saved them. I let you go, I let Raven go, I let David down—”

“The past. These... insecurities are things of the past now.”

“They never go away. It doesn’t matter if no liquor has past my lips in months or the serum has no place in my life anymore, it’s always lurking in the background. Not just insecurities, but mistakes and losses too. They are as real to me as anything else has been. But... but I need to let go. I can’t bring these babies into the world with shackles on their feet, not the way I did to David. I want you, I do, but I can’t... I can’t need you anymore. I can’t let myself fall apart without you again. I owe my children more than that. I owe Hank and Betsy more than that.”

“So why are we here?”

“Just because I can’t let myself need you doesn’t mean I don’t want you still. You…” Charles clarifies, before trailing off again.

“Tell me. It’s just you and me. Anything you say is safe here. No one needs to know,” the other man reassures him.

“You’re the only person I’ve ever loved this way. Truly, deeply loved. Probably the only person I ever will. That terrifies me because you hurt me, in so many ways. You left me more than once. And I hurt you too. I turned my back on you. I don’t know how to fix it. I don’t know if it can be fixed,” Charles admits, letting a tear run down his face. Erik, not Erik, Dream Erik, whichever, reaches out and wipes his tear away.

“Soon. One day soon, we’ll be together again.”

“You can’t promise me that. You of all people, if that’s even what you are, cannot promise me that.”

“Once upon a time, I knew a young graduate overflowing with hope. Dig deep, find some of that and hold on to it until I come back. Because I will come back. I just need time and you do too I think.”

“Maybe.” Dream Erik brushes his fingers through Charles’ long hair and leans forward before pressing a chaste kiss to his lips. Charles takes a moment to savor the press of lips, so sweetly familiar before his analytical mind takes over.

“Wouldn’t this be considered autoerotic stimulus?” Charles questions. Dream Erik’s lips pull into a smirk.

“Are you so academically inclined you can’t just say masturbation? And this is your mind, you know, you make it what you want. But if a dream is dubious at best for you, it could just be a
The room flips around him suddenly. It takes Charles a moment to realize the room hasn’t change, he is just now on his stomach, his flat stomach. His sweaty skin sticks almost uncomfortably to the sheets beneath him and to the shirt trapping his arms behind his back. He is at a loss of where he is for a moment, then a familiar hand is holding his neck and chin, a familiar weight is pushing down on him as Erik thrusts inside him roughly and he remembers their night in Paris. This is one of the upsides to eidetic memory, being able to remember the good, pleasurable moments in his life with perfect clarity and telepathically recreating it, feeling it.

Charles groans at Erik’s harsh movements. This memory is of the first time they had sex that night. Charles wanted it hard and fast, wanted to feel something that would leave marks, evidence that this was real. Erik had needed the release as well. Staying stagnant in one place and then being thrown headlong into a save-the-future mission there was a well of emotion he needed to pour into something and Charles was willing.

His moans deepen as Erik drives in harder. And he knows it’s a dream, somewhere deep down he knows, but it’s too much and it’s all he wants right now. It’s his head anyway, who will it hurt to get lost in it a little?

“Tell me,” Erik says, just like he had that night. And just like that night, Charles doesn’t answer. Erik pulls out and turns him on his back. He grips a handful of Charles hair, pressing open kisses to his throat before he pushes into him again.

“Oh god,” he chokes out.

“Tell me, tell me you missed me,” Erik demands, echoing his previous demands.

“I missed you. I missed you. Erik, please,” Charles begs. His body is thrumming with pleasure as he feels, actually feels when Erik hits his prostate. He whimpers pathetically, but there is something else, something different, something that wasn’t there before. He ignores it and reaches up to hold Erik’s cheek.

“I missed you, I did. Don’t leave, please,” Charles says, letting the words to flow from his lips even as his chest constricts like it didn’t before. Erik kisses him harshly, not allowing their lips to part more than a second. It’s hot and too close, it’s too much and Charles can’t breathe. He can’t breathe.

*I can’t breathe!*

He pulls away from Erik’s lips, mumbling the words over and over.

“I can’t breathe. I can’t breathe. I can’t breathe.” It’s eerily reminiscent to when he was lying on a Cuban beach. For a second, he’s there on the sand with the sun beaming down on him, looking into Moira’s sad eyes telling her that he can’t feel his legs, but in a blink it’s gone and he’s staring at Dream Erik again whose eyes are wide.

“You need to wake up,” he informs him. Charles clutches his chest in panic.

*Can’t breathe, can’t breathe, can’t breathe.*

“Wake up!”

Charles’ eyes fly open, taking in the dark silhouettes in his room before his burning lungs take precedence over acclimating himself back into reality. He still can’t breathe. He pushes himself up,
trying to sit up and feels hands assisting him. He looks up and sees David’s fearful eyes swimming above him.

“Hold on.” David moves off the bed, flicks on the lamp and then bustles back over to Charles, placing pillows behind him to help him sit up. It helps minutely, but it still feels like he isn’t getting enough air to his lungs. His heart pounds painfully in his chest and his head feels like it’s pounding as well. He’s sweating and his nerves are tingling uncomfortably throughout his body. He doesn’t know what’s happening, but he’s afraid. Suddenly, David is by his side clutching his hands.

“It’s alright. Uncle Hank and Betsy are coming. They’re going to be here any minute. Just try to breathe. In through your nose, out through your mouth. Calm your mind and focus on breathing,” David coaches. Charles would laugh at his 11-year-old using his words to try to calm him, but he needs it, so he squeezes his hands back and tries to focus on calming himself down. Panicking isn’t going to help.

He’s not sure how long it takes for Hank and Betsy to burst into the room and then take him down to the lab. They hook him up to an oxygen machine and give him a mild tranquilizer, but it still takes an hour before the attack abates.

David stays by his side the whole time, clutching his hand. Charles holds his hand back, not willing to admit how fearful he is, but also not willing to let go of the comfort his son’s proximity is providing. Hank runs all manner of tests while Betsy and David try to keep him calm and focused on breathing.

“I’ve run tests. Everything looks normal now. The babies aren’t in any distress. Your heart rate and blood pressure are still a little high, but that could just be anxiety,” Hank says, sitting on the edge of his desk.

“Do you know what happened?” Betsy asks, squeezing Charles’ shoulder comfortingly.

“If I had to give my best guess, I would say it might be autonomic dysreflexia. It’s the most common complication that pregnant individuals with spinal cord injuries experience.”

“What is that? What does it mean?”

“It’s an abnormal response which occurs when your body is experiencing pain or discomfort below the level of your spinal cord injury. Probably Braxton-Hicks contractions in this case. The signals for pain or discomfort don’t get to the brain because of the spinal cord injury. As a result, the body’s blood pressure increases to dangerous levels. That explains the hypertension. It can also cause bradycardia, slowing of the heart rate, or in this case tachycardia, abnormally fast heart rate. In rare cases, it can cause respiratory distress. It doesn’t help that you were asleep at the time. The babies are already pressing on your lungs at the best of times, not giving your lungs enough room to expand fully and properly oxygenate your blood and tissues which can cause hypoxemia or hypoxia in the long-term if not monitored properly. It’s worse when you’re lying down, especially if you’re on your back, it can cause the asthma-like attack that we saw tonight. I’m going to monitor you, but as long as nothing changes for the worse, you can go back to your room tomorrow.”

“Thank you, Hank,” Charles mumbles behind his oxygen mask, appreciating his friend’s matter-of-fact tone. It helps to have things laid out before him as plainly as possible. He knows what’s wrong and what needs to be tackled, he doesn’t have to dwell on what-ifs.

“You almost died,” David says almost accusingly as Hank returns to his work and Betsy goes to
her bedroom at Charles’ prompting.

“That’s an exaggeration. You heard Hank, it’s common.” David shoots him a small glare.

“You couldn’t breathe. You were so afraid that you screamed for me in your head.” Charles didn’t remember that, but it clearly left David shaken.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to startle you, my darling.” David’s lips purse like that wasn’t what he wanted to hear before his face turns up in determination.

“I’m staying with you.” Charles tuts in disapproval.

“It’s a school night. You need your sleep.”

“Not here, though I’m not leaving, I’ll sleep here. I meant your room. I’m moving into your room until the babies are born. I’m gonna make sure nothing happens to you,” David says, nodding his head slightly as if the decision was made final with that one gesture. Charles raises an amused eyebrow.

“Darling—”

“What if you can’t call me next time? I’m staying where I can watch you.” Charles is about to point out he’s not David’s child before Hank speaks up.

“It’s not a bad idea. I’ll leave an oxygen machine in your room too to help, but someone should be with you at night to make sure you stay off your back and nothing happens while you sleep, especially if you’re going to be having Braxton-Hicks contractions that could lead to more episodes of autonomic dysreflexia or respiratory distress.” David shoots Hank a smile before moving to cuddle to Charles’ side.

“It's just for nighttime. I’ll come to your room with my pillows so you can keep yours. Plus, you can read me my stories at night, so I benefit too other than just making sure you're okay.”

“Sounds like a solid deal to me,” Hank backs up from his computer. David smiles in his direction again.

“See? Uncle Hank agrees.” Charles opens his mouth and then closes it again before shrugging.

“And so he does. How could I deny you with such an endorsement?”

~*~*~

After that scare, Charles continues as normal. David’s pregnancy was difficult too, but the twins are especially murder on his back. The nausea is still prevalent but not as much as it was with David and while he is in pain, it’s not as debilitating. He thinks it probably helps that he is not recovering from his spine injury while pregnant. The emotional wounds were still raw then too. He wasn’t in a good space, physically or mentally, for his pregnancy to be anything besides another source of pain. This time around, he takes things much more easily. He self-imposes bedrest on himself even though Hank says the babies are healthy and Charles is doing as well as can be expected. He doesn’t want to take any unnecessary risks. Besides the anomaly of being a pregnant man, having twins increases the risk of complications occurring. Being a recovering alcoholic and drug addict increases the risks too, so does his paraplegia and his age. The arrival of 1974 saw Charles turn 42 years old. David, unwittingly, increases some of Charles’ worries by telling him about things he’s read that states pregnancy in older women could lead to negative side effects to their children: physical disabilities, mental retardation or developmental delays, increased risk of
stillbirths. Charles decides then and there to live as stress-free and relaxed as possible. David proves to be a huge source of relief there.

Having David in his room doesn’t prove to be such a bad thing. Every night David shows up with his pillows, a book and a tray of tea. They sit down and chat over a cup before Charles reads a chapter to or with David, who falls asleep most nights to the sound of Charles’ voice. It feels like he’s getting precious moments he wasted back. There are still several nights where David wakes him up so he can turn on his side or helps him with his oxygen machine after Charles wakes unable to breathe, but he does feel better about it knowing he isn’t alone and it helps to mend his relationship with David all the more.

Tonight, just as every night for the past couple months, David walks into his room precisely at 9 pm with a pillow under each arm. Two floating trays proceed him into the room, one holding a ceramic pot stewing with chamomile tea and two teacups and the other holding bowls of fresh strawberries and melted chocolate. A book floats into the room behind him. He has been getting much better with his telekinesis thanks to the combined efforts of Betsy’s tutelage and Charles’ encouragement. David pours Charles a cup with a few drops of honey and takes his own with two cubes of sugar before settling in beside him.

They usually talk about any and everything they can think of: David’s school day, any upcoming events or tests, sometimes Charles tells him stories about his childhood. David has gotten more and more curious about Raven now that he is going to be a big brother. Charles isn’t sure he’s the best person to council him on that seeing as how his sister ran from home, but he’s got Cain as an example of a brother that’s so much worse than himself. He knows David will never be anything close to that and Charles has never been either, so he can at least give himself a pat on the back there.

They are quiet for a moment, a lull in their conversation punctuated by sipping and chewing, before David speaks again.

“Have you thought of names?”

“It’s still two months away from their birth, but I thought you might like to name them.” David’s eyes light up at that.

“Really?”

“Yeah. I’m gonna need help with them, especially when I reopen the school. Who better than their big brother?” David sits back thinking about it as Charles dips a strawberry in the chocolate.

“Do you remember my fifth-grade teacher, Ms. Mayberry?”

“Vaguely,” he answers truthfully.

“She was my favorite teacher. Her mind was so… bright. She really loved us and believed in all of us. I still see her sometimes. I used to talk to her sometimes about my feelings and about us, nothing specific, but she always gave me great advice, encouraged me. Her first name is Lorna. I really like that name.”

“Lorna. I like that too. What about your brother?” David is quiet for a long while. Charles patiently waits him out, half of his attention grabbed by the food beside him, so he is startled when David does speak.

“Magnus Jakob with a ‘k’. That’s our father’s middle name and our other grandfather’s name,
right? I have your grandfather and father’s name as my first and middle name, so…” Charles is taken aback. This is the first time David has ever acknowledged Erik as his father and the first time it’s anything approaching positive.

“I think that’s a wonderful idea,” Charles says, not trying to let on how surprised yet pleased he is.

“Lorna’s middle name can be Edith then, after our grandmother. That way, their names mean something important, just like mine.” Charles pulls David towards him, pressing a kiss to his head.

“You’re so smart, you know that?” David gives him a pleased smile.

For the first time, it strikes Charles that this is his new normal. He isn’t craving alcohol or the serum to shut the world out, or gorging on his own pain, or thinking about what he’s missing. Instead, he’s thinking about what he is gaining and his future. That fact fills him with pride at his own accomplishment and he settles into the moment.

~*~*~

Just as with David, Lorna and Magnus are born via cesarean section performed by trained doctors who forget about what took place the moment they leave the manor. When Charles groggily comes to, his head swimming from the anesthesia and his stomach aching from the surgery, Betsy is at his side.

“Finally awake, sleeping beauty? I thought you were going to stay knocked out, sleep the night away,” she comments once his eyes are open.

“Giving birth is tiring work, you know.”

“I don’t actually. What a world we live in where you do,” she jokes, turning towards him so he can see the bundle in her hands.

“Magnus,” she states, handing the baby over to him.

The child blinks up at Charles with Erik’s eyes, his hair a peach fuzz of light auburn atop his head. Charles takes a moment to take him in, absorb the weight of him in his arms as a tangible entity, another precious thing that he and Erik has managed to create from all the mess between them. He smiles down at his son and presses a light kiss to his forehead.

“Lorna?” He asks. Betsy nods to Charles’ left. David is lightly dozing in a reclining chair with a second bundle in his arms. When Lorna fusses a little, David shakes awake, rocking the baby like he has been doing it forever. David had taken his role so seriously that he checked out baby magazines from the library and took in all the information he could. The young telepath smiles at Charles when he realizes he is awake.

“Papa!” He somehow manages to exclaim it and whisper it at the same time, mindful of scaring the twins. Charles nods him over with a smile.

“Lorna has green hair,” David informs him offhandedly as he approaches and sits next to Charles on the bed. The older man raises an eyebrow at the non sequitur and glances at his daughter who has more hair than either of her brothers did at birth, bright green hair and Erik’s eyes. Charles takes a moment to lament that genetics seems to have deemed his eyes undesirable in comparison to his former lover before staring down at Lorna and Magnus a moment more and reaching the same kind of awareness he did when David was born. Lorna will be a mutant, though he doesn’t know what her powers will be. Magnus will remain baseline, but that hardly matters in Charles’ eyes. All he feels the longer he looks at them is an overwhelming sense of love overshadowing any
lingering doubts or fears he’s had since DC and Paris. He feels like he is in a better place than he’s been in years. He’s clean and sober. He has a goal to work towards for the future with the school. And now he has two new members of his family, little souls who will be counting on him for everything. He knows he won’t make the same mistakes of the past.

“They are both perfect,” he declares, leaning over to press a kiss to Lorna’s forehead as well before pulling David into his side.

“I will never leave you, my dears,” he whispers to them, echoing the same promise he made to David when he was born. This time, he intends to keep it.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!