One Man's Worth

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Summary

(Post X-3/DoFP Compliant) In a race through time, one man must change the course of the future. But what does this stranger known as Bishop really want? Can the X-Men help him or will suspicion tear their world apart? (A Movieverse take on the ultimate RoLo cartoon "One Man's Worth". Don’t look for consistency here, you won’t find it.)

Notes

I wrote this on the Rolo Realm forever ago and decided I’d transfer it here. This is actually one of my favorite stories that I have ever written and since it's complete, regular updates will definitely be happening. I will also add the one-shot I did to accompany this story at a later date.

I hope you enjoy my silly take on One Man's Worth!
Another Time, Another Place

The sleek, metallic halls were home to him, calling to the need inside of him to constantly seek protection. It was something like a home, a den of man-made metals. Inside there was safety, hope, and all those things the aging, weary priests insisted on screaming to the fiery heavens.

“We don’t have much time,” said his companion as they dashed down the halls. “They’ll discover us at any moment.”

“They won’t break the lines,” rumbled the younger of the pair.

A worn keypad was manipulated by the genius beside him and the young companion’s heart began to pound within his breast. His entire life he had fought for a cause, even before he understood what that cause might be. They had taught him tolerance in the face of bigotry, love in the wake of devastation, peace in a lifetime of war.

“Father!”

The smaller man turned from his watchful post beside the enormous machine. It dwarfed anything in the room, making even the large young man feel miniscule and unworthy. His father, however, still seemed larger than life. Perhaps it was that way for all children, even as they grew into adulthood.

There was always something so comforting, strengthening about his father’s presence. He would have given good money to have him along on this perilous and insane trip. It was right up Father’s alley, really.

But there was only enough in the machine for one. He had to do this alone or not at all. He had been training for this moment ten years. Failure was not an option, not with so much at stake. If it killed him, he would succeed.

“Hey, kid,” his father said, voice tight. “You ready?”

“No,” he shook his head with a small smile. “But I will go.”

“I know,” Father said warmly, reaching out to shake his hand. “You’ll make us all proud.”

There was something more than pride in Father’s words. Hope, which always seemed just a little alien from his voice, shone through now. The young man took the bracelet from his companion, nodding when the elder explained several things about this monumental trip.

Inside this room, where the machine had been created through the order of the men they fought, was the barest hint of heroism and bravery. Whatever happened, these two would go on to tell generations about one man’s sacrifice.
Of course, he didn’t plan on losing anything, no matter what Father and Mother tried to tell him. He could be as just as damn stubborn as they were.

“I’ll tell the girls you said goodbye,” Father grinned, pulling his son closer for a quick, masculine embrace.

“Tell them I love them,” he whispered, clinging to his father for a moment longer than he needed to.

“Be careful, son.”

“Goodbye, Father.”

“Go, now!” Forge ordered.

“GO!” Father hollered a moment later. Scraping of metal on metal and the whine of machinery rang through the metallic corridor. They had been discovered. Time, it would seem, was up.

Father shoved him in the general direction of the contraption as he grabbed the laser-gun from its holster. As he ran toward the machine, he fired several rounds, providing cover for his father until the last possible moment.

“Go, son!” Father shouted over the din of battle, turning to watch his son with sorrow in his eyes. “GO!”

Bishop fired two last shots, capturing the image of his father in his mind before closing his eyes and stepping into the machine. Sound faded into a dull, robotic murmur as his body fought to stay in one piece while being ripped through time.

He knew, without his father saying, that he would never see him again.

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The Here and Now

Ororo Munroe stomped through the halls of Xavier’s Institute for Higher Learning with thunder rolling in her wake. In the two months since she had taken over the position of Headmistress at the exclusive mutant school, everything seemed to collapse the moment her back was turned.

Her companions, as usual, were of little help. Henry McCoy, whom had resigned from his post as Secretary of Mutant Affairs to rejoin the team in the battle with Magneto and Phoenix, declined an offer to become a U.N. Ambassador. He lived back at the school now, teaching several courses while making nice with the Wolverine.

Wolverine. Ororo snarled to herself. Though she was happy to have the help during the start of the school year, the man was beginning to make an ass out of himself. Not a day went by when he wasn’t banging on her office door with a list of problems she needed to fix now.

She often entertained ideas of tossing his adamantium-laced body into the lake and bringing down the Artic to Westchester.

If her companions were not driving her quickly up the wall, her new generation of X-Men was
testing the very limits of her self-control.

Bobby Drake, Katherine Pryde, and Piotr Rasputin had been officially inducted after their display of power at Alcatraz. Now, it seemed, they believed they needed to guidance, no adult to watch over them on missions. That was swiftly going to come to an end if Ororo had to strip them all of their recently acquired positions.

And she did not even want to get started on Marie. That girl had been nothing but a thorn in her side since returning to the mansion cured of mutation. It was a constant fight between both Storm and Wolverine as to whether or not the girl could stay on at the mansion. Ororo felt that she could return to her family while Logan viciously fought back that they were supposed to be teaching tolerance.

Storm argued that they needed the space; Logan shouted that they still had a wing they could open up if the need arose.

In two months, they were still stalemated.

Ororo slammed into her office, kicking her door closed as she rounded on Hank and Logan. Both men were lounging casually in her office, chatting amicably as they awaited her arrival to start the daily staff meeting. Ororo on the other hand, was covered with frog intestines.

"Henry. Peter. McCoy." Each word had a deliberate threat and punctuated by a massive clap of thunder.

"Good Lord, Storm, whatever happened?" Henry stood as though to aid her.

Ororo put a hand up to silence him, trying in vain to control her temper. With her free hand, she gestured to the bloody green mess covering her new gray suit.

"This is what happens when you leave supplies out in a school filled with teenagers," she explained as though speaking to an infant. "Go. Clean. It. Up. Now."

Hank blinked at her for several moments, unable to speak. He must have caught the murder in her eyes, for he excused himself a moment later.

Ororo shrugged out of her jacket, ignoring Wolverine’s presence and tossed the ruined material into a corner of the expansive room. She could feel his eyes on her back as she turned on him, unbuttoning her blouse as she stepped into the washroom where she kept a spare change of clothes.

"You wanna talk about it?"

"No," she snapped from the bathroom, throwing her shirt out into the office.

"Ok." He refused to press, as always. "If yer gonna striptease, at least do it where I can see."

Ororo ducked her head into the office and glared at him for all she was worth. The Wolverine gave her a broad grin around his cigar, winking playfully. She had to pull her head back into the bathroom before she laughed. It was irritating that he kept doing that.

Though she was often annoyed with him – not to mention everyone else lately – a part of her was thrilled that he opted to halt his wandering ways. Staying on with the X-Men, she felt, was a selfish move on his part. But he tried, every day, to make his place here among them. Their blue, furry
friend, she felt, was an essential part to his integration.

After pulling on faded Xavier sweats and a matching hoodie, she came back into the office. Instead of taking her usual place behind her departed mentor’s desk, Ororo plopped onto the sofa beside Logan.

“You look like you need a drink.” He observed almost immediately.

With her eyes closed, Ororo smiled swiftly. “I need several of them as well as a big-biceped Latin lover named Julio to feed me grapes and rub my feet.”

When Logan did not respond, she opened her eyes, head resting against the back of the sofa. Logan was staring at her as though she’d grown another head. Unable to contain it, she chuckled slightly, feeling a little better about her day.

Losing Scott and Jean had been difficult for her. In all of her life, she had never had siblings until coming to Xavier’s School. The young weather witch had found an instant family in Scott, Jean, and darling Henry. They had shared in everything. To have that so horribly taken away was cruelty on hellacious levels.

But nothing compared to losing Charles. Her mentor, father, friend…Charles had taken her from the idolatry of the tribes in southern Kenya and given her purpose, a mission. That mission got her out of bed every morning, even in the beginning when even breathing caused her heart to ache.

It still hurt, but every day that hurt bled away a little more. She put on a brave face for the children and her colleagues. Somehow she was sure that neither Hank nor Logan completely believed it. Hank especially knew what her family meant to her. Family, in her mind, was everything.

While she was lost in her thoughts, Logan had sat up, looking around in that eerie manner he had that she likened to a skittish deer. She could hear him sniffing the air and was surprised when he stood, moving in front of her as though to protect her.

“Logan?”

“Somethin’ ain’t right in here,” he replied softly. “Shh.”

Clamping her mouth shut at his prompting, Ororo moved to stand as well, staying behind the over-alert cover her friend provided.

“Get down!”

He barely gave her time to gasp in shock. Logan tackled her to the sofa, toppling it so they could use it for cover. He cradled her in his arms, holding her head down as though he expected to absorb some kind of blow.

A beat later, terrible noise flooded the room. It sounded as though the very air were fighting, battling over which particular atom belonged in each individual space. The furious molecules suddenly restricted breath. Both mutants fought to breathe. Ororo clung to her teammate as unnatural winds kicked up, threatening to sweep them both away.

Snikt! She heard his claws extend and watched him bury the lethal adamantium into the polished floorboards. He used the extensions of his body to hold them both in place as papers and furniture
whipped around the room.

“Are you doing that?” He shouted over the roar.

“No! It is not natural!” She replied, trembling in his embrace.

And then, as quickly as it had started, the winds ceased. Papers rustled to the floor and glass shattered as it fell from the suddenly still air.

Wind tousled and confused, Logan retracted his claws, keeping Ororo behind him as he stood. She peered over his broad shoulders, startled to find a full-grown man standing in the very center of her office.

His back was facing them, his towering frame somewhat enhanced by the decimated room. He wore clothing of worn black leather; his long dark hair tossed over one shoulder. Ororo gripped Logan’s arm, trying to keep him calm.

The stranger turned then, revealing a determined young face and soulful obsidian eyes. In his hands was a contraption that could have been a weapon, but unlike anything she had ever seen.

“Who are ya? And what the fuck are you doin’ in here?” Logan demanded, clenching his hands into fists.

As if shocked by the words, the stranger did not speak. He looked from one to the other, sizing them up even as Ororo stood to her full height and met his dark gaze.

“Start talkin’, bub,” Logan growled. “While ya still can.”

“I would listen to him,” Ororo chimed in. “He has a short fuse.”

“I’m Bishop,” the man said in a quiet tone. “I’m from the future.”

Ororo felt her eyebrows fly into her hairline as Logan turned his head to meet her eyes. She shrugged slightly, squeezing his arm to let him know she was just as confused. Her friend slowly released six weapons from their hiding place, raising them just as deliberately.

“Put it away, Wolverine,” Bishop said pointedly. “You might not believe me, but I’m not leaving until my mission is done. Call the others. There’s something you all need to hear.”

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From his place in the underground War Room, Logan watched the stranger with guarded eyes. There was something familiar about this kid. Not in his features or his manner, but in the scent. Something…comforting that he couldn’t quite place.

The man was really just a boy, maybe a little older than Pete and Bobby. But there was a hardened look to this pup, as though he’d lived a life that he shouldn’t have. His face was marred by a long “M” shaped tattoo that covered his right eye.

He stared straight ahead while Storm called the others into the X-Men’s meeting hall. Occasionally, though, Logan caught the youngster glancing at him or Storm. There was something like recognition
in his gaze, but of what Logan couldn’t begin to fathom.

From his gear, Logan pegged him as a warrior. His stance was almost predatory, his eyes obviously trained to take in anything and everything. This was a man that fought for a living.

“This man, who claims his name is Bishop, just appeared in my office,” Storm was saying imperiously to the assembled group. “He claims to be from the future.”

“I don’t claim anything,” Bishop fired back. “I am from the future.”

“I fear you must prove that, my boy,” Hank cut in, his voice still typically cheerful. “Claims that one is from or has knowledge of the future are usually not so easily believed.”

“I can’t say too much or I might change history in a way that wouldn’t be in our favor,” Bishop said cautiously. “How would you like me to prove it?”

“What are next week’s lottery numbers?” Logan asked without missing a beat.

“Wolverine.” Storm shook her head slightly. He grinned. She rolled her eyes.

“Look, I don’t have time to sit here trying to prove something to you.” Bishop sighed.

One look around the table told both Bishop and Wolverine that he wasn’t going to have any time to do what he came for until they were convinced that he happened to be from the future. Storm already looked more than suspicious while Hank genuinely curious.

The younger X-Men just seemed confused.

“Ok,” Bishop gave in. “Fine. What’s today’s date?”

Ororo recited it for him quickly. The man’s eyes widened slightly; Logan could almost see him calculating something in his head before he replied.

“That’s the day…” The dark man chuckled. “Ok, Storm?”

She raised a solitary white brow in answer.

“You got frog intestines spilled all over you because two students – Max and Emily – blew up Dr. McCoy’s case for his Biology class.”

“Any spy could have seen that just an hour ago.” She countered, narrowing her eyes.

“Ok,” he continued. “In about a minute, the mansion’s main line will ring. It’ll be Nightcrawler calling for Rogue. After that phone call, she’ll be very upset. She will demand to be taken to Germany for several weeks.”

As if on cue, the dull ring of the mansion’s telephone line rang throughout the underground chamber. Logan grabbed the receiver from the wall, barking the greeting Ororo insisted they all use.

“Yeah,” he said upon hearing Kurt’s audibly distraught tone. “I’ll get her.”

He waited until Rogue had picked up her end of the phone, cradling the receiver carefully. When he
faced Bishop again, he caught a moment of complete vulnerability in the man’s ebony eyes. He had left something – or someone – he cared about a great deal to come back here.

Logan went with his gut. “I believe him.”

“Logan,” Ororo sighed. “This is impossible.”

“Not really,” Bishop said, still looking at Wolverine. “In fact, Dr. McCoy here already knows several people working on the theory.”

Hank’s face broke into an immediate grin. “Forge? He’ll…”

Bishop smirked, putting a single finger to his lips as though telling Hank to keep his mouth shut about certain things. Hank, for his part, closed his mouth quickly while looking ready to burst from the inside out.

“Let us suspend all reality for a moment and say I believe you,” Storm said coldly. “What is this mission so important that one must time-travel to complete it?”

For several seconds, Bishop did not speak. He did, however, turn to face the X-Men’s leader all traces of his vulnerability gone. “To stop a war we’ve been fighting since I was five years old.”

“What war?” Logan questioned.

“The one that gave me this,” he indicated to the scar on his face. “It’s the brand of a mutant, we all had to get them when I was a kid. The Rebellion broke out shortly after. We’ve been fighting ever since.”

“You have come back to prevent the war from happening altogether?” Hank asked, looking hard at the young man.

“Yeah,” Bishop said, determination taking over his face again. “It’s torn North America apart, thousands have been killed, on both sides.”

They sat for a moment in utter silence. Logan felt, for the first time, that this is what Xavier had been fighting to prevent. A war on that magnitude was something no one needed to be part of. Was that what lie ahead for them? Death and destruction the likes of which the world had never seen?

“There was a catalyst around this time, or that’s what our research has determined,” Bishop continued a moment later. “I’ve come back to ensure it doesn’t happen.”

“How do we know it won’t make things worse?” Bobby interrupted for the first time. “You could just wipe out all mutants or something.”

Bishop stood slowly to his full, massive height. He glared at the young X-Man, his eyes nearly glowing as he did so.

“Boy,” he growled insultingly. “I left my parents -- my family -- behind to complete this mission. I won’t see them again. Hell, by the end of this I may not exist. I’m sure. I’m damn sure.”

Bobby swallowed hard and looked back down at the table.
Ororo cut in again smoothly. “Bishop? What is this catalyst?”

For a long, tense moment, the man did not speak. When he did, it was with conviction and a hint of sorrow.

“I don’t know. I honestly don’t know.”
Enemies

Chapter Summary

Bishop warns the X-Men of an upcoming battle, but an injury during the fight makes things all too clear for Henry McCoy.

Chapter Two: Enemies

Against the gently rolling hills that bled into the thick, untamed forest, there was the image of peace and family in this place. A scion of knowledge, of tolerance, of understanding the likes of which no human had provided before and likely never would again. Charles Xavier had died, yes, but his dream lived on.

The dark man watched from his high window as children laughed and played in the warm glow of dusk. Such things were alien to him. Never in his life had he played with such abandon, such security. Those things were tales of the past, fairy stories told to soothe away the fears when the concussion of explosives shattered the night and friends failed to come home.

Bishop placed a hand on the cool pane, closing his eyes briefly to relish the strange sound of carefree laughter. Football. He had never seen the game played this way before. It was as most things in his life: just another story from a better past.

Mother had taught him about things like this. She drilled into his head from an early age, before and during the days of war, how civilization had once operated. Though she had fought for mutant rights her entire life, she was not jaded by it. She refused to be. Her smile and warmth were ever present, creating this thing called hope deep inside his soul.

Father had taught him determination to fight; Mother taught him what he was fighting for.

His sister would have loved to see this. Bishop wished he could capture the image for her; to show his cynical sibling that everything they had been told was reality. He could almost imagine them here as children, playing in the grass as carefree children were supposed to.

He missed them. Of all the things he could possibly wish for, he wanted to see his beloved family again. Bishop was not a fool. He knew, even at the tender age of fifteen when they began training him for this mission, that the undertaking would ever alter his world.

It would take them from him. Forever.

“Mother.” He whispered to the quiet, envisioning her in his mind as he always saw her. Serene, beautiful, deadly.

There was much to do now, he mused opening his eyes once more to the frolicsome children out of
doors. Many seeming catalysts existed in this time and he had to explore each and every one of them to determine the cause of the war. The first, he knew, would happen in mere moments.

Collecting his plasma gun, Bishop poured some steel into his spine and forced himself to leave the window. Battle was on the horizon, which is why this day was selected, so his sentimentality would have to wait. The deaths of Xavier, Phoenix, and Cyclops had been dismissed at this catalyst when Storm took up the torch to lead the legendary X-Men.

She had no idea what that one impulsive decision had done. He knew. He could never tell her.

Striding from the bedroom he’d been given after several hours of shouted, angry words between Wolverine and Storm, he paused to listen for them. No matter what that uncanny duo did, they did it loudly. Some things never changed.

It took only seconds for the dulcet tones of Storm to reach his ears. She was just down the hall, moving closer with every step. Bishop faded into the shadows of a nearby alcove to listen, curious when his name immediately crossed her lips as she drifted into earshot.

“Bishop is a liability, Logan,” she was saying in that imperious tone. “We shouldn’t have him anywhere near the children.”

“What should we do with him?” Logan’s deep baritone rumbled in reply. “Give him a hearty slap on the back and show him the door?”

“Why, Wolverine,” Storm replied with obvious mocking. “That is the most intelligent thing I have ever heard leave your lips.”

“He’s from the flamin’ future, Storm,” Wolverine snarled back.

“So he claims,” she responded heatedly. “There are special places for people such as he. Bellevue immediately springs to mind.”

“You think the kid needs a padded cell?”

“I think he is a gun-toting psychopath.”

Bishop winced, a small smile curving his lips. Yes, she was definitely the woman he remembered. The woman had the sharpest tongue on the planet. He’d heard stories of how she could cow an entire regiment with one scornful comment.

“Heard that, Bishop?” Logan questioned with laughter in his voice as they came around the corner. “You hear that, Bishop?”

He did not have to see her face to know there was murder reflected in her dark eyes. Wolverine had the mysterious knack for getting under her skin. She would have expected him to warn her that the man they spoke of was within sniffing range.

Bishop was relatively sure that was a deliberate mistake on the other man’s part.

Stepping from the shadows, emotions quickly covered, Bishop shouldered his plasma rifle and inhaled deeply. “You should suit up.”
“Oh?” Storm crossed her arms over her chest, a defensive move. “And why is that?”

“Get the kids into the underground levels, seal off the entrances into the tunnels.” Bishop ordered, moving past her.

“Trouble?” Wolverine questioned, easily falling into step beside him.

“You have no idea.”

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Storm adjusted the collar of her leather uniform, ensuring that Marie had all of the instructions needed to care for the children. She hated taking anything like this on faith, but it was always better to be safe than sorry. That went doubly for anything having to do with the children entrusted to her care.

Once the lower levels were sealed with her X-Man passcode, Storm moved quickly upstairs. This entire situation set her teeth on edge. In her orderly, structured world things like time travel and strangers from the future were confined to the safety of paperbacks and film. Coming face to face with the impossible tweaked her nose slightly.

She did not believe this young man, at least not yet. Charles had always taught her to question herself and her perceptions. Personality, he told her, colored every viewpoint of everything in the world. It was why so many cultures and races could not get along for longer than a few years without someone’s opinion offending another.

When she reached the upper levels, Beast greeted her with a warm smile. She returned the gesture wanly, wanting to get this terrible charade over with. Whatever Bishop was certain would happen today was likely a fluke or just a ploy to make them believe him.

If she found out he had been wasting her valuable time, he would need several doctors and miles of duct tape to put his mangled body back together.

“Nothin’ yet,” Logan reported as he sauntered in from outdoors, where he’d been doing a preliminary smell-check.

Bishop stood in the exact center of the posh foyer, his hands gripping the odd weapon with white knuckles. There was no expression on his face as he stared straight ahead, but determination and righteousness seemed to radiate from him.

He was a handsome man, she admitted to herself. Even the horrible mark of a mutant over his eye was borne proudly, as though he refused to believe that mark was something to be ashamed of. For that Ororo could give him a slight nod of respect. He accepted what he was without apology or remorse.

During her long, silent inspection of him, the man had met her gaze. Ororo felt something swell between them, but his stubborn refusal to let anything show put a stop to it. His head tilted just slightly to the side.

“Duck.”
At Bishop’s single word, Ororo raised a brow. Wolverine moved to her, forcing her head down and covering her with his body. Annoyed, Storm opened her mouth to protest, hating the way he continually treated her as though she were made of precious crystal.

A heartbeat later, she was happy he had done so. Glass and splintered wood flew with bullet speed through the otherwise empty foyer. Bishop had not so much as flinched while the X-Men covered one another, the spray of what had once been the foyer door washing over him almost negligently.

Shadowcat darted forward, gripping the dark stranger and phasing him through the floor a beat before a laser sizzled through the air. Had he not been removed from that place, he would have taken the blast directly to the back.

When the girl and her charge reappeared, he rolled his eyes. “I needed that laser charge, Kitten.”

“Well,” Wolverine growled as his claws escaped their confinement. “I think our new friends have a few more for you.”

Bishop shrugged his arm from Kitty’s while raising his gun. “Whatever you do, don’t get dead.”

And then he was gone.

In a flurry of black leather and long, braided hair Bishop all but flew through the foyer’s decimated front door with the primeval grace of a predator. Electronic charges from his futuristic weaponry sang all around them as the X-Men scrambled to find their footing.

“Fan out!” Storm commanded her team. “Give Bishop cover, before he gets himself killed.”

They filed through the door together, moving as one sinuous unit. Storm leapt for the skies, the heavens crackling around her at their mistress’ command. She saw Beast and Wolverine flanking their unusual companion with Iceman, Shadowcat, and metallic Colossus bringing in the rear.

“Brotherhood!” Wolverine shouted as they met the remains of Magneto’s ill-fated army.

Storm launched herself higher, bringing down torrential rain and freezing winds upon the new battlefield. Mutants she could not recognize nor name flooded the expansive lawns of Xavier’s school, at least a dozen that she could see outright.

Her team fell on them with the force of a tsunami. They were well trained and used each other’s abilities flawlessly. Even Bishop fell into the formation, his laser weapon firing repeatedly.

She noticed, however, when several of them moved to counter him. Without pausing to think, Storm threw herself toward the ground, hovering just above Bishop’s head. A careless flick of her wrist, directing the screaming winds, tossed the mutant rebels across the lawns where they could not harm an X-Man.

To her surprise, Bishop glanced up at her almost causally. “That’s it?”

Suddenly irritated, Storm shook her head. “What did you expect? ‘Whirlwind from the heavens, engulf these misguided souls’?”

He had the audacity to smirk at her.
“It’s got a ring to it, Storm,” Wolverine tossed over his shoulder as he engaged a massive youth in hand-to-hand combat.

“So does “Holy bovine, Batman” but I don’t hear you shouting that!”

“Can we finish this later?” Iceman shouted from behind them. He drifted up toward Storm on his now patented iceslide. “What the hell do these guys want?”

All eyes seemed to turn to Bishop. Storm watched him grit his teeth, but his eyes were on her alone.

“They want the kid.” He said almost grudgingly. “Leech.”

“Jimmy,” Storm and Iceman said in unison.

She flipped her body backward, catching herself gracefully on the winds while Bobby rushed into the fray. Lightning tore the heavens apart, streaking onto the lawn as it attempted to strike at her opponents.

The other X-Men defended their home with the expertise borne of months in grueling training. She trusted them to take care of the home, of the children as well as she could. Launching herself further into the air, she brought down the chill of the Arctic, focusing the bitter cold on their advancing opponents.

From her position above, she was able to view the entire battle, calling out commands via the interlinked comm. badges each X-Man wore. She controlled the field from aloft, creating frozen hell conditions for their enemies. The X-Men were trained to fight in these conditions for a reason.

“Avalanche! Get that bitch out of the sky!”

At the unfamiliar call, Storm turned toward the sound. Violent shockwaves rippled the air, her winds crying out in something akin to pain at the unnatural invasion. She thrust her arms out to protect herself as the very air around her shivered.

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Hearing the crude command from behind enemy lines, Logan immediately ceased fighting. Something in that tone made his blood run cold in his veins. They may not have gotten along like best friends, but she was his teammate.

He slammed an adamantium fist into the face of some young pup attempting to take him down, his eyes scanning the turbulent skies for signs of the X-Men’s leader. Iceman and Colossus were taking down a duo of their own. Shadowcat was playing Ultimate Hide and Seek with several others too stupid to realize they had a snowball’s chance in hell at actually catching her.

Angel swooped in from whatever rock he’d been hiding under, collecting an opponent and dropping him sharply into the frigid lake. Beast grabbed the boy’s hand, hitching a ride across enemy lines where his rough, animalistic fighting style quickly broke their lines. Their bastardized version of a Fastball Special worked as flawlessly here as it did in the Danger Room.

What he could not find, however, was Storm or Bishop.
“WOLVERINE!”

At the younger mutant’s fateful call, Logan whipped around in time to see Storm freefalling from the sky.

“STORM!”

His cry rent the night, pausing most of the action as he tore across the sopping earth. He knew, before he started moving, that he would be too late to reach her. Her seemingly fragile form slammed into the rain-soaked earth, muddying her snow-white hair as she sank into the squashy grass.

Screaming with preternatural rage, Wolverine cut down anything in his path, his eyes focused on nothing but the frail form lying still in the thick mud. Someone called his name; a laser blast singed his shoulder. None of it mattered.

When he reached the unmoving body of Storm, he retracted his lethal claws and sank to his knees. Heedless to any injuries she might have sustained, he gathered her into his arms, shaking her none too gently.

“Wake up, woman,” he demanded as the X-Men closed in around them. “Come on, darlin’.”

“How is she?” Angel questioned as he hovered above.

Wolverine failed to respond as he brushed the dirty white locks from her already bruising face. Her flesh was cold under his fingers, body still lifeless in his arms. He leaned down, placing his ear over her mouth to listen for breathing.

“I hope,” came a raspy voice from the semi-comatose woman. “Someone hit that little bastard.”

“He’s down,” said Kitty with a menacing snarl. “For a week or two.”

Relief flooded Wolverine’s system. He stood, cradling her protectively to his chest. She melted in his arms, allowing him to carry her back toward the mansion. The others would clean up the mess. He would talk to Bishop about this entire thing later.

For now, he had to take care of their resident weather witch.

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Beast watched Wolverine carry Storm back into the mansion. She would require medical attention, to be certain, but something else weighed heavily on his mind. His eyes turned from the limp woman and her knight protector to the lone wolf standing in the wake of battle.

The battle had been swift, the enemy taken by surprise by the X-Men’s heightened state of readiness. Had Bishop not warned them, it could have ended far worse than it had.

Demoralized, the Brotherhood fled, carrying their wounded as fast as they could from the hallowed ground of Xavier’s School. Beast watched them leave, quietly posting three X-Men on watch until they were certain the coast was clear to bring the children out of the lower levels. Jimmy was safe, for now. Ororo had correctly assumed that someone would come for him. Henry doubted this would be the last attempt on the boy’s life.
All of this was pushed to the side as he came to stand beside the stoic Bishop. Though he did not know if he believed the man’s claims of knowledge from the future, he did feel a strange kinship with him. He reminded Beast of someone, though whom was elusive.

There was, however, the interesting development Beast had noticed during Storm’s dreadful fall. Bishop had halted in his tracks, horror overcoming the usually emotionless features. Beast had paused to take in this strange development and noticed something even more out of place.

For several seconds during that deadly plummet, Bishop had faded. It reminded the furry blue mutant of Shadowcat’s unique phasing ability. Disquiet passed over Hank’s heart as Bishop stared at his own fading form. Something more was happening here. Bishop was not disclosing all of the important information.

Yet, seconds later, the man snapped back into full focus. He seemed to breathe a sigh of relief. Beast decided he was going to get to the bottom of this.

“What?” He questioned, drawing the man’s attention.

“What?” The younger man replied testily.

“Would you like to explain that state of flux a few moments past?”

Bishop turned unfathomable eyes to the mutant scientist. “You already know the answer, Beast.”

The indigo man frowned, glancing toward the sky as though he expected the knowledge to fall into his lap. It was a futile gesture, he believed, but a wholly human one.

Bishop had gone into temporal flux as something was changed in the course of history. Had the Brotherhood succeeded this day? Was Jimmy killed in his timeline? Why would that have affected the man?

He paused. Jimmy was not the key here, he realized. It was only at Storm’s injury that he began to fade. Beast inhaled sharply.

“Oh my stars and garters.”

“Yeah.” Bishop said quietly. “Welcome to my world.”

~**~

New York City, New York

Injured and severely lacking conviction, the Brotherhood drifted into their apartment building where they set up headquarters, several moaning as they nursed various wounds. Going up against the X-Men was risky, but the surprise attack should have given them something in the way of an advantage.

Instead, they seemed to be awaiting the attack, flooding their manicured lawns like a force of nature. They were even better trained than at the fiasco they referred to as Alcatraz. When the Phoenix and Magneto had been destroyed, the Brotherhood banded together.

“What happened?”
Their leader came from the rickety staircase, surveying his mutant fighters with a swift glance. Arclight glared at him, laying the unconscious Avalanche on the tattered sofa. He was going to be out for a while and having such a powerful ally down for the count always got her panties in a bunch.

“They were waiting for us.”

“Impossible.” He countered her, gray-blue eyes afire with conviction.

“Yes?” Arclight shot back. “They were all in uniform, damn it. Avalanche almost died!”

“Perhaps you should be more selective of your lovers, my dear, if he is to be beaten by these uncouth whelps.”

She glared at him, coming across the room to stand toe to toe, ignoring the shocked murmuring of the mutants surrounding them. Since Callisto’s untimely death at the hands of that weather bitch, it was no secret that Arclight had an ulterior motive. She wanted Storm’s blood, at any cost, for taking her friend.

“They were expecting us,” she said slowly, menacingly. “Someone told them.”

“Only those that went on the mission were given prior knowledge,” he responded, looking around carefully. “Psylocke?”

The Asian beauty moved from behind their leader, her long violet hair slung over one slender shoulder. She looked through the entire team, letting her mind wash over each and every one of them. She delved inside, stealing secrets and discovering lies until no one could hide any longer.

“It was no one here,” the clipped British accent sounded odd from her olive lips. “They are loyal to you, to the Cause.”

“Good,” he said, clasping his hands behind his back.

“There is someone new at the school, though,” she continued. “A dark man with a tattoo above his eye.”

“Yes,” Arclight cut in. “Bishop by name.”

“Bishop?” He shook his head, pondering this new development. “I don’t recall that name.”

“We should investigate. Maybe he’s some kind of psychic that predicted the attack.” Arclight sighed, rubbing her temples with the fingertips of one hand.

“Yes, do so,” their leader commanded. “I want to know everything there is to know about this Bishop.”

“Yes, sir.”

The reconnaissance team split from the main body immediately, fading from the room as though they had never been there at all. Arclight watched their leader smile knowingly, fondly at his beloved disciples.
“You did well, in the face of such a foe.”

“Thank you, Magneto,” Arclight replied with a small smile.

He nodded to them, reaching out to touch Psylocke’s plump cheek as though stroking a beloved feline. The girl preened into the touch as Magneto’s mutation began to hum. He brought several vials to his hands via the metallic bands sealing the thick fluid inside. The mutant held the fragile glass up to the light, a slow, sinister smile curving his aging mouth.

“When the time comes,” he announced softly. “We will be ready for them.”

~**~

The not too distant future…

The child woke in the dead of night, panting and sweating as he ran from the dreams that threatened to consume him. He kicked his blankets off, taking his beloved, ratty teddy bear in his arms and popping his thumb into his mouth.

Mother and Father were speaking in low tones in the next room, comforting him with their mere presence. He tiptoed out of his room and down the hall. Neither of the questioned his wakeful state as he climbed eagerly into Mother’s lap.

Father reached over to touch his head in that paternal familiarity as Mother continued speaking.

“It has begun, then?” She asked of Father softly, her thumb idly stroking Lucas’ chubby cheek lovingly.

He leaned into her touch, letting it carry away all of his worries and the remnants of his terrible dreams. At least here, with them holding him, nothing was too horrible that it couldn’t be overcome. His parents were superheroes, after all.

“Well, it’s startin’,” Father replied to Mother. “I want you two to head for Scotland.”

“No…” Mother began.

“Hole up at Muir Island, at least until the worst is over. Moira and Sean can protect you.”

“And who, tough guy, is going to protect you?”

Lucas sucked more steadily on the digit between his lips. Were they going away? Had the bad men come to take them? Father always said if the bad men came, they might get separated. But he shouldn’t worry, Father said, he would always find them. No matter what.

Still…he didn’t want to leave Father or Mother.

“I don’t need protectin’.” Father told Mother. “You need to get Luke out of here. He’s our job right now.”
“You think it’s best for us to abandon his father?”

“Watch what you’re saying!” He snapped, indicating to Lucas’ half-asleep form in Mother’s arms.

“I am not leaving you here,” Mother continued, cuddling her son closer. “We will send our child to Moira. He will be safe there.”

“No.” Lucas whimpered, clinging to Mother. “Don’t send me away, Mother.”

“Jesus, you’re scaring him.” Father reached over, lifting the little one into the safety of his arms. He allowed Lucas to settle there. The boy inhaled the scent of his father, falling back into an easy half-sleep at the comforting scent.

Nothing would get by Father. He could keep them all together.

“I am not leaving you here,” Mother said again. “We will stay together, as a family.”

Lucas nodded his agreement emphatically. Father shushed him gently.

“It won’t be easy. This war’s been a long time brewin’.”

“What choice do we have?”

Silence.

Lucas looked between Mother and Father as their eyes met above him. There was love in that uncompromising stare, something that screamed forever into the face of time and Fate. They reached across the space separating them in the small room, their skin glowing in the dying firelight as their hands entwined.

“Together,” Father agreed. “Like always.”
Chapter Summary

Bishop takes a moment to relieve some of his burden with Hank, while Wolverine and Storm butt heads once again.

Chapter Three: Truth

He had memories of this kitchen. As a child, his mother would bring him here when he had nightmares. She would sing softly after procuring him a cup of hot chocolate, luring him back to better dreams of sunlight and laughter.

Bishop pulled the front of his long dreadlocks back, securing it with a thin strip of black leather. He rotated sore shoulders with the motion, trying to work some of the ache from them. The trip back had been strenuous and his body screamed for sleep. So swiftly called to battle certainly hadn’t helped anything.

There would be no rest, not just yet. He had miles to go and an ache in his heart. They had told him he would not be prepared for this. With all his training, the millions of history lessons, there was nothing that could be done for his confrontation with the past on an emotional level. He should be keeping his distance, but it was increasingly hard even within the negligent space of several hours.

Bringing his hands together, Bishop took a deep breath. At least he would have some sort of ally now. Father said Beast would likely figure everything out long before anyone else. He could always talk to McCoy, no matter what the trouble.

The kitchen door swung open, revealing the bestial-looking mutant in question. He still wore his lab coat, but there was a small smile on his face as he entered. The other man said nothing as he moved around the kitchen.

Bishop heard the dull clink of glass and metal before McCoy moved toward him, holding what smelled to be coffee in plain black mugs. Good, real coffee.


Beast smiled, though his eyes reflected sorrow that something as simple as a cup of coffee was so important to him. Bishop tried to smile, but took a sip of the fresh, bitter brew and nearly fainted with the pleasure of it.

“Your mother is resting comfortably under the watchful eye of our resident Wolverine and the others are asleep.” Beast said calmly. “We have the freedom to speak, should you wish to. Or you may simply enjoy the delightful French Roast in your hands. We could go wild, let our hair down and dig into some Ben and Jerry’s.”
Bishop blinked. “Who are Ben and Jerry?”

Beast put a hand to his chest, gasping dramatically. “Good Lord, boy, what have your parents been doing with you?”

The younger mutant could not help himself. Though he tried to remain stoic, he found himself unwillingly smiling. It was not long before a soft chuckle left his lips. McCoy was always one of his favorite adults with that knack for always making him laugh.

“Its ice cream,” McCoy said quickly, standing. “And I always need something decadent after such a robust tussle.”

“Wait…” Bishop could feel his face lighting up with hope. “Did you just say ice cream?”

McCoy grinned like a schoolboy. “I will get two spoons.”

Anticipating the sweet treat he only vaguely remembered from a far off childhood, Bishop watched as Beast rummaged through the icebox. A small carton was removed before McCoy took two spoons from a drawer and bounced back to the table.

The two sat quietly while Beast opened the ice cream carton and handed Bishop a spoon. Slightly wary that his memory would be better than reality, Bishop gave himself a quick mental pep talk before spooning a small amount of the dessert into his mouth.

The soft, gooey chocolate ice cream laced with something that reminded him of fruit brought a smile of utter pleasure to Bishop’s lips. He hadn’t had anything so good in years. Speech was lost as he dug into the sweet treat.

“Things must be dire, indeed,” Beast said several minutes later in a low, maudlin tone. “If such simple pleasures are forgotten.”

Bishop let the ice cream in his mouth melt on his tongue as he fought with the maddening urge to keep his poker face in place, his hand close to the vest. Beast knew enough as it stood; he could cause irreparable damage to course of history. But for all of Bishop’s meticulous training, he still knew little about the actual people of this world and how events came to pass.

He knew the ripple of aftershocks, not the devastation of the earthquake.

Eyes on the spoon in his hand, Bishop watched the reflection of the dim light on the ice cream-smeared metal. Father had been right after all; he did need to talk to someone.

“Its worse,” Bishop said quietly. He cleared his throat to get the emotion out of it. “Why else would they start playing with timelines?”

“And your mother agreed to this?” Beast questioned softly.

“She didn’t like it,” he admitted. “But someone had to go. I volunteered.”

“You came here, facing a world you do not understand, the mother you left behind,” McCoy sighed. “Bishop, I’m afraid I still…”
“You’re skeptical,” Bishop smiled at his spoon before meeting Hank’s eyes. “You’re always skeptical, Uncle Hank.”

Amusement covered the young mutant’s face, as his “uncle” seemed to enjoy the simple, familial endearment.

“Mother’s big on titles,” he offered as explanation. “She’s big on family all around.”

Silence stretched between them again. Bishop took another small bite of ice cream, washing it down with the delicious coffee his uncle had provided for him. Such little things…but important ones. Bishop hoped that his mission would give his sister the wonderful taste of ice cream.

“Bishop,” McCoy spoke after several long moments of silence. “You must speak on this, at least somewhat. Holding all emotion inside will do more harm than good.”

“I can’t,” he shook his head. “I’m afraid of what my words will do to this timeline.”

“The timeline you came back to change?” Beast raised a blue brow. “You already altered it. You are only causing yourself unnecessary pain.”

He sighed. “I have to look that woman in the face and pretend she isn’t my mother. There is nothing but pain from where I sit, Uncle.”

Hank seemed at a loss for words for a moment. He reached across the table, taking a dark hand with one covered in fur. Bishop met his uncle’s eyes, expelling a breath forcefully.

“Ok,” Bishop said softly. “There is one thing I know will prove to you who I am without getting Mother and I swabbed in the med-lab.”

Without another word, Bishop reached into his pocket and produced a small holo-imager. He placed it in the center of the table, pressing the button on the side to produce the image it had captured some time ago.

The small screen flickered to life, a recording he had kept lovingly on his person for some five years now. Before both mutants, Storm appeared on the screen, her face battle-worn and smeared with dirt, her shocking white Mohawk flowing in the wind.

“Bishop,” she snapped at the man behind the imager. “Would you please stop that?”

“Of course not,” he answered quickly.

A beat later, an explosion rocked the imager, but Storm was laughing. Wolverine had landed directly on top of her.

“Hey, darlin’.”

“Why, hello there,” she replied with a matching grin.

“Ew,” came a new voice as the camera swung from the kissing couple. It focused on a tall, leggy beauty with hair the color of flax and completely white eyes. “Bish, make ‘em stop!”

“Can’t do that,” said Bishop from behind the camera. “Smile, Shardy.”
“God, you three are insane.” The blonde said with a fond eye-roll. “The world’s going to hell and you’re just standing around!”

“The world’s always goin’ to hell, honey,” Wolverine replied as the imager began to crackle.

“Yeah, yeah,” Shard replied, her image fading. “Come on, Bish, we’ve got an opening in the left flank that’s got the Munroe name written all over it.”

“I’m there!”

The imager switched off, taking the glowing memory away. Bishop handed the slender disc to his uncle. He knew the man would take the futuristic technology apart, proving once and for all that he was exactly as he claimed.

Beast was staring at him in shock, blinking somewhat dazedly, as though he had been hit in the head with something heavy. Bishop braced himself, waiting for the stream of questions likely to hit him in mere seconds.

“Wolverine?” was all the enormous furry mutant seemed capable of saying.

“Well, yeah,” Bishop rolled his eyes. “What? Did you think my mother immaculately conceived me? I have a father.”

“But…Wolverine?” Hank shook his head.

Bishop nodded miserably. “I know. I don’t understand it. They seem to hate each other now.”

Beast frowned. “They didn’t tell you about their relationship?”

He shrugged one shoulder, looking away. “They just glossed over everything before Mother got pregnant with me.”

After regarding him silently for several moments, Beast sighed. “You must give them time, surely you cannot have been born for several years from now.”

Bishop winced.

Beast inhaled sharply. “Don’t tell me. Just…don’t.”

The younger mutant gave him a small smile. “I wasn’t planning on it.”

“Who was the girl? Shardy?”

The dark man looked away again. “My sister, Shard,” he muttered quietly.

Hank promptly slapped his forehead with a furry palm. “I don’t think I want to know any more.”

Sensitive to the fact that his uncle’s brain likely felt ready to implode, Bishop changed tactics.

“I did do something right, though,” he said flatly. “History says that Leech was killed on this day, that Mother watched him die.”
“Watched?” Hank asked, obviously taken aback.

Bishop nodded. “She was restrained and too close to Leech to use her powers. The guilt ate at her for years. Still does, if you ask me.”

“Why would they want to kill the child?” Hank mused, scratching his chin.

“To eliminate the threat,” Bishop offered. “And because the Brotherhood controls the last of the mutant cure. They’ll use it in ways you can’t even imagine.”

“Oh, my stars,” Hank said, realization dawning on him.

“Yeah,” Bishop scowled. “That’s something I need to take care of. I’ll need access to Cerebro’s computer files.”

“Why?”

“I have to find the Brotherhood by Saturday, or the X-Men will be holding another funeral.”

~**~

Aside from the minor concussion and a case of having the wind knocked out of her, Storm felt fine after the Brotherhood’s futile attack. It made her blood boil, though, to know they had invaded her home, threatened to take her children from her.

That maternal instinct she always tried to tamp down was in full swing this morning.

Christina Aguilera blasted from the earphones jacked into her portable MP3 player as dawn inched over the expansive tree line. She mouthed the words, glancing up at the golden sky as the rhythmic pounding of her running shoes striking pavement kept the time.

It was her ritual, her cleansing. As Kitty liked to say “Stormy’s Me Time”. Usually, no one bothered her on the three-mile morning run around the grounds. She would listen to whatever music her friend downloaded, keeping her pace steady. At times, of course, the pace was punishing or languid.

She started the strange custom just after arriving at the mansion some years past. Running kept the wanderlust at bay those first years. Now it cleared her mind, gave her time to mull over problems or emotions.

It gave her time to quell the impulse to murder Wolverine with his own claws.

No man on earth needed to be so damned stubborn. He adamantly refused to allow her to make any decision without extensive argument. He second-guessed her at every turn, undermining her authority over the children – with said children usually in the room – every time he felt the urge to irritate her.

More often these days, Ororo wound up venting to Henry about his behavior. All Henry would say most of the time was that things would work themselves out. She had no help in dealing with the Wolverine.
What made the entire situation worse was the fact that he sought her out, no matter if someone else could help him with whatever particular problem he needed solved at that exact moment. He could not go a single day without picking a fight with her.

While she appreciated his staying on, knowing it was something Charles would have wanted, the man irked her. He danced upon her last nerve until she thought she would explode. He was wonderful with the children and took over Cyclops’ classes, but there were days she would give good money to see him drive off into the sunset on his pilfered motorcycle.

At least he would not bother her now. He learned, very quickly, that no one came to Ororo during her run.

She supposed there was something comforting about the continuity in Logan’s urgent summons. Every hearty bellow of her name reminded her that he had stayed with her when the others passed on without her. She knew, without either of them saying, that his influence had directly led to Henry turning down the offer as a United Nations Ambassador.

But he was so damned stubborn!

No man had any right to be such an enormous pain in the posterior only to turn around a heartbeat later to knock her knees out with a sexy smirk. That was irritating as shit.

At least when he had pursued Jean, Ororo was safe from even imagined longing. Logan’s heart had belonged to the deceased telepath since the moment they met. Ororo thought it was sweet, if misplaced. She could vividly recall several conversations with Jean on the subject. The general consensus was while Wolverine was handsome, roguish, and had a smile that could tempt a nun into sin, he was off limits.

Jean was devoted to Scott.

She had also tried to encourage Ororo to look at him as more than just a thorn in her ass. Had Logan stuck around after his first encounter with the X-Men, Ororo had the terrible feeling that her beloved friend would have attempted matchmaking.

Ororo would admit to a certain primal attraction, which was easily written off as sexual frustration. It had, after all, been quite a while since she had any physical contact that did not require batteries.

Shaking her head to clear it of thoughts of Wolverine, Ororo grinned as her music switched to the immortal genius of European techno-master Scooter. Humming to the throbbing beat, her pace increased to keep up with the vibrating tempo. She glanced back up at the morning sky, smiling slightly.

That fleeting smile was wiped from her lips a beat later when a tall, dark figure fell easily into step beside her. Annoyed now, Ororo glared at the stoic, expressionless face of Bishop as he jogged beside her.

He was staring straight ahead, something loud blasting out of a small earpiece. Without a word, he glanced to her and increased his pace.

Feeling that challenge bring her hackles up, she rushed to outdistance him. He moved easily in step with her, and then outran her once more. Ororo caught up, feeling her competitive drive kick into high gear.
In seconds, the two of them were racing down the path. Ororo pushed her body into a full tilt run with everything she had left, uncaring that sweat was pouring down her face, making her clothing cling to her curves.

Bishop’s dark flesh gleamed with the sheen of sweat now covering him. His breathing was labored as they rounded the greenhouses, heading for the long stretch that would take them back to the mansion.

He quickly sprinted away from the X-Men leader, leaving her in the proverbial dust. Ororo gaped at him, surprised at how fast a man that big actually was. She slowed her pace again, feeling the burn deep inside her muscles, her bruised lungs crying for reprieve.

As the back door to the mansion appeared, she slowed to a walk with one hand on her aching hip. Bishop continued down the path at his uncanny pace. When Ororo reached the steps, she stopped, watching him carefully as he moved further and further away.

Noticing Hank had appeared at her side, she took the towel and water bottle he handed her after removing the earphones from her ears. Not bothering to look at her enormous blue friend, she watched Bishop slowly disappear.

There was something to this man who claimed to know the future. She squinted at his vanishing form in the bright morning sunlight. It surprised her when she realized she was beginning to accept his claims. Perhaps because of the battle the previous afternoon or the simple fact that something in her “gut” – as Logan referred to it – told her he was legitimate, but she believed him.

“He has requested access to Cerebro’s computer files,” Henry said quietly. “But for that I need your authorization.”

Storm wiped the sweat from her brow. “If he wants access, he can ask me.”

Hank regarded her calmly. “Yes, my dear.”

Ororo waited until Bishop was out of her eye line completely before she turned and moved into the house to start her day.

~**~

He watched her from the window in the upstairs hall as she ducked back into the house. Hank shook his head after her, then turned as though searching for the jogging Bishop. The darker man had disappeared into the expansive grounds, keeping his pace almost punishing.

It was something of a habit for Logan to watch Ororo on her daily run. From his window, he could see every turn she made around the greenhouses until he lost sight of her in the tree line where Bishop had just vanished to.

He often wondered what drove her to run at five every morning. She’d been doing it since his first visit to the mansion, surprising him one of the first mornings after he awoke in the med-lab after Liberty Island. He’d gone out to be alone and found himself and found himself staring at an aloof weather manipulator chasing whatever she was looking for in the quiet dark before dawn.
Since the deaths of more than half her family, Logan watched her retreat into a hole deep inside. She’d shown him after Alkali Lake that there was personality and fire beneath the icy exterior she portrayed to the world. Her damn challenges to him always weighed heavily on his mind, driving him to thoughts about home and permanence he’d never before entertained.

And yet, she kept her distance as though she’d spent a lifetime doing just that. The children, Wolverine, and even to some extent Hank were kept at arm’s length. In the aftermath of Phoenix’s destruction, Logan had expected anger, grief. He’d prepared himself for it, wanting to prove to her that he wasn’t just a nomadic jackass as he assumed she considered him.

In no way was he prepared for her calm. She had simply taken up the Professor’s school, dealt with the lawyers, counseled the children as though she felt nothing.

That, more than anything, led to the little game he continued with her. Picking at her, prodding her until he was sure she entertained thoughts of murder. At least she was reminded that he was still there, that he had no intention of leaving. It probably wasn’t the best way to be there for her, but it had been in motion by the time he realized what he was doing.

Well, partially. She irritated the shit out of him. Her cool composure, stick-up-the-ass attitude and righteous superiority just got under his skin. He wanted to crack the ice around that woman, to see what kind of fire lay dormant beneath the wintry surface. The poking at her became his retaliation for crimes she likely didn’t know she committed.

No woman had any right being that damn stubborn and cold when she looked like that. Oh, his heart still mourned for lost Jean, but Ororo had taken over other parts of him. That was irritating as shit. How could he properly irritate her if he kept waking in the middle of the night from sweat-inducing erotic dreams?

He chalked it up to his being male and her being the only female in the vicinity over twenty-one.

She was a looker, no denying. Delicate features etched into soft, caramel flesh with those expressive dark eyes and unique snowy hair often filled idle thoughts. When he pissed her off, her face would flush, reminding him that she could actually shove a lightning bolt up his ass if he pushed too far. Logan happened to enjoy danger, perhaps that was the allure.

He waited for several minutes until he was sure she was in the kitchen, getting everything ready for the breakfast rush. Before he moved from the window, he caught a glimpse of Bishop moving around the track again. The dark mutant had determination and icy cool all over him. It reminded him of Storm, in some weird way.

Though he wasn’t one to trust easily, he couldn’t help it with Bishop. Something in the man’s eyes told Logan this wasn’t to be easily dismissed. He had to taken this entire ordeal on a leap of faith, no matter how insane it sounded. Bishop was here for a reason and everything in Logan’s body told him to close his eyes and jump over the precipice between logic and faith.

Familiarity. That’s what it was. There was something so damned familiar about that guy.

Sighing at his own, sentimental thoughts, Logan lit his cigar and stomped down the stairs. If he didn’t get down soon, he’d miss his morning bout with Storm. That would just send his entire day out of whack.

Before he hit the bottom of the staircase, he inhaled deeply and bellowed: “STORM!”
He didn’t need to see her face to know she’d just rolled her eyes toward the heavens for strength.

“What?” came the already irritated reply as she entered the hall.

Damn, he’d almost missed her.

“We gotta talk, woman,” he snarled while inwardly laughing. Logan pulled an envelope from his back pocket and thrust it at her.

She took it with a slightly raised brow as her water bottle tilted up for her to drink. When she brought it back down, Ororo sighed. “I have asked you repeatedly to stop referring to me as ‘woman’.”

“What would ya like me to call ya?” Logan countered.

“Oh, I don’t know,” she brushed past him, moving up the staircase. “Storm, Ororo, Professor Munroe.”

Logan made a face at her back.

“I saw that.”

He fought a smile, following her up the stairs. “Anyway, Storm wanna explain that?”

She tossed the now empty water bottle into the trashcan on the landing before glancing at the envelope.

“This? It’s your pay stub, Wolverine,” she said simply, thrusting it back at him when he fell into step beside her.

“Yeah? So, why is the balance negative 6 grand?”

The slow, sideways smile that curved her luscious lips threatened to take his knees out. No damn way a woman should be that damn sexy without even trying. It wasn’t right.

“Well, you did use my business credit to buy Marie’s tickets to Germany.”

Logan came to a dead halt in the hallway. “What?”

Ororo turned on him, raising that seductive brow again. “Do I look stupid?”

He honestly had no answer for that. Storm tossed him a flirty smile and turned on the heels of her white and blue sneakers. Astonished that he’d been busted and busted hard, Logan gave immediate chase.

“I ain’t payin’ this,” he snarled as she unlocked her bedroom door.

“You don’t have to,” she shot back. “I am garnishing your wages.”

“What?”

With her Lycra-clad hip, she pushed into her bedroom, taking the stack of messages someone always
slipped under her door. Logan didn’t care whose room they were entering; they were finishing this conversation.

The scent hit him before he even noticed the furnishings. Rain and snow and all those things nature provided saturated the room. At first the scent disoriented him, he thought they had somehow walked outside. It took several seconds for him to realize it was her scent, unaltered by several dozen others.

“I said I am garnishing your wages, Wolverine,” Storm replied as she scanned her messages.

He took a moment to stare at her. Hair a mess, not a drop of makeup on her face, her simple blue tank and white Lycra pants, she should have looked like hell. Instead, Logan saw her as the world should have. Beauty, danger, the ferocity of the elements all wrapped into this innocently buttoned up schoolteacher.

How the hell was that fair?

Logan had to blink twice to get his thoughts in order. He really, really needed to get himself laid before his hormones got the best of him.

“You can’t do that.” Logan fought her, balling his hands into fists.

“Actually,” she countered without looking up. “I can. I am the administrator and headmistress of this school, which you are an employee of. I can do whatever I like.”

He glared at her. Unperturbed by his anger, Ororo took the earphones dangling over her shoulder and collected the slender MP3 player from the clip on her pants. She frowned at a set of messages, shaking her head to herself.

“I earned that money,” Logan said as he came closer. “Dealin’ with those brats all day.”

“Of course you did,” Storm murmured absently. “And you spent it as well.”

“This is fucked up.”

His swearing recaptured her waning attention. It wasn’t any fun to fight with someone who wouldn’t fight back, after all.

“Watch your mouth,” she fired back, her dark eyes flashing. She looked around suddenly, as though realizing for the first time that he had stealthily invaded her personal space. “Get out of my room.”

“Nuh-uh,” Logan said. He shook his head, crossing his arms over his chest. “You’re gonna pay me.”

“No,” she disagreed. “You are going to pay me. I can’t afford to buy round trip tickets to Germany for every former student I’ve got.”

“We gonna get into that again? She’s still one of us.”

“No, she isn’t.”

“Damn, now you sound like Magneto.”

Whoops. Logan inwardly winced. He had just crossed that imaginary line; jumped right over it with
all six claws blazing. The flash of hurt that came over her lovely face made him want to duck his head in shame. He fought the urge, meeting her gaze defiantly.

“Get out of my room.”

“No.”

He realized what she was going to do a minute too late. She glanced at the open door behind him and then thrust one hand out in an almost careless motion. The force of her suddenly gathered winds hit Logan square in the chest. He toppled backward, tossed out of the room and into the hall. Her bedroom door slammed closed as he hit the deck and slid several feet.

Collecting himself, Logan propped himself up on his hands and stared at the closed door.

“Bitch,” he snarled under his breath.

“Jackass,” he clearly heard her mutter from behind the closed door.

One of these days they were going to end up killing each other, he was certain of it.
Luke loses himself to memory before Logan and Ororo find themselves in a...compromising position.

Chapter Four: Embrace

Another Time, Another Place

His legs were swinging over the edge of the chair, a bar of nutrients in his hand. He munched absently, wondering when all the fuss was going to be over. Mother hadn’t sung him to sleep last night, which always made him a little antsy. With Father in the other room too, Lucas wanted to throw a fit that everyone was ignoring him.

What could be so important? Mother and Father always said they loved him more than anything in the world. They’d tried to leave the fighting so many times, as a family, just to keep him safe. But it never worked. Something or someone always called them back. Luke finally decided that he’d just learn to fight too. That way, they always stayed together.

Luke sighed, pulling the wrapper over his nutrient bar and stuffing it into his pocket. He missed real food sometimes. If he thought hard about it, he could remember the delicious meals Mother would make in the warm, sunny kitchen back at the mansion. They’d been happy there until the fighting started. Until the bad men had come to destroy their home.

He couldn’t remember what his room had looked like, what posters Father had put on the walls, but he recalled the feeling of safety, of home. Moving every few days, with the sounds of air raid sirens and explosions dwarfed the cherished memories. Luke thought, sometimes, that life was defined by waking up to those awful noises.

“Lucas?”

At Father’s call, Luke’s mood brightened immediately. He slid off of the chair and rushed to his father, hugging him tightly around the legs as only a seven year old could. Father smelled of cigars and sweat, his eyes rimmed with dark shadows from lack of sleep.

“Where’s Mother?” The boy asked cautiously, wondering if she had been injured in the battle.

“Inside,” Father said as he lifted the stocky boy into his arms. “Someone’s here to meet you.”

“Who?” Luke questioned as Father carried him into the room. “I didn’t see anyone come in.”

Father chuckled quietly. “She came another way, buddy.”
Luke’s eyes had to adjust to the dim light of the secluded room, but he soon spotted his mother lying on a small cot in the corner. She looked tired, a small secret smile covering her lips when she caught sight of him. One long hand beckoned them closer, her free arm shifting a tiny bundle in her arms.

“Come here, darling,” she whispered to Lucas. “Your sister has arrived.”

He suddenly understood as Father lowered him to the floor. Mother had been saying for a long time now that someone important was going to come. He’d watched her belly swell, felt the little person she swore was inside kick his hand as it lay upon the massive lump. Excitement filled his tender heart as he scrambled to Mother’s bedside, eager to meet this long-awaited arrival.

Mother shifted toward him, unwrapping the teeny bundle in her arms as Lucas peered closer. The little person looked squashed and mean, like an old man. Her dark skin was slightly pink and when her eyes opened, he immediately saw that they were rimmed with white. Like Mother’s.

“Her name is Elizabeth,” Mother whispered as the baby looked up at her big brother curiously.

“She’s tiny,” Lucas muttered, reaching in to take one miniature hand with his pinky. “And squishy.”

“You were pretty squishy, too,” Father chuckled again. “It’s a small place to squeeze out of.”

“You don’t have to tell me,” Mother quipped, grinning at Father.

Lucas didn’t understand what they meant, but he was too engrossed with the tiny person to really care. He leaned in, kissing her itty-bitty forehead. “Hi, Lizzie. Welcome to the world.”

~**~

“Bish!”

“Shar?”

“Oh, thank the Goddess above,” his sister’s voice crackled through the comm.. “What’s your location?”

“Five clicks due east of the river basin,” Bishop replied, tamping down his relief at hearing her voice. “Yours?”

“Three south of your current,” Shard reported professionally. “Storm’s unit is in position as well. Move on thunder, big brother.”

Bishop smirked, hiding the gesture from the men under his command. He noticed the clouds darkening overhead with something like pleasure. It was always nice to know that Mother was watching their backs.

“Copy that,” he barked to his sister. There was a heavy weighted pause on the comm. before he replied. “Don’t get dead.”

“Back at ya,” Shard said as the comm. clicked off.

With a glance at his men and several silent hand gestures, Bishop ordered his team to move on his
mark. Several of them glanced at the sky, gulping at the sight of his mother’s tornado farm dancing just above the ground. It would do no damage yet, but the awesome power she wielded made some nervous.

Thunder shook the heavens and Bishop’s team poured out of the trenches. They fell on the human attackers in droves, meeting up with the other two teams mid-field. Though technology had improved over the last several decades, swarms of mutants were still hard to fight back for normal humans.

What would kill one might aid another...how could you effectively counter that?

Bishop fired off several charges with his plasma gun, absorbing two or three with his mutated body. He raised a bare hand, rerouting the kinetic energy back at his foes. He spotted a slash of brilliant light across the battlefield and inhaled deeply.

There was Shard.

Thunder boomed and lightning crashed.

Mother.

Bishop felt the hair on the back of his neck stand up, the approach of something malevolent and evil making his stomach clench unpleasantly. Nimrod.

Before the dark man could turn to counter his would-be attacker, the feral, animalistic scream of someone else cut through the battle-heavy din.

Father.

He whipped around in time to see Wolverine attack the white and crimson robot. Nimrod had zeroed in on Bishop, even as Wolverine’s claws tore at the monstrosity’s computerized innards.

“Wrong kid, bub.”

Bishop light off three of his most powerful rounds before tapping his comm.


The effect of his words was immediate. A stream of bright protons streaked by him a beat before powerful winds brought the hovering form of a weather goddess. While Wolverine darted in and out of Nimrod’s range, taking hunk of metal from the monster as he did, Bishop lit off with his weapon while Shard flooded the sensitive computer system with burning light.

Mother had to go and show off with her lightning.

Something inside the menace known as Nimrod exploded, sending the entire Munroe family flying. Bishop felt as though his body had been caught in one of Arclight’s shockwaves as he struggled to retain consciousness.

Rolling to push himself to standing, he caught sight of Nimrod’s mangled body. Father was thrown almost carelessly over a busted street lamp. Mother lay motionless on the pavement. Shard was only inches from her brother, a large gash on her cheek.
“Shar?”

He crawled to her, grunting through the pain. “Lizzie?” Emotion choked his throat as his fingers grazed her shoulder, trying to jostle her enough to wake her.

“Not dead,” the young woman groaned. Bishop thought the relief at hearing her voice would make him faint. “Kinda wish I was, though.”

He had to smile at that. Nothing ever stopped that woman’s insane sense of humor.

“STORM!”

Both children turned as fast as they could, watching as their father limped toward the fallen form of their mother. Without even speaking, they helped one another stand, stumbling toward their rapid-healing parent.

Wolverine had drawn Storm into his arms, touching her face and cradling her as though his heart were breaking. Shard and Bishop sank to bruised knees, reaching for their mother with trembling hands.

It was their worst fear, losing one of their number to battle. It was why their parents often sent them on duo missions far from the fighting, why Bishop was being trained for such an impossible assignment.

“Storm, don’t you leave me,” Wolverine growled, leaning down to nuzzle her nose.

“Mother?” Shard whimpered.

Bishop, on the other hand, had stood. He raised the weapon in his hands, taking several plasma charges from the surrounding battle. Rage colored his vision a bright crimson as Nimrod’s repaired body met him toe to toe.

“Lucas…”

He ignored his sister’s call, lighting off both weapon and mutation at the bastard machine so hell bent on destroying his family. An enraged scream left his throat as he pushed the creation of that dead bastard Trask back toward the main battle.

At seeing him, the mutants turned from their human enemies and fell on the robot. They could not kill it, but they would fight it.

Bishop turned back to his family, not surprised to see his mother’s eyes staring back at him. Father was still holding her as though he could anchor his beloved to the here and now by will alone. Shard was standing, limping toward her brother.

He came toward them, sinking back to his knees as they huddled together amid the victorious tide. Family. That was everything. He’d do anything for them.

Anything.

~**~
Now

“What do you mean ‘no’?”

“Do you have a problem understanding simple words? Do we not speak English in the future?”

Storm was staring down at her files, ignoring the angry glare currently making the hair on the back of her neck stand up. Bishop had come into her office shortly after noon, demanding to be allowed into Cerebro’s classified files.

Obviously her answer was not going to go over well.

“You’re being unreasonable.” Bishop grunted, crossing his arms over his chest.

“No, I’m being responsible,” Ororo countered without bothering to look up. For some reason her casual dismissal of his request bothered him. “The information in those files is sensitive and I can’t just hand that over to every Tom, Dick, and Marty McFly that comes along.”

She scrawled her signature at the bottom of a purchase order and filed it away neatly. Bishop had still not left her office, so she straightened her spine, readying herself for the fight that was likely to ensue.

Though he had been at the mansion only two days, Ororo could see he was forming ties to the people housed within. Logan and Henry were the worst culprits, often found chatting amicably with their strange guest. That made her nervous. Bishop had the potential to make things messy. Ororo didn’t much care for messy at the moment.

Storm only wanted him gone. There was nothing she needed less at the moment than a self-proclaimed futuristic mutant determined to change the course of history in ways she could only imagine. What she did need was next month’s class schedule, a talk with her financial advisors and a week in Belize.

“I need that information,” Bishop was saying. “I have to…”

“Save the world, prevent war, yadda yadda yadda.” Storm flapped her hand impatiently at him.

“You go too far,” he snarled.

Storm stood, slamming her hands on her desk as the sting behind her eyes told her the tenuous hold on her devastating mutation was slipping.

“I haven’t gone far enough,” she shot back. “You can’t just burst in on our lives and expect to be handed everything you demand on a damned platter.”

Bishop’s ebony gaze met hers, hard and unrelenting. She had to hand it to him; the man was like a pit bull after a juicy bone. He didn’t let anyone or anything cow him. Ororo drew in her mutation, feeling it darken the skies.

“Do you think this is easy for me?” Bishop said in a deathly quiet tone. “You have no idea what I’ve done to get this far.”
Storm shrugged one shoulder. “I don’t care. I have other things that need my attention.”

His jaw came closed with an audible snap of his teeth. “The Storm I know would never be afraid of something she couldn’t explain. The woman I know has never been a coward a day in her life.”

Angry now, Ororo came around her desk in two strides, facing down the man she wanted to electrocute. His eyes met hers, unwilling to give even an inch. She gripped his shirt, bringing his towering frame down until they stood nose to nose.

“You don’t know me. You have no idea who I am,” she whispered scathingly.

Bishop’s eyes reflected acute and momentary pain, the look gone in an instant. Ororo flinched, something in that odd look lancing through her heart. She suddenly felt for this young man, wanting to reach out and comfort him.

What the hell was wrong with her?

He gently pried her hand from his shirt, shrugging her grip off as though she were nothing. Storm drew her emotions inside, buttoning them up as she stepped back slightly. He was getting to her; breaking down some invisible barrier she hadn’t even known was there.

“You know something, Storm?” Bishop said, regarding her impassively. “You’re right, I don’t know you. I don’t know anything about this cold, heartless bitch standing in front of me. I know the woman from my timeline and suddenly, I don’t want to fix a goddamn thing. I’d rather keep the Storm I know.”

Ororo felt as though she had slapped him, the honest truth in his eyes nothing compared to the pain she could see bubbling beneath the surface. She cast her gaze to the portrait over her desk, as though asking Charles what he would do in this situation.

In that one moment, with Bishop’s heated words echoing in her mind, she believed him. She could not explain how or why, but her heart placed her firmly on his side. Hating her treacherous heart, she let Bishop brush past her. The feel of Charles in her mind reminded her that he had always said to follow one’s heart.

Damn that man.

“Bishop.”

His heavy footsteps stopped at her office door at her gentle call of his name. Neither of them turned around, keeping their backs facing one another. Ororo closed her eyes, throwing a quick prayer up that someone – anyone – guide her through his unfamiliar territory.

“You tell me why you need Cerebro’s files,” she said quietly. “And I’ll give you access.”

A lengthy pause followed this, each conferring with their own demons.

“The Brotherhood has the cure,” came the soft rumble of his rich baritone. “They will turn it into a weapon of mass destruction against all mutants that don’t join them. One more piece of the puzzle.”

Ororo took that blow to the heart, but said nothing to betray that. “That’s why they wanted Jimmy?”
“To kill him,” Bishop agreed. “And to break you.”

Unable to turn around, though she desperately wanted to, Ororo swallowed thickly.

“What?”

“You’re the reason this side of the fence exists,” Bishop revealed with obvious emotion in his voice. “When you took up Xavier’s torch, you saved the dream. You’re their worst enemy and our biggest champion.”

She felt a single, hot tears lip down her cheeks. It was too good to be true. Knowing that she had done something good when she kept the school open paled in comparison to what this young warrior was saying now. Could she be that woman? Leading her children into battle for the sake of an ideal?

Was she that hero at heart? Or was it all an act?

“Why are you telling me this?” She demanded of the young man behind her, turning to stare at the broad expanse of his back.

“I shouldn’t,” he said, not turning to her. “But you have to know. You can’t give up, you can’t let them break you.”

His words were almost desperate and Ororo felt their meaning to the bottom of her soul. In that place she kept locked away since the death of her family, she felt life again. This young man knew that side of her, the part of her she kept locked away while she dealt with the school, the children. Was she that person in his world? Was she free?

“Storm Delta Zulu Foxtrot.”

She would never be able to explain why she said that or how she knew it was the right thing to do. Storm handed over the mansion’s secrets to this dark stranger and felt good about that. It should have terrified her, but something like relief flooded her tense shoulders instead.

“Thank you.”

And with that, he left her alone in the office.

~**~

Lying awake well past midnight, Logan stared up at the dark ceiling of his bedroom. He fought dreams of half-remembered faces, the men that had tortured him, cruelly stolen his memory. Grappling with those old demons was nothing compared to the burning recollections of Liberty Island, Alkali Lake, Alcatraz.

Kill me. Kill me before I kill someone else.

Shaking his aching head, Logan closed his eyes. He faced the open window, only prying his eyelids apart when a warm breeze reached him. Emerald green eyes seemed to stare back at him, though he knew it to be impossible.

Save me.
I love you.

His hands clenched and released against his pillow as he fought to regain control. If the memories took him, he would feel the warm weight of her against his claws as she died, hear the scream Storm tried to hold back. The sight of her beautiful face frozen in death. Storm’s tears. The sorrow.

“Damn it.”

On the growled curse, Logan pushed himself to sitting, swinging his legs over the side of his bed. He didn’t want to dwell here anymore, lost in dreams he wanted nothing more than to hide from. Nothing was all right in the quiet hours of the night, when memory overtook him more swiftly than a lover’s ignited passion.

Rarely did love enter his thoughts of Jean anymore. He was wracked with the guilt of taking her life, but the love he had claimed in those last seconds had faded. His love for her had been fast and fiery, not made to last. He felt like a traitor just thinking that, but the truth would not leave him alone.

He pulled on a sweatshirt and padded out of his bedroom, lost in those self-destructive thoughts. Maybe some time working out in the Danger Room would exhaust him into dreamless sleep. If that didn’t work, he’d just stay awake. Sleep was for the weak anyway, right?

As he hit the main floor, before he turned toward the elevator, Logan heard the muffled sound of a piano. He felt his brow go up, his nostrils twitching as they inhaled the sweet scents of night. The only fresh scent was that of the school’s headmistress and it happened to be coming from the same place as the music.

Deciding to forgo his work out in favor of curiosity, Logan tiptoed toward the soundproofed Rec Room. He slid the door open gently, peering inside to find Storm seated at the enormous black piano, a half-gone bottle of vodka resting beside a full glass.

“Oh, Georgia. Georgia. No peace I find. Just an old, sweet song keeps Georgia on my mind.”

Surprised to hear the soft, throaty vocals coming from Storm’s full lips, Logan opened the door a little further. Her playing continued as though she had not seen him, her throat vibrating with the low hum as she moved to the end of her slow, maudlin song.

He wasn’t quite sure what to make of this rather entertaining and disconcerting situation. It wasn’t like Storm to stay up past midnight. It wasn’t like her to drink. And who knew she played the piano?

Was it Mystique or something?

Logan sampled the air again, confirming even to his suspicious mind that the woman inside was actually Storm. He stepped fully into the room, part of him wanting to continue watching her unnoticed, but knowing she would outright murder him if he didn’t announce himself soon.

Storm closed the piano up, taking her glass as she stood. Logan knew instantly from the slight sway that she had obviously had more than just a glass. From her state of undress, she’d come down after preparing for bed. Did nightmares plague her nights? Insomnia?

“You can come in,” she said, startling him. “I don’t bite.”
“You sure?” Logan asked playfully.

“Mmm,” she hummed.

He remained where he stood, watching as she stumbled with some dignity toward the large stereo. Storm fiddled with the controls for several minutes, giving Logan an ample view of her back end as she bent at the waist. Her soft cotton sleep pants looked at least one size too big, worn with time and love. Her tank fitted against unrestrained breasts; that snowy hair loose at her shoulders.

Appealingly innocent, that was the only way he could describe it. When the music changed to a throbbing dance beat, Storm’s hips swayed enticingly to the bass. Her arms went over her head – glass and all – as she danced. There was a slightly bemused smile on her beautiful face, one that spoke volumes of the alcohol consumption. No wonder it was so nice out, their weather mistress was completely hammered and enjoying every moment of it.

“Want a drink?” She offered dazedly.

Logan grunted, moving into the room and swiping the bottle from the piano. He glanced at the label, noting that she had somehow gotten into Piotr’s stash. Hank’s amusing tales of Storm as a thief sprang to mind, making him smile.

As he took a heavy pull from the bottle, Storm rolled her hips, turning to face him.

“It’s good.” He offered as she took a dainty sip from her glass.

“Mmm.” She hummed again.

If she didn’t stop, he’d end up seduced before either of them knew what was happening. Raging hormones were set to light like flame to kindling at the easy, uninhibited movement of her body. She looked ready to be tossed against that wall and taken. Hard. The evil, naughty voice in the back of his mind told him he could take her, show her what it was like to feel something on a completely primal level.

Stopping the destructive train of thought before it got him into trouble, Logan took another long draw from the bottle, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

Storm danced her way toward him, fire and alcohol swimming in her dark eyes. Logan nearly gulped. She reached for him, taking his hand to draw him closer. Little red flags went up in his mind, making him quickly put the liquor aside. The last thing either of them needed was for things to get complicated between them. A drunken romp was certainly asking for complications.

“You should go to bed,” he tried to convince her. “It’s late.”

“Lonely,” she muttered, throwing back the rest of the contents of her glass. “Too lonely.”

“Storm,” Logan tried again as she pulled him closer still. “You should go to bed.”

She shook her head, that glorious hair whipping about her face. “Stay with me.”

He stopped, releasing her hands. Storm halted as well, staring up at him in confusion and guarded hurt. Logan shook his head at her slowly, reaching for her glass and prying it from limp fingers.
“Come on, I’ll take you to your room.”

Her face crumbled slightly. He could feel the change in the air outside, the sudden chill that slipped through the room like the tears he knew she wouldn’t shed. Logan took her hand, unable to resist the impulse to kiss her palm, as though apologizing for something he didn’t understand.

Silently, he pulled her from the Rec Room, leading her up the stairs. She followed like a lost duckling, clinging to any form of reality she could find. He didn’t know what had sparked her sudden drinking binge, but the need to keep her tethered to this world was too strong to be denied.

When they reached her door, Storm pressed her body close to his, tilting her head up as though in offering. Logan grunted inwardly with restraint, making the man inside of him war with the beast that resided in his soul. He couldn’t do it. He couldn’t take advantage of a drunken woman so obviously hurting. Her confusion would clear in the light of day and their relationship would shatter, no matter how antagonistic it happened to be at the moment.

Logan brought his hand up, cupping her chin and running his thumb over her plump, seductive bottom lip. “This ain’t what you need tonight, Storm.”

At his whisper, he caught the flash of hurt in her eyes.

“It’s ok,” he continued. “I’ll stay with you.”

She seemed to accept this, her dark eyes meeting his unrepentantly. They stared at one another for what seemed to be an eternity, neither finding the words and their eyes too guarded to reveal anything but subtle curiosity.

Finally, Storm opened her bedroom door, stumbling slightly in her inebriated state. Logan caught her waist with his hands, following her inside and shutting the door quietly behind him. Without so much as an embarrassed pause, Storm led him to her bed, drawing back the covers and inviting him to lie down with a look.

He slipped into her bed, enjoying the softness of her blue sheets and the scent of nature all around him. She climbed in after him, lying on her side so that she faced him. Their eyes met again, that guarded stare from outside of her door returning.

Without a word, Ororo reached for his hand. She entwined their fingers, laying their joined hands on the pillow between their faces. Logan would never be able to explain why he allowed this intimate touch or what he was thinking as he lay beside her.

In the still of the night, they watched one another silently, hands clinging together like frightened children.
Chapter Summary

Bishop finds his next target while Storm and Wolverine delve into things best left undisturbed.

Chapter Five: Spark

The cheerful chirp of a nearby bird dragged her from the heavy, beautiful sleep she’d found herself in. Warm, bright sunlight poured in from her open windows, showering her with the glow of early morning. Somewhere out of doors the trees rustled their leaves together by means of a soft breeze.

Inside, Ororo fought the world’s urging to wake, wanting to drift back into that dreamless oblivion. Though she knew a headache was likely to pounce at any second, she enjoyed this moment between wakefulness and sleep. It was like being wrapped in a warm blanket, safe from the horrors another day might bring.

She shifted, murmuring sleepily at the feel of a masculine body behind her. It felt wonderful to wake beside someone, to have an anchor to the real world. There was something fitting about the contact between a man and a woman, something nothing else in the world could match. Oh, she had missed this feeling. That lazy, sated euphoria that overcame someone who spent the night actually sleeping.

Ororo batted her eyes open slowly, hating to leave this peaceful moment. A cursory glance about the room told her that everything was in order. The little voice in the back of her mind piped up, telling her in naughty tones that nothing would be amiss if her personal sentinel had really remained with her all night.

He had. She knew instinctively that he had slept beside her through the accursed darkness.

I’ll stay with you.

Ororo would never admit it aloud, but his whispered words and obvious restraint made her die -- just a little -- from the chivalry in his actions. The man may irritate her in the cold light of day, but that night he’d been exactly what she needed. Someone to lean on.

“Oh,” she heard the deep rumble of his voice, still drained with sleep. He sounded adorable and she almost hated him for it. “Sleep good.”

“Uh-huh,” Ororo replied for lack of anything else to say.

The arm thrown carelessly over her waist in the night flexed, bringing her closer. She felt Logan’s nose at the nape of her neck, his breath stirring the fine hairs there.
“You smell good.” He observed which made her smile.

Shifting her legs and flipping herself under the heavy weight of his arm, Ororo turned to face her companion. His eyes were open, zeroing in on hers almost the instant she was in view. That guarded look was replaced by one of innocent satisfaction. Ororo wondered when the last time he had really and truly slept was. Before Alcatraz? Alkali Lake?

Had he ever?

She wanted to lose herself in the moment, but her rational side kept tugging at her. She had a million things to do, dozens of calls to make, children to feed. Why was she loitering in bed with a man she wanted to kill or sleep with depending on the time of day?

Oh, but he was so appealing. That soft, sated smile bordered on contentment and made something in her chest purr happily. She wanted nothing more than to slip further beneath the covers and loiter with him some more.

“Don’t think,” Logan’s sleep-ridden voice cut into her thoughts. “Don’t overanalyze this. We got some sleep, lets leave it at that.”

“Logan…” she began, the buttoned up professor sneaking in to take over the woman.

“Hey, I just think it’s funny that I spent a whole night with you in my arms and I didn’t even try to cop a feel.”

Unable to resist the lazy rumble of his voice, the amusement dancing so nakedly in his eyes, Ororo ducked her head into the pillow, chuckling softly. For another moment, she could tuck the professor away, she thought.

Just a moment.

He surprised her by reaching up, taking her cheek in one calloused palm. There was something about those hands, she mused. Rough, big, masculine. Without thinking about it – or the ramifications of the action – she leaned into the touch. The wide pad of his thumb traced the line of her cheekbone, his suddenly serious eyes locking with hers.

“You’re beautiful,” he whispered in the sunny quiet as though he had only just discovered something precious and powerful.

Ororo couldn’t stop herself if she tried, moved by the intimacy of his touch, the honesty in his words. She reached out for him, tucking an errant lock of his dark hair back into its customary peak.

“So are you.”

She thought he might be offended or irritated by her comment. Not many men would appreciate being referred to as beautiful. But Logan merely smiled, a soft, pleased curve of his lips that made her ache to bite the corner of his mouth.

“You sober?” His question was low, nearly a growl as she shifted closer.

“Yes.” Ororo felt his grip tighten; saw the flash of something primal in his eyes and felt the same mirrored inside her. “Hell, yes.”

“Good.”
They met halfway, lips fusing together with heat that scorch the sun. Ororo’s hands flew to the wild mane of his hair, burying inside in some futile attempt to hold on to reality. His kiss seared her to the core, sending every nerve ending in her body up in flames. That wonderfully pliable mouth took hers without remorse or apology. She parted her lips, entreating him inside as he covered her body with his.

Both of his hands found their way into her hair as hers drifted down to his shoulders. His tongue swept past her lips, tracing the edge of her teeth before plunging deeper to duel with her own. Ororo leaned up, undulating into Logan’s hard body in an uninhibited quest for more.

Their mouths came apart only when air became necessary. Unable to remain idle, Ororo latched onto the flesh of his throat, rewarded when he groaned softly under the assault. Impatient hands traced her curves, pulling back the duvet and sheets until there was only clothing between them.

She licked his pulse point, smiling against the frantic tattoo of his heartbeat. Logan pulled away with a soft growl that ignited more than frightened her. He mimicked her actions, tilting her head to the side with a gentle nuzzle before feathering kisses onto the sensitive flesh of her throat.

Ororo groaned something that could have been his name. Goddess, it felt **good**. How could she have forgotten the way a man felt in her arms, touching her, fanning flames that threatened to burn?

“Ororo.” His tender rumble of her name sent a delicious shiver racing down her spine as he tugged on her earlobe with his teeth.

A knee came between hers, parting her legs so he could rest between them. Ororo dragged her feet up his calves as he settled between her thighs, tracing the curve of his backside until he jerked against her.

His hard, hot length pressed into her belly, making want flare and pool inside her. Their lips met again, more frantic and needy this time. Ororo’s thought processes stopped, her neglected body overriding her better judgment.

Of course it was the exact moment she made the unconscious decision to take Logan inside her body, damn the consequences, the unlocked bedroom door swung open.

Startled, the couple on the bed turned toward the intrusion, matching looks of complete irritation and hatred on their faces. Ororo felt shame filter through her lusty mind, knowing what a compromising position they’d just been discovered in. What had she been thinking? Oh, right, she hadn’t been.

Bishop stared back at the couple on the bed, something like mute shock in his eyes. Ororo winced inwardly, wondering what he thought of his hero now. No one spoke and the long, tense moment stretched between the trio.

“I didn’t mean to interrupt,” Bishop said after a time. “It can wait.”

He turned on his heel and left the room in a flurry of dark leather and long hair.

Ororo nudged Logan, refusing to meet his eyes, in a silent plea to get him off of her. He remained quiet, shifting so she could slide out of the bed. Turning her back on him, Ororo moved toward the bathroom, her skin still tingling from the aftermath of his hands.
She didn’t bother to look up when the bedroom door snapped closed behind him.

~**~

So, it wasn’t a fairytale love story.

He stared down at his hands, studying them as if all the mysteries of life were contained in his dark flesh. The image of his parents locked in that borderline aggressive embrace threatened to break his heart.

Was he really the product of some lonesome romp? Is that why they refused to tell him about their lives before his conception?

All his life Bishop held the lofty ideal that his parents were the closest things to soul mates as mortals could get. His life, though torn apart by war, revolved around the simple truth that his parents loved one another, loved him, loved his sister. That love held them together when times were rough, as the battle dragged on.

His mission seemed to pale in comparison to seeing his parents as they were before his birth. The heated arguments, irritation that seemed to come off of them in waves was not his memory of these people. He remembered laughter, love, even passion to some extent.

Satisfied that he wasn’t going to start that temporal flux again as the skies outside remained clear and bright, Bishop sighed before he slammed his hand into the mansion’s intercom system, activating panels all over the grounds.

“X-Men to the War Room.”

Within seconds, Shadowcat and Iceman phased through the ceiling, landing neatly behind Bishop. The girl blinked at him as she took her seat, offering a gentle smile. Typical Aunt Kitty.

Colossus entered from the elevator a moment later, flanked by Storm and Beast. Bishop took a moment to capture the image of his mother as a young woman, noting the familiar smile she was giving his Uncle Hank.

He saw her in flashes here. Her strength was undeniable, her beauty unquestionable. The way she moved, how she fought, the damn stubborn determination…that was all Mother. It made him ache for the woman he had left behind, longing for her soothing embrace and the soft sound of an old lullaby.

Bishop didn’t care if he was a mama’s boy; most men didn’t have a mother half as wonderful as his.

She met his eyes without flinching, her cool dark gaze hiding anything that may have swirled beneath the surface. To his astonishment, she rewarded him with a small smile. Bishop felt emotion choke his throat, but he tamped it down.

“Where’s the fire?”

Turning toward the elevator once more, Bishop nodded to the man that would one day be his father. Logan had dressed since Bishop had last seen him several minutes ago and had a cigar hanging loosely from his lips. He wouldn’t change much in the next thirty years or so, though Bishop knew Mother would calm him.
She would never tame him, but something about her soothed his inner demons.

Logan caught Bishop staring, one bushy brow going up in silent question.

Heart clenching, though he refused to let it show, Bishop turned to the assembled mutants. This torture was slowly killing him. If he didn’t start getting more done, to get back to whatever future he would have, he actually might lose his mind.

Avoiding the curious stare from Beast, Bishop cleared his throat and shrugged out of his protective leather coat. He heard Kitty gulp and glanced at her. Oh. He’d forgotten about the scars, the tattoos. Well, she’d deal with it.

“I’ve gone through several of the files I needed from Cerebro,” Bishop began in a ringing tone. “I believe I have discovered the Brotherhood’s main headquarters.”

Of course, his mother spoke up first from her perch on the edge of the table between Colossus and Beast.

“Where?”

“An apartment building in New York City,” he replied. His dark hands gripped the back of a chair so he could lean on it. “Xavier had tracked several mutants to the area before his death and all reports from my timeline say they were close to the mansion around this period.”

“That’s what you’re basing this on?” Iceman cut in skeptically as he sat back in his chair.

Bishop ignored him. “My goal – at least for this event – is to get into the building, bypass the more powerful mutants and take out Pyro.”

The assembled mutants jumped collectively. Bishop did not bother to flinch. He knew that Pyro had once been one of them, a student of Xavier’s until he betrayed them. The boy was Magneto’s most dangerous disciple.

“Take out?” Logan questioned from his place opposite Storm. Bishop almost smirked at the man’s relaxed posture, the feet resting on the table.


Storm cleared her throat, holding Piotr back with a hand to his shoulder. “X-Men don’t kill, Bishop. At least, not if we can help it.”

“Do I look like an X-Man?” Bishop fired back.

She glared at him, her eyes suddenly rimmed with white.

“Why Pyro?” Iceman cut in, effectively halting the building fire fight.

“In my timeline,” Bishop began, noticing the several pairs of rolled eyes without comment. “Pyro is one of our most deadly adversaries. Within days he will destroy part of the mansion, causing a death that was pivotal to the start of the war.”
“Who?” Beast questioned quietly.

Bishop didn’t have to respond. His eyes, of their own accord, darted to Piotr. To his dismay, the man was looking right at him. Storm’s hand gripped the young mutant’s shoulder more tightly, as though she could keep him from falling by sheer will.

“Pete?” Wolverine’s heavy boots hit the floor with an echoing thump.

His future mother stood slowly, meeting his gaze across the metallic table.

“Why Piotr?”

He clamped his mouth shut, unwilling to reveal the reasons. Thunder slammed against the windows, her eyes swirling white in an instant. The other mutants startled, but Bishop did not react.

“Wrong time, wrong place,” Bishop said at last. “He just happened to be there.”

Storm’s eyes slipped back to their cocoa color, but fire snapped inside the dark pools. Bishop winced inwardly, knowing that look. She was ready to crack the heavens and do some serious damage.

“Pyro is the key here?”

“Yes.”

“Then he’ll be dealt with,” Storm looked toward her X-Men. “Kitten?”

“Ma’am?”

“Get on your computer, see what you can find on Pyro and the Brotherhood’s movements.” Her orders were clipped, to the point, and left no room for argument. “Hank, get Angel and start a watch. Six hour shifts between you, Logan, Angel, Colossus, and myself.”

Bishop sighed, his fingertips biting into the back of the chair he’d been strangling for the last several seconds.

“I already know where they are and what they want.”

“I’m not taking your word for it,” Storm snapped. “You can help us or get the hell out of our way. But you’re not to leave this mansion.”

“I’m not one of your toy soldiers,” Bishop shot back.

She moved around the table, standing toe to toe with him again. Damn. She reminded him of his mother so much that he wanted to look away like a chastised child.

“I may believe you’re from the future; I may even want to help you.” Her tone was scathing. “But I will never condone killing without cause. You can’t condemn someone for something they might do.”

“He’ll do it.”

“The future isn’t set in stone,” she replied quietly. “You, of all people, should know that.”
With that, she faced the others, her leadership role reaffirmed. Bishop inwardly raged, knowing it was going to cost them for delay.

“You have your orders.” She shooed the X-Men out of the room. “Logan, perimeter check.”

“You got it.”

Ororo blinked as he left the room. She pointed the way he had gone somewhat dazedly, glancing at Bishop as the others filed out.

“Did he just…not argue with me?”

Bishop’s only reply with a knowing smirk. All right, so they had potential. That was something, at least.

~**~

After checking the perimeter once the children were in bed, Logan ensured Angel was on watch in the security alcove, monitoring all of the screens from the hundreds of cameras placed all over the grounds. The day had been long, but Warren was fanatical about his job here at Xavier’s. The kid was best for the graveyard shift.

Finding himself wide-awake, Logan made his way through the quiet mansion, deciding to give the new pool table a run for it’s felt. He closed the soundproofed doors, effectively locking in any noises so that he wouldn’t wake the children.

If someone had told him two years ago that something like that would concern him, he would have laughed in their faces. The Wolverine taking care of children.

He switched on the stereo equipment to the local country station, nodding in approval to the tune that wafted from the speakers built into the walls. The room was one of his favorites in the mansion. Though it was a game room, complete with a television and every video gaming console known to man, there was something homey about it.

The polished wood furniture had chips and dents from years of abusive children; plush green cushions were faded and worn. There was a foosball table, one for ping-pong, a chessboard, and various other games to keep teenagers occupied.

A hole-ridden dartboard was placed along the back wall, the standing line a few feet away. Storm’s choice for a new billiard table lay between, calling to Logan like siren to sailor. The woman had taste, he’d give her that much.

Strong, dark cherry wood flanked the deep emerald felt. Curved legs and carved feet propped up the beautiful table, making it fit in the general splendor of Storm’s grand piano in the corner.

“Now, that’s just sexy,” Logan said to himself with a feral grin.

After lighting a cigar and popping open one of the beers he’d stashed in the small refrigerator, he set up the balls in the rack. Nodding his head in time with a classic Garth Brooks tune, Logan pinched
the cigar between his teeth while selecting a pool cue. Much to his surprise, he found one of dark cherry that looked to match the table. Unlike the others waiting innocently against the wall, it bore a carved handle.

His name was painted into the handle in elegant gold script. Surprised, Logan removed it from the holder, stroking the stylish piece almost reverently.

“Thanks, Storm.” He chuckled in the quiet, shaking his head slowly.

Settling the cue between his fingers, Logan leaned on the polished edge of the table. He lined up his shot expertly, pulling the cue between his fingers before slamming it against the white ball.

*Crack!*

Music to his ears. Logan hummed to the music, taking another long drag from his cigar before calling himself a shot. Five ball, side pocket. *Crack!*

Oh yeah, this was the life.

“Should I leave you two alone?”

Distracted by his pleasure at the table and Storm’s silent gift, he hadn’t smelled her coming nor heard the door slide open. Logan looked up from his position, finding her long, slender form over the edge of the table. Maybe he was slipping, getting soft. Why didn’t that bother him?

To his surprise, she was smiling at him, leaning in the doorway. He gave her a grin, smacking the pool balls so that they scattered. He took a moment to look her up and down, memories from their… whatever that was earlier fluttering through his mind.

She was dressed in her teacher’s clothes. Dark slacks tailored to her long legs, a white blouse that molded perfectly to her figure. He could see the edge of her boots under the hem of her pants and she’d pulled on her favorite belt, black leather with an “X” for a buckle.

“This is nice,” he said, giving no indication as to whether he was speaking about the cue or the table.

“I had it made,” she shrugged. “Charles always gave us a gift for our first teaching year. Thought I’d continue the tradition.”

Touched, though he didn’t want to admit it, Logan grunted.

Storm didn’t seem disturbed by this. She gently waved the thin stack of paper in her hands, coming fully into the room after closing the door to keep the music out of the main hall.

“I got your security briefing.”

Oh, hell, she wanted to bring that up now? He had been enjoying himself, too. Damn her for bringing it to him now. He didn’t want to fight with her tonight.

“Yeah? Whatcha think?”

As she moved closer, he caught a whiff of her perfume. Beneath the scent of fresh vanilla, he caught her fragrance. Rain and snow. How the hell did she manage that? Logan knew, with his eyes closed,
every scent in the mansion and every person therein. Mutations even gave off their own scent, alerting him when someone was using their powers.

Storm’s was the faint linger of burning ozone. It would leak into the scent she always carried, reminding him of the way her eyes would swirl from dark to milky as she tapped into her power.

Why was he spending so much time thinking about this? Well, if she didn’t smell so damn good, he wouldn’t have this problem.

“It’s interesting,” she said in a noncommittal tone. “And I enjoyed your budget breakdown.”

“Yeah, well,” Logan shrugged, making another shot before he straightened. “I wanted it idiot-proof.”

“Shut up,” she replied almost absently. “I’m approving it.”

Thunk! His cue sailed by the ball he was aiming at, dinging the felt as he stared up at the Headmistress in surprise. “Yeah?”

“Mmm,” she hummed. Something about that throaty sound made anticipatory lust stab at his belly. Not a good sign.

“Why?”

“Because the money is there,” Storm answered. She halted her movement across the table from him, crossing her arms loosely under her breasts. The action made delicate cleavage peek out from the neckline of her shirt, which momentarily distracted Logan.

“That ain’t the only reason, darlin’,” he said quickly. He folded his hands on the tip of his cue, the butt resting on the floor between his feet.

“I ain’t your darlin’.” The words were short, giving him the indication that she really didn’t like his endearment.

They stared at one another across the table for a long moment. Tension filled the space between them and Logan was reminded of the incident in her bedroom. She’d felt so damn good in his arms. Waking with her wrapped up beside him, her telltale scent filling his nostrils, he realized very quickly that he’d slept through the night.

No nightmares. No haunting screams. No Jean begging him to save her. Just Storm and her impossibly soft bed.

That kind of thing was addicting.

“I think Bishop isn’t telling us everything,” she said at length, breaking their uncomfortable silence.

“He isn’t.” Logan nodded, actually agreeing with her.

“I’m afraid for the children,” she admitted. “The last time there was an attack…”

“I was here.” He interrupted. “I’m here now.”

“I know,” Storm cleared her throat. “If you think these upgrades are warranted, I’ll call Forge in the
morning."

He kept her gaze, unwilling to let her flinch away. “They’re warranted.”

“Ok.”

Storm broke their eye contact and turned as if to leave. Logan felt his body tense, as though some unconscious decision had been made to give chase. He paused when she stopped. The impulse to catch her wasn’t altogether alien; he’d felt it before. For Jean.

“About this morning…” she began. Logan watched her toss her head slightly, shaking the choppy white locks from her eyes.

“Yeah?”

“I trust it won’t happen again?” Dark eyes met his across the table, guarded and unsure.

“I wouldn’t say that,” Logan replied before he knew what he was saying.

Her guarded eyes narrowed. “Why not?”

Logan shrugged one shoulder, not allowing her to break eye contact.

“I’m not Jean.” Her tone was slightly defensive, that uncertainty coming back into her chocolate gaze.

“Never said you were,” Logan answered quietly.

Silence. They stared at one another again, neither seeming to find the words to say what was on their minds. It was so much easier when he could just irritate her. But he knew now. Oh, hell, he knew how she felt. He could still feel the echo of her responsive body on his skin; taste the impossible sweetness of her mouth.

There was attraction, sure. He would never deny that Storm was beautiful, sexy. She had sensuality coming out of her ears. He’d been without a woman for a long, long time. Was it just frustration? Hormones?

Or was there something beneath the surface here? The very thought was terrifying and thrilling at once.

“I can’t do this. I won’t do this.”

She turned to flee, dropping his paperwork on the table. Logan dropped his cue onto the dark felt, coming around the table before he could tell himself to stay still. He should let her go. Everything told him to let her escape, to forget it ever happened.

Apparently his body was having none of that. His hand caught her wrist as she reached the door, whipping her around so that she nearly fell into his chest.

“Don’t,” she commanded hotly.

“Can’t stop,” he whispered back, burying a hand in her hair.
That hand fisted, bringing her up so he could cover her mouth with his. She melted like warm butter in his arms, parting her lips to invite him inside. Logan didn’t need to be told twice. He took her mouth violently, wanting to punish her for making him feel again.

Damn it. He didn’t want this.

Logan pulled away, fighting for breath and not daring to meet her eyes. His heart had begun to pound, his body tensing toward hers in a desperate attempt to get her hands on him. This wasn’t right. What the hell was he doing? He didn’t want to feel this again. The ache and pain that came from falling, from feeling.

“Too late,” Storm murmured.

This time, she kissed him. Logan inhaled through his nose, the damned scent of her making him harden even against his will. He groaned into her mouth when she wiggled against him, the delicious friction ending all thought then and there.

He lifted her effortlessly into his arms, stumbling blindly backward. His legs hit the pool table and he turned them around, setting her on the edge. This put her in perfect range for all manner of naughty things. His hands fell to her thighs, squeezing harder than was probably necessary. Her nails dug into his shoulders, her tongue dueling viciously with his.

When they broke away to breathe again, Logan found himself mesmerized by the dark fire in her eyes.

“Yeah,” he swallowed hard, reaching up to cup her face. “Way too fuckin’ late.”

~**~

Bishop closed the door to the Rec Room, shaking his head. He shouldered the plasma rifle, running a hand over his face in distress.

*Come on*, he thought with sorrow. *On the pool table?*

He’d only stopped at hearing their voices on his way out. When his mother insisted she was not Jean, Bishop felt his heart stop. Had Father been in love with the doomed Phoenix? Why had they never told him?

It was too much. Coming back here to a world that was so different from the one his cherished parents had always told him about was hard enough. Knowing his entire existence was based on hormones was even worse.

He resolved to deal with it tomorrow. Bishop slipped out of the mansion on silent feet, fading into the night as Wolverine would teach him to do years from now.

The mutant terrorist known as Pyro had a date with oblivion.
Want

Chapter Summary

Her words came back to her from just minutes before. Too late. It was too late to stop it. Nothing could be done now. Oh, she could run. She could bolt into her bedroom and hope by morning it would blow over. Or… Or she could give in to the want, take whatever he would offer her and deal with the consequences in the morning.

Yeah. Ororo chose option number two.

Chapter Notes

So this fic goes back to about 2005 on another site. I was loading it here and got lazy. A commentor made me get my ass in gear tonight so...enjoy the rest of the story in it's completion!

Thanks so much for reading!

Smack!

Her back hit the felt hard enough to make the table groan. The clacking of the pool balls sent sprawling by a sweep of Logan’s impatient hand nearly drowned in the screaming winds. Their lips were still fused together as he spread himself over her, his legs effectively pinning hers to the edge of the pool table.

There was nothing warm or tender in his touch. Rough hands were on her to punish, consume, as though he wanted nothing more than to get her out of his system. She knew, with neither of them saying, that this wasn’t going to be romantic. She didn’t want it to be. Romance was for children and simpering singles. Logan wanted to possess; Ororo needed to burn.

He pulled her up again, his hands grasping the flimsy material of her shirt. With a hard tug, he yanked it over her head, dropping it onto the floor as her hands found their way back to his shoulders. Ororo pushed the open flannel shirt from his arms, breaking their air-depriving kiss to latch onto the salty flesh of his neck.

His hands left her flesh only long enough to pull his tee from his chest. Ororo leaned back on her hands, admiring the view he presented. Hairy, muscular, Logan practically oozed sensual masculinity. All man. Hard lines and dominance. Something in Ororo called to that, wanting to get lost in the feel of him.

But she knew it was akin to playing with fire. Attraction flowed between them, even in the light of day. This fatal step might drag her into something she didn’t want or need. She didn’t want to feel anything for this man, but she could sense something seeping into her heart, taking her piece-by-piece.
Her words came back to her from just minutes before. *Too late.* It was too late to stop it. Nothing could be done now. Oh, she could run. She could bolt into her bedroom and hope by morning it would blow over. Or… Or she could give in to the want, take whatever he would offer her and deal with the consequences in the morning.

Yeah. Ororo chose option number two.

Without allowing her thought process to kick in again, she reached for his jeans, tugging him closer with a yank on his belt. Logan fell over her again, his hands coming up to cup at her satin-encased breasts. In a flash, he’d undone the front clasp, pulling the straps down her arms so her chest was bare before him.

Dark eyes feasted on her bare flesh. Ororo took his momentary distraction – reveling in the hungry look in his eyes – to unclasp his belt and flick open the button of his jeans with thief’s precision. Logan’s beautiful mouth curved into an amused smirk.

She leaned up to capture those perfect lips, smoothing her hands into his jeans to squeeze his ass. He sucked in a breath, his body jerking into hers. Ororo nibbled on his bottom lip, shifting against the hard wood of the table until his hands fell to her hips.

He stepped back slightly, kicking his boots off and letting her do the same. His foot impatiently shoved the discarded footwear out of his way. Without waiting for him, Ororo sat back enough to unbuckle her belt. She lifted her hips to shimmy out of her pants and panties, noticing he dropped his jeans just as fast.

“This is insane,” he rumbled when they were naked. The hungry, almost violent look in his eyes sent fluid rushing to her center, her heart pounding madly in her ears.

“I can go, if you want me to.” There was a challenge in the husky timbre of her voice.

Logan slammed her back onto the felt, harder than before.

“No, you really can’t.”

His lips captured hers again in a kiss that ignited what little passion still lay dormant between them. Ororo groaned, the sound answered by his low growl. He wrenched her legs apart, settling between them until she could feel the hot, hard length of his cock against her thigh. She undulated into him, wanting to feel him inside of her, mortality be damned.

But Logan obviously had other intentions. He pulled her hands from his hair, pinning them above her head with one of his own. He released her mouth to suck one hard nipple between his lips, swirling his tongue over the hardened bud until Ororo could do nothing but toss her head back against the table. Mindless from pleasure as he lavished attention on one nipple and then the other, she panted his name like some wanton thing.

Her body thrummed for more. Fires she thought doused by the death of her family, the loss in her heart, roared to life under his bruising touch. He licked a long path down the valley of her breasts and lower, releasing her hands only when he had to.

She kept them above her head, grasping the opposite edge of the table desperately. When she felt Logan’s breath against her wet core, she gasped, her hips arching up in offering. Logan needed to
His mouth covered her wet flesh, tongue tracing the lines of her folds. Ororo’s nails dug into the thick felt beneath her, a low groan escaping through clenched teeth. Logan’s wide hands held her hips in place as he ceased his slow torture, devouring her as though she would be his last meal.

Lightning raced through her body, snapping over and under her flesh as Logan’s tongue danced over her swollen clit. He growled again, suckling the tiny bud into his mouth and grazing it with sharp canines.

Ororo shattered. White-hot light erupted behind her eyes and she shook with the force of it. Logan continued his attentions until she whimpered, shifting her legs until he was forced to stop. Her body, on high alert now, quaked with the aftershocks. Goddess, the man had talent.

He covered her again, wrapping her in another of his drowning kisses. She could taste the tang of herself on him, the thrill of it heating her blood for another round. Feeling reckless, she rocked her hips against him, succeeding in rubbing his cock with her wet center.

Tearing her mouth from his, Ororo met Logan’s eyes, reveling in the desire reflecting back at her.

“Fuck me.”

The effect of her words was immediate. Logan captured her wrists with one of his again, the other gripping her hip hard enough to leave marks. He shifted his hips, burying himself inside of her easily. Ororo felt her body clamp down on him, drawing him deeper and deeper until she wasn’t sure he would ever be truly gone.

“Sweet Jesus,” he swore against her breast.

His pace was as punishing as his kisses. Harder with every thrust, faster, deeper…she’d never felt anything like it. Her hands twisted in his grip, her eyes drawn to his face. His eyes were on hers, his expression unreadable save for pure, animalistic pleasure.

Ororo brought her legs up, resting her bare feet on the edge of the table. The action allowed Logan deeper inside; they both cried out at the change in position. She managed to wiggle one hand free of his grasp, holding onto his shoulder as he took her.

“Goddamn,” he snarled, latching onto the flesh of her neck. “You feel…so…fucking…good.”

She gasped when he released her other hand, palming a throbbing breast and flicking his thumb over the dark peak. Ororo tilted her head to the side, allowing him to thoroughly mark her with his mouth.

“H-Harder,” she pled. “Logan…Jesus…”

“Fuck,” he grunted, rearing up.

Ororo blinked up at him as he grasped her legs, tossing them over his shoulders.

“Hold on, ‘Ro.”

He trapped her thighs with both powerful arms, his hips rocking into hers with more force than she thought was possible. Pleasure coiled in her belly as he stroked her, his balls slapping her backside.
with every thrust. Ororo pushed her hands into her hair, taking his wonderful abuse as she whimpered his name.

Logan’s breathing increased, his posture going rigid. Ororo slipped her own hand between her thighs, manipulating her clit expertly as Logan pounded inside of her. His eyes flashed with something dark and feral as he watched her, muscles in his jaw bugling.

She came again with winds screaming outdoors, her back arching off of the pool table and body shaking until she thought she would lose consciousness. Logan swore violently, releasing her legs and covering her quivering body with his. He arched harshly into her, spilling himself against her womb as they fought for stolen breath.

Her arms wrapped about his shoulders, legs circling his waist. Logan’s touch shifted from the brutal, punishment of just moments before until he was nearly tender. He buried his face in the crook of her neck, shivering violently.

“I don’t wanna let go.” He whispered in the sudden quiet. “Not tonight.”

“Don’t,” Ororo replied before she could stop herself. “Stay with me.”

Logan didn’t reply as they held one another amid the dying wind. Ororo didn’t think he could.

~**~

They were watching him carefully, trailing him as he traversed the highways between New York City and Xavier’s School. They had orders to take him out, to do whatever was deemed necessary.

He was a problem. They weren’t sure why, but he was a problem.

The man known as Bishop turned in the empty street, looking over his shoulder.

Pyro gave the command.

They fell on the scarred mutant without remorse or mercy. He was a traitor and would die a traitor’s death. The Brotherhood struck back at the X-Men.

~**~

She’d left his bed before dawn, following her daily ritual as though nothing had changed. He watched as she gave in to her morning run, three miles as dawn broke over the grounds.

She fixed breakfast, checked on the children, showered and changed. Nothing at all seemed amiss with her. That was irritating as shit.

Logan felt inside out and backward. He couldn’t get the sound, scent, feel of her out of his head. He’d taken her thrice more in the comfort of his bed, drawn sounds from that beautiful throat that he ached to hear again and again. Her warm, receptive body had been so damn right on his, waking beside her akin to bliss.

So why wasn’t she effected?
Grumbling, he stomped through mansion, lighting a cigar as he entered the foyer. Hank moved past him, shaking his head.

“Ohoro said no more smoking around the children.”

“Ohoro can blow me.”

He continued on, leaving a shocked Hank in his wake. Poor Beast, he’d make it up to him later or something.

As Logan reached the front door, all of three steps later, the memory of Ororo with her mouth around him, that dangerous glint in her eye, washed over him. He nearly stumbled, grabbing onto the door and clearing his throat quickly.

A glance around told him that no one had seen and he smacked his forehead gently on the wood of the door with a muted *thunk*. He was going to have to watch his mouth. Images like that were going to slowly drive him insane.

Through the night, he’d vowed that it would only be one night. He’d sworn to himself that he would resist her, send her away, not give in. He couldn’t handle having this ache inside of him, he didn’t want it. Feeling for someone brought nothing but pain, to both parties.

It didn’t matter that he’d slept so well with her in his arms. That wasn’t the point. Best to just leave it alone, let that amazing night be lost to the realm of memory. He could let go. He would.

He was lying to himself.

Logan opened the front door and stepped quickly onto the porch. Storm’s copies of the Tribune and USA Today were waiting for him. He bent at the waist to retrieve them, glancing at a headline about some random fire in Jersey. Logan shifted the cigar in his mouth, ripping the rubber band from the national paper and opening it curiously.

His sharp eyesight caught a movement at the mansion’s gates. Looking up, he noted three figures standing in front of the wide wrought iron. Something about the dark figures made his blood run cold.

A beat after he looked up, one of the figures shifted. The shape of a body flew over the gate, a dull thud echoing in Logan’s preternatural ears. He tensed, claws biting at the inside of his flesh. What the hell?

“A gift from the Brotherhood,” said a sultry female voice. “Think twice before attacking us again, X-Man.”

*Bishop.*

Logan felt his entire body freeze with the terrible truth. He dropped the papers, the rustle of the soft sheets dancing in the gentle breeze. A million terrible scenarios ran through his head in the space of an instant.

He was off the porch in the next heartbeat, the scent of blood reaching his sensitive nose. Horror gripped his heart and before he hit the ground, he screamed.
“STORM!”

Oh, God, the rage was terrible. It filled his throat with the coppery taste of violence, colored his vision crimson. He was going to kill every last one of those sadistic bastards. Logan hit the fence, screaming his pain through the wrought iron, heedless to Bishop’s lifeless body on the ground at his feet.

“W-Wol…”

At the choking voice, the fight left Wolverine so swiftly he was momentarily unbalanced. Logan pushed away from the gate, hearing the sounds of footsteps racing up the drive. Storm screamed for Beast, Kitty was crying, Peter metaled-up.

He kneeled beside Bishop, whom shook uncontrollably. The young mutant reached for his hand, grunting through the pain. His dark eyes, swollen from injury, met Logan’s. In an instant, Logan felt that connection and familiarity deepen. He knew this kid. Maybe they fought together, but he knew this determined mutant.

“Storm! Hurry the fuck up!” He shouted, shocked at how broken his voice sounded.

But she was at Bishop’s other side, her face torn by anger and fear. She spared Logan not even a glance as the younger man turned to her. He grabbed her hand, bloodying her flesh as she held him.

“M-Mother…”

Storm shook her head, whispering soothingly. “No, Bishop. It’s Storm. Hang on, sweetheart. Henry is coming.”

Bishop gritted his teeth, nodding. “S-Storm.”

Logan glanced between them, shaking off the odd feeling that passed over him at Bishop’s fevered slip. Poor kid. With so much blood loss and pain, Logan would probably be calling for his mother too.

At least, if he could remember her, anyway.

Hank appeared a moment later, shooing Ororo and Logan out of the way. He ordered Piotr to lift the wounded mutant, rushing him into the mansion. Piotr cleared the curious and frightened children with a single bellow in his native tongue.

When they had vanished into the house, Storm stood. Wolverine leapt to his feet, sniffing the air quickly. Her eyes were rimmed with white, rage clearly written on her delicate features.

“It was the Brotherhood, all right,” Logan informed her quickly. “Said we attacked them.”

“Damn him,” Storm sighed. “He went to kill Pyro.”

“And got his ass handed to him,” Logan shook his head, rolling his shoulders. The rage was returning, eking into his body until it threatened to take him over.

Storm, however, was already in her leadership mode. “Kitty?”
“Yeah?” The girl looked shaken, but she tilted her chin up bravely.

“Get me in a room with the Brotherhood’s new leader. It appears we have some things to discuss.”

“What about Future Boy?” Logan asked, cocking a brow at her. “Who’s gonna yell at him?”

The scowl on Storm’s face was positively terrifying. “Oh, don’t worry. If he lives, he and I will have a nice, long conversation.”

Logan paused as Kitty raced back to the house, pushing the children inside. Storm smelled of Bishop’s blood, her swirling eyes trained on the gate and all that lay beyond.

“You ok?”

Surprised that he asked – and more so that she did not immediately snap at him – he watched as she shook her head sadly.

“No.” She cleared her throat. “I want to know what in the name of hell is happening here.”

He shifted closer to her, finding her gaze in the morning light. “With Bishop? Or us?”

“There is no ‘us’, Wolverine.” Storm’s voice wavered, just enough that he knew she didn’t believe that. “There are bigger things going on.”

“Keep tellin’ yerself that, darlin’.”

With that, he strode back into the house, leaving her alone on the drive.

~**~

Magneto sat regally in his office, watching his assembled mutant team cautiously. They were proud of themselves; of the news they had brought him. He smirked inwardly. Oh, these children had learned very well in their limited time with him. These would be his tools against the X-Men against those responsible for his months as a human.

“What is this news, my children?” He asked of their leader.

Pyro, his proud and flourishing disciple, smirked wickedly. “We found out who the Bishop guy is.”

“Oh?” Magneto raised a silver brow.

“He’s from the fucking future,” Pyro blurted as though unable to control himself. “He says he’s from a time period where mutants and humans are at war.”

“Really?” Magneto sat up, intrigued by this. A glance at Psylocke made the girl nod.

“He’s legit, so far as I can read.”

“Why has he gone to the X-Men?” He asked, looking between Pyro and his lover.

“We’re not sure,” Psylocke answered quickly. “He has some sort of ties to them. He’s leading them
toward a world without the Brotherhood.”

“Why?” Magneto demanded, sitting up fully.

“His mind is a jumble from the time travel,” the violet haired woman replied. “I do know that the war
was started by something that happened between you and Storm. It ignited the tensions with Norms,
started everything.”

Magneto sat back in his chair, mulling this over. So far as he knew, Storm and the other X-Men had
no idea that his powers were returned. Weeks after the cure was so heartlessly crammed into his
chest by that blue oaf, he’d begun showing signs of mutation once more. His power was limited, for
the moment, but he grew stronger every day.

He could not risk confrontation, not yet. If something were brewing, he needed to know about it.
What better way than to capture one with intimate knowledge of the future?

“Did you kill him?”

“No,” Pyro shook his head. “We returned him.”

“Good,” Magneto stood, pushing his desk away with a flick of his wrist. “Observe them, wait for an
opening. Bring Bishop back here. We need to have a chat, he and I.”

“What about the X-Men?” Pyro asked heatedly. “They’ll interfere.”

“Avoid them,” was the clipped command. “You never know who may come in handy.”

“Right.”

Pyro led his team out, leaving Magneto alone with his thoughts. He moved to the dingy window,
staring into the bright sunlight. Storm. Ah, he’d always felt that she would be a worthy adversary.
When he and Charles started that blasted school, he could sense such power in their Windrider.

“What is it, little girl?” He asked the silence. “What will bring us to war?”

There was no answer, save the chill of foreboding that crept into his heart.
Chapter Summary

Everything has now changed for Ororo and Logan.

Logan handed her a steaming cup of coffee as they awaited news in the kitchen. The children had scattered throughout the home, most of them opting to remain indoors while Piotr and Bobby did security checks.

Forge would be along in the morning to upgrade security throughout the grounds, turning the mansion into a veritable Fort Knox should the need arise. Ororo knew he would ask a million questions about their visitor and how much they could tell him was up to the man currently fighting for his life.

Angel had gone down with Hank, offering his field medic skills. Everyone else had been shoved out of the med-lab, ordered to get the hell out of his way. Bishop’s wounds were heavy, his blood loss massive. Ororo had already phoned ahead to the nearby hospital, in case a trauma team was needed.

The Brotherhood was going to answer to her for this.

She curled her fingers around the steaming mug, her jaw aching with the force of her clenching. How could he have been so stupid as to take on the Brotherhood without backup? What was that man thinking? Why had the Brotherhood returned him instead of killing him outright?

Logan stared at the small television screen on the kitchen counter, absorbed in the midday news while she fought her inner turmoil. She glanced at his rugged profile, trying to ignore the way her mouth was suddenly dry and her heart skipped several beats.

Not wanting him to notice her careful study of his face, Ororo swept her gaze back down to her paper. Her body was still blissfully sore from Logan’s aggressive attentions from the previous night. He’d taken and taken from her until she felt there was nothing left to hide. The experience of being really and truly possessed by a man left her with the tingle of feminine pride. It left her inside out, exposed.

That wasn’t a feeling she cared for.

Ororo knew she was fighting a losing battle, but so much of her sanity depended on keeping her life neat and orderly. Just as her emotions kept the weather bright and clear, she buttoned up all personal entanglements and tucked them away. Logan was difficult to resist, but she would have to find a way to do it, lest she lose everything she worked so hard to achieve.

When he turned to glance at her, smiling slightly, her heart dropped to her feet. Oh, hell. She was in for it.

Logan sat up a moment later, his ears twitching. Reacting to his enhanced senses out of pure instinct, Ororo set her coffee down.
“What is it?” She asked as Logan turned toward the door.

“Furball,” he answered. “He’s comin’ up in a hurry.”

“Ororo, Logan!” Hank said before he raced into the kitchen a scant ten seconds later.

Her blue friend had blood smears on his lab coat and fear in his eyes. In his hands was a set of tubing and what looked to be a needle. Ororo jumped up, staring at him in surprise.

“What are your blood types?” Her friend demanded. “Quickly!”

“O neg,” Logan responded as he stood.

“AB negative,” Ororo supplied.

“Come with me, my dear,” Hank jerked his head toward the hall.

Ororo glanced at Logan, then gave chase, following the blue doctor down into the sublevels of the mansion. She had to run to keep up with his hurried pace. He led her into the med-lab, ushering her onto the bed beside the battered Bishop.

“He needs blood,” Hank explained. “Badly. Angel?”

“We’re losing him,” the blonde man answered, pain etched into his features.

Ororo ripped the sleeve of her shirt, taking the elastic from Hank as he checked Bishop’s vitals. She yanked the slender elastic over her bicep, pumping her fist several times to raise her veins.

“This is a needle, not a catheter,” he explained. “Do not move your arm.”

She nodded, holding her arm still. Wincing as the needle bit into her flesh, Ororo closed her eyes while Hank taped the apparatus to her arm. She watched, mildly fascinated, as sticky red blood was pulled from her body. It snaked through the clear tubing, slipping like silent salvation into the man lying beside her.

Ororo felt something nudge at the back of her mind as she looked at the young man so beaten by their enemies. Something like recognition slipped into her heart. Her blood type was not common and if Hank preferred her over Logan’s universal donor…

She thought, perhaps, they were related in some way. Was that why Bishop stared at her sometimes? Why he seemed taken aback by the differences between her now and the future persona?

“He has a rare blood type,” Hank murmured.

“So I see,” she agreed. “We’ve had that problem with me before.”

“Yes,” he continued, speaking as though to himself. “It was fortuitous.”

Ororo couldn’t stop herself. Henry knew something, as he tended to. She swallowed hard and nudged him lightly with her foot.
“Good thing he had a blood relative around.”

“Quite,” Hank answered without thinking. “A parent is usually the donor of choice.”

Time, quite simply, stopped.

Blinking rapidly, Ororo grabbed Hank’s sleeve, yanking him until he stumbled back to stare at her. Realization flooded his kind blue eyes as she gripped the sleeve of his lab coat, shaking her head repeatedly. She could hear the machines monitoring Bishop’s status slow, alerting the other mutants that he was stabilizing.

“Henry. What?” She breathed, paying no mind to Bishop or Angel.

Her friend swallowed audibly, glancing at the dark man lying on the medical bed. He seemed at odds with himself, warring with his confidentiality clause and friendship. Ororo tugged on his sleeve again, forcing him to look at her.

“Tell me, damn you,” she insisted.

Hank exhaled slowly. “He’s your son, Ororo. Bishop is your son.”

It took all of one second for the weight of his words to sink in. Ororo reached up, yanking the needle from her arm and jumping from the bed. Shaking Hank off of her, she ran from the med-lab, racing through the metallic halls and into the elevator.

Smacking the up button repeatedly, she was raging by the time she reached the mansion’s main level. Thunder slammed against the windows, wind howling with her internal hell. Oh, by the Goddess, she was going to murder that man.

She all but flew into the kitchen, rounding on Logan the moment she saw him. Unable to speak as he continued to idly stare at the television, she kicked her leg out, knocking his feet from their placement on the table.

He startled, looking up at her as coffee sloshed down his shirt.

“What the flamin’ hell is your problem?”

Ororo jabbed a finger at him. “You! Come with me! NOW!”

Thunder boomed in the heavens. Logan immediately stood.

She turned on her heel, knowing he was following as she stomped back into the lower levels. No one stopped her, nor dared question as the skies cracked and the weather took a definite turn for the worse.

Logan didn’t speak as they entered the med-lab, Ororo slamming the door so that it swung violently on its hinges.

“SIT!” She commanded Logan.

He watched her cautiously as he lowered his coffee-stained form into a nearby chair. Hank came around the bed where Bishop lay, Angel exiting the lab swiftly. Ororo rummaged through the
counter, muttering to herself as her heart ached in her chest.

Once she located several sterile swabs, she shoved them at a wincing Henry. “Do it.”

“I already did,” Hank tried to calm her. “When he claimed…”

“I don’t care, Henry Peter McCoy. DO IT!”

Another massive clap of thunder echoed through the mansion at her words, startling even Logan. The two men stared at her, but she only had eyes for Hank.

The blue mutant unwrapped a sterile swab and immediately Ororo opened her mouth. He gently scraped the inside of her cheek before covering the sample and marking it with her name.

When he turned to Logan, the feral obediently allowed Hank to do the same, his eyes on Ororo the entire time. She wasn’t sure how much he had guessed, but an eyebrow went up when Hank swabbed Bishop though the younger man was unconscious.

“This will only take a moment.”

Hank ducked into his office, leaving Ororo and Logan alone. She didn’t spare a word for him, staring instead at the prone form of the man claiming to be her son. It couldn’t be true. How could she have a child? Oh, God. Did she already carry him?

“Wanna explain?”

“Logan,” Ororo closed her eyes, shaking her head. “You don’t want to talk to me right now.”

“Fine.”

They looked away from one another, waiting on Hank as the monitors beeped steadily to break the oppressing silence.

~**~

Another Time, Another Place

Lucas slipped into his family’s quiet home long after they were all asleep. He knew that when Father got a hold of him, his hide was going to be tanned. Repeatedly. The only defense he could muster was that he knew it was the right thing to do. They would understand that. He hoped, anyway.

Setting his laser rifle down by the back door, Lucas took a step into the tidy kitchen and froze.

“Welcome home, son.”

On immediate alert at seeing his father’s unmistakable silhouette leaning in the doorway to the living room, Lucas swallowed thickly. Damn. He’d wanted a little time for them to cool down, to think over what he’d done. An ambush hadn’t been on his list of things to do today.

“Father.” He replied at last, proud when his voice did not waver.

“Are you out of your goddamn mind?” The elder mutant snarled, moving from his lounging position
to stalk toward his wayward offspring.

Lucas tilted his chin out defiantly. “I did what I had to.”

“Lucas,” Mother’s voice came from the foyer as she stepped up beside her husband. “What have you done?”

Unable to fight them both, Lucas sighed before turning his eyes away. His arms ached terribly, the force of the blast having sent him sprawling into a nearby concrete median. The leather of his militia uniform was shredded in places, which he knew his mother was mentally cataloguing as he thought it over.

“You know what he did, darlin’,” Father growled. “He went on that fuckin’ mission we told him he couldn’t.”

“Lucas?” Mother’s tone was neutral; the calm before the storm.

“I had to,” the seventeen-year-old defended. “They were short handed!”

“It was suicide!” Mother’s shout resembled the clap of thunder behind it. “By the Bright Lady, how many did you lose?”

He felt the blow to his heart again, remembering the feel of blood on his hands. “Thirty.”

“Flamin’ Christ,” Wolverine roared. His adamantium-laced fist socked a hole in a nearby wall, to which his wife raised a solitary brow over glowing eyes.

“Just because you were too goddamn afraid to go on that mission doesn’t mean I’ve forgotten our responsibilities!” Lucas shouted, suddenly enraged. “You two could have turned the mission around, made it a victory for the Rebellion!”

Before he could process that Father had moved, Lucas was flattened against the wall. He gulped against his will as lethal adamantium claws erupted from his father’s hands, coming within centimeters of his face.

“Watch who you’re callin’ a coward, boy,” Father snarled, heedless to Mother’s plea for them to act like adults.

Lucas could hear the muffled weeping coming from his little sister and felt shame fill his heart. But he glared defiantly at his father, wanting to tell the old man that he wasn’t some boy anymore. He was a valued member of the militia, a part of the mutant Rebellion.

“The mission was foolhardy and solved nothing,” Mother said from behind her men. “We did not participate because we did not believe it right to attack a human power base without provocation.”

“We told you not to go,” Father continued, finishing her thought. “Cause you’re toein’ a fine line, son. Between right an’ wrong.”

“You can’t keep me locked up like this,” Lucas thundered, heedless to the claws. “I’m not a child!”

“You’re my son,” Father countered with raw emotion in his voice. “An’ yer slippin’ away a little more every day. You’re listenin’ to the ravings of a madman instead of your family.”
His father’s claws retracted, the vice grip loosening so quickly that Lucas stumbled. He glanced to Mother, whom cradled Lizzie in her arms, running a hand through her the soft flax of her hair. Both girls had tears in their eyes, Lizzie clutching her beloved teddy bear with all the strength she could get in her ten-year-old body.

“You deal with him!” Father snapped to Mother. “Jesus H. Christ, he’s fucking stubborn.”

Mother sighed, handing the whimpering Lizzie over to Father. The white haired woman came to her son, whom ducked his head. Mother had the rare ability to make him feel five years old, no matter how right he thought he was.

She grasped his chin in her hand and yanked his eyes to meet hers. “Do you honestly believe us to be cowards?”

Lucas shook his head as much as he could. Of course he didn’t think they were cowards. His parents had fought impossible odds before, gone charging into battle broken and bleeding.

“My son, Magneto is leading you down the wrong path,” she said with quiet intensity. “You must choose, in this moment. Him or us.”

Without thinking, Lucas swallowed over the lump of pure emotion in his throat and embraced his mother. “You, of course. I’m sorry.”

“If you ever disobey the orders of your commander again, I will have you kicked from the militia,” she said, though her arms came around him soothingly. “And if you refer to me as a coward just once more…”

“Electrocution, I know, I know.”

~***~

Here and Now

One word that was rarely used to describe Logan was patient. He was known for roaring, snarling, leaping into action without thought to consequences. And yet, here he sat, in the sterile med-lab, patiently waiting to see what she would do next.

He caught the lingering scent of fear and rage on her, wondering how she managed to look that calm when her insides were in hell. Oh, he could tell. He knew without even looking at her that she was coming close to losing her grip. The faint tinge of ozone on the air was enough to send the fine hairs on the nape of his neck to attention.

A natural problem solver, Logan had quickly deduced some of what was happening here. Storm obviously thought there was some kind of genetic connection between Bishop, herself, and Wolverine. He didn’t want to entertain thoughts of the young man being their child, but it kept coming back to him again and again.

That sense of familiarity, the way he reminded Logan of the wintry mutant…it made sense and lacked it at the same time.

Finally, after what seemed to be decades spent in the tense silence, the computer’s printer groaned to
life. Ororo was off her chair in an instant, an angry glare ensuring neither conscious man moved to intercept her.

Logan felt his body poise for action again, wondering if whatever she was about to read would effect him. Contrary to popular belief, the feral wasn’t stupid. He knew something huge was about to go down, could feel it in the depths of his soul. Fate was handing him his ass.

Ororo’s expressive eyes darted over the wet ink, her face crumbling for a beat before the rage contorted her delicate features. Logan captured that fleeting moment forever in his mind. Her guard had been down, revealing a chink in that icy armor. Maybe there was hope yet.

Hope for what…Logan couldn’t quite say. He would have to go with his gut for now, no matter what she was about to say.

“By the Goddess,” Ororo shoved the paperwork at him, startling him slightly with her swift movement. “How did I let you get me pregnant?”

Logan felt his eyes widen. “Huh?”

“He’s your son. Our son. Jesus,” Storm rubbed at her temples, her entire body trembling.

Dark eyes darted over the medical jargon marking the warm paper. To an accuracy of 97.98%, Logan and Ororo were the parents of the mutant known as Bishop. Swallowing hard, tasting the ozone on the air, Logan tossed the paper over his shoulder.

“This is your fault,” the beautiful woman rounded on him angrily. “This is completely your fault.”

“My fault?” Logan snarled in response. “I don’t think I forced you onto that pool table. Or my bed. Or the goddamn floor!”

Her eyes snapped with lightning, swirls of milky white threatening to overtake cocoa. “I tried to leave!”

“Not that hard, darlin’,” Logan fired back. “I think the term ‘Fuck me’ left your lips ‘fore mine.”

“Logan, Ororo…” Hank tried to cut in. His words fell on deaf ears.

“God, if you could just keep it tucked away for longer than five minutes…”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa! It takes two to tango, Storm. I wasn’t alone in this and you’d best remember that, girl.”

“Stop this at once!” Hank snarled as he shoved them apart. “You’re not helping Bishop with your petty arguing.”

“Hank…” Ororo tried.

“Henry…” Logan attempted.

He held up both blue paws to silence them. “I don’t want to hear it. You both made the conscious decision to fornicate on the pool table – thank you for the warning, by the by – and you will deal with the consequences.”
Logan glared at the snowy-haired mutant around Beast. It struck him at that moment that their little romp could have already implanted the child inside of her. His rage left in an instant, an alien need to protect what he’d created overwhelming his heart.

“Hank?” He cleared his throat, not looking at Storm now. “Is she…?”

“I am unsure,” the blue doctor shook his head. “We cannot be sure for at least several weeks.”

“But it’s possible,” he glanced to Storm, meeting her guarded gaze. “He could be in there right now.”

She turned her back on him, but Logan caught the subtle shift in her arms as she covered her abdomen with one hand. Putting that safely in his “win” column, Logan shook his head.

“This is fuckin’ unreal.”

“Yes, I know,” Beast clasped his shoulder soothingly.

Ororo slammed out of the med-lab, letting massive thunder crack the heavens as the door swung ominously behind her. Logan swallowed thickly, glancing to his son lying helplessly on the bio-bed only a few feet from where he was standing.

Fate had a twisted sense of humor.
A new player enters the scene. Logan and Ororo grapple with the knowledge of Bishop's parentage.

What did I do to deserve you?
What did I do to deserve this?
I won’t shut up
I won’t calm down
I won’t kiss you
I won’t want you
I won’t love you

Writhing bodies moved to the pulse-pounding music, hands waving in the sweat-thick air as the blonde singer screamed into the microphone. Bobby grinned at his brunette companion, pleased to find her eyes closed, mouth roughly forming the words to one of her favorite songs.

Though there was turmoil all over the mansion, Storm had given Kitty her birthday gift before Bishop’s arrival and insisted she use the coveted concert tickets. Kitty asked Bobby to come with her, obviously more comfortable with the suggestion given Rogue’s trip to Germany.

Nodding his head to the beat he could feel in his blood, Bobby looked back to the stage just a few feet in front of him. The blonde front woman of Dazzler caught his gaze, shooting him a teasing wink as she vocalized into the chorus. Blinding lights erupted behind her, giving the audience more than just human eye candy.

He winced against the brightness, grinning when Kitty bumped him as she swayed enticingly to the music. Dazzler was her favorite band; common knowledge at the school where the mutant woman made her home. Hardly a day went by when Kitty wasn’t blasting one of the underground discs in her bedroom or the training room.

Bobby didn’t know much about the musician, save that she was irredeemably hot and could belt out hard-core ska and Etta James without batting an eyelash. His eyes lingered on the mesh top she wore, which barely covered what looked like a black bikini top. Her tight leather pants rested at toned hips, revealing a muscled abdomen and the waistband of what Bobby only hoped was a thong.

Her heavy combat boots thudded in time to the beat as the music reached its peak. Bobby had to give Kitty credit; she could pick a concert.

It felt good to just let go, to be eighteen if only for a night. He could forget about Bishop, future war, and present hate crimes. There were no X-Men, no Brotherhood…not right now anyway.

Cheers were deafening when the song ended. Bobby winced when Kitty screamed her pleasure, the look on her face as close to pure bliss as the young man had ever seen. He swallowed hard, giving his companion a smile as Dazzler’s drummer wound up again.
The singer’s voice dropped into a sensual purr, her vocals easily seducing every man – and probably some women – in the club.

*Creep into my bedroom, baby*
*Show me what you mean by love*
*Creep between my sheets, darlin’*
*Let me show you what I do*
*How I’m gonna do you*

Dazzler’s front woman winked at Bobby again. He felt his face heat.

“You could get lucky, Iceman!” Kitty yelled over the music. “Just don’t forget me when you go back stage to “creep”.”

She laughed hysterically as his face was sent into embarrassed flames. He socked her familiarly in the arm. Even with her teasing, this was the best night he’d had in a long time.

He didn’t even feel guilty thinking that. Rogue had left for Germany without saying goodbye, hadn’t she? Obviously she didn’t think he needed her. She could keep right on thinking that.

Bobby glanced around again, smiling as he found himself falling into the sexually charged song. He spied something familiar out of the corner of his eye and froze.

“Kitty.”

She turned to him, seemingly confused. Bobby jerked his head to the left, feeling his hands clench into fists. Pyro, their old schoolmate and new enemy, was making his way toward the back of the club.

“Jesus,” Shadowcat breathed loudly. “He’s going backstage.”

Bobby grabbed Kitty’s hand. “Come on. We have to follow him.”

She nodded, letting Bobby lead her through the teeming throng surrounding the stage. This wasn’t good. Just two young X-Men confronted by the Brotherhood. Iceman felt his heart begin to pound.

Even if he could reach Storm or Wolverine, they were at least half an hour from help. There was no way anyone could get here in time to help them. A glance at Kitty assured Bobby that she understood the situation as well. Whatever happened, they had a job to do. When they signed on as X-Men, they agreed to protect innocent lives, to fight for Xavier’s dream.

Taking the backstage passes Storm had surprised them with, Bobby and Kitty were admitted into the back area of the club. They hung back, trying to look inconspicuous as the music from the stage halted. The concert was over.

“Sorry you missed the end,” Bobby whispered to Kitty as they stood against the back wall, watching Pyro carefully.

“That’s ok,” Kitty said lightly, her hand squeezing his. “In case this gets sticky, I had a really good time tonight, Bobby. Thanks for coming with me.”

He gave her a strained smile, giving in to the impulse to kiss her cheek. She colored prettily, looking away from him.

The band came through the thick black curtains leading to the stage a moment later. Cheering and
applause from the crowd outside rang through the backstage area, making Bobby wince. Soon those with backstage access would stream back here, making it difficult to maneuver. He led Kitty closer to the dressing rooms.

“He’s talking to her,” Kitty whispered urgently.

Bobby followed her gaze, scowling when he saw Pyro open her dressing room door. He followed her inside, leaving another mutant outside the door as though guarding it. Kitty shook her head, releasing Bobby’s hand.

“We have to get closer,” she hissed over her shoulder. “Come on!”

He followed, weaving through the dozens of bodies quickly filling the room. They slipped past guards and the other band members, most of them distracted by women in revealing clothing whom had obviously had far too much to drink.

Bobby iced his fist up, moving toward the young mutant guarding the door. Kitty ducked instinctively as Bobby threw that fist out, weighted by several pounds of ice. The boy fell into Kitty’s arms, who quickly phased him through the floor.

Looking around to ensure no one had seen anything, Bobby crept to the door, putting his ear against it. A soft whooshing told him Kitty had returned. He closed his eyes, concentrating as Wolverine had taught him.

Pyro’s familiar voice came through the thick wooden door, mingling with the throaty vocals of Dazzler’s lead singer.

“The Brotherhood wants you, Alison,” Pyro was saying. “You have the potential to be a very powerful mutant.”

“Right,” the girl replied with some sarcasm. “Do I look like I want to kill all humans? I like norms. They’re so…normal.”

Bobby resisted the urge to snort.

“Our leader is prepared to offer you free run of the music industry once the war is over.”

The woman inside laughed. “What war? You haven’t even started fighting and he’s making plans for this glorious take over? Thats real smart.”

“Look, Blaire,” Pyro said, sounding frustrated. “Magneto won’t take no for an answer. You’re with us or against us.”

“Hmm,” she hummed in reply. “Then I’m against you. Like it or not, mutants and norms need each other. I’m not for killing people because I’m different. You’re barkin’ up the wrong tree, Sparky.”

Bobby distinctly heard the sound of Pyro’s apparatus engage. Before he could take the door down, Kitty had phased through it. She popped it open halfway through, allowing Iceman inside so that Pyro was effectively trapped.

The blonde mutant could have saved them both the trouble. She stood with both hands out at Pyro, bright white light erupting from her palms. There was a look of hatred on her face as Kitty moved up to her.

“Guys like you give all mutants a bad name. Tell Magneto he can suck my dick.”
“Wow,” Kitty said clinically. “I think we’ll get along just fine.”

Blaire turned on them, one hand still trained on Pyro as the other came up. Bobby and Kitty put their hands up in defense. “We’re not Brotherhood!”

“Iceman! Kitty?” Pyro grunted from his placement against the wall, his hands pinned behind his back. “What are you doing here?”

“Our job,” Bobby said gruffly. He turned his back on Pyro, meeting the deep green of Alison Blaire’s eyes. “It’s ok. We’re from Xavier’s School.”

“Mutant high?” The girl dropped her hand a fraction. “I’ve heard of it.”

“We saw this jerk come back here and thought you might need help,” Kitty gestured to the restrained Pyro. “Guess we were wrong.”

Alison shrugged, grinning at them. “He’s not the only one with gifts. I’m fine.”

“Yeah, but…” Kitty sighed. “Bobby, I think we could use some privacy with Alison, don’t you?”

“My pleasure.” He whipped around to Pyro, decking him cleanly with one icy fist. The boy slumped against the wall, released from Alison’s mutation, his nose bleeding as consciousness left him.

“Don’t mind him,” Kitty was saying to Blaire. “They have some unresolved anger issues.”

“I can see that,” the blonde smirked. “Nice hit, though.”

“Thanks,” Bobby winked at her. “You sure you’re ok?”

“Peachy,” she grabbed a bag and slung it over her shoulder. “If the Brotherhood’s looking into me though, I’d better skip town. Thanks.”

Kitty caught Bobby’s gaze and he nodded instantly.

“We’ve got a better idea.”

~**~

Alison Blaire happened to be just over five feet tall with emerald green eyes and long blonde hair. She had the delicate features of someone raised in high society and a body that betrayed her addiction to sports. Her voice was her bread and butter, her status as a mutant a guarded secret.

She had an overly bright view of the world and shared that optimism with anyone and everyone within earshot. She spoke her mind, usually without caring what someone thought of her. She laughed, a lot. Teasing seemed to be her favorite past time and her genuine interest in the people around her was oddly endearing.

Kitty had made a friend.

While Bobby piloted the borrowed Mazda through the massive gates of Xavier’s School, the two girls chatted in the backseat. Kitty caught him glancing at them more than once, but decided not to comment on it. Though her new friend seemed at ease, there was a guarded, almost skittish feel to her.

She was ready to bolt at the first sign of danger. Kitty set her mind to making the girl feel at ease, hoping nothing had come along during her night out to send the X-Men into fits. If there was mutant
high drama, Kitty wasn’t sure she could keep Alison from running.

“Home sweet home,” Bobby said as he parked the Mazda and hopped out of the driver’s seat.

“Welcome to Xavier’s School for Gifted Youngster’s.” Kitty slid out of the car, watching as Alison stepped out behind Bobby.

Her eyes were scanning the entire grounds, her red lips falling open in mute surprise.

“Holy shit,” she breathed. “You guys really call it that?”

“Yeah,” Bobby shrugged, moving up the walk. “Don’t blame us, we didn’t name it.”

“Right, if I start seeing leprechauns and fairies, I’m so outta here.”

“No yellow brick roads either?” Alison questioned as she glanced at Bobby.

“No even a cowardly lion.” He winked as Kitty threw open the mansion’s doors, letting the sound of laughing and quarreling teens waft through the foyer.

Kitty stopped inside, taking her coat and placing it on the hook bearing her name. She watched Alison tense a little, her emerald gaze darting about quickly. The mansion’s interior was often off-putting. Antiques and Persian rugs weren’t exactly what people had in mind when they thought of mutant school.

The girl tucked a blonde lock behind her ear, smiling slightly as she shrugged.

“Beats the band’s van, that’s for damn sure.”

Bobby was calling for Dr. McCoy and Storm when Piotr came jogging down the stairs in his Snoopy pajama bottoms and a tight tee shirt. Kitty gulped a little, blinking at the way his muscles moved beneath the thin cotton.

“Holy…” Alison breathed as the young man moved toward them, obvious interest in his eyes.

“What followed you home, Katya?” His slight Russian accent was filled with good humor.

“They wanted a kitten or a puppy,” Alison said as she recovered from her dumbstruck awe. “But they got me instead.”

“Lucky us,” Piotr said with a grin as he stuck his hand out. “Piotr Rasputin, also known as Colossus.”

“We call him Peter,” Kitty supplied as the two shook hands.

“Alison Blaire, aka Dazzler. You can call me Ali.”

“A pleasure to meet you, Alison.” Piotr turned to Bobby. “Are you looking for Beast?”

“Or Wolverine or Storm.” The other boy supplied somewhat sullenly. Kitty shot him a glance, which he avoided.

“Ah, the latter you will not find. Storm is upstairs and Wolverine is with Bishop. I can find Beast,
“Cool.” Bobby shrugged out of his coat.

“Ali’s bunking with me, so we’ll get her settled. Send Dr. McCoy up when you find him?”

“Sure thing,” Bobby agreed.

“It was nice to meet you,” Piotr offered as the boys moved into the living room.

“You, too.” Alison tossed over her shoulder while Kitty pulled her upstairs.

“So, what do you think?” The brunette asked, giggling at the way Alison leaned to watch Piotr and Bobby exit the foyer.

“I think I’m gonna like it here.” Dazzler’s grin was positively ferocious.

~**~

She’d avoided everyone the previous evening, concentrating on her own thoughts and the men they revolved around. They had given her space, for which she was grateful. If Logan had shown his damned face at her door after all that was revealed, she would have killed him.

Taking a cup of coffee to the kitchen table, Ororo narrowly avoided colliding with several running students. Without even the mental presence to chide them, Storm let them escape into the sitting room as they prepared for classes.

What she really wanted was to be alone, but as usual the demands of a headmistress weighed heavily upon her. There could be no hiding under the covers today, no matter how badly she wanted to. She couldn’t face Logan and Bishop yet, not when she didn’t know what she was feeling.

Her son. Their son. It couldn’t be possible, could it? Physically, yes, she supposed there was a chance. She couldn’t even tell herself that she’d never wind up in Logan’s bed again. But the way Bishop had always spoken of his parents, as though there were important, cherished. How could she and Logan had created a child so innately good?

Bishop had come back to the past to correct the future, saving hundreds of lives. Ororo liked to think that she could do something so courageous, leaving everyone she loved. There was no doubt in her mind that Logan would, if something he loved were at stake.

And yet, the manner in which Bishop had spoken of his family had given Ororo the image of two loving and happy parents doting on a wonderful son. Part of her hoped the image was wrong while the larger side prayed that it was not. If Bishop truly was her son, she hoped his life had been as happy as she could provide in wartime.

Shaking herself back to the present, Ororo glanced around the sunlit kitchen.

Hank stood at the kitchen table with the young recruit Bobby and Kitty had appeared with late the previous evening. The girl was tugging on his blue mane, the warmth in her laughter making Ororo smile. She recognized a sort of kinship with this mysterious waif. Street kids to the bone, she surmised from the way the girl behaved. Always ready to bolt, never quite settled.

Ororo took a seat across from the newest member of her ever-growing household, glancing at the paperwork Henry had insisted she fill out.
Ororo turned her gaze to the lost soul regarding her with teasing eyes. “Alison, I will not respond to lady. You may call me Ororo or Storm. Formalities get in the way.”

“This is so cool,” Alison grinned, munching on a donut. “A woman runs this place. All my dreams have come true.”

Storm had to fight back the smile that threatened to curve her lips.

“You go on, girl. Burn! Fight! Win! Show these boy muties who’s the boss!”

“What is wrong with boy muties?” Hank asked, raising a blue brow.

“Boys are stinky, throw rocks at them,” Alison replied cheekily.

“Can we get back on topic here, please?” Storm cut in before Hank could respond.

She stacked Alison’s paperwork together, binding it with a paper clip. Alison was just nineteen years old, alone for most of her life due to disinterested parents. She had confided in Kitty, who in turn told Ororo, that her parents disappeared completely from the girl’s life after her first use of mutation.

Ororo could feel Kitty’s affection for the young singer and immediately knew they would have something special if Dazzler stayed on. She regarded the girl over the table, not surprised to find her sitting back in the chair, staring unabashedly at Storm.

Fearless. The girl had no fear. She seemed to toe the line between eccentric and openly rebellious. She had been pierced several times – six in each ear and both eyebrows that Ororo could see – each some kind of silent statement. Each tattoo a symbol of independence.

But beneath the surface, there was vulnerability in this beautiful urchin. A pure soul lingered, hidden by brash attitude and sarcasm. No doubt life had forced her to cover up, to never show that beautiful inside lest it be destroyed.

Ororo could definitely connect with that.

“You were thirteen when your mutation manifested?” She asked, shrugging off her inner thoughts.

“Yep.” Alison grinned. “I got pissed off at my boyfriend and cut a hole in his truck. He was so pissed off. It was great.”

“Have you received any training?” Henry asked, marking something on his medical sheets.
“Not really,” she shrugged. “I practiced a lot in my backyard. I’ve got the gist of it.”

“Would you be prepared to hone your skills more fully?” Beast asked again.

Alison seemed surprised by his question. “Think I could?”

The furry blue mutant nodded, his expression open and warm. “Oh yes. I believe you have only begun to scratch the surface of your gifts.”

“Huh,” she said with a shrug. “Sure.”

“We are prepared to offer you a place here at Xavier’s,” Ororo continued. “But there are rules you must follow.”

The girl’s nose scrunched up in dislike. “Rules.”

“Yes, rules,” Ororo pressed. “Kitty can fill you in on most of them, but I will say now that there are three basic rules. Breaking these can lead to immediate removal.”

“She’s a hardass,” Alison said to Beast, whom covered a laugh with an ineffectual cough. “Ok, boss-lady, fire away.”

Ororo held up one finger. “One: You will not use your gifts to intentionally harm a student or faculty member.”

“Well, duh.” Alison rolled her eyes. “Next.”

“Two,” Ororo’s middle finger joined the first. “No drinking or drug use on the premises. Smoking is permitted out of doors and only if you are over eighteen.”

“I don’t smoke.”

“Good. And finally,” Ororo held up her ring finger. “Under no circumstances are you to enter the lower levels of the mansion without a faculty member with you. Have I made myself clear?”

Alison nodded immediately. “Crystal. Nothing I can’t handle.”

“Excellent,” Hank said, standing quickly. “I can give you that tour now, if you’d like.”

“You’re on, Beastie,” the girl grinned as she leapt to her feet. “Are there really stables?”

“Oh yes, do you ride?”

“Well, I do own chaps and a bridle, but I’ve never been on a horse.”

At her deliberately teasing words, Hank blushed and stumbled slightly. Ororo hid a smile in her hand, watching as the blue doctor and her new charge moved into the hall. That girl was going to be a handful.

Almost the instant the other two rounded the corner, Logan appeared in all his Stetson and cigar glory. He watched the new girl with a careful sniff in her direction. Ororo turned to her paperwork, ignoring the fact that he dared to exist in the same timeline as she. The scent of his cigar smoke made her stomach clench, even as Alison yelled: “Hey! Boss-Lady said no smoking in the house!”

Logan chose to not respond as he stomped into the kitchen. A cursory glance in his direction told Ororo that he had not changed since the previous day. He had obviously remained in the med-lab,
watching over the man that claimed to be their son.

“Who’s the blonde?”

“Alison Blaire,” Ororo replied without looking up. “The Brotherhood tried to recruit her last night.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes.”

He grunted.

Irritated that she felt desire stab at her stomach upon seeing him, that his scent and voice made her want to ensure they conceived the man in the med-lab, Ororo stood. His back was facing her as he fixed his usual black coffee.

“I thought you and Beast injected Magneto with the cure.”

Logan’s back immediately stiffened. “We did.”

“Apparently you missed.” Her tone was scathing. “Bobby and Kitty said Pyro revealed Magneto as the leader of the Brotherhood. Alison confirmed it.”

Wolverine turned on her, dark eyes flashing. “We fuckin’ cured him, Storm. I was there. I watched the needles go into him.”

She exhaled slowly in an attempt to control her temper. “Then we are going to have a very large problem.”

He regarded her quietly for several moments. Tension flowed freely between them, making both mutants edgy and unsure. Ororo wanted to run for the back door and leap into the skies, but she refrained. There was too much to do, as usual. She would just have to deal with Wolverine.

“We already have a problem,” he countered harshly. “Like why you won’t go down and speak to your son.”

Ororo wished he had chosen to physically slap her. Having Bishop thrown in her face was not how she envisioned her morning. She took another deep breath, refusing to avoid Logan’s heated gaze.

“He isn’t awake,” she said quickly. “And I honestly have nothing to say to him, aside from screaming about the stupidity of taking on the Brotherhood alone.”

Logan’s dark eyes flashed with something primal. “He’s our son.”

“No yet.” She turned to scoop Alison’s paperwork into her hands, wanting only to escape from the accusation in Logan’s eyes.

He stopped her, grasping her bicep and turning her around.

“You might not see him as your son yet,” he told her in a tone that was more a growl than anything. “But he looks at you and sees his mother.”

Though she knew it was likely the truth, Ororo shook her head, tearing her arm from Logan’s grasp. She didn’t want to think about this now. She didn’t want to know if her one night with Wolverine would turn into a lifelong bond. By the Goddess, she never wanted to know if her heart would betray her down the line and jump into the hands of their resident feral.
“I have work to do.”

She could see that he wanted to say something, but he held back. Clenching his jaw so that his pulse jumped radically, Logan waved a hand toward the door, anger coming from his every pore in waves.

“Well, go. I ain’t stoppin’ ya.”

Ororo took the invitation and left the room at a sedate walk. The angry heat of Logan’s gaze followed her all the way to her office.
Mother

Chapter Summary

Logan deals with his feelings. Alison makes herself at home. Bishop is confronted by the changes in the timeline and a complication he never expected.

Bishop’s condition slowly improved throughout the day following the Brotherhood’s brutality. Logan entered the med-lab after his altercation with Storm, spitting mad and ready to scream. The woman was absolutely cold, nothing beneath her beautifully placid surface but ice. He hated that he still wanted her, that he could vividly recall every moment of their night spent together. If he could forget about it, maybe that would make her easier to move on from.

*Keep dreamin’, bub,* Logan thought as he sipped his coffee.

He took the stool beside his future son’s bed and glanced at the monitors. His heart rate was stronger, his breathing back to normal. Apparently Bishop was as much a fighter as his parents; there was some measure of comfort in that.

Logan couldn’t understand his own actions. From the instant Bishop’s parentage was revealed, he felt a deep, unbreakable bond with the younger mutant. Logan could feel something for him, an echo of the future this man represented. He didn’t know exactly how to handle it, so he figured waiting patiently for Bishop to recover was a step in the right direction.

Bishop saw his father when he looked at Wolverine. Something in that trust, that intimate knowledge humbled him. He had a million questions for Bishop, most of them revolving around one simple issue. Why had he let his son do this?

The dark man’s breathing shortened, drawing Logan from his thoughts. Ebony eyes blinked before he winced in pain. The feral watching over him stood, taking the needle Hank had left him and removing the protective covering.

“Hey, kid,” Logan said quietly. “Hurt?”

“Y-Yes.”

“Hang on.” Placing the needle at the top of the IV, Logan quickly injected the morphine, watching as the pain medication snaked through tubing before reaching Bishop’s body.

The other man sighed, coughing slightly. Logan pressed the foot pedal beside the bed, helping him sit up. He’d woken enough times in this damn med-lab to know how things worked, even without Hank’s crash course in medical training.

“Better?”

“Yes, thank you,” Bishop coughed. Logan took the nasal oxygen apparatus and pulled it over his son’s head.
Bishop was staring at him as he tightened the nasal tubes, adjusting them so they would remain in place. Unable to think of anything to say, Logan cleared his throat, meeting the dark eyes that he so suddenly realized were his.

“You know.”

Two words said it all. He nodded curtly, urging his son to lie back down. Busying himself with changing bandages, Logan took several deep breaths, trying in vain to think of something -- anything -- to say.

“Your mother always gonna be such a bitch?”

That wasn’t exactly what he’d had in mind, but it slipped from his lips before he could stop it. Logan winced, surprised when Bishop chuckled slightly.

“No, actually,” he said gruffly. “She loves you to distraction in my timeline. I can’t figure it out why, you’re an asshole in this time.”

Logan grunted, peeling back a soaking gauze bandage and nodding at how quickly Bishop was healing. “You’ve got a point.”

They lapsed into silence while Bishop was re-bandaged. His son muttered a thank you under his breath while Logan cleaned up the mess they had made. Dark eyes followed his every movement and when he looked back up, Logan caught the unguarded pain in those familiar eyes.

“I’m sorry,” Bishop whispered. “I just…”

“Its ok,” Logan grasped his shoulder, not knowing how to kill the impulse. “You couldn’t tell us.”

“I wanted to,” Bishop answered. “And we’ve already changed the timeline so much…but you hate each other. You’re not the people I know.”

Logan took a seat on the edge of the bed, shushing an obviously distraught young man. He wondered again why his future self had allowed his son to leave, to go back to a time when his parents were at one another’s throats. What was he thinking? No child deserved this shit.

“We don’t hate each other,” Logan sighed. “We’re just…well, we…Hell, I don’t know. She gets under my damn skin.”

Bishop grinned, shaking his head. “Uh-huh, you say that now…just wait twenty years.”

Both men chuckled quietly. Logan found himself cataloguing everything the future mutant was doing, saying. Oh, there were a million tells in his manner and voice. Hundreds of things told of the man’s parentage. He was a perfect blend of Storm and Wolverine, if you looked hard enough. The kid might as well have been wearing a neon sign.

“Are we close?” Logan asked suddenly, gesturing between them. “You and me?”

Bishop nodded. “Yes. Mother and I are very close as well.”

“I teach you how to fight?” He continued, his throat tight.
“You taught me how to play baseball first.”

That did it. Logan stood, turning away from his son as tears stung at his eyes as emotion rolled over him. Mental images of him tossing a ball to a child in the sunlight, laughing when he missed, cheering when he caught it…it was too much.

One tear was all he would give the image, the emotional gesture wiped away instantly. How could he be this man? How would he grow into that kind of father? It was unreal. It couldn’t be true, no matter what his heart was telling him.

The med-lab doors hissed open a moment later and as though in slow motion, Logan saw Ororo enter. She tossed one lock of shocking white from her eyes, her pressed blue suit seeming a little out of place on someone so wild, so untamed.

Logan halted those thoughts the moment their eyes met. She had let some of her guard down before coming down here. What was she looking for?

“Is he awake?”

Logan nodded with a grunt, stepping to the side to allow her unfettered access to the man on the bed. Bishop shifted restlessly, looking somewhat like a child about to be taken to task by a ferocious mother.

“Bishop,” she said, striding toward him with a toss of her head. “How are you feeling?”

The dark man shot Logan a questioning look to which he nodded. Yes, she definitely knew. Poor kid.

Her heels made soft clicking noises on the polished tile. She stopped at his bedside, crossing her arms over her chest and glaring at the young man for all she was worth. Logan had to fight an amused smile, wondering how many times Bishop had seen that exact look on her face in his younger years.

He heard the darker man gulp. That was hilarious.

“You disobeyed a direct order,” Storm said bluntly. “You took on the Brotherhood single-handedly and nearly died in the effort.”

Bishop nodded. “They’re having the mansion watched. Didn’t happen in the other timeline.”

“Right.” She inhaled and exhaled slowly, obviously trying to control her temper. “Are you somehow slow? Eat paint chips as a child? Is there some reason for your utter stupidity?”

He paused, shrugging one shoulder. “My mother dropped me once.”

Storm gasped. Logan slapped a hand over his mouth, trying to control his laughter. She whirled on him, glaring. That only made the entire scene that much more hysterical. Logan erupted into laughter, clapping the counter as he howled with mirth.

“Bishop.” Storm said over Logan’s laughter. “That is not funny.”

“Course it wasn’t,” he said dryly. “My father caught me though, so no harm done.”
Logan grinned at him.

“You don’t understand,” Bishop continued. “Pyro is a direct threat. Piotr’s death started a massive downhill slope for the X-Men, which opened up room for the Brotherhood to step in. The X-Men lost so much ground, they nearly handed them the war, Mother.”

She had obviously caught Bishop’s slip up. Logan tasted saline on the air mixed with ozone. Storm was about two seconds from all out crying. Without thinking about it, he stepped up behind her, placing a hand on her lower back. The gesture at once familiar and foreign.

“This is insanity,” she whispered. “How can you possibly be our son?”

Bishop’s eyes reflected hurt, which made Logan’s heart ache. “I don’t know. All I know is that I was born, you were married, and you’ve never left one another’s sides in twenty years. That’s all I ever needed to know.”

Storm turned to Logan, her eyes pleading. “It’s not true. It’s genetic manipulation.”

Before Logan could speak, Bishop was singing. A slow, haunting melody filled the med-lab in a language Logan did not recognize. The young man had his head down; eyes closed as his rich baritone lovingly caressed each syllable.

Ororo had tears splashing down her cheeks. Unsure what was happening here, he touched her chin, one eyebrow cocked in question. She shook her head, mouthing the words their son was singing. Oh, he mused, he just proved something to her.

“*The Goddess’ Lullaby.*” He said when he was through. “N’Dare’s final words to you.”

Storm whirled about, sitting on the edge of the bed and reaching for Bishop. She cupped his cheeks with her palms, really looking at him as though for the first time. One of her long, dark fingers traced the marking over his eye and Bishop allowed a tear to slide down his cheek.

“No child of mine deserves to be so marked,” Ororo whispered. She leaned forward, pressing a tender kiss to his forehead. “We will fix it, my son, I promise you.”

Bishop wrapped his arms around her, burying his face in his mother’s shoulder.

“Lucas,” he said so softly even Logan nearly missed it. “My name is Lucas.”

~**~

Ok, so they were a bunch of geeks.

Ali looked around the expansive game room, her cue gripped between fingers whose tips were painted shocking blue. She tilted her head, allowing one long, blonde pigtail to drape over her shoulder. A few of the students were staring at her, many of them with obvious interest or open curiosity.

That was a new one.

It wasn’t as though she’d ever been around mutants. From her earliest memory, her mother and
stepfather had drilled into her head that normal was good. Anything other than that was to be avoided, shunned, and destroyed. They had an image to uphold, of course. There were clients to entertain, office parties to smooze.

God, they made her fucking sick.

Dressed in her black knee hi socks, heavy combat boots, short plaid skirt and mid-riff baring white tee, she would have shocked her parents into stroke. Ali’s creamy flesh showed off by revealing clothing bore several tattoos, each of them her pride and joy. She liked to think of herself as unique, but part of her knew she was still trying to shed the box her parents had so easily shoved her into.

The moment she’d punched a hole in her boyfriend’s truck, she knew she was lost. Peeling the upper crust from her soul was more painless than she’d thought it would be. She just let the designer clothing and careful manicures fall away. She took her trust fund, found a second hand clothing store and reinvented herself. Mutant, musician…free.

“Eight ball, center pocket.”

Smiling brightly at Kitty’s ease around a pool table, she cast another swift glance around. When the bright brunette had first suggested Xavier’s, Ali was just looking for a pit stop, a place to spend the night. She assumed they would try to force her into another box, label it, and call it a day.

Imagine her surprise when she realized she wasn’t the biggest freak at the breakfast table. There was the big blue doctor. He was fun. Kids with weird physical mutations, those like her who could hide it but refused to. They laughed here, played, were kids. There was something about this place, something that felt terrifying like home.

Kitty did a little victory dance as she won their game. Ali rolled her eyes.

“Ok, hot shit, rack ‘em.”

The other girl was still dancing when adorable Bobby and that uber-hot Pete came waltzing into the room. Ali felt the weird swooping sensation – like a punch to the gut – when Pete smiled at her in greeting. They were both wincing as though sore and Bobby limped with every step.

“Mornin’!” She said brightly to cover the fact that she wanted to drool. “You guys look beat.”

Bobby threw himself into the sofa, turning on the X-Box and grabbing a controller. “Just got our butts handed to us by Beast. That guy is fast.”

“He’s such a cutie,” Ali countered as Kitty giggled. “If he were ten years younger, I’d snap him up like the last slice of pizza at a hockey game.”

Pete raised a brow, amusement playing about his perfectly shaped mouth. Damn, he was just delicious. “Is that so?”

“What’s the matter, Petey?” Ali teased, leaning over the table to break the racked balls. “‘Would you be jealous?”

He laughed, the sound warm and rich. Ali nearly swooned. Damn, that might get annoying.

“I would pine away, miserable and alone while writing bad poetry.”
Feeling her feminine pride perk up, though she knew he was teasing, Ali smacked the cue into the balls and straightened. She deftly slid between the huge, hunky Russian and the table, rubbing her barely-covered backside against his crotch in open invitation.

“I doubt you could do anything badly, Petey.”

The boy blushed, really and truly blushed, as she moved away. He cleared his throat, excusing himself before he joined Bobby at the X-Box. Ali turned to Kitty with a triumphant grin.

“You’re so bad,” the other girl grinned, shaking her head. “So, so bad.”

“Oh, I know,” Ali said bright. She made another shot, coming around the table and crooking a finger at Kitty.

“What’s up?” Kitty asked, waggling her eyebrows. The girl was so cheerful, so open, Ali thought she might have found her soul mate.

“So, what’s the deal with Mother Russia?” Ali questioned quietly.

Kitty’s brows came together in a thoughtful furrow. “Huh?”

“Tall, dark, tightest ass on the planet…” Ali pointed. “Is he taken? If you tell me he’s gay, I’ll lose all faith in humanity.”

The other girl clapped a hand over her mouth to stifle a giggle. “Come on, let’s grab a snack.”

They put the cues back into the holder, Ali tossing Bobby and Peter a smile as the girls exited the game room. Kitty pulled Ali closer, tucking their arms together so they could whisper conspiratorially. Ali’s heart clenched. No one had ever wanted to whisper secrets with her or just talk about boys. It was so damn sweet the blonde nearly sniffled.

“Well, Pete’s a complicated guy,” Kitty was saying as they entered the bright, cheerful kitchen. “He’s not gay though, so breathe.”

“Oh, thank God,” Ali crossed herself with a cheeky grin. She slid onto the barstool, tossing the lone occupant of the kitchen a hello. He ignored her.

Kitty was inside the fridge, digging for something. “He’s got some emotional issues, though.”

“Like what?” Ali asked as Kitty handed her a bottle of water.

“He’s still weird about being a mutant, about people accepting him,” Kitty offered, leaning on the counter across from Ali. “He wasn’t treated well the first time he…”

The brunette made a gesture that Ali frowned at. “What?”

“His mutation makes him turn into metal. He’s like bullet proof and twice as hunky.”

“Is that humanly possible, Kit? I mean…holyhell the man’s a god.”

Kitty chuckled. “I’m just sayin’, for all his superstrength and unbreakable steel, inside he’s a turtle
without a shell. Its one reason he’s not taken, hot as he is, he doesn’t trust easily.”

Ali cracked open her water bottle, biting on the inside of her cheek. “I can understand that, trust me.”

“If you two are done, I’d like to keep my lunch down, thanks.”

Kitty and Ali jumped, both turning to look at the man lounging at the kitchen table. He was handsome, Ali surmised. Piercing dark eyes, whiskered face, hard body. But there was something primal about him, something like a barely-caged beast.

“Oh, Wolverine,” Kitty said brightly. “This is Dazzler. Daz, Wolvie.”

The man known as Wolverine stood nodding to both young girls. He gave Ali a long look, one eyebrow creeping up to touch his hairline.

“Anyone ever tell you to put some clothes on?”

Ali smirked wickedly. “Like what you see, Old Man?”

He snorted. Ali beamed.

“Logan.”

“Ali.”

He put his plate into the sink, tugging on a lock of Kitty’s hair as he passed them, leaving the room. Kitty smiled at him, but Ali instantly recognized the gesture as friendly, almost parental. Ok, Ali mused, so he was one of the teachers.

“So,” she said absently. “Is this place just a breeding ground for hot guys? Cause where have they been all my life?”

Kitty laughed, hopping off the stool. “Come on, we’ve got training with the blue guy.”

“Oh yay!” Ali leapt from her stool. “My other favorite hunk.”

“So bad,” Kitty laughed as they headed for the mansion’s lower levels.

~**~

Piotr watched Ali and Kitty leave the Danger Room, triumphant smiles on their exuberant faces. The blonde was doing some kind of silly victory dance, which made Katya laugh hysterically.

She was pretty, he thought, tilting his head to study her unobserved. He peered into the monitor, zooming in on her face without thinking about it. Dark makeup covered her eyelids, making the deep green of her eyes sparkle. Vibrant, funny, cheerful.

He shook his head, knowing he shouldn’t be dwelling on her. It was hard, though. She always looked at him as though she would rather look at nothing else. In her thirty-six hours at the mansion, she’d made him blush a dozen times. She was always smiling, attached to Kitty’s hip. Her revealing clothing and tattooed flesh only made her seem rebellious and desirable.
“Stop it,” he ordered himself, sitting back. He moved to zoom the camera out again, but paused. “Leave it alone Piotr.”

She was singing to Beast, making the older mutant roll his eyes as Kitty laughed. Piotr smiled. Something about that girl got under his skin. He had the chilling sensation creeping down his spine, as though he knew she would impact his life in some way.

He couldn’t let that happen. Bishop had already told him his fate. The second attack from the Brotherhood would be his final battle. Piotr was comfortable with this, with the knowledge of his own demise. He had been trained to accept things, this was no different.

There were no great loves to leave behind. Only his sister, and Storm had assured him years ago that she would be taken care of. His friends would move on, his name someday forgotten. If he were taken, there would be no shaking of the earth, no un-fixable broken heart. He doubted his loss would be taken very hard by anyone, save perhaps Storm. She had known him the longest, after all.

The others all had someone, in some form. Kitty would have Alison. Bobby had Rogue and Artie. The adults had one another. Piotr had ever kept himself apart, afraid of hurting someone with his mutation. Only Kitten and Bobby had ever gotten close and that was simply because he could not get rid of them to save his life.

As he continued to stare at the image of Dazzler, his normally emotionless thoughts made his chest ache. She turned her impish face toward the camera, as though she sensed someone was watching her. A slight frown creased her brows and she moved away.

Piotr sighed, zooming the camera out and turning his attention to the rest of his watch. Storm would have his hide if she knew he was using the mansion’s equipment to stare at pretty girls.

It would be better for her if he kept the impish Alison away until after the battle. That way, his death wouldn’t hurt her.

He almost believed that. He almost wanted to.

~~**~~

Bishop pulled his jacket on, frowning at his mother as she spoke in a low tone with Hank. From the stiffness of her back and the frown on her beautiful face, there was some bad news.

“Hey,” his father greeted as he entered the med-lab. “What crawled up your mother’s ass?”

He smiled, shrugging one shoulder. “I’m not sure. Did she call for you?”

“Yep,” Logan lit a cigar, inhaling from it quickly. “Broke up my Danger Room session.”

“Delta Zulu?” Bishop asked curiously.

Logan’s brows shot up to take residence in his hairline. “Yeah.”

“Ha,” Bishop smirked. “I beat that one when I was fifteen.”

“Good for you,” Logan shot back almost affectionately. “Shut up.”
The darker mutant laughed. “Sorry.”

“You meet the new kid?” Logan paused, laughing at himself. “Never mind.”

Bishop frowned. New kid? No one had ever said that a new mutant joined the X-Men just before the second Brotherhood attack. In fact, he was relatively certain all the players were on the board, ready for action.

When he mentioned this, Logan scowled. “You’ve got no memory of anyone mentioning Dazzler?”

Completely confuse, Bishop frowned. “Dazzler? The singer? She was supposed to be killed two nights ago.”

“Fuck. Storm!”

Mother rushed from Hank’s office, a startled expression on her face. She listened intently as Bishop and Wolverine explained their findings to her. Both she and Hank sat on the edge of the medical bed, Storm’s eyes boring into her son’s.

Bishop’s heart clenched. She really was the woman that would become his mother, at least a version of her. He wondered if her pregnancy with him had calmed her or if giving her heart to Father had done it. Perhaps he would see the start of it, because Father was right, she could really be a bitch in this timeline.

*Must be where Shard gets it from,* he thought with a pang.

“What do you think?” Logan asked, snubbing his cigar out in a bedpan, much to Hank’s dismay.

“Lucas already changed the timeline,” Storm mused, making her son’s heart skip again. “By saving Jimmy’s life.”

“And for every action, there are infinite possibilities.”

“If Jimmy had died, no way Kitten and Popsicle woulda gone to the concert,” Logan grunted while crossing his arms over his chest. “Pyro woulda have Dazzler all to himself.”

“So what does this mean?” Storm continued, tapping her lips with her forefinger. “The balance seems to have tipped in our favor; we have an extra X-Man.”

“And my knowledge of the future is shaky,” Lucas added. “We can’t depend on my memory anymore.”

“I suggest we play it by ear,” Beast chimed in thoughtfully. “When is the second Brotherhood attack?”

Bishop glanced at his parents. “Tomorrow or the day after, I’m not sure.”

“We’ll keep the mansion on high alert,” Storm commanded quickly. “Someone needs to be with Piotr at all times. I will not lose him.”

“You heard the boss,” Wolverine snapped. “Let’s get our shit straight.”
Storm rolled her eyes at him.

“Mother?” Bishop sighed inwardly, noting the way her eyes lit up at the name. “What were you and Beast talking about?”

She became suddenly, deathly serious. Glancing at Logan, she took Lucas’ hand and squeezed it. Swallowing hard, knowing the slight tremble in her familiar hand couldn’t be a good sign, he straightened his back, ready for anything.

“There’s a problem,” she said quietly.

“What?” Father interrupted, looking nervous.

Storm looked away from them both before meeting Lucas’ eyes.

“For all intents and purposes, Lucas…the tests I had Henry run on me…”

“For fuck’s sake, woman!” Logan exploded. “Spit it out!”

Her eyes, however, remained on her son. “Lucas, it should be physically impossible for me to have children.”

Bishop’s world came crashing down around his ears.
Leviathan

Chapter Summary

Alison convinces Piotr to play football, which leads to something more. Logan and Ororo find comfort in one another. Pyro makes his move.

“There’s the snap! Blaire falls back, narrowly avoids a tackle from Guthrie. She’s moving back, farther, farther. Looking for an opening. LONG pass to PRYDE! Beautiful catch! Ladies and gents, she could…go…all…the…way! SCORE!”

Ali stopped her narration and threw her hands up as Kitty landed in a heap with Bobby, whom had been attempting to tackle the young brunette. With a whoop of glee that seemed impossibly loud in the perfect spring morning, Ali pumped her knees together in an odd touchdown dance that looked more like the Funky Chicken.

Good-natured grumbling sounded from the other team, but Ali’s “Packers” patently ignored it. Leech gave Ali a cheerful high five, which made her rub his bald head in a familiar manner. Though she had only been at the mansion two days, it already felt like home. She couldn’t imagine wanting to leave.

That should have scared her shi-tless.

As the teams lined up again, Ali caught sight of a colossal Russian watching from the sidelines. She tossed him a grin from beneath that light-absorbing black under her eyes. He raised a massive hand in greeting, a smile curving his lips almost instantly.

Damn. He was adorable.

“Blue 52,” Bobby called loudly as Ali dragged her eyes from tall, dark, and holyshitBatman. “Blue 52…set…HUT! HUT!”

The opposing quarterback snapped the ball and Ali darted forward. Her athletic body easily avoided clumsy Guthrie again as she moved toward the smirking Iceman. He was a cocky little bastard, she thought wanting to knock that strut out of his step.

She leapt over Artie, using his back as a step to throw her body at the All American Drake. He landed on his backside with a muffled grunt, the ball bouncing out of his hands. Leech was on top of it in an instant, recovering the ball from the “Giants”.

Ali kissed Bobby noisily on the cheek. “Sorry, Iceboy.”

“Well, it got you on top of me.” He shot back with a teasing smile.

“Perv.”

She scrambled off of his lap, holding a hand out to help him stand. The teams called a quick time out,
rushing to the table Beast had set up for them. There were snacks and a huge container of Gatorade for the taking. Ali jogged toward the assembled mutant teens with Bobby, laughing when he rolled his shoulder, claiming she had dislocated it.

Ali snagged a Bagel Bite and gratefully took the Gatorade Kitty handed her. She moved off to the side to avoid death by hungry teen, standing with her friend in the warm morning sunlight. She couldn’t remember ever having so much fun, at least during the day and without being chased by the cops.

When Kitty had suggested a Saturday football game Ali was immediately interested. She loved to play or basically do anything that involved getting hot and sweaty.

She glanced at Piotr, surprised to find he had been staring at her. He looked away quickly, nodding at something Bobby was telling him. Ali looked down at her clothing, wondering if he was staring because of the grass stains on her too short cut offs or the enormous Green Bay “G” on her too-large jersey.

“I wish Pete would play,” Kitty said with a sigh.

“Why doesn’t he? If we bully Angel to join in, we’d be all set.” Ali finished her Bagel Bite and swallowed the last of her Gatorade.

“He’s afraid he’ll hurt someone,” the other girl replied. “He always watches though, it’s kinda sad, actually.”

“Huh,” Ali grunted, glancing at the Russian again catching his gaze once more. She tossed her cup into the trashcan Beast had provided.

“Ali?” Kitty asked as the girl remained silent.

“He’s too cute to sit on the damn sidelines. Go get Halo.” Ali tossed over her shoulder, jogging over to Piotr and Bobby.

“Oh, brother,” Kitty muttered as she obediently went inside to fetch Warren.

Piotr’s eyebrows went up as Ali approached, muddy sneakers and all. She winked at Bobby, poking Pete in the shoulder to ensure she had his undivided attention. His intense gaze met hers, the corners of his eyes crinkling in something like a quiet smile. Ali felt her stomach swoop again, her knees threatening to knock together.

“Come play with me,” Ali said, deliberately teasing. Bobby choked on his Gatorade.

“I cannot join you,” Piotr said gently.

“Bullshit,” Ali shot back with a mischievous wink. “Are you afraid of a girl?”

One of his hands came up, his fingers splaying over open air. Ali licked her lips without thinking about it, wondering how his hands would feel on her skin. She needed to take care of herself before she jumped the poor boy.

“My strength could hurt someone,” he continued as she looked from his hand to his eyes.
“Uh-huh,” she turned over her shoulder. “Yo! Jimmy!”

The bald boy rushed over, his grin infectious. Ali threw her arm around the young mutant companionably. She raised her free hand, staring at it for a moment before meeting Piotr’s eyes without flinching.

“Because of Baldie here, we don’t have powers.”

Without so much as a warning, Ali jumped on Piotr, easily flattening him to the grass. He grunted at the impact, his hands immediately grasping her hips as though to steady her. Sprawled over him, Ali grinned in triumph.

“Dazzler!” He said with shock written clearly on his face.

“See?” She replied cheekily, swatting his chest lightly. “If you were Colossus right now, no way I coulda done that. Get on your feet and come bask in the love of the pigskin.”

Something that could have been hope sprang into Piotr’s eyes. Ali shifted on his wide hips, trying to stand and having a hard time finding her balance while tangled with Piotr’s heavy body. She saw him grit his teeth and couldn’t help but wiggle her backside experimentally.

Oh, she mused at his sharp intake of breath. So, he is human.

Unable to resist, she leaned down to whisper into his ear, rewarded when Piotr’s hands tightened on her hips.

“Huh,” she whispered huskily. “You look good on your back, Petey.”

When his eyes widened in surprise, she found her feet and jumped up. Angel had joined the others, many of them watching her in shock. Ali gave them all an unconcerned toss of her head, her long, blonde ponytail flying.

“I call Angel!”

“Right on,” Bobby whooped with joy. “I’ve got Tin-Man.”

Piotr stood, brushing his jeans off as Ali took the ball from Jimmy. She could feel his gaze on her back, but chose to ignore it. Swallowing hard as the teams lined up, Ali noted that Piotr was looking around with something akin to wonder. Her heart ached at the expression, wondering how long he had kept himself apart from his companions.

No more, she decided. She’d been in his shoes, keeping everything close to the vest, never letting anyone close. All it did was make the lonesomeness inside swell and ache until it was damn near unbearable. She’d been that poor boy.

Giving him a wink, she crouched behind Jimmy. “Gonna run with the big boys, Mother Russia?”

He gave her a full on grin that made her heart skip. “Bring it on, Yankee.”

“Green 45! Hut, hut, HUT!”

~**~
She was so damned cute. Piotr sighed, running a hand over his face late that evening. He couldn’t get the football game out of his head; flashbacks of a morning and afternoon spent being an eighteen-year-old boy haunted him during the graveyard security shift.

Alison’s laughter rang in his head, making his hands clench at the memory. She’d tackled him. He grinned briefly at the image. He couldn’t believe anyone had to audacity to spear tackle Colossus. Most of the young people gave him wide berth, knowing he could inadvertently harm them.

Dazzler had absolutely no fear. Her eyes and smile were always unguarded, friendly, vibrant. He could easily forget all about everything when she gave him that silly, saucy smirk. Her teasing words and – Jesus – athletic body almost made him quiver. He shuddered just remembering how she’d felt sprawled atop him.

Sighing, he shook his head, concentrating on the screens in front of him. There was a glitch in one of the cameras on the grounds, so he typed quickly to realign it as Katya had taught him.

He caught a glimpse of blonde hair in one of the mansion’s cameras and double taked. Staring in shock as Alison crept toward the kitchen, he gulped heavily. She was so damn pretty. Her thin cotton tank molded small, pert breasts; her belly bare due to the pants that rested on slender hips.

Touching the screen, Piotr chided himself. He wouldn’t be around long enough to truly know her, no matter how she pursued him. Oh yes, Piotr knew when he was being chased. Ali was a skilled hunter; she stalked her prey with skill and grace. The young mutant wasn’t sure how long he could outrun her.

He watched as she detoured from the kitchen, her head tilting as though she were listening for something. Piotr cursed in his native tongue, reaching over to turn the knob on his stereo. He’d borrowed the disc from Kitty, enjoying the melodic wail of Dazzler’s voice and the pain in her lyrics.

Unfortunately, she’d discovered where the music was coming from. Piotr pulled himself together as much as he could before the door popped open. He took several calming breaths as the girl entered, her music playing softly as he tried to focus on the screens.

Did she have to smell so good? How was that fair?

“Petey,” she greeted with a wave. “I thought I heard someone in here.”

“Dazzler,” he grunted, glancing at her reflection in one of the larger screens. “Did I wake you?”

“Nuh-uh,” she said, coming to his side. She hopped up onto the countertop, her plump back end bumping his coffee cup. “That’s my CD. Damn, I love this song.”

Before he could stop her, she reached over to turn the music up. He should shoo her out of the room, send her to bed. But he didn’t want to. She was comforting for some reason. Piotr watched her out of the corner of his eye.

“I don’t know how to tell you, I’m in love with you. I don’t want to turn away, cause I’m so into you. I can’t take this pain anymore, I don’t wanna cry. Baby, when you walk away, I swear I’m gonna die.

She was singing with the stereo, her voice matching the electronic recording perfectly. Piotr gulped
when she grinned at him.

“You wrote it?”

“Yep,” she shrugged. “Another ode to my mystery man.”

Amused, Piotr arched a dark brow. “Mystery man?”

Alison swung her legs, humming to the music. “You think I’ve ever been in love like that? Nah. When I write those songs, it’s for someone I haven’t met yet.”

“Yet?”

She looked at him fully, her emerald eyes holding his without remorse or apology.

“Well, I want to find that kind of love. Just have to be patient, I guess.”

“You are very optimistic.” Piotr observed with longing.

“You’re very moody,” she teased. “Don’t you have any hope? You’re young, good-looking, and can toss a football over sixty yards. Have some faith.”

Piotr looked away, typing into the computer bank to correct another glitch. Hope? What was that? He’d been shunned for his status as a mutant, injured those he cared for, left his homeland to come to this school for mutants. Even his friends were afraid of him at times.

Things like falling in love were to remain dreams. What should it matter? He would be dead before the end of the week.

“Petey?” He heard her shift, but refused to turn.

“Peter.”

She was off the counter now, standing by his chair. Piotr felt her hand on his chair and was helpless to stop her from turning him around. He met her gaze briefly, not trusting himself to hold those beautiful green eyes that darkened to a pure jade.

Without asking, she pushed his shoulders until he sat back in his chair. Fear nipped at him, mixed with the flickering of desire as she sinuously climbed onto his lap. His hands gripped the arms of his chair, trying to hold back from touching her.

Alison wrapped her warm hands around his neck, shifting so she could plant her knees on what little space remained between his thigh and the chair arm. Jesus, she was…sexy. There was no other word for her uncompromising confidence. As she settled, Piotr met her eyes, swallowing hard.

“You’re so damn cute,” she muttered, echoing his internal thoughts without knowing it.

“Dazzler…” He needed her to go. Now.

“Hey, it’s Ali. Dazzler is the impersonal codename you use to keep me away,” she whispered, leaning closer until he could feel her breath against his lips. “Doesn’t work with me, comrade. If I want you, I’ll get you.”
He was shaking. Damn, but she was appealing. He wanted to dive into her and see if she was as warm and open all over. The urge terrified him. A doomed man had no right to take a step toward a woman’s heart. He would only hurt her.

“Alison,” he nearly pled. “You should…”

“Oh, shut up, Pete.”

Her lips were on his and, by God, it felt wonderful. Piotr’s hands came up from the arms of the chair, smoothing up her back. Her tank slid up, allowing him to flatten his palms against her silken flesh.

He parted his mouth when her tongue slid out to caress his bottom lip. She groaned into his mouth, melting into his arms. Her breasts pressed into his chest and that flicker of desire was fanned into flame. Piotr pulled her closer, making her whimper. His ravished her mouth, giving into the pull. Ali thrust her hands into his hair, holding him in place.

Her hips rocked and Piotr felt all of the blood in his body shoot to his groin. Piotr memorized her taste, sweet and satiny like a fine vodka. He could take that with him, if nothing else. He wanted to map her completely in his mind, remember what it felt like to hold a woman. The last time he had tried…

Alison wiggled again, shifting on his lap. Piotr took a shuddering breath when she pulled away to breathe. She gave him no chance to recover, to think, before she claimed him again. It would be so easy to give in completely, to take her in this chair until he wore her beautiful body out.

“OW!”

Piotr froze. He relaxed his grip on Ali’s waist slowly, already knowing the awful truth. Alison was holding her breath when he pulled away. She smacked her lips, her pink tongue darting out to lick the bottom.

“I’m ok,” she said softly. But there was pain in her tone.

“I’m sorry,” Piotr said immediately, guilt crushing him already. “I shouldn’t have…I’m sorry.”

“Hey,” she said, ducking her head to attempt meeting his gaze. “Piotr.”

Hearing her say his name, the gentle accent she inflected to get the pronunciation right, wrenched his heart. He caught her under the arms and stood, placing her on her feet as gently as he could.

“It’s past curfew,” he said, trying to detach himself. “You shouldn’t be out of bed.”

“Piotr, come on,” Ali said, obviously hurt by his dismissal.

“Get out.” He replied harshly, glaring at her.

“Asshole,” Ali shot back. “I know you didn’t mean to hurt me. Things got a little heated, I mean, damn. That was one hell of a kiss.”

“LEAVE!”
She didn’t startle at his bellow, or the stream of Russian curses that left his lips. He ran a hand through his hair, moving to the door and swinging it open. Alison glared at him, shaking her head. The only sound between them was her throaty vocals wafting through the room from the stereo.

Alison turned sharply, her hand thrust out as a beam of sizzling light left her palm. She effectively melted the stereo, making the sound distort as it bent and swayed. That done, Ali tossed her blonde head and brushed past him.

“Goodnight, Piotr.”

He slammed the door behind her. Though he tried to resist, he couldn’t. Piotr darted toward the cameras, catching a look at Alison as she stomped up the stairs, her mouth moving as though cursing him. His eyes followed her until she ducked into the room she shared with Kitty.

Piotr threw himself back into his chair, covering his face with his hands.

“What have I done?”

~***~

“Ali?”

“Go back to sleep.” She snapped, darting into the bathroom.

Kitty was getting out of bed as Alison flicked the light on, turning her back toward the full-length mirror. She lifted her shirt as her friend poked her head into the bathroom. Alison winced, noting the dark, ugly bruises already forming on her waist.


Ali touched the bruises gingerly, sighing. “I kissed Piotr.”

“You…oooh,” Kitty winced. “Got a little…heated?”

“Yeah.” Ali dropped her shirt. “I think I hurt him more, though.”

“It’ll be ok,” the younger girl said with a small smile. “You can talk to him tomorrow.”

Ali tossed her head, facing Kitty with a defeated look. “Yep. Soon as I figure out what to say.”

The girls moved back into their room, flicking the light off quickly.

“So,” Kitty asked as they climbed into their beds. “Good kiss?”

“Girl,” Ali whispered, touching her mouth. “You’ve got no idea.”

~***~

Logan stopped outside of Storm’s bedroom after his perimeter check. A quick sniff told him she was inside, his ears picking up the sound of her humming as she readied for bed. She’d been going to bed
later and later. He wondered what kept her from sleeping.

He knocked twice and entered without waiting for her to invite him inside. She was sitting at the vanity table by the window, a brush in her hand. Logan blinked at her, reminding himself that this woman would one day be his wife.

Or so they thought. They’d changed the timeline so much already, who knew if he would actually marry this weather goddess.

She’d been on his mind for the last several hours. Bishop was reclusive, hiding in his room after Storm revealed what they thought was an inability to carry children. Something about the battle at Liberty Island, the way Toad had thrown her into the elevator shaft. Logan knew she’d been hospitalized afterward, but he had never thought to ask why.

Blunt Force Trauma to the Abdomen. That was the reason her doctors had given her. There was scarring on her uterus, making it inhospitable for human life. Logan agreed with Hank that her inability to accept Bishop as their son was likely because of this knowledge. The poor woman had confronted something she thought utterly impossible.

“Logan?”

“Hey,” he eased further into the room. “I wanted to see if you’d talked to Luke.”

A frown creased her brow as she placed the brush on the vanity top. “No. He wouldn’t let me in.”

“You dropped an A-bomb on him, Storm,” Logan sighed, rubbing his eyes. “He ain’t takin’ it well.”

“No, of course not,” Ororo looked away. “I shouldn’t have told him.”

“Maybe not, but it’s out now. Gotta deal with it.”

She gifted him with a small smile. “Wisdom? From the Wolverine?”

“Quiet, woman.”

Ororo stood, completely unashamed in her cotton nightgown. Logan felt his mouth go dry at the sight of her. The smooth material molded to her generous curves, the light blue color stark against her dark skin. She was beautiful and damn if he didn’t want her again.

He’d just come to ask about Luke, he told himself. He’d done that. He should go.

But Logan didn’t want to go back to his own room. He wanted to feel her again, to fall into her body until he exhausted himself. He wanted those hot kisses, to hear her moan his name as he brought her to bliss. By God, when had he decided he wanted this woman?

“Logan?”

He grunted, noticing that she’d come closer. He could smell the lavender of her shampoo, the creamy vanilla of her hand lotion. Without thinking about it, one hand reached for her.

To his great surprise, Ororo moved closer, allowing his hand to grasp her hip. She smiled slightly, brushing her body against his in pure invitation.
"I don’t want to be alone."

There was something in her eyes, in her scent that gave him pause. Oh hell, she was ripe. Her hormones in overdrive due to the change in her cycle, she would likely jump just about anything to get her itch scratched.

No, he amended as his hand reached up to touch her cheek. She never did just anything. Logan ran his thumb over her bottom lip, enjoying the heady, intoxicating scent that called to the primal beast inside of him. He wanted to mate, to take her with passion and fire until there was nothing left between them.

“I want you,” he whispered, dragging her hips against his so she could feel the ache. “Say I can stay.”

“Stay,” she pled, leaning to brush her lips against his. “Stay with me, Logan.”

He didn’t need telling twice. Taking her into his arms, he tilted his head down to kiss plump lips, pulling her closer. She wound her body around his, letting him lift her into his arms. Logan held her gently, as though she were breakable. Precious. The last time they’d done this dance, it was filled with anger and punishment.

Not this time. He lowered her to the bed with extra care, splaying her fantastic body out as though she were a gift. She smiled up at him, the simple gesture creating an ache in Logan’s heart. This was no fast and furious romp on the pool table, no second wind on the floor of his bedroom. She was offering herself to him.

He covered her body with his, taking her lips in a slow seduction that stole his breath away. Her hands drifted over his shoulders lightly, as though she were exploring him for the first time.

Logan undressed himself in stages, keeping his hands on her as much as possible. Her nightgown was unbuttoned slowly, his lips raining kisses on every inch of flesh he exposed. He learned every secret her delicious form had to offer, taking every sensual part of her in his hands for proper inspection.

His mouth traced her curves, covering the dark peaks of her breasts before traveling lower. She undulated into him when he covered her center, crying out softly. Logan feasted on her, drawing out wild cries and throaty moans.

When she came down, he took her mouth again. Long, caramel legs came up to wrap about his waist. He slid inside of her on a low moan of her name. She drew him deeper, deeper, deeper. Logan kept his eyes on hers, drowning in the promise and fire he found there.

She tightened around him, her heels pressing into his ass to pull him closer. Ororo’s hands flexed on his shoulders, nails biting into his flesh. He could feel her give in, surrender in his arms as though she were tired of fighting.

Logan found himself doing the same without thinking about it. He fused their mouths together, swallowing her cries as his hips thrust faster. She tasted smoky, like one of his favorite cigars. It was a taste he could lose himself in. Logan buried his face in her shoulder, murmuring her name as her grip on him tightened.
They exploded together with gentle sighs. Ororo wrapped him into her arms, kissing his sweat-slicked hair. He rolled onto his side, staying inside the warmth of her body as he drew her into his embrace.

Ororo looked up at him, her emotional armor suddenly gone. She smiled again.

“Logan.”

He returned her smile sleepily.

“’Ro.”

~**~

Pyro looked to the violet-haired Psylocke expectantly as dawn broke over the mansion’s grounds. It always surprised him that he felt no sense of loss at seeing his old home. The manicured lawns and sculpted gardens were too pristine, too perfect for him.

John liked his destruction too much for perfection.

“They’re asleep, except for Colossus.”


“Orders?” Betsy asked, raising a dark brow.

“Hit fast and hard. Get Bishop.”

She smiled wickedly, closing her eyes to send out the command via telepathy to the other Brotherhood mutants. Pyro smirked at her, staring at the revealing violet uniform that molded her slender curves.

One thing he liked about Betsy was her ability to be sexy and dangerous without even trying. Should their mission go well, he’d have to visit her bedroom again.

“They’re in place.” She told him, her arched brow telling him she’d caught his thoughts.

“Good,” he grasped her ass, squeezing it tightly. “Go fuck ’em up so I can fuck you.”

“Mmm,” she hummed, a glowing psi-blade erupting from her right hand. “Promises, promises.”

The sound of an explosion came from the back of the mansion and Pyro leapt over the wall. His war had just begun.
Salvation

Chapter Summary

Logan and Ororo's morning is interrupted by an attack on the mansion. Alison makes a play to save Piotr that might get her killed.

“Um, Ro?” Logan’s gasp of her name made her grin against his chest. He sucked in another breath as her teeth scraped over one of his taut nipples.

She licked a path down his chest, her fingers flexing into his thighs. His hands wove into her hair, tightening as she moved lower. They’d gotten absolutely no sleep, content to explore one another more thoroughly than they had before.

Ororo relished the intimate knowledge of his body, the secrets he carried. If she scraped her teeth over his abdomen, he flinched and swore. Rubbing circles with her thumb behind his ear made him growl in a most enticing way. She memorized everything, wanting to keep his secrets as he now kept hers.

Teasing him with long, slow licks and nipping teeth, Ororo ignored a second call of her name as she neared her goal. The generous muscles in his belly contracted beneath sun-bronzed skin. Ororo brought her hands up, taking his engorged cock into her hands, stroking him firmly.

“Christ, woman!” He groaned, his hand pulling at her hair. “Will you just…”

“What?” Ororo questioned, raising a white brow. She ran her thumb over the head of his dick, reaching down to cup his balls gently.

Before he could respond, she ducked her head, taking him fully into her mouth. He swore violently as she enveloped the silken steel of his cock between her lips. Pushing her hair away from her eyes, she watched as he tossed his head back, the veins in his throat bulging as his hips jerked into her mouth.

She swirled her tongue over the tip, enjoying the salty taste of him. Her head bobbed up and down, moving in time with her hand as she stroked him to pleasure. Large, masculine hands twitched in her hair, attempting to guide her movements to ensure the most pleasure for her feral lover. Logan groaned her name when she hit a delicious spot, so she made a mental note to remember it.

Shifting between his thighs, Ororo continued her ardent ministrations. Eager to please, enjoying the feminine thrill of having so much power over so stubborn a man, she increased the suction of her mouth, making Logan swear once more. He rocked his hips eagerly, setting a steady pace between them. Ororo caught his gaze and winked, pleased when he smirked back before dropping his head again.

“Stop,” he pled a moment later.

Ororo lifted her head, keeping her hand moving while she looked up at him. “Why?”

“I want you to ride me,” he ground out, sitting up and reaching for her.
Grinning, she obediently slid up his legs, straddling him quickly. Logan’s hands rested on her hips, his dark eyes glinting with lust. Ororo put her hands on her breasts, arching a brow when Logan growled. She flicked expert fingers over her taut nipples, drawing a low moan from her own throat.

Logan lifted her effortlessly before slamming her welcoming body down on his. They groaned in unison as they joined, their bodies immediately moving. Ororo put her hands on his chest, using his heavy body for leverage as she shifted her hips. Her pace immediately rough, impatient, she rode with him abandon. Logan thrust up into her, his breathing short and labored as though he were fighting for every breath.

The feel of him hot and hard inside made Ororo groan his name. She lifted and lowered herself quickly, shifting until every stroke hit just the right spot inside of her. Gasping as he thrust harder, Ororo let her hand fall to her clit, manipulating the swollen bud quickly.

Ripples made her muscles quiver and Logan growled. He moved faster, harder, deeper, until Ororo felt fire coil in her belly. Tossing her head back, she let her orgasm crash over her, heedless to the screaming winds and pelting hail. Logan’s grip on her hips bordered on painful as he tumbled into bliss a scant second after she.

Ororo collapsed onto his chest, breathing heavily and covered in sweat.

“How…exactly…did we end up here again?” She asked in a teasing tone.

“I’m still…” Logan paused to swallow. “Wonderin’ how I got ya on the pool table.”

“Pervert.” She chuckled.

“Bitch.” He replied affectionately.

They lay together in the dark quiet, content in one another’s company. Ororo drew nonsense designs on his chest as he kissed her forehead. His arms wove around her, giving her the feeling of complete and utter safety. She hated to admit it, but she felt safest in Logan’s arms, as though she knew no harm would befall her on his watch.

But their peace was cut short by a series of suddenly alarmed sniffs from the man in question. Ororo sat up slightly, meeting his eyes.

“What is it?”

He sniffed again, the pulled her to his chest and rolled them both onto the floor.

“Explosives!”

The blast rocked the mansion’s very foundations. Protected by Logan’s arms and the heavy wood of her bed, Ororo felt the tremors in her very blood. Fear for the children in her care, for her son down the hall, brought her to her feet almost the instant the shaking stopped.

Logan caught her around the waist, shoving her uniform into her chest. His eyes glittered with the call to battle, the violence she knew pumped through his veins.

“Put it on, darlin’,” he ordered on a growl. “I mean it.”

Ororo nodded obediently, yanking the protective leathers over her nude body as her son strode through the bedroom door without knocking. Again.
Bishop looked between them, a small smile curving his lips when he noted his father’s bare chest and hastily drawn up sweats and his mothers quickly turned back to hide her nudity.

“Iceman and Angel are ushering the children below. The security shields are in place. We have four minutes before Forge’s force field comes down and the Brotherhood is inside.”

Storm finished zipping her uniform, following her lover and her son into the hall. It was eerily quiet as the trio made their way toward the source of the explosion. Ororo knew that Logan’s new security fields, monitoring system and lower-level lockdown would keep the children safe. There was comfort in that.

“We have to get to Peter,” Ororo said as they entered the main hall at a dead run.

“Oh, darlin’? Don’t think that’ll be an option.”

“’Elo, runt,” said the taunting accent of Juggernaut. “Care for another tumble, then?”

The man ran toward the budding family and they immediately fell into formation. Ororo hoped and prayed that someone – anyone – got to Piotr before Pyro.

~**~

Shadowcat and Dazzler vaulted over the staircase, landing neatly beside one another in front of several terrified children. The hum of Forge’s force field assured the two girls that they had another few minutes to get the little ones to safety before the shit hit the fan.

Ali scooped up a little girl – Rahne by name – and pushed her into the tunnel opening. She assured the young mutants that everything would be all right; hoping the sight of the elder girls in the X-Men leathers would be somewhat reassuring.

After securing the hatch as Wolverine taught them, ensuring that nothing short of an atomic explosion could open it without the password, the girls turned to one another. Forge’s force fields came down and they swallowed heavily.

“We have to split up,” Kitty said, taking Ali by the shoulders. “You have to go to Pete.”

“Um,” Ali said with a confused stare. “I think he’d be fine.”

“No,” Kitty shook her head. “Remember what we said about Bishop being from the future?”

Another minor explosion made both girls wince. They ducked into an alcove, Ali shaking her head in confusion.

“Yeah, but what’s that got to do with Mother Russia?”

Kitty bored her dark eyes into Ali’s, making the blonde’s heart stutter in her chest. Whatever her friend was about to tell her wouldn’t be good.

“In Bishop’s timeline, Pete died today. Pyro killed him.”

Ali turned and ran. She didn’t know when that decision had been made or even if it was the right one, but she clicked her iPod on and rubbed her hands together as she took the stairs three at a time.

With Linkin Park screaming out of the speakers Beast had put into the sleeves of her uniform, she darted through the massive halls of Xavier’s mansion. Slightly concerned when she came into contact with neither the X-Men nor the Brotherhood, she fought to focus her mind on the simple task
of finding her *comrade*.

Skidding to a stop in her thick leather boots, she grasped the door jamb to halt her progress, whipping her body into the security room.

“Piotr?!”

All she found was an overturned chair, spilt coffee, and a smattering of Swedish Fish candies on the floor. Trying to control her fear, Ali rushed to the camera screens, quickly locating everyone she knew.

“Storm, Wolverine, Bishop…big guy with ugly helmet…front foyer.” She turned to another set of screens. “Oh, good. Shadowkitten, Iceboy, Halo…wow that’s one fatass bad guy…heading to the backyard. Beast at the elevator bank… Pete? Come on, Pete.”

She caught sight of Pyro and her world tilted. He was just down the hall with some spiky, violet-haired woman. Piotr was nowhere to be found, but that didn’t mean she couldn’t lure the little bastard away from Mother Russia. Protect him.

Ali rushed out of the security office, grinning when Pyro and the other mutant startled.

“Catch me if you can, dickwads.”

She turned and ran. Hearing the sound of running footsteps not far behind her, Ali darted into a small corridor, gasping when a ball of fire shot past her, narrowly missing her nose.

Strong arms whipped her around and relief almost winded her. Piotr, in all his colossal metallic glory drew her roughly to his chest. Silver eyes glared at her as his grip on her biceps brought her nearly off her feet.

“What are you doing?”

“Saving your shiny metal butt, that’s what.” She tossed back, kicking her legs to be let down.

He dropped her on her feet. “Go back to Katya.”

“No,” Dazzler put her hands on her hips, glaring back at the handsome Russian. Kitty was right; he was even more appealing in his metallic form. It was just sexy.

“This is my fight,” Colossus said softly. “I don’t want you to get hurt.”


Any further argument was cut off by the appearance of the violet-haired mutant behind Colossus. Ali acted without thinking, using Colossus as a stepping-stone. He seemed to catch on quickly, lifting her over his shoulder effortlessly so that she could tuck her body into an immediate flip.

Using the music blaring from her suit, Ali turned her hands onto the woman, shooting blinding light from her palms.

“Hey now, I didn’t come up behind you for a cheap shot,” Dazzler taunted as she rolled to her feet.

The agile Asian woman sidestepped Ali’s light quickly; her hands erupted with purple light. “Aww, does the little Sparkler want to play?”

Dazzler growled, white-hot light singeing the carpet at the woman’s feet. “That’s Dazzler, bitch.”
“Psylocke,” the woman crouched into what looked like a starting position. “Come and get me.”


Glancing over her shoulder to ensure Piotr was all right, she found he was avoiding his former schoolmate’s pyrotechnics easily. She would have to keep a close eye, though. If Pyro had bested him before…

Psylocke came at her, violet blades humming with power. Ali felt something brush against her mind and understood. The woman was some sort of telepath. Dazzler tossed aside the use of her powers and fell back on her closest friends.

Right and Left.

When she met the other woman toe to toe, she knew immediately to avoid those humming blades. Ali spread her feet, bringing her fists up quickly. She’d been in enough barroom brawls and mosh pits to know her way around a fistfight.

Her first two punches were misses, but Psylocke took a mean elbow to the nose. The girl cried out as Alison thanked the material of her uniform for protecting her elbow. She whirled as her opponent leapt back, blinded by the pain of her broken nose. Ali caught her shin with a booted foot, bringing her sharply to the ground.

But Psylocke was just as fast. She shoved a well-placed fist into Alison’s side, the protective leathers cushioning the blow. But the right hook to the jaw…that hurt.

“This is not the way ladies fight,” Psylocke said, blood staining her teeth.

Ali darted backward, avoiding a swipe with those weird purple blades. “Ladies? Bitch, we’re in a fistfight. There’s no ladies here.”

Whipping her body around, Ali smacked Psylocke in the forehead with a roundhouse, taking one in turn when the other woman recovered. Spitting the blood from her mouth all over the expensive Persian as she crumbled to the floor, Ali checked on Piotr.

He was watching her, his hands holding Pyro’s behind his back. Alison breathed a sigh of relief. At least that was one less thing to worry about.

When the other mutant came at her again, Ali swung her leg around, knocking her onto her back with an undignified yelp. Ali straddled the slender woman, pulling her fist back and slamming it into her already bloodied face.

Two more blows had Psylocke lying limply and Dazzler stood, rotating her shoulders.

“Pleasure doin’ business with you, Lockie.”

She kicked the limp body for good measure, wiping the blood from her nose with the sleeve of her uniform. Ali looked around quickly, noticing that Pyro had somehow come out of Piotr’s grasp. That shouldn’t be possible, not with Piotr’s strength.

Ali ran toward the duo, the fierce need to protect almost a living thing inside of her. She thrust her hands out, calling on her mutation in desperation.

Nothing happened.
It was at that moment she saw Piotr begin to “power down”. Warm, pale flesh replaced the cold steel and her heart skipped to a stop. Jimmy stood at the entrance to the staircase, looking frightened and confused.

“Jim-bo!” Ali screamed as she made a mad dash for Piotr. “GET BACK!”

Though she and Piotr were too close to Leech for their powers to work, Pyro was not. He grasped a picture frame – one with a photograph of red haired woman and bespectacled man – from a nearby table. The insane mutant lit it aflame, hurling it with all his strength toward the vulnerable Piotr.

Ali caught the dark, vulnerable gaze of Colossus, watching in horror as a small smile graced his perfect lips. He was going to just let it happen.

“NO! PIOTR!”

With no thought in her head, Ali reached the dark Russian just a moment soon enough. She shoved him out of the way, turning as the flaming projectile hit her square in the chest. Darkness enveloped her and a distant scream of her name went unanswered.

~**~

“ALI!”

Colossus felt his world come sharply into focus as he sprawled on the floor, screaming her name in utter futility. She’d come between him and Fate, taking the fatal blow meant for him. His heart stopped in his chest, fear gripping the bottom of his soul as her lifeless body slammed into the far wall. The scorched wall buckled under the weight of her, paint crackling.

Her blonde head lolled back from the force of Pyro’s assault and she slid to the floor without uttering a single whimper.

Crimson colored Piotr’s vision and his mutation suddenly kicked back into high gear. Piotr stood, covering his body in that protective super-steel. Pyro was staring at the fallen body in absolute horror, his eyes darting to Colossus only when the other man was upon him.

Piotr took Pyro by the throat; lethal hands ready to crush the very life from his enemy. But something stopped him. Perhaps it was the presence of innocent Jimmy or the good instilled in him by Xavier and Storm. Whatever it was, in that moment, it saved Pyro’s life.

“Take your bitch and get out of our home,” Piotr growled in a sinister tone.

“Pete…” Pyro gagged, unable to breathe through the vice grip on his throat.

“Go.”

He turned and tossed Pyro like a rag doll, making the other boy land in a heap beside the beaten and bloody Psylocke. The other woman was staggering to her feet. Pyro helped her, the two of them limping past a terrified Leech.

Heart in his throat, Piotr turned to where Alison lay, powering down quickly. Jimmy rushed forward as well, tears running unchecked down his pale cheeks.

“Alison?” Piotr called softly, kneeling to drawn her limp form into his arms. Her head rolled back over his forearm, her bruised lips parting.
“Ali?” Leech questioned, shaking her shoulder. “Ali, this isn’t funny.”

Piotr put his hand to her cheek, leaning his ear to her mouth. No breath. He touched her wounded chest, feeling the armor dented beneath the leather. Trembling violently, Piotr stood, gathering her to his chest. He had to find Beast. Wolverine. Anyone.

“Come on, Jim.” Piotr ordered, carrying Alison’s lifeless body through the mansion’s corridors.

Signs of battle were everywhere. Burn marks in the carpeting, splintered wood, decimated furniture. Colossus found himself rushing down the stairs, holding tears back only by sheer will. He wouldn’t let this happen. She couldn’t die when it was his time. How could she have been so stupid? Why? Why had she done this?

Swallowing over the lump of emotion in his throat, he shouted the instant he saw a battered Wolverine inspecting a bleeding Storm.

“Help me!” He screamed, rushing toward the pair. “Someone HELP!”

Storm’s dark eyes filled with shock and fear when they landed on Ali’s body. Wolverine leapt forward as Piotr’s knees gave out. He crouched to the floor, looking about helplessly.

_Don’t die,_ he pled with her silently. _Please don’t die, Alison. Don’t go._

“She can’t breathe,” Wolverine was murmuring. “Storm, get Beast.”

But the woman was already screaming into the comm. link shared by all X-Men. Beast was on his way, even as Wolverine inspected Alison’s fragile form.

_Snikt! _One long adamantium claw burst through Wolverine’s skin. He ordered Colossus to remain still, curiously not demanding that he release the girl’s body.

That lone claw moved quickly over Ali’s chest, rending the armor of her uniform effortlessly and releasing her from the dented material. She coughed instantly; groaning as shaking hands came up to her chest. Piotr felt a sob lodge in his throat at the sound of her rasping cough. Alive. She’d lived.

Wolverine restrained her hands gently as Beast appeared in the foyer. Alison’s chest was singed badly and the massive bruises already forming were cause for concern.

“She needs to be taken to the med-lab,” Beast said quickly. “Give her to me, Peter.”

Piotr’s grip tightened considerably. There was no way in the name of hell he was releasing her, not yet. He could not shake the mind-numbing fear that she would somehow drift away if he let go.

Beast’s blue eyes were sympathetic. “All right. Carry her to the med-lab, my boy.”

Unable to reply verbally, Colossus gathered Alison’s wounded body closer to his chest, standing gracefully so he would not jostle her any more than necessary. She whimpered as they rushed toward the elevators.

“Comrade…” she whispered hoarsely.

“I’m right here,” he answered quietly.

A soft smile covered her lips and she calmed. Beast ordered Colossus to place her on the medical bed as Angel appeared in the lab as well.
Piotr stepped back as the two worked quickly to stabilize Alison’s condition. Piotr’s back hit the wall and he slid down to a crouch. He would never get that image out of his mind. The fear in her eyes when he turned to her, knowing this was the moment of death. The way her body had flown backward, the feel of her lifeless in his arms.

He’d seen her in action now, the rough street brawl fighting style effective and somewhat graceful. She handled herself well in battle, and he thought she would replace him on the team after his death. Never had he imagined that she would step in front of a fatal blow for him, saving the life that was meant to end.

He never wanted to see anyone hurt in his stead. He was Colossus, almost invulnerable to harm when in his super-steel structure. No one ever needed to take a hit for him. But she had, without question or pause. What kind of woman did that for a man she’d known less than a week?

_We’re X-Men. X-Men stick together._

Piotr got the distinct impression that his status as her teammate had no bearing on her thought process. She just did what needed doing.

He stared at her on the med-lab table, wondering what he was going to do now that she’d bought his life nearly at the cost of hers.

~*~

“Alison is stable,” Hank said as he entered the kitchen. “She’ll be fine.”

“Oh, thank whatever God is up there and all of his friends,” Kitty said, dropping her forehead onto the table.

The assembled X-Men were wired after the rough battle fought on their home soil. Kitty, Iceman, and Angel had dispatched the creature known as “The Blob” with a combination of maneuvers taught in the Danger Room.

Juggernaut was not so easily dismantled and it had taken the combined might of Storm, Wolverine, and Bishop to even slow him down. When Pyro ordered the mission aborted, he’d punched Storm one last time for good measure and rushed back out of the house.

Beast, whom had been securing the last of the children, met Arclight one on one at the entrance to the lower levels. His semi-rapid healing process had already divested him of most of his wounds, but the other woman was not so lucky. Beast had assured Bishop that her legs would heal…eventually.

With the Brotherhood flushed from the mansion, Bishop had insisted they all gather in the kitchen. He wanted a head count, if nothing else. Besides that, news of Alison’s self-sacrifice for Piotr and Jimmy’s intervention had clicked something together in his brain.

He looked at the sullen young man across the table, knowing he was no doubt cloaked in self-loathing and worry. Whatever was brewing between Dazzler and Colossus had some bearing on this altered timeline. They’d been dead in Bishop’s.

Jimmy, he felt, was the Chaos Factor. So much of what derived from his death had been ever altered. Dazzler’s life was interconnected with Jimmy’s and now with Piotr’s. Bishop felt the nagging of something coming together pull at his mind and he ran a hand over his bruised face.

Maybe his parents weren’t the bigger picture here. Still, it was nice to know they were moving closer, as he could see from the intimate way they had been standing in his mother’s bedroom as the
battle began. That was cause for hope.

His mother’s barrenness would have to be addressed later. If he dwelled on it, the worry made his stomach clench unpleasantly.

This timeline resembled his own in only minor ways now. Magneto was on the move, three X-Men were alive and well, but Bishop couldn’t shake the feeling that he wasn’t done yet.

Mother reached over, taking his hand in hers and squeezing his fingers. She always did that, he thought with a wry smile. She instinctively knew when he needed her touch, or her voice, or just her presence. She gifted him with a gentle smile before shaking her head at Bobby.

Iceman, true to form, was reenacting several points of his battle with the Blob. Kitty was rolling her eyes, Angel shaking his head in dismay. Bobby embellished a great deal, making the story sound as though the fate of the world depended on every hit and parry. Bishop chuckled. His uncle Bobby had always been something of a storyteller.

On the cold nights, when the sounds of battle drew too close, Iceman would pull Bishop – and later Shard – close to regale them with tales of the X-Men. It gave him so much history on his family and friends…

Bishop turned dark eyes to Kitty, frowning slightly. Her future was the next to be altered. He glanced at the clock, mentally calculating how long it would take. Marie would return and things would get ugly. Fast.

When her dark eyes met his, Bishop gave her a small nod. She grinned at him.

*Yes,* he thought grimly. *Better Marie than Kitty.*
Guilt

Chapter Summary

Logan muses a miracle, Alison continues to recover, Piotr shuts himself away, Bobby and Kitty made a choice.

Logan sat with Ororo, Bishop, and Hank in the War Room long after the other X-Men had been tucked into their beds. They had secured the building, ensuring that the damage from Pyro’s explosions would be fixable come morning.

The foursome wound up “talking shop” into the wee hours of the morning. Though neither of them said it, they had known it was a close call. Alison was still in the med-lab, sedated so she could escape the vast amount of pain she was in. Logan had to hand it to the girl, she was stronger than she looked.

Topics of choice this fine evening strayed from the battle, from the close call with Pete. From Jimmy’s trembling recounting, Alison had leaped in front of the fatal blow at the exact right moment. Bishop had said, on no uncertain terms, that it was only a second that mattered to the timeline.

Instead of rehashing a battle to fuel further nightmares for the young ones, they revisited everyone’s concern on the conception of Lucas.

“I am quite sure there is a medical explanation,” Beast was saying wearily. He glanced at the monitoring system quickly, ensuring Alison’s vitals were still stable.

“Hank,” Ororo broke in gently. Logan could see her hand entwined with their son’s and his heart skipped. She seemed to need constant physical contact with him now. “You looked at the scans yourself.”

“I know that, my dear,” he said, running a hand over his indigo face. “But there must be something… For goodness sake, your son is alive and sitting beside you at this moment.”

“I realize that,” answered the wintry mutant. “I am just concerned. How much time do we have before you cease to exist, son?”

The question was directed at Bishop, whom met his mother’s eyes unflinchingly. He turned, then, to Logan, as though asking permission. Logan nodded once, hoping his son could read everything he wasn’t saying in his eyes.


“And we must keep in mind that there is a slight chance that you are already with child, Storm,” Beast reminded her gently.

“Yes, yes,” she waved him off testily. “We need answers here, Henry.”

Logan decided to weigh in, his eyes darting from his son to his mother. “Anyone even entertain the idea that this might be a miracle?”
Three sets of eyes locked onto Logan. The feral merely shrugged. “I’ve seen stranger.”

He felt her eyes on him and met her gaze steadily. Hope and fear and something he couldn’t name swirling through those chocolate depths. Logan didn’t know how to convey what he was feeling; the uncertainty, pain, and something that might have mirrored her hope, so he simply stared at her across the expanse of the conference table.

Ororo rewarded him with a slight smile, so faint one might have missed it. Her dark eyes snapped free of fear and she turned to their son.

“He does have a point,” she said quietly. “Perhaps you are my miracle.”

But Bishop winced. Logan groaned. “Oh, God. What now?”

The dark mutant sighed, running his free hand over his tired face. Logan watched him touch the “M” marking over his eye and felt anger stab through his concern. No one was marking his kid that way. It wasn’t right.

“I know you can get pregnant, Mother,” Bishop said softly.

“How?” Hank interrupted.

He looked between the other adults for several moments. There was a struggle inside of the young man, one that he was obviously going to wrestle with for some time. Storm squeezed the man’s hand, and he glanced at her, exhaling sharply.

“I have a sister,” Bishop said quietly. “I can remember your pregnancy and the day she was born.”

THUMP! Logan’s precarious perch with his legs resting on the table was compromised as he tried to sit up too quickly. He landed in an undignified heap on his back, deciding it wouldn’t hurt to just stay on the floor for a moment to collect his thoughts.

No one was even breathing, or so his ears told him. When he finally got to his feet, he watched as Storm opened and closed her mouth several times soundlessly. Luke looked ready to bolt under the weighted and disbelieving stares of those around him. Logan shook his head, the words “I have a sister” echoing through his mind.

“A daughter?” Ororo finally managed to break the silence.

“Yeah,” Bishop grinned slightly. “Lizzie. Shard. She’s, uh, the biggest pain in the ass on the planet, but we love her for some reason.”

“Huh,” Logan grunted. “Sounds like her mother.”

Ororo glared at him. He smirked hugely.

“This changes the perspective slightly,” Hank was murmuring. “It’s obvious that somehow, Ororo will conceive and carry two children to term. I must talk this over with Forge in the morning.”

“Forge?” Ororo asked as Logan came over to place his hands on his son’s shoulders. The darker mutant looked up at him, smiling thankfully.

“Yes, he has a new invention he wants to test on Alison’s injury. A dermal regenerator of some sort. Alison was intrigued enough to give us permission.”

“She seems to be a dare devil,” Storm observed somewhat fondly.
“That she is,” Hank stood, checking the girl’s vitals again. “Her heart rate has jumped. Hmm, I think it is time for another round of morphine. Excuse me.”

As the big blue mutant left the room, Logan fell into the seat beside his son, looking between mother and child quickly. His mind was conjuring images of a white-haired little girl clinging to his legs, dancing on his toes. The mental picture made his heart ache.

“She’s more like you,” Bishop offered to break the quiet. He met his father’s eyes without apology. “Reckless, untamable, and damn loveable for it.”

“She and I must butt heads like a couple of rams during mating season.” Storm winked, grinning at her own joke.

“Just a little,” Luke chuckled. “Don’t be too hard on her, Mother. For all her faults, she’s got a heart of gold.”

“Hrm,” the woman hummed, her eyes catching Logan’s gaze. “Sounds like someone else I know.”

Logan felt himself stiffen proudly at her comment. The obvious love in Bishop’s words made tears sting at the back of Logan’s eyes. His family was happy, loving, and closer than anything else, even during war. How had they managed that?

When Ororo tilted her head at him curiously, he amended his internal dialogue. Of course they’d managed it. They had probably promised one another that nothing would ever come before their family. The two of them would fight, tooth and fucking nail, to give their children some measure of happiness, even in the most bleak of times.

In that instant, he understood. Whatever had happened in the other timeline, Ororo and Logan had decided to ban together. They were warriors at heart; they would fight for anything to do with their children. Even in the face of death and destruction, they could fill a child’s earliest memories with love and affection.

Perhaps he hadn’t been in love with Ororo in that timeline. Had they faked it for their child’s benefit? Or was it real, coming to fruition in the months leading up to the birth? Logan studied her lovely face, her open gaze inquisitive and honest. He could love her, he mused. She drove him crazy, got under his skin, fought, refused to submit.

Hell, she was making him hard just looking at him.

As though she’d caught on to his internal monologue, she stood abruptly.

“I’m tired. I’m going to bed. Goodnight, Lucas.” She kissed their son’s forehead, raising a brow at Logan.

He knew that look.

Logan was on his feet in seconds. “Yeah. Me too. Night, son.”

Rushing around the table, he followed Ororo out of the room. He could hear his son swear and the dull thud of his head hitting the table.

“Oh, God. You two are so gross.”

Ororo must have heard this as well, for she laughed even when Logan grasped her arm, spinning her to crush her lithe, leather-clad body to his chest. She hummed against his seeking lips, a smile still
curving that delectable mouth.

“Maybe we should start locking the bedroom door.”

He chuckled, a dark and husky laugh that made her shiver.

“Where’s the fun in that?”

Two days flew by for the bedridden Alison. The morning after the attack, a Cheyenne by the name of Forge had appeared. Though her chest had ached terribly, she’d chatted with him for several moments before he and Beast put her back under for the experimental procedure.

When she woke again, some of the pain was gone and her bruising lighter. Forge was enthusiastic about his new invention and thanked her heartily for allowing him to experiment on her. Ali had laughed, thanking him for ensuring her boobies no longer felt as though they’d been on fire.

He’d gawked at her before Hank ushered him out of the room.

Late afternoon found her surrounded by new friends. Magazines and fast food wrappers littered the med-lab floor, but Beast never complained. Ali sat up against the back of her bed, giggling and laughing with Kitty, Bobby, and Warren.

She’d had a steady stream of visitors all day. Even the reclusive Jimmy had appeared with a long-stemmed rose cut from the garden. He had attempted to apologize, but Ali was having none of that. They had, after all, managed to protect Piotr, even if her battered body protested the split-second decision with every breath.

The only person she had not seen was the man she’d foolishly leapt in front of. Piotr, by all accounts, had retreated into his bedroom, answering insistent knocks for no one. Ali frowned at the thought, wondering why he’d gone into hiding. She wasn’t one to brandish heroics around like a badge on her sleeve, but a thank you wouldn’t have gone unanswered.

Thumbing through the celebrity tabloid Kitty had given her, she glanced around again. Bobby and Kitty were talking quietly over their findings in a tattoo magazine. Angel shook his head at them both while preparing some kind of medication for Ali. She rolled her eyes. That boy needed to lighten up in a big, bad way.

Her eyes widened as she came across a photograph of David Beckham, throwing her head back to laugh at the blurb beneath.

“Listen to this!” She demanded of her companions as the med-lab door hissed open. “David Beckham purchased a vibrator for his wife with the outrageous price tag of 2 million dollars.”

“Good God!” Kitty exclaimed, leaning over to look at the article. “That’s just nutty.”

Ali laughed harder. “If I’m spending 2 mil on a sex toy, it’d better be a life-sized, fully functional Wolverine sex-bot.”

“Really?”

She looked up, grinning wolfishly as the man himself arched a dark brow at her. Instead of being
mortified, as many would be, she winked impishly.

“Well, yeah. I mean, it’s two million bucks, Wolvie. If I’m spending that kind of dough, it’s gonna be worth it.”

Storm, whom had entered with the feral mutant, arched her light brows and grinned at Ali.

“I would have to agree,” she said, much to the younger mutants’ surprise. “But then, I have the real thing which is always preferable.”

“Show off,” Ali grumbled good-naturedly.

“Ok,” Bobby interjected, looking slightly green. “Can we stop talking about Wolverine and sex? I’m gonna have nightmares.”

“Shut up, Iceboy,” Ali laughed. “It’s common knowledge that Wolverine is completely shaggable. Right, Kitten?”

The brunette blushed brightly as several sets of eyes swung toward her, but she shrugged.

“Sure, why not?”

“Ok, this is getting disturbing. Be quiet.” Logan insisted, pulling a cigar from his pocket.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Storm continued with a mischievous smirk. “I could give them details, Logan.”

“Share!” Ali demanded through her laughter.

The light-hearted moment was broken when pain shot through her chest. Ali gasped with the force of it, coughs wracking her body. Kitty was on her feet in an instant, bringing a small steel basin over for Ali to spit into.

Everyone nearby halted all movement, watching as she hacked into the basin. Her chest ached and her head spun, making Warren glance at her monitors quickly.

“That’s enough fun for you today,” he ordered briskly. “Everyone without medical training, get out.”

“War…” Ali attempted, stopping when another coughing fit washed over her.

“Nope. Out.” He stamped his foot, angelic wings twitching with his determination. “Yes, even the senior X-Men. She needs to rest. You can see her later.”

Giving in to her “nurse’s” demands, Ali weakly waved goodbye as everyone filed out of the room. Kitty squeezed her hand quickly, the last to exit the room. Angel swept up to the bed, fiddling with monitors and injecting pain medication into the IV taped to her hand.

Ali fell back against the pillows, fighting for breath.

“You all right?” the blonde man questioned, brushing a lock of hair from her face.

“No,” she admitted, glancing at him. “I mean, what I did…I still think it was right.”

“But you’re angry,” he finished when she halted. “That he won’t even come to say hello.”

Ali looked down at her hands, picking at her chipping nail polish. “Is it so much to ask?”
“Not at all,” he assured her with a fond smile. “I can go up, try to shame him out.”

She shook her head slightly. “No. Just leave it.”

“Only if you’re sure…”

“Yeah,” Ali’s voice softened as her medications began to take effect. “I’ve got no doubt in my mind that he’s carrying enough guilt and shame to fill the Grand Canyon.”

Sleep claimed her before the words had even left her lips. She drifted off with Angel beside her, falling into dreams she would never clearly recall.

~**~

In the dim light of gathering dusk, he sat on the edge of his bed. His elbows rested on denim-covered knees, his hands limp between his thighs. His shoulders slumped with defeat, the weight of everything that transpired pushing on him so heavily it took his breath away.

Shadows played against his face as he sat, unmoving. His careful study of the floor had not ceased since he’d come into his room the previous day. Sleep eluded him, dreams consisting of naught but horrible nightmares.

**NO! PIOTR!**

Dark eyes flinched, heavy lids covering them for a moment. The image of her body hitting the wall, his own terror reflecting in a futile call of her name would not leave him. It clashed with vivid recollections of being flattened to the grass in warm sunlight, of heady, stolen kisses in the security room.

*Dennis’t work with me, comrade.*

His chest rose and fell with a long, shaky sigh. Tearstains had long dried on his cheeks, the wetness replaced by salty residue as his body refused to produce more. Why had she done this? What was she trying to prove?

Breath hitched in his chest, catching until he released it in a slow exhale. His gaze flicked to massive, deadly hands. He’d been prepared for death; a part of him might have even welcomed it. Anything for the team, for the family Storm and the Professor had offered him that cold night in Russia. At least he could have protected someone else. Oh, he knew how Fate liked to work. Tit for tat. A life for a life.

He could sacrifice himself without thinking twice. Everyone died. Mortality had never frightened him. It was part of the balance. When Bishop had revealed his fate, Piotr accepted it without alarm or fear. Whatever was meant to be would be.

Never, not under any circumstances, would he willingly sacrifice another. Piotr could not even contemplate it when it came to her. He was ready for death, but not for it to take her. The image of Pyro’s nearly fatal projectile slamming into Alison’s chest still brought the threat of tears to his eyes. It terrified him. In that one moment, the nearly indestructible Colossus felt true fear.

Heavy lids covered his eyes again. That fear had reflected in the deep jade of her eyes. She’d been
afraid for him. Had anyone looked upon him with such emotion before?

No. Usually everyone accepted that Piotr was damn near invulnerable. He was to bust through walls and deflect bullets. No one in his or her right mind would offer to protect him. Piotr Rasputin was the protector. But that little slip of a girl dove in front of death for him, ever altering the timeline once more.

Lifting his head as someone began to bang on his bedroom door again, Piotr began to study the ceiling.

“Piotr Rasputin! You son of a bitch! Open this goddamn door NOW!”

Kitty. Again.

Her call went unanswered.

The slender brunette continued her relentless pounding. Piotr sighed heavily, his heart aching in his chest. He should have been down in the med-lab when she first woke. A real man would have been by her side through it all; a rock during the worst of the pain.

How could he face her?

“PETE! You spineless coward! Get off your ass and come out here! I swear by all that is good and frickin’ holy, I’m gonna drag you to the med-lab. She saved your life, you ungrateful swine.”

Enduring Kitty’s verbal abuse, Piotr felt his chin dimple, emotion crumbling his face once more. There was nothing to say to Alison…or perhaps too much. He had told himself that keeping her away was for her own good, to shield her when Death came for him.

There was nothing to that statement any longer. No looming demise colored his vision. In fact, he could see too far. Lost, adrift without the comfortable buffer of knowing one’s fate left Piotr with a vacant place inside of him. What was he to do now?

*Have some faith.*

Without his permission, a fresh set of tears slipped from his tired eyes. Dropping his head forward again, Piotr’s eyes closed once more. Faith. What did he have faith in?

He couldn’t face her. His heart could not take the reality of beautiful, vivacious Alison confined to a medical bed. For the last several hours Piotr had attempted to make his feet move, to carry him down to the med-lab. They stubbornly refused his half-hearted commands.

“How? Pete? Pete, come on.” Kitty’s voice was soft, almost sympathetic.

“Its ok to be upset,” she attempted. “But you can’t hide in there forever.”

Piotr’s voice obstinately refused to work. The memory came back again, slamming through his mind with all the force of a hurricane wind. His breath caught in his throat. Silent sobs shook his shoulders, even as he heard Kitty move away from the door.

This was ridiculous. He barely knew the girl. And yet, she had made him laugh, given him the best kiss in the history of the world, and saved his life. He wanted to thank her, but the guilt crushed his very soul.

When he’d come down the stairs just days ago, spotting the striking blonde covered in tattoos, his
heart had tripped for maybe the third time in his life. She’d turned those enormous green eyes on him and it had taken every ounce of strength in his body to not stutter like an enamored schoolboy.

That saucy smile and velvety voice captured his attention, no matter how he had tried to distance himself. Watching her “touchdown” dance had made his breathing accelerate. When she’d come around that corner in the middle of battle, her face reflecting so much relief at seeing him…

“Ali…”

The broken whisper of her name seemed so loud in the silent room. Piotr stared down at the floor as dusk faded into night. No matter how he wanted to, he couldn’t face her. It was his fault. Everything was his fault.

~**~

“Kitty?”

Bobby Drake knocked on her open bedroom door, poking his head inside cautiously. He found no immediate sign of the brunette mutant, but her open invitation to her room allowed him to come inside.

Since Alison’s arrival at the mansion just over a week ago, he’d seen very little of Kitty. She was Ali’s constant companion; often found in the room they shared listening to music and laughing into hysteric. Bobby didn’t think Kitty made friends that easily. Her brilliant mind and penchant for being overly bubbly wasn’t a big attractor for some reason.

He could see, however, how Alison would latch onto her. They were similar souls. Giddy, optimistic, borderline silly. Kitty had needed a friend since Jubilee had chosen Marie’s side in what was less-than-affectionately called the “Bobby Wars”. Kitty had lost a good deal to Marie’s jealousy. Not that it was completely unfounded.

Bobby finally found Kitty, which made an instant smile curve his mouth. She was half-inside her closet, muttering curses as she searched for something, one foot booted and the other merely socked. He glanced at the beds on either side of the walk-in storage space. Ali hadn’t had time to personalize her space, but Kitty’s spare sheets of a rich gold were rumpled on the new girl’s bed.

Of course, though he liked to think of himself as committed to Marie, Bobby happened to be male. As such, he could not resist the powerful urge to tilt his head, gazing openly at the rounded rump peeking out from the closet. Bobby licked his lips, his hands itching to grasp that denim-covered bottom.

She really needed to stop being so damn cute.

“Kitty?”

“Hang on!” came the muffled response. “I think I lost my mind back here, along with my other boot.”

Bobby glanced around the immediate area quickly. Spying her favorite boot lying innocently beneath Ali’s bed, where it had obviously been tossed at some point, he bent at the waist to scoop it up. He moved up beside the closet, leaning one shoulder on the wall and grinning down at Kitty’s half-invisible form.
“Oh? This boot?” The shoe dangled from careless fingers, like a treat for the searching kitten.

She popped out of the closet like someone had shoved her. Her good-natured glare was infectious, making Bobby’s widen.

“I think this boot hates me. Seriously.” Kitty sighed as she took it from him. She sat on the edge of her bed, pulling her shoe on quickly.

“When your boots start having issues, it’s time to reevaluate your priorities.” He said sagely, garnering himself another adorable glare.

“You’re a barrel of laughs today, Drake,” Kitty rolled her eyes as she laced up her boot. “You been down to see Daz yet?”

He shook his head, sitting on the edge of the musician’s bed. “Nope. Just got out of the Danger Room with Wolverine.”

“Pete show up?” Kitty questioned instantly, her brow furrowing with concern.

Bobby shook his head. He didn’t know what had happened between his friend and Dazzler, only that the wake of it had left him buried in his own demons. The man had not left his room since ensuring Ali would make it through the night. No one had so much as seen him eat.

“Damn,” Kitty said, blowing a wayward chestnut lock from her eyes. “I was hoping he’d have come out of seclusion by now.”

“You know Pete,” Bobby answered. “He’s a weird guy.”

“Yeah,” the girl shrugged, dropping her foot onto the floor with a muted thud.

They stared at each other across the scant feet that separated the beds. This happened more often than he wanted to admit. He’d find himself at a loss for words, content to merely watch the play of emotions over her beautiful face.

It wasn’t right, harboring this…whatever it was for Kitty while still trapped in a relationship with Marie. He inwardly winced at his own wording. When had being involved with Marie become “trapped”? He couldn’t recall, but that’s how it felt.

She was free to go dashing off to Germany at a moment’s notice, but heaven forbid he enjoy a boy’s night out with Pete and Warren. To be brutally honest, it was getting on his damn nerves. And the more he thought about the concert, enjoying the simple company Kitty provided…well, it wasn’t constructive to his staying with Marie.

“Bobby?” Kitty asked cautiously. She’d never mentioned it, but he felt the rift growing between them. If he didn’t do something soon, he’d end up losing his best friend.

Slowly, Bobby stood with a strained smile. Damn it. Why couldn’t he just pull his balls together and tell Marie it was over? Why couldn’t he just pull his balls together and tell Marie it was over? Why did it have to be so damn complicated? He wanted Kitty, he thought she wanted him. He didn’t need all of this damn drama.

Wincing again at the thought that Marie enjoyed her drama, Bobby headed for the door.

“Lets go check on the invalid before she makes Doctor McCoy change his fur color to ‘Blush’.”

When he reached the bedroom door, Kitty’s hand found it’s way into his. Bobby paused, his free
hand on the knob. He knew he should leave. Drop her hand, rush to the lower levels and make Ali laugh for a while with some old X-Men stories. That’s what he should do.

Too bad he couldn’t actually do it.

“She’s doing a number on you, isn’t she?” Kitty said quietly.

“Kitty…”

“No,” she cut in, leaning up to put her chin on his shoulder. Instinct made him turn his head, just slightly, so he could see her out of the corner of his eye.

“We shouldn’t.”

“Probably not,” Kitty agreed. “But I’m tired of waiting. She’s not here, Bobby. And bitchy of me as it is, I don’t care anymore.”

They were silent for a long moment, one filled with unfulfilled promises and tension thick enough to stand on. He swallowed hard, inhaling the dizzying scent of her perfume. She was warm against his arm and back, drawing the icy mutant closer. Their breathing hitched, heartbeats raced, nerves stood on anticipating edge.

By God, he wanted her.

“Close the door, Bobby,” she whispered enticingly.

For once in his life, he didn’t question the impulse. Without a word, Bobby closed Kitty’s bedroom door.

And locked it.

~**~

He gingerly peeled back the bandages, his thumb caressing her swollen lip as much as he dared. She smiled at him, allowing that thin veil to come down, revealing the vulnerable woman beneath the warrior.

“Sorry,” he mumbled, reaching for the sterile solution and a fresh bandage.

“Doesn’t hurt,” she replied, settling against the pillows. “What did he say when you told him?”

He sighed, cleansing the stitched wound from the blonde X-Man’s hands. “He’s disappointed, but something’s brewing. Everyone can feel it.”

“Well,” she winced as he hit a sensitive spot. “We knew going after them would bring their wrath eventually.”

“Yeah,” he nodded, setting the sterile gauze aside to inspect the clean wound. “Just didn’t think he’d take it so well.”

“He’s planning something,” she replied, violet eyes open and curious. “He wants to get his hands on Bishop.”

“I know,” John replied, placing the sticky bandage over her stitches carefully. “I do too, you know?”

Betsy regarded him quietly for a moment as he moved on to her wounded hands. He kept his touch
light, a bit shocked to be tending her so carefully. They’d never really had this kind of relationship. Something about the altercation at Xavier’s mansion left him rattled, though. She seemed to understand his need to comfort and allowed it.

“You carry guilt for hurting the girl?”

He did not reply.

“She did beat the shite out of me,” Betsy teased.

Pyro grinned briefly. “Yeah, but you asked for it. How’d you let her get one up on you?”

Betsy shrugged as he finished his doctoring. She beckoned him closer with a crooked finger. He slid up her body, curling into her embrace on the creaking bed. Her long, nimble fingers raked fondly through his hair, the two of them finding a moment’s peace in the tempest of brewing war.

“I didn’t want to hurt her, or Pete,” John admitted quietly.

“You may have to, before the end.” Her words were soft, pointed, and held the subtle hint of empathy.

“I know.”

“Shh,” she quieted him, drawing him closer. “Sleep. We will decide what must be done in the morning.”

“Yes, dear,” he murmured, kissing her cheek. “We’ll find a way to get to Bishop.”

But Betsy had already drifted off to dream. John watched the steady rise and fall of her chest, reaching up to gently touch her cheek. She really was beautiful. His screaming Amazon and delicate Princess.

John lay back against her pillow, staring up at the ceiling. If he fucked up again, he had no doubt that Magneto would enjoy killing him.
Surrender

Chapter Summary

Alison confronts Piotr, with interesting results.

Released from the med-lab on the third day post-battle, Alison bid her good doctor farewell and darted for the elevators. Much as she adored the big blue mutant, the med-lab was damn claustrophobic. The scent of acrid cleansers and constant beep of monitoring equipment was driving her swiftly up the wall.

Once she managed to get upstairs, she paused in the main hallway. Bobby and Kitty had been conspicuously missing from their usual visits over the last twenty-four hours or so. She should find them, yell at them a little. What could be more important than ensuring she was not bouncing off the walls because of Dr. McCoy?

Deciding she would head upstairs first, Ali moved to the stairs, touching the bruise between her breasts carefully. It was visible beneath the scooped neckline of her tank top, the deep purples and blues stark against her pale flesh. It was still a little painful, but breathing was no longer an Olympic event, so Ali wasn’t complaining.

When she’d agreed to join the X-Men, it had surprised the young mutant by how easily they accepted her into their ranks. Storm explained that their dead mentor – Xavier – had always believed the best in those willing to fight. It was a leap of faith. Alison glanced at a photograph of the man in question as she headed toward her room, wondering if he would have accepted her as easily.

Well, maybe jumping in front of a suddenly vulnerable Colossus would have stuck her in his good graces. She would never know.

Ali poked her head into Bobby’s room – the first in the hall – not surprised to find it empty. Before she reached the bedroom she shared with Kitty, she noticed the door of Piotr’s room was ajar. Her heart thudded in her chest, bruised flesh aching with the sudden leap.

Knocking quickly, irate and excited in the same moment, Ali pushed the door open. The room appeared empty, making her heart ache for an entirely different reason. He still had not come to see her, though she distinctly recalled him carrying her through the mansion to the med-lab. Why had he gone? Did she really mean so little in the grand scheme of things?

Ok, so they hadn’t known one another long. Still, didn’t saving someone’s life mean something? She wasn’t looking for medals or praise, but she would like to know that her moment of weakness had made some effect. No ripples on the pond, she mused stepping into Piotr’s sanctuary. Not a one.

Ali’s boots made soft thudding noises on the hardwood as she entered his private space. It smelled of oil paints and spice, like his cologne. Curious, she left the door open behind her, peering into the dimly lit bedroom.

Spotting a covered easel in one corner, she felt an eyebrow go up.
“What’s this, Petey?” She questioned the silence. Noting several canvases turned the wrong way, Ali moved to them.

Selecting one, she flipped it around easily, stunned at the absolutely lifelike painting of Storm. No, not Storm. Ororo. The woman was soaring amongst the clouds, her eyes glowing white, much longer hair flying back like a banner. But the smile…that stole Ali’s heart. Ororo looked peaceful. Happy.

Taking another, Ali found a likeness of Wolverine. Ah, again, not Wolverine. Logan. He was on what looked like the back porch, one leg propped behind him for balance as he leaned against the wall. A cigar was between his lips, the flame of his lighter almost real enough to burn.

Completely fascinated now, Alison turned over each and every painting. Kitty. Bobby. Artie. Warren. Even one of a red haired woman smiling kindly and a man with ruby-red lenses over his eyes. Each portrait radiated love, as though Piotr had somehow managed to capture a piece of each soul on the simple canvas. As though each soul had given it to the artist willingly.

Alison lovingly touched Kitty’s portrait, depicting her young friend beneath the massive oak in the courtyard, books spread all over the grass, sunlight beaming down. It was Kitty at the heart, bookish and just a little silly. Ali adored her for it.

Now, of course, she had to see what lay beneath the covering on the easel. Setting the paintings back where she’d found them, Ali straightened. She marched over to the tall easel, not daring to reach for the top of the drop cloth. Instead, she merely grabbed the bottom edge and yanked it down so that it nearly covered her head.

“Oh, sweet Jesus.”

Painted with that same delicate care, Alison stared back at herself from the large canvas. A bright, sunny backdrop showcased her messy ponytail and the twinkle in her eyes. She was wearing her beloved Green Bay sweatshirt, a football cradled between her elbow and hip. Her head was tilted, bare lips curved into a smile. Black paint was added beneath her eyes, the same as she had worn during the football game several days ago. He’d even added in her eyebrow, nose, and ear piercings. Ali could barely recognize herself. She looked…beautiful. Tears stung at the back of her eyes as she lovingly reached up to touch the canvas. The painting was unfinished, but he had faithfully drawn everything in to be completed at a later date.


She reminded herself that every other portrait seemed dead on. Perspective, that’s what her mother used to tell her. Everything in the world was a matter of perspective.

Consumed by emotion she couldn’t name, Ali turned away from the portrait. Trying to get a grip on her turbulent feelings, she took in the rest of Piotr’s rooms. Books were stacked haphazardly on his desk with papers and pencils. Paints, charcoal and brushes, however, were neatly placed on the table beside the easel. Ali felt herself smile. It was obvious where his attentions lingered.

A poster of a band Ali herself loved – Staind by name – was plastered to his closet door. His bed was unmade, covered with dark blue sheets and a smattering of papers. Ali’s eyes narrowed as she
spotted what looked like a sketchbook.

Without even pausing to feel a little ashamed, Ali crossed the room. Taking up the open book, her eyes widened. The first sketch was of her, head in her hand, elbow on the table. She was laughing.

On the next page, another of her during the football game doing her touchdown dance. Several others were various parts of her face, as though he had practiced sketching her in order to get it right. Good Lord, in the drawings where her arms were bare, Piotr had faithfully recreated her various tattoos.

Finally, Ali’s eyes landed on a drawing of her in full X-Men gear. She was posed just so, standing in what looked to be a battle-ready position. From the tension in her arms and legs, she could almost feel the call to combat.

What was he doing? Why in the name of hell were there so many drawings of her?

“What are you doing?”

Startled by Piotr’s gently accented voice, Ali jumped a bit, spinning toward the door. His massive form took up the entire doorway, blocking the light from the corridor beyond. Ali’s heart tripped, stuttering in her chest until it nearly winded her.

His dark eyes flashed, flicking toward the disturbed easel before resting on the sketchbook in her hands. Unsure if he was angry or merely surprised, Ali swallowed hard and thrust the book toward him.

“What is this?” She demanded softly. “Why are you drawing me?”

“Why are you invading my room?” He shot back harshly.

Ali’s blood heated with anger. “Oh, I don’t know. Maybe ‘cause you didn’t have the fucking heart to visit me in the med-lab?”

Dark eyes reflected momentary hurt, but Ali shrugged it off.

“Leave.”

“Oh, no,” Ali shook her head. “You’re not pulling that one on me again, buddy.”

Piotr strode into the room, fearsome and enormous. Ali didn’t have to be afraid. She knew, better than anyone, that he wouldn’t hurt her. Nothing in the world was dragging her from this room short of all out war until she had a talk with this Colossus.

“This is my personal space.” He fought back, lethal hands clenching into fists.

Ali dropped the sketchbook onto the bed, reaching down to pull her shirt off. She marched up to him, pointing at the seven-inches of bruising on her chest. Thank God I wore a bra today, she thought with a hint of amusement at her expense.

“See that?” She demanded. “That gives me all the goddamn right in the world to be in your room right now, Piotr. You owe me that much.”
His eyes strayed to the bruises, his posture slouching a bit. Ali could almost see the weight he shouldered. In that moment, he reminded her of the mythical Atlas. A personal favorite among old Greek myths, she thought that this young mutant tried to carry the world on his shoulders like that same plucky hero.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered. “I didn’t…”

“What?” Ali threw her hands up when he halted. “Damn it, Pete, you’re fucking infuriating!”

His eyes locked onto hers after a careful study of her face. Ali moved closer, so close she could feel the heat of his body. It made her shiver slightly. One of her hands shoved at his chest, not at all surprised when he didn’t so much as budge.

“And what would you like me to say?” His voice rumbled as he glared down at her. “What you did…”

“What!” Ali exploded. “What was wrong with saving your life? You were throwing it away anyway!”

“I did not ask you to!” Piotr fairly shouted.

Ali arched a pierced brow. “Oh, so you are alive. Feel that? It’s called anger.”

He glared at her.

“You have no idea who I am,” Piotr said a touch more evenly. “You…you had no right interfering.”

Ali nearly slapped him across that handsome, tortured face. Paying no mind to the fact that she was half-dressed standing in the bedroom of a man that regularly set her insides on fire, she shook her head, stepping closer yet.

“I had every right,” she shot back. “You knew…you knew that Pyro was here for you, that Fate had already taken you once. You were going to let it happen. Why? What the hell is so damn bad in your life that you wanted the easy way out?”

“Nothing!” Piotr threw his hands into the air, obviously frustrated. “But Fate chose me for a reason, Alison. You should not have upset the balance.”

“Oh holy hell,” she sighed, rubbing her tired eyes. “You’re damn stupid. If Fate was unchangeable, how could Bishop come back? Do you think her so weak as to simply allow that?”

Piotr turned, slamming his bedroom door. Ali jumped slightly, surprised to learn that their raised voices had gifted them with an audience. Her opponent’s swift movement scattered listening teens and one blue fur-ball.

When he faced her again, his hands grasped her arms tightly. Startled by the emotion in his eyes, the red lids from what looked like crying, Ali felt herself soften. She reached for his face, turned away when he jerked his chin from her reach.

Bastard.

“You…” He halted, the breath he inhaled shaky with restraint.
“Piotr…”

“All my life,” Piotr whispered. “I have been surrounded by fear for others. Fear that I would harm them accidentally. I kept myself apart, not worthy to feel as the others do. You, you stupid, foolish girl, nearly died for nothing. I have nothing. My passing would shake no lives.”

She absorbed this carefully, finding it amazing how similarly she had spoken just eighteen months ago. Oh, Dazzler had been there. That dark, lonely room your soul could lock itself into to prevent hurt had been her home for months. She had told herself a million times that it was better to guard one’s heart, even from something so simple as friendship.

“Pete,” she exhaled. “Don’t you see what Bishop was saying? Your death destroyed the X-Men. They love you. Do you have any idea what I’d give for that?”

He released her gently, surprising Ali when her arms did not hurt. Even in his anger, he had controlled himself.

“Don’t,” he shook his head. “Just leave me alone.”

“I swear to God,” Alison groaned. “I don’t know whether to kiss you or show you my right hook up close and personal.”

Their eyes locked across the dim space between them. Ali could feel the heat flare between them, quickly replacing her anger with desire. It wasn’t right, what this idiot could do to her with one glance at those impossibly dark eyes.

He felt nothing, Ali surmised. If he was anywhere in the same neighborhood as she had been, he kept emotion as far away as he could. Ali never wanted to go back there. She felt everything now, even to her own detriment. Anything was so much better than nothing. Being alone wasn’t an option anymore.

She would see to it that Piotr understood that as well, though it was incredibly painful to let that emotion in after so long without.

Surprising her again, Piotr took a step toward her, grasping her biceps in his massive hands once more. Unlike before, there was no anger in his touch. He never wanted to go back there. She felt everything now, even to her own detriment. Anything was so much better than nothing. Being alone wasn’t an option anymore.

Piotr leaned toward Ali until she could feel the warmth of his breath against her lips.

“Kiss me.” His demand was hot, making her knees turn into butter.

She desperately wanted to be able to resist him. Really and truly, Ali wanted to reach back and deck this stupid, stubborn man. But the heat in his gaze, in his touch, was too much. It brought her back to that night in the security room, when his kiss had melted her like snow to spring’s thaw.

Giving in, Ali gracefully pulled herself up to her tiptoes and mashed her lips to Piotr’s. He let loose a groan that could have been her name, strong arms encircling her instantly. Ali was lifted, settled on his waist with her legs wrapped around him before her lips parted to invite him inside.

One of his hands found it’s way to her hair, fisting in the long locks to hold her in place. Ali
whimpered as his tongue slipped into her mouth, threatening to devour her. She let him. She wanted to be devoured by this man as though the world were ending all around them. Desperate, heady, his kiss sent her senses into mayhem and she found herself completely comfortable with that feeling.

When his free hand grasped her backside, Ali tore her mouth from his to gasp. He had the nerve to smirk. Ali gave him a mock glare, ducking her head to feather kisses onto his neck. Piotr groaned again, the sound sending delicious shivers down her spine. God, she wanted to make him do that again.

“Put me down,” she requested huskily when her mouth reached his ear.

Without a word, Piotr gently put her on the floor. Ali stumbled slightly, her equilibrium unbalanced by lust for a moment. Then, reaching past him, she locked the bedroom door before meeting his eyes.

“Didn’t think I was leaving, did ya?” She winked, her hands grasping the hem of his shirt.

Fear flashed into Piotr’s eyes. “Should we…”

“Shh,” Ali silenced him with a gentle kiss. “You won’t hurt me.”

Ah, she thought as his eyes reflected surprise. He’d never voiced it, but she knew. He was terrified of what he might do. Ali found herself completely unafraid, though the last time they’d kissed she ended up with bruises.

With entreating hands, Ali pulled the thin cotton of his tee over his head, licking her lips when a wealth of tanned flesh was suddenly bare to feasting eyes. She tossed his shirt over her shoulder, pressing wet, open-mouthed kisses to the twitching muscles of his chest.

Piotr lifted her again, walking her toward the bed until he could lay her onto it. They helped one another toss papers and clothing off of the mattress before Piotr flattened her to the bed, covering her smaller body with his.

Ali ran her hands up the broad expanse of his back, enjoying the hisses and sighs that escaped his lips. He unfastened the front closure of her bra, pulling the flimsy material away to reveal her bare breasts.

She was careful about moving as Piotr kissed her flesh with more care and tenderness than she expected. Ali sighed contently when he feathered soft, innocent kisses over her bruises before taking an already taut nipple into his mouth.

As though his rough tongue against sensitive flesh unleashed a firestorm of energy, they tore at one another. Her boots were tossed across the room, smacking into the carefully propped portraits. Piotr did not even bother removing her jeans. He grasped the waistline and with one tug of his preternatural strength, effectively tore them down the seam.

“You’re replacing those,” Ali gasped as he threw the destroyed material over his shoulder.

“No, I’m not,” he replied, nibbling at her lips. “You started this.”

Ali grinned, nipping at his bottom lip. “Ask me if I’m ashamed…go on. Ask me.”

Piotr chuckled, the husky, rumbling sound making Ali’s center pool with want. She fought with the
zip of his jeans, finally divesting him of his boxers and pants with his help. Hissing at the feel of bare flesh on bare flesh, Ali cradled his larger form in her arms, his hips between her thighs.

He leaned up on his elbows, hands brushing long blonde locks from her face as dark eyes bored into hers. Ali stared back, unwilling to flinch and knowing if she did, that he would bolt for the door. She touched his face gently, tracing the lines of it almost lovingly.

“You’re going to be trouble,” his whispered, a slight smile curving that perfect mouth.

“They’ve been tellin’ me that since the day I was born, comrade.” Ali replied, dragging her toes up and down his bare leg.

Ali kissed him again, hard and demanding. Piotr responded instantly, his hands tracing the gentle swells of her body, making her writhe under his touch.

“This won’t hurt you?” He questioned as another set of light, teasing kisses were rained on her chest.

“Uh…no?” Ali gasped, her hands grasping the pillows. “I might explode though.”

“I certainly hope so,” Piotr chuckled.

“Oh shut up.”

He chuckled into her flesh again, his hands shifting her thighs apart further. Piotr shifted, clearing his throat as he met Ali’s eyes again. She arched her brow, wrapping her hands at his nape to ensure he was looking at her.

“Been a while?”

Her lover nodded silently.

“It’s ok,” she whispered, kissing him again. “We’ve got time. You’ll remember how it all works.”

Settling more comfortably between her thighs, Piotr rocked his hips gently. Ali felt her eyes cross before she slammed them closed, the feel of his hard length hot against her thigh. Piotr groaned again, wrapping her into another of his toe-curling kisses.

Ali could never be termed a patient woman. She wiggled her hand between them, grasping his cock and stroking it gently.

Piotr tore his mouth from hers, swearing harshly in his mother tongue. Ali quieted him softly, feeling him rock harder into her hand. She pulled gently, leading him toward her as tenderly as she could when consumed by desire and rampant need.

He took her silent cue, sliding inside of her warmth with one hard thrust. Their groans reverberated off the walls of his bedroom. Ali locked her legs around him, enjoying the hard, heavy feel of Piotr buried inside of her. His hands reached for hers, their fingers locking together as they held onto each other.

A hard thrust of her hips invited Piotr to take his pleasure in her body. He did so immediately, setting a slow, but demanding pace. Ali tossed her head against the pillows, his invasion welcome and consuming. She tightened her muscles, pulling him deeper.
Piotr lost all control. He slammed into her, making Ali nearly scream in pleasure. But he took her mouth, her noises of impending release lost on his lips. Panting, sweating with exertion, Ali met his frantic thrusts with her own, her body begging him to throw her off the precipice between sanity and heaven.

When they found it, they did so together. Locked in a mass of sweaty limbs and keening cries, Ali and Piotr tumbled off the edge into bliss mere heartbeats apart. And when it was over, Piotr gathered her into his arms, his massive hand covering the tender space between her breasts as though to feel her heart’s frantic beating.

They said no more as the day was spent in one another’s arms.

~**~

Kitty popped her bedroom door open, peering down the hall as day broke over the mansion. Bobby’s chest was against her back as they ensured the coast was clear.

He wrapped her into a quick kiss before bolting from her room. Once he was safely inside, Kitty turned to duck back into her room. She should feel ashamed, she knew that. But it was hard to when her heart knew this was right. Whatever Bobby had with Marie had been over for months, but neither of them were ballsy enough to end it.

She was tired of waiting for him. Even if she had to sneak for a while, it would have to be worth it.

Kitty heard a soft, familiar giggle and peeked around the corner of her door. Holding her sheet tighter to her chest, she noticed Piotr’s bedroom door open a crack. Her eyebrows shot up to her hairline when she noticed a tiny blonde kissing the tall Russian for all she was worth. Kitty grinned at the sight of Ali in Piotr’s way too large shirt as they parted.

Piotr leaned against his door, a goofy, satisfied grin on his face as he lounged in pajama bottoms sans shirt. Ali blew him a kiss as she turned toward the room. Kitty bolted back inside, waiting for her friend.

When the blonde darted into the room, she was flushed, giggling and looked pretty well satisfied herself. Kitty grinned, sitting primly on the bed with her sheet-Toga.

“Well, well, well…”

Ali startled, closing the door and turning to the other girl with a grin. “Oh. Hey.”

Deep green eyes glanced over Kitty and one light brow arched. “Holy shit! Did you and the Iceboy…get it on?”

Kitty rolled her eyes. “Get it on? What are you, twelve?”

“Uh, no,” Ali grinned wickedly. “Ask Petey, I’m all woman, Kitten.”

“Oh, ew. The guy is like my brother. Now I have to scrub my brain.”

Ali chuckled, dropping her boots by the door and coming closer. Her hair was wet, hinting that she’d
showered. Lucky bitch. Piotr was one of the few students with a bathroom all to himself. That had to be invitation for all manner of fun stuff.

The girls chatted amicably as they dressed for the day, after Kitty grabbed a shower in the bathroom they shared with Jubilee and the absent Rogue. Ali replaced all her earrings that had been removed during her stay in the med-lab, applying makeup beside Kitty as they talked over their nocturnal adventures.

“My God,” Kitty told Ali as they applied mascara. “He’s…stamina. Cannot do without stamina.”

“You kidding? I didn’t sleep. At all.” Ali dusted her eyelids with a soft cocoa shadow. “Isn’t it cool how sex can replace sleep?”

Kitty giggled. “Mmm. Yeah. Don’t I know it.”

When they finished, the girls headed out of the room, unable to wipe massive grins from their faces. Kitty’s, however, faltered when Piotr came out of his room, immediately slinging an arm over Ali’s shoulders. They looked adorable. Like a couple.

Kitty greeted Bobby with a nod and smile, as she did every morning. Her blue-eyed lover looked upset by this, so she squeezed his hand quickly. That earned her a quick, though haunted smile.

When the foursome reached the foyer, talking over the plans for helping rebuild the destroyed sections of the mansion, Bobby froze.

“BOBBY!”

Kitty whipped around quickly, spotting Marie rushing from the sitting room. She leapt into Bobby’s arms, raining kisses over his face. Ali took Kitty’s hand, threading their fingers together in that oddly feminine gesture of comfort.

She couldn’t stand it. Not watching them, not when she could hear Bobby’s whispered endearments in her ear, his groans of her name as they made love.

“I can’t do this,” Kitty turned to leave the room. To her surprise, Piotr and Ali were hot on her heels.

So, Ali dealt with Jubilee when the girl appeared before them.

“Something wrong, Pussycat?”

The Asian girl smirked. Ali stepped between her and Kitty, heedless to Piotr’s soft call of her name.

“You got a problem, Sparkles?”

Jubilee disliked Ali on sight her first night in the mansion. Perhaps it was instant hatred based on clashing personalities…more likely, Jubilee hated anyone close to Kitty. Ali, however, was not one to back down. Kitty reached for her hand, not surprised when she was as ignored as the massive Piotr.

“Not at all,” Jubilee said in that slimy tone. “Just wondering why no one said hello to Marie.”

Ali smirked. “No need.”
“Oh?”

“Oh-huh.” Ali stepped back, throwing her arm over Kitty’s shoulders. “I’m on her side.” She pointed to Piotr. “As I’m sleeping with him, he’s on her side by default.”

Piotr slapped a hand over his eyes. Jubilee’s jaw clenched so hard Kitty swore she could hear teeth grinding, even over Marie’s squeals behind them.

“That’s not smart.”

Ali was in Jubilee’s face in the space between heartbeats. “Yeah? You got something to say?”

“Sure,” Jubilee whispered. “I can’t wait to tell Marie all about it.”

“Oh, shit,” Piotr swore behind Kitty. He reached for her shoulder, drawing Shadowcat back several feet and to the left.

Before anyone could stop her, Ali reared back and solidly decked Jubilee in the face. The other girl flew backward, crying out in pain.

All other motion in the busy foyer stopped immediately.
Shattered

Chapter Summary

Marie's return throws the mansion into chaos.

It was steadily becoming commonplace, waking in Storm’s bedroom. Since Pyro’s most recent attack on the X-Men, he’d spent more time here than in his own room, which should have surprised him.

Instead of dwelling on it, both Ororo and Logan merely ignored the change to their relationship. Wrapped in one another’s arms into the wee hours of morning, they disregarded the world outside of her perfumed bower, content to steal a few moments alone. At times, Logan would goad her into a fight, just to have her snap at him.

How long had he been doing that, he wondered. Poking at her, wiggling under her skin just to get a rise out of her, to see those dark eyes rim with frost. It really amazed him to realize much of his frustration with the woman stemmed from a consuming attraction he’d long buried under memories of a certain red head.

Ororo had asked that very question the previous night, lying awake in his arms as the spring breeze slipped into her room. Looking up at the ceiling, Logan was honest with her. She’d haunted him, though why he had been unable to understand. With Jean, the attraction was immediate and red hot. With Ororo…the burn smoldered, sending up smoke to distract his usually keen senses.

She’d teased him about being dense. He’d tickled her into taking it back.

So strange, he thought, fighting to keep his eyes closed against the harsh morning sunlight. Just weeks ago, he could have strangled that snowy minx and not felt a twinge of guilt. Now, he wondered how he managed to sleep without her cuddled close to him. Maybe that’s the way it was supposed to work, he mused. How could he know? The only other woman he’d cared for had been engaged the entire time he pined for her. So, maybe, just maybe things weren’t working out so oddly after all.

Prying tired eyes open, Logan inhaled deeply as he stretched out like a cat on Ororo’s Egyptian cotton sheets. The bed beside him was cold, which made him frown. It wasn’t unusual, as she insisted on running every morning at dawn, but he hated missing her. Wincing against the sunlight pouring through Ororo’s five million windows, he glanced around quickly. Scents of shampoo and soap hinted that someone had recently taken a shower.

The beautiful mutant stood before her dresser, peering into the large mirror resting on the back. Her hands were busy smoothing lotion over her arms as she lounged about in a long silk bathrobe. She had the television on, barely loud enough for her to hear in all areas of the bedroom suite. Savannah Guthrie was laughing at something a vapid movie star was saying as Logan scratched his stomach.

Ororo had not noticed he was awake, so he shifted his head against the pillow, allowing a smile to curve his lips. She rolled her eyes at something Lauer said, setting her lotion down on the dresser’s top. Her fingers danced over the meticulous line of perfumes she owned, selecting one from the
dozens of expensive bottles.

Logan sampled the air lightly, grinning full on when he realized she had sprayed her throat with his personal favorite. Though her usual scent of winter frost and a sweet summer breeze was enticing enough, when she added the subtle hint of decadent sandalwood, she drove him absolutely crazy.

Though he never thought about it until recently, it was an intimate privilege to watch a woman’s daily ritual. He inhaled deeply, catching her scent as she ran her hand through the short white of her hair as though fluffing it up. Logan rolled his eyes at her. She could wear a potato sack and not wash her hair for a month and she’d still be a damn knock out.

Ororo untied her robe, moving away from the dresser and turning toward the closet. Logan licked his lips as she pulled the soft satin from her body, revealing smoky flesh marred only by a black lace bra with matching panties. She put her arms over her head, stretching with a yawn as she made her way into the closet.

Logan sat up against the headboard, rolling his shoulders and relaxing. His lover came out of the closet a moment later, fastening a black skirt with a blouse tossed over her shoulder. If she continued to prance around half-dressed, Logan was going to make her very late for whatever she had planned this morning.

“Oh,” she pulled up short, spotting Logan awake. “There you are. I thought you’d sleep all day.”

“Mornin’, darlin’.”

Her smile was warm and infectious. Logan shrugged one shoulder, unabashedly sliding out of the bed. One of her brows arched at his naked – and ready – body.

If he hadn’t had to piss like a racehorse, he might have dragged that gorgeous woman into his arms. He plodded into her bathroom, whistling a little as he popped up the toilet seat before relieving himself. He washed his hands, splashed water on his face, brushed his teeth.

Ororo was fully dressed – complete with black pumps that made her legs seem impossibly long—when he came back out. Logan yanked on a pair of jeans, leaving them unbuttoned as he crossed to help her make the bed.

The domesticity of their morning ritual was not lost on him, but he shoved aside thoughts that dwelled on how tamed he was becoming. He liked this effortless ritual, liked seeing her before she slipped into “Storm” mode. End of story.

He appraised her after the bedspread was smoothed to her satisfaction. “You look nice today.”

Ororo’s face flushed slightly as she came around the bed. He immediately took her into his arms, inhaling the seductive scent of her. “You can be very sweet.”

“Hey,” he grunted with a fake scowl. “Don’t go noisin’ that around, darlin’.”

She held up her right hand. “Scout’s honor.”

Logan leaned closer, capturing her lips softly as her arms wound around his neck. In a few minutes, they would have to face the masses, get lost in repairs and students and the day-to-day grind of running their beloved ’Mutant High’. But for right now – just this moment – they could be
themselves without pressure.

When Ororo pulled away, she gently nuzzled his nose with hers, making him smile softly. It was a rare thing, that particular smile, but he found himself unable to stop it whenever Ororo got sentimental or tactile.

“What are your plans for the day?” She asked without leaving his arms, one hand toying with the hair at his nape.

Logan fought to concentrate, her hands tended to distract him. “Danger Room with the kids at nine, reffing a football rematch at noon, and Luke wanted to look at something in Cerebro again this afternoon. You?”

“Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork, lunch…” She grinned. “Paperwork, paperwork…”

“Buried in it again?”

Ororo pouted. “The elves still won’t come out at night to help.”

“Bastards.” Logan smirked, capturing her smiling lips again.

They were still locked together when a polite knock sounded on the door. Neither of them moved, as though they both silently agreed that whomever wanted their attention could wait another thirty seconds or so until they were finished.

“Mother?”

Ororo pulled away from Logan, turning to open the bedroom door. Logan grumbled good-naturedly about having his own kid keep interrupting them.

Lucas came into the room, dropping a familiar kiss onto his mother’s cheek as he did so. Logan nodded a good morning, grabbing a clean t-shirt from the laundry basket Ororo had brought up the previous evening and pulling it over his bare chest.

“Oh look,” Bishop said with something that could have been humor. “You’re both dressed.”

The man’s mother smacked him sharply on the back of the head, making both father and son crack into identical grins. Ororo looked between them with a mock shudder.

“It’s eerie how alike the two of you look,” she teased, closing the bedroom door when their son was inside completely.

“Somethin’ the matter, son?” Logan asked of Bishop as he sat on the bed to pull his boots on.

“Marie will be home very soon,” Lucas explained quietly. “As in, within the next few minutes.”

“Is there something wrong with her?” Storm asked as she slipped her arms into the jacket that matched her skirt. She buttoned it quickly, giving her a professional appearance. Logan suddenly wanted to tear her clothes off.

“Not exactly,” Lucas replied, taking his father from sexually charged thoughts. “Look, this isn’t… well…”
“Lucas.” Ororo’s curt call of his name, the way her arms folded over her chest made Logan smirk behind her. She was every bit the mother in moments like this.

Apparently Bishop agreed. He looked at the ground, reminding Logan of a chastised child.

“Marie and Iceman’s relationship has been in the toilet for months. Everyone knows this. Bobby…”

“Slept with Kitty?” Storm offered easily.

Logan scowled. He wanted to beat the boy for betraying the Southern belle, but at the same time, Lucas was correct. Whatever the two had was gone and had been for months. Even before Marie took the cure, the air between the so-called couple was cold. How could Logan blame the poor kid for wanting something real?

He’d still punch him. Principle of the thing, really.

“Yes,” Bishop said, looking relieved that neither of them were terribly surprised. “But Marie will find out, quickly. There will be a fight. I’m not exactly sure how it happens, but Marie leaves the X-Men.”

Logan caught the glance Ororo shot at him as he grabbed the cigar he’d set on her nightstand. Something didn’t ring true here. What was Lucas hiding? He bit back the urge to ask, reminding himself that both he and Ororo had sworn to not pressure their son for answers any longer. He would tell them what they needed to know.

They hoped.

“In my timeline, Kitty ended up alone. Pete was dead and she’d lost most of her friends to the tension between she and Marie. She lost Bobby on this day, as he was determined to make his relationship with Marie work.”

Ororo’s frown deepened. “You don’t want them together.”

The dark mutant shook his head. “No.”

“Why?” Logan asked, ignoring the sharp look his future wife shot him.

Lucas regarded them both carefully. “You’ll understand soon enough. I just…I can’t…”

At the desperation in his tone, both Ororo and Logan moved to him quickly. She grasped his massive hand while Logan squeezed his shoulder. This shit was tearing his son apart and he hated every minute of it. This was the reason Ororo and Logan made their promise. They had no desire to cause their son further grief.

“It’s ok,” Logan whispered.

“We will work it out, little one,” Ororo soothed.

“You haven’t called me that in a long time,” Lucas chuckled weakly. “Not since I got taller than you.”
She winked at their son, her smile instant and glorious. “Perhaps I should.”

Before they could speak again, Logan caught the scent of Artie wafting through the door a mere moment ahead of loud, frantic knocking. Ororo immediately rushed to the bedroom door, throwing it open to find their hysterical charge bouncing on the balls of his feet.

“It’s Jubi and Dazzler!” Artie explained in a rush. “They’re goin’ at it in the foyer!”

~**~

The scene in the foyer was one for the record books. Ororo came to a screeching halt, yanked against Logan’s chest and ducked out of harm’s way as a rogue blast of white-hot light came zinging through the corridor.

She spotted the Asian mutant squaring off against their newest team member, not surprised to find Piotr huddling over Kitty and Marie and Bobby tucked into the doorway leading to the den. The teens had done an exemplary job of keeping the younger children out of harm’s way.

“Let me up, Logan,” Ororo commanded, scrambling to her feet as high-pitched curses flew through the open foyer.

“Jesus,” Logan said as he stood, hauling Ororo to her feet. “What got into these two?”

“We had best find out,” she replied, steadying herself as she took in the infuriated faces of the girls circling one another like pit bulls.

Each of them thrust hands out, Ali dependant on the CD player clipped to her belt for a constant source of energy. Brightly colored globules of what Jubilee called her “fireworks” exploded as Ali bent backwards in an elegant flip. Pure, blinding light left Dazzler’s hands, the force sending Jubilee sprawling back against the staircase.

Ororo darted from the corridor leading to the kitchen, letting Piotr snatch her from the entrance to the Rec Room. He pulled her backward, cradling her as Kitty ducked back into the Rec Room. Ororo smiled tightly to Logan, whom crouched beside their son in the opposite hall.

“What happened?” Storm demanded of the young Russian, wincing when Ali took a sharp jab to the jaw.

Piotr sighed. “Jubilee and Dazzler are doing what Katya and Marie should have.”

Kitty flushed, looking guilt-stricken. “I…”

“It’s fine.” Ororo cut in, not wanting to get into details here. “We have to stop them before Alison aggravates her injuries. I would rather not have two of my pupils locked in the med-lab for a week.”

Piotr nodded. “If someone can subdue Jubilation, I can control Alison.”

Ororo arched a brow. “Oh?”

He gave her a slightly self-mocking smirk. “As I am sleeping with her, she must submit by default.”
Kitty erupted into giggles. Ororo realized then that there was an inside joke here. Likely one she did not want to be included in. Storm motioned to Wolverine, whom nodded with immediate understanding. Bobby and Marie slipped further into the den.

Piotr’s skin rippled as he transformed into the metal-saturated Colossus. He stood from the doorway without fear, handing Kitty off to Ororo wordlessly. Wolverine leapt into the foyer almost the instant Colossus stepped in.

Wolverine reached the brawling, blood-soaked girls first. He grabbed Jubilee’s hands, thrusting them into the air where her fireworks harmlessly smacked into the ceiling. Piotr stepped up behind a shocked Alison, pinning her arms to her sides even as she fought against him.

“Excuse us,” he murmured, lifting the girl effortlessly.

“Carry on,” Wolverine nearly chuckled as Piotr carried a screaming Alison up the stairs.

Things settled immediately as the other mutants came out of their hiding places. Ororo winced, nothing the newly-repaired foyer was covered in scorn marks. She sighed, shaking her head as Beast appeared in all his lab-coat-flapping glory.

“Oh, my stars and garters,” he gasped, surveying the damage. “What happened?”

“Sparkler and Jubes thought they’d reenact Holyfield versus Tyson.” Logan answered as Beast came to fuss over a sullen Jubilee.

“Luckily, no one got an ear bitten off,” Bobby chimed in sarcastically.

Kitty remained at Ororo’s side, fidgeting and chewing on an already nerves-swollen bottom lip. Ororo glanced at Marie, whom was staring at the girl somewhat coldly. The headmistress thought quickly about intervening, drawing Marie off and distracting her. But she knew, better than anyone, it was only delaying the inevitable.

Iceman stood off to the side, his position squarely between both girls. Ororo looked to her own son, whom hung back, watching the entire episode with haunted eyes. He claimed Marie and Bobby were to be separated. Though she hated herself for it, Ororo developed a plan and acted before second-guessing herself.

“You two girls want to weigh in?” She asked tartly. “What were they fighting about?”

“Ask her,” Marie jabbed a finger in Kitty’s direction.

Kitty shrugged. “They were choosing sides.”

“For what?”

Marie practically snarled. “War.”

Ororo felt that blow right to the heart. The Southern girl was glaring at Kitty, whom looked cool and aloof by comparison. Bobby crossed his arms, deftly stepping between them. His face was a mask of confusion, of self-loathing. Ororo pitied the poor boy, knowing how difficult any decision would be for him.
“To your corners,” he said quietly. “Marie, I’ll be up in a minute. Kitty, why don’t you go make sure Daz hasn’t murdered Pete.”

Kitty immediately moved toward the stairs, vaulting upward so that she could phase through the ceiling. Marie stared at Bobby for a moment before collecting her bags and moving upstairs at a more leisurely pace.

Beast was moving Jubilee down to the med-lab. This left Bobby alone with Storm, Bishop and Wolverine.

The boy’s shoulders slumped, his gaze cast to the ground as the world weighed in on him. He shook his head, emotion tingeing his voice in a way that made Ororo ache to hold him.

“I love her.” He whispered into the silence.

“Which one?” Wolverine asked gruffly.

Bobby let loose a short, hollow laugh. “I don’t really know.”

~**~

Piotr took the icepack Kitty handed him, kneeling in front of Alison to place the cold package to her swelling eye. She winced, attempting to draw away as Piotr grasped her chin to hold her in place.

Kitty sat cross-legged on Piotr’s bedroom floor, flipping through one of his sketchbooks with a broken look on her face. Ali glanced at her, pouting a little around a split lip. He could understand the bond between these girls, though it surfaced quickly. In the need for female companionship, they had easily latched on, likely startled to find how much they had in common. He knew Ali’s breed. Much like their resident Wolverine, she would brook no foolishness when it came to the few she allowed close. She would fight to the death for the little gang Bobby, Kitty, Piotr, and herself had formed since her arrival.

Marie and Jubi had no idea the enemy Ali would be if she so much as sensed ill will regarding her new family.

“I think you’ll live, Brawler.” Piotr sighed, inspecting her face carefully. “Do you always think with your fists?”

“Kept me alive for a couple years on the streets, Mother Russia,” she replied, her voice muffled by distended flesh.

“Hey,” Kitty piped up from the floor. “I’m glad someone hit Jubi, I’m just sorry it wasn’t me.”

“What will I do with the two of you?” Piotr shook his head, squeezing Ali’s Lycra-covered knee with his free hand.

She grasped the icepack, holding it to her eye as her free hand toyed with the eyebrow-ring he’d been forced to remove. Kitty looked up, flashing him a winning grin that never quite reached her eyes.

“You love us, get over it,” she said with an amused snort.
“We’re just so cute,” Ali added quickly.

“You are enormous pains in my…” Piotr finished his comment in Russian, but both women got his meaning.

He sat on the bed beside Alison, not surprised when she all but crawled into his lap. Icepack forgotten, she snuggled into his arms, making Piotr smile. He kissed her hair, inhaling the sweet scent of her shampoo as he wrapped his arms around her possessively.

This woman would likely drive him completely mad, but he would enjoy the ride. She was under his skin, creeping into his heart until he no longer knew what it would be like to evict her; the very idea was somewhat frightening. In lieu of being an idiot and pushing her away, he would rejoice in this piece of life.

Kitty cooed over a drawing she had found, bouncing up to sit beside the cuddling couple to show Alison. Piotr tilted his head, smiling quickly. He had drawn it of both girls with Kitty whispering conspiratorially into Ali’s ear. The blonde was laughing, her hand over her mouth to hold back peals of silvery mirth.

“That’s awesome!” Ali gushed. “Its screaming album cover, isn’t it?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Kitty mused. “Am I on the album?”

“Sure!” the singer bounced in Piotr’s lap. He grunted, shifting her just slightly so that she would stop hurting – and arousing – him.

When a familiar knock came on the door, Piotr called for Bobby to enter. He should have been annoyed that his entire ragtag clique was invading his room, but he found himself unable to. It was as though Ali and Kitty had breathed life into his private haven.

Bobby stuck his head into the room before coming in and closing the door behind him. He had eyes only for Kitty, whom offered him a small smile.

Piotr waved him inside as Ali grabbed her icepack again. She placed it on her eye, shifting in Piotr’s lap until he hissed at her to be still. The evil little grin she gave him made his blood heat, even as Bobby faced Kitty in their friend’s bedroom.

“I can’t go back to her,” he said quietly.

Kitty immediately grasped his hands, bringing him closer. “What was that?”

“I broke up with her,” Bobby whispered against her lips. “I don’t love her.”


Piotr shook his head. “You are an incredible sap, Brawler.”

“You love it, comrade,” she shot back, kissing him quickly.

Before he could stop her, Ali bounced out of his lap, tossing her icepack into the trashcan beside the easel.
“Come on! We’re going out!”

~**~

Logan heard the sound of piano music coming from the Rec Room and ducked into it. His latest perimeter check had gone well, his talk with Marie…not so much. The Southerner had spent two hours throwing her belongings against the wall. He dared not point out that she was not even mourning the loss of Bobby.

She was, however, spitting angry that Kitty had “stolen” the young man away. When she learned that the strange quartet had gone out to one of Dazzler’s favorite nightclubs, Marie’s mood took a sharp turn from bad to “Hell hath no fury”.

Finished ducking flying objects, Logan moved into the Rec Room, smiling at the image of Ororo seated at the piano. Hank stood beside her, a violin expertly caught between his chin and shoulder, the bow dancing gracefully over the strings.

Logan did not know what they were playing, but the tune was filled with longing, with hope. It stirred the soul, brought emotion to the back of his eyes. He leaned against the doorjamb, cigar pinched between his teeth, watching as his lover and friend seduced the duet into the still spring night.

Ororo was humming, her eyes closed as the music washed over her. Hank had a similar expression on his face, one of minute pleasure. Logan could not take his eyes off of them, letting the soulful tune slip into his heart.

He memorized the smile on Ororo’s face, wondering what it would take to have her look like that every single day. Was it the music? Her company? The simple pleasure of doing something without demands on her time? He wasn’t sure, but damn if she didn’t look carefree as she lovingly stroked the beautiful black and white keys.

The song wound down, but Logan had already made his decision. He was in love with her. Completely, recklessly, painfully in love. This wasn’t a lusty flash of fire for a woman he knew was ever out of his reach. It was a simmer, a long, slow burn that threatened to consume everything in it’s path.

That woman was going to be his, come hell, high water, or the end of the world. She was his, plain and simple.

Her deep, dark eyes opened, finding him as though sensing his presence. Ororo smiled, the gesture sending Logan’s heart directly to his feet.

Oh, yeah, he was in love. He’d have to thank his son one of these days.

~**~

Bishop melted into the shadows of midnight, not surprised at how easy it was for them to both slip out of the mansion undetected. He’d followed her to the nightclub, spotting the younger X-Men generation dancing in a throbbing nightclub.

She’d let shortly thereafter, raging as she piloted her vehicle through New York’s seedy underbelly.
He had always liked New York. It was a long-legged woman, filled with sensuality and class while flirting with debauchery. Interesting place, he had always thought. Even at the height of war, the city stood tall against all those that would attack it. New York stood as a bastion of what the world had been, what it could yet be again.

Tonight, however, it courted danger. Bishop watched her carefully, tracking her with skills taught by his overprotective father and the patience of a hunter that swam in his very blood. He knew she would do this, that it would be her time to snap. If they had waited, if she had not confronted her enemy for another few months…

Magneto would win.

She entered the apartment building, so Bishop took up residence in a nearby tree, waiting and watching. He flipped on the earpiece he’d taken from Forge before his trip back, tuning it to the matching piece he had planted on her jacket before leaving the house.

“I want to see him,” said the agitated Southern voice.

“You are?”

“Rogue. He knows me.”

Silence. The drip of a leaky faucet mingled with muffled voices and the unmistakable sound of some very enthusiastic couple squeaking bedsprings.

“Well, look what the cat dragged in.”

Pyro.

“You’re lookin’ good, John,” Marie replied. “Where is he?”

“He’ll be right out,” Pyro replied. Bishop shook his head. They should have kill that bastard when they had the chance.

“How’s your boyfriend? Happy he can fuck you now that you’re cured?”

This was the moment he’d been waiting for. It was one of the instants that Forge had drilled into his head as important. One of two things could happen, each altering the timeline that already resembled his own so little.

Bishop caught choking sounds on the audio equipment. A body hit the floor. Psylocke yelled for her lover, screaming at the Southern belle to stop hurting him.

“Well, well, well,” came the chilling voice of Magneto. “I see you have discovered the cure’s complete inability to work properly. Do release him, Rogue.”

Sounds of a scuffle, of a woman’s tears.

“You want information on the X-Men? You got it.”

“What is in it for you?” Magneto’s tone was sharp, not nearly as amused as he probably would have
liked to appear.

“Revenge,” Marie answered as a whooshing sound came through the mike. “This really is a nice power, Pyro. Mind if I play with it for awhile?”

Bishop leapt from the tree branch. His work, for tonight, was done.
Shard

Chapter Summary

Logan and Ororo take the next steps before another visitor from the future drops into the kitchen.

Soft, irregular notes wafted through the empty corridor. The music halted, silence giving way to the muted thud and soft twang of a guitar tuning. It began again seconds later, accompanied by a clear female voice.

“I can’t go back to the way things were, who knows if I’d even want to. My life has changed, for the better I’m sure. But without you, it all comes down. Without you… Damn it.”

She stopped her fingers, silencing the shivering strings by flattening her palm. Alison leaned over from her perch on the wide, sunny window seat, crossing out lines of music and lyrics from the notebook beside her. It had been a while since she’d written anything new. Even before her involvement with the X-Men, she’d been running on a long dry spell.

But the bug had bitten. Hard. Ali had always dealt with her emotions by writing. Anger, fear, lust, emotional clarity, she could belt it out of her into song. Cheaper than therapy. Hell, most of her songs were bread and butter to the young musician.

She plucked at the guitar strings again, letting an uncharacteristically soft, gentle melody drift from the battered instrument.

“I know I’ve been a wild girl, I’ve painted every town red, but you make me feel like a woman, better off at home in bed. I can’t get passed this feeling, that everything’s right here before me. I can’t let go of loving you, I don’t think I know how.”

The music stopped again, this time making Ali smile. She marked down a change in chord before going back to her guitar.

“Have I been mistaken? Have I tried too hard? Can I live without you? Yeah, I think I could. But it would be a lonely place, lying here without you. I don’t want to go back. Don’t let me fall.”

From her perch on the seat, Ali could see Piotr helping Beast outdoors. The two were busily laying down hedging for the garden, smiling and content in one another’s presence. Ali shifted, stretching her legs out on the cushioned seat. Sunlight beamed merrily through the windowpane, warming her almost as much as the thought of Piotr did.

How it had happened – and so quickly – was a distant unknown. She had not come here with the intention of falling ass over elbows for the stoic Russian. She felt it happening, how her heart was steadily reaching out for his. There was no stopping it, even if she were afraid or unsure.

But she wasn’t. She adored her Mother Russia more than was probably healthy. His stubbornness, his loyalty, and even that damned stony silence. She’d gotten used to his mental time outs, knowing
he liked taking time before acting or speaking.

Course, she dearly loved making him be impulsive.

He laughed at something Beast said. At the window, Ali strummed her guitar again, not bothering to think about what she was playing.

A dark male laugh and running footsteps made Ali turn slightly from the window. She never stopped playing, even as Storm and Wolverine darted past her toward the bedroom everyone knew they were sharing. Neither of them spared the musician even a tiny hint of acknowledgement. She shook her head, leaning back against the edge of the seat as she continued playing.

Apparently spring was in full swing here at Mutant High. Ali chuckled to herself, going back to her music.

~**~

The rending of material echoed in the relative silence. She yanked his t-shirt apart, desperate for the feel of his warm flesh under her fingers. He groaned loudly, muttering a bastardized prayer into the hollow of her throat.

Her body was on fire, that was the only explanation. Logan constantly stoked that fire, built it up from dying embers until it raged wildly. She fisted one hand in the coarse black of his hair, pulling his head up so she could capture his lips with hers.

Logan’s hands smoothed greedily over her cloth-covered curves. Ororo did not have to guess how long it would take him to rid them of any barriers. One thing Wolverine did not have in spades was patience. He took things, lovingly or hard, but he took them. She found, quite by surprise, that his penchant for sexual robbery was a turn on.

“Goddamn, you’re beautiful,” her lover whispered huskily into the quiet.

Unable to respond as he pulled her shirt over her head, Ororo only gasped. His hands covered suddenly bare breasts, massaging them together as he bent his head to lave at the taut peaks. Ororo’s eyes slammed closed, her body bowing off of the bed in a desperate attempt to get closer.

She clawed at his shoulders, raking long nails over sweat-slicked flesh. Logan took one of her throbbing nipples into his mouth, suckling lustily and driving all thought from her mind. Ororo forced her hands from his shoulders, wiggling them between their straining bodies to fumble with the large buckle holding his belt together.

“I want you.” She whimpered into his ear. He growled softly. “I want you, Logan.”

Something about her saying his name always snapped some hidden control inside of him. He released her breasts, rearing up to flick his belt open. While he discarded his jeans, Ororo took a long look at him, lust brimming in her belly like a living thing.

He was all man; there was no other way to describe it. All broad muscle and dark hair. She knew his body nearly as well as her own. Little secrets had been discovered – and exploited – in the dead of night or bright sunlight. Whenever she could, Ororo had her hands on their resident feral.
“Stop that,” he demanded, the twitch of his lips betraying his amusement.

Ororo arched a thin light brow, leaning up on her hands and saucily scooting back on the messy bed. “What?”

“Quit lookin’ at me like you’re gonna eat me alive.”

“Oh, but I am,” she teased as he gripped the hem of her skirt. He peeled it from her hips, down her thighs quickly, as though he were unwrapping a present.

When he dropped that impossibly sexy mouth to her caramel flesh, Ororo’s eyes rolled into the back of her head. Her panties were pulled down as the skirt had been while Logan licked a hot, wet path along her inner thigh. Sniffing sounds preceded the curve of a smile against her flesh even as his fingers found her.

Logan groaned as thick digits parted slick folds. Ororo gasped, letting her head fall back as her hips arched eagerly into his hand. He shifted on the bed, his hard length resting against her thigh. Ororo squirmed, even as one of those talented fingers dipped inside of her.

“Oh, God,” she groaned, thrusting her hips so she was nearly humping his hand like a bitch in heat.

“Like that?” He questioned against her stomach, where he’d been placing several innocent kisses. Trembling hands flexed against sweaty shoulder, even as she undulated wildly. “Yes.”

“How bout this?” His teasing tone was muffled, his mouth covering the ache between her thighs.

“Logan!”

He found her immediately, knowing her body as intimately as she had been schooled in his. Manipulating her with the finesse of an expert, Logan feasted. He took and gave and brought her to the brink under his skillful attentions within seconds.

Ororo tossed and turned on the pillows. It wasn’t enough. Knowing he was her lover, how well he could handle her body, her moods…it wasn’t enough.

Thought was shoved with force from her mind as Logan slithered up the length of her body. Her lips fused to his, fiercely and with unspoken demand. There was no going back for either of them, there had not been since the first night they tumbled into her bed, lying chastely in each other’s arms.

His tongue, coated with her taste, dove inside to duel madly with hers. Ororo bent her knees, drawing them up and forcing her beloved feral to settle between her thighs. She gasped at the intimate contact, his arousal jutting against her wet, aching flesh.

He was inside, deep and hard, before she could catch her breath. It left her lungs on a long, shuddering sigh. Heavy arms slid beneath her, encircling her back and drawing her shaking body completely into his. She could feel the mad tattoo of his heart against hers, not surprised to find the beats in perfect unison.

Holding her as though she were precious, Logan began to move. Their fast and furious passion simmered, allowing them to take their time. Ororo wanted him so badly it nearly brought her to tears, but his soft, gentle, almost achingly tender lovemaking swelled her heart. His arms were salvation,
She didn’t know what she would do if he ever let go. Terrified by the wayward thought, Ororo wrapped her arms and legs around him, anchoring him to her.

“Don’t let go,” she whispered as he slid in and out of her in perfect rhythm.

“Wasn’t plannin’ on it.”

They rose and fell together, sighed and gasped, whispered soft words of affection as their bodies collided. There was no rush, no lingering fear. Here in this moment, they were two people falling recklessly in love.

Oh, Ororo thought as she crested. *I love you, Logan.*

Waves of pleasure crashed through her, mimicked in the body loving hers with tenderness and demand. His pace increased, the bedsprings whined as he drove into her again and again. She lifted herself, wanting to melt into his body and take up residence there. Her heart swelled and burst as she tumbled off the edge again, this time taking him with her.

Logan laid her back gently, nuzzling her nose with his as they grew limp and hazy with afterglow. Ororo clung to him still, unable to release him. She was in love with him. All those months of sniping and griping…they were wasted. This man owned her heart, understood her at a core she hadn’t been aware of.

This man belonged to her.

“Hey,” Logan whispered, sounding somewhat alarmed. “Hey, you’re shakin’. What’s wrong?”

Unable to speak without letting emotion choke her tone, she exhaled sharply. Pulling her love closer, holding him more tightly, she fought to control herself.

Since the arrival of Bishop, so much had changed. Would she and Logan have found one another without him? She liked to think so. Even as she clutched his sweat-slicked frame to hers, she wanted to believe that this would have been her fate no matter what. She and Logan had fought for months, lashing out against an attraction neither wanted to admit was even there.

Ororo’s hand smoothed over the back of his head, lost in the coarse locks. She kissed his cheek. She knew the dangers coming into this. Logan could be a free spirit, went with the changes in the wind. As Charles had told her that fateful day, she knew better than anyone how fast the weather can change.

But her heart told her that Logan was devoted and loyal. He was not prone to abandonment.

“Ororo.” He let the name roll off his tongue and Ororo opened her eyes.

“Well,” she said, her voice stronger than she expected. “I think I’m going to have to marry you.”

Logan pulled back, dumping her head back onto the pillows. To her inner delight, he never released her, keeping his arms and body interlocked with hers.

The look on his face was priceless. Stunned, shocked, and somewhat amused.
“Oh, yeah?”

“Mmm,” she hummed in the affirmative. “As I cannot seem to get you out of my system, it is the only choice.”

Humor sparkled in his eyes, barely covering what she detected as hope and adoration. That kind of look could turn a girl into Jell-O.

“Yeah? Well, maybe I’m already sick of ya.”

She knew better, reveling in this seldom seen playful side of him. “That might work on your other girls, but I see you, Logan.”

His hold became fierce, tightening as his eyes reflected mischievous anger and yet more amusement.

“There ain’t no other girls, darlin’.”

“Don’t I know it,” Ororo kissed his lips, lingering for a moment before speaking against his mouth. “Marry me, Wolverine.”

Logan’s eyes drifted closed, the soft curve of his mouth betraying the blow to his heart she had just dealt him. She was not afraid that he would say no. To her surprise, there was no tension in her sex-soothed body. She did see him, right through the brash outer shell he portrayed to the rest of the world.

When those ebony eyes met hers again, the emotional shields he depended on here down. He let her see everything he could never say, let her drown in it.

“Yeah. I’ll marry you, baby.”

Ororo kissed him, giddy and light with his easy affirmation. He chuckled, the sound as carefree and easy as hers. Her heart beat frantically against her chest, wanting to rush out of this room and find a damn priest before he could change his mind.

“You need a ring,” he announced a moment later, tickling her throat with quick, drugging kisses. “What kind ya want?”

“Big, flashy. Makes J-Lo’s 4-carat monstrosity look like costume jewelry!” She giggled when he pinched her thigh.

“You want it, you got it, darlin’.”

Ororo laughed, hugging him tightly again. Logan buried his face in her shoulder, breathing deeply. She turned to kiss his hair. “Come with me.”

She untangled her body from his, before hopping out of bed and rushing to her dresser.

“You want that ring bad, doncha?” His teasing tone was filled with laughter as she pulled on a t-shirt and a pair of jeans.

Logan dressed as quickly. Ororo grabbed his hands, walking backward toward the terrace and
pulling him with her. She had to move, to do something with this unfathomable energy that sprang to life in her.

“Fly with me.”

He gave her a bemused smile. It reminded her of that night on Liberty Island, when he’d trusted her to lift him with only Jean’s mind for stability. The flash of remembrance in his eyes told her he’d recalled that moment as well.

To her pleasure, he did not ask if she could control it now, or if she was sure. In the ultimate showing of trust, Logan moved to the balcony and leapt from it. Ororo grinned, flipping her own body from the stone rail of the balcony, calling on the wind.

She lifted them both, catching an unconcerned Logan long before his heavy body contacted the earth. He was grinning, relaxed as she moved them both into the bright sky.

For the first time since the deaths of her family, Ororo was happy. She would hold onto that moment with both hands and duct tape.

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“So, who wins the World Cup?”

Bishop glowered at the perky blonde across the table from him. He had no knowledge of this girl, only that she had died before she could ever meet the X-Men. Her death was prevented by his actions, which she asked him about all morning.

He understood her, to some extent. When the young, pierced girl had come to him, spitting and snarling at his revelation to Piotr some weeks ago, he accepted her anger. She had saved the young man’s life, preventing the first of many problems for the X-Men. Bishop appreciated her efforts, her anger.

But she was slowly driving him mad.

“I cannot reveal that.”

“Oh come on,” Dazzler whined from her place beside Piotr. “Just a teeny hint.”

“Alison,” Piotr admonished, tickling one of the feet carelessly thrown into his lap.

“What?” She demanded on a laugh. “I’ve got money on Russia, comrade.”

The huge mutant shook his head, going back to his textbook. Bishop wished the boy would put his work down and take the girl away. Far away. Russia was an excellent idea, actually. How could he take her constant chatter? She was always in someone’s face, questioning or arguing.

At least, Bishop admitted, she was loyal.

Thoughts of Marie were pushed aside, at least for now. He wanted to keep his relaxation for a moment. His blood pressure was skyrocketing, leading to Uncle Hank’s infernal monitoring machine attached to his forearm. If he did not take a few hours to relax, he could have a stroke.

That was unacceptable. He needed to be alert, to protect his family.
Turning his attention back to Blaire and Rasputin, he finished readying a cup of coffee and moved to attempt escape.

“Come sit down, Bishy,” she stopped him. “I’ll behave.”

Colossus snorted from behind his textbook. Dazzler pinched him indelicately.

When she kicked a chair out for him and Piotr moved several of his notebooks, Bishop accepted the offer. At least she had something other than timelines and parents to talk about. He could get her started on music, fall asleep to her easy chatter.

“You holdin’ up ok?” She asked seriously when he sat.

“I am well,” Bishop answered stiffly, unused to anyone save his parents asking after him.

Alison cocked her head to the side. “You want help getting that plasma rifle out of your ass?”

Piotr did not even look up from his work. “Alison.”

She ignored her lover. Bishop arched a brow, sipping his coffee quietly. She continued staring at him, those enormous jade eyes boring into his. This Dazzler would be formidable in his time, he could feel it. Her alliance with the X-Men, her love for Colossus, would make her a force to be reckoned with.

A distant wonder if her children knew he and Shard was slightly disturbing. Chills ran the length of his spine, a foreboding warning of things to come.

The young couple was cause for speculation alone, he thought. Neither of them was supposed to be alive, and yet here they were. He had done that, altered the future. They were his new concern, wondering what had changed by saving their lives. Cause and effect could be a karmic bitch.

Alison wore Levis torn in several places over her worn combat boots. She’d pulled a signature tank top on, layering it with a light flannel shirt at least two sizes too big. Her long blonde hair was up in a rough topknot, several wayward strands falling from the pins used to hold it up.

Piotr had donned a faded t-shirt bearing the image of Sylvester Stallone’s Rocky on the front, his jeans as time-worn as his lovers, without the shredded aspect. They were one hell of a couple. As powerful and prospectively dangerous as Storm and Wolverine. That would be interesting.

“Hello?” Blaire was snapping her fingers in front of his face when Bishop came back to reality.

He flinched, raising a brow to her. She grinned impishly.

“Mental time-out?” She asked, taking a sip from the cold pop in front of her.

“Something like that,” he answered, trying to not smile.

She rolled her eyes, leaning over to peek at what her boyfriend was doing. Her eyes rolled toward heaven again as she snatched his pencil away.

Piotr said something in Russian that sounded nothing like “Stop it”. Alison ignored him, pointing to
the complicated mathematics.

“You’re doing it wrong, comrade,” she said kindly. Bishop arched a brow at the tone. He’d never heard it. She was usually annoyed or joking.

“Then explain it,” Piotr said indulgently.

Several minutes later, Bishop had a migraine just listening to the girl explain, but Piotr kissed her quickly. The girl giggled somewhat girlishly, shattering the image of a badass musician who could kick ass and forget the names.

When the young man went back to his homework, Alison shot Bishop a look.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

They were interrupted by the arrival of his mother and father. The elder couple was laughing, his father chasing his mother into the room. She paused to kiss their son, making Bishop’s heart leap with easy familiarity.


“Yes, Mother,” he shook his head in exasperation.

Father clapped his shoulder before mock-hitting Alison with a closed fist. The young woman chuckled, ducking away from the affectionate touch. Mother went to the refrigerator, ducking into it while she hummed quietly. Father plopped into the free chair beside him.

Piotr announced he was finished with his homework and in reward, Alison climbed onto his lap. Though he blushed, the younger mutant allowed the intimate contact, even when the blonde girl wrapped him in her arms and mashed her lips to his.

Logan and Lucas immediately covered their eyes, groaned and looked away.

“You two look so alike,” Ororo muttered as she came over, taking up Alison’s now-empty seat.

Father was staring at her, Bishop noticed when he opened his eyes. In fact, Mother was staring back at him as though he had hung the moon and stars all for her. Hope leapt in Bishop’s heart.

When Alison released Piotr from their lip-lock, both panting with what Bishop hoped was oxygen deprivation, she immediately caught something in the wind.

“You look like the cat that got the canary,” Dazzler observed as she turned in Piotr’s arms.

Storm and Wolverine held a quick, silent conversation with their eyes. Father’s smile was lazy, relaxed as he sat back in his chair. Mother turned slightly to Alison, thrusting out her left hand. Bishop felt his heart stop.

“No,” she said whimsically. “Merely a goddess who caught herself a Wolverine.”

Upon his mother’s left ring finger was something he had seen a million times. The shiny gold band
was simple, smooth and adorned with a beautifully cut diamond. His mind immediately put the plain band in front of it, which she would don at the ceremony.

Alison squealed, making Father swear as the sound pierced his sensitive ears. She enveloped the X-Men leader in a massive bear hug, not bothering to leave Piotr’s lap. Bishop noted how the young man held her securely by the waist to prevent a fall, even as he reached across the table to shake Father’s hand.

“When did he ask?” Alison questioned breathlessly, grabbing at Ororo’s hand to inspect the ring. “Whoa, nice ice. That must have put you back a couple grand. Jesus.”

“Two weeks ago,” Ororo answered, glancing at her husband-to-be.

Bishop took his father’s hand under the table, hiding the intimate gesture. Wolverine looked at him, that familiar half-grin betraying to his son exactly how happy he was. Bishop amended several mental issues in that moment. His parents did not have the typical love story, but they did love one another.

Weight left his chest easily.

“Wow,” Alison breathed. Bishop caught the sound of tears in her tone. “This is awesome. So, think you’re knocked up yet? Cause that’ll be cool.”

“Alison!” Piotr cut in, shaking his head and dragging her back to his chest.

“What?” She blinked in faux innocence as Father chuckled.

“Shush, woman,” Piotr ordered.

“Uh-huh,” Alison countered with mischief in her tone. “Like you haven’t told me ‘I wish they would be quieter about it.’”

Piotr put his head in his hands. Mother laughed and Bishop snorted into his coffee.

“Like we haven’t heard the two of you,” Father countered easily.

Alison winked impishly without any hint of embarrassment. “You’re just jealous.”

“Like hell,” Father grinned, indicating to Mother. “I’ve got that. You don’t hold a candle, Sparkler.”

Piotr covered Alison’s mouth, one of his dark brows arched protectively. “I do not share, in any case. Besides, no offense to Storm, but she does not hold a candle to Alison.”

Bishop swore Dazzler melted in the strong Russian’s arms. Ororo smiled indulgently to them both, the kind of smile that she would someday bestow on himself and his little sister. Colossus’ face colored, as though he had not expected to say so much.

Before any of them could continue, Father stood slowly. He sniffed the air, his hands clenching into fists as the resonating sound sounded through the room. Claws unsheathed, the other mutants jumped to their feet.

Father pushed Bishop aside. “Get down!”
He trusted Colossus to cover both women and the massive mutant did so. Bishop felt the odd pull in his stomach as his father protected him. Unnatural winds tossed dishes and servingware through the room, ripped the textbooks off the table.

“What is that?” Alison screamed, her voice betraying fear.

No one answered as winds died and the sound of someone retching violently replaced it. In the stony silence, Bishop opened his eyes, immediately recognizing the pair of boots he caught sight of from under the kitchen table.

He shoved Father away, standing quickly. A tall, blonde woman with white eyes was bent over the counter, emptying the contents of her stomach as she trembled. Bishop’s heart slowed to a stop and he took one step toward the familiar mutant.

“Shard?”


Little Sister

Chapter Summary

Shard arrives with trouble in tow. Psylocke and Pyro contemplate the future of the Brotherhood.

Another Time, Another Place

It was her first time onto the battlefields. Father had held her back as long as possible. It had been the same for Bishop himself. Though they had been trained since childhood to fight, to protect themselves and all they believed in, their parents were overly strict about when one could prove his or her mettle on the bloodstained battlegrounds.

Bishop had heeded the call of war five years ago. Shard had champed at the bit for her chance, screamed and fought with their parents until thunder shook the heavens and claws unsheathed. They had contemplated sending her to the sanctuary of Muir Island, stopped only when Luke begged them to reconsider.

She walked toward him now, a leggy beauty of seventeen years clad in protective leathers. Her hair was colored blonde, distinguishing herself from their mother as her teenage glands demanded. Glowing eyes snapped with fire as she strode toward him.

He saw her, then, as a person rather than his little sister. She moved with a determined stride, literally oozing grace and primal splendor. Heavy combat boots pounded the packed earth beneath her feet. Her hands were smoothing the edges of her gloves, the line between her eyes betrayed nerves.

When she caught sight of him, her lips drew tightly together and she gave him a scowl worthy of their father.

“What in the name of hell are you doing here?”

Bishop regarded her coolly over the braids tossed carelessly over his shoulder.

“I’m with you, General’s orders.”

Shard shoved her hands onto her hips. “Mother put him up to this, I know she did.”

He merely arched a dark brow.

“I don’t need looking after! I’m trained, goddamnit.”

“Language,” Bishop barked. He drew himself up to full height and faced his sister. “I outrank you, Corporal, and you’d better remember that. When you’re in that uniform, you will follow orders and you will keep your mouth shut. Clear?”

Shard’s spine went ramrod straight at his harsh words. He knew his little sister, likely better than she knew herself. Years of having no other playmates had toughened them, strengthened the sibling bond present from her birth.
She would not be coddled. If Bishop wanted her to listen, he would pull rank on her. Telling her that she was his only sister, that he loved her, would only stroke that damned independent nature so strong in their DNA. She thirsted to prove herself worthy, to crawl out of the looming shadow of their parents.

Yes, he understood her very well.

“Yes, Sergeant,” she replied curtly. “What are your orders?”

Bishop turned on his heel and tossed her a sheet of paper almost negligently. She followed him, nearly running to keep up with his long stride.

“Our rear flank is weakening and the reinforcements were ambushed at Crystal River.” He spoke in the commanding tone he learned from Mother. “We are taking in a reserve unit to strengthen the line. Our main goal, however, is to bring them supplies and medical units.”

“Injuries?” Shard questioned as they pushed open the heavy steel door of the school turned headquarters.

“Several, though the death toll is remarkably low.”

“Ok,” Shard nodded as they strode down the corridor. It was filled with human and mutant soldiers, most awaiting orders. Sounds of the battle drifted in through broken windows.

He glanced at his sister as she straightened up even further. They pushed into the makeshift War Room, coming face to face with the force of nature that was their mother. She stood around a wide holo-map, indicating to the red dots that pinpointed the location of the enemy.

“You two are late,” she barked at her children as though they were grunt soldiers.

“My apologies,” Bishop answered as they took their places beside her.

Several other Rebellion leaders were gathered here. Some even believed Storm capable of complete nepotism. They had no idea she was harder on her own offspring, demanded more from them than she would any other.

Love insisted that she teach them to defend themselves, to survive when nature took her from them. Fate required that they use those skills in a war none of them had wanted.

“Bishop and Shard’s unit will move to strengthen the rear flank. Angel, I want your aerial team to provide some cover.”

“Yes, ma’am.” The blonde, winged mutant’s face was drawn seriously, though no amount of blood or battle could take the hope from his soft eyes.

“We have an hour to prep,” she continued. “Havok, Polaris, take your team and get Wolverine’s reinforcements back to base.”

Bishop shot a glance to his mother and then the girl standing beside him. He had not known that Father was leading the ambushed team. Worry pulled at his heart and from the slight tilt to his sister’s chin, she felt it as well.

Mother’s hands were steady when she turned to face them. The others were filing out of the room quickly, knowing their orders. When the family was left alone, their mother gifted them with a small, tense smile.
“I have not heard from him,” she said in a low tone. “There has been no contact at all.”

Neither Bishop nor Shard spoke. It was not often that the family was separated like this. Mother and Father usually ran missions together, to keep worry from distracting them. Bishop had taken to joining them some years ago. It was Shard’s turn now.

“He’ll be all right,” Bishop said softly.

“Course he will,” Shard piped up. She screwed her face into a mockery of their father’s scowl. “He’s the motherfuckin’ Wolverine, right?”

Neither scolded her for language. Mother’s hand rose, trembling slightly as her infamous guard came down. She hesitated for only a beat before giving in to the urge. Taking one of her children’s hands in each of hers, she threaded their fingers together, creating a tight circle of blood and love.

Bishop closed his eyes briefly, taking his sister’s free hand to complete the circle. She did not shy away or insist that she was too grown up for such things. Instead, she clung to him, each drawing strength from their center, their core.

Mother and Father had instilled in their children a deep need for family, had nurtured it even when the world began to fall down around their ears. If nothing else, Shard and Bishop were loved and that was more than many in this war torn world could claim.

“We have work to do,” Mother broke into his thoughts a moment later. She released their hands, stroking each cheek before wrapping them into a three-pronged embrace. “Be cautious, my children. You have already made me proud.”

Bishop, feeling emotion choke his throat, kissed his mother’s cheek. Shard followed suit, the two women sharing a trembling smile.

“Say hey to Pops for me, yeah?” Lizzie requested as she backed toward the door.

“Of course.”

Luke followed his sister, turning to look at his mother over his shoulder.

“She’ll do well.”

“I know,” Mother replied with a nod. “She is her father’s daughter.”

Bishop nodded, turned, and marched off to battle.

~***~

Now

She felt as though her body had been torn into shreds and tossed to scorching winds. Her stomach roiled even as she turned to face the assembled group. Her skin hurt from head to toe, muscles aching with the otherworldly trip she had submitted to so willingly.

There he was. Tall and proud, dark against the bright light, her brother stood as though to welcome her. She fought the need to overturn her stomach again, gloved fingers gripping the cool countertop to steady weak legs.

“Shard?”
At his soft call of her name, she smiled slightly.

“Bish.”

“What…” He was breathing erratically as he stepped to her.

In one moment, she was swept into the steady harbor of her beloved brother’s embrace. Uneasy from the travel, terrified of what she had come to do, she wrapped her weary arms about his neck, clinging for support to his hulking frame.

The others were of no matter to her. This man was her mission, to hell with his own. Forge had sent her back to him, to be his champion and support as she had been from the moment of her birth. They were two sides of the same coin, a matched set that seemed closer than the most intimate of twins.

“Lizzie,” he whispered, kissing her hair. “What are you doing here?”

Reality leaked through the hazy satisfaction of finding her brother again. Her mission loomed on the immediate horizon, forcing her to release him.

He stepped back, retreating and retracting that sanctuary she wondered if she would ever have again. Half-remembered memory sliced through her spinning mind. Mother’s tears, Father’s curses, Forge’s trembling shove into the portal.

Feeling the change in the light, knowing something else had come through, Shard grasped both of the plasma pistols holstered to her thighs.

“Nimrod.”

One word. Bishop turned, finding his rifle under the table. It was then that Shard caught sight of the others. A pretty blonde stood beside a protective young man. Mother reached for Father.

Oh, God, she thought with a private wince. They’re here.

“Where?”

Bishop’s commanding voice jarred her from sentiment. She had to complete her mission.

“I’m not sure,” she replied, charging her pistols. “Usually we just follow the screams.”

As if on cue, the terrible sound of frightened children pierced the tension. Mother and Father bolted from the kitchen, followed by the other two mutants she had no recollection of. They weren’t a part of her education, at least that she knew of. Everything was still somewhat foggy in her aching mind.

Bishop strode with her, the two locked in easy cadence as they readied their weapons and their hearts for battle. Children flooded the halls, lead by the elder among them to safety. Shard dismissed them without a thought. If she paused to think, she would succumb to the fear. If the fear took her, she would be useless to the battle, to the family she needed to protect.

As they rounded one corner of the mansion she had no memory of, they came upon a scene of horror.

Massive and evil, the white and red shrouded Nimrod floated easily in the front room. Several inches above the expensive Persian, the form of their most hated nemesis raised one deadly hand, pointing it to the blonde woman.

“NO!”
Bishop stepped forward, protecting the petite girl with his body. Shard easily flanked him, both pistols raised. In unison, the warriors fired lethal plasma charges at the mechanical heart of their foe, succeeding in pushing him back less than a foot.

“Move!” Shard ordered the young mutants behind her.

She tugged the girl out of the way, willing her body to phase into pure light. Mother was shouting to Father as Bishop continued plugging Nimrod with his rifle. The constant bombardment slowed the attacker’s movements, but not enough to even give the illusion that it was damaging the technological marvel.

“Hit me!”

Hearing Bishop’s call, Shard turned her hands to her brother, charging her body with a pulse of energy. It lashed out at her sibling, absorbed into his mutated body without pause. He converted it inside of him, striking back at Nimrod with more power than any weapon could muster.

“His armband!” Shard shouted as Nimrod was shoved outside. “Get his armband off! Stay clear of his hands!”

She didn’t know if they understood her, but the other mutants leapt into action. Given more space now, they encircled the malicious Nimrod, even as Storm and Shard took to the air.

Mother’s freezing winds seemed to pose a problem for Nimrod. Light burst forth from the blonde girl, dazzling even Shard’s mutated eyes. The dark man had shifted, becoming metallic before her eyes.

He managed to get close enough to Nimrod to grasp his arm, but the robotic menace was easily rid of him. Bishop continued his unrelenting barrage, charged with his sister’s unique mutation.

“Wolverine! Colossus!” Her brother was shouting in that tone she recalled from so many battlefields. “Distract him! Dazzler, Shard, blind him. Mother!”

“I understand,” Mother replied from her place beside her future daughter. The temperature dropped even more drastically. Had Shard been in her humanoid form, she might have been hindered by the cold.

Instead, she charged her body with light and flew down toward the battle. Darting in front of Nimrod, she blinded the robot, trailing light like a comet behind her. The one called Dazzler created what looked to be a torrent of multicolored light, following it up with a concussive charge that sent Bishop stumbling.

The confusion tactic was the only one that could work on the powerful Nimrod. As her father and the mutant known as Colossus crept closer, she brightened the nimbus surrounding her light-generated body. Nimrod swatted at her with a burning charge, but she avoided it easily.

Several seconds of silent battle ticked by, broken only by the sizzle of the air and a resounding clang of metal striking metal.

And then, all was quiet.

Shard shifted back into her humanoid form, landing gracefully beside her brother. Nimrod was gone and in her father’s hand lay the armband that was the key to their foe’s demise. He handed it to her silently, dark eyes watching her cautiously. Shard took it from him, shoving the broken contraption into her pocket as Bishop turned to her.
“Now,” he said on a soft sigh. “What the hell are you doing here?”

~**~

The girl was beautiful.

He watched her carefully, trying to keep his contemplation of this future child from being overt. Her skin was darker than his, though lighter than ‘Ro’s and Bishop’s. She had her mother’s hair, evidenced by the shocking white roots visible beneath the flaxen blonde.

Watching her, he could pick out the features that betrayed her parentage. ‘Ro’s nose, Logan’s lips, her father’s scowl, her mother’s smile. It was more evident in her, the mixture of her parents, or perhaps he was simply more adept at seeing it now.

The only mar to her beautiful face was the burned-black “M” branded into her left eye.

She accepted the cup of hot coffee gratefully, though she stayed close to her big brother. It was a defense, he thought with some surprise. She was nervous and afraid and therefore sought out the protector. Luke always protected his little sister, that much was written plain as day in the body language between them.

But, Logan amended his internal dialogue, he depended on her as well. Shard seemed to be Bishop’s softer side, the foil to his gruff warrior. The girl was just as tough, but they both softened in the downtime together.

He found himself proud that his children were so close. What was it like, he wondered, to depend on someone so wholly, to know they would be there come hell or high-water.

“It wasn’t pretty,” the girl was saying. Her rich, throaty voice was much like her mother’s. “Mother and I came into the room in time to see the Sentinels storm it. Bishop got through, but barely.”

“Sentinels?” Dazzler asked curiously as she toyed with the handle of her coffee mug.

“Robots,” Bishop explained. “Designed and deployed to round up and tag mutants.”

“That’s just nasty,” Dazzler commented with a grimace.

“Nimrod is the most deadly phase of Sentinels,” Shard continued. “He’s indestructible. Even if we do manage to blow him up, he just regenerates.”

“Amazing technology,” Beast murmured, looking interested and disgusted at the same time.

“Yeah,” Shard answered, sipping her coffee.

“When I was coming through the portal, Sentinels had located the base,” Bishop went on. “I left Father and Forge to fend for themselves.”

“Hey, Luke?” Shard interrupted almost conversationally. “What part of “need to know” didn’t you get during the briefings?”

He glared at his little sister in a gesture that looked more fitting to a seven year old. “I’ve had some issues.”

“You’ve always had issues,” she quipped. “I just didn’t realize they were this bad.”

Bishop sighed. “Shard.”
She mocked him. “Bishop.”

Logan turned his head to hide the amused smile. He shared a glance with Storm, enormously warmed and entertained by the easy relationship between their children.

“So, they know who we are?” She pressed.

“Yes.”

“Wonderful.”

Storm tilted her head at their daughter, regarding her openly. “Has anything changed in your timeline?”

Shard blinked owlishly, slowly lowering her coffee cup to the kitchen table. “What do you mean?”

A glance around followed by a quick sniff told Logan that everyone in the room had just tensed. Questions like that tended to herald bad news in this little crew.

“I left right after you did,” she told Bishop quickly. “How long have you been here?”

He shot Logan a look. “Two months.”

Shard’s lips formed a silent “o” of understanding. “OK, so you’re forgiven for spilling the beans.”

“Thanks,” her brother replied somewhat mockingly.

“Why would Forge have recalculated everything?” Bishop mused aloud.

His sister shook her head. “He didn’t. Nimrod did. We only figured out that he was coming through to kill you at the last second. They’d discovered our plans.”

“How?” Bishop demanded.

She shrugged. “I don’t know. All I know is bad guy came to kill big brother. Little sister take care of bad guy, save big brother. That’s all I needed to know.”

“Simpleton,” Bishop shot her half-heartedly.

“Nerd.”

“Children,” Ororo cut in wearily, the word and tone worn as though she had said it a million times.

“Sorry, Mother.” The children droned in unison.

“That’s almost creepy,” Dazzler chuckled. “They aren’t even born yet and she’s got ‘em whooped.”

Shard tossed the young girl a grin. “If she was your mother, you’d be whooped too.”

“I like her,” Dazzler said to no one in particular.

~**~

Magneto watched the footage carefully, pausing to restart it over and over again. They were a flawless team, he mused. Love bound them together, made them whole. A team as his Brotherhood
was quickly proving they could not become.

He ruled them with fear and ideals. Storm commanded her troops with love and maternal affection. Was her way better than his? Perhaps. But he could not allow his children to become soft, not with what lay ahead for them all.

“She can’t be trusted.”

Turning from the screen, tucking away his silent contemplation, Magneto faced his darling Psylocke with a slightly paternal smile. Though he was tough, he was not heartless. He truly cared for many of his mutants.

“As I recall, Pyro said something eerily similar about you.”

“I didn’t defect from the other side,” she defended with a toss of her spiky, violet hair. Dark eyes reflected her concern, her unease.

“Yes, but she has given us useful information,” he muttered, gesturing to the laptop on which the video was playing. “Very useful.”

“Why?” Psylocke pressed. “She’s always been one of them. No boy on earth could shake a girl’s faith like that.”

“No?” Magneto questioned her, somewhat amused. “Either way, I am getting what I want. Bishop becomes more of a puzzle every day.”

Psylocke came around the edge of his metallic desk, grasping his aging hand in a manner quite unlike the distant psychic. Startled, he looked up into those unreadable eyes, wondering if her relationship with Pyro was to blame for this sudden change.

“Magneto, I’m begging you, leave him alone,” she pleaded, crouching low to look up at him. “No good can come from this.”

“You presume to tell the future now?”

“No,” she shook her glorious head, her beautiful face twisted with agony. “But I can have a hunch just as well as anyone. My hunch is telling me that this entire thing is bad news.”

Magneto took his hand from hers, looking toward the dirty window of his office.

“I know what must be done,” he said quietly. “And while you are my advisor and confidante, I will not be ordered.”

“Erik,” she pled again. “I’m only concerned for you.”

He smiled slightly, not bothering to look at her. “How remarkable. You actually believe that.”

As though he had physically struck her, the girl moved back. She stood, taking several steps from him and turning so that the smooth line of her back was facing him. Her survival after Alcatraz was nothing short of a miracle and she had sought him out in the aftermath.

Once the cure’s devastating effects began to fade, she had helped him regain his power, to build his legion of followers. She had done it all out of loyalty. Psylocke was Callisto’s steadfast companion, turning only to Magneto in the wake of her untimely death at the hands of Storm.

“You should get some rest, my dear,” he prodded, wanting his time alone.
She left without another word.

~*~

“He’s losing his mind, John,” she whispered as the light began to drift into darkness.

“I know,” he grunted from the bed, taking her hand weakly. Rogue had spent another evening borrowing powers, learning to master them so she could use them in battle. John did not have to wonder why she continually chose him.

Rogue had a taste for revenge and sought it again and again. Pyro, weak from her attentions, could feel the tension radiating from his lover. When she had shifted from easy fuck to companion was murky, but he was thankful for the ally given changing times.

“I can’t believe he keeps letting her do this to you.” Betsy came closer, placing her hand on his forehead. She telepathically scanned him, linking their minds briefly. John often called the gentle endearment a “psychic’s kiss”.

“She’s the favorite.” John answered, barely biting back the content sigh as she “kissed” him again.

“Doesn’t she realize he’ll betray her? Look at what he did to Mystique.”

He grasped her hand more tightly, feeling his strength coming back. It flooded in waves, swelling and ebbing, until he was returned to his pre-Rogue state. Things were unraveling fast for the Brotherhood. Several of their recent endeavors had ended badly, two deaths were on their heads now.

“Hey, Bets?”

“Mmm?” She hummed, her fingertips dancing over his brow.

John wanted to tell her that she could go to Storm for help, if anything happened to him. He needed her to understand that the X-Men could be allies, that they were not the villains he had wanted them to be. With aging came wisdom and the regrets for mistakes ate at him a little more every day.

Yes, he had hated the restraint Xavier put on them all, but…

“Come lay with me,” he whispered into the darkness.

If she was surprised, she never let on. Her long, lithe body slipped beneath the covered, curving into his with the knowledge of intimacy.

John curled her into his arm, kissed her hair tenderly. Maybe he could tell her, someday. Maybe after Magneto killed him, she would find sanctuary with them.

Maybe things wouldn’t be so bad after all.
Chapter Summary

Ororo has a surprise for Logan. Shard and Bishop muse on the future. Psylocke makes a bold move.

Long after John slipped off to dream, Betsy lay awake. Her darkly violet eyes traced the shadows and lines of his face in the moonlight. When she’d first come to Magneto, to the Brotherhood, she had found Pyro the most interesting of the ragtag group. He was malicious and vengeful, his power coveted in the circle of mutants.

But as the months went on, their suspicious natures and distrust faded. While Magneto found new favorites to further his increasingly insane schemes, they slowly drifted together. Betsy took him willingly into her bed, but she fought to keep him out of her heart.

It had proved futile, much to her amusement. Pyro blazed past her defenses and set up shop as though he intended to stay. She found that she could adore him, respect him as a potential mate. They understood one another on a basic level; found solace and comfort where there should be none.

In battle, they were a flawless team, unlike most of the doomed Brotherhood. They complimented one another, depended on each other for support. Psylocke had resented this at first, no matter how comfortable it seemed. She hated needing anyone, but John made being alone next to impossible.

Now, she saw everything they had worked for with new eyes. Watching the blonde mutant fall, sensing John’s remorse and guilt had opened her eyes. Looking around the squalid base of operations no longer filled her with righteousness. Magneto’s increasing distance as he took Rogue under his wing only reinforced what she was beginning to understand.

Perhaps what she believed was once noble. Freedom for mutants, the joy of being different. Psylocke had always reveled in her powers. She loved her status as a mutant, bearing her mark proudly as she fought beside her beloved Callisto. When had these noble ideals been perverted? What Magneto asked of them now was murder and corruption. He hated and fought to bring that hate into every follower’s heart.

No longer could Psylocke follow him blindly. She reached up, trailing one long finger over John’s lips. Her little psychic’s kiss told her enough about his thoughts and emotions to give her a clear indication of what he desired. He wanted her to seek out refuge with the X-Men, their hated enemies. Part of her railed against the suggestion, but her new perspective granted her a moment’s pause.

John’s tales of life among the X-Men still echoed in her mind. Though he hated their hidden status, their easy defense of those that would rather see them all dead ate away at him with every passing year, he respected them. He explained time and time again that they were a family, more so than the Brotherhood could ever hope to match. She barely understood this concept, but knew it to be important in the grand design.

“I understand,” her accented voice was barely a whisper in the darkness. “I understand, John.”
Moving with the stealth of a trained warrior, she slipped from the bed after kissing his pouting lips. While he breathed deeply in the land of dreams, she pulled on a pair of jeans and a black top, sweeping her long, violet-streaked hair into a sloppy ponytail.

On silent feet, even with her heavy boots, she opened the window and peered into the night. John thought they had more time, but Betsy knew Magneto well. If they did not move soon, they would go down with him.

For him, for the man she loved, she would go to their enemies. Psylocke folded her lithe body into the window, pausing as she perched on the sill to glance back at John’s moonlit form over her shoulder. He muttered in his sleep, reaching out to her side of the bed in search of her.

“Bets?”

But when John looked up, blinking sleep from his eyes, all he could see was the open window and curtains dancing on a soft breeze.

~**~

Standing at the bathroom sink, Ororo listened as Logan chuckled at something John Wayne was saying on the television. She knew he was propped against her headboard, likely naked, with a beer in his hand and a cigar pinched between his teeth. She smiled briefly at the image, knowing he was out there, waiting for her.

A glance at her hand made the smile spread somewhat further, the glint of her diamond ring shining in the bathroom light. They’d purchased it together, inscribing a delicate “For my ‘Ro, my Storm” on the underside of the band. She would inscribe his wedding band with something similar, the matching rings a symbol of what she knew in her heart.

Placing the small plastic tube on the counter, she turned to the side, watching her reflection carefully. Beneath her white satin robe, she pushed her still-flat belly out, pinning the material to the sides to simulate a swollen abdomen. Ororo giggled soundlessly, looking over her shoulder as though Logan would appear behind her.

It would be awkward, she decided. Her body would swell, hormones thrown completely off track… she wondered how her mutation would be affected. Storm faced the mirror once more, allowing her belly to lie flat as she peered curiously at herself.

There was no change, not yet. It was unlikely anyone would notice anything in the near future. But she knew. Was there light in her eyes? Did she glow? Her smile reappeared as she took up the small plastic tube again, her gaze drawn to the two pink lines that indicated her condition.

How? How was this possible when all medical data said it could never happen? Ororo exhaled slowly, trying to push away the panic that suddenly took up residence in her chest. Without a doubt, she was pregnant. Her little Lucas now dozed beneath her heart. She already knew what a man he would become. Noble, strong, valorous.

Ororo would give the world this incredible gift and it humbled her. Lucas had come back from his timeline, into a world he hardly knew, to save their kind. What mother could resist that overwhelming swell of pride and responsibility? She caught her own gaze in the mirror again, mentally preparing herself for the years to come.
Her son would grow into a fine man, but she would die before someone marked him.

“’Ro? You fall in?”

At Logan’s call, she swallowed hard. “I’ll be right out.”

“You ok?”

“Fine.”

His grunt said he didn’t believe her, so Ororo killed the light and opened the bathroom door. Clutching the positive test in her hand, she leaned in the doorway, watching him with a fond smile upon her face.

There he was, her Wolverine. A beer between his naked thighs, cigar in his mouth, chest blissfully bare. Just Logan. He could really be a simple, uncomplicated man. Give him alcohol, nicotine, food, and sex and he nearly purred like a kitten.

“Whatcha lookin’ at, darlin’?” His question was in that teasing growl she knew well, one of his brows cocked inquisitively.

“You,” she answered simply, shrugging one shoulder.

“Oh, yeah? Like what ya see?” Logan waggled his brows at her suggestively.

“Of course.” Ororo pushed off from the doorway, stepping fully into the room and around the bed.

Logan’s eyes watched her every move, his predator’s gaze taking in every sway of her body as she passed in front of the television. It stroked the hell out of her ego when he watched her that way, as though he would rather look at nothing else. Inwardly preening at his undivided attention, Ororo came to her side of the bed, shrugging out of her robe.

He rewarded her choice of nightgown with a hearty wolf whistle, licking his lips as his eyes took in every curve. Ororo rolled her eyes at him, setting her robe on the edge of the bed. The clingy ivory satin was a personal favorite. She felt posh and sexy beneath the plunging neckline and nearly invisible straps.

“Was I a good boy today?” He inhaled from the cigar, his voice a husky whisper. “Cause that looks like a present.”

Ororo tossed him a saucy smirk, her heart leaping to a frantic tattoo in her chest. She had to tell him, the knowledge begging to be released to the world. She took a steadying breath, then silently handed him the pregnancy test she’d just spent the last several minutes taking.

Confusion covered Logan’s face as he took the slender plastic from her. His beer was set on the nightstand as he turned it over in his hands. Ororo held her breath, waiting for it to dawn on him. In the dim light, she could see the reflection of John Wayne in his eyes.

The cigar fell from his mouth when it dropped open in shock. When the still-burning end scorched his thigh, he came back to life, scooping the lit cigar into his hand as he stared at the tube. Ororo felt her heart trip as he turned those unfathomable eyes to her.
Hope was written so clearly there that it momentarily knocked her off balance.

“You…”

“I’m pregnant.”

Logan tackled her.

Ororo laughed heartily as she was flattened to the bed. Cigar and test went over the edge of their bed, landing on the floor and quickly forgotten. Her fiancé’s lips claimed hers, his nude body splayed over hers in a rough marriage of satin and skin.

“I thought you couldn’t?” He choked when they broke for air.

Ororo’s head was spinning. “I know. I can’t explain it.”

His hands came up to frame her face, holding her to him as their eyes met across the scant inches that separated them. Logan smiled, really and truly, before whispering against her lips.

“A miracle,” he told her as their lips met again. “Just a miracle.”

She hummed under his touch, her heart skipping when a masculine hand splayed eagerly over her unchanged womb. Her love buried his face in her neck, inhaling her scent with the precision of primal instinct. Ororo felt that telltale heat pump into her system, the tingle under her skin a call for Logan’s masterful touch.

His lips curved into a smile she could feel against her flesh, even as his hand began to explore her curves over the soft satin. The material bunched as he gathered his fingers together. Slowly, teasingly, the cloth whispered over her thighs.

“Feel like celebratin’?”

At Logan’s taunting growl, Ororo licked her lips. Her head lolled to the side, providing him with better access as his tongue darted out to taste her.

“I thought we might want to reenact the event.”

“Read my mind, woman.”

~*~

In the light of a waxing moon, two mutants sprawled on the roof of the sleeping mansion. Bishop and Shard were propped up on their hands, leather-clad legs stretched out in front of them. It was, as only they knew, a long-held tradition. Even at the height of war, when the concussion of explosives could rend the night, there could always be peace like this.

Brother and sister were side by side, looking up into the clear, starry sky. The moon, full and round, beamed down it’s silvery light, casting everything into ethereal shadow. Xavier’s School sat upon grounds that were beautifully kept and masterfully displayed. Every nook and cranny was filled with life, with hope, even in the dead of night.
Shard shifted beside her brother, drawing his gaze to her lovely face. She was smiling, that soft, secret smile most would never think her capable of. Lucas knew, of course. He could read his sister like an open book. Neither of them handled separation well, something they continually blamed on their parents. Even the thought of being apart could cause something akin to physical pain.

When Bishop prepared for his mission, Lizzie became sullen and withdrawn. They thought, at the time, that his jump back in time would spell the end for them. Never again would they sit like this, alone in the dark. Lucas thought that there could be nothing more painful than leaving his little sister. Saying goodbye to his parents was hard, but leaving Lizzie was almost more than he could bear.

Many could not understand how siblings could be so close when so far apart in age. Lucas once again shoved the blame onto his parents. Since her birth, Lucas was given one mission that he never failed in.

*She’s your sister, son, you don’t never let her down, hear?*

Father’s stern words to an amazed seven year old were inscribed on Bishop’s heart. Not once in his life had he contemplated being without little Lizzie.

“They’re weird,” his blonde companion said suddenly. Amusement, barely detectable, lingered in her voice.

“Mother and Father?” He questioned, already knowing the answer.

“Yeah,” Lizzie whispered. She tilted her head at the swollen moon. “She’s gorgeous.”

Bishop had to smile at that. “She will always be gorgeous.”

“The old man hasn’t changed much, huh?” Lizzie chuckled softly. “Man, he’s just a badass.”

“Oh, yes.” Lucas shook his head, long braids rustling with the movement. “They were interesting, to say the very least.”

A short, comfortable silence followed this as the siblings lost themselves in fond memory and easy speculation.

“She pregnant yet?”

After sighing, Lucas launched into the tale of his two months among the X-Men. Lizzie was a captive audience, as always. She reacted in all the right spots, grunting comments when required and keeping her mouth shut otherwise. He felt as though he were confessing, weight leaving his chest as he poured his heart out to his only true confidante.

When he was finished, Shard whistled lowly. “Good. God.”

Relieved, relaxed, Lucas nodded. His shoulders, relieved of their burden just slightly, slumped with the effect of his sister’s patient listening. What had he been thinking? Shard should have come back with him from the start. She, as always, was his partner in crime, his best friend.

“Man, Luke, I can’t believe all that happened…” She reached over, squeezing his shoulder quickly, comfortably. “And you haven’t lost your damn mind.”
“I haven’t?” He quipped with a small smirk.

“Well, no more than usual,” his sister replied impishly.

“Lizzie, there are pieces to this puzzle that I cannot understand. Marie’s betrayal went off flawlessly, but how…”

“Do Dazzler and Colossus fit in?” She finished his thought effortlessly, shrugging one shoulder. “Dunno, but they’re involved in a big, bad way.”

“Father had a point, they are a few X-Men up from our timeline.”

“True.” Lizzie chewed on her lip absently. “They’re solid, loyal, there’s something to that.”

Lucas grunted his agreement. “Do you think…”

“Psylocke will turn?” She shrugged one thin shoulder again. “Hell if I know. Mother was confident about that aspect, especially if Marie turned…”

“But it seems so damn unlikely. Mother sounded like a psychic in those last months. She was trying to predict how someone else would respond twenty years in the past.”

“Yeah,” Lizzie said with a knowing smile. “But how often is Mama wrong?”

They shared a short, intimate silence at this. Knowledge that only they carried of the woman sleeping below them, wrapped in the arms of the man that would father her children. The siblings lapsed into that quiet contemplation, watching the stars dance against inky black sky. Crickets sang in the distance, mingling with the soft rustle of grass caught in a breeze.

“I keep expecting to hear the explosions, the gunfire, the screams.”

Bishop glanced at his little sister, nodding once. “It was the same for me.”

“It’s amazing,” Lizzie went on softly. “I watched a group of kids play basketball today. They were laughing, had absolutely no fear of anything.”

“They didn’t lie,” he answered just as quietly. “There was a time before war and fear.”

“I want it,” his sister said fiercely. “I want this, Luke. I wanna grow up in this place, smiling and laughing with my mother, father, and stupid big brother. I never want to be afraid that one of you might not come home.”

Because she was here, because he could, Lucas threw an arm over her thin shoulders and tugged her close to him. He rested his chin on the top of her head, squeezing her tightly as she melted into her big brother’s embrace.

“We will, Lizzie. That’s why we came back.”

“I know, Luke,” she whispered in the dark. “We have a chance to save the world.”

Inspired suddenly, Lucas grinned and kissed his sister’s hair. Remembering his conversation with Beast that awful night after his arrival and his mental wish for his sister, he decided to go with his
gut, to show her what this world could be like.

“Before we save the world, you’ve got to do something for me.”

“What?” His sister questioned without moving her head from his shoulder.

“Help me raid Uncle Hank’s ice cream stash.”

Lizzie pulled away, frowning at her brother with confusion in her eyes.

“What’s ice cream?”

~**~

While Piotr studied for his upcoming college exams, Ali found herself wandering through the mansion. It was still early, but she was winding down from her midnight security shift the previous evening.

Armed with a cup of decaf and her battered guitar, she made her way to the front door of the mansion. Settling outside, inhaling the dewy morning air, she set her cup down and idly strummed the guitar strings.

Everyone who was not preparing for university midterms or coming onto shift was still asleep. Her instrument played a soft, hopeful tune to match the perfect serenity of a spring morning. The air was heavy, scented with clean blooms and rising sunshine.

“I never knew what real love was,” she sang quietly into the dawn. “Until that night you stole my heart. I still can’t believe it, how can this be true? Just promise me, wherever you go, you’ll take me with you.”

Warming to her tune, Ali shifted on the steps, propping the guitar more securely on her lap. She was playing by ear, letting her hands and voice act out of instinct. One of her many gifts was to remember everything she played…if it happened to be worth a damn. She never forgot a good tune, no matter how asleep or wasted she was.

Continuing with the gentle, swaying melody, she hummed into another verse.

“I found everything, while lost in your embrace... It's here inside me, held captive in your eyes. Please don't leave me. Now I'm too afraid to be alone. So wherever you go, take me with you.”

Changing the tempo of the music, she continued on, mentally marking her last lines as a chorus.

“So, baby...if you’ve got room in that heart of yours, don’t leave me here alone. Keep me in your soul, even when we’re apart. Don’t take your love away, stay here by my side. Take me to heaven with you. Take me with you.”

Her mind flashed through recent memories of Piotr, uncommon tears stinging at the back of her eyes. Her heart ached. It was so stupid, so completely insane to care for someone as deeply as she cared for her Russian lover. She could so easily lose herself in him; submit to him in ways she never thought possible.
The effect was evident in her music, her voice. Everything she’d written recently was some sort of lament to him. She had told him once, before that devastating first kiss, that her songs were written for a “mystery man” she had yet to meet. Ali wondered, for the first time, if she had found him.

“Ali?”

Turning sharply, she tossed her guitar aside, leapt to her feet, and launched herself into Piotr’s arms. Where he had come from or why didn’t matter, so long as he held her close. She wrapped one long, pajama-clad leg around his thigh, her arms tossed carelessly around his neck. Ali buried her face in Piotr’s shoulder, even as his impossibly strong arms came around to hold her tightly.

“I love you,” she whispered suddenly, unafraid of the consequences.

Piotr tensed, his arms tightening around her as though in reflex. Ali gripped him as though her life depended on it, sniffling against his shoulder.

“Oh, thank God,” he whispered at last. “I thought I would have to say it first.”

Ali chuckled somewhat tearfully against his shoulder. With trust she’d never known she could give, Ali leaned back so that he had to shift to hold her steady. She kissed his lips sweetly, gently, before nuzzling his nose with hers.

“Not a chance, Mother Russia.”

“I do love you, Brawler,” he replied, stealing another heart-stopping kiss.

“We’re nuts,” she whispered, grinning happily. “I barely know you.”

Piotr shrugged, a small, winsome smile curving his perfect mouth. “Who cares?”

He kept her in his arms, as though in no way bothered by her weight. Their eyes met, obsidian on jade, and locked together. She could see him, through him in ways no other could ever boast. Piotr’s passion and fire reflected back at her, mingling with his innate tenderness, his wonderful heart. He humbled her with every second.

Piotr gave her his heart, the key to his soul, and she suddenly understood what a precious thing that would be. She kissed him again, a single tear slipping from her eye to spill down her cheek. Alison never cried, but the emotion between them was so strong in this moment that she could not hold herself back. Her comrade deserved more, all.

“Well, this is a touching scene. Anyone have a hankie?”

Colossus dropped Dazzler on her feet and the blonde woman turned sharply. She immediately thrust both hands out, calling on her mutation as the grating sound of metal on metal told her Piotr had tapped into his own power.

“Oh, stop that, you stubborn gits.” Psylocke said testily as she darted out of the line of fire effortlessly.

“What the hell are you doin’ back here, Lockie?” Dazzler spat angrily. “Ready for another round?”

“Perhaps later,” Psylocke said primly, looking from one to the other. “I’m here under a white flag of
“I see no flag,” Piotr said with a deadly, flat edge to his voice.

The violet-eyed mutant drew herself up proudly. “I need to talk to Storm.”

“Oh, no,” Dazzler said after a sarcastic pause. “How bout I kick your ass instead?”

“Do shut up, Sparkles,” Psylocke dismissed easily. “I do not have time for this.”

“Make time,” Piotr interrupted coldly. “You are not welcome here.”

The Asian beauty seemed unconcerned and took several steps closer. Dazzler and Colossus closed ranks immediately, each trying to protect the other. Alison swallowed hard, ready to thrown down with the telepathic mutant again if need be. She wasn’t touching Piotr if Ali had anything to say about it. No one would hurt her Colossus.

“I’m here in peace,” Psylocke tried again. “I have information for Storm.”

Ali and Piotr shared a quick, calculating glance.

“Information?”

At Piotr’s question, Psylocke grinned. “Oh, yes. I’m here to bargain, big guy. I want my freedom and in turn, I’ll help you obliterate Magneto.”

Ali’s suspicions grew, but curiosity was getting to her. What would make this strange mutant betray her leader? Did she really have something the X-Men might need? Were Ali and Piotr ready to walk away, possibly destroying a positive step for Xavier’s heirs?

Another glance at Piotr told her he was thinking all the same things. They had to, at least, take this to Storm and weigh her decision. Her lover nodded almost imperceptibly and Ali turned to their unwelcome guest.

“One wrong move, Lockie, and I’ll rearrange your face. Again.”

Psylocke shrugged easily. “Fair enough.”

As the unlikely trio entered the house, Ali moved to take Piotr’s hand. It seemed their declarations would have to be celebrated later. For now, they had to figure out what to do with Magneto’s right hand woman.
Loyalty

Chapter Summary

Psylocke reveals her ace. Logan has a moment alone with Shard.

Frantic, Pyro bolted from his bedroom and rushed down the stairs as though all the demons of hell were snapping at his heels. He ignored startled shouts from his fellow Brotherhood members, whipping past them in a mad dash for the front door.

Where had she gone? Had her psychic probing told her of his insane notion? God, please, don’t let her be dead.

When Psylocke became his reason for breathing, the only bright spot in his life was a distant, mystifying puzzle. One morning he simply awoke beside her and realized that was how he wanted to wake every single day. Her tough as nails attitude and overwhelming tenderness bashed right through any barrier around his heart.

No matter how he tried to tell himself that it was “just sex” his heart quickly decided otherwise. For the first time in his young life, John cared more about a woman than he did himself. He’d deal with the X-Men or the Devil himself to keep her out of harm’s way.

There was no fucking way anyone was going to hurt her.

As he dashed out of the house and hopped into the battered Honda that served as his wheels, he realized that this was what loyalty felt like. He didn’t give a rat’s ass if Storm and Magneto tore the world apart around him, so long as Betsy was wrapped up safe somewhere. Mutants and humans could destroy the universe…he really didn’t give a shit.

That realization made him throw the Honda into reverse and punch the gas petal to the floor. He would catch up with her; ensure she was all right. After that, he didn’t know what the hell they were going to do.

With Rogue and Magneto joining forces against the X-Men, the old man had really lost it. He was constantly sequestered from his faithful followers, making plans that escalated rapidly from unlikely to just plain fucking crazy. Pyro didn’t want part of this any longer. Lensherr was so determined to kill half the planet just to have his way. Somewhere along the way, Magneto had become the very thing he professed to despise.

At least, John thought as he turned the Honda onto the deserted streets, Xavier had never been a hypocrite. He fought the same fight as Magneto without the endless death toll. What did the benevolent man get for his trouble? Death at the hands of a mutant too powerful for this world. A mutant he loved as a daughter.

John would never agree with the restrictions placed on mutations by Xavier’s students, but the line had to be drawn somewhere. Without even knowing it, John stepped over the proverbial line in the sand to join Storm’s X-Men once more. This time, it would be different. He wasn’t that arrogant kid
looking for kicks any longer. He was a man now.

A man with something precious to lose.

Miles flew by under the spinning tires of his Honda. Hands gripped the steering wheel until his knuckles were white with tension. Betsy. Goddamn it, Betsy. What was she thinking? They couldn’t do anything rash! Caught between a rock and adamantium, they were flirting with disaster.

Even sleeping together, falling in love, that was dangerous. Magneto did not like for his followers to become attached to one another. They were to worship him alone, without room in their hearts for one another.

It was yet another difference between Lensherr and Xavier. Magneto wanted a congregation; Xavier needed family.

Well, John thought as the speedometer hit one hundred miles per hour, Betsy is my family now. He wasn’t going to lose her, come what may. Had he not just found Betsy, Pyro might have drifted into the night, leaving behind war and zealots. But she was worth fighting for, worth sticking it out.

Worth a million rounds with malicious Rogue.

The engine whined as he took the entrance for the highway. He had to find her. There was nothing left if he lost her.

Nothing.

~**~

Storm, Wolverine, and their children were poised around the kitchen like sentinels. Their guard was up, each piercing stare boring into the woman that sat proudly at the table. No one spoke, even after Colossus and Dazzler left the room. Ororo knew they were just outside, ready for their enemy to attack.

She wouldn’t, Ororo thought as she watched the violet-eyed mutant cautiously. This woman had an intelligence in her gaze that spoke volumes. She would not start open war while in an enemy camp. It wasn’t logical or tactically sound.

Logan was leaning against the wall behind her, their daughter mimicking his easy but ready stance as though it were second nature. Their volatile tempers were best kept behind the more levelheaded Bishop and Storm. For some reason, this observation struck Storm as enormously funny.

“I want out.”

Startled by the woman’s blunt, flat comment, Storm glanced to her son. Bishop’s face gave nothing away, but she could see something flash in his eyes. Whether or not this was a good thing would wait until later.

“Why?” Storm demanded quickly, gauging her young foe carefully.

Psylocke looked down at the table, her eyes guarded, posture rigid.

“Magneto has lost what little sanity he retained since Rogue joined him.”
“What?” Logan’s abrupt snarl made Ororo flick her hand at him, cautioning her beloved feral to calm down.

The woman tilted her head, still looking at the tabletop. “You didn’t know.”

“You’re lyin’,” Logan said again. “Marie wouldn’t…”

“You’re a man, Wolverine,” Psylocke interrupted. “You wouldn’t understand.”

“Then explain.”

But the awful truth was dawning on Storm already. Rogue was so reclusive now, often leaving the mansion for several hours without explanation. Even Jubilee commented that after the trip to Germany, her dear friend was secretive and elusive.

Storm chalked it up to a broken heart, to bruised pride. As the unlikely foursome of Piotr, Alison, Kitty, and Bobby forged a fast, solid friendship, Marie drifted quickly and quietly away.

“Bobby.”

Psylocke met her eyes, a bemuse smile ghosting over her lips. “Hell hath no fury…”

“Shut up!” Logan snapped, pushing away from the wall. He ignored Shard’s entreat ing hand and Ororo’s warning gaze.

“She isn’t lying,” Bishop said at last.

The room fell deathly silent in one tortured breath. Father turned to son, two sets of dark eyes meeting in an unfathomable battle of wills. Bishop straightened his shoulders, unwilling to bend, unable to explain.

Shard stepped easily between them, placing one hand on each rapidly rising chest.

“There’s a reason, Daddy,” Lizzie said quietly. “Just hear us out.”

The betrayal was written so clearly over Logan’s gruff features that it tore at Ororo’s heart.

“Daddy?” said the woman now forgotten. “Oh, Magneto must have loved that.”

“Shut up,” the family said in unison.

Logan inhaled deeply, exhaling the breath as slowly as he could. The tension in her family made Ororo shake her head. It was really a shock that her children would live to see adulthood, seeing as how damn stubborn they all were.

“This happen in your timeline?”

Bishop nodded to his father’s curt question. “Much later, but yes.”

“Why?”
“The cure doesn’t work,” Psylocke offered. “Rogue has regained her mutation.”

“She can control it now,” Shard chimed in. “In our timeline, Rogue got fed up with hiding it, fought with Bobby…we don’t know all the details. But she went to Magneto and struck a deal with him.”

“Magneto encouraged her use of her powers. She would go into battle armed to the gills while some unlucky bastard was at home recovering.” Bishop’s voice was flat, but his mother could see the turmoil raging in his eyes.

Logan, for his part, was shaking with rage, with pain. She took his hand, squeezing it gently. To her great surprise, he relaxed a fraction, his gaze meeting hers.

The guilt reflecting in his dark eyes broke a little more of her heart. Ororo gave him a heartbroken look, sighing heavily as she turned, once more, to the enemy at their table.

“How are you telling us this, Psylocke?”

The girl exhaled as all four mutants resumed their unwavering stare. Something in the way her hands trembled, how her eyes flickered, reminded Ororo of herself. Whatever had happened to this mutant vigilante shook her to the core, made her question everything she ever wanted.

Unable to resist, Ororo came around the table, taking the girl’s face gently in her hands. Oh, but she was so young. Vulnerability crumbled her face, her eyes suddenly filled with uncertainty and fear. Magneto, though he might not know it, just lost his follower.

“He’s turning on me,” she whispered. The sound was broken, weak. “And on John. I can’t let this happen. He’s…God. Erik’s lost his mind.”

As though a damn burst, Psylocke began to talk rapidly to a captive audience.

“At first, it was wonderful. Here was a real leader, one that could take us out of the alleys and sewers. I nursed him back to health, brought him powerful and loyal followers. John and I were his most faithful, the ones he turned to for everything.”

“But then he changed. Once he learned of Bishop, he went ballistic. He ordered us to find out about him, to attack the mansion in hopes of capturing him again. Magneto thinks that knowledge of the future could help him destroy all humankind. I did not sign up for that. Mass genocide? There has to be a limit.”

“A limit?” Logan cut in. “Didn’t think you like limits.”

“I don’t,” Psylocke answered honestly, meeting his eyes without fear. “But what Magneto…God, the last time I looked into his mind, he was toying with the idea of killing Storm. That’s not unusual, but he wanted to ensure she was pregnant.”

Several audible intakes of breath did not stop her.

“His plan is simple. The cure isn’t permanent, but close enough. He’s had some kind of chemist working on the compound. They’ve succeeded in making it airborne.”

“My God,” Shard said breathlessly. “He could destroy the X-Men in one move.”
Psylocke stood; her slender form moved with the innate grace of a trained warrior. She paced back and forth, her hands rubbing together nervously.

“That’s the plan,” she answered in that clipped British accent. “Wipe out all powers, move in, destroy the X-Men. It’ll clear the path to a human-mutant war.”

“Humans wouldn’t stand a chance,” Bishop said thoughtfully. “So many mutants out there can regenerate or avoid conventional weapons.”

The young woman nodded as Ororo’s head began to spin. “I want to stop him. I need to stop him. This isn’t right, no matter what I believe about mutants.”

“That’s some story,” Wolverine interjected once more. “But that don’t explain why you came to us. You hate us.”

Her silent feet stopped their pacing and her back straightened considerably. Storm watched as the girl turned to face the feral mutant, her eyes afire with determination.

“He knows John and I aren’t wholly with him,” she explained softly. “He’s gearing up to have John killed. I won’t be far behind.”

“You love him. John.” Ororo observed, having caught the change in the telepath’s voice. She knew it well, she used it herself whenever speaking of Logan.

Of course, that made perfect sense. What else but love could turn this warrior to her enemies? She was protecting the man that stole her heart, no matter the consequences. She might have followed her deranged leader to the end had he not threatened the life of the one person she was willing to risk it all for.

In that moment, Storm understood Psylocke completely and she trusted that instinct.

“Yes,” the woman answered just as softly. “I can’t let anything happen to Pyro.”

Logan, for his part, turned to his children in confusion. “She talkin’ bout the same Pyro?”

Before anyone could move, Psylocke stiffened. Storm saw her eyes glaze over, knowing the gaze well from her years beside two of the most powerful minds on earth. The woman’s psyche was reaching out, searching for something that caught on her mental radar.

She was gone in a flash, moving from the kitchen at an alarming speed. Storm and her family were hot on her heels, following the suddenly desperate mutant as she sped through the kitchen, the hallway, and pulled up short in the foyer.

Standing hollow of the wide-open door, his hands aflame, was Pyro.

~**~

“Bets?”

She flew across the scant distance separating them, avoiding the fire in his hands so she could throw her arms around him. John held her close, snuffing out the flames. His heart was beating wildly, mind spinning as he searched for her thought to join his.
What are you doing? He asked in the silence of her mind.

Saving you. Saving us. She replied without speaking.

He knows, Bets. I think he knows.

He does. But I don’t care. If we move swiftly…

Do you know where it is?

Yes.

~**~

Hours later, when the mansion was winding down from a turbulent day, Logan stood on the balcony outside the bedroom he shared with his fiancée. Hands draped over the stone railing, he stared aimlessly into the darkness, as though sheer will would bring him the answers he so desired.

Guilt gnawed at his innards, hit gut roiling as everything he’d missed in the last weeks came crashing down around his ears.

Why? Why did he just assume Rogue was fine? So caught up in babies and ‘Ro was he that the first person to actually care whether he lived or died slipped through his fingers. Warning signals overlooked now stared back at him with the effect of neon in a well.

Marie never met his eyes anymore. She muttered excuses and vanished whenever he entered a room. She was distant, evasive, so completely alien that Logan wondered if he even knew her any longer. Could losing a boyfriend do that? Did something more sinister linger under the surface of someone he believed completely without guile?

Her betrayal of the X-Men was nothing on what Logan felt she inflicted upon him personally. She was encouraging someone to murder his unborn son. What kind of twisted mind could do such a thing?

Logan shifted against the railing, swallowing over the lump of emotion suddenly lodged in his throat. There was enough blame to go around, he mused. His personal life thrust Rogue away, leaving her to feel adrift and alone. This was his goddamn fault.

“It doesn’t do any good.”

Startled that someone had managed to sneak up on him, Logan cast an irritated glance to the slanted roofing above him.

Shard was perched on the edge of the roof, her short blonde hair dancing in the light summer breeze. Her eyes glowed in what moonlight shone through thick clouds, one brow cocked in a mirror expression of her future mother.

“You move quiet,” he replied shortly.

The girl grinned hugely. “You forgetting who my father is?”
Logan fought the smirk that overcame his trademark scowl as his would-be daughter flipped her long body from the roof. She landed with cat-like grace on the stone railing, completely confident that the twelve-inch space would provide adequate footing.

With one hand between bent knees for balance, Shard looked back at her father. Logan met her gaze, finding his daughter's eyes filled with the same serene wisdom that her mother was famous for. Though she was more like him in temperament, Ororo had imprinted herself on the young woman before him.

There was something infinitely comforting in that realization.

The silence stretched between them, as though neither knew exactly what to say. She sought him out, Logan thought, as their eyes remained locked. It still seemed surreal that he was standing beside a daughter yet to be conceived. He was privy to an impossible gift. All through her life, whenever she appeared, he would carry the image of his strong, beautiful child as a woman. He would know, without a doubt, that he did the best he could do for her.

Perhaps that was the reason he was so set for Psylocke’s utterly stupid plan. The violet-eyed telepath told the X-Men that she lifted the location of Magneto’s cure stockpile from his mind. They were to leave in the morning, several X-Men strong, to destroy it before he could destroy them.

To give his children a chance at a better life, one free of tyranny and war, he would give his soul. His eyes darted over the burned-black M scarring her lovely face and rage licked at his belly. No one would touch his child that way, or anyone else’s. If he could change that fate, alter the future, then it was the least he could do.

Shard smiled faintly, turning on her perch to stare out at the grounds. Her lips twitched as her expression melted into something akin to longing.

“When I was a little girl,” she began quietly, her gaze traveling the expanse of the Great Lawn. “You told me stories of this place. Every night before I went to sleep, you would hold me close and tell me fairy-tales of the X-Men and their beautiful mansion.”

Reminded of Bishop’s admission to Logan of them playing baseball, he had to take a deep breath to keep his suddenly rampant emotions in check. His daughter continued, unhindered by her father’s silence.

“I never believed you,” Shard admitted softly. “I thought you’d made it up. Until right now, I didn’t dare believe that there was a world free of mortar shells and explosions.”

“Don’t blame you,” he said at last.

Her smile widened for a heartbeat, but she kept her eyes on the Lawn. Logan wondered if she was capturing it in her mind, her fairy-tale come to life.

“It’s so quiet.” Glowing eyes drifted shut and a look of contentment crossed her lovely face. “How can a place be so quiet? It’s unreal.”

“I thought so, too,” Logan offered, staring out at the Lawn with her. “First time I came here, I thought it was just a dream. Nothing could be so pure, so damn good by accident.”

Shard chuckled, the sound carried away on the wind that reminded him of her mother. “You know,
Mama’s right. We are just alike.”

The pride in her voice made Logan’s shoulder’s straighten. “Sorry about that.”

“Nah,” Shard shrugged, opening her eyes. “I like me.”

They lapsed into silence again, this time much more comfortable. Logan wondered how many times he would talk to her like this. No pretenses, no bullshit, just a man with his kid, sharing the cool night breeze. Logan felt he could definitely get used to it.

“Daddy,” she said, the single word making his heart trip. “It’s not your fault. About Rogue.”

Scowling once more, he turned his eyes to the Lawn. “You know that, eh?”

Shard shrugged again, shifting on her precarious perch. “She’s confused and she’s hurt. What she never wanted to admit was the look she got in Lensherr’s mind when he tried to kill her appealed to her. She wants the kind of power he offered. Loyalty to the X-Men, to Bobby was only going to keep her in check for so long.”

Though part of him knew Shard had no reason to lie, his mind rebelled. Marie wasn’t inherently bad. He couldn’t believe that.

He could feel her eyes on him, the weight of her probing stare sending the fine hairs on the back of his neck to attention. Yeah, she definitely took lessons from her mother while she got all that stealth training.

“I should have protected her.”

Shard nodded sharply. “Maybe. Or maybe things are exactly the way they should be.”

Logan swung his face around, immediately catching the glowing gaze so achingly familiar.

“How can you say that?” He demanded hotly, grasping her arm. “She’s not like him, Elizabeth.”

She held his gaze, unwavering, fearlessly. “I wasn’t trained for this like Luke. I call it like I see it. She’s a kid, Daddy, but she made her choice.”

Reminded, painfully, of the day Ororo confronted him in his bedroom, he released Lizzie’s arm. Shaking his head, he dropped his hands back to the railing, fingers grasping the edge as though to steady himself. Shard went back to her contemplation of him, her gaze hot and heavy as he tried to avoid it.

“Daddy,” she tried again, tilting her head to study him further. “This isn’t your fault. Guilt won’t solve anything.”

“I have to save her,” he said, surprised by the admission. “I can’t…”

“Fine.” Shard’s voice was immediately hard as diamonds and sharper than a blade. “Then I’ll cease to exist. So will Luke, and mother. Who the hell knows how many others!”

“You can’t predict the future!” He roared, pushing away from the railing and turning his back on her.
“No, I can’t. I can only tell you what decades of research told me. Rogue doesn’t want to be saved.”

Thrusting a hand into his unruly hair, Logan took several seconds to simply breathe. It didn’t matter how much he loved his family… or would come to. He’d promised Rogue, swore to protect her. The overwhelming guilt that he let her down crushed his heart.

“I came back to save my brother.” His daughter continued unrelentingly. “He came back to save his family. Can’t you understand that we wouldn’t do anything – not one damn thing – to put that in jeopardy?”

“You came back to stop a war, fuck the consequences.” He countered quietly.

“Yeah, that’s what we told ‘em. That’s what we said.” Shard sighed, then swallowed audibly. “We lied. Bishop came back for you, for Mama. No more, no less.”

Logan slowly turned back to face her. Still crouched on the railing, she was like some Amazon princess come to right wrongs and serve justice. Blonde locks floated about her face, caught on the sweet breeze. Glowing eyes reflected determination and longing. Her stance was all primal instinct.

Could he turn away from his own child? Logan didn’t think he had the strength for this.

“A great man once told me that sacrifices are necessary, that they happen every day. That doesn’t mean they can’t suck serious balls.”

Amused, though he tried to deny it, Logan snorted. “Who the fuck told you that?”

Shard smirked, one of her light brows arching delicately. “You did. Duh.”

He paused, mind still churning over everything she’d said, everything he was feeling. The click of the inside door told him Ororo had finally come to bed. Shard smiled softly, nodding her head toward the bedroom.

“Go on.”

Logan met his daughter’s gaze once more and could not help but ask one, simple question.

“Am I a good father?”

Lizzie blinked at him, then exhaled shakily, as though fighting tears. “If you weren’t, why would Luke and I be fighting so fucking hard for you?”

Before he could respond, Shard pushed off from the railing and leapt onto the roof. He watched her go, listening to the barely-detectable footsteps as they retreated above. That was one hell of a kid, he decided as Ororo poked her head onto the balcony.

“What are you doing out here?” His wife-to-be asked, coming up behind him.

Logan shrugged one shoulder, finally dropping his gaze to meet hers. No matter what they shared,
something about his talk with Shard seemed too personal to repeat. He wanted that moment, that memory for his own.

“Nothin’, darlin’. Nothin’ at all.”
Chapter Summary

The X-Men brace for the mission that could change everything.

Piotr gladly considered himself a patient man. Granted, he possessed a formidable temper, one that flashed and boiled before simmering. Careful control enhanced by the knowledge that his mutant gift could harm a loved one often misled those around him. Stoic, they called him, unmoved.

He easily managed to hold himself in check when Storm, Wolverine, and their future offspring announced that the X-Men were providing sanctuary to Magneto’s betrayers. Pyro’s once hard, unyielding eyes became once again familiar at one glance. He, Piotr noticed immediately, regarded the violet-haired telepath the same way Piotr watched Alison.

There would not be forgiveness, not just yet. But there was, to his great surprise and pleasure, an understanding.

Alison’s temper, on the other hand, ruptured like Vesuvius.

Before she could unleash her volatile and rarely suppressed temper on the uncanny duo, Piotr neatly scooped her slender body into his arms and carried her upstairs. She fought. She kicked. She screamed in Russian, Czech, and English, but never once actually attempted to harm the man who loved her.

Once they were alone, locked in the solace of his bedroom, he released her. Ali instantly bolted for the door, which he blocked with his much-larger body.

“Move,” she demanded frostily.

“I’m bigger,” he replied softly. “Don’t make me tie you to the bed.”

As a mark of how seriously she was taking this turn of events, Ali did not even smirk at his comment. She often teased him about that particular sexual adventure and her unwillingness to pursue it under the circumstances was understandable.

So now, roughly four hours later, Piotr was patiently letting her stew. Occasionally, his beloved siren would break her silence to rant. He appreciated her swearing and open annoyance much more than the uncommon quiet. Ali was not one to hold her tongue, so he hated when she felt the need to.

When she was ready, he thought while keeping both eyes on her, Ali would talk to him. While he waited, Piotr contented himself with working on several sketches between bouts of Ali’s towering rage.

Irresistibly cute and unusually beautiful, his young lover was damn appealing while she pouted. Sulking in the center of his bed, she toyed with the frayed hem of her skirt, lips pursed together until he wanted to take that moping mouth with his own. He sketched her idly from the chair he stationed
by the door. The curve of her cheek, the long, unbroken line of her nose, that lush bottom lip she painted with sheer gloss...his heart tripped at the sight. How could he have thought this kind of loving, of wanting, was only found in fairytales? There it was, his heart screamed, sitting moodily on his bed.

Charcoal swept over parchment, his eyes never leaving the intense study of Alison’s profile. He moved down to capture the way her chin rested in her palm, her feminine fingers curling slightly over the swell of her jaw.

“I can’t stand this,” she whispered quietly.

Taking his cue without missing a beat, as though it were instinct, Piotr nodded. “I know.”

“He tried to kill you,” Ali continued without looking up. “He damn near killed me, but the almost killing you thing pisses me off way more.”

His hand never paused, never stuttered, while she spoke. That tone clenched his already bruised heart, hating the melancholy and simmering anger that leaked through it. Piotr tilted his head, his hand shifting to recreate the tattoo on her left forearm.

“What’s done is done, my love,” he answered gently. “Would you have altered it?”

“Meaning?” She shot at him, temper rising once more.

“Your foolish leap in front of me saved my life, yes.” Piotr whispered, his heart in his throat. “In turn, it led me to you. Had Pyro not attempted to murder me, would we be here? Would you love me as you do? Would I love you in return?”

Ali’s sea green eyes drifted shut, her chin dimpling with emotion. Piotr frowned slightly, setting his sketchpad and charcoal on the floor before crossing to her. She did not recoil this time, instead welcoming the hand he placed on her shoulder. Finally, the guard was down and she would allow him to comfort, to be comforted.

“Well?” Piotr demanded, meeting her gaze when her eyes drifted open once more.

“I don’t know,” Ali admitted, reaching up to cup his cheek. “I hate it when you get all wise on me.”

Piotr smiled, kissing her lips quickly. Climbing into the bed with her, he slipped around, drawing her tiny form onto his lap. Arms encircled her, making those hands he’d just admired from afar rest on his forearms. He dipped his head, resting it on the curve of her bare shoulder.

“Our lives are never easy,” he went on in a low tone. “We must, at times, do things, deal with people we would rather not.”

“If you’re saying we should just kiss and make up, I’ll singe you.”

Smiling into her skin, he placed a gentle kiss to that shoulder, inhaling the scent of vanilla from her flesh. “No. But I am saying that, perhaps, we should give them a chance.”

She snorted. “Like Lockie stands a chance. I already handed her ass to her.”

“Admirably,” Piotr agreed. “They are not the enemy here. Time is. Perhaps we have the chance now
to end Magneto’s reign, to change the course of the future.”

“We already did that,” Ali whispered, her hand drifting to the scar on her chest. Heart clenching, the memory of her body thrust against the wall by Pyro’s flaming projectile racing through his mind, he covered that hand with his.

“Yes, we have. For the better.” With a mental sigh, he realized he truly believed that now. “We have a chance to ensure he harms no others. I want that.”

Her breath caught in her throat as Piotr kissed her shoulder once more before speaking against her ear. “I want no war in our future.”

Ali turned her head, meeting his eyes as her own glistened. She sniffled, the tip of her long nose slightly pink with emotion. “We have one? As an us?”

Piotr pressed his lips to the tip of her nose, then her mouth, then placed his forehead against hers. Oh, how easy it was to be with Dazzler. Her life, her brilliant light, was something he never knew he was missing. Just the thought of a life without it ached. He wanted her, he loved her, and by God, he would live whatever of his days remained with her at his side.

“Yes,” he answered simply. “Our future. You will make millions in music and I will sit at home with the children and a feather duster.”

That brought laughter to Ali’s eyes for the first time in hours, even as her mouth curved into a grin. “A feather duster? Will you have an apron, too?”

“Of course.” Piotr turned her in his arms, forcing her to straddle his thighs. Her arms draped over his shoulders and his heart seemed content to stay just like this, until the end of the world.

“How many kids?” She asked curiously while settling. “Two?”

He mimed thinking of his answer, enjoying the playfulness so ingrained in this young woman. “I was thinking five…perhaps a half-dozen.”

Ali threw her head back, laughing. “Comrade, if I’m making millions, I’ve got to keep the body somewhat in tact.”

He sighed dramatically. “All right. I will settle for four.”

“Mmm,” Ali hummed, pressing her mouth against his. “Deal.”

Their kiss did not lack passion, but let it smolder and simmer beneath an unexpected layer of sweetness. Hands roamed innocently with the familiarity of intimacy, their embrace comfortable rather than desperate. He sampled her mouth as though there was nothing he would rather do. She explored his slowly, as though mapping it in her mind.

When they parted, he cupped her cheeks, brushing each thumb over delicate bone and silken flesh. Her eyes searched his, the underlying fear wrenching his heart further.

“Tomorrow,” she began haltingly. “Promise me, Piotr.”
“Anything.” He answered without hesitation. For her, he would do anything.

“Promise you won’t do anything stupidly noble.” Her voice quivered. He held her more tightly. “Promise we’ll both come home.”

Piotr knew the dangers. Psylocke’s insane plan was likely to cause irreparable damage, to both the X-Men and the Brotherhood. Nothing could be certain, especially when trusting a former enemy. It was too easy to realize some of his friends might never return.

But he clung to hope, to that simple virtue she taught him in the space of weeks.

“I promise.”

Ali sniffled once more, leaning forward to envelop him in familiar arms. Piotr hugged her as tightly as he dared, burying his face in her long hair. She trembled slightly, with fear, with knowledge, and distantly he realized he did the same.

Neither spoke, content to merely hold on as the hours toward dawn ticked by.

~**~

Not far down the hall, Kitty relaxed beside Bobby in the soft silver moonlight. Their post-coital haze wrapped them in a world where no other existed. That wonderful, elated first flush of new love was stolen from them, but they could find solace in one another.

Their breathing regulated as they clung to each other in the darkness. Naked bodies were sticky with sweat, their desperate lovemaking now fading into companionable quiet. She absently drew circles on his arm as she stared at the ceiling, wondering what the morning would bring to her exceptional family.

Bobby came to her room after the X-Men’s meeting, his eyes haunted and emotions raw. Kitty said nothing, pulling him into her arms so they could soothe that rawness in them both with intimacy and love. Their guilt weighed heavily, but like a derailed freight train, passion seemed impossible to stop.

“I should feel like an asshole,” he whispered, breaking the silence. “But I don’t. That just makes me feel worse.”

“You couldn’t have stopped her,” she replied gently. “She had a choice, like all of us.”

“I know.” Bobby shifted, pulled, until Kitty was held tight into the curve of his arm. “I love you, Kitty. I really do.”

Overcome, she exhaled a shaky breath into his chest. His hands flattened against her back while hers smoothed over his hairless chest. Feeling his slowing heartbeat against hers, Kitty sighed in part contentment, part anticipation. Everything would change with the attack tomorrow.

All their lives as X-Men prepared the young members for a battle such as this. Even Alcatraz seemed to pale in comparison. It was no fly-by-night operation, a frantic fray to halt hateful mutants, but a strategic advance, a first strike against their enemies. Bishop, Shard, Wolverine, and Storm pounded out a strategy with the help of Psylocke and Pyro. They would hit fast, hard, and without any warning. Magneto knew by now that his cohorts betrayed him…did he have time to calculate their attack?
So many variables floated through Kitty’s mathematical mind that she could no longer make sense of it all. Bishop’s arrival threw her sense of the world into chaos. How many variables could she plug into that x factor?

Did Magneto expect their attack? Was Psylocke’s stolen information correct? Was the unlikely duo really on their side? Did Rogue tell her new ally everything about her former family? What do the lives Bishop saved – Ali, Pete, Jimmy – mean to the timeline?

For once in her young life, logic failed her. Kitty couldn’t see all the possible outcomes. Fear was alive inside of her, an uninvited passenger as she attempted to sort out scattered thoughts. They’d nearly lost the rescued trio once…should they risk it again? What if all their meddling made things worse?

“Wow,” Bobby said with a small laugh. “I can almost see those insane thoughts going on in your head.”

Kitty pinched his pectorals lightly. “Lots on my mind.”

“I can see that. Your eyes get all wide and her nose scrunches up.” He made a silly face, backing it up with a childlike tone. “You’re so cute.”

“Oh, shut up,” she countered on a chuckle. “I am not.”

“Yes, you are,” Bobby disagreed in a normal tone. “Cute, silly, sexy.”

“Ok,” she nodded with a grin. “Keep going.”


Kitty was purring under Bobby’s gentle, relaxing touches. She could forget everything when he turned his attention on her. The clutter in her mind – a constant companion – flew out that proverbial window under her lover’s easy affection. It wasn’t a simple feat to make Kitty stop thinking. Bobby did it every time he touched her.

“You drive me crazy.” His voice was husky now, a desperate whisper. Ah, she thought proudly, he’d gotten his second wind. Score.

Kitty phased out of his embrace, letting him fall back against the pillows with a laugh. She reappeared on top of him, turning laughter into a long, aching groan.

“That’s the plan.”

He chuckled again and was still laughing as he slipped inside her.

~**~

A floor above, Wolverine stepped into his bedroom, bringing Ororo in behind him by tugging on their joined hands. She followed quietly, wondering to whom he’d been speaking when she came into the room. The dull murmur of voices told her it was a woman on the balcony. Concluding that the hope in his eyes could only come from one of their children, Ororo decided he had spoken with Shard.
Pleased at this, she stopped to turn him around. Logan faced her, his gruff features wild and rugged in the dim light of their bedroom. Her hands laced loosely with his, a gentle tether between them that was a physical manifestation of their bond. Love swelled in her chest, heightened by the fear of what morning would bring.

He wouldn’t ask her to stay behind. Did he understand that no force on earth could keep her from protecting her family? That maternal instinct already in gear with the onset of pregnancy refused to remain safe when those she loved marched to battle? Or was he confident of their victory? How could he know her, them, so well already?

It was her name he whispered to break the silence. A murmur, a heartbeat, which in an instant reminded her why she loved him. Logan loved with everything, holding nothing back. He could be hurt because of that limitless heart and she vowed to treat it as the precious thing that was.

Hard, calloused hands came up to cup her face. Bottomless ebony eyes searched hers, his touch infinitely gentle, wholly consuming. Ororo fought for breath as this man stole it away again, leaving her filled with him.

They came together slowly, mindful of all that would come to a head in the dawn hours. It might be the dumbest thing she ever agreed to or the wisest. Only time would tell.

He undressed her in stages, in layers, letting every barrier between them fall to the floor. They never moved from their place by the bed, eyes locked together as the world fell away. Here, in this place, in this moment, there was only them. Life grew in her belly; love blossomed in her heart. Logan’s hands on her skin became reality, everything else an otherworldly dream.

Only when they were both bare, when nothing stood between them, did he kiss her. Lips were tender, though his kiss hinted of passion, of lust, of love. She wanted everything, all of him, until the world came down around their ears.

Together, wrapped in one another, they fell onto the bed. Her heavy lids fluttered closed as Logan pressed warm, wet kisses to her throat, teeth scraping over the pulse-point. Her hands grasped at his shoulders, trying to find balance before she let go.

Mentally she made promises he might never hear. Unaware that he did the same, she vowed he would stay with her. Nothing would part them, not the malevolence of Magneto, not the decay of time. She would remain with him, with the man she loved to distraction. True love. Ororo never believed in it until the moment her heart took residence in the Wolverine.

Damp skin melded together, shifting and sliding as Logan and Ororo gave their bodies up to boundless pleasure. His hands slipped over her, mapping, remembering. He intimately knew every curve of her, every rise and swell. Even with the knowledge that he could recognize every inch of her in pitch darkness, he touched every inch again. She returned his ardent attentions with the same intensity, the same tenderness.

Their mouths met again, heated passion licking to life inside her, overwhelmed by the consuming warmth. It seemed to Ororo that she waited the whole of her life for this moment, for a time when she and the man she loved would find nothing but one another. He took his fill of her, then came back for more. She feasted on him, on the uninhibited love flowing between them.

He took her quietly, sliding inside so that she gasped with it. Sensation overcame thought and time,
each new pleasure washing over the next as though waves on a shore. Their hands sought one another, fisting together on the pillows. Ororo gave herself up to it, surrendering as she could never recall doing before. Logan’s face, contorted and beautiful with pleasure and love, hovered above hers. He took her mouth again and again as their hips met with agonizing, languorous strokes.

No words passed between them, both content to say everything that needed saying through their entwined bodies. Thought hazed and the world grayed, ragged breathing mingling with the gentle groan of bedsprings. Logan held her more tightly, his every breath a plea.

_I won’t let go. I’m never letting go._

Was it her chant or his? Oh, God, did it matter?

Heart filled, body tensed, Ororo gasped his name as Logan pushed them both over the edge and into delirium.

_~*~*

She slept like an angel. Every curve of her was soft with sleep. Her hair lay in wild disarray against down-filled pillows. Her hands rested on the sheets, fingers curled slightly as though trying to hold on to her dreams.

John watched her carefully, unable to believe she was in the room he once shared with Bobby. They were here, in the home of the enemy, betraying someone they both thought they would follow into the very depths of hell.

It was for her. John knew that. He wouldn’t have come here for protection if not for the beautiful telepath at his side. She was worth it, he thought as a lone fingertip stroked the swell of her cheek. Worth fighting, dying, lying for. What else was there?

Battle loomed on the horizon, an end to everything that threatened their lives. He did not fear Magneto or combat or death. But Pyro found himself terrified that Psylocke might be hurt in the crossfire. She wouldn’t stay behind, no matter how he wanted her safe.

A warrior at heart. He had to accept that or get the hell out of her life.

Her violet eyes blinked open, a soft, entreatin hum leaving that perfect mouth. Her gaze was clouded with sleep, but she smiled at the sight of him. As though in invitation, she shifted closer, one hand reaching for his.

John couldn’t help but entwine those long fingers with his, smiling at her in the moonlight. Understanding filled those bewitching eyes and she tugged him closer. He leaned over without protest, inhaling the subtle scent of exotic flowers that seemed to cling to her soft flesh.

“John.”

“Betsy.”

Her head remained on the pillow, her posture relaxed. “We’ll be fine.”

He wanted nothing more than to believe her. “Will we?”
Betsy propped up on one elbow, placing her face just inches below his. Tilting his head, John kissed her gently, giving in to the contented sigh when her mind brushed his. He felt the love there, the ache he brought to life. Her brief “kiss” showed him everything she felt for him. It was devastating in the best of ways.

How could another human being feel that for him?

“You are so filled with doubt,” she whispered in that clipped accent. “Have I not gained your trust?”

Alarmed so quickly by that thought, John slid down under the bedspread. His free hand sought the swell of her hip and settled there. It was a possessive move, one designed to tell her without words that she belonged to him and no other.

“I trust you,” he answered honestly. “I’m just a little…”

When he trailed off, she smiled softly. “Besieged?”

“Good word.” John touched her nose with his. “What I feel for you terrifies me, honey.”

Betsy exhaled slowly, her hand tightening on his. Her head fell back, inertia bringing him down until he was lying beside her. Their legs immediately locked together, one of hers draped almost casually over his. Intimate. It was an intimate gesture.

“It’s not real if it’s not terrifying, so pardon me for being thrilled.” She winked slyly. “I feel the same way, but that fear is cushioned by the knowledge that I do, in fact, love your skinny, irritating arse.”

Delighted by her playfulness, John pinched her appealing backside. “Huh. I think I love your sarcastic, anal-retentive ass.”

Betsy laughed, the silvery, carefree sound soothing the nerves he hadn’t known went so deep. When she let loose, was free to just be herself, Betsy had some silly tendencies. He found that side absolutely irresistible. While under Magneto’s boot heel, he required his telepath to glimpse diseased minds, to sink into depravity. He very nearly erased that warmth, but Pyro fully intended to nurture it into complete recovery.

“Have you decided?” Her tone shifted to serious. “Where we will go?”

Looking into those deep eyes, John contemplated his answer carefully. There wasn’t a place for them with the X-Men and he knew neither wanted one. When the Brotherhood broke and the dust settled, Pyro and Psylocke would be on their own. The thought was daunting, saturated with the knowledge that they were responsible for one another. No fearless leaders to answer to, no friends to lean on… just them.

He didn’t want it any other way.

“Abroad,” he answered quietly. “Any place you’re dying to see?”

Her eyes reflected thoughtfulness, long fingers clutching his tightly. An anchor, he mused as he squeezed the delicate hand. They anchored one another.

“Africa,” Betsy decided, rewarding him with a beautiful smile. “South Africa, specifically. I want to disappear into teeming broods and unchecked wild.”
Turning this over in his head, John decided he didn’t give a damn where they were or what they did, so long as they remained together.

“We’ll book a flight for Johannesburg in the morning.”

“You’re easy,” his companion teased. “I could have said “The dark side of the moon” and you would be developing a plan for hijacking the next launch.”

Amused that she knew him that well, John shrugged. “I don’t mind adventure, especially if you’re with me.”

Psylocke, hardened warrior, mutant fighter, and all-around badass, went gooey. He grinned, seeing the tenderness flood her eyes, the slight tremble to her smile. It wasn’t easy to make a woman like her melt, and his ego flexed mightily at the simple fact that he could.

“You murder me with things like that.”

“I had to keep you somehow.”

She hit him with a pillow, making her lover laugh so that it rolled through the darkness. He took up his own weapon, smacking her directly in the face. War was declared at this and while the others slept, Betsy and John destroyed one another with cotton and down.

That memory would take them both into battle.

~**~

Dawn was breaking over the grounds when Bishop awoke. He dressed in complete silence, checking the plasma rifle he habitually carried to ensure it was in working order. His braided hair was bound at his nape with a twist of old leather. It wouldn’t do to have the long plaits flying into his face at a crucial moment.

Boots that were scarred with battle and wear covered his feet, his warrior’s melancholy drifted in and out of his consciousness while he prepared. Everything he worked so hard to achieve for most of his life would come to a head in just hours. There would be victory or defeat, either way, his work was coming to an end.

If they succeeded, he and Shard would cease to exist. That thought didn’t bother him as much as he assumed it would. His lack of existence meant the reality altered. Success. His sacrifices and labor might herald a new era for man and mutant alike.

His sister would taste ice cream. They would play together in sunlight without fear. He would live his life without the scars of war.

As though thinking her name summoned her from mist, Shard entered his bedroom on silent feet. She smiled, her eyes already consumed with the call to battle. His little sister, his constant companion, reached for his hand as swirls of pink stained the lightenig sky.

“You ready?”
Bishop nodded. “I’ve been ready for a long time.”

Lizzie grinned, tilting her head to study him without qualm. Her eyes glowed about the edges, a signature that she carried over from their beloved mother. Fingers threaded together, holding on as tightly as either dared. There was never shame here, never the stigma others might place on so intimate a kinship.

“I’m looking forward to remembering ice cream,” Lizzie admitted.

“So am I.”

“Luke.” Sister embraced brother, holding him to her fiercely because it was allowed, welcomed.

His arms encircled her, clinging to the little girl turned woman in his arms. Luke remembered, with eerie clarity, the day of her birth. He’d kissed her tiny, squished head, welcoming her to the world because she would be his and his alone.

He taught her how to punch when she was three. That little, beautiful face screwed into such concentration that he’d laughed. She had tackled him, whooping his larger, ten-year-old butt with an efficiency that declared her a Munroe.

Fate gave him this chance to fight at her side one last time. When they said goodbye to this realm, when they moved on, it would be together. Nothing could be more fitting, more perfect than that.

“Liz,” Lucas swallowed hard over the emotion in his throat. “Just get through this day. One more day.”

“That’s all we ever do,” she whispered into the quiet. “One day at a time.”

Even as the others woke and their mother barked over the intercom for her future children to join the X-Men, they held on.

Just a little longer.
The X-Men confront Magneto's forces, including Rogue, and Logan is forced to make a bold move.

He shifted in the leathers covering his body, mind drawn back to the first time he wore them. Cyclops tossed the too-small suit angrily, obviously peeved at being overruled. The uniform chafed at his skin, metal plates stitched inside making movement difficult. And yet, there was something soothing about donning that signature black marked with an embellished “X”.

A symbol, he thought, catching his reflection in the mirror. The X-Men uniform symbolized everything they were. Logan wondered at this revelation, looking into the reflection until he saw Ororo in the mirror.

She smoothed the leathers over her body, hands pausing to flatten over her belly. Logan’s gut clenched, knowing she thought of the child snuggled inside. Lucas was just down the hall, but here in this room at the same time. Another symbol, a bright, shining light at the end of a long, dark tunnel. His son, their son.

Hell, he didn’t want her to go. In a perfect world where his woman did what he asked, he’d have immediately parked her butt on the sofa while he trotted off to battle. They risked putting unborn Lucas into battle, erasing him from any and all timelines. But how could he ask her to mind the store? She had just as much stake in this as everyone else.

She came up behind him, wrapping leather-covered arms around his torso. Logan closed his eyes, inhaling the scent of her as gloved hands came up to grasp her arms. Storm smiled into his shoulder, fitting that familiar body against his as though the motion was pure instinct.

“We should gather the others.”

Logan nodded, turning his head. When his eyes opened, they met hers, locking immediately onto the deep chocolate irises.

“You ready for this?”

Her smile never faltered. “Going head to head with an insane Magneto? How can anyone be ready for that?”

Grunting his agreement, Logan turned slightly until he could place his hand over their unborn son. Hers covered his, completing the odd circle that was their budding family.

“He’s got two plates of metal that makes Kevlar look like aluminum between the bad guys and him. Not to mention one invincible daddy and a pretty powerful mommy. He’ll be fine.”

“Famous last words.” Logan kissed her quickly, soothing the fear in both of them.

“Be careful.” She whispered, leaning up to wrap him into her embrace, cape and all. Logan pulled her close, held on tightly.
“Back at ya, darlin’.”

With that, Ororo released him, turned, and strode from the bedroom in all her glory. He followed suit, falling in step behind her as they marched determinedly down the hall.

Two doors popped open, as though following some preordained script. Shadowcat and Iceman, similarly garbed, fell in behind Wolverine and Storm. Dazzler and Colossus stepped up beside their friends, moving just as quietly.

As they reached the stairs, lavender-clothed Psylocke and street-garbed Pyro stared at the assembled mutants with something like awe. Logan’s ears pricked up when Pyro spoke.

“Hang on, Bets.” He said to his companion. “I want to watch the superhero entrance.”

Snorting to himself, Logan glanced over his shoulder. Ok, he could see where Pyro got the idea from. They did look like something out of a superhero movie. A group of leather-clad mutants flanking the undisputed leader, ready to march into battle come hell or high water.

If he could slow it down, it would be something out of that Justice League movie Bobby was addicted to. The thought made Logan grin.

“Excuse me.”

Startled when Dazzler broke formation and nudged him, Logan turned to her. The slim blonde, however, was moving past him, slipping through the meager space between body and wood. Colossus swore under his breath as she clenched gloved fists, her face utterly calm. Logan realized what was happening a beat too late.

Standing toe to toe with Pyro – Logan grinned when Psylocke flinched slightly – the blonde singer drew back a fist and solidly decked their new ally.

“That’s for scaring Jim-bo!”

Her opposite hand flew out in a powerful left jab. Pyro’s already-bleeding face snapped to the side so hard, Logan thought he heard a crack of bone.

“That’s for trying to kill Mother Russia!”

She grabbed at his jacket, yanked him forward and brought her knee up sharply. The body-weapon struck true, hitting Pyro directly in the sternum. Wind rushed from the boy’s lungs in an ungraceful whoosh. His face turned the color of a ripe tomato and Dazzler leaned forward under the weight of his body.

“And that’s for me.”

Bobby and Kitty clapped at the display. Colossus shook his head, though Wolverine could see the grin threatening to overtake his face. Dazzler tossed Pyro aside as though he were nothing, wiping her gloved palms on the pants of her suit.

She flipped a lock of gold over her shoulder, grinning at the others. “Ok, now I’m ready.”

Wolverine regarded her for a moment, then glanced to Storm. His fiancée had an elegant brow arched, and amusement toying at her unpainted lips.

“All right. Lets go.”
They ate an early breakfast when Bishop and Shard appeared from the rooms above, but no one really tasted it. Most of the children were not awake yet; Angel and Jimmy were given instructions. No one wanted to tell the angelic mutant and his friend that one or more might not come home.

Somehow, they didn’t have to. The sorrow and fear were naked in Warren’s eyes. He clasped hands with each male, embraced every female. He walked them to the Blackbird, waited until the hangar doors closed.

As a unit, even with the addition of Psylocke and Pyro, they filed into the jet. Everyone strapped in as Storm took the pilot’s seat with Wolverine seated beside her. Normal seating rules were suspended and Ororo did not comment as everyone selected their partner.

Bishop and Shard were behind their mother, with Shadowcat and Iceman beside them. Dazzler and Colossus took their place in the rear, keeping watchful eyes on Pyro and Psylocke. Storm tried to fight a grin at John’s bandaged nose, but thanked Dazzler silently for not taking out more on him. Three swift blows were enough to get her point across, without using her mutation or real combat training.

On a rumble, the Blackbird’s engine started. Above, the basketball court vanished, leaving a gaping hole in its place. With technology similar to the military’s Harriers, the jet rose directly into the air, clearing the hole in seconds.

“Hold on.”

Logan grunted beside her, tightening his harness. Aware that the man she loved hated flying, she tipped the nose of the jet up gradually, easing up the engines until they screamed and the Blackbird was quickly slicing through the air. They left behind the mansion, banning together because out in the world, they were warriors.

After leveling the plane off, Ororo pointed it toward the coordinates provided by their newest allies. She looked over her shoulder again, nodding to Psylocke as the girl arched a brow in question. Yes, Storm trusted her information. What choice did they have? Sure, they could wait until Magneto attacked again, but at what cost?

Exhaling quickly, she addressed them all. “Stay strapped in. I don’t need one of you getting hurt now.”

“Mama? Any chance at an airsickness bag?” Shard asked, her color distinctly green.

“Head between legs, Lizzie.” Logan replied as he unsnapped his harness. “I’ll get one.”

Shard dropped her head between her knees, Luke calmly whispering to her soothingly. While her father rushed into the back of the cabin, Shard groaned with dismay. Amused by the display, though she tried to hide it, Storm watched her children carefully. Of course, it shouldn’t be so surprising. Logan hated to fly and quickly developed nausea if she attempted to use evasive maneuvers. Obviously more than good looks trickled down in their genes.

“Don’t you fly?” Bobby asked curiously as Logan returned with several bags.

“Yes,” Shard replied carefully. “But I’m in control and its not really flying so much as swimming.”

“If she hurls,” Dazzler chirped from behind them. “I won’t be far behind.”
Colossus handed her the laptop and an iPod, shushing her quietly. Storm glanced at her flock and grinned before turning to the controls. They were an odd bunch, one she couldn’t help but love with everything she had. Once Charles’ dream seemed impossible to reach. She told him, years ago, that if they took on the mantle of mutant freedom fighters, their lives would meld into one battle after another.

He sought patience, she recalled. How would they ever enjoy freedom, she asked, if things like love and family were to take a backseat to battle?

Storm looked to Wolverine as he slid back into his co-pilot’s seat. In some way, she thought, Charles was right. Patience provided the means to help build a better world. Bishop, her darling son, reared under his parents’ teachings breathed that dream. A better world. For everyone in it.

“Did I just see you put the Backstreet Boys on your iPod?”

Piotr was laughing. A hard smack leather on leather said Alison had whacked him for the comment.

“Oh, shut up,” the singer replied testily. “The beats are a constant….”

Everyone fell immediately silent. The Blackbird’s alarms were screaming. Ororo grasped the joystick and rolled the plane without comment. She didn’t know what was coming or even if it happened to be dangerous. Knee jerk reaction demanded she protect. End of commentary.

“Ts Erik!”

Psylocke’s shout was drowned out by the whine of engines, the clamor of mutants to hold on while Storm rolled the jet expertly. Shard busily vomited into the airsick bag, with Bishop swearing under his breath. Kitty accidentally phased, but the hand clinging to Bobby’s kept her centered enough to come directly back.

“Where is he?” Storm demanded as the jet stuttered.

“I can’t shut him down,” Psylocke replied. “But…just there, behind us.”

“Pyro?” Their leader asked sharply, leveling the plane off.

“There’s not enough oxygen this high,” came the winded reply. “The flame’ll just fizzle.”

“But light won’t!” Ali cried, unbuckling her harness. “Piotr, come with me.”

“What are you doing?” Logan demanded, struggling to see over his shoulder as the jet rolled again. “Sit down!”

“Later!” Alison shot back. She punched a gloved hand into the emergency hatch release. “Everyone hang on!”

“Shit!” Jet spiraling Logan couldn’t so much as reach his harness as the centripetal motion fought with gravity. “Storm! Pull it up!”

“I can’t!” She shouted, yanking on the controls. “He’s spinning us!”

Wind whipped through the jet as the hatch opened. The others clung to their seats, each struggling to see what Colossus and Dazzler were getting up to. Unable to control the jet, Ororo turned fully, astonished to see the slender blonde and massive Russian holding on to the handle used for parachuting in case of emergency.
“I’m trusting you, comrade,” Ali shouted over the wind. “Hold on.”

“I will not let go,” he assured her while shifting into his organic metal form.

In an instant, Ali leapt from the jet.

“ALISON!” Kitty shrieked, fruitlessly reaching for her friend.

“NO!” Logan, Bishop, and Pyro shouted in unison, nearly mimicking Kitty’s panicked grab.

Immediately reminded of Rogue’s shocking trip into dead air, Storm and Logan both tried to stand. The jet spun precariously, teetering as though balanced on the tip of a toy top. Colossus, however, stood calmly, both feet braced, one hand clinging to the jet, the other holding a delicate black boot.

Sound seemed to dull, as though Ororo were suddenly suffering from acute hearing loss. She realized, after a moment, that Ali was drawing it into herself. Auditory absorption, Beast called it. She needed it to power her mutation.

“CLOSE YOUR EYES!” Colossus’ scream almost drowned in the scrambling air, but the command in his tone immediately snapped all eyes closed.

“Take this, you overgrown, purple-bellied fuckhead!”

Even through her closed lids, Ororo saw the flash of blinding light and winced. If Alison indeed used the jet’s engine noise for power, they might have seen it on the other side of Pluto. The light faded instantly and quite suddenly, Ororo found the jet’s deadly spin slowing. Sound returned in full force.

The hatch slammed closed, two bodies hit the deck. Ororo pulled on the joystick with one hand, the other fighting with controls to stabilize the very unhappy machine. In seconds, the jet leveled and she turned to look over her shoulder.

Colossus had Dazzler by the shoulders. “If you ever jump out of an airplane like that again, I’ll follow you. And then kill you with my bare hands.”

“Fair, ‘nuff, Mother Russia.”

They embraced, and Ororo distinctly noticed the tremble in Piotr’s hands.

“Hey, Luke?”

“Yes, Father?” Both voices sounded gruff and weary.

“Hand me a spare bag.”

~=**~= 

With Magneto blinded by Dazzler’s converted sound, the X-men approached the base of his chemical operations more cautiously. Psylocke scanned the area continuously, reporting to Storm of any oddities she happened to find. All of them had a few choice words for Alison and Piotr, but most seemed willing to wait until it was safe again.

Bishop glanced at his still-sick sister, shaking his head. Shard could have flown out of the jet and done exactly as Dazzler had, without risking death. But as sick as airplane travel made his blonde sister, she was useless until her feet hit the ground.
Pyro actually seemed nervous as they drew nearer and nearer to the Iceland base. Kitty and Bobby fell completely silent after Dazzler explained that blinding Magneto only slowed him down. Had Bishop done the job, Magneto would be dead…but Dazzler, he learned, wasn’t prepared to kill.

That was fine, he thought while Mother consulted her telepath, until they reached the base. Their plan kept everything simple. Get in, destroy the Cure, get out. Bishop, of course, had plans he didn’t think his mother needed to know about. He and Father agreed that Magneto needed to be taken out. Permanently.

Forge impressed upon the young warrior that timelines shifted not because of major battles, but moments. Split seconds decided the fates of millions. Bishop understood this and had since his teens. Instants made up a life, a series of them. Shifting, changing with every decision made. It was impossible to effect one thing without setting off a chain reaction.

Saving young Jimmy was the stone, everything after merely ripples on the pond. Dazzler, Colossus, Rogue, Shadowcat, Iceman, Pyro, Psylocke, even his own parents were ever altered by that one life. Uncle Hank once quoted an old proverb that stated one man’s life, no matter how simple, affected countless lives.

Cause and effect.

Glancing to the others, Bishop realized that this trip, this battle, surrounded him with people who’s lives he’d touched. Uncle Bobby, in his timeline, was a bitter, haggard man with no hope. Aunt Kitty lived as though a ghost, never letting anyone close lest she be hurt.

Pyro, driven to madness with power, reigned as Magneto’s right hand. Psylocke hid away from the world, losing her sanity in the diseased and poisoned minds Magneto surrounded himself with.

Colossus and Dazzler never met, doomed to end their lives before ever starting.

“Head in the game, big brother.” Shard whispered, reaching to take his hand.

“I’m here,” he replied carefully.

“Always have been.”

He gave her a small smile, squeezing her fingers gently. At the end of this, he and his sister would cease to exist. But, he amended swiftly, no matter where they landed, the Munroe children would be together. There was infinite comfort in that single thought.

“There’s a rooftop about a block from the main center,” Mother muttered to Father.

“Why bother?” Father’s rough voice hinted at dark humor. “They already know we’re here.”

“So, land on the main building, hop out and what…? Wave?” Mother questioned shortly.

“I like to make an entrance.”

Shard and Bishop shared an easy, amused glance at overhearing the conversation.

They hovered for several minutes while Psylocke continued to scan the area for mutants. Dazzler had her iPod on already, the volume too low for Bishop to distinguish a song. The others fidgeted, many looking to their respective partners. Saying goodbye, I love you, be careful.

He knew this moment, the deep silence before the storm. It happened before every battle, most
fearing that this time, they’re loved one might not come home. Bishop kept his hand in his sister’s unwilling to let go until he absolutely had to.

“We’re landing on the medical building,” Storm announced after a long pause. “Wolverine and Colossus will take point. I want everyone on their toes. Something moves, incapacitate it.”

Everyone nodded. Spines straightened, leather squeaked against leather.

“Storm?”

Psylocke’s voice was a soft, apologetic whisper as the jet landed with a soft bump. All eyes swung to the resident telepath.

“They’re waiting.” She lifted her chin almost defiantly.

Without prompting, each X-Man slipped out of his or her harness. They stood, moving into the wide walkway that separated the rows of seats. As one, they looked to each other, some smiling, as though capturing the image for posterity.

“Jesus,” Kitty groaned. “We’re all so morbid.”

The tension cracked as laughter rang through the metallic jet. Bobby slung his arm over her shoulder, kissed her hair. Bishop filed that moment, that image away, for himself.

Turning to his parents, standing side by side, he smiled slightly. “Let’s end this.”

Storm nodded, her white hair glowing in the brilliant light. “Dazzler, open the hatch.”

The blonde, whom stood closest to the hatch, jogged toward it with Colossus on her heels. She drew in a lusty breath, then slammed the release button. She was humming as it lowered, as Colossus stood at her side.

They didn’t need prompting this time as sound dulled. Alison thrust her hands out the moment she was able, sending blinding light through the hatch. Several human shrieks were audible through the open doorway.

“Man, I love my powers.”


Wolverine slipped past the others until he and Colossus filled the open hatch. Steel-coated, adamantium-plated, the duo threw themselves out of the door, rolling down the steps. Dazzler backed them up with a concussion of sound.

Iceman and Pyro went next, fire and ice pouring from their hands. Shard, slipping into her light-based form, flew from the jet. Psylocke back-flipped out, her hands glowing with humming psi-blades. Shadowcat followed suit, phasing her body into flux to avoid damage.

Bishop cocked his plasma rifle, meeting his mother’s eyes.

“No matter the outcome,” she said as they moved toward the fight. “Know that I am proud of you.”

Unable to reply, he watched as his mother drew in the elements and called on lightning. What could one say to that?

Lucas held his rifle ready and stepped onto the ramp. The fight was impossibly quiet, enormously
frenzied. Magneto’s swollen forces met the X-Men with fervor, but not training. They relied heavily on mutation to fight.

The X-Men, when cornered, fell back on teamwork and hand-to-hand. Dazzler, Shard, and Shadowcat worked as an odd team, felling four vigilantes before they parted to begin again. Wolverine and Colossus mowed over several mutants, backed up by Storm’s vicious weather cycles.

Sending sizzling plasma from his rifle, Bishop threw himself into the clash. One mutant with spikes coming out of his flesh caught his arm, but Luke broke it with a firm snap of his arm. There were screams of the injured, howls of triumph, roars of rage.

“Shadowcat!”

Iceman called for his lover, taking her hand and pushing her on an iceslide. She used her phasing ability to short-circuit electrical components in a nearby door, sealing it shut as even more of Magneto’s forces attempted to aid their companions.

A lull settled over the group as they stood amongst blood and dying. Wolverine, in his ferocious rage, took them all in at a glance.

“Where to?”

Psylocke’s beautiful face went blank, even as crimson trickled down her cheek from a wound. Singed flesh saturated the already dank air, creeping into Bishop’s nostrils as he awaited instruction.

“There are more forces below. Blimey,” the woman said softly. “He’s been busy. Below that is the containment chamber, where they’ve been creating the airborne Cure. Some of the scientists there are worried about radiation.”

“We will deal with that when we have to,” Storm cut in decisively. “Which way?”

She indicated to the three doors flanking them. One, of course, cut off reserves thanks to Kitty, but the others were innocently awaiting decision.

“Left,” Psylocke decided quickly. “The guards there are human, humans will lead toward the Cure.”

“Course,” Pyro chimed in. “No mutant wants to get near that thing.”

The X-Men jogged to the door, Kitty opened it with careful computer manipulation, leading the others into a wide, airy courtyard. Lush green trees and brilliant blooms bathed in white sunlight seemed eerily out of place here amid the destruction.

“LOGAN!”

Bishop turned on his heel, staring in infuriated shock as his mother was dragged toward the sky by an invisible hand. X-Men closed ranks, even as Shard took to the air in a desperate attempt to catch her mother.

Something flew through the air, tackling his light-shrouded sibling until they landed against a tall statue. It shattered, drawing some attention away as Storm vanished into the sky.

“STORM!” Wolverine screamed to the empty air. “STORM!”

“Rogue.”

Bishop’s focus left his mother and turned on the four young adults surrounding the unconscious
Shard. Rogue was standing there now, ankle-deep in the man-made pond. Here and now stood the Rogue Bishop remembered. White-streaked hair awry, a sardonic twist to her mouth, eyes dead to everything but dark amusement, the mutant terrorist faced her former friends.

“Marie,” Wolverine attempted, his gaze still drawn upward. “This isn’t you, darlin’.”

“How would you know?” Rogue shot back, tilting her head almost curiously. “I wouldn’t worry none bout Storm. Erik’ll be done in a minute.”

That snapped Father back to the reality glaring at him from hateful eyes. “He hurts her, kid, ain’t nothin’ on this earth’ll stop me from guttin’ him and you.”

“Thought you’d look after me,” Rogue laughed. “Turns out, I can look after myself.”

Colossus moved first, taking one step and bringing a metallic fist against Rogue as hard as he could. Bishop winced when Rogue flew backward, her laughter still hanging on the air. A blow such as that from the mighty Colossus would kill many.

Rogue stood quickly, brushing dust from her yellow and green jumpsuit. “Aw, now, Petey. That tickled.”

She jumped into the air, twisting her body and thrusting both arms out with fists for hands. Colossus took the super-powered hit directly to the chest, landing some yards away while Dazzler fought to control herself. Bishop could see the concern, the rage, in her eyes.

“Got some new powers, eh?” Dazzler spat. “Wanna tangle with me, kiddo?”

“Oh, shut up, Sparkler.”

Before Rogue could continue her attacks, Wolverine stepped between her and Ali. The blonde seemed put-out by this, but took the moment he provided her to check on Colossus. Kitty and Bobby were helping the flesh-covered Piotr stand, the young mutant shaking his head as though to clear it.

“What are you doing?” Wolverine demanded. “We’re your friends. Your family.”

“I ain’t got a family, Logan.” Marie responded in an eerie, detached tone. “You all done turned your backs on me, sugar. Magneto was the only one who understood what I could be. What I am.”

“He’ll kill her.” Logan tried again. “I love her, Marie. She’s havin’ my baby. And you’re helping him kill her.”

Something, perhaps regret, crossed Rogue’s lovely face. “I loved someone once.”

Iceman let the pity, the loathing cross his features, even as he supported the injured Colossus with Kitty’s help. Bishop slowly lowered his rifle, wondering if Rogue’s seeming invulnerability would protect her from the futuristic blast. He glanced to the sky, searching quickly for any sign of his mother.

“You didn’t love me, Marie,” Bobby answered quietly. “We weren’t ready for love.”

“You! You can’t tell me what I feel!” Rogue screamed, but she allowed Logan to restrain her.

“No, he’s right.” Wolverine’s voice was thoughtful. “Kid, you don’t know what love is. How it changes you. You were too damn happy bein’ miserable, Cure or not. That why you came to Magneto? Punishment?”
“Shut up.” She demanded. But Logan held on.

“I’ll show you.” He said quickly. “I’ll show you what love does.”

“Daddy!” Shard struggled to stand. “Daddy, no!”

But Wolverine had already pressed his lips to Rogue’s unprotected forehead. Bishop reached for his father, not noticing how the skies above blackened and raged. Choking sounds broke the sudden silence and the Wolverine collapsed.

The clouds burst open, rain pelted the courtyard through the broken window. Rogue, whose eyes were filled with tears, turned her face to the sky and screamed.
Chapter Summary

The final chapter.

The X-Men wage war, losing so much in the process, but have the sacrifices fixed the timeline?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

While Wolverine writhed on the floor, his son and daughter cradled the weakened body. Rogue continued to weep and scream in the same breath, whatever she absorbed from Logan tearing her heart into shreds.

“Ali.”

Piotr turned to Dazzler, whom looked shocked and confused. “Yeah?”

“Come on.” He took her hand, indicating for Kitty and Bobby to follow. The foursome bolted down the corridor, three looking to the metallic Colossus as though perplexed.

He stopped them, Rogue’s screaming mingled with the thunder as the sounds dulled. They still had a mission, no matter what was happening. Find and destroy the airborne cure. With his friends at his side, Colossus took the lead.

“We have to find the cure.” He said quietly. Dazzler’s hand squeezed his.

“You’re right.” Iceman gulped, looking around them as though he would find a sign pointing them in the right direction. “Which way, Boss?”

Shadowcat poked his shoulder, pointing down the corridor. A thick glass door sat at the end of the hall, proclaiming: Danger – Radiation.

“Didn’t Psylocke say something about radiation near the cure?” Dazzler asked, dropping Piotr’s hand to sprint toward the door.

“Al!” Kitty cried, chasing her. “There are guards!”

Piotr felt the chill, a creeping foreboding that threatened to incapacitate him. He tore off after both girls, with Iceman at his side. Fate, he remembered, was a fickle fiend. She took at random, leaving those behind to mourn and rage. They’d fooled her so many times already; it seemed appropriate that she might interfere now.

Dazzler reached the door unhindered, pressing her face against the cool surface, hands coming up to steady her. Shadowcat was still several meters behind, ahead of the boys that followed.
“Stop!”

An unfamiliar voice whipped Dazzler’s head around. The world slid into slow motion as Piotr skidded to a stop. A thousand memories flipped through his mind, even as the gunfire echoed in the corridor.

He watched, unable to move, as Alison’s tiny body took four bullets to the chest. She never had time to react, to defend herself. Kitty screamed with loss, the sound akin to a still-beating heart pulled from a warm chest. Iceman stopped as well, as though someone hit the pause button. Men were running, shouting, even as Ali’s limp form was tossed back onto the bloodied floor.

Piotr would never recall screaming her name, only that he rushed to her side, still coated in metal. The next round of bullets ricocheted off of him, stopped when Kitty and Bobby fell on the attackers. They did not kill the bastards with guns, but sealed all three up into ice, leaving heads free.

“M-Mother R-Russia…”

He grasped Ali’s hand, shifting back into his human form. Tears streaming down his face, Piotr squeezed her hand. They both knew, without him even looking at the holes in her chest, that this was it. She coughed red blood, wearily grabbing his arm with her free hand.

Kitty and Bobby remained back several paces, but he could hear her crying.

“Ali, no.” Piotr pled, his voice shaking. “Stay with me. Don’t…don’t go.”

She did not respond for several seconds, as though every breath took every bit of her will to process. Deep jade eyes dulled, the light leaving them as her blood soaked the tile beneath her.

“I love you.”

“Ali. Ali!” Piotr felt her go limp, felt the life leave her body as those eyes closed forever. Weeping openly, he gathered her into his arms, clutching her to his chest. Rocking back and forth, unable to contemplate that she’d gone, he whispered prayers in Russian, begging a merciful God to return her.


Kitty fell to her knees at his side, reaching for her friend as she wept. Bobby sniffled, wiping at his eyes with one leather glove. The three of them remained that way for several minutes. Piotr did not know if he would ever leave that moment. Everything he wanted in his life was wrapped up in the girl lying dead in his arms.

There was no rage. It was only sorrow, grief, deep and debilitating that filled the empty place where Ali had been. He touched her blood-smeared face, kissing still-warm lips one last time. Lingering there for a moment, he let his tears fall onto her face.

“Guys,” Bobby choked. “We have to…I’m sorry, but…”

“Its ok, Bobby,” Kitty sniffled loudly. “Pete…”

He continued rocking, looking into the peaceful beauty of Alison’s face. Not wanting to move, he shook his head. “I don’t care. Go.”
“We’re not leaving you here,” Iceman retorted fiercely. “More guards could come.”

“We’ll come back for her,” Shadowcat whispered. Piotr finally took his eyes from Alison’s face. Tears and grief swam there, but behind determination and understanding. “We won’t leave her here with them. I promise, Peter.”

With Kitty leading him gently, Piotr slowly released the hold on Alison’s body. Together, they lowered her tenderly to the floor, each ensuring they did not injure her battered body. Piotr rose, his fingers trailing over her cheek.

He shifted, flexing muscle so that organic steel coated his body. Kitty busily bypassed the door’s security precautions and the trio stepped into the super-heated laboratory.

Inside was vacant, as though the scientists evacuated swiftly. Long tables were filled with equipment, most of which Piotr could not name. He cared very little for what was happening here, only wanting to complete this mission so he could die from grief.

*Die.* She was dead. They killed her.

The rage came now. Roaring with it, Colossus slammed both metal-laced fists into the tables, destroying work that obviously took time to accomplish. Chairs splintered, glass broke, and still he rampaged. Destroying computers, wishing they were human bodies, Piotr did not stop until he heard Kitty call for him, fear tingeing her voice.

“In here.”

A large, round chamber stood at the back of the room, marked with symbols that betrayed it as radioactive. Moving toward it, flanked by Kitty and Bobby, Piotr peered into the small glass window. Long rows of test tubes were inside, numbers and letters written on them in some order Piotr couldn’t decipher.

“It’s the cure,” Kitty said when he moved aside to allow the other two to look. “That’s the genetic code for it.”


“There’s a generator in there,” she responded. “If we could overload it, it might get hot enough to burn the cure up. These blast doors should withstand the fire and the radiation leak, that’s why they were built.”

Piotr, heart still raw, nodded. “I’ll go.”

“Are you nuts? There’s no way you’d get out in time!” Bobby fairly shouted.

“Does it matter?”

Both must have seen something in his eyes, for they backed down. Kitty explained, swiftly, how to overload the generator and opened the door. Piotr stepped inside, closing his eyes as it sealed up behind him. Perhaps his mutation would protect him…but if it did not, he would at least see Alison again.

With Bobby and Kitty watching him, Piotr ducked into the narrow corridor between racks of Cure
High above the X-Men, Ororo faced a blind Magneto. The light from Dazzler’s mutation horribly burned his face and hands, but the grip he had on her was fierce. The metal lacing her uniform was a calculated risk. Upon undertaking this mission, she knew it was insanity to wear metal while battling the “master of magnetism”. However, they were unsure whether or not Magneto would even appear and going up against mutants and humans without even a little protection was just plain crazy.

Now, of course, that metallic protection reached up and bit her in the ass.

She drew on her own gifts, pulling a tornado from empty skies until it swirled around both Storm and her foe. How could he even know he had the right person? Did he merely reach down and grab one at random?

“Ah, my dear Storm,” Magneto greeted almost warmly, though there was pain in his voice. “Now we may speak alone.”

Because he had her by the proverbial balls, Storm kept her voice calm. Fear for herself, for her son, kept her from releasing mutation completely.

“Is that what you wanted, Erik? A chat?”

Magneto chuckled. “I wonder how did you manage to subvert both Psylocke and Pyro? They were once impossibly loyal to me.”

“Oh?” Storm allowed herself to grin. “Release me and we will talk, Erik. I can fly, you know.”

Much to her surprise, Magneto let loose his hold on her armor. Startled, Ororo easily called on the winds, staying aloft and facing him. Was it a gesture of trust? Or had Dazzler weakened him with her blinding light?

“Tell me,” he urged, bringing her out of contemplation. “Does my beloved Psylocke fancy herself in love with the traitorous Pyro?”

Bristling, Ororo clenched her hands into fists. “They love one another, yes. But it was your looming madness that drew them both to the X-Men. Why, Erik? Why do you want to destroy us?”

“Destroy you?” Amusement played about his burned face. “Is that what you think I am doing?”

Storm hovered a little closer, letting the rage she carefully controlled until now surface.

“You have created an airborne “cure” for mutation. What other use could you have for it than the destruction of those you see as traitors?”

His mouth twisted into a wry smile. “Not the X-Men, Storm. You.”

Fear, cold and consuming, flooded her very blood. It took every amount of courage, of tenacity in her to remain in front of this man. Because of Magneto, the world would see combat as it never had before. How many lives did he cost them all? For what? Vengeance?
“Why me?” the question was quiet, nearly lost as they stood on empty air in the eye of a tornado.

“You should have ended it when Charles died,” Erik accused. “This dream of his was best laid to rest when the Phoenix destroyed him.”

“YOU destroyed him, Erik.” Storm shot back, the grief rising to twist her heart. “Your betrayal, your use of the Phoenix destroyed him. You let him die.”

For a moment, the pain of losing Charles swelled between them. For that instant, they were united in the loss. They both felt the blow to their hearts, knowing that life would always be a little bit worse without the benevolence, the kindness Charles ever carried with him.

She nearly reached out to comfort the man that had been her mentor’s best friend. But she recoiled, Lucas’ voice echoing in her mind.

“I have many regrets, Ororo.” Magneto paused, his hands raising. She braced herself. “But if your Bishop has seen the future, we will ever be at odds. You came here to stop me? What makes you think you have the power?”

They clashed immediately. Magneto attempted to regain a hold on her metallic uniform, but Storm battled back with a shocking bolt of lightning. Drawing on her fear, on the maternal instinct she always harbored, she flung the tornado at him, propelling upward in the same instant.

“You don’t stand a chance, Storm!” He roared over the winds, sidestepping her storm cell. “You know that I am more powerful.”

“You don’t know anything about me, Erik!” Her scream melded with the winds, which came forth in ancient harmony with rain and hail. Lightning slashed at the sky. He tried to push her back with a magnetic field, but before he could, Ororo unzipped her uniform and let it fall from her body.

The black body stocking, worn to protect the skin from leather, soaked with the rain. Knowing she was somewhat safer from Magneto – drawing on the iron in one’s blood took much more concentration – she flattened her body and flew in a tight circle.

Magneto screamed in rage, tossing magnetic fields blindly when he realized she’d cast her uniform aside. “I’ll kill you! And the death of both you and that squalling brat will clear the way for mutants everywhere.”

“Charles,” Ororo whispered to the sky. “I’m sorry.”

She knew what to do and could not hesitate. Cold trickled through her body, the pull of Magneto attempting to draw the iron out of her blood. Before it was too late, she had to silence her mentor’s friend.

Coming up behind the blind mutant, Ororo whispered in his ear. “Goodbye, Erik.”

Lightning erupted from her palm and Storm reached out to touch Magneto. He screamed, the sound echoing even over the winds she called to whisk her away. Raw electricity ripped through the mutant foe and his hold on her released. Magneto fell, still caught in the seizure she induced.

When his body struck the ground, she looked away. Sickened, horrified, Ororo barely kept hold on
her senses. There was still the cure to worry about and Magneto’s weakened forces. Turning upside
down, Storm flew back to the building, to her family.

~**~

“Oh, God.”

Psylocke spoke as Rogue cowered in a corner. Pyro glanced at her, noting the sudden sorrow on her
face.

“What?”

“Dazzler,” she spoke haltingly. “They’ve killed Dazzler.”

Bishop stood, his face terrible with rage. “Who killed Dazzler?”

Pyro stepped between his love and the futuristic mutant. Everything was so surreal. Magneto and
Storm battling it out high above them, Rogue thrown into chaos with Wolverine on the floor…now
someone was dead?

He looked around, realizing that four X-Men were absent. Worried, though he and Iceman had their
disputes, he grasped Psylocke’s hand.

“Guards,” the violet-eyed telepath answered. “She was shot. Colossus and the others are destroying
the cure.”

“How?” Bishop questioned, reaching for his rifle.

“Fire. They’ll overload the generator.”

But Rogue’s screaming stopped. The silence deafening after so much noise, Pyro and the others
turned quickly to stare at her. Braced for whatever she might throw at them now, they closed ranks,
even stepping in front of the injured Shard and their weak father.

“What did I do?” Marie questioned, tears in her eyes. “I never meant…I didn’t want…”

“You are a spoiled child,” Bishop shot back, obviously angry. “People are dead because of you,
Rogue.”

The young girl’s face crumbled and she buried it in her hands. Her sobs echoed in the quiet, the
destruction all around absolute. Pyro wondered at the anti-climatic feel to this entire scene. They
came prepared for battle, only to split up. One X-Man was dead, another’s fate unknown as the skies
cleared.

“Ha,” Psylocke said ruthlessly as something hit the ground outside with an echo. “Storm won.”

“Yes, I did,” replied the X-Men leader as she dropped through the broken ceiling. “And no, I’m not
proud of it.”

“Magneto?” Bishop asked, coming over to his mother.

“Dead.” She responded. There were cuts on her face and her uniform was gone, but Pyro was
momentarily stunned by the fierce conviction in her eyes. Magneto never stood a chance against so powerful a woman.

“Logan?” Storm peered past her son, to the man she loved lying limp beside her daughter. “What happened?”

Once she had Logan’s hand in hers, Rogue stood. Her face was still ravaged by grief, but she was no longer trembling. Pyro opened a fist, wondering if he’d have to burn the girl to get her to back down. No matter what powers she’d stolen, there was a time limit. He’d like nothing better than to destroy this kid.

Storm turned to her, eyes sweeping over the girl’s face. Her hand still clutched that of the Wolverine, but her stance was all about protection. No matter what happened, this woman risked everything for her family.

John wondered if he could ever claim the same. Sure, he’d gone over to the enemy to protect Psylocke, but was he truly a good man or did he just have moments of weakness?

Stop doubting, John.

At Betsy’s silent command, he yanked his thoughts back to the present.

“He…” Rogue stammered. “He told me he’d show me what love really was. Oh, God, Storm. I didn’t know. I couldn’t understand.”

Logan stirred, blinking one eye open as Rogue’s mutation released him. “Now you do, kid. So, what’s it gonna be? Us or them?”

Pyro glanced at Bishop, whom moved back to hold his sister. They shared a glance, something heavy stretching between them. He knew, without a doubt, that this was the moment they were waiting for, the instant that would ever alter the future.

“You,” Rogue answered heatedly. “I wanna come home.”

In the same instant, an explosion rocked the building. Psylocke gripped her head, her powerful mind reaching out to touch the other mutants. Pyro held her close, steadying her so she wouldn’t fall while she consulted the array of minds at her command.

“They’ve done it.” Betsy exalted, jumping up to embrace Pyro. “The Brotherhood is on the run, humans are evacuating like hell just opened up, and the X-Men destroyed the cure!”

Pyro whooped loudly, swinging his beloved around while Storm watched them curiously. She couldn’t understand the joy that came with being liberated. For the first time in their lives, Betsy and John were free. They rejoiced in the private, mental link they shared, wild with relief.

So John never saw Bishop and Shard touch their armbands and vanish from their timeline.

~**~

They landed on the grounds of Xavier’s School some ten years in the future. Shard, still wounded, clung to her brother. Bishop held her tightly, keeping his eyes closed as he feared for what they
Forge insisted they take the final jump, just to ensure everything ended in the way they wanted. Their armbands could help them exist outside of time for only a few minutes, allowing them to glimpse at the future they gave their lives to create. It was, Forge explained, the only gift he could give.

Sounds of laughter reached his ears and Bishop’s heart clenched. Birds were singing and sunlight felt warm on his cheeks. No gunfire, no explosions. Carefully, Luke opened his eyes, surprised to find that the grounds were in tact. There were children playing basketball in the warm summer breeze.


“I don’t know,” he answered honestly. He hooked his sister’s arm over his shoulder, half-carrying her so they could look around.

No battle had been waged here, he thought as they skirted the lake, heading toward the house. Everything was as he’d last seen it, just before the battle with Magneto’s forces. Grass green and thick under his boots did not fit in with the dirty, ragged place his father once insisted had been their home.

He could hear a familiar laugh mingled with a young boy’s doopy giggles. Sensing that it was safe, he pulled Shard to the side of the building, allowing her to lean on the corner and peer around it with him.

Mother was running in the warm sunlight, a water gun in her hands. She chased a boy of around ten, a boy Bishop recognized as himself. Mother soaked her son, laughing as though her life held no sorrow.

“Mama,” Shard whispered. “Oh, that’s my Mama.”

“Shh,” Bishop cautioned as the back door opened.

“What in the flamin’ hell are you two doin’?”

“Father,” both children said in unison. They shifted, peeking further around the corner.

Wolverine had not aged, but carried a toddler on one hip. Elizabeth’s white hair and big blue eyes gave her away as she clapped at her brother’s antics. Bishop felt tears lodge in his throat, watching his father expertly bounce his baby sister on one denim-covered hip.

“Playing!” Luke said, getting his mother directly in the back with a jet of water from his sophisticated water gun.

“Looks like it. Don’t you point that thing over here, Luke. You get Lizzie wet and I’ll tan your hide.” Logan snapped, shifting so his large body protected the baby girl.

Ororo bounced over to her husband, kissing him and their daughter quickly. They whispered, so low that neither of the peeking adults could hear. But Bishop knew the suddenly rigid stance of both parents and grinned.

“They know we’re here,” he whispered to Shard. She nodded, melting back a little and clutching her wounded side.
A beat later, Logan insisted little Luke take his sister inside. The boy grumbled good-naturedly, but was promised ice cream if he looked after her for a few minutes. Bishop grinned, realizing that his sister would have ice cream as well.

“Hello?” Mother’s soft greeting preceded her by a heartbeat.

Having heard the approach, Bishop merely smiled when his parents came around the corner. Mother embraced him swiftly before turning to Shard. The two women were grinning, tears standing in their eyes.

“August third, 2020.” Father offered when he met Bishop’s eyes.

Mental calculations flew through Bishop’s weary mind. By this time, in the old timeline, Magneto waged war on humanity at large. But there was no war here, no battles, nothing that said he had failed.

Father clutched his shoulder, smiling slightly. Fatherhood settled well on the once gruff Wolverine. But he seemed so happy now, so calm and settled that it increased the ache in Bishop’s heart. He’d never know these wonderful people without the turmoil of war. Here they could just be.

“It’s not perfect,” Wolverine told him quietly. “But it’s all right.”

“Mutants have more freedoms,” Mother chimed in. “Like your father said, it’s not perfect, but we’re happy. There’s no war or even the threat of one.”

Shard exhaled sharply. “What happened to everyone?”

“Quickly,” Bishop pled. “We don’t have much time.”

Mother began, taking a hand from each child in hers. Those hands were so strong, he mused, prepared for whatever lay ahead.

“Marie came back to the X-Men, but she had some problems. She’d killed a mutant and permanently gained the ability to fly and avoid most injury. She’s in prison for the murder right now.”

“I’m sorry,” Bishop muttered.

“It’s ok, she’s doin’ better, son.” Logan cleared his throat. “Kitten and Iceboy got married a few years back. They’re expectin’.”


“Disgusting.” Wolverine flashed her a grin.

“Pyro and Psylocke relocated to Johannesburg right after the battle. We get letters from time to time. They were married a year after the battle with Magneto. And, believe it or not, they formed a strong friendship with Kitten and Bobby.”

“ Weird,” Shard and Bishop whispered in unison.

“They’re leading their own team out of South Africa, nicknamed X-Treme.” Mother added almost
absently. “With the anti-mutant protests there, they thought it was a good idea. It’s working rather well, from what we’ve heard.”

Bishop paused, dreading the next question. While they’d all had ten years to deal with Dazzler’s death, for him, it was mere moments ago. He could not help the idea that he failed that vivacious girl.

“Colossus?” He inquired softly. “How is…”

Storm and Wolverine shared a heavy glance at this. Both sets of eyes reflected pain, and they looked toward the four gravestones in the garden almost involuntarily.

“Alison’s death changed him,” Mother replied carefully. “He stayed with us long enough to see her buried and returned to Russia.”

“Only one he still talks to is Kitty, but even that’s few and far between. Works on his family’s farm.”

“He never got over it,” Shard whispered sadly.

“Pete loved her,” Father answered with a shrug. “Still does. That changes you.”

Luke caught his sister’s gaze and the pain behind it. They’d changed so much, saved so many lives, but the guilt weighed in. They’d known the tiny, blonde singer. Before they came back, she was not even a blip on the radar…

“Pete told me somethin’, right before he left.” Father cut into his son’s thoughts. “Told me to give you both a message.”

Startled, both children stared.

“We saw you two vanish, I guess we all figured you’d come to check it out.” Logan grinned. “Anyway, Pete told me to thank you both.”

“Thank us?” Shard interrupted. “He lived, but…”

“He loved,” Storm added. “I think he wanted to thank you for that gift.”

Bishop’s armband began to beep and he impulsively embraced his father. Logan held on just as tightly, saying goodbye for the final time.


“You got it, son,” Father chuckled.

They broke apart so he could hug his mother, so Shard could say goodbye to their father. Mother was smiling through her tears, touching the brand over his eye before she kissed his forehead.

“You’ll never be marked, my son.” Mother whispered. “I’m so proud of you.”

When they parted, Bishop turned to hold his sister. Mother and Father clasped hands, even as their children began to phase in and out of reality.
“We done good, big brother?” Shard asked, her voice an eerie echo.

“Done real good, kid.” Bishop responded, pulling her closer. They held on, even as time took them apart, leaving their parents alone in the mansion’s shadow.

The last image Storm and Wolverine had of their warrior children was them holding one another, smiling in contentment and victory.

Neither said anything, but stared at the empty space for a long time. Finally, still holding on to one another, they turned back toward the house. Their children came to say goodbye, to take the knowledge with them of a better world.

“MOTHER!”

Little Lucas came barreling out of the house, covered in chocolate sauce, his face infuriated. Logan peered into the wide, glass door to find his two-year-old daughter smirking. A bottle of chocolate syrup lay abandoned on the floor.

Logan couldn’t help it. He threw his head back and laughed.

Chapter End Notes

I have written a Dazzler/Colossus one shot to go with this fic, a missing moment. Please give it a read, though it'll probably make you hate me.

Thanks for reading this old fic of mine. I do still love it, even all these years later!

-Me

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