Generation X

by SOABA

Summary

The third of December, nineteen sixty-two. The day that Charles Xavier’s world was completely and irrevocably turned on its head.

“I’ve run the tests multiple times, Professor,” Hank said, fiddling with his lab coat, “The results are conclusive. You’re pregnant.”

Notes

My best friend wanted me to write a story where Charles and Erik raise a bunch of mutants together. I went a bit overboard, but had quite a bit of fun doing it. This series doesn’t actually have an ending at the moment so if you choose to read this be warned that this is gonna be a hell of a long ride. I’ll probably update once a week but that’s not a promise. Real Life has to come first.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter One:

The third of December, nineteen sixty-two, otherwise and henceforth to be known as ‘The Day’. The Day that Charles Francis Xavier’s world was completely and irrevocably turned on its head.

“Come again, Hank,” Charles sputtered a bit wildly, after having stared at the blue-furred scientist for a full five minutes in absolute shock.

“I ran the tests a dozen times, Professor, and then I ran them a dozen times more just to be absolutely certain,” Hank said, fiddling briefly with his lab coat before insisting, “The results are conclusive. You’re pregnant.”


“Normal men can’t, but you can,” Hank told him earnestly. “As far as I’ve been able to tell with the resources that we have at our disposal, you have a secondary mutation, Professor. A…. well, a rather remarkable secondary mutation.”

Hank was telling the truth.

Even if Charles had not been one hundred percent certain that Hank would never attempt to deceive him in such a cruel way – Hank was not hard wired with the ability to lie successfully, or really to lie at all – his telepathy provided incontrovertible proof of the other Mutant’s candor regarding the matter at hand. Hank’s certainty blazed from the scientist’s mind into Charles’ own without vacillation. Charles was going to be a father, albeit in what had to be the single most unlikely way possible.

Bloody. Hell.

Hank started speaking again, after another minute had passed and Charles had not responded, his tone almost halting, “I’m sorry to have to ask, Professor, but did you and Erik…”

“Yes,” Charles whispered, subdued.

Hank nodded, the confirmation providing the greater clarity of the situation that he sought, “Sorry to pry, I know it’s a sensitive topic, but I did have to consider the possibility that you could reproduce asexually. There’s still so much we don’t know about mutation and I couldn’t just determine that the idea of spontaneous pregnancy was an utter impossibility.”

“You don’t…” Charles trailed off, swallowed and then tried again, “You’re not… upset… about Erik and me?”

Hank’s eyes widened and then perceptibly softened, “I would never think less of you for who you love, Professor. Homosexuality is not a sickness, no matter what most people seem to believe. In fact, evidence has cropped up that many historical figures, from Alexander the Great to Shakespeare, had male lovers. You’re still you.”

“Thank you, Hank,” Charles breathed out in stark relief. “That means a great deal to me.”

Hank smiled widely, “I’ve estimated your due date to be mid to late June, in case you were wondering.”
Charles actually had not been, because he had not yet managed to gather his scattered mental faculties back into the semblance of order that was required for such wonderings, but he appreciated the information nonetheless, “Thank you.”

If Hank’s calculations were correct, and they always were, then that put the date of conception sometime in early September. There was probably little chance of knowing the exact day or night that the impossible had been achieved, since he and Erik had been extremely *active* during the course of that entire month. The clock had been counting down and their potentially life-ending showdown with Shaw had been inching closer and closer; neither had been interested in wasting precious time. The pair had rarely been apart if they could help it.

That was certainly something that Charles had to worry about, was it not?

*Erik.*

Would Erik come home to him, if he knew about the child growing, inexplicably and miraculously, inside of Charles?

Charles so desperately wanted to believe that he would. Erik craved family and, even though the metalbender had tried to bury it deep within his heart, Charles had seen Erik’s secret and golden desire to create a family with him. The visions of him and Erik raising and loving little mutants had been irresistible, a siren call impossible for Charles to ignore completely. Certainly, Erik had never imagined that something as astonishing as Charles being able to bear his child could happen, but surely it would delight him. Charles hoped beyond hope that it would delight him. Once Erik got over the shock of learning that, yes, it was actually possible to knock up your decidedly male lover, at any rate.

Of course, that raised the issue of how exactly he was supposed to *tell* Erik, since Charles did not actually have the slightest clue regarding his whereabouts. Erik, along with Raven and Shaw’s former associates, had vanished in the wake of the disaster that Cuba had been… and none of them had been heard from since.

A part of Charles really, really wanted to give into the hysterics that he could feel dancing around in his chest, but that would surely terrify Hank and the others, which Charles had been actively avoiding doing. Just two days ago, he had been staunchly pretending that everything was perfectly normal – or what passed for normal in a house containing four mutants and a CIA agent. He had made remarkable progress in regards to regaining the full function of his legs and had been happily dismissing the copious vomiting that his body had subjected him to at all times of the day. He had told himself that it was just another symptom of his healing. Like the occasional muscle spasms in his legs and the near-constant aching of his lower back.

Then, Hank had cornered him and demanded, as much as Hank ever really demanded anything, that Charles agree to participate in a plethora of medical tests. A million unpleasant scenarios had run through his mind, but he had not dreamed the truth. How could he have, when the truth was so fantastical?

And all of it had culminated in Charles perched on one of the sterilized counters in Hank’s lab, wondering how in the hell he was supposed to locate the errant father of his unborn child.

Mutation truly was an extraordinary thing.

Charles abruptly realized that Hank had been talking to him, “Forgive me, Hank, I’m a bit… spaced out at the moment. What were you saying?”
“That’s totally understandable, Professor,” Hank assured before telling him, “I was just saying that I’ll need to get some supplies from town. I’m fairly certain that I can build an ultrasound machine easily, but I’ll need to gather as much information about pregnancy and childbirth as I can. I’m probably not anyone’s first choice for an obstetrician, but I don’t want to risk you or the little one by bringing in a stranger. In theory, you could wipe the memories of any doctor that we bring in to help you, but the actual birthing process is notorious for triggering unanticipated hiccups and with the CIA still looking for us… I figure that it’s better to be safe than sorry.”

“Quite right,” Charles agreed. “But, Hank? You *are* my first choice. There’s no one that I trust more to deliver my baby.”

Charles could not see Hank’s blush, not with all of the rich, cobalt fur covering his person, but he felt it mentally.

‘So this is what it feels like, to have a parent that trusts you and isn’t always disappointed.’

“Thank you, Professor,” Hank replied, bolstered by Charles’ unwavering pride and faith in him, and then he blinked rapidly behind his glasses. “So, uh, what do you want to tell the others about all of this?”

Ah. Right.

Charles told Alex, Sean, and Moira everything the following morning as they were sitting down to breakfast. For all of the fretting that he had done the night before – he had all but worn a groove into the floor of his study, what with all of his nervous pacing – it was a rather anticlimactic event.

“Oh, thank God,” Alex slumped against the back of his chair in relief.

Charles shot him a startled look.

“What?” Alex defended. “We were terrified that you were dying. A pregnancy, no matter how bizarre, is something that I… I mean that we, all of us, can deal with.”

‘Won’t lose him, thank god, we won’t lose him too. I can’t lose him too. We need him. He’s not gonna leave us.’

“That is so wicked!” Sean exclaimed, staring at Charles’ stomach, as if he would develop x-ray vision to see the unborn child if he just looked long and hard enough, even as he bounced in his seat. “Wait. How’s the kid gonna get out of you, Prof?”

“I’m going to have to perform a Caesarian,” Hank answered swiftly. “Most likely anyway.”

“Wicked,” Sean repeated, grinning widely.

‘Is it a boy? Is it a girl? Is it a Mutant? Probably, but who cares, really? This is so exciting! We’ll have a baby sibling to look after!’

“Lehnsherr had better man up and take responsibility,” Moira decreed in the no-nonsense tone of voice she had long ago perfected, “Or, I’m going to castrate him. Slowly.”

‘Don’t know if he’ll come back, but Charles will be taken care of, no matter what. I won’t fail him again.’
Charles’ boys looked both awed and terrified at her solemn proclamation.

“I cannot properly express how touched I am to have your support,” Charles said quietly,fighting back tears. Despite everything that had happened, he was so incredibly fortunate, because he had these four amazing people in his life, “Thank you, all of you, so very much.”

“We’ll be here for anything you need,” Alex promised.

“Just don’t make any cracks about me being ‘mother’,” Charles said, clearing his throat and then looking directly at Sean, whose thoughts had turned to just that subject. “Pregnant I may be, but I’m still male.”

Sean only looked marginally guilty, which probably was not enough to stop him from doing just that.

“I mean it,” Charles warned, “I’ll make you believe that you’re a rabbit if you do. A helpless, fluffy bunny.”

He would never – he respected his family far too much – and Sean certainly knew that, but the redhead did not bother to call his bluff. He just grinned again, offered him a mock-salute, and then went back to pondering Charles’ belly with an earnestness that was a bit silly.

“You’re going to tell Erik, aren’t you?” Alex spoke up, a glimmer of hope brightening every corner of his mind. Alex wanted their family whole again nearly as much as Charles did.

“I believe so, yes,” Charles answered what had not really been a query at all.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” Sean asked hesitantly, looking up to meet Charles’ gaze. It had nothing to do with him not missing Erik and Raven, because he did, but that he feared getting them back only to lose them once again.

“No, but it would be a worse idea to not tell him,” Charles said. “Could you imagine how he would react if he were to find out later from someone else… it would hardly be good. I’m just not yet sure how I’m going to reach him; he didn’t exactly leave a forwarding address.”

“I may be able to help with that,” Hank interjected, “I’m working on a portable version of Cerebro, a miniature version of the one that you used before. It’s probably going to take me at least six months to rebuild the proper version in the sub levels and give it all the upgrades I want to have installed before you use it, but I can have the smaller one ready in just a month, give or take a few days.”

Hank took a sip of his orange juice, “With your permission, Professor, I also want to build two more Blackbirds and get eventually get started on another project that will truly make this place a safe haven for mutants.”

“What’s that?” Moira asked.

“A shield,” Hank announced animatedly, “It’ll be invisible to the naked eye, but will keep unwanted guests out, even teleporters once I get the algorithms just right. We’ll be able to turn the house and grounds into a proper school. Even if the government locates us, they won’t be able to reach the students.”

“You can build that?” Sean sounded amazed.

“It’ll take some time,” Hank admitted, “But, yes.”

“You pull that off,” Alex said, “And I’ll never call you ‘Bozo’ again, Bozo.”
Hank rolled his eyes and then turned to look at Charles.

“I approve without stipulation,” Charles told him, “And you have my gratitude.”

Hank beamed and shot up, “Excellent, I’ll get started right now!”

“You’ll finish your breakfast first,” Charles contradicted dryly, raising an eyebrow at him. “I’ll not have you starving to death.”

Hank sheepishly sat back down and took a bite of his pancakes.

Charles had been trying reading the only book on childcare that he owned – a thick tome that was practically falling apart at its seams, had almost certainly been outdated even when he was an infant, and was written in French; but then, it was not as if Brian and Sharon Xavier had been preoccupied with how they should raise him, or raising him at all really, so of course they had never supplemented the library with other books on the topic – when noxious waves of fear, guilt, and pain suddenly slammed into him in an oscillating pattern.

It took him only a moment to realize that the sensations were emanating from Alex and then only one more for Charles to shove the disappointing, crumbling book off of his lap and onto the floor so that he could rush out of his bedroom. He hurried without pause into Alex’s suite, where he found the blond badly twisted up in the sweat-soaked sheets of his bed, trembling violently and sobbing almost silently in his sleep.

Caught in the throes of a particularly vicious nightmare.

Perched on the edge of Alex’s bed, Charles cast his mind out toward the boy’s, gleaning knowledge of the horrible dream and at the same time easing Alex from its grasp. Alex jerked awake and into Charles arms.

“Professor?” Alex managed after a full minute of quavering.

“I’m here, Alex,” Charles promised.

Charles did not ask if Alex wished to discuss those details of the nightmare that were as unfortunately vivid as they were unreal with him, because he already knew that the boy most adamantly did not – Alex would prefer to never think of them again. Charles could hardly blame him for that, but it still broke his heart to know that Alex was in such deep pain because of the parts that had been real.

“I am so very sorry about Armando,” Charles said softly. “I know that there was very little time to grieve him back then, but there is time now. You don’t have to hide from us, Alex, not ever.”

The tears that Alex had been fighting broke free and the blond wept into Charles’ shoulder. He sobbed for a love that had bloomed so brightly and then had been so cruelly and apathetically snatched away from him by Shaw. For a few short weeks, Alex had known what it was like to be truly loved by another – to fall head over heels into an unconditional love – and then Armando was gone. Taken, just like every other good thing in his life.

‘My parents. My baby brother. Erik and Raven. How long will I have Charles and my brothers and Moira before they too are taken away from me?’

“You are not going to lose us, Alex,” Charles swore then. “I will not let that happen, darling. For
better or worse, you are stuck with us. We’ll probably drive each other crazy and worry too much and never give each other a real moment’s peace, but that’s what families do. We may argue, at times, but when it comes down to it, we will fight for and with each other. And we will not be torn apart.”

It would take time for Alex to really believe him, but Charles had never been more determined to keep a promise.

“Armando’s death was not your fault, so don’t you dare blame yourself,” Charles instructed. “Shaw took him from us; it was that monster’s fault, not yours. Armando loved you, Alex. He thought about you all the time and he would never have wanted you to blame yourself.”

“It was my power!” Alex exclaimed brokenly.

“Yes, it was your amazing and beautiful powers that Shaw stole from you and turned into something terrible. Your gift could never have harmed Armando; you both knew that back then, when you tried to save Angel. It was not your fault.”

Slowly, Alex began to calm, though he made no attempt to leave the comfort of Charles’ arms.

After several minutes of stroking his hand through Alex’s damp hair, Charles recalled the other prominent part of Alex’s bad dream and asked, “Your little brother, Scott, he’s still alive?”

“Yes,” Alex’s voice cracked, “But I don’t know where he is; when our parents died, we were separated by the state. Scott wasn’t even four yet when they took him away from me; he was screaming for me and I couldn’t get to him. I begged so many times to be told something, anything about him, but everyone I spoke to always refused to tell me. Told me that I didn’t have the right to know. And then my powers manifested and…”

“I’ll find him, Alex, I swear,” Charles vowed. “As soon as Cerebro is finished, earlier even, if I can get a hold of his records. I’ll find Scott, no matter how long it takes me.”

Alex’s eyes welled up with tears again, “Thank you, Professor.”

Charles projected a sleepy calm at him and helped Alex settle back down onto the dry side of the bed. They could worry about changing the sheets in the morning, when Alex was not so overwrought with emotion.

“Professor?” Alex murmured drowsily. “Your baby is extremely lucky to have you. You’re already an amazing dad.”

Charles smiled warmly at him, “Thank you, Alex. Good night.”

“G’night.”

“That is entirely too risky,” Charles declared, trying very hard to hide the alarm which threatened to bubble up and over in his gut.

Moira had come up with a plan.

A terrible, horrible, no good plan of which Charles did not approve in the slightest. In fact, if his respect for Moira had not been quite as concrete as it was, he would have bloody well erased said plan from all memory because he hated it just that much.
“If they don’t believe you-”

“They will,” Moira interrupted firmly and without fear. “I’m a good actress, Charles. I have to be. I can convince them that you’ve wiped my memory. They’ll be suspicious at first, of course they will, they are the CIA after all, but they’ve long underestimated me.”

“And then?”

“I’ll be put on desk duty for a while,” Moira admitted, “But that works in our favor. It’ll be far easier for me to access classified information that way.”

“I don’t like this. I don’t like this one bit, Moira.”

“I know you don’t, but we need to know what they plan on doing next, Charles,” Moira said reasonably, reaching out to place a comforting hand on his left arm. “I promise that I’ll be as careful as I possibly can, but I have to do this.”

Charles understood her motivations, the love and concern for their patchwork family that she projected was like a beacon for a telepath.

“You have nothing to prove to us, you know?” Charles said softly. “You did not fail me in Cuba; you’ve never failed me.”

She blamed herself for the bullet, no matter how many times Charles had insisted that she should not.

“I won’t fail you in this,” Moira determined and then smiled at him. “Everything will be fine. Let me handle the CIA and you focus on training your X-Men.”

Charles raised an eyebrow, “X-Men?”

Moira laughed, “Blame Sean, he came up with it. But I do like it, it fits.”

“I suppose.”

The boys took to learning that Moira was leaving to spy on the CIA about as well as Charles had expected them to.

Which was to say, not at all.

If one were to relate that they had severe objections to her plan, it would still have been an understatement of epic proportions.

All three of Charles’ boys had been extremely vocal in their protests regarding her leaving Westchester, Alex the most so, over the next few days. Moira, however, was determined and by the ninth she had departed for Washington D.C. to implement her hazardous agenda.

The boys, predictably, spent quite a while moping and worrying once she was gone. After witnessing a ridiculous number of scenarios involving Moira’s untimely death flitter like rotten butterflies through the boys’ thoughts, Charles had thrown up his hands and ordered them to follow him on a trek across his massive estate. Charles’ destination had been on the far northern end of his property, were grew a lovely little grove of tall, beautiful pine trees.

“Pick one out,” he instructed, gesturing to the pines with a gloved hand, “Because we’re going to need a marvelous tree for our first Christmas together as a family.”
Hank, Sean, and Alex’s eyes lit up in excitement, warming Charles completely despite the frigid air.

The ‘Great Coniferous Tree Debate’ took long enough for Charles’ face to go completely numb, but in the end a gorgeous fourteen foot pine tree had been happily situated in the mansion’s great den, the biggest of the several it boasted, its sweet perfume already wafting throughout the large room after only a few minutes.

“I say that we all go wash off the sap on us and then get to decorating,” Charles suggested.

The boys were quick to comply and soon boxes that had been untouched for years were being dragged down from the attic. With Charles’ blessing, Alex and Sean went a little crazy draping garlands and tinsel all over the house while Hank helped Charles hang up wreaths and bows. Once this had been finished, the four set their sights on their tree. As Charles and Alex carefully hung the crystal ornaments that had been in the Xavier family for generations, Hank and Sean studiously strung together various flavors of popcorn to wrap around the tree. For the final touch, Hank and Alex lifted Sean up onto their shoulders so that he could place a porcelain angel on the topmost bough.

“Beautiful,” Sean breathed once he was back on the ground.

“It certainly is,” Charles agreed.

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Christmas came surprisingly quickly and the celebration was bittersweet. They all had people whom they dearly missed, but managed to take comfort in the knowledge that they still had each other.

Along with the practical things that Charles gifted them, things like clothes and bank accounts and allowances, he had also given each of the boys one of his cars.

Brian Xavier – and, unfortunately, Kurt Marko after him – had adored collecting high-end, expensive vehicles. Charles cared not one whit for the extravagant collection and had decided that gifting some of them to his sons, for there was no denying that they had become just that, would at the very least establish happy memories to associate with the ostentatious automobiles. The boys had been stunned and then giddy with gleeful excitement when he told them that they could each pick one out. It had taken hours to get Sean to stop bouncing around the cherry red Bandini 1100 that he had chosen.

Charles knew what Erik would have had to say about it all.

“You’re spoiling them, Charles.”

And he would have said it with such resigned disapproval as well.

Charles could hardly bring himself to care. The boys deserved to be spoiled after everything that they had gone through. They had been so brave and so loyal and they deserved everything that Charles had to offer them.

Charles knew how Raven would have reacted too.

“How come I don’t get a car?” she would have pouted at him.

“Because I’ve seen you drive, darling,” Charles would have responded dryly.

And then she would have pretended to be upset with him until he gifted her with the sapphire and
pearl necklace that he’d had commissioned just for her months earlier while they had still been in England. The necklace was upstairs, wrapped in golden paper and a bright blue bow, sitting atop her bed. It, like her brother, was waiting patiently for her to come home.

He had not bought a Christmas present for Erik, of course, knowing full well that his lover had grown up Jewish – for all that Erik spurned religion of any kind now – and would not appreciate the gesture. There was a gift in Erik’s room, however, a beautiful book straight from the shelves of Charles expansive library. The book was a first edition of Erik’s favorite story, a German fairytale that his mother had often read to him when he was very young. Charles had planned to give it to him upon the successful completion of their mission in Cuba, except the mission in Cuba had been anything but a success. Shaw was dead, yes, but the cost... the cost had been too fucking high.

The book was waiting for its owner too.

Christmas Supper was a glorious affair. Charles had hired a team of professional cooks to prepare it and the result was a tremendous amount of delectable food. After they had eaten as much as they possibly could, Hank demonstrated his previously hidden talent at playing the piano while Charles, Sean, and Alex sang every Christmas Carol that they knew, and a few that Charles was sure the boys had made up. Charles had allowed the boys each a glass of brandy with dinner and the liquor had certainly done its job.

To the delight of all four, the best Christmas gift arrived around nine-thirty that night. A brief but loving phone call from Moira, letting them know that her plan was working and that she was safe.

Despite the absent friends and family members, it was, Charles decided, a rather successful first Christmas.

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True to Hank’s word, Mini Cerebro, as Sean had unabashedly christened it, was finished midway through January. Even knowing that its range would be greatly reduced compared to a full scale version of the device, Charles was eager to test it out. For several reasons.

Firstly, to locate Erik and Raven and give them an incredibly good reason to abandon their ridiculous crusade against the humans and come home, where they belonged. Secondly, to find Scott and keep his promise to Alex. And thirdly, well, Charles very much wanted to once again experience the incredible sensation of touching so many beautiful minds at once. An experience that only Cerebro could offer him.

And so, Charles found himself sitting up on one of Hank’s lab tables with Mini Cerebro’s helmet securely on his head.

“Ready?” Hank double-checked.

“Ready,” Charles said confidently.

Hank turned the portable Cerebro on.

It was just as amazing as Charles remembered it to be. Unlike its predecessor in Virginia, Charles could only feel the minds of those in the North-Eastern section of the United States, but he was hardly going to complain.

After a few moments of simply basking in the sensations that the device offered, Charles began sorting through the minds of the Mutants that he could feel, looking for the specific ones that he wanted to connect with. It was a familiar enough process and should not have given him any great
surprises. But, of course, that was the nature of a surprise – you did not expect them.

“Armando?” Charles tried to grasp the almost ethereal-like mind of the boy whom he had believed lost forever, but it was wispy and impossible to keep steady.

“Professor?” Armando’s mental voice echoed back weakly – without Cerebro, Charles likely would never have been able to detect him at all. “Is… is that you?”

“It’s me,” Charles replied, “Where are you, Armando?”

“Near Alex… I think. I can feel him… sometimes, but I can’t reach him fully.”

“I want you focus completely on my mind, Armando,” Charles ordered with as much calm as he could muster, “I’ll guide you to Alex’s.”

Armando obeyed and Charles felt the boy’s mind slowly begin to solidify, becoming something that Charles could latch onto once more. Charles did and then pulled it to Alex’s mental signature; to his great relief, the boys’ minds wove together almost immediately.

“Mando?” Alex sounded heartbreakingly hesitant.

“It’s me, Alex,” Armando responded, growing stronger by the second. “I’m here, baby, but I need your help to come back.”

“Anything,” Alex swore. “Anything, Mando.”

“Just… just don’t let go.”

“Never.”

Charles opened his eyes and grinned in unfettered delight as Armando began to materialize before them – Charles and Alex pulling him back in tandem with his mutation pushing. It only took a minute and then he was standing in the lab, naked as the day he was born, but really there, really alive. Armando briefly started to sink downward, unused to having actual legs after so long, but Alex caught him and held him up, tears of joy running freely down his face.

“Sean, Hank,” Charles spoke thickly, “If you would be kind enough to go fetch some clothing for Armando?”

At Charles’ instruction, the boys managed to scrape the jaws up from off the floor and then quickly rushed to do just as Charles had asked. Charles lightly hopped off of the lab table and followed them out. Alex and Armando needed each other right now. Everything else could wait.

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Alex stared at Armando and was quite resolved to never, ever look away. Mando stared right back, a fierce love burning in his chocolate eyes. Alex raised a shaking hand to gently stroke Mando’s cheek, half certain that the other man would vanish as he did. But, to Alex’s utter amazement, he did not and a harsh sob tore its way out of Alex’s throat as it finally hit him that Armando was really there.

“Hi,” Alex managed to say.

“Hey,” Mando murmured back.
“You’re here,” Alex whispered. “Oh, god, I thought… I thought I was never gonna see you again. I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, Mando, I killed you. I’m so sorry!”

“Oh, Alex,” Mando pulled him close without hesitation and Alex buried his face in the other man’s neck. “Have you been blaming yourself all this time? It wasn’t your fault. It was my plan, baby, and it was Shaw who hurt me. Not you, never you. You could never hurt me. I love you so much.”

“I love you,” Alex returned, clutching Mando’s shoulders almost desperately. “I… I missed you.”

Armando was here. He was real. And Alex was never going to let go of him again.

“How?” Sean demanded, clutching the set of sweats he had dashed off to collect for Armando to his chest.

“Darwin’s mutation is the ability to adapt to survive,” Hank reasoned, though he looked just as startled as Sean.

“Yes, but…” Sean trailed off as memory assaulted him.

‘We saw him die. Saw Shaw…’

“When Shaw attempted to kill him,” Charles explained, placing a reassuring hand on Sean’s shoulder, “Armando’s mutation did the only thing it could to protect him. It transformed him into pure energy. The problem was turning him back. He is quite fortunate that he has such a strong connection to Alex; he could have been stuck as energy forever otherwise.”

“Oh, man!” Sean said in glee after a few moments’ consideration, elation overtaking his shock. “We’ve got Darwin back!”

For the first few hours, there seemed to be no end to the joy that the inhabitants of the mansion felt in the wake of Darwin’s miraculous return. But then Armando had brought up the whereabouts of the others and things had sobered up quickly.

It was Alex who explained the details of the ill-fated mission in Cuba, Sean who spoke of the division that had rocked their little family, and Hank who had finally revealed their Professor’s shocking condition.

“That’s incredible, Professor,” Darwin said in amazement.

“Yes,” Charles agreed, “The capabilities of mutation are, quite simply, astounding.”

“So, what’s the plan now?” Armando asked. “We obviously can’t work for the CIA anymore.”

“We’re going to turn this place into a school,” Sean said excitedly.

“A safe place for all mutants,” Alex added, “A place where they don’t have to be afraid of who they are and what they can do. A place where they’ll be accepted, unconditionally.”

Armando’s eyes lit up, “Count me in.”
In the days that followed, Charles used Mini Cerebro each morning like clockwork. With Alex, Armando, and Sean attending Columbia University during the week – money really was incredibly useful when it came to convincing school boards to ignore criminal records and other such potentially problematic things – Hank was responsible for monitoring Charles while he was hooked in. Hank did this despite the fact that Charles had repeatedly insisted that he did not need a babysitter.

It turned out that all four of his boys were quite protective of him.

Two weeks had passed since Armando’s return and Charles had still made very little progress in locating either Erik or Scott. He had suggested moving Mini Cerebro to a different location, but Hank was hesitant to do so until they heard from Moira about whether or not the CIA was actively searching for them.

Charles sighed as he felt Mini Cerebro shutting down, “Hank I know that that was not a full hour.”

“Sorry, Professor,” Hank replied, “But you’ve got a phone call. I put the guy on hold, but he seemed really impatient.”

Charles quickly scanned Hank, but could not place the voice he found in the scientist’s memories, “Thank you, Hank. I’ll take the call in my study.”

“Okay,” Hank replied, and his mind quickly turned to the project he wanted to start on.

“Don’t forget to eat lunch today,” Charles reminded as he exited the lab.

“I won’t,” Hank returned absently.

Charles shook his head fondly. No doubt he would have to drag Hank upstairs come noon.

Once in his study, Charles immediately picked up the red colored phone on his desk, “Charles Xavier.”

“Finally, Mister Xavier. I’m the social worker in charge of handling the Scott Summers case,” an irritated voice announced with preamble.

“Ah, excellent,” Charles replied, “And your name is?”

“Buntz,” the man retorted waspishly. “What exactly is it that you want to know?”

“I’m representing a member of Scott’s family that is trying to locate him,” Charles explained. “I understand that Scott is in the foster care system.”

“He is,” Buntz responded, “He was last assigned to the Pritchett family, but he’s not there anymore.”

“Then where is he?”

“No idea,” Buntz said, sounding remarkably unconcerned. “He ran away, the little bastard. And good riddance too, he was nothing but trouble.”

“He’s nine years old,” Charles seethed, one hand curling into a fist and the other strangling the phone receiver. “He’s just a little boy and you… Where do the Pritchets reside?”

“Chicago, Illinois.”

Damn. Chicago was right outside the range of Mini Cerebro.
“Good luck finding the little shit,” Buntz continued, and Charles heard the sound of papers rustling in the background, “I heard he ran off with some girl, a Jane Greg or something.”

“Thank you for your time,” Charles spoke with a calm that he did not feel, “I strongly recommend that you search for a new line of work, Mister Buntz, as you are sorely unqualified to safeguard the welfare of children.”

Charles hung up on the man before Buntz could say anything more, slamming the phone down with more force than was necessary. His hands automatically rose to his temples in an attempt to rub away the headache that he could feel coming on. He would never understand people of that ilk – and he did not wish to.

There was a chance that he could find Scott and the girl that he had left with if Charles remained in Westchester, but that would only be possible if the children decided to wander toward the east coast and Charles had little reason to hope for such a thing. There was nothing else for it.

Charles had to go to Chicago.

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Chicago was exactly the same as it had been the last time Charles was there. Bustling, loud, and, of course, windy.

Charles had booked the Presidential Suite at the Drake Hotel, an Italian-style resort at the top of Chicago’s Magnificent Mile. His boys, despite the seriousness of their mission, were absolutely enthralled by the place.

“Guys,” Sean exclaimed, “There are full-size chocolate bars on the pillows, the good kind.”

Hank was engrossed with a brochure of the hotel, “It says here that there’s an exclusive club on the premises.”

“Ah, yes,” Charles said absently, “Club International. The Xavers have been members since its inception in the forties, although I’ve never been.”

“The bar is stocked, guys,” Sean said, “Like fully stocked. With the good stuff.”

“Did you see that chandelier downstairs?” Alex remarked in an aside to Armando, “It probably had a million crystals on it.”

“Why don’t you boys go enjoy Afternoon Tea in the Palm Court?” Charles suggested, “While I get started with Mini Cerebro. It’ll probably take a while and I know that you four are hungry.”

“I’m covered in blue fur, Professor,” Hank tried, because he did not like leaving Charles alone when he was using the machine, no matter that he had designed it in the first place.

“Which no one has noticed or will,” Charles countered easily, “A lovely benefit to traveling with a telepath. Go, I’ll be perfectly fine.”

“I need you three to keep Alex distracted,” Charles projected to Hank, Sean, and Armando, “I don’t yet know what I’m going to find.”

One more gentle mental nudge had the boys out the door and heading for the elevator. Charles settled onto the couch and activated Mini Cerebro.
Finding the Pritchetts was easy; getting into their minds was even easier. It was what he found in their minds that was startling. Scott and the little girl, Jean Grey, that he had run away with were Mutants.

Images of fire-like beams bursting from Scott’s eyes and of Jean making things go flying through the air without ever having touched them flashed through Charles’ consciousness. The Pritchetts had not yet told anyone about what they had seen Scott do, but they meant to as soon as Jean’s parents returned from searching their old farmhouse for their errant daughter. They wanted Scott and Jean locked up, kept far away from normal people.

It was so very easy, perhaps too easy, for Charles to carefully take apart the memories of John and Lucille Pritchett and then stitch them back together sans any knowledge of Scott Summers and Jean Grey. These people would not be a threat to Scott any longer – right now, anonymity was a Mutant’s best defense.

Charles turned his attention to scouring the city for Scott and Jean.

After nearly an hour of methodological scanning, he found them huddled together in an alley hiding from a pair of police officers who were searching for truants. Even though they were covered in layer of blackish dirt, Charles could see the familial resemblance between Scott and Alex and was impressed by the startling dark red of Jean’s hair. Scott had his eyes scrunched shut, as if he could not bear to open them up.

Using Cerebro as a boost, Charles projected an almost corporal image of himself into the mouth of the alley, causing Jean to jerk backwards in fear and Scott to quickly follow suit, “It’s alright, it’s alright. I swear that I have absolutely no intention of causing either one of you harm.”

“Who are you?” Scott demanded, looking in his direction as if he could see him.

“My name is Charles Xavier. I’m a friend of your brother’s, Scott. I’m a friend of Alex’s. And, like both of you, I can do things that ordinary people cannot.”

“You know Alex?” Scott asked in disbelief.

“Yes,” Charles answered gently. “He has missed you a great deal, Scott, and has been looking for you for a long time. He is going to be so glad to see you again.”

“Where is he then?” Scott questioned. “Why isn’t he with you?”

“He is with me, actually,” Charles replied. “We’re both at the Drake Hotel right now.”

“What?”

“I’m a telepath, Scott,” Charles explained. “I’m communicating with you with my mind. I’m not physically here, not yet, but I will be soon and so will your brother.”

“No!” Scott cried suddenly. “You can’t come here! Alex can’t come here! I’ll hurt him too! You’ve got to tell him to stay away! To stay far away from me!”

“No, Scott, it’s alright,” Charles soothed. “Alex has powers very similar to yours. I helped him to gain control of his gifts and I can help you too. You don’t have to be afraid.”

“Really?” Scott’s tone was a mix between desperate and hopeful.

“I promise,” Charles reassured, “We’re going to come get you now.”
Scott looked fearful for a long moment before slowly nodding, his longing for his big brother stronger than his alarm, “We’re near the Navy Pier. Please hurry; the police will be checking this alley again soon.”

“We will,” Charles said before deactivating Mini Cerebro.

Not a moment too soon as Alex, Armando, Sean, and Hank reentered the suite only seconds later.

“How’s Scott?” Charles asked, his heart swelling with pride.

“Scott’s fine,” Hank said with a smile. “He was just very, very, very happy to see you.”

“We should have come sooner.”

“We will,” Charles said before deactivating Mini Cerebro.

The sight of young Scott stumbling blindly into Alex’s outstretched arms was one that Charles would never forget. It was heartwarming and beautiful and Charles would have loved to watch the two of them forever, but there was another matter that desperately required his immediate attention.

Jean Grey.

To Charles’ surprise, he quickly realized that she was not just telekinetic, but was telepathic as well. She was how Scott had been able to get around Chicago without ever opening his eyes; she had been his guide, projecting what she saw into his mind so that Scott could still see.

Jean was petrified of the adults and Charles could not blame her. Not when he could so clearly see her memories of being drugged, beaten, and chained up by her own parents.

The images made his blood boil.

Charles knelt down in front of her and slowly reached for her much smaller hands, projecting as much love and safety as he could toward her. Despite her fear and wariness, Jean allowed him to take her hands in his. Charles counted this as a small victory.

“I am so sorry that you have been hurt, little one, but I promise that I am not going to let anyone harm you ever again. I have an estate in New York, a place where you can use your beautiful gifts without fear. A place where you’ll be safe. A home where you’ll be loved and protected. Would you like that?”

Jean tilted her head and Charles felt her bright mind seeking entrance into his own. He let her in, allowing her to easily find what she was searching for, namely images of Westchester and his dreams for a school.

Jean blinked and then launched herself into Charles’ arms, clinging to him.

“I think that’s a yes, Prof,” Sean said.

“I do believe so,” Charles agreed as he stroked Jean’s dark red locks.

“Even if Scott can’t turn off his powers, I’m sure that I can develop something to give him his sight back,” Hank declared later that night, once they were back in their hotel suite.

Alex, Armando, and Scott were already in bed. The two Summers boys were exhausted from the day and Darwin was watching over them protectively. Sean was running around the resort attempting to steal chocolates, which left Charles and Hank talking in the sitting room with Jean curled up against Charles’ left side.
“I wonder if all Mutant siblings have powers that are complimentary to one another or if this is an event unique to Alex and Scott,” Hank mused, “It’ll be fascinating to research. There’s so much about our own evolution that we don’t know yet. If mutation is hereditary. If Mutant children will have the same gifts as their Mutant parents. Where mutation comes from in the first place. We’re on groundbreaking territory here, Professor.”

Before Charles could reply, Jean started whimpering in her sleep.

Charles immediately reached his mind out for hers and she latched onto it, using his mental presence as a type of security blanket that drove her night terrors away, “Shh, little one. You’re alright.”

Jean stilled and her breathing evened out.

“They hurt her, didn’t they?” Hank asked, “Her parents?”

“Yes,” Charles admitted, and it was a struggle to keep his voice even as he relayed, “They kept her chained up in their cellar and tried to… tried to beat the freak out of her. Scott broke her out and they ran.”

“We’re going to need to come up with a cover story for her,” Hank decided after a minute of seething, “Unless you want to have to mind-whammy everyone who sees her.”

“Mind-whammy?”

“Sean,” Hank explained with a shrug.


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Charles did not, in fact, think of something. It was Jean herself who, quite accidentally, came up with her own cover story a few days later.

“It’s not entirely unprecedented,” Hank said, “A lot of people bury traumatizing experiences to help themselves heal.”

“Yeah,” Sean replied slowly, “But most people don’t accidentally wipe their entire memory and replace it with something better.”

Hank shrugged his shoulders a bit helplessly.

“She got to Scott’s memories too,” Alex announced as he and Mando entered the study, “He doesn’t remember the Pritchett’s and thinks that he’s been here for months.”

The boys turned as one to Charles.

“Hank’s right,” he managed after a few moments’ deliberation, “It’s a defense mechanism. I had no idea that a telepath could alter their own minds – although, I suppose there’s every chance that I wouldn’t remember if I ever had known.”

“So,” Armando questioned, “What are we going to do?”

The group contemplated that, all still astonished over the recent, unprecedented turn of events.

Jean had pranced down the stairs earlier that morning and the first words out of her mouth were, “Daddy, can we please have French Toast for breakfast?”
Charles had stared at her for nearly a full minute before regaining enough of his mental faculties to delve into Jean’s mind. What he discovered had left him gaping in shock.

Eventually, he had managed to choke out a, “Sure, love,” before turning to his boys and revealing what he had just discovered.

Sometime during the night, while she slept, Jean had shredded all of her memories of her biological parents and her life with them and had then patched together a new reality for herself. A reality where Charles was actually her father and her mother was one of Charles’ old girlfriends from his college days.

Jean now believed that Charles had not known that she existed until a few months prior, not until her ‘mother’ had died in a car accident and Charles had been contacted by a social worker. It was a much more pleasant life than the one she had actually lived and had instilled an incredible confidence in Jean overnight. Her query for French Toast had been the first words that Charles have ever heard her utter, the first words that she had dared to speak aloud. Words spoken in a British accent no less.

Her grin at his affirmative answer had been the first time that he had seen her smile.

“Nothing,” Charles answered Armando.

“Professor?” Hank spoke up.

“We needed a cover story,” Charles said, “We’ve got one. Forcing her to remember what her parents did could cause irreparable damage to her psyche. I promised to protect her; I can’t hurt like that. Her telepathy isn’t like mine, so we don’t have to worry about her accidentally overhearing the truth.”

This was true. Unlike Charles, who had to work to keep out of the minds of others, Jean had to concentrate firmly to get into a single mind. This could change over time, as her powers developed, but Charles doubted that she would ever easily access more than a few minds at once. Her telepathy was her secondary mutation after all; it would be her telekinesis that would truly define her.

It only took a minimum amount of persuasion to convince the boys that reversing Jean’s alterations was a bad idea in the long run. Sean caved first, followed in short order by Hank and Armando. Alex had held out the longest, but was won over when Charles successfully assured him that Jean’s tweaking had caused no harm to his little brother and was actually probably beneficial to Scott.

Later, Charles contacted his lawyers and convinced them with a combination of money and telepathy to do several illegal things for him. Five days later, Charles was, as far as the government was concerned, the legal father of Jean Elizabeth Xavier

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“But what if they don’t work,” Scott fretted.

He was standing in the middle of the Danger Room wearing a pair of red-tinted goggles. Hank had explained that he had crafted them out of Rose Quartz, which was apparently one of the very few things that could block Alex’s plasma blasts. If, as Hank suspected, Scott’s eyebeams were composed of the same energy as his older brother’s, then the goggles would block the beams and allow Scott to see again.

“They will,” Hank told him, “I had Alex help me test them. Open your eyes, Scott.”

Scott bit his lip, still unconvinced. He had become more cheerful and happier since Jean had altered his memories, but he still feared his powers a great deal.
“Buddy,” Alex chimed in, “Everything’s going to be okay, trust me. Just open your eyes.”

Slowly and with great trepidation, Scott did. A second later he gasped in utter delight, “I can see!”

Everybody cheered.

“Well done, Hank,” Charles praised, “Very well done!”


Hank beamed in response.

Moira called the next morning.

“I’ve got good news,” she announced, “The CIA has decided to put Mutants on the back burner on the orders of President Kennedy himself. Apparently, there are bigger fish to fry right now.”

“That’s splendid!” Charles declared. “Does that mean you’ll come home then?”

“Not yet,” Moira said with regret, “The higher-ups may have decided that you’re not a threat, but I’m still concerned about Stryker. He’s the one who pushed for the missiles to be fired in Cuba and I don’t believe that he’s going to leave Mutants alone just because the Director ordered him to.”

“You’ll be careful,” and it was not a question.

“Promise,” Moira agreed, “So, what’s new in Westchester?”

“You won’t believe what I have to tell you, my dear.”

On February the eighteenth, Charles finally managed to locate Erik with Mini Cerebro.

“Erik!”

“Get out of my head, Charles!” Erik snarled at him immediately.

“Wait! Erik, please listen-”

“No!”

And then he was gone. His mind nothing but a void thanks to Shaw’s wretched helmet.

Charles wrenched Cerebro’s interface off of his temple, shoved it into Hank’s arms, and ran out of the lab. Only once he was safely ensconced in his bedroom did he allow himself to cry.

The pain he had felt then was nothing compared to the agony inflicted upon him the following afternoon. Plastered all over the news were details regarding the deaths of over three dozen naval officers. Charles hadn’t needed Moira’s confirmation to know that each of them had served on one of the American battleships in Cuba.

Every single one of them had been killed by thick metal spears that had no business being anywhere near them.
Charles retreated to his study in order to escape the pity and horror radiating off of the boys. He made a decision that nearly rent his soul in two that evening.

To keep him or her safe from the fallout of their father’s warmongering, Erik could never learn about the existence of their child.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter Two

It was storming on the evening in early March when Charles was interrupted from his reading aloud of ‘The Hobbit’ to Jean and Scott by a loud pounding on the mansion’s front doors. The boys, who were pretending to read their own books because they were ‘much too old for bedtime stories’ – at least, according to Sean, whose own book was upside down – immediately stood and placed themselves between Charles, Scott, and Jean and the doors.

“It’s quite alright,” Charles told them, “Our guests do not mean us any harm. They’re Mutants in need of our help.”

In fact, Charles recognized the older of the two minds. While he and Erik had been recruiting, they had briefly encountered a crass, gruff man who had rather ineloquently told them to leave him alone. Erik had been angered by the Mutant’s dismissal, but Charles had sensed the man’s deep-seated pain and had telepathically offered his assistance should the man ever need it.

Charles rose and walked, he was not waddling, thank you very much Mister Cassidy, to the front doors. He opened them wide, without any hesitation, which mollified his boys a bit.

“Hello again, Logan,” Charles greeted.

“Chuck,” the man replied, gruffly of course, and if his appearance had not raised the hackles of the boys his tone certainly did the trick.

Behind Logan stood a petite teenage girl with wild blonde curls and eyes the color of golden honey.

“Do come in,” Charles insisted, “The weather is simply frightful tonight.”

Logan stomped inside without any dithering on his part and the girl followed quickly, one hand gripping the back of Logan’s slick leather jacket.

“You know these people, Professor?” Alex asked, eyeing Logan warily.

“I know Logan,” Charles said cheerfully.

Logan snorted.

“I have not, however,” Charles continued as he shut the doors, “Had the pleasure of meeting the lovely young lady with him.”

“I’m Chloë,” the teenager said, “Chloë Howlett. I’m his daughter.”

“Charles Xavier,” Charles offered his hand, “It’s wonderful to meet you.”

Chloë shook his hand with a small smile, “It’s nice to meet you too. Can you really read minds? Daddy said you could.”

“I can,” Charles said, bringing two fingers to his temple. “My mutation has granted me a wide range of mental powers, just as yours allows you to heal at a rather remarkable speed and has given you the
ability to shift into a half-lynx form.”

Chloë’s eyes widened and she smiled freely, impressed and unafraid, “Whoa.”

“You smell pregnant.”

Charles and Logan were sitting in Charles’ study, drinking tea and beer respectively after having seen everyone else, save Hank who had wandered down to his lab, to bed.

“I should,” Charles replied blithely, “Seeing as how I am.”

Logan raised an eyebrow, but otherwise did not react, “Where’s the Shark?”

“Erik… Erik’s gone.”

“Sorry, Bub.”

“You are more than welcome to stay here, you know,” Charles offered, eager to change the subject, “I will, of course, provide asylum for Chloë, but you do not have to leave, my friend.”

“I ain’t good for her,” Logan said bluntly, “She’ll be for better off without me in her life.”

“I don’t think that Chloë would agree with that assessment.”

Logan shrugged, “Her mother’s dead cause of me. I won’t see her dead too.”

“The actions of those heinous men were not your fault, Logan,” Charles stated in a firm tone, “And your daughter does not blame you for what happened.”

“She should.”

Charles sighed, “I’m afraid that we shall simply have to agree to disagree on this subject. I want you to know, Logan, that you will always be welcomed back here.”

Logan grunted and if Charles had not been capable of reading minds then he would have had no idea how touched the other Mutant actually was.

“In the morning, I’ll have Chloë’s records pulled from her former school in Ontario and arrange for her to finish her high-school education here. I believe that it would be safer to home-school her, all things considered,” Charles decided, paused, and then, “I do wonder, what made you decide that you could trust me?”

“Your scent,” Logan revealed, “Very few people smell like you do, Chuck, but then, there are very few truly good people in this world.”

As soon as Logan was sure that the men who murdered Adrian had not followed him and Chloë to Westchester, he left. Without saying goodbye to anybody but Chuck, who had made one last attempt to convince him to stay.

Logan knew better than to think that staying was a good idea. Chuck was a good man, had good people by his side, and innocent children to take care of. Logan simply had too many enemies to risk squatting in any single place for long; he would only be putting Chuck’s family in danger.
Besides, Logan was very used to being without a home.

His daughter deserved far more than that, though, far more than Logan could give her. Chloë would be safe and happy living with Chuck. He was doing the right thing in leaving her behind.

If only he could convince his conscience to stop making him feel so damn guilty.

Charles nearly had a heart attack very early the following morning when he realized that he could feel the consciousnesses of his unborn children.

*Children.* Plural. There were four incredibly distinct mental signatures brushing up against his own.

*Four.*

As quickly as he possibly could, he made his way down to the lab where Hank, who had slept as much as Charles himself had – which was to say none – was rebuilding an advanced version of the Blackbird One’s engine.

“Oh, hey, Professor,” Hank greeted, “I was totally about to go to bed, soon-ish.”

“Lying to a telepath, Hank, is not something that very many people have ever been successful at.”

“Um, right,” Hank said, abashed.

“Never mind that now,” Charles told him. “Did you ever finish the ultrasound machine that you were working on?”

“Yes,” Hank confirmed, “But I thought you wanted to be surprised.”

“I already have been,” Charles revealed, “I think… I’m fairly positive that I’m carrying more than one child.”

“You think that you’re having twins?” Hank asked.

“Try a quartet.”

Hank blinked at him, “And, um, you think this because…”

“I can feel their minds,” Charles explained, and if he was gesturing a bit wildly then it was certainly not his fault, “Four minds whose location my telepathy has pinpointed to be my stomach.”

“Okay then,” Hank responded, ever adaptable, “Take off your shirt, climb up on the counter you use for Mini Cerebro, and lay down. I’ll wheel over the ultrasound machine.”

Charles complied, squirming a bit when the cold metal countertop touched his bare back. Hank pushed over a boxy contraption that was obviously meant to be the ultrasound machine – although, quite frankly, it looked more like a sonar apparatus that had been cannibalized and then haphazardly put back together – and then grabbed a jar of clear jelly from one of the shelves.

“This is going to be cold,” Hank warned, “Because I didn’t get to warm it up.”

Very carefully, Hank spread thick globs of the gel on Charles’ distended belly, switched on the ultrasound machine, and then picked up what had to be the transducer, even though Charles had never seen a cordless transducer before.
Hank moved the device slowly over Charles’ stomach, before halting it suddenly and excitedly declaring, “Well, Professor, you were right. There are definitely four babies. That’s incredible, you know, since quadruplets are so rare. They appear to be growing in two separate wombs, which is really quite fascinating. I wonder why two wombs are necessary. Perhaps it has something to do with their mutations. Chloë is obviously proof that mutation is hereditary so I think it’s safe to say that your children will be Mutants, Professor.”

“Oh god,” Charles spoke as he stared at the grainy image of his children on the monitor and tried very, very hard not to cry, “I haven’t prepared at all.”

Chloë was heartbroken when she woke up a few hours later and discovered that her father had vanished in the night.

Charles did the only thing he could think of to both lift her spirits and solve the problem of her only owning a single set of clothing and asked, “Have you ever been shopping in New York City, Chloë?”

That was how he found himself wandering into boutique after boutique with Chloë and Jean, who had begged to tag along, leading his way. Apparently, buying clothes for a teenage girl was a much more complicated venture than doing the same for boys, teenaged or otherwise, or an eight year-old whose only real stipulations were that her outfits all be in some shade of pink, purple, or blue.

Chloë preferred earthy tones and growled every single time that one of the salesladies suggested that she wear skirts, like a ‘proper’ young lady, instead of slacks. The growling was either ignored, by some of the more seasoned workers, or caused the women in question to go into hysterics – in which case, Charles was forced to quickly alter their memories to stop their panicking and prevent them from tossing the trio out of the store. Chloë was decidedly unapologetic for growling at the women in the first place and Jean found it increasingly hilarious.

Chloë did eventually consent to getting a single jade green colored dress, but only because Jean had picked it out and Chloë had no desire to growl at her.

Charles was immensely grateful when the entire ordeal appeared to be over and he quickly loaded an impressive number of shopping bags into the trunk of his car, ready to head for home. But then Chloë and Jean had caught sight of a nearby baby store.

Two and a half hours later, the three were finally heading back to the mansion after having all but cleaned out a grand total of five upscale baby shops, making the owners of said shops very happy. Charles was extremely appreciative that his last name allowed him to request that the purchases be shipped directly to his home, because there certainly had not been room enough in the car.

A few days later, Charles was in the midst of examining Chloë’s school transcripts so that he could compose lesson plans for her – she consistently received top marks in history and literature but slacked considerably when it came to mathematics and the sciences; she had also completely failed her cooking classes – when Sean burst into his study like the whirlwind he was in order to drag Charles upstairs and into the room that he had previously chosen as the nursery for the Quad, a moniker that he had Mister Cassidy himself to thank for. Charles had picked the spacious room because it was light and airy, had windows overlooking the flower garden, and because it was directly across the hall from his own. Charles had been meaning to decorate the plain space for weeks, but something else had always needed his attention more.
He found Hank, Armando, and Alex standing in the middle of the room and it certainly was not plain any longer. It had been transformed into a gorgeous nursery with a color scheme comprised of pale greens and grays. The four bassinets, the dressers, the rocking chair, and the two changing tables were all stained a lovely shade of champagne gold. The bassinets were filled with blankets and stuffed animals, the very same ones that Chloë and Jean had helped him pick out. Charles had a feeling that if he opened the dressers he would find the clothes that he had selected as well.

They had surprised him with this and surprising a telepath was a feat and a half. Charles was trying very, very hard not to burst into tears because his amazing children had gone out of their way to create this beautiful sanctuary for him and his unborn babies. The amount of work that had to have gone into transforming the room was heartwarming, to say the absolute least.

“Professor?” Alex moved toward him in alarm, misinterpreting his reaction as distress.

“I’m alright,” Charles assured, “It’s just, you know, hormones. This, what you all have done, it’s incredible. Thank you so much.”

Charles had not been avoiding using Mini Cerebro after Erik’s callous dismissal of him; he had just been really busy lately. Yes, that was it. There was no avoidance going on in Westchester.

Charles had always been rather good at fooling himself.

When he thought back on it over the following months and years, Charles would always thank every deity he knew of that Chloë, who had been mesmerized by the very idea of Cerebro, had convinced him to demonstrate for her how it worked on that specific drizzly afternoon in April. Because the alternative… it didn’t bear thinking about.

“They’re so young,” Hank commented from the passenger seat of Charles’ navy blue Mercedes.

Sean was driving the vehicle while Alex and Armando followed closely behind in the second car, a twin of the first save for its ebony paintjob.

“I never really questioned it with Scott and Jean,” Hank continued, “I suppose that I assumed that Jean was like you, Professor, that she’d always had her powers and that Scott was just an early bloomer. But… there is no way that these four could possibly be in puberty already. They’re little more than toddlers.”

“I’m not a toddler!” Peter, the eldest of the four who had an incredible shock of quicksilver hair and the super speed to match it, spoke up indignant, “I’m six.”

Then, he yawned.

Peter was the only one of the children, who were all tucked up against Charles in the backseat, who was still awake. It was quite obvious, though, that he was quickly losing ground in his Herculean battle against slumber. The other three, Ororo, Bobby, and Kitty, had passed out almost immediately once they had been convinced that they were truly safe from the hellish men that had taken them. Fear was quite exhausting, after all, especially for such tiny beings.

“Six is a rather grand age, isn’t it?” Charles said, gently rubbing circles into Peter’s back. He could not nudge Peter to sleep telepathically, could barely read the boy’s mind at all, because Peter’s thought processes were simply too fast and Charles suspected that attempting to slow them down
would only give Charles himself a headache.

Peter yawned again, “Yes.”

Another few seconds and he was snoring softly, fast in dreamland.

“Prof,” Sean’s voice was almost a whisper, and the taint of fear was present both in his voice and mind, “One or two kids is a coincidence, but four… if Mutants are coming into their powers earlier… they could be in a lot of danger. Little kids don’t know that they should keep what they can do a secret. One day they’ll be eagerly telling their parents, their friends, and their neighbors and the next they’ll be dragged off by government goons.”

Sean was absolutely right and the reality he alluded to was frightening. Most young children would expose themselves as Mutants without a thought, and in a time when anonymity was their greatest protection too. The children whom Charles and his X-Men had just rescued were proof of that.

The men who had held them captive were still alive, but it had required every ounce of Charles’ considerable self-control to make sure of that.

The half-dozen government agents had possessed no compunctions at all about putting bullets through the heads of Peter’s aunt and Ororo’s grandparents. Right in front of the children, no less. They certainly had not felt even a smidgeon of guilt when they convinced the Drakes and the Prydes to sell Bobby and Kitty to them for a quarter of a million dollars apiece.

The children had been traumatized enough by the time the X-Men reached them, and that was the only reason that all Charles did was tamper with the perceptions of the agents. They would never recall that their armored van had been forced to pull over and, at least until they reached their destination, they would remain fully convinced that their young prisoners were still in their custody.

They would all also suffer terrible migraines for the next two weeks, but that was neither here nor there.

Charles exhaled heavily, “I know, Sean, I know. Hank, if I can get you everything you need for it by tomorrow night, how long will it be until Cerebro is completed?”

Hank thought about it briefly, calculations running at incredible speeds through his mind, “I can have it finished in three weeks.”

Charles nodded, “Alright, that’s good. I have a feeling that we are going to need it.”

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Jean and Scott adored their new playmates. They took to their new roles as big brother and elder sister like ducks took to water. As a result, within only a few days, the new children were smiling and laughing and calling Charles ‘daddy’.

Charles, who had been terribly worried that the children would be severely damaged psychologically, was very surprised that they were not. The reason for this eventually became clear.

It was starting to become a pattern really. Jean, quite subconsciously, had detected their pain and, in an attempt to protect her new brothers and sisters, she had dulled the memories that frightened them to a significant degree while they all slept. It was not as absolute as the tampering that she had done to her own mind, or even Scott’s, but it had apparently greatly sped up their healing processes.

For this reason, Charles was inclined to let it be.
“Daddy,” Kitty ran over to where Charles was sitting with Bobby, “I drewed you a picture!”

“It’s beautiful, Kitty, love,” Charles praised, carefully taking the multicolored squiggle-covered piece of paper that she was holding out toward him, making her beam in delight, “Thank you very much, darling.”

“You’re welcome, Daddy,” Kitty kissed his cheek and then made her way over to where Jean and Ororo were setting up a three-story doll house.

“I like this doll,” Ororo said in regards to a figurine with mocha skin and caramel brown hair, “She’s a princess. When I grow up, I’m gonna be a princess too.”

“Being a princess isn’t a job,” Peter appeared out of nowhere to say.

“It is too,” Ororo insisted.

“Ororo can be a princess if she likes,” Charles said quickly to prevent an argument that would only end in tears, “Just like you can be whatever you want when you grow up.”

“Princess Ororo,” Ororo murmured to herself happily.

“I want to steal a ship and be a pirate then,” Peter decided, “You can be a pirate too, Bobby.”

“I don’t wanna be a pirate,” Bobby protested, “I want to sell ice cream.”

“If you’re a pirate you get to steal ice cream,” Peter offered, “And snow cones and cake.”

Bobby proceeded to ponder this new knowledge, “Okay then.”

Having received Bobby’s agreement, Peter quickly switched to a new topic, “Dad, my tooth is wiggling around.”

“It’s probably getting ready to come out,” Charles told him, “To make way for your grown-up teeth. Do you know what that means?”

Peter shook his head.

“In a few days, you shall get to place your tooth under your pillow for the tooth fairy to come collect.”

“What’s that?” Peter demanded.

“The Tooth Fairy is a magical sprite that visits during the night, while you’re sleeping, to collect the milk teeth of all little children,” and, because Charles could see that Peter was about to argue that he was not little, he quickly tacked on, “And big children. And in place of your tooth, she leaves you a surprise.”

“What does she do with the teeth?” Bobby wanted to know.

“She turns them into stars,” Charles said, “That’s why there are so many of them in the sky.”

“Oh,” Bobby looked awed, “Cool.”

Charles caught sight of Sean, who was leaning in the room’s doorway, watching with a fond smile.

“What?” Charles asked.
“You’re really good at this dad stuff, you know,” Sean said, “Like really good.”

Charles meant to respond, but Peter distracted him by letting out an extremely dramatic sigh that got everyone’s attention.

“What’s wrong?” Jean asked.

“Why can’t my tooth be ready to come out now?” he bemoaned, “A few days is forever.”

“Stryker’s been spitting mad all week,” Moira sounded quite pleased to report to Charles, “Something about his best agents managing to mysteriously lose classified government assets.”

“They’re not assets,” Charles replied, “They’re children.”

“Are they alright?”

“They are. I’ve decided to adopt them.”

“That’s actually no where near as surprising as you probably think it should be, Charles,” Moira remarked, “Tell me about them.”

“The eldest, Peter, he’s six and he could make it halfway to California before I finished speaking his full name.”

“Teleporter?”

“No,” Charles clarified, “He’s just fast. Astonishingly so. Ororo is five and she can control the weather. She made it rain indoors yesterday after Peter pulled on her pigtails, quite literally unfortunately.”

Moira laughed, “That’s incredible!”

“Bobby and Kitty are both three,” Charles continued, “Bobby can create and control ice. He froze the baseball pitch two days ago. He was quite upset about it at first; was convinced that I would be mad and would want to get rid of him. I managed to convince him that I wasn’t upset and then we all had a lovely afternoon ice-skating, but it’ll probably take time to booster his confidence. Especially after his parents… after his parents sold him.”

“What?” Moira’s voice had gone flat.

“His and Kitty’s,” Charles said grimly, “For two hundred and fifty thousand dollars each.”

“Peter and Ororo’s parents?” Moira asked softly.

“Peter lived with his aunt and Ororo with her grandparents. They’re all three dead,” Charles admitted, “Killed by Stryker’s agents.”


Charles briefly bit his lip and then hesitantly asked, “Moira, am I doing the right thing?”

“What do you mean, Charles?”

“It’s just… it has occurred to me that what I’m doing is rather tantamount to kidnapping.”
There was a long silence from Moira’s end before she evenly spoke, “Charles, those kids, their old lives are over. The government is never going to stop hunting for them. And quite frankly, they could do a lot worse, a hell of a lot worse, than being gifted the name, Xavier. Sometimes, doing what’s right means breaking the law as it stands. Remember, it was crafted by imperfect people and so is imperfect itself.”

A tightness that Charles hadn’t before detected eased in his chest, “Thank you, darling.”

“Anytime,” Moira said, “So, what’s Kitty’s gift?”

“She can walk through walls,” Charles revealed, “And phase through ceilings. I nearly had a heart attack when she fell through the floor this morning. Fortunately, though, she landed on the sofa in the room below. Being a parent is quite stressful at times, Moira.”

Moira burst into laughter.

In order to avoid the craziness that was sure to come about should he take four small children shopping in the City, Charles called for a renowned children’s tailor to come out to the mansion. This had seemed like a stroke of brilliance, until the man had caught sight of Ororo.

The only physical reaction the man had was a thinning of his lips, but the thoughts running through his mind made Charles vibrate with fury.

‘Great, a fucking negro. The only thing niggers like her are good for is pleasuring men.’

“Get out,” Charles growled, making his family look at him in shock, “Get out now and do not come back.”

The man fled the grounds.

“Uncle Charlie?” Chloë spoke up cautiously, “Are you okay?”

“That man’s thoughts were vile,” Charles told them, still seething.

“How about Alex and I help you take the kids shopping tomorrow?” Armando suggested, ever the reasonable one.

“That would be most appreciated.”

And if Charles held Ororo more closely than normal that night, stroking her silky white hair as he simultaneously read aloud and plotted unpleasant things to do to ignorant, bigot tailors, well, no one mentioned it.

True to his word, Hank had the full-scale version of Cerebro finished by early May. Everyone eagerly gathered in the spherical chamber to watch Charles use it for the first time.

“Why are some people red?” Ororo asked.

Like the others, she was being very careful to stay absolutely still while Cerebro was activated.

“They’re Mutants,” Charles answered, “Like us.”
“There’s a lot of them,” Jean said.

“Around ten thousand,” Charles agreed, “And most of them are quite young. Only about half have actually manifested.”

“Mani-what?” Kitty asked.

“Manifested,” Charles repeated, “I mean that only half of the Mutants you can see have powers that they can use.”

“Oh,” Kitty said.

“Are you going to help them too, daddy?” Bobby inquired.

“I very much hope so.”

Hank’s next big achievement took place on the twenty-seventh of May, when the mansion and the grounds surrounding it were enshrouded by the shield he had developed. As advertised, it was practically invisible although there were a few small patches where the view was distorted and blurry.

Alex spent an entire hour blasting at it with his plasma rings before clapping Hank on the back in approval, “Awesome work, Beast.”

“It can’t stop a telepathic attack,” Hank cautioned, a bit flustered by everyone’s open admiration.

“That’s what you’ve got me for,” Charles quipped and then said more seriously, “Now that the summer has begun, I have a class that I need to teach all of you.”

“What’s that?” Sean wondered.

“How to protect your minds from a telepath.”

“Why?” Chloë asked, “You’d never use your gifts to hurt us, Uncle Charlie.”

“Jean and I are not the only telepaths in existence,” Charles said, “And I know of at least one who is certainly a threat.”

“Emma Frost,” Alex supplied.

“Indeed,” Charles nodded, “And I have no intention of allowing any of you to remain vulnerable to her. I’m more powerful than she, so if I can train you to resist me, you’ll be able to resist her if the need ever arises.”

“If we learn how to block telepaths,” Chloë questioned, tense, “Does that mean that we’ll no longer be able to feel you connecting all of us?”

“No, it means that you’ll be able to guard your thoughts and prevent telepaths, myself included, from tampering with your mind and altering your perceptions. The connection will still be there as long as you want it to be,” Charles answered and was surprised when she and the older boys relaxed in relief.

They loved that Charles could link their minds. It gave them a sense of ease, knowing that they were never truly alone. It had been a very long time since anyone had viewed his telepathy as a comfort.
Raven had. Once upon a time. But then she had gotten older, had entered her teenage years, and that had changed. She had started to resent Charles’ presence in her head to the point that she had eventually made him promise to never read her thoughts again. It had hurt far more than he had ever let on, her making that ultimatum.

Even Erik had always been wary of Charles’ gifts. Had called them tricks and had never really trusted them, no matter how much he had claimed to love Charles himself.

Now, here he was, surrounded by people who loved this part of him. It was strange and wonderful and it made Charles love them all the more.

Moira had successfully endured a fucking terrible day.

It had started with Levine spilling blisteringly hot coffee all over clothing and reports and had only done downhill from there. By quitting time, she had been ready to murder every single person around her, but had managed to leave the building and get into her car so that she could to head to her apartment without blowing up.

She had calmed down a bit on the drive back to her apartment – not her home, no her home was in Westchester, New York with the Mutants that she had come to adore – but then she had noticed that her front door was slightly ajar. Moira was really not in the mood to deal with whatever idiots had decided that it would be a good idea to break into her apartment.

Silently, she drew her revolver and entered, stealthily making her way into her living room where she could just make out a hulking mass on her sofa. Moira raised her gun and quickly flicked on her light to illuminate… Alex and Darwin making out on her goose-down couch.

They sprung apart as if they had been burned and gave her identical startled, and slightly abashed, looks.

“How did you get in here?” Moira demanded, holstering her gun and crossing her arms in quick succession.

“I, um, picked the lock,” Alex revealed sheepishly.

“Why?”

“The Professor sent us,” Darwin explained, drawing a sleek black box out of his back pocket, “He wanted us to deliver this to you. Sorry we… got a bit distracted.”

Moira took the box and opened it, removing what appeared to be a business card made of silver that had twin ‘X’ s embossed on the front and back, “What’s this for?”

“Hank got that shield of his up and running,” Alex answered, “That keycard will grant you access past it.”

“Thanks, then,” Moira said, walking over to her fireplace and crouching down. She jimmed open the flute and then carefully tucked the box, the key once more ensconced within it, into a cubby hole that she had carved out years earlier. It went right beside the pair od ID’s and Passports that declared her to be both French and Italian.

“The chimney, really?”
“Don’t knock it, Alex,” Moira replied, “It’s a great hiding place. The CIA has turned this apartment over eight times and they’ve always ignored it. It’s a good thing that you’re here. My phones have been tapped, so it’ll be a while before I can call you guys again.”

“Are you in danger?” Darwin wanted to know.

“No,” Moira told them, “But Stryker’s managed to convince the Director to focus on Mutants again. Covertly, of course, because President Kennedy refuses to condone hunting down innocent people for no reason other than the fact that they’re different. I’m planning to quietly get in touch with the man to let him know what’s going on, but I have to wait a few more days to keep Stryker’s suspicion off of me.

“You boys need to warn Charles to stay super vigilant in the meantime.”

“We will,” Darwin promised.

Five minutes before midnight on the ninth of June, Charles was woken from a deep and mostly peaceful slumber by a shooting pain in his abdomen.

Chapter End Notes

For any of you who are disappointed that Logan’s left, never fear. He’ll be back.
Three

Chapter Notes

I warned in the tags for period-typical racism. I’m warning you again.

Chapter Three

Despite the pain that he was in, Charles probably could have made it to the labs slash medical center on his own steam. He was not given the chance to prove that particular conjecture, however, as Hank – who had heard Charles’ both physically and mentally cry out at the sudden and piercing hurt – rushed into Charles’ bedroom, took one look at him, and then swiftly scooped him up into his blue arms before sprinting toward the lab.

Once there, Hank very carefully set Charles down on the padded examination table that he had cobbled together only a few weeks earlier for the very event that was about to take place. Under any other circumstances, Charles would have complimented Hank for doing such a good job at making it comfortable, but right then all Charles could focus on was the pain in his belly.

That and the fact that Armando, Alex, Sean, and Chloë were all hovering around him in various states of distress and excitement.

Hank noticed this only a heartbeat later and wasted no time in demanding, “Everybody but Darwin waits outside.”

“Why?” Chloë questioned, crossing her arms over her chest.

“Because both you and Alex still lose control of your powers in high-stress situations, which this is about to become the very definition of,” Hank replied matter-of-factly, “And Sean throws up at the sight of blood.”

“That was one time,” Sean protested.

“Out,” Hank ordered and the three, reluctantly, obeyed.

“I can stay then?” Armando remarked.

“Keep the Professor distracted,” Hank instructed, “While I prep him for surgery.”

“I’m not deaf, you know,” Charles snapped, more waspish than he would have typically been.

Hank briefly looked contrite, “Sorry, Professor. It’s just that you’ve often said that listening to the minds of others helps to center you when you’re upset. This is going to be disconcerting at the very least and Darwin’s got the calmest mind in the mansion. Focusing on his thoughts will help once I get started.”

“Ah, right,” Charles said, mollified. “Ow, ow, ow!”

Armando quickly moved to Charles’ right side, readily taking Charles’ hand into his own and throwing his mind wide open. He made no comment at how hard Charles was squeezing his fingers
together; not having to worry about Charles breaking them was probably one of the many benefits of his rather singular mutation.

Hank whipped the ultrasound machine over to them and then lifted up Charles’ shirt. Like he had a few months earlier when Charles had first felt the Quad’s minds, Hank applied the jelly quickly and then moved the transponder across Charles’ stomach, primarily over his lower abdomen. He gazed intently at the screen for several intense minutes and then nodded sharply.

“It’s like I suspected,” Hank stated, “No birth canal has formed, but you’re definitely having contractions, so the babies are ready to meet you, Professor. On a scale of one to ten, how badly would you rate your pain?”

“As soon as this is over, I am going to get in Cerebro, find Erik, and viciously murder him,” Charles gritted out from behind clenched teeth as another contraction hit him. “Bloody fucking hell!”

“Okay then,” Hank accepted that calmly. “I’m going to numb you from your abdomen down, Professor. You’re not going to like the sensation, but there is no need to panic. It’ll only be temporary, I promise.”

To anyone else, Hank’s words would have seemed patronizing, but not to Charles. He had lived through a time, however brief, when he had truly believed that he would never have feeling in his legs again. If it had not been for Hank’s quick actions while they were still stranded on that godforsaken beach in Cuba, living without his legs would have been his reality.

“I need you to take off your shirt and pants, Professor,” Hank said next, “You can keep your underwear on; I’ll be making the incision right above your waistline.”

Charles complied, with Hank and Armando’s assistance, and then Hank had him sit up. There was a quick, sharp pinch in his lower back as Hank injected him with the numbing agent and then Charles was allowed to lie back again. The serum’s effect was almost instantaneous and Charles hated it. Fucking hell, he despised it and he was definitely going to punch Erik in the throat when he saw him again, because this was entirely his fault – the cad.

“Professor,” Hank’s voice made him look up, “Focus on Darwin now. I should be done in about an hour. If he’s not enough try to tune into the dreams of the kids. Just, whatever you do, stay out of the heads of the three worrywarts outside, they’ll only cause you stress that you really don’t need right now.”

Hank did not tell Charles to stay out of the scientist’s own head, because he knew there was a chance that being able to see, firsthand as it were, what Hank was doing would help him to cope. Charles was, after all, a scientist himself, one with a curiosity to rival the infamous Alice’s.

Charles did as Hank had suggested, latching easily onto Armando’s mind. It was incredible how cool, calm, and collected his eldest boy’s thoughts always were. There was emotion, a plethora of it, but never panic. Armando could reason through fear of any kind in less than a second. Charles very strongly suspected that this was a factor of Armando’s gifts. There was an absence of turmoil in his mind that was exceedingly rare and any pain from his memories was tightly packed away. Not buried in his subconscious, like pain normally was, but simply dismissed. Armando focused on the present, never letting the hurt of yesterday mar the happiness of today. Charles had met several people in his life that had adopted the philosophy of ‘living in the moment’ but with Armando it was more than just an ideal to aspire to. It was simply how his entire being was hardwired. And in contrast to the carelessness of almost everyone else who subscribed to that way of living their lives, Armando was responsible, kind, and a solid, unwavering presence.
Fascinating did not begin to cover Armando Muñoz.

The majority of those without telepathy would certainly find it difficult to comprehend why a man like Armando would fall in love with a man like Alex, a man who was seemingly his complete opposite. This was not the case for Charles, though; he could see that for all of their differences, the two were, at their cores, the same. They were both bright and brave and honorable and capable of so much abiding, loyal love. It was because of this shared core that their differences became, not obstacles that hindered them, but compliments to one another which only served to make them stronger when they stood together.

Even their mutations were well-matched. Alex’s gift was as volatile as it was beautiful, for all of the control that he had gained over it these days – extremely high stress situations aside. During the times that Alex’s control slipped, Armando was there to help him regain it, his own mutation making it possible for him to help Alex in a way that no one else could – not even Charles.

Having Armando back was nothing short of a miracle, not the least of which was because Alex would never have been whole without him. He would have healed, of course, and carried on – because Alex was not the kind to give up without a serious fight – but the scar from Armando’s loss would likely have never truly faded.

Charles’ attention to Armando’s thoughts began to erode when he felt Jean’s unconscious mind seeking out his own. This was a common enough occurrence. After the children had learned that Charles was usually capable of lucid dreaming and could connect their minds so that everyone in the mansion could all share dreams, they usually would instinctively utilize the links that Charles had crafted between his mind and theirs’ once they had entered the REM part of their sleep cycle. They would search him out and on the best nights, when they got their full eight hours, Charles was able to construct two mental wonderlands for his family to enjoy as they slumbered on.

Though Charles could not force himself to experience REM, he could drift into a dream-like state while remaining conscious. Charles did so then, drawing the six sleeping minds in the mansion into the warmth of his own.

Time passed in strange ways in dreams, and so while it seemed like an eternity to Charles, it was really only twenty minutes before Hank drew him away from pirates and dragons and fairies and back to awareness. And he did so by placing Charles firstborn child, a tiny, quiet little boy with tufts of chocolate brown hair, into Charles’ arms.

A baby girl was given to Charles a few minutes later. Her auburn hair was thicker than her elder brother’s and she quite clearly had Charles’ nose. She was also far more vocal, wailing and flailing her little arms and legs in displeasure. Her mind was far too immature for Charles to actually read, but he could still gain vivid impressions from it.

“She doesn’t like the light,” Charles revealed in a soft tone that held no small measures of absolute wonder and awe.

Armando grabbed a lightweight shawl and helped Charles situate the babes so that they were lying flat against him. He then carefully draped the blanket over the newborns, tucking it around Charles’ shoulders and blocking the harsh light of the lab from two pairs of sensitive little eyes. Charles’ daughter stopped complaining immediately and his son also began radiating content, apparently agreeing with his sister that the familiar darkness was better than the new, unknown brightness of the world outside of their daddy.

In another twenty minutes’ time, Charles first set of babies was joined by a second. Another son and another daughter.
They were both slightly bigger than their older siblings, but still so very small. The boy had the same reddish-brown hair that Charles saw in the mirror every day and the girl had tight, dark brown curls.

It had taken a bit of maneuvering, but Charles had managed to get all four of them into a secure position in his arms at the same time.

“I’m putting you on two complete weeks of bed rest to heal from the surgery,” Hank said as he finished stitching Charles back together.

“Mmm hmm,” Charles replied, a bit too mesmerized with his little ones to truly hear what Hank was saying.

“I mean it, Professor,” Hank warned, “Two weeks or I’ll dismantle Cerebro for a month.”

*That* certainly got Charles’ attention, “But-

“*Two weeks*,” Hank stressed.

“Yes, yes, all right, Hank,” Charles agreed, “That’s probably for the best. Do you two mind… giving me a minute before you let the others in?”

“Of course, Prof,” Armando responded, “Come on, Hank.”

Hank looked torn for a moment, before deciding that Charles could probably be left alone for a few minutes without injuring himself and he quickly followed Armando out of the lab.

“You are all so very beautiful,” Charles whispered and then he screwed his eyes shut in an attempt to stop the tears he could feel welling up. The attempt failed and several hot drops of salty water escaped, cooling rapidly on his cheeks, “Damn you, Erik. You should be here. I wish you were here.”

Charles murmured prayer did nothing to change the reality of the situation. Erik had chosen warmongering over peace with the man that loved him desperately and so, as long as that remained the case, Erik would be a threat, no matter how inadvertently, to the precious lives of their children. Keeping their true parentage hidden from everyone outside of the family that he had created in Westchester was of paramount importance, even though it tore at Charles’ soul to know that Erik was going to miss *so much.*

“I can’t give you his name,” Charles told his newborns with a shaky voice, “So mine is going to have to do. Welcome to the world, Oliver, Aurora, Casper, and Melody Xavier.”

Alex, Chloë, and Sean descended upon Charles and the newborns as soon as they were the mental green light to do so, bursting into the lab with giddy anticipation.

“Oh, wow,” Sean said, his mouth agape.

‘*Wow, wow, wow! Look at them! They’re really, actually here. Oh, they’re amazing! This is amazing*’

“Why do you look so surprised?” Charles wondered with teasing amusement, “You’ve known for months that I was pregnant, darling.”

“Yeah,” Sean said, with a beaming smile, “But there’s knowing and then there’s *knowing,* you
know?"

Charles shrugged good-naturedly, “Would you like to hold one of your siblings?”

Sean’s eyes lit up, “Yes! Which one?”

“It’ll probably be easier to pick up Oliver,” Charles suggested, “He’s the one on the end.”

“Oliver?” Hank spoke up as Sean obeyed and carefully scooped the eldest baby boy up to his chest to be rather expertly cradled there.

“Oliver Preston Xavier,” Charles confirmed. “Alex, come here and hold his brother.”

Alex did so without hesitation and Charles recalled that both he and Sean were so used to and at ease with babies because of they had grown up with younger siblings.

‘He’s so small and beautiful. Charles’ hair. Erik’s nose. He’s perfect.’

“What’s his name?” Armando asked, an arm wrapped around Alex’s waist.

“Casper. Casper Payce.”

Armando didn’t have younger siblings, but he did have younger cousins that he had helped to look after. He held his pointer finger out toward Casper.

“He’s not old enough to grab-” Hank started only to cut himself off when Casper focused clearly on Armando’s finger and latched onto it with his tiny hand. “Never mind, then.”

“This is Aurora Blaise,” Charles revealed as he passed the elder of his two infant girls to Hank.”

“She’s beautiful,” Hank said, “They all are.”

Chloë was apprehensive about taking Melody from him. Aside from the sleeping children upstairs, who were a far cry from helpless and fragile babies, she had very little experience with kids.

“There’s nothing to be afraid of,” Charles assured her.

“I’m not afraid,” Chloë replied defensively before slowly reaching out to pick up Melody.

“Make sure that you support her head,” Sean reminded as Charles relinquished his youngest to Chloë.

Chloë glared at him, “I know.”

Despite her trepidation, Chloë got the hang of holding a baby fairly quickly.

‘Holy shit, she’s… she’s wonderful. Wow, Uncle Charlie, you made some gorgeous kids.’

“That’s Melody Brooke,” Charles told them all, “She’s the youngest.”

The group only stayed in the lab until Charles had regained feeling in his legs and could walk once more, to his great relief. Not that he actually got to walk, as Hank passed Aurora over to Armando and then lifted Charles up to return him to his third-floor bedroom, ignoring Charles’ protests the whole way.

Hank deposited him on his bed a minute or so later, “I’m going to go make up some bottles. The
Quad will probably be hungry soon, if they’re not already.”

Alex and Armando gave Casper and Aurora back to their father.

“We’re going to bring their bassinets in here for tonight,” Alex explained.

“Yes,” Charles smiled gratefully, “Thank you, boys.”

Feeding the Quad and coaxing them to sleep was much easier than Charles had thought that it was going to be. They drifted off without a fight, radiating contentment for Charles to bask in.

“Just wait a few days,” Sean quipped at him, “Soon they’ll be up at all hours and you’ll be tearing your hair out. You might even go bald.”

“`They’re really little,” Ororo breathed a few hours later.

“I was never that small,” Peter declared.

“You were so,” Ororo disagreed, “Everybody is.”

“Did you want to hold them?” Charles inquired quickly, in an effort to head off the argument that was beginning to brew.

“Yes!” Kitty chimed in with great enthusiasm.

“Oh huh,” Peter agreed.

Bobby stayed quiet, but his eyes sparkled in delight and he beamed at Charles.

‘Pretty and tiny. Ours. I’m so happy.’

“I do, daddy!” Ororo said.

“I love them,” Jean announced as Charles carefully handed her Oliver, “They’re perfectly wonderful.”

‘Watch over them always. Our baby brothers and sisters.’

Scott carefully took a whiff of Oliver’s hair, “I don’t know what Sean was talkin’ bout; he smells fine, like sweet milk.”

“You weren’t in here earlier,” Charles remarked dryly.

To everyone’s immense surprise, Sean’s prediction did not come true in the first week of the Quad’s life. Nor in the second. Nor in the third. Eventually, Charles became cautiously optimistic that it never would.

Not that his newborns never fussed, of course, because they did. Aurora and Casper got disgruntled a bit more than Melody and Oliver did. But, Charles could always near immediately perceive what they wanted and then quickly give it to them. They never cried simply to cry and while they had a marked preference for Charles’ arms – telepathy was quite useful in determining these things – they never complained about being with any of the others.
Indeed, it was not unusual to see one of them propped up in a baby swing that Hank had rigged, listening – as much as an infant could listen – to the blue-furred scientist ramble on about physics or to find one of them seated in a high chair as Sean taught Chloë how to cook or for Charles to scan around and discover that one of the four was attached to Armando as he watched Alex precision train with his powers. None of them were ever placed in any kind of danger, of course, as everyone in the house was hyper-aware of their wellbeing.

Hank had theorized that the psychic links, which Charles had established with the Quad and the rest of their family, might have had something to do with this remarkable development. There really was no way to be sure, though, and while Charles was curious, he was also content enough to just accept the situation for what it was. To be honest, Charles was happier than he had been in a long time. As surrounded by those that loved him as he was, it was easy for Charles to ignore the hole in his heart. He smiled more often and for longer, prompting the others to do the same, which in turn invigorated Charles even more. It was a lovely cycle of laughter and love that no one wanted to disrupt with fear and worry.

Not even the news that the United States had placed a trading embargo on goods from Cuba could dampen anyone’s spirits. Not like it would have a few months before, when any mention of any kind regarding that place would have sent Charles spiraling back into a semi-depressed state.

Charles would have been happy to spend the rest of the summer in a glorious haze of sunshine, baseball, tea parties, and swimming, topped off with evenings spent curled by the fire as Charles read aloud, his babies swaddled protectively in the arms of the older children and the rest of his family eagerly leaning in close to listen to the words that he spoke.

Unfortunately, reality came knocking on the doors of Charles’ world on the tenth of July.

“Charles Xavier,” Charles spoke into the blue phone that hung from the wall in the smaller of the mansion’s kitchen.

“Ah, Mister Xavier,” a genial-toned man returned, “This is Detective Swanson of the Westchester Sheriff’s Department. I’m calling in regards to your missing car.”

“I’m not missing any cars,” Charles said, confused. “I’m quite afraid that I have no idea what you’re talking about, Detective?”

“I’m referring to the nineteen fifty-seven, green Chevrolet Corvette that’s registered in your name, Mister Xavier. I know that you own many cars, being who you are, and so you probably weren’t aware that it had been stolen. But,” Swanson illuminated with no small amount of pride in his words, “We’ve arrested the man who took it.”

Oh good god. Armando. They had arrested Armando.

“We know that you’re a very busy man, but if you could just come down to the station so that we can charge the culprit-”

“Is Armando Muñoz alright?” Charles demanded fiercely, “Because if you’ve harmed him, I swear upon all that is holy that you are going to regret it immensely.”

“He’s, wait… you know him?” Swanson sounded less pleased with himself and far more, appropriately, worried.

“Of course I know him,” Charles snapped, “I’m the one who gave him the car that you so
erroneously decided was stolen. Why was he even pulled over in the first place? He *never* speeds."

“Well,” Swanson said weakly, “A black man driving such an expensive car is rather suspicious-”

“I’m on my way,” Charles interrupted the man without guilt, “He had better be alright and, so help me god, if he is still in a cell when I arrive, there will be hell to pay, Detective.”

“Professor?” Alex spoke as soon as Charles had, none too gently, hung up the phone. Worry was flooding from his mind into Charles’ own in tumultuous waves.

“It’s going to be fine, Alex,” Charles assured, forcing himself to take a deep breath, “There’s just been a misunderstanding. I’m going to take care of it right now.”

“I’m going with you,” Alex told him.

Charles nodded, knowing he had no chance of keeping Alex from doing just that, “We’ll be back soon. Hank, you’re in charge until then.”

For once, Sean and Chloë did not argue.

People moved rapidly out of Charles’ way as he stormed into the Sheriff’s Department, Alex dogging his heels resolutely.

They found Armando perched stiffly in one of the Department’s uncomfortable black plastic chairs. There were two officers hovering near him, but at least he was not in a cell. Not any longer, anyway. Charles witnessed, during a brief scan of Armando’s memories, how the boy had been interrogated and how the officers doing so had freely hurled cruel words – and, to Charles abhorrence, a fist or two his – way.

“Are you all right, Armando?” Charles asked, more for the benefit of the nearby deputies than for any other reason. He already knew perfectly well how shaken Armando was by everything and also how he was trying to conceal it for Alex’s sake.

“Yes, Professor,” Armando replied quietly, “I tried to tell them… they didn’t want to listen.”

“I know. None of this is your fault,” Charles said, “Alex, take Armando home. I’ll be following the two of you shortly.”

Alex obeyed, putting a hand on Armando’s shoulder and steering him outside.

“Um,” a balding, stout man with a badge proclaiming him to be ‘J. Swanson’ dared to speak up, “But, Mister Xavier, sir-”

Charles turned to glare fiercely at the officer, “Who, exactly, are the deputies responsible for illegally detaining my student?”

“Your student?” Swanson asked.

“I am a certified professor with four bloody PhDs,” Charles said markedly, “So it does stand to reason that as a professor, I would have students to teach.”

“What’s going on out here?” A new voice interrupted. “Charles, is that you? Is everything alright?”

“Sheriff Tyres,” Charles greeted, turning to the man who had just walked in, “It’s good to see you.
It’s been some time.”

“It has, Charles,” Tyres agreed, pleased to see him, “Seven years. Last I heard you were studying abroad in England. I always knew that you would do great things; everyone here has always agreed that you were even more brilliant than your father, God rest his soul.”

“I received my doctorates,” Charles said, shaking the Sheriff’s proffered hand, “And decided that I had been away from home for much too long. It would hardly do for the Xaviers to abandon Westchester. I’m afraid that I currently have a grave problem, Richard.”

“Oh?”

“Indeed. You see, several of your deputies decided to wrongfully arrest one of my students simply because he was driving one of my cars,” Charles revealed.

“What?” Tyres retorted, turning to give the surrounding officers a sharp look.

“He was a nigger sir,” one of the men protested, “How were we supposed to know that he wasn’t some coon thief?”

“You had no right to pull him over in the first place,” Charles thundered, “You freely admitted that he was breaking no laws. I am appalled by both your language, Deputy Rill, and the behavior of this entire department. Armando Muñoz is an honorable man who fought and nearly died for this country and he deserves your respect.”

A spark of alarm had risen within Sheriff Tyres, a result of the older man knowing perfectly well that losing Charles’ favor could have devastating consequences for his career. The Xavier family had long been known for helping the sheriffs and mayors that they liked get votes. Charles could easily have Tyres replaced in the upcoming election if he did not handle this situation correctly.

“I’m so very sorry that you’ve been inconvenienced, Charles,” Tyres spoke quickly, “I can assure you that the men involved will be punished for their thoughtless actions and that nothing like this will ever happen again.”

And they would be; six months in the typing pool was the worst kind of penalty for men like these.

“The police are supposed to be defenders of the populace,” Charles remarked, “My students need to be confident that you’ll be there to help and protect them. No matter the color of their skin.”

“You’re absolutely right, Charles,” Tyres assured, “And I will personally impress that upon all of my men.”

“I’m very grateful,” Charles told him, “And glad that my confidence in you has not been misplaced, Richard.”

When Charles reached the mansion, he was not surprised to discover that Alex and Armando had gone straight down to the Danger Room upon their own arrival home. Even an idiot, something that Alex most certainly was not, could have figured out that the reason that Armando had been arrested had little to do with legality and everything to do with the color of his skin.

Charles let them be, knowing that Alex needed to calm down and that Armando was the best person to achieve such a thing. Instead, Charles put the Quad down for a nap and then gathered the rest of his children to him.
“This world is not perfect,” Charles spoke, “And unfortunately, the human race has long hated difference, feared it even. The struggle that we face to be accepted is not a new one.”

“Was Armando arrested because he’s a Mutant?” Scott asked.

“No,” Charles answered, “He was arrested because he’s black.”

“That doesn’t make no sense,” Peter said.

“No,” Charles agreed, “It doesn’t. Unfortunately, however, humans often judge one another based on the color of their skin, their religion, whether they are male or female, and whom they choose to love.”

“That’s stupid,” Jean decided.

Charles was inclined to agree with her.

“If humans can’t get over the differences amongst their own kind,” Chloë remarked, “Then how can we have any hope that they’ll be able to accept us, Uncle Charlie? Mutants are a totally divergent species from humans.”

“It won’t be easy, but I have faith that we can show them a better way,” Charles replied, “By being the better men and women to begin with and not lowering ourselves to the standards of those who would discriminate against us.”

“And should we fail?” Hank wondered, “If the humans decide to come after us, no matter what we do?”

“Heaven help anyone that tries to harm any of you,” Charles stated bluntly.

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Jean came to speak to him that evening, “Daddy, the man you sent away a few weeks ago, he had bad thoughts about Ororo, didn’t he?”

Charles looked at her in surprise, “Yes. How did you know?”

“Scott and I were worried about Alex and Mando,” Jean explained, “They were in the Danger Room a long time. So we decided to spy on them. Like secret agents. Mando said that he was used to people being mean to him and that you sent the clothing man away for the same reason that you yelled at those police today.”

“That’s true,” Charles told her, “But it isn’t polite to eavesdrop, Jean.”

“I wasn’t,” Jean insisted, “I was being a spy, daddy.”

“Right, of course you were.”

“If anybody ever says anything mean to Ororo,” Jean declared, “I’m going to punch them in the head. Like Alex has been teaching me to do.”

“No, you will not,” Charles quickly disagreed, gently pulling her down to sit on the sofa next to him, “Violence only begets more violence, my dear.”

“Huh?”
“Hitting someone will only make them want to hit you back,” Charles reiterated using simpler terms, “It will not make them agree with you. In fact, it will in all likelihood make them disagree with you even more than they already did.”

“Then how do I get people to not be mean to Ororo?” Jean asked, “Or Mando? Or… any of us?”

“You talk to them,” Charles revealed. “Words have great power, Jeanie, when you use them correctly.”

“Can you teach me how to do that?” Jean wondered.

“Yes, my darling,” Charles assured, “I can.”

Charles helped Ororo become a princess for her sixth birthday. She got to wear a sparkly, dark blue ball gown, long white gloves, and a small tiara set with miniature diamonds.

Her birthday cake was three tiers high and had elegant swirls curled into the purple fondant. Charles bought her a china tea set, imported from England, and a book of fairy tales that had been made especially for her. Her name was embossed on the midnight blue leather cover in curling, golden letters.

Ororo adored her presents; her favorite was that she got to boss everyone else around for an entire day.

The festivities helped to brighten the spirits of everyone; something that had been sorely needed for nearly a month. They had all still enjoyed each others’ company, of course, but their joy had been heavily subdued since Armando’s arrest. That day, everyone had smiled and laughed freely.

That night, as Charles was tucking her into her canopy bed, Ororo asked a question that made him pause.

“Daddy? Does god exist?”

“I don’t know,” Charles answered honestly.

Ororo looked at him in disbelief, “But you know everything.”


“Bibi and Babu said that god exists,” Ororo revealed, catching Charles off-guard, because his daughter had never spoken about her deceased grandparents before, “But Peter said today that he doesn’t think god is real. That his aunt told him that god died when she was a little girl.”

And that was another topic that hadn’t ever been addressed. Peter’s aunt. Charles would have to fix that, soon.

“Whether or not you choose to believe in god, or gods, or whatever, is a choice that only you can make, darling,” Charles told her, “I can’t make it for you.”

“What do you believe?” Ororo wanted to know.

“I think that there are many things in the universe that are beyond our understanding,” Charles said, “I can’t give you a yes or no answer, Ororo, because I’m not sure myself.”
“If god is real,” was Ororo’s next question, “Do you think that he loves Mutants as much as humans?”

“Why wouldn’t he?” Charles countered.

“Because we’re not like ordinary people.”

“And why would any loving god see that as a bad thing?”

“He wouldn’t” Ororo decided, “Goodnight, daddy. Thank you for my party, and my presents, and my yummy cake.”

“You’re welcome, sweetheart,” Charles kissed her forehead, “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“How dangerous would it be for us to go to D.C. this Wednesday?” Alex asked a few afternoons later.

“I can keep anyone untoward from noticing us if need be,” Charles told him, made curious by the request, “Why?”

“There’s going to be a sort of march for equal rights that day,” Alex revealed, “A man named Martin Luther King Jr. is going to be speaking, and I think that we should go.

“Of course we can go,” Charles acquiesced, beaming proudly, “I think that it’s a brilliant idea, Alex.”

Alex smiled, “Thank you, Professor.”

Martin Luthor King Jr. was the single most charismatic man that Charles had ever seen in action. His words could have moved mountains, did, in fact, sway the hearts of hundreds in one solitary afternoon.

King had called for a revolution and both civilians and government officials were heeding his call. Not a revolution that involved guns and the blood of innocents spilled, but one free from violence and high tempers. A revolution to be won through peaceful action, logic, kindness, and harmony.

Charles only respected him more for that.

On the way back to New York in the Xavier Family’s private jet, as he taught Ororo and Jean how to play chess, Charles reflected that he would be grateful if he could do a fraction of what King was doing for African Americans for Mutants.

Raven had given him the moniker, ‘Professor X’. How better could he use it than for the betterment of his people?

Charles had not been expecting it, which is why it had taken him so long to notice the dead space approaching the mansion. A void that he had only ever known to be caused by one thing - Shaw’s damnable helmet – drawing closer and closer.
Erik was heading for the school.

Not just Erik, actually, but Raven and all Shaw’s former associates as well. They were two miles out from the gates and were closing fast.

“Chloë,” Charles instructed with a calm in his words that he certainly did not feel, “Take the children down into the Danger Room and stay put until I give the all-clear.”

Chloë obeyed without quarrel, plucking Oliver and Melody from their playpen, while Scott and Jean picked up Aurora and Casper. She quickly led all of the children out of the living room and down the hall, toward the bunker’s entrance.

“Prof?” Sean asked, worried by the anxiety that Charles was unwittingly projecting.

“Erik’s here,” Charles told them, “And he’s brought friends.”

“We can ignore them,” Hank suggested softly. “They’re not getting through the shield and they can’t hang out by the gates forever.”

“Erik might actually,” Charles shook his head, “No. We can’t hide… I’m not going to hide from him.”

“If you’re going to speak to them, then we’re going with you,” Alex insisted.

“Very well,” Charles said, “We’ll meet them at the front gates.”

A part of Charles – the part of himself that kept him supplied with faith and made him believe the best of others until something so drastic happened that he simply no longer could – desperately hoped that Erik and Raven were here because they had decided to come home. To come back to Charles and be a part of the family that loved them once more. He could not help but to hope. To snuff out that part of who he was would be to destroy who he was utterly, so quelling that hope was simply impossible.

Charles did try to tell himself to not expect anything, but that was not enough to stop his heart from sinking at the sight of the deep frown on Erik’s face. It had been nearly a year since they had last seen one another and Erik’s obvious displeasure at being near Charles hurt a great deal, far more than Charles could afford to let on.


“What the hell is surrounding the mansion?” Erik demanded, not bothering with any pleasantries.

“It’s a shield,” Hank spoke up in a growl, “To protect the school from outside threats.”

“A shield,” Erik repeated incredulously.

“You can be as disbelieving as you like,” Charles said, “But you will find that gaining unsolicited access to my property is far more difficult than it used to be, my friend.”

“I cannot teleport inside,” Azazel said, disgruntled. “I had to teleport to the outskirts of Westchester instead. It was a long walk here.”

“No,” Charles agreed, “You can’t.”

“I thought you didn’t want to prepare for a war,” Raven said.
“I said,” Charles looked into his sister’s bright yellow eyes, “That I would not help you start a war, Raven; I never said that I would not defend me and mine should it become necessary. War or not, this place will be a sanctuary for Mutants.”

“I suppose that this shield means that you’re not going to let us in,” Erik determined.

“Take off the ridiculous bucket on your head and you will be more than welcome to,” Charles challenged.

“You don’t trust me.”

“You decided not to trust me first, Erik.”

“Darwin,” Angel interjected impatiently, “How are you alive? Shaw… he killed you.”

“He thought that he had,” Armando answered coolly, “He was wrong. My mutation saved me.”

“She saw you at the march in D.C.,” Charles revealed to him, “When you went to go get water.”

Angel glared at Charles, “Stay out of my head.”

“People that I consider to be threat to the ones whom I love do not get to make demands like that, Miss Salvador.”

Angel flinched at his stony countenance.

“Am I a threat?” Raven asked carefully.

Charles softened considerably, “You are my sister. I made you a promise, Raven, and I have no intention of breaking it. Even if I don’t agree with your current course of action.”

Raven nodded at him, mollified.

“We have no reason to still be here,” Erik declared suddenly. “It’s time for us to go. Darwin, you are more than welcome to join us.”

“I’m good here,” Armando responded firmly, placing a hand on Alex’s shoulder to keep the blond from snapping at Erik, “Abandoning my family isn’t something that I would ever consider doing.”

Raven flinched at that and Erik’s frown deepened.

“Goodbye, Erik,” Charles said, ignoring the way that those two words felt like a dagger slipping in between his ribs, “Raven? Be safe, please be safe.”

Raven did not have time to respond before she and the others were gone in a puff of smoke, leaving only the smell of sulfur behind.

“I guess Azazel can teleport out just fine,” Sean muttered.

“It could be that Azazel can only teleport to places that he can clearly picture,” Hank commented, “He’s not familiar with this area, so when he couldn’t teleport to the doors or the gates, Westchester itself was his next best option. Next time he’ll probably be able to teleport right outside the shield.”

‘Chloë, darling,’ Charles projected, ‘You can bring everyone out of the Danger Room now.’

‘Is everyone okay, Uncle Charlie?’ Chloë returned.
‘As well as we can be.’

“I couldn’t detect how many, exactly, there were, Sugar,” Emma told Erik as she examined her nails and then flipping her hair over her shoulder, “Less than a dozen, most likely, but Xavier was definitely protecting children in that mansion of his.”

“He’s going ahead with his plans to start a school,” Raven realized, “Beast said as much.”

“That shield of theirs is an incredible advantage,” Azazel spoke, “We would greatly benefit from having one of our own.”

“Except we’d have better luck finding peach sherbet in hell than convincing the Beast to build us one,” Angel said dryly.

“We could borrow him and make him,” Janos suggested.

“Absolutely not,” Erik countered immediately, “We do not harm or threaten to harm other Mutants. We’re better than that.”

“Do you think it a wise idea to allow Xavier to collect Mutants?” Emma asked, arching one thin eyebrow, “He’s a telepath, a much stronger one than me. He could make others do as he wants them to do easily.”

“Charles would never do that,” Raven protested.

“Maybe not to you,” Angel said pointedly.

“I think that Charles is doing what we, currently, cannot,” Erik replied to Emma, “He’s protecting those of our kind who are too young to fight against the humans that would oppress us. Charles is too much of a morally upright person to force others to believe what he believes; for all that he has no qualms about performing his other mind tricks. In time, any students that he has will come to see that our course of action is what’s best for our people. Let him have his school. At least that way he’ll be doing something to help Mutantkind.”
Chapter Four

When Charles decided to teach Chloë how to drive, the day before her sixteenth birthday, he had badly underestimated her ability to operate a car. Chloë surprised him by being quite a good driver. He had expected her to be the opposite, not because she was female, Charles hardly subscribed to that particularly asinine branch of thinking, but because she generally rivaled Sean in the reckless department and Sean, although he typically behaved himself in Charles’ presence, tended to go a little crazy behind the wheel. Chloë was also in the habit of using questionable judgment. Case in point – all of the times that she had tried to feed the kids nothing but processed sugar for breakfast in lieu of preparing actual meals.

Only the day before, she had decided that it would be a swell idea to leap into the diving pool from the highest point that she could find, namely, the roof of the mansion, and had briefly shattered the radius and ulna bones in her right arms as a result. So, Charles had expected her to take to being a motorist in the same way that she took to everything that was not a book, with reckless abandon.

Instead, Chloë handled the grey dodge that they were in so well it was almost as if…

“You’ve done this before,” Charles realized.

“My dad taught me to drive as soon as my legs were long enough to reach the peddles,” Chloë admitted, “Everything from a motorcycle to a semi truck. I can also take apart and put back together nearly any engine, hot wire most vehicles, and fly both planes and helicopters. Dad, when he was around, insisted on me knowing these things just in case, well, just in case what happened in March, happened.”

“You’ve never spoken about your mother,” Charles said gently.

“She never loved me,” Chloë said bluntly, “I was a miscalculation on her part. She got herself pregnant in an attempt to keep my dad with her – she was crazy in love with him – and then had to live with knowing that the only reason he came around at all was because of me.”

“Was she aware that you and your father are Mutants?” Charles asked.

“Since knowing that I was one would have required her actually paying any attention at all to me, no. My grandmother knew, but she died when I was eleven. I have no clue if either of them knew about daddy,” Chloë paused. “I begged my dad to stay after Nana passed, you know, but he didn’t. I guess that it was stupid of me to think that he wouldn’t leave me again after…”

“Your father loves you very much,” Charles said, his tone firm but kind. “He did not wish to leave you behind here, Chloë, no matter how much he trusted me to look after you. He left because he truly believes that you’re safer without him in the picture.”

“Well, I believe that he’s an idiot.”

“He’ll come back,” Charles determined.
“How could you possibly know that, Uncle Charlie?” Chloë asked.

“I just do,” Charles said. “I have faith that he will come back.”

Chloë absorbed his words for a minute before radically changing the subject, “Will you be upset if I make out with Sean tomorrow?”

“I’ve managed to bug Stryker’s private line,” Moira informed Charles without preamble as soon as he had answered the phone at eleven-thirty on the night of September the eighth, “I’m calling from a diner on the outskirts of Lancaster, Pennsylvania since I can’t use my own phone. Stryker ordered some of his men to abduct a Mutant child from Kentucky, a nine year-old boy named Samuel Guthrie. They picked him up two hours ago and are heading toward a facility in Muskegon, Michigan. I have to go.”

And then there was nothing but a dial tone.

“You’ve finished the Blackbird?” Charles questioned as soon as he exited Cerebro.

“A few days ago, yes,” Hank confirmed.

“Alright,” Charles decided, “Alex, Armando, I need for the two of you to take the Blackbird to Kentucky to collect young Samuel’s family. They’re worried sick about him and they won’t be safe there for much longer; Sam’s their eldest and the only one who has manifested, but all of their children are Mutants. Be prepared to meet resistance inside of the farmhouse, there are six armed guards. Get in and get out as quickly and safely as you can and then head straight back here. Hank, I need you and Chloë to remain here to look after the little ones and monitor the situation remotely, while Sean and I go to intercept Stryker’s men outside of Cassopolis, a town a little over a hundred miles away from Muskegon. We’ll lie in wait beneath an underpass and I’ll force them to pull over like I did with the agents back in April.”

Hank nodded in understanding and then suggested, “You four should probably all wear your suits, just to be safe.”

Charles and the other boys turned to look at him in surprise.

“What suits?” Armando asked.

“You’ve finished them,” Sean realized excitedly, “Our X-Men suits!”

“Like the ones we wore before?” Alex questioned, “In Cuba?”

“I’ve improved them a great deal,” Hank informed them, “For one thing, they are completely bulletproof this time. I’ve lined them with a non-magnetic alloy, there’s not a trace of metal that Erik can control on them.”

Hank slid open a large panel on the east wall of his lab to reveal seven blue and gold suits, “They’ll also keep your temperature regulated, meaning that you’ll stay cool in the summer and stay warm in the winter. You could wear these comfortably in both the Sahara and in Antarctica. The belts contain a collapsible grappling hook, two spring loaded knives, and, most importantly, a tracker.

“A tracker?” Sean repeated.
“As long as you’re wearing your suit,” Hank explained, “I’ll be able to locate you. You know, in case something goes wrong.”

“And if our suits are removed?” Alex pointed out.

“I’m still working on that bit,” Hank admitted, “I’ve been developing a type of fabric that will imprint on a single individual, making it possible for one person to don or remove a specific suit. The formula’s not quite right yet.”

“That sounds brilliant, Hank,” Charles praised, before turning to the other three boys, “We had better suit up.”

They all changed into their new uniforms quickly. The suits came with matching masks and Charles only hesitated briefly before putting his on, “Try to only refer to one another by your codenames, especially the two of you, Havok, Darwin. I won’t be able to alter the perceptions of the men in Kentucky.”

“Yes, Professor,” Armando replied.

“If something goes wrong, twist the ‘X’ on your belt counter-clockwise. It’ll activate a distress beacon,” Hank told them before wishing them, “Good luck.”

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The drive was long, even with Sean behind the wheel forcing the navy Mercedes to move at speeds that were not really recommended for such a vehicle. Several times during the course of the trip, Charles had been required to use his telepathy to prevent any police officers from noticing them and trying to chase their car down. Despite their ridiculously swift speeds, they still only made it to the interception point with a scant few minutes to spare.

Sean parked the car in the thick shadows of the underpass and then he and Charles quickly exited the vehicle in order to stand in the dewy grass beside the highway. There was no moon to light the road and earth which flanked it, which made concealing their presence that much easier.

“Bloody hell,” Charles uttered only a few moments later, when the targeted truck came into his range, “I can’t make the driver pull the truck over. The cab must be protected by something that blocks telepathy. It feels similar, though not completely, to the mirrored room on Shaw’s submarine.”

“Shit,” Sean swore, thinking furiously for a moment before suggesting, “What if I hit the truck with a sonic scream? I’ve been practicing adjusting the power level behind each one. I can blow out the glass around the cab and then you’ll be able to get into the driver’s mind.”

“You’ll have to be precise,” Charles considered the idea, “Very precise. Too much power and the truck will flip, too little and there won’t be any noticeable effect at all.”

Sean nodded, “I can do it, Prof, I’m sure of it.”

‘I can do this. I can do this. That little kid is depending on us. I won’t let him down. I won’t let the Professor down. I can do this.’

“Yes you can,” Charles conceded. “When I give the signal then, Banshee, scream.”

A pair of large headlights rounded a bend and what appeared to be an ordinary semi truck, when in reality said truck was anything but, came rumbling into view and Sean drew in a deep, confident breath in preparation. The semi drew steadily closer until it was almost on top of them and then
Charles ordered, “Now, Banshee!”

Sean immediately let out a high-pitched shriek that caused the truck’s unique windows to shatter and its entire frame to shudder. Charles latched onto the driver’s mind and a second later the truck came to a screeching halt. A mere heartbeat later and Charles had everyone inside the large vehicle, save for the young Mutant whom they had come to rescue, frozen in place and utterly unaware of their surroundings.

“Excellent work,” Charles praised Sean, mentally projecting pride and approval the redhead’s way. “Now let’s get Mister Guthrie out of here. And quickly, there’s another car carrying more of Stryker’s agents only a few miles behind.”

Sean reached the truck first, wrenching open the doors and climbing inside before halting, his self-satisfaction fading away to horror and disgust in an instant, ‘Hell, they put him in a fucking cage, Professor.’

And so they had. A tiny, cramped cage obviously meant for medium-sized dogs and they had forced a small, terrified child into it. Charles felt absolutely justified in ensuring that the agents present would all suffer debilitating headaches for months.

Sean crouched down beside the cage and spoke softly to Samuel as Charles scooped up a set of keys that had fallen to the floor when the truck stopped so suddenly, “Hey, kiddo. Don’t you worry, buddy, we’re gonna get you outta there and back to your mom and dad.”

“Who… who are you?” Samuel stuttered out fearfully.

“I’m Professor X,” Charles explained in a gentle tone as he unlocked the cage, “And this is Banshee. We’re like you, Samuel, we have gifts just like you do. I swear to you that we mean you no harm.”

‘We’re Mutants and we shall do everything in our power to protect you and your family,’ Charles sent with his gift and then watched as they boy’s eyes widened in surprise.

Charles held out a hand to the boy, who looked back and forth from it and Charles’ face with searching blue-grey eyes for almost a full minute. Then, he slowly reached out and took it.

Sam!” Lucinda Guthrie, Samuel’s very pregnant mother cried out upon seeing her eldest child walk into the mansion’s library – flanked by Sean and Charles – safe and mostly sound, “Oh, Sammy!”

Sam ran into her arms, “Mom! I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, mom. I didn’t mean for any of this to happen.”

“It’s not your fault, son,” Sam’s father, Thomas Guthrie, said firmly as his wife clung tightly to their child. “We’re just so glad that you’re alright.”

“Did those awful men hurt you?” Lucinda demanded, pulling away so that she could look Samuel over, “I swear to god, I’ll run them all through our wood chipper as slowly as possible if they so much as gave you a bruise!”

“I’m okay, mom,” Sam assured her and then tried unsuccessfully to stifle a yawn, “Just sleepy.”

‘Everything went smoothly in Kentucky,’ Alex projected to Charles, ‘We left the agents stationed in the Guthrie’s home unconscious but alive.’
'Sam’s siblings are all sleeping in one of the guest rooms, Professor,’ Armando added. ‘They were wiped out by everything that happened and all wanted to be together tonight.’

‘I can hardly blame them. Good work, both of you,’ Charles returned before speaking aloud, “Would you like your own room, Samuel, or would you prefer to rest with your brothers and sisters?”

“With my brothers and sisters, please, Professor X,” Samuel yawned again as he was finishing the sentence, “Sorry.”

“It’s perfectly alright,” Charles assured, “You’ve had a trying day. Chloë, could you show Mister Guthrie to the room where his siblings are?”

“Sure thing, Uncle Charlie,” Chloë replied and then patiently waited for Sam to hug and kiss both of his parents good-night before leading him out of the room.

Thomas turned to Charles and Sean then, “Thank you so much. I don’t know how we can ever repay you for saving our son.” Thomas looked over to Alex and Armando, “For saving all of us. Just… thank you.”

“There’s no need for that,” Charles replied and the patriarch of the Guthrie family turned back to him, “Mutants need to protect one another. I am very sorry that the government has seen fit to uproot your lives, Mister and Missus Guthrie.”

“We can’t go back to Kentucky,” Lucinda determined, “We’ll never be safe there, will we?”

“I’m afraid not. The government knows what all of you look like now and will not hesitate to come after you again,” Charles told her and then offered, “You are all more than welcome to remain here for as long as you need. I intend to open a school, a school where children like Samuel can utilize their talents without fear.”

“Are there many?” Thomas asked, “Children like Sam?”

“A fair number,” Charles admitted, “Around eight thousand, although most of that number have not yet manifested their gifts. There are a little more than ten thousand Mutants worldwide.”

“We’ll… we’ll think about your offer,” Thomas said, sharing a look with Lucinda, who was frowning heavily.

Charles’ children loved having new playmates, even though Samuel and his seven – soon to be eight – siblings did not stay in Westchester for very long.

“I don’t see why Paige had to leave,” Ororo complained, as she squashed the scrambled eggs on her plate into mush instead of eating them, “Or why any of them had to go away. They were fun to play with. Do you remember how Sam made all those big waves in the inside pool?”

“I remember, my darling,” Charles said as he fed Casper his bottle, “The Guthries didn’t feel like it was safe to remain here, in America. They thought that it would better to go stay with their family in the south of France. Maybe, one day, they’ll change their minds and come back.”

“Hopefully soon,” Scott said, around a mouthful of bacon, “Because I want Cannonball on my team, Uncle Charles.”

Charles blinked in confusion, “Cannonball? Who on earth is Cannonball?”
“That’s going to be Sam’s X-Men name, Daddy,” Jean explained, diligently cutting up her strawberry crepes into uniform, bite-sized pieces. “Sam is ‘Cannonball’, Scott is ‘Cyclops’, and I’m ‘Phoenix’.”

Charles gaped at her in lieu of replying to her declaration.

“I want an X-Men name!” Peter shouted through the sausages that he had stuffed into his mouth.

“Me too!” Ororo agreed. “I want one too!”

“You can be ‘Bullet Boy’,” Scott told Peter, “Cause you’re as fast as a bullet.”

“I’m faster than any dumb bullet,” Peter disagreed, “I’m gonna be ‘Quicksilver’. Cause I’m quick and my hair is silver.”

“I wanna be ‘Storm’,” Ororo decided.

“You can be ‘Iceman’, Bobby,” Jean suggested, “And Kitty, you can be ‘Sprite’.”

“I like that, Jeanie,” Bobby smiled, “Oops, I mean, I like that, Phoenix.”

“What’s a sprite?” Kitty asked.

“A sprite is a type of fairy and some fairies can walk through walls in the storybooks that Daddy reads to us,” Jean explained.

“Oh, then I wanna be Sprite, just like you said, Phoenix,” Kitty said.

The wonderful breakfast that Sean had prepared for the family had suddenly become highly unappealing to Charles. In fact, he felt a bit ill. Apparently, he was not the only adult in the house who felt this way, judging by the milky white color that Alex had turned.

“You guys are way too young to even be thinking about being X-Men,” Alex said with a firmness in his voice that hid the panic he was trying to fight down.

“Well,” Scott wanted to know, “How old do we have to be to be X-men?”

“Twenty-one,” Charles interjected quickly, “You have to be twenty-one.”

“But Sean isn’t twenty-one,” Jean protested.

“There were… extenuating circumstances in his case,” Charles said in as stern a tone as he ever used with his children, “None of you are going out as X-Men until you’re twenty-one. End of story.”

Or ever, if Charles got what he wanted. It was bad enough he had to send his older kids into battle, he did not want to send his little ones into it too.

Most of the children pouted, but Scott just sighed and said, “Okay, Uncle Charles. I guess that will give me more time to train to be one of the X-Men.”

“You guys are too young to train too,” Alex spoke up.

“Well, how old do we gotta to be to train?” Peter questioned impatiently.

“Sixteen,” Charles decided, “When you’re old enough to drive a car, you’ll be old enough to train as X-Men.”
There, that should give Charles plenty of time to talk his children into picking far less dangerous career paths that were unlikely to give him coronaries.

Chloë perked up at that, “So that means I can train then, Uncle Charlie?”

Charles inhaled sharply, “If… if that’s what you want, Chloë. But… you need to know, the things that we sometimes have to do… they’re dangerous, darling.”

“I know,” Chloë answered resolutely, “But I want to help protect our people. Besides, Hank’s already made me a suit.”

Charles nodded in resignation, sensing that any attempt to sway her from this course would fail miserably. He supposed that he could only hope that not all of his kids would still want to become X-Men when they grew up.

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“Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday, dear Jean! Happy birthday to you!”

“Make a wish, Jeanie, darling,” Charles urged his, now nine year-old, daughter.

Jean briefly scrunched her eyes shut, revealing the light dusting of green eye shadow that Charles had only allowed because it was her birthday, and then took a deep breath before blowing out all nine of her iridescent silver candles at once. The rest of the family cheered at this accomplishment while she beamed.

“Well done, love,” Charles praised her.

“Wha’d ya wish for, Jeanie?” Kitty asked curiously.

“What did you wish for,” Charles corrected mildly.

“Right, what Daddy said,” Kitty agreed.

Jean shook her head, causing her twin braids – which had taken Charles over an hour to put in that morning – to sway back and forth, “I can’t tell you. If I tell, it won’t come true.”

Charles alone knew what Jean had wished for, although he would keep his knowledge of her wish to himself even as he did his best to fulfill it. His sweet daughter had wished for nothing else save for her family that she loved to always be safe and happy.

It was a tall order, but one that Charles would be more than pleased to fill.

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Charles and his family stared at the television in utter shock as reporter Walter Cronkite delivered the news that President John Fitzgerald Kennedy had been assassinated in Dallas, Texas. It was November the twenty-second, nineteen sixty-three, and the entire nation was in mourning for a great man.

“How?” Jean choked out as she curled into Charles’ side and clutched at his sweater, “Daddy… why would someone do something like this?”

Charles took a deep breath to steady himself before replying, “There are monsters in this world, my love, no matter how much we might wish differently. They don’t live in your closet or beneath your
bed and they aren’t otherworldly creatures. They’re people who went wrong, people who made very bad decisions. I can only assume that one of them is responsible for this tragedy.”

Moira contacted Charles three nights later, with information that Charles would have sold his soul to have never received.

“The bullet that killed President Kennedy,” Moira revealed haltingly, “It curved, Charles. Erik was present at the scene, along with Raven and Azazel. They got away… but several agents saw Erik manipulating the bullet. I’m so sorry, Charles…”

The phone fell from Charles’ hand, clattering against the kitchen counter, gathering the attention of the others in the room. Charles began to sink, but Armando and Sean were there to catch him and guide him to the nearest chair in the dining room. Charles was only vaguely aware of Alex picking up the fallen phone and demanding an explanation from Moira.

“Uncle Charlie?” Chloë asked, sounding very far away from him despite how she was grasping at his hands.

“Go get Hank, Sean.”

“Professor?”

“What’s going on?”

“The Professor’s in shock, Hank.”

“Erik killed the President.”

“We can’t get Charles to respond.”

‘Professor,’ Hank’s mental voice was enough to snap Charles back to reality, his eyes meeting Hank’s.

“Erik killed Kennedy,” Charles whispered the words, wishing with all his heart that they were false, that they had never existed in the first place, “Raven was with him.”

Hank’s eyes mirrored Charles’ grief.

“Magneto killed Kennedy and Mystique was with him,” Alex disagreed firmly, “The Erik and Raven we cared about, they never made it off of the beach in Cuba, Dad.”

After a long moment, Charles nodded, accepting Alex’s words because he could do little else. He buried his face in his hands and began to sob.

Charles was not sure how long that he sat at the dining room table, mourning the loss of the man he loved and the sister whom he had so cherished, but he did know that his family never once strayed from his side.

Scott’s tenth birthday, on the tenth of December, helped to rejuvenate Charles a fair amount. It was easy, after all, to find a reason to smile in the fact of Scott’s great enthusiasm.

In the weeks that followed, Charles went to great lengths to hide his lingering grief by throwing
himself into preparations for Christmas. It was his first Christmas with his little ones and Charles was determined to create a winter wonderland for his family. There was, like last year, an enormous and elegantly decorated Christmas tree in the great den, but this year Charles had also situated nearly a dozen smaller pines throughout the rest of the ground floor of the mansion. Charles had even managed to find miniature trees for each of the children’s bedrooms, where he placed sweets and small trinkets early each morning on the twelve days leading up to Christmas. Nearly every surface in the mansion was covered in tinsel, or beautiful bows, or faux sparkling snow. Wreaths hung on every door and mistletoe hung from every doorway – which Chloë and Sean used as an excuse to snog one another silly. The days leading up to Christmas were spent ice-skating on the lake or engaging in epic snowball fights that Bobby always won. The nights involved snuggling up in a big pile, drinking hot cocoa and munching on fresh, warm gingerbread as Charles read ‘A Christmas Carol’ aloud to everyone else.

By the twenty-third, everything was almost perfect. Bobby had figured out how to make ice that would never melt and so his bedroom windows were permanently frosted over in intricate patterns. The Quad were crawling all over the place, which led to Hank coming up with a number of inventive ways to keep them out of places they shouldn’t be. Chloë managed to bake desert without burning it, although she did cause the soup to explode, but baby steps were important.

And then Moira called for the second time in less than thirty days, as Charles and his family were enjoying Chloë’s seventeenth attempt at strawberry shortcake, and Charles knew that something was going to be very wrong before she even spoke a word.

“Stryker’s taken another Mutant,” Moira said, “And he’s already had him for a week in a place called Alkali Lake in Alberta, Canada. He really wants to keep this man, Charles, he’s been very careful about keeping him a secret. I only found out because I decided to listen in on a conversation that Stryker was having with a scientist named Bolivar Trask.”

“Trask?” Charles was surprised, “I’ve heard of him. He manufactures weapons, doesn’t he?”

“Yes,” Moira confirmed, “And Stryker wants Trask to weaponize the gifts that Mutants have.”

“Lovely,” Charles replied with no small measure of disgust, “We’ll leave for Alkali Lake as soon as the Blackbird’s prepped. What’s the Mutant’s name, do you know?”

“Stryker just referred to him as the Wolverine.”

Charles’ eyes immediately shot over to where Chloë was sitting at the dining room table and his stomach dropped, “Hell.”

“Do you know him?” Moira inquired.

“Yes,” Charles responded, “And Stryker is going to regret taking him, I promise you that.”

“Be careful,” Moira urged.

“You too,” Charles said before hanging up.

“Who have they taken?” Chloë asked, her voice shaking, somehow already knowing what Charles was going to say.

Charles took a deep breath, “Your father.”

Chloë was out of her seat in a flash, knocking it over. Her claws came out and dug into the table and her teeth sharpened into fangs.
“Hank, Alex, Armando, and I will be going to rescue him. You and Sean will be remaining here,” Charles said quickly.

“The hell I am, Uncle Charlie!” Chloë snarled, “They’ve taken my dad.”

“And I swear to you that we are going to bring him back to you,” Charles promised, “But you’re emotionally compromised right now and that makes you a liability. You’ve improved in leaps and bounds since you got here, darling, but you still can’t control your instincts when you’re angry or afraid. Besides, your father would not thank me for putting his underage daughter at risk, especially not for his sake.”

Chloë very reluctantly accepted his decision, “You’ll bring him back?”

“We will,” Charles vowed, “We will.”

The flight to Alkali Lake was brief, one of the benefits of having a jet that could easily break the sound barrier at your disposal.

“The facility is lined with those blasted mirrors that block my telepathy,” Charles told Hank, Alex, and Armando grimly as they drew close to their destination.

“I’ve been scanning the facility,” Hank revealed, simultaneously steering the Blackbird and perusing digitized maps, “And it looks like I’ve found us a way in. There’s an old service tunnel from back when this place was just an average, run of the mill, dam. As far as I can tell, there don’t seem to be any kind of cameras or sensors present in that sector.”

“Set the Blackbird down as close as you can, Hank,” Charles instructed, “Swift and stealthy is our modus operandi tonight, gentlemen. And remember, codenames only once we have exited the jet.”

“Can you imagine all of the dam jokes we’d have to listen to if Sean were here?” Alex remarked in an aside, causing Armando to chuckle quietly.

Hank managed to land the Blackbird less than a dozen yards from the service tunnel’s entrance and said as he shut most of the jet’s systems off, “I’m keeping her cloaked, so everybody remember where I parked her at.”

The group exited the jet quietly and made it the short distance from the Blackbird to the rusty trapdoor that served as the entrance to the service tunnel without raising any alarms. Upon receiving Charles’ telepathic approval, Alex blasted the lock on the door with a precision that he had not possessed a year earlier. Hank lifted the trapdoor up, revealing a long, dark passage. Wordlessly, Hank passed out miniature flashlights that emitted a dim bluish glow when turned on.

‘Beast?’ Alex questioned mentally.

‘They’re less suspicious than bright yellow light beams would be,’ Hank defended.

Charles entered the tunnel first, despite the boys’ telepathic protests. Charles understood their reasoning for him staying behind them, logically, but Charles was rarely a purely logical being and if this was a trap, well, Stryker would only be getting his hands on his boys over Charles’ dead body. So, Charles led them through the damp tunnel that smelled strongly of mildew and mold, ignoring their mental admonitions that he would be safer behind them, only stepping aside when the group happened upon a second locked door, presumably the one that would grant them access to the facility’s core, where Logan was sure to be.
Alex,' Charles projected, ‘You’ll need to blast through this door as well. Be prepared to fight, boys. I don’t imagine that we’ll be able to get to Logan without raising an alarm or seven.’

Alex stepped forward, a bit of relief wafting from him as he did. Charles scowled in the dim light. Honestly, he wasn’t half as helpless as his kids seemed to think that he was.

‘We don’t think that you’re helpless,’ Armando’s mental voice was soothing and Charles realized with a start that the others had caught that last thought of his.

‘Of course not,’ Hank added quickly, ‘It’s just... we know that they’ll be targeting you specifically, Professor. Stryker knows what your gifts are, even if he isn’t sure how powerful you are and if he has any intelligence at all, he’ll know how important you are to us.’

‘I am more than capable of defending myself,’ Charles pointed out, his mental voice dry and lacking all amusement.

‘We know that,’ Alex assured, ‘But... we need you. We can’t lose you, Professor, and you are a target.’

‘Do any of you honestly imagine that I don’t need you just as much?’ Charles shot back.

‘Of course not,’ Armando answered at once, ‘Which is why we are all going to exercise as much caution as possible tonight.’

This was definitely something that Charles approved of wholeheartedly, because he could no more stand to lose one of them than they could to lose him, ‘Let’s go then, Alex, if you would?’

With the same unerring precision that he utilized to blast the lock on the trapdoor, Alex sent a small flash of bright, scarlet red plasma into the door’s handle, causing it to jerk open about an inch. Charles immediately sensed over a hundred minds, several nearby but not too close, including an unconscious Logan’s. The one mind that he failed to sense was Stryker’s.

Charles stepped out of the tunnel and into an empty hallway, which was lined with the damn telepath-blocking mirrors on one side. Charles had the rather ridiculous urge to find something heavy to smash them all with, a feeling that only intensified when Hank exited the tunnel after Alex and Armando and closed the door, cutting Charles’ telepathy off from those outside the facility. Charles turned to the left, ‘Stryker isn’t here, but I can sense that Logan is this way.’

‘Where do you think that Stryker could be?’ Hank wondered as they moved toward the center of the base. They passed a number of individuals, some of which were armed soldiers and some were scientists, wearing blood-stained lab coats. Charles entered their minds with no measure of guilt and altered their perceptions, ensuring that those whom they passed would never remember seeing them in the first place.

‘Probably hunting down more Mutants for his scientists to experiment on,’ Alex responded, his thoughts tainted with anger and disgust, ‘God, can’t they clean their damn lab coats? Who would want to walk around covered in blood?’

‘It’s more efficient for them not to bother cleaning them,’ Charles revealed to them gravely, ‘Why take the trouble to remove the blood when you will only get more on your coat the next day? Logan may be the only Mutant here now, but there have been dozens before him. This base has existed much longer than we suspected; Stryker knew about Mutants long before I revealed myself to the CIA.’
‘Professor,’ Armando suggested then, ‘After we rescue Logan, it would be very easy to flood this facility. The water pressure would probably wash it away completely.’

Charles hesitated briefly, ‘We set off the alarms first, give people time to get out. If we kill them, we’ll be no better than they are and Stryker could use it as an excuse to get the CIA interested in hunting down our people again.’

‘Agreed, Professor’ Armando projected back.

They found Logan only a few minutes later, in what appeared to be a surgical room; there were numerous blood stains on the floor and walls. Logan was strapped down to a lab table made solely of metal and was not wearing any clothing. Charles gently touched the other man’s shoulder, causing Logan to jerk awake, his eyes wild.

“Who the fuck are you?” Logan demanded hotly.

“It’s the Professor, Logan,” Charles said softly, “I know that I’m in a mask, but it is me. Beast, Havok, and Darwin are here as well.”

“I don’t know any of you,” Logan growled and, by god, he really believed that.

“We’re friends of yours,” Charles explained, “Friends of your daughter’s too.”

“I ain’t got a daughter,” Logan snapped.

Charles turned to Hank in alarm even as Alex asked, completely horrified, “What the hell have they done to him?”

Hank looked up from Logan’s medical reports, eyes brimming with a mix of sorrow and righteous indignation, “They’ve bonded some kind of supposedly indestructible metal called Adamantium to his entire skeleton. I can only assume that the pain from the procedure must have led to his current amnesia.”

“Oh god,” Alex whispered.

“Can you bring back his memories, Professor?” Armando asked.

“Yes,” Charles said decisively, because there was no way he was going to fail in this, placing two fingers on either side of Logan’s head, “I can.”

“What the fuck are you doing?” Logan demanded, straining against the straps still holding him down.

“Just stay still and remain calm, my friend,” Charles said, “I give you my word that you’ll thank me for this later.”

And then Charles was submerged in Logan’s turbulent mind. It was hardly easy, unlocking the memories that made Logan who he was, while also keeping the memories related to the terrible, painful, and bloody surgery, that Stryker had mercilessly ordered to be inflicted upon Logan, from surfacing. Remembering the details of the surgery would reset Logan’s mind again, a product of Logan’s own mutation.

Finally, Charles took a step away from a gasping Logan, fury boiling in his gut. Stryker was so very fortunate that he had chosen to stay away from his base of horrors today. In the mood Charles was in, he would have gladly ripped the bastard’s mind to shreds for what he had done.
“Chuck?” Logan spoke as if didn’t really believe Charles was there.

“Hello again, Logan,” Charles greeted.

Hank began to remove the thick leathery straps that held Logan down and Logan grunted in pain. Charles looked to see blades sticking out of the underside of the straps and he gnashed his teeth together at the red stains on them, even as Logan’s wounds began to heal.

“Stryker is nothing more than a monster,” Alex whispered as Hank worked to quickly peel off all of the sadistic bindings. Logan jumped off the table as soon as he could and glared at it.

Armando passed Logan a set of clean blue scrubs, which were slightly too small for the man. “He really is,” Logan commented gruffly as he dressed, “The fucker cut off my favorite leather jacket and totaled my motorcycle.”

“Both of those can be replaced,” Charles said, “You cannot be. Let’s get you out of this hellish place, my friend. It’s time for us all to go home.”

True to Armando’s prediction, the Alkali Lake base was completely washed away when Hank burst the dam with a few well-placed hits to its structure via the Blackbird’s laser defense system. No one perished when the facility was destroyed; the whole of the staff was a perfectly safe distance away, watching it’s decimation with wide, confused eyes, never noticing the jet blasting away from the site and back toward New York.

“Chloë?” Logan asked on the brief ride back to the mansion.

“She’s perfectly safe,” Charles assured, “If quite a bit worried for you.”

“She knows that I was taken?”

“It wasn’t possible for me to keep it from her,” Charles admitted. “We received word during dinner, while she was present.”

“Don’t… don’t tell her that I forgot who she was,” Logan requested, deeply and heartbreakingly ashamed.

“We won’t,” Charles promised, “But Logan, you must know that it wasn’t your fault, what happened, what was done to you.”

Logan snorted, evidently not agreeing, “I can’t remember, exactly, what Stryker did to me, Chuck.”

“Your mutation, first and foremost, protects you from permanent harm, my friend,” Charles admitted, “Remembering the procedure that Stryker subjected you to… it would have caused your mutation to wipe all of your memories once more, so I had to bury it as deeply in your mind as I possibly could.”

Logan nodded in understanding, “Thank you… Professor.”

“Daddy!” Chloë leapt into Logan’s arms.

Logan caught her and held her close, drinking in her scent and presence like a man dying of thirst, “Hey, pup.”
He had missed her so much; he always missed her when he had to leave. She was the one true bright spot in his life, his baby girl.

“If you ever leave me again,” Chloë warned, her voice rough and Logan could smell the dried tears that she must have shed earlier on her cheeks, “I will hunt you down and drag your ass back, after kicking it good, of course.”

Logan barked out a laugh, feeling lighter than he had for a long, long time, “That’s my girl.”

“This Adamantium stuff is incredible, Professor,” Hank told Charles when he entered the lab to fetch the scientist for lunch, “If it wasn’t magnetic, I’d line all of our stuff with it. I’m still sorely tempted to anyway. Maybe I can figure out a way to demagnetize it during its creation, because, wow.”

“Is it really indestructible?” Charles asked.

“Once it cools from its liquid state, yes,” Hank answered, “And making it is a long, arduous process that takes months. You have to constantly keep it hot until you’re ready to shape it, because after that, it’s impossible to reform.”

“Erik could manipulate it, though, get it to change shape.”

“He could,” Hank allowed, his tone careful as he reminded, “But he’s not an option for us.”

Charles nodded, “I know, Hank, believe me, I know. At any rate, removing it from Logan’s body is not something that we’re capable of doing then?”

“I’m afraid not, Professor.”

“I’m truly glad that you have decided to stay here, my friend,” Charles said to Logan on Christmas Eve.

Nearly everyone else was already in bed, awaiting the morning and the celebrating that the dawn would bring.

“I can’t leave Chloë again,” Logan stated gruffly and with a hint of pride, “She’ll find a way to kill me.”

“Probably,” Charles agreed, and he tactfully decided to ignore the way that Logan felt indebted to him and his family for saving him. It was ridiculous, really, but Charles knew that there would be little point in trying to dissuade the stubborn man from feeling the way that he did.

“Stryker’s still out there,” Logan said.

“He’s quite fortunate that he wasn’t at Alkali Lake last night,” Charles freely admitted to him, “I very seriously doubt that I could have stopped myself from doing him grievous harm.”

“We’ve got to stop him from kidnapping and hurting other Mutants,” Logan said, “Alex was right, that man’s nothing but a monster.”

“We will,” Charles promised.

“And while we’re waiting for the bastard to slip up and give us an opportunity to get at him,” Logan
wondered, “What are we supposed to do, Chuck?”


“No, I really wouldn’t, Bub,” Logan said quickly.

“History, I believe, since that is the subject you most enjoy,” Charles continued as if he had not heard the protest, “Aside from self-defense, which you are more than welcome to become involved in as well.”

Logan sighed and downed the rest of his fourth beer of the evening before conceding, “Whatever you say, Chuck.”

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Christmas came bright and early on the twenty-fifth and was filled with all the things that a Christmas should be filled with – laughter, cheer, good food, love, and piles upon piles of presents wrapped in vibrantly colored paper and ribbons. It was easy for Charles to pretend that nothing was missing in such a festive and warm environment.

But then, as the day wound down to a close, Charles received an enormous shock. He felt, for the few briefest of moments, Erik’s unprotected mind by the front gates before it vanished once more. Charles immediately dropped what he was doing – namely, trying to open a bottle of vintage red wine to go with dinner – and ran toward them, ignoring the incontrovertible fact that Erik had to be gone.

When he got to the gates, he saw, sitting in the snow on the outside of the shield, a small box wrapped in grey-green paper with his name clearly visible on the gift’s golden tag. Charles stared at it for a long time before finally using his keycard to retrieve it from the snow. He carried it up to his room, using his telepathy to avoid everyone else on the way.

Inside the box was an inch thick, bright silver bracelet that was inscribed, in Erik’s unique handwriting, with the German words, ‘Ich Werde Dich Immer Lieben, Schatz.’

And Charles’ heart broke all over again.

Chapter End Notes

‘Ich Werde Dich Immer Lieben, Schatz’ (I Will Always Love You, Sweetheart)
Chapter Five

Logan was not tailing his daughter while she spent her Valentine’s Day with the ginger-haired screamer who had somehow managed to catch her interest. He had just happened to feel like visiting the ridiculously frou-frou restaurant that Chloë and Sean had chosen to eat dinner at. Logan had already shaken his head in disgust at all the frills and lace that adorned the place several times since sitting down at his small corner table, a table that was covered in pink silk and red satin bows.

He had not had any particular reason to believe the Banshee was a particularly wise kid, but Logan had not thought that he could be this stupid. Surely the kid knew that Chloë could only find a place like this, with its pink doilies and heart-shaped candles, absolutely sickening. Logan had bet to himself that his daughter would not last five minutes in a joint like this before she was demanding to leave.

But then five minutes had passed, and then another thirty, and Chloë, impossibly, seemed to actually be enjoying herself. Maybe being in love, or thinking that you were in love, really did turn you into a fool.

Logan turned his attention away from his daughter when a short waitress with brunette curls approached and asked for the tenth time if there was anything else she could get for him. He sent her away again, perfectly aware that she was growing more and more annoyed with him – the restaurant was packed and there was a long wait, obviously the woman wanted him to leave to make room for someone who would order more than a single cup of the least appalling tea on the menu – but he could hardly bring himself to care. Logan was not leaving the joint until his daughter had.

Chloë sat down in front of him suddenly, having apparently crossed the restaurant in the time it took Logan to dismiss the waitress, and she had a scowl on her face, “Daddy, what are you doing here?”

“Enjoying this lemon tea,” Logan said innocently, taking a sip of the, now cold, beverage.

“If you were Uncle Charlie,” Chloë replied wryly, “I might have actually bought that.”

Logan frowned at her.

“If you were Uncle Charlie,” Chloë replied wryly, “I might have actually bought that.”

Logan frowned at her.

“Don’t give me that look, daddy,” Chloë chided without heat, “You know perfectly well that I can take care of myself. Not that your caveman theatrics aren’t, you know, touching and all.”

Logan huffed, “Stryker-”

“Is in D.C.,” Chloë interrupted, “Uncle Charlie said so at breakfast just this morning. I’ll be fine, so go home, because you really aren’t fooling anybody.”

Logan sighed, but stood, and noticed how much happier the brunette waitress looked as he did, and Chloë quickly followed suit, “Fine, pup, I’ll head back to the mansion. You’re not really into all of
this… stuff, right?”

Chloë laughed, “Of course not. Sean and I came here to make fun of it. We’re going bowling after this.”

“Well, have fun, I guess,” Logan sent a fierce look Sean’s way, causing the kid to slink down in his plush seat.

“Daddy,” Chloë chastised, catching the look, “Go.”

“Alright, alright, I’m goin’,” Logan winked at her and then made his way out of the restaurant, getting some amusement from the way everybody eagerly moved out of his way. He had to walk a block to reach the red motorcycle that Chuck had permanently loaned him – Chuck just did things like that – so that he could head home.

And wasn’t that a strange concept. *Home.*

Logan had gone so long without one that it was hard to accept that he had one now. He was still adjusting to the radical lifestyle change, even after a full month and a half. He had not been looking for a home, but Chuck and his kids had taken him in and presented him with one gladly, practically smothering him with love and acceptance from the moment that they learned he was going to stay. Logan might have been able to walk away from it all in the beginning, if he had not made that promise to Chloë, but he sure as hell couldn’t now. He cared about them all way too much.

They had become *family* before Logan had even realized that they were friends and Logan could not abandon them. Unlike when Chloë was young, they would not be safer if Logan kept his distance. They would be in more danger, especially since they all clung to the notion that they had to save the goddamned world. They were good people but, not counting their idea to install that nifty force field thing, their self-preservation was for shit.

So Logan would remain, because somebody had to keep the idealistic asses of his family safe.

Charles had gotten into the habit of using Cerebro every morning before his little ones woke up so that he could determine the whereabouts of Stryker, ensure that Moira was still okay, and check to make sure that none of the Mutants he had previously pinpointed were in danger. There were so many children, most unmanifested of course. Charles could hardly wait to receive the green light to transform his mansion into a proper school, so that he could begin recruiting the children who needed help controlling and becoming comfortable with their powers, but the approval was slow in coming. The legalities for opening a school, especially an exclusive boarding school like Charles’ had to be by necessity, were far more complex than Charles had imagined them to be. And there was little chance of using his money to smooth the way this time. During the last conversation Charles had with his lawyers, only a few days earlier, he had learned, to his displeasure, that it could take up to seven *years* to finally get the go-ahead for his school. The only positive that Charles could manage to come up with was that at least his chosen teachers would have time to mature before they became responsible for students that they were not family to.

As Charles was scanning through Florida, he came across a mind that gave him great pause. The unshielded mind of the Brotherhood’s latest recruit; obviously Miss Frost had yet to teach him how to even basically block his thoughts from a telepath. Without guilt, Charles dove into the man’s brainwaves and learned something that made him grit his teeth in anger.
Charles removed Cerebro’s helmet from his head, shutting it down automatically and startling Hank, who was calibrating some kind of portable communication device.

“What’s wrong?” Hank asked quickly, “You never come out of Cerebro before your hour is up unless something’s wrong.”

“Gather the X-Men in the Mission Room,” Charles instructed, “We’ve got a problem.”

Despite being woken before dawn, the boys, Chloë, and Logan were alert and attentive, if still wearing their pajamas, by the time they met Charles in the Mission Room. All seven of them took seats around a circular table made of silver metal and then six pairs of eyes turned toward Charles.

“The Brotherhood has taken a new member into their ranks, Mortimer Toynbee, a Mutant who prefers to go by the name of ‘Toad,’” Charles revealed without preamble, “His powers are as his moniker suggests, superhuman strength in his legs which allows him to jump very high and very far, enhanced reflexes, slightly enhanced healing, a thirty foot prehensile tongue, acidic saliva, control over amphibians, and his pores secrete a resin that both allows him to stick to any surface and will paralyze those whom he comes into physical contact with. He can see extremely well in the dark but daylight causes his eyes pain, forcing him to wear goggles which shield him from the sun’s rays.”

“So we should go for the eyes if possible if we have to fight him,” Alex concluded, “Which I take it we’ll have to.”

“Most likely,” Charles confirmed with a nod, “I read his mind. The Brotherhood means to steal a shipment of a hundred and fifty missiles from the docks in Port Canaveral early tomorrow morning.”

“Shit,” Sean breathed.

“We can’t let that happen,” Hank said urgently, “The damage that they could do with a single missile would be massive. With a hundred and fifty of them… they could devastate the whole country.”

“So we stop them before they can get their hands on the shipment,” Armando determined.

“Hank,” Charles said, “You, Logan, and I are going to take the Blackbird out over the Atlantic at dusk to rendezvous with the U.S.S. Nimize. I’m going to convince the men onboard to hand over the missiles to us, if you think that the Blackbird can handle the weight.”

“It’ll handle the weight fine, Professor,” Hank assured him, “Our jet can carry several tons of equipment plus fifteen passengers easily.”

“Won’t the men on board the ship get in trouble if their cargo just vanishes?” Chloë wondered.

“The missiles are non-magnetic,” Charles revealed, “Stryker ordered them constructed for one very specific purpose.”

“To take out Magneto,” Alex said.

Charles nodded and then said, “After all the past three times that his agents have been duped, I imagine that Stryker will simply blame me when he discovers that the missiles have vanished.”

“Which will turn you into a fucking target, Bub.” Logan pointed out.

“I’m already a target,” Charles reminded with a dismissive wave of his hand, “We’ll drop the
missiles off here, pick the three of you up, Alex, Armando, Sean, and then head to Florida.”

“If the missiles aren’t going to reach Port Canaveral, then why are we going to Florida?” Sean wondered.

“Because I don’t imagine that the Brotherhood will be too pleased to have their plans thwarted. There’s a good chance that they’ll take their frustrations out on the men onboard the ship,” Charles pointed out, “And them doing so will only make things worse for our people.”

“I suppose that I have to stay here while the rest of you go to Florida, don’t I?” Chloë pouted.

“You bet your ass that you do,” Logan replied and then turned to Hank, “If Magneto can control all magnetic metal, then I won’t be much use in a fight against him, unless you’ve figured out a way to demagnetize the Adamantium in my body.”

“No, but I’ve lined your suit with a substance that will disrupt the magnetic field of everything within five feet of it,” Hank responded, “Magneto will still be able to sense the metal, but he won’t be able to control it.”

“He’s gonna love that,” Alex stated blandly.

“You should probably stay here while the rest of go to Florida, Professor,” Armando suggested then, with a calm but cautious tone, “We can all shield ourselves from Frost now and the kids need you.”

Armando did not say that, when it came to fighting the Brotherhood as opposed to humans or Mutants with unshielded minds, Charles would almost certainly be a liability, he did not even think it. He did not have to.

“I know,” Charles sighed, surprising and relieving the boys, “I don’t like it, but I know. I’ll monitor the situation remotely with Cerebro. If it comes down to it, I’ll be able to shut most of the Brotherhood down from here, though it’ll be rather painful for them if it comes to that.”

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It was one of the hardest things that Charles had ever had to do, sending his boys and Logan into battle without him. The rendezvous with the U.S.S. Nimize had gone off without a hitch and Charles prayed that the altercation between his X-Men and the Brotherhood would as well.

Charles spent the hour and a half between his loved ones leaving Westchester and their arrival in Florida pacing a hole in the library while Chloë pretended to read a book of French poetry in one of the armchairs by the fire that was dancing merrily in the fireplace, oblivious to the worry of the two beings nearest its heat. He didn’t want to imagine that Erik would cause any true harm to his family, but he couldn’t deny that he feared just such a thing happening, how could he not after what Erik had done to Kennedy?

As soon as the clock chimed four in the morning, Charles rushed out of the room, heading straight for Cerebro. Chloë followed, determined to at least monitor him as he used it, since it was the only thing she could do. Charles activated the machine and pulled its familiar helmet over his head. While he usually would spend a few moments basking in the nearly overwhelming harmony that was produced by his touching so many minds at once, this morning he ignored the feeling and immediately cast his mind south. He found the minds of his X-Men easily, so attuned to them as he was, and then hovered to witness what would happen next.

Alex, Armando, Sean, Hank, and Logan had positioned themselves in the thick shadows of Port Canaveral, monitoring the dock where the U.S.S Nimize was scheduled to berth. There was no sign
of the Brotherhood for a few long minutes and then Riptide stepped into the light underneath a lamppost, wearing a standard sailor’s uniform and puffing on a cigarette, looking for all the world as if he was supposed to be there. Several others passed him and never gave him a second glance.

‘Here comes the Nimize,’ Alex projected shortly after Janos’ appearance and Charles turned to look out over the rolling waves to see the large red and white ship sailing toward the docks, unaware of the danger lurking in wait for it.

The ship had scarcely dropped its anchor before the Brotherhood was converging on it. The Brotherhood had barely landed on the Nimize’s deck, scaring her sailors terribly in the few seconds that preceded Emma putting them all to sleep, before the X-Men had followed suit. Erik, who was wearing a redecorated version of the helmet that Charles hated so much and a ridiculous magenta cape that matched an equally ridiculous magenta suit, did not look, in any way, pleased to see them.

“Um, dude,” Sean said, without thinking, “Why have you got a bug on your helmet?”

Erik glared at him, “It’s not a bug, Banshee.”

“It looks like a bug,” Sean replied, “Hey, Beast, how come we don’t get capes?”

“There’s no way I’m giving you a cape,” Hank responded firmly, “You’ll get yourself sucked into an airplane engine within a day.”

“What are you doing here?” Angel snapped at them.

“The Professor asked us to deliver a message,” Alex announced, crossing his arms across his chest.

“What message?” Erik demanded, “And why isn’t he here to deliver it himself?”

“Like we’re ever letting you near our Professor again, Magneto,” Alex growled out.

Armando placed a calming hand on Alex’s shoulder, “We’re here to tell you that the missiles you’ve come here for are gone. They were dumped overboard into the depths of the Atlantic late last night.”

Not the truth, of course, but safer to relay than the truth. Charles did not know if Erik had sunk so far as to be willing to threaten one of his X-Men for the missiles – which were stored away in the mansion for Hank to strip apart later – but Charles did know that he would willingly trade the missiles for his family’s safety if he had too. He would trade just about anything for that.

Erik was immediately livid, his grey-green eyes flashing dangerously as he hissed out, “What?”

“The missiles are gone, Bub,” Logan told him, looking remarkably unconcerned by Erik’s ire as he did so, “Unless you’d like to scour the bottom of the ocean for them. Maybe you can find a magenta diving suit to match your cape.”

The metal of the ship groaned and trembled as it felt Erik’s anger.

“Calm down,” Hank chastised, “Those missiles were non-magnetic; they were meant for you. They were too dangerous to keep around and you know it.”

“I’m perfectly aware that Stryker intended them for me,” Erik seethed, “It would have been all the better to use them on him.”

“And achieve what exactly?” Sean demanded, “If you had used those missiles to kill Stryker, ten more like him would have risen in his place.”
“Then we’ll kill them too,” Raven declared.

“Like you killed Kennedy, a man who was keeping the CIA from hunting us down?” Alex questioned heatedly.

Erik made to reply but a sudden gunshot cut off whatever he had been about to say in response to Alex’s damming accusation. Erik spun around with remarkable speed and reached out with his powers, stopping a large bullet from piercing Raven’s head. Charles shook with relief, because there had been less than half an inch of distance between the bullet and his little sister. Erik quickly rounded on the shooter and his dozen friends and barked out in irritation, “Emma!”

“I can’t sense their minds,” Frost replied hastily, sounding wary and looking extremely put out by this fact.

Charles, unlike Frost, could sense the soldiers, in the same way that he could sense the helmet that had once belonged to Shaw, and projected to his team, ‘Their minds feel like Magneto’s helmet, like dead space. They weren’t present onboard the ship last evening, I would have sensed them.’

‘They must have boarded sometime after we took the missiles,’ Hank stated, ‘We resealed the crates that the missiles were packed in before we departed the Nimize last night; Stryker must not realize that the missiles he ordered are already gone. He suspected we would be here today, but must have thought that he had no reason to worry about the Brotherhood showing up, which makes this…’

‘A trap,’ Alex’s mental voice was grim, ‘For us.’

‘Most likely,’ Hank agreed.

Erik didn’t respond verbally to Emma, he just ripped all of the guns from the soldiers’ hands and turned them around on their owners. As the soldiers quaked in their boots, Erik calmly examined the bullet that had nearly killed Raven. “This is an armor piercing round,” he said quietly, looking at the X-Men, “My people don’t wear armor.”

“Stryker ain’t exactly the Professor’s biggest fan,” Logan admitted.

“Why?” Raven demanded, “Hasn’t he just been hiding away from reality in his mansion since Cuba?”

“No, he has not,” Sean countered, his temper flaring in a way it rarely did, “He’s been protecting our people and doing a far better job of it than any of you have. We’ve rescued over a dozen Mutants from Stryker since the Professor recovered from your fearless leader putting a fucking bullet in his back, Mystique, something that took months, by the way, and caused him daily agony for weeks! All you’ve managed to do since Cuba is kill people.”

A wooden bucket flew out of nowhere, just as Sean finished ranting, hitting Erik in the side. One of the soldiers, the same one who had tried to shoot Raven, had apparently gathered up enough courage, or stupidity, to try to assault the group of Mutants again, “Stand down you fucking freaks!”

Erik’s hand flexed and the soldier’s body was riddled with bullets without any warning at all. The man fell, dead before his body hit the deck, which quickly became stained with his blood.

“Shit,” Sean breathed out, looking pale at the sight of blood.

‘Steady, Sean, darling,’ Charles sent to him, ‘Don’t look at him. Focus on the Brotherhood.’

‘Yes, Prof,’ Sean sent back.
“Obeying Stryker,” Erik promised the remaining soldiers, “Was your last mistake.”

“No, Magneto!” Armando called out, stepping in between the soldiers and Erik.

“You don’t need to hurt them,” Sean added, as he and the others copied Armando, “They’re defenseless; they can’t do us any harm. Just let them go.”

Charles watched as confusion flickered across several of the soldiers’ faces. What had Stryker told them to get them to come out here, he wondered?

“They came here to hurt your Professor,” Erik said, apparently deciding to appeal to the boys’ protective natures. Not a bad plan, all things considered, “They came here to capture him and drag him back to Stryker to be tortured and experimented on.”

“Even so, the Professor would never want us to kill for his sake,” Alex spoke up, “He’d be pissed if we tried, if we even thought about trying.”

“I’m not asking you to kill, Havok,” Erik replied, “I’m just asking you not to get in my way as I eliminate a threat to someone we both hold dear.”

“Stryker is the threat,” Armando protested, “Not these men.”

“They work for Stryker, that makes them a threat,” Erik disagreed, “Now stand down, get in your jet, and go back home.”

“We’re not going to let you hurt them, Magneto,” Hank asserted.

“Azazel,” Erik lost his patience and barked out, and despite only saying a single name, it was obviously an order.

Charles went after the teleporter’s mind immediately, breaking through the flimsy, by his standards, walls that Frost had constructed to stop him. Azazel would have a migraine for days, but he also would not be able to help Erik in this. Neither would Frost, Angel, Riptide, or Toad by harming anyone – Charles went after them in short order. The only minds left untouched were Raven and Erik’s.

Erik’s eyes widened as Azazel collapsed to the deck, unconscious, followed in short order by the other four. Logan, Alex, and Armando began assaulting the guns, which were still poised in the air to shoot, while Sean and Hank cornered Raven.

With several consecutive blasts of hot plasma, Alex turned all of the hovering rifles into ash, while Logan and Armando covered him. Erik ripped up part of the deck and used it to shove the two away.

‘Get the humans off of this ship,’ Charles instructed his X-Men then, ‘I'll distract Magneto while you do.’ And he knew, without having to check, that they would obey him without question.

Erik raised a heavy beam of metal with his powers then, preparing to send it flying into Alex. Charles materialized in front of him at that moment, making Erik freeze in shock, “Don’t you fucking dare harm him, Erik!”

“You incapacitated my people, didn’t you?” Erik realized, his hands curling into fists, which caused the metal beam he was levitating to fold in on itself until it was nothing more than an oddly shaped ball, “God damn it, Charles! What the hell are you thinking? These men were sent here to kill you or worse!”
“Killing these men for following the orders of their superiors will not convince the humans that we can coexist peacefully with them,” Charles replied.

“Neither will letting them live!” Erik snapped back, “Look around you, Charles! The humans don’t want peace, they want to capture us, experiment on us, and annihilate us! We need to strike preemptively, it’s the only way our people will be able to survive what’s coming.”

“The only one trying to start a war is you, Erik,” Charles argued.

“Because the humans don’t have to,” Erik returned heatedly, “If we don’t fight all they have to do is round us up, throw us into concentration camps, and find some new and creative way to kill us in mass.”

“No, Erik,” Charles denied earnestly, “We can show them a better way. We can prove to them that we’re no threat, that peace is possible. And we can start proving that by sparing the lives of these men. If we show them mercy it could change how they feel about us, it could convince them to say ‘no’ the next time that they’re ordered to go after a Mutant. And they, in turn, can convince others. Revolutions do not always have to be full of bloodshed, my friend, history has proved that before.”

“History has also proved that revolutions are resolved much more quickly with bloodshed,” Erik stated, “We’re the better men, Charles. We shouldn’t be living with the humans, we should be ruling over them. They are nothing compared to us, Schatz.”

“Don’t call me that,” Charles whispered harshly, “Don’t you dare preach that mass murder is an acceptable course of action and then call me that, Erik.”

“Charles—”

“I love you,” Charles swallowed hard, “But as long as you insist on trying to start a war, Erik, I will be there to stand in your way. If you want to kill innocent people, you’re going to do it over my dead body.”

Erik flinched back, “I would never hurt you, Charles.”

“You already have,” Charles replied.

“I… I’m sorry about what happened in Cuba,” Erik told him gently, “But Moira is the one who fired the gun in the first place.”

“I wasn’t talking about the bullet you directed into my back,” Charles said coldly, and then added, because his family had been busy while he distracted Erik, “The ship has been evacuated, there’s no one left for you to attack save my X-Men. I’ll revive Azazel and then you need to get your people the hell out of here.”

“I’m not leaving without the missiles,” Erik stubbornly insisted.

“The missiles are gone,” Charles retorted, “You’d need a submarine to get to down to them. You’ve lost, Erik.”

“This battle perhaps,” Erik conceded with a fierce glare, “But this is only the beginning, Charles, I promise you that.”

The X-Men celebrated their victory over the Brotherhood that night, after having slept the rest of the
morning and the afternoon away. For Sean and Chloë’s parts, ‘celebrating’ included skinny dipping in the indoor pool, which led to Charles having to have a conversation he really would have liked to postpone for several years with Scott and Jean. Logan was none too happy about the development in the young couple’s relationship, growling heavily whenever Sean was in the same room as him. Alex did not help matters when he loudly, and in front of Logan, told Sean to make sure that he used condoms.

The days following were remarkably tense and Charles was very grateful for the distraction that was Peter’s seventh birthday. Charles arranged for the party to be held on an actual ship, made to look like a pirate’s vessel, and Peter was absolutely delighted by all of the waiters and waitresses, who were dressed in colorful, if not actually historically accurate, pirate costumes. There was even a lively show during dinner.

It was during dinner that Melody decided to speak her first word, as Charles was trying to wipe ice cream, which she had gotten into before he could stop her, from off of her face. “Dada,” Melody pouted at him as he cleaned her up and pushed his ice cream away from her little hands.

“Melly said her first word!” Peter cheered, pulling his youngest sister out of Charles’ arms so that he could give her a tight hug. Melody squealed in delight and wriggled in Peter’s hold as Charles smiled fondly at them both.

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Oliver and Aurora both said their first words exactly a week later. Oliver’s was ‘sissy’, in reference to Jean, whose attention Oliver wanted most at that particular moment. Aurora’s first word, ‘no’, was spoken a few hours later, when Charles tried to feed her a second spoonful of the mashed peas he had prepared for the Quad’s dinner. It was followed by her throwing the peas right into Charles’ face.

“Scott did that to me once,” Alex laughed as he handed Charles a napkin, “Although his weapon of choice was carrots.”

“Carrots are evil, Alex,.” Scott immediately spoke up, “Evil.”

“They are,” Ororo agreed, “But not as evil as squash. Squash is the evilest.”

“And bussel spouts,” Bobby added.

“Brussel sprouts, love,” Charles corrected as he cleaned himself off, “And vegetable are good for you, not evil. They’ll help you grow big and strong, which is why you need to eat them.”

Judging from the looks of sheer disbelief he received from the children, Charles seriously doubted that he had convinced them of his point.

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March the twelfth was not a good day by anyone’s standards, let alone Charles’. It had started off poorly, with Charles waking up with a splitting headache and a sore throat, and had only gotten worse as it progressed.

Ororo and Peter spent the entire morning bickering which eventually escalated to full-out war between the two. The front lawn was now sporting multiple patches of charred earth from where Charles’ weather-controlling daughter had struck it with her lightning in an attempt to hit Peter, who had thrown all of her dolls into the swimming pool. Charles had been forced to put them both in time-out for the first time ever to think about their actions.
Kitty, jealous of the way that Bobby’s ice covered his room in ever-changing swirling patterns, had then decided, while Charles was hoarsely telling off Peter and Ororo, to get creative with her own bedroom. She had gone into the groundskeeper’s shed and discovered several tins of paint, leftover from the last time that Sharon Xavier had decided to remodel a part of the mansion. One of the paint cans had upended over Kitty’s person, as she tried to pull it down from the shelf it had been tucked away on, and Kitty ended up stained an obnoxious shade of fuchsia – which had been Sharon Xavier’s favorite color – for the duration of time that it took her to reach Charles up in his study, dripping paint and tears as she ran to him. Charles’ own clothes were, subsequently, as ruined as hers were, especially since she spent a good five minutes sobbing into his shoulder before he could wrestle her into a bath. Armando – and Charles thanked very deity that he had ever heard of, and some that he had made up, for him – had managed to clean up the paint trail by the time that both Kitty and Charles were paint free, but Charles was going to have to replace both his and Kitty’s bathtubs, as they were now discolored in several places.

No sooner was this crisis dealt with, than Jean approached Charles, with half of the edges of her beautiful dark red hair singed horribly.

“What happened?” Charles exclaimed, repositioning Aurora onto his left hip, because she had started wailing every time that Charles tried to set her down, so that he could examine Jean for injury.

“Scott and I were playing with our powers outside and, um, I was standing a bit too close to his target,” Jean explained sheepishly, “I made flying disks out of sticks with my telekinesis and Scott was shooting them down. Please don’t be mad at Scott, it really was my fault. I’m sorry, Daddy.”

“I’m not angry,” Charles assured, because frazzled was a far more accurate description of his mental state, “It was an accident. The two of you really shouldn’t be playing with your gifts without an adult nearby, though.”

To salvage what was left of Jean’s hair, Charles had to drive her, Aurora, and Scott, who felt incredibly guilty for the incident, into New York City so that they could go to a salon. After having to endure forty-seven agonizing minutes of Envy’s receptionist shamelessly and inappropriately flirting with him, to Scott’s absolute mortification and Aurora’s apparent displeasure, though there was a chance that she simply did not appreciate the woman’s nauseating perfume, Charles was extremely relieved to be able to get the hell out of the place.

They drove home, Jean sporting a stylish bob haircut, and Scott spent the entire ride back to Westchester alternatively telling her how pretty she looked and apologizing for messing up her hair in the first place.

All Charles wanted to do when he got back to the mansion was go straight to bed, but the grim look on Hank’s face when he walked into the foyer told him that such an aspiration was simply not going to become a reality any time soon.

“Moira called while you were out,” Hank said, “Stryker’s taken another Mutant and his two young children. He’s got them in a facility in Utah, right smack dab in the middle of Salt Lake City.”

“Then we all need to suit up,” Charles returned.

Charles had never before been to Salt Lake City and, following the rescue of Adam, Ally, and Kyle Kelekolio, he doubted that he would ever be able to stomach going back. The X-Men had saved the father and his two children with few problems – one of the soldiers, a dark-haired man who had also been present on the Nimize, guarding the facility had led them straight to the cell where the three
were being kept without even having to be asked – but there was still a body that they had to bring back home.

He did not know how Angel had been caught, but Charles was perfectly aware of how she had died. She had been dissected alive, if the way her facial features were frozen in an agonized scream was any indication, and Alex had been the one to find her wings, separated from her body and mounted up on a wall like a perverse hunting trophy. There were other ‘trophies’ too: a pair of webbed hands and feet, a large patch of orange fur, a set of twisted horns. Charles ordered Alex to burn them all save for Angel’s wings, which they bundled up carefully with what was left of the girl; many of her organs were missing. Charles took a minute to be grateful that Sean had been required to stay at home with Chloë to watch the little ones, because his son would have surely passed out at the sight. Sean did not do well around blood or things gruesome.

Charles and the others left the facility a smoldering ruin, with its scientists and most of its soldiers wandering around in confusion. The dark-haired soldier watched the blaze with a kind of satisfaction on his face and Charles thought that, perhaps, his family had gained another human ally. Only time would tell.

Charles coughed harshly as they were beginning to fly over Tennessee, Hank had chosen a curving route just in case, and Adam approached him.

“You’re ill,” Adam stated and then raised a hand up, “May I?”

Charles nodded and then gasped as a pale blue light flowed from Adam’s hand into Charles’ chest. His headache faded away, his inflamed throat suddenly felt a million times better, and the aching in his chest vanished completely.

“Your mutation is healing others,” Armando realized.

Adam nodded, “It’s why I chose to become a doctor. I wanted to help people with my gift. I suppose that I must have brought suspicion down on myself by healing someone too quickly or someone who shouldn’t have healed at all. I’m also very strong. I have to admit, I thought that I was the only one like me until Stryker took me and my children.”

“There aren’t many of us, yet,” Charles said, exceedingly grateful to be able to speak without pain, “But you’re not alone, Doctor Kelekolio.”

“Adam, please,” the healer insisted, “Thank you, by the way, thank you so much for saving us.”

“There’s no need for that,” Alex replied, “It’s kinda what we do.”

Adam raised an eyebrow in question and Alex, with an occasion interjection from Armando and Logan, launched into an explanation of the X-Men and the school they wanted to create. This eventually morphed into a discussion of how mutation was hereditary, meaning that Ally and Kyle were almost surely Mutants too, and the conversation ended as Adam agreed to stay with them at the mansion for as long as they needed a doctor.

“I am sorry for your loss,” Adam nodded respectfully at Angel’s body then, “She was in the cell next to mine for a few days. She was a very courageous young woman. Stryker only ordered her death because she refused to give up the secrets of the other Mutants she knew.”

“There’s no denying that she was brave,” Charles stated quietly, “I’m going to have to-”

‘Charles!’
“Land the plane, Hank!” Charles ordered at once, only now realizing that they were passing over Richmond, “Land it now, here! Moira’s in trouble.”

Hank changed course at once as Armando asked, “What’s wrong, Professor.”

“Stryker suspected that Moira was giving him away and he set a trap to prove it,” Charles explained as he repositioned his mask onto his face, “Moira’s being hunted by two of Stryker’s agents, Coleridge and Mortimer, right now. The men were both on the Nimize.”

“So you can’t get into their heads,” Alex deduced, “How close are they to Moira?”

“Too close,” Charles answered flatly as the jet landed heavily in the middle of an abandoned street, “Adam, you and your children stay in here where it’s safe. We’ll be back soon.”

Charles, Logan, and the boys exited the jet, which Hank had not bothered to decloak, about a hundred yards from Moira, who paused in relief when she caught sight of them. That pause proved to be a very big mistake. The men chasing her caught up to her in that moment and the taller of the two lunged at her with a large serrated knife. There was no time to call out to warn Moira and all Charles could do was pray that something halted the dagger in its tracks.

To Charles’ horror, the knife did not stop. Instead it plunged deep into Moira’s gut and her white blouse turned red in an instant. Coleridge sunk down as she did and then yanked the dagger back out of Moira’s stomach, raising it so that he could slam it back down again.

“Moira!” Alex shouted, blasting the agent standing over her away without even thinking about it. Coleridge flew back, screaming in more surprise than pain. His partner immediately converged on him, beating out the minor flames that Alex’s limited plasma blast had created. Alex, for his part, raced over to Moira with Charles, Armando, and Hank hot on his heels.

“Boys,” Moira whispered as Charles lifted her as much as he dared, “Charles… I’m so sorry…”

“Shh, love,” Charles soothed, “It’s going to be alright. You’ve done beautifully, darling.”

“We have to get her to a hospital now,” Hank urged after only the briefest of assessments, “There’s a very good chance that Coleridge hit her appendix, we can’t risk peritonitis.”

“What’s-” Alex began.

Hank quickly cut him off, his tone terse, as he tied a tourniquet around the gaping hole in Moira’s stomach, “A type of inflammation that could kill her if the blood loss itself doesn’t.”

“Let me see her,” Adam spoke up then, having left the safety of the Blackbird to join them.

Armando and Alex parted so that Adam could kneel down at Moira’s side. Unlike when he healed Charles, Adam held out both of his hands and a light that was so white it was almost painful to look at flowed out of them in rhythmic pulses. The wound on Moira’s person began to knit itself closed and her breathing steadied.

“That’s beautiful,” Moira murmured, her eyes becoming unfocused, “It’s like a warm blanket.”

Moira slipped into unconsciousness and Adam’s healing light faded away, “She’ll be alright now. A few days of bed rest and she will be perfectly fine.”

“Thank you,” Charles said with a thick voice, tears of joy escaping from his eyes, “Thank you, Adam.”
“Professor,” Logan called over from where he was guarding the two agents that had been sent to assault Moira, “What you want me to do with these assholes?”

Charles very gently passed Moira over to Hank, “Secure her in the jet.”

“Yes, Professor,” Hank agreed, carrying Moira away from the bloodstained pavement. Adam trailed after them, questioning Hank about whether or not he knew how to perform a blood transfusion, since Moira would feel better faster with one.

Charles walked over to the agents, “I don’t believe in killing, not unless it’s absolutely necessary. I don’t abide torture either. I won’t hurt you for what you’ve done; I won’t threaten to hurt you if you dare make any attempt to finish the job that you started tonight. If I could get into your minds, I would erase them and send you far, far away from here, but I can’t. But what I can do is access the minds of every single person that you love. If you ever come after me and mine again, I will make sure that all the people you care about forget who you are. Your family, your friends, your neighbors, fuck, even the people you don’t like, will have no idea that they ever knew you existed. You touch my family and I will destroy your lives, that is my promise.”

“Get the fuck outta here,” Logan snarled at them, once he was sure that they had understood Charles’ declaration. Coleridge and Mortimer ran, not bothering to look back.

Charles turned to Alex, Armando, and Logan, “Let’s go home.”

After seeing Moira carefully tucked into bed in the room that she had claimed over a year earlier, Charles made his way into his study to make several phone calls. Within an hour, he had purchased a plot in a graveyard nearby the mansion and had succeeded in ensuring that no one would ask any damning questions regarding Angel. Then he descended down into the subterranean levels of the mansion and headed for Cerebro.

He had a telepath to contact.

Charles met the whole of the Brotherhood in front of Angel’s final resting place the following afternoon. He had not snuck out of the mansion, per say, but he also had not told any of his family where he going to be. As such, he was waiting alone when Erik, Raven, and the rest of their band crept up to the polished black marble that marked Angel’s grave.

“I had her cremated,” Charles spoke first, “To prevent anyone from trying to dig her up for experiments. I’m so sorry.”

The golden letter on the gravestone twinkled in the sunlight and the words made Charles stomach turn, ‘Here lies an Angel, taken too soon. 1943-1964’. She had only been twenty-one years old.

“Why have you done this?” Frost gestured to the gravestone, her voice as cold as her name suggested it should be.

“Because I’m the one who made her a target in the first place,” Charles replied in a dull tone, “If I hadn’t recruited her for the CIA… she’d still be alive.”

“And miserable,” Raven spoke up, tears streaking down her face as she stepped a bit closer to Charles, “Angel hated the life she had before she found out that she wasn’t alone.”
“Lay the blame where it belongs, Charles,” Erik instructed, sorrow and rage flashing simultaneously through his eyes, “With the humans. They have to pay for what they’ve done to Angel. We have to ensure that no more of our brothers and sisters suffer as she did.”

“And I suppose that you still think a war is the only way to achieve that,” Charles commented blandly, his eyes still fixed on the curvy font of Angel’s gravestone.

“It’ll take a war to assert our dominance over the humans,” Erik asserted.

Charles laughed harshly, “Then, by all means, Erik, start a war that you can’t possibly win.”

“Charles-”

“There are just over ten thousand Mutants on this entire planet,” Charles cut him off. “Eight thousand of them are children, most of whom haven’t even manifested their powers. Of the two thousand adult Mutants, less than a quarter possess mutations that would, in point of fact, be helpful in a battle and less than that number would actually want to fight. So please, tell me, Erik, how exactly you intend to conquer three billion humans with less than five hundred of our kind?”

Erik was silent.

“And how many of our people do you intend to sacrifice in the process?” Charles forged on ruthlessly, “How many of our kind will end up like Angel? In a century from now, we would, perhaps, stand a good chance at winning a war against the humans. But that time is not now, Erik. The only thing you will succeed in if you continue on this path is getting yourself and everyone who follows you killed.”

“And your solution to the problem of our kind being persecuted and hunted down like animals is to hide away in a bubble,” Erik retorted, “To hide our gifts from the world and pretend to be less than we are. To wear costumes and fucking masks, Charles.”

“To ensure the survival of our people, to keep the children who cannot yet defend themselves safe, yes, Erik,” Charles returned, “Right now, anonymity is our best defense, our best hope of securing peace in the future.”

“The humans are going to hunt us whether we fight back or not,” Erik insisted, “There is no possible chance for peace between our species and theirs. Your idealism will be your undoing, Charles.”

“You like to compare the humans to Shaw, but Shaw was a Mutant, my friend,” Charles pointed out, “No human as done you more harm than he.”

“Not yet they have not,” Erik replied, “But they’ve certainly tried and will try again.”

Charles frowned in confusion at Erik’s words.

‘He means you, sugar,’ Emma sent to Charles with a disinterested tone, ‘Stryker set a trap in Florida for you and your X-Men. Magneto raged about it for days afterwards and not because your loyal little soldiers beat us.’

“You’re right about Stryker,” Charles admitted, as he tried to process what Emma had told him, and he didn’t need his powers to know that he had surprised them all, the shock was plain to see on all their faces, including Erik’s. “He’s too much of a threat to our people to allow him to stay in power. But taking him out publicly won’t be doing us any favors either.”

“Why haven’t you wiped his mind,” Raven demanded to know, “Like you did with Moira?”
“I can’t,” Charles revealed, “I can track his mind, but I can’t get into it. He’s no Mutant, but he does have a kind of natural defense against telepaths.” Charles let them soak that piece of information in for a minute before adding, “And I’ve never even considered tapering with Moira’s memory.”

“She works for the CIA!” Erik protested, “She’s one of them, Charles, and you’ve trusted her with your secrets?”

“She works for me, actually,” Charles said coolly, “She returned to the CIA as my spy; she ferreted information regarding Stryker’s illegal Mutant experimentation to me for months and months. We recently pulled her out because it became too dangerous for her to continue, after she nearly died to protect us. She may not be a Mutant, but her loyalty to me and the boys is absolute.”

“Because she knows you’re more powerful than her bosses, perhaps?” Toad suggested.

“Because she loves us,” Charles snapped.

“How do you suggest we handle Stryker then?” Erik questioned then, clearly not eager to discuss Moira any longer, “Covertly kidnap him and drop him off on a deserted island?”

“Is that an option?” Charles wondered, “Because it’s not actually a wholly terrible plan. We can just throw all of the unreasonable bastards who want to hurt our people on one island far, far away from civilization and call it a day.”

“We can’t do that, Charles,” Erik said.

“Why ever not?”

“Because… because what if they build a raft and sail back to civilization?” Erik asked.

“They can’t sail away if there’s a giant metal wall around the island sealing them in,” Charles said.

“Because a giant metal ring in the middle of the ocean wouldn’t be suspicious at all,” Erik stated dryly.

“The Pacific is ridiculously large,” Charles told him, “It’d be easy to hide an island full of bigots in the unexplored areas of it.”

Erik opened his mouth but then paused when he caught sight of something behind Charles, “Your bodyguards are here.”

Logan and Hank, Charles had sensed their minds approaching ten minutes earlier, although he hadn’t mentioned it. The two had found Charles by using scent alone, tracking his car the twenty-five miles from the mansion to the graveyard he had selected for Angel, which was truly a remarkable talent.

“I hardly need bodyguards,” Charles scoffed in response.

“Beast and the Wolverine seem to disagree,” Azazel stated, “They’re both growling at us.”

‘Do calm yourselves,’ Charles projected to the pair, who were now stalking over with greater speed than before, ‘Erik and Raven aren’t going to hurt me.’

‘But the others might,’ Logan sent back.

‘You can’t trust them, Professor,’ was Hank’s response, ‘I know how badly you want to, but you must remember what they’ve done and what they plan to do.’
“I have to go,” Charles said aloud at Hank’s reminder, because for a minute, debating the absurd island idea, he had forgotten everything wrong between him and Erik. He had been enjoying their bizarre conversation, just as he used to enjoy all their talks before it all went to hell in Cuba.

“Charles-” Erik began.

“Be careful, whatever you do, be careful,” Charles urged and then he turned away from Erik and headed toward Hank and Logan.

Charles did not immediately retreat to his study to decompress after returning to the mansion, but only because his family would always come before his own personal needs. He faked a smile during dinner, which Moira was absent from due to her need for rest, and managed to fool the little ones and Adam with ease. There was no way he could have convinced his boys, Chloë, or Logan that he was truly alright, however, since they were, all of them, well-versed in what he was like when he faked cheer. Charles did not feel any guilt due to the partially-failed deception, though, because the six of them were pretending to be okay too.

Logan and Chloë had not known Angel personally, she was an enemy and a mere name sometimes mentioned in connection to the Brotherhood, respectively, to the two of them, but she had not deserved to die the way that she had. Being dissected alive was a horrific way to leave the world and they were both well aware of the reality that, if Stryker and those like him got their way, such a fate could be theirs, or worse, that of someone they loved, as well. Chloë’s claws came out twice during dinner as she tried hard not to imagine Sean, or Logan, of Charles, or one of the little ones at the mercy of men in blood-stained lab coats.

It was different when it came to the boys. They had been friends with Angel before she became their opponent in battle and her death hurt them far more than she had when she walked away to join Shaw. Armando had even almost died for her sake. They needed time to mourn her, time to accept the harsh truth that the girl who had almost been their sister would never laugh, or fly, or fight again.

Charles, for his part, was full of guilt. He, no matter what anyone else said, had been the one to drag Angel onto the path that led to her death. He had been the one to convince her to fight long before Erik was able to persuade her to accept that all humans were the enemy. Charles was also grateful, and he hated himself for feeling any kind of gratitude at all during a time like this, that Angel’s death at the hands of human scientists had not swayed any of his family to see Erik’s side of things. If anything, they were more determined than ever that doing things Erik’s way would only get more of the people they cared about killed in brutal and terrible fashions.

The Quad were put down for the night in the nursery at seven thirty and it took two readings of ‘The Cat in the Hat’ and several renditions of ‘Hush Little Baby’ before the last of Charles’ four infants, Oliver, on this particular occasion, lost his battle with sleep. The rest of the family gathered in the den, as was their custom, come hell or high water, to listen to Charles read a chapter of ‘The Return of the King’ and then Charles directed Jean, Scott, Peter, Ororo, Kitty, and Bobby to their beds as well.

Only after they were all slumbering peacefully did Charles seclude himself in his study, the door cracked open slightly so that he could hear if one of his children called out for him vocally instead of mentally. He virtually buried himself in paperwork, because he was actually responsible for a number of lucrative businesses, and let the mind-numbing work of filling out redundant forms and waivers distract him from the trying few days he had experienced.

“Charles,” Moira’s voice brought him out of a world full of figures and sums and back to reality and
“Moira, darling,” Charles chided as she approached his desk and sat in one of chairs opposite his own, “You’re supposed to be resting. Not wandering around barely healed.”

“I will rest,” Moira said in reply, “But I need you to help me with something first.”


“I want you to create a failsafe in my mind,” Moira told him, “To ensure that no one will ever be able to force me to betray your secrets.”

Charles blinked in shock, “Moira-”

“It can be a word,” Moira interrupted him to continue explaining, “A word that I would never typically use in everyday conversation and, by speaking that word, all information concerning those I love will be locked away until I hear the counterword spoken by you or by one of the boys.”

“Moira,” Charles spoke, stunned, “I can’t ask you to do something like that.”

“You’re not asking me. I’m asking you, Charles,” Moira insisted, “I refuse to be a liability to our family.”

“You are not a liability, Moira MacTaggart,” Charles countered, his tone absolute as he stood up and moved around his desk to kneel in front of her. He took her hands into his own, squeezing them tenderly, “Please don’t ever even consider the idea that you could be, because you’re not, darling, you’re not.”

“But if I’m ever captured again, I could be,” Moira pointed out, gently and reasonably, “Please, Charles. I’ll… I’ll be far more at ease if I know that no one can ever make me betray our family’s secrets.”

“Alright,” Charles conceded reluctantly, “Have you got a failsafe word in mind?”

“Anacreon,” Moira revealed with a wry smile, “I despise both poetry and bawdy drinking songs, so I seriously doubt I’ll ever have to bring him up.”

“And the counterword?”

“Pegasus,” Moira’s smile softened, “My favorite Greek myth.”

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Charles did not sleep much that night at all and what sleep he did get was riddled with nightmares that left him gasping and racing into his children’s bedrooms to ensure that they were all still perfectly fine. He finally gave up on the idea of rest and wandered down to the Hank’s lab around four fifteen the following morning.

Hank, for his part, had never tried to sleep at all and had instead thrown himself into his current projects. “Hey, Professor,” Hank greeted, clearly a bit high on caffeine, “I finished our back-up Blackbird a few hours ago. Can I build a deep-sea submarine with the non-magnetic metal from the missiles that we liberated from Stryker?”

“How, exactly, are we going to be able to use a submarine?” Charles wanted to know, “We’re ten miles inland from the Atlantic.”
“Yeah, but it’s all your land from here to the sea,” Hank said eagerly, “Once the sub’s built, I’m going to ask Alex to blast us out a tunnel leading from underneath the subterranean levels of the mansion to the water. Also, can I redesign the Danger Room? I think that I can create a type of computer program that will allow us to train with hundreds of different scenarios in there. Oh, and Scott and Jean want me to make them hoverboards, is that okay? I’ll only design them to go about six inches off the ground.”

“Hank,” Charles interjected before the scientist could continue, as he was clearly about to do, “You are more than welcome to build and create whatever you like, but before you do, you’re going to march yourself into the kitchen, make yourself a nice soothing cup of chamomile tea, drink it, and then get ten hours of uninterrupted sleep.”

“But.”


Hank obeyed and Charles went back upstairs to shower and dress for the day. He had just finished pulling a pair of cashmere socks onto his feet when a wave of telepathic distress washed over him, emanating from the nursery. Charles rushed across the hall to find his youngest son sitting up in his crib with unshed tears in his eyes.

“Bun-bun,” Casper pointed to the floor, where his much-loved stuffed rabbit had fallen.

Charles quickly scooped the plush toy up off the ground and presented it to Casper, who took it immediately and crushed it to his chest. “There we go, love, it’s all better now,” Charles soothed, tucking Casper back under his blanket and running a hand through his thick hair, “And look at that, you said your first word. Well done, my darling, well done.”
Before Charles could arrange a trip back to Richmond to collect Moira’s belongings, her apartment exploded.

“Officially,” Armando added, after Charles had imparted this startling news to Moira, “The explosion was caused by a gas leak.”

“I think we all know that that’s not true though,” Alex said wryly.

“I’m terribly sorry, love,” Charles told Moira, “But anything that survived the initial blast was destroyed in the ensuing blaze.”

Moira shrugged, not nearly as upset as Charles had worried she would be, “I didn’t keep anything of real sentimental value there anyway, I hadn’t for years. I have a safety deposit box in Nevada under a pseudonym that contains my Nana’s jewelry and some photos. I figured out a long time ago not to trust the CIA with things that I valued.”

“We’ll collect your things from Nevada as soon as you’re fully recovered,” Charles promised.

“Thank you, Charles,” Moira smiled, gratitude wafting off her person like a fine perfume, “Now, where are my nieces and nephews? I’ve been dying to meet them for much too long.”

“Waiting outside,” Charles admitted, “They’re just as curious about you as you are about them, darling.”

“By the way,” Sean said casually, though they could all tell that he was absolutely serious, “We’d all appreciate it if you didn’t go on any more solo, covert missions. I don’t think we could handle the stress again.”

Moira’s smile softened, “I promise, Sean. All further covert missions will be done with a partner.”

“How do you feel about teaching?” Charles wondered.

“You’re all completely ridiculous,” Moira laughed in fond exasperation.

Kitty spent her fourth birthday party wearing wings fashioned of purple gauze and wire and throwing sparkly pink and gold glitter over everything and everyone. The children ate far too much sugar and the adults laughed, more than they had in weeks, at their antics. Charles knew very well that the clean up from the festivities was going to be a massive headache come morning, but the bright smiles on the faces of his family were more than worth it.

Adam and Moira had found fast friends in each other in the days since the latter’s rescue, and the pair could often be found in deep discussion about genetics and how the study of such could be highly beneficial to the practice of medicine. Charles hadn’t realized that Moira was so interested in either...
field and asked her why she hadn’t pursued a career in one of the two.

“My father encouraged me to become a scientist and even paid for me to attend college to become a geneticist like I wanted,” Moira admitted, “But, two days after my father died, my former husband showed his true colors and... put a stop to that. When Joseph was killed in a car accident, he was driving drunk and drove straight into a pole, I tried to go back to school, but my mother, who believes that a woman being anything but a dutiful housewife is unnatural, refused to give me access to the money my father sent aside for me to do so. I joined the CIA mainly to spite her; she wanted me remarried as soon as possible.”

“If you still want to be a geneticist,” Charles said in a tone that brooked no argument, “I’ll see that you get to become one.”

“Thank you, Charles,” Moira replied, “But I can’t ask you to-”

“You’re not asking me,” Charles repeated her words from a few days earlier, “I’m asking you. Do you want to be a geneticist?”

“Well, yes, of course-”

“Then you will be,” Charles insisted, “And please don’t worry about any of the things I can feel you worrying about.”

“Thank you,” Moira whispered, her eyes gleaming with unshed tears.

“What will you explore first?” Adam asked gently.

“Mutation,” Moira answered promptly, “Blood tests have proven that Mutants and humans are similar but different species. But Mutants are born of human parents; maybe genetics will be able to explain why.”

“Daddy!” Ororo ran over to the group, interrupting their conversation, “Peter got up onto the chandelier in the ballroom and he’s swinging on it.”

“Oh, dear.”

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Compared to Kitty’s birthday, which ended with Peter briefly enduring a broken arm, (thank God for Adam’s healing abilities), the Quad’s first birthday party two and a half months later was far more sedate, (and free of accidents), but still just as enjoyable. There was a ridiculous amount of presents, sugar-free ice cream and equally sugar-free cake, and Sean was even prevailed upon to dress up as The Cat in the Hat to entertain the children.

And then something both remarkable and terrifying occurred while Hank was tossing Oliver up into the air and catching him, Oliver’s favorite game. Hank suddenly turned to Charles and announced in a voice full of surprised wonder, “Professor, Ollie’s got telepathy.”

“How do you know?” Alex asked, before Charles could collect himself enough to speak.

“He just projected a picture of his teddy bear into my mind,” Hank revealed in excitement, “He’s definitely a telepath. The sensation felt almost exactly the same as when the Professor sends things to us, Ollie’s mind just has a different... flavor, I suppose.”

“You mean like how the Professor’s telepathy makes us think about the textures of old books and the
taste of honeyed tea underneath the warmth we feel?” Armando questioned.

“Yes,” Hank agreed, “Oliver’s is just as warm, but he reminds me of the smell of baby shampoo and the feel of plush toys."

“Wicked,” Sean breathed out.

Charles reached out and took Oliver from Hank with trembling hands. Oliver frowned at him and then Charles mind was soon invaded, gently, by the very image that Hank had described. Charles took a calming breath, “Okay, love, Daddy’s going to get you your teddy.”

Later that evening, once all the children were tucked into bed and the other adults were occupied with other pursuits, Logan found Charles in the library and pressed a glass of expensive scotch into Charles' hand. Logan collapsed into the nearest chair, a large beer his preferred choice of refreshment, and watched Charles pace before the fire for a few minutes before speaking, “I can smell fear ya know, Chuck, and that particular scent is comin’ off of you in waves.”

Charles took a fortifying sip of his drink before admitting, “Being a telepath... It’s not exactly easy, Logan. It can hurt to have access to as many minds as I can touch at once without Cerebro. Jean, she has to work to use her telepathy, but I... I have to work to not use it. It’s as easy as breathing for me to dip into other people’s heads and if Oliver is anything like me... I used to pass out in large crowds.”

“You don’t now,” Logan commented, “So what changed?”

“Raven,” Charles whispered, his heart aching, as it always did, at having to bring up his lost little sister, “The link that I formed to her mind grounded me during my most turbulent years. She asked me to stay out of her head entirely, eventually, but, by that time, I had far better control over my powers. Crowds still gave me terrible tension headaches for a long time though.”

“They don’t anymore?” and Charles only knew that Logan was tense with worry because of the link he had with the other man’s mind.

Charles shook his head, “I’ve come to realize that my mutation requires me to have mental links to thrive. Cerebro doesn’t even cause me minor pain anymore. It used to give me agonizing headaches, you see, before the boys came into my life, before Moira and the children and Adam and you. I constantly have to work to prevent myself from getting lost in the minds of others, but the links provide me with a... well a wall, I suppose, that I can take shelter behind.”

Logan absorbed this, “If Oliver is like you, then there shouldn’t be a problem. If he starts out with the links that you need, he should be fine as his powers grow stronger.”

“I might have to create them for him until he’s old enough to forge them and sustain them on his own,” Charles finished his scotch and then poured more from the crystal decanter into his glass, “I’m fairly certain that I wasn’t capable of crafting the links, at least consciously, until after puberty. The link I formed with Raven was an accident, to be honest.”

“You never formed one with your mother?” Logan asked with a frown.

“No,” Charles sighed, “Perhaps because I knew, instinctually, if not intellectually, that being so deeply connected with her would be far more detrimental than harmful. Raven was all I had for a very long time and before her, there was no one.”

“You ain’t by yourself anymore,” Logan finished off his beer, “And if any of the people who love you have anything to say about it, you won’t ever be alone again, Chuck. And neither will Ollie.
As July came to a close, the second of Charles’ four toddlers, Aurora, manifested powers too.

Quite possibly she had manifested her gifts much sooner than the thirty-first, maybe even before Oliver had, but that was the date that everyone else in the mansion came to the realization that she had developed a sense of empathy that was worlds more profound than any human’s ever could be. Charles thought back on all of the times that Aurora’s mood had mirrored that of her siblings’ and on the times when she had clung without reason to his person, all occasions when Charles himself had been upset about something, and concluded that her powers had certainly begun to develop months earlier at the very least.

Hank was thrilled with Aurora’s mutation, “Telepathy and empathy are really very similar, Professor. Brother and sister mutations, in a way, and Ollie and Rorie did share a womb. If my hypothesis is correct, Casper and Melody will probably develop powers that compliment one another too. You must have noticed that, for all Ollie and Melly’s temperaments match, they strongly prefer being with Rorie and Casp, respectively.”

“I have,” Charles acknowledged, “Though, I’ve been trying to encourage that they all play together.”

“It could be that their genetics play a role,” Hank suggested, “Perhaps their individual genomes instinctually induce them to pair up as they do. Maybe Moira can look into it, she spends every minute that she’s not with Adam pouring over genetic research. I think she’s fallen in love.”

“She’s only known Adam for two and a half months,” Charles responded.

“I meant with genetics,” Hank clarified, “But you have to admit that those two grew very close, very quickly. Besides, it only took us a few hours to fall for… and we’re still… well.”

“Yes,” Charles agreed softly, “I know.”

“This is impossible,” Chloë insisted, throwing yet another ruined pot roast into the rubbish bins, as Uncle Charlie referred to them, with more force than was really necessary.

“It’s really not,” Sean grinned at her, “You just don’t have the patience for cooking.”

Chloë glared at the oven, wishing for a minute that she had Jean’s telekinetic powers, so that she could reduce the damned thing into nothing more than crushed parts. How irritated would Uncle Charlie be, she wondered, if she slashed the oven apart with her claws?

“Hey,” Sean reached over to turn Chloë’s head toward him with a tenderness that was often absent in most of his actions, “You don’t have to keep doing this if you hate it, you know. If you talk to the Professor, I’m sure he’ll be okay with fudging your grades for this particular subject. It’s bullshit that it’s required for girls to graduate high school anyway. I hope you know, I would never think that you have to do the cooking or baking just because you’re a girl.”

Chloë moved into his arms without warning and kissed him. She adored kissing Sean, it was as if she had somehow managed to capture her own personal ray of sunlight to warm her up and keep her cheerful during dismal days.

“I love you, Sean Cassidy,” she whispered, admitting this unchangeable truth out loud for the very
first time.

Sean’s answering grin was almost blinding, “I love you too, Chlo, more than anything.”

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Ororo turned seven in August, which, of course, meant even more cake and ice-cream and sugar-high kids. During that same month, Charles and his X-Men rescued two more Mutants from a facility in Maine, a woman who could transport herself through mirrors and her six year-old who had an identical, though far less developed, mutation. Both declined to stay in Westchester, choosing to remove themselves to Australia instead.

Chloë and Charles’ children, the ones who were old enough for such things, returned to their school books in September. Charles was truly in his element as a teacher, he thrived in the position, no matter what subject he was teaching. He oversaw Chloë’s work in attaining a high-school diploma, sans home economics, which she flat out refused to keep learning, and taught both Kitty and Bobby how to read. Ally learned her letters, Peter and Ororo figured out how to add and subtract time, and Scott and Jean mastered imaginary numbers and pi under Charles’ tutelage.

When Halloween came around, Sean convinced everyone, except Logan who disagreed with all of Sean’s ideas on principle, to go out trick-or-treating in the City. The rest of the family dressed up in fantastical costumes and enjoyed themselves immensely as they ran through Times Square. For the first time in years, Charles did not have to alter the humans’ perceptions of Hank.

Jean turned ten in November and the Scott turned eleven just over a month later. Both of them were ecstatic to receive the promised hoverboards from Hank, which Charles expressly forbid the younger children from touching. Christmas came and went and was a merry affair. There was no gift left by the gates from Erik this time and Charles tried very hard to pretend that he wasn’t disappointed by that. The rest of the family pretended not to notice his slight melancholy, just as they turned a blind eye to the carefully-wrapped presents that both Charles and Hank left in Raven’s old bedroom.

Bobby turned five and Peter turned eight and, before Charles really even knew it, it was Kitty’s birthday again. Time was passing by, much faster that Charles could ever be happy about. His children continued to grow and grow, as much as Charles wished that they would remain his little darlings forever. Oliver, Aurora, Casper, and Melody had gone from crawling to running around basically overnight and had gotten into the habit of trying to explore everywhere, especially the places that they shouldn’t be. This lead to some very impressive baby-proofing on Hank’s part.

Moira and Adam were married on the third of April. Moira truly looked a vision in her long white gown and crown of red roses. Charles officiated the ceremony and cried as much as everyone else did, though many of them would deny it later, when Moira and Adam pledged themselves to another in this life and the next.

A Mutant and a human, very much in love and absolutely dedicated to one another. Better than mere peaceful coexistence, this was proof that Charles was right to hope for a bright future where both species would live together in harmony, stronger together than they ever could be apart.

Casper manifested his powers during the party that followed the beautiful ceremony. And he did so by setting his bowl of ice cream, which he most decidedly did not want, on fire. In the days and weeks that came after the wedding, Charles would be exceedingly grateful that he had possessed the foresight to stock up on a multitude of fire extinguishers when he had been training Alex.

A few days before Moira and Adam were scheduled to return from their Hawaiian honeymoon, all of the inhabitants of the mansion, except Logan and Chloë’, whose mutations prevented them from
having to deal with such paltry things as illnesses, got sick. Melody was the worst off of them all, developing a fever that was so bad that it caused her mutation to kick in as a self-defense mechanism. She froze her cot and covered it, (and everything else in Charles’ bedroom, as he’d wanted her close by him during the night), in a thick blanket of snow.

Hank was terribly excited for a different reason, namely that his hypothesis regarding Casper and Melody had been proved true. Despite the great, and rather obvious, differences between fire and ice, both Casper and Melody could control a physical element. They each would be powerful in their own right, but together they could be an unstoppable force of nature.

“Do you think that it’s possible for a Mutant to produce a human child?” Charles asked a few days after Moira and Adam had returned home. Things had settled down again, for the time being, in the wake of their homecoming, which Charles was grateful for. It looked as if things were about to unsettle quickly, though.

“A child without powers, yes,” Hank replied, as he sterilized a large needle carefully, “Human, no. I’ve analyzed blood sample after blood sample; we’re definitely two different species. Even if a Mutant procreated with a human, their child would still be half-Mutant. That’s just the basic genetics of it, professor. Moira’s research has proved that Mutant genes are dominant over human ones. When two half-Mutants have a baby, that baby is nearly always going to be a Mutant, full-stop. It’s why Mutants so often appear to be born of human parents.”

“You don’t think that Mutants evolved from humans, do you?” Charles said.

“It’s a possibility,” Hank acknowledged, “But the blood is just so different and so are the genetic codes, it seems unlikely. I know that evolution has worked wonders throughout history, but this, us, if just feels like it’s something more than that.”

“Like what?” Charles wondered, tilting his head in consideration.

“Maybe… maybe we came from something else entirely,” Hank mused, “Nearly every ancient culture makes mention of beings coming down from the stars or of gods with remarkable powers unique to the individual, like in the Roman and Greek myths. Zeus could call down lightning, like Ororo, Hercules was uncommonly strong, and Hephaestus could control great fires. I know that it might sound crazy, but hardly more insane than telepaths and shapeshifters and teleporters would sound to us if we didn’t know for a fact that they existed.”

“I suppose that theory would help explain why it took so long for Mutants to appear,” Charles replied thoughtfully, “And why they’re appearing en masse now. Perhaps you’re right and the genes that make us Mutants have existed, dormant, for much longer than we imagine. We might never be able to be sure of the truth though.”

“Do you think the Italian government would be upset if we tried to excavate underneath the Pantheon?” Hank asked jokingly.

“Yes,” Charles chuckled, “I so. Are you absolutely certain that you want to attempt this, Hank?”

Hank nodded, even as Charles eyed the syringe in his hand with great trepidation, “I’m sure, Professor.”

“It’s just… the last time…” Charles trailed off, knowing that Hank would comprehend his meaning easily.
“I know, but I’ve fixed the problem. It’ll work this time,” Hank determined, totally confident.

“There’s nothing wrong with you,” Charles told him gently but firmly, “You do know this, yes?”

“I know,” Hank lied, not exactly looking Charles in the eye. Charles was kind enough not to call him out on it. This was Hank’s decision to make, not Charles’, and he couldn’t force Hank to love himself as he was. Hank would have to learn to do that in his own time, “The world isn’t ready to accept my Beast form yet, Professor. Besides, it’ll be better protection if I can shift back and forth at will.

And so Charles didn’t argue, although neither did he give Hank an endorsement, as Hank lined up the needle and slid it into one of the veins in his forearm. Hank slowly injected himself with the yellow serum inside the syringe, the serum that he had engineered to restore his form to what Hank deemed a ‘normal’ state. Charles watched as blue fur and claws and fangs receded, watched as Hank morphed back into the tall, thin scientist that he’d been when Charles had first met him in Richmond, Virginia.

“It worked,” Hank declared in delight a few minutes later.

“Indeed.”

The rest of the adults in the mansion were very careful not to mention Hank’s sudden appearance change. They mostly accepted it with shrugs, and a few raised eyebrows, as if Hank went around looking radically different every day. The children, however, had no such compunctions to stop them from speaking up.

Peter and Ororo asked a thousand and one questions, neither of them able to comprehend why Hank would not want to be blue and fluffy all the time despite Hank’s patient answers. Kitty pouted so deeply that Hank eventually promised to shift back into Beast form during story time, (Charles had a few days earlier begun reading ‘The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe’), so that she could cuddle with him, as was her custom. Jean, upset that Hank felt the need to change anything about himself when he was so ‘groovy and awesome’, refused to speak a word to Hank for an entire week, prompting Scott, who would find a way to lasso the moon if it made Jean happy, to do the same. The worst reaction, though, was Oliver, who screamed and kicked whenever Hank picked him up sans fur.

The end result of all of this was that Hank spent far more time in his Beast form than out of it and Charles mused, if only to himself, that applying the serum to his blood had really been rather a waste of Hank’s time.

The Quad turned two and, in lieu of a party, Charles chose to fly his family to California so that they could visit Disneyland. Logan had attempted to stay behind, because he apparently didn’t do ‘ridiculous family theme parks’, but Chloë had dragged him out of the mansion and onto the Xavier private plane.

The children had a marvelous time running around the fascinating and incredible park. They adored the rides, from the Mad Tea Party, where Scott and Jean’s determination to spin as fast as possible caused Alex to lose his lunch, to Peter Pan’s Flight, which was Peter’s favorite by virtue of its name, insisting on going on them over and over again. Ororo loved Snow White’s Scary Adventures and Kitty cried when she had to get off of Dumbo the Flying Elephant for the final time that day.
Charles basked in the knowledge that he wouldn’t have to deal with any clean up on this particular birthday and was more than willing to be dragged around by one child or another throughout the day.

A few days after returning home, Charles happily hung a picture of the whole family, standing beneath Sleeping Beauty’s Castle with huge smiles on their faces, up in his study in a mahogany frame. It quickly became his favorite to look at, followed by the picture of Logan scowling while wearing a pair of Mickey Mouse Ears that hung in the main den.

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Two weeks after Ororo’s eight birthday, Charles was jerked from a deep slumber by the sound of screaming.

Charles was out of bed in a flash, ignoring his dressing gown in favor of sprinting toward the screams. He slammed into Peter’s bedroom, Hank, Alex, Armando, and Sean hot on his heels. Charles quickly soothed the other children back to sleep but could feel that the other adults, who had bedrooms that were on the second story instead of the third, were rushing toward Peter too.

Peter, who was caught in the throes of what had to be a vicious nightmare.

Charles could only catch fragments, Peter dreamed at almost supersonic speeds, as he scooped his sweat-soaked son up into his arms, but those bits and pieces were enough. Peter had been dreaming about Charles dying, in a dozen different and gruesome ways, the most common being shot through the head, point blank, just like Peter’s aunt had been.

“Peter, darling,” Charles soothed, easing the boy back to consciousness, “It’s alright my love, daddy’s here, you’re safe.”

‘I’ve got him,’ Charles projected to alarmed group of people hovering in Peter’s doorway, ‘He had a rather unpleasant nightmare. You can all go back to sleep.’

Slowly, the others obeyed, all broadcasting worry and concerned love for Peter. There was another emotion present in many of them, understanding. Nightmares were, unfortunately, not an uncommon occurrence in the Xavier household, despite Charles’ attempts to keep them at bay with his dreamscapes. Sometimes, the mind just needed a nightmare to overcome a daily fear.

Peter feared losing him as he’d lost his aunt.

“Daddy,” Peter sobbed into Charles’ neck, clinging tightly to him, “Daddy, you were dead!”

“It was only a dream, Peter,” Charles assured, rubbing small circles into his son’s back, “I’m right here. Daddy’s not going anywhere, darling.”

“Promise,” Peter demanded, through his tears, in a thick voice, “Promise that you’ll never go away!”

An impossible promise to make; no one could live forever. But Charles made it, nonetheless, because what else could he do in the face of his baby’s terror, “I promise, Peter, I promise that I’m never going to leave you.”

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Charles was in the middle of a phonics lesson with Bobby and Kitty when the story broke, interrupting the soap that Sean and Chloë were watching on the television in the largest den.
‘Professor!’ Sean projected, his words infused with horrified concern, ‘The Marvelle Resort has caught fire. There are over a hundred people trapped on the higher stories.’

‘Mission Room,’ Charles instructed his X-Men, ‘Now.’ And then he spoke aloud to his children, “We’re going to have to stop for today, my darlings. Daddy has to go to New York City.”

“As you or Professor X?” Bobby asked, closing his school book reluctantly. Unlike Peter and Ororo, who could barely sit through any type of school lesson, Bobby and Kitty loved to learn new things.

“Professor X,” Charles admitted.

“Why can’t we come to?” Kitty wanted to know, before adding earnestly, “We could help you, Daddy.”

Charles swallowed back the panic that surfaced every time that he was forced to think about his children willingly placing themselves in any kind of danger, “I appreciate that, my love, but you’re much too young to come along, both of you. You still have much growing to do before you’ll be ready to help my X-Men. Now, if you want to help someone, I believe that Auntie Moira could use some assistance in the kitchen. She’s baking some sweets.”

Bobby and Kitty grinned brightly and ran off toward the East Wing, where the more intimate of the two kitchens was located. Charles didn’t bother wasting any time to put away the school work, he simply rushed down to the Mission Room, where the others were already gathered.

“We’ve got to help those people,” Sean insisted before Charles could even speak a word.

“And we will,” Charles assured him before turning to Hank, “Can our suits withstand the heat?”

“They’re fireproof,” Hank replied with a nod, “And plasma-proof, for that matter. But we don’t have helmets to protect our heads and faces from the heat, at least not yet, so we’ll have to be careful. I have made devices that will protect our lungs from smoke and any other dangerous fumes or gasses. Rebreathers, they’ll recycle whatever air is in our lungs when we put them on. You could take them into an environment without breathable air indefinitely.”

“Brilliant,” Charles praised, impressed, as he often was, with Hank’s ingenuity, before facing them all, “Suit up, then. We’re taking off as soon as the Blackbird is ready.

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Charles’ X-Men saved sixty-eight lives that, had they not intervened, would have been lost. They started with the trapped children, Charles using his telepathy to direct his men to the terrified young minds, and the little ones those minds belonged to, that were like sirens calls to him. Only once every child was secure in the care of a police officer or paramedic, which the street below were full of, did the X-Men turn their focus to rescuing the adults.

Because Charles’ priority was the rescue mission that he and his family were engaged in, he did not, at first, notice the presences of the reporters who were filming the X-Men as best as they could. He didn’t notice, really, until one of them, a young woman with a thirst to prove herself, bodily grabbed Sean’s forearm, as he delivered another individual to the safety of the street, shoved a microphone under Sean’s nose, and demanded, “Who are you and why are you here?”

“We’re the Professor’s X-Men,” Sean told the woman distractedly, eager to resume saving people, “And we’re here to help.”

Sean launched himself back up into the air before anyone else could ask him any more questions, not
realizing then how much of a stir his words caused amongst those who heard them or that they had been broadcast, live, across the country. Charles knew, though, and he had to mentally shrug to himself. The public had been bound to learn about the X-Men at some point, although Charles would have to have a talk with his X-Men after they returned home about speaking to the press. He needed to ensure that they spoke to no more reporters without his knowledge and approval. Charles knew very well how dangerous the wrong words said to the right people could be.

Once Charles had ensured that there was no one else left to save from the once resplendent resort turned blazing, smoky hell, he and his X-Men made their way as discreetly as possible, helped along by Charles’ telepathy, to the roof of the next building over where the Blackbird was hovering, cloaked, of course. Their trip did not go wholly unnoticed, however, as they were followed up to the roof by a child whose brown hair and mocha skin were smudged with ash.

“Wait!” the little girl called out to them, running up to Hank and hugging him around the waist tightly, to Hank’s not-so-mild surprise, “Thank you, for saving my sister and me.”

Hank knelt down to her level, “You’re welcome. I’m glad that you’re both alright.”

“The man in the suit is wrong,” the girl decided with a shy grin, “You’re not scary at all.”

“What man?” Hank questioned.

“Stryker’s here,” Charles realized, sensing the CIA operative and some of his special soldiers, “And he’s brought friends. We need to move.”

“Take care,” Hank told the girl, standing back up.

“What’s your name?” she asked quickly, “Mine’s Lenore.”

“Beast,” Hank replied, and it was the first time that he had ever sounded proud of the moniker.

“Bye, Beast,” Lenore’s grin turned into a bright smile, “It was nice meeting you and your friends.”

“Goodbye, Lenore,” Hank returned with a smile of his own.

Charles quickly ushered him and the others onto the Blackbird. Within seconds after strapping in, they were blasting away from the scene.


“Yes, Professor,” Hank agreed, before continuing in a tone full of wonder, “She wasn’t afraid of me.”

“Course she wasn’t,” Alex spoke up, leaning leisurely against Armando, “You’re a giant, walking, talking blue teddy bear.”

“You’re the least scary person we know,” Sean scoffed, “And I’m including the babies in that.”

“Rorie can be pretty damn scary if you don’t get the voices right when you read her, ‘The Cat in the Hat’,” Alex said.

That earned a collective eye roll.

“She didn’t mean to kick you there, babe,” Armando told him, “And you know it.”

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Charles and his family celebrated their success into the wee hours of the morning, popping several bottles of Brian Xavier’s good champagne. The children feasted on ice cream and a giant cookie cake that they had helped Moira bake earlier that afternoon. It was covered in blue frosting and yellow sprinkles and candy and was almost sinfully good.

Everyone ended up all but passing out in the main den, watching reporter after reporter praise the X-Men on the news. Footage of their actions played over and over, as well as Sean’s declaration and a brief clip, shot from somewhere far away, of little Lenore hugging Hank.

The family fell asleep immensely satisfied, full of pride, and joy, and, best of all, hope.

“And what’s you name?” Erik asked the young woman before him, a Mutant who had heard of his Brotherhood, via the same underground network that had delivered Toad to them, and had tracked them down to join their noble cause.

“Lucy is the name my parents gave me,” the tall woman tucked a strand of her long, brown hair behind one ear, “‘But I prefer ‘Sting’."

“Sting, then,” Erik acknowledged, “A reference to your gift?”

“Yes,” Sting, because Erik would not think of her by her unwanted human name, “I can cause searing mental agony to others and my mind, as Miss Frost pointed out earlier, cannot be read or controlled.”

Erik smiled briefly at her, not a real smile, because those belonged only to one specific person, but a half-smile that, nonetheless, eased some of the tension in the woman’s body. The poor girl had obviously been afraid that he might turn away like her former family and friends had, “Welcome to the Brotherhood of Mutants, Sting. You don’t need to fear the humans any longer. We’re a family and we protect each other. Together, we’ll bring about a world where our people will never have to hide from or be afraid of lesser beings.”

Sting smiled and that was when Raven, and it was telling, Erik noted, that he still thought of her by the name that Charles held so dear, entered the room, “I’m sorry to interrupt, Magneto, but there’s something on the news that you need to see.”

“Mystique?” Erik questioned, because she was clearly very upset by something.

“My brother,” and Erik’s heart stopped beating for a moment out of dread, “Is a colossal idiot,” Raven took a deep breath, “Just… come and see.”

Erik and Sting followed her out to the communal room where the cheap television that the Brotherhood owned was playing the news. And what news it was.

“This is Melanie Amburgh, live from New York City, where you can see that firefighters have finally managed to put out the inferno that devastated the Marvelle Resort. But that’s hardly the big story here this evening, ladies and gentlemen. The big story is that of the masked heroes who saved dozens of lives earlier this afternoon, heroes who used extraordinary abilities to do so and then vanished as quickly as they came. Here are some clips recorded earlier today.”

And then Erik watched, gaping, as a team that could only be the X-Men, Erik recognized them all save one, delivered person after person from inside the blazing hotel.

“We’re the Professor’s X-Men. And we’re here to help,” Banshee announced to a younger reporter.
And there was a little girl running to hug Beast as the X-Men prepared to leave.

Amburgh returned to say, “It’s just been confirmed that the number of people these X-Men rescued from certain death is sixty-eight. If you are watching this, our heroes, on behalf of New York City, I would like to express my deepest gratitude for what you’ve done today. Gentlemen, thank you.”

Erik switched off the television with a flick of his wrist, “Damn it, Charles!”

“Your ex-boyfriend,” Emma snapped at Erik, “Just exposed out people to the entire fucking world, Magneto.”

“What was he thinking,” Riptide demanded.

“He’s a naïve, arrogant, fool,” Raven replied, her hands clenching and unclenching into fists repeatedly, “He thinks that if he does enough good the humans will have no choice but to accept us.”

“He’s wrong,” Sting said confidently, “They might be singing his praises today, but tomorrow, they’ll be trying to murder him.”

No. Erik could not let that happen. Charles might be naïve, and stupidly hopeful, and arrogant, but he was what Erik loved most in all this world and he refused to see Charles’ light snuffed out by a race that was so inferior to their own.

“What are we going to do about this?” Azazel asked.

“We’re going to step up our plans,” Erik determined, “I refuse to let Charles be the instrument of his own destruction. There are children who need him desperately and I won’t let him risk them because he’s too proud to admit that he’s wrong.”

If Charles refused to do what was necessary to secure their future, then Erik was more than willing to do it for him.

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Charles took Jean on a shopping trip to New York City for her eleventh birthday, just the two of them, upon Jean’s request. With nine children and his X-Men to juggle, one-on-one time with any of his children was rare, so Charles was more than happy to agree to Jean’s application when she made it.

They went to several toy stores first, because Jean insisted on getting some early Christmas shopping done while her siblings and Scott were absent, and then they had lunch in a fancy bistro in Times Square. After lunch, Charles took Jean to a movie and then to an uncountable number of boutiques to purchase her a new wardrobe, since the vast majority of the clothing she already owned was getting too small for her.

Charles arranged for all their purchases to be delivered to the front gates of the mansion, where someone with a keycard would meet them to bring them inside. As Charles and Jean were walking back to the car that they’d driven to the City in, Charles caught a very unpleasant thought, ‘Mutant Freaks. Should be put down, both of ’em.’

Charles cast his mind out at once, even as he casually threw a protective arm around Jean’s shoulders and drew her near. There were seven government agents, covertly following him and his daughter, who had orders to bring him before Director McCone. They were carrying tranquilizer guns and had guessed, although they didn’t know for certain, that Jean was a Mutant because they had heard her call Charles, ‘Daddy’ several times.
Jean looked up at Charles in confusion, able to sense his distress through their mental link.

‘Jeanie, love,’ Charles sent over to her mind, ‘I need you to stay very calm and do exactly as I say.’

‘Daddy?’

‘We’re being followed,’ Charles admitted, ‘But everything will be alright. When we pass by it, we’re going to duck into that sports store up ahead, okay?’

‘Okay,’ Jean replied bravely, absolutely sure of Charles’ ability to protect her.

‘Now,’ Charles and Jean rushed into the shop and then turned to see the agents run past, following a mental projection of their targets that was racing away down the street.

Charles quickly led Jean back outside and to their car. As soon as she was secured in the passenger seat, Charles threw the automobile into drive and began to steer the car, at indecent speeds, out of the City. As soon as they were far enough away, Charles cut off his projection of his and Jean’s body doubles and felt the surprise and anger of the agents as their targets vanished into thin air. Thank fuck those goons had been working for McCone and not Stryker.

‘Are you alright?’ Charles asked Jean, hardly realizing that he was still using his telepathy.

Jean nodded, ‘Yes. They were chasing us because we’re Mutants, weren’t they?’

‘I’m afraid so,’ Charles agreed solemnly.

‘Are they mad because people like the X-Men,’ Jean wondered.

‘Yes,’ Charles told her, leaving out that Director McCone was also pissed because he both despised vigilantes and blamed Charles for Moira’s defection.

‘People need the X-Men,’ Jean declared decisively, ‘So those men are just going to have to get over it.’

Charles chuckled, despite his lingering stress, ‘I quite agree, my love.’

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“That’s not good,” Sean said later that evening, after Charles had explained to his X-men what had happened in the City.

“That’s an understatement, Bub,” Logan interjected, “The government knows that Chuck’s Professor X.”

“To be fair,” Charles pointed out, almost reasonably, “It wasn’t exactly hard for them to figure such a thing out. I did work for them at one point, if you recall.”

“Erase their memories of that,” Moira suggested, “You should have done it ages ago anyway. Make them believe that Professor X and Charles Xavier are two very different people; make them forget the faces beneath the masks of all your X-Men. You can’t have them forget Mutants, not anymore, but you can make them forget names, you can have them destroy every file that they have on all of you. You can’t get to them all, I know, but if most of them forget... I know Stryker well enough to say that he won’t reenlighten them. He’s arrogant enough to want to, and believe that he can, take this family down all on his own.”

Charles nodded, albeit reluctantly, “I suppose that’s for the best. We shouldn’t leave home by
ourselves either. Safety in numbers and all that. And the children shouldn’t leave the mansion
without at least two adults accompanying them.”

“Agaed,” Armando said, “Can Stryker track us here? I know he can’t get inside the shield, but if he
can find this place regardless…”

“No,” Charles was sure of this, at least, “I ensured that some time ago. All information regarding my
properties and businesses are buried under so much red tape that it would take Stryker decades to get
at it. I even arranged for several false paper trails to make anyone investigating believe that I live in
Houston, Miami, or Seattle. Only one of my lawyers has full access to my assets and he is paid very
well for his silence.”

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That night, in the CIA headquarters and various other government branches across North America,
every file and hard drive and record that mentions Charles, or his boys, or Moira, or even Erik and
Raven, because Charles can’t not protect them too, are destroyed. Hundreds of men and women go
to bed and will wake up the following morning never realizing that precious information has been
stripped from their minds, forever, because Charles also planted a compulsion inside their heads to
keep on forgetting that he and his loved ones are Mutants, should they ever be reminded by one of
Stryker’s men. The compulsion will only break if Charles himself tells them that he is Professor X,
which, at this point in time, he can never see himself doing.

Charles is aware, when he stumbles out of Cerebro after four straight hours and is guided to bed by
Hank and Adam, that he crossed a line that night, but he can’t bring himself to feel truly guilty about
it. He’s protected his family and Charles had always known that, if it came down to it, he would do
whatever he had to in order to protect his family.

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Chapter End Notes

For those of you wondering when Erik is going to finally get his shit together, he starts
to in the next chapter. I hope that you enjoyed, :)!
Chapter Seven

Chapter Notes

Period-typical racism, homophobia, and sexism. Also, there is a scene that contains a memory of an attempted rape of a child. Nothing actually happens.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Seven

The second time that the X-Men faced the Brotherhood in battle, they lost.

Though the others did not, (and certainly never would), Charles blamed himself for how the situation went down. He’d read Toad’s mind, like he had before, and had discovered that Erik was arranging for his people to steal an experimental bomb from a weapons’ testing site in Loveland, Colorado. Charles had never imagined, in his arrogance, that he had only seen exactly what Erik wanted him to see until it was much too late. When the X-Men arrived at the abandoned warehouse that was supposedly serving as the testing site, they’d discovered that it was no testing site at all, that it was as abandoned on the inside as in looked like it would be on the outside.

And then they’d been ambushed by a Brotherhood that was missing its leader, its teleporter, and its telepath.

Charles, when he had entered into it, had not bothered to delve more than surface deep into Toad’s mind, had not thought it would be necessary, as ridiculously “open” as it was to him, so Charles had not known to warn his X-Men about the Brotherhood’s newest Mutant, about Sting. Her ability to cause mental anguish was formidable and while Charles could protect the minds of his family, at the sacrifice of his own, he couldn’t shield them and break through the thick shielding that Frost had placed around the minds of Raven, Riptide, and Toad at the same time. Sting’s own mental protection was vastly different from the others, it was natural, a part of her mutation.

The X-Men had excellent reflexes, honed by daily practice, they were strong and fast, but they couldn’t fight off Riptide’s whirlwinds, which threw them across the building while not affecting the Brotherhood at all, Toad’s wicked, paralyzing tongue, which incapacitated both Alex and Sean in short order, and Sting’s curved swords, which were apparently made from Adamantium, because they easily batted away Logan’s claws, all at the same time. Charles wondered, through his pain, when Erik had discovered the metal and why no one had heard about the Brotherhood striking one of Stryker’s facilities, which were the only places, besides the mansion at 1407 Graymalkin Lane, that the metal could be found.

Raven and Hank, who were a bit away from the main fray, were not so much fighting one another as they were dancing around each other, neither willing to do any real harm to their opponent. From the smirk he’d seen on his little sister’s face, Charles could tell that Raven was rather enjoying the sparring.

And then Erik had shown up, with Azazel and Frost in tow, with what had to be a bomb tucked under one arm and a deep frown on his face as he took in the X-Men. At his appearance, the Brotherhood, save for Sting, who kept up her mental assaults, stopped fighting and stepped back.
“I know that you’re watching in Cerebro, Charles,” Erik announced, “Why don’t you come join the party?”

He couldn’t, Charles was barely able to keep up the fortification he had crafted around the minds of his X-Men, let alone waste any more of his strength projecting a semi-corporal form of himself over halfway across the country.

“He ain’t watchin’,” Logan denied, growling low in his throat.

Erik looked at Emma, who shrugged delicately, “I can’t tell one way or another, sugar, Xavier’s mental protection of them is… remarkably strong.”

Erik’s frown became even more pronounced, though Charles had hardly believed such a thing to be possible, “Have it your way, then.”

“Clever trick, this,” Armando said from he was kneeling by Alex, “The bomb was never in Loveland, was it?”

“Never,” Erik agreed, “The testing site was in Lakewood, about fifty miles east of here. What Charles saw in Toad’s mind was similar to… a mirage. My telepath can do tricks too.”

Charles bristled at the tricks comment. He wasn’t a bloody dog and his gifts were not tricks meant to amuse and deceive, no matter what Erik seemed to believe.

“Was?” Armando asked.

“We destroyed it, of course,” Frost smirked.

“And the humans inside?” Logan demanded.

“What does it matter?” Erik replied waspishly, “They’re humans. Why do you insist on trying to protect a doomed race?”

“Most of us have human family, Erik,” Sean snapped back, recovering enough from his earlier paralysis to sit up with Logan’s help, “We may not be all that close to them, but we chose that path to keep them safe. Do you really think that we’re going to stand back and let you hurt them, or worse? Do you really want us to become like you, desperately seeking revenge for the death of someone we loved? Because if you do, you must know, that it would be you and your Brotherhood that we’d come after.”

“Honestly, Erik,” Alex interjected as Armando helped him to stand, “You make it really difficult sometimes to see any differences between you and Shaw.”

Erik flinched, his face going white under his helmet as blood drained from it, “I am not Shaw.”

“Then prove it,” Hank challenged, crossing his arms across his chest, “You want to protect Mutants, then great, so do we. But killing the humans isn’t going to protect us, it’s only going to put us in greater danger, put the children who can’t defend themselves in greater danger. They’re safe now, Charles has ensured that, but even he won’t be able to protect them across the entire fucking planet twenty-four seven. Do you really want to be the reason that thousands of children are hunted down like animals?”

“They’re not safe,” Erik protested hotly, “Stryker-”

“Stryker is one man with limited resources,” Hank interrupted, “And one of less than fifty humans
who can remember our names and faces.”

“What?” Raven spoke up.

“Charles wiped us from the memories of nearly everyone who knew our identities,” Hank replied, his voice gentler as he spoke directly to her. “Every file and record on us was destroyed, even the ones that Stryker had. Most of his task force was rendered useless to him after Charles was finished with them.”

“Charles did that?” Raven almost whispered, shock coloring her words.

“He’s not nearly as naïve as you like to think, Raven,” Hank said, “He may want there to be peace, wants it desperately, even, but he’s not going to just let our people be killed to gain it. Honestly, you grew up with him; you must know how protective he is of those he loves.”

“I do know,” Raven answered quietly with a hint of wistfulness, not protesting the use of her old name as she usually did, looking at Hank with a tenderness that Charles hadn’t seen from her in a long time. For a moment, Charles felt hope rise up inside of his heart.

That was the moment, of course, that everything went to hell.

A small, nonmagnetic blade suddenly sailed through the air without warning, piercing through the armor Hank’s suit with an impossible ease and burying itself in his left side, right below Hank’s heart. Nonmagnetic, Charles knew, because Erik, who now looked livid, had tried and failed to stop it in its tracks. Hank began to collapse, but Logan and Armando caught him before he could hit the floor.

“Hank!” Raven cried moving forward in horror.

“Stay away from him!” Alex snarled at her, his power rising up along with hot, potent anger as he realized that Sting, with her arm outstretched and a smug look on her face, had been the one to throw the blade.

‘Bring him home now!’ Charles sent, stopping Alex just short of killing the girl.

‘Professor,’ Hank protested, in agony despite Charles’ desperate attempts to dull his pain receptors, ‘The bomb.’

‘Forget it,’ Charles ordered, ‘Come home. Hank needs Adam.’

Alex sent a blast of his plasma upward without warning, bringing a large chunk of the wooden roof down in between the X-Men and the Brotherhood. Azazel could have teleported the latter past the rubble easily, but he didn’t, and the X-Men were able to get Hank onto the Blackbird and maneuver the jet up into the air within a few scant minutes.

The plane, which already moved at ridiculous speeds on a normal day, was then pushed to its limit, booking it back to New York at an unprecedented velocity. Charles only exited Cerebro, his head and heart pounding, in pain and fear in equal measure, once the Blackbird had crossed over the boundary that was the Westchester County Line and he was sure that Hank would survive the few remaining minutes that it would take the X-men to reach the mansion. Charles and Adam were waiting for them in the jet’s hanger, rushing up the gangplank before it had even been fully lowered.

“We’re sorry, Professor,” Alex apologized quietly as they watched Hank rest, the rise and fall of his
chest soothing them all. “We failed you tonight.”

“You did not fail me,” Charles protested at once, “If anything I failed you, I should never have accepted what I saw in Toad’s mind at face value. I underestimated Frost, badly; it won’t happen again.”

“You could never fail us, Professor,” Sean replied firmly, “Ever.”

“I sent you into a trap,” Charles reminded.

“You never would have sent us if you’d thought it was anything of the sort,” Armando returned evenly, “Besides… Erik didn’t want to harm us, he was furious when Sting hurt Hank.”

“Raven was horrified,” Sean added, “Professor, Sting only hurt Hank when… well, when Raven looked like she might…”

“Like she might want to go with him,” Charles finished softly, “I know, I saw it too.”

“Should I have not ordered her to stay away?” Alex asked, worrying his lower lip.

“If Raven truly wants to come home, then she will,” Charles answered him, because he knew his sister and how stubborn she could be.

“Why did Erik want you to read Toad’s mind in the first place?” Sean questioned, “He could have been in and out of the testing site and we never would have known about it.”

Charles sighed, “Erik was trying to prove a point tonight.”

“A point?” Logan inquired gruffly.

“That trying to stand in his way is a useless endeavor,” Charles explained, “That we can’t stop him from starting a war.”

“Then we ain’t the only ones who failed,” Logan said.

“The Brotherhood may have beaten us in this fight,” Armando interjected in agreement, “But they’ve hardly convinced us to give up.”

“When the time comes,” Alex affirmed, “We’ll be ready for them.”

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“What the fuck were you thinking!” Erik raged at Sting, his muscles trembling with fury.

Sting flinched at his anger, but returned in a steady voice, “I was protecting us and our cause, Magneto. The X-Men are a threat to both.”

“They are not,” Raven’s voice was thick with tears still unshed, “We proved that tonight! You saw—”

“I saw you being seduced by false hope, Mystique,” Sting interrupted, “You were all but ready to jump into Beast’s arms to be carried off back to your naïve, foolish brother.”

“I was not,” Raven denied, but even Erik had a hard time believing her.

“Mystique’s loyalty to our cause is absolute,” Erik snapped, because even if he was unsure that this was true, he’d never admit to it, “You’re the one who deliberately disobeyed my orders. Because of
you, there is a very good chance that Beast could die tonight!”

Raven lost control of her emotions at that point, running from the room before anyone could see her tears. Erik didn’t have the heart to admonish her for displaying such weakness. If Charles had been the one stabbed… Sting would already be dead.

“Allowing the X-Men to continue to stand in our way simply because you want to fuck Xavier isn’t a tactically sound decision,” Sting, unwisely, said.

Erik snarled and shoved her back up against the closest wall, one hand around her throat, “I’ve explained to all of you, multiple times, why Xavier and his men are necessary to us. We can’t protect the children of our species, our hope for the future, right now; we have neither the time nor the means to provide for them. Xavier does, but if he dies there will be no one able to safeguard our future. When I give you orders, you will obey them, or you’ll be out. Do you understand?”

Sting nodded stiffly.

Erik released her, allowing her to rub at her throat, “You had better pray that Beast survives the wound you gave him; because I won’t help you if Mystique decides to tear out your throat should he die. Do not disobey me again.”

If you even fucking breathe on Charles, Erik thought but didn’t say, I will gut you like a fish.

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“No Cerebro for a week,” Adam instructed as he finished alleviating Charles’ headache.

“But.”

“No ‘buts’,” Adam insisted, “Or I’ll be more than happy to tell your X-Men that you hid the fact that you were in immense pain from them for hours, Charles.”

“No Cerebro,” Charles agreed with a sigh, “Got it.”

After making this promise, Charles exited the Medical Center, which had once been the small, second ballroom on the first floor of the east wing, a location that had been chosen because Charles intended to convert the whole of the east wing into classrooms and it was probably for the best that the main medical center be as close to where the students, that he hoped to soon have, would spend most of their day. The upper floors of north wing would contain the boys’ dorms while the upper floors of the south wing would be where the girls’ dorms would be located. The grand ballroom and dining room on the ground floor of the north wing would be turned into a common room for all the students and a cafeteria, though one that was rather more upscale than in other schools, respectively. The gym and indoor swimming pool on the first floor of the south wing would both be expanded slightly to accommodate more people. The west wing, where Charles family lived, would probably be the only one untouched by any construction crew.

Charles made his way down into the subterranean levels, of which there were also three, although the lowest was still a work in progress, since the submarine was not yet finished. The Danger Room, which Hank was almost done fine-tuning, and Cerebro, which Hank was always updating, were located on the second level. The hanger that held the Blackbirds and the frameworks for two smaller one-man planes and Hank’s labs were to be found on the first level, the latter of which was where Charles headed.

Hank was supposed to be in bed, resting after nearly bleeding out, but he had snuck down to his lab, while Charles was busy with Adam, to examine the dagger that had stabbed him.
“Hank,” Charles said with disapproval, “What do you think that you’re doing?”

“I couldn’t sleep,” Hank admitted, “I needed to figure out how Sting’s blade managed to pierce through my armor. It should have been impossible, I designed the suits to be able to withstand almost anything, except adamantine, though I’m working on that, but adamantium is magnetic, and that,” Hank gestured to the small dagger that was, at least, clean of blood, “Is not.”

“What have you found?” Charles asked resignedly.

“Absolutely nothing,” Hank said in disgust, glaring at the knife, “It’s as if it doesn’t even exist, Professor. All the scans I’ve done don’t register it as being present at all and no chemicals have any affect on it. And it’s blunted, the edges and the point, it should never have been able to get through the armor in the first place. I can’t even get it to cut through a loaf of bread.”

“Maybe being able to create knives like this one is a part of Sting’s mutation,” Charles suggested, “Perhaps they only work for her because they were formed out of her energy.”

Hank blinked, “That’s… a much better explanation that any I’ve been able to come up with.”

“I’m sure you would have gotten there eventually,” Charles said pointedly, “If you weren’t exhausted beyond measure.”

Hank grinned sheepishly, “Yeah, okay, I get the hint. I need to go back to bed. Night, Professor.”

“Goodnight, Hank.”

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“This bomb is designed to destroy only living matter, turning it into ash, while leaving non-organic matter untouched,” Riptide explained.

“An envoy of government agents, Stryker’s men, will be passing by on this road,” Erik gestured down to the map that the Brotherhood was congregated around, “Just outside of Cedar Vale, Kansas at two-thirty p.m. tomorrow afternoon in a grey truck. Their mission is to abduct a high-school student named Sara McLachlan, a Mutant, after she gets off of her school bus. We’ll bury the bomb under the road and detonate it as the truck passes over it. With one fell swoop, Stryker will lose all of his top agents.”

“Can’t we just attack the truck outright?” Sting asked, earning a sharp glare from Erik.

“The bomb was one of Stryker’s pet projects,” Emma answered, “And he knows by now that we’re the ones who took it from him. Killing his men with his own weapon will be rather poetic, don’t you agree?”

Sting nodded, not daring to speak up again. She was alive only because Azazel had been able to spot Beast walking around outside the day before, making some kind of adjustments to the shield he’d built.

“This is only the first strike,” Erik added, “Once Stryker’s attention is on us we can destroy him and everything he’s built. I want him to know that we’re coming for him.”

“What about the girl?” Raven inquired, “She won’t be safe if she stays in Cedar Vale.”

“We’ll find her after we’ve finished with Stryker’s men and strongly suggest that she either join us or let us take her to North Salem,” Erik replied, “But we can’t force her to do either if she doesn’t want
to, it’s her decision to make.”

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The bomb was buried, the trap was set, and the Brotherhood was concealed in the cornfield bordering the road to watch their handiwork.

At two-twenty, a school bus full of what could only be high-school students came puttering down the road, driving a ridiculous fifteen miles an hour. It was a small bus and the children inside were laughing and smiling, blissfully unaware of the Mutants watching them. One of the girls had bright blue curls and was surrounded by a number of others, not ostracized as Erik had feared she would be. As the bus passed by him and his men, Erik saw a boy gently tuck a lock of Sara’s hair behind her ear, which was pointed elegantly.

And then the bomb went off.

There was no time for them to react. In a split second, seventeen happy kids and their driver had been transformed into nothing more than thick, smoldering, black ash. The bus itself tilted onto its side, due to the kinetic force that the explosion produced, though it remained largely intact, save for a few shattered windows and small dents.

“Oh my god,” Raven whispered as the dust, the children, began to settle, looking as horrified as Erik himself was.

This wasn’t what was supposed to have happened. They’d meant to strike at the heart of the anti-Mutant government and had, instead, blown up innocent boys and girls who had been no threat at all, one of whom had been one of them. Von Gott, he really was Shaw’s monster, wasn’t he?

Shame and, with it, anger, began pulsing through his body, replacing the horror Erik had earlier felt, “Azazel, get us out of here now.” With a poof of red smoke and the smell of sulfur, the Brotherhood had disappeared from rural Kansas and had returned to the relative safety of their base. Erik rounded on Riptide, “How the hell did that happen?”

“I don’t know,” Riptide managed to answer, shocked still, his accent thicker because of it, “I calibrated the bomb’s timing system perfectly, I’m sure of that. It shouldn’t have gone off until the timer reached ‘0’, which it hadn’t.”

“He’s telling the truth, Sugar,” Emma spoke up quietly, more affected than Erik had ever seen her before.

“Perhaps the bomb wasn’t as ready as Stryker and his scientists believed,” Azazel suggested, “Or they lied about it being ready in the reports we stole from him.”

“We killed children,” Raven intoned in a dead voice, “We… fuck.”

“Most of them deserved it,” Sting spoke up, earning Raven’s ire at once, “They were human.”

“They were children, you vicious bitch,” Raven seethed.

“Children that would have grown up to be just like Stryker,” Sting said dismissively.

Would they have? Erik wasn’t sure. He’d seen the way that the other children had accepted Sara’s radically different hair and ears. Raven looked at him and, this time, there was no way that he could deny the doubt he saw shining in her golden eyes.
“It has been determined,” Director McConé announced via the television, live from a press conference in Washington D.C., “That the deaths of the seventeen high school students from Cedar Vale, Kansas, and the driver of their bus, were caused by a terrorist organization known as the Brotherhood of Mutants. At this time, your government is asking you, the American people, that if you have any information at all concerning these terrorists, or the vigilante group known as the X-Men, to please come forward.”

“Mutants have proven to be volatile and violent,” so-called expert and doctor of psychology, Paul Nash, declared during a televised lecture, “They’re mentally unstable, psychopaths and sociopaths, all of them, and they all need to be confined for the good of society.”

“Mutation is an aberration!” Father John Spokes announced, “Mutants are going to hell as surely as homosexuals, and niggers, and women who refuse to submit to their husbands and fathers. They’ve all got the devil in them!”

“Mutation is a genetic defect that leads to destructive behavior,” Warren Worthington, Sr. publicly declared in response to a reporter’s query, “The government should be focusing its attention on finding a cure for the unfortunate men and women afflicted with this disease.”

“They should all be lynch-” and Charles yanked out the plug for his television with an unnecessary amount of force to cut off the umpteenth tirade of that afternoon.

“That’s more than enough of that,” Charles said firmly, “No more watching the news for a few weeks. And don’t listen to a single word that you heard those ignorant fools utter, because you know that they’re all talking out of their arses.”

“The public seem to have no problem listening to them, though,” Chloé pointed out, clutching Sean and her father’s hands tightly, her voice less steady than Charles would have liked.

“Not all of them,” Charles disagreed, “Not the people we’ve already protected. I’ve felt the minds in New York City. Most of them are very angry on our behalf. They still have faith in us. Don’t you dare lose faith in yourselves.”

“We can’t lose to the Brotherhood, next time,” Alex said with unshakable determination, “Or the war that they so desperately want… it’ll come.”

The following five and a half months were far more peaceful than anyone had expected them to be following the Brotherhood’s attack in Kansas. For reasons that no one understood, Magneto’s terrorist group seemed to vanish without a trace. Charles tried very hard to hide the worry he felt due to this development; he was both afraid for and of Erik and Raven these days.

Bobby turned six in January and the most exciting thing to happen during that entire month was a strike of public transportation workers in New York City. Moira announced that she was pregnant in
late February, and she and Adam would learn in early June that they were going to have a baby girl. March brought the birthdays of both Peter and Kitty, who turned nine and six respectively.

Ally began floating without warning in the middle of April and the whole family had a time trying to remove her from the painted ceiling in the ballroom. The Quad turned three on the tenth of June and, a day later, Rorie became the first of the four to develop a second mutation, telekinesis. Charles was made aware of this new manifestation of power when she dragged him from the lab, where he was talking to Hank about installing security cameras and sensors that detected motion around the boundaries of the shield, and into the nursery because she wanted him to play with her.

Peter developed an obsession with Batman and insisted on watching every episode that came on, no matter how many times he had seen a particular episode before. Charles was forced to buy a second television so that Chloë and Sean stopped complaining about missing Get Smart because Peter was hogging the TV in the den. Charles shortly thereafter had to buy a third television set because Moira had to watch Days of Our Lives and numerous other soap operas to keep her brain saturated in endorphins.

The biggest news came on the fifteenth of June, when Alex and Armando approached Charles with the request that he officiate the closest thing that they could have to a wedding ceremony. Charles was more than happy to agree to do just that. He wished deeply that their marriage could be more than just in spirit, that they could be legally bound together as husbands, but he had faith that, one day when the world had learned tolerance and acceptance, they would be.

For one whole day, everything was perfectly wonderful in the Xavier household. And then Charles got a call that would change the lives of his family forever.

"Charles!" Moira projected from downstairs, distracting him from the latest scientific journal he was reading on cellular structure, 'You've got a phone call. It sounds important.'

"Thank you, darling," Charles replied, exiting his bedroom, 'I'll take it from up here in my study.'

'No problem, Charles,' Moira returned, already half-distracted by the latest episode of the currently playing soap opera.

Charles entered his study and picked up the red phone on his desk, “Charles Xavier.”

“H… hey, Charlie,” came a shaky voice that Charles had never expected to hear again.

"Cain?" Charles managed to say, surprise coloring his tone.

“Yeah, it’s… it’s me. Um, how are you?” Cain asked.

“I’m doing fine.” Charles replied, his brain still trying to process the fact that his stepbrother was willingly speaking to him, even if it was via telephone.

“Good, that’s… good. How’s Raven?”

“She’s fine too,” Charles hoped this was true, at least, “Cain, not to be rude, but, why are you calling me. The last time we spoke you said you wanted nothing to do with me or my freakishness ever again.”

“Than was a long time ago, Charlie,” Cain protested, “I’ve changed since then.”
“Cain,” Charles sighed, only to be cut off quickly.

“I mean that, Charlie,” Cain’s voice was full of urgency, desperation even, now, “I’ve… I’ve changed, while I was in the army, in ways that… that only you could understand.”

Charles inhaled sharply, “What?”

“I… I can do things, Charlie,” Cain admitted, “Things that… well, that I shouldn’t be able to do. Can… can you still do that mind trick thing that you did when we were kids?”

“It’s not a trick, Cain,” Charles retorted firmly before admitting, “But, yes. What can you do?”

“I would really rather not discuss it over the phone,” Cain answered, “It’s pretty hard to, um, explain. It’d be easier to show you, really.”

“You can come by the house,” Charles suggested.

“No!” Cain protested at once, sounding almost afraid, “You’ve got other people there and… I can’t. I can’t, Charlie, I can’t go into public.”

Cain’s mutation definitely had a physical aspect then. No wonder he sounded so upset; Cain had always taken great pleasure in his looks. They had gotten him a lot of things back in the day; had allowed him to get away with plenty of things too.

“I could meet you somewhere,” Charles offered, “Where are you?”

“Hiding out in your hunting cabin,” Cain admitted miserably, “I know that I should have asked you first, but I didn’t have a way to contact you until I got to the phone in here.”

“It’s fine, Cain,” Charles assured, “I’ll meet you out there, okay?”

“You’ll come alone?” Cain questioned.

Charles hesitated. He really shouldn’t agree to do anything of the kind, what with all of Stryker’s men skulking about. The others would be upset if he went off alone, even if it was for his stepbrother’s sake.

Cain sensed his indecision, “Please, Charlie, I don’t want anyone else seeing me like this. I… please.”


“Okay,” Cain responded, a bit more brightly, “Thank you, Charlie.”

“You’re welcome, Cain,” Charles said, “Goodnight.”

“Night.”

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In the light of day, the actual act of sneaking out of his house was much harder than he had imagined it would be when Charles had been speaking to Cain the night before. He wouldn’t have been able to accomplish it at all if he had not had such intimate knowledge of all of the hidden passageways in and out of the mansion. He took one of his father’s vintage motorcycles to go meet Cain, since it was much easier to maneuver such a small vehicle through the winding forest paths that led to the second, much disused gate to the Xavier property.
He felt the tell-tale tingle that meant he had passed through the shield, the key card was secured in his pocket, and then turned his bike north toward the monstrously large hunting cabin his grandfather had purchased on Lye Lake some fifty years earlier. It had been a favored haunt of both Brian Xavier and Kurt Marko, and so, up until now, Charles had avoided it like it was the second coming of the Black Plague. But here he was, on his way to the blasted lodge for the sake of his stepbrother, of all people.

It was nearing eleven in the morning by the time Charles reached the lake and the sight of the beautiful, ostentatious, ebony wood cabin rising up from the horizon made Charles as unhappy as it always had when he was a boy. After he handled the situation with Cain, Charles was going to sell the damn place to the first person he could find. There were far nicer cabins in Breckenridge anyway.

Charles didn’t feel Cain’s mind until he was pulling up the driveway, and he realized then that it was disconnected, almost scrambled, and impossible for Charles to truly latch on to. Part of Cain’s mutation, perhaps, Charles noted to himself, as he parked his motorcycle as close to the front doors as possible. His dismounted the bike and jogged up the stairs leading to the porch; the lock on the doors was broken, most likely as a result of Cain forcing his way inside.

“Cain?” Charles called out, as he entered the foyer lined with the heads of over a dozen bucks.

“I’m back here, Charlie,” Cain replied from a bit further in, “In the living room.”

Charles followed the sound of Cain’s voice, traveling down the hallway until he rounded the particular corner that would lead to the main den. He stopped short at the sight that greeted him; his step-brother, was standing proudly in the dead center of the living room. Cain did look different, radically so, from the last time that Charles had seen him, boarding a flight to get as far away from Charles and his telepathy as possible, planning on joining the armed forces. Charles’ first thought was that there was no way that Charles was going to be able to bring Cain back to Westchester on the flimsy bike that he’d used to get out here.

Cain had always been fit, but he was now three times larger than he had been at eighteen, and every inch of that bulk was solid muscle. He was wearing what seemed to be a sleeveless red jumpsuit, fashioned out of a shining metal that conformed to his body perfectly, and a pair of enormous boots made of the same material. There were thick bands of metal around his biceps and forearms and similarly heavy knuckle dusters ringed his fingers. He was wearing a helmet too, but Charles knew immediately that it wasn’t what was blocking his telepathy; it didn’t feel like Erik’s helmet did.

He was also smirking, looking the furthest from upset that he possibly could. Belatedly, Charles realized that he had possibly made an erroneous mistake coming out here without backup. His boys were going to be furious with him.

“Cain,” Charles said carefully, bracing himself.

Sure enough, Cain chuckled darkly, “You really came, you were really stupid enough to come out here by yourself and all I had to do was pretend to be scared in one fucking phone call. I begged for help and you came running, even after I threatened to kill you if you ever came near me again.”

“What do you want, Cain?” Charles asked in a gentle tone. It was submissive, but such had always helped Charles when it came to Cain before. Cain had been less likely to beat him black and blue if Charles let the other think that he was in charge. And that had before Cain had gotten a hold of whatever steroids had caused his change; black and blue would be preferable to dead.

“Revenge,” Cain snarled, “I’ve been waiting years for it, Charlie, and now I’ve finally got the power
to get it. I found a rather remarkable gem in the shithole that was Korea, you see, and it’s enabled me
to do extraordinary things.”

“Revenge?” Charles questioned softly, shifting back onto his heels slowly, “Revenge for what,
Cain?”

“For killing my father,” Cain growled, “I remember what you did to him. You gave him an
aneurysm and then convinced me and everybody else to look the other way. You’re going to pay for
that with your life, Charlie. And my name is Juggernaut.”

Charles immediately focused all of his powers on breaking through Cain’s mental defenses, even as
the other launched himself at Charles, but he knew instinctively that his best wouldn’t be enough to
stop Cain. He ducked and rolled, barely managing to dodge Cain, who kept going and crashed
straight through the bloody wall. Cain spun around with a roar and then he was in the air, held
suspended by a force not his own.

Erik had come, he and his Brotherhood.

Cain screamed in frustration, thrashing in the air despite Erik’s hold over the metal he was wearing.

“Cain,” Charles tried, “Calm down. We can talk about what happened that night. You don’t
understand what was going on.”

Cain just kept roaring and struggling against Erik’s control, and Charles could see that Erik was
losing his hold on Cain.

“Knock him out!” Erik snapped.

“I can’t!” Charles replied, “I can’t get inside his head.”

The helmet went flying off of Cain, which really only served to enrage Charles’ stepbrother further.

“The helmet isn’t why I can’t get into his head,” Charles informed Erik.

“Oh, for god’s sake,” Erik gritted out, “Toad, paralyze him.”

Toad obeyed, striking Cain’s skin with his tongue. Once, twice, three times before Cain finally fell
still. Erik dropped him onto the floor, breathing heavily.

“If he so much as twitches,” Erik instructed Toad, as he moved over to Charles’ side to help him
stand, “Hit him again.”

Toad nodded.

“You get yourself into the most interesting situations, Sugar,” Emma drawled out, one elegantly
groomed eyebrow raised as she gazed at Charles.

Raven grabbed Charles’ arm before he could respond, “Your father’s study, now, Charles.”

“But… Cain,” Charles protested.

“They’ll keep him unconscious, believe me,” Raven muttered as she dragged him out of the
damaged lounge and across the hall, “We need to talk.”

“Raven-” Charles started, even as she slammed the door closed between them and the Brotherhood,
who looked a cross between amused and bemused.
“Charles,” Raven interrupted him sharply, “What was the hell was he talking about?”

“Which part, exactly?”

“All of it,” Raven told him, her arms crossed across her chest.

“I didn’t give Kurt an aneurysm,” Charles replied quietly, after a moment, “Any type of aneurysm would be a physical condition and not something that I can just induce a person to develop. Cain wasn’t… completely wrong, though. I did… kill Kurt, accidentally; I never would have intentionally…”

“How?” Raven questioned, her voice colored by disbelief.

Charles took a deep breath before continuing, “I went into his mind with the intention of hurting him, I was angry and afraid and I had to stop him from… from hurting you. The moment that I slammed through the flimsy shielding he’d had around his mind, he knew about my powers, Raven, he had for years, his blood pressure spiked and the aneurysm he had, which none of us knew about until it was too late, ruptured.”

“Kurt never tried to hurt…” Raven trailed off and then narrowed her eyes in realization, “You messed with my memory.”

“Yes,” Charles admitted softly, “I did, about a week after Kurt’s funeral. You weren’t coping, Raven, you… I thought that I was going to lose you. So… I locked the memories of what happened that night so deep inside your mind that even your subconscious couldn’t access them. When you woke up the next morning, you had regained the confidence and spirit you’d lost in the wake of what Kurt tried to do.”

“Undo it,” Raven ordered without hesitation.

Charles’ eyes widened, “Raven—”

“Now, Charles,” she insisted, snatching his hands with her own and holding them up to her face.

Charles cupped her cheeks tenderly, caressing them with his thumbs, “You… you’re not going to like what you remember, love.”

“I figured that out by myself, actually,” Raven replied, “But I want the memories back regardless.”

Charles released a shuddering breath, “Okay.”

He moved two fingers to either side of Raven’s temple; the touch was unnecessary, they both knew that, but Charles wanted the physical connection almost desperately. Charles slipped into his sister’s mind carefully, ensuring that his mental touch would be nothing but warm and gentle. Raven’s mind was as bright and as beautiful and as strong as it ever had been and, by God, how Charles had missed the way that it sang to his own. It was like listening to a siren’s call.

Raven inhaled suddenly.

‘Raven,’ Charles sent at once, ‘What’s wrong? Am I hurting you?’

‘No,’ Raven denied truthfully, trembling minutely beneath Charles’ fingertips, ‘I just… I’d forgotten. Unlock the memories, Charles.’

They were easy for Charles to find, since he had been the one to hide them in the first place, in the
darkest part of the furthest corner of Raven’s mind. After only a brief pause, Charles pulled them out of black and into the golden light that made up most of his sister’s mental landscape where Raven could access them as she so chose. She did, immediately, and Charles forced himself to view the scene that played out with her, unwillingly to let his sister watch one of the worst nights of their lives by herself.

Charles was shouting in pain, pleading for someone to ‘stop’. Raven, terror and determination rising up instantly at the sound of her brother’s fear, rushed without thinking toward where it was coming from, resolved to do whatever it took to end Charles’ distress. She raced through the hall on the third storey of the east wing, where she and Charles weren’t typically allowed because it was Kurt’s private space, burst into one of the spare bedrooms, and froze in horror at the sight of what was waiting to greet her.

Kurt had her brother’s wrists tied to the headboard of the room’s bed and he was tearing off Charles’ clothes, even as Charles fought wildly against the much larger man. Both Charles and Kurt turned toward the door as it slammed against the wall, Charles’ eyes widening in horror and Kurt’s going dark with something else.

“Raven, get out of here!” Charles begged her at once, “Please, go!”

Raven moved, not out like Charles had asked, but forward; anger spurring her closer to her brother. Kurt grabbed her arms before she could reach Charles’ side. Charles strained desperately against the ropes keeping him in place as Kurt lifted Raven up.

“Hello, pretty,” Kurt slurred, his breath reeking of what Raven knew to be the very expensive brandy that he was so fond of, “Come join us.”

“No!” Charles shouted, terrified in a way he hadn’t been earlier, “No, Kurt, don’t touch her. You can have me, but don’t touch her!”

Raven kicked out, catching Kurt in his right knee. The man howled furiously and bodily threw her onto the bed next to Charles. A second later, Raven lost control of her form in a way she never had before, turning a vivid blue.

Kurt’s bloodshot eyes widened and his lips curled in disgust, “I should’ve known. You’re a freak just like your fuckin’ brother. I can’t get rid of him, not till I can get to Xavier’s money, but I can get rid of you!”

Kurt snatched a up a heavy brass lamp from the bedside table, raising it up into the air, and Charles screamed, “No!”

Their stepfather froze where he stood and then, a few moments later, fell backwards, the lamp slamming into the hardwood floor and causing parts of it to splinter. Kurt was completely still and Raven knew, knew without checking, that he was dead.

Charles, her sweet, good-natured, pacifist brother, had killed Kurt to save her life.

Raven jerked away from Charles’ touch, stared at him for a long moment, her golden eyes full of unshed tears, and then she launched herself into his arms, burying her face in the crook of his neck as she sobbed. Charles held onto her person as tightly as he dared, stroking her red hair with one hand while the other rubbed small, soothing circles into her back. They stayed that way, embracing each other, until Erik interrupted, nearly ten minutes later.

“Have you two finished?” He asked, a softness in his expression that belayed the harshness of the
words, “Because we have a situation to deal with.”

Charles looked inquiringly at Raven, willing to put off having to handle Cain if his little sister needed more time.

“We’re good,” Raven answered, and it felt true for the first time in a long time.

“How did you find me?” Charles questioned then.

“Your bracelet,” Erik said, “I made it, I can track it. When I wondered why you were heading out here, Raven insisted that something had to be wrong. She said that you despise this place.”

“I do,” Charles admitted, “And I should have known that you had an ulterior motive in giving me a Christmas present.”

“If you weren’t reckless with your life,” Erik chided, “I wouldn’t have to devise inventive ways to keep track of you, Schatz.”

Charles opened his mouth to reply and the windows blew in as several large wooden containers crashed through them without warning. Purple fumes began spraying out of them, through tiny holes, clogging the air in a matter of seconds.

Charles began to choke as the fumes hit his lungs, and he sunk to his knees as his strength gave out. He was vaguely aware of Erik wrapping his arms around him before everything went black.

Chapter End Notes

I'm an evil person. Only two more chapters to go.
Chapter Eight

No one realized that Charles was missing until breakfast. In all honesty, it probably would have taken them longer to realize that he had left the safe confines of the shield if not for Charles’ staunch insistence that breakfast and dinner were basically sacred times of the day that the family had to spend together. So when Charles didn’t appear in the dining room, his children in tow, come eight-thirty, Alex and the others knew that something wasn’t right immediately.

And then Jean had come barreling into the dining room, Oliver clinging to her like a limpet, with news that none of them were glad to hear, “Daddy’s gone! He’s left Westchester!”

“What?” Logan barked out.

“His mind isn’t here,” Jean insisted, “He isn’t here.”

Without having to even discuss it, the X-Men split up to search the house and the grounds while Moira corralled all of the kids into the family den to watch Peter Pan, assuring them that Charles would be back soon and that they didn’t need to worry. It said something, didn’t it, that they had a plan in place in case something like this ever happened.

“Jean’s right,” Logan told them as soon as they’d all met back up in the foyer a scant twenty minutes later, “He’s left the grounds, on a motorcycle. His scent trail is heading north.”

“How can the Prof not be here? I can still feel him,” Sean said in as calm of a voice as he could muster up, his worry for Charles obvious in the slight trembling of his hands.

“A strong mental plane isn’t always subject to the usual laws of physics,” Hank pointed out.

“Huh?” Chloë questioned, giving Hank the look they all used at times, when Hank spoke in technical terms instead of English.

“The links that he has to our minds don’t necessarily have to change because of distance,” Hank clarified, fiddling with his glasses, “The part of his telepathy that crafts and safeguards the links is separate from the part that allows him to read minds. Based on Charles’ power levels and how vital the links are to his health, I think that it probably would still feel like he was just in the next room even if he were on the other side of the world from us, maybe farther than that.”

“We still felt him Florida,” Mando acknowledged.

“Because he was in Cerebro,” Sean countered. “Right?”

“Not the entire time,” Chloë revealed, “He only activated it once he was sure that you were near Port Canaveral.”
“There’s no way for us to tell if he’s nearby or not using the links,” Hank said, “Jean, however, is a telepath herself and the connection that she has to Charles is different from ours by the very virtue of that fact. If she says that he’s not here, he’s not here.”

“I suppose that means that we can’t use the links to find him either,” Alex sighed.

Hank shook his head, “We can’t, no; we’re not telepaths.”

“I can track his scent,” Logan interjected, “We’ll find him that way.”

“As long as it doesn’t rain,” Chloë reminded.

“What possessed him to leave without backup in the first place?” Moira demanded, “He knows how dangerous things are for us right now. Stryker and his men could be lurking around any corner and they want Charles more than they want anyone else.”

“I can think of a few people who could have convinced him to do just that,” Alex told her.

“Erik and Raven,” Sean intoned softly.

“If they asked him to meet them somewhere then he could have been easily convinced to do so,” Alex agreed, “And he wouldn’t have told us because he knew that we would try to convince him to do otherwise.”

Charles loved Erik and Raven too much to ignore them if they pleaded for his help.

“Who else knows how to drive a motorcycle?” Logan demanded then.

“I can,” Alex replied.

“So can I,” Adam said, shrugging when several of the others looked at him in surprise, “I used to race them when I was a teenager. I stopped after one of my friends was injured; it was how I discovered my mutation, healing him.”

“I know how to drive a motorcycle too,” Chloë offered.

Logan snorted, “Yeah, no, you’re stayin’ here, pup. Alex, Adam, come with me. Best wear your suits under your clothes, just in case. The rest of you, keep the kids distracted.”

Alex wasted no time in getting dressed, pulling jeans and a long-sleeve shirt on over his suit, grateful that the latter’s fabric would keep him from becoming overheated because wearing such an outfit during the summer would seriously suck otherwise. The high neck of the suit remained visible, but his helmet would cover it just fine and the bright blue material that rose above the collar of his shirt wasn’t enough to turn any heads anyway.

Mando joined him in the garage as Alex was pulling a pair of gloves on, Alex’s blue helmet in his hands.

“Be careful,” Mando told him, passing the helmet over.

Alex leaned over to kiss him, smirking a little bit when Mando ran a hand through Alex’s hair, mussing it, “I will, promise, babe. And we’ll find the Professor too.”

Scout bounded up to Alex’s side, apparently having slipped away from Chloë, “Alex? Is it true that Uncle Charles is in trouble? Jeanie’s really upset.”
“Either he’s in trouble or he’s going to be,” Alex muttered, and then, at Scott’s confusion, “He’ll be fine, kiddo. We’re going to bring him home, okay?”

“Okay,” Scott nodded.

Hank entered the garage then, a trio of what looked like small silver buttons cupped in the palm of his hand. “Here,” he said, passing them out to Alex, Logan, and Adam, “These will enable you to communicate with me back in the lab. You tap them once to turn them on and again to switch them off. These are just prototypes, so I’m not sure how well they’ll work if the motorcycles are running. I started developing these in case we ever had to go on a mission and the Professor was incapacitated for some reason.”

Alex fitted his inside his right ear, grimacing at the idea of the Professor incapacitated, and then pulled his helmet over his head before climbing onto his cobalt bike; he had made it with his own two hands from parts that Charles had ordered for him, building it had become a healthy outlet for his anger, especially since Hank had recently commandeered the Danger Room. The grey and black bike Logan chose had similar origins. The maroon bike that Adam was riding had once belonged to Brian Xavier; a relic, but one that still ran like a dream.

“Call us as soon as you have him,” Moira requested of Adam, kissing the side of his helmet after he nodded.

Sean and Hank swung open the garage doors, the latter muttering, “I’ve got to make these things automatic,” as he did so.

Logan peeled out of the garage, Alex and Adam following behind him immediately.

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It was half past eleven when it happened.

Logan and the others had been pushing their bikes to drive at speeds that would probably lead to them breaking their necks if they lost control, Chuck’s scent was slowly growing stronger because of this, an indication that they were catching up to him, wherever he was, when the link that connected Logan’s mind to the professor’s, that warm connection that came with the surety that you were loved and would never be alone, suddenly grew cold. Logan jerked his bike to a halt and, based on the way that Alex and Adam did so at the same time, Logan realized that he hadn’t been the only one who felt the change.

“Oh, god,” Alex gasped, yanking his helmet off of his head and turning to Logan, his eyes wide with horror and fear, “Oh, god!”

Logan tapped his earpiece immediately, “Hank!”

Hank’s voice came, a few moments later than Logan was happy about, “We felt it too, Logan. The kids are panicking.”

“He’s still alive,” Logan said, “The link may be cold but it’s not gone, that means he’s still alive.”

“But how…” Alex’s eyes hardened as he discerned the answer on his own, “Stryker.”

“Come back here now,” Hank ordered, “We need to regroup—”

Thunder rolled above Logan’s head and he turned to see the sky slowly growing dark, “There’s no time. It’s going to rain; I’ll lose the Professor’s scent if we don’t keep going.”
“The chance that you’ll catch up to Stryker before the rain hits is negligible, Logan,” Hank retorted.

“At least we’ll know what direction he’s takin’ the Professor,” Logan returned, “That’ll be something, at least.”

“Be careful and watch your backs,” Hank instructed.

“We will,” Logan promised, before tapping the earpiece again to switch it off, “Let’s get goin’.”

It was only half an hour later that following Chuck’s scent led to them reaching an enormous hunting cabin by a large lake, a cabin that had the name Xavier scrawled over its doors in letters made of ivory. Two seconds was all the time it took to confirm Logan’s worst fears.

“Jesus,” Alex murmured, “And I thought parts of the mansion were bad. This place is… something else. No wonder the Professor never mentioned it to us before.”

“Stryker has the Professor,” Logan snapped, “And, apparently, the Brotherhood too. They headed north-west from here.”

Lightning cracked across the sky ominously and then the heavens opened up.

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Charles woke up to a fierce headache, the likes of which he hadn’t experienced in a long time. It took him less than ten seconds to determine that the telepathic links he maintained with his family had been muted to almost the point of nonexistence. This realization was more than enough to trigger a panic that bordered on overwhelming.

Charles jerked upright, his eyes snapping open as he did… straight into Erik’s arms.

Charles blinked at the metalbender in startled confusion, the bewilderment enough to stop his alarm in its tracks. And then everything came flooding back to him.


Charles’ children and X-Men were safe and sound in Westchester. It was Charles who was the one in danger, not them. Charles… and Erik and Raven, who were watching him with more open concern than they had showed for him in some time.

Charles forced himself to take a deep, calming breath, “How did they find us?”

“We don’t know,” Erik replied; his grip on Charles’ person tightening, frustration and fear all too palpable in his voice, “We only just now woke up.”

“We don’t know where the others are either,” Raven added, her tone tight with worry.

They were probably locked up in a similar, if not identical, cell, all things considered. The room, though it hardly deserved the word, was close to freezing, almost like a meat locker, and wasn’t that a dreadful thought? Raven was wrapped up in Erik’s ridiculous cloak and…

“Your hair’s black,” Charles pointed out, realizing then that she wasn’t blue, “And curly.”

“Apparently,” Raven agreed, not sounding very happy about it.

“It doesn’t really suit you,” Charles said.
“I know that you prefer it to be blonde-” Raven began, anger creeping into her voice.

“I prefer it red, actually,” Charles contradicted.

Raven deflated, surprised but pleased, “Oh.”

“They didn’t give you clothes, did they?” Charles questioned, frowning deeply.

“You’re such a prude, Charles.”

“Would you like it if I ran around naked?” Charles demanded.

Raven opened her mouth and then shut it again.

“That’s what I thought,” Charles said pointedly, reaching out to lightly touch the collar that was resting snugly around his little sister’s neck. It was a thick, heavy-looking thing that provided a dim, greenish glow, the only light to be had in the cell. Erik was wearing an identical one and, judging by the weight around his own neck, so was Charles. He kept his tone deliberately light as he said, “The collars are a new development. Stryker must be getting desperate.”

“Can you access your powers at all?” Raven asked in an undertone.

“No,” Charles answered, even as he moved his fingers up from the collar ringing her neck to caress her cheek, grabbing a hold of one of Erik’s wrists with his other hand, ‘A bit, through physical contact, apparently, but it’s rather tiring.’

‘Then don’t use it unless it becomes absolutely necessary. We’re going to need every advantage we can get,’ Erik instructed, squeezing Charles’ hand, speaking aloud at nearly the same time, “Damn.”

“The X-Men will come for us,” Charles told them softly, ignoring Erik’s non-suggestion, ‘They probably knew that I was in trouble the moment Stryker snapped a collar around my neck.’

‘How-’ Erik began.

‘You’ve got links with them,’ Raven cut Erik off, her mental voice unable to mask her hurt and jealousy, “They don’t know that we’re in trouble. It'll probably take them weeks to find us without you there to guide them.”

‘Yes. I need them and they’re not afraid of my mind tricks.’ Charles replied, more coolly than he’d really intended to, “Stop disparaging my X-Men.”

Raven flinched and Erik stiffened at the term that Charles’ had projected.

‘What do you mean you need them?’ the latter questioned, “Your X-Men are barely trained children.”

‘Keeping control over my powers used to cause me immense pain. The links shield me from that,’ Charles answered shortly, “At least they’re not unstable sociopaths who kill presidents and children, Erik.”

‘You told me that the pain stopped after puberty. You said blocking people out didn’t hurt you anymore. Fuck, Charles, we spent years at both Harvard and Oxford,’ Raven accused sadly before telling him, “We didn’t kill the President; we were trying to save him.”

“He was one of us,” Erik revealed, “A Mutant. The bullet curved because I was trying to keep it
from hitting him. The secret service jumped me before I could fully stop it.”

‘I didn’t have much of a choice. You didn’t want me in your head, Raven. So I got very good at hiding the hurt from you,’ Charles retorted, “And the children?”

‘Damn it, Charles! It wasn’t the link that I minded! It was you plucking thoughts from my head and deciding what I wanted before I had even really made up my mind.’ Raven snapped mentally, saying aloud in a more subdued manner, “The bomb was supposed to take out Stryker’s men; we were trying to stop them from capturing a teenage Mutant named Sara.”

‘You never made that clear. You ordered me out of your head; I stayed out,’ Charles said, resisting the childish urge to cross his arms defensively, “So what happened?”

‘All I wanted was for you to stop reading my mind without my permission. I never wanted the link gone, but when you took it… I thought it was because you were furious at me for asking you to stay out,’ Raven revealed, her eyes, which were a strange dark green color, welling up with tears, “It was an accident, Charles. The bomb went off early, we don’t know why. We never wanted to harm any of those kids… they loved Sara, even though she was a Mutant.”

‘Oh, Raven. I don’t think I could get that angry with you if I tried and, trust me, I’ve tried, darling,’ Charles sighed, stroking Raven’s cheek with his thumb, “Is that why you didn’t come home after Beast was hurt? You wanted to before then.”

“I didn’t think that you’d want me…” And the tears spilled over then.

Charles pulled her into his arms, holding her close as Erik held him, murmuring into her hair, “I will always want you, Raven, you’re my little sister. You always will be, no matter what happens or what you do; I will always love you. I’m so sorry that I made you doubt that.”

“It’s not you fault,” Raven told him.

“It is,” Charles said firmly, “I’m sorry.”

“I love you, Charles,” Raven whispered.

Erik let them stay wrapped up in each other for longer than Charles would have thought before he finally broke the almost tranquil scene, “It won’t be long now.”

“What’s going to happen?” Raven asked, her voice calm despite the deep fear Charles felt every time his fingers brushed across her face as he stroked her hair.

“It’s not going to be pleasant,” Erik replied, gently, and then he ordered, “When they come for us, you let me take the brunt of what happens. You keep your mouths shut and don’t draw attention to yourselves.”

“Like hell-”

“Fuck, no-”

Erik cut off both Charles and Raven, “I appreciate the sentiment, but you will do as I say. I’ve been through this before; I know what to expect and how to handle it. Neither of you have.”

“And if they mean to treat you the way they treated Angel?” Charles challenged hotly, using anger to cover up the dread coursing through his veins.
“Then my death will give you and your sister more time,” Erik shrugged, as if it were truly as simple as that.

“No,” Charles’ voice cracked, “Erik, no-”

The door to the cell slammed open and Stryker strolled inside, looking remarkably pleased with himself. Erik stood immediately, yanking Charles and Raven into standing positions behind him, even as all three caught sight of Sting positioned amongst Stryker’s men, smirking vindictively.

“Sting-” Erik started.

“Actually,” the woman interrupted, “It’s Ramona Stryker.”

“My niece did a very good job fooling you and your Brotherhood, didn’t she, Magneto?” Stryker chuckled, obviously not truly desiring more of a response from Erik beyond a furious glare, “I’m very proud of her. She even managed to save the lives of my best men without you ever catching on.”


“Unfortunate casualties in the greatest war humanity will ever fight,” Stryker returned with mock sadness.

“Against Mutants?” Erik snarled.

“Against a threat far more potent than Mutants,” Stryker revealed, “I’ve worked for the government for years; I’ve seen things that even you wouldn’t believe, things that the government have tried very hard to cover up. We’re not alone in this universe, far from it, and one day, they’ll come for us.”

“You’ve tortured and killed our people because you’re frightened of little green men?” Erik questioned, disbelieving and furious.

“They’re not little, they’re not green, and they’re most certainly not men,” Stryker stated with an absolute surety that was startling on its own, “Weaponizing Mutation is the key to saving our planet. A man like you, with your command of metal, you could pull the aliens’ ships right out of the sky.”

“I’m not going to help you, if that’s what you’re getting at,” Erik retorted.

“You won’t have a choice,” Stryker said, “When the time comes, you’ll fight for us. Being willing really isn’t a requirement when it comes to my soldiers.”

“You killed Angel,” Erik growled, “Why not us?”

“Angel could fly and spit acid,” Stryker shrugged, “I already have a Mutant who can do the latter, and he does it better, and the former really isn’t worth much in a fight. She served us better under a microscope, so that we could learn more about the Mutant genome. We would have studied her wings too, tried to recreate them, but someone took them from us.”

“My sincerest apologies,” Charles said in a tone as insincere as he was capable of.

“You spoke incorrectly, by the way,” Stryker told Erik next, “I need you alive; not them.”

Erik’s hands curled into fists, “Touch them and I won’t do a damn thing for you.”

“Yes,” Stryker said, almost amused, “You will. Shapeshifting isn’t a tactical advantage in a war unless you’re trying to get information and all I need to know about the aliens is where to shoot them
at. Telepathy would, actually be helpful, but Xavier is too powerful to use my *special* drug on. Plus, he’s been rather a pain in my ass these past few years.”

“And it’s been a privilege to make your life as difficult as possible,” Charles snarked at him.

Stryker’s mouth twisted up into a snarl and he turned to his men, “Take the girl.”

Ice shot through Charles’ veins at the order. Erik lunged at Stryker, only to collapse in agony as Sting focused her powers on him. Charles stepped in between Stryker’s goons and his sister only to be bodily shoved aside. Adrenaline crashed through his person as the men grabbed Raven’s arms; without even really thinking about it, Charles reached over to twist the heel of his left shoe, grabbing the small knife stored there. Before anyone else had time to notice the weapon, Charles launched himself over to Stryker and stabbed the man in the thigh, driving the tiny blade into the thick flesh as deep as it would go.

Stryker let out a scream of pain, collapsing to the ground. Charles yanked the knife back out and lifted it to stab him again, only to have his mind suddenly assaulted by a searing pain that could only have been caused by Sting.

The next few moments were a blur, but then Stryker was upright again, leaning heavily against one of his men and ordering, “Leave her, take him to Trask!”

Men gripped the undersides of Charles’ arms and hauled him up, dragging him from the cell as Raven and Erik repeatedly shouted his name in horror.

‘*I love you,*’ Charles did the impossible and projected without contact, despite the exhaustion it caused and the mental agony he was in, ‘*I love you both so much.*’

And then Charles’ world went dark.

Charles was forced back to consciousness by a burning sensation that started in his arm and spread throughout his body. He was lying under an overly bright light on a hard table and he quickly realized that something cold was keeping his limbs motionless. Metal cuffs, no doubt, but, at that moment, Charles was grateful for them, because they provided the slightest bit of relief from the excruciating heat that was engulfing his person.

A man came into Charles’ view a few moments later. He was short and wore glasses, a lab coat, and rubber gloves. Charles recognized him immediately as Bolivar Trask.

“Good afternoon, Mister Xavier,” Trask smiled cruelly, “How are you feeling?”

“Go fuck yourself,” Charles managed to grit out.

Trask tutted at him, “Such language. Don’t you like my serum? It has a very scientific name, of course, but I like to call it *Hellfire.* It’s designed to both keep you alive and to ensure that you feel the pain of what’s about to happen tenfold. I don’t normally use it during my operations, but Stryker insisted. You really upset him, Mister Xavier.”

“Good,” Charles managed.

Trask smiled, “We’ll start by collecting the basic samples. Hair, blood, skin, nail, saliva, urine, and semen. And then we’ll move on collecting brain tissue, spinal fluid, and bone marrow. Then I’ll harvest pieces of your organs. And through all of this, you’ll be alive, unable to die, and you’ll feel it,
every second of it. And once I’m finished, I’ll have you thrown back in your cell so that you can slowly bleed to death in the arms of your precious sister and you’ll leave this world knowing that everything I did to you, I’m going to do to her.”

“Don’t you touch her, you bastard,” Charles growled out furiously, jerking as much as he could against his restraints.

“Let’s begin, shall we?”

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“I swear to God, I’m gonna put a damn tracker in his bloodstream,” Hank snarled as his equipment once again showed negative results.

“What exactly are you doing?” Sean asked him.

“Trying to figure out where the Professor is using his particular DNA code,” Hank explained rapidly, “I’m scanning geographical sectors, one by one. Unfortunately, north-east of Lye Lake is a quite a large portion of geography, including most of Canada. I’m basically looking for a needle in the world’s largest haystack.”

“We’ll find him,” Armando spoke up, as calm and determined as he ever was.

“Yeah,” Hank sighed, “But will we find him in time?”

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“Are you sure about this?” Scott asked her.

“I’m a telepath,” Jean insisted, “I can find him. I’m sure of it. Besides, you heard Hank, they’re not sure they’ll find him before he gets hurt.”

“Okay,” Scott nodded.

Jean turned to Peter, “You’re sure that you can get me inside?”

Peter nodded decisively, “You might feel a bit sick once we’re on the other side.”

“No!” Jean insisted, “I can do this!”

She mentally grasped the link she shared with her dad and followed it miles and miles, until finally
she found herself plunging into his mind.

‘Jean!’ her dad sounded terrified, ‘What have you done? Your telepathy isn’t strong enough yet, get out of Cerebro, now!’

‘I had to find you. I know where you are now, in the bunker,’ Jean told him, pouring the knowledge she had gleaned from her search into the minds of her aunts and uncles, ‘The X-Men are coming, daddy.’

A moment later, the power overwhelmed her. And then it was gone and Hank was there, pulling the helmet off of her head and scooping her up into his arms.

“Go get daddy,” Jean ordered, before a deep fatigue claimed her.

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True to his word, Trask had Charles taken back to the cell, back to Erik and Raven, once he had finished with him. The man carrying him dumped him on the floor without ceremony, eliciting a hoarse groan from Charles. Charles throat was raw by that point; Trask had delighted in making him scream.

“The drug will be wearing off soon,” Trask promised, as Erik and Raven scrambled to pull Charles into their arms, “I don’t imagine you’ll live longer than a few minutes once it does. I will, of course, perform a full autopsy once you’re dead. Enjoy the rest of your night.”

“I’m going to tear you apart,” Erik promised darkly.

Trask just laughed, “I’m sure you’ll try.

And then he was gone, sealing the three Mutants back inside their cell.

“Charles, you idiot,” Raven sobbed, “Why the hell did you do that?”

Despite the agony the motion caused, Charles lifted his arm up so that he could cup her cheek, “You’re my sister. There is nothing in this world that I would not do for your sake, darling. I’m sorry, I should have told about Kurt a long time ago, but I wanted so badly to forget it ever happened. I’m sorry.”

Charles coughed then, a hacking cough that brought up blood and caused him to seize in such great pain that he briefly stopped breathing.

“Don’t you dare die on us, Charles!” Erik demanded, his green-grey eyes filled with unshed tears, “Just keep breathing, Schatz. We’ll find a way out of here, we’ll get you help.”

‘The X-Men are on their way,’ Charles projected, sapping much of his remaining energy, ‘They know where we are.’

Charles’ vision blurred briefly.

“Charles!” Raven’s fear-filled voice was enough to bring Charles back from the brink, at least temporarily. Trask’s serum was losing its edge, the fire slowly becoming a simmer.

“I should have told you every day how beautiful you are, Raven. The night we met, in the kitchen, I thought that you were the most beautiful person I had ever beheld. I was so scared,” Charles admitted, “From the very first moment you became my whole world and I was so afraid that
someone would take you away and hurt you; it became my worst nightmare. So I insisted that you always use a normal form and that was wrong of me. I’m so sorry. I’m so, so sorry, Raven.”

“It’s okay,” Raven soothed, “I understand, Charles, I do. I love you so much. Just, please, please don’t leave me. You have to stay awake, Charles, please.”

Charles was certainly going to try. He had no desire to die, but, if he had to go, there were far worse ways than going while being cradled between his sister and the man he loved.

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“What… what if we don’t reach him in time?” Sean whispered, as the Blackbird hurtled toward the bunker that Jean had pinpointed as Charles’ location.

“He’s the Professor,” Armando assured, “He’ll be okay. He will. He has to be.”

“And if he’s not,” Alex added darkly, his power bubbling beneath his skin, “Everyone on Stryker’s payroll is going to pay for it.”

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He wasn’t going to be able to hold on much longer. There really was no denying it; he was fading and fading fast. And if he was going to die, then there was something that Charles simply had to tell Erik.

Because Erik and Raven would survive this ordeal; Charles was utterly confident that his X-Men would be able to get them out. Charles was also sure that his family would take the truth about the Quad’s parentage to their graves before they breathed a word about it to either of them.

Erik would use Charles’ death as an excuse to wage a devastating war against humanity, and perhaps knowing that he was a father wouldn’t temper him in the slightest, maybe it would. Either way, Charles couldn’t leave the world without telling Erik the truth. Erik deserved to know that he wasn’t alone; Charles had promised him once, in the water, that he would never be alone. It was time for Charles to keep that promise.

Erik did not dare speak the words aloud, not when there was every chance that Stryker or Trask, who no doubt were basking in the glory of Charles’ slow death, would overhear them. So, with the last vestiges of his energy, Charles pushed a chunk of precious information into both Erik and Raven’s minds.

He didn’t get to witness their reactions.

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Erik knew that Charles was fading and, at this point, he could only pray to a God he no longer believed in that the X-Men managed to find them soon. That the healing Mutant reached Charles in time, because if he didn’t… Erik would make it his mission to slaughter every single human he could get his hands on until either they had all been obliterated or he was.

When Erik felt Charles projecting something into his mind, he initially was fully prepared to berate him for daring to give up, for trying to say goodbye. But what he received from Charles was so far from what he had expected that it shocked him into silence.

“I’ve finished running the tests, Professor,” Hank told Charles, “I know why you’ve been getting sick. You’re… you’re pregnant.”

“I’ve run the tests multiple times, Professor,” Hank said, “The results are conclusive. You’re pregnant.”


“Normal men can’t, but you can,” Hank told him, “As far as I’ve been able to tell, you have a secondary mutation. A rather remarkable secondary mutation.”

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“I’m sorry to have to ask, Professor, but did you and Erik…”

“Yes,” Charles whispered.

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Plastered all over the news were details regarding the deaths of over three dozen naval officers. Charles hadn’t needed Moira’s confirmation to know that each of them had served on one of the American battleships in Cuba.

Every single one of them had been killed by thick metal spears that had no business being anywhere near them.

Charles made a decision that nearly rent his soul in two that evening.

To keep him or him safe from the fallout of their father’s warmongering, Erik could never learn about the existence of their child.

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Charles lay in bed, reading aloud from ‘The cat in the Hat’ and rubbing small circles onto his swollen belly.

“‘We can have lots of great fun if you wish, with a game I like to call up, up, up with the fish.’ Goodness, I do hope none of you ever try that.”

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“You are all so very beautiful,” Charles whispered, “Damn you, Erik. You should be here. I wish you were here.”

Charles murmured prayer did nothing to change the reality of the situation. Erik had chosen warmongering, over peace with the man that loved him desperately, and as long as that remained the case, Erik would be a threat, no matter how inadvertently, to their children.

“I can’t give you his name,” Charles told his newborns with a shaky voice, “So mine is going to have to do. Welcome to the world, Oliver, Aurora, Casper, and Melody Xavier.”

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Oliver, a telepath. The smell of baby shampoo and the feel of plush toys.

‘Sissy.’
Aurora, an empath. Clinging to Charles whenever he was upset.

‘No.’

Casper, a pyrokinetic. Setting his ice cream on fire.

‘Bun-bun.’

Melody, a cryokinetic. Freezing her cot.

‘Dada.’

Erik was a father, alarms were blaring, and Charles was unconscious, barely breathing. The anger that had blossomed in Erik’s chest dissipated as quickly as it had risen, because Charles wasn’t waking up.

“Charles!” Raven was screaming, “Don’t you dare! Wake up, Charles! Oh God, wake up!”

“Schatz,” Erik heard himself begging, “Please, come back!”

And then the door to their cell blasted open.

“Raven?” that was Hank’s voice and he sounded surprised, but it didn’t matter, because Charles was leaving.

“He won’t wake up!” Raven choked out.

And then Erik was being pulled away from Charles by two pairs of strong arms. Erik bucked wildly, trying to get out of their hold.

“Calm down, Erik!” came Alex’s voice on Erik’s left, “Adam’s going to heal him, just calm down!”

“What the hell is he saying?” Sean asked as a white light began to pour from the healing Mutant’s hands and into Charles.

“Something in German,” Armando answered, from Erik’s right side.

Across the cell, Hank was holding Raven, whispering reassurances to her as Charles’ breathing began to deepen and even out. The bruises on his body began to fade away and the wounds Trask had inflicted upon him started to knit themselves closed.

Adam stepped back from Charles after an indeterminable amount of time had passed, “He’s going to be okay.”

Alex and Darwin released Erik, and he moved immediately to Charles, pulling the telepath close.

“He’ll be sore for a week or two,” Adam continued, “And he’ll definitely need to stay on bed rest for a few days, but he’ll be fine.”
“They cut him open,” Raven revealed, tears still slipping down her cheeks, “They… they…”

“They collected samples from him,” Erik managed to get out in English, “Everything from his hair to a piece of his heart. Those samples need to be destroyed, if possible.”

One of the Mutants, the Wolverine, growled fiercely, unsheathing his claws, “That’s definitely possible, Bub. Get Chuck to the Blackbird; I’ll be along in a few minutes.”

The man stalked out of the room and Darwin spoke up, “I’d better follow him. He’s liable to do far more than just destroy samples right now.”

And then Darwin was gone too.

Erik stood, Charles cradled securely in his arms.

“What do you need help?” Sean questioned.

Erik shook his head, “I’ve got him.”

“Oh, okay,” Sean accepted that with an ease that surprised Erik, given the fact that they were supposed to be enemies, “Then let’s get outta here.”

Erik followed Sean, aware that Hank and Raven were hot on his heels, Alex and the healer, Adam, bringing up the rear. They passed soldier after soldier prone on the bunker’s floors on their way back to the jet; they were still breathing and Erik was only slightly tempted to remedy that. Getting Charles to safety was far more important than satisfying any desire for revenge.

Moira, who was rather obviously pregnant, was waiting for them inside the Blackbird. Erik expected hostility from her, but she just took in the sight of him holding Charles and demanded, “Is he alright?”

“He will be,” Adam replied, bending down to kiss her gently.

Well, that was certainly a development that Erik had been unaware of.

“Where are Logan and Mando?” Moira inquired.

‘Logan’ had to be the metal-clawed Mutant’s name.

“Destroying biological evidence,” Alex answered.

Moira frowned, “What kind of biological evidence?”

“The unpleasant kind,” Logan interjected in a gruff tone as he and Darwin entered the plane, “We got everything, but Stryker and Trask have apparently vanished.”

“There’s a second bunker somewhere else,” Darwin revealed, “The rest of the Brotherhood are being held there. The soldier that we… interrogated didn’t know where it actually is.”

With a jolt Erik realized that he had managed to forget all about the rest of his people. Seeing Charles nearly die had driven all thoughts of them from his mind.

“We have no way of locating them right now and we need to get the Professor home,” Alex decided, “Moira, let’s get the Blackbird into the air.”

Moira and Adam shifted into the cockpit, strapping themselves into the pilot and copilot’s seats,
respectively.

“Charles is going to insist on trying to find them with Cerebro,” Darwin pointed out.

“If the Professor tries to do anything of the kind before Adam and I give him the all-clear,” Hank muttered as he situated himself and Raven into adjoining seats, “I’ll dismantle Cerebro for a year, just see if I don’t.”

Logan spoke up then, “Magneto and Mystique are coming with us?”

No one answered him for a long moment.

“I’m not leaving Charles,” Erik declared, his tone daring them to object.

Alex took that dare, “Why not? You left him before.”

“He didn’t nearly die before,” Erik snapped.

And Alex blew up, “Are you fucking kidding me? You put a bullet in his back, Erik! The only reason he can walk is because of Hank’s quick actions! You left us stranded on a beach, surrounded by men who had just tried to blow us to kingdom come! We only got out of there because the Professor, despite all of the pain he was in, managed to manipulate those men’s minds, something that put him in a coma for an entire fucking week, you dick! You nearly killed him and the-”

“Alex!” Sean cut the other off harshly.

“And the babies he was carrying,” Erik finished, making every single one of Charles’ X-Men freeze.

Erik had not only nearly killed the man he loved, but he’d almost killed their babies too. Was it any wonder then, that Charles had decided not to tell him about them? That he’d been afraid that Erik would hurt them, inadvertently or otherwise?

That he’d chosen to tell Erik now, that Charles was willing to proclaim that he still loved Erik, that was remarkable. The depths of Charles Xavier’s forgiveness were unfathomable and Erik had never felt more unworthy of them.

“How…” Sean trailed off.

“Charles told us,” Raven explained quietly, her gaze fixed on her brother still, “When he thought that he was going to… he told us.”

“If we let you return to Westchester with us,” Alex warned, “And you break his heart again, I will kill you, Erik.”

Erik believed him.

“After I tear off you balls,” Moira cheerfully added from the front.

The backup bunker was nowhere near as sophisticated at the primary bunker had been. Unfortunately, thanks to the meddlesome X-Men, the backup bunker would have to suffice.

“You underestimated the Mutants,” Trask berated Stryker, “I’ve warned you repeatedly not to do that.”
“We’ve had a minor setback,” Stryker countered, “Besides, there’s no way Xavier survived. The X-Men will flounder without their leader.”

“Or become more dangerous than ever,” Trask pointed out, “Mutants are a threat to our way of life. It’s time you stop focusing on abstract perils and start focusing on the one that is growing in size with every passing day. These creatures are spawning at an exponential rate and we need to put a stop to it.”

“Not until the earth is safe,” Stryker asserted.

“There won’t be an earth to keep safe if we don’t eradicate the Mutant menace, Stryker.”

“Without Mutants we don’t stand a chance in stopping what’s out there, what’s coming for us,” Stryker snapped, “We’re going to continue to focus on creating a Mutant army, and that’s the end of it, Trask.”

Trask sighed, “Alright, you are the boss, after all.”

“Start with the demon,” Stryker instructed.

“What about the non-Mutant? Xavier’s stepbrother?” Trask asked.

“Keep him on ice for now,” Stryker decided, “I want to know more about this temple in Korea that hands out powers like they’re dime-store candy.”

Charles woke up, which was a surprise in itself since the last thing he remembered was dying. What was even more surprising was that he appeared to be safe and sound in his bedroom, and that his entire household seemed to be sleeping in said bedroom. His children were piled in his bed, Kitty’s arm was thrown over his chest, which wasn’t that uncommon, as getting them to sleep in their own beds was still an ordeal on most nights, and his X-Men were all resting on pallets on his floor, which most decidedly was unusual.

And, by God, that was Raven curled up by Hank’s side. His sister had come home; she was safe.

“Charles,” Erik’s soft voice made Charles turn his head to the right, where the man he loved was sitting. In one of Charles’ chairs. In Charles’ room. By Charles’ side.

“Erik?” Charles’ voice was quiet and rough.

Erik reached out and stroked Charles’ face tenderly, “Go back to sleep, Schatz. Everything is okay now.”

“Stay?” Charles murmured, feeling his body and mind being called back to slumber already.

“I’m not going anywhere,” Erik promised, “We have far too much to talk about. But that can wait until morning. Rest, Schatz, I’ll be right here.”

Chapter End Notes

Only one more chapter to go!
Chapter Nine

Something was poking him. Repeatedly. In the face.

Charles groaned and forced himself to open his eyes.

Casper was sitting astride his chest, tapping his right pointer finger against Charles’ cheeks, forehead, and nose, while humming a tune that Charles didn’t recognize. It took a moment for Casper to realize that Charles had, in fact, woken up and then he cried out in pure delight, “Daddy!”

And then Charles found himself at the bottom of a pile of children, all who sought emotional consolation for his sudden absence. Charles really had screwed up, hadn’t he, to have sparked such strong alarm in his little ones.

“It’s okay, my darlings,” Charles promised, projecting wave after soothing wave of calm and love toward them, “Daddy’s not going anywhere.”

The tense worry and fear that Charles could sense only dulled partially as he held his children, smothering them with kisses and hugs one by one, making the Quad giggle as he blew raspberries on their stomachs, and that was because everyone else in the mansion, including Erik and Raven, (who hadn’t been a fever-dream, after all), was still fretting over his state. A quick scan of Adam’s mind told Charles that he had been unconscious for nearly forty-eight straight hours and that the doctor had begun to fear that Charles had slipped into a coma when no one and nothing had been able to wake him.

‘I’m awake and perfectly fine,’ Charles sent to them all, flinching slightly at the slight headache actively using his powers caused.

“Daddy?” Ororo worried.

“Just a minor headache, love,” Charles assured her, relaxing slightly as the worry vanished, replaced by a medley of relief, frustration, joy, irritation, and thankfulness.

“Here, Daddy,” Bobby lifted his hand to Charles’ forehead and frost spread across it in a thin layer, easing the dull throb with remarkable speed.

“Thank you, Bobby,” Charles said gratefully, and Bobby’s ice had been applied just in time, because Charles was suddenly barraged by a number of loud, stern thoughts from numerous members of his family.

‘We are going to have a conversation about you running off on your own to meet your nut-job stepbrother, Chuck,’ Logan informed him, ‘Especially after you made everyone else promise to not leave by themselves.’

‘I’m designing a tracker meant to appear to be nothing more than an ordinary red blood cell and I’m going to inject it into you in your sleep,’ Hank threatened.

‘You know,’ Moira told him, her mental voice full of exasperation that was a touch less fond than it normally was, ‘You’re remarkably idiotic for someone with a genius-level intellect, Charles. Someone with four Ph.D.’s should know better than to sneak out of the house when he knows that he’s being hunted by a man like Stryker.’
‘If your intention was to ensure that we’d never give you another moment’s peace,’ Alex projected, ‘Congrats, you’ve succeeded, Professor.’

‘Chloë’s trying to make you soup,’ Sean revealed in a mournful tone, which, more than anything else, prompted a second, larger wince from Charles.

“What’s wrong?” Jean demanded.

“Nothing, love,” Charles mollified, “Daddy’s just a bit sore all over, that’s all.”

“They hurt you,” Jean thought, ‘I saw that man hurting you.’

‘Yes,’ Charles was forced to admit, ‘But I will heal, Jeanie. I’m very proud of you, by the way, even if using Cerebro was a foolhardy thing to do.’

‘You mean like leaving the house by yourself?’ Jean questioned with faux innocence.

‘Yes, alright, I see your point, darling.’

“Daddy,” Oliver spoke up, wearing as deep a frown as a three year-old could muster, “You went bye-bye. In here too.”

Charles carefully took his son’s hand, which was touching his head, into one of Charles’ own, “I am so, so sorry for that, Oliver. Daddy is never going to let that happen again.”

“He certainly is not,” Erik’s voice rang out from the doorway, “Pancakes and bacon are waiting downstairs, little ones.”

“But, Vati,” Kitty protested, making Charles blink, “We want to stay with Daddy.”

“Breakfast is the most important meal of the day,” Erik said, a twinkle in his eye that belayed the solemnity in his tone, “So scoot.”

The children obeyed, giggling and darting back to Charles several times each to smack kisses on his face.

“I’m not little,” Peter informed Erik seriously.

“You’re littler than me and your daddy,” Erik pointed out, ruffling Peter’s shaggy, silver hair, “You need a haircut, Liebling.”

Peter’s eyes widened in horror and he covered his hair protectively with his hands, “No!”

And then he was gone, slamming the bedroom door closed behind him.

Charles’ mirth faded quickly and he forced himself to focus all of his attention on Erik, nervousness thrumming through his veins. He was absolutely sure that Erik was about to start yelling at him at any moment; positive that the screaming would lead to Erik walking away for a second time. Instead, Erik crawled on top of him, careful to keep his full weight from settling on Charles, and kissed him as if the world were about to come to an end.

“Mein gott, Charles,” Erik gasped out a few minutes, or hours, Charles was a bit fuzzy about time frames at that moment, “I thought…”

“Erik,” Charles moaned in response, a bit helplessly, pulling Erik’s mouth back to his own.
Sex with Erik had always, always been amazing; so amazing, in fact, that Charles hadn’t been able to get enough of it Pre-Cuba, had been absolutely convinced that Erik had utterly ruined him for any other hypothetical lovers. But this, this was so much more than that. This passion was fueled, not by lust and the first stirrings of something more potent, but by giddy relief, and heated desperation, and the pure, unadulterated love. This was how it should have been between them all along.

The aftermath looked like this: Charles and Erik twisted up in the cotton sheets, limbs entangled, clinging to one another, fully and utterly sated. A part of Charles would have been content to stay cradled in Erik’s arms, basking in the afterglow, forever, would have liked to ignore that there was anything wrong with the relationship they had. But there were things that had to be discussed between the two of them, or, Charles knew, even the memories of moments like this would become tainted by sour thoughts and feelings.

“So, Vati?” Charles inquired mildly, absentmindedly tracing whorls on Erik’s chest.

“Jean took one look at me and asked, ‘Vati, where have you been?’,” Erik revealed, the fingers of one hand playing with Charles’ hair, “In an English accent that’s probably even more adorable than yours.”

“My accent is not adorable, Erik,” Charles protested, aware that he sounded a bit like Peter had earlier.

“Yes, it is,” Erik disagreed, “Then she asked me if I was staying this time.”

“Are you?” the question slipped out before Charles could stop it. He had meant to work up to that particular line of inquiry.

“That-” Erik started only to cut himself off as the bedroom door opened without warning, a blue figure slipping inside the room, letting the door swing closed behind her.

“Raven!” Charles squawked, scrambling for the sheets to cover himself and Erik.

Raven snorted in amusement, although Charles could see the darker blue spots on her cheeks, how it looked when she blushed in her normal form, “The two of you certainly wasted no time.”

“Did you need something, Mystique?” Erik asked pointedly.

“Yes, actually,” Raven returned, gathering herself, “I need my brother to promise me that he’ll stop trying to put his life on the line for others.”

“How much faith, exactly, do you have in convincing me to agree to something like that?” Charles wondered.

“None, really,” Raven smiled ruefully, “But it was worth a shot anyway. You’re a moron, Charles.”

“Apparently numerous people in this house share that opinion, sister dear,” Charles told her.

“Then I suppose it has to be true,” Raven replied and then added, with forced casualness, “I guess I’ll have to stay then, to ensure that your pathological need to save the world doesn’t get you killed.”

“I’ve been reliably informed that that’s a full-time job,” Charles warned, smiling widely.

“The person who told you that must be wise beyond wise, mustn’t she?” Raven teased, coming over to press a kiss to Charles’ forehead. She wrinkled her nose a moment later, “You need a shower.”
“I’ll get right on that,” Charles assured her.

“By the way,” Raven asked, “Why is my old room full of presents?”

“You missed several birthdays and Christmases while you were away,” Charles explained.

“There are at least fifty presents from you,” Raven stated, one ginger eyebrow arched.

“Well… you also missed a couple Halloweens… and Easters… and Valentine’s Days…and-”

Raven laughed fondly, “You’re such a sap, Charles. Do you think was right, Stryker, about… the aliens?”

“I think that he is completely convinced that he’s right. I also think that it would be ridiculously arrogant for us to assume that, in all the infinite cosmos, our planet is the only one with life,” Charles answered.

“Because arrogance is such a foreign concept for you,” Erik muttered.

Raven snorted again, “I suppose we’ll just have to wait and see. Seriously, though, Charles, take a bath; you reek.”

And then she danced back out into the hall and a missing piece of Charles’ heart slotted back into place.

“She’s right, you know,” Erik commented once they were alone again.

“You need a shower too,” Charles told him.

“I meant about you being an idiot,” Erik clarified for him, “How the hell could you have possibly believed that meeting Cain by yourself was a good idea?”

“I’ll admit it wasn’t one of my brightest,” Charles acknowledged, “He asked for my help and…”

“Not everyone is deserving of your help, Charles,” Erik said firmly, darkly.

“Quit sounding like you think I should count you in that number, Erik Lehnsherr,” Charles chastised.

“I nearly killed you and our children.”

“What happened in Cuba was an accident, Erik!” Charles exclaimed, hating, despising the defeat he heard in Erik’s voice, “I forgave you for it a long time ago, darling.”

“You shouldn’t have!” Erik proclaimed, loudly, “I don’t deserve-”

“Why don’t you let me decide whether or not you deserve to be forgiven for what happened on the beach,” Charles insisted, “Seeing as how it happened to me, not you, or anyone else!”

“Charles-”

“I hid our children from you,” Charles interrupted, “I may have had excellent reasons for doing so, but I still did it. I still kept children that I knew you desperately wanted from you. Can you forgive me for that?”

“Yes,” Erik didn’t even hesitate, “I understand why you did it, Charles. Their safety has to come first, always.”
“Then I can forgive you for making a poor decision during a highly stressful situation that had emotionally compromised you from the start,” Charles said.

“I love you,” Erik told him, his voice full of wonder, “I have done nothing in my life to deserve you, Schatz, but I’m going to be selfish and keep you anyway.”

“Does… does that mean you’re going to stay?” Charles asked, hope bubbling to the surface.

“If you’ll have me,” Erik replied, a promise.

Charles kissed him again, “Always, Erik.”

Raven almost immediately ran into Alex and Darwin after exiting her brother’s room.

“Raven,” Darwin greeted with a nod, “Is the Professor-”

“You don’t want to go in there,” Raven told them, “Trust me.”

“The Professor is projecting an awful amount of happiness right now,” Alex stated, phrasing it like it was a question.

“He and Erik are… reconciling,” Raven explained, “Repeatedly.”

Alex cringed, “Okay, we really, really did not need to know that. It’s like having to imagine your parents having make-up sex. Is he always going to project feel-good vibes when…”

“Just be grateful he’s gained more control over his abilities since his university days,” Raven said wryly, “I once got a mental eyeful that I could have cheerfully lived forever without.”

“We’ll bring the Professor breakfast later,” Darwin decided, “It’s probably best that he stays in bed for a bit anyway.”

“Wise decision,” Raven drawled.

“Have you made one?” Alex asked, “Are you staying?”

“And if I am?” Raven wondered.

“Then there’s a scientist downstairs who could use some cheering up,” Alex said.

“I don’t think he wants to see me,” Raven replied, flashing them a weak smile, “He’s been avoiding me like the plague since yesterday morning.”

“He’s trying to distance himself,” Darwin explained, more gently than Raven probably deserved, “He thinks it’ll hurt less that way if you leave again.”

“I’m not leaving,” Raven asserted.

“Then go tell him that,” Darwin suggested, “Not all of the presents were from Charles, after all.”

Raven nodded and turned to head downstairs, only to pause when Alex called out, “Raven?”

Raven looked at him.

“Welcome home.”
Her smile was real this time and it stayed in place until she reached the stairs that led down to Hank’s labs. After spending the entirety of twenty minutes psyching herself up, Raven finally made her way down them, and then hesitated in the doorway after spotting Hank, “I like what you’ve done with the place.”

“Raven,” Hank looked up from the microscope he was bent over and straightened.

“Can I come in?” Raven asked.

“Be my guest,” Hank replied, “How are you feeling?”

“Better,” Raven answered, “Better than I have in a long, long time, actually. Relived that Charles is awake; he really scared me this time.”

“He scared all of us,” Hank agreed.

“Was… was he that bad, after Cuba, was he that bad?” Raven needed to know; the thought had been plaguing her for days now.

“He certainly wasn’t in good shape,” Hank replied, “But, no, it wasn’t that bad. Most of his organs didn’t have to be regrown for one thing. He was comatose for a week, though.”

“I shouldn’t have left him,” Raven confessed, “If I hadn’t, maybe none of this would have happened.”

“You can’t know that,” Hank argued, “And you aren’t to blame, Raven.”

“I hated, Sting,” Raven disclosed, “She nearly killed you; I wanted to rip her apart for that. But I never imagined that she was capable of turning us over to Stryker. I should have seen it; she was constantly trying to sow discord, trying to pit Emma and me against each other. We just thought she was a nuisance. We were so blind. And Charles paid for it.”

“Charles is going to be okay,” Hank promised her, “Mentally and physically, he’s almost healed already.”

“And emotionally?” Raven questioned, “He was cut open, Hank, every part of his body was violated by a monster. And he felt every second of it.”

“I’m not going to tell you that it will be easy,” Hank said, “Because that would be little more than a pretty lie, but he will be okay. He’ll have his X-Men and his children beside him to get him through this.”

“And me,” Raven announced.

Hank blinked rapidly, “You’re staying?”

“Yes,” Raven confirmed, “I left because I was looking to be a part of something great, but what I failed to see then, was that I was already a part of something, something better than great, something good. I won’t make that mistake again.”

“What about the Brotherhood?” Hank inquired carefully, and Raven found herself wishing that it wasn’t her imagination that had her hearing hope in his words.

“I don’t know,” Raven frowned as she considered that, “We’ll free them from Stryker and Trask once Charles is healed enough to use Cerebro… and then, I guess it will up to them. I know my
brother well enough to know that Charles will offer them sanctuary here for as long as they want it; they’ll have choose whether or not they want to stay.”

“What about Erik?” Hank asked, the first hints of a smile beginning to creep up on his face.

“It would take the god-damned apocalypse to get Erik to willingly part from Charles again,” Raven determined, “And even then, I wouldn’t bet on it happening.”

Hank beamed, “Good… I’m glad.”

“So am I,” Raven said.

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“For the record,” Alex crossed his arms across his chest, his tone brimming with blatant irritation, “I think that this is a fucking terrible idea.”

“Noted,” Hank replied, “At length. He’s fully recovered mentally.”

“He can barely walk!” Alex protested.

“Alex,” Charles spoke up from where he was leaning heavily against Erik, “I appreciate your concern, darling, I really do, but if we wait until I’m fully healed to do this, there might not be any members of the Brotherhood left to find. We don’t have the time to waste and both Adam and Hank have approved of me using Cerebro for a brief period of time.”

“Twenty minutes,” Hank interjected, “And then I’m shutting it back down, Professor, whether you’ve located Stryker’s second bunker or not.”

“You said I was fully recovered mentally,” Charles pointed out.

“Don’t push your luck, Bub,” Logan commented gruffly as Hank shot Charles a look that dared Charles to do just that.

“Twenty minutes sounds great,” Charles acquiesced gracefully.

Charles let go of Erik to pick up Cerebro’s helmet, swaying slightly. Erik immediately steadied him and then kept his hands firmly planted on Charles’ hips, “Easy, Schatz.”

“I think I should send Trask a fruit basket to thank him for being so attentive in his care,” Charles muttered.

“As long as the apples are poisoned,” Erik shrugged, allowing the levity, knowing that Charles needed it.

“Why not poison all the fruit?” Sean suggested, “And line the basket with explosives?”

Charles huffed out a laugh, “Stop giving my students ideas, Erik.”

“I’m hardly going to squash their creativity, Charles.”

Charles rolled his eyes and situated the helmet on his head, “Fire her up, Hank.”

Hank complied, and the spherical room lit up. As it always did, the rush of so many minds touching his own made Charles weak in the knees. Instead of gripping onto the interface this time, however, Charles had Erik to keep his standing.
Finding the bunker was almost laughably easy; Emma’s mind was like a beacon, even muted as it was by her suppression collar, and it took him less than five minutes to latch onto it. Charles resisted the urge to rub at his neck; the collar had been gone long before he’s woken up, but he could still feel its weight.

‘Emma,’ Charles projected.

‘Xavier,’ Emma sounded broken, and it only took a moment to discern why.

Azazel and Janos were dead, killed by Trask, and the madman was working over Toad at that very moment. Emma hadn’t loved them, at least not in the way an ordinary person would define love, but they’d been a constant in her turbulent life, the closest she had ever had to family.

‘We’re coming for you,’ Charles promised, ‘Just hang on.’

Charles turned to Alex, “Prep the Blackbird; Emma’s in Vermont.”

“Just Emma?” Sean inquired in confusion, “Where are the others?”

“Dead, or just about, I’m afraid,” Charles revealed.

Anger rippled through Erik and Raven, seeping into Charles’ mind.

‘Magneto and Mystique?’ Emma asked, having felt the rage, with just the slightest amount of hope.

‘Safe,’ Charles assured.

‘Do they know about Sting?’ Emma questioned.

‘Yes,’ Charles confirmed.

‘I’m going to gut that little bitch,’ Emma vowed.

‘Evidently, there’s a line to do that,’ Charles told her.

‘We can take turns,’ Emma announced.

Erik ripped the door off of Emma’s cell; the destruction placating a small part of his fury, “Are you hurt?”

“No,” Emma replied, relaxing when Erik used his powers to divest her of the hideous collar around her neck. The collar fell to pieces and then the metal in it crumbled into dust.

“Let’s go,” Erik led her through the maze of hallways and out of the bunker, meeting most of the X-Men at the jet.

“We found the others,” Hank told them in a grim tone, “Alex destroyed their bodies, and Trask’s operation room.”

“Where are Wolverine and Banshee?” Armando asked.

“We’re here!” Sean called out, as the two raced over.

“Where the hell have you two been?” Alex demanded.
Logan shared a satisfied grin with Sean before answering, “Ruining Stryker’s year.”

“IT’s gone,” Trask snarled, standing in the wreckage of what had been his most valued collection, slivers of glass crunching beneath his boots, valuable serums mixed together on the floor. What hadn’t been shattered had been stripped apart in a rage, “All of it! All of our samples, our research, they took or destroyed everything!”

“We’ll have to step up operations,” Stryker replied, “We still have a handful of Mutants under our control.”

“We should kill them while we still have the chance,” Trask snapped, “Before the X-Men manage to take them away from us too.”

“Absolutely not, we need them, now more than ever,” Stryker disagreed, “Pack up what you can salvage. We’re moving our operations to Thailand.”

“What part of ‘everything was destroyed’ was too complicated for you?” Trask demanded, “The Mutants are too dangerous; they need to be eradicated!”

“They’re our only hope!” Stryker shouted, “Enough arguing, Bolivar. Do as I say and get ready to move out.”

“I won’t be listening to you,” Trask said slowly, “Not anymore.”

Without warning, he plunged a claw crafted out of adamantium into Stryker’s gut, ripping it back out in another swift motion. Stryker went down immediately, clutching his stomach, his eyes wide with shock.

He managed to gasp out, through the pain he had to be in, “Trask, why-”

Trask slashed the claw across Stryker’s throat, tearing it open, “Because the human race would be doomed if I were to continue to follow you. It’s unfortunate, really; you were a good friend, Stryker, the best I’ve ever had. Don’t worry, I’ll ensure our people survive.”

The light in Stryker’s eyes faded away a few seconds later, his chest stilling. Trask tucked the claw back into the inside pocket of his lab coat and then knelt in the blood that had begun to pool around the dead man, ensuring that said coat was saturated in it. He stayed there, for at least a half hour, until the back-up Stryker had called in stormed the bunker.

Because God loved him, it was Stryker’s son, Will, that found Trask desperately trying to “stop” the bleeding.

“What…” Will rushed over, sinking to his knees beside Trask, “Dad!”

“It’s too late,” Trask forced his voice to break, “I tried to save him.”

“What happened?” Will questioned, devastated, “Who did this?”


“Wolverine?” Will asked, something dark growing in his tone. Trask reveled in it; perhaps he could save Will like he couldn’t save his father.

“One of the X-Men,” Trask explained, “I warned your father that we needed to take them out; I told
him that all Mutants were dangerous, but he was so insistent that we could work with them. He had such faith in them... and look what those monsters have done to repay that faith. They all need to be destroyed.”

“Yes,” Will agreed, his eyes hardening, “You’re absolutely right, Doctor, they do. They will all pay for this.”

“Will?” Ramona entered the room, “Where’s... oh my God, Uncle!”

The Mutant ran to her fallen leader, pulling his head into her lap, frantically searching for a pulse that was long gone.

“All of them,” Trask gave Will a significant look.

Will nodded, snapping open the holster on his hip, pulling out his gun, aiming, and firing it in one fluid motion. Ramona, the Mutant, fell backwards, a bullet buried in her brain.

“Good job, son,” Trask praised, “You’ve helped protect our species from the greatest threat of all... evolution.”

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“What do you mean you’re staying here?” Emma demanded, “What about all of our plans? The Brotherhood?”

“There’s nothing left of the Brotherhood,” Erik pointed out.

“And our last ‘plan’ ended with an entire bus full of schoolchildren dead,” Raven reminded, “Their parents couldn’t even bury them.”

“That was Sting’s fault, not ours,” Emma insisted. “The humans aren’t going to stop trying to come after us just because you chose to hide behind a force field.”

“I know,” Erik agreed, “But from now on, Raven and I will be facing those individuals with our family by our sides and at our backs. You’re more than welcome to be a part of that family, Emma.”

“I don’t think so,” Emma denied the offer immediately, “I have no desire to play ‘house’, Magneto.”

“As you wish,” Erik accepted.

“Where will you go?” Raven asked.

“For now, Europe,” Emma decided, “I’ve always been partial to France.”

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Emma departed without bothering with any kind of farewells; she wasn’t a ‘goodbye’ type of person, Charles knew.

Erik joined him on in the indoor pool deck a few minutes after Emma’s mind had left the grounds, having seen her through the shield. Charles was reclining in a lounge chair, monitoring their children and Ally and Kyle ice-skate on the frozen water. Casper was the only one not enjoying the activity, he was bundled up in a thick blanket in Charles’ lap.

“It’s the middle of June,” Erik stated, frowning at the ice and falling snow, bemused.
“Bobby wanted to teach the Quad and Kyle how to skate,” Charles explained, “So he froze the pool. I’m fairly certain that Melody is the reason that it’s snowing though.”

Erik looked suitably impressed and then turned to Casper, “Why aren’t you skating with your brothers and sisters, little one?”

Casper gave the ice a dark look, “Too cold, Vati.”

On the pool, Aurora wobbled dangerously. Jean reached out with her telekinesis to steady her before her younger sister could fall. Peter zipped around most of the others while Ally and Ororo floated around, skating in the air.

“I’m sorry, Liebling,” Erik consoled, using his powers to levitate the spare change in Charles’ pocket into the air before their son. As Casper watched curiously, the coins began to morph into a tiny silver dragon with copper wings. Casper laughed in delight and Erik held out the toy to his son, “Here you go.”

Casper took it, not with his hands, but with his mind, getting the dragon to dive and loop through the air with an ease that was almost startling. The dragon beat its wings and even roared silently.

Erik’s eyes widened comically, “Charles, that’s not me.”

“So I see,” Charles replied, in awe of their son, “He apparently has your powers too, love.”

“Did you know?”

“I had no idea,” Charles answered, drawing Casper close enough that he could kiss his cheek, “That’s marvelous, darling.”

The children were laughing, the adults were at peace, and Erik was by his side. Charles’ family was whole and safe and strong. It wasn’t perfect, but nothing real ever was.

“Absolutely marvelous.”

{THE END}

End Notes

Feel free to ask questions, I may or may not answer them depending on whether doing so will spoil my plot, and to leave constructive comments. Please do not point out errors in my spelling or grammar or leave negative feedback. I am writing this for fun and for my own enjoyment above all else. I will delete any comments that I don’t like. If this upsets you, then that’s really just too fucking bad.

Holy shit, I actually finished it, :)”

Thanks to everyone who stuck by me from start to finish, and thanks for all the lovely comments that kept me inspired!
Book Two of 'Homo Mutandis Superior' will show up at the beginning of September, for anyone interested in a sequel. I'll be participating in Keira Marco's Little Black Dress Challenge in July on Rough Trade, so my attention will be divided for a bit.

Thanks again!

Works inspired by this one:

[Art For Generation X By SOABA by WishfulDream](#)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!