Summary

Summary: When Rogue is rescued from the lab, she begins to wonder if she is a means to an end and nothing more. Takes place within the events of the Rogue Cut of DOFP, and what comes after.

Notes

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**a means to an end**

noun:

1. a thing that is not valued or important in itself but is useful in achieving an aim.
Battery

battery

noun: bat-tery ˈba-tər-ē

1. a container used as a source of power; a means to store energy.

2. an offensive touching or use of force on a person without the person's consent

I never saw it coming.

The night the mansion was attacked, there was no moon. They planned it that way, of course; when the power was cut, everything went pitch black. We couldn't even see our hands in front of our faces.

Fumbling through the dark, hearing only the sound of our own breathing, we didn't know whether to panic or not. That was before the screaming began.

Shattered glass, swift footsteps, dart guns fired; the sickening sound of bodies dropping to the floor. Chaos and terror, so thick in the air you could choke on it. It was like the first time the mansion was attacked, years ago, only it wasn't; it was infinitely worse. Last time they didn't have the sentinels. Last time we had Logan.

A few made it out and lived to tell about it, but many were not so lucky. Anyone who tried to cross the lawn was gunned down by the sentinels, no warning and no attempt to capture.

I felt my way along the hallway, searching for that secret passage that we escaped through last time. But it was too dark, and it was too late for that.

Where is Bobby? I hope he makes it out alive. I wish Logan was here. Those were my last thoughts as I pulled the dart from my neck and the floor rose to meet me.

I think of them now as I lay here on the cold metal slab, looking up at masked faces and harsh lights. I'm scared. I can feel the anesthetic moving through my veins, and I don't know which is worse, to stay awake and feel everything, or sleep and suffer the after effects later, knowing when you wake up that horrible things have been done to you.

The very first time they cut me, I didn't make a sound. Skin samples they took. It hurt so bad, the scalpel slicing into my pale, baby-soft skin. But I was proud of myself, not giving the bastards the satisfaction of hearing me cry out.

I only realized later on that it didn't matter one way or another; the doctors don't feel remorse or take delight in your pain down here. There is a disgusting kind of fascination, yet cold neutrality towards mutants that makes you feel like you're not even human; you are merely a subject of science. If they anesthetize you, it's not for your sake, as if to spare you the pain or anything. It's merely a matter of convenience for them. They might be performing a procedure that requires accuracy, for example, and the restraints aren't enough to keep you from squirming. Rumor has it, though, that some of them will put you under if the screaming gets too noisy; but again, it all comes down to convenience for
The anesthetic is taking effect; my thoughts are all starting to swirl together. *I'm scared. I hope Bobby is alive. I wish Logan was here.*

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The walls are white. The bed is white. My clothes, their clothes, everything, white. No, not everything. Sometimes there are shades of blue and grey; powder blue, slate blue, steel blue...cyan, silver, pewter, ash...

I've become a connoisseur of colors, especially blue and grey. Even white has a color cast if you look for it. When you never get to see anything else, you learn to appreciate every nuance, every subtle tone and gradation. Fifty Shades of Grey has got nothing on me.

Blood red, now there's a treat. Maybe I'll get to see that today, if I can stay conscious. God, listen to me. I think I'm starting to lose my mind.

They'll be coming for me soon; I can tell because I smell like antiseptic.

There are two warning signs in this place that tell you it's going to be a very bad day for you. One, is when you're stripped down, thrown into a shower stall and hosed down with an antiseptic solution. That usually means one thing: you're going to the operating room, and you're going to get cut. If you're lucky, they'll give you anesthetic and knock you out once you're on the slab; if you're not, well...that's what the restraints are for.

The other time you know it's going to be a bad day is when your meal comes with a "special brownie", as we like to call it down here. We all know what it really is; they like to play it off like it's some kind of reward for good behavior or a luxury they've bestowed upon us, but we know better. Loaded with a special cocktail of sedatives made just for mutants, those sweet little squares let us keep our powers functional, let the scientists control us and run their experiments with our suppression collars off, but at the same time they make us too stupid to form enough independent thought to fight back or escape.

The first time I ate a special brownie, not knowing what it was, they made me kill another prisoner with my skin. A 16 year old girl, who happened to live three doors down from me in the mansion, before this hellish nightmare all began. Now she lives inside my head.

You can refuse to eat the special brownie, of course, but that doesn't mean that you've gotten away with something. You can do things the easy way or the hard way around here, but one way or another, you're going to cooperate. Go ahead and skip the special brownie; they'll just send a few guards to waltz right into your cell, beat the crap out of you, and stick you with a needle. That special brownie does start looking like a luxury after going through the alternative a few times. Most of the prisoners just eat it without question now. I don't.

Maybe it's the Logan in me, or hell, maybe it's all Rogue; but somehow it just feels wrong to go down without a fight. I've always had a fighting spirit, but I have Logan to thank for the defiant growl that comes out of my throat when the guards come for me.

Logan. I wonder where he is now; last I heard, he was wandering the Canadian wilderness, still running from ghosts. There was a rumor that he might have gone to Japan after that, but who knows.

I miss him so much. Does he think of me? Probably not. The last time I saw him was years ago, just
after the battle at Alcatraz; I had just returned to the mansion after taking the cure, but he was getting ready to leave again. Lost in himself, drowning in grief, I don't even think he was going to say goodbye to me; if I hadn't come to his room first before going to see Bobby, I would have missed him altogether.

I remember standing in his doorway, watching him pack his bag for a good minute before I said anything. I wanted so badly for him to turn around and smile at me. Greet me with a handshake, a hug...a kiss. Tell me he missed me while I was gone. Ask me to go with him, wherever that was, because I belonged to him, not Bobby. I knew he wouldn't.

He sensed that I was there of course, though he kept his back to me. I wondered for a moment if he was mad at me for not being there at the battle. For selfishly throwing away my gift while the X-men fought against all odds.

"Hey, Logan," I said quietly. "I'm back." And touchable, I wanted to say. He finally turned around to face me, and that's when I knew he wasn't angry with me. In fact, it wasn't me at all that he was thinking about.

"Hey, kid." He tried to put on a good face, but the smile I had been hoping for never came. Instead he just looked...haunted. I knew the reason why.

I heard about it everywhere inside the mansion in hushed whispers and sympathetic tones when I got back. He killed her. Beautiful, kind, softspoken Jean had a side to her that Logan never knew existed. Sweet, graceful, angelic Jean took a bellyful of adamantium and died in the arms of the man who loved her.

Lucky Jean. If Logan could see me now, I would tell him. If he knew what I've had to endure down here, he would dry his eyes and be grateful that he spared her this hell. Jean was the lucky one.

I've always envied her, but never more so than now. At least she had people to mourn her loss; at least she got to be held by someone who loved her when she died.

I'm beginning to realize that's probably not in the cards for me.

For months, every time I laid on that operating table, every night I fell asleep in my cell, battered and violated, I wondered if tomorrow would be the day that Logan would come slashing through those walls to break me free. (C'mon, I'll take care of you.)

I try not to fantasize about that too much these days. It just reminds me of how forgotten I am. Logan went through hell and back, almost died, to save me once; maybe once was enough for him.

Sometimes I still indulge in hope, though, when the pain gets to be too much and I need something to hold onto, something to keep me breathing in and out. I pretend that Logan thinks of me once in a while, and smiles. (Hey kid, you miss me? Not really.) I like to imagine that somewhere out there, Bobby is alive; at least then I know that there is one person who loves me.

They're coming for me now. The guards enter my cell, three of them. They learned the hard way the very first time they came to take me, to never come alone; this little girl is a trained X-man--tougher than she looks, with a nasty temper and a few dirty fight moves hidden up her sleeve thanks to the Wolverine in her head. But three guards won't be necessary today. I don't feel like fighting any more.
My skin is frosting over, my lungs filling with ice crystals as I struggle for breath. *I'm supposed to be in her room by now, but I'm here with you instead, and I don't want to leave. You feel so good in my arms, your skin, your lips so soft and warm on mine. Suddenly the power has been cut; everything is pitch black. Glass is breaking, people are screaming. We have to get out of here. Take my hand, you whisper. We're dropping down through the floor to the level below, then another, and then we're running, running down the secret passageway, guided only by the light of my cell phone. Out into the night air, we've made it past the sentinels. The mansion is under attack, but we're safe, we're together... Ice, running through my veins, filling my lungs - oh god, what's happening? My eyes fly open with a gasp. Someone stands over me - he looks just like Bobby. Is this a dream? Another familiar face approaches, and now it's a living nightmare. Magneto. I struggle helplessly against the restraints - is no place safe?

"Rogue--Rogue, it's ok; he's with me."

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"Why would you listen to a copy of the album instead of the real thing?" I looked at my friend Sarah like she was crazy. I knew she loved that boy band, but geez. This was taking things a little too far.

"Because I don't want to ruin the original," she replied with a 'duh, isn't it obvious' tone of voice. "If I'm gonna wear something out, it'll just be the copy, and then if anything happens to it I can just toss it out. The original will always be safe and sound."

The memory comes unbidden as I hear the Professor explain the plan. I try to concentrate on his words, though I am still reeling. I can't believe Bobby is dead. I can't believe I'm sitting here, in the blackbird, when only an hour ago I was strapped down to a table, waiting to be cut. I can't believe that, of all people, the person who rescued me from that hell hole was Magneto. But that's not what has me reeling the most.

I can't bear to think of it, because it means that everything that I held onto all this time, everything that kept me hoping through the endless days, months, years, kept me breathing in and out when all I wanted was to die just so I could end the pain...it was all a lie.

I never saw it coming.

Bobby knew...he knew all this time where I was, and he didn't think of me until today. They didn't come for me because they wanted to rescue me. They came so that I could rescue them.

"Rogue," Professor says gently, pulling me back to the here and now. Right, the plan. Kitty is hurt, he tells me; I'll need to take her power, and keep Logan back in the past so that he can fix our future.

"Do you understand?" he asks me.

I understand. I'm beginning to understand all too well. I wish I didn't.

"You are our last hope, Rogue." Professor looks at me. His eyes are part apology, part supplication. I nod my head and numbly agree. I have a role to fulfill.

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Absinthian

ab•sin•thi•an

adj:
1. Of, relating to, or suggestive of wormwood or absinthe, a green, bitter, toxic liqueur made with wormwood oil and anise; bitter, harsh
2. Of bitterness, sorrow

"After the first glass, you see things as you wish they were. After the second, you see things as they are not. Finally, you see things as they really are, and that is the most horrible thing in the world." - Oscar Wilde

Mama used to say that being bitter was like taking a poison and waiting for the other person to die. How ironic; Bobby's dead...but for some reason I can't stop myself from sucking down that poison. I'm angry and sad, though who I'm more angry and sad for, Bobby or myself, I'm not sure. Most of all I'm just bitter. What kind of a person does that make me?

The past hour, I've done nothing but sift through Bobby's memories as we fly to our destiny in Tibet. It's not fun finding out how little someone cared for you by looking at yourself through their eyes. But maybe I'm being unfair in my assessment. Bobby did care for me, in his own way; apparently, sparing me from the truth and then abandoning me was his own twisted way of saying 'I care'.

"Hey, that's not fair. I cared!" Bobby protests weakly. "I just...I cared for Kitty, too."

"Shut up!" I hiss out loud by accident, interrupting the tense silence of the cabin. The Professor's head moves slightly, but he says nothing; I wonder if he is listening to my thoughts, sensing the turmoil in my head. Magneto eyes me with a questioning glance. I clear my throat and look away.

Bobby wants to defend himself, but instead retreats to a corner of my mind to hide as I pick apart his memories yet again. There's no hiding from me in here. I see everything.

We've found a small group of mutants who have an encampment at an abandoned lodge on Blue Mountain, about 15 miles northwest of Westchester. They're letting us stay, but only because we both have useful mutations. Kitty can get them into secured areas for provisions and intel; I keep the food from spoiling since there is no electricity to run the refrigerators.

They've given us our own room at the end of the left hall. It's actually pretty comfortable, all things considered. Not much different than our dorm rooms back at the mansion; only now, we can be together. I think of Rogue and wince. I know she didn't make it out. I should ask the group to help me get together a rescue mission...but it's too risky, and I'm afraid to rock the boat. I tell myself that we'd never make it back out alive anyway; it would only mean more mutant deaths, and what would that accomplish? What would happen to Kitty if I got killed? What if she got killed? I look at Kitty, sleeping next to me, and I'm just insanely grateful that I was with her when the mansion was
attacked. I can't bring myself to regret that; otherwise we wouldn't be here right now, together in each others arms.

I clench my jaw and give Bobby the mental equivalent of a dirty look. He cringes, but then feels me digging deeper into his memories.

"Rogue, don't do this..."

"Fuck off, Bobby. It's my head, I can do whatever the hell I want."

"You've already seen everything. Why keep doing this to yourself?" He tries to reason with me, but it only makes me angrier.

"Rogue..."

I ignore his half-hearted plea and continue on, poring over each memory. I don't know why I'm doing this to myself. Bobby's right, I've already seen everything. Do I think the truth will change if I look hard enough?

Holding her hand. Kissing her. Fucking her. All while knowing exactly where I was. It's all there for my painful pleasure, and I get to experience it from Bobby's point of view no less. I see stolen moments and whispered devotions; promises to each other...but no promises for Rogue. I slice myself again and again with every memory, stick my heart with every detail. I can't stop myself. I must have some kind of sick fascination with the pain. No scientists or doctors needed this time; I can do my own cutting.

I'd been reduced to an afterthought, not even worth mentioning to those who might have been able to save me. At least not until I was needed for a specific purpose. Although, who's to say whether they would have saved me otherwise?

I can't bear to think about the answer to that question. Instead I direct my bitterness towards Bobby again.

"Did you think of me while you were making your little love nest with her at the mutant camp?" I sneer, already knowing the answer. He doesn't respond.

"That could have been me with you all that time, Bobby," I try again, this time with a little less acid. Even more than wanting to hurt him the way he hurt me, I just want to know why. Why was I so easy to leave behind? Why was I so easy to forget?

"That could have been me, Bobby. That should have been me. Would that have been so terrible?" Bobby remains silent.

I hate that. He always did the same thing when we were together; any time we'd have an argument and I wanted to hash things out, he would shut down, shut me out. Diffuse the fight by letting me rant until I got tired of talking to the wall. Wait for things to blow over, and then go on as if it never happened. We didn't argue very often, but when we did, I would have much preferred he fight back than shut down.

Sometimes I think you can't truly know a person until you've seen them under pressure. Maybe that's why I never saw any of this coming. You can't really get to the pith of a person until you've ventured outside of that comfortable sweetheart zone and seen how they act when things get rocky. Seen how far they'll go to win the fight, how quickly and deeply they will try to wound you...found out how much wounding they will withstand and hope they haven't reached their limit, because the alternative would mean giving up, wiping their hands clean of you. And then, waiting to see if there
is anything worth saving...after. These things are more revealing than all the poetry and flowers in the world could ever be.

Listen to me, rambling on and getting all philosophical and shit, as if I know anything about relationships in my vast experience. Anyway, Bobby and I never had the chance to test out my theory; you can't technically fight with someone who won't even engage. It pisses me off.

The more I turn it over in my mind, the more I think maybe you don't need to get hit over the head with some huge event to see a person's true character. Maybe you just need to open your eyes, and be honest with yourself, and trust your instincts instead of being so pathetically desperate that you are blind to what's happening right in front of you.

I guess I should have seen it coming, right? Little signs were always there, which I wasn't exactly blind to, but...I didn't want to make mountains out of molehills. I brushed off my feelings as being paranoid and overly jealous; or worse yet, I blamed myself and my stupid life-sucking skin. Bobby was such a nice guy; how could I blame him for comforting our friend Kitty after the Professor died? They were just ice skating, right? Bobby was such a saint for wanting to be with the untouchable girl; how could anyone blame him for growing tired of gloves and scarves? Poor Bobby! Even I secretly felt sorry for him.

And then when I took the cure, I thought all my problems were solved. Bobby and I could finally touch, kiss, do all the things that couples do. Too late, only now do I understand that it wouldn't make a damn bit of difference.

All those little signs were still present; a lingering glance here, a touch of the arm there; the two of them teaming up in the danger room; flirting thinly disguised as playful banter between friends. Nothing overt, and yet, added up together, all those little signs made up one big neon sign that I just didn't want to see.

I blinded myself to the truth because I didn't want to be alone. How ironic that I would end up being more alone than I ever imagined. Maybe deep down I knew that Bobby and I had some problems, but I never, ever saw that coming.

The night the mansion was attacked, Bobby was supposed to come by my room after grading midterms. I waited, while the minutes, then hours ticked by and he still hadn't shown up. And now I know why. He was with her.

Lingering in her room, reluctant to leave the warmth of her arms, while I waited in my room, unwilling to think about why he might be so late. Eyes burning bright for her, while I blew out all the candles and fell asleep on my bed. Hand held fast to hers, while my hands blindly felt along a pitch black hallway. Running to freedom, while the blackness closed in and my captivity began. Lying in their bed, caressing each other with warm gentle touches, while I laid on a cold metal slab and...and...

Suddenly it's hard to breath. My eyes are clenched shut, as I struggle to keep from making a sound. I hold my breath, swallowing a sob. Don't make a sound. Don't let them hear you cry.

My chest is tight with the effort of trying to silence the grief and anger raging inside. I quietly take in another gulp of air. Not a sound...not a sound...

Then I feel it. A presence, softly pressing on my mind. My eyes fly open.

"Stay out of my head, Professor," I growl.
"Rogue..." He looks at me with kind eyes. Kind, but still probing, and I'm not letting one more person invade my body or mind.

"I said stay out of my head!" I reach down inside, and dig up my quiet companion, the young girl who once lived down the hall. She had the ability to shield herself against telepaths.

I throw up the shields, and feel the Professor's presence leave my mind, as a look of surprise crosses his face. Old, tired eyes of a once-father figure search my face, and I can only bear it for a moment before I stand up and walk to the back of the cabin.

I'm not there any more, I tell myself. I'm not there any more. I'm not in that hell hole anymore...but I'm still in hell just the same. Which is worse, the knowing or the not knowing? Futile, endless hope, or seeing things for what they were and what they are? I can't tell any more. I can't feel anything but grief and anger, and I want to lash out, to smash something.

Bobby's still there, watching me warily from a dark corner of my mind, and suddenly I can't hold back any more.

"You abandoned me, Bobby! You left me to die!" I shriek internally. "Do you have any idea what I went through? What kind of hell I've had to endure?" I'm holding the sides of my head and pacing back and forth in the tiny medbay. "Years, Bobby! You knew where I was--for years! And you never said a word to anyone."

Bobby remains silent, and God, that just sets me off. I go for blood. "You disgust me. I was never enough for you, was I? You never had the guts to be honest, never had the guts to choose. You just kept me waiting in the wings, while you had your little indiscretions with that whore."

"Watch it! Don't call her a whore!" Oh, finally he speaks. He's finally saying something, because it's in her defense.

"Why were you even with me, Bobby? Why were you with me, when you so clearly wanted to be with her? You just wanted to go with the flow like always, and never make any real choices because that would rock the boat," I spit. "When it came down to it, you were glad that the choice was made for you that night. And once I was out of sight, I was out of mind, wasn't I? You're a cheater and a coward!"

"I never cheated on you," Bobby protests. "Not when we were together. Kitty and I never slept together until...after."

"Oh, lucky me!" I say, my inner voice dripping with sarcasm. "My boyfriend waited until after I was imprisoned to fuck another woman." I shake my head in disbelief. "Mentally cheating is just as bad as physically cheating, Bobby. Maybe worse."

"Hey, don't act like I'm the bad guy and you're so innocent in all this!" Bobby retorts. What? What?? Did he just say that to me?

"You think I don't know about your feelings for Logan?"

"Logan?" For a moment, I am stunned into silence.

"You really want me to be honest with you, Rogue? I'll give you honesty. You didn't really want to be with me, either, did you? You just settled for me. Logan was the one you really wanted--I knew it, he knew it; hell, everybody in the whole mansion knew it."

I let out a huff of air. That was a slap to the face.
"If you really want to point the finger at someone for why we didn't work out, maybe you should look in the mirror, Rogue. If you want someone to blame for all of this, maybe it should be Logan."

"Blame Logan?" I say incredulously. "He wasn't the one who left me for dead the night the mansion was attacked. He wasn't even there!"

"Yeah, my point exactly. He wasn't there. And you want to know why he wasn't there? Because he loved Jean, not you."

"Shut up!"

"After she died, there was nothing to stay for, so he left."

"Shut up, shut up!" I hiss out loud, covering my ears and backing into the corner.

"Did he ever come looking for you after all hell broke loose? Did he ever try to rescue you? No. You want to know where he was? On the other side of the world, screwing some Japanese chick so that he could forget about Jean."

"Shut up," I moan, sliding down the wall to the floor. "Just stop."

I can't bear to hear another word. My hands are clamped over my ears and I'm rocking back and forth, trying to shut out Bobby's voice.

God, it hurts, it hurts. He's right, I know, and that's the worst part. But still it hurts so bad to hear it said out loud. The truth of everything; it was always there, hidden in plain view; I just didn't have the guts to acknowledge it. I feel the hot prick of shame and curse my weakness. Foolish girl, thinking that Logan would ever come back for me someday. (I'll be back for this.) Stupid girl, clinging to a poor substitute for the man I secretly loved. (I don't want you to go...) Cowardly girl, living in denial, afraid to see things for what they really were. (Look in the mirror, Rogue.) Pathetic girl, alone as always. (Nothing to stay for.)

Bobby's right; I am nothing to stay for. And I have nothing to stay for.

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Ambivalence

am•biv•a•lence
/amˈbivələns/
n.
1. the coexistence of opposing attitudes or feelings, such as love and hate, toward a person, object, or idea.
2. uncertainty or indecisiveness as to which course to follow.

"My dear...please don't do this to yourself." A gentle hand touches my arm, stilling my body; I look up, and realize that I have been rocking back and forth, bumping my head against the locker.

Steel grey eyes, familiar and yet not; they belong to a man who was once my captor; a man who raped my mind and almost killed me, a lifetime ago it seems. Steel grey eyes, now warmed with a compassion that I've never seen in them before; they belong to a man who reached into the depths of hell to pull me out.

Magneto is crouched down next to me, watching, waiting. "There now. It would be a pity to go through all that trouble to save you, only to have you hurt yourself, wouldn't it?" He looks at me with a faint smile. I'm staring back at him, slowly putting the pieces of myself back together.

I blink a few times. My mind is stumbling at the idea of Magneto offering me comfort; it's so incongruous with what I know to be true, the image I have of him burned into my brain. The man who tried to kill me. The man who saved me. I'm trying to wrap my head around it all.

"The world really has gone to hell in a handbasket, hasn't it?" I muse. "Everything is... topsy turvey. I used to know who the good guys and the bad guys were."

Magneto's eyebrow lifts a little, but otherwise his expression doesn't change. I think he's somewhat surprised, or maybe amused, by the irony of it all.

"Well, that depends," he says, shifting himself to sit on the floor across from me, "on your definition of 'good' and 'bad'."

I let out a little huff. Just like him to put his own spin on things to twist reason and logic towards his favor.

"Well for starters, I would have said that anyone who tried to use me as their own sacrificial lamb in order to gain world domination...probably bad." The biting remark is out of my mouth before I can stop it. Not a very nice thing to say to the man who just rescued me, though I wasn't trying to be mean. I just seem to have lost my filter.

"Ah yes. That." He lifts his eyes to meet mine. "I am sorry that I had to sacrifice you for the sake of our mutant brothers and sisters."

Ok, now I know we must be in really big trouble. Magneto, apologizing? Things must be very dire indeed. Before I have time to truly process the implications of such an earth-shattering occurrence, he immediately brings me back to earth.

"It was nothing personal," he continues. "I was only trying to prevent the very future that we are living right now. Your sacrifice would have meant the survival of so many."
Well, damn. What am I supposed to say to that? Part apology, and part 'I would have been justified in killing you because the world would have been a better place'. Should I be thanking him, or apologizing that his plan didn't work out? It's so fucked up, just like everything else in this world.

"You know, my mama used to say that people are never all good or all bad," I say, looking down at my gloved hands. Hands that have hurt and killed people. "Nothing is ever black or white. Truth is, most of us live our lives in the grey." I give him a sideways glance. "But you? I'm pretty sure you've never stepped one toe in that grey area your entire life. For you, there's only ever been Magneto's way, and then everyone else's."

The corner of his mouth pulls up in a wry smile and he half chuckles. He doesn't even try to defend himself. I can't help but think that maybe he shouldn't, knowing what I know now.

Maybe it would have been better if Logan had never saved me that night. Maybe Magneto is right, and my death would have meant the survival of millions. What right do I have to be here? So much suffering could have been avoided, both theirs and mine.

It's not like anyone would have missed me anyway. Sure, maybe at first, everyone would have been all, "Oh, that's so sad. Alas, poor Rogue, we hardly knew ye." They might have had a small memorial service, but then life would have returned to normal. And this hellish nightmare we are living now would never come to be. No Mutant Registration Act. No Sentinels. No mutant concentration camps. No worldwide destruction and death.

Magneto is still sitting across from me, saying nothing, but I wonder if he's thinking the same thing.

"When I was just a boy, I killed my mother."

My eyes grow wide. That was unexpected. He couldn't really mean that, could he? Magneto was never going to be mistaken for a saint, but I can't imagine that he would be capable of doing something like that.

"I didn't pull the trigger," he continues. "But my failure...my failure to control my powers was, indirectly, the cause of her death." He leans his head back against the wall, his eyes staring off to a faraway memory. "In 1944, my parents and I were taken prisoner by the Nazis and sent to a concentration camp. It was a terrible time. Families destroyed, millions of people murdered--all because they were deigned to be different than those in power." He turns his face to me and the look he wears sends chills down my spine. "History has a tendency to repeat itself, doesn't it?"

I just sit there, mute. He's right, and it's a disturbing thought that I understand all too well.

"That night, hundreds of us stood there in the rain, cold and afraid, as they sorted us like cattle. When they came to my family, they were shouting and pointing their guns; they began separating us, and I knew then that I would never see my parents again. I fought them with everything I had, but what can a young boy do against men with guns? Still, I fought, and screamed, and reached out for my mother as they dragged me away. I could still see her there, crying, watching me through the iron gate as my feet slid through the mud. And that's when I could feel it. I didn't understand what that feeling was in my frantic state, but something was pulling me, pulling my outstretched arms towards her like a magnet. I locked on to that feeling, and continued to reach for my mother, struggling with all my strength as the soldiers began piling on to stop me. Finally, one of the soldiers marched over and struck my head with the butt of his rifle. It was only after I awoke hours later that I found out what I had done to the wrought iron gate, which had been bent and torn from its hinges. I didn't understand it then, but that was the day that my powers had manifested."

"Is that how you escaped? By using your new powers?" I ask. "And...your parents..."
I watch as a flash of pain passes over his features; it's barely perceptible and only lasts for a second before he schools his features back to the unreadable expression he usually wears.

"I saw my mother one last time."

There is a lump in my stomach as a cold feeling of dread creeps over me. I already know this doesn't end well.

"A Nazi scientist named Dr. Schmidt, later known as Sebastian Shaw, saw what had happened to the gate when I was taken from my parents, and was enthralled with my ability to control metal. He wanted to use me for his own purposes, use my abilities to advance his own agenda. When he called me to his office, I nearly leapt for joy when I saw my mother standing there. However, I soon discovered that this was not meant to be a joyful reunion."

Magneto reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small object. He opens his hand and shows me a coin, resting in his palm; I watch as it levitates and begins to spin slowly above his hand.

"So simple," he murmurs. "Move the coin. Ask me now and I could practically move mountains. But when Sebastian Shaw ordered me to simply move the coin across his desk...I could not do it. I didn't know how to control my powers yet. Even when he held a gun to my mother's head...I tried with all my might, but I could not move the coin. He may as well have asked me to move the earth itself."

The coin drops to the floor and makes a clanging sound as it hits the floor and rolls to a stop.

"I never felt so helpless in my entire life as I did the moment I looked into my mother's eyes, knowing that she was going to die. And die she did."

Once again I am struck mute. Horrified by man's inhumanity to man. And suddenly filled with a new understanding of Magneto's driving force. What can I say to so much pain? Nothing that will take any of it away.

"I'm sorry," I say quietly.

He turns his face to me once more. "I vowed that day...never again would I allow anyone to control my fate. And I would fight to secure my freedom and control, by any means necessary."

He holds my gaze with his steel grey eyes for a long moment, before picking up the coin and putting it back in his pocket. We both sit in silence.

"All my life, I've never felt in control," I murmur. "I've tried. Lord knows I've tried; but I've never succeeded. I've always been swept away by a current too powerful for me; taken to places I never intended to go, forced to do things that I never wanted to do." I look down at my hands again, and slowly pull off the gloves. Pale skin, so soft. So deadly. And so coveted by those who would use me for their own purposes.

"My own body was the first thing to take away my control. When I was 17, I kissed a boy and put him into a coma for three weeks. That's how I found out about my 'gift'. After that everything changed; my own parents didn't want to have anything to do with me any more.

I couldn't believe that they could just cut me off like that, throw me out into the street like garbage. It was like they didn't even know me at all, and that was what hurt the most. I wasn't their daughter; I was a freak."

Magneto listens intently. He doesn't say anything, but I can see it in his eyes. This is the very thing he has fought against his entire life.
"I was on my own for about 8 or 9 months, just barely getting by, doing whatever I could to survive. But I stayed strong. I had a goal in mind. I was going to make it, you know? One way or another, I was going to not just survive, but thrive, despite my parents, even if I was all alone. I was going to make it an adventure like I always dreamed about; see the world, starting with Anchorage. Of course, you know how that ended up," I say shooting him a knowing look. "I met Logan, who was going to give me a ride to the next city; but your crony Sabretooth came along to attack us, and boom, next thing you know I'm living with the X-men. Not what I intended, but I swam with the tide and made the best of things. And just when I was starting to get used to the idea of a semi-normal life..."

"...I came along," Magneto finishes the sentence for me.

"You came along," I say, nodding slowly. "Kidnapped me. Cuffed me to that machine; forced your powers and your mind into my body. Then took my life." I look directly into his eyes. "You took my life, and gave it away to our fellow mutants. But it wasn't yours to give."

Magneto remains silent for a moment. But at least he has the decency to look me in the eye. "I took away your control..." he says finally. "And for that, I am sorry." We sit there, just looking at each other. He doesn't pat my arm or squeeze my hand or any of that sentimental nonsense. That wouldn't be him. But an understanding passes between us, and it's enough.

"Thanks," I whisper. We both know that, given the chance, he would have done it all over again. But in some warped way, I find it comforting that he at least regrets something.

"Maybe everybody would have been better off if your plan had worked, though," I say with a pained smile, hastily wiping a tear away. "That seems to be all I'm good for anyway. Who knew my skin would be so useful?"

I slide open the zippers that were built into my specially-made prison uniform, the ones that run all the way from wrist to shoulder, and gently brush my fingertips over the marred skin. It hurts to look at my arms, riddled with ugly scars; a testament to just how useful my skin was to the scientists.

"You know, I spent years in that lab, praying for someone to rescue me. Feeling so very alone. Hoping that somewhere out there, someone was looking for me; maybe worrying about me...waiting for me, the way you might anxiously wait for a loved one to come home from a long, arduous journey. But there wasn't."

I think of my parents. Bobby. Logan...

"In fact, no one even missed me while I was gone. At least, not until my ever useful skin was needed again." Magneto's eyes travel down my scar-covered arms and then back to my face again. There is almost a shadow of sympathy about to cross his face, and I hurry to look away, zipping my sleeves and pulling on my gloves.

"I'm so tired of being used," I mutter. My voice is bitter and resentful, but I can't hide the tear rolling down my cheek. "Why should I even go through with this crazy-ass plan that you've all cooked up anyway? Why should I care what happens to the rest of the world, when I don't even care what happens to me? Why should I care about fixing the future when there's never gonna be a real future for me? What if I choose to just say 'screw everybody' and let it all end? At least my suffering would be over then."

Magneto considers my words for a long moment. I'm expecting him to look angry, or to narrow his eyes at me with contempt for my utter selfishness. But he doesn't. Instead his expression is one of...recognition. Empathy.
"My dear..." he says finally. "If there is anyone in this world who understands how you feel at this very moment, it is the man you see before you.

I wait for him to continue, maybe launch into some passionate rant to convince me that I should set aside my pain and do this for the sake of the X-men, for mutantkind, for the world! But he says nothing more.

"And?" I ask with trepidation.

"And after all these years of bitterness and hatred," he says wistfully, "the only thing I am left with is regrets."

Again, I'm expecting more, but that's all he has to say. Why is he holding back? Is this some tactic or mindgame to manipulate me? I don't understand it.

"Tell me this, do you think anyone regrets leaving me in that hellhole all that time?" I demand.

"Bobby and Kitty were the only ones who knew where you were. Charles was unable to make contact with you because they kept you within the walls of Cerebro; he thought you were dead."

"And do you think anyone would have saved me if they had known sooner? Would anyone have even attempted to rescue me if they weren't completely desperate and needed me to take Kitty's powers?" I ask, my voice trembling. Another tear rolls down my face and falls with a splash onto my hands. Magneto's eyes lock with mine for a long moment.

"I don't know," he says gently. A sob escapes from my throat. The honesty is too much. "Shouldn't you be comforting me right now, telling me what I want to hear so that I'll go along with your plan?"

He slowly reaches forward his hand and touches a white lock of hair by my face. "You once asked me if I was going to kill you...and I said yes. Do you remember?"

"Yes," I whisper. "On the torch...the Statue of Liberty."

"That's right. I've never lied to you before, Rogue, and I promise you, I will never sugarcoat the truth."

I look into his eyes, and I know in that instant that he really does mean it. His honesty is brutal; his truth is painful to hear, but at least it's real, and for that I'm grateful.

"The truth is, my child, your powers could give us all a second chance, and second chances come so rarely in life. The rest of us want to live. We desperately want the chance to live a better life."

With his last words still hanging in the air, Magneto rises to his feet. He turns and looks at me once more with an expression that is part hope, part stoic resignation.

"We could try to force you to use your powers to help us, but the truth is, you hold all the power at this moment, Rogue. For once...you are in control."
Watershed

water·shed
noun:

  1. a point or division where a river is split into two distinct paths that will never intersect again.
     Synonym: divide
  2. a critical turning point; a defining moment.

I can feel the jet rumble as we make our landing, and my stomach clenches. It's time. I'm dreading this moment; the raw, unvarnished moment when I get off this plane and I look everyone in the eye--look her in the eye. When I'm wondering what they see when they look at me. When they're wondering if I'll be able to help them. And then I'll see the look on their faces when they realize I don't have an answer to that...because I don't know if I want to or not.

The answer should be simple. There should be no question as to whether or not I'll help them; the old me would have jumped right in and helped without hesitation. The old me, she would have felt a sense of loyalty. She would have possessed a sense of duty--that thing that drives all X-men to fight for the greater good, to sacrifice one's own interests for the sake of others.

I can't feel those things any more. I'm afraid that the old me is dead, because the only thing I can feel right now is bitterness. Betrayal. Abandonment. Loneliness. I am nothing but a means to an end. And I want to end it all.

It's wrong, I know. It's wrong. Somewhere inside me I know I should feel a trace of decency and compassion for these people who were family to me. I must have lost those things along the way at some point; like a phantom limb, those things used to be a part of me...but they've been cut away and now there is only this vague, dull ache reminding me of what is no longer there.

"Rogue." The Professor pauses in front of the medbay, and I rise to my feet. The look in his eyes is uncertain; it says that he is not used to being unable to read someone's mind, unable to know every thought as it passes. It's disconcerting for him. I know I should say something to reassure him, but the words won't come. He nods and beckons me to follow him towards the exit.

Magneto falls into place behind me as the hatch opens; the look in his eyes says that he is not used to this, this whole letting someone else have a hand in his fate thing. We both know he wants to force me; we both know he would if he could. He has always been a man of action, ready at any moment to flip the tables on everyone to get what he wants. But this time he has to wait and see.

We reach the bottom of the steps and I look around; nightfall. The sky is dark and ominous; the air carries a chill, and with it, an uncomfortable sense of anticipation. My first time outdoors since God knows when, and of course it has to be dark and cold; I can't remember the last time I felt the sun on my face. But maybe it's a good thing that the sun isn't shining. A beautiful day would feel like some kind of a mockery right now in the face of our solemn circumstances.

A gust of wind whips around us, and we all look up. Storm, looking like a white haired goddess, stands guard at the top of the wall. Our eyes meet; even from this great distance, I can see hope mixed with desperation. But underlying it all is pride and that sense of duty which I no longer possess, and I swear she can see that when she looks at me. It reminds me of the same look she gave
me when I first said I wanted to take the cure. I set my jaw and keep walking.

I can feel their eyes on me as we cross the courtyard; it's just a short way to the entrance, but it feels like an eternity before we get there. Some faces are familiar, some not; all carry that same expression of hope and desperation, fear and courage. Their eyes all ask the same question, and I wonder if my eyes answer them, revealing the words that my mouth can not seem to say.

Don't they understand? I don't want this pain any more. I don't want a second chance, don't want another future; why would I want to live a second lifetime of pain and loneliness? I'll still be the untouchable girl at the end of the day.

Magneto waves his hand and the door to the monastery opens. I don't want this. I want to turn around; I want to run to the top of that wall and shout into the abyss, "Let them come! Finish it!" But instead my feet keep moving of their own volition, carrying me forward over that threshold.

We move down the small corridor, and Bobby is suddenly active in my head, doing the mental equivalent of pacing back and forth.

"Rogue, you have to let me talk to Kitty. Please, just let me talk to her and--"

I clamp down and shove Bobby to the back of my mind, ignoring his plea. I'm awful, I know. I just can't bring myself to care.

I'm sick of this life...sick of myself; sick of what I am and what I've become. If Magneto is right and I really am in control for once...maybe I should be the selfish one this time and not care what happens to anybody else. Maybe I should give myself the gift of sweet oblivion from this godforsaken life. Maybe I should---

I stop in my tracks. Logan. At the sudden sight of him, laying there just a few feet away, all the breath is knocked out of me. It's really him. My heart starts to beat so hard I feel like it's going to come out of my chest.

Logan, looking so fierce and beautiful. The face that I know so well; the face that I've seen countless times when I've closed my eyes. It's been so long, I'd forgotten. I'd forgotten what it was like, what it does to me just to be near him. There are just some things that never go away, not with time, or distance, or hardship...not even with years of trying to forget. The sight of him is both a lance to my heart and a balm to my soul.

God, I've missed him so much. He actually looks like he's aged since I saw him last; life has been hard, and I guess maybe even a near-immortal man is not completely immune to the ravages of war. He looks careworn and...

Jesus, his arms are tied down. The image causes a déjà vu so strong that it makes my stomach turn. He's lying on that slab, looking just...vulnerable, and suddenly his nightmare of having white hot metal poured into his body comes rushing back to me. Flashes of fear and rage and helplessness as he screams and chokes on icy green liquid--it's more than I can bear.

It kills me to see him like this, because suddenly I realize what will happen if I choose to end it all right now. It will mean the end for me and for everyone else...but not for Logan. No, Logan will survive; and for him, it will be just the beginning. Everyone he's ever cared about, the only family he's ever known will be wiped out, and he'll be all alone in the world. And if they capture him, I know exactly what they'll do to him; with his long life, it could mean endless years of torture, imprisonment, experimentation. I can't allow that to happen. Something inside of me breaks. No matter what happens to me...I have to do this for Logan.
I take a step forward, and that's when Kitty looks up and sees me approaching. She looks haggard and sweaty, and there are blood stained rags on the floor all around her. Her eyes warily scan the room; I know who she is searching for.

"Wh--where's Bobby?" she asks, her voice trembling and raspy.

I know that it's irrational and petty of me, but seeing her hunched over Logan like that with her hands almost touching him makes me want to rip her face off. Logan isn't mine; he never was, I remind myself with a wince. But that doesn't stop the hot flare of possessiveness that roars through my veins when I see Kitty sitting so intimately close to him. And on top of that, she has the nerve to ask me about Bobby? If looks could kill, she would be dead right now.

Bobby seizes the opportunity, and without warning his words come out of my mouth.

"I'm sorry, Kitty..."

_Dammit, Bobby!_ I wrestle him back down and clench my jaw shut for good measure. Nobody is steering this ship but me, sugar, I'm sorry.

Slow realization crosses Kitty's face, and her lip begins to quiver. Bobby is dead. Face twisting in anguish, her head bows in sorrow as quiet sobs shake her body.

I thought I would feel a sense of triumph watching her heart get crushed, just like mine was; but it's a hollow victory, and what little satisfaction there is leaves a bitter taste in my throat.

I step closer and brace myself for the onslaught. Here goes nothing.

I touch her hand, and instantly I can feel her in my head, her powers and her memories surging through my body as her head throws back and veins begin to bulge in her face. I do my best to block her memories of being with Bobby; I've already seen more than I can stand, thank you very much. I take what I have to, just enough in order to do the job, and let go, swiftly taking her place by Logan as she falls into Magneto's arms like a limp ragdoll. I look over my shoulder and see her twitching on the floor, and I admit--I do get some small satisfaction from dropping her like a stone. Serves her right, I think to myself. It's wrong, I know; but I never said I was perfect or nice.

I turn my attention back to Logan, who seems to be unaware of the exchange that just took place.

"Hello, Logan," I greet him softly. I wish I could give him a hug like I used to when he would come home to the mansion after a trip. "Hey kid, you miss me?"

I know he can't hear me, but I can't help repeating our old familiar greeting, if only just to hear them spoken aloud one more time. "Not really," I whisper with a soft smile.

Logan draws in a deep breath and shudders.

Wait, did he...? Did he hear me just now? My heart starts to flip-flop in my chest. Does he know it's me?

I close my eyes. It's faint at first, but gets stronger once I recognize it...I think...I swear that I can feel a connection between us. Does he feel it, too?

Kitty never talked about how her mutation works, but if she can phase another person's mind into the past, then she must form a connection of some kind with them in order to do that. What if her powers work in the opposite way that mine do? Maybe instead of taking in other people, she puts a bit of herself into the other person.
My stomach flutters at the possibility, the thought of being connected to Logan on an intimate level like that.

I sit there quietly, just listening to him breathe. The sound calms me, and soon I can sense the connection again. The feeling sparks a warmth in the center of my chest that spreads out slowly to the rest of my body. Something catches the corner of my eye, and I look up. The flicker of candle light through stained glass is throwing soft hues throughout the room, painting the stark white of my uniform with color. Crimson...sapphire...emerald...gold...I drink in all the colors that I haven't seen in ages.

It's always been that way. Logan comes and goes in and out of my life; and every time he returns, it's like feeling the sun's warmth after a long cold winter. He rides in on a whirlwind, bringing color back into my world, when I didn't even know just how grey it was.

My bare hands are close to his face, and it makes me ache; I wish that I could touch him. Slowly, I inch my fingers closer, and lightly brush his sideburns with my fingertips.

"How are you, Logan?" I murmur. "It's been a long time." Since that day that I stood in your doorway as you were leaving, I think to myself.

So many things I should have said, if I hadn't been such a chicken shit. Don't go. Take me with you. Come back for me...

Any of those things would have been better than saying nothing at all.

Not that it would have mattered, a small, traitorous part of me says. He was in love with a woman he could never have, a ghost who would always mean more to him than anyone living, least of all me.

I push those selfish thoughts away before they take over and suffocate me. This may be the last time that I get to see Logan, in this lifetime or the next, and I can't afford to waste it going down that road of self pity.

What can I say to him? He probably can't hear me anyway. Still, I can't deny that there is some kind of connection between us; and if there is, I only want good things to come through that connection. So I try to think of something good.

"Remember the first time we met?" I ask softly. "At that old dirty fight bar in Laughlin City?"

That was so long ago...but it's the first thing I can think of. The first time I remember something good happening to me after my mutation manifested.

"I was a scared little runaway," I continue," and you were such a big, mean badass, no one in their right mind would ever think to come near you," I say with a hint of a smile. "But I knew better. I could tell, out of all the people there, I would be the safest with you. And I was right," I say, lightly caressing his sideburns again. "I always knew you were the good guy."

Logan continues breathing steadily. The connection feels calm and peaceful, so I continue.

"I was so hungry from being on the road; I hadn't eaten in days. And when you gave me that beef jerky, I really wolfed it down, didn't I? I saw the look on your face," I say with a quiet chuckle.

"By the way, I was right about the seat belt," I point out, referring to his insistence that he didn't need auto advice from a kid, moments before Sabretooth attacked and Logan was thrown 50 feet through the windshield. If Logan were awake right now, he'd be calling me a smart ass and chasing me down to give me a noogie.
That was always a point of pride for me, being the only person in the entire mansion who dared to razz the Wolverine, and get away with it, too. Not even Jean got to do that.

Thinking about Jean and Logan hurts my heart again, and I try to think of some more good things to dissipate the ache in my chest.

"Remember that time we pranked Kurt?" I say finally, glad to have another memory to latch onto. "That was the funniest thing I had ever seen."

I can still see the surprised look on Kurt's face--well, what little of his face we could see through the cream pie filling as the crust slid to the floor.

"I don't think Kurt ever imagined in his life that he would teleport right into a dessert," I say with a little grin tugging the corner of my mouth. "Such a trusting man. But he took it with such good humor, didn't he?"

That was the first time I ever heard Logan really, truly laugh out loud. I think everyone in the entire mansion stopped in their tracks, wondering what that strange sound was reverberating through the hallways. I remember thinking how laughing made his beautiful hazel eyes sparkle, and I made up my mind right then, that I was going try to make him laugh like that as much as possible.

I never could after that day, though. That was right before Jean came back from the dead.

The thought pricks my heart and I silently curse myself. Why can't I just get through one decent stretch of time without my thoughts and memories leading to pain? And why am I sitting here talking about silly old memories to an unconscious man when the world is about to end for us?

Maybe because I know that there is something else I need to say, but I can't bring myself to say it.

Suddenly the Professor inhales, and a look of dread passes over his face.

"They've found us."

Oh, god.

Magneto stands up quickly and goes to help the others ward off the sentinels, casting a foreboding glance at us as he leaves.

This is it. Time is running out. And as I look down at Logan I realize, if there is anything I need to say to him, this is my last chance. No more denial. No more holding it in. No more beating around the bush.

"Logan...I...I've missed you so much," I say softly, so low that only he can hear me. "A lot has happened since I last saw you. Since you...left...and went to Canada. While you were in Japan..."

I swallow and close my eyes. I feel like my heart is being squeezed in my chest, just thinking about Logan pining over Jean. Making love to the woman in Japan. Moving on with his life while I was trapped in that place...

"I know you were having a hard time, after...what happened," I say finally, opening my eyes again. "I hope you found some peace in your travels."

I gently stroke his sideburns.


"I know you were having a hard time, after...what happened," I say finally, opening my eyes again. "I hope you found some peace in your travels."

I gently stroke his sideburns.
"Did thoughts of me ever bring some measure of comfort to you? Because I want you to know...I thought about you every single day. Saw your face in my dreams...sometimes even talked to you. Well, the old you in my head, anyway, leftover from all those years ago when you healed me. And I want you to know...it was a comfort to me."

I can hear the wind starting to pick up outside. Storm is gearing up for the attack, and it sounds like a hurricane approaching.

"When they captured me...and they did their experiments...and there was no night or day and no end to the pain and I thought I was going crazy, I...I wanted to die. The only thing that kept me breathing in and out was your voice, Logan, telling me to hang on. Telling me that the real you was out there, looking for me...promising that you would find me, and slash through those walls to break me free," I say with a tremble in my voice. "'Hold on just a little longer, Rogue. I'm coming,' you'd say. 'I'll take care of you...'

A tear slides down my cheek. It hurts to say these things, but I have to keep going. Last chance, I remind myself.

"You never came for me. You never came...but...I don't blame you, Logan. I know that you had your own life to live, your own demons to fight. It's just that...I needed you, Logan. Everyone abandoned me, and I needed you. And I know it's selfish of me to ask, but...in the next life, if we know each other, please..."

The words are stuck in my throat as another tear rolls down my face. Outside, the wind is howling, thunder is crashing. Then, a huge explosion goes off, causing the earth to shudder beneath our feet.

"Logan, promise me," I whisper. "Promise that you'll find me in the next life, and please...take care of me. Even if it seems like I'm ok. Just...look after me once in a while."

Everything is quiet for a moment. And then I hear the words, just barely audible, whispered from his lips. "I promise..."

Oh my god, he...he answered me. Is this real?

I want to say more, but then suddenly Professor gasps and his head throws back.

"Storm..."

Mayhem ensues, and it sounds like chunks of metal slamming against the door; Magneto is building a barrier. Kitty rushes forward, phasing through the door and pulling Magneto back inside with her. He leans back heavily against the wall and slides to the floor, blood dripping from his stomach.

Logan begins struggling against the restraints, grunting and growling as his face grimaces in pain. His claws fly out with a metallic sing as his distress escalates, and then his growls morph into a full on yell of agony.

"Oh dear god, no," utters the Professor. We all watch in horror as Logan begins choking and gasping, as if he is drowning.

"Shhh...shhh...it's ok Logan. Everything is going to be ok," I whisper, stroking his sideburns, kissing his head.

After what seems like an eternity, the choking subsides. But I'm still so scared for him and I pray that he's not suffering right now. I continue caressing him and making soothing sounds.
Outside, we can hear battle cries and cries of agony as the X-men fight and are slaughtered one by one. Ancient structures crumbling to the ground. Fire and rending of the earth. Devastation and annihilation. Then the sound of destruction at our door.

"Logan, there's something else I need to tell you," I whisper desperately. "Something I should have told you all those years ago."

The door is smashed open as sentinels crawl in from every direction.

And here we are at the world's end. There is no more time. Nothing left, except to say last words; this is the moment when we are reduced to our singlemost naked, essential truth.

The sentinel's face opens like a ghastly mouth of blinding, white hot flame.

"Goodbye, Logan. I love you."

...

...
Fool's Paradise

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 took us up to the end of the Rogue Cut of DOFP. Now the story continues with what comes after.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

fool's par-a-dise

noun:

1. a state of happiness based on a person's not knowing about or denying the existence of potential trouble.

I never saw it coming.

There was no moon the first night she came to my room. I wonder now if she planned it that way. The darkness was like a soft film over everything...hazy and sensual...a veil, obscuring the unspoken line that had always lain between us.

She was using it as a shield, to soften the intensity of the moment, the intensity of my stare. She couldn't hide the sound of her heart fluttering, though. Not from me. Parted lips and the quickening of breath; the scent of apprehension mixed with excitement and arousal; nervous swallow and the soft heat of flushed skin. She thought the darkness would be some kind of buffer between us, but it only served to sharpen the senses and stir the animal.

The light of the lamp post shone through the curtains, spreading a faint glow over the room; barely enough to reveal a few lines and shadows to her eyes, but to my eyes, my senses, she was crystal clear. Standing there in my doorway, wearing a thin cotton nightgown, that white stripe in her hair like a halo around her face...she looked like an angel.

She looks like an angel, lying naked beside me now. Her warm, soft body curled up against mine, soaked in the intoxicating scent of us.

I lean down to kiss her shoulder. So much beautiful, silky skin, just begging to be touched. I never thought she would learn to control her skin. I never thought that I would be the lucky bastard who would get to touch it every night like this.

Good things like this don't just happen to me. Good things like her. Or maybe, I realize, good things do happen, did happen to me once before; she happened to me once before, but I was too busy fucking it up last time around to see it.

I'm no genius like the Professor, but I'm not stupid enough to make the same mistake twice. I don't
plan on fucking it up again.

I gotta admit, I never saw any of this coming, though. Back in the old timeline or reality or whatever you want to call it, things were pretty bad. The world was on the highway to hell, and mutants were on the bullet train to extinction. When I agreed to let Kitty send me back in time to try and fix this clusterfuck we had found ourselves in, it was kind of a long shot. I didn't know what I was going to wake up to when the new future took hold.

Lo and behold, I wake up, and it's good times, exactly like it was before the world went all to hell. The whole gang is together thanks to yours truly, everybody's alive, and there are no sentinels. Dang. I don't want to brag, but I fixed that shit.

Storm, Beast, Kitty, Colossus, Jean...it was even good to see Scott, if you can believe that one. I'm all honing in on Jeanie like a tractor beam, because holy shit, she's alive and I didn't kill her, and I put my hand out to touch her face because I can't believe it's real, and then (insert record scratch here), Scooter appears out of nowhere and blocks me, the tightass. I guess some things never change.

But surprisingly, I didn't mind. I know it sounds crazy, but I was actually glad to see him. Jeannie was alive, and I finally felt like some kind of weight had been lifted off my shoulders. And now that the weight was gone, I could finally step back, and see things for what they were.

I'll always care for Jean...but what we had wasn't love. Infatuation? Maybe. Affection? Definitely. But love? I only have to feel Rogue in my arms to know the answer to that one.

I spent a lot of time barking up the wrong tree back in the day. Flirting with a pretty redhead with long legs to prove something to myself, turned into flirting with her in front of her fiancé for kicks, turned into genuine affection, turned into obsessing over what I couldn't have, turned into killing her out of duty and mercy, turned into a haunting guilt that followed me everywhere, turned into years of holding vigil for a ghost. And I thought that was love.

What the hell did I know? Turns out, not a whole lot. What's that they say? Hindsight is 20/20, don't know what you got until it's gone and all that cliché bullshit you always hear? Yeah, turns out you always hear those sayings for a reason. I'm a walking billboard for those clichés.

I never thought I could feel more pain and guilt than when I had to kill Jean during the battle at Alcatraz, but I was wrong. The worst was when the Professor and Magneto brought me home from Japan and I found out Rogue was gone.

Government bastards attacked the school with an army of special ops and a fleet of sentinels while the Professor was dead. They never stood a chance.

When the Professor came back to life, he came back to a scattered team and a life of exile. He used his telepathy to locate any survivors; that's how he found Storm, Colossus, Bobby, and Kitty. But he never found Rogue. She was gone.

I kept thinking, if only I had come back sooner. If only I hadn't left in the first place. She'd be alive, and we'd pick up where right where we left off, and I'd get to tell her...

I don't know why, but somehow I always thought that no matter far I wandered, I could come back and she'd be waiting there for me, with a big smile on her face and stars in her eyes, ready to welcome me home like she always did.

There was this unspoken, subconscious truth that I carried around with me everywhere. No matter how bad things got, there was someone out there who knew me, inside and out; someone who
literally had me in her head and knew every dark corner of my soul, and somehow, still cared about a bastard like me. I carried that truth with me, even if it was buried so deep in my heart that I lost sight of it at times.

I remembered the last time I saw her, standing there in my doorway. Watching me with hopeful eyes, waiting for me to say something. Waiting for me to be the first to give her a hug after she took the cure. Instead I barely looked at her. I couldn't see past my own grief, and I wasn't equipped to deal with those hopeful eyes, wasn't ready to sort out this...thing that was between us, whatever it was. If I had known that it was going to be the last time I would ever see her, I wouldn't have brushed her aside so easily like that.

Hindsight is 20/20. Don't know what you got until it's gone.

I wrap my arm around Rogue's waist and pull her close to me, burying my face in her neck. Her scent is so sweet, and I memorize it like it could be the last time I'll ever get to hold her. "I know what I've got now, baby," I whisper into her hair.

She stirs and softly mumbles in her sleep; her hand finds mine, fingers absently tracing the space between my knuckles for a moment before she drifts off.

I know what I've got now.

...

...

Scott is yammering on about our next mission, some kind of reconnaissance on the newly relocated FOH headquarters, but I'm not hearing a word of it, because I'm too busy watching Rogue chew on a pen while she takes notes. She's sitting there, looking and smelling so luscious, tapping that pen on her sweet, pouty lips; everything in my field of vision blurs except for the direct line of sight to her mouth, which suddenly is magnified and crystal clear. That little cupid's bow of her upper lip, calling to me. The shine of her strawberry lip gloss. Teeth biting her lower lip as she concentrates. Then those teeth start nibbling on the tip of the pen and suddenly I have to shift in my chair to relieve some pressure.

As if she possesses some kind of sixth sense for my hardening cock, she stops nibbling and turns her face to look at me from across the room. Her expression is completely unsuspecting at first, but then her eyes turn to molten chocolate because she realizes what I've been thinking, and something about those doe eyes changing from innocence to awareness and then desire turns my cock into a raging hard-on. It's a good thing my lower half is covered by the conference table, or I'd be putting on quite a display for the team.

A little smile tugs at the corner of her mouth, and she turns her attention back to taking notes as if it's the most interesting thing in the world. But damn it if she doesn't start nibbling on the fucking pen again. And this time she darts that little pink tongue out to lick the tip, so discreetly yet suggestively that I have to suppress a groan. She's going to pay for that one later.

Ten agonizing minutes later, and the meeting is finally over. I'm going to corner her in the hallway, and in my lowest, huskiest voice demand to know just what she thinks she's playing at. She'll look at me all innocent-like, but her answer will be saucy as hell. A few more suggestive innuendoes, and I'll be fixing to drag her up to my room and--

"Suit up for the danger room, ten minutes sharp!" Scott barks before we can even stand up.
Dammit all to hell. I stand up, about to tell Scott where he can stick his ten minutes, when Rogue comes sauntering past me.

"Well come on then, don't want to be late," she says in a honey sweet voice so low that only my ears could pick it up. "And maybe you can show me some of your moves, Wolverine." She throws a glance over her shoulder and I watch her walk out the door, swaying her hips all the way. Hmm, maybe I do want to go to the danger room after all...

Every day it's been like that with me and Rogue. Making eyes at each other; murmuring thinly disguised innuendoes and dirty little comments under our breath; just barely getting through a long day full of meetings and training and being all professional and whatnot. Night time, though...at night, she comes to my room, and it's a whole different story.

Damn, I am one lucky man. I have to pinch myself sometimes, because this new life with Rogue is almost too good to be true.

You know, when I first woke up after my little time traveling stint and staggered out of my room, I couldn't believe my eyes. Rogue. Alive. It was like something out of a dream, seeing her step out into the hallway; a mirage, too good to be real. She saw me and tilted her head with a little smile, before turning to walk away with Bobby.

I feel a hot spike of jealousy now just thinking about her with the Icicle; in that moment, though, I was just relieved and grateful. She was ok. She was ok, and for the first time in years, I didn't feel dead inside.

I remember her being with Bobby back in the old timeline, so I wasn't surprised to see her with him in the new one. But it kind of pissed me off that the old Logan from the new timeline was just as much of a dumbass as I was in the old timeline. Fuck, listen to me. Thank God I only went back in time once, otherwise I'd go nuts just trying to keep it all straight. Anyways, from what I can tell, old me of the new timeline was up to his/my usual dumb-assery before I woke up, chasing a certain pretty redhead with long legs, all the while letting my girl fall right into the arms of a damn popsicle. Yeah, I'm the best there is at what I do, and apparently what I do is fuck things up with Rogue.

My first instinct was to spring the claws and tell popsicle boy to take a hike. I traveled 50 years into the past and back again to get here, and nothing was going to stand in the way of my second chance to make things right with Rogue.

Nothing, except the thought that maybe...maybe she was already happy in this new life, and I would be messing that up for her. That stopped me right in my tracks.

I'm a man who fights for what he wants; I'll fight anyone and anything that tries to take what's mine. But I won't fight against her happiness. I wasn't going to take that away from her, because I knew she deserved it, more than any of us. So...I let her go.

I didn't want to, but I did it for her. I took a step back, and I watched her live her life, and I didn't interfere. What's that they say? If you love something, set it free and all that bullshit? Yeah, once again I was a walking, talking poster boy for yet another cliché.

Thing is, though...I didn't do a very good job of setting her free.

I tried to stay away, I really did. I tried not to stare at her every time she walked in the room. Tried not to let my eyes linger, even though all I wanted to do was watch her move, and talk, and smile, and breathe. Take in every little thing about her, every soft curve, every little quirk in her expression, all the nuances in her scent. I tried to stay away...but I was starving for her.
After everything that had happened, here she was, so close and yet so far away. And every time I saw her with him, it was like a kick to my gut. 'Cause she didn't know it, but she was mine.

When we'd be doing our team exercises in the danger room, I'd find myself compelled to protect her, even though she was more than capable of taking care of herself, what with her extra strength and ability to fly. I don't know where that came from, but it was hotter than hell to watch her kick ass and outperform everyone on the team. Still, I couldn't stop myself from asking if she was ok every time she took a hit. She would always say she was fine, but her expression said that she was oddly touched, and that just made it all the harder to keep my distance.

It wasn't long before she started catching me watching her. She'd smile and casually look away, like maybe it was a coincidence that she just happened to look my way at the same time as I was glancing her way. And I should have looked somewhere else at that point, should have willed myself to stop, but I couldn't.

She'd glance my way again, and I'd still be watching her. Our eyes would lock for a moment. And then a look would cross her face, almost like...uncertainty, mixed with...something I couldn't put my finger on.

I wanted to believe it was longing, because I missed that look so much. I'm such a selfish bastard...but I missed knowing that she wanted me.

How many times did I see that look of longing on her face, and bask in the warmth of that adoration, but never return the sentiment? How many times did I see that look in her eyes, and pretend there wasn't something between us because I was too much of a chicken shit to figure out what it was?

Now the tables were turned. And I couldn't stand it.

I wanted what I wanted, screw the old 'loving something and setting it free and waiting for it to come back to you' bullshit. I tried that, and it was killing me.

There were only two choices for me at this point: I could be a really selfish bastard and interfere with her life, hopefully breaking up her relationship with Bobby and making her mine like I should have years ago, or I could pack my bags and get away from there so that I couldn't interfere with her happy life. One was the right thing to do, and other was about self preservation...though it was starting to become less and less clear which one was which.

I must have gone back and forth about it my mind a hundred times. Went so far as to have my bag packed and waiting by the door every day for a week. Even left the mansion a couple times...though I never made further than a hundred miles before the pull became so strong that I had to turn back. I was damned if I did, and damned if I didn't.

And then one night, she came to my room, and she took the choice out of my hands.

I never saw it coming. Standing there in my doorway, and God, she was wearing nothing but that gauzy little white nightgown. Silvery stripes framing her face like a halo. The scent of excitement and arousal clinging to her creamy, very exposed skin. When had she learned to control it? She still wore gloves and scarves all day, still covered every inch of her skin to protect the people around her.

She was either here to kill me, or to reveal a very big secret that she had been keeping from everyone. I was hoping it was the latter, though at this point I would have gladly given myself over to whichever fate she chose for me.

I had been laying there on my bed, just staring at the ceiling in misery and wishing I could drink
myself unconscious like everybody else in the world, when I sensed someone at my door. Not
knocking or anything, but just standing there.

Watching the door knob for any movement, I kept my body still, but slowly let out my claws.
Whoever was dumb enough to try to sneak up on the Wolverine in his sleep deserved the skewering
he was about to receive.

And that's when a familiar scent floated into my room. I sheathed my claws and stood up. Rogue?
What the...what was she doing here? Before I could fully process this turn of events, the latch
clicked and the door slowly swung open.

And there she was.

Without the moon it was almost pitch black, except for the faint light of the lamp post outside; but to
my eyes, my senses, she was crystal clear. So beautiful.

We both stood there, looking at each other, not saying anything. I could hear her heart beat,
fluttering wildly in her chest. For a moment, she looked like she was going to take a step forward,
but then she hesitated and pulled back.

Every fiber of my being wanted to reach out and pull her to me. To claim her as my own, right then
and there; to give her everything I had, to ravage her and love her and show her that she was mine
and no one else's.

Easy bub, I had to remind myself. I didn't even know why she was there to see me.

Maybe it was something simple, like she just wanted to thank me for having her back at team
practice. Yeah, as if she needed me. Still, she did seem touched that I showed concern for her,
unlike Bobby, who was too busy helping Kitty hobble out of danger to notice that Rogue was under
attack.

Maybe she had a fight with Bobby, and wanted a sympathetic ear and I was the only one up at that
hour. Wishful thinking and not very likely; she'd probably talk to that Jubilee girl before talking to
me about her man problems.

Maybe she just had a normal question, like 'hey, do you have a pen I could borrow?' or something
equally as mundane. But who shows up at a man's door at that hour and lookin' like that, just to
borrow a writing utensil?

My head was starting to spin with all kinds of maybes and what-ifs and plausible scenarios. I stood
there, rooted to the spot as I warred with myself.

"I..." She faltered, her mouth moving a little, but no more words came out. She closed her eyes and
swallowed, then opened them again. "I shouldn't be here..." she whispered, taking a small step
forward.

Fuck it. Fuck Bobby, fuck deadly skin, fuck holding back, fuck everything. My mind was made up
at that moment, and I wasn't going to wait another minute. I strode across the room to meet her, and
cradling her face in my hands, took her mouth in a ravenous, searing kiss.

Her eyes grew wide at first, but then closed as she whimpered into my mouth. Her lips parted and
gave way to my tongue, allowing me to taste her unbearable sweetness, and I drank it in like a man

Her fingers dug into my sides, gripping the fabric of my wifebeater, and God, she started kissing me
in return, matching my hungry exploration with an intense hunger of her own. A small moan rose up in her throat as she pressed closer and her kiss grew in desperation. Something inside me twisted, because I realized in that moment that it wasn't just me, giving in to my own desires and taking what I wanted from her. She wanted me. The realization nearly sent me into orbit.

With a growl, I pulled her into my room and shut the door, pressing her against the wall and deepening our kiss. Immediately her leg came up and wrapped around my hip, her hands gliding up my chest and curving behind my neck to pull me closer. My hand slid down her thigh, palming the flesh of her ass as I continued to plunder her mouth. Finally we drew apart, our breathing heavy and ragged.

"You sure about this?" I rasped.

For a split second, something in her eyes made me think that she might change her mind. Not now, darlin', not after all this time...If she walked away from me now, I was going to ask her to turn her skin on and just kill me right then and there, because there was no going back for me after this.

"Is it Bobby?" I asked, my gut sinking.

"No," she whispered. She raised her face to mine, tilting ever so slightly; a silent gesture, asking to be kissed again. Her mouth hovered just beneath mine, little puffs of air brushing across my lips as she breathed. "There's no one else." She lifted up on her toes and hungrily brought our lips together.

There's no one else. Her words rung in my ears as I pulled her closer, devouring her with lips and teeth and tongue. No one else. Suddenly the need to claim her, to possess her, was stronger than anything I had ever felt in my life. There can never be anyone but me.

"Mine," I growled into her neck as I sucked and nipped a path down to her collarbone. Sweeping my thumbs over her nipples, I lowered my head down and put my mouth over one and began teasing the hardened peak with my tongue. I could taste her through the thin film of cloth, and my mouth watered as I craved for more. I dropped lower, lifting up the hem of her nightgown. Starting at her navel, I began kissing my way down her belly; then lowered down to my knees. I nuzzled, reverently, at the vee of her sex; my fingers curled over the edge of her panties, sliding them down past her knees and dropping them to the floor; then, looking up, I nudged her legs apart and kissed her clit. I could feel her knees weakening as a little moan slipped out, the heady scent of her arousal thickening the air, and the beast inside howled and rattled its cage. Standing up quickly, I cupped her ass firmly with both hands.

"Mine," I growled again, and she gasped as I lifted her up and wrapped her legs around my waist, carrying her over to the bed. Though I had picked her up roughly, I lowered her gently to the bed, watching as her hair fanned out on the pillow. I kissed her softly before slipping her arms from my neck and her legs from my waist.

I stood up to take off my clothes, then kneeled between her legs again. Slowly, I released a single claw. She sucked in a small breath.

"Trust me," I murmured. "I won't hurt you." She nodded, and I lifted the hem of her nightgown, slowly, carefully cutting the fabric, while she watched with hooded eyes and bit her lip. The fabric fell to her sides, and she shivered, her body laid bare to me. So beautiful.
I leaned down and kissed her navel; then soft swell of her hip bone, and the other. Then the petal-soft skin of her inner thighs. Her ripe, luscious scent was driving me crazy, making my brain fog and my head spin with anticipation and desire. I had to taste her.

She arched her back and gasped in pleasure with the first stroke of my tongue, and I was lost. Lost in the warm, honey-sweet and salty taste of her bursting on my tongue; lost in the soft moans that fell from her lips; lost in the complete bliss of coming home to my Marie.

She gripped the sheets, her breath hitching and the movement of her hips becoming erratic, and I held her down firmly, increasing the pace and relentlessly driving her to the edge. Within moments she cried out, her head thrown back. Her mouth hung open in wordless ecstasy, while I reveled in the sensation of her coming in my mouth. She was still riding out the waves of her orgasm when I couldn't take it any more; I had to be inside her.

I rose up and thrust into her, burying myself deeply. Her fingers immediately dug into my back as our eyes locked, and God...I swear the earth moved. Everything I was, every second I had lived up until this point...they were nothing. I was simultaneously shattered and made whole in this one moment. Marie...

I felt her body soften as she came down from her orgasm, and I began thrusting again in a slow, deep rhythm. Her hands came up to my chest, stroking the hair and then gliding over my shoulders and arms. The look in her eyes...it was like she knew me, and yet...she was seeing me for the first time. Maybe it was like that for the both of us.

I leaned down to kiss her, tenderly at first, our mouths moving in rhythm to the same cadence as our hips. The slow burn quickly began to blaze out of control, our kisses becoming hungry, demanding. Her hands gripped my back, gliding down to grasp my hips and ass, urging me on. I drove into her forcefully then, grinding into her as deeply as I could. I could feel the tension building, winding tighter and tighter like a coil, until it snapped and we were both thrown headlong into an explosive climax.

Her screams were muffled as she turned her head and bit into my arm. The sensation almost sent me into overload, a million synapses firing off in my brain and the animal inside roaring to the forefront. Did she know what she was doing? Did she know what that bite would mean to a feral like me? Before I could stop myself, I came down and sunk my teeth firmly into the tendon of her neck, continuing to drive into her, staking my claim. She gasped and cried out, but in pleasure, not pain, and the animal howled in triumph.

When the last pulses of our orgasms were spent, I kissed her softly once more, then we collapsed onto our sides, boneless and sated. Rogue fell asleep within moments, curled into my side. And for the first time in 50 years, I slept without nightmares. For the first time in my life, I felt like I had found home.

Chapter End Notes

We could end the story right here and everything would be great, wouldn't it? But the course of true love never did run smooth, and there is more to Logan and Rogue's story before it's all said and done. Sorry not sorry. :)
Anamnesis

an·am·ne·sis
noun
1. the recollection or remembrance of the past; reminiscence. In philosophy, the remembering of things from a previous existence.

I open my eyes. It's almost dawn. The mansion is quiet, the world resting peacefully under a soft blanket of muted blue light. I turn lazily to my side, and the sight that greets me puts a little smile on my face. I still can't get over the fact that I'm waking up next to Rogue in my bed. Naked Rogue, I think to myself, still smiling. The sheet has fallen away from her breast a little, and I can see a pert nipple just barely peeking over the edge. She looks so delectable I want to slide the sheet down, take that nipple into my mouth and roll it on my tongue like a sweet raspberry. Mmm.

She's dreaming about something. Her breathing is uneven, little twitches tugging at her mouth, her eyebrow. I wonder what she's dreaming about.

Sleep is so different for me now. I still have nightmares once in a while, but not all the time like I used to, not since our first night together. And they're nothing like the ones I used to have where I woke up in a cold sweat, stabbing the air with my claws.

Back in the old timeline, Rogue always seemed to sense when I was having a nightmare. You'd think that after I stabbed her that first time she came to my room she would never come near me again, especially when I was sleeping. Wrong.

I told her to stay away. Too dangerous, I told her. Not worth risking her life. But she didn't listen, no matter I said, or what anyone else said for that matter. She always did have a stubborn streak.

I remember so many nights, waking up with an angry, desperate roar, claws slashing and sweat pouring off of my body. It would take a minute to come back to reality, my eyes blinking away the remnants of murky green water. And then I would hear her.

Shhh...it's ok, Logan. Everything is going to be ok.

She spoke to me softly from the corner of the room, out of my reach, caressing me with her voice. Calming the beast. Recognition settled over me finally, and I retracted the claws. A wave of nausea hit me then.

"You shouldn't be here," I rasped, hanging my head as I turned to sit on the edge of my bed.

"Don't you worry, sugar. I'm just fine," she replied, padding to the bathroom and flipping on the light. The sound of running water drifted from the doorway, then the trickle of water being wrung from a washcloth.

"I know how far to stand back now," she said with a knowing little smile, like my claws were some kind an endearing quirk of mine and not a life threatening monstrosity. "Drink," she ordered, placing a glass of water in my hand. I obeyed as she draped a cool washcloth over the back of my neck,
gently rubbing my back with her gloved hands.

"Want to talk about it?"

"No." No way did I want to tell her about those nightmares. She didn't need to know about that. She didn't need that kind of darkness in her life, like an ink blot, staining everything it touches.

Turns out, though, it didn't matter if I talked or not; she knew it all anyway.

"Was it the one where they put the metal on your bones?" She asked with a hint of sadness in her voice. "That one hurts so bad."

I looked at her, stunned.

"What do you mean, hurts so bad?" Realization began to creep into my consciousness, and I shook my head in denial. "You're saying it in present tense, as if...I never told you...how could you know..."

She looked away, apology written on her face.

"Marie?"

"I...I tried to respect your privacy, Logan. I blocked your memories as best as I could, both times after I absorbed you. But the nightmares...they come anyway. No matter what I do." She lifted her eyes to meet mine. "I'm sorry."

She was sorry. She was sorry that my nightmares were haunting her. God.

"Darlin, no. Don't be sorry. I'm the one who's sorry," I said in earnest, taking her hand in mine. "I'm so sorry that you have to live with my memories. No one should have to live with that."

She said nothing for a moment.

"You're right, no one should have to live with that." Her words cut me to the quick. It was one thing to wonder, even expect that she might think it, but to hear the words come from her lips..."

"Logan, listen to me," she said softly. She gently placed a hand on the side of my face. "Look at me. No one should have to live with that. Least of all you." She gazed at me for a long moment, her warm chocolate eyes looking into mine like she could see right into my soul, and that what she saw there wasn't just a worthless beast.

That was the first time I saw it in her eyes. Something that I didn't want to acknowledge at the time, didn't want to put a name to. Fool. I'm not afraid to put a name to it now.

"I'm glad to share the burden with you, Logan." She caressed my sideburn, then she kissed my head. "I'm always here if you need me," she whispered into my hair.

She left to go back to her room then, stopping at the doorway to glance at me one more time, before disappearing into the dark hallway.

And from then on, that was our routine.

Shhh...it's ok, Logan. Everything is going to be ok.

You shouldn't be here.
Don't you worry about me, sugar. I'm just fine. Want to talk about it?

No.

I'm always here if you need me.

Her words echo in my head as I'm pulled from my reverie by a low whimpering sound. Rogue is still dreaming, but she is becoming restless in her sleep. She mumbles something, then shakes her head. Her breathing is becoming more erratic, her legs shifting under the sheets. I wonder if she's having a bad dream. No, it's probably just an active one, I think to myself.

Then I smell it. The scent of pain. Sadness. Her face twists into a grimace, and then a choked sob escapes from her throat.

"No," she whimpers.

"Rogue?" I say softly, touching her shoulder. Tears gather at the corner of her eyes and run down her face. I sweep a thumb across her cheek, wiping a tear away.

"Rogue, baby, wake up," I say again, this time giving her a little shake. "Rogue." She wakes with a start, watery eyes looking at me but not seeing. "Hey kid, it's me. It's Logan."

She blinks a few times, then looks around. Slowly, she returns to reality, then looks at me again.

"You ok, darlin'?"

"Um...yeah," she mumbles, clearing her throat. "I'm ok." She sits up and wipes her cheeks with the back of her hand.

"You were dreaming," I say, brushing a silvery lock behind her ear. "Seemed like a bad one. Wanna talk about it?"

"No, no I'm fine," she says, recovering quickly. She draws the sheet closer to cover herself. "I'm fine, really. What time is it?"

"Little after 5 a.m."

"Five...I better get going," she says, looking toward the door.

"You're sure you're ok?"

"I'm ok. Really." She slips out of the bed and begins fumbling around for her clothes.

I keep watching her, looking for a sign that says she's not ok like she says she is.

"Stop worrying about me. I'm totally fine, I swear." She throws me a quick glance over her shoulder and tries to smile reassuringly before turning to pick up her panties. She knows me too well.

"Alright, darlin', just making sure. You women are hard to read sometimes. Mixed signals and whatnot," I say, attempting to lighten up a little for her sake. She rolls her eyes and smiles for real at that.

"So where do you have to be at this hour?" I ask, leaning on an elbow with one eyebrow cocked.
"I, um, have an early morning. Stuff to do. Errands...and stuff..." she mumbles, trailing off.

"Errands and stuff, huh?" She has her back to me, and I watch as she slides her panties up over that beautiful, curvy bottom.

"Yeah, um...just things I have to do. And then we have team meeting, and practice..." She hooks her bra and then begins to pick up her clothes that have been discarded carelessly in a trail from the door to the bed. I step out of bed and approach her silently from behind.

"You're in an awful hurry," I rumble softly next to her ear. She lets out a tiny yelp of surprise, and I can't help the smirk that appears on my face as she turns around.

"I'm not in a hurry," she denies, her eyes lifting to mine briefly before looking down at the clothes she has clutched to her chest. She slips past me and drapes them over the armchair. "It's not that I'm in a hurry...it's just that I have a lot of stuff I need to do." She picks up her shirt and fumbles with it, attempting to turn it right side out.

"Yes, I think we established that; you have important 'stuff' to attend to," I say, coming to stand behind her again. I place my hands on her waist and kiss her shoulder. "But since you're not in a hurry, then I guess that means you can stay a little longer." She tries to pretend that she is unaffected, but I can feel her resolve crumbling as I continue placing a trail of kisses on her shoulder. She starts to protest, until I reach that sweet spot where her shoulder meets her neck, and then she closes her eyes with a soft moan.

"Mmmm...you smell so good. And your skin...so soft and silky," I murmur, placing little sucking nips up and down the smooth column of her neck. My hands slide up her body to cup her breasts. "But you know where you're the softest and the silkiest?" I whisper. My hand begins a downward path, and she waits in breathless anticipation, soft pants coming from her parted lips. I delve a finger inside of her, eliciting another moan.

"Logan, I really need...to get going..." She protests feebly.

Seeking out that sweet spot on her shoulder again, I place a kiss there and then firmly sink my teeth into the sensitive flesh. Her head lolls to the side and she drops the shirt to the floor. Her hands move to cover mine, one at her breast, kneading and pinching, the other between her legs; she follows the movements as I slide my fingers in and out, stroking her slick, wet folds and circling her clit.

"Logan..." she moans.

"I need to feel your soft, sweet pussy around my cock. Right now," I rumble.

Knowingly or not, she presses herself back into me, rubbing her bottom against my erection. It's all the invitation I need. Bending her over at the waist, I take her hands and place them on the arms of the chair. She moans softly as I move the crotch of her panties aside and begin rubbing the head of my cock against her opening. Her moan turns into a gasp and her fingers dig into the upholstery when I enter her with a hard thrust.

She feels so damn good as I slide in and out of her, pumping with a powerful rhythm into her silky, wet heat. In the quiet of the early morning, the sound of skin slapping on skin breaks the silence, low grunts and soft cries of pleasure filling the air.

There is nothing that makes me feel more primal than taking her from behind. I want claim her. I want to plant my seed in her. I want her to feel me so deep that I'm fucking imprinted in her very
soul and she knows without a doubt who she belongs to.

These thoughts towards her, the crudeness of them...it's wrong, I know. I should be thinking sweet, romantic thoughts. I should be making love to her. Instead I growl with pleasure and possessiveness and raw animal hunger as I thrust faster and harder.

She comes with a strangled cry, convulsing around me, and I follow her, gripping her hips and coming in hot, throbbing spurts deep inside her.

Afterwards, a quiet tenderness settles over us. I straighten her panties back in place, stand her up, and take her mouth in a sweet, gentle kiss. Her body is soft, languid under my hands as I caress her skin.

I pick up her forgotten clothes and help her get dressed. I don't know what makes me feel the need to do this, but in this moment, somehow it just feels right. Instinctual. The animal part of me wants to take care of his mate now; that's only way I can describe it. It's making love, after.

She once again protests weakly, insisting that she doesn't need my help, but I ignore her as I button her shirt and then trail my knuckles along the curve of her breast. She steadies herself with a hand on my shoulder and smiles, partly amused and part secretly enjoying this strange ritual as I kneel down to slip her shoes onto her feet. Smoothing a white lock of hair from her face, I finish by tilting her face up with my hands and kissing her luscious mouth one more time.

"Now you can go take care of that 'stuff' that's waiting," I say with a smile against her lips. She lowers her face and smiles sheepishly at first, but then she straightens up and feigns indignation.

"Hey, that stuff is very important!"

"Uh huh, very important, I'm sure."

"It is!" she huffs. "Believe it or not, my life does not revolve entirely around you, Mr. Wolverine. I have other things going on, and they are quite important." That's the Rogue I know--feisty, proud, and charmingly ridiculous at times.

"Is that so?" I reply with a raised eyebrow. "So now you've got important things and stuff to attend to?"

"That's right," she says with her chin in the air, mustering her conviction. "In fact, I better go attend to those things and take care of that stuff right now." She turns to head for the door, chin held high. I smack her ass and she gasps, looking back at me with her eyes narrowed and her mouth open.

"You do that darlin'. And when you're done, you bring that fine ass back here to me tonight so I can attend to some very important things."

Her face breaks into a grin and then she leaves, tossing her hair over her shoulder and sashaying all the way down the hall. I stand there admiring the view until she is out of sight.

Smiling to myself, I close the door. Damn, life is good.

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I'm still in a good mood from this morning, a damn good mood, and that's a new feeling for me. I can't remember the last time I felt this...happy. It's almost enough to make me want to whistle on my
way to class. Almost. There are some things that the Wolverine just does not do, so a nice swagger down the hall with less scowling than usual will do the trick.

"Logan, a word, please?" The Professor calls out to me from his office as I pass by.

Shit. I've missed another "history lesson" with him; that makes three no-shows now. I guess Rogue wasn't the only one who had things to do this morning.

"I'm sorry for missing our appointment, Professor. Again."

"Logan," he says with a sigh, "wasting my time with your truancy notwithstanding, you've missed 50 years of important history. And it's imperative that you become familiar with it."

"Yeah, I know, I know. I've been meaning to talk to you. But with adjusting to the new timeline and getting my bearings, and spending all my time with..." He raises his eyebrows.

"Well let's just say I've been...distracted."

"I see." He wheels around his desk and comes to face me. "You realize that this isn't just about you resuming your role as history teacher, don't you? That was the old Logan, and you are not him; or at least, not in the same capacity. We've made the necessary arrangements for another history teacher, and in the meantime your new role as the survival and self defense instructor is going quite well."

"Hmph." I find it amusing that old me of the new timeline was a history teacher. It kind of reminds me of that time we were hiding out at Bobby's parents' house after Stryker's attack on the mansion, and I told them I was a teacher of art. Never in a million years would I have seen myself as a schoolteacher, let alone someone with a regular job, living in a mansion with a bunch of mutant superheroes. But here I am.

"That being said," he continues, "our history as a country, as mutants, and as x-men has been re-written. It is important to know that history, to know where we came from and where we've been, so that we can make a roadmap for our future. As you know, those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

The Professor is really killing my buzz, here. I've had an excellent morning, and the only future I care about at this point is the one I'm going to share with Rogue. I don't need to know anything else.

"I'll be honest with you, Professor. I've seen what the future was like firsthand in the old timeline. And this life we are living now is nothing like what we were living then. This is like heaven on earth compared that nightmare. Look around you," I say, gesturing with my arms. "Everybody's alive. No sentinels. No mutant concentration camps. No wars. As far as I'm concerned, we're golden. What more do I need to know?"

He leans back in his wheelchair. "It's a little more complicated than that. Surely you must know that just because there is no war, it does not mean that there is peace. We prevented a moment in the 1970's that would have led to disastrous consequences, yes. But human and mutant relations still have a long way to go."

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I know he's right. Charles has always been a man of peace, has always held onto his idealistic hope that humans and mutants can live in harmony. But even he has a pragmatic side to him that knows that peace never lasts, and you have to be prepared for that. It's one of the reasons we still have a danger room, and use it every day.
"Look, Professor," I say finally. "I get it. Things aren't perfect. And if something comes up, you know that I'll always have your back, whatever comes our way. But I'm done with the past. I just want to move on and enjoy life in the here and now."

His face changes to an expression of understanding, but there is also disappointment in his eyes.

"Alright," I sigh. "Just give me a little more time and I'll come by for a history lesson." I suppose it won't hurt to give him a few minutes of my time if it will make him feel better.

"Very well," he says, looking pleased. "I shall look forward to brushing up with you."

"Yeah, can't wait," I reply. I hear a soft chuckle behind me as I leave his office.

...
Sucker Punch

sucker punch

[suhk-er-puhnch]

noun

1. a devastating, unexpected blow that sends an unwary opponent sprawling, dazed and confused.

"Always remember, your first line of defense is using your brain," I remind the students with a finger tap to my temple. "Don't be stupid and get yourself in a bad situation in the first place." Young faces look up at me, listening intently. I hope they've learned something today; I'm still not sure if I'm cut out to be a teacher, but I have noticed that they're improving, so I can't be all that bad.

"Class dismissed." The kids jump up and leave the gym in a flurry of footsteps and excited chatter, happy to start the weekend. I can't blame them; I've been chomping at the bit to start the weekend myself. I was this close to blowing off class when I saw Rogue in the hallway earlier today.

She didn't see me watching her from a dark corner, and let out a little yelp when I grabbed her, yanking her into my arms. It was cute for a second until she whirled around slammed me into the wall, leaving a huge dent in the plaster.

"Oomph!"

"Logan! Oh my God, I'm so sorry!" She began brushing bits of plaster off of my shirt. "I didn't mean to do that--I just reacted on instinct."

"That's one hell of an instinct, darlin'," I replied with a smirk.

"Thanks," she mumbled, a blush coloring her cheeks a pretty shade of pink. She cleared her throat. "So where are you off to?" she asked, changing the subject.

"Well I was on my way to teach class, but now that you're here," I lowered my voice and rumbled close to her ear, "I'm thinking about playing hooky." I turned her back to the wall and leaned in close, my hands curved around her waist.

She looked up and down the hall nervously, her eyes following the movement of several people passing by. She placed her hands on my arms and gently pushed them away. "Logan...I can't right now."

"Hmm, let me guess...you have more things and stuff to do?" My hands went to her waist again, this time slipping my thumbs under her shirt to stroke her skin. I leaned down for a kiss, and her heartbeat sped faster. Her hand went to my chest and pressed back, keeping our lips from making contact.

"Just...not here." I looked into her eyes, and could see that she wasn't being playful or coy. She actually looked a little nervous. Uncomfortable.

"I'm sorry," she stammered. "I'm just not used to...PDA's. Public displays of affection," she clarified
when she saw the confused expression on my face. "Can we...can we just meet up tonight?"

Public displays of affection, she called it. I never gave it any thought, but now that she mentioned it, we had been doing an awful lot of discreet flirting these past few weeks, but nothing outright. Everything was always just under the radar; light brushes of our bodies as we passed each other, heated looks and dirty innuendos murmured under our breath, testing how far we could push things without getting caught. That was part of the fun.

We could keep playing our fun little games if that's what she wanted.

"Sure, darlin'. I'll see you tonight then." I took one of her gloved hands and raised it to my lips for a chaste kiss.

"Thanks, sugar. See you tonight." She squeezed my hand and then slipped past me to go her own way, wherever that was.

I can still see her pretty face in my mind as I gather my things and leave the gym. The soft pink hue creeping into her cheeks as she brushed the plaster from my shirt. I want to make her blush like that again. Smiling to myself, I make a mental note to think of different ways I can get her all flustered next time.

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She's so goddamn beautiful. Her eyes are closed and she's caressing her breasts as she rides me, her hair cascading down her shoulders like a waterfall of mahogany splashed with a shock of white.

I grasp her hips, pressing down to grind into her deeper. My name falls from her lips in a breathy cry as she climaxes, and that is a sound I will never get enough of. My vision goes white hot as I reach my own climax, and she contracts around me, undulating and milking with every roll of her hips.

So fucking beautiful. Fierce. Ethereal. With a final jerk of her hips, she collapses forward onto my chest, breathless, her hair falling like a curtain around us.

Her face hovers an inch from mine, our breaths mingling as she slowly opens her eyes. We lay there for an endless moment, still joined, looking into each other's eyes. I want to stay like this forever.

Her hand comes up to touch my face. Delicate fingertips whisper down my sideburns and beard, then brush my lips with a feathery softness.

I've never felt this...complete. As I watch her, mesmerized by her beautiful face, I still don't understand; what was I so afraid of before? Why couldn't I see what was right in front of me?

There are plenty of rational explanations. I tell myself that she was too young. That I was too messed up, too broken. That she was already taken. That I was in love with Jean.

Excuses.

All these enhanced senses, and I couldn't even recognize my own mate because I was too damn busy blinding myself to the truth.

I saw it, right there in her eyes. I can see it now. It still scares the hell out of me, but this time, I'm not running.
"I love you."

Her hand goes still.

She says nothing for a moment; but the soft look in her eyes has suddenly disappeared, replaced by a look of confusion. Denial. She shifts uncomfortably, avoiding eye contact.

"Logan, don't...you can't..." She shakes her head.

"Hey...darlin' look at me." I take her chin and turn her face to me. "Look at me."

She hesitates, lifting her eyes to mine, just for a moment until she turns her face again. I don't know what's going on in her mind, but it almost seems like she's...afraid to believe me or something. Maybe afraid isn't the right word. I don't know. All I know is that one minute she was looking at me that way--the same way that I remember so well from the old timeline, and the next minute she's pulling back and won't look at me at all. What happened?

Then I think about it. What if old me of the new timeline really did fuck things up as badly as I did in the old timeline? What if I gave her a reason to not believe me?

Maybe I spent too much time running. Maybe there were just one too many unspoken words between us, things left unsaid and too many times the love in her eyes was unreturned. I did it once before; by the time I came to terms with it she was already gone.

I'm not gonna let that happen again. No more things left unsaid.

Determined to make sure she understands, I take her face in my hands and force her to look me in the eyes.

"Darlin', look at me. I do, and I can. I love you...and I always have."

I wait, hoping that she'll hear my words and believe them. I need to see that look in her eyes again...I need it more than air.

That look in her eyes doesn't come back, though; instead, she looks like she wants to be anywhere but here with me. It feels like a slap to the face. She climbs off of me and covers herself in the bed sheet, sitting with her knees to her chest.

"Don't say that that," she says quietly, staring off into the empty space in front of her.

"What...why not? It's the truth."

She doesn't answer.

I move to sit directly in front of her, once again forcing her to look at me.

"Look...I know that I've...been fucking up for a long time and it's taken a while to come to my senses, but I'm done with all that. And I want you to know, without a doubt, that I love you."

"Stop saying that. Stop saying you love me," she says, pulling the sheets tighter.

"Why? Why can't I say that I love you? I don't under--"

"Because you don't really know me!" she snaps.

I stare at her in disbelief.
"What the hell are you talking about? Of course I know you."

"You think you know me."

"There's no 'think' about it, darlin'; I know you, better than anyone else in the world. C'mon, what's this about?" I reach out to tuck her hair back, but she slides out of the bed to evade me and begins picking up her clothes. Her slight is another slap to the face. She's never avoided my touch before, even when she couldn't control her skin.

"Nobody knows me. Not really. And I like it that way," she mutters with her back to me as she dresses.

I'm starting to get pissed. After everything we've shared, she's going say some bullshit line about me not really knowing her? I don't know what the hell is going on, but I'm getting to the bottom of this. I jump out of bed to pull on my jeans, and then I get in front of her again, this time taking hold of her arms.

"What's going on, Rogue? Talk to me. 'Cause one minute we're making love, and the next minute you're acting like we're practically strangers."

"That's because we are practically strangers."

"The fuck we are!" I growl. "There is no one, and I mean no one, who knows you better than I do. And it goes both ways! The things we've been through together...the way we've always taken care of each other. We have a special bond that no one can touch, and it's been that way since the day we met in Laughlin City. You can't deny that!"

"Since Laughlin City? What are you talking about?" She casually tosses out the words, like it's nothing as she reaches for her boots. It's one last blow, a sucker punch to the gut. A coldness spreads through my chest as I realize that she really is denying us. Denying us.

I feel like I'm in some kind of nightmare, only I can't wake up. Even if I could, I'm not sure Rogue would be there to comfort me this time.

How did it come to this? How did everything turn to shit, just from saying three little words? Am I going crazy, or weren't her eyes filled with love for me too only minutes ago? I swear I saw it. But looking at her eyes now, I only see indifference.

"I have to go." She stands up and grabs her jacket, then heads for the door. She's leaving again, in the middle of the night like always.

Now that I think about it, she's never stayed until morning. She's always had some excuse when I've asked her to stay, which I didn't really think about too much before, but now...now I'm starting to wonder if she's just been using me and then blowing me off. She wouldn't do that, would she? Or maybe she doesn't want to be seen coming out of my room. Come to think of it, she doesn't want me touching or kissing her in public during the daytime, either. Public displays of affection, my ass. Maybe what's really going on is that she's seeing Bobby again, and doesn't want him to know about us.

The realization lights up a hot flare of anger and before I can stop myself, before she can react, I've got her spun around and pressed against the door. My thoughts are swarming through my head, angry and wild and desperate. I know I'm being irrational, but I can't control it as I grasp for something, anything that will make sense of all this.

"Why did you come to my room that first night?" I demand. She squirms and tries to slip out of my
grasp, refusing to make eye contact. I press her back against the door.

"You're not going anywhere until I get some answers. Now talk. To. Me." After a moment, she reluctantly looks me in the eye. "What the hell have we been doing all this time, Rogue?"

She stares at me, but says nothing.

"Why did you come to my room that night? Tell me it was because you felt something for me," I demand. "Tell me! Did I just imagine there was something between us? Or were you just here for a good fuck?" I snarl.

Her temper flares in her eyes and she clenches her jaw. "It wasn't what I came for," she says quietly.

"No? What was it then?" By now my chest is heaving with anger and frustration. "Answer me, damn it!"

For a moment, a flicker of something passes through her eyes...almost like...a shadow of longing. Turmoil, as if she wants to tell me something.

It's gone in a flash and she looks away, closing herself off to me again with a mask of indifference. And that just sets me off.

I turn her face and crash my mouth onto hers in an angry, bruising kiss. Forcing my tongue into her mouth, I grope her breast roughly, and she pulls back with a gasp, a look of shock on her face.

"What's the matter, darlin'? Isn't this what you came for?" I sneer, hating the words as they leave my mouth, yet unable to stop them. "Don't lie. This was what you wanted. I could smell it on you then and I can smell it now."

She slaps me in the face.

My mouth comes down on hers again, my hands holding her face so she can't break away from my punishing kiss. Forcing my tongue into her mouth, I grope her breast roughly, and she pulls back with a gasp, a look of shock on her face.

"That's the matter, darlin'? Isn't this what you came for?" I sneer, hating the words as they leave my mouth, yet unable to stop them. "Don't lie. This was what you wanted. I could smell it on you then and I can smell it now."

She slaps me in the face.

My mouth comes down on hers again, my hands holding her face so she can't break away from my punishing kiss. She fights a little at first, but then after a moment she stops struggling. Her fingers glide up to my chest, and for a blissful moment I think she's actually responding to my kiss. That's when she lets me have it.

With a forceful shove, she pushes me off of her so hard that I slam into the dresser, cracking the wood and breaking the mirror above it. Shards of glass fall to the floor with a crash.

"This isn't what I came for, and I don't have to tell you a damn thing, sugar!" She points her finger at me, emphasizing her words. Her eyes are blazing with fury, and I can hear her heart pounding wildly in her chest.

She glares at me for a moment, then turns to leave. I'm about to say something to her, when suddenly there is a knock at the door. Her hand freezes on the doorknob and she looks at me.

"Hello? Wolverine, are you alright, mein freund?" It's Kurt.

"Shit," I mutter quietly. "Uh, yeah...I'm ok, Kurt. Thanks," I say through the door.

"Are you sure? What was that loud noise? Do you need my help?"

Rogue fixes her eyes on me, lips pursed and shaking her head slowly. She heads for the window.

"Wait!" I whisper, reaching out my hand.
"Logan? Shall I come in?"

"No, no, I'm good, Kurt. It was just a nightmare. Thanks for checking on me, buddy."

"Ok..." he says finally. "Please call on me if you need anything, my friend. Gute Nacht."

"I will, thanks. Good night."

Rogue has one leg out the window by the time I finish sending Kurt away.

"Rogue, wait!" I stride across the room to stop her. But she doesn't wait. With both legs out the window, she casts one more look at me over her shoulder.

There is anger in her eyes...but there's also sadness. It kills me to know that I am the cause. For a split second, I could swear her eyes flash to green, and then she leaps out into the air, her arms outstretched like wings. I watch as she soars like a graceful bird, her hair flowing in the wind, until she disappears into the inky blackness of the night.
My eyes are playing tricks on me. They must be, because I keep seeing the faint flash of white stripes, ghosting in and out of the darkness as I stare out into the black void of the night. As if any minute now, she'll come flying back through this window and into my arms. Not likely.

And why would she? The way I acted. The way I...forced myself on her, kissing her with anger instead of tenderness. The things I said. I can't think of it without wincing.

I think somewhere in the back of my mind, I might have suspected that Rogue would be a little different in this life, but I didn't want to think about it. I was just so happy to wake up and see her, alive. And then when she came to me unexpectedly that first night, and we made love, and she wanted to be with me as much as I wanted to be with her, I just...

I've had so little happiness in my life that I was starving for it. Starving for her. Like a hungry dog who by some stroke of luck had found a bone, I just wanted to grab onto what was in front of me and run with it before someone or something took it away.

There are some things you can't outrun, though.

I've been trying so hard to not look too closely at things, since the moment I woke up in the new timeline. Trying not to figure out how or why I had been given a second chance. Trying not to tempt Fate by asking too many questions, so that maybe, maybe just this once, I could fool her into overlooking something good in my life. The only one I was fooling was myself.

Is this how it's going to be for me and Rogue? Over before we really began like last time? I stare out the window, still looking for that flash of white stripes. The sun is almost over the horizon now, and the sky is turning a soft pink.

"Fuck fate," I growl to myself. I throw on my jacket and head out the door to get some answers. This old dog isn't giving up without a fight.

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"Ah, Logan. Good morning; please come in. Can I offer you a drink? Some tea, perhaps?"

The Professor offers me tea, but even as he speaks, he's wheeling over to the liquor cabinet and reaching for the scotch. Before I even say anything, he pours a glass and places it in my hand. There is a spark of humor in his eyes, but there is also the warmth of understanding.

"I hope you'll forgive me for presuming to know what your beverage of choice would be, especially
at this hour of the morning, but you looked like you could use something a little stronger than tea."

"Hmph. You're not wrong about that. Thanks, Professor."

"Not at all. So what can I do for you, Logan?"

I sink into the deep leather chair and stare at my drink, swirling the liquid around the glass slowly. The Professor waits, patiently, for me to say what he probably already knows I'm going to say.

"You were right," I finally admit with a sigh. "About needing to know our history. I should have come to you sooner."

I look up to read his face, expecting a lecture; but there is no look of judgment in his eyes, only kindness.

"You're here now, and that is all that matters."

"Yeah. I'm here now," I say quietly. "I'm ready to hear what you have to say."

He smiles. "Very good. So, where to begin? There is so much to tell you," he says thoughtfully.

I know where I want him to begin; more than anything, I need to know about Rogue. But somehow it doesn't feel right to just come out and ask about her. Her words from last night are burned into my mind. *Nobody really knows me. And I like it that way.*

The memory is a sharp pain in my chest. She obviously wants to keep some things in her life private, and that probably includes our relationship. If I ask about her directly, I might let on some things to the Professor that she doesn't want anyone to know.

I want to get to the bottom of all this...but I don't want to violate her trust. Fuck. I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place.

"How about we start at the beginning," I say finally.

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Half an hour later and I've heard some crazy ass shit. How we've all ended up here together at Xavier's school in this new timeline is nothing short of a miracle.

Mystique is actually one of the good guys this time around, if you can believe that. I can't. I'd trust that blue bitch as far as I can throw her. But the Professor tells me that she actually helped the X-team save the world back in the 80s from some asshole trying to bring about the apocalypse, so now she's everybody's friend and is welcome to come and go at the mansion whenever she pleases. Hank actually has a thing for her, and they've been an on and off item for years. It's a good thing she hasn't come around before this, or I probably would have clawed her.

And Storm was one of the bad guys at first, which shocked the hell out of me. She was actually one of the four mutants helping that apocalypse maniac destroy the world. Storm, miss Earth Mother, of all people.

Magneto was one of the four, which doesn't shock me at all, but he changed his mind at the last minute and helped save the X-team, so they're supposedly on good terms. You never know with that one. I put him in the same category as Mystique; I'd trust him as far as I can throw him.
Not everything is different; Scott and Jean are together per usual. Kurt is his same old self, and so is Piotr. I'm here, and so is Rogue.

But as I listen to the Professor, I'm beginning to see that even if most of us did end up in the same place, not everyone took the exact same path to get here as they did the first time around. Kurt came to the X-men a full 20 years earlier than he did in the old timeline. Quicksilver, too. Angel was fucking born 20 years earlier than last time, and he was one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse. What the hell?

And if they took a different path to get here...what about Rogue?

"You seem troubled, Logan." He watches me with perceptive eyes. "Perhaps we should finish up for today and pick up where we left off another time."

"How did I get here?" I blurt out. It's the closest thing to asking about Rogue that I can manage without giving everything away.

"Indeed," he nods. "My apologies, Logan; I'm sure you must be anxious to hear about your own history."

My history. I've been the man with no past for so long that the idea of having a history feels like an almost foreign concept. I spent a lot of time searching, just trying to find out simple things, like what my real name is. Where I came from. How old I am. Why my whole damn skeleton was covered in adamantium.

I still want to know that stuff, but the funny thing is, there's something far more important to me now.

"We have some information that we recovered from an old military base near Alkali Lake, which was once the headquarters for a secret government program called "Weapon X". But it is rather incomplete, since most of their records were destroyed when they moved their operations." He looks at me apologetically. "We spent many years looking for you after the standoff at the Whitehouse in 1973. We had no idea that Stryker had taken you."

Fucking Stryker. The mere mention of his name makes me want to put my claws through a wall. If he's still alive in this timeline, I'm gonna fucking kill him. Right after I fix things with Rogue, I'm gonna find him and kill him.

"It was more than a decade before you crossed our paths again--Jean, Scott, and Kurt had a brief chance meeting with you inside the Weapon X compound, though they were merely teenagers then and had no idea who you were. The state you were in...Jean said that they had taken all your memories. Used some method of mind control to reduce you to your feral state. They had turned you into a weapon."

A growl slips from my throat, and I have to repress the urge to spring the claws.

"Sounds about right," I grumble, tossing back the rest of my drink.

"This happened to you before, in the old timeline, I gather."

"Yeah. I think so. I got pretty much the same amount of info as you; just pieces here and there. I was close to getting more, but Stryker was...killed before I was able to get all the answers I wanted."

"I see." The Professor says nothing more; he looks saddened. I know he wishes he could have prevented all this from happening to me again.
"Hey, it's ok, Professor." I lean forward and put my hand on his shoulder. "You did your best, and that's good enough."

He gives me a pained smile. "Thank you, Logan. You did tell me that once before, all those years ago, when you asked me to find everyone and bring them to the school."

"I remember. And you did. We're all together now, thanks to you."

He drops his gaze, nodding slowly. "I wish I could have done more for you, Logan. Even if that technically was the 'old' you, had we been able to prevent Stryker from taking you, perhaps...you could have gone back to your old life in 1973. The groundwork would have been laid for a whole other life, with a complete history. A home. A family."

"Hey, don't think like that, Professor. You can't think about the what ifs. I already have a home and a family, right here. The history's not complete, but two out of three ain't bad."

He looks up, both surprised and touched. "You will always have a home and a family here with us."

We both sit there for a moment, not saying anything, but affirmed by the words we both needed to hear. I smile and break the silence by handing him my glass. "Thanks. Now don't get all mushy on me, Professor. We're good, so how 'bout another scotch?"

He laughs and wheels over to the liquor cabinet with my glass. "It took us another 15 years to find you," he says as he pours. "We used Cerebro, of course, but it was difficult to pinpoint your signature brainwave patterns. I believe it may have had something to do with the way they tampered with your mind." He returns and places the glass in my hand.

"Well, as a wise man said to me not so long ago, I'm here now, and that's all that matters."

"A wise man?" He chuckles warmly. "I don't know how wise this man is, but there is truth to his words." I'm glad that I'm able to lighten the mood for him. I don't want him to be burdened with guilt over my life, this man who has been like a father to me.

"We found you in Laughlin City, in the Canadian province of Alberta. Causing ruckus at the local fight bar," he says with a smile.

My smile fades. Laughlin City. This is it; the point where I met Rogue...or should have met her.

"I'm sure it comes as no surprise..." The Professor trails off when he notices the look on my face. "Are you alright, Logan?"

My mouth is suddenly dry and I can't speak. I take a gulp of my scotch.

"You look troubled again. What's wrong?"

"Was there...anyone with me?" I ask carefully.

"There were plenty of people there, but none that I would qualify as 'with you', per se, like a friend or traveling companion."

My heart sinks, and the dead weight in the pit of my stomach grows heavier. And I have to ask. I have to.

"Was--Rogue there, by any chance?" I manage to stammer.

"Rogue?" He tilts his head. "Not that I know of. We only just recruited her this past year; prior to
that we had no knowledge of her."

I think I'm going to be sick.

I can see her in my mind. Sitting at the end of the bar, wearing that hooded green coat and looking like she hasn't eaten a good meal in months.

Standing up in my trailer, sassing me as I throw her duffle bag onto the ground. (Where am I supposed to go?) I don't know. (You don't know or you don't care?) Pick one. (I saved your life.) No you didn't.

Climbing into my cab, after I admit that I can't leave her alone to freeze to death on that snowy road. I'm not gonna hurt you, kid. (It's nothing personal; it's just that when people touch my skin, something happens...)

Asking about my claws. (When they come out...does it hurt?) Every time.

Telling me her true name. So what kind of a name is Rogue? (I don't know, what kind of a name is Wolverine?) My name's Logan. (Marie...)

Gone.

"You were close to her, in the old timeline." The Professor watches me intently, a look of comprehension passing through his eyes. "And you care deeply for her now."

My eyes snap to his. "You reading my mind, Professor?"

"No. I don't have to. I may be a telepath, but your love for her is plain to see."

"Shit." I run my hand through my hair. "Is it that obvious?"

He smiles kindly. "Only just now."

I lean forward to rest my elbows on my knees and hang my head with a sigh.

"I cared for her very much in the old timeline. Loved her, though I didn't realize it at the time. But she died, and I never got to tell her."

"I see," he says softly.

"When I woke up in the new timeline, and I saw her alive--I thought I might have a second chance with her. That we could pick up where we left off."

"But you're discovering that she isn't exactly the same person as she was before."

"She's still the Rogue I know," I say with a little too much vehemence. "Shit." I sit back and scrub a hand over my face. "She's still the same person, even if there are some things that are different. I don't know how to explain it, but I just...know."

He listens, saying nothing, but his eyes are filled with compassion. And suddenly I'm not sure who I'm trying to convince, him or myself.

"We had a lot of history together in the old timeline. But if she only got here this past year, then...that history is gone. So...am I crazy to think that I know her at all?"

"No. You're not crazy to feel that you know her."
"I want to believe that..." God, I really want to. But after last night...

"Logan, when it comes to a person's true self, I'd like to believe that the whole of our being is greater than the sum of our parts. And though we are shaped by our experiences in life, the core of who we are remains the foundation. In this new timeline, Rogue has taken a different path than before, and so therefore, she herself may be a little different than you remember. She's had different life experiences that influence her attitude, her decisions, her emotional reactions. In other words, she's carrying different baggage on this journey. But she has arrived here all the same, hasn't she? And something has drawn you two together again, even though the circumstances are different this time."

I let his words sink in. "This whole time travel thing with different timelines is so f-- messed up," I huff, standing up and walking to the window in frustration. "I don't know what to think."

"Then don't think." I turn to look at him, caught off guard by his counter response. "Feel." He wheels closer. "What do your instincts tell you?"

I close my eyes for a moment, then open them again. "They tell me that she's still the Rogue I know, even if she's...carrying different baggage now. She's still my Rogue."

"Good. Then you need to meet her where she is right now. Start over, and get to know her again. Don't think of it as getting to know a stranger, but rather, think of it as a renewal. And trust that the forces that drew you together, the instincts that drew your 'true selves' to each other in the old timeline, will be there again in this one."

I sit on the ledge and look out the window with a sigh, trying to wrap my head around all of this. It's late morning now and the campus has come alive with students. And I'm reminded that Rogue was never one of them. I wonder where she has been all this time if she hasn't been at the school. And what finally led her here?

"Professor? In the old timeline, Rogue and I came to the school together. How did...can you tell me about how she came to join the X-men in this timeline?"

"Yes, of course." He nods in understanding. Then a little smile creeps up as he prepares to tell me the story. "It seems that Rogue is an appropriate name, if her first encounter with the X-men is anything to go by. The team was on a pick-up in New York City, a young boy who had been thrown out of his foster home when his mutation manifested and so he was living on the streets. They knew he would run if they approached him in their uniforms, so they were dressed in plain clothes and planned on a subtle introduction to slowly gain his trust. Just as Scott was about to engage the boy, Rogue passed by and picked his pocket."

My eyebrows fly up. "Rogue picked Cyke's pocket?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so," he chuckles. "Scott would have let it go, except that she didn't just steal his wallet. She stole one of our communicators."

I shake my head. Mr. Perfect made such a rookie mistake; first, he kept his X-phone in his back pocket unsecured, and second, he let someone sneak up on him. Classic. I'm filing that one away for a later time when I need to bust his balls about something.

"Scott ordered Kitty to follow the boy while he went after Rogue, which unfortunately spooked the boy and he started to run. Rogue, meanwhile, seemed to disappear into thin air. Sensing that they were about to lose the boy, Scott, Kitty, and Jubilee all attempted to intercept him, but he managed to evade them by getting lost in the crowd. Just as they located him again, the boy saw them and darted into the busy intersection, directly into the path of speeding vehicle. He would have been killed in
that instant, had it not been for Rogue, who flew in from seemingly nowhere and swept the boy out of harm's way."

"Damn..." I feel a swell of pride in my chest thinking about Rogue saving that boy.

"Indeed. She set the boy down next to Jubilee...and then she did something equally unexpected. She gave back the wallet and the communicator. Jubilee instantly recognized Rogue's potential as X-men material, and asked her if she would come to the school to see if she might like a place to stay and a possible spot on the team. She declined, and took off like a shot into the sky before Jubilee could say any more. They never expected to see her again. But then, a week later, she showed up at our door."

"And who answered the door?" The words are out of my mouth before I even realize what I'm saying. The only thing I'm thinking right now is that I hope it wasn't Bobby. I still remember looking in on Rogue while she was in her first class and seeing Bobby try to charm her with that stupid ice rose.

"I believe it was Bobby who welcomed her in."

Fuck. It figures. My fists clench and I suppress a growl.

"They were never an item, you know. Rogue and Bobby."

My eyes snap to his again, thinking that he's reading my mind again; but his expression is one of understanding and I realize sheepishly that the jealousy is probably written all over my face.

"He might have tried to pursue her for a short time, but she never reciprocated his attention. She mostly keeps to herself, though looking back I suspect that she might have had eyes for someone else," he says with a knowing smile.

"She did?" My heart feels like it just skipped a beat.

"Strange how she seemed very reluctant to join the team despite all our efforts to entice her. But then suddenly she changed her mind, and agreed to join the team on a trial basis. I'd like to think it was my powers of persuasion that did the trick. But really the only difference that time was that you walked into the room."

"Yeah?" He nods, and there goes my heart again. I'm like a damn schoolgirl hearing about her crush. Somehow I manage to keep a straight face.

The schoolbell goes off, and we both realize that it's time to wrap it up.

"Thanks, Professor," I say, standing up.

He smiles. "Until next time. There will be a next time, won't there?"

"Heh, yeah. Sooner than later this time."

"Very good. I shall look forward to our next history lesson," he says, wheeling back to his desk.

I head for the door, but stop at the threshold. There's still one more question on my mind, though I think I already know the answer. I turn around and try to prepare myself for the inevitable kick to the gut.

"Professor...there's just one more thing I wanted to ask you."
"Yes, of course. What is it?" He looks up from his notepad.

"Did Rogue...have the white streaks in her hair when she came to the school?"

"Yes, she did," he says with a nod. "Did she not have them in the old timeline?"

His words bring the expected kick to the gut, and I try to hide my disappointment. Another piece of our history gone.

"They're not natural or a part of her mutation...I was there when she got them. She almost died that night; her hair turned white from the trauma. They're a scar."

"I see," the Professor murmurs. "She's never mentioned how she got them; she is a very private person who doesn't like to speak of her past. And for some reason I never was able to get a clear reading from her, so I don't know very much about her history, unfortunately."

"You tried reading her mind?"

"Initially, yes. I try to respect the privacy of the people who live here, Logan, but I do have to keep the safety of the school in mind. Everyone gets scanned when I first meet them."

"So...if you couldn't read her mind, how did you know for sure that you could trust her?"

"I didn't." He smiles. "I trusted my instincts, and took a leap of faith."
Dawn

dawn

noun

1. the first appearance of light in the sky before sunrise.
2. the beginning or rise of something

verb

1. to begin to be perceived or understood

I've been wandering the grounds all afternoon. Rogue still isn't back yet. There's a lot going through my mind; all the things the Professor said about her and how she took a different path to get here. So much of our shared history gone. Not just the big things, like how we met, or the night I saved her life on the Statue of Liberty. Little things. Things I never gave much thought to because they just...were.

The easy way we could always talk to each other, natural as breathing. The way we could be together and not talk at all, and that was ok, too. I'd watch the game on TV and she'd lay on the floor of my room and study all evening. Or sometimes we'd both be itching to get out of the mansion, so we'd spend the afternoon wandering the woods. Found a secret spot that way, an old weeping willow tree by a bubbling stream. She'd climb up to sit on a low branch, leaning with her back against the trunk, legs swinging while she softly hummed a song to herself, and I'd lay at the foot of the tree with a cowboy hat over my eyes, dozing off to the sounds of the stream, the birds, her voice.

I remember the pranks we used to play on people around the mansion; Scott and Kurt were our two favorite victims. God, the shit we used to pull, I still can't believe we got away with that stuff.

I remember all those mornings she would drag me out of bed and up to the roof at the ass-crack of dawn to watch a sunrise with her because nobody else would. She always made up for it by bringing a basket with all my favorite foods for breakfast. And a good cigar.

I wasn't always around, but when I was, somehow we always ended up together, like two peas in a pod. Yeah, I chased after Jean any chance I got, and I did my share of running around with the barflies and fight groupies when I wasn't out hunting for my past. But when I came back, she was the one who made it feel like coming home.

My thoughts are interrupted when I catch Rogue's scent and realize that I've ended up outside of her door. I don't even remember returning to the mansion.

I wonder if she's in there. If she is, I wonder if she'll let me in, or even talk to me at all. I take deep breath and raise my hand to knock.

"She's still not back yet, brah," Jubilee informs me as she breezes by. "Haven't seen her since dinner yesterday." I watch her hop down the stairs and disappear around the corner.

I drop my hand to my side and look at the door again. I've never been in her room before, I realize; she has always come to my room. It feels kind of strange standing here, almost like I'm...intruding or
something, even though I'm on the outside. I should just go back to my room for now, but I can't seem to make myself move from the spot.

There's a part of me that wants to go in, even though she's not there. Just for a minute. Maybe get a little peek into her life, and then leave. I know I shouldn't, but my hand is already reaching for the doorknob. I'll look around without touching anything, just for a few minutes, I tell myself.

I walk in and close the door quietly. The room is filled with her familiar scent, enveloping me like a warm blanket, and I close my eyes. After a moment I open them again and take in my surroundings.

Bed is made neatly, with the standard issue linens that the school provides; nothing frilly or fluffy, or piled up with pillows like some women like to have. No pictures on display, and only a few personal items lying around, just necessities like a hairbrush and some toiletries. The room is actually pretty sparse, almost like it's barely lived in.

I walk over to the closet and slide open the door. Like the bed, it's a neat, no frills closet. Some familiar outfits hang in the front, but not enough to even fill half of the space available. In the bottom of the closet, a couple pairs of shoes and a pair of leather boots. And that's pretty much it. I reach out my hand and brush my fingers across Rogue's clothes hanging there, remembering the morning that I dressed her, and for a moment, I can almost imagine feeling the warmth of her breast as I buttoned her shirt.

I'm about to turn away when I spot something tucked in the back of the closet.

Crouching down, I reach into the dark corner and pull it out. An old green duffle bag, similar to the one she had when I met her. The familiar sight of that duffle bag takes me right back to that day, and my heart twists a little in my chest. (Where am I supposed to go?) I don't know. (You don't know or you don't care?) Pick one...

I run my fingers along the olive green fabric, remembering. Everything she had in the world was in that bag. So alone, just like I was.

My fingers find the zipper, and slowly pull it open. Inside, the bag is stuffed with clothes and all the essentials that one would need to hit the road at a moment's notice. Packed and ready for running, just in case. My heart sinks a little, knowing that she still feels the need to keep a bag ready like this. That she still doesn't feel safe enough. That she doesn't feel like she belongs.

I sigh and close the zipper. I'm about to stuff the bag back into the closet, when I hear a faint metallic rattling sound from somewhere inside the bag. My curiosity is piqued; I shouldn't look into her personal belongings any further...but I'm in it now, I rationalize. If I'm going to do something wrong, I guess I might as well do it right.

After opening the bag again and rooting around, I find a hidden pocket. I reach inside, and as I slowly pull out the object and hold it up to the light, I realize what it is and almost choke. It's a set of dog tags...just like mine. Only they're not mine. Mine are tucked away in my dresser in an old cigar box, where I found them after I woke up in the new timeline. Where did she get these?

I lower the tags into the palm of my hand, and stare at the names. One tag is etched with the name "Danvers". Who the hell is Danvers? Was he a boyfriend? Then I look at the name on the other tag, and my heart stops. "Rogue". What the fuck?

How did she get these tags? Were they issued by the Canadian military? That's not possible, since Rogue isn't a citizen. I know what they resemble, but--no...I don't want to believe it. I shake my head; it can't be. There is only one place where she could have gotten tags like these. The
implication hits me like a ton of bricks, and suddenly my head is swimming with a hundred different questions.

I don't know what to think. I feel numb as I tuck the tags back into the pocket and zip the bag closed. How do I even begin to approach Rogue about this?

Just then, I hear a stumbling sound coming from the window. I quickly shove the bag to the back of the closet and close the door. Rogue is back. She wobbles as she climbs in through the window and almost loses her balance before finally planting her feet on the floor. She doesn't even flinch when she sees me.

"How sweet," she says with a smile. "You been waitin' up for me, sugar?"

She throws her jacket onto the chair and saunters closer to me, her body very loose and relaxed as she sways her hips. She's drunk. She smells like whiskey, Southern Comfort to be exact, but not like she's been hanging out at a dingy bar. More like fresh air, with a faint scent on her clothes that almost smells like...copper?

"I was worried about you."

She cups my face with her hands for a moment, pouting and then smiling at me like I'm a puppy or something. "Aw, now that's just adorable." She slides her arms around my neck as she presses her body against me and begins nuzzling my neck.

I take her arms off my shoulders and hold her hands to my chest. "Where did you go?"

"Out," she replies.

"Just out." I raise my eyebrow at her. "Care to elaborate?"

She says nothing for a moment, but then to my surprise, her eyes change color...and now they're green.

"Flying has always helped me clear my mind," she answers. Her southern drawl is gone, replaced by something resembling a New England accent. "Rogue, on the other hand, likes to fly, but when it gets really bad, she adds her own way of dealing with things, if you catch my drift." She holds an imaginary bottle and makes a drinking motion with her hand.

I'm taken aback by the sudden change in her voice and mannerisms. "Rogue?"

"The name's Carol. And I've got my eye on you, bub." She pokes my chest with her finger to emphasize her words.

I stand there, mute. Clearly the person talking to me is a personality that Rogue absorbed somewhere along the way. Before I can fully process this new piece of information, Rogue is back.

"Mmm, I missed you, sugar. Did you miss me?" She glides her hands up my chest and then plays with the collar. I look at her for a long moment, searching her face, and I wonder if she remembers what happened last night.

"I did miss you," I admit. "And...I need to apologize."

"Apologize for what?" She asks as she slips my jacket off and tosses it aside. She doesn't seem to remember what happened; that or she's pretending she doesn't remember. Either way, I need to get this off of my chest.
"For last night...for the things I said. The way I acted. I shouldn't have forced myself on you like that."

She pauses for a moment, her eyes downcast, and I can see the flicker of a memory pass over her face. She gathers herself quickly and looks up with a smile.

"Aw, that's all right, sug. Don't worry about it. I kinda like it rough sometimes." She winks at me coquettishly.

"Listen to me," I say softly as I take her face in my hands. "Rough can be good. But not when it's done out of anger. I was wrong to treat you that way, and I'm sorry." Her eyes lift to mine, and for a moment it seems like I've gotten through to her. There's hurt in her eyes, but there's also a hint of something else; she looks...touched. I stroke her cheek with my thumb, wanting so much for her to know how much I truly mean it. Suddenly she seems uncomfortable. Almost like the sincerity is too much to bear. She puts on a forced smile, and just like that, the moment is gone.

"You know what the real problem is? People get too wrapped up in emotions all the time. They confuse sex with love; it makes them say and do things they don't really mean." She begins unbuttoning my jeans. "It's best to keep things simple and uncomplicated."

"Rogue, darlin'---wait." I still her hands. "What are you doing?"

"Accepting your apology," she replies, pushing my hands aside and going for my jeans again. "Besides, you were right. This was what I came for that first night."

"I don't believe that." I still her hands again, but she simply moves them up and begins unbuttoning my shirt. "Darlin' stop...I know that's not true."

She pauses to strip off her shirt, then grabs my hand and places it on her breast, pressing her fingers over mine to knead her warm flesh. Instinctively my thumb brushes over the lacy material, sweeping over the hardened bump of her nipple, and she moans softly.

"Mmmm, it is true." She leans in, nuzzling my neck again. "You know I want this," she whispers in my ear. "Can't you smell it on me?" I feel a prick of pain when I hear my own words coming back to me from her mouth. But she's not lying.

I try not to take in her scent, but I can't help myself; she smells so damn good. The scent of her arousal goes straight to my cock, and I'm instantly hard.

I need to get hold on this, because it's not the right time. I close my eyes, exhaling with a rumble, trying desperately to tamp down my own arousal. By the time I open my eyes again, she has her pants off. She grabs my hand again, pressing it in between her legs, and God help me, her panties are soaking wet. Shit.

"Rogue, baby stop..." I put my hands on her waist and hold her back from me a few inches. "This isn't what I came for."

"Hmm, are you sure, Logan? I may not have your enhanced senses, but this doesn't lie." She puts her hand on my erection and presses it firmly. She begins stroking me through my jeans, and God, I nearly rip the rest of her clothes off to take her right then and there. Yes...Wait, no. Fuck!

"Darlin', please. This isn't the right time. We really need to talk right now."

She gets down on her knees and opens my jeans, and fuck, I realize that I'm still going commando from last night. She takes my aching cock in her hand and strokes it eagerly, and my eyes roll back
from the sensation.

"Darlin'," I stammer. "You don't have to do this."

"Mmm, yes I do," she says with a smile, licking her lips.

God, I am so tempted to just let her take me into her mouth. To watch those beautiful lips wrap around my cock and suck it until I come so hard I'm seeing stars.

The temptation is strong; it would be so easy to fall back into a physical relationship with her...but where would that leave us emotionally? We had a deep friendship in the old timeline, but not a physical relationship. Now, we have a physical relationship...but is that all we have? I think there's more to us than that, but it needs time to grow. I want more than just the physical. I want it all.

"Rogue---stop. Please..." I manage to gently push her hands away and tuck myself back into my jeans.

She looks up at me in surprise, and suddenly her eyes turn green. She looks pissed.

"You've been fucking with her all this time, Logan. Why stop now?" It's Carol again.

"Just...not like this," I say quietly. I help her up onto her feet, then pick up my jacket and place it gently over her shoulders. She watches me with uncertain eyes as I tuck a white lock of hair behind her ear.

"When did you become such a boy scout?" Her words are meant to be sarcastic, but the tone of her voice doesn't quite carry the harshness to match.

"I'm no boy scout," I grumble. "And I've been fucking her, but not fucking with her. There's a distinction."

She raises her chin. "Not when you're pretending to love her."

Her words are like cold water thrown on my face. I stand there, looking at her with no response.

She closes her eyes, and when she opens them, they're brown again. Rogue is back. She begins to sway a little, and as she steps toward me, she stumbles into my arms.

"Rogue?"

She looks up at me with a tired smile. "Hey sugar."

"C'mon, darlin'. Let me take you to bed; you need to sleep now." I pick her up and carry her over to her bed.

"Don't leave me here alone, Logan," she mumbles. "Stay."

"I'm not going anywhere, darlin'."

I kick off my boots and climb onto the bed with Rogue still in my arms, then sit with my back against the headboard. Rogue curls up in my lap and tucks her face into my chest.

She sleeps quietly, but after a few minutes, she lifts her head. "What time is it? I have things I need to do," she says sleepily. She tries to get up.

"Shhh...they're not important. Just let me hold you," I say softly, pulling her closer.
"I'm so tired, Logan."

"Sleep baby. I've got you."

I rub her back until she closes her eyes and drifts off. After a few moments I feel her stirring again.

"Logan?"

"Yeah, darlin'?"

"What did you mean when you said we've known each other since Laughlin City?"

My hand stills. "I...made a mistake. In the heat of the moment, I just...I was all mixed up inside, darlin'. It was only a dream."

She looks up at me with sleepy eyes. "You dream about me?"

I look down at her beautiful face, so innocent and trusting, and for a moment, I'm painfully reminded of the Marie I held so long ago on that train the night she ran away. I swallow and nod.

"All the time."

"Yeah?" She smiles softly, then lays her head on my chest and sighs. "I dream about you, too." Her eyes slowly close and she drifts off again.

"Don't hurt her, Logan," warns Carol. "She's had enough heartache for one lifetime."

There's a little twist in my heart when I hear her words. I look down again, but Rogue's eyes are still closed.

"I won't hurt her," I say finally. "I'm going to take care of her."

Everything is quiet for a moment, and then I hear it.

"You promise?" The words are spoken so softly, I can't tell this time if it's Rogue or Carol talking. But it doesn't matter. I'm making a promise to Rogue, to Carol, and myself...and this time, I'm keeping it.

I kiss her head softly and press my lips to her temple. "I promise," I whisper into her hair.

. . .

. . .

The light of dawn filters in through the window, and I look down at Rogue; she looks like an angel resting peacefully in my arms.

We made it until the morning. We've never done this before, just holding each other all night. We've fallen asleep together after making love plenty of times, and I would always hold her for a little while, but she never stayed the night. And we've never gotten together without it eventually leading to sex.

This is something different, and it makes me feel...hopeful. Like maybe we can start all over again and build something even stronger than we had before.

She's beginning to stir. I watch the slow flutter of her eyelashes as she opens her eyes.
"Hey," she says softly, a little smile touching her lips.

"Hey." I smile back at her. This is nice; I could definitely get used to waking up like this every day.

We say nothing for a moment, our eyes locked in an intense gaze, until she bites her lip and looks away shyly. This...this is definitely something different.

"Um, did I...sleep on your lap all night?"

"Yep."

Her forehead wrinkles as she recalls the events from last night. "I was totally drunk, wasn't I?"

"Yep."

"Did we..." She bites her lip again.

"No."

She looks down at herself, noting her bra and panties which are still intact, then realizes she is wearing my jacket. She suddenly looks embarrassed.

"But I totally threw myself at you, didn't I?" She searches my face as I try to keep my expression neutral. "No...more like I forced myself on you. You were just trying to talk to me, and..." She covers her mouth with a little gasp. "I ripped your pants open and grabbed your..." Her face scrunches up in embarrassment. "Oh God..."

"Hey, hey...don't worry about it. It's ok." I lift her chin with my finger. "It's ok." She hesitantly meets my eyes. I tuck a white lock of hair behind her ear and caress her cheek. "I know the effect I have on women. They can't help themselves," I say with a serious face.

She gasps in surprise and lightly smacks my arm. "Oh, you!" I smirk and she rolls her eyes. "The arrogance," she mutters.

"Hey, I'm not arrogant. I'm just stating the facts."

"Yeah, yeah, I know. You're God's gift to women, blah blah blah," she says with a wave of her hand. I raise my eyebrow at her, and she smirks back at me before sitting up for a stretch. "Mmm, what time is it anyway?"

"Don't know. Why, you got more things and stuff waiting for you?"

She narrows her eyes at me and huffs in mock indignation, but there is a little smile tugging at the corner of her lips. "Maybe."

"Too bad," I rumble, pulling her closer. "You're mine now. I'm not letting you get away this time, so whatever they are, they'll have to keep waiting."

"Is that so?" She says with an amused smile.

"That's so," I say, smiling back at her. We gaze into each other's eyes for a long moment, and I don't know why, but it's almost like a sort of calm washes over us.

My smile fades and I look at her solemnly. "I'm sorry about the other night."

A flash of regret passes through her eyes. "Me too."
"I shake my head. "Darlin', don't apologize. You have nothing to be sorry for."

"Darlin', don't apologize. You have nothing to be sorry for."

She nods, then drops her gaze for a moment. "Well...I did trash your dresser. And the mirror," she says with a sheepish smile.

We both start chuckling at that. "Yeah, you did. Ok, you're right; you need to apologize for that."

"I'm sorry," she says, still smiling.

"Damn straight you are. Don't let it happen again."

"Ah won't, sugar, just as long as you don't go pissin' me off again," she replies in an exaggerated Southern accent. We both chuckle again, but then the laughter fades to an awkward silence as we remember our conversation that night.

"I'm not sorry for saying that I loved you." I look into her eyes without hesitation or apology.

"Logan--"

"I'm not sorry," I say firmly. "But, maybe it was too soon." She looks at me, uncertainly mixed with longing in her deep brown eyes. "I do care for you a lot, though, so maybe we can just...slow things down a bit. Take things one step at a time."

She releases a breath and nods. "Ok. One step at a time sounds good."

She lays her head against my shoulder and I pull her closer.

"I've been thinking about it, and maybe slowing things down a bit means more than just the...I don't know, the emotional part of it I guess. Maybe we ought to slow things down a bit in the physical department, too."

She looks up and stares at me, her eyebrows furrowed. "Are you saying that we should...stop having sex?"

"I don't know. Maybe." I shrug my shoulders. "Maybe we kind of put the cart before the horse, you know what I mean?"

I can't believe I'm saying this, even as the words leave my mouth. But I have to keep reminding myself of the end game, here. I want it all--love and sex and friendship, and everything we had in the old timeline on top of what we have now; and the only way I'm going to get Rogue to understand that I love her is if she realizes that there is so much more to us than the sex.

"Uh huh. So you're saying you want to court me properly now, like maybe you want to make an honest woman out of me someday?" She giggles and bites her lip.

"I'm saying maybe we need time to let things grow without the distraction of sex in the mix." God, what am I saying? This is so un-Wolverine-like, telling a woman that we should hold off on sex.

"I'm saying maybe we need time to let things grow without the distraction of sex in the mix." God, what am I saying? This is so un-Wolverine-like, telling a woman that we should hold off on sex.

End game, Logan. Remember the end game...

"You're really serious about this," she says with a tone of disbelief.

"Yeah, I guess I kind of am."

"You think you can actually...go without...while we start dating for real?"

"Well, I didn't say that I'd be going without," I reply with a 'well duh' kind of tone. "I just said that
maybe we should stop having sex for a while." I look at her with a serious expression and wait for it.

"Oh! You arrogant bastard!" She smacks my arm again. "Be serious!"

"Alright, alright," I chuckle. "I'm just teasin'. But yeah, I can go without."

"Really. And for how long? A day? Two days?"

"As long as it takes, darlin'." I flash a cocky smile at her.

"As long as it takes for what?"

"Just as long as it takes. That's all I'm sayin',."

"Hmph. You know what I think?" She crosses her arms and looks me directly in the eye. "I think you're all brag and bluster."

"Is that so?"

"That's so, Sugar. I think you wouldn't last through the weekend, is what I think."

"Oh, is that what you think?"

"That's what I think."

"Well you would be wrong. I'll have you know, missy, that when it comes to sex, my self-control is unparalleled."

"Oh really?" She replies with an eyebrow cocked. "Unparalleled? That's a pretty strong word."

"Yeah, really. I can be damn sex camel if I need to be."

She laughs at that. "A sex camel? Oh Lordy, now I've heard everything."

"That's right, darlin'. I bet I could outlast you; in fact, if we do this I bet you'll be beggin' for it before I do."

Her chin drops and she huffs as she stares at me. "Oh, now see there? Now your mouth is writing checks that you can't cash. There is no way that would ever happen."

"No? Well why don't just start today and find out, if you're so sure."

She pauses for a second, with just a hint of hesitation in her eyes. "Alright, mister sex camel, you're on," she says finally. "We'll see what's what when all's said and done."

"All right then. Good," I say with a nod.

"Good."

We look at each other for long moment, saying nothing. As we sit there thinking about what we've just agreed to, the reality sinks in and it's apparent that we've stumbled into new territory. The silence becomes awkward, and she looks away, suddenly shy again.

"Hey," I say softly, caressing her back. "You ok?"

She looks up at me and nods. "Yeah...I think so," she says with a slightly hopeful tone. "Are we really doing this?"
"I think it's worth a try. Don't you? It might be a good thing."

A little smile pulls at the corner of her mouth. "Yeah...I think it might be a good thing."

I smile back at her, and we go quiet again. Suddenly, her stomach growls loudly, breaking the silence. We both chuckle at the interruption, and she blushes.

"I guess we should probably go to breakfast," she says sheepishly.

"Heh, yeah, I guess so." She moves to get up, and I reluctantly let her go.

"Wait," I say, and she turns around. I stand up and take her hand, pulling her back to me. "I have an idea. You stay here and just relax. I'll be right back."

She smiles, curiosity written on her face. "Ok..."

"Give me 10 minutes. Don't go anywhere." I kiss her chastely on the lips, then slip on my boots and head for the door.

"Logan?" She calls after me.

"Yeah, darlin'?" I pause in the doorway and look back.

"I...I care about you, too." I stand there, stunned by her admission. She fidgets and bites her lip nervously. "I just wanted you to know that. It...it goes both ways..."

She looks like she's ready to bolt again. But I don't give her the chance. Striding over to her, I take her face in my hands and kiss her with all the tenderness and passion that I can show her. She makes a small sound of contentment in her throat as her fingers curl into my shirt. I finish by nibbling on her lower lip before pulling back to look into her eyes.

"Wait here, darlin'," I say softly. "I'll be back for this."

...
Surface

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

surface

noun

1. the outward appearance, especially as distinguished from the inner nature:

verb

1. To rise to the surface.
2. To emerge after concealment.

Taking the stairs two at a time, I can hardly wait to get back to her room. I knock on her door and wait. When she answers, I let out a breath, not even realizing I had been holding it. She's so beautiful, standing there in her green and black kimono.

"You're back," she says with a little sigh of relief.

"Told you I'd be back for this," I say, lifting her chin and kissing her lips tenderly. She smiles shyly and plays with the buttons on my shirt.

"Where did you go?" She backs up to let me in her room.

"You'll see. But first, you need to get dressed."

"Ok..." She searches my face, but I just raise my eyebrow at her. She laughs and heads to her dresser, pulling out a pair of pants and a t-shirt and laying them on the bed. She begins untying her kimono.

"Wait...I'll turn around while you change your clothes."

She looks up, surprised. "Alright," she says with a little smile.

I nod and turn my back to her. There's a small pause, and then she begins taking off her kimono.

She's getting naked back there, and because I can't see her, my other senses become sharpened to her presence. The sound of the silk gliding slowly across her skin and dropping to the floor. The scent of her arousal lingering from last night. It's almost more erotic than actually seeing her naked, and it's driving me crazy. I may already be regretting the bet we made as to who would last longer without sex. End game, Logan. End game.

"You can turn around now."

I turn around and see her fully dressed, watching me with a hint of curiosity. This is different, and I don't think she knows what to make of it. "Looking' good, darlin'."

"You didn't peek." She searches my face, unsure, waiting for me make a sexy joke or innuendo. But I'm not going to do that. My gesture was sincere, and I want her to know that.
"I'm a man of my word," I reply simply.

We stand there for a moment, not saying anything. And I think she realizes that I'm really serious about this whole "taking it slow" thing. A little smile forms on her lips, and she looks touched. Maybe I don't regret making the bet after all.

"So you are, Mr. Wolverine," she murmurs.

I come forward to take her hand and kiss her sweetly once more. "C'mon, darlin'. I want to show you something."

As I lead her to the door and reach for the doorknob, I feel her suddenly pull back a little.

"My gloves..." She lets go of my hand and runs to her dresser, opening the top drawer and pulling out a pair of thin black gloves. Pulling them on quickly and then wrapping a sheer scarf around her neck, she comes back to me and takes my hand. I don't know why she feels the need to wear her gloves and scarf; she clearly has control of her skin. Is it an old habit she doesn't want to break or is it some kind of fashion thing?

"Ready?" I say reaching for the doorknob.

"Um, yeah. No, wait..."

My hand pauses as she looks at the door nervously. "What's wrong?"

"Do you think anyone is in the hallway?"

She has that same look on her face; the uncomfortable expression she had when I got a little too close to her in the hall the other day with all those people around. Public displays of affection, she called it.

Suddenly doubt is starting to creep into my thoughts. Is she worried someone will see me coming out of her room in the wee hours of the morning? What is she hiding?

I need to give her the benefit of the doubt. I don't want a replay of the other night, just when we were starting to make progress.

Taking a deep breath, I squeeze her hand in understanding. "It's alright. I'll take a look." I know there's no one out there; I would have heard something if there was. But if it will make her feel more at ease, I'll do it anyway.

I turn the doorknob and crack the door a little, peeking out into the hallway to make sure no one is coming.

"All clear."

"Thanks," she whispers, squeezing my hand back.

I nod and we slip out into the hall, closing her door quietly behind us. I lead her down to the very end of the corridor, then turn down another hall to the very end, where there's a door with a sign that says "no admittance". Looking over my shoulder one more time, I pull a key from my pocket. The rusty latch turns with a wiggle and I open the door.

"After you, sweetheart," I say with a wave of my hand. She smiles and walks in. I follow her in and close the door behind us.
Inside, there's a rusty file cabinet and an old metal desk, scattered with some papers, a few tools, and some jars filled with nails, screws, and washers.

"This is the old maintenance office," I inform her as she walks around looking at the various items scattered about. "C'mon, this way."

I take her hand and lead her to the back of the office, where there is a metal staircase leading up to the roof. We climb to the top and open the door. A soft breeze and a beautiful morning sky greet us as we walk out onto the roof.

"What's this?" she asks, looking at the blanket spread out with plates and silverware and a big basket in the middle.

"This," I say with a grin, "is breakfast."

Her eyes light up and she looks at me with a big smile. "You did this for me? No one's ever surprised me with breakfast before."

"Well I'm about to change that." I pull her in for a kiss, the lead her to sit down on the blanket. Opening the basket, I set out the toast, peanut butter, chocolate chips, bacon, and a thermos of coffee.

"Oh yeah, one more thing." I reach in and pull out a six pack of beer and a cigar. I wink at her and she rolls her eyes.

"This is perfect," she beams, filling her plate. "I know I'm weird, but I love toast with peanut butter and chocolate chips. How did you know?" She narrows her eyes at me. "Have you been spying on me?"

I stop chewing my bacon for a moment, at a loss for words. I know because I've eaten breakfast with her on this roof top before. Watched a dozen sunrises with her in this very spot, followed by a picnic basket she packed with all my favorites and hers. But I can't tell her that.

Swallowing, I just shrug, trying to act casual. "I asked the cafeteria ladies. They said they'd give me the 'Rogue Special'."

She laughs at that. "I guess I am kind of a creature of habit."

We continue to eat our breakfast, talking about anything and everything. It's just like old times, and I realize how much I missed this. How much I took things for granted. She doesn't remember all those times we shared...but that's ok. We're starting over, and it's going to be ok.

"I almost forgot," I say when there's lull in the conversation. I reach into the basket and present her with a flower I picked from Ro's garden.

"Oh, a dahlia!" she says, looking pleased. "So pretty." She smells the flower and closes her eyes.

"Glad you like it."

"My Gran was an avid gardener," she says, twirling the stem between her fingers. "I spent a lot of time hanging out in the garden with her during the summer. Pulling weeds and watering plants. Sometime not working at all, but just talking about whatever came to mind."

She takes off her gloves and touches her fingers to the delicate petals. "Did you know that some dahlias are as big as dinner plates?"
"Wow. That's a big flower," I say, popping open a beer.

"Gran used to tell me all about each flower species and its meaning."

"Its meaning?"

"Um, yeah. Its meaning. Like, back in Victorian times, people would give different kinds of flowers to express different sentiments. So for example, a rose would symbolize love; or a daisy would represent purity. Red poppies would be a symbol of remembrance, especially for fallen soldiers."

"Huh. So what does the dahlia symbolize?"

"Well...Gran used to say the dahlia was kind of a wild card," she says thoughtfully. "It could have two different meanings...depending on the person giving and receiving the flower."

She goes quiet for a moment, still stroking the petals gently with her fingers.

"And?" I prompt her, setting my beer down.

"And...well, on the one hand they could represent an everlasting bond between two people." She looks up for a moment, giving me a shy smile before looking down again. She's so cute. That's right, baby, we have a bond that no one can touch.

I wait for her to continue, but she goes quiet again. She strokes the petals, refusing to meet my gaze. Her eyes get a faraway look as she stares at the flower, and somehow it seems like the mood of our conversation has shifted.

"On the other hand..." she continues, hesitating, "some say the dahlia is...an omen of betrayal."

We both go quiet then. It almost seems like the very air around us goes still, and the hair stands up on the back of my neck. And she's still not looking at me.

I'm not a superstitious man, not by a long shot. But somehow, this whole thing with the dahlia and its double meaning makes me feel a little...uneasy.

Out of all the flowers in Ro's garden, why did I pick that one? I could have given her a damn rose, any color of the rainbow. But I saw this one tucked away in the corner and I had to have it. It's almost like it was meant to be or something.

This is ridiculous. I would never betray Rogue, and I'm not going to get spooked by a damn flower, for fuck's sake.

I reach out and tuck a white lock of hair behind her ear and gently lift her chin. "I'm going with the first meaning, darlin'."

She lifts her eyes to mine and smiles. "Me, too."

..."..."

The purple early morning sky has given way to the blue of late morning as we eat our breakfast in peaceable silence.

"I met Carol last night."
Rogue breaks into a fit of coughing, nearly choking on her toast.

"Easy, easy. Here, have a drink," I say, handing her my beer and patting her back. "You ok?"

She takes a few sips and wipes her mouth with a napkin. "Yeah, I'm ok." She clears her throat and catches her breath.

"She's very protective of you."

Rogue looks up, unsure of what to say. "Yeah, she, um...she looks out for me."

She goes back to picking at her breakfast, but not really eating it. I can tell she's a little nervous.

"She said, and I quote, *I've got my eye on you, bub,*" I say with a smirk. "Complete with finger poking me in the chest."

Her mouth drops open for a second before she closes it and covers her mouth with her hand. "Oh, crap," she mumbles under her breath.

"So now that the cat's out of the bag, you want to talk about it?"

She bows her head and sighs. "Not really," she says, looking up. "But I guess I owe you an explanation."

I shake my head. "You don't owe me anything, darlin'. You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to. But...I'd like it if you did."

She looks at me for a long moment, grateful that I'm not pressing her, but still torn about whether she wants to talk about it or not.

"Carol normally stays inside my head," she says finally. "She doesn't come out like that usually, at least not without my consent. But sometimes, if I'm vulnerable in some way, like when I'm injured or in pain, or under some kind of physical or emotional stress, she slips through. It's her way of making sure I'm ok. Or maybe kind of sharing the burden."

She looks up at me, waiting for me to react in some way, but I remain still, just waiting for her to continue.

"I'm not crazy you know. I don't just have random voices in my head. It's a part of my mutation."

"I never once thought you were crazy. I know you're not."

She lets out a small breath. "Ok."

She grabs the beer I gave her earlier and finishes it off. I wait patiently until she's ready to speak again.

"Everybody thinks that my skin is poisonous," she says finally. "But what they don't know is that it doesn't just kill. When I touch people, I can absorb their life force and their memories. And if they're a mutant, I can absorb their powers. Usually the powers are temporary, but if I touch them long enough...it can be permanent. That's why Carol lives inside my head."

She looks at me again, expecting a reaction. I already know all this, of course, but she doesn't know that. What I don't know is why she has been keeping it a secret. "Go on."

"I haven't told the Professor or anyone here; they all just think that touching my skin means instant
coma or death. They also think I can't control it."

Suddenly it all makes sense, why she doesn't like public displays of affection. She doesn't want anyone to know she can touch.

"And you've been keeping yourself covered all the time to make sure they don't find out. Why?"

"I just..." She looks at me with a pained expression. "I don't want anyone to know. Please don't tell anyone, ok?" She starts to tremble, her hands shaking as she wraps her arms tightly around herself.

"Hey, hey," I say, pulling her into my lap and wrapping my arms around her. "It's ok. I won't tell anyone. It's ok."

"I couldn't control it before, and it was awful. But just because I can control it now, doesn't mean I'm safe. I don't want anyone knowing the full extent of my powers and what I can do. The less people know about me, the better."

We sit there in silence, her head leaning on my shoulder as I gently rub her back. She doesn't think she's safe. My thoughts are all swirling around in my head, wondering what happened to her in this life, what made her so afraid to tell anyone the true nature of her mutation. It makes my stomach twist into all kinds of knots thinking that she feels unsafe, right here at the school.

I want to get it out of her, right now, to make her tell me everything. I want to ask her what happened, who did things to make her afraid; where those dog tags came from, and whether they have something to do with the reason for her fear.

But I know I have to take things slow, and let her tell me in her own time. She's just starting to open up to me, and I can't jeopardize that.

I take a deep breath and exhale slowly. "You can trust them, you know," I say into her hair as I kiss her temple. "The Professor, and the X-men. You can trust them."

She finally looks up at me. The look in her eyes is a mixture of longing and apprehension. "That's what Carol thinks, too."

"Yeah? Maybe you ought to listen to her. I don't think she would steer you wrong," I say, stroking the white strands of hair around her face.

She gives it some thought. "I suppose. She's always looked out for me. It was her idea coming here in the first place, because she had heard about the school being a safe place for mutants. If it wasn't for Carol, I wouldn't have come. And everyone has been really nice but...I just can't bring myself to tell them everything." She sighs in frustration.

"I know, baby. It's hard, allowing yourself to trust people. Truth be told, I didn't trust them at first, either."

She looks up in surprise. "Really?"

"Really. I've had a lot of reasons in this life not to trust anyone. A lot of things done to me, and taken away from me, by people who wanted to use me for their own purposes." I extend the claws in my one hand, watching them gleam in the sun. "I've always had claws, but I wasn't born with metal on my bones."

She reaches out slowly, looking at me and then at my claws. Her expression is a mixture of awe and sadness as she gently strokes the blunt side of the blades.
"When they come out...does it hurt?

My heart stutters in my chest. I can't believe she just spoke those words to me. What are the odds that she would say the exact same thing in two separate lifetimes? And in all the years I can remember, no one has ever asked me that. Just her.

I swallow and look into her eyes. "Every time."

She slowly nods her head in understanding. The déjà vu is so strong, I feel like we could be in my truck right now, driving down that snowy road.

She touches my face and rests her hand on my chest, looking up at me with soulful, brown eyes. "I'm sorry."

"It's alright, darlin'," I say, squeezing her hand. "Don't worry about me, I'm tough."

She smiles a little at that. "How did you know for sure that you could trust the Professor and the X-men?"

"I didn't know for sure, not at first. But I trusted my instincts, and took a leap of faith."

She looks at me for a long moment, then lays her head on my shoulder. I wrap my arms around her securely and kiss her head. "Trust me, darlin'...but if nothing else, trust your instincts."

"I'll try, Logan. I'll try."

...  

Chapter End Notes

By the way, cschoolgirl gets the credit for Rogue's favorite breakfast food. Of course I had to run out and buy peanut butter and chocolate chips after that! Yumm... :)
Déjà Vu

déjà vu

noun

having the strong sensation that an event or experience currently being experienced has already been experienced in the past.

...  

"Logan," the Professor looks up from his desk with a smile. "You remembered your history lesson. Excellent." He wheels around his desk and goes to the liquor cabinet to pour me a drink. It's kind of turned into our routine; I come for a history lesson, he pours the drinks, and we shoot the breeze. Sometimes it's about me brushing up on all the history I missed, but most of the time, we just talk. Today I have a feeling that he's going to pick my brain about the old timeline, which he likes to do when mutant related politics and events are in the news. Our history lessons are just as much for him as they are for me, or so he tells me.

"Professor," I greet him with a nod and take my drink before sinking into the leather chair. "What's on the agenda for today?"

"Something very interesting in the news this morning, Logan." He pauses to pour his drink and then wheels closer. "It seems that Bolivar Trask has been released from prison."

My hand stops mid-air in the middle of going for a sip of my bourbon. "Trask?"

Bolivar Trask, as in the guy who created sentinels. His name brings back a flood of memories and I sit there, speechless.

"Yes, the very same Trask that created the sentinel program," the Professor answers, as if I had just spoken those words aloud. "It appears that he was pardoned by the president."

"Son of a bitch..."

"Indeed," he replies with a somber expression.

I shake my head. "Why would the president pardon him?"

"Good question. The official statement given by the press secretary was that Trask had 'served sufficient time for his crimes'. His release has been granted with the stipulation that he will work directly for government research and development, under strict supervision. Apparently his 'extraordinary intelligence and talent for innovation in biotechnology' would better serve our country and its citizens by making advances in modern science."

"Hmph. Serve our country and its citizens? I highly doubt that. Sounds more like they have something up their sleeves."

"Yes, my thoughts exactly," the Professor nods. "But, it's interesting to note that aside from the sentinel program, Trask did spearhead a great deal of research for the creation of artificial limbs," he says thoughtfully, "as well as a number of vaccines that helped to eradicate some very deadly
diseases prevalent in third world countries. It's hard to say what kind of research they will have him working on."

"Yeah well, where I came from, his vaccines helped eradicate mutants. We were the disease, Professor. And his artificial limb research? It looked like helping people, but behind the scenes he was using the technology to roll out the next generation of sentinels, ones that moved like people instead of robots," I grumble, throwing back the rest of my drink and plunking my glass down on the table.

"I see," the Professor says with a concerned expression. "This is very disconcerting."

I walk to the window and stare out, watching students laugh and play in the sun without a care in the world. Such a contrast from the dark, war-torn existence we came to face in the old timeline. Always running for our lives, just trying to stay one step ahead of those relentless killing machines.

"The second generation of sentinels were released just after the Mutant Registration Act. They were more streamlined than the first, and more advanced, though they still behaved mechanically. Trask started churning them out by the thousands and stationing them all over the country, supposedly to supplement existing military and law enforcement in order to protect our national security. People didn't like it at first, having these huge robots towering over them everywhere, but they got used to it. The government kept feeding them some bullshit about the sentinels 'protecting our way of life'. Eventually, people ate it up...and even grew to like the taste."

"Unfortunately, people have a tendency to believe the propaganda when faced with uncertainty and fear of the unknown," Professor says with a sigh.

"You can't even begin to imagine what the third generation of sentinels were capable of, Professor." I turn to face him. He looks concerned, but I don't think he grasps the extent of the devastation and horror that was unleashed on the world I knew. "They weren't just mechanical robots any more. They were...fluid. That's the only way I can describe them. They changed their form, like shapeshifters."

"Shapeshifters...yes, I remember you telling me that Trask used Mystique's DNA to develop the sentinels," he says, eyebrows furrowed.

"They were adaptable to any situation; whatever power a mutant used to fight them, the sentinels were able to mirror them right back, and then use them to kill other mutants. I've never seen anything like it."

"My God...such a machine must never come to be in this timeline," the Professor says gravely.

"No...never again." I pour myself another drink and toss it back. It does nothing for me.

There's an old, familiar feeling that echoes through my chest, reminding me of something that I would rather not remember. I'm not thinking about the war or the hardship or the constant running just to stay alive one more day. All I can think about is that one moment. The moment the Professor told me that there was no more school to go back to. No more Rogue to go back to.

I saw the footage after the attack. Sentinels on every corner of the mansion roof, one of them standing right in the very same spot that Rogue and I always had breakfast. Smoke coming out of the East Wing. Bodies on the lawn.

All I could think about is how she died...that the last thing she probably saw was the face of one of those monstrosities. And I wanted to slash my own throat.
"As you remember, Mystique was shot in Paris, so they were still able to obtain her DNA," the Professor says, interrupting my thoughts. "But, we did take precautionary measures after the Whitehouse standoff, launching several covert operations to destroy all the DNA samples that they kept."

"Are you sure you got everything?"

"I believe so...we did everything in our power and used every connection we had to track down all the lab records."

We sit there in silence, both knowing that there are no guarantees. There could still be a secret copy hidden somewhere. He looks at me with understanding in his eyes, and I think he must be reading my thoughts.

"Logan, I'm going to have one of my connections do some intel. Whatever Trask is up to, we'll stop him. We won't allow history to repeat itself."

... ... ... ...

"I don't know, Logan...what if she doesn't like it?"

"She'll love it."

Rogue holds up the little patchwork quilt and frowns. "Maybe she'll think a handmade gift is hokey. I should have just gotten something from the baby registry."

I come up behind her and wrap my arms around her waist. "She won't think it's hokey," I say, kissing her shoulder. "Anybody can buy something off the registry; but this is something special."

She places her hand on my arm and snuggles into me. "I guess you're right. Gran used to make a baby quilt for every grandchild and just about every pregnant mom she knew. It'd be nice to carry on her tradition."

"I think Gran would have liked that." I give her another squeeze and she smiles.

I lie down on the bed and watch her finish wrapping the quilt. She's a little nervous about going to Jean's baby shower, but I think she's also kind of looking forward to it. Little by little, she's slowly starting to accept the friendship of the other women. She's always talked to them, of course; it's impossible to be on a team without good communication, but other than that she has mostly kept to herself. It's nice to see her opening up a little to the others.

Jubilee seems to be her favorite; Rogue says she likes Jubes because she does most of the talking so Rogue doesn't have to. I suspect that it's really because Jubes has a comfortable, uncomplicated way about her that puts Rogue at ease; she seems to understand Rogue without words...makes her feel like she doesn't have to do anything but simply be.

Jubilee was the first to figure out that Rogue and I are together of course. Can't put anything past that one. For all the effort she puts into portraying herself as a gum-cracking mall rat, she is more perceptive than a house full of telepaths.

Everyone on the team seems to have finally caught on now, and although Rogue was a little nervous about it at first, no one has said a word. There's just been an easy acceptance of our relationship, no questions asked, which has been both a surprise and a relief to her.
Rogue is ready and I walk her down to the common room where the women and some female students are gathered for the shower. We menfolk aren't invited, so I drop her off with a little kiss to her gloved hand and head for the kitchen. Scott, Piotr, Kurt, Hank, and Bobby are already there snacking on a deli tray and cracking open a few beers. Piotr hands me a cold one and claps me on the back.

"Wolverine! Cyclops is going to be father now; maybe you will be next, eh?" he grins at me.

"I don't think so, tin man," I say with a smirk. "Maybe you're up next. 'Course, you need to find yourself a willing woman first. Good luck with that mug." The guys all break into laughter at that.

We continue to joke and talk about all the fun Scott's going to have changing dirty diapers. He takes the ribbing with good humor, though. I can tell he's really looking forward to fatherhood, stinky diapers and all.

Scott seems to be a little more relaxed around me now that he knows Rogue and I are together. According to the Professor, old me spent quite a bit of time flirting with Jean before I got here, and made no attempts to hide it. Par for the course, I suppose. It almost makes me feel ashamed of my blatant disregard for their relationship in the old timeline. I was just so...misguided. Now that I've come to my senses about Rogue, I can look at Scott and Jean and be truly and freely happy for them.

The party is winding down, and I decide to take a peek at what's happening in the common room. Leaning against the doorway, I watch Rogue hanging out next to Jubes, laughing at something she says as they play their baby shower games. Jean is smiling as the girls wrap toilet paper around her belly for some odd reason. Suddenly they all cheer and Storm hands Rogue a prize. Rogue looks up at me and smiles; I think she might actually be enjoying herself.

Afterwards I walk Rogue back to her room, toting a basket of floral scented bath supplies.

"I know this stuff probably stinks to high heaven, what with your sensitive nose," she says with a grin. "I might just give it to Jubes."

"Well, I didn't want to say anything, but yeah. This stuff stinks to high heaven," I smirk, and she nudges me with her elbow. "Besides, you don't need all this perfumey stuff. You already smell delectable, all the time."

"Oh, do I?" she giggles.

"Yes, you do." We stop at her door and I give her a heated stare. "Good enough to eat." She blushes a little and bites her lip, her fingers lightly brushing my arm as she fidgets.

"Well then...I guess I'll stop over at Jubes and give her this basket. Don't wait for me; go on ahead and I'll just meet you at your room."

"Alright, darlin'. Don't be long." I give her discreet kiss and hand her the basket.

"I won't," she says with a smile. I watch her walk down the hall until she rounds the corner and then I head for my room. I have this feeling that Rogue is going to be a little while; Yellow can be a bit of a talker.

On the way, I bump into Jean. "Hey Logan!"

"Oh, hey Jean. How was the shower?"

"It was wonderful. Thank you for convincing Rogue to come," she says, smiling warmly. "It was
so nice having her there."

"I didn't have to do any convincing; she wanted to be there," I assure her.

"I'm so glad to hear that," she says with a little sigh of relief. "She had a good time, right? I feel like she's opening up a little more to us finally."

"Yeah, I think she is."

"I think," she says with a knowing smile, "you might have something to do with that."

"Yeah?"

She nods. "I think you've been good for her. I can feel a different kind of energy coming off of her when you're around. It's like...a warm sense of belonging. She feels deeply connected to you."

I feel a smile creeping up on my face. "You can feel that?"

"I can feel it. And Logan?" She touches my arm and leans in to whisper, "I think she's been good for you, too."

"Maybe," I admit with a smile.

She looks at me with a soft fondness in her eyes, and it takes a moment, but I realize that she has the same look that Scott had today; there's an openness that wasn't there before.

"I'm so happy for you, Logan."

"Thanks, Jeannie. I'm happy for you and Scott, too."

Her face lights up and she hugs me. "Thank you. That means a lot to me."

We stand there, looking at each other, and I think maybe we're both thinking the same thing. There's a sense of peace and acceptance between us now. Once upon a time, I might have pursued her any chance I got, and she might have felt some kind of attraction to me, even if she would never act on it. But now, we can just be ok with the affection we have for each other as friends, no strings attached.

I watch as she rubs her swollen belly, and her hand rests over her stomach. There's a baby in there. Such a contrast between this timeline and the old one, and I can't help but stare at the spot where I stabbed her with my claws, right where her baby now grows.

"Do you want to feel? He's kicking right now."

I look up in surprise. "You sure?"

"Of course," she smiles. "C'mon, put your hand right here."

She takes my hand and places it on the spot. The image of my claws sinking into the soft flesh of her belly flashes through my mind, and I suck in a small breath.

"Can you feel it?"

"Can I what?" My eyes dart to hers.

"Can you feel him kicking?"
"Oh...yeah, I can feel him."

"It's so amazing, isn't it?" A look of concern crosses her face. "Logan, are you ok?"

I look at our hands resting on her belly and nod. "More than ok." The incredible guilt I used to feel has been lifted, and I'm just grateful that we were all given a second chance to live our lives the way we were meant to live them.

Jean smiles and I smile back. Then the scent of floral bath salts touches my nose.

"Rogue."

Rogue stands there, not saying anything, and I follow her gaze to my hands on Jean's belly. "We were just...the baby was kicking," I say, pulling my hands away. She looks at Jean and then me again. Her expression isn't accusatory at all, though I still feel like I've done something wrong. Instead the look in her eyes is almost one of...recognition. Acceptance. Like she's a little sad, but not surprised, and somehow that's even worse.

"That's great," she says quietly, mustering up a smile. "Congratulations again, Jean."

"Thanks so much, Rogue. I love the quilt."

Rogue nods and looks at me.

"Congratulations, Jeannie." I pat her lightly on the arm and walk over to Rogue, taking her hand. "Ready?"

Her eyes meet mine and she nods with a smile that doesn't touch her eyes. "Ready as ah'll ever be."
Naked

Chapter Notes

As always, a big thank you to cschoolgirl for the beta, and a big thank you to those who are still reading this story and commenting faithfully. (((hugs)))

na•ked

adj.

1. without clothes.
2. (of something such as feelings or behavior) undisguised; blatant.

"Everything ok, darlin?"

"Of course, why wouldn't it be?" Rogue answers casually.

I don't buy it.

"No reason," I say, opening the door and letting her into my room. "Just checking. In case you wanted to talk about anything."

"We've been talking all day." She glances at me for a moment as she takes off her jacket and tosses it onto the chair.

"I know. I just wanted to make sure. I thought maybe after what happened today, you might think..."

She tilts her head. "That I might think what?"

"That Jean and I are more than friends."

She pauses for a moment. "And are you?"

"No."

"Well then. You're not, and I'm fine. Case closed." She gives me a peck on the cheek. "Mind if I just take a shower here?" Rogue asks, kicking off her shoes and heading to the bathroom.

"Of course not. You know you don't need to ask," I reply, a little surprised by her question.

"Well, I didn't want to assume..." she shrugs, standing in the doorway.

"Go ahead, assume. I want you to." I look into her eyes intently. "Anything I have is yours."

She looks at me for a long moment. "Thanks, sugar," she murmurs. She retreats behind the door,
leaving it half open.

After a moment, I hear the water running, and the sound of clothes dropping to the floor.

"I probably shouldn't be doing this here. It's kind of not fair to you."

"Oh? And why is that?"

"Well, you know. Because of our bet and all. Me being here, in your room...naked and wet." She steps into the shower and lets out a little moan. "Mmm, God that feels good."

I stand there, staring at the door as little puffs of steam begin to roll out. Closing my eyes, I draw in Rogue's scent, intensified by the heat and moisture. Damn bet. There is nothing I would love to do more than tear off my clothes and get into that shower with her right now. But none of this is really about the bet; it's about us learning to have a relationship based on more than physical intimacy, and I have to stay the course if I want to earn her trust.

"Warm water and little bubbles running down my body," she continues. "It's like I'm waiving all this temptation right in your face."

If I didn't know any better, I'd say there was a smile on her face as she was talking. The sound of a small object hitting the floor echoes in the bathroom. "Oops, dropped the soap," she giggles.

The thought of her bending over to pick up the soap, that fine, luscious bottom raised in the air...damn.

She knows what she's doing to me. She left that door open on purpose.

I go into the bathroom and open the shower door.

"Oh, are you joining me?" she says with a coy smile.

My eyes roam up and down her body for a moment, lingering on the little rivulets of water clinging to the curves of her breasts. Damn, damn, damn. I close my eyes with a sigh and try to push the image from my brain. "No, darlin'. You're joining me, in the other room. We're going to talk about this."

Her smile fades as I reach to turn the water off. "Talk about what?"

Taking a towel from the hook, I gently wrap her up. I cup her face in my hands, caressing her cheek with my thumb. "You know what."

We stand there, both waiting. Her expression is unwavering as she meets my gaze, but I hold my ground. Another long moment passes, and I keep waiting.

Finally, her expression breaks and she closes her eyes in surrender. "Fine," she sighs, dropping her forehead to my chest.

I wrap my arms around her and rest my chin on her head, just holding her for a while.

"I know you don't want to talk about it, darlin', but I do. We need to. I don't want any...unspoken things hanging between us." I raise her face to mine again, and wait for her to look me in the eye. "Do you understand?"

Reluctantly, she looks up. Warm brown eyes search my face, and it's a look I've seen before. A shadow of uncertainty mixed with longing; guarded, with that touch of vulnerability that she tries to
She nods in half-hearted agreement. "Ok."

"That's my girl." I kiss her forehead. "Come on. Let's get under the covers and keep you warm."

Holding her hand, I lead her to the bedroom and we slip under the covers. I lie on my side and pat the spot next to me, encouraging her to snuggle up closer, face to face.

Slowly and gently, I begin caressing her arms and shoulders, hip and back, while we lay there looking into each other's eyes, saying nothing. Patience. I need to give her time to open up to me.

I can see the wheels turning. *Come on, baby. Talk to me.*

"Look, I know you weren't doing anything...wrong." She glances tentatively at me for a moment, then looks away. "I mean, we were all touching Jean's belly today, so it's not like what you did was anything out of the ordinary. There's no reason for me to feel...whatever. It's...stupid, really."

"Darlin'. It's not stupid. You feel what you feel, and there is nothing wrong with that."

"Yeah," she says quietly. "I guess so."

I continue caressing her hip and back, waiting for her to say more.

She lets out a soft sigh. "I know that Jean loves Scott, and he loves her. They mean the world to each other. Anyone can see that." She pauses, hesitating to say more.

"But?"

"But...I can see that Jean means something to you, too."

"Darlin'...all that flirting I used to do with Jean...I was just being stupid. It was a mistake, and it didn't mean anything."

"That's not what I meant."

My hand stills for a moment. "It's not?"

"No...I mean, that's part of it. But, that's not all. I don't know how to explain it, Logan, but there's just this...feeling I can't shake. I've had it for a long time."

She goes quiet, her eyes glazed over as if she were searching for a memory. "Sometimes I dream about it. That you loved her, and she broke your heart. You spend the rest of your days wandering the earth, trying to mend it. And somehow, my heart is broken, too."

I feel a small twist in my chest at her words. She has no idea how close her dream was to the real thing. "It's...just a dream, baby. It's not real," I reassure her.

She looks up, her expression a little self-conscious. "I know. Dreams are not reality, even if they seem very real." She lowers her face, her cheeks coloring a little.

"Still, something about the way you looked at her today," she murmurs, "when you had your hands on her belly... there was this look in your eyes. Different than the way you used to look at her when I first came to Xavier's. Not flirtatious, or suggestive. It was a far away look...wistful almost."

"Darlin'...it's not what you think." I hesitate, trying to find the right words. How do I explain
something like this? Old timelines and past lives and painful mistakes and second chances? I'm not going to lie to her...but I need to choose my words carefully.

"You care for her a lot. Don't you?"

"I do..." I answer warily, "but only as a friend, nothing more. That look you saw today...I was just happy for her. That's all."

She sighs. "Logan...our relationship...whatever we have together...I don't expect anything from you. Just be honest, ok? I can take it."

"Hey, look at me." I look her into her eyes with a steady gaze, unflinching. "I am being honest. What we have together is the only thing that matters to me. You got that? That means you have a right to expect everything from me."

Rogue studies me for a long moment. "Do I?"

"Yes. You do." I tuck a white lock of hair behind her ear. "I'm all yours, darlin'. Even if you won't let me say the 'L' word." She stares at me, speechless, and I smirk. "Just tryin' to lighten the mood a little, sweetheart."

She narrows her eyes at me, but before long I can see the corner of her mouth twitching as she holds back a smile, and she visibly relaxes.

I begin caressing her back and hip again. After a moment, she snuggles in closer to my chest, and I curl my arm around her, holding her securely. We stay like that for a while, just wrapped around each other.

I think it was a good thing, making her talk about what happened today. I'm no expert on relationships, that's for sure; hell, I'm the last person anyone would expect to talk about feelings and shit. But I meant what I said about not wanting any unspoken things hanging between us. I don't want to make the same mistakes I did last time around.

"So...I have a right to expect everything from you, huh?" I can hear that little smile in her voice again. "What might that entail? Because I can be very demanding."

I look down at her, and she has her face buried in my chest, but I can see her smiling.

"Did I say everything?" I tease. "I meant to say, some things, on occasion. If I feel like it, and you've been a good girl."

Her eyes snap to mine. "Oh no you don't, mister. There's no backtracking now. You said everything, and I intend to have it all. I want everything that's coming to me."

I flash an evil grin. "Oh, you'll get what's coming to you, alright."

Her eyes grow wide and she tries to scramble away from me, squealing as I pounce on her and start tickling her sides.

"Ah, ha ha! You big meanie!" She laughs, kicking and squirming. "No fair!"

"Hey, I never said I played fair, darlin'," I smirk.

Her eyes light up in challenge and she wiggles out of my grasp. She turns and pounces back, tumbling us both over as we laugh and engage in an all-out tickle war.
We continue playfully wrestling and teasing until finally, we collapse onto the bed in a truce. Rogue curls into my side, wrapping an arm around my waist and hooking her leg over mine. I kiss her head and she sighs, snuggling closer.

I've always loved that about us. Even in the old timeline, we could always go through the gamut, from angry to serious to playful, and everything in between. And in the end, we'd still care for each other. Still be drawn together.

She's still my Rogue.

After a while, her breathing slows to a peaceful, quiet rhythm, and she starts to drift off. "Logan..." she mumbles, "can I sleep here for tonight?"

"Of course, darlin. Always."

"Thanks. This is just so nice, staying here with you," she murmurs. "I want to stay like this forever."

I look down and her eyes are closed. I softly kiss her forehead and brush my lips to her cheek. "Then stay forever," I whisper.

...

...

Something warm and soft under my hand. My fingertips glide along a wandering path, over a silken landscape of curves and dips. Instinct draws them to an irresistible valley of warmth, and a low rumble rises in my chest. I want to explore. Taste. Bury myself in that slick heat.

I wake with a start. I look around and spot the clock on the nightstand; it's a little past midnight. Rogue is sleeping next to me on her belly, still wrapped in her towel, hair all mussed up...and looking completely fuckable. My hand is nestled between her thighs.

Damn, that's a hell of a way to wake up. Gently, I draw my hand back. I can't resist the temptation; bringing my fingers to my mouth, I close my eyes at the taste of Rogue on my tongue.

Fuck. I'm hard as a rock, and this is not helping. I think I need to take a shower to get my mind off of this aching need.

I place a kiss on her bare shoulder and slip out of bed, padding to the bathroom. Shedding my clothes, I blast the hot water and step into the shower, leaning forward with my hand on the wall and feeling the spray wash down my back.

I breathe a heavy sigh. My mind keeps going back to the image of Rogue from earlier, standing there in front of me, naked and wet. Warm water cascading onto her body as she looked at me with those dark eyes, little rivers streaming down between her breasts, into her navel and spilling down between her legs.

She wanted me in that moment, too, of that I have no doubt. It would have been so easy to just strip off my clothes right then and there and get into the shower with her. To feel her body press eagerly against mine.

I'd wind her hair around my hand and guide her lips to my hungry mouth, kissing her deeply and sensually until she was breathless and trembling.
I'd leave a trail of kisses down her neck and shoulder, take each nipple into my mouth and tease it mercilessly with my tongue, then suck it just to hear her gasp as her fingers gripped my hair.

I'd slide my hand down between her thighs, drawing a beautiful moan from her throat as I drew exquisite circles around her clit.

Just thinking about what I'd do to her makes me utter a low groan, and I wrap my fist around my cock, bucking a little at the sensation as the water continues to run down my body. My mind takes me further down the rabbit hole, and soon I'm seeing myself hike her leg around my hip, thrusting into her as she cries out in pleasure.

I'm driving my cock deep inside of her over and over again, her body rhythmically sliding up and down the shower wall with each thrust as she clings to me for dear life. The pressure builds higher and I'm ready to come hard.

I stroke myself and growl, ready to come for real. That's when I sense it. I stop and listen, then sniff. The humid air is heavy with the scent of Rogue...and lust, both hers and mine.

"I know you're there." My voice is low and graved with unspent desire. "You don't have to hide."

The room is silent except for the sound of running water and falling droplets. Then, a form moves into view in front of the frosted door. She hesitates, reaching out, then pulls back.

I throw open the door and look at her over my shoulder, watching her eyes grow wide, her lips parting as her gaze falls on my erection. She looks up and blushes.

"Did you come to watch, darlin'?" I say, standing up straight and turning to face her.

"No, I--I mean..." she stammers. "I know I...shouldn't be here. I had a bad dream and couldn't fall back asleep. I came looking for you...and then I heard the water running, and I heard..." Her voice trails off.

"Heard what?"

She blushes again. "I didn't mean to intrude on your...private moment. But once I got in here, I couldn't tear myself away, knowing what you were doing."

I stare at her for a moment, and she fidgets nervously, averting her eyes. She turns to leave.

"Don't."

She stops, turning back slowly.

"I told you...anything I have is yours. Even this." My eyes bore into her, intending to leave no doubt in her mind that I mean every word.

I turn to rest my hand on the wall again and begin stroking myself, letting the water fall on my shoulders.

She stands there motionless, at a loss for words, but I can feel her eyes on me. It only heightens my arousal.

I have no self-consciousness when it comes to nudity or sex. This is a different kind of intimacy, though. She's the only one I've ever opened myself to like this.

The rhythm starts slow, gradually increasing in tempo and I let out a low rumble, stroking a little
harder. I can hear Rogue breathing, her heart beating a little faster, her scent growing thicker, and it drives me crazy to know this is turning her on. I can feel myself getting close again.

"Can I---?" Rogue suddenly whispers shyly.

I pause and look at her for a moment, surprised. Dropping my hand to my side, I turn to face her. Watching me with darkened eyes, she slowly opens her towel and lets it fall to the floor. She steps in and closes the door. We stare at each other for a long moment, the water cascading around us, the desire rolling off of us in waves.

Suddenly, Rogue pulls me down for a hungry kiss, then grasps my cock, eagerly stroking it with a little moan. My eyes roll back at the sharp relief and pleasure of her touch and a low groan rips through my chest.

My entire body aches with the need for release, and my hips start to buck involuntarily as she pumps my cock. She reaches down between her legs, coating her fingers in her own slickness and using it lubricate my cock as she strokes it.

"Fuck, Rogue. What are you doing to me?" I manage to grind out as the heightened waves of pleasure hit me. I look down and the sight of her small hand wrapped around my length is more than I can take. I can feel the flames licking at my spine as the pressure builds to the breaking point.

"Marie," she whispers breathlessly in my ear. "My real name...it's Marie."

"Fuck, Marie!" I growl, exploding into her hand as my fingers grip her hips so hard I'm sure there will be bruises later.

Her hands remain on me, gently massaging as I come down from my orgasm, panting and sated. She kisses me on the jaw.

"Thank you," she whispers. "For letting me see you."

I look down at her beautiful face as she nuzzles my chest. And it hits me like a ton of bricks: she told me her name.

She doesn't know that I already knew it; I must not have called her Marie at all in this timeline. I wasn't consciously avoiding it, but I was so used to calling her Rogue because she never told anyone else.

This is a big deal. It means that she trusts me enough to know this very private part of her, a part that she doesn't show anyone else.

I don't know what to say. All I can manage in this moment is just to pull her tight to me and kiss her fiercely with everything I've got.

She hooks her leg behind mine, whimpering softly, her body rubbing against me with need. We draw apart, both breathing heavily.

"My turn to thank you," I say, descending my hand to her slick opening. She gasps as I slide a finger inside and then two, so wet already. Like a finely tuned instrument, my hands draw the sweetest sounds from her as they play with her sensitive flesh. Tiny flutters around my fingers tell me that she's about to come, and she tenses, grabbing tightly onto my biceps.

"Logan!" she cries out, digging her fingers into my arms and burying her face in my shoulder with
muffled moans. She hooks an arm around my neck and pants heavily as she hangs on to me, her legs wobbling, and I wrap an arm around her waist to steady her.

We remain like that for several moments, clinging to each other as the warm water falls down around us.

"Dang," she mumbles. "I needed that."

"Yeah, me too," I agree.

She raises her face to look up at me, her eyes like molten chocolate. A little smile plays on her lips.

"So...does this mean one of us lost the bet?" she asks, her smile growing wider.

I shake my head and chuckle. "I have no fuckin' idea."

"Hmm...I think maybe we both won on this one, sugar," she giggles, and we both break into laughter.

We take turns lathering each other up, and have just as much fun getting clean as we did getting dirty. I think she may be right; bet or no bet, we both won tonight.

...
"So that's how I broke my arm when I was 12. By walking the roof of my daddy's toolshed, because I wanted to be like Anne of Green Gables." Rogue takes another bite of her peanut butter and chocolate chip toast.

It's a beautiful morning, and we're starting the day in my favorite way. Well, second favorite; you can imagine what my favorite morning activity with Rogue might be, heh. But we're still trying to take things slow, so I'm not even gonna go there.

"Hmph. This Anne character sounds like a little bit of a rebel," I conclude, biting off a piece of bacon. "Giving her best friend booze, smashing a slate over Gilbert's head for making fun of her hair...sounds like real troublemaker."

Rogue huffs and narrows her eyes at me. "Maybe she is. And?" She lifts her chin in the air in defiance.

I keep a poker face for a few moments, reaching for her coffee, pretending not to notice. She crosses her arms as I take a sip, and I finally look up from the mug and grin. "I like her."

Rogue stares at me for a moment, then lets out a breath and laughs. "Good. I didn't want to have to dispatch of you like Gilbert Blythe."

"Ouch," I chuckle, raising my hands in surrender.

"Anyways, she wasn't so much a troublemaker as she was...spirited. Everything she did was according to her own instincts, rather than everyone else's expectations of what was proper. I guess that did kind of make her a rebel."

"That's why I said I liked her. Nothing wrong with being spirited. And following your instincts is always a good thing."

"Yeah, I suppose you're right," she says, taking another bite of toast. "Hey, how do you know so much about Anne of Green Gables anyway? I can't imagine the Wolverine reading something like that in his spare time."

"I, uh..." I clear my throat, prodding my brain to come up with an explanation. She looks at me expectantly. "I watched the whole series on TV one night when I couldn't sleep. Lost the remote and was too lazy to get up and change the channel."

There, that sounds reasonable, right? I hope she buys it. I never read the book, of course, but I remember her talking about it in the old timeline. Her grandmother gave her those books, and it was one of the few times that she would talk about fond memories from her childhood. And if I did happen to pick up a few key points in the plot or remember the characters? Purely by accident. I was
only trying to be a good listener. I certainly didn't watch the entire movie that night on purpose.

"Really. You were so lazy that you would rather watch a movie about the charming misadventures of an orphan girl in Victorian times than simply get up and change the channel?"

"I was tired," I say with a shrug, stuffing another piece of bacon in my mouth.

She shakes her head. "I don't buy it."

I freeze for a moment and look up. "You don't?"

"Nope."

"Well...that's my story and I'm sticking to it," I say gruffly, taking a gulp of coffee and avoiding her stare.

"Hmph. You know what I think?" she says, raising an eyebrow. "I think that you actually watched the movie on purpose. And I think that once you started watching it, you got sucked in and couldn't look away because it was so good. I think," she says with a big grin, "that you loved it. Didn't you? Admit it!"

I look up and blink a few times, and she giggles. Oh. That's what she thinks? Well...what else can I say?

"Shhh, don't say that so loud," I hiss, my eyes darting back and forth to make sure no one is listening. I've got a reputation to uphold, you know."

"Ha! I knew it!" She laughs, clapping her hands.

"Hey! Shhh!"

"I knew it," she whispers, grinning like a fool.


She giggles again. "Aw, that's nothing to be embarrassed about, sugar. It's a great movie."

"Hmph." I reach for a beer and crack it open. I take a few long swallows, plunking the bottle down with a sigh. I know it's only ten in the morning, but I don't think there's ever a bad time for a good beer. Besides, it's practically lunch time, right?

"So, what other delightful secrets does the Wolverine have? Anything else I should know about?"


"That's it? Really?"

"Yep. Sorry to disappoint ya, kid."

She smiles and goes back to her breakfast. "Whatever you say," she says under her breath, biting into her toast.

A soft breeze blows a lock of her white hair across her face, and she pushes it back as she gazes out over the lawn. I take another swig of my beer. I love mornings like this, having breakfast with my girl, talking about anything and everything, and always with a bit of good natured teasing. Each time I'm reminded more and more that she's still my Rogue. Still my Marie, I note with satisfaction.
The breeze blows some hair across her face again. I reach out and tug on the white streak playfully.

"Watch it, Gilbert. I don't want to have to teach you a lesson," she grumbles, the corner of her mouth twitching as she brushes her hair back.

Her little warning makes me smile, but I can't help the wistful feeling that settles in my chest when I see those white streaks. There are questions that have been lingering in the back of my mind for a while now, and I've been waiting for the right moment to bring them up. I'm not sure if this is the right moment, but I'm also not sure how much longer I can wait.

"I'm just curious about your hair, is all," I say, trying to sound casual. "Were you born with those stripes?"

She stiffens for a moment, eyes fixed on her toast. "No...I got them later," she says quietly.

There's an awkward silence as she avoids looking at me. She takes another bite of her toast, but chews slowly, as if suddenly she has lost her appetite.

"Hey...I'm sorry if I made you uncomfortable. I didn't mean anything by it...I just wanted to know."

"Why do you want to know?" She asks, her voice carefully measured.

"Because," I insist, though it doesn't really explain anything. "Because I care about you. I care about you a lot, and I want to know everything there is to know about you," I say gently, lifting her chin. "Is that so bad?"

"There's not much to know." She turns her face away and sits in silence, looking off into the distance.

"'Course there is. I'm sure there is way more to you than meets the eye."

"Well there isn't. Sorry to disappoint ya," she mutters.

"No? Damn. That's boring." I smirk at her, hoping for a reaction, but she ignores me.

"Darlin'..." I sigh, "Don't you think you can trust me by now? I thought last night meant something. Didn't it...Marie?"

She looks at me suddenly at the mention of her real name. "It did mean something," she whispers. "It meant a lot."

"It meant a lot to me, too. You trusted me with your real name last night. Can't you trust me now with this?"

She opens her mouth to speak, but stops herself. I wait for her to say something, but instead she just looks away again, pulling her knees to her chest.

Shut out once again. I'm trying to be patient, but the frustration is beginning to quickly mount up inside of me. Why does this have to be like pulling teeth all the time?

I wish she would just talk to me. I wish every two steps forward weren't accompanied by another step back. Fuck.

With a growl I stand up, walking over to the ledge for some air.

Patience has never been my strong suit. And yet, I know that's exactly what she needs from me. I
need to calm down. Taking a deep breath, I let it out slowly and close my eyes. *Peaceful thoughts*, I think wryly.

"I'm sorry," I hear a whisper from behind my back.

Turning around, I'm captured by two beautiful, tortured brown eyes. She gazes at me for a long moment, and I can see the emotions warring within. She's torn. Torn between wanting to trust me, and needing to protect herself. Oh, darlin'.

Any frustration I might have had crumbles when she looks at me like that. If there is anyone on this earth I can learn to be patient for, it's Rogue. *As long as it takes*, I remember telling her. I wasn't just talking about the bet when I said that to her.

What I really meant was, *as long as you need to feel safe, darlin'. As long as you need to understand that I'm going to take care of you, and I'm not going anywhere.*

"Don't be sorry, baby. You have nothing to be sorry for." I pull her into my arms for a hug, and she holds on to me tightly, laying her head on my chest.

We stand there for a long time, just holding each other without words. I nuzzle my face in her soft, sweet-smelling hair, and remind myself to just...be in the moment with her. I don't need all the answers right now.

And then, unexpectedly, I hear her voice, soft and low.

"If I tell you what happened...you might not ever look at me the same way again, Logan."

I kiss her head. "Impossible, darlin'. Nothing could ever change the way I see you."

"Don't be so sure."

Her warning hangs in the air between us, and in the silence I'm left wondering what could be so bad that she thinks I would look at her differently.

She lets out a shaky sigh.

"I got my stripes the day I absorbed Carol."

"Carol?" I try to pull back to look at her, but she holds on tightly, keeping her face turned into my shoulder.

"Don't," she whispers.

I remain motionless, trying not to break the tentative moment. My mind is turning over this new revelation, though; I never expected her to say that her stripes came from an absorption. That never happened when she touched anyone in the old timeline; it was the trauma of Magneto's machine that stripped the color from those locks. I was there. I saw the blaze of white surging through her hair from root to tip as she screamed in agony.

"You--I didn't know that could happen to you just from touching someone."

"That--that never happened before. I don't know if it was because there was something different about Carol, or if..." She hesitates.

"If what?" I prod her to continue.
"I had touched other people before, but never for that long. Never until they..." She trails off. Her face is hidden, but scent of pain and sorrow are thick in the air around us. "Never until I absorbed them completely."

There's a long silence as I replay her words in my head and their meaning dawns on me.

"You absorbed Carol completely, as in--" 

"I killed her, Logan!" she whispers, her voice breaking. "I killed her. I touched her and held on until I took everything. Everything! She was my friend, and she died because of me!" She buries her face in my chest as she clings to me tightly, sobs racking her body. "I'm a fucking murderer. God..."

"Hey, hey...shhh." I rub her back and kiss her head. "It's ok, baby. It's ok. You are not a murderer."

I hold her securely in my arms for several minutes, comforting, soothing her with soft sounds as she lets go of her long-held grief. It tears me up inside to hear her cry, to know that she is in pain. It makes me feel powerless. I don't know what I can do to take it away, except to just be here for her. Slowly, the sobbing ebbs to a quiet sniffle.

"Darlin," I say softly. "Look at me." She shakes her head, refusing to meet my gaze. "Please look at me, baby."

Slowly, she raises her face to me, but her eyes remain closed.

"Please," I whisper.

Tear-soaked eyelashes flutter softly, and then her warm brown eyes finally lift up to mine. I sweep my thumb softly over her cheek, brushing away a tear and caressing her face.

"Listen to me, Rogue," I say gently. "Marie. Really listen to me. No matter what happened with Carol, you are not a murderer. Do you hear me? I may not know everything there is to know about you, but I know that much."

She searches my face, eyes filled with sadness and guilt. "How can you say that? I killed my friend, Logan."

"Whatever happened with Carol, I'm sure that you had no other choice. I know that you are a good person, Marie. I believe that with all my heart...and I want you to believe it, too."

She looks at me for a long moment, her lips parted to speak, the words trapped inside as if she has so much to say, but is unable to say it. Once again she is torn, at war with herself; struggling between the need for forgiveness, and the need to punish herself. I know that look, because I have worn it many times in my life.

"I want to believe it, Logan," she says, tears brimming in her eyes. "I just..." Her voice catches, and she says nothing more.

"If you can't believe it...then I'll believe enough for the both of us." I kiss her on the forehead. "Until one day, you'll be ready to believe it, too."

Her expression is one of doubt, but she surrenders finally, laying her cheek against my chest and melting into my arms. It's a long time before we are ready to let go of each other.
As we stand there, wrapped in a tight embrace, I'm trying to wrap my head around this new information. In my efforts to unravel the details of Rogue's life in the new timeline, somehow I'm always left with more questions than answers.

Rogue and Carol were friends. Not acquaintances or enemies, but friends. And for some reason, Rogue took Carol's life. You would think that Carol in her head would hate her for what she did...but she doesn't. Instead she is protective of her, like a big sister.

I know that Rogue would never hurt a friend on purpose; but she says that she held on until she absorbed Carol completely, so it was not an accident...which leads me to believe that she had no other choice.

What kind of situation could Rogue be in that would force her use her powers and kill her own friend?

I feel like I'm picking up a trail of puzzle pieces, but I don't have enough to put together and see the whole picture. I need more...though I know Rogue will not give them up easily.

Then it dawns on me, and instantly, the hair stands up on the back of my neck. I've had a big piece of the puzzle all along, but I didn't know where it fit until now. The dog tags.

Fucking Weapon X. I don't know how I know, but I just do. If there is one place that can take away your humanity, force you to do things you never thought you would, it would that fucking hell hole.

And now it's all starting to make sense. Rogue's reluctance to let anyone know the extent of her powers; her difficulties trusting people, and the nightmares...she has them almost every night. It all sounds too familiar.

The need to know what happened to Rogue at Weapon X and then kill everyone who hurt her burns through me like Greek fire, and a growl rises up from my throat.

"Logan?" She pulls back and looks at me, concern written in her eyes.

"Baby, I need to know something." I hold her face gently in my hands. "And please tell me the truth."

"I...I always tell you the truth," she answers softly.

"It was Weapon X. Wasn't it?"

She freezes. "What did you say?"

"You were in Weapon X, and they forced you to kill Carol, didn't they?"

She stares at me, a look of shock and confusion on her face. I must have hit pretty close to the mark; I can see it in her eyes as she shakes her head, unable to speak. I wait for her to say something, to confirm my suspicions.

What I'm met with next is a pair of green eyes blazing with fury and suspicions of their own.

"You son of a bitch," she says in a low voice.

"Carol?"

"You son of a bitch! How the hell do you know about Weapon X?"
I stand there, stunned by the abrupt transformation. I don't know what I expected, but it wasn't this sudden flash fire of rage from Carol.

"Are you some kind of spy?" she hisses.

She starts backing away, and I reach my hand out. "Wait--"

"Don't touch me. Don't touch her!" She warns with a shriek.

"Carol, wait. It's not what you think..."

"No? What is it then? Because Rogue has never told another soul about that--that place. Never. There's no way you could know that, so right about now," she points with an accusing finger, "it looks like you're one of them, bub."

Shit. How do I explain this? How do I tell her that I know about Rogue's dog tags? Because really, that's the only logical explanation. But if I tell her that, she's seriously going to be pissed to find out I went through Rogue's bag.

Suddenly, she seizes me by the front of my jacket and shoots up into the air like a rocket. We are ascending higher and higher, so fast that the wind whips through our hair and when I glance down, the mansion is rapidly starting to shrink to the size of a postage stamp.

We finally come to a halt and hover there in the sky, my feet dangling a thousand feet above Westchester. Fuck. I really hate flying.

She jerks me up to her face and glares at me. "Listen up, Wolverine. You have some explaining to do. You've got 30 seconds until I drop you like a bag of dirt, so start talking."

"Easy, now," I say slowly, raising my hands. "I'm going to tell you everything." I hope she isn't serious about dropping me; it won't kill me, but it'll definitely hurt like a bitch.

"What do you want from her?"

"Nothing." I shake my head. "I just want to take care of her."

It's throwing me off, seeing Rogue in front of me, hearing her voice but with a different accent. Even her mannerisms are different, and it's hard to wrap my head around this strange dichotomy existing in one body. I stare at Rogue's face, so beautiful up here in the bright clear sky with her hair flowing all around like a goddess, and for a moment I'm dazzled.

"20 Seconds, loverboy. I know this drop won't kill you, but you'll be out of commission long enough for us to take off without a trace. You will never see her again, I swear it."

My stomach drops when I hear her say that, because there is no doubt in my mind that she is absolutely serious about that. "Whoah, ok! Look, I found her dog tags," I confess. "It was by accident...but when I saw them, I recognized them right away."

Her eyes widen and she gasps. "You went through her things?"

"I'm sorry. It happened the day after we had that fight; she was gone a long time and I came to her room looking for her."

"Oh, and you just happened to stumble across her dog tags, buried in a secret pocket, inside a bag hidden at the back of a dark closet, right?"
"Something like that," I mumble, realizing how bad this must look.

"And what do you mean, you recognized them right away? How do you know what they are?"

I let out a deep sigh. "I know...because I've been there. I was in the Weapon X program...but not as one of them."

She narrows her eyes at me. "What the hell does that mean?"

"It means that I don't work for them, and never did." I reach into my pocket, and slowly, I lift my dog tags up, suspending them between us. "I was a prisoner."

I watch the shock and disbelief wash over her face as she reads my tags.

And then, I'm free falling.

...
I've had dreams about falling from great heights before. The kind where your stomach flies into your throat, and your whole body zings with the horrible thrill that only comes with the sensation of sudden and rapid descent.

Some people say that in their dreams of falling, they suddenly develop the ability to fly. Gliding across the sky like a bird, they experience a freedom like they've never known before. Others say that moments before impact, they wake up with a jerk, gasping for breath, but relieved to realize that they were dreaming.

Me? I'm not so lucky. In my dreams, I hit the ground hard, and I feel everything. If my bones could break, they would; but they don't, thanks to a hundred pounds of adamantium fused to my skeleton, so all the damage is done to the soft tissue. Torn ligaments and scrambled organs, punctured lungs and internal bleeding for me, woohoo.

I don't know how I know what hitting the ground from a thousand feet feels like, but I suspect that it's more than just my imagination that comes up with the details. Something tells me that I know what it's like to be dropped from a plane over foreign lands during times of war, and that I also know what it's like to have a parachute malfunction.

The worst part isn't even the impact. It's the healing afterward that gets me, because fuck, I have to lay there on the ground for half a day while I wait for everything to stitch back together and it burns like a mother. Meanwhile, I gotta fight off the scavengers coming around, just waiting for me to die so they can have their dinner.

Now as I fall from the sky at a break-neck speed, all of these things pass through my head in the blink of an eye...and yet somehow, none of it scares me. The only thought that matters, that keeps pulsing through my mind is the fact that I could lose Rogue. I could lose her. I could lose her. You'll be out of commission long enough for us to take off without a trace. You will never see her again, I swear it.

Carol's words ring through my ears as I fall helplessly to the earth, waiting for impact. Wake up. Wake up, you sorry bastard! No such luck.

This is it. I wait for it, eyes wide open as the ground rises to meet me. 3, 2, 1...

"Gotchaaa!" I hear a voice say as I'm plucked from the air and swooped up into the sky like a soaring eagle.

"Shit," I mutter with an explosive breath, looking over my shoulder at--Rogue? Carol?

"What's the matter, bub? Don't like flying?" Carol.
"Took ya long enough," I grouse. "Nothin' like waiting until the last second."

She shrugs. "Hey, you're just lucky I'm a fast thinker and an even faster flyer. The longest part was deciding whether to give you a second chance or not."

She ignores me as I glare up at her, swinging around to the rooftop and setting me down.

"Thanks," I grumble, feeling pissed, yet extremely grateful that Carol decided to give me a second chance.

"Don't mention it," she says with a smirk. She saunters over to the ledge and sits, crossing her arms, eyes following me as I snatch up a beer and gulp it down.

Finishing it off, I grab another as she watches in amusement. "What?" I growl.

"Nothing," she says, still smirking.

I pop off the top and take another long swallow. "Hate flying," I mumble before downing the rest.

"I can tell. That's too bad; flying really is like pure freedom. There's nothing like it."

"I'm happy to keep both feet on the ground, thank you," I grumble, to which she scoffs.

"Why do you even bother?" she asks, nodding at what's left of the six-pack in the picnic basket. "I thought you couldn't get drunk, what with the healing factor and all."

I pick up another bottle and roll it in my hand for a moment, swiping my thumb over the condensation. "I can't...at least not very easily. It takes a few bottles of the really strong stuff, and even then it doesn't last long."

"Hmm. So why even bother with the Molsen?" she asks, tilting her head.

I pause and turn it over in my mind for a moment or two. "Consider it something like...comfort food," I say finally. "Tastes good. Fills me up. Reminds me of the good things in life."

She nods. "Makes sense. We all have our vices, don't we? Mine's chocolate, the really good stuff."

"Cigars," I nod, taking a swig of my beer.

"Tequila," she says with a grin.

"Uh uh, bourbon," I counter.

"Flying," she says with a wave her hand in the air, then brings her arm down with a fist, "and kicking ass."

"Heh. Fighting and f--" I stop myself and she raises her eyebrows. "Fighting."

She snorts at that. "Fighting and fighting, huh? Don't worry, loverboy. I wasn't born yesterday, you know."

I clear my throat and drink some more beer without answering.

"I have been pretty impressed with your ability to stick with the bet, though," she says breezily.

My eyes snap to hers. "That's between me and Rogue," I say with a low growl. "What we do in
private is none of your damn business."

It's really fucking with my head to say that to Carol when she is speaking with Rogue's body. Then a disturbing thought crosses my mind. Is Carol there all the time, listening to our conversations? Is she there when Rogue and I are getting intimate? That's a fucked up way to have a three-way when you think about it. I'm not sure I want to know the answer to that one.

She stands up and stalks over to me. "Let me see your hands."

"What for?"

"Just give them to me, you big baby."

I growl, but she ignores me as she reaches out and takes my hands, turning them palms down. Sweeping her thumbs gently over the skin of my knuckles, she looks at them thoughtfully for a moment. "Interesting," she murmurs. "No scars."

"Healing factor, remember?"

"I know. But just because you heal fast it doesn't necessarily mean no scars. Everybody heals after a cut, but the mark usually remains."

Her words give me pause. "Fair enough."

"Let me see them," she says.

"What?"

"The claws. Let me see them."

I stare at her with a glint of suspicion, and she raises an eyebrow expectantly.

"Don't give me that look, bub." She puts a hand on her waist, cocking her hip to one side. "If there is anyone here who has a right to be suspicious, it's me, and it's Rogue. You haven't exactly been lying to her, but you haven't been telling the whole story, either."

I stare at her for a long moment, then look away, taking a gulp of my beer. For a moment there I thought she was referring to everything that happened between us in the old timeline. Impossible, of course; she was obviously talking about my time at Weapon X.

I haven't been withholding that knowledge from Rogue on purpose; I was just waiting for the right time. Now that I know that Rogue was also a prisoner of Weapon X, I'm beginning to think that it wasn't just me who had been waiting for the right time. Truthfully, I don't know if she ever intended on telling me; but now that the cat's out of the bag, I need to let her know that it's safe to talk about it. And I have to convince Carol of the same.

"Fine, I'll show them to you. But if I talk...you talk."

"Excuse me?" she huffs, narrowing her eyes. "You know, just because I caught you from falling doesn't mean I've completely made up my mind about you. What makes you think I have to talk about anything, bub?"

I look her directly in the eye. "You don't," I reply simply. "You definitely hold all the cards here, Carol."

She pauses, taken aback by my admission.
"I could sit here and say that I won't talk unless you talk. And then you could tell me to go fuck myself. Take off and disappear, you and Rogue, and I'd never see her again."

She continues watching me, saying nothing.

"Or, I could talk, tell you anything you want to know, "I continue, "and you could still take off. There would be nothing I could do to stop you."

"I could..." she agrees, a note of skepticism in her voice.

"You could," I say quietly.

She studies me for a moment, trying to figure out my angle. "So if you know that we could take off either way, why say anything at all? It doesn't seem very Wolverine-like to admit a weakness."

"Because we both care for her."

Carol's eyes fall for a moment, a stab of conscience crossing her face.

I take a step closer. "I only have one weakness. And it's for Rogue."

Slowly, I release my claws, careful to point them across my body so that the blunt sides of the blades are facing her. "She needs this; to be able to trust someone again. To feel like she has a home, right here. And she needs to know that she is not alone in this. Don't take that from her, Carol."

Carol looks at my claws, turning my words over in her mind. She lifts a hand and slowly, delicately touches a blade with her finger. Closing her eyes, she lets out a soft sigh. Suddenly she turns to walk over to the ledge and sits down, swinging her legs over to face out. Her hands grasp the edge as she hangs her head, sitting in silence.

Several moments pass by until, finally, she speaks.

"It's just been me and Rogue for a long time," she says quietly. "Well...me and her, and the others they forced her to absorb. But they're just echoes. Here, but not completely here...not like me."

I walk over to the ledge and sit beside her. Her eyes are fixed on the ground below, unfocused, lost in a memory.

"You were both prisoners of Weapon X," I say gently.

"Yeah." She nods, still looking off into the distance.

She falls silent again. The sound of birds singing all around us fills the air, but it feels off. It's too happy, like some kind of strange contrast to the somber mood; it doesn't sound right, when I can smell the sadness in the air.

"I had already been there for two years before Rogue came. Two long years. The things they did to me...I can't even..." She shakes her head. "Not just imprisonment, but forced labor. Experimentation. Torture. The worst part is, the torture wasn't even physical; it was mental. See, because of my mutation, they couldn't penetrate my skin with their drugs, so they used some kind of telepath to get to me. That's how they made me do what they wanted; if I tried to refuse, or escape, they'd fuck with my head. They'd show my parents being tortured, crying and begging me to cooperate so they could live. Or they'd make me believe I was on fire or something."

"Shit."
"Shit indeed."

For a moment, her description stirs a distant ghost of a memory; not quite fully formed, but I can still feel it...the mental anguish. Flashes of excruciating pain, even when no one was touching me.

"Same," I manage to force out. "I don't remember everything, but a lot if it comes back to me in my dreams. They wanted to turn me into some kind of ultimate weapon. They had to break me first, though. They wiped all my memories...tortured me endlessly...and then to make me indestructible, they poured molten hot metal onto my bones. I know I was fully awake for that, because I still feel it in my nightmares."

"Jesus. That's why your claws are metal?" she whispers. "You weren't born that way..."

I spring the claws. "Nothin' natural about this." I study them for a moment, then snap them back in. "By the time they were through with me, I was reduced to a completely feral state; nothing but a killing machine. A monster."

"Shit," she exhales, looking at me with sympathetic eyes.

"Shit indeed," I mutter.

We both fall into silence, steeped in dark memories, lost in a shared misery.

The wind picks up a little, and I look around us; clouds have started moving in and it looks like it might rain today. The birds have stopped singing, and for a moment, it's like mother nature is reflecting our mood.

"I think that was what they wanted to do with me at first; to make me into some kind of perfect soldier," Carol says thoughtfully. "Can you imagine? Super strength, ability to fly, near invulnerability? I was quite the catch." She huffs and shakes her head. "I was hard to control, though. Even when the telepath had me in his grips, they still couldn't get me to completely obey them all the time."

"Heh. Me neither." We exchange a small smile at that one.

"I was so stupid," she whispers. "I brought it all on myself."

"No you didn't." I give her a stern look. "Nobody ever asks for that shit. Don't talk like that."

"I did," she insists. "I brought it on myself. I was young and naive, and a little too cocky for my own good. My head filled with a little bit of idealism and a whole lot of ambition. So ready to serve my country and 'fight the bad guys', just like my granddaddy did back in the day. And in the process of trying to prove myself, I walked right into their hands."

She sighs and lays down, her body balanced on the ledge as she stares up at the sky.

"My dream was to get into Air Force Special Ops someday. Ironic that I joined the Air Force, I know, given that I could already fly," she says with a wave of her hand, "but I wasn't exactly going to be able to make a career out of flying around my own 'unique' way, without an airplane. I figured, this would be the closest thing, without giving away what I really was. Because even though I was a mutant, I could still pass for "normal". Don't ask, don't tell, right?" she says with a small, bitter laugh.

"I was good, too. I quickly advanced through the ranks, earning the respect of my peers and superiors. In fact, I did so well that they advanced me to a special new unit, where they said I'd get
to do some important, classified stuff. I was so damn proud of myself."

"What kind of special unit?" I say with suspicion.

She gives me a sardonic smile. "A special unit that utilized mutants."

"Weapon X..." I mutter.

"Weapon fucking X," she nods. "And to think, I was actually grateful in the beginning. Grateful to those assholes, can you believe it?"

I stare at her, with no words; I can only offer her understanding in response to the bitterness and betrayal in her eyes.

"They pulled me into the General's office one day and said, 'We know you're a mutant'. I was sure that I was screwed. I don't know how they knew, but they did. And I was prepared for the worst. They're going to kick me out, I thought, probably with a dishonorable discharge. I wish now that they had," she huffs. "Instead they offered me a promotion. They said that they were starting a new mutant task force, strictly classified, and they wanted me to be team leader. And I thought, hell yeah! Finally, I could be myself and really show what I could do." She shakes her head. "I fell for it, hook, line, and sinker."

"Hey. Don't beat yourself up, Carol. There's no way you could have known."

She looks at me with sad eyes. "No, I guess not. But it still kills me that I went into the program willingly."

"I'm sure you weren't the first," I tell her. "Those fuckers are masters of manipulation."

She nods sadly. "Yeah, they got me good. Some people were captured with weapons and drugs, but not me. I was lured in with promises, like a fool. I was their puppet, carrying out all their orders with a smile on my face. Going on missions and doing things that seemed...questionable at times, but telling myself that they were necessary for the greater good. But things became progressively worse, my orders increasingly questionable, increasingly...amoral..." She closes her eyes and rakes her hands through her hair. "By the time I came to my senses and told them I wouldn't follow their orders any more, it was too late. They had that telepath cocked and ready to control any rebellions, and I was trapped."

She sits up and pulls her knees to her chest, burying her face in her arms. I wish I knew what to say to make things better; but really there's not much you can say to something like that. I walk over to her and place a hand on her shoulder. Sometimes a touch is better at conveying things than words.

"The things I did, Logan...I can't even bring myself to say them out loud."

"No judgment here, Carol. I'm no angel myself."

"I know, Bub." She looks at me with a sad smile. "Thanks."

She places her hand over mine and gives it a squeeze before turning to hang her legs over the edge.

As we sit in silence, I mull her words over in my head. Her remark about being able to pass for normal give me pause. Up until this point, I've only known her as a personality inside Rogue's mind; but she's not just an anomaly, or some kind of quirk that shows up at random times. She's a real person, who once had her own body. It only seems right to acknowledge that.
"So...you could pass for normal, huh? What'd you look like?" I ask, hoping to lighten the mood a little.

She looks up, surprised. Her eyes light up and she smirks. "Better than normal. I was a real hottie in my day. Gorgeous blonde hair, piercing green eyes, legs that went on for miles...and one hell of a rack," she says proudly. "Definitely too much for you to handle, bub."

"Oh is that so?" I say with a grin.

"That's so, loverboy."

We both chuckle at that. Even though it kind of grated on my nerves at first, her little nicknames that she has assigned to me, 'loverboy' and 'bub' are kind of growing on me. She's the only one who's allowed to call me those, though; anyone else who tries it is going to get their ass clawed. I'm talking to you, Cyke.

"I never thought I'd be living in someone else's body," she says, suddenly wistful again. "Rogue has been very kind to share hers with me."

My smile fades and my ears prick up at the mention of Rogue's name.

"I remember the day they brought her in. She was beaten pretty badly. They dragged her into my cell and tossed her on the floor in a crumpled heap. 'You have a new roommate now,' they said with a snicker."

My jaw clenches and I have to fight the urge to pop the claws. "You got names on the sons of bitches who beat her?" I growl before I can stop myself.

She gives me an understanding look. "Sorry, Bub. I don't." She turns away and murmurs under her breath. "Doesn't matter anyway; they're dead now."

I try to calm down so I can hear the rest of her story, but the thought of someone putting their hands on Rogue like that makes me seethe in anger. If they weren't dead already, I would be hunting them down and giving them a slow, painful death.

"I have to hand it to her, though. She didn't give them what they wanted."

My eyes snap to hers. "And what was that?"

"Her name."

I sit there, speechless, completely taken aback by her answer.

"They wanted her name for their files, which they kept on each of us; but she refused to tell them. Rogue. That was the only name she would give them. The guards did just about everything they could do to a person; probably would have killed her if they could have, but her mutation was too valuable according to the scientists, so they had to let her live. Rogue was all they could get from her. And Rogue was the name they put on her dog tags."

I stare at her, still unable to speak. And suddenly, I realize just how much Rogue was giving me when she told me her name. It didn't just mean something. It meant everything.

"Tough as nails, that girl is," Carol says.

"Always was," I murmur as memories of Rogue from the old timeline dance before my eyes.
Carol looks at me strangely. "What?"

I clear my throat. "Uh, why didn't they use their drugs on her, or have the telepath make her talk?"

Carol nods. "I wondered the same thing. Turns out that the night she was captured, Rogue had accidentally touched a girl who had the ability to shield herself from telepaths. The guards had stripped her naked and shoved her into a holding cell with the girl, and the two made contact. Poor thing ended up in a coma. But thanks to her, Rogue was immune to "The Great Illusionist," she says with a sarcastic wave of her hands, "and the mind control drugs didn't work, either, because they were derived from his spinal fluid. Would you believe it? I seriously can't make this stuff up."

"I believe it."

I've seen the lengths that they will go to for their own sick agenda. Nothing is too perverse, too inhumane. I'm just glad that Rogue was immune to their telepathic assaults.

"I initially thought they put us together as a way to punish us," Carol says, shaking her head. "And maybe that was part of it. We were given one ration of food to share between us at mealtime. There was only one cot in the cell, so we were either going to have to take turns sleeping on the cold, concrete floor, or try to both sleep in the cot together somehow without touching. They loved treating us like animals. But that wasn't the only reason they put us together."

"You think there was more to it than that?"

Carol says nothing for a moment, her eyes staring off into the distance, as a few scattered rain drops patter on our skin.

"You know, sometimes the way to hurt someone the most, isn't by hurting them at all," she says in a low voice.

I look at her, but she doesn't look back, her eyes still focused on the horizon. "What do you mean?"

I prompt her, though the uneasy feeling in the pit of my stomach grows. "Carol?"

"We made the best of things, Rogue and I, whatever they threw our way. Right off the bat we got along. We were like...kindred spirits. Many sleepless nights were spent whispering to each other in the dark, talking into the wee hours of the morning. We comforted each other, looked out for each other...grew to care for each other like sisters. And that's where they got us."

She lifts her head and turns to look at me with haunted green eyes.

"After that they didn't need to use their telepath to make me obey their commands, and they didn't need to torture Rogue to make her cooperate with their sick experiments."

She watches me and waits as it all finally dawns on me.

"They used you against each other, didn't they?" I breathe. "Neither of you wanted to see the other get hurt. That's how they got you to cooperate."

Carol nods slowly. "Ain't that a son of a bitch?"

She gets up and walks over to the picnic basket, grabbing my beer and finishing it off with a sigh. She picks up the flower I brought for Rogue, looking at it thoughtfully as she walks back to the ledge and sits down, swinging her legs over to face out.

"I've done some things I'm not proud of, Logan. Hurt and killed innocent people." She stares at the
flower, turning it slowly and studying the petals. "They made me choose. Her or them."

She plucks a petal and tosses it into the wind.

"They made Rogue choose, too. We both swore to each other that we could take the pain, that we wouldn't give in...but all it took was them making one of us watch what they did to the other, and it was over."

She continues plucking flower petals, one by one.

"You both did what you had to do to survive, Carol. What you had to do to protect each other."

"I know. We did what we had to do, time heals all wounds and all that bullshit, right? I know."

She plucks the last petal and tosses the mangled flower over the edge, watching it fall to the ground below. "The scar still remains, though."

We sit in silence. Here and there, little droplets of rain begin to fall, making gentle ticking and tapping sounds as they land.

"Rogue said that she..." I hesitate. "That she touched you until she absorbed you completely. How did they make her do that?"

"They didn't." Carol turns and looks at me then. "I did."

"You..." I shake my head, trying to find my voice. "You made her do it? I don't understand."

"It was the only way."

"The only way to what?"

Carol stares at me, saying nothing. The smattering of raindrops has become a steady drizzle now, falling from a cold, grey sky.

"The only way to what?" I ask again.

Carol stands up. "I...I don't think it's my place to say any more, Logan. I've already said too much, I think."

"Wait," I say, standing up and reaching my hand out to stop her.

"I'm not going anywhere, Bub," she reassures me, touching a hand gently to the side of my face. "I promise. But Rogue is the one you should be asking. It's her right to decide how much to tell and when to tell it."

I reluctantly nod my head in understanding, knowing she is right, but still...what if Rogue never tells me?

"She'll tell you, eventually," she answers softly, as if she just read my mind. "Be patient. Keep doing what you're doing...and don't give up on her."

"Patience isn't my strong suit," I say, which makes Carol smirk a little. "But I'll never give up on her."

Carol nods. "Good." She closes her eyes and lets out a soft breath. "Rogue, honey, come on out," she whispers.
"Carol...before you go, I just want to say...thanks. For everything. For being there for Rogue, and looking out for her. For giving me a chance to be there for her, too."

Carol opens her eyes and smiles softly. "Don't mention it, Bub."

She closes her eyes again and her smile fades as she turns her attention inward.

After a moment, her dark eyelashes flutter open to reveal a pair of sweet, brown eyes.

"Logan?"

I touch a lock of white hair and tuck it behind her ear.

"Yeah, baby. I'm here."

She searches my face, looking for a sign. "You and Carol had a talk."

"Yeah, we did."

"And you're still here," she says with a note of surprise.

I pull her close to me and look into her eyes. "Not goin' anywhere, darlin'."

We stand there together for several moments, not speaking, just looking at each other while the steady, soft rain falls around us.

Somehow, she manages to look both vulnerable and strong, fragile yet fierce, all at the same time. The knowledge of what she went through at Weapon X...what she endured and yet came out a survivor, still fighting the good fight, afraid but still willing to give so much of herself to an undeserving bastard like me...maybe that is what is coloring my vision. But no. She has always looked this way to me.

"Logan, I...I know that there is so much more that you want to know...that I need to tell you. And I will. I just--"

"Shhh, darlin' it's ok. Whenever you are ready, you'll tell me. All that matters to me right now is that you're not going anywhere either."

She lets out a soft sigh, grateful and relieved. "I'm not going anywhere."

I caress her cheek softly, wiping away the drops of rain that have gathered on her skin. Taking her face gently in my hands, I bend down and touch my lips to hers, kissing her tenderly.

"Good," I murmur. "Now, how about we both not go anywhere together, and get inside," I say, looking up at the sky.

A soft smile touches her lips. "Ok, Logan. Let's not go anywhere, together."
Rogue's breathing is soft and even as she lies next to me, tucked into my side. I lift my head to look down at her; she has drifted off to sleep mid-sentence. With a little smile, I pull the covers up over her shoulder and gently kiss her forehead.

We spent the day holed up in my room after my talk with Carol. Still feeling a little raw from the rollercoaster we just went on, neither of us felt like going anywhere after that. We made a nest of blankets on my bed and enjoyed several hours of simply being in each other's arms.

As we curled up in bed together, she spoke of simple things; fond memories of gardening with her grandmother; finding a new book in the Professor's library; Jubilee being a goofball. But even though she spoke of pleasant things, I could see in her eyes that there was so much more just below the surface, just waiting to be let out.

It's tough watching her as she struggles with herself internally, trying so hard to just let go and open up to me. I wonder if it will always be like this. I guess the only thing I can do is keep trying to give her all the time and patience I can.

As much as Rogue keeps a tight rein on herself during the day, the night time is a different story. She talks in her sleep quite a bit, and that is when little things slip through.

I can't remember the last time she has slept without having nightmares. Lately, though, they seem to be getting worse. Sometimes she'll call out; other times I hear little snippets of her talking to someone. But often, there are just...whispered words of despair, and the scent of sorrow. Those are the times that break my heart the most.

I wish I could have been there for her. I wish I could have known her back then, because I would never have let any of this happen to her.

My conversation with Carol has had my mind turning over with so many questions. How did it happen? How did Rogue end up at Weapon X? Where did things go wrong in this life?

Did she try to hitch hike her way to Anchorage like she did the first time around? Maybe she tried, but the timing was wrong and that's why our paths never crossed until now. Maybe she made it to Laughlin City, but there was no grizzled mutant cage fighter with a trailer to hide in. Maybe she had to find someone else to give her a ride, and they saw a hungry, desperate girl all alone, and took advantage of her...
Dark thoughts of all the things that might have happened start swirling in my head, all the ways that someone could have hurt her. My fists clench and before I realize it a growl rises in my chest.

"Logan?" Rogue mumbles, peering up at me with sleepy eyes.

Shit. "Sorry, baby." I kiss her forehead. "It's nothing; go back to sleep." She snuggles closer, sighing softly as she drifts off again.

I take a deep breath and try to calm down so I don't disturb her again. I try not to let all the maybes and what ifs get me all worked up when I don't have the facts. Maybe it wasn't all that bad, I try to tell myself...but deep down, I know that whatever happened, good or bad, she still ended up at Weapon X.

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I'm under water. Cold water illuminated by a sickly green light, bubbling all around me. My entire body is strapped down and I can't move at all. There is no escape. Rage and helplessness and fear are coursing through my veins as I struggle, watching the needles descend upon me. No!

I can see a masked face, distorted through the rippling surface of the water, hovering over me; a searing pain rips through every part of my body, and I scream in agony.

My claws fly out and I spring up with a thunderous roar, savagely stabbing him through the chest. A girl screams, and I look around to see where the sound came from. What is happening? Then I look at the masked man again...but it's not him that's impaled on my claws. It's Rogue.


"Baby, I...I'm so sorry..." I stutter, my voice trembling.

I wait for the awful sound of her choking as her lungs fill with blood.

"Use your powers," I urge her, my voice thick with desperation.

No, she shakes her head.

"Take my healing, baby...please," I beg her, falling to my knees. "Please, baby--turn it on and take it all..."

Slowly, she reaches her hand out, her fingertips hovering a hair's breadth from my cheek. I close my eyes, waiting for her delicate touch, for the pull to take my life so that she can live. I wait for the pull...but it doesn't come. Instead, I hear a hushed voice, whispering words of comfort.

"Shhh...it's ok, Logan. Everything's going to be ok."

I open my eyes and blink a few times. "Rogue?"

She gazes down at me with soft brown eyes, making soothing sounds as she caresses my face. "It's ok, Logan," she whispers.

"Did I hurt you?" I choke out, frantically feeling her body for wounds.

"I'm ok, sugar. You can't hurt me--"
"Oh, God..." My heart nearly jumps out of my chest when I notice her nightshirt, which has three ugly slashes ripped into it. I lift her shirt in a panic, looking for the stab wounds, searching for the blood. There's nothing there but smooth skin.

"You didn't hurt me. See?" She takes off her nightshirt and places her hand over mine, sweeping our fingers over her chest and belly. "Invulnerable skin, remember? Don't you worry about me, I'm just fine."

I look up at her, searching her face. Where am I? Which timeline?

Slowly, I get my bearings, and it finally begins to dawn on me; she's ok. We're in the new timeline...I had a nightmare...Rogue is ok....

I throw my arms around her in a crushing embrace and bury my face in her belly, inhaling her scent deeply as I tremble with relief.

Rogue begins caressing my shoulders and back.

"It's ok, Logan," she murmurs into my hair. "Everything is going to be ok..."

My breathing slows down and my body begins to relax. And then I'm suddenly aware of something. Everything about this is so...familiar; it's like déja vu. The nightmare. Waking up in a cold sweat, claws slashing through the air. And Rogue, unafraid, whispering words of comfort...the same words she used to say to me in the old life. All those times that she came to my room when I was having a nightmare...

Shhh...it's ok, Logan. Everything is going to be ok.

You shouldn't be here.

Don't you worry about me, sugar. I'm just fine. Want to talk about it?

No.

I'm always here if you need me.

All the times she came to my room...and all the times I let her go.

I pull back and look up at her face. The same face, the same soft voice, the same gentle touch...the same look in her eyes.

"Please don't tell me to go, Logan," she whispers.

She has the same look in her eyes, only this time, I'm not afraid to put a name to this thing between us. This time, I don't have to let her go back to her room. She's here, and I'm not letting her go.

"Don't go, Marie," I say to her. "Don't ever go."

Her lips part, drawing in the slightest breath, her eyes locked with mine.

"Somehow...I feel like I've been waiting so long for you to say that."

"I feel like I've been waiting so long to say it."
We stare into each other's eyes for a moment...and in that moment, which seems like an eternity, something passes between us. Something that feels like floating in some kind of space between past and present.

And then suddenly, it's like there is an unstoppable, inevitable force drawing us together. Our mouths crash together in a hungry, desperate kiss. It feels like coming home.

Our hands are instantly everywhere, all over each other's bodies, touching, feeling, taking in everything as if we only just now discovered each other and need to make up for lost time.

I stand up and draw her body tightly to mine, ravaging her mouth, my hand coming up to tangle in her hair. She gasps as I release her lips and move to her throat, then her collarbone, kissing, scented, marking. I can't get enough. I can't get close enough.

I rip off her panties as she tears at my pants and then we tumble backwards onto the bed. Within moments she is straddling me, and then I feel her, hot and slick, as she sinks down on my cock with a moan.

She closes her eyes and her head falls back as she rolls her hips, her breasts swaying with the motion. My hands find their way to the curve of her waist, then down to cup her ass. She leans forward onto my chest, holding my face as she starts kissing me again. I wrap both arms tightly around her back like an adamantium cage, bucking my hips, eating her moans as I slide in and out of her body.

I'm wrapped around her, I'm inside her, and it's still not enough.

"Logan," she whispers. "Please...I need you on top. I need to feel you like that."

I kiss her once more, then roll her over until she is underneath me. I drive into her, all the way to the hilt, and she gasps in pleasure. Burying my face in the curve of her neck, I can only mumble her name incoherently while I continue thrusting. Marie...Marie... She wraps her arms around my neck and hooks her ankles behind my back, clinging to me, as if she can't get close enough, either.

My senses are overwhelmed with her scent, the feel of her soft body underneath and all around me. Neither of us can stop the frantic, desperate pace threatening to burn our bodies to ash. Her arms and legs tighten and she cries out my name as she climaxes. With one last hard thrust, I'm dragged down into oblivion with her, a thousand points of light sparking behind my closed eyes as I fill her.

We lay there for several minutes, our cooling bodies still entangled, slowly catching our breaths. I still don't want to let go, and neither does she.

"I'm sorry," I murmur. "I wanted to go slower the first time, darlin'. Take my time, make love to you...but I couldn't help myself."

I wanted to go slow your first time, an unbidden thought whispers somewhere in my mind. And even though it doesn't make sense, the thought is there. Not the first time after the bet, or the first time tonight. *Your* first time.

"I know, sugar." She softly traces her fingers over my back. "I couldn't help myself, either. But fast or slow, rough or gentle, it doesn't matter. It's us, and I have no regrets."

My throat tightens when I hear her words. I lift my head up to see her face....and she still has the same look in her eyes. The look. The one that I saw all those times and didn't want to understand, couldn't understand. Only this time, I didn't let her go.
And once again, I feel like I'm floating in that strange space between past and present. This is how it should have been in the old life, my mind whispers. Her, understanding and accepting me, all of me...and in her eyes, offering her love. Me, understanding what she was offering, and accepting it.

If I could go back and relive those moments, I would have done things differently. Maybe, on some level, that's what we were doing just now--reliving those moments. Making up for lost time. Righting some of the wrongs.

I know that she doesn't remember anything from the old life, but still...I swear it was like she could feel it, too. Is that crazy?

Maybe. Probably. I don't know...as I look into her eyes, all I know is that I love her, and I will take any opportunity I can this time to show her that.

Slowly, I lower my head and kiss her softly, sensually, taking my time to taste and savor her. Her eyes open in surprise and she pulls back from the kiss.

"Logan, are you...ready again?" she asks.

I give her a little grin. "Healing factor, darlin'."

"Oh...my, that's handy," she smiles, blushing.

"First time was fast and strong, like we both needed it," I say to her. "Now, we're gonna take our time, making love the way we wanted to."

"Ok," she whispers, gazing into my eyes. "Make love to me the way you wanted to, Logan."

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Aberration

Chapter Summary

Rogue has some strange feelings crop up that she can't explain. Mutant and human relations are starting to deteriorate, and Logan is discovering that the world is not as perfect as he thought in the new timeline.

ab·er·ra·tion

noun

1. a departure from what is normal or expected; a deviation from a moral standard
2. a defect in a lens or mirror that causes the formation of a distorted image

"Alright, people, let's get this meeting started," Scott says with a sigh as he shuffles some papers and sets them on a stack of folders. He looks a little aggravated this morning; well, more so than usual. Must be tough walking around with that stick up his ass, heh.

The rest of the team files in and takes their seats as Scott opens the wall cabinet where the large monitor is housed. The Professor wheels next to the screen and takes the remote.

"Mornin' Roguey, Wolvie," Jubilee says, taking a seat beside Rogue. Rogue gives me a little smile, squeezing my leg with a gloved hand before turning to talk to Jubilee.

"Good morning, my friend," says Kurt as he pulls out a chair and sits next to me.

"Hey, Kurt. How's the tail?" I nod at the appendage, which still has a bandage wrapped around the middle. He got hurt the other day during a Danger Room session and we were sure it was broken.

Kurt smiles a big pointy-toothed grin. "Much better, danke schoen. It was only a sprain, I am happy to say. Following the advice of our good doctor McCoy, I refrained from using it to swing from the chandelier for a few days, so it is almost as good as new."

I stare at him for a moment, then look at Hank. "Was that...a joke? From Kurt?"

"I believe it was," Hank says with a chuckle.

"Yes, a joke," Kurt says with a big smile. "Did you like it?"

"Wow, it's a miracle," I say, winking at Hank.

"Indeed. Will wonders never cease," Hank nods sagely.

Kurt's smile fades. "A miracle? I do not think this qualifies as a miracle. According to church doctrine--"

"Relax, buddy," I say with a grin. "We're just kiddin' around. You don't have to take everything so
literally."

Kurt smiles sheepishly and laughs. "Ha! Another joke--you are very funny!"

"Yeah you know me. I'm a real barrel of monkeys," I say, to which Kurt laughs even more.

Scott gives us a disapproving look and clears his throat.

"Sincerest apologies, Scott," says Hank. "Please, go on."

"As I was saying, the ladies locker room showers will be undergoing some maintenance this morning, so please make note. You won't be able to use them after Danger Room practice."

"Ooo, looks like we'll be taking our showers with the boys today, right ladies?" Jubilee says with a waggle of her eyebrows. Storm and Jean smirk at each other, and Kitty gasps, turning pink as Bobby nods his approval.

Scott's eyes are concealed by his ruby glasses, but by the look on his face, I'm pretty sure he just rolled them.

"Next week we have Parent's Day for the students," he continues, ignoring her comment, "and each of you will be expected to be on hand to answer questions and give tours. Bobby, we'll need an ice sculpture for the banquet."

"Yes, sir," Bobby confirms with a salute.

"Jubilee, you're in charge of keeping the young kids in check."

"Yo, I'm on it, chief," Jubilee answers.

"And of course I think it goes without saying, I need everyone to be friendly and welcoming."

The room goes conspicuously quiet, and I can feel all eyes turn toward me. Everyone except Kurt, who keeps stealing glances at me and quickly looking away, biting back a snicker.

"What?" I growl.

Silence and a bunch of raised eyebrows.

"I don't know why you're all looking at me," I grumble.

Without saying a word, everyone turns back to Scott, who has a grim look on his face.

"Just make sure you don't scare anybody away," he says. "Last time one of the prospective students went home crying."

"Hey, it's not my fault that the little punk--"

"Maybe Logan should be in charge of security that day," Rogue interrupts with a sweet little drawl, placing her hand on my arm. "Behind the scenes, so he can keep an eye on things."

I look at her and she winks at me discreetly.

Scott's expression softens at Rogue's charming demeanor. "Alright. Maybe that's a good idea," he says with a nod, to which Rogue flashes a satisfied smile.
I'll have to thank her later for saving me from a day of schmoozing with the parents and acting all cordial. The torture.

Scott continues to drone on about various events and whatnot, while the rest the crew tries to act like they are not bored.

"And finally, we have a more serious matter at hand. I'm sure you've all heard by now that the National Security Advisor died of a stroke last Tuesday. They've just announced the appointment of Senator Kelly to the position. For those of you not familiar with Senator Kelly, he has been a long time supporter of the movement to pass the Mutant Registration Act, and a very influential voice in the FOH."

Senator Kelly. I remember that guy from the old timeline; apparently, once a prick, always a prick.

"In his press conference this morning," Scott continues, "he announced that one of his first orders of business will be to ensure the nation's security through the revival of the Sentinel program."

"The Sentinel program? As in, those mutant hunting robots created back in the 1970's?" says Jubilee.

My ears prick up at the mention of Sentinels.

"The very same," says the Professor. He points the remote at the monitor and turns it on.

A large crowd of people, many obviously mutants, are shouting and waving signs in the streets outside of the White House in protest. 'We are ALL human', one woman's sign says. 'Different, Not Dangerous' another one says.

Along the side lines are pockets of anti-mutant protesters, carrying posters and jeering at the pro-mutants. The footage is a little shaky and partially obscured, like it was taken secretly with a cell phone or something.

"Wait, I thought that the Sentinel program was completely dismantled when Mystique saved the president or something," says Bobby. "I remember hearing about it in history class."

"Yes, it was," says the Professor. "That was an important moment in the history of mutants, and went a long way towards human and mutant relations. However there has always been a portion of the human population that remains fearful and distrusting of mutants."

"Especially when they see things in the media, like mutants using their powers to commit crimes and acts of violence," Scott adds.

The Professor nods. "When people are afraid, they do rash things in order to restore their sense of security."

Just then, an anti-mutant protester soldier-wannabe in camo pants whips out a gun and begins waving it around, shouting slurs at the man in front of him, who has red skin and orange hair.

"I don't need sentinels to take out mutie freaks like you!" he yells. "I can do it myself, right here, right now!"

"I'd like to see you try," the mutant shouts back. As his chest heaves in anger, his skin starts to darken, and little glowing red cracks begin to form all over his body. It reminds of the way molten lava looks, with the black crust and the red glow of magma swelling beneath.
Some people start scrambling to get away from the confrontation and violence that they can see is about to ensue. Camo Pants takes aim and continues shouting threats at Lava Man, who now has the air around him rippling with the heat emanating from his body.

Not everyone is trying to get away, though. Within moments, Lava Man is flanked by two other mutants, one with spikes coming out of his face, and the other who has skin like a lizard. Meanwhile, Camo Pants and his little entourage are ganging up, ready to brawl. Insults and threats are flung back and forth, and things are escalating quickly.

"Come at me, asshole, I dare you!" yells Lava Man, steam coming out of his mouth as he shouts.

Suddenly shots ring out, and several people in the crowd erupt in screams of terror and shock, dashing for cover. Lava Man lets out a roar, bursting into flames, and begins advancing towards the humans.

Camo Pants drops the gun and stumbles backward, his eyes widening as he realizes that Lava Man is completely unaffected by the bullets. He knows that he is big trouble now.

The asphalt beneath Lava Man's feet starts steaming. Reaching down, he scoops up a handful of the softened asphalt, shaping it like a snowball. He throws it at Camo Pants, narrowly missing him and hitting a nearby car, causing it to explode in flames. All mayhem has broken loose, as people panic and run in every direction.

The destruction continues, until out of nowhere, a military hummer pulls up and soldiers jump out with their weapons drawn. Without a word, two of them holding these strange looking guns with large barrels take aim and fire, releasing some kind of pulse that knocks everyone to the ground, humans and mutants alike. They all lie there, motionless.

Everyone in the room stares at the monitor, speechless as they try to comprehend this strange turn of events.

"Oh my God...are they dead?" whispers Jubilee, her eyes wide. "Did they just kill them on the spot?"

"No, I don't believe so, Jubilee," says Hank answers, staring thoughtfully at the screen. "I think they have been rendered unconscious. Look what the soldiers are doing now; they are putting handcuffs on the mutants."

The soldiers cuff Lava Man, who is now back to his previous state of plain red skin, and strap him to a transfer board before carrying him off to stash him in the back of the hummer. They also take the man with the spikes, but leave the lizard looking guy behind. They leave Camo Pants and his friends on the ground where they lay. Jumping back into their vehicle, the soldiers peel out and are gone in the blink of an eye.

The Professor stops the video. A silence has fallen over the room, as we wrap our heads around what we just saw.

None of this is new to me, with the rioting and violence towards mutants; this is the kind of thing we saw all the time in the old timeline. But I didn't expect to see it in this timeline, at least not so soon. And the weapon they used to knock out those people--I don't remember ever seeing that before.

"What just happened?" says Kitty. "What did we just see?"

"It happened all so fast," Bobby shakes his head. One minute they're protesting, the next minute they're fighting, and the next minute they're just...gone."
Kitty takes Bobby's hand, and they look at each other with concern. "They came and took those mutants, and no one stopped them. They can't do that! Mutants have rights!" she says.

The Professor looks at them, saying nothing. They can see in his eyes that there is no simple answer to that. Mutants have rights, at least on paper, but that doesn't mean that those rights can't be violated.

"That could happen to any one of us," Kitty says, shrinking down into her chair.

"I wouldn't let that happen," Bobby murmurs to her, squeezing her hand. "I would never let them take you like that."

Next to me, I hear Rogue huff quietly. I glance at her, and see that's she's staring at Bobby and Kitty, her eyes filled with contempt.

"Hey," I whisper. She doesn't answer.

I stare at her as she watches Kitty and Bobby, but she doesn't seem to notice; she just looks pissed.

"What's the matter?" I whisper again, while Scott and the Professor continue speaking with the others.

"Professor, what was that weapon they used?" Storm asks. "I've never seen anything like it before."

"Rogue," I whisper, touching her leg.

Her eyes finally snap to mine, breaking whatever thought she had going on there for a minute. She shifts in her chair, looking a little flustered, as if she was somewhere else and just realized that I had been talking to her.

"You ok?" I ask her quietly.

She looks at me for a moment, then nods, though her smile is unconvincing. "I'm fine. Really."

I hold her gaze for a long moment, trying to get a read on her, but then she looks away and turns her attention back to the conversation that the others are having.

"My sources have gathered some intel, and it appears that those weapons were prototypes," says the Professor. "How they work, in essence, is by generating a pulse of energy capable of instantly disrupting neurological function."

"Total knock out," mutters Piotr.

The Professor nods. "Thus far, the ones we saw in the footage are the only ones they have managed to build, and they have a limited life span due to the unstable nature of the pulse generator."

"I certainly hope they never work out all the bugs," Hank comments.

"We're keeping an eye on it," says Scott. "Hank, maybe you can look over some of the data and see what you can find out."

After a few more minutes of discussion, they wrap up the meeting, and Scott reminds us all to head to the Danger Room next as everyone files out. After the room is empty, I turn to Rogue.

"Hey. Everything ok?"
She looks at me with a faint smile. "Yeah. Everything's fine." The morning light filters through the window, bathing her in a warm, soft glow as she looks out over the front lawn.

"You sure?" I ask her. "You didn't seem fine a minute ago."

"Really? I don't know why you would think that." She stands up and casually gathers her notebook and pen.

"Because you were practically burning a hole into Kitty and Bobby's foreheads with your eyes," I answer, standing up with her.

She looks at me for a moment, then starts heading for the door. "I don't know what you're talking about. They were speaking, and I was just looking at them. I think that's pretty standard practice, don't you?"

"Darlin', that wasn't simply looking at them. That was shooting daggers." She reaches the door and I tug gently on a lock of her hair. She turns around, a little smile playing on her lips as she sighs, and I touch her under the chin. "Come on, tell me. What was that all about?"

She looks at me for a long moment, the words percolating just beneath the surface as usual.

"I know you want to tell me," I murmur. "Maybe I can loosen up those lips a little." Leaning in, I touch my mouth to hers, just barely. Once more, softly, and then a little lick of her lower lip. It's enough to make her part her lips with a little intake of breath, granting me access. I deepen the kiss, slowly and sensually caressing her tongue with mine, reveling in the softness of her lips, the feel of her body as I gently press her against the doorway with my hips. I finish with a few sweet kisses to her lips and trace a finger along the side of her cheek.

"Ready to talk?" I murmur again.

She slowly opens her eyes with a dreamy smile, and I grin back at her.

"That's a nice way to loosen lips, mister. Is that how you get all the ladies to talk?"

"Just one," I say with a wink.

She looks at me for a long moment, then finally relents. "Ugh, I don't know why--there's really no explanation--but for some reason, I just wanted to smack them both. That's terrible, because they've been nothing but nice to me," she confesses. "In that moment, when they were holding hands, and Bobby was all, 'I would never let them take you like that', it just made me feel...ugh!" She sighs and shrugs her shoulders. "It was uncalled for, really." She hugs her notebook and looks at the floor.

She looks so vulnerable and cute in that moment, I just want to scoop her up and carry her to my room.

"Nah," I assure her. "Those two can been pretty annoying sometimes. I'm sure that they deserve a hard smack for something."

She glances up at me and snorts. "Probably," she grins.

"C'mon. Let's get to the Danger Room before Scooter has a conniption."

She laughs and takes my hand as we head out the door.
Sentinel

**sentinel**

*noun*

1. a soldier or guard whose job is to stand and keep watch.

"Today we're going to do some combat simulations against Sentinels," Scott announces. "We hope that we will never have to actually use these skills, but he have to be prepared for that possibility."

"I still can't believe that we even have to consider it as a possibility," Kitty complains. "I didn't think people hated mutants any more. I mean, isn't this the 21st century?"

"Dude, times are changing," says Jubilee. "And not for the better. We all thought things were peachy between humans and mutants, but there are haters out there. A lot of them, and looks like they've just been laying low up until now."

"There are a lot of haters, but there are many of those who are our friends and allies," Storm says in her usual calm, unflappable tone. "Just because the haters are blowing their horns the loudest right now, does not mean that they are the majority."

"Yes, we must focus on the positive," adds Kurt. Storm smiles at him and he smiles back at her shyly.

"Respectfully, I must interject," says Hank with a furry finger in the air, "that majority or not, there are some significant 'haters' as you say, who are in power right now. We must keep an eye on things, and as Scott said, be prepared."

Scott nods. "And on that note, let's get started. I'm splitting you up into teams of two. Logan, you're with Colossus, Storm, you're with Nightcrawler, Rogue, you're with Ice Man, Shadowcat, you're with Jubilee, and Beast, you're with me. Jean will be taking a break from drills for a while, for obvious reasons. She'll be in the control room with the Professor."

Scott looks up and Jean smiles down at him through the glass of the control room. She rubs her belly and Scott smiles back.

"Begin simulation," Scott says.

The room is suddenly transformed to the White House lawn, where a hundred empty chairs are lined up in front of a stage decorated with red, white and blue. Behind the stage are ten sentinels standing in one towering row.

"Whoa," Bobby Breathes. "They are huge."

As I look around, it dawns on me; this scene looks familiar. Very familiar.

"This set was designed based on the 1973 White House standoff; details taken from news footage as well as first person accounts from the Professor, Hank, and Mystique were used in the creation of this simulation. The only thing we have left out is the crowds of people."
"Wow, this is like going back in time," says Jubilee.

Yeah, something like that. I think it's funny how they all talk about this as if it were ancient history; to me, this happened only a few months ago. I made the time jump, changed the past, and in the blink of an eye, woke up here in the new timeline. It still fucks with my mind sometimes. To think that only a few months ago, I was in a completely different world; a dark, dismal world in which Rogue was dead. The thought is like a prick of pain in my chest, and my eyes seek out Rogue, who stands next to me. Unable to stop myself, my hand is drawn to hers, lightly touching her fingers with my knuckles; a slight movement, just to remind myself that she is really here.

She looks at me for a moment and gives me a little smile before turning her attention back to Scott. I feel the feather-light brush of her hand, then a gentle squeeze of my finger before letting go. It's a subtle exchange, but it's enough to keep me grounded.

"These Sentinels were absolutely state of the art at the time," says Scott. "Although they were created during a time when computers were a new thing and there was no such thing as the internet, make no mistake; they are still dangerous. They were formidable then, and they are formidable now."

"Well, what are we waiting for?" Piotr says, balling his fist and hitting his palm.

"Yeah, let's kick some Sentinel ass!" says Jubilee, her eyes lit up with excitement.

"Alright, let's go," says Scott with a nod. "Remember, you'll need to work with your partner and have each other's backs. They are relentless machines, designed to detect the mutant gene and destroy it. Sentinels, power on."

At Scott's command, the Sentinels come to life, their eerie eyes glowing yellow. Everyone just stands there, in awe of these 18 foot minions of menace.

"You all just gonna stand there?" I grunt. "I think you better get a move on."

Suddenly half of the Sentinels turn on their rocket blasters and rise into the air. They raise their arms and begin firing at the team with built-in machine guns.

"Oh, shit!" Jubilee yells and starts running for cover. Everyone except for me and Piotr takes off in different directions, with the Sentinels in hot pursuit.

"Well, whaddya think, Tin Man. Feel like a fast ball special?"

Piotr looks at me strangely. "A what?"

Oh, yeah. I forgot that this is the new timeline; they've never seen this kind of battle before, and Piotr has no memory of this effective little move we created. It was kind of a running joke in the old timeline, before the shit hit the fan and things got serious. Any time we were up against a really tough opponent, the solution was to "throw Wolverine at the thing". Heh.

"Just throw me at 'em," I explain with an evil grin.

He looks at me for a moment, unsure if I really mean what I just said. He shrugs his shoulders, then grabs me by the uniform and wails me into the air, straight at the approaching sentinel. Hell yes, this is the one time that I actually enjoy flying. Wouldn't Carol be proud if she could see me now. Letting out a thunderous roar, I pop the claws and chop the Sentinel's head clean off with two swipes.
With a heavy thud, the head falls the ground and rolls, coming to a stop at Piotr's feet.

He looks up at me in wonder, and then a big smile forms on his face. "Fast ball special. I like it!"

"Heh, I thought you would, big guy. C'mon, let's go find some more robots."

Twenty minutes later and Piotr and I have managed to take down two more Sentinels. These monsters are definitely formidable, as Scott said, but after fighting them for several years in the old timeline and experiencing the latest generation of Sentinel that could shape shift and take mutant powers, these ones today almost seem like child's play to me. The rest of the team, however, are still working on the remaining seven with difficulty.

Storm is trying to get together a tornado to tear apart the Sentinel chasing her and Kurt, but it takes her a few moments to work up the winds; hard to do when two Sentinels are coming at her so fast. Kurt keeps having to teleport her out of danger every time they get too close or open fire, and then she has to start over again.

Scott and Beast are doing ok with their Sentinel, though Scott is finding that they are pretty tough and can withstand a good number of blasts from his visor. He's finally managed to knock out one of its legs out, and Beast is jumping on its back to tear out the hydraulic tubes and wires from the neck, just like he did back in '73. Before he can completely disable the Sentinel, it lifts an arm and fires off several shots, two of which hit Scott in the shoulder.

"Fuck!" He yells, grabbing his shoulder and staggering behind a fallen tree.

There's no blood, since the simulation has been programmed to use non-lethal bullets, but they still hurt like a bitch. If this were real life, he could have been killed.

Kitty and Jubilee are struggling just to stay alive, let alone defeat their Sentinel. It's hovering in the air, coming at them with bullets and heat-seeking missiles so fast, Kitty can barely phase herself and Jubilee in time. Jubilee starts shooting off her energy plasmoids at the Sentinel, but it only disrupts the machine temporarily. They duck behind the White House pillars to regroup, and Jubilee yells to Kitty that she needs to get closer.

Kitty nods and answers that she will create a distraction. She begins playing a game of cat and mouse with the Sentinel, dodging between pillars, disappearing into the floor of the balcony and reappearing below, sprinting across the lawn and hiding behind the stage, dashing and phasing through anything and everything that will hide her. The Sentinel shoots at her with precision, but she remains phased as she runs so that the bullets go right through her. She makes her way back to the pillars and phases through the first level door, the Sentinel in hot pursuit. The machine comes down to the landing and smashes in the door. Just then, Jubilee sets off a rapid series of explosions at the base of two of the pillars, causing them to collapse on top of the Sentinel, crushing the mechanical monster to the ground. The light in its eyes go slowly fade out, and then it's still.

"Yeah!" Jubilee cries out, pumping her fist in the air. "We got him, Kitty! Wooo!"

Kitty comes out of the White House with a wary expression on her face. "We did it?"

"We did it, girl!"

"Yes!" Kitty claps her hands and gets a huge smile on her face. "We rock, Jubes!"

"Yes, we do, my friend." She runs over to the Sentinel, climbs up the pile of rubble, and stands on
its head. Wiggling her hips, she does a little dance of victory, then puts her hands on her hips and raises her chin to the air in a super hero pose.

"Kickin' some Sentinel a-a-ass, unh!" She sings. "Ooo! Here, Kitty," she says, reaching into her pocket. She pulls out her phone and tosses it to her. "Take my picture. This one's going on my kick ass wall of fame."

"Jubes..." Kitty shakes her head with a smile. "You really are--" Kitty stops, a look of horror on her face. "Jubes, get off. Get off of that thing now!"

"No way, dude! I need my picture."

"Jubes, it's not dead!"

Just then, the Sentinel's eyes light up, and it begins moving. It lifts its head and tries to get up, reaching around to push off the broken pillars.

"Oh, shit!" Jubilee jumps off the Sentinel's head. "This sucker is still alive! Run, Kitty!"

The two start running for cover as the Sentinel stands up and begins firing.

Rogue and Bobby, meanwhile, are taking down a Sentinel with a one-two combo. Rogue has taken a piece of scrap metal and is shielding herself and Bobby as he shoots ice from his hands to freeze the Sentinel's legs and arms, so that it can't walk, fly, or shoot. She then flies up to the Sentinel and tears its head off.

She sees me watching her from a distance and smiles, blowing me a kiss. Damn, that's my girl--I knew she would be good at this. I am seriously turned on right now.

Another Sentinel approaches, and Rogue picks up the scrap metal again.

"I've got you covered, Bobby. Freeze this son of a bitch."

Bobby nods and begins blasting the Sentinel with ice. First he aims for its arms to keep it from firing, then he works on the legs. Its feet begin to falter for a moment as they become encased in ice, but the Sentinel still manages to advance towards Rogue and Bobby.

"Keep going, Bobby; I'll fly up to tear its head off like the other one," Rogue instructs him, before launching into the air. "Cover me!"

Just then, a cry is heard from behind a crumpled car several yards away.

"Kitty?" Bobby calls out, searching the field with his eyes. "Kitty are you ok?"

"I'm ok, Bobby!" Kitty answers. "I think I sprained my ankle."

"Bobby, keep going with the ice!" Rogue yells over her shoulder. "It's starting to break free and I need to get closer."

Bobby hesitates. "Kitty's in trouble," he says, sprinting towards the car. "Hang on, Kitty, I'm coming!"

"Bobby, wait!" Rogue calls after him. She watches as Bobby rushes across the lawn to help Kitty.

The Sentinel that has been chasing Kitty spots her and Bobby and raises its arms to open fire.
"Bobby, take my hand!" Kitty shouts.

He grabs her hand and she pulls him to the ground with her. They wrap their arms around each other and Kitty phases them both, allowing the bullets to pass through them. It shoots relentlessly as Kitty and Bobby remain huddled, clinging to each other.

Out of nowhere, the Sentinel's head suddenly explodes, a shower of colorful sparks shooting out like a firecracker. The headless Sentinel drops to its knees and falls over. Kitty and Bobby look up in confusion.

"Surprise, bitch! I bet you didn't see that coming, did ya?" Jubilee says as the smoke clears, looking at the fallen Sentinel with satisfaction.

"Jubilee!" Kitty exclaims. "That was amazing! How did you do that?"

Jubilee shrugs her shoulders with a grin. "Learned something new today. I thought I could only shoot fireworks from my hands; but it looks like I can focus my energy on an object and kind of charge it up, causing it to explode from a short distance."

"That is so awesome!" Kitty says with admiration.

Jubilee smiles. "Yeah it is kinda awesome, isn't it?" She pulls out her phone and takes a selfie next to the burnt gaping hole where the Sentinel's head used to be. "Kick-ass wall of fame, baby!"

Kitty and Bobby look at each other and roll their eyes, then laugh.

"Thanks for trying to save me," Kitty says to Bobby, squeezing his hand.

Bobby smiles and kisses her sweetly. "I told you, I'll never let anything happen to you."

Things are starting to quiet down as one by one, each team defeats their respective Sentinels. Rogue is making short work of the one that she and Bobby were fighting; she has torn off both its arms and busted one of its legs, throwing it down to writhe in a broken heap on the ground.

She sees Bobby and Kitty cuddling and whispering to each other, and stares at them intensely, her expression one of pure animosity. She's so focused on the two of them that she doesn't see the last Sentinel suddenly appear from behind.

"Rogue, look out!" I shout to her.

She glances at me for a moment, but I'm too late. Before she can react, she is smacked out of the air by the Sentinel's huge robotic hand, slamming into a tree trunk with a sickening thud before falling to the ground.

"Rogue!" Piotr and I start running towards her. Oh God, she's not getting up. My eyes are fixed on her, watching for any sign of consciousness. Finally, she moves a little and groans, rolling onto her back.

The Sentinel slams down his foot on top of Rogue, smashing her with brute force. Rogue cries out and struggles to lift its foot off, but her arms are trapped. She tries to gasp for air under the crushing weight, barely able to make a sound. She can't breathe.

Piotr gets to her first and tries to lift the Sentinel's foot off of her, but it doesn't budge.

"Scott! Shut down the Sentinel!" I yell as I jump over the smoking rubble and debris lying
everywhere, trying to get to Rogue as fast as I can.

Scott quickly looks at me and then Rogue, and nods. "End simulation," he commands.

Everything around us disappears, revealing the Danger Room once more. Rogue gasps for breath, coughing violently and turning to her side, the crushing weight finally removed from her chest.

I rush to her side and gently pick her up, cradling her in my arms. Her eyes are closed as she swallows, trying to catch her breath.

"Rogue, darlin'..." I whisper, touching her cheek. "Are you ok?"

She moans and cracks her eyelids slowly. "My head hurts."

"Shit. Come on, let's get you to the medbay. Hank!" I call over my shoulder. "We need a stretcher."

"No, I don't need a stretcher," she mumbles. "I can stand."

"Darlin', I don't think that's a good idea."

"I can stand," she insists, slowly getting to her feet. She rubs her chest and hisses in pain, then takes a step, wobbling a little.

I quickly take her arm and hook it over my shoulders, wrapping my free arm around her waist. The rest of the team gathers themselves and start heading for the locker rooms, looking sore and beat up.

Bobby walks a hobbling Kitty along and reaches the door at the same time as us. He looks at Kitty and then Rogue, who is grimacing in pain. The moment Rogue sees Kitty and Bobby, she goes stock still.

"You son a bitch," she spits. "What were you thinking?"

Bobby's mouth opens, but he says nothing.

"You never leave your teammate!" She throws my arm off her waist and takes a step towards Bobby, pointing a finger at him sharply. "You never abandon your partner!"

Bobby and Kitty both stumble backwards a little, stunned by Rogue's venomous behavior.

"I-I'm sorry, I--Kitty was in trouble. I had to help her," Bobby stutters. "I thought you could handle it."

"Bullshit!" Rogue spits again. By now the rest of the team members are approaching, curious about what is going on. "She had a twisted ankle, she would have been fine. All she had to do is remain phased until Jubilee could get there. Rogue was the one who needed you! She was almost killed because you ditched her in the middle of battle!"

Bobby and Kitty get a strange look on their faces. "She?" says Kitty.

"This is so like you, Bobby. She needed you to do your job, and you chose to run off to your precious little kitty-cat," she says with a dismissive wave at Kitty. Kitty's chin drops with a gasp. "Meanwhile, Rogue was clocked in the head with the force of a freight train, and then almost suffocated under the weight of that Sentinel."

Everyone stands there, staring in stunned silence. Jubilee clears her throat. "Ummm, Roguey? Why
are you talking about yourself in the third person? Are you okay?"

"Your eyes..." says Storm in wonder. "They're green."

Oh shit. I grab Rogue's arm and spin her around; two very green eyes stare back at me. Carol.

"Hey, guys, Rogue hit her head pretty hard. She needs to go to the medbay, right now," I say, quickly wrapping my arm around her and ushering her towards the door.

"I'm not going to the medbay, bub, so don't even try it," she says firmly.

"Ok, then we'll just go to my room and lay down for a while."

"Hmph. Fine," she grumbles. We're almost out the door, when she stops and turns around. "She still feels pain, you know. Even if her skin is invulnerable."

The team stands there, saying nothing as Carol looks each of them in the eye.

"C'mon, darlin'. Let's go," I say quietly.

I give her waist a little tug, and she finally relents, turning back with me towards the door. I can feel everyone's eye on our backs as we walk away, the only sound coming from the swish of the door closing behind us.
Chapter Summary

Shadows from the past are beginning to appear more frequently, taking their toll on Rogue.

**shad·ow**
noun
1. an area of relative darkness caused by the blocking of light
2. an ominous feeling of oppressiveness, sadness or gloom.
3. a remnant or vestige: a shadow of one's past self

"I never saw it coming," she says softly.

I turn away from the window and glance across the room at Rogue's blanket-covered form in my bed. She has her back to me, but even without seeing her face, I know that she isn't talking to me. She's been sleeping for the past hour, talking to someone in her dreams.

After the whole Danger Room thing happened, I took her back to my room and had her lie down; or rather, asked Carol to lie down so Rogue could get some rest. After Hank stopped in to check her over, it took a while for things to settle; Carol was still really keyed up, cussing a blue streak about "Ice-dick and his Kitty-cat". I can't blame her; Bobby made a really dumbass mistake. He should have stayed with Rogue, his assigned partner, instead of running off to help Kitty. What a big help he was, too; he did absolutely nothing except hold her hand while she phased them both to avoid getting shot. Dumbass.

Still, what troubles me more than what Bobby did is the way Rogue was acting before she was knocked out by the sentinel. Yes, it was a dick move what Bobby did, and I intend to beat his ass for it the next time I see him, but I can't believe that Rogue allowed herself to be so distracted by that. It's not like her to lose focus in the middle of a battle; she is usually a fighting machine with a one-track mind when she faces an opponent. Instead she had the same look on her face that she had in that team meeting; lost in a cloud of animosity as she stared at Bobby and Kitty, completely unaware of what was going on around her. I know that those two can be annoying, but it just doesn't make sense.

My thoughts are interrupted by a soft moan.

"I can't take this pain any more," Rogue whispers.

I take a step towards the bed, then stop myself; I shouldn't wake her, she needs the sleep...though I can't say how much good it will do her when she's like this. I let out a weary sigh and scrub my face, heading back to the window ledge. Hank already gave me medication for her earlier; but I don't think that it will help this kind of hurt. I've been watching her toss and turn every night. Listening to her pain and sadness. I should be used to this by now, but it's taking everything I have not to wake her up again, just to take the nightmares away.
"You keep saying hold on a little longer. I wish you would stop saying that," Rogue pleads softly, her voice breaking. "I don't want to hang onto this hope any more. He's not coming."

I look over my shoulder. Who is not coming? Who is she waiting for?

I quietly approach the bed and sit on the edge of the mattress next to Rogue. Brushing a lock of white hair away from her face, I watch as her emotions play across her delicate features. It's hard watching her go through this every night. I keep thinking maybe it will get better with time; that maybe I can chase away these demons with love and patience. But maybe...maybe love and patience aren't enough.

I've been patient, as much I can be, ever since that night Carol and I talked about their imprisonment at Weapon X. I haven't asked any questions since then, haven't asked what happened and what they did to her. I haven't pushed Rogue to tell me how she got there, or how she got out. But I'm this close to giving up on this waiting game that we've been playing.

No, I won't ever give up on her; that's not even an option. But I need more to go on than a bunch of one-sided conversations taking place in a dream, more than just a few hints of her past from the woman who shares Rogue's body.

Carol. She must know more than she is letting on; she shares a body and a mind with Rogue. How much does she see of Rogue's memories? How much does she know?

Maybe I can talk to Carol while Rogue is sleeping. Would she tell me anything? Immediately I feel a twinge of guilt. Part of me that says it would be wrong to go to her behind Rogue's back...but then again, there is another part of me that says Rogue needs my help, and I need to do whatever it takes to give her that, even if she's not ready.

I shake my head. No...Rogue would see it as a violation of her privacy. I have to sit her down myself and somehow get her to talk to me.

As I sit there debating, something I overhear catches my attention.

"You abandoned me, Bobby. You left me to die," she hisses. "Do you have any idea what I went through? What kind of hell I've had to endure?"

I think she must be dreaming about the Danger Room incident now. The last part doesn't quite make sense, though. What does that mean, the hell she's had to endure? Does she mean Weapon X?

"You knew where I was-- for years! And you never said a word to anyone."

Her face darkens with anger, her breathing becoming more rapid as her legs move restlessly under the sheets.

"You disgust me. I was never enough for you, was I? You never had the guts to be honest, never had the guts to choose. You just kept me waiting in the wings, while you had your little indiscretions with that whore."

That doesn't make sense either. Indiscretions with that whore? Who is she talking about? Kitty?
Professor said that Rogue was never with Bobby, and if that's true, she wouldn't be saying these things to him at all. But if she's not saying these things to Bobby, then who is she saying them to?

The thought of Rogue with anyone, let alone Bobby, causes the animal inside to stir. Jealousy begins to creep up inside of me, and I struggle to tamp it down. I know she had a life before I came along, and it's unreasonable to expect that I'm the only man she's ever been with.

Anyways, maybe I'm reading into things too much. Dreams aren't exactly linear in nature; they are often a mashup of different memories and thoughts, sometimes happening out of order, sometimes all happening at once. Some of it is real, and some of it is not. Still...her words have something niggling in the back of my brain.

"Shut up." Rogue rolls over, her face twisted in a grimace. "Shut up. Shut up." Her hands fly up to cover her ears, and she begins repeatedly banging her head on the pillow. "Shut-up-shut-up-shut-up-shut-up!"

"Woah, hey," I say, trying to soothe her. "Rogue, darlin', it's ok. It's ok. Marie!" I gently shake her shoulder. "Wake up, baby."

She wakes with a start, her eyes darting about the room. I wait a moment for her to get her bearings.

"You're ok, darlin'. It's me. You're ok."

She blinks a few times, then finally looks at me, recognition slowly seeping into her consciousness. She looks tired. More tired now than she did before she fell asleep.

"He was in my head."

"Who was in your head?"

Her eyes grow distant as she tries to recall. "Bobby. I don't know how he got in there. I don't--I don't remember touching him, but he was there, clear as day."

Bobby? When would she have touched him? Could it have happened in the Danger Room? Maybe it happened before I got here in the new timeline. I sit there quietly and rub her back, trying to comfort her even as a hot wave of possessiveness runs through me.

"Is he there now?" I ask calmly.

"No, I...I don't feel him any more, but...he was there...but that can't be. I don't know, it felt so real."

"It must have been just a dream, darlin'."

"Not a dream," she shakes her head slowly. "More like...a memory."

"I'm sure it seemed like a memory," I tell her softly. "Dreams can seem so real when we're stuck inside of them."

"No," she insists. "I know the difference. I don't know how to explain it, but there's a certain...feel to it when someone has been in my head.

"So you think he touched you somehow by accident?"
"No, definitely not, but...I could swear it was real. It couldn't have been, though."

I watch as she tries to put the pieces together. "What did he say to you?"

She flinches ever so slightly. "Nothing," she answers and looks away.

"Didn't seem like nothing a minute ago."

"It was nothing."

"You were banging your head, trying to get him to shut up," I tell her. Her eyes dart to mine self-consciously. "It was on the pillow, but still. It looked like you were trying to hit your head up against a wall."

"Oh..." she whispers, her face turning pink. She fidgets with the sheets, which have been crumpled in her fist.

"Come on, darlin', talk to me," I gently coax her, brushing away a lock of hair and taking her hand in mine.

She shakes her head. "He was saying...things I didn't want to hear. I couldn't shut him out because he was inside my head. I just wanted him to stop."

"What kinds of things?"

She hesitates. "Things about you," she whispers.

"About me? What did he say about me?" I say softly, my thumb caressing her hand.

"That you left me alone...because you loved Jean."

My hand stills. For a moment I can't even speak. That she would even believe that for a second...it's like a cut to my heart. "Darlin," I shake my head, "You know I don't love Jean. I love you. Only you. I would never leave you, ever. You know that, right?" Her eyes are cast downward as she nods her head. I lift her chin to look me in the eye. "Don't believe a dream, no matter how real it seems. I'm real." I take her hand and place it over my heart. "This is what's real."

She looks into my eyes for a long moment, as if she's searching for something. Finally she leans forward and throws her arms around me for a hug. I pull her close to me and wrap my arms tightly around her, breathing a quiet sigh of relief.

"You've been having a lot of nightmares, and they're getting worse," I murmur into her hair. "I wish you would talk to me about it."

"I know..."

"You've been acting a little off lately, too. First with the meeting, and then with what happened in the Danger Room..."

She pulls back. "What do you mean, what happened in the Danger Room?" She looks down at herself, suddenly noticing that her uniform is gone and she's tucked into bed. "What happened?"

"You don't remember?"

She thinks for a moment. "I remember we split up into teams and were fighting the Sentinels," she says cautiously. "I was with Bobby...and...he ditched me to go help Kitty. I was handling things ok,
"You were knocked out of the air by a sentinel. Slammed against a tree...then almost crushed under its foot. You couldn't breathe. Scott had to shut down the simulation to get you out of there."

"Oh...that's...wow." Her gaze falls and she rubs her chest, realization darkening her expression; she grimaces as she remembers the pain. "I guess...maybe I'm not as invulnerable as I thought, am I?"

"You're still the strongest person I know," I assure her. "But I think we all found out today that you're not invincible. You have to learn how to be careful and understand the ways that you can be hurt."

"Yeah...I guess you're right," she nods reluctantly.

I take her hand again. "There's something else."

Her eyebrows furrow as she looks up. "Something else?"

"Yeah. It's..." I hesitate, "I think the cat might be out of the bag about Carol."

Her eyes grow wide. "They know about Carol?" she chokes, her face blanching. "How?"

"When you got hurt, she knew it was Bobby's fault..."

She raises a hand to stop me and closes her eyes. Her head tilts a little to one side and her forehead scrunches; as I watch her eyes move beneath the lids and her frown grow deeper, I can see the entire scene in the Danger Room play across her face.

"Oh my God..." she groans softly. "Carol..."

"I'm sorry, baby."

She opens her eyes. "I can't believe she did that. She blew my cover."

"She was just sticking up for you, darlin'. I know it wasn't the best timing, or how you wanted people to find out, but..."

She leans forward and rests her forehead on my shoulder with a sigh. "How am I supposed to face everyone after that?" she mumbles into my shirt. "What am I going to say?"

I caress her hair and kiss her head. "Why don't you just...tell them the truth?"

She lifts her head. "The truth? You mean the fact that I've got a whole other person living inside my head? That I can absorb a mutant's memories and powers with a single touch? Or how about the fact that half of the powers I possess, all the things that are so useful to X-men, like flying and super strength, were taken from the very person living inside my head because I killed her."

She stands up and begins pacing the room. "God, I can just imagine the looks I'm going to get. I can see the judgment in their eyes already."

"No one is going to look at you like that," I assure her, standing up to follow her across the room. She stops and faces me squarely. "No? How about when they find out that I've been lying to them,
Logan? I've had these powers all this time, and I never told anyone."

"I'm sure you had your reasons..." I say gently. What those reasons are, I've been trying to figure out since day one. I look into her eyes and wait, silently willing her to fill in the blank that I've left for her, hoping she'll open up just a little and give me something to go on. She meets my gaze for a long moment, then breaks away, turning to look out the window.

She's torn as usual, and as usual, her default is to withdraw in silence; it's expected, but that doesn't make it any less frustrating. Patience, I remind myself. Though I just want to spin her around by the shoulders and demand answers, I know it's not the way. She needs me to be her rock right now, and that's what I'm going to do.

Without a word, I step closer and wrap my arms around her from behind, kissing her shoulder.

"It's ok," I whisper.

She places her hands on my forearms, closing her eyes as I gently envelope her in the safety of my embrace. *I'll take care of you."

I hold her like that for several minutes, arms wrapped protectively around her, kissing her temple as the tension in her body slowly begins to ease.

I nuzzle her hair, lowering my head to place a gentle kiss behind her ear. I feel her hand move, lightly tracing my forearm with her fingertips. It's the smallest of touches, but it's enough send a light tingle through my body.

She smells so good. I continue nuzzling her hair, placing soft kisses behind her ear and down her neck. She draws in a breath through parted lips, goosebumps appearing on her skin where I've left a trail of kisses.

Her reaction sends another spark through me, settling low in my body and making me hard. I shouldn't be doing this to her; she needs to rest. Physical comfort is always something we have been able to fall back on when the words just won't come. But she needs emotional comfort, not this.

Even as these thoughts go through my mind, my lips find the soft, warm skin of her neck again. *I shouldn't be doing this*, I chide myself; but it doesn't stop me from darting the tip of my tongue out to taste her. A low rumble rises in my chest, and I taste her again.

A soft whimper escapes her lips and her fingers press into my arms as my kisses become less gentle and more urgent. My hand slides across the smooth fabric of her camisole, cupping her breast. I flick a thumb over her nipple and she moans.

My hardened cock strains against my jeans, and I press it insistently into the curve of her backside. I can smell the need rolling off of her. Instinctively my mouth seeks out the sensitive spot between her neck and shoulder. She tilts her head to the side, exposing her neck to me in submission, and I'm helpless to stop myself. The animal comes life, and all restraint is gone. I sink my teeth into her flesh firmly, holding her still as my other hand slides under her panties. She gasps in pleasure as I massage her clit, her hand flying down to grasp mine.

I move my other hand from her breast to turn her face to me, plundering her mouth with a ravenous kiss.

Breaking away, I guide her closer to the window, and bend her forward, placing her hands on the windowsill. She looks over her shoulder, her lips wet and swollen, watching me with desire as I unzip my jeans. I slide her panties down to her knees and nudge her feet apart.
I take a moment to savor this beautiful sight; gliding my hands over her thighs, palms following the curve of her ass, then the swell of her hips...every inch of her skin feels like silk. I move my hands slowly along the curve of her small waist, gritting my teeth as I grasp it firmly and pull her closer, grinding my rock hard erection against her. She moans in response, and I growl, reaching further up her body and grasping harder.

"Oh!" she suddenly yelps, hissing in pain.

My eyes snap upward, catching her expression. Her face is twisted in a grimace for a second, before she hurries to smooth it away so that I can't see it.

"Are you ok?"

"I--I'm fine. Don't stop," she says, rubbing her bottom against my erection. "Please..."

In that moment, the lusty haze is broken, as I realize why she had cried out. She's injured. Even though I can't see the physical evidence, her ribs must be bruised from the Sentinel attack--and in my moment of passion, I've hurt her.

I look up and see our reflection in the dark window. Her small form, bent over with hands on the windowsill, a hulking animal standing behind her, ready to satisfy his own sexual appetite. Bastard.

"Stand up, baby." I gently raise her up and straighten out her panties and camisole. She looks up at me with questioning eyes as I pull her close.

"What's wrong?"

Tucking a strand of white hair behind her ear, I caress her cheek. "I'm sorry."

She tilts her head to one side. "Sorry for what?"

"For being a selfish bastard. For making you do this. I should be comforting you, but instead I'm only thinking about what I want. All the things I want to do to you..."

"Oh, Logan..." she reaches up and touches my sideburn, tracing her fingers down through the hair along my jaw. "You're the furthest thing from selfish. And you're not making me do anything."

"You're giving me too much credit, darlin'."

A little smile curves at the corner of her mouth. "C'mon," she says, taking my hand. She gives me a small tug, leading me towards the bed. "Lay with me. Just like this." She turns to her side and pats the spot behind her, beckoning me.

I lay down behind her, and she snuggles back into my body. I'm still hard, and my cock presses against her as she pushes back with her bottom. Suppressing a groan, I gently wrap my arm around her waist and shift my hips back.

"Stay," she insists, placing a hand on my hip. She wiggles back, pressing herself against my erection again.

"Darlin', I'm trying to do the right thing here, and you're not makin' it easy. It's hard to comfort you when all I want to do is fuck you till you can't see straight."

"Why can't you do both?" She takes my hand and places it on her breast. "This is comfort." She moves my hand down between her legs. "This is comfort, too."
"I don't want to hurt you," I say, stilling my hand.

"You won't. Just start off slow, like this," she murmurs, slowly rolling her hips, pressing my fingers against her clit. She moans softly, rubbing her backside against my cock, and I close my eyes at the sensation. "Please, Logan...."

Unable to resist temptation any longer, I place several kisses on her back and shoulder. Carefully, I lift her leg, then guide my cock slowly into her slick heat.

"Yes--more..." she whispers.

I push my cock in further, thrusting at the end until I'm all the way in, and she moans in appreciation. I begin a slow, even pace, sliding almost all the way out and then back in again.

It's a carefully measured, slow thrust so as to not hurt her, but at the same time, it's an incredibly intense sensation. My body is spooned around hers as I move within her, and the intimacy of it surprises me.

She gasps in pleasure when I hook my arm under her knee, shifting it higher and burying myself deeper. I slowly begin increasing my pace. I can smell and feel her getting closer, and I struggle to maintain control.

She reaches her hand down between her legs, seeking her release. With a cry, she falls over the edge, and I follow her immediately, filling her completely with one final thrust of my hips.

Withdrawing slowly, I gently lower her leg, then slide my arm around her waist, holding her close to my chest. She sighs with contentment and rests her arm over mine.

"That was somethin' else, wasn't it?" she purrs.

"Yes it was," I rumble softly in her ear.

"I know it wasn't how you intended to comfort me initially...but it was what I needed. You're always there for me, Logan, giving me what I need, whether you understand my reasons or not. And that means a lot to me."

I kiss her shoulder. "I'm always here for you, darlin'."

She squeezes my hand. "Thanks, sugar."

Several moments pass in contented silence as we come down from the high. With each passing minute, though, those feelings of contentment are replaced by the question lingering in both our minds.

"So...are you going to talk to them?" I ask. I softly caress her belly, tracing slow circles around her navel. I love the way her stomach dips just a little right there.

She says nothing for a few moments. "I'm worried about what they're going to say. Worried what they're going to think when they find out I've been hiding something from them."

"I think you're going to find that they're a lot more understanding than you give them credit for. Every mutant at Xavier's has a history, and believe me, no one is perfect. Not even old One-Eye. We've come from all walks of life, and we've all been accepted as family."

"Family. Are you sure it's not more like a group of people conveniently given a place to live, made
to feel like they belong, simply because they have useful powers?

Her question knocks me for a loop. "What do you mean?"

She turns herself over to face me. "I mean, mutants are a valuable commodity, Logan. If you have mutants working for you, you have power. Everyone knows it...including the Professor."

I stare at her, at a loss for words.

"Just the other day I saw a news story," she continues, "about how several countries are building up their armies with special mutant divisions in a race to become the most powerful. It used to be 'don't ask, don't tell'; but now it's become this elite thing to join, and mutant recruitment is at an all time high. How is Xavier's any different?"

"Xavier's is different because the Professor cares. His mission in life is to help mutants."

"But it doesn't hurt if the mutants he helps can return the favor by devoting themselves to his cause," she points out. "The Professor has basically created his own elite task force."

"First and foremost, this is a school, darlin'."

"Future elite task force incubator," she retorts.

I blink a few times. "You can't believe that."

Her expression softens and she sighs. "I don't know what I believe, Logan." She touches my chest, absentely running her fingers through the hair. "I know the Professor is like a father to you; the X-team is your family. They've been nothing but good to me so far, and for that I'm grateful. But you can't tell me that I would have a home here if I didn't have such useful powers. I've been around the block, sugar, and nothing is for free; especially not for people like us."

I stare at her for a moment, trying to comprehend this sudden turn in the conversation. "What's this all about, darlin'? I thought we were talking about Carol."

She caresses my muttonchops, stroking the bristles along my jaw. "We are but...like I told you once before, the less people know about me the better. If they don't know about my powers, then they can't use those powers."

I take her hand and kiss her fingers. "Marie, baby...this isn't Weapon X. No one wants to use you here. We're teammates, but we're also family; and your worth is not determined by what you can contribute."

She casts her eyes downward, unwilling to meet my gaze. "C'mon..." I lift her chin to make her look at me. "Give these geeks a shot, huh?"

A tiny smile touches her lips, and reluctantly she nods. "I'll try. For you, Logan."
Broach

Chapter Summary

The X-team is a family, and like any other family, everybody is into everybody else's business. Rogue knows that she has some explaining to do.

broach
verb
1. raise a sensitive or difficult subject for discussion.
2. rise through the water and break the surface.

Rogue's gloved hand grips my arm a little tighter as we pass through the heavy oak doors of the cafeteria.

"Easy, darlin'. It's gonna be fine," I quietly reassure her. I can hear her heart begin to beat faster as we pass the students and approach the table where the X-team is sitting.

"It's not too late to turn around and go out for breakfast," she says under her breath. Her grip loosens and she starts to pull away.

Quickly I grab her hand before she can get away, drawing her close as we continue on our trajectory.

"Nope, gonna face this head on, kid."

She narrows her eyes at me. "Kid?"

I shrug my shoulders with a smirk. We stop at the bar and I calmly pour two coffees, black for me, Cinnabon creamer for her. She loves that sweet flavored stuff; with how much she uses, I'm surprised she can even taste the coffee. "Something to eat?" I gesture towards the danishes and bagels.

"No..." She takes a shaky breath, "I don't have an appetite right now."

"It's going to be ok. You'll see." I take her hand again and we head for the table.

Every so often someone at the X-table looks up discreetly, noting our arrival, then looks away. They're all careful not to stare or be too obvious about watching us; all of them except for Jubilee, of course, who was never one for subtlety.

"Heyyyyy, Roguey! How are you feeling?" she says gingerly with an earnest smile, as if she were approaching an injured wild animal and trying to soothe it with her voice.

"Better, thanks," Rogue grumbles in reply.

"You seem to be fairing well," Hank remarks, clearing his throat. "I am very pleased to see that you are up and about."
"Thanks," Rogue answers with a tentative smile.

I pull out a chair for her and we take a seat at the table near Jubilee and Hank.

"Mornin'," I nod to Jean, Scott, and Storm.

"Good morning," they each reply, acknowledging us with a smile before returning their attention to their breakfasts.

Silverware clicking with porcelain plates, silent sips of coffee...a quiet awkwardness settles over the table as everyone tries to act normal. Awkward, but at least no one has had the nerve to dive right in and start peppering Rogue with questions. She might actually have a chance to calm down and have some pleasant conversation before she eases into--

"So, Roguey, what was that all about yesterday?" Jubilee blurts out.

Kitty chokes on her orange juice, coughing and sputtering as she throws Jubilee an incredulous look. Bobby looks like he's just seen a ghost. Jean and Scott stop mid-bite and look at each other before ducking back down to their plates, and Rogue stiffens. Fucking Jubilee.

"What? We were all thinking it," she says, looking around at a table of stricken faces. "Hello, she was talking about herself in the third person and her eyes changed to a different color. Clearly there's something going on."

"Jubilee," Storm chides her gently. "You're embarrassing Rogue."

Jubilee sidles closer to Rogue and takes her gloved hand. "Rogue, honey...I'm sorry to be so blunt, and I'm totally not trying to put you on the spot. But we're a family here. We talk about everything."

"Maybe you talk about everything," Bobby mutters under her breath.

"Shut up, Bobby," Kitty replies, throwing him a look. She turns back to Rogue. "Ok, maybe we don't talk about everything...but the point is, we could talk about anything if we wanted to, and it would be ok. No matter what. So whatever it is you have going on, whatever you've got on your mind, it's ok. No one is going to judge you." She looks around the table for confirmation. "Am I right, guys?"

"Of course--you are absolutely right, Jubilee. Please feel free to speak without hesitation, Rogue," Hank says, to which the rest of them agree, nodding their heads.

Rogue's face is pale as all eyes turn to her. Her mouth opens to speak, but she hesitates and closes it again. This is no surprise to me, of course. Getting Rogue to talk is never as easy as simply asking and getting a straight answer. But add to that the scrutiny of the entire X-team in the middle of breakfast? Good luck with that.

"Ok, I'm sorry; maybe that was a bit much to throw at you right off the bat. Let's just start with...something easy," Jubilee suggests. "Simple conversation, about pleasantries and, um, fun stuff. Like um...Oh! Like how you totally kicked ass when you were fighting those sentinels! You were awesome, tearing them to pieces like that. Wasn't she, guys?" She looks around the table expectantly.

Scott finally clears his throat and speaks up. "Uh, yes, I would have to agree with Jubilee; I was very impressed by the way you handled those sentinels, Rogue. You showed excellent teamwork with Bobby, and did extremely well on your own even after Bobby..." his voice dies off as he looks at Bobby, who cringes as he picks at his food dejectedly. "Well, after Bobby went to help Kitty..."
Kitty stares at her plate, mortified.

"Guten Morgen," Kurt sings cheerfully from behind, breaking the awkward moment. No one says a word as he and Piotr find a seat at the table and begin digging into their food. Kurt looks up between mouthfuls. "What did we miss?"

"Oh, nothing," Rogue mutters. "We were just sharing an uncomfortable family moment."

"Hey, now," Jubilee protests. "We're trying to make you feel more comfortable. In fact, we want you to feel so comfortable that you can talk to us about anything."

"Yeah, I don't think it's working," I say, throwing her a dark look, which she completely ignores.

"As we were just saying, Rogue was awesome in the Danger Room yesterday," Jubilee informs Kurt.

"Da, she was," Piotr nods. "Very impressive, Rogue. You are small but mighty!"

For a moment, Rogue forgets her embarrassment and a little smile appears. The moment is fleeting, though, and her smile quickly fades when Kurt speaks again.

"Yes, yes, you were wonderful! Oh, but then something happened--you were hurt!" Kurt says, his eyes wide. "You were hurt, and it was very strange after that. You were not yourself at all."

Hank clears his throat, "Kurt--"

"Mmm, yes, very strange," Piotr agrees, shoveling a forkful of eggs into his mouth.

"Piotr--" Hank says, his eyes shifting from Piotr to Rogue.

"Your voice sounded different. The way you moved, and the way you talked; not at all like you, liebchen," Kurt says shaking his head.

"Kurt--" Hank tries again.

"Da, not like you at all. Very strange," says Piotr.

"Piotr, please--" says Hank.

"Oh! And your eyes, they were a different color!" Kurt leans in, becoming more animated.

"Mm, yes! A different color--I noticed that," Piotr agrees, stuffing his mouth with toast.

"Perhaps it is another part of your mutation, but I don't think so," Kurt says thoughtfully. "It happened so suddenly, that I think it must be something else."

Hank raises a finger. "Gentlemen, if you could just--"

"That's exactly what I've been saying," Jubilee nods with satisfaction. "Something else is definitely going on, and we need to get to the bottom of--"

"Enough!" Hank growls, slamming his fist down on the table. Everyone jumps at the sudden outburst. "Can't you see that you are all making Rogue feel uncomfortable? Where are your manners?"

The group is silent as all eyes fall to Hank and then Rogue. Rogue looks like she wants to crawl
"Geez, sorry," Jubile says under her breath. "We're just trying to help."

"Sorry," Piotr and Kurt say quietly.

"Now then," Hank says calmly, smoothing his clothes and folding his hands on the table. "I know that you care for Rogue very much, as we all do. But she is recovering from a stressful experience, and she does not need to face an inquisition the moment she arrives to breakfast. Please restrain yourselves. If there is anything that she wants to talk about, and that is if she wants to talk, she will do so in her own time, on her terms."

Hank looks at me and I give him a nod. Thanks, Furball; I owe you one.

"Sorry, Roguey." Jubilee slumps her shoulders, peeking up at Rogue from her plate. "I didn't mean to put you on the spot like that. I was just worried. I know I can be too nosy sometimes..."

Rogue sighs and some of the tension leaves her body. "It's ok, Jubes. I appreciate your nosiness; it just means that you care." Jubilee looks up and sees a little smile on Rogue's lips.

"You know I do, babe," Jubilee grins. Rogue takes her hand, giving it a little squeeze.

"To be honest...I did come here with the intention of talking to all of you about something," Rogue admits slowly. "I know I was acting strangely yesterday..."

She looks around the table, and opens her mouth to speak, then breathes out a frustrated sigh as she rubs her hands nervously on her legs. Everyone remains quiet, patiently waiting for her to continue.

"I...I want to let you know what's going on...but I...I don't know how to tell you."

"Take your time, honey," Jean gently reassures her. "There's no hurry."

Rogue nods and takes a calming breath. I turn in my seat, pulling her back between my legs, and she leans into me, gripping my knee.

"There's something I haven't told you about myself...about my powers, and--God, this is hard," she mutters, shifting uncomfortably. "I wasn't born with super strength, or the ability to fly. I was born with another mutation..."

Storm tilts her head slightly. "You mean you changed mutations?"

"No, I...I still have the same mutation, except now, I'm...more than I used to be. You know that my skin is untouchable..."

"We know about your deadly skin, Roguey. It's no big deal," Jubilee pipes up.

Rogue smiles tentatively. "Thanks, Jubes...but that's not what I mean."

"You were born with one mutation, and then developed a secondary mutation later on." Hank nods. "I've read about this phenomenon occurring with some mutants; it's not completely unheard of."

Rogue shifts uncomfortably, squeezing my knee a little tighter. "Not developed...more like...acquired."

"I'm not sure I understand. You acquired them...how?" Hank asks.
"I..." Rogue's heart is beating fast and her body is tense as she braces herself to answer. "I..." Her eyes dart around, looking for the nearest escape route. "I can't do this." She stands up abruptly to leave.

"Darlin', wait--" I call after her.

"No, Logan. I can't. I just can't," she says, her words tumbling out as she quickly walks away.

I stand up and go after her, glancing over my shoulder at the X-team, who remain motionless, confused by Rogue's sudden departure. I'm about to call after Rogue again, when out of the corner of my eye, I see Jubilee stand up.

"Rogue! Catch!" Jubilee calls out.

Rogue turns her head, and in that brief moment, Jubilee throws something to Rogue. Before Rogue has time to think, her body reacts and she lifts off a couple of feet in the air, catching the object. When she comes back down, she peers at the item in her hand. It's a big, softball-sized blueberry muffin.

"Jubes, what are you doing?" She gives Jubilee a confused expression.

"Play a game with me," Jubilee replies, walking over to Rogue.

Rogue stares at her for a moment, her mouth open. "Seriously?"

"Hear me out, ok? It's not a stupid game; it's something I learned in group therapy back in the day, and it's really helpful."

"I am not interested in group therapy," Rogue tosses the muffin back to Jubilee, "especially ones that involve hurling baked goods around." She turns to walk away.

"Wow. Thanks for shitting on my idea so handily," Jubilee mutters, looking down at the muffin in her hand. "It worked for me," she says quietly.

Rogue slows to a stop, her face dropping as she lets out a quiet sigh. She turns around. "I'm sorry, Jubes, I...I didn't mean to be dismissive. What's the game?"

Jubilee looks up. "It's actually pretty cool if you give it an honest chance."

"I will," Rogue promises.

Jubilee searches her face for a moment. "Good," she nods. "Now come back to the table and have a seat."

Rogue and I follow her back and take our seats at the table. Everyone looks relieved that we have decided to return, but at the same time, they are watching Jubilee with her blueberry muffin and wondering what exactly she had in mind. Knowing Jubilee the way we all do, it's going to involve highjinks of some kind.

"Ok, so I know we may have been a little overwhelming for you just now, with everyone asking questions and talking at once, and I know that it's hard opening yourself up when you've got something inside that you just can't get out," she begins. "So here's a little thing we used to do in therapy. We did it with a ball, but since I don't have one, this muffin will have to do." She holds the muffin up. "I present to you the Muffin of Immunity."
There's an awkward silence.

"Muffin of Immunity?" says Bobby.

"That's right, the Muffin of Immunity," Jubilee confirms. "It means that whoever has the muffin must share something about themselves that no one knows, but whatever that person shares, they can not be judged for it. That means that after we are done here, no one can say a word about it to you or anyone else, not without your permission. No weird looks, no teasing, no disapproval. Only listening without judgement. Is that clear?"

Each of the team members look at one another with a slightly uneasy expression.

"You're allowed to ask the muffin-holder questions, which he or she can choose to answer, or to say 'pass'." She holds the muffin up. "So, who wants to go first?"

A long silence stretches out as each person tries to avoid making eye contact. No one wants to be first. Pansies.

"I'll go." Everyone turns their heads, completely caught off guard. I don't think anyone expected the Wolverine to show any of his cards right off the bat; I'm the most reclusive person here. Yeah, I don't like sharing, but I'll do it for Rogue.

Jubilee's face lights up and she practically skips over to me with glee. "Awesome, Wolvie! Thank you for volunteering." She places the muffin in my hand. "You're a true leader."

I see Scott flinch out of the corner of my eye at her words, and already I'm glad that I threw my hat in the ring first. Heh. I love busting his balls; anyways, nothing like a little friendly competition to bring out the best in someone, so maybe this will give him the motivation to loosen his lips a little.

I toss the muffin back and forth from one hand to the other, thinking about what I should say.

"This is going to be good," I hear Kurt whisper to Piotr with a grin.

"Alright. How about this. I like to sleep in the nude."

A series of groans and face palms erupt, while Kurt covers his mouth, suppressing his laughter. Kitty turns beat red while Bobby makes a face; Storm shakes her head, Jean rolls her eyes but smiles, and Scott looks disapproving (no surprise there). Rogue turns and gives me a look that says, 'Did you really just say that?'

I shrug my shoulders and give her a smirk.

"Dude, that doesn't count. I think just about everyone here could have guessed that," Jubilee interjects, her hand on her hip. "Give us something good. Something real. Allowing yourself to be vulnerable is the name of the game so that everyone can let down their guard." She darts her eyes to Rogue and then back to me, giving me a look.

"Fine," I sigh. "Let me think. I like to sleep in the nude."

I toss the muffin back and forth from one hand to the other, thinking about what I should say.

"Alright, I've got something. But if I hear one word about this after our little therapy session, I'm gonna skewer that person's ass. We clear?" I glare at everyone.

"We wouldn't dare, Logan. Hold that Muffin of Immunity with confidence," Jubilee asserts.

I look around and give each person another glare, just for good measure. "Fine. Here's my share. A
while back I told Rogue about how I couldn't sleep, so I started watching TV. And I lost the remote, so I ended up watching the entire Anne of Green Gables series that night. But the truth is...” I crack my neck and shift in my seat. "I didn't watch it because I lost the remote and was too lazy to get up. I watched it because I liked it. A lot."

Every stares at me for a long moment, until suddenly it's like a dam breaks loose and everyone starts laughing their asses off. Rogue turns to me with a sympathetic smile; but her eyes are grateful, and when I see that, everyone else just melts away. I can do this for her; I can be a little vulnerable so that everyone can let down their guard, and she won't feel alone.

Truthfully, I don't mind everyone laughing, because I don't really care what they think. But just for fun I'm going to get back at Bobby for his stupidity in the Danger Room. I see him snickering and I stand up, grabbing him by the collar. Popping my claws out with a snikt, I bring the blades to his neck.

"You got a problem with that, bub?" I growl. Everyone at the table goes quiet, and Bobby's eyes grow wide as saucers.

"Logan," Scott says sharply.

"You think there's something wrong with enjoying a nice historical drama?" I growl again, ignoring Scott. "I'm probably more than a hundred years old, boy. Maybe it reminds me of my past. Something wrong with that?" I tighten my grip and lightly press the points of my claws into the soft skin of his neck.

"N-no sir," Bobby stutters. "Nothing wrong at all. You're totally right, it's a great movie."

I glare at him with death in my eyes for a moment, then yank him close to my face, nose to nose. "You're god damn right it is. And I'll tell ya what you're gonna do. You're gonna watch the whole thing tonight and report back to me tomorrow about which part is your favorite, you got that?"

"Y-yes, sir. I will, I swear." Bobby swallows.

"Logan," Storm says in her soft, calm voice. "You've had your fun. Can you please let Bobby go now? We want to continue the game."

"Hmph," I grunt, pushing Bobby back into his seat and releasing his collar. "I say it's Bobby's turn." I retract my claws, extending my hand towards him and he flinches backward. "How 'bout a handshake. No hard feelings, right?"

Bobby looks at my hand and then meets my eyes reluctantly. He hesitates, then slowly takes my hand, shaking it tentatively. "Um, right. No hard feelings."

I release his hand, and he sinks down in his chair, all the blood drained from his face.

"Okaaay," Jubilee says awkwardly. "I guess it's, um, your turn, Bobby. What do you want to share?"

Bobby clears his throat. "Well, I, uh...I think for the first time in my life, I just wet myself."

Everyone starts laughing, and even Bobby smiles sheepishly.

"Told you it was going to be good," Kurt whispers to Piotr, who smirks and nods.
Expose

Chapter Summary

Some unpleasant truths are revealed.

**expose**

verb
1. make (something) visible by uncovering it.
2. reveal the true, objectionable nature of (someone or something).

I gotta hand it to Jubilee, this little "Muffin of Immunity" exercise is entertaining, if nothing else. I've learned some pretty interesting things about my team mates, though it's a shame that we have to button our lips about it after this is over. I've learned that Hank has an extensive porcelain doll collection, Kurt once tried to wear makeup so that he could have a 'normal' skin color, and Jean sometimes uses her powers to cheat at board games because she can't stand to lose. Scott pees in the shower. Bobby is afraid of snakes. Kitty has phased into the men's shower and has seen each of us naked--though she swears up and down that it was an accident. Storm admitted that she sometimes will purposely cause the sky to crack with thunder whenever she has gas so that no one can hear her break wind. Seriously, I can't make this stuff up.

After a few rounds of silly admissions and good natured ribbing, people have started opening up more for real, though. The tone has eventually shifted from funny to more serious and emotionally revealing with each passing round; and as each one has allowed themselves to be a little more vulnerable, so has Rogue.

I can tell that she's working up the courage to tell everyone about Carol. If we all keep this up, she just might talk. It will be a huge step for her. She shifts nervously in her seat; Scott is up, and then it's her turn.

"...I'm worried that I won't be a good father," Scott admits, his shoulders slumped. Everyone rushes to reassure him, patting him on the back and telling him how amazing of a father he is already.

"Don't worry Scott; you are going to be an awesome father," Jubilee says confidently. "Besides, it takes a village to raise a child, and you know this child is going to have the best village in the world--the X-team."

Scott nods, somewhat relieved. "Thanks, guys."

"Rogue, your turn!" Jubilee smiles.

Rogue looks up apprehensively. "Oh. Is it my turn already? I...I don't know what to say."

"Dear, I remember you were going to tell us about your mutation earlier," Storm reminds her with a kind smile. "Maybe you could tell us more, if you're ready."

"Oh...right. Well, yeah...ok," Rogue fumbles with her words. "I'm sure you're all wondering what
happened in the Danger Room yesterday...and it does relate to my mutation."

Touching her back, I give her a reassuring look. She takes a breath and nods. "Ok... so you all know about my skin, right? And you remember how I said that I wasn't born with the mutation that would allow me to fly and have super strength?"

"Yes, you said that you somehow 'acquired' these secondary mutations," says Hank, "rather than developing them."

"Yes--that's true. I acquired them." Rogue fidgets with the fingers of her gloves, picking at the fabric. "I acquired them because...I have the ability to absorb other mutant's powers through touch."

She stares at her lap without glancing up, waiting for the reaction.

"Cool!" Jubilee breathes, her voice laced with awe.

"Fascinating," says Hank, amidst several murmurs of excitement around the table. "You are able to absorb another mutant's powers and use them as your own?"

"Um, yeah," answers Rogue, looking somewhat hopeful after the positive reaction.

"Fascinating," Hank says again.

"You mean, you could suddenly be able to teleport, like me?" asks Kurt.

"Or turn to steel, like me?" Piotr knocks on his chest.

"Um...yeah. Anything you can do, I can do," answers Rogue.

"Fantastic!" Kurt says in wonder.

"Why didn't you tell us this before, Rogue?" Scott asks. "This sounds like a very useful mutation."

"Indeed, the possible applications of this mutation are limitless," Hank adds. "Just think of it. If one of us were injured on a mission, you could borrow our powers and be a kind of substitute."

Out of the corner of my eye, I notice Rogue bristle at his words. Hank is caught up in his excitement, oblivious to her reaction.

"Or you could borrow powers from several mutants," he continues, "and be one woman army of sorts! You could--"

"She could," I interrupt, "but it's not that simple. Absorbing another mutant's powers come at a price...for both Rogue and the other person."

"Oh...I see. There are side effects to using your powers, then," says Hank.

"Yes...unfortunately." Rogue slumps a little in her seat. "It's not all it's cracked up to be. Along with the powers, I absorb a person's memories and sometimes even personality traits. Sometimes when I first absorb someone, I can't tell which memories are mine and which are theirs. It really messes with my head. Worst of all," she winces a little, "when I touch people, I take some of their life force."

"Life force?" Jubilee says, tilting her head. "As in, you suck out some of their life?"

"Jubilee," Storm chides her. "Try to be a little more sensitive in the way you phrase your questions."
"I'm sorry, Roguey--I didn't mean it like that." Jubilee ducks her head apologetically.

"It's ok," Rogue replies, looking uncomfortable. "But yeah. That's pretty much what happens. Let's put it this way; the first boy I ever kissed ended up in a coma for three weeks."

"Whoah," Jubilee utters.

"I can still feel him in my head. He's just an echo now; that's what happens to the people I absorb. They kind of fade after a while. But if I hold onto a person long enough..." Rogue trails off.

The table goes quiet; a few people exchange worried glances. Jean is the first to break the silence.

"Rogue...if you hold on to a person long enough, they don't fade away, do they?"

Rogue looks down dejectedly and shakes her head no.

"They die, and you retain them in your mind, permanently...is that what happens?"

Rogue nods slowly.

Jean gives her a sympathetic look. "I'm so sorry to hear that, honey. That can't be easy to deal with."

"I understand why you are reluctant to use your powers," Hank says solemnly.

"Wait, does that explain why you were acting so strange in the danger room?" asks Bobby. "That wasn't you yelling at us then. That was a person you absorbed."

Rogue meets his gaze, her expression unapologetic. "Yes, Bobby. That was my friend Carol you met; she's like a big sister to me. After you left me to fight that sentinel alone and I got hurt," she says calmly as Bobby flinches, "she got a little pissed...and Carol doesn't mince words."

"I'm sorry," Bobby mumbles, his eyes downcast. "I don't know what else to say. It was a gut reaction when Kitty got hurt."

Rogue remains silent, and I put my arms around her.

"So...Carol, huh?" Jubilee pipes up. "Sounds like a pretty good friend to stick up for you like that." She smiles at Rogue encouragingly.

"The best," Rogue says softly. She sighs and bows her head. "I feel so bad that she has to live inside my head like this."

"She's living in your mind? Like, forever?"

"As far as can tell, yes...permanently," answers Rogue.

Storm reaches out and places her hand on Rogue's sleeved arm. "Poor dear, you must have been devastated when you accidentally touched her." She looks at Rogue, waiting for an answer. Rogue lifts her eyes to Storm, but remains silent. "Rogue?" Confusion crosses her face when she receives no answer.

"Of course she was devastated," Jubilee says quickly. "She was Rogue's friend. That had to have been traumatic to have such a terrible accident. Right, Roguey?"

"Yes, it was absolutely devastating." Rogue looks at her, hesitating to say more.
"But it wasn't an accident...was it?" Storm's eyes are stricken with realization. Kitty gasps, and Jean looks at Scott, shock written on her face. Storm looks down at her hand on Rogue's arm, withdrawing it quietly.

Rogue's eyes follow the movement of Storm's hand, and she looks up, hurt.

"I...I don't understand," Jubilee stutters. "Why would you...she was your friend."

Rogue's mouth opens, but no sound comes out. "I had no choice," she finally chokes out.

"You always have a choice," Bobby says, putting his arm around Kitty and pulling her close.

Rogue throws him a dirty look. "You have no right to judge me, Bobby."

"We're trying not to," says Kitty timidly, "but you killed your friend, Rogue. That's...how do we know you wouldn't do the same to one of us if you were in a pinch?"

Rogue sucks in a breath. "I wouldn't!"

Kurt looks at Piotr and stands up, motioning with his hands for everyone to calm down. "Let us not be too hasty to pass judgement, my friends. Remember the Muffin of Immunity."

"I don't think the muffin is supposed to cover something like this," Bobby mutters.

"Watch your mouth, Ice Prick," I growl at him. "You lookin' to have your guts spilled?"

"Alright, that's enough," orders Scott. "I think it's best if we all take a step back for a moment; things are getting a little too emotionally charged."

Everyone sits in uncomfortable silence. Rogue looks like she's ready to bolt again.

"Let's focus on the logistics of Rogue's mutation, and how it can be used to benefit the team. Hank, can't you help her find some way to use her ability to absorb powers, without all the adverse effects?" says Scott.

Hank clears his throat. "I don't know," he says thoughtfully. "I would certainly like to try. This is such a unique mutation, with incredible possibilities. I would love to try some experiments."

Rogue's eyes snap to Hank, and immediately I can almost feel the hair standing up on her neck.

"Perhaps the Professor could help her," Jean says.

"Jean's right," says Scott. "The Professor will definitely want to hear about this. He's helped a lot of mutants control their powers so that they can live up to their fullest potential."

"Maybe I don't want his help," Rogue says acidly. She stands up to leave. I rise, placing my hand on her arm, and she shakes me off. "I think you people need decide: Am I an asset, or a liability? Family, or--" she looks around, her eyes fierce. "Friend-killer."

With her words hanging in the air, she spins on her heel and storms away without looking back.

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