

Anniversary

“Oh Logan, its beautiful.”

“It ain’t much darlin’. Took me a while t’ find ya somethin’, there ain’t much left o’ Tiffany’s these days.” He quipped.

“No Logan, its perfect.”

Ro held the gift in her hands; a fine golden chain curled about her fingers, on it a small white porcelain dove of peace which she cradled in the palm of her hand. Ro glanced up, a bright smile on her face.

“Happy anniversary, darlin’.” Logan murmured bending to kiss her forehead.

Quietly he reached down and undid the clasp, wrapping it about her neck as she held her long silver hair back for him. Once in place she ran her fingers over the small bird lovingly and sighed. “If only it were so.” She whispered.

“One day darlin’ maybe one day.” Logan tried to assure her, but they both knew it probably wasn’t to be.

Shaking herself from her thoughts Ro rose to her feet. “I have something for you also, my husband.” She smiled.

“Oh, yeah? Ya shouldn’t have.” He grinned, she always knew how to drive away the demons in his mind with her radiant smile.

“I wanted to, it is not often one gets the chance to celebrate, and ten years has passed so quickly. come, I will show you.”

“Commander Logan!”

The couple spun on their heels to face the interruption, their bodies stiffening instinctively as the reality of the outside world re-entered their one moment of contentment.

“What is it Summers?” Logan snapped.

“I’m sorry sir, it couldn’t wait. Sentinels have been sighted fifty miles south-west of the city.”

“How long?” Logan asked flashing a embittered look at his wife.

“Most are on foot sir, crushing whatever they can find. At their present speed, no more that four hours.”

Logan’s shoulders visibly sagged at the news. The look in Ro’s eyes told him she too realised the gravity of the news.

“How many?” The messenger was silent except for the gulp as he nervously swallowed. “HOW MANY?” Logan bawled.

“Intel suspects about a thousand in the first wave, sir and although they couldn’t get any further forward they think possibly two more waves behind them.”

Logan closed his eyes for a moment and clenched his fists. “Get everyone inside the city limits. I want all the group commanders ready with their platoons, they know what to do, they’ve been prepin’ fer this fer weeks.”

“Yes sir.” The soldier turned to take Logan’s message.

“‘N Kid?”

“Yes sir?”

“Thanks.” Logan tried to make amends for his sharp tone.

As the door shut behind him Logan turned to face his love. “I guess this is it.” he grimaced and before she could answer the growl grew in his chest, bursting out into a roar as he let his claws shoot from his fist. Spinning on his heels he embedded them in the wall, old plaster and paint exploded in a cloud as he vented his frustration on the brickwork.

Ro stepped to his side, running her hands over his back to soothe him, whispering gentle words in his ear. As his breathing slowed and his anger subsided, he turned to her, leaning heavily against the savaged wall.

“God-damn it Ro, tonight of all nights.” He growled through clenched teeth.

“Shhh, shhh, my darling, tonight is no different from any other to them. We knew this day was coming.” she whispered softly stroking his brow.

Carefully she took him into her arms and held him, she always knew how to ease his spirit. Gradually he reciprocated, folding her into his embrace and, finding her neck, placed gentle kisses there until she moaned in that soft way he always loved.

“Husband, I still have not given you your present.” She murmured pulling away gently.

“I’m sorry Ro, it got spoiled.”

“No, it has not. We still have some time and regardless of this present situation I asked Them not to disturb us for an hour. We have time, come.” Ro held out her hand. “Come, my love, They will call for us if anything happens. Just for a while, forget that which lies outside.”

Logan glanced at the door and then back at his beloved. “*just fer once think o ya self Logan.*” he thought as he took her hand.

Ro led him through the ruined building they called their home and command centre; once a prestigious New York hotel. Picking up a candle she had placed on a shelf earlier Ro lead him onto the dark staircase.

“Where we goin’ darlin’?” he asked.

“Patience Logan, you will see.” She smiled.

As they delved deeper and deeper into the bowels of the old building Logan could make out a faint flickering red glow from below. Dropping down the last flight Logan was greeted with a wonderful sight. There in the bottom of the stairwell Ro had been busy.

“So this is were ya been hidin’ all day.” Logan turned to her with a grin.

“Its just a little something.” She replied with that wildly mischievous grin he loved so much.

Ro had placed several of the hotels old mattresses in the space under the stairs. Over them she had piled reams of coloured cloth which she had draped up the walls and pinned, turning the dank and dusty space into a bright oasis. Candles flickered all around the walls casting pretty patterns over the little nest. For a brief moment Logan forgot the world at the top of the stairs, with all its violence and destruction. Here in this moment it was just the two of them; together, just as it always should have been.

“I collected the cloth from an old haberdashery on the outskirts of town which I used to visit many years ago. There wasn’t much I could salvage but...”

Logan shook his head at her excuse. “Darlin’ it’s perfect.” He took her in his arms and they kissed for a long moment.

Steadily he helped her from her clothes; unzipping the heavy flak jacket she wore and then easing her from her now greying uniform. Logan watched her as she gracefully pulled herself free of the skin-tight garment, his heart quickening at the sight of that milk-chocolate skin. It never ceased to amaze him just how beautiful she was, even with the battle scars that now criss-crossed her body. She returned the favour; helping him from his combat fatigues and tattered shirt. She ran her fingers over his broad chest feeling his warmth under her fingers.

In the stillness he scooped her up in his arms and that wonderfully erotic first night they had spent together so long ago came flooding back into his mind. Placing her gently in the middle of the bed they carefully helped each other out of the remainder of their clothes and then lay back together, stripped of the accoutrements of war and naked to the world.

Logan leant up on his elbow watching the beauty next to him, dressed only in the necklace he had given her. He traced his fingers over her belly and brushed loose strands of her silver mane from her face.

“I’m sorry darlin’,” he finally spoke, “I’m sorry things turned out this way.”

“There is nothing to be sorry for Logan.” She whispered in her soothing way, reaching up to caress his cheek.

“Yeah There is. All this. It should o’ never been this way. I wan’ed t’ give ya so much more.”

“I have all I need.”

“No, ya shoul da had a home, a garden...a family. God Ro I so wan’ed t’ give ya a family of ya own.” Tears rose in his eyes as he thought on what could have been. Suddenly he chuckled, trying his best to stop the pain in his heart, as the thoughts raced through his head. “I always saw ya wi’

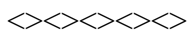
loads o' kids, ya would 'a' been a great mother ya know, and we'd never be short o' baby sitters not with Jub...." his voice cracked before he could finish the words.

"Logan, don't my love. Don't torture yourself. It was not your fault, remember? And it was so long ago now."

They both recalled when this all started. The sick feeling returned to Ro's stomach as the echoes of that night filled her mind; the slamming open of the mansion doors as Logan staggered in, his clothes torn, his face wet with uncontrolled tears, carrying the limp body of the young girl he had sworn to protect, Jubilation Lee. She'd died in his arms when the Sentinel, sent to track her down crushed her and left her for dead. He blamed himself, he always had. But even with all his strength he could not have stopped the attack. That was just the beginning.

"Come to me Logan, let me take away your pain." She opened her arms to him and he sank in, the warmth of her body forcing a sigh from his lips.

Wrapping himself around her the two released all their feelings into each other as they so often had; sorrow, anger, guilt and most of all love. After ten years the one thing they treasured above all else was their unerring love for each other. These stolen moments together amid the death and destruction they had witnessed, were all they now had. In the flickering candlelit darkness they made love, till the tears fell and the anger was howled from their bodies.



"Commander Logan?"

Logan shuffled in the heap of fabric, warm and comfortable.

"Commander Logan?" Came the voice again.

Suddenly his senses snapped back into alert mode and he sat bolt upright. "What is it?" he yelled up the stairs.

"Sir, I'm sorry, but Storm told me to wake you at the appropriate time." As if to reinforce the interruption the ground suddenly shook and a deep rumble could be heard above ground. The dust and loose plaster floated down about them coating the bright cloth of the bed.

"That's ok kid. What's the situation?" Logan asked as he pulled on his pants.

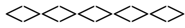
"Sir the Sentinels have reached the outer defences. The regiments have set the traps as ordered and are moving back to the secondary positions."

Logan assimilated this latest tactical information. "We'll be right up."

"Very well sir."

Ro was already out of bed and dressing as Logan climbed to his feet. "You ready?" He whispered in her ear as he bent to kiss her soft skin before it disappeared under her thick clothing.

"As always." she answered with a smile, but the outward stillness she always displayed hid the tumult in her heart.



The south-western skyline glowed an eerie shade of red and orange. Red flashes of laser light sparked across the horizon followed by the loud crashes of falling buildings and bombs exploding. Logan itched to be in the thick of it. The two remaining X-Men stood on the balcony of the hotel watching the scene. Runners sprinted to and from the command centre in the lobby of the building, shouts echoed across the ruined plaza as men and equipment was moved up to the front line. It was time; they had prepared for this moment for so long, both knowing that tonight was the high-water mark.

“Logan,” Ro whispered. “Do you think we have a chance?” She asked plainly.

“Dunno, darlin’. But it never stopped us before did it?” he turned to face her, trying to reassure, but the grim expression on his face told a different story. He knew full-well tonight could be their last. She slipped her small hand into his and they fell silent.

“Commander? D-company report tanks entering the city on the left flank.”

“I will go.” Ro replied in her familiar resolute tone which always seemed to bring a sense of peace and renewed determination to all who heard it. She paused for a moment to look into her lovers eyes. “I must go.” She whispered.

“I know.” Logan glanced at the small white bird on the chain around her neck. “Some anniversary huh?” He bent and kissed her lightly on the lips.

No goodbyes or long speeches. Both had learned over the years that time was precious and what could be said in a few words was all that was necessary to convey their feelings to each other. As she rose into the air he held on to her hand for as long as he could. With a flick of her hair lightning flashed across the sky. Logan watched her as she flew through the ruins, slipping from view.

“Commander, its time.”

Logan just nodded. Then with a thought spun on his heels. “Kid?”

“Sir.”

“Come here.”

The young man came to stand beside his commander, waiting stoically for his orders, but non were forthcoming. The two men watched the sky flicker for a moment then Logan spoke. “Summers.” He softened, dropping the formality. “James, I want ya to know kid. Ya mom and dad woulda been proud.”

The lad turned red-faced towards Logan and nervously straightened his visor. “Sir, I...”

“I’m tellin’ ya. If they coulda just seen ya now. Boy, Cyke woulda been a right-royal pain-in-the-ass knowin’ ya’d made it to Ops Control Officer.”

“Thank you sir.”

“Hey kid, will ya fer once call me Logan.”

“Sir?”

“O’ hell never mind.” Logan laughed slapping the young officer on the shoulder.

A bright bolt of lightning lit the sky. “Guess Ro’s brewin’ up a storm fer them tin cans. Come on Summers. We got some Sentinel ass ta kick.” With that Logan turned and headed for the stairs with the young Summers in tow.

Only time and luck would tell if they would all make it through the night. Thoughts of the woman he loved so deeply flooded his mind. He knew in a few short minutes he would be battling at her side; the only place he ever wanted to be. “Just like old times hey sweetheart.” He whispered to himself as he spotted the white-haired woman flying like that white dove of peace high above the buildings.

He sprinted through the city with A-company at his heels, six shiny claws just itching to tear into Sentinel steel. The images of his fallen comrades flashed across his mind; Beast, Cyclops, Jean, Gambit, Rogue, Jubes and the man, in whose name he still wore the tattered cloth badge on his jacket, Charles Xavier. Their loss had been so hard to bare; a piece of him dying with each one, but now his mind was turned to his own survival and that of his beloved and the rest of mutant-kind. A yell went up from the band of men that surrounded him almost drowned out by the deafening roar of battle as the enemy was sighted ahead. Logan felt the cry rise in his chest to join them as his feral rage grew. If this was to be his last night then by god he would go down as he’d always hoped....fighting.

“Death or glory boys, fer death or glory!”