

The Persia Saga

An X-Men Fan-Fiction Story

By Logan Berry

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Prologue

“Too Hot, its always too hot down here”.

The man stood at the blast-proof window, dabbing the back of his sweating neck with a clean cotton handkerchief. He stared into the blackness beyond the glass looking through his own reflection. Hidden from view by the dark void, a door slid open and four figures clothed in the bright yellow plastic of biohazard suits stepped inside. The light from the open doorway cast sinister shadows across the room – a cavernous thing, filled with metal pipe-work and hulking objects. The four pulled forward a large trolley, obviously heavy by their laboured attempts to push it, and with the doorway providing the only means of illumination as they set about their task.

The man wiped another bead of sweat from his brow, as the men inside the room reached their destination. One stepped out of sight for a moment and then, like the gaping jaws of hell, two huge portcullises began to rise in front of them. Even at this distance the man behind the glass blinked hard as the light from the furnaces dazzled him. The four figures continued on.

“Another 8 months wasted” the man grimaced at the thought. *“What is it I’m doing wrong?”* His expressionless exterior belied his doubtful mind as he watched the men begin to lift the large objects off the trolley and throw them into the blazing fires.

“Ehhermm” came a cough from behind him. “Er, Professor Tweed?”

“Edwards, your late!” Tweed answered spitefully, turning on his heels to face the interruption as he dabbed away more sweat from his neck.

“Yes sir, I’m sorry about that sir...you see..” the white coated Edwards said timidly while he shuffled on the spot.

“Never mind,” Tweed spat, cutting him off mid-explanation. “This is a disaster, Edwards!” he bellowed, turning back to the window, “an unmitigated disaster.”

“Yes, sir” Edwards confirmed eyes focused on the floor.

“What the hell is your team playing at! This is the fourth failure in two and a half years”

“Yes sir...er...I know sir, but we do...er...have some idea...er..as to the causes”. Edwards fumbled with the folder, clipboard and report he was carrying, searching for the appropriated piece of paper.

“Well?” Tweed replied with the tone of an angry school teacher. “this better be good, that’s 90 million dollars they’re throwing into that incinerator and I don’t intend to see another 90 million go up in smoke.”

“Here’s the report sir”. Edwards handed Tweed the document containing the research group's findings.

Tweed flicked through it, stopping occasionally to read sections and grunting either his displeasure or agreement. Finally he closed the document. “And your conclusion is?” he asked, a little calmer.

“Well, sir” Edwards cleared his throat. “The failure seems to emanate from our approach to the program itself.”

“Meaning?” Tweed demanded.

“Meaning,” Edwards continued, “we had assumed that we could carry out the manipulation of the tissue artificially.”

“And, now your saying this is not the case?” Tweed was starting to get impatient. “Don’t waste my time. I’ve been in this game since before you were out of diapers. I know how the procedure works. I invented it!”

“No...no sir please, let me explain.” Edwards stammered. “We aren’t doing anything wrong, its just...well...we’re missing a vital ingredient.”

Tweed looked annoyed. “And that is?”

“Well, in order for the tissue to develop, it needs a naturally produced enzyme to be present at the moment the tissues are combined,” Edwards explained, feeling more comfortable discussing his work. “Since we carry out the procedure in a sterile environment, the enzyme is not present.”

Tweed considered this, his agile mind twisting over the problem. “So, what your saying is we need live test subjects.”

“Yes, sir.” Edwards conceded.

Tweed contemplated this idea. *Damn, damn, damn! I’ve been so wrapped up in the failures, I let this snivelling shit outsmart me. Concentrate, Tweed. This white-coated wretch may be onto something.*

“Edwards how many ‘dormants’ do we have in the field?” Tweed asked.

“There are twenty pairs sir, but we have two here in the facility, who were never released.” Edwards tried to follow Tweed’s train of thought.

“Are they compatible?” Tweed queried.

“No, sir they’re both male - orphans.” Edwards replied, beginning to see his boss’s plan. “We need two female subjects.”

“Then, bring in the others.” Tweed demanded.

“But sir,” Edwards cautiously argued, “its been so long.”

“I don’t care, recall them,” snapped Tweed. “I want as many as we can get. And, Edwards...”

“Yes sir?” Edwards cringed - he knew what was coming.

“Bring me all the documentation on the X-gene project.” Tweed turned back to the window as the men finished throwing the last of the containers into the furnace.

“Sir?” Edwards chest tightened.

“You heard me.” The light from the flames flickered across Tweed’s face as he watched the half-grown embryos burn. “It’s time we enhanced the mutations.....prepare a breeding program.”

Chapter 1: Rescue

Cyclops shifted his weight and stretched out his left leg, rubbing his cramped thigh through the black leather suit. He was tired and cold. He’d been crouched at the side of the warehouse for three hours, watching the street and the building opposite. He pressed the button on his radio-mike.

“Wolverine, do you see anything?”

“Negative” came the growling reply “I don’t see shit up here Bub, lets call this off, I need a beer”

“Not just yet, its 1am, we’ll stay put till dawn”. At the realisation of the time Cyclops stifled a yawn.

“Would you like to trade places for a while Cyclops?” The gentle voice of Storm whispered behind him and he turned to face her, smiling.

“Yes, Storm that would be great, I could do with a break.”

Keeping low so as not to give away his position he shuffled passed Storm and dropped to the cold concrete, resting his back against the wall. Sighing with relief, as the ache in his thighs eased he considered their mission.

Two days earlier.

Scott sat in the empty office waiting for the Professor. All was quiet except for the rhythmic ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece. He gazed out of the window at the long flower beds now full of yellow daffodils and the bright lime-green of the spring foliage bursting on the trees, at least in his minds-eye they were, but in truth they were just shades of ruby. The sun shone in through the large bay windows casting stripes of brightness across the oak panelled room and he watched the flecks of dust dance in the beams. He was moved from his contemplation by the door creaking open.

“Good morning Scott” Charles addressed him in his soft baritone voice, as he wheeled into the office.

“Morning Professor” Scott answered. Scott could see from Charles expression that something was bothering him.

“I’ll get straight to the point Scott. Last night I received a rather surprising phone call from an old friend I haven’t spoken to in years. He was hoping we would be able to help him, or rather his daughter”.

“What’s the problem?” Scott asked, “She a mutant?”

“No, that’s the curious thing”. Charles’ brow furrowed as he paused for a moment. “Scott, have you heard of Williams Industries?”

Scott considered the question. “Yes, they’re a big multi-national, dealing mainly in micro technologies I think”

“That is correct, but they also deal in everything from pharmaceuticals to agriculture. Lewis Williams is the old friend I referred to”

“Wow, you have some friends in high places Professor!” Scott exclaimed.

“Indeed, but what he told me was more of a concern on a personal level. He said that in the last week his daughter had been followed on three occasions by two men, whom she described as ‘strange looking’”

“That could mean just about anyone!” Scott answered.

“That’s what I thought, but he insisted that they were mutants” Xavier replied. “There has been a spate of mutant attacks on non-mutants over the last few weeks.”

“Yes Professor, Jean and I have been keeping an eye on them to make sure it doesn’t get out of hand, but there doesn’t seem to be any pattern to the attacks, they’re just random muggings, that sort of thing. Why didn’t he just go to the authorities?”

“That’s what I suggested” Xavier replied. “But he insisted it was something more and that the authorities would do nothing to help. In the end I said I would see what we could do, to put his mind at rest. Williams is a high profile businessman but he has always kept his family out of the limelight, it maybe that he thinks it’s a rival trying to intimidate him through his daughter”

“So what would you like me to do?” Scott queried.

“I don’t think this requires extreme measures but I would like you to investigate all the same. Take Storm and Wolverine; keep a vigil on the girl’s apartment for a couple of nights. If everything is ok I can reassure Lewis”.

“So, who’s the girl?” Scott asked.

“Her name is Kaylan O’Connor, and she’s my god-daughter” Xavier answered softly. “but I haven’t seen her for many years, not since her mother died.”

“Oh” was all Scott could answer a little surprised.

“I guess that it’s only fair that you know.” Xavier paused, trying to find the right words to say. “Even though many years have passed she still means a lot to me, that’s why I want you to do this for me” He looked distant as he thought on memories from the past Scott could only speculate on.

“I’ll get on it Professor” Scott replied firmly.

“Thank you Scott” Xavier smiled weakly.

So for the second night here he sat, waiting patiently in the cold dark alley wishing only to be back at home in bed, with Jean in his arms.

Wolverine sniffed the air. Up on the roof it was much fresher. He liked it up here, alone, un-hassled by the others. He paced along the precipice for the 50th time that night, scouring the streets below with his keen vision, still nothing. Walking steadily back to the front of the building his mind wandered to the cold beer and hot shower waiting back at the mansion. He let a slight shiver run down his back as the cold began to seep through the black leather of his suit.

“Baby sittin’, that’s all I ever do these days, baby sit” he grumbled out loud to himself.

Reaching the building front he leaned out over the edge to get a look at the front steps four stories below, nothing. He checked his watch, giving himself 15 minutes before his next round, he pulled up the battered armchair he’d found the night before - someone obviously liked to come up to the roof to sit - and placed it at the corner of the roof so as to see the street below and keep his ass from freezing.

“*I’m gettin’ too used to the comforts of home*” he thought as he sat down, a smile spreading across his face. He hunkered down in the chair to continue his vigil.

BAMF

Even semi-conscious of the city’s sounds around him, Wolverine’s ears picked out the strange but distant sound emanating from across the street. The hairs on the back of his neck bristled and he subconsciously clenched his fists. In one swift move he leapt from the chair and onto the precipice, crouching down so as not to be seen from below. It sounded slightly familiar, like a car door being slammed whilst hundreds of sparklers crackled at once, but from this distance he could not be sure. He glared down the street for several minutes but nothing looked out of the ordinary, a few late-night party goers the odd dog sniffing in the gutter. Relaxing his shoulders a little, he dropped back to the roof and climbed into the chair, pulling his legs up so that at any moment he could dash for the roof door. Something wasn’t quite right, he could feel it.

“Cyclops?” Storm whispered gently as she patted him on the shoulder. He’d dozed off in the alley and came-too with a start, pushing himself up onto a crouch in his confusion.

“What!” he exclaimed.

“It’s OK” Storm reassured him. “But I thought you should know, there are two men approaching the door of the apartment block”. Storm pointed in the direction and Cyclops followed her finger.

Across the street two figures were at the apartment entrance. The door required a key and key-code to enter, so Cyke knew only the block residents would have access. The pair watched from the alley, adrenaline starting to flow.

“What are they waiting for?” Cyclops whispered through clenched teeth. He could feel his belly tighten as it always did before a fight.

The two men took their time, one held the handle of the closed door whilst the other fumbled, his back to the street, with the key-coder. Cyclops had had enough; he began to edge out into the street.

“Wait!” Storm murmured, grabbing Cyclops’ arm gently. “Look, they’re going in....false alarm I think.”

Sure enough, the two men entered the building; Cyclops could just make out the green light on the key-coder showing their entrance code was good. He sat back on his heels.

“Well spotted Storm, I think I’m getting a little stir-crazy” he smiled weakly, “Just tired”.

He shuffled back into the alley, sitting down behind Storm.

“It’s ok, I’ll continue to watch” she said.

“Thanks, maybe just for a few.....”

AAAARRRRRRHHHHHHHHH! An ear-splitting scream ripped through the cold night air, taking both Storm and Cyclops by surprise.

“What the....!”

Cyclops was already on his feet and heading out of the alley, closely followed by Storm. He scanned the front of the building trying to pin-point the cry and spotted a window, slightly ajar on the second floor.

“There!” he shouted, pointing to the window. The lights of the apartment were on, even at that late hour.

“Is that her apartment?” questioned Storm.

“Yes, I think so, Wolverine, do you read?”

“Loud an’ clear Bub, I heard it, I’m already on my way” he growled back in Cyclops’ ear-piece.

“Storm can you get us both up there?” Cyclops asked.

“Yes” answered Storm looking up to judge the height of the building, the opaque glaze passing over her eyes as she did so.

Cyclops turned and strode towards her already fighting hard against the rising winds as Storm raised her arms. Her black cape and silver-white hair fluttered around her and the air cracked with lightning. As he gripped her shoulders she flicked back her head and the wind whipped them off their feet into the air. They raised high above the street, as close to the building as Storm could get them. As they drew level with the window, Cyclops could just make out three figures in the room.

“*The two men!*” he realised. “*Damn it!*” He pushed aside the thought that he had totally misread the situation and put a life at risk. He let go of Storm’s shoulder with one hand and swung round slightly to get a better view of the room.

“Storm” he shouted over the howling wind, “can you get me over to the window?”

“Yes” She replied and flicking her head back once more, the winds rose to her command.

Cyclops felt the force lift him and as it did he kicked out. His out-stretched leg hit the pane of glass first, sending shards flying into the room. He braced himself for the impact as best he could, knowing he could distract the attackers just long enough for Wolverine to get there.

By the time Cyclops called him on the radio Wolverine was already half-way across the roof. When he heard the scream echo off the buildings his body reacted on instinct. The old armchair had given him the springboard he'd needed to propel himself several feet towards the roof-top door. Now as he heard the explosion of glass he was already at the bottom of the second flight of stairs and was sprinting along the corridor. SNIKT, claws shot through the leather of his gloves, the sting of their unsheathing made him grimace. He rounded the corner and skidded to a halt at the open apartment door.

The two men grappled with their intended victim as she struggled to escape. When the window imploded all three were forced to duck as they were showered in glass. It was all the opportunity the woman needed. She scabbled free of their grip and threw herself at the door of an adjacent room, slamming it shut behind her. Cyclops shook his head to clear the stars from his vision. His flight through the window had been stopped abruptly by the back of a sofa, behind which he now crouched.

"Neck not broken...good" he thought.

There was a crackle of broken glass behind him as Storm flew in through the smashed window and dropped lightly to the floor behind the sofa. Peering over the top of the seat Cyclops surveyed the room. The two men were now hammering on the locked door the woman had escaped through, ignoring the interruption of Cyclops' entrance.

The two were both dressed in long gray overcoats. The taller of the two was slim with long greasy-looking wavy hair, his skin too was a lighter shade of gray which gave him the appearance of a ghost. The shorter man had honey-blonde hair and bright green eyes; compared to his partner he had an almost ruddy complexion.

"Thor!" the taller man snapped, "blow the door and let's get out of here"

The blonde Thor took two paces back. "Move away" he said. He raised his hands to chest height and clenched his fists.

"Started the party without me did ya?" Came a snarling voice from behind them. "Sorry, I forgot to bring the beer" The black-clad body of Wolverine filled the broken doorway of the apartment. He tilted his head as he eyed the two startled men from under furrowed brows.

"Heeerrreee's Wolfy!" He hissed as he ran at Thor.

Two ribbons of yellow light shot from Thor's hands but his aim was deflected as he was knocked sideways when several hundred pounds of black-clad Adamantium barrelled into him. The lightening bolts hit the ceiling ripping a hole in the roof and causing plaster to cascade down onto them like confetti.

"They're mutants!" Cyclops exclaimed as he rose from behind the sofa.

He leapt over the chair, heading for the other man who was now making a break for it towards the unguarded front door. A gust of wind shot past him and the half broken door slammed shut blocking his escape. He turned just in time to see Cyclops go for his visor as he ran towards him.

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Cyclops fell forward into the space as the man vanished, causing the air around him to buzz as it was sucked into the vacuum. He re-appeared on the other side of the room.

“He’s a teleporter!” Cyclops shouted over the noise of the fighting.

Wolverine’s concentration was on the man he had pinned to the floor, one arm across his neck the other with claws just inches from his nose.

“Give up now Bub and I promise not to hurt ya” he said with a sneer.

Thor wriggled underneath the weight that sat astride him, fighting to free his arms. He had more strength than Wolverine anticipated. With one mighty grunt Thor forced Wolverine over, kicking out with his legs and landing them square in his stomach. Wolverine doubled over. It was all the time Thor needed, raising one hand he let fly with a lightning bolt, catching Wolverine in the shoulder and throwing him back hard against the wall. Scrambling to his feet Thor ran towards his partner.

“Thor, quick!” the tall ghost man held out his hand as Thor reached his side. They were penned in on two sides with their backs to the wall as Storm and Cyclops moved in. He glanced through the window and then back into the room at the two approaching figures in black. He began to laugh, and with that the air crackled.

BAMF

The two men in gray vanished from the room.

“There!” exclaimed Storm as she looked out of the broken window. “They escaped into the street...shall we follow”

“No” answered Cyclops “I don’t think they’ll be back”

“oohhh shit...that stung” Wolverine said as he clambered to his feet rubbing his shoulder. Straightening up, he stretched his neck from one side to the other, cracking it back into place.

“You ok?” Cyclops asked crossing the room to face his team-mate.

“Yeah, I’m fine...who the fuck were they?” Wolverine asked.

“Don’t know...but we’re gonna find out”

Their conversation was halted by the sound of sobbing coming from the adjoining room. Cyclops headed for the door, and with a lightly focused beam of energy he popped it open. As he did so there was a terrified scream from inside. Carefully, he pushed the door open.

The sobs grew louder as he entered the bathroom.

“Please...Pleasedon’t hurt me” begged a shrill, tear-filled voice.

“Its ok, don’t be afraid” he whispered.

The voice came from behind the drawn shower curtain and Cyclops gently drew it back.

“Eeeee” screeched the woman again. She was curled up in the corner of the bath trying desperately to crawl up the wall to escape whoever it was trying to get her.

“Please” he said. “Don’t be frightened”. But the look of naked fear in the woman’s face told him she was too scared to understand.

Cyclops turned “Storm? Please come here I need your help, I think I am scaring her.” He backed away to let Storm pass. She knelt down by the bath and placed a gentle hand on the woman’s arm. At the sight of another female the woman relaxed a little, body still shaking with sobs.

“Here now” Storm whispered. “Don’t be afraid, we’re here to help you, you’re safe now”

“Who...who are you?” the woman asked trembling, tears rolling down her face.

Storm held out her hand and the woman took it. “My name is Ororo Munroe, these are my friends, Scott and Logan, we’re friend’s of your father’s”.

Chapter 2: Scent of a Woman

“Logan!...found anything?”

Logan looked up from the book he was flicking through to see Scott emerge from the bathroom.

“No, nothing” he answered as he closed the book, ‘a history of the modern jet engine’, Logan raised a brow. “*Unusual reading*” he thought. “*Wonder if she could supe-up my bike?.*” He smiled to himself. He could hear Storm’s voice from the bathroom gently trying to coax the girl out. “*Poor kid, attacked in her own home by some mongrels ...no wonder she’s terrified*”

He placed the book back on the desk and continued to look for anything that might explain the attack. The apartment was a simple affair and sparsely furnished; large living room with a small kitchenette, bathroom and bedroom. Even though the woman’s personal effects were scattered about the place it didn’t seem homely. “*Just somewhere to sleep*” Logan mused “*be’n in too many ‘o these kinda places myself*”.

The living room however now resembled a war zone, the door hung half on its hinges and the dust from the smashed ceiling covered the furniture. Logan wandered over to a small table which, he assumed, he had knocked over in his fight with Thor. He picked it up and placed a broken vase he found under it, back at its centre. Feeling a little awkward at the damage he’d inadvertently caused he wandered over to examine a set of photos on the wall.

“*Wonder which one she is?*” he thought, inspecting each picture. “*Maybe she’s the geeky one with the glasses if she reads books like that*” he decided, picking out a girl from what looked like an office group photo.

Yet, something played on his mind. There was something about this apartment he just couldn't put his finger on - not the basic furniture or the un-lived-in appearance of the place - something that seemed tangible, yet vague. A sense - not a material thing. He flared his nostrils at the annoyance.

"*Scent!...that's it, it's a smell...but what?*" he thought, furrowing his brow. He let it slide for the time-being. He idly wandered back to the desk where Scott was now standing flicking through the pile of text books.

"She teaches at Westchester University" he said as Logan reached his side. "Guess she's an engineer...and a good one at that, some of these books are beyond me"

"Well that wouldn't be difficult, now would it" Logan growled.

Scott bit back, cheeks swelling. "Well I happen to think that I'm..."

"You two!" Storm cut Scott off mid-sentence, leaving it one-nil to Logan. "Quiet, I think she's just about ok to come out. Sit down, I don't want you two frightening her again with your bickering".

Logan turned away, a faint twist of a smile on his lips. Scott just shrugged, there was no point in answering Storm back, she had a remarkable ability to be able to tongue-lash the both of them if she wanted. She re-entered the bathroom and Logan looked round for a seat. He pulled out the chair from under the desk and swinging his leg over it, sat so he could rest his arms on the top of the chair back. Scott flopped down into the sofa which half-an-hour ago had broken his flight through the window. He sighed with relief as the soft cushions took his weight. The two waited.

Logan sniffed the air again. It was getting stronger. "Do ya smell it?" he mumbled.

Scott eyed him curiously. "Smell what?" All he had was a nose-full of plaster dust and Logan's attitude.

"Oh, never mind" he answered irritably trying to shake it from his mind.

"It's ok; we're going to go out now, ok?" Storm whispered gently to the woman, who was now standing in the middle of the bathroom. "Nothing will happen to you, I promise".

The woman nodded, still choking back sobs. Her face was still wet with tears and her hair hung lankly, over her face.

She lightly took the woman's hand and lead her into the living room. Timidly the woman peered round the door. Taking in the sight of her destroyed apartment she let out a sob and tried to pull back into the bathroom.

"No, no...its ok." Storm stated.

The woman relaxed a little and let Storm lead her back out into the room. She helped her round to an armchair and seated her down, taking a second armchair for herself, next to the woman. Holding her hand gently Storm stroked it trying to keep the woman calm.

"You better now?" Storm asked.

"ye...yes" the woman sobbed.

Logan eyed her suspiciously, she looked normal enough; She was about 5'6", slim-build, but curved in all the right places, honey-blond hair, definitely not the woman he'd picked out in the photos. But still that uneasy feeling gripped him and it was getting stronger. He shifted in his chair, as the hairs in the nape of his neck bristled.

"What's your name?" Logan's mind was snapped back into the room by Scott's inquiring voice.

There was a long pause. The woman sniffled from behind the curtain of hair covering her face. She was still in a state of shock and Scott's direct questioning was not easing her fears. The woman looked towards Storm for silent support.

Storm nodded. "go ahead, its ok, he's real nice when you get to know him".

The woman smiled for the first time since the attack, as Storm gripped her hand for a moment in encouragement. Slowly the woman turned her head to face the two men sat across the room, pushing strands of tousled hair from her cheeks.

"Kaylan O'Connor" She answered her voice still trembling but now strengthened by Storm's reassurance.

Tears still smeared her face and her skin was pink from crying, but Logan could not suppress the sound of the sharp intake of breath as he beheld the woman's face for the first time. She was beautiful; he could see it even through the tears and puffy eyes. She had delicate features; an oval face and soft cheekbones, pale creamy skin and a small straight nose with a light sprinkling of freckles over the bridge, pink full lips that seemed to have a pout all of their own and soft arched brows. But he was transfixed by the defiant stare of two of the deepest blue eyes he had ever seen. They were so deep in fact that he could barely make out the black of her pupils. They seemed to bore into him, reaching into his soul. Logan felt drawn to her, he felt himself leaning over the back of the chair, magnetised by her stare. Beads of sweat broke out at his temples and the heat rose in his body. He swallowed hard and looked away, focusing his attention on Scott.

"what the hell!?...those eyes...crap...I knew there was somethin' not right here" Logan's mind whirled. Scott sat, unmoved. *"either his visors broke or he's a robot...how could he miss her eyes"* Logan thought, as he stared at Scott.

Logan dared to look back at Kaylan, but she had already shifted her gaze back to Storm. He pulled at the collar of his leather suit, it was starting to pinch. He scowled at his so obvious unease. Had the others noticed? He hoped not. He tried desperately to focus, to drive out the overwhelming feelings of fear, attraction and anger now welling up inside him. Scott and the woman were talking but he no longer heard. The scent which had been growing steadily now seemed overpowering. It filled the air around him, cloying at his throat, and she was the source. But she was a straight-down-the-line human or so Scott had told him before the mission. Those eyes and that scent, it all stemmed from her and he knew it.

Coughing to clear his throat, Logan stood up feeling a little uneasy on his feet and ran a gloved hand through his sweat-flecked sideburns. "I'm gonna do a sweep of the parameter" He announced in a voice which didn't feel like his.

Scott and Storm looked at him, a little surprised at his sudden interruption in the midst of their conversation.

“I don’t think we’ll have any more trouble tonight Logan, besides its nearly dawn” Scott answered as he looked out of the window.

“Still” Logan spoke, trying to regain his usual gruff tone, “think I’ll take a look...would feel better if I did” He growled, fixing Scott with a viscous stare.

“Ok” Scott sighed, knowing it was best not to argue with the Wolverine once he set his mind on something, besides he was too tired to argue.

“We’ll be heading back to the cars in a little while so don’t go too far” Scott added as Logan strode across the room. “I think we should take Miss O’Connor back to the mansion with us”

“Whatever” was all Logan answered as he reached the door of the apartment. Scott rolled his eyes.

“The mansion? What’s that?” Kaylan questioned, gaining a little confidence.

“It’s somewhere you’ll be safe” Storm told her, smiling.

Kaylan seemed a little confused, but still dazed from her ordeal decided not to question further and except their help.

“*Gotta get out!*” his mind yelled.

Slamming the broken door behind him, Logan headed down the corridor as fast as he could go. By the time he reached the end of the corridor he was running. His head was pounding. His skin felt clammy under the restrictive leather suit, adding to the overwhelming sense of claustrophobia he was now feeling. He swung around the banister, absently headed up the stairs three steps at a time.

Like a free-diver breaking the water’s surface, Logan burst out through the door gasping for air. He was back on the roof. The early morning air was still fresh and it filled his lungs; cool and clean. He let his body flop back against the door, slamming his head back hard against it in frustration with himself and the situation. Closing his eyes he let his head fall forward onto his chest, drawing in a deep breath, the beginnings of a growl building in the pit of his stomach. He threw back his head once more and in the only way he knew to release the tension, let the growl build to a roar as he howled the anger out of him. The tension released, he fell forward onto his knees, his face contorted in a snarling grimace, as he heaved the last of the aggression from his body. After a few moments he sat back on his heels, breathing easier. He pulled the leather gloves from his hands and ran his fingers through his hair, pulling roughly at his tufts in annoyance.

“*what the fuck?*” he berated himself. “*behavin’ like some nut-job. Pull ya self together*”

“Logan...you there?” Scott’s voice on the radio-mike broke his train of thought.

“Wha’d ya want kid?” Logan spat back channelling his aggression into answering Scott.

“We heard some noises from down here, like howling? Do ya see anything out there?” Scott questioned.

“What? Ya scared one-eye?” Logan sneered, continuing before Scott could get a comment in. “Yeah, heard it too” Logan fained concern, “I’ll check it out, prob’ly just dogs”. It was just enough of a plausible lie to keep Scott off his back for a while.

Throwing his gloves to the ground he tugged at the zipper of his suit, letting it open to his navel. The cool air caressed the soft black hairs of his chest sending a shiver through his body and freeing the last of the tension. He sat for a while staring across the building and into the city beyond.

*“this is crazy, ya ran... there’s somthin’ seriously wrong here, with her!...
So god-damn beautiful...whoo!, Those eyes...had to get out
She’s no human...gotta be mutant...
Oh jeez...”*

Pulling himself to his feet, Logan headed across the roof, following the line of the precipice, trying to clear his head. He finally reached the corner where he had spent the earlier part of the evening, the battered old armchair tipped over backwards from where he’d leapt from it. He picked it up and dragged it a little distance away from the edge and slumped down into it.

*“So what do I do now? Fuck, I feel like an idiot.
She’s just some woman...beautiful at that but...
This is seriously fucked up.
I’m not goin’ near her till I know what the deal is.
Don’t wan’ her in the mansion...don’t trust myself.*

He could feel anger rising in him again but this time without the strange yearning that had forced him to flee the apartment.

“We’re ready to go...you finished up there?” Came Scott’s voice in his ear.

“Nah, you go ahead” Logan answered trying to buy himself a few more minutes alone.

“What the hell you doing?” Logan could hear the irritation building in Scott’s voice and it pleased him to think visor-boy was wound up.

“I’m gonna check out the building across the street where I think those two bastards arrived” He tried to sound convincing as he shuffled down in the chair.

There was a long pause. Scott was obviously weighing up the chances of getting Logan to do as he was told. “Ok. Go ahead”

Logan’s lip curled *“Cyke knows when he can’t win”*

“We’ll take the Mazda ...we’ll leave the Lotus for you. See you back at the mansion....oh and Logan?”

“Yeah!”

“Don’t take too long...we have de-brief at 9 sharp”

“Always in command ‘ey bub?” Logan thought to himself

Logan pulled the radio-mike from his ear and tossed it on the floor. He'd given himself a few hours peace. But how was he going to face them?...tell them what he thought?. He knew deep inside that he couldn't leave it alone. A shiver shook him again as he closed his eyes and sleep took him. Images flooded his mind...

Screaming...shadowy figures
Water... drowning...pain...no, no!
Searing...pain...eyes...blue eyes
No...can't
Blue...no, no, NOOOOO!

He sucked in a sharp breath...heart pounding. The sun was up and the first birds were singing. Everything seemed normal. Looking down he found his claws imbedded in the arms of the chair. Another bad dream - but now there was a new discomfort in the midst of what he was used to.

SNIKT

He pulled the blades free and stood up. He knew what he had to do.

Chapter 3: Revelations

"It's like she had some power over me" Logan whispered, emotion making his voice tremble. "Like I was bein' driven away but pulled in at the same time, it was claustrophobic, I had t' get out," he paused, taking a deep breath, "sorry Professor".

He stared into the coffee he held in his hands - slumped forward, arms resting on his knees - in the large leather sofa of Professor Xavier's office. Contra to his usual ability for arriving late to de-briefs, Logan had been in Charles' office since he returned from Kaylan's building, an hour and a half earlier.

Charles sat in silence as Logan related the turn of events as he saw them. Xavier usually waited for Scott to carry the meeting, but one look at Logan when he arrived back at the mansion told him that it could not wait. So, whilst the rest of the team caught a well earned rest, Logan filled in the Professor. Charles wheeled round his desk and came to a stop in front of Logan, a look of concern on his face. He thought carefully on what he should say to the tired and agitated Wolverine.

"Logan, it is difficult for me to know how to respond," he began. "I believe you made the right decision to step out when you did" Charles smiled and patted him on the shoulder trying to give him reassurance. Charles sat quietly in contemplation for a moment, allowing Logan's account to run through his mind. "You say you sensed some kind of scent?"

"Yeah, an earthy smell...like...like" he tried to search for the right words, but nothing that made any sense would come. His mind seemed to bring up distant images from his long-passed life in the Canadian Rockies. "Like the smell of the rain on the trees - sweet but musky" he answered, looking up at Charles. "But Scott and Ororo, didn't smell it." He paused, studying the Professor's expression. "You don't believe me do you?" Logan spat.

"No, Logan it's not that" Charles sighed. "I'm just not sure the source of this 'scent' is Kaylan."

“I’m tellin’ ya Prof. There’s something strange about that girl!”

Xavier shook his head, how could the blonde smiling child he had known so many years ago possibly be a mutant? “*I would have known, Lewis would have told me*” he thought as he wheeled over to the window, staring vacantly into the gardens beyond, memories of his old friend floating through his mind.

KNOCK, KNOCK.

“Come in” Charles turned to face the door, grateful of the interruption.

“Mornin’ Professor” Scott said cheerfully as he strode purposefully into the office. “Ro’s on her way but I don’t think Logan’s ba...”

Logan dropped his coffee cup onto the low table in front of him, just loud enough to catch Scott’s attention.

“Mornin’ Cyke!” Logan sat back in the sofa scowling at Scott’s presumption that he had not returned.

“Oh, morning Logan, I didn’t think you were back yet” Scott answered slightly surprised.

Scott flopped into the sofa opposite Logan as Ro entered followed closely by Kurt, Marie and Bobby. When all were settled Scott cleared his throat to begin the usual de-briefing session.

“Ok, last night’s attack on Kaylan O’Connor” he began.

“Scott” Charles interrupted. “Logan has already briefed me on the incident at Kaylan’s apartment, I’m afraid her father was right, she IS in some kind of trouble.” He glanced around the room at the group. “Thank you Scott...Ro, for bringing Kaylan here safely, she means a great deal to me and I’m sure her father will be most grateful for your help” he smiled “But what concerns me Scott, are the two mutant attackers and this strange scent Logan picked up on whilst at the apartment. He believes that it came from Kaylan and has suggested that she may be a mutant of some kind, although I have sensed nothing from her.”

“Logan never told us about the scent Professor” Scott answered, “He just upped and left.”

“I did tell ya Scott” Logan retorted. “But ya just weren’t listenin’.”

The two men stared at each other across the room in silence, neither one prepared to back down. Logan was in an antagonistic mood; The lack of sleep and the vision of those eyes every-time he blinked, was making him even more riled than usual. No-longer able to control the swell of emotions, Logan erupted.

“I’m tellin’ ya,” he bellowed, ““blue-eyes’ up stairs is a mutant, ain’t no-one gonna tell me otherwise!”

“Logan! The Professor is right, we have no reason to believe she is a mutant” Scott answered forcefully.

Logan’s brow furrowed, “I know what I smelt Cyke and it weren’t no bake sale”

Scott tried to reason with him, “Logan, we need to trust the Professor’s judgement on this one. He has known Kaylan for a long time.”

“He ain’t seen ‘er in twenty-five years” Logan growled, “that’s a lotta water under the bridge.”

“That’s true Logan,” Charles agreed, “She was six when I last saw her. Her mutancy would have developed in her teenage years. But then why didn’t she try to use whatever ability she has to defend herself...No, I don’t believe she is a mutant”

“I think we need to wait and see...let Jean run a few tests” Scott added.

“Oh yeah, that’s right,” Logan thundered leaning forward in his seat, “And while we wait, she’s in the house with god-knows-what ‘abilities’ and at least two renegade mutants after her. That’s a great idea Scott, let’s ‘wait and see’” Logan added, imitating Scott’s tone.

Scott began to lose his cool, “Logan, what the hell is your problem? She’s the Professor’s god-daughter, we have a duty to protect and help her.”

“We have a duty to protect the rest of the kid’s as well, Bub, or had ya forgot!” Logan snapped, gripping the edge of the sofa.

“So what if she does have abilities” Scott replied angrily, “what are ya gonna do Logan, run from her again?” He sneered.

It was all Logan could take. The lack of sleep, the visions and the lingering scent in his nose drove him forward out of his seat with a thundering growl, as he sprang at Scott. He just cleared the table in a single bound, but caught the half-finished coffee cup with his toe, sending a spray of liquid across the floor. He hit Scott square-on with such power that all in the room heard the air forced from his lungs. In a split second Logan had Scott pinned to the sofa, one knee in his stomach and his large hand around his throat.

It all happened so quickly no-one had time to properly react. Ro was flung back away from the sofa as Logan pounced on Scott. Kurt, who until that moment had been quietly perched on a side-table by the wall, teleported instinctively across the room and Marie let out a sharp scream and grabbed Bobby hoping to avoid injury.

“Don’t you ever accuse me o’ runnin one-eye”. Logan snarled, inches away from Scott’s face, which was rapidly turning purple “I walked out o’ that apartment for the good o’ the team, the situation demanded it, and I’d do it again if the same thing happened. Ya don’t have to like it, Bub, but that’s the way it goes.”

“LOGAN!” Xavier yelled both vocally and telepathically for all to hear.

All stopped in their tracks, but Logan. He defiantly held on to Scott’s throat, squeezing a little harder, causing him to gag and squirm under his grip.

“Logan! Release him or I’ll be forced to make you”. Xavier’s threat was not hollow.

Deliberately slowly and with much effort he eased his grip on Scott’s neck and casually stood up; Scott, almost at the point of passing out, sucked in air coughing and gagging.

“Logan there was no need for that” Charles spoke as calmly as he could, but a note of anger was still in his words. “Are you alright Scott?” he asked, as Ro poured him a glass of water and handed it to him. Taking a sip and coughing again, he nodded.

Logan stood facing the Professor, still defiant, the red mists still clouding his vision. He spoke, voice trembling with anger. “Professor, I know she’s ya god-daughter an’ all, but I stand by what I said; she’s a mutant, and the sooner we find out what she is, the sooner we’ll know what those mongrels wann’ed and the sooner I can go kick lightnin’-boys ass.” And with that he turned on his heals and headed for the office door, slamming it behind him. The remaining X-men sat in stunned silence.

Marie was the first to move, she headed for the door after Logan.

“Let him Go, Marie” Xavier called. “It’s ok, he’ll be alright”. Marie nodded and returned looking anxiously at the door.

Charles sighed as he wheeled behind his desk. “We have work to do” he announced, regaining his composure. “We need to find out what it was that Logan sensed and who the two mutant attackers were. Scott, I have a feeling those muggings you and Jean were investigating may be linked to this, see what you can find”.

Scott nodded “I’ll get right on it Professor”

“Kurt, please will you check on Logan, make sure he’s ok”

“Ja, Herr Professor” Kurt answered, and disappeared.

“Ororo, would you kindly bring Kaylan to my office when she is rested and has eaten. I wish to see her ...its been a long time” he smiled thoughtfully.

KNOCK KNOCK

“Come in, Kaylan.” The large oak door slowly opened and a blonde head peered in. “Please, come in my dear”

Kaylan timidly entered. Closing the door quietly behind her she took a few tentative steps into the room. What only an hour before had been the site of conflict was now the paragon of tranquillity. Kaylan was still too dazed to take in the sights around her but what she had seen of the mansion since her arrival was overwhelming.

“Hello my dear, it’s been a long time” the voice by the window said softly. Xavier turned his wheelchair to face the woman now standing uncomfortably in the middle of his office.

“Uncle Charles!” She exclaimed.

The past hours of pain and anguish were swept aside as Kaylan dashed across the room to embrace her god-father. Flinging her arms around his neck she squeezed him hard, laughing like the small child he remembered so many years ago.

“Oh, my dear Kaylan” Charles laughed, trying to extricate himself from her clasp. It was pleasant relief from the morning’s events. “It has been so long since I’ve seen you, let me look at you”

Kaylan stepped away from his chair, she stood, hands on hips as she did as a child, and gave a little twirl for Charles to see. With a few hours sleep the puffiness had cleared from her face. Refreshed from a shower and hearty breakfast Kaylan now felt more herself again.

“You have become a fine young woman Kaylan” Xavier assured her “And an accomplished one I understand?”

“Yes Uncle Charles” she answered beaming.

“You don’t have to call me Uncle now my dear” Charles smiled, “it’s been what, twenty-five years since I’ve seen you, I think your old enough to call me Charles now”. He beckoned to her, “Please, have a seat, we have much to talk about”

She took a seat on the sofa as Charles wheeled to the table to pour tea. Kaylan’s mind reeled with questions she was now so desperate to ask.

“Uncle Charles...sorry” she smiled a little embarrassed, “what-on-earth are you doing here anyway? Did Dad send you? And where are we exactly?”

“Questions, questions, you haven’t changed Kaylan” he laughed.

Kaylan sat back, excepting the tea from him. She had always had an inquisitive mind - it was what had gotten her a Lectureship at Westchester University at such a young age, wanting answers immediately to everything. She had a fond place in her heart for Charles Xavier; as a child, after her mother died and with her father away so often, Charles had become a surrogate father and tutor to her, until she had been sent away.

“This is my school Kaylan, my school for gifted children. We are just outside Westchester. Do you remember what happened?”

Kaylan’s face clouded as she recalled the night before. “Yes, unc...Charles, I remember. I was attacked by ...by...” her voice trailed off as she thought of her two attackers. “And then these people rescued me.”

“They brought you here” He answered.

“Do you know them? Are they friends of Dad’s?”

“Yes I do know them. The ones you met last night are part of a team of Mutants who help human and mutant alike. They live here in the School, most are ex-pupils, others have found their way here over the years.”

“But the two that attacked me...they were mutants too?”

“Yes, but not from here, I intend to find out what they wanted from you.”

“So how did you know? About the attack I mean?”

“Your father, he called me some days ago. He told me you had been followed. He asked me to help”

“But you two haven’t spoken in years, why would he....”

“I don’t know Kaylan, he never explained. I was wondering if you could tell me. How IS your father?”

“Well, as always. Working hard, never stops. Still don’t see him much. But he’s been a little on edge lately, I mean he always has things on his mind, but lately he’s been distant”

She looked sad at the thought of her father. Whilst their relationship hadn’t been a close one, she still loved him dearly. After the death of her mother when she was six he had done his best to raise her and provide her with the best of everything, but it had never truly brought them together.

“Don’t worry”, he said softly, perceiving her troubled thoughts, “I will inform your father you are safe.” He paused taking a sip of tea. “Now Kaylan, do you know why those men attacked you?”

“No, I have no idea.” Flashes of the attack raced through her mind as tears came unbidden to her blue eyes.

“We know that there have been other attacks on humans, but as yet information is sketchy at best. I have two of the X-Men working to determine a pattern, but until then I want you to remain here” Charles requested.

“Oh, Charles, I don’t know if I can” she replied. “I have my work, my teaching...”

“Kaylan I must insist” he said firmly, “I do not believe it is safe for you to return and I would like to have you checked out by Doctor Grey”

“Why, what’s wrong with me?” Kaylan was beginning to get upset.

“Nothing my dear, but one of team who rescued you last night sensed something at your apartment. He believes those mutants were after you because of it and I want to make sure your ok.” Xavier gazed at her, a gentle smile on his face, just like she remembered as a child.

“The dark one!” she whispered under her breath. “The one who left, he was looking at me funny.”

“Yes” chuckled Xavier, “That’s Wolverine, or should I say Logan. He never has much to say, but when he does....” Charles trailed off, thinking on Logan’s earlier outburst. “So, Kaylan, please will you stay, just for another day?”

Kaylan took his hand in hers and held it to her cheek. “Alright Uncle Charles, for you, anything and we do have a lot of catching-up to do” and, she kissed his hand gently.

Chapter 4: X-Gene

Korrigan Tweed sat alone in the vast, steel re-enforced room he called an office. The only light coming from a dim desk lamp, casting a sickly yellow glow across an expanse of paper and folders scattered over the table. Tweed idly ran his wiry fingers through his greasy graying hair as he pawed over the content of a large red folder marked ‘Secret’. He had not left the room in three days. He slept little; dozing on the couch at the far end of the room when he could no-longer keep his eyes open.

Food and drink had been brought to him, but he ate little, instead choosing to devour the content of the myriad documents.

Stage one of his scheme was nearing completion and the need to force his team on to the next phase drove him with an absolute passion. Over twenty years of research sat in piles on and around the desk, all the result of Tweed's single-minded and sometimes brutal focus to achieve perfection. Nothing less would do.

But the last few years had been hard. He had allowed THEM to make too many of their own decisions, stepping back to enjoy his wealth and fame. But a string of unsuccessful experiments and dwindling investment had driven him back to the beginning – back to his initial research, when money was no object and the need to achieve gripped his power-hungry mind. Since his team had discovered the error in their earlier work Tweed had stepped back into the limelight, taking control of every element of the new scheme, nothing was done without his say-so. The energy that had driven him as a young biologist had now reawakened, and the Professor of genetics and bioengineering now worked with renewed vigour.

"Professor Tweed, your two o'clock is here." came the delicate voice of his secretary over the intercom.

"Yes, yes, send them in woman" he spat agitated by the sudden disturbance. He'd lost track of time – having neither watch nor window.

The 'bio-containment' door to his office slide open and three white-coated scientists scurried in, led by Edwards.

"Well!" Tweed addressed them without lifting his gaze from the folder.

Edwards hesitantly stepped forward "err...yes sir...err...we have the latest progress reports on stage one, sir" he stammered. Tweed always made him nervous, even the thought of his boss made his left eye twitch.

"Yes, yes, and?" Tweed said, finally fixing them with a frosty gaze (that would have put Bobby to shame).

Edwards continued, "Sir everything is progressing as planned. 15 pairs have been recovered so far."

"And the cover stories?" Tweed interrupted.

"Going to plan, Sir. The two shape-shifters we've employed have been taking their places for a few days as and when we recover each unit. By the time the units are discovered missing there is no trail to follow"

Tweed's face twisted in a cruel smile, "Good, Good"

"Err...Sir...err..." Edwards muttered.

"WHAT!" Tweed barked, knowing instinctively that Edwards had bad news, he could always tell what was coming when the wretched man started to hop nervously from one foot to the other.

"Sir we have had some difficulty in acquiring one half of unit 16"

"What sort of difficulty?" Tweed rose from his seat and strode around the desk to stand before the now cowering Edwards.

"Well Sir...err...the retrieval team encountered...err"

"SPIT IT OUT MAN!" Tweed yelled, droplets of his spit splashing Edwards glasses.

The blood was rising to Tweed's cheeks, as the intimidated Edwards tried not to make eye contact. The other two scientists unconsciously took a step backwards. Tweed's bellowing rages were renowned throughout the complex and neither wished to be on the receiving end.

Edwards looked up, "They encountered resistance Sir"

"Well what kind of resistance?" Tweed was losing patience.

"Mist reported they were attacked by three black-clad Mutants at 16's home. "

"MUTANTS!," Tweed yelled.

Edwards winced "Mist said it was as if they knew we were coming, Sir"

"Why didn't they eliminate them?" Tweed snapped.

"Err...they were...err...over-powered Sir" Edwards cringed, waiting for the back-lash.

But Tweed strode back to his desk, scattering documents onto the floor as he searched for a single sheet of paper. Discovering it he scanned the list of names and code numbers on the page. Tracing his finger along the line pertaining to unit 16 his heart skipped a beat and the blood rushed in his temples as he read the two names.

"Which one of unit 16 did they fail to retrieve?" he whispered, staring at the page.

"Err... the female Sir"

Tweed's heart pounded in chest. "*Kaylan O'Connor*" the name rang in his head. Of all the units, she was the one he'd wanted most. He threw the paper back onto the desk and propelled himself at Edwards.

"Do you realise what you've DONE!" Tweed's voice rose to a roaring crescendo as he grabbed Edwards' collar. Edwards had no clue, he knew the units only by number, not wishing to give the 'poor unfortunates' the dignity of names, freeing himself from the moral accountability which Tweed forced upon him.

The name, *Kaylan O'Connor* was all Tweed could hear in his mind, over and over again as he shook Edwards violently. The first, the beginning, the key to his research. "*How could they loose her?*". He recalled the day his research truly began.

25 years earlier.

"Well, does she have it?" Lewis Williams' voice trembled with fear and anticipation as the white coated man entered the waiting room.

Dr. Korrigan Tweed silently crossed the room and sat down beside his old friend. His thin slit of a mouth drawing back into a slight smile but his eyes gave away his true emotion. He patted Lewis on the shoulder.

"Now Lewis, I told you not to worry" He answered calmly.

But Lewis was worried; it was his daughter in there. "Is she alright?"

Tweed took a deep breath. "Yes, she's alright, the procedure went well"

"And does she have it?" Lewis asked again.

"Yes, Lewis, I'm afraid she does." Tweed replied, trying to portray an air of sombre concern when inside his heart was racing with excitement.

"Oh God!" Williams stood up, a look of frantic horror on his face his heart bouncing in his chest. He paced the room rubbing his hands together nervously, unwilling to accept the enormity of the situation. "Oh God!". He stopped for a moment and faced his friend. "What can you do to help her, Korry?" he whispered. "Please you have to help her."

"Yes, Lewis, I can help her, but" he paused, only for dramatic effect.

"But what!" Lewis snapped hysterically, "Money's no option, you know that!"

"It's not the cost Lewis" Tweed answered. "The procedure, well...it's new...something I've been working on."

"Yes, yes, anything, please" Lewis pleaded, tears welling in his eyes at the thought of his daughter lying in the lab.

"Please sit down Lewis, I'll explain what it entails, you may not want to put little Kay through it when I've explained it to you" Tweed tried to sound genuinely concerned but he knew his friend would try anything to protect his precious child.

"The procedure is untested on humans, but I have had exceptional success on animal subjects" he continued. "Firstly, I will need to take a sample of spinal fluid that will involve a painful lumbar puncture. From this I can extract the gene in question and place it in stasis, 'freeze it' if you will." he smiled at the attentive Williams.

"And that will stop it?" Lewis asked hopefully, "She won't develop what her mother had?"

"It's hard to say Lewis, this is experimental. I could not cure her mother but with the information I gained from her I have developed this procedure and maybe I can help Kaylan live a full and normal life"

Lewis slumped back into his seat, loosing his wife had been hard enough, but the thought of loosing his daughter as well he could not bare. He nodded his head. "You must do it, help her Korry, whatever it takes."

"Very well Lewis" Tweed could barely contain the excitement welling up inside him. "We'll begin immediately." He stood up to leave. "Trust me Lewis, Kaylan will be fine."

Now all Tweed could think of was taking out his frustration on the diminutive man. Edwards squirmed in his grip, trying to speak. "S..i..r...we...wi...ll...try...ag...ag...agin". Tweed pushed him backwards, forcing him to fall into the arms of the other two scientists.

"GET OUT!" Tweed yelled. "You're totally incompetent. I can't trust you to do anything right." The three men scurried for the door as thoughts whizzed through Tweed's agile mind. "NO WAIT!" he yelled after them. The three stopped in their tracks.

Tweeds voice fell to a whisper "Retrieve the others, we cannot delay stage two. But tell those idiots Mist and Thor to keep their eyes open. We cannot afford to be exposed." Edwards nodded and turned again for the door. "Save the female till last."

Twenty years earlier

"That's it!" Tweed whispered excitedly to his assistant as he stared through the eye-piece of the electron-microscope. "I think we have it." He stepped back to allow the woman assisting him to view the sample. Picking up a Dictaphone Tweed begin to record his findings.

"Subject XG12, shows noticeable signs of pre-pubescent gene mutation, gene proteins showing considerable aggression towards 'X-block', will consider additional doses over next few days".

He switched off the recorder and placed it back on the table. "Anne, please add my recommendations to XG12's chart would you" he asked his assistant. The woman nodded and headed out of the lab.

Tweed picked up his notes and walked to the desk in the corner of the lab. He slumped down in the chair sighing with relief. His latest patient had proved particularly tricky and to finally get some results was a god-send.

"Not disturbing you, am I?" came a deep baritone voice from the doorway.

Tweed looked up, a little surprised to find Lewis Williams' head poking around the door. "No, No not at all" he answered, flashing Williams a broad smile to hide his annoyance at being interrupted. Quickly closing the folder he had open on the desk and shuffling a few papers Tweed rose from his seat and met his friend halfway across the room.

"It's good to see you Korry" Lewis said, shaking Tweed's hand.

"And you, Lewis" Tweed replied.

"How's everything going?" Lewis asked looking around the large multi-million dollar lab.

"Very well, thanks to you old friend" Tweed answered with a sly wink.

Lewis smiled, a little embarrassed at his friends remark. "No thanks needed Korry, it was the least I could do. You have everything you need?" he added.

"Oh, yes, yes, I couldn't ask for more Lewis." he lied. *"there was always more ...and Lewis will give it to me"* he thought deviously.

"Good, well I'm glad things are running smoothly, let me know if you do need anything" Lewis finished.

"So, how's the research, not that I could begin to understand what your doing?" he laughed.

"Things are going well" Tweed's eyes sparkled at the thought of his latest breakthrough. "We have four patients in the ward at the moment and they will be ready to leave in the next few days. We have three more due in next week."

"And the treatments?" Lewis asked.

"Oh, yes the treatments are working well. We are very pleased with the results." Tweed gushed.

"I'm glad" Lewis added. He thought back to the day Kaylan had been released from hospital five years before and the relief that came with knowing she was going to live a normal life. He thought of the parents and families of the children now on the ward and smiled to himself, knowing how they must feel.

"Have you seen the new plaque, Lewis?" queried Tweed, breaking his train of thought.

"No, not yet" Williams answered "Although I've heard it's very nice, I'll go along and see it later."

"It seems appropriate that the man who has invested so much in this research should have a wing named after him" Tweed added greedily.

Lewis blushed slightly; he was not one for accolades. It was enough that his money was helping those in need. "Well, I'll let you get on, looks like you have a lot to do" he said peering over Tweed's shoulder at the laden desk.

"Oh, yes I do" Tweed cut in, taking his friend by the arm and leading him to the door. "It was good to see you Korry"

"You too Lewis, we must have dinner sometime soon" Tweed suggested.

"Yes that would be good" Lewis added as he slipped through the door.

Tweed closed the door behind him. *"Wish he'd ring first before dropping by."* he thought, returning to his desk. He pulled out the folder from under the hurriedly placed papers and read the title on the cover silently to himself.

US Government:
Classified: Eyes Only
Mutant Research: X-Gene Project

Chapter 5: Change of Mind

Logan leaned against the frame of the bay-window, pool-queue in hand in the games-room. He eyed the cab parked outside. The click of ball hitting ball echoed in the high-ceilinged room as Bobby put another into the corner pocket.

He watched the four figures walk slowly down the front steps of the school. Kaylan handed her bag to the cab driver and turned to hug Jean. The two women exchanged a few words and Jean stepped back to let Ororo say goodbye. Ro took her firmly by the shoulders and kissed her on both cheeks. Next Scott, ever the gentleman, extended his arm and shook Kaylan's hand speaking briefly to her. "*Givin' her a few last words of wisdom 'ey bub?'*" Logan presumed. Kaylan nodded and as she looked back over Scott's shoulder her face broke into a broad smile. Logan edged closer, pushing back the curtain, to get a better view.

She strode back up the steps to where Charles waited patiently and bending slightly, kissed him on the forehead as he took her hands in his. They spoke for a few moments and kissing him again, Kaylan said her goodbyes and headed back down the steps. Halfway down she paused momentarily, a shiver passing down her back. She turned and looked up at the stately mansion, the red brick façade concealing its true nature. For a brief moment she thought she saw the outline of a figure with a familiar silhouette standing at the upper floor window. Logan dodged back, letting go of the curtain.

"Damn it" he whispered under his breath, those blue eyes piecing him for a second.

The three team-members stood together waving on the steps as the cab drove away through the school gates - Kaylan was going to be returning home, after a few days vacation at her Aunt's.

Logan sighed with some relief at her departure. What should have been a twenty-four hour stay had turned into three of the longest days Logan had ever known. Her ever-present aroma had made it impossible for him to avoid her completely and his senses had taken more of a battering than his body had ever experienced in any cage-fight. But, his anger after the rescue had slowly begun to give way to an insatiable curiosity which drew him to her and that morning's chance meeting had finally begun to change his mind about Xavier's strange god-daughter.

He breathed deep, her powerful scent still pervaded every room in the mansion and having just gotten used to it he knew it would all too quickly fade. "*Can't believe I'm gonna miss it*" He thought, frowning. He had not wanted her in the mansion in the first place, but her leaving made him feel somehow empty.

At least the others would be able to relax a little; Logan had been like a bear with a sore head since his fight with Scott, and the two men still weren't talking. "*Least he's not bendin' my ear like normal*" he'd confided in Ro the day before.

"Logan, it's your shot!" Bobby shouted across the room.

He continued to stare out of the window "You take it kid" he mumbled preoccupied with his thoughts.

Looking a little bemused, Bobby shrugged and bent over the table to take Logan's shot, deliberately missing so he could win the frame. Logan's sifted through the events of the last three days which had lead to his change of mind.

The fuming Wolverine sat alone on the floor of the garage, his back to the old work bench. After storming out of the Professor's office he'd found himself wandering through the grounds of the mansion. The spring air and the morning sounds of the outdoors eased his temper slightly, but he was resolved to stay clear of the house for the rest of the day. He'd found his way to the garage behind the school and contemplated taking off on his bike. But he knew that wouldn't fix the fight he'd had with Scott or solve the Kaylan situation so, forcing himself to stay, he set about cleaning the large black body of the Titan Phoenix ZSX motorcycle.

BAMF

He heard the sound he'd been half expecting from just outside. The familiar rustle of raincoat broke the stillness of the garage as his blue-skinned friend bounded in through the double doors and negotiated the parked cars.

"Wie Geht's Logan?"

Logan looked up, gas-cap in one hand, oily rag in the other, at Kurt standing over him. He made a half-hearted attempt to smile and continued to polish the cap.

"Are you ok?" Kurt asked gently, kneeling down at Logan's side, his tail swishing the dust into patterns on the garage floor.

"Yeah" Logan sighed; "I'm sehr gut" he answered in German with a hint of sarcasm. "I guess they're real pissed off at me." He added, not looking up from his polishing.

"Nein, nein, it is all forgotten."

"Yeah right." Logan laughed; Kurt always had a way of projecting an air of calm and peace even when all hell was breaking loose. Logan knew Scott wouldn't forget his violent attack so easily, he also knew his outburst could jeopardise their already fragile relationship. But he could not forgive Scott for accusing him of running even if it was, in part, true. "*Damn fool...let ya mouth run off before ya brain's kicked in as usual*" he'd chastised himself as he'd left the mansion. He could just picture the scene now back in the house, Scott sitting on the medi-bed in the lab while Jean gently checked his bruised neck, listening patiently to his ranting about Logan's behavior. Logan smiled to himself, "*One o' these days I'm gonna kick his ass good 'n' proper, then he'll know 'bout it*".

"They send ya out here?" Logan tilted his head in the direction of the house.

"Ja, Herr Professor, he wish me to everything alright make." Kurt stumbled over the words.

Logan shrugged, "Well, I guess it will be when SHE leaves."

Kurt looked confused. "Logan, vot is it dat you don't gleich?"

“Like?” He and Kurt had found over time they enjoyed trying to figure out what the other was trying to say. With Logan’s inability to put his emotions into words and Kurt struggling to translate his into English, their conversations could sometimes last for hours.

“Ya heard what I said back there,” he growled. “She’s bad nachricht.”

“Ahh, bad news yes?” Kurt mused, not truly understanding Logan’s problem with the girl he had just rescued. “But she is human, no?”

“S’posed to be, but I ain’t so sure.” He answered, shaking his head.

The two men sat quietly for sometime; Logan buffing the cap to a bright shine in an attempt to focus. The image of that beautiful tear stained face and those blue eyes would not leave him. Kurt ran his fingers over his pocket crucifix, uttering a silent pray of forgiveness for his friend.

Myriad emotions sloshed around Logan’s brain; Anger at himself for being effected by Kaylan’s presence and letting her come between him and the rest of the team, fear for the children now living with an unpredictable entity in the mansion and increasingly, curiosity at finding out what she could do. He rarely experienced such emotional turmoil, and it was driving him crazy. He polished harder, rubbing a hole in the cloth.

“Kurt” Logan eventually spoke. “This just ain’t right. Her bein’ here I mean.”

“But ve cannot turn da poor child out ven she is in need, Logan. Ve muss be da good Samaritan no?” Kurt asked.

“I guess” Logan grumbled.

Kurt continued. “Herr Professor made dis haus a home for zose who needed protection, is she not von?”

“’spose” he shrugged. “But we need to protect ‘em that’s already here – Marie, Bobby, Jubilee!”

“And ve vill, Logan.” Kurt smiled. “You care much for ze kinder, ja?”

“Well I...I... just doin’ my job Bub” Logan stuttered a little and eyed Kurt surreptitiously. His usual ability to maintain an air of indifference, whilst protecting those he cared about, was getting harder to disguise these days. Kurt prodded him with a long blue finger and laughed, Logan could not suppress the sly smile that passed over his lips.

“As Scott said, ve muss wait an see” Kurt added, “Only Gott knows vat vill happen. Zere are enough of us here to protect das kinder. It vill be ok.” He nodded.

“Well I guess she’ll be gone soon” Logan sighed. “Till then I’m gonna steer clear. Her scent’s drivin’ me crazy.” Logan patted Kurt on the shoulder as he stood up. “Com’ on,” he said holding up the cap to the light. “Got more chrome to polish”.

Day Two

The previous day had been an exercise in ‘enemy avoidance’ as far as Logan was concerned. After finishing every inch of polishing on the bike he’d ridden out to get sushi and spent the night brooding in the studio-flat above the garage. Sleep had come in fits and starts; his mind awash with images of the mission, the action with the mutants, the fight with Scott and above all else Kaylan. He was getting used to the visions of her now, her delicate features pervaded his every thought, and it was now useless to fight them, so instead he let his mind wander. He had come to the conclusion if he was to rid his himself of her he had to let it run its course.

Waking with the sun streaming through the small window of the dusty room, he’d found himself still dressed, face-down, star fished across the bed, in a pile of tangled bed-sheets. A six-pack and two boxes of half-eaten sushi, one spilled across the bed, lay next to him. As he’d rolled over he’d groaned at the line of six holes in the wooden head-board behind him, splinters of wood covering the pillows.

“great, somethin’ else f’ me t’ fix.” He growled under his breath, annoyed.

Grabbing his denim jacket he’d headed out into the spring morning, dew was still fresh on the grass and a light mist hung about the trees. He’d wandered back to the house via the side entrance, being careful not to make any noise. The peace and quiet of the early morning suited him just fine and lessened the chance of running into the others. Opening the door into the kitchen he’d been hit by a sensation that almost sent him reeling back into the yard. The scent that he’d tried so hard to purge from his system again filled his nostrils. But what only two nights ago had driven him into a savage rage now stirred up new emotions, his stomach twisted into knots and his chest tightened. The scent flooded his body; giving him a head-rush and making him feel strangely aroused. It was a softer, more delicate scent than before, like lilies after a rain-storm, yet it was still unmistakable, Kaylan! He forced himself on; unsure just how much more of this onslaught to his senses he could take.

Stripping off the beer and sushi-stained T-shirt and his old Levi’s he’d grabbed a shower. Lingered long in the steam-filled cubical, head bowed under the hot spray. The pounding of the water on the back of his neck eased the ache in his mind as he watched the rivulets of water cascade over his taut body, letting the tingling sensation run away with the liquid down the drain. More relief came in the form of a morning in the gym; an hour on the treadmill followed by two hours of weight training. In truth he didn’t need it, his powers of self-healing and the very nature of his Adamantium skeleton kept his body in almost perfect physical condition, but he enjoyed the adrenaline buzz that working out for long periods of time gave him. He’d just completed his fiftieth bar-bell snatch when Xavier entered his mind.

“*Logan*”. The shadowy voice echoed inside his head like a shout down a long tunnel. He hated the sensation, it always caught him unawares. Logan’s body stiffened. He grimaced as he fought to hold the bar-bell weight above his head.

“What?!” he spoke out loud, his face turning red with the exertion. He took a deep breath, letting the words form in his mind. “*Yeah wha d’ ya want?*”

“*Logan I wish to speak with you...would you meet me in the conservatory*” Charles’ voice resonated through his mind. Xavier was always to the point when communicating via his telepathy. Logan preferred it that way, “*The less time he spends in m’ head the better*” was his attitude.

“*On my way*” he answered. He expelled the last of the air from his chest as he dropped the weights to the floor with a thud. Grabbing his towel from the bench he set off out of the gym.

He wiped the sweat from his neck and chest, half-heartedly brushed his hair back into its usual tufts, and pulled on his T-shirt as he strode down the corridors of the school heading for the hot-house and Charles.

A blanket of warmth surrounded him as he pushed open the double doors to the conservatory, the smell of damp earth and moist foliage filled the air, reminding him of April showers in the high Rockies, a pleasant relief from Kaylan's scent. The high-ceilinged glass-house resembled more of a jungle than a room, filled from floor to ceiling with exotic specimens and climbing plants. Just as exotic, insects and butterflies fluttered about the place giving the room an appearance of continuous movement.

"Ah, Logan, over here", Xavier called out from just beyond a curtain of ivy. The professor sat at a small wrought-iron table which faced out into the garden. A china tea service, set with two cups, placed on top. As Logan rounded the curtain Xavier began to pour the tea. "Please, won't you sit".

Logan stood-fast. "Listen, if ya gonna lecture me 'bout yesterday, ya can forget it". He turned slightly to make a point of leaving.

"No Logan, please" the professor asked calmly, "Please sit, there will be no lectures I promise". He gestured to the seat opposite.

Logan pulled out the other chair and sat, eyeing the professor. "*No lectures, yeah, that's about as likely as Scott gettin' a personality transplant*" Logan mused to himself.

The professor smiled. "Scott's character is just fine the way it is Logan".

"Stay outta my head Chuck!" Logan answered angrily, grabbing the table and making the china rattle.

Charles raised his hand in supplication, "Please Logan I meant nothing by it, that was an all-too loud thought which I couldn't help but hear, I'm sorry, please let's begin again".

Logan sat back into his seat in silence for a moment.

"How are you feeling this morning? I noticed the lights on in the garage till late, did you stay there last night?" Charles asked as he passed Logan a cup.

"Yeah, well I've felt better" he sighed as he scratched absently at his side-burns, "Thought it best to stick around, ya know, in case, just stayed outta th' way."

Charles nodded, "I understand".

"It ain't gonna way" Logan added, "I can smell 'er all over the house," He gestured in the direction of the upstairs guest quarters "Although it ain't as bad as it was. An' I still ain't changed my mind."

"Jean is going to do some tests on Kaylan today, I am hoping that they will help us determine whether Kaylan is truly a mutant or not." He paused, "But I have no idea what I'm going to say to her father." Xavier looked perplexed. Logan knew either way it was going to be hard for Xavier to talk to his old friend. Charles tried to lighten things up a little, "Well, I did not ask you here to burden you with my problems".

"Ahh, here we go" Logan grumbled, rolling his eyes back in his head.

Charles continued, ignoring Logan's protests "Logan, I would be most grateful if you would teach Kaylan some self-defence, I...."

"NO, NO NO!" Logan yelled, slamming the tea cup to the table and propelling himself from the chair. "Not even if hell freeze's over!"

"...Logan, please...." Xavier tried to finish.

"Which bit of NO don't ya get!" He spat, turning to face the professor.

"...I wouldn't have asked you here if I didn't think you were the man for the job." Charles replied, placing the cup on the table and wheeling over to where Logan now stood staring angrily out of the window.

"Yeah right!" Logan laughed at Xavier's persistence, "There's plenty here who can show her that stuff."

"Yes, Logan your right, there are others who are equally good at such techniques, but you know the more street-wise skills that I think she requires."

"That's bull Chuck and ya know it." Logan crossed his arms in defiance.

"Well, I can see it might be too much for you, perhaps I should ask one of the others..."

"Now, wait just one minute! I never said it was too much now did I?" His bravado belying the uneasiness he felt, but the last two days of walled-up emotions were too much and they finally broke like a wave over him. He turned and slumped down on the broad windowsill, Charles' insistence over-powering his pride.

"I can't ok? Is that what ya wann'ed to hear...I CAN'T. I can't handle this much longer." Logan raised his head and fixed Xavier with a dark stare. "She's drivin' me crazy wi' that scent o' hers, it's pullin' me in all directions. Ya gotta get Jeanie to find out what's up with her and fast."

Charles looked intently at the agitated wolverine, sighing asked gently, "Logan what is it that you fear most?"

Logan sat in silence for sometime, myriad things filled his head. "Not been able to protect 'em" he finally spoke, nodding in the direction of the school. "The kid's. I know too well how exposed they can be, and right now I'm not runnin' on all cylinders."

"You can't protect them alone," Xavier answered looking concerned. "In any case, are you referring to their vulnerability ...or your own Logan?" Charles enquired subtly.

Logan stared back at him, brow furrowed, he hated this psycho-analysis bull-crap the Prof. always laid on him, but he could see his point.

Charles patted him on the arm. "Then the only way to deal with it is to face it."

Logan looked away, shaking his head. "I can't! At least not right now" he hissed through gritted teeth. He pushed himself to his feet and shrugging, turned to leave.

“Logan! please, try to remember what I said...face your fears.” Xavier smiled. “Oh and if it will make your day any easier, Kaylan will be leaving tomorrow afternoon” Charles added.

“Thanks” he replied. “Ya know where I am if ya need me”. He nodded to Xavier as he pushed the doors open and headed back into the school.

Day Three

As daylight shone through his window the smell of bacon wafted into his room and was driving his taste-buds insane. Logan lay spread-eagled on his bed trying, without much success, to concentrate on the novel which lay open in front of him. He wasn't really in a literary mood, but trying to stay out of the way of the rest of the house-hold had driven him to look for something to do other than sit in his room. He flicked the pages idly, trying to focus on the line of text, finally in frustration, he threw the book onto the floor; his need for food overriding his desire to try to finish the story.

Logan rose and headed down to the kitchen, sniffing the air as he went. “*she's not up yet*” he thought as he searched out Kaylan's aroma through the smell of fried eggs. As the initial bombardment to his senses had eased, Logan had begun to notice the almost imperceptible changes in her scent from one moment to another. She was like a chameleon he thought, her body giving off shades of scent like the changing colours of the small reptile.

The previous day he'd noticed Kaylan's heady scent had altered, it took a while to identify but eventually it came to him, honey!, the usual smell of lilies were now flecked with honey, a sweet almost tangible taste, making him want to lick his lips. His curiosity finally overcoming his wariness, he'd followed it along the corridors, the scent growing in strength all the time.

From beyond the doors of the study came the sound of two women giggling; The first he knew oh-so well, Ro, her deep infectious giggle always made him smile, but the other, that was new, light, happy, Kaylan. For the first time he'd heard her voice since the rescue it sounded bright and cheerful with a hint of mischief. The sugary scent wafted through the door; a tingling sensation grew in his body and his breathing increased. He had to fight the urge to enter the room, to get closer to the sweet aroma; he closed his eyes and leaned against the door-frame listening to their chat like a school boy eaves-dropping on the staff-room. Ro was mid-way through relating a story to Kaylan.

“...So I said, ‘do you know what happens to a Toad when it's struck by lightning?’”

“And what did he say?” Kaylan giggled.

“He didn't say anything, he was too busy trying to hold onto the railings with his tongue” Ro laughed.

“Oh Jeez, Ro I wish I could have seen it.” Kaylan chuckled, “Ororo, you're quite remarkable, it must be amazing to have such powers.” She added.

Ro smiled graciously at the woman opposite. “Thank you Kaylan, the goddess has blessed me, but with power comes responsibility and each day is a constant struggle to maintain control...”

Logan pushed himself away from the door leaving the two women to their conversation. He thought on Ro's words as he wandering back to his room, "*a constant struggle to maintain control...she ain't wrong there*" he thought wryly.

He had spent the rest of the day in contemplation; meditating on Xavier's words. '*face your fears Logan*'. After hours of Tai Chi, Logan was not only able to distinguish Kaylan's changing moods but with focus, could pinpoint her location in the mansion as her aroma wafted through the corridors like a homing beacon. As he concentrated, he could see the colours in his mind; When she was happy that subtle smell of lilies and honey filled his brain with golds, reds and yellows making him feel alive, aroused and hungry. When she was serious, greens and browns swirled in his mind and the scent of trees and earth brought him a sense of sobriety. When she felt sad, the rain fell and the sky darkened, blues twisted and eddied and the anger and aggression that had driven him out that first night grew in him, awakening his feral nature. He had happened upon her taking a nap that afternoon on the porch, and found her scent softened, becoming almost creamy. He smiled to himself as images of white clouds flowed into his mind and the taste of hot milk filled his mouth; his body ached with feelings of tenderness and compassion. He'd told himself constantly it was a security precaution, to be able to detect her location in case something happened. Deep down, he knew the need to know where she was and to feel that tingle that began when he sensed her was the driving force.

Feeling comfortably full having devoured three eggs, four rashers of bacon, a bowl of grits and three slices of bread not to mention the carton of milk, Logan wended his way back through the corridors to his room. He rounded the last corner, the last pages of the novel on his mind, when the wind was knocked from his sails by the dull thwack of a body slamming into him.

"Huh!" the stunned body grunted, meeting the solid wall of flesh head-on. "Awww, Oh! Oh! I'm so sorry!"

Logan bent to pick up the book from the floor that was flung from the other's grip.

"s'ok" he muttered. SNIFF, SNIFF

He didn't need to look up to know at whose feet he crouched. The scent of 'honeyed lilies' swirled around him. In his preoccupation he'd failed to notice Kaylan's approach. He closed his eyes for a split-second trying to focus. The hairs on the back of his neck stood to attention and a chill gripped his belly. He hadn't been this close to her since the rescue and long hours of meditation had not prepared him for such a sudden encounter. He couldn't help the defensive growl that rose from his chest as he drew himself to his feet.

"try 'n' be nice" he told himself.

"I'm sorry" came a soft apologetic voice, "I wasn't looking where I was going". Kaylan looked up and met Logan's scowl with two shining blue eyes. 'The honey faded to rain and the corridor seemed to turn a shade of sea blue'

"No, you weren't" Logan answered gruffly. He held out the book at arms-length making sure he didn't touch her. "*I ain't gonna let her get to me no matter what she smells like.*" He tried to convince himself.

She furtively studied the dark, thick-set frame of the glaring Wolverine. *“He’s been trying to avoid me, but he doesn’t seem so bad in the light of day”* she thought. *“Better without the uniform, doesn’t shave much! I really don’t think he likes me”* she concluded as he glowered down at her. She felt his dark eyes bore into her from under those thick eyebrows examining every nuance of her body, making her feel uncomfortable and awkward. *“What do I say to him”* she thought. “Thank...Thank-you.” Kaylan smiled as she gingerly took the book from him.

“K” Logan rumbled folding his arms across his chest and trying to maintain an air of indifference. *“She looks different”* he noted raising a brow. She had put on a little makeup; a soft pink sheen of lip gloss which emphasised her shapely mouth and a blue mascara which accentuated the deep blue pools of her eyes. His attention was drawn to her shapely figure, Ro had lent her a change of clothes – green combats and a grey zip top, and her hair was tied up loosely in a ponytail. *“Not bad...what are you thinkin’ damn it, Logan”* he cautioned himself.

There was a moment of awkward silence as the two faced each other in the corridor.

“I...err...should go” She smiled uneasily “Unc...Charles has arranged some self-defense classes for me with ...err...Scott”

“Right” Logan growled “The gym’s that way” he finished, trying to stay polite.

“Thank-you” she whispered glancing shyly at him. ‘The lilies returned and swirling yellows filled his mind’. Gripping the book to her chest she hurriedly side-stepped him only to collide with his arm as she did so. “Sorry, sorry” She muttered becoming increasingly embarrassed at her clumsiness. ‘As myriad colours shimmered in his vision.’

Far from being annoyed by her ineptitude, a curl of a smile spread across Logan’s lips. He turned to watch the woman scurry off up the corridor, leaving a trail of scent in her wake. *“Maybe she’s not as bad as I thought”* he mused. He looked down at his arm where she had brushed past him. He could still feel the soft pressure of their collision on his skin. Bending his head a little, he sniffed at the material of the T-shirt. Closing his eyes, he absorbed the delicate fragrance and those blue eyes filled his vision. A shiver ran down his spine and he felt a pleasant throb in his groin.

Wait a minute, Scott! What the hell’s one-eye teachin’ her self-defense for? Couldn’t fight his way outta paper bag, this I gotta see”. He turned and set off in pursuit of Kaylan and the direction of the gym. A seat on the mezzanine level would provide the best view from which to watch the pair and to see what she was capable of. The day was looking up and the book all but forgotten.

“Ok, put ya weight on to your left leg...yep that’s it, step a little more to the left...here.” Scot gently pushed Kaylan’s thigh forcing her leg out, manipulating her into the correct position. She giggled, more from embarrassment at being touched by the handsome team leader than her inability to follow his instructions.

“Ok that’s good” he said assessing her stance. “Right, when I come up behind you I want you to put your left hand here”. He moved into position at her back, wrapping his arm around her shoulder and neck. Trying hard to concentrate, Kaylan griped his arm at the elbow as he instructed. “Good, ok now when I say go, brace with your left leg, bend your right leg slightly, grip my arm and throw your right shoulder forward...ok got that?”

“Er, yes I think so” Kaylan answered timidly; trying to remember all the instructions.

“Ok, one, two, three, go!”

Scott tightened his grip around her neck, pulling her body in sharply to his chest. Kaylan tensed, her mind flashed back to the night of the attack; the thought of Mist’s cold grey arm around her throat and the fear that had made her scream out, filled her body. The unconscious instinct for self preservation took over. With a sudden snap of her body she grabbed Scott’s arm and hurled her body forward, yelling at the top of her lungs. To his surprise Scott was lifted into the air and flung to the floor at Kaylan’s feet, hitting the deck with a solid thud.

“Uuph!” He grunted.

Realising what she had done and shocked by her incredible show of strength she fell to her knees at Scott’s side.

“OH, God Scott, I’m sorry, are you ok?” She asked grabbing his arm as the stunned commander rolled onto his side and began to kneel up, laughing.

“Yeah, I’m fine Kaylan, fine, just a little...well...a little surprised is all...are you sure you’ve never done this before?” He queried jokingly.

“No, honestly, I don’t know where that came from.” Kaylan added as she sat back, relieved that she had not done him any damage.

The two sat on the mats laughing and chatting for some time at Kaylan’s new-found strength; Scott trying to build up her confidence. Neither were aware of the figure crouched in the viewing gallery above them, watching them intently from under furrowed brows.

Logan let out a low rumble of approval as he watched Kaylan throw the 6’ man to the floor. *“That’s it!, she’s just gone up in m’ estimations...mutant or not”* he thought with a smile on his face. *“Any one who gets the better of visor-boy is good in my book.”* He sat back, leaning against a chair to watch the remainder of Scott’s lesson. Her scent wafted up to the balcony and Logan closed his eyes and drew in a deep lung-full of it, letting it wash through him in a pleasant wave. The ever-present sweetness mingled with the warm musky aroma of her perspiring body - He could almost taste it. He found himself absently pressing his hand to his crotch and it set his animal heart racing.

As the minutes ticked by her confidence grew as Scott took her steadily through the basics of self-defence. She was a quick learner; she watched intently as Scott demonstrated, then she would follow him in slow-motion before attempting the move herself. As she progressed her embarrassment and awkwardness began to fade and her body begins to flow and bend readily to each position. The swirls of colour seemed to follow her every move giving her an almost liquid quality. Logan sat captivated by her movements, she was not physically well conditioned as the members of the x-team were but she was lithe and supple and her body easily found the right posture. He watched the look of serious concentration on her face; the way her nose screwed up and her lips pouted when she exerted herself and the way her deep blue eyes sparkled when she made a breakthrough.

“She’s got potential” He mused, watching her kick out at Scott’s kick-boxing mitts as he coerced her on with words of encouragement. *“Shame Cyke’s ‘bout as good a teacher as Chuck is a long distance runner – that guy is so full ‘o himself, she ain’t gonna be able t’ beat a fly wi’ them techniques”*.

He cursed for not finding the strength to teach her himself. But from where he sat he could finally see what she was made of, and he had to admit he liked what he saw. *‘Least I know what we’re up against if she goes postal’* he considered, but with the keen eye of a hardened fighter he could also see that a few more lessons would make her formidable ally. *‘I could make her good’* he contemplated *‘wi’ a bit o’ time.’*

But he had no more time; she was leaving later that day. With a heavy sigh he stealthily pushed himself to his feet and returned to his room. Images of her flittered through his mind for the rest of the day and the sight of her standing over Scott on the floor brought a rueful smile to his face. It was impossible to concentrate on the last few pages of his book, instead he headed out into the school and found to his relief he was dragged into a pool game with the senior boys.

“Logan ya wanna finish this game?” Bobby poked Logan in the side with the pool cue.

“Yeah, er yeah kid, sure” he half smiled and stepped away from the window as the car turned left and disappeared. With a pang in his heart he made his way back to the pool table as Bobby chattered on about school. Logan wasn’t listening. In those few short strides from the window to the table an idea broke like a wave in his mind. *‘I have t’ see her again’*. As he bent to take the shot the plan had already formed. *‘tonight!’*.

Chapter 6: Frozen

“Did you check for contamination Jean!” Xavier asked abruptly, his head bent over the eyepiece of the microscope. His distressed tone made Jean flinch in her seat as she held the vial of blood up to examine the amount of plasma settled on the surface. Sighing heavily, she placed the tube back in the rack and pushed herself from the chair. She was exhausted. Rubbing her aching neck she crossed the lab.

“Charles, I’ve checked it three times...there’s no change...the results are the same.” She placed a gentle hand to Xavier’s shoulder. “Please Charles.” She whispered trying to stifle a yawn.

It was 1 am, and she had been poring over the same data for two days. Startled by the results of what should have been a routine analysis; Jean had called Charles down from his office earlier that day. Running the analysis again made no difference the results were clear to both of them.

Charles looked up at her tired eyes. She could see the worry on his face and feel the waves of sadness he was trying to suppress - that someone dear to him had been mistreated this way upset her immensely. Never in all her years at the school had she known Xavier to show his emotions and this brief glimpse tore at her heart and she instinctively bent and wrapped her arms around his neck.

~ Please professor ~ she tried to reassure him.

She pulled away as he struggled to laugh it off, embarrassed by his un-characteristic lack of control. “Oh dear.” He whispered, turning away. ~ I’m sorry Jean ~

“It’s alright Professor” she replied, “It’s late and we’re both tired, its only natural you should be...” she trailed off, not wishing to remind him of why he was there. She took a deep breath. “Professor...Charles, I don’t think...”

Xavier half smiled at her, only too aware of what she was about to say, “Yes Jean I know.” He answered as he wheeled away from the counter.

~ Please sit with me. ~

Kicking off her pumps she eased her aching body into a leather seat in the briefing area and brushed her ruffled red hair back from her face. Charles sat quietly opposite, eyes unfocused, staring at a point on the wall behind her. The ripples of anxiety flowing from him buffeted her mind, and she struggled in her fatigued state to maintain control.

~ Charles please ~

He looked up, reality dawning on his face. “Oh my dear, I’m so sorry, I wasn’t thinking.”

“Its ok, its just exhaustion.” She whispered rubbing her temples.

They sat in silence for a long while, both considering the implications of her findings. Finally Xavier spoke. “Why Jean? Why would someone do this to her? She must only have been a child, she couldn’t have known what they were doing.”

“I don’t know Professor,” she answered with a sigh. “But then nothing seems to surprise me these days.”

Charles shuddered, forcing his emotions down, he closed his eyes, sucking in a deep breath. Finally, regaining control, he breathed out slowly and opened his eyes. “Gene manipulation is one thing...but this...”

“The problem is what do we do about it?” Jean replied, “I don’t have the necessary skills to...”

Xavier cut her off; “Nonsense Jean, you are an accomplished biologist.” he smiled at his now grown-up pupil.

She returned his smile, somewhat embarrassed. “You know what I mean Charles.”

But Charles already knew where her train of thought was leading. “Hank?”

“Yes” She answered. “I think he will be able to help us with this problem, he’s the only person I know with the necessary experience to fix this kind of damage.”

“Yes I agree. It will however require you to spend sometime in Scotland. Hank has been working with Moria on several research projects. Even though your visit would be of a serious nature I’m sure they would both love to see you.” Charles replied.

“Yes, it will be nice to see that furry genius again.” She added. “It’s been a long time.”

Xavier smiled; reminded of Jean’s fondness for the man they affectionately called Beast. “You can make preparations after a good night sleep my dear. I will ring Hank in a couple of hours.” His tone

became serious. “Then we will brief the others. I want everyone working together on this. This has changed things completely.”

She nodded as she stifled another yawn.

“Now do go to bed, there will be much to do in the morning.” Charles added.

Rising from the seat and stretching, Jean headed for the door. “Are you coming Professor?”

“In a moment my dear” he whispered, trying to reassure her.

But Jean could still sense the sadness in the professor and she felt tears come unbidden to her eyes. There was nothing she could do or say to that could possibly ease his distress, instead she wished him good night and wandered along the silent corridors to her room; the results of her analysis whirling around her head. Stripping off her smock and clothes she shuffled down into the bed, glad of the relief the mattress brought to her aching back. Scott groaned and rolled over. No longer able to contain the anguish Charles had shared with her she allowed the tears to flow down her cheeks.

“Scott,” she whispered, “Please hold me.”

Half asleep, Scott wrapped his arms around his love and she folded herself into his warmth “*Tomorrow is going to be a hell-of-a-day.*”

“Please take a seat Marie.” Xavier waved to the empty chair at the conference table as the youngest member of the X-Men entered the room. The entire team was assembled, woken by Xavier’s telepathic message at 7am. Jean could feel he had not slept, and his face was clearly drawn and pale, but she sensed he had returned to his familiar self, focused and ready to chair the meeting.

“Well, now we’re all here, I’ll begin”. He sucked in a deep breath. “As you are all aware Jean has been analyzing Kaylan’s blood sample.”

“Huh” Logan grunted in feigned disgust and shuffled in his seat at the mention of her name; maintaining the façade was getting difficult. Ro fixed him with an irritated stare; it was just too early for one of his crabby moods. “Sorry.” Logan muttered, silently slapped-down by those big brown eyes.

“Yes, well, it was to be a routine analysis, even though opinions as to the outcome were varied.”

Scott flashed Logan a look and rubbed absently at his neck, still flecked with purple. Logan just raised a brow and scowled back.

“I have to inform you all however, that the results were not what I had expected”.

“I knew it!” Logan exclaimed slapping his hand on the table. “I damn-well knew it!”

“LOGAN!” Scott bellowed, unable to keep his temper.

“O’ get the bug out ya ass, one-eye...” Logan snapped back.

“Stop it!” Ro interjected, “Before I knock this childishness out of the pair of you”. The two men glared at each other but stayed silent. “Please Professor, continue”.

“Thank-you Ororo. As I was saying, the results of Kaylan’s blood tests were a surprise to me, but it seems Logan’s suspicions were correct”.

“So, she **is** a mutant?” Logan questioned; curious to discover why she had been driving him crazy all this time.

“Well, yesand no.” Charles replied.

“What the hell’s that supposed to mean?” Logan looked bemused. “An’ spare me the science mumbo-jumbo.”

“It means exactly that Logan,” Jean stood up to take over from Xavier. “To put it simply, she has no outward signs of mutancy, yet her DNA and gene profile shows she is to all-intents-and-purposes a mutant.” Jean began.

“So what has caused this?” Ro questioned.

“At this point we’re not positive but it looks like someone has interfered with her genes” Jean answered. “But the professor and I have been in touch with Hank and we believe he will be able to help us discover what has happened and how it was done.”

“So, in the meantime there’s a mutant, who don’t know she’s a mutant, out on the streets”. Logan asked slumping back in his chair.

“Yes” Jean replied.

“Don’t ya think we should get ‘er back?” He retorted.

“Not just yet Logan,” Charles interjected. “Until we know more, I do not wish to attract too much attention to Kaylan or her father, either from her attackers or the media; since she was just here it might be just the kind of thing some enterprising reporter might want to exploit. Her family is high profile, the last thing we need right now is to have them under public scrutiny”.

“So what’s the prognosis Professor? Will Kaylan be alright?” Scott asked.

“I believe so Scott, she seems to have lived her life relatively normally until now and I see no reason why she can’t continue to do so.”

“But what about her x-gene?” Marie questioned.

Jean picked up the remote for the projector off the lectern and headed over to the wall. Pressing the button, the image of a gene profile flicked up on the large screen. “This is a normal mutant gene profile,” she pointed to the image with a laser pointer. “Mine in fact...these however,” the image changed, “are Kaylan’s genes”.

To all present, the difference between the two images was clearly visible.

“Some how,” Jean continued “the development of Kaylan’s x-gene has been halted, ‘frozen’ if you like, by the looks of it sometime in early child-hood, well before she would have begun to exhibit mutant abilities.”

“Manipulation and testing on mutants is not unheard of” Charles interjected, “but in all my years, I have rarely seen anything as blatant as this.” He glanced at Logan as he spoke, “To completely repress the x-gene...” He trailed off with a sigh.

“So your saying this has been done to her...it’s not just another mutation?” Scott asked.

“We are not sure how it has been achieved,” Jean replied, “but there seems to be some residual enzyme present around the gene, suggesting that it has indeed been suppressed”.

“So what about ‘er scent?” Logan asked, his fascination with this woman’s condition growing by the minute. “How come she’s givin’ off pheromones like a chameleon changes color?”

“Well, this is only speculation Logan,” Jean answered, “but it could be that as she has grown older the strength of the enzyme suppressing her x-gene has begun to weaken. It’s possible that she is starting to exhibit her mutant powers and her scent may be the first to emerge, from that we could hypothesize that eventually she would gain all her abilities - whatever they may be - although how she would deal with them at such a late stage in her life is anyone’s guess. Right now she’s not even aware that she is producing pheromones that’s why they’ve effected you. She will have to be taught how to control it.”

A wave of relief spread over him. To finally know the truth; to know she was a mutant, all-be-it unaware of her potential, filled Logan with a sense of satisfaction. “*Next time maybe ya’ll listen Cyke. I know a mutant when I smell one.*” He smiled inwardly to himself, vindicated at last.

“So now we know what **she** is,” He growled rubbing his knuckles, “whose evil lab door d’ we go knockin’ on this time?” The compulsion to get his claws into the attacker who’d flattened him with a lighting-bolt in Kaylan’s apartment was rapidly growing in his gut.

Charles wheeled around the table, “That is what we must find out, Logan. Whoever is responsible for this must be found and stopped before anyone else – and there may already be others – are assaulted in this way. This violation could have all kinds of ramifications; not least a way for the anti-mutant lobby to expand the mutant registration program with a method of control **before** mutancy develops.”

“Professor, I think I may have some leads which could help us.” Scott replied standing and heading over to the computer terminal on the lectern. “I’ve been looking at the series of attacks in Westchester with similar M.O.’s to that of Kaylan’s.” A city map appeared on the screen with red dots scattered across it. “As I have discovered, they are not isolated cases. In fact there have been four attacks in Westchester in the last few weeks but, I have tracked ten similar attacks across the country, some dating back as far as three months ago.” The map changed to that of the U.S. with more of the red dots dispersed across it.

Scott continued. “All these cases have similar characteristics. 1) They were all attacked at or near their homes. 2) The victims were all approximately the same age. All aged between 25 and 30, except Kaylan who has just turned 31, and all human. 3) They all report seeing similar dressed guys to the ones we encountered. 4) Since making their statements to police, all of them have either taken extended vacations or disappeared without leaving contact details or telling family. All that is except Kaylan, we know were she is and we now know she’s a mutant.”

“So what about these missing people?” Ro asked.

“That’s the next thing I’m going to look at. We need to get hold of police reports and evidence.” Scott replied. “Bobby and Marie, you could help me with that.” The two youngsters nodded.

“Vat about zer medical records?” Kurt quietly added.

“I’ll take a look at those,” Jean responded, “I should be able to get access to the national archive, see what I can pull out before I leave”.

“I’ll assist you Jean” Ro offered. “Then Kurt and I can search for further information”.

“Well looks like ya all got it under control, no need f’ me t’ hang around.” Logan announced, pushing himself up out of his chair.

“Logan!” Charles called after him. “There **is** something for you to do”.

Logan hovered halfway out of his chair. “Like what,... watch the kids?” he quipped.

Charles ignored him. “Check out the other attack locations in the city; see if you can find anything that the police missed.”

Logan nodded. It was all the incentive he needed. “*Few hours outta this place will suit me fine.*” he thought.

“Right well we all have things to do.” Charles addressed them, his spirits rising a little from the gloom. “Please keep one-another informed of progress. We will meet at dinner before Jean leaves for Scotland, thank you all.” He smiled at the assembled team.

Conversations about the present crisis broke the silence of the conference room as the team members heading off to carry out their appointed tasks.

~ Jean, may I speak with you ~ the voice of Xavier echoed in her mind and Jean turned from her conversation with Scott.

“What’s wrong?” Scott asked.

“Nothing, just the professor wants me...I have to go...see you later for dinner?” Jean smiled at him.

“Yeah sure.” He kissed her softly on the cheek and headed for the door.

Jean wandered around the table, to where Charles waited. “Do you think you could spare some time to discuss a few things?”

“Yes of course”.

They headed back up to the professor’s office. Jean made herself comfortable on the sofa and waited for Xavier to begin. Wheeling himself behind his desk, Charles sat in contemplation, staring out of the window into the gardens beyond.

“Jean, I have to contact Lewis Williams” he shook his head. “I am having difficulty finding the right words to tell him that not only is his daughter a mutant but that she has been violated”.

Jean thought on Xavier’s predicament for a moment, “Maybe it would be better if you invited him here. Show him the school and let him meet the pupils, I’m sure it will ease the situation.”

“Yes Jean that may be the best option. I still can’t believe he was not aware of her condition and if he did know, why he would not confide in me. I have known his family for many years; he knew he could trust me.” He turned to face her. “Maybe that’s why after his wife Jennifer’s death, he sent Kaylan away and why we lost touch...oh this is all speculation!. I need hard facts and he is the only one who can give them to me”.

Jean could sense the feeling of betrayal Charles felt as he thought about the old friend who only a few days before had called him for help to protect his daughter. She hoped in her heart-of-hearts Charles was right, and that Williams didn’t know of his Kaylan’s situation, but it also seemed completely plausible that a high-powered businessman such as Lewis Williams could disguise his own daughter’s mutancy, after all it only took money – Jason Stryker was living proof of that.

“I’ll invite him here tomorrow; I’m sure after Kaylan’s rescue he’ll be happy to oblige.” Charles added. “Thank you for your patience and efforts Jean.”

“Now you know that’s not necessary, Charles”. She smiled coyly, rising from the chair. “I’ll head off and pack and then help Ro, see you at dinner.”

“Bye my dear.” he said as he turned back towards the window to contemplate the impending reunion.

Chapter 7: Admissions & Omissions

“Good-night Mr. Williams.”

“Good-night Scott, and thank you for the tour, it has been most enlightening.”

“My pleasure. ‘Night professor’.” Scott nodded and headed for the door.

“Good-night Scott, and thank you for taking the time to show Lewis around. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

The heavy oak door closed with a solid thud as Charles made his way across the study to the sideboard that held a collection of crystal-cut decanters and spirit glasses.

“Whisky Lewis?”

“Yes please, that would be nice.” Lewis Williams made himself comfortable in the large leather sofa. His mind was filled with the thoughts of what he had seen that evening in the ‘School for Gifted Children’. Never in his wildest dreams had he imagined such a place existed and that his old friend, Charles Xavier had accomplished his long-time goal of helping young mutant children. It also amazed him that Charles had managed to keep such a marvellous place hidden from the public gaze for so long. But his admiration and awe were gradually extinguished as the spectre of long-suppressed

memories passed over his mind. Charles joined him, handing him his drink and positioning himself opposite. Lewis smiled, trying to regain his composure pushing the memories back into a dark corner.

“You truly have achieved miracles here Charles.” Williams began.

“Thank you Lewis, it has taken many years but I think we now have a wonderful school and I am very proud of my students.” Xavier beamed with an inner light at the thought of his ‘special’ family.

“You know, I cannot thank you enough for what you have done for my daughter. I spoke to her on the phone last night from her Aunt's" Lewis said, "She didn't say much, but then she never does.” he muttered. "She spoke highly of you Charles, but then you did always have a closer bond with her that she ever did with me." A look of dejection briefly passed over Williams' face at the thought of his partial estrangement from his only child.

Charles felt more than a little embarrassed, but knew to some extent it was true. After Jennifer's death, Lewis had thrown himself physically and mentally into his work, spending almost every waking moment caught up in some work related activity, board meetings or jetting off to some distant country to arrange take-overs. He virtually lived in his office; not wanting to return to the place that held so many memories of his dead wife. Kaylan had been left alone in the family's town house, with only a nanny and house staff for company; too young to understand grief, but old enough to feel rejection.

Charles, understanding the sense of abandonment the loss of a parent could bring and seeing Lewis lock himself away in his work, had taken up the task of helping the 6 year old through this traumatic period of her life; easing her mind with gentle thoughts and feelings. It was then, without notice or explanation that he had arrived at the house one afternoon to be told by the house-keeper that Kaylan and her nanny had been sent to Switzerland. She was to be taught at a prep school for girls, where she remained until returning home at the age of 19.

Charles never went back to the house after that day. He had hoped for a long time that Lewis would contact him to explain, but the call never came. He had often thought of them both, but only in fleeting moments. His only knowledge of the family coming from newspapers or the frequent TV reports of the growing Williams business empire. He had resigned their friendship to a distant memory and moved on with his own career.

Months turned into years, years to decades and now here they sat once more; the two middle-aged men indelibly linked by the love for one child. The night that Lewis had called him had been a surprise to Charles; it would have been all too easy to turn away from the man who had shunned him all those years ago, but he could not. Kaylan still meant a great deal to him and now he had to face one of the most daunting tasks of his life.

“But we both know showing me this wonderful place was not the real reason for inviting me here tonight, was it Charles?” Williams added sombrely, shaking Charles’ from his thoughts.

Charles shook his head. *"Now comes the difficult part"*. “No Lewis it was not.” He sighed. “First of all I have to ask you, do you know of any one who would wish to harm you or your family?”

“HA!” Lewis let out a sharp laugh. “Of course there are Charles! I’m a business man, I didn’t get where I am to day by pussy-footing around. I take over businesses, there are bound to be a few depressed managers and disgruntled employees wanting my head on a plate.”

“But can you think of any recently that would have cause someone to attack you through Kaylan?”

“No” his brow creasing in thought, “No, I don’t think so, but my most recent acquisition in Japan was a bit messy; managing director committed suicide, threw himself under the Bullet Train in Tokyo, honour and all that.” Lewis took a sip of his whiskey. “Bad affair, but we arranged to take care of the family, I’m not completely heartless Charles, no-matter how the press paint me.”

Charles knew this to be true; Lewis’ hard-nosed exterior and focused business mind; a result of driving himself to the limit for years, concealed the genuinely caring spirit of the man who’s donations to charity and investment in health-care where equally renowned.

“So you don’t think anyone in the business world arranged this attack?”

“No, definitely not.”

But Charles could sense there was more to Lewis’ adamant tone; there was something he wasn’t telling. A feeling of guilt and betrayal emanated from Charles’ guest, but he proceeded with his questions.

“Lewis I think there maybe more to this attack than there seems at first glance.” Charles continued, “One question I want to ask you, what made you suspect the men following Kaylan were mutants?”

Lewis swallowed hard; the spectre rose again. “I...err...I...don’t know, I...err...just kind of guessed from Kaylan’s description, when she called me.”

Charles’ eyes narrowed, there was definitely something not right here; Lewis was suddenly caught off guard by his question.

“So it was just a guess, nothing more?” he pressed.

“Yes, they sounded strange and shifty and I just....” He trailed off, trying to push aside the long distant memory with a fabrication. Charles winced at his friends comment. “I’m sorry Charles, that’s a presumption I shouldn’t have made.”

“No Lewis you shouldn’t, its assumptions like that which have resulted in the human-mutant disturbances we see on the news. I thought you would have known better.”

Lewis hung his head at Charles scathing remark. It was true, he had grown up with Charles and accepted his mutant powers from an early age, but as the years passed and their separation grew, he too had been coloured by biased news reports and his own painful experience.

“Well it turns out your assumption was correct.” Charles went on, not wishing to make Lewis feel awkward. “The two men who attacked Kaylan were indeed mutants, and powerful ones at that. They escaped before my team had time to apprehend them, but we have found evidence of their involvement in other attacks. Kaylan was very lucky the x-men were there. You know she was very brave. She managed to lock herself in the bathroom, that’s where my team found her.”

“She always was fast on her feet.” Lewis replied with a chuckle.

Charles sat back in his wheelchair, the words to tell Lewis about his daughter forming in his mind. He took a sip of brandy, taking solace in it’s warmth as it trickled down his throat.

“There is more, something I have not even discussed with Kaylan yet. I needed to speak with you first. One of the team noticed something about her, something unusual.”

“Like what?” Lewis leaned forward in concern.

“Her scent.”

“Her scent? What you mean like her perfume?”

“No, her body scent...her pheromones. He has the ability to detect them.”

“What is he, a dog!”

“No, but he does have the senses that many animals possess; one of them being smell. He was overwhelmed by Kaylan’s scent. So much so, it concerned me greatly and I had Jean Grey our biologist, run a few tests on her.”

“What kind of tests?” Flashes of Kaylan as a young child; her big tear-filled blue eyes gazing at him through the window of an isolation ward leapt into his mind and his heart pounded.

“Blood test, Lewis. We analysed her blood.”

“And what did you find?” he snapped.

That sense of guilt hovered around Charles again. “There is no easy way to tell you this Lewis so I’ll be blunt. Kaylan is a mutant.”

“WHAT!! NO...that can’t be...your wrong!!” The genie was finally out of the bottle. The dam of denial finally burst with the weight of truth. Lewis tried to feign surprise.

“No Lewis,” Charles said calmly, “I’m afraid I’m not, she is a mutant.”

Lewis slumped back into the chair, a myriad emotions playing out on his face; anger, fear, hurt.

“There is more...”

“Oh god what else?” he whispered but he knew what was coming.

“The gene which gives her her mutancy has been suppressed.”

“What the hell does that mean?” Lewis raised his voice becoming increasingly more distressed but not, as Charles thought, by what he was hearing; he already knew.

“It means that at some point, possibly when she was very young, someone or thing physically manipulated her DNA to suppress the mutant gene, stopping her from developing her mutant powers, I’m sorry Lewis. Has she ever had any medical procedures or tests done?”

“No, no I’m sure.” He snapped his eyes darting from side to side as he thought of his daughter and her long concealed passed.

Charles felt the sense of discomfort and fears grow stronger in his guest. He was sure he was hiding something. It would be so easy to probe Lewis’ mind; to glean what information he required. But,

Charles Xavier could not pillaged another's thoughts, not without consent, it was against everything he stood for. If Lewis had something to share, he hoped his friend would come to him willingly.

He sat in silence for a moment, watching the expression on his friend's face. He had seen that expression so many times before; that look of fear and sheer incredulity when a parent discovers their child would never grow up the way they had always dreamed. Charles knew all he could do was be there for him.

Lewis took a gulp of whiskey. The secret that he had kept hidden in the depths of his mind had finally come back to haunt him. His mind whirled; thoughts chaotically cascading one after the other. He felt sick. His heart raced. What had he done...

15 years previous - Kaylan at 21 years old.

“WHAT IN GOD’S NAME DO YOU THINK YOUR DOING!” The door to the bio-containment lab crashed open, setting off the gas-release alarm.

Two figures in haz-mat suits spun round in shocked surprise.

“LEWIS, WHAT THE HELL! You shouldn’t been in here!” The muffled voice of Korrigan Tweed exclaimed from inside one of the suits.

“LIKE HELL I SHOULD!” Lewis bellowed.

Tweed, moving as fast as he could in the restrictive suit, hustled Lewis Williams through the door of the laboratory closing the containment door behind him. Several white coated figures were already rushing about the room in an attempted to clear the facility of any contamination Lewis had caused.

“DON’T YOU TOUCH ME YOU SON-OF-A-BITCH” William’s screamed pushing Tweed away from him.

“Lewis, what the hell’s wrong with you?” Tweed shouted, pulling off the hood and unzipping the suit, “Have you gone mad? We could have been working on a virus or something, you could have been contaminated.”

“Yes but your not working on viruses are you Korry? I know exactly what you’re up to!”

“I beg your pardon Lewis, what are you talking about?”

“Don’t play the innocent with me. Your research Korrigan, I know what your doing and it’s not gene therapy.”

Tweed’s blood froze, “*What does he know?*” He threw the suit onto a nearby chair and grabbing Lewis by the arm, dragged him into an adjoining lab. Trying to remain calm, Tweed closed the door behind him. As Lewis paced like a caged tiger between the benches. “Now what’s all this about Lewis? Why on earth have you come bursting in like this?”

“You know why, I trusted you Korry, I respected you and you lied to me.” Lewis’ voice shock with penned up anger.

“Lied, about what?” Tweed asked smoothly, brushing his hair back from his sweat-flecked forehead.

“About your research, its nothing to do genetic illnesses is it? You’re doing **mutant** research!”

The colour drained from Tweed’s face, but he kept the calm mask in place.

“No, no” He laughed, “we’re doing nothing of the sort, who on earth gave you that idea?”

“We had an appointment remember, you were late. I waited in your office, you didn’t even have the decency to hide them, I saw the documents on your desk. Government work!, x-gene project! YOU’RE A LIAR.” Lewis yelled, slamming his fist into the lab counter.

“You were snooping? How **dare** you look through my private papers? I could have you arrested.” Tweed screamed back.

“No Korry I wasn’t snooping, I have every right, and I don’t have to remind you who paid for this facility.” Williams snarled, fixing him with an angry stare. “I’ve given you every thing you’ve ever asked for, without question, and I can damn well take it away.”

“Don’t you dare threaten me; I’ve made you a tidy penny out of this research, your pharmaceutical companies would have gone bust years ago without the drugs I’ve developed.”

“But it’s the research you’re **not** doing for me that I’m talking about.” Lewis growled “Exactly who are you working for?”

“I’ve told you I’m not working for any one.” Tweed tried to continue the charm offensive.

“Bull-shit!! I have friends in high places Tweed, I can find out you know.”

Tweed’s face broke into a twisted smile “Ha! Do you honestly think those kind of people are traceable.”

Williams spun on his heels to face his so-called friend. “So you admit it then, you are doing other work?”

There was no point continuing the pretence any longer, “Yes, yes, I am, I’m sorry you’ve had to find out this way Lewis, but like I give a damn what you think.” Tweed spat “The pittance of a research grant your organisation gives me is pathetic compared to the x-gene project, I don’t know how I’ve managed to stick it out here all this time.”

“Then why don’t you get out, and take your filthy covert research with you.” Lewis shouted.

“Oh no, it doesn’t work like that Lewis.” Tweed sneered “We need your facility as a cover, we’re in the public gaze and your up to your neck in it and there’s no getting out.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Lewis frowned.

“Exactly that, just what do you think the press will say when they find out the multi-million dollar business man Lewis Williams CEO; defender of the pharmaceutical industry, donator of hospitals and clinics, is found to be carrying out secret mutant research? They would have a field-day”

“Are you threatening to blackmail me Korry? Because if you are my lawyers will tear you apart.”

“Do you think I’d be stupid enough not to have a contingency plan Lewis? Your name is on numerous documents and your links to this place are public knowledge. It is you who wouldn’t stand a chance in court.”

“Are you alright Dr Tweed.?” The pale grey face of a young man appeared around the door.

“Yes, Mist, I’m fine there’s no problem here.”

“Alright sir, but we’ll be just outside if you need us.”

Lewis, stalled by the intrusion turned away, considering Tweed’s threat. “Then I’ll close the place down Korry, sell it off.”

“And just who will carry out your precious gene therapy then?”

“I’ll find some one” Lewis answered in a low voice.

“You’ll find no-one. No-one with the experience I have. Just who do you think **fixed** little Kaylan, Lewis? Poor little thing, full of mutant DNA; a sick infection that her wonderful father bestowed on her! Who can save her from a life of shame? Oh, that’s right, uncle Korrigan. You weren’t complaining when I cured her were you?”

“You? You did what? A mutant, no, you monster! What did you do to her?” Lewis felt his heart miss a beat. The blood rushed to his head. What awful game was Tweed playing?

“I cleansed her, stopped her from becoming a freak.”

“But you said, you said she had her mother’s illness.”

“Yes, yes, her mother, how sad, dead before her time. Well at least she didn’t suffer, well not too much. It took a few painful procedures though; she was a real screamer. Thanks to her and her genetic donation, I developed the cure-all, the holy grail of DNA manipulation, X-block, a way to freeze mutant genes.”

“**YOU EVIL BASTARD!** My wife, my daughter, I’m gonna **kill** you!” The anger and shock at Tweed’s flagrant admission drove Lewis over the edge. He flew at Tweed grabbing him by the throat, trying to choke the life from him. Tweed yelped, his cry for help gagged by Williams’ fingers pressing on his windpipe.

Everything he had believed-in for over fifteen years was a lie. His wife’s death; it could have been prevented. Kaylan’s hereditary illness; didn’t exist. Tweed had used them both as guinea-pigs for some perverted power trip. Their entire friendship was built on deceit and subterfuge and he no longer knew the man he held by the neck. Tweed, surprised by Lewis’ un-characteristic aggression struggled in his grip trying to free himself.

The sudden flare of bright white light stunned the two battling men for a moment and Lewis released his grip slightly as he was temporarily blinded by the flash. He heard the clatter of feet and loud voices and then, without understanding what was happening found himself lifted off his feet as a searing pain hit his chest. He was flung into the air, propelled across the lab counter, sending flasks

and Petri dishes smashing to the floor. The wall stopped him with a bone crunching thud as his body smacked into it. Sliding into a pile on the floor, his vision filled with silver sparks and he struggled to breath.

“Thank you Thor.” He heard Tweed’s whispered voice and tried to focus his swimming vision across the room. A young blonde-haired man stood next to the doctor staring at Lewis with large green eyes; a strange yellow haze hovering around his tightly clenched fists. The grey-complexioned man stood with his hand on Tweed’s back and arm, helping him over to where Lewis lay.

“You stupid old fool!” Tweed spat hoarsely as he rubbed his neck. “Did you think I would carry out this work without some kind of protection?”

Lewis tried to push himself up but the pain in his chest made him gag and fall back. He lay there looking up at the gloating Tweed.

“Don’t you ever challenge me again Lewis. It is **I** who runs this place not you and there is nothing **you** can do about. If you try to go to the press or the police you will get more of the same and next time I’ll let Thor finish you off.”

“I don’t care what happens to me Korrigan!” Lewis’ voice trembled.

“Oh, no? Well what about your dear little Kaylan? I’m sure Mist here would love to spend a little time with her.”

“You wouldn’t!” he exclaimed.

“Try me.”

Tweed had called his bluff. He could not risk Kaylan being drawn into Tweed’s sordid research again and the thought of one of those thugs having their way with her was beyond thinking about. He slumped to the floor physically and mentally drained. Tweed smiled at Lewis’ obvious surrender.

“Alright Korrigan, you win.” He mumbled, wincing with pain. “Stay away from Kaylan! I’ll do as you ask; I’ll keep my mouth shut, but only for my daughter’s sake.”

“Good, I’m glad you see the sense of it all Lewis.”

“But what will happen to her?”

“Oh nothing, she’s fine. I told you I fixed her. Her mutant gene will never resurface, it’s held in suspension, she’ll be normal.”

Lewis closed his eyes as tears filled them. He sighed with relief; as long as she was safe nothing else mattered. He would keep his mouth shut; try to forget what Tweed had revealed.

“I want you out of here; I don’t care what your sponsors say. You have a week.” Lewis growled through gritted teeth.

“Now, now Lewis, no ultimatums.” Tweed sneered, “But yes, I think your right, its time we moved on from this little hovel. I’ll grant you that one wish. But don’t think your getting off the hook so easy.

They'll be watching you." He waved a hand in the direction of the two young men. "And if they see anything they don't like..." Tweed trailed off; there was no need to finish the threat.

"Lewis, are you alright?" Charles' voice snapped him back into the present. His hands were clammy around the whiskey glass and he could feel beads of sweat on his forehead.

"Yes" he whispered and coughed to clear his throat. "Yes, I'm fine. Just a bit surprised. I think I need to go home and think about all you've said." He tried to smile.

"Yes" Charles added, "You're probably right." Placing the brandy glass on the coffee table he turned and wheeled towards the door. Lewis pushed himself from the sofa and followed.

"Thank you for a lovely evening Charles. It was good to see you again."

"I'm sorry it was under such circumstances though Lewis."

Lewis only nodded as he opened the door. "Don't worry Charles, I'll show myself out. The car is waiting out front."

The ride home seemed to take an eternity; Lewis' mind wandered through that awful day over and over again. But as the car turned into the drive of his town house he was resolved to put right the mistake he had made all those years ago.

Chapter 8: Beer & Women

Why am I sittin' 'ere night after night watchin' over ya? I got other stuff ta do ya know. All this effort is drivin' me crazy. Th' effort it takes not t' just come over there an' drag ya back t' the mansion. Woman yer a distraction I don't want, but I'd never forgive m'self if som'ing happened t' ya.

"Beer!" It wasn't a question, it was a command.

The kitchen was quiet for early evening - most of the children were either at prep or in the games-room. Logan and Scott were back on speaking terms, just. The week after Kaylan left had been busy, Scott and Logan had been forced, due to nature of the present situation, to work closely together, Logan collecting info from attack sites and Scott correlating the data. Logan always found re-con a necessary pain in the ass, but detailed planning was vital if they were to discover who or what was behind Kaylan's frozen x-gene. The two worked quietly and efficiently, only speaking when completely necessary. No mention was made of the fight, but Logan occasionally caught Scott glaring at him and absently rubbing his neck. Now, with the brief opportunity of a break, the two men found themselves together in the kitchen on the hunt for food - and in Logan's case, drink.

"Ok, but just the one." Scott replied.

'Tsst...tsst'. Logan popped the tops off two bottles and handed one to Scott, taking a stool at the breakfast counter. He checked his watch; two hours and he'd be gone. The soft hairs on the back of his neck prickled at the thought.

"Out again tonight?" Scott asked, noticing the furtive glance.

"Yup." was all Logan answered as he put the bottle to his lips. *"I can feel a lecture comin' on, go ahead Cyke, ge'd it off ya chest."*

"You know you can't keep swapping your night-shifts with other members of the team, it isn't fair...and besides they're going to get sick of you asking." Scott tried to sound authoritative, but he knew he was wasting his breath. Logan's irritable mood had been persistent ever since Kaylan's rescue, to the annoyance of many of the team, most of all Scott, who's patience was beginning to wearing rather thin.

"Kurt likes workin' nights." Logan responded, thinking on the little arrangement he had made with the Nightcrawler a week ago.

"Well, it's got to stop!"

Logan silently glared at the commander, taking another deep drink of beer.

"Where are you going anyway? You've been out every night for the last week." Topping the list of Scott's grievances with Logan was his recent spate of nighttime sorties.

"Wouldn't ya like t' know one-eye." "Who are ya, m' Mom?" Logan growled.

Scott wasn't sure which way Logan might jump in his present frame of mind and he was too tired for an argument. "Whatever it is, I hope it's not trouble." He added.

"It ain't Cyke, well not yet it ain't." "Maybe you shudda kept that comment t' ya self...Bub." Logan got up for another beer, 'Tsst...tsst'. Dropping a second bottle in front of Scott, he grabbed a jumbo bag of potato chips out of one of the cupboards and threw them onto the counter.

"How do you do it Logan?" Scott asked as he opened the bag. The question came out of the blue and Logan had to choke back a mouthful of beer.

"Do what?" he coughed.

"Just come and go as you please." Scott questioned.

"It don't take much talent...ya just open th' door..." Logan replied sarcastically, Scott fixed him with a side-ways glance. "sides I got Mother Summers t' keep an eye on me...right?" He finished, raising a brow and smiling.

"Everything's simple for you isn't it? You think everything is black or white don't you?" He had wanted to ask Logan that very question since his arrival at the mansion. Scott took his role within the team very seriously and he found it hard to accept Logan's nonchalant attitude to his position within the team.

“Ya think so huh?” *“try bein’ driven nuts, that ain’t simple.”* Logan reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a cigar, biting off the end, he lit it and took a few drags. Clouds of smoke billowed across the kitchen causing Scott to cough. “Ya don’t know shit about me kid”.

“How can you walk in and out of peoples lives and not think it effects them?” Scott thought back to the how Rogue had coped in the weeks after Logan left for Alkali Lake. She had spent many hours with Ro and Jean trying to overcome the feelings of rejection from the man who had saved her life, twice.

“I do what I thinks right...ya don’t like it...tough.” Logan leaned back in his stool, “It don’t pay t’ have ties Scott, one day ya’ll learn that.” He answered wistfully, reflecting on long painful memories. *“They can take it away so easy.”*

Scott shook his head. “That doesn’t give you the right to do as you please. You have to consider the team...”

“Ya wanna keep askin’ them question’s Mama, or ya gonna end the lecture right now? I said I’d have a beer with ya, I didn’t say I needed yer agony-aunt advice.” Logan growled as he roughly pushed the stool back from the counter. Grabbing the bottle he headed for the door; he’d had his fill of Scott for one evening.

“So, is it a woman?” Scott asked as Logan headed toward the door. The way he’d been acting all week, Scott presumed it was either that or he’d lost a fight with someone.

“What!” Logan sounded more shocked at the question than he intended. His internal defenses snapping into place. Taking a swig from the bottle to hide his surprise he turned to face the question.

Scott pressed, feeling he’d hit a nerve, “Who you’ve been seeing all this time...is it a woman?”

Logan glanced at Scott, an eyebrow raised. “Why? Would it make ya feel better if it was?” His bravado belied his thoughts. *“Kaylan”*.

Scott’s thoughts turned to Jean. She had been a contentious issue between them ever since Logan’s arrival and it always got Scott’s defenses up. “If it meant you stopped hassling Jean, then yeah it would make me feel better.”

“This don’t concern Jeanie, one-eye, though it’d make it easier if it did, damn it!” Logan thought

“You still haven’t answered my question?” Scott said.

“No, th’ answer’s no, I ain’t seeing no woman”. Logan lied. The thought of Kaylan filled his mind and he felt a gentle heat rise in his cheeks. He put the cigar to his lips, took a long drag and blew out the smoke to hide his discomfort. *“Jeeze, I can smell ‘er right now.”* “But th’ night’s young...” he sneered.

“Ya see! That’s what I mean... nothing touches you does it?” Scott exclaimed.

Logan had to laugh at the up-tight commander, “Ya worry too much ‘bout other peoples stuff.” He chuckled, returning to sit back down at the counter.

“Do you want another?” Scott asked as he got up for another beer. ‘tsst...tsst’.

Logan smiled, “Ya know, ya can rely on me Kid, I ain’t goin’ no-where.”

“Because you got something going on, right?”

“Right.”

There was long pause as Scott sat back down at the counter and grabbed a handful of chips, considering his next question.

“So if it were a woman, hypothetically speaking, what would she have that would keep you here?”

“Ya gotta thing ‘bout chicks tonight haven’t ya Scott...Jeanie not puttin’ out?” Logan laughed.

Scott fixed him with a sideways glance, intent on not rising to Logan’s wisecrack.

Logan considered Scott’s question, images of old encounters flickered in his mind. “What would a woman have?” He mused. “Oh, I dunno ...er...Green eyes, short red hair...nice as...”

“Logan! For fucks sake...” Scott shouted slamming down his beer bottle and sending a wave of froth across the counter.

“Hey, Hey! Scotty...I’m just yankin’ ya chain, kid, com’ on...don’t take it so serious.” Scott shrugged and reached across to the sink for a cloth to wipe the beer up.

“A woman...to keep me here...err well.” Logan thought about his life or what he could remember of it; years on the road moving from place to place, the dives he’d lived in and the women he’d known. He tried not to think of Kaylan, but the image of her eyes and soft pale skin filled his mind, along with an overwhelming need to see her, and an anger at his weakness for being so needy.

“I dunno,” he said, feeling the conversation was getting way to close to home. The blue-eyed mutant woman, un-aware of her true nature, filled his mind. Their first encounter had left Logan almost ready to kill; her unrestrained scent driving him crazy. But since her departure from the mansion, the more he tried to get her out of his mind the more he needed to see her. The powerful feelings he was having for this woman disturbed him and excited him at the same time. “*She needs my protection, she’s ain’t safe on her own. Them mongrels could be back anytime, that’s what’s keepin’ me here.*”

“Come on Logan.” Scott laughed regaining his confidence at Logan’s discomfort.

The image of her played through his mind. “Well, I guess she would have to be good lookin’.”

“That goes without sayin’.”

“Slim...but shapely,” he added. “Ya know wha’d I mean?”

“Yep” Scott nodded.

Putting down the bottle on the counter he glanced at his watch again, knowing his nightly foray across town was imminent.

“You gotta go?” Scott questioned, spotting Logan’s second look.

Logan shifted in he chair, “Yeah kid, ya still gotta problem wi’ that?”

“I guess I don’t have a choice do I?” Scott laughed.

“Guess not.” Logan growled.

“Well then, take your phone!” Scott added.

“Yeah...Mom.” Logan raised a hand in answer as he passed through the kitchen door, the pleasant ache of anticipation filling his body.

Them moves o’ Scott’s ain’t gonna do jack if them guys come back. Don’t ya know how unsafe it is fer ya? Damn it Logan, a beer, a shower and the TV, that’s what ya should be doin’. But no, ya gotta go bein the protector, the tough guy. Jeeze ya can be an ass some-times. Its fer ‘er own good, just keep tellin’ ya self...who ‘m I kiddin’ ...I’m fallin’ fer her.

Chapter 9: Latent-X

Jean sank back into the leather of the plane seat.

“Can I get you anything Ms. Gray?” The fixed smile of a smartly dressed flight attendant stared down at her.

“No, thank you, not just at the moment.”

The attendant smiled again and headed for the back of the plane. Jean turned to look down at the seat next to her. Placed carefully on it sat a large black flight-case. On its side in bold black print with bright yellow background, a Biohazard sticker told of its content. After several telephone conversations between Hank and HM Customs, the airport authorities had given permission for Jean to fly the case back to Westchester without the long-winded checks usually reserved for cases of this nature. She smiled to herself. “*I don’t know how he does it? He’s such a charmer.*”

As the engines of the small private jet rumbled into life, Jean looked out of the window across the tarmac to the sprawling airport concourse. There at the far end of the terminal building a lone figure stood; wrapped in a long trench coat, scarf and a wide-brimmed trilby pulled down over his face. Hank had risked much to accompany her to the airport, but he would not listen to her gentle protests as he helped her onto the ferry at the islands private jetty.

~ Thank-you Hank, I’ll call you when I’m home ~

She watched as Hank raised a hand to the glass in acknowledgement of her telepathic message. As the plane taxied for the runway, Jean strapped herself in and rested the back of her head against the seat. She ran her hand up onto the top of the case, satisfied that her busy week had been a success.

“Fascinating, undeniably fascinating.” Hank pulled off his half-moon spectacles, unconsciously placing the end of one of the arms in his mouth and biting down; preoccupied by what he had seen through the microscope.

“Well, my dear I am quite frankly confounded by this particular conundrum you have presented me with.” He announced, turning to Jean who sat next to him at the counter in the vast laboratory. “But I am most confident that we will be able to unlock the secrets of this enigma without any great labours.” He added smiling, revealing a row of sharp white teeth.

Her journey to the Centre for Genetic Research on Muire island had been uneventful; flying into Glasgow international airport, and then from there by car to Oban where she caught the private island ferry. She was fatigued from the hours of travelling, but insisted on setting aside pleasantries with her old friend to show him the sample of Kaylan’s blood. The complexities of the frozen x-gene had piqued Hank’s insatiable appetite for all things of a biological nature and already his mind was working on solving the problem.

“Well Jean, all the samples are ready for testing, but cometh the hour cometh the man as they say; I’m afraid I can feel the hunger pangs rising, which can only mean that it is time we took some repast. We will have much to do tomorrow and you require rest. Come, I am sure Moira will be waiting with our meal and she is most eager to show you your room.” With that, the large blue-furred man hopped off the stool, holding out his arm to show Jean the way.

As they walked together down the myriad, corridors Jean couldn’t help but grasp the big man’s arm and give it a squeeze. “It’s good to be with you again Hank,” She smiled. “Even if it is under such circumstances.”

“The feeling is mutual Jean, I have missed the mansion and the X-Men, but definitely you most of all.” He grinned.

“Oh, you! Flattery will get you every-where” she giggled. “But don’t tell Scott that.”

“I most certainly will not.” He added, feigning a serious tone.

The next day found the pair busy in the laboratory, using Jean’s earlier analysis, the two set about separating samples of the enzyme from Kaylan’s blood.

“Jean take a look at this!” Hank yelled, eyes fixed to the microscope as he flailed his hand wildly in Jean’s direction.

Jean walked over to where he sat at the counter and peered into the eyepiece at the sample. Under the extreme focus of the lens, Jean could see a cluster of protein molecules that made up the enzyme.

“We need to assess its reaction to genetic material.” Hank announced. “Jean, pass me that syringe.” Jean unwrapped the sterile item from its packaging and handed it to Hank. Without a thought, he deftly pushed the needle into his forearm and withdrew a sample of blood. “Reintroduce it into the enzyme.” He urged as he rubbed the spot on his arm. Jean’s steady hand lowered the syringe over the

Petri-dish and dropped a single drop of blood onto the clear liquid. Hank fixed his eyes to the microscope again. “Ha-Ha!” He exclaimed. “Just as I thought, look and see.”

Jean looked down at the sample, there in the dish the clusters of proteins began to wiggle furiously, attaching themselves to the blood cells and passing through the cell walls. Within seconds, the cells were coated with the quivering proteins.

“But that can’t be right Hank, proteins don’t ‘move’ on their own, they need to be mixed into the blood using a centrifuge or the blood-stream.”

“Correct they don’t move on their own, but I don’t think we are dealing with any ordinary cluster of proteins. This enzyme surrounding Kaylan’s gene, seems to be ‘aware’.”

“That’s not possible!”

“Well I believe someone has made it possible.”

The two geneticists stared at each other; the enormity of what they had discovered gradually sinking in.

“Let us try the same procedure with non-mutant blood.” Hank fetched a small vial from the fridge. “This is a sample from one of our human researchers, I am sure he will appreciate the irony of being used as a guinea-pig.” Hank replaced the Petri-dish and Jean again dropped a sample of the human blood onto it.

“Nothing.” Hank exclaimed. This time the enzyme did not react, floating past the blood cells introduced into its solution. “This enzyme has certainly been engineered to recognise only the blood of mutants. It is attracted by the presence of the x-gene; passing into the blood cells and inhibiting the gene, thus stopping the individual from developing their mutant abilities. It does not require the gene to be active, merely present. This is indeed an incredible piece of genetic engineering.”

“I agree Hank, it is quite amazing, but terrible non-the-less.” Jean added.

Hank began to make notes on their findings, “We have much to do Jean,” he said excitedly, “We have to find a way to detach this enzyme permanently.”

“I think I have it!” Hank exclaimed.

Several days had passed since their first breakthrough. The two were pushed to the limits of their knowledge, but Hank’s desire to find a solution drove the pair on. Hour after hour they toiled, only stopping briefly to eat the meals that Moira brought down to the lab; insisting that they needed to keep up their strength, tutting and shaking her head as she left them. “It’ll nay b’ good fer tha’ young lassie ye trin’ t’ hilp if ye both t’ tired t’ werk!”

“I think I have finally got the balance just right.” He told Jean as she approached the bench. “Look, if I introduce some of the enzyme to this blood sample, and give it a moment, now, when I add the latest batch of the serum.”

Jean fixed her weary eyes to the microscope and watched as Hank dropped in a small amount of the solution they had been working on. As she watched, the serum swirled round the blood cells. Adjusting the resolution of the lens, she could see the protein molecules clearly. “Nothing’s happening Hank.” She muttered, disheartened by yet another failure.

“Just wait a moment more, my dear.” He said gently.

“Ooh!” she exclaimed. As she watched, one of the protein clusters popped open, pouring its content into the solution; then another and another, until the whole eyepiece filled with the bursting enzymes, as the serum continued to mix with the sample in the dish.

“Well!” Hank questioned, a smile spreading across his face.

“I think you’ve cracked it Hank.” Jean answered as she rose from the microscope.

“Indeed!” Hank added excitedly. “A few more tests and I think were maybe ready.”

The added boost this new discovery brought pushed them on with renewed vigor. By supertime, six small vials of clear liquid sat out on the bench of the lab, the innocuous substance containing the hope of freedom from the noisome x-gene blocker. All was quiet, as the pair surveyed their achievement.

“I christen thee Latent-X!” Hank announced, raising an empty test-tube to the new serum in salute. “Well Jean, our work here is done.” Hank smiled, patting his friend on the shoulder.

Jean sighed, “Thank you so much Hank.” She said, turning towards him.

“On the contrary Jean, no thanks necessary, I must thank **you** for allowing me to work on such a wonderful problem. I am most pleased by the results of our collaboration and hope that it will benefit Xavier’s god-daughter and hopefully others.”

“I think this calls for a celebration, don’t you?” She added.

“Yes indeed my dear, I will inform the rest of the staff of our discoveries and arrange a little soiree for this evening. You go freshen up, I will finish off here.”

Giving him a brief hug and a peck on the cheek, Jean headed back to her room to change for evening gathering in the laboratory refectory. After a brief phone call to Scott and then to the Professor she wandered down to the dining hall. Having found her way through the congratulating crowd, Jean finally found Hank.

“Ah, my dearest Jean.” Too excited to hold himself, Hank took her arm and guided her through the throng, to the side of the room. “I have something else for you to take on your return journey.” He pulled from his jacket pocket an envelope. “I had one of the other researchers work on Kaylan’s DNA earlier in the week...”

Jean gave him a smirk. “Can’t stop yourself can you Hank?” She jokingly chided.

He shook his head and continued. “With your earlier data and the clean sample of Kaylan’s blood He identified her mutancy type. Its all in there.” He tapped the envelope Jean now held. “I thought Charles would want to know.”

Jean smiled and kissed his cheek, "Thank you Hank, I'm sure he will, if we're going to treat her we will need to know."

"Ms. Gray?" The voice of the flight attendant woke Jean from her sleep. "Ms. Gray, would you like your dinner now?" The uniformed woman asked.

"Yes please." Jean answered through a yawn. She looked at her watch; four more hours and she would be back home. As she tucked into her evening meal she thought on what the future would hold for Xavier's god-daughter. Would she want to become like them knowing what the change would entail? If she did, how would she deal with her new-found abilities? Jean could only wonder at the daunting decision facing the woman.

The yard gate creaked open inch by inch, as Logan stealthily eased his large frame into the passageway between the house and the neighbouring hedge. It was dark, late evening with a warm breeze just lifting the leaves on the trees. Slowly closing the gate behind him he slide, back to the house wall, to the end of the passage; taking a quick glance around the corner and darting back to check all was clear. It was an automatic reaction; he'd been watching the house all day and knew it was empty. Stepping out into the yard he quickly made his way up the back steps and pulled open the porch door. He knew once inside he would not be seen. Pulling a small black zipped case from his jacket, he opened it and pulled out a fine needle lock pick. Deftly, jiggling it in the lock he listened for that satisfying click that told him he had rolled the barrels into the right place. Twisting the door handle, he slide inside the house.

He had arrived in Utah that day on his latest mission to collect evidence of possible mutant kidnappings. Storm had flown him and his bike to a discreet location some 20 miles from the house. After stashing his ride behind a dumpster two blocks away, he'd found himself a concealed position from where he could watch the property. Now as he stood in the kitchen of the empty dwelling he concentrated on his task.

There was nothing distinctive about the two-story house; brick and wood framed, two bedrooms, living room and kitchen. Logan could sense that the present occupiers had not been home in some time; The bin in the kitchen had not been emptied and old vegetable peeling had rotted, giving off a pungent smell. The house smelt musty and airless. Logan pulled a torch from his back pocket and flicked it on, his modifications to the small flashlight causing it to produced only a faint light; not much use to most people, but with his keen vision it was all Logan needed to aid his task.

Flicking the light across the room, he could discern no object out of place. After scanning the living room he headed into the hallway and up the stairs. Reaching the master bedroom, he pushed open the door.

"Hhmm," he thought at the sight that greeted him, "*this don't look like the room o' someone who just went on vacation.*"

The bed was un-made, as if someone had just got up. But it was more than that; some of the sheets were scattered over the floor, as if the person had been dragged from the bed. On the nightstand, a lamp had been knocked over and a newspaper lay crumpled at its base. Logan picked it up and read the date.

"*Three weeks old.*"

“Storm, ya readin’ me.”

“Yes Wolverine, what is your current position?” The delicate voice of the weather-witch crackled in his ear-piece.

“I’m on site, looks like we got another one. Think the guy put up a bit o’ a struggle, been gone three weeks.”

“Bring back anything you can find.”

“Will get back t’ ya. Out.”

Logan crossed the floor of the room and pulled out the case, opened it and placed it on top of the chest of draws under the window. The case was a parting gift from Jean; a small kit she had put together for him to collect samples and evidence from the sites he and Scott were investigating. Pulling out a roll of tape, he lifted a partial fingerprint from the mirror on the dressing table and with the use of tweezers he managed to find a few hairs on the pillow. “*She’s gonna have missed all the fun o’ analysing these samples when she gets back.*” He mused as he thought on Scott’s detailed, and in Logan’s eyes, painfully obsessive study of all the samples he’d brought back from various sites.

With nothing more left to do, he packed away his kit and prepared to leave. “*Another one gone an’ no way o’ getting’ em back, gotta get a break on this soon.*” As he flashed his torch around the room one last time, a dark object caught his eye. It would have been all too easy to miss had he not been standing in the right place. Just by the bed, half hidden by the scattered bed sheets was a small black lump. As he carefully pulled back the sheets, several more lumps appeared. Bending to take a closer look Logan realised that these lumps made a pattern on the floor. As he lifted the sheets and threw them onto the bed, more of the lumps appeared. These were more scattered but still recognisable as coming from the same source. As he looked, the pattern became a recognisable image. “*Foot print!*”

There on the floor was the outline of a large shoe, left in lumps of dirt. But where was the rest? Why were there no signs of it anywhere else in the house? Logan’s brow furrowed. The soil must have been wet when the person, most likely the attacker, had walked on it. Then, having dried out, the soil trapped in the tread had come loose and fallen onto the floor of the room. Logan quickly pulled out a test tube from the case and scooped up some of the dirt. Holding it up he pointed the dim beam of the torch onto it. It was a rich ruddy colour breaking up into a fine powder in the test tube. “*Hmm, definitely not local farm boys.*” He thought as he stashed the tube carefully in the case. Gathering his kit he headed out of the house, making sure he left no trace of his presence.

“Storm, get ya jet prepped darlin’, we just hit pay-dirt, I’m on ma way back.” He growled into his radio-mike as he revved the bike into life.

“Com’ on Ro, don’t keep m’ in suspense, what ya find?” Logan sat on the counter in the lab, looking down at the white hair of Ororo as she studied the soil sample under the microscope.

“Patience Logan, these things take time. I have yet to do a pH test.”

Ro had been most intrigued by Logan’s findings and had set about analysing the sample on their return to the mansion. Logan watched as she busied herself preparing the solution that would give her a

definitive answer as to where the soil came from. It had been their first major breakthrough since the start of their investigation into the disappearing people and Logan was keen to get answers, especially if it meant finding out who'd attacked Kaylan.

"Found anything Ro?" Scott questioned as he breezed into the lab.

Ororo sighed, "You are both too impatient, please give me a few moments," she asked, shaking the test tube solution in her hands. "Scott please pass me that colour chart over there".

Scott picked up the sheet that contained a blue to red scale. Ro carefully placed the tube into a rack and turned to face the two men. "Now we wait." She announced.

It was impossible to miss the exaggerated sagging of Logan's shoulders and the audible sigh that accompanied it. Ro, ignoring this childlike reaction turned to the computer, pulling up files pertaining to soil analysis. From the colour, texture and particle content already input into the database, she had already identified the soil as coming from somewhere on the South American landmass.

"How long?" Scott queried.

"One more minute". She answered. The two men waited in silence for what seemed to them, ages. "Alright, now we will see." Returning to the rack she raised the tube up to the light. The soil had settled to the bottom leaving a rich red liquid. Ro carefully moved the card behind the tube until she found a match between the two.

"So what we lookin' it?" Logan asked abruptly.

"Let me add this to the data I've input into the system." She replied. With a few keystrokes she was done. "Alright here we are." She added, turning to the two men who came to peer over her shoulder at the screen. "The database has cross-referenced all the soils likely to contain the descriptions I input, but with the highly acidic pH value it identifies only one possible location."

"Brazil!" Scott interrupted as he read aloud the flashing name on the screen.

"Indeed." Ro added.

"So how did Brazilian soil end up in a bed room in Utah?" Scott muttered. "And why wasn't it anywhere else in the house?"

As the thought past crossed Logan's mind, only one thing flashed into it. "Teleporters!" He yelled. His two team-mates turned to face him in surprise. He looked at them with an 'it's so obvious' expression on his face, "Teleporters! If ya ain't got wings an' an open winda, how ya gonna get into a room?"

"Teleport," Scott completed the question. "That's why we haven't picked up their trail at the other locations."

"Yep." Logan replied.

"Think its our two boys from Kaylan's apartment." Scott queried.

"Ya can betchya."

“But that still does not explain how the soil got from Brazil.” Ro interjected.

“Well it looks like we are going to be ‘Flying down to Rio’, as they say.” Scott laughed at his little joke. “I’ll inform the Professor of our findings.” Scott turned and strode for the door, “Oh, and well done you two.” He added.

Logan raised a brow at Scott’s praise. “Own’y one reason Cyke’s that amenable,” he whispered to Storm, “Red’s gotta be on ‘er way home.”

Ro flashed him a smile, it was nice to see Scott in a mood lighter than his usual commanding persona would allow. “Come along Logan, let’s you and I have tea before the troops are rallied.” She added, heading out after Scott.

“I cannot state just how significant this break through it, thank you all for your efforts over the last week, but especially to Ororo and Logan for bringing this evidence to light.” Charles patted Ro on the arm in a small show of gratitude as he wheeled himself passed the sofa. The remaining members of the team had assembled in the professor’s office to hear the latest news on the unusual soil sample found at the house in Utah.

“It seems clear now that the reason we have been unable to trace the missing people is that they have been spirited away by teleportation; possibly by the same one you encountered at Kaylan’s apartment.” Charles added, addressing Scott. “It also seems likely that the reason we have been unable to apprehend these ‘people’ is because they are not within the United States borders. I think we are all agreed that the only way to approach this is to send a team to Brazil.”

“Professor, we’re already prepped and ready to go.” Scott answered in his most official tone.

Charles smiled at the eager commander. “I have no doubt of that Scott, but let us consider things for a moment.” Charles paused as he examined his options like the moves on a chessboard. “We do not yet know what we are facing, I feel we should be cautious at this point, we do not want to risk the lives of the people who have been kidnapped. I suggested a reconnaissance team; to assess the potential threat and bring back information.”

“What’s wrong with just kickin’ some ass?” Logan growled, the slow slicing sound of metal cut through the stillness of the room as Logan released a two-inch section of blade from his right hand.

“There will be time for that Logan, right now we need solid information; where are the people being held and who is holding them?”

Logan clenched his fist, the urge for some serious action stirring his feral body. “Suit ya self Chuck.”

“We’ll go with the Professor’s plan Logan.” Scott stated forcibly.

Logan looked up, fixing Scott with a dark stare. “Wha’d ever, Cyke.” He shrugged, drawing the blade back in.

After a monetary pause Charles spoke. “Well then, let’s make final preparations. Scott, Ororo and Logan, you will head-up the mission, you leave tomorrow for Rio.” Charles turned his wheelchair to

return to his desk as the meeting adjourned. “Oh, one last thing, Scott I know you’ve already heard, but the rest of you will be pleased to here Jean is on her way home. She gets in tonight.”

“Told ya so.” Logan whispered into Ro’s ear with a smirk as they paused in the doorway.

“She and Hank have produced some wonderful results, and have produced a serum which she tells me will release Kaylan’s repressed gene.”

A warm sensation passed through Logan’s gut. The thought of a cure for her pleased him more than he realised and he felt his heart pound for a moment at Charles’ announcement. Would it mean she would return to the mansion? He hoped so. As he headed down the corridor to make final preparations, a feeling of concern passed over him. Growing-up knowing you were a mutant was something most everyone in the mansion knew only too well, but to have it thrust upon you, when all your life you thought you were just another human being, that was a tough one. Ro’s words from that day in the study, “*With power comes responsibility*,” echoed in his mind. Would she be able to deal with the responsibility that whatever Hank had cooked-up would release in her? A small part of him felt sorrow for the blue-eyed woman thrust into a life filled with fear and hatred on all sides. Could she handle it? As he entered the hanger, he resolved himself to help her through it, in whatever way he could.

Chapter 10: Sleepers Revealed

“I’ll be going alone from here, Anderson.” Lewis Williams announced, turning to his PA as they stepped out of the limousine.

The tall, well-dressed man looked bemused, “Sir?”

“It’s alright Anderson; this is a personal visit, why don’t you take the rest of the day off.” Lewis tried to smile at the younger man, but the thought of what he was about to do made his stomach turn and a cold shiver pass down his spine.

“If your sure sir.” The assistant queried, surprised by his boss’s sudden offer of a days holiday.

“I’m sure. I’ll give you a call when I need you.” Lewis added as he looked up at the glass skyscraper. The reflections of white clouds passed over its dark-smoked surface giving the illusion that the world was slipping sideways. Lewis wobbled a little from the strange feeling of motion, as he took a tentative step. He straightened up and sucked in a deep breath to restrain the bilious taste growing in his mouth, as he strode purposefully towards the revolving doors of building; the black car pulling away from the curb behind him.

The entrance hall of the New York offices of the Tweed Corporation were palatial; a wide concourse set with large sofas and plush carpeting, all surrounding a magnificent water feature with a large silver revolving ‘T’ at its centre. But it was nothing Lewis Williams hadn’t seen before and even though he had never been in this particular building, the grandiose surroundings did not even register in his mind as he headed for the elevators.

As the doors gently closed and the compartment shuddered as it rose, Lewis contemplated what he was about to do. Nothing in his whole life had prepared him for this moment. He had in his time crushed rivals and destroyed huge conglomerates, but never had he been as scared as he was now.

PING

The lift shuddered to a stop and several people stepped into the compartment. Lewis stepped back, a wave of claustrophobia passed over him. He questioned his motives for being there. Was he doing the right thing? Would he get what he wanted? What would he do when it was all over?

PING

The lift stopped again and the group alighted, this was his last chance to back out; to walk away as if nothing had happened. The doors closed. Too late, alone once more, the small confining box ascended. He tried to run through the plan in his mind.

After his evening with Charles, the Pandora's Box of secrets he had kept hidden for so many years had been reopened and he had no choice but to put them to rest once and for-all. He had cancelled all but a handful of meetings that week; choosing instead to sit in his office and brood. The plan which he was now intent on following had manifested itself in those long days and nights as he sat alone. He would carry it out with the cold, calculated focus of the battle-hardened businessman he truly was.

PING

The lift reached its destination. The doors eased open and Lewis Williams stepped out.

The penthouse floor of the Tweed building stretched out before him. A wide mahogany reception desk filled one wall, over-shadowed with yet another silver 'T' hanging behind it. "*Tweed's ego is stamped everywhere.*" he thought wryly.

He was greeted by the bright-white fake smile of a receptionist, with an equally fake tan. "Good morning sir, welcome to the Tweed Corporation, how may I help you?" The woman asked in an almost robot-like patter.

"My name is Lewis Williams; I'm here to see Professor Tweed." Lewis answered quietly.

"Do you have an appointment sir?" The woman twittered.

"No, I do not, but he **will** see me."

The woman tilted her head abruptly and grinned, "I'm sorry sir, Professor Tweed is extremely busy. I'm afraid you'll have to make an appointment, what company are you from?"

Her fake jollity combine with the sickness he felt in the pit of his stomach was beginning to wear on his nerves. The blood rushed in his temples. Leaning over the counter he grimaced at the receptionist. "Now listen here, woman." He hissed. "I don't have time for your repetitive drivel. I am Lewis William and I'm in no mood to be explaining myself to you. Now get Korrigan on the phone and tell him I'm here."

The smile was wiped from the woman's face as Lewis made his demands. Gingerly picking up the receiver she pressed the intercom button. Lewis stepped away from the counter and straightened his

jacket, the redness draining from his face. After several moments of hushed conversation the woman replaced the handset.

“Err, one moment Mr. Williams, Professor Tweed will be right out.”

Lewis nodded and stood facing the large double doors at the end of the corridor. Time passed, he hated to be kept waiting; it was not the treatment he usually received, but he knew Tweed had his reasons. He drew in another deep breath, the longer he waited the more his brain told him to leave. “*No, I have to see this through, no matter what the consequences.*” He told himself.

The click of door handles shook him from his thoughts and the doors opened. “Ahh, Lewis Williams, what an unusual surprise, it’s been just too long.” Lewis’ stomach knotted at the sound of the sickly-smooth voice he had hoped he would never hear again even if he’d lived to be a hundred.

He watched as Korrigan Tweed sauntered down the corridor to greet him, his thin lips drawn into an artificial grin masking the hatred that he knew lurked in that twisted mind of his. Lewis tried to feign a smile but he knew it was a grimace. “Korrigan.” He answered curtly.

“To what do I owe the pleasure of such a visit?” He didn’t wait to get an answer, turning instead to the over-tanned receptionist. “Gloria, please bring tea through to my office. Now where was I? Ahh yes, what brings you here, Lewis?”

Lewis scowled; he could see the game Tweed was playing; trying to keep him off guard. *Well two can play that game Korry.* He thought bitterly.

“I don’t think this is the place to be discussing business do you Korrigan?”

“No, no you’re quite right, please step into my office.”

Lewis followed him down the corridor and through the double doors. The office took up one half of the penthouse floor; windows on three sides, looking out across the city skyline with all its sky scrapers. The furnishings were even more expensive than those in the lobby; deep red carpets and large sofa chairs and a large oak desk piled with documents dominated the room.

“So, what do you think of the public face of Tweed Corporation?” Korrigan oozed as he closed the doors behind Lewis. “The pinnacle of pharmaceutical sciences; drug development, gene therapy,

“...Genetic rape you mean!” Lewis spat.

“Now, now Lewis, that was uncalled for. The Tweed Corporation would never consider carrying out genetic manipulation, not unless it was to the benefit of all.” Tweed smiled at the bare-faced lie he was so used to regurgitating for the press.

“There’s only one person this all benefits,” Lewis muttered. “and we both know who that is, Tweed.”

Tweed shrugged it off, unwilling to take Williams’ bait. “Please won’t you sit?” Tweed smiled as he took the seat behind the desk.

“I’ll stand, thank you.” Lewis answered tersely.

“Suit yourself. So, do tell, what is it that would make you come all the way down here after all these years, don’t tell me you want to apologise for your behaviour?”

“HA!” Was all Lewis could reply to the audacity of Tweed’s question.

“Well I suppose not. But it must be important for you to come here personally, how long’s it been? Ten years? But I have to say, it’s not unexpected. I knew one day you’d show up.” Tweed’s face contorted into a grin.

“Yes, you’re right, maybe I should have done this sooner, but I’ve had my reasons.” Lewis responded, his brow furrowing at his weakness.

“Ahh yes, our little arrangement. Well it seems to have worked out for all the concerned parties doesn’t it, you get to keep your precious life and I get this.” Tweed extended his arms indicating the wealth that surrounded him. “You know, leaving your research facility was the best thing I ever did, thank you Lewis.” Lewis shuddered as Korrigan’s nauseating gratitude.

“Kicking you out was the best thing I ever did Korrigan, you’re a sick waste of resources, not to mention the fact that you murdered my wife.” Lewis snapped.

“Tut, tut, Lewis, now you of all people should know that at the cutting edge of technology there are always some unfortunate results; collateral damage, so-to-speak.”

“Why you...” Lewis launched himself across the wide oak desk at Tweed. He had tried to restrain himself as Tweed has goaded him, but no longer. Ten years of pent-up anger and guilt at the death of his wife by this man came bursting forth. Tweed pushed back his seat as Lewis reached out to grab his collar, causing him to sprawl full-length across the table.

“Your tea Professor Tweed.” The voice of the receptionist resonated around the room.

“Ahh thank you my dear.” Tweed answered. Unruffled by Lewis’ attack, he rose from his chair and headed over to the small table where the woman, unaware of what had transpired, had placed the tray. “Tea, Lewis?”

Lewis, dragged himself up off the desk, straightening out his suit and turned to face Tweed, the redness of his anger still showing in his face. “No.” was all he answered.

Korrigan poured himself a cup and made himself comfortable on one of the sofas. “Please Lewis, won’t you have a seat. Let’s discuss this like two grown men.”

With round one going to Tweed, Lewis conceded and made his way to the other seat. “What’s the saying Korrigan, ‘what ya give out comes back to ya ten-fold’? You **will** get what you deserve.”

“I’m sure Lewis, but till then.” He raised his cup in mock salute. Lewis glared at him, the sickening feeling filling his stomach again at the sight of this evil being in front of him. “Now let’s get down to business, what do you **want**?” Tweed hissed, his demeanour changing in an instant. The nauseating smile faded, replaced by an emotionless expression of contempt.

“I know what you did Korrigan, nothing can change that,” Lewis began, “but your up to something new, I know and now others know.”

“Others?” For the first time a fleeting expression of concern crossed Tweed’s face. “What others?”

“That I won’t tell you, but believe me they are not to be trifled with.” Lewis got straight to the point. “I want to know what you were planning to do with Kaylan?”

“Ahh, Kaylan, how is the lovely young woman? Well I hope? Living a **normal** life?”

“Yes, no thanks to you.” Lewis retorted.

“Good I’m glad. Now what were you saying? What was I going to do with her? I really don’t know what you mean Lewis; I haven’t seen her for years.” Again, the sickly grin passed across his face.

“Don’t lie; you know perfectly well what I’m talking about. You tried to have her kidnapped.” Lewis spat.

“What, are you accusing me?” An expression of innocence spread over tweed’s face.

“That’s exactly what I’m doing.”

“Well I’m down right shocked Lewis that you should even consider I would do something so awful” Tweed added calmly.

“Don’t play the innocent with me, I know it was you, I have witnesses who saw those two thugs of yours.” Lewis answered.

“What thugs?”

“Come on Korrigan, there’s no point playing charades with **me**. They were at her apartment, several weeks ago.” Lewis related the information Charles had given him.

Tweed sat back in his chair and sipped the tea. “Exactly were does this slanderous accusation emanate from my friend, and exactly how do you intent to link me to this erroneous information?”

“I will not reveal my sources...” Lewis replied.

“Whatever, it makes no difference. I have nothing to do with this. So thank you for coming down here, it was nice to see you.” Tweed rose from his seat, placing his cup on the table and heading towards the door in an attempt to show Lewis out.

Lewis remained in his seat. “*You came here for a reason, come on Lewis make your point.*” “How much?” Lewis whispered looking down at his hands in a show of submission.

“What?” Tweed’s curiosity was piqued.

“I said how much? How much will it cost to get you out of our lives Korrigan?”

“Ha, ha, ha, did I just hear you correctly?” Tweed scoffed, “Did you just offer me money Lewis?” Tweed returned to his seat. “Please Lewis don’t demean yourself, what on earth would I want from you that I don’t already have?”

“Kaylan!” Lewis’ head snapped up and he fixed Tweed with a hateful stare.

Tweed rolled his eyes back into his head. This was getting boring.

“What do you want with her Tweed, to carry out more of your sick gene research?”

“You have no idea do you Lewis,” Tweed exclaimed, “You and your little world of take-overs and mergers. You have no concept of the things going on in the world; you just want what you can get your money-grabbing hands on.”

“What, and money isn’t **your** driving force!?” Williams spat back.

Korrigan ignored him, he detested this man with a passion; Tweed had spent years, as he’d seen it, bowing and scraping to him, whilst Williams had gained all the glory for his ‘wonderful contributions to medical research’. But now he had the upper hand. The hatred grew in him along with a need to finally set Lewis straight. “There’s a wave and it’s rising Lewis, and that wave is the growing mutant population, and if something isn’t done, they are going to take over everything.”

“*So, finally the true comes out, your ego can’t help itself can it Korrigan.*” “So you’re going to make sure they don’t eh?” Lewis answered gently coaxing Tweed to say more.

“Yes, I started it all those years ago...with Kaylan.”

Lewis shifted in his seat, the fight between him and Tweed still fresh in his mind. “And just how many others did you ‘doctor’?”

“Enough, at the time, but now....” Tweed looked deep in thought.

Lewis pushed a little further. “So you intend to continue your work...by kidnapping Kaylan?”

“The work has to continue, it’s them or us.” Tweed looked up from his thought, Lewis had caught him off guard in a moment of reverie and he’d all but admitted his involvement.

“What do you intend to do...with herand the others?” Lewis continued his face a blank mask.

“Do you honestly think I’m going to tell you?” Tweed sneered, realising what Lewis was trying to make him do.

“Yes, if its not money you want, I want your assurance she will be safe.” Lewis now had his chance; lull him into a false sense of security, offer him the thing he most wanted. If there was one thing Lewis Williams was an expert at, it was making them believe they were getting what they wanted. The trap was set; he just had to wait for the right moment to close the door.

Tweed’s eyes shone; would he really give Kaylan over that easy? What was he missing? “My assurance, are you offering a trade Lewis?” He questioned subtly.

Lewis maintained his cold exterior, whilst all the while his stomach churned and the blood in his temples throbbed. “I’m offering you what you want, but I need assurances. If I **let** you have her, what do you intend to do with her?”

Without realising it Tweed's ego was not only getting a massage, it was getting the full top to toe treatment as well. The deeply self-possessed man could not resist the opportunity to gloat over the deviousness of his current project.

"I'M GOING TO MAKE NEW MUTANTS OF COURSE! What do you think all I'm interested in is locking them away so they can't cause trouble? Dear-god Lewis you are just too naive." He laughed hysterically. "It's fat-wallet idiots like you that will see the sharp end of what is to come if the mutants get their way, and I intend to be there, right at the front of the line with my own personal army when all hell breaks loose."

Lewis finally had the truth after all these years, and he was flabbergasted at what he was hearing. "What are you talking about Korrigan?" He added gently pushing him on to explain his plan.

"The future Lewis, those that I 'treated' are being recalled. None of them know what they are of course. All they know is that years ago they were treated for some form of genetic illness, just like Kaylan, but they are so much more than that, they are SLEEPERS! Ready to be woken, they will be trained, trained to penetrate into all walks of life and when I have released their blocked x-genes they will be unstoppable. I will have the business world and governments at my command. But that's just the start, the first wave, with the new breeding program I have planned the rising tide of mutants will be crushed, and in its place will be a hybrid; cross-bred mutants, more powerful than their parents but all very compliant, of course."

"And that's why you need Kaylan, to complete your little army?" Lewis slumped into his chair, the enormity of this revelation finally destroying the last threads of human compassion Lewis had for this twisted soul before him. "I don't know who you've become Korrigan, but your completely bloody insane aren't you?" he whispered.

"On the contrary Lewis," Tweed answered almost cheerfully. "I am just 'edging my bets' as they say. 'Covering all the bases'. With a control on the mutant population there will be no need for the human race to fear them; they will be ours to command." He added in a matter-of-fact way.

"You mean **yours** to command."

"Well, that depends on your perspective Lewis," Tweed sneered, "put it this way, I don't think I'll ever get a parking ticket again."

Lewis stared blankly at Tweed. The man was quite obviously out of his mind. Everything Lewis had planned to say slipped from his mind. What should he do now? How could he stop this mad-man?

"I can't let you take her Korrigan!" Lewis murmured.

Tweed raised a brow. "You can't stop me Lewis...remember?"

Lewis closed his eyes for a moment, the thought of his cowardice all those years ago; the guilt and shame of hiding what he knew for the sake of his empire cut him to the quick. "It doesn't matter any more Korry," he whispered as a tear welled up in his eye. "I have nothing left to loose, except my daughter and I won't let that happen, not again."

"You don't fool me Lewis, you don't have the guts for it, not when it comes to her, or your precious business. I will have her and the others and I will carry out my work." Tweed scoffed.

“Over my dead body!” Lewis snapped.

The sickly smile returned to Tweed’s face. “That can be arranged!”

Lewis had no choice but to reveal his hand. “There are others that know what you tried to do, and I have already left arrangements...if something should happen to me...the world will know Korrigan, I’ve made sure of that.”

It was a bluff, Tweed thought. He knew Lewis would never risk his life’s work, not for anyone. “And your precious empire?”

“TO HELL WITH THE BUSINESS! It means nothing, only Kaylan matters to me, and I should have told her that a long time ago.” He added sadly, “So, if you want a fight, you got it, either way you’re going to jail Korrigan. I’m walking out of this building and straight to the World news office.” The game was up, Lewis had played his trump card and, so he believed, Korrigan would have no choice but to give in.

“What, you think I’m just going to let you walk out of here after what I’ve just told you?” He laughed. A stab of fear shot through Lewis’ body, what had he neglected? Tweed continued. “What do you think I am Lewis? This is not the movies; where the bad guy gives up his secrets to the special agent, only to be shot two scenes later. You know, I should have done this ten years ago. MIST! THOR!”

The two grey-coated men entered via a second door in the corner of the room. Lewis leapt from his chair, panic spreading through him. He recognised them straight away, even though they were a little older, and he remembered the pain they had inflicted on him. He had to leave, and quickly.

“Gentlemen, won’t you escort our visitor to a more secluded location...hmmm...say...Brazil!!”

Lewis made a dash for the door, but a thick, putrid smell enveloped him and suddenly Mist stood blocking his way. He turned, his eyes wide like a terrified animal; trapped. Thor was behind him, one fist raised. “You won’t get away with this Tweed, the documents are well hidden and if I don’t show up on a certain day, and they go to press. The world will know what your planning Korrigan, kill me if you like!” His voice trembling as he yelled.

“Boy’s, I’ve had enough of this.” The smile slipped from Tweed’s face, replaced by a dark frown.

The last thing Lewis Williams saw was the bright yellow flash of lightning filling his vision. The burning sensation that hit his stomach knocked the wind out of him and he doubled over, then the lights went out. Thor reached the crumpled body on the floor and scooped it up.

“Mist! Take him to a holding cell at the facility, I don’t want him loose. We have to move quickly now. How many have you left to collect?”

“Just two sir, Kaylan and Nick Hudson.”

“Good, get him tonight, then the girl tomorrow, and no mess-ups. Make sure the shape-shifters are in place, and get one of the shifters to cover Williams as long as possible. I don’t want anyone getting suspicious. Find out his routine for the next week. That should give us enough time.”

The two heavies left with the limp body of Lewis Williams. Tweed returned to his desk. He had to keep focused, now was not the time to worry about idle threats. He hoped that's all they were, but he could not take the risk. Once he had Kaylan and the others no-one would find them. He smiled to himself as he looked through his reflection and out across the sprawling cityscape. "My plan **will** succeed."

Chapter 11: Alley Cat

The scream echoed through the night air, bouncing off the walls of the surrounding buildings.

To anyone passing it was just another accent to the cacophony of night-time noises but to Wolverine it was like being stabbed in the head. The cry shook him from his contemplative vigil and he sniffed the air, "NO! Not again".

His thick-set, muscular body tensed; fists clenching, hairs on the back of his neck bristling. His lip curled revealing short white fangs as a spontaneous rumbling growl rose in his throat. Within seconds he was tearing across the roof of the disused warehouse, heading for the fire-escape. As he flew down the stairs he had time to glance across the street; his keen vision taking in every nuance of the scene before him.

It was just after 11pm, the street was nearly empty except for a young couple climbing into a cab and a drunk leaning against the boarded-up news-stand, swigging from a paper wrapped bottle. The street lights cast circles of yellow light on the pavement and the neon sign of the pizza take-away on the corner flickered pink and blue; reminiscent of some old 70's discotheque.

With one flight left he launched himself over the rail, dropping the last 12 feet to the ground with a thud and breaking into a run without missing a step; his short powerful legs carrying him effortlessly across the road and along the sidewalk, sensitive ears still ringing with the last of the echoing cry as he followed it into the night.

The sound of anguish he pursued filled him with anger, and he berated himself for his momentary lapse in concentration. "*Ya shuda bin watchin*". He sprinted on, sniffing again; the air told him all he needed to know. "*Just up a head...not too late*". He passed the last street light; the darkness enveloping him, his acute senses undaunted by the darkness.. Twenty yards ahead a pale light seeped through the darkness; an alleyway.

As he drew level with the narrow entrance the air about him grew thick with a familiar scent of fear. A wave of pure loathing and aggression spread through his body, broken only by the dull throb in his fists as he unconsciously released six sharp blades.

Gazing into the pale light he caught sight of two figures; a large male and smaller female caught in an embrace. But this was no lover's lane. The two struggled; arms flailing, body's twisting, grunts and yelps filling the air.

With his keen senses he quickly assessed the scene. "*Just one, where's the other one?*" A couple of short strides and he was within a few feet of the pair.

“Don’t ya know, it ain’t nice to beat on a lady, Bub.”

The low gravelly tone of Wolverine’s comment echoed down the alleyway, startling the two figures. For an instant the male loosened his grip and half turned towards the sudden interruption. The face that had been indelibly burned into Wolverine’s memory stared back at him in sheer astonishment.

“Oh shit, not you again!” Thor muttered as his captive tried to wriggled free of his grip.

“Kaylan! Ya awright?” He shouted. Kaylan tried to nod, unable to speak for the arm wrapped round her neck.

Wolverine’s form filled the path of the only escape route; legs braced ready to power him forward, arms raised, blades glinting in the soft light, his cold, clear gaze fixed on his opponent. The scent greeting his nostrils inflamed his already rising temper, she was afraid, but a faint shift in the odour filled him with a sense of relief, satisfying him that she felt safer, in spite of still being caught in Thor’s grip.

The stillness was broken by the sudden rattle and crashing of trash cans to his right. The moans and groans of the other male echoed in the passageway. Wolverine shifted his stance, giving him the option of taking on a second assailant. From between the bins rose another familiar face; pale as ever and slightly dazed. As Wolverine and Thor turned their attentions to the staggering Mist, Kaylan forced herself free of Thor’s grip, trying to drive herself towards her waiting rescuer.

Taking no chance for Mist to recover and teleport out, Logan launched himself at the disorientated figure. “RRRAAAHHH!”.

Kaylan was halfway to his side when she felt the hard grip of Thor on her arm pulling her back.

“Not this time girlie, you ain’t gettin’ away”.

Fear, anger and disgust filled Kaylan’s every fibre. All she wanted was to escape from these evil men, and for the second time in two weeks they were after her. She had always been a reserved person; never wishing to upset or hurt others, never raising her voice or arguing, but this continued barrage of attacks and the pain they inflicted brought emotions to the surface the likes of which she had never previously experienced.

This was the last straw; no more, rage shook her body and as Thor tugged at her arm, a silver haze filled her vision bringing the world suddenly into sharp focus. She felt suddenly like she was outside her body; seeing and hearing everything around her, fully aware of her actions but no longer in control. Everything seemed to be in slow motion.

Spinning on her heels she swung her fist, landing Thor squarely in the jaw, the sound of crunching bone filled her ears, but she no longer cared. As Thor fell backwards, blood splattered from his mouth onto the ground. Kaylan recovered her stance and bending her legs slightly launched herself upward, scissor-kicking in the air and landing Thor a second blow to the chest. The stunned man flew backwards from the extraordinary force, hitting the brick wall of the alley with a sickly thud. The air was driven from his lungs, spraying more blood from his mouth. Doubling over, he slumped to the ground.

Logan was on top of Mist in an instant, throwing him back into the trash cans, but before Logan could grab him a second time the air shimmered in front of him.

BAMF.

Mist vanished, re-appearing behind him to plant a sharp kick to Logan's kidneys. Logan toppled forward but caught himself on the wall and with a sudden turn pushed himself back and spun to face his attacker.

"Is that all ya got, Dough-boy?" Logan snarled. "Ya know ya could do with a few sessions on a sun-bed Bub, the pale an' int'restin' look's out this year." He sneered, grabbing Mist by the waist and throwing him back against the opposite wall, prompting Mist to teleport again. "Damn it I hate this teleportin' shit." Logan growled through gritted teeth as he dropped into the space left by Mist.

A yelp and gurgle from down the alleyway caused Wolverine to turn his head. His eyes widened at the scene that greeted him, Thor was tumbling backwards as Kaylan stood fixed to the spot; arm outstretched, fist balled-up, specks of blood peppering her hand from the contact it had made with Thor's jaw. This once diminutive woman seemed to grow in stature as he watched her crouch and kick out with ferocious power, landing him another blow, brief seconds later she landed, both feet planting firmly on the ground, her tousled hair blew back as her head snapped round and he caught a glimpse of her face. The once delicate features appeared to have hardened; her brow furrowed in concentration, her lips parted in a silent snarl and for a split second he could have sworn her eyes changed, and staring at him were no longer the usual iridescent dark blue pools but two yellow orbs slashed with black irises.

Logan pushed himself from the ground, only to see Mist vanish again. "Shit...gave 'im too much time."

Mist reappeared at the feet of his unconscious partner "Come on Thor ya stupid SOB." Mist yelled, grabbing him roughly by the coat. "Gotta get outta here." Thor moaned and tried to stand as the air shimmered and the two vanished as Mist transported them away.

A sudden eerie silence descended on the alleyway. Logan watched Kaylan as she remained statue-still in the pale light. "Kaylan?" he whispered. She didn't move. "Kaylan!" he raised his voice a little louder. Her body jerked as he shouted her name and it seemed in the half-light that she shrank a little in size. A strange aroma filled Logan's nostrils; a spiciness, reminiscent of paprika with a hint of musk, wafted through the air. His brow furrowed; it was a scent he had never picked up from her before. His mind filled with flashing images of fights past and a feeling of wild anger began to grow in him. A strange malevolent feeling fleetingly passed over his mind and then was gone, replaced by a need to be at her side. Shaking his mind free he headed over to where she stood, concerned for her well-being. "Ya awright, are ya hurt?" His pace broke into a dash as he watched her legs buckle, grabbing her around the waist just before she reached the ground; her limp figure lying unconscious in his arms. "**Kaylan!**" He yelled out, releasing the remaining battle fury and strange feelings of anger in one breath.

Hastily checking for a pulse; he found her skin pale and clammy and her breath rasping, scooping her up in his powerful embrace he stood, the familiar scent of lilies slowly beginning to return as he carried her from the alleyway. It was only a block to her apartment, and he knew he needed to get her somewhere warm and safe, quickly.

Awareness seeped into the black void.

The blackness swirled into a dark blue and then purple, till it all blended into a dark orange-red. Consciousness returned to Kaylan. She lay still, eyes closed, only aware of the dim light filtering through her eyelids.

“I’m not dead” she thought groggily. Becoming aware of her body, she let her hands slowly slide from her side.

“I’m in a bed?” she determined feeling the soft mattress beneath her. Sliding her hands back, she ran them across her body.

“Nothing feels broken and I’m dressed!” She slowly opened her eyes, blinking painfully, even in the low light, unsure of where she was she tried to focus on the ceiling.

“This is my room!” she realised. She moved her head slightly, taking in the familiar surroundings. But there was but one thing out of place. *“Where is the light coming from?”* she wondered, trying to push herself up to determine the source of the light. In the corner, a desk lamp stood on the floor, its adjustable stand bent up, casting its harsh light across the wall diffusing it so that there was just enough to illuminate to room. *“That’s my table lamp, it shouldn’t be there.”* she thought, frowning.

She was shaken from her lethargy by the sound of chinking china coming from the kitchen, Someone, was in the apartment. Feeling confused and scared she tried to get up; swinging her legs out and pushing herself to the edge of the bed. But her efforts were hindered by the excruciating throbbing pain filling her head as the blood all seemed to rush to her brain. Gripping her temples in her hands, she tried to stop herself from slipping back into unconsciousness. As the pain eased and the silver flashes in her vision faded she steadily moved herself off the bed. Pausing to steady herself, she took her first tentative steps, the burning returning to her temples causing her to falter. Staggering, she reached the door with some effort, slumping against the door frame to catch her breath and allow the swirling flashes to subside once more. Concentrating her efforts, she reached for the door handle. Outside, the sound of heavy footfalls passed by, causing Kaylan to hold her breath; Heart and head pounding, body tense and aching. Whoever was beyond the door had brought her back to the apartment and she was sure they would be intent on keeping her there, her only thought now was how to escape.

Taking a deep breath she turned the door handle as quietly as she could, opening it by a small amount she peered through the crack, blinking at the brightness from the light in the room beyond. Listening intently for movement and hearing nothing, she dared to pull open the door a little further and shuffled out. The room seemed normal enough; nothing was out of place except for a few books which had obviously been moved to gain access to the lamp. Glancing across the room she tried to judge how fast she could make it to the apartment door. It just never seemed that far before, but she knew in her present state it might as well have been a climb up Mount Everest but she knew she had to try. Slowly stepping out into the room as lightly as she could, she held on to nearby pieces of furniture for support. Suddenly she realised she had not considered exactly where she would go once she reached the door, and in bare feet she probably wouldn’t get far, but hopefully it would be far enough.

She nearly fell to her knees from the shock as a loud crash emanated from the kitchenette behind her followed by a deep growling curse. Gasping she tried to steady herself on the back of a chair, suddenly realising with dread she had given herself away as from the kitchenette she heard that same deep voice say, “Hullo?”

Stumbling forward, heart pounding and the dizziness returning, Kaylan took the last faltering steps to the door reaching out desperately for the handle.

“Hey! What ya doin’ up?” The voice was now in the room with her.

Shear terror took hold of her; her vision fizzed and sparked and her temples pounded with the effort of trying to turn the handle. Nothing; the door was locked. Feeling frantic now she pulled at it in the desperate hope that it would somehow open, she couldn’t stop the tears welling up in her eyes. The sound of striding feet behind her drove her on; she tried to yell and kick at the door, thrashing wildly at it in blind panic.

“Its OK.” She heard the voice murmur behind her and looked round with unseeing eyes; too scared to recognise the figure trying to comfort her.

“No, No, NO!” she bawled, sliding slowly down the door frame, body shaking, too exhausted to struggle any longer. “*If they are going to get me they can have me.*” was her last desperate thought as her vision began to darken. Hitting the floor with a thud, the dark void consumed her once more.

Logan reached her side as she flopped back against the wall. Sighing in frustration, the blue-grey haze of fear and hurt she’d created in his mind cleared slowly. Gently picking her up he carried her to the sofa and busied himself with making her comfortable once more; carefully placing a cushion under her head and covering her with a throw from the arm chair. Getting the lamp from the bedroom he set it up on the desk, turning off the main light. Kneeling at her side he stroked away the loose blonde strands of hair from her forehead. A wayward tear began to roll from the corner of her eye and he tenderly ran his fingers over her cheek and wiped it away.

“Got ya self into a heap o’ trouble ain’t ya darlin’?” He whispered to her. “But yer a fighter an’ no mistakin’ that.”

Rising from her side he settled down into the arm-chair opposite to wait for her to regain consciousness. After a few minutes the soft scent of cream began to pervade the room telling him she was at peace. He smiled to himself and sighed, gazing at the sleeping beauty lying on the couch, content in the stillness of the apartment and the knowledge that for now she was safe.

“NO, get away! No I won’t let you.” Kaylan’s body convulsed and shook as the nightmare engulfed her. “Hhhuuh.” With a sudden jolt she sat up; dazed and confused, her mind still flooded with wild images. She squinted in the half-light of the living room. “Oh god!” she gasped, suddenly catching sight of the figure sitting in the chair opposite, unable to see the face in the shadow she began to panic.

“It’s awright Kaylan, yer safe.” The shadowed male voice whispered as his large figure rolled out of the chair towards her. Instinctively she pushed herself back into the couch in an attempt to escape. “It’s ok,” he said again, seeing her reaction.

The voice seemed familiar, and from deep in the back of her mind, through the maelstrom of images she recalled his name. “Lo...Logan?” she whispered hoarsely.

“Yeah, Kaylan it’s me, ya remember?” His figure broke from the shadows and Logan came to stand over her.

“Yes, I remember.” She sighed with relief at the unforgettable face of her rescuer. “How long have I been out?” she muttered stifling a yawn.

“Couple o’ hours, no more.” He answered trying to reassure her.

“Ooww, my head hurts.” She moaned, rubbing her temples. “What happened?”

“We’ll get t’ that later, just rest fer now OK?”

“OK,” She said trying to smile, but every muscle and sinew in her body ached and so she chose to slumped back into the soft cushions.

“Don’t know ‘bout you, but I’m starvin’...want some’ing t’ eat?” He asked, trying to lighten the mood.

“No, no you go ahead.” She muttered, closing her eyes.

“K.” Disappearing into the kitchenette and after some further rattling and clinking, Logan returned with a tray stacked full of boxes. “Didn’t know what ya liked so I ordered a bit o’ everythin’.” He smiled at her as he lowered the Jenga-like structure of take-outs onto the table.

Even though food was the last thing on her mind, it did smell really good. Tempted by the large pizza box on the bottom of the pile she picked up a plate from the top and held it out. “I’ll have some of that please.” She asked impishly pointing at the pizza box.

Logan raised a brow at the mischievous expression on her face; knowing he was going to have to shift all the packages. Audibly sighing, he made an exaggerated point of lifting each box to get to the pizza, making her giggle as he did so. It was good to hear her laugh again, the last time he’d heard it was in the gym at the mansion and a warm ache tightened his stomach.

Suddenly realising just how hungry they both were, they set about devouring the contents of the assorted cartons and boxes. Sign-language becoming their only means of communication as they passed each other various items, pointing and grunting, mouths crammed full of food. Having satiated their appetites the two simultaneously rolled back into the sofa, making satisfied sounds. Looking over at her companion, Kaylan began to giggle.

“What’s s’ funny?” He questioned, scowling.

“It’s just...its just you have a bit of...come here.” Leaning over, she plucked a small piece of noodle from Logan’s thick side-burns.

He watched her intently as her small hands gently lifted the morsel from his face; her delicate scent wafting around him as she moved her fingers. For a brief moment she looked into his eyes. Kindness and delight sparkled in her blue pools and a happy smile graced her pretty, but tired face. He had to look away; suddenly unable to manage the welter of emotions.

“Think I should clean up.” He muttered pushing himself off the sofa and beginning to stack the empty boxes haphazardly on the tray. After several minutes of bustle in the kitchen and with his façade of indifference firmly back in place he sat back down taking the arm-chair opposite her, suddenly feeling the need for his own space.

“D’ ya remember what happened tonight?” He asked bluntly.

A little bewildered by his sudden change of demeanour, but none-the-less anxious to discuss the evenings strange events, Kaylan made herself comfy on the sofa and tried to recall all she could. “I remember getting off the night bus having been out with friends and walking up the street to my apartment.”

Logan recalled that too; he’d been sat meditating on the roof of the derelict warehouse when the essence of lilies reached him. That first caress of scent, now so familiar, always filled him with a wave of emotions which he now enjoyed so much. Drawing in a deep lung full of it, he’d let it soak through him, giving him an almost narcotic effect. That’s when he’d heard it; the scream. He was still angry at himself for indulging his emotions when he should have been keeping watch.

Kaylan furrowed her brow in recollection. “I remember hearing feet running up behind me. Next thing I remember is being grabbed from behind and being dragged into the alley. It was the gray-skinned one.” She said, looking up at Logan. “But I remembered what Scott taught me and I threw him”.

Logan chuckled, “So that’s why he was in the trash cans!”

She nodded, “Next thing I know the other one’s grabbing me and that’s when you showed up.”

“Lucky I did, but I think ya were doin’ great on ya own.” He laughed.

“Then something strange happened. I started to feel weird, like I wasn’t in my body and everything was really bright. I don’t remember much after that...except.” She paused trying to find the right words to explain. “I saw these eyes, yes...eyes like cats-eyes they were.” She looked puzzled, staring at Logan for some kind of assurance.

Logan realised at the time that what he had witnessed and smelt was the first visible display of her mutancy, but he could not bring himself to tell her what he knew. “*That’s Chuck’s job.*” He thought, but the truth was all too clear to him; the attack in the alley had brought her abilities closer to the surface and he now knew for sure that he had to get her back to the mansion.

“Maybe ya saw a cat in the alley or some’ing” He suggested, knowing it was a poor explanation but right now it was the best he could come up with to avoid alarming her. “But ya certainly put lightnin’-boy in his place darlin’.” He offered and smiled at the memory, trying to take her mind off the subject.

She smiled back at him, “Well I am grateful you were there too.” She answered, but a confused look slowly began to spread across her face. “Just exactly what were you doing there, Logan?”

“Oh, well.” He hesitated, “*Damn it, what’s ya cover story ya idiot!*” Thinking quickly he answered, “Well ya see Chuck had mentioned he was a bit concerned considerin’ everything that had happened, so I figured I’d swing by and just check t’ see ya were ok.”

Kaylan smiled, “Well, thank-you for that, I don’t know what I would have done if...” She trailed off, as she realised the alternate outcome didn’t bear thinking about.

Logan gazed at his watch. “Ya know, I think we should both be goin’ back t’ the mansion, it’s nearly 2am.”

“But....”

“Considerin’ what’s happened I don’t think its safe fer ya here any more, I think it’d be best if ya came with me.” he insisted with a growl, making it clear that he didn’t intend to leave without her.

Kaylan knew she should protest but, after everything that had happened she just didn’t have it in her to argue. “Alright, I’ll go,” she said. “But just let me get a few things first.”

“k.” With that agreed Logan was quickly out of his seat and bending to help her up. After a slow walk to the bedroom they worked together to pack some clothes and books into a back-pack, after which he left her to get changed. “Don’t forget to grab a warm coat, it might be kind o’ chilly on the way back, I am riding the ‘cycle.” He added as he headed for the door.

Sitting alone in the living room he took the time to figure out what he was going to say to Chuck when he returned with his god-daughter in tow at some god-forsaken hour of the morning. As he thought about this problem it was swept away by the joyful thought of having her back in the mansion, only to be followed by the thought of how hard it was now going to be to disguise his true sentiments for this woman; not just from her but from his team-mates as well. He resigned himself to keep his distance as best he could, only being near her when absolutely necessary, at least until she had some better control of her abilities, especially her scent or he might just loose it; with that alarming though he stood and began to pace.

“I’m ready.” Came the cheerful voice from the bedroom door. She lent nonchalantly against the door-frame, the pack over one shoulder, dressed in a pair of old denim jeans and a blue canvas bomber-jacket and leather boots. “Well, will this do?” she asked.

Eyeing her closely for a moment; he realised even in worn jeans and jacket she looked stunning. “Just fine.” he answered quickly turning away and heading to the apartment door to avoid staring. Holding it open for her she slid passed him, catching his body with her arm as she passed, giving him chills and causing him to fumble with the key in the lock. “Jeez Logan pull ya-self t’gether.” he mumbled, finding himself unable to drag his eyes away from the sight of her walking down the corridor. Shaking his head he could only sarcastically mumble “This is defiantly going to be interestin’.”

Logan led the way across the now empty street; senses scanning the place for unwanted activity. As they reached the warehouse, Kaylan following Logan into the alleyway.

“Oh MY God!” She gasped and Logan spun round on his heels; blades shooting from his fist in full protection mode. But Kaylan stood stock-still in the alleyway, staring passed Logan’s shoulder. “Is that what I think it is?” She asked, eyes wide, a look of amazement on her face. Logan turned back around to look in the direction she was staring. There, half-hidden in the shadows stood his ride.

“Err, yeah.” He answered a little disconcerted, re-sheathing his blades.

Dropping her back-pack to the ground in her excitement she ran past him to the side of the machine; suddenly forgetting fatigue and pain both, to crouch down at it’s side. “It’s a Titan right?” Logan watched, surprised as she gently placed a small hand on the wide leather seat and ran her fingers lovingly over the shining chrome of the engine block. “She’s beautiful! A ZSX custom!” She exclaimed, staring back at Logan, a wide-eyed smile breaking out on her face. “Oh jeez, she’s nitro-injected too.” With that she broke into giggles of delight.

“Ya like bikes then?” Logan asked, bemused at her knowledge of his specific machine. *“The only other woman I know who likes bikes works in a garage in Alaska and she used to be called Steve!”* He thought wryly.

“Oh, yes, I love bikes...well actually I love anything that has an engine, but bikes especially.” She gushed.

Logan pulled the key from his jacket pocket and slid a leg over the seat. “Well what are we waitin’ for then? Com’ on, get on.” Picking up her pack and fumbling to get it on in her excitement, she climbed on the pillion seat behind Logan as he fired the bike up. The V-twin rumbled under them as Logan eased the half-ton beast out of the alley and into the street. Kaylan immediately wrapped her arms around him, pulling herself in tight and resting her head on his back only to realise again how really tired she was. But with the smell of old leather and gasoline filling her nostrils she couldn’t help but smile to herself. For the first time in ages she felt safe.

Logan tensed as he felt her fingers creep around his waist and lock across his chest. Feeling her warm body pressing against his back he closed his eyes for a second savouring her touch. The scent of lilies mingling with the bike exhaust set his body tingling with pleasant sensations. Blipping the throttle, he turned into the street. The engine roaring away as the ZSX carried them into the night; back to the safety of the mansion.

Chapter 12: Homecoming

The black and chrome motorcycle gleamed in the warm yellow light cast across the driveway from the open front door of Xavier’s school for gifted children.

“Logan!” Bobby shouted as he sprinted down the wide stone steps leading down from the mansion.

“Hey kid, what ya doin’ up?” Logan inquired as he pulled the keys from the ignition.

It was nearly 4 am, and Bobby and some of the older boys had been watching horror movies in the t.v. room (as they were allowed to do on a Saturday night). They had all fallen asleep on the sofas several hours before, but the familiar rumbling sound of Logan’s bike woke several of them and Bobby was first to the door. He instinctively knew something must be wrong; Logan never brought his bike to the front of the school; usually swinging round back to the main garage.

“Bobby, go get the others, we got a visitor.” Bobby glanced over at the quiet figure still sitting on the seat trying to get a better look as Logan climbed off and began to help her from the bike.

“K.” The young x-man turned and headed back towards the mansion, but the excitement had already woken the house-hold and as Bobby reached the top of the steps Ro marched through the open door.

“Bobby, what’s going on?” she questioned with authority.

“Logan’s back...and he’s got someone with him.” Bobby replied.

“Who?”

“D’know, couldn’t tell.”

Perplexed, Ororo hurried down the steps as Logan was heading up; a back-pack slung over his right shoulder and his left arm wrapped around the waist of a figure who seemed to be leaning quite heavily on him for support.

“Logan? What’s happened?” She asked growing more concerned as she reached the pair.

“S ok, Ro, nothin’ we couldn’t handle, right?” He addressed the figure next to him and she raised her head and nodded.

“Kaylan!, Oh my Goddess, what on earth happened, you look exhausted.”

“Hello Ororo.” Kaylan managed a weak smile. The journey from the city had taken nearly an hour and she had fallen asleep leaning against Logan’s warm back. Now, holding on tight to his jacket she wearily made her way up the stairs with his help.

“There was a bit o’ trouble Ro.” Logan shot her a look that told her not to ask anything more, she nodded in acknowledgement but her eyes told him she wanted all the details later, as she turned her attention back to the young woman.

“Here, take my arm, we’ll find you a nice warm bed.” Ro, took her weight and Logan released her from his grip, standing for a moment on the steps as he watched the two women walk slowly further into the house.

“What the hell is going on?” Scott exclaimed as he rounded the door and stood, arms folded at the top of the steps. “Kaylan?”

“Hello Scott, nice to see you again.” Kaylan yawned a greeting as she and Ro made their way through the door.

Scott shot Logan a questioning look. “It’s a long story.” Logan muttered as he strode passed Scott moving catch up with the two women not giving him a second glance.

Scott reached out and grabbed Logan’s arm. “Hope this is not the trouble we were talking about?” he snapped.

A deep ‘don’t touch me’ growl resonated in Logan’s chest as he turned on his heels and fixed the commander with a dark stare. “I **said**, it’s a long story an’ I ain’t about t’ start explain’ now.” Logan snarled. He snatched his arm away from Scott and continued into the house. Dropping the pack to the floor of the room Ororo had located for Kaylan he headed for the kitchen with Scott in pursuit.

“Scott?” The baritone voice of Professor Xavier queried, “What is going on, I heard all the commotion.” Scott turned, grim-faced, to meet him.

“It’s Logan, and he has Kaylan with him.” Scott announced.

A look of surprise spread over the professor’s face. “What! Where is she?” He exclaimed with concern.

“Ro has taken her to bed, she looks a little worse for wear, but she’s ok. Logan wouldn’t tell me what happened; I was just going to speak with him.”

“I’ll go Scott.”

“But...”

“It’s alright, I’ll go, please make sure the doors are locked, and see if you can get the students to their rooms.” He added, glancing over to the t.v. room where several bleary-eyed boys were still curled up on the couches. Scott sighed, but nodded and headed back towards the front doors. Charles wheeled towards the kitchen to find Logan.

“I know what ya gonna say.” Logan muttered, his back to the kitchen door; His sharp hearing picking up the rhythmical movement of the professor’s chair as he’d made his way down the corridor. Logan leaned against the counter, his jacket thrown over the breakfast bar and a beer already in his hand.

“Oh, really, you have developed telepathic abilities recently have you?” Charles tried a little humour to ease Logan’s mood. “What happened?” He asked, trying to sound calm, but Logan could detect the slight elevation in his tone and sensed the concern he was trying to conceal.

He slowly turned, taking another swig of beer. “She was attacked...again.” He answered abruptly.

“Where?”

“Near ‘er apartment.”

“Do I need to ask why you were there?”

“Don’t suppose so,” Logan glared.

The Professors, ‘I’m waiting’ expression made Logan sigh heavily, he knew this moment would come. He was going to have to explain himself and it wasn’t something he had been looking forward to. “Bin keepin’ an eye on ‘er. Thought she might be in fo’ some more trouble.” he paused briefly, “I was right.”

“Logan,” Charles softened. “I am not questioning your motives, I am most grateful for what you have done. But it would have better had you informed us of what you were doing.”

“Had things under control.” He stated sulkily.

“I’m sure of that, but if you were that concerned you should have said something so that we could back you up if needed.” Charles added, Logan shrugged. “Would you like to tell me what happened?”

“Ok.” Logan replied quietly. He pulled out one of the breakfast table chairs turning it as he sat down so he could rest his arms on its back and he began to relate the nights events; the attack in the alley and Kaylan’s ferocious reaction, as the professor sat beside him listening intently. When he had finished he waited as Xavier assimilated the information.

“How long have you been going there?”

Logan looked slightly uncomfortable, “Since she left here.” He answered quietly, picking at the corner of the bottle label. “I jus’ felt... Ya said I had t’ face my fears...well I did. I felt like I had t’ make it up t’ her...ya know, after I wouldn’t...”

Charles smiled, “I understand Logan. You did what was right, even if it was a little unorthodox.”

Logan looked across at the Professor and nodded. “I’d prefer it if ya kept it t’ ya self Chuck, just between you an’ me right?”

It wasn’t often that Logan asked for anything; and Charles knew how much he valued his privacy. “Let’s just say it was a ‘covert operation’ I had you working on.” He added, winking as he spoke.

Logan took a deep breath. “Thanks.” The two sat in silence for a few moments considering the implications of the attack. “This thing ain’t gonna stop till we get them two creeps and whoever is pullin’ their strings.”

“I agree, but circumstances have changed somewhat now, we have to consider Kaylan’s feelings and how to help her deal with her mutation and the fact that someone deliberately suppressed it’s manifestation.”

“That’s som’ing you gotta do Chuck. Me? I just want to see those two and their boss put out o’ action. At least we’ll get a little closer tomorrow.” he stated rubbing his knuckles.

“I’m scrubbing the mission Logan.”

“What! But ya can’t, we’re gettin’ close.”

“I know, but Jean’s back and she brought a serum to neutralise the agent in Kaylan’s system, she also brought a letter from Hank, he has identified Kaylan’s mutation and from what you have told me it seems likely her abilities are already trying to break through on their own. I need to talk to her first, explain to her what’s happening. I don’t know how she will react. I think it would be best for Kaylan if you and Scott are around the next few days.” he sighed, “If Kaylan chooses to begin treatment, it could be hard for her. I suspect she is going to need **all** of our support.”

“But Jean can take care o’ that can’t she? Me an’ Cyke can go do the recon, we...”

“I’ve made my decision Logan.” Charles snapped. “I’m sorry,” he added more gently, realising his tone, “just for a day or two, ok? I just want you to be here, she trusts you and it may make this transition easier for her to have someone with a feral mutation around to help.”

“An’ if she don’t wan’ it, what then?” Logan asked.

“I have no idea Logan.” The Professor’s expression said it all. He was fearful of what might happen and knew it was out of his control, knowing whichever path she decided to take may not matter if what Logan had seen was, as they suspected, her body overcoming the neutralising effect of the x-gene blocker.

“Well ok Chuck, but ya can bet ya Scotty won’t be too happy ‘bout it.”

Charles sighed, "I can see the sky getting lighter outside, I suggest you get some sleep Logan, the next few days are going to be busy." Charles turned his chair and wheeled towards the door. "And thank-you yet again for bringing Kaylan back safely."

He shrugged and smiled raising the bottle to his lips.

"mmmmeeerrrrr."

"Afternoon sleepy-head." Logan said

Kaylan stretched out under the soft cotton sheets. The sun cast intermittent shafts of light through the half-drawn curtains. "Morning." She groaned as she stretched.

Logan sat close to the bed in a large leather armchair. He was dressed in his black Hakama pants and a clean white vest, a large book sitting in his lap and his bare feet resting on the bedcovers. Jean and Ororo had taken turns through the night to watch over their new guest, but as morning slipped into afternoon the need for rest led the two women to seek out extra hands. Reluctantly Logan accepted the assignment; being alone with her again, so soon after their return was not what he'd had in mind, but he had made a promise to himself that he would watch over her and so here he sat, quietly reading a beaten-up copy of 'The Seven Samurai' in the half-light.

"How long have I been asleep?"

"All day." He murmured, closing the book.

"Really?" She stretched out again; rolling over and then back, tangling herself up in the sheets. "I could sleep another ten hours." She giggled, pulling the covers up round her face.

"Go ahead, it won't hurt ya." He laughed.

"Are you my guardian angel Logan?" she asked, surprising him with her direct question. "Because it seems like every time I wake up, there you are." She beamed, her blue eyes shining.

Logan felt like blushing, "Nah, just checkin' in on ya is all."

"Well its nice, thank you." She whispered.

Logan felt uncomfortable in the silence that followed but was gratefully relieved by the gentle knock at the door. He rose and opened it to find Ro standing with a tray in her hand, "I brought you something to eat; I thought you could use it."

"Thanks Ro, she's awake," he nodded his head in the direction of the room, "an' I think she could do with somethin'."

"Well there's plenty here for both of you if you don't mind sharing with Logan that is." She asked Kaylan with a wink. Logan growled at Ro's joke as she flashed him a smile, taking the tray into the room and placing it carefully on the small table by the window. "Hope your feeling better this afternoon, Kaylan."

“Yes, I am feeling much better for the sleep and no, I don’t mind sharing one bit, I’ve witnessed his table manners.” She said with a giggle remembering the huge pile of take-out food they had devoured at the apartment the night before.

Glancing from Kaylan to Logan with a quizzical look on her face, Ro decided she was **really** going to have to get all the details of what had happened the previous night from Kaylan when she was feeling stronger. “Well I guess since you slept most of the day away I don’t need to ask if you slept soundly,” she laughed, “but since the sun is still up and it’s a beautiful day outside, would you like me to open the curtains and the window.” Kaylan nodded and the light poured in as Ororo pushed open the French windows onto the small balcony. “I’ll leave you to help yourself to food.”

“Catch!” Logan said as he unhooked a bathrobe from the back of the bathroom door and threw it at Kaylan as she pushed herself out of bed, it landed squarely on her head and she yelped in mock annoyance. Smiling, he turned and headed out onto the balcony, picking up the tray as he went. Ororo just shook her head and left them to the food, curious about Logan’s seemingly relaxed manner and the substantial change of attitude towards the young woman.

The day was fresh and warm, and in stark contrast to the previous night. Logan sucked in a deep breath giving himself a moment to centre his mind and relax. A peculiar sense of relief at having her back in the mansion passed over him. “*Least its one less thing ta think about.*” But it was clear things were not about to go easy, for him or for Kaylan. After a few moments he heard the sound of padding feet and turned to see Kaylan, eyes blinking in the sunlight as she appeared in the doorway. “Ya want O.J. Kaylan?” He asked as he poured himself a glass, forcing the thoughts of the future to the back of his mind.

“It’s Kay.”

“Huh?” He looked up, confused by her answer.

“Kay, my friends call me Kay. I guess after last night I should classify you as one of those.” She smiled, sitting down opposite him. “Please...I would like it if you called me Kay.”

He smiled back at her, welcoming the sincerity in her voice and the closer familiarity between them, “Awright, Kay it is.”

As they tucked into the meal Logan tried to conceal his glances at ‘Kay’ as she ate; watching the soft aura of reflected sunlight surrounding her. That, combined with the heady sweet smell of honey which filled his nose, for a brief moment allowed him to empty his mind of all the grief in his life; the school, the X-Men, the constant battles with his team-mates and bad-guys and forgotten past. Just for that one moment there was just him and her; no mutations, no pain, no bitterness, just two people having a peaceful meal. Here they sat casually eating lunch as if nothing else mattered. He tried to conceal a sigh of mixed emotions as reality returned.

The sun caught the highlights in her loose blonde hair and her blue eyes glinted with the reflected light. The colour began to grow in her pale cheeks as she warmed up in the sunshine and when she occasionally caught him looking, she found it hard to suppress a smile. “*He’s been so good to me.*” She thought as she sipped at her orange juice. This stocky, dark-haired man intrigued her, with his piercing eyes and thick side-burns. The gruff tone that had scared her when she first came to the mansion, she now looked forward to hearing; no longer did she see him as a figure to be frightened of, but one who’s care and attention had saved her life, on two occasions. She was happy to find a new friend.

Logan took his leave of her with the tray when they were finished and headed downstairs, whilst Kaylan got changed. She had just finished in the shower when the phone in her room rang.

“Kaylan, my dear, I heard you were up, are you well?”

“Yes, Uncle, I am.” Kaylan replied, now refreshed from the previous nights drama.

“Would you feel up to taking a walk with me in the grounds?” Charles tried to hide the tone of concern in his voice.

“Yes, of course, I’ll be down in a few minutes.”

“The trees are so nice at this time of the year don’t you think?” Charles commented as Kaylan walked at the side of his chair down the wide gravel pathways between the flower beds.

“Oh yes, it’s so beautiful here.” She replied, glancing at the large specimens of Silver Birch, Oak and Rowan.

Charles tried to make small-talk as they made their steady progress, but the seriousness of the situation filled his mind. “Kaylan, we need to talk.” He finally announced.

“About the attacks, I know.” Kaylan added.

“Well yes, that, but there are also other things which I fear I need to tell you.”

“That sounds ominous,” she laughed, but glancing down at her hands, she saw the sombre expression he wore and realised it was no laughing matter.

“I’m afraid it is. It is most serious. Please won’t you sit down.” Charles motioned to the bench nestled in an arbour surrounded by white rambling roses. He studied his god-daughter for a moment and sighed. Seeing her there, framed by such beauty made it all the harder to speak. “This isn’t easy for me,” he murmured. “I have discussed these things with so many of my students, yet here, with you I feel lost for words.”

“It’s alright” she smiled patting his hand. “I’m a big girl now. I can take it, whatever it is. After the last few weeks I think I’m ready for anything.”

“You may not be ready for this my dear.” He sighed, trying to compose himself. “Kaylan, these men that have attacked you, we’ve spent the last few weeks trying to track them down, but to no avail as of yet. Yesterday however, we had a breakthrough. We think we know where they may be based. We do not know what they want you for, but we do know they want you because, because...” he couldn’t bring himself to say the words.

“Is there something wrong with me Charles?” She asked bluntly.

Charles looked at her. “Not ‘wrong’ with you exactly, but yes there is something.” He sucked in a deep breath. “There is no easy way to say this my dear, so I will tell you straight, you are a mutant,”

He paused looking for a reaction. “You are one of us.” He raised his hand slightly in the direction of the school.

The word hung in the air between them for a moment. Kaylan stunned by the implications of Charles’ disclosure. It was beyond comprehension; She, a mutant, how could that be? She wasn’t like any of the people here at the mansion; no abilities no physical aberrations, what would possibly make her a mutant? Yet, from the back of her mind came the thoughts she had tried for so long to keep locked away; the thoughts that had kept her from making friends at school and university, the thoughts that always made her feel different from others; like there was something just out of reach. “A mutant?” she whispered. The word seemed suddenly strange in her mouth.

“Yes my dear, the blood test we gave you confirmed it. But there is more.”

“More?” she repeated slightly dazed. What more could there be? In a split second her whole perception of her life had changed.

“You see we suspect the reason these men tried to take you is because the x-gene that makes you a mutant was frozen. We will discuss this more when you have had time to think about all this, but sufficed to say, someone has introduced an enzyme into your system which has blocked the gene’s activation.” He spoke steadily to allow his words to sink in. “That is why you have no outward signs of your mutation. But its still there and we have found that the enzyme is starting to slowly break down, which means eventually you **will** develop your abilities.”

“You mean I have no control over this?” She whispered.

“In a word Kaylan, no, no you do not. But my dear we have found a solution, and that is what I need to discuss with you.”

“Go on.” She asked, staring at the floor.

“The first option is to stay as you are,” Kaylan looked up at him in surprise, “we have no idea how long the enzyme will last in your system. It could take many years before it has completely broken down. The changes would be slow but none-the-less you would change. You would have to spend the rest of your life knowing what you are underneath. We can do much to help you though, and you would be welcome to stay here. If you choose to continue with your life as it is, I think we would have to arrange a safer place for you to live, so that **they** don’t find you.” He paused for a moment. “The other alternative is to let us help you become what you should be. Jean and one of our friends, Doctor McCoy have developed a serum. If you choose to take it, it will break down the enzyme more rapidly and allow the development of your mutation. This will not be an easy path my child. You may have to give up all that you know outside this school; your home, your life as a lecturer. You may no longer be accepted as a member of society; you very possibly will be shunned. But as with the other option you can find a home here, you could continue your work and teach at the school. You may even wish to join the X-Men themselves. These are your options Kaylan, I am sorry my dear..”

Charles watched her reaction as she sat in stunned silence. “You know its funny,” she finally responded with unfocused eyes, “I always thought there was something wrong with me, but I just never knew what it was. You know I thought you were going to tell me I had some serious illness or a life threatening disease. I never expected this.”

“There was no easy way to tell you.”

“I am a scientist and engineer,” She replied bluntly, “I would not have wanted you to try to sweeten it, I prefer things in black and white.” The two sat for sometime in silence as Kaylan tried to absorb the revelation. “What do I do now?” She asked.

“The decision is yours Kaylan, I will advise you the best I can, and I would suggest that you talk with some of the students here before you make a decision.”

“What will I become?” She asked quietly

“Doctor McCoy analysed your gene, after removing the enzyme. It seems that you have an animal strain of genetic code, most likely in his opinion, feline in nature.”

“Feline, you mean Cat? I’m going to turn into a cat!!” She exclaimed slumping back into the seat.

“No my dear, not necessarily.” He tried to reassure her. “Each mutation manifests itself in a different way, and there is no way to tell what abilities will surface with each mutation. Yes you could develop distinct features like Kurt or some of the children, but you could equally develop more subtle characteristics like Bobby or Jean. It is impossible to tell. But whatever happens, you would be in the safest place here, surrounded by people who understand and do not judge.”

“I’m a cat,” she repeated. An uncomfortable silence descended on the pair. Charles waiting patiently to answer any more of her questions, Kaylan continuing to stare at her feet, trying desperately to make sense of the situation, “Would you mind if I spent sometime alone.” She asked looking up at him for the first time. “I need to think about this.”

Transfixed by her deep blue eyes now filled with the shine of oncoming tears, Charles tried to smile. “Yes, I understand. If you need me I’ll be in my study.” Kaylan rose from the arbour and turned to walk down the path that led into the ornamental garden. He watched her go, hoping that she would choose to stay so that he could see her through this transition.

The late spring flowers of tulips, alliums and crocuses carpeted the beds of the Victorian knot garden, perfectly enclosed in their own picture frames by the low box hedging. But Kaylan paid little attention to the beauty around her. Her mind was filled with a whirl of thoughts; questions and counter questions; the more she thought the more it became a seething mess in her head. So use to solving difficult problems in her day-to-day research, this tumult in her brain that she had no control over, filled her with dread. She wandered along the paths, unaware of her direction; finally almost out of breath with thinking she staggered to a halt and slumped down next to a tall Oak tree.

“What do I do now? Do I stay? What’s this serum Charles spoke of? Do I want to be a mutant? What kind of cat? A cat! Why didn’t father tell me? Is that why we don’t speak? What about my work? Do I give up my career?” The thoughts spilled over and over. She hung her head, cupping it in her hands and rubbing the temples; trying in vain to release the pressure building there. Feeling almost consumed by the chaos she threw back her head as a yell burst from her lungs. She clamped a hand over her mouth, surprised by the ferocity of her anguished cry of frustration. Then there was only stillness. She could hear the leaves rustling in the light breeze and the distant calls of the children in the gardens closer to the house. **H**er world had been irreparably changed, yet life continued on around her, oblivious to her personal upheaval.

“Are you alright Kaylan?”

Startled, Kaylan looked up in the direction of the voice. Just above her head, gently floating down to the ground beside her came Ororo.

“I...I’m...not sure.” She answered hoarsely.

As her feet touched the earth, Ro lightly walked to Kaylan’s side and sat down opposite her. “Is there anything I can do for you?”

“No, I don’t think so.” Kaylan looked away to hide the tears building in her eyes. On the one hand she did not really wish for company but equally she felt relieved at no longer being alone.

Seeing the anguish on Kaylan’s face Ro endeavoured to lighten the mood. “You know, you have picked a beautiful spot here in the garden, although I much prefer it from the air. It is my favourite place, when I need to think.” She tilted her head slightly hoping for a response from the clearly distraught woman. Kaylan tried to smile, but it was half-hearted. “But, sometimes it is better to share one’s problems with those around you don’t you think?” She added.

Kaylan looked up at the white-haired woman sitting patiently on the grass; outwardly she was a paragon of peace and tranquillity, but Kaylan was acutely aware of the wildness of this woman’s true nature, which lay just beneath her soft chocolate skin and deep brown eyes.

“I’m a mutant!” Kaylan burst out. “I’m a...” The words stuck in her throat and the tears flowed from her eyes.

Ro moved forward, taking the woman into her arms. “Oh, my dear Kaylan,” she murmured, “there is no need for tears. Do not be afraid of who you are.”

“But I don’t know what to do,” Kaylan sobbed. “I...I...”

Ro rubbed her back gently to calm her, “Life is a strange and wondrous, and sometimes terrifying thing, Kaylan, it is not given to us lightly, and whatever it throws into our path we must try to accept it with grace, and hope that we can continue on our journey with the Goddess’ blessing.” Kaylan sobbed into Ro’s shoulder. “You are not the first to experience the prospect of a new life, and you will not be the last.” Ro continued. “Each of us here knows only too well the challenges that being different can bring.”

“But you grew up with it,” Kaylan tried to answer through the tears, “I’m a grown woman. How can I make a change like this?”

“Look to it as an opportunity, you will not have to face the heart-ache of puberty and the fear of being different. All your life-experiences will help you overcome the changes you face. You see, there is a silver lining in every cloud.”

Kaylan pulled away from the woman’s embrace, taking solace in her words. She wiped the tears from her cheeks with the heel of her hand and tried to smile. “I still don’t know what to do,” she sniffed, “either way Charles tells me I’m going to develop my abilities whether I like it or not, I don’t see what choice I have. Do I stay here or go on with my life knowing I’m different?”

“That is only something you can answer Kaylan, all I can do is tell you of my own experiences and hope that they will guide you. Has he told you what you might become?”

“Yes,” she wrinkled her nose at the thought. “A cat!”

“A cat,” Ro repeated, “hmmm, there are definite advantages to being an animal, don’t you think?”

Kaylan looked bemused.

Ro continued, “For example, you can hide from others when you want peace and quiet, you can sleep all day in your favourite chair, you can climb trees better than anyone else...”

“You can catch rats!” Kaylan added.

The two woman looked at each other, “EEEUUWWW!” they exclaimed in unison. Realising their identical response, they burst out laughing.

“I am sure you will find many other wonderful benefits of being feline.” Ro finished through the laughter.

“I hope so,” Kaylan added sniffing, regaining a little of her usual composure. “It will take me sometime to get used to the idea though, it’s not something I expected. I’ve always had such an ordered life, always had plans, you know, but I guess that’s all over now.”

“No, no my dear, just because you are different doesn’t mean you can’t lead the life you want. You can still do all the things you set out to achieve, they may not be the way you pictured them, but they are not unobtainable.”

“I guess.” Kaylan sighed.

“Come,” Ro gracefully rose to her feet and held out her hand, “Would you like to see the school from my favourite view?”

“Up there you mean?” Kaylan pointed skyward and Ro nodded. The remaining tears and uncertainty slowly ebbed away at the thought of Ro’s suggestion, “Alright,” Kaylan answered, never one to refuse a challenge. She stood up, dusting the dry grass from her jeans. “But how do we ...” Kaylan didn’t finish the sentence, as Ro wrapped an arm around the woman’s waist and they began to lift off the ground. As Kaylan watched in awe, the weather-witch’s eyes turned opaque and the gentle breeze that had surrounded them whipped up into a gust. She felt her feet lose contact with the ground as they rose effortlessly into the air.

Rising up into the canopy of the Oak, Kaylan closed her eyes; fright and exhilaration mixing together in a rush of adrenaline. She felt the wind on her face and the strength of Ro’s arm around her, and as swiftly as the wind had made them airborne, so too did the rushing air clear her mind of all the chaotic questions.

“Whatever life throws into our path we must try to accept it with grace.” Ro’s words echoed in her mind. Instantly, her path seemed clear. Opening her eyes wide to take in the spectacular view, she felt renewed. *“I am a mutant!”* she told herself, as she tightened her grip on Ro’s jacket, *“This is my future, this is where I belong.”*

Chapter 13: Dreams

Hold on, Hold on to yourself, For this is gonna hurt like hell...

...You know that only time will tell, What is it in me that refuses to believe...

...Am I in heaven here or am I in hell. At the crossroads I am standing...

Hold On, Sarah McLaclan

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A paw rested lightly on the soft fur of the carcass; claws slowly extending, pressed without effort, into the fresh pelt. Deep ruddy blood welled up around them. Standing proud and majestic over its fallen prey, the creature scanned the horizon; which was empty in all directions. Wild pig or antelope, it made no difference, the outcome for its victim was still the same.

It closed its eyes, savouring the heady sweet smell of its kill; the shameless pleasure of the predator. The pin-sharp rows of incisors glinted white in the shimmering sun light as the creature opened its mouth, lowering its head towards its meal. The first press of its nose into the still-warm, moist flesh sending an uncontrollable shiver of delight through its body. It dabbed the tip of its pink tongue into a pool of salty red juice, lapping at the gooey fluid with delicate precision. It paused, relishing the sensual pleasure, bordering on wild elation.

The first bite was the most satisfying; its teeth pressed forward, slicing through the tender meat like it was melting butter. The thick warm liquid bursting upon its tongue, mixing with its saliva as it drove deeper into the flesh. Purrs of self-satisfaction filled the air. Pulling away with this first fresh chunk, it did not chew it, but let the slice slither down its throat, craving for the sensation to never end....

Kaylan woke with a start; her body covered in sweat and the sheets thrown to the floor. It was the dream again. Turning to the bedside table she groaned seeing the clock blinked 3am. Breathing heavily, she pushed herself up and headed to the bathroom. Blinking in the bright light, she absently ran the cold water and splashed it on her face, staring at herself in the mirror as the water ran down her cheeks. “*Who am I?*” she contemplated.

She climbed out of her pyjamas, peeling off the damp clothing, and tossing it to the floor. Wandering naked, back into the bedroom she pulled at the curtains and threw open the French windows. The warm night air blew over her skin and she shivered from its caress. She stood for a long moment, her slim body bathed in silver moonlight, a hand on each door trying to push the dream from her mind. “*No going back now...just have to stick it out.*” With a sigh she turned and climbed back onto the damp bed.

For the third night in a row, the dream of the creature had woken her from her sleep and she knew when she closed her eyes it would return. Her scientific mind told her it was just the start of her treatment; her x-gene asserting itself. But she was terrified by the prospect, a natural response she told herself; fear of the unknown, no control. Yet it left her with an inexplicable feeling of arousal; a sense of power, a freedom of spirit, feelings of such intensity she had never before experienced. She knew her only choice was to ride it out, but how long would the nightly visitations last, she did not know. “*Maybe this is it; maybe this is how I will live my life from now on.*” She shivered at the thought and

tried to push it from her mind, turning over and clutching the pillow to her chest, she closed her eyes thinking back to the morning her new life started.

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“It’ll be ok, I promise.” Jean smiled.

Kaylan tried to look down the length of her body to the end of the medi-bed where Jean stood. For a brief moment she experienced a strange feeling of *deja-vu*. Somehow she had been in this same situation before, but the moment passed as Jean spoke.

“I’m only going to give you a very small dose to begin with.” Jean reassured her, “We have to make sure you don’t have any nasty reactions.”

Kay’s heart pounded in her chest as she watched Jean fill the small syringe from one of the vials. “Logan?” she whispered. The presence of her new-found friend, at what was to be her ‘re-birthing’ as she’d jokingly called it, meant a great deal to her. She had approached him with the request at breakfast and with a curt nodded and well-hidden feelings of pride and privilege, he accepted.

“I’m here darlin’,” Logan stepped up to the side of the bed wrapping his large hands around her small fingers in comfort. “It’s gonna be ok.” He added, gently squeezing her hand. She tried to smile but the fear was clear in her eyes. The scent of fright and sadness mingled together and shades of green and blue coloured his vision. But today it didn’t matter, “*She can make me see whatever she wants, it ain’t gonna bother me. Hell, she’s brave.*”

“My dear, try to relax.” The soft baritone voice of Charles whispered from the other side of the bed. She turned to face her uncle, remembering that gentle voice from when she was a child. “There is nothing to fear.”

“Alright, we’re ready.” Jean announced as she stepped up to the bed, taking Kaylan’s left arm by the wrist.

“Kaylan,” Charles murmured. “I have to ask you one more time. Is this what you what? Your life is about to change forever.”

Kay smiled at him, tears welling up in her eyes, a myriad emotions flowing through her. Nothing in her entire life had prepared her for this moment, but she knew her future was indeed inevitable. She sucked in a deep breath and nodded. “Yes, uncle, it’s what I want.”

Kaylan stiffened with anticipation as Jean cleaned the soft patch of skin on her arm with a cotton swab. Charles tried to take her mind off it. “Kaylan, do you remember when you were a child and I used to visit?” She nodded. “Do you remember the stories I used to tell you?”

“Oh yes, I do.” She smiled.

“Do you remember the unicorn? Concentrate on him like I taught you, my dear. ” It was one of Charles’ mind-relaxing techniques which he had used on Kaylan as a small child during the traumatic period of the loss of her mother and her father’s estrangement. Now, he recalled the technique to help her through yet another unpleasant event.

The memories of her childhood came flooding back; long hours alone in the town house, filled only with private tutors and the constant fussing of her nanny. Her days were made brighter by the regular visits of her dear God-father, Uncle Charles who would spend hours telling her stories and playing games. She recalled the happy feelings she always felt at his visits and how they had always been so much more intense than at other times. He had never told her how he had helped her through that year by easing her mind with pleasant thoughts, but now he would be revealing his gift.

Kaylan pictured the unicorn of her childhood in her mind's eye. As Charles closed his eyes, suddenly the mythical creature was cantering through her brain; bright dazzling colours shimmering in its mane, its hooves leaving a trail of sparks as it ran. The image was so vivid, just as she remembered it from so long ago.

“All done.” Jean's voice broke in and the galloping creature vanished from Kaylan's mind. The procedure was over. Kay opened her eyes as Jean placed a Band-Aid over the puncture mark. “Nothing we can do now, but wait.”

Looking up, she fixed Charles with a mischievous eye. “It was you all along wasn't it?” She murmured. “You made the unicorn for me when I was a child.”

Charles smiled, a slight blush rising to his cheeks. “Yes, it helped you through so much Kaylan. I thought it would help now.”

Kay slowly climbed off the bed. “Thank you uncle, it did.” Sighing in relief, she swung her legs off the bed, rubbing her forearm. “*That's it,*” she thought, “*no going back now.*”

Logan looked bemused. “Enough with the mythical animals you two, how ya feelin' Kay?”

She turned to face him. “I feel fine, I think.”

“You may experience some side effects in the next few days, but with the small dose I've given you they shouldn't be too bad. Let me know immediately if you experience anything, ok.?”

“I will. Thank you Jean, and you as well uncle.” She bent and kissed him on the cheek. Turning she headed for the door, with Logan following behind her. “I think I'll get some fresh air, take a walk in th...” Kaylan's sentence was cut short as a wave of dizziness washed over her and her legs buckled. Logan, stepped in, scooping her up as she keeled sideways. He carried her back to the medi-bed as she protested. “I'm ok, I'm...”, but her head swam and her vision fizzed.

Jean busied herself checking Kay's vitals. Her temperature was up a little and her heart was racing but her blood pressure was near normal and she showed no other symptoms that gave Jean cause for concern. “I think even that small dose is having an effect. Plenty of rest for you my dear. Doctor's orders.”

“I'll make sure o' that, she ain't goin' no-where.” Logan growled in mock aggression as he winked at Kay.

“Make sure she doesn't Logan. I don't what to have to get Scott to post a 24 hour watch.” Jean giggled.

“I promise Jean, I'll stay in my room and get some sleep.”

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Now as she lay naked, clammy and tired in her bed clutching her pillow, that first morning of her new life seemed such a long time ago. The dizzy spells had passed, but with their departure came the dreams and night-sweats. She couldn't decide which was worse and tomorrow would be her second injection, "*Lord-knows what will happen next.*" She thought as she finally closed her eyes and let the dream play out once more.

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"I know your going to feel a bit awkward. But would you like to sit in on one of my classes?" Jean asked. The two women sat in the small study, which acted as a staff common-room, drinking tea.

Whilst Jean expressed how pleased she was with Kaylan's progress, Kaylan resolved not to reveal the strangely erotic animal dreams she had been having. She felt a little uncomfortable about them and their content and even though all the house-hold had made her so welcome, she still felt it would take time for her be that comfortable with these new people.

Jean continued. "When new students arrive, we have a series of induction classes. You know, lay a few ground rules, and teach them how to behave at the school. But also, and the professor feels very strongly about this, we teach them how to deal with their powers, how to control them and how to use them for good. If you felt like joining in..." she offered.

"I would love to. It's been a while since I've been in a classroom. I miss it and I think it would help me.... Adjust."

"Great, well there's no time like the present. I have a class starting right about now."

Jean lead the way to one of the seminar rooms at the far end of the school. The boisterous noise of prattling children could be heard all the way down the corridor. Many of the children had only been pupils at the school for a few days; some had only just arrived. Everything was new and exciting to these 12 to 14 years olds as they began to make new friends and found for the first time they could impress their fellow classmates instead of frightening them.

"We call this class 'Dealing With Mutation,' DWM-101 for short, but some of the older children have jokingly taken to calling it WMD-101, Warning Mutant Danger - 101as we **occasionally** have the odd mishap when new students can't control their mutations, but really it's rare. The children at first are usually only allowed to use their abilities to train in a special program in the danger room with the staff, but the reason a lot of them are here is because of their lack of ability to control their new found gifts."

As the two women entered the room there was a scramble for desks and a hush descended on the assembly. "Please Kaylan, take a seat."

Kaylan walked through the rows of children to an empty desk two rows from the front. She squeezed herself into the chair, designed - she realised as she breathed in - for much smaller frames than hers. Even after all her years as a lecturer and academic, sitting with the children brought back the vivid feelings of pre-pubescent awkwardness and embarrassment; memories of her first day at prep school in Switzerland and how the other children had called her names because of her piercing blue eyes. Yet, as she looked at the youngsters around her - some outwardly no different to any other teens, others

clearly ill-at-ease by their obvious mutations - she realised that she was truly privileged to be surrounded by such extraordinary people.

“What’s your thing miss?” a small but authoritative voice demanded causing Kay to look round. Sitting to her right a small girl sat alone. She had dark brown hair that hung in two untidy plats and a ruddy complexion like she’s been playing out in the cold. She faced Kaylan, grinning with a wide smile of braced teeth.

“My thing? Oh you mean my mutation.” Kaylan felt surprised by the child’s bluntness but also by her reaction to it, ‘my mutation’; like it had always been there. She smiled to herself. *“I’m getting used to it, I think?”* “I’m a cat, of some sort, not sure just yet.” She answered simply.

“Ya don’t look like a cat, miss? Where’s ya tail, and ya whiskers, all cats have whiskers.” The child added with some authority.

“Well I don’t have those just yet, I’ve only been a mutant for a few days.”

“A few days!” The girl screeched, “but you’re a grown-up. You like really old. How come you only just became a mutant?”

“It’s a long story…?” Kay fished for a name from the little girl.

“Annabelle, miss.”

“You don’t have to call me ‘miss’ Annabelle, Kaylan will do just fine.”

“Ok.” She added nonchalantly. For a moment the young girl examined her quizzically; arms lying folded on top of her desk with her chin resting on her hands and her head tilted to one side.

“Maybe I can tell you about my abilities another time, when they’ve developed a little.”

“Annabelle!” Jean exclaimed. “Please concentrate on the task. You can talk to Miss O’Connor after class.”

“Yes mam.” the child replied a little dejected.

Kay patted her on the arm and winked. “It’s alright.” she whispered. Annabelle’s face lit up and her chest swelled with satisfaction; she had found herself an ally, and an adult one at that. Pleased with her new-found friend and hoping the other children would notice, Annabelle sat up straight and turned to face the front of the class. Kaylan smiled to herself at the young child’s obvious pleasure and settled back to listen to Jean’s lesson on Mutant Etiquette.

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“Ok class, now that we’ve been through the rules, we’re going to try a little technique for dealing with those awkward moments when you don’t feel in control of your powers. Now what’s the first thing we do?” Jean addressed the class. Several hands rose into the air. “Jonas?”

A small green-haired boy eagerly waved his hand above his head, more clawed fingers covered in scales. “Takth a deep breath Mith Grey.” The boy whispered shyly, his pink forked-tongue protruding slightly from his mouth as he spoke.

“Yes, Jonas, good answer. What else?” Another sea of hands rose. “Crystal?”

A tall child sitting close to the window, wrapped in thick, padded garments, lowered her shimmering glass-like fingers as she answered. “Ask politely to be excused.”

“Good, ok, now I’m going to teach you some breathing techniques for you to use once you have excused yourself and found a place to sit quietly for a while.”

Jean set about explaining the simple breath control, giving a short demonstration and then asking the children to join in. Kaylan closed her eyes and began the repetitive process; breathing in through her nose and out through her mouth.

As she began the visualisation those same strange feelings that manifested themselves in her dream began to grow. Slowly at first, odd flashes of the creature flickered in her mind. She tried to push them aside; to focus on Jean’s voice guiding the class further into the meditation and the forest-scene Jean was describing. But the pull of those potent emotions grew ever stronger; the sense of power and freedom enticing her deeper into the waking dream. She felt the eyes of the beast suddenly upon her, scowling back at her. Irritated by the intrusion, it turned away. Filled with fear yet unable to stop herself she timidly raised her hand and reached out. Her fingers shook, yet the creature ignored her. Her outward reach seemed to take forever and then,

“WWWEEERRRRRAAWWW” the cat whirled on its haunches, mouth wide in anger, saliva dripping from its sharp white teeth. In an instant it lashed out a paw, catching her and slicing deep tracks into her outstretched arm. The pain seemed so real, blood oozing out onto the flesh and Kay yelped at the burning sensation, her eyes suddenly opening in shocked surprise.

“Kaylan, its alright, I’m right here with you, are you ok?” Jean was already by her side. Sensing the growing wave of powerful emotions building in the woman she had made her way quickly through the desks gently opening her telepathic link into Kaylan’s mind to help her through her experiences. Kay blinked as reality reasserted itself. “yes, yes.” She exhaled, “I think so, it was just a vision, I’m ok.”

Jean was more than a little concerned. She had seen the creature manifested in Kaylan’s mind and she sensed also it was not Kaylan’s first encounter with it. “You’ve seen it before.” She whispered. Kay nodded. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I didn’t know how.” Kay answered, rubbing her temples.

“Maybe we should call it quits for today.”

“No, no I want to continue if you will let me.” Kay looked around the class, a complete stillness had descended as the children stared at her; some a little afraid, others curious at the woman’s behaviour.

“Alright, but any more signs like that and your off to the medi-lab.” Kay nodded agreement and smiled. “Alright class, lets start again.”

Once again, Kaylan closed her eyes as Jean gently coaxed them back into their meditation. As the feelings returned Kay fought to control them; like a deep-sea fisherman reeling in his catch, she let the feelings run then, pulled back with every ounce of her being. Slowly her confidence grew, the emotions easing and becoming familiar. This time as the big cat appeared in her minds-eye she reached out with a steady hand. A sense of relief coursed through her body as she felt the first touch

of fur under her fingers; It's side rising and falling as it breathed in and out. With each breath a deep rumbling purr escaped it's throat. She pressed her hand to it, feeling it's warmth. And as Jean continued her gentle dialogue, Kay moved closer to the animal, kneeling at it's side and feeling its fur against her as she lay her body lightly over it.

Suddenly her whole being was filled with a bright feeling of inner peace and contentment; the fear and hostility that usually accompanied the creature was ebbing away. She felt herself sink into the animal's skin; the softness and warmth surrounding her, pressing at her legs, arms, face and torso, yet it was not claustrophobic or uncomfortable but powerful and tender. She felt a strong sense of acceptance. Finally she and the creature-within met on equal terms; the merging of the two, human and animal, had begun.

She opened her eyes wide, as if seeing for the first time. All around her was bright and clear, every nuance of the room, normally unnoticed by the human eye could be seen and as she concentrated harder she began to pick out the tiniest details; the fine markings of the spider in it's web above the door, the tiny flecks of dust collecting on the skirting-board. Sounds began to grow in volume; she picked out the tick-tick-tick of Jean's watch, inaudible to most of those in the room yet bright and piercing in her ears. Focusing ever harder, the tiniest of scuffling sounds reach her from metres away, far below the floorboards of the old house a family of mice scurried through the dust and detritus, four, she knew instantly.

As she pushed herself deeper into these new experiences her nose picked out the scent of Jean's perfume from across the room. Seeking out greater stimuli, Kay sucked in a deep breath, her brain instantly sorting through the myriad aromas; Dust, candy, dirt, rubber-soled shoes. Then through it all her brain latched on to a set of unmistakable scents. Her focus shifted totally to it; sweat, a long gym work-out?, the faintest hint of gasoline fumes, bike maintenance? and the heady odour of cigar smoke and leather mixed with the deep overwhelming scent of male. Kay's head snapped round just as a shadow passed across the small window in the door. But the sudden distraction sent her senses reeling; her vision fizzed and the clear images vanished, the minute sounds and vibrations stopped, leaving her ears ringing with white noise and the scents that had been so easy to discern suddenly made her gag and sneeze.

"Are you alright." Jean whispered, her attention on the silently meditating class broken by the loud 'achoo'.

"No, not really." Kaylan answered, her mind still reeling from the intense bombardment to her senses. "Think I'll go lie down for a while."

"Well, it's nearly time we finished." She added. Jean slowly brought the youngsters out of their meditation and the once still room begin to rustle with whispering voices and giggles. Having given them homework and dismissed the class, Jean drew up a seat next to Kay. "Everything ok?"

"It was such a strange sensation, not like the nightmares I've been having, more like a test of wills. Its the first time it let me touch it, do you think it has accepted me?"

"I think you've finally accepted yourself." Jean smiled back, patting her on the arm. "I can't say I've had any experience like this when my powers manifested, but you, you have had this forced upon you and everything is flowing out like a tidal wave. This could just be the start. But why didn't you tell me about the dreams, I could have tried to help you through them."

"There was something about them...I...I couldn't share. I felt I needed to deal with them myself."

“I think your spending far too much time with Logan.” She laughed. “His ‘loner have to do it himself’ habits are rubbing off on you. Would you mind?” Jean raised her hands and indicated she wished to take a look inside Kay’s mind.

“No, I don’t mind. If you think it will help.”

“I don’t know about that, but it will help me to understand.” Jean raised her hands to the side of Kaylan’s face and gently let her mind open. The images rushed by as she floated through Kay’s consciousness focusing on the cat-like creature; strange scenes of wide empty prairies, and bloodied grass where fresh meat lay. Pushing deeper towards the animal Jean felt herself running, running alongside a large wild cat. At first she could not make it out, its speed blurring its outline. But as she watched its gracefully sleek body bounding over the grass-land she could discern its identity. Slowly moving away and letting it run, she returned to the room and Kaylan sitting with her eyes tight shut opposite her.

As Jean lowered her hands Kay opened her eyes. “Well?” she asked.

“Well, I could see it, and see some of the things you’ve been seeing these last few days. If only you’d told me.”

“Well, that’s passed now,” Kay answered. “Don’t worry, I can handle it. So, what did you see?”

“It’s defiantly a cat, but we already knew that’s what your mutation would be. It seems to be some kind of African wild cat, it looked a bit like...like a cheetah, I think. But it didn’t have the usual spots.”

“Do you think its just my mind manifesting my unconscious thoughts?”

“Possibly, it could be your bodies way of dealing with the activation of your x-gene. The brain’s way of dealing with things it can’t understand, by making images of your mutation.”

“Well at least I’m not going mad.” She joked.

“No your not, but any more dreams and you come straight to me ok. That’s what I’m here for...to help.”

“I will. There is more Jean, just now, in the meditation. My senses went wild. A little like in the alleyway the night Logan rescued me, but much stronger and more vivid. I could smell and hear and see things so clearly. But then something distracted me and I lost control.” Kaylan kept the reason for her distraction to herself; owning up to loosing her concentration from cigar smoke, leather and bike grease was something she felt strangely unwilling to discuss.

“Sounds to me like your x-gene is enhancing your senses, learning to keep control will be your next step. Maybe a bit of time with Ro may help, she knows some good techniques for such things. Any biological changes to your vision and hearing are something we can check out in the lab during your next injection, speaking of which...” Jean looked down at her watch. “it’s that time Kaylan.”

Kay sighed inwardly as they headed toward the med lab to start round two. If this was just the beginning; just a brief glimpse of what was to come she knew she was going to have to draw on all her years of self-reliance and scientific single-mindedness to get her through the weeks to come. “*You’ve*

finally accepted yourself;” Jean’s words repeated in her mind. “*I hope she’s right,*” but as she thought on the strange and wonderful feelings she had experienced during the meditation and the sense of elation still lingering, she smiled to herself, “*Then again, I think maybe I’m going to enjoy getting to know this new me.*”

Chapter 14: Down

Kay rolled onto her back, stretching out in a long, languid yawn. The summer sunshine shone in through the open curtain casting long warm beams across her naked body. After awaking one too many times drenched in sweat she had finally given up the pj’s that had been her standard for most of her life. Now as she absorbed the gentle heat a smile spread across her face at the pleasantness of the sensation and her new-found freedom from night clothes. Sleepily she rolled over to the edge of the bed her eyes half closed from the near-blinding brightness of the morning sun. Rising, she stretched out again and padded to the bathroom.

The near-blood curdling scream of anguish reverberated across half the school. Logan nearly fell off his chair at the sound, as he pulled on his boots ready to begin prepping for the recon mission. There was no mistaking from whom the sound emanated, it was indelibly marked in his brain. Recovering quickly he threw open his bedroom door and swung himself into the empty corridor, heading for the room two doors down.

“KAY!” he hammered on the door, “Kay ya awright?” he bellowed. The scent of distress wafted under the door and those all too familiar shimmering colours pervaded his vision. He heard another anguished cry from inside and shook the door handle. “Kay, what’s wrong?”

“Don’t come in!” came a sobbing screech from just behind the door and he heard the key turn in the lock.

“Kay what the hell’s goin’ on.” “*Jeeze, what’s wrong with the woman? Ok, ya got no other choice Logan, ya can fix it later.*” With that he unsheathed a single blade, smoothly shearing through the lock, his forward momentum carried him into the room and he crouched instinctively; setting his feet squarely to brace himself for an attack. But the room was empty. For a split second the thought of teleporting bad-guys entered his mind, but a crashing sound and wailing from the bathroom put aside his fears.

“Kay!” he banged on the bathroom door.

“Go away Logan.” Came a tear-filled sob.

“I ain’t goin’ anywhere till ya come out here and show me ya ok. That scream a yours just got half the school outa bed.”

“I’m alright.”

“Kay I din’t just fall out th’ sky, I can smell ya darlin’ and fine ain’t what I’m smellin’.”

“Logan?” Jean stood in the open doorway a look of deep concern on her face. On hearing the scream she’d frantically dressed and grabbed her medi-kit. As she’d headed down the corridor the sense of

distress and fright emanating from Kaylan grew ever stronger in her mind. “I can feel her projecting .” Jean closed her eyes for a moment focusing on Kaylan. “Something has happened to her body. I don’t think she’s in any danger, she’s just distraught.”

“Gimme five minutes to get her out, then I’ll call ya, k?”

Jean, still concerned, complied with Logan’s wishes. “*If she’ll confide in anyone here, it’s him.*” she thought. With a nod she acknowledged his request pulling the damaged door shut as she left Logan to coax her out.

“Com’ on darlin’ I ain’t leavin’, and I can sit here all day if I hafta.”

“No.”

“Ain’t the correct answer.”

“I just...I can’t...”

“Ya want me ta’ come in there and fetch ya out?”

“NO..NO!”

Logan sighed in frustration. “Well ya can’t stay in there ferever. Whatever it is, I’m sure it ain’t that bad.”

“Oh yes it is.”

“What, ya like, grown another head or som’in’?”

There was a long pause. “Err, no, not a head.”

“Well what, I can’t help ya if ya don’t come out and won’t talk to me.” Silence, “Kay?”

“Alright, but you promise not to laugh.”

“Now why would I do that? Ain’t many things that make me laugh kiddo, specially other peoples misfortunes. So come on.”

Long pause. The latch clicked as the door slowly opened. Kay had her bath robe pulled tightly around her with the collar turned up; tugging at it to make sure it covered her completely. Her hands covered her face and she stepped gingerly into the room; only able to see through a small crack between her fingers.

“See that weren’t so bad now was it?”

“Guess.” She mumbled through her fingers.

“So what’s goin’ on?” Logan asked.

“Something horrible Logan, sit down and I’ll show you.”

“K”, He turned and sat down on the edge of the bed. Kay continued to stand in the centre of the room.

“You promise?”

“Scouts ‘onour darlin’.” Slowly she rolled her hands away from her face. At first Logan saw only those deep blue eyes fix him with a doleful stare. His brow furrowed. There **was** something different about her face, “*It looks a little ‘fuzzy’.*” He thought. Screwing up his eyes he refocused, but it was still there. “Come here.” He gestured her over. Timidly she obliged, stepping within a couple of feet of him. A soft yellow haze reflected in the light as the bright sun shone through the window catching the side of Kaylan’s face.

“What??”

“I’M FURRY!” Kaylan shrieked in frustration and anger. “I’m furry, fluffy! Hairy! Look!” Suddenly hysterical, she reached for the bottom of the robe and began to lift it.

“Whoa, Whoa.” Logan exclaimed, suddenly made uncomfortable by Kay’s actions. “I get it, no need to...”

“I just wanted to show you my leg.” Kay explained, giving Logan a bewildered look.

“Oh, ok.” He added, somewhat relieved.

Kay raised her leg onto the ball of her foot and eased her knee out between the folds of the robe. The soft yellow shimmered along the outside of her calf and knee. Silently, Logan examined it from his seat. “*That’s fur awright.*” He mused following the line of it up her leg to the edge of the robe.

Glancing at her face with its dejected expression filled him with a need to lighten her spirits, when the wicked thought suddenly grabbed him. “Does it...err...does it, go, all the way...ya know...up.” He grinned wiggling his index finger in an upward gesture.

Kaylan went from white to red in an instant; the thought of Logan making fun of her combined with the sheer brazenness of his question sent her into a spontaneous rant. “Logan, you promised you wouldn’t make fun of me this is so hard for me I thought you would understand I hate this I can’t stand it just go, ok, I’ll deal with it myself...” she turned away suddenly to head back towards the bathroom.

“Hey hey, I’m sorry ok, I didn’t mean t’ be funny, I’m sorry...” He grinned trying to be as apologetic as possible, but still looking mischievous. She wrinkled up her nose and pouted at his repentance, but her eyes glinted and he knew her anger was abating.

He waited for a moment as she straightened the robe. “Well, does it?” He added grinning once more.

“LOGAN!” Kay lashed out a hand, catching him on the arm with a playful swat. They stared at each other for a moment. Logan peering at her with a roguish look wiggling his brows. Kay looked away, trying to hide the grin that was now growing on her face. “AAWWW!” she yelled in frustration, stamping her foot, no longer able to hide her amusement. “Logan this is serious.” She moaned, trying to keep a straight face.

“I know, I know, sorry darlin’, I couldn’t see ya so upset is all. Just waned t’ see ya smile.” He winked at her and she grinned. “Stuff like this happens all the time round here. An’ well, figured it was likely ta happen to ya sooner or later.”

“I know, I just didn’t expect it to happen...well...this soon. Do you think its permanent?” she asked, pulling the gown in a little tighter.

“Hard t’ say. I ain’t no doctor. Ya’ll have to let Jeanie take a look.”

“It feels so strange.” Kay whispered, wriggling under her robe, a look of concern returning to her face.

“Com’ere.” Logan beckoned, slowly reaching out a hand. Kay flinched. “S ok, it ain’t gonna hurt ya, I just...” He broke off as his outstretched hand caressed her cheek. The tips of his fingers were met with a downy softness; an almost silky quality that barley felt like it was there.

Kay closed her eyes, sucking in a sharp breath, not only surprised by the gentleness of his large hand but by the powerful sensations that spread rapidly through her body. Every nerve-ending was tingling with a wave of euphoria, it spread out from her cheek, across her face and down through her chest. As it reached her legs they began to shake. Her whole body felt like it was being pricked with a thousand tiny pins. But with it came other new sensations. She perceived instantly the force each of Logan’s fingers was applying to her cheek. She felt the heat of his hand and intuitively knew his body temperature. All these things came to her in an instant. She tilted her head and pressed her cheek into his hand, a whispered moan escaping her lips as she instinctively sought to intensify the sensation. But through the tingling haze that filled her mind the image of two glowering cats eyes startled her. She abruptly exhaled, her eyes opening wide; surprised by the vision and suddenly ashamed by her enjoyment of his simple caress. She pulled away, lowering her head so her hair fell over her face to hide her sudden embarrassment.

Logan sat, his eyes fixed but unseeing on the robe-clad woman before him; swirls of colour clouding his vision. In that same instant as his fingers touched her face a powerful wave of emotions surged over him; Kaylan’s emotions. He sensed her surprise and shock at his initial contact, slowly intensifying into pleasure and desire as she pressed her face into his palm. Then as if suddenly hitting a wall, fright and confusion smacked into his mind and a dark shadow cast over his vision. He felt her pull away; her contact with his mind and body broken leaving behind only a vague afterimage, like a distant memory. He swallowed hard, trying to recover his poise, lowering his hand gently so as not to frighten her.

Hearing a sob, his vision was brought into sharp focus. Kaylan stood before him shaking, clutching at her robe, emotions overwhelming her. Sliding off the bed, he approached, putting his arms out and turning his palms up in supplication. She took a step back, frightened by the prospect of what another touch would bring.

“s ok.” He whispered. “s ok.”

Reaching out for her, he gently pulled her into his body; making sure her hypersensitive skin did not touch him. Wrapping her in his arms he felt her go limp as her body convulsed with tears. He held her in his embrace for many minutes, stroking her back to calm her and whispering soft words of understanding until the shaking subsided. Easing away and turning her slowly, he silently lead her back over to the bed and helped her climb in; pulling the sheets up over her shoulders. She stared blankly as if hypnotised by the experience.

“I’m gonna fetch Jean.” He muttered, still feeling a little dazed by the experience. “She really needs to take a look at ya.”

“NO!” Kay exclaimed jogged back to reality by Logan’s words, surprising him by her insistence.

“I have ta.” He frowned.

“No, please, not right now, I, I don’t feel I could face it...not just at the moment.” She stared at him with tear-filled blue eyes and he understood. “Would you stay with me a while?”

He tried to smile, “Sure.” Stepping away he went to retrieve a chair from the desk.

“Logan? Would you sit up here...with me?” She patted the empty side of the bed next to her. “So I know your there...” As the moment of his touch passed, she had experienced a feeling of loneliness and isolation, like something had been ripped from her. When he’d held her again that feeling had eased but now, alone in the large bed the feelings returned and she longed for that simple contact once more.

After sharing such an intense moment, he too felt a strange sense of emptiness that right now only closeness could ease, but his feelings were torn and he knew he needed to put some distance between the two of them; right now it would be all too easy to let their impaired emotional state lead to something he couldn’t control. “Don’t think that would be a good idea right now darlin’ but I promise I will stay right here.” He said as he moved the chair in tight to the side of the bed.

A feeling of emotional exhaustion passed over him as he sat down, the power emanating from Kaylan’s mind and body during that one brief touch had left him feeling drained. Logan let his head loll back against the chair and closed his eyes, listening to the soft slow flutter of her breathing as she fell to sleep.

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The sensation of having his hair brushed from his face startled him from his slumber and instinctively he grabbed the hand.

“AAOOWW!” Kaylan let out a yelp.

He opened his eyes focusing on the woman who bent over him, his big hand wrapped around her small wrist. “Sorry.” He muttered, letting go. “How ya feelin?” he asked.

“A little better, thank you.” That familiar smile had returned but the sparkle in her eyes was still missing and he could hear the tiredness in her voice. “The fur, it’s gone, I just checked.”

“How long we been asleep?” he asked curtly, running a hand through his hair.

“Not long, half an hour or so.”

He pushed himself from the chair with some urgency; the grogginess still lingering. “Ya still need t’ get checked out. Com’ on, I’m takin’ ya t’ Jean.” He added as he headed for the door.

Kay, feeling a little bewildered by the whole experience, complied without any argument. Even though her outward marks had vanished the lingering sensations still pervaded her mind and she knew

after her last experience - wrestling with her senses in the classroom - that Jean would be more than a little annoyed if she didn't report what had happen. It was obvious Logan wasn't about to let it go either, and it was clear from his behaviour that he felt just as uncomfortable as she did. Pulling her robe tightly around her she followed him to the door, pausing briefly as she passed him. "Logan, I'm sorry about ...that...whatever it was...I couldn't help it, it just..."

"Gonna need to fix ya door," he interrupted, determined to end any further discussion of the topic. "I'll get the lock changed later." He finished, trying to smile but inside he felt knotted-up. He'd expected things to get bad; to feel things for her he knew he should try not to feel, but he'd never expected it to be like this. He knew she was trying and that whatever 'it' was she couldn't help it, but those crazy feelings he'd had all those weeks ago, when she first came to the mansion, were starting to manifest themselves again in the pit of his stomach. He needed some space to get away from these emotions, just for a little while.

"Shit, the recon mission. it'll just have t' wait till I got this sorted." He thought with a sigh.

They walked in silence to the medi-lab, Logan clearly lost in thought and the worry in Kay's mind growing with every step - worry that she may have inadvertently hurt the one person she trusted without question. She felt helpless and out of control, unable to stem the growing tide of mutant powers and incapable of controlling them. *"What have I done? I've hurt him somehow. Those emotions, those feelings were so strong. He looks so angry. Oh god, I can't take much more of this."*

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Jean was already in the lab when the two silent figures arrived. "Oh Kaylan, are you alright?" she asked, taking Kay by the hand and leading her to a bed. "What happened, I sensed there was something wrong with your body."

"I woke up with fur Jean, but its gone now." Kaylan answered. "Logan helped me through it." she added, turning a smile to her stoic-looking companion in the hopes he would respond in kind. But he was lost in his thoughts and remained statue-still. Kay's heart sank a little further.

"Well I'll check you out, I don't feel its anything to worry about, it maybe something your going to have to get used to." Jean added.

"I gotta go." Logan announced, focusing on Jean, his mind turning to the mission and the need for time alone.

"Thank you for bringing her down Logan." Jean replied, busying herself with equipment to monitor Kaylan's vitals.

Kay sat quietly on the bed, now truly convinced she had hurt him deeply and done irreparable damage to their friendship. She watched him turn in silence. "Logan?" she whispered. He paused halfway to the door and turned to look over his shoulder. "I'm sorry." He smiled the best he could and turned for the door. Kay flopped back on to the pillows, tears beginning to well in her eyes.

"Hey, what's the matter?" Jean asked turning as she heard a quiet sob.

"I think I hurt him Jean."

“Who, Logan? No, don’t be silly, how could you have hurt him? He’s as tough as old boots.” She joked, coming to sit on the edge of the bed.

“I don’t mean physically, I mean mentally.” Realising there was no way she could keep her current bout of reactions to herself, Kay began to tell Jean of the sensations she had felt when Logan touched her fur and how he had reacted.

Jean listened intently, it was clear that Kaylan’s powers were growing more rapidly than anyone had expected and the feelings of fear and confusion emanating from the woman told her that she desperately needed support.

“It was as if he felt them too. Like telepathy or something.” Kaylan added, when she had finished the description of what had transpired.

“Sounds to me more like an empathic reaction, he sensed your feelings not your thoughts. It could be that because you both have feral natures you have some kind of empathic link to one another. Its something I need to investigate further.” Jean mused.

“Whatever it was it upset him I can tell.”

“Its just Logan’s way Kaylan, I don’t think he’s in any way angry with you, maybe just a little caught off his usual guard. I mean, if the intensity of the contact was as you described you were lucky it was Logan you were with and not someone of a weaker constitution.”

Kay considered Jean’s words, she was grateful for all of Logan’s help, but it did little to lift her spirits.

“Come on, lets take a look at you.” Jean announced.

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“Ah, gentlemen, please, come in.” Charles urged as the two X-Men entered the office. “I have some particularly disturbing news to discuss with you that could effect the mission.”

Logan and Scott glanced at each other as they both took a seat on the sofas. They had been finishing pre-flight checks when the telepathic summons from Professor Xavier echoed in their minds. The look of concern was clearly visible on Charles’ face as he wheeled himself from behind his desk, coming to a stop between them.

“What is it?” Scott asked, keen to find out what else they were up against.

“It seems that my old friend, Lewis Williams, Kaylan’s father, is missing.” Charles announced.

Scott shifted in his chair. “When did this happen?”

“Well the facts are not completely clear, but he has not been seen for two days.”

“An’ they only just decided to tell someone?” Logan muttered sarcastically.

“Well it seems the things are not so clear-cut Logan. I received a call a short time ago from Lewis’ personal assistant, Anderson. He was the last person to see Lewis. But from what he has told me, Lewis had been behaving strangely for some time, ever since he came here to dinner several weeks

ago and that is why he chose to call me, before informing the police – this is not something that needs to be plastered all over the front pages. He told me that after his visit Lewis spent nearly a week in seclusion, he cancelled all his appointments, wouldn't see anyone, spent hours just sitting in his office. Then he suddenly decided to pay a visit to the head of the Tweed corporation, a man by the name of Korrigan Tweed. Lewis told Anderson he was an old friend.”

“Do we know anything about this Tweed guy?” Scott interrupted.

“Yes indeed, he is head of a medical research company, producing billions of dollars-worth of drugs each year. But he is most notable for his genetics research.”

“Hmmm, sounds like the pieces of the puzzle are starting to come together.” Scott mused.

“My thoughts exactly” Charles added. “Tweed is more than an old friend of Williams, he worked for him for many years. Developed new techniques in gene therapy; helping those with hereditary illnesses and so forth. Lewis invested a great deal in this work, his wife suffered for many years from a terminal genetic condition and he tried everything to help her.” Charles brow furrowed as he recalled long-buried memories of Jennifer O'Connor. But now was not the time for regrets, taking a deep breath he continued. “As I remember Tweed left the company suddenly, and set up on his own. It was reported that Tweed and Williams had had a disagreement, but they both denied it to the media of course. I always found it a little odd that Tweed suddenly had a great deal of funding to play with, I suspect the government or some private organisation may have had a hand in getting him re-established. He's been a big-hitter in the pharmaceutical industry for many years now, I can imagine he has his finger in a large number of pies, not least genetics research.”

“Have you ever met him professor?” Scott asked.

“Only once, at a genetics conference. Pompous sort of a man; very confident in his abilities, but always seemed a little too confident. Anyway, Anderson thought there was something amiss when Lewis gave him the day off, saying he wanted to visit Tweed alone. The PA went into work as usual the next day, but Lewis didn't arrive at the office, nor did he come home, according to the house staff. Then out of the blue he turns up on the doorstep of his home. Told the staff and Anderson he's stayed with Tweed the previous night. There was I suppose, no reason for them not to believe his story. Anderson noticed nothing amiss at first, but then he said he noticed little things, like Lewis forgetting people's names and mislaying personal effects. He didn't think anything of it at first, just put it down to his boss being stressed. But then two days ago Lewis received a private phone call and then promptly left the building, telling his secretary that he would be out all day and that Anderson should meet him back at the house. Lewis never returned.”

“Maybe he just took a vacation.” Logan quipped.

“More likely he's in some kind of trouble.” Scott retorted.

“It is the likeliest option.” Charles replied with a sigh.

“Do they know who called him?” Scott enquired. “Maybe we could trace the call.”

“From what I understand it's a private line, and the calls are not logged for that very reason.” Charles continued. “I as yet do not know what link Tweed has in all of this, but I get the nastiest of feelings he may have something to do with the kidnap attempts on Kaylan and the others. Although why he would be involved in such an awful thing is beyond me.”

“Maybe he wants her for some of his genetics research.” Logan suggested.

Charles fixed him with a frown. “I was trying to avoid thinking that, but you are right Logan, it is possible. We know she has mutant abilities and we know someone at some-time interfered with her x-gene. It is possible that Tweed has some way of reversing that process.”

“Or messed her up in the first place.” Logan growled.

Scott and Charles looked at each other, both knowing Logan’s words could be prophetic.

“Do you think Williams knew about Kaylan’s condition all along?” Scott suggested.

“I don’t know Scott. But it does make me wonder.” Charles paused, old memories again filling his mind; Jennifer’s sudden death, Kaylan’s unannounced departure to Switzerland and his estrangement from his long-time friend. “I can’t imagine he would keep such a thing from me, we were friends for so long.”

“Maybe Mr. Williams didn’t want Kaylan to be treated, that’s why he visited Tweed in the first place. Scott ventured.

“I’m not sure Scott, but I don’t think we have the whole picture just yet. There is still the question of Brazil and what that has to do with the other kidnap victims. Try and find out all you can about the region where the soil sample came from, any unusual activity, that sort of thing. Keep me posted.

Scott rose from his chair. “Will do Professor.”

“I will have Ororo and Marie help me find out a little more about Korrigan Tweed and his company and what he may have to do with all this. I’ll send Jean out to take a look at Lewis’ house and office, see if she can pick up anything. But remember, yours is a recon mission only. Strictly no engagements.” He added, fixing Logan with a concerned stare.

“No problems Chuck, strictly recon.” Logan smirked as he pushed himself out of the seat.

The two men headed for the door, Scott deep in thought, running over his plans in his mind. But Logan’s mind was elsewhere; even though focusing on the mission brought him a sense of relief he still couldn’t shake the knotty feeling in his stomach and chest and that scent of sadness that hung in the air around him.

“Logan? Charles called, as the big man passed through the door. Logan paused and turned leaving Scott to stride off down the corridor, “Is everything alright? You seem a little distracted.” Charles asked gently, sensing Logan’s intense emotional state. “I felt something was wrong with Kaylan this morning, but Jean informed me it was nothing to worry about, said you had helped deal with the matter.”

“Err, yeah Chuck, she grew herself some fur. Kinda surprised her a bit. But its gone now. She’s with Jean in the medi-lab.”

“And there’s nothing else bothering you?”

“No. Well...no.” He frowned. He had no wish to share the strange experience he had had that morning, especially with her ‘uncle’, although he knew Kay would probably talk to him about it at some point. It was his problem to deal with and he preferred to keep it that way.

Charles smiled at the uneasy wolverine. “It means a great deal to me that you have found a way to help her, I know it wasn’t easy at first. Thank you, yet again Logan.”

Logan just shrugged. “*Not easy at first!, it ain’t easy any time.*”

“Alright. I’ll see you when you get back.” Charles added, nodding a good bye.

Logan turned and headed for the hanger and the waiting blackbird; those inexplicable feelings of concern tinged with aggravation pulled at him again. “*Jeez Logan ya can’t leave it like this. Ya got no reason t’ be riled up, it ain’t her fault. Gotta make it up to her.*”

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“Hey darlin’.”

Kay woke suddenly from her nap, rolling over slightly to face the familiar voice. Logan stood at the side of the medi-bed dressed in his black leather suit and with his hair brushed back into those familiar tufts he resembled even more than usual, his name-sake.

“Hey.” She whispered groggily, turning over fully to face him. “I thought you’d left already.”

“Nah, couldn’t go without seein’ how ya were doin’.” He winked.

Kay’s heart pounded with relief. She had been so sure her friend and guardian angel had left, still angry at her uncontrolled reaction to his touch. Yet here he stood, about to go off to who-knows-where, and he had taken the time to visit her. “*Oh Logan, I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry.*” Her mind repeated over and over.

“Listen, ‘bout earlier,” he begin, as if reading her thoughts. “Sorry if I ...well ya know. It wasn’t ya fault. Just wana’d ya to know.” He lowered his gaze, unable to stand the piercing blue eyes now turning glassy with tears and the shades of blue and green beginning to swirl in his mind.

Kaylan tried to control it, but her emotions got the better of her; a mix of relief, happiness and embarrassment washed through her. “I’m sorry too Logan.” She tried to reply but the tears rolled out over her lashes and down her face.

“Hey, come on. There’s no need fer that. Just forget about it ‘k. I’m just glad I was there ta help ya.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, well... could a done without the sensation overload,” he smirked, “but yeah, couldn’t have ya goin’ through this shit on ya own, right?”

“I guess.”

“I’ll see ya when we get back ok, I’ll teach ya some stuff to help ya control that kinda thing. I gotta go.” He thumbed in the direction of the door.

Kaylan felt suddenly at a loss. She knew both he and Scott would be away for a while, but she hadn't expected to feel like she was losing her friend yet again. "When will you be back?" she ventured timidly.

"Couple days." He smiled. "You'll be fine, 'sides, Jeannie and Ro 'll keep an eye on ya." Logan's tone belied his true feelings. For even though he felt relief at spending a few days away from this intensity between them, he had the overwhelming need to stay at her side; to watch over her. He pushed these powerful urges back down as he sucked in a deep breath.

"Look-after yourself Logan, don't get hurt." It was a natural thing for her to say, she knew little of Logan's abilities and the thought of anything happening to him suddenly filled her with fear.

"Ain't no worries on that front." He quipped.

Kay tried to wipe away the tears on her cheeks, "I wish you weren't going." She whispered, then looked up bashfully, realising she had vocalised her thoughts.

"Gotta go find out what's goin' on down there. We do this all the time, ain't nothin' to worry about." He added trying to ease her visible concern. "I'll see ya soon 'k."

"Ok."

Logan raised his hand and with a leather-clad finger reached out and brushed the remaining tears from her cheek. Kay smiled, closing her eyes for a moment remembering the feelings of closeness.

"Logan! You ready to go." The voice of the commander crackled in his ear-piece and he pulled his hand away to press the send button on the side of the radio-mike. The feelings of apprehension returned in Kaylan as she watch him visibly flip from friend to fighter.

"Yeah Kid. On m' way." He growled, but his brow softened as his attention was drawn back to her. "See ya darlin'." He smiled turning, he strode to the door.

She watched him go, only falling back into the pillows when the doors closed behind him. "Be safe Logan." She whispered as she closed her eyes and sleep took her.