

# Maybe in another dimension

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## Kapitel 1: The beginning of the end

Sometimes, when you think everything goes the wrong way and anything can't get worse, it always gets worse. Like when you thought you had a sister, which will stay by your side forever and then wanders off, because she isn't satisfied with the way you treat her. Or when you thought you had a best friend for life, who will betray and abandon you the moment you let him know that you see things differently. Or when you thought legs and hair would be anything but a matter of course.

When Charles drank the rest of his outrageously expensive Whiskey and looked out of the window right into the dark, rainy sky, all that came to his mind were his bad life choices. Sure, Raven came back after the events of Apocalypse and trained his students into something that he refused to call "soldiers" – but it was nothing like before. Of course, there was the school, the kids, his other friends and a bank account full of money, which normally would make people enormously happy. But when you have no opportunity to spend the money or get any feeling out of it, money really can't buy you happiness. The school was nice and gave Charles a feeling of usefulness. When he gave lessons to the kids, he forgot for a moment that he was just a bald guy in a wheel chair between a handful of young people, who still have to reach their full potential, while he was at the end of his best years.

And the more the Professor stared out of the window and thought about all the hassles in life, he wondered what his best friend would think of him, if he saw his sombrelly state. He would probably go nuts and tell him to pull himself together. But everyone needs to get depressed from time to time. Especially when you're crippled and lonely.

Maybe it was the whole Whiskey bottle he emptied within an hour or his dark thoughts that he didn't notice the group of people approaching the school. It was already too late, when Hank entered his room, shouted something about leaving right now and grabbed his wheel chair. All Charles could focus on was his friends' blue fur that was hanging into his eyes. When they reached the hallway to the stairs, he saw the strange intruders storming into the building. They wore white plastic devices around their heads, which made it impossible to enter their minds. Strange, thought Charles, as he was pulled by Hank to another direction. It reminded him of the odious helmet that made his beloved friend feel like a dead man. Maybe it was something similar? Or Charles was just too drunk to manipulate those soldiers. After all he couldn't even see them without a tiny blur to their silhouettes.

He heard the screams of his students down the hall, while Hank tried to get him to safety. They seemed to run towards the escape tunnels that Charles had advised to build after the whole school was destroyed. What a good plan that was.

Charles tried to sober up, but the whole world was still spinning around him. It was like a dream – everything happened so fast and slow at the same time, he couldn't recognize what those all-in-white-people exactly did. They didn't shoot, although they were carrying weapons.

"Hank", murmured Charles when they reached an empty room. "What happened?" His heart was racing but his eyes felt like they would shut at any minute. In contrast, Hank seemed to explode any minute.

"I don't know who they are", he began, as he managed to put a huge cupboard in front of the door, "but they surprised us by storming into the house from the backyard. No one saw them coming."

He opened the windows and looked outside, as if jumping out of the second floor would be a solution. Maybe for him, but not for Charles. It was Hanks disappointed voice that got him out of his thoughts:

"You're drunk again, aren't you?"

A faint smile came to Charles face, while the footsteps and screams outside of the room began to get louder. "Maybe", was all he could say that wouldn't sound like he was already at the edge of fainting.

The professor wondered why those strange humans were trying to attack his school. And how they got here. What they wanted.

Suddenly the doors were thrown open and a group of all-in-white-people began to shoot. Blue fur was covering him in a second, but it was in vain: Those weren't normal bullets – these were little syringes filled with a blue liquid. Charles saw how Hank got to the ground, gasping in pain. The humans aimed their devices at Charles neck. Then his vision began to blur. Hands were grabbing him.

And then everything went black.

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It was rather a beautiful day in autumn, so Erik decided to go into the tiny garden he had created a couple of months ago in front of his equally tiny house. As he was harvesting some leaves off the ground, he thought about Magda and Nina. He missed them deeply but the pain in his heart began to fade every day. His life as Henryk – which felt like another lifetime – seemed to fade, too. En Sabah Nur gave him powers beyond his beliefs and gave him the chance of revenge that he needed, but after he tried to kill everyone that was once dear to him, Erik had to stop. He saw what he had become and it was the exact opposite of that, what Magda would have wanted. She accepted him the moment they met and Erik was grateful for that. Still, he had the feeling that he didn't deserve her. Or anyone else.

Charles offered him to stay at the school after the events of Cairo. A tiny part of him wanted to stay. Wanted to go back to Westchester County and live a happy life next to his beloved friend. But then he remembered their different views on mutant kind and how they would argue every day. Erik was sure it would have ended the same as back in Cuba: a hurtful separation. And after losing his whole family, his life and almost his will to live, he didn't want to lose another thing that was dear to him. So, the best idea was leaving the things that are precious to avoid losing them in the first place. If it was his choice to leave, a parting seemed less painful, then it would have been, when it was forced by another person or thing.

Living in a city with other mutants seemed fine. Genosha was nice – their own little island nation where no one will disturb them. Erik was their leader and he had the feeling, he did the right thing. It was not the best solution for mutant kind, but it was a peaceful way to remember the humans that they exist. And wasn't that what Charles always wanted? A peaceful solution? Erik smiled to himself thinking of his friend while he saw the similarities in their way of living: Erik was a leader of mutants and Charles was a leader of mutants. They both were living separate ways but

somehow very identically.

Erik grabbed a fistful of leaves when a young female mutant showed up and attracted his attention.

"A blue man and that shapeshifter woman are on the way to you! Do you await them?" Before Erik could answer the obviously stressed lady, Beast and Mystique showed up around the corner. They looked kind of pale and tired.

As soon as Mystique stood in front of Erik – around three arm lengths safety distance – her whole face crumbled into something that he would have described as 'not amused'.

"We need to talk", was all she said, before she passed him and entered the tiny building without asking for permission. Beast waited for an unnecessary polite moment and looked Erik straight in the eyes until he followed wordlessly Mystique into the house.

Erik's eyebrows shot up. "Please", he said more to himself as to his guests, "come in." The woman who announced the unexpected guests was still standing in front of Erik's yard, so he dismissed her with a slight nod. Without a word she turned around and went back to the alley she came from. Erik could only hope that she kept the arrival of two 'enemies' to herself; otherwise he assumed half of Genosha will stand in front of his house in about ten minutes.

When he entered the living room and closed the door behind him, Mystique and Beast already stood in the middle of the room inspecting his few belongings. It looked like they were searching for dangerous weapons he held in store just in case a war might rise when he is in the shower.

"What gives me the honor?", asked Erik sarcastically and crossed his arms. "It's rare that I get visitors, especially those of your kind. Let me guess: Is it about the school? Did I miss a room to build? Or do you want another floor?"

Mystique pressed her lips in a thin line and frowned, while she searched for Erik's eyes.

"I try to ignore what you just said and go straight to the point", she hissed in a dangerous tone. "We need your help and I won't take no for an answer."

Erik's eyebrows shot up. "Oh, is that so? Well then", he said, shuffled to the main door and opened it, "goodbye then."

"This is not funny", started Beast to speak for the first time of their visit and clenched his fists, while he approached two steps to Erik. "Charles is in real danger and we don't need your attitude! Raven, this was a mistake. I know you had high hopes about him, but no – just no!" His voice went higher with every word while Erik's face went darker. Slowly, he closed the door again and let his hands fall to his sides. He looked to Mystique, then to Beast. A bad feeling made his way through his spine. "What happened...?"

"Are you willing to listen and help us?", asked Mystique in a hasty tone. "We need to know You're on our side before we tell you the details. You're not the trust worthiest person. But you're as strong as you're in constant anger – and that's what we need right now."

The corner of Erik's mouth twitched. "If you don't trust me, then you shouldn't ask for my help. But sure, keep going. Where's Charles?"

"We don't know", Beast said. And before he could continue, Mystique interrupted him. "We know exactly where he is. But we can't get to him."

"He was kidnapped?", pressed Erik. "How did that happen? He is a telepath. Whoever is near him won't get very far." And then, within a second, all the worst-case scenarios flew past his eyes: Charles was wounded. Unconscious. Hurt. Or something equal as bad as that, so he wasn't in the position of manipulating the enemy.

Beast chewed on his lower lip and it looked like he almost ripped it from his chin. "The people that took him wore devices around their heads. I assume they had the same effect like your helmet."

"Bullshit", said Erik and crossed again his arms in front of his chest. "My helmet is one of a kind."

"Maybe not?", Mystique cut in. "You don't know who had his hands on your helmet and it's powers when you were in prison, do you? Maybe they found out what makes it special and developed some kind of technology. You remember Trask? He was all in with his robots. We know shit about other companies and their electronic stuff."

"What we know", sighted Beast, while he obviously tried to calm himself, "is that Charles is held hostage in a facility on a deserted island near the west coast. We don't know who they are or what they want from him, but they stormed into the school, took him and left. No one was severely hurt or got killed. Their main goal wasn't to destroy us. There's a high probability that they just came ... for Charles."

Erik tightened his eyebrows and also began to chew on his lower lip. His heart began to pump faster in his chest, while he processed the new information. "...Did they hurt him?", he asked in a quiet voice.

Mystique raised her shoulders and looked to the floor. Beast gave an angry snort. "Probably not."

"*Probably?* What do you mean with *probably*? Where were you when they got their dirty hands on him?" Erik's mind went wild while he thought of Charles alone in a room with no one around to help him.

"I was there with him, but I was knocked out before they took him! They shot with strong sedatives!"

"Beast, I swear –", Erik began and made a large step towards the blue fur man. The metal in the room began to shake and tiny pieces already flew around.

"Stop that Erik, Hank isn't to blame", Mystique shouted, "He gave his best to rescue Charles but was overwhelmed by their syringes. And on top of that Charles was very, very, *very* drunk. He probably could have helped himself a little bit more if he weren't in such a bad shape."

For a long moment no one said anything until Erik found his voice. "*Was zur Hölle?* Now you blame him for his own kidnapping? How drunk was he that –"

"He just was, okay? The important thing here is: We need to get Charles out of the facility!", Mystique interrupted Erik's helpless talk. "Will you help us or not?"

Erik grabbed into his short auburn hair and pulled desperately. "I can't believe this ... You don't know what they will do to him, do you? What if they will use his powers? Like Apocalypse did. Then we're all screwed." He sighted defenseless and walked around the tiny coffee table in front of his worn-out sofa. "How long is Charles already missing?"

"... three weeks", mumbled Hank; knowing already how Erik will react to that answer. "What?!", came the predicted answer. "He is already three weeks in their labs? Are you

kidding me?"

"We tried to help him on our own first, okay?", screamed Mystique in a high-pitched voice. "We needed to find out who they were and what will await us there! But then we failed and couldn't get Charles out. But we know he is still alive, I felt his mental nudge at some point when we were near the island."

"Wow", breathed Erik and squeezed his eyes with his fingers. "Of course, they won't kill him. If they wanted him dead, they already would have done that in the school."

Resignation came over him as he sat down on the sofa. Neither Beast nor Mystique said anything while he rubbed his head in frustration.

"They will hurt him...", mumbled Erik so quiet, both had to lean in to understand him. "They will hurt him."

"Erik, if you help us, we might come in time to help him get out and – ", began Mystique but was interrupted by Erik's desperate and angry voice.

"You already waited three fucking weeks! Do you think they just ate cake and drank tea with him in that time?", he shouted and gesticulated with his hands in the air. "For god's sake, he already suffered, I'm sure of it!"

"And will you do something about it, god damn it?", Mystique shouted back at him and grabbed the backrest of the sofa.

"Of course I will", he hissed and got to his feet. "I will kill them all."

He knew Charles would be last person on earth to be okay with Erik killing a whole island of scientists, but after what he learned about those people, the urge to end their miserable lives was something very satisfying inside his mind. In the past years he often thought about Charles and how he was doing, but never felt the necessarily to actually check on him. Now that he left his friend not long ago on amicable terms and saw how his other friends failed to rescue him, Erik's first instinct was to help. For the first time in what felt like an eternity he wanted to be there for Charles. And get him out of those hell labs. It has always been his fault when something bad happened to his friend. So helping him was the least he could do now that he was in danger – again.

"It's an island, don't forget that", Beast said while they sat in his research lab and determined the few information they got of the facility. "We're trapped if something happens to the jet."

"I can levitate myself and float over the ocean if it's necessary", Erik said dryly and played with the end of a map. "Wear a lot of metal on your body. Then you don't have to worry about any jet."

Beast hesitated for a way too long second. "No, thank you. I still don't trust you."

"Rather die in that hell then let me help you?" A smile crept in Erik's face. "Why am I here again?"

"To help us and now shut up and listen to Hank", came Mystiques voices as she was followed by couple of students. A few of them Erik already knew but forgot their names. The girl who took Apocalypse down was there, too. Suddenly he was glad to wear his helmet. It was the first thing he took with him when he left Genosha and went with Beast and Mystique.

"What are the kids supposed to do?", he asked and pointed with his chin towards the group of young people.

"They will come with us", Mystique explained and led them further into the research lab. "They all have talents we might need."

Erik raised an eyebrow and watched the red-haired telepathic girl, which stood in a lonely corner and looked like as if she wanted to disappear immediately. "If you have a strong telepath with telekinetic powers with you, why would you need me? She can manipulate everything, not only metal."

"I know it always hurts you almost to death when you have to work with other people. But I also know that after you learned about Charles' situation, you have in mind to go to the island all by yourself and I don't need to be a fortune-teller to tell you that this will be your death. So, just do us all a favour, behave and do what you're supposed to do."

The white-haired girl – Ororo was her name? – chuckled and followed Mystique after her great speech to a couple of boxes with uniforms in it. Everyone took a suit that made Erik's heart go warm and his eyes go blind. They were so ugly like they always were – with black and yellow and basic stitches that looked like some of the kids had sewn them together – but they were what Erik also once had worn all those years ago and somehow it was a heart-warming memory. Because it belonged to a time when he was still with Charles. A time where he was more than anger and bitterness. Where he did more than make him cry and suffer. A time where they both laughed and had a great time as brothers. Or friends. Or whatever it was what they once had.

"Sure, Mystique, whatever you say", Erik said with a crooked smile and chose not to go further on the topic.

"We will fly over the facility with the jet", explained Beast and tried to get Erik's attention back, "The building has a large roof where we can enter. From there we can only assume what will be inside. Last time they shot with syringes and other devices with sedatives. The guns have no metal, be warned."

Erik nodded while half his concentration was already on that mission.

"We will go west, Mystique and Scott will take the north, Jean and Ororo will go south and the rest will take the east route. Got it?"

Again, Erik nodded and tried to be convincing, although he didn't even know who was supposed to go where, because he sucked at names. Beast explained something about the devices on their heads. Then what they wore and Erik couldn't care less. He will kill them, no matter what they will wear or what they will say or do. They took Charles and that was their first mistake.

When Erik gathered all his things back at Genosha for the mission, he felt into a mournful silence. Why wasn't he with Charles when it happened? Was it again his fault? If he just stayed with him, maybe he could have prevented Charles kidnapping. Maybe it would have been different. But instead he was at Genosha and probably thought about another war for mutant kind while his friend got hurt and dragged off. *This time shall be different*, Erik thought while he chose to sleep with his helmet on his head. It was not like he didn't trust Charles, but now that the probability was high that his telepathy might got hacked, Erik needed to be sure. Needed to be sure that Charles won't get any more into his head than he already was.

## Kapitel 2: Iaret Industries

The next day, Erik waited in the main hall for the others and found himself a little bit more nervous than necessary. It was the forthcoming unknown that made him feel uneasy. And looking at the kids in those uniforms made him even more tense.

“Ready?”, Beast asked as he passed Erik and went straight to the black jet. Mystique took a few things with her that looked like first aid packages and followed her friend. The young students looked all a little bit pale, but got in the jet as well. Erik was the last to follow. His dark coat flew dramatically behind him as he entered the aircraft. The helmet a little bit heavier than usual on to his head.

They all went into a crushing silence, after Beast started the engine and flew high above the school right to the island. It was a few minutes after the start that the grey-haired boy found his voice and talked to Erik.

“You know... I’m glad you’re here”, he said a little bit nervous. “And I’m sure the Professor is glad as well.”

Erik just nodded and tried to ignore the start of an uneasy conversation. But the boy just continued talking.

“Back in Cairo I really thought you wanted to destroy us. After you’ve lost... well, your family and such.”

“Peter”, came Mystique’s voice from one of the frontal seats. “Now is not the time.”

“For what?”, Erik found himself suddenly curious. “You brought him with you back in Cairo, Mystique.” He looked back to the young man. “And I have a feeling you want to tell me something. It’s Peter, yes?”

“Ah, yeah”, he nodded and wiggled in his seat. “Raven is right, maybe now is not the time. Uh, or is it Mystique? What do you want to be called?”, he changed the subject rather smart.

“I don’t care”, the blue skinned woman grumbled and looked out of a tiny window.

“There was a time when you cared a lot”, Erik reminded her of the last years, where she came with him to find herself and became the great Mystique instead of Charles little girl named Raven. But instead of her raising voice, he just heard her sighing and then ignoring him. The other kids stayed silent and even Peter didn’t say anything anymore.

The whole situation in the jet became even more unbearable, so Erik hoped they would arrive soon, so he can leave this sticky atmosphere.

After what felt like an eternity, they saw the island. Beast gripped the controller and

almost crushed the black plastic out of sheer nervousness. "We're almost there. I will try to land on the roof as agreed. We need to move quickly then. They probably have already seen us."

As Erik looked out of the window, he saw people storming out of the big complex. "Pretty sure they have seen the big black aircraft."

The building was bigger than he had expected. On the maps it looked big, sure, but this? This was almost a whole city. How are they supposed to find Charles in there?

Right before the aircraft could land on the roof top, they got shot. Of course, they got shot, Erik thought to himself as he watched tensely smoke enter the plane.

"Out, out!", shouted Mystique, while she tried to help the others to get out of their safety belts. Everything went loud and high noises were hurting Erik's brain. Then the airplane crashed.

It took him a couple of seconds to recognize where he was. Fire, smoke, Mystiques shouts. Then blue fur grabbed him and pulled him over the ground until they reached the outside of the jet. The thing had crashed into one of the many complexes of the facility and had destroyed most of it. A few dead people were lying next to him.

"Are you hurt?", Beast asked in a raspy voice and flicked his fingers in front of his still adjusting eyes.

"Stop that", Erik grumbled and smacked the blue claws away. "Where are we? And what happened?"

"We got hit by a... I guess missile."

"Ah sure... made of plastic or what?"

"Obviously. Or did you wanted us to get shot?" Beast got up and rolled his eyes almost into his head. "They will be here any minute, you better – "

And then the kids screamed as new smoke arose from the destroyed halls of the building. They were probably at the second floor. Third? Maybe the first floor? Erik was still trying to get up – his legs felt wobbly and his eyes hurt whenever he looked into the blinding that was white everywhere. The halls, the lights, the floor, the walls – everything was clinically white. Only the broken pieces of the jet and some wall fragments had a different, darker colour.

The smoke spread quickly around the long halls. Erik tried to run, but his legs didn't move the way he wanted. Loud sirens chimed through the building and made clear that the whole lab city was aware of their presence. The screams of the kids went quieter until no one was heard anymore. Erik limped as fast as he could, but to no avail. The smoke reached him and in the moment he breathed the chemicals in, he knew that it was over.

When Erik opened his eyes again, he felt terrible. His lids were swollen, his head hurt and his hands and legs were immobile. Only when he looked around for the first time, he realised that he wasn't dead but in a little cell that was as white as everything he saw until now. Everything was made out of plastic and glass, as if they knew he would come to rescue Charles. Why else would an organization build only with non-metal materials?

His helmet was gone and he was alone. Just a tiny white room with a white floor he was sitting on. His legs and arms were tied up in tight cuffs. He couldn't move an inch. And before Erik felt the memories starting to come back when he was in prison – with all that white and glass and plastic – a door opened and a slim woman entered the room. Her long black hair was in strong contrast to the rest of the facility.

"Welcome to Iaret Industries, Magneto", she said in a calm voice. Behind her were two large men, probably security. They held those plastic guns Beast was talking about. "You're here because you were negligent. I hoped for more... resistance."

Erik blinked a few times to adjust his eyes that still felt very swollen. The smoke or gas was presumably not the best treatment you could give your body. Shortly he wondered what happened to the others, but found himself to not care at all about them. Most importantly was: "Where's Charles?"

"Straight to the point as always, I see", the woman mused and gave him a dry smile. "You will see him soon. When we're in the final phase, you can watch our most significant research result. But now we need your powers for the machine. Would you be so kind?"

And with that, the two big men came into Erik's cell and grabbed him. He tried to fight back, but in the end the cuffs were still too tight and the men too strong. They put something in his left ear which felt like a little headphone but was immediately starting to feel unpleasant. He heard a faint whisper in his head. A familiar voice. A mental nudge.

"Please, this way", the scientist said and stepped aside, so Erik could go outside. The two large men opened the cuffs and put them to the ground. They didn't touch him, grabbed him or tried anything to hinder him from running. Slowly, Erik felt his legs work and how he got up. Like a puppet he moved towards the door, where the woman was waiting. Panic made his way through his mind, when he realised that he was no longer in control over his own body.

"Don't worry. We're only manipulating your endocrine system. Your mind is safe", she assured him into false safety as she led him through a white corridor. "It's amazing what we learned from your little friend, Magneto. Because you know", Erik was walking beside her like they were old friends talking about the good old days, "to control someone's mind is everything. There is no use, if you can bend metal or shoot lasers out of your body, when someone is mentally directing you. A word or an idea – and your whole world changes."

They entered another part of the lab city, where a lot of people were working on different researches. Some of them had animals in their grasp. Others humans. Or maybe even mutants. They all looked like they were about to die any minute. Pale, with dark circles under the eyes and way too thin.

But the scientist just continued talking as if they were passing a beautiful park. "We found that to be very fascinating and went to study this ability. But without a proper test subject we couldn't investigate any further. We found other telepaths, but they were all too weak. Their powers were not strong enough for more research. We tried different things – revival, comas, clones – but none of them survived the tests long enough."

Erik felt his blood boil. Those scientists were all the same. They took mutant lives and played with them like they were disposable toys. To do what? Take their powers and turn them against themselves. To smother them. To kill them.

He wanted to say something, argue with her – or just end her – but all he did was walking next to her like a marionette. The familiar whisper in his left ear a constant sound in his brain.

The woman reached for a mechanical door that opened as soon as she put her hand on a display. In the next room was a big table. And a lot of surgical tools made of glass. Erik felt his heartbeat go faster. "After all this time we finally found out about Charles Francis Xavier. The events of Cairo put a spotlight on him. After all – he was in our heads. All around the world."

The big guys led Erik over to the table and waited for him to lay down. And though everything in him wanted to resist, he did exactly what was wanted of him. He laid down. The table was cold and uncomfortable. White plastic made his skin crawl. What he would have done for anything made out of metal.

"Charles Xavier was the perfect match. So we got him. And until now he is the most significant being, I've ever worked on." She smiled again and Erik wanted to puke. He knew it. They were using Charles. Hurt him. Maybe even tortured him. How could his friends wait three weeks? How dared they to wait that long?

For a moment she just stared him down while she stood next to the table. The big guys left the room and other people joined them. Other scientists, Erik assumed, as they began to put electrodes on him.

Metal.

Finally.

And the devices that were brought to him had tiny pieces of copper in them to carry electricity.

"Charles Xavier's abilities were dangerous, Magneto. You did a good job with that

helmet of yours. We knew that telepathy is something very strong and as a psychiatrist I know what a mind can do and what not. And protecting your own brain isn't something normal people can do. Unfortunately, we – and that includes you as well – are those normal people, so we figured that we need a device to protect us. That's when you and your little accessory came in handy. We analyzed it and were amazed how it was made. Probably not by you, I assume, but by someone else. It was amazing. Though it took us some time to reproduce the effect on other things."

Erik was all but in the mood to answer. What he heard was horrible. And he wanted the nightmare to end. His heart raced and pumped adrenaline through him. His mind and body were fighting each other and he was reminded of his terrible past at Auschwitz, where Shaw had made him watch his mother die only because he wasn't able to control his powers. And right now, he wasn't able to control anything. The lack of it made him panic.

After all electrodes were placed, the young woman leaned over him. "With this", she pointed at her little device at her ear that looked a bit like what Erik wore, "no telepath can reach our minds. Not even Charles Xavier. Because with his power we were able to improve our technology."

Erik's eyes hurt. The light above him was too bright. The white of the walls were blinding him. And those words made him forget how to breathe. Suddenly electricity went through his body. He felt it prickling under his skin.

"To be honest, we had our difficulties with him. He could have taken down every one of us, if he wasn't in such a bad shape. We were just lucky, I'd say." There was that smile again, but this time it was distant. As if she was thinking about something in the far distant of her mind. "I always wondered why he never used his power to his full potential. Only with our help he reached a level that was enough to pass the tests. There was so much strength in him he had never used." Her eyes went cold again in a second. "But it doesn't matter, does it, Magneto? You probably wondered about the same all those years ago and I presume you still don't have an answer."

The electrical blows became stronger and Erik gasped in pain. His muscles began to itch. His whole body was on fire. But he wasn't able to scream or shout. Only his breathing went quicker.

"Oh, don't worry. We won't kill you. We just want to analyze your ability and therefore we must take your powers. It's like – hm", and then she was thinking like a child with a finger on her chin, "Imagine you're a battery. A battery with a lot of power in it. And we are the machine that takes this power to function. But you're not just a battery – you're a rechargeable battery! Your body will recharge you after every time, so we can use you every now and then."

Suddenly it hit Erik like Charles' fist back at the Pentagon: Their little devices only function with the power of other mutants? Is that the reason why they had so many people in here that looked like they were dying? Because they were actually passing from all those draining tests?

“You’re like batteries for us, Magneto. Mutants have a special ability that allows them to use their body differently than humans do. And we take advantage of that. Because”, and her eyes began to shine, “imagine what it will be like, when no one needs to worry about a free will anymore? There will be peace and order. Regulations that everyone follows. No more ugly questions. No more rebellions. No more war.”

She was insane. More insane than he was – and that was something.

“With the help of your little friends we will achieve that goal in only a few days. We knew you would come for Charles Xavier one day, but you also brought more mutants with you. Strong, powerful mutants. They will give us a huge advance.”

Oh god, it was his fault again, wasn’t it? Death followed him like a disease you can’t cure.

“When our system is finished with all the processes, we can go to the next step. Charles Xavier will help us to reach all people in the world – like he once did in Cairo. But he won’t just speak to them, he will take control over them. He will tell them what to do and what not. And like that we can control aggression and other human flaws. Aren’t that great news?”

No, Erik wanted to shout, those are the thoughts of an ill mind. He learned that in Cairo after he realised that he betrayed his true friends. The woman’s eyes were still on him, as if she waited for an actual answer. But after a few seconds she just walked away from the table and from Erik’s field of view. The sound of the door was heard and after that scientist gathered around the cold table.

More electricity went through his body and everything burned. His skin was probably smoking because he smelled burned flesh. After a few moments in which he wondered if the others were under the same treatment and if they were still alive, he passed out.

## Kapitel 3: There has to be another way

When Erik woke up, he was in his little cell again. His skin hurt and his head felt heavy. All he could do was staring on the white ceiling. The familiar hum was still in his head. He assumed that the body controlling tool was still in his ear. There were no chains. No big guys. Just Erik. In his old clothes. Worn out. Without his helmet. And without Charles.

God, what if they tested him the same way? They probably did even worse things on him. He had to find him. Just once in his life he needed to save someone he loved, not kill them. Just this one time.

But even if he tried to fight back the hum and move, he couldn't even lift a finger. All he could do was sit like an old puppet in a corner.

One time another scientist came to check on him. After that, Erik got an infusion and wasn't sure what it was that they injected him with. After a couple of hours – Erik wasn't sure how many have passed, because the bright light was constantly on, so the effect of night and day was non-existent – someone brought him food. It looked like a mush of something healthy. And it tasted exactly like that.

Somehow, he managed to sleep a couple of hours until he was brought back to the lab. Well, not really brought by someone – he just walked the way all by himself like a good dog. As soon as he was lying on that horrible table again, the electricity came back. He couldn't even scream, because the mental nudge didn't allow it. Erik was trapped in his own mind and for the first time he wished to say sorry to Charles. He never understood. He probably still doesn't, but clouded by his pain, all he could think of was Charles and how he almost cried in that plane back then after the Pentagon, when he tried to make Erik understand why he took this DNA changing serum.

Back in his cell, Erik felt exhausted and slept what felt like a whole day, although he wanted to stay awake. The food was terrible and he began to understand why all the people here were so thin. It was probably meant to meet the needs of the human body, but nothing more.

The tests continued and Erik felt like dying. There was no way out: Whenever he felt the metal around him, he wasn't able to control it. The hum in his mind was still strong and after the fourth or fifth time he went to that lab, Erik wondered if this regulator might be Charles'. The scientist woman hadn't appeared again, so Erik was left with speculations, but the more he thought about it, the more it made sense: Charles was the one controlling his body. And Charles would be the one controlling every other person on this planet.

Erik wondered if Charles was still capable of fighting. Maybe he had already lost the battle and was what Erik would call braindead. Exactly what had probably happened back in Cairo hadn't Erik changed his mind. It would have been still Charles' body, but the mind of Apocalypse in him. Something in Erik broke not knowing if Charles was

alright or if he was already dead. He cursed himself for being so selfish and letting his best friend alone all those years. They could have been together – after all he wanted Charles by his side! But Charles didn't want that. He was the one denying the shared future. He was the one sending Erik away and then got all angry because Erik did exactly that. Maybe Charles had understood that sending Erik away was a mistake back then and had wanted to atone for this by asking Erik to stay even after Erik betrayed them so severely with Apocalypse.

Erik found himself lost in his thoughts to cut down the pain he constantly was in. After what felt like an eternity, he felt himself already giving up. When Charles was braindead by now and the other X-Men in the same position as him, then it was over. There was no coming out.

Right in the moment, when Erik wanted to give up and hoped that by doing so, he would see Charles again on the other side to say sorry, his cell door opened and the scientist woman came in. But she seemed in a hurry.

"Are you alright? Oh, god, you have that thing, too! Give me that", she said and moved towards him. Before she touched him, her hand dissolved into blue skin.

"Mystique", was the first thing Erik managed to say with his raspy voice after she had removed the tiny headphone and thrown it on the other side of the room.

"We need to get out of here, they're insane!", she swore as she got up again and helped Erik to his feet. "I already found the others. They're on their way out of here. Hank remembers the maps. We should hurry to stick with them."

"No", Erik coughed and stumbled against a wall. "We need to get Charles."

"We don't know where he is! If they get us again, it might be over! I just managed to escape, because I transformed into the scientist bitch and a young lab assistant thought I was her. That won't work a second time!"

Mystique was right, but there was no chance he was leaving without Charles. "Then go. I will look for him alone."

"What? We will come back for him! Erik, don't be so –"

But he didn't let her finish. He walked out of the room with unsteady legs and moved past the hallway. He already knew the route to the lab room, where they tortured him, but the rest was still unknown. So he did, what he wanted to do, since he entered the torture lab: grab the tiny metal strings and use them. A few people saw him on the way and wanted to run, but Erik was faster. He killed them with his bare hands and god – it felt so good. They deserved it. Even if they were just following orders.

Then again, sirens shrilled through the halls. Before he could reach the lab room with the metal in it, he got shot with one of the syringes Beast spoke about. Within a second everything went black again and Erik wished he would have killed more people on his short way.

He already lost count how many times he has woken up from unconsciousness since he got there, but this time felt different. There were cuffs again. But more like a straitjacket. He was standing up against what felt like a wall but was maybe something more movable. In front of him was a pedestal with big machines. They were all made of metal, but Erik wasn't able to control it.

"Don't even think about it, Magneto", he heard the scientist woman and this time, Erik knew it wasn't Mystique. "You tried to escape – that hurt me. You were our precious guest and a great patient."

She stepped into his field of view and looked at him with strict eyes. Her long black hair was tied back which made her look a bit older than she probably was. "And on top of that, your little friends managed to escape. What a shame. I hope they will drown."

Erik found himself relax for a quick moment. They made it out of here? Good.

"But that doesn't matter. In the end they will be freed of their human faults as everyone else." She took a clipboard from a nearby table and looked it through. "You're here to give us a little bit more power. I don't want to wait any longer. The cleansing will start now."

A few scientists walked around the pedestal and started machines. Erik wanted to say something and suddenly his voice came back. That meant, there was no headphone in his ear.

"Where is Charles?"

The woman looked up from her clipboard and raised her eyebrows. In a monotone voice she said: "Right there."

Erik followed her finger to the pointed direction. With a racing heart he recognized the statue that was sitting in the middle of the machines and tools.

Bright blue eyes looked directly to him. Black circles under his eyes and the pale face showed plainly how they must have mishandled him. Only when Erik's eyes wandered over Charles motionless face, he saw the stitches on his bald head. Red and blue and violet. Dried blood over the cuts. Did they open his head? Did they examine his brain – literally?

Charles sat like a dead body on the chair in the middle of the room. Scientists put devices on his way too thin body. He wore just a plain white shirt and some white sweatpants that almost matched the colour of his skin. Blue veins covered his arms and neck, while a lot of needles poked into his skin. Erik wanted to scream, but nothing came out of his lungs.

Tears began to shoot into his eyes. Charles didn't move. He didn't do anything. Just

breathed and watched.

“What did you do...?”, Erik whispered and blinked the wetness in his eyes away.

“We analysed him”, the scientist answered coldly and came back to him. She adjusted a few electrodes on his body and looked concentrated. “As I told you, Magneto, he is a powerful telepath and we didn’t want to risk anything. We needed to take his free will first, before we could take the will of all the other people. That makes sense, right?”

“Not at all”, he hissed and tried to avoid her touch. But in the end, she just smiled at him and took her clipboard.

“Whatever”, was all she said as she wandered to another direction of the room and joined more scientists. “We will start now.”

In the corners of the big room, Erik saw other mutants that were bound to what looked like a sack barrow. Machines were connected to them as they were to Charles and to Erik.

As soon as the hum of the devices around him started to increase, he got nervous. There had to be something he could do!

Then he looked to Charles, who seemed to watch him passively. The mental nudge was distant, but present. Maybe that was the answer? To reach out to Charles? Like he used to do back when they were still ... good friends?

What did he have to lose?

“Charles”, Erik tried to talk through the mental link he remembered very well. “Charles, can you hear me? Are you still with me?”

The hum of the machines went louder by every second. Scientists looked at their monitors, not in the direction of Charles or Erik.

“Charles, please. Where are you? Let me in... We need to do something to get you out of here!”

But again, there was nothing. Maybe Charles really was braindead? Maybe his best friend was no longer there. Erik closed his eyes and refused to believe in that possibility. He searched his mind to the last corner until he found the memories of Charles and him. The good ones. The ones, Erik hadn’t touched in years. The ones, where they laughed and sat together with a good drink until the morning sun rose. The ones, where Charles smile made his eyes shine brighter like every light in the world. The ones, where his freckles seemed to deepen whenever he stayed a day outside with Erik instead of sitting all day behind his books. The ones, where he looked Erik in the eyes and told him beautiful things. The ones, where his cheeks got red, whenever Erik said something equally beautiful to him. Where he was happy with Erik. Where he was happy in general.

The mental nudge was stronger now and Erik felt a little tug. He reached for it before the moment was gone and suddenly, he was standing in the school. The lab was gone. Sunlight was coming through the windows and made everything look peaceful. It was a late summer day and the sun was already sinking. The atmosphere was calm and soothing.

"Erik", came finally the familiar voice from the stairs. "You're here."

"Charles", Erik whispered as he saw his friend walking down the stairs. He looked like time hadn't passed at all. His hair was falling into his eyes with every step he took. "I'm so glad to see you."

"I'm not", Charles said in a serious tone, when he reached the main floor, that made Erik shudder. With slow steps he approached him. "You being here means that they captured you as well."

"That's true, but I will find a way to get us out", he promised with way too much enthusiasm. "I'm just glad they didn't destroy your mind and –"

"But they did, Erik", murmured his friend while he looked paler by the minute. "I'm trapped here, I don't have any connection left to my body or to anyone else. I'm surprised you managed to link with me."

"I actively searched for our link", he admitted. For a moment he thought Charles smiled, but as soon as he blinked a second time, that smile was gone.

"I'm sorry, my friend, that it came to this", he heard his dear friend say. His way too blue eyes shined in the setting sun. "I wished for another end for us."

"Don't say that, Charles", Erik breathed, "We can still make it."

Charles grabbed his dark blue cardigan and pulled it together. He looked like he was cold. "Did they tell you what they will do?"

Erik nodded. "They want to use you to manipulate humankind. And mutant kind. To annihilate free will."

The sun was going down very quickly. The hall was getting darker. "They will use my body to annihilate everything, Erik. I can't let that happen."

"And it won't – we will get out of here. Just... Just tell me what I can do to help you get back your connection!"

But Charles shook his head. Brown locks wobbled in the air. "They use high frequencies and electrodes to manipulate my body and created a catalyst – like Cerebro. But this time much stronger. They shut my mind away, so I won't interfere. I didn't find a way back to my body. And now it's too late. I can sense that they will start to use my powers for their plan to control humans and mutants."

Erik felt again a strangling sense of helplessness. Looking into those blue eyes that were gritty to choose.

Choose between his mind trapped inside his own school or ...

"What are you planning to do, Charles?", asked Erik in a rush and grabbed Charles arm. It felt so unreal to touch him. After all, they were just inside Charles' mind. Or were they inside his own mind?

"I can control the mind of other people, but I can also control my mind like that of another being, which means... I don't know if it will work, but I have to try." His face went blank for a second. After that a determined expression settled over his face. "In the very moment, when they try to use my full powers and turn on the catalyst, I will ... I will self-destruct. That will damage the system and hopefully everything else." He closed his eyes and let his head fall down. "I'm so sorry, my friend, that you're here. I can't guarantee that you won't get affected by my plan. The machines may explode or implode and since we're connected to the same devices, it may happen that –"

"Don't you dare", hissed Erik with pure venom. "Don't you dare and think about suicide!"

As if something snapped inside Charles, he opened his eyes and looked angry. "What choice do I have? Do you think I want to die? But what if I let them do as they please? The whole world will suffer because of me! I need to destroy them and if that means I have to destroy myself – then be it!"

"I won't let that happen, Charles!", Erik shouted and wondered, why they were arguing again. Even in such a disastrous moment all they could do was fight.

"There is nothing you can do", said his beloved friend in a sad tone. The sun settled down and slowly the school began to crumble. "I will destroy everything. And I can only hope that you will survive, Erik."

The metal bender wanted to object, tell him that no way in hell he will just stand aside and watch Charles die, but before he could say something, his friend withdrew his arm from Erik's grip and retracted from him with glistening eyes.

"Goodbye, old friend. Please don't forget me", were his final words that hurt Erik almost to tears.

"Charles, please, there has to be another way –", but he was cut off by a blast outside of the school. He turned around to see what happened, but was suddenly back in his own body. As he opened his eyes, people were running in different directions, while loud noises came from the machines. The scientists looked stressed and something seemed wrong. Then he saw Charles – or at least his body – how he was still sitting on that strange chair with all the devices on him. Erik heard cries, then the first machine broke down and smoke evaporated from it.

"Shut it down! Shut it down!", came the familiar voice of the black-haired woman. She

was standing in front of monitors and waved her arms in the air. Other scientists followed orders and tried to save the whole mission.

Charles had managed to destroy the facility. But at what cost? When Erik looked back to his friend, his blue eyes were wide open and his mouth apart. Around him smoke and suddenly flames.

Erik did his best to get out of the straitjacket but couldn't move anything beyond his fingers. One explosion at the end of the room killed the already dying mutants. Collateral damage, Erik would have said. But right now, everyone was within the line of collateral damage. Erik didn't care about himself, but he cared about Charles. And he was dangerously close to the burning machines.

With a lot of force, he managed to fall to the ground and hit something hard with his sack barrow. Two buckles broke. But before he could escape the straitjacket, another explosion got off and burned the plastic. Flying pieces hit Erik on the forehead. For a short moment he saw stars and fell back to the ground. Screams, shouts and loud alarms filled his head. It felt like Auschwitz. Everyone around him was meant to be dead. Everyone, including him.

But not Charles. Everyone, but Charles.

When he looked up, blue eyes began to move for the first time. "Charles!", screamed Erik, but the noises around him were louder. "Charles!", he repeated, but his friend was still absent.

Then everything went so horribly wrong, Erik wished he would have killed every human being on earth before this could have happened. Blood began to flow out of Charles nose. Then out of his eyes. Even out of his ears. Erik didn't dare to look away even though he wanted to.

Charles was dying. Inside. In his own mind.

His friend blinked the blood out of his eyes. Red tears streamed down his face and connected with the blood flowing out of his nose and mouth.

Everything happened in a blur, when Erik saw Charles' face moving to him. His eyes searching for his. And in the end, he mouthed "Erik" before the final explosion blew everything up.

## Kapitel 4: Charles No. 3

Dust was covering his face and he had to cough. There were still flames burning from the machines around him, the alarm was also still on, but somehow everything seemed to have come to an end. Erik tried to get up, but found himself falling to the ground again and again. The explosion was so loud, a strong tinnitus was in his ears. Dead people were lying on the floor. Scientists, but also mutants.

Charles.

When he finally managed to stand up, he noticed a few cuts on his own skin, but nothing severe. With shaking legs and hands, he moved towards the middle of the room. He couldn't breathe. There was suddenly no air. Everything went silent for a moment and Erik felt like dying, too.

Charles lay between broken pieces of the machines in a pool of blood around him. His face was turned towards Erik and looked emotionless. His mouth was slightly open, his eyes stared into nothing and blood was still flowing out of his skull. The whole image was just terrifying.

"Nein", breathed Erik in despair and felt to his knees. "Nein, Charles..."

In the moment he wanted to come closer and touch him, a large part of a machine broke and fell on top of the lifeless Charles. Erik was fast enough to fall to the side. It took him a minute to realise what just happened. Charles was dead. He was... really dead.

"Verdammt", Erik choked and still didn't find enough air to breathe. "Verdammt, Charles! Wieso hast du das getan?"

He cried desperately and hoped it all to be a dream, but in the end, he feared the worst case was now reality. And on top of everything he couldn't even rescue Charles' dead body to bury him properly. When he thought his heart was already broken and couldn't be in any worse shape, he was wrong.

"Damn it! That bastard", came the familiar voice of the black-haired woman. She and a couple of other scientists had made it, too. "He overrode the system! God damn it, we had everything in control but that!"

Now that Erik was free and had no mind controlling device in his head, he felt the abyss in his heart grew wider the longer he stared down the scientists and felt the metal beneath his fingers. Charles wouldn't have wanted this, but he was dead. He wouldn't have wanted to be dead, either.

He summoned his powers and let the metal float through the room. He killed one scientist after another. And while he was doing so, he thought about his mother. Magda. Nina. Charles. They were all dead. Again, he asked himself if that's what he

was meant to be. A monster. A killer. A lonely man without anyone to love. A desperate figure in a minor role.

“Fuck!”, screamed the woman who was responsible for all of that. “Okay, okay, I got it, you’re angry, but we didn’t kill him! He killed himself! Really! We tried to save him, but –”

Erik didn’t want to hear any of it. So, he just put a metal pipe through her face. In the next moment he regretted killing her so soon, but he wanted it to end... all of it. Once he killed all of the other people in the room, his sight got back to where Charles was buried. Tears were streaming down his face and he didn’t know if he should just stay here and wait for his own death or if he should try to escape and leave it all behind. Because after his mother’s death he wanted revenge and kill the bastard that was responsible for this. After the death of his wife and child, he vowed vengeance against humanity for their incapability to accept mutants. In the end he understood that Shaw’s death didn’t bring his mother back, but made him feel a little bit better. He understood that he was responsible for people fearing him after everything he had done and that the death of his family was a terrible accident caused by himself. But Charles death ...

Charles death was different.

Erik killed the people who took him and made him suffer, but in the end, it was Charles himself who chose to die. For the sake of humanity. For the sake of mutant kind. When it all came to an end, it was him who took the suffering. Like he always had. And he took it gladly.

Erik was hurt and desperate. He felt agony in his guts rising. But it was nothing like the anger he felt before. This one was much sadder than the others. He felt like his heart was an open wound. Charles has always been his better half – he showed him a different path of life that he refused to take, but still acknowledged. Charles saw good in him, when the rest of the world only saw the monster. When everything seemed to have ended, Charles was there and helped him up.

But now?

What was left?

Erik stood in the middle of the room and watched the flames go higher, until the emergency smoke detectors went on and let rain fall down the ceiling.

Security entered the room, but Erik killed them with more metal he found in the machines before they even could get near him. With a last look to where Charles was buried and with the image of his bloody tears, he began to walk out of the disastrous scene. His heart ached and he didn’t know if he would make it out of the facility, but at least he wanted to try. Charles would have wanted it that way. He was dead, but the school was still there. His children were waiting for him. Someone should tell them. And something inside Erik was sure that this time – finally – he would stay at the school. At least for a couple of months. He would come home. For Charles.

The hallway was filled with broken pieces of glass and plastic. Some animals were on their way to the exits. Erik followed a few ducks until they reached a dead end.

“Where is the exit, god damn it”, Erik cursed and went to another direction. But again, a dead end. There was no plan, no map or even exit signs. Was that supposed to be a labyrinth?

On his way to an exit, he encountered more people. Mutants, security and scientists. Erik just passed by and killed the security and scientists with a little copper strand he got out of a machine. The mutants were allowed to leave.

When he reached stairs, he wasn't sure in which direction he should go. After a few seconds of consideration, he decided to go up. Maybe they had held him in the basement and this was the way out. But only more security and scientists came along that needed to be killed. Erik found no pleasure in it, but couldn't refrain from doing so. It was something that had to be done.

After hours of just walking and killing, Erik felt exhausted. He leaned against a wall and closed his eyes.

“Why did I kill this scientist bitch so soon? I should have asked her to show me the exit before torturing her”, Erik muttered and rubbed his eyes. They felt swollen and sensitive from all the crying. Everything hurt – his body, his mind, his soul and his heart. Charles' death was something he had seen coming but not so soon. And not like this. He thought he was prepared for that moment, but obviously he wasn't. Maybe the death of a loved one was something you can't get prepared for.

Suddenly someone moved behind him. Erik made himself ready to take another useless soul off the face of the earth, when he looked into bright blue eyes.

Brown locks framing his slightly red cheeks.

Tiny freckles on his nose.

“Impossible...”, Erik breathed and looked into the pale, familiar face.

Charles was standing by the end of the hall, wearing white clothes that looked a lot like another straitjacket, but he wasn't chained or tied up. Just the opposite: he was walking freely on blood of the dead people with bare feet like he was running in the middle of a flower field.

“I... I watched you die”, choked Erik with utter surprise to see his friend standing in front of him – walking, with hair and looking... fine. Absolutely healthy. Not a scratch was on him.

“Erik”, came Charles calm voice. A little too quiet and shy, but it was definitely him. “You're... Erik, right?”

Charles took a few steps forward and almost fell over a dead body, but caught himself before the fall. Charles had made little footprints on the floor with his bloody feet. Erik needed a few more seconds until he realised that this person in front of him was really Charles. Alive.

He wanted to run to him, take him into his arms, squeeze him and never let him go again. But before he reached his friend, a handful of soldiers came from the other side of the hall and shot. This time with real bullets – but not made of metal. Erik was caught off-guard and just fell to the floor. No bullet hit him – luckily.

But Charles was shot directly into the head.

With open eyes he fell to the ground and was immediately dead. It was like he never existed in the first place – lying between all the other dead people. As if he had been just a mirage.

Erik couldn't believe his eyes. Charles was killed – again. Right in front of his eyes and he wasn't able to do anything against it! What kind of terrible fate was this?

"There is still one alive! Kill him", came the order from a soldier, who was standing at Charles's dead Body. "Over there!" He was pointing at Erik.

This time he got himself together before they had the chance to shoot, took the copper wire from before and let it flow through the soldier's necks. It was a matter of seconds until they all fell to the floor. Erik made his way over the dead bodies to Charles. Or what was left of him.

He was lying between two other dead men with his eyes wide open – staring into the white wall covered in blood. Erik wasn't sure if he was seeing things or if this was real. Charles died, was buried beneath a large piece of stone and other things from a machine that exploded right next to him. Then – who was this?

Erik reached out for Charles' twin. His hair was so soft; has it always been this soft? Whoever that was, it hurt Erik the same way as to see the real Charles lying dead before his feet. Tears shot into his eyes and overflowed his cheek. With a slow and gentle motion, he closed Charles' rigid eyes.

"God, Charles... What happened?", he sobbed, while caressing his brown hair. "You were back and... now you're also dead. What the fuck happened?"

He sat there for a few minutes until more soldiers came across and shot right away. Erik killed them all. One after another. He still felt numb, but he told himself it was the right thing to do. After another killing spree, he wanted to take Charles' body with him and at least bury this one properly. Maybe at the school. Or at a beautiful place.

Then he heard Charles' voice again: "Erik."

He turned around to see another Charles standing at the other end of the long white hall. He was wearing the exact same clothes, had the same haircut and the same

bright blue eyes like the one Erik was holding in his arms.

"What the...", he started, but was cut off by his still-alive-friend.

"You're Erik, right?", he asked in the same voice as the first Charles. Or the second – depending which one was meant to be the first one.

"I... I am", he murmured, but wasn't sure if an answer was needed at all. If this Charles will die any minute, too, then –

"Is that... me?", he asked with wide eyes as he discovered the dead Charles in Erik's arms.

It took a long second for Erik to recover from the weird scene. "Yes, that's... that was also you. I mean... Who are you? Are you also Charles?"

The strange man nodded. "I'm Charles Xavier. And you're... you're Erik Lehnsherr, right? I remember your name and your face. You look very familiar."

Erik wasn't sure if he was glad to see another Charles or horrified. Because something was definitely very wrong. Either he was seeing things that didn't exist or someone was joking with his mind or... or what exactly was that supposed to mean?

"Are you... are you his twin? Had Charles twins?", Erik asked in a quiet voice and got to his feet, while putting the dead Charles back to the floor.

"No, I don't have twins. I'm equally surprised as you are", he admitted and came a few steps closer. "He is a perfect copy of me."

The joy in Erik's heart grew as a living Charles came closer to him. There was this strange feeling of hope. Within a second, he scanned the hallway for more soldiers. The first mistake shouldn't be made a second time.

"Maybe he is my clone...", Charles mused as he inspected the dead body like one of those scientists.

"Then you're a clone, too. Because the original... looked very differently than you."

"How can I be his clone, when he looked differently?"

It was like talking to a younger version of Charles. When he was still naïve and innocent. Not that he lost these traits over the years, but they got significantly weaker with his age. "He had no hair and wasn't able to walk. You are obviously able to walk and still have hair. But I'm 100% sure that the one without hair and legs was Charles Xavier. Not you."

Suddenly this version of Charles looked offended. "But I'm also Charles Xavier!"

Erik took a deep breath. "No...", he started and thought about his Charles. The dead

one. The one that was sorry for killing himself to save the world. The dumb one. The really dumb one. A few tears came back and Erik wanted to kill more of those horrible people that tortured him. Just to numb the pain.

"... he died?" Charles No. 3 looked at him with a hurt expression. "I just saw it in your head. You were thinking of him. He really looked different. But I can also see... that we were so much alike."

"You are also a telepath?", Erik asked surprised. "Then you're really... his clone?"

Charles raised one shoulder and bit his lip. "Maybe... I don't know. I don't feel like a clone. But I also can't remember anything that happened before I woke up a few minutes ago."

Now Erik was alert. "You woke up? Where?"

Charles No. 3 pointed to the direction where he came from. "A big room with monitors. Some people wanted to hurt me, but I was able to escape."

"Take me there. Maybe we can find an answer to all of that."

They left Charles No. 2 between the other dead people and moved on. It was hard to walk beside a Charles Xavier that wasn't exactly Charles Xavier. He had his face, his eyes, his hair and just everything that his Charles also had. But the more Erik watched the clone beside him, he saw the differences. Or maybe he just persuaded himself of believing that. Because after all: the real one was dead.

When they reached another complex of the building Erik didn't recognize, Charles No. 3 pointed to a damaged door. It almost looked like an elephant had ran through it. Some dead scientists were lying on the floor, but no blood was around them.

"That was the room I woke up", he told Erik and stopped walking.

"Was there someone with you?"

"Just me and a few people that wanted to kill me." His voice became darker with every word. As well as his mood.

Erik ignored the changing atmosphere and gesticulated towards the now empty room. "What happened to them?"

"I killed them first."

And with that, Erik's heart skipped a beat. Slowly, he looked to Charles No. 3. "You... killed them?"

Determined eyes met his. "Of course. Otherwise they would have ended me. I had no choice."

"There is always a choice. Your own words." Erik wasn't sure if he was glad to see a Charles that was capable of killing or if he was terrified. Because an innocent Charles with obviously little to no knowledge of who he was and very strong mutant powers who lived for a couple of minutes was somehow an alarming combination. His friend had always played the good guy and acted like he was human when in fact he was able to tear down a whole country while sitting in a wing chair sipping his afternoon tea. So often, Erik was furious about Charles' ignorance towards mutant kind; not helping them and still playing the nice professor when the whole world was going down. Now he saw a Charles in front of him that was apparently completely fine with killing people. Would he be fine with killing Erik, too? If he must? If he felt threatened by Erik? He recognised him, knew his name and that he was nothing like the other people in this facility, but was it enough not to harm him? Or was knowing him a good reason to harm him?

"I don't remember saying that", Charles No. 3 admitted after hearing Erik's quote. He turned to face him and looked him straight in the eyes. Something glistened in his eyeballs. "You remember me clearly, but I don't remember you. I don't remember anything. Let me look into your mind. I want to regain my memory."

"No way", Erik blurted. "You're not allowed to be in my head."

Charles No. 3 watched him for a few moments in complete silence and with a curious look on his face. Suddenly he furrowed his brow. "Weren't we friends?"

Erik felt the foreign mind coming closer to his own and took a step back. "Stop that! I said, you're not allowed to rummage around!"

"But I need to know who I am. I only know my name and yours. That I'm a telepath and ... that I'm obviously not the real Charles Xavier." Blue eyes narrowed. "And that makes me feel... very sad. Because I was so sure that I am me." He looked into his palm and scanned every wrinkle. "That I am Charles Xavier."

Erik's throat felt constricted. Was this all a mad dream? A hallucination that someone planted in his brain? Was this really a clone of Charles? What did they wanted to do with all those clones? Are there even more?

"Maybe", Charles suddenly answered and looked as horrified as Erik himself.

"Stop it. The last warning. Stay away from my mind."

And as if Charles became finally a little bit more like himself, he slowly nodded and retreated from Erik's thoughts, though he obviously didn't like it. "As you wish."

Both of them stared to the destroyed room in front of them. It looked like the lab where they held Erik in and it made his stomach twist uncomfortably. But then he saw a lot of papers on the ground.

"Maybe they're important", he murmured more to himself than to Charles No. 3, but he answered nonetheless.

"Those documents? What do you want with them? I already looked through them. A lot of numbers and strange words I don't know", he said and watched as Erik got the papers anyway.

"You don't remember anything beyond your or my name, I suppose it's only natural that you can't decipher any scientific records", Erik sighted and looked through the thick folder. It was really filled with numbers and strange notes. "I'll take it with me. Hank can read it. I'm sure of it."

Charles No. 3's eyes opened a little bit. "Hank? That name sounds familiar. Who is that?"

The auburn-haired man sighted again and closed the folder with Charles records in it. "A friend. Of yours."

"Not our friend?" Big blue eyes looked at him as if they wanted to cry immediately. "Were we really enemies?"

"No, Charles, it's not that easy..." Just as he wanted to begin a long speech about their different views on mutant kind – and asking himself if Charles knew about the meaning of the word 'mutant' at all – something crashed into a wall a few halls away from them. Both Erik and Charles flinched at the loud noise. A siren went on again.

"What happened?", Charles breathed in shock and grabbed Erik's arm. His hand was warm. Something that caught Erik off guard.

"Erik?!", shouted a familiar voice through the white, empty halls. "Are you here? God – what happened?"

Suddenly Mystique came across the corner and startled at the sight of Erik and Charles. "Oh god, is it – you managed to save him? And you're both uninjured! What a miracle – god, Charles, I'm so sorry – "

But Erik cut her off. "He's not Charles."

Charles No. 3 turned his head to Erik and looked hurt. "Why do you say that?"

"Because you're not him." And with that, Erik shook his arm free. "You're just a clone! The real Charles is dead!"

Mystique gasped and watched the scene in utter horror. "W-What... Charles is dead? But who is this?" Only now she seemed to realise that Charles wasn't supposed to walk. And have hair. "... a clone? Did they really clone ...?"

"Apparently, yes", Erik huffed and walked towards his ex-partner. "Are you here with the jet?"

It took her a moment to answer. Her eyes were glued on Charles No. 3. "Y-Yes. Hank is

in the cockpit. Waiting for us. The others are also searching for you.”

“Then we leave.”

With big steps he passed the blue woman and the clone. Erik couldn't point a finger on it, but something made his eyes sting. Maybe it was the dust from the crash or the hurtful feelings inside his heart that came up whenever he thought about the real Charles.

“What about the other clones?”, he heard Charles No. 3 asking. “We can't leave them here!”

“There are other clones of you? This is so fucked up! This is so, so fucked up!”, Mystique began to shout hysterically. “And the real Charles? Our Charles? Where is he? Is he really dead?”

Erik stopped a few steps away from them and turned around. It took him a lot of effort not to cry in front of them. “He is. I will tell you everything that happened, when we're in safety. Now come. We will blow up this facility. And kill whoever is left.”

Instantly, Mystique went silent. “You're kidding, right? You want to kill... Charles' clones? And everyone on this island?”

“Yes”, was all that Erik managed to say without breaking into a hurtful rage and turned around to walk into the direction of the jet. He wanted to leave this hell. And maybe... just maybe, he will wake up in his bed in Genosha and think of Charles, who was also lying in his own bed at the school thinking of him. Alive. Without hair and without legs. Just the way it was meant to be.

But when he reached the jet and saw Beast through the window of the cockpit, he also saw the reflection of Charles No. 3 following him. He looked pale and anxious. Mystique was right behind him. Her eyes still wide from the shock.

“Erik”, began Beast and looked relieved. “I'm glad to see you in one piece.”

“Glad to see you, too. Thanks for coming back and getting us out of here”, Erik managed to mumble before he threw the stack of papers down in front of Beasts feet. “Here, Charles' data from the labs.”

Only now Beast recognised the other person with the dark brown hair. “Is that...? Charles?”, Beast asked in a low voice as if not believing his own eyes. “Did they heal him?”

“No. They cloned him.”

The scientist in Hank showed up first and let his eyes shine in the dimmed light as if a kid got a new toy. But the friend in Hank came up just a second after the joy and made him look as horrified as everyone else who learned the truth about Charles No. 3. But he didn't say anything. Instead, he stared through the cockpit.

“Maybe you will find information about this whole scenario in those files”, Erik tried to explain, but failed in sounding certain. Whatever those crazy scientists had in mind – cloning Charles was horrible. Because the person who stood outside of the jet talking to Mystique wasn’t the real Charles and the realisation hurt.

“I can”, Hank began, took a moment to collect himself and began anew. “I can try to copy the video files from the cameras around the facility. Or what is left of it.”

Erik wasn’t sure how Beast was meant to do that, but he couldn’t bring himself to care. All he did was crawl to the back of the jet and lay down on the cold, hard surface. He noticed how Mystique and Charles No. 3 entered after a long discussion and how Beast started the engine before his body finally gave up.

## Kapitel 5: Who are you?

When Erik woke up, they were still in the air. The constant shaking of the cold floor of the jet woke him up. At first, he looked around and noticed that Mystique was sitting right next to him, holding the huge folder of Charles's documents. And right after thinking about Charles his eyes began to burn and his chest to ache. Mystique looked into his direction and blinked a few times before she spoke to him in a quiet voice.

"How?", was all she asked. Erik needed a second to react to that one-word question.

"What how?", he asked back in a raspy voice. His bones still hurt and his whole body felt weak. The flying noise of the jet made his head buzz.

All of the sudden the powerful shapeshifter Mystique became Charles' little girl as she looked to the staple of documents in her arms. It took her apparently a lot of effort to build a coherent sentence. "How did he die...?"

Erik examined her and asked himself if it was the right time to tell her the truth. And if not – when would have been the right time? His eyes wandered through the jet. Empty seats after empty seats. Finally, in a dark corner near Hank's thousands of board computers, sat Charles No. 3. He still looked pale and stared at his feet. He didn't move at all. Just sat there and stared. Erik wondered for a moment what he was thinking about or if he was thinking at all because somehow this person – even if he looked like Charles – appeared to be alien.

After a long moment of silence, Mystique kicked Erik's shin. "Tell me how!", she demanded in a louder, but shakier voice.

"He killed himself", breathed Erik; his eyes still lingering on Charles No. 3. "They wanted to use him as a weapon and parted his mind from his body to abuse his powers."

Suddenly the whole jet became even quieter than before. Even Hank seemed to listen now. Where were the kids? The other mutants? Took another plane?

"Oh god", hiccupped Mystique and pressed the documents closer to her chest. "Did you see it? Were you with him? How did it happen?"

And suddenly blue eyes lifted and looked directly into Erik's. Without breaking the contact, Erik nodded. "He killed his own mind. Without it, his body broke down and the machines overrode. Everything exploded. In the end...", Erik needed to swallow to avoid shaking in his voice, "... he killed himself and almost everyone involved in that moment."

"Did he tell you all of that?", Beast asked from the cockpit. Erik felt the jet sinking. They would arrive soon at the school.

"I was in his mind... he told me his plan in his last moments."

Suddenly Mystique shifted in his seat, so Erik had to break the eye contact from Charles No. 3, who looked more shocked with every minute.

"You were with him and didn't stop him?!", she shouted with a desperate tone. "Was there no option to save him? Was he really left to die in the end?!"

A tiny part of Erik knew that she was just sad and shocked by the story, but the bigger part of him became angry by the accusation.

"You chose to run away instead of helping him!", he shouted back and straightened up, although he was still sitting on the ground. "You waited three whole weeks to rescue him! You didn't do anything to help him! So – yes – in the end, all I could do was watch him die! And let me tell you this: it will haunt me forever! You want to know how he died? Yes? I tell you how!" And with that he forgot himself completely in that sadness that turned into rage. "He destroyed his own mind, bleeding from his nose, his eyes, his mouth and ears! He suffered so long and, in the end, he had to suffer even more to the point where he was almost gladly taking death as the last resort! And after I had to watch him die, I had to look in his dead eyes! Don't you dare accuse me of not helping him – because where were you?! Where the fuck were you –"

"Erik", came Charles' quiet voice from the other end of the jet. "Don't."

Mystique was now crying desperately and just held on to the documents. Beast was nervously holding the wheel. Erik didn't notice that the whole jet was shaking because he couldn't control his powers. Blue eyes looked tired in his direction.

Two words, thought Erik. Two words and he felt like crashing into thousand pieces. Charles No. 3 was still looking at him as if he was expecting him to finally let go of all that rage and sadness. But Erik wasn't ready. Not now. Not yet.

But he did let go of the jet, so Beast was able to fly properly again.

The rest of the flight was held in silence, only interrupted by the silent hiccups of Mystique.

When they arrived, the sun shone above their heads. The school was filled with little children and some teachers. Erik watched them with swollen eyes. As if Beast had read his mind, he spoke to him very quietly:

"We didn't want to alert all of them and trigger a panic. Only the teachers knew that the Professor was kidnapped. The children thought he was on a business trip."

"How very clever of you", Erik answered sarcastically. "And what will you tell them about him?" He pointed at Charles No. 3, who was very still standing next to Mystique. The tired expression was still in his face, but also a huge amount of amazement. Erik

could only snort. "He doesn't even remember his own home. Look at him. He looks at the school as if he is retarded."

Beast adjusted his glasses and pressed his blue lips together. "Why do you speak of him like that? Aren't you happy that Charles isn't... dead? That there is still a Charles left?"

Erik felt a laughter coming out of his mouth even if he didn't feel like laughing at all. "You speak of him as if he is a new species." His eyes began to burn whenever he looked into the direction of the imposter. "He is not Charles. Charles is dead. He killed himself. I saw him dying."

"This may be only a clone, but still – it's Charles", Beast sighted and stepped aside to go to Mystique. "I will check the folder if I can find new information. And I will look through the video data I could rescue. After that we will see. In the meantime... we will tell everyone that the professor is ill and that he needs some rest. Hopefully that will keep the children at bay."

"Good luck with that", Erik hissed and looked to the jet. "Did you get my helmet?"

"Of course not."

"Great", was all he said after another loss of something he held dear and was now lost. His head hurt so bad, Erik wanted to go home. There was no need for him to stay at the school. A version of Charles was there. And apparently everyone was happy with that solution. So, Erik walked away from the group and towards the end of the landing field.

"Where are you going?", Beast yelled after him. Just before Erik could decide whether to jump off the school roof or just fly back to Genosha, Mystique was getting in his way. "Running away again?"

She knew exactly where to poke to evoke a reaction. "I never ran away from anything."

"You did", she corrected him in a venom spitting tone. But her eyes were still red from all the crying, so she came off less as fierce as she might have liked it. "You ran away when Charles needed you the most. And now he does again and you're sneaking out the backdoor again!"

Erik wanted to argue that Charles was the one who had sent him away at the beach and that Erik had refused to come back the last few times because going into retirement wasn't an option but never ran away from responsibilities, as Charles No. 3 came closer. Every word that Erik wanted to say was now stuck in his throat.

"Is this where we live? In a school?", he asked in an innocent tone. "Are we teachers?"

Again, Erik felt rage coming up his spine. This wasn't Charles. Not at all.

"You are a professor, Charles. This is your school. Don't you remember?", Mystique told him in a very Raven manner; full of love and care.

Blue eyes brightened. "My school? I own a school?"

"You really don't remember...", she mumbled, but still smiled in the clone's direction. "But don't worry, you will regain your memory somehow!"

Charles No. 3 was still looking at the huge building with pure amazement. "Am I... am I rich?", was all he said after that.

Mystique chuckled and seemed to have forgotten that this Charles was not her brother. "You're rich. Very rich."

"That's amazing", Charles No. 3 said and smiled.

Erik had to leave after that. Seeing him smile was nothing he could bear right now. So, he left with a dramatic swung to his feet and flew away. All he could hear was Mystique's angry moaning and Charles' still astonished voice: "He can fly? That's incredible!"

On his way back to Genosha, Erik wondered if this clone was just a baby version of Charles, because the constant amazement was something he remembered very clearly of the real Charles in the first months of their encounter.

When he arrived at his current home, a lot of his people asked him what happened and where he was. But he went straight to his house, locked the door and let himself fall face down on his bed. He stared at his nightstand for the next hours and thought about all the things that happened in the last days until he fell asleep out of exhaustion.

## Kapitel 6: Friend or Foe

“Erik.”

His gentle voice woke him up. As Erik opened his eyes he looked straight into blue ones. His dark brown locks were laying softly on the white pillow in which he seemed to sink. The faint sunlight shone behind him into the dimly lit room and made him look like a saint. He was laying on his side, looking straight to Erik and seemed to be very comfortable under the still warm blanket. He must've woken up just a few minutes ago, too.

“Charles”, muttered Erik with a raspy voice and mustered his old friend a few more times until he moved his hand to touch the slightly red cheeks with the tiny freckles on it.

“Don't”, Charles breathed shaky, but didn't move. Erik stopped his hand midway and wondered why he wasn't allowed to touch him. “You were always allowed to touch me, my friend. But not anymore.”

Suddenly Erik was reminded of what happened. Charles was wearing those white clothes they had given him. The big chain around his neck. And before Erik realised that the peaceful morning was nothing but an illusion, Charles blinked the first blood drops out of his eyes.

“I didn't want to die”, he cried silently. “I wanted more time...”

Erik felt his heart ache and his eyes burn while he was watching his friend laying in bloody sheets without the knowledge to stop it. He just lay there. Like Charles. Only the quiet sobs of him filled the room.

“I wanted to change the world; to make it a better place.”

A faint tinnitus was starting in Erik's ears.

“I wanted you to come home.”

The blood was starting to flow out of his nose, ears and mouth while he was speaking. A pool of red liquid was building around them.

“I wanted you.”

The blood rose until Erik was covered with half his body. They would drown.

“I wanted.”

Erik couldn't move. He needed the peaceful morning back but then remembered that this kind of morning never had happened. Only back then, when they were traveling

to find other mutants, they woke up next to each other with back pain and headaches because of the cheap beds and the numerous drinks they had the night before.

What a time that has been. And now? He was drowning in Charles' blood.

He startled awake the next moment. The blood and Charles were gone. Only white sheets in which Erik was tangled. The morning light was now replaced by a cloudy day. A quick glance to his nightstand told him that it was already past noon.

His heart was still racing from his nightmare and he wondered why he dreamed of that peaceful morning first. After all it had no relation to Charles' death. Maybe it was a form of wishful thinking now that he knew that this will never happen again.

With his mutant powers he made something to eat, although he didn't feel like eating. But his body needed it after all the mushy food in the institution he was held the last days. He ate quietly. Just stared into his bowl and tried not to think about anything that was related to Charles. To the institution. Or the clones.

Of course, that didn't work for long. And so, Erik was sitting in his backyard watching the clouds pass by and wondered about the whereabouts of the other clones. He had passed out before they blew up the island. And he was 100% sure that whether Beast nor Mystique had had the balls to do that. It was very likely that more fake Charles' were running around. And Erik wasn't sure if he could kill one of those clones. Blowing up the whole island, not meeting one of them and pretending they were just sleeping anyway (and therefore not feeling anything) made it less horrible for him. After all they were not real. ... were they?

"But I need to know who I am. I only know my name and yours. That I'm a telepath and ... that I'm obviously not the real Charles Xavier. And that makes me feel... very sad. Because I was so sure that I am me. That I am Charles Xavier."

That were Charles No. 3's words. He only remembered his own name. And Erik's. That somehow made things a little bit more complicated. Was Erik important enough to be remembered? Not Raven, not Hank, not the school – but Erik? For a moment, Erik let his mind wander to the possible "what ifs":

What if this clone of Charles was really a version of Charles Francis Xavier? And all the other clones equally as well? What would have been the purpose of that? Why did they clone him in the first place? To test out different methods of their abusive research? To have multiple telepaths if one of them ... died? Weren't mutants just batteries to them? So, they cloned the most important one? What if the conscious of Charles was in that clone now? That he wasn't really dead but just didn't remember because of the transmission of his mind? A new body with just... amnesia?

Erik felt his eyelids twitch. Those thoughts made him nervous. Too much thinking about it made him also very sad. Because Charles' old body may be dead now but if this clone is also Charles and just a forgetful version of him – then they didn't have

lost, did they? Charles just needed to remember his past and he would be his old self. Maybe that was what they were doing right now. Beast would be in his labs, doing a lot of research on the new Charles and give him eventually the confirmation that he was healthy. And after that they would let him wander through their minds to remember who he once was. In the end he would be truly Charles Francis Xavier.

He would remember who Erik was. What he had done to him. That they had a lot of differences and sometimes hated each other for their views. That things weren't easy between them and probably never will be. That there was a mutual love for each other but the greater cause of the mutants was more important to both of them. In the end, nothing would've changed.

In the end they would live their separate lives – again. And somehow that made Erik calmer. That Charles wasn't dead. That he just had amnesia.

Before he could wonder about the other clones, the things that had happened in the labs and that Charles apparently had killed a lot of people in there, Erik went to bed again. It was too early for him to sleep but the constant speculating made him exhausted.

Three days went by where he avoided the people of Genosha as best as he could. But eventually he told one guy what had happened to get those dreams and coping mechanisms out of his head that kept him awake at nights. This guy urged Erik to go back to the school and see what Charles was doing. He was still the enemy and if those mad scientists had given him more strength then he might be a bigger threat than before. Especially because of his amnesia. Good guy Charles was probably dead and the new one could have been worse. He killed without hesitation after all.

So, Erik made his way back to the school with his old car while being a lot more nervous than the nights before when he thought about Charles as a baby version of his former self. What if the guy was right? What if Charles was now a weapon and not a nice professor in a wheel chair?

When he arrived, everything seemed to be normal. Children were playing outside, although it was still cloudy and kind of cold. He saw a few familiar faces but couldn't remember their names. He parked in front of the entrance, didn't bother to knock or wait until someone was opening the door for him and just entered the building. Some teachers looked at him in utter shock while the children just stared.

"Where's Beast?", he asked in a low, hopefully threatening voice. Because the sleepless nights and constant thinking about Charles' death made him feel worn out and weak, which he hoped didn't made him less imposing. He was still Magneto. Genosha needed a strong leader. And the school a constant reminder that humanity is the evil one in that war.

"What do you want?", came Mystiques voices. She was in her human form again. Like good old Raven. "Made up your mind about everything?"

"Not really", he answered her in a serious tone and chose to dismiss the idea of

mocking her about her appearance. "Where's Charles No.3?"

"Charles No. 3?", Raven repeated with wide eyes.

"The first one killed himself. The second one was shot between the eyes. This one survived. So he's No. 3", Erik explained and didn't bother that some children were able to listen to the conversation.

His former right hand watched him in absolute disgust. "You're the worst."

Erik ignored her words. "Where is he?"

It took her another few moments of sinister staring before she walked towards the labs. Erik followed her without a word.

When they arrived, Beast was sitting between a lot of computers and lab supplies. But no Charles. Only when Raven cleared her throat he looked up. His eyes – even if the blue fur was almost hiding them – went wider. "What are you doing here?"

"He wants to see Charles", Raven informed him before Erik could. "No. 3", she added in a poisonous tone and crossed her arms.

"Oh great", Beast said in a sarcastically tone. "Charles wanted to see you, too. I told him what I told him the last 20 years, but it seems this time fate works in his favour."

"Spare me the lecture and tell me what I want to know", Erik demanded although he knew that he was in no position to demand anything.

"And that is?" Beast also crossed his arms. Erik was not extremely welcome but they seemed to be willing to cooperate. Probably because of Charles No. 3, who was nowhere to be seen.

"The documents. What did you find out?"

Beast smiled and arched his eyebrows but did not answer. Erik just continued.

"The video footage. Was something useful in it?"

Again no one answered immediately.

"And what about the other clones? Where are they? I take it that you didn't blow up the island. So they're still somewhere, right? And what about the clone we took out of there? Is he a threat? Can he remember anything more than before? Did you let him into your minds?"

"Okay, stop", Raven interrupted him suddenly and stepped in front of him. "You're not here to check on Charles because you're worried of him. You're here because you fear he might be a threat to you and Genosha! You're disgusting, Erik! Is that all that matters to you? What about Charles? Don't you want to know how he is doing? After

learning that he is 'just a clone'? That he was disabled for 20 years because you harmed him? That he lost everything back then? That he has to lose it again – at least in his mind? That he has to remember all those years without being really there? That someone else lived this life that he now needs to adopt?"

Tears were filling her eyes and Erik knew that something had happened in the last three days. The first thing that came to his mind was how Charles had to live through all of those terrible things again through the eyes of different people and breaking down. Again. Numbed himself with alcohol or drugs or whatever he could lay his fingers on.

"I take from your words, you let him into your minds?", Erik asked in a quieter voice than before.

"We wanted to, yes", Beast put himself to the talk, "but he refused."

Erik didn't believe his ears. "He refused?"

With a low sigh Beast stood up and took some papers off his desk. "After you left – thank you for that, Erik – we didn't know what to do. But Charles noticed our helplessness and offered to stay still as long as we needed him to be. He agreed on testing his body on any diseases or complications. We found none, thank god for that. He is a healthy human being. Maybe even healthier than before. After all, this body didn't suffer 10 years of alcohol abuse and other drugs."

The blame vibrated literally in the air to where Erik was standing. Raven kept quiet and stood still next to him; arms still crossed.

"His spine is intact; his hair grows normally. His brainwaves are a little bit different than before, but we still need to test that any further."

"How different? What does that mean?" Erik felt his pulse fasten.

"We don't know yet – god, didn't you listen? We need to test that any further. Let me finish speaking", Beast growled into his direction. He took another paper from his desk only to throw it into another direction. "When we offered him to go into our heads to see what a man he was, he refused with the words 'that he doesn't want to know'. He saw a few pieces of the past and he didn't like it. I assume he was in your head?"

Erik nodded. He suddenly felt something creeping up his spine. Was it guilt? Was it sadness? In any case it made him feel insecure.

"Great. He knows that he was a professor and that he owns this school. He also knows that we're his friends and that he grew up with Raven. But he doesn't remember anything personal. Like his childhood or anything beyond that. The last days he kept reading his old books to regain at least some knowledge he once had."

"And he is a pretty fast learner. Even faster than before, I'd say", Raven interrupted

Beasts monologue.

“That’s because a part of his brain remembers what he had already learned all those years ago. Because that’s the next big thing: He is the exact copy of ... well... our Charles. Our old on.”

The insecurity inside Erik increased with every of Beats’ words.

“I wasn’t able to decipher every detail in the reports but it was enough to see that they cloned Charles multiple times but failed in the beginning.” Beast gulped for a second before he resumed his talk. “There were a lot of failed clones of Charles that died almost within hours but had fully capable brain functions.”

The implication made Erik shudder. They played with Charles. They played with everything that was him. Every clone of Charles was kind of a version of the real Charles. And they all died within such a short time. Erik wanted to kill them again. Especially that scientist bitch.

“Yeah, I know what you’re thinking. That’s horrible. And also a reason why cloning is forbidden... usually. But we all know that they didn’t play by the rules at all.” Beast leaned against one of his tables with supplies on it. “After they managed to clone Charles correctly, they reproduced him multiple times to ensure that they had enough material to work with. And as mad as that sounds – it’s what gave us Charles back. The clone is Charles, but he was never meant to learn anything or interact beyond the facility. He was meant to be a power source for their great plan to annihilate free will in case the real Charles would die in between out of exhaustion. That was his purpose. They didn’t bother to give him memories or something like that. That would have been useless and wasted time.”

Beast sighted. A long silence hung between the three mutants until the scientist tapped absently on the surface of the table. “After Charles realised that he wasn’t meant to live at all, he retreated to his room. That was yesterday. Since then he remains silent and only visits the kitchen from time to time. And after I looked through the footage of the security cameras, I think it’s best if we don’t stress him with any more information.”

“What did you see?”, Erik asked carefully, knowing that he might not like the answer to that question. Indeed, it took Beast a lot of effort to find the right words.

“Aside from torturing other mutants and animals, they hurt the original Charles really bad. They cut open his brain and examined everything they wanted to know. They even took parts of it and made research on how Charles would react to certain lights or other stimulations without the piece of brain they took.”

Erik’s numb heart began to fill with rage again. Hatred. And everything that wanted to destroy mankind. But before Erik could form his plan on destroying the earth, Beast sighted again.

“It’s terrible, yes, but what makes me nervous the most is what comes next. The

clones woke up one after another and got killed within minutes. One clone got shot right before your eyes, right?"

The flashbacks came back to Erik and made him shudder. So he just nodded.

"They were all killed before they could leave their room. The scientists kept them in tubes. Somehow the system released them – probably because it overrode and the alarm went off. The whole project was burning down, so they eliminated every mutant and clone before something even worse could happen. The only reason, why a clone managed to escape was –"

"He killed them first", Erik interrupted Beast with a monotonic voice.

Both Raven and Beast stayed silent for a moment. "Did you see it?"

"No, Charles No. 3 told me."

"Stop calling him that!", Raven shouted at him and huffed angrily.

"He told you? Then he knew what he was doing...", Beast muttered and looked over the staples of paper. "Maybe it was just an instinct. Everyone would defend themselves, if someone was threatening to kill them. This one was just fast enough."

"And now you're certain he won't kill again?"

Beast looked at Erik with determined eyes. But his words were less so. "No."

"No isn't a good answer, you know that", Erik clarified the situation they were in. "We don't know who he is or what's left of the real Charles Xavier. What if they fucked up and made him a monster?"

"Oh, you mean the one you are?", Raven interrupted and stepped closer. "Don't worry, until now he is the Charles Xavier we all knew. Innocent and enormously dumb when it comes to certain topics."

"He is by far not dumb", came Beast's voice, while he tapped with one of his big feet. "But yes, he shows the typical behaviour of the original Charles. The only interference was apparently in the labs, when he tried to escape."

Erik looked through the room. "Show me how he escaped."

"Are you sure, you want to see that?", Beast asked and arched one eyebrow.

"Of course. I need to know if Charles is a threat or not", he said, careful not to say 'Charles No. 3' to avoid any further discussions.

"That's not up to you. You left. And with that you left your right to have a say in this matter", Raven snorted angrily.

Erik ignored her and moved his chin towards the monitors behind Beast. "Show me."

Although Beast wasn't convinced it was a good thing to show Erik the footage, he turned around and clicked through some files until one media player opened and showed a white room filled with torture tools and one white cube. A few seconds went by until an alarm began ringing. Beast clicked again on the player and the footage moved forward.

"It's probably where the facility began to burn down?", he asked while he watched the sprinkler system on the video start. Erik just nodded and cramped a little bit. The memories were still fresh. Sleepless nights with Charles by his side didn't help to get over it either.

"It took a few minutes before the system broke down. Here... Charles is now awake", Beast muttered and pointed with one blue finger on the screen. Indeed, Charles No. 3 was now crawling out of the cube and seemed weak. The camera was attached to the ceiling so Charles' face was hidden by his hair.

As soon as he was standing, a few men came into the room. Probably the same security that was killing the whole complex. And that got killed by Erik.

Suddenly they stopped moving and dropped their guns. Charles No. 3 did nothing but stand there. Finally a part of his face could be seen but the video quality was too low to show any details on his expression. The men grabbed their throats, moved around the room and finally fell to the floor. Erik remembered that there was no blood. Just dead people. Now he knew why:

Charles made them forget how to breathe.

The whole scene was over in about two minutes. Charles No. 3 made his way out of the room with unsteady feet. When he was out of the room, Beast stopped the video.

"Then he met you. In the hallway", he said and watched Erik's expression. "I assume he recognised you in an instant."

"He did", breathed Erik and stepped away from the computers. Away from Beast. Away from Raven.

"Erik", began Raven, "Charles is a very mighty telepath – he always was. He could have killed us all if he would have been in the mood. But he didn't. And that he killed now was just a reaction to defend himself. We should be lucky that at least one clone survived and that Charles is still with us."

"There was no need to let them suffer", Erik said in a monotonous voice. "The real Charles would never have done that."

"He is the real Charles! An innocent version of him. He wouldn't do this again, I'm sure of it", Raven explained and shook her head. "The more he learns about himself or about other people, the more he acts like himself. Just give it time."

“He is actually an exact copy of the original version, but in the end he might differ here and there. His brainwaves are, as I said, a little bit different. But more tests will show how different they are in the end. I believe his powers are stronger than before. Until now he was able to feel and hear people that live in the next city. That’s impressive. The original Charles wasn’t able to do that. And right now Charles is sitting in his room and doesn’t use them at all, which means he can regulate himself pretty well already. We don’t have to worry that he will do us any harm. He’s very dutiful.” Beast’s words were meant to be careful – not so cheerful like Raven’s and not so pessimistic like Erik’s – but in the end they all said the same thing: Charles No. 3 was a different version of the real Charles Xavier and no one was able to predict his behaviour like before.

## Kapitel 7: This was your home

Erik needed to leave the lab for a moment. All of this was just too much. First, he had to see Charles die two times and now his best scientist friend was telling him that Charles No. 3 was actually Charles, but in a more different version than everyone had thought. Killing other people.

He was standing in the hallway, staring at the grey floor. It was the hallway that lead to Cerebro and Erik wondered, if Charles No. 3 was able to use it. After what Beast had said, Charles No. 3 was capable to do even more than just sit behind a machine and talk to other humans or mutants. In other words: Charles No. 3 was a threat. A dangerous one no one was able to predict.

Without telling Mystique or Beast he left the cellar and went upstairs. On his way he saw a lot of children and teachers – some of them curious, most of them afraid. And again Erik asked himself, if he's doing the right thing or if he should just leave and let the others handle whatever will arise. Charles was alive – at least in a form of a clone – and that was all that mattered, right? But then again: If this clone was something different than Charles, something more murderous and bloody-minded, then he needed to be stopped. And the thought that someone else was going to interfere in this whole disaster to prevent Charles No. 3 from doing anything stupid made Erik's stomach twist. If this clone has to find an end, Erik wanted to be the one doing it.

In the end he was standing before Charles' room. The door was closed and nothing could be heard behind it. Absolute silence. The only thing that was in Erik's ears was his hammering heart. If this clone really was Charles – what is he going to do? And what if he was not – what is he going to do?

Without waiting another couple of unnecessary thoughtful moments, he knocked. And waited. But there was no answer. Was he not allowed to come in? Did Charles No. 3 already looked into his head and knew what he was going to do before he himself even knew? God, Erik wished for his helmet. Why did he left it at that island? He should search for it. It was, after all, an element of safety. Something that made Erik calmer when he was around Charles. And even when he was not, because one could never know when Charles was using Cerebro.

But maybe he was asleep? Erik knocked again, this time a little bit more aggressive. But again no answer. So it was the former: Erik was not allowed to come in. But did that ever stop him? No, not really.

"Charles, I'm coming in now", Erik declared and opened the door. It wasn't locked, but that wouldn't have made any difference. The lock was made of metal.

When he entered the room, he looked for those brown locks but found none. Not on the bed, not in the bathroom, not on the balcony. Charles wasn't in his room. But didn't Beast said that he isolated himself upstairs? Then again, Erik remembered that Charles was visiting the kitchen from time to time. So, Erik left Charles' bedroom and

headed straight to the kitchen. Two mutants were sitting there – a big shiny man and a woman with short hair. But no Charles.

“Is the professor here?”, he asked but got not answer. Instead they looked at each other and left the room without a word.

“What the –“, Erik cursed and looked around. But no sign of Charles. Wasn't he also reading a lot of old books to regain some of his memory without breaking into someone's mind?

So the search continued and Erik went for the library. He was glad that he remembered where everything was. The school had been – after all – a home for Erik. If only for some weeks.

But in the library, he only found some students who were chatting about a book. The moment, Erik walked in, they stopped talking and looked at him with big eyes.

“Did you see the Professor?”, Erik asked again without hesitation. The students blinked a few times until one boy shook his head.

“Where is he?”, he tried again, but the teenagers just looked at him with frightened eyes. “God damn it! Has anyone seen him at all?!”, Erik began to lose his temper and took a step towards the group. But before he could make another threatening step, in hope to get an answer, he felt the mental nudge. The comforting, soothing one.

“Please, my friend, don't eat them”, came Charles' calm voice in his head. “I'm upstairs. In your room.”

With an annoyed snort, he left the library and took two steps at once while running up the stairs. Only when he arrived at the hallway to Charles's and his bedrooms, he needed to remind himself that it was no longer his room he was heading to. That he no longer lived here and that he wasn't going to go to Charles to chat about mutants above a good old chess game with a Martini in his hand.

When he arrived at his old room, he opened the door and immediately was surprised by the familiar look of it. Some things changed, like the bed or the TV and phone. But everything was still there where Erik remembered it was. Astonished, Erik stayed in the middle of the room and didn't recognise Charles sitting at the window.

“When I entered this room, I remembered it immediately”, the telepath began to talk with his soft and calm voice. “My old self rebuilt it the same way it used to be, I suppose. I heard the building was destroyed after the events of Apocalypse.”

Erik turned around to look into those ocean eyes. Blue and glistening, like they always had been. “You remember Apocalypse?”

“No, not really. Hank told me about it, but it's more like reading it in a book. The story of someone else.”

"I'm sure Hank told you why the school was destroyed", Erik muttered and felt his heart getting heavier.

Charles stayed silent for a second before he stood up and straightened his cardigan. Seeing him standing up so easily was still a strange sight for the metal bender. "He said you were involved in the events. But not how far and what you had to do with him."

The statement made Erik laugh. "Oh great, he left the important part out."

"I didn't want to hear it", Charles interrupted the sarcastic laughter. "I remember some things about you. That we had something special and you hurt me after that. But I don't care about the details."

Erik stopped laughing and made a sinister face. "You should."

Charles No. 3 turned around and looked out of the window. Silence stretched through the room, while Erik mustered his back. Seeing him standing and with hair made him feel lighter, happier even. It was something Erik took from him and that he has now regained. But the constant fear inside his head made him remember that this wasn't the real Charles. The Charles he knew, the one he shared a lot of feelings with, is dead. Buried underneath the ruins of a laboratory.

"Raven, my sister, said that she also hurt me a lot in the past and that she was sorry. And Hank was very sad when we talked about the past, too. I also saw a wheelchair standing in my room. Another, older one in the basement. You said that I wasn't supposed to walk. I take it that I was paralyzed back then." Finally he turned around again and looked Erik deep in the eyes. "All I got until so far were terrible news, my friend. Starting with the fact that I'm just a clone. That I lost my memories to a former life. That this life was all but happy. That it was actually pretty horrible considering that I was crippled, had no hair and had no one dear to me in my age. Why did I never marry? Or had children on my own? Why is everyone so sad when talking about me and my past? Is it because I'm just a clone and not the 'real' Charles Xavier? Or is it because of something else? Was my life that miserable?"

Charles stayed calm though he talked about such stressing things. Erik didn't know what to say. Except for the truth. That – yes – Charles' life was shaped by numerous disastrous events. And most of them were linked to Erik. But he said nothing.

"I take your silence as a yes", Charles No. 3 sighted. He blinked a few times while staring to his feet. "I don't want to know about the past. I don't want to remember those horrible things."

After this statement, Erik found his voice again: "You have to. You need to! It's what formed you over the years and made you who you ... were. Are. I don't know."

"Is that the reason why you're here?" A little smile formed around on this face. "I'm Charles Xavier, but a different version as it seems. I don't want to know how you compare me to my other self. I'm me. Nothing more, nothing less. Please, accept that,

my friend-“

“Stop calling me that”, Erik snapped and balled his hands into fists.

“But you are my friend. Are you not?” There it was again. Charles’ innocent voice with that slight accent that had made Erik docile in the beginning. Right now he wasn’t so sure if the effect had worn off after all those years or if it got even worse considering that he hadn’t had any contact to an innocent version of Charles in recent years. Whenever they have met, Charles had glared at him. And with good reason.

Erik didn’t know what to do. He wanted Charles No. 3 to remember. Remember who he was, who Erik was. What they were for each other. And that nothing will change after that horrible incident, because the relationship with Charles was always something he could hold on to. Even though they weren’t always on good terms, he was still glad he had the Professor. But now? Now there was a man, looking like Charles Xavier, acting like him but refused to be him.

“I am”, Erik breathed. “But not the way you’d think.”

“In fact, I don’t know you. But since you were the only person I could remember...”, suddenly he came closer to Erik, looking for his eyes. “... I think of our friendship as a deep one.”

“And here you are mistaken”, the metal bender said in a low voice. But Charles came closer nonetheless.

“I saw how you were shaken by my death. That you felt horrendous guilt and that you considered staying with my dead body.” Charles No. 3 stood before Erik, but didn’t touch him. And he was glad that they didn’t touch. Standing so close to him was more than enough. “Don’t tell me that we weren’t close friends if it’s evident that we were.”

“But we weren’t. We didn’t like each other – not always, but most of the time. Because we had differences we weren’t able to resolve. You have to remember that. You can’t pretend it all never happened, because you refuse to acknowledge that bad things happened. At least for the sake of Raven. Or Hank.” Saying their human names made Erik cringe, but Charles seemed to refuse to call them by their mutant names. Or didn’t even know about them. “Or the school.”

Charles No. 3’s eyes shone even though the weather was cloudy and almost no sunlight touched the room. He stared into Erik’s eyes, but said nothing. Was he wandering through his mind again? Was he thinking about Erik’s recommendation? Before Erik could add anything on the topic, he felt warm fingertips on his palm. The eye contact between them didn’t perish.

“Ignorance is a bliss, Erik. And I’ll take that gladly. Just this one time in my life. Let me be happy”, he whispered into the sticky silence of the room. “I want to live another life, begin anew. Without all of the burdens from my horrible past.”

Again, Erik was lost for words. He understood what Charles No. 3 wanted. Erik himself

often wished for a numb heart. Or to forget what happened in his life. His dead mother, his dead family and his dead visions about a future for mutant kind that probably will never exist. But he would also lose all of his beautiful moments: happy scenes with his mother when he was young, coming home to Magda and pretending to be someone else or laughing with Charles when he was still able to do so. All those happy memories he had with Charles were now... gone. At least for Charles.

The grip around his hand became stronger. The warmth of Charles No. 3 fingertips spread through his whole arm. Touching him felt... different now. Touching him at all felt strange. When was the last time they had touched each other's hands?

"I want to get to know you, Erik. Again. Maybe we can resolve those differences now?", Charles said so quiet that Erik had to concentrate on his voice even though they were standing so close to each other.

And before Erik could give in – give into that warmth, the scent of his beloved friend, the loving idea that was standing behind those beautiful words – he reminded himself that he was the one who made Charles suffer all those years. "If you don't remember me properly, then it should stay that way. It's probably better like that. You don't need to get to know me, believe me. It's best if I just go and let you live your life then."

The comfortable atmosphere was turning cold into a second. Charles No. 3's face hardened and he let go of Erik's hand as if he burned himself.

"Funny how you cite Hank. He said the exact same thing about you... and I", he spoke in a stern voice. "You want to leave again? When you left three days ago I thought you'd never come back. Hank told me that the probability was high. That made me so sad I didn't even understand why, considering that we just met. And now you've come back... for what? Telling me to forget you once and for all?"

And here it was again. Charles on the verge of tears. And though it still was just Charles' clone and not the real Charles, it had the same effect on Erik as in the past: Avoid and just leave. Because seeing his friend cry was always something very unsettling for the metal bender that he couldn't handle.

"Believe me, if I tell you, that it's the best for you if I'm not in your life."

And without waiting for an answer, Erik just left the room. Again he let Charles down. But he seemed okay. There was no monster. No bad guy. Just a version of Charles that was still full of hope and love when it came to Erik.

When he was sitting in his car, he saw Charles standing on a balcony staring down with a destroyed look on his face.

Erik did it again. And so he left.

## Kapitel 8: Shapeshifting Emotions

Being back in Genosha didn't feel as good as he had hoped. It was a home. Kind of. But standing in his old room in the school that looked almost exactly like he left it, with Charles by his side, touching hands and loving words made him feel pain. So much pain that he wanted to throw up as soon as he entered his tiny house with the more or less well-maintained front yard. Erik knew why he had avoided the school for so many years. It just brought back the worst and the best memories.

He never wanted to let Charles back in his life this much. It made him weak, vulnerable and sensitive. But the last events had required one last visit. To see if Charles was alright. To see that he won't kill without reason. That he didn't become a monster. Like Erik.

Now that he knew there was no real threat, the metal bender could go back to his usual self and forget about the human part in him that wanted to stay at the school. Stay with Charles and stay in those arms for ever. Forget about his cause, forget about mutant kind and forget that he was a terrible man.

The time flew by and Erik did his best to fit back in his old routine. His people still tried not to ask about the recent events but failed here and there. Only that one guy, who made Erik go back to the school, asked about Charles and got an actual answer. But all of his reactions were the same: doubtful.

It was a late sunny day when Erik felt the presence of unfamiliar metal around his house. He recognised it within a few seconds as jewellery. From Raven.

"You did it again", was all she said after she invited herself into Erik's house and sat down on the cushy little couch. The sun was already setting, so Erik turned on some lights to take away the sharpness of her visit. At least that's what he intended to do; in the end the lightening made Raven's face even more obscure. He liked her blue form more; her human form made him uncomfortable.

"Did what", Erik asked in a low tone and tried to be occupied with a cup of coffee to prevent Raven from seeing his face. She had to be content with just glaring at his back.

"You left. Even though he asked you to stay."

That made him laugh. "He didn't ask such a thing."

"You're so full of shit", came her angry voice. "What's this time? Because he's 'just a clone'? Because the real Charles died? He is Charles! Don't pretend he's not!"

Erik stared into the cup of fresh coffee. He wasn't sure whether to give the mug to

her peacefully or to throw it into her face. Since they were in his house and throwing the hot liquid into her face would end in a fight, he decided for the former.

"You're running away", came suddenly Charles voice. Erik turned around to see Charles sitting on his couch, casually crossing his legs and looking at him. For a second – just a millisecond – he believed it to be true. That Charles was sitting there and waiting for his coffee that Erik just made for him.

"Stop that", growled the metal bender and grabbed the mug.

"Why?", Charles – no Mystique – asked in an innocent, but serious voice. "We need you in the school. There are still a lot of things that don't work."

"Like what? Teachers and stuff? You want me to be in front of a class? With students who fear me?", Erik teased and finally put down the coffee in front of ... Mystique.

"No, I want you to do your fucking job as a friend and be there, when another friend needs you." Before Erik could offer a sarcastic or angry answer, fake Charles kept talking. "Don't you see? This is your chance. Your chance to do it better. To be the friend you weren't all those years."

Before Erik could answer to that ridiculous statement, Charles stood up. Erik froze when he came towards him. "He lost his memory and he doesn't want to remember, because everything we told him about the past was horrible and, to be honest with you, I can't blame him. Not at all. It's kind of sad that he doesn't want to remember our childhood, the precious moments we had, but even here I can't say that he's wrong. Our childhood wasn't easy, especially for him. Hearing voices, no one else could, as a young boy must have been terrible. His mother was an alcoholic and his step father abused us all. The only love he felt was in the heads of other people. Even I was afraid of him sometimes because he was so powerful. He felt people dying when he was still very young, Erik. All he ever had was pain and suffering. And then he drowned himself in books, lectures and university stuff. He made fun of women in bars, picking them up like they were nice toys just for the moment while in search for some love."

Charles had never told him any of that. Probably because Erik wasn't worth of knowing. Or more likely, considering it was Charles, he didn't want to burden him with his past.

Fake Charles came so close that Erik felt his breath. It was hard not to think that the real Charles was in front of him. Or Charles No. 3. Because Raven even smelled like him. Like the school. Like ... what used to be his home.

"And then there was you. I know that now", fake Charles breathed. His blue eyes were fixed on Erik's mouth. "Suddenly he was different. No more bars, no more One-Night-Stands, no more drinking. Fighting for a cause he believed in by your side was what made him happy. You two were great together. You had your differences but at the same time you found a balance. He was always too optimistic about everything and you were too pessimistic. If you both would have listened to each other more, maybe

things would have gone a different way.”

“Are you here to lecture me about the past? Because if you do: look into a mirror”, Erik managed to say.

“You’re blaming me for leaving him?”, fake Charles asked. The whole situation was disturbing: Charles was standing right before him and talking about himself in third person. But then again Erik had to remind himself that this person in front of him wasn’t the real Charles. Or Charles No. 3. “He gave me his blessings to go. In the end he was hurt by my decision and I truly regret leaving him for so many years alone. For not writing him once. Or not visiting him, when he had those numerous operations. I feel probably as guilty as you. But I’m not hiding in a village I built myself to feel better about my ‘oh-so-great-cause’ and my decision to leave him.”

“You’re playing really dirty, Mystique.”

“So did you”, fake Charles said and came so close that their chests touched, “all those years.”

Erik wanted to move. Had to move. But all he did was stare the person in front of him down. “Just back off.”

“Just come home.” Warm hands touched his shoulders and moved higher to his cheekbones. The touch was so light, Erik could have mistaken it for a loose hair touching his skin. “Take the opportunity to make it better.”

The whole situation was suddenly turning very emotional. And Mystique knew exactly what she was doing. Seeing Charles so close, again on the verge of tears with his eyes glistening in the pale light of the room, made his stomach twist. And his heart ache. That’s why he had always avoided his old friend: he made him weak. So weak.

And in those weak moments he wanted nothing more than to be held by him. Something in Erik shouted “Let’s just be together, let’s go far, far away from here and begin a new life, just the two of us, no one else! Let’s pretend the world is a beautiful place, where we can settle down and be happy again after so many years of misery! We suffered enough, just let’s go!”.

But no. The mutants needed them. Both. And now that Charles Xavier was no longer in his best state with his memories, it all depended on Erik.

“Good night Raven”, was all Erik could manage to say before he finally stepped away from the warmth and turned his back to fake Charles.

“Erik, don’t –”, he began, but Erik was already on his way upstairs.

“Just leave. Please.”

He assumed it was his shaky voice that made Raven go in the end. She didn’t come back after that visit. And in that night, Erik dreamed of Charles. Lying in his bed.

Talking about his past. Until he dissolved into waves of blood again.

## Kapitel 9: If you don't stay, I will

It was like the weather was equal to Erik's mood: rainy. Cloudy. Cold and uncomfortable. Two weeks passed by since Charles had died and Charles No. 3 had took his place. After the second week Erik still couldn't get a night full of sleep. Horrible dreams and the constant reminder what happened made him feel worn out. And there wasn't even a grave for Charles where Erik could go to mourn over his death.

On one of those rainy afternoons, Erik was sitting with a group of other mutants under a big pavilion chatting about their next plans while it was raining like waterfalls. Erik suddenly felt again unfamiliar metal. But this time no jewellery that Raven was wearing. More like buckles on a bag. Or on a belt.

"Someone is entering Genosha", a young lady with weak telepathic powers said with a serious voice. "I can feel him."

"Him? Who is it?", another mutant asked and stood up to look through the pouring rain.

"I don't know", she said and also stood up. She searched for Erik's eyes who nodded in her direction. Promptly, she made her way into the rain and went searching for the intruder. Erik made himself be ready for whoever it was that dared to enter his territory.

It took her a few moments until she came back with a horrified look. "Magneto", she shouted over the rain and finally arrived at the pavilion. "I don't know who it is – but he looks exactly like... like the professor!"

"The professor?!", someone exclaimed with a hysterical tone. "Fuck, what's he doing here? Shit, what should we do, Magneto? We're at his mercy right now! You don't have your helmet and our telepaths are too weak for him! He will destroy us!"

"No, it can't be the professor! He was walking! And with hair!"

"Impossible? Did he find a way to heal himself?!"

"No way – maybe it's an imposter?"

"Shapeshifter?"

"Possible..."

Erik stopped listening after the woman had announced Charles No. 3. The hysterical voices made him even more nervous. Especially when a figure arrived around the corner, stepping through the deep mud with a lot of difficulties and carrying a tiny bag over his shoulders. He was soaked from the rain, his hair was falling into his eyes

and with every step he seemed to almost fall over. Charles No. 3 had a lot of difficulties to move at all without falling face down into the dirt.

"It's him, no doubt!", someone screamed and was ready to fight. Another mutant started to summon his powers and was already flowing into Charles' direction.

"Stop!", Erik managed to shout just in time to prevent anyone from attacking the telepath.

Curious and doubtful eyes looked to their leader.

"He is no threat. At least... not now. If he wanted us dead, we'd already be", the metal bender explained and stepped out of the rain. The truth behind his words made him shudder, while he floated over the muddy way. When he was near Charles, he landed right beside him.

"What are you doing here?", Erik asked in a loud voice to be heard over the rain. He couldn't believe his own eyes: Charles Xavier, wet and full of dirt, was standing in Genosha. Alone.

It took Charles a few moments to regain his voice. He was pretty out of breath. The walk had been apparently already too much for him. "God damn it!", he cursed, "If I had known that this place is such a mess when it rains, I would have come when it wasn't raining!"

Erik heard a lot of mutants talking and coming out of their houses. Charles was already getting too much attention for Erik's taste.

"You didn't answer my question", he continued without showing a reaction to Charles No. 3's statement.

Blue eyes blinked into his direction through wet strands of hair. "What do you think? You don't want to stay at the school – then I will stay at... What it's called? Gen...sha?"

"Genosha", Erik corrected surprised. "It's... Genosha."

"Great! Does Genosha also have houses? With roofs? Or do you all live outside?", Charles whined and whipped his wet hair out of his face only to let it fall back when he was grabbing his tiny bag that was equally as wet as him. Erik also started to feel the cold water run over his back, so he just nodded and led the way to his house. With one look into the direction of his people they stayed silent. No one attacked them. Good thing I'm such a strict leader, Erik thought while he made his way through the mud. Charles was still having problems with the path, so Erik took his tiny, but heavy back with his powers and continued walking. Charles didn't say anything. Maybe he did, but the rain was so loud that Erik might've not heard it.

As soon as they arrived at the house, Charles sighted contently. "The rain is truly horrible", he said with a shaky voice. "God that was a ride..."

Erik put down the bag near the cloak hanger and watched Charles trying to get out of his muddy shoes. Those expensive Italian shoes were ruined.

"I have a few questions for you, but I guess, you want to get out of those clothes first", Erik asked and gesticulated towards Charles' appearance.

"Please", was all he said. And it was such a tender 'please' that Erik found himself unable to resist and help Charles get out of those shoes. He himself was pretty wet and now almost equally dirty.

"You can take a shower upstairs. I'll give you something to change." He sounded way bitterer than his intention was. And he wasn't sure why.

"Thank you", Charles murmured but didn't move. So Erik led him upstairs to the bathroom.

They walked in complete silence but Erik saw that Charles was inspecting the house. He was looking at all the furniture and things Erik owned. When they arrived at the bathroom, Erik told Charles to undress and give him the clothes to dry them. And without hesitation, Charles began to undress himself in front of Erik.

"You can... give me the clothes after the shower", the metal bender muttered after realising that Charles was already on his trousers.

"Okay", he answered as casually as possible. His cheeks became redder with the second.

"Take what you need." After that, Erik disappeared into his bedroom and searched for something to wear for Charles and then for himself. He decided that it wasn't necessary for him to shower as well. Dry clothes had to be enough.

When he came back, the bathroom door was wide open but Charles was apparently under the shower. Erik lurked into the room and only saw the steamy glass of the shower but no essential parts of Charles. Carefully, he laid the clothes next to the sink and retreated immediately. Sure – he has already seen Charles naked. But that was 20 years ago and in the middle of an exhausting road trip where neither of them cared about anything at all. They even slept in one bed at those horrible hotels completely naked or with just a bath robe. In retrospective that was ... very intimate. But they trusted each other completely. Even in such moments they felt cosy around each other. But that was a long time ago.

Now a clone was standing under his shower. Charles No. 3 came out of the bathroom around ten minutes after Erik had left him the clothes. The metal bender had made some coffee and was standing in the kitchen area. Charles came closer with Erik's clothes on and Erik had to be honest to himself: it was a very comforting sight. The still slightly wet hair, the thick sweater and –

"Where are your pants, Charles?", Erik asked desperately not to look at his naked legs. Thank god the sweater was long enough to cover the rest.

"Your waist is much smaller than mine, Erik. They don't fit me. But it's okay... I'm just a bit cold." He rubbed his arms.

Erik sighted. He didn't think of that. "Go to the couch. I'll get you a blanket." On his way to the bedroom he grabbed Charles' wet clothes and put them into the washer. They were too dirty to just let them dry. On his way back, he held the blanket tight to his chest.

He stopped in the living room right behind the couch. Charles was sitting there and looking around the room. The whole scene was so surreal. This had to be an illusion. Or a trick.

When he stepped in front of the couch, Charles smiled at him and took the blanket. He wrapped himself up with it instantly. Erik didn't say anything and headed back to the open kitchen. He knew Charles didn't like coffee as much as he did, so he put up some hot water and made tea. On the other hand – this wasn't Charles. It was a version of him. Maybe this one liked coffee?

"No, thank you, a tea would be lovely", Charles No. 3 suddenly said in a calm voice.

Erik tensed immediately. He wanted to shield his mind.

"You're thinking very loudly, my friend. I don't mean to do any harm or to overstep your boundaries. Those thoughts of you are just coming straight into my ear, like a phone call from another person on the street. I just happen to hear them", he clarified like he did all those years ago. So, explaining like he's talking to a child was still a trait of him.

Erik didn't bother to answer; Charles had probably already heard his thoughts about 'not stepping over boundaries'.

"I believe you have some questions", the telepath assumed eventually and waited patiently for his tea. When Erik finally arrived with a mug in his hand and passed it to Charles, he sat down in front of him on the old wing chair and nodded.

"Indeed. Let's begin with the reason you're here", he started and sipped his coffee that was already beginning to get cold.

"Oh, I already gave you my reason, but I assume the rain was very loud so I might repeat myself: If you're not staying at the school, then I will stay at Genosha."

Erik remained silent for a moment and took another sip from his coffee. He thought about Charles' words and decided that he didn't understand a word.

Charles chuckled. "You know, I talked to Raven about you. Why you were so angry at me and why you refused to stay at the school or at least in my proximity, when you were so clearly attached to my old self."

"I wasn't –", Erik started but was interrupted by Charles, before he could avoid the elephant in the room.

"She told me that we were both stubborn and didn't listen to each other's standpoints back then. Things went pretty bad and we both kind of regretted how things have turned out. In the end whether you nor I were willing to quit their current life. And it turned out that we both loved and hated each other at the same time. We knew we wanted to be together but we also knew that it won't work."

Erik felt his eyelid twitch. "Now if that wasn't a good résumé of our relationship", he said sarcastically. "That still doesn't explain why you're here."

"No?", Charles probed. "I think it's obvious. I don't remember anything, Erik. And that means that I don't remember why I never came to you." Suddenly he frowned. "Regarding my former inability to walk I might see the reason why I never came to Genosha. I mean – no wheelchair would have gotten through this pile of mud."

Erik's eyes widened a bit. Was that... was that supposed to be a joke?

"You can't stay here", the metal bender finally whispered. "You can stay the night if you want, because it's already late and the weather is horrible, but you can't stay here permanently."

Charles expression turned bitter. His frown got deeper. "Why not?"

That made Erik laugh nervously. He almost broke his mug in his hands when he pressed his fingers together. "Because someone has to be at the school. You're their leader, I'm the leader of Genosha. You can't just ... walk to the enemy."

"I don't think we're enemies, Erik", he murmured, but Erik didn't let him finish.

"Maybe you don't think that. And maybe me neither. But a lot of other mutants do. You're a threat to them and if I didn't interfere before they would have killed you on sight."

Red lips were pressed together. Dark lashes blinked a few times. "Did I hurt them in any way? Back then?"

"No... But you're a strong telepath and they fear you. Because you could do anything with them."

"I could. But I won't."

Oh, how Erik loved this sentence. Whenever it came out of Charles' beautiful mouth, his first instinct was to make it shut again.

"Do I really need to explain why they fear you nonetheless?", Erik sighted and put down his mug on the little coffee table that was separating the two mutants.

Charles looked into his tea. "Maybe another time."

"Fine, maybe another time. Do you want to stay the night? Or do you want me to bring you home? We can drive and..." The words stayed stuck in his mouth as he was thinking about a way to bring Charles home. "How did you even come here? With one of your cars?"

Blue eyes looked up. "I wasn't so sure if I could still remember how to drive. So I took the train. And walked."

Erik stopped breathing for a while. Only after a few seconds, when he felt his lungs ache, he found new oxygen. "That... that'd take hours."

"Yes, indeed, I was on my way for about, hm, I guess six hours. And at this point I might state that I'm really tired, but I owe you an explanation, so I'll rest later. After all, I came with the intention to stay. And right now that seems to be impossible – at least from your side."

"What the –?" Erik was lost for words. And yet they came out like a waterfall after realising that Charles had travelled six hours in the rain to get to Erik. "Where is Raven? Or Hank? Why didn't they drive you? Or brought you here with the jet – I mean, we have enough space to land. You'd rather walk all this way through the rain? And you only came with one tiny bag with the intention to stay? Where is all your other stuff? You can't be serious!"

Charles didn't reply immediately and his frown softened. He waited a few moments and watched the tea in his mug, until he finally spoke again. He suddenly looked like a child. Even more so when his words were so soft that Erik didn't understand him at first. "They don't know I'm here."

"... You're kidding."

The telepath smiled weakly. "No. They don't know I'm here. With you. I left before the sun rose with only light luggage. When Raven returned from a trip a few days ago, she looked very sad. So I asked her what was wrong but she just said that she was sorry and that she didn't know what to do. So I looked into her mind and –"

"You can't do that without her permission", Erik interrupted his friend with stern words. But Charles shook his head.

"I needed to. I was so worried about her. And I didn't dig very deep. Just the surface. But then I saw that she met you. And you talked about us. She wore my form; that wasn't really nice of her because it unsettled you a lot."

"God, Charles, you...", but the metal bender didn't say anything further. He circled his temples with his fingers to calm down.

"To make it short: I saw where Genosha was and that you were living here. And it looked nice. At least in Ravens memory when the sun shone. This", and with that he

gesticulated towards the window where the rain was still pattering, "is not nice."

"Okay", Erik began with a quick hysterical laugh. "You can't stay here. Especially when whether Hank nor Raven know that you're here."

"I'm not a child that ran away from home. I'm a grown man and I can decide on my own." Charles voice suddenly changed a lot. The tone was... demanding.

"I know that but still: you can't just leave your own property. What about the school? The children? And what about your ideals?" He took Charles' silence as a good indicator that he was winning the argument. "Because let me tell you this: We're fighting here real fights. We're not waiting until someone gives us what we want. We take what we deserve. If you stay, you have to fight, too. My ways are far more ruthless than yours. People will die. Your beloved humans will die. Mutants will die."

"Why do they have to die?", Charles asked as if he really didn't know.

"Because war is like that. People die for our greater cause. Mutants have to be free. Without humans oppressing them."

The telepath snuggled a little bit deeper into the blanket as if he didn't want to hear the truth about war. "But we're free. I don't see any difference between mutants and humans. I was able to do anything up until now without restrictions. And ... Genosha seems to be free, too."

"Because we fought for it, Charles! That's why I told you to remember the past – nothing here was given to us for free! Or just because we asked nicely! We had a terrible war, a lot of mutants died – for this exact freedom."

Erik's head hurt. And judging the look on Charles' face, his head was hurting, too.

"I will call Raven to inform her that you're here. And then you can stay the night if you want, but tomorrow morning you'll be gone", Erik informed Charles like a parent lessoning a child.

And suddenly the only answer he got was a nod. No more words were said. He looked into his mug, sad and down, until he drank the last sip. It hurt Erik to see his friend like that; again rejected. He headed to the phone and dialled Ravens number.

His thumb was hovering over the last digit.

Wasn't this the chance he always wanted? His dream that Charles would come to him one day and share his ideals. And finally see that war sometimes is the solution. That threatening and killing humans was sometimes necessary. Of course not always: Since Erik was living peacefully in Genosha he knew that both ways had its appeal. That Charles' way was also a solution. Both of their ideals were sometimes true. And now Charles was sitting in Erik's clothes on Erik's couch in Erik's house with Erik's blanket over his legs saying that he wanted to stay. With Erik.

Eventually, Erik put the phone back. Raven and Hank probably already knew that Charles was here. Where else would he have gone?

"Did you change your mind?", the familiar, calm voice came from behind Erik. When he turned around he saw into those blue eyes that were directed at him with hope.

"I did. But only for now. We have to see if this is going to work. You don't know me... after all." And that was something that made Erik gloomy.

"That's why I'm here. I want to change that", Charles said with a light tone. A faint smile came to his lips. "When I woke up, all I knew was my name and yours. Not even my sister's. Or my best friend's."

It hurt in Erik's chest to be reminded of that day. But at the same time he felt the warmth from Charles radiating.

"You're special to me, Erik. And I want to know why. Maybe we can find... a way to make this work. I can feel that you want that, too."

Erik couldn't help but smile at that. And then he noticed that Charles was projecting his feelings on him in that moment.

"Okay, there have to be rules", the metal bender began with a shaky voice. "I don't have my helmet, so you have to stay out of my head. Permanently. Got that?"

"What helmet?"

"Doesn't matter. Will you stay out of my head?"

Charles considered it for a few seconds, then nodded. "But I can't rip my ears off when you're thinking so loudly."

"I will try not to scream while thinking", Erik joked dryly, which made Charles chuckle. A faint heat crept up Erik's cheeks at the sight of it. "Rule No. 2: This is my house, my village, my people. And if we're going to war, then it's like that. I will listen to you when you have a different opinion but in the end – I decide."

To Erik's surprise, Charles nodded nicely. He really couldn't remember anything before the incident.

"Rule No. 3: You will tell Raven and Hank that you're here and you will visit them from time to time. I don't want them to think I lured you in my house and chained you to some pipes in my cellar."

"Why... Why would you do that? And why would I let you do that? I'm a telepath, you can't do anything I don't want", Charles objected and played with the seam of the sweater.

"That was a joke... Of course I wouldn't chain you – ", Erik sighted. "Just visit them,

ok? Tell them you're here."

"But then they will come and want me to go back."

Erik smiled while he took the mugs and placed them into the dishwasher. "I thought you're a grown man? If you object to go back, they have to accept that you will stay here."

Charles eyes got wider. "So", and suddenly small hands grabbed at Erik's shirt around his back. "I'm allowed to stay here?"

The slight touch gave Erik goose bumps. When he turned around, Charles still hold on to his shirt and looked up at him with those eyes he recognised from 20 years ago. And before he could wonder when he stopped naming Charles 'Charles No. 3', he tried to smile and said:

"Yes."

## Kapitel 10: Fancy fo a game

Erik didn't know if his decision to let Charles stay was the right thing to do. But he had the feeling that if he had decided against Charles, he would've regret it. Maybe it would all work out. And they could be together like in the old days.

After Charles knew that he was allowed to stay, he relaxed instantly. Though the air still felt sticky: Erik didn't know how to handle the telepath and what to do with him. He was never good with adequate social interaction and being with someone you originally avoided was even worse. Back then, when they were young, they had a constant link through their minds, so Charles always knew what to do or to say, so Erik didn't have to bother. But now, Charles wasn't allowed in his head and Erik had to speak for his own to bring in some interaction.

So he came up with that one thing Charles and he had always enjoyed. "Fancy for a game?", he asked when he watched Charles wandering through the living room inspecting things.

Charles turned around and looked confused. "For what game?"

Erik's joy over a good chess game with his beloved friend died down immediately. "Chess. We'd used to play it."

"We had so many differences that we avoided each other for almost 20 years, but we... played chess?" Charles arched his brow in disbelief.

"It was our mutual ritual", Erik explained while gaining the chess board made of metal with his powers and placing it on the coffee table. "We always chatted about mutants, our plans and our visions above a good game. You were a worthy opponent. The best by far, to be honest. At least for me."

As soon as the chess board was placed and Erik sat down on his wing chair, Charles followed to the couch and ogled the board. "That sounds... very nice." He also sat down and placed the blanket back on his naked tights. "But I'm afraid I don't remember all of the rules. I mean, I know how chess works, but... I'm not sure I will be the opponent you're used to."

Erik knew that something like this would have happened sooner or later. That his amnesia would come with a lot of restrictions. But he tried his very best not to be upset and throw the chess board out of the window. "We can have a test round."

As soon as Charles made his first move, Erik felt this familiar warmth coming up his spine. Chess was something that he had reserved for Charles – and only for Charles. It was their thing, their come together, their way of expressing their thoughts. He once played chess with Magda, because he missed playing it after so many years, but it had felt wrong. He had never touched a chess board since then, when Charles was not around.

After a few minutes of concentrated playing, Erik won. Of course, but Charles did a really good job. After all – they played for several minutes. Someone with little to no talent for playing wouldn't have lasted a minute with Erik.

"You're a fast learner", the metal bender admitted and looked up. His voice felt a little bit raspy. When Charles also looked up, he tried to look less intimidating. And it seemed to work: Charles smiled at him brightly.

"I still don't remember playing but I remember that I've used to play a lot", he explained but sighted immediately. "Ah, that probably sounded weird, but I hope you know that I mean. Anyway: It's a wonderful game. I'd like to play another round."

Somehow Erik liked that Charles was so amazed by playing chess. "This was just the test round. We're playing three rounds. Let's see if you can beat me."

Charles laughed like he hadn't had in years. As if time had stopped and they were back at the study, where they used to play. The only difference were his tiny wrinkles around his eyes that indicated that years have passed.

After the first round was over and Erik had won, Charles sighted in contentment. They didn't talk between their moves like they used to because Charles seemed to be too occupied by the game. Before the second round started, Erik went to the kitchen and grabbed two glasses.

"Do you want a drink?", he asked, already looking for the whiskey.

"Alcohol?", Charles asked innocently as if he wasn't allowed to drink yet.

"You will like it. It's the same Whiskey we used to drink." The revelation of the fact that Erik always had bought the same Whiskey Charles owned was suddenly very uncomfortable for the metal bender. He had just blurred out a very personal secret.

But thankfully Charles still had amnesia and didn't ask why Erik had bought the alcohol after all those years. He just nodded and smiled, while he waited for Erik to come back.

After Charles had nipped at the brown liquid, he grimaced. "That's disgusting!"

Suddenly, Erik felt like laughing. "Disgusting? You always liked alcohol very much. I'd even say... a little bit too much."

"Really?", Charles wondered and took another sip. "Maybe I can get used to it."

"Oh, you don't have to. After all, alcohol is bad." And before Erik could feel like a parent again, he made the first move for their second round.

This time they chatted a little bit. About Genosha, what Erik's position was and who's living in this village. Charles only asked polite questions that weren't too personal, but

at the same time he looked like he was really interested in more information. Erik was suddenly so absorbed in talking about future plans of Genosha that Charles beat him.

"I saw the opportunity and I took it", was all Charles said while he was grinning like a champion.

He was, indeed, very powerful. Not only was he enormously intelligent, but he was also very talented. In almost everything. Erik was again amazed by his friend. Silently. Deep within his heart. He'd never say it, but the admiration was still there.

Charles finished his drink in the middle of the third round. Before he could say something about the taste of the alcohol, Erik got the bottle and poured more whiskey in the glass. Maybe it wasn't the best idea to give innocent Charles more alcohol when he had never drunk anything, but it made the awkward situation they were in more comfortable. At least for Erik. The light dizziness made him calmer. About the situation. About his decision. About his feelings. About Charles.

By the end of the third round that Erik had won, he was a little bit drunk and Charles was pretty drunk.

"Now I understand why people drink that", he slurred, "it has a really, really nice effect." While he giggled, Erik emptied his third glass of Whiskey and felt his mouth twitch. He smiled and looked at his friend that was playing with the blanket around his legs.

"It's already late", Erik finally said and peeked to the clock in the kitchen. Out of an old habit, he said: "Let's go to bed."

And suddenly Erik felt his mind spin. He looked to Charles who was staring at him with red cheeks and seemed to project again – in his drunken state no wonder. "To bed?"

"Ah, well", the metal bender murmured while he was looking at everything in the room except his friend. "I only have one bed. But if you're staying for the next days... weeks... or, uh, months" – god, why had he drunk so much? – "we can buy you your own bed. But for now... You can decide whether to sleep here on the couch or... well..."

That didn't sound right. At all.

Charles may have broken the rules and was wandering through Erik's mind. He felt it. The warmth radiating around his head. "It's fine", Charles blurred eventually. "I'm sleeping here. The couch is absolutely adequate."

Erik now wondered what Charles had seen in his head that he dismissed the idea to sleep with Erik instantly. To sleep in his bed. Not with Erik.

"Okay, good night then", Erik stammered and rushed to the stairs before Charles would see more of his messy thoughts.

“Good night, Erik”, he heard Charles voice, but he was already halfway to his bedroom.

When he lay down, the whole room swam. His heart hammered in his chest and he wanted to slap himself for acting so poorly just because of a few drinks. He didn't even offer Charles a pillow or a better blanket.

He fell asleep with his clothes on. When he woke up it was still in the middle of the night, but he had to go to the toilet. With half closed eyes he shuffled to the bathroom. His head hurt. The hangover came quickly this time.

After he returned to the bedroom, he was wide awake. The thought that Charles was sleeping downstairs on his couch was making him nervous. Was that really a good idea? To let him stay? He didn't remember anything. He was just a clone. Not really Charles. But at the same time, he was Charles. The latest game showed Erik that this version of the telepath was very much like the young version from 20 years ago. When the world around Charles Xavier was still intact. When he wasn't ruined by Erik Lehnsherr.

And a part of Erik didn't want to do the same mistake again. He wanted to give Charles an opportunity to make his life a better one. And because Erik knew that misery and death followed him like a disease, it would have been the best solution to let Charles stay at the school. Without him. But Charles didn't want to be left alone. He even walked to Genosha by himself, just to be with Erik.

What a beautiful thought that was.

## Kapitel 11: Genius

Erik didn't know when he fell asleep again, but when he woke up, he smelled something burnt. His first thought: the house was on fire. He jumped out of bed and hurried downstairs where the smell intensified. But instead seeing flames and smoke, he saw naked legs covered with tiny freckles and bare feet standing in the kitchen right in front of the oven. Charles was cooking. Or at least tried to.

"Charles", Erik sighted and went closer to the disaster. "What... What are you doing?"

But before his friend could answer, he saw what was left of some eggs in the pan.

"I tried to make breakfast... But I failed", he admitted sadly and looked very upset. "I thought I might remember cooking like playing chess yesterday. But... it seems that my old self didn't cook at all."

"He did", Erik smirked and took the pan out of Charles hand to throw away the eggs. "But it ended always exactly like this. Don't worry. I guess Charles Xavier just can't cook."

"Really? Did I already try to make you breakfast?", the telepath asked curiously and watched how Erik disposed the eggs and grabbed new ones from the carton right next to the stove.

Erik stopped for a moment in his movements. He remembered Charles standing in the kitchen back at the school trying to make Erik breakfast after they had had a little fight the night before. He burnt everything that could be burnt. In the end they shared a big pot of yogurt with fruits in it, because everything else had ended up in the trash by Charles. They laughed about it the whole day and the fight was forgotten. "You did", was all that Erik said after he began to cook some new fried eggs.

Unfortunately eating yogurt with fruits didn't solve paralyzing your best friend. Or betraying him. Or almost killing him.

"You don't have to make breakfast for me, Charles. I usually don't eat anything in the morning. Coffee is enough", Erik explained while he sizzled some bacon.

"I wanted to be useful", he explained and watched Erik cooking.

"You can be while you're trying not to burn down the house", Erik joked, but Charles frowned like he was deeply hurt. So the metal bender added a bit more bacon stripes as an apology. He knew Charles liked it savoury in the morning. That's why he got soft at the edges after Erik moved in with him 20 years ago. Everyday bacon and eggs or sausages weren't very healthy. But Charles loved it, so Erik didn't object and made him what he wanted. Almost every day.

"You made me breakfast... almost every day?", Charles whispered, looked down and grabbed the kitchen counter.

Erik's eyes began to sting. Was he thinking again too loud? "That was a long time ago."

"Why did we stop making breakfast for each other?"

"Oh, you want to know more about the past?", Erik teased. With a little bit too much aggression, he put the eggs and bacon onto plates. "Then remember."

"I can't trigger memories like that. And I just... don't get why we separated. What happened that we... ended up like this? Just tell me. I don't want to rummage in your mind to find the answer."

Erik started the coffee machine. "I don't have the nerve to talk about that in the morning. Just take it as it is." He placed their breakfast on the kitchen island. The loving atmosphere was turning sour. And suddenly Charles didn't say anything anymore. When he wanted to brew some tea and didn't know how to start, Erik placed him at the kitchen island and made everything else. Erik's passive-aggressive behaviour was making Charles insecure. In the end they ate in complete silence. And Erik wondered, if his decision to let Charles stay, was the right one. Maybe they weren't made to live together. After all, people change over the years. And 20 years of separation wasn't probably the best for a friendship.

After they finished breakfast, Charles asked carefully for his clothes.

"They're still wet", Erik grumbled as he got upstairs to shower. Charles followed him.

"Don't you have a dryer?"

Erik sighted. "I don't need one." It was still cloudy outside, but the rain stopped. He looked outside of the bedroom window, thinking about a way to dry Charles clothes faster. Maybe another mutant in this village owned a dryer. "You should've brought more clothes."

"Maybe", Charles admitted, "but I didn't want to carry half a ton for six hours."

Suddenly Charles stepped in front of him and started opening Erik's wardrobe. "I need something to wear, Erik, I can't run around half naked all day. Although I enjoy it."

Erik tried to ignore the statement as best as he could. "I have a meeting at twelve. I can ask someone for clothes for you", Erik murmured and grabbed some clothes for himself while Charles was still looking through his belongings. A part of him was offended and angry that the telepath was so rude to not mind his personal spaces. Another part of him loved the straight-forward Charles. Seeing him grabbing a different Cardigan and a shirt with the intention to wear it was making Erik's heart warm. He felt... comfortable.

When he was in the bathroom, he began to gather some things for Charles. Like a new

toothbrush, some towels and a brush. Erik didn't brush his short hair, but Charles had to. This mob of hair had to be tamed.

Suddenly, Charles knocked at the slightly open door and peeked inside. Erik just came out of the shower and was wearing only a towel around the waist, which made both of them a little bit uncomfortable. Nonetheless, Charles spoke silently. "They're coming, Erik. What should I do?"

"Who's coming?" His heartbeat went faster. A threat? An enemy? More scientists?

"Raven and Hank!", Charles whined.

"Oh, god..."

Indeed, it was like Charles had predicted: They acted like Charles was their child that ran away to his friend which they didn't approve. Raven stood next to the kitchen island with crossed arms, while Hank sighted almost every two seconds in disbelief. Like two parents in distress.

"We were worried, Charles. You can't just... run away", Hank said as the good guy he was.

"A lot of things could have happened on the way! That was reckless! You're still lacking a lot of memories – you don't know yet who's the enemy and who's not!", Raven yelled as if she was the more stricter parent.

"I'm a telepath. I know exactly who my friend is and who my enemy is", Charles sighted and played with the buttons on the navy Cardigan he was wearing. Blue really was his colour.

"Apparently not", Hank grumbled and looked in Erik's direction.

"Erik is my friend", Charles said with a determination that made both Hank and Raven go silent. "I'll stay. I'm no use as a professor at the school. I don't know what to do with all of the students. And to be honest with you: I don't intend to change that. I know that the school was built by me to give young mutants a place. And that my intention was to create an institution where humans and mutants could live together peacefully. And it kind of worked."

Hank and Raven just watched Charles speak. And they looked at him as if he was an alien.

"But we all know how that ended, right? The school had to be rebuild a few times, because humans and mutants destroyed it several times over the years. I got paralysed, I lost my hair, I lost almost everything that I held dear in life , I almost got killed a few times as far as I know and I was alone. Completely alone all those years." Blue eyes glistered in Erik's direction. "I don't want to be alone anymore."

"You never were, Charles!", Raven interrupted Charles' speech and came a step closer

to her brother. "You've lost some people, yes, but that was a long time ago. Now you have a family again. You have me, Hank, the children, all of the teachers –"

"That's not what I mean and you know that", Charles interrupted her sister and Erik began to sweat nervously.

All words seemed to be stuck in Ravens throat. Hank blinked a few times in disbelief. "You can't be serious, Charles. I mean – Genosha is great, not very peaceful, but yeah, you can probably find someone here. But can't you look for a woman while staying at the school? Where we have an eye on you? Where you can be the professor for all of your students? Your current situation is still vague, you know that. What about Moira? You could call her, I'm sure –"

"Who the fuck is Moira?", Charles blared and seemed to get angrier by the second.

"A very good friend of you from the CIA", Raven explained with a soothing voice, trying to calm her brother down. "You used to... uh, date? I'm not sure if you guys really dated, but you had a crush on her!"

"On Moira?", Erik asked with a sarcastic tone. "Really?"

"I don't remember her. Even after her name was mentioned. She can't be that special." Blue eyes searched to Erik's grey-green ones as if to say 'I'm sorry'.

"Charles, I understand you want to have someone special in your life, that's ok. You never mentioned something like that before, but we can find someone. I'm sure. But please come back. You're not safe here", Hank plead while adjusting his glasses.

"I'm perfectly safe here", Charles objected again and took a few steps towards Erik. His warm hands grabbed Erik's arm. "And I don't need you to find someone for me. Just let me decide on my own."

The implication was too strong for Erik. "Maybe they're right, Charles", he said with a slightly shaky voice. "You're better when you stay in the school."

Charles' eyes widened. Blue balls looked up to Erik and couldn't believe what he just said. All of them stayed silent for a couple of seconds until Erik felt the mental nudge. Charles was asking for permission to enter his mind.

"Charles", Erik thought with a loud mental sigh.

"Why are you sending me away again?"

"You're implicating something you might not understand yourself, let alone Hank or Raven."

"I'm implicating nothing. I just want to stay here. That's all."

"And what about saying you want to find someone special while grabbing my arm?"

"You are special to me! Am I not to you?"

"Are you talking through a mental link? Hello? We're still here!", Raven interrupted with a disturbed look on her face.

Both Erik and Charles blinked in their direction. And since the metal bender didn't want to answer Charles' mental question, he decided to avoid the whole situation completely.

"Charles is staying here for the moment", Erik sighted in resignation and cut off the mental link. The telepath let go of his arm immediately. "I wanted to send him away yesterday but he refused. So I allowed him to stay at Genosha for the next days. Or weeks. Depending on how well this is going to work and how long he intends to stay."

"It's what you always wanted, hm? Charles Xavier, the great telepath, now fighting for your cause?", Hank spat and growled under his breath. "What a great coincidence that he has no memories of your old self. No more your opponent but your ally – that sounds nice. How did you do it? What kind of promises did you tell him? To stay with him this time?"

"I promised nothing", Erik answered with a serious tone. "Now go, before I forget myself and let you escort by one of my soldiers."

"Oh, soldiers, how wonderful!", Hank raised his voice. "Do you hear that, Charles? He has his own soldiers! For someone who was the victim of a disastrous war, you're pretty good in playing war yourself, Erik!"

Raven's eyes were dancing between Hank and Erik. She knew that things would escalate any second if she didn't do anything. But Erik's mood had already snapped.

"You dare saying those things to me? You weren't there, you didn't see the things they have done!", the metal bender yelled and gathered metal around him. All kind of things started to rattle around the house. But Hank wasn't intimidated.

"Do you see that, Charles? He's dangerous! He wouldn't hesitate to kill us all if it wasn't for you all those years –"

But before Hank could finish his sentence, a soothing atmosphere was spreading through the living room.

Hank stopped yelling. Erik stopped gathering metal around him. Raven loosened up.

"Just go", Charles breathed and stepped in the middle of the room. "Thank you for your concern, but I'm fine. I will call you once in a while. But for now: please go."

Both Raven and Hank nodded contently and stepped outside. After the door was closed again, Erik felt the soothing atmosphere around his mind fading.

Neither of them said anything until they heard a car leaving.

“You overstepped my boundaries. Again”, Erik muttered in a low voice.

“If I hadn’t deescalated the situation, you and Hank would’ve destroyed the house. We all seem to be very stubborn people.”

Erik ignored Charles goodwill and glared at him. “Do that again and you will leave. Permanently.”

“You’d rather have your house destroyed, a fight with a friend and probably wounds all over your body instead of me in your head?”

“Hank’s not my friend”, Erik growled and came closer to Charles, who was still standing in the middle of the living room. “He wouldn’t have had the chance to destroy anything in here. Let alone myself.”

“So, you would have killed him? Was he right about that?”

There it was again. The constant disappointment in Charles’ eyes returned whenever he was confronted with one of Erik’s flaws.

They looked into each other’s eyes for a couple of seconds until Erik felt that a fight wouldn’t solve anything. Because – no – of course, he wouldn’t have killed Hank. Not because of something trivial as an insult. But acknowledging that would mean that Erik had to comply and admit to have overreacted.

“I will head to the meeting now”, he announced grumpily instead and walked past Charles.

“Have fun. Please ask for some clothes, yes?”, the telepath muttered angrily back.

As soon as Erik stepped out of the house, he felt lighter. He found that he liked arguing with Charles when he was angry as well. Most of their encounters were filled with so much rage from Erik’s side and so much sympathy from Charles’s side. He was never truly angry. Whenever Erik did a horrible thing – Charles forgave him the second he had done it.

Maybe it wasn’t so different right now. But it was trivial. The fight was a nice change to all of the other burdens they had to carry for the last years. Because when Erik would return later to his house, he knew that Charles would still be there.

## Kapitel 12: Were we in love back then?

Thankfully, a fellow mutant had almost the same statue as Charles, so he could lend him two jeans. Erik had to do a lot of explaining to do while they had the meeting, but his people were more or less open minded towards the new habitant.

“Is it really safe to have him here?”

“If he’s here by his own, then we’re lucky to have him, right?”

“Will he help us with our problems with the humans?”

“Is he your new pet?”

“Did you finally give in?”

“What if it’s a trap?”

He received all kinds of opinions during their meeting but generally the mood was accepting. Charles Xavier was now officially a part of Genosha. At least for now.

When he came home, he saw Charles sitting on the couch reading a book. Again, he was covered with the blanket and more cushions he had probably found around the house.

As soon as Erik entered the living room, his friend looked up and smiled at him faintly. “How was the meeting?”

“Great”, the metal bender murmured. It already felt way too comfortable to get asked that kind of question by someone who just started living with Erik. Despite the fact that the question never arose if Charles should get his own flat or house. “I have two jeans for you. The guy said you can keep them.”

Blue eyes widened. “Oh really? That’s so nice, thank you!”

The jeans fit more or less. This version of Charles was a little bit smaller around the waist than Erik had in memory. The jeans were a bit loose.

“It’s just for today”, Charles said and moved around the couch to see if the trousers were okay.

“Seeing your tiny luggage... You might want to add some more clothes.”

“Is there something nearby? Where I could buy new outfits?”

Erik sighted and went to the kitchen. He was hungry. “About an hour drive from here are a few shops. But nothing special. So don’t expect expensive brands like...

whatever you wear usually.”

“I don’t know what I usually wear. I just grabbed a few things from the cupboards back at the school.” The brown-haired telepath followed Erik to the kitchen and lingered at the island. “Then I will keep wearing your clothes if you’re okay with that.”

Erik wasn’t okay with that. Or was he? In the end he didn’t answer and gathered some noodles.

Charles watched him intensely and nibbled at his nails. “I wanted to make something to eat, but then I remembered that I’m no good as a cook. So I waited for you.”

“It’s probably better this way. I don’t want to see my kitchen in flames.”

Charles giggled and stepped closer. “Maybe you can show me some tricks?”

“Tricks? It’s just cooking...”

“Then let me watch you.”

Erik furrowed his brow.

“Please”, Charles said again so tenderly that Erik’s heart melted in an instant.

So they cooked together in the afternoon and again in the evening. Charles was good in cutting things without hurting himself, so he had a new job to do, while Erik did the rest.

Right after they finished eating, Charles asked for a round of chess. And Erik’s mood lightened up instantly.

“Do you also want a drink?”, Erik asked, already knowing the answer.

“Yes, please”, Charles said with a loving smile on his face.

Erik won all rounds, but Charles was getting better. This time they only drank one drink that they didn’t even finish after they were done playing.

When they were sitting in comfortable silence, Charles interrupted it by asking a strange question. “How many people did you kill?”

He caught Erik off guard. He almost spilled his drink. “Excuse me?”

“Hank was clearly convinced that you’re a cruel murderer. But being here with you... is completely different. It’s like he’s talking about a different person. I know that you have a short temper, but... now I’m curious. How many people did you kill?”

Ah, Charles was starting to get to know him. But unfortunately from the wrong perspective. “Too much, I’d say. On the other hand... maybe too less”, Erik answered

truthfully and stared into his almost empty drink. "I used to kill every Nazi, I met. Then I killed every human being that was threatening me. And now... I kill if only necessary. But unfortunately that's very often."

Charles watched him with curious eyes. "Did my older me killed anyone?"

"I don't know. Probably?"

"Hank didn't want to tell me. And Raven said that killing people should be avoided if necessary. As if I was a child."

"You are", Erik said and looked into Charles eyes. "You don't remember your past and you're only a few days old. We weren't able to predict you."

"My other me was predictable?"

Erik smiled. "Oh, yes. Almost completely."

"That's not a nice thing to say", Charles pouted and drank all of the remaining Whiskey in his glass. Although it was just one drink, he was already a little bit drunk.

After another comfortable silence arose, Erik also finished his drink and thought about going to bed. Right after he was wondering if Charles might need another blanket, Charles started speaking again.

"Can I ask you a personal question?"

Erik raised his eyebrows and nodded after a few moments of guessing what it might be that Charles wanted to know and needed to ask beforehand.

"When we met... back then. You know, 20 years ago", he started stammering as if he had difficulties to formulate a coherent sentence. "Were we in love?"

Erik felt his heart stopping. The shock must have been written on his face, because Charles looked suddenly equally shocked.

"I-I mean – I feel so attached to you that I thought... You know, I only remembered your name and mine and when we met for the first time it felt... so calming. I was so scared in that facility, but then there was you. And even now I feel so comfortable around you. But you keep saying that it's far more complicated between us than just friendship, so I thought..." He placed the empty glass back on the tiny table next to the chessboard and searched for Erik's eyes. "Those feelings I have for you are deep. Very deep. I guess, it's because I felt them for such a long time. And considering that you hurt me back then and we separated on such bad conditions... I don't know. It sounds like we were lovers. And then broke up."

Oh god, Erik thought. Innocent Charles was cute. But also too directly when talking about feelings. Not that he hadn't been in his old state, but saying 'My feelings for you are deep' was next level. And Erik was so bad in talking about feelings. That's why

it has always been easy with Charles in his head. There was no need to tell him – he already knew. But that mental link was out of question.

“That’s not exactly how it went”, Erik began and wet his dry lips. “We weren’t... a couple or something like that.”

“Oh, I see”, the telepath muttered and looked down – clearly disappointed. “Was that the reason why I wasn’t allowed to say something like that in front of Hank and Raven?”

Erik sighted. And against his own reason, he poured himself another drink. “No. That was something different.”

Blue eyes looked at him in confusion.

“Affection between two men is... difficult. Hank and Raven may be a little bit more open towards that topic, but others aren’t. Just be careful when talking about finding someone special and referring to another man”, Erik explained and was reminded at the camps in Auschwitz, where homosexuality was treated like a disease. Just like being Jewish.

Charles stared to Erik’s drink and decided to take a second one, too. “I don’t understand that, but I think I have to accept it.” He drank his Whiskey in two sips. “But thank you for your answer. I guess our feelings are not mutual then.”

Erik’s heart hammered in his chest. His hands were shaking. He never imagined talking about something like that with Charles. Not like this. Not on this level of honesty.

Before Erik could say anything, Charles took the bottle and poured more Whiskey in his glass. Again. “I see now that this explains a lot. Your behaviour towards me and my older self. And why I was so desperate. And why I never got married. Or had a partner at all. I guess, I was waiting for you to come back to me. Or something like that.”

Erik also drank his remaining Whiskey down in one. But it wasn’t helping at all. His heart ached nonetheless hearing such assumptions.

“And here I am again”, Charles said and suddenly smiled sadly in his drink. “Can you believe it? I didn’t know anything about you – just your name – but I was so convinced that you were special to me that I didn’t see that you weren’t thinking the same. I was convinced that going to you instead of waiting another 20 years would solve everything. But I guess... that’s not the case.”

Erik wanted to answer. Wanted to say something. But nothing came out of his mouth. Silence stretched through the room that made him uncomfortable. Then he saw Charles wiping over his face with his arm.

He was crying.

“Oh, Charles, no”, Erik tried to sound soothing but tensed up immediately.

Then Charles laughed between the silent sobs. "I don't even know why I'm crying! I'm so sad and I don't know why. But I don't want to remember my horrible past, because I have the feeling that... knowing why I'm crying won't make me feel any better. Most likely even worse!"

The more Charles swiped over his wet face with his arm, the less Erik knew what to do. Why was he so bad at that topic?

But he remembered that Charles liked being touched. He used to hug Raven a lot and when he and Erik became friends, he hugged him too, whenever the opportunity had arrived. It was very awkward at the beginning, because Erik hadn't been touched like that for most of his life. But he got used to it.

Until he had to give up on it again.

The metal bender got up, walked around the tiny coffee table and sat down next to Charles. He opened his shaky arms and put them around the warm body. Charles sobbed in surprise, but leaned against Erik instantly. A few seconds passed by until Charles finally came closer and also put his arms around Erik. He laid his head on Erik's shoulder and probably closed his eyes, because hot tears streamed down Erik's throat. His warm breath was on Erik's skin. His hair smelled like Erik's shampoo. The navy cardigan still looked nice on him. His tiny hands on his back were comforting.

The hug felt so nice, Erik also closed his eyes and lay his cheek on Charles' hair. The crying stopped after a few moments of hugging and caressing backs.

And eventually they fell asleep on the couch.