

Undying Hurt

Hurt & Comfort - VI

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Undying Hurt

[Chapter 1: Otherwise Ordinary]

"You're free to leave. There's nothing keeping you here." Emma Frost said in a voice as cold as her name implied.

"I'm keepin me here, Em. You *need* me." Logan said frankly.

Emma composed herself for a moment, gathering her thoughts, as well as her temper, before quietly saying, "Yes. We do, in fact, need you. However, I can't have you going off like a renegade, seeking vengeance, and endangering everything we've worked so hard to accomplish."

"I'm not the one endangering everything. Look around, Em. Take a good long look. First, we lost Gene, then Angel and Gambit. Now Cyclops, Iceman and Pyro. What's left to save?" Logan implored her to understand.

"Like I said before, you're free to leave." Emma said in a much softer voice.

"No way, Professor. If you're stayin, I'm stayin. All's I'm sayin is that we can't keep waitin for 'em to attack. I know that dark ops and sneak attacks goes against yer grain. But the fact of the matter is, this is all we got left. Diplomacy failed. Following 'the rules of war' failed. All we got left fer a hope of survival is guerilla warfare." Logan said frankly.

"I can't... I won't accept that. If we abandon our principles and attack without obvious provocation, then we're living down to their expectations of us. We will be proving all their anti-mutant propaganda to be true." Emma strenuously explained.

"What good is it if we held true to our convictions, if we're all dead?" Logan asked simply.

Emma took a deep breath, then released it slowly before saying, "No. I refuse to believe that things are that grim. We simply need to regroup..."

"If that's yer decision, then that's what we're doin. I just had to have my say." Logan said coldly.

"Thank you, Logan. I honestly don't know why you have chosen to stay. But I'm grateful that you have." Emma said with a weary smile.

"You're the telepath. I figured that if you wanted to know somethin, you'd just look fer yourself." Logan said with a smirk.

"If it were anyone else, I might. But looking into your mind gives me nightmares." Emma admitted shyly.

Logan had no trouble believing her.

* * * * *

As Emma was sorting through dozens of reports, trying to find some sort of a haven for her people, should the need arise, she was suddenly aware of a psychic intrusion in very close proximity to her.

She turned in time to see a swirling vortex form in front of her desk. Relief and dismay fought for control of her emotions as she saw the image of her long-time friend, Scott, resolve into being in the mist.

He appeared to be in a bed, obviously injured, but also seemed to be alive and in reasonably good spirits.

"Hello Professor." Cyclops said to her calmly.

"Scott? It's good to see that you aren't hurt. We've all been quite concerned." Emma replied carefully, not wanting to display too much emotion, in case this whole event was somehow staged.

"I am fine. After Gene's death, I... um... did something stupid." Scott said with a blush of embarrassment.

Professor Frost only responded with a raised eyebrow of inquiry.

Scott raised his arms and showed the bandages.

Emma nodded in understanding, then asked, "So, where are you?"

"I'm in a neighboring dimension. Andrew... Professor Frost, this is Andrew, he found me near death and brought me here to save my life." Scott said timidly.

"Hello Professor Frost." Andrew said quietly.

"Hello Andrew, thank you for saving Scott, he is very important to a lot of people here." Emma said without a hint of emotion showing through her look or voice, still not willing to fully believe what she was seeing.

"I just wanted to let you know that I am alive and well. I have been ordered to stay in bed for a week until I am healed." Scott said, with a bit more confidence.

"You must admit that this is quite a bit to take on faith, Scott. Do you think that you can provide me some sort of proof to verify your claim?" Professor Frost said professionally.

"Orroro, could you come here and say hello to Professor Frost?" Scott said to someone who was still outside the view of the portal.

"Hello Professor Frost, from what Alan has said, you can verify the location of my other self in your dimension to corroborate his story." A woman who looked very much like Orroro Munroe said in a self-assured and dignified manner.

"Alan?" Professor Frost asked cautiously.

"Yes, that is what we call your Scott, since we have one of our own." Orroro said with a gentle smile. The mannerisms were undoubtedly those of Orroro Munroe. If this were a shape-shifter or some sort of elaborate holographic construct, it was flawless.

"May I ask, why you didn't have him here to verify your story?" Professor Frost asked cautiously, becoming more and more willing to believe what she was being told.

"Because he is at the bedside of his injured fiance, Jean Grey." Scott, or Alan, as he was now known, said in a pained voice.

"I see." Professor Frost said and cast a glance toward another person she could see through the vortex. The young man was completely unfamiliar to her.

"Oh, Professor Frost, this is Xander. He is a visitor from yet another dimension." Scott said formally.

Emma nodded in introduction then turned back to Scott and asked, "Then you will fully recover?"

"Yes, I just need to take time for the wounds to heal and I will be fine... There is one other thing I need to tell you." Scott said with nervousness in his voice.

Emma again prompted him to continue, with her eyebrow.

"Andrew and I have become involved, we are planning a commitment ceremony in one year." Scott said anxiously.

The Professor betrayed her shock for an instant before saying, "You have only been gone for three days and are very emotionally unstable, as evidenced by your suicide attempt. Are you sure this is a wise course of action?"

"That's why we're waiting for a year. I love Andrew completely, but I have enough sense to realize that this is not the time for me to be making life-altering decisions. Please be happy for me, Professor." Scott said in a pleading tone.

"I will do this for you, Scott. I will reserve judgment until I have had a chance to get to know Andrew. It may not be a blessing as such, but it is not disapproval by any means." Professor Frost said in a voice that might almost be considered tender. Part of her was still on guard, but doing this wouldn't compromise the safety of the mansion to any appreciable degree.

"Thank you, Professor, that is all I can ask. As soon as Andrew and I are released by our doctor, we will probably be returning to your dimension." Scott said seriously.

"How did Andrew come to find you?" The Professor asked curiously. If the story Scott was telling was true, it might somehow be of use to her in the future.

"Andrew has the ability to open interdimensional portals, apparently my... suicide attempt... had the effect of throwing my counterpart in this universe into a coma. When Andrew came to help, he was able to see what was happening to me and... he saved me." Scott said in wonder, giving it voice for the first time.

"So our Scott was in a coma, Alan was near death from blood loss, and Andrew had a stroke from overusing his mutant ability. That is why we haven't contacted you sooner, Andrew has been recovering as well." Ororo said informatively.

Professor Frost nodded in acceptance when Scott said, "I'll check back with you in the next day or so, I just wanted for you to let everyone know that I am well and not to worry. How are things there?"

"Much the same as when you left, however, the news of you being alive and recovering will be a much needed morale boost. Everyone is becoming weary of the fight." Emma said as the tiredness she was feeling could briefly be seen.

"How are Remy and Warren?" Scott asked quietly.

"Warren seems to be recovering well, but Remy is inconsolable. I don't know what else to do for him." Emma said, this time actually betraying worry for an instant in her expression.

"Would you mind if I were to talk to him next time we contact your dimension?" Scott asked with his own worry showing.

"No, I don't know that it will help, but I don't see how it could cause any harm. And doing something is preferable to doing nothing, which is all we have left to try with Remy." Emma said in an uncharacteristic ramble.

"Please let him know that I may be calling on him. We'd better close the portal now, Andrew still has to contact his home dimension later this morning." Scott said with a grim smile.

"Be well my friend." Emma said, then watched as the swirling vortex dissipated into nothingness.

* * * * *

"Cyke's alive?" Logan asked with an uncharacteristic smile.

"Yes. Although he will need to recover from his injuries, I would venture to say that he might be able to rejoin us in two to three weeks." Emma said carefully.

"What ain't you sayin'? Yer holdin somethin back." Logan said suspiciously.

"According to the story I was told, he was discovered by a mutant from another dimension..."

"That can't be good." Logan interrupted.

"Actually, if all is as it appears to be, the person who found him seems to be not only a mutant, but sympathetic or at least indifferent to our cause. I couldn't detect any deception or coercion during my interactions with them." Emma said carefully.

"But you're still not completely buying it." Logan said speculatively.

"You know what they say when something sounds too good to be true." Emma said frankly.

Logan nodded his agreement.

"It would also appear that the mutant who discovered Scott and saved his life, is planning to return here with Scott when he is fully recovered." Emma said thoughtfully.

"So we'd have a guy who can cross dimensions?" Logan asked cautiously.

"Yes. That's what they indicated." Emma said carefully.

"Too good to be true." Logan said in a low voice.

Emma nodded her agreement.

* * * * *

As days passed, Emma was no less concerned for her friend, Scott. But she took some consolation in the apparent fact that he was safe and well cared for.

Emma was going through the MedLab, inventorying supplies and preparing for another emergency, hoping that her preparations wouldn't be needed, when she sensed several presences forming into being behind her.

She turned suddenly, and was relieved to see the ghostly images of Scott and Andrew, as well as Xander and another man who seemed to be vaguely familiar, but whom she was sure that she didn't know.

"Welcome gentlemen. To what do I owe the honor of this visit?" Emma asked pleasantly.

"We came to visit Remy. I was worried about him." Scott said, revealing his concern in his expression.

"He's just in the next room, I'll go get him for you." Professor Frost said and left the room.

* * * * *

"Remy. Would you like to get up for a minute? You have some visitors in the main room." Emma asked quietly. She had discovered early on that speaking to Remy in a professional or authoritative voice automatically compelled him to rebel against her. However, the southern gentleman deep within him tended to be well mannered and respectful when she treated him gently.

"Non. Remy don wan to be seen if Remy can't see who dere." Remy said as he remained on his bed.

"Of course. You can do as you like. But Scott was concerned for you and asked if he could speak with you." Emma said in a low voice, hoping not to spark Remy's independent streak.

"Scott be here?" Remy asked with surprise and sat up on his bed.

"That's right. And he came here, specifically to visit with you." Emma said as she took his hand and led it to her elbow.

"Do Remy look right? Don wan go out dere lookin sick." Remy asked as he stood.

"The bandage on your eyes is the only indication that you aren't in perfect health." Emma said softly.

* * * * *

Professor Frost entered the room leading the distraught form of Remy LeBeau.

"Remy, I've been worried about you." Scott said and fought the urge to run and hug the man.

"Scott? I could say the same for you, mon ami." Remy said in a weary voice.

"Professor Frost, may I have a word with you?" The unknown visitor asked hopefully.

"Please call me Alan. In the dimension I've been in there is another Scott. It's just less confusing. Remy LeBeau, I'd like to introduce you to Scott, my brother from another dimension, Andrew my fiancée, and Xander my caregiver. Dr. Hank McCoy is also here, talking with Professor Frost." Scott, now known as Alan, said formally.

There was a course of 'hi' when Remy gave a small smile and said, "Remy blind, non? You need to talk one at a time for Remy to tell one from another."

"Okay, I'm Scott. It's nice to meet you Remy. Alan's told me... actually nothing about you, but he seems to like you so that's good enough for me." Scott said, ending with a smile.

"Fair enough." Remy said, turning his face toward Scott's voice.

"I'm Andrew." Andrew said shyly.

"You got you a real talker der Sc... Alan." Remy said with a teasing tone.

"Hi Remy, I'm Xander. Nice to meet you." Xander said quietly.

"Xander? As in Alexander, non?" Remy asked, turning to him.

"Yeah, I got the choice of Alex, Lex or Xander. This seemed to be the coolest." Xander said in a seemingly lighthearted tone.

"So, are you all mutants too?" Remy asked as he felt for and found the bed behind him and took a seat.

"All but Xander. Andrew is called Portal, and I've been renamed Gemini. Scott is Cyclops."

"But that name might fit me best." Xander said under his breath.

Remy turned to Xander and raised an eyebrow above his bandage in question.

"Xander had one of his eyes gouged out by a... demon?" Alan asked uncertainly.

"By a priest of the first evil... but he was kind of demony with super strength and stuff." Xander said in a more comfortable, conversational voice.

"You sound like you're talking through a tunnel, why it be like dat?" Remy asked of the group.

"Andrew is sort of projecting us here with his mutant ability. We're still in our own universe, we're just able to see and hear yours." Scott said in explanation.

"So did you see what you came to see? I be here, all dats left of me. Bout time for ole Remy to be put out to pasture." Remy said, looking more tired.

"I came to visit with you to see if I could help you." Alan said seriously, worried by Remy's attitude.

"Ain no help fo da Cajun. Nuthin left ta help." Remy said and got off the bed.

"I wouldn't say that Mr. LeBeau." An unfamiliar voice said from behind the group.

"What's up Hank?" Andrew asked in confusion.

"I have been talking with Professor Frost, I won't bore you with details, but suffice it to say, I may be able to restore some sight to Remy." Hank said seriously.

"Hank? What do you mean? Is there something you can do to help Remy?" Alan asked excitedly.

"Perhaps, I would need to examine him to see if he would be a likely candidate for a live organ transplant. I had actually been looking into the possibility for Mr. Harris." Hank said professionally.

"You be sayin dat you can get Remy some new eyes?" Remy asked with excitement.

"I'm saying that I can examine you to see if it is a possibility." Hank said calmly.

"Dr. McCoy and I have discussed this and decided that, if you are willing, you may go with them to their dimension to receive the medical attention that we frankly cannot provide for you." Professor Frost said without emotion.

"While I am familiar with the theory, I have not performed the procedure myself. Therefore, I have contacted a specialist who will be at the mansion later today... that was the matter I wished to discuss with you Mr. Harris. I see no reason why he couldn't look at Mr. LeBeau while he is there." Hank said, pleased that he might be able to help these men.

Xander and Remy were both dumbstruck. Finally Andrew broke the silence by saying, "Let's open the portal and get Remy to our universe then."

"Give me a moment to collect Remy's medical records, that should save you some work." Professor Frost said and opened a file cabinet drawer.

"Thank you Professor, I'll take good care of him." Alan said seriously before Andrew interrupted.

"We're going to fade out now, but the doorway will open in just a minute."

Professor Frost nodded as the men faded. A minute later a swirling vortex appeared before her and Alan stepped out.

"You ready to go Remy?" Alan asked with happiness showing through his voice.

"Oui." Remy said and followed as Alan led him back through the portal.

* * * * *

"Thank you for coming on such short notice." Emma said as she walked into the dining room. Normally, when she called for a meeting of everyone at the institute, there would be people left standing. But today, they didn't completely fill the places at the head table.

"What is it, Em? It sounded important." Logan asked in his usual, informal way.

"Rumors, mostly. But some very disturbing rumors, to say the least." Emma said as she took her seat.

"What are they up to, now?" Warren asked darkly. He had only been released from bedrest the day before, and wasn't fully recovered from the surgical removal of his wings, or the castration.

"A group in New York city was able to get word to me that they have intercepted some intelligence related to a biological weapon that is being developed." Emma said carefully.

"What does this have to do with us? I say, let the Feds handle it." Warren said grimly.

"If only it were that simple." Emma said, then gave a long sigh, which revealed her exhaustion. "If the intelligence is right, the biological weapon was engineered to seek out the active X gene and destroy the host."

"Is that even possible?" Paige asked incredulously.

Paige was a fairly recent arrival. She was beautiful, brilliant, but also very young. She was one of a small group of students that had arrived when their school had been attacked and destroyed.

"Theoretically, yes. But genetic engineering is such a new science... honestly, I just don't know." Emma reluctantly admitted.

"So. If it's true, what do we do?" Logan asked bluntly, always ready to cut to the chase.

"For now, I need for everyone to covertly gather as much information as you can. The threat is too dire to disregard the possibility simply because it seems so far fetched." Emma said honestly.

"Angelo's got some serious hacking skills. He might be able to find somethin." Mondo said enthusiastically.

Angelo and Mondo had arrived with Paige, and while they might be valuable members of the team, someday, they were still terribly young and in need of much more experience before they could be trusted as full fledged X Men.

"Find out what you can... all of you. Just, please, be discreet. We don't need to be drawing attention to ourselves at this fragile time." Emma said cautiously.

"Don't no one catch me. I'm an Internet ninja. I'm in and out before they ever know I was there." Angelo said confidently.

"I pray that you are." Emma said quietly.

* * * * *

"What is it, Em?" Logan asked as he rushed into her office.

"Grave news, I'm afraid." Emma said as she looked up from her desk with concern filling her eyes.

"What now?" Logan asked as he took the chair across from her.

"Everyone has been searching for information to confirm or refute the report that a biological weapon is being constructed." Emma said very precisely.

"Yes or no. That's all I need to know right now. You can fill me in on the details later." Logan said forcefully.

"Yes."

Logan was surprised by the single word answer.

"I've heard from two different sources that not only are they working on the virus, but also that they may have already completed it." Emma said quietly.

"Alright. Then all we need to do is find out where they got it, and take it from 'em." Logan said simply.

Emma smiled at him. And while that was normally a pleasant thing to happen, Logan found it to be unusually irritating at the moment.

"What aren't you telling me?" Logan asked gruffly.

"The United States, South African and Chinese governments are apparently collaborating on the effort. With our depleted manpower and dwindling resources, I can't see any way of doing anything meaningful to prevent the

distribution and deployment of the biological agent, if that's what they're planning to do." Emma said frankly.

"Give me somethin, Em. Even if it's a one in a million shot. I can't just sit and wait for it to happen." Logan said in an imploring voice that he was unaccustomed to using.

"Very well. At this point, I don't see that it can make a difference. I will give you copies of all the reports that the others have collected. In the interest of protecting the mansion, I don't want to know your plans. Go and do what you feel is necessary, and know that my hopes and best wishes go with you." Emma finished in nearly a whisper.

"It's really that bad?" Logan quietly asked.

"Logan... Johnathan, by what I've seen, this could exterminate all of mutant kind. I keep hoping that I'll find some error or falsehood, but everything seems to corroborate everything else. This viral weapon is supposed to be lethal to mutants one hundred percent of the time." Emma said seriously.

"Give me the intel, then set me loose. Let me see if I can fix this for you." Logan said gently.

"It will take me a minute. Why don't you go pack the things you'll need and I'll have it ready for you by the time you return." Emma said quietly.

"I'll fix this. Just watch me." Logan said before hurrying out the door.

* * * * *

"...So far the reports indicate that the, so called, super flu has only affected one underground community in lower Manhattan. The 'Friends of Humanity' spokesman, Charles Xavier, has stated that the flu is God's just retribution on the scourge of his creation. Reportedly, most, if not all, the deaths were of people that the friends of humanity identified as mutants."

"Will you turn that shit off? I'm trying to eat." Logan said as he tried to ignore the television in the greasy spoon diner.

"Serves 'em right." The cook/waiter said gruffly as he walked to the television and hit the 'off' button.

"...not right. Shouldn't be like this." A man muttered from the other end of the breakfast bar.

Without looking, Logan knew the man was homeless, or at least hadn't bathed for an untold number of weeks.

"It's wrong! It's all wrong! It's not supposed to be this way!" The man ranted.

"Git on outta here, Garvin, or I'm gonna have'ta call the cops on you again." The cook/waiter said impatiently.

"They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind!" Garvin urged him to understand.

"Now, how'd I know we was gonna be talkin bible before this was all done? Git ya ass outta here, or I'm callin the cops ta stick ya back in the nuthouse."

The vagrant finally got to his feet and tottered toward the door as he quietly said, "Whispers of the talking dead, going through the motions, thinkin they're still alive..."

Logan felt a chill run up his spine at the words. He wasn't usually one for superstition, but knowing the things that he did, the words hit too close to home.

* * * * *

"It's a chilling spectre in Times Square. There are no people out. The super flu that has already killed thousands, seems to have mutated and become impossibly more infectious. Doctors are at a loss to find an effective treatment. No comment has been made by the CDC except to say that they are studying the problem. Doctors are advising people to stay away from public areas and groups of people and to thoroughly wash their hands after any physical contact with another person." Logan heard on the tinny speaker of the radio one of the other passengers was listening to.

"Like some hand washing's going to stop this thing." A man chuckled from beside Logan.

Logan turned to glare at the man.

"It's a government plot, you know. Those vapor trails that the jets put out... that's how they keep us all docile and complacent. This flu, I bet it's to cull the herd. They's got too many workers and not enough work. Instead of having to feed them all, it's best to thin them out and make sure the rest is real scared."

"Did I say or do something to make you think it'd be alright to talk to me?" Logan asked curiously.

"The vapor trails, the water supply, the genetically modified foods... It's everywhere! You can't escape it!"

Logan stood and walked to the back of the bus as he muttered, "Why is it when I sit down every lunatic in a six mile radius is drawn to me? This is why I don't like to take the bus."

* * * * *

"London is reporting a catastrophic surge in new influenza victims. The hospitals are closing, unable to cope with the influx of new patients. It is estimated that seventy five to eighty percent of the population are infected. As in other countries, no effective treatment has been found to prevent, postpone or cure the disease. The Italian government has withdrawn all it's foreign diplomats and closed all governmental offices. In a statement released to the public yesterday, the Italian Prime Minister urged all uninfected people to remain indoors and avoid contact with others at all costs."

"Mister? You sick?" A teenage girl asked quietly.

"No. Not so far." Logan answered cautiously as he stepped away from the television in the deserted department store.

"I don't know what to do. My dad..." The girl trailed off as she started to cry.

"Go on home. Stuff like this brings all the crazies out." Logan said gently.

"But my dad, he's dead. So's my mom and my little brother. I don't know what to do." She said past her tears.

"None of us knows what to do. I tell you what. I'm heading back up North. If you want to come along, I wouldn't mind."

"Yeah? Really? Where are we going?"

"I gotta stop in a town, up north, and tell a friend of mine that I'm sorry about something, then I'll probably go on up into Canada. There's places up there where you can go and not see another living soul for months at a time." Logan said with a smile.

"From the look of it, you could stay here and do that." The girl said as she looked around.

"Like I said, stuff like this, it brings the crazies out. It's best if we're somewhere isolated until this all blows over." Logan said seriously.

"Okay." The girl quietly agreed.

"Name's Logan. What you called?"

"Ruby."

"Come on, Ruby. Let's load some of this stuff in my pickup and get on the road."

[Chapter 2: So Near]

"So, what's your friend like?" Ruby asked suddenly, breaking the long silence that had fallen between them.

"Emma's a college professor and a doctor." Logan said with a smile, waiting on her reaction.

"How'd a guy like you get to be friends with someone like that?" Ruby asked incredulously.

"I've asked myself that a few times. But what it comes down to is that things just sometimes work out that way." Logan said honestly.

"I tried calling my friends, but none of them answered..." Ruby said quietly.

"You're alive. That means you gotta keep goin'." Logan said gently.

"But I don't know what to do. I'm only twelve." Ruby said weakly.

"You're awful grown up for a twelve year old. I would'a guessed fourteen, at least." Logan said with a smile.

"My dad says that I'm growing up too fast and that I should be happy being a kid for as long as I can." Ruby said frankly.

"All dads say that. It's part of the job requirement."

* * * * *

"Can you pull over? I don't feel too good." Ruby said suddenly.

Logan looked around for a convenient place to pull off and noticed the sign announcing a rest area up ahead. "Can you hold on for a minute or two?"

"Maybe. I think I'm gonna throw up." Ruby said in a low voice.

Logan speeded up.

* * * * *

"How you doin in there, Ruby?" Logan called from outside the ladies room.

"I'm okay. I think it was just my nerves." Ruby called back.

"Good. I'm gonna make a pit stop, then we'll be ready to go again." Logan said as he walked toward the men's room.

When he walked in, the smell alerted him to what he was going to see.

Two dead bodies were huddled together on the tile floor.

Logan was about to look away, when a spark of recognition caused him to look more closely.

All the death he had witnessed in the past weeks had been of people he didn't know. Seeing Bobby and John's bodies brought the reality home to him in a way that nothing else would.

He didn't have any words to say or any tears to shed for the pair. He stepped over their bodies and went about his business as though he had never seen them... but he had. The stark reality wouldn't be denied.

* * * * *

"Are you okay?" Ruby asked when they were back in the truck.

"Yeah. How bout you?" Logan asked quietly.

"I'm feeling better. I think it was just nerves." She said quietly, and Logan knew that she was thinking the same thing that he was.

"What do you think happens when you die?" Logan asked in what he hoped was a nonchalant voice.

"Why would you ask me that?" Ruby asked in panic.

"Because it could happen to either one of us. I'd just like to know what you're expecting, so if it happens, I can pray or light a candle or whatever it is that you do to see that someone gets to go to the good place." Logan said frankly.

"I don't know." Ruby said quietly.

"Is it that you don't know, or that you don't want to talk about it?" Logan asked frankly.

"I've never really thought about it, much. I mean... I'm twelve!" Ruby exclaimed as tears welled in her eyes.

"Well, if it makes you feel any better, I don't know either." Logan said honestly.

"Yeah. It does make me feel better." Ruby said quietly.

"But not talking about it doesn't make it go away. What do you think?" Logan asked curiously.

"I've heard all that stuff about God and heaven... I guess it could be like that." Ruby said uncertainly.

"It could." Logan agreed.

"I guess, I mean, I don't want to die, but if I'm going to, I guess all I'd really want is for someone to... care. I don't know if prayers or candles or anything like that makes any difference at all, but I just think that if someone was there to say goodbye, and, like, mean it. That'd be enough." Ruby said thoughtfully.

"If it happens, I'll be there." Logan said quietly.

"What about you?" Ruby asked curiously.

"I never saw nothin that made me think that this wasn't all some big thing that happened all on it's own. No God, no mystical powers, no ghosts or nothin like that." Logan said thoughtfully.

"So what do you think happens when you die?" Ruby asked quietly.

"Nothing." Logan said simply.

"What do you mean?" Ruby asked in confusion.

"I mean, nothing. You just stop. The person you were is suddenly not there anymore and all that's left is meat." Logan said frankly.

"So you don't believe in heaven and hell?" Ruby asked slowly.

"Nope. If you think about it, what were you before you were born? Nothing. You didn't exist. So I figure that when you die, you go back to being that."

"I think I'd rather believe in heaven." Ruby said quietly.

"There's lots of things I'd rather believe, but that don't make 'em true."

Ruby watched Logan drive for a few minutes, then quietly said, "You may be right. But I still think I'd like to know that when I'm gone, someone will be there, saying goodbye."

"I already promised."

* * * * *

"Why are we stopping?" Ruby asked as she felt the truck slowing down.

"We'll be reaching my friend's house before too long. I just want to call ahead and see what's going on there before we just show up out of nowhere." Logan said honestly.

"You can use my cell phone." Ruby said as she rushed to take it out of her jacket pocket.

"You can try, but I'm bettin that there's no service." Logan said simply.

After a few tries, Ruby quietly said, "You're right. Nothing."

"Never was much of anything like cell service in this area." Logan said without concern.

"Are you worried about your friend?" Ruby asked in a whisper.

"A little. But if she ain't there, or they're all sick, we'll just go on up to Canada." Logan said simply.

Ruby nodded that she had heard.

* * * * *

"Em, is that you?" Logan asked uncertainly.

"Logan? It's good to hear from you. How are you?" Emma asked with concern.

"I tried, Em. I swear. They just let it loose too quick for me to stop it." Logan said regretfully.

"You have a way of taking a one in a million risk and making it pay off. This time it didn't work. That's nothing to be sorry about." Emma said gently.

"How are things there, Em?" Logan asked quietly.

"Like you, I've done my best and taken a one in a million chance, and it hasn't paid off." Emma said regretfully.

"What's wrong?" Logan asked cautiously.

"We're all infected here. I still don't know how they delivered it, but there are now at least two distinct forms of the virus. Everyone in the mansion was infected with the original strain, the one designed to kill mutants." Emma said gravely.

"Everyone? Does that mean that you..." Logan trailed off, knowing that that was exactly what she meant.

"Stay away, Logan. If you're not infected, then don't come here. Get as far away from civilization as you can and stay there." Emma said firmly.

"Is there anything I can do?" Logan asked in a low, serious voice.

"Survive."

* * * * *

"It looks like we'll be movin on up to Canada." Logan said as he climbed into his truck.

Ruby was slumped against the passenger window, apparently asleep, when Logan noticed something red, clutched in her hand.

Reluctantly, he pulled her fingers open enough to see the tissue that she was clutching, drenched in blood.

He placed his fingers on her throat, already knowing what he would discover.

Logan carefully picked up the girl's body and lifted it out of his truck, careful not to cause it any unnecessary damage.

After a look around the unfamiliar little town, he spotted a church about half a block away.

"Like I told you. I don't know, either." He said quietly to her as he walked.

Stepping into the church, he was confronted by the smell of dozens of bodies, scattered everywhere.

Determined to complete his task, he walked down the aisle, stepping over countless corpses as he did so, until he finally reached the altar at the front.

He gently placed the young girl's body on the altar, then looked up at the enormous crucifix on the wall behind the pulpit.

"You treat her right, or you'll answer to me." Logan said firmly, then knelt by Ruby's side and gave her a gentle kiss on the forehead before saying, "Goodbye."

* * * * *

"Logan! I didn't think you'd be coming!" Emma said in surprise as she met him in the hallway, outside the common room.

"I didn't think so, either. I was travelling with someone, but... let's just say, that if it's possible for me to get it, I got it." Logan said quietly.

"I've studied your physiology enough to know what to expect, but I'd very much like to see how the virus is impacting your systems." Emma said carefully.

"You always did say the sweetest things to me." Logan said with a grin.

"Come downstairs with me. We may not have a lot of time." Emma said seriously.

"Do you think there's any way you can make a cure with my blood?" Logan asked curiously.

"Considering how this virus was designed and knowing how your healing factor operates, my instinct is to say 'no'. But we won't know if we don't try, right?" Emma said as she stepped into the elevator.

"How are you doing, Em?" Logan asked with concern.

"It's there. I know it's there. I'm using every skill, every tool, every drug at my disposal to keep me going. If there's a way to beat this damnable thing, I'm determined to find it." Emma said firmly.

"That's my girl." Logan said with a grin.

"I am NOT a girl. And I'm most certainly not YOUR girl." Emma said indignantly.

"You never let me get away with anything." Logan laughed.

Emma gave a single nod, then stepped off the elevator.

* * * * *

"So, what's the verdict?" Logan asked when Emma pulled back from the microscope.

"It's worse than I thought." Emma said gravely.

"Give it to me straight. What are we talking about?" Logan asked seriously.

"The virus isn't being impeded, but your healing factor is healing the damage caused by the virus."

"Yeah. So?"

"So, since your healing factor isn't putting up much of a fight, the virus will slowly but surely propagate and thrive within you. If nothing changes, it will eventually be strong enough to actually kill you." Emma said seriously.

"Okay. I get that." Logan said quietly.

"No. I don't think you do. This thing is going to try to eat you alive, from the inside out, but your healing factor is going to keep repairing the damage. So what you're going to experience is an increasing torture that will likely drive you insane before it kills you." Emma said firmly.

"So, what's the bad news?" Logan asked with weak humor.

"Your healing factor negates most pain medications." Emma said bluntly.

"Last I checked, the opiates still worked on me." Logan said quickly.

"Yes. And I don't want to know how you checked. But that's true. Your healing factor does seem to ignore opiates. So when the pain gets to be too much to bear, do what you have to do, but be aware that if you use too many..."

"I promise to go into rehab if I survive." Logan interrupted.

"If you use too many, your healing factor will likely adapt and start nullifying the opiates." Emma continued.

"So only use as much as I absolutely need to." Logan said with a nod.

"I wish there were something more I could do for you." Emma said quietly.

"Have a beer with me." Logan said with a grin.

"Excuse me?"

"You're a classy lady. I never asked you out because I thought you wouldn't be interested in a guy like me. But now... how about having a beer with me?" Logan asked hopefully.

"The things I do..." Emma said with a shake of her head, then firmly said, "Fine. One beer."

Logan smiled, then gestured toward the hallway.

* * * * *

As Logan pulled away from the mansion, he felt a momentary twinge of regret at leaving Emma to face what was to come on her own. But if her predictions about his condition were true, and he had no reason to think otherwise, then there were some things that he wanted to do before he either died, or became nothing more than a wild animal, ravaged with unending pain.

His original plan had been to go north and live in seclusion, but knowing what he did now, he didn't see any point to that.

His first stop as he drove south was in the small town where Ruby had died.

After a stop by the local hardware store, which was deserted, he helped himself to a pickaxe and a shovel.

Next, he went to the church and retrieved Ruby's body.

Although he considered going to the local funeral parlor and getting the biggest, nicest coffin that they had to offer, in the end, he decided that a simple dirt grave would be enough.

As he was digging, he had to stop once for a coughing fit, and noticed that he was coughing up blood.

He only took that as a sign that he needed to keep moving if he were going to carry on and fulfill the rest of his plans.

Once a suitable grave had been dug, he placed Ruby's body gently on the dirt in the bottom and stopped to look at her.

"I wish you'd had the chance to grow up. I bet you would've been a remarkable woman."

That being said, he began to fill in the grave, ignoring the sweat and his churning stomach as he did so.

Grabbing a case of beer for the road, Logan got into his truck and started driving south again.

Even though he had lost the light, he knew what his next destination was and wouldn't be diverted from his plan.

He didn't know why it seemed so important to him, but for some reason he felt that this was what needed to be done.

As a road sign announced the rest area ahead, Logan slowed the truck, so he would have the maneuverability that he needed.

When he saw the rest area facilities, he crossed the median and pulled into the northbound rest area.

* * * * *

"Hey, guys. I didn't forget you." Logan said as he walked into the restroom.

The two bodies were still there, right where he'd left them.

"Let's get you guys outta here." Logan said, then picked up the first of the two bodies.

He thought that the body was that of Bobby, but in the meager light, he couldn't be sure.

After a moment, he supposed that it didn't matter, as he carried the body to the back of his pickup truck and gently placed it inside.

A few minutes later, he carried the other body out of the rest area bathroom and placed it more or less beside the first one.

"I know we wasn't best buds or anything, but that don't mean that I wanted you to have a state highway toilet to be your final resting place. How's 'bout I find a nice place with some trees or somethin' like that for you?" Logan said as he spread a tarp over them.

The smell on his clothes was horrendous by now, but he mostly put that out of his mind as he drove south, searching for a suitable final resting place for the two boys he had briefly known at the mansion.

* * * * *

"What do you want?" A trembling voice asked from behind the counter at the cheap little motel where Logan had stopped.

"A bed and a hot bath would be nice." Logan said honestly.

"You're not sick?" The person, he couldn't tell if it was a man or woman, asked from out of his line of sight.

"Actually, yeah. I am. But if you'll just toss me a key, I'll leave ya alone." Logan said seriously.

"Promise?"

"Yeah. Promise." Logan said quietly.

A hand reached up, and it seemed that the person he was talking to was a female.

She grabbed a key and threw it wildly toward him.

There was no way that Logan could catch the wild pitch, but once he retrieved the key, he said, "Thanks. I'll be outta your hair in the mornin'."

"Just go." She whimpered.

Logan shrugged, then walked out to get back into his truck and drive around to his room.

* * * * *

The shower was a welcome relief.

Despite a few aches and pains and a bout of nausea during the night, Logan was mostly well rested as he left the motel room.

Like the night before, the parking lot was deserted except for his truck.

He glanced into the bed of the truck, to be sure that nothing had been disturbed, then got back on the road, still heading south.

His search for a radio station proved to be fruitless. There was nothing but static.

The next town he approached seemed to be emitting a lot of smoke, so he did his best to get past it quickly, so as not to be caught behind burning debris.

Finally, he came to a stretch of open road that looked rather inviting.

The early autumn sunlight was promising warmth and the trees still hadn't begun to turn, so it had an almost summer feel.

"Here." Logan said as he spotted a stream that ran parallel to the road.

It took him a few minutes, but he found a spot where he could pull off.

* * * * *

The ground here was much softer than the last he had dug.

Logan made quick work of the digging, then began carrying the bodies to the makeshift grave.

"Here. I found you a nice spot, by a river and under a tree. Not that you guys will notice, since you'll be together." Logan said as he placed Bobby's corpse on the moist earth.

"Don't worry, Ice Cube. John'll be here to keep you warm in just a minute." Logan grinned as he walked back to the truck.

He lifted John's stiff corpse out of the truck and carried it over to the grave with little effort.

"There you go. Nice and cozy. I know you guys'll take care of each other, so I'm not worried bout'cha." Logan said as he started to fill in the dirt.

"Who are you talking to?" A young man asked cautiously, as he approached.

"My friends here, that I'm burying." Logan answered honestly.

The young man stayed several feet away and watched as Logan continued to fill in the hole.

"You sick?" He finally asked.

"Yeah. What about you?" Logan asked as he used the flat of the shovel to pack the slight mound of dirt on top of the grave.

"Yeah. I woke up with it this morning." The young man said as his eyes filled with tears.

"What's yer name?" Logan asked as he walked back to his truck and tossed the shovel into the back.

"Travis." The young man said in a quaking voice.

"Wanna beer?" Logan asked as he reached into the passenger side of the truck and pulled out two.

"I'm only nineteen." Travis admitted shyly.

"What's that matter, now?" Logan asked as he walked to Travis and offered the beer to him.

"Yeah. I guess it doesn't." Travis chuckled as he accepted the beer.

After a long drink of beer, Travis quietly said, "You don't look sick."

"Maybe not, but I am." Logan said as he leaned back against the side of the truck, then took a long, slow drink.

"Everyone I know is dead." Travis said quietly.

"I know lots of people. So I can't say if all of 'em are dead or not. All I know is that I'm still alive, so I'm gonna act like it." Logan said firmly.

Travis took another drink of his beer, then said, "I don't know what to do."

"Sing a song. Dance a jig. Go down to the football stadium and dress up like Marilyn Monroe." Logan said with a smile.

Travis laughed, which ended in an agonized cough.

"Or don't. I'm just sayin, you got one last chance. Make the most of it." Logan said frankly.

Travis took a drink of beer to try and quell his cough reflex, then he quietly said, "It may sound stupid, but there's one thing that I've always wanted to do."

Logan looked at Travis inquiringly, but didn't ask.

"My mom has all these little porcelain figurines that she's collected all her life... ugly little things. Ever since I can remember, she's constantly been after me to watch out for her 'pretties'... I hate her 'pretties'. If I'm gonna die anyway, I'm gonna make sure those ugly smirking little pieces of glass die before I do." Travis said firmly.

"Do you live around here? Need a ride?" Logan asked as he looked around.

"Nah. All I have to do is walk across that field and I'm home." Travis said peacefully.

"Go to it, Kid. Time's runnin out."

"All I need is five minutes and a baseball bat."

Logan nodded, then watched as Travis ran across the street, then climbed the fence into a vast field.

He took one last drink of his beer, then dropped the can as he walked toward the newly filled grave.

"I don't know how these things work. But, if there is something after... keep an eye on Travis for me, would'ja?" Logan asked as he looked at the mound of dirt.

After a bittersweet smile, Logan turned and walked back to his truck.

He looked up and down the long, empty road, then shrugged before getting in and starting to drive North.

* * * * *

"Em... I don't know what you expected your end to be like, but this somehow seems right." Logan said as he looked at her pale body behind her desk.

He walked to her and easily lifted her into his arms and carried her body out of the room.

"I think I done enough gravedigging for a while. I'm sorry if that seems disrespectful, but I'm feelin like shit about now." Logan said as he walked toward the elevator.

"Besides, everything you did in your life was enough of a memorial. You were an amazing woman and a good friend. If that ain't enough ta git ya inta tha pearly gates, then screw'em. They don't deserve you." Logan said as he waited for the elevator doors to open on the lower level.

* * * * *

"Here, I'm gonna put you in the isolation room. I see you already got a few people in there, so ya won't be alone." Logan said as he awkwardly opened the outer door.

Once again, the smell of death assaulted him. He was barely able to keep his stomach contents at bay while he gently placed Emma's body in a chair beside the window.

"I hope you won't think too bad of me, but I'm gonna go upstairs and get hammered. This has been one bitch of a day." Logan said, then closed the isolation room door.

[Chapter 3: Endless Days]

A stabbing pain suddenly woke Logan from a relatively decent sleep. Thanks to his healing factor, the effects of the alcohol had already been purged from his system, but waking so suddenly left him with a sense of disorientation.

His claws emerged with a loud ::snick:: in the otherwise quiet room. Most times in the past when he had felt a stabbing pain in his gut, it was because he was actually being stabbed, so the reflex was perfectly reasonable.

As he searched with all his senses, trying to find an enemy to eviscerate, another stab of pain occurred which caused him to double over.

In a moment of clarity, he realized that what he was feeling was, in fact, the virus within him causing one or another of his internal organs to fail or explode or do some other nasty thing to cause this sensation.

He pulled up his shirt to find a blackish, bluish, greenish bruise rapidly expanding to cover the entire left side of his abdomen.

Then, the familiar warmth of his healing factor, hard at work, kicked in and he watched as the bruise faded, almost as suddenly as it had appeared.

He glanced at the window to find that it was light outside.

Not feeling any desire to linger in bed any longer, he got up and went through the motions of getting ready to start his day.

* * * * *

More out of habit than thought, he made his way to the kitchen and began making himself a cup of coffee.

It pained him to find that the coffee container was nearly empty and that this would be the last fresh ground coffee that he would have unless he went into town and found some there. Emma only kept a small supply on hand at any given time, so the coffee that they had would always be fresh.

Fortunately for him, Emma also had a taste for antiques and happened to have an old fashioned, hand crank, coffee grinder. Although he was certain

that the thing probably hadn't been used to grind coffee in the better part of a century, he was grateful for it. Because if he hadn't remembered it being on the mantle in the common room, he would have had to resort to something like a canvas bag and a hammer to get the job done. He needed his coffee.

Once the coffee was in the old fashioned percolator that he had retrieved from the camping supplies, he put it on the gas stove to heat. While the coffee was brewing and filling the kitchen with it's life giving aroma, he started rummaging through the kitchen for something to have for breakfast.

Then he realized that the thought of food was disgusting to him. Intellectually, he knew that he should eat something to help keep his strength up, but no matter how much he tried to convince himself, he couldn't quite manage it.

Although he suffered through some minor pains in his abdomen, he mostly enjoyed his coffee as he contemplated his plans for the day.

After his encounter with Travis the day before, he felt compelled to go and seek out other survivors. Even if they were infected, it was preferable to doing nothing to help anyone else.

* * * * *

Since his motorcycle had been destroyed, a few months before, Logan had resisted the urge to ride again. He had always had the feeling that if he got on another motorcycle and felt that sense of freedom, that he might be inclined to go and not come back.

This morning, that thought didn't hold as much sway as it once had. If he were to get on the motorcycle and go, he wouldn't be letting anyone down. No one would be hurt. No one needed him. If he didn't come back... it wouldn't matter.

As he finally arrived in town, he went directly to the downtown area and began his search for survivors, reasoning that anyone who wanted to be found, would probably go to the city center.

He got off the motorcycle and started to walk, watching and listening carefully for any indication that he wasn't totally alone.

Unfortunately, all his ears picked up was the distant whistling of the wind.

The only scents he could detect were the putrid odors of rotting flesh.

As morning gave way to afternoon, his pace became more insistent.

Going from storefronts to offices to banks, he found no one... at least, no one alive.

As would be expected, doctor's offices and churches were the worst. The stench alone was enough to drive him away. Add on top of that, the evidence of the futility and empty hope that people had suffered in their last moments as they put their faith in science or God, only to have it proven equally ineffective. It was more than he cared to endure.

As the sun began its descent to the horizon, Logan finally made his way back to the motorcycle, carrying the only good news of the day, a backpack filled to capacity with coffee beans.

Throughout his entire day, he hadn't detected a single indication that anyone was still alive. He saw the futility of his wasted effort, but also knew that the next day he would set off in a different direction and explore another town, exercising his diminishing hope that he might find someone... anyone, still alive.

* * * * *

Another town, another empty hope dashed.

Given the futility of the previous day and the threatening look of the weather, Logan decided to take the truck and conduct most of his search from the street.

There were a few times when something would catch his eye and he would get out of the truck to investigate, but none of them led to the discovery of anyone alive.

By not investigating on foot, he was able to search two small towns in the time that he had done one the previous day.

As the sun was setting and he was about to start back toward the mansion, he jolted with surprise when he saw a light turn on in one of the houses he was passing.

He slammed on the brakes and ran to the door, not concerned with how psychotic he might appear to whomever he may be interrupting.

When he knocked on the door, it swung open under the force.

Cautiously, he walked into the room and found a quaint little home, like something from a Christmas special on TV, not that he watched such things.

There was an artificial fireplace with the simulated fire burning in the hearth. There were lights, not only on the tree, but also strung around the room, giving everything a warm, festive glow.

"Hello? Is someone here?" He called out, then listened carefully for anyone who might answer, or for anyone who might be cowering in fear, trying to be quiet.

He heard nothing.

As he walked across the room to the fake fireplace, he found a picture on the mantle.

A father, mother, and three young school aged kids were all smiling in the photo. But the most notable one in the picture was the Great Dane grudgingly wearing a santa hat.

He couldn't help it, the silly sight made him smile.

"Hello? I'm not going to hurt you. Is anyone here?" Logan called out again as he placed the picture back on the mantle.

He stepped toward the hallway and his hopes fell, as the stench of rotting flesh assaulted him.

Even though he didn't need to, he walked back and verified for himself what he already knew.

Three of them were in one bedroom, still holding on to each other. The other two were each in their own beds. It seemed they had been dressed in their best clothes and positioned very precisely for their final rest.

Logan shook his head as he walked back down the hall toward the living room, when out of the corner of his eye he spotted something on the floor of the kitchen.

The body of the Great Dane was laying there, unmoving.

Logan thought back over everything he had been through since this whole ordeal began and realized that in the entire time that he had been searching, he hadn't seen a single dog, cat or even a bird.

Flies were definitely thriving, but as far as any higher life form... he hadn't seen any.

As he was contemplating that, a snowman on the lawn suddenly lit up.

Realizing what might be happening, he walked to the Christmas tree by the front window and discovered that it was on a timer.

With his hopes once again dashed against the rocks, he made his way out of the house and to his truck.

He immediately proceeded to the nearest purveyor of alcoholic refreshment and loaded the bed of his pickup with all he could carry.

* * * * *

After the multiple disappointments of the previous days, Logan decided that the search for other survivors was a futile one.

Breakfast had been coffee. And the rest of the morning was spent considering what supplies he might need in the long term. He wasn't sure where to find all that he needed, but if he were going to continue on at the mansion, he would need to get various other camping supplies to compensate for the luxuries of civilization that were falling away.

Around noon, Logan was surprised to find that he actually had an appetite, so he ventured into the pantry to see what was available.

The mansion had lost electricity early on, but a few of the surrounding communities still had power. So, for as long as that lasted, he could pick up frozen foods to increase the variety in his diet.

Today, however, he was satisfied with a can of corned beef hash, heated on the gas stove.

Just as he was sitting down to his lunch the sound of a honking horn startled him.

As quickly as he could, he ran to the front door and threw it open, not giving a thought to whether this person might be some sort of a threat.

He stepped onto the porch in time to see a teenage girl climbing down out of a Hummer.

"Hello!" Logan called with uncharacteristic excitement.

"Oh my God! I knew it! I knew someone would be here!" The girl cried as she ran to him.

Even though the girl was a complete stranger to him, he hugged her like a long lost friend.

"I can't believe it! I drove and drove and... I couldn't find anyone..." She said before breaking into uncontrollable sobs.

"I know. I been looking, too." Logan said as he continued to hold her.

"You're real, aren't you? Please be real." She whimpered into his chest.

"Yeah. I'm real. I promise." Logan said with a smile.

After a moment more of hugging, the girl pulled back slightly to look him in the face.

He waited, not knowing what she was looking for.

"Logan, right?" She asked cautiously.

"Got it in one. How'd you know?" Logan asked curiously.

"I talked to Paige and she mentioned you."

"Well, since you know who I am, maybe you could tell me your name." Logan said gently.

"Oh, right." The girl said as she pulled fully out of his grasp. "My name is Monique."

"Pretty name. So you're a friend of Paige's?" Logan asked, already missing the feel of her against him.

"We were roommates before our school got destroyed. When everyone else was on their way here, I took off so I could see my family." Monique finished in a diminishing voice.

Logan didn't need to ask. Her expression told him all he needed to know.

"Is Paige here?" Monique asked hopefully.

"I'm the only one left alive." Logan said in almost a whisper.

Monique froze for a moment, but didn't seem to be too surprised by the announcement.

"What about the others? Did they all end up coming here?" Monique asked quietly.

"I wasn't here when it happened. I know that Mondo, Angelo and Paige arrived together, but I don't know if they were here at the end." Logan said honestly.

Monique slowly nodded.

"I think I should tell you, I've got the virus. It just ain't killed me, yet." Logan said quietly.

"Yeah. Me, too." Monique reluctantly admitted.

"You got the healing factor?" Logan asked curiously.

"Yeah. That and exceptional strength... a lot of good it does, now." Monique finished with a shrug.

"You're still alive." Logan said simply.

"Somehow, I can't make myself feel happy about that." Monique said honestly.

"You and me, both, Kid." Logan chuckled.

* * * * *

Logan woke to the sound of movement in the house.

He tried to ignore it, but after living in silence for so long, he found that he couldn't.

Finally, he got out of bed and went downstairs to find Monique busy in the kitchen, fussing over something.

"Mornin, how's it goin?" Logan asked as he walked to the stove.

"I'm not sure what I'm doing. I've never had to cook without a microwave before." Monique said frankly.

"Takes some adjustment." Logan said as he reached up to the cupboard to take down the cannister of coffee beans.

"I bet you could live out in the wild without any trouble at all." Monique said with a smile.

"I wouldn't say that. There's a few things about civilization that I miss when I'm up in the hills. But you make due with what you've got." Logan said frankly as he poured the beans into the grinder.

"Yeah. I'm just not good at doing that." Monique quietly admitted, then reluctantly asked, "Am I doing this right?"

Logan looked at the frying pan with hacked up pieces of spam in it, then at her look of frustration.

"You might try cutting them more evenly. And the fire could stand to be a touch hotter." Logan said honestly.

"Yeah. I know about the cutting. But I didn't want to touch it. It's gross." Monique said with a sour look as she adjusted the flame under the skillet a little bit higher.

Logan smiled as he set up the coffee pot.

"Do you want something to go with this? I couldn't really find anything I know how to cook in the pantry." Monique asked as she watched the spam cooking.

"Not feeling much like eatin, ta tell ya the truth." Logan said honestly as he put the percolator on the stove.

"Yeah. I was like that yesterday. I'm a lot better today. Maybe I'm beating this thing." Monique said happily.

"Maybe." Logan said quietly as he stared at the percolator for a moment, then finally turned to her and said, "Professor Frost checked me out when she found out I had the virus. She said that because of the way the virus is made, it kind of homes in on the X gene and, I don't know, bonds to it, or somethin. So, what's happenin inside me right now is that the virus is getting stronger while my healing factor is fighting the damage it's causing. Because of that, I have times when I'm not too sick, then something hits me real bad and my healing factor has to fix it."

"Is that what's happening to me?" Monique asked cautiously.

"Dunno. Maybe." Logan said honestly.

"So, did she say... I mean, will you get better?" Monique asked quietly.

"No. She didn't think so. She figured that the virus'd keep gettin stronger until it finally did somethin' that was too bad for my healing factor to fix." Logan said regretfully.

"When Mr. Cassidy found out that I had the healing factor, he said that I was a level four... whatever that means. Do you know, is that good enough to beat this thing?" Monique asked cautiously.

"I don't know if your healing factor works the same as mine. Yours might see the virus as a threat and fix you right up." Logan said honestly.

"What level is your healing factor rated at?" Monique asked curiously as she started to turn her spam with a spatula.

Logan picked up the percolator from the stove and poured himself a cup of coffee before quietly responding, "Eight."

* * * * *

"So? What do you think?" Monique asked with a smile of accomplishment.

"You fried it right." Logan said as he fought to keep his stomach contents in place.

"I guess all it took was the end of the world to finally get me to want to learn how to cook." Monique joked.

"You get hungry enough, that happens." Logan said with a smile.

"Well, I need to learn to cook if we're going to be the parents of a new generation." Monique said teasingly.

Logan looked at her with wide eyed surprise.

"As far as I can tell, we're all that's left. Either humanity is going to die out, or we're going to have to repopulate the earth." Monique said with a smile.

"This virus inside me is getting bigger and stronger every day. I don't know how long it's gonna take, but I think Em was right. It's eventually gonna kill me." Logan said seriously.

Monique sobered at the serious words.

"Besides, I wouldn't want to bring a kid into a world like this, knowing that I probably wasn't gonna be around to help them." Logan added in a grim tone.

"Yeah. I guess that'd be kind of a rotten thing to do." Monique quietly admitted.

"You ever thought about what happens when you die?" Logan asked cautiously, not sure what her reaction would be.

"No. I figure when the time comes, I'll face it and deal with whatever's there. Until then, there's no use worrying about it." Monique said simply.

"I like the way you think." Logan said with a nod of approval.

* * * * *

"You slept late. I was just about to go check on you." Logan said as he sipped his coffee.

"I've been up for a while. I've just got a bad headache." Monique said as she shuffled into the kitchen.

"How bad?" Logan asked with concern as he noticed the dark circles under her eyes.

"On a scale of one to ten? About one hundred and thirty seven." Monique said as she settled into a chair at the table.

"Hang on. I'll get you something for that." Logan said as he stood.

"Painkillers don't work on me." Monique warned him.

"We'll see about that." Logan said with a grin, then hurried out of the room.

* * * * *

"If your healing factor works anything like mine, then this will sneak in under the radar and take the edge off the pain." Logan said as he handed her two pills.

"What is it?" Monique asked before popping them into her mouth.

"Let's see if it works, first. If it does, then I'll tell you." Logan said seriously.

"The way I'm feeling... I think maybe you're right about the virus. I haven't ever felt this bad before." Monique said as she rested her head on her folded hands.

"Just wait for your healing factor to fix whatever the virus is doing." Logan said gently.

"Yeah. I think I'm just going to go back to bed." Monique said quietly, then slowly stood.

"I'll be up to check on you in a little bit." Logan said seriously.

"You don't have to worry about me. I'll be fine." Monique said wearily.

"Nope. I've got to worry about you if we're expected to repopulate the earth." Logan said with a grin.

"Not today, I've got a headache." Monique said as she left the room.

* * * * *

"How ya feelin?" Logan asked as he walked into Monique's room.

"It still hurts, but those pills helped. Thanks." Monique said tiredly.

"You need anything? We got chicken soup." Logan said quietly.

"No. Nothing. I think I just need to rest to get over this." Monique said honestly.

"Okay, then. I'll check back later."

* * * * *

"You doin' any better?" Logan asked a while later, as he carried a tray into Monique's room.

"Honestly, no." Monique said as she seemed to struggle from the effort of opening her eyes.

"I brought you some of that chicken soup I was telling you about." Logan said gently.

"I can't." Monique gasped.

"You need to eat to keep your strength up." Logan said imploringly.

"No. But I could use some more of those pills... It hurts... It really hurts." Monique said past labored breaths.

"Be right back. Hang in there." Logan said before dashing away.

* * * * *

When Logan hurried back into the room, he was stunned to see Monique ineffectually trying to stop the flow of blood running from her nose.

"Let me help." He said as he ran to the bathroom and grabbed a towel.

"It won't stop." Monique struggled to say.

"Just hang on. Give your healing factor the time it needs to kick in and fix this." Logan said as he held the bath towel to her nose to stop the flow of blood.

"Did you bring the pills?" She struggled to say.

"Right here." Logan said as he pulled the bottle from his pocket.

"Give me four." She demanded with what seemed to be the last of her strength.

Although he wanted to warn her about the possibility that her healing factor might adapt to make the painkillers ineffective, one look at her convinced him that she needed the relief from pain here and now more than she might in the future.

"Here you go. You need some water?" Logan asked as he handed her the pills.

Monique popped the pills into her mouth and swallowed them down without hesitation.

"How that nosebleed coming along?" Logan asked cautiously.

"I think it's easing up." Monique said as she fought to keep her eyes open.

"You're doin fine. Just hang in there. The pills will kick in any minute now."

* * * * *

"Is it gettin any better?" Logan asked gently as he pulled a chair up to her bedside.

"When did you get here?" Monique asked curiously.

"I've been here all the time, makin sure that you're going to be okay." Logan said gently.

"Get your big butt over here and give me a hug. I thought I'd missed you." Monique said happily.

"What?" Logan asked in surprise.

"What about Mondo and Angelo? Are they here, too?" Monique asked hopefully.

"I'm guessin that four pills was too many for you." Logan said slowly.

"Doing 'Boy Things'?" Monique laughed joyfully.

"Monique, this is Logan. I need for you to listen to me." Logan said firmly.

"Paige, remember when you told me about Logan? He's just like you said." Monique giggled.

"Tell you what. I'm gonna leave you here talkin with yer friends, and I'll check back later." Logan said cautiously.

"Yeah, I bet he's hung like a horse." Monique chuckled.

"I'll just go."

* * * * *

Logan checked back multiple times, and each time he found Monique holding in depth conversations with people who weren't there.

Finally he cautiously walked in and found her quiet.

"You doin okay?" Logan asked gently.

"Mama said I can't have a puppy." Monique said as her eyes filled with tears.

"That's some kind of trip, you're takin." Logan said hesitantly.

"I'll be good! I promise!" Monique called out in a begging tone.

"I know. I believe you." Logan said softly.

"I wanna puppy! Please Mama!" Monique screamed as tears flowed down her cheeks.

"Why don't you just settle down there, now, Monique. It's time for you to get some sleep."

"I wanna puppy!" Monique said firmly as she crossed her arms across her chest and stuck out her lower lip.

"Go to sleep and we'll talk about it tomorrow." Logan said reasonably.

"When's daddy gonna be home?"

"I don't know, darlin." Logan said wearily.

"But I still want a puppy." Monique said quietly.

"Try to get some sleep." Logan said as he got up from the chair.

"My puppy's gonna be named Bobo."

"Alright."

* * * * *

"How you feelin now, Monique?" Logan asked as he took a seat in the chair by her bed.

"Nana booboo, Mama."

"I see." Logan said as any hope that he had held, fell away.

"Meemaw, hoosaw." Monique giggled.

Logan took a tissue from beside the bed and gently wiped the drool from her cheek.

"Go to sleep now, little angel. I'll be right here watching over you." Logan said softly.

Monique smiled at him, then closed her eyes.

* * * * *

Around three in the morning, Logan woke in the chair by Monique's bed and checked on how she was doing.

He wasn't surprised to find that she wasn't breathing.

Although he didn't know the medical explanation for what had happened to her, part of him understood the regression and expected this outcome.

He gently picked up her body and carried her down the hall, without a word.

The ride in the elevator was silent, as was the walk to the medlab.

"Here you go, guys." Logan said as he opened the containment room door. "I got another one for you."

He picked up her body and carried her into the room.

He originally had thought that heaping the bodies in the containment room might be considered disrespectful. But now that he'd had time to live with the idea, he believed that these people who were so close in life, might have chosen to be together in death, had they been given the choice.

"I guess we won't be repopulating the earth." Logan said with one last look at Monique, then turned to leave.

When he saw Emma's body, he quietly said, "Watch after the new kid for me, will 'ya, Em? Make sure she fits in."

After a long, silent moment, he closed and sealed the door.

[Chapter 4: A Time of Rest]

Waking up feeling horrible, wasn't a surprise.

While it was true that he didn't get hangovers, that didn't mean that he didn't have to face any consequences from the previous day's activities. The times he'd awakened feeling less than absolutely perfect probably outnumbered the times he didn't.

However, this morning, when he awoke, it was with disquieting thoughts of Monique, fresh in his mind, and a bevy of physical complaints too numerous to list. The number of aches and pains, along with the severity, was something new.

Every joint hurt. Every muscle hurt. His bones hurt. His skin, his cartilage and he was pretty sure that even his hair, hurt.

He had no real desire to start his day, and nothing to look forward to. But, his morning coffee was sitting in its cannister, waiting for him to grind it. And if he didn't, he wouldn't get his morning fix.

Every step, every movement, caused flashes and flares of agony. Fireworks of pain exploding, sometimes predictably, in answer to a movement, sometimes at random, with no warning.

As he reached the kitchen, he thought about what a sorry sight he must make. Proud and mighty, 'The Wolverine', of the X-men. Now he was barely able to stand upright. His knees complained at supporting his weight and threatened to dump him at any moment.

The effort and ache of turning the crank on the coffee grinder very nearly made him give up on the whole thing. But he was already down there, in the kitchen. The mere thought of food was absolutely abhorrent to him. But the simple fact was, he wouldn't be leaving that kitchen without his damned coffee.

As he was drinking his coffee, he felt a sense of annoyance building within him.

The kitchen that he was in irritated him. He hated it. There was no thought or reason behind the feeling. Just, at that moment, he absolutely hated it.

In better times, he might have flown into a rage and trashed the place. But, honestly, he didn't have the energy. Instead, he sat, stewing in anger and loathing, as he tried to contemplate anything he could do, anywhere he could go, that might bring some small measure of peace.

His mind flashed back to Monique, and he considered that it might have been better if she'd never shown up at the mansion.

As much of a pain in the ass as she could be, she provided companionship and a sense of connection to the way life used to be. Now she was gone, and he was left with nothing. No purpose. No distraction. Only the huge empty mansion that seemed to mock him by its very existence, standing tall and proud while the rest of the world was withering away.

He hated it.

He wanted to destroy it.

He wanted to be destroyed.

After all, he nearly was, anyway.

An untold amount of time later, he forced himself up off the kitchen chair and began to pace. The nervous energy and anger smoldering within him wouldn't allow him to stay still, even though every movement brought wave after wave of agony.

He left the kitchen and walked the dark, empty halls.

Everything he encountered just fueled his anger and annoyance.

The dining room, once grand and elegant, now stood as a grim reminder of the absence of anyone to make use of it.

The common room, once a meeting place, filled with laughter and spirited conversation, was now a stuffy box, inundated with useless ornaments and trinkets from a time that had passed. 'Pretties' as Travis had called them, mocking his agonized state with the promise of continuing to exist long after he had gone to join the others in the containment room in the basement.

A new stabbing pain erupted in his lower abdomen, followed by an urgent need to go to the toilet.

Logan didn't want to even speculate what had just ruptured deep inside him as he ran for the nearest bathroom.

Fortunately, for what little dignity he still retained, he made it in time. But just as he came to rest on the seat, the sudden urge to vomit assaulted him.

He grabbed up the trash can from beside the toilet and began to lose the contents of his stomach at the same time as his bowels released.

The sight of the blood in the trash can didn't even register as unusual to him. By now, it was expected.

The blood in the toilet was a less common occurrence, but not all that shocking.

The vomiting and diarrhea lasted for nearly half an hour before he seemed to finally be completely empty.

He felt horrible.

He felt weak and frail. Everything continued to hurt. Every movement continued to send flashes and flares of agony throughout his body. But somehow he managed to make his way back to his own bathroom, and take a shower.

The water was steamy hot, nonetheless it didn't seem to offer any relief to his aching body.

But he desperately needed to feel clean.

The shower took an inordinate amount of time, partly due to his starts and stops from the aching joints and muscles, and partly due to his almost obsessive need to be sure that he was, indeed, clean.

Finally, shower complete, he made his way to the medlab.

As he was riding down the elevator, it suddenly occurred to him that the elevator ran on electricity. It shouldn't be functioning, yet it was.

Likewise, the basement should be dark. But the lights were functioning albeit, at a lower illumination than they did typically.

It was just like Emma to have a plan in place that would take into account a loss of main power, but he didn't know what to do with the new information, or if it would actually be of any help to him, at all. Given the dimness of the lighting, was it going to run out? Or was the limited power being automatically rationed?

However, he couldn't help but wonder if there might be a way that he could use the reserve to restore power to the rest of the mansion... or maybe just run an extension cord upstairs somehow.

He didn't know, and quite honestly, either option was far beyond what he could do either in terms of his physical state or his level of ambition, at the moment.

When he finally reached the medlab, he went to the cabinets of medications to get what he needed.

The memory of what happened to Monique was still too fresh in his mind for him to take the chance of taking too many, but he was at a point where he couldn't endure the pain any longer.

He needed relief.

He found the bottle of pills and nearly tore the cap off.

He took two of the pills and swallowed them dry. Then held the bottle firmly in his agonized, aching hands and waited.

Standing silently in the dim lighting of the medlab, he really looked at the room for a long moment.

Emma was usually such a 'neat freak' that it was surprising to find packaging and medical instruments scattered on the floor. He didn't want to imagine the horror that must have taken place for Emma to allow things to fall into this state of disarray.

For just a moment, Logan thought about tidying up and putting things back in their right place. But just as suddenly, he realized what a monumental task that would be in his current physical state, and besides, he probably wouldn't have cleaned it up if he were fit, healthy and everyone in the world were still alive.

A sudden chill washed over his body and he found himself trembling where he stood.

Carefully, he recapped the bottle, so as not to drop any of the precious pills. Then he made his way back to the elevator.

By the time he was back to the common room, he was shivering uncontrollably.

He grabbed up the quilt that was draped across the back of the nearest couch and wrapped it around himself.

Despite the aching in his hands from his grip, he continued to clutch it tightly to try and maintain some sort of body warmth as he curled into a tight ball on the couch.

His teeth literally chattered as he clenched his eyes shut and tried to will himself to be warm.

He lost any concept of time as he huddled into himself, all alone, and finally fell into a fitful, fever enhanced, sleep.

* * * * *

He woke up suddenly with the wet quilt constricted around him, sticking to every inch of exposed skin.

The sweat was running in rivulets down his face and into his eyes as he fought to extricate himself from the suffocating cocoon.

He felt like he was roasting alive and on the verge of passing out from the extreme heat.

Once he was finally out of the quilt, he realized that the clothes he was wearing were stuck to him and sopping wet with sweat.

He wanted to go upstairs to take a shower and rinse the sweat off, but at the moment, it was more important for him to get a drink. He was absolutely parched.

About halfway to the kitchen, the realization struck him that all the aches and pains that he had suffered through that morning were suspiciously gone.

He still felt as weak as a newborn kitten, but he no longer had the screaming agony in every part of his body.

Once in the kitchen, he drank glass after glass of cold water from the tap.

It took a while, but finally his thirst seemed to be slaked and he was ready for that shower.

He went up to his room and shed his clothes on a direct path to the bathroom.

After turning on the shower to let the water warm up, he stopped at the toilet to relieve his bladder.

As the feeling of relief washed over him, he looked down and noticed that he was peeing blood.

He paused for a moment, waiting for an emotional response that never came, then got into the shower to wash the sweat away.

As soon as the shower was finished, he walked down the stairs and out to the garage, where his truck was parked.

He picked up three cases of the liquor that he had taken from the liquor store in town, not paying attention to what types of liquor they were, and carried them into the house.

* * * * *

Moments of clarity were few and far between in the next week.

More often than not, Logan would start his day with his customary coffee, which he had recently taken to lacing with Irish whiskey. Then the drinking would continue, so as to numb his perceptions and inhibit his ability to think.

Quite a few times, surges of pain found their way through his alcoholic haze, but he kept himself drunk enough that he didn't particularly care.

The truth of his new existence was that his only goal in surviving each day had become to just get it over with.

Being sick and tired had become the new normal.

He had stopped taking the pain medication for the most part. Even though it offered some temporary relief, he had come to the realization that those brief reprieves from the pain made the return of it seem that much worse.

Floating in an alcoholic oblivion turned out to be the preferable way.

He hadn't been into town but once in the past week, and that was to get more liquor.

He was barely eating.

He did little in the way of picking up after himself.

And his personal hygiene had fallen to an all-time low.

* * * * *

Then another week passed, mostly without notice.

The nearly constant aches and pains had returned, and showed no signs of letting up anytime soon.

His world had constricted into the area surrounding one particular couch in the common room.

The 'nest' he had constructed had bottles of liquor and some beer within easy reach, and a multitude of empties in sort of a blast pattern outside of

the nest, where he had haphazardly pitched them in any direction that struck his whim.

Also within the 'nest', he had a collection of crudely torn pieces of cloth which he kept close at hand to quickly mop up whatever horror he might suddenly expel from his ailing body.

He had no recollection of his last bath and only the beard growth he had achieved gave him any sense of how long it had been since he had shaved.

In rare moments of near sobriety, he had contemplated constructing a guillotine. He reasoned to himself that it would be a quick and efficient way to end his life.

Part of his reasoning was that, without other people, there was really no point to his survival. No matter what he did, be it great or small, it didn't matter.

Also, Emma had told him that the agony and torture that he had been enduring would only escalate.

Due to his experiences in the Weapon X program, he knew without a doubt that there actually were levels of pain that his illness had not yet attained. However, he had no desire to revisit them.

The guillotine seemed like a very practical way of bringing the increasing agony to an end.

The only thing that was stopping him from going through with his master plan to end it all was that to do it, he'd have to get off the couch.

The way he was feeling, that wasn't happening.

* * * * *

One month...

It had been one entire month since he'd seen another living soul.

There had been a time when being alone was a rare and cherished thing in his life.

He had intentionally distanced himself from people and gone so far as to leave on extended trips into the wilderness, just to be away from them.

In fact, there were two occasions the he could recall when he had gone into isolation and not had any sort of human contact for over a year.

He had enjoyed those times.

He held the memories as a thing that was precious to him.

But during those days, he had always known that other people were there.

If he ever wanted to make contact, if he ever wanted to reach out, if he ever needed anyone, it was possible.

Never before in his life had he ever had the sense of being so completely, irrevocably, eternally alone.

The aches and pains had become such a common and constant thing that they were hardly worth thinking about.

He never made the decision to stop drinking. In fact, most nights he still had a few beers before settling in for the night. But over time, the drunken, alcoholic haze lost it's appeal.

Logan had no choice but to accept the reality that everyone was gone. But it didn't automatically follow that since they were gone from the present, that they were out of his life.

One night, mostly on a whim, he made his way upstairs and went into one of the bedrooms. He didn't actually know whose it was when he chose it, but soon found that it had belonged to Warren.

Slowly, and mostly respectfully, he rifled through Warren's personal possessions and began piecing together, reconstructing, who Warren had been.

Looking through the artifacts of Warren's life gave Logan an insight about the man that he had never had when Warren was alive.

Stuck up and shallow, was how Logan had always thought of the man. But the bits and pieces of Warren's life scattered around what used to be his personal space, spoke of a man who felt deeply and had been hurt one

time too many. Warren had pictures of past loves and old letters that he had received.

By the end of it all, Logan wished that he had known Warren better, so that he could have offered to help him... or just to let Warren know that if he needed someone, Logan would be there.

That was how it started.

Each night, Logan would go up to someone's bedroom and explore their personal artifacts. Even though they were long dead now, it still seemed important to him that he learn about these people he had lived with and fought along side.

Looking back, he supposed that being a loner, like he was, and keeping himself somewhat distant, might not have been the best way to handle things. But the other side of that was that he had come to them. He had chosen to stay with them and join their team. So, even though he didn't get close to anyone on a personal level, they were his comrades. No, none of them were close to him. But they were close enough. And it had been just what he needed at that time.

Early in his explorations of the bedrooms, Logan was surprised to find that several of the residents of the mansion kept personal journals or diaries. A few of them mentioned in the opening pages that Professor Frost had suggested that they keep journals to sort out their thoughts and feelings by putting them into words.

Logan was surprised to find his name mentioned, rather favorably in one of the journals. He wasn't quite so surprised when he found it in the next one. By the time he had finished, he had discovered that at least four different people had been attracted to him, some of them to the point of it being a 'crush'.

Two of those four were men, and he never would have suspected that they had ever thought of him in those terms.

Perhaps most astonishingly, all four of those who had written down their feelings toward him only made brief mention of his physical attributes. All of them seemed to have been trying to find ways to get to know him better

as a person. By all accounts, they liked him and were frustrated because they couldn't find a way to get to know him better.

Also surprising, through all the journals that he had read, not one person had an unkind word to say about him.

Logan knew what a jackass he could be. He was crude and disrespectful sometimes. He would have understood it if some of his team members had thought he was a creep. But, apparently, none of them did. They understood that some of what he did and said were his defense mechanisms, warning people away from getting too close. They weren't offended by it, they understood it and respected the boundaries that he had set.

When it was all said and done, Logan finally concluded that, although he didn't know it at the time. He did actually have friends.

* * * * *

In some ways it seemed like just yesterday that everyone was filling the mansion with their lives and their noise.

In other ways, it seemed like forever ago.

One particular day, Logan woke to a surprising sensation. For that brief instant, for that precious sliver of time, nothing hurt.

That respite from the pain had the added benefit of allowing him a moment of self-reflection.

He looked back on the choices he had made and the actions he had taken during the past month and a half. Some of those choices, he wasn't too proud of. But there was no use in getting bogged down with regrets.

As he got up to go make his coffee, the familiar aches and pains were back to their usual intensity.

Lately, the joints in his hands had taken to swelling to obscene proportions while they screamed out with agonizing pain.

Today wasn't too bad... relatively speaking.

He carried with him the peaceful, introspective mood that he had woken with as he made his coffee.

He needed to make plans.

It didn't matter what they were, but he was living from day to day on nothing but habit. And while that might work in the short term, it was no way to live your life... and he was alive.

Once the coffee was ready, he took a cup to the table and set it down, then rummaged through one of the kitchen drawers until he came up with a pen and a pad of paper.

He made a note that he needed to check the oil on the truck and maybe take it into town and see about getting some new tires.

He wrote down a small list of items that he needed to get from the grocery and hardware stores. They were things that he had been needing for a while but never seemed to remember when he was there.

He also made a crude supply list for the things he would need to construct a guillotine. The way he felt today, he didn't know that he'd need it. But he could always use it for slicing open coconuts or something.

The list continued and ended up being three pages long.

There were some of the items that, looking at it objectively, he would probably never actually do. But that didn't matter at this stage.

For the first time in a month and a half, he was making plans for the future.

* * * * *

Waking up blind was a new and unexpected experience for Logan.

For two months, now, Logan had been waking up each day to discover what horror awaited him, but he had never considered blindness as a remote possibility.

It had taken him... well, he didn't know how long it took him, because he couldn't see a clock. But it took him an unreasonably long time to even dress himself.

By the time he had made his way downstairs to the kitchen, the familiar warmth of his healing factor was repairing whatever hideous thing the virus had done to his eyes. And before the coffee was finished brewing, his eyes had returned to normal.

The aches and pains were still with him.

The swelling joints came and went.

The bouts of expelling large amounts of blood from various orifices was less common, but still happened occasionally.

This was his life now.

Accepting that as true gave Logan the motivation to take a good look at how he was living and make a few changes.

He wasn't living in filth. He had enough of that during the weeks he spent seeing life through a liquor bottle.

No. He was maintaining a perfectly respectable lifestyle.

But here he was, living in a huge, beautiful mansion. And he spent as many nights sleeping on the couch in the common room as he did sleeping in a bed.

With that in mind, he started doing a good cleaning job... well, at least in the rooms that he used.

He dusted, took out several loads of trash, and even swept the carpet in the common room with a broom.

After that, came the task that he had been dreading.

He needed to do dishes.

That, in itself, doesn't sound too bad.

But the reason he needed to do dishes was that he had run out.

Every dish in the mansion was dirty...

Every.

Single.

One.

In a mansion that had functioned as both a base of operations for the X-men and as a boarding school, they could feed fifty people without ever having to worry about having enough plates.

Did he feel good?

No.

Did he want to do it?

No.

But he did it. In one go, he washed two months worth of dirty dishes.

Early on, he had thought about going into town and just getting new dishes to replace them.

When the last of the dishes were finally done, he decided that on his next trip into town, he'd pick up some paper plates.

Next, Logan went upstairs and did a good job of cleaning up.

He shaved for the occasion and put on some good clothes.

He ignored the complaints of his joints as he climbed into his truck and started the drive into town.

His first stop was at the hardware store.

He knew what he wanted, but hadn't thought through the logistics involved in carrying out his plan.

He found a few small generators, so that he could restore electricity to his living space. But the problem was that they were too small to do much more than provide him the use of one or two appliances.

The hardware store didn't carry anything near the scale that he had in mind.

He had to stop for a few minutes to think things through, then remembered seeing a construction site on the edge of town.

He didn't know if it would have what he needed, but took the chance and drove down there anyway.

At the end of his shopping expedition, Logan returned to the Frost mansion with the bed of his pickup loaded with dry and canned groceries and he was towing a generator that was fixed to a trailer.

* * * * *

The virus living within him was getting more aggressive, there was no doubt of that.

He was no longer able to do big projects, he just didn't have the energy.

Along with the almost constant pain, he would now also develop horrible sores that would open and drain without warning.

But in over three months, he had been able to establish a relatively comfortable life for himself. Most of that was due to the work he had done more recently.

He was at a point where the rooms that he used on a regular basis were kept reasonably clean.

He washed dishes at least once a day... he NEVER wanted to have to go through the experience of washing them all at once again.

He kept himself clean and mostly shaved... not always, but he didn't let his beard get out of control.

Weather permitting, he would make one or two trips into town a week, just to bolster his supplies and occasional trips to other towns to see if the pickings were better.

On his last trip, he was able to find powdered milk, which was incredibly helpful for cooking.

And, at the end of each day, he would typically snuggle into his favorite couch, wrap himself in his favorite quilt, and settle in to watch a movie.

It was strange. He had never been much of one to watch movies, before. But he found himself captivated with many of the old black and white, WWII era dramas and occasionally, some of their comedies.

Although if anyone else in the world were alive to see him, he would never do it, he also occasionally indulged himself by watching Audrey Hepburn movies. He absolutely loved them.

* * * * *

Pain had become a fact of life.

The bleeding, the vomiting, the diarrhea, the sudden running sores... all of it was just there.

But after four months, the one thing that actually caused him to worry were the headaches.

Watching what Monique had gone through, and how she ended up, made him wish that he had actually gone through with constructing the guillotine.

The horror of her death still haunted him, and it was brought back to him, fresh as the day it happened, every time he felt a pain erupt in his head.

He had given up on the pain pills for the most part. Partly because of Professor Frost's warnings, but mostly because he knew that he could endure the pain.

But when it came to headaches, he immediately took some pain meds to quickly deal with it... except, he would never take four.

* * * * *

The headache this day wasn't bad, at least, not yet.

He had found that if he caught it early, sometimes it didn't get any worse.

The bottle of pills that he had been using for weeks on end was finally empty, so he made his way down to the medlab to get some more.

He hadn't been down there in quite a while.

Given the choice, he'd be happy enough to never go down there again.

When the elevator doors slowly opened, he noticed that the lighting was far dimmer than he recalled.

Whatever reserve power source Emma had set up for the underground portion of the mansion seemed to finally be running out.

"Hello?" Logan heard from down the hallway.

He froze in place for a moment as his mind raced over what he had thought he had just heard.

As he saw it, there were only two possibilities. Either somehow, some living person had found their way into the mansion, and into the basement, without him noticing. Or what had killed Monique was now happening to him and he was seeing hallucinations.

The former seemed so unlikely that it wasn't worth considering. The latter... if he were having hallucinations, then it was already too late for him to do anything but to play along and see where this path took him... maybe he'd end up wherever Monique had gone.

"Who's there?" Logan called gruffly.

"Where are you?" A young voice called in panic.

That seemed curious. When Monique was having her hallucinations, she seemed to be talking to people that she knew.

Cautiously, Logan walked down the hallway and found a transparent young teenager looking back at him. He wasn't sure, but the boy looked somehow familiar.

He sniffed the air to see if he could detect anything to indicate if the boy was real or not. When he didn't smell anything, he cautiously asked, "You a ghost?"

"Yeah, I guess so." The boy said in a small voice.

Suddenly, Logan remembered where he had seen the boy before.

Before Bobby had left to join John, the mansion had been attacked and... "Figures, the whole world dies and I get haunted by the little mutant hating puke that got me shot in the head."

"Yeah, sorry about that." The boy... Ronny, Ronny Drake, said in nearly a whisper.

"Whatever. How come you're haunting the mansion?" Logan asked with mild curiosity. Hallucination or no, at least it was someone to talk to.

"I don't know. I guess when I told mutie fag that I wanted to see his freak kids get dissected he must have got pissed off and killed me." Ronny said with a shrug.

Logan's head gave another throb and reminded him why he had come to the basement in the first place.

"Some people are just touchy that way." Logan said as he walked past Ronny into the MedLab's treatment room.

"Can I hang out with you? I'm kind of alone down here." Ronny asked with a pleading tone.

"Yeah, sure. But you start talkin any mutant hating trash to me and I'll leave you alone." Logan warned as he found the bottle he was looking for. He had a headache and he wasn't about to put up with any crap. Not even from a ghost.

"Yeah, I can do that." Ronny said quietly and followed Logan to the elevator which opened as he approached.

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Logan led the ghost first to the kitchen, then into the common room. He had done a good job of keeping up with things for a while, but hadn't been feeling well for the past few days and had let a few things slide. It wasn't horrible, but there was a little trash on the floor by the couch and a few dirty dishes.

"I wasn't expecting company." Logan said quietly as he took a seat on the couch. The ghost had already seen it, so there was no point in cleaning it up, now.

"Are you the only one here?" The ghost asked as he looked around the room.

"Yeah, I been alone for four months. Everyone else is dead." Logan said and took two pills, then washed them down with a beer. This would be the test. If the headache were the culprit, then the ghost of Ronny Drake should fade away as soon as the headache let up.

"Everyone in the mansion died? How did that happen?" Ronny asked quietly.

"Everyone in the world died. Some mutant hating trash decided that the world would be a better place without us and made a virus to kill us all. It backfired and killed everyone." Logan said before taking another drink of his beer. He suddenly realized that he wasn't used to talking to people anymore.

"So you're alone in this world?" Ronny asked with a note of fear.

"Yeah, as far as I know. I ain't seen or heard anyone else since November." Logan said, looking curiously at the ghost standing before him.

"How can you live like that? I mean, I've always been around people, I can't imagine being completely alone." Ronny said thoughtfully.

"You don't have to imagine it now kid. You are alone. Unless you meet up with another ghost, you and me are it. And I don't think we're going to be best buds or anything since you got me shot when you were alive." Logan said honestly. Ghost or no, he wasn't going to let that go, like it was nothing.

"So you don't mind being alone?" Ronny asked uncertainly.

"Well, I guess since you're dead I can tell you. I mind it. I've always been a loner, but when I wanted to be around people, they were there. Now, I dunno, it's like there's no point to being. I think it's like, when you help someone, you have a purpose. It makes their life better and yours. Without anyone else around to help or fight, I can't make a difference. There's no point." Logan said quietly. He was surprised to hear himself put those feelings into words. Not wanting to pursue the subject, he quickly finished his beer.

Ronny sat silently for a long minute then said quietly, "I never helped anyone."

"You're a user, kid. You use people to get what you want and damn anyone else's feelings." Logan said without malice. Ghost or not, the kid needed to know.

"You don't know me." Ronny said in offense.

"No. But I've known enough people like you to recognize the breed. You're a parasite, you latch on to someone until they can't give you anymore then you move on." Logan said then got up from the couch and walked out of the room.

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Logan stood for a moment in the kitchen, contemplating the conversation he had just held with someone who wasn't there.

He reflected back on how Monique had been holding conversations with all her friends and couldn't decide if the same thing were happening to him.

If he were having a hallucination, would he even be questioning it? He didn't know.

After grabbing a plate of food and another beer for himself, he slowly walked back to the common room.

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"I'm really sorry I got you shot. Will you tell me your name?" Ronny asked shyly.

"Logan." He said before taking a large bite of food.

"Thanks Logan, you can call me Ronny if you want... That stuff you said... about me being a parasite... you're right... but if that's what I am, how do I become something else?" Ronny asked plaintively.

"Dunno kid. You most likely can't change... being dead and all." Logan said in a slow considering voice.

"I was afraid of that. But if I wasn't dead, how would I be able to change?" Ronny asked in a low voice.

"Let me ask you somethin kid. Who do you respect? Who do you like? Who is your role model?" Logan asked, then when he saw Ronny deep in thought, he took another bite of his food.

"No one." Ronny finally answered timidly.

"Thought so. Some people can change themselves with willpower but... I think you need an example to follow. Someone you can trust and respect, maybe your dad." Logan said with a shrug.

"He raped me this morning and I killed him... I'm thinking no." Ronny said darkly.

"You're dead, you can let it go now. But you're right, bad role model." Logan said and sat his empty plate aside.

"The only person I can think of is my brother, Bobby." Ronny said weakly.

"Yeah, the gang were all tore up when he ran off with John to join up with another team. I think it took guts for him to make a change." Logan said in a considering tone.

"But I just saw him a few hours ago, right before... I died." Ronny finished weakly.

"Whatever, I don't know what happens when you die, maybe you were put on hold for a few months before you woke up here. But I saw Bobby and John with my own eyes a few months ago. They died holdin on to each other." Logan said without a trace of emotion.

"Bobby's dead? I didn't even think about that..." Ronny said as he realized that he couldn't cry.

Logan looked at the distraught expression on Ronny's face curiously.

"Being dead sucks! I can't even cry for my brother!" Ronny said in anger.

"Yeah, let me know if you find the upside to it." Wolverine said with a chuckle.

Ronny nodded, then thought to ask, "What about you? If you had a second chance, what would you do?"

Logan got a big genuine smile on his face and said, "Orroro."

"I don't understand, what's that?" Ronny asked with confusion.

"She's not a what, she's a who, and she's the most beautiful woman I've ever known... I never even made a single move on her. If I was to get a second

chance, that's all I'd want, is to stop being such a chicken shit and let Rorro know how I feel." Logan said with a fond smile that turned sour at the sheer sentimentality of it all.

"Don't worry Logan, I'm dead, who am I going to tell?" Ronny said with a smile.

"If you wasn't dead before, I'd have to kill you fer seein that." Logan said with a growl.

"I think I just found the upside." Ronny said with a grin.

Logan rolled his eyes, then picked up his plate and left the room to get another beer.

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Just as he reached the common room door, he heard an unfamiliar voice say, "If you're sorry, they'll forgive you. They're good people."

"But I'm not. Robert was right. I'm a bad person. I'm a bully and a liar. And I don't know any other way to be." Ronny responded.

"How do you want to be, kid?" Logan asked as he walked back into the room, beer in hand.

He wasn't surprised to see Bobby. But seeing another boy that he didn't know made him stop and wonder again whether this was a hallucination or not.

Bobby and his friend stared at Logan, as Ronny said, "I don't even know how else I can be... this is all I've ever been."

"Logan?" Bobby asked with confusion.

"Yeah, how you doin, Ice Cube?" Logan asked as he took a drink from his beer. What had Emma said about a dimensional traveler?

"I thought everyone here was dead." Bobby said in wonder.

"Everyone else is... So I guess this means Ronny ain't dead. Bet you're glad to hear that." Logan said with a chuckle.

"Yeah, I guess." Ronny mumbled.

"Ronny, you're coming back with me as soon as we know where we're going to put you. When you threatened the mansion, you made it a lot harder on yourself. But you won't be alone. I'll come and visit with you as often as I can until we figure out what we're going to do..." Bobby said with conviction, then turned to Logan and said, "I'll let the others know you're here. We'll find a way to get you to our dimension without bringing the virus."

That was it. The final piece of the puzzle.

Yes. Everyone in this world was dead.

But there was another world where everyone was alive. Even if they couldn't find a way to cure him. If he just had a few weeks, a few days, even a few hours, he could be among the living again.

It would be enough.

The End