

# Heroes Can Be Hurt

## *Hurt & Comfort - V*

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## Heroes can be Hurt

### [Chapter 1: Silent Hallways]

"Eric?" Charles asked as he awoke.

"Yes Tiger?" Eric asked with a peaceful smile.

"You haven't called me that in years." Charles said quietly.

"That's because we haven't shared a bed in years. But in bed, you're always a tiger." Eric said playfully.

"Oh Eric, you are the only bright spot in all of this. I'm so overwhelmed by all that's happened..." Charles trailed off.

"I can help if you'll let me." Eric said hesitantly.

"What can you do?" Charles asked and turned to face Eric.

"Let me take control of things for a day or two, just to put things in order for you. I promise that I won't take any action that you wouldn't approve of." Eric said as a vow.

"And what am I to do during all of this?" Charles asked, intrigued by the idea.

"Watch. Listen. Think. Plan. Do the things you do best while I sort out all the details that are muddying the water." Eric said in a considering tone.

"Thank you Eric-love. I can always depend on you to see to the heart of the matter." Charles said with admiration.

"As I can always depend on you to take the appropriate action once that heart is revealed." Eric said honestly.

"Having you here gives me hope. If you hadn't stayed... We've suffered so many losses... I feel that I am doing more harm than good by keeping the institute open." Charles finished with a whisper.

"Charles, you are doing so much good by providing the children a place to be welcomed and accepted. If you accomplish nothing else, that alone should give you sufficient purpose to continue. There is so much

intolerance in the world that this is one of the few good places for a mutant child to be." Eric said sadly.

"How are your children Eric?" Charles asked gently.

"They survive. Neither of them knows I am their father, though I think Pietro suspects. Charles, the world has changed so much, if they were still children, I would bring them here... there are few places in the world that I consider safe for a mutant child." Eric said with pain.

"It hurts you." Charles said in realization.

"Yes Charles, it hurts to see the injustice, bigotry, hatred, malice... they're just children." Eric said and looked at Charles with watery eyes.

"I know Eric, and thank you. Apparently I needed a reminder of why I started this school." Charles said

"We both need to be reminded of our priorities from time to time. I can't believe that I went off like some kind of mini-god believing in my own superiority... it could only cause a swell of resistance. I better than anyone should understand the nature of opposing forces." Eric said with humility.

"Let's get ready to begin our day. I pray that it is a better one than yesterday." Charles said honestly.

"Do you want to share a shower?" Eric asked with a slight leer.

"Not this morning Eric-love. We need to meet with everyone so you can work your magic and clear the muddied water... and when we take a shower together, I want to be able to take my time." Charles finished with an answering leer.

"As you like Charles. Let's get ready for the day." Eric said and got out of bed.

"Just as fine as I remember... Eric, you only improve with age." Charles said and watched as Eric dressed.

"You are good for my ego Charles, though I can truthfully say that you have matured quite well. I didn't believe it was possible for you to be more attractive than you were as a young man but... here you are." Eric said with sincerity in his voice.

"Thank you Eric. Let's get going, we have to get this day started." Charles said as he pulled himself into the wheelchair beside the bed.

\* \* \* \* \*

Warren woke early as was his habit. He dressed quickly and slipped out of the mansion quietly.

His mind was still filled with images from the day before. He took to the air, deep in thought, as the sun began to rise on the horizon.

[Something is missing; A greater purpose. My decision to leave the X-men was the right choice at the time, but being here, contributing to the greater good, it is something that is missing from my life.] Warren thought with pain as he flew high above the mansion.

He was broken out of his thoughts as he noticed a dark figure crouched on the roof of the mansion. Warren cautiously glided closer to investigate.

There was a man sitting on the roof, crying. As Warren got closer he noticed that the man was cutting the flesh of his leg.

Carefully he landed on the roof, ten feet from the crying man.

Kurt looked up suddenly and hid the knife.

Warren walked slowly toward Kurt with his arms and wings spread in a non-threatening manner.

"Mien Got." Kurt said with a gasp, then whispered, "Engel."

"You don't have to hide what you're doing. Will you talk with me?" Warren asked carefully as he noticed the dark blue man was trembling.

"I must atone for my sins... a man is dead. It is my fault." Kurt said with hitching breaths, then began crying again.

"Come here." Warren said and kept his arms open in invitation.

Kurt dropped his knife and ran into the embrace.

Warren held the crying man close and rubbed his back to offer comfort.

No words were spoken as the men held each other and silently shared their pain.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Xander?" Remy asked in a whisper of a voice.

"Remy. Lay still, try not to move your eyes, they need time to heal." Xander said quickly.

"De operation, it was a success non?" Remy asked as he laid still.

"As far as we know. We'll know more when you can take off your bandages. But for now, we have to give your eyes time to heal. The longer you can keep them still, the more likely it is that you will have eyesight."

"Remy can do dat." he said quietly.

Xander scooted the chair closer and laid a hand on Remy's. "Some things have happened while you've been asleep." Xander said with pain.

"Jus tell Remy. You don't need to dance around it." Remy said with strength.

"A group of government officials and scientists developed a virus to seek out and destroy all mutants on your home world." Xander said, trying to keep his voice even.

"Go on." Remy said without emotion.

"The virus mutated. It killed everyone." Xander said in a whisper.

There was silence as Remy digested the information.

"Then the same thing was about to happen here. The X-men, Magneto's group and the GenX kids stopped them. But..." Xander said and noticed a tear falling from his eye.

"Go on." Remy said and turned his hand over to take Xander's into a firm grip.

"Alan was hurt... he might be dead. Andrew ported them somewhere... we don't know where." Xander said with pain.

"What else." Remy asked, obviously trying to contain his emotions.

"All the children were sent to my world, so if the virus got out, they would be safe. With Andrew gone, there is no way to get them back... or even let them know that we are alive." Xander said and laid his head on his and Remy's joined hands, holding the back of Remy's hand to his cheek, needing some sort of comfort.

"Was Alan de only one hurt?" Remy asked with a hitch in his breath.

"No, some of the kids from the GenX school were hurt and Artie was shot." Xander said and tears began to flow freely.

"Artie be well?" Remy asked with guarded emotion.

"Yeah, Artie's going to be fine. Clarissa won't leave his side. They're both worried about you." Xander said carefully.

"You let dem know Remy be fine. Even if de eyes don work, Remy be fine." he said with assurance.

"I'll let them know." Xander said with a relieved smile.

"So dat be all?" Remy asked in confirmation.

"There was one death. The Remy LeBeau from this universe was killed during the raid." Xander said gravely.

"Don worry Xander. If dat Remy have a life like me, dere be no reason to grieve. He be leaving nothin and no one behind." Remy said calmly.

"Cajun, don't you ever think that no one cares for you here. I know you don't like to talk about stuff like that but you need to know that you're my friend and I care very much about what happens to you. The others care too, Artie, Clarissa, Orroro, Andrew, Alan, Scott, Alex, Dawn and Tara. They all care about you and have been here to check on you every chance they had since your surgery began." Xander said with strength.

"Tanks Xander. Remy know dat you care. If dat other Remy don have you as a friend, den he be like I was before... alone." Remy said in explanation.

"Okay. Just as long as you know." Xander said quietly.

"Xander? You be cryin?" Remy asked hesitantly.

"Yeah. I know it's not a 'manly man' sort of thing to do, but so much has happened. I'm just glad that you're awake. I can't handle all this without my best friend to talk to." Xander said in an embarrassed smile.

"Bes frien?" Remy asked with surprise.

"Yeah Cajun. I didn't expect it either. I guess it's your natural charm." Xander finished in a teasing tone, just as surprised as Remy.

After a long moment of silence Remy said, "So tell your bes frien bout what's been goin on."

"Before Alan... Before... we found out about where your eyes came from." Xander said, feeling a fresh stab of pain as he remembered again that Alan was gone.

"What you find?" Remy asked quietly, understanding the pain.

"Her name was Margaret Riley. She was forced off the road by a drunk driver. Both she and her husband were killed." Xander said carefully.

"Remy need to know bout her. She give Remy sumthin, Remy gotta give sumthin back." he said definitely.

"No offense, but I thought you were a thief. It doesn't add up." Xander said in confusion.

"No fense tween friens Xander, Remy be a tief, but he take from businesses an from rich folk who got nuthin but money an won't miss a few tings." Remy said calmly.

"But you don't steal from common people. Just those that deserve it or hoard their money... Like Robin Hood?" Xander finished with a smile.

Remy smiled at the comment, then said, "De only poor Remy be givin de money to be poor Remy."

"Fair enough." Xander said then thought of something else, "Margaret was pregnant."

"Le infant... de baby, did it live?" Remy asked in a whisper of hope.

"Yes, Dawn and Tara helped her to survive. The baby is listed in serious condition." Xander said with assurance.

"Dat be what Remy need to do for Margaret Riley. She give Remy eyes so he can see dat de baby be taken care of." Remy said with assurance.

"I thought so. Before Andrew left... he got me all the information he could find on Margaret and her husband... they have only one surviving relative... Margaret's mother, Vada Jeffers. She lives in Perth Amboy, New Jersey by herself and is seventy years old. I don't see how she can take care of an infant..." Xander trailed off.

"Remy an Xander see to dat. Le tiny femme want for nuthin if Remy can provide." Remy said with assurance.

"Well the first step to helping the baby will be to get you on your feet again... you need anything?" Xander asked carefully, surprised he hadn't asked sooner.

"Remy got an itch, on de back of de right leg." Remy said with frustration.

"I got you covered Cajun." Xander said with a smile and went to Remy's leg.

"Higher or lower?" Xander asked and moved his hand gently down from the knee.

"Higher." Remy said.

Xander moved back up past the knee and asked, "Higher?"

"Down to de back of de leg... higher jus a little... dat... dat's it." Remy said with relief as Xander scratched the itch.

"Tanks Xander." Remy said in bliss as Xander finished the scratch by rubbing the area.

"Anytime Remy. I'm going to be here beside you until you get your bandages off, so if you need anything, all you have to do is ask." Xander said seriously.

Remy went silent as he considered the statement.



"Remy? Does that mean you need something?" Xander asked carefully.

Remy fought the urge to nod and said hesitantly, "Remy needs to pee."

Xander thought for a second and said, "Do you want me to wake up Hank to take care of that?"

"Non." Remy said shyly.

"Okay. There is a portable urinal here... just give me a second." Xander said and walked across the room to grab it.

"Here you go." Xander said and tried to get through this as clinically and professionally as he could so as not to embarrass Remy.

Xander lifted the gown out of the way and efficiently positioned the urinal.

"Go ahead." Xander said and turned his head.

Remy let loose the flow of urine and sighed in relief.

"Remy done." he finally said.

Xander removed the urinal and lowered the gown quickly.

"Tanks Xander." Remy said with a blush.

"Whatever you need my friend." Xander said as he returned to Remy's side.

Remy felt a quiver in his belly and could feel the beginning of an erection.

Xander watched as the gown began to form an impressive tent.

Remy's blush was full force as Xander said, "Do you need some help to take care of that?"

"Remy not ask you to. Xander be Remy's friend, not wan to mess it up with dat." Remy said seriously.

Xander thought about the response, then said, "Remy, I don't know if that would mess it up or not, but just so you know, I'm not offering out of pity or duty. I like you. I can see where you might be getting some mixed signals

from me so I'm just going to say it. I'm bi, I'm attracted to both men and women. It isn't about gender as much as the person. I'm attracted to you. If you aren't into guys or really don't want to take a chance of messing up our friendship, I can respect that. But if you just don't want to because you think I really don't want to... I do."

Remy thought about the words for a minute then said quietly, "Xander, Remy got no problem bein wit a guy an you be a good frien. But Remy be stuck in dis bed. It be too much like pity, Remy don wan to take da chance. When Remy be out of bed an can hold you in his arms, ask again. Remy probably say yes."

Xander thought about that and said, "You've got a deal Cajun."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Thank you all for coming." Eric said to the group in the dining room.

"I am going to remain here for a time to help Charles attend to the aftermath of yesterday's events." Eric said carefully, noticing that everyone had fallen silent.

"First order of business is the status of the mission: All known traces of the virus and data have been destroyed. All the scientists who developed the virus have been dispatched except for... two?" Eric asked, glancing at Charles.

"One now." Charles said quietly.

"And that remaining scientist will not survive the day." Eric said with confidence.

"My associates, with the exception of Mystique will be leaving after this meeting. If we require their services, we can summon them." Eric said and looked at the people he had brought with him. He noticed disinterest on most of their faces and a look of relief on Pyro's face.

"Before we separate, we need to find what is to be done about the children. Does anyone have any comments or suggestions?" Eric asked in a demanding tone.

"I can try. I've never tried to cross dimensions, but there may be something I can do to help. I'll have to do some research." Dawn said timidly.

"Very good Tempest. We are fortunate to have you on our team." Eric said with admiration. He knew that this declaration would let his associates know that she was off-limits to whatever pranks they might consider in the future.

"Any other suggestions?" Eric asked the room.

"There are a group of mutants who live underground in New York. I will communicate with them and see if any of them has an interdimensional ability like that of Andrew." Orroro said from her chair.

"Good, I too will search for mutants with such abilities. With our combined efforts, perhaps we can bring your children home quickly." Eric said, sparing a glance toward Charles and Emma.

"Other business?" Eric asked after a moment of silence.

"We will be leaving this afternoon if you have no more need of us." Emma said, dividing her attention between Charles and Eric.

"We will keep you apprised of any developments as they happen." Charles said with assurance.

"What about Gambit?" Lance asked, as he saw that the meeting was about to end.

"What about him?" Eric asked with genuine curiosity.

"He's dead. Aren't you going to do something?" Lance asked, not knowing exactly what he wanted done.

"I notified the thieves guild of his death last night. They asked that I dispose of the body discretely." Eric said, obviously finished with the subject.

"But he was one of us. Shouldn't we... I dunno... honor him? Grieve?" Lance asked with emotion.

"Do as you like. I hardly knew the man. He was paid well for the risks he took and the odds finally caught up with him... I'm sorry. That's all the eulogy I have to give." Eric said and sat down beside Charles.

Lance looked hurt, lost, disillusioned, but remained silent.

Kitty noticed the look and understood his feelings. She discreetly walked to Lance's side and put an arm around him to let him know he wasn't alone.

"If there is nothing else then let's see what we can do to retrieve our children." Charles said to the group.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dawn caught Hank as he was walking from the meeting.

"Yes Miss Summers?" Hank asked as he stopped in the hallway.

"I need to know if you have any of Alan's blood... or anything else. I may need it for my spell and wanted to ask you before it was too late." Dawn said quietly, realizing how gruesome the request seemed.

"Come with me to MedLab and we'll see what we can find." Hank said and led the way.

## **[Chapter 2: With Opened Eyes]**

Marie and Bobby walked from the meeting silently. The enormity of the past day was still catching up with both of them.

"Can I kiss you?" Bobby asked quietly.

"You know what will happen." Marie said with warning.

"I know. I'm just feeling very alone and need a kiss... if you don't mind." Bobby asked with hesitation.

Marie nodded and pulled Bobby into her arms.

Bobby moved carefully into the kiss and closed his eyes.

The kiss was brief, only a few seconds, but Marie was flooded with Bobby's powers and thoughts. She pulled away, not used to feeling so... assaulted... by the thoughts of someone when she absorbed their abilities.

Bobby looked at her with worry and asked, "Did I do something wrong?"

"No Bobby, you're just so upset that I got a big fistful of your thoughts when we touched... that's never happened before." Marie said as she sorted through the foreign images in her mind.

Bobby went pale as he realized what she just said.

"YOU FUCKER! YOU COMPLETE PRICK!" Marie screamed and took two steps back.

"Marie, I can explain..." Bobby began, then trailed off as he noticed most of the X-men standing and watching.

"YOU USED ME! I WAS YOUR COVER SO NO ONE WOULD KNOW THAT YOU'RE GAY!" Marie screamed with hurt and accusation.

"It's not like that." Bobby said with a blush that started at his toes.

"Oh God! And you dumped John... YOU DIDN'T EVEN HAVE THE DECENCY TO DUMP HIM! You sonofabitch! You just left him hanging!" Marie screamed, then noticed John watching from the doorway of the dining room.

"John, will you come here?" Marie asked quietly, which seemed an extreme change from her screaming of a moment before.

John walked to her spellbound.

Marie pulled him close and pressed her gloved hand against the back of his head to rest his head on her shoulder.

"He used me too John. He thought by being with the untouchable girl, he could hide who he was from everyone. I didn't know John, I swear. I never would have looked at him if I had a clue that you were together." Marie said tenderly to John, but everyone in the hall could hear clearly.

"You... you can see his thoughts?" John asked carefully.

"Yeah, I've got a gut full of them. Is there anything you want to know?" Marie offered with tenderness.

"Did he ever love me?" John asked and pulled back to look at her with tearful eyes.

"No. Bobby never loved anyone but himself." Marie said and pulled John close again.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tara looked on with worry as Dawn went from book to book frantically searching.

"Please Dawn. Come down stairs and eat something, you need to take a break." Tara said with pleading.

"I can't. If I stop, I'll have to go back through all this again. Over half these books are written in demon languages and I have to translate the headings and sometimes the entire page before the spell to find out if it's what I need... I'll have something later." Dawn said and went back to work.

Tara moved closer behind Dawn and asked, "Is there anything I can do to help?"

Dawn stopped and looked up to see the concern in Tara's eyes.

"Yeah, if you wouldn't mind, you could bring me some of that food you were talking about. I can't leave what I'm doing but I can eat something while I'm doing it." Dawn said and let her love show in her expression.

Tara nodded quickly and left the room.

[I don't deserve her... but I will do my best to be worthy and never cause her pain.] Dawn thought and returned to her research.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mystique was walking outside, trying to get away from the conflicts in the mansion that were, frankly, none of her concern.

She heard a sound and noticed two people on the roof of the mansion. She could just make out that one of them was Kurt and decided to investigate.

Assuming the form of a large bird, she flew to the roof and landed well out of their sight, then in the form of a cat, she made her way stealthily to listen to the conversation of the two men.

"You know that cutting yourself doesn't take the pain away." Warren whispered, still holding tight in the embrace.

"It is my forgiveness." Kurt said in a tearful voice.

"It is mutilation... I understand, but this isn't the way." Warren said in as soft a tone as he could manage.

"You couldn't understand." Kurt said and pulled away.

Warren pulled open his shirt to reveal a patch of skin crisscrossed with a basket weave pattern of scarification. After waiting for a moment to be sure that Kurt had seen, he closed his shirt again and said in a whisper, "Mine weren't for forgiveness, my were to prove to myself that I could still feel."

Kurt stood in shock, never knowing that anyone but he had ever done such a thing.

"Kurt, it took me a few years of therapy to get past it but now I understand... you're hurting... inside. By hurting outside, you make the pain real and release it... the problem with that is, that when you're done,

whatever hurt you is still there... and still hurting you... it's never enough." Warren said sadly and moved cautiously to take hold of Kurt again.

"How can you know? What pain do you have? You are beautiful, like an angel. Not a hideous demon like me." Kurt finished with loathing.

"That's how. You assume that you can understand me and my life by my appearance. People may look at you and think 'Demon' and run away, but they look at me and think 'Angel' and pretend to like me. Given the choice between loneliness of being shunned and false friends who want to be seen with me... I don't know... Both are pretty lonely." Warren finished sadly.

"Mien mutter, she left me to die because I am this monster. The people of the circus, they find me unt take me in." Kurt said in desperation.

"And my parents died in a plane crash. They were very wealthy and when they died I hadn't seen them in nearly a month. I can't remember anytime in my life when I sat down with them as a family and did... anything. I was raised by a governess and the household staff. I'm not comparing my pain to yours, it's like trying to compare apples to sheet metal. I'm just saying that I have my own pain that drives me, and I understand yours... as much as any other person can." Warren said truthfully.

After a long minute of silence Warren said, "My name is Warren, I don't think we've been introduced."

"I am Kurt, known to many as 'The Amazing Nightcrawler'." Kurt said in a practiced tone.

"Kurt, will you let me show you another way to deal with the pain? I can't promise that it will be easy, but it will be much healthier than this." Warren said and motioned to the knife.

"I cannot promise but to try." Kurt said shyly.

"I'll never ask for more than you can give. Would you like for me to fly you down?" Warren asked, just wondering how Kurt had managed to get on the roof.

"I can teleport." Kurt said in response to Warren's curious look.

"Okay. But would you *like* to fly with me? Flying is more fun when I'm not alone." Warren asked hopefully.



"Yah, zat would be good." Kurt said shyly.

Warren opened his arms to Kurt and when they were in a firm embrace, Warren lifted them into the morning sky.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mystique watched the events unfold before her and finally changed back to her true form.

[You were loved. I loved you so much That I gave you away to protect you.] She thought sadly before changing again and flying away.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Marie, can we talk?" Bobby asked hesitantly from the doorway of the common room where she sat alone.

"Go away Bobby." She said with disgust.

"Marie, I'm sorry. Please let me explain..." Bobby began but was interrupted.

"No Bobby, let me explain. I didn't just pick up stuff about me and John. I know what you did to your brother. If you don't want everyone you ever met to know about that, you'll stay away from me." Marie said with menace and turned away.

Bobby went pale, but couldn't leave it like that.

"Marie, we were just kids... you know it didn't mean anything. It was just messing around." Bobby began his standard rationalization.

Marie thought for a moment before saying, "Its called rape."

### **[Chapter 3: Unacceptable Losses]**

The professor and Eric were in the office when the alarm sounded.

"Is that a biohazard alarm?" Eric asked in confirmation.

"Yes, Eric, will you get us out of the mansion as quickly as possible, I'm going to contact everyone and let them know to get out." Charles said quickly then focused his mind to reach each person in the mansion.

//Everyone, evacuate the mansion. There has been a leak in the BioLab and the automatic defenses will seal the mansion within minutes.// Charles sent with as much calm as he could manage as Eric pushed his wheelchair quickly down the hallway.

"Professor, what has happened?" Orroro asked in a panic as she stood by the main door to guide people out the exit.

"I don't know. The system is automatic. Something has been released in the BioLab. Once we're outside, I'll see what I can discover." The Professor said as he was pushed quickly out of the room.

The Professor noticed that Kurt was standing with everyone else in front of the mansion and said, "Kurt, can you get Artie and Clarissa to safety? They are in Artie's room."

"Yes, Herr Professor." Kurt said and vanished in a bamf.

Charles cast his telepathy about to find Xander furiously trying to release Remy from the halo.

//Mr. Harris, you must leave immediately or you will not be leaving at all.// The Professor sent with some pain at the thought of leaving Remy.

Xander heard the words in his mind and said aloud, "You save us both or we both stay, I'm not leaving Remy."

"Xander, go." Remy said and tried to push Xander's hands away.

"Forget it Cajun. We're in this together. I'm not going to lose you now." Xander said and continued to work on the halo despite Remy's efforts.

"Herr Professor. The children are safe." Kurt said quickly and pointed at Artie and Clarissa.

"Good, thank you Kurt." Professor Xavier said as he saw the doors in the MedLab seal through Xander's eye.

"What about Xander?" Alex said as he ran to the Professor.

"He and Remy are in MedLab, they couldn't release Remy from the halo before the lower level sealed itself." The Professor said grimly.

"Herr Professor, I can get to zem." Kurt offered.

"No Kurt, if the doors have sealed, then there is a possibility of contagion... Everyone, look around and see if anyone is missing." The Professor called vocally while trying to make some sort of connection to Hank.

After a few frantic minutes of milling about, Orroro announced, "Logan, Hank, Jean, Remy and Xander are missing. All the rest are accounted for."

"Don't worry about Logan, he's running an errand for me." The Professor said to Orroro then turned to Scott and said, "Scott, we need to gather a team to investigate the lower level. If Hank and Jean are alive, they will need to be taken to the Omega Chamber so the BioLab can be sterilized. Remy and Xander are still alive in MedLab, they will need to remain where they are until decontamination is complete. The threat of contagion is too great to consider releasing them until we can be absolutely certain that they aren't infected." the Professor said in a pained voice.

"Yes Professor, Nightcrawler, Angel..." Scott began when the Professor interrupted.

"They can't go. Warren's wings won't fit in a biohazard suit and Kurt might be startled and teleport which could release the contagion. Shadowcat won't be able to go either because she might be tempted to phase and could release the virus. We can't allow the possibility that the virus will be released... we will collapse the mansion on top of the lower level to contain the virus if need be."

Scott was surprised by the statement but finally nodded and said, "Tempest, Sprite, Iceman, Rogue and Colossus, we're going in to save our team members."

"I wish to help as well." Orroro said with strength.

"I know Storm, but your arm is broken. You stay here with Angel and Nightcrawler and protect those that are left of us from harm. The way things have been going the past few days... it's sure to come." Scott said in a tired voice before walking to his assembled team.

"Hey Bro, don't forget about me!" Alex said as he ran to the team that was heading into the mansion.

"No Alex. Dawn and I are going in... and there is a chance we may not be coming out. I need for you to stay. You are the last of our family, I need to know that one of us is safe. Please, do this for me." Scott said with pleading in his voice.

"Scott..." Alex began, then nodded and walked back to the group surrounding the Professor.

//There are emergency biohazard suits in the supply room next to my office. You can take the main elevator down, but until the contamination is contained, the elevator will not go back up.// The Professor said to their retreating forms.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Rogue, can we talk?" Iceman asked as he put on his biohazard suit.

"You want talk, I'll give you talk. We're on this team and I will fight to defend you if I need to, you don't have to worry about that. But outside of team business, shut. up. and. leave. me. alone." she said with fury in her eyes, then walked away, fastening the hood of her biosuit.

Tara and Dawn put on their suits and shared a brief but heartfelt kiss before fastening their respective hoods.

Scott and Colossus finished suiting up and Scott said, "Peter, let me look over your suit, it seems too small for you."

Peter slowly turned as Scott inspected the suit and finally said, "Take it off, the seals are stretched. One wrong move and they'll give. You won't be any help to us dead."

Peter's eyes went big at the statement and he began to take off the suit.

"Thanks for trying Peter, I know you want to help. Go wait with the Professor, we're about to go." Scott said with respect.

Peter nodded and left the room.

"Okay team, let's go and get 'em." Scott said and led the way to the main elevator.

\* \* \* \* \*

//Professor? Can you tell me what's going on?// Xander asked, as he tried to make the telepathy work.

//You are both sealed in that room. A virus has escaped in the BioLab and you cannot be released until the lower level has been sterilized.// the Professor sent with an undercurrent of dread.

//What else?// Xander sent with a tone of gruffness.

//If it is the virus that infected Remy's world, and you have been infected, there is no known cure.// the Professor sent with sorrow.

Xander looked at Remy who was getting up off the bed and thought,  
//What can we do?//

//Nothing. Scott and his team will be to you soon, but they won't be able to open your room. If you aren't already infected, that would increase your possibility of infection.// the Professor thought gravely.

//Then why are they coming down if they can't help us?// Xander asked reasonably.

//For Hank and Jean... if they are alive, they will need to be moved out of the BioLab before sterilization can begin.// the Professor sent with pain.

//So, will we be out of here by tonight?// Xander asked with hope.

//I wouldn't make any plans for the next week if I were you Mr. Harris.// the Professor sent, trying to give an undertone of humor.

//What happens at the end of that week?// Xander asked with dread.

//Either you'll be alive or dead.// the Professor sent and tried to flood the link with reassurance.

//Don't worry Professor. I've faced death so many times that 'Big D' and I are getting to be chums... Is there going to be any way to feed us for the next week?// Xander thought to ask.

//I'm afraid you'll have to make due with the emergency rations in the supply cabinet by the door. It should be fully stocked with enough food for a month.// the Professor said reassuringly.

//We're only signed up for one week. Then we're outta here.// Xander said definitely.

//It's a deal. One week, then I'll take you both out to dinner anywhere you want to go.// Charles thought with a fond smile.

//We'll take you up on that.// Xander sent back with his own smile.

//I must attend to Scott and the team, take care of each other.// the Professor sent with false enthusiasm.

//Yeah, say hi to everyone from me.// Xander finished weakly as he felt the link go silent.

\* \* \* \* \*

Scott and the team stepped off the elevator into silence. The biosuits made it nearly impossible to hear anyway but the sterile hallway with steel walls made the silence seem deafening.

Scott couldn't bring himself to break the silence so he motioned for the team to follow him down the hallway and to their first stop, the BioLab.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Xander, you being quiet." Remy said suspiciously.

"I've been talking to the Professor." Xander said honestly.

"What he be sayin?" Remy asked with interest and turned to face Xander.

"He says that a virus escaped in the BioLab and it could be the same one that killed everyone on your world." Xander said gently.

"We gonna die?" Remy asked in a seemingly unconcerned voice.

"Either we will or we won't. The room sealed up, we just don't know if it sealed something out or something in. If we're still alive this time next week, then it sealed something out." Xander said and hopped up on the bed beside Remy.

"Will you help Remy take off de bandages? Remy want to see you before..." Remy said and left the sentence hanging.

"Yeah. But don't get your hopes up too much Cajun. I've been fighting demons for seven years... I'm a little banged up." Xander said shyly as he began to remove Remy's bandages.

"Remy don care if you look like de elephant man. Jus need to know what you look like to put a face wit de voice." Remy said and waited for Xander to finish unwrapping the bandage.

"Okay. Hang on Remy, I'm going to turn down the lights so you don't get blinded... why don't you lay down. This might make you dizzy or sick to your stomach after being blind for so long." Xander said and moved to dim the lights.

"How you know bout stuff like dat?" Remy asked and laid back on the bed.

"Because my best friend was having new eyes surgically implanted, I did some research to help him out." Xander said and moved to Remy's side.

"Your frien, he be a lucky man." Remy said honestly.

"I'm the lucky one, to have found a friend like him... hold still, I'm going to remove the gauze pads from over your eyes. Just keep them closed for a second and I'm going to wash them off." Xander said and wet a cloth at the sink.

"Here we go... keep them closed... there, all clean... open your eyes slowly, if the light's still too bright, tell me and I'll turn it down some more." Xander said and watched.

Remy opened his eyes slowly and looked at Xander.

"You look good." Remy said with a tiny smile.

"And that has to be the sweetest compliment that I've heard in my life Cajun." Xander said with joy as he looked into the deep jade green eyes looking back at him.

Remy tried to sit up, then fell back onto the bed.

"Xander was right bout de dizzy ting." Remy said between deep breaths.

"So just stay laying down for a few minutes and tell me what it's like." Xander asked curiously.

"It like being let loose from a prison... it like bein alive... it like being in love..." Remy finished shyly.

"So they work okay? I mean your vision isn't blurry or anything?" Xander asked carefully.

"Dey work fine. How do dey look?" Remy asked curiously.

"Beautiful. You have two beautiful jade green eyes... I never thought to ask, what color were your eyes before?"

"Dey be red, an de white part be black. Das why de 'Friends of Humanity' cut dem out." Remy said without emotion.

"Sorry Remy, I just never saw you with eyes and didn't know. If I were going to pick a color for your eyes, it would be this one. Your eyes look great with your hair... hey, there's a mirror over here on the side of this cabinet, I'll help you over and you can see." Xander finished with excitement.

After a minute of adjusting to walking again, Remy made his way to the mirror with Xander's help.

"Xander be right. Dey do look good." Remy said and looked to Xander with a happy smile.

\* \* \* \* \*

The team reached the BioLab and received instructions telepathically how to gain access. After punching in the codes, going through a door, punching



in more codes, and going through another door they finally came upon the sprawled bodies of Hank and Jean.

//I can't tell if they're alive or dead from inside this suit.// Cyclops thought in frustration.

//Find something glass and hold it under the nose to see if it fogs.// the Professor sent quickly.

Cyclops found a glass microscope slide and held it under Hank's nose to reveal strong steady breaths.

//Hank's alive.// Cyclops thought with relief.

//But Jean isn't.// Cyclops thought with despair, then quickly sent, //She's alive, her breathing is just very slight.//

//Get them both to the Omega Chamber, then we can begin sterilization procedures.// the Professor sent to the entire team.

Bobby and Scott took hold of Hank as Marie, Dawn and Tara took Jean and they began to haul them out of BioLab. Once out of the second door Dawn screamed to be heard, "WHERE ARE WE GOING?"

//Follow this corridor to the end and turn left. The Omega Chamber is at the end of the hallway.// the Professor's voice replied in a calm tone.

"THANK YOU!" Dawn screamed and received a chuckle through the telepathic link.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Xander, Remy got a question for you." Remy said carefully and moved to sit in a chair.

"Go ahead." Xander said and turned to face Remy.

"You not try to protect Remy. When we first meet, you tell Remy where de food be and leave him to it. Jus now, you tell de truth, you don dance around an make it a story." Remy said in confusion.

"Yeah, what's your question?" Xander asked, not understanding.

"Why?" Remy asked carefully.

"Because you can handle honesty and truth. You're a strong person and I respect you. When I first met you I could tell that you had dignity and self-respect, and if I was in your position, I would want to have the same dignity. Since then, I don't pull any punches with you, I know you can handle the truth. If you ever want me to lie to you to spare your feelings, you'll have to tell me, because I plan to be honest with you." Xander said honestly.

"No, dat okay. Remy like de truth. It make life easier when you don have to try an know what people be meanin besides what dey be sayin." Remy said plainly.

"Good. Then let me be honest and tell you that you need a bath Cajun. You haven't washed since you've been in MedLab and you're starting to smell ripe." Xander said without teasing.

"Dat be a little too honest for Remy." he said with a smile to show that he wasn't really offended.

"We don't have a shower down here but there is a bathroom, so you can get cleaned up. When you're done, I'll do the same. I'm not feeling too fresh either.

Remy nodded and went to the bathroom.

\* \* \* \* \*

The team arranged Jean and Hank on the floor of the huge Omega Chamber.

"What is this place?" Dawn asked loudly to be heard by Scott.

"It is a containment room. Like a prison cell for the most powerful mutants known, the Omega Class mutants. It can be sealed completely from the rest of the lower level and if need be, can be ejected into a 200 meter deep shaft below us and the shaft will fill with dirt and rocks behind it." Scott said and stood.

//Sprite, stay with your uncle Hank, Rogue, stay with Jean. Cyclops and Iceman, return to the BioLab to try and identify the virus that escaped.

Tempest, go to the MedLab, I believe that Mr. Harris and Mr. LeBeau would enjoy a visit.// the Professor sent to the team.

\* \* \* \* \*

Remy walked out of the bathroom, wearing the hospital gown.

"Here you go Cajun, now you don't have to walk around with your ass hanging out." Xander said and threw some surgical scrubs to Remy.

"You not like looking at Remy's ass?" Remy asked with mock hurt.

"I never said that. It is a fine ass, superior to most I've seen. I just thought you would want to keep it warm." Xander said with a smile.

Remy pulled on the pants and said, "Dat be a good idea."

There was a tapping on the window and both turned to see the yellow-suited Dawn looking in.

"Dawn!" Xander said loudly, but there was no way she could hear.

After long moments of trying to gesture and make themselves understood, Xander finally pointed to himself and Remy then made an 'Okay' symbol with his forefinger and thumb.

Dawn responded with a thumbs up.

Remy moved closer to the window and pointed to his eyes.

Dawn put her hands to her face, as though she were gasping in surprise then she gave a little bounce of excitement and joy.

Both Remy and Xander smiled at the gesture.

//Miss Summers wants you both to know how happy she is that Remy can see.// The Professor sent on her behalf.

"Tell her that we're glad to see her." Xander said outloud, determining that it was more polite than sending silently.

"An dat she be a beautiful sight to Remy's new eyes." Remy said aloud, following Xander's example.

Dawn put her head down and made a scuffing motion with her foot that indicated shyness.

"How are Hank and Jean?" Xander asked with concern.

//Alive. Once we know which virus escaped, we will have a better idea of what to do for them.// the Professor said as Dawn looked on seriously and nodded.

Dawn made a 'bye-bye' wave and walked away from the MedLab

Xander and Remy both mimicked her motion and watched her leave.

"She a beauty." Remy said and walked to a chair.

"Yeah. I've known her all her life. She's really great." Xander said fondly.

"So she from your world?" Remy asked, getting comfortable in his chair.

"Yeah. Dawn and Andrew... are both from my world... I'm so worried about him." Xander said and threw himself onto the bed in the middle of the room.

"Tell Remy bout what happen?" Remy asked with concern showing in his eyes.

"There was an explosion. Orroro says that someone rigged the data warehouse to explode if anyone tried to infiltrate it. Alan caught the explosion full force... he lost a leg, and Hank said that he was beyond help. His internal organs were so messed up that there wasn't anything Hank could do to save him. Andrew stayed by his side for over an hour and then ported them out without a word to anyone... that was last night. We haven't heard from him since." Xander said and his eye began to close sleepily.

"When be de las time Xander get some sleep?" Remy asked quietly.

"Dunno. I fell asleep a few times in the chair by your bed last night... before that... I guess I haven't really slept since your surgery." Xander said with his eye closed.

"Xander sleep. Remy keep watch." Remy said quietly and walked to the control to dim the lights further.

"Thanks Cajun. Good... Friend..." Xander said as he drifted off.

[Never been a frien before. Don know how to do it. But Remy will be a frien for Xander. Maybe more...] Remy thought as he settled into a chair and closed his eyes.

## **[Chapter 4: Mutable Relief]**

//Cyclops, Iceman, move around the room carefully and try to find anything that will identify the escaped virus.// the Professor sent to the pair.

//Could this broken bottle with the biohazard symbol on the label be it?// Cyclops asked suspiciously, because it's never that easy.

The professor looked through Scott's eyes and thought, //That would be it. 4892B4E-2 go to the computer and pull up the detail report on that virus.

Scott walked to the computer and said in frustration, //I can't type in these gloves.//

//Do your best, use a pencil and the hunt and peck method of typing if that is easier.// The Professor sent, watching Scott's movements carefully.

//I've got it... this isn't the bad one, is it?// Scott asked with hope.

//No, we seem to have avoided the worst case scenario... All team members return to the BioLab for sterilization.// The Professor sent with relief.

//So what is it? Are Hank and Jean going to be alright?// Cyclops asked with worry.

//Quiet. All of you. Here is what I know. The virus that was released was an attempt to counteract the virus that contaminated Alan and Remy's world. The nature of this virus was to reinforce and strengthen the host in the same manner that the original virus had been designed to destroy the host. The theory was that this virus could be introduced into an infected individual to strengthen them until both viruses could be purged from their systems naturally. However the counter-virus was too unstable to be useable. That was the etymology of the first version of the counter-virus. Hank was apparently working on version two when the accident occurred. He hadn't made any significant notes as to it's nature or stability, so we will have to assume the worst and maintain full containment protocols. The good news is that the first version of the virus was projected to be non-lethal to the host and should not be contagious after a few days.// the Professor sent to everyone with relief.

//What's going to happen to Hank and Jean?// Alex asked the Professor timidly.

//We'll all find out together. This virus is intended to seek out the X-gene and boost the immunity and healing factor of the host. What it will actually do is anyone's guess.// the Professor sent to all.

//What do we do now?// Cyclops asked as the last of his team gathered in the BioLab.

//Your team needs to go into the outer room of the BioLab.// the Professor sent to the team.

Once the team were assembled in the room the Professor sent, //Now close both doors and type the following code into the keypad by the exit door. 999999\*4E\*1A enter//

Cyclops pressed the keypad and the lighting of the room changed to a deep purple glow.

A fine mist filled the room, then water began spraying down.

The team looked out the windows to see that the hallway was also flooded with mist and water, but the BioLab itself was not.

//???// Was all that Cyclops could think to send.

//Decontamination. When the decontamination is complete, your team will be able to remove their suits and return to the main level of the mansion. The code I gave you excluded the main BioLab and MedLab from the decontamination. The decontamination evacuates all the oxygen as part of the sterilization process, so Xander and Remy will be spared and the BioLab will be dealt with later since we may have need of a sample of the virus at a later date. You will all need to be patient while the decontamination cycle completes, it takes fifteen minutes.// the Professor sent with assurance.

\* \* \* \* \*

"What was it like down there?" Alex asked as Scott walked out of the mansion.

"Think of your worst nightmare, then put two of your closest friends looking like they're dead into the picture." Scott said and hugged his brother tightly.

"It's okay Bro, the Prof says that Jean and Hank are alive and the virus was made to make them stronger." Alex said with reassurance.

"I know, it's just that... I've cared for Jean for so long... to see her like that nearly killed me. I'm glad you're here Alex, all of it, it's getting to be too much. Alan, Andrew, the virus, the kids, now this..." Scott said and held tighter as he began crying.

"I've got you bro. Come on." Alex said quietly and led Scott back into the mansion.

"What about Uncle Hank? Can I do anything to help him?" Tara asked as she held tightly to Dawn.

"Yes Tara. We'll take turns staying with Hank and Jean until the virus has worked out of their systems. Once they are no longer contagious we can take them to the MedLab and make them more comfortable. For now, we'll have to keep them in the Omega Chamber and keep Mr. Harris and Mr. LeBeau confined." The Professor said calmly.

"How soon will we know if Xander and Remy are infected?" Tara asked cautiously.

"Since I now know which virus has been released, I can give a more specific estimate of that. If they have been infected, they will exhibit symptoms within twenty-four hours. By this time tomorrow they should be released if they are uninfected." The Professor said introspectively.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Remy?" Xander said in confusion as he awoke.

"Xander, you miss de show. All de lights turn blue an it rain in de hallway." Remy said from his chair.

"Have you heard anything about Hank and Jean?" Xander asked with worry.

"Non, de Professor don say nothin. Why don you call him and fine out?" Remy asked quietly.



"Professor? Are Hank and Jean okay?" Xander asked aloud as he sat up on the bed.

//They remain unconscious. We have reason to hope that they will be fine, perhaps healthier than before.// The Professor sent to both men.

"Good. Are we still sentenced to a week of confinement?" Xander asked as he looked toward Remy.

//With time served, you should only have to remain for another fifteen hours provided that neither of you exhibit symptoms of infection.// The Professor sent happily.

"Fifteen hours is no problem. We'll just hang out for a while, it'll be like a day off... but without television." Xander ended in a sour tone.

//I believe the cavemen were able to survive weeks at a time without television Mr. Harris. You should be able to survive one day.// The Professor sent in a teasing tone.

"Yeah, but they had dinosaurs to play with..." Xander said with a playful smile.

//Deal Mr. Harris. Just deal.// The Professor sent before letting the link fall silent.

\* \* \* \* \*

//Professor, something's wrong with Uncle Hank!// Tara called mentally.

//Be calm Tara, tell me what's wrong.// The Professor sent and turned his full attention to Tara.

//He's started grunting and growling and is thrashing around... I don't know what to do to help him.// Tara sent with fear flooding the link.

//Get out of there Tara. I will send someone to help your Uncle Hank, in his current state he could hurt you without knowing.// the Professor sent with concern.

//Yes Professor, as long as you help him.// Tara sent as she left the Omega Chamber.

\* \* \* \* \*

//Charles, can you see?// Eric called mentally.

//Yes Eric-love, the virus appears to be changing him physically. It must be quite painful, I'd like to give him something for the pain.// Charles said hesitantly.

//I don't think he's feeling anything, he shows no signs of consciousness and anything you give him could react badly to his changing physiology.// Eric speculated.

//I'll trust your judgment, but if he regains consciousness, we will give him something immediately. I can't bear to think of him suffering.// Charles sent with emotional pain.

//I know Charles. I'll get the necessary things together in case they are needed.// Eric sent with love for the compassion of his lover.

//Before you do that, focus on Jean for a moment.// Charles sent quickly.

Eric focused his attention on Jean who lay silently.

//The virus doesn't seem to be having the same effect on Jean.// Charles sent curiously.

//Perhaps it is dependent on the X-gene as to how the effect of the virus manifests.// Eric sent speculatively.

//Perhaps.// Charles sent in contemplation as Eric left the room to get the pain reliever for Hank.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Dawn?" Tara asked from the doorway.

"In here. I think I've found something!" Dawn said with excitement.

"What did you find?" Tara asked and moved to stand behind Dawn.

"I have a link to Buffy. When I was created, it was by using Buffy as a template. If we can get everything we need together, we should be able to open a doorway to her."

"What do we need?" Tara asked carefully.

"That's the hard part. This is a spell written in a demon language, meant to be used by demons. We need a lot of ingredients that you can't find at the local grocery store... but it may be a way to get the children back." Dawn said and sat back with joy.

"Then let's tell the Professor, he may be able to help us get what we need." Tara said with a happy smile.

"Hold on for a little bit. I need to finish translating this and make a list of ingredients. I can probably get it done in a day." Dawn said confidently.

"Can I help?" Tara asked hopefully.

"Yeah. As I read it, you write it down. This spell is long and complicated, plus we'll have to adapt it for this dimension." Dawn said in thought.

"So it was meant for your home dimension?" Tara asked with a little worry.

Dawn looked up with apprehension and said, "No, it's for a hell dimension, it's a demon invocation to create a doorway."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Mr. Harris, Mr. LeBeau, I wanted to be here personally for your release from captivity." Charles said happily as he entered the MedLab.

"Thanks warden, you still going to take us out to dinner?" Xander asked carefully.

"Of course Mr. Harris. This evening the three of us will enjoy a dinner of your choosing. Just decide where you want to go and let me know." The Professor said with a smile.

"Guillioime's Oyster Bar." Xander said with a smile.

"I'm afraid I don't know where that is." The Professor said hesitantly.

"It's not far from here and Remy says it has some of the best authentic Louisiana cooking in the state." Xander said happily.

"As you like Mr. Harris, Mr. LeBeau. Be ready to leave at six." The Professor said and turned to leave, feeling a note of dread at the thought of authentic Louisiana cooking.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Professor had determined that Hank and Jean were no longer infectious so Scott was taking his turn watching them both, enjoying being able to do so without the biosuit.

//Professor, Hank is waking up.// Scott called with excitement.

//On my way.// the Professor sent quickly.

"What happened?" Hank asked in confusion.

"There was an accident. One of the viruses escaped." Scott said quietly.

"The Omega Chamber? Did we lose containment?" Hank asked as he looked around in confusion.

"No, but we had to act as if we did, just in case. We didn't know which virus had escaped." Scott said seriously.

Hank looked up in panic and asked, "Which one was it?"

"4892B4E-2." Scott said, knowing that the name of that virus would be etched in his mind forever.

"What did it do? I only just created it and hadn't mapped it's effect." Hank asked curiously.

Scott looked at Hank's arm and waited for Hank to follow his gaze.

After a long startled examination of his blue fur, claw-like hands and feet and feeling his face to reveal fang-like teeth Hank said, "My God. I'm... I'm... what am I?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Bobby laid on his bed and thought about the events of the past few days.

Alan and Andrew were gone. That kinda sucked. They were always nice.

The kids were gone...

People all over the place were banged up, shot, virus infected. Too bad for them.

Marie had basically 'outed' him to the X-men, but no one seemed to care. He had still been included on the team to help on the lower level and no one but Marie seemed to be upset with him about anything.

Finally he decided that whatever problem Marie had, was her problem and he would just avoid her for a while and she would get over it.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Professor?" Xander asked from the doorway of the office.

"Mr. Harris... Mr. LeBeau, please come in and sit down. What can I do for you?" the Professor asked and moved his wheelchair around the desk to sit before the men.

"We need to borrow a car." Xander said shyly.

"Mr. Harris, neither of you have documented legal identities in this dimension. It would be highly inadvisable for you to drive." The Professor said firmly.

"Then we need a driver too. We need to go to Perth Amboy, New Jersey." Xander said carefully.

"I'm afraid it would be rude to visit Mrs. Jeffers unannounced. Call ahead and ask if you can visit tomorrow. If you would like, I'll have someone drive you in the morning." The Professor said with a knowing smile.

"Have you been peeking?" Xander asked in an accusing tone that was only half-serious.

"Not at all. Mr. Summers... Alex, came to me and volunteered to drive you there when you got out of MedLab." The Professor explained calmly.

"Good. Then we'll get with Alex and leave tomorrow... and that way we don't have to miss our dinner tonight." Xander said with a smile.

"About that, would you mind if Eric accompanied us?" Charles asked, a bit timidly.

"No, you Remy?" Xander asked over his shoulder.

"Non, don know de man." Remy said honestly.

"Eric has an... abundant... personality that some find to be off-putting, but he is a good friend and happens to enjoy authentic Louisiana cooking." Charles finished with a fond smile.

"Good, the four of us at six. It's a date." Xander said, then noticed the looks of question in both Remy and Charles' eyes.

"Shut up." Xander said sharply and walked out of the room.

Remy cast an amused glance to the Professor before following Xander.

## *[Chapter 5: Self-Image and Self-Deception]*

"I'm a monster." Hank said in a tearful voice as he looked in the mirror.

"You're a mutant." Scott said in a gentle tone.

"Leave me alone." Hank said and pointed toward the door.

"Hank. Please don't..." Scott began.

"Leave!" Hank demanded and let loose an animalistic growl.

Scott hung his head and left the room.

As he stood in the hallway outside he saw the light go off under Hank's door then heard the sound of horrible, gut wrenching sobs.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Scott?" Jean said as she opened her eyes.

"No Jean, it's Alex... how are you doing?" Alex asked carefully.

"Wonderful... I feel... everything." //Professor, I'm awake and feeling fine.// //Scott, I'm awake. You don't have to worry, I'm okay.// //Orroro, thanks for being concerned, I'm fine now.// Jean said and sent simultaneously.

"Good, we were all worried about you." Alex said with relief.

"I know Alex, and thank you for that." Jean said as she telekinetically lifted herself to her feet.

"Wow, the powers are really working." Alex said with wide eyes.

"Yes. If you'll excuse me, I have a few things I need to take care of." Jean said and walked out of the Omega Chamber as if only the slightest thread of gravity was holding her down.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Dawn?" Jean asked as she knocked on the door.

"Jean?" Dawn asked in surprise as she opened the door joyfully.

"I'm all better now." Jean said with a smile as she accepted the heart-felt hug from Dawn.

Tara looked on with a shy smile and said, "I'm glad you're better."

"Thank you Tara... I came up here to help you with your work." Jean said and moved into the room.

"You know about magic?" Dawn asked with surprise.

"I know about Shi'ir science... it turns out to be basically the same thing." Jean said as she looked over the text that Dawn was working on.

Dawn and Tara watched silently as Jean quickly read the pages before her.

"This won't work. It will create a spatial claustrophobia that will have an escalating azimuth potential that cannot be contained by this dimension." Jean said absently as she looked through the books before her.

"Could you try that in the witchcraft for dummies version?" Dawn asked, feeling totally outclassed.

"Sorry Dawn, I was using some Shi'ir formulae against the spell and got caught up... it will basically be a beacon to every demon within twenty-six dimensions announcing that there is a free buffet waiting. The spell is a trap to get people to use it so they can be easily conquered." Jean said simply.

"Well, if you can read these spells so well, can you help us get the kids home?" Dawn asked with hope.

Jean thought for a moment then said, "Yes, I'll need Xander. He's a full human and that is his native dimension... and... the ingredients are going to be a challenge."

"I know. There aren't many magic supply stores around here, I mean *real* ones." Dawn said in acceptance.

"If only it were that simple. We are going to need some demon components for this spell... luckily we have the rarest of the components that we'll need." Jean finished with a smile.



"What is that?" Dawn asked in wonder.

"An interdimensional key."

\* \* \* \* \*

Scott sat in the Professor's office and waited for the Professor to look up from his work and acknowledge him.

"What can I help you with Scott?" The Professor finally asked.

"It's Hank, he's... I don't think he can deal with the change. He needs help and won't let me help him." Scott said with worry.

"I understand your concern. I can feel his despair from here, but until he is ready to accept help, we're going to have to leave him to deal with this in his own way. See that he is brought food and is offered help when you visit, but don't press him." Charles said in a considering tone.

"It doesn't seem like enough." Scott said sadly.

"I know, but until he is ready, nothing we can do will actually help him." Charles said firmly.

"Thank you Professor. I'll see that he is fed and knows that I'm available if he needs me." Scott said and got up to leave.

"Scott, would you run an errand for me tomorrow?" Charles asked carefully.

"Of course, what can I do for you?" Scott asked and took his seat again.

"Mr. Harris, Mr. LeBeau and Alex are going to Perth Amboy tomorrow. I would like for you to go along." Charles said, with a serious look.

"Sure, what do you need me to do?" Scott asked, eager to help.

"Enjoy the time with your brother and your friends. Things have been so serious and grave here of late that you need some time away. Take the day off." Charles said with a firm tone.

"You're right. The pressure doesn't have time to release before more pressure is added. I feel like I'm going to shatter." Scott said honestly.

"I know Scott. Take the day to relax. You deserve it. Take the Institute credit card and enjoy yourself. We can manage just fine for one day." Charles said with reassurance.

"Thank you Professor. Sometimes it's hard for me to give myself permission to relax." Scott said and got up to leave.

"Permission granted. Have a good time." The Professor said with a gentle smile.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Bobby?" A feminine voice came from the closed door.

"Jean? Come in." Bobby said with surprise.

"Yeah, I'm better now. We need to talk." Jean said seriously as she walked into the room.

"Sure, about what?" Bobby said as he sat up on his bed.

"About you. Whatever happened to me opened my telepathy fully. I know everything that is going on... and everything that happened before." Jean said seriously.

"Marie knows it all too." Bobby said with a shrug.

"What Marie saw was what happened, I saw why it happened." Jean said cryptically.

"So? It happened. It's over." Bobby said, masking his true emotions.

"Bobby, until you deal with this, you will never be able to feel anything for another person. You'll only ever be like this, caring just for your own self and own desires." Jean said carefully.

"It's worked fine up to now, why change?" Bobby asked as he laid back on the bed.

"It's only worked because it's kept you from being hurt. You are now at a stage in your life where you need to let people in and take chances... to become an adult." Jean said firmly.

"What if I don't want to?" Bobby asked, trying to contain his nervousness.

"I'm not giving you a choice. If you continue like this you are going to hurt someone worse than you already have. The path you are on ends with you dead or in prison. There is no happy ending for you. If it were just you, I might consider letting you deal with things in your own way but I'm doing this to protect all the people you're going to hurt on your way down. I care for these people and I won't let you hurt them." Jean said fiercely.

"Okay, I guess it doesn't matter anyway. Do what you need to do." Bobby said and crossed his arms behind his head.

Bobby looked around and noticed that he was back in his bedroom at home. He looked at himself to see that he was about four or five years old again.

His heart began to beat faster as he realized what was happening and he heard the heavy footsteps coming up the stairs.

[NOOOOOOOOOOO!] He screamed mentally.

\* \* \* \* \*

"This list of ingredients is impossible. I wouldn't be able to find some of these things in Sunnydale... and you could find *anything* there." Dawn said as she looked over the list.

"What about the places you found things in your home world... do they exist here?" Tara asked carefully.

"Yeah, some do. I can get the usual stuff, henbane, shrieking mandrake... stuff like that is no problem. But the demon things... Z'Nor blood, Grue's milk... I haven't got a clue of where to look in this dimension for stuff like that." Dawn said while shaking her head in frustration.

"Where would you get those things in your home dimension?" Tara asked quietly.

"Giles... he's a watcher. He can get just about anything from the watcher's council." Dawn said with excitement.

"So we just need to find the Mr. Giles from this dimension and get him to help." Tara said with a smile.

Dawn stopped and thought about Tara's words. After a long moment she voiced her thoughts, "Why would he *want* to help us?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Marie was walking down the hallway as she noticed Jean leaving Bobby's room, wiping tears from her eyes.

"What did he do to you?" Marie asked with immediate fury.

"Nothing Marie, calm down, he didn't do anything. I promise." Jean said as she finished wiping her eyes.

"Then why are you crying?" Marie asked in challenge.

"I'm about to do something that is wrong on so many levels that I can't even tell you. But you know half the story, and if you don't get the other half, you'll never get past this." Jean said hesitantly.

"What are you going to do?" Marie asked with worry at the vague statement.

"I'm going to show you why Bobby is the way he is." Jean said and motioned for Marie to follow her into a room.

\* \* \* \* \*

Alex, Remy and Xander were getting ready to leave when the Professor called to all three of them, //Gentlemen, would you mind if Scott were to accompany you on this trip?//

They all looked at each other, shrugged and shook their heads.

"Are we ready to go?" Scott asked, carrying a backpack.

"I guess that means we're getting predictable." Alex commented and motioned for Scott to 'come on'.

\* \* \* \* \*

Bobby awoke and his mind filled with the horror of the previous night.

Jean had shown him things that he had worked all his life to suppress. The pain, the humiliation, the fear... they all flooded into his mind as fresh as the first time they had happened.

"Are you ready for more?" Jean asked as she walked into the room.

"Oh God no. I'll do anything you want. Don't make me go through it again." Bobby begged as tears began flowing freely.

"It'll be better this time, I promise. Last night you had to watch and feel it all happen just like it did before. It was necessary to reveal all the things you had hidden over the years. Today you get to take control, say what you want, fight back, do what you wish you could have done before." Jean said helpfully.

Bobby sat in a daze as what she was saying began to sink in. "I can fight back?" he asked in a timid voice.

"Yes Bobby, you can scream, fight, run... It's your choice." Jean said somberly.

"Okay. Okay. I can do that." Bobby said and took a deep breath to relax.

"Lay back." Jean said in a commanding tone.

Bobby laid back and braced himself for the horror to come.

## **[Chapter 6: New Adventures on Familiar Roads]**

Xander and Remy sat in the back seat of the convertible and just watched as the road passed them by. All four of the men had been silent since leaving the mansion.

"Hey guys, what time do we need to be there?" Scott asked Xander and Remy.

"No particular time. I just asked if we could stop by today." Xander said loudly to be heard over the rushing wind

"Did she ask why?" Alex asked as he kept his attention on the road.

"Yes, I told her that Margaret did something nice for us and we wanted to talk to her about it." Xander said, then asked, "Can we stop somewhere and get some sunglasses? This wind is messing with my eye."

"Open the front flap of my backpack. I brought spares." Scott said to Xander in the back.

Xander opened the pouch to find three pairs of red sunglasses.

"I can understand bringing an extra pair... but three? Anal much?" Xander asked as he put the red sunglasses on.

"I brought them for you guys, just in case. Anyone else need some sunglasses?" Scott asked and looked around.

"Sure." Alex said and held out a hand.

"Tank you, Remy wan to protect de new eyes." Remy said as he accepted a pair of sunglasses from Xander.

"No problem. Why were you wanting to know when we're supposed to be there?" Xander asked Scott.

"I just thought we could stop for breakfast. I've got the Institute credit card and the Professor's permission to use it." Scott said with a smile.

"Four guys, a credit card, and the open road... the possibilities are endless." Xander said with a mischievous smile.

\* \* \* \* \*

"This is Rupert Giles, may I help you?" Giles said cautiously as he answered the phone.

"Mr. Giles, I am at the Xavier Institute in Westchester, New York. 'Vreggash Lorien K'T'norn T'Hoth Liebriefriew - Akash Tvaari Olsaang Tiembrew." A female voice said calmly before hanging up the phone.

Giles went pale as the woman on the phone spoke the words that would begin the spell to create a hellmouth.

"What is de problem, my watcher man?" Kendra asked with concern at his drastic reaction.

"We must go to Westchester, New York immediately. Apparently there is someone there who intends to release hell on earth." Giles said as he grabbed his ever-present rucksack from beside the door of the apartment he shared with his slayer.

"An dis be a job for Kendra, de Vampire Slayer?" Kendra asked as she grabbed her own bag, which was always packed and ready to go.

"Keeping that woman from opening the hellmouth is your job, if she opens it, closing it is mine." Giles said as he walked out the door.

\* \* \* \* \*

Bobby looked around his bedroom and noticed that it was smaller... he was taller, an adult.

He looked at his hand and concentrated his power. A sheath of ice covered his clenched fist.

He looked up suddenly as he heard the heavy footsteps on the stairs.

The temperature in the room began to drop as Bobby drew on more and more of his power. The fear was driving him to push his limits.

The door opened and his father filled the doorway.

"You know what time it is. Drop 'em." The man said with drunken nonchalance.

"No." Bobby said quietly, not in fear as much as suppressed fury and felt his power release just a little more.

"You givin me lip boy? I'm gonna show you what to do with those lips." The man said and walked closer.

"Stop." Bobby commanded in a voice that was between a growl and a whisper.

His father took another step and Bobby held up his hand and let loose the last of his control over his power. The ice covering his body shattered to reveal that his hand had become living ice.

Bobby looked his father in the eyes and said, "You're never going to hurt me again. I loved you and you hurt me. You made me so I couldn't love anyone ever again. I'm taking back everything you took from me."

Bobby lifted his hand toward his father and sent out a concentrated blast of ice that froze him solid. Then he remembered what he had done to his brother and said in realization, "You almost made me just like you."

Bobby balled up his fist and punched his father's jaw, then watched in satisfaction as his father fell backward to the floor and shattered into a hundred frozen chunks.

Bobby smiled at the feeling and walked over to sit on his bed.

The room melted around him and became his room at the mansion.

Bobby looked down to see that he *really* was made of ice. He looked to Jean in question.

"Without all that holding you back, you have greater access to your powers. I've just taken you through a very quick fix for your problem. I can't fix everything. I've allowed you this image to give you closure and opened your eyes to the pain. Marie understands what happened to you and may choose to either try to be your friend or avoid you. Either way, she doesn't hate you anymore. The rest is up to you, your brother, John, your life, now that you have a heart, follow it and do the right thing." Jean said and turned to leave.

"You sound like you're going away." Bobby said suspiciously.



"Not before time." Jean said and left the room.

Bobby sat back on his elbows and thought, [My brother... John... my life.] And began to cry.

\* \* \* \* \*

Marie walked into the common room and sat down in a daze.

"How are you doing this morning Marie?" Orroro asked as she entered the room.

"I... don't know." Marie said helplessly.

"Would you care to talk?" Orroro asked and took a seat beside her.

"Yeah, like if someone did something really bad, but it was because someone did something really bad to them, it would be like not his fault because he doesn't know any better... right?" Marie asked in a rush.

Orroro blinked, sat quietly, blinked again, then said, "If I understand any part of what you just said, I believe you are asking about personal responsibility and blame."

"Yeah, I guess." Marie said unsurely.

"Just because something horrible was done to a person doesn't give them the right to harm another. I believe that you are having trouble distinguishing between being responsible and being guilty. If a person is responsible for causing another harm then they have the obligation to compensate the one who was hurt. If a person is guilty, then they are truly sorry for their actions and strive to make amends and not allow it to happen again. There are times when the terms seem synonymous but in other circumstances, they are not." Orroro said sagely.

"So someone is responsible if they cause harm, but they're guilty if they're sorry afterward?" Marie asked in confirmation.

"Yes, I believe that is accurate." Orroro said in a considering tone.

"What if what the person did is so horrible that there is no way to make up for it?" Marie asked desperately.

"Compensation does not always mean restoring things to their former standing, it simply means making an effort to try and restore the balance. If it is something horrible, then the compensation will likely be extreme to be seen as just by both parties." Orroro said speculatively.

"And what about if they're guilty of something that horrible?" Marie asked carefully.

"That is a matter of forgiveness."

\* \* \* \* \*

The convertible pulled up in front of a distinguished small house on a very ordinary looking street.

"Who has a cell phone?" Alex asked the group.

"My calling plan doesn't cover this dimension." Xander said with a look of apology.

"They'd probably charge you a higher rate if they did." Scott said with a smile as he held up his own phone.

"Good. How about this guys, you take my phone, Scott's number is in the address book so you can call me when you're finished. Scott and I will cruise around and find out what Perth Amboy has to offer two bachelors with unlimited credit." Alex said with a smile.

"Good plan." Remy said to the group and took the phone from Alex.

"Yeah, we'll see you guys later. And save a little credit so we can get something to eat on the way home." Xander said with a laugh.

"No promises." Scott called out as Alex drove away.

\* \* \* \* \*

Giles got out of the taxi closely followed by Kendra.

"Good lordy, what kinda place be dis?" Kendra said in awe of the mansion.

"I don't know Kendra, but let's find out." Giles said and led the way to the door.

Before Giles could knock, the door opened and Professor Xavier said, "Come in Mr. Giles, Kendra, we've been expecting you."

"You were?" Giles asked with worry.

"Yes, don't worry Mr. Giles, we're all friends here. Come in and I'll explain everything." Charles said with a welcoming smile.

Giles hesitantly walked into the mansion, closely followed by Kendra.

"Come this way and we'll sit and talk." Charles said and led the way into the common room.

"I was led to believe that someone here was trying to open a... doorway, was I misinformed?" Giles asked suspiciously and finally took a seat.

"No, no. That is quite correct. We will be attempting to open a doorway as soon as we can get the proper ingredients together." Charles said pleasantly, enjoying Giles frustration.

"You can't. A hellmouth could flood the earth with demons. You have to understand..." Giles began as a blue man with yellow eyes, two fingered hands and a pointy tail walked into the room.

"Herr Professor... My apologies, I did not know you had company." Kurt said quickly in embarrassment.

"That's fine Kurt, what did you need?" Charles asked casually.

"Warren said he left his briefcase in zis room unt I came to get it." Kurt said quietly.

"I'm sorry, I haven't seen it Kurt. Mr. Giles, Ms. Ololafhey, I'd like for you to meet Kurt Wagner." Charles said graciously.

"Mien pleasure to meet you." Kurt said and gave a courteous bow.

"Yes, a pleasure." Giles said with astonishment.

"Sorry for ze interruption." Kurt said and disappeared with a bamf.

"You were saying?" Charles said to Giles with curiosity.

"Oh yes... You could flood the earth with demons if you open a hellmouth." Giles said then watched in wonder as a handsome man with large white wings walked into the room.

"I'm sorry Professor, but I'm sure I left my briefcase in here. I have some very important papers to fax." Warren said in apology.

"Check behind the ottoman, you were laying across it watching television the last time I remember seeing you in here." The Professor said from a place of memory.

"That's right, thanks Professor." Warren said and went to the side of a couch and retrieved a briefcase.

"Warren, I would like for you to meet Mr. Giles and Ms. Ololafhey, this is Warren Worthington the third." Charles said politely.

"Of Worthington Industries?" Giles asked automatically.

"Yeah, but don't call me if your toaster doesn't work, that isn't my department." Warren said with a charming smile before leaving the room.

//Dawn, Tara, Jean. I think I have him warmed up. It's time for you to make your pitch.// The Professor sent while smiling pleasantly.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Mrs. Jeffers?" Xander asked in a timid voice.

"Call me Aunt Vada, all the young folk round these parts do. Come in, come in out of the morning chill, you'll catch a death." Aunt Vada said and quickly ushered the men into the house.

"Thank you ma'am. This is Remy LeBeau and I'm Xander Harris." Xander said and walked in.

"You said on the phone that my Maggie had done something nice for you. Did you know her well?" Aunt Vada asked as she took a seat.

"We never actually met her." Xander said shyly and fell silent.

The moment of silence stretched on...

"Well, I'm not getting any younger. What did she do?" Vada snapped.

Xander was shocked by that and Remy quickly said, "Margaret give Remy her eyes when she die."

Vada sat silently for a moment then asked, "May I see?"

Remy moved close to Vada and looked deep into her eyes.

He noticed as a tear began to fall. "Remy sorry." He whispered.

"Don't be sorry. Part of my Maggie is going to live on in you. It's not everything I could have hoped for, but now she's going to live on through you, through you and the baby." Vada said with a pained smile.

"Dats why we come to see you. We wan to be sure dat da baby have everyting she need. Margaret give Remy de eyes, den Remy do dis for Margaret." He said carefully.

"The baby has everything a child could want... except two parents, a home and a name." Aunt Vada said sadly, then turned a fierce gaze on Remy and asked in a challenging voice, "Can you provide those things for her Mr. LeBeau?"

Remy was stunned into silence and turned to look at Xander who nodded enthusiastically.

"Yes Aunt Vada, Remy an Xander could do dat. She be raised to know what a good woman her momma be." Remy said with certainty.

"I knew if I had faith, the good Lord would provide someone to watch over that child. I raised three and outlived them all... no parent should have to see their babies die." Vada said in a defeated voice.

"We live in a school for gifted children outside Westchester, New York. We could bring her to visit you whenever you want, or you could come to visit us." Xander said hopefully.

"I would like that Mr. Harris. I trust that you know some lawyers that can make all of this legal?" Vada said as she tried to smile.

"I don't know any personally, but Professor Xavier is sure to know someone who can help." Xander said, dividing his attention between Vada and Remy.

"Good. Just do what you need to and bring me the papers. Would either of you like some lemonade? I made it fresh this morning." Vada asked and got out of her chair.

"Yes ma'am, tank you." Remy said with appreciation.

"Can I help you?" Xander asked and got up.

"That's very kind. Yes, thank you Mr. Harris." Vada said and walked into the kitchen.

"Please call me Xander... We're going to be family." Xander said as he followed.

## **[Chapter 7: Endless Possibilities]**

Bobby awoke from an exhausted sleep and looked around his room. It seemed foreign to him, like it belonged to someone else.

He searched through his dresser until he found some jeans and a T-shirt, then after pulling them on, went down to the kitchen for some food.

"Bobby, what's wrong?" Peter asked with concern.

"Nothing Pete. Why do you think something is wrong?" Bobby asked curiously.

Peter gestured to indicate Bobby's appearance then stood silently.

"I just felt like jeans today. What have you got going on? Feel like doing something?" Bobby asked as he poured a bowl of cereal.

"I... Bobby, you do not like me. I have lived here three years and you have never spoken to me outside of duty." Peter said suspiciously.

Bobby stopped in mid bite, his spoon halfway to his mouth and thought. Finally he said, "I guess Marie was right, I was being a prick... I'm sorry Peter, I never disliked you, I guess I was so caught up in myself that I didn't notice that I was being rude to you. Can you forgive me? I promise to do better."

Piotr saw the sincerity on Bobby's face and nodded silently.

"So do you want to do something today?" Bobby asked again and continued eating his cereal.

"I was going to run the track, you could join me if you would like." Piotr said carefully, knowing that Bobby didn't like to run.

"Yeah, sure. But I'm not good at it, I've got skinny little chicken legs. Will you slow down so I can keep up with you?" Bobby asked pleasantly.

"As long as you let me know when I am going too fast." Piotr said and smiled.

"Great, what time should I meet you there Pete? Or should I call you Peter?" Bobby thought to ask.

"I will meet you at the track to stretch in one hour, and you may call me Pete if you wish." Piotr said with a smile.

\* \* \* \* \*

Orroro knocked on the door and said, "Hank, it is Orroro. I have brought you lunch."

She heard the door unlock and saw it open a crack before Hank's voice said, "Leave it on the dresser inside the door."

"Please Hank. Let me talk with you. There is no reason for you to do this. You do not have to go through it alone." Orroro said in a pleading voice.

"Orroro, you are so beautiful, I've always thought so, and now I'm... this beast. I couldn't stand to see your reaction to me. It hurts too much... What might have been... Just leave me alone." Hank finished quickly.

Orroro sat the food on the dresser and said, "You have given me a grave insult by assuming that I would like or dislike you based solely on your appearance. It hurts to know that you think me so superficial."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Mr. Giles, Ms. Ololafhey, I'd like to introduce you to Dr. Jean Grey, Tara McCoy and Dawn Summers, I believe they are the ones you came to speak with." Charles said and motioned the three women into the room.

"A pleasure, I think. Am I to understand that you three intend to open a hellmouth?" Giles asked as he looked at the three beautiful women.

"Not exactly. I misled you when I said that on the phone. I know that the spell would flood the earth with demons. But we needed your help and... here you are." Dawn said with a helpless shrug.

"Continue." Giles said with suspicion.

"Nearly three dozen of our children are trapped in an alternate dimension. You have access to the resources that we need to retrieve them. *We will* retrieve them with or without your help, but this way you have the option of overseeing the opening of the interdimensional gate." Charles said professionally.



"How did your children come to be trapped in an alternate dimension?" Giles asked carefully.

"There was a young man here who could open dimensional vortices without the need for spells or supplies. The children were in danger and he relocated them, as a favor to us, so they would be safe. However, when the danger came and went, he ended up in another dimension... and we haven't heard from him since." Jean said calmly.

"I am not saying that I will help, but I am curious to know which spell you plan to use." Giles asked the three women.

Tara handed several sheets of paper to Giles and he read them slowly.

"This is the most elaborate... it's brilliant. The balance of forces is inspired." Giles said in awe of the spell.

"Thank you. If we can get all the components to make it work, it should be able to lock in on the proper dimension and open a vortex. Do you have access to the supplies we will need?" Jean asked carefully, gently probing his mind for the truth.

Giles looked over the ingredient listing carefully and finally said, "The only things I cannot provide are the designate and the key."

"The designate is named Xander, he is native to that dimension. And I am the key." Dawn said with pride.

"You... a key made into human form? How?" Giles asked in wonder.

"It's a really long story that involves my sister Buffy, who is a vampire slayer..." Dawn said looking at Kendra, then she turned back to Giles and said, "... A group of monks, and the hell-god Glorificus."

"A story that I would very much like to hear sometime. How do you three intend to generate the necessary power to breach dimensions?" Giles asked, just beginning to believe.

"Look at me and see." Dawn said quietly.

Giles looked in confusion and Dawn rolled her eyes and said, "Really look at me."

After a moment Giles caught her meaning and willed himself to see with magical sight, and what he saw made him gasp in astonishment. Before him Dawn stood surrounded by a green aura that was a perfect sphere, beside her was Tara enveloped in a light blue sphere and behind them was Jean, radiating the purest, whitest light he had ever seen.

"What you be seein watcher man?" Kendra asked impatiently.

"They are an elemental triumvirate. Water, Air and Spirit. With their powers combined, they could very well open a dimensional vortex anywhere they wanted." Giles said in awe.

"Watcher man, you need to be usin de little words for de slayer." Kendra said in frustration.

"If I help them, they can open a doorway. Now I just need to know that they are who they say they are and mean to open a doorway for the reason they say." Giles said in challenge.

Charles moved his chair in front of Giles and said, "Mr. Giles, I am a telepath. If you will give your permission for me to do so, I will share the experiences that led up to the relocation of the children. That way you will understand because you can feel and see the events that brought you here." Charles said carefully.

"You will not alter my free will or my memory in the process?" Giles asked carefully.

"It will appear like an image in your mind that you can turn away from at any time. You will not be forced to witness anything you do not wish to. Your slayer can watch for any signs of struggle on your part and I will discontinue the link at her slightest bidding." The Professor promised.

"Very well, what do I have to do?" Giles asked after giving a slight nod to Kendra.

"Just relax, this will only take a minute." Charles said and merged his mind with Giles.

All the women watched silently as the two men sat staring into each other's eyes.

Finally Giles took a deep breath and looked away.

"What it be watcher man?" Kendra asked with concern.

"I'm fine Kendra. Charles just showed me how the children were sent to the alternate dimension... a dimension filled with demons, vampires, and nearly a dozen active slayers. We need to get them out of there." Giles said as he looked around the room.

"Thank you Mr. Giles. I knew we could count on you to help." Dawn said with a tender smile.

"You're very welcome Miss Summers. Where is a phone? I need to call to get some of these supplies sent from overseas." Giles said impatiently.

\* \* \* \* \*

Marie came down the stairs and to the front door where Clarissa said someone was waiting for her.

She walked cautiously to the door and saw the uniformed man.

"Can I help you?" She asked with caution.

"Delivery ma'am, are you Marie Rogue?" the delivery man asked.

Marie smiled at the name and nodded.

After signing for the delivery she took the box and ran into the common room to open it.

Dawn, Tara, Jean, the Professor, and two strangers were in there but she didn't care. She opened the box and revealed a spray of flowers, which contained no less than twenty different varieties of flowers, all perfectly arranged.

"Who's it from?" Dawn asked and gaped at the beauty of the huge collection of flowers.

Marie opened the card and read the message inside.

>You were right.

>I was a prick.

>I'm sorry,  
>Bobby

"Bobby." She said and looked around the smiling faces in wonder.

"If you ever find a straight man who'll do that for you, keep him." Dawn said frankly, and everyone in the room turned their attention to her.

"He's sorry." Marie said in wonder and felt a tear fall down her cheek.

"I'll take care of those for you Marie, I think Bobby is out at the jogging track." Jean said with a tender smile.

"Thank you Jean." Marie said happily and ran out the room.

"Where were we?" Charles asked and looked around the group as Jean left with the flowers.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Will you stay for lunch? I have plenty and you should have a good meal before your drive back." Aunt Vada said tenderly.

"I'd like that, but I'll have to call my friends and let them know not to wait on us for lunch." Xander said and held out his hand to Remy for the phone.

"Nonsense. Remy, you call them and tell them that they are invited to lunch at Aunt Vada's house and I won't take no for an answer." Vada said with fire.

"Yes ma'am." Remy said with a fond smile and called the number.

"How many will we be?" Vada asked Xander as Remy made the call.

"Five." Xander said quietly.

"Good, good. I know just what to fix." Vada said and walked into the kitchen.

"Please let me help you in the kitchen." Xander offered and followed.

A moment later Remy called out, "Remy be helpin in da kitchen too."

## ***[Chapter 8: New Leafs and Old Scars]***

Bobby was keeping pace with Piotr, actually enjoying the feeling of jogging around the track when he noticed Marie standing at the side, watching.

"I'm sorry Pete. I'm done." Bobby said and waited for Pete to answer.

"You have done well Bobby. Perhaps we can run again tomorrow." Piotr said, keeping his pace.

"I'll be here. Thank you for letting me join you." Bobby said with appreciation.

"You are always welcomed. I believe Marie wants to speak with you." Piotr said.

"Yeah." Bobby said and jogged away from Piotr.

"Hi Marie." Bobby said and stopped before her.

"Hi. I got the flowers." Marie said cautiously.

"Good. I hoped you would like them." Bobby said and began to stretch to cool down.

"I just need to know why. What do you expect, since you've given me the flowers?" Marie asked and watched Bobby's reaction.

"I don't expect anything. The flowers were my way of saying I'm sorry. I wanted you to know. I don't expect you to forgive me or be my friend. I just want you to know that I'm sorry I treated you wrong and will never do anything to hurt you again." Bobby said seriously and stopped his stretching.

"If you're sorry, then can you tell me why you used me? I know, but I need to hear you say it." Marie said quietly.

"I used you because I didn't want to admit to anyone, even myself, that I was gay. I went through the motions of caring for you because I didn't care about your feelings, and it was the easiest way to get what I wanted... the perfect cover." Bobby said honestly, with a look of shame.

"What changed?" Marie asked, looking into Bobby's eyes.

"Jean. She showed me things that I'd tried to forget and... she changed me. It's like she tore me down and rebuilt me... inside. Marie, if you want me to stay away, I'll never talk to you again, I swear it. And if you ever want anything, all you have to do is ask and it's yours. I hurt you so much that I can never undo everything I did. I've screwed up my life so bad..." Bobby finally trailed off.

"It's okay Bobby. Let's start over. Since you've been rebuilt, let's just say that whatever the mean old Bobby did is gone with him. I can't say that I'm ready to be your friend yet, but I'm not your enemy. Can we leave it like that for a while?" Marie asked hopefully.

Bobby smiled and said, "Any way you want. This is more than I could have hoped for, and a lot more than I deserve. Thank you Marie."

"Go shower, you're all sweaty." Marie said and walked away.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Jean, do you have a moment to talk with me?" Orroro asked with concern.

"Of course Orroro, what's got you so upset?" Jean asked and took a seat at the kitchen table.

"It's Hank. He won't talk to anyone or come out of his room. I am worried for him." Orroro said and let the concern show on her face.

"I know. I can't help but pick up his emotions... We need to let him deal with this in his own way. There is nothing we can do or say that will cause him to snap out of this, he has to do it for himself." Jean said seriously.

"But left to himself, he might become so despondent that he will... hurt himself. Jean, I cannot allow that to happen." Orroro said with a note of fear.

"Okay Orroro, I know of one thing that might help, but it will take me some time to get it together. Can you hold on till we get the kids back?" Jean asked in an almost pleading tone.

"I can do that. As long as I know that something will be done, I can endure." Storm said, forcing herself to calm.

"Good, once the kids are back, I'll start working on it. Mr. Giles is probably done by now, I'd better get back to the others." Jean said and got up from the table.

"How are *you* Jean? You seem to have been going non-stop since you recovered from the virus." Storm asked with concern.

"Thank you for worrying Orroro, but I'm fine. The virus actually made me stronger, increased my abilities and my clearness of thinking. It's like being truely awake for the first time in my life." Jean said with a joyful smile.

"That is good. But take care, you have been ill for days, do not overtax yourself." Orroro said gently.

"I'll be careful, now I've got to go." Jean said and bounced out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"All the supplies will arrive by this time tomorrow." Giles announced to the group.

"Even the Grue's milk?" Dawn asked with a grin.

"Yes." Giles said absently then got a mischievous smile, "Don't tell me that someone..."

"Yup. My sister Buffy." Dawn said with a chuckle.

"Would you let the rest of us in on the joke?" Charles asked with curiosity.

"Go ahead Dawn, it's your story." Giles said and settled back to listen.

"Okay. One time back in Sunnydale, someone was about to open the hellmouth and Giles... our Giles, sent Buffy out to get Grue's milk as one of the ingredients to close the gate." Dawn said with a smile.

"Um, what's a Grue?" Tara asked quietly.

"It's like a troll, but slimier. And they're all female." Dawn said quickly.

"Go on." Giles said, trying to contain his laughter.

"Buffy finally tracked down a Grue, living in a junkyard outside town. She fought... fought the thing for nearly three hours... trying... trying to milk it..." Dawn said, really trying not to laugh... and failing.

"Xander and Anya were with her, and finally... Anya says, 'She probably keeps it in her refrigerator.'" Dawn said and burst into laughter.

Giles saw that the others weren't getting it and said, "Grue's milk is a concoction that they brew and drink, not something that they produce..."

"Buffy spent three hours trying to milk that poor thing, and there was a jug of the stuff not twenty feet away from her." Dawn said and broke up into uncontrollable laughter.

"Your sister must have upset my counterpart quite a bit to elicit such a vindictive reaction." Giles said with a smile.

"Yeah. I think that was when she barged in on him and Ethan... a friend and then told *everyone* what she saw." Dawn said and cast an apologetic look at Giles.

Giles tried to look nonchalant as the slightest blush could be seen creeping up his face.

"Mr. Giles, Miss Ololafhey, would you join us for lunch? It is a little past time and we'd enjoy having you." Charles said graciously.

"Thank you. And we didn't take the time to make accommodations before we left, so I could do that while lunch is being prepared." Giles said and moved back to the phone.

"Please stay here with us. I insist. There is plenty of room here and you are both welcomed." Charles said and moved for the door.

"Thank you Charles. I believe I'd like to accept your invitation." Giles said.

"I be stayin too, but only if you call me Kendra. Nobody call me by de last name but de lawman an de doctor, an I don wan to tink bout bein wit eider of dem." Kendra said with ferocity.

"Very well Kendra, please come in the dining room and have lunch with us. I believe there is little else we can do until supplies arrive." Charles said and led the way.



\* \* \* \* \*

There was a knock on the door and Xander ran to answer it.

"Come on in guys, lunch is almost ready." Xander said with a happy smile.

"Xander, introduce me to your friends." Aunt Vada said happily.

"Aunt Vada, this is Alex Summers and his brother Scott. They are the ones who drove us down here." Xander said as he radiated joy.

"Xander, you go in and turn the chicken, we don't want it to burn." Vada said and motioned Scott and Alex into the living room.

"Thank you ma'am." Scott said shyly and took a seat.

"Take your sunglasses off inside the house." Vada said sternly.

"I'm sorry, I can't. I have a medical condition." Scott said quietly as Alex took his off.

"Oh, alright then. Nothing serious I hope?" Vada asked and took her own chair.

"No, I've had it since I was a kid. I can't stand the light. Thank you for inviting us to lunch." Scott said, trying to change the subject.

"I enjoy having company. So you two are brothers? How did you come to be at the institute?" Vada asked pleasantly.

"I'm a teacher there... and a student. Alex is visiting me from Hawaii." Scott said and relaxed into the couch.

"Hawaii... Oh I've always wanted to go there, but Mr. Jeffers and I could never seem to make it happen." Vada said with a dreamy look.

"It's just as beautiful as you imagine. I love living there." Alex said with a gentle smile.

"I bet. A handsome young man like you must have a dozen women chasing him all over the islands." Vada said with a chuckle.

"Not even one... but I'm just eighteen, there's plenty of time for that." Alex said and took a deep inhale of the aroma of cooking chicken.

"Listen to your Aunt Vada. There is never enough time for that. I had forty-seven years with Mr. Jeffers before the good Lord took him from me and it wasn't nearly enough. I know people are always saying to wait till your older and financially secure, but I'm telling you to find it now, hold on with both hands and don't let go for anything." Vada said strongly.

"I'll remember that." Alex said quietly.

Xander called from the kitchen, "I think the chicken's done."

"Chickens are sneaky, they'll lie to you. Give it a few more minutes to be sure." Vada called out over her shoulder.

"Yes ma'am." sounded from the kitchen and Vada turned her attention back to Scott and Alex.

"I need to know something about Xander and Remy. I'm a pretty good judge of people and can tell that they're both good men, but they haven't said anything about what they do for a living..." Vada said while watching Scott and Alex carefully.

Scott remembered the bio that the Professor had written for Xander and said, "Xander inherited quite a bit of money from his adoptive parents, so money isn't a big problem for him."

"And he has a job waiting for him at Worthington industries as soon as he's ready to take it." Alex threw in, not wanting Xander to sound like a spoiled rich kid.

"Hmmm. How did he get a job like that?" Vada asked with genuine curiosity.

"Warren Worthington is a friend of ours, he used to go to the institute and stops in every now and then. He and Xander got to talking and Warren offered him a job." Scott said, glad that Alex had thought to mention that.

"What about Remy?" Vada asked curiously.

"Well, he was completely blind until... yesterday. I don't know what his plans are. He probably hasn't had time to make any." Scott said with a shrug.

"I think it's ready." Xander called from the kitchen.

"Then bring it out to the table, hot pads are in the drawer by the refrigerator." Vada called out and got up out of her chair.

"Let's all go into the dining room and enjoy this meal." Vada said with a smile.

Alex and Scott obediently followed.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jean, Tara and Dawn went to the kitchen to quickly prepare lunch for the group as Bobby entered.

"Hey, do you need any help?" Bobby asked shyly.

"Sure Bobby, would you put together a salad while we make the sandwiches?" Dawn said as she was pulling things from the refrigerator.

"Sure. What's going on?" Bobby asked as he began getting things together for a salad.

"Mr. Giles and Kendra are here to help us open a doorway to get the kids back." Dawn said as she started assembling a dozen sandwiches.

"Great, it's been really quiet without them, I hope they're okay." Bobby said, feeling a stab of shame at his lack of concern for them earlier.

"Angel and Buffy will make sure they're alright. But I miss them too, I can't wait to get them back." Dawn said as she worked.

"Is this enough soup?" Tara asked quietly.

"I think so, with the salad and sandwiches it should be just about right." Jean said as she pulled a pitcher of tea from the refrigerator.

"Is there enough?" Dawn asked at Jean's look of disappointment.

"No. Someone put an empty pitcher in the refrigerator." Jean said with an exasperated look.

"Then we'll have to make some more." Dawn said and began putting the tops on the sandwiches.

"It'll be warm." Jean said with a sour look.

"Excuse me, Iceman here." Bobby said as he finished washing vegetables.

"Yeah, thanks Bobby." Jean said and began making the tea.

"Do we have some good tea for hot tea? Mr. Giles likes that." Dawn said quickly.

"Yes, I don't think Orroro would mind if we used a little of hers." Jean said and pulled the tea from the cabinet.

"It's not in tea bags is it? I don't want to hear the tea bag lecture from Giles again..." Dawn said and began cutting the sandwiches into wedges.

"No, it's real tea leaves. The water will be ready for it in just a minute." Jean said with a smile.

"The soup is ready." Tara said and turned off the stovetop.

"Since we have company, let's do it fancy and put it in the tureen. It's right over there." Jean said with a quick gesture to some shelves.

"Please let me get that for you Tara." Bobby said quickly and went to the shelves.

Tara cast a surprised look at Dawn who shrugged and began stacking the sandwiches on a platter.

"Bobby, I think I'm about ready for you to add your special touch." Jean said as she looked at the pitcher of steaming hot tea.

Bobby handed the tureen to Tara then focused his power very carefully on the tea pitcher. He could feel the excited molecules, rushing around, expending their heat. He caused the molecules to slow their dance a little at a time and just before they stopped, he stopped.

"Um, Bobby?" Jean said quietly.

"What?" Bobby asked and turned his attention to Jean.

Jean looked at him and he followed her gaze to look at his arm. His body had become living ice. Without knowing it, his power had transformed him.

"Sorry, I've got to get used to the new level of power." Bobby said in embarrassment.

"And you've got to get some weatherproof clothes." Dawn said as she watched the jeans and T-shirt flaking off his body.

"Oh shit!" Bobby gasped and ran from the room.

The women all laughed and began hauling the food into the next room full of hungry people.

\* \* \* \* \*

As Vada took her place at the table heavily laden with food she said, "Dear Lord, thank you for your bounty and these good men who've come to share it with me. Thank you for sending them to care for the baby. I seldom pray for you to send me help, and I thank you for sending it this time. Amen."

Scott and Alex both looked in surprise at Remy and Xander.

"Did Remy forget to mention bout de baby?" Remy asked with an innocent smile.

"Yeah, you skipped that part." Alex said with a chuckle.

"Oh dear, you must have thought I was a nosy old woman, asking about Xander and Remy's jobs like that." Vada said with her own chuckle.

"Aunt Vada, if we can get everything in order to adopt the baby, you are still going to be her grandmother. If we're her parents and you're her grandmother, then that makes us family. And family aren't nosy, they're just concerned. Go ahead and ask whatever you want." Xander said fondly.

"Okay, since you offered, what happened to your eye?" Vada asked and picked up a piece of chicken.

"BB gun." Xander said without a moments hesitation.

"I knew it! I warned all my kids about that, and they never would believe me." Vada said in triumph.

"Xander be waitin for a new eye like Remy was." Remy said, then took a bite from his corn on the cob.

"Really? It's good to know that modern medicine can do that, I hope it won't be too long a wait." Vada said and took a bite of her macaroni salad.

"I'm on a list. The expected wait is a year. Remy was just lucky..." Xander began and regretted saying the words immediately.

Vada saw the stricken look come over Xander's face and said, "Don't worry Xander. It hurts, but it won't honor Maggie's memory to stop talking about her. She's still part of the family, now it's just the family history."

"Thank you Aunt Vada." Xander said quietly.

"So, if you two are going to adopt the baby, does that mean you're already married?" Vada asked and took another bite of chicken.

"Um, no. We aren't... we haven't..." Xander stammered.

"What Xander be sayin is dat we not do anyting official yet. We not been together dat long." Remy said smoothly.

"Before you try to adopt the baby, you probably should. I don't think the courts would grant an adoption to two single men without some kind of formal relationship." Vada said in speculation.

"She be right." Remy said and put his hand over Xander's on the table. "Xander, you wanna marry Remy?" he asked quietly.

Silence filled the room for a long moment.

The next sound that could be heard was Xander's head hitting the table.

### ***[Chapter 9: Soliloquy]***

Clarissa appeared in the dining room, right before Giles.

One moment she wasn't there, then she was.

"Clarissa, what have I told you about using your abilities without supervision?" the Professor asked sternly.

"I'm sorry Professor." Clarissa said timidly.

"What if Kitty isn't around to pull you out of the wall like last time?" the Professor continued.

Clarissa nodded with her eyes cast down.

"Go ahead and eat. Just don't transport unless someone is around who can help you." the Professor said with a tender smile.

"Yes Professor. I just came to get Artie some food." She said and began to fill a plate.

"Get enough for you both." the Professor said and turned his attention back to Giles.

"I believe I've been very patient, but I must know... what is this place?" Giles asked carefully.

"It is a school for mutants." Charles said carefully, waiting for a reaction.

"But from the way the media portrays mutants... they make you all look like a bunch of rabid animals." Giles said in puzzlement.

Logan walked into the room and Bobby couldn't help but say, "Mr. Logan, we were just talking about you."

"Stuff it, ice cube." Logan said gruffly then said to the Professor, "It's done."

"Thank you Logan. I promise that if I have my way, I'll never ask something like this of you again." The Professor said cryptically.

Logan gave a sharp nod and grabbed a sandwich before leaving the room.

"He's more like what I expected." Giles said honestly.

Bobby spoke up in Logan's defense, "He is what the world made him to be."

Everyone froze in wonder at the profound statement coming from the normally shallow teen.

Bobby looked at everyone watching him and quietly went back to eating.

\* \* \* \* \*

Xander looked around in wonder at the beautiful scene. It was a wedding. Everyone was there. He saw Scott, Alex, Alan, Andrew, Buffy, Dawn, Tara, Aunt Vada and several people he didn't know.

He looked beside him to see Remy looking back with beautiful green eyes, filled with unshed tears.

Xander felt the love of years deep within his soul and noticed the lines that had formed on Remy's face over the years, lines that spoke of joy and laughter.

The minister began to speak and drew Xander's attention back to the front of the wedding hall.

"We are gathered here today to join this couple, Marguerite Vada LeBeau and Chakotay B'Elan Summers..."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Hey guys, you got a minute?" Bobby asked as he walked into the common room where Warren was working on some paperwork and Kurt was quietly watching a movie.

"But of course, come and sit with us." Kurt said as he motioned Bobby to join them.

"I just need some advice... I just kinda... came out of the closet... yesterday. And I don't know... How am I supposed to act now?" Bobby asked carefully.

Warren looked up from his work with surprise as Kurt suddenly found the television much more interesting.

Finally Warren asked, "Before I answer, I just need to know why you're asking us."

"Because you two are a couple." Bobby said plainly.



"Bobby, you are mistaken. Warren and I are not a couple. My beliefs prohibit such behavior, Warren is my friend. That is all." Kurt said honestly.

"That's right Bobby. I'm completely straight, Kurt is a good guy and I enjoy his company but that's all." Warren said, trying to ignore his blush.

"I'm sorry guys, I just noticed that I always see you two together... So I guess that means you don't have any advice for me, huh?" Bobby asked plaintively.

"Actually I do have some Bobby. You asked how you're supposed to act now. Act like yourself. Your orientation is just one part of your life. Be yourself and that way if you find someone who's interested in you, it will be the real you and not the person you're pretending to be." Warren said carefully.

"But I'm not sure who the real me is." Bobby said in a lost tone.

"Zen perhaps you should find out before you commit to one lifestyle. Is there any need for you to decide today?" Kurt asked quietly.

"No... I just feel... lost." Bobby said honestly.

"When I have had that feeling, I have sought the answers in the Bible. I do not speak of such things to those who do not wish to know. But if you have questions, I will always be available to speak with you." Kurt said with a look of honest caring.

"Kurt is right, it's important to know who you are before you make decisions that will affect your life. For myself, I find that a regular schedule brings stability and structure to my life. Something as simple as getting up the same time each day and having a certain number of things that need to be done gives me a sense of... accomplishment at the end of the day. In the week that I've been here I've begun to feel... adrift. The work that I'm doing right now could honestly wait till later, but this is the time of day that I sit down and clear my desk of outstanding work." Warren said seriously.

"Are you saying I should get a job?" Bobby asked unsurely.

"No, not so much a job as an objective. Set some goals for yourself. Some daily goals and some longer term goals. These things are for you and no one else. If you accomplish your goals then you will get the sense of

accomplishment as your reward and if you fail, your own disappointment is your only punishment.

Bobby sat silently and considered the words. Finally he asked, "Do you think you could help get me started? I'm not sure how to set goals."

"Sure Bobby. Take this paper and write out two schedules for me. One for your school days and one for your days off. You don't have to fill every minute, for now, just write down the things that you do every day, around the time you do it. Things like waking up, meals, classes... whatever you do daily. When you're done, we can look it over and develop one or two goals for you." Warren said and handed some paper and a pen to Bobby.

Bobby sat in the floor at the coffee table and began to write.

\* \* \* \* \*

"What happened?" Xander asked as he felt light slapping on his face.

"You fainted when Remy asked you to marry him." Alex said with a smile.

"No... no, it wasn't like that. I remember this feeling. It's an old spell that was put on me before I was supposed to marry Anya. I just got a glimpse of the future." Xander said and tried to shake himself out of it.

"What you see Xander?" Remy asked with concern.

"Where's Vada?" Xander asked carefully.

"Trying to find some smelling salts. Go ahead, tell us what you saw." Scott said quickly.

"It's fading, like a dream. I saw Marguerite's wedding... Remy and I were there, and very much in love. All of us were there... and she was marrying someone... named Summers. That's all I remember." Xander said and grabbed his lemonade.

"So you not answer Remy's question. You wanna marry Remy?" He asked bravely.

"I just got a taste of what I felt in the future. Yes Cajun, I absolutely want to marry you." Xander said and pulled Remy into a hug.

"None of that at the dinner table." Vada said as she walked back into the room.

Remy and Xander broke apart and looked shyly at Aunt Vada.

"It official, we be gettin married... or whatever dey let us do..." Remy said and looked at the other men.

"I think right now that you can get married in five states, New York isn't one of them but if you get married in Vermont, New York will recognize your marriage." Scott said in concentration.

"What about New Jersey?" Xander asked with concern.

"I don't know, we'll have to ask the Professor's lawyer what is the best way to do this so it's as legally binding as possible." Scott said and went back to his seat.

"We talk to da Professor tonight. Remy don want to wait." Remy said with a fond smile at Xander.

"Do you gentlemen have any plans for later this afternoon?" Aunt Vada asked.

"No, we're free all day." Alex said and went back to eating.

"How would you like to take me to the hospital to visit the baby?" Vada asked and returned to eating too.

"That would be great, I can't wait to see Marguerite." Xander said happily.

"Marguerite?" Vada asked carefully.

"Marguerite Vada LeBeau." Xander said definitely.

"A good name. I can see that the baby, Marguerite, is going to be well taken care of, you two don't dally around and put things off till later." Vada said and sat back in her chair.

"Nobody promised me a later." Xander said with a shrug.

Vada laughed at the comment and said, "That philosophy will serve you well young Xander, make sure that Marguerite learns it too. I believe it is a key to having a fulfilled life."

"Thank you Aunt Vada, I will." Xander said with a shy smile.

\* \* \* \* \*

Bobby looked at his list of goals and thought about what Warren and Kurt had done for him.

[They treated me like a person, like an adult. They didn't make fun of me or try to convince me of anything. They both explained their points of view and let me make my own decisions. It's my life, and I have to take responsibility for it. Warren and Kurt were both telling me that in their own ways.] Bobby thought and read what was before him.

>List your school subjects in order of most favorite to least.

>

>Investigate the careers that focus on the subject(s) that you enjoy most.

> - Expected Salary

> - Education Required

> - Availability of Work

>

Bobby thought about the assignment and thought, [This is it, the moment that I decide what I'm going to do for the rest of my life.]

\* \* \* \* \*

"Professor, do you have some time to speak with us?" Xander asked hesitantly.

"Of course, please come in and sit down." The Professor said as he moved from behind the desk.

He was surprised to see Remy, Xander, Alex and Scott file into the room.

"We need to ask for some more of your help." Xander said shyly.

"I take it that this has to do with your visit to Mrs. Jeffers. What can I do for you gentlemen?" Charles asked with genuine curiosity.

"Two things actually, I want to marry the Cajun and we want to adopt Margaret Riley's baby as our daughter." Xander said matter-of-factly.

Charles sat, stunned. [In the future, I must remember to scan them before they come in.] He thought, then said as calmly as he could manage, "This seems a rash decision, last I knew, you Mr. Harris were heterosexual and you Mr. LeBeau embraced your freedom to a point of being antisocial.

"Bisexual." Xander corrected.

"Remy got better." Remy said with a smile at the confusion of the normally controlled Professor.

"Scott, Alex, what do you have to add to the conversation?" the Professor asked hopefully.

"We just came to cheer them on..." Alex said with a smile.

"...And offer any help that we can." Scott finished with an identical smile.

"May I assume that the two requests are related?" The Professor asked, deciding to just accept it and move on.

"Yes, to adopt Marguerite we will need to be married... or have a commitment or something... what we actually need to talk to a lawyer about that to see what is the best way to do this." Xander said disjointedly.

"I see, so the marriage is one of convenience to facilitate the adoption of the child... who is being adopted to repay Margaret Riley for her gift of the eyes." Charles said bluntly, hoping to make the men think about what they were about to do.

Xander was immediately infuriated. He glared at the Professor for a long moment before saying, "Professor, I fell in love twice today. The first time at Aunt Vada's table when I had a glimpse of the most perfect future that I could imagine, a future where I was married to Remy. And the second time in the hospital, looking at that helpless sweet little baby girl. We are speeding up the marriage so we can start the adoption and hopefully have it done before Marguerite leaves the hospital. But don't doubt my love for either of them. Scan me if you need to see for yourself to believe it."

"That won't be necessary." The Professor said quietly, humbled by the ferocity of Xander's statement.

"Yes it is. Read me. Know the truth." Xander said intensely.

The Professor nodded and looked into Xander's eye.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Warren? Am I disturbing you?" Bobby asked hesitantly through Warren's door.

"No, not at all, I was just reading, come in, it's open." Warren said and put down his book.

"I... finished." Bobby said shyly, holding a sheet of paper.

"Did you find anything that you're interested in?" Warren asked casually.

"Yeah, but it's kind of... nerdy." Bobby said timidly.

"Yeah, so? You can decide to take a job where you can look cool while you're miserable, or a job where you're doing what you enjoy... what did you choose?" Warren asked as he adjusted his position in his chair for comfort.

"Accounting." Bobby said shyly.

Warren smiled.

Bobby saw the smile and immediately thought that Warren was amused by his choice. Bobby turned to leave in defeat.

"Hold on Bobby, I was smiling because... I'll tell you what, next week if everything here is back to normal, I'll take you to work with me one day and introduce you to some people, some very cool people. The whole idea that accountants are nerds stopped being true when computers came on to the scene... if it ever was true. The accountants that work for me are on the cutting edge of technology and software. One of them, Justin, has a love of Jaguars... the cars, not the cats. Ask him about his collection and you won't be able to get him to shut up for two hours. And another one, Lou, is a computer guru that even the computer technicians ask for advice when it comes to networking. What I'm trying to say is, they're real people, they are not just their job titles. Come with me next week and talk to Justin and Lou, ask them whatever questions you have about being an

accountant, the upside and the downside, and about the education you'll need." Warren said supportively.

Bobby nodded. "Thanks Warren." He said absently as he walked out of the room. Then he felt it, the sense that he had just accomplished something. Like he was one step closer to his future.

\* \* \* \* \*

Waves of love and tenderness flowed over Charles as he looked for concrete images in Xander's mind. There was a bubble of memory coming toward him and Charles embraced it, expecting to see the events of earlier in the day.

Charles found himself sitting in the MedLab watching Xander holding Remy's hand. The feeling of love was unmistakable as Xander sat watching Remy, waiting for him to wake. There was pure love and devotion flowing from Xander, and by extension, to Charles.

The Professor let loose of that memory and touched another. He saw Xander leading Remy into the dining room and could feel the respect and admiration coming from Xander. He quickly let loose of the memory and moved to another.

The Professor found himself sitting in a church. Xander and Remy were simply holding hands but the love and devotion of years radiated from them like a beacon in the night. Charles was in awe of the blinding, intoxicating love that flowed off the two men. Reluctantly, he pulled back and something caught his eye. It was something small, faint... almost forgotten. The Professor reached out to a faint bubble of memory that was almost too faint to touch.

Charles touched the bubble of memory and it opened to reveal the first glimpse that Xander had of Remy.

The Professor carefully felt what Xander had felt at the first encounter. Respect, admiration, attraction and caring.

Charles finally withdrew from Xander's mind and said, "I understand."

## **[Chapter 10: Duty and Dementia]**

"Pete? Could I talk to you for a minute?" Bobby asked carefully through the door.

"Bobby?" Pete asked in a daze.

"Yeah, is it too late?" Bobby asked with worry.

"No, no. Just a moment for me to dress." Pete said as he pulled on a robe, then said, "Come in."

"I'm sorry Pete. I didn't think you'd be asleep already." Bobby said apologetically

"It is fine Bobby. What concerns you?" Pete asked quietly.

"I dunno, my life, my future... stuff like that." Bobby tried to say casually.

"Bobby, I have been in this country for three years and have learned the language for the most part, but some things still confuse me. I am not sure if I have misled you in some way or misunderstood you. So please do not be offended... I am not gay." Peter said with a terrified look on his face.

Bobby smiled gently and said, "Pete, I didn't think you were gay and I wasn't trying to pick up on you. I just wanted to talk to someone my own age... that I haven't pissed off yet."

"That is good Bobby. What is it you would like to talk about?" Pete asked with concern.

"I've been talking to Warren and Kurt about my future. I just wanted to ask you what you think about me studying to become an accountant." Bobby said hesitantly.

"I think I am a bit envious that you have been able to make such a decision. I have been considering my own future for some time and have not been able to come to a decision." Peter said honestly.

"If you want, I can go with you to Kurt and Warren for them to help you. They were really good about helping me to sort out what I wanted. They didn't try to convince me of anything, they just helped me identify my



choices and see the positive and negative points of each choice." Bobby said seriously.

"That would be good. When I have tried to make such decisions for myself, I find that I become lost in details and overwhelmed by indecision." Peter said and rested back in his chair more comfortably.

"Yeah, I know that feeling. So you think it's okay that I want to be an accountant?" Bobby asked tremulously.

"Yes, it is an honorable profession and from what little I know of your nature, I believe you would enjoy it." Peter said honestly.

"Thanks Pete. I guess I just needed to hear it from someone I respect... I mean, I respect Kurt and Warren, but they helped me decide, I needed to hear someone else's opinion before I committed to it." Bobby said in thought.

"Thank you Bobby, it is good to know that you respect my opinion. It has been difficult for me in this country. I do not know how to get to know people well and have been very lonely here. I am glad to have finally made a friend." Piotr said a bit shyly.

Bobby was taken aback by the frank admission and finally said, "And I'm glad that my first real friend is a genuinely good person. I'm discovering who I am and it helps for me to have a friend who is good and decent to provide a... moral compass... when I can't find my own."

"That is a great burden of responsibility, to be the conscious of another, I will try to be worthy of your trust in me." Piotr said in an honored voice.

"I don't have any doubt in you Pete. Now I'm going to go and let you get back to sleep, I'm sorry for waking you. Thank you for taking time for me." Bobby said and rose to leave.

"You are always welcomed to come and talk with me my friend. You will join me for jogging tomorrow?" Piotr asked as he rose to walk Bobby to the door.

"I've got it set everyday in my schedule... I wouldn't miss it." Bobby said with a smile as he left the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Very well gentlemen. We will contact my lawyer in the morning and begin proceedings on both matters. I'm sorry if I seemed hesitant to help but I had to know of your motivation before I could commit to helping you." Charles said seriously.

"Thank you Professor." Xander said humbly.

"Will you want to remain in the boathouse or move to other accommodations after the wedding?" the Professor asked both.

Xander and Remy looked at each other for a moment, then Remy said, "We not talk about dat, but Remy wan to stay in de boathouse."

"Me too." Xander said as he turned his attention back to the Professor.

"Then I will see that you are provided a larger bed." The Professor said absently.

"Remy stay on de couch till de wedding night." Remy said quietly to Xander, but everyone in the room heard.

Xander noticed that everyone was watching him and said in explanation, "We're not going to consummate the relationship until after it is official... what can I say, we're just two old fashioned kinda guys."

"An dat another reason we want to have de wedding as soon as possible." Remy said with a leer directed at Xander.

"Oh yeah." Xander said and responded with a searing look in response.

\* \* \* \* \*

The morning light fell over the mansion to reveal Kurt and Warren in the air, gliding through the sky. It had become a part of both men's routine that they both enjoyed.

Giles was rereading the spell, looking for possible problems as Kendra slept in the adjoining room.

Jean, Tara and Dawn were in the dining room discussing the upcoming spell and working out the location and remaining components.

Remy awoke on the couch and decided that Alan and Andrew must have a very different idea of what is comfortable. Sleeping on the pull out sofa was like sleeping on a sack of doorknobs and there was a metal bar that dug into his back no matter how he positioned himself on the bed.

Xander woke to find himself alone in his room and smiled as he thought that soon he would not have to experience the feeling of isolation anymore.

Piotr had been awake for an hour and was thinking about Bobby's words of the night before as he considered his own future.

Bobby awoke to the sound of his alarm and looked at his schedule to begin his first structured day.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Mr. Howlett, I have you on speaker phone with Mr. Alexander Harris and Mr. Remy LeBeau. We have need of your services to expedite the marriage of these two men and the adoption of a newborn infant. Will you be able to help us?" Professor Xavier said as he relaxed behind his desk.

"I believe so Professor. I will need to know some particulars before I can give any concrete advice. Are you committed to the idea of marriage or is a civil union acceptable?" Mr. Howlett asked professionally.

"Either be fine. We wan to do whatever be best to get da baby adopted." Remy said a little loudly to be heard on the speaker phone.

"Cajun... Have you been to Guillome's?" Mr. Howlett asked with the sound of a smile in his voice.

"Two days ago." Xander said with a genuine smile.

"Good, I go there whenever I can find the time. I can't think of another place that serves a decent crawfish stew within three states." Mr. Howlett said honestly.

"De gumbo make Remy tink of home." Remy said with his won smile.

"Are you both residents of New York?" Mr. Howlett said, getting back into a business-like tone.

Both Xander and Remy looked at the Professor in question.

"Xander is a resident, Remy's identity is a bit... foggy in the official records." The Professor said helplessly.

"You'll need to clear the fog as much as you can before the adoption proceedings Professor. They've been known to do the equivalent of a body cavity search on prospective adoptees records. You'll need to nail down as many things as you can before the hearing." Mr. Howlett said seriously.

"Remy can do dat." Remy said with strength.

"And is the child to be adopted in New York?" Mr. Howlett said after a moment.

"New Jersey." Xander said, beginning to worry.

"That helps." Mr. Howlett said absently.

Xander and Remy both looked at Charles in question. Charles shrugged in response.

"Does the child have any living relatives?" Mr. Howlett asked in an unchanging tone.

"Just one, her grandmother Vada Jeffers." The Professor said quickly.

"And what is her attitude about you adopting her granddaughter?" Mr. Howlett asked with a tone of curiosity in his voice.

"She ask Remy an Xander to adopt Marguerite. She be seventy year old an don wan to raise another baby." Remy said in a hesitant voice.

"That helps us too. Okay gentlemen, I'll tell you what I have so far. Although gay marriage is all the rage these days, there is such opposition to it that it makes adoption harder. Fortunately, if you have the old fashioned civil union, you should be able to sneak in under the anti-gay-marriage protesters radar and file for the adoption without opposition. Since the child to be adopted resides in New Jersey, the adoption will be handled in that state with that state's laws. That helps us because New Jersey has a relatively long history of granting adoptions to same-sex couples and their adoption codes make it easier to expedite the process." Mr. Howlett said quickly.

"Which state should we get marr... the civil union in?" Xander asked, not knowing it would be this much trouble.

"My personal recommendation would be New Jersey. The reason being that you can fill out the paperwork and stand before the judge the same day. In New York you have to file in advance and wait for a date to come up. It's best to find a smaller town to have the civil union because there is less wait in the courtroom. In the larger cities there can be a backlog that might make you wait for a couple days before your petition can be heard." Mr. Howlett said in concentration.

"Like Perth Amboy?" Xander asked everyone in the room.

"I'm not familiar with the town, but it sounds like a good place." Mr. Howlett said in a considering tone.

There was a long moment of silence before Mr. Howlett asked, "Are there any 'special' considerations I should be aware of?"

Xander and Remy looked at each other in question, then turned in unison to the Professor. "No Ken. Only Mr. LeBeau is a mutant and his mutation isn't obvious. We won't need any special accommodations this time." Charles said with a smile.

"Good, although I enjoy the challenge, some things just *can't* be done." Mr. Howlett said with a sound of relief.

"You've always come through for me Mr. Howlett, and I thank you for that." Charles said with admiration.

"Thank you for saying so Professor, but you know my motivation behind all of this." Mr. Howlett said cryptically.

"Yes. Is there anything else we should be aware of before we begin proceedings?" Charles asked carefully.

"How soon are you planning to have the civil union?" Mr. Howlett asked curiously.

"Tomorrow if that's possible." Xander said and looked at Remy in question.

Remy nodded enthusiastically.

"Gentlemen, would you mind if I accompanied you tomorrow? Just to be sure that everything is signed and filed properly?" Mr. Howlett asked carefully.

"Sure Mr. Howlett. And we could stop at Guillaume's on the way back." Xander said excitedly.

"That sounds like a great idea. What time should I be at the mansion to meet you?" Mr. Howlett asked casually.

"Let's make it nine o'clock, that way we can get into the courthouse around ten." Professor Xavier said in a considering tone.

"Professor, we'd like to invite Aunt Vada to join us. Maybe we should add some time for her?" Xander asked quietly.

"Let's say eight-thirty. Be sure to call her sometime today and invite her." The Professor said in a tone of warning.

Xander nodded.

"Good. I'll see you at eight-thirty in the morning. It will be a pleasure to meet you in person. Goodbye." Mr. Howlett said in a friendly tone.

"Same here. Goodbye." Xander said before the phone hung up.

\* \* \* \* \*

Just after lunch a man arrived at the door of the mansion, looking around apprehensively.

"May I help you?" Scott asked as he answered the door.

"I have a delivery for a Mr. Giles. Am I at the correct address?" The man asked with a British accent.

"Yes, please come in." Scott said and led the man to the common room where everyone was waiting.

"Wendell? It is good to see you, have you brought everything I requested?" Giles asked as he gave the man a hearty handshake.

"Yes sir, all the items you requested are in the car outside. I must admit that when I saw the list, I didn't think I would be given access to a few of them." Wendell said as he looked at the other people in the room.

"One of the benefits of being the watcher to the active slayer. We'll have time for introductions later. Charles, would you see that the car is unloaded and Mr. Harris joins us in the clearing? Miss Summers, Miss McCoy and Dr. Grey, would you come with me to prepare the ceremony?" Giles asked in a commanding tone as he led the way out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

The group walked outside to a clearing among the trees.

"A picturesque location, may I ask why you've chosen it?" Wendell asked quietly as he looked around.

"We are unsure of how the gateway will manifest itself, so we decided to have the ceremony outside in case it causes damage." Giles said as he began setting cups of herbs out in the grass.

"What can I do to help?" Wendell asked.

"Take these pages and study the chant. This spell requires things to be done in a particular rhythm. If you have any difficulty with the pronunciation, ask Dr. Grey for clarification, she is familiar with the language the spell is written in." Giles said and began to position items around the circle that Dawn and Tara were creating.

Several X-men carried boxes and bottles to the clearing.

"Please just set everything by those trees, we will go through them in a moment." Giles said while positioning a cluster of berries in the grass.

"Do you want us to stay here or stay away?" Scott asked carefully.

"I would like for Ms. Munroe and Mr. Harris to stay. From what Dawn and Tara have said, she can provide extra energy for them should they fall short. And Mr. Harris is the designate and vital to the spell. The rest of you may stay or go, as you like, but if you stay, you must remain silent and still. Any distraction could cost us our chance to open this portal. We have enough supplies to try this once more if this fails, then that is all. There will be no more." Giles said seriously to the group.

Scott nodded and moved to a spot well away from the group of busy people to stand and watch.



## ***[Chapter 11: The March of the Titans]***

The X-men stood still and silent, each wondering how long this could possibly take. It had been nearly half an hour since the ceremony began and it showed no signs of ending anytime soon.

Wendell had been chanting constantly the entire time. Dawn, Tara, Giles and Jean were each kneeling at the edge of the circle and every now and then one of them would throw something into the center. Xander stood at the edge of the circle and looked around occasionally, not knowing what he was supposed to be doing. Suddenly Giles stood and began to chant in unison with Wendell. Everyone present was surprised at the beautiful tone of his voice. His strong tenor voice carried the chant into a song. Next Dawn stood and joined the chant, but she wasn't singing the same words as Giles and Wendell. Her song melded and accented Giles and Wendell's song. Tara suddenly stood and began to chant the same song as Dawn, but her verse seemed to be following by a stanza, like a round of 'Row, Row, Row your Boat'.

Finally Jean stood and began to sing in a beautiful clear voice. Her song seemed to be unrelated to the others, but it rang crisp and true.

The singing continued and Tara's song began to get faster as Dawn's began to get slower. Jean continued to sing her own song, but it seemed to be changing into a more familiar tone. Finally all the songs merged into a harmonious voice. Each of the participants threw a different item into the center of the circle at the crescendo of the final note of the chant... and silence fell over the clearing.

A light began to glow in the middle of the circle and grew rapidly until it reached the edge of the circle.

Giles pulled a knife from his belt and handed it to Dawn.

Dawn braced herself and pulled the knife quickly down her palm.

She held her hand inside the circle and when the first drop of blood hit the glowing ground she began a new chant. Jean walked up behind her and began to speak in a clear voice, in a language none present could understand.

Giles walked behind Xander and lifted his arm and directed Xander to put it into the circle as Dawn had.

A mist formed in the circle and finally resolved into the image of Buffy sitting on the edge of her bed, her head buried in her hands.

"Buffy?" Dawn called with excitement.

"Dawn?" Buffy said and looked up at the portal, revealing the tears in her eyes.

"Buffy, get the kids, quick. When this portal closes, we might not be able to open another... ever." Dawn said with force.

Buffy ran from the room and the portal followed her.

"Buffy, the portal is focused on you. Get where you need to be, because I can't hold it like this much longer." Dawn said in warning.

Buffy came to a stop in the lobby of the hotel and called out, "THE PORTAL IS OPENED, GET EVERYONE AND LET'S GO!"

People began to come from every direction.

"Hurry and grab your things, when the portal closes, whoever is left here won't be going back home." Buffy said to the assembled group.

"Hurry Buffy!" Dawn said with urgency.

"I'm hurrying. Here they come." Buffy said and started ushering the first children through the opening.

Scott and the others ran to the first children through the portal and pulled them in for heartfelt hugs.

Dawn was surprised to see Angel heading for the vortex and called out, "Kurt, come here quick."

Kurt appeared in a ::Bamf:: immediately beside Dawn.

"See that man holding the little boy and covering himself with the trench coat? I need you to get him inside, to someplace with no sunlight." Dawn said as Angel stepped through the vortex and began to smoke immediately.

Kurt grabbed onto Angel and the boy and in a ::Bamf:: they were inside the mansion, in the hanger bay.

Angelo and Jubilee were the last to run through the portal.

"Is that everyone?" Dawn asked quickly.

"Yeah, I think so. Tell me quick, what happened?" Buffy said as the vortex began to slowly shrink.

"We stopped the virus, Alan was in an explosion, he and Andrew haven't been seen since. The Giles from this universe helped me to open this portal. We may never be able to open it again... I love you, big sister." Dawn finished in a tearful voice.

"You take care of yourself and Tara. I love you too. Dawnie, take care of Angel. He's going to stay in your universe... he'll explain. Help him to fit in... I love you too." Buffy said as the vortex shrank to less than a foot wide.

"Goodbye."

\* \* \* \* \*

Kendra felt a pinching pain in her gut and her eyes suddenly went wide.

[Dere be a vampire close by.] She thought with astonishment.

She ran back to her room and to the backpack that she carried whenever away from home. She pulled out three wooden stakes and two vials of holy water.

[Kendra be finding you vampire, and sending your demon ass to hell where it belongs.] She thought as she left the room to begin tracking the vampire.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Come in Mr. ??" Charles said as Kurt ushered Angel into his office.

"O'Rourke, but you can call me Angel." he said quietly.

"I have been monitoring the events in the clearing and must admit that I'm puzzled as to why you chose to come here." Charles said and moved from behind his desk.

Angel looked at Kurt then to Charles with a helpless look.

"Kurt, I believe there is a child waiting to speak to me in the outer office, would you wait with him?" Charles said, casting a glance at Angel to see his reaction... which was relief.

After Kurt left the room Charles asked, "So what is it you wanted to tell me privately?"

"One of the children, Chris, I want to see... I don't know how to put it." Angel said with exasperation.

"Is that who's waiting in the outer office?" Charles asked carefully.

Angel nodded, trying to think of how to put his request into words.

"Bring him in and we'll discuss why you're here." Charles said succinctly.

\* \* \* \* \*

The portal was closed and everyone was with the children except for Giles and Wendell. They had volunteered to gather the supplies back to the mansion.

"So how was it there?" Dawn asked Jubilee with concern.

Jubilee looked up with tearful eyes at Dawn. "I'm so glad to be back. There were demons and vampires and... the kids..." Jubilee said and began to cry.

"The demons won't go to the hotel no more." Angelo said as he put an arm around Jubilee.

"What happened?" Dawn asked moving from concern to worry.

"Ethan made stink bombs for all the kids. I don't think the hotel will ever smell right again." Angelo said in a ramble.

Jean had been listening and asked, "What about the demons?"

"They attacked the second day we were there... the kids thought it was fun... I never saw nothing like it." Angelo said with wide, worried eyes.

"Rachel thought it was funny when they 'popped'. She was making their internal organs explode." Jubilee said with worry and a bit of fear.

Angelo held Jubilee close and began to stroke her arm soothingly.

"No one's seen Wesley since yesterday. I... I don't know what they did with him." Jubilee said with a note of fear.

"Maybe I can help with that." Jean said and cast her telepathy out to find the answer amongst the children's minds.

"It was an accident... his hair will grow back... he wasn't hurt... physically." Jean said with assurance before focusing on the people before her again.

"Fred wants to get her tubes tied and for Gunn to get a vasectomy, just to be sure." Jubilee said tiredly.

"I'm guessing they didn't behave themselves for you." Jean said with a weak smile.

"I NEVER want to be in charge of the kids again. One at a time they're great but as a group they're EVIL. I mean the *demons* were afraid of them... from the depths of hell, real live DEMONS were afraid of those kids..." Jubilee said and began crying again.

"It's okay Mija, we're back home, we're not responsible for the kids anymore." Angelo said as he led Jubilee to a couch.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kendra followed her slayer senses through the levels of the mansion and finally tracked the feel of the vampire and narrowed her search to one floor of the mansion.

Before long she had eliminated three hallways on the main floor and began to walk down the last as she held her stake tightly with anticipation.

\* \* \* \* \*

Angel walked to the outer office and motioned. A young boy, maybe fourteen, walked in shyly behind him.

Angel knelt down and said quietly, "Don't worry Chris, Professor Xavier won't hurt you. Just talk with him and maybe he can find a way so we can stay together."

The door burst open and Angel automatically pulled Chris close to protect him.

"Let loose o dat boy, vampire!" Kendra screamed as she ran into the room with her stake raised to strike.

"NO!" Chris screamed and pulled out of Angel's grasp in time to throw himself into the path of the stake that was plunging toward Angel's heart.

There was a sickening 'Thunk' as the stake pierced Chris' chest and he fell limp into Angel's arms.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jean had sensed the shock of the Professor and the fear of Chris before his mind went silent. She ran down the hall and into the Professor's office to a surreal sight.

She took just a split second to glean the events of the past minute from the Professor and Kendra's minds.

//Orroro, I need for you to brew up the biggest storm that you can make to feed Dawn and Tara power.// //Tara, Dawn, get down to the MedLab and set up the spell to open a vortex to Alan. I'll feed you power and Orroro is going to stir up the elements for you. A boy is going to die unless you do it NOW!// //Mr. Giles, Wendell, get in the nearest elevator and go to the basement. Someone will take you to the proper place for a ceremony. Kendra just staked a fourteen year old boy. If you want to save the boy, you'll help us do this.// //Scott, Alex, get down to the MedLab and help Dawn, she knows what to do.// //Professor, call Emma Frost. Then I could use Hank's help. Try to convince him to help save this boy.// //Xander, Remy, keep the children busy. It's going to get pretty scary in a few minutes.// "Angel, we're going to the MedLab downstairs. I'm a doctor and I may be able to save him." Jean sent and said simultaneously while she put a hand on Angel's shoulder.

Angel looked at her with watery eyes and nodded.

There was a blinding flash of light. When Charles could focus his eyes again Angel, Jean and Chris were gone.

//Jean, what did you just do?// Charles asked curiously.

//No time. Get Hank.// Jean sent sharply and closed the link.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dawn, Tara, Scott and Alex began carrying the supplies to open a portal from the garage where they had been stored to the MedLab. They set up for the spell in the recovery room off of surgery, the last place that Andrew and Alan had been seen.

Scott watched helplessly as Dawn set up the spell as she had done in the clearing. She quickly ran out of the room and returned a moment later with two frozen bags.

"These bags have some of Alan's blood and some of his flesh. Hank and I saved everything we could so I could use them in this spell. Normally something like this wouldn't work, but since you two are almost identical, it should be close enough to lock in on him wherever he is." Dawn said in explanation as she went through the supplies.

"Do we need to get Jean?" Scott asked as he looked at the two bags.

"No, you saw the ritual performed, you take Xander's part. Wendell will take Jean's. Alex will take Wendell's part which is just chanting. Alex can follow along with the paper, everything is spelled phonetically and you've both heard it once. Go through it with Alex one time while Tara and I finish setting up." Dawn commanded and went back to arranging things.

Finally there was silence as Alex and Scott finished their practice and Tara and Dawn had everything in place.

"Let's get this moving, from what Jean said, a boy's life is at stake. We've got one shot at this so let's make it count." Dawn said and motioned to Alex.

Alex looked at the paper and began a slow rhythmic chant.

\* \* \* \* \*

//Jean is there anything you can do?// Charles asked quietly.

//The stake has pierced his aorta and done damage to the heart itself. He'll die if we remove the stake and he'll die if we don't.// Jean sent back with frustration.

//Why do you have Dawn and Tara opening a portal?// Charles asked curiously.

//I really don't have time Professor. I promise that when all of this is done I'll explain everything to you. But for right now, please trust me.// Jean sent with tired pleading.

//I trust you Jean, I always have.// The Professor sent before letting the link go silent.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Dr. McCoy, there is a child with a ten inch piece of wood sticking through his heart. Dr. Grey can't save him. We *need* you Hank." The Professor said with desperation.

"I'm sorry Professor, but you'll have to find someone else." Hank said in a defeated voice.

"There *is* no one else. You have to get down there right now!" The Professor said with force.

Silence was the only answer he received.

"Damn you Hank. Damn you and your lies about how being a mutant didn't make you less human. You lied to me, to all of us. You think we're animals because we're mutants, don't you." The Professor said with fury.

More silence was the Professor's answer.

"Because if you thought that mutants were real people you'd be down there saving that little boy's life rather than being up here mourning your 'lost humanity'." The Professor said with disgust.

The Professor received the silence he expected and left Hank's door.



//I'm sorry Jean.// The Professor sent in defeat.

//Then there's just one chance.// Jean sent back in concentration.

## [Chapter 12: Just One Chance]

Orroro stood on the roof and drew to the depths of her power to create the biggest, most violent storm that she had ever envisioned. The clouds in the sky began to darken and fill, then began to rotate above the mansion.

//Jean, what I am doing is quite dangerous. A tornado of this magnitude could grow beyond my ability to control.// Storm thought in warning.

//I know Orroro. My last other option just failed, if this doesn't work a child is going to die and the future of this world... just trust me Orroro, this *has* to work, it's our last hope.// Jean sent with anguish.

//I trust your judgment Jean. You say this is necessary, that is all I need to know. If it is a storm that you need, then a storm you shall have.// Orroro sent back with trust and determination.

//Thank you Orroro, I must concentrate on keeping this boy alive just a little while longer.// Jean sent with an undercurrent of helplessness.

Orroro turned her full attention back to the sky and the clouds went from gray to deepest black as lightning began to crack in the sky and the wind began to howl.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kendra was shaking and noticed that she was being held.

"Dat boy, did I kill de boy watcher man?" Kendra asked helplessly.

"He is still alive, but I don't know for how much longer." Giles said honestly as he held her trembling body close.

"De vampire was ahold of dat boy. Why de boy protect him?" Kendra asked in confusion.

"From what Charles told me, the vampire is named Angel and has been cursed with a soul. He and the boy have bonded as father and son. Angel came here to try and find a way that they could stay together in safety." Giles said as tears of sympathy fell down his face for the pain of his slayer.

"Watcher man, what happen to me now dat I kill dat boy?" Kendra asked fearfully.

"He's not dead yet. If he survives we'll find a way to sort this out... Don't worry my slayer, I'll keep you safe." Giles said and pulled Kendra close to him as much for his own need for comfort as for hers.

"An if he don't?" Kendra asked quietly.

"We'll deal with that if the time comes." Giles answered in a whisper of anguish.

\* \* \* \* \*

The largest tornado that Storm had ever summoned was swirling above her, it went on for miles in all directions, as far as the eye could see. She could barely keep her footing as the howling winds pulled at her from every direction.

Orroro felt something surge around her, within her, through her. And there was silence. She looked into the sky where there wasn't a hint of a cloud in any direction. The air was so dry that she could feel a pulling sensation on her skin as the sudden heat of the sun immediately dried her.

[I pray it was enough.] She thought as she went to the attic entrance and back into the mansion.

\* \* \* \* \*

As Dawn's blood began to flow the vortex formed into a long swirling tube of smoky energy.

Dawn drew power from Tara, the storm outside and from Jean to try and make the tunnel reach far enough to grab hold of Alan. Then there was a surge of power through her link with Jean at the same time as a surge of power came from the other side of the vortex. In an instant Andrew and Alan were standing before her.

"Dawn? Oh Gods Dawn, you're bleeding! What happened?" Andrew asked in panic.

"Andrew... thank the Goddess... it was the only thing I could think of to try... I'm an interdimensional key and Scott is identical to Alan so I had to try." Dawn said through tears of joy.

Andrew thought about what she was saying and said, "The Hellmouth Gate?"

"Something like that. I know it's dangerous, but with Alan's blood, I was sure we could find you." Dawn said, continuing to cry.

"Icheb, I need you to come here." Andrew called out to someone outside her view.

"Father, what are you doing?" a boy asked, looking to be about fifteen or sixteen years old.

"This is my world, that is your Aunt Dawn. I need for you to call Chakotay and tell him that there is a vortex that leads to my world in our cabin, and hurry." Andrew said quickly.

"Andrew, jump through." Dawn called, feeling a sense of panic. She knew that if the vortex closed, she might not be able to open it again. Some of the supplies were so rare that she might not be able to ever replace them.

"Dawn, I can't. I won't leave without my kids." Andrew said plainly.

"Well get them together, when my blood stops flowing, the gate closes." Dawn said with worry, then thought, [Kids?]

"I'm going as quick as I can... Trey, William, Robert, Jimmy, Janine!" Andrew called.

A moment later Andrew spoke to someone outside her view.

"Let's do this Borg style, by the numbers. Three, Four, Five begin disassembling the alcoves. Six, start packing everyone's belongings, go from room to room and pack whatever you think we need. Throw everything on the bed and wrap it in the blanket. Seven, get on the comm and start calling the family, Dave, B'Elana, Seven... call everyone to help." Andrew said desperately.

"I'll help Six." Alan said.

"No love, the portal is focused on you. If you move, it moves and I can't keep it stable if you're moving around." Andrew said with effort.

The teen boy came into view and said something that Dawn couldn't make out.

Andrew began talking to the boy, then to Alan.

Scott walked beside Dawn to look inside the portal.

"Scott, it's so good to see you. How are you?" Andrew asked with joy.

"One hundred percent better now that I know you two are okay." Scott said honestly.

"Oh Gods, I can't believe it." Andrew said as tears of relief fell down his face.

"Crewman Alan Summers to the Captain." Alan said after slapping his chest.

"Go ahead Crewman Summers, I trust that this is important." A deep woman's voice said in a threatening tone.

"A portal just opened in our cabin that leads back to our home. I just wanted to ask your permission to leave the crew and Voyager." Alan said with emotion creeping into his voice.

"I'm on my way." The woman said abruptly.

Andrew began talking with someone outside her field of vision. Then she heard a voice say, "Jimmy! Where are you squirt?"

Andrew started talking to someone on his other side, also out of her view.

Then two men walked into view of the portal. One of them said, "Icheb said you found a way home."

"Actually it found us. Chakotay, Tom, I'd like for you to meet my sister Dawn and my brother Scott." Alan said proudly.

"I'm here too." Alex yelled and ran to Dawn's other side.

"And my brother Alex." Alan said with a joyful smile.

"Father, the first alcove is disassembled." Someone called in the distance.

"Move on to the next one and someone will haul it out." Andrew called back in response.

"We can get that." Chakotay said and ran out of view of the portal, followed by Tom.

"Alan, where do you want this?" A stocky man asked, carrying a bundle.

"Through the portal... Dawn is there anyone there who can haul the things we pass through to you?" Alan asked with a desperate tone.

"Alex, get help." Dawn commanded.

Alex got a vacant look in his eyes and a moment later he said, "The X-men will be right here to help."

"Good." Alan said and looked at the stocky man with the bundle, before he said, "Pass that to Alex."

Alex took the bundle and ran out of the recovery room and into the waiting room to set the bundle down.

Logan, Xander, Remy, Warren, Kurt, Bobby, Peter and Kitty came into the room in a group.

"She opened the portal to Andrew and Alan, these are their things. Will you guys help us?" Alex asked in a rush.

"That's why we're here kid." Logan said gruffly and walked past him.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Gentlemen, I have to say that this is a bit of a surprise." A woman said as she walked into the room.

"For us too Captain. My sister Dawn found a way to open a vortex and get us home." Alan said with pride.

"A pleasure to meet you. Your brother has been a great asset to the ship." The Captain said diplomatically.

"I'm glad he behaved himself for you... he's not known for that." Dawn said with a look of mischief.

"Oh Dawnie, no one's teased me like that in months. God I've missed you." Alan said fondly.

"Gentlemen, permission to leave the ship and crew of Voyager is granted. May you find peace and happiness wherever you go." The Captain said seriously.

The X-men poured into the room and surrounded Dawn.

"Come on guys, lets get this stuff moving." Andrew said with effort.

"Uh, yeah... I only got so much blood here." Dawn said tiredly.

"Bucket brigade." Alex called as he followed the group back into the room.

The sounds of people handing items down the line obscured Dawn's hearing to the point that the next thing she could clearly make out being said was Alan saying, "Okay guys. I need for everyone to go to their own room and make sure one last time that everything was packed. Dave, will you check our room one more time?"

A minute later Dawn felt a lightheaded sensation pass over her and looked to see the blood barely dripping from her hand.

"Guys, I'm running out here." Dawn called into the portal.

"Me too." Andrew said in a whisper, looking like he might pass out at any moment.

Then Alan said, "That's it. Everyone who's going, line up in front of the portal. We're leaving now."

Dawn saw the fifteen year old boy standing beside Alan, ready to walk through the portal.

"Hurry." Dawn whispered.

"X-men, I'd like to introduce my family." Alan called and led the boy to the portal.

"My oldest son, Icheb LeeAndrew Malachi Summers." Alan said with pride and patted Icheb's back as he walked into the portal.

"My son Trey O'Seofon Summers." and placed a hand on his back as he walked by.

"My son William Alan Spike Summers."

"My son Robert David Summers."

"My son James Tiberius Olson Summers." Alan said and ruffled Jimmy's hair as he went by.

"And my daughter Janine Cinderella Summers." Alan said, then whispered something to her.

Alan held out his hand to Andrew and said, "And my husband, LeeAndrew Malachi Summers."

They walked through the vortex, hand in hand. The moment they were both firmly on solid ground Dawn released her power.

Alan looked around in shocked disbelief as he stood back in the MedLab.

Dawn slumped and Tara guided her quickly to a chair.

//Andrew, we need you in surgery NOW, grab your MedKit and your kids, you'll need them both.// Jean called with a frantic thought.

"William, find the MedKit. We're needed, so all you kids, follow me." Andrew said tiredly.

\* \* \* \* \*

Andrew walked into the surgery and looked at the young teen laying bloody on the table with the stake sticking out of his chest.

"Slayer?" Andrew asked without emotion.

"Yes, she was trying to stake me and Chris... threw himself between us." Angel said with anguish.

"Borg style. Four, I need the medical tricorder." Andrew said as Four walked into the room, carrying the MedKit.



Andrew took the tricorder from William and scanned the boy on the table. He looked at the readings for a moment, then looked around the room.

He took a deep cleansing breath and began.

"Two, take this tricorder and monitor his vital signs. Three, you're in charge of the neural stasis unit. Four, be ready to hand me what I need from the MedKit. Five, you'll hand me surgical instruments from that tray. Six, get the regenerator and set it for cardiac tissue, fine beam. Seven, see that man over there? His name is Angel, he needs a hug. You keep on hugging him till I say stop. Jean, I need Bobby in here ASAP and stand by to assist. Alan, crowd control, but I'll need your help in here in a few minutes." Andrew snapped out, then said in a quieter tone, "Four, Kroth Tosh N'Kah, thirty-five micro-units." and a moment later, held out his hand for the hypospray.

Everyone took their stations.

Andrew took the hypospray from Four then injected Chris and handed the hypospray back. Then he took the tricorder from Two and looked at it for a moment.

"Four, Triaprizine, two units." Andrew said in deep concentration.

After Andrew injected Chris, Two said, "His heart function has slowed thirty five percent."

"Good. Three, status?" Andrew asked quietly.

"Neural stasis is optimum." Three stated professionally as Bobby entered the room.

"Bobby, I need for you to drop this boy's body temperature to ten degrees... Celsius." Andrew said without looking up.

"I don't know if I can do it that exactly." Bobby said nervously, looking at the injured boy.

"Get as close as you can. Two, let him know when he has reached the correct temperature." Andrew said carefully.

"Yes Father." Two said as he held his gaze on the tricorder.

The temperature in the MedLab began to drop and Chris' body began to chill.

"Dr. Grey, stand by with suction. I'm about to remove the stake. Five, forceps." Andrew said and took a firm hold on the stake.

With one hand he pulled the stake from the back, while with the other he used the surgical instrument to pull at the base. Finally it came loose with a sucking sound and Andrew put the stake and forceps aside on the tray.

"Suction. Regenerator." Andrew barked.

As Dr. Grey evacuated the blood from the wound, Andrew carefully began to regenerate the cardiac tissue from the deepest point of damage, upward.

"Good, good. Three, status?" Andrew asked carefully.

"Optimum." Three said quickly.

"Two?" Andrew said carefully.

"The heart has slowed to three beats per minute, body temperature is twelve degrees, blood remains sufficiently oxygenated." Two said efficiently.

Andrew handed the regenerator to Six and said, "Reconfigure for arterial regeneration."

"Seven, status of hugs?" Andrew asked as he looked up from his work.

"The hugs seem to be only marginally effective." Seven said gravely as she held tight to Angel.

"Then say comforting phrases occasionally, such as 'he's going to be fine' and 'try not to worry' and lay your head against his chest or shoulder while you continue to hug." Andrew said and looked at the wound again.

"Alan, I'm ready for you. Bobby, you can stop now." Andrew said with a voice of concentration.

"What can I do love?" Alan asked quietly.

"If you open your secondary aperture just a pinpoint and your primary aperture wide open, would you be able to cause a wide, low energy beam?" Andrew asked as he took the regenerator back from Six.

"Yes, that sounds right." Alan said unsurely.

"I need for you to raise Chris' body temperature, not too quickly, but raise it until it reaches normal. Icheb can let you know when you've reached the correct temperature." Andrew said and turned on the regenerator.

"Yes father." Icheb said, still focused on the readings.

"Now?" Alan asked with a note of apprehension.

"Yes love, as low power as you can make it." Andrew said to Alan, then said, "Four, four units of epinephrine, set it for deep penetration."

Alan began to cast a red glow over the operating table as Andrew injected the chest of the boy.

Long slow minutes passed and the only sound that could be heard was the hum of the regenerator as Andrew continued to work.

"His temperature is nearing normal." Two said in a rush.

"Good, you can stop Alan. Dr. Grey, the damage to the heart and aorta has been repaired, would you look it over to see that I haven't missed anything and take over?" Andrew asked and turned to look at Jean.

"Yes Andrew." Jean said with a smile and moved in.

"This looks good. Five, would you hand me the small hemostats, there are some splinters I'd like to remove before I close the wound." Jean said as she carefully examined Chris.

Five handed over the requested item as Andrew walked away from the surgery.

"Two, status." Andrew called quietly.

"Normal sinus rhythm, sixty-two beats per minute, normal body temperature, oxygenation within normal parameters." Two said quietly, matching his father's tone.

"Two, remain until the surgery is complete and monitor his condition. Three, discontinue neural stasis. Four, pack up the MedKit. Five, remain to assist Dr. Grey until the surgery is complete. Six, give the regenerator to Four and find your padd, I would like for you to record your experience. Seven, continue hugs." Andrew said as he looked to each child in turn.

"Dr. Grey, do you need me to assist?" Andrew asked carefully.

"No Andrew. Once the wound has been cleaned, all that's left is to close up." Jean said as she continued to work.

"I'll be in the waiting room, if you need me one of the children can come and get me." Andrew said and gave a discreet nod to Five.

### **[Chapter 13: The Forest, The Trees]**

Alan, Andrew, Three, Four, Six and Bobby walked out of the surgery and into a room full of X-men.

Everyone started to ask questions at once as Alan held up his hands and said, "Jean is still in surgery so we need to keep it down. Andrew?"

"He should be fine. The damage has been healed and there shouldn't be any lasting effect." Andrew said carefully.

Dawn ran up and pulled Andrew into a deep hug as Scott did the same for Alan.

"Thanks guys. We have some things that have to be done right now. Is our stuff still in the boathouse?" Andrew asked over Dawn's shoulder.

"Just like you left it." Alex said from the group.

"Good. Whoever wants to help, we have a lot of stuff that needs to be moved over there." Andrew said and walked through the group to the pile of their possessions.

"What's the rush, you just got back?" Dawn asked with a slight whine.

"Our children need their regeneration alcoves assembled and adapted for this century. Once that's being done, I'll be able to sit down and talk with everyone." Andrew said firmly.

"We can go without regeneration for several days if necessary." Trey said quietly.

"I know Trey, but I don't want you to have to feel that discomfort when we can prevent it. I have to stay here in case Jean needs me, Alan?" Andrew asked with a helpless look.

"Right love. Three, Four, Six. We're going to open a portal into the basement of the boathouse. Everything is going to be carried over, you three need to separate the alcove components in preparation for assembly. X-men, anyone who is going to help, grab some stuff and start hauling." Alan said as Andrew looked on with a tender smile.

A portal formed in the wall and the first of the Summers family possessions were carried into the boathouse.

\* \* \* \* \*

Emma Frost ran into the mansion and directly to Charles office.

"What happened, and you said Chris... None of my children is named Chris." Emma said in a rush.

"Please, try and be calm Emma. The child is going to be fine thanks to some... unbelievable help. Come with me to MedLab and we'll talk to Angel, I'm sure he can answer your questions." Charles said and led the way out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Michael?" Emma said with a note of fear as she watched Dr. Grey working on the motionless boy.

"He likes to be called Chris." Angel said from behind her, still holding Janine in a hug.

"He talked to you?" Emma asked with disbelief.

"Yes, apparently his name is Michael Christian. No one ever called him Michael until... he went to your school." Angel said quietly and shifted Janine for a more comfortable grip.

"But he never talks to anyone. He was so withdrawn I could only do the slightest telepathic scan." Emma said in wonder.

"From what he said, I remind him of his father... and he misses his father horribly." Angel said with a note of pain and looked through the window into the surgery where Jean was still working.

"He's going to be fine." Janine said and laid her head on Angel's shoulder.

"His parents were killed in an explosion. He has the X-gene but hasn't manifested any mutant ability as of yet." Emma said as she continued to watch the surgery.

"Yes he has... the explosion was him. His parents were fighting and screaming at each other. Something snapped inside him and his mutant ability let loose. The explosion destroyed his house and his family. He wandered away, and finally he was brought to you." Angel said, filled with concern.

"Try not to worry." Janine said and held tighter.

"I had no idea. From all reports, he was playing at a friends house when the explosion occurred... no wonder he didn't speak. That poor child, the guilt he must be feeling." Emma said in realization.

"I don't think he's been feeling much of anything. He's barely been existing. We've spent every night the past week just sitting up and talking about his family and... my son Connor. I lost him almost a year ago." Angel finished in a whisper.

"I'm glad he's finally been able to open up to someone." Emma said honestly.

"Miss Frost. I don't want to lose him. He needs a father, I need a son, we *need* to be together." Angel said with increasing strength.

"I don't see that as being a problem. You've obviously done more for him than I ever could, he was at the school for almost a year and never spoke to anyone... I didn't even know his name." Emma finished in a defeated tone.

"Actually, there might be a few problems. First, I'm not from this universe. And second... You said you're a telepath, try to scan me." Angel said quietly.

Emma focused her power and it was as if there was no one there. She could clearly focus on the girl, but the man holding her was blank, not shielded, just... not there.

"I don't understand." She finally said.

"I'm a vampire." Angel said shyly.

Emma looked at him with disbelief in her eyes.

"Little one, is your name Seven?" Angel asked Janine quietly.

"My designation is Seven of Seven, my name is Janine." She said in an equal quiet tone.

"Janine, that's a very beautiful name." Angel said with a smile.

"Yes. I know." Janine said smugly.

"Janine, would you look the other way for just a minute. I need to show Emma something." Angel asked with his most convincing smile.

"Father told us about game face and about you having a soul. I promise I won't be frightened, I wanna see." Janine ended in a pleading tone.

"Okay my little limpet. But if you get frightened, just tell me and I'll put you down." Angel said as he looked into her eyes.

Janine nodded and watched carefully.

Angel let his game face come to the fore. His ridged forehead, yellow eyes and fangs became prominent as he looked at Emma.

"That wasn't scary." Janine said and put her head on Angel's shoulder again.

"I must be losing my touch." Angel said, then noticed the look of fear in Emma's eyes.

Angel quickly changed back and said, "I promise, I don't bite people anymore and I try to help them whenever I can."

Emma thought for a moment before saying, "I need to talk with Charles about this... just don't do anything until I've had a chance to talk to him."

Angel nodded and looked back into the surgery where Jean was putting things away.

From her place against Angel's chest Janine said, "He's going to be fine."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Charles, I need to know what's going on. That... creature... wants to adopt one of my children." Emma said in a lost tone of worry.



"By everything that I've picked up from Miss Summers, Mr. Harris and Mr. Wells, Angel is on a mission of redemption for the horrible things that his demon did earlier in his life... unlife... existence. He is a responsible person who works very hard to do the right thing and help people." Charles said as they traveled down the hallway.

"But he is a vampire... I didn't think they really existed... and what happened to Michael?" Emma asked, still in a fog of shock.

"There is a young woman here named Kendra... she is a vampire slayer. When she felt Angel's presence, she went to kill him as she and her kind are meant to do. When she was about to put a wooden stake through Angel's heart, Chris threw himself in front of Angel to protect him." Charles said as he sent the images from his own mind into hers.

"I can only imagine that kind of love." Emma said absently as she watched the scene unfold in her own mind.

"Perhaps this is what Chris needs to forgive himself for his father's death. Be that as it may, thanks to some... extradimensional, futuristic, and intergalactic help, Chris will make a full recovery. If you would like I'll just share the images with you... I can't find words to explain all that I've witnessed today." Charles said in an overwhelmed tone.

"I believe that would be best, I've only just arrived and have encountered things I cannot describe." Emma said and accepted the images that Charles fed to her.

\* \* \* \* \*

"He's resting comfortably." Andrew said as he, Icheb and Robert walked through the wall into the basement of the boathouse.

"Everything is looking good here. We've just been sorting things into different piles. Scott and Alex took the stuff from our room and the living room upstairs. The kids' things are here... I didn't know what to do with them." Alan said helplessly.

Andrew looked around the room and said speculatively, "This is a pretty big room... Icheb, how many rooms do you think we could partition this space into?"

After a long moment of consideration Icheb finally said, "We could construct six equal rooms that would be two by two meters."

"Then we need to make some decisions. Everyone upstairs, we need to discuss some things." Andrew said and led the way.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Mr. O'Rourke, I'm sorry about my abrupt behavior earlier, but I was unprepared for your... transformation. Now that I have had time to speak with Professor Xavier, I believe that I am ready to continue our talk." Emma said calmly.

"Thank you... Emma?" Angel asked, not knowing the proper way to address her.

Emma nodded elegantly and continued, "I have witnessed the images from Charles mind and have no doubt of your devotion to Chris or his to you. So what I need to know now is, what is to be done about it?"

"Since Andrew is back, I could take Chris to my world and he would be my son." Angel said quietly and shifted Janine for a better grip.

"Quite frankly Mr. O'Rourke, I don't know if that is in Chris' best interest." Emma said regally.

"But we *need* to be together." Angel said in panic.

"I agree, but I do not believe that your world is the best place for a mutant child to be raised. According to what you said to Professor Xavier, his mutation has already manifested once and because he couldn't control it, his parents are dead. What happens to him if the same thing happens to you?" Professor Frost said bluntly.

"I didn't think of that." Angel said quietly.

"I have spoken to Charles about this and he's offered to allow you to stay here, as a teacher. Chris would study here as a student and learn to control his abilities in an environment designed for that purpose. He would also be surrounded by other mutants, which I believe to be important to his self-image." Emma said in a controlled tone.

"But in my world..." Angel began.

"You have a very simple decision to make Mr. O'Rourke. Either you will stay here with Chris or you will return to your own world without him... I said the choice was simple, not easy." Emma said firmly.

"You're wrong. It's the easiest choice I've ever had to make. I'll do anything to stay with my son. I'll stay here with Chris." Angel said with finality.

"I had hoped that would be your answer. Let's go back to the waiting room, I'm sure he'll want to see you when he wakes up." Emma said with a smile.

\* \* \* \* \*

Scott and Alex were sitting in the living room when everyone emerged from the basement.

"Good, you're here. We need Remy and Xander too. I think we need to have a family meeting to discuss what we're going to do." Alan said and took a seat.

"XANDER, REMY, COME DOWN HERE." Alex yelled and everyone looked at him in surprise.

"Come on guys, I'm not going to run up the stairs just to say that." Alex said simply.

"Kids, you can sit on the floor, pull some chairs in from the dining room or squeeze in on the couches wherever there is space." Andrew said, seeing them standing in a row.

"What about Janine?" Jimmy asked timidly.

"Oh yeah, I left her with Angel..." Andrew said and used his power to peek in on them in the MedLab. "It'll be good for him. I don't think he gets nearly enough hugs." he finally said with a smile.

"What you be needin Remy an Xander for?" Remy asked as they descended the stairs.

"Family meeting." Alex said over his shoulder.

"Jimmy, would you give up your seat for Uncle Remy? Come here and sit with me." Alan said with a tender smile.

Jimmy did so and came to rest on Alan's knees. Alan pulled him into a hug then cradled him to rest comfortably in his lap.

"We need to discuss what we want to do to modify the house for the children. Does anyone know if the attic space is useable, I never looked." Andrew asked everyone.

After a moment of silence Alex said, "I can go up and check it out, where's the tape measure?"

"Trey, would you go with your Uncle Alex to make measurements? You know the amount of space needed for an alcove, see if it is possible... and desirable." Alan said in his fatherly tone.

"Yes Dad." Trey said and waited for Alex to lead the way.

"Icheb, would you look into that closet under the stairs and see if it could be widened to create a livable space for one person... something bigger than two by two." Andrew asked.

"Yes Father." Icheb said and walked to the indicated door.

"William and Robert, up to now we've kept you two in the same room. I need to know if you want to be in the same room now or would you prefer separate rooms?" Alan asked seriously.

"We would like to continue to cohabitate." Robert said surely.

"William?" Alan asked to be sure.

William nodded.

"Jimmy? When we moved into separate rooms on Voyager you didn't want to be alone. What do you want now?" Andrew asked carefully.

"I would like to share a room with Robert and William... If they would let me." Jimmy said hesitantly.

"What do you say guys? I need for you to tell me what you honestly think and feel.

Both boys had looks of concentration, then they turned to look at each other in unison. Finally Robert said, "That would be acceptable."

"I'm sorry Robert, but that isn't good enough. I won't let Jimmy move in with anyone unless he is wanted. I wouldn't want to be somewhere that I was only tolerated and none of my kids are going to know that feeling if I can prevent it." Andrew said with fire.

William finally said, "We would like for Jimmy to move into our room. He is our brother and we like him."

Alan looked at William and Robert with a smile and said, "I'm proud of you guys. What do you say Jimmy, do you want to move in with Robert and William?"

Jimmy nodded and smiled.

Trey and Alex came down the stairs and Trey quickly said, "Dad, the room will be acceptable for two separate rooms four by three meters each."

"Yeah, there's a ton of space up there, it's not completely finished, but there is a solid floor, and it seems livable." Alex said and took his seat.

"Dad, Uncle Scott looks like you." Robert said in realization.

"I told you I was a twin like you guys. This is my twin brother Scott." Alan said happily.

Robert and William looked back and forth between the two and both eventually smiled.

"So you guys aren't the only twins in the family anymore." Alan said, enjoying their happiness.

"And in about six and a half months there's going to be another set of twins." Andrew said lovingly.

Alex and Scott both looked at Alan and Andrew curiously.

Alan put up his hand and said, "Pregnant, twins, boys."

"You Summers be like rabbits." Remy said with a smile.

"Look who's talking. We'll be bringing home our daughter long before their sons are born." Xander said lovingly.

At Andrew and Alan's twin looks of question Xander explained, "Remember Margaret's unborn baby... the lawyer says we should have her legally adopted by the time she's ready to leave the hospital... Marguerite Vada LeBeau."

"So that makes... fifteen people living in a house designed for four?" Alex asked in question.

"I know Alex, but I don't want to move back to the mansion, and I love living with all you guys. I really want to find a way to make this work." Andrew said emotionally.

"Father, the space could be modified to accommodate one room three by three meters if you would be willing to sacrifice some closet space from that room." Icheb said, indicating Alan and Andrew's room.

"Good... Icheb." Andrew said, deep in thought.

"Icheb and Trey in the attic, Janine in the new room on this level, And William, Robert and Jimmy in the basement." Alan said in triumph.

"What about Marguerite and the twins?" Andrew asked with worry.

"Remy have an idea for dat." Remy said and drew everyone's attention. "It be some time before de babies come. Why not add on to de house before dey come. Marguerite can stay wit Xander an Remy till she have a new room."

"We'll need to talk to the Professor, but I don't see any reason why he'd refuse." Alan said in a considering tone.

"Icheb, how much will need to be done before we can put an alcove into Janine's room?" Andrew asked, beginning to get impatient.

"Nothing, the alcove could be assembled immediately, the adjustments are required to increase the space to a level that you would find acceptable. The room is currently two by two meters which I believe to be insufficient by your standards." Icheb said in a very Borg-like tone.

"Yes, that's too small in the long term, but it'll be fine for a few days... Trey, what about the attic, what modifications would need to be made before installing the alcoves?" Andrew asked.

"No modifications are required." Trey said, also in a Borg-like tone.

Andrew and Alan both caught on and Alan shifted Jimmy off his knees. Alan went to Icheb and Andrew went to Trey and they simultaneously pulled their sons into a hug.

"Sorry guys, I know it's a lot of changes in a short time. Don't close up on us, you're here with family, if you're feeling uncomfortable about anything, just say it, there's no need to go all Borgy on us." Andrew said as he held Trey close.

"It is irrelevant. I feel disoriented by the strangeness of this place. There has been much change in a short time." Trey said quietly.

"Then lets get to work setting up alcoves and getting unpacked. Maybe when we have some of our own things around us, we'll feel more at home." Alan said and released Icheb from the hug.

"Yes Dad." Icheb said and walked to the basement.

All the children followed Icheb and Andrew and Alan sat back down on the couch.

"You've got some good kids there." Alex said in a considering tone.

"And you've got some good nephews, Uncle Alex." Alan said with a smile.

Scott and Alex looked at each other with surprise as that sunk in.

"Is it too early for a visit?" Dawn asked as she, Tara and Jean walked into the boathouse.

"You three are always welcomed here." Andrew said with a smile and pulled Dawn into a hug.

"Andrew, when you have a moment, I need to discuss something with you." Jean said with a somber tone.

"Okay Jean, come with me into the bedroom while I unpack." Andrew said and led the way.



## ***[Chapter 14: Intersections and Intercessions]***

"It's Hank. There was an accident and it... changed him... on a genetic level. He hasn't come out of his room in days and Orroro is worrying herself sick about him.

"Changed him physically?" Andrew asked in confirmation.

"Yes, he's still Hank inside, but outside he looks like some sort of beast." Jean said with worry.

"If you're asking me to fix him, I can't do anything about a change on the genetic level. You saw the extent of my medical training. I'm trained to stabilize a patient until a doctor can arrive." Andrew said helplessly.

"No, the change is not the problem. It's Hank. He won't talk to anyone, he's withdrawn to the point that it is unhealthy for him. I'm not asking you to fix him physically, I'm asking you to help him to deal with what has happened to him. When I asked for his help with Chris today, he refused." Jean said with sadness.

"I don't know what I can do. If he won't talk to anyone else, there's no reason for him to talk to me." Andrew said honestly.

"Andrew, you have a gift for dealing with people, I believe that if anyone can open Hank's eyes to the truth, it's you." Jean said with admiration.

"Okay, but I think I'll need my support group for this job." Andrew said and walked for the door.

"I trust you to do the right thing." Jean said and followed.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Mr. Giles? Kendra?" Charles said quietly as he knocked on the door.

Giles opened the door with a look of fear.

"The boy is going to be fine. Dawn used the last of the portal components to open a vortex and summon the help we need." Charles said with a peaceful smile.

"Kendra! Did you hear that, he's going to live." Giles said with joy.

"I hear watcher man." Kendra said with a tearful smile.

"You are both welcomed to stay here as long as you like, provided that you not try to terminate any of my other guests while you're here." Charles said only half-jokingly.

"You have my assurance. Now that we know of Angel's soul, he will not be a target for my slayer." Giles said enthusiastically.

"I keep to me room if dat be best." Kendra said in resigned acceptance.

"That's won't be necessary. Apparently Angel is friends with several slayers in his own world and understands why you tried to stake him. As long as you don't pose a threat to him or his son, he won't give you any problems." Charles said with assurance.

"Thank you Charles, I believe that we will be leaving in the morning, but it has been good to meet all of you." Giles said with genuine admiration.

"Dinner will be served in about half an hour, please come down and join us." Charles said as he turned to leave.

"We will, and thank you again." Giles said as Charles left the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Kids, we've got a job. Come up." Andrew called down the basement stairway.

"What's up love?" Alan asked with worry.

"We've got to fix Hank." Andrew said with a shrug.

"Good luck, I've been trying for a week to get him to talk to me." Scott said honestly.

"Let me work my magic." Andrew said to the group of adults as the children trooped upstairs.

"One step." Andrew said and opened the portal into the hallway outside Hank's room.

Andrew motioned to Alan to call for Hank.

"Hank? Would you talk to me for a minute?" Alan asked hesitantly.

"No Scott. How many times do I have to tell you? I don't want to talk." Hank said gruffly.

Andrew waved his hand and the door became insubstantial.

"Maybe just once more, because it isn't Scott, it's Alan." Andrew said as he led the group through the transparent door.

"Andrew? Alan? How?" Hank asked in astonishment, forgetting his self pity for a moment.

"To say it's a long story is an understatement. But we're back and we're here to get you out of your room. I'd like for you to meet my children." Andrew said and motioned to the group of children huddled just inside the door.

"I can't. Don't you understand? I'm a monster! Look, your children are terrified of me." Hank said with pain.

"Trey, please disregard tact and tell Hank why you are all gathered at the far end of the room." Andrew said firmly.

Trey broke loose of the group and said, "Your odor is strong and quite offensive."

"You stink Hank." Alan said succinctly.

"I understood him." Hank said in offense.

"Do you have another pair of those sweat pants?" Andrew asked politely.

"Yes." Hank answered cautiously.

"May I see them?" Andrew asked, trying not to spook Hank.

Hank got a pair of sweatpants from his dresser and handed them to Andrew.

"Good, that should be all we need." Andrew said and opened a portal beneath Hank's feet.

Hank dropped out of sight with a yelp of surprise.

Andrew calmly opened a portal in the wall and walked through.

Everyone else looked at each other in question and followed him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Andrew stepped onto the boat dock that was attached to the boathouse, closely followed by Alan and the children.

Alan and Andrew laughed at Hank who was wet and sputtering, as he swam toward the dock.

"Icheb, I need for you to go to both bathrooms and gather all the shampoo, soap and conditioner that we have. Alan, I'll make a portal for you to the garage of the mansion, I need the scrub brushes that they use on the cars, a hair brush won't hold up to that fur." Andrew said and formed a portal.

"Trey, come with me to help carry brushes." Alan said and walked through.

"Mr. Wells, that was quite unnecessary." Hank said as he climbed onto the dock.

"First of all, the name is Summers now, I got married. And second, you've had plenty of time to take care of this yourself. Now we're going to do it for you. Get out of those sweats, you're about to be shampooed." Andrew said firmly.

"You can't be serious." Hank asked in shock.

"Hank, I am completely serious. You either take them off or I'll drop you in the Arctic for a few minutes, then we'll chip them off." Andrew said as Icheb ran up carrying several bottles.

Hank turned away and took off the sweatpants.

"Okay, everyone grab some shampoo and start scrubbing. You'll need to work it in to get all the way down to the skin, if you try to rub it, it'll just wash the fur on top." Andrew said and accepted a bottle from Icheb.

"No, you can't..." Hank began to say as Andrew, Jimmy, Icheb, William and Robert began to lather.

"Shut up. If you weren't being such a big baby we wouldn't have to do this." Andrew said firmly and worked the shampoo into Hank's scalp.

"Mr. Wel... Summers, I assure you that I was not being a big baby." Hank said huffily.

"Really? Jean says that Orroro is worrying herself sick over you. Scott has been trying to get you to talk... just talk... for days and you wouldn't even do that. And a little boy nearly died today because you were so involved in your pity party that you wouldn't even try to save him." Andrew said moving from frustration to anger.

"I couldn't..." Hank began and was interrupted.

"Couldn't what? Pull your head out of your ass long enough to think about someone besides yourself? Couldn't save a child's life because you were immersed in your self-indulgent pity-fest? Couldn't care enough about the feelings of your closest friends to even give them reassurance? Couldn't set an example for the children to show that mutation doesn't make you, or them, less human? Go ahead, explain it to me, you couldn't what? You've got my attention now!" Andrew said with fury then stopped scrubbing to listen.

Hank stood silently as everyone but Andrew was washing his fur.

He turned and noticed Alan and Trey waiting expectantly, holding brushes.

"What have I done?" Hank asked in realization.

"I just told you what you've done. The question is, what are you going to do?"

"I'm sorry Andrew, I didn't realize..." Hank trailed off, not knowing how to voice his feelings.

"Don't tell me you're sorry, tell Orroro, Scott, Jean and Chris. They're the ones who have been hurt by you. If you're really sorry, then grab some shampoo and start washing, because I don't think anyone here wants to be the one who washes your crotch." Andrew said bluntly.

Hank couldn't find any words to respond to that so he held out his hand and received a squirt of shampoo.

\* \* \* \* \*

After a dunk in the lake, Hank made his way back to the dock.

"Okay, everyone grab a brush, we have a ton of fur to brush before it tangles." Alan said to the group.

"I don't know how to thank you for all you've done. It is difficult to believe that a rational man such myself could be so effected by circumstances." Hank said speculatively.

"That's nice Hank. Could you help us here? Even with eight of us, combing out a blue wookiee is going to be a big job and we still have to build six regeneration alcoves before the end of the night." Andrew said in frustration.

"Love? I could do the heat thing like I did in surgery... like a wookiee hair dryer?" Alan asked plaintively.

"Great idea love. You turn on the heat while the rest of us wrestle out the tangles, we'll have him looking 'bouncy and radiant' in no time." Andrew said and started brushing in earnest.

Movement from the corner of Andrew's eye caught his attention. He looked up to see Jean, Alex, Scott, Remy, Xander, Dawn and Tara watching them brushing Hank.

Andrew made a shushing motion and shoed them away.

//Don't worry Andrew, we'll never tell him that we saw.// Jean sent to Andrew's mind.

//Thanks Jean. I may have been stern with him, but I really care about his feelings, I don't want him to be embarrassed.// Andrew sent as he continued brushing.

//Said like a true father.// Jean said and sent a wave of admiration and respect across the link before it fell silent.

"What are regeneration alcoves?" Hank asked as he brushed the more... personal... areas of his body.

"The children are a fusion of organic and mechanical components, the regeneration alcove recharges the mechanical parts, provides nourishment, expels waste, and does repairs on all the components of the organism, mechanical or organic." Andrew said absently as he continued brushing.

"Father, you speak like a Borg." Jimmy said with a chuckle.

"I guess that's why I'm 'One of Two'." Andrew said with a shrug and continued to brush.

"And I'm glad to be your 'Two of Two'." Alan said and moved in for a kiss.

### ***[Epilogue]***

Jean appeared in the Professor's office in a blinding flash of light.

The Professor sat stunned as Jean stood, radiating peace and joy.

"I don't have much time to explain. Somehow the power of Jean Grey and the Phoenix along with the enhancement of her mutation by the virus created me. It's a beautiful thing, like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. But because of that I can't stay here." Jean said with a note of sadness.

"Why not?" The Professor asked cautiously.

"You know that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. The same goes for potential, that is how challenges come to us that are usually within our abilities to overcome. The potential I have now could attract a counter-force of such magnitude that it could destroy this solar system." Jean said seriously.

"When do you have to leave?"

"Now. Every minute that I stay increases the danger. But I'll stop in from time to time to visit. The place where I'll be living is designed for a being like what I've become." Jean said with happiness radiating from her eyes.

"You are obviously happy with the transformation. But you speak of yourself as though you aren't Jean Grey anymore. Who are you now?" The Professor asked quietly.

Jean disappeared in a flash of light and her answer hung in the air. //You can still call me Jean, but the rest of the multiverse will call me Q.//

***[The End]***