

Maybe in another dimension

Von ellenchain

Kapitel 4: Charles No. 3

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

Charles.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He summoned his powers and let the metal float through the room. He killed one scientist after another. And while he was doing so, he thought about his mother. Magda. Nina. Charles. They were all dead. Again, he asked himself if that's what he was meant to be. A monster. A killer. A lonely man without anyone to love. A desperate figure in a minor role.

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

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

Charles death was different.

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

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

But now?

What was left?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Brown locks framing his slightly red cheeks.

Tiny freckles on his nose.

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

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

middle of a flower field.

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

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

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

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

But Charles was shot directly into the head.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He turned around to see another Charles standing at the other end of the long white hall. He was wearing the exact same clothes, had the same haircut and the same bright blue eyes like the one Erik was holding in his arms.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Erik took a deep breath. "No...", he started and thought about his Charles. The dead one. The one that was sorry for killing himself to save the world. The dumb one. The really dumb one. A few tears came back and Erik wanted to kill more of those horrible people that tortured him. Just to numb the pain.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Was there someone with you?"

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

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

"I killed them first."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It took her a moment to answer. Her eyes were glued on Charles No. 3. "Y-Yes. Hank is in the cockpit. Waiting for us. The others are also searching for you."

"Then we leave."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Only now Beast recognised the other person with the dark brown hair. "Is that...?"

Charles?", Beast asked in a low voice as if not believing his own eyes. "Did they heal him?"

"No. They cloned him."

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

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

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

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