

Maybe in another dimension

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Kapitel 6: Friend or Foe

“Erik.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A faint tinnitus was starting in Erik's ears.

“I wanted you to come home.”

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

"I wanted you."

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

"I wanted."

Erik couldn't move. He needed the peaceful morning back but then remembered that this kind of morning never had happened. Only back then, when they were traveling to find other mutants, they woke up next to each other with back pain and headaches because of the cheap beds and the numerous drinks they had the night before.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What if this clone of Charles was really a version of Charles Francis Xavier? And all the other clones equally as well? What would have been the purpose of that? Why did

they clone him in the first place? To test out different methods of their abusive research? To have multiple telepaths if one of them ... died? Weren't mutants just batteries to them? So, they cloned the most important one? What if the conscious of Charles was in that clone now? That he wasn't really dead but just didn't remember because of the transmission of his mind? A new body with just... amnesia?

Erik felt his eyelids twitch. Those thoughts made him nervous. Too much thinking about it made him also very sad. Because Charles' old body may be dead now but if this clone is also Charles and just a forgetful version of him – then they didn't have lost, did they? Charles just needed to remember his past and he would be his old self. Maybe that was what they were doing right now. Beast would be in his labs, doing a lot of research on the new Charles and give him eventually the confirmation that he was healthy. And after that they would let him wander through their minds to remember who he once was. In the end he would be truly Charles Francis Xavier.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Where's Beast?", he asked in a low, hopefully threatening voice. Because the

sleepless nights and constant thinking about Charles' death made him feel worn out and weak, which he hoped didn't make him less imposing. He was still Magneto. Genosha needed a strong leader. And the school a constant reminder that humanity is the evil one in that war.

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

"Not really", he answered her in a serious tone and chose to dismiss the idea of mocking her about her appearance. "Where's Charles No.3?"

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

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

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

Erik ignored her words. "Where is he?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The documents. What did you find out?"

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

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

Again no one answered immediately.

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

“Okay, stop”, Raven interrupted him suddenly and stepped in front of him. “You’re not here to check on Charles because you’re worried of him. You’re here because you fear he might be a threat to you and Genosha! You’re disgusting, Erik! Is that all that matters to you? What about Charles? Don’t you want to know how he is doing? After learning that he is ‘just a clone’? That he was disabled for 20 years because you harmed him? That he lost everything back then? That he has to lose it again – at least in his mind? That he has to remember all those years without being really there? That someone else lived this life that he now needs to adopt?”

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

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

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

Erik didn’t believe his ears. “He refused?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“And he is a pretty fast learner. Even faster than before, I’d say”, Raven interrupted Beasts monologue.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Aside from torturing other mutants and animals, they hurt the original Charles really

bad. They cut open his brain and examined everything they wanted to know. They even took parts of it and made research on how Charles would react to certain lights or other stimulations without the piece of brain they took.”

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

“It’s terrible, yes, but what makes me nervous the most is what comes next. The clones woke up one after another and got killed within minutes. One clone got shot right before your eyes, right?”

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

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

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

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

“No, Charles No. 3 told me.”

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

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

“And now you’re certain he won’t kill again?”

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

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

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

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

Erik looked through the room. “Show me how he escaped.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Charles made them forget how to breathe.

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

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

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

"Erik", began Raven, "Charles is a very mighty telepath – he always was. He could have killed us all if he would have been in the mood. But he didn't. And that he killed now

was just a reaction to defend himself. We should be lucky that at least one clone survived and that Charles is still with us.”

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

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

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