

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Aftermath.

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As Emma finishes helping Thaddeus completely lock Apocalypse up in the darkest recesses of his mind, she can't help but grimace a little. Obviously, she would much prefer that they did away with Apocalypse altogether. Letting any version of the ancient mutant survive, even imprisoned like this, was a risk.

Unfortunately, it was a risk that she and Thaddeus knew they had to take. If Apocalypse was correct, then Selene might have already obtained the power she thought she needed to be able to take the two of them on. And that meant that the Black Queen would be coming for them at any time now.

They needed as much power as they could get their hands on if they were going to face off against a seventeen thousand year old witch who was obsessed with ascending to godhood, that much was certain.

... But for the moment at least, the fighting was over. Under Emma's leadership, they had dealt with Apocalypse's Four Horsemen while Thaddeus was dealing with the mutant himself.

Ms. Marvel's powerup along with her use of actual strategy and tactics had allowed her to take down the Juggernaut solo, because even transformed into the Horseman of War, the brute was a bit of a one trick pony. So long as you didn't let him build up momentum, he couldn't very well do much.

Meanwhile, the X-Men would have been hard pressed to handle their leader, transformed into the Horseman of Death as he'd been. However, they were lucky to have Emma backing them up. Xavier's telepathic might was no joke of course, especially empowered by Apocalypse. And yet, Emma was stronger and backed up by the Phoenix besides. Nudging his attacks away so that the X-Men

could deal with him and take the Professor down nonlethally had been simple enough.

Finally, there were the other two. Emma had focused the majority of her attention here, ensuring that nothing happened to those that were firmly in her and Thaddeus' camp. Still, these mysterious female horsemen that Apocalypse had found certainly weren't pushovers.

The green one had showed an impressive display of telekinetic might... albeit focused seemingly entirely on metal, something that Emma had certainly made note of and had her suspicions about. But it was the red one that truly grabbed her attention and forced her to prioritize her above all costs.

The all-red Horseman of Famine had proven to be an even stronger psychic than Charles as the Horseman of Death. If it wasn't for Emma's connection to the Phoenix Force as well as the fact that she could feel the Horseman of Famine constantly fighting against Apocalypse's control, they would have been a lot more pressed in the battle that had just taken place.

Strangest and most concerning of all, Emma had felt a flicker of interest from the Phoenix possessing her directly at the all-red Horseman. In another time and place where they were less fortunate, there was a very real chance that the Phoenix could have jumped ship in the middle of this battle, spelling doom for them all.

... But that hadn't happened. All was well that ended well so far, and with Apocalypse dead, his control was broken and his power was receding from his latest Horsemen. Juggernaut had been rendered unconscious by Ms. Marvel and thus remained that way, but the other three were all varying degrees of coming back to themselves.

"Jean!"

Emma's head sharply turns to see Scottie Summers stepping towards the all-red Horseman. Her eyes narrow as the brunette looks both stricken but dangerously hopeful. To be fair, Emma had had her own suspicions on whether or not

Apocalypse had gone gravedigging for his Horseman of Famine. However, she wouldn't have thought that Cyclops would have had the time to focus too much on the other battles when she and the rest of the X-Men were fighting for their lives against their beloved Professor.

Regardless, she watches on in silence as Thaddeus rejoins her at her side, choosing not to interfere for the moment. Wolverine is already grabbing Cyclops by the arm anyways, stopping the brunette from advancing forward.

"That ain't Jean, Scottie..."

Whipping her head around, Cyclops snarls.

"What? You saw what she was doing! It could be her!"

But Wolverine just shakes his head. Before Scottie can get any angrier, there's a low groan from the woman in question.

"Nngh... he... he's right. I'm not Jean Grey."

Emma turns back with everyone else to stare as the armored mask covering the former Horseman's face finally finishes disappearing, revealing her in full. The first thing she notices... is that while this is not Jean Grey, she certainly looks a lot like Jean Grey. Red hair, familiar facial features... Emma should know, she's seen enough of a certain clone at this point to detect the similarities.

Indeed, Thaddeus even signals his surprise through their connection, with Emma sending back an acknowledgment and agreement.

The red head looks around at all of them for a moment, her eyes seeming to settle on a few of them in particular with greater recognition than normal. However, her strongest reaction comes from seeing Scottie Summers. For a long moment, the former Horseman just stares at Cyclops... more specifically, at Cyclops' tits.

Just when things are starting to get awkward, she seems to remember herself, jerking her eyes away and scrambling to her feet.

“I’m not Jean... uh, you can call me Rachel. And I’m a long way from home.”

Rachel. The lack of a surname feels rather important at the moment, especially given Emma’s suspicions. But of course, everyone that Apocalypse ‘recruited’ into his Four Horsemen has just been through a traumatic experience.

Something that Charles Xavier, as he finishes recovering, is quick to remind them all.

“That is quite alright, my dear. We’ll be happy to help you get home, wherever that home is.”

Rachel fidgets for a moment, biting her lower lip as she sweeps her gaze across all of them again before nodding slowly.

“Sure. I’d like that.”

Smiling wanly despite his clear exhaustion, the Professor next looks to the other woman who Apocalypse had taken. By this point the Horseman of Pestilence has also been completely freed from her armor... but that doesn’t mean she looks ‘normal’ by any stretch of the imagination. Her bright green hair makes her stand out quite a bit, even as she looks like she’d rather be anywhere else than near any of them.

“And you, my dear?”

Biting her lower lip, she hesitates for a moment... before shaking her head.

“I’m nobody... nobody important. Would love a ride back to civilization though if one is on the table.”

Nobody important. Emma would snort derisively if she didn’t have better self-control than that. Both her and Thaddeus feel no small amount of incredulity at the idea though. Sure, Thaddeus had been focused on fighting Apocalypse, but

he knew from her just how dangerous the green-haired woman had been. Apocalypse didn't just pick 'nobody important' to make into his Horsemen... and the transformations he triggered were built off of existing powersets, not creating something from nothing.

"Nobody important? You really expect us to believe that? Like I didn't see you grab Talon by her claws and toss her around a few times?"

Of course, Wolverine just has to open his big mouth. And once Wolverine has spoken... Cyclops finally tears her eyes off of Rachel long enough to look over as well.

"... Wolverine is right. You were controlling metal during the fight. It's pretty obvious that you're connected to Magneto in some way, so you'd better start talking."

Emma sees an opportunity, even as both Storm and the Professor look exhausted by their teammates' suspicion. Before either of them can interject to tell Wolverine and Cyclops to back off and stand down, Emma steps forward with a smile on her lips.

"I don't believe that will be necessary."

Under incredulous gazes from the X-Men side of things, Emma lets her smile grow as she gestures to the young green-haired woman.

"This woman has been through a lot... unless you actually believe that Apocalypse received her consent before transforming her into one of his Horsemen. Based on everything we know, that seems highly unlikely. She's a victim in all of this as much as everyone else. And... I don't see Magneto anywhere around here. Do you?"

Even as Cyclops and Wolverine both bristle at her words, Emma is already holding out a hand to the former Horseman.

"We'll get you wherever you want to go my dear, no questions asked."

Looking between the two groups, one who clearly had it out for her and then Emma and those surrounding her... the green-haired woman nods and quickly moves to stand by Emma and Thaddeus. She even gives Thaddeus a quick, appreciative glance that has Emma's smile growing a bit more wicked.

As for Thaddeus himself, he simply crosses his very big arms over his very broad chest and stares the X-Men down, daring the lot of them to say anything more. He definitely wasn't in the talking mood at the moment, not when he just got done dealing with Apocalypse trying to take over his mind, but that was alright... Emma would do the talking.

"We should all get out of here and back to the States, I imagine. Though... what do we want to do with him?"

Raising an arm, Emma points at the unconscious form of the Juggernaut. Removing his powers was impossible as far as she knew... while Apocalypse's armor had receded, the rest of the Juggernaut's armor was welded into his body from what she recalled hearing last.

He wasn't a good man even when he did have free will... but did they want to take him into custody or anything like that?

When none of the X-Men seem to have a particularly strong opinion, Emma looks to Ms. Marvel. She is technically the actual authority here since the Avengers are basically backed by parts of the United Nations. The blonde hesitates for a moment before sighing.

"We'll take him back with us. I should be able to get him into containment before he wakes up... letting him roam free, even in the desert, is too dangerous."

Fair enough. Emma just shrugs and nods as Ms. Marvel reaches down and picks Juggernaut up by one arm, easily lifting his massive limp form out of the sand. Looking at everyone else, she arches a brow.

"Shall we be off then? Ah but first..."

Emma turns to Rachel, a slight smile on her lips.

“I do believe we’ll be splitting up here and going our separate ways. Would you prefer to leave with them... or us.”

She gestures to the X-Men on ‘them’ and herself on ‘us’, making the options clear. And then she takes a metaphorical step back and lets the X-Men dig themselves a proper hole.

“She’s coming with us, of course!”

Or rather, Cyclops does anyways. The brash brunette looks downright appalled by the idea of this Jean Grey lookalike leaving with them. However, her forcefulness only seems to disturb Rachel more, making her decidedly uncomfortable. This is something that Xavier doesn’t fail to notice, the Professor clearing his throat and speaking up.

“Rachel... I would love to host you at my Institute until we can get you home. My name is Professor Charles Xavier and-!”

"I know who you are."

Rachel cuts in hastily... before looking to Emma.

“And you... you’re Emma Frost, right? The White Queen of the Hellfire Club?”

Emma arches a brow but nods all the same.

“Indeed.”

“... I’ll go with you.”

How strange. Emma doesn’t quite understand the girl’s motivations as she moves to stand with the others... but she’s also not complaining too much. Especially when it pisses off the X-Men some more. Indeed, Cyclops looks ready

to start a fight over this latest act and Wolverine doesn't look much better. Before either can do anything however, Thaddeus takes a step forward.

"Talk to you later, Storm."

And then he waves a hand and sends them all plummeting through portals beneath their feet, vanishing into Limbo and no doubt reappearing in their mansion on the other side of the world a moment later. There's a squawk of protest from Cyclops and a growl from Wolverine... but they're gone too fast for it to matter.

Thaddeus then looks to all of them with a slight smile.

"Everyone please get ready, since I assume none of you want to spend longer in this desert than necessary. We'll be teleporting in three... two... one."

On one, they vanish from the middle of Apocalypse's hastily constructed fortress and appear back in New York City, specifically in Emma's penthouse apartment. Everyone catches themselves easily enough on their feet having been forewarned... and then Emma gets to watch as the green-haired woman and Rachel both look around in wonder. Clearing her throat, she draws their eyes back to her.

"It would be good to have a name to call you by, even if you are 'nobody important'. Easier to get you home as well."

The green-haired woman hesitates for a moment longer before slowly nodding.

"Lorna. My name is Lorna Dane. Technically... Doctor Lorna Dane. I have a doctorate in geophysics."

Emma smiles and nods.

"Well met, Dr. Dane. Well, you've both had quite the experience. Luckily, this apartment has multiple fully equipped bathrooms that you can use to shower and freshen up. Please, feel free to make use of the facilities."

That gets both of their attention and soon enough Sage is leading them both down the hall to show the way to each of the bathrooms. Emma watches them go and then looks back to the rest.

Cessily is the one who breaks the silence and states the obvious, her head tilted to the side.

“... So the green-haired woman is clearly Magneto’s daughter, right? Did you guys know Magneto had a kid besides the twins? And the red head... is she another Jean Grey clone or something?”

Laura grunts and crosses her arms over her chest.

“It definitely felt like I was fighting Magneto in that battle. She rendered me next to useless multiple times...”

Emma just stays quiet in turn, though she and Thaddeus are certainly considering things in the recesses of their shared mental space. Dr. Lorna Dane and ‘Just Rachel’... they were an interesting pair of individuals weren’t they?

And it was incredibly curious that both of them had chosen to come with them instead of accepting the offer of help from the X-Men. Sure, Cyclops was as abrasive bitch but Rachel apparently knew that Emma was the White Queen and had still come with them... what was up with that, exactly?

What was up with either of them?

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A/N: Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!