

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

A/N: Lorna and Rachel have *thoughts*.

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Lorna lets out a breathless sigh as she steps under the roaring hot water of the shower she's been directed to. On the one hand, getting naked in a stranger's home and a stranger's bathroom was a bit iffy at the best of times. On the other hand, she'd already been mentally violated this past week in the worst ways imaginable, so what did it matter anymore?

... She hadn't asked to exist. She hadn't asked to be born like... this. In fact, as she'd grown up and realized the truth of things, Lorna had ultimately decided to do everything in her power to escape the hand dealt to her. She'd run away from her blood family, from her mutant abilities, from everything. She'd tried her best to be someone else entirely.

For a while, it had even worked. She'd gone back to school, she'd gotten a doctorate in geophysics, and she'd even found work at a university. Everything had been... fine. Not perfect, not spectacular, but also not terrible either. She'd escaped. She'd been done.

Except, of course... she'd really just been lulling herself into a false sense of security, hadn't she? She'd convinced herself that it was all over... but more the fool her. It was never over in the world of mutants and powers. And no matter how much she might have wanted to divorce herself from that world, it continued to come back for her like a bad habit.

She'd been in her office at the university when Apocalypse had come for her. He'd ripped the entire outside wall of the room away with his powers, appearing before her with glowing red eyes. His voice had reverberated through the air even as she'd backed away from him in terror.

“Your father would have been my first choice. However, his time in captivity has left him unacceptably weak. I require stronger foundations for my Horsemen.”

And that was that. Lorna had been out of practice so her attempts at resisting the blue-skinned demon had been weak to begin with. But truth be told, even if she'd been at full strength she knew deep down that there was no fighting him anyways. It was over before she could even blink.

All because her blood father, the mutant terrorist known as Magneto, hadn't been 'up to Apocalypse's standards'. Something about the man being imprisoned or captive or whatever. She hadn't even been the bastard's first choice. No, she'd been a backup plan at best.

It was... all kinds of infuriating, wasn't it? Lorna could hardly even begin to fully process the range of emotions she was feeling right now about the situation. Everything she'd done, everything she'd tried to do... and none of it mattered in the face of Apocalypse's power. He wanted her... so he'd gotten her and he'd turned her into one of his Horsemen without so much as a 'by your leave'.

Was it foolish to think she could escape this life? All Lorna wanted was to be normal. All she'd wanted for the longest time now was to just... live a normal human life. But the Powers That Be refused to leave her alone.

So here she was in some rich, grandiose penthouse bathroom, taking a much-needed shower after her week spent in the desert. Even wearing that Horseman Armor that Apocalypse's transformation forced upon her, Lorna still has sand in unspeakable places that she relishes getting out of all the nooks and crannies now.

She didn't know what was meant to happen next in all honesty. She hadn't really chosen to go with this particular group because she trusted them, but rather because she didn't trust the X-Men. Or at least, she didn't trust the X-Men to treat with her fairly.

Indeed, they were already suspicious of her just because her powers reminded them of her father. It had been Emma Frost, seemingly the leader of the faction Lorna had chosen to leave with, who had stood up for her against their suspicions.

Hopefully Emma would get her home as she'd promised. But at the same time... could Lorna really afford to return to her old life and stick her head in the ground again? If she continued to try and hide as the mild mannered Doctor Lorna Dane, would she just find herself being threatened and attacked by yet another power tripping mutant before long?

More importantly, Apocalypse's kidnapping of her hadn't exactly been subtle. Was her job at the university even still intact? Or was she going to be out on her ass either way? She would have to find out... hopefully they'd let her place a call to see what was going on back home once she was done with this shower.

For now though, Lorna enjoys the rush of hot water flowing down her naked body, cleansing her of the dirty, scummy feeling that comes with being encased in a set of armor and living out in the desert for an entire week. God it feels good to be clean again if nothing else...

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Rachel Summers was a long, long way from home. As hot water runs over her naked flesh, her hands scrubbing away at her body, the pale red head bites her lower lip, trying to figure out her next steps.

On the one hand... she should probably just rest for a day and then go back, right? This technically wasn't any different from most of her other trips except for how she'd gotten herself captured and controlled by Apocalypse within mere hours of arriving in this universe.

Still, the red head is used to seeing all sorts of things in her travels through space and time. She's witnessed a hell of a lot of crazy shit. And yet... never before has she arrived in a universe where her father was a chick.

Cyclops, aka Scott Summers, was always a man as far as Rachel knew. Him and Jean Grey got together and had multiple children, of which she was one of them. Although, Rachel herself was special. There was only one of her across every universe... even in universes where other Scotts and Jeans had a baby girl and named her Rachel, that Rachel wasn't her but an entirely different person.

Still... still, this particular universe was the weirdest she'd ever been to. Scott Summers was a woman. Jean Grey was seemingly dead (for now). And all of their world-altering children would... never be born? Was that right? Because two women couldn't... make babies together, could they?

Rachel bites her lower lip as she turns that idea over in her head for a moment before violently shunting it away in her mind's eye. Those were her parents... she definitely didn't need to be thinking about all of *that*. Instead, she refocuses herself on the other numerous issues with this timeline.

Apocalypse was dead. Which shouldn't have been possible considering the ancient mutant was immortal. En Sabah Nur was both an External and had the ability to take over and possess others if he decided they were stronger than him. And yet... and yet, by the time she'd been freed from Apocalypse's control, it was already over. That blond man with Emma Frost had gone and drained the ancient mutant dry, turning him into a husk of a corpse.

But he also hadn't been possessed. He hadn't seemed to be in danger of falling under Apocalypse's control. But then, that might have something to do with Emma Frost being the host of the Phoenix Force in this universe. And boy wasn't that a shock. Not just that she was hosting the Phoenix Force, but also that the damn birdbrain didn't immediately try and jump ship to join with Rachel as soon as it noticed her.

Of course, that would have been really quite bad considering Rachel had still been under the control of Apocalypse at the time. Yet... it wouldn't be the first time the Phoenix Forced fucked up with her. They had a long and storied history, almost as long and storied as the history between the Phoenix and her mother.

But no... this Phoenix in this universe was attached to Emma Frost and didn't seem inclined to detach itself any time soon. Meanwhile, the blond giant of a man who had killed Apocalypse seemed to be suffering no adverse effects from draining the cockroach of a mutant dry.

In other circumstances, Rachel would have been happy to depart with the X-Men. But these circumstances she found herself in changed things. Not only was the idea of hanging out with her dad-mom extremely weird to her... but she *needed* to figure out what was going on with Emma Frost and her boytoy before she left this universe behind.

Rachel knew better than most that Emma Frost could do good. And yet, it was obvious that the blonde psychic was NOT part of the X-Men in this universe, or a Professor at the Institute. And that meant Emma was still part of the Hellfire Club, something she'd confirmed when Rachel had asked back in the desert.

It fell to her to get Emma off of her current path and onto the path of redemption, Rachel figured. Especially when the blonde was hosting the Phoenix Force. And especially when several women that Rachel recognized as X-Men like Talon, Mercury, and Magick were all seemingly not X-Men in this universe! Or at least, were more affiliated with the White Queen of the Hellfire Club than they were Professor X and the Institute!

Not to mention Sage was seemingly involved in all of this as well and if Rachel could convince everyone to just turn over a new leaf and join the X-Men, then maybe Sage would finally be able to break her cover and stop pretending to be Tessa, the Black King's right hand woman. Though why she was here working for the White Queen instead of with Shaw WAS strange...

Either way, Rachel leaves the shower after a bit feeling like she's got it all laid out before her. She's a woman on a mission, really. She towels off and gets dressed in the fresh set of clothing left for her and then steps out of the bathroom only to run right into Sage who is waiting for her calmly.

"I hope the shower was to your satisfaction."

Rachel licks her lips and nods.

“After the week I’ve had, it felt amazing. Though... I don’t think I caught your name. I’m Rachel in case you didn’t already know.”

Sage smiles and inclines her head.

“Yes, but it’s still a pleasure to meet you properly Rachel. I’m Tessa.”

Rachel tilts her head to the side at that, considering how much she wants to push things... but fuck it, they’ll figure out she’s not from around here pretty fast anyways so she might as well drop a couple of tidbits. Plus, she already admitted to recognizing Emma as the White Queen of the Hellfire Club.

“Tessa... I would have thought you’d be at the Black King’s side right now, all things considered.”

That causes Sage to pause and look Rachel over in a new light for a moment before letting her smile turn rather... sardonic.

“Alas, that would be somewhat difficult all things considered. The Black King is dead.”

Rachel’s eyes damn near bulge out of her skull at that as she chokes on her own spit.

“S-Sorry, what? Sebastian Shaw is dead?!”

Maybe she’s talking about a different Black King. Lord knows there were enough of them over the years. The idea of Sebastian Shaw being dead though, at least at this point in the timeline... of course, even when he does die, he’s never truly gone. Just like Apocalypse. Still...

“Indeed. He was slain by the White Queen’s Knight.”

Who the hell was the White Queen's Knight? That thought barely has the chance to pass through Rachel's mind before it hits her and she narrows her eyes.

"The blond giant who killed Apocalypse. Is he who you're talking about?"

Sage looks amused at Rachel's description of the man. Rachel, meanwhile, feels it to be appropriate. While his size had changed a bit during and then after the battle, he'd still been the same size as En Sabah Nur while fighting the other mutant. And afterwards, he was still over six foot even after he shrunk down a bit. So yeah, giant was applicable in her humble opinion.

"His name is Thaddeus. Now please, follow me."

Rachel files away the name even as Sage turns to begin walking down the hall. Which is when Rachel makes a snap judgment and reaches out, grabbing Sage by the wrist.

"Wait."

Stopping dead in her tracks, Sage looks down at where Rachel is holding her, making the red head blush and let go.

"S-Sorry, it's just... I don't think you'd want anyone else to hear this."

Taking a step closer, Rachel lowers her voice to barely a whisper as she meets the undercover psychic's eyes.

"I know who you are, Sage. I know you infiltrated the Hellfire Club on the orders of Charles Xavier."

At Sage's widening eyes, Rachel hurriedly adds on a bit more.

"You don't need to worry; I'm not going to blow your cover... but I need your help."

Rachel isn't surprised when Sage compartmentalizes within seconds and maintains her composure admirably despite this bombshell. Staring piercingly at her now, the other woman arches a single brow.

"And what might you need from me?"

Rachel licks her lips, glancing down the hall.

"... I'm from the future... or rather, a future. In that future, you're free of this 'assignment'... and Emma Frost is a Professor at the Xavier Institute for Higher Learning. Both of you manage to escape the shackles of the Hellfire Club and Emma redeems herself for her past misdeeds... she becomes a hero."

Sage stares at Rachel with an unreadable expression on her face and of course Rachel isn't foolish enough to try to read the other psychic's mind. In the end, she squirms under the intense gaze, shifting from foot to foot and feeling antsy.

"W-Will you help me make that a reality here too? If Sebastian Shaw is dead it should be even easier. We just need to convince Emma to abandon the Hellfire Club. Once we do that, you'll both be free."

Silence reigns as Rachel waits with bated breath to hear Sage's answer. She could only hope that the other woman saw the good in Emma that Rachel knew was there and chose to help her out. Otherwise... she didn't know what she was going to do.

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