

## Magical Mutations

### Chapter 11

The siren wailed in three short bursts, and the world snapped to life around Harry in the blink of an eye. He hit the field at a full sprint, and the grass underfoot was too green, too even, and too synthetic. That's because it wasn't grass at all. It was just the Danger Room's idea of grass. A sound like sheet metal being torn in half thundered behind him. Harry risked a glance over his shoulder and saw four Sentinels rising up from the forested margin of the training field, their armor panels shimmering with metallic reds and purples. Each one was easily twenty feet tall. Their round eyes glowed orange, and one of them leveled an arm at him.

Laser fire lanced through the air. Harry twisted sideways and felt the energy bolt whip past his ribs with an electric sizzle. He kept running, staying low to the ground and using the uneven contours of the field as cover. The Danger Room kept things interesting. The open grass suddenly dropped away into a shallow dip, and Harry dove into it, skidding on his shoulder and letting the artificial turf skin his elbow. He barely had time to roll before another searing beam fused the dirt inches from his face, glassing a hand-sized patch of mud.

Logan's voice grumbled in his ear. "Don't just run, kid. Mix it up."

He grinned and pressed his comm. "I'm working on it."

Three Sentinels strode into the field while one hung back, their metal knees flexing with a dampened hiss. Their hydraulic arms lifted, ready to fire again. Harry braked hard and reversed course. One Sentinel fired at his feet, and the ground exploded around him. Harry threw himself forward, then let the Phoenix in him surface for a split second. He burst into flame, and he reappeared on the Sentinel's shoulder, standing on a lip of armor, thirty feet above the ground. The robot tried to swat him off with a massive hand, but Harry bent backward and dropped flat. The panel was hot and vibrating under his chest. He rolled, anchored himself by jamming his fingers into a vent, and then aimed a kick at the Sentinel's faceplate, just to annoy it.

The Sentinel beside it reoriented, its targeting lasers crisscrossing the air. Harry smiled, gave the middle finger to the main camera, and vanished in a swirl of orange fire just as a wide-beam laser pulse cored the first Sentinel's head. Its skull detonated with an explosive clang, and pieces of servos and hot plastic rained onto the turf below.

He landed back on the ground, a dozen yards ahead of the wreckage, and kept running. His shirt clung to his back with sweat, and the familiar feel of adrenaline filled his body. Harry heard the Sentinel crash behind him, and the brutal impact made his teeth rattle. He heard Logan chuckle over the comm.

The third Sentinel adjusted its approach. A massive hand scooped up a chunk of earth, aiming to hurl it at him. Harry faked left, then teleported right, keeping low and moving in erratic

patterns. He could sense the Danger Room's predictive targeting algorithms having a hard time keeping up with him. Sure, it couldn't think on its feet like a human could, but it was still a worthy adversary.

Ahead, the field abruptly ended in a thirty-foot brick wall. It was absurdly tall and smooth. There was no way up, and no obvious handholds. He felt the Phoenix's giddy enthusiasm bubble up. 'Why not try something new and slightly crazy?' Harry asked himself. Harry raised a hand and focused. The bricks at the bottom of the wall warped, bulged, and suddenly flowed upward like a wave. He sprinted up the moving ramp as it surged under him. The bricks formed and dissolved under his feet, and his momentum carried him high enough to catch the top edge.

Another laser fired, vaporizing the ramp as he leaped. Harry twisted midair, got both feet on the edge, and vaulted. He dropped twenty feet on the far side and landed in a shoulder roll, then came up running.

The Sentinels had adapted, and the final one had joined the group. They were now back to three. They didn't try to jump the wall. Instead, they punched through it, brute-forcing a gap. The wall shuddered and cracked as twin fists made a canyon-sized breach. The robots advanced, intent on finishing him off.

Harry reached the base of a sculpted hill. The rendezvous point was a hundred yards up. He started to climb, but paused. The Sentinels were lining up their shots, targeting him as they stepped through the broken wall. Harry inhaled some much-needed oxygen, then snapped his fingers.

The wall morphed before his very eyes. The bricks liquefied, then sprouted into a forest of steel spikes, each one the thickness of a telephone pole. The first Sentinel caught four through the midsection and froze in place as blue sparks fountained from its back. The second took a spike through the shoulder and stumbled. Its arms windmilled as it tried to keep its balance. The third tried to stop before reaching the spikes, but Harry had already conjured a sphere of pure energy. It was dense and flickering with firelight. He hurled it at the cluster of Sentinels and watched as the orb rainbowed through the air and then detonated.

The fireball turned the near field into a warzone of flying shrapnel. Fragments of Sentinels flew in all directions. A severed hand tumbled past Harry's head. The shockwave flattened the top of the hill, and the explosion of Phoenix fire made the air uncomfortably hot. He shook off the ringing in his ears and started running again, barely winded.

He crested the hill, saw the blue holographic flags of the rendezvous point, and made it to the finish line with a final sprint. The moment his hand crossed the threshold, the grass, the wind, and even the sparks from the destroyed Sentinels froze. The Danger Room's simulation was locked in a perfect still frame. The field reset, and Harry was left panting as the room's true gridwork and silver struts reemerged from behind the fantasy. A faint clapping echoed through the steel rafters.

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When the real world reasserted itself, Harry found the Danger Room cool and quiet. His own breath was the loudest sound in the room. He straightened and stretched his back, finding his muscles sore and slightly aching. He'd spent the entire run in overdrive, and now that the threat was gone, he felt the heat crawling up his neck and into his ears.

A heavy hand smacked him on the shoulder, hard enough to make him stumble. Logan stood there with his arms crossed, wearing a shit-eating grin. He had an unlit cigar stub jammed in one corner of his mouth. "Not bad, kid," Logan said. "You gonna take a bow, or you want to hear how you could've done better?"

Harry shook his head, still catching his breath. "There's always a speech."

"Damn right." Logan gestured with a meaty hand. "You got fancy with the wall trick, but you gave up high ground. Next time, use the terrain instead of making it show off for you. Second thing ... you keep blinking around, and you're gonna end up blindsided. Sentinels adapt, remember?"

Harry grinned and wiped his brow with the back of his hand. "You should run it sometime, and see how fun it is with four of them shooting at your face."

Logan huffed out a sound that might have been a laugh. "I'd be done before they could finish calibrating." He shifted his weight, scanning the overhead monitors that hung suspended in the gridwork above. "You got a minute to talk, or you got a hot date with the showers?"

"That depends. Is this about Sabretooth again?"

Logan's brow crinkled. "You think I got you running evasion drills for my health?" He plucked the unlit cigar from his mouth and gestured with it like a pointer. "That bastard made it onto school grounds last night. He left his calling card on the perimeter fence."

Harry frowned. "I thought security would keep the unwanted out."

"Not if he's motivated. He tore three panels out of the ground and walked through like he owned the place." Logan's eyes were sharp and intense. "You notice anyone in town acting weird lately? There's some real weirdos at that school of yours. Anybody spending a lot of time near the property edge?"

"No. Not unless you count Jean's ex-boyfriend. He drives by the gate sometimes. I'm pretty sure he's looking to kick my ass, though. I think he suspects that it's me who keeps pissing in his car." Harry tilted his head. "You don't think he's working with Sabretooth, do you?"

Logan barked out a short laugh. "If he is, the world's doomed." He pocketed the cigar and clapped Harry's shoulder again, gentler this time. "Don't worry. I got people fixing the fence and adding more hardware. Next time he shows up, he'll catch a laser right in that ugly mug of his. But you keep your head on a swivel. He's got a hard-on for you."

"I'm flattered," Harry said in a deadpan voice.

"You wish." Logan jerked his thumb toward the access door. "You're done for now. Next up is the new batch."

A shuffling sound and a chorus of muffled complaints signaled the arrival of the next training group. Scott was at the head, his ruby shades reflecting the Danger Room lights. Jean walked beside him, already rolling her eyes at something he'd said. Behind them, Kitty bounced in place, her ponytail flipping with each step. Kurt, in his normal blue form, teleported into the room.

Scott raised a hand. "Yo, Logan. Can we run the simulation, or is the field still smoldering? Harry really did a number on those Sentinels."

Kitty circled Harry with wide eyes. "That was insane! The spike thing? Totally overkill."

"It worked, didn't it?" Harry said.

Logan cut in, raising his voice so the group would settle. "Alright, listen up. Standard Sentinel protocol. First, you run it solo, then together as a team. You know the drill. Summers, you're squad leader. Grey, you run defense. Kurt, you're on point for retrieval. Kitty, you're up first."

Kitty's expression slid from eager to resigned in the space of a breath. "Can I have, like, five minutes to stretch?"

"Nope," said Logan, already tapping at the control panel on the wall. "If you want to stay alive, you stretch while you run."

Kurt wagged his tail and offered Kitty a dramatic, clawed hand. "I will catch you if you fall, lieblich."

Kitty ignored him and started jogging in place, muttering under her breath about sadists. Harry caught her eye as he headed for the exit. "Good luck," he said with a smile.

She stuck out her tongue. "Don't shower too long. If I die in there, it's on you to avenge me."

Harry offered a salute, then ducked through the access door. The hall outside was cool and smelled faintly of cleaning chemicals. He felt the adrenaline starting to drain away, leaving a

pleasant, tired ache in his limbs. The Danger Room's observation deck was empty except for a few discarded candy wrappers that probably belonged to Kurt. That boy really loved his snacks.

He paused at the water fountain, drank deeply, and thought about what Logan said. Sabretooth would probably try to get onto the property again. The bastard never gave up ... but neither did Harry.

A boom echoed from inside the Danger Room, followed by what sounded like Kitty's voice yelling, "This isn't fair!" He grinned and headed for the locker room, knowing that by the time he got out, the squad would be up to their elbows in disaster. He knew Scott and Jean could handle themselves, but Kurt and Kitty were new. They'd be in for a rough time. He couldn't help but chuckle.

### **Magical Mutations**

Harry slipped out the mansion's side door with his hands jammed deep in his hoodie. The early morning air was very cold, and his breath fogged the moment he let out a shivery exhale. Even the birds seemed to second-guess waking up this early, holding off on their usual jovial chirping. It wasn't even seven yet, and like most days, Harry had slept only a few hours before waking up fully refreshed. Instead of sitting around waiting for everyone else to wake up, he decided to take the opportunity to visit Storm's greenhouse.

A thin vapor of heat curled from the glass roof that was already collecting dew on every pane. Harry paused at the entry and looked in. He didn't see her. The usual smell of compost hit him as he stepped inside. It had become his morning habit to help Storm haul sacks of mulch or arrange the large pots with his powers. They were chores she could easily handle on her own, but Harry knew she liked having someone to boss around. He liked just being around the sexy woman. She was easy to get along with, and she had a playful side that others rarely got to see.

Ororo's black stiletto heels were parked neatly under the edge of the potting table. On top of the table sat her pressed gray trousers, which were folded into a precise rectangle. A crisp, folded white blouse rested on top of the trousers. Harry raised an eyebrow. He looked around for any sign of her, but everything was exactly in its place. Everything was exactly where it should be, right down to the carefully labeled bags of mulched bark and peat, the tidy rows of ferns, and the African violets.

"Ororo?" he called out, soft enough to avoid disturbing the odd peace.

"Back here, Harry." Her voice, even muffled by a row of tall, thick tomato plants, was still easily heard. Her voice was quite powerful for a woman of her size. He moved toward it, brushing the leaves aside, until he caught a glint of movement near the hydroponics tanks. Harry then stopped short.

Storm stood with her arms raised and palms up like she was about to catch a lightning bolt. Her camisole, which was a white scrap of paper-thin fabric, was plastered to her body. Water beaded on her bare shoulders and trickled down the deep valley of her cleavage before streaking over the faint swell of her flat, smooth stomach. The camisole was soaked clear through, and it clung so tightly to her chest that Harry could see not just the curve but the exact shape of her breasts. He could even see the stiff peaks of her chocolate-colored nipples. Her white panties had gone almost transparent. The elastic dug into her thick, fleshy hips, and Harry spotted the outline of her smooth mound below. He swallowed loudly when he saw the way the crotch clung to the shape of her plump pussy lips.

All around her, rain was falling from a precise, isolated storm held overhead like a personal weather system. Though it was more like a heavy drizzle. Water blanketed the raised beds and sprayed in silver sheets around her. Her feet were bare and slick on the tile, and her long white hair had been drenched into a single wet rope that trailed down her back.

Harry's brain stuttered. Blood rushed into his cock so fast he had to shift his stance, hoping his thigh would disguise the obvious. He tried to say something, but his throat only delivered a weak grunt.

Storm turned slowly and theatrically and dropped her arms. She regarded him with a raised eyebrow. Her icy blue eyes narrowed while her full lips pulled into a delicate smirk. Her eyes swept down to his crotch, and she smiled.

"Well, good morning to you too," she said, pausing to let her gaze linger. "I was wondering if you'd show up this morning. Logan put you all through the wringer in the Danger Room last night."

He wanted to make a witty joke, but the words jammed up at the mere sight of her nipples poking through the wet fabric. He tried to drag his eyes to her face and mostly succeeded.

"You're, uh," he began. "You're watering the plants again."

"Very observant, Harry." She splayed her hands, and the rainfall above condensed to a needle-fine drizzle. "You'll forgive me if I'm wearing less than you're used to, but I enjoy the sensation of water on my bare skin." She glanced down her own body as if only now noticing how little she wore. "It reminds me of my time in Africa."

The light drizzle had dampened his forehead, and he wiped it away with the back of his hand. He had obviously seen Storm watering her plants before. She often wore small shorts and tight shirts, but he had never seen her so exposed. Her unhurried posture and the way she stood in front of him, with no intention of hiding herself, made it feel like she had meant for him to see her this way.

"It's a good look," he offered, and his voice croaked a little.

Storm laughed, and it sounded soft and genuine. "I know this isn't exactly appropriate." She gestured at herself. "But I enjoy it. There's something pure about getting drenched with rain. Besides ..." She took a step closer, letting her hips roll just a little. "You seem to appreciate it."

Harry tried really hard not to stare at her breasts, instead fixing his gaze on her eyes. "You really went all out today, didn't you?"

She clicked her tongue and circled a hand, and the rain above her thickened, soaking her again. "I like having a friend whom I don't have to hide from. I enjoy being myself, even if it's only for a brief time every morning." She squinted at him. "You're very tense, Harry. Would you like a closer look? Or should I put on a robe for your delicate sensibilities?"

He knew she was toying with him. Storm liked to push at the boundaries between them, but never quite like this. Still, he wasn't going to back down.

"I'm fine. I mean, you're fine. It's just ..." He lost track of the sentence, embarrassed at how his cock pressed against the seam of his jeans.

Storm tilted her head and strolled toward him, water dripping from her arms. She stopped just short. She was so close he could feel the heat radiating from her skin. "You're blushing," she said with a smirk. She reached out and dragged a finger along the line of his jaw, then flicked a bead of water onto his nose. "Relax. You look like you're about to faint."

Harry chuckled nervously and shrugged. "You're the one who looks like a swimsuit model on the cover of a gardening magazine."

She smiled sexily. "Not just a model, Harry. A goddess, remember?" She caught his gaze again and held it. She then tipped her head back and exhaled. The rain stopped falling from the swirling clouds above them. Storm's skin glistened with wetness, and her muscles slightly trembled from the cold water. The outline of her nipples stood out even harder now. She caught him staring and did not look away.

"You know, I could just strip down completely," she said. "But then you might really need a chair."

"I'd be fine," he assured her with a small smile.

Storm shook out her head, sending sprays of water everywhere. She laughed again and ran her fingers through her hair. The movement made her perky tits jiggle wonderfully.

"You're a bold one, Harry. But I'm not sure you're ready for all of me."

He smiled a little wider. "Who knows? Maybe I am."

She leaned in, lowering her voice. "Careful. You might get what you wish for."

Then, without warning, she flicked her fingers, and a burst of water dropped from the swirling clouds above, dumping a torrent of water straight onto his head. The shock froze him for a second. His sweatshirt was instantly plastered to his skin, and the water was cold as hell. He yelped and staggered back.

Storm cackled and pointed at him. "See? You're not so tough."

Harry squeezed water from his sleeves and stared at her. His face was wet, and his hair was plastered to his head. He let out a breath, grinned back, and shook his head.

"Fine, you win," he said.

She straightened up with her arms folded under her breasts, pressing them together so they strained even more obviously against the wet camisole. Storm was really putting on a show for him. "You're soaked," she said teasingly. "Maybe you should take off those clothes before you catch a chill."

Harry laughed, and the tension between them fizzled and was replaced with something easier. He grabbed a towel from the potting bench, but when he tried to towel off, Storm intercepted him and pulled it away. "Let me," she said softly. She carefully and slowly blotted his cheeks.

For a minute, neither said anything. Water dripped from the greenhouse roof and splattered on the flagstones. Storm's thumb traced a line along his cheekbone. The touch was gentle and almost affectionate. Then she turned away, her own cheeks darkening with embarrassment.

"I should get dressed," she said. "But I hope you'll join me again tomorrow."

Harry couldn't wipe the grin from his face. "Yeah," he said. "I'll be here."

He watched her grab her clothes and disappear behind a screen of hanging ferns, her wide hips swaying with the same deliberate tease as before. The last thing he saw was a streak of her white hair, shining in the early-morning sun.

Outside, the morning had warmed up slightly, and Harry waved a hand at himself. His clothes and hair instantly dried with a puff of warm air. As he strolled back to the mansion, he couldn't shake the image of Storm's wet, sexy body from his mind ... not that he wanted to. He wore a goofy grin all the way back to his room.