

Magical Mutations

Chapter 12

The lake glinted under a beam of pale sun, and Jean kicked a pebble into the shallows. She'd worn skinny blue jeans that hugged her hips and a sweatshirt that kept threatening to slip off one bare shoulder. Her red hair was down and loosely bounced against her back with every step. Harry tried not to gawk, but Jean was very sexy, and she damn well knew it.

"You're staring," Jean said, smiling sideways.

"As Logan always tells us, I'm keeping my head on a swivel," Harry said. "The last time I walked out here with you, you pushed me in."

She looked back, pretending to think about it. "That's because you touched my butt. Besides, you teleported away before you even hit the water. You spoil all the fun."

He loved her dimpled grin, and he had a feeling that she knew exactly what he was thinking. Jean fueled the fire by brushing her hair behind his ear. "I told you ... that was an accident. But you know what they say ... If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." Harry's eyes drifted over her sexy body.

Jean rolled her eyes, but her cheeks were pink. "You're quite confident in yourself."

He chuckled and shot her a boyish grin. "It's my most endearing trait."

They made it to the rickety dock, which creaked when Harry stepped on it. Jean followed, balancing like she was on a catwalk. She spun once with her arms out and lost her footing when a loose plank shifted. Harry reached out to steady her, and his hands gripped her sides. She stumbled forward, and her chest pressed against his. For a second, she just stood there and stared into his brilliant green eyes, and her freckles darkened as she blushed.

"Careful," Harry said, his voice playful and amused. "I don't want to explain to everyone how their favorite ginger drowned in a foot of pond scum." Jean's hand squeezed his bicep.

She snorted. "Scott would probably hold a memorial every week for a year." She didn't move her hand.

He felt a strange current between them. It was like two magnets desperate to come together. His hands lingered, then slid down to her waist. Her eyes moved from his eyes, down to his lips. Harry didn't have to read her mind to know what she was thinking, and he was very tempted to try his luck.

“Do you remember what happened last time?” Jean asked with a sexy smirk, answering his unspoken thought.

“Yep, but I think it’s worth the risk,” Harry said, and his face was close enough to hers that her eyelashes tickled his cheek.

“Who knows? Maybe you’ll be luckier this time around,” she teased, not pulling away.

He grabbed her by the waist tightly and held her body against his. Jean giggled and wrapped her arms around his neck. Her hands fisted in his hair.

“You’re smoother than I thought,” she said, then kissed him. Her soft lips just brushed against his at first.

Harry instantly kissed her back, not caring if they both lost their balance and crashed into the water. She deepened the kiss, opening her mouth and inviting his tongue in. Their kiss was slow at first, but it quickly turned greedy, like she’d wanted this for months. Her lips tasted like bubblegum, and the slide of her hips against his made his knees a little unsteady.

“You have zero self-control,” Jean said, breathlessly breaking the kiss.

Harry looked down at her, staring at her wide, wiggling hips. “You’re the one grinding on me.”

She giggled and pressed harder against him. He could feel her perky breasts mashed against his chest. “So what if I am?”

He moved his hands lower and squeezed her ass, just hard enough to let her feel it through her jeans. She yelped, then slapped his shoulder. “Harry!”

He was about to come back with a legendary retort, but Jean went straight for his lips again. She moaned into his mouth, and her hands slid under the back of his sweatshirt, her nails scratching light trails over his back. Her body was very warm, and her lips were incredibly soft.

He bent her back against the railing, and she let him, arching with a sigh as Harry’s lips found her neck. Jean’s eyes fluttered, and she gripped his hair for support. “You keep this up, and I may just keep you all to myself.”

“Promises, promises,” he joked, and kissed along the line of her jaw.

Jean was suddenly full of passion, and there was no hesitation in her actions. Her legs wrapped around his waist, and she kept moving against him like she was testing his limits. Harry felt her smile into his mouth. “You’re seriously hard right now,” she said, and she ground harder, rubbing her jean-covered crotch against the bulge in his trousers.

He didn't get to answer, because a sudden, telepathic voice cracked through his brain.

"Jean ... Harry ..." Xavier's voice thundered inside both their heads. "Apologies for the intrusion, but there is an urgent situation. Please report to the Blackbird immediately. I'm assembling the team."

Jean gasped and jerked back. "He ... he totally saw all of that."

"I don't think he's actually watching," Harry said, but even he doubted it. "Probably."

She scrambled to right herself. Her hair was slightly tangled, and her lipstick was smeared. She tried to smooth her shirt, then gave up and glared at him. "Look what you did," Jean said. Her lips pink and puffy. "Now I have to explain why I'm horny and late to a mission brief."

Harry took her hand and tugged her off the dock. "Just tell everyone you got blasted with the telepathic interference of a couple of horny joggers nearby. No one will ever know."

She smacked him in the chest and snorted. "You're an idiot."

They started running up the hill, toward the mansion. Her hand stayed in his, and when she glanced sideways, her smile was almost naughty. "Play it cool when we get there, or everyone'll know that we've been fooling around," Jean said as they neared the mansion.

"I don't mind everyone knowing," Harry smirked. She rolled her eyes and kept tugging him along.

They hit the back patio, and Kurt was already there, teleporting in and out of the shadows. "You two are late!" he called out, his blue tail wagging. "Everyone is waiting!"

"We're on our way," Jean called back, not bothering to hide the rasp in her voice. Harry shook his head and chuckled.

They slipped inside, and Harry breathed a sigh of relief when the warmth of the mansion washed over him. The rest of the team was waiting in the bowels of the mansion. Scott stood ramrod straight, already in his uniform. He shot an unimpressed look at Harry, then Jean, taking in their windblown hair and swollen lips. He didn't say a word. He just pointed at the Blackbird.

Harry didn't bother hiding his grin. He squeezed Jean's hand once, then let it go. She punched his arm again as they walked, but her eyes never left him.

They hit the loading bay and jogged up the ramp, still breathless but now locked in game mode. Harry didn't know what crisis awaited, but whatever it was, he was actually looking forward to it. He had been training a lot over the last few weeks, and he felt that he was slowly getting better at using his powers.

Jean pulled him into the seat next to hers, and they buckled up as Storm fiddled with the Blackbird's controls. A few minutes later, the sleek jet shot down the long tunnel, exited through the cliff face, and shot high into the air.

Magical Mutations

In the darkness of night, a long black limousine idled on a small runway next to a private jet that had just landed. The driver silently got out and went to the door. He opened it with the kind of careful formality reserved for politicians and royalty.

Principal Darkholme made her way down the step, her crisp gray skirt suit swishing with every confident step. She slipped into the car without so much as a thank you.

Inside the limo, a middle-aged woman with short brown hair and dark sunglasses sat. Darkholme slipped in, and the door shut behind her.

"Hello, Irene," she greeted the woman, her voice ice-cold and unhurried. "It's been a while."

Irene didn't need vision to recognize Principal Darkholme's voice. The woman had a reputation for running the school with military discipline and zero tolerance for disruption. What most didn't know was that her real name was Raven Darkholme, and she didn't just enforce order. She compelled it, bent it, and twisted it until reality matched her vision. Irene couldn't see her cold eyes, but she felt their weight on her face. "Raven," she greeted her back with a nod. "I'm sorry to call you here, but it's urgent."

There was a subtle ripple in the air, and then Principal Darkholme's voice shifted and slightly deepened. Irene never saw Darkholme's body morph into her true form ... that of Mystique. "Do you have any idea what your little protégé has gotten herself into?"

Irene was careful with her words. "Marie was at a party. She was dancing with a boy, touched his skin, and her powers manifested. We both knew this day would come," Irene nervously stated. "Now he's in a coma. The boy's name is Cody, and he's currently at the hospital. His parents are with him. Marie is, at this very moment, making her way to his house. That's where she thinks she belongs. She's lost, Raven. The sudden flood of new memories is overwhelming her. Marie's confused, and she needs help."

Mystique's patience frayed. "What she needs is containment. The X-Men are on their way. If they get their hands on her, all our plans will be for naught. We've had years invested in her, Irene. Carefully-managed exposure, slow acclimation. She was one of our most promising recruits. Now all that effort ..."

"Is not wasted," Irene interrupted, her voice soft. "You've seen what I've seen. She's still valuable. She's still ours ... if we can get to her first."

There was silence. Irene could tell Raven was weighing her options. Finally, Mystique spoke again. "You can see the future. Tell me how this plays out."

Irene hesitated. The visions were always fractured, like watching a movie split across a dozen screens. She concentrated harder and saw Marie standing at the threshold of Cody's house, fumbling with the doorknob. "She'll go to the boy's house. If we wait for Xavier's lackeys, they'll scoop her up, and she'll vanish into the compound, never to be seen again."

Mystique's fingers drummed against the leather seat. "We can't allow that. Not after all we've done."

"There's another way," Irene said. "Let me talk to her first. She won't trust you, not yet. But if I can reach her ..."

Mystique's smile was cold. "You always enjoyed playing the mother. However, that won't be necessary. I have a plan of my own."

Mystique broke the silence. "You're not going to hurt her, are you, Raven?" There was a pause, then a bitter exhale. "After all, she is your ..."

"I know what she is," Mystique snapped. "Now tell the driver the boy's address and let's go," she said, leaving no room for arguments.

Magical Mutations

Xavier, Storm, Logan, Harry, Jean, Kitty, Kurt, and Scott all loaded into the black Suburban parked at the back of the garage. The Blackbird had taken them as far as it could, and now they had to continue their journey on the roads of Mississippi.

Storm took the wheel and merged onto the highway heading south. Logan rode shotgun with an unlit cigar stuffed in his mouth. In the back row, Kurt, Kitty, and Scott sat with their shoulders squared and their knees wedged uncomfortably against the vinyl seat. Xavier was in the second row, his wheelchair locked into a special rig on the back of the SUV. Harry found himself next to Jean, who was sitting next to Xavier. He could feel the nervous excitement in the car.

"Is everyone clear on the objective?" Xavier asked, his voice even and unreadable.

"Get the girl, avoid a scene. No powers unless necessary," Scott rattled off. He tended to get quite stiff during a mission.

"We're not just grabbing her," Jean added. "If she's lost control, she'll be terrified. We need to approach her gently."

Harry stretched his legs and looked around at the team. "What's her story, again?"

"Her name's Anna Marie, and her powers triggered at a party a few hours ago. She panicked, ran, and no one's seen her since," Xavier answered.

"She put a boy in the hospital," Storm added, glancing at Xavier. "His name is Cody Robbins. He hasn't woken up."

"Which is why we're going to the hospital first," Xavier said, his hands folded in his lap. "If we can see the effect her touch had, we may be able to help her before anyone else gets hurt."

Logan growled. "Why not just do your thing and scan the kid from here?"

Xavier shook his head patiently. "The boy's mind is in disarray, likely due to the psychic residue left by our young mutant. We will need physical proximity for a proper scan." He looked at Jean, who nodded in return.

The SUV rolled to a stop in the hospital parking lot. The building was a squat, ugly structure built in the seventies, with low ceilings and brown brick everywhere. Logan took point, leading the team through the revolving doors. The reception area was mostly empty except for a bored-looking nurse and a pair of elderly men reading newspapers.

Xavier lingered at the curb, and Storm wheeled him up the ramp. The rest of the team filed in, scattering throughout the waiting room like a crew of misfit relatives. Harry and Jean stayed together, waiting while Xavier quietly checked in at the front desk.

"Do we know where the guy is?" Harry whispered.

Jean closed her eyes and concentrated. "The Professor says he's on the third floor, intensive care. Room 312."

Kitty looked around to make sure no one was watching, then phased through the wall just long enough to peek at the security station. "There's a cop posted outside the elevator," she reported after phasing back. "It might be tough getting in."

"Want me to stir up a distraction?" Kurt said, with a toothy grin.

Harry considered it for a moment. "Let's save that for emergencies." He turned to Jean. "I've got an idea. Ready?"

She took a deep breath and nodded. "Ready."

Harry held out his hand, focused his intent, and changed both his and Jean's clothes. Her jeans and sweater shimmered into a crisp nurse's uniform, and his hoodie and sweats became a set

of green scrubs. He even conjured up fake hospital badges. "Show off," Jean whispered, but she was smiling now.

Xavier, from across the room, raised an eyebrow and gave a slight nod of approval.

"Alright," Jean said, her voice shifting into professional mode. "Let's go."

They walked briskly around the corner and to the elevators. They nodded at the stationed cop, and Harry pressed the call button. He barely looked up as Harry and Jean stepped in.

On the ride to the third floor, Jean mused aloud. "Do you think she meant to do it?"

Harry shook his head. "No one ever does, not the first time at least. She's probably more scared than anyone."

The elevator dinged, and they stepped into a pale green hall lined with faded posters about heart health. They found room 312. The blinds were closed, but they could see people moving around inside through the cracks.

Inside, Cody lay unconscious, connected to monitors that beeped and blinked with unsettling regularity. His parents hovered at his bedside, holding his hand and whispering softly. There were at least three more people in the room, probably other family and friends.

Harry slipped in first, flashed a practiced smile, and addressed the adults. "Hi, sorry to interrupt. We're here to check his vitals."

Cody's mother looked up with worried eyes. "Please, just ... whatever you can do."

Jean moved quietly to Cody's side and placed a gentle hand on his forehead. As she pretended to check for a fever, she closed her eyes and dug into his mind. Harry nodded his head as he pretended to read the monitoring equipment.

Jean saw flashes of the incident. There were swirling images of a girl with a shock of white and auburn two-toned hair. She could feel the panic, a sudden drain, and the memories colliding and bleeding together. She heard a psychic echo. "She didn't mean to. It was just an accident."

Jean's hand trembled, and Harry moved to her side. Through their open mental link, Xavier was quietly absorbing everything she saw. Jean finished her work and straightened up. She smiled softly at the family. "There's no fever, and his vitals are strong. That's a good sign. The doctor will be by soon to update you."

They left the room, walking quickly until they reached the end of the hall. "Are you alright?" Harry asked, concerned.

Jean looked pale, but nodded. "I saw everything. There are even bits of her memories in his mind. She's so lost. She doesn't even know who she is anymore."

Harry put his hand on her shoulder and squeezed. "We'll find her."

They took the stairs down to the first floor, moving with purpose through the labyrinth of corridors. When they exited, the rest of the team was waiting in a line of battered hospital chairs. Xavier beckoned them over.

"Good work, you two. Now that I've seen the boy's mind and know what to look for, I can easily sense Marie. She's completely overwhelmed. She's trying to find her way home ... Cody's home. The memories are ... mixed up. She's headed there now," Xavier explained.

Logan's expression slightly softened. "Should we cut her off before she gets inside?"

"Give her space," said Xavier. "We need to let her feel safe, or she'll lash out again. Harry, Jean, you'll approach her first. The rest of us will remain close enough to step in if things go wrong."

Scott grumbled, but nodded. Kitty turned to Harry and Jean. "Nice work, by the way. You two make a cute medical team."

Harry saw the flush on Jean's cheeks, and he grinned. "She's very good at playing nurse."

Jean snorted. "You just wish you were the patient."

The banter was cut short by Xavier. "Come along. We need to get going. I already have the boy's address from his medical forms." They all nodded and herded back to the waiting SUV.

Magical Mutations

Marie didn't know who she was anymore, and that frightened her more than anything that had ever happened in her life. She moved through the world with two sets of memories, and they clashed and tangled in her head. She kept hoping that it would sort itself out, but every time she closed her eyes, she relived two entire lives at once. Sometimes she was Marie, a girl from Mississippi with a curious mind and an excellent sense of fashion. Other times, she was Cody Robbins, a high school baseball star who was as dumb as a post but still kind-hearted. The problem was, she couldn't tell which one was really her.

She wandered the streets after making her escape from the party, drawn by the memory of Cody's house. It wasn't just in her head. The familiarity of the front porch, the chipped paint, and the creak of the spring-loaded screen door felt as vivid as her own. Her feet followed a route she'd never walked before in her own body, and yet she arrived without a problem. Her hands trembled as she rummaged under the chipped ceramic frog by the porchlight, because she already knew the spare key would be there. She had never been to this house, but she

remembered where the key was hidden and the exact way to jiggle the lock so it wouldn't stick. She didn't know if she was breaking into someone else's home or coming back to her own.

The house was silent, and it was the kind of deep quiet that made even the hum of the refrigerator sound abnormally loud. Marie stepped inside and shut the door behind her, cringing at the soft click. Her shoes left dirty prints that only she would have noticed. Cody never cared about dirt on the carpet. She moved through the darkened living room with the confidence of someone who'd grown up there, but her mind screamed that none of it belonged to her.

She paused beneath the family photos along the stairwell. There was Cody, grinning with a black eye under his Little League cap. There was his mother with her hair pinned up. She made her way up the stairs, each step recalling memories that were never supposed to be hers. She tried to push the memories away, but they kept coming, relentless and all-consuming.

When she reached Cody's room, she hesitated outside the door, her hand hovering over the knob. She expected to see someone else's life on the other side, but instead, the room looked achingly familiar. His bed was unmade, and the sheets were twisted up in a heap. There were jerseys pinned to the wall and a stack of baseball cards on the nightstand. She slumped onto the edge of the bed and buried her face in her hands, rocking back and forth. None of this made sense. She didn't know if she'd killed Cody or if she'd become him. Maybe she was just losing her mind.

She sat there for a long time, and her tears soaked through her gloves. She sobbed once, then clapped a hand over her own mouth to keep quiet.

A noise snapped her to attention. There was a creak, a muffled footstep, then the unmistakable sound of someone moving in the hallway. Every hair on her neck stood up. She wiped her eyes and looked for something to defend herself with. She grabbed the first thing her hand found, which was a heavy metal trophy from the shelf.

The footsteps grew louder, and a shadow moved under the door. Marie stumbled to her feet and backed up as far as she could. The door burst open, and a man filled the frame. He was short and broad-shouldered, and he was wearing a strange brown and black outfit.

He smiled, but there was no warmth in it. "I heard you like to party, girl," he growled. He stepped into the room, and the air seemed to get colder.

Marie gripped the trophy so hard her knuckles went white. "Stay back!" she yelled, and her voice warbled embarrassingly. The man ignored her and closed the door behind him with a quiet click.

"Be nice, girlie. I'm here to deliver a message from the X-Men," he chuckled gravelly.

He stalked toward her with slow, menacing steps. He lifted his hands, balled them into fists, and six long blades shot out from between his knuckles. They gleamed in the dim light, and the sound they made was like knives being sharpened at once.

Marie's mind raced. She had to get away. She had to survive, but her legs wouldn't move. She was frozen in place, stuck between the bed and the wall.

The man grinned wider and licked his lips. "Let's dance," he said, and lunged at her.