

Bits and Pieces

XMFC - Charles/Erik

Von Nevaeh

Bits and pieces

Was uns hindert, unsere Freunde auf den Grund unseres Herzens blicken zu lassen, ist gewöhnlich nicht so sehr Misstrauen gegen sie als gegen uns.

What keeps us from letting our friends look at the bottom of our heart is normally not distrust against them but against us.

François de La Rochefoucauld

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Being in someone's head was always a strange feeling. Even thirty years of practice and adaption didn't change that. It was like... he always thought drowning would feel like this. Diving deep down in someone's thoughts was like slipping into water, except that it wasn't water displacing air, it was another mind displacing his own. As a kid, he didn't realize, but as an adolescent, he feared to lose his personality, his being.

He learned to get used to it, he learned to use it, in every possible way and it were many. But still... he didn't tell Raven the whole story behind his promise. Of course he didn't want to steal her privacy by reading her mind, but more of he didn't want to be confronted with it. It took so much out of him.

And then came the day, the day on the boat, the ridiculous operation to catch Shawn, which was doomed from the beginning. He could feel another mind trying to infiltrate him, and worse, it worked. He always thought, and he didn't care how arrogant it was, that his powers were incomparable. But this other person had no trouble entering him, hurting him. Not making him feel awkward or losing his mind, but hurting him, like a million screws driven in his brain. It was absolutely agonizing until the moment he sensed someone else. Someone with so much hatred and anger inside him, and someone so helpless it pained his heart. And for once, kept his brain empty.

It only took him an instant to realize that this person was about to die and he couldn't, he couldn't let that happen! He knew he was irrational, maybe crazy when

he jumped in the water with all his clothes on and grabbed the man floating in the water, tried to push him to the surface, which, of course, didn't work. But talking to him, that did work.

What he didn't tell Erik was that he hadn't in fact read his mind that time. Only the close-to-surface thoughts, which were enough to determine his irrational hatred of Shawn but nothing in-depth. He did that later, in the CIA facility. It was nothing he would normally do, he would try to run from doing it, protecting himself, but Erik's thoughts felt soothing, cold and heartbreaking. It certainly broke his heart. He didn't even have time to process what he saw, when he started sobbing and ended with crying violently for a while. It wasn't his emotion that let him do it, it was Erik's, the ones he hid inside him, the ones he didn't even want to think about. And it pained him and at the same time, touched him. He felt the importance of it, how he could never understand human beings if not knowing their pain, their anger and their losses. The same night, Erik left the facility and he didn't even try to stop him. At least he pretended to do so.

It wasn't until the next day, with Erik coming back and him almost unable to hide the wide, wide smile he was only too willing to show, he got to know Erik's opinion on all of that. Right after they left the office, on their way to Hank's thought amplifier, Erik grabbed him on his arm and pushed him to a nearby door.

"Is that office empty?"

He looked at him impatiently.

"Is it?"

Charles looked stunned, but answered.

"Ye-, yes, it is."

Without further ado, Erik pushed him inside the office and let the door snap shut with his powers.

"You little fucker were inside my mind, yesterday. I felt it. And now I want to know what this is all about! Think I'm so stupid not to realize, you let me walk out of here on purpose? With no guards on the entrances of a secret government base, just you and your motivational speeches?"

He should have felt intimidated, but he didn't. He felt pity for the rage and the distrust on Erik's face.

"So what!"

"I wanted... you did come back, didn't you?"

"That's not the point, Charles!"

It was, but he didn't want to discuss that right now.

"See, Erik, I thought you would come back when no one stopped you leaving. You would have left anyway, I just wanted to make it ..."

"You are so full of yourself. It's disgusting."

Erik turned his head away, but he saw his face smoothen. He hadn't meant no harm, he just didn't... he didn't want to lose him, not after finding him just recently.

"Why did you come back? Erik?"

Bleib aus meinem verdammten Verstand raus!

He looked confused for a second.

"Funny, not being able to read someone's thoughts, right, Charles?"

It was a challenging look, he got from Erik, and he made his point. He couldn't have his way, at least not always. And pressing the matter now was certainly futile.

"No, Erik. Pleasant."

He smiled shyly at him, but Erik ignored it.

"Don't do that ever again or you can start your new career alone, got that?"

He just nodded, before Erik winked and signaled that they could go to Hank. He had a hard time getting rid of the smile after that.

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He hadn't been in Erik's mind after the incident. Erik probably couldn't believe it, but Charles could very well keep to himself. Oh, how he could! He hadn't even been reading Erik's surface thoughts, as he did with everyone else. With that, he gave the rear mirror a short glance, seeing ... 'Angel', as he had to call her since she refused to give them her real name, sleeping in the backseat. He knew, he was inappropriate, selfish again, but he couldn't help feeling a certain satisfaction, seeing her lying there.

They could've spent the night at a motel, Charles would've actually preferred that, but since he didn't have to drive and since... he tried not to chuckle. He really hadn't read Erik's thoughts but he sure as hell did so with Angel's. And right know, she was having a very vivid dream, seeing herself wrapped in a corset with metal holdings, just kept together by Erik, lying naked... He pulled out again. So she wanted to fuck him, just cause she found him attractive, more than him obviously and she was positively influenced by the fact of meeting other mutants and all that arguing about coming with them and whatever. Charles was also very positive, Erik wanted to fuck Angel. At least she would be his type, considering his memories – young, from the horizontal business and easily forgettable after.

Charles dared to look at Erik. At his reflection in the side window of the car. He didn't look tired, he didn't look disappointed, in fact, if he had to point out... he looked rather blank. And still they were driving, this night, instead of sleeping in some lousy motel, just because of him, just because they thought it would bother him if they fucked each other senseless. Maybe they were a bit influenced by his ability to pop into their private space, which he wouldn't have done, but they didn't know that. He actually thought about telling them to get a room at the other end of the corridor and be done with it, but then... he didn't. Cause no matter how hard he tried not to be ... well, Raven would probably say 'arrogant ass', he still couldn't escape the enormous satisfaction of being so important that both of them decided to follow *his* wishes.

He grinned slightly, looking at Erik (the right side of the car, this time), noticing how he pressed his lips a bit tighter than necessary together and leaned back, to sleep a bit. Erik had wanted to drive anyway.

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Charles couldn't help but notice, how far away Erik was sitting from him. On their way here, he had been so close to him, had seemed to need the closeness, but now... Charles gave him a quick glance, but Erik was looking in a different direction anyway. He could see it, the mixture of satisfaction, of slowly dropping adrenaline, of power and of anger, anger for the missing of Shawn, a bit desperation and underneath all... gratitude.

Charles really became good at noticing when it was not the time to be full of himself again (not that it stopped him from being it anyway) but Erik's gratitude towards him, despite all the other thoughts and feelings he was currently dealing with made his body feel a bit warmer... that alone was very welcome in the unheated airplane.

It was even more satisfying to know that Erik knew. And finally understood, Charles would care for his wishes. Cause it would've been so easy to just get into his head and stop him from running into the building, he could have made him turn around, walk quietly to the car and let him free when they crossed the Russian border. Of course risking what was coming after.

But he didn't. He didn't want Erik to be angry, didn't want to force his control, his will on him, he knew, how important it was, he couldn't have done it. Even so, he suspected Moira to know very well what he had done. Or hadn't, for that purpose.

Still... he was sitting so far away, gratitude or not. Charles wanted his closeness, as Erik had needed it before. He could still feel the spot on his thigh, were Erik had patted him, the thought of it made his heart pound a little faster. The only touch they had shared so far, not counting the Florida incident, god no. He definitely had other things to focus on back then.

Following an impulse, he changed position in his chair, leaning on the other side, closer to Erik, almost touching his arm. Erik noticed, gave him a short glance, before he looked away again, lost in thought. But he didn't move. Charles touched his arm

lightly with his elbow. He kept sitting still. And it became even warmer in the airplane.

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Everything went so fast, he had trouble keeping track of all events. Charles was standing under the shower, desperately needed after the training session with Hank. He liked the occupation, but it was the quieter moments, when he had time to think, everything rushed into his brain at once - the attack in their absence, the death of Darwin, Angels sudden change of sides (although not unexpected) and now... the preparations for the saving of the world.

It was definitely a lot to think about, especially in his position. But what bothered him the most was... well, Erik. He had absolutely no influence on him (so much he found out already. His attempts to lecture him about his ability gave him a very insulting speech from Erik for being a know-it-all who should care about the underaged idiots who actually needed to rely on him. That kinda stung.) and he hated himself for the fact that Erik actually had more place in his thoughts than all of the worlds ends together.

Charles felt the soothing warmth of the water, before he turned it cold. The pain, the sudden change of temperature drew his thoughts away from Erik. He couldn't stand it anymore.

A few minutes later he dropped out of the shower, rubbing himself dry more intensely than necessary. Everything had gone wrong. He knew he had tried to ignore that thought, pretended it didn't exist, but it did. It fucking did, and it was the exact truth. They didn't have any time left. He knew something awful was about to happen, something that would set them all apart, when they would finally face Shaw. He had no idea what that would be, but ... Erik had waited most of his life for this and no matter what would happen, he wouldn't return the same. And the thought frightened him, for he wasn't even sure what to think of Erik now.

Erik had just started to trust him, he had let him deliberately touch him and Charles knew, even the light touch in the plane, a touch most people wouldn't even have recognized, meant so much more. It was more intimate... Charles grinned slightly. It was more intimate than sex. And it was not about to happen again.

A lot of things went wrong, of course. But this one bugged him the most.

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Only three days left. Nothing changed. Well, in fact, a lot of things changed. Alex was fine tuning his accuracy, Sean was doing the same more or less, Hank was doing... something important, that he was sure of and even Raven was working out, although Charles didn't know to what purpose, but then it kept her occupied, so he didn't complain.

But one thing hadn't changed, and that was the lousy situation he faced with Erik. He even made it worse, refusing to shoot him in the face, but he didn't ask him to try pushing him out of his thoughts either, so he had no heart for his complaining.

At least, Erik wasn't in the mood for complaining now. Charles had found out very

soon that chess was something Erik needed to calm down. Probably because he could focus completely on the game and wasn't constantly under the pressure of all his thoughts. Charles felt it. He didn't want to, he had promised it, but Erik even woke him once with his insomnia-induced stream of destructive thoughts, so strong, they literally poured out of him. But now, nothing was in his head. It was beautiful.

They did hardly talk anymore while playing (they had before, when it was just the two of them and Raven, but that time had passed much too fast). To Charles' great displeasure, however, he was not so good at focusing on chess.

His thoughts went rampage to such an extent he was worried, Erik might sense *him*. It didn't surprise him, though. Sitting there, his normally strapped down mind found finally the outlet to consider, why Erik didn't talk right now (he knew why, but he liked to think about other reasons), why they sat so close together but he had the feeling, miles would separate them and what could probably happen if he just pushed the chess board aside and hugged Erik, for hugging seemed like something, Erik desperately needed.

Instead, he made a quick move (it was his turn. He had to pay so much attention.) and emptied the rest of his drink in one quick shot. The burning of the scotch in his throat was just the right thing to feel. Erik looked up, eyeing him suspiciously.

"If you keep on drinking like that, we can quit playing right now."

Charles almost laughed. He had given the game zero attention, to win like that would've been a miracle. Still, it was rather cute. The topmost thought of Erik was the most adorable one he ever read of him. He actually thought, he drank to get rid of the frightening thoughts of war in three days.

Well, he was half right. It was war that frightened him. But it was the one going on right now.

"Don't worry. I don't get drunk so easily."

Erik looked rather skeptic, but said nothing. Instead, his mind emptied again down to the thoughts about his next move.

Charles had lied, of course. By the time they finished the game (Erik had won. Wasn't even challenging) Charles was a quarter bottle further and felt rather ... warm. He started to put the figures together, but his shaky vision convinced him to let it be for the next day. In his rear vision, or was he looking...? He saw Erik getting up and decided in an instant, it was a good idea to do that too, use the opportunity to accompany him to his room, maybe accidentally bump into him... But he didn't even have to go that far. The moment he stood up (too fast, but he doubted, slowing down the movement would've changed a thing) he... fell. His impression was more on spinning and wheeling, but he knew, falling was the thing. Falling, and getting caught in two unfamiliar arms wrapped in an unfamiliar turtleneck. He had wondered what they were made of, cheaper than expected...

"What did I tell you! Can you walk?"

Charles was a bit dazed. He got his hug, he didn't want to leave it so easily. So he just

pretended to need a bit more time to get on his feet and grabbed harder on Erik's pullover.

"Charles? Das war so klar..."

Before he even realized what was going on, Erik already tried to get him into a position he could carry him to his room. At this point, Charles realized he had to stop acting, but a small voice in the back of his head told him to just play along, to let him do it, cause what's the big deal, no harm done except maybe a bit of teasing the next day... and while still considering the pros and cons, Erik got hold of his knees, lifting him up while Charles still clung on his back like a drowning man on his piece of wood. Charles had to smirk on that thought. *Drowning... right.*

The walk down the hall seemed to go on forever and end in a second. Charles had his head on Erik's shoulder, feeling the soft material, feeling the hardness of his bones, his muscles, as they carried him, wondering, how Erik could hold him so easily, feeling his heartbeat, feeling his steady breath on his head, the grip on his back, on his knees, so strong and still... trying to be gentle. This was more intimacy than he hoped for, dared to hope for, and, being as selfish as he could be, he wished it would last longer than the walk down the hall. That this man he barely knew, this person who had all right to be closed up (since when did *he* like to be physically close to almost strangers...?) would allow him, and only HIM, to be close, to let him into his guard, to give him more of those touches he didn't even know he craved for that much... to just be his.

The door flung open and Charles was put down on his bed. So much to that.

"You think you can manage from here, Charles?"

Charles looked up, ignoring the slight shiver of his vision.

"What... what if I say no?" *Gonna stay?*

Erik furrowed his brow slightly before he answered.

"If you still manage to talk in reasonable sentences, you're obviously fine. Good night."

And with that he was gone.

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At a certain point in life, looking back comes with regret, and Charles was no exception to that. He led the life of his choice so far, but the older he got, the more he thought about all the things he could have done different, could have avoided, could have started.

One thing that bugged him since he met the first mutants was not working against the habit of giving everyone stupid nicknames. It hadn't seemed important to him back then - he never thought they would stick with it, but they did. Now was hardly

the time to tell anyone about his opinion on getting called Professor X (why not something related to his power anyway?) without hurting the feelings of others who took the whole deal serious. He sometimes wondered, what Erik thought about that...

But that was only a minor regret, something he mused over when having a little spare time, when the thoughts about other memories was way too painful to be allowed in his mind. Right now, however, it made it to the surface.

He wondered why he never bothered to tell Erik. Why he thought it would be unimportant. No, forgettable, or... was he afraid? Afraid of a reaction, what reaction, how he would handle it... if he could. The question nonetheless loomed in his head. Why didn't he tell him how he felt when he was near. The calmness he put on his restless mind.

"How come you never manage to focus on the game, Charles?"

Charles looked up, realizing, he wasn't paying any attention. Chess was never his game anyway.

"I always thought you wouldn't notice."

Erik smiled, a smile that barely reached his eyes.

"I didn't mind as long as you put in enough effort to entertain me. What you are clearly not doing right now."

"Really."

He looked at Erik, into those light blue eyes, much lighter than so many years ago, as they met for the first time. Somehow his gaze became more irritating that way, more... knowing.

They continued playing, kept it up for two rounds before Charles started talking again.

"Since you got here I couldn't help but wonder, how it feels for you to be here."

He looked up, but Erik didn't bother to follow.

"Not being able to feel metal. I can barely imagine how the presence of an inanimate object feels like, but you were surrounded by it for your whole life. Is it like losing... something so normal, so natural to you, that you don't even recognize having it? Like losing your breath?"

Erik finally looked up, face expressionless.

"I just imagined it like that since using my ability always makes me feel like... drowning. It's just not pressing air out of my lungs but me out of myself. I can control it, now better than before, but... it was never necessary with you."

Erik hadn't looked away, fixed on Charles' eyes until he finished. Only there was no

response after Charles stopped talking. Erik just looked at him for a few seconds, before his gaze fell upon the chess board. He moved one piece.

"Checkmate."

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Just a little push was all it needed...

Erik... you should know how much all of this... YOU mean to me!

... I do. I need to protect it.

I love you.

The helmet was already back in its place, Erik missed his last sentence. When Erik's fist slammed into Charles' temple, pushing his head to the side, spilling sand and dirt all over his face, he tried so hard to see the protection.

He does, now. And it hurts.

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Fin.