

Maybe in another dimension

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Kapitel 3: There has to be another way

When Erik woke up, he was in his little cell again. His skin hurt and his head felt heavy. All he could do was staring on the white ceiling. The familiar hum was still in his head. He assumed that the body controlling tool was still in his ear. There were no chains. No big guys. Just Erik. In his old clothes. Worn out. Without his helmet. And without Charles.

God, what if they tested him the same way? They probably did even worse things on him. He had to find him. Just once in his life he needed to save someone he loved, not kill them. Just this one time.

But even if he tried to fight back the hum and move, he couldn't even lift a finger. All he could do was sit like an old puppet in a corner.

One time another scientist came to check on him. After that, Erik got an infusion and wasn't sure what it was that they injected him with. After a couple of hours – Erik wasn't sure how many have passed, because the bright light was constantly on, so the effect of night and day was non-existent – someone brought him food. It looked like a mush of something healthy. And it tasted exactly like that.

Somehow, he managed to sleep a couple of hours until he was brought back to the lab. Well, not really brought by someone – he just walked the way all by himself like a good dog. As soon as he was lying on that horrible table again, the electricity came back. He couldn't even scream, because the mental nudge didn't allow it. Erik was trapped in his own mind and for the first time he wished to say sorry to Charles. He never understood. He probably still doesn't, but clouded by his pain, all he could think of was Charles and how he almost cried in that plane back then after the Pentagon, when he tried to make Erik understand why he took this DNA changing serum.

Back in his cell, Erik felt exhausted and slept what felt like a whole day, although he wanted to stay awake. The food was terrible and he began to understand why all the people here were so thin. It was probably meant to meet the needs of the human body, but nothing more.

The tests continued and Erik felt like dying. There was no way out: Whenever he felt the metal around him, he wasn't able to control it. The hum in his mind was still strong and after the fourth or fifth time he went to that lab, Erik wondered if this regulator

might be Charles'. The scientist woman hadn't appeared again, so Erik was left with speculations, but the more he thought about it, the more it made sense: Charles was the one controlling his body. And Charles would be the one controlling every other person on this planet.

Erik wondered if Charles was still capable of fighting. Maybe he had already lost the battle and was what Erik would call braindead. Exactly what had probably happened back in Cairo hadn't Erik changed his mind. It would have been still Charles' body, but the mind of Apocalypse in him. Something in Erik broke not knowing if Charles was alright or if he was already dead. He cursed himself for being so selfish and letting his best friend alone all those years. They could have been together – after all he wanted Charles by his side! But Charles didn't want that. He was the one denying the shared future. He was the one sending Erik away and then got all angry because Erik did exactly that. Maybe Charles had understood that sending Erik away was a mistake back then and had wanted to atone for this by asking Erik to stay even after Erik betrayed them so severely with Apocalypse.

Erik found himself lost in his thoughts to cut down the pain he constantly was in. After what felt like an eternity, he felt himself already giving up. When Charles was braindead by now and the other X-Men in the same position as him, then it was over. There was no coming out.

Right in the moment, when Erik wanted to give up and hoped that by doing so, he would see Charles again on the other side to say sorry, his cell door opened and the scientist woman came in. But she seemed in a hurry.

"Are you alright? Oh, god, you have that thing, too! Give me that", she said and moved towards him. Before she touched him, her hand dissolved into blue skin.

"Mystique", was the first thing Erik managed to say with his raspy voice after she had removed the tiny headphone and thrown it on the other side of the room.

"We need to get out of here, they're insane!", she swore as she got up again and helped Erik to his feet. "I already found the others. They're on their way out of here. Hank remembers the maps. We should hurry to stick with them."

"No", Erik coughed and stumbled against a wall. "We need to get Charles."

"We don't know where he is! If they get us again, it might be over! I just managed to escape, because I transformed into the scientist bitch and a young lab assistant thought I was her. That won't work a second time!"

Mystique was right, but there was no chance he was leaving without Charles. "Then go. I will look for him alone."

"What? We will come back for him! Erik, don't be so –"

But he didn't let her finish. He walked out of the room with unsteady legs and moved past the hallway. He already knew the route to the lab room, where they tortured

him, but the rest was still unknown. So he did, what he wanted to do, since he entered the torture lab: grab the tiny metal strings and use them. A few people saw him on the way and wanted to run, but Erik was faster. He killed them with his bare hands and god – it felt so good. They deserved it. Even if they were just following orders.

Then again, sirens shrilled through the halls. Before he could reach the lab room with the metal in it, he got shot with one of the syringes Beast spoke about. Within a second everything went black again and Erik wished he would have killed more people on his short way.

He already lost count how many times he has woken up from unconsciousness since he got there, but this time felt different. There were cuffs again. But more like a straitjacket. He was standing up against what felt like a wall but was maybe something more movable. In front of him was a pedestal with big machines. They were all made of metal, but Erik wasn't able to control it.

"Don't even think about it, Magneto", he heard the scientist woman and this time, Erik knew it wasn't Mystique. "You tried to escape – that hurt me. You were our precious guest and a great patient."

She stepped into his field of view and looked at him with strict eyes. Her long black hair was tied back which made her look a bit older than she probably was. "And on top of that, your little friends managed to escape. What a shame. I hope they will drown."

Erik found himself relax for a quick moment. They made it out of here? Good.

"But that doesn't matter. In the end they will be freed of their human faults as everyone else." She took a clipboard from a nearby table and looked it through. "You're here to give us a little bit more power. I don't want to wait any longer. The cleansing will start now."

A few scientists walked around the pedestal and started machines. Erik wanted to say something and suddenly his voice came back. That meant, there was no headphone in his ear.

"Where is Charles?"

The woman looked up from her clipboard and raised her eyebrows. In a monotone voice she said: "Right there."

Erik followed her finger to the pointed direction. With a racing heart he recognized the statue that was sitting in the middle of the machines and tools.

Bright blue eyes looked directly to him. Black circles under his eyes and the pale face showed plainly how they must have mishandled him. Only when Erik's eyes wandered over Charles motionless face, he saw the stitches on his bald head. Red and blue and violet. Dried blood over the cuts. Did they open his head? Did they examine his brain –

literally?

Charles sat like a dead body on the chair in the middle of the room. Scientists put devices on his way too thin body. He wore just a plain white shirt and some white sweatpants that almost matched the colour of his skin. Blue veins covered his arms and neck, while a lot of needles poked into his skin. Erik wanted to scream, but nothing came out of his lungs.

Tears began to shoot into his eyes. Charles didn't move. He didn't do anything. Just breathed and watched.

"What did you do...?", Erik whispered and blinked the wetness in his eyes away.

"We analysed him", the scientist answered coldly and came back to him. She adjusted a few electrodes on his body and looked concentrated. "As I told you, Magneto, he is a powerful telepath and we didn't want to risk anything. We needed to take his free will first, before we could take the will of all the other people. That makes sense, right?"

"Not at all", he hissed and tried to avoid her touch. But in the end, she just smiled at him and took her clipboard.

"Whatever", was all she said as she wandered to another direction of the room and joined more scientists. "We will start now."

In the corners of the big room, Erik saw other mutants that were bound to what looked like a sack barrow. Machines were connected to them as they were to Charles and to Erik.

As soon as the hum of the devices around him started to increase, he got nervous. There had to be something he could do!

Then he looked to Charles, who seemed to watch him passively. The mental nudge was distant, but present. Maybe that was the answer? To reach out to Charles? Like he used to do back when they were still ... good friends?

What did he have to lose?

"Charles", Erik tried to talk through the mental link he remembered very well. "Charles, can you hear me? Are you still with me?"

The hum of the machines went louder by every second. Scientists looked at their monitors, not in the direction of Charles or Erik.

"Charles, please. Where are you? Let me in... We need to do something to get you out of here!"

But again, there was nothing. Maybe Charles really was braindead? Maybe his best friend was no longer there. Erik closed his eyes and refused to believe in that possibility. He searched his mind to the last corner until he found the memories of

Charles and him. The good ones. The ones, Erik hadn't touched in years. The ones, where they laughed and sat together with a good drink until the morning sun rose. The ones, where Charles smile made his eyes shine brighter like every light in the world. The ones, where his freckles seemed to deepen whenever he stayed a day outside with Erik instead of sitting all day behind his books. The ones, where he looked Erik in the eyes and told him beautiful things. The ones, where his cheeks got red, whenever Erik said something equally beautiful to him. Where he was happy with Erik. Where he was happy in general.

The mental nudge was stronger now and Erik felt a little tug. He reached for it before the moment was gone and suddenly, he was standing in the school. The lab was gone. Sunlight was coming through the windows and made everything look peaceful. It was a late summer day and the sun was already sinking. The atmosphere was calm and soothing.

"Erik", came finally the familiar voice from the stairs. "You're here."

"Charles", Erik whispered as he saw his friend walking down the stairs. He looked like time hadn't passed at all. His hair was falling into his eyes with every step he took. "I'm so glad to see you."

"I'm not", Charles said in a serious tone, when he reached the main floor, that made Erik shudder. With slow steps he approached him. "You being here means that they captured you as well."

"That's true, but I will find a way to get us out", he promised with way too much enthusiasm. "I'm just glad they didn't destroy your mind and –"

"But they did, Erik", murmured his friend while he looked paler by the minute. "I'm trapped here, I don't have any connection left to my body or to anyone else. I'm surprised you managed to link with me."

"I actively searched for our link", he admitted. For a moment he thought Charles smiled, but as soon as he blinked a second time, that smile was gone.

"I'm sorry, my friend, that it came to this", he heard his dear friend say. His way too blue eyes shined in the setting sun. "I wished for another end for us."

"Don't say that, Charles", Erik breathed, "We can still make it."

Charles grabbed his dark blue cardigan and pulled it together. He looked like he was cold. "Did they tell you what they will do?"

Erik nodded. "They want to use you to manipulate humankind. And mutant kind. To annihilate free will."

The sun was going down very quickly. The hall was getting darker. "They will use my body to annihilate everything, Erik. I can't let that happen."

“And it won’t – we will get out of here. Just... Just tell me what I can do to help you get back your connection!”

But Charles shook his head. Brown locks wobbled in the air. “They use high frequencies and electrodes to manipulate my body and created a catalyst – like Cerebro. But this time much stronger. They shut my mind away, so I won’t interfere. I didn’t find a way back to my body. And now it’s too late. I can sense that they will start to use my powers for their plan to control humans and mutants.”

Erik felt again a strangling sense of helplessness. Looking into those blue eyes that were gritty to choose.

Choose between his mind trapped inside his own school or ...

“What are you planning to do, Charles?”, asked Erik in a rush and grabbed Charles arm. It felt so unreal to touch him. After all, they were just inside Charles’ mind. Or were they inside his own mind?

“I can control the mind of other people, but I can also control my mind like that of another being, which means... I don’t know if it will work, but I have to try.” His face went blank for a second. After that a determined expression settled over his face. “In the very moment, when they try to use my full powers and turn on the catalyst, I will ... I will self-destruct. That will damage the system and hopefully everything else.” He closed his eyes and let his head fall down. “I’m so sorry, my friend, that you’re here. I can’t guarantee that you won’t get affected by my plan. The machines may explode or implode and since we’re connected to the same devices, it may happen that –”

“Don’t you dare”, hissed Erik with pure venom. “Don’t you dare and think about suicide!”

As if something snapped inside Charles, he opened his eyes and looked angry. “What choice do I have? Do you think I want to die? But what if I let them do as they please? The whole world will suffer because of me! I need to destroy them and if that means I have to destroy myself – then be it!”

“I won’t let that happen, Charles!”, Erik shouted and wondered, why they were arguing again. Even in such a disastrous moment all they could do was fight.

“There is nothing you can do”, said his beloved friend in a sad tone. The sun settled down and slowly the school began to crumble. “I will destroy everything. And I can only hope that you will survive, Erik.”

The metal bender wanted to object, tell him that no way in hell he will just stand aside and watch Charles die, but before he could say something, his friend withdrew his arm from Erik’s grip and retracted from him with glistening eyes.

“Goodbye, old friend. Please don’t forget me”, were his final words that hurt Erik almost to tears.

“Charles, please, there has to be another way –”, but he was cut off by a blast outside of the school. He turned around to see what happened, but was suddenly back in his own body. As he opened his eyes, people were running in different directions, while loud noises came from the machines. The scientists looked stressed and something seemed wrong. Then he saw Charles – or at least his body – how he was still sitting on that strange chair with all the devices on him. Erik heard cries, then the first machine broke down and smoke evaporated from it.

“Shut it down! Shut it down!”, came the familiar voice of the black-haired woman. She was standing in front of monitors and waved her arms in the air. Other scientists followed orders and tried to save the whole mission.

Charles had managed to destroy the facility. But at what cost? When Erik looked back to his friend, his blue eyes were wide open and his mouth apart. Around him smoke and suddenly flames.

Erik did his best to get out of the straitjacket but couldn't move anything beyond his fingers. One explosion at the end of the room killed the already dying mutants. Collateral damage, Erik would have said. But right now, everyone was within the line of collateral damage. Erik didn't care about himself, but he cared about Charles. And he was dangerously close to the burning machines.

With a lot of force, he managed to fall to the ground and hit something hard with his sack barrow. Two buckles broke. But before he could escape the straitjacket, another explosion got off and burned the plastic. Flying pieces hit Erik on the forehead. For a short moment he saw stars and fell back to the ground. Screams, shouts and loud alarms filled his head. It felt like Auschwitz. Everyone around him was meant to be dead. Everyone, including him.

But not Charles. Everyone, but Charles.

When he looked up, blue eyes began to move for the first time. “Charles!”, screamed Erik, but the noises around him were louder. “Charles!”, he repeated, but his friend was still absent.

Then everything went so horribly wrong, Erik wished he would have killed every human being on earth before this could have happened. Blood began to flow out of Charles nose. Then out of his eyes. Even out of his ears. Erik didn't dare to look away even though he wanted to.

Charles was dying. Inside. In his own mind.

His friend blinked the blood out of his eyes. Red tears streamed down his face and connected with the blood flowing out of his nose and mouth.

Everything happened in a blur, when Erik saw Charles' face moving to him. His eyes searching for his. And in the end, he mouthed “Erik” before the final explosion blew everything up.

