

Typically Hurt

Hurt & Comfort - I

MultiMapper

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Book 1: Typically Hurt

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Chapter 1: The Slip

The battle was over and the hellmouth was closed.

Andrew sat on the bus and thought over the events of the previous day. Anya was dead, she died defending him. Spike sacrificed himself to close the hellmouth forever. Robin was seriously injured. Caridad was in bad shape too. Something had happened to Rona, she wouldn't talk to anyone and just sat holding on to herself and quietly crying.

Then he thought further back to more distant events. Xander had lost an eye to Caleb. Kennedy was dead. Willow was barely functioning because of her grief.

He thought about Warren who had turned evil and killed Tara and subsequently been killed by Willow... and Jonathan whom he, himself had killed while under the control of the first evil.

The pain of losing so many people he considered friends tore into his soul and he began to consider the nature of friendship. These people, that he was traveling toward Cleveland with, seemed on the surface to be his friends but not too long ago he was their enemy. They had held him captive, tied to a chair. Finally they trusted him enough to let him loose and let him fight along side them. But were they his friends? Anya was his friend; they were both outsiders to the core group and had begun to develop a real friendship... before she died.

But what about the rest? Were they really his friends? He was aware of their condescending attitude toward him. Just because he tended to use metaphors that contained *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings* scenes, his thoughts were dismissed as childish. He was the same age as Buffy, Xander, and Willow. He was older than Caridad and the rest. Yet everyone in the group treated him as if he were the youngest of them... even Dawn.

All of a sudden Andrew was shocked out of his remembrances. He felt like something was about to erupt within him and he was scared. They were on a bus on the open highway.

He knew what was going to happen next. He was about to have one of his attacks. If he allowed it to happen, he wouldn't be able to distinguish between reality and his hallucinations. He had felt the attacks coming on and had been able to suppress them up to now but this one was so powerful that he knew that it would get away from him.

Normally he would sit through his hallucination alone, very quietly and when it passed, he would feel better, like it had been exhausted, and he would be normal again.

He had been hiding the hallucinations for years, it had been his only secret, his hidden shame. Even Warren and Jonathan didn't know about it and now it was about to happen in front of all these people. He didn't know what to expect really. He had never been around anyone when it happened before and had no idea of how to suppress it when it was this powerful.

He heard a scream in the distance as the bus swerved and spun and finally came to a screeching halt. Moments later he realized that the scream had been his own and that a swirling vortex of energy had formed right beside the bus. He knew instinctively that this vortex was the physical manifestation of the hallucination and therefore his responsibility to close. He didn't understand how one of his hallucinations could become real like this, but Buffy and the others could obviously see it.

People started pouring out of the bus to inspect the swirling bluish twist in reality.

Buffy whirled on him and screamed, "What did you do? You made this didn't you? How many times have we told you not to fool around with magic, you could have gotten us all killed!"

Andrew made his way past Buffy and, focusing his thought and power, he raised his hands and drew the energy powering the vortex back into himself.

The others watched in shock as Andrew commanded such power and dissipated the vortex without incantation or ritual.

"What did you do?" Buffy repeated, assuming her intimidation stance. (Huffy Buffy angry arms #4)

"I... I don't know. It just slipped out..." Andrew said with wide-terrified eyes.

"Slipped out?!" Buffy squeaked. Then after a moment to calm herself she continued in a quieter tone, "Do you think you can keep it from slipping out again till we get to Phoenix?"

Andrew just nodded his head. Buffy took command as she was wont to do and got everyone back on the bus. Everyone stayed away from him and not another word was said.

The bus continued on and Andrew began to think to himself, [They saw it. It wasn't just in my mind. All these years I've been thinking I was going insane and it really was happening. What does it mean? What have I been seeing?]

* * * * *

//Cyclops, Storm, Bobby. Go to the *Blackbird* immediately. I've just detected an Alpha level mutant in Arizona. For some reason I can't focus fully on him but he is giving off waves of grief and fear. I'm using Cerebro to ascertain his exact position. Scott, you're team leader. Ororo, you can pilot and provide backup in the event of unforeseen circumstances. Bobby, even though you aren't an official member of the team, I was hoping that you might be closer to this boy's age and would be able to put him at ease.//

//Yes Professor.// Storm and Cyclops replied as Bobby responded, //Thank you Professor.//

Within minutes the X-Men had assembled themselves at the jet and were underway to Arizona.

* * * * *

The *Blackbird* landed in the Superstition Wilderness outside Mesa Arizona, a suburb of Phoenix. Storm waited with the jet as Bobby and Scott made their way to the forest's campground. With a little telepathic nudge from the professor, a cab met

them at the campground and they made their way into town. Guided telepathically by the professor they made their way through Mesa and into Tempe and eventually found themselves in front of a door in a seedy motel.

//He's inside. Be careful. He is despondent and quite powerful.//
The professor telepathically sent to the pair.

Cyclops knocked on the door. When the door opened, the teenage boy's face was alight with hope, then suddenly fell when he saw that these weren't his friends come back to reclaim him.

"May we come in? We'd like to talk to you for a minute if you don't mind." Cyclops said kindly. He didn't need to be a telepath to feel the disappointment pouring off the boy.

"If you're here to sell me something, you can save your pitch for someone with money. And if you're here to discuss the state of my immortal soul, that one's been pretty much decided." Andrew said, withdrawing into the room.

Cyclops entered the dingy little room, followed by Bobby. "I'm Scott Summers, this is Bobby Drake. We aren't here to sell you anything or try to convert your beliefs. We came because we detected a large discharge of power in the area that traced back to you. We wanted to know if you would like some help learning how to control that power. There is no pressure here. If you say yes, we can take you with us to a school for people who need to learn to control gifts like yours. If you say no, we'll leave and not bother you again."

"A school? For people like me?" Andrew questioned in disbelief.

"Yes, the general public isn't aware of how many people like you... like us, there are. By receiving training, we can use our gifts responsibly and not be a threat to the general population." Scott said quietly.

Andrew thought for a moment, [Why not? Buffy dumped me here to fend for myself. I have three more days in this motel room, then I'm out on the street. I have thirteen dollars in my

pocket. I have no place to go. No one to give a damn if I live or die. Why not take a chance?]

"Okay, I... I'll give it a try." Andrew said haltingly.

"What is your name?" Scott asked awkwardly.

"Andrew. Lee Andrew Wells." Andrew said with a big geeky smile and extended his hand.

Scott took Andrew's hand and shook it firmly. "Well Andrew, if you'll gather your things, we can go right now." Scott said with a smile of his own.

* * * * *

They made their way to the forest by way of a cab, then started walking.

"Guys, is this school in the middle of the forest?" Andrew asked while hefting a suitcase for a better grip.

"No, we came in a jet that is parked just ahead. Would you like some help with one of those bags?" Bobby asked with a smile.

"Sure, uh, that would be great." Andrew answered, surprised that these total strangers could be so friendly and inviting.

Bobby took the suitcase from Andrew and five minutes later they came upon Storm in the forest.

"Andrew, this is Ororo Munroe. Ororo, this is Andrew." Scott said formally.

"A pleasure to meet you Andrew." Ororo said and extended an elegant hand.

Andrew took her hand and shook it gently. "Nice to meet you Ororo." Andrew said with a timid smile.

"The *Blackbird* is right this way." Ororo said and led the way.

"This thing is awesome! It's like something out of *Star Wars*! We're actually gonna fly in it?!" Andrew said, so excited he was one step from hyperventilating.

Storm got an indulgent smile on her face as she nodded and led the way into the jet.

"Yes, put on your seat belt and enjoy the ride." She said, enjoying the boy's excitement.

//I think his mutation makes him invulnerable to telepathic scans. I can get flashes of emotion from him but no thoughts.//
The professor sent to Scott.

//He seems to feel all his emotions to the extreme. From what little I've seen, when he's sad, he's in the depths of despair and when he's happy, he's on top of the world.// Scott responded.

//Such a thing can be a blessing and a curse. When you arrive, bring him to the dining room to meet with me, my study can be a bit intimidating and I'd like to make him as comfortable as possible.// The professor sent before he let the link go quiet.

* * * * *

Andrew followed the others off the jet and through the hallways of the enormous mansion. He had seen the building from the outside and couldn't believe such a large and beautiful place existed outside the movies. His mind focused back on the present as they entered a large dining room.

"Welcome Andrew, I'm Professor Charles Xavier, I run this school for the gifted." The professor said, extending a hand.

"Wow, this is so cool. I mean, I've never been anyplace so beautiful before. My whole house could fit into this room!" Andrew said, then came to an abrupt stop as he realized that he was babbling.

Professor Xavier let the verbal barrage go without comment and replied, "Thank you, I'm glad you like my home. If you choose to stay, you would be living here."

Andrew's eyes got big as he thought about living in a mansion in the country like the rich people he had seen on TV.

"Scott, would you take Andrew to his room so he can get settled in?" The professor said verbally while mentally he said, //If you

don't object, I'd like for him to have Jean's old room. I get the feeling that he may need to have someone close for a while that he can depend on for help, and if you are willing to serve I would like that person to be you.//

"Of course Professor, come on Andrew and I'll show you the way." Scott said verbally and in his mind he said, //I would have volunteered if you didn't ask. Someone's done a number on this kid, he looks like he's expecting to get slapped down every time he says something.//

//Listen to him, let him tell you his story in his own time. For now just get him settled in and we'll introduce him to the other students at dinner.// The professor responded as Scott and Andrew left the room.

"I just want to hold him close and protect him from the world." Storm said with uncharacteristic emotion.

"No one had better give him a hard time while I'm around." Bobby said with venom.

"I understand and share in your protective feelings for Andrew. I think it best if, for now we let him know that we are available to him if he should need us for anything and leave the next move to him. I am worried that he might feel crowded or bullied if we all push for him to stay." The professor said as he put the pieces together in his own mind.

"Of course, Charles. But it wouldn't hurt if I found out what his favorite meal is and had it for dinner tonight. Would it?" Ororo asked with a gentle smile.

"No, it wouldn't hurt a thing." Charles said with an answering smile.

* * * * *

"This will be your room." Scott said as he opened the door for Andrew.

"Gods above and below us, I've never imagined a room like this. It's huge! You mean I get this room all to myself?" Andrew

asked, on the verge of hyperventilating with excitement.

"Yes, it's all yours. Mine is right over there." Scott said from the doorway, pointing.

Andrew saw the movement and stepped back into the hall to be sure he knew where Scott was pointing.

Scott said seriously, "If you need anything, just ask." And made as if to walk away.

Andrew nodded in acceptance and turned to walk back into his room.

Scott put his hand on Andrew's shoulder and gently turned him back to face him.

"Andrew, I'm not just saying the words to be kind. I mean it, if you need anything... to find your way to somewhere in the mansion, or to the phone, or if you just feel like talking, I'll be here for you. I know it can be scary to be in a new place with new people. Everyone here has been in the same place as you are right now and knows how it feels." Scott said, letting caring show through his voice.

"Thank you, Scott. I don't think I've had a chance to be scared yet. I'm still too freaked out by how big and wonderful this place is." Andrew said with excitement.

Scott tilted his head, as if listening to something only he could hear then asked, "What's your favorite meal?"

"What do you mean? Like all time ever or everyday food?" Andrew asked confused by the seeming non sequitur.

"Either. What foods do you enjoy the most?" Scott said, not wanting to get into a discussion about telepathy at the moment.

"Well Whoppers are my favorite burger, KFC's Original Recipe is my favorite chicken, and Domino's thin crust, light sauce, cheese only is my favorite pizza..." Andrew said before Scott could interrupt.

"Sorry, I meant home cooked foods."

"About the only foods I've had that were cooked at home were mac & cheese, beanie weenies, and soup. I guess the beanie weenies were my favorite. Why did you want to know?" Andrew asked suspiciously.

Scott considered the question and finally decided that he'd better come clean. Enough facts were being glossed over without a bald-faced lie. "The professor is a telepath, Ororo asked him if she could cook your favorite meal tonight so that you would feel welcomed. The professor just asked me to ask you what your favorite meal is."

Andrew nodded seriously then asked, "Why didn't he just ask me himself?"

"He didn't want to scare you by speaking to your mind all of a sudden. Besides that, you seem to be resistant to telepathy, he might not be able to speak to your mind anyway." Scott answered honestly.

"Yeah, I would have probably freaked if I started hearing voices in my head... If you know that I'm resistant to telepathy, does that mean he already tried to read my mind and couldn't?" Andrew asked without anger or accusation.

Scott nodded and said, "Yes, but that was before we met you. He just wanted to know who you were, if you needed help..."

"...If I had an automatic weapon pointing at the door you were about to knock on." Andrew finished, understanding that the scan was for Scott and Bobby's protection.

"Yeah, that's the type of thing we like to know in advance." Scott said with a timid smile, still standing in the doorway.

"Where are my manners, come in and sit down... unless you have somewhere else you need to be... I mean you don't have to... but if you wanted..." Andrew stammered.

Scott decided to put Andrew out of his misery and said, "Andrew, I would enjoy sitting and talking with you and I don't need to be anywhere else before dinner. The only reason I was

going to leave earlier was to give you time to unpack and rest up after all the things that have happened today."

"I can unpack later and I'm way too excited to rest, so come in." Andrew said nearly vibrating with energy.

Moving into the room, Andrew led Scott to the small table with two chairs just inside the door and took a seat. "What should we talk about?" Andrew asked, truly at a loss.

"Well, why don't we start by telling a little about ourselves and we'll see where the conversation takes us?" Scott asked and received a nod of agreement from Andrew.

"Well, you already know that my name is Scott Summers. Let's see... I'm twenty-three years old and I have one surviving relative, my brother Alex. My mutant ability is an optic blast of energy, which is why I always wear these glasses. I was one of Professor Xavier's first students. I am a qualified teacher and teach some classes here at the school. I also take some classes taught by the professor, so I'm still a student too." Scott said, then thought all of that might have been a little intimidating.

Andrew processed that information for a moment then said, "My name is Lee Andrew Wells. I'm also twenty-three but most people think I'm about sixteen. I don't know if I have any relatives left alive. Dad left us when I was about five and Mom bailed out when I turned fifteen. I took turns staying at my friends, Warren and Jonathan's houses till I graduated high school. Their parents never figured out I was living with them, ain't that something? Jonathan and Warren and me, we made some bad choices. Warren killed this girl, and the girl's lover killed Warren. And Jonathan... is dead too."

Scott noticed the shrouded look that came over Andrew's face and heeded the professor's words earlier, 'in his own time.'

Thinking to divert the conversation from becoming too serious Scott finally said, "We have a pretty good video library here at the mansion. What types of movies do you enjoy?"

* * * * *

The topics of *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings* and various action/adventure movies were introduced and discussed in due time.

When the discussion of movies had been exhausted, an uncomfortable silence fell between them and Scott decided to ask a question that was nagging at his mind. "So, what kind of ability do you have? I mean we know that it was powerful, but we don't know exactly what it is."

"Honestly, I don't know what it is either. Until this morning... Gods was it only this morning? It seems like days ago... Anyway, I always thought that I was hallucinating when it happened. I would feel this... build up... and I would have to let it loose. When I did, I would see things that I didn't think were real." Andrew said haltingly, having difficulty finding words to describe it. Then he said in a lost tragic voice, "I thought I was going crazy."

Andrew sat in silence for a moment then came back to himself. "I went for a few days without... using up my power, I suppose... and so it built up in me... the power was too much for me and it slipped out. It made this swirly thing, it seemed like a portal, or vortex. I don't know where the thing led to, but it would have been big enough to fit our entire bus into." Andrew said, remembering the morning.

"Did it go away on its own or did you close it?" Scott asked with genuine curiosity.

"I took back the power that made it open. It didn't feel like I closed it as much as pulled the plug on it." Andrew answered.

Scott thought for a moment and said, "We have a student here that can teleport himself. He might be able to help us figure out how to focus and control your power... from the way you describe it, it's similar to his in some ways. His name is Kurt, you should be meeting him at dinner. Speaking of which, we should be getting there now. Dinner will be served in a few minutes."

Andrew got up from his chair and walked over to a mirror, fussing with his hair for a minute before turning to leave.

"You look fine. It might be a little scary to meet all the students at once like this but just remember that each and every one of them has had to go through the same thing and were just as scared as you." Scott said with reassurance.

"Okay, I can do this." Andrew said, bracing himself.

"I'll be right there with you. Bobby, Ororo, and the professor will be there too. If it gets to be too much, just tell one of us and we'll get you out of there." Scott said, worried about the frightened look on Andrew's face.

Andrew took in a breath and nodded.

"Then, let's go." Scott said, leading the way out of the room.

* * * * *

They entered the dining room to find nearly two dozen people milling around, finding places to sit.

"We can sit over here if you like." Scott said quietly as he led Andrew to a table by the wall.

"Students... may I have your attention." Professor Xavier said in a full voice, quieting everyone in an instant.

"This is Lee Andrew Wells. He is visiting our school today and may decide to join us. Please make him feel welcomed." The professor said as he motioned to a suddenly dumbstruck Andrew.

"Say Hi." Scott said quietly.

"Hi." Andrew said to the room.

Some general murmuring commenced, then Ororo entered the room. "Bobby, Scott, and Andrew, would you help me carry in dinner?" She asked with her ever-present dignity and grace.

"Of course." Scott said, speaking for the group.

Andrew followed blindly along behind Scott into the next room.

"Andrew looked as though he could use a moment away from the spotlight." Ororo said kindly to Scott.

"Thanks." Andrew said shyly.

"Ororo, have you seen Kurt today? I wanted to introduce him to Andrew." Scott said, as Ororo passed him a large bowl of salad.

"No, I believe that he and Hank went to Boston to gather some of his things, they should be back in the morning." Ororo answered and handed Andrew a platter of assorted breads.

"I guess you'll get to meet him tomorrow." Scott said as he walked out of the kitchen, closely followed by Andrew.

"Why do I always get the heavy one?" Bobby asked with strain in his voice as he followed more slowly.

They made their way into the dining room and sat their pans on the center table.

* * * * *

The beanie weenies had been a great success with all the students. The accompanying side-dishes made up for any nutritional deficiencies in the main course. Salads and multi-grain breads plus a dish that Ororo insisted was a squash puree but most at the table believed to be a form of algae and decided to pass.

After the meal, Scott led Andrew to the common room where the students could enjoy television, Ping Pong, and other assorted games.

"Would you like to hang around here or do something else?" Scott asked Andrew carefully.

"What are you going to do?" Andrew asked quietly.

"I think I'm going to put on a movie... that is if I can get the group to agree on one." Scott said loudly enough to catch the attention of the others in the room.

"*Sweet Home Alabama.*" Marie said quickly.

Several groans and hisses ensued.

"*Terminator 3*." Scott said next.

"Watched it last week... I liked 2 better... I'd rather read a book." Were the comments from the group although the book comment from Bobby was an obvious exaggeration.

"*Star Wars* Trilogy." Bobby said with enthusiasm.

Andrew perked up at that suggestion and said, "I'd like to see *Star Wars*."

Scott thought about it and even though he normally wouldn't watch it, it might be fun to watch it with Andrew. "I could go for *Star Wars*." He said to the group.

"Okay." Marie said, not really caring.

"Yeah." Piotr said and took a seat.

Someone's shadow passed quickly by the doorway and Scott called out, "Logan, would you like to watch *Star Wars* with us?"

Logan poked his head into the room and asked, "The real *Star Wars* or that Amidala, Anakin crap?"

"The real *Star Wars*. We're just about to start the first movie." Scott said hopefully.

"Yeah, thanks One-Eye... who's tha kid?" Logan asked when he noticed Andrew.

"Logan, this is Andrew. Andrew this is Logan, don't take him personally... he's just like that." Scott said with a smile to forestall any offense.

"Nice to meet you. You like *Star Wars*?" Andrew asked with apparent disbelief.

"Yeah. Good action, good story." Logan said gruffly.

Marie turned off the light as Bobby started the movie and silence fell over the room as the words '*Episode IV: A New Hope*' scrolled up the screen.

* * * * *

Andrew laid down on his bed and thought about the past two days. Yesterday he knew that he was going to die fighting the first evil. This morning he was sure that he was going to be living on the Cleveland hellmouth with the Slayers. This afternoon he thought he was going to be alone and living on the street, he had no friends, no home, no hope of any escape. Now he was in a new home with people who seemed to really like him.

The professor had welcomed him into his home without knowing anything about him except that he needed help. Ororo had cared enough to prepare beanie weenies for dinner, and everyone seemed to enjoy them as much as he did. He had found that Bobby shared his love of all things *Star Wars* and didn't think he was a geek or nerd for knowing trivia about the movies.

Then there were the others who he had met during the movies and between tapes. Marie had been friendly but what really caught his attention was when he caught her smiling at him while he was talking *Star Wars* trivia with Bobby. It wasn't an eye-rolling 'he's such a stupid kid' smile like Willow would have given. Her smile seemed to be happy for her friend Bobby finding someone to share in his *Star Wars* talk. Piotr hadn't really spoken to him until the end, but when he did Andrew couldn't doubt that the large Russian was completely honest when he said, "I hope you decide to stay with us." These people didn't want anything from him but to help him learn to use his powers and to be his friend.

Finally, there was Scott. Andrew wasn't blind or stupid. He knew that the professor had asked Scott to look after him... but it wasn't like that. Scott could have accomplished that by taking him to his room and leaving him there or leaving him with the kids to watch the movie. But Scott had stayed with him through all three *Star Wars* movies and seemed to enjoy his company. In the morning he was going to give his answer. He thought he might like to stay here. This was what he had been looking for his entire life... a place where he belonged.

Chapter 2: Unfamiliar Ceiling

Andrew woke to the sound of light knocking on his door.

"Come in." he said sleepily as he looked up at the unfamiliar ceiling and tried to remember where he was.

"Andrew, the Professor wanted to invite you to monitor some classes today so you could see what you'd be getting into if you decided to stay." Scott said as he walked into the room.

Andrew scooted up to a sitting position and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. "That sounds like a good idea... what time is it?"

"It's almost seven-thirty. Classes don't start till nine but I thought you'd like to take your time getting ready and maybe have breakfast with me." Scott said timidly.

"I don't usually eat breakfast but it sounds like a nice idea. When and where should I meet you?" Andrew asked, now more awake.

"Why don't I stop by here in about thirty minutes, that will give us an hour to eat and get ready for classes." Scott said and waited for an answer.

It was then that Andrew noticed that Scott was dressed in pajamas and a robe. "Thanks Scott, I'll be ready when you get here." Andrew said with a smile.

Scott nodded and left to prepare himself for the day.

Andrew went into the bathroom... his bathroom... his very own, private, for his use only, bathroom and took a leisurely shower while thinking some more about his upcoming decision. After sharing a bathroom with two slayers, a witch with an attitude, and a dozen potential slayers, having a bathroom to himself was just about enough to get him to stay.

* * * * *

Andrew sat and watched Orroro teaching a science class while his mind drifted back to breakfast. Marie and Bobby had made

waffles for everyone. They had strawberries, blueberries... in all, about a dozen types of fruit available to top the waffles as well as five types of syrup. Andrew hadn't intended to eat any waffles but with a little friendly prodding from Bobby he had relented and said he would eat one. Three waffles later, Scott had to drag him away from the table to get them to class on time.

"Andrew?" Orroro's voice said, breaking Andrew out of his remembrance.

"Yes Ms Munroe?" He said, addressing her properly in the classroom.

"I just wondered if you would explain the theory of time travel as it relates to the speed of light." She said simply as if she were asking about the weather.

Andrew decided that since she asked him the question, that he would answer.

And so he began.

After nearly fifteen minutes of explanation he finally came back to himself and finished his narrative. He looked at the class's fascinated faces then glanced at Orroro who was smiling approvingly.

"Very well thought out, Andrew. And where did you come up with such an extensive and detailed time travel theory?" Orroro asked.

For a momentÂ Andrew had a flash of fear as he thought she was setting him up to ridicule him in front of the class, but when he looked at her, he knew that she was genuinely interested in where he had developed his theory.

"I've watched a lot of science fiction movies. Time travel makes for some interesting stories. In explaining the science fiction 'science' of how time travel works, they actually come up with some valid ideas along with some pure fantasy. All I did was watched the movies critically and identified the bits of actual science from the fiction. Then I put those bits into some sort of

order to form a theory." Andrew said, hoping that he explained it well.

"And thus the point of this entire lecture. If you watch the world around you critically, you can sort truth from falsehood and develop scientific theories from your critical observations. Just like Newton's encounter with an apple led to the scientific principle known as gravity so your critical observations may lead to a discovery that could change the world." Orroro said with a smile at Andrew as she dismissed class.

After the last of the students left the room, Andrew asked, "How did you know that I had a time travel theory?"

"I overheard you and Bobby talking between movies last night. Your conversation is actually what inspired today's lecture." She said with a smile.

"So you don't think that me liking Star Wars is a waste of time and childish?" Andrew asked, not daring to believe that someone he respected could appreciate his fondness for Star Wars.

"As far as being a waste of time, I believe that my lecture today spoke for itself on that point. Fiction and fantasy as well as the world around us can be great sources of inspiration and innovation. As for being childish? It's entertainment. It is designed to take you away from reality for a short time and take you on an adventure. It is a very healthy and wonderful thing to be able to enjoy something so completely. If anyone ridicules you for your enjoyment of such things, look at their life and see what enjoyments they have. Do you really want to follow their example on how to enjoy yourself?" She said as she packed up her books to move to another classroom.

Andrew thought about Buffy and her opinion of fun... what fun? She was the embodiment of angst. Then he looked at Willow... nope, the wicked witch may have had fun at some point but now she was pretty much 'fun free'. Xander had shared his enjoyment of SciFi, especially Babylon 5, but he didn't discuss it around the others because he didn't want to be belittled the way that Andrew was.

He followed Orroro out of the classroom and she pointed to a room down the hall. "That's the next class you are scheduled to monitor. I have to be going, enjoy your day Andrew." She said as she walked away.

He was stunned by another revelation. What might seem like an obligatory comment on the surface was honestly meant by her. She truly wanted him to enjoy his day.

He walked into the indicated classroom and took a seat in the back.

Scott was going from student to student, apparently looking at some type of homework.

That was followed by an explanation of said homework in front of the class.

Andrew was letting his mind drift again, much as he had in Orroro's class.

"Andrew, I know that you are monitoring classes today, but I was hoping that you would participate in our discussion." Scott said, not pushing but inviting him to join in.

Andrew gathered his things and joined the group of students.

"Yesterday we were discussing practical applications of certain algebraic, physics, and geometric principles. Can anyone solve the problem depicted on the board using an inclined plane?" Scott asked the class as a whole.

Andrew looked closely at the board and immediately flashed back to his experiences with Buffy and the others. Before he could think better of it he answered. "Sure, the inclined plane can be used to give mechanical advantage. I'm assuming the thing labeled 'a' is too heavy to be lifted by normal means and the level 'c' is the place you want the object to end up. 'a' could be dragged up the ramp to the higher place. But since 'a' and 'c' are in an enclosed place, I'm guessing that the ramp would probably be too steep to be practical?" Andrew glanced at Scott who nodded.

"A lesser incline, would require lesser force to relocate the object to the higher level but the ramp would have to be longer to move it. But the dimensions of the room don't give enough space to use a ramp... If you took this inclined plane and brought it into the third dimension and curved it, then you could lift the same object nearly straight up. Like using a screw but in reverse since you would be moving the object up the inclined plane... ramp... around and around until you had it at the level you wanted it. And if you threaded a platform on the screw and stabilized it with a rod..." Andrew drifted off, picturing the whole thing in his mind.

Scott looked at Andrew with admiration for a moment then said to the class. "That was a great example Andrew... in fact better than the one that I was going to use. Can you tell me what common machine could use the spiral inclined plane that you've described and basically how it would work?"

Again Andrew's mouth reacted before his shyness and self-doubt could stop him. "Sure, you could make a forklift or elevator that could be elevated by using a motor turning a threaded shaft..."

"We don't have a motor, what else could you use to power our elevator?" Scott interjected.

Without missing a beat, Andrew asked, "Could we get a small car tire rim and a large tractor tire rim?"

"Yes, that shouldn't be a problem." Scott answered, intrigued.

"Then we could suspend the large tire rim upright and fix a crank on each side of it. The cranks could be attached by poles to treadles on the floor that could be rocked up and down by one person. The small tire rim could be fixed to the base of the screw and the two tire rims would have a belt that would run between them so each complete rotation of the large rim would be several rotations of the smaller rim." Andrew answered as he put the pieces together in his mind.

"I've got it!" Bobby said as he walked to the board. He made a surprisingly accurate representation of what Andrew had

described.

"Can everyone see how it works now?" Scott asked the class. To his delight, everyone seemed to understand.

"And what is the underlying principle of the entire machine?" Scott prompted.

"The inclined plane, a ramp." Said Piotr in wonder.

"So a screw is a ramp?" Kitty asked to be sure.

"Yes it is. And on that note we'd better stop and pick this up tomorrow. Remember to do your assigned reading and think of practical examples for tomorrow's discussion." Scott said as he dismissed the class.

"That was cool Andrew. I didn't understand that stuff when I read it." Said Kitty as she left the room.

"Yeah, I would have ramps in all directions. Very smart." Piotr said as he walked by.

When the last student left Andrew stood in shock for a moment until Scott put a hand on his shoulder.

"We have the next period free. The Professor didn't want you to feel overloaded by scheduling every minute of your day and since I have the next period free, I asked if we could schedule you off too." Scott said with a smile.

"That stuff with the inclined plane. How did you know that I knew about stuff like that?" Andrew asked, truly confused.

"I didn't, we were having a discussion and I wanted you to be a part of it. I honestly didn't expect you to say two words, but I'm glad you did. Your explanation and example made the principle of mechanical advantage and the inclined plane come alive for them. You are really very good at problem solving." Scott said as he sat back in his chair.

"But I felt really smart, and I'm not really..." Andrew began.

"Andrew, none of us knows everything. You know some things, I know some things, and the Professor probably knows more

things than both of us put together. But being smart isn't just being able to read things in a book and recite them back. It's about knowing, understanding, and being able to use the knowledge in a practical way. You've just demonstrated that you can do that. And these skills that you have are the skills that we are trying to teach and inspire in our students." Scott said seriously.

"So instead of teaching them to recite useless facts, you're trying to prepare them for life by giving them the tools and understanding to apply scientific and mathematics principles to everyday situations?" Andrew asked in confirmation.

"Exactly. But not just science and math, we also teach history from the perspective of questioning the participants motives behind their actions and the strategy that went into their campaigns. We teach an auto mechanics course that draws on the principles of math, geometry, algebra, science, chemistry and physics. Our self defense class also includes lessons in first aid, anatomy and physiology, physics, chemistry and geometry among other things. The students are assigned reading and class time is used for practical demonstration and discussion. Grades are given based on participation and demonstration of an understanding of the principles that were explored in the course." Scott said and realized that he had slipped into lecture mode.

"It makes sense. So if I were to come here as a student, what would I do? I mean, I've already graduated high school... what would I do?" Andrew asked in a small voice.

"You would take classes like I do. After some initial testing to determine your grade level, you would be assigned the general studies classes that every college student has to take. In about six months, you would choose your major. It sounds like a lot of pressure but the Professor is really good at helping you explore your talents and interests and guiding you toward a career that you will enjoy."

Andrew got a funny look on his face and became silent for a moment.

"Andrew?" Scott said quietly, worried by the look of distant concentration.

"Andrew? Are you alright?" Scott said more quietly and moved closer to Andrew to catch him if he fainted.

Andrew shook himself out of his thoughts and looked at Scott who was about ten inches away and looking concerned. [He really cares. So that's what it feels like... I never knew.]

"I'm okay Scott, but could you come to my room for a minute? I... I've got something to show you... but not here." Andrew said nervously.

"Sure Andrew, I'm right behind you." Scott said, feeling a little anxiety at the drastic shift in Andrew's mood.

* * * * *

Not a word had been spoken from the classroom, through the house and upstairs to Andrew's room. Scott had shifted from slight anxiety to full worry by now. Andrew silently opened the door and once they had made their way inside he turned and locked it.

"Scott, you remember when I told you that my power built up and got away from me yesterday?" Andrew asked without making eye contact with Scott at all.

"Yes." Scott said, realizing that Andrew was about to let him in on something very personal.

"The reason the power built up and got away was because I was around people and couldn't use up my power like I usually do... like I've been doing for years. You asked about my power... and I want to show you but... I've never even told anyone before much less..." Andrew said nervously.

"Go on." Scott said in a near whisper, not wanting to spook Andrew.

"Whatever you see... just stay still. It's not real... I mean it is real but not to us... no... that's not right... it's like watching a

movie, but it's real life... but not here..." Andrew stammered, then stopped and took a deep breath.

"I always thought it was a hallucination, but since it's not..." Andrew trailed off.

"Just tell me what to do, and I'll stay still. I trust you Andrew." Scott said with belief showing in his voice.

Apparently that had been the right thing to do because Andrew pulled the two chairs away from the table and sat them next to the wall facing out into the room.

"We'll sit down here and use up my power." Andrew said with some nervousness in his voice.

"Don't worry Andrew. I'm here with you and I'm not going to freak out on you." Scott said comfortingly.

Andrew nodded and they took their places on the chairs. After some deep breathing exercises, Andrew extended his arms wide, as if to encompass the entire room in his power. Then he opened his eyes and they cast a golden glow on the room.

Scott watched in wonder as he saw the room change before him. It was basically the same room but there were different things on the walls and the bed was in a different position than it had been.

Scott heard a knock on the door, but the sound seemed to be tinny and have a slight echo.

"Gene! Are you in there?" Scott heard his own voice calling from the door.

A handsome young man with red hair and green eyes came into view before them and said, "Yeah Scott, come in."

The door opened and Scott saw himself run into the room and into the arms of the red haired man... Gene.

"Oh God Gene. I had that dream again. The one where I lost you... where you died. Please hold me. Prove to me that you're

really here with me." Scott heard his doppelganger say in a tearful voice.

"Scott Summers! If I were a suspicious man I would think you were making this story up to get into my pants." Gene said with a teasing smile.

"Eugene Gray! I would never stoop to such a trick to try to get into your pants... and since you're a telepath, I wouldn't even consider it." Doppelganger Scott said with an answering smile that turned serious. "Gene, these dreams are really scaring me, I mean the way they make me feel... like I might do something stupid because you're gone."

"Define stupid." Gene said with absolute seriousness.

"Suicide stupid." Scott said quietly and rested his head on Gene's shoulder.

"Scott, I don't know what the source of these dreams is, but this is serious. I know you don't like to involve the Professor in personal matters but I'm going to insist that you talk to her... if you don't. I will." Gene said absolutely.

The doppelganger Scott nodded into Gene's shoulder then quietly asked, "Would you go with me?"

"Are you sure Scott. I mean this is something so personal..."

"...I'm sure. I love you Gene, and I don't want to have any secrets from you... not even in my dreams." Doppelganger Scott said as he began nuzzling Gene's neck.

"Don't start something you can't finish." Gene said in an aroused breathy voice.

"Who says I can't finish? I haven't let you down yet, have I?" Scott said with a smile.

Doppelganger Scott gently pressed his lips to Gene's mouth as his hands explored Gene's back.

Scott moved a hand between them to undo the buttons on Gene's shirt.

With a playful smile, Gene pushed Scott slightly away from himself. Their clothes began to unbutton, unfasten and in less than a minute they were both naked.

"God, I love it when you do that. And I love you Gene. You're my best friend, my lover and I just want to hold you close and never let you go." Doppelganger Scott said before moving in for another deep kiss.

Andrew dropped his hands and slumped in the chair as the room faded back to its original state.

Chapter 3: Status Quo

{I'm sorry Scott.} Andrew whispered.

"What the hell was that?" Scott asked in shock.

"An alternate reality, I think. I didn't know it would be like that... I would never invade your privacy like that Scott."
Andrew said in a fearful voice.

Scott focused his attention on Andrew who was visibly shaking and curling into himself.

Without a second thought Scott pulled Andrew into a hug and said quietly, "I'm not angry Andrew. Just surprised. Please don't worry about it, I'm not angry with you at all."

"Really? Thank you, Scott... I just wanted to show you how I get rid of my power. I had no idea that it would be something like this. Usually it's just boring stuff that doesn't make much sense. I promise that I'll never tell anyone what I saw here."
Andrew said, enjoying the comfort of Scott's arms.

"Andrew, there are some things that you should know about me... Since you saw these things, I think you should know my side of the story." Scott said and released Andrew from the hug.

"Okay." Andrew said, gathering his emotions and turning his focus on Scott.

"Not too long ago I was in love with a woman named Jean Grey. She sacrificed herself to save a group of us from certain death." Scott said quietly, retreating behind a wall of emotionlessness.

"Oh Gods, no..." Andrew said, tears filling his eyes again.

"And what that Scott said about... doing something stupid... I've thought about it... a lot." Scott said, focusing his gaze on the opposite wall.

"But you seem so together. Like you've got it all figured out."
Andrew said in confusion.

"I have my career figured out... and other things... but the center of my life, my best friend, my lover, is gone... and she left a hole that nothing else can fill. And every single day, I search for things to fill that hole, but nothing helps... And I'm tired of trying..." Scott said with tears falling from beneath his glasses as his emotional walls began to fall.

Andrew gathered Scott into a hug, much like Scott had just done for him. "Scott, you're my friend and I'll be here for you for as long as you need me." Andrew said as he pulled Scott's head onto his shoulder.

Scott pulled back and looked into Andrew's eyes. "You're my friend too..." Scott said and became silent in contemplation.

"What is it?"

"I just realized that I've known you for less than two days and you probably know me better than most of my friends here at the mansion. I mean, I just told you things that I wouldn't even consider telling any of them." Scott said, trying to figure it out.

Andrew thought about that and reflected it on his own life. Finally he said, "The status quo."

Scott gave him a 'what the hell are you talking about' look that was quite impressive considering that Andrew couldn't see his eyes.

"The people around you know who and what you are. They hold an image of you as you do of yourself. I'm guessing you see yourself as a self-sufficient man who needs to appear strong at all times to be seen as an effective leader." Andrew said, hoping that Scott wouldn't be offended by his observations.

"I'm guessing that Jean saw you as more than a leader. She saw you as a man. You could probably discuss anything with her, tell her your deepest most private thoughts without worrying that she might think less of you. Am I close?" Andrew asked as he pulled Scott to him again.

"Pretty close." Scott mumbled.

"Now Jean is gone. Everyone you knew before still sees you the same way, as being self-sufficient and you have to keep up the appearance for them as much as for yourself. It's like a house of cards, your foundation has been shaken and you're afraid to change anything or the whole thing might come crashing down... so you maintain the status quo." Andrew said as he began gently stroking Scott's back, trying to give him some comfort.

"Are you saying that I'm in a rut?" Scott asked quietly, tensing a little.

"Not exactly. You know that if you asked for help, all your friends would be there to help and support you. But you need them to see you as a strong leader. You need to see yourself as a strong leader. That's just the type of support that you need from them right now." Andrew said from a place of deep thought.

"I guess I can see that." Scott said and relaxed again.

"So that left you hurt to the core and completely alone, and unable to change anything. Then I came along... I don't have any preconceived notions or expectations of you, so you could be yourself with me. And as luck would have it... I happen to think that you're a cool guy and a good friend." Andrew said with a smile.

"But it happened so fast..." Scott murmured into Andrew's shoulder.

"It may be that you're hurting and need a friend and I'm scared to be in a new place and need a friend... but I really think it's more than that... Sometimes two people just connect. I think that if we had met under different circumstances, we would still be friends... just maybe not as quickly." Andrew said with a fond smile that turned serious.

"And as your friend I'm going to say something that you probably don't want to hear." Andrew said seriously and stopped stroking Scott's back.

"What's that?"

"Gene Gray, the one in the alternate world, was giving some good advice. If you're having those kinds of thoughts, you need to get some help. I'll be here to help you and support you however I can but not if you won't help yourself." Andrew said, thinking how he should have said those words to Warren in the past. The world might be a very different place today if he had. Scott lifted his head and looked into Andrew's eyes to see the seriousness housed within.

"Will you talk to someone?" Andrew asked hesitantly.

Scott slumped his head in acceptance and quietly said, "Yeah, the professor."

"Good." Andrew said with a smile and pulled Scott close again.

"Would you mind coming with me? I mean, I just think it would be easier..." Scott asked, unsurely.

"I wouldn't mind at all. But you're probably going to get into some really personal stuff... are you sure you wouldn't mind?" Andrew asked with his own unsureness showing.

"After that look into my psyche, I doubt that I could tell you anything that you haven't already figured out for yourself. And besides, you just saw me naked and fully aroused, I don't see the point of trying to hide anything from you after that." Scott said with a smile into Andrew's shoulder.

"I'll make you a deal. I'll go with you when you meet with the professor and if he says it's okay for me to be there, I'll go with you for as long as you're comfortable with it." Andrew said calmly.

Scott nodded in acceptance.

A growl from Andrew's stomach caught both Scott and Andrew's attention. A moment later an answering growl from Scott's stomach started both men laughing.

"Do you think they're trying to tell us something?" Andrew asked through his laughter.

"Yeah, and we'd better get to the dining room before it's all gone, lunch has already started." Scott said, getting up from his chair.

"Before we go... I just wanted to say that despite what we saw... thank you for sharing your power with me. I know you were scared and I'm glad you trusted me enough to show me." Scott said seriously.

"And thank you for trusting me too. I think you're the first person who ever did." Andrew said in response then headed for the door.

* * * * *

The two men enjoyed a delicious lunch of soup, sandwiches, and salad. They sat alone at a table in the dining room and talked about the school curriculum and some of the students while they ate.

They had just finished and were making ready to leave when Scott stopped and tilted his head slightly, as if listening. Andrew remembered the gesture from before and knew that the professor was talking with him telepathically.

"The professor wants to know if you would mind a physical examination and evaluation of your powers this afternoon?" Scott asked carefully.

"Before I answer, how physical is the physical?" Andrew asked, flashing back on some horrifying moments with uncaring doctors in his past.

"Doctor McCoy uses advanced scanning devices for most of his exam. The most embarrassing thing you'll have to do is remove your shirt." Scott said with an understanding smile, having had more than one uncomfortable experience at the (cold) hands of a medical professional.

"Do you have to go to class now?" Andrew asked, promising himself that he wasn't going to ask Scott to stay with him through the exam.

"Normally yes, but Logan is going to take my classes this afternoon so I can go with you to visit Doctor McCoy and then you can go with me to talk to the professor." Scott said as he led the way out of the dining room.

* * * * *

When they stepped off the elevator Andrew thought he'd been transported aboard a spaceship. This place was incredible.

"What... what is this place?" Andrew asked.

"This is just the way to the medical facility. You saw this before when we got off the jet, don't you remember?" Scott asked, leading the way.

"No, I guess I was still too freaked by the jet and the mansion to notice this. It's so different from upstairs..." Andrew said in wonder.

"Yeah, wood and carpet make for a nice comfortable living environment, but they aren't practical for certain things like medical research and combat training. Those things are done down here." Scott said as he opened the door to the medical offices.

"You don't have to polish all this metal, do you? It would take a week of cleaning." Andrew said curiously.

"No, this level of the mansion is self-cleaning for the most part. As long as you pick up after yourself, the mansion's central computer will do the rest." Scott said with a smile as he led Andrew to an examination table.

"Oh, you're early. Hello Andrew, I'm Doctor Hank McCoy, you may call me Hank if you like."

Andrew shrank back in fear from the large buff man and started inching his way toward the door.

Scott noticed the 'fight or flight' response in Andrew and said, "Hank, could you give us a minute?" in a tone of voice that meant, 'leave us alone... now.'

"Of course, I'll just be in the next room when you're ready."
Hank said with confusion at the boy's reaction.

"Andrew. Can you tell me what's wrong?" Scott said soothingly.

"He just scared me. He looks like all the coaches who used to scream at me and make fun of me in school... I know it's stupid to be afraid of him, but I can't help it." Andrew said with a trembling voice.

"It's not stupid, it's a survival skill... a learned response to being threatened. It was difficult for me to be comfortable with him at first too. He came here after Jean died to serve as the doctor for the school, as well as to work on his own research. Because he was replacing Jean, I automatically had a problem with him. But I've discovered that Hank is a good man and a consummate professional. Please don't think I'm trying to tell you how you should feel or anything like that. I'm just saying, Hank is new here too, give him a chance." Scott said as he laid a hand on Andrew's shoulder.

Andrew laid his hand over Scott's and gave it a squeeze. "You'll be right here with me, right? So I'll be fine. Let's just get this over with." Andrew said while pulling his courage together to face one of his leftover fears from Sunnydale.

"Okay Hank, we're ready." Scott called out to the next room.

* * * * *

The exam went without incident. Hank noticed that Scott wouldn't take more than one step away from Andrew's side at any time during the exam and that Andrew kept glancing over at Scott to make sure that he was still there.

"We're done. Aside from a slight case of malnutrition and a few scars that I would like to ask you about later, you're in perfect health." Hank said carefully. Though Andrew had calmed slightly, he still looked as if a loud noise would make him jump out of his skin.

::BAMF::

"*Herr Doktor, was ist...*" Kurt said as Andrew jumped off the table and moved to attack.

"Scott! It's a demon! Get out of here." Andrew said in a panic as he threw a punch toward Nightcrawler's jaw.

Kurt acted from instinct that had been honed in hours of training and grabbed the arm and twisted to flip Andrew, using his own momentum against him.

At Kurt's touch on his arm Andrew reflexively kicked out his feet, dropping his dead weight in front of Kurt. With a twist on the way down, he positioned himself so he landed on top of Kurt with his forearm across Kurt's neck and his knee in Kurt's belly.

"Andrew wait! This is Kurt, he's not a demon, he's a mutant like us." Scott said quickly, trying to stop the fight before it became bloody.

Andrew felt the adrenaline pumping through his veins and stopped short of punching Kurt in the face as the words registered.

"Like us? Are you sure?" Andrew asked, not loosening his grip on Kurt for an instant.

"I'm sure. Relax, Kurt isn't going to hurt you. He's here to help you learn your mutant ability." Scott said in a relaxing tone.

Andrew pulled himself up and felt foolish for attacking this demon... this man... without provocation.

Suddenly ashamed for his actions, he extended his hand to help a stunned Kurt off the floor.

"I'm sorry Kurt, please forgive me. I've been fighting demons for a while and it was kind of a reflex... but that's no excuse. Anya would be ashamed of me if she saw that." Andrew babbled to a halt.

"No harm was done. I will forgive your attack if you will show me the move you did. It was something else." Kurt said as he began to feel the effects of his own adrenaline.

Andrew looked into Kurt's eyes and saw that he meant what he said. "It's a deal." Andrew said and shook Kurt's hand once he was solidly back on his feet.

Andrew looked at Kurt strangely for a moment and muttered, "Rafael."

"Vat?" Kurt asked in confusion.

"This symbol, it's Rafael. And here is Uriel. And over here, this combination of angelic symbols forms a blessing. 'To plea... beg. To beg for forgiveness for the sins of my life.'" Andrew said as he moved from side to side to examine the scarification on Kurt's skin.

"You are correct. Most people do not know the ancient symbols. *Und* I haf met no one who could translate them before." Kurt said, his esteem for Andrew going up yet another notch.

"Yeah, well I've learned a few ancient languages over the years. Aramaic, Gaelic, Ancient Greek, plus a few demon languages." Andrew said offhandedly as he continued to examine Kurts scars.

"Demon languages?" Hank asked, intrigued.

"Sure, Fyrial, Turak' han, Ottoman and Roman Z'nor, and I know a little Thoth..." Andrew said before noticing the stares from all those gathered in the room.

"How did you come to learn such things?" Hank asked with great interest.

"I used to practice magic... black magic... and the spells that I used were written in the ancient languages..." Andrew trailed off as he saw the disbelief in their eyes.

The silence was thick and oppressive. They apparently thought him to be insane or a liar. Well, proof was no problem.

"*Creo Ignem.*" Andrew said as he made a complicated gesture.

A melon-sized ball of fire formed above his hand and hovered.

"See?"

Hank snapped out of his shock after a moment and ran to get a scanning device.

After a few minutes of Hank scanning him, Andrew asked, "Are you about done? My arm is getting tired."

"Oh, yes. That is sufficient. But would you mind if I asked you to do that again later?" Hank asked as he started fiddling with his scanning device.

"I won't mind." Andrew said as he made a gesture and dissipated the fireball.

"You said you've been fighting demons. How did you come in contact with them? I mean I honestly thought they were a myth." Scott asked, stunned at the myriad of talents his friend possessed.

"I'm not very good at fighting. Buffy and the others are the real demon fighters. I learned some moves to defend myself so I could help when we closed the hellmouth in Sunnydale." Andrew said as he moved to sit back on the bed.

"*Was ist ein 'hellmouth'?*" Kurt asked in wonder.

"It's a portal to a hell dimension. If it were opened, demons could flood the Earth. Sunnydale had a hellmouth and we closed it... day before yesterday? It feels like it was weeks ago with all that's happened." Andrew said in his own wonder.

"Where is Sunnydale?" Scott asked.

"In California, about two hours from Los Angeles." Andrew answered.

"Is that where you're from?" Hank asked as he pulled up chairs for everyone.

"Yeah, I lived there all my life until we closed the hellmouth and blew up most of the town... you must have heard about that?" Andrew asked, getting a sinking feeling.

"No I haven't. I like to keep abreast of current events, and I am sure that I would have heard about something like that." Hank

said.

"Something's wrong." Andrew said as he put the pieces together.

"What do you mean?" Scott asked, worried by the tone in Andrew's voice.

"I need to check something on the Internet, is there somewhere I can do that?" Andrew asked seriously.

"In my office, through that door. What do you need to check?" Hank asked, also beginning to worry.

"I'll tell you everything when I know for sure." Andrew said as he walked into Hank's office, followed by the others.

* * * * *

"Shit." Andrew muttered as he turned away from the computer.

"What's going on?" Scott asked with a feeling of dread.

"Things weren't adding up. I mean you not knowing about demons. Me not knowing about mutants. The explosion in Sunnydale should have made national news, and you hadn't heard about it..." Andrew stopped to draw in a shaky breath.

"What is it?" Scott asked, beginning to suspect.

"That portal I made, the one big enough for our bus to fit through... I think it did fit through it. I checked out some things. There is no town or city named Sunnydale in the state of California. My email account doesn't exist. I looked at the news sites and it isn't the same news as it was before... This isn't my world." Andrew finished in a small defeated voice.

Scott took a moment to process that when he barely heard Andrew whisper, "{I thought I found a place where I belonged... but I'm not supposed to be here.}"

Scott saw Andrew sinking into the depths of his own despair and decided to take action. He grabbed Andrew by the shoulders and asked, "Says who? I mean yeah, you didn't start here but you have the ability to open a dimensional vortex, so who's to say you aren't supposed to be right here, right now."

Andrew perked up a little then and looked at the faces of the men around him. "Really?"

"Scott is quite right. If there are forces guiding our actions on predetermined pathways then you are no doubt where you need to be... and if you subscribe to the more chaotic view of things as I do. You can boil this situation down to two words..." Hank said with certainty.

"Fuck it?" Andrew asked with a mischievous smile.

"Shit happens." Hank replied with his own smile.

"So what do I do now?" Andrew asked the group in general.

"We gauge your powers with Hank and Kurt. Then you go with me to meet with the professor." Scott said simply.

"But... but... I'm from an alternate dimension." Andrew stammered.

"And how does that change anything?" Scott asked seriously.

Andrew stopped and thought. When Scott and the others had found him in Phoenix, he had no one and nothing. He was starting fresh with a new life. So instead of starting in a new state, he would start in a new world... "It doesn't."

Chapter 4: Testing Limits

"Where do we start?" Andrew asked nervously.

"I'd like to start by trying to open a portal from here to another point in the mansion." Hank said speculatively.

"I don't know how to do that." Andrew said timidly.

"That is what Kurt is here for, if your ability works the way I suspect, when Kurt teleports himself somewhere, you should be able to open a vortex and follow him." Hank answered looking back and forth between Kurt and Andrew.

"You ready?" Kurt asked.

"After you." Andrew said and, for the first time, reached within himself and drew the power up and out.

::BAMF::

But instead of a black mist floating in the air where Kurt had been, there was a swirling gold tunnel of mist about eight inches around.

"Do you think you can open the vortex wider Andrew?" Hank asked while taking readings.

"Yeah, lemme try." Andrew said as he focused more of his energy on the opening.

A few seconds later the swirling mist began to grow and within a minute was six feet across.

"What now?" Andrew asked.

"How do you feel?" Hank asked curiously, noting that Andrew didn't seem to be concentrating or expending energy to maintain the vortex.

"Really good. I felt like I was in control of the power." Andrew said happily.

"Was? You mean you aren't controlling it now?" Hank asked with worry.

"No, it's doing it by itself now. I can close it by drawing the power back, I've done that once before. But I want to see where this leads first." Andrew said with a smile.

Andrew and Scott entered the vortex and in one step they were standing in the kitchen watching Kurt pour a glass of milk.

Scott and Andrew looked back at the vortex they had just passed through. They could just make out the hazy form of Hank looking back at them.

"Ready to go back and tell Hank that it worked?" Andrew asked.

"Let's take some cookies back with us, kind of a celebration. Kurt, will you grab the milk and I'll grab three more glasses." Scott said, walking to the cupboard and handing Andrew the cookies.

"Yah." Kurt answered and went back to the refrigerator.

"We ready to go back?" Andrew asked while standing in front of the vortex with the bag of cookies.

"Yeah." Scott answered and walked into the vortex. Andrew walked through next and finally Kurt.

"We brought you cookies." Andrew said with a smile.

"I take it you traveled to the kitchen." Hank said with his own smile.

"Yeah, do you want to try it? It's just like walking across the room." Scott said, happy that the first test had worked so well.

"I would indeed." Hank said with a smile and walked into the vortex.

A moment later Hank walked back into the room through the vortex carrying a box of twinkies.

"Twinkies are the perfect complement to cookies when celebrating." Hank said with a guilty smile.

"Are you ready to close it?" Hank asked Andrew as he opened the box.

"Sure." Andrew said and raised his arms. He felt the power pour back into himself and turned back to look at the others.

"Zat looked easy." Kurt commented around a mouthful of cookie.

"It was. What do we do next?" Andrew said, getting a handful of cookies from Scott.

"As nice as it is to have a shortcut to the kitchen, I think our next step should be covering a little more distance." Hank said, then took a bite of a twinkie. The look of bliss on his face was a thing to behold.

"How can I do that? I mean, with Kurt targeting for me, I can go pretty much anywhere he can but I'm thinking that you want me to be able to target for myself... and I don't know how." Andrew said seriously as he poured a glass of milk.

"How did you follow my teleport?" Kurt asked and accepted a glass of milk from Andrew and passed it to Scott.

"I don't know, it's like, I pulled my power up, and it was ready, then you teleported and there was this twist, right in front of me, so I pushed the power into it and it became a vortex." Andrew tried to explain.

"*Und* vat did the twist look like to you?" Kurt asked as he motioned to Scott that he wanted more cookies.

"Look isn't exactly right, it's more like felt... but that isn't it either." Andrew said, trying to pinpoint the sensation.

Kurt sat down his cookies and milk and walked to the center of the room. He closed his eyes and turned slowly. "Zere, focus in zat direction, *was ist das*."

Andrew looked where Kurt was pointing and didn't see anything, but then something occurred to him and he let just a little flux of his power loose, allowing him to see the unseen and looked at the same spot. And there it was, another twist, just a slight

one but it was there. "I can see it, where does it lead?" Andrew asked in awe.

"Vy don't you try to follow it *und* find out?" Kurt asked, amazed at the golden glow of Andrew's eyes.

Andrew cast his awareness upon the twist and rode it to its destination. Suddenly he could see a bedroom, not his own but one in the mansion.

"It's a bedroom." He said quietly.

"Yah, my room. Zat is where I came from when I first met you." Kurt said, happy that Andrew was learning this without difficulty.

"Andrew, I think your room is just above Kurt's, see if you can find it." Scott suggested and Hank nodded in approval.

Andrew nodded his head slowly and unlinked his awareness from the teleport trail. He drifted up and up and through the ceiling until he was in a bedroom. But not his.

"I did it but it's not my room." Andrew said carefully as he concentrated.

"What do you see?" Scott asked, trying to figure out where he was.

"Blue scarfs, lots of plants and an open window." Andrew said, trying to figure out where he was.

"It sounds like Ororo's room, yours is next door, the dresser is against the wall you share with her." Scott said carefully, trying not to break Andrew's concentration.

Andrew drifted through the wall and saw the familiar room that he had slept in the previous night.

"I'm there, I'm going to try to open my own portal there." Andrew said in concentration.

He poured his power like before but instead of pouring it on the existing portal, he poured it on the point where he wanted the portal... and nothing happened.

"It didn't work." Andrew said in defeat.

"I believe you were just working on one end." Kurt said as carefully as Scott had.

"Can you see what I'm doing?" Andrew asked and let his concentration fluctuate a little.

"No, I do not see as you do. I can only go to a place where I have been, *und* must be familiar with zee room. But I could not see you trying to form a door in zis room. You must make a door here *und* zere. Zen pull zem together." Kurt said, hoping that Andrew could make it work.

Andrew focused again and followed Kurt's instructions. He poured his power into a point in his room, then into another point here, and finally pulled the two points together.

He had expected the pulling together to be difficult, but the creation of the entry and exit had been the hard part. They came together like they were drawn to each other.

"Great, now just make the opening big enough for us to go through and you'll have it." Scott said with excitement for Andrew's achievement.

In the space of a heartbeat Andrew opened the vortex until it was six feet across and exactly level with the ground on both sides.

"Looks like you're getting the hang of this." Scott said and patted Andrew on the back in congratulations.

"With teachers like you guys, how could I go wrong?" Andrew said and walked through the vortex.

* * * * *

Once all four of them were in Andrew's room, Hank asked, "You feel up to trying another one?"

"Sure, just let me close this one first." Andrew said and with a glance, the vortex was gone.

"I'll leave the destination up to you. Just someplace where no one will see the vortex formed. We need to be discreet. I would like to see if you are limited by distance as Kurt is." Hank said seriously.

"Distance... Let's see what I can do." Andrew had a thought and then let his mind fly. He stayed deep in concentration for five full minutes before Scott asked Kurt, "What's he doing?"

"He is far beyond my sight, but he is in control *und* looking for something." Kurt said quietly.

About a minute later Andrew's eyes opened and were glowing golden again. He raised his hands and a vortex opened before him. Once it was fully formed, he lowered his hands, closed his eyes and slumped a little.

//Scott, I don't know what Andrew just did but his power spiked out of the Alpha range and into the high Omega range. Proceed carefully.// the professor's voice sounded with worry in Scott's head.

"Andrew, what did you do?" Scott asked quietly.

"Walk through and find out." Andrew said with a weak smile.

"You coming?" Scott asked.

"I'm right beside you." Andrew said and they walked as one through the vortex.

* * * * *

Scott's ears popped when he emerged from the vortex and it took him a moment to orient himself. He looked around in amazement at the dingy little motel room.

"Phoenix? You made a vortex that ported us from Upstate New York to Arizona?"

"Yeah, Hank wanted me to try for distance so I thought I would come back here... I forgot to check out of the room, and it's paid up for two more days." Andrew said with a smile.

"Are you okay? This had to take a lot out of you." Scott asked with worry.

"Well, I don't think I could go any farther than this, I was pushing my limits creating the vortex. But now that it's made, I'm fine." Andrew said with a tired smile.

Hank and Kurt emerged from the vortex and each grabbed their ears.

"Yeah, the difference in air pressure messes with you, doesn't it?" Andrew asked and sat on the bed.

"Where are we?" Hank asked, looking out the window.

"Phoenix, Arizona." Scott answered in a neutral tone.

"My word." Hank responded with wide eyes.

"Zer is a note for you here Andrew." Kurt said and picked up a note from in front of the door.

Andrew took the note from Kurt and slowly read it.

Scott became concerned by the look of despair that came over Andrew's face.

"Andrew?" Scott asked but got no response.

"Andrew, is it something I can help with?" Scott asked, feeling a tremble of fear on his friend's behalf.

Andrew only responded by handing the letter to Scott.

Scott read the letter and rather than become fearful, he became angry... beyond angry. How dare ANYONE speak to this kind, gentle man like this!

"Scott, what's the matter?" Hank asked, aware of the drastic shifts in the two men's moods.

"May I read it to Hank and Kurt?" Scott asked Andrew who was sitting, staring at the wall.

"Sure. Doesn't matter now." Andrew said with a trembling voice.

Andrew,

I don't know where you stranded us, but we'll be back at eight tonight and you'd better be here to send us back.

In case you aren't here, Willow is working up an enchantment to hunt you down and bring you back to us.

Either way, once we're back home, she's going to strip your magic to make sure that you never do anything stupid like this to us again.

Buffy

"And she can do it. Willow is one of the most powerful witches in the world... my world. She nearly destroyed the entire Earth last year." Andrew said on the verge of crying.

Scott looked at the clock on the dresser to be sure of the local time and turned to Andrew.

"Andrew, do you remember what your first words were when you saw Kurt?"

"I think I called him a demon... why?" Andrew looked up at Scott through tearful eyes filled with confusion.

"You said, 'Scott. It's a demon. Get out of here.' and started to fight him." Scott said, trying to make a point.

"Yeah? So?" Andrew asked, more confused.

"Why did you react that way? It's important that you understand." Scott said in a completely serious tone.

"I was going to protect you. You're my friend and I didn't want you to be hurt." Andrew said timidly, glancing at Hank and Kurt.

"You were defending me. Risking your own life to protect mine... Right?" Scott asked.

Andrew nodded.

"Hank would do the same for me... or for you... and so would Kurt. And I can say without a doubt that Bobby, Marie, Piotr, Ororo, and the professor himself would defend either of us the same way you defended me."

Andrew thought about that for a moment and decided that it was true. He could see evidence of it in each and every person who lived at the mansion. Even Logan.

After a few moments of thought Andrew nodded in agreement.

"Do you know what that means?" Scott asked, hoping that this would make Andrew understand.

Andrew shook his head and turned his gaze on Scott.

"That you are one of us. You belong with us and we will fight along-side you to defend you for the same reason that you

defended me earlier today. Andrew, welcome to the X-Men."
Scott said and indicated for them to go back through the vortex.

Chapter 5: Slayers Wrath

//Professor, as team leader it was my decision to make and I'll stand by it. Andrew is on the team. He is smart, he already has reasonable control over his ability, and what I've seen of his fighting skills leads me to believe that he will be an asset to the team.// Scott thought to the professor.

//Please allow me to disagree with you before you defend your actions. And I happen to agree completely, I am just concerned by his lack of training.// The professor responded.

//Granted that if we had the convenience of more time, training would be a priority but we have no time... absolutely none. In less than three hours we will have to face them, and probably do battle with them to keep Andrew here. I don't think they will accept his offer to send them back home unless they get to torture him afterward.// Scott thought with venom.

//Mobilize the X-Men and those of the senior students who demonstrated that they were capable in a crisis in the raid. I will leave the planning in your hands and whatever decisions you make, I will be behind you... but when it comes time to fight... I will be beside you.// The professor sent with strength.

* * * * *

"Andrew, we need to go down to the launch bay. I have a surprise for you." Scott said as he knocked on the door of Andrew's room.

"Come in." Andrew said.

Scott walked through the doorway and stopped, stunned. They were standing in the launch bay.

"How?" Scott asked before he could think better of it.

"I just put my portal in the doorway." Andrew said with a shrug.

"But it wasn't swirling or anything." Scott said with confusion.

"I figured out how to make it invisible. It's still the same thing I was doing before, I'm just tweaking it a little." Andrew said with a smile at the look of approval from Scott.

"This is what I wanted you to come down here for." Scott said, pointing to some black leather uniforms.

"Uniforms? You said 'the X-Men' earlier, you really are a team aren't you?" Andrew asked in wonder.

"Yes WE are. What shoe size are you?"

"Eleven." Andrew answered in confusion.

"These should be about right." Scott said and handed Andrew a uniform.

"And you said that you have a mutant ability... eye blasts?" Andrew questioned.

"Yes, and I wear this visor to control the blasts, that's where I get the code name Cyclops." Scott said, modeling the visor.

"Okay, what is everyone else's names?" Andrew asked with excitement.

"I'll tell you while we change, the locker room is through here." Scott said and led the way.

"Ororo can control the weather and her code name is Storm. Logan has metal claws that come out of his hands, he is called Wolverine. Kurt is called Nightcrawler." Scott said as he was stripping out of his clothes.

Andrew realized that he was staring at Scott getting undressed and shook himself back to the job at hand. "Go on." He said as he began to undress.

"We are going to bring a few of the students who are level-headed in a crisis. Bobby can control water and ice. Marie can absorb thoughts and abilities... Let me help you with the jacket, the leather can get a little stiff when it hasn't been worn for a while." Scott said and helped Andrew into his black leather jacket.

"Thanks" Andrew said and sat down to pull on his boots.

"Kitty can phase through solid matter. Piotr can cover his body with armor and is unnaturally strong."

Scott pulled on his own boots, then he rose and said, "Stand up, let's have a look." With a shock he realized once again that Andrew wasn't a boy. Andrew was a man, his own age and looked slim but surprisingly muscular when he wasn't hidden behind baggy clothes.

"Is it okay?" Andrew asked trying to look at himself.

"Yeah, a perfect fit. The professor is going to call the others, we need to go to the dining room and start planning how we want to do this..." Scott said as he walked out of the locker room and gathered a stack of uniforms.

"Let's take the short cut." Andrew said with a smile.

"After you." Cyclops said and followed Andrew through the hangar doorway that now opened into the dining room.

* * * * *

They entered the dining room to find Storm, Wolverine, and the professor dressed in uniforms. A moment later Bobby, Marie, Kurt, Piotr, and Kitty entered the room.

"Students, those of you who are here proved to be able to handle yourselves in a crisis. If you accept this position, you will be X-Men. You will be expected to perform your duties as X-Men and students, allowances will be made in your training schedule for your school schedule. By accepting this uniform, you are accepting a great burden of responsibility." The professor said seriously to the teenagers.

"Iceman?" Scott asked, looking at Bobby and holding up a uniform.

Bobby took the uniform and smiled.

"Rogue." Scott said next, to a surprised Marie.

"You sure?" She asked, wide eyed.

Scott just nodded in response as she took the uniform.

"Shadowcat?" Scott said and Kitty squealed and bounced up to Scott to take the uniform from him.

"Nightcrawler... we made some adjustments to the standard uniform. We'll adapt it if it doesn't fit." Scott said, handing Kurt his uniform.

"I have always had a problem buying off the rack. We will make it work." Kurt said and moved away.

"Colossus." Scott said and handed Piotr his uniform. Piotr just nodded his head and looked as if he were going to cry.

Scott then stood back and looked at his complete team.

"Andrew, I know Scott already declared that you are part of the team. But I just have to hear it from you, to be sure in my own mind, do you want to be one of us?" The professor asked seriously.

"I thought I wanted to stay at the school last night. I was sure this morning. But this afternoon, Scott showed me that it's more than that, I belong here. You took me in and accepted me and made me one of you before I knew what happened. So... do I want to join you? Yes. More than anything I've wanted in my life." Andrew said honestly.

"X-Men, may I introduce our newest member, Portal." Scott said with a great smile.

* * * * *

Andrew spent more than half an hour telling about what abilities the Slayers and the scoobies had.

He told about the way they used to be and how things seemed to go bad when Willow's lover was killed. He spoke of specific instances when Buffy would ridicule him in front of everyone and when Xander acted like his friend, only to find out that he was laughing at him behind his back. And when Willow would bully or threaten him with her magic. He told about how Dawn

and the potential Slayers had started as sweet frightened girls and turned into hard, mean fighters without compassion or pity. By the end of it every X-Man there was ready to kick some Slayer ass.

"So, are we ready to do this thing?" Wolverine asked impatiently.

"Yeah, Portal are you sure you're up to all these jumps?" Cyclops asked with concern.

"No sweat. I just piggy-backed on the trace of the vortex I created three hours ago." Portal said with a smile at Cyclops.

"Good, get team two in position, then join team one." Cyclops said and walked through the swirling vortex.

"Team two, right this way." Portal said and created another vortex on the opposite wall.

* * * * *

"Andrew, it's eight o'clock, are you in there?" Buffy screamed as she pounded on the motel room door.

"Come in." Andrew said with a neutral tone.

Buffy walked into the room and was stunned to see four men waiting for her. One of them was Andrew, but not looking at all like Andrew. The second was in a wheelchair, the third had on some kind of funny glasses, and the last one just looked... mean.

"What's going on here. Who are your friends?" Buffy said with a sneer.

Wolverine and Cyclops both made a move to shut her up but Andrew raised a hand and said, "Doesn't matter. Do you still want to go home?"

"Yeah. Come on and make with the mojo so we can get you fixed." Buffy said with a smirk.

"I won't be going with you, but I will be glad to send you back." Andrew said pleasantly.

"Stop playing games Andrew. Let's go." Buffy said and made a motion to the bus.

A moment later Willow made her way to the room. "What's taking so long?"

//They're all blocked from me.// Professor X sent to the X-Men in the room, except Portal.

"I just told Buffy that I would send you all back, but I won't be going with you." Portal said, sounding a little less confident.

"Oh, you'll be coming back with us." Willow said and began to chant as her eyes turned black.

//Now.// The professor sent and several things happened simultaneously.

Wolverine grabbed hold of Buffy and pulled her through what appeared to be a solid wall.

Rogue stepped from behind the door and laid her hand on Willow's neck.

At Rogue's movement, Portal created a vortex just above the bus, then quickly brought it down to the ground. In the blink of an eye, the bus vanished from where it had been.

Anyone who had been passing by and noticed the bus vanishing suddenly wondered, "What was I just thinking?" and went about their business.

When Willow was finally unconscious, Cyclops carried Willow through the wall as Portal and Rogue followed.

Once Professor X emerged from the vortex, Portal closed it and took the power back into himself. Moving the bus had drained him so the returning power was a relief. They were standing in the middle of the desert, miles from anyone.

Everyone who was able to fight got off the bus and formed into a line opposite the line of X-Men.

"What the hell are you supposed to be?" Faith said with a laugh.

Portal looked at the Slayers ready to fight and felt that something was wrong.

A muffled complaint erupted into a full-blown scream as Buffy broke free from Wolverine.

Portal blinked, astonished as he realized what was wrong and said, "Rogue, what did she do to them? And how do we undo it?"

Rogue was struggling with the malignant darkness coursing through her mind and fought to answer. "Warped... minds... evil... spreads like... cancer." Rogue said before tilting her head back and screaming.

Portal's mind raced. If she had planted evil in each of them then it would grow over time. Every improper thought and misdeed would bring pleasure and help the spread of the evil until it drove each of them to complete madness.

But how to stop it?

* * * * *

"If they want a fight, they'll get a fight." Buffy snarled and raised her hand. From behind her Dawn threw the Scythe of the Slayers and she caught it without looking.

"Dibbs on the reaper." Wolverine called and moved toward Buffy.

"One-Eye is mine." Called Cyclops moving toward Xander.

"The pretty one for me." Colossus called and went toward Faith.

On down the line, the X-Men and Slayers paired off to fight. Portal stood thinking that there had to be a way to end Willow's spell.

"Nightcrawler!" Portal called out with excitement as he was struck with inspiration.

* * * * *

Buffy swung her scythe down to deliver a blow to her opponent's neck and it was stopped.

She stood stunned at the sight of metal claws coming out of the man's hands.

He knocked her scythe away and delivered a hard kick to her stomach.

She automatically doubled over from the kick, then an instant later stood up with an uppercut to Logan's jaw, catching him by surprise.

* * * * *

"Show me what you got, Freak!" Xander said from a crouched position, holding his favorite battle-axe.

Cyclops let loose an optic blast but Xander easily dodged it and swung his axe. He came within inches of making Cyclops' internal organs external.

"The rest of them are bad but you're the worst, you pretended to be Andrew's friend, then laughed at him behind his back... and then to his face." Cyclops said in disgust and let loose another optic blast at Xander.

Xander could feel the heat from the blast and smell burnt hair. He realized that fighting this guy might not be as easy as he first thought.

* * * * *

Colossus stood there as Faith pounded on him repeatedly. He watched her punch, jab, and kick at him. Finally, when her movements were becoming sluggish, he punched her one time. Square on the jaw. Knocking her out stone cold.

* * * * *

Shadowcat saw the girl her own age coming at her with a sword in her hands and madness in her eyes.

"Hey, can't we talk about this?" Shadowcat said as Dawn closed the distance between them.

Shadowcat became insubstantial as the sword passed through her. Dawn stood in shock as Shadowcat walked right through her.

While Dawn was looking down at herself Shadowcat picked up a rock and knocked her on the head.

* * * * *

"Yah?" Nightcrawler asked as he appeared before Portal.

"I just realized that if you know the ancient angelic symbols, then you must have read the ancient accounts of the overthrow of the first evil."

"Yah, but of course." Nightcrawler responded, not knowing what this had to do with anything.

"Did they say anything about those that were touched by darkness, how they could be saved from it?" Portal asked frantically.

"Zey must be touched by heaven's light to cleanse the evil from their souls." Nightcrawler said from a place of memory.

"Heaven's light? Lightning?" Portal asked with excitement.

"Yah, I suppose it could be." Nightcrawler said, thinking about it.

"I've got to talk to the professor now, thanks." Portal said and walked through a doorway that couldn't be seen.

* * * * *

"Professor, I think I've got a way to restore them back to themselves."

"What would this cure entail?" The professor asked casually.

"They need to be hit by lightning. It will kill the thing inside them that is causing them to act this way." Portal said with imploring eyes.

"Or it might end up killing them." The professor said reasonably.

"Or WE might end up killing them." Portal said in response.

After a moment of silence and a look of concentration from the professor, he said, "I'll talk to Storm, if she can manage a non-lethal dose of lightning, we'll try it."

"Try it on me first." Portal said with certainty.

"But you aren't twisted like them."

"But I've got it in me, same as them... right?" Portal asked bravely.

"Yes Andrew, that is why you are immune to telepathy." The professor said carefully.

"And in time I'll become like them. Twisted, mean, violent... and I'll end up as an insane beast." Andrew said with fear in his voice.

"But you aren't affected by their madness."

"I can't be sure of that, it may already be affecting my mind, and I'll never be sure unless I do this. Besides, this way you have the possibility of curing your enemies rather than killing them. Look at them Professor, they want to fight to the death for no reason, and I bet if you look on the bus, you'll find that Rona is fully insane by now." Portal said and the professor knew that he couldn't deny him what might be his sanity.

"I'll talk to Storm, if she agrees, you will be our test subject to see if the treatment works." The professor said, resigned.

* * * * *

//You want me to what!?!// Storm asked in shock.

//A non-lethal dose of lightning to cleanse the parasite that was introduced into his mind. If it works, we will do it on the others and restore them to the good people that they were before.//
The professor asked in a tone of pleading.

//You believe him then?!// Storm asked as she was still deciding.

//Now that I know what to look for, I can see it for myself. Andrew doesn't provide a fertile ground for it to grow, so it isn't affecting his actions much, if at all. But this thing will take hold

and spread given enough time. It is disgusting and malignant, warping and twisting the mind until it causes a state of complete madness.// The professor thought, as he sent her images of what he had seen.

//Of course I'll do it Charles. Death would be a mercy if the remaining life offered nothing but that.// Storm thought in sadness.

"Storm will do it, you should move to open ground." The professor said and watched Portal walk away.

{Good Luck.} The professor said in a whisper.

* * * * *

Portal stood, awaiting his fate. He was to be hit by lightning that would cleanse or kill him. But either way, he would meet it standing tall.

He thought about his team, his friends, the X-Men and how any one of them would do the same thing he was doing, and how any one of them would take his place right now if they could.

Storm walked up to Andrew with tears in her eyes, she put a hand on his shoulder and asked, "Are you sure?"

"Heavens light will cleanse me or kill me. Yeah. I am sure. Thank you for doing this Ororo, I know it's hurting you to do this for me." Portal said in a strong voice, then turned his gaze forward, toward the battle.

"May God watch over you, my friend." Ororo said as she walked away and focused her power.

LIGHT-BURN-BOOM-PAIN-STENCH-SOUR

nothing.

* * * * *

Wolverine and Buffy's fight had become little more than a dance. Her attacks against him did little damage and only served to increase his anger toward her. The professor had declared that

the X-Men should not use any lethal attacks, so his attacks against her were only serving to do the same.

"Come on and fight me!" Buffy screamed in rage.

Wolverine could see the madness dancing in her eyes and knew that this type of bloodlust could only end in one of them being dead... and it wouldn't be him.

A crack of lightning could be heard behind him. He reacted immediately. As she launched a punch toward his jaw, he grabbed her arm, twisted and brought it up behind her. In one quick move he pulled her into a 'sleeper' hold and waited for her to fall into unconsciousness.

"About time." He muttered as she finally went limp in his hold.

* * * * *

Piotr had tied Faith up to keep her from hurting anyone else when she awoke.

When she finally opened her eyes, she had a bewildered look.

"Are you better now?" Piotr asked with concern.

"Why do you care?" Faith asked, truly puzzled.

"I care because I didn't want to injure you. There is no reason for us to be fighting. We only wish to help and protect Andrew." Piotr said quietly.

There was a crash not too far away and Faith said, "I don't think that's a problem now. He was just struck by lightning."

Piotr looked over to see Andrew's smoldering body lying motionless on the ground.

"I don't know how it came to this... why are we acting this way? And now Andrew is..." Faith said as tears welled up in her eyes.

Piotr took her bound hands into his and said, "I do not know why, but if you can ask the question, then I think it is not too late."

Faith looked at Piotr seriously and nodded her head in acceptance of his statement.

"Can you untie me now?" Faith asked politely.

"I may be strong as an ox, but I am smarter than one." Piotr said with a smile as he released her hands from his.

Faith gave a little shrug and said, "It was worth a try."

Piotr and Faith watched the battle continue.

* * * * *

Cyclops was fighting Xander and becoming extremely frustrated. This man was a capable fighter and probably the most annoying person that Scott had ever met.

"Why don't you have a real weapon?" Xander taunted as he tried to get another of his axe blows to connect.

"I don't need one with you. You fight like a girl." Scott said, trying to throw Xander off-balance by sending an optic blast directly into his path.

"If you knew the girls that I do, you'd take that as a compliment." Xander said with a laugh as he dodged the blast and caught a glancing blow on Scott's thigh with the axe.

::CRACK::

Scott glanced over his shoulder to see Andrew fall to the ground. A wave of panic washed over him. He turned back to see Xander getting back into his crouched fighting stance.

[Screw this!] Scott thought to himself and let loose an optic blast that hit Xander full in the chest and knocked him back fifteen feet into the side of the bus.

Before Xander's body could even hit the ground, Scott was running toward the motionless body of Andrew.

* * * * *

Andrew woke up to slaps on his face. He slowly opened his eyes and looked up into the tear-stained face of Cyclops.

"Thank God! Andrew, how do you feel?" Scott asked frantically.

"I... I just got hit by lightning. How do you think I feel?"

Andrew said with a gravelly voice and a pained smile.

"Enlightened?" Scott said with a serious face that finally broke into a smile.

"Cold." Andrew muttered as he went pale and began to shake.

Cyclops laid down beside him and held him close. He whispered in a comforting tone. {What you're feeling is shock, your body's natural reaction to what just happened. Just hang on and it will pass. Stay with me. Can you hear me?}

"Yeah. I'll be fine. Scary." Andrew said through chattering teeth.

"Did it work?" Scott asked hoping to divert Andrew's attention.

"I don't know. Everything feels weird so I can't tell. Ask the Professor to try to use telepathy on me. That should tell us for sure." Andrew said hoarsely.

//Andrew, how are you feeling?// The professor sent with worry.

//Cold, shock... but I'm getting better. Since I can hear you does this mean the lightning cleaned me out?// Andrew asked with hope.

//Yes, I can find no traces of the malignant power in your mind.// The professor said happily.

//Then I guess it's time we started zapping some Slayers, huh?// Andrew thought with glee as he tried to get into a sitting position. Immediately Cyclops moved to support him.

//Are you glad to be able to help them?// The professor asked curiously.

//Yeah, and I'll get some satisfaction watching them get the shit shocked out of 'em too.// Andrew thought with an underlying smile.

//Well, I suppose you've earned it. Watch closely. The show is about to begin... And Ororo is saving Buffy for her grand finale.

She wants to chase her across the desert before zapping her.//
The professor thought with his own smile.

//Professor? Are you going to be getting some enjoyment from
this too?// Andrew asked, shocked.

//Of course not. I am merely gratified at the prospect of curing
those tortured souls and restoring them to themselves.// The
professor thought seriously.

Andrew heard the words, but felt that the professor was going to
enjoy the coming scene, nonetheless. //Whatever you say
Professor.// Andrew responded indulgently.

The professor sent a flash of reproof across the telepathic link
before saying, //Oh, look, she's about to start... look at that one
go...//

* * * * *

The Scoobies and Slayers were gathered around the bus. Brief
explanations had been given and they were ready to leave.

"You sure you don't want to come with us Andrew? I mean, it
is your home." Buffy asked with compassion in her eyes.

"No thank you Buffy. I have a home here and I'm very happy.
But there is something that I didn't mention before... the vortex
that brought you here... it wasn't magic, it was an ability that I
was born with. I can open doorways to different places and
dimensions." Andrew said carefully.

"So, did you mean to bring us here?" Buffy asked in confusion.

"No, my power honestly did slip out. It found the echo of
someone else's interdimensional portal and opened it. In fact, the
closed portal is right over there, in front of the bus. I'm going to
reopen it to send you home. I didn't have any clue what was
going to happen and didn't figure it out until the X-Men helped
me to understand and control my gift." Andrew said honestly.

"Does that mean you'll be able to open the door whenever you
want?" Buffy asked, trying to understand his ability.

"Yes, it means that I might be coming to visit at any time."
Andrew said with a smile.

"That would be nice. Giles found a nice place for us in Cleveland before he left Sunnydale... here's the address. Will you keep in touch?" Buffy asked genuinely as she handed Andrew the new address.

"Of course. This is my home now, but that doesn't mean I'm going to forget all of you." Andrew said, getting a little misty at the sentiments being expressed.

"Yo! We going or what?" Robin called from the bus.

Buffy nodded and quietly said, "Goodbye Andrew." And got on the bus.

Andrew flexed his power and reopened the vortex.

He waved as the bus drove through his vortex and was gone.

"So are you going to visit them?" Scott asked as he and Andrew walked back to join the others.

"Nope. Probably not, and I doubt that they expect me to. But I'll keep in touch and I left the possibility open, just in case."
Andrew said and rejoined his team.

Chapter 6: Epilogue

In the two weeks since the battle with the Slayers, Andrew had settled into a contented routine in his new home. He had already started taking some introductory college classes in the mornings and worked as a teacher's assistant for Scott and Hank in the afternoons.

Each day, just after lunch, he and Scott would meet with the professor for a counseling session. He had been afraid that he would be uncomfortable attending the sessions but found that it was the most comfortable part of his day.

In the early mornings and late afternoons, he would have his 'work-out', sharpening his fighting and teamwork skills as part of his X-Men training.

He still had moments of disbelief about how his life had changed so completely but couldn't help thinking that he wouldn't change a thing.

He walked into his room and focused his power on the dresser mirror. It was a variation of his portal ability that he enjoyed.

"Mirror, mirror on the wall, I'd like to place a long-distance call." He heard through the vortex of his mirror.

"Good one Dawn, the best yet. How are things at Slayer Central?" Andrew asked politely.

"About the same. Willow still isn't quite right but Xander and Buffy are working with her and they swear that they'll get her back to normal. Everyone else is pretty much back to themselves." Dawn said with a smile.

"That's good to hear. Nothing new on this side of the looking glass either except that I started my college classes." Andrew said happily.

"That's great. We did hear from Angel the other day... Buffy wouldn't talk about it, but I guess there are big things going on in L.A." Dawn said conversationally.

"Aren't there always?" Andrew responded with a chuckle.

//Portal, we need you in MedLab as soon as possible.// Andrew heard from the professor.

"I've gotta go, the professor is calling. I'll talk to you next week." Andrew said and grabbed his jacket.

"Same time, same channel." Dawn said with a smirk as Andrew withdrew his power from the mirror.

Andrew fixed his jacket and took one step and he was in the MedLab in front of a worried Hank.

"I just got a call from my niece in California, she sounded scared and needs my help. Can you get me there quick?" Hank asked nervously.

"Do you have a map of the area where we need to go? It's hard to target a place I've never been." Andrew replied professionally.

"Right here on this computer." Hank said quickly.

Andrew nodded his head and took a moment to study the map on the computer. "UCLA?" Andrew asked in confirmation.

Hank nodded and watched as Andrew closed his eyes and focused his power. He had developed the multiple portal technique to increase his distance and within two minutes had located his target.

"Three steps and we'll be there." Andrew said and the portal opened.

"Thank you Andrew." Hank said with genuine gratitude before walking through the vortex.

* * * * *

"We are in the building you had highlighted; do you know the room?" Andrew asked.

"Yes, it's just upstairs, number fourteen." Hank said as he led the way.

A moment later they were standing before a door and Hank was knocking.

The door opened and a timid voice said, "Uncle Hank? I just... How did you... Oh, come in."

Hank entered the room followed by Andrew.

"This is Andrew, Andrew I'd like you to meet my niece..." Hank was interrupted.

"Tara?" Andrew asked in wonder.

The End

To Be Continued in Book 2: 'Circumstantially Hurt'