

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Thaddeus chooses Selene and gets back to more immediate concerns.

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The truth was, if he believed everything Saul was saying, then it was really a question of the devil he knew versus the devil he didn't. After all, as big of a threat as Selene might be, Saul was likely even more of one... and no doubt had his own plans and schemes going that Thaddeus didn't even know about.

Involving himself with the ancient immortal was a high risk, high reward type situation. Either he came out the other side better off... or he didn't. But the thing was, Thaddeus and Emma already knew most of what there was to know about the threat posed by Selene. The Black Queen being an External was just one more piece of info on top of the pile.

Involving himself with Saul was just one more complication Thaddeus didn't need right now, especially when he and Emma were already dealing with the whole Phoenix situation. So, all in all... he plasters a crooked smile on his face that he doesn't quite feel and spouts Saul's words back to him.

"Actually... making Selene mentor me sounds good. Let's go with that."

Saul doesn't overtly show it, but Thaddeus senses a bit of disappointment and judgment from the ancient man all the same. In the end, stroking his grey beard, Saul just inclines his head.

"Very well. I shall inform her of your decision. It will be up to you and her to reach out to one another from there. Keep in mind that your past enmities are just that... in the past. You are now part of a rather exclusive club, young Thaddeus. For now, everything in your life holds great meaning to you, for you have not lived a normal mortal lifespan as of yet. But as the years turn to

decades and the decades turn to centuries, you will find that all things fade... save for your fellow Externals."

Thaddeus can't help but clench his jaw a little bit at that. It's a daunting thought, to gaze into the future and think he'll eventually be all alone... except for a group of ancient beings who have all been around for hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands of years more than he has.

Only... he doesn't have to put up with that, does he? He has the power to make his closest companions immortal to. He has the power to warp reality itself thanks to Wanda. And he'll only get stronger from here. Thaddeus doesn't have to lose anyone precious to him if he doesn't want to. Not ever.

Of course, he doesn't tell Saul that. At best, the old man will probably laugh in his face at his 'naivety'. At worst, he'll take offense in some way and try to prove Thaddeus wrong. So yeah, best not to poke that sleeping bear.

Not that he gets much of a chance to respond in the first place. Saul does wait half a beat after he's done speaking, but when Thaddeus stays quiet, the ancient immortal simply nods his head decisively... and vanishes from the room altogether with a sharp crack. His disappearance causes the feeling of static and electricity from earlier to dissipate, meaning that the spell he cast to obfuscate their conversation has also ended.

As such, Thaddeus isn't too surprised when the posh British voice from before comes through the ceiling again.

"It would seem that your guest has vacated the premises, Mister Cummings. May I escort you back to Sir and the other Avengers?"

Sighing, Thaddeus pushes away from the table and stands while nodding.

"Yeah, sounds good."

Within moments, he's stepping into a room with the onsite Avengers again... and judging by the looks on their faces, they definitely listened in. The only

question is what exactly Saul made them all hear. Thaddeus doesn't want to give anything away, but it's not like he knows what conversation the ancient immortal simulated...

Luckily for him, Emma comes in clutch. She'd watched his real conversation with Saul of course, but she'd also observed the Avengers watching the fake conversation at the same time. As such, Thaddeus quickly learns through her that what they'd seen was Saul offering Thaddeus a place at his magical academy... because Thaddeus was the Chosen One or something.

"So... what did Gandalf want, exactly?"

Holding back the urge to groan, Thaddeus looks to Stark and arches a brow.

"I don't see much point in repeating what you already know. And surely 'Dumbledore' would be more appropriate."

Tony Stark's eyes narrow for a moment... before he smirks and shrugs.

"Eh, if old and wispy in there had bad intentions, you would have been happy to have us ready to back you up, don't deny it."

Playing along, Thaddeus just shrugs back as he nods.

"You're not wrong. But enough about that. He had the wrong guy, I'm not some magical Chosen One or anything like that. I'm not a hero at all, really. If anything, I'm someone who needs the real heroes' help. That would be you guys, in case it wasn't obvious."

Hawkeye snorts derisively.

"Yeah, we got it."

Smirking thinly, Thaddeus sweeps his gaze over the assembled Avengers. Iron Man, Hawkeye, Captain America, Ms. Marvel... and She-Hulk. Honestly, this was never how he wanted to meet Jennifer's team. He really did feel like the two

of them had a pretty good relationship, but as far as first impressions went, this could have been way better.

But hey, at least Jennifer wasn't throwing him under the bus for what happened with Shaw or anything like that. She was still in his corner; Thaddeus had to believe that.

"Getting back to the matter at hand... I'm not being controlled by Emma. You're not being controlled by Emma either. Emma Frost has no desire to control anyone or take over anything. There's no denying that if she wanted to, she could do a lot of damage... however, that's true for pretty much everyone in this room, isn't it?"

When that still doesn't seem to convince all of them, Thaddeus just sighs.

"Look. There are a lot of very powerful people in our world, people with the personal power of nuclear weapons resting at their fingertips. Emma Frost is one of them. She's dangerous... but she's not a threat. At the end of the day, the only reason you're all acting like this is because Charles Xavier and the X-Men have told you it's potentially the end of the world if she's left to her own devices. I'm here to show you that it's not."

There's a pause as they all exchange silent looks with one another. Then, Ms. Marvel steps forward, the beautiful blonde narrowing her eyes in a challenging gaze.

"Then you won't mind if we call them in. Let us facilitate a meeting between you and the X-Men. Xavier himself can tell us if you're under anyone's control."

At first, Thaddeus feels exasperated. Then he realizes... he never did explain to them just what level of defenses his own mind had, did he? There shouldn't be any way for even the likes of Charles Xavier to break in at this point.

... But fuck it, maybe that would be the proof needed to show he was of his right mind anyways. If Xavier couldn't enter his mind, then surely the man would think that Emma couldn't either, even with the Phoenix backing her up.

Frankly, it was better than nothing. Getting the Avengers to agree to back off first would have been ideal since it would have cut the legs out from under the X-Men's hunt, but Thaddeus was always going to have to convince the X-Men to back off as well anyways. So...

"That sounds great. Call them in. Bring them over. Let's get this over with, please."

Ms. Marvel looks surprised by his agreement, like she was expecting to catch him out with her suggestion. A considering glint enters the busty blonde's eyes as she crosses her arms over her chest, but after a moment she offers a grudging nod of respect and looks to the others.

Not all of them look happy about it... but now that the idea has been offered and accepted, no one actually protests. Instead, a message is sent off and they're forced to wait for the X-Men's response and arrival. In the meantime...

"Since we're waiting anyways, can I get some food please? I'm rather peckish at the moment."

Stark scoffs.

"Seriously? 'Peckish'? What are you, some Victorian Era noblewoman?"

Thaddeus just raises an eyebrow in response, not about to let himself be needed or pulled into some sort of dick measuring contest by the other man. Even if he WOULD win, obviously. Finally, Stark just rolls his eyes.

"Yeah, fine. JARVIS, get us all some food, would you?"

"Of course, sir."

From there, things are a little awkward, admittedly. Jennifer tries to talk to him once or twice, but Thaddeus keeps his answers short and sweet and on point. He's not going to get drawn into a conversation in front of her friends... and to

be fair, he IS hungry. When the food does finally arrive, Thaddeus devours it... and he has to admit, a rich guy like Stark truly has access to the best cooking money can buy.

Fortunately, the X-Men's response comes while they're eating and shortly after they're done, the X-Men contingent arrives outside of the Avengers' Compound. As its announced that they've been let inside and are on their way, Thaddeus reaches out to Emma and Emma reaches back to him, offering comfort. So long as they have each other... they can face anything together.

The door opens and Thaddeus rises to his feet, arms crossing over his broad chest as four people enter the room. Coming in first is a familiar face... Storm steps inside and as soon as her eyes land on him, she looks a strange mixture of relieved and trepidatious.

After Storm comes the man himself, Charles Xavier entering in what can only be described as the sci-fi equivalent of a wheelchair. Specifically, it doesn't have wheels but instead seems to float, and it covers the Professor's body from the waist up. Definitely a more advanced form of transportation than what he'd had back when he'd tried to recruit Thaddeus before the younger mutant had even graduated high school.

Battle Ready are the words that come to mind for this new 'vehicle'. A personal hovercraft would definitely help Xavier be more mobile in a fight than a normal wheelchair, that's for sure.

Following behind Professor X are two more people... one of them is a brunette with a clenched jaw and a red visor over her eyes and the other is a short, grizzled looking musclebound man with mutton chops and spiky hair.

Thaddeus doesn't actually recognize either of them at first glance, but Emma does. Cyclops and Wolverine. The former being the team leader of the X-Men's actual superhero team as well as the lover of Jean Grey and the latter being the original source of DNA for someone he knew quite well... one Laura Kinney. Great.

The four X-Men all stop with a space between them and Thaddeus and the Avengers, creating a sort of no man's land between the two groups that starts up a silent standoff... for all of half a second before Cyclops steps forward with a growl that might have been cute if not for the circumstances.

"Where is she? Where is Emma Frost?"

His crossed arms tighten up a bit as Thaddeus narrows his eyes.

"Not here. She's somewhere else. Somewhere safe."

That definitely doesn't appease Jean Grey's former lover, who scoffs loudly at Thaddeus' words.

"Nowhere is safe as long as that *thing* has a host."

In that moment, Thaddeus is very, very glad that Cyclops, aka Scottie Summers, has never caught wind of Madelyn Pryor's existence. It's quite obvious already that the brunette didn't take Jean Grey's death very well... and he really has no idea how she would react to the existence of a clone. Whether the reaction would be positive or negative, Maddie didn't deserve to be hounded or hunted by anyone for a face she didn't choose and circumstances completely out of her control.

Fortunately, Xavier steps in then, holding up a hand and clearing his throat.

"Cyclops, please."

Scottie bristles... but ultimately steps back, falling in line. She might be the team leader for the X-Men when they were out in the field, but Charles Xavier was their true leader, obviously.

Captain America speaks up into the ensuing silence.

"Mister Cummings here disagrees that Emma Frost is a threat. He also disagrees with the assessment put forward by the X-Men that he was kidnapped

or controlled by Emma Frost in any way. We brought you here in hopes that you could verify with your own abilities whether he was telling the truth or not, Professor.”

For a long moment of silence, Charles Xavier looks at Thaddeus piercingly. But Thaddeus doesn't feel even an attempt at psychic intrusion so...

After a beat, the Professor glances to Captain America and smiles.

“I would certainly be happy to try... however, we would either need to move outside or you would have to lower the compound's psychic shielding first.”

There's a pause at that and then Captain America looks over at Iron Man with an exasperated expression. Tony Stark blinks, playing innocent for a moment before giving it up and smirking ruefully as he shrugs.

“What? Just testing things. Wanted to confirm that our guest here really didn't sabotage anything before he arrived.”

The X-Men look confused by this, while Thaddeus just resists the urge to sigh again. Stark moves over to the wall once more and after playing with the console, he nods back to all of them.

“Alright, it's down for the moment.”

There's a beat of silence as Charles Xavier stares more intently at Thaddeus than before. Thaddeus stares back, not really doing anything but standing there. His psychic defenses, after all... are passive and innate.

After a beat, Thaddeus feels an attempted intrusion glance off of his mind as a grimace flashes across the disabled mutant's face. The grimace is gone as quickly as it appears though, replaced by a rueful sort of smile as the Professor shakes his head.

“I see that you and Ms. Kinney have gotten rather close in the past several months.”

He then looks to the rest.

“I cannot peer into this young man’s mind. It would take days, if not weeks for me to even make a concentrated attempt.”

Before anyone can really muster a response to that knowledge, Wolverine steps forward with a growl.

“Speaking of Laura... if you really are on the up and up and want to prove that Frost ain’t a threat, how about you start by bringing back all of the OTHER mutants she kidnapped, bub.”

Thaddeus frowns at that.

“She didn’t kidnap anyone. They all went with us willingly.”

Wolverine sneers, clearly not believing it for a moment.

“Prove it.”

Hm... perhaps that was the right call here? Both Thaddeus and Emma were rather done with being treated like this. Sure, they weren’t heroes... but they weren’t monsters either. Kitty and the others could prove that easily enough. But it also removed any remaining leverage and would reveal Emma’s location on the Moon...

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A/N: Reminder, I genderbent Scott Summers into Scottie Summers half a lifetime ago in Chapter 68, so despite literally never doing anything sexual with her or having her show up onscreen until now, I have to stay true to that story choice now Imfao.

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