

No Place Like Home by B Nickerson {Rated G}

A Cross-Reality Challenge in which Hugh gets a chance to try on Logan's real shoes!

(All X-men characters belong to Marvel/20thCenturyFox)

"Cut!" director Bryan Singer yelled, his effort to keep a behind-schedule X-men 2 *on-schedule* coming to an abrupt stand still yet again.

Hugh Jackman groaned. Jimmy Marsden, for whatever reason, just couldn't seem to get through his lines without giggling and Fam and Halle were starting to catch the bug, too. Normally, he'd be infected as well, but today he just wasn't in the mood. Long hours on the set, early mornings training and Oscar being sick keeping him and Deb up most of the night, all contributed to his grumpy ill-humor. Dourly, Hugh paced off-camera to wait. Someone behind him suddenly yelled a warning, but before he could turn, he felt a sharp pain against the back of his head, then eyes tunnel-visioned, his ears rang and blackness engulfed him.

As if from a distance, he recognized a familiar voice and felt himself being shaken. Opening his eyes, Hugh stared into Cyclops visor. "Jimmy," he muttered, a hand reflexively going to his head, though, oddly, he felt no pain now.

"Jimmy?" Scott Summers repeated. "You must have hit your head harder than usual, Logan."

"Logan?" Hugh echoed, still dazed as he felt himself helped to his feet. He stared around. He was standing in the same dark alley that had been part of the set, but this was no set. There were no cameras, lights or crew. "What happened?" he demanded. "Where's everybody?"

"I don't know," Summers replied quizzically. "*You* chased Avalanche down here. You tell me."

Hugh stared at him. Even with lifts, Marsden was never so tall. Then he laughed lightly and said loudly, "Okay, this was a bloody good joke, but games over, time to come out!"

Summers scowled. Just then Jean, Storm and Gambit ran breathlessly into the alley. They stopped beside him.

"Gambit say it be some spell 'fore dey show dey faces again."

Hugh stared afresh at this look-alike for actor, Mike Weiss.

"What's the matter, Logan?" Storm asked softly, with just a touch of middle-eastern accent. "You look like you've seen a ghost."

"What happened?" Jean hissed to Scott.

"One head knock too many I think. We need to get him back, check him over." Scott grasped Hugh's arm, but he snatched it back.

"Wait a minute! Who are you? Where's Bryan? Where's the crew? What's going on?"

Scott just nodded to Jean. Stepping back, she extended her hands and levitated a protesting Hugh Jackman, who looked ever so much like Logan to them, into the air and floated him to the jet.

Experiencing real mutant power threw him into an immediate terrified silence and when they reached the jet, he could only gawk at the huge SR77-style jet, standing there as real as he was. At their urging, he reluctantly clambered on-board, his stomach flip-flopping with nausea. "This has to be a dream," he mumbled to himself. They directed him to his usual seat behind Storm and he fumbled the head-set on while staring around the jet's interior, so similar to the set mock-up with one minor exception---*this one worked*.

He watched Scott maneuver her smoothly as they lifted off, then over the head-set listened to him conversing with someone he could only assume was Xavier, though he'd have sworn it was Patrick Stewart's voice. He and his "*scrambled brain*" were the topic of their conversation.

"This is worse than a dream," he told himself. "It's a bloody nightmare."

In the hanger, he shakily descended the jet's rear steps, his eyes roaming curiously around the huge underground port that housed it before allowing Jean and Scott to each take him by an arm and lead him docilely to the medical lab. There, the door hissed open, making him jump nervously and inside, Patrick Stewart's look-a-like, was seated in his wheelchair, waited for them. Hugh gawked, astounded at how much the lab looked like the set, though he spotted some technology here and there he didn't recognize. It was also chilly and he

shuddered involuntarily, perhaps as much from shock as cold.

Jean raised the exam table from the floor, then patted it. Reluctantly, he perched on it as directed, feeling like the proverbial bug-under-a-microscope.

"So," Xavier said, "What happened, Logan?"

"I'm *not* Logan." Hugh had to resist calling him Pat.

"Ah. Who do you think you are then?"

Annoyed by this childish patronizing, Hugh snapped, "Listen. I don't know what's going on. All I know is I'm an actor who *just* plays Logan on a movie. My name's Hugh Jackman."

"What do think?" Scott asked Xavier. "Split personality? Or has he finally just gone loopy?"

Hugh eyed the young X-men leader. His austere and commanding sense of presence sharply contrasted Jimmy Marsden's more easy-going manner.

Xavier only frowned thoughtfully. "What year is it...Mr. Jackman?"

"2002." Hugh didn't miss the sudden rise of Cyclops eyebrows above his visor.

"And who is President of the United States?"

"George W. Bush," then effecting his accent more strongly, added, "Though, I'm Aussie, mate."

Jean and Storm both snickered. "Cute accent," Jean remarked.

Scott and Xavier only exchanged looks, then Scott said, "I was ten in 02 and I don't remember any movies about Logan."

He stared at them. "Are you saying this is the *future*?"

"Maybe not *yours*," Xavier replied with furrowed brow.

"I know who I am." Hugh retaliated doggedly to cover his own confusion. "I don't care if I look like him, I'm *not* him. I'm married, got a kid and I act for a living. That's it."

"Why don't you lay down and relax, Mr. Jackman," Xavier calmly instructed his rankled patient. "If you'll permit me, I can verify what you're telling us."

"You want to do that mind-reading thing, don't you?"

Xavier smiled reassuringly. "I won't harm you."

Hugh scanned the ring of intrigued and perplexed faces around him, heaved a sigh, then patiently obeyed. Xavier wheeled around to his head and held his hands an inch away on either side.

"Can you get me back?" Hugh interrupted.

"We'll try. Now relax, Mr. Jackman." Xavier closed his eyes for several minutes. When he opened them, he said. "I'd like Jean to do a scan on you--just to confirm some things before I speculate further."

Hugh nodded and reluctantly shifted over to the table she directed him to and let her slide him inside the familiar prop-machine that, now, wasn't a prop. He squinted in the brightness and listened nervously as it's banks of lights clicked in sequence around him, having never heard them before. Sound was post-production.

Outside everyone peered at the monitor, seeing exactly what they'd expect on Logan's skeleton. Adamantium.

"Hmmm," Xavier mused. "It's Logan's body alright, but not his mind."

"You're kidding," Scott murmured. Xavier shook his head.

Gambit folded his arms on his chest. "We be in big trouble den."

"Not necessarily," Xavier replied. "He *is* an actor. He *could* play the part."

Scott frowned dubiously, considering that as Jean slid the table back out and Hugh eagerly hopped off, glad to be out.

"Well?"

"What do you remember?" Xavier asked him.

"Getting whacked on the nog"

Xavier looked to Scott. "And Logan was unconscious?" He nodded. Xavier looked at Hugh again. "Well, the scan shows adamantium on your skeleton proving that *is* Logan's body," he explained. "However, in *mind*, you are exactly who you say you are. Hugh Jackman, an actor."

"Crimy. Are you suggesting some kind of switch happened while I was unconscious? I'm here and he's...there?"

"More than that. I think you've crossed a dimensional plane into an alternate reality. In your world, we are mere fiction, but here---quite real."

Hugh ran his fingers through his hair, swearing under his breath. "This is a bloody mess! My wife and kid are back there. They'll think he's me--what'll happen?"

"It's hard to say. He'll certainly be more lost and confused than you," Xavier assured him.

"And helpless," Scott added. "No adamantium."

"Then knock me out and get me back!"

"We have a slightly more pressing problem to contend with before we figure out how to get you home," Xavier told the distressed looking Wolverine. "There's an important rendezvous Logan has to keep tomorrow night." With a brief glance at his watch, Xavier corrected himself, since it was well after midnight. "Actually tonight. The contact only knows Logan and only agreed to meet with Logan for the exchange."

Hugh stared at Professor Xavier, still feeling as if Bryan Singer could yell "cut" any minute and Patrick Stewart would hop-up and walk about. "You want *me* to impersonate *Logan*?"

"You said you're an actor," Scott challenged. "Get in character. Give us a sample."

Hugh eyed Summers hotly, then paced away, channeling those emotions in order to connect to his projection of Logan and when he turned back, he *was* Logan. With a haughty glare, he walked right up to Summers, jabbed a finger into his chest and gruffly snarled, "Don't tell me what to do---*Cyclops*."

The girl's and Gambit gave him a little round of applause. Scott smirked, "It'll do."

Hugh rolled his shoulders around to release tension and looked at Xavier. "You really think I can pull it off?"

"Easily."

"Well, give me some kinda script then and I'll ad-lib from there."

"We can do that. Scott, will you show Mr. Jackman to Logan's room. It's late and tomorrow is going to be a big day---for all of us."

Lost in his own thoughts, Hugh walked silently with Scott to the elevator that took them to the first floor, then upstairs to "his" room, where Scott left him to himself. He got ready for bed hoping, as he slid under the covers, that he might wake up at home, beside Deb and this all would just be some vague nightmare he could forget.

He wasn't so lucky. He awoke still alone in the strange bed in Xavier's mansion with the clock face telling him it was nine a. m. Grimly, he got up and dressed. It was weird looking in a mirror at a face that was, yet wasn't his. He looked like Wolverine without all the daily make-up or goo to keep his hair in place. He ran a brush through the thick, wavy mat, fascinated at how Logan's cowlick's curled-up like devil's horns all on their own. Then he stepped into the hallway, pausing just long enough to figure out which direction he'd come from last night, then headed for the stairs. He found Storm waiting for him at the bottom and greeted her with an easy "G'day."

She smiled. "Good morning, Mr. Jackman. Care for some breakfast?"

He nodded. "Call me Hugh."

She nodded. "This way."

He walked with her, noting how different her hair was from Halle's wig, how it hung in thick wavy stresses and how strikingly exotic and graceful she was. The dining hall turned out to be a large room with mounted deer, boar and antelope heads decorating the high walls and a stone fireplace with a fire blazing inside. He politely collected breakfast from the elderly ladies behind the steam-tables, then joined Scott at a table where he was rapidly grading papers.

He glanced up at Hugh's approach. "Good morning, Log...", he began, catching himself. "I mean, Mr. Jackman."

"Just Hugh, mate." He sat, surveying Scott's stack of books and papers as he did so. Storm took the chair beside him. "What is it you teach?" he asked Scott.

"Everything from basic math to trig. The kids are different ages, so I have to teach several levels in one class."

Hugh nodded as he dug in hungrily. He'd never once thought how smart Summers had to be. He squeezed out his tea-bag and added half-and-half to his teacup, then suddenly felt stared at. He looked up. "What?"

"Logan usually drinks black coffee," Storm answered.

"He calls drinking tea like that *sissified*," Scott chuckled.

"He would," Hugh snorted, storing that tidbit away for later use.

"It's hard adjusting to you looking like Logan without *being* Logan," Scott added.

"I could say the same thing about you. You could be twins with the guy who plays you, though you're a bit taller."

Scott smiled at that and, finished with his grading, neatly stacked the homework papers to one side. "I've always heard everyone's supposed to have a doppelganger," he replied as he rose to refill his teacup.

"It must be strange for you---being here," Storm said.

Hugh glanced at her and sighed, nodding. "Strange. Confusing. Scary. All that."

When Scott returned, he gave his watch a quick check, then stirred half-and-half into his own tea. Hugh observed the real Cyclops was quite dapper. Even his jeans were pressed with perfect creases. "So," Hugh inquired, "what's this exchange tonight about?"

Scott shrugged. "It's Logan's baby. All we know is it's supposed to be valuable mutant intelligence and he believed his contact reliable enough to arrange the pickup."

"So you really don't know who I'm meeting?"

He shook his head. "Don't worry. We'll be nearby."

"Lovely." Hugh toyed with his food with his fork, his ideas wandering then to something else he'd been thinking of. "If I have Logan's adamantium, then I also have his claws?" They both nodded. "So, how does he make them come out?"

Storm and Scott exchanged a glance.

"I suppose he just thinks about it," Storm offered hopefully.

Scott snorted with a bemused smile. "It's never come up before and we never asked, but even if you could, would you know what to do with them? They're not what I'd call safe playthings."

"I worked with a real set while filming. No problem." Hugh asserted, though he skipped mentioning all the times he'd either cut or stabbed himself even with the pretend ones.

Scott checked his watch again. "Well, time for class." He slid his papers into a folder and collected his books. "I guess you'll just have to go outside and figure it out. See you at lunch." Then left.

"I've got class, too," Storm agreed. She rested a kind hand on his forearm. "Good luck---and be careful," she gently cautioned.

Hugh mulled things over a bit longer before clearing out as well and heading outside to do exactly what Summers had suggested---figure it out.

He decided being outside was a good thing. No one was around to hear him cuss the first time he managed to get the blades out. He didn't expect the sharp, stinging pain that came when they pierced his skin and, because the pain broke his concentration before he could get them locked in place, they slipped back in again. Nor could anyone see him looking ridiculous, dancing around, shaking his hands out and rubbing his knuckles. Fortunately, it was a *very* quick pain, though still enough to make him hesitate. Bracing himself, he reached deep inside for Logan's rage and with a bellow, popped the claws fully into place. After that, he shadow-boxed through all the fighting motions he'd used on the set and becoming exhilarated, couldn't resist snarling, "No one messes with the Wolverine!"

Finally, hot and sweaty, he winced only slightly when he retracted the blades. He started to walk away, then spun around, snapping them out again, as if confronting an imaginary attacker, testing his control. Satisfied he'd mastered their use, he retracted them again and continued walking toward the school. It was only then he realized the possibility of having to use them could become a reality. The very idea of actually having to run them into a

living person, perhaps even killing them, turned his stomach, reminding him he *wasn't* Wolverine. He wasn't a mutant or a killer. He was just Hugh Jackman, actor, husband, father---a guy who'd never been in a life and death scrape in his entire life.

Humbled, he spent his time until lunch exploring Xavier's vast mansion, particularly the garage full of classics and Scott's custom motorcycle. Just for a look-see.

Back in the dining hall for lunch, Hugh immediately noticed he drew many glances as he got in line, no doubt because news that he was an "imposter" had gotten around. He glimpsed Rogue a few of people ahead of him with Gambit, but any resemblance to Anna Paquin proved only skin deep as soon as she turned her stormy and angst-filled gaze on him. It had a darkness, which Anna, of course, lacked and Rogue's gothic make-up only seemed to accentuate it. In fact, most of the students had a sense of grimness about them quite apart from the actors who portrayed them. It was eerie and he could only assume it due their hard life experiences as mutants. Rogue ignored him after that, returning her attention to Gambit.

He settled cheerfully at a table with the rest of the team and Xavier.

"So," Scott immediately asked, "did you figure it out?"

He nodded. "No problem," then dug hungrily into his food, having worked up an appetite and let the conversation drift away from him to other topics. He didn't want to go into the in-securities he was having.

After lunch, Xavier had him come to his office to give him, at least, the sketchy details of the plan, with "sketchy" being the operative word, and rehearse his part. Xavier explained then that Scott only had coordinates to land in a specified location in the outback of Alaska, where he, as Logan, was supposed to go a cabin, meet his contact, collect the information, then get back on the jet and fly back. He surveyed the page of meager script Xavier handed him with dismay. "I don't see how I can cover not knowing who I'm meeting or what I'm asking for."

"Bluff," Xavier replied. "Logan's not a man of many words---use that to your advantage. Force your contact do the talking."

He nodded dubiously. "It seems to me Logan's left you a little high and dry on this one. I'm surprised you don't keep him on a shorter leash."

"This is hardly a run-of-mill circumstance, Mr. Jackman. Consciousness's don't trade places everyday, so its a little hard to anticipate. As for Logan---he may march to the beat of his own drums, but I've always found him trustworthy."

Hugh nodded, absorbing this little character revelation.

"Shall we rehearse?" Xavier invited.

He nodded again, stood and approached Xavier as his contact and imagined a cabin in a frozen wasteland as Xavier drilled him over and over until his performance as Logan was smooth, regardless of what he threw at him. After that, he had all afternoon and the rest of the evening till flight time to try to stay busy and not worry, though he didn't have much appetite at dinner.

Too soon, it was time to don uniforms for their late night flight. He changed beside Scott, slipping into Logan's *real* X-men uniform and noting its many improvements over his costume version. It had some kind of protective environmental-knit lining that could keep its wearer either warm or cool as circumstances warranted *and* it had a built-in cup, a little nicety that might've saved him from being nearly castrated by his flying-harness in the first film had his costumer been so thoughtful.

"Nervous?" Scott asked, trying to lighten the mood.

Hugh put a hand to his stomach. "Worse then opening night. Can't tell whether to chuck or pee on myself." He'd certainly done his share of both at one time or another.

Scott chuckled and clapped him on the shoulder. "You'll do alright." Then passed him his X-men arctic gear,

which consisted of a black parka, a heavy scarf and a pair of ski-goggles. Hugh made one last pit-stop before heading for the jet, just to be sure.

In Alaska, he exited the jet, joining his team standing on the snow, surveying the cold twilight landscape. Close to midnight, it was that time of year when arctic nights are short and barely night at all. Several hundred feet away, a cabin stood framed against snow-covered firs and low hills that ascended rapidly to majestic peaks. It was far prettier than he'd ever imagined and, under other circumstances, he might even have enjoyed it. He looked to Scott, who nodded, then signaled the rest of the team to break up and take their positions.

Squaring his shoulders, Hugh got in character, then crunched resolutely through the snow towards the cabin.

As he neared it, the pungent scent of burning wood greeted him, assuring him their contact was, indeed, home. He pulled the goggles and scarf down enough to expose his face, then knocked on the door. It opened a crack and a woman of intoxicating beauty peered out. Her skin was pale and fine as white porcelain china. Her black hair was cropped short and her eyes were the deepest violet-blue he'd ever seen. He scowled impatiently in order to hide his surprise.

She smiled. "Logan, come in."

Brushing past her, he strode directly to the fireplace and stopped in front of it. Throwing back his hood, he gave the meager decor a cursory glance just to give himself a minute to re-coop. A beautiful female contact hadn't been exactly what he'd imagined. Turning, he faced her. She was dressed simply in pants tucked into knee-high boots and a bulky red sweater that clung to her shapely figure and he arched his left brow as if to say, "Well?"

"Don't you have anything to say to me, Logan?" she asked.

"I'm not here for a social call," he retorted brusquely.

Her full lips pouted. "You never were one to mince words."

He shrugged one shoulder indifferently, waiting for her to offer the item. He had no idea what sort of history these two had, but whatever it was, obviously her coals for Logan still burned bright and he should be very careful with what he might say.

She to his side then and reaching to the mantle, picked up a small, rectangular lacquered box. Opening it, she removed two three-inch DSD's and handed them to him.

He looked at them, then pocketed them. "Thanks."

"Is that all?" she asked with beseeching eyes.

Suddenly, before he could decide how to reply, something burst through the wall, landed on a chair and exploded into flames, startling them. It was quickly followed by a second flaming projectile, which also exploded into flames. It was she who moved first, grabbing his arm and hustling him toward the rear of the cabin. She grabbed a parka off a hook along the way, then led the way out a back door. There she hurriedly jerked a tarp off a snowmobile.

"They're after me, not you," she informed as she threw the tarp in a heap to one side, then zipped-up her parka. "I'll try to draw them off so you can get away."

He could hear the approaching whines of other snow mobiles, increasing explosions and yelling voices. Maybe Scott's. "Better hurry," he said.

She took a step toward the snowmobile, then paused, turned back, seized him by his parka collar and planted a kiss on his lips before he even knew what was happening. Then, just as abruptly, she let go, whispered, "Take care of yourself---like you always do," then leaped on her snowmobile, started up and roared off without a backward glance.

He just stood shivering in the freezing air, staring after her, entirely stunned until a fresh explosion shook him back to reality. The far end of the cabin was already ablaze, so he ran to the opposite end that wasn't on fire, crouched and peered around the corner in time to see his lady friend loop around front to catch her adversaries attention, then swing back into the trees with them hot on her trail. Then he peered across the snow plain in the direction of the jet, trying to decide whether he should make a break for it or not. Fog was rapidly building up,

probably thanks to Storm, and he could see Cyclop's red optic beams firing after the retreating snow mobiles. He finally decided he should make a dash for it and plunged into the fog, running low in the direction of Scott's red beams. Then, as if it were filled with land-mines, the snow around him abruptly began randomly exploding and he could imagine it was some mutant thing. Terrified, he didn't know what else to do, but keep running and try a little zig-zagging.

Suddenly, a massive explosion behind him blew him face-first into the snow. Scrambling up, he ran desperately on, his lungs aching with cold, his pulse pounding in his temples. He could make out Scott waving him in just before he heard another explosion close by and felt a sharp pain against the back of his head. The impact plowed him into the snow and as he rolled over on his back, dazed, the last thing he saw before blackness overtook him was Scott's visored face leaning over him, urgently calling his name, "Hugh! Hugh!"

"I got it!" Hugh mumbled as he pried his eyes open and felt for his pocket. *Funny, he couldn't feel any parka.*
"Got what?"

Hugh Jackman's eyes rolled upward to peer into Patrick Stewart's concerned face. He glanced around at the rest of his equally concerned friends surrounding him. Jimmy, Famke, Halle, Mike and Bryan. He was back! Reflexively his hand went to the goog on the back of his head as he struggled to sit up. "How long was I out?" he asked. *It felt like two days.*

"Just a few seconds," Jimmy Marsden replied.

Hugh looked into those clear blue eyes. "That's *all*?"

Jimmy nodded.

"And nothing unusual happened?" They all seemed perplexed at his question. "Never mind, " he told them. Hands helped him to his feet as he happily surveyed all the sets, equipment, cameras and crew.

"Are you sure you're okay?" Bryan Singer asked with concern.

"After all the stunts I've done? What's a little bonk on the head? Let's get on with it!"

They went back to the shoot and Jimmy finally got through his lines without giggling. Since no seemed to think he'd been gone, Hugh found himself questioning whether the fading memories of his experience had been anything more than a dream. After all, he *was* living and breathing "X-men" sixteen hours a day. It *could* have just been some kind of dream, for all he knew. Whatever it was, though, it changed his perspective. It made him delighted with his ordinary life and he ended the day in a far better mood than he began it. When he got home, much to his wife's surprise, he kissed her like he hadn't seen her for a week, then eagerly picked up Oscar, still grumpy with his cold and kissed him, glad to be home where he belonged, where life was safe and relatively simple.

Still, at odd moments, that sensation of Alaska's biting cold would come back to him. Or the sting of Logan's claws bursting through the skin between his knuckles or that porcelain face with the strange violet eyes would hover mistily in his mind's eye forcing him to wonder whether it hadn't been more than just a simple dream.

The End