



The Presage by B. Nickerson {Rated G}

Synopsis : A Photo-Prompt Challenge, the object being to write a short X-men story based on this photo of two hands reaching out of darkness in 3000 words or less.

[All X-men characters belong to Marvel & 20th Century Fox. Photo was borrowed from Flickr for the sole purpose of being a story inspiration.]

Charles Xavier was walking down a long hallway. It appeared to stretch endlessly into the distance ahead of him. He peered around at the pearl gray cement walls on either side of him, recognizing them as familiar, yet not really remembering ever being in such a place before. He was underground, he knew, though he didn't know how he knew. He squinted up at the recessed florescent lights overhead, then glanced over his shoulder to see what was behind, but only saw more of the same endless gray corridor that way, too..

He turned his eyes forward again, puzzled. It was all very odd, but even odder was the fact he was *walking*. Where was his wheelchair? Where was he going? Why did it feel so important that he keep going, like some appointment awaited him that he shouldn't miss?

Suddenly Jean's voice interrupted his thoughts calling his name faintly ever so faintly. "*Charles...*" Xavier stopped. "*Jean?*" he thought back.

"*Charles...help me.*"

There was no mistaking the urgency in her tone. "Where are you?" he shouted out-loud, turning about, trying to get a bearing on her, but he couldn't seem to pin point her location and felt like pounding the walls with his fists. *Which way?* Though, obviously there were only two alternatives. A strong urge suggested he go the same direction he'd originally been walking and trusting that instinct, he did exactly that breaking into a run same direction he'd been walking.

"*Please...hurry,*" came Jean's bare mental whisper.

That spurred Xavier on to even greater speed as he charged down this hallway that didn't seem to have any end---then abruptly he saw a gray office door appear as if out of a fog and he stopped, his side aching from the exertion; but, sensing there was no time to waste, he quickly opened it and dashed inside. There, he froze in his tracks. It struck him as some sort of a meeting room, but it was a wreck, like a fight had occurred. Chairs were over-turned and the large, oval table in the center lay split in half. However, this wasn't what held his attention---it was the unbelievable thing across the room, a vertical vortex hovering just above the floor. It looked like an upright black hole. It was oval shaped, about the height of a man with a pitch black center and an outer edge comprised of slowly rotating diaphanous color.

It was a spectacle to behold, an anomaly Xavier's knowledge of physics couldn't explain---but that wasn't the worst part. The worst was Jean was on the floor in front of it on her belly, her arms stretched out in front of her, her fingernails clawed against the floor trying to fight against being pulled any further in--and clearly losing. She was still being drawn into it, though her effort was giving the whole mid-section of her body an elongated and stretched appearance that that made him cringe to look upon. She literally looked like she was been torn apart.

It was at this moment that Jean raised pain-filled eyes to look at him.

Horrified, Xavier wanted to rush over and grab her and pull her free---but he could not. His legs and arms refused to obey him. In fact, his knees gave way and he collapsed to the floor, unable to even crawl to her. He tried using his telekinesis, but that, too, refused to work. He couldn't even speak. All he could do was watch helplessly. His heart ached, tears ran down his cheeks and a scream hung strangled in his throat as more and more of Jean slid inside the vortex's black middle until, finally, only her head and shoulders remained.

"*Tell Scott I love him,*" was her last thought to him before her head and shoulders also disappeared leaving only her two hands reaching pleadingly out of the inky blackness toward him...

Charles Xavier jerked upright in bed with a cry, then looked around blinking at the familiar furnishings, realizing he was in his own room. The gray light of dawn was peeping through the blinds illuminating his black cat, Celine, on the bed near his feet regarding him quizzically. "Sorry, old girl," he told her, "Just a bad dream."

Or was it?

This was the third time this month he'd had the exact same dream, identical in every detail. It always started in that gray endless hall and always ended with his inability to rescue Jean from her terrible fate.

He gripped the metal triangle above him and scrubbed his face with his free hand trying to dis-spell the vivid awfulness of the dream. Despite its repetitive nature, he was reluctant to call it a "premonition." His knowledge of science simply wouldn't let him because the phenomena envisioned wasn't possible, certainly nothing of that size of such a vortex, so he couldn't and wouldn't give it a literal interpretation. More likely it was a symbolic embodiment of fears he generally had for his X-team's safety and just a creative invention of his mind for expressing that fear. That and the fact he'd probably read *way* too much sci-fi as a lad. In any case, he was awake so there was no point in trying to go back to sleep.

"Might as well get up," he muttered as much to himself as Celine and set about his morning routine, his memory of the dream or even any concern about it rapidly fading with the rising sun.

The End