

TRIBUTE by DG Davis {Rated G}

Synopsis: Description Challenge: one X-men describing a fellow X-men.

[All names, locations or businesses are either products of imagination or are being used fictitiously and any resemblance to persons living or dead is coincidental. All X-men characters belong to Marvel/20CenturyFox. Original character, Susan, features here as Logan's wife.]

Shuffling the ten feet or so to the podium and up the steps, I feel as gloomy and turbulent as the heavy clouds scudding across the late autumn sky. This thing ain't my thing. It's not that I'm nervous. It's just.... anything I've got to say won't do justice.

From the inside breast pocket of my best leather sport jacket, I pull out and unfold a sheet of paper. It's notes Sue insisted I use. My eyes track over the crowd. Five hundred rented chairs and heck if there aren't a fair number standing in back and off to the sides. Man o'man, lots o'people really care 'bout him. Pity reunions hafta happen because of funerals.

Front and center is his wife...uh widow and their three kids. An Afro-Latina, Cecilia Reyes is a striking woman, his equal and opposite in all the right ways. They made some kinda good looking, terrific kids.

A shiver chills my spine. Those kids are just a few years younger than mine. Fate's an unpredictable, unforgiving monster. Blink and it might be my wife and kids in the same spot.

Can't help tugging on my collar. That's another thing Sue insisted on: starched dress shirt. She said white. I won with gray. The color doesn't stop it from feeling too damn tight and itchy. Squaring my shoulders, I suck in a breath to steady myself for something I never figured on doing for anybody. But I ain't eulogizing just anybody.

"Hank McCoy was a good man. Thinking and speaking good, living good and doing good factor into it, but that kind of good is mostly on the surface. Hank was deep down good. Deep down decent. Ferals, like Hank and I, can smell it." I chuckle openly, "Don't take this wrong, but Hank smelled good."

Laughter peals out. Some's polite, but there's more than one belly laugh. Even Charles bucks up though his laughter is cut short by a worrisome spell of coughing. I almost lose my place offering a silent plea that I don't have to repeat this scene anytime soon.

"He was one of the smartest men, and by that I mean book smart and street smart, I ever knew. Hank could rub elbows with and finesse the powers that be. But, if the situation demanded, he was never above getting down and dirty. You could count on him to think and act fast. You could trust him at your back.

"All of us can recall a time or two when Hank had our backs." I see nods, especially from the front row. "First time for me was Alcatraz. Who ever thought some overgrown blue smurf who talks like he swallowed a dictionary had it in him? I sure didn't. He proved me wrong and I'm...grateful he did.

"And it wasn't just in a fight where you could count on him. Over how many games of chess or backgammon, soaking up his beloved double malt scotch, did I unload my gripes and screw ups on him? Too many, for sure. If his words of wisdom didn't get through, I could bet on him to knock me upside the head 'til I got it. Lucky for us both, that didn't happen often. The man was a genius and I'm fairly certain I wouldn't be standing here today if it weren't for Hank's brains. He kept me alive when a blood transfusion sent my healing factor haywire. He did it again when my healing factor failed after Magneto shot me up with the Cure. There's more, but this isn't about me. If he was still here, I could never repay him personally for the times he's saved my life. So, I'll have to settle for the next best thing."

Glancing towards them, I repeat a vow I made privately to Hank's family, "Wherever, whenever, I'm...Sue and I are gonna take care of you."

Flashing me a sad, sweet smile, Cecilia mouths, "Bless you," before she reaches to clasp hands with my wife sitting a few seats away.

"There aren't many..." I hesitate, letting the emotions, mine included, settle. "There aren't many folks in this world I respect and trust as true friends and vice-versa. Truthfully, Hank and I didn't start out real smooth and everybody knows we had our ups and downs." I chuckle again. "First time we met, I wasn't too impressed and if you know me, I don't keep my opinions to myself. A bit o' name calling turned into competitive growling. I guess if the situation at hand hadn't been so serious, we might've thrown punches."

I see Storm grin and mouth, "You're so bad."

"A couple of times we did come to blows." I lower my head, "Gotta admit, those times were mostly my fault. But, going to the heart of the matter, whatever the cost, Hank stood up to me or anybody for all that's reasonable and right." Looking down at the closed, flag-draped casket, a sudden lump in my throat forces me to swallow.

"You are my friend....ya big ol' blue fur ball." Blinking, I will the wetness in my eyes away and suck in a fast breath, "Save some o' that ancient double malt for when I catch up to ya."

That's all. It's the best I've got to give. Fighting grief, I'm on autopilot as I step down, press a comforting kiss on Cecilia's cheek and ruff three curly little heads. Vaguely aware of the next eulogizer, I take my seat next to Sue.

"You did great," she whispers and tangles her fingers with mine.

Sighing, I lean back and lift my face to catch a fleeting ray of sunshine. Tonight, after all the ritualized, civilized mourning's over, when the moon's a fingernail clipping clinging on a velvet black sky, I'll grieve. One feral for another, I'll howl my sorrow into the cold, empty night.