

[thirteen] stryker strikes again

NOVA WAS SITTING ON THE STAIRS reading when she suddenly felt a whoosh of air and then found herself outside in the grounds, her book still open in her hands. She no longer felt the nausea that often came with the super-speed that she had grown familiar with, and as more kids began to appear in the grounds around her, Nova watched in horror as the entire mansion went up in flames, an explosion shaking the very ground she stood on.

She rushed forwards. "Dad!"

"Nova!" Hank shouted, catching Nova as she tried to run for the house. "Nova, he's not in there."

Peter Maximo removed his goggles, having successfully rescued everyone from inside the house. "Wow."

Nova turned to face her boyfriend, eyes widening. "Peter!"

She rushed at him and jumped into his arms, leading to him chuckling as he hugged her back. "Hey, Zero. Miss me?"

"Yes," she replied. "It's a good thing you were here."

"Wh-Where did you...?" Hank stammered.

"I was looking for the professor," Peter replied. "I thought he lived here."

"Hank, where's dad?" Nova asked, an arm still wrapped around Peter's shoulders.

Hank's expression clouded over. "They took him."

Nova's heart sank. "Who? Who took him?"

Before Hank could reply, the whispers coming from the students made her turn, spotting Raven in the middle of the crowd in her natural form. She looked around at the students before her eyes settled on Hank and Nova.

Hank smiled. "They look up to you. Right now, they need you."

"That's not what they need," Raven replied, turning back into the form that Nova had seen earlier that day.

A car pulled up and the four escapees returned. Scott rushed up to them. "What happened? Where's Alex? Where's my brother?"

Peter shrugged. "Pretty sure I got everybody."

Nova turned to Hank. "Alex is..."

"Alex was closest to the blast," Hank replied quietly.

Scott backed away and ran, Jean following after him. Nova watched the two of them go before she turned to Peter. "I'll be right back, I promise."

Peter nodded. "Go."

Nova ran after Jean and Scott. She knew he would need someone to comfort him, and although Jean would have been enough, Nova had never been one to let people suffer when she had a chance to help them. Charles was gone, taken by an unknown enemy, and the mansion was gone too. Nova herself felt like she was about to cry, but for the sake of Scott, she kept her emotions at bay.

"Alex..." she heard Scott gasp, as he looked down at the wreckage before him, the ruined mansion where his brother had met his untimely end.

Nova covered her mouth with her hand, horror-stricken. She remembered Alex from when she was little. He was funny and caring and always snuck her candy whenever Charles wasn't looking. Losing him hit her hard, the same way it would hurt if she lost someone else she loved, so she couldn't imagine how Scott was feeling.

Jean placed a hand on Scott's shoulder to comfort him, and when Nova saw her face change to worry, she stepped forwards. "What's wrong?"

Jean turned at the sound of a helicopter, and when Nova saw it approaching from above the trees, she was quick to grab Scott and Jean by the arms and pulled them down out of sight. Kurt, who had followed Jean and Scott, took cover with the other three.

"Please remain calm," a woman's voice said over a speaker system. "Medical assistance is on the way. Please remain calm. Medical assistance is on the way. Please remain calm. Medical assistance is on the way."

Nova watched as Moira stepped forwards to greet the men, only for a man to shout, "FIRE!"

A blast knocked every mutant in the vicinity off their feet, and Nova made to get up and run for her friends. Jean caught her arm. "No, you can't go out there!"

"Peter," Nova gasped, watching him fall to the ground. "Oh my God..."

"Going over there is suicide," Scott agreed. "We're better off over here."

"Shit, shit, shit," Nova whispered, watching as the man moved through the unconscious mutants. "I know that guy."

"I want her," he instructed, pointing at Moira. "Him," this time he pointed at Hank. "Him," this time, Peter, before he finally stopped at Raven. "And her."

"Yes, sir," came the reply.

"Leave the kids," the man shouted.

"How do you know him?" Scott asked.

"His name's Stryker," Nova replied. "It's really hard to explain, but he's not a good guy."

A man appeared in their peripheral vision, moving through the wreckage, and the four of them ducked down. Kurt asked, "What do we do?"

"Just stay down," Jean replied.

She used her powers to hide them from the man, and when he was gone, Scott said, "Thanks, Jean."

"We gotta help them," Nova said, watching her friends get carted onto the helicopter on stretchers. "Kurt, can you get us in that thing?"

"You want to get in there?" Kurt asked. "What if the soldiers see us?"

"Don't worry, they won't see us," Jean promised. "Trust me."

"And if they do, I've got it covered," Nova replied, her fingers crackling with purple electricity.

Kurt held out his hand. "Hold on."

Taking his hand, Nova felt Jean cover her hand with her own and heard her voice in her head. "Don't worry, we'll save them."

Kurt transported them into the chopper, appearing to be in some sort of cage. Nova spotted her friends lying on the ground across from them, and when the chopper's engines fired up, her eyes widened.

"Kurt, get us out of here," Scott demanded.

Scott gasped. "Uh, I can't. When they closed the doors, there's some kind of electrical field. It's like Berlin all over."

"Jean, get in the pilot's head," Scott said. "Don't let them take over."

"I can't," Jean replied. "I can't reach the pilots. I can't reach anyone."

"Nova?" Scott asked desperately. "Can't you ground this thing?"

Even though she knew it was futile, Nova attempted to use her powers. Nothing happened and she shook her head. "No, they're not working. Damn Stryker."

"What do we do?" Kurt asked, sounding panicked.

"Alright, alright, we just need to stay calm," Nova said, turning to her friends. "We just need to stay calm."

"How do we stay calm?" Scott asked.

"We're still alive, aren't we?" Nova asked, and Scott nodded. "Then we need to stay calm and keep it that way."

The chopper took off and Nova fell back against the wall of the cage, putting her head in her hands. She was trying to work out where everything had gone wrong, because in the space of not even ten minutes, she had lost her father, her home and had to watch her friends get taken hostage by the one man that had the power and the ability to destroy them all...

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