

## [fi een] running into an old friend

**WITH JEAN HIDING THEM** from the guards with her telepathy, Nova led the way through Stryker's facility, following the men who had their friends. When the men came to a stop, Nova held out her arms and the four of them stopped, watching as their friends were carried into a cell and le inside. When the men le the cell, Nova watched the door close, a foot-wide metal contraption that looked almost indestructible. Even though she could almost feel the electrical field reverberating from the cell door, she began looking for a way to free her friends.

"What's taking so long?" Scott asked, as Kurt placed his hands on the door.

"I can't get in," Kurt replied. "They have a field around it, like the helicopter."

"Nova, can you use your powers?" Scott asked.

Nova closed her eyes, holding out her hands. She could feel the power surging through her body, right down to the tips of her fingers, but no matter how much she concentrated on wanting to rip the door o it's hinges, it wouldn't budge. She stopped, letting out a defeated hu as she glared at the door.

She turned to Scott. "The answer to your question is no. Not when there's an electrical field. If we cut the power, then maybe, but Stryker... he's clever. He knows what he's doing."

"You know him well?" Kurt asked.

Nova sighed. "I do."

"There's gotta be a way to cut the power," Scott said, looking around.

"If we can do that, and cut the power, we can get them out," Nova said.

"Alright, let's go," Jean said.

They headed down the maze of corridors, and when they approached a doorway that opened up into a hangar of sorts, Nova saw a guard pass by the opening. She and Jean moved back as Scott and Kurt did the same on the opposite side of the corridor, and when the guards had passed, the door closed.

"Guys, that could be our way out of here," Scott said.

Nova nodded. "It could."

"Hear me, inhabitants of this world."

"What is that?" Scott asked, looking around.

"This is a message."

"I think it's the professor," Jean said.

Nova's eyes widened. She was used to hearing Charles's voice in her head, but this seemed di erent. The tone he was using; it was strained, like he was being forced to speak the words he spoke.

"A message to every man, woman and mutant in the world. You have lost your way, but I have returned. The day of reckoning is here. All your buildings, all of your towers and temples, will fall, and the dawn of a new age will rise, for there is nothing you can do to stop what is coming. This message is for one reason alone: to tell the strongest among you, those with the greatest power... protect those without. That's my message to the world."

"He just spoke to me," Jean said quietly.

"I think he spoke to everyone," Scott replied.

"I could hear him too," Kurt said.

"No, no, he just sent me a hidden message," Jean said. "One he knew only I would hear. I know where they are."

A guard rounded the corner. "Hey!"

Nova acted instinctively, stepping forwards and planting her feet. She shoved her hands out in front of her and the guard went flying backwards as she felt a hand on her arm and then the world shi ed around her. She found herself standing in another corridor, Jean and Scott beside her, Kurt just ahead of them.

"Well, we lost the element of surprise," Nova said. "Come on, let's move."

They rounded a corner, and came to another locked door. Peering inside, Scott said, "The generator. It's worth a shot."

"Kurt," Jean said.

Kurt held onto the three of them and transported them into the room. As they approached the generators, it appeared that the room also acted as a laboratory of sorts, and when Nova heard a snarl from within a container, she froze.

"There's some kind of animal in there," Scott said.

"It's no animal," Jean said. "It's a man."

"Who is he?" Kurt asked.

"That part of him has been taken away," Jean said.

"What do you mean?" Nova asked.

"I mean they turned him into some kind of weapon," Jean replied.

The doors burst open, and just as Nova raised her hands, Jean grabbed her arm. She had hidden them from sight with her powers and gave them time to take cover behind the cage and as the guards slowly entered the room, Jean used her powers to open the cage, releasing whatever was inside.

An alarm started blaring throughout the facility as the door opened, and out stepped the man who had been locked in the cage. He was breathing heavily, but Nova's breath hitched in her throat when she saw who it was.

"Logan," she gasped.

"Fire!" the guards exclaimed.

Gunfire rained down on Logan and Nova stepped back. Logan didn't fall from the bullets; in fact, they didn't seem to have any e ect on him. He let out a yell and launched himself at the guards. Their screams echoed through the room.

When the guards were dead, Logan ran o down the corridors, leaving Nova and her friends to chase a er him. They followed the trail of destruction, dead soldiers littering the facility as Logan tore through the place on a rampage.

"You sure he's not an animal?" Scott asked.

"I know him," Nova said.

"How the hell do you know him?" Scott asked.

"From a long time ago," Nova replied. "But I doubt he remembers."

They followed a er Logan until they eventually caught up with him. He was pushing open a door which lead to the outside, and when they stopped behind him, he turned to them. Scott reached for his glasses, but Nova grabbed his arm.

"Scott, wait," she said.

Jean approached Logan slowly, cautiously, and his claws retracted. Nova noticed that where his claws had once been made of bone, they were now made of metal, leading her to wonder exactly what Stryker had done to him.

"Jean," Scott said slowly.

Jean reached up and Logan grabbed her arm. She gasped but didn't pull back, instead removing the helmet from Logan's head. She placed her hands on either side of his face and closed her eyes, communicating with him in her own way.

When she lowered her hands, Logan seemed almost calm, pulling out the screws that had been implanted into his body and freeing himself from the shackles he wore. He looked at Scott, Kurt and then Nova, a flash of recognition in his eyes when he saw her staring back at him, before he ran from the facility and into the snow.

"What did you do to him?" Scott asked.

"I found a piece of his past and gave it back to him," Jean replied.

"Just a few memories I could reach."

"I hope that's the last we've seen of that guy," Scott said.

Nova shook her head. "I don't think so, but we have to get to the others."

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