

## [twenty] the constant in someone's life

1985:

"NOVA XAVIER, WILL YOU MARRY ME?"

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Nova's eyes widened when she saw the ring and it took her a moment to fully take in what was happening. Peter was proposing, here, now, in this very moment, and she was standing there, shocked to her very core.

"Nova?"

"Wha- I'm sorry," she said, shaking herself out of her stunned stupor.

"Yes."

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"Yes?"

"Yes, I'll marry you."

Peter was on his feet in an instant, wrapping his arms around Nova's waist and spinning her around as she laughed. When he put her down, he placed his hands gently on her cheeks and looked her in the eyes. All he could see when he looked at her was the rest of his life, waking up to her every morning and going to bed together, maybe having a home of their own... he loved this girl more than anything.

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"I love you," he whispered. "So much."

"I love you too," she replied, placing her hand on the back of his neck and pulling him towards her.

She kissed him gently, and felt his hands fall from her face and settle on her waist. She smiled into the kiss, unable to accurately describe the feeling she felt in that moment.

You know when you're on a rollercoaster, and you're on the way up and the anticipation is killing you because you don't really know what to expect. Would you throw up? Would you cry? Would you laugh? That was how Nova had felt all day, dragged through various stores and made to look completely unlike she usually did.

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When Peter asked the question, the rollercoaster hit the drop, and a er that moment it takes to register that you're really moving now, the feeling of pure exhilaration had hit her and she couldn't help the smile on her face.

Peter pulled away first, brushing his thumb gently across Nova's cheekbone. "I'm so glad you said yes."

"What, you thought I'd say no?" she asked.

"Well, I was preparing for it, just in case," Peter replied, taking the ring from the box. "Can I?"

Nova held out her hand and Peter slid the ring onto her finger. She smiled at him as he let his thumb brush the back of her hand. "You know, you're the best thing that's ever happened to me, too."

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"Well, that's good then, isn't it?" Peter replied. "But hey, hold on," he turned to look at the trees. "Alright, you guys can come out now!"

Cheers erupted from the trees, and Nova laughed when she saw her friends appear from the shadows. Jean, Ororo, Scott, Kurt; all of their friends came forwards, cheering and clapping as they rushed at Peter and Nova.

It was in that moment, her hand clutching Peter's as their friends congratulated them, listening to them gush over how adorable the proposal was and how gorgeous the ring was, that she felt truly, truly content with her life.

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1986:

"I'm so nervous, I think I'm going to throw up."

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"Now, that wouldn't do anybody any good, would it?" Charles asked, smiling up at his daughter.

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When Peter had come to Charles to ask for Nova's hand in marriage, he had been such a stuttering mess that he couldn't actually get the words out and had resorted to telling Charles to read his mind in order to ask the question. When he realised what the boy was asking, Charles agreed immediately, because he had never seen two people who loved one another the way Peter and Nova loved one another.

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Now, with her hand clutching his as they waited for the music to start, Charles felt tears well up in his eyes. He had raised Nova since she was two years old, and she had been the one thing that truly kept him from spiralling all the way down a er everything he had been through. She was the constant in his life, and now he was giving her away to become the constant in someone else's life.

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It was a bittersweet moment.

Jean and Ororo were Nova's maids of honour, because she couldn't decide between the two, and Scott and Kurt were Peter's groomsmen. Peter's sisters, Wanda and Lorna, were Nova's bridesmaids, and were going to lead the bridal party into the room. Most of the people that Nova had grown up with were in that room, through those doors, waiting to watch her take this next step in her life.

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Because of the amount of mutants in attendance, the wedding was being held at the mansion, which made things a lot easier for those attending. Only Peter's mother and sisters had to make a journey to attend, and they didn't mind making the trip to New York for the sake of Peter's wedding day.

Even Erik had returned from wherever he had been to attend Nova's wedding, and he was sitting in the front row where her family would be sitting. She didn't have any relatives, but Erik, Raven and Hank were sitting in the row where her family should have been, because they had been as good as any family to her.

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When the music started, Nova jumped slightly and gripped Charles's hand. He smiled. "It's not too late to turn back, you know? Mind, I think Peter might be slightly embarrassed, but it's not too late."

"No, no, I'm ready," Nova said. "I just... I'm nervous."

"It's alright to be nervous," Charles told her kindly. "Everyone gets nervous when they make these changes."

"Hey, dad?" Nova whispered.

"Yes, Nova?"

"Thank you for being the best dad ever," she said. "I don't know where my life would have gone if you hadn't found me. Thank you for... everything."

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She couldn't truly convey how much Charles meant to her with words, which so o en fell short when it came to emotions, but when Charles took a look inside Nova's head, he could see everything she wanted to say but couldn't find the words for. Everything was a big thing, and all the memories she could remember were at the forefront of her mind as she spoke to Charles, because of all the things he had taught her in her life, each was just as important as the others.

The doors opened and Wanda and Lorna made their way into the mansion's grand hall. Jean looked back at Nova and winked before she and Ororo headed into the hall a er Wanda and Lorna.

"Dad?"

"Yes?"

"Don't let me fall over."

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"I'm afraid I won't be much good if you do," Charles replied, a light attempt at humour. "But I've got you, Nova. I won't let go."

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Nova smiled at her father, took a deep breath, and walked into the hall.

Her friends were smiling at her as she walked down the aisle, and Erik even gave her a thumbs-up as she passed them. All those eyes on her, and all Nova could see was Peter. The moment she saw him, everything felt right. Her nerves melted away and were replaced with the same warmth she always felt whenever she looked at Peter.

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His eyes were filled with love as he watched her approach slowly, and she smiled at him. He grinned in return and bounced back and forth on the balls of his feet in anticipation. When Nova and Charles reached the front of the room, she turned to her father.

"I love you, dad," she whispered.

"I love you too," he replied.

She kissed his forehead before straightening up. Charles didn't seem to want to let go of her hand, so she squeezed it gently. "Dad, it's time to let go."

In her head, she heard his voice. I don't want to let go. It means you're not my little girl anymore.

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She smiled. I'll always be your little girl, dad. Nothing will ever change that.

Charles's eyes so ened. Welcome to the rest of your life, Nova.

She winked at her father before stepping up onto the makeshift stage that had been set up at the front of the room. Hank got to his feet and walked up to the altar, squeezing Nova's arm gently as he passed her. He would be officiating the ceremony, and had even gotten ordained for the occasion. Nova wouldn't want anyone else to be the one to marry her and Peter, because Hank had been a part of her life for as long as Charles and Erik.

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Peter smiled at her when she was standing in front of him, leaning towards her to whisper, "Hey, you look great."

She let out a light laugh. "Thanks, you don't clean up too bad yourself."

"Scott even made me wear one of these weird flowers," Peter said, pinching the flower in his lapel. "Although I don't see why when you've got a bunch there."

Nova giggled. "It's just tradition, Peter. Besides, it looks cute. You want to get married in front of a room full of people?"

"All I'm seeing is you," he replied.

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It took everything in her not to kiss him there and then, but Hank cleared his throat and the room went quiet. Peter winked at her, a grin on his face as Hank looked between them, silently asking if they were ready. When they both nodded, he smiled.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today..."

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