

## [twenty two] party in the woods

**MORE CHEERS GREETED THEM** when they returned to the mansion, and as the younger mutants applauded, Charles appeared in his wheelchair. "That's enough, boys and girls. That's enough. The X-Men have today done an incredibly brave thing. They have once again proved to humanity exactly why they need us, people like yourselves. The president sends his regards as well as his heartfelt gratitude and, as for myself, I have never been prouder. Enjoy yourselves. You certainly deserve it. In fact, you all do. No more class, the end of the day."

The mutants cheered and dispersed as Nova grabbed Peter's hand. Before they could escape to the quiet of their room, the younger mutants surrounded them and started asking questions.

"Was it awesome?" one asked.

"What was space like?" asked another.

"I basically did everything," Peter said. "I mean, Jean did a little, like, towards the end, but it was mostly all me." ↵

"Oh, how modest," Nova said with a roll of her eyes. "Come on. Let's go get changed."

"But I'm not done basking in my glory," Peter complained, as Nova pulled on his hand.

Nova laughed as she pulled him away from the younger kids. "Come on, superhero."

She dragged him upstairs, and when they were in the safety of their room (having finally been allowed to share a room given that they were now married), Nova turned to Peter and kissed him.

"Not that I'm complaining, but what's with you?" Peter asked.

Nova shrugged. "Just have a lot of extra adrenaline."

"Well, it's a shame you don't have super-speed to run it all o," Peter replied with a shrug. "Whatever could we do instead?"

"I have some ideas," Nova replied. "First, I'm going to shower—"

"Ooh, nice."

"And you're going to join me." ↵

"Even better."

"And then we're going to throw a party in the woods behind the house," Nova continued. "And we're going to drink and have fun and just be teenagers again."

"We haven't been teenagers for a long time," Peter said. "But yeah, let's do it." ↵

Nova grinned, turning to Peter as she walked backwards towards the bathroom. "Come on then, Speedy." ↵

Parties had gotten exponentially better since Nova and Peter's impromptu karaoke night all those years ago, and the venue had moved outside into the woods. Storm controlled the weather and made sure to keep the skies clear so that they could party for hours, and a bonfire was set up in the middle of the clearing, a drinks table not far away.

Nova and Peter were drinking (not necessarily the non-alcoholic punch that was provided), and one of the younger mutants was singing, her voice a beautiful melody that carried through the trees. ↵

Grabbing Peter's hand, Nova pulled him closer to the music. "Come on, dance with me."

"I don't dance," Peter replied, stumbling a er her. ↵

"For someone so quick on his feet, you really have no coordination," Nova laughed, placing her hands on Peter's shoulders. "Come on, just sway with me. You don't even have to move your feet."

With his hands on her waist, Peter started swaying slowly. "Am I doing it right?"

"I don't know how there's a wrong way to sway," Nova replied. "You're doing just fine."

"You know, this reminds me of our wedding night," Peter replied. "When we were outside, dancing, and you were barefoot in the grass because your heels kept getting stuck..."

"I remember that," Nova smiled. "And I was running round barefoot for the rest of the night."

"Yeah," Peter laughed. "But I remember thinking in that moment, with you in my arms like you are now, that I've never seen anyone else look more perfect than you." ↵

Nova's expression so ened. "I love you so much."

"I love you too," Peter replied, leaning down to kiss Nova gently.

With their foreheads touching, Nova whispered, "Do you ever think about getting out?"

"What do you mean?" Peter asked.

"Like, moving on?" Nova asked. "From being part of the X-Men. Like, do you ever think about trying to starting a family?" ↵

"Well, we were halfway there in the shower earlier," Peter said teasingly. ↵

Nova rolled her eyes. "I'm serious, Peter. Do you not just wanna, I don't know, slow down?"

"Not really," he replied. "But I've never thought about starting a family until now. I mean, what if I turn out to be a terrible dad? I don't exactly have the best example of a good dad." ↵

"He doesn't even know you're his son," Nova pointed out. "But if he did, I'm sure Erik would be a good dad."

"Yeah, but what if, because of that, I'm a terrible dad?" Peter asked.

Nova kissed him so ly, murmuring against his lips, "We'll never know unless it happens," she pulled back to look him in the eyes, running her fingers through the hair on the back of his head. "But I know you'll be the best dad if the time ever comes."

"Can you imagine a little mini me running around?" Peter asked. "But they look like you except they're super fast?" ↵

"That would be a nightmare," Nova laughed. "I can barely handle one of you, let alone a tiny version." ↵

"I'm sure it would be fine," Peter replied with a grin. "Alright, now I really want a baby."

"These things don't just happen overnight," Nova said. ↵

"Well, maybe we should go back upstairs and start the baby-making process," Peter whispered. ↵

Nova grinned. "I like your thinking."

As she and Peter made to leave, Nova saw Jean out of the corner of her eye. She was holding the sides of her head with her eyes squeezed shut, almost like she was in pain, and Scott, who was standing near her, seemed unable to calm her down. ↵

She heard Jean yell, "Stop!" and throw her hands out to the sides. ↵

A wave of energy knocked every mutant in the vicinity o their feet, but Nova was quicker. Grabbing Peter's hand, she glued them to the spot with her powers and they watched Jean fall to the ground, scorch marks surrounding her body as she laid there.

"Jean?" Nova gasped, rushing towards her friend. "Jean?"

Raven and Hank sprinted into the clearing, stopping short when they saw Jean. Raven's eyes widened. "We have to get her inside."

"I got her," Nova said, using her powers to levitate Jean o the ground.

She carried her inside, taking her to her room and laying her down on her bed. When she was settled, Raven caught Nova's arm. "Can you check on the kids?"

"Yeah," she nodded. "I'll get Peter to help me." ↵

"Nova," Hank called. "Don't let any of the kids come this way. Not until we know it's okay."

She nodded. "Hank, is she gonna be okay?"

"I don't know." ↵

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