

[twenty six] confronting the enemy

"**SHE'S IN THERE,**" another of Erik's mutants informed them, as they walked up the pathway towards them.

"Hello, old friend," Charles's voice spoke from behind them.

Nova turned at the sound of his voice, finding that Charles was not alone. Surrounding him were Kurt, Storm and Scott. Erik planted his feet. "Save the 'old friend' shit, Charles. And stay out of my way."

"I'm sorry for what she did," Charles said. "But I can't let you go in there."

"You're always sorry, Charles," Erik said. "And there's always a speech, but nobody cares anymore. Not even your own daughter."

"We do this here, now, they'll see us as monsters," Charles told him.

"Violent freaks, fighting on the streets of New York."

Erik glanced at Hank. "What did I tell you?"

"Damn it, man, your homeland will be gone," Charles snapped.

"Everything you care about."

"Save it," Erik shot back.

"If you touch her, I will fucking kill you," Scott seethed.

"Don't do this, Erik," Charles pleaded. "Killing Jean will not bring Raven back."

Erik looked Charles right in the eye as he said, "The girl dies."

Hank growled and leapt over the fence, running towards the building.

Nova looked between her father and Erik, who had taken over Hank.

"I'm sorry," she said to him, speaking only to him as she caught his eye.

You have to trust me.

I never stopped trusting you," he replied. "Whatever you're about to do... be careful."

Nova nodded, adding as an afterthought, "Please don't let Scott fry me."

As she flew over Erik, she swore she heard a distant chuckle ringing through her head. She could hear the chaos around her as she landed beside Erik at the entrance of the building, hearing a thud behind her, followed by a blast of red-hot energy narrowly avoiding the side of her face.

Erik grabbed her shoulder and pushed her behind him as he formed a wall of metal between them and Scott. Nova pushed past Erik and ran inside the building, stumbling as she entered the foyer. Looking up,

she saw Jean standing on the floor above her, leaning on the railing.

"Jean!" she exclaimed, holding her hands up in surrender. "Jean, please—"

"Kill her," the woman beside Jean instructed.

Nova thrust out her fist and opened it, forming a protective bubble around herself. A gravitational field that even Jean's powers could not cross. Rising into the air, Nova held out her other hand and the woman behind Jean went flying backwards.

"Jean!" Nova yelled. "Jean, please, they're coming to kill you!"

She didn't get a chance to continue before Erik had entered the building, barricading the door with a tram car. Nova looked down at him, realising with a jolt that she couldn't save everyone.

"I know whose blood that was," Erik said, rising into the air so that he was level with Jean.

"You cast me out," she snapped. "Now you come here to kill me?"

"That's right," Erik replied, as the metal railing on the stairs came loose and shot towards Jean.

She caught it before it could reach her, teasing for a second before she dropped it. "And you couldn't even do that. Let me show you how."

Jean pinched her fingers together and Erik started groaning as his helmet seemed to cave in on him, crushing his skull. Nova flew between him and Jean, holding out her hands desperately.

"Jean, please!" she begged. "Please don't listen to that bitch. We're your friends."

"He's not," Jean said, gesturing to Erik.

"But he's my friend!" Nova yelled. "Just like Raven was your friend."

Jean blinked at the mention of Raven and Erik's helmet broke apart, floating in the air for a second before it latched onto his body and he went flying backwards, smashing through the window and disappearing from view.

"Erik!" Nova yelled, turning back to Jean. "What did you do?"

"You haven't chosen a side in this," Jean hissed. "You're with Magneto and yet you don't want to kill me? Why?"

"Because you're my friend!" Nova shouted, as Jean trapped her using her powers. "You're my friend, Jean! Think about that! Think about Scott, and Storm and Kurt and Peter... Peter's in the infirmary because of you!"

"I told you not to come," Jean told her, and Nova choked out a gasp as she felt her airways constricting.

"Are you... really gonna kill me?" Nova asked. "Are you really going to do that to me? You're first friend?"

A movement below them gave Nova a chance to free herself and she let out a yell, sending out a wave of gravitational energy that knocked the woman accompanying Jean over her feet again. Jean, however, remained rooted to the spot and looked down at Charles.

"Have you come to kill me, too?" she asked.

"Never!" Charles said. "Jean, never. I failed you, I know that, but this isn't you."

Jean thrust Kurt backwards and Nova yelled, "Kurt!"

"You have no idea who I am," Jean said.

"I've raised you since you were a little girl," Charles replied. "I think I do."

"She's not your little girl anymore," the woman said.

"Who... What are you?" Charles asked. "Jean, please try and remember what I taught you. You can control it. You can do anything you set your mind to."

"So show me," Jean replied. "Walk to me."

"You know I can't," Charles said.

Jean didn't listen, forcing Charles out of his wheelchair. He let out a pained yell as Jean forced him to walk towards the stairs. Nova flew down to help her father, but Jean threw her aside and she crashed into the wall. She hit the ground and watched as Charles began to walk up the stairs.

"Please, Jean," he begged.

"Dad!" Nova yelled.

"Please," Charles pleaded, as he reached the top of the stairs.

"Dad!"

Nova forced herself to stand as she stumbled towards the stairs, wanting to save her father. She leaned on the wall for support, and watched as Jean lowered Charles to the ground.

"I knew... I knew you were still in there," Charles whispered.

"He just showed you your past," the woman said, stepping over Charles. "Follow me into your future."

"No."

"Jean," Nova called. "Jean, please."

"I never asked for this," Jean said, tears in her eyes. "Any of it."

"I travelled to the stars for a girl that you don't want," the woman said.

"Then take it," Jean said. "Please. Free me."

"I'll try," the woman said, placing her hands on Jean's cheeks.

Nova watched as a connection was formed between them, the same solar energy being transferred between the two as they became joined inextricably. Nova fell down beside her father as he said, "Stop it. You're going to kill her."

"Your lives mean nothing," the woman said. "Your world will be ours."

"You'd kill us all," Charles realised.

"Yes."

"Jean, you have to let go," Nova shouted. "Jean, let go! Let go, Jean! Let go! Let go!"

The wall exploded below them and Scott leapt into the room. "Jean!"

He fired his optic beams at the two and separated them. Jean fell to the ground beside Nova, who leaned over her. "Jean? Jean?"

"Charles, what's wrong?" Scott asked, rushing up the stairs towards them.

"I don't know, I can't read her mind," Charles replied.

"She's alive," Scott said.

"Scott, you have to get her out," Charles said. "You have to... No!"

Nova felt a shock before everything went black.

Continue reading next part