

[twenty eight] the phoenix set free

THE ENTIRE TRAIN WAS DERAILED by Jean, but Nova and her friends were surrounded by bubbles of protective energy that caused all of the debris to bounce harmlessly away from them. Nova's leg flared with pain as the bubble was lowered and hit the ground. She lay there, unable to move, until Erik appeared above her.

"Nova?" he asked. "Are you alright?"

"My leg," she whispered. "I think my leg is broken."

Erik's eyes widened. "Alright, we have to get you up."

"No, no," Nova pleaded. "Erik, please, it hurts too much."

"I need to help and you can't stay here," Erik said. "Come on."

He pulled her to her feet and she let out a scream of pain as her leg jolted. Erik wrapped her arm around his shoulders and his waist wrapped securely around her waist. The two of them stumbled over a pile of debris and saw Jean standing in the centre of the destruction.

Leaning heavily on Erik for support, Nova watched the creatures charge Jean.

She destroyed every single one, turning them to nothing but dust, until one managed to sneak up behind her and ran her through with a large pole. Jean glowed for a second and Nova gripped Erik's hand, unable to muster any sound as she watched Jean destroy the spiked pole and turn to the man that impaled her. She placed her hand on his face and he crumbled to dust under her touch.

The woman ran at Jean and caught her in a chokehold, intending on completing the transmission of the power from Jean's body into hers. She watched as Jean was surrounded by the same solar flare that originally entered her body up in space, watching as Jean shot skywards and took the woman and the energy with her.

"Jean!" Nova cried. "Jean, no!"

Erik caught her as she stumbled against him, holding her upright as they watched Jean disappear into the atmosphere. A loud boom caught Nova's attention and she saw the sky light up a brilliant orange colour, letting out a sob as Erik tried to hold her upright.

"She's gone," she gasped, clinging to Erik's jacket. "She's g-gone."

Nova went limp against Erik and passed out. He let out a yell.

"Somebody help me!"

Everything was bright. Too bright. So bright that it hurt Nova's eyes when they opened slowly. She could hear something; a buzzing noise, like electricity humming through wiring, and when she finally came to, she was staring at the ceiling of the mansion's infirmary.

"Are you alive?" asked a familiar voice. "Holy shit, is that movement? Is Sleeping Beauty finally waking up?"

Nova turned her head, spotting Peter sitting beside her bed. "Peter?"

"Hey," he greeted, reaching for her hand. "I'm so glad you're awake."

"What happened?" Nova asked tiredly. "Where's... Where is everybody?"

"Everybody's fine," Peter replied. "Everyone's okay."

"What happened?" Nova repeated.

"Well, from what I hear, you kicked ass until you got your leg snapped," Peter said. "Hank said it's an even worse break than mine was, and that's saying something."

"My leg?" Nova asked. "Wait... Is Jean really..."

Peter's expression clouded over. "Uh, yeah. Yeah, she's... she's gone."

Nova's face fell and tears filled her eyes. "All that... All that for nothing."

"It wasn't for nothing," Peter said. "She's free now."

Nova nodded. "Can I get up?"

"Do you think you can walk?" Peter asked.

"Yeah," Nova replied. "Come on, help me up."

Peter did so, and as Nova sat up, she noticed the cast wrapped around her leg. It was covered in doodles, all manner of artistry having been scrawled on the bandage. She could see her friends' names, even Erik's signature along with a get well message. There were little lightning bolts and optic beams and, there, drawn right where her knee was, was a poorly drawn phoenix.

Nova smiled. "That's so... so cool."

Peter chuckled. "Come on, let's go see everybody."

Her friends were thrilled when they saw Nova hobbling towards them, leaning heavily on Peter for support while using one of the crutches she had been given. Hugs were shared, apologies given out and tears were shed, but the one person Nova wanted to see was Charles.

She made her way to his study, and when she walked in and found him sitting at his desk with Erik opposite him, she winced. "Is now a bad time?"

"Not at all," Charles replied. "Please, come in."

"I'll leave you two alone," Erik said, getting to his feet.

As he left, he took Peter with him, and closed the doors behind them. When they were alone, Nova turned to Charles. "I'm sorry."

"For what?" Charles asked.

"For how I spoke to you," Nova replied. "It wasn't fair of me to take my anger out on you."

"I fear I deserved it," Charles said. "But you never have to apologise to me for anything, Nova. Do you understand that?"

"I'm sorry I left," Nova continued. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you where I was going. I'm sorry about everything."

"Nova," Charles interrupted, his voice gentle. "I forgive you, although I'm afraid apologies are due on my behalf."

"For what?" Nova asked.

"For everything," Charles replied. "For sending you on missions beyond your capabilities, for not listening to you, for putting you in danger. The list is endless."

"I forgive you," Nova said.

Charles rolled out from behind his desk and reached for Nova's hand. As she leaned on her crutch and squeezed her father's hand, he smiled. "You're lucky. Hank said if you'd hit that wall at the wrong angle it could have shattered your spine."

"Well, lucky it was just my leg then," Nova replied with a small smile. It soon fell back to sadness. "What am I supposed to do now?"

"Now that what?" Charles asked.

"Now that Jean's gone," Nova replied. "She's my... She was my best friend."

"She wouldn't want you to let your life end because of her," Charles said. "You have so much ahead of you to look forward to, Nova. Remember that."

Nova nodded. "I miss her."

"I miss her too," Charles replied, squeezing Nova's hand again. "But we'll get through this, okay? We'll get through it together."

"Together," Nova said. "So... what do we do now?"

Charles smiled. "I think it's time to make some changes around here."

[Continue reading next part](#) □