

## L'Havre, Part 2 by B Nickerson {Rated PG}

*Synopsis: The wild night turns into a wild ride for certain mutant teens out on the town even as Mystique and Magneto are on their way to a new hideaway.*

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"Just stay cool," Nick hissed as soon as he saw the ruffian and his pals closing in. They ominously encircled Pyro. "My friends want to see that trick," the ruffian demanded. "Sorry, all out."

The ruffian opened his palm and one of his buddies slapped a lighter into it. He clicked a flame up and waved it around Pyro. "Let's just see how much you like playing with fire."

"Rasbury!" a deep voice suddenly boomed. They all looked up to see a uniformed security man striding toward them.

The ruffian immediately hid the lighter behind his back and assumed an innocent look. "Yes, sir!"

The guard pointed at Rasbury, then in the direction of the door. "You--out!"

"But I wasn't doin' nothing!"

"If you leave now, I'll let you in next weekend. If you don't, I'll ban you for a month. Your choice, Rasbury. And take your pals with you."

Rasbury and his cronies sheepishly shuffled away closely followed by the guard. That's when Keith reappeared carrying two sodas and slid back into his seat by Jubilee.

She accepted the soda he offered her. "Where'd you go?"

"The security guys all know Rasbury. He's always making trouble. I think they like kicking him out."

"It was you who told them?" she guessed.

He just smiled.

"I could've handled them," Pyro grumbled.

Kitty threw him a shut-up look, then smiled at Keith. "Thanks."

He shrugged modestly. "No sense letting one bully spoil the whole night." He nudged Jubilee and inclined his head back to the dance floor again. She eagerly accepted his invitation.

They hung-out at Rumor-Mill until it closed at midnight, then filed out to the car. The rain had long since stopped and the drop in temperature had turned puddles on the pavement into black ice. Following Pyro, Nick, Fred and Darla, Keith carefully escorted Jubilee to the TransAm. Fred opened the passenger door for Nick and Darla to hop in back, then stood there, waiting for Jubilee to get in with clattering teeth.

Keith took both her hands. "Well, good night Miss Jubilation Lee. I'm glad you came."

"I'm glad, too," she replied, reluctant to leave.

Everyone in the car was shivering. Pyro revved the engine to encourage some heat. "Fred!" he yelled, "Shut the dang door!" Fred shoved it closed, leaving himself out in the cold.

Jubilee gave him an annoyed glance, then turned back to Keith, hoping for a kiss, but he just re-opened the car door and guided her inside with a smile. "Drive safe," he told Pyro. Fred flopped the seat-back back into place and piled in. Keith politely closed the door after him, then stepped back to wave them off.

Pyro pulled out, making everyone squeal as he fished-tailed out of the parking lot, while Jubilee twisted around to wave energetically at Keith until he was out of sight.

Pyro hit the interstate south towards Middleburg, with the radio and heat blasting. It never once occurred to him to consider he was driving a vehicle without anti-lock brakes on a potentially icy road and gave no thought to the "bridge freezes before road" warning signs, though he purposefully kept to the speed-limit to avoid attracting police. With just a learner's permit, it wouldn't do to be caught.

The radio station went to commercial break. "How about changing stations," Jubilee suggested.

Without thinking, Pyro automatically reached for the TransAm's old-time radio knob, taking his eyes off the road for a second, but it was a second too long. When he looked up, he suddenly realized red-tail lights ahead of

him were going much slower than he was and slammed on the brakes. To his horror, the Trans Am continued its forward momentum, sliding on locked wheels on a road that had turned into a bridge spanning a stream. The car's nose was aimed straight at the cement abutment of the bridge and, panicking, he jerked the wheel hard right, sending them into a spinning skid. Everyone was screaming. Pyro felt a hard jar that jerked the wheel out of his hands as the front end rammed into the abutment, followed by a horrible crunching, scraping sound. Ricocheting off that, the car slipped backwards off the road, sliding down the steep, ice-glazed embankment toward the stream. They could've gone in, but mercifully, the car ground to a stop, the front end swinging around so they were aimed in the same direction as the highway. Inside the car, there was silence.

The engine was still running, so Pyro shifted it into park, then looked in back. "Everyone okay?"

Nick was rubbing his neck. "Yeah--until Mr. Summers gets a hold of us."

Jubilee tenderly touched the spot on her head where it had whacked against the window and winced. "Guess I'll live."

"I'm okay," Darla said.

"Me, too," Kitty echoed.

Pyro looked at Fred beside him and even in the dimness could see his eyes still squeezed shut. He sniffed. He could smell pee. "Did you wet your pants?" he demanded.

Fred just nodded in shame without opening his eyes. Everyone groaned.

There was a sudden knock on Fred's window. It was then Pyro realized a pair of red tail lights on the road slight above and ahead of them. A wave of fear washed over him as he imagined cops were here already. "Open it, Fred," he groaned.

Fred opened his eyes and cranked the window down, letting in freezing air. Outside, an older guy bundled in scarf and knit cap peered in, his wrinkled eyes taking them in. "You kids okay?" He got several "uh-huhs" and "yes, sirs" in reply. "I've got a tow line here in my truck," he said. "Want me to give you a pull back up to the road?"

"Yes, sir," Pyro said, "We'd appreciate it."

The old guy nodded and left. Fred hurriedly closed his window and, through the fogging windshield could make him out, trotting back to his truck. Pyro adjusted the defrost to put heat on the windshield. "Fred," he ordered, "while he's pulling, you push."

"Outside? You want me to go *outside*? I'll freeze to death."

"The longer we sit here the more likely a cop is gonna come along. One look at my learner's permit and we'll be in jail while they're calling the school. You want that?"

"Uh, no."

The truck's tail lights backed-up toward their front end, the guy got out, fished something out of the back of his truck, tied it to the front of their car, then came around to Pyro's window. Pyro cranked it down.

"Okay," the stranger said, "We're set. Just give her gas nice and easy and don't step on the brakes and we'll get you back up on the shoulder."

"Yes, sir."

"I'll put my hand out when I'm ready."

"Yes, sir."

He nodded and trotted back to his truck and Pyro quickly closed his window. "Okay," he told Fred. "Do your stuff."

Fred grumpily heaved himself out the door, slamming it behind him as he walked reluctantly behind the Trans, shivering. Pyro gave the brake a couple pumps, then carefully rested his foot on it and slipped the car back into drive. The old guy's arm waved out the window and Pyro felt the car tug. He took his foot off the brake, letting the car roll forward after the truck. In back, Fred carefully reached under the bumper and gripped the chassis frame and, with a grunt, put his ox-like strength into the forward motion of the car, keeping the rear from slipping. In seconds they were safely back on the hard shoulder. Fred ran around immediately and hopped back in, clattering with cold. "I'll probably get sick," he grumbled.

The old guy got out, unhitched his line and came around to Pyro's window again. "You kids were lucky this time," he warned. "Don't do anything sudden on these icy roads. If you need to slow down, just take your foot off the gas and if you have to use your brakes, pump'em, don't stomp 'em. Got it?"

"Yes, sir. Thanks."

The old guy grinned and offered Pyro his hand, they shook, then he trotted back to his truck. Pyro closed his window again, put the heat on high, checked for traffic, then eased back onto the road behind the truck. He obeyed all the old guys suggestions and put Fred in charge of the radio adjustments, so they had no more incidents, though he wondered what the outside of the car looked like. Before this they might've suffered only a scolding, but now, like Nick had suggested, they were gonna catch heck from Mr. Summers.

At the school, Jack and Storm were in the general office passing time playing Cribbage while they kept an eye on the video monitor, which offered shifting views of the school's various entrances, including a view of the driveway as it approached the garage. They were at Scott's desk, since it was the largest and had the best view of the monitor. Jack cheerily put his Cribbage peg in the winning hole and Storm collected the cards to re-shuffle, giving the clock a quick glance as she did. She sighed. It was nearly two a.m.

"What's the sigh for?" Jack grinned. "Losing or the time?"

"Both, but I'm not going to lose this time."

Jack just laughed. "Your deal."

Thirty minutes later, Storm saw the TransAm on the monitor already in the driveway headed into the garage. "They're back," she announced. They both dropped their cards and dashed for the garage.

In the garage, Pyro pulled the Trans into it's space, then they all got out and walked around it to survey the damage. The entire right side was scratched, the headlight smashed and the front fender fairly crumpled.

"We are *so* busted!" Nick groaned.

Suddenly, Jack Smith's voice boomed across the garage making them all jump. "Mr. Allerdyce, Mr Dukes, Mr Cameron, Miss Pryde, Miss Lee and Miss Bradshaw front and center!" he commanded.

They lined up nervously in front of Coach Smith while Miss Monroe was walking around the car surveying the damage. "You had an accident?" she asked in an accusing tone.

No one spoke. They just stared at their shoes.

"Speak up," Jack boomed. "Answer the lady."

"Yes, ma'am," Kitty squeaked.

Storm took her place in front of them beside Jack, her hands on her hips and her eyes snapping with fire. "Look at me!" she commanded. The air sizzled with static as they raised guilty eyes to her face. She looked squarely at Pyro Allerdyce. "Was any other vehicle involved?"

"No ma'am. We just slid a little and bumped a guard-wall. That's all."

"That's all?" Storm exclaimed. "*That's all?* Doesn't the Professor have enough to worry about with Mystique and rescuing Rogue without adding *you* to his list? Can't you think of anything besides yourselves? Haven't we taught you anything here?"

They all cast their eyes down. Darla sniffled and swiped tears from her cheek. Jack surveyed their downcast looks sternly. "You six have all been A.W.O.L. Do you know what that means?" Silence. "I can't hear you!" he snapped.

"No, sir," they all replied in unison.

"It means being absent with leave. You had no permission to be gone and, on top of that, you've damaged Professor Xavier's personal property. You best prepare yourselves to do some time for your crime," he reprimanded. "Now, upstairs, to bed all of you. Chop, chop."

Without a word all six dashed past them like a herd of mad horses.

"And quietly!" he bellowed as an after thought, then grinned down on Storm, whose eyes were still smoldering. "You have a temper, girl. Does my brother know?"

Color rose to her cheeks. "Yes...well, sort of."

"Sort of?" he echoed with a quirked brow as they walked back inside. "Ever shown him any of that thunder and lightning?"

"No, but he knows."

"I can see your first fight," Jack said, covering his head and cowering as if afraid of something striking him from above. "No, don't...I didn't mean to forget our anniversary. Really I didn't!" he teased, doing a mock-impersonation of Alex.

Storm pulled a face and punched him playfully in the arm. "Oh, stop it! I would never!"

Jack just laughed merrily.

Several hours later, Jean pulled into the garage and parked the SUV. She and Scott had just gotten out and had just opened the Professor's door, when Jack came striding into the garage.

"Something's happened," Xavier stated to Jean and Scott, causing them to peer at Jack expectantly as he approached. His expression was pleasant, but his blue eyes were serious.

"What's up?" Scott asked.

"It seems Pyro decided to take a joy-ride in the TransAm." He jerked his head in the direction of the vehicle. "Took Jub, Nick, Darla, Kitty and Fred with him and had a close encounter with a bridge abutment."

Scott immediately strode over to the old Trans, leaving Jean to pull Xavier's portable wheelchair from behind the driver's seat by herself. Jack helped her arrange it, while Scott walked around the TransAm, examining the damage. Xavier had maneuvered himself into it by the time Scott returned, scowling.

"The car is a minor detail," Xavier told him. "Right now, we have larger concerns." His eyes went to Rogue still in the back-seat. He thought to Jean, *"Let's get her downstairs."*

Jean raised her hand and carefully levitated Rogue out of the car, then followed the Professor. Mentally to Jack and Scott, Xavier added, *"And you two can get a gurney and move those boys upstairs."*

"Right," Scott muttered.

Jack slapped Scott on the back. "I'll get the gurney," then followed Jean and Xavier underground.

In the med-lab, Xavier raised an exam table from the floor and Jean floated Rogue onto it, while Jack grabbed a gurney and headed back upstairs. Then she and Xavier entered the adjoining isolation room and looked around. Designed for extreme necessity, it had a single, metal door with a slot for food or other necessities, which could be passed through it. Inside was only a bare, single bed and a few boxes of supplies stacked against one wall. Jean quickly moved the supplies into the lab and made the bed, then Xavier levitated Rogue from the exam table to the bed. He waited outside in the lab while Jean stripped Rogue and dressed her medical scrubs until she called him.

*"We're ready,"* she finally announced to his mind. Xavier rolled into the room to Rogue's bedside. "First we must help her face what's happened to her," he told Jean grimly, "Then we'll work from there."

She nodded. Closing his eyes, Xavier entered Rogue's mind and released her from the unconsciousness he'd imposed. Immediately her eyes flew open, wide with horror and she screamed over and over, her fingers curling in agony as she re-lived the moment of absorbing Elsie to death.

Jean closed her eyes and shuddered at Rogue's torment, which washed against her inner senses like waves rolling in, one after another. Tears spilled down her cheeks and, when after what seemed like an eternity, the screaming stopped, she opened her eyes and saw Rogue was curled into a fetal position, her eyes squeezed tightly shut. Then Jean looked at the Professor. His hands were folded in his lap. His cheeks were damp also and she put a sympathetic hand on his shoulder.

He reached up and patted it. "I would never have chosen these circumstances," he sighed, "but now that they're here, I'm going to use them to teach you how to decipher memories. Are you ready?"

She wiped her cheeks dry and nodded. "What do you want me to do?"

He gestured at the head of the bed. "Get us some latex gloves, then sit there and place your hands on either side of her head, like any telepathy session."

Jean fetched the gloves, handed Xavier a pair and donned hers. Then she arranged a supply box to sit on and, resting her elbows on the mattress, held her hands on either side of Rogue's head.

"Very good," Xavier said. He put a gloved hand on Rogue's arm. "Marie," he announced in a gentle, but firm voice, "Jean and I are going to try to help you. First, we must identify the dead girl's memories and separate them from yours, then we'll gradually filter them out. It will take some time, but I promise things will get better. Right now, we're just going to spend a few minutes at it, then we'll give you something to help you sleep."

At Xavier's nod, Jean closed her eyes in concentration and entered Rogue's mind.

Meanwhile, Mystique and her team had returned to St. John's Bridge, Maryland, pulling into the driveway of the one house she'd maintained rent on, where a large RV waited patiently in the driveway. Hypno immediately hopped of his van and opened the side door, then watched Magneto and Mystique jealously as they hopped out, hand-in-hand. In his late thirties, Hypno had made his living as a magician and hypnotist long before the term *mutant* ever came into vogue. "Hypno the Amazing," he'd called himself, though Everitt Camden was his given name. Life had been good until his wife left him, then he'd started drinking and using drugs, which put his career on the skids and him in rehab. Clean eight years now, he'd eked out a meager living performing in restaurants and children's parties until he'd discovered his mutant-gift lent itself more profitably to making strangers "voluntarily" give him their assets. That's how he'd met Mystique or rather how she'd come to know him. She'd spotted him at an up-scale DC piano bar working his magic on people, making them buy him drinks and offer him money and shrewdly deduced his talent. Then she'd followed him home, confronted him and offered him membership in her Brotherhood, though her cause wasn't what made him join her. He'd fallen in love with that blue girl as soon as she showed herself to him, which is why he obeyed her every wish and regarded Magneto so darkly now.

"Hypno," Mystique said, drawing his limpid blue eyes. "You take Trane, Solo, Lodestarr and Shade and we'll meet you in Miami."

He nodded and sullenly led his charges to the garage, opened the door and loaded them into a fresh nine-passenger van waiting inside. It had "Laverne Youth Camp" cleverly painted on the side. He passed out ball-caps with the same name printed on them while Trane settled into the drivers seat, then Hypno took the seat beside him and unhappily watched Magneto politely guide Mystique into the large RV.

Inside the RV, Mystique shifted from the male image she'd held until now for a pretty woman in conservative tourist shorts and blouse, then handed Magneto a travel bag as she threw orders to Castile and Cathleen to change. Like robots they went to the rear of the RV, where clothes waited for them, stripped and put on the new ones. "Fold those other things and put them in that suitcase," she commanded and they did so. "Now sit down." When she faced Magneto again, he was already in tan shorts and just buttoning his Hawaiian shirt. He looked like a tourist--except for the helmet that guarded his thoughts from Xavier. "We're just an ordinary family on vacation," she purred sweetly.

He tapped his helmet with a smile. "And how were you planning to explain this?"

She indicated he should sit, opened another bag and pulled out several rolls of gauze bandage. "It just so happens," she explained as she neatly bandaged his head and helmet, "that my husband just recently had a *serious* head-injury."

When she was done, Magneto slipped into the passenger's seat and pulled down the visor mirror to have a look. His head was wrapped as neatly as a mummy, allowing just his face to show. He smiled. "Clever. You seem to have thought of everything, my dear."

She beamed with pleasure at him, then took her place in the driver's seat, started the RV up and pulled out.

In the van behind them, Trane also started-up and pulled out, but turned the opposite direction at the end of the drive, since their orders were to go by separate routes. Hypno tried not to think about Magneto alone with Mystique for fifteen hours. Instead he focused on being with her again on the yacht awaiting them in Miami.

Xavier, as soon as he'd given Rogue something to rest, hummed out of the lab with Jean walking beside him. "Try to get some rest," he said to her at the elevator.

"And what about you?" she asked.

He smiled. "I'm going to look in on our two new guests first, then I'm off to bed as well."

The elevator arrived on the second floor. "See that you do," she scolded lightly as he rolled out past her.

He quickly located the two new boys, each left sprawled on a bed in separate rooms by Jack and Scott. He rolled into the one, surveyed the thin, acne-faced boy, then released his mind from unconsciousness. The lad came awake with a start and, disorientated, jerked up and peered around, confused.

"Don't be afraid," Xavier assured. "You're safe and among friends. I'm Professor Xavier." He offered his hand. "And you are...?"

"Justin Blake," he replied hesitantly, weakly clasping Xavier's hand. "Where am I? Where's Dr. Pierian?"

"Is that the last thing you remember? Being at Dr. Pierian's clinic?" Justin nodded. "Well, I'm afraid things weren't as they seemed," Xavier said, "The person you thought was Dr. Pierian was actually a shaped-shifting mutant known as Mystique. Tell me what you remember."

"I remember filling out paperwork, then Dr. Pierian interviewed me, took me to the exam room and gave me a shot, then...nothing till now. Are you sure that wasn't the real Dr. Pierian?"

"Quite sure. Why did you go to this clinic?"

"I thought she might help me."

Rapidly scanning Justin's mind he discovered the boy deeply feared his astral-projection gift because he could not control its occurrences nor avoid the outer blackness where the red-eyes seemed to be after him. "You wanted her to help you with your astral projection problem?" Xavier filled in.

Justin's eyes widened. "How'd you know?"

He patted his arm. "We're all mutants here," he replied, "It just so happens I'm also a telepath who can astral-project and I think I can help you...if you'll let me." Justin mutely nodded "You should rest now," Xavier said. "Sleep as long as you like, then come downstairs when you're ready and one of my people will show you around." Then, after wishing him a good night, he hummed out of Justin's room to visit the next young man, where he had a nearly identical conversation with Buck Thompson, who was mutant with exponential strength. It wasn't being strong that had made Buck seek out Dr. Pierian, but it was how his skin took on a resilient, stony-texture Xavier reassured him he was in a place where no one would find him unusual, then went to bed, as promised.

In the morning, Jack was in the cafeteria promptly at seven. The three elderly cooks, Mrs. Carter, Mrs. Hunnicutt and Mrs. Wheeler, who were seated at a table enjoying rolls and coffee, all looked up surprised to see him so early. "Good morning, ladies," he said cheerily.

Mrs. Hunnicutt's wrinkled, black face broke into smiles. "Mr Jack, whatcha doing here so early, honey?"

"Oh, just a couple kids decided to take one of the Professor's cars on a joy-ride," he replied as he filled a mug at the urn, then joined them at their table. All three looked appalled.

"The scamps!" Mrs. Carter snorted, shaking her head.

"Kids will be kids," Jack shrugged. As soon as he finished his coffee, he went directly upstairs to roust 'certain' youngsters out of bed, starting with Pyro. Jack stopped at his upper-bunk first. "Time to rise and shine," he announced loudly.

Pyro pried his eyes open to squint at Jack's stern face. "Huh?" he grunted.

"I said get up! Time for breakfast and chores."

Pyro groaned and pulled the blankets over his face, but Jack promptly jerked them off him. "You don't want me hauling you out by the collar, do ya?"

"Okay, okay," Pyro groaned. He grimaced at the snickers coming from beds around him.

Jack moved on to Fred, who was across the room, dead to the world on a lower bunk and, leaning near his ear, barked, "Frederick Dukes, on the floor now!" Fred woke with a start and flopped out onto the floor with a thud.

Nick was already up and dressing even before Jack got to him. Jack just gave him a hard eye. "You boys have exactly ten minutes to be up, dressed and downstairs for breakfast," he boomed, then left the room and went to the girl's room down the hall. There, he politely knocked. Allison's blonde head poked out. "Oh, it's you, Coach."

"Tell Miss Pryde, I want to speak to her."

Her head disappeared a moment, then reappeared. "She's still asleep, Coach."

"Wake her up," he ordered softly, "and tell her if she doesn't come to the door right now, I'll come in and get her."

Allison's eyes widened and she disappeared again. He could hear excited whispers and girlish squeals, then groan's and Kitty Pryde's bleary-eyed face finally peeked around the door at him. "Yes, Coach?"

"You, Miss Lee and Miss Bradshaw need to be up, dressed and down to breakfast in ten minutes."

"Okay," she said, "I'll tell 'em."

He caught the door before she could close it. "And tell them if anyone's not, I'll come up here and carry them downstairs in their PJ's." He checked his watch then. "Time starts now," and sauntered off, leaving Kitty to rush around waking her pals.

Going back to the cafeteria, he posted himself in the doorway, his eye on his watch. It was actually closer to twelve minutes before all six finally straggled breathlessly past him, got their food and sat down to eat. By eight-thirty the rest of the student body was in the cafeteria and the place buzzed with conversation. Jack walked to the center of the room and whistled for their attention. It grew quiet and everyone looked at him. "Who has stable duty today?" he bellowed. Three hands shot up. "You're relieved," he said. "See Mr. Drake for new duties." They cheered, while Pyro and his bunch all groaned. They were going to be shoveling straw and manure.

In his quarters, Xavier was grimly watching the news about Magneto's "mysterious" escape from West Albany, which had obviously occurred during the time they'd been rescuing Rogue. Numerous prison personnel were listed as dead as well as Warden Swalley and his family and Xavier felt deep regret. "I'm only *one* man," he muttered to himself, "I can only do *so* much." Worst of all, he wasn't even certain it was Warden Swalley he'd spoken to that morning. "Mystique," he promised, "You'll pay one day."

At lunch-time, Pyro, Kitty, Darla, Nick, Fred and Jubilee all dragged into the cafeteria, worn and grungy looking from mucking out the stables, glad to sit down for lunch. Fred gulped his food down, then pushed his tray aside, lay his head on his arms on the table and closed his eyes.

"Go to bed," Pyro snapped.

"Too tired," Fred mumbled.

"Well, that's where I'm going," Pyro retorted, half-rising from his chair.

"Oh, Mr Summers," Kitty suddenly said.

Pyro sank down again and all looked at their leader-instructor, who was standing solemnly directly behind Pyro, his hands clasped behind him. "If your finished," Scott said, "I want you to report to the garage for a little wash and wax detail on the school SUV and I will be inspecting your work."

Pyro groaned. Summers was *infamous* for nit-pickiness.

"But, Mr. Summers," Jubilee complained, "Do we *have* to? We're already *so* tired."

"And who's fault is that?" Scott snapped.

No one dared meet his ruby-quartz gaze. Five of the six resignedly heaved themselves up with their trays and left, leaving Fred snoring on the table. Scott grasped his arm and tugged. "Com'on, Mr. Dukes. You, too."

"Huh?"

"To the garage. Wash and wax the SUV. While it's still today."

"Uh, okay...I mean, Yes sir, Mr. Summers." Fred collected his tray then, disposed of it, and trailed after the others. "Hey guys! Wait for me!"

The estate garage was actually a relic of another time and had its own antique gas pump as well as a wash-stall.

Scott checked on the kids progress a couple times, finally accepting a spotless SUV, then sent them to his class room, where he passed out note-paper and a pen to each. "On this paper," he said, "I want complete details of why you went out last night, what exactly happened and what lesson you've learned." Then he seated himself behind the desk and pulled out math homework to grade. "No one's leaving until everyone's done," he warned, "so take your time."

After that, there was nothing but the sounds of pens scratching on paper for the better part of an hour. Once in a while, Scott would sneak a glance at them to see who was done. Of course, Pyro and Kitty were done first, followed by Nick, Darla and Jubilee. Fred took the longest and when he finally quit scribbling, he made them suffer an additional ten minutes before finally accepting their papers and letting them go. "You're free until dinner," he said, "Then the Professor wants to see you in his classroom at seven on the dot."

They hurriedly filed out and Scott smiled after them, then settled back to read their papers, his heels kicked up on the desk. That's where Jean found him. "There you are," she said, coming up behind him. She planted a kiss on his head and combed her fingers through his hair.

He caught one of her hands and kissed it. "Hi, sweetheart."

"What are you doing?"

He passed her the last paper he'd been reading and shuffled the rest into a neat stack.

She rapidly skimmed it. "You think writing this will teach them something?"

"Probably not, but it might help us. What are you up to?"

She replaced it with the rest. "I'm meeting the Professor downstairs in a few minutes. We're going to try to work with Rogue some more before dinner."

"How is she?"

She sighed, "I don't know. I just don't know."

Scott squeezed her hand encouragingly. "If anyone can help her, you can."

Later, after dinner, Xavier was in his classroom reading over the papers Pyro, Jubilee, Fred, Nick, Darla and Kitty had written. It was interesting reading with reasonings ranging from "I wanted a good time" to "just because so and so was going." The events they described were nearly identical with particular emphasis on the near car wreck and the lessons they'd learned ranging from "being more careful on icy roads" to "not sneaking out." Kitty apologized for her behavior and Fred apologized for loosing his bladder in the Trans Am. Xavier smiled and shook his head. "*Ah, the impertience of youth,*" he sighed.

At seven, the six arrived and seated themselves in the semi-circle of desk-chairs in front of him. Xavier studied them with an appraising gaze. Kitty Pryde was usually a conscientious girl and good future X-men material. He hadn't yet made a determination about Jubilee, who tended to be rash, or Darla and Nick. Give them another year. Mr. St John Allerdyce, on the other hand, was a self-willed rebel he doubted would ever be suitable for the team. Then there was his ever-present side-kick, Fred Dukes, who stuck to Allerdyce like peanut-butter on bread regardless of the abuse he got, which, to Xavier's mind, pointed to an unhealthy tendency for conformity. Or perhaps it was just that birds of a feather, flocked together. "Well," he said to his contrite charges. "I can't say I'm not disappointed in your decision-making."

"I'm sorry, Professor," Kitty blurted, "I think we all are." Nick, Darla and Fred, all nodded in agreement, though Jubilee or Allerdyce did not.

"I'm not concerned about the vehicle." Xavier went on. "It's insured and can be repaired. Lives cannot. You were very lucky---this time. Lucky, the car didn't turn over or hit any other vehicles and no one was seriously injured. If anyone had been injured, Mr. Allerdyce, both you and I would have been held responsible. Do you know what that might have entailed?"

"No, sir."

"First you would've been cited for having neither an adult nor a legal license and probably would've been suspended from getting one. If another vehicle had been involved you would've faced various legal charges and, in



turn, I and the school would have been liable for prosecution and lawsuit on your account." He gestured at the others around Pyro. "Your friends could have gotten more than just a head-bump."

Allerdyce gave the others a quick glance, then focused on his hands again. "I didn't think of that, sir."

"No, young man, you certainly did not." Xavier asserted. "So, because you thoughtlessly endangered others, I'm imposing two additional months on your temporary license before you may apply for a regular one."

Allerdyce slumped further into his chair, muttering, "Yes, sir."

"The rest of you," Xavier continued, "are equally guilty of poor judgment. On a night when I was depending on you to protect the home fort, you let me down. Instead, you took advantage of our absence to indulge yourselves. That's hardly proof you're reliable and ready for un-supervised privileges such as pizza outings or teen clubs. Therefore, the six of you will have stable duty every Saturday and no allowance through the end of November and no outing privileges whatsoever until you show me better judgment." No one made a sound. "Any questions or comments?" he asked. Fred raised his hand. "Yes, Mr. Dukes?"

"Sir, may I go to the john?"

"Yes, Mr. Dukes." Xavier replied, then before the young man escaped out his door, said, "Oh, and Mr. Dukes." Fred, stopped and turned nervously. "You will clean the Trans Am's interior this week. You can see Mr. Summers about supplies." Fred just nodded and hurried out. "The rest of you are dismissed." The six stood and shuffled morbidly out the door.

The next day was Sunday and Andi and Logan returned home, unaware of the weekend's events. As soon as they entered the house, Logan's eyes fell on a large, brown-paper wrapped rectangle leaning against the stairs with his name written in large letters on it. Recognizing Jack's handwriting, he plunked their bags down and eagerly picked it up. It read, "*Congrats, buddy. You deserve this now!*" and tore the paper off, already knowing what it was. He grinned at the sultry portrait of Andi he'd always admired.

Andi was at the answering machine. "Mom, call me as soon as you get in. I'm at home,." Jack's voice said, so she immediately grabbed the phone from its charger.

As Logan pondered where he should hang the picture, he also listened to Andi's conversation. "You got Rogue?" she asked. That got his attention. Putting the portrait down, he immediately went to her and hissed into her ear, "Where is she and how is she?"

Andi held a finger up for him to wait. He regarded this with a scowl, then, wrapping his arms around her waist, pressed his against the phone receiver to listen. All he was was the details about the kids errant outing and the wreck of the TransAm.

"Stupid twits," he muttered. He waited impatiently through all Andi's, "uh-huhs" until she finally said, "Okay, honey. Bye. Love you." At that point he spun her around to face him. "What about Rogue?"

"They picked her up Friday night. She's at the school."

That was enough for him. He took the phone from her hand, returned it to the charger and guided her back to the car in the garage.

"Mystique made her absorb another mutant to death," Andi explained along the way. "Jack says she's in bad shape. Not even talking."

Logan held her car door. "They shoulda called," he grumbled as she got in, though she seriously doubted he'd have taken kindly to his honeymoon being interrupted *even* for Rogue. "It was just a pick-up," she replied gently as he got in. "The damage was already done. We'd have only been excess personnel."

"What was that little dunder-head thinking?"

"There's worse news. Mystique broke Magneto out while they were rescuing her."

"Figures," Logan scowled. "When it rains, it pours, don't it?"

Inside the school, Andi paused, trying to sense Rogue. Logan watched her eyes darken slightly. "Where is she?" he asked.

"Downstairs," she replied. "Jean and the Professor are with her." She was silent a moment, then looked at him. "Xavier says to wait until he calls us, then we can see her. They're working with her right now."

With a nod, Logan took her hand and they walked to the Rec-room. It was an hour before they got the okay. Professor Xavier and Jean met them when they arrived. They both looked strained and tired. Andi traded a quick embrace with Jean while Logan glanced around the lab looking for Rogue. "Where is she?"

Xavier calmly pointed at a heavy metal door. "In there, for now."

Logan stared at it, then back at the Professor. "Like a prisoner? What's wrong with her?"

"Mystique forced her to absorb another mutant to death," Xavier replied.

Andi gasped, her fingers coming to her lips in horror.

"Can you help her?" Logan asked.

"We will do all we can, but bear in mind having a person die in her mind is a psychological shock of such an extreme nature it's possible Marie may not ever fully recover," Xavier cautioned. "I don't know when or even *if* we'll be able to return her to the student population."

Logan gawked at him, then at the metal door as he broodingly remembered Rogue telling him she could still 'feel him in her head' after absorbing his healing ability.

"Right now her memories are mixed up with another girl's," Xavier continued. "She doesn't know if she's from Meridian, Mississippi or Bloomington, Illinois. Jean and I are trying to isolate and sort out those memories for her as well as help her cope with the death she's experienced."

Jean said, "We're spending two sessions a day with her and keeping her on an anti-depressant."

"But you don't know if you can get her back to normal?" Logan reiterated and both Jean and the Professor nodded.

"What's her condition now?" Andi asked.

"Withdrawn and unresponsive," Jean answered.

At that, Logan ran a perturbed hand through his hair, then looked dubiously at Andi.

"We wanted to see her..." Andi offered tentatively.

"It won't do her any harm," Xavier replied, "and it might do some good."

Jean offered them latex gloves.

"You didn't happen to find out why she ran away did you?" Logan asked Xavier while tugging the gloves on.

"No, not yet. I think that's something we'll have to wait for Marie to reveal when she's ready."

Jean unlocked Rogue's isolation door and held it for them, though Logan paused uneasily in the entry as he stared at the forlorn form in the bed. She was curled up on the cot, facing the wall. Suddenly he felt Andi's hand slide into his and taking a deep breath, went in.

"Remember, she can hear you," Xavier hissed softly. Then closed the door after them.

At the same time, at a marina in Ft Lauderdale, Florida, Mystique, now guised as an elegant woman known as "Madame Ferre," was escorting Magneto up the ramp of her eighty-foot yacht, the Princess Adaline, which she'd acquired while posing as Senator Kelly. Once she'd finished transferring all Kelly's financial assets to her Netherlands account, she'd also transferred his yacht as a gift to herself under the name "Madame Ferre." The only other people presently on-board included a cook and helmsmen, whom she'd carefully hired through a crew-finder service under the stipulation they be unmarried, so she'd be able to dispose of them easily later with fewer questions.

She first escorted Magneto to the aft master cabin, then settled the mutant teens, Castile and Cathleen into theirs. After that, she checked in with the helmsmen and cook and issued them their orders.

A short time later, Hypno and the rest of her team arrived and, as soon as they were aboard, the Princess sailed for open sea, bound southeast toward the West Indies. Their ultimate destination lay among the Lesser Antilles Islands.

Meanwhile, inside Rogue's isolation room, Logan seated himself gingerly on the cot beside her while Andi remained standing beside him. He rested a hand on Rogue's shoulder. "Hey, kid," he said.

Andi leaned down and brushed away a couple of strands of Rogue's white hair from her face. "We're both here, honey," she added, then gave Logan a nod of encouragement.

"Listen, it's tough right now," he offered awkwardly, "but you're gonna be okay. You just have to hold onto that. When have I ever steered you wrong?" Then, uncomfortable, he looked to Andi for help.

"Hold her hand," she whispered. "We should just sit with her a while. Our presence is as important as our words."

He nodded and took her small white hand into his gloved one, holding it for several minutes until he could bear it no longer. Putting her hand back on the bed, he stood. "We're going now, but we'll be back," he announced, then caught Andi's hand and gave the door a rap. Xavier opened it. He was apparently alone. Jean was gone.

"Thanks." Logan mumbled, breezing past with Andi in tow. They took the elevator up, then went straight to the garage, where he put her in the car. Neither spoke, until, eaching the edge of Westchester, he suddenly said, "Let's just get some groceries and eat at home."

Andi studied her new husband's profile as he drove. His eyes were on the road and his jaw tight. "Sure," she agreed easily. She felt it best right now to simply be agreeable while he was working through his various unresolved issues with Marie. One certainly was his unfulfilled promise to protect her, a promise the girl had gone out of her way to keep him from fulfilling and the fact it result both in a severe injury and a rescue he couldn't participate in. Logan was a man of his word and these things were bound to sit hard with him, but how hard or for how long she didn't know.

Logan pulled sharply into the grocery parking lot and was out of the car striding toward the adjoining liquor store before Andi even got her door open. She stared after him in dismay, then went ahead into the grocery store, quickly selecting milk, cereal and some sandwich items for dinner, though she doubted Logan would care about eating. He was already in the car smoking a cigar when she returned and without a word, just revved the engine, then squealed out of the parking lot.

When he pulled into their garage, as soon as he turned the engine off, he snatched up his brown bag of alcohol from the back seat and marched straight into the house.

Andi sighed as she toted three plastic bags of groceries in after him. She flipped on lights he hadn't bothered with and proceeded to put the groceries away. Then she peered out the sliding glass door at him, able to see his dark silhouette seated at the patio table outside along with two whiskey bottles. She also caught a faint flare of a match--he was lighting a cigar.

She heaved a sigh. It was funny how, only a few hours ago, they'd been so close and now, suddenly so far apart. Yet Andi already understood life with Logan was going to be a regular roller-coaster, but it was she who had two marriages worth of experience with which to weather it and it was he who would have the bigger learning curve. So, she left him to his mope and attended to tasks at hand, one being taking the luggage upstairs and unpacking. Then she enjoy a leisurely bubble bath, then put on a snugly robe, opened the window a crack to let a bit of cold air in, since that is something she'd learned he liked, then settled into bed to work her crosswords awhile before turning the lights out.

It was long past midnight when Logan finally crept contritely up the dark stairs. Despite two bottles of liquor he was still sober as a preacher. He often wondered why he even bothered drinking at all, but supposed he liked the idea of it.

Reaching the top, he stared at the closed bedroom door, entirely unsure what to expect considering he ignored his new wife half the night on this, their first night at home. If the shoe were on the other foot, he knew he'd be mad as heck. Heaving a determined breath, he quietly edged the door open and peered within. Cold air from the window brushed his face and he observed Andi's blanket-covered form in the bed. Slipping in, he closed the door silently and tip-toed into the john, took a quick shower, then tried to ease himself into the bed without disturbing her. He thought he'd succeeded when she suddenly asked, "Are you alright?" startling him.

"Yeah," he replied, then paused for an outburst or a rebuke. None came. "I didn't mean to wake you," he added. "I heard the shower."

He hesitated, wrestling with whether he should ask or not. She didn't *sound* mad. "Are you mad?"

She rolled over toward him with a sleepy sigh. "Bout what?"

"Leaving you alone all this time."

He felt her reach to his face, her fingers playing with his mutton-chops. "I know you're upset over Rogue," she replied, "and you just needed some space. I'm sorry she's too stubborn to let you help her."

Logan kissed her hand, then en-folded her into his embrace, quickly making up for his earlier negligence.

Aboard the Princess Adaline, Mystique had Hypno order the hypnotized kids to stay in their rooms after dinner and she assigned Shade, Trane and Hypno guard duty. Then she restlessly strolled the deck until the Princess was safely outside US territorial waters before she went below to Magneto's cabin.

Entering, she found him stretched out on the bed in smoking jacket with a silk ascot, like a king on a cruise, reading a book, a bottle of champagne on ice with glasses for two on the bed-table. She resumed her natural shape as she locked the door, then leaned coyly against it.

"I take it everything is in order," he said without looking up.

"Everything's perfect," she answered.

Magneto raised his eyes then and surveyed her red-hair, yellow eyes and coy smile. Devouring her slender curves hungrily, he smiled and set his book aside. "I believe a celebration is in order," he purred as he rose, meeting her at the center of his cabin. She offered him her hand with the air of a princess meeting her suitor and, grasping her finger's delicately, Magneto pressed them to his lips.

"And what form shall I take for you tonight?" she murmured seductively.

He drew her closer. "Tonight, my dear, I think you should be yourself."

Aglow with pleasure, she stepped into his kiss even while outside, Hypno's ear was pressed to their cabin door, listening jealously.

Andi woke shortly before six and, figuring she could make it to school to join Scott and Jack for the usual morning jog, eased out of bed, hoping not to wake Logan. He suddenly stirred. "Where're you goin'?" he mumbled.

"To school," she replied softly.

He mumbled incoherently and seemed to fall back asleep, so she quickly dressed and left.

In Xavier's quarters, his private phone rang and he hummed out of his kitchen to look at the caller ID. Only a trusted few had his unlisted number. He recognized it at belong the Fred Duncan, the FBI man who had once played such a vital part in helping him locate and rescue Scott nine years earlier. Duncan was now surreptitiously head of "mutant affairs" in the Bureau, though no one knew either his true mutant sympathies or that he, Charles Xavier, was Duncan's ace-in-the-hole on mutant info. So, considering Magneto's escape, Xavier wasn't the least surprised to hear his old friend's voice in his ear.

Duncan skipped niceties. "Our boy's back on the street, Charles. Whacha got for me?"

"Good morning, Fred," Xavier replied anyway. He could hear sounds of traffic in the background. Fred always used a public phone to call him. "How's your family?"

"Fine. Skip to the facts, will ya. I'm under pressure here."

Xavier chuckled and told him everything he had to date, that the morphing mutant known as Raven Darkholme, a.k.a. Mystique, was the mastermind behind Magneto's jail-break as well as Warden Swalley's murder and that she'd also posed as a Dr. Pierian to take over her research project as a method of recruiting young mutants to assist her. Then he explained how one of his own children ran away to that clinic, was captured and used as bait to keep them busy while Mystique broke Magneto out. He never gave Fred any unnecessary details, such as Rogue's mutant abilities or the two boys he'd rescued and Fred certainly didn't know about Cerebro.

"Raven Darkholme again," Duncan muttered. "Why didn't you call me about this Dr. Pierian thing? It woulda

given us a clue."

"I didn't know all this as a fact until after we rescued our girl and the jail-break had already occurred."

"You had suspicions, though."

"Last year, Fred, I warned you Mystique was posing as Senator Kelly and he'd turn up missing eventually."

"You know I couldn't sell that to my supervisors," Duncan grumbled. "And you didn't give me anything to sell it with."

"A mutant who can look like anyone is hard to catch," Xavier countered philosophically. He couldn't very well tell Duncan the real Senator had dissolved into a puddle in his underground med-lab.

"Yeah and I haven't got squat on Darkholme. Your girl, the one you rescued, she'd doesn't know anything does she?"

"I'm sorry, Fred. She was under some kind of mind control and doesn't remember anything."

"Mind control, huh?" There was a pause and Xavier was sure he was scribbling that down.

"Well," Duncan sighed. "I guess I can check into this Dr Pierian thing and try to spin what you've given me into some kind of spiel that'll get my butt out of the sling. You wouldn't happen to have any guesses about where Darkholme and Lehnsherr might be headed?"

"None."

"Okay, then. You call me if you get even the tiniest shred of something that might help."

"Take care of yourself, Fred," Xavier replied and hung up. He studied the phone. He hadn't been in Cerebro for quite some time. He checked the clock. He had a first hour science class, but could try after that.

When Andi arrived at school, she found Jack and Scott at their usual starting place, stretching and warming up. Scott was surprised to see her and couldn't stop his brows rising above his glasses. "Well, good morning."

That made Jack, who had his arms braced against the mansion wall and was stretched out full length, peer under his arm. Seeing it was his mother, he straightened and swept her into his embrace. Scott just looked on, watching them laugh and trade a mother-son peck on the lips with just a bit of envy.

"So, you saw Rogue last night, I take it?" Scott asked. "What'd you think?"

"She has a long road back. How's Jean holding up? She didn't look good last night."

"It's hard on her," Scott admitted. "Every therapy session takes a lot of concentration and it saps her energy levels. She has to take a nap after every one and it's giving her headaches."

"Rogue's recovery is going to be hard on all of us I think," Andi replied.

Back at Andi's house, Logan rolled over and reached across the bed. When he found no one, he raised his head, scowled around, then squinted at the clock. It was eight-thirty. He sat up, foggily remembering her telling him she was going to school, which meant a cold ride on his Harley rather than in a nice warm car, and he grumpily got dressed, grabbed some cereal, put on his cold weather gear and rode out. When he got to the school, he went directly to the gym, where Jack and Andi were shooting hoops.

Andi looked up when he came in. He was still in his cold weather gear, carrying his helmet and aggravation was written all over his face. Something was wrong. Tossing Jack the ball, she said, "I'll be back in a minute," and walked towards her husband, who made no move to meet her halfway. She met him with a smile. "Good morning."

"Whacha doing here?"

"Just shooting a few baskets." Her lightness of manner failed to soften him.

"You know don't have to in until *nine*."

Andi abruptly realized she breached an expectation. "I know, but you know *I am* an early riser."

Clearly he didn't find her reply satisfactory as he scowlingly brushed by her to stalk into the gym office. So much for all that talk on their honeymoon about just accepting one another just as they were. She heaved a sigh and followed him. Jack gave her a querying look as she passed, which she waved off, then entering the office, closed the

door. It took a little negotiation and reminding of that conversation about accepting one another, but eventually, though grudgingly, Logan compromised. He agreed she could come in early to jog with Jack and Scott on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, but on Tuesdays, Thursdays and weekends, she would sleep in.

Xavier, as soon as his first hour class was over, went underground into Cerebro. He'd barely cleared his thoughts before a soft, feminine voice greeted him. "Is that you, my friend, Charles?"

It was Peace. "Good morning, Peace. How are you?" Her voice sounded different, more mature maybe.

"I am fine. You have not been here in a long time."

"I'm sorry. I've been busy."

"Are you looking for more friends today?"

"No, actually I'm looking for an enemy."

There was a pause. "Enemy," Peace replied. "A person who feels hatred or fosters harmful designs against another."

"Quite correct." Her dictionary reply surprised him a little.

"This enemy hates you?" she asked.

He wasn't sure if hate were the right word. Strongly disagree, perhaps. He couldn't forget he and Erik had once been chums. "No, he fosters harmful designs against others."

"I see. And what will you do once you find this enemy?"

"Try to stop him."

"I see. You are protecting your friends from this enemy."

"Yes." Xavier decided to pursue his earlier question. "Peace, where do you live?"

"Where I am."

"I mean, where are you?"

"Here is where I am."

"You're speaking to me from somewhere else, far away. Where is that?"

"I only know I am here and here is where I am. I cannot be anywhere else."

This was turning into a laughable, but futile conversation. "Does the place where you are have a name?"

There was a pause. "Like Charles or Peace?"

"Those are names for people. Places like cities, states or countries have their own names. Remember I told you I live in the United States?"

"Yes." She paused. "Where I am has no name. I must go now. I must finish my calculations. Good bye Charles." And she was gone. Xavier couldn't begin to fathom what sort of prisoner he was dealing with. He tried to locate Magneto and Mystique, but as he expected, found nothing. He made a special effort to be cheery and enthusiastic during the pumpkin carving contest later in the afternoon and the Halloween social that evening to try to boost everyone's sagging spirits over Rogue and his own over Magneto.

A couple days later, Logan came home late because of all the extra work Ro was wanting done on her new bedroom, such as converting the original single closet into a double *including* a closet storage system. It was exasperating. He found Andi on the sofa, curled up around a pillow. He smiled and went to her, intending to plant a kiss on her sleeping face, but she wasn't asleep. She was awake and turned a puffy, tear-stained face to him. He started, his heart crushed to see such a look. It reminded him painfully of the last time he'd made her cry. He knelt by her uncertainly, afraid he was the cause. "What's wrong, Angel? What is it?"

"Jana sent me an email. I guess Alex told her about us getting married."

He was hugely relieved her upset wasn't his doing. It was her daughter's. However, he didn't yet know all that much about her except that she didn't want anything to do with her Mother, which seemed incredibly bizarre.

He observed her notebook computer was open on the desk and he could see the screen saver. "What'd she say?"

"You can read it."

Moving to the desk, he touched the mouse pad, eliminating the screen saver and showing him the email from her daughter that was still open. He scanned it. It was unbelievable. He couldn't believe the things Jana dared to say to Andi and he knew, if she were his kid, he'd beat the tar out of her. Basically, her daughter accused her of having crossed the last line of decency and morality, not simply because she remarried, but because she married someone from "that disreputable school." Worse, she called Andi a "whore" in capital letters. That was enough for him. Angrily, he punched delete, then went back to Andi, scooping her into his arms. He wanted to say something to comfort her, but saying anything was walking a fine line being he was a newcomer to the family and ignorant of any exact details between the two women. "I'm sorry," he said.

"It's not your fault," Andi replied. "Somehow, it's mine."

He immediately realized arguing this point would be useless. "That's not what I mean," he quickly corrected. "I'm sorry you had to read that." He was gratified to feel her hold on him tighten. "I promise you, if we ever have any kids and any of them even try to talk to you bad, I'll beat the snot out of them."

That made her laugh a tiny bit. "Kids?" she echoed.

"I just said 'if', darlin'."

Andi chuckled softly against him, still sniffing some.

"How 'bout this. If you see an email from Jana, you tell me and I'll read it first, then tell you the gist."

"That's a nice offer, but really I generally never hear from her. This was the first email she's sent in *years*---that's why I even read it. I don't know what I was expecting." Her voice became husky with emotion. "But really, it's my problem, not yours."

"Being married makes everythin' *our* problem, Angel." He felt her heave a sigh.

"*We'll* probably never hear from her again," she muttered pessimistically.

He could see she wasn't really ready to let him fully into the matter, so he changed tact. "How 'bout you fix yourself up and I take you to dinner?"

She nodded. "Deal," and left his arms to go upstairs, wiping her face dry as she went.

He looked after her. He realized then there were things in this family he might always remain an outsider to, regardless of long he was married to Andi.

While the FBI was scouring the US for them, Darkholme and Lehnsherr, were headed for a tropical paradise. The Princess Adaline cruised pleasantly along the West Indies and the Antilles, finally meandering its way among the scattered islands of the Lesser Antilles to their destination, the Isle of St Maurice. Formerly dominated by France, the small crescent shaped island had been released to independent rule ten years earlier and, since then, had suffered one shaky democratic election, two coups and two provisional governments, the second provisional government being the one currently in control, however tenuous. It's once vivid night spots were broken-down and vacant buildings. Machine-gun mounted jeeps patrolled the streets enforcing curfews and the beautiful beaches were barren of the tourists that had once covered them thick as fleas. It was here, just outside the islands territorial waters, that Mystique ordered the Princess to weigh anchor until nightfall. Then after dark, they cruised closer. With Magneto in the cockpit beside her, she searched the shoreline with binoculars, looking for the designated signal. Hypno currently manned the helm. He'd hired helmsmen and cook were both below decks under one of his special spells.

"There it is," Mystique announced, pointing.

Hypno saw the light and motored toward it, docking at a rickety wooden pier. There were some men there attired in military uniforms, clearly expecting them, who seized the lines, tied them off and helped lower the gangplank. Magneto and Mystique descended it first, with Hypno trailing behind. She, still guised as "Madame Ferre", was elegant in a tailored blue suit and heels, while Hypno and Magneto both were wearing pseudo-US camouflage military uniforms. She greeted the soldiers in French, they the soldier loaded them into a jeep and drove them along the coastline to an expansive hacienda that obviously had seen better days. Once inside, they were escorted directly to General Legrono's office.

Magneto studied the short man who stood when they entered with concealed distaste. His uniform was ornate, actually accentuating the General's short stature and his eyes calculating and piggish. A heavy mustache covered his upper lip and his cheeks were heavily scarred with pock-marks. What hair showed from beneath his ornate, military hat was black and oily.

The General smiled a smile full of teeth outlined in gold, then stepped out from behind his desk to accept Mystique's proffered hand. "Good evening, Madame Ferre," he said in French. "I am glad to see you've finally arrived."

He kissed her hand, while she demurely smiled on him. Originally, while posing as Senator Kelly last year, she'd visited this struggling isle and had struck a deal with the General to provide "US aide", then, later, as the Senator had written him a letter introducing herself as "Madame Ferre", who would be an official liaison of this deal. Right now, the General believed their yacht was loaded with arms and a covert squad of Special-Ops soldiers provided by the US for his personal use in overthrowing the existing government. He would never realize his disappointment. She indicated Magneto beside her. "Colonel Erik Lehnsherr, this is General Rousseau Legrono of the People's Revolutionist Party."

Magneto smiled tolerantly and offered his hand, which the General clasped and pumped with pleasure. Then she indicated Hypno on her other side. "And this is Special Adviser, Everitt Camden."

He stared a moment at the dwarf. "I'm not running a circus," he snorted, then bent down to have a closer look at Hypno. "What sort of Adviser are you?"

Hypno met Legrono's piggish brown eyes with his limpid blue ones. "Human relations," he murmured and, mesmerized him quick as a cobra, bending the General's will to his own. A few minutes later, when Hypno ordered Legrono to straighten, he was no longer his own master. "General Rousseau Legrono," he said, "you will do whatever I, Magneto or Mystique tell you to do from now on. Understand?"

The General nodded, his expression blank.

"Very good, Hypno," Mystique purred. "How could I have done this without you?"

He bowed to her like a performer, as delighted to have her praise.

Magneto strode around the desk and took a seat behind it. "General," he ordered, "Get me your maps and show me all your plans and, if anyone comes in, tell them you're busy." Legrono obediently opened desk drawers, pulled out maps and explained in detail his manpower, armament and coup strategy. Within an hour they knew everything. Since he now had a mutant team to incorporate, Magneto revised the plan on several points, then gave Legrono his new instructions for his people to carry out. He intended to use him as a puppet and stand in his shadow and rule this country while he turned it into his own. He smiled. He already had a name picked out. Instead of St Maurice, he was going to call it L'Havre; the french meaning: "the haven." He was going to turn it into a land of mutants, a country they could call their own.

Seventy-two hours later, St Maurice's existing government fell to the People's Revolutionist Party, but that bit of news barely registered on the wires. What monopolized media attention as well as Xavier's were the special news bulletins coming out of Turkey.

They'd just hired Tau Omega.

*Continued in "Through the Shadow of the Valley of Death"*