

## Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Part 2 by B. Nickerson {Rated PG-13}

**Synopsis: Jean and Scott adjust to prison and Weir takes responsibility for arranging their rescue.**

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While Jean and Scott were sitting in jail, it was still early afternoon in Westchester, where Bobby Drake was in Scott's classroom, carefully arranging his books and notes on Scott's desk. He glanced at the white-board behind him, smiling bemusedly at the thought of writing "Mr. Drake" on it, but decided against it. Getting his friends to accept him as their substitute teacher was going to be difficult enough without making it worse.

He glanced at the clock. He still had five minutes and sat down to review his lessons again, nervously determined to be the best substitute he could. A short time later, he heard his "class" filing into the room and Pyro was, of course, the first to make remark. "So who died and made you king?"

Bobby looked up from his notes.

Smirking, Pyro plunked his books loudly on his desk at the back of the room and remained standing. A few snickered at his wisecrack.

Bobby patiently picked up the roll-book and stood in front of the desk. "If everyone will take a seat," he said pointedly, "we'll begin." Then he began reading off names, diligently checking off each student as they responded and ignoring Pyro, who was obstinately standing at the back with folded arms. "Okay," Bobby said as he finished. "Who's in basic math?" Elliot, Sam, Fred, Tel and Angelica raised their hands. "Who's in Algebra one?" Nick, Darla, Jubilee, Doug and Jimmy Proudstar raised their hands. "And who's in Algebra two?" John Proudstar, Kitty, Big Pete and Pietro raised their hands. Pyro just stood there, smirking, daring him to do something. Bobby nonchalantly set the roll book aside, walked behind his desk again, pretended to sort through his notes, then looked at Pyro. "I'm sorry, John. I don't seem to have *your* section: retard algebra."

The class exploded with laughter. Reddening, Pyro retaliated with a single upright finger.

Filled with triumph, Bobby turned to the white-board and began writing out the first exercise. "Okay basic math, turn to page thirty-six," he said.

Pages rustled. Bobby felt a paper wad pelt him between the shoulder blades, followed by snickers, but ignored it and continued writing. Then he heard a second land on his desk behind him. Suddenly, there was an uproar behind him and he whipped around to find a blazing paper-wad in the middle of his notes. Incensed now, Bobby quickly iced it, tossed it in the waste basket beside the desk, then rested an even chillier gaze on his friends.

"Listen," he warned, "You can either have *me* or you can have Coach Jack and Coach Jack told me to tell you that if *he* has to takeover, you'll be doing *every* homework problem *plus* any he can make-up *and* a pop-quiz first thing everyday." Everyone groaned. "So, what'll it be?"

"You, man," John Proudstar said, "We want you." Heads nodded all around in agreement. Pyro glared at him sulkily.

"Okay then. Don't give me anymore flack or Coach Smith will be up here tomorrow." Bobby looked hard at Pyro, who just contritely slid into his seat and opened his book.

Downstairs, in her private room in Dr. Summer's lab, Rogue lounged on her bed, watching a movie. Against the wall behind her bed, was a large poster board covered with scribbled get-well-wishes from her fellow students. She had permission to invite anyone down she wished to visit, but it's the last thing she wished to do. She was mortified enough as it was without having to answer a bunch of stupid questions. It was bad enough just facing Xavier every day...twice a day...*every dang day*. Just then, a familiar electric hum came to her ears. "Speak of the devil," she muttered.

"May I come in?" his voice called.

Rogue resignedly turned off the movie with sigh. "Yeah."

Smiling pleasantly, Xavier hummed through her open door with a teddy-bear passenger seated in his lap. Rogue

stared at it. "What's that?"

Xavier arranged himself at the card table in the center of the room, then plopped the teddy-bear on it. It had a note slipped through its neck ribbon. "It's for you," he said.

She first eyed the note, then Xavier suspiciously.

"Go ahead," he urged.

Heaving herself off the bed, she took a seat and gingerly pulled the paper out. Inside, it read, "*A fuzzy new friend to keep you company. Your friend, Bobby.*" Noting the underline, she regarded the fluffy brown bear with mixed feelings. Bobby had given her the previous bear, the one she'd taken with her, which was probably still in the bag she'd taken to Dr. Pierian's clinic...where she'd absorbed that other girl...Elsie...and...*killed* her."

"Marie?"

Lost in pain and guilt, she met Xavier's gray eyes.

"It wasn't your fault," he assured softly.

She dropped her eyes and nodded, then set the bear aside for later consideration. She'd also lost her journal that same day. It'd been in the same bag and someone, somewhere was probably reading all her most private feelings and poetry...poetry about Logan...and Jack. The very idea gave her a rush of embarrassment, but Professor Xavier was too busy pulling out a stack of blank paper from beside him in his chair and dumping a box of colored markers on the table to notice. She scowled at them. "What am I supposed to do with this?"

Xavier selected a piece of paper and a green marker. "Just start drawing--anything you want," he replied and began studiously drawing.

Rogue watched him turn lines into shapes, surprised to see Xavier had more than just mind-reading as a talent. He suddenly stopped and looked into her eyes with that peculiar coercing gaze.

"Oh, aw-right," she snapped, snatching a blue marker.

Smiling approvingly, he selected a new color and returned to his own artwork.

After thirty minutes, Xavier called a halt. "Let's see what we have," he offered. He lifted his paper and held it for her to see. It was a simple cottage surrounded by a profusion of multi-colored dots, giving the distinct impression of an extravagant flower garden. "This is something I remember from my father's estate in England when I was a young boy," he explained. "I think the grounds keeper lived in it." He indicated her picture. "Now tell me about yours."

Reluctantly, she held it up. "It's just a house."

He studied the dark, lop-sided structure surrounded by a stormy landscape without a sun or trees, all in blues, blacks and purples. "It certainly is," he murmured and extended his hand for her to give the paper to him, then held it up for her to view. "Who lives in this house?"

"No one."

"It's empty then?"

She nodded, uncertain where he was going.

"If you were this house, how would you be feeling right now?"

She peered carefully at her artwork. "It's...uh, dark and ugly and not like other houses people would want to live in. It's different. It's feeling it will never find a family who wants to live in it." She paused. "Is that enough?"

"Yes, that will do for today." He passed her drawing back to her. "We'll draw again tomorrow."

"Do I have to?" He arched a brow at her, implying an "of course," and she groaned, "Twice a day?"

"No. Just one session of drawing. You're better at it than you think."

She eyed her drawing ruefully with intentions of throwing it away as soon as Xavier left.

"I'd rather you didn't," he said.

She gave him an indignant look.

"I'd like you to keep them," Xavier went on. "For future comparison."

Rogue laid her drawing aside with a sigh and he turned his chair to leave. "I'll see you after dinner," he said. "Have a good afternoon."

"Right."

Xavier, hummed out the door, quite satisfied with the results of his first bit of "art therapy" and Rogue flopped back on her bed to finish her movie.

## Day Two

In Turkey, when morning came to the police station, a fresh rotation of officers arrived for duty. Computers ground-out the days admin paperwork and clerks distributed it. In the jail, the deputy quickly perused the fresh roster of prisoner transfers, then passed it to a junior deputy with orders to make the necessary arrangements.

A short time later, Jean found herself being escorted out of jail to a car that would take her a women's prison, while Scott, along with several other men, found himself being herded into a different vehicle by the impatient prods and jabs of billie-clubs. Every jab angered him, but he kept his cool with gritted teeth until seated, then, as the vehicle lurched forward, turned his thoughts to Sam Hamblin. *Very soon*, she would be reporting them as missing to Ben Weir, who would, in turn, call Xavier, who would begin planning their rescue and that gave Scott a measure of comfort.

A few hours later, in Samsun, Samantha Hamblin paced the living area of the jet irritably, worried because it was eleven o'clock and the Summers *still* hadn't shown up. Max watched her sit down, pull a file folder from a drawer at the side of the coffee table and look up the Carsamba hotel's number, then she pulled out an Iridium sat-phone no bigger than a regular cell phone and called. She inquired if the Summers had checked out yet, listened to answer, then flipped it closed, her face grim.

"What's happened?" Max asked.

"The clerk says the Summer's were arrested last night," she explained while shrugging into her jacket, "but they have their luggage, if I'd like to pick it up." She zipped it up. "I'm going to Carsamba. If you don't hear from me in two hours, call Mr. Weir." Max nodded. "Watch the store," she ordered, then hopped down the steps to the tarmac and went into the terminal.

She rented a car and drove grimly to Carsamba. Until four months ago her life had been no more complicated than flying a private jet here or there. Before that, she was a D.C. cop for ten years and, before that, a military cop in the Air Force for eight. That's when she'd taken up flying as a hobby, then just continued up-grading her licenses until she could quit police work altogether and fly full-time for a private jet company. Then, four months ago, she'd met Ben Weir at a Washington D.C. party. They'd each come with someone else, but after laying eyes on each other, they'd left their dates behind. He was what she liked in a man; that sense of contained power needing someone to tame it. So, she'd gone home with him, but quickly learned he wasn't the tamable sort and after two days of frolic, they'd parted company amiably. So, it naturally was a great surprise when he called her up to offer her a job co-piloting his personal jet as well as serving as his executive assistant. Plus he offered a lucrative salary, which, of course, there was no way she'd refuse. There was only one small condition. "I don't ever fraternize with my employees," he'd warned her. "So, from now on, I'm either Mr. Weir or Sir to you."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Weir," she'd replied, which is how she came to be chasing around Turkey now, looking for two lost mutants. Thoughts of Scott Summers warmed her. He had that same sense of contained power hiding beneath a reserved exterior just crying out to her to come find and draw out. The very thought made her mouth dry with anticipation.

Arriving at the designated hotel in Carsamba, Sam noted the Summer's rental still parked in front as she went in and interviewed the polite and apologetic clerks. They only knew that Summer's had been arrested the evening before and had secured their belongings this morning. So, she collected the Summer's two travel bags, noticing pointedly that Mrs Summer's medical-case was missing, but the clerks insisted this was all they found. "Has their room been rented yet?" she asked The clerk shook his head. "May I see it?" They obligingly escorted her to the Summer's room, now cleaned and made-up, and she checked it over thoroughly, but the medical sample bag clearly had not been simply "over-looked." Not liking the implications, she thanked them, got directions to the police station and went there, where results were even more disturbing. She waited patiently in line at the front desk, then

asked about Scott and Jean Summers. Fortunately, the young, fresh-faced officer manning the desk spoke English well.

He scrutinized his computer screen, scrolling through arrest reports, finally telling her he had no record of those names. "Are you sure they are arrested?" he asked.

"The hotel people said so," she replied.

He studied his screen again quizzically, tapped some more keys, studied the results, then shook his head. "I see nothing. The police always make reports. If they are not here, they cannot be arrested. I am sorry." He then looked beyond her to the person behind her and Sam reluctantly stepped aside.

She returned to her car and immediately called Weir for instructions.

Meanwhile, Jean and Scott had both long since been delivered to their respective ward-class prisons and processed in as inmates. Each had traded civilian clothes for prison attire, which amounted to an orange one-piece jump-suit, a pair of heavy wool socks and black rubber flip-flops. Then each had been handed a rolled-up wool blanket that had seen better days and were each shoved into large, open wards.

Jean surveyed her new surroundings bleakly, her nose assaulted by the pungent scent of unwashed bodies and human excrement. It was a long room constructed of gray cement block with equally long, narrow, barred windows set high up on the wall and propped open letting in cold outside air. Bare, low-voltage light bulbs burned dully in along the ceiling. She could tell where the john was located by the huge pile of human dung and shuddered in revulsion. Eyes were staring at her. Eyes belonging to women young and old, some even with small children. They were lounging either on thin canvas covered pallets or on the bare, filthy cement floor. At least sixty or seventy, she guessed. Visions of lice, bed-bugs, dysentery, tuberculosis, hepatitis and pneumonia filled her with dread, then, getting a grip on herself, her medical professionalism kicked-in. Arming herself with her rusty French, Jean bravely approached a very pregnant and swollen middle-aged woman to see if she could help.

Scott, likewise, had been shoved into identical circumstances on a men's ward and, though he couldn't see his surroundings, he could certainly *smell* the them. He just stood frozen where he was, clutching his blanket uncertainly, unhappy with his utter helplessness. Then footsteps approached him. He tensed. "Who's there?" he asked suspiciously.

A German-accented voice replied in good English, "Hello.

"Hello," he replied in return.

"Ah, you are American?"

"Yes."

"You are blind?"

"Yes," Scott answered simply, since for all intents and purposes, he *was*.

A hand gently gripped his elbow. "I have space for one more. Come."

Scott allowed himself to be lead, forced to trust a perfect stranger he couldn't even see and let him guide him to sit on this "pallet". He felt it with his fingers; the pallet was a thin, hard-as-a-board, canvas covered mattress--if you could call it a mattress.

The German settled beside him on his right. "My name is Paul Hooper," he announced. "And you?"

"Scott Summers." Scott offered his hand for Paul to shake. "You sound German."

Paul chuckled. "Half. My father was an American G.I. My mother divorced him and brought me back to Germany. I was raised there since I was seven."

"I see."

"And on my other side is our other roommate," Paul went on, "Kaya."

Scott offered his hand that general direction and felt it only lightly and quickly gripped in return.

"So, what are you here for?" Paul asked.

Scott decided it didn't make a huge difference whether he told him or not. "Someone planted drugs in my hotel room and my wife and I were arrested for it."

"Ah, and what sentence do you have?"

"What do you mean?"

"How long do you have to spend here?"

This question of sentencing implied a trial, which he hadn't had and this suddenly worried Scott. "I don't know. I wasn't sentenced. I wasn't even tried. Is that normal?"

"Did you talk to a lawyer?"

"No."

He could hear Kaya and Paul trade quiet, spirited conversation in German, which worried him even more.

"This is very bad," Paul finally replied. "Kaya says it means someone wishes to get rid of you."

Scott's brow furrowed as he thought of the internment camp and Tau Omega. Still, he was confident the Professor would find and rescue him. "I shouldn't be here long," he replied. "I have friends who'll be looking for me and they'll probably get me out of here in a couple days."

Paul translated to Kaya, then patted Scott's shoulder. "You are lucky then. Lucky, too, to have arrived here after the devil has gone."

"The devil?" Scott repeated.

"Yes, one of the wardens. He was a sadistic one. He raped Kaya with a coke bottle when he first arrived. There are two fellows across the room who are paralyzed from beatings he gave them and another who lost his eye. Sometimes he forced prisoners to rape prisoners." Scott heard Paul cluck his tongue in disgust. "Fortunately he is gone now. Transferred maybe or retired."

Scott shuddered both from cold and disgust. "He could get away with that?"

"My friend, the first lesson to learn here is there are *no rules*. What the law may say and what is done are two different things. Especially these days."

"Has anything happened to you?"

"I am lucky to say just once. I was sick after I first came here and my wife convinced our Consulate to obtain medical care for me and the wardens put me in a vehicle and beat me as we drove around. They broke my arm, then brought me back." He took Scott's hand and ran it down his forearm, letting him feel the uneven knot of an improperly healed fracture. "And I never saw a hospital or doctor. I told my wife not to send any more help. They do not like it. It is best here not to complain."

Scott took that in soberly, anxiety starting to gnaw on his empty stomach as he thought fearfully of such things happening to Jean. "So, I take it your wife isn't in jail as well?" he asked Paul.

"No. I was here alone, on business," Paul replied. "She comes to visit me about once a month, if they let her. I was in a traffic accident with a passenger bus and I am sentenced to five years. I have been here almost two."

A talkative sort, Scott listened to Paul's continued stories about prison life with mixed horror and morbid curiosity until time for the mid-day rations, when Paul graciously guided him to collect his bowl of soup, a paper cup of water and hunk of dry bread. Once seated on the pallet again, Scott sampled the lukewarm contents of his bowl, promptly spitting it back in the bowl, exclaiming, "How can anyone eat this!" Then, he regretted his outburst, since this is what his new room-mates were surviving on.

"It is better to soak the bread," Paul kindly suggested. "Then both are better."

Scott contritely did so and it did make the bread slightly more palatable, but that's all he ate. When the bread was gone, he set his soup aside and just polished off his cup of water.

From beside him, Paul asked, "May Kaya have the rest of your soup?"

"Sure," Scott said. "*Why not*," he thought, "*the Professor will be here in a day or two anyway.*"

After the meal, Scott used his teeth to make a small tear in his blanket, then tore off a narrow strip to bind around his eyes like a blindfold to make keeping them closed easier, then pulled the rest of the blanket around his shoulders, though it did little to keep him warm. Paul had said the windows were left open all the time for ventilation, letting cold in all winter and flies all summer. It proved a long, afternoon of sitting, standing, then sitting again until the evening ration finally arrived, breaking the monotony. It was the same soup, bread and water and

Scott just used the soup to dampen the bread again, devoured it hungrily and drank his water, then offered the remainder to Paul to give Kaya. He decided his meals were the perfect way to keep track of time; two meals being equal to one day. When they settled down to sleep, Paul slept between him and Kaya and laying there, shivering with cold as he clutched this blanket tightly, Scott realized that by sharing his pallet, Paul, being in the middle, stayed the warmest. So, Scott just lay there, too cold to sleep, listening to the coughing spells of his fellow prisoners and the disturbing rumbling in his intestines, his mind haunted with Paul's brutal tales, worried about what might be happening to Jean.

Jean, in her own ward-prison, clutched her blanket tightly around her. Not so lucky as Scott to have a roommate willing to share a pallet, she'd settled for an open spot on the dirty floor, her eyes squeezed shut against the ceiling lights that burned night and day, her auburn hair strewn behind her. Shivering, she doubted she'd sleep much and felt her intestines rumbling suspiciously. It was the water, she was certain. It was going to give her fits of diarrhea, but there was nothing to do, but drink it and endure the consequences.

It was late Wednesday afternoon when Xavier got Ben Weir's call. "We have a problem," Weir announced without preliminaries, "It seems the Summers have both disappeared."

Xavier's heart pounded in his ears. "What?"

"According to the hotel people they were arrested last night, but this morning, according to the police, they don't know anything about it. The med-sample case is gone too."

Xavier sat in stunned silence, that dreadful word *arrested* echoing in his head. Turkey's jail-system was notoriously brutal. "We *have* to find them," he finally managed.

"I *will* get them back, Professor, one way or another," Weir promised. "It's what I do. However, we *are* dealing with a Nato ally and no matter how Mr and Mrs. Summers got themselves entangled in their legal system, I want you to let *me* handle getting them back out."

The only thing on Xavier's mind right then, however, was getting down to Cerebro and confirming for his own peace of mind whether Jean and Scott were still alive. "Can I call you back?" he asked.

Weir hesitated a moment, then said, "Alright. I'm at home," and hung up.

Xavier hummed immediately down to Cerebro and was relieved to find he could feel them both, still in Turkey, though they were now in separate locations. From Scott he only perceived darkness, indicating to him the boy no longer had his glasses, but from Jean, he sensed her squalid captivity. Satisfied, he returned to his classroom office, which had the closest phone and called Weir back, ready now to think strategically about the problem.

"They're alive," he announced to Weir. "I sensed Jean in a large closed space surrounded by people of rather shabby condition."

"And Mr. Summers?"

"He's in another place, some distance apart from her."

"How far would you say?" Weir asked.

"Within a radius of fifty miles."

"Hmm, fifty miles."

Xavier could hear the faint scratching of pen on paper.

"That may be quite useful," Weir went on. "We're lucky your Mr. and Mrs. Summers didn't make things worse by using their, uh...special abilities. Which brings us back to what I was saying, I want you to let me find and rescue them. Bringing more mutants into a country already on the verge of mutant hysteria will only complicate matters."

Xavier, however grudgingly, knew Weir was right. "You have a plan, I trust."

"I've arranged for a local lawyer to meet me in Samsun, and through him I'll hire local private investigators to flash photos around and interview Carsamba police officers because someone, somewhere saw them."

"Then what?"

"Then, the game will be afoot. Tau Omega made the first move. Now it's our turn and my move will be to locate the Summers, prove wrongful imprisonment and obtain their release."

"And Tau will make another move."

"I'd expect it."

"Okay, worst case scenario. Let's say, legal avenues fail and you can't get them released."

"I have an extraction team on stand-by in Europe. One phone call and they'll be in place. I *can* get your people out, Professor."

"You've done this sort of thing before, I take it."

"You could say that."

"Very well, Mr. Weir. I will let you handle this on the condition that one of my people goes with you."

"If that's what you wish, Professor, then I'll take Andi. She already has all the training necessary to round out my extraction team and she'll pass as a visiting parent perfectly."

Xavier winced, realizing with loathing he'd been once again maneuvered by Weir into doing exactly what Weir wished. However, wanting Andi to go and getting Logan to go along with it were two different things. "Alright, I can ask her to go with you, but the final decision will up to both her *and Logan*."

"Professor, you and I both know you are quite capable of managing Mr. Logan," Weir firmly replied. "Just give Andi some good, individual photos of the Summers and tell her I'll pick her up at home tomorrow at two p.m." He hung up.

Xavier scowled at the receiver, then dialed Andi's home number, glancing at the clock as he listened to it ring. It was after eleven p.m.

Her sleepy voice answered. "Hello?"

"It's Xavier," he announced, "We have a crisis and I need you and Logan in my private quarters right now."

After she said okay, he hung up and hummed down the silent corridors to his quarters and into his bedroom, where he collected his yamulka and prayer book. Returning to his sitting-room, he used the time to pray for Scott and Jean, asking for their protection.

When, Logan and Andi entered Xavier's sitting-room a short time later, Logan's eyes landed immediately on that small, round velvet symbol of Xavier's faith still perched on his bald head; his faith that there was an Ultimate Good and order in the universe. It was something he and Xavier didn't see eye to eye on, but the fact Xavier was wearing it *and* calling them in at such a late hour gave him a *really* bad feeling.

"What's up that couldn't wait till morning, Professor?" he grumbled as he and Andi settled side-by-side on on the red sofa in front of him.

"We have a situation," Xavier said, "but almost no facts. Tuesday evening, Scott and Jean were arrested in their hotel room and taken away by Turkish police."

Andi's eyes widened. "That's not good," she said.

"No," Xavier agreed, "it's not. And it gets worse. The hotel people saw that much and secured their belongings, then Wednesday morning, when they didn't show up, one of Weir's pilots went to Carsamba, collected their baggage and inquired at the police station. The police, according to their computer records, claimed they had no record of such an arrest and Jean's med-sample bag wasn't among their things. While we're certain they are alive, Mr. Weir and I believe they've been shuffled into the Turkish prison system."

"So, what do you want us to do?" Logan interrupted, "Find them and break them out?"

Xavier peaked his fingers together and chose his words carefully. "I wish it were that simple. We cannot simply assault a NATO ally like a group of terrorists. We believe Tau Omega is behind this convenient disappearance and tracking them down won't be easy...or quick, which is why I've decided to allow Mr. Weir to continue handling it."

Logan snorted and Andi gently put her hand on his knee, encouraging he be patient.

Xavier first met Andi's eyes. "*You're the best choice to go,*" he thought to her, then, said out loud to Logan, "I've also agreed to send Andi along to help him."

Logan snapped to rigid attention in his seat. "What? Don't I have any say about this?"

Xavier shook his head. "I'm sorry, Logan."

"What's wrong with you going?"

"Whoever goes has to be able to play a duo-role. They must be able to serve as a visiting relative or on an extraction team, depending on the circumstances and I'm not suited to the latter." Logan glared at him, then at Andi, then at Xavier again. Xavier leaned slightly forward, his address to Logan more intense. "I'm not sure you understand the implications of Turkish prison, Logan. I'm sure you've seen the inside of a few US and Canadian jails, but compared to Turkish prison, those are *resorts*." His blue eyes became watery. "Scott and Jean may feel their lives have been difficult lives, but nothing as difficult as what this is going to be and...well, if they aren't both raped or worse, we'll be *very* lucky." He took a deep breath. His voice quavered, "I *need* Andi to go on this one, Logan."

Logan stared at Xavier and, afraid the old man might burst into tears at any second, stifled his further objections.

"I'll do whatever you want, Professor," Andi offered softly.

"Very good. Mr. Weir will pick you up at home tomorrow, at two." Xavier replied. "Why don't the two of you take tomorrow off."

Logan immediately launched off the sofa, stalked to the door, jerked it open and left. They could hear him swearing down the hall. Andi heaved a deep breath as she got to her feet to follow.

Xavier looked apologetic. "I'm sorry to be the cause of trouble between you two."

She waved that away, then she regarded Xavier pensively. "Are you sure you *want* Ben handling this?"

Xavier looked distracted. "I don't prefer it...but I agree with the low-profile approach he's offering and I'm sending *you* to keep an eye on things."

Andi offered her hand for him to clasp. "I'll do my best."

Xavier's gaze became distant, as if listening to something far away. "You better go on. Logan's waiting on you."

She smiled her thanks and dashed outside, where she found Logan was leaning against the Firebird's front fender, puffing on one of the Jamaican cigars he and Jack so liked. When he saw her, he impatiently exhaled a stream of smoke. "About time."

She walked around the car and quietly got in, knowing he needed cool-off time. Logan started the Firebird up and burned rubber, fish-tailing around Xavier's end of the mansion, then roared down the driveway and out onto the highway. Luckily, no Sheriff's were in the vicinity.

Once home, Logan marched promptly to the refrigerator, grabbed a long-neck, plopped in the easy-chair, grabbed the remote and turned on the TV. Andi patiently hung up her coat, then stood beside his chair. "Feel like talking?"

Eyes glued to the TV, he just snorted. "What's there to talk about? Seems like everythin's already been decided," then swigged a gulp of beer.

"I think there's still plenty to talk about," Andi replied, lightly combing her fingers through the top of his hair, "Like what we're afraid of or worried about and how much we'll miss each other." With that, she pressed a kiss on top his head, then went upstairs to their bedroom and pulled out her suitcase to begin packing.

Logan would talk *when* Logan was ready to talk.

About thirty minutes later, she heard him stomping up the stairs, then spared him a glance as he stalked into the bedroom. His looks were still grim, so she just returned to folding various items of clothing into her suitcase.

Behind her, she heard the bed creak as he sat down, followed by the thump of first one boot, then another landing on the floor. Then silence. Andi didn't let it faze her. She started humming.

"So," Logan finally grumbled, "what's gonna keep you from ending up in exactly the same situation as Jean and Scott?"

Andi finished folding a blouse and turned. She found his surly look charming in its own way. She went over and sat beside him on the bed. "Well, it's not likely," she replied, looping an arm around his waist, "since I'm just going there to find Jean and Scott, not investigate Tau's internment camp."

"Not good enough."

Andi perched her chin on his shoulder. "Do you know what your problem is?"

He turned his face toward hers, which putting them nose to nose. "What?"

"You just don't like it that you can't be my personal body guard."

He humphed derisively. "Is that so?"

"Or maybe it's just you don't want to you might miss me like crazy."

"Oh, really?" His eyes glinted a bit of humor now.

"Yes, really," she replied, offering her lips for a kiss, but he only gave her a peck and pulled back, serious once more.

"I'll let you go--on one condition."

Andi arched her brows expectantly at him, amused by his determination to have a say.

"Promise me you won't go anywhere near that internment camp," he said. "No matter what."

"Alright. I promise."

He was okay after that. So okay, he took her breath away, his passion as extreme as his anger had been only moments before.

In Turkey, it didn't take long for Scott's intestines to force him to have to urgently wake Paul for help getting to the toilet area, which he'd willingly offered to do anytime Scott needed. "Sorry," Scott murmured, "I have to go."

Paul just heaved to his feet and took Scott's elbow. He lead him to the far end of the room where the smell of human dung and urine was strongest, stopped, turned him around and said, "This is it. I will turn around and you say when you are finished."

Scott hurriedly undid his jump-suit, glad he couldn't see how exposed he was doing his business here in the open. When he felt done, he hissed, "Toilet paper?"

"I'm sorry, there is none," Paul whispered. "We must make-do without."

Scott grimaced, straightened and pulled his jump-suit back up. It was going to be a long, nasty couple of days.

"I'm done." He felt Paul grip his elbow and escort him back to their pallet, where they settled back to sleep.

Paul was swiftly snoring, while he shivered and slept only fitfully, dreaming of streams of cool water. He had to wake Paul for three more trips and, when he wasn't sleeping, Scott tried to focus on what might be happening back in Westchester, working out an imaginary step by step process of what his team might be doing about rescuing them. It seemed the only constructive and hopeful thing to think about. Worrying about Jean or thinking about food only tormented him.

### **Day Three**

Too soon it was morning roll-call and he heaved himself to his feet beside Paul and Kaya, shoving the blanket-strip that covered his eyes up his forehead so it appeared to be a head-band until after the warden left. Then he pulled it back down over his eyes and had Paul walk him down to the toilet end of the ward to take a leak. Once there, he could hear others were doing the same, the steamy smell of urine strong in his nostrils. Then he and Paul returned to the pallet, to sit or doze the endless hours away until rations came. By then Scott's stomach was so empty it was gnawing on his backbone. He drank the water first, then dabbed the bread in the broth until he'd devoured it and, conscious of fluid loss from the diarrhea, tried to drink some of the soup, but his gag reflex kicked in after about three mouthfuls forcing him to quit. He set the bowl side. "Here," he said to Paul. "I'm finished."

In her ward, Jean spent her morning after roll-call with Ajda, the older, pregnant woman, trying to make her comfortable. Her symptoms were worrisome. From face to ankle, Ajda was swollen and her labored breathing signaling a condition critically dangerous to both Ajda *and* child. Jean also had lucked into a willing volunteer for an assistant, named Nisa, who also translated her poor French into better Turkish. That's how she'd learned exactly how Ajda, who was over forty, had come to be pregnant in such miserable place. Apparently she'd been trading

"favors" with one of the wardens for better food, clothing and personal items until about two months ago, when he stopped coming around. Whether he'd been promoted, transferred or quit, no one knew.

When noon rations came, Jean observed the soup was exactly the same as yesterday's, a sort of watered down version of refried beans with puddles of grease floating on top and a smattering of small chunks of either potato or turnip. Hardly a sustaining meal. She grimaced and tipped it up to drink, then hesitated as she noticed a dead bug carcass floating in it. Tossing it aside, she forced herself to down the soup.

Word that she was a doctor got around quickly and Nisa kept her busy treating strings of patients suffering everything from wounds and colds to what she was pretty sure was tuberculosis. Unfortunately, she could do little more than offer sympathetic examinations. What she would have given for just some basic soap and water.

While afternoon wore on in Turkey, it was still early morning in Westchester and Professor Xavier was seated at the card-table once more with Rogue, happily coloring as they had every morning after breakfast for the past three days. He had, of course, brought her up to date on all events upstairs like Jubilee's return without Trent, Pyro's night out in the Trans Am and the subsequent discipline Scott dished out, the mutant internment camp in Turkey, Scott and Jean's mission there, their sudden disappearance and that Andi would be leaving later in the day to look for them. Sessions with her were going well and he was bonding with Rogue in a way he seldom had opportunity to do with his students anymore, a bond like he'd developed with Jean and Scott. As he colored with Rogue, it reminded him of so many similar times coloring with Jean when she'd been a little girl and made him long to have her safely home again.

"All your friends ask how you are everyday," he told Rogue. "They want to know when they might see you."

Rogue just shrugged a shoulder and answered without lifting her eyes. "I don't know why. Ya'll should be mad at me."

"Why do you think so?"

"Cuz, ya'll did so much fo' me and I kicked ya'll in the face by runnin' away."

"No one seems mad. I'm certainly not." He heard her marker stop moving and raised his eyes to meet her eyes searching his, seeking to discern whether he was speaking the truth. He smiled at her. "No, I'm not just saying that."

She smiled ever so slightly and returned to coloring. "I'm jus' not ready yet," she replied, answering his earlier question. He just nodded and kept coloring.

When Andi's doorbell abruptly rang at one-forty, Logan was still lounging under the bed sheets, happily reading the newspaper's comic section, while Andi was showering and dressing. He glanced at the clock. "I thought he said two," he grumbled, tossing the paper aside. Getting up, he scooped his sweatpants off the floor, pulling them on as he walked. Andi popped her head out of the bathroom in time to see him shimmy them up over his hips before he disappeared out the bedroom door.

Going downstairs, he jerked the front door open. "You're early," he announced testily to Ben Weir, who was standing on their front step with his hands shoved in the pockets of his dark blue overcoat.

He just brushed unceremoniously past Logan into the living room. "I'll wait," he replied flatly and made himself at home on the sofa.

Logan glowered at him as he shut the door, then dashed two-steps at a time back upstairs. A few minutes later he returned, fully dressed now, proceeding Andi down the stairs, carrying her coat, suitcase and day pack.

Hearing them, Weir stood and walked around to meet them at the door, his eyes glancing approvingly over Andi's mode of dress. She looked very European in her long black skirt, creamy turtleneck sweater, knee-high black boots and black beret set at an angle above her shoulder-length chestnut curls.

Logan thrust Andi's suitcase and coat into Weir's hands. "You carry these," he ordered, then opened the door and ushered him out ahead of them.

Weir silently carried her stuff to the rear of his Jag, where he opened the trunk and stowed them inside while Logan escorted Andi to the passenger door. There, he set her day pack on the cars roof and drew her into his arms

for a good-bye kiss--and he made it long just to annoy Weir.

Weir just regarded this sullenly as he shut the trunk, then got in his car and started the engine as a hint he was ready to go.

Pulling back, Andi gave Logan's mutton-chop an affectionate pat. "I'll miss you."

"Me, too," he replied. Reaching behind his neck, he unfastened his dog-tag chain. "I want you to take this," he said as he re-fastened it around her neck.

Andi clutched the tags and looked into his golden hazel eyes, touched he was entrusting her with such a precious connection to his identity.

He tapped her hand. "You have to bring them back now, hear?"

She nodded solemnly and, overcome with the glow of love, threw her arms around his neck, hugging him as if heart and soul depended upon it. Then releasing him, Logan opened Jag door for her. She got in and he passed her the day-pack from the roof, then squatted down to eye-level with her. Cupping her cheek in his hand, he said, "Remember your promise."

Placing her hand over his, she replied, "I will."

Logan glanced past her to Weir, who had his head turned away, seeming to find great fascination in the town houses across the street and gave him a finger-jab in the arm.

Jerking around, Weir regarded Logan as if he were something rather smelly on his shoe.

"You'd better take care of my Angel and bring her back in one piece," Logan warned, pointing at his nose. "And no taking her anywhere near that mutant camp. Got me, Bennie?" Then jabbed Weir's arm in cadence with each word he said as he added, "Cuz-if-anything- happens-to-her-I'll-be-slicing-you-into-lunch-meat."

Weir stared at the offending finger, then at Logan, reddening. His lips tightened into a thin line, but he only nodded and looked away.

Andi arched her brows at Logan, questioning his need to antagonize Weir, but he just smirked, winked, gave her one last smooch, then reluctantly stood and closed the door.

As soon as he heard the door shut, Weir put the car into drive and pulled away, leaving Logan standing in the clumps of melting snow.

Inside the Jag the silence was palpable. Andi fastened her seat-belt and drew out a pack of spearmint gum from her pack. "You know, Ben," she said, "we're going to be together for awhile, so we might as well make some kind of peace." Then offered him a stick of gum. "Gum?"

He glanced at her, at the proffered gum, then at her again and finally nodded. "Fair enough," he replied, taking it.

"So what's the plan?"

"You have the photos?"

She patted her pack.

"First we're flying from JFK to Frankfurt, then Max and Sam will pick us up and fly us to Samsun. A Turkish lawyer I've contacted will meet us and from there we'll build a strategy, hire local P.I.'s, visit the hotel in Carsamba and whatever else we need to do to locate the Summer's."

"Is this lawyer someone you know?"

"No, I did it the old-fashioned way. I called attorney's in Samsun, got recommendations and just narrowed it down to this guy, Alican Keles. He's got a good reputation, is old enough to be experienced and has a decent court record."

"All that may be good for an ordinary case, but ours is on the delicate side," she suggested dubiously.

"Don't worry, I have lots of experience at this sort of thing," and threw her a smile. "And you *can* trust me."

Andi wasn't reassured. She remembered all too well that this was the same guy, who only a few months before, had tried to passing himself off to her as something he wasn't. On the other hand, he was referring to trusting his *professional* skill in this instance. She decided to drop that line of questioning. "So what went wrong?" she asked,

referring to Jean and Scott's arrest.

Weir shook his head. "I don't know. Their cover was air-tight. I even had personnel files for them planted in the Disease Control Center and World Health Organization just in case anyone ran a background check."

"What about internal leaks?"

"On my side...or yours?"

Andi scowled at him. "Don't be ridiculous. The only thing anyone knew at Xavier's was that Jean and Scott were going to Turkey to investigate Tau Omega. I mean your side. Who knew their destination? Their hotel? Someone from Tau might've gotten to them."

"No, Andi. They didn't. I check my people so thoroughly, I know how often they call their own Mom's."

"Ah, and it's those same fine security protocols that kept the Spider from using you to recruit me and Jack."

He looked at her sharply. "Ouch. I thought we had a peace treaty?"

Andi took a deep breath and made herself relax. "Right. Sorry."

"First, we'll get to Samsun, then we'll start piecing together what happened and why."

Reluctantly, Andi nodded and drew out her cross-word puzzle book from her pack. Ben was right, of course. They'd solve nothing arguing theories. She'd have to wait until she could investigate the facts.

Weir interrupted her thoughts. "But one thing we will do," he said, "we *will* find Scott and Jean." Andi looked at him. "You have my word."

#### **Day Four**

Even as Weir and Andi were on their way to the Laguardia Airport, in Turkey it was already the wee hours of Friday morning. Wrapped in his meager blanket, Scott was too cold and hungry to sleep. He just lay listening to the rise and fall of unintelligible conversations going on around him and smelling the ever-present aroma of Turkish cigarettes. According to Paul, family visitors were allowed to provide inmates such things, which is how Paul slept so comfortably behind him now. Apparently his wife dropped by with fresh thermal underwear about every other month during winter and Paul, who gave his old ones away, had cheerily suggested Scott might want his present set the next time his wife visited. Of course, Scott was confident he wouldn't be here *that* long and kept his mind busy strategizing his own rescue, imagining everything from Professor Xavier arriving with a simple diplomatic release to a more explosive team rescue. Just then, a dire rumble in his intestines warned Scott of impending diarrhea and he hurriedly shook Paul awake for an escort to the far end of the room, still embarrassed to have to ask help for such a basic function.

Jean, in her ward, lay curled on the dirty floor, eyes squeezed shut against the ceiling lights relentless glare, shivering. Unlike Scott, she wasn't calculating the passage of time or contemplating rescue. She simply believed the Professor would come for them in due time and, until then, she would make the best of things. At roll call, she got up, drew her blanket around her shoulders like a shawl and hurried to Adja's side to help her waddle into line, worried that mother and baby would certainly die if something wasn't done *soon*. She studied the middle-aged warden calling roll from a clipboard, then appraised the two armed and obviously bored younger wardens behind him. Choosing the older warden first, Jean targeted his mind, carefully narrowing and focusing her thoughts just as she'd so often done on Capitol Hill with the Professor, when they would plant subtle, mutant-favorable "suggestions" into passing lawmakers minds. This time, though, she wasn't projecting words, since she couldn't speak Turkish, but rather a strong sense of concern for Adja's condition and succeeded in making him glance Adja's way a brief moment. Then she focused again, aiming now at a younger guard and sending the same impression again. He also spared Adja a brief glance just before all three left, then she and Nisa helped Adja back back to her pallet, Jean feeling a momentary guilt about using her powers against Scott's orders, but compassion for Adja drove it quickly away.

As Weir's jet was on approach, Andi peered out a window to view Samsun. It was a bustling modern city

sprawled along the edge of the Black Sea on one side with a range of mountains behind. She observed a four-lane highway running along the shore line and a dozen freight ships sitting a dock awaiting their loads. Red-tile roofs seemed to top every building as far as she could see.

Upon landing, Andi grabbed her bag, shouldered her day-pack and walked beside Ben into the international wing of the terminal. Once through customs, they made their way into the main terminal where they found a cheerful, thirtyish-looking man with light, curly hair in a dark winter overcoat holding a sign reading "Mr. Ben Weir" in red marker. They headed his way. "Mr. Keles?" Ben asked.

Alican Keles shook Weir's hand enthusiastically. "Yes. Welcome to my country." He looked at Andi. "And this is your associate..."

"Madame Andi Ravannisky," Weir finished.

Andi offered him her hand to shake, noting he had blue eyes.

He smiled warmly. "I am sorry, Madame, that the circumstances of your visit aren't more pleasant, but I'll do all I can to make everything as comfortable as possible."

His gaze was earnest and Andi immediately felt at ease "Thank-you."

"Please allow me," he said, indicating her bag and day-pack and she gave them into his hands. "Come. My car is this way," he said. He led them out of the terminal and through a walkway into a cold parking garage to a silver, four-door Mercedes. He first seated her, holding the rear passenger door for her, then went to the trunk with Weir, loaded their things, then both got in front. Keles started up and drove out of the airport, merging into a stream of highway traffic. He glanced over his shoulder. "Are you hungry?"

"I am," Andi replied. She'd only had coffee and a Honey Bun earlier and that was long gone.

Keles looked at Weir, who returned a confirming nod. "Good," Keles smiled happily. "First, we eat then I will take you to your hotel."

While Keles navigated through the busy Samsun traffic, Andy gazed out at row after row of high-rises, the edges of their red tile roofs bright in the pale winter sunlight. Soon they were downtown, the streets filled with cars, bicycles, scooters and people on foot clutching their coats tightly against the cold. Overhead, a profusion of gaudy, foreign signs announced the wares and services being offered in various shops and offices and the streets were dotted with food vendors and handicapped beggars seeking alms.

Finally, Keles turned down a side street and parked, then guided them inside a small restaurant where eager young waiters in black pants and matching vests buttoned over white shirts rushed to take their coats. They were seated at a table draped with a pristine white tablecloth with dinner settings for four, the white napkins folded and standing upright like ghosts in the center of each plate. They sat, a waiter whisking away unnecessary table settings away while another handed them menus. Andi flipped hers open, scanned it, then set it aside.

"What would you like to drink?" Keles asked. "Coca-cola? Juice? Coffee?"

"Bottled water, please," Andi replied.

"Me, too," Weir agreed.

Keles repeated their orders to the waiter briskly in Turkish and he promptly disappeared. "Have you eaten Turkish food before?" he asked.

"Not in a long time," Weir replied.

Andi shook her head. Turkish was one place she'd never been before.

"May I order for you then?" Keles asked, clearly wanting to do so.

Andi nodded agreeably and Weir just gestured with his hand for Keles to go ahead. The menu was in Turkish anyway. Two waiters returned. One carried a tray with two bottled waters, a bottled coke for Keles and three glasses, while the other brought a plate neatly stacked with sliced bread. Keles ordered their food, then they collected the menus and disappeared again. Andi helped herself to a bottled water, skipping the glass.

"Still, you hear nothing from your son and his wife?" Keles asked conversationally.

Andi replied without missing a beat. "No, nothing." Explaining Scott as her son was what she and Weir had agreed upon as the simplest explanation for her presence.

"And the hotel people said they were arrested?"

Weir answered. "My pilot talked to them and that is what they said."

"Then she went to the police and they told her they had no record of any such arrest?" Keles said, reiterating the facts.

"Correct," Weir replied, pausing as a waiter arrived with their salads, arranged them swiftly, then retreated. Andi put a forkful in her mouth, sampling the parsley, tomato and onion mix, while carefully watching Keles watching Keles face as he processed what they were telling him.

"But why did they go to Carsamba? Especially now, when there is so much trouble there?" he asked, referring to the nearby internment camp.

"I just gave Scott and Jean the use of my jet for a few days as a wedding present," Weir suavely explained, then shrugged. "Where they went--that was their own choice."

Andi smiled agreeably and continued this rehearsed explanation. "Scott and Jean are young. Maybe they were just looking for a little excitement." She pushed her empty salad plate aside. She was more hungry than she realized.

Keles looked dubious.

"What matters," Weir asserted, "is they got themselves into some kind of trouble and now we don't know where they are."

A waiter whisked away their salad plates even as another arrived with several plated loaded with molded mounds of white rice and several shish-kabobs.

Keles slid the meat off the skewer with a fork onto his rice. "Hopefully, it is only a matter of misplaced information," he commented.

Andi traded glances with Ben, as they both knew it was not. After that, they conversed more personally until waiters returned to whisk their empty plates away.

"Would you like coffee?" Keles asked. Andi and Ben nodded and he gave orders to the next young waiter who showed up, while Ben pulled the photos of Jean and Scott out of his briefcase. He offered them to Keles, who studied them.

"They are attractive young people," he observed, "I am quite sure there is some police officer in Carsamba who will remember them."

"Exactly why I want you to hire some local P.I's," Weir said. "They can talk to the police officers off-duty, so they won't be on the defensive."

Their coffee's arrived along with three plates of Turkish baklava thickly strewn with the green crumbles of crushed pistachios. The coffee was in tiny white demitasse cups each painted with a pink rose blossom and served on matching saucers.

"I have already contacted an agency," Keles affirmed as he slid the photos into a inner pocket of his jacket.

Andi picked up one of the tiny cups, fondly imagining Logan trying to manage such a teeny cup and enjoyed enjoyed the baklava.

After lunch, and Keles drove them to their hotel, a Sheraton, built on a hillside facing the Black Sea and over-looking downtown Samsun. Pulling up in front of the main entrance, he popped the trunk, then made sure the bellboy had all their things, even tipping him for them. They were about to follow the boy inside when Keles stopped them. Hurriedly he pulled out a business card and scribbled something on it, then handed it to Weir. "You *must* come to my home for dinner tonight. Give this to the taxi and he will bring you."

Weir hesitated. "You don't have to do that. We can eat here."

"No, no. The hotel restaurant is fine, but I insist. You come to my house. My wife is an excellent cook."

Weir glanced at her and Andi gave him a nod. He pocketed the card. "What time?"

Keles consulted his watch. "Seven o'clock?"

Weir glanced her way again, and Andi, thinking that would give her time to rest and call Logan, nodded.

"Alright," Weir said. "We'll come."

"Good," Keles said, seizing Weir's hand and pumping it enthusiastically. "I will take care of everything and see you at seven," and giving them a final wave, got in his car and drove away.

Their rooms were on the sixth floor. Andi swept it with her eyes, taking it in. It was decorated in tones of blue with two single beds instead of one double with a framed print of flower bouquets mounted on the wall above each. The curtain was open on the window and Andi went to it and gazed across the city-scape to the distant deep blue of the Black Sea. With a sigh she turned away and pulled out her Iridium phone, figuring she had time to check in with Logan, then get a nap and a bath before dinner.

In Westchester, Logan was sprawled on the sofa lightly snoring when the sudden ring of the phone woke him. Without opening his eyes, he simply seized it from its charger on the coffee table, where he'd put it so he wouldn't have to get up. "Hello," he mumbled.

"It's me."

He sat up, squinting at the time on the charger. It was five a.m. "You okay?"

"Yes. It's good to hear your voice."

"Yeah. Is that slime-ball treating you okay? Not hitting on you is he?"

Andi laughed lightly at the idea. "Ben was a little sulky at first, but he got over it. He's been very polite."

"He'd better be."

She laughed again. "I love you, too," then told him all about their meeting with the lawyer and he about things at school and how he'd been hanging out with Jack watching sports the past two evenings. As their conversation concluded, Logan said, "No going near that mutant camp, right?"

"Right. I'll call you tomorrow."

"If you don't, I'll make Jack fly me over pronto and drag you back!"

She laughed merrily and hung up. Logan set the phone back in the charger, stood and stretched, making joints snap and pop. "Well, since I'm awake anyway..." he grumbled, "might as well do something," and, throwing on his jacket, drove over early to school.

Three hours later, Jack's cheerful whistling disturbed his snooze on the lopsided sofa in their gym office. He squinted open an eye, just enough to peer ill-humoredly at his pal, who was grinning down on him. "Do ya havta be so cheerful all the time?" he sniped.

Jack pulled a box of donuts from under his arm and held them out for him to see. "I thought I'd find you here, so I brought breakfast."

Prying himself into a sitting position, he seized the box and hungrily stuffed half of powdered donut into his mouth.

"Been here all night?" Jack asked.

"Na," he mumbled around the donut. "Andi called. Woke me up."

"So, only half the night. And she got there okay, I take it."

Logan was already selecting another donut. "Yup."

Jack smirked. "She hasn't even been gone a day and you're already miserable without her."

Logan steadfastly focused on eating, unwilling to admit such a thing, particularly to Jack. Jack just laughed and grabbed the coffee urn to go fill it with water.

"Hurry up with that coffee," Logan snapped.

Jack paused at the office door just long enough to waggle an impertinent middle finger at him.

"And keep your opinions to yourself," he called, just to get the last word, then pensively examined the fat jelly donut in his hand. Jack was wrong. It wasn't just having Andi gone that bothered him---it was the fact she was alone with Ben Weir and he wasn't there to keep an eye on him.

## **Day Five**

Scott couldn't sleep. He just lay there, stiff with cold, thinking. It hadn't been a good day. He'd expected at least

some hint of rescue by today, even just a message--but there'd been nothing. He consoled himself that one more day wasn't unreasonable. Lots of things could have happened to cause a delay. Problems at home with the students. Unexpected mutant activity somewhere that needed immediate attention. Legal obstacles. "*Lots of things*," he told himself.

On her ward during morning roll-call, Jean once more tried projecting an urgent concern about Adja's condition into the guard's minds and again saw both their eyes flick toward Adja in response, yet they still left as soon as roll was finished. All she could do was to keep trying.

On the way to Carsamba Andi rode in the back seat meditatively looking out on passing scenery. It was now the second day of their search for Scott and Jean and it'd taken nearly all day for Mr. Keles to set up a meeting with the two hotel clerks who'd witnessed Jean and Scott's "alleged" arrest. Apparently, the Carsamba police were just as interested in their testimonies and had already questioned them rather zealously, being none too happy to have ostensibly "arrested" then "lost" two Americans in the middle an already tense international situation with the internment camp. It'd taken Keles a good while to persuade the two men and the hotel management to allow them to talk to them as well. It was nearly dark when they arrived in Carsamba, at the hotel and Andi gave the area a quick mental scan for mutants as she got out of the car, but there were none. There was a slender, nondescript guy leaning against the wall adjacent to the hotel entrance reading a newspaper, who looked up at their arrival, folded his paper, then approached Keles as if he knew him.

Andi immediately guessed he was the P.I. He and Keles traded rapid Turkish, then she watched him lead the way to a blue sedan parked about four parallel spaces down from the hotel. It could only be Scott and Jean's rental and she followed, then peered in through the passenger side window, noting a large manila envelope tucked between the passenger seat and the emergency brake.

"Key?" Weir offered, dangling a duplicate key he'd gotten from the rental agency in front of her face.

Andi took it, then walked around to the driver's side, opened the door and popped the trunk latch. "Check the trunk," she ordered, even as she got in and searched the interior. Finding nothing of interest, she just grabbed the envelope and checked its contents, which proved to be just the directions to Carsamba and the internment camp, then got out. Weir was just closing the trunk. "Anything?" she asked.

"Nothing." His eyes fell on the manila envelope in her hand.

"Just their itinerary information," she explained, even as she tossed the key to the P.I., who deftly caught it. He was no doubt going to return the car to the agency. After that, she and Weir followed Keles into the Carsamba hotel.

The lobby was small, but clean and clearly had seen more prosperous times. The carpet was thread-bare in spots and the walls were yellowed from years of cigarette smoke, though someone had tried to make it more hospitable through the additional of bright calico curtains and assorted house plants.

Keles traded brief conversation with the counter clerk before saying, "This way, my friends."

They followed him and he was following a stout, neatly-suited gentleman Andi guessed had to be the night manager. He guided them around behind the front desk into a windowless, cubby-hole of an office containing only a black metal desk with a aged PC on it, two wooden office chairs and a elderly xerox machine standing against the side wall.

The manager smilingly offered her the chair behind the desk and Weir sat in the other right next to her while the manager left to scrounge up another seat for Mr. Keles. When he returned, he not only brought a chair, which he placed beside the Xerox for him, but two very nervous looking clerks who each had brought a wooden stool. Then the manager backed out of the room, closing the door after him, leaving just enough room for the two clerks to arrange their stools in front of the door and sit down.

Andi looked them over. One man was older, in his fifties, his dark hair streaked with gray and a huge gray mustache. The other was a swarthy young man of about twenty with a long nose and gold-rimmed glasses. Both

were neatly attired in hotel livery. Keles gave them a quick briefing in Turkish, introducing Weir and herself, their eyes flicking her way when he mentioned her name, no doubt explaining her as Scott's mother. And it had the desired effect. Both men's eyes softened immediately from suspicion to sympathy.

"How's their English?" Andi asked Keles who repeated her question to them, then translated their replies, indicating first Mr. Mustache, "Mr. Benim speaks very little, but Mr. Prensi says his is fair."

Weir said, "What about German or French?"

Again, Keles translated. Overhearing "*Français*" in their replies, Andi already knew they did speak it. Immediately she rattled off a question in French. "Who escorted the police to Mr and Mrs. Summers room last Tuesday night?"

"I did," Mr. Mustache replied, also in French.

"This one escorted the police," Andi informed Weir, who could speak German well, but not French.

"Ask him how many."

"How many were there?" she repeated to Mr. Mustache.

"Four. Two police and two soldiers."

Andi gave that info to Weir, who rapidly scribbled it down. "They were all in uniforms, I take it," he said.

"Were they in uniform?" Andi asked.

Mr. Mustache nodded vigorously.

"Could you tell what service or unit the soldiers were with?"

He shook his head. "There have been soldiers all over town ever since the internment camp and they looked like the same soldiers."

Andi told Weir and he made a note. "Let's find out how nosy he was," he said. "Ask him if he did any eavesdropping after he took them to the Summers room."

"So," she asked Mr. Mustache, "Did you leave immediately or did you stay and listen?"

His cheeks reddened as he answered. "I pretended to leave, then came back. They left the door open, so I stood several paces away and listened."

"What did you hear?"

"I heard someone say they found drugs. That's when I came back downstairs."

Andi turned to Weir, struggling to contain the sudden anger she felt, her eyes burning like fiery emeralds as she leaned in close to hiss, "Jean and Scott were framed with planted drugs!"

Her impassioned looks awoke sudden forgotten ardor as he met her eyes, but didn't know whether to blame his sudden perspiration on that or just the closeness of the room. "They probably brought it with them," he whispered, trying to stay matter-of-fact. "Their window of opportunity was too narrow to do much else. Which one of these guys saw them bringing the Summer's through the lobby?"

Andi had to take a deep breath to keep her anger in check and asked the question.

Mr. Longnose shyly raised his hand. "I did," he replied in French. "Your friends were in handcuffs."

"Did you see anything else, such as the drugs they claimed to have found?"

He nodded. "One soldier was carrying a brick-sized plastic bag filled with something white, like cocaine or maybe heroin."

Andi translated to Weir, then addressed Mr. Mustache. "And where were you?"

"In here, telling the manager what was happening."

"Did any of you look out the window or door after them when they left the lobby?"

"I did," young Mr. Longnose replied.

"Did you see their vehicles?"

He shook his head. "They were parked too far down the block for me to see and I was afraid to step out the door."

"And neither of you saw nor heard anything else?"

Both shook their heads. Andi looked at Weir. "Is there anything else we want to ask?"

He scanned his notes, then shook his head. "We're done." He gave a nod to Keles, who thanked the gentlemen profusely for their help, then ushered them out the door, their stools in hand. Weir loosened his tie as he stood and moved out of the way so Andi to get out from behind the desk.

As soon as the clerks were out the door, Keles closed it and faced them soberly. "If drug trafficking is the charge, clearing your children will be most difficult."

"Alican," Andi said, "I swear to you, Jean and Scott were not drug-users nor were they carrying drugs with them."

"I know, Madame, and I believe you, but once a criminal charge is on paper here, it is not what we believe that matters, but what is written."

"Ah," Andi replied, "but where is that paperwork, since the Carsamba police didn't even know they'd arrested Jean and Scott except for the testimony of these two hotel clerks?"

"That is the puzzle," Keles agreed.

"A technicality," Weir said as he re-opened the office door, "that can be made to work in our favor. Let's go, I'm burning up." He ushered Keles and Andi out ahead of him and falling in behind them, allowed himself to visually appreciate Andi's figure. The memory of her refusal to marry him still had a bitter taste. He never liked to lose.

It was late when Keles let them off at the Sheridan in Samsun and Weir went directly to his room, where he took a shower, then lay in bed in the dark staring at the ceiling sullenly, his fingertip idly tracing the tiny claw scar on his throat, knowing that even now Andi was calling Westchester, calling *him*, his vile competitor, the one they called *Wolverine*.

*Continued in Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Part 3*