

-Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Pt 5 by B. Nickerson {Rated PG-13}

Synopsis: Xavier sets standards for Gambit and Scott is finally rescued--but will he ever be the same?

{All names, locations and businesses are products of imagination or used fictitiously and resemblances to persons living or dead is coincidental.

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Note: "Ahbap" is pronounced "ah-bee" thru out.

Though Scott didn't want to move, the next bout of coughing forced him to sit up and hug his ribs in an effort to brace the spasms, but it did little good. It still left him gasping and sweating from pain for several minutes before it eased up and he could check himself for other injuries, but only found his right ring finger and pinky swollen, probably broken during the clubbing. He then examined the metal panel that sealed him, feeling it with his good hand. Its surface was covered with a multitude of small, pencil-sized holes, probably for ventilation. He felt above his head, finding the coarse underside of what he could only guess was the prisons foundation just a few inches above him. Standing obviously wasn't an option. Under him was cold hard-packed dirt, it's chill already insidiously working its way up his tail bone. The air smelled faintly of urine and feces, telling him he wasn't the first tenant and that he didn't want to go feeling around in dark corners. He hugged himself as another coughing spell came on, it's force racking his body, every spasm agony. It was in the quiet afterwards that he noticed a sudden soft, skittering sound and he tensed with dread. It was most likely rats. He snatched a thong off his foot and held it at the ready as he imagined hordes of glowing eyes watching him, just waiting for an opportunity to gnaw on human flesh.

In Westchester, as soon as the Thanksgiving football game was over, Logan tagged along with Jack to Professor Xavier's private quarters. Apparently, the Professor wanted to see Jack about something, and he had nothing better to do. When they reached Xavier's outer doors, Jack knocked.

"Come in." Xavier called.

They found the Professor seated with his back to the crackling fire in his wheelchair, looking relaxed in a velvety blue-quilted robe. He had a decanter of brandy and three snifters arranged on a silver tray on the coffee table waiting for them.

Logan flopped in the far corner of the sofa, while Jack sat on the end nearest Xavier.

Xavier lifted the decanter. "Brandy?" he asked.

"Sure," Jack said.

Xavier filled a snifter with the gold-colored liquor and handed it to Jack, then looked at Logan with a questioning brow.

Logan gave a nod, then rose enough to fetch the snifter from Xavier's and settled back into his sofa corner.

Filling his own, Xavier lifted the snifter in a toast. "L'Chayim," he said, gave it a swirl, then took a sip. Seeing Jack do the same, Logan followed suite with a swirl and a sip. The fluid ran rich and smooth down his throat, and liking it, he tossed the remainder down in a gulp. Only afterward did he recognize Xavier and Jack staring at him with amused expressions and still full snifters. "What?" he demanded.

"More?" Xavier asked.

Logan shook his head. He didn't like being the butt of other peoples amusement. "Too classy for my blood," he replied, setting the snifter aside.

Xavier's fury black cat, Celine, chose that moment to stroll into the room and promptly elected Logan's lap as her place to sit. He scratched her behind the ears as she settled down, purring loudly. Animals seemed drawn to him, whether he liked them or not, though he liked cats well enough. They had a peaceful quality.

"There's no accounting for taste," Jack observed.

"Jealous," Logan countered.

Xavier cleared his throat to garner their attention. "I have a favor to ask of you, Jack. I need Gambit ferried about town tomorrow and I was wondered if you'd be willing to do that for me?"

"Sure. Where's he need to go?"

“A hairdresser and a thrift shop for starters.”

Jack nodded. “No problem. What time?”

“Say, ten o'clock?”

“Any hair place in particular?”

“No, just any walk-in type should suffice. I'll be giving him precise instructions in the morning, but what I want is for him to come back looking entirely different.”

“And you want me to make sure that happens?”

“Precisely.”

“That sounds like this guy is in more than just a *little* trouble,” Logan interjected. “What's he done anyway?”

“I'd rather let Gambit explain that when he feels ready. For now, the thing to know is he's asked for help and I've agreed to give it.”

Logan snorted.

“Of course,” Xavier added, “he already suspects there's more to us than simply a school, but he doesn't know quite what, which is why I'm allowing him to nose about, within certain limits, unimpeded. I *want* him to figure us out a bit and, when the time is right, I hope to persuade him to stay on with us as part of the team.”

Logan rolled his eyes heavenward. It always came to that. “What makes you think he'll even *want* to to?”

“He has the right heart for the job, I think, but mostly he's got no place else to go.”

“He's that stuck?” Jack asked.

Xavier nodded.

“Lucky us,” Logan muttered.

Day Twelve, Friday

Scott spent his time in his confined underground space shifting through various sitting positions, since, because of the rats, he was terrified of laying down. Besides, sitting up accommodated his coughing spells better, but the monotony was dreadful and the silence, deafening. He missed Ersay's friendly prattle and the general sense of other people being around. Here, he was utterly and suffocatingly alone, like a seed buried in the earth. His stomach burned and growled weakly for sustenance and his mouth felt like a desert. He couldn't even drum up enough spit to swallow and didn't know which would drive him to madness first: boredom or thirst.

Meanwhile, at the Sheridan hotel restaurant, Andi and Weir were in a booth, each preoccupied with after-lunch reading. Ben was engrossed in the New York Times and Andi was struggling to keep her attention focused on reading the book Mr. Keles had procured for her. It was one of a stack of dogged-eared English novels Keles had located for her, probably at Weir's request. She found herself reading and re-reading the same page over as her mind kept wandering off, wondering when Keles might finally 'discover' Scott's location. It seemed to be taking an inordinate amount of time. She didn't know how many jails or prisons might lay within target range, but did know Mr. Keles was a thorough man who would tirelessly check every single possibility. It was just all this infernal waiting around that was driving her crazy. Seeing she wasn't getting anywhere in the book, she lay it aside with a heavy sigh that made Weir glance over his newspaper at her and peered into her empty coffee cup, then around the room for a convenient server.

“Where's one of those servers when you want one?” she carped. “They don't give us a moments peace when we're eating!”

Weir merely smiled and resumed reading. Suddenly, his Iridium rang and he pulled it out. He glanced at the caller ID. “It's Keles,” he informed her as he flipped it open and put it to his ear. “Yes, Alican.”

Andi listened with hopeful interest.

“Good,” Weir said, giving her a thumbs up. “That's really good.”

She sat back, relieved. He'd found Scott.

“Right,” Weir replied, then after a longer pause, said, “Okay, I'll be right there.” He flipped the phone shut,

tucked it away and folded his newspaper aside. "Well, we're in. Alican just got a fax from a prison in Tokat confirming our young Mr. Summers is definitely there."

"So, when can we get him?" Andi asked eagerly.

"Well...that's going to be the tricky part."

Andi's hope immediately sank. "What's the catch?"

"Apparently, it's a maximum security F-class prison and the tricky part is its jurisdiction. It's not just under the Ministries this time. It's also under the military and, unfortunately, we'll have to have clearances from both."

Andi could only imagine how long *that* would take. "*Maximum security?*" she repeated incredulously. "What about seeing him? They should have some kind of visitation, shouldn't they?"

Weir slid out of the booth. "Probably. I'll find out, but right now, I need to go help Alican with the paperwork. There's a lot to be done and only a few business hours left today to get started in. If we play our cards right and if we're *very* lucky, we might get Scott out as early as next Tuesday. Maybe. I'll let you know about the visitation when I get back."

Then he hurried away, his departure attracting the attention of a server, allowing Andi to get another pot of water and more instant Nescafé packs. Pulling the New York Times to her, she searched for the daily cross-word, preferring that to the book, trying not to think about how Scott might be faring.

In Westchester, Gambit reported to Xavier's office as ordered promptly at nine-thirty a.m.

"Come in," Xavier's called to his light knock.

The lanky young man entered, then settled on the sofa in front of Xavier's desk. "Bonjou, Professor," he smiled.

Xavier surveyed Gambit's handsome, clean-shaven countenance. Both an eyebrow and his ear lobes were pierced and adorned with gold. His shoulder-length light brown hair had blonde high-lights and was tied neatly back in a pony-tail. His smile exposed rows of brilliant white teeth. Yet, however congenial he seemed, Xavier sensed a confidence bordering on the arrogant beneath that sweet laid-back Southern charm. Xavier just smiled agreeably. "Well, I'm pleased to see you've so quickly found a niche for yourself in our kitchen."

Gambit shrugged. "Jez a hobby."

Xavier nodded. "Let us discuss your transformation. Everything that made you once recognizable as Remy Lebeau must now be entirely changed. Your hair style, your hair color, your mode of dress, even your habits." He lay a medium sized velvet, draw-string bag on the front of his desk, "First thing to go is all that jewelry. I'll keep it here in my safe."

Gambit retrieved the velvet bag, then began removing earring and eyebrow loops, his gold designer watch and numerous rings from his fingers. He saved his diamond wedding band for last, granting it a glance of faint regret before pulling it off and dropping into the bag as well, then passed it back to Xavier.

"Jack Smith," Xavier continued, "will be taking you to a hair salon for a color and cut. Keep it moderate. Also facial hair---grow some. Anything to make you look different then you do now."

Gambit nodded.

"You will, of course, also need a new wardrobe, something along the lines of a college student-look, I think, and for that, Jack will be taking you to our local Goodwill."

Gambit's nose wrinkled faintly.

"Objections?" Xavier asked.

"No, sir. I wit do as you say."

"Purchase different sunglasses. Change your brand of cologne, your brand of deodorant, even things so small as your favorite chewing gum. Change anything that could be associated with your previous identity and, it should go without saying that while you're incognito here, you are not to have any contact whatsoever with any of your prior associates, friends or even family. Is that clear?"

"Very clear."

"Any questions?"

“Gambit wonders how all dese changes will be paid for, since he came only wit de clothes on his back?”

“I’ll cover it.”

“Den, no, Gambit have no other questions.”

“Very well. That will be all.”

Gambit stood, automatically checking his wrist for the time, then, seeing it bare, mentally added 'cheap watch' to his list of things to purchase as he walked toward the door. When he opened it, he found Jack Smith casually waiting for him in the hall seated on the old wooden church pew opposite Xavier's doorway.

He promptly stood. “Guess I'm you're chauffeur for the day,” he remarked.

“Oui,” Gambit agreed and followed Jack to the garage, where they both observed the school SUV backing out of it's parking slot.

Jack gave a short whistle and it stopped, then approached the driver's side. The window rolled down and he leaned his head allowing him to see Ro behind the wheel and Jean in the passenger seat.

“So, where are you two ladies off to?” he inquired.

“Newboro,” Storm replied with a smile. “We've decided to have a girl's day out. Lunch, haircuts, manicures, shopping--the works.” She flicked a casual glance toward Gambit standing a few paces behind Jack, waiting. “What about you two?”

“Same,” Jack grinned with a wink. Pulling out his wallet, he peeled a couple twenties out of it and offered them to her. “Have lunch on me. Treat yourselves somewhere really nice.”

Ro shook her head. “You don't have to,” she protested.

“I want to,” he insisted, pressing the money toward her.

She consulted Jean with a glance and at her nod, accepted the cash with a resigned sigh. “Oh, okay, but we owe you.”

“No you don't,” he grinned and stepped back with a good-bye salute.

Shaking her head, Ro just rolled up her window and pulled away.

Jack resumed course for his truck and Gambit followed, curious now what his amiable escort's exact relationship with Ro was.

He waited on the passenger side of the black 4-door king-cab truck while Jack unlocked it, then hopped in.

Jack was already behind the wheel and pulling out a cigar from a cigar box resting on the seat between them. “Care for a one?” he asked.

“Oui,” Gambit replied quickly. He was down to his two last cigarettes, which he'd been saving.

“Help yourself.”

Gambit drew out one of the slender cigars and ran it under his nose, inhaling it's aroma. “Jamaican. Merci.”

Jack exhaled a stream of blue smoke. “No biggee,” he replied and, clamping the cigar between his teeth, started up, shifting into reverse.

Gambit lit-up likewise, inhaled deeply, then exhaled with satisfaction, the smoke whisking out the slightly open window as he began his casual queries of Jack, exploring who he was and how he fit.

By the time they reached the local hair cutterly in town he'd learned Jack was a veteran Marine pilot; that he, along with his Mother and Logan, coached the athletic program; that his Mother was Logan's wife and that she was currently out of town on business. However, beyond that Jack waxed suspiciously vague on exactly what sort of business or how he'd gotten from the Marines to a mutant high school. It wasn't coincidence, of that Gambit was sure, but, for now, it was just more intel for his mental files. He'd generally queried Jack's relationship status as well and was gratified to learn him currently 'uncommitted', since he quite fancied Stormy.

It was afternoon by the time Jack dropped Gambit back at the school. He now sported shorter dark brown hair that hung in wavy layers. Bangs hung to the top of this new narrow black-framed sunglasses and in his hands on either side were two fat shopping bags: one from Goodwill and one from Walmart.

Andi's patience for waiting around was long gone by the time Weir got back to the hotel. By then it was seven

o'clock and she felt she was ready to go stir crazy from useless, helpless waiting around.

"Well?" she demanded of him as soon she opened the door at his knock.

"Well, we've faxed our case to all the pertinent government offices and, on Monday, we'll get the verdict."

"Two more days," she groaned.

"Have you eaten?"

She shook her head. "Nothing substantial. I'd like to get out of this hotel. I'd *like* to get out this country, but I'd settle for a meal somewhere else besides the restaurant downstairs or Mr. Keles place."

"Fair enough. Are you ready?"

She nodded and got her overcoat from the chair. "What about visitation?" she asked, shrugging into it as they walked into the hallway.

"Yes. I've arranged for Alican to take you there tomorrow. He'll pick-up you up downstairs at ten o'clock."

"Good. At least that's something," she sighed.

Day Thirteen, Saturday

The drive to the city of Tokat took a good two hours, though the prison itself was past the city, about thirty minutes southwest. It was nestled among barren foothills, like an eyesore that needed to be hidden from civilized eyes, a great gray fortress. It had a typical prison layout consisting of high walls topped with coiled razor wire and guard towers at every corner. The main structure inside was comprised of five wings, each ten stories tall, arranged like the points of a star around a central admin building.

For purposes of modesty, Andi carefully looped a scarf over her head before getting out of the car and taking Mr. Keles elbow for the walk to gate. Once through, they proceeded into the admin building where he left her to wait in the waiting room while he ironed out the final red-tape.

Andi sat in one of the utilitarian chairs in the drab gray room, waiting for what seemed an exasperating length of time before he finally returned and waved for her to join him. From there, a stern looking, pot-bellied guard, led them to a visitation room, which was long and narrow and filled with a haze of cigarette smoke. One side of the room was a long line of desk-like cubicles, many already occupied by people murmuring quietly into phone receivers.

Keles walked to one of these cubicles and Andi sat a chair facing a desk separated from it's twin on the other side by a thick, slightly scarred clear plexiglas wall. Panels on either side of her insured a margin of privacy and a black phone receiver was on her left.

Keles bent to her ear. "Since only one visitor is allowed at a time," he whispered, "I will wait for you in the main waiting room." Then, after giving her an encouraging pat on the shoulder, he left, leaving her to peer anxiously through the plexiglas for Scott.

Minutes ticked by and Andi shifted restlessly. Then more minutes ticked by and still no Scott. She shifted again, beginning to worry. That it was taking so long for him to appear didn't seem a good sign. Catching movement out of the corner of her eyes, she looked and saw the same pot-bellied guard returning. He indicated she should follow him and she reluctantly did so, extremely worried now what this might mean.

In the corridor, she was met by an apologetic looking Keles.

"What's going on?" she hissed. "Where's Scott?"

"I am sorry, Madame. It seems he is unavailable to see visitors today."

"What! Why?"

Keles heaved a breath. "There was a incident, some trouble he was involved in, so he's not allowed visitors today."

"What happened?"

"I couldn't find out. No one seemed to be able to tell me more."

Andi huffed out an exasperated breath. "So, *when* will he be allowed visitors?"

"They say he will be available tomorrow."

"Did you explain that he's an American, here under false arrest?"

"Until I have a writ confirming it, they have no concern for what I say. I am sorry, Madame that is how it is. Come, I will take you back." He offered her his arm again and escorted her back to the car, though Andi remained tight-lipped the entire ride back to Samsun, irked to have come so far for *nothing*.

When Keles pulled to a stop in front of the Sheraton entrance. "We will have better luck tomorrow," he said. "I will come at the same time tomorrow, yes?"

Andi just nodded, then went directly to her room, where she tossed her overcoat on a chair, then flopped on the bed to stare frustratedly at the ceiling. Hardly five minutes had passed before she heard a rap on her door. Dragging her herself back up, she opened it to find Weir. "We didn't see him," she announced in a biting tone, walking away.

"I know. Alican told me."

"Good news travel fast," she returned sarcastically, plopping into the chair on her little table and pulling her laptop to her. Weir sat down across from her.

"You're worried, aren't you," he said.

She peered agitatedly at him. "You should be, too. I couldn't see him because of some kind of *incident*," she said, emphasizing it with air-quotes. "We haven't the faintest idea what that means!" She put her face in her hands. "You don't know Scott, Ben. He's used to being in control of himself and of most things around him. I can't even imagine how he's coping and he's been at the mercy of who-knows-who, doing who-knows-what to him for almost two weeks now without any contact from us or any idea what's going on!"

"He *will* cope," Weir replied. "And we've been using every resource at hand to emancipate him."

Andi raised her face from her hands and looked at him, her eyes boring into his. "If for *one* moment I thought differently, Jack would already be here!" She didn't know what she hoped to gain by saying that, but it made no apparent dent in Weir. He just patiently laced his fingers on the table in front of him.

"You know, Andi, I'd do *anything* for you and I've spared no expense trying to find Jean and Scott. If we'd been able to locate either of them immediately, things would've been different, but as it is, within the parameters of the situation, we *have* done our best."

Her face softened slightly. "I know and I appreciate how hard you've worked. The waiting is what's killing me."

"It'll work out," he promised as he stood. "The Keles's are expecting us tonight. Shall I tell them we'll come?"

Andi just nodded numbly and Weir left her to herself. She glanced at the time. It was nearly three. Normally she'd be talking to Logan about now, but she'd already re-scheduled their phone call for tomorrow because she didn't know how much delay seeing Scott would cause. Not seeing him at all wasn't something she'd anticipated and, as much as she might long to hear Logan's voice and air her complaints, she just thought it better to stay on schedule. Besides, with Jean quizzing him everyday for info on Scott, telling all that would only make things tougher. So, she decided to take a nice, relaxing bath instead and to try not to dwell on matters.

Meanwhile, Scott was just drifting nebulously somewhere between consciousness and dreams in his dark little hole, when suddenly the sound of the metal panel sealing him in came to his ears. Then faint light struck his eyelids as rough hands seized him, dragging him out. His knees promptly buckled when they stood him on his feet because he'd been sitting so long, but the guards merely jerked him back up, the motion on his ribs forcing a croak of pain from him.

They hauled him back up flight after flight and down corridor after corridor and Scott wondered where they were taking him this time. Would it back to a cell or worse--back to the terrible shower room bench for unfinished business?

Jerked to a halt, he heard the familiar sound of a cell door sliding open, then was shoved forward hard enough to stumble to the floor.

"Ahbap!" a voice called.

It was Ersay's voice and Scott was filled with gladness. "Water, I need water," he croaked hoarsely as gentle hands helped him up, then guided him to the sink, where he turned it's trickle on full and greedily pressed handful

after handful of water to his lips.

“Where have you been, ahbap?” Ersay asked.

“In a hole in a wall... in the basement,” Scott replied between slurps.

Ersay clucked his tongue. “I’ve heard rumors of such a place.” He let Scott drink his fill, then helped him into his bunk, though the exertion left Scott gasping painfully.

“What did you do to make them put you there?” Ersay inquired.

“They tried... messing with me...and I...resisted.”

“That is bad,” Ersay murmured.

Scott thought that an understatement. “How many...days?”

“Almost three.”

It had seemed like an eternity. “That’s all?”

“Yes, ahbap.”

Scott arranged himself into back into a sitting position with his back against the cement wall. It made it easier to cough. Then, he felt around for his blindfold and Ersay put it under his hand. “When do...we eat?” Scott asked, tightening the strip over his eyes.

“Not until tomorrow. I am sorry, ahbap.”

Scott didn’t reply. He just grimly pulled the thin wool blanket around his shoulders and leaned his head back against the wall. “*This is it, then*” he thought darkly, “*back to living from meal to meal in this devilish place.*” Hope of ever getting out vanished like a wisp and he felt the cold fingers of depression reaching for him, dragging downward, whispering to him that it would be better to die than live like this.

The next morning, Andi was back in the car with Keles on her way back to the gray prison fortress beyond Tokat, hopeful she might actually get to see Scott this time.

In his cell, Scott was sitting on his bunk, Indian-style, his chin dipping to his chest off and on as he dozed between coughing spells. From time to time his ears would prick at the sound of a guards approaching footfalls and he’d stiffen, afraid they might be coming for him, since he knew from Ersay that the guards were often prone to revenge. So he’d listen carefully, not relaxing until the footfalls faded safely into the distance.

Today, however, he wasn’t so lucky. The footfalls stopped right at his cell, then the door slid open. Scott held his breath.

“Scott Summers,” an voice pronounced.

Scott cringed, but there was nothing to do but obey, though, he’d already decided if they tried anything, he was just going to open his eyes and take them all out. It might take him out, too, but that was okay. He no longer cared.

“Evette,” he agreed in Turkish, which meant ‘yes’, then carefully lowered his feet to the floor, leaving his blindfold behind on the bed. He felt Ersay take his elbow and guide him forward, then a less-gentle hand seized his arm, thrusting him into the corridor. Prodded by a billie-club, he was herded along various corridors and down stairwells, his fingertips gliding along whatever he could touch helping him find his way. Finally, he was pushed through a door and discovered himself not only a room that was comfortably warm, but also alive with the buzz of conversation. Surprise made him stop, but the nudge from the billie-club got him moving again and he found himself led to a chair, which he was pushed into and a phone receiver pressed into his hand.

At the same time, Andi was on the other side of the plexiglas, watching. Though she knew to expect Scott not to look very good, he looked far worse than she expected. Of course, the orange jump suit he wore was baggy and clearly meant for a less-tall man and he had a short growth of beard, but more appalling was how beat-up he looked. His closed eyelids were puffy and swollen and dark circles lay under them. Purple bruising showed on his jaw, up one side of his head and on his neck. When he grasped the phone, his sleeve rode up showing her the multiple tiny round bruises such as fingers leave behind when they grip too tightly and feared the worst.

Scott put the phone to his ear. “Who’s there?” he wheezed hoarsely. then erupted into a coughing.

"It's me," Andi said, recognizing he was also sick.

"Andi? Where are you?" he asked intensely.

"Right across from you," she replied with forced cheerfulness, gently tapping the acrylic barrier. "I can see you."

He reached out, pressing his dirty palm to the barrier a moment before snatching it back. "I expected you *days* ago!" he grouched irritably. "Where have you guys been!"

"Here, trying to find you and Jean."

"And did you? Where is she? Is she okay?"

"Yes," Andi assured him, "we got to her a couple days ago and, yes, she's fine. She's already home." He had another coughing spell so bad he could barely get a good breath and Andi watched with great concern. "I don't suppose this place has much in the way of medical care," she said.

"No," he gasped, "And don't *even* think about trying to get me any! *Promise* you won't."

Andi was taken aback. "Why?"

"Just promise," he wheezed. "Never mind why."

"Alright, Scott. I promise." That seemed to calm him.

"Jean's okay, then? No one...*hurt* her?"

"She's okay. No one hurt her." She wished she could say the same for him.

Coughing interrupted him again. It was because he was talking so much. "How is it you found her so quickly and not me?" he croaked.

"All the electronic records were being altered even as you and Jean were being moved around, mostly to keep us busy, we think. It's been a regular game of hide and seek, believe me."

"Tau?" he hissed.

"We think so."

"That's still no excuse. You can't tell me you didn't have some idea where I was," he carped, then lowered his voice. "*What about Cerebro?*"

Andi shied away from repeating the word. No telling who was listening. "Well, *that is* how we had some idea where to look," she carefully replied. "But remember, it's preciseness is related to *you* being able to *see* where you are. We had to rely on a more general sense of vicinity and you *were* being moved around like a chess pawn. Every time we thought we had you, you'd be gone. That, plus all the politics has made it really slow going."

"Politics!" he spat. "Don't give me that. If Jack were here instead of me, you'd have gotten him out *long* before now."

Andi couldn't believe he actually thought that, but now wasn't the time for rebuke. "This isn't how I *wanted* things to go either," she replied. "We got into this using the system and never anticipated Tau playing it against us."

"There are times to use the system and times to use force and this is one of those times you should've used force!" he retorted, somewhat loudly, his face reddening with anger.

Andi observed a couple guards hovering along the back wall suddenly cease conversation to look in Scott's direction.

"You're getting loud, Scott and guards are looking," she warned, then was appalled to see Scott practically turn white and hunker close to his receiver as if expecting some blow from above. All Andi could feel for him was compassion. "I know it's been terrible for you being here blind and alone and being jerked from jail to jail, wondering all the time where we were and when we'd get you out of here."

"Don't try and sound like you know what I've been through, because you *don't!*" he hissed harshly, which started him coughing again.

Andi patiently switched to a more factual response. "I was here, the next day, looking for you as soon as we got word that you and Jean were missing."

He snorted. "You want a metal? When are you getting me out?"

Andi paused for a deep breath of patience. Scott was sick and not himself. "Soon, I hope," she answered evenly. "The paperwork's a bear."

He turned a deeper shade of red, his jaw flexing with constrained anger.

Andi observed a guard heading Scott's direction and checked her watch. Their thirty minutes were nearly up. "Our time is up," she said quickly. "Is there anything you want? We can bring you things like personal items and snacks."

"I've got nothing," he snapped, "so anything will be an improvement." The guard lay on hand on Scott's shoulder making him jump nervously. "Cigarettes for my cell-mates," he said hurriedly, then hung up and let himself be escorted away.

Andi watched till he was out of sight, then returned to the main waiting room, to Keles, whom she found seated, reading through some paperwork. Upon seeing her, he quickly returned it to his brief case and stood up. "How is your son?" he asked with concern.

"Pretty beat-up looking," Andi replied as they walked toward the exit. She was eager to get outside and inhale some fresh smoke-free air. "And pretty angry," she added, acutely aware of Scott's seeming indifference now to any sort of mother-son arrangement between them. "We *really* need to get him out of there," she stated feelingly.

"Of course, Madame, I will do all I can," Keles promised.

It was a quiet drive back to Samsun. She didn't feel much like chatting. Instead she just gazed out the window at passing scenery, unable to forget how terrible Scott looked or how angry he seemed as she pondered exactly how much detail she ought to email Xavier and Jean.

At the Sheridan she went directly to her room and no more had her coat off then she heard a rap on her door. Of course, she already knew who it was even before she opened it.

"How'd it go?" Weir asked, breezing in.

Andi went to the little table and sagged into the chair. He sat across from her. "Scott looked really beat-up, Ben," she said. "And he's pretty upset we've left him there for so long." She drew a piece of hotel stationary to her, quickly jotting a list of things for him to purchase for Scott: packaged snacks, chocolate bars, a change of underclothing, toothbrush and toothpaste, chewing gum and the requested cigarettes.

"Understandable," Weir replied, peering at what she was writing. "We'll be all-over getting him out as fast as possible first thing tomorrow."

Andi passed him the paper, then checked her watch. "Now, if you'd excuse me, I have a phone call to make."

With that, she was able to shoo him out, but she e-mailed Xavier before calling Logan, carefully recounting every observation of Scott's appearance and reactions because she knew, if she were in Jean's shoes, she want to know every details no matter how difficult to hear.

In New York, Charles Xavier was trying hard to engross himself in his students essays, but his thoughts kept drifting back to Andi's e-mail and how Jean was going to react when she read it. He was expecting her shortly, as he'd asked her to drop by for the purpose of showing it to her. He raised his eyes to the door as he felt her arrive. "Come in," he thought.

She entered, smiling demurely, lovely in a red cowl-necked knit dress. Her hair was short now, bobbed to the jaw-line, a youthful modern cut. She took a seat in the wing chair in front of his desk, gracefully crossing her legs.

He smiled, trying to be at ease, but she read him anyway.

"You have news about Scott?"

He nodded and just passed her the print-out of Andi's email. He could think of no way to soften the blow. "Andi saw him," he said.

Jean accepted it with trembling fingers and perched her reading glasses on her nose.

He watched her as she read, saw tears brim along her eyelids, heard her suck in her breath at each shocking detail. Then, when she was done, she removed her glasses and silently began meticulously folding and re-folding the

paper until she'd turned it into a small, neat square before she raised her anguished eyes to his, an anguish that could only echo hollowly between them. There were no words worth saying, no thoughts to ease their mutual pain.

Then, with a slight nod, she stood and quietly left, the square of paper clutched tightly in her hand.

He turned away from the essays and stared out the window at lightly falling snow wondering if he'd made the right choice. Had the common path of diplomacy really the most efficient path? Could he have really done something more or sooner to save Scott?

Day Fifteen, Monday

With Weir and Keles downtown busy battling their way through the bureaucracy, it was Sam Hamblin who drove Andi back to Tokat, a shoe box size box wrapped in brown paper in her lap. Only by focusing on her book, could Andi keep herself from impulsively stabbing at non-existent brakes as Sam kept pace with the native drivers, dodging and cutting around them at break-neck speed. Of course, Keles drove in similar fashion, but somehow it seemed less noticeable in his large Mercedes than this small Audi. Plus it also lacked a CD player, having only a radio able to pick-up local Turkish channels, so there was only silence between her and Sam. They may have traded a little casual banter over their few meals with Weir, but generally she and Sam had nothing in common and, right now, Sam was all business, concerned only with the task of delivering her to the prison, which suited Andi fine.

When they arrived, getting through the gate was just a matter of showing the appropriate paperwork, then inside the admin building again, Andi passed off the box of goodies into appropriate hands to be given to Scott sometime after their visit was completed. Sam remained in the waiting room while Andi once more returned to the visitation room and took a seat in a cubicle. Within a few minutes Scott arrived, a guard directing him into the chair opposite her and slapping the phone into his hand.

"So, here we are again," she said, since asking the usual how are you' seemed woefully inappropriate.

"Unfortunately for me," he rasped back sarcastically.

Andi tried to keep an up-beat tone. "I brought you the cigarettes you asked for and some other things."

"I hope that means food."

"Yes, there's some packaged snacks."

"Good. When do I get it?"

"After our visit or so I was told, by our lawyer, Mr. Keles. He's the one helping us with your case."

"Us?" Scott repeated. "Who's with you? Logan?"

"No. He's still at home. Ben came."

"*Weir!*" Scott spat, his harsh tone causing a fresh coughing spell. "You're here...with *him*," he croaked. "Who's idea was that?"

"Professor Xavier's. *This* is Ben's area of expertise."

"What? Screwing things up?"

"He *and* Professor Xavier agreed on a diplomatic course of action for obtaining your release."

He gave a derisive snort. "Obviously, that's working."

"Slow, but sure," Andi retorted unrelentingly.

He switched topics. "So, whatever finally happened to that *place*, you know the one that started this whole mess?"

Andi knew he meant the interment camp. "Gone. Bull-dozed, buried, quarantined."

"And the...kids in it?"

She lowered her voice to a bare whisper. "Dead."

"And the samples...you got them, right?"

"Unfortunately, they conveniently disappeared at the same time you did."

"What! You mean I've gone through all this for *nothing!*" he hissed through gritted teeth, then began swearing. Not loudly, but it was disturbance enough to attract the casual glance of a couple guards again.

“Scott, you need to get a hold of yourself!” Andi hissed back. “You’re attracting attention.”

He immediately quieted and hunkered down over the receiver again.

“This has been frustrating for everyone,” she said. “You, me, Jean, the Professor, Logan---*everybody*.”

“Like you’re really suffering, staying in a nice hotel, eating three squares a day.”

Andi held her tongue. There’d be a time and place for recriminations. She checked her watch. Still about five minutes left. “Our time’s nearly gone,” she informed him. “Is there anything you want me to pass along to Jean?”

“Tell her...I love her and that I’ll see her soon.”

“Alright.”

“And you can tell the Professor thanks for nothing.”

A guard came then and placed his hand on Scott’s shoulder. Scott hung up and Andi watched him led away.

Once he was out of the visitation area, Scott felt a shoe-box sized box pressed into his hands. His mouth watered at the prospect of what might be in it and couldn’t wait to get to his cell to open it. It was the first small goodness he’d had since his incarceration. Then came a sudden Turkish command to halt. It was reinforced by the a billie-club thrust in front across his chest, barring his way, but it was the voice giving the order that made him tremble. He recognized it. It was the same voice that had ordered him bent over the shower-room bench and then put in the hole in the basement. He felt the box of goodies snatched away, but knew better than protest this time. Even so, they gave him a hard jab in stomach with a club that doubled-him over hardly able to inhale a breath. It took all his strength not to buckle to the floor. A poke from behind suggested he should start walking again and he heard the other guard walking away chuckling.

Once in the cell again, Ersay helped him up into his bunk, then he put on his blindfold again and sat with his back against the cold cement wall, brooding. Somewhere at the back of his starved and murky brain was the persistent idea his still being stuck here was the result of poor planning and that had to be someone’s fault, whether Xavier’s or Weir’s or both.

Even as Andi was on her way back to Samsun, in Westchester Ro was having her own problems.

She was in her classroom, prepping an end-of-semester history test for her class when a rap on the door made her look up. It was only a little after eight. Her class didn’t officially start till nine, but it wasn’t uncommon for a student to come by early for a little help, though they generally didn’t knock. She was both surprised and dismayed to see it was Gambit standing there and her brow furrowed as she took in the picnic basket he carried.

“You did not come to breakfast dis morning,” he announced cheerfully, traipsing into her room. “So Gambit bring breakfast to you, oui?”

She actually had deliberately skipped breakfast to work on the test paper, not to mention her desire to avoid his amorous flirtations across the steam-table whenever she could. She kept snack bars in her desk.

She watched with displeasure as he arranged coffee carafe, two mugs and a plate of cinnamon rolls between them on her desk, then proceeded to fill one of the mugs with steaming coffee.

“I wish you wouldn’t,” she sighed.

“What? Stormy no want coffee?”

“I no want breakfast.”

“Ah.” He efficiently drew a student close to hers to sit in, picked up the mug and helped himself to a roll. “I will eat and we will jez visit den.” He surveyed the surroundings. “Nice room,” he observed, then pointed at the assortment of house plants along the rear glass wall. “Gambit see you have de green thumb.”

She regarded him with exasperation. “Gambit should also know Stormy has a boyfriend.”

Dark brows rose above his narrow sun-specs. “He is not here, oui? Gambit no see him.”

“No, he’s not here *all* the time, but I’m expecting him for Christmas,” she replied, though saying so was something of a white-lie, since Alex he didn’t think he be getting away for this holiday at all.

Gambit indicated her left hand. “Gambit see no ring”

Storm blushed. "Not yet."

He polished off his cinnamon roll thoughtfully. "Den we could be friends---while you wait."

"I don't think that would work out."

"Why not? You be friends with Jack."

She shook her head. "That's different. My boyfriend is Jack's brother. We're practically family."

Gambit helped himself to the second roll. "Let Gambit get dis straight. You want to marry Jack's brother, who is also the son of the lady married to Mr. Claws-in-de-fist." Storm nodded. "Den he'll be your father-in-law, no?"

Storm blinked at him. "Well...I suppose, if you want to be technical about it."

Gambit stood, polished off his coffee, then repacked the picnic basket. "Zounds complicated."

"Families generally are."

Gambit's smile turned wistful. "Oui, Gambit no argue dat." Then, collecting his basket, said "Adyeu, cherie," and sauntered out.

Ro looked after him. It wasn't Logan who concerned her, however. It was Andi. When it came to Alex, there seemed to be a glacier-sized wall of ice standing between them. She and Andi might talk about school or missions, but never Alex and, except for that one time when she'd given her advice about Alex's sister, he was a moot topic. Ro sighed as she returned to her work. Alex kept telling her not to worry about it and she kept telling him she couldn't not worry about it, since she believed one didn't just marry a man, but a whole family.

Ro stayed after her class ended and worked until shortly after eleven, just so the cafeteria would sure to be swarming with students, so Gambit would be too busy to spare her any attention. She had a bad feeling he wasn't going to give up easily. Fortunately, he was conveniently busy elsewhere in the cafeteria when she arrived and it was Mrs. Hunnicutt who loaded her plate with beans and cornbread. As she headed for the staff table, she observed Rogue seated with Bobby, Kitty and Nick, smiling and chatting with her friends, glad the girl was back in the normal flow of student life.

Jack and Logan were already seated and Jack pulled out a chair next to him for her.

"Thank you," she said as she sat. Jean and the Professor hadn't joined them for meals since Andi's email about Scott. Jean had let her to read it's grim details. "Anything new from Andi," she politely asked Logan, who'd been increasingly grumpy in Andi's extended absence.

"Not really. When I talked to her, she'd just come back from visitin' Scott and Weir wasn't anywhere around yet. I guess there's two places he's got to get an okay from in order to get Scott out. But I can tell ya this," he asserted, "I know they'll high tailin' it toot-sweet as soon as they've got him out."

Day Sixteen, Tuesday

Andi's eyes dully scanned the familiar surroundings of the Sheridan restaurant she always seemed stuck waiting around in. The walls were terra-cotta in color and decorated with scenic paintings in gilded frames. As she added creamer to her Nescafé, a line of poetry came to mind concerning Scott's accusing her of "not suffering," which was "stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage." That line summarized perfectly how she felt. Though she wasn't behind bars, sitting around this restaurant hour after hour, unable to do anything to help was certainly its own kind of confinement. She sighed again hoping Weir and Keles would soon return with the necessary General's signature on Scott's release, so she could stop sitting and start doing.

Unfortunately, it was nearly one o'clock before Weir *did* come back, but when he did, his face was beaming with triumph and Andi immediately snatched up her coat and day-pack. He had the signature and it was time to do something. She met him and, catching her elbow, he quickly escorted through the hobby.

"Alican's in the car and the prison is expecting you," he explained hastily.

A second later, she was back in the Mercedes on her way to Tokat.

The sound of his cell door opening startled Scott from his lethargic doze to nervous full alertness.

"Scott Summers!" a voice summoned in heavily accented English.

He was only glad it wasn't the shower-room guards voice. "Evette," he replied quickly.

"Bring your things, come!"

Scott slid to the floor, removed his head band and grabbed his blanket. He was unsure what this meant. Was he being moved to a different cell? He felt his elbow gently grasped and knew it was Ersay who led him forward, perhaps for the last time, for all he knew. A less-gentle hand then seized his arm and he was hustled out of the cell and down hallways and stairs, afraid of what new horror lay ahead.

Suddenly, he felt jerked to a halt, then a medium size metal box was thrust into his hands and he was taken a few paces down a hall and shoved into a room.

"Knock when you are ready," he was told, then heard the door click closed. Scott stood there, first surprised, then suspicious, but he heard no indications anyone else was in the room. "Hello?" he asked, "Is anyone here?" but his voice, then his coughing just echoed emptily. Satisfied he was alone, he squatted, set the metal container on the floor and explored its contents. Inside, he felt fabric: a sweater, a shirt, a pair of dress pants, a pair of loafers, a pair of socks and a pair of underwear. He clasped the shirt to his face and sniffed the faint scent of his own cologne. His clothes! That could only mean he was being released! He stripped and, with a giddy delight, put them on, though he was quickly dismayed at how loose his trousers hung on him. Keeping enough weight on his thin frame was always a battle and this brief stint in jail hadn't done him any favors. Irritably, he tightened his belt the extra notch, thinking this just one more thing to thank the Professor for. He ran his fingers through his hair, trying to comb it into place, which made his scalp itch, probably from lice. Being as ready as he was going to be, he found the door and knocked. It opened and he was escorted down a long corridor, then shoved out a door.

"Scott!"

He turned towards the voice. It was Andi.

Andi ran to him and embraced him, glad and relieved, but he didn't return it. Instead, he stiffened in resistance, so she let go. "I brought your glasses," she said, pressing them against his hand.

Seizing them, he quickly slid them on, able to survey his actual surroundings for the first time: the bland gray waiting room, Andi and a blondish, curly-haired man in a blue suit with a briefcase. He looked at them, then for an exit sign. "Can we go now?"

"Sure, but first you should meet our lawyer," Andi said, indicating the blue-suited man. "This is Mr. Keles. Without all his hard work we might never have gotten you out."

Keles smiled, bowing ever so slightly to her tribute. "Ah, Mr. Weir must have equal credit."

"Can we save the mutual admiration and just leave?" Scott snapped.

With a polite smile, Keles obligingly ushered them toward the exit and eventually out of the prison to his car. It was bitterly cold outside with a icy wind and the walk to the visitors parking lot was a long one, so Scott was shivering convulsively with clattering teeth by the time they reached the Mercedes. He paused just long enough for a final real look at the prison before sliding into the back seat. Andi followed him, carefully draping a thick afghan around his shivering shoulders she brought for just this purpose.

To Keles, she said, "We need heat as soon as possible."

"It will be warm very soon, Madame," he promised as he started the car and backed out.

Andi drew a thermos from her pack, opened it and poured hot tea into the cap, then pressed it into Scott's trembling fingers. "Here, hot tea."

He sipped it, she keeping her hands cupped around his in order keep his shaking hands steady. By the time he'd finished it, the car heat had warmed things up and his shivering was easing off.

"Want something to eat?" she asked.

He nodded. "More tea."

Andi drew two hard rolls spread with soft cheese wrapped in a napkin that she'd saved from breakfast and gave them to him one at a time and another cup of tea.

He devoured both like a starving man. "More," he croaked.

"I'm sorry, I didn't bring more."

He abruptly handed her the empty thermos cap. "Well, you should have," he admonished.

Andi took it, displeased with his attitude and surprised he should be so ravenous after that snack box she left--unless something happened so he didn't get it. "You did get that box of goodies I left?"

He just pulled the afghan more tightly around his shoulders without reply.

"They *did* give it to you, didn't they?" she asked.

He nodded and fell to coughing again.

Her intuition told her she wasn't getting the whole story. "So, how was that beef jerky?"

"Great."

"Well, that's amazing, since there wasn't any beef jerky in that box."

"So what?"

"So, you either got the box or you didn't."

"Is this something we have to talk about?"

"You just lied to me, Scott and that's not like you."

"Alright," he snapped in exasperation, "if you must know, the guards took it away from me before I even got back to my cell."

She was disappointed, but not surprised. "I'm sorry, Scott."

He shrugged indifferently. "Things happen."

"Well, I hope *certain* things didn't happen," she said. "Like rape."

There was a long silence. So long, Andi was afraid the answer was going to be "yes."

"No," he finally replied. Then leaned his head wearily against the seat back. "Can we stop with the twenty-questions now? I'm tired."

"Sure, but talking about it helps put everything behind you more quickly."

"As far as I'm concerned, it already is."

Andi reached a hand toward his forehead to see if he might have a fever, thinking sickness might account a lot for his sour-grapes, but it aside.

"Leave me alone."

Andi gave up and seeing being left alone was what he wanted, she moved to the front seat as soon as Mr. Keles stopped for gas a short time later.

"When will we get there?" Scott grumbled.

Andi consulted her watch. "We'll be in Samsun in another hour."

"No, I mean home-home."

"As soon as we get you de-loused and changed, we'll be on our way."

"Can't we skip all that?"

She just shook her head. There was no way Weir would risk lice on his precious jet and, she, of course, had taken the necessary precautions to protect herself from infestation as well.

Scott just muttered derisively under his breath, then was quiet except for intermittent coughing for the rest of the trip.

When they reached the Sheridan, Andi took him directly to her room, instructed him to put all his current clothing in the provided garbage bag for Keles to burn later, then sent him to the shower.

Glad to finally shower in privacy, Scott relished the hot water and scrubbed his head and body several times with the de-lousing products she'd left in the shower for him. Then he redressed in the fresh clothing that Andi had also left out for him, things from his satchel: underwear, dark blue sweatpants, his old gray 'Cornhuskers' hoodie-sweatshirt, a pair of white socks and sports shoes. Facing the mirror and preparing to shave, he paused, studying his reflection, a man seeing a stranger. Even when the beard was gone and his hair combed, the pale, bruised face looking back at him still didn't seem really his own.

When he came out, Andi was holding his down-jacket, ready to help him slip it on.

"I can do it myself," he said, taking it. "When can I call Jean?" he asked, while struggling to get it on.

Andi left him to it and donned her own coat. "After we're secure in the air," she threw back as she walked out.

Once Scott joined her in the lobby, they caught a taxi to the airport where Weir and Mr. Keles were already waiting for them. Mr Keles gave her and Weir each a teary-eyed hug and kiss goodbye, then they breezed through customs and onto the jet. Its engines were already warming up as Sam Hamblin quickly secured the door behind them, then hurried for the cockpit to take her seat as co-pilot. Andi flumped into the first of the two large, Lazy Boy type seats and buckled-in; Scott took the other, while Weir stowed their bags, then buckled into a sofa seat.

Within a few minutes, they were air borne. Exhausted, Andi closed her eyes, though Scott's constant coughing beside her made it anything but restful.

As soon as the jet leveled-off, Weir was up, his motion causing Andi to open her eyes.

"We've got something for that coughing problem," Weir announced to Scott. To her, he said, "Why don't you show our guest to his rack," then headed for the galley.

Scott looked after him sourly.

"He means bunk," Andi explained as she un-buckled and stood. "Navy talk. This way."

Un-buckling as well, Scott sullenly followed her through the hatch into the galley, then left down the long narrow aisle to the tail section, which housed the rear cabin. A heavy pleated curtain served as a door and was presently secured aside. Inside the narrow room were four berths, the two bottom beds were open and made, the top two still secured closed. Between the two beds against the far wall with a hooded light fixture mounted above it was a wood-toned night-stand and on that stand was a medium sized blue bottle with a Turkish label.

"See that," Andi said, pointing at it, "That's the Turkish equivalent of a sniffing, sneezing, coughing, aching, fever so-you-can-get-some rest medicine. A dose of that should quiet things down for you."

He just surveyed the accommodations austerely. "Not exactly a four-star hotel."

Andi was severely tempted to fire back something along the lines of it being 'more than adequate for a "pity-party," but held her tongue, did an about face, then marched directly up the aisle back to the galley. There she slid into the first bench at the table. The rich aroma of freshly brewing real coffee tickled her nose as she watched Weir moving about, putting out things for a light meal. He'd removed his jacket and tie and was just in his shirt sleeves rolled-up to the elbow. He could be a good guy when he wanted to be, she had to admit, but she didn't regret having chosen Logan.

The galley itself was very much like an efficiency kitchenette in a RV. The table was a mere booth with bench seats on either side. A small frig was housed under a wood-toned cabinet across from it, which had a tiny aluminum sink and a bit of counter space. Above this small sink-counter was a coffee-maker unit attached to a small microwave above it. On the other side of the aisle were storage cabinets that acted as pantry space. Beyond the galley, was the locked door of the cockpit.

Andi surveyed makings for peanut butter and jelly sandwiches on the table in front of her, including pints of milk, bottles of water, paper plates, plastic ware, napkins and a box of Honeybuns.

"Hungry?" Weir threw over his shoulder as he was pouring coffee into two blue ceramic mugs at the counter.

"Kind of."

He brought the coffees to the table, along with the tray of sugars and flavored creamers and regarded her thoughtfully as he sat down opposite her.

"What's going on?" he asked.

That she was irked must've showed--but she never had a chance to tell him, since Scott chose that moment to join them. She shifted over to make room in her seat, since she was sure he'd prefer that to Weir regardless of his disgruntlement toward her.

Scott surveyed what was on the table as he did sit next to her. "I would've thought you more of a fillet mignon and champagne kind of guy," he remarked.

"Sorry to disappoint. My personal chef couldn't come." Weir replied.

"I bet."

That wasn't fillet mignon didn't seem to stop Scott from quickly putting together a peanut butter sandwich. He

had another coughing spell along the way.

“Did you take some of that Nyquil?” Andi asked, concerned.

“I’m not stupid,” Scott replied.

Weir put down his sandwich. “You can drop the attitude. A yes or no would’ve sufficed.”

“Ah, the chivalrous knight to the rescue,” Scott retorted. “I’m sure Logan would like that.”

“Didn’t you say you wanted to talk to Jean, Scott?” Andi quickly asked, with a quick look and nod at Weir, who got the hint. He obligingly unclipped his Iridium off his belt and slid it over toward Scott.

“Why don’t you take your sandwich and Ben’s phone into the main cabin and have a private chat?” Andi further suggested. “What’s our arrival time?” she asked Weir.”

“Around ten o’clock Eastern Standard Time--give or take a couple minutes.”

“You can tell her we’ll be in around ten,” Andi affirmed to Scott, who sourly snatched up the phone, his sandwich, a Honeybun and a bottle of water.

“I’d rather sit some where else anyway,” he grumbled as he stalked away into the main cabin.

As soon as he was out of ear-shot, Weir said, “You should’ve let me take him down a notch or two.”

“It wouldn’t have helped. I told you he was angry.”

He snorted. “I’ve seen this sort of thing before. It’s not like he was in prison for a cause. It was purely a distraction orchestrated by Tau. Completely meaningless. But a man’s mind needs a reason ‘why’ for his suffering and a way to process what he’s been through. So in such situations, in lieu of any *actual* reason, it’s not uncommon for the mind and emotions to turn to blaming someone or something else as a substitute.”

Andi had to admit that’s what it seemed like was happening. “Well, Scott knows the truth. He’s a logical person. He’ll face it eventually.”

Weir gave a slight shrug. “Maybe. Eventually. But right now, he’s not being logical. He’s being reactionary and life is going to be pretty rough for everyone in his near vicinity until he does come around. So, until then, I strongly suggest *you* steer clear of him as much as possible. There’s no reason to let him blame you. We did the right thing, you and I, handling it quietly like we did. It was the right decision.”

But it wasn’t herself Andi was thinking of just then, but rather Jean, who shared Scott’s closest vicinity, and she didn’t know how prophetic Weir’s words would soon prove to be.

Continued in “Faith, Hope and Love”