

Wednesday, May 9, 10:30 a.m., Black Mountain, New Hampshire

Delayed Fallout, pt. 1

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Dianne asked, a concerned expression on her face.

"Yes, I'm sure," Jeff answered firmly. "I need to understand everything, even if I don't remember it all."

Dianne sighed heavily. Tuesday had been a long, lazy day for them both. They had gone exploring in the SUV, checking out the scenery which was still just becoming fully green in many of the mountainous areas. The press was kept at bay by a cadre of discreet security guards as they traveled. They had spent some time looking for a nice restaurant, and soon discovered that many were still closed because the tourist season had yet to begin. The plan for Thursday was to drive up Mt. Washington and visit some of the natural wonders in Franconia Notch. But today, Jeff wanted to go out to the crash site. He wanted to see where it was and hear Dianne tell him what happened. He had read all the rescue logs, yes, but he wanted the immediacy of being there.

He had given Callie a call, and asked her to go through the logs and find out the exact spot where the helijet went down. She was puzzled by the request but obliged him. Then he put in a call to New York and asked Steve, the head of the Tracy Industries hangar, to give him a more precise description. Steve didn't like it, but Jeff pressed him, and finally the hangar chief caved. Now Jeff was dressed in jeans and a light shirt of the traditional checked flannel and was ready to go.

They drove off the property in silence, Dianne with her arms wrapped tightly around her. It had finally dawned on her that the reason she didn't want Jeff to go to the crash site was not because of the effect it would have on him, but what it would do to her. ~Jeff doesn't realize what he's asking me to do and I don't know how I can tell him, especially when this might be something I need just as much as he does.

Jeff followed the GPS indicator and they bumped along the old logging road that led to the clearing they were looking for. When the device showed that they were close to their goal, they got out, Dianne hesitating as Jeff held out his hand. He had taken a smaller GPS unit with him, one that he could hang from a belt loop, and he consulted it as they penetrated a small stand of woods, Jeff in the lead, Dianne following numbly.

The white birch woods gave way to a wide, green clearing, the soft new grass already grown calf deep and with spring wildflowers waving in the sunshine, an occasional insect buzzing about them as it tended to its business. Jeff looked around in confused wonder at the site. "It's a lovely place."

"It didn't look lahke this back 'n February," Dianne said in a shaky voice that broke on the last word.

He glanced over at her, concerned, and sudden comprehension dawned. "Oh, God! Dianne! I'm...

I'm sorry. I had no idea." He pulled her to him and held her close, feeling her tremble in his arms. "C'mon. Let's go back. I don't need to see this."

"But... Ah think Ah do," she murmured into his chest. "Ah've been goin' along all this tahme, thinkin' Ah had dealt with it, an'... now Ah'm not so shoah Ah have." She pulled away and gazed up into his blue eyes, her own filled with tremulous, yet-to-be-shed tears. She swallowed hard, and said, "Let's do what we came heah t' do."

"Are you sure?" Jeff asked, his voice persistent, his gaze into her eyes intense in his concern. "We don't have to do this."

Dianne nodded wordlessly, and Jeff drew in a deep breath, letting it out slowly. "All right," he finally agreed. "We'll continue. But will you trust me to know if it's too much for you? Will you trust me to pull you away if I see you're overwhelmed? Because, frankly, I don't know that you'll be aware of it."

Dianne nodded again, and he let her go. "Okay, dear heart. Tell me what happened."

She clutched his hand in an almost painful grip, and silently pulled him into the clearing.

tbc....

From: Tikatu Sent: 9/18/2005
