

BACKPACK ADVENTURES

Episode 5

“Congo Cry”

June 16, 2001

Ebola River, DRC, Africa

Dr. Kathy Allen twisted uncomfortably on her narrow camp cot. Mosquito netting draped over her, tickling her skin with every movement. Sweat soaked her thick, auburn hair, and she longed for a shower after six days in the jungle.

What really kept her awake was the monkey bite on her shoulder. It was still sore after three weeks. During a routine examination, her oldest lab monkey, Keeta, had suddenly taken a nip on her shoulder. Kathy believed it was only because Keeta was bored in his cage. She had been so busy getting ready for this trip to Africa that she had been ignoring him. Keeta had bitten her during Kathy’s last visit to him before leaving for Africa. Despite a degree in medicine and the Ph.D. in virology, there is still much for me to learn about primates, Kathy thought.

Here, deep in the Congo jungle, Kathy could hear soft rustling in the canopy, and the occasional eerie cry of an infant chimpanzee as it nested somewhere high above her. Insect sounds washed through the moist air like waves. The crescendo filled her ears till she felt her own body humming, then fell back to a soft drone. The jungle is snoring, thought the young researcher. Tomorrow, when I reach the outpost at Yambuku, I’ll sleep well enough to snore too.

As she dozed, Kathy Allen tried to imagine what she’d find in Yambuku, a tiny medical outpost that had gained fame twenty-five years ago. She shifted again and winced as her tender shoulder bumped the cot’s frame. She hoped she’d find a bed, a bath, and the boxes of medicine and vaccines she had shipped ahead. She could use them all.

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“That pregnant monkey that Kathy left here while she’s in Africa doesn’t seem to be doing too well. Travis and Summer, you need to stay away from her till I find out from the primate breeder down in Alice if he’s had any illness among his other quarantined monkeys,” warned Travis’ father, Dr. Tony Allen, as his two children entered his clinic. Dr. Allen was a veterinarian, and his sister had asked for his help in quarantining two monkeys she was transporting from a breeder in South Texas to her research facility in Virginia. “I haven’t been able to talk to Kathy yet.”

“Why didn’t Aunt Kathy take the monkeys to Virginia?” asked Travis. The teenager had always been especially fond of his aunt who was barely twice his age.

“Well, she had been planning a trip to Africa in July, but she was called there a month ahead of schedule due to an outbreak of illness among the chimps along the Ebola River in the DRC, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Her friends at Doctors Without Borders asked her to come help verify the disease and set up prevention methods to keep it from spreading to humans. You might say she’s doing field research, but it’s more like in the jungle. My little sister is crazy if you ask me.”

“But she loves what she does!” defended Summer. When Summer’s mother had married Travis’ father five years ago, it had been hard to accept a new father and a brother. Aunt Kathy had visited often that first year. Her fun-loving, adventurous ways and gentle laughter had gained Summer’s respect and love and had helped make Summer and Travis as close as a real brother and sister. Travis had enlisted Aunt Kathy’s help in devising a motorized wheelchair for Summer with mountain bike type wheels that let her keep up with her friends. Aunt Kathy never thought anything was impossible.

“Besides, little sisters don’t have to do just what their big brothers think,” Summer added with a wink at Travis. She and Travis had argued as they came over to the vet hospital about whose turn it was to feed and water the monkeys and who had to clean the cages.

“You sure are fast to take up for Kathy. How much did she pay you to help pack all those boxes of vaccine and medicine?” Dr. Allen asked.

“She didn’t have to pay me anything. I was glad to pack that stuff to ship to Africa. She *is* paying us to feed and water the monkeys, though.”

“Well, until I know what’s wrong with that monkey, you kids are out of a job. I don’t want you around them, do you understand?” warned Dr. Allen sternly.

Travis began to protest, but then mumbled, “Yes, sir.” Summer nodded silently. They had been counting on the money from feeding the monkeys. They were not usually paid for doing chores; chores were just part of being a family.

Dr. Allen hesitated at the back door to the vet hospital. “I’ve got to go check on a horse in the far pen. I’ll pay you what Kathy was paying for the monkey chores if you straighten up the storeroom. It’s never been the same since Kathy kept all her stuff in there to ship to Africa.”

Cleaning the storeroom would not be nearly as much fun as caring for the monkeys, but the thought of getting paid for it set Travis and Summer in motion. They entered the dimly lit closet with ceiling-high shelves on three sides and barely enough room for Summer’s wheelchair.

Cartons of medicine, equipment, sacks of food, boxes of every kind of animal vitamin and stacks of magazines and vet supply catalogs littered the area and spilled from every shelf. It looked like no one had organized the room in years. Puffs of dust rose into the air as Travis shifted a box to make room for Summer.

“I hate to tell Doc, but this place was bad before Aunt Kathy put her stuff in here,” Summer said with a grin. “We had a hard time packing everything in this cramped hodgepodge of junk.”

“Yeah, I bet you and Aunt Kathy made this mess!” teased Travis as he tossed a plastic calf bottle at Summer. It bounced off her head and landed at her feet.

“Ow! Stop that, you big bully!” Summer warned with a frown. She reached to pick up the bottle, intending to launch it back at Travis, who now swung a long, clear tube like a wobbly baseball bat. As she bent down and stretched out her arm, her gaze fell under the lowest shelf below the counter. There a box, plastered with shipping labels marked for Africa, lay far beneath a shelf. “Travis, come help me. Look!”

Travis dropped the tube and rushed to Summer’s side. “What is it?”

“It looks like one of Aunt Kathy’s boxes of medicine. She had each different kind of medicine in a separate box. She’s going to need this!” Summer watched as Travis pulled the box out and dusted off the outside. She could see “Box 1 of 1” printed in Aunt Kathy’s round handwriting on the side. She pointed to the markings. “See, this means she only had one box of this kind of medicine. We’re going to have to ship it to her.”

Just then they heard the front door to the clinic open. “Hello, anybody in here?” called their friend, K.T. Watson.

“In here, in the storeroom,” Summer called. K.T. followed her voice to the closet and squinted into the darkness as her eyes adjusted from the midday sun outside. She too had enjoyed seeing the monkeys and came every day to help and to play with them.

“What are you doing in here?” K.T. asked.

“Well, Doc says we can’t care for the monkeys because the pregnant one seems sick. So he gave us a job to clean the storeroom, but look what we found!” Summer answered. She held the bread loaf-sized box so K.T. could see it.

But K.T. was focused on what Summer had just said about the monkey. “One of the monkeys is sick? How sick?”

“Sick enough that Dad doesn’t want us near it,” replied Travis.

“Oh no! Does your aunt know yet?”

“Doc hasn’t been able to reach her. But we can try again to call her. We need to let her know she left this box of medicine here too. I wonder how many days it takes to ship something to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.” Summer was more concerned about the medicine than the sick monkey.

“I need to tell you something,” K.T. began hesitantly. “Before your aunt left, she told me something that I promised not to tell, but now...”

“What is it?” Summer blurted out loud as K.T. paused. Sometimes she felt K.T. could be too dramatic, but the look on her face now was scaring Summer.

“I was in here with her one day before you came in, just talking, and I accidentally bumped her shoulder with the cage door. She winced even though it was a little bump. I said I was sorry, and she said it was just sore from a monkey bite, but not to say anything to your dad or even you. She didn’t want anyone worrying about her while she was in Africa. I didn’t think it was any big deal, but what if the monkey that bit her is this sick one? Kathy should know the monkey’s sick, right away.” K.T. paused to catch her breath. Travis and Summer silently exchanged worried looks. The closet seemed to close around the three friends like a crypt full of dark secrets.

“I can’t believe you didn’t tell me, K.T.,” Summer said with hurt in her voice.

“I didn’t think Kathy would go to Africa if she might be sick. She’s a doctor, after all.”

“You don’t know how determined she was to go. She changed all her plans at the last minute to go a month early! Her arm could have been falling off and she wouldn’t have stayed here,” Summer retorted.

“Hey, don’t go ballistic, Sis,” interrupted Travis. “I think we can solve the problem of the lost box and the monkey bite at the same time. I’ll call Roman, and he and I will take the box to Aunt Kathy in the Congo with the BPC.”

“Oh no you won’t! I’m the one who found the box, and I’ll take it to Aunt Kathy. I’m tired of being left behind while everyone else gets to have adventures. Besides, you don’t know which ‘Congo’ is the right one,” Summer answered angrily.

“There’s more than one Congo?” mumbled Travis, who had relied on Summer’s expertise in geography to travel to Egypt on their first adventure and to find K.T. in the Ukraine.

Ever since Roman had developed the BPC for travel through space and time and had made backpack computers for each of the friends in their small club, Summer had always been the one left behind as the safety contact, the brains behind the computer. She knew better than anyone how to set the programs precisely, and precision would be key to locating Aunt Kathy in a dense jungle half the world away.

“Summer’s right, Travis. She should go,” agreed K.T. who was feeling miserable for not telling Summer about her aunt’s injury. “I can help her. It’ll be just a quick little jaunt to Africa and back. You can be our safety contact.” Ever since K.T. had been stranded in Ukraine, she had seen the wisdom of filing a “flight plan” and having backup contacts at home in Texas.

“Well, there’s no way you’re going without me,” declared Travis. “We’ll get Connie and Roman to be our backups. Sorry, K.T., but I’ve seen how your little jaunts can become big fiascos. We all go together, or I go to Dad.”

K.T. scowled at Travis. He never seemed to trust her with Summer.

“What are we waiting for K.T.?” Summer’s face beamed with a bright smile and the sparkle of excitement flashed in her blue eyes. She held the box in her lap. “Travis can call Connie and Roman about backing us up. Then we’ll meet you at the gazebo in twenty minutes with our backpacks. Too bad,” she added mischievously, “the storeroom will just have to wait.”

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A bright sun was directly overhead and a stiff, hot breeze snapped the colorful flags hanging from every light pole along the wide boulevard. Street signs told the three young travelers that they were on the *Boulevard du 30 Juin*, the main street in downtown Kinshasa. Modern buildings of concrete, glass and steel lined the wide thoroughfare filled with buses, cars and pedestrians. The hum of traffic sounded exactly like any city in Texas.

“Are you sure we’re in Africa?” asked Travis. “This isn’t like any jungle I’ve ever seen.”

“We’re in Kinshasa, the capital of the DRC. It’s one of the most modern and largest cities in all of sub-Saharan Africa. About 5 million people call this home. Don’t worry. Once you leave this urban jungle, the green jungle is not far away. It’s a good thing I confirmed the exact street location of the Doctors Without Borders office. Look, it’s just across the street.” Summer pointed to a small sign that read *Medecins Sans Frontieres* in front of a first floor clinic that had a line of people queued down the sidewalk. “That’s where we’ll find Aunt Kathy, I’ll bet.”

Travis and K.T. followed behind Summer as she crossed with the traffic light to the other side of the broad roadway. A few people stared at the blonde youth rolling along confidently in her motorized wheelchair followed by a lanky, sandy-haired, teenage boy and a petite black girl. All three carried large backpacks, giving them the appearance of students, which was all the more confusing for the locals; few children of this age were still in school in Kinshasa.

“This is going to take hours!” complained Travis as they reached the end of the line of sick people. “And I don’t want to catch something standing in this crowd. Can’t we just go up to the front and ask for Aunt Kathy?” He glanced at the man directly in front of Summer.

“What are we going to tell your aunt about how we got here?” K.T. asked.

“I think if Aunt Kathy expects us to keep a secret, we can expect her to keep one too. We’ll have to tell her about the BPC,” Summer stated calmly. “How else?”

Travis raised his eyebrows and shrugged. He didn’t like the idea of telling his aunt about the BPC. “We could put a note in the box and then just hand it to someone inside to give to her.” He was beginning to feel very uneasy about seeing his aunt in person.

“No way, Travis. We need to see her to find out if the monkey that bit her is the one that’s sick. Don’t you want to see her?” Summer rolled her chair forward as the line inched closer to the door.

Travis didn't have a chance to answer. A nurse in a white lab coat carrying a clipboard had been moving down the line, asking questions of each waiting patient and giving each one a sheet of paper to carry into the clinic. She had reached the person before Summer, and they listened as she questioned him.

"What is your name? Date of birth? Age?" she asked in Lingala, the universal language of the DRC's diverse population. Summer was glad the translator programs in the Texans' backpack computers allowed them to understand and speak any language.

The emaciated man mumbled the answers hoarsely. He seemed barely able to breathe. Lesions covered his face and neck. He said he had been getting worse for several years. The nurse asked why he had not come in sooner. He simply closed his eyes and shook his head. She turned his arm over and ran her finger down the tracks of needle marks that followed his bulging veins.

"Do you use intravenous drugs? Share needles and syringes?"

He nodded twice.

She called out to another nurse closer to the door to call for a stretcher immediately. "We will give you something to ease the pain as soon as possible." She helped load the frail man onto the stretcher and finished her notes. She tore the sheet from the clipboard and handed it to the waiting stretcher-bearer. The others in line turned their heads as the afflicted man was carried into the clinic. The nurse turned back to Summer and blinked her eyes in surprise.

"How can I help you?" she asked in French.

Summer hesitated and then answered, her words translated instantly by the BPC, "We are looking for Dr. Kathy Allen. She came to work here two weeks ago. We have a package to deliver to her." Summer took the small box from her backpack.

"Yes, I know Dr. Allen, but she left a week ago to go to the new clinic in Yambuku which just recently opened. Can you leave the package for when she returns in four weeks?"

"Four weeks! We were hoping to see her today, right now!" Summer exclaimed as K.T. echoed behind her with a soft scream. Travis seemed almost happy to hear the news.

"Is there any way we could call her in Yambuku?" he asked coolly. "It really is imperative that we speak to her as soon as possible." He gave the nurse a big smile, trying to look older than his fourteen years.

“Yambuku does not have phone service as it is deep in the jungle, but we do have radio contact. Come in the clinic with me, and I’ll help you reach her.”

Travis bowed slightly and followed her into the crowded clinic with Summer and K.T. close behind him. The girls rolled their eyes when Travis whispered to them, “At least one of us knows how to get into the clinic quickly.” The people in line stared at the three strangers. Many tried to fan themselves with the clinic papers as the midday heat began to rise.

The clinic was much larger than it looked from the outside. About ten doctors were set up down a long narrow room separated only by sheets hung between the examination tables. There was a small office at the end of the room where a gray-haired man was talking on the radio. The nurse turned to them and pointed to rickety chairs along the wall where several people waited.

“You may wait here till Dr. Sonnier is finished. He is talking to Yambuku Clinic right now. Tell him you need to talk to Dr. Allen. He is the one in charge here.” She left with her clipboard to continue her interviews on the sidewalk.

Travis leaned against the doorway and waited for a chance to speak to the doctor. Summer moved her chair against the wall, and K.T. nervously paced in front of her. Snatches of conversation floated in the stagnant air blown timidly by two struggling ceiling fans. Summer listened to the two women sitting closest to her. One was a thin, elderly woman, the other a young mother with a baby.

The mother held her infant, mopping his face with a dirty rag as he sweated profusely and tried to nurse. A sore on his lip seemed to cause his mother’s milk to run down his chin instead of into his mouth. The mother of the infant was speaking in angry tones to the elderly woman.

“It’s taking my whole family. How can I tell my husband ‘no intimacy’ because he’s sick? I can’t even tell he’s sick. Now, it’s too late. Now, I have it, and I’m afraid my son has it too. There’s no more being young and strong. But why are you here, Grandmother?”

“That is what we are going to find out,” interrupted a doctor with a stethoscope around his neck as well as a paper facemask. His hands were covered in thin surgical gloves. “Come, Grandmother. This table closest to you is ready.” Summer and K.T. watched as he gently helped the old woman onto the table and put his facemask over his nose and mouth.

“Tell me what you are feeling,” he instructed in a muffled voice.

“My throat is sore, and I have a headache. My old legs are stiff, and I ache whether I walk or sit. Maybe I am just old and tired.”

“Could be you have flu or mononucleosis,” the doctor said as he felt her swollen glands along her neck and under her arms.

“That’s what they said I had eight years ago when I got sick after my surgery. That ‘mono’ thing you said. They gave me medicine, and I have been well ever since.”

“You had mononucleosis after a surgery? How long after?”

“Oh, about three, four weeks.”

“Did you have a blood transfusion during surgery – what did you say – eight years ago?”

“Yes, they gave me blood, but I know they use clean needles. It was at the hospital in Makulu. Makulu is where I worked in a resort hotel. Makulu is a clean, safe, healthy place.”

“It’s not the needle I’m concerned about,” mumbled the doctor softly. “We need to do a blood test to check for antibodies. That will tell us what is really wrong. And then we can make you better, Grandmother.” He turned on a green light above the bed, and a lab technician came over to him. “I need to ask you one more thing, Grandmother. Have you been with any men lately?”

The old woman laughed. “Not since my poor husband died twenty years ago.” She pointed to the young mother in the chair beside her. “No, I cannot have the problem she has.”

The doctor turned, wrote on her chart and handed it to a waiting lab technician. “Let’s hope not,” he said grimly as the lab tech, switching off the light, led the woman away to another room. He turned his attention to the young mother.

Meanwhile, Travis was eavesdropping on Dr. Sonnier as he talked with the medical team at Yambuku. Dr. Sonnier wore headphones so Travis could only hear one side of the conversation.

“I need a breakdown of last week’s cases. How many tested positive for acute HIV infection? Mmm-huh.” Dr. Sonnier wrote as he talked. “How many tested asymptomatic? Really? Wow!” he said scribbling more numbers on the large yellow pad. “Full-blown AIDS? That’s surprising.” He paused listening intently to the person on the other end of the radio. Travis wondered if it was Aunt Kathy.

Finally, Dr. Sonnier asked softly, “Any Ebola verified? Still just rumors of sudden fevers and bleeding?” Again he waited silently. “Has Kathy Allen arrived yet? No? Well,

she's scheduled to arrive today. I'll be waiting anxiously to hear from her. We lost contact two days ago, so I'm assuming her handheld radio battery must be dead. She's got the best portage team accompanying her so I'm not worried. Besides, she used the radio to call in reports quite frequently the first few days. Probably wore it down."

Travis leaned forward and could hear static crackling from the headphones. "What was that?" the doctor shouted into the mike. "Yeah, she was finding dead chimps all along the river. She's got tissue samples to test as soon as she arrives." Static crackled again. "Don't worry, she knows what she's doing. You just keep treating those opportunistic infections, and she'll look for the cause. Call me as soon as she arrives."

The gray-haired doctor abruptly clicked off the mike, snatched the headphones from his ears, and turned on his stool at the same time. "What do you want?" he barked at Travis who was caught gawking at the physician.

Summer, K.T., and Travis all jumped, but the other doctors seemed accustomed to Dr. Sonnier's brusque manner. Everyone went on without looking up.

"Um, we, um..." Travis stammered.

Summer rolled forward. "We're foreign exchange students from the United States, and we were asked by Dr. Allen's brother to contact her while we're in Kinshasa. Your nurse told us she was on her way to Yambuku and that we might radio her. She said to ask you for help because you're the boss. Can you help us?" Summer smiled sweetly at the grizzled doctor.

Travis began to explain that Kathy had not yet arrived in Yambuku, but realized he'd be giving away that he had been listening, so he kept quiet. He simply nodded in amazement at Summer's cool manipulation of the facts. K.T. thought to herself how great it would have been to have Summer along on the other adventures. She was one smooth operator.

The doctor stared at Summer for a moment assessing her story. They did look like students. The boy even resembled Kathy a bit. He would help them. "She's scheduled to arrive today. What time today, I do not know. You are welcome to wait here, but I warn you, it may be a long wait, and this is not a comfortable place to be."

"Yes. And we don't want to be in your way, so we'll wait outside and check back later." Summer maneuvered her chair and led her friends outside.

"Smooth talking, little sister," Travis complimented Summer. "What do you propose to do now?"

“You don’t really want to wait here, do you?” asked K.T. Sitting still was not her forte.

“Of course not, K.T., but I don’t think I can travel to Yambuku. There won’t be good trails or any pavement. Travis, you and K.T. will have to take the box to Yambuku and leave it for Aunt Kathy. Try to see her without being seen. If she looks healthy, we’ll just let Doc tell her about the monkey. If she doesn’t look healthy, call me on the BPC. I’ll wait here as your safety back up and to listen for her radio contact.” As she spoke, Summer located information on Yambuku with her BPC. “Here are the coordinates for Yambuku. Be careful.”

She handed the box to K.T. who stuffed it in her backpack. “Are you sure you’ll be all right?” asked K.T.

“Yeah, maybe I should go to Yambuku alone and let K.T. stay here with you,” offered Travis. As long as he didn’t have to see his aunt in person, he wasn’t scared.

“No way! You two go take this to her or the whole trip is pointless. I’ll be perfectly safe at the clinic. Don’t worry! Now go!” She led them down the sidewalk to the corner of the building where an alley ran between the clinic and a bank. K.T. and Travis ducked into the alley and then disappeared. “Good luck.” she whispered.

Summer suddenly shivered despite the heat. Now that they were gone, she could drop the façade of cool and calm. She buried her face in her hands only for a moment, then wiped the few tears from her cheeks, and rolled toward the clinic door. I’ve been scared before, she thought. I can handle this.

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Travis and K.T. found themselves just behind a low wooden building with mosquito netting for windows. A huge electric generator hid them from view on one side. A small sign on the generator read “Property of Yambuku Clinic.” Everyone seemed to be gathering in front of the building where shouts and laughter could be heard.

“Welcome, welcome, Dr. Allen, to the heart of the Congo. We are so glad you have come to help us solve this mystery!” a man’s voice rang out above the others.

“I’m afraid I’ll bring more questions than answers, Dr. Kalevu, but I am glad you asked me to come.”

Travis gave a sigh of relief to hear Aunt Kathy's voice. She sounded good, but they needed to see her to be sure. He motioned to K.T. to follow him to the window where they could peer through the netting.

Dr. Allen followed Dr. Kalevu into the one room clinic and directed the porters to unload their backpacks on the front porch. As she slipped off her own backpack, she winced and grabbed her shoulder. K.T. grimaced, recalling how Aunt Kathy had done the same thing when K.T. had bumped her.

"It's still sore," she whispered to Travis. He put his finger to his lips and motioned K.T. be quiet and look.

"Are you hurt?" asked Dr. Kalevu.

"No, just a sore that hasn't had a chance to heal. Before I left Virginia, one of my monkeys gave me a 'good-bye' bite, and it got infected from the backpack as we traveled the Congo trails. All my medicines were sent ahead. I was foolish not to pack any for the journey. The boxes have all arrived, haven't they?"

"From the manifest it looks like only one box is missing. We haven't tried to unpack anything, preferring to wait for your direction." Dr. Kalevu handed Kathy the list of shipments.

She ran her finger down the packing slip and muttered a "drat" as she found the one that was marked as missing. "It's the box that has the new needles for the syringes. It's very important that we use disposable needles and syringes, especially during a possible outbreak. I'll have to call the States and have another shipped ASAP. In the meantime, I've picked up several tissue samples from dead chimps along the way that need to be tested." She stopped as she noticed Dr. Kalevu's facial expression.

"No need to be concerned, Dr. Kalevu, I *did* pack the protective virological sampling gear for the trail. I have a great respect for the Ebola virus—if that is what we're seeing decimate the chimpanzee population. I'd heard from Michael Fay in Gabon that the chimps and great apes are vanishing. We found dead specimens at every charcoal burner and mining camp along the river. Hate to say it, but it does look like EHF. I ran my battery down two days ago calling Dr. Sonnier every day."

"Yes and we must radio him now. He guessed your battery ran out, but he was anxious to hear you arrived safely." Dr. Kalevu led Kathy to the radio desk near the window where K.T. and Travis were hiding. The Congolese doctor flipped a switch for the diesel-powered generator

that provided on demand electric power for the clinic. It roared to life beside the two startled friends.

As Dr. Kalevu tried to reach the Kinshasa clinic, Travis turned to K.T. and whispered, “The monkey that bit Aunt Kathy was in Virginia.”

“Yeah, it couldn’t be the sick one. I think we need to sneak this box into the clinic and hurry back to Summer.”

“I’d like to go to the restroom before you call Dr. Sonnier. Is there a privy out back?” Aunt Kathy asked as she reached for her backpack and began to unpack.

“Yes, behind the clinic, a small hut near one of the creeks that flow through the village.”

“That beats what I’ve had this past week!” laughed Kathy.

K.T. glanced over her shoulder. She could see the hut only a few yards away. She grabbed the box from her backpack and, without consulting Travis, hurried to the privy. She slid the box under the door and ran back to Travis. She had just dived behind the generator when Kathy walked past toward the bathroom.

“You’re crazy!” hissed Travis, even though he had to admit to himself it was as good a plan as any. K.T. might be bold, but sometimes it paid off.

“Yeah, crazy as you are!” K.T. answered with a smile. “Let’s get out of here before she comes back out.” She could hear Kathy’s cry of disbelief as she found the box of needles. K.T. grabbed Travis’ hand and with a click they were gone, the whirl of their departure absorbed by the hum of the mighty generator.



Summer kept her eyes open for her friends and her ears open for the crackle of the radio. She had moved back inside the clinic where she could avoid the curious stares of the pedestrians on the busy street. Here inside, the sick folks took little notice of a girl in a wheelchair.

From the corner of her eye, she caught a glimpse of Travis outside in the alleyway motioning for her to come out. Then the radio blasted loudly with Dr. Kathy Allen’s voice calling for Dr. Sonnier. He hurried to the radio, apparently oblivious to Summer waiting there. He’s already forgotten me, thought Summer, as she rolled out the back door of the clinic to the alley. She hurried to hear what Travis and K.T. had to report.

“It was a Virginia monkey,” K.T. blurted out. “Not the sick one from Alice.”

“And we left the box where Aunt Kathy would be sure to find it,” added Travis.

K.T. giggled. “In the bathroom!”

“I want to hear more, but we need to get back. Re-set the coordinates and timeframe. Stand on either side of my chair, please. I don’t want anyone to be left behind!” Summer gave them the numbers to punch, and then all three held onto her chair as the incredible device swirled them back to Texas where Dr. Tony Allen was trying to call his sister in Africa to tell her a pregnant monkey had just died.