

## INTO TEMPTATION

"Julia, have you seen Morgan?" Bess' worried voice reached John Danziger as he was crouched under the TransRover. He lay on his back beneath the vehicle, checking the machinery for any damage it might have sustained, during the day's long hike across the rocky terrain.

"Didn't he go with Devon, to bring water from the stream below?" Julia's voice queried.

"Yes," Bess confirmed. "But that was over an hour ago. And it's almost dark now. You don't think anything could've happened to them, do you?" Concern for her husband pitched the Earth woman's voice slightly higher than its usual pleasant tone.

Danziger pushed himself out from underneath the Rover and climbed to his feet, slapping at his knees to dust them off.

"I'll go take a look," he offered. He silently cursed Morgan, and Devon. He'd hoped to spend a few moments of quality time with his daughter before dinner. He didn't want to go traipsing through the brush looking for missing crewmembers. And Morgan had likely gone off on another find-fame-and-fortune survey. Still, Adair would've called it in, wouldn't she? "You're right, they should've been back by now," he told Bess.

"I'm going with you," Julia said, making for the med-tent to get her bag. "They may need my help." Danziger nodded.

"I'm coming too," Bess said. Her tone made it obvious she wouldn't listen to any objections the others might have.

Danziger grabbed a Mag Pro -- better not go anywhere on this planet without a weapon, he thought -- and the three walked off, pushing through the dense brush that grew on the hillside where they currently camped.

A meandering stream of clear water ran across the bottom of the valley, yet they didn't want to camp too close near its banks. They'd seen how calm streams could turn into violently churning rivers in a matter of seconds if it rained in these hills. And thunderstorms threatened. Instead, Devon and Morgan had taken a couple of containers each, to fill with enough water for their evening meal.

The dense brush made it difficult going -- reason why the two water-carriers hadn't taken a vehicle -- but it wasn't far. Soon Danziger and his two companions arrived at the stream. Ahead the larger of the two moons peeped cautiously over the horizon and stars blinked on overhead.

Danziger stopped abruptly, causing Bess to bump into him, when he noticed Devon and Morgan sitting together near the stream. To his astonishment they were singing old campfire songs, Devon's clear voice intermingled with Morgan's lower yowls. When he caught sight of his wife, Morgan waved at Bess, a wide, uncontrolled sweep of his arm, and motioned her to join them.

"Bess, love of my life, come here and let me hug you," he cried as he clambered to his feet. Or at least tried to. Before he made it halfway up he toppled over and crashed on his side. Bess hurried to him to see if he was hurt. But Morgan shook with laughter at his own expense.

All through the commotion Devon just sat quietly, watching with a large and happy, albeit mildly goofy, smile on her face, a grin that stretched from ear to ear. The three new arrivals exchanged a puzzled look.

Julia frowned and scanned the two crewmembers quickly with her Diaglove. Then she chuckled and straightened to scrutinize the vegetation along the river.

"What is it?" Bess asked, looking up from where she sat hugging Morgan. He was busy beaming a delighted grin at her. Danziger followed Julia's gaze while he slowly lowered the Mag Pro.

"There's nothing wrong with them, not really," Julia grinned. "Except they're both stoned out of their minds."

Danziger and Bess raised their eyebrows. "What?" they exclaimed in unison.

"There are traces of lysergic acid in their blood," Julia explained. "That's the main component of the drug they called LSD, or acid, in the twentieth century. It relaxes inhibitions and produces a sense of euphoria. It can also cause hallucinations," she lectured while her gaze slowly traveled over the clearing. Her face brightened as she caught sight of a patch of large, purplish-red flowers, still blooming despite the darkness. She knelt next to it and extended her hand. Glancing at the display she murmured in satisfaction. "Just as I thought. They must've smelled this flower." She swayed on her knees as a spell of dizziness assaulted her. She scooted back quickly.

"Woah," she muttered and climbed to her feet. "We'd better steer clear of that plant. Its effect is very strong."

"Are they going to be okay?" Bess asked, worried. Her experience with the spring flowers had left her wary, regarding the local flora.

"Oh, yes," Julia said. "They're just intoxicated. They'll probably feel pretty bad tomorrow though. Dizzy, nauseous, like they got a severe hangover. But that's probably all."

Danziger groaned. A hung-over, grumpy Devon Adair would be just the thing to make his life miserable in the morning. Add to that a Morgan Martin in the same condition --

"We better get them back to camp," he said, bending to lift Devon up in his arms and carry her back.

"Danziger, wait," Julia stopped him in mid-motion. "It's better to make them walk if they can. The exercise will help the drug flush out of their systems more quickly."

"Okay. You take care of Morgan," he said and the two women nodded. They pulled Morgan to his feet and ducked to make him put his arms across their shoulders. Leaning heavily on them, Morgan allowed them to lead him away from the clearing, up the hill. He kept trying to put loud, smacking kisses on Bess' cheek while he was chattering away about actually hearing the twinkle of the overhead stars. "I love this planet," Danziger heard him cry as they disappeared into the brush. "I love it!"

Shaking his head, Danziger crouched near Devon. He was furious with her; how could she've been so dumb as to take a whiff of some unknown flower? She ought to know better.

"Adair, what were you thinking?" he growled, roughly hoisting her to her feet. She giggled as she fell against him, leaning heavily on him for support.

"It's so beautiful here, John," she smiled up at him. "The flowers are so pretty. And did you know that the moons sing? They sound like blue." He glanced at her quizzically and Devon blinked at him, her eyes sparkling innocently.

Danziger steered her forward, frog-marching her ahead of him, following the trail the two women and Morgan left through the undergrowth. He tried hard to keep some space between himself and her as he pushed her along. Her nearness made him feel uneasy and gawky, evoking memories of the ungainly youth he once was. But she was hardly capable of standing on her own two feet and lurched heavily, stumbling against him as they went along.

When she overbalanced and tripped over her own feet he lunged to keep her upright. Devon giggled again, a pleasant chortle that brought a smile to his face despite his discomfort. As she leaned against him, she turned and threw her arms around his neck, her fingers interlocking behind his head.

He gasped at her touch and for a brief moment time seemed to stand still. Danziger stared down at her while she turned her face upwards. Then, before he knew what was happening, she twined her hand in his blond locks. Her slender fingers grazed the sensitive skin on the back of his head, and she pulled his face down. Her lips brushed his cheek, before they found his mouth and she kissed him hard.

He tried to pull back instinctively but she wouldn't let him. As her tongue forced his lips apart and began to explore his mouth, he breathed in sharply through his nose. Momentarily he was incapable of movement, intoxicated by her closeness and the sweetness of the kiss, the soft touch of her lips on his.

She pressed herself against him with an urgency that made his head spin. He could feel her warmth; her hardening nipples pressed through the thin fabric of his shirt. Her hands slowly explored the strong muscles of his back and shoulders.

The temptation was almost too much for him. His senses sharpened as he drank in the taste of her. She was so close, the fresh smell of her hair, clinging in his nose. He could see the tiny crow's feet around her eyes, getting slightly more pronounced as their kiss deepened and her face flushed. His need rose while the blood drew from his face, flowing out of his brain, and rushing to other body parts in happy anticipation of things to come.

"Oh John," Devon whispered huskily, her warm breath tickling his throat, sending a shiver down his spine. He swallowed. With an extreme effort of will, he pried her arms loose from his neck, pushing her away until he could be sure she wouldn't feel his excitement growing.

"Adair, stop it," he rasped, his voice hoarse as he attempted to sound stern. She pursed her lips, looking slightly miffed.

"Don't you wanna play?" she purred flirtatiously.

"You're zonked," Danziger said gruffly. "You don't know what you're doing." He took a few deep, ragged breaths, trying to get himself under a semblance of control. She laughed at his obvious discomfort. Her eyes gleamed darkly in the moonlight while her hand trailed teasingly across his chest. Her touch made the hairs on his arms raise. "You're so strong," she sighed as she leaned into him again.

He realized he'd better get her back to camp quickly, before he lost control. With a growl he scooped her in his arms, carrying her to her tent. She bubbled with laughter, clasping her hands securely behind his head. He walked as fast as he could, almost running the last few meters to the safety of the canvas walls.

With a relieved sigh Danziger dropped her on her bunk, fully intending to make a quick exit. Her arms were still tight around his neck and Devon refused to let go, trying to pull him with her on her bunk. He barely managed to keep his balance and dropped to his knees beside the cot.

"Oh God, Adair," he groaned as she lifted her head and her soft lips found his mouth again. "You'll be the death of me," he muttered helplessly against her teeth. As if by their own volition, his hands were roaming across her body, exploring the soft curves of her breasts and she shifted under his gentle touch, a low moan escaping her lips. Letting go of his hair, she reached out and tore at his shirt, trying to pull it up and over his head. He moaned as her nails grazed the bare skin of his back.

Suddenly he heard a rustling sound and the light of the two moons fell full on the groping couple.

"John, I saw that you ca--" Julia's voice faltered as she took in the scene in front of her. Fast as lightning, Danziger shot backwards from the cot, tugging his shirt back down, desperately trying to regain control of his breathing. He was grateful for the dim light so the doctor wouldn't be able to see the bright red color creeping upward from below his collar.

"Oh," Julia said, grinning sheepishly, "I'm sorry. I wanted to scan Devon one more time. I can come back --"

"No!" Danziger gulped. "I ... eh...," he stuttered, glancing back at Devon. Her eyes were closed and she snored softly, vast asleep. His mouth opened and closed, then, without a further word, he fled from the tent, nearly bumping into the pole supporting the roof on his way out. Julia's quiet chuckle followed closely on his heels.

Danziger ducked back into his own tent, nearly tripping in his haste, and prayed hard that True would be elsewhere. His silent plea was answered and he found himself alone in his tent. When his knees suddenly turned to water and buckled, he flopped down on his bunk. His breath still came in quick gasps and his heart thudded in his chest. He leaned forward, his head resting on his knees. Visions of Devon's face, flushed with passion, danced in front of his closed eyes.

He groaned and focused all his thoughts on reiterating the technical specs of the vehicles in his mind. Finally, his breathing slowed to a more normal rhythm and he sat up, calmer now. At last he felt in control enough to rejoin the group for their evening meal. Yet, it was a long time before he fell asleep that night.

"Oh, my head," Devon groaned as she ducked to walk out of her tent.

"Morning," the few people already gathered around the fire greeted her. Walman wordlessly handed her a cup of coffee.

"Thanks," she muttered, glaring around defensively.

"Devon, how are you feeling?" Julia asked.

"Like hell," Devon replied.

"Do you remember what happened?"

Danziger held his breath, in trepidation of her reply. He kept his eyes locked on the fire, meticulously avoiding looking at Devon. He wasn't sure what he hoped she would answer.

He was strangely pleased he'd gotten a glimpse of the warm, passionate woman Devon really was, beneath that veneer of cool practicality she wore like a cloak. And he desired to get to know that woman better. On the other hand, he figured she was going to be very embarrassed if she remembered sharing her passion, letting go like that. He didn't think he could deal with her embarrassment. And even worse, she might accuse him of trying to take advantage, while he had done his utmost to withstand the temptation.

After a long pause, Devon answered. "No," she said slowly, drawing out the word. "I don't really remember anything after reaching the river, with Morgan. Not until I woke up this morning." She frowned a little while she grasped at the memories, then shook her head. "No, it's all a blur."

Danziger let out his breath in a slow sigh. A relieved grin broke on his face but it faltered as he caught Julia's gaze. She was smiling ever so pleasantly while she told Devon not to worry. "It might come back to you." And she winked at Danziger when their eyes met.

He knew his secret would be safe with her. But in private she'd tease him mercilessly. And he suddenly regretted all the times he'd ribbed her about her relationship with the cocky pilot. He swallowed hard, realizing he had some difficult times ahead of him.

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