

## MIND SHADOWS

### A LOVE LOST – revised June 2000

*[Voice of Alonzo Solace]*

Day 92 on the planet, our thirty-first day stuck in the Bio dome. The group was complete again after our trip through the tunnels. Julia and I had never been happier than when we stood on what we thought to be the New Pacifica beach. But faith in the ones that we love is one of the hardest things to hold on to. Did he tell the truth? Does she really love me? Those questions can be triggered by a small event, but can have far-reaching results...

oOo

The Eden Advance group celebrated the return of their four lost members until late in the night. After they disappeared into the spiders' tunnel, the other crewmembers gathered near the entrance, worried and hopeful at the same time. It was a disappointment, especially to Devon, that they didn't find a fast track to New Pacifica. For now though, it was enough to just be together again.

Dr. Julia Heller was really glad the group decided to wait out winter together. She couldn't believe all that had happened to her in the space of one day. Was it really only this very morning that they were discussing Alonzo's and Danziger's plan to leave on a long trek, a two-month scout? She glanced across the Biodome room, to see the pilot talking with Devon and Uly. When Devon threw her head back and laughed about something he said, a shadow crept across Julia's mind. Did Alonzo tell her the truth when he said he might stay in New Pacifica when she did? Or had the spider bite revealed subconscious longings?

Julia shrugged and chided herself, "Don't be silly, Heller. Of course the spider's toxin caused his sudden attraction to Devon. That's all!"

Alonzo caught her looking at him and, excusing himself to Devon, walked through the crowd to her. "Hey Doc," he said. Suddenly a mischievous grin lit up his face and leaning closer to her he whispered, "You wanna sneak off now, finish what we started?" She blushed when she realized he was referring to their passionate kiss in the cave. She glanced around furtively, hoping nobody noticed her sudden discomfort. Alonzo chuckled and took her elbow to gently lead her out of the main room, back to her tent.

The next morning she awoke early. Snuggling closer into the warm embrace of her sleeping lover's arms, Julia drowsily reviewed the events of the previous day. She smiled; she remembered that Danziger punched Alonzo when he had insistently declared his sudden passion for Devon. She couldn't really blame John; she'd probably have done the

same if she had stayed in the cave a minute longer...

The smile froze on her face as she remembered a previous occasion when Alonzo had called out Devon's name instead of hers. He had been waking from a Terrian dream then, but it still rattled her. Suddenly restless, the cramped bunk not nearly as comfortable as it was a few minutes earlier, Julia decided to get up and see if she could get some breakfast.

She couldn't shake the somber thoughts though. The kiss in Grendler cave, and their love-making last night, that certainly seemed genuine enough. Still, was he honestly planning to stay on the planet once they reached New Pacifica? Did he really love her, like he said he did? Could he? Could anyone?

Alonzo entered the dome just as she was finishing her meal. Julia shifted uncomfortably as he sat down right next to her. His presence so nearby did nothing to clear her head, the confusing thoughts whirling in her mind. She jumped at the chance when she caught Bess' eye.

"Bess, I'd like you to help me take inventory of the fruit the Grendler left us. I want to see if all of it is edible. And maybe you have some ideas on how best to prepare the various fruits. I'd like to start right now," she added as she got up.

"Sure," the other woman said, throwing Alonzo a puzzled look, but he just shrugged.

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Alonzo watched Julia leave with Bess, without so much as a glance back at him. He absently wondered what he might have done wrong, to warrant such cool behavior. Yesterday, and last night, Julia had been welcoming enough. Yet, her posture told him that right now it'd be a good idea for him to leave her alone for a bit. She'd snap out of her mood in her own time, he thought, and left the main room to see if Devon needed him to go on a scout or something.

That evening, for the first time in weeks, the group feasted on something quite different from semolina bars. Bess and Julia had spent the full day locked in the tiny kitchen area Eden Advance had built in the Bio dome. Alonzo felt somewhat disappointed that he hadn't seen Julia all day, but as he was enjoying a fruit-laden meal decided that this feast was worth doing without her presence for a bit. Later tonight, he thought, he'd have her all for himself again.

He'd drawn the early evening watch, so it wasn't until Walman relieved him that he got the chance to see if Julia's distant mood had passed. When he came into her tent, she appeared fast asleep, her back turned towards the entrance. Not wanting to wake her, he ducked back out of the tent, securing the flap behind him.

o0o

Julia tensed when she heard Alonzo enter her tent. She pretended to be asleep and sighed with relief when the pilot did not try to wake her but left without so much as a word. The last thing she needed right now was to look into those deep brown eyes and have him try to make her talk. Her heart was in turmoil; thoughts were whirling through her mind. She had hoped that working on the food samples with Bess would put her mind at ease. Working usually calmed her. Except this time. Instead she had caught herself surreptitiously keeping track of both Alonzo's and Devon's whereabouts.

"This is ridiculous!" she thought to herself. "Heller, you really have to stop this—" 'jealousy,' her mind softly whispered. The thought startled her. Could that really be what she was feeling now, jealousy?

Tomorrow, she decided, she would go and talk to Danziger. He was the only one that had actually seen Alonzo fawning over Devon – besides the object of his affection of course, and she couldn't go talk to Devon! The woman had already teased her enough with her "emotionally charged reaction"! No, Danziger, she decided. He might understand.

Julia lay awake most of the night, and finally fell asleep into a fretful slumber. Uncharacteristically, she overslept the next day, which immediately put her in a bad mood. By the time she came out of the med tent, most people had already finished their breakfast and settled into the daily winter camp routine of various repairs and scouts for food. When she entered the Dome, only Morgan was left, clearing away the breakfast leftovers.

"Morgan, have you seen Alonzo?" she asked, while taking a reluctant bite from a semolina bar.

"Yes," the bureaucrat answered, putting the breakfast bowls away, "you just missed him."

"Oh?" she queried, raising her eyebrows. "Where'd he go?"

"He left with Devon this morning. Said they wanted to go back to the Grendlers' cave, to see if there's anything left that can be salvaged."

She stared at him, mouth agape; she felt like the ground under her feet just dissolved and she was plummeting down. "He left with Devon... he left with Devon..." The words kept repeating themselves in her mind.

"Julia, are you okay? You look as if you've seen a ghost! You're not coming down with

something, are you?" Morgan fretted as he noticed the shocked look on Julia's face. "Oh please, don't tell me our only doctor is getting sick!"

Ignoring Morgan, Julia made her way out of the Bio dome, pushing a surprised Walman out of the way as he came in the door.

"Danziger! Hey, Danziger!" Julia strode across the snow laden clearing towards the 'Rover, where the mechanic was, as usual, tinkering with some piece of equipment.

"Yeah, what," he muttered absently, concentrating on whatever he was working on.

"Did you know Devon and Alonzo went back to the Grendler cave?" she asked, twirling her Gear between her fingers.

"Yeah," he answered. "I asked him to go along. Adair was planning to go all by herself."

"Oh..." was all Julia said. She was a little at a loss for words. She knew Danziger had a soft spot for Devon. That he had asked Alonzo, of all people, to go with Devon had taken her aback. Noticing her silence, Danziger looked up to see her stunned expression.

"Yes, I asked him. You got a problem with that?" he asked.

She blushed slightly. "No, ... I mean... what if—" she stuttered. The blush deepened when a slow grin of sudden understanding crept over the mechanic's face.

"Oh, come on!" he laughed. "Don't tell me you took that whole Devon-I-didn't-die-because-you-called-me-back rant serious!"

"No... No!" she repeated more strongly. "Of course not! It's just—"

"Julia, you \*know\* the spider's bite caused that," he interrupted her. "I mean, that Grendler went nuts about \*you\*! You don't really believe you are the regular Grendler's type, now do you?" He was grinning at her widely now. "Besides, I'd punch his lights out again if he ever pulls another stunt like that." He added the afterthought lightly but with a serious edge to his voice.

Julia hesitantly smiled back at him.

"I suppose you're right. I'm being silly, I know. I can't get it out of my head though," she admitted. "I guess I'm just feeling insecure." She shrugged a helpless apology.

"Well, let me tell you, there's nothing to worry about. Fly-boy is totally crazy 'bout you," he assured her. "But if it makes you feel better, we can go to the cave ourselves later this

morning. I've been wanting to give the DuneRail a test-run and going to the cave is as good as anywhere."

oOo

Alonzo and Devon were exploring the deep recesses of the Grendler's cave, salvaging any Eden equipment that seemed even remotely useful. Most of the stuff was useless though, being smashed or torn apart.

"Devon?" Alonzo asked, a little hesitant.

She looked up at him, questioningly.

"I... eh... I wanted to apologize. I mean, I think I embarrassed you back in the cave at the beach..."

"Alonzo," Devon smiled. "You don't have to apologize. We all know what caused your eh..." She chuckled. "Amorous behavior. You may want to talk to Julia though. She knows it's her that you really love, but she seems a little insecure about it."

"Yes, I know. I told her that I might hang out for a while, you know, after we get to New Pacifica, but she didn't seem to really believe me. And then this... thing happened. I haven't had the chance to talk to her alone though, since we came back."

"Give her some time," Devon advised. "Julia has had a lot on her plate since we got here. She's not equipped to handle the emotions she has been experiencing since the crash. I'm sure she'll come around. She is very fond of you, you know."

He nodded. "Devon... I wouldn't know what to do without her."

oOo

The Rail wove through the trees at high speed. "John, don't you think you should slow down a little?" Julia asked, hanging on to the bars for dear life.

"Nah," he answered as the wind swept his golden curls about his face. "I need to test the modifications I made. Can't do it if we go at a snail's pace!"

"But what if we hit something? Or if you can't hold it?" she cried, the flashes of green going by way too fast for her liking.

"Don't you worry 'bout that. I can hold the Rail anytime!" and he steered sharply to the right to avoid another tree.

Julia gritted her teeth as she grabbed the bar with renewed strength. Damned Danziger and his precious vehicles! Just imagine what he'd say if any of \*them\* drove like this!

"Look out!" she yelled when she noticed the dark Grendler's shape suddenly looming in their path. John cursed as he threw the Rail sharply to the left, missing the Grendler by mere inches.

For a second, time seemed to stand still, the Rail suspended on two of its wheels. Just as John thought the vehicle would right itself, the front wheel hit a rock hidden beneath the snow, upsetting the precarious balance and sending the Rail crashing onto its side. With a sickening thud the vehicle screeched to a halt against a tree. Then there was only silence...

oOo

"I'd say we've seen every nook and cranny in this cave twice now," Devon remarked as she studied the meager results of their explorations. "I guess we better head back to camp, before anyone gets worried that we took another trip down those tunnels."

"Yeah. And I promised Morgan I'd help him build a beach into his VR programming," Alonzo answered. "Besides, I still need to find an opportunity to talk to Julia."

As they came out of the cave, Devon's Gear beeped. "Devon, this is Yale. Have Danziger and Julia arrived yet?" the cyborg asked without any preliminaries.

"No," she answered. "Were they coming out here?"

"Yes, Danziger took the Rail for a test run and Julia went with him. They were going to meet you and see if they could help you get the materials you might have found back to camp. But that was over an hour ago. And we haven't heard from them since."

"Well," Devon replied, pensively, "if it were only Danziger, I wouldn't be worried. He never answers his Gear anyway. But Julia... She's much more responsible than that." When Devon mentioned the doctor's name, Alonzo raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"What's with Julia?" he asked.

"Do you know which route they took?" Devon asked the tutor. She signaled Alonzo to wait a moment.

"They said they were going to take the low track, through the woods. If you walk back along the ridge, you should be able to see them if the Rail broke down or..." Yale's voice

trailed off. He didn't want to speculate on what might have happened to the pair.

"We'll do that. Adair out," and Devon pushed back the eyepiece.

"What?" Alonzo asked, a note of urgency creeping into his voice at seeing the expression on Devon's face. "What happened?"

"They don't know," she answered. "Julia and Danziger were going to come and meet us here with the Rail. They should have been here a while ago. We'd better walk back along the ridge, so we can more easily see the low ground."

Not wasting any more words on why's or how's, Alonzo turned and started walking back along the ridge, his whole posture set in grim determination.

oOo

Danziger became aware of a pounding headache. He carefully opened his eyes and his senses were assaulted with bright, white light. Slowly, the world swam back in focus. He was lying on his side in the snow, next to the Rail. There was something odd about the vehicle though.

After a few more moments it came to him. The Rail was upside down, four wheels sticking up in the air! What the...?

Then he remembered. The Grendler suddenly in his path, the desperate turn to the left, the vehicle overturning... "Julia..." he gasped. Where was she? Why wasn't she already buzzing about him with her diaglove? With a tightening feeling in his gut he realized that the fact that she wasn't could only mean one thing: that she herself was hurt badly in the crash!

Slowly he tried to sit up, his head throbbing and dark spots swimming into his vision. Careful, Danziger, he admonished himself, can't have you pass out again.

When he managed to get into a sitting position, his eyes fell on the limp form next to the Rail's front end. His breath caught in his throat. "Julia?"

oOo

Up on the ridge, Devon's breath came in ragged gasps as she tried to keep up with the pilot, who set a grueling pace in his worry for the doctor. "Alonzo, wait!" she panted.

He came to a sudden halt ahead of her, but not because of her plea. He put the jumpers to his eyes, and frowned. "Oh God... there's the Rail! It's upside down. They must have

had an accident! Come on!" he yelled as he dashed forward and slid down the slope, throwing up a cloud of snow and dirt in his haste to get to the vehicle.

"Julia?! Julia! Where are you? Are you okay?" he shouted as he skidded to a halt.

"Lonz? Is that you? We're here," a weak voice came from the other side of the vehicle.

"Danziger! How are you? Where's Julia..." Alonzo's voice faltered when he skirted around the upturned vehicle and his eyes fell on her limp body.

"What have you done to her?" he accused the mechanic. He dropped to his knees next to the unconscious doctor and hesitantly touched her pale face. "Why did you have to take her along? Man, if she—" Alonzo didn't finish but the murderous look he shot the wounded man was unmistakable.

"Hey, she *wanted* to come," the mechanic defended himself. "She was worried about you being alone with Devon..." But the pilot wasn't really listening anymore. Instead, he was trying to get the doctor to wake up.

"Julia... Doc, can you hear me? Say something!" he pleaded, as he lightly tapped her on the cheeks. But there was no response.

"We have to get her back to camp," Devon said. She pulled the optic feeder of her Gear forward. "Yale, there has been an accident. Julia is seriously hurt. The Rail is damaged. We need some extra hands here. Send Walman and Baines here. And does anyone know how to read a diaglove?"

oOo

Darkness had fallen long ago by the time they finally put Julia's body down on a cot in the med section of the Biodome. It had taken them hours to get the unconscious doctor back to camp. The TransRover couldn't make its way to the accident site, the trees were too dense and the snow too deep. Finally, they hauled Julia back to camp on an improvised sled.

With the doctor being unavailable and no one able to handle the diaglove, they had to revert to old-fashioned methods of counting heartbeats and checking pulses. Though Julia's pulse seemed regular and strong, she had not come around. Alonzo sat next to the cot, holding her cold, limp hand in his two strong, warm ones. They left him that way as the others got together to confer on their next course of action. Not that they were able to do much.

None of them had any more than rudimentary medical knowledge, which was fairly

useless at the moment. Yale had scanned his database to see what information was logged there. But even he couldn't tell them much. Except that Julia seemed to have hit her head pretty hard. And this, two days after being knocked out in the Grendler cave, was \*not\* a good thing. There was nothing to do though. According to Yale's outdated information on head injuries, they just had to wait and see if Julia came out of her apparent coma all by herself. Yale did not tell them about the cases that had the patient coming out of a coma a virtual plant.

One by one the Eden crew came to ask Alonzo if anything had changed. Until the ceaseless repeat of the same question annoyed him so much, that he asked Zero to guard the door and keep everyone out. Yale, with his silent understanding, was the only one Alonzo could tolerate to be in the room. The tutor checked up on him regularly. That night, and the next morning, Alonzo refused to leave the doctor's side. It wasn't until noon that he entered the main room, having to answer a call of nature. The Eden crew was shocked to see the way he looked, disheveled, his face white and haggard, with dark circles underneath his eyes.

"Alonzo, have you slept at all?" Devon asked him. He shook his head, too weary to talk. "Alonzo, this is no good. You need to eat something and get some sleep. Yale can watch Julia for a while. And we'll get you the second there's a change in her condition."

"No," he croaked, "I can't leave her."

"But Alonzo, you will kill yourself if you keep this up. What good will that do?" Morgan asked.

"It won't matter," he replied, "if Julia d—" His voice broke, the words refusing to form, and he hurried from the room.

A few minutes later, the pilot had again taken up his vigil in the small room. He once more took her hand in his, softly stroking her palm. "Please, Julia," he whispered. "Please don't leave me, come back." A solitary tear trailed down his cheek as he closed his eyes.

oOo

Alonzo found himself on the dream plane. The bright blue sky, the blindingly white sands beneath his feet, it was all so familiar. Still, at this moment he could not enjoy the feeling of peace that usually came over him here. "Julia," he whispered.

Suddenly the scenery changed. He was back in the med room in the Dome. He looked down at Julia, lying still and unmoving on the cot, her eyes closed. And he saw himself, sitting next to the cot, holding her hand, his head bowed.

"Julia," his dream-self sighed once more.

Suddenly, she opened her eyes. And while he watched his physical self sitting still, not moving, head bowed and obviously fast asleep, Julia floated towards him, her body remaining motionless on the cot.

"Alonzo," she said in greeting, her blue eyes full of love, her words only sounding in his head. "I am sorry, it wasn't meant to be. \*We\* weren't meant to be."

"Julia, what are you talking about?" he wanted to shout. The words caught in his throat while she slowly floated toward the door.

Suddenly he realized what was happening. She was saying goodbye, she was dying, right here and now, in front of his eyes. "Julia, no!" he yelled, and tried to go after her. "You cannot leave, not now! Not after I spend a hundred years waiting to find you. Not now, that life is finally worth living! I want to enjoy this ride to the fullest, but not without you!"

Her image turned towards him. "Alonzo, you will be fine, I promise. I won't be really gone; we will meet here, on the dream plane. But I need to go now, there's no more time..."

"Nooo!" he screamed, when she drifted from the room. With a sudden start he woke up to find himself inside his physical body once more. Yale was standing next to him, shaking him, his eyes infinitely sad.

"Alonzo, it's over. She is gone..."

*[Voice of Devon Adair]*

And so we lost another of our party. And a crucial one at that. Without Julia's medical knowledge, our chances of getting to New Pacifica unscathed have diminished greatly. Predictably, Alonzo is devastated by the loss of his love, sinking into a deeper depression than ever before since crashing on the planet. John also takes Julia's death extremely hard, being consumed by guilt. It will be a long time before life in our group resembles anything even remotely normal...

## EPILOGUE

*[Voice of Devon Adair]*

It was nearly 2 months after the demise of our doctor, that winter finally broke and that we could leave this cursed place, which had caused us so much grief. Ever since Julia

passed away, Alonzo has been withdrawn, spending more and more time lying on the bunk in the now vacated med room in the Dome. I worry about him; it's not good to keep so much grief inside. But Yale says he probably never learned how to share his grief. And I think he is right. Julia was the only one Alonzo ever really opened up to. I often marvel at how much alike they were in their difference. Both were lost souls, driven by unknown demons, taking refuge in their professions. Until they found each other here, on G889, and became whole. Only to be torn apart again by a stupid accident that shouldn't have happened in the first place.

Another member of our small party that occupies most of my waking worries is John Danziger. He's torn apart by the guilt he feels over the part he played in Julia's death. At least, in *his* mind. I think that no one can be blamed for the accident. If the Grendler hadn't suddenly stepped into their path, if John had not been pushing the Rail to its limits, if Julia hadn't come along, driven by silly jealousies, if Alonzo hadn't come with me to the Grendler cave, if, if, if. It doesn't matter, it happened.

Alonzo however, blames Danziger even more than John blames himself. The pilot hasn't spoken a single word to him since it happened, leaving the room whenever Danziger enters it. One time I tried to break the deadlock by suggesting they go on a scout together. Danziger was strongly opposed. "He hates my guts," he nearly wailed, very uncharacteristically. It was then that I realized how strong his feelings of guilt were. He did not fear Alonzo's hate; he feared his own self-hatred. In the end, the whole idea was aborted, as Alonzo flatly refused to go scouting with John.

And now, finally, we are on the road again, traveling towards New Pacifica, our destination that is still so very far away. New Pacifica, where new challenges await us, where we have to ready the settlement for the colony ship that is coming.

[Voice of Alonzo Solace]

At last we are on the move again. I'm glad we left the Biodome behind; too many memories lurk there.

In the beginning, I dreamt often about Julia. Simple, regular dreams about the things we'd done together. Dreams of the way she smiled, the way her eyes lit up as she discovered another of the planet's secrets. I remember her laughter, rare and always rejoicing. And I remember her tears, that day I had found her in the shrubs behind her tent, that horrible day when we had left her behind. Those dreams are my escape from harsh reality, the only solace that I can find. These days I don't dream about her much, though, and I fear I'm going to lose her a second time.

Often, when I went to the place we've buried her, I cried. I cried for the memories and for the things that could have been. After nearly a hundred years of traveling through

space and time, I had finally found something, some\*one\* that was worth staying for. I had tried to tell her that, a few days before the accident. But now, now there was nothing left but go back to the stars.

And sometimes, sometimes I think I can hear her voice, calling me. Calling me from behind the twin moons, from behind the stars. Not once has she visited me on the dream plane, never, despite her promise.

[Voice of John Danziger]

As we finally left the winter camp behind, I felt relief. I've spent a lot of time outside of the camp since Julia died, scouting, trying to escape my demons. Alonzo hates me for causing Julia's death. I will never forget the look he gave me as he knelt at her side near the upturned Rail, a look that promised murder if she died. And then she did... He blames me for taking his love away. And he is right, \*I\* curse myself for the pain I caused. No matter how many times Devon assures me it was not my fault, that it was an accident, in my heart I know better. I have caused Alonzo to feel the same pain I felt when True's mother Elle was taken from me. No, I have caused him even worse pain. After all, I do not have to live every day in the vicinity of that carelessly stupid bureaucrat that had caused Elle's oxygen supply to malfunction. Alonzo has to live with \*me\*, and my presence is enough to remind him every minute of every hour of his loss.

[Voice of Uly Adair]

When we left Mary's garden behind, I was happy. At first it had seemed a safe place to be, but after what happened to Julia, I wasn't so sure anymore. Now we are traveling to New Pacifica again, where the colony ship with the other Syndrome children will land. And then the Terrians will heal all of them! I miss Julia though. She'd been so happy for me, when the Terrians healed me. Although she couldn't understand how it had happened. And I think she was the smartest doctor I have ever known. I had forgiven her when she had used the changes in me to try and change herself. I know she didn't mean any harm and I was glad when Alonzo brought her back.

Alonzo... he has been very quiet since Julia died. And he blames Mr. Danziger. I think he hates him for taking Julia away... but Julia isn't really gone. She comes visit me sometimes in my dreams. I talk to her. I tell her about the things that happen in the camp, you know, about True's Koba and all the other things. And then she usually smiles at me, that soft smile she has. She's sad though. She wants to visit Alonzo, but he doesn't listen to her. I think it is because he is so full of hate for Mr. Danziger that he can't hear her. But I don't know how to explain it to him. I'm only 9, you know...

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