

FIND US ALIVE EPISODE 35: GLORIA ALVES

To secure, to contain, to protect. These were the commandments by which Gloria Alves sought to keep the Earth, and human society, from collapsing in upon itself like a dying star.

The Foundation worked. Unfortunately. When the problem of anomalies is called into question, everyone has a theory. Destroy them with indiscriminate prejudice. Publicize them and let the people decide. Harbor the ones who speak well enough to justify their lives. Create them, for fun. Create them, for profit.

But when the goal was the preservation of human lives, nothing worked as well as the Foundation. Pound for pound, the Foundation had saved more people than any other interested party.

And that goal, the objective of keeping people alive, of keeping people safe, was shared in its totality by Gloria Alves. It was a grand shame that the primary way to accomplish this was so bitterly cold.

She didn't think herself a frigid person. All the best leaders in the Foundation were those who could detach themselves from their emotions, unhook from their souls as easily as unplugging a table lamp. She tried. But sometimes, after her own light was unplugged, the bulb stayed on, flickering and sparking.

Perhaps it could be called a "house rule" of the Foundation. You want to succeed? You want to save the world? Divorce yourself from your heart. There is no room for love in this place. Not for the individual, anyway. Your love is for humanity, for every person you save by locking that part of yourself away. If you cannot bring yourself to make that sacrifice, your spine will splinter beneath the pressure.

It was profoundly difficult work. Alves was not naive, she did not *like* the way things had to be done. But there was a reason they were done that way. The system had been in place for decades, and for decades, collateral damage had been kept to a

minimum. If it were to continue working, they would need to play by the rules. Nobody enjoyed it. It was a necessary evil.

Gloria Alves loved her site. She loved the people in it. And for this reason, Gloria Alves was ready and willing to be hated by every single one of them.

The movie nights, the karaoke, even the infamous game of "Capture the Flag." All of them were enjoyable, even she could admit that. But in the end, they were a distraction. They occupied time better spent working toward their goal: escape. As long as they were in this place, they were not safe, in spite of how they may feel like it. There would always be new Dash Ones crawling through cracks in the walls, always a new horror waiting to reveal itself. They could not afford to take the situation with anything but the utmost seriousness.

And Beatrix Klein, all bellowing laughter and creases at the corners of her eyes, was ill-suited for Foundation leadership.

She was emotional. Impulsive. Irrational, sometimes.

Tunnel vision keyed into the small picture, not the large one. She was an excellent researcher; curious, tenacious, fiercely brilliant. But as Acting Site Director, she didn't understand her duty. Not to keep her staff happy, to keep them *alive*. To return them to their families as quickly as possible and in one piece. To waste no time in the process.

The only way out of here was the Foundation's way.

The new Reset had brought with it a host of new problems. Problems that Gloria Alves was prepared to finally handle properly.

Number one.

Last month's disastrous attempt at escape had ended in a host of new injuries to several members of the staff. The rapid displacement of these people after the Reset could exacerbate said injuries. On top of the previously known recurring damage

(primarily Security personnel in BC-2), Medical would be spreading their resources even thinner than they already were. This would mean some people would be left without care, at least for the first 24 hours following the Reset. Marked on one of the nurses' bodies was a list of names of the re-injured, in order of severity. At Alves' direction, another nurse had scratched an additional list into her calf using a safety pin, cataloging the new injuries caused when the site flipped. The scratches would heal, but for the next 48 hours, they would be invaluable in deciding who received a bed, and who didn't. With hard limits on supplies and harder limits on space, priority went to those closest to death, and those who would best benefit from continued use of their legs.

Number two.

A certain wayward Dash Three instance, upon reappearing in his cell in D-class containment, had wasted no time in using a screw to scratch the start of approximately seventeen incomplete Dash One instances into the walls before Security stopped him. Preventing him from creating more was no issue. It only took two people to subdue him. Stopping the blitz creation of a bulk batch of Dash One instances was much more difficult. Alves had accounted for this. Informed one of the youngest members of Security where to find a flare gun. She even timed how long it took him to go from his Reset starting point, up to the equipment room, and back down to BH-2. And the young Security guard she had chosen for the task had reached his destination with enough time to stop all but one of D-1's creations. The one complete instance only caused a tiny tremor, and amidst the general chaos, no one even noticed.

The other suspected Dash Three, formerly the Head of Psychology, would reappear in his office, barricaded in by a heap of rubble just outside the door. This meant several things. Firstly, he would be prevented from assaulting any more staff, should the urge present itself. But secondly, he would be locked in a room full of writing utensils that could be used to create more Dash Ones than his counterpart could produce with a

screw against a concrete wall. And thirdly, it would take much longer to stop him, since opening the door required the removal of several large chunks of ceiling. But she planned for all this as well. Every Security guard in the immediate area would be busy with the important task of digging out their broken-bodied comrades, which meant the excavation and containment of Individual 3B would be delegated to a different group. This new group was an easy choice: the rest of the Dash Three instance's former department. 3B was not particularly strong, and even armed with whatever sharpest pen it could find in its office, it wouldn't be able to fight off multiple, prepared people. Psychology was nervous about this plan, understandably. But they would soon find they didn't need to be. They cleared the door, preparing for the worst, but opened it to find 3B sitting on the floor, waiting. A thorough sweep of the office found no evidence of new Dash One instances, or even the start of any.

Number three.

Site-107 had come into possession of two Dash Two instances, deemed by Research and Containment not to be an immediate existential threat, even if one of them had the potential to be dangerous. Alves had very little faith that the situation would go completely as planned. And lo and behold, her instincts were once again correct. The larger and more volatile instance, designated SCP-SixtyThreeTwenty Dash Two Point Two, reappeared in the dormitory temporarily assigned to one of Dr. Shao's bodyguards. It escaped into the halls and wreaked havoc until Containment personnel, and Alves herself, could wrangle it into a cell. None of her people were injured, but the creature couldn't be pacified. It had spent the last 24 hours screeching and throwing itself against the walls, and Alves had a firm theory as to why.

A theory pertaining to item number four.

Gloria Alves had prepared for everything, she thought. She had accounted for every injury and potential injury and had allocated the site's resources accordingly. But in the moments after the Reset, when

gravity had returned to normal and the familiar cycle of chaos had begun again, one unassigned field agent reappeared on the AB floor, made it approximately two meters toward the doors, and collapsed.

Site-107 currently had enough injured personnel that some had to be treated in the halls outside the infirmary proper. But even so, Alves was bound and determined to prevent casualties at all costs. And what happened on the AB floor was different. No apparent cause, no warning sign, no predictive factors. In the present circumstance, the sudden collapse of one might spell the sudden collapse of others. Medical was pulled taut by the demand at the start of every cycle, but when the agent was wheeled into the infirmary by one nurse, one Records employee and Dr. Klein, once again showing her inclination toward being overly emotional, Gravett herself was the one to shoo the lot of them away.

It took moments before word spread through the site like a brushfire. No one dead, but something was wrong with Agent Love.

A new problem arose for Acting Site Director Gloria Alves. As Gravett busied herself with God-knows-what behind the closed door of Site-107's only unoccupied room, the operating theater, people began to congregate. Alves never figured the agent to be especially popular, considering her tendency to yell or assault people almost entirely unprovoked. But nonetheless, a small crowd had amassed at the door, asking if she was alright, asking what happened.

As soon as she had an answer, she would give it to them. But until then, more waiting.

The machine could not stop. The best thing Alves could do for the agent was continue pushing for escape as hard as possible. Best case scenario, Gravett would find and fix whatever was wrong, and Site-107 would have wasted no time fretting over her condition. Worst case scenario, they would have access to a broader array of resources on the outside, improving her chances of survival should the problem be out of their realm of possibility.

Or at least on the outside she could receive a proper burial.

Mourning was a waste of time, Gloria Alves thought. Not in every circumstance, but certainly in this one. Every moment they spent grieving their dead was a moment that could be used to prevent another loss. Grief was natural. But paralyzing fear was also natural, and they were professionals. The more time they spent in SCP-6320's subdimension, the more her associates grew comfortable. They were not safe enough to mourn, not yet. When they were out, when they were all safe, *then* they could weep.

Alves had lost people, just like everyone else. She would honor them by bringing their stories to the outside.

Beatrice and her damned bleeding heart resented the Foundation's means of handling the dead. Alves always considered it kinder, in a way. Another component of the personal sacrifice made when you entered this world. The people around you would die. Bleak, but reality. If you allowed yourself to be broken a little with every death, it wouldn't take long before there was little of you left unbroken. She wondered how Bea made it this long in the first place.

Beatrice Melanie Klein. So full of passion it carried her voice from the top of the site to the bottom and back again. A bonfire of a researcher, driven by a more earnest hunger for knowledge than Gloria had ever seen. Countless times, she had watched researchers in her same position as they withered under the pressure of the Foundation. Watched them come in, color in their cheeks and light in their eyes, and she watched the color fade and the light die.

But not Bea.

The same stuff that kept Gloria's back straight kept the spark behind Bea's eyes. It kept the fire fed that surged inside her. Gloria was not jealous, but sometimes the blacker recesses of her mind wondered what it would take to snuff that fire. Out of morbid curiosity, of course, not a desire to see it happen. If Bea had made it this far, through all this, burning as bright and loud

as ever, what would it require to reach the end of the wick? A failed escape attempt? A dead Engineer?

The space between the closed operating theater door and the ultimate fate of one field agent?

Gloria was not jealous. But she also wondered what Bea's reaction would be if it was her in that room, instead of Agent Nari Love.

Too often, she had been swept up into Beatrix Klein's blazing tempest. She was magnetic, fascinating, beautiful. Gloria was not immune to Bea's brilliant gravity, and as hard as she tried to disengage, she kept being pulled back in. Every time Gloria came back to herself in the cold hours of the morning, she had to fight off the splintering pain of her hard-won walls beginning to crack. Every time, it took days to repair that damage.

There is no room for love in this place.

In another life, in another time, maybe they could have been together. They might have met in school, gone to coffee shops and overpriced restaurants, eventually settled into a slow existence of household chores and homemade dinners.

But this was not that life. Nor would it ever be.

She didn't want to hurt Bea, which is exactly why this could not continue to happen. In as much the same way that she sacrificed herself for the good of the masses, Gloria Alves had to sacrifice herself for the good of Beatrix Klein as well. They had a duty to humanity, not to each other. The world needed them both too much.

Besides, Gloria was not a creature built to hold anyone. She was happy to fill her arms instead with her noble responsibility. Decades of working buried under concrete honed her into a perfect instrument for the greater good, one that didn't need something as trivial as a hand in hers.

Still, she wished those decades made it easier to let go.

On some level she understood Bea's methods. At least, she understood why Bea clung to them, white-knuckled and stubborn. It felt like a victory, seeing the smiling faces of your staff. But it wasn't a victory. It was a triviality. In treating the symptoms, Beatrix Klein had forgotten the plague entirely.

But Gloria Alves wielded the cane now.

She held a Department Head meeting. No more wasting time loitering outside the Medical wing. There was work to be done.

Medical was already busy. Containment could begin drafting plans for containing the Dash Three instances quicker when the next Reset hits. Security needed to comb the building for any missed Dash One instances that occurred during the previous cycle. Botany had crops to repot and propagate, Maintenance had food to inventory and redistribute. Records had information to format before it could be tattooed onto its respective keepers. Research had a couple Dash Twos to investigate, courtesy of a host of broken rules. Engineering had enough of a break, and the device in the wall could be the next piece of the puzzle.

Communications could continue shouting into the empty void, for now. Until Alves could find something to properly occupy his talents.

But the staff that would be the most difficult to wrangle would be Haldi's Surveillance monitors.

Two had died in the Shift. Apparently, the last one left, a very young and very nocturnal new hire, had spent an entire cycle attempting to carry the work by herself. Klein had assigned Agent Love to help, before finally replacing the two other deceased officers. Alves wasn't oblivious. She noticed the budding romance between Agent Love and Officer Raddagher perhaps even before Beatrix did.

Alves made a mental note to find a possible temporary replacement for Officer Raddagher. The poor thing. There were some who simply had to learn the hard way, how vast and incomprehensible a mistake it was to love. She herself had been one of those people, once upon a time. It was not a mistake she would make again.

But just like the days following the shift, just like the days following the detonation, time was precious. Time was life. The Foundation marched on, and so would she. And by extension, so would the rest of them.

Gloria Alves was certain that, by the end, they would all hate her. Klein had handed them toys and privileges and excuses that she never should have, and Alves was about to take all those things away. Resentment bubbled into her throat at the thought. She knew it wasn't Klein's intention to make her the bad guy, but it was the result nevertheless.

She straightened her back, and the papers on the late Dr. Carson's desk. If her staff had to villainize her in order to make it through this hellish ordeal, so be it. She cared more about their safety and their success than she did about their opinions of her. Alves would accept being hated by the entire Foundation, if it meant her staff survived.

Her walkie crackled. Gravett, voice graveled from exhaustion and the simple reality of her advanced age, informed her of the diagnosis. Alves instructed the surgeon to keep it quiet, until she could find a way to disseminate the information. Gravett agreed and signed off, and Alves dropped her head into her hands.

Her brain flicked through the possibilities. This complicated things. Quite a great deal, actually. She had been hoping for something impossible, something esoteric. Something a cooperation between Medical and Research could address. Something anomalous, within her own stretched definition of "normal."

She could inform the agent's strange little social circle, give them the opportunity to say their goodbyes. Then again, maybe it

would be kinder just to let her go. Gravett said there were still options, still avenues by which survival might be possible. Equipment that could be cleverly repurposed for different kinds of scans or procedures.

But Gloria Alves was nothing if not an observer of the cold edges of reality.

And the statistical likelihood of Agent Love surviving a ruptured aneurysm was infinitesimal at best.

The choice was hers. She could tell Gravett to attend to the majority, to allow the comatose field agent to quietly slip away. Hope could be dangerous. And cruel. Her friends still lingered at the door in spite of every instruction to return to their responsibilities. She had a chance, said Gravett. To spend time and resources pursuing that chance could crush them worse than letting her go now. It may be their own faults for buckling under the temptation to care for each other, but if she indulged that hope, she would be raising them up to fall even farther.

There was very little hope for Agent Love.

There was very little hope for their escape.

She picked up her site radio.

If the Foundation could work for their escape, and it would, it had to, it could work to save Agent Love.

To the best of her ability, Gloria Alves would keep everyone alive.