

Put It In Writing

Put It In Writing an original UFO story by Ed Straker, edited by A. Rodgers.
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This one is for Straker. Honored, Sir.

He died three months ago. Quick, painless. At the hands of a cold blooded assassin that even I couldn't keep away.

I was there when it happened. He asked me to drink in his memory. Then that glorious heart of his that infused my organization with life just quit. That morning and the mornings before it are no different than any of the mornings that led to this, the end of my days. Yet my insides are dust, and I'm moving around mechanically. I somehow managed to make it into my office the day I lost him. Then I went to what passes for a home. The morphine kept him pain free.

No amount would help me.

I'm bleeding. The whole world is bleeding.

Make..it..stop.

I've never asked for much. I did my duty to the best of my ability. The perks of the job didn't matter much. This is all I'm asking.

Make how I feel stop.

Even after I buried my son, my heart had some respite. Long after the screams in my ear about how I always had to leave had faded to acceptable, faded echoes that stopped hurting. After a while even when you're fool enough to incriminate yourself for a crime you never committed, a sick realization eases in and replaces the guilt that never was yours to carry alone.

I never killed John. They did. All of them. Shall I be more concise? His contempt for another man's child. The boy. Her inability to look past what she wanted. The inevitability of being Mama's little girl long past the expiration date. A man's responsibility? The solemn job of trying to save a threatened Earth? Actually meaning the words you said when they pinned the bits of metal on your chest which signified you left the civilian world behind? Making your life mean something. You never struggled for anything past the color of curtains.

To think that I almost threw it all away for a woman about as intellectually consequential as a soap bubble.

Oh break the bloody rule for once. Right. Because Ed, that job you sacrificed everything for means as much to me as a discarded cotton ball I used to take off makeup. You looked good on my arm. That's where it began, and ended. God forbid I let you have a few more seconds with your own son.

I hear John laughing to my core. My core, Mary! When you love that fiercely, when you carry that pride, when you grasp memories that firmly, you lose nothing. It was you who let us both slip away. So you never wanted to see me again? Do you know what Alec said to me about that? Can you guess?

You robbed me, Mary. You took away my name. That boy I watched being ripped away from my heart and laid into the earth, as if that didn't scar me enough, you called him Rutland. What was my beloved John to your damn controlling Rutland?

The boy. One less mouth to feed. One less reminder that you'd been in my bed before you ever were in his, or so I stupidly believed. My eyes, despite all the jokes Alec made about them, aren't there for decoration. I saw Rutland at the party, a man who according to Alec was no more comparable to me than an Interceptor was to a child's balsa wood airplane.

Yeah, I picked up my pieces and went. The sun is blotted out. The world is empty. There's no cover. He died. As did the world. How can there be life anywhere without my friend?

I'm afraid.

I was once afraid of being afraid. I'm afraid I'm afraid now, Is that you laughing, Alec? I said that because I know you would like it.

I got the letter I expected this morning. You're out of a job, Straker. Depression and unacceptable stress levels have rendered you unable to perform your job. Your personal recommendations for replacements for the position will be carefully considered. I actually laughed at that one.

Say, General? I have this brilliant idea. Maybe one of the aliens could run Shado? Maybe I should take Ellis's name off my official recommendation and actually pencil that in. If only I could go have coffee with that dead playwright. Maybe then I could be remembered properly. Death of A Commander. In three acts. Curtain.

I asked to be laid out in my blues. I've worn a decent amount of gongs following the rules and regulations that pertain to military dress. Regulations which plagued the lives of those that came before me and will have the same effect on those that come after me .

Ah, by the book heads. To think I was one of them once.

I just singlehandedly saved my entire battalion, Sir. Glad to do it. Lost both arms?

Inconsequential, Sir. Wings are one fourth of an inch off center, Sir? Against uniform regulations, Sir? Shot at dawn for it, Sir? Damn. To think I once thought choking down meals ready to eat was hell.

Alec always said I probably bought my entire medal array at a garage sale. I just glared at him, hiding my perpetual grin at his antics designed to make me laugh.

Once, I told him he was right. I said I'd picked them up cheaply because some ex-combat pilot sold his so he could pay off his whopping bar tab. He laughed for two whole minutes. I counted. I so rarely countered his zingers with that degree of success that I was obscenely pleased with myself for an entire day. Now he's gone. He couldn't even die in action. No, the damn cells in his own body did the deed.

There's an empty bottle in front of me, Alec. How did you ever digest this poison? I don't care how expensive you claimed it was. I drank every drop in your name. It tasted like somebody had boiled down a tarmac and stuck a fancy label and a cork on the bottle they poured the result in.

I've got one of the flintlocks you gifted me with in front of me, Alec. I actually considered using it. I just couldn't bring myself to make that much noise. It might scare the birds.

I always liked birds. I followed them into the wild blue yonder. All that is behind me now.

In the end, it'll be my only other friend, my Glock. Got a fresh magazine in it. I'm a small arms expert, Alec. I won't miss. Twenty out of ten, Straker. Pass. Ten would have been sufficient, Straker. Sufficient isn't a word I ever understood, Sir.

Is that you screaming at me, Alec? Yeah, I know, retirement I could go teach at MIT. I could improve my golf game. That damn swan deliberately got in the way of my ball, Alec. Stop laughing, Alec. I said I liked birds. Did I say they liked me? Damn protected feathered servants of Her Majesty just kick their feet around all day. What do they know about golf?

More than me? That isn't funny, Alec

Yes it is. True, too.

Come collect me, soon Alec. I have no dread of hell. If you aren't there, in whatever place I'm going to, then what happens to the soul some bastards thought I lacked won't matter to me in the least. Mary, the note I'm leaving mentions you. I told Alec what you said. The business about you never wanted to see me again. I thought you'd like to hear his response.

He looked at me seriously, that man which I respected and cherished more than any person I'd ever known. That man who was an extension of my heart. That man I called by the only rank that really mattered to me.

Not Colonel.

Friend.

He said "Ed, thank God. Make her put it in writing."

Sound of a single, muffled gunshot. A discarded shell which had once housed a decent man hits the floor. Afterwards, a glorious sunrise of renewal greets England.

Elsewhere, a lone swan glides solemnly through the glimmering waters of the Thames, as if in mourning for one of its own kind.

Yet suddenly all seems right with this world.

And the next.

The End