

Parting Gifts

Alison Jacobs
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Alec Freeman had been chasing the aliens for at least five miles and it seemed a lot more. The fact they were dragging a semi-conscious Ed Straker between them seemed not to slow them down at all. Not for the first time he realised he was getting old. But that was a passing thought, pushed out by more pressing ones such as the need to stay upright over the broken ground and the fact that he had lost contact with SHADO more than an hour ago. If there was back-up on its way, it had little idea where to look.

He would have to deal with this himself. Problem was, he had shot off most of his clip when he killed the crew of the second UFO after they had downed Lieutenant Barnes. He had one bullet left.

Through the trees he saw the dome of the UFO shining in the sun. He had to move now.

He stepped out into the open. He could get a clear shot at either of the red suited figures but he could not kill both and he was too far away to rush them. Ed was conscious, just about, but in no fit state to fight back. They would have him inside in a second.

His eyes met Ed's over the distance. He knew what he wanted. The worst thing in the world would be to be taken alive, to be helpless in their hands with no hope of rescue.

At the very last moment Alec Freeman raised his gun, took careful aim and shot his friend cleanly through the forehead.

Dream over. Freeman woke up running with sweat. He took the usual remedy - showered, dressed and got into the car.

It was a lovely morning, bright and cool. The sort of morning to remind him why he was doing this, remind him this was a good world. The churchyard looked fresh and green.

He had expected his plan to cause trouble but with the help of a sympathetic vicar he had got away with it. Mary Rutland had never found out that her ex-husband was buried only a few yards from their son. He walked up to Straker's grave and for a long moment stood looking at it.

Rest in peace, it said. He hoped it was true. If anyone deserved rest and peace it was Ed Straker.

Eventually he patted the gravestone - "I could have done without the guilt. Yours and mine both." - then he walked away, back to work. Commander Freeman with the world on his shoulders.