

Lights, Camera, Action!

A UFO Story by Amelia L. Rodgers ©2000 all rights reserved

(This story is a sequel to my story SHADO is Green, and is a Saint Patrick's Day story, and is best enjoyed while drinking green beer.)

Dedicated to Alec Freeman for the time and trouble he spends looking after our beloved what's-his-name, (g) and to George Sewell.

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Alec Freeman didn't like anyone upsetting his plans. It was only a week to Saint Patrick's Day and he studied the memo carefully. There was going to be a party for the SHADO personnel soon. That didn't bother Alec. Generally the SHADO personnel would decorate the restaurant, and Alec, in long standing tradition, would play some kind of joke on Ed. Last year he'd managed to have Ed's car painted green. Straker tolerated Alec's pranks, because he knew full well it was good for morale, and he also knew personnel looked forward to whatever Alec cooked up. Generally Ed would mumble and lecture about people behaving unprofessionally, but Alec knew Ed looked forward to these occasions just as much as everyone else did.

All well and good. But why, suddenly, was Ed Straker hosting the party? Ed wasn't exactly the party type. But there it was in black and white lettering, on the circulated memo:

Commander Straker requests your presence at a small gathering to celebrate St. Patrick's Day. Casual dress. Food and refreshments provided, but feel free to bring a dish of your choosing to share.

"Maybe he's finally seen the light or something," Paul Foster shrugged later at Alec.

"Oh don't be ridiculous. This is Ed we're talking about." Alec tapped his fingers in a drum rhythm on top of the Control room console.

"So? We both know that Straker lets his hair down now and then. Besides, Alec, I would have thought you'd be glad Ed's finally relaxing like this. You're the one who is always moping that he works too many long hours and skips meals."

"Paul, I just have a funny feeling about this."

"Well, when you figure it out, you let me know. I'll see you there, okay?" Paul waved and walked off.

Alec noticed Ayesha listening intently.

"What's your make on all this?" Alec asked her.

"I think it's a good thing, Colonel. Besides, why don't you just ask the Commander about it?"

"I would, but last I asked, he was involved in some business up top, on the studio lots. Ah, there he goes." Alec hurried up to Ed, as the SHADO commander came in and entered his office.

"Something wrong, Alec?" Ed asked.

"No, UFO activity is light, and it's been fairly quiet. I wanted to ask you about something else."

"Go ahead." Ed sat in his chair, reached for the cigar pail, thought better of it, and sat

back again, picking up his paperweight, and toying with it.

"You appear to be managing the stop smoking business pretty well." Alec smiled.

"Hmm? Oh yes, yes, well the patch Dr. Shroeder gave me works pretty well. I'm in the last week of using it. Matter of self-control with a little medical science tossed in for help." Ed watched Alec go to the drink dispenser. Ed smiled. "Which you could use some of. Self-control."

Alec poured himself a whisky.

"We've had this conversation before." Alec smiled back.

"So we have. Was there something in particular you wanted to see me about?" Ed studied his paperweight, tossing it idly from hand to hand.

"The upcoming Saint Patrick's Day party. I didn't quite think I'd ever see you break down and actually celebrate."

"Ah. That. That was a suggestion on Shroeder's part. Good for morale. These things are good for morale, Alec. We both know that. Sort of a necessary evil. Besides, it gives me the opportunity to keep an eye on everyone," shrugged Ed.

"Did you ever get all the paint off your car?" grinned Alec.

Ed stopped tossing the paperweight, placed it on its stand.

"Go do something constructive, Colonel Freeman," Ed said, with a hint of a boyish grin. He picked up one of the file folders, and opened it.

"See you later, Ed." Alec drained his glass and set it back up among the others.

"See you at the party, Alec," Ed nodded, without looking up from reading.

Alec went out.

Ed then dropped the folder, picked up his phone, and made some calls, with the boyish grin still in place.

* * *

The studio restaurant was closed off for the private party, and when Alec Freeman arrived, it was already in full swing.

Several people waved at him, and Paul Foster, with a leggy blonde from security, cheerfully slapped him on the back.

"Happy Saint Patrick's, Alec."

"Same to you. Where's Ed?"

"Over in the corner with Virginia. Looks sort of sullen about something." Paul shrugged. "There, by the punch bowl. Oh, and the seafood dip is great, Ayesha brought it."

Alec trotted over to where Virginia Lake was staring at Ed. Ed was wearing a light beige suit and bow-tie in muted colours. Alec furrowed his brow.

"How can you even think that?" Virginia was saying, loud enough to be drawing some stares.

"Oh, listen, I know it isn't something you'd understand, Colonel, believe me. You've displayed your stupidity in the matter enough times." Ed shrugged.

Virginia Lake flung the punch in her glass into Ed Straker's face.

"Jesus!" Alec said. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

"Why don't you ask Straker?" Virginia pushed past Alec, and buried herself in the crowd. People were shocked, and were doing their best to try not to look directly at the scene.

Ed calmly picked up a napkin, and dried his face, sipping his punch.

"Let it go, Alec. She's more than a little drunk by now anyway. Did you just get here?"

Before Alec could reply, Keith Ford came up.

"With all due respect, Commander, you shouldn't have insulted her like that. She worked hard on the project."

"Everyone did, Ford. They're supposed to, Ford. I don't tolerate a bunch of crybabies." Ed sniffed at the operative. "You smell like a second-rate distillery. How many drinks have you had anyway?" Ed snapped.

"Ed!" Alec said, a mixture of disbelief and horror on his face.

"Shut up, Alec. If I want your input, I'll let you know, okay? This is supposed to be a party, people are supposed to be enjoying themselves. God, this punch tastes like fertilizer. I think I'll have myself a real drink."

"Look, Ed . . ."

"Oh let him alone, Alec, he's acting normal for once. You're always baby-sitting the imbecile like a three-year-old, let him be," Paul Foster said, scooping up some more dip on a cracker. Ed poured himself some brandy from a bottle. He took a considerable gulp of it, and glared at Foster.

"Nobody asked you to stick your damn nose in this, Foster. Are you insinuating that I'm some sort of an idiot? You never liked me much, did you, Foster? You want a piece of me?" Ed yelled at him.

Paul laughed.

"I could break you in half without trying," he said.

"Now that's something I'd like to see," Ford sneered, "Cut the Commander down to size."

Foster laughed. Ed looked at Ford, drank the contents that were in his glass, picked up the brandy bottle again, poured himself some more. Then with a quick, unexpected movement, he smashed the brandy bottle over the back of Ford's head. Ford went down, hard. Ayesha screamed and ran to his side. People began to back up, file out of the room quickly, until only a few were left.

"ED!" Alec yelled.

"Now what were you saying, Foster? Come and get me, Foster. Come on. Come on, you alien loving bastard. Still want to kill me? Come on. Or is it that you only act like a man under alien influence?"

"Don't push me, Straker! Don't you push me!"

"ED! PAUL!" Alec exclaimed. "Stop it!"

"He asked for it, Alec. You know he did." Virginia Lake interjected.

"Have you all gone mad? I've had enough. Ed, I'm taking you home." Alec said.

Ed pushed Alec aside.

"Come on, Foster. Come on, turncoat. Let's see what you're made of, shall we?"

"I'm warning you, Straker. Don't push me, you little arrogant spineless bastard. You don't have the organization to back you up now. You start something, I'll finish it."

"STOP IT! That's an order. For God's sake, Foster, don't you see that something's wrong?" Alec shouted.

"Not much of a man, are you, Foster? Didn't take long for the aliens to get to you, did it? You're nothing, Foster, nothing, compared to me. Come on, try and get the best of me. You couldn't even hit me a couple of years ago. Come and try and beat me, Foster."

"Ed, something's wrong. Something's really wrong. I'm going to call--" Alec started to say, but Paul suddenly spit in Ed's direction. Ed threw what remained of his drink in Foster's face. Foster tossed his food dish aside, and pulled something out from under his jacket. Ed made a lunge at Foster, and Foster shot him three times.

CRACK. CRACK. CRACK.

Ayesha and Lake screamed. Alec froze. Ed's features twisted in disbelief and agony, and he fell to his knees then onto his side, spurting blood from his chest and mouth. He jerked a few times in a sort of seizure and lay still. Lake bent over him.

"He's dead."

Alec punched Paul so that he went flying into the refreshment table.

"That is no way to treat SHADO personnel, Alec," a much loved and distinctive voice from behind Alec said quietly. Alec spun.

Ed Straker rose, smiled as though he didn't have a care in the world, and sauntered over to help Paul Foster up. Alec's jaw dropped, his mouth moved, but not one sound came out. Keith Ford grinned, sat up, and got on his feet.

"Lights, Camera, Action." Virginia Lake laughed. Ed nodded at her.

"That punch wasn't in the script, Paul, you okay?" Ed grinned.

"I wouldn't trade any minute of it, it's worth it to see the look on Alec's face," Paul chuckled, accepting Ed's hand, and rising.

Alec suddenly grinned. He roared in laughter.

"You dirty son-of-a-bitches. You knew. You all knew."

"Everyone was in on it, Alec. I arranged to have the use of some of the props, too, like that brandy bottle, which contained iced tea, not brandy. And the fake blood capsules and that sort of thing. Paul's gun with the blanks. But the punch Virginia threw in my face was real enough," Ed grinned slightly at Lake. "Besides, I had to think of some way to get back at you for all the stuff you've pulled over the years on Saint Patrick's Day."

"I'm going to get you for this, Ed. I'm going to get you good." Alec jabbed Ed with a finger.

"Good job, everyone," Ed said as the crowd came back in, and broke into spontaneous applause. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to get changed out of this suit, and go back to work. Happy Saint Patrick's Day, everyone. Enjoy yourselves, I expect everyone back to work by tomorrow morning."

There was a returned chorus of equal wishes for Ed, and he smiled at his people. Then he headed out.

Alec followed Ed out thoughtfully.

"You died pretty well, you know," Alec chuckled.

"One picks up a few tricks of the trade, working as a film executive," Ed grinned back at him. "You hit Paul pretty hard. He's liable to come in tomorrow with a beauty of a shiner."

"Paul deserved it. He shot you in cold blood, at close range," Alec reminded Ed playfully.

"Ruined one of my best suits, too."

"Ed, I'm going to get you for this when it's my turn again. I nearly had a stroke tonight."

"Yes, yes, but I think finally I have revenge for what you did to my car. Happy Saint Patrick's Day, Alec."

"Same to you. And don't think I won't get you next time." Alec winked.

"I'm counting on it. Good for morale." Ed smiled. "Oh, and Alec?"

"Yeah?"

"The punch really does taste like fertilizer."

The end