

The Interview

a UFO satire by the SHADO Writers' Guild, ©2011

Miss Ealand paused and studied their faces politely. The truth was, she was studying them to save Ed Straker the trouble of taking their measurements for the purpose of constructing a coffin for them. First, they were late. A good ten minutes late. They stood there and smiled at her with an identical pair of smiles as amiable as arsenic poisoning. One was taller than the other. Both of them wore suits, same color, same fabric, same same. Red, the color of carnage. Dressed for success. Only it was in their case, dressed for excess. Excess of ego, excess of language, excess of bias, excess of makeup. Excess of thinking they could talk down to her because she was several years older than them.

"We're here to see Straker," the taller one said. What she didn't say but Ealand heard, was you aren't important enough for us to talk to you, and we are getting these jobs because we are younger and more efficient and can be promiscuous to get us what we want and where we want to go, because that's the way it's done, spinster. And Ealand didn't say my boss will scan you, discern all that in five minutes, and squash those egos of yours faster than an Interceptor flies. Then he'll eviscerate you and put what's left of your remains in his vaporizer. God save your souls, because I certainly won't.

"I'm afraid you're ten minutes late." Miss Gracie Ealand's tone was suited more to reading to a group of children from a storybook. What Ealand would have preferred to have communicated was you two obviously did not do your homework. My boss just came back from arguing over SHADO's budget with General Henderson. He's going to show you about as much mercy as King Henry VIII showed his wives.

The taller one started her spiel. Miss Ealand played with her pen, and hoped she could clear Straker's schedule long enough for him to witness their beheading. He liked outdoor sports.

"In this area of Southern England there is an excessive amount of traffic during commuter hours. It isn't feasible for the studio or Mr. Straker to expect us to be at work on time. Where I was born, people understand that. It has to do with your questionable work ethics and practices."

"Does it? Dear me. Well then I suppose you'll have to go in." Ealand buzzed her boss.

"Straker." Any sane human being would have run after hearing that word spoken in that way. Fiddle-dee-dum and fiddle-dee-dumber didn't. Miss Ealand tried to remember the charwoman's personal number. Straker so detested dead bodies decaying on his office floor.

"They're here, Sir."

"Are they? Did they finally decide to grace us with their presence? How delightful. Do send them in, Miss Ealand."

Click.

Blindfold? Cigarette? Cleric? Change of underwear? Go in. May God have mercy on your souls, if you even have any.

"You may go in now."

The tall one sauntered in purposely, the shorter one showed an uneven row of teeth in what may have been a pastiche of a pleasing smile, but you'd have to be Q from James Bond's MI6 to detect it.

"You two are late." He ignored their attempts to shake his hand.

"Yes, as we just explained to your secretary-"

"That's 'yes, Mr. Straker'. She's my executive assistant. I heard everything you said to her, she left the intercom open for me. Surely you two, ah, let's see." Straker picked up the file, skimmed it for names, and slammed it upon his desk. "Schwinn and Wheatly. Surely you two can understand being late isn't exactly a behavior to practice if you genuinely want a job with my studio?"

"Quite frankly, we noticed Miss Ealand is old. Not very much in this office has been updated, especially her. Clearly she isn't attractive enough to rely on as the first positive impression of your business. I have considerable experience in running an office. If I could sit down-"

"No. So she's older, unattractive and nothing's been updated. My, my, you two are geniuses. Be sure to include that when you make out your forms for the unemployment line. It may be to your advantage. Good day."

"Now, wait a minute. You haven't even looked at our C. V.'s"

"Another incredible observation. Go on."

"I think it would be to your benefit to see how well our ideas would-"

"I think it would be to your benefit to turn around, take your companion there with you, and march out the door."

"So you're a misogynist as I expected," the taller one sneered. "Quite common among managing directors in a male dominated society."

Ed Straker leaned back in his chair, laced his fingers. Had Alec Freeman been there, he would have warned them that action indicated a certain silver-haired Commander was rattling his tail before he took a chunk out of their hide and was gracious enough to exchange it for his venom. Or maybe he wouldn't have warned them and would have just sat back for the show.

"Am I a misogynist? What else am I?" Straker agreed as readily as if she'd said he had two eyes.

"Clearly you have some sort of sexual disadvantage. I've known some older men-"

"I've heard of stretching the truth to secure a job, but considering your personality, that last statement of yours is ridiculous. Sorry, go on."

"We wouldn't want to-" the smaller one managed to choke out.

"You actually are capable of speaking by yourself? I was beginning to suspect you were something manufactured by Gerry Anderson," Straker admitted. "So you two are friends? How often do you have to sacrifice small animals and human decency to appease her wrath?"

"You have such a wonderful sense of humor!"

Straker sat there silently, exhibiting his wonderful sense of humor for Wheatly. Either that or he'd gone into the early stages of rigor mortis.

"We wouldn't be adverse to participating in the sex act with you to work at the studio. If you used the proper protection, of course," the tall one said.

"Proper protection? For whom? Me? How thoughtful of you, but I must decline." Straker smiled. "Haz-mat suits and helmets tend to be too expensive these days."

"For instance, we Europeans know how to perform techniques that would eradicate your obvious problems with erectile dysfunction. Most men your age have problems with it."

"You see, that's the problem with a college education. You don't learn the really important things in life, such as assuming the adult male you just insulted is going to admit to an inadequate sex life with some Valkyrie he just met, simply because she's trying to bully him

into doing what she wants since that's her style, and in her opinion all men are the same. Then there's her equally erroneous assumption that because she can pronounce words with more than one syllable that she's absolutely right at all times. Sorry, I was actually disagreeing with you just now, don't know what came over me. Oh. Right. Rational discourse. Free exchange of ideas. Outdated practices such as having a different opinion than yours. I hope this is just a phase I'm going through."

"What the hell? Believe me, just because you're American-"

"When did that become a crime? I need to read the newspapers more often. Did they ban weddings too?"

"What are you doing here in England anyway? Shouldn't you be back in the States waving old Glory? You were formerly an Air Force Colonel. Money obviously was your motivation to go into show business. You don't sound like all that American military indoctrination made much of an impression on you." She sneered at him. Either that, Straker thought, or it was acid indigestion. Not hers. His. "Not much of a patriot after all, are you?"

That hit home. Straker considered allowing Alec to stuff the bully and her entourage of one into a whisky bottle. One never knows when a door stop might come in handy, he thought. Like possibly preventing General Henderson from entering my office. Cheaper than a thermonuclear device. He did say I have to cut costs.

"You question my patriotism again and I'll make an impression on you. With my studio car's tires."

"You're threatening me now?" She laughed.

"No, you'd like that too much."

"Obviously you're an insignificant little male up on a shrine way past his prime, and believe me a few hints in the right places and your career will be over."

"Does that mean I wouldn't have to spend any more time with you or Topo Gigio over there? Can I get that in writing?"

"I've changed my mind. I don't think you have any sexual drive at all."

"What makes you think that?"

"Well, normal men have a certain 'reaction' to vital women such as myself."

"Retching?" He smiled cheerfully at her. She didn't recognize the implied threat. "Next you'll tell me that being a Boy Scout means I'm a rabid homophobe, too."

"That's a given," Schwinn sniffed. "It's well known that..."

"What else do you object to?" he asked. "No, strike that. Is there anything or anyone you like besides you and your mirror?"

"You're interrupting me and being rude again."

"Me? I wouldn't dream of it, I know anyone suggesting that you're wrong is problematic for you. Please continue. I might finally be able to catch up on some sleep."

"You Americans always assume that your Catholicism based sexual indoctrinations-"

"Puritan," Straker interrupted.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Puritan, not Catholic. Now brace yourself, I'm about to ignore you for a full ten seconds and I know that's going to be difficult for you." Straker picked up his telephone. "Miss Ealand? Would you happen to know who is working in our eraser department today?"

Ealand hoped he didn't hear her gulp. Ed Straker was like a dog or a horse. He could smell fear from a block away.

"Miss Rigby, Sir."

"Excellent. Have her come in at once."

"Eraser department? You still have that much of an antiquated system to correct errors?"

"Well, the Boy Scout motto is 'Be Prepared'. And I do like to think I'm prepared, even for the likes of you."

"Now wait-"

Rigby came in. She found Straker physically, intellectually, and spiritually attractive, as well as being vulnerable. She gave him a respectful nod as though he were a saint for whom miracles were the norm. He had an air of authority she'd never been able to copy properly. But after all, she was a SHADO operative, and had to maintain a cover. It wasn't like she could walk around showing her deepest feelings about him like she was writing in some live journal he could read. People were naturally curious about some of her more foreign ideas and she'd be found out. Why, she feared she could even be banned from the studio for expressing some of her more bizarre opinions about Straker. But after all, she had to keep calm and carry on. No use in letting all this useless mental masturbation ruin her day. Her Catholic mother back in Philadelphia (or was it Boston, she couldn't remember which) would never have approved of it. Besides, Straker depended on her to keep her cool.

"Them? Is it true they dissed Miss Ealand? Is it true they were LATE for their job interview with you?"

Straker nodded, his mouth curling slightly into a shape that might have suggested he actually had a sense of humor. But some facts about the Commander were too shocking for the world to accept and had to be concealed, she mused.

Rigby's jaw dropped lower than an adult film star's sense of morality and Guy Burgess's sense of loyalty. She recovered. Straker admired her cool. She was among the few females that hadn't slept with Paul Foster. Virginia Lake had come intriguingly close to making Straker dissolve into hysterical laughter by frustratingly suggesting even the studio tomcat had reservations about whom it copulated with, whereas Foster was rumored to have tried to seduce the female mannequins on stage seven after one drink too many. Alec had offered to buy them dinner, at least he had manners.

"What do you want done with them after the procedure, Sir?" Rigby was actually thinking How badly do you want me to hurt them before I give them the amnesia drug, Sir?

"Use your lack of discretion, Rigby. Show them out after serving them our special coffee. Wait. I have a better idea."

Straker smiled fully and leaned back in his seat, hands behind his back, and detailed his plans for the duo to her.

Rigby listened, scribbled notes on a pad and her blood froze. She had to accept his orders with grace.

One week later, Schwinn and Wheatly found themselves at the IAC with the handwritten glowing recommendations of one Ed Straker. They were applying for a job there without really knowing why, the amnesia drug tended to have that result on some people. Despite that, they were hired with no problem at all.

And so they worked.

As General Henderson's personal assistants.

He was getting remarried. The ceremony rehearsal was quite lavish. The financial budget was quite generous. The pianist played the wedding march perfectly. Over and over and over.

No one quite understood why both Schwinn and Wheatly each had to be given a new outfit after several hours of watching the wedding rehearsal. The outfit consisted mainly of a

straight jacket.

They were taken to Dr. Jackson, who seemed elated at having them as test subjects.

No one heard from them again.

Talk about happy endings.

The End? ;)