

Magic Fairies

by Amelia L. Rodgers

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Caution: contains adult language

Dedicated to someone unique and special to me.

As always, I appreciate Commander Ed Straker's willingness to allow me to record these events in his life for posterity's sake.

(Note: the interpretation of the religion involved in this story is purely my own, for dramatic purposes. However I did do some research on it, and drew from that.)

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Ed Straker sneezed. And sneezed. He groaned. He coughed heavily. A lousy cold. He'd faced aliens, people that wanted to kill him. He'd been shot, stabbed, beaten, kidnaped, on the verge of death. He'd survived all of that. And now here he was, miserable, home in bed, beaten by one lousy cold. As if that hadn't been enough, Alec Freeman had unexpectedly arrived and was mothering him again.

"Go away and let me die in peace, Alec," he said.

The Australian grinned broadly at him.

"Oh, quit enjoying yourself. I know you're enjoying this. You came over here against my orders to sit there, gloat, and hand me tissues. You've undoubtedly infected yourself by showing up here, which means you can't go back to SHADO for at least two weeks, and Foster will have to handle everything." Ed didn't bother to mention that Alec's genuine concern for him had touched him deeply.

"Now now, Ed, you should lay back and rest. Here. Here's a nice tissue. Now don't blow too hard." Alec chuckled.

"Alec, as soon as I'm strong enough, I'm going to kill you," Ed declared.

"Can I draw up a will first?" grinned Alec.

"Who do you have to leave anything to? That new redhead? What's her name? Lois something?" Ed asked.

"Lois? Good heavens no. We broke up two weeks ago. I'm dating Sheelagh. Gave up a breakfast date with her just to come and make sure you were all right. Now drink your juice."

"Alec, do you know what you can do with that juice?" Ed said, trying to sit up in a comfortable position. He drew his blankets closer around himself.

"Temper, temper, Commander."

Ed crumpled the tissue into a poor substitute for a weapon and threw it in Alec's direction.

Someone knocked at the door.

"Oh fantastic. Who's that? Foster? Lake? Ford? Did you sell them tickets to stand there and watch their superior suffer?"

"Drink your juice," Alec said. There was a slight edge to his voice, and his hand rested on his gun butt. Ed caught the protective reaction and smiled.

"Stop worrying, it's probably just someone who wants to sell me a cold remedy," Ed said. He watched Alec leave his bedroom.

Alec opened the door just wide enough to see who it was. An old woman stood there, looking frightened.

"Oh can you please help me? I'm lost, I was on the bus, and we stopped, and oh dear, I got lost," she said.

"Who is it, Alec?" Ed called from his bedroom. When no answer came, Ed got up, put on his robe over his pajamas, took his own automatic from the night table drawer, and cautiously and a bit shakily went into the living room. Alec was standing there with an old woman. Quickly Ed slid the gun into his robe pocket. "What's going on?"

"Says she's lost," Alec said. He clearly didn't trust her.

"Lost? Hello Ma'am. Won't you sit down?" Ed said.

"Oh, thank you, you have such a kind face, I've been walking so long." She settled on Ed's black sofa and he sat next to her. Alec watched her, still judgmental.

"Alec, get us some coffee," Ed said. "Or tea, would you prefer tea?"

"Ed," Alec said meaningfully. Ed frowned, did Alec really think this frail woman was there to do him in somehow? Ed patted the shape of the automatic that could be clearly be seen through the fabric in his pocket, and Alec nodded. Ed wryly had to admit the aliens sending a killer granny after him might work, but all the same--

"Oh, coffee would be just wonderful, just wonderful. Black with three sugars please." she said. Alec went into the kitchen. The woman began to cry. Ed sighed, sat closer, picked up one of her wrinkled, frail hands gently and patted it.

"It's going to be all right. Now why don't you tell me what happened?" Ed said.

"You sound like you have a cold, dear. Honey's best for that. In hot tea. Why if I still had my house--I'd make you up some of my peppermint tea with a lot of honey." She smiled at him. "That would fix you up in no time at all."

Alec had come in, with coffee cups on a tray for each of them. He handed Ed his light, sweet coffee first, and then handed the woman's to her. She reluctantly let go of Ed's hand, and took it.

"Still had your house? Where do you live?" Alec asked, and then sipped his own coffee.

"The Black Oak Retirement Home--my grandson said it was best for me to give up my house and go and live there. Oh the people there are nice enough, but I wish I'd never listened to him. What's your name?" she asked Ed.

"Straker. Edward Straker." Ed took a sip of coffee, set it down on the table.

"Why, that's a fine sounding name. You have the most beautiful blue eyes, Edward. My husband had eyes like yours," she said.

"I've always told Ed he has beautiful eyes," Alec said, amused. Ed stared at him.

"Where's your husband now? And what's your name?" Ed inquired.

"Oh Edward, it's Petunia. Such a silly name, isn't it? Petunia Cole. Mrs. Petunia Cole. My dear, sweet George died years ago. Heart attack, you know. Awful sudden. I only have the one grandson, Lawrence. Both his parents were killed in an hotel fire. Such a pity, you know. I never got on too well with Lawrence after that. I always felt my son and his wife just threw money at Lawrence, their way of raising him, you see. Poor, misguided boy squandered every bit of it. After the fire, we tried to raise him up right, get his life straightened out. I fear he just resented us," sighed Petunia. "Dear me, now what was I saying?"

"You said you were on a bus?" Alec reminded her.

"Oh, yes! We were going on an outing. The bus got a puncture. We were all quite worried, you know, but the driver said there was nothing to worry about, and that we should get out in the fresh air while he fixed it. Some of us did and some of us didn't. I got out, to stretch my legs, you know. I walked around, it's so beautiful this time of year. I just walked, not really thinking about where I was going. I picked wild-flowers, too. I used to have such a lovely garden," she muttered sadly.

"So you found yourself out here. Lost. No wonder you were so frightened. This home you live in, what did you say its name was?" Alec asked.

"The Black Oak Retirement Home," she said.

"Alec, get on the phone, get a number for the place. Don't worry, Mrs. Cole, we'll get you back. You can count on that." Ed smiled.

"Oh thank you. Thank you. You're just a dear, lovely man. I will never forget this. You'll see. And you too---I didn't catch your name?"

Alec looked up from the phone and smiled. "Alec Freeman, Ma'am." He started dialing. Soon he was talking to someone.

"Any luck, Alec?" Ed asked. Alec lowered the phone for a second and nodded.

"Didn't have a problem at all. The place isn't too far from London. They were pretty worried about her. Seems she's wandered off like this a lot. They're sending a car for her," Alec said.

Petunia had set aside her coffee and had taken Ed's hand again and was holding on to it. Ed smiled at her.

"You'll be home soon, " he assured her.

"Oh, I'll be safe and sound, but dear, I won't be home. I'll only be home when I pass from this life and see my George again. With the Lord. And the Lord will bless you both for helping a poor old woman."

"Believe me it was our pleasure, Ma'am," Alec said, hanging up. "Why Ed, seems you've got yourself a new girlfriend there."

Ed shot Alec a I'm going to kill you look. The woman giggled, sounding much younger than the eighty or so years Ed guessed she was.

"Oh, my, my, believe me, if I had been single and found you when I was your age, I would have done anything to hold hands like this with you. You're such a good looking man." She beamed at Ed. Ed flushed a little at the appraisal.

"He's single too!" Alec grinned. The woman giggled again. Ed rolled his eyes.

"I can tell you two are old friends, and your friend is so playful with you. You should thank the Lord you have such a good friend, Edward."

"I should shoot him, is what I should do," Ed said with a grin.

"Oh no, no, no, you mustn't say that," she tittered. Alec came over and sat on the edge of the couch next to her, causing Ed to have to quickly slide over to make room. Alec ignored the look he got from Ed.

"Oh he's always saying evil, nasty things to me, Petunia. Why I came all the way over here this morning to see if he was all right . And what thanks did I get for it? Not a one," Alec dramatically moaned. He clutched his chest and blinked his eyes to clear non-existent tears. Ed just watched him, trying not to laugh, tapping his fingers on his robe in a show of impatience. The woman giggled and patted Alec's hand.

"My, my, that's terrible. How could you do such a thing to such a nice man, Edward?" she said, winking at Ed. Ed smiled angelically at her, while he plotted Alec's demise.

"That's right, Ed. How could you?" Alec asked, with as innocent an expression as he could muster. "And to such a wholesome, innocent, kindhearted person like me?"

"It's not working, Alec. It's been a long, long time since you've been innocent," declared Ed. He coughed a little, sighed, and sat back against the sofa. She squeezed his hand.

"You poor dear. Such a wretched cold. You should be in bed, not keeping an old woman company. Mr. Freeman?"

"Call me Alec, please," Alec said. "What is it?"

"Where is Edward's bedroom? I think we should get him to bed."

"No, no, I'm fine," Ed said, and promptly coughed heavily, demonstrating that he wasn't.

"It's that door, and I think that's a feat you better try by yourself. Believe me, he'd never go if I take him." Alec grinned.

"Get up dear," she said firmly to Ed.

"No, no, Petunia, I'm fine, really I am."

"Oh dear, and I thought you were such a gentleman. Now here you're disappointing an old woman by being stubborn. Dear me." she smiled.

"Terrible, isn't he?" Alec said, barely concealing a grin.

Ed gave a heavy sigh, stood, and offered her his arm. She smiled and led him into his bedroom. Alec followed taking Ed's robe, made heavy from the weight of the automatic, quickly before she could do so. Ed slid into his bed. Alec hung up Ed's robe.

"There you go, dear. Close your eyes."

Ed gave Alec an threatening look, but obediently closed his eyes. The woman pulled her blankets up to his chin, and moved the faux fur black and white throw over him. She gently smoothed his platinum hair down, and then stroked his forehead. After a while, Alec saw Ed's features relax .

Freeman grinned. Good, he thought. Don't know how you managed to pick this flat, but you're a blessing, Mrs. Cole. Rest is what he needs. And it would have taken me a lot longer to get him to actually stay in that bed, and sleep.

She looked at Alec, gave Ed one final gentle touch on the forehead. Then she got up and followed Alec into the living room, and sat back down on the couch. She placed her hand in the pockets of her cardigan and brought up some wild-flowers which hadn't survived the long walk. They were as bent and wilted as she was, noted Alec. She handed them to him.

"For you and Edward. Oh, my. Oh, I know they don't look too good, do they, dear? But if you press them between the pages of a book, they'll last wonderfully. Alec, will you do something for me?"

"Anything. And I think they're the most beautiful flowers I've ever seen, and I'm sure Ed will too," smiled Alec, accepting them gingerly. He rose, and chose the book 'Profiles in Courage' from Ed's collection of hardbacks, and placed the flowers in it.

"Take care of that dear, sweet man in there, won't you? I think he needs someone to look after him, and he hasn't got anyone. I don't see a woman's touch anywhere around here, and until he finds the right person, why, I think he needs you to look after him."

Alec chuckled.

"You're very observant. And he does. And I always have and I always will. Even after he finds his own Petunia," Alec smiled. There was a knock on the door. Alec went to answer it and ever cautious, opened it just enough to see who it was.

"Mr. Freeman? I'm Lily Marsh? I'm the activities director at Black Oak--I've come for Mrs. Cole?"

Alec nodded and let her in. There was something odd about her but he couldn't put his finger on it. She embraced Petunia.

A month later
Ed's SHADO office
night

"How'd that afternoon meeting with Henderson go?" Alec wondered. "I'm just about to go home, but I thought I'd ask." Ed grumbled.

"Same as always. I made my pitch to them for the two new Interceptors. I think in the end I'll get them. He's just throwing his weight around as usual, making me sweat it out," Ed said. The SHADO commander picked up a file and thumbed through it.

Alec went over, helped himself to bourbon from the drink dispenser, grinned at Ed. Ed's phone rang.

"Straker. Who? This late? All right, hang on. Alec, do you know a Lily Marsh?"

"Marsh? No, can't say I do. Wait--yes--that's the woman who came to your flat to collect Petunia Cole," recalled Alec. "Petunia insisted on having our number, so I gave her the studio's main line."

"Hmm, wonder what she wants with me? Okay Miss Ealand, put the call through."

Alec watched Ed's face darken after a few moments. He talked for quite a while.

"Yes. I understand. Yes I will be there. My condolences, Miss Marsh." Ed hung up. He sighed.

"What's wrong?"

"Seems Petunia Cole passed on. Peacefully, in her sleep. Miss Marsh is the executor of her will." Ed looked thoughtful.

"What did she want with you?" Alec said.

"Alec, it seems she left us each something in her will. We are both to report to her barrister's office on Tuesday, and meet with Miss Marsh."

"What? Good God, Ed, what did you get yourself into?" Alec chuckled.

"Not me. Us. You're coming with me," Ed said. "Miss Marsh specified that she wanted us both to be there."

"She might have left us millions." Alec grinned.

"Somehow I doubt it. However, the prospect of telling Henderson that I had enough money for twenty Interceptors, and that he could go take a flying leap, does have some appeal," Ed replied, with a slight smile. "Alec, have you ever thought about it?"

"Telling Henderson--" Alec began. Ed chuckled.

"No. About getting old. About being like Petunia. I never want to cash in my chips like that, stuck in some retirement home, dependent on others to look after me." Ed picked up his paperweight and toyed with it thoughtfully. Alec frowned for a second, he knew Ed was having trouble coping with coming close to turning fifty. He quickly flashed a big grin at his brooding superior.

"Oh, you just worry too much. Besides, Ed, you and I could have some real fun chasing nurses down the corridors in our wheelchairs." grinned Alec.

"Alec, you're missing a integral point of that prospect." Ed smiled slightly.

"Well, Swami Straker, look into that crystal ball you have there, and pray tell me what I've missed."

"Miss Marsh said that Petunia was eighty-nine." Ed went on turning the paperweight

between his hands, and Alec had the distinct feeling he was building up to something.

"So?"

"So, when you and I reach the ripe old age of eighty-nine, it's quite possible we won't remember, nor will we be capable of doing, what we were chasing those nurses for." Ed chuckled softly. Alec moaned. He drained his drink.

"Now I'm really depressed, Commander," he said.

"Go! Get out of here and go see your Sheelagh, I have work to finish," Ed said, laughing.

"Sheelagh? Nah. It's Agnes this month."

"OUT, Colonel Freeman."

"You need sleep too, Commander Straker."

"OUT. Wait--"

"You want Sheelagh's phone number?" Alec asked hopefully.

"I'll pick you up around nine at your place on Tuesday. Now go." Ed picked up the folder, and started reading it again.

"Sounds like a plan. Goodnight Ed. Don't stay here too much longer."

"Goodnight, Alec."

Tuesday Morning

British Law Firm office

"How do you do, Miss Marsh, I'm Ed Straker and you know Alec Freeman."

"Yes, I had the pleasure of meeting him at your flat. You seem to have recovered from your cold, Ed," she smiled. "Alec said that you were ill in bed. Petunia told me about it. I'm glad that you're well now."

"Yes, thanks, just one of those seasonal things. Look, I'm very sorry to hear of Mrs. Cole's passing. It was a pleasure getting to know her, even for that brief while. I understand you and she had become quite close?" Ed looked expectantly at Marsh, but she seemed to avoid answering, and waved a hand in the direction of the man with her.

"How rude of me, this is Kevin Baxter, Mrs. Cole's barrister. Now all we have to do is wait for that horrid grandson of Petunia's, Lawrence."

Ed shook hands with Baxter. Baxter chuckled softly. Alec nodded at Baxter and he and Ed took seats. Ed removed his cream Nehru jacket, and hung it over the back of the chair.

"I'll get you some coffee, while you're waiting. And Lily flatters the Cole boy by calling him horrid, believe me. I tried everything I could to stop him, but he managed to take over her life. That idiot takes drugs, drinks like a fish and never appreciated a penny she gave him, I'm afraid," Baxter sighed.

"I recall she said she didn't get along with her grandson," Ed replied, frowning.

"We needn't trouble ourselves with Lawrence Cole for long. Harm you do to others returns threefold to you," Marsh said. She fingered a large clear crystal she was wearing on a silver chain. Ed noted she wore a pentagram as well, the first thing he had noticed. Ed watched her as she assisted Baxter with the tray of coffee, cups and saucers and dish of cookies, and then sat down. "I practice wicca, and that is a fact well known to me. For you see, I am a witch. Until this day I have lived by our creed, if it harm none, do as you will."

"Witch?" chuckled Alec. "In this day and age?" Marsh smiled at Alec, and studied him carefully. Ed watched Alec with amusement.

"Well well well, if it isn't Mother's sorceress. Is that supposed to scare me, old woman?"

All eyes fell upon a man in his late thirties, who entered, pulled up a seat and pounded the table. The cups of coffee rattled. Ed stared at him, disliking him instantly. The grandson spoke with an American accent.

"Let's get this started. I want to get the hell out of here, and not exchange pleasantries at a damn English tea party. Read the bitch's will."

"My God," Baxter said. Ed scowled. Alec's mouth dropped open. Ed found his attention drawn back to Marsh, to catch her reaction.

Marsh just went on looking at Cole impassively, like a cat might. In fact, thought Ed, with her long dark hair, and creamy skin setting off a pair of dark, expressive eyes she almost looked like a sleek, graceful cat.. Ed admired the way she did not let anything Cole said or did get to her.

"Now see here--" Alec began, starting to stand, but Ed put out a hand, shook his head slightly. Alec furiously sat down.

"There's an old phrase, Alec." Ed's distinct voice was pitched low, and steady, but Alec knew Ed was as furious as he was. "Beneath contempt. I think it applies to this gentleman." His comment brought a radiant smile from Marsh. Ed had to admit to himself he found her attractive. From the way she often looked at him, clearly with pleasure, as if she were

listening yet again to some favorite melody, he figured the attraction was mutual. Ed also knew Alec had noticed it, and was enjoying it as much as Ed was.

"Oh fuck off why don't you. You make one phone call for the dotty twit and you wind up inheriting something. Well, you listen to me. If she's left you anything substantial, I'll fight it in court. So you can forget about making a killing on this. Now read the damn will, Baxter," Lawrence Cole snapped.

"Oh you needn't tell me again. The sooner this is over, the quicker I can get out of the sight of the likes of you," Baxter said. He began reading, "I, Petunia Flora Cole, being of sound mind and--"

"Cut the crap. What did she leave me?" Cole replied. "You know, you old jerk. So spill it."

"She left you the bulk of what estate she had left. You have the house and everything in it. In the event of your death, everything would go to Miss Marsh here. She also left you around twenty-thousand dollars in American currency."

"That's all?" Cole complained. Ignoring him, Baxter continued.

"Miss Marsh, Mr. Straker, Mr. Freeman, she left you all envelopes, and three boxes." Baxter reached under the table and picked up three medium size boxes, and envelopes which he set in front of them. "Each envelope contains a thousand pounds."

Cole started to laugh.

"A lousy thousand? That won't buy you shoes for your feet. What's in the boxes?"

Lily Marsh smiled radiantly. "I know. For it was I who taught her to fashion them, the same way its been done for hundreds of years. Open them, gentleman."

Ed exchanged looks with Alec, then reached for the box. It wasn't heavy. Ed opened the box, and pushed aside white tissue paper. He drew an object out of the box. Alec did the same, and blinked.

"What the fuck is that thing?" Cole snorted.

Ed balanced the tiny, delicate handmade doll in his hand thoughtfully. It had bright blue eyes and lace wings, and long black hair. It seemed to study him as carefully as he did it.

"There's a little tag on it," he announced. "Shall I read it?"

"By all means, Ed, do." Marsh smiled. "You have been blessed by the Goddess in many ways. One is your voice." Ed smiled back at her.

"I am your magic fairy. I have been made especially for you, Edward. I will grant you but a single wish, so consider your wish carefully, for what is done, is done."

"Same thing here," Alec chuckled, pointing at his tag. "Mine's addressed to me."

Ed smiled at him.

"Not a believer in magic, are you, Alec?" Marsh smiled. "At least your friend Ed remains open minded."

"Smoke and mirrors," chuckled Alec. "Doves in a top hat. Women sawed in half. All very entertaining, but not one bit real."

"Yes, yes, but I believe it was Arthur C. Clarke who said any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." Ed pointed out, toying with the doll.

"This thing is stuffed with cotton, Ed, it's not exactly technology." Alec grinned, and stuffed the doll inside his jacket with the envelope.

"What a joke! You really believe that thing grants wishes?" Cole laughed. "So, witch, what are you going to wish for?" he taunted Marsh. Marsh held hers as gently as one might hold a child. She stroked its long black hair. She whispered something to it.

"That is not your business, Lawrence Cole," she told him.

"That's right, old witch. I get everything I wanted, including getting rid of that dotty grandmother. Now where do I sign to get what's rightfully mine, you old jerk?" Cole demanded. Baxter handed him the paperwork.

"You will receive a cheque for twenty-thousand soon. Ownership of the house and contents thereof is already yours. You have a copy of the deed there. Miss Marsh, Mr. Straker, Mr. Freeman, if you'd sign your papers?"

Ed and Alec signed, together with Marsh. They exchanged handshakes.

"Remember, gentlemen, choose wisely, for what is done, is done." Marsh said. She smiled at Ed and Alec. She shook hands with them, her hand lingering a moment longer in Ed's. Cole signed and left. Ed pocketed his envelope.

"Well, we have a full day ahead of us at the studio, so I'm afraid we'll have to be going. Nice meeting you both," smiled Ed. He and Alec strolled out of the office and into an lift.

"That was extraordinary. Not often you get to meet a witch." chuckled Ed. He clasped his doll thoughtfully.

"You actually believe Marsh is a genuine broomstick riding, spell-casting witch?" exclaimed Alec. "She certainly seems to have bewitched you. I saw the way you two looked at each other."

Ed grinned at him. "Wicca's an old religion, Alec. Recognized by the military as such. She did have a regal, mysterious way about her. Even bewitching, you might say. However I think she's more liable to get around in a Jaguar XKE than on a broomstick." Ed said wryly.

"Well, whether she was or not, we're both a thousand pounds richer. I'll buy us lunch somewhere." Alec grinned. The two of them left the lift at the ground floor and through the entrance, onto the parking lot. Laurence Cole was seated at the wheel of his car, obviously in some distress, gunning the motor repeatedly without success. They watched him. He rolled down his window.

"Hey! " Cole said. "I need some help."

"Car isn't starting?" Ed asked.

"Been sitting here for minutes. Got jumper cables?" Cole implored.

Ed smiled brightly.

"It so happens I do."

"Well, don't just stand there, bring your car around and power up my damn battery!" Cole demanded.

"I don't think so. Good day, Mr. Cole." Ed said pleasantly. Alec, walking beside Ed, started laughing. The two of them reached and got into Ed's car. Cole was heard to be calling them choice names from across the parking lot.

"That wasn't all I'd like to have done to that idiot." Ed sighed. He thumbed the door button.

"Certainly wins the Bastard of the Year' title in my book. Say, Ed what are you going to wish for?" chuckled Alec. Ed looked at his doll almost somberly, then chuckled.

"Oh, that's easy, Alec. I wish to die now, quickly and painlessly, while I'm still fairly active, and not when I'm old, sick, and helpless in some awful place like that home Petunia died in. Stuck with a imbecile like that for a grandson. Wheelchair races or no wheelchair races, those senior citizen homes are depressing. I've visited them to see old acquaintances of mine that I knew from the service. So I know what I'm talking about. How about you, Alec? Oh damn!" Ed snapped his fingers.

"What's wrong?" Alec said.

"My jacket, I forgot it on the chair. I'll be right back, Alec." Ed told him.

"Stay here, I'll go for it." offered Alec.

"No thanks Alec, I can manage. Hmm I see that our friend got his car started. Pity." chuckled Ed. "Give me a minute."

"Sure."

Ed thumbed the door button, got out, tossed the doll on his seat and walked toward the building across the lot. Alec picked up the doll and playfully swung it around. Ed surprisingly seemed to be taking the magic fairy business a lot more seriously than he expected. He guessed it was more sentimentality than superstition on Ed's part. The constant references Ed made to age bothered him though. Alec knew Ed was not only going through any man's fear of losing his youth but he was afraid of becoming too old to run SHADO. Well, as long as I'm still breathing, Ed, that won't happen, he grinned to himself. He watched Ed walk toward the building. That woman sure didn't seem to mind his age, either, Alec thought with a chuckle. Speak of the devil. There she is.

Ed was a few feet from the door when he heard a screech of tires, and he looked in the direction it had come from. Lawrence Cole's car pulled out of the parking space, and was headed directly for him at maximum speed. It took him completely by surprise. He began to break into a run, but felt an intense burning sensation as the car hit him. Rising up with a brief whoosh of air. A dull thud. Then nothing.

Cole's car sped off.

"ED!!!!!!!!!" screamed Alec. Alec jumped up out of the car. Lily Marsh had been walking toward Ed with a smile from out of the building, holding Ed's jacket. She screamed. Alec ran to Ed, ignoring her. He knelt beside Ed's broken body. Ed lie still on the pavement. His forehead was badly gashed.. His neck was tilted sideways at an impossible angle. His large, clear blue eyes were open, seeing nothing. The finely shaped mouth was slightly open. Yet there was a faint peaceful expression on his face. Alec reached for his wrist to get a pulse. He tried his throat.

There was no pulse.

Commander Edward Straker, his closest friend, a man he admired, loved and trusted, was dead. Alec slowly cradled the body, and held it against him. Lily Marsh looked sadly at Ed, tearful.

"The Goddess has claimed her own," Marsh said softly.

"This can't be--he was alive moments ago--talking to me--Not like this, not struck down by some maniac!" Alec shouted.

"My wish will bring you and Ed justice, and my friend Petunia justice." Marsh said.

"Do you think I care about justice? The only justice I care about would be bringing my friend back. This isn't right, he wasn't that old, we were laughing, we were joking. God. He's my friend. God. God. God." sobbed Alec. He gently lay the body down and closed Ed's eyes. "I'd do anything to bring him back. He died for nothing! Nothing!"

The magic fairy--someone seemed to whisper in his ear. It might have been Petunia, but he really didn't think about it.

"My God." Alec stood up, ran to the car, and then he thought what am I doing? This is absurd. No--It's worth a try--I have to do something. He grabbed Ed's doll from the seat and ran back with it.

"I wish for Ed to live." Alec implored it.

Ed didn't stir. His neck had been obviously broken by either the impact itself or the landing when he was flung by the car.

"Damn you and that old woman. Why did you even have to come into his life? He could be alive now if we hadn't come!" Alec threw the doll bitterly aside. Marsh picked it up. She examined it carefully.

"This is the doll fashioned for Edward. The wish may have been used. Did he wish?" Marsh asked.

Alec frowned.

"You don't expect me to believe --wait-- I wish to die now while I'm still fairly active, that's what he said casually--oh my God--" shuddered Alec. "No this can't be happening!"

"Did you wish on yours?"

"Good Lord, mine! I didn't--I didn't wish!"

Lily Marsh smiled. "Then wish for his life to be restored, Alec. Take the doll out and wish for it to restore his life as strongly as I wished for Laurence Cole's life to be taken. I have thrown aside my pledge to do no harm, and I will pay threefold for my decision. You will carry no such burden. You must believe the magic, Alec." Marsh covered Ed's face gently with his jacket.

Alec fished the doll from inside his own jacket. He stared at it. He blinked back tears. He hesitated.

"But, but this is nuts. It couldn't have been that doll. Cole is a maniac, he could have --"

"Alec! You must believe in the magic. You must." Marsh cautioned him. "I cannot restore your Ed to you, for I used my wish. So it is up to you. You must hurry."

"All right, damn it. I wish for you to be alive again, Ed. Come back! Live, damn it!" Alec cried desperately.

Did Ed stir faintly underneath the jacket? No, no, it had to be wishful thinking--his neck had been broken--

Ed groaned softly. Alec threw off the jacket and bent over him. There was blood still dripping off his gashed forehead, but he held his neck normally. Alec stared at him, numb.. Ed looked up, eyes un-focused, and continued to groan softly. Ed's face was ashen.

"Call for an ambulance!" Alec shouted at Marsh. She smiled, and ran toward the building. Alec grasped Ed's hand tightly. "Ed, can you hear me? Don't move. You're going to be all right. You understand? You're going to be all right."

"Alec-- is that you? Everything hurts. I can't see too well." Ed managed to say weakly. "Cole---he came--he came--"

"Quiet Ed, don't try to speak, just hang on until the ambulance gets here. You're going to be all right." He felt Ed's fingers close around his. "Do you hear me? You're going to be all right," wept Alec.

"No wheelchairs, Alec." Ed whispered in a weak voice.

"No wheelchairs, Ed." Alec smiled down at him. A faint smile appeared on Ed's lips. He closed his eyes, slipping into unconsciousness again.. Alec heard the wailing of the ambulance siren coming closer.

* * *

Miles away, Lawrence Cole drove like a madman. Bastard. Idiot. Moron Straker. Self-righteous bastard. Got in my way. Nobody gets in my way, he thought, nobody. Crap! The car rolled over train tracks with a firm bump. Christ, he needed a fix. Even a stiff drink. But that jerk Baxter had served coffee. What the hell? There was a figure in the road ahead of him.

He honked the horn frantically for a while and then pressed his foot on the pedal, picking up speed. Everything was his now, and nobody was going to take anything that belonged to him. Incredibly, he saw it was that asshole Marsh. Her and her damn crystals, stones, incense and candles. Damn witch! Laughing hysterically, he drove right over her. He looked with satisfaction in his rear view mirror. He craned his neck to see. He hoped he hadn't killed her outright. The bitch should suffer.

She stood there in the road, staring impassively at him, smiling.

"Fuck!" He pulled the steering wheel around, turned the car back. He sped toward her. How the fuck had he missed her? Suddenly she vanished. He heard a train whistle, loud, and he hit the brakes. The train was coming up fast. He hit the brakes again. Nothing. The car continued to fly forward toward the oncoming train. He desperately tried to open the car doors, but they wouldn't budge. Lawrence Cole screamed in horror as his car smashed right into the side of the train, and crumpled up like a piece of tinfoil, killing him instantly.

Mayland Hospital

Three days later

night

Ed Straker sat in his hospital bed, reading the newspaper account of the tourist whose body had been recovered from the wrecked car. Ed had bandages on his ribs and forehead. He had needed stitches, and he'd been badly bruised, with busted ribs, but he was recovering well.

"They finally identified him from his dental records, Alec. It was Cole all right." Ed frowned. "I would have liked to have put that man behind bars for the rest of his life. It's almost a pity he died that way. Too good for him."

Alec nodded from his bedside chair.

"Lily met with me today. She inherited Petunia's house, money and belongings," Alec said. "How are you feeling?"

"Head pounds a little, hurts if I move too much but I shouldn't be in here much longer. Look, Alec. Whatever happened, it may seem like the dolls worked, but that's more the power of suggestion than magic." smiled Ed. He put down the newspaper, and drank some cold water.

"Believe what you want to, but I saw you get hit, and I saw your body. You were very dead. I'd be delivering your eulogy right now if it wasn't for that doll. Marsh cursed Cole, which is why they had a hard time digging what was left of him out of that car," Alec firmly replied. Ed looked amused.

"Alec, the shock of seeing me get hit--you can't have been thinking very clearly." Ed shrugged. "By the way, what happened to the dolls? I would have liked to have kept mine. Maybe I could have wished for those Interceptors," teased Ed. "Oh , right, you insist that I used my doll already." Ed chuckled softly. Alec looked at him.

"Not thinking clearly? Maybe. Lily took them both when the ambulance came for you. Besides, Ed, I think you and I have had enough of magic and witchcraft. Oh that reminds me--" Alec dug into his pocket. Ed poured himself more water from the pitcher at his bedside. He watched Alec as the Australian handed him a shining quartz crystal on a gold chain. "A gift from Lily, Ed. She claims it will help you heal much faster."

"Interesting. Well, considering I don't want to be here much longer, that sounds good to me." Ed took the crystal pendant. He blinked.

"What?"

"Odd. I felt a brief tingling sensation." Ed said.

Alec chuckled.

"Can't say I'm surprised. Nothing that woman does surprises me anymore. I don't know what to believe."

"I think the whole point is to believe in something, Alec. To believe that a power exists, greater than you or me, " Ed told him thoughtfully. Ed suddenly yawned. "You know, Alec, what I believe right now is I need to get some sleep."

"Ed Straker actually admitting he needs to sleep? Now that's genuine magic." Alec grinned.

"Could be," grinned Ed. "Go home or go see that girlfriend of yours. Agnes."

"Agnes? Honestly, Ed, she's old news. I'm dating Eve now," Alec said with a wicked grin. Ed looked heavenward.

"One of these days you're going to get in a lot of trouble with all those women, Alec. I

really wish it happens soon, so I can enjoy every minute of it," smiled Ed.

"Thank God you only had one doll then, because that's a wish of yours I wouldn't want to come true." Alec shuddered.

Ed laughed. He winced. "Hurts to laugh. Goodnight, Colonel." he smiled.

"Goodnight, Commander." Alec chuckled.

The End