

Time Enough To Kill

Part 1 - Amelia Rogers

"Wait, what you're saying is that Ed Straker is a murderer? Come off it Henderson." Alec Freeman grumbled.

"I'm telling you, Freeman, his fingerprints were found on the knife and that knife was buried in..." Henderson picked up the report again. "buried five inches deep into Inspector Sarah Bessinger's back."

"You're telling me you believe Ed is capable of that kind of thing?" Alec growled.

"Maybe you should ask Straker." Henderson opened the file the report had been in and showed Freeman a blurry photograph. It showed Edward Straker grinning broadly at the camera, his hands resting on a woman's shoulders. "That's Bessinger."

Alec Freeman stared at the photo.

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Edward Straker groaned. The alarm clock buzzed loudly at him. He fought off a feeling of nausea and sat up in bed. For a moment he couldn't see clearly, and the room was only a mix of colours. He had no idea where he was.

"What the hell?"

The sheet that covered his body was a pale lavender satin. It still smelled faintly of roses.

"If this is someone's idea of a joke..." Straker said angrily to the empty bedroom. As his vision was restored to normal, he realized he had no memory of what had happened. His head hurt horribly and his right hand was swollen. It bore a discoloration. Straker slid out of the bed and gave a start, suddenly aware he was only clad in briefs. He started to look for anything that might give a clue to the events of the past 8 hours. He saw something glint on the white carpet, and bent over to pick it up, but a dark curtain descended in front of him and he lost consciousness...

Part 2 - Deborah Rorabaugh

"How are you feeling?" Freeman's voice sifted through the haze that surrounded him. Straker opened his eyes. The light was too bright, then dimmed to a more tolerable level. He caught a glimpse of a yellow SHADO medical jumper in the corner of his eye and tried to move his head.

"Stay still, Commander," Jackson's soft voice instructed. "You have a concussion and we're still analyzing the drugs in your system."

"Drugs?" Straker asked, surprised at how scratchy his voice sounded in his own ears.

"Security found you in Sarah Bessinger's flat. Got you out of there about five minutes before the police arrived," Freeman said.

"Whose flat?" Straker asked. He had a vague recollection of a room with lavender sheets and the scent of roses.

"You don't remember?" Foster's voice asked. He moved closer, into Straker's field of vision.

"No," Straker said.

"You don't remember going to Sarah Bessinger's flat last night?" Foster insisted.

"I don't know anybody named Sarah Bessinger," Straker replied. "I certainly don't remember going to her flat." Straker watched as Freeman and Foster exchanged a worried glance. "What's happened?" Straker demanded.

Freeman gave Foster another look, took a deep breath and said: "You've been missing for twelve hours. Your car was found near Metro headquarters. From what we've been able to piece together, you met Miss Bessinger at her office there, and you left with her."

"And?" Straker asked, knowing from Freeman's expression that there was worse news on the way.

"Her body was found in her car, at reserved parking garage just outside White Hall. She'd been stabbed to death, a single strike to the heart," Freeman said. "Your fingerprints were on the knife handle."

"And the police are looking for me?" Straker asked.

"MI5 was notified when the prints were identified. General Bond called General Henderson. We've been able to put a lid on it so far, but there are a lot of questions. The police aren't happy being told it's a national security matter," Freeman explained. "They're continuing their forensics investigation."

"Ed, if she was a security risk, or if you were in danger, we would have something to work with, get this handled," Foster said.

Straker massaged his right hand, noticing once again how bruised and swollen it was. He had a faint memory of a discoloration on his hand, but there was no sign of it now.

"Paul, I don't remember," Straker said. "I don't remember driving downtown, meeting this woman or anything. I think I remember a bedroom somewhere, but I think I was alone."

"Doctor, is there anything you can do?" Foster asked.

Jackson shook his head, crossing his arms across his chest. "It is possible the amnesia is a result of the psychological shock of either committing or witnessing the murder, but with the drugs in his system and the concussion, I doubt it's that simple."

"Do you think I killed this woman?" Straker asked, addressing the room in general.

"You are certainly physically capable of having committed this crime," Jackson said. "And anyone can commit a violent crime, provided the provocation is sufficient."

"Ed, considering the circumstances, I think it might be better if you stayed here in the medical center," Freeman said.

"I'm under arrest?"

"Let's call it 'protective custody', okay?" Freeman suggested. He gave Straker a crooked smile. "We'll get this straightened out."

Part 3 - Yuchtar

As the three men walked away from Straker's bed, he could see the worried glances they cast his way - he could feel the tension in the room. How could they think him capable of such a thing? He felt an anger welling up inside him, but couldn't consciously decide who he had to be angry at.

A flash of bright light blinded him and Straker shut his eyes tight. Images blinked through his mind like a psychic slide show. A woman, pleasant face, soft voice - gone before he could recognise her. Followed by a glimpse of his hand and a sense of a slight pain, like a pin prick. Flash! That was gone too. The woman's face again - no longer pretty, but laughing - features twisted in mockery - then gone. Replaced by the image of a knife. An ordinary knife - nothing special about it, other than the fact that it was dripping blood and resting in his hand. Flash! Gone, like the rest.

"NO!" Straker yelled, as he thrashed on his bed. The images vanished and were replaced by three anxious faces staring down at him. Concerned faces, friendly faces, familiar faces. Straker felt he should know them, but he didn't. Why were they so upset? He wasn't hurt very badly - felt fairly well, in fact.

"What?" he said. "Bit of a headache and my hand is sore, but other than that I'm fine." He flashed them what he hoped was a reassuring grin. "I'm hungry."

"Fascinating," Dr. Jackson muttered. "Perhaps I should look through that toxicology report again..." The tall, gaunt figure strolled away.

"You screamed, Ed," Freeman told him. "What was that all about?"

"Did I?" Straker asked, pleasantly, hoping he was guessing right that the question had been directed at him. After all, they were all looking at him - except the thin creepy looking one who had just gone across the room, of course - so he must have been speaking to him. "Sorry. Any chance of snagging a lunch or something??"

"Do you know who we are?" Foster asked with a frown.

"Errrrrm, sure!" Was that the answer they were searching for? He did so want to please.

"He's clueless," Foster said to Freeman in amazement. "In a matter of seconds, he's lost it all!"

"It must have something to do with the combination of drugs in his system," Jackson surmised to no one in particular. "Almost like SHADO's own amnesia drug, but less stable."

Part 4 - Amelia Rodgers

"How the HELL did he get out of medical centre?" Henderson demanded.

"General, obviously the drugs in his system are unpredictable. It is only a matter of time before security finds him." Jackson said. "Colonel Freeman sent a search team out as soon as we realised he'd gotten away."

"Nobody expected him to react that way. We all heard him scream. He may be going through the trauma of the murder again, or hallucinating all together. We don't know. He already started to think we suspected he actually killed that woman. Then he fails to recognise who he is or where he is all together," sighed Foster "I just hope Alec finds him in time. He pinched somebody's Range Rover off the studio lot and took off in it before anyone could stop him. Luckily we managed to stop the owner from reporting it to the police, at least for a while."

"Whose vehicle was it?" Henderson grumbled.

"Some merchandising executive wanting to get licensing for that children's show filming on the set. Singing guinea pigs, rabbits, Sesame Street type production. I remember Ed was complaining about being pestered by him shoving prototype guinea pig puppets in Ed's face. "

Paul Foster grinned broadly, but his smile faded. "Christ, for a few seconds I almost forgot how much trouble Ed's in. We've got to find him..."

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Ed Straker frowned as he drove. Stealing people's cars didn't seem to be something he did..or was it? Well, he couldn't stand those strangers just staring at him like that, and he kept pushing the mental image of a corpse's blank, staring eyes out of his mind. He had to get away from that sterile place with all its unfamiliar equipment. Some instinct in the back of his head had guided him through the twisting corridors, and only a few of the people he passed by had even looked twice at the pajamas he wore. They seemed oddly respectful of him..damn. He couldn't remember. The compassion in the eyes of the one who had called himself Freeman..something about it made Ed uneasy. Almost like he wanted desperately to beg him to just..please..help...

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...you're never going to get away with this... believe it...no one's going to honestly think I could kill a woman like this... stay away from me... what the hell are you putting in my hand? No! OH GOD that burns!! DON'T DON'T! HELP ME ALEC! HELP...

"NO!" Ed turned the steering wheel violently and ran off the road, screeching to a stop. He pushed open the door and just ran blindly to get away from the memories. After several minutes of running he just collapsed onto the leaf- strewn earth. His hand hurt terribly. A quick look at it showed it to be discoloured and swollen again. That meant something, that stirred a bone-deep fear in him, but he didn't know why, what to do or who to turn to. He had to run...

"Who the hell are you?"

Ed flinched violently and looked up in terror. An elderly woman, her hands muddy and bent with arthritis, stood glaring at him. She waved a garden rake meaningfully.

"This is my property and you're on it! Now I may have been a widow for six years young man, but you can count on me being able to look after myself. Now you answer me or I'll..."

Ed Straker started sobbing. He buried his face in his hands.

"No, wait...listen...no need to do that." The woman bent over, dropped the rake, and held Ed's shuddering body. "Why you're hurt! Your poor hand! Listen, you look exhausted and

hungry. Come with me. I know when a person is in real trouble. I didn't get to be seventy-two without learning something. You have kind eyes. Stand up now."

"Don't let them kill me. Don't let them get me again. I don't want to remember anything. Can't they see that?" Ed begged the woman. He allowed her to help him up.

"Hush now. Ruth's going to take care of you. You can stay with me as long as you like. Hardly a soul knows I live out here. I like it that way. You'll be safe with me, and my husband left me plenty enough for me to support the two of us. Hush now..."

Ed suddenly brightened. "Edward."

"What, dear?"

"My name is Edward." Ed said with a look of accomplishment.

"Well, it suits you. Come on now."

Part 5 - Deborah Rorabaugh

"We have a lead on why the Commander was with this Sarah Bessinger," Security Chief Natiroff said. "The Commander received a phone call yesterday morning, from CID Inspector Bessinger. Apparently she didn't know we record all incoming phone calls."

"What was it about?" Foster asked.

"Inspector Bessinger had information concerning a possible security breach within SHADO," Natiroff said. "She indicated she had evidence of drug smuggling using both SHADO and Harlington-Straker facilities. Naturally, the Commander agreed to meet with her to determine the seriousness of both the allegations and the possible breach."

"Why didn't he ask you to go along with him?" Freeman asked. "For that matter, why didn't he mention it to one of us?"

"He was asked to come alone and not to mention it to anyone," Natiroff said. The office doors slid open and Suzanne Martin, Natiroff's assistant, walked in.

"We found the Rover he took," Martin announced. "It had run off the road. The Commander left it with the engine running."

"Any sign of him?" Foster asked.

"No, but there are several houses in the area he could have gone to. Someone may have seen him," Martin said.

"What do we have on the locals?" Freeman asked.

"Ordinary people, nothing that ties them to SHADO or U.F.O.s," Martin answered, handing Natiroff a board with notes clipped to it.

"Nothing that we know of," Foster corrected. Natiroff glanced at the notes and then handed the board to Freeman.

"The house closest to where we found the vehicle is owned by a Ruth Naudet. She's a widow, seventy two. Her husband was in government work, left her a pension and insurance money. She owns the house and property outright."

"And nothing to link her to us or Ufos?" Foster asked.

"Nothing. An upstanding citizen. Volunteers at the food bank and at the local Humane Society," Martin said. "The report we have indicates she has a penchant for picking up stray animals. She worked as a nurse at a local clinic until she and her husband retired, about ten years ago. He died just last year."

"I'm going out there," Freeman announced. "Paul, you handle things here, and for God's sake, keep the police out of it."

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Ruth Naudet looked down at her new charge. Her late husband's clothes fit him well enough, just a little baggy, but then Nathan Naudet had been a big man until cancer had eaten him away. Edward was a puzzle wrapped in an enigma, as the saying went. He was frightened, that much was obvious. And he acted in many ways like a small, terrified child. But Ruth didn't think he was simple, or retarded. His expressions, the way he carried himself, his choice of words, all indicated someone with good intelligence.

She put his hand to soak in some warm salts, hoping to draw out the infection that had to be there. She had suggested calling her doctor to look at it, but Edward refused, becoming nearly hysterical at the suggestion.

Ruth found herself wondering what she had gotten herself into.

There was a knock at the door and she went to open it, leaving Edward in the kitchen,

soaking his hand.

A muscular man with a pockmarked weather beaten face, wearing an expensive suit, stood in the doorway. "Mrs. Naudet, I'm sorry to disturb you, but my name's Alec Freeman."

The man pulled a photograph from his suit pocket and showed it to her. It was Edward. "We were wondering if you'd seen this man. He was driving a car that was found near here."

"Is he in trouble?" Ruth asked.

Freeman shook his head. "He's a material witness to a murder and he may also be badly hurt. He left the clinic he was being treated at before the staff had a chance to examine him."

"What's wrong with him?"

"I'm not at liberty to say, except we believe he may be in what they call a 'fugue' state, amnesia, trying to escape what he saw."

"Is he dangerous?" Ruth asked.

Freeman smiled and she knew he suspected Edward was there. "No. He's a very good man who's just in a bit of trouble right now and we need to know he's okay. If you see him, will you call me?" He handed her his business card, the simple one, with just his name and phone number on it.

She put the card in her pocket. "I'll let you know if I see him," she promised.

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"He's there," Freeman told Natiroff.

"Shall I send in a team to get him?" the Russian asked.

Freeman shook his head. "No. Send a team of minders out. Observe and guard, but don't be seen doing it. If Jackson's right and he's in a fugue state, I don't want to frighten him and make it worse."

"Do you think we can get the woman to cooperate with us?" Natiroff.

"I don't know, yet," Freeman admitted.

The side door to the house opened and the old woman came out, grabbing her rake from its place beside the door. She began raking up the fallen leaves. From the pattern of leaves in the yard, it was obvious she'd been interrupted at that chore.

Freeman left the car and walked over to her.

"You're still here?" she asked as he approached.

"I don't have much to do today, except find my friend and try to help him out of whatever he's gotten himself into," Freeman said.

"Does he do that often?" she asked.

"Do what?"

"Get into trouble."

"Often enough," Freeman said with a smile. The porch door creaked and Freeman looked up to see Ed Straker standing on the porch.

"I won't go back," Ed announced.

"All right," Freeman said.

A puzzled look came into Ed's face. "You're not going to make me go back?"

"Well, Jackson's pretty mad at you for walking out on him and Henderson's just plain furious, but that's normal," Freeman said.

The puzzled look didn't disappear and Freeman suspected that Ed couldn't identify the names he'd just been told.

"Just promise me you'll stay put, so we can keep an eye out for whoever murdered that woman," Freeman said. "If they know you might be able to identify them, they may be back to

finish the job."

"But, I don't know anything," Ed protested. "And..." He looked like he was about ready to cry.

"I know you don't remember anything right now," Freeman said. "I also know you didn't do anything. But someone's trying to make it look like you did."

Ruth's eyes widened.

"You're sure I didn't do it?" Ed asked. He had gone pale and his hands were shaking, as though some frightful memory had come forward.

"The Ed Straker I know is incapable of cold blooded murder," Freeman assured him.

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"The team is in place," Natiroff said when Freeman went back to the car.

"Good," Freeman said. "He's probably as safe here as anywhere, until the other side makes their move."

"You believe the aliens are behind this?"

Freeman looked over at the Russian. "I just told Commander Straker that the man I know he is is incapable of cold blooded murder. I happen to believe that's true."

"Therefore, either he didn't do it at all, or he had an excellent reason to do it," Natiroff said.

"And we'd better figure out which one and why," Freeman said. "The police don't take kindly to one of their own being killed. And I don't know how long 'national security' is going to keep them off."

Part 6 - Yuchtar

Ruth Naudet had a frown on her old face. Edward Straker was sleeping. His hand was still discolored. That worried her. If his friends had seen that, they might be working things out right now. The stupid thing wasn't working right either; Straker should not have remembered his name and certainly not her house! What had brought him back here?

Bessinger must have done something wrong when she implanted the thing. The stupid woman never even figured out that she would have to die in order for the plan to work. The money was all she cared about. Ruthie hated her and was glad she was dead.

But what should she do now? She didn't want Edward Straker to die, but if he remembered any more, the plan - and she - would be ruined! Why couldn't he have just accepted that he had killed the stupid woman and gone quietly insane and/or been locked up for the rest of his life? Just like her Wilbur. Dear, sweet Wilbur. Never wanted to hurt anybody - dying like some dog in a cage in some swamp in Vietnam. Why? Why did this man - so angelic looking in sleep - send her only grannbaby out to die like a dog?

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"Look at this," Natiroff said to no one and every one. He had several sheets of fax paper, which he spread out on the table, shoving aside beakers and test tubes without so much as a 'by your leave' to Jackson.

The easy going doctor merely raised an eyebrow in pique before glancing at one of the sheets. "What have you got?" he asked.

"Letters written to the US State Department?" Foster read from one of the headers. "What are these about?"

"Written by Nathan and Ruth Naudet regarding their grandson, Pfc. Wilbur Naudet, a POW in Vietnam," Natiroff explained.

"Hmm," Jackson said as he read the letter he had picked up. "It would appear that they think the young man is still alive and blame the Air Force for some kind of cover up."

"No," said Freeman. "They know he's dead now - his remains were shipped home about a year ago - and they blame certain Intelligence officers for what happened."

"One Intelligence officer in particular," Natiroff said.

"Colonel Straker!" they all exclaimed in unison.

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"Have some tea, Edward. It will calm your nerves."

The old lady wore a kind smile. She was very reassuring. Straker took the tea, but grimaced when he sipped it.

"Too hot, dear?" Ruth asked.

"Bitter." The bitterness was somehow familiar as well, but Edward could not place the taste.

"Oh dear, I must have let it steep too long." Her smile never faded, but she was internally kicking herself for not buying some coffee last time she was in town - the bitter taste of coffee would have masked the darned stuff! "Never mind," she said kindly as she took the cup away and poured it out down the drain. "We'll try again later." And I'm almost out! This stupid mixture is not easy - or cheap - to prepare! "Why don't you go have another lie down, Edward dear? You'll feel better."

"Yes, perhaps I will. I am feeling a bit faint." Straker left the room unsteadily and lay down on the sofa.

If he starts remembering again, she thought to herself, I'll have to do him in. No choice now. But how to make it look like an accident? Hmmm, she didn't have to, though did she? He was a wanted murderer. She walked over to the drawer and took out a long butcher knife. "Why, no, officer," she whispered to herself. "I had no choice - he was like a mad man - came at me screaming like a banshee. Lucky I had the knife in my hand, or I'd of been a goner for sure. And he seemed like such a nice young man, officer - why would he do such a thing...?"

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Straker tossed and turned in his sleep. The images running together in his mind made no sense. A bloody knife, a police badge, his hand, an old photo of a kid in a USAF uniform, Ruthie laughing, yelling, laughing, yelling -- at him - at him - the knife in --- HER hand In HER hand ... The photo, the knife, his hand, her hand ...

"NOOOOOOOOO!" He suddenly screamed as he sat bolt upright on the couch, narrowly missing the knife Ruthie now held over her head, ready to strike down. Instinctively, he grabbed her arms and pushed. She was a large woman, but Straker was stronger and more experienced. He quickly dislodged the knife from her grip and pinned her to the floor.

When the door burst open and Alec Freeman rushed in ahead of a whole SHADO security squad, Straker had everything under control. "Well, Ed," Freeman said with a grin. "Are we, uh, interrupting anything?"

"Arrest her," Straker said. "For the murder of Sarah Bessinger and for attempted murder, conspiracy, and anything else you can think of along the way."

* * *

Straker was already back at work less than a week later. Freeman found him in his office with Jackson, a cloud of smoke rings above his head.

"Didn't I order you to take a couple weeks rest, Commander?" Dr. Jackson was saying with a wag of his finger.

"Too busy, Doctor! Ah, come on in, Alec - please disturb! Jackson here is doing his best impression of my mother."

Jackson grinned evilly at that, which startled Straker just a bit.

"Ed," Freeman ventured. He was so curious, he was about to bust, so he had to ask. "Did she ever say why she did what she did? Or *how* she did what she did??"

"The why is easy, Alec - she blamed me for her grandson's death. He was with a squad I ordered into the field - strictly routine - no conspiracy or cover up involved. Seems her son - the boy's father - killed himself shortly after the war. Ruthie's husband Nathan was a pharmaceutical engineer - HE came up with the amnesia drug formula."

Jackson spoke up at this point. "Yes, quite fascinating, really. Quite fascinating - very close to our own, but of course, not stable - lucky for you, Commander."

"Yes, lucky me."

"There was a small object implanted in the Commander's hand, Colonel. It was designed to slowly and steadily release the drug into the blood on a set schedule - quite ingenious - IF it had worked. Again, you were lucky, Commander - it didn't work."

"If she wanted you dead, why didn't she just kill you from the beginning?"

"Oh, she didn't want me dead, Alec - not at first! She wanted me locked up the way her grandson had been."

"Hard to contemplate what might have happened if she'd had time enough to kill, Commander..." Jackson was in one of his far away, boy, I'd like to study this some more moods.

"Yes, well, it's all been 'quite fascinating,'" Straker said as he stood and smoothed down the front of his jacket. "But I have to go oversee the first production of that new children's show with the dancing guinea pigs - seems there is one little critter in particular who won't dance unless I'm there!"

As Straker strolled away, they could hear his voice from down the hall. "Fox Mulder!! Just the lad I wanted to see. Know anything about guinea pigs?"

END