

Elementary, My Dear Straker

by Pamela McCaughey (2020)
based on the series "UFO" (1969-71)
created by Gerry and Sylvia Anderson, and Reg Hill
and based on **Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)**
created by Dennis Spooner
A follow up to the episode The Square Triangle...
Email:

CHAPTER ONE - 1980

Paul Foster came into Commander Straker's office, flang the second section of the daily local newspaper on the desk and sank down in a seat across from him, "Have you seen this yet?"

Straker, who'd been working on some files before he'd been so rudely interrupted, picked up the tabloid and snapped it flat to peruse the article outlined in blue marker. Only a few moments into the story he looked up at Foster, "Are you sure this is the same man?"

"Yes. I'm sure. They've managed to do it after all."

"Well, I told you a couple of months ago that we weren't policemen - that the issue didn't concern us in any way."

"How can you say that?" Foster got up and helped himself to a drink of whiskey from Straker's office bar - an action more suited to Alec Freeman than Foster, "We knew they were conspiring to commit a murder and we just let them get away with it."

"Look, Paul, I know this business bothered you, but consider the risks we were taking by getting involved - we'd already had them in here to be dosed with amnesia drug - I hoped that perhaps they'd give up on the idea because of that."

"The amnesia drug might have wiped away memories of their original plot - and their accidental killing of the alien - but it didn't curtail their plans to kill off her husband."

As if trying to shelve the whole argument, Straker folded the newspaper and dropped it into the trash bin beside his modern-looking plexiglas desk, "We've got too much to do chasing down aliens and stopping them from setting up nests and beach-heads here on the planet. You only met the husband involved once - why does this incident stick in your craw so badly?"

"This incident 'sticks in my craw', as you Americans put it so crudely, because it was a blatant case of murder - we had the power to stop it and we didn't. I just hate the whole mess - that they got away with it. Now that glorified gigolo will live on the husband's hard earned money and have his widow too."

"You know we couldn't get involved or inform on them without having to identify our own reasons for being on the scene of their first attempt."

Foster shook his head, "We had the dead alien off the premises very quickly - we could have called the police in after that."

"With what? Nothing but suspicions? They'd have wanted to know who it was they killed instead of the husband! We could hardly have told them it was an alien!" Straker was tired of the discussion; they'd argued about this at the time, and got nowhere, "Now if you have anything more constructive to do, this would be the time to do it."

After buying himself another newspaper, Foster sat down in the SHADO cafeteria to re-read the article on Jack Newton's death. Ruled accidental by the police, the husband had met his end in a seemingly innocent-looking car accident, with his vehicle going off a steep curve. Innocent looking, except for the fact Foster knew that Newton's wife and her lover, Cass Fowler, had been scheming to get rid of him, and their first attempt had been foiled when an alien stumbled into the house and got shot for his pains. That's when SHADO had to step in, remove the dead alien, neutralize the house, and submit the two conspirators to some amnesia drug, as Straker had already reminded Foster.

If Foster really wanted to see justice done, he was going to have to forget about the initial murder plot involving the dead alien, and investigate the actual car accident death. He just knew it was no accident. The article claimed the car had swerved off the road and Newton had been thrown out of the vehicle, his death attributed to massive head wounds. Paul got up abruptly. It was time to see his friends in IT, to hack into the police computer files and get a copy of the autopsy report...

In the early 1980's, computers utilized by the public at large were very few. Most computers were the property of major institutions, government offices, police departments (local as well as Scotland Yard), universities, scientific think tanks, and of course SHADO and her sister organization, Omega. SHADO, from the first, had been blessed with the most state-of-the-art computer systems in the world, and computer systems security so tight as to be squeakless. In addition to their own security, SHADO's IT people were also able to compromise other systems, to get required information, be it medical, political, or semi-espionage. Whatever SHADO personnel needed from other systems was easily obtained by experienced hackers. They could get in, access the required info, and get back out. All without leaving any evidence they'd ever been in. Firewalls for computer systems would come much later, although SHADO and Omega were well protected themselves.

Most of the IT people were used to requisitions requesting information gotten in this manner; Foster took the liberty of calling in a small favour in order to get the police and medical files he wanted on Jack Newton. He didn't want a requisition somehow coming back to bite him on the arse, especially if Straker found out. If Straker wasn't interested in this case, then that was fine.

He took the acquired printed materials home to read the contents. There were a series of photos taken at the accident scene, both before and after the ambulance had arrived. The police files included information that hadn't appeared in the newspaper reports - Newton was not judged to be intoxicated at the time of the accident. He apparently smelled considerably of alcohol, but the autopsy tox screen results confirmed that he hadn't been over the legal drinking level when he apparently lost control of his car. Also, since his vehicle had not had emergency airbags, it was decided he ended up outside the car through the drivers' seat window, which was broken. All very innocuous. Unless you knew of somebody who wanted the poor man dead.

The car was currently at the police impound lot, where it had been checked forensically to see if there were mechanical problems, like failed brakes, or a seized steering wheel, et al. Nothing was found that suggested any foul play. Maybe, just maybe, the car itself was not the problem. What if it was the husband himself? What if something had been done to him that had put him in a vulnerable position from the start?

Foster was no policeman, but he did know when something smelled bad, and this time he knew there were two stinkers involved... but how to start an investigation on the quiet without somehow compromising his role in SHADO?

* * *

Jeffrey Randall looked up as his secretary ushered a new client into his office.

The new fellow held out his hand across the desk and asked, "Are you Randall or Hopkirk?"

Taking the offered hand and wincing at the tight handshake, Randall had time to regard the handsome man across from him before saying, as he often had to, "I'm Randall. My partner, Hopkirk died some years ago. I've never taken his name off the office door out of respect, I suppose. What brings you in here to a private investigator? Cheating wife?"

"No. Well, yes, but not mine," Foster smiled ruefully, "Some else's wife. And that other man is dead now. I suspect his wife and her boyfriend killed him."

Randall smiled back, "This is a matter for the police. Have you any evidence? Have you spoken with them?"

"I've had the opportunity to see the police and autopsy reports. Here are copies," Paul had been careful to have them reprinted without any SHADO or Omega logos on the paper.

Unfolding the proffered papers, Randall quickly scanned them, "There appear to have been no issues with the car itself found. The victim was apparently thrown out of the car.....no seatbelt worn? And not enough booze found in the blood stream for him to be over the legal limit," he looked up at Foster, "What makes you think this accident was really a murder?"

Foster had to be very careful now. He couldn't tell Randall his real original involvement in the case. He had to maintain SHADO's secrecy, "Because the wife was plotting to get rid of her husband so she could be with her lover."

"I reiterate - even if a disgruntled wife wanted to be free of a sticky commodity like her husband, there's nothing in these reports to suggest anything sinister, let alone shouting a murder was accomplished. You'll have to do better than vague accusations."

"What if I were to tell you I'm the lover?" Paul was playing a very dangerous card game now.

Randall's eyes widened in response, "And, if you are the lover in the story, why are you telling me?"

"Because, sir, I believe I'm next to be murdered." Foster replied matter of factly.

"You think you're about to be the next victim? What makes you so sure?"

Lowering his head a bit for effect, Paul said, "Look, this woman is now very wealthy, her husband had a substantial insurance, and he'd been bringing in a big salary and putting it into investments that pay out huge interest rates. Her total monthly income is in the six figure range."

"So, you'll be well looked after," Randall grinned.

"You don't understand. She's been very secretive lately, going on trips without me, not telling me where she's been, generally behaving in a shady manner. I think she's got a new man, and she doesn't know how to tell me."

"And if she did have a new man, that would put you out of the picture, wouldn't it?"

"All the way out. But, she and I plotted together to get rid of her husband. She knows if she dumps me for someone new, I could go to the police and tell them the truth, and how it was done."

Randall leaned his chin on his fist for a moment, "So what is it you expect me to do for you?"

"I'll pay you.....I have some money.....I want you to start surveillance on her and her activities. I need to know if there's another man involved, and who he is."

"You realize I cannot help you commit a crime against the lady in question, or her new man, if there is one now."

"Yes, I know. But if I have proof there's someone new, I can show her the evidence you get for me, and I can at least get some money out of her for my troubles."

"You mean to extort her with my evidence," Randall was serious.

"I promise, I just want some security that she won't turn on me and give me up to the police to get rid of me. That's what I'm afraid of."

Randall was silent as he considered what was being asked of him, "It won't be cheap my friend. He wrote out his daily fee on a piece of paper and shoved it across the desk to Foster.

Without a beat, Foster took out his wallet and handed over a handful of cash, enough, Randall figured, to pay for at least two weeks of investigation.

"I'm sure you'd like a receipt for this amount of money. What is your name, sir?"

"Cass Fowler," Foster relied with a small smile.

"And who is it you want me to surveil?"

"Mrs Jack Newton," Paul gave the merry widow's home address and phone number, "Is there any chance you could bug her phone for me?"

"Well, I can, but it's also illegal for a PI like me to do it, so it'll cost you something extra."

Foster pulled another 200 pounds out of his wallet and handed it over, "I won't need a receipt for this if you can do it."

"Right then. I'll get to work immediately."

"Today?" Foster gave him a hopeful look.

"No, but first thing tomorrow. I've got to get some phone and house bugs from an electronics dealer here in town that I trust, and I want to case Mrs Newton's home and neighbourhood."

"When can I hear something from you?"

"When I've got something. If she really is entertaining a new man in her life, I'll be able to find out. No matter how hard they try to stay under the radar, there's always a way to catch them up."

Foster left Randall's office with a polite farewell to the PI's pretty secretary. She was quite attractive, but he was on a mission. He decided that in his spare time, he'd tail Mrs Newton as well, keeping well out of Randall's way, but he'd let Randall gather the evidence. He'd lied about being Cass Fowler, her real lover, because that way Fowler would look to Randall as the suspected "new" man in her life. The money Foster paid Randall was got out of his own secret Swiss account. It would be untraceable since it was cash.

Paul knew he was putting himself on the line, but Straker was right, the case did "stick in his craw" to use Straker's own words. He wasn't above a little fornication with a pretty unattached girl, but he had a real animus against husbands or wives cheating on their spouses. He'd grown up in a house in which his parents abused each other and cheated on each other, leaving him languishing in a violent and unsettled childhood. It engendered in him a lifelong dread of marriage or commitment that he wasn't able to shake.

So, this mission to catch Mrs Newton and her lover Cass Fowler was hatched partly from his personal angst, and partly from his sense of fair play. The poor bloke had no idea his wife wanted him dead, and it had taken two tries to accomplish just that. Why hadn't she asked for a divorce? More than likely she could have gotten a generous settlement. Or did she and Cass get greedy and decide the multi million dollar insurance payout should be theirs too? He didn't know right now, but hopefully Randall would find enough recorded evidence on them with the house and phone bugs, that Foster could send this information to the police, all the while keeping himself out of the case afterwards.

That Mrs Newton and her lover hadn't married yet was likely because it was too soon after the husband's death. People might make ugly talk of a kind that could get the pair in trouble, and at this point, keeping a low profile was all important. The insurance settlement hadn't been paid out as yet, and surely they wouldn't want to jeopardize getting those millions.

Paul got into his purple gull winged vehicle and drove off.

CHAPTER TWO

Jeffrey Randall watched surreptitiously through his camera as Liz Newton opened her front door. Quickly slipping inside was a young man. Randall had taken several quick photos with his telephoto lens. He would develop them later, when he returned to his office. The lights inside the house snapped off. Was this evidence of hanky panky, he wondered? Why turn off all the lights? Unless they were going to bed...

He had just poured himself a cup of tea from his thermos and was settling in for the overnight when his partner, Marty Hopkirk materialized in the passenger seat beside him. Clad in his perennial white suit, shirt and tie, his dark hair in place, he smiled and inquired, "Cheating wife case?"

Randall balanced his tea mug carefully, after almost spilling it at Hopkirk's precipitous appearance, "Jesus, Marty, I wish you'd warn me before you materialize! You scared the shit out of me!"

"Sorry about that," the ghost of his one time private investigating partner looked sincere, "Wanted to check in on you and your new case."

"It's about a cheating wife, but she and her original lover may have killed her husband and now the lover thinks she's got a new man and he's afraid of being killed himself. He certainly paid me enough to take this case. Plus an extra 200 quid to bug her phone and her house. Wasn't easy, either. She doesn't leave the house much these days."

"Is there anything I could do to help you, old pal?" Hopkirk asked.

"Actually, yes there is! Would you consider going inside and scouting around for me? A young man arrived only a couple minutes ago, was let inside, and then all the lights in the house went off. I'd like to know what's going on in there!"

"I thought you said you'd bugged the house?"

"Yes, I did, but I won't get access to the recordings for a day or two yet. I'd like to know now."

"I don't know, Jeff, it's not my business to spy on others....."

"Oh, come off it, Marty, how many times have you stuck your head in and reported what you saw back to me?"

Hopkirk hung his head a bit, then said, "I can take a quick peek. I really hope I don't see them fornicating... it's so unnerving, especially since that subject is somewhat taboo where I come from..."

"Just take a look for me!"

Soundlessly, Hopkirk disappeared out of the passenger seat. Randall continued to watch the Newton house through his camera and sipped his now cold mug of tea. A moment or two later, Hopkirk reappeared.

"Well?" Randall asked.

Hopkirk rolled his eyes theatrically and said, "Just as I thought. They're fornicating alright!"

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure! I may be dead but I still remember what all that wrestling and giggling under the bedclothes means!"

Randall smiled. Apparently that man in his office had some good cause for his concerns. Mrs Newton already had a new lover.

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Foster, too, had been focused on the Newton house that same night. Unlike Randall, he didn't have a ghostly partner to confirm his ideas about what was going on inside, but he had a pretty good idea nonetheless.

Secreted several properties closer than Randall, he utilized a camera and binoculars to keep watch. Straker had granted him a few days off. He hadn't told Straker why he wanted the time, he'd just muttered something about family business and hoped the Commander would be satisfied with that.

Although Randall was a good PI, he'd failed to detect Foster's presence there. At least Paul thought he'd eluded being spotted; SHADO training had come in handy yet again.....

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Hopkirk was sitting in with Randall quietly. On such surveillance events there wasn't much to say. Besides they knew each other for so long and so well, that they could sense the other's moods, even though one of the partners was now a ghost.

Quietly, Hopkirk said, "Did you know there's another bloke here on the street watching the same house you are I think? I could be wrong, but he's sitting there with binoculars and a camera just like you are."

Randall turned a look of consternation on his partner, "How do you know?"

"How do I know anything? I saw him myself."

"You're kidding?"

"No, I'm not kidding. Handsome fellow. Very intent on following the action at the house."

Shaking his head, Randall had a bad moment wondering if his client had hired another PI besides himself. Could he afford to do that?

"What's he look like?"

"Hm...blue eyes, darkish hair, couldn't make out much more because of the darkness."

"I thought ghosts could see in the dark like a cat!" Randall snorted.

"Even cats can't see completely in the dark, that's an old wives' tale."

Sometimes Marty could be exasperating, ghost or not.

"Can you go back and take another look at our mystery man for me?"

"Oh alright! But I won't be able to make him out any more than I was a few minutes ago."

A nanosecond later, Hopkirk rematerialized into the passenger seat beside Randall.

"So?"

"Same as before. Nicely dressed though. Not as nice as me, but expensive enough. He glanced up and down at Randall, "Certainly more chic than you, old friend," and he grinned.

"Look, I'm planning to stay till daylight – you know, see if her bedfellow leaves after breakfast, get some better photos in the sunshine," Randall explained, "You can stay or take a break."

Hopkirk sighed, "If only I could. One of the things I really miss about being dead is not being able to enjoy a good strong cup of coffee."

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What passed for sunshine in that part of England arrived just as Randall was ready to close his eyes. Hopkirk spoke to him gently, which brought the exhausted PI back to full alert. The tea in his canister was stone cold. He felt the shivers that accompany tiredness, but the shivers also served to waken him. It was a very cool morning indeed.

Silently, the PI and his ghost partner watched the Newton house. About 90 minutes later, they were rewarded with some activity. The front door opened, and the young man who's entered the night before was now exiting. He took a quick glance about, satisfied himself that the street was carless and quiet, and left the scene, walking briskly. Had he stashed his car elsewhere to avoid comment or attract too much attention?

During this time, Randall had been able to take a series of up close pictures with his telephoto lens in usage, satisfied that he'd scored some good images for identification purposes.

"What are you going to do now?" Hopkirk queried.

"First, I'm going to the office to develop these photos. I might even pour myself a slop of whisky in my coffee! Then, I'll call that Cass Fowler fellow to come and see if he can ID the new man in Mrs Newton's life. Then, I'm going to go to bed for a few thousand years..."

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True to his word, Randall added whiskey to his coffee, and spent more than an hour developing what he considered the best photos for his client to peruse. He dialed him up around ten thirty to report on the night's activities.

Within an hour or so, Foster arrived to see Randall's photos. To his thinking, those photos could provide some proof of the relationship between Fowler and Mrs Newton, especially if Randall had gotten some good stuff off the phone and house bugs.

Randall slid a manila envelope across the desk, "Take a look at these. Is there any chance this bloke is known to you?"

Paul made a game of looking the black and whites over very closely before he said slowly, "I don't know his name, but I have seen him before.....at the funeral reception I think....."

"Are you sure about that?"

Foster nodded, "Yes, I do believe so. But, he didn't seem at that time to be too friendly with the widow in question."

"Well, if they were hiding their new relationship, he wouldn't dare compromise her in public, now, would he?"

"I just don't understand.....I mean, when did she have time to take up with someone else?" I mean, it took months of planning to off her husband. I spent a lot of time with her. How the hell could she be running a second relationship? When would she have the time, or how could she be so brazen as to have him at the house?"

Randall shrugged, "Look, pal, I don't read minds. I can't answer any of your questions about this. The only thing I know is that he went in after dark, and left so early nothing was stirring on the street."

"What about the bugs you planted?"

"I should be able to get the transcripts later today."

"You have someone transcribe bug recordings?"

"My deceased partner's widow. I pay her extra for such work and she's not the kind to open her mouth. I can trust her. She does this sort of thing for me all the time."

"Call me if anything good is on the recordings then. Maybe they talked on the phone."

"I'd be more interested in the house bugs. They were recording the little tete a tete they had last night."

Foster looked down at the floor, pretending to be disturbed by the concept that his woman was cheating on him, "Call me." And he left the office, carrying the envelope of photos.

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The photos were good, but they weren't proof of anything but an affair between Fowler and Mrs Newton. Paul needed something really good to utilize as leverage against them. He still wasn't completely certain about how he was going to get them turned up to the police. He was hoping Randall would be able to gather enough evidence to expose them, but he required proof that their affair pre-dated the death of Mr Newton, and that they'd actually plotted to kill him. He realized ruefully that he was still a long way from the smoking gun. Maybe this was why Straker had been so insistent they not get involved – proof was going to be very difficult to acquire.

But, Paul Foster wasn't the kind of man to give up easily. If he had been, he'd never have ended up in SHADO at all. It was his dogged investigation after he'd seen an actual UFO in space, and his test plane had crashed, that brought him into SHADO.

He thought of the two culprits and his expression hardened. Mrs Newton was the kind of older woman who used her financial status to attract younger men. Cass Fowler was the kind of man who knew instinctively what older women wanted and provided it, for the right payoff. What a pair!

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A knock on the door brought Marty Hopkirk's pretty widow to answer. She invited Randall in, offered him coffee and sat down with a stack of typed papers.

"This is an ugly case isn't it?" she asked, pouring cream into her cup.

"Is it what I think it is?"

"Mostly pillow talk and sex. But there is an interesting reference on the tape. Apparently the pair are planning a trip away."

This brought Randall out of his slumped position, "They're going abroad?"

"They didn't refer to the destination per se, but they definitely were chatting in the afterglow about going away for awhile to keep out of the public eye."

"Hmmmmm. Any mention of how they were going to be travelling?"

"Flying. Maybe they're going to the continent?" she queried.

"I wonder if they've made reservations yet..." Randall mused aloud, he shifted in his seat with a big smile, "Are you busy today? I can pay you more money to do extra work for me...."

"What are you thinking?"

"You can do it right here from home. If they're going to fly, they'll be likely travelling by commercial airlines. Could you call all the airlines and check to see if they have reservations for Mrs Newton and pretend you're her?"

Mrs Hopkirk smiled, "What exactly am I supposed to say?"

"When you do get the right airlines, say you want to confirm your tickets and that you've lost them and need new tickets issued. They'll likely demand a fee to replace them. Say you'll pick them up personally. I'll give you some cash to pay with. If the trip is imminent, like within the next 2-3 days, ask if the tickets can be changed to a different date a week later. Same deal, you'll pick them up."

"What if they ask for ID?"

"I know you Jeannie, you'll think of something to stall them. Just get those tickets."

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Several hours of calling the various commercial airlines finally produced results. Jeannie posed as Mrs Newton on the phone and explained her quandary about the lost tickets. There was indeed going to be a fee to replace them. Jeannie also confirmed the dates and discovered that the proposed tickets were not to be used for another three weeks. Destination: Rome. This gave her a lot of wiggle room to get the copies for Mike Randall.

Picking up the phone again, she placed a call to Randall's office, "Mike, I got the airline the tickets were booked with. The guilty pair is planning to go to Rome in three weeks' time. I told the airline I'd pick up the replacement tickets later on today in person and pay the fee."

"That's my girl!" Randall slapped his desk with the flat of his hand, "Nice work indeed! Stop by here on your way to the airline and I'll give you the extra cash."

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"As you can see, Mr Fowler, Mrs Newton and her friend have made reservations to leave the country. The transcripts of the house bug uncovered this piece of information and I got my girl to pose as Mrs Newton in order to get replacement copies. I'd say we've got a short window of opportunity in which to gather more proof...."

Paul put the tickets back on Randall's desk, a dark expression on his face, "If they're leaving that soon, they must be planning to eliminate me before they go!"

"Have you noticed anything amiss with the widow? Has she backed off, begged for more space, stopped answering your calls, what have you?"

"That's just it, Randall. She's still acting like she wants me. I mean.....up until you got the photos of the other man leaving her house that morning, she's been sleeping with both of us....."

"When did you last see her?"

"Last night. She asked me over for dinner. All lovey dovey. All over me. No hint of anything wrong."

"And... did you..."

"What do you think? Of course not! I pleaded exhaustion and left after dessert!"

"You don't think she might consider your refusal, however politely couched, to be odd?"

Foster got up from the chair and passed the office, "I don't know. I just couldn't imagine myself in bed with her again, after.....those photos.....and the transcripts of the house bug...."

"It's really vital that we identify this bloke. You say you don't know his name. There has to be some way to find out. Which funeral home handled the after reception? Maybe his name is on some list there." Randall, poised with his pen, scribbled furiously as Paul told him which funeral company had been involved. He knew Cass Fowler's name would perhaps be on any lists as a guest, and he was posing as Fowler. He didn't want to trip himself up in the search for evidence.

Sitting down again, Foster leaned across the desk, "Maybe my only chance is to confront her, to tell her I have proof she's sleeping with someone else – maybe remind her of what we did together. Ask her why she's booked two tickets to Rome without telling me..."

"Are you sure that's wise? Such actions could backfire," Randall wasn't keen on having a dead client if such a confrontation went badly.

Patting his coat, Paul replied, "I bought a gun yesterday."

"This is all very dangerous, Mr Fowler. Why don't you wait until I've done more investigation?"

"I need to consider all my options. I'll call you soon. If you don't hear from me, it might be because I'm dead."

Randall had been in contentious spots before. But, he really didn't want to see this client dead. He couldn't get any more money from him if he was dead. So far he'd paid a small fortune. Was the gun registered? Did he have a licence for it? Was he cold blooded enough to kill Mrs Newton and her new lover in a fit of fear and jealous rage? Should he call the police about this? He poured himself a shot of whisky from a bottle he kept stashed in his desk drawer. It had a calming effect and helped him think...

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Foster entered Straker's office feeling frustrated. He'd just gotten orders to return to MoonBase in a couple weeks and he was very concerned about concluding his gambit to catch Cass Fowler and his merry widow. He didn't want to raise too much of a ruckus in case Straker questioned his behavior, but he didn't want to feel pushed to get things finished before the situation presented itself satisfactorily. The PI Randall was very helpful indeed, however, Paul felt now he'd be forced to act before he was ready. What to do, what to do?

Straker looked up from his video phone and waved Foster into a chair across from his desk. Foster listened until his boss cut the call short and hung up.

"You wanted to see me?" Straker growled.

"You don't sound happy," Foster answered, taking note of Straker's sour facial expression and pissed off tone of voice. Straker often sounded like a man who didn't like to be disturbed, no matter the reason.

"I'm not, but so what is new? Henderson is giving me grief once again about cost overruns on some new tech we're trying to develop.....and just what do YOU want?"

"I received orders to report back to MoonBase in three weeks. Did you issue them?"

"Yes, I did, so what?"

"I wasn't aware my presence was required so soon."

"Had to transfer Lt. Ellis away for some additional training, and I know how popular you are with the girls up there. Didn't think you'd mind," Straker sat back in his chair with a sardonic grin.

"Well, no, I actually don't," Foster smiled back, "But I'll be tied up in briefings for days before I fly up. Not looking forward to that."

"Look, Paul, when you're up on MoonBase, I consider you my eyes and ears. I'm concerned that there's been too much fraternization of a personal kind. Ever since Gay Ellis and got involved, I've been wary of such things. Getting personal dulls the senses, takes the edge off our personnel, which puts the installation, and there for us here on Terra Firma, at risk. We can't afford those kinds of indulgences."

"You send Freeman instead," Paul offered.

Straker laughed shortly, "Are you kidding? He'd create more problems of that sort than sort them out! You know what a ladies' man he can be!"

Foster knew only too well what a charmer Alec Freeman could be, despite his lack of being handsome in the conventional way, "I suppose, but what makes you think I'm any more trustworthy?" Paul felt like baiting Straker.

"You're scared of me, Freeman isn't."

Now wasn't the time to debate his own opinion of Straker's ability as his CO to make his life miserable if he overstepped. Instead, he replied, "Is there any chance my trip up could be postponed? Let's say a couple weeks?"

Tilting his head to one side, Straker's cold blue eyes bored into Foster's equally blue eyes, "What's this really about, Paul? Some girlfriend?"

Lowering his head to appear embarrassed, Foster said, "Yeah, you got me."

"Better wrap up the romance asap, then. Tell her you're going to be out of town for awhile. That way you won't be lying. Say you'll be in Borneo scouting locations for Harlington and Straker's next big film!"

Foster laughed in spite of himself, "Hell, Borneo is almost as remote as the moon!"

"Too true," Straker grinned back, appropriating a cigarillo from the box on his desk, and lighting it. Foster noticed his boss didn't offer one to him

As the bluish smoke curled up around his silver haired head, Straker got serious once more, "I can't give you any more time. Ellis is scheduled to return to Earth in 21 days and I want you up there before her departure so the transfer of command happens smoothly. I'm sorry if I'm inconveniencing you."

Paul knew that last comment was a sarcastic comment aimed right at him. Straker was never sorry to inconvenience anyone. It was part of his charm, he mused, "Alright, I'll pack my silver jumpsuits and have myself on the shuttle at the appointed time," he sighed heavily as he got up, "If you could see the girl, you'd know why I'm not so keen to leave." There was no girl at all, but he felt it necessary to carry on the fiction that there was. Better to keep Straker in the dark about what he really was up to.

"Don't let the door hit your ass on the way out," Straker puffed over his cigarillo.

CHAPTER 2

Paul pulled Randall's photos out of the envelope again and looked them over. As far as Randall was concerned, Foster WAS Cass Fowler, and Fowler was Mrs Newton's new and mysterious lover. Plus she had tickets to take them to Rome for a romantic vacation, now that Mr Newton was dead. With barely three weeks before he had to leave for MoonBase, how the hell was he going to set this up, so those two would end up in the hands of the police?

He knew they'd managed to kill Newton in such a way that it looked accidental. Therefore, they were not currently under police scrutiny. Could he arrange things so that somehow they feared the police were onto them? Suddenly, he came up with an idea that might move things along.....

Getting a Scotland Yard detective's badge was easy. SHADO's own documents unit was expert in creating fraudulent items for use in various cases of alien incursions or abductions. Because of his importance in the organization, his request wasn't questioned, and the false badge, complete with a fake name, was ready within 48 hours.

His plan, for the moment, was simple. He was going to land at Mrs Newton's front door, identify himself as a Yard agent, get inside, and start asking uncomfortable questions about her husband's death. He planned to go when she was alone, without Cass to bolster her. From what he'd seen at the time she'd killed the alien by accident, she was a woman easily flustered, and apt to say the wrong thing, perhaps even incriminate herself unwittingly. Paul also decided to wear a wire, just in case she did say something probative.

He knew she wouldn't remember him from the alien incursion because both she and Fowler had been administered the amnesia drug, which would erase at least twelve hours from their memories. If she did claim to recall him, he'd tell her he was one of the officers investigating Mr Newton's accident, giving a pretext for her possible recognition. His plan was to scare enough to bring Fowler into her fear, and see if he could trip them up.

It was overcast and drizzling when Foster presented himself at Mrs Newton's front door. When she answered, he showed her the badge, identified himself as Detective Simon Templar and asked if he could come in, as he had a few questions about her husband's death.

Foster could see it immediately in her eyes that she was both startled and afraid by his arrival. However they'd planned the accident to look just like an accident, she was clearly still feeling some guilt over it. Good. Maybe he could utilize that guilt to get much needed information.

Mrs Newton invited him to sit down in the living room but did not offer any coffee. Clearly, she wanted to keep this encounter as brief as possible. Foster noticed that the décor in the room had been changed since she'd killed the alien. The furniture was all new, and looked expensive. He reminded himself that she'd come into a very sizeable insurance after the death of her spouse. Fresh flowers adorned the adjoining dining room table, and he saw that the table was set for two. Was Cass enroute for a romantic dinner en deux?

Foster didn't want to linger too long in case Fowler did indeed show up, but he didn't want to hurry, either. He wanted to take his time, question her in such a way that scared her, and see if she broke a sweat.

Seated across from him on the matching loveseat, Mrs Newton was dressed well, her reddish hair coifed beautifully, as though she'd been to the hairdresser recently. Her fingernails shone with a polish colour that matched her outfit. This was a woman awaiting the arrival of her lover and co-conspirator, and Foster had put a kink into her plans for the day.

"What's this all about, Me Templar? It was my understanding that my late husband's death was an accident," she was twisting her fingers in her lap a bit.

"Well, on the face of it, it did look like an accident, but some of our forensic findings have made us question that original assessment. Tell me, Mrs Newton, did your husband have any people in his life who might not have wanted to see him stay alive? He was in a very serious money business, could he have made enemies? Investors who felt taken advantage of? Co-workers who envied his success?"

The merry widow shook her head slowly, "He never spoke of such things. He always said what he did was confidential and he couldn't speak about his clients. The bank made everyone sign special documents promising to never divulge any details about their investors."

"I see. What about other aspects of his life? I'm sorry to ask this, but did he have any vices that could have gotten him in trouble?"

"Oh no, I don't think so! My husband was a very... pedestrian kind of man. He never did anything that was out of place..."

"Is there any chance he might have.... Well....had a lady on the side?"

Mrs Newton actually blushed. Was it guilt? "He wasn't that kind of man, he was devoted to me in every way..."

Too bad you hadn't been equally devoted to him, Foster mused to himself, before asking another question. He decided to offer up a few tidbits of seeming evidence that was bogus, but she wouldn't know that. She was never privy to the autopsy reports or the actual investigation, so he could afford a little prevarication, "There was nothing wrong with the car, you know. Whatever happened that night had nothing to do with faults in his vehicle. But, our recreation of the accident itself didn't make much sense. We do that, we can determine how accidents actually happened, even if they really are accidents."

"Oh...I see..."

"And this one has just foxed us. It looks like an accident, but there are details we've discovered that just don't add up. So you can see why I've come to ask you some questions."

"The police asked me similar questions at the time, and I answered them as best I could, so I don't see how I can help you any further, Detective....No unusual details were mentioned to me at the time of my husband's death..."

"Well, they wouldn't mention anything that could interfere with an ongoing investigation, now would they? Information like that is kept from the public."

"If it wasn't a fault in the car, what could have happened?"

"That's just it. Was there anybody who might have wanted your husband dead? Who would stand to benefit? Didn't you receive a sizeable insurance payout?"

Mrs Newton looked down at her twiddling hands in her lap and was silent for a moment, "Yes, I was his beneficiary, but that's nothing sinister. That's just a matter of course. My insurance policy listed him as my beneficiary. I was told his death was determined to be an accident, and papers were sent to the insurance company accordingly."

"That's a mistake Scotland Yard is hoping to rectify. Mrs Newton," Foster's face was serious, "The original determination was arrived at without a full look. The officers involved have been reprimanded and the case sent on to us for further research."

"I don't see how it makes any difference now... my husband is still dead..."

"Wouldn't you like to know if your husband was murdered? He may well have been a victim of foul play. The big question here is really who would do such a thing, as you say he had no enemies you can think of."

Paul could see her eyes fluttering. She was getting very unsettled. She didn't know he knew the truth about her involvement in her husband's death, or that she had help in killing him. He was dredging up not just guilt but her terror at being discovered. Her plans with her lover would go out the window if the law found her out.

After a long pause, the merry widow replied, "Do you really think he was murdered?"

"We suspect so, yes."

She got up from the love seat and paced across the floor, her hands clutched together, "It's just so... unforeseen. It's only been a few months, and I've been trying to adjust to my life without him..."

I just bet... Paul thought. Keeping a straight face, he responded, "I know this must come as a shock for you, but believe me when I say that we at Scotland Yard intend to get to the bottom of this matter, and if a crime has been committed, we want very much to get justice for you."

When she turned her face back to him, Paul could see she was close to tears. Were they tears of fear, or crocodile tears meant to cozen him into thinking she was grieving her husband? "I'm going to have to move along, Mrs Newton, I have some reports to read before the end of my day, but I felt it was vital that I explain the situation to you."

She nodded and moved towards the front door, to see him out, "Yes, I understand, Detective. It's very disconcerting. I had no idea. I mean.... I accepted the original police report about the accident..."

"I'll get back to you when we have more to go on," Paul told her, and let her close the door behind him.

Mrs Newton watched Foster aka Templar drive away from behind her living room curtains. She was suddenly shaking. For all this time, she and Cass had congratulated themselves on committing the perfect crime. They thought they'd left no evidence at all that the accident was anything but an accident. And now this!

She and Cass had tried to keep a low profile in the months since her husband's death. They did not go out anywhere in public together. They didn't want to be seen. In fact, they were getting cabin fever from meeting secretly indoors all this time. They didn't even dare go to see a film. If they were going to get away scot free, they had to be very careful. The trip to Rome, paid for with insurance monies, was going to be a much needed respite from the secrecy they'd been forced to endure.

The detective had not given her any details of the investigation so she couldn't even decide what evidence they might have had. Or did he actually know she'd been involved and was just baiting her? Shivering, she wrapped her arms around herself and reached for the phone. She had to tell Cass...

Within fifteen minutes after her agitated phone call, Cass Fowler had slipped in the back door under cover of darkness. She was waiting for him, and broke into tears when he put an arm around her.

"Oh Cass! What are we going to do? They must know something! We were soooo careful!"

Fowler led her to the couch and sat her down. He went to the table with the liquor bottles and poured her several fingers of brandy into a snifter, "Here, drink this. Calm down and tell me as much as you can about what this detective said to you...."

Pausing to swallow a big gulp of the brandy, Mrs Newton used Cass' proffered hankie to wipe her eyes, "He was so... sure that their investigation would turn up... evidence. He didn't give me any details... he said he couldn't as it was an ongoing investigation... he kept asking if my husband had any vices, any enemies, a mistress... all I could say was no to every question."

"Look, my dear, maybe this was a fishing expedition. Maybe they really don't have anything and he was taking a run at you to see if you'd betray anything. You didn't say anything crucial did you?"

"Of course not!" the brandy snifter was now empty and Cass got up to refill it.

Reseating himself beside her, he handed over the booze, "I'm sure it's nothing to worry about. The drug we gave him wouldn't leave any traces. I doubt if it even showed up on the toxicology screen for the autopsy."

"But, he said it wasn't a fault in the car, it had to be something else that caused the car crash!" she wailed.

"The original investigation decided it was an accident, why would they reopen the case?"

"I don't know. He didn't say. But he did tell me the officers who signed off on it got in trouble."

Cass was thoughtful for a moment, "You could contact those officers and ask them if they're aware the case is now an open investigation."

"No, I can't do that! They'd wonder why I was asking them such questions. I don't want to talk to any more police. It was harrowing enough at the time of the accident. I was so scared."

"Well, we have to find out what they know somehow. There's too much at stake here. I don't intend to go to prison."

Mrs Newton pulled away from Cass indignantly, "I don't want to go to prison either! If I go, you go!"

Cass was on his feet, "Are you threatening me? We decided to do this together, so we could be together!"

She got up from the couch and ran to Cass, throwing herself into his arms, "Oh darling, I didn't mean that! I'm just scared to pieces! We got away with it, I thought we were in the clear, and now those damn police may ruin everything!"

Fowler embraced and kissed her. She seemed to go limp in his arms. He knew he always had that effect on her, which is why they were together in the first place. She was putty in his hands.

"We can't start tearing each other apart like this. We've got to stick together. And think of a way to avoid any trouble," he paused, thinking, "How fast can you get into the bank?"

"Why the bank?" she asked slowly.

"If you could clean out all your accounts, and reschedule our tickets to Rome, we could at least leave the country until this business blows over."

"Yes. Yes. I could go to the bank in the morning and get a bank draft, or transfer funds to a bank in Rome. We can fly out in a few days. All I have to do is call the airlines." She smiled wanly, "Oh. Cass, you're so level headed, I would never have thought of that myself..."

He smiled and kissed her again, "That's my girl. Now, what's for dinner tonight?"

It was barely light when Cass slipped out of bed and started to get dressed. As per their usual arrangement, he would leave before the neighbours were out and about, and exit from the back door. He looked down at his sleeping mistress. If she got to the bank, they could live quite nicely on the investments and insurance monies left behind by her late husband, and enjoy the temperate climate of Italy for some time. Maybe they'd never come back to Britain. The sooner they left the better he'd feel. He wondered if she'd exaggerated the seriousness of the visit from the Scotland Yard detective, but then again, why would Scotland

Yard get involved if they didn't have some sort of evidence? At any rate, they'd been so careful, he couldn't imagine there even was any evidence to discover.

Cass made his way out to the back hall of the house, and unlocked the door. He heard a strange sound behind him, and looked over his shoulder.

Mrs Newton was standing there, nude, her hair disheveled from their night of passion, leveling a handgun at him.

"Liz! My God, what are you doing?" Cass recognized the weapon as the one they'd originally planned to use to shoot Jack Newton months ago.

Her hands gripped the gun and were shaking, "You did this. You talked to the police, didn't you?"

"What are you talking about? Are you mad? Why would I talk to the police? What could I tell them without implicating myself?" he began trying to think about how to wrestle the gun away from her.

"Why else would the police come here and ask questions, unless they had some inkling that Jack's death wasn't an accident?"

"What would I have to gain from turning us in? That's insane!"

"Maybe you're tired of me. Maybe there's someone else. Maybe the reason you wanted me to go to the bank was so that you could get the money from me and leave me behind to take the blame!"

"Liz, you are the only woman in my life. The only one I want. Would I have helped you kill Jack if I didn't want you?"

"Want me, perhaps, but do you love me?" she was too close. She could fire point blank and kill him easily.

He shook his head, "Don't be so silly darling, of course I love you! But, do you love me? Do you trust me? Why are you threatening me with a gun?"

Tears slowly coursed down her face, "I do love you... but..."

"Here, calm down, let's talk this over..." Cass made a grab for the weapon, but Liz backed up and screamed. There was a sharp sound and Cass fell to the floor, a red puddle issuing from his chest and pooling on the floor.

Liz stared down at her lover, the gun still in her hand. She screamed again, but this time the scream was a wail of grief. She sank down and gathered up Cass in her arms, "Oh, darling, I'm so sorry, so sorry, so sorry..."

EPILOGUE

Commander Straker laid the newspaper down on his Plexiglas desk to read the front page article about Liz Newton and the murder of her lover. Police investigating ascertained that not only had she killed Cass Fowler, but she confessed to having conspired with her lover to kill her husband months earlier. The scandalous case was making headlines all over England.

When Paul Foster entered his office, Straker handed the paper over and said, "You wouldn't have had anything to do with this business, would you?"

Paul read the first several paragraphs and looked up at his CO, a stunned look on his face, "Well, this is quite the turn of events, isn't it?"

"You didn't answer my question," Straker said, still standing behind his desk.

"I'm as shocked by this as you are. Can't say I'm sorry the perpetrators were hoist on their own petard, though." Paul laid the paper back on the desk and sat down.

"I know this case was bothering you, Paul. We talked about it several times and I warned you against getting involved. We aren't the police. Such matters are not for us. We have enough to do second guessing the aliens."

"Look, I know what you said. I've been getting ready to go back to MoonBase. I don't have time for such things anyway."

Paul had the feeling Straker didn't exactly believe him, but had no real reason to think otherwise. He took the opportunity to change the subject, "I leave in 48 hours. Once I get on site, Lt. Ellis will make the trip back for her training course."

"That's fine, Paul. I'll send along some reports that the trackers should familiarize themselves with. A few minor changes in protocol. Nothing too drastic. What are you going to do with your remaining time before you go?"

"Oh, I might do a pub crawl with Alec. One last hurrah before I can't have a drink, or ogle pretty girls," Foster smiled.

"Just don't get so hung over that you get sick on the shuttle again!" Straker admonished him.

"No, I learned my lesson a long time ago about that!" he got up to leave. As he was headed for the door, his CO said, "Kind of convenient that Liz Newton killed her lover and confessed to her part in her husband's death, don't you think?"

Paul looked back over his shoulder, "Sometimes the truth just has to come out!"

* * *

Mike Randall sat in his office, sipping a cup of morning coffee and opening his mail. One rather fat envelope caught his attention, so he decided to open it first. He sliced through the top flap and several hundred pounds worth of notes fell onto his desk. He blew into the end of the envelope to see if there was a note inside. Nothing. Just the money. He counted it up. In all, five hundred pounds. His secretary brought in the newspaper and left it on his desk with a smile. He flipped it over to scan the front page.

His brow puckered in consternation. Two photos and a huge headline adorned the front page. One was a photo he recognized immediately, it was Liz Newton. But the other photo was captioned as Cass Fowler and that was not the Cass Fowler who'd hired him to surveil Mrs Newton. This face belonged to the supposed second lover Cass Fowler had been afraid of. He looked again at the money pile on his desk. And sighed. Should he contact the police? Tell them what he knew?

His car needed some repairs. It was old and not running well. He couldn't afford even a second hand one at this point. That money just might pay to have some work done on it. Mike pulled his bottle of booze out of the lower desk drawer and poured a healthy splash into his coffee. What a way to start the morning!

THE END