

The Gift

A UFO Challenge Story for the Sci-Fi Forever Forum

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Based on the Characters and series created by
Gerry Anderson



Historians Note: The opening of this story is written in the *Soul Mates* universe and takes place in June of 1984 about three weeks after the episode *The Long Sleep* written by David Tomblin.

June 17, 1984:

We're going to need a bigger place, she thought as she looked through the now crowded closet of their bedroom and removed her robe from the hanger. Donning the garment and sliding her bare feet into her slippers, she quietly strolled into the kitchen to avoid waking her new fiancé.

The alert had come in just after midnight. Two UFOs had managed to breach their outer defenses and by the time Sky 1 had intercepted them it was almost three thirty in the morning. When the two of them made it back to bed, they had little on their minds except sleep and she barely remembered kissing him goodnight. But the soon to be Virginia Lake-Straker had resigned herself to the fact that SHADO would be a constant source of interruptions into their private time, an occupational hazard, Ed had told her. Last night was the third time in as many weeks that Ed had been called back to HQ

for an alert and even though he told her she didn't need to go with him, her sense of duty said otherwise.

By the same token, she had managed to convince him to take more of his allotted time off and delegate more responsibility to the rest of the command staff. "You don't have to do this alone Ed. You've got good people working for you. Let them share some of the load," she had told him a few weeks after the *Timelash* incident. Straker being Straker was resistant at first but Ginny pulled the efficiency reports and dropped them on his desk. The numbers didn't lie and Ed was forced to concede her point.

Virginia put the coffee pot on and looked at the clock seeing that it was almost eleven. *So much for our morning run*, she thought as she sat down at the kitchen table and contemplated the events of the past few weeks.

Today was Father's Day, and she found herself thinking about her upcoming wedding day and

she was saddened by the fact that her dad would not be walking her down the aisle. Her first marriage was a civil ceremony that lasted all of ten minutes, hardly worth remembering considering how the relationship ended.

Virginia wanted her nuptials to Ed, to be special, and that meant a church wedding, the dress, the pictures, the music, all the trimmings, and the reception after. Of course that took planning and it also meant waiting until after the tracking upgrade program was finished in late November.

She stood up and grabbed a cup of coffee along with her father's journal that her mother had given her two weeks ago. Once she had settled back down she opened the book and began to read. As she sipped her coffee, she found herself lost in the pages of her family history.

Ginny was so engrossed in the journal that she didn't hear him walk in. He leaned against the doorway to the bedroom and admired her

beauty as she continued to read. It was moments like this that Ed found her most attractive. She noticed him as she took a sip of her coffee.

“How long have you been standing there?”

“Not long,” he said as he came to her and kissed her on the cheek. “Good morning.”

“Good morning,” she said, pulling him in taking his mouth with hers. “You didn’t think you were getting away with just a peck on the cheek, did you?”

“With you? Not a chance in hell,” he said as he rose to grab a cup. “What are you reading?”

“Dad’s journal,” Ginny said with a sigh. “I’ve been thinking about our wedding and it hit me this morning that Dad’s not here to give me away.”

Ed filled his cup and sat across from his future wife. He reached across the table and took her hand. “Do you need to talk about it?”

She squeezed his hand in return, “Ever since Mom gave me this book, I’ve found myself preoccupied with my father. I’m still not at all over some of the things I’ve learned about my parents over the past three weeks. Finding out that they knew about the aliens back in 1943 was a bit of a shock and I’m still trying to sort it all out.”

“I know how that feels,” said Ed remembering his conversation with his father just before his death. “It’s a bit unsettling when someone turns your world upside down. When Dad mentioned Bob Lake, I had no idea that he was talking about your father.”

“I still can’t believe they knew each other,” said Ginny, looking out at the gray skies. “I wish I could have met him Ed.”

Virginia could sense the turmoil of emotion that he was feeling, the shared empathic connection being another aspect of their relationship that they were still trying to adjust to.

“It’s hard isn’t it?” she asked.

“At least Dad and I had a chance to set things right. The years we wasted were my own damn fault.”

Outside the sky had opened up and a steady rain began to fall on the patio.

“You know Ed; there are things in here about your father as well. Today might be a good day to explore our shared history. It’s supposed to rain all day.”

“I think I’d like that,” he said.

The newly engaged couple spent the next few hours cuddled on their couch, immersed in the forty year old book.

Kimbolton, England, 10-February-1945:

“I always did have a soft spot for a man in uniform,” she said to him as she watched him straighten his tie in the mirror.

Lt. Colonel Robert F. Lake turned and welcomed his pregnant wife into his arms and kissed her deeply. When the kiss had ended he continued to gaze into her deep blue eyes with his slate gray ones. Although she was taller than average, she still had to stretch a bit to reach his six foot two frame.

“Now that was the right way to say good morning,” he said. “I thought you were still sleeping Lynn.”

“It suddenly got cold in there without anyone to snuggle up to,” she answered with a waifish grin. “You’re not flying a mission today, are you?”

“No, but we have to go over the details for the raid scheduled on Dresden three days from now. In fact I’m meeting with Jim Henderson this morning. God Lynn, I hope the hell we are wrong about this.”

Unknown to all but a select few, his wife was also his contact in the SIS or MI6 as it was also

known. She often knew more about his mission objectives than he did. As the group intel officer he had met the blonde British beauty two years ago in an intelligence briefing. They started seeing each other very soon after and were married six months later. Because of her cover, most of his war buddies thought he had married a nurse on the base RAF hospital.

The Lakes had not planned to start a family until after the war, but Bob's close brush with death back in November coupled with the romantic reunion had un-expectantly changed their plans. Lynn was now well into the third month of her pregnancy and she just started to show.

"Bob, you've seen the evidence. You know what it means."

"I know," said Lake, frustrated with the situation. "It's just that the civilian casualties are going to be staggering. They couldn't have picked a worse city to stage out of."

British Intelligence had uncovered evidence of an advanced weapons research laboratory in the Friedrichstadt district, just west of the city center. In addition to the main laboratory, there were smaller design and drafting offices throughout the Dresden area. It was suspected that these weapon designs were of extraterrestrial origin, obtained either by salvage, or collaboration.

“There is only one way to keep these weapons off the battlefield,” said Colonel Lake. “We’re going to have to flatten the city.”

“Bobby, you don’t have a choice. There’s too much at stake,” said his wife as she clung to him.

“I know, it’s just a bitter thing,” he said as he kissed his wife again.

Lynn walked her husband to the door noticing that it was still dark out. She looked at the clock seeing that it was only four in the morning.

“Where is the meeting, Bob?”

“London. The Prime Minister will be there along with SACEUR.”

“Sir Winston and General Eisenhower? My you are moving up the ladder.”

“Not if I can help it. I just want this damn war to be over so I can retire from the military, maybe teach aeronautics, and spend the rest of my days with my lovely wife and child.”

“You mean wife and daughter. I told you we’re having a girl.”

Robert Lake just shook his head in resignation. Lynn had been so sure that the unborn child was a girl that they had even decided on a name. But in the two years he had known her, he found that she had a knack for seeing things before they happened. His wife had warned him to take extra care during the mission in November. It was a mission that had almost cost him his life.

“Okay, you win. Wife and daughter,” he said in resignation. “I should be home around two thirty. Love you sweetheart.”

He drew her in for a long kiss and then bent over to kiss her slightly distended belly.

“See you later Virginia, Daddy loves you.”

He kissed her one last time and waved as he walked out into the cold winter morning.

Lt. Colonel Lake pulled into the designated parking area a few miles from the city. The meeting had been arranged, by necessity, under a veil of extreme secrecy. Colonel James Henderson was already standing next to the staff car that would shuttle the two men into the city.

Bob Lake saluted his friend before shaking his hand.

“Good morning Bob,” Henderson said warmly.

“Are you up for this one?”

“Hello Jim. I’m about as ready as I’ll ever be. Do you think they’ll believe it?”

“I spoke to Ike this morning. He doesn’t need any convincing. Neither does Arthur Harris, he’d bomb the city just for spite. But the Prime Minister is worried about the political fallout and since he is going to be the one that will catch the heat we may have to twist his tail just a bit. Diplomatically of course,” he added.

“I’ll leave the diplomacy to you. You know me Jim. I call it as I see it, and I don’t give a rat’s ass about the politics involved. Ninety nine percent of the poor bastards that are going to die in the next few days don’t have a clue as to why. Have we come up with a plausible cover story?”

“Our Russian friends are going to unknowingly help us with that. They’ve requested that we target the major communication and rail hubs in preparation for their push west towards Berlin. The damage we inflict will cause

disarray in the Reich's command and control infrastructure. With any luck, we can end the war in Europe by mid spring.”

“Do the Russians have any idea about what we have found?”

Henderson looked at his watch and shook his head. “If they know, they're being pretty tight lipped about it. It's time.”

The two men climbed into the waiting staff car and were whisked into the British capitol. The Cabinet War Room was located in the basement of the Office of Works, between Parliament and the Prime Minister's residence at Number 10 Downing Street.

They spoke not a word on the way as the driver had only orders to shuttle them in and return to fetch them a few hours later.

Colonel Lake looked on the damage in horror, thankful that his wife was not in the city at the

start of the war. The intervention of fate had saved her life.

The staff car pulled up to the Office of Works just as Air Marshall Harris' car was leaving. Only Harris and his deputy were present and they quickly walked into the building.

As they exited the vehicle Henderson said to the driver, "We should be wrapped up by noontime."

"Very good sir," said the Brit lieutenant.

They pulled their identification from their coats and showed them at the door and the two men were led down the stairway to a room that few men were allowed access.

As Lt. Colonel Lake recounted his encounter with the unidentified craft over Loch Ness, he expected to see disbelief in the eyes of the Prime Minister. But Winston Churchill was poker faced through the entire presentation. When

Lake returned to his seat, the Minister seemed to be lost in thought and an eerie quiet fell over the room.

“Colonel Lake, do you believe that these objects were of extraterrestrial origin?”

“I consider that a very distinct possibility Mr. Prime Minister. The craft was like nothing that I had ever encountered. There were no visible flight control surfaces and they seemed to defy the laws of aerodynamics and physics.”

“Lt. Colonel Lake and Colonel Henderson are not the only officers to report seeing these objects,” interjected Eisenhower. “But their reports provided us with more detail than any of the others.”

“General Eisenhower, is it your belief that these craft are related to the weapons research in the city of Dresden?”

“I am convinced of it Mr. Prime Minister.”

“I see,” said Churchill. “But it’s my understanding that none of these weapons systems will be ready for another year. Even the worst case estimates show that the conflict will be over long before then. The city of Dresden is considered a cultural center with little or no military value. I don’t need to tell you chaps that bombing the city without an obvious cause will be looked upon as a deliberate targeting of the German civilian population it’s a political minefield to be sure.”

“That’s what we thought as well, until yesterday,” Eisenhower began. “Colonel Henderson?”

Jim Henderson stood and went to the podium.

“As you all know, the advanced weapons program was uncovered a few weeks ago by our good friends in MI6. In order to amplify our findings, the Office of Strategic Services diverted one of our agents to investigate the laboratory. Our agent is a United States citizen

of German descent and what she found was chilling.”

Henderson paused to take a sip of water.

“The scientists at the lab are in the process of designing a biogenetic weapon capable of targeting specific ethnic groups. According to our agent, they have run two successful tests one in the laboratory and one under actual battlefield conditions. Both tests were highly successful and they are preparing to mass produce the gas.”

“How did they test the weapon in battle?” asked Harris.

“The Germans used a Russian POW camp as a test site. The weapon killed every Russian but had no effect on the camp staff.”

“Dear God,” said the Prime Minister. “If the Germans could eliminate the threats from the eastern front, they could push our forces out of the Rhine and back into France. Theoretically

they could push us all the way back into the sea. Does the President know of this?”

“Yes Mr. Prime Minister, he has already given his approval for the raid. The final decision is yours,” said Eisenhower.

“We don’t have any choice. I’ll authorize it. Do you have the raid plan drawn out Colonel?”

“I do Mr. Prime Minister. The 379th Bombardment Group under the command of Lt. Colonel Lake will hit the target on the 13th of February. Their primary target will be the laboratory facilities west of the city center. Bomber Command will conduct a night raid in the same general area. The following morning, I’ll lead the 303rd Bombardment Group to target the secondary objectives. There won’t be much left to the city when we finish, sir.”

“A blemish in the art of war,” Churchill added. “It is a truly bitter thing.”

Robert Lake nodded silently having said the same thing to his wife that morning.

Henderson and Lake engaged in small talk on the way back to the airbase.

“How is Lynn feeling?” asked the elder officer.

“She started showing about three weeks ago, just about the time she got over the morning sickness. Jim she has never looked as beautiful as she does now.”

Jim smiled remembering his own adoration of his wife when she was carrying their first child.

“Enjoy the next few months. The reality of having children will be upon both of you soon enough.”

“You sound as if you regret having kids Jim,” said Lake, somewhat confused.

“Oh, not at all. What I mean is that the two of you are about to enter a special time in your

relationship. You'll be closer than you've ever been without the worry of having other little ones to keep track of. Cherish every moment of it Bob. Once the children are born, things change forever."

"I'll keep that in mind."

"What are your plans after the war, Bob?"

Lake pondered the question as he looked out the window of the staff car.

"I'm thinking about retiring and going into teaching. Lynn and I want to enjoy a nice quiet life together. Why?"

James Henderson regarded his friend carefully, "The President as authorized a special commission to address the situation we face. I've been asked to head it up. It's a fast track to my first star and more importantly it's vital to our national security. I'm going to need a good deputy. Would you be interested?"

Robert Lake silently considered the proposal. To accept it would mean staying in uniform, working long hours, and less time with his family. It also meant that the alien threat was being taken seriously by the United States and probably Britain as well. His country and his world needed him and Robert Lake was a duty driven individual.

“I’ll have to discuss this with Lynn,” he said. “It’s not a decision I can make alone.”

Henderson chuckled, “At least you have that luxury as she already knows what is going on. I didn’t have that option. You should know that the Chief of MI6 will be asking your wife to stay on as well, for the same reason. This information is being compartmentalized for obvious reasons. The joint commission will not bring in new personal until and unless they are absolutely needed.”

“This is going to be multinational?”

“For the time being, it will be limited to the United States, Britain, and France. Yes some members of the French resistance have knowledge of the suspected collaboration. We are talking of less than two hundred people being involved to start and out of that number; only about fifty will know the full story. Tell me that this doesn’t intrigue you.”

Lake was intrigued. The thought of examining technology that was years, maybe even centuries beyond anything he had ever seen was a golden opportunity.

“Can I let you know tomorrow?”

“Certainly, but remember, once you’re in, you’re in. There is no turning back.”

Lake would have said yes in a heartbeat, and he was sure that his wife would agree, but this decision would change both of their lives and they needed to talk about it.

There's no going back, the Colonel had said. Just how complicated was this going to be?

After he left the HQ of the 303rd Bombardment Group, Lt. Colonel Lake was tasked with coordinating the fighter escort plans for his group. The base at RAF Leiston, home to the 357th Fighter Group, was an hour away. *So much for being home by two*, thought Lake.

As he walked towards the operations building a familiar voice called out to him.

“Bob...Bobby Lake!”

“Tony!”

Major Barnett Anthony Straker quickly caught up and saluted his friend before shaking his hand.

“What brings you to Leiston, buddy?” asked Straker.

“I’m delivering the op orders for the Dresden operation.”

“I heard some flak about that one. Why don’t you join me for lunch? A few of the guys from our class are stationed here. It will be like old times.”

“Well Lynn was expecting me home at two, I’ll call her from inside and make sure she’s okay,” said Lake.

“You see that’s the problem with marrying a Brit. Because she’s here you have to report in.”

“At least I don’t have to sleep alone on these cold winter nights. And it’s nice to have someone beautiful to go home to rather than a barracks filled with a bunch of men.”

“Touché,” said Straker. “I’ll save you a seat in the mess hall.”

Robert Lake watched his friend stroll towards the mess hall knowing that for all his flair he deeply missed his wife. Lake and Straker had

met in basic flight school and had kept in contact despite the different training paths their careers had taken. Bob was sure they were going to have another bomber vs. fighter conversation and he was going to be sadly outnumbered this time. Although he could ask Lynn to insist that he come straight home. *There's a thought.*

“Nonsense Bob,” said Lynn Lake over the phone. “You haven’t seen Tony in six months. Of course I don’t mind if you have lunch with the boys. What time should I expect you home?”

“No later than four, I’ll be home in time for tea.”

“I’ll make sure that the water is boiling. How did your meeting go?”

“Better than expected, I’ll tell you more about it when I see you.”

“All right, tell Tony hello for me. Love you.”

“Love you too sweetheart.”

In the mess hall Tony Straker was telling his latest war story.

“So here I am, all alone. My wingman has been shot down and I’ve got a pair of ME-109s on my ass. I’m figuring that’s it, I’m going to get my tail smoked. And assuming I survive the trip down, I’ll spend the rest of the war in a German POW camp. All of a sudden I hear Charlie Johnson yell tally-ho and one of the fighters behind me explodes in a fireball. I pulled the stick hard over and looped the aircraft and end up on the tail of the kraut that was following me. A quick bust with the fifty sent him down in flames. And that is how I got kill number seven. Shit luck, and a little help from my friends.”

“Some of you guys just have all the bloody luck,” said Lake as he poked his friend in the arm.

“God, he marries one of them and he’s even starting to sound like a Brit,” said Johnson,

pointing his finger at Lake. “I always knew you bomber pilots were a crazy lot.”

“Hey watch it Charlie. I’ll have you know that my B-17 can take a pounding that would reduce your little fighter to scrap metal,” Lake retorted. “Boeing Aircraft Company really knows how to build ‘em.”

“Yeah that is true, but they’re still big ol’ targets as far as I’m concerned. Speaking of building things, Tony tells us that you and the little lady have a bun in the oven. I told you that this turkey was a randy bugger.”

“Unlike you guys, I do have something to do after a mission,” said Bob. “Truth be told, we hadn’t planned on it. Back in November, I thought I was going to buy the farm when we landed after that mission over Berlin. Our plane had been shot to hell; two of the engines were out, hydraulics gone, we were very lucky to walk away from that one. When I got home, well, I think you all get the picture.”

“With any luck this whole fracas will be over in a few months,” said Tony. “So Bob, do you think it’s a boy or a girl?”

“Lynn is absolutely convinced that we are having a girl, we’ve even picked a name. And I hope you are right about this damn war. Speaking of family, how are Charlene and your son, Ed, right?”

“They are both well, God I miss them. If it wasn’t so dangerous they would have come over at Christmas. I just didn’t want to take the chance, hell the U-boats bit off a liner just the other day.”

“That’s why I didn’t send Lynn back to the states. She was safer here as long as she was away from London,” said Lake.

Lynn Lake had lost both of her parents during the London Blitz at the beginning of the war. By chance she had been away for training when the bombs had totally destroyed her home in the British capital. They had moved to London from

her birthplace in Brighton when her father was elected to Parliament. She still had several aunts and uncles living in the south coast city.

“Well, I should get moving,” said Bob. “I promised Lynn that I would be home by four and I don’t want to be late. Gentlemen, it was good to see you all again.”

“Take care, Bob.”

On the way home Bob Lake thought about the upcoming mission. It was deep in the heart of eastern Germany and while the Luftwaffe had been all but decimated, German resistance was still very high. And there was the flak. During the last raid the anti-aircraft fire had been so thick that one could have walked on it. With the end of the war in sight, and a baby on the way, he couldn’t help but ponder the immense risk of each and every mission. The thought of losing his life didn’t concern him as much as the thought of his wife having to raise their child alone.

13-February-1945, 22:00Z:

Well, the overall logistics for this mission just got much more complicated with the weather related cancelation of this morning's surgical strike. Between the raid tonight and the much larger force that will be flying tomorrow, I expect the Germans to throw everything they have at us. I know that we are going to take some losses. We're so close to the end of this damn war and so many of my men have made it this far. How many of them will I lose tomorrow? God help us all.

As Bob Lake finished the entry in his journal, he noticed his wife looking out the window. She had been quiet over dinner and he knew that something was troubling her. Lake closed the book and stood from his desk. He strode up behind his wife and wrapped her in his arms.

“Bomber Command should be over the target about now,” he said to her.

She said nothing but reached for his hand and he could feel her trembling.

“Lynn you’re shaking, what’s bothering you?”

Lynn Lake turned to him and smiled, but her eyes were drenched in tears.

“Talk to me sweetheart, what’s wrong?”

“I have a very bad feeling about this mission Bob. I don’t know why, I was fine this morning,” she said trying to make light of it.

He held her close in an effort to quell her fears.

“I’ve survived much more risky missions than this one honey. But I will be careful.”

“Well you had just better be.”

“Is that an order?”

“Yeah, it is,” she said. “Besides we told Jim Henderson that you would take that job offer. So you have to come back, otherwise I’ll never hear the end of how you left him holding the bag.”

“You’ve got a point there. Are you sure about this Lynn? Did we make the right call?”

“Bob, you’re a man driven by duty, I think that is one of the reasons I fell in love with you. We both know how important this commission is. We could be dealing with a threat that makes the Axis Powers look like a schoolyard bully.”

“I suppose you’re right. We should get to sleep. We’re scheduled to be wheels up by eight in the morning.”

“I was going to suggest going to bed, although sleep wasn’t what I had in mind,” she said with a saucy grin.

“Remember, I have to fly in the morning.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll go easy on you.”

RAF Kimbolton, 14-February-1945, 08:00Z:

The B-17G named *Lady Lynn* lifted off the runway as Mrs. Robert Lake watched from the

flight line. *Stay safe Bob*, she thought as the silvery aircraft gracefully climbed into the morning sky. Bob Lake had flown five missions with this new aircraft, a brand new replacement for the *Tar Heel* that crash landed after the Berlin raid in November. Unlike some of the aircraft named after women that had racy nose art, the *Lady Lynn* was simply black lettering in gold trim. A pair of blue eyes with long lashes was painted under the words.

As she watched the rest of the squadron take off, Lynn clung to the letter that her husband had written for Valentine's Day. It had been written so romantic that it brought her to tears while she was reading it. When her husband's group was out of sight she strolled off the flight line and drove herself back to their home a few miles from the base.

Lynn found herself fighting restlessness all day and as much as she tried she was unable to shake the sense of foreboding that threatened to

overshadow her. She looked up at the clock on the wall seeing that it was quarter past twelve. “They should just about be there by now,” she said aloud.

After she ate lunch, she decided to take a nap as she had not been able to sleep at all the night before. Lynn sat down on their bed, deciding not to set the alarm for her nap. Her husband would wake her when he returned.

Lynn woke with a start to a pounding on the door. The clock on the nightstand read half past four and she jumped out of bed, throwing on her robe as she went to see who was there.

Standing outside, his hat in his hand, stood Colonel James L. Henderson and Lynn felt her soul go cold with dread.

“No...this isn't happening. Oh God, please...” she began. “Bob?”

“Lynn I'm very sorry...”

Henderson had to grab her to keep her from falling and he helped her to the kitchen table as she sobbed in grief...

Ed held his fiancée tightly as she cried in earnest over the loss of her father. He found himself struggling to maintain his own composure, his own eyes misty from the sight of seeing the woman he loved in such distress. Outside the steady rain turned into a downpour that mirrored the torrent of emotion that he was feeling as he watched his future wife mourn her loss.

“I’m sorry Ed,” she said when she was finally able to speak. “I’ve never really cried over my father’s death, not like this. I guess I’ve been holding all of this in.”

“It’s all right Virginia,” he said in a supportive voice. “You don’t have anything to apologize for. Being married means sharing sorrow as well as happiness.”

“The letter that my father wrote to my mother was beautiful. Mom let me read it years ago. To this day, I don’t know how she dealt with the loss. I don’t know if I could.”

“Don’t sell yourself short sweetheart. I’ve always admired your inner strength. You don’t know how much you helped me stay grounded during the *Timelash* incident.”

“I’m glad you think so,” she said recovering quickly. “I was scared to death. The only thing that could have terrified me more than I was would be the thought of being a liability to you.”

“There was never any chance of that.”

Virginia had pulled herself together now and she set her father’s journal down on the coffee table.

“I’m glad Mom gave this to me Ed. I’ve always felt like I knew Dad, but reading about his thoughts of Mom and their life together...words just aren’t enough.”

“It was a precious gift, especially the entry she added at the end.”

As he held his fiancée, Ed considered what things might have been like had Robert Lake lived. He had planned on taking the job as Henderson’s deputy. Would Lake have ended up in command of SHADO? Would Virginia and he been comrades in arms? Would they have ever met? The possibilities could give him a headache if he thought about it too much.

Having lost his own father just a few months ago Ed knew some of what his future wife was feeling but he also knew that she would have died for the years that he and his father had wasted. *It was a mistake that I will never repeat*, he thought as he pulled her in for a long gentle kiss.

The phone rang, interrupting their tender moment once again.

“Straker.”

Virginia could see his expression change as he listened to the voice on the other end. She put her father's journal back in the safe and set the lock.

“Right, we'll be there in thirty minutes.”

“More trouble?” she asked, sure that she knew the answer.

“Multiple sightings,” he answered.

She followed him into the bedroom where they quickly dressed.

“Well, I knew from our second date that our life together would never be boring. At least I'm not going to be disappointed,” she said with a wry grin.

A very short time later the couple, bond by love, a common sense of purpose, and shared family history, emerged from the house and climbed into the waiting vehicle that would whisk them to the nerve center of the organization that was a predominant role in both their lives.

As they drove towards the city they both thought of the gift that would see them through the responsibilities they shared, the gift of each other.

END