Summary

Napoleon suddenly develops chest pain, which derails his life in Section II.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

As so often happens when they have an assignment in a small town with one small hotel or when Mr. Waverly and Accounting were on a path of parsimony, Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin once again found themselves sharing a bed.

This had never been an issue for Illya, used to such sleeping arrangements well into his early adulthood. In fact, he preferred such an arrangement, but within the norms of American society, adult men sharing the same bed was considered taboo.

At first, Napoleon, not unexpectedly, was uncomfortable with the whole thing, but as time went on, he admitted he slept better together while on missions and recovering from them for several reasons, including fewer nightmares and immediate reassurance after hellish ones, as well as that rare sense of safety.

This night would give them a new reason and begin the countdown of the days the chief enforcement agent had left at U.N.C.L.E.

Day 1

Late April, 1968, Baldwinsville, New York

They were exhausted from successfully completing their assignment, which meant they didn't have
to sleep with one eye and ear open. They barely had the strength to place their Walthers under the feather pillows, brush their teeth, and get into their pajamas before collapsing into immediate repose.

At 2:04 a.m. according to the travel alarm clock, Napoleon woke abruptly from a deep slumber to crushing chest pain. The room was cool yet he was sweating profusely. He couldn't blame this on his partner; though Illya did seem to have a second job as a human furnace, he wasn't employed as one tonight.

He could feel his heart beat erratically in his chest, neck, ears, abdomen, toes. He hungered for air, but wasn't able to draw a single satisfactory breath. He was even petrified to move, thinking it would hasten the inevitable.

_I'm dying and Illya will wake up to a dead body … I can't let him find me like that._

But no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't even draw on his strength to speak, much less nudge his partner awake.

Dread swept through him like a full-force hurricane, making his breathing even worse. This was not how he expected to end. He had more or less figured he'd die at the hands of THRUSH or some corrupt despot, not at the inherent failure of his own body.

A flash of hope temporarily displaced the panic when Illya stirred. **Thank God!** He shuddered to think how long it would have taken Illya to notice anything amiss if they had been in separate beds.

“Poleon?” Illya questioned, sleep disinclined to release him. Slowly, he turned to face Napoleon.

The instant he saw his partner's ashen complexion, labored breathing, pained expression, and sweat-soaked silk pajamas, Illya came fully alert. “The devil!” he uttered sharply in Ukrainian. In English, he said, “I think you're having a heart attack, Napoleon. I will get you to hospital in Syracuse.” He clasped Napoleon's shoulder before shooting out of bed.

Illya had his holster and gun strapped to him, sport jacket and shoes on, Napoleon's weapon secreted in his suitcase, and Napoleon across his shoulders in less than two minutes. Adrenaline and his immeasurable concern for the most important person in his life made it effortless for Illya to carry him to the rented sedan.

Illya drove from Baldwinsville to Syracuse, which normally took about 20 minutes, in less than ten.

**oOo**

When Kuryakin explained that Solo was law enforcement at risk of attempts on his life, the ER nurse allowed Illya to stand in a corner of the room where his partner was being assessed and treated. Years of training to suppress emotions threatened to crumble as he observed the team crowded around Napoleon's gurney. He could cover his anxiety and worry if Napoleon was dying from injuries or toxins, but not this. Not in a vigorous, healthy man in his 30s. Neither was prepared for this.

He heard words and phrases such nitroglycerin, oxygen mask, 12-lead, ST elevation, ischemia. From his occasional readings on pathophysiology, he knew he had guessed correctly.

_A heart attack will take Napoleon out of the field. That will devastate him. If he lives._

Illya banished that last pessimistic thought out of his head immediately. Napoleon would live because he had to. For each other.
The second dose of nitroglycerin had Napoleon feeling much better despite the arrival of a headache he attributed to the drug. His breathing and panic eased. He could no longer feel his heart beat, which was unexpectedly alarming. Soon enough, he supposed, his rational mind would tell him not feeling his heart beat was a good thing.

Between the doctor and nurses and technicians moving around him, he began to catch glimpses of his partner who stood stolidly against a wall, his arms crossed over his chest. Napoleon wanted to laugh at the absurd picture of Illya in a sport coat and pajamas, but was too tired to generate anything except a smile. When Illya didn't acknowledge it in any way, he figured the oxygen mask hid that from him. *Unless he knows something I don't... Stop that, Solo! You're fine!*

He knew he wasn't. He knew whatever this was life-changing, and not just for him.

Hearing the doctor say that the ECG changes had resolved did nothing to assuage his fear or anger.

Finally, Illya heard “resolved.” He permitted himself only the briefest moment of relief because he knew this was far from over.

The nurses and technicians cleared out, leaving only the physician and the U.N.C.L.E. agents in the room. The cardiac monitor's beeping was the only sound for a moment. It was slow and steady, as expected in such a physically fit man.

“Should I ask your watchdog over to hear the diagnosis, Mr. Solo?” Dr. Basil Crenshaw asked gently.

“Yes, please, Doc. He's my partner and he needs to know everything.”

Crenshaw, a slender, tall man with dark red hair and sparkling hazel eyes, waved Illya over. The agent, dour expression on his pale face, came to stand on the opposite side of the stretcher from the doctor. He extended his hand. “Illya Kuryakin.”

The physician took the proffered hand and introduced himself. “So, let's get down to business. First, the good news. Mr. Solo, in my professional opinion, I don't believe you had a heart attack.”

Napoleon's face brightened despite the fact that the big “but” of bad news was coming, though Illya's remained unchanged.

“Now the not-so-bad news. With everything considered, I think you have what's known as Prinzmetal's angina, sometimes called variant angina. It's a spasm of an artery that feeds the heart muscle. Interestingly, there's no blockage in the artery itself. This type of chest pain occurs in younger people, usually in the early morning hours while they're asleep. To be sure, you'll need to undergo some testing.”

“But it can it be cured, right?” Napoleon queried.

“Nope, afraid not. But it is controllable. Nitroglycerin under the tongue when there's a spasm will stop it and the pain, just like it did this morning. There are medications that can prevent the spasms as well.”
Sometime during the conversation, Illya had gently rested his hand on Napoleon's forearm. Solo had been listening so intently to Crenshaw and working through the implications of what he was hearing that he only became aware of the warm hand when it twitched.

Twice in less than an hour, Illya had touched him. Outside a mission the controlled Russian rarely initiated touch, and usually when he was concerned about Napoleon. *He thinks it's over for me. For us. But this isn't real. It's not over.* Napoleon choked back a sob threatening to escape from deep within his chest. He heard nothing else that the physician had to say.

Illya's hand tightened, almost painfully, on his arm, drawing Napoleon out of the blackness that had filled him. “Napoleon, the doctor wants to know if you have any questions,” Illya said in a calm voice.

“Oh. Ahhh, no, not at this time.”

“Is there any reason why he cannot travel? It would be safer for him to be in a more secure environment at our headquarters. I assure you our medical team is top-rated.”

*That's my Illya, always safeguarding me. Too damn bad he couldn't shield me from this.*

“I think that will be fine. Mr. Solo, we'll send some nitroglycerin tablets with you. A nurse will come in and teach you what to do if and when you have another attack. I'll write up a quick summary and get some ECGs copied to go with you. If your doctors need more, I'll have the information faxed. You can leave the number with the ward secretary.” Crenshaw gave them a professional smile and left.

The instant he was sure the physician was out of hearing range, Illya said, “It is possible Dr. Crenshaw is mistaken in his diagnosis. Mr. Waverly will ensure you are evaluated by top cardiologists. There may be a cure Dr. Crenshaw does not know about. Or perhaps you were exposed to a chemical -”

Napoleon interrupted him with a bitter, “Stop it, Illya,” instantly regretting the tone. His partner withdrew his hand as if Solo had burned it. “Sorry, didn't mean to snap at you. I'm a little … wound up.”

“Understandable. So like a clock, begin to wind down.” Illya smirked. Turning serious, he said, “You will overcome this complication as you have all others.”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence, partner mine, but you know this is probably it for me in the field. The sooner we both face it ...” Napoleon found he couldn't continue with the obvious and left it to Illya to complete it on his own. *This is not happening!*

“We don't know that yet, Napoleon. It could be -”

Again, Napoleon interrupted. “Since when have you become the optimist in our partnership?”

“Since when have you become its pessimist?” Illya said almost angrily. “You are such a blockhead at times,” he growled through clenched teeth while glaring at his friend.

Napoleon took a deep breath and exhaled audibly. “Look, let's assume the worst and hope for the best, shall we?” He reached for one of Illya's hands, now clasped in front of him, which he stroked gently with his thumb, as much to allay his own anxiety as it was to cool Illya's temper. “Go call HQ so we can get out of here as soon as possible.”

Illya paused for a long moment while the fire in his eyes settled to mere sparks. “Very well. I should
be able to convince Waverly and Medical to send a helicopter. I'll request that the hospital provide a security guard be nearby for you. Once he's here, I'll leave for Baldwinsville to gather our things. I should be back within an hour.”

Napoleon's smile had a tease in it. “The way you drive, it'll be closer to thirty minutes.”

oOo

Solo tightly gripped the small brown bottle containing the nitroglycerin pills. He wanted to throw it against the wall, crush it under his heel, blow it to smithereens with one of Illya's most destructive bombs. The bottle was a symbol of his losing everything of importance to him: his identity as an U.N.C.L.E. agent; his active role in making the world a more peaceful place even when it involved death, deception, and manipulation; his partnership and friendship with Illya.

The latter, he acknowledged woefully, would hurt the most. Even if he were able to stay with U.N.C.L.E. in some capacity, the partnership would dissolve. Illya would be CEA—a position he would rightfully inherit—and continue to go on missions. Forever without him.

The friendship, the strongest and most precious one he'd ever had, would be greatly tested. Illya would have little time for him. Even now, neither man felt they had enough leisure time together. They both resented solo assignments or those paired with other agents. How could they possibly maintain their connection in this crappy new world?

The first coils of anger and self-pity started to weave their way into his changing persona.

oOo

On the return to HQ, Waverly ordered Napoleon to submit for 24-hour observation in U.N.C.L.E. Medical. Napoleon was too tired and worried to argue. Besides, he reasoned, the sooner the cause of this heart attack-like incident could be determined and possibly cured, the sooner he'd be back in the field at Illya's side where he belonged.

Day 2

The first of two attacks occurred a little before 1 a.m. The chest pain vanished in 10 minutes thanks to nitroglycerin. The pain of hopelessness that rose in his soul eased thanks to Illya's presence in a recliner at his bedside.

oOo

Dr. Laurence Samuels, also known as Sam, handed Alexander Waverly the summary report on Solo's tests. He sat to Waverly's left at the round table. Napoleon was to his left, Illya to Napoleon's left. Ordinarily, Sam wouldn't reveal his findings to anyone but the chief and the patient, but as with all tightly-knit partners, he knew better than to object to Kuryakin's presence.

“As you are all aware, I'm not a board-certified cardiologist but I am well-versed in cardiac diagnostics and treatment. Between my exam of Mr. Solo, the attacks he had early this morning, and the records from St. Joseph's in Syracuse, I agree with Dr. Crenshaw's diagnosis, given there is no evidence of any known foreign chemical in Mr. Solo's blood, but we'll keep testing for substances. It is prudent, though, that he have further cardiac testing. I recommend that be performed at New York Presbyterian.” He paused to catch his breath. The other three men had not moved or changed their flat expressions.

However, Napoleon felt the tension rise in his partner and himself. He knew Illya was working as hard as he was in keeping that hidden.
“Sir, I would like to propose another option.”

“Go on, Mr. Kuryakin.”

“We know Mr. Solo is monitored closely by THRUSH when he is in the city.”

“As are you,” interjected Napoleon.

Illya flashed his partner an annoyed look that clearly read, *This is about you.* He quickly returned his focus back to Waverly.

“If he is observed entering that facility, THRUSH reasonably will assume there is something seriously wrong with him and therefore quite vulnerable. A significant security force would have to be in place to guard him.”

“Yes, I'd agree, particularly after that unfortunate business of your kidnapping by that Karmak fellow.” Waverly sighed. “What is your suggestion?”

Illya looked at Napoleon blandly, except his eyes asked for forgiveness. “I should think the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota would be suitable and safer than New York. THRUSH is unlikely to have that hospital or Mr. Solo under its ... malocchio.”

Napoleon couldn't decide if he was furious with Illya for suggesting some place far away from him during these last few days as partners or appreciative for being concerned about his physical well-being. Regardless, Napoleon was loathe to go.

Waverly took up his pipe, already filled with his special blend, and unnecessarily tamped the tobacco down while he deliberated. After a long, silent moment, he said, “Dr. Samuels, your opinion.”

Sam glanced at the partners before answering Waverly. “I think it's a good idea. Mayo and Presbyterian are leaders in this area. Certainly, security would be less of an issue.”

“Agreed. Mr. Kuryakin, thank you for the suggestion. You are dismissed. Mr. Solo, Dr. Samuels, you will stay.”

Napoleon swallowed while he ticked off the four very long seconds it took for Illya to stand. His body military-rigid and clearly projecting his disagreement with the banishment, Illya stalked to the door without saying a single word. On the way, he brushed Napoleon's back with his hand. Solo took comfort in the gesture that reminded him Illya was there for him. Waverly seemingly attended only to his task of tamping, but Napoleon knew better.

As soon the door swished closed, Waverly said, “Mr. Solo, you are an intelligent man and well aware of the rules and regulations applicable to Section II agents. One of those is the reason why your partner is acting chief of your section.”

Waverly cleared his throat and stood, diligently not making eye contact with either man. He turned to gaze out the window. “Mr. Solo, you must know that you will always have a place in this organization as long as you want one. All of Section I is in agreement with this. We are also in agreement that your days as a field agent are, most regrettably, over, and much too early at that. THRUSH, what is left of it, will be overjoyed.”

He turned back to face Napoleon and Samuels. “As of tomorrow morning, Mr. Kuryakin will become the Chief Enforcement Agent after what will surely be unanimous approval by the Section I heads. As for you, Mr. Solo, well, if you do not choose to retire, what we have to offer will depend on the recommendations of the Mayo physicians. Dr. Samuels, you will see to it that Mr. Solo has
the earliest available appointment. If it is not within the next two days, please let me know. I'll see to it myself. I may have a few favors on which to collect.” He paused. “Mr. Solo, you've hardly spoken. Is there anything you'd like to say?”

Napoleon shifted in his seat then crossed one leg over the other's knee. *This isn't happening. It can't be happening...* “Ah, well, I am pleased Mr. Kuryakin is the new section head; he'll do a fine job. As for your offer, it is very generous, and I appreciate it greatly. I would like you to consider another option. I would continue as section head but my missions would be local, low-risk courier runs or protection duty for dignitaries.”

“I commiserate with your desire to maintain the status quo to some extent, but that is not viable. If you do have this, er, variant angina, your capture would mean you would miss your medication or put your colleagues in danger. If it is something else … Regardless, Mr. Solo, I am not willing to risk that and neither should you.”

Napoleon smiled with resignation on losing this battle, yet he had hopes he could come up with another alternative that would keep him at least in Section II, if not the CEA. “Understood, Mr. Waverly. And now, if you don't mind, I'd like to take my, uh, former partner”—those two words crushed his spirit—“to lunch.” He stood, somehow controlling his trembling, straightened his suit coat, and said, “Mr. Waverly, Doctor.” He left, projecting an air of equanimity that was an Oscar-worthy performance.

He nodded to Lisa Rogers and walked past her without a word. He could feel perspiration gather in his armpits and the base of his back, taste bile in his throat. He was grateful he made it to the nearest private bathroom before the sweat beaded on his forehead and his stomach emptied its contents.

He sat on the cold tile floor while he tried to deny everything. He could lie—and had lied—to himself but somehow, that wasn't working. The pain, the dyspnea, the *fear* that happened these past two nights were too real. He recognized the darkness of depression—certainly not the blues, which he admitted he had in the past—that was settling over him, suffocating him even more than the breathlessness of a variant attack. The losses strangled him like a garrote.

Napoleon Solo, agent extraordinaire in so many people's eyes, a person imbued with a love of life and dedicated to keeping the lives of others protected and the world safe, found himself wishing he had died yesterday morning in Syracuse. Where the hell was his vaunted luck now?

It was quite some time before he felt ready to leave and face whatever came next.

oOo

Illya had fumed all the way to his office, trying to fight the impotence he was experiencing. Before he could settle in to do some work, Lisa summoned him back to Waverly's office.

“Ah, Mr., uh, Kuryakin, I have a special operation for you,” Waverly said without preamble.

Illya remained standing. “And that would be?” He added, “Sir?” almost as an afterthought.

“There is some intelligence coming from Prague that a THRUSH satrapy is attempting to influence the resistance to the Soviet rule. Their purpose is not known, but I would hazard a guess that they intend to incite violence by the resistance which has been quite peaceful to date. As you know, that would be most unfortunate, further destabilizing the, ah, situation.”

“Of course. Tensions between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union are already quite high. What would you have me do?”
“Infiltrate the resistance, Mr. Kuryakin. If THRUSH has its hand in this mess, both governments
need to know.”

“Who will partner with me, Mr. Waverly?”

The chief’s eyes widened in surprise. “Why, no one, Mr. Kuryakin. Did I not make myself clear this
was a special operation?”

Illya nodded while he worked on how to respond. “I am not sure I’m the right person for this
mission, sir. If the resistance finds out I am Soviet-”

Waverly cut him off with a wave of his hand and a sharp, “Then don’t let anyone find out, young
man.”

Illya couldn’t help feeling he was a lamb being swiftly herded to the slaughter. Surely Waverly must
know how dangerous this would be for him without a partner. As usual, though, his superior would
keep his cards close to the vest and trust that his agent would succeed—or die trying. “Will the local
agents be available for backup?”

“If you need them, they will be. You will leave immediately. I remind you not to tell anyone
about this mission.”

Illya didn’t need the reminder. He was sure Waverly gave it anyway as he suspected Illya would
violate that rule by letting Napoleon know, given the current indefensible situation. And Waverly
was correct to assume that. So he wouldn’t tell Napoleon where he’d been sent.

“The Prague office is seeing to your needs for this operation. And you will need this,” Waverly
continued. He placed a gold-colored pen communicator on the table and spun it. “Please give me
your standard communicator. Should you require assistance, well, you know what to do.” The
“please” had the unmistakable ring of a command.

Illya was stunned at the direction. Usually he kept the standard transceiver with him on these special
ops, and when Waverly instructed him not to carry it, he left it in his office. But this was
unprecedented and more than worrisome. He plucked the device from the table without stopping it.
With his other hand, he fished out his usual communicator with ever so slightly trembling fingers and
placed it on the still-spinning table. His fuming had now turned to full-blown rage that was
becoming increasingly difficult to control.

oOo

Solo returned to his office that connected by an ordinary door with Illya’s. Before giving his usual
courtesy warning knock, he spied what appeared to be a large smudge in the lower right corner of his
easel pad. He bent to examine it.

It was obviously a drawing of a single spire of a church. He knew Illya had rendered it, recognized
his friend’s particular precision, and he knew it was a message informing Napoleon of his location.
However, this one, though fairly detailed, was one that worried his memory to name it.

His ah-ha moment came a few minutes later. It was St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague. He had raved
about the beauty of the church when he, on vacation because of his broken arm, had tagged along
with Illya, who was on a mission to investigate the possible use of a motion picture studio by
THRUSH three years ago.*

His anger and worry flared. Surely Illya was going undercover and that THRUSH was likely
involved. Currently, Prague was particularly dangerous for any Soviet, U.N.C.L.E. agent status
notwithstanding. And Waverly was sending his partner into a highly volatile situation and probably without a partner. *The bastard!*

The notion of leaving U.N.C.L.E. seeded itself inconspicuously in Napoleon's subconscious.

**Day 3**

Solo experienced three attacks between 1 and 7 a.m., all relieved by nitroglycerin. Napoleon had been dreaming of a bloodied Illya alone, running through the streets of Prague when the last one occurred. He left Medical, the dark circles under his eyes and pasty complexion evidence of his weariness. He listlessly prepared for his trip to Minnesota later that day.

He knew he was getting worse. His fear about Illya in an untenable situation without him there as partner was devouring him, stressing him to unacceptably high levels given his heart problem. His heart might not kill him, but his worry about Illya could.

Napoleon unconsciously detached himself a little further from U.N.C.L.E.

**oOo**

While Solo was boarding an U.N.C.L.E. jet, piloted by Kitt Kittridge, who would also serve as his guard, for the Rochester Municipal Airport in Minnesota, Kuryakin’s was landing at Prague–Ruzyně Airport. He was met there by his backup, two Section III agents, both out of Survival School for about four months. He knew both of them from his assignment to identify and capture a THRUSH mole. They had impressed him as average candidates, suited for Section III but a long way from Section II material.

The two agents escorted him to a nearby room used by Customs. There, he changed into European-style clothing. Because he was recognizable by so many THRUSH agents, he colored his hair a dark blond, changed the shape of his nose, and applied a Van Dyke beard. Finally, he added an insert into one shoe that altered his gait.

Alterations to his appearance complete, he then perused the papers that would support his cover as Eliás Holub, a hard-up graduate student from Brno. Inwardly, he was pleased with the Czech version of his own given name. On the other hand, he snorted at the last name; though it meant *pigeon* in English, in this context, he knew it meant *fool*.

It fit. He did feel like a fool, for accepting this assignment without insisting on a partner. But defying Waverly too much could result in him being shipped back to Russia and a life without a death that wouldn’t come quickly enough.

The local agents went for food and drink to give Kuryakin time to read the information gathered for this operation and study city maps. Illya bombarded them with questions, most of which they were able to answer satisfactorily, on their return. Because he didn’t have a standard communicator, the agents gave him the telephone number of where they would be awaiting his call for aid. Finally, they gave him a rucksack filled with what he needed for his cover.

He sighed as he shrugged on the pack. He could envision Waverly sending him out more and more often alone with little or no backup. He resigned himself to being completely on his own for most of the rest of his U.N.C.L.E. career or working with partners with whom he hadn’t established a rapport in the field. Either way, his risk for injury or death was higher than ever. He shuddered to think that this would be his life from this time forward.

**Day 4**
Even the presence of an attractive nurse did little to ease his concerns about the four attacks Solo had that first early morning at Mayo.

*No attacks when I’m awake. Maybe I should just quit sleeping.*

And he thought of Illya. Worried about him ceaselessly. He thought of Waverly, and his heavy-handed approach to this situation and his and Illya’s partnership. He barely heard the physicians confirming the Prinzmetal’s angina diagnosis and its possible treatments.

“Is there a cure?” was his only question.

“None that we know of at this time. However, this type of angina can be controlled. The possibility exists that future attacks may never occur again, as long as you stay on your medication. We’ll start you today and see how things go during the night.”

*Cold fucking comfort,* he thought sourly. If there were any night that he needed Illya sharing his bed, it would be tonight, to calm the nightmare of what his life had irrevocably become.

oOo

Eliás Holub, a.k.a. Illya Kuryakin, had easily befriended two young men he identified as physics majors at Charles University after eavesdropping on their conversation at an outdoor café. He told them he was in Prague to visit that same university where he hoped to be accepted into the doctoral program. He also expressed his interest in the resistance to Soviet oppression because he, too, believed in what First Secretary Dubček wanted.

Hours later, after talk of physics and mathematics and more, the one named Anton begged off, stating he needed to study. The other, Jaroslav, stayed.

Jaroslav scrutinized Illya closely.

“Why are you looking at me in such a way?” asked Illya, showing mild discomfort.

“How do I know you speak the truth? That you are not a Soviet spy?”

Despite being expected, that question nevertheless unnerved him. He laughed heartily to cover his discomfort. He leaned forward to close the distance between the two of them. Quietly, in a conspiratorial tone, he said, “I want the freedom of democracy. I want to owe the Soviets *nothing* once I earn my degree, even if it means I must live in hovels and work doing anything to pay my tuition. Now, if I attend Charles University as I hope, with the Soviets paying for it, I will have to work for the CCCP for many years, doing what *they* tell me, not what excites me, not what moves quantum mechanics ahead for the good of all. A scientist must be free of ideology.” It was easy to say this with passion; after all, it was what he felt.

Illya could see Jaroslav processing what he had said. The silence seemed to stretch for many minutes, though in reality it was less than two.

“I believe you, Eliás Holub. However, know that I will keep a close eye on you for the time being.”

Kuryakin easily hid his relief with a nod and a small smile.

“Come with me,” said Jaroslav. “I will introduce you to the ‘cell’ of resistance of which I am a part. You are welcome to stay with me and my roommates, if you don’t mind a pallet on the floor.”

Illya accepted, showing his gratitude in an open smile, and thanked him.
Later that night, as he settled in to sleep, he wished Napoleon was with him, sharing the floor and easing the vulnerability one inevitably had when sleeping alone with people he didn’t know or trust. As he relaxed, a thought intruded: *Have we become too dependent on each other?*

Sleep that night was restless and he woke, feeling disoriented and lonely.

**Day 5**

Hope sprang up in Napoleon’s chest at having had only three attacks with milder symptoms than before. Maybe the preventive medication was working already. Maybe he could go back to his Section II world and Illya Kuryakin.

He chastised himself for being so foolish for even fantasizing that this progress would negate the trajectory his life was now on.

At the mid-morning conference with his physicians and the nurse who would educate him more thoroughly about his treatment, he sat with attention that didn’t reflect the chaos and anger in his thoughts. He nodded at what might have been the appropriate times, asked no questions except for clarifications.

_God, I’m tired. What I wouldn’t give for one night of uninterrupted, deep sleep. I’m sure I’d have one if Illya were with me._ Then an uncomfortable, unwanted thought sprang into his mind: _Have we become too dependent on each other?_ He tried to shake it off but it tenaciously clung to him like a ravenous leech.

When the lead physician declared he could be discharged as soon as the nurse finished with his education, he smiled graciously and thanked them. He left the room and told Kitt, who stood just outside the room, that he could file a flight plan for the afternoon.

**oOo**

Kuryakin was making progress in meeting people in the resistance beyond Jaroslav’s cell at a large park. He recognized no one and hopefully, no one recognized him. He couldn’t shake the feeling, though, that he and/or his new “friends” were being watched.

His feeling was justified. Someone was watching the group he was with from afar, and had zeroed in on him.

“Edvard, this is Janus,” said the man into a THRUSH communication device. “I’m not sure, but I think we may have a bastard cousin from my *U.N.C.L.E.*’s side of the family visiting us. He looks vaguely familiar. Likely disguised. I just can’t place him yet.”

“You better identify him soon, Janus. Get back to me when you have.”

“Of course, Edvard. Send someone to continue the surveillance. I’ll be at HQ soon after to look through the U.N.C.L.E. dossiers. And if I’m right, which I usually am, we can arrange a timely end to his meddling.” He smirked as he cut the connection.

**Day 6**

On his return from two stressful, attack-ridden nights in Minnesota, Napoleon was dejected but not surprised that Illya wasn’t there to greet him at the airport. Making matters worse was the fact that he had been unable to contact his erstwhile partner. Napoleon deduced Illya had had to surrender his standard transceiver. He stood there, in the middle of the terminal, hoping that his friend was just running a little late.
Kittridge waited patiently for about ten minutes, suspecting what had virtually immobilized his fellow agent. “C’mon, mate, let’s get goin’,” he said amiably. “I want to beat the worst of the traffic.”

Napoleon’s lips twisted in reluctant agreement. Nothing more was said, even when they entered the U.N.C.L.E. complex through the garage entrance.

oOo

April Dancer, the acting CEA while Illya was on assignment and all the more senior Section II agents otherwise occupied, couldn't tell him anything. “The Old Man's running Illya's op himself of course, so he wouldn't be contacting me.”

“Do you even know where he is?”

“I can't be positive, darling, but I think it's Prague. I heard a rumor that some birdies were beating their wings to overheat the atmosphere there.”

Prague, according to the news Napoleon had been following, was less and less a healthy place for a Soviet with each passing day. Paired with THRUSH's probable presence in that city deep in upheaval, Napoleon's stress level catapulted into the ionosphere. He brushed off the twinge of fear in his chest. “Has anyone heard anything from him?”

“Not to my knowledge, Napoleon. Waverly must have him on the single-channel comm.” This was the latest communicator. It had only one channel that opened immediately on activation, thanks to a very thin, powerful antenna attached to the side, and there was virtually no delay in transmission or reception. Yet another invention of Kuryakin’s and an engineer in Section VIII.

April's communicator chirped. “Dancer here.”

“Ah, Miss Dancer, is Mr. Solo with you?”

Napoleon nodded his consent to answer in the affirmative.

“Yes, sir. He dropped by here to say hello on the way to your office.” Both agents cringed at the white lie; Napoleon's route from the agents' entrance to Waverly's office went nowhere near April and Mark's office. April mouthed Sorry on hearing their boss's peeved harrumph.

“Mr. Solo, report to my office immediately. Oh, and this time, don't take a roundabout route.”

“Ah, yes, sir. I'll be there toute de suite.”

“See that you are.”

Before Waverly could close down his connection to April's device, they heard Illya's strained voice crackle over the sound of gunfire and terrified shrieks: “Kuryakin here. I have been compro—” Abruptly, there was no more as Waverly had cut the connection to Dancer.

April turned to speak to Napoleon but he had already left.

oOo

Solo was moving so rapidly that he almost ran into the door to Waverly's office before it could open. Once inside, he stopped in time not to blurt out his demand to know what was happening to his partner.

“... find him, then report back to me immediately. Now, get on with it, man,” Waverly snapped
before flipping a switch on the communications console. “And Mr., um, Solo, do not even think about asking any questions on what you heard earlier. It is no longer your business.”

Napoleon clenched his fists, his manicured fingernails all but piercing the skin of his palms. “Illya Kuryakin is always my business, officially or not,” he answered, able to keep his fury under control only with the greatest effort.

“That is not up for discussion. What is, is your, um, future, Mr. Solo. Dr. Samuels”—he indicated Sam, who was sitting across the rotating table from Waverly—“has conferred with your physicians at the Mayo Clinic. They have a plan of action for you, as do I. Of course, you have a choice to adhere to the medical plan or not. You also have a choice regarding your continued employment. Sit, Mr. Solo.”

Napoleon decided not keep his body language neutral; he let his anger come through loudly and clearly. He came close to ripping the button off his suit coat before sitting down hard enough to rock his chair.

“Hi, Napoleon,” began Sam. “Your Mayo doctors informed me you're aware that the diagnosis of Prinzmetal's angina is confirmed and that they've spoken to you about treatment, including the prevention of attacks. If you're okay with it, we'll continue with the medication today.” Sam paused, looking at Waverly as if seeking support before returning his gaze to Solo. “This will necessitate you staying in Medical for at least 48 hours so we can closely monitor your response to the medication. Once we're certain you're tolerating the drug, you'll only need to sleep in Medical until we find the dose that works for you.”

“Why?”

“Because that's when your attacks occur. When you can go a few nights without one, you can go back to sleeping in your own bed. After we're sure you're stabilized on medication, we'll pursue ways to decrease your stress, which is probably a trigger for the angina. Part of that is ...”—Sam paused, obviously detesting to say what he must—“... reassignment.”

Napoleon's mind went blank to avoid the anguish of leaving his purpose-filled life—and to a large extent, Illya—behind.

Waverly's throat-clearing brought him back. “If you do not choose to cooperate with the entire medical plan, Mr. Solo, you will exercise your third option of retirement. You will no longer be employed by U.N.C.L.E. in any capacity. Do you understand?”

“Uh, yes, sir. I understand. I agree to whatever the plan entails.” The only upside to this is seeing Illya from time to time.

“Now, concerning your future duties in this organization. There aren't many positions in which there is little stress, as you well know. However, there are two possibilities Dr. Samuels and I believe may be suitable. One is promotion to Policy and Operations, where you will handle the planning of the more complex operations. There is one caveat with this, however. You will not actually run the operations. Someone else will, with you serving as in a, um, consulting capacity in an effort to avoid unnecessary stress. You would succeed admirably in this position, I am sure.”

Napoleon knew Waverly would keep his special ops, which frequently included Illya as the lone agent; Napoleon would have no say in that matter. For the first time, Solo was conscious of how deep his escalating resentment and anger and detachment went.

“The other offer is a somewhat lateral move. If you prefer, you would become the new head of
Public Relations and Propaganda. Your, um, silver tongue should serve you well in that, um, capacity. Your success in this position would be a given as well.” Waverly then picked up a manila folder from the center of the table and placed it on the edge. He spun it. Solo stopped the rotation with his knee.

“Inside you will find the details of each position,” Waverly continued. “You may take your time considering these, Mr. Solo, but do not take too long. U.N.C.L.E., like people, must move on.”

Napoleon’s stomach seethed at the blatant order to move on. He opened the folder but paid no attention to the contents. I’m not ready to do that, he thought hotly, even though he knew he must. In that instant, he realized what moving on would be for him. Meanwhile, he’d play along.

After a few moments, when he had sufficiently composed himself, he looked up. “Thank you for the offers, Mr. Waverly. Both are very tempting. I appreciate the extra time to make a decision.”

Turning to Sam, he said, “I’m ready to start whenever you are.”

oOo

Kuryakin heard someone nearby shout over the noise of the demonstrators, “That man is KGB! He is sent to spy on us! Probably to kill us, too!” He pirouetted to face the person outing him.

A mid-level THRUSH Illya recognized was pointing at him. Nearby demonstrators glared at him. Jaroslav stared at him with eyes of stupefaction that accused him of betrayal.

Several marchers converged on him, their anger fueling the fists that pounded him. He let them beat him down, tucking his head under as much as possible, so he could lift his snub-nosed revolver from its holster on his right ankle and gold-colored communicator from the left ankle sheath.

Before he could activate the transceiver, he heard the snick of a switchblade opening behind him, despite the noise of the melee. He guessed where the blade might come at him and dodged, still bent at the waist, to his left.

He guessed correctly. The knife sliced his jacket, drew no blood. He lurched up, throwing off the untrained people pummeling him, and stood, then thrust a foot backwards. It caught his attacker’s knee—Illya grinned at the satisfying sound of crunching bone—and he fell, crying out in agony.

More and more people pressed in on him. It slowed the physical abuse but that wouldn’t last long. He fired his gun over their heads. Screams of fear almost drowned out the gunshots, but not enough that they weren’t recognized. Those that didn’t drop to the ground ran away in all directions, Illya trailing closely behind them. Then bullets followed him. They had to be coming from guns wielded by THRUSHes who didn’t care if they missed the target. Innocents near him began to fall, wounded. He hoped none had died.

Immediately, Illya veered away from the panicked mob, strangely gratified that the bullets continued to follow until one deeply creased his right upper arm. He dropped his weapon, cursing the numbness that caused that to happen. He shot into a narrow passageway between two buildings, hoping he was out of range or at least hidden. Finally, he activated the communicator. As soon as he heard the connection open, he shouted to be heard over the continuing gunfire and the outcries of the terrified marchers before Waverly could say a thing: “Kuryakin here. I have been compromised. Minor wound. Notify -”

The transmission ended suddenly as a bullet that Illya was sure was meant for his head instead shattered his communicator. The sudden heat caused him to drop the useless device. Chert! The THRUSH snipers had re-positioned themselves rapidly. He raced deeper into the passage, bullets
still chasing him but failing to find their mark but showering him with chips of brick and mortar.

A manhole cover gave him a possible escape. Adrenaline spiking to augment his will to survive, he practically raised the heavy metal circle over his head and heaved it as if it were a discus. He jumped down blindly into Prague’s underground. He hoped the THRUSHes wouldn’t follow him down in this maze of tunnels carrying filth, rats, and who knew what else.

Kuryakin cursed Waverly and his decision not to send him with a regular communicator as he began his trudge to another exit far from his entrance to this miserable venue. He cursed him for not having better backup in the form of Napoleon Solo. And he cursed the fates for what they’d done to his partner and friend.

Day 7

Because he knew THRUSH would be guarding manhole covers at a minimum, Illya waited hours in the city’s underground trenches before climbing out of one he had calculated to be far from the demonstration site.

He did have some proof that THRUSH could be involved in fomenting the demonstrators to violence. Not enough to convince the Soviet central government, though. At this point, the Soviets would just say that his attacker had recognized him and tried to kill him for accolades and a promotion. He needed more. Regardless, he needed to get this information to both Waverly and Dubček.

It was well after midnight when he finally chanced a look from beneath a slightly raised manhole cover. He saw no one, heard nothing. He gritted his teeth and ignored the pain in his arm that mounted significantly with the effort to move the cover enough for him to slip through this opening.

Illya laid on the deserted street for long minutes, slowly recovering his breath and strength and trying to control his pain. Hungry, thirsty, grungy, and hurting, he decided to seek refuge at the Romanian embassy. Romania was both an U.N.C.L.E. signatory (at least he still had his watch with the U.N.C.L.E. ID disc in it) and the home country of some of his ancestors. He’d be welcomed for either reason.

Day 10

Solo had fallen into a routine: sleep in Medical, attached to electrodes to monitor his heart rate and rhythm, take nitroglycerin if he experienced angina, have his blood pressure checked; work out in the gym, take his medication, have blood drawn, have his vital signs taken, describe what he was feeling (Dizzy? Constipated? Feeling skipped beats? Nauseated? Headachy? Headache because this constant intrusion is giving me one!), consider which job he might take, etc.

Mostly, he worried about Illya Kuryakin.

To put an acid icing on his burgeoning despair, he had had several attacks every night since the initial one. Sam was titrating the dosage up slowly, as Solo's blood pressure was lower than desired, which convinced Napoleon he'd have to sleep in the infirmary for months.

And Waverly’s patience with him was wearing thin; it was especially tested by Napoleon’s near-constant queries about or demands to know Kuryakin’s status.

Waverly continued to keep mum about the Russian agent. His building resentment toward his boss was no longer inexplicable. Napoleon surmised this was Waverly’s clumsy, cruel way of helping Napoleon adjust to life without Illya as his partner. Instead of easing Napoleon into a new position
and away from the most significant relationship in his life, Waverly's actions simply fueled Solo's estrangement and caused him to more deeply grieve the loss of their partnership.

It was as if, Napoleon had thought, Waverly was trying to symbolically kill Illya, not just their partnership.

Now it was his fifth night back since his return from Minnesota. With a mix of anger and despair, he removed his suit, shoes, and socks and stepped into his pajama bottoms. He applied the monitoring electrodes himself, refusing to let the nurse do it, his way of asserting some control over this untenable predicament. He crawled into the hospital bed and waited for sleep and what would surely be another attack.

Day 11

Illya, nearly out on his feet, entered Medical not long after midnight to be checked out from his ordeal in Czechoslovakia and East Germany.

The Romanians had welcomed him without question and had cleaned him up, tended to his gunshot wound and numerous abrasions from his journey in Prague’s underground world. At Waverly’s direction, Kuryakin had gone to East Berlin to deliver his report to the KGB there, though Illya couldn’t figure out why. When he asked, Waverly had barked, “You do not need to know, Mr. Kuryakin.” As he suspected, the KGB colonel didn’t believe THRUSH was actually involved in stirring up the resistance, that Kuryakin had been unlucky in being recognized by a THRUSH agent present for other reasons. The colonel completely dismissed the gunfire directed at the agent.

As Illya rose to leave the interrogation room to head for U.N.C.L.E.’s West Berlin office, the lieutenant behind him had injected him with a knock-out drug. The colonel, who had publicly and adamantly disagreed with letting him go to U.N.C.L.E. more than ten years ago, had given him a hateful smile, saying, “There is other information we want, Illya Nickovitch.” He had blacked out a moment later.

For some indeterminate amount of time, Illya endured drugs and beatings and humiliation when the drugs didn’t work. Why the colonel would risk his career, maybe even his life, by taking such action against someone with temporary protected status, Illya had no clue, nor did he care. Unless he was no longer protected. All it did was end the vacillation he had for applying for U.S. citizenship. And he knew if Napoleon had been with him, this wouldn’t have happened at all.

Sometime later, while he was still drugged and once again filthy, he was dumped at Checkpoint Charlie, with a note attached to his jacket informing the reader of his identity. Several U.S. marines had hauled him over to safety and called U.N.C.L.E.-Berlin.

Jason Walters, a very large and physically powerful and imposing agent on temporary assignment as Section II head for U.N.C.L.E.-Northeast had retrieved him and taken him to HQ. By the time they had arrived, Illya had recovered enough to realize that despite his disgusting fetor and soiled garments, Jason had treated him with care and dignity. Jason had helped clean him up, then gently attended to all his wounds. Finally, Jason had helped him dress in loose-fitting, dark blue cotton shirt and trousers.

Once Illya could speak semi-coherently, he had asked, “Heard anything ‘bout Na-?”

Jason had offered him an apologetic smile as he injected a sedative in his fellow agent’s thigh muscle. “Waverly's orders, Illya. Sorry.”
Illya’s lips had turned up slightly at the way Jason had pronounced his name—just like Napoleon did. He had cursed Waverly for doing everything he could to keep Illya in the dark about his partner. Then a different type of dark had overcome him and he had slept.

The sedative had not been very effective against the turbulence of the flight and the insistent pain from the batterings and wounds. He could deal with the pain better and the nightmares that had dominated his short bursts of R.E.M. sleep if his trusted partner was reclining in the seat next to his. He had arrived in New York more tired and ragged than when he had left Germany.

Once cleared by Medical, Illya showered in the bathroom within that department, then returned to his exam room for the redressing of his wounds by Meredith, one of the night nurses who invariably wore her strawberry blonde hair in a thick braid down her back.

“I’m not supposed to tell you this, but Napoleon is here,” she said as she applied a thin layer of antibiotic ointment to the scrape on his chin.

Illya immediately shed a good deal of his fatigue and lassitude. “May I visit him?”

She shrugged her shoulders. “Officially, no one but Waverly and the medical staff is allowed to see him. However, you are one tricky customer. And I forgot to wear the glasses for the eyes in the back of my head.”

On the spur of the moment, Illya touched his lips lightly to her forehead. “Thank you,” he said softly to her surprised eyes.

Meredith recovered quickly, except for the blush, and said, “Will the real Illya Kuryakin please come forward? This one is freaking me out.”

The usually non-demonstrative Russian cocked his head to one side, an impish curl to his mouth. “I seem to have fallen victim to Napoleon Solo’s influence.”

She grinned widely. “Oh, lord, help us all. One Napoleon Solo is enough without him having students determined to surpass the master.”

A few minutes later, Meredith said, “Okay, Don Juan Junior, all done. You can get dressed now. Don’t forget to take your antibiotics.” A split second later, an alarm sounded. “That would be Napoleon. Room 4.”

Though Illya was fast in slipping on his underwear, Meredith was already out the door.

Napoleon woke up yet again with an attack. His racing pulse set off the monitor alarm. He was already reaching for the nitroglycerin when his night nurse, Meredith, entered his room to answer the alarm. “Go ahead, Napoleon. I’ll take your pressure as soon as it’s under your tongue.”

Though the pain had lessened with each passing night, the shortness of breath was as bad as ever, making it nearly impossible for him to speak. He simply nodded, opened the tiny bottle with sweaty, shaky fingers, shook out several tablets. He lost two of them to the floor before he could capture the third and pop it under his tongue. He laid back and offered his arm to Meredith.

Never betraying her concern, she calmly took his pressure. “A little low, Napoleon, but okay. How are you feeling?”

“Better,” he answered, his breathing already back to normal and the pain almost non-existent.
“Good. Three more minutes and I'll check your pressure again. I have a feeling you won't need a second dose.”

Meredith was right. His symptoms were gone and his blood pressure remained stable. She helped him wipe the sweat from his body and change into a fresh gown and pajama bottoms.

“Feel up to a visitor?” she asked with knowing smirk.

“At this time of … Illya?” he said loudly enough for the name to be carried beyond the closed door.

Less than a second later, Illya's disembodied head topped with damp blond hair appeared through an opening in the door. “May I come in?” He smiled his pleasure at seeing his friend.

Napoleon met his smile with a wide grin. “Only if you promise to stay.” The visitor slipped the rest of the way into the room. He held the door open for the nurse.

Meredith stopped shy of the threshold. “If anyone asks, I have no idea how Agent Kuryakin wound up in Agent Solo's room. He is a spy, after all, and a really sneaky one at that.”

Napoleon thanked her, smiling warmth and gratitude. This time, Illya gave her cheek a light peck. She sighed and said in a stage whisper, “Too bad polyandry isn't legal.”

Illya shuffled to Napoleon's bed. “How are you feeling, my friend?”

“Much better now that you're back. I'm almost at a safe dose to prevent attacks.” The former senior agent frowned at Illya's black eye, abraded chin and knuckles, paler-than-usual skin, the effort just to walk and stand. He knew the clothes hid more proof of a rough mission. “You look wasted. What happened?”

“Chalupa, the THRUSH sub-leader in Poland, who recognized me happened. He told the group I had infiltrated that I was a Soviet spy. That led to some hours of cat-and-mouse above and below ground in Prague. It was some time before I could effect my escape to the Romanian embassy. From there, our chief ordered me to East Berlin to report to the Soviets.”

Napoleon heard what Illya didn’t say. “Drugged and interrogated.” His anger was palpable. And the emphasis Illya had put on chief spoke volumes on what he thought about that command. Why the hell did Waverly send him there?

Illya nodded, looking away from the enraged eyes that told him what Napoleon was surely thinking. “I think he wanted to remind me what would likely happen if I am released from service to U.N.C.L.E. before the end of my contract.” He paused, shivered, sighed. He recaptured his friend's eyes, still enflamed. “I've been through worse,” he said matter-of-factly. “We both have.”

Napoleon snorted his agreement. He blinked slowly, signaling a change in topic. “Did you have a chance to talk with Dubček?”

“No, unfortunately. Perhaps Waverly did.”

“The way he’s been lately, I wouldn’t bet on it.”

Without saying a word, both men knew what the other was thinking: some of Waverly’s decisions lately were not as prudent as they had been, and for at least a few months.

Illya tottered precariously. “Napoleon, I'm pooped. We'll talk more after I've slept for several days. I'll be in the agents' dormitory.”
“No, you won't. You'll stay with me.”

Illya gave him a grateful smile. “But will you respect me in the morning?”

“Why should I begin now?”

Smiling at the repartee he’d missed over the last two weeks, Illya quickly shed the borrowed shower sandals, leaving on the U.N.C.L.E.-logoed long-sleeve T-shirt and sweatpants. “Uh, I need the other side tonight,” he said reluctantly when Napoleon scooted to his usual side of the hospital bed. Illya slipped beneath the covers Napoleon held up for him. Without a word, the partners moved into their customary position: on their sides, knees bent, backs touching—their own depiction of the Roman god Janus, of two distinct lives that function as one rather than changes and transitions.

Napoleon listened to Illya’s breathing change to indicate he was asleep within a few seconds of settling in. He smiled and thought, We aren’t too dependent on each other. We do this to stay sane and safe. Napoleon had wanted to stay awake to savor every moment of the last time they would probably share a bed, probably the last time to be with his anchor in the rough seas of his life, but he fell asleep a short time later, calmed by being with Illya.

There was not another angina attack to wake him, either, for the first time since Baldwinsville.

OoO

Once he ascertained that Solo was still in Medical and asleep, Alexander Waverly practically stomped into the department at 9:30, ready to berate everyone for allowing Solo to miss his scheduled 9:00 a.m. appointment. He held his tongue, since his acrimonious expression made the entire staff rush around to appear too busy to even acknowledge him.

The Section I chief stormed into Number 4, Solo’s room, callously not caring if he woke the man up; he had had his fill of everyone coddling this grown man.

He bit his tongue when he saw Solo and Kuryakin, both fast asleep, squeezed into the hospital bed. The covers were on the floor, no doubt having ended up there during the night. Kuryakin lay on his left side, curled into a loose fetal position. A bulky dressing was obvious beneath the right arm of the T-shirt. Solo was also on his left, almost spooning his former partner, his arm haphazardly yet protectively resting over the Russian’s waist.

Waverly was near shouting to wake the men when a strong, bittersweet memory, laced with heartache, surfaced, effectively silencing him.

For nearly three years in his work with the French Resistance in World War II, he was paired with Victor Marton. They became fast and demonstrative friends, despite Waverly’s British reserve. Their work was not unlike what U.N.C.L.E. agents did in some ways. And in those dangerous, horribly mad times, they were virtually inseparable, doing everything together, including sharing a bed or, more often, a pile of thin blankets on a cold floor or a small rectangle of grass under the stars.

And when the war ended and the Nazis were being hunted down, they joined that endeavor together. Eventually, it was time to return to their pre-war lives. Waverly chose to work with several other men to develop what would eventually become U.N.C.L.E., while Marton was drawn inexplicably to the nefarious THRUSH.

Waverly felt his heart break again. He understood all too well what was happening to his top two agents. It was worse than death, because both would still be alive in their inevitable separation, and nothing would ever be the same. His strategy from the start when he’d paired them was to foster in
part an interdependence that would keep them both alive; they were too good to truly be considered expendable. But as with staying with Marton, he had made a mistake in keeping them together too long. Now he was trying to save them the same heartache he had experienced, that he still felt acutely at times.

And he was making a mess of it. This was one of those rare times when he couldn’t come up with something that worked, that would ease the pain of loss. He just seemed to be making it worse, if he read the two agents correctly.

He harrumphed. *Alexander Waverly, you are a sentimental, old grandmother.*

Waverly, infuriated with himself that he likely would lose Napoleon Solo entirely, could feel him pulling away. He knew he’d possibly lose Illya Kuryakin as well not long after Solo left. He took cold, hopeful comfort that Kuryakin would exercise better judgment and stay with the Command rather than return to what would be a horrific and short existence in Russia.

Waverly took a deep breath. *Get on with it. You must keep order, follow policy. They are no different from any other agent,* he thought, even though it rang false in his soul.

Just as he was opening his mouth to bark the two men awake, he turned to look at the door that had swooshed open.

“Alexander,” Laurence Samuels whispered, “come out here. We need to talk. *Now.*” His facial expression and tone clearly indicated he would brook no argument.

Waverly noted the edge Samuels used in the use of his first name. The physician was pulling rank—the only person who could do that to anyone in Sections I, II, and III. He nodded and passed through the door Samuels held open for him. Samuels followed right behind him and said, “My office.”

Once there, Waverly waited for Samuels to close the door and turn around before he spoke, determined to take back the upper hand.

“What were you thinking, man, allowing your staff to disobey my orders?” Waverly, face turning a shocking pink, shouted angrily. “I should fire you forthwith.”

“That is your prerogative, *sir*—contempt crackling like fire in that word—“but I can assure you, all of the night staff are very … displeased with your orders. As am I. Everyone is considering quitting, unless you can give us a valid reason for keeping these two men, who have done so much for this organization and the world, who have sacrificed so much, who epitomize the meaning of partnership, apart.” He stopped to catch his breath.

Waverly took advantage of the slight pause. “I have my reasons, to which I deem you are not privy.”

“Don’t give me that, Alexander. Sending Kuryakin off on a very dangerous mission when there were plenty of other people who would not have been at such a high risk you could’ve sent while Napoleon needed his support makes absolutely no sense.”

“You have made your feelings known, Dr. Samuels, so if there is nothing else -”

“Oh, there’s more, Alexander. Do you know last night was the first time Napoleon Solo got more than a few hours’ sleep in a row since this whole variant angina raised its nasty head? And that’s because Kuryakin was with him.”
“Don’t be ridiculous.”

“I’m not. I’m serious as a heart attack. One of the reasons Napoleon has these episodes is stress, and he’s been stressed because you have been doing your best to keep these partners, *friends*, apart and he was very worried about Illya. Makes me think you don’t care one whit about the man now that he can no longer fight THRUSH the way he used to.”

Waverly’s pink shade darkened to red. “How dare you!”

“Oh, I dare. They’re mature adults, more intimate than married couples in many ways. Partners’ trust in each other is like no other. The human thing to do is to let them work this change out on their own in their own way. This … separation is harder than death, Alexander, and you know it.”

Waverly knew the physician was correct. However, he still thought his way of approaching this was the best way of few choices. Now he was thinking he was wrong in offering Solo another position within the organization. The former agent should quit and disappear, a kind of death, so both Solo and Kuryakin could get over their loss in time. Unlike his continuing grief, given that seeing Victor simply reminded him that their relationship had changed, polite adversaries rather than cherished friends.

“That is your opinion, Dr. Samuels. I disagree with you and my orders stand.”

Sam clenched his hands into fists that whitened with rage. “So, should I tender my resignation or would you prefer to fire me?”

Waverly paused as he considered the genuine question. “If you believe you can no longer abide by this organization’s policies and my decisions on matters concerning Section II and III agents, I would appreciate it if you resigned as I dislike terminating one’s employment.”

The U.N.C.L.E. chief side-stepped Samuels, opened the door, and left an open-mouthed physician in his wake.

oOo

“You’re doing what?” a disbelieving Napoleon Solo asked Laurence Samuels. The stress on *what* caused Illya Kuryakin to stir and huff but didn’t wake him. Napoleon’s gentle pat on his shoulder settled the Russian down.

“You heard me, Napoleon,” Sam said, more quietly than he had spoken before. Samuels had awakened Solo so he could get to his meeting with Waverly. “I’ll be turning the letter in later today. Not to worry, though; I’ll be around until you’re stable. Which should only be a few more days at most.”

Napoleon eased himself out of bed, taking care not to disturb Illya. He smiled fondly at his partner—he now refused to think of Illya as his former partner—when the slumbering man emitted a disgruntled sigh.

Samuels glanced briefly at Illya and was quickly reassured that the agent remained asleep. “He must be exhausted.”

“From what he told me, his time in Czechoslovakia and Germany was far from pleasant.” Napoleon made no effort to mask the bitterness in his voice.

“I’ll read his chart later. But now, you need to get to your meeting with Waverly. A fresh set of clothes is waiting for you in your locker as usual.”
Solo frowned as he slid his feet into his slippers. “Why are you quitting, Sam?” He reached for his robe draped across the back of the visitor’s chair.

“A lot of little things over time, Napoleon. But the proverbial straw is his treatment of you and Illya. Ordering everyone to keep you separated, not even give out any information, is simply … draconian. I don’t understand it and he won’t explain it. He basically vetoed my ‘prescription’ that the two of you be there for each other during this time, and I won’t tolerate that.”

“He can’t override your orders. That’s against Medical Operations policy.”

“Yep, it is. And this from a man who challenged me to follow policy or else.” Samuels’ snort underscored the irony of their chief’s actions. “Come on. I’ll escort you to the showers. I don’t want to be here if we wake Illya up before he’s ready.”

Napoleon chuckled as he shrugged into his robe. “I’ve learned how to dodge his wrath over the years,” he quipped with more than a little sadness.

They left, leaving Illya to wake up alone a half hour later, panting rapidly from a nightmare in which the KGB was electrocuting him, with a smug Alexander Waverly as a witness.

oOo

“Ah, Mr. Solo. I hope you enjoyed your extended rest.”

Napoleon fumed inwardly at the umbrage in Waverly’s tone. He decided not to apologize for being late due to getting the most restful sleep he’d had in almost two weeks. “Yes, sir, I did.” He fell silent as he twisted a button on his suit jacket.

Waverly lifted his unruly eyebrows at the impertinence of Solo not apologizing for his tardiness. “Sit, Mr., uh, Solo.”

Napoleon did as directed but took his time. He smiled genially, said nothing. He decided he was enjoying being passive-aggressive.

“It has been a few days since you were offered two positions,” Waverly finally continued. “I think you should have reached a decision by now.”

He should have, but he hadn’t. Then it suddenly became obvious what he should do—leave U.N.C.L.E. Without a moment’s hesitation, he said, “I will be retiring, Mr. Waverly.”

Waverly’s face was inscrutable during the pregnant pause that followed Solo’s declaration. “I am sorry to hear that, Mr. Solo. You would have excelled in either position. Your skills and leadership will be sorely missed by most of the world, though lauded by THRUSH and any number of people wanting to destabilize the peace, however fragile it is in many places.”

Solo said nothing, choosing to wait for Waverly to say more.

Eventually, Waverly cleared his throat. He said, “You, of course, will undergo deprogramming, Mr., uh, Solo. However, because of your position and the risk to your life from THRUSH for the foreseeable future, which surely will think your retirement is simply a ploy of some sort on our part, it will be much more selective than usual.”

“Thank you,” Napoleon said, careful not to add sir.

“We will facilitate a license for you to carry a concealed weapon. I’m hoping you never have the
occasion to use it, but one cannot be too careful in your situation. You may also keep your
communicator if you wish.” Waverly coughed weakly, a segue to his next words. “To increase
your safety, you may want to consider, uh, going somewhere rather out of the way. An extended sea
voyage, perhaps. It would be more difficult for your, um, enemies to find you.”

Another long pause, during which Solo sat there, struggling to maintain a peaceful, neutral
expression despite his need to tell Waverly what he thought of all that he’d done since Napoleon’s
first attack.

“I expect you to remain here long enough to make sure your, um, condition is under control.”

“Of course. Dr. Samuels believes it should only be a few more days.”

“Good, good,” Waverly said less than sincerely. “Very well, then, I expect your letter of intent by
the end of the day. Tomorrow, you will start the separation procedure. That is all, Mr. Solo.”

Napoleon gave Waverly a polite, shallow smile, stood, and left the room, erect posture and easy gait
belying the ache in his chest, a different pain but just as devastating as the Prinzmetal’s angina.

He made it, without incident, to the private restroom he’d used when he was relieved of his Section
II duties and placed in limbo. As he turned off his communicator, he stared at the unrecognizable
face in the mirror. It wasn’t him. It was the face of someone who’d lost his purpose. Vacant. Flat.
Useless. Zero.

And worse, it was the face of a man who had lost his best, most trusted friend.

oOo

Alexander Waverly wondered if he had done the right thing in accepting Solo’s resignation, if he
shouldn’t have talked him out of it or refused to accept it.

He banished that thought quickly, because he now realized that Solo’s leaving was the best, albeit
painful, option. One that he’d been subconsciously pushing.

He toggled the intercom switch to his assistant’s desk. “Uh, Miss Rogers, please arrange the next
flight to Tokyo for Mr. Kuryakin. I believe one is scheduled to leave in approximately three hours.
Make sure his go-bag is ready for him as well.” He flicked it off and opened the one to Medical.

“This is Alexander Waverly. Is Mr. Kuryakin still there?”

“Yes, sir. I just checked on him. Still sleeping.”

“Very good. Please wake him immediately and tell him to be in my office in, um, thirty minutes. If
he asks, you may tell him I have an assignment for him.”

oOo

Illya Kuryakin was incensed. He’d been roused from his bed in Medical, still tired, rushed to
shower and have his wounds re-dressed, and run to Waverly’s office to meet the thirty-minute
deadline.

He bit the inside of his mouth when Waverly ordered him to Japan to investigate a possible alliance
between the Yakuza and THRUSH, which was trying to recover in that sector of Asia. “A
potentially volatile situation,” his chief had said. So, another special operation with a high risk
attached to it. Again he was denied a standard communicator.
“If I may ask,” said Illya, “is Na-, Mr. Solo still in the building?”

“You will need to check with Reception, Mr., uh, Kuryakin. I am not in the habit of knowing the whereabouts of my agents at every moment.” There was a biting undercurrent in the words. “You do not have the time to speak with him, and more importantly, you are forbidden to speak with him. Now, then, traffic is heavy this time of day so you must leave forthwith.”

“Yes, sir,” Illya responded through teeth that matched his clenched fists, not caring about the tint of insubordination in his tone.

This sparked him to start the process of applying for permanent resident status, possibly citizenship, on his return from this assignment. He would get in touch with contacts in the State Department sympathetic to the plight of Soviet citizens and one of the FBI agents, now a friend, who had vetted him before his assignment to U.N.C.L.E.-New York. Perhaps he could even manage to keep his official ties to his rodina. And then he could leave Waverly and his increasingly poor, perplexing decisions behind.

He stopped at Lisa Rogers’ desk. “Have you seen Napoleon?” he asked, not bothering with social pleasantries.

Rogers dropped her usual formality and said with some empathy, “He left Waverly’s office about an hour ago.”

Illya scowled at the news. His partner could be anywhere and he had no time to spare, thanks to Waverly’s skillful manipulation of the time line for mission prep and making the flight. Why does he persist in keeping us apart?

“Will you do me a favor, Lisa?”

“Let me guess,” she said with a wry quirk to her lips as she handed him a slim attaché case filled with the information he would need to absorb before arriving in Tokyo. “Let Napoleon know about this latest … escapade?”

One side of Illya’s mouth quirked upward. “You are correct. And please tell him I’ll call as soon as I can.”

“You got it. Now, out of here, or you’ll miss your flight. Your travel bag, with enough bandages and antibiotic ointment to last to Tokyo, is already in U.N.C.L.E. cab number, um, 432, waiting for you outside Del’s. Safe trip, Illya.”

“Arigato and sayonara, Lisa,” he said with slight bow at the waist.

oOo

When Lisa found Napoleon nearly two hours later, he was sitting on a step in the stairwell.

“What on earth are you doing here, Napoleon? And why haven’t you answered your communicator?”

Solo gave the assistant a weak smile. “Waiting for Illya, though at times it’s felt as if we’ve both been waiting for Godot.” Lisa nodded, kept silent. Napoleon continued, “Illya’s one of the rare people to use the stairs when he’s by himself and I was hoping to catch him here. Give us a chance to talk privately. Don’t know why really, but I turned my communicator off.”

Lisa waved her hand to indicate Napoleon move over on the step. When he did, she sat beside him.
“Illya wanted me to tell you he’ll call when he can. He’s off to Japan for another special op, this one involving the Yakuza and our not-so-friendly flock of birds.”

Christ! The Yakuza is at least as brutal as THRUSH! And he’s alone again, no doubt. “Please tell me someone from the Tokyo office will partner with him.” Though his voice didn’t give away his worry, Napoleon was certain his facial expression did.

“Sorry, but I’m not aware of any details.”

“Maybe I can page him at the airport.”

Lisa sighed. “Sorry again, Napoleon. His flight took off on time about 15 minutes ago.”

Napoleon’s face flamed darkly at Waverly’s continuing ill-intentioned attempts to separate them even on a personal level. “Damn!” he muttered. He rubbed his face several times to with shaky hands. “Thanks, Lisa. Guess that’ll teach me to turn off my communicator.” He gave her a feeble smile and squeezed her knee.

Lisa returned the smile and patted her friend’s hand. “I better get back, or the chief will have my head. You know how he’s been lately.”

Solo gathered himself, shaking off his misery. “Yes, I do. I need to speak with him. I’ll be there in a few minutes.” Time to give our “chief” a piece of my mind.

oOo

“Why are you doing this, Mr. Waverly?”

“Doing what, Mr. Solo? And I do not appreciate your rudeness in … barging into my office.”

Napoleon refused yet again to apologize. “Why are you preventing Illya and me from even talking with each other? I can understand that I am no longer privy to the operations of U.N.C.L.E. and Illya would never reveal anything, but we are friends as well. You have no right to dictate that aspect of our lives.”

“Indeed I do, Mr. Solo. Any relationship you have that could have an impact on your effectiveness as an agent is one that comes under my purview. And friendship, particularly one as … extraordinary as yours with Mr. Kuryakin, one that has blurred the line between partnership and friendship, does have such an impact. Fortunately, it has not had a detrimental effect on your performance. That is why I have permitted you and Mr. Kuryakin to remain partners. But that friendship, which is so entwined with your partnership, must come to an end as well, even if you had stayed on. As such, you will be better able to move on with your new life. Make new friends. Find another career.”

In less than a second, Napoleon realized Waverly might be right. If Napoleon stayed with U.N.C.L.E. or even in New York City, he’d always be anxious about Illya being in the field without him, or with a partner who didn’t have the connection they had, the connection that had saved them countless times and brought about an unrivaled success rate.

Damn it all, if the Old Man isn’t right. And he manipulated me to quit. The old buzzard. Bested me again.

His chest filled with the oppressive pain of loss, too much loss. His job, his identity, Illya.

In time, he thought, once he was healthy and adjusted to his new life, he’d bring Illya, that contrary,
brilliant, irascible, loyal, witty, taxing, trusted and trusting, beautiful human being, into that life.

“If that is all, Mr. Solo, you are dismissed.”

“Ah, yes, Mr. Waverly,” he said, his words colored with humility and chagrin. He turned and left in an easy amble that he used considerable energy to create and maintain, thinking how he’d explain all this to his ex-partner. He headed for his office to begin the task of sorting through files and other U.N.C.L.E. work product. As he came across personal items, he tossed them in the trash, not wanting anything to remind him of the true self he was rapidly losing.

Until he came across the polished, irregularly shaped, very rare blue garnet encased in an acrylic box. His birthstone. A 35th birthday gift from Illya, just last year—or was it decades ago. He smiled, recalling the presentation of the gift, then dinner at his favorite Moroccan restaurant, followed by an off-Broadway play that had received rave reviews, all at Illya’s expense. This he would keep.

Tomorrow, after what he hoped would be his last night in Medical, he’d begin dismantling the rest of his disintegrating self at his apartment. At least its next tenant would be Illya Kuryakin.

Day 14

Napoleon Solo, still headachy from the minor deprogramming, took one last tour of the CEA apartment to confirm that he had left behind what he wanted his ex-partner—Christ, when did I start thinking of Illya that way?—to have. What he wanted for himself was either in the banker’s box he carried or in storage on Long Island.

He sighed, heavy with anguish and fear of the unknown and resentment for the turn his life, his frailty, had taken him.

His free hand was on the front door knob when his phone rang. He knew it was Illya, but he was too much of a coward to answer it. He knew he’d regret that later, but he didn’t have the strength to say good-bye without crumbling into a heap of self-pity. And he didn’t want to leave Illya that way. Hell, I don’t want to leave him at all. So instead, he’d left Illya a letter with a false promise, though a lie better described what he’d written.

With a lethargy born of emotional fatigue, he opened the door, closed it gently, fumbled for the key, locked the apartment, walked away from a full, wonderful life and the one person who meant more to him than anyone, to one as barren as his rudderless soul. In just two weeks, he had become a nonentity.

As he trudged to the elevator, he was grateful he couldn’t hear the phone he knew was still ringing.

As soon as he exited the building, he realized it was possible to be less than zero.

oOo

Illya Kuryakin finally had a few minutes to place a call to Napoleon. He let the phone ring 20 times, sensing that Napoleon was in his apartment. He hung up reluctantly, wondered why his friend refused to answer.

When he tried later after yet another round of martial arts sparring with a teenaged Yakuza member determined to show his superiority over the white Occidental, Illya was greeted by an unknown voice informing him that the number was disconnected.

He could feel his skin drain of color, his chest fill with sickness. His mind became as disconnected as Napoleon’s phone.
It was almost 2 a.m. when Kuryakin entered the lobby of his residence, one of the U.N.C.L.E.-owned buildings reserved for Section II and III agents. It felt different the instant he stepped through the door. It felt lifeless, now lacking Napoleon’s energy that seemed to be there even when he was elsewhere. Illya knew that was ridiculous, but he also knew Napoleon Solo was a force unto himself.

Pete Driscoll, the Section III agent on guard-and-doorman duty, greeted him with, “Hi, Illya. Been expecting you. Long flight, huh. Bet the mission was successful.”

Illya gave him a weak smile at the obviously false gregariousness. “Yes, it was.” Except for that barbaric tattoo on my palm. Projected Patona*** of the Yakuza indeed. Napoleon will tease me relentlessly about … He terminated that fruitless line of thought. “Is it safe to assume Napoleon has left?”

Driscoll’s cordial expression changed to one of sympathy. “Yeah. A few days ago.”

Illya stood there, no longer feeling the weight of his briefcase and travel bag, just the heaviness in his body. He hoped his face reflected none of the barrenness in his soul, or the agony in his heart.

He sighed. “Thank you, Peter. Have a good night,” he said flatly. He headed for the elevator and was grateful the door to the car was open, as if it were waiting for him to take him to a place he no longer thought of as home. Not with Napoleon gone forever from his apartment three flights above his. He pressed the button for his floor.

The next thing he was aware of was standing in his living room. His knees quivered as he stared at an envelope propped against a gaily-wrapped box on the coffee table. He could see his given name written in Napoleon’s distinctive style on it. He dropped the case and bag and debated whether he should turn and leave or approach what Napoleon had left for him.

Long moments later, he chose the latter. On wobbly legs, he walked to the sofa and balanced on the edge. His hand shook so badly that the side table lamp he turned on almost fell from perch. He took a deep breath before reaching for the envelope.

The envelope, a small booklet-type, had a bulge at the bottom edge. He picked it up, felt the bulge, identified it as something metal. Taking another deep breath, he opened the clasp. Slowly, he upended the envelope and three keys fell out.

Instantly, he recognized two of the keys as belonging to Napoleon’s prized Porsche 911, which he had purchased only three months ago. The third one, he guessed from its shape, belonged to some sort of storage unit.

After putting on his glasses, Illya reached into the envelope. He felt the expensive stationery Napoleon used for personal correspondence. With great care, he pulled it out, treating it as if it were rare and ancient and fragile, that it warranted delicate, white-glove treatment.

It was folded in half. Carefully, he lifted it open. He began to read, unaware how shallowly he was breathing.

*Dear Illya,*

*In case you haven’t heard yet, I’ve decided to head for greener pastures. Don’t know what they are yet, but I’m sure I’ll find some place where I’ll fit.*
I’ll be taking the Pursang out for a long stretch first, in hopes of staying out of any unfriendly aviaries and coming up with possibilities for work. If nothing else, at least it’ll clear my head and recharge my batteries, so to speak.

You’ll be moving into the CEA apartment soon.

Illya’s eyes snapped shut. This was becoming too real. He knew he had to move into the higher-security apartment designated for the CEA, yet he didn’t want to. I don’t want things to change. Reluctantly, he opened his eyes and continued reading.

I’ve left a couple paintings that I know you like and a few other things that aren’t supplied by our “landlord” so it won’t be so bare. If what I left is not to your liking for whatever reason, the pieces can go into my storage on Long Island. Feel free to use anything that’s there, too. Except my ties. You’ve been known to use them for purposes other than what they were made for.

He drew in a much-needed breath, followed by an amused exhale. Of course Napoleon would remember Illya borrowing his tie to use successfully as a sling early in their partnership. Called him “David” and “Davey” for weeks.

You now have the key and the address is at the bottom of this letter.

Illya glanced down, recognized the address. It was in the same town where the Pursang was moored. Was no longer berthed, he corrected himself. Something too familiar and very much unwanted began to make itself known in his chest. He resumed reading.

I decided not to put the Porsche in storage. It’s a car, and it’s meant to be driven. There is no better driver than you, and I know you’ll treat her much better than you would my ties. The paperwork for adding your name to the title is complete, and you should be getting the revised one within a few weeks. My aunt is taking care of the car note and insurance until I’m gainfully re-employed. You only need to pay for gas (petrol, to mollify your Cambridge sensibilities) and maintenance.

His mouth dropped open at Napoleon’s generosity. The man was notorious for that, but Illya thought this was exceptional largess even for his partner.

The wrapped box is your birthday present. I might not be back by then, so you have my permission to open it any time you want to. Knowing your curious, impatient nature, I’d bet you’d opened it before reading this. I found it in a little shop while we were in Vladivostok for your last annual five-day navy tour. Should look perfect on the fireplace mantel.

Illya gasped again and again, each breath feeling as if it was fragmenting into hundreds of pieces as it passed through hundreds of tiny double-edged daggers that had appeared all along his airway.

Illya knew Napoleon, his best friend and partner, would not be returning. He knew as well that he’d never hear from him again. Illya was being left behind yet again.

That unwanted sensation in his chest grew quickly into the full pain of abandonment. It started in the center and spread like a noxious, tenacious weed insinuating itself through his body and soul. Grimly, he gave it a name, a French one, because French was a beautiful language and it might soothe the torment: angine abandonnée.

But this time was different. All of the other people he had loved in his life left due to death. Napoleon Solo, though, was different. The American, who had so quickly befriended a man from an enemy country, who was an intelligent, loyal, libidinous, creative, manipulative, charismatic, witty, caring, trusted and trusting, beautiful human being, was his first and last best-beloved friend,
his only zaduševnost, would be somewhere, alive.

After a long moment, he tried to read the rest of the letter, but found his vision wavy. He put the letter down and picked up the box. His hands trembled so much that it took him much longer than expected to open it, pull out the copious amounts of excelsior, lift out the set of nesting dolls.

The outer-most one was a painted man with dark hair and smiling brown eyes, dressed in traditional Ukrainian garb.

He hugged it to his chest so tightly that he added physical pain to his angine abandonnée and let the pools in his eyes release their salty contents.

15 years later

“I can't do this alone.” ‘This’ is more than this mission. ‘This’ is also my life. Napoleon Solo, alone for far too long, paused as he prepared to rectify the mistake he made so long ago with the decision not to bring the most important person in his life back into his life. He needed to apologize, to ask forgiveness. Most importantly, he would ask Illya to be his partner again. Not “former,” not “ex,” but “always” partner.

“I need Illya Kuryakin.” Understatement of the decade.

oOo

Illya dropped a generous number of bills on the bar to pay for their drinks and his meal. “When my dinner arrives, please enjoy it yourself if you like,” he told the bartender. He and Napoleon walked out of the restaurant, side by side.

Napoleon stopped on the sidewalk and turned to his partner. “I'm hoping Sir John just wishes to consult with us on this one.”

Illya's brow furrowed. “Why is that?”

“We probably wouldn't have to travel in that case. We'd stay in the city, sleep in our own bed. Truthfully, I haven't had a decent night's sleep in, oh, fifteen years.” Napoleon gave his friend a hesitant, questioning look.

'Bed,' not beds. Illya knew exactly what Napoleon was asking, and it suited him just fine. Taking on a serious tone, he said, “Interesting you should say that, my friend. I have not slept well for fifteen years either. A good night's sleep would be most welcome.”

Napoleon's eyes shone with happiness, and he graced his partner with his most dazzling grin. In return, Illya broke into a bright but close-lipped smile.

“This begs the question, whose bed?” asked Napoleon with easy confidence.

Illya contemplated for a moment before he gave his zaduševnost a free and easy grin. “Whichever is smaller.”

the end

March 2019

*Reference to the end of The Discotheque Affair
**Reference to *The Concrete Overcoat Affair, Part 2*

***Though there are a number of meanings for this Japanese word, in this case it means *partner* or *associate*.

Among other things, Janus is the god of duality.

End Notes

Thanks so much to CoriKay for the beta. As usual, right-on suggestions.

Illya’s mission in Czechoslovakia took place during *Prague Spring*.

Read more about *zaduševnost*, a Russian's best-beloved or "behind the soul" friend.

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