

**Author's Note:** Written for the [LIFECYCLE: FEAR](#) challenge on [LIVEJOURNAL'S SECTION VII](#) community.

*I took a few liberties with interpretation here, but I hope folks agree this tale serves the spirit of the challenge.*



Age wrinkles the body.  
Quitting wrinkles the soul.

*Douglas MacArthur*

**BECAUSE...**

BY [LAH](#)

**Winter 1960**

**Rural NY near the Canadian border**

“That’s crazy talk, Napoleon,” commented U.N.C.L.E. agent Malachy Gavin. The Irishman had heard that this American operative could be a bit, shall we say, devil-may-care with regard to his own safety, despite the man’s impressive successful mission record. “We got the innocents out. Let HQ deal with shutting down this Thrush facility all together.”

The facility in question had been performing drug experiments on a group of teenagers the supra-nation had somehow talked into joining what was thought by authorities to be a religious cult. What Thrush had been after were guinea pigs to test some of their latest pharmaceutical creations and the cover-in-question had worked very well indeed for providing those. Disillusioned adolescents were, in truth, easy fodder to feed the need with such a design in place, especially with the charismatic speaker the supra-nation had utilized to front their plot.

Napoleon Solo, partnered for this assignment with Gavin, had managed to talk the teens out of the compound, Napoleon's own golden-tongued charisma standing him in good stead in the endeavor. Yet the satrapy itself still stood unmolested, ready and waiting for the infusion of more guinea pigs, and that idea was anathema to Solo.

"Malachy, with this weather, it could be days before headquarters is able to dispatch a plane to destroy the compound," Solo disputed the other agent. "You know that as well as I do."

A snowstorm had been raging for hours here, far from unheard-of in this area. The snowfall already measured more than two feet with no letup expected in the immediate future. The abandoned warehouse where the agents and their troupe of rescued innocents were now sheltering wasn't a place where they could stay for long, with no heat and no food and more than a few of the youngsters in need of medical attention.

"But they'll get it done, Napoleon!" countered Malachy a bit hotly. "Why take the risk of going back to blow it up from the inside?"

"Destroying the satrapy was part of our mission scenario," counter-counteracted Napoleon stubbornly.

"If possible!" the Irishman bluntly reminded the American.

"I can do it," determined Solo inflexibly.

"Napoleon," Gavin now tried a softer tone of voice, trying to reason with the resolute man, "there is no doubt you could get back in to set charges. The security here seemed pretty lax on the whole. But the timers were in that backpack we lost in the storm, so you'll only have the TNT with fuses to manage the job. Honestly there is little hope you could get back out of the facility and far enough away from the immediate explosion in this heavy weather. Making any attempt to do that would be like inviting Death Himself to dance with you."

"How long will it take you to get these kids far enough away from the compound to be safe from any fallout from the explosion?" Napoleon steadfastly ignored the other man's reasoning.

Malachy gave up the fight. "Trudging this large of a group through near knee-deep snow with some of them still drugged-up to the gills?" He shrugged. "Figure three-quarters of an hour."

Napoleon nodded. "I'll wait three-quarters of an hour then."

Gavin sighed in resignation. "Luck of the Irish be with you, Napoleon. I'll get this ragtag assemblage ready to move," he then finalized before he shifted his focus to the teenagers and the effort to get them all sorted out for traveling by foot in the snowstorm.

As Malachy talked the kids through what they would need to do, emphasizing that they had to all stay together, Napoleon sorted through the small stash of explosives in the remaining backpack. TNT detonated on fuses alone really wasn't ideal in any sense of the word, but it was all he had to work with and he would make it do.

As he went about his task, a girl of maybe fifteen or sixteen came up to Solo. She had been close enough to overhear his previous conversation with Gavin.

“Don’t you fear death at all?” she asked him curiously.

Napoleon looked up into her wide, unknowing eyes: a youngster who had yet to experience very much of life.

“Let’s just say I have rather a healthy distaste for it,” he answered with a small smile.

“Then why go back? Why go back when, as the other man says, your HQ could arrange for destroying that compound?” she questioned further.

Napoleon stared at her for second or two in silence. Then he shrugged. “Because,” was the only response he deigned to give.

She continued to study him quietly as Solo arranged the explosives in the pack for easy retrieval.

“Your soul will never grow old,” the girl commented after a pause of a few minutes.

Napoleon turned back to look at her. “What?”

Now it was the girl who shrugged. “Something I heard once, about age wrinkling the body but quitting wrinkling the soul.”

Napoleon’s smiled again, this time more broadly. “General MacArthur said that,” he informed her.

“Whoever said it, I think it’s very true,” she noted certainly. “And you’re not one ever to quit, are you?”

“Part of my assignment was to make sure this place never made ill-use of anyone again,” he summarized.

She narrowed her eyes thoughtfully before remarking, “That’s your real fear, isn’t it? Failure?”

Napoleon had never really considered his attitude in such light, but maybe there was some truth to that suggestion.

“Let’s just say,” he decided after a few moments of self-deliberation, “that I have rather a healthy distaste for it.”

The girl smiled widely.

“You better get ready to set out,” Napoleon then advised her. “It won’t be an easy journey to the nearest town.”

She nodded and turned to rejoin the others.

“Honey,” Solo called her attention back to him. “What’s your name?” he asked as she turned to again face him.

“Janey,” she told him. “Jane Answeith.”

“Well, Jane Answeith, Napoleon Solo,” he said, indicating himself with a finger pointed toward his chest, “will see you back in the HQ in New York.”

“I expect he will,” she agreed before she turned back again to the join the others.

**—THE END—**

