

Author's Note: This story was created for the **HODOWE: United Nations Day Challenge**. It is an aftertake on my fanfic story [THE CINDERFELLA AFFAIR](#), so reading that story first is recommended.



SEEKING ENTENTE CORDIALE

BY [LAH](#)

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“The Princess isn’t generally a troublemaker,” went on the harried and somewhat embarrassed administrator of the touted United Nations International School, commonly known as UNIS, located in Manhattan.

“Likely just a childish prank,” allowed the good-looking, dark-haired man walking beside the female school official. “Still, I do have to speak with her.”

Napoleon Solo, North American head of Operations and Enforcement in the international organization known as U.N.C.L.E., was well aware that Thrush, the supra-nation out to make itself the ultimate director of every facet of human existence, often recruited young. So nothing in this case could be assumed simply because of the tender age of the prankster.

“This mischief is so unlike Her Highness,” continued the administrator in unhappy bewilderment. “I have absolutely no idea what got into her.”

What had started out for Solo as just one of those “promote good feeling” type of assignments Mr. Waverly had been giving him lately as he edged ever nearer to his change in status from a Section II enforcement agent to a Section I policy manager had turned unexpectedly into a more operational mission. U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim and several other members of the United Nations Secretariat had been touring UNIS as part of not only United Nations Day festivities, but also in recognition of the coinciding first World Development Information Day.

There was a fair on the school grounds showcasing the cultural diversity of the many nations represented both in the student body and the faculty. National cuisine, dress, music, song, dance and other customs were highlighted in various events that were handled in the main by the UNIS pupils themselves.

Everything had been going along swimmingly, with the visiting dignitaries obviously enjoying themselves in the convivial atmosphere. Napoleon was amongst the VIPs, discussing with the others U.N.C.L.E.’s contributions in the ensurance of world order that helped retain the traditions on display. Solo too had been enjoying himself, much to his own surprise. That is until an explosion had gone off in one pavilion very near the Secretary General, releasing an inky bluish-purple cloud with an intensely unpleasant odor. Solo’s small team of enforcement agents had gone into immediate action, getting Waldheim and company “the hell out of Dodge”, and securing the area as necessary.

Needless to say all the U.N.C.L.E. personnel had been relieved to find the gaseous emission of what was in essence no more than a smoke bomb completely non-toxic. Nothing more than colored fumes perfumed with a bit of eau de skunk. They were even more relieved to find the installer of this harmless though noisome apparatus was none other than a student of the school. The girl had gone to the dean and openly admitted her culpability once all the ruckus had settled down. And now Napoleon was about to interview the miscreant just to be absolutely certain there was no Thrush secret involvement or nefarious intention behind the deed.

The school administrator opened the door to her office where that miscreant was currently awaiting judgment. And in that instant Napoleon Solo was hit right between the eyes with memories from the past he generally kept strictly compartmentalized, safely stowed away from his current life.

“Mr. Solo, may I present Princess Luce of Nascoste,” the dean quite unnecessarily introduced the girl as Napoleon need only look at her to know exactly who she was.

The face was a just-on-the-verge-of-adolescence version of a face he remembered well: that of Abriana, Grand Princess of Nascoste. The eyes were the same shockingly pale sky-blue, the hair the same golden brown and was even worn in a chin-length style very similar to that her mother had worn more than a decade-and-a-half before. The shape of her countenance was a match right down to the delicate point of that chin, and the mouth boasted the same identically proportioned upper and lower lips. The aquiline nose might have come courtesy of her father’s genes, but the light dusting of freckles across the bridge of that nose definitely came courtesy of her mother’s. Though of smallish height and narrow of build, the girl’s legs were notably long, another physical attribute garnered straight from her maternal bloodline. In short, she was every inch her mother’s daughter.

“Your Highness,” the school official properly reversed the introductions, “Mr. Napoleon Solo of the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement.”

“Still outrageously handsome,” remarked the Princess rather cryptically.

“Have you met Mr. Solo previously?” inquired the administrator.

“No, but we have at last met now,” responded Luce, again rather cryptically. “I think I should talk to the representative from U.N.C.L.E. alone, Mrs. Saldrani. After all, I might want to vigorously rattle before him family skeletons I would never unearth to you.”

“It’s a bit irregular,” forwarded Mrs. Saldrani hesitantly.

“It would perhaps be best,” Solo seconded the royal request. “If there is some international skulduggery afoot of which Her Highness is somehow aware...” Napoleon let that ominous prospect hang in the unfinished sentence.

“Yes, yes, of course,” finally conceded the dean, definitely anxious to not be party to any more international incidents this day. “I will wait in the outer office.” And with that she closed the door leaving Napoleon Solo and Princess Luce of Nascoste in relative privacy.

“I take it you are aware of me?” Napoleon began the dialogue between them as straightforwardly as possible.

“My mother has a scrapbook she keeps on a high shelf in her lingerie closet. A scrapbook I have seen her take down and pensively leaf through many times. It always intrigued me,” came Luce’s explanation. “So, while she and my father were away from the palace on one of those silly royal progresses last year – no, the year before, I made it my business to get that album down from its supposed hiding place and take a look for myself. In it were newspaper clippings and magazine articles regarding the marriage, a readily proclaimedmorganatic one, of Grand Princess Abriana of Nascoste to you, Mr. Napoleon Solo of the State of New York in the United States of America.”

Seventeen years before Napoleon Solo had indeed been married to Grand Princess Abriana of Nascoste. That marriage had provided an identity cover for his very first true mission as an U.N.C.L.E. Section II enforcement agent. Of course the thing is it had been a cover on his part, but not on the part of the Grand Princess. She had had no idea about the why or wherefore of any of Solo’s assignment, or even knowledge that Napoleon was an operative for U.N.C.L.E. At least not until the suspected threat to the royal family of Nascoste had been vanquished in a rather spectacular way with the gunshot wounding of both himself and Abriana’s sister, and the fatal shooting of a prominent and secretly Thrush-backed cabinet minister. Thus it was perfectly true to say that the union between herself and Solo had, for Abriana at least, been in all ways a love match.

“My appetite to know more was then whetted, you might say. So, after my perusal of that scrapbook,” continued Luce readily, “I spoke to some of those on staff at Castello di Marmo Scuro who remembered you. And I must say all remembered you fondly. Thus my intrigue only grew, and I began to scour out whatever information regarding you I could find, from both public and private sources. You see I am very good at finding a way of getting into supposedly ‘eyes-only’ governmental records. My brother and I make a game of it: he has the rarely questioned access and I have the generally unrecognized cunning.”

“A potent combination indeed,” commented Napoleon with a vaguely amused yet indefinably troubled smile.

"We are twins, my brother and I. Did you know that?"

"Yes, I do know that."

"I'm six minutes older, but he is still Crown Prince."

"Ah, the injustice of the laws of male-preference primogeniture," Napoleon commiserated.

"I will have a title of my own one day: that of Princess Adjuvant. I'll have it because my Aunt Donjeta gave it up many years ago, saying she preferred to live as a private citizen. Though, being a member of a reigning family within an absolute monarchy, she still is not honestly that. I guess she just didn't want the responsibility of a formal place in government."

Napoleon knew exactly why Donjeta had relinquished the station and status of being Princess Adjuvant. She had in truth been given no choice. Her cavalier usage of the position had almost resulted in Thrush gaining an advantage via the royal family of Nascoste that could have permanently damaged U.N.C.L.E.'s influence within the Soviet Bloc. But Solo was positive this inquisitive young princess, despite her wily investigations, yet knew nothing of this, and he certainly would not be the one to tell her.

"I have to wait until I am eighteen though," Luce complained, "to officially have the title. Even with my thirteenth birthday being next week, that's still five long years away! It's so unfair. I mean Alceo – that's my brother – has been Crown Prince since the day he was born. And, if in the meanwhile my mother bears a second son, I won't ever have the title at all. Still, I don't see that happening. I think my mother is more than done with having children."

Abriana, Napoleon knew, was a bit more than a year younger than himself, and he was yet a few months shy of turning forty. So giving birth to another child was not a strict impossibility for the Grand Princess, but her eldest daughter was most probably right. Abriana and her husband likely considered their family complete at this stage in their lives and had no plans to add to it. Though "accidents" did of course happen on occasion, over the years Napoleon had heard reports of Abriana having several miscarriages, evidence that childbearing had never been an easy process for her even during a more comfortable phase of her biological clock.

"So how does any of this relate to the stink bomb you detonated near the Secretary General of the United Nations and his party?" Solo decided to bring the exchange around to a more relevant track. For some reason he just didn't want to dwell on the reality of Abriana's cozy family with spouse and three children while he remained at a very similar age minus any such personal 'baggage'.

Luce giggled in a very twelve-year-old girlish manner. "It did really stink, didn't it?"

"Profoundly," agreed Napoleon. "But that doesn't answer my question, now does it?"

"Well, you see," Luce expounded more seriously, "all that snooping into private records paid off in that I found out you were secretly an agent for the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement when you wed my mother. I didn't know if you still were of course, but then I happened to see you today giving orders to what was obviously a protection unit for the U.N. group. I recognized you immediately. Your looks are as distinctive as your name, you know."

"Do tell," Napoleon gibed a bit sardonically.

“Oh, I’m sure you did already know that,” the Princess considered the crux of that contention and relegated it as moot. “Anyway, the conclusion I reached is that you must indeed be still working for U.N.C.L.E. So I quickly devised a plan guaranteed to get your attention in a professional capacity at least. My brother taught me how to make stink bombs eons ago,” she exaggerated time as most children tended to do. “I never used that knowledge before, but today I was certainly glad he had shared it with me.”

“And now that you have gotten my attention?”

Luce straightened her shoulders defensively. “I just wanted to meet you.”

“Some particular reason? My connection to Nascoste was short-lived and, as the saying goes, before your time. So why this... intrigue I believe you called it... this intrigue with me?”

“You are my mother’s grand passion. I guess I just want to better understand the why of that.”

“I doubt very much I would qualify as your mother’s grand passion,” hedged Napoleon.

“Oh yes, you do so qualify,” pronounced Luce very certainly and most earnestly.

Napoleon took a steadying deep breath before forwarding slowly and surely, “Highness, I was wed to your mother for a few short months with the union ultimately being formally annulled by both state and church. Your parents have been married for nearly fifteen years, thus developing together a very full and stable life.”

“And have as well together bred and are currently raising three wonderful children,” parroted Luce likely from descriptions she had heard or read regarding her family over the years, “myself, my brother Alceo, and my younger sister Sarine.”

“I do assure you I am no threat to the happy continuance of any of that.”

“But none of that has anything to do with grand passion, Napoleon. May I call you Napoleon? My mother and father,” she rushed on without giving Napoleon so much as a moment to accept or reject the requested familiarity, “have a very... companionable relationship. They like each other; they respect each other; they are even openly affectionate with one another. Yet neither would ever be mistaken for the other’s grand passion.”

“And, at the impressive age of twelve, you are categorically confident of this,” remarked an uncharacteristically vexed Napoleon not at all in the manner of a question.

“At the impressive age of a week shy of thirteen, yes I am categorically confident of this,” retorted the somewhat affronted Princess. “Females come to recognize these things very early on in life.”

It was that statement even more than her looks that to Napoleon marked Luce indisputably as the offspring of Abriana. This girl had her mother’s starry-eyed outlook, her steadfast belief in one-and-only loves and fated fairytale romance. Though a dedicated and efficient ruler, Abriana’s vision with regard to strictly personal relationships lacked the practical clarity she gave to other matters. Or rather it had. Napoleon was certainly not in a position to advance such an opinion now.

He had himself always possessed a rather romantic soul. He still did, but his basic nature had been tempered by various life experiences through the years. And so, he imagined, had been Abriana's. Not the least of those experiences being their marriage, so much a tenderness-and-desire-filled assurance of projected lifelong devotion for her and so much an unpredictably disconcerting yet necessary display of ultimate dedication to the causes of U.N.C.L.E. for him.

Given the emotional toll taken on both parties by the predetermined – on Solo's part – and unanticipated – on Abriana's part – severance of their union, perhaps it would be wiser or at least kinder to nip in the bud Luce's dew-drenched preconceptions of "grand passion". Yet what right had he to boldly dispute any of those notions merely because of his personal "garden" of life experiences? She was a girl just flowering into womanhood; thus she deserved to expect an as-yet-unbounded expressive environment to blossom around her. Coming to realize the actual limits of that environment would happen for her eventually, but it wasn't his place to try and force any foreshortening of that natural interval in time.

"Inogda nasha yedinstvennaya funktsiya v techeniye momenta dolzhna tol'ko sushchestvovat"¹," Napoleon quietly quoted a subtle reminder to himself. This was what his pragmatic partner, Iliya Kuryakin, had on occasion said to him when he seemed to be getting too involved in matters that were beyond the suitable scope of his influence.

"Dlya sushchestvuyushchikh v dannyy moment yavlyayetsya chasto boleye chem dostatochno"²," concluded Luce in perfectly accented Russian.

"You speak Russian then?" inquired Napoleon, truly glad to back off onto a more neutral subject.

Luce nodded. "Both my parents consider it a matter of practicality with Nascoste so closely bordering the Eastern Bloc nations."

"Yes, such a short distance across the Adriatic Sea to Albania." Napoleon let recollections of his own one-time envelopments in Nascoste almost overtake him for the briefest of moments.

Luce nodded again. "I actually speak five languages fluently," she then revealed with assertive pride. "Italian of course," she first referenced the native tongue of Nascoste, "English, Russian, Albanian and French. I am the linguist amongst the three of us: Alceo, Sarine and me. Alceo's Russian is atrocious and his Albanian is even worse. And Sarine often finds English eludes her ready understanding and proper pronunciation. You speak Russian very well," Luce noted of Solo. "Almost as naturally as you do English. Do you speak any more languages?"

"Italian and French," Napoleon informed her, "as well as a substantial smattering of others. In my line of work it is... a matter of practicality," he utilized her own phrasing, accenting it with a full-on smile

"I should have guessed about the Italian," Luce commented candidly. "The marriage ceremony between you and my mother was officiated in Italian, wasn't it? In the parish church of Vatican City?"

¹ Sometimes our only function in the moment is just to be.

² For existing in the moment is often more than enough.

“Yes,” Napoleon kept his answer short and to the point as this was not reminiscent territory in which he wished to further venture.

“Did you speak all of those languages at my age?” required Luce curiously.

“I learned Russian a bit later in life, when I served in the military. But English, Italian and French: yes, I spoke them at your age. Even younger actually.” Surmising that the trappings of a seemingly more intimate tête-à-tête might ease the tension between them, Napoleon confided, “I was what would be termed a diplomatic brat. Thus I learned to converse in the language necessary for everyday communication wherever my grandfather, who was my legal guardian, was posted by the American government. Αftó [tan epísis to pós píra mia poly vasikí katanóisi tis ellinikís qs éfivos.³”

“What language is that?” Luce asked with unmasked admiration.

“Greek,” replied Napoleon. “But don’t ask me to provide much more by way of verbal demonstration in that regard. My Greek is only minimally serviceable in the best of scenarios.”

“It’s still impressive.”

Napoleon gave her a slight bow. “I am flattered that an accomplished young linguist like yourself should think so, Highness.”

“It is my facility with language that gave me the chance to study for one term at an international school outside of my home country,” Luce provided that information unasked.

“Really?” prompted Napoleon with all the sharpness of a man accustomed to taking advantage of such unasked-for intelligence.

“Yes,” rattled on the Princess, obviously content with this opportunity to converse further with him, no matter on what subject. “You see I tend to get restless, and that can make me a bit... well, melancholy. I was utterly bored with the classes at the academy traditionally attended by all members of the royal family in Nascoste, and I think my blue moods starting noticeably wearing off on my teachers.” The girlish giggle briefly burst forth from her once more. “So my mother proposed an academic term in an international school abroad as, she said, ‘an opportunity to practice speaking another language on a daily basis’. But I think she understood what I desperately needed was an adventure.”

Napoleon couldn’t help but grin at that. Yes, it would be very like Abriana, who had in so many ways felt constricted by the heavy responsibilities of her own position, to realize her dream-drunk daughter had reached a point where she simply required a stimulating breath of fresh air.

“I was given a choice of going to school in London, Paris or New York. I chose New York because it is outside of Europe with its often Old-World excessive respect for royalty.”

“And are you enjoying your adventure here in the United States?”

³ That was also how I picked up a very basic comprehension of Greek as a teenager.

“Oh yes, immensely!” Luce enthused with undisguised zeal. Then she set her pale blue eyes directly on his hazel brown ones as she made particular mention, “I am especially enjoying getting to know you.”

Napoleon refrained from mentioning, with typical adult condescension feasibly peppered with a dash of spy shrewdness, she would never get to really know him. He simply couldn't permit that. But then again perhaps Solo, with classic adult single-mindedness conceivably infused with a splash of spy arrogance, simply refused to acknowledge how much a person could be gauged by the contents of a brief and somewhat rambling conversation.

“You said your grandfather was your legal guardian. Did your parents die when you were a child?” Luce barreled on, eager to learn all she could of this man for whom she was ‘categorically confident’ her mother still carried a torch.

“My father died before I was born,” Napoleon provided only half an answer.

“And your mother?” pressed Luce.

“Let's just say she took no part in my upbringing.”

Luce tilted her head, studying his face intently, as if she could read clearly there what his words left masked.

“Was it lonely for you? Being raised like that?”

Napoleon's lips curled into a barely-there smirk. “I don't think anyone would ever describe any aspect of my life as lonely.”

“Then they would be wrong,” decided Luce, truly startling Napoleon with her unconditional conclusion, though his features revealed nothing. “Do you like working for U.N.C.L.E.?” she then asked seemingly without taking so much as a single breath between her previous statement and her next question.

“It has its moments,” Napoleon evaded any direct response.

“Like the excitement in the moment of becoming the Grand Consort of a Grand Princess?” Luce grasped on his seemingly noncommittal reply to prod that positively thorny subject. “Even temporarily?”

“That was a moment,” Solo tactfully tried to answer in a way that would not upset his young inquisitor, “I found more disquieting than exciting.”

“Why?” demanded the uncompromising girl. “Why disquieting?”

“Because it meant deceiving your mother, at least to some extent,” Napoleon cautiously clarified his meaning. “I truly never wanted to do that.”

“Yet you did.”

“I did indeed,” admitted Solo quietly. “I know this will be difficult for you to accept, something with which you will undoubtedly find it very hard to empathize, but I only did that perceived wrong to ensure what would be accounted as a tangible good.”

“Accounted as a tangible good by you, you mean.”

“Yes,” Napoleon knew he had to concede that particular.

Luce’s eyes searched his once more. “But not just by you,” she again with lightning speed calculated a set perspective on but a few points of ready reference. “More importantly, accounted as such by U.N.C.L.E.”

Wisely Solo elected to make no comment on this very astute assumption of hers. This girl was sharp as a tack, and she was picking up a lot about him from very little contact and a supposedly inconsequential chat.

“I can see why my mother was so attracted to you,” Luce finalized her capsule interpretation of Solo’s personality. “I mean aside from the obvious of course. You have one of those souls.”

“One of what souls?” Napoleon found he couldn’t resist the urge to inquire.

Luce gave an eloquent shrug. “Idealism mixed with integrity and a willingness to do something, not just profess something.”

A bemused smile curled Napoleon’s lips. “And you can tell that how?” he questioned frankly.

Luce’s only reply was another eloquent shrug.

“I suppose females come to recognize these things very early on in life as well?” Napoleon teased, but not harshly. Rather his tone and manner were gentle, almost protective of her still-gestating view of human traits.

Luce gazed at him assessingly, as if trying to determine if she should tell him something in particular. A momentary downward flick of her glance was all that physically registered her resolution on this score.

“You asked how I am so sure you are my mother’s grand passion,” she began shyly. “At the back of that scrapbook I told you about there is an envelope.”

Solo kept patient, not in the least trying to rush... or dismiss... whatever revelation would be forthcoming.

“In that envelope,” went on the Princess, “is a formal royal decree, drafted in 1955 as a direct announcement from my mother within her personal latitude as Grand Princess, yet never officially proclaimed. It declares you in possession of a heritage that includes ties to old French royalty.”

“Ah,” Napoleon acknowledged, the memory of Abriana’s proposal so many years ago flooding him with conflicting feelings he had thought firmly locked away in the deepest recesses of his heart. “The suggested disclosure of such a lineage for me was but an offer kindly made by your mother.”

“An offer that was based on a lie,” Luce stated certainly. She had read all the reference material from the sources that had investigated Solo’s background before his marriage to Abriana, and

she knew unequivocally that no such legacy bloodlines existed for him. Thus what was in the decree was nothing more than plausible fabrication.

“Yes,” conceded Napoleon.

“My mother, whose intense devotion to the laws and traditions of Nascoste is unparalleled, was willing to consciously bend those... for you. What more evidence is necessary of her unreserved and unmitigated love? She wanted to keep you as her consort, and she wanted any children she would have by you to inherit her throne.”

Napoleon ran a hand through his hair, pushing back the errant forelock that had at some point during this encounter fallen across his forehead.

“Luce,” he attempted to make his words more personal by using her given name in address for the first time in the course of their conversation, “sometimes in the heat of the moment, people do things or say things or even believe things that, given a sufficient cooling-off period, they would regret.”

“She kept that decree, Napoleon,” Luce brusquely rebuffed his bland if sincere platitude. “All these years. She could have destroyed it. Probably should have destroyed it, as a matter of private integrity. She never did. Instead she hung onto it, clinging to the hope it represented, because she never stopped wanting you beside her. Never.”

Napoleon just didn’t know what to say to that.

“Yet you refused... what did you call it? ...her kindly offer.” Luce picked up the discussion after a few minutes of Napoleon’s express silence. “It doesn’t take a genius to deduce the reason for that: she simply was not your grand passion.”

“No, I’m afraid not,” Napoleon judiciously did not try to dispute any of Luce’s previous assertions, simply confirmed the only one he could with complete honesty and utter certitude.

Luce stared at him for a long moment and then affirmed with complete honesty and utter certitude of her own, “Yet you had... have a grand passion.”

Napoleon’s mind filled with images of Clara: Clara who he has lost partly because of his Command-required marriage to Abriana. But then he realized it wasn’t fair to put any blame for his loss of Clara on anything that had occurred with Abriana. Rather it was the unvarnished fact that union had been a thing required by U.N.C.L.E., a requirement to which he had faithfully acceded, that had been at issue.

“I imagine we all have at least one ‘grand passion’ during the course of our lives, Highness,” Solo gave Luce’s perspicacity its full due.

“And yours is the endgame of U.N.C.L.E.,” stated Luce matter-of-factly.

For a moment – and a moment only – Napoleon was shocked to his core that this barely-adolescent girl, who was only acquainted with him in the broadest of terms, could peg the primary center of his being with such acuity. True, he had never himself conceived of his unswerving commitment to U.N.C.L.E. as any sort of “grand passion”. Yet, when it came right down to it, wasn’t it something for which he had, more than once, voluntarily sacrificed

supposedly more personal aspects of his life? To willingly bear offenses of the heart to steadfastly retain the constancy of the soul: Wasn't that the very essence of a grand passion?

"I suppose I should resent you." Napoleon was saved the awkwardness of a response as Luce continued to speak. "You rejected my mother's heartfelt sacrifice of her deepest principles. And your mere existence will always leave my father in second place in my mother's affections. Though I have been going on-and-on about my mother," she noted now a bit anxiously, "I do love my father, you know, just as much as I do her."

"I never doubted it, Highness," Solo sympathetically soothed the girl's apprehension on this score.

"I said that with my parents one would never mistake either for the other's grand passion," reiterated the Princess with open and therefore intensely touching trust. "That's indeed true, but only superficially. I really do believe my father would have it otherwise, you see. Yet he respects my mother too much to ever inject himself anywhere in her emotional makeup where he would be unwelcome. To ever try and force himself into those hidden recesses of the soul she long ago earmarked only for you. He is, you must understand, a very good and caring man."

"One need only hear the tone of voice with which you speak of him to understand that."

Luce smiled then with apparent relief and, in light of all her previous audacity, rather surprising bashfulness.

"Still, I honestly don't resent you at all, Napoleon. In fact I find I rather like you," she confided with a totally guileless blush. "And meeting you has made me consider something I never before credited as possible leeway with regard to anyone's most avid fixations. That maybe grand passions aren't meant to be more than hopes or dreams. Maybe sometimes life in the day-to-day sense just can't endure the overwhelming scope of them."

"It could well be so, Highness."

"Even your grand passion is that to a large extent, Napoleon: just a hope and a dream."

"I don't doubt it," Napoleon appeased her benign conceptions of universal law.

"Will you inform my mother and father about the episode with the stink bomb?" she suddenly returned to the more mundane concerns of a child fearing a scolding from a parent.

"I don't believe that to be necessary," he reassured her. "After all, no real harm was done, and I'm sure you will not try any such stunt again."

"Cross my heart and hope to die," pledged Luce solemnly as she made the prerequisite gesture to accompany her words.

"Never hope to die," advised Napoleon with a sagely smile. "Only ever hope to be."

There was no mistaking the sheer radiance of Luce's return smile.

“I believe we have reached what would be termed in French entente cordiale,” Solo diplomatically suggested.

“Yes, I believe we have,” readily agreed the beaming Princess of Nascoste.

“Highness,” Napoleon then finalized their meeting with a slight bow from the waist as he reached out and, taking one of her small hands in his, kissed it gallantly.

“Napoleon,” acknowledged Luce in turn as, appearing every inch a reflected image of her sweetly composed mother when she had accepted the loss of that she most desired, the not-yet-teenaged royal slightly nodded her head to him in farewell.

—THE END—

