

Author's Note: Originally created for the **HODOWE: May Day Story Challenge** and evokes the idea of productivity, e.g. fruitfulness, of purpose and spirit.



Words contract a significance which clings to them long after the condition of things to which they owe it has passed away.

Joseph Barber Lightfoot

A FINE FECUNDITY OF PURPOSE

BY [LAH](#)

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Napoleon Solo stared at the words on the page before him. He really didn't know why he was procrastinating on adding his signature to this standard contract. Hell, he'd been signing these with the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement every year since the January of 1955. That first year there had actually been two such documents to sign. The initial one had been an interim contract right after his December '54 graduation from Survival School. Then on the 1st of May 1955, his original full-term contract with U.N.C.L.E. had gone into effect. Yet right from the beginning the agreement to which he had "put his John Hancock" had been a Section II contract.

Maybe that's what felt so odd this year, for this would be his last time signing a Section II bond. In January of next year he would be required to sign an interim agreement as part of another

section of U.N.C.L.E., more than likely... much more than likely... Section I. Subsequently the following May a full-term contract would be drawn up to reflect his new status.

He'd been Section II for eighteen years come January. His life had been defined by that reality for most of his adulthood. And knowing that reality would soon change made him in some ways rather melancholy, a not very usual state of mind for Napoleon Solo.

As Napoleon was pondering all this, the badge of his partner, Illya Kuryakin, gave the Russian access to the CEA's private office from the public corridor beyond.

"I'm going to the cafeteria for a late-day coffee and danish, Napoleon. Do you want—" Illya's words stopped short as he got close enough to Solo's desk to identify the document on which Napoleon was distractedly tapping the top of his pen. "You only have until 5:00 pm today to provide your signed copy of that to Lisa Rogers, you know," he needlessly reminded the other man.

"I am well aware of the deadline," responded Napoleon with definite grumpiness.

"Then what's holding you up in getting the paper nicely autographed and properly delivered to the Old Man's assistant?"

"I have time."

Illya eyed his friend a bit warily. "Napoleon, you're not thinking of **not** signing that, are you?"

"No, I'm not thinking of not signing it," conceded Solo.

"Then?" Illya prompted for some explanation regarding his friend's hesitancy.

Solo sighed heavily. Should he elaborate on his current feelings? Even to Illya? Despite the fact the man was his closest friend, Kuryakin was still technically his subordinate.

Illya, however, was determined not to be put off. He plopped himself down in one of the chairs in front of Napoleon's desk and demanded bluntly, "Tell me."

Solo sighed once more, but gave in to his friend's insistence. "It's the end of an era," he stated cryptically.

"End of an era?"

"In my career... and in my life. I have been an U.N.C.L.E. enforcement agent in Section II for nearly half my lifetime."

"And?"

"This is the last contract I will ever sign with U.N.C.L.E. in that capacity, Illya. Officially I am now a lame duck Chief Enforcement Agent."

"Horse hockey!" announced Illya emphatically.

Despite his downhearted gloominess, hearing the Russian use such a quaint English expletive instead of some more verbally pyrotechnic exclamation in his native tongue did bring a small amused smile to the lips of the American. "Did I hear you right? Did you say horse hockey?"

"I did, and I say it again: Horse hockey! Napoleon, there is no such thing as a lame duck Chief Enforcement Agent any more than there is such a thing as a lame duck Section II. As long as you are willing to put your life on the line for the precepts of U.N.C.L.E., no one in his or her right mind would even think to refer to you in such a cavalier manner."

"Maybe," allowed Napoleon, but with definite dubiousness.

Now it was Illya who sighed heavily. "Seriously, Napoleon, where is all this self-pity coming from? It's not like you, and frankly it's not an attitude you wear well."

"Thanks so much for the sympathetic ear, partner."

"You don't need a sympathetic anything regarding this. What you need is a good swift kick in the coccyx to set your thinking straight."

"And thanks so much for graphically describing where you account my brains as residing."

"Napoleon, stop! Just stop and listen to yourself!"

"I'd rather just stop everything from changing."

"Change is inevitable and rarely as devastating as we imagine."

"I am not devastated!"

"Yet you are despondent."

"No!"

"Depressed."

"No!"

"Dejected."

"No!"

"Down-in-the-dumps."

Napoleon caught the ready denial on his lips and instead merely answered quietly, "Yes." Then he furthered just as quietly, "I guess I just feel I am losing relevance."

"Relevance to...?" pressed Illya

"To the continuance of world order, to the fight for neutral right, to everything that U.N.C.L.E. stands for."

“Excuse my ignorance, but how exactly is a man who will one day undoubtedly hold the position of Continental Chief of U.N.C.L.E. North America, and thus be accounted as one of the five governing heads of the entire organization, losing any of that?”

“That might be a horizon in the distance on the new road I’ll be traveling soon, but for the moment all I can see is the dead-end on the current road I am traveling now. I suppose it’s easier for you, Illya. Your government leaders say ‘Take the path to which we point’ and you do without any emotional wavering back-and-forth.”

A truly inscrutable expression came over Illya’s countenance then. And, though Napoleon might not be able to interpret it absolutely, he had learned enough of the Kuryakin facial landscape over the years to recognize he had said something thoughtless and unintentionally hurtful.

“I’m sorry, Illya. I didn’t mean that. I know nothing is really that cut-and-dried for you—”

“You don’t have to apologize, Napoleon. In some ways it is indeed that cut-and-dried for me. I signed my contract the minute it was dropped in my in-box over a week ago. I never so much as mulled it over. I just signed because that is what I unconditionally recognize I have to do in my particular situation. Yet life for every human being is nothing more than successfully meeting a series of challenges. And the challenges of my life are undeniably different than the challenges of yours.”

“Do you ever think about it, Illya? I mean not being Section II anymore?” Solo questioned his friend a bit sheepishly. “I know your last contract as an enforcement agent won’t be drawn until next year. Still—”

“I think about it, Napoleon. Now and again, I do think about it.”

“Do you think you’ll be recalled? To Russia?”

Illya slowly shook his head. “Honestly, I don’t. It would be a matter of national prestige for my government to be able to boast an operative on the policymaking side of U.N.C.L.E. Mr. Waverly is well aware of this, as well as the luster having a capable Soviet administrator would add to the multinational reputation of the Command.”

“Meaning he won’t shut you away in a science lab?”

“I’m not fit for such a role, Napoleon. I was a scientist once upon a time. Now theory-bound research is no more than a hobby for me. I am a man accustomed to taking more direct action.”

“And Mr. Waverly will assign you according to those talents.”

“As we both know he will as well assign you.”

“When a door closes, a window opens?”

Illya nodded. “Something like that. Your career in Section II is something of which you can be justly proud, Napoleon. I have myself heard you referred to as the best Chief Enforcement Agent U.N.C.L.E. has ever had. You are not only completely committed to pursuing the Command’s goals, but are as well continually courageous and considerably compassionate in

reaching for those aims. With your innate knack of understanding when to confront, when to cajole, and when to compromise, strategy is your undisputed forte.

“All these qualities,” Illya continued quite matter-of-factly, “make you respected by your superiors, your peers and your subordinates, not to mention your affable personality making you additionally well-liked by them. Thus I have no doubt whatsoever that years from now the same sort of complimentary affirmations will be made with regard to your tenure in Section I.”

Then, lightening the stark seriousness of moment, the junior-officer-by-two-years added, “Though I have absolutely no idea why I am inflating the already enormous girth of your ego by telling you any of this. I must be under the influence of some new Thrush drug.”

At that easy return to friendly and familiar verbal jousting between them, Solo chuckled. “Actually under the influence of a new U.N.C.L.E. drug, tovarisch. We’ve been using you as a guinea pig for buoying the spirits of end-of-term Section II Chief Enforcement Agents. The Section VIII test-tube jockeys figured, if upbeat sentiments were expressed by a dour Russian, it couldn’t help but have a salubrious effect.”

“Cossacks!” played along Kuryakin with a jovial twinkle in his eye.

“Yet now that you have uncovered the scam, I’ll sign off as such a CEA that it all worked exactly as expected,” quipped Napoleon in turn as he broadly scrawled his signature on the final page of the contract before him.

Solo looked back up to see the most unhidden look of satisfaction on the face of his friend. Illya’s pleased visage made Napoleon realize he was the one truly scammed... right out his negative melancholia and back into positive productivity as a confident head of Section II.

“Let’s go get that pre-dinner snack of yours, I. K.,” Napoleon suggested as he stood up from behind his desk, contract in hand.

“And you can deliver that most likely illegibly-inscribed stack of tree pulp to Miss Rogers on the way,” agreed Illya as he too rose from his chair.

“Nicely under the wire,” Napoleon acknowledged readily and without a single iota of anxiety.

As the pair exited the office, Solo queried of his friend, “Illya, have you ever wondered why Mr. Waverly designated May 1st as the ‘drop-dead’ date for the signing of yearly U.N.C.L.E. contracts?”

“That’s simple, Napoleon,” replied Kuryakin knowingly. “He wants us workers to believe we actually possess some leverage in the matter.”

“And we don’t?” Napoleon asked with a slight smile.

Illya shook his head certainly. “Not once you let the politically nonpartisan premise of U.N.C.L.E. inside your soul.”

“Moves right on in there, doesn’t it?”

Now the Russian nodded just as certainly. “And makes itself permanently at home.”

—THE END—

