

THE RAWNESS OF NATURE

BY [LAH](#)

Summer 1966 ***the Florida Everglades***

The man dressed all in green from the hat on his head to the shoes on his feet shooed off his minions with a careless wave of his hand. Like creatures of the earth, they vanished into the surrounding wilderness without so much as a sound.

“I suppose you’re wondering,” the man-in-green forwarded to his two captives, Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin of the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement, each of whom was rope-bound the entire length of his stark-naked body to a separate tree, “why I had you stripped down before having my men tie you up here?”

“Ensuring we had no gadgets to effect an escape of course,” Illya rationally assumed.

“Do we even want to know?” questioned Napoleon straight to the point.

“You city-dwellers are just blind to the sheer spectacle of an awe-inspiring natural masterpiece like the Everglades,” expounded the man-in-green. “But me, I understand such things. Thus I realize, when I intend to leave something in this pristinely raw environment, it should be equally as God made it.”

“Leave something?” Illya picked up on the most relevant part of the spiel.

“Why, yes. I’m going to leave you boys to bask in the glories of nature, and subsequently fulfill the necessary cycle of decay that feeds the future magnificence of this vista.”

“Why am I not surprised?” asked Napoleon.

“No worries though, my fine fellows. You’re near enough to the mangrove swamp that the gators will likely come and finish you off long before you die of exposure or dehydration.”

“How kind of you to take such care in the ecological disposition of our persons,” Illya remarked somewhat sourly.

“I take great pride in my loving respect for the virginal wilderness.”

“Mother Nature is no doubt ecstatic,” Napoleon now remarked in a tone equally as sour as Illya’s.

“Sarcasm isn’t going to rattle me, Mr. Solo. I know my way is to be lauded. Why, I’ve even seen to it that the hemp rope securing you to these sturdy trees is covered with a layer of Spanish moss to make it blend perfectly into the surroundings. So I leave you to listen to the caws of birds and the sluggish murmurs of the waters of the swamp. Surely you could ask for no more peaceful final hours?”

And with that the man-in-green too made his exit as soundlessly as his fellows before him.

“He’s nuts,” complained Napoleon bluntly.

“This is unusual for a Thrush?” countered Illya just as bluntly. “But he was perhaps showing himself less than an environmental genius when he decided upon this moss-covered rope.”

“You think the integrity may be compromised?”

“Very likely.”

“Well, this tree I’m tied to is surrounded by a strangler fig, Illya, which can provide a rough enough surface for me to perhaps abrade through the lashings at some weak point.”

The tree to which Illya was tied was a straight-as-an-arrow black mangrove with no such extra abrasive surface to use against the rope. Mentally acknowledging this fact regarding their individual situations, Napoleon volunteered gamely, “Okay, here goes nothing.”

With that Solo began squirming as much as he could against the tree, searching with his body for some particularly rough point in the envelope of branches twisting around the main trunk. He found one, fortunately or unfortunately, near the back of his left hip. So he wiggled and rubbed his naked backside against that protruding extension of the strangler fig.

“What a premium I could charge the secretarial pool at HQ for a glimpse of this particular shimmy-shake,” Illya teased with a wicked grin.

“No comments from the mangrove forest if you please,” shot back Napoleon.

After about twenty minutes of the “shimmy-shake”, Solo was rewarded as the fibers of the rope gave way. Pushing the remaining cocoon of moss-covered twine from around him with steady (and unintentionally provocative) thrusts of his hips, he managed at last to free himself. Locating a sharp rock nearby, he then set about releasing his partner.

Once the mind-and-body-occupying maneuvers necessary to achieve escape from their bonds were over and done, Napoleon noticed a rather annoying itch all along his back and most particularly on his backside.

“Illya, I think I’m allergic to that tree bark or something. I am itching like crazy.”

“Only to be expected,” came Illya’s unconcerned response. “That tree you were tied to is a poisonwood.”

“A what?” queried Napoleon with a shocked blink.

“A poisonwood: Its bark has the same irritant properties as poison ivy or poison oak.”

“You knew this and never said a word as I intrepidly grazed my bare derriere against that stuff?”

“Napoleon, we had to get free, yes? A rash, therefore, had to be placed well behind in priorities,” gibed the Russian.

“Kuryakin, later I’m going to demonstrate around your neck the techniques employed by the mighty strangler fig.”

“You’ll be far too immersed in getting to the bottom of a hot Epsom-salt bath. Now, let’s find a means for a pair of unequivocally in-the-raw U.N.C.L.E. agents to take civilized leave of the

awe-inspiring raw spectacle of the Everglades. Do you think Spanish moss kilts would make a sufficiently refined fashion statement?"

"Depends entirely how they are draped over the more prominent underpinnings."

—THE END—

