

**Author's Note:** Written for **QuoteME: Challenge 2** on Section VII.

This vignette takes place just after the rescue of Napoleon from the hands of Thrush by Illya leading a Soviet military force in Communist-regimed Czechoslovakia as described in my previous fanfic piece [SUBROGATION OF THE SOUL](#). It would be placed chronologically a few hours after **Act IV** of that piece, and thus before the **Epilogue**.



Friendship needs no words – it is solitude  
delivered from the anguish of loneliness.

*Dag Hammarskjold*

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BY [LAH](#)

**February 1965**  
**Louis Pasteur University Hospital**  
**Košice, Czechoslovakia**

“I will need to question him as soon as possible, comrade,” the captain in the Soviet VDV (Vozdushno-desantnye voyska) bluntly informed fellow Russian Illya Kuryakin.

The man speaking was in command of a company of the U.S.S.R.'s 7th Airborne Corps that had just aided in the incursion, takeover and shutdown of a Thrush operation located in the extensive cave system of the Carpathian Mountains. The man to whom he spoke was a Section II enforcement agent in the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement. And

the man about whom he spoke was also such an agent for U.N.C.L.E.: Napoleon Solo, who had been retrieved from Thrush captivity during the assault on the satrapy.

“Mr. Solo is still under the effects of sedation used to ease his discomfort as his dislocated shoulder was properly repositioned,” Kuryakin put off his persistent countryman for at least the fifth time in the past two hours.

The captain huffed discontentedly. “You cannot shelter this man from the security necessity of interrogation.”

“This man is an U.N.C.L.E. agent,” responded Illya in a huff of his own. “His retrieval was an U.N.C.L.E. operation. The raid on the Thrush stronghold was an U.N.C.L.E. operation. There is thus no ‘security necessity’ to concern the Soviet government in this case.”

“This man is an American,” spat back the captain, barely containing his disdain.

“This man is an U.N.C.L.E. agent,” repeated Illya pointedly. “A well-respected, highly-regarded and somewhat importantly placed U.N.C.L.E. agent. He cannot be treated like an American spy.”

“I do not care about the supposed importance of his position within the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement,” the captain summarily dismissed Illya’s argument. “By nationality, he is an American, an American on Soviet soil.”

“And thus an enemy in your eyes.”

“And I would hope in your eyes as well, comrade,” suggested the captain in no uncertain terms.

“No, in my eyes he is as much my comrade as any man could be. He is willing to lay down his life, not for nationalistic ideals, but for universal ideals.”

“Universal ideals,” the captain scoffed.

“You have no understanding of the Command,” put forth Illya in just as certain terms. “You have no understanding of what those of us dedicated to its ranks of enforcement are asked to sacrifice. You have no understanding there exist realities far more pressing than mere political differences.”

“Comrade Kuryakin,” the captain forwarded unbendingly, “I obeyed orders and allowed you command of the assault on this so-called Thrush satrapy in Slovak Karst. My men should have been as ever under my authority, but my express instructions were to follow your lead. So I did what was required without complaint. I will not, however, concede the right to interrogate this American because you reserve the right to protect your friend.”

Kuryakin’s cool blue eyes seemed to darken to steely gray, as when a storm transforms the dominant color of a usually tranquil sea.

“Comrade Captain,” Illya pronounced each syllable with meticulous distinctness, “you will **not** interrogate Mr. Solo. The ‘right’ I reserve is that of the Command to perform its own debriefings on its operatives after any U.N.C.L.E. mission. I suggest your superiors check with Alexander Waverly about the unqualified application of that particular prerogative.”

And with that definitive end to their discussion, Illya summarily turned his back on the officer in “Uncle Vasya's Troops”<sup>1</sup>.

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### ***Several hours later***

Illya was seated at the hospital bedside of his partner providing Napoleon information about the various arrests of Thrush personnel and the seizure of evidence from the invaded satrapy. Yet he knew Napoleon was only listening with half an ear. Solo’s inward attention was still focused on the sad demise of the young Polish Thrushie with whom he had shared a prison cell.

That inward attention – depression undoubtedly – was the main reason Illya had wanted to spare his friend the strain of an interrogation by Soviet military personnel. It was too soon after the girl’s self-inflicted death to inflict upon the American the stress of an inquisitorial session by any by-the-book representative of a hostile governmental regime.

“So Klara’s mother and sister were both found dead?” queried Napoleon forlornly.

Kuryakin nodded. “Both apparent suicides.”

Napoleon went silent once more, his glumness quite unusual and therefore somewhat jarring to Illya. The Russian didn’t know what to say. He didn’t know how at this moment to ease his friend’s desolation. All he could do was be here; all he could do was not leave Solo alone to drown in the all-too-fresh depths of his grief. And perhaps too it was better not to talk; perhaps too it was better to let Solo have solitude to collect himself. Solitude, but not loneliness in his current heart-weary state.

After what seemed to Illya a very long time, Napoleon finally spoke again.

“I’m not really that out of it, Illya,” he assured the other man. “At least not so out of it that I don’t know what you did for me.”

“I rescued you of course, Napoleon,” stated Kuryakin matter-of-factly. “It was my duty as a fellow U.N.C.L.E. agent. And as well,” Illya softened his clinically detached sentiment to a more emotionally attached one, “I know very well you would do the same for me.”

“Not that, Illya,” contradicted Napoleon.

Illya blinked in definite astonishment at the unanticipated remark. It was true he and Napoleon had gotten into the habit of purposely not thanking each other for every risk one took for the other within the framework of a mission. Still, one did expect such things to be no less appreciated because of habit.

“Well, there is that of course,” Solo reconstructed his response as he gave his partner a somewhat lopsided and conspiratorial smile. “But what I mean is, I know you stood up to the VDV Captain on my behalf. I know you made sure the Soviet military machine didn’t have its probing way with me.”

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<sup>1</sup> The creation of the post-war Soviet Airborne Forces owe much to the efforts of one man, Army General Vasily Filipovich Margelov, so much so that the abbreviation of VDV in the Airborne Forces is sometimes interpreted as “Uncle Vasya's Troops”.

“Oh that,” Illya easily dismissed his perilous championing of U.N.C.L.E.’s rights over those of his own country.

“Yes, that,” confirmed Napoleon. “Might not stand you in good stead with your government, Illya.”

Kuryakin shrugged indifferently. “If I had let him interrogate you, might not have stood me in good stead with your government.”

Solo chuckled, a sound that was pleasing indeed to Illya’s ears. It seemed to signal that his partner would soon enough come out from under the cloud of his current anguished melancholy.

“Touché, tovarisch,” the American saluted his Russian partner.

Illya shrugged once more. “That particular member of my country’s armed forces was trying to invoke rights even the most elite in that state body don’t have with regard to an agent of U.N.C.L.E. So I decided it was time to evoke my personal prerogative.”

“Your personal prerogative?” questioned Napoleon in a bit of confusion.

Illya nodded sagely. “That of a friend,” he explained straight to the point.

Napoleon was quiet again for a long moment and then he said with true gratitude, “Thanks, Illya, for not leaving me alone even when I dispiritedly assume I am.”

There was in that fragment of time nothing more that needed to be said between the two men. So they simply sat together and enjoyed the solitude of being totally separate, completely different ...and yet not.

**—THE END—**

