

SANELY SERENE/SERENELY SANE

BY [LAH](#)

Spring 1964...

Napoleon Solo leaned his arms on the wooden railing and gazed out over the broad expanse of the enclosed herb garden. The day was sunny and warm and the scents drifting in the breeze from the aromatic plants mingled pleasantly with the salt tang from the nearby ocean.

"I could live like this," he remarked to his partner.

"Could you really, Napoleon?" Illya asked in some surprise. "No global wrongs to right? No universal ideals to forward? No adrenaline rush from the insane physical and mental energy it takes to do what we do?"

Napoleon smiled lazily. "Here though lies the sanity of serenity."

The two U.N.C.L.E. agents had just successfully completed a mission in this seaside Long Island hamlet during which this impressive stonework country house with its well-tended acreage had served as an undercover headquarters. On the whole Napoleon's current tasks for the Command ran true to his name, involving solo assignments. But sometimes Mr. Waverly saw fit to provide his top agent backup, and Illya Kuryakin was truly pleased to have been put in that position on this particular project. He and Solo worked well as a team, their skills complimenting each other's, and the comfortableness between them made it easy for them to split responsibilities as best suited to an active operation.

Illya had only been stationed in the New York headquarters of U.N.C.L.E. for a couple of years. Being a Soviet in the United States was proving an adjustment, but from the beginning the dark-haired man who now stood beside him had offered friendship. And Illya had welcomed that offering once he had overcome his initial suspicion as to why such was being tendered to him by an American.

Not quite a year ago Solo had been promoted into the position of Number 1 in Section II North America. It was a prestigious post and one accounted well deserved by all but a jealous few within the organization. Now rumors had started flying that Mr. Waverly, the Section I Number 1 of the North American division of the Command, was considering Napoleon as his own eventual successor.

"Napoleon," Illya began cautiously, "what if... well... if Mr. Waverly decides to groom you to succeed him..."

"Secret, Illya?"

"I've successfully kept many in my time," Illya responded with a small smirk.

"He's already decided. He talked to me before we left for this mission; asked me to mull over the possibility carefully as he wouldn't force me into anything."

Illya was silent for a long moment, digesting this new reality. With more managerial seasoning, Napoleon would make a first-rate Continental Chief; Illya had no doubt of that. And Solo had a good number of years yet in the field in Section II to gain in organizational experience as Chief

of Enforcement. Yet this was a decision with a lot of consequences and thus Napoleon would have to seriously weigh all the pros and cons.

Breaking through his own natural reserve with regard to physical contact, Illya gently placed a hand on his friend's forearm. "You know there can be no life like this," he reminded the other man as he made a sweeping gesture with his free arm, "if you say yes."

Napoleon nodded. "I know."

The two men spoke no more on the subject, though uncharacteristically Illya kept his fingers lightly clasped around Napoleon's forearm, silently offering him support in whatever his ultimate decision on the matter might be.

Spring 1974...

In January 1973, Napoleon Solo retired from the field as an enforcement agent. He was immediately promoted into Section I and put in charge of the Command's auxiliary Los Angeles office. He remained in that position until September of that same year when he was reassigned as head of the subsidiary office in Rome, Italy.

Meanwhile Illya Kuryakin was moved from New York to Belgrade in Yugoslavia to serve as head of Section II in that small ancillary office. He remained in that position until he too retired from the field at the end of 1973. He then returned to New York and was promoted into his new position of Number 1 in Section III North America.

Napoleon was brought back to New York in March 1974 while final arrangements were made to accommodate the changeover in upper-management power within the American division of the Command from Waverly to Solo. Today, 16 months after he had left the field, Napoleon Solo was officially taking over as Number 1 in Section I of the North American division of U.N.C.L.E. with Illya Kuryakin as his second.

Standing within the familiar confines of the Continental Chief's office, Napoleon attempted to wrap his mind around the fact this was now **his** personal domain. He realized somewhere on the periphery of his consciousness that he'd need to embellish the rooms with a few personal touches to bring the reality fully into practical application.

"Brooding or daydreaming?" asked Illya as he walked unexpectedly through the auto-opening pneumatic door.

"Wondering how you got past my armed assistant," answered Napoleon with a wry smile.

Illya smirked. "Miss Rogers considered me safe enough to pass through unannounced."

"So much for increased security measures about my person," Napoleon noted with a small chuckle.

The gaze of each man caught and held that of other and the expressions on their faces turned deadly serious. Though neither voiced the sentiment, they both realized that indeed today marked a new phase in their working relationship. No longer field partners who needed to succeed within specific parameters on assigned missions, they were now both administrative

chiefs who must focus their attentions on the overall goals and good of the Command as an international entity.

A bit awkwardly Kuryakin moved a large if relatively flat parcel he carried from under his arm into his hands. "I brought you a gift. To decorate your new office."

Accepting the package, Napoleon settled it on the nearby desk as he tore open the brown paper wrapping. That action revealed a stylishly framed and matted 11x13 color photograph of a stone house surrounded by a railed herb garden overlooking the sea.

"You remember?" questioned Illya softly.

"I remember: where I pondered the sanity of serenity and decided only U.N.C.L.E. could offer the serenity of sanity."

"No regrets, Napoleon?"

"No regrets, Illya."

Illya smiled then, one of his exceedingly rare full smiles. "We will keep the world sane, my friend."

Napoleon now smiled one of his familiar brilliant smiles, the one that crinkled the corners of his eyes in pleasure. They had been the best team in their enforcement-agent past and they would be the best team in their operations-managerial future. "Indeed **we** will, tovarisch."

Then Napoleon moved closer to his friend and embraced him in a strong bear hug to which Illya contentedly and without a hint of reserve responded in kind.

—THE END—

