

Author's Note: This story was written for the **Mood-Y: Challenge 1** on **LiveJournal's Section VII**.
The key mood is: **Sentimental**.

References in this tale are both to my fanfic story [THE CINDERFELLA AFFAIR](#) and to the MFU series episode **THE TERBUF AFFAIR**.



The world is neither wise nor just, but it makes up for all its folly and injustice by being damnably sentimental.

Thomas Huxley

REMINISCENCES AND RECOGNITIONS

BY [LAH](#)

Valentine's Day
February 1965

"I am so looking forward to our date tonight, sweetheart," Napoleon Solo all but cooed into the telephone receiver. "Of course you are my valentine," he guaranteed after a brief pause where a question had obviously been asked of him by the undoubted lovely on the other end of the wire.

"At least for this year," thought Illya Kuryakin a bit sarcastically as he waited, somewhat less than patiently, for his partner to finish his private phone tête-à-tête with whatever willing female

was occupying his romantic interests at the moment. He rapped smartly on the surface of the CEA's desk in an attempt to bring his superior's focus back to business.

Solo put up one index finger, indicating it would be just a minute longer before his U.N.C.L.E. partner would have his full attention. Kuryakin gave a characteristic eye-roll as he resumed his silent waiting. Yet he couldn't help but feel as if something was up with his partner. It was virtually unheard-of for Solo to continue a personal call when the details of an upcoming mission needed speedy discussion and strategic decisions.

"See you at eight then, honey. Keep the good champagne chilled and your luscious self warm," Napoleon finalized his nighttime rendezvous with an easy smile. That easy smile faded as if by magic though as he hung up the phone and picked up the mission file lying open on his desk.

"This looks straightforward enough," the Number 1 in Section II commented to his Number 2. "We go in, grab the plans, and make a hasty retreat. Of course we'll likely have to put some unruly birds out of the way in the interim," he continued speaking in breakneck haste as he dropped the folder back on his desktop and leaned over it, further scanning the contents. "Now, if we..."

Napoleon continued chattering a mile a minute. Not at all his usual MO. The CEA was nothing if not laid-back and confident with regard to any assignment. Thus a simple dialog concerning a mission setup wasn't something that should set him off on an intensely supersonic momentum. He seemed... frenetic. Yes, that was the right term for Solo's current state.

"Whoa, whoa, Napoleon, slow down and breathe!" Illya finally inserted a remark into the thus far very one-sided exchange.

"We need to get these plans finalized, Illya," noted Napoleon as he glanced quickly back up at his partner and then immediately back down at the file, his overly hyped-up state not relaxing at all. "So let's consider what—"

"Time!" interjected Illya as he put up the sports signal for a time-out, the palm of one hand extended flat out above the upright fingers of the other in a T-formation.

"I thought you were impatient to get this done?" goaded an obviously exasperated Solo as he gazed over at Kuryakin once more.

"I was impatient to get your attention back on U.N.C.L.E. matters and away from personal concerns," conceded Illya. "But you don't have to wind yourself up into manic mode."

"I'm not."

"You are. And I would like to understand why. This mission is, as you already mentioned, fairly routine."

"Nothing is ever routine with U.N.C.L.E.," countered Napoleon, an edge of sullenness surprisingly evident in his voice.

"Does that remark have some special meaning?"

"Why would it? It's a fairly routine remark."

“Not from you.”

“Well, excuse me for being human, Illya. I didn’t realize that was a condition I was expected to forego as head of Section II.”

“That’s it!” decided Illya firmly as he held out one hand, upraised palm forward. “You are going to explain to me what is currently going on inside your head. Now.”

Leaning back in his chair and steeping his fingers near his lips, Napoleon stared uncompromisingly at the other man. He was obviously trying to decide what course of action was warranted in these particular circumstances. Illya was his friend, but he was also his subordinate. So where did the boundaries of friendship end and those strictly of authority take over? Finally he asked, “What do you know about my once-upon-a-time marriage?”

“I know it was part of a mission scenario.”

Solo nodded shortly. “My first real solo mission,” he added with an ironic smirk at the play on his own name.

Now it was Kuryakin who nodded. “I know that too,” he admitted.

Napoleon eyed the other man assessingly. “You’ve read the mission report from that affair, haven’t you?”

“I appreciate that it is highly classified,” hedged Illya.

“But somehow you’ve managed to lay eyes on it.”

Illya shrugged. “I have some advocates in convenient places.”

“Waverly?” questioned Solo with ready perception.

“When you and I became full-time partners, he did provide me access to some... recommended reading.”

“I just bet he did. The Old Man is nothing if not a brilliant tactician.”

“He paired us as a team; so I have to agree,” teased Illya with a one of his customary half-smiles.

That brought a brief responding smile from Napoleon before his hazel eyes took on a faraway look. “I really liked her, you know: Abriana, the Grand Princess of Nascoste. I didn’t love her of course, but I really did like her.”

“Why shouldn’t you? To my knowledge she is a very likeable woman.”

“She was very young... then.”

“So were you. Just twenty-two, weren’t you?”

Napoleon nodded absently. "I was indeed twenty-two, ten years ago when a rather unanticipated task was set for me by the Command. Ten years ago this month. Ten years ago this very day."

"Ah," comprehended his partner.

"Clara and I," Solo referenced his long-ago lady-love who Illya had encountered during his partner's private undertaking in Terbuf some months before, "had just initiated a relationship. I mean a romantic relationship," he clarified. "We had been friends for years, but that was to be our first Valentine's Day as a couple."

"Until U.N.C.L.E. made a request."

"I wasn't permitted... I couldn't..." stumbled out Napoleon. "I didn't explain anything to Clara. I cancelled our date for that evening and immediately boarded a flight to Rome to connect on to the capital city of Nascoste. Clara only learned about my subsequent engagement to the Grand Princess through newspaper stories. And then she watched the television newsreel footage of the royal wedding a few months later. All without a word of explanation from me."

"You had your orders, Napoleon."

"Yes, I had my orders," agreed the other man somewhat bitterly. "Those orders were to make the Grand Princess fall in love with me. And I carried out that directive with gusto. As Waverly foresaw, that directive was a natural fit for my... particular talents."

"Napoleon—" Illya attempted to assuage what he assumed was the other man's guilt.

Solo put forward his hands, separated with palms facing one another, in a gesture that clearly read his partner was not to make any endeavor to reassure or comfort him.

"Her Gracious Highness fell hard for me. I made unequivocally certain of it. So in the end I wound up not just piercing Clara straight through the heart with an emotional dagger, but doing the exact same thing to Abriana too."

Illya didn't know what to say to that and his instincts told him that in this situation the best approach was to say nothing at all.

"You know what the worse of it is?" resumed Napoleon after several unnaturally long and unmistakably silent moments had passed. "I do realize that I should feel shame for doing that to them both. But I can't. I can't because I patently recognize there was nothing else to be done. No other workable scenario to right a situation that desperately needed righting."

"Yet you hold on to personal culpability," observed Illya.

"That is an persistent ache of which my heart will never be free," Napoleon accepted the inevitable. "Guess that makes me a sentimental fool," he added with a rueful twist of his lips.

"Sentimental? Undoubtedly. But a fool?" Illya slowly shook his head. "Never. It simply means you have a finely-honed sense of conscience, my friend, and that's pretty much essential to be one of those fighting the good fight."

Both men were quiet then, each mulling through the realities and the sacrifices of what they did for a living, of the world for which they took so much responsibility upon themselves to keep balanced toward the good.

“I’ll never marry again,” Napoleon found himself sharing with amazing candor, even considering it was his best friend to whom he was making this startling revelation.

Taken somewhat aback, Illya countered, “You think that now.”

Solo decidedly shook his head. “I don’t think that, tovarisch; I know it. I already have a wife, you see. Her rather ungainly name is the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement. So I’ll have my passionate flings with this or that accommodating lady and thoroughly enjoy every nuance of them I will confess. Yet in the end I’ll stay true to my one wife for my soul is bound to her forever.”

And to that particular sentiment Illya patently recognized there was indeed no consoling reflection that could honestly be made.

—THE END—

