

**Author's Note:** Written for the [HODOWE: SWEETEST DAY Challenge](#) in [LiveJournal's Section VII](#) community.



I think about you. But I don't say it anymore.

*Marguerite Duras*

## **SWEETEST THOUGHTS, BITTEREST CERTAINTIES**

BY [LAH](#)

### **Autumn 1970**

The October day was fine: the air was fresh, the temperature crisp and the sunshine bright. All in all, a perfect representation of the glories of the fall season. Within the New York headquarters of the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement, the Chief of Enforcement, Napoleon Solo, was brightening the day even further for the numerous female

employees with the personal delivery of a small box of chocolates and a single long-stemmed yellow rose, each such gift presented with a brief but sweet kiss on the cheek. Illya Kuryakin, Solo's field agent partner, rolled his eyes as he witnessed the procedure repeated several times along with the hackneyed phrase "Sweets for the sweet."

"Napoleon, can't you come up with something at least a little more original?" he finally voiced his complaint.

"Why? It's Sweetest Day and the sentiment fits the occasion," challenged Solo with an amiable smile.

"And what kind of holiday is that, I ask you? You know of course it was created to serve the self-interests of the candy companies in this country? Capitalistic nonsense!" came Illya's final assessment.

"The ladies enjoy the attention, and frankly I enjoy providing it. Anyone ever tell you that you can be something of a curmudgeon, IK?"

Illya crossed his arms in front of his chest in a very familiar gesture. "Apparently you just did," he noted sarcastically to his partner.

Napoleon laughed lightly. "Yes, apparently, I did."

"When you are quite finished providing your sweetest attentions to the ladies here in HQ," stated Kuryakin pointedly, "I will be waiting in your office. We have some security details to go over before Mr. Waverly heads off to Geneva day-after-tomorrow on his junket to the United Nations."

Napoleon nodded. "Will meet up with you there in about twenty minutes," he acknowledged before striding gallantly, sack of boxed chocolates in hand and cluster of sunny roses tucked under one arm, toward the Translation Department and its several female operatives.

As Illya entered Solo's office and seated himself in the guest chair before the CEA's desk, his gaze caught on a stash of flowers lying in an open florist box. At first he thought it was just more of Napoleon's supply for U.N.C.L.E.'s female employees here in New York, until he realized these blooms were different. Napoleon had been handing out cheery yellow roses, signifying affectionate friendship, to the gals of HQ. But here were blossoms of a totally different hue, perhaps two-dozen of them. Yes: two dozen – all of a very delicate shade of lavender. In the back of his mind he recalled something he had read once about lavender roses being used to express love at first sight or the eternal bonds of the enchantment of such love.

"These must have cost a fortune," he thought admonishingly, censorious of such extravagance expended for what he considered a manufactured holiday.

Napoleon's entrance curtailed his thoughts on the flora and the two settled down to planning security measures for Mr. Waverly while he was in Geneva. This was to be a trip of only a few days' duration and the Northwest Continental Chief would travel to and fro in the safety of U.N.C.L.E.'s own private jet. Yet protection arrangements within the hotel where Waverly would be staying had to be finalized, as well as all the safekeeping necessities of the ground transportation betwixt the airport, hotel and U.N. headquarters.

“That’s that,” concluded Napoleon once all the plans were settled and set down in writing to both their liking. “I’ll advise the security team on the decided procedures.”

“We should get to the hotel some hours in advance to make sure everything is in order,” suggested Illya.

“We’ll fly out tomorrow rather than the day after with the Old Man,” agreed Solo with a nod. “I know we have the field office checking things out, but nonetheless I think it wise we do a final inspection ourselves.”

“Can never be too careful,” approved the other agent.

“But that’s tomorrow,” finalized Napoleon as he rose from his chair, “and for the rest of today, I have plans. So I’ll meet you at the airport in the morning, tovarisch.”

Solo closed the long box of roses that had been sitting open on his desk and slipped it protectively under his arm.

“Who are those for?” questioned Illya out of curiosity.

“Just someone,” was the only response Napoleon deigned to give, and that vague response set off alarm bells in the mind of Illya Kuryakin. For Napoleon Solo was never secretive about his casual amours, not even when they involved enemy agents like Angelique or Serena.

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Clara Valdar née Richards stared at the man seated opposite her. He still could move her, but she had moved on. She didn’t know how to take this gesture of his. The box of lavender roses with which he had gifted her lay open between them on the little café table, in some ways a barrier of sorts with regard to what had been and what now was. They sat at an outside table and perhaps it was a bit brisk to share coffee and pastries outdoors. Yet Clara had jumped at the opportunity to sit here in the open on this pleasant autumnal day, away from any secluded nooks and crannies within the restaurant itself.

“How did you know I was in town, Napoleon?” she asked.

“I still have some mutual contacts,” he conceded.

“My parents told you,” she concluded certainly.

“I remain in their good graces,” admitted Napoleon a bit sheepishly.

“And will always, no doubt. They desperately wanted us to wed, and they certainly never approved of my marrying Stefan and moving to Europe,” she expounded somewhat resignedly.

“Read the card in the flowers, Clara,” prompted Napoleon with a sentimental little half-smile.

Reluctantly Clara lifted the tiny card and read what was written on its faintly pink, opalescent cardboard surface. As if her fingertips had been burned by the message, she quickly dropped the card back amidst the blooms.

“Napoleon, did my parents bother to tell you why I am in New York?” she wanted to know.

Napoleon frowned. “Something about seeing a doctor, a specialist. You’re not ill, are you, Clara?” he questioned with real concern.

She shook her head. “No, not ill.” Then she sighed. She had to tell him this, hard as it might be for him to hear. “Stefan and I have been seriously trying to have a child. In fact for several years now. But things haven’t worked out and I heard about fertility treatments here in the States that have had quite a good success rate for women with my particular condition.”

Napoleon’s face went very still. “I see,” was all he said.

“I hope you do,” she stated with real feeling as she instinctively reached across the table and placed one hand on the one of his that rested there. “I am truly touched that I’ve remained in your thoughts, affectionately it would seem. I never want you to lose that sweetness with regard to the memories between us, Napoleon. They will always be sweet to me too. And I really want you to understand that.”

Napoleon smiled gently. “But what’s past is prologue. I do understand, Clara. Really, I do.”

No more on this was said between them as they finished their shared repast while in engaging in only blasé conversation.

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“Why would you give her roses?” demanded Illya bluntly. “Particularly lavender roses, if you catch my drift. And you being you, I’m sure you do.”

Napoleon stared at him with open shock. “You followed me?”

Illya didn’t answer directly. After all, he knew that perhaps he shouldn’t have trailed Napoleon, that perhaps he shouldn’t have made like a spy and shadowed his own partner to his rendezvous with his old flame. Yet he also knew Clara Valdar had absolutely no qualms about using Napoleon Solo for her own ends. He had personally witnessed that in Terbuf. And he also knew how susceptible Solo was to her wiles. Now Kuryakin stood uninvited in Solo’s apartment wanting assurance that Napoleon wasn’t being lured in again by this woman.

“You can berate me later,” Illya told the other man in no uncertain terms. “Now I want an answer to my question.”

“You don’t have any right to an answer to that question!” spat back Napoleon through clenched teeth, his voice taking on that measured tone and cadence Kuryakin knew all too well signaled the other man’s true anger.

“No, I don’t have any right,” conceded Illya. “But if she twists you around her little finger again, it will more than likely be me that has to pick up the pieces she leaves behind in the wake of her attractively retreating backside.”

Napoleon took a deep calming breath. “There won’t be any twisting around any fingers. She is here to get fertility treatments, so to start a family with her husband.”

“And are you hoping you will be the fertility treatment of choice?”

Now Solo didn’t hold back his rage. He swung – his fist clenched tight – and hit Kuryakin square on the jaw, knocking him to the floor.

Illya remained prone for a good minute or two, silently working his offended jaw. He had deserved that punch. He knew he had. Sometimes his own indignation let his tongue get away from him.

"I'm sorry, my friend," he apologized sincerely to Solo as he sat up at last. "I just don't want to see you hurt again."

Napoleon nodded somewhat morosely and then sat down cross-legged on the floor beside his colleague-in-arms and comrade-in-soul. "Why can the past always manage to tempt us with such an enticing siren song?" he asked earnestly. "Even when we know it's just an echo that isn't real any longer?"

"Precisely because it is just an echo," responded Illya thoughtfully, "and thereby any off-key notes lose clarity."

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On September 1st, 1971, in a hospital in Rome, Italy, Clara Valdar née Richards gave birth to a healthy 6 lb. 2 oz. baby boy she and her husband, Stefan Valdar, named Jacques. Whether the meaning of supplanter that name carried as part of its history was purposely chosen or even known by the babe's mother was a secret that would never be shared by Clara even within the defensive shelter of her own mind.

—THE END—

