

## WE ARE WHAT WE LIVE (PART 1: “A JOB ONLY A MADMAN OR SADOMASOCHIST WOULD DO”)

BY [WENDIEZ](#)

**Author’s Note:** *A sequel to the fourth season episode “The Gurnius Affair”. Illya has had to do one of the worst things an agent could ever be forced to: for the sake of the mission, he tortured his partner. Solo holds no animosity for the deed, but the pragmatic Russian can’t seem to find the justification for it. If Napoleon cannot persuade his private partner to talk about what is troubling him, Mr. Waverly will order him into the hands of the UNCLE psychiatrists, and perhaps, out of the field.*

**Act I: “The mission comes first.”**

**Room 312 in a hotel somewhere in San Rico...**

“Are you sure you wouldn’t like to sample the local nightlife with Terry and me?” Napoleon Solo called from the bathroom. A towel girded the handsome dark-haired agent about the hips and he deftly glided a razor across his lathered chin.

Illya Kuryakin sat, one leg crossed over the other, in a wooden and upholstered accent chair at the open balcony doors, facing outward and overlooking the street. “Yes, I’m sure,” he said, without turning his head, his chin resting on the knuckles of one hand.

Napoleon studied his partner from the doorway of the bathroom. The characteristically reserved Russian had been silent for most of the return trip back to the hotel. Solo thought, at first, the Nazi-like uniform Kuryakin wore was the impetus for the moodiness, but when a change of clothes had been found for him, it failed to draw him out. “You okay?” he queried, though he was reasonably certain of the answer.

The answer was short, clipped and somewhat terse. “Yes.”

Napoleon stepped out into the room to dress into the carefully laid-out clothing on the bed. “Would you mind if I closed the balcony doors? We may be several floors up, but I still have my modesty.”

A soft snort of a laugh from the occupant of the chair told Solo, he had managed to wedge a small opening in the closed door of his friend’s demeanor.

“What? Was that a snicker I heard? A hint of a chuckle?”

Illya looked over at Napoleon, expressionless. “More like a gag reflex. A completely involuntary response.”

“Right. Look, Illya, I know you’re stewing about something.”

“Perhaps. But if I was, it’s not something I want to talk about right now.”

“I understand. This was a rough mission, for both of us. I don’t want to even think about most of it until we’re back in New York.”

“Agreed.”

“So, why are you sitting there, staring out the window, brooding, when you could be out having a good time? A couple of margaritas and you’ll forget what it was you were trying to forget.”

“I am not in a ‘going-out’ mood. Since we weren’t able to find the suitcase I brought along, these—” he gestured at his over-sized khakis, “—are the extent of my wardrobe. I would prefer not to sample the local nightlife in someone else’s cast-offs. It’s bad enough I have to wear them tomorrow to pick up my replacement credentials and passport.”

“When did you become such a clothes-horse?”

Illya stood up and closed the balcony doors. “Get dressed for your date, Napoleon. I don’t want to go out and I don’t want to talk. What I do want to do is go down to the bar and acquire some liquid refreshment for the evening. I can assure you I will be quite placid by the time you return from your tryst with Miss Cook; that is, *if* you return.” The blond-haired agent walked past his companion and out the door without another word.

The dark-haired agent sighed heavily and began to dress.

Solo was putting the final touches on his ascot tie when he heard the key in the door and Kuryakin entered, bottle in hand. Napoleon noted as he turned his head, that the Russian had not brought a glass with him. “No dinner?” he asked quietly.

Illya lifted the bottle of amber-red liquid.

The senior agent made a face. “I don’t think I want to be around you tomorrow.”

The bottle made a sharp sound as it was set rather heavily onto the table. “Your prerogative.”

“You’re in a hell of a mood. Can I trust you here by yourself?”

“This isn’t the first time I’ve polished off a bottle on my own. Think of it as Russian-style debriefing.”

“We *are* going to talk about this when we get back home.” It was not a question.

Illya nodded slowly. “But tonight it has to go away. And I have to be alone. Please, don’t push any further.”

Napoleon conceded. “All right, but promise me one thing.”

“I know. I’ll be right where I’m expected to be. In the bathtub, on my side. I rarely throw up when I’m drunk.”

“There’s always the chance that it’s one of those times. I’d hate to have to tell Waverly of your demise by attempted self-embalming.”

Illya turned his back on his friend and headed towards the bathroom. “I need a shower.”

“You took one before I did.”

“Well, I need another one.”

Napoleon stared after him, even after the door closed and he heard the sound of running water. The man he called partner, friend, *brother*, was deeply troubled, but he knew that the man's ethnicity would not allow him to open up until he had weathered what was bound to be a wretched night of alcohol-dampening a dark Russian mood. Solo hoped he would be able to charm Terry Cook into accommodations in her room.

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Illya stepped out of the shower stall, briskly rubbing the cotton towel over his wet arms, and caught his reflection in the mirror above the washbowl. His skin was flushed bright pink from the hot water, but he thought he could still detect the ugly prosthetic scar. His hand reached up to touch his right cheek and met moist, smooth skin. He remembered hastily ripping the thing from his cheek as they escaped the mountaintop rubble that had been Gurnius' installation. Why, then did he still see it in the mirror?

*You are over-tired, Illya Nickovetch*, he said silently to the face in the mirror. You need to sleep.

*I can't. I'm afraid of the nightmares*, the reflection answered.

*Nightmares are tricks of the subconscious mind. They're not real.*

*They are the ghosts of the past that haunt us when we are fragile. Like now.*

*We are not fragile—!* He protested angrily to the mirror.

But the mirror replied, *We tortured Napoleon to his physical limits. And a part of us reveled in it.*

Illya grabbed the washbowl with both hands, knuckles white. No! his mind screamed. He looked up into the mirror again—and saw the palest trace of Nexor's scar on his right cheek. "No—" he whispered as his right hand rose to cover half of his face. He turned from the mirror. In his line of sight, the bottle of rum waited for him, the bedroom light reflected in the clear, rosy golden liquid. There was more than enough there to obliterate the vilest of nightmares.

He walked purposefully across the room, ignoring his state of undress, and reached for the neck of the bottle. In a moment, he had disposed of the cork and swallowed a deep draft of the contents, comforted by the harsh burn of the liquid in his throat that brought tears to his eyes and nearly took his breath away. "There will be no haunting tonight—" he murmured fiercely and drank deeply once more.

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Napoleon put his key in the lock of his hotel room and turned the key. He looked over at Terry Cook, stylishly attired in a locally purchased white linen sundress. "Illya's liable to be rather surly, especially since he not only missed breakfast but also his appointment with Julio Martinez for his IDs. He was in one of his dismal Russian moods last night and was determined to down a fifth of rum."

"A fifth?" Terry exclaimed. "Why, that'd kill him! Wouldn't it?"

"That's why I'm checking on him. It's not like him to miss a meet, especially one he set up." He opened the door to enter and immediately pulled it shut again, when he saw the occupant of the bed. "Ah, Terry? I think you'd better go back to your room. Mr. Kuryakin isn't exactly in a condition to entertain guests right now."

"Is he all right?"

“Well, he appears to be, but if we went in right now, I believe you’d be seeing a little more of him than he would be comfortable showing you.”

“You mean he’s naked, huh?” Terry replied, grinning slyly.

Solo sighed heavily. “As a jaybird. Do you mind?”

“Well, I suppose not. Though, it might be fun to see his face when he wakes up and sees me standing there.”

“Trust me, Terry. Fun is the last thing it would be. Run along, now. I’ll pick you up for lunch.”

Napoleon waited until Terry had turned the corner before opening the door again. The Russian lay prone on the mattress, legs sprawled in awkward positions, one arm twisted across the width of the mattress. The other hand was under the pillow with his head. It was definitely not a position conducive to a good night’s sleep.

Solo gave his partner a back-handed slap to the bare buttocks. “Time to get up, sleepyhead.”

The hand under the pillow moved and a moment later, Napoleon was looking down the barrel of a Walther P38. A harsh voice, thick with displeasure and languor accompanied the weapon. “Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t put a bullet between your eyes.”

Solo tempered his own annoyance. “I’ll give you three. Number One, I’m your partner; Number Two, I’m your superior; and Number Three, in your condition, you couldn’t put a bullet into the wall. Rum is definitely not your spirit, my friend.”

Kuryakin lowered the gun and slowly pulled himself up to sit on the edge of the bed. “Rum was all they had,” he mumbled numbly. “What time is it?”

“Almost eleven-thirty. Terry and I—”

Illya shot up from the bed. “*Hooy na postnom maslye!*<sup>1</sup>” he spat vehemently and bounded towards the bathroom.

Napoleon followed him. “Illya, it’s okay! I took care of it! I got your papers!” He stopped short when he saw his friend staring blankly at the remains of the bathroom mirror and the shards of glass strewn on the floor and in the washbowl. “What happened here? Are you cut anywhere?” He ran a quick scan over the Russian’s body, but saw no blood. “Talk to me, partner.”

There was a sigh and the voice that responded was subdued. “Actually, I’m at a loss to explain this for the moment.”

“There’s bottle glass in the sink, too. I’ve never known you to be a violent or angry drunk. But obviously, someone was both last night.” He eyed his partner critically. “Any thoughts?”

Kuryakin stared at the destruction for long moments, his face, a mask. Then he shook his head slowly. “I should find a broom and pan to clean this up. Inform the front desk, and pay for the damage.”

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<sup>1</sup> A very vulgar way of saying: Shit!

“Damn straight you’re paying for the damage. But, I’d like you to open a door a little too. This mission, it really tore a hole into you, didn’t it?”

“Evidently, more than even I realized.” He took a deep breath. “I don’t remember doing this.”

“You were blind drunk, that’s why.”

“I don’t think I was. I had had a fair portion of the bottle, but it was quickly losing its appeal.”

“So you got mad at the rum for not being vodka. I’d call that—” He gestured at the broken glass “—over-reacting. Which also isn’t like you. What was it about this mission that’s got you tied up in knots inside? Is it because you had to torture me? That I might hold that against you, against our friendship?”

“And this isn’t the time to be having this discussion. You said so yourself last night.”

“That was before I saw your artwork in here. Maybe now *is* the time to clear the air about a few things before they have a chance to do more harm.”

Illya shook his head. “I can’t do this now. We have other obligations to finish first; return Miss Cook to the U.S. and report to Mr. Waverly.”

“Terry’s a big girl. She can leave without our escort. She *got* here without an escort. And we’ll just tell Waverly we need a day or two to finish up.”

“And I can wear the same clothes for two more days—”

Napoleon smiled. “Well, right now, you’re not wearing *any* clothes.”

“I’ll get dressed in a minute. Napoleon, I really would rather finish the mission and go home. Then talk.”

“Are you sure? You have me a little worried.”

“Yes, I’m sure and you do not need to worry.”

“Okay, we’ll do it your way, but I do want to tell you one thing: I know you did what you had to do for the mission. And it *is*, first and foremost, about the mission.”

Kuryakin nodded. “The mission comes first.” He turned from his partner to find his clothing. However, when they were out of sight of each other’s faces, both scowled deeply and thought how wrong that statement was in practice.

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## **Act II: “His current report is a very dry read.”**

If Napoleon had not known otherwise, he could have sworn that the conversation between him and his somber partner earlier that morning had been a hallucination. The blond-haired Russian did not seem the least bit hung-over, ate his lunch with his usual enthusiasm, and was actually charming towards Terry. Solo studied the pair as they conversed about cameras and photography. The diversity of his partner’s knowledge never ceased to amaze him for Illya seemed versed in everything from subatomic particles to current women’s fashions. Napoleon

suspected the interest in photography to be a hold-over from the time when Kuryakin had been seeing quite a bit of Marion Raven, an innocent from several years ago. As always, however, the job came first, and Marion eventually went the way of many an agent's love interest.

"You know, Illya," Terry said with one of her impish grins, "I really can't get over how much you looked like that awful Colonel Nexor, especially when you were dressed up in his uniform."

"That was the intention when I was impersonating him," Illya answered noncommittally and looked up, catching Solo's eye for an instant. *Stop this—now, please—*

Napoleon picked up the pitcher of lemonade in the center of the table and filled Terry's glass. "Illya and I have a rule between us that we never discuss a mission until we first put it down on paper. That way we don't influence each other's viewpoints." He turned his head and received a grateful half-smile for the untruth.

Illya held out his glass for the last of the lemonade. "What time did you say our flight was, Napoleon?"

"Three o'clock," Solo reminded him, even though he knew his partner was fully aware of their departure time. The object was to keep Terry from venturing back to details on the mission. "I think we might have a little time to do some last-minute souvenir shopping, don't you think, Illya?"

Kuryakin nodded. "It will give me a chance to find some suitable clothes to wear on the plane, so I don't look quite so much like your poor immigrant cousin. I'll meet you back at the hotel in an hour." He drained his glass and excused himself from the table.

After a minute of watching the lithe, blond agent saunter up the street, Napoleon felt a tug on his jacket sleeve. Terry was looking at him questioningly. "He's all right," he said, trying not to give her cause to doubt his word.

"Of course he is, Napoleon," she said casually, sipping her lemonade. Then her tone became hard. "I was in that room, too, Napoleon, and scared out of my mind. I saw his face when he was doing what he did to you. And it wasn't the face of your friend; it was Col. Nexor."

Solo was irritated. "And if it hadn't been for my *friend*, we wouldn't be here talking about him. He not only saved your life, and mine, *again*, he saved the world, *again*. I think he's allowed to have his moods."

"I'm going to be glad to get back to my photography," Terry mused wistfully, running her finger over the rim of her glass of lemonade.

Napoleon took a deep drink and wished the lemonade had been a pitcher of *Tom Collins*<sup>2</sup>.

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Illya was in the lobby of the hotel, reading the local newspaper when Napoleon and Terry returned from souvenir hunting. Even behind the newspaper, Napoleon could see that his partner had chosen to spurge a little when selecting his attire. "What's new?" the senior agent asked indicating the paper.

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<sup>2</sup> A tall drink of the 60s made with lemon juice, sugar and gin.

The younger agent folded the newsprint carefully before he stood up. "There's a Jai Alai match tonight. If we were staying an extra day, it would have been interesting to see it."

Napoleon smiled at the casual slacks in a beige linen and the cornflower-blue short-sleeved straight-hemmed shirt. "I approve of the attire. You had help?"

Kuryakin chuckled. "I knew you were going to ask me that. Actually, I did happen upon a helpful sales clerk who recommended these items. She said the shirt brought out the color of my eyes." He looked at Terry, who was staring back at him with a rapt expression, and raised his eyebrows.

Napoleon also looked at Terry. "Your clerk knew what she was about, my friend," he said and turned back to his partner. The playfully smug expression on the Russian's lips made Solo roll his eyes. "Though I kind of liked those baggy khakis."

"Since you lost all of my clothes, I'm going to let you reimburse me for these. I lost one of my best black turtlenecks."

"It's a shame you only have five more in your drawer at home. Besides, I'm not the one who lost your clothes. The car you had them in went up with the mountain."

Kuryakin waved him off and sat down again. "Never mind. Anyway, I'm 'packed', essentially, and I plan to continue reading my newspaper while you and Miss Cook gather your belongings." He opened the paper, crossed his leg, and began to scan the newsprint once more.

Napoleon stared down at him for a moment, confused about the man who looked like his partner, but was not acting very much like the dour Russian he usually was. Then Terry grabbed his arm and he had to follow her to the stairwell.

Solo had little time to observe his friend on the flight back to New York City, for the plane was full after the stop in Miami and they had not been able to book three seats near each other. Napoleon sat near the front of the plane, just behind first-class, with Terry while the Russian was relegated to a seat in the back. Illya didn't seem to mind and produced a paperback novel as if he'd been expecting a singular ride the whole time.

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The plane touched down on a Kennedy Airport runway shortly after nine p.m. Though tired from the day's activities and the forced inactivity during the plane ride home, Solo felt obligated to, at least, make the suggestion of going for a nightcap before dropping her off at the hotel near UNCLE headquarters. He was secretly glad when she admitted to being tired as well and anxious to get to her hotel. He was not expecting his partner to exit the taxi to begin the five block walk to headquarters.

Hurriedly paying the cab driver, he half-ran to catch up with Illya, nearly a full block up the street. "Hey—" he called, but resisted the urge to catch his friend's arm.

The blond agent paused. "What is it, Napoleon?" he said, not turning.

"Look, I know you're cheap, but I planned on paying the cab fare for both of us. Why did you get out?"

"Perhaps, I preferred to walk back to headquarters."



“Perhaps you wanted to set yourself up as a target instead.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I’m equally as armed as you. It obviously didn’t occur to you that I might want some solitary time to hash out what I plan to put in my report.”

“Would you care to hash it out over a drink instead?”

“With you?”

“That was my idea.”

“I’d rather not.”

“Coffee, then. I’ll get one of the secretaries to make us a fresh pot.”

“Do what you’d like, Napoleon. I don’t plan to make it a long night.”

“How long are you going to put off the inevitable?”

“As long as necessary.”

“You’re forcing me to pull rank on you.”

“And you misunderstand me. I’m not trying to escape the conversation we need to have. Only delay it until the circumstances are better suited for it.”

Napoleon suddenly had a horrible notion. “Illya, are you contemplating ending our partnership? Asking Mr. Waverly to split us up?”

“No, but I haven’t dismissed the idea that after our upcoming conversation, it may be you doing the contemplating.” The blond Russian’s shoulders slumped slightly. “You see, therefore, my reluctance.” Suddenly, he was unbelievably weary, both in body and mind. “I’ve changed my mind. I’m going home.” Illya walked away from his partner without a goodbye and turned down the next cross-street. Napoleon stared after him in shocked bewilderment, wondering what his partner, friend, and brother thought was so unconscionably unforgivable to warrant ending their partnership.

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The next morning, Napoleon arrived at UNCLE headquarters at 8:00am with Terry Cook to find Kuryakin already ensconced behind his typewriter. The deep furrow between the narrowed eyes told Solo that Illya was struggling with the report, for he typed a line or two and then stared at the page for twice the length of time.

Solo regarded him with sympathy. He was not looking forward to rendering his own report. He caught Illya’s attention with a wave. “Mr. Waverly wants to see us at 9:00.”

“I’ll be there,” the Russian replied without looking up. There was a quick glance at his wristwatch and the typing speed picked up its pace.

Solo escorted Terry to the commissary for coffee and hopefully, a sweet roll or doughnuts.



Terry Cook was in the middle of her “freedom of the press” tirade when Illya entered Waverly’s office, UNCLE’s gift to her carefully concealed behind his back and a file folder in his hand. The camera slipped surreptitiously onto the table behind Solo as the CEA was saying:

“It wouldn’t make any difference, Terry.”

She was nonplused. “It wouldn’t?” she said and turned to see Napoleon shaking his head in affirmation.

Kuryakin took his place at her right. “Even if you went to the newspapers, they wouldn’t believe you.”

Solo added quickly: “Saving the world from a mind-grabbing machine. Think anyone would take you seriously?”

“Unless you had the film to back you up,” Illya said as a lead-in for his partner’s presentation.

Solo brandished s new 35mm SLR camera identical to the one she had broken saving his life. “With the gratitude and compliments of UNCLE.”

She lit up, smiling broadly, “Oh!” As soon as the camera hit her hands, she began to focus and snapped a picture.

Mr. Waverly objected, a signal for Kuryakin to gently remove the camera from her hand and remove the film from the camera. He returned the empty camera to its owner, then without another word, gave Mr. Waverly the file folder and left as silently as he had entered.

Mr. Waverly opened the folder, glanced at it briefly and looked up his CEA. “Mr. Solo, why don’t you escort Miss Cook to reception; then I want to see you back here immediately.”

It was in that moment, Napoleon realized that his partner was no longer in the room. “Right away, sir,” he replied softly and showed Terry to the door.

Mr. Waverly opened the folder once more and began to read, his frown deepening with the passing narrative.

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Five minutes later, Solo sat across the huge round table from his boss. He had a reasonably good idea why Waverly had called him back.

The head of UNCLE North America began without preamble. “Mr. Kuryakin has requested two weeks’ vacation time, effective immediately. This is rather unusual for him, don’t you agree?”

Napoleon nodded slowly. “This was a very difficult mission for both of us.”

“Indeed, Mr. Solo. I suspected it would be and it does seem to have taken quite a toll on Mr. Kuryakin.”

“I know. What does he say in his report?”

“Nothing out of the ordinary, but I have noticed in the past, Mr. Kuryakin’s writing becomes more succinct and coldly scientific as mission events affect him on a more personal level. His current report here is a very dry read, Mr. Solo.”

“What are you suggesting, sir? I don’t think it would be fair to subject the psych staff to Illya’s temper if you order him in for an evaluation.”

“Mr. Kuryakin will allow himself to be evaluated if I decide that it’s necessary. That’s why we are having this conversation. Mr. Kuryakin states blatantly that it was necessary to put you under torture as part of his charade as Nexor. How do you respond to that?”

“Naturally, I would have rather he hadn’t, but I know Illya did what he had to do. Otherwise, Miss Cook and I would have both been killed outright. Besides, I set up the circumstances. In his place, I would have done the same to him.”

“Is he aware of that?”

“Of course. But something is still eating at him. I told him that we needed to talk about this, and he agreed. Looks like he’s changed his mind.”

“Unchange it, Mr. Solo. We are in a dirty business, and sometimes we have to get our hands very dirty. If Mr. Kuryakin won’t unburden himself, I will unleash him on the psychologists. The last thing I need is to have an agent implode in a difficult situation. You have a week. If your methods don’t work, Dr. Pirelli and his methods will have him for the second week of his vacation.”

Solo stood up. “That’s quite an incentive, sir. I’ll see what I can do.”

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Napoleon was not surprised to find their shared office vacant. A quick call to Wanda at reception told him his partner was still in the building, unless he had left by one of the other two exits. Two more inquiries confirmed it. That left the commissary and the labs. It was nearing lunchtime, so Napoleon decided to check the commissary first: if Illya was there, he’d found him, if not, he could take lunch to him.

He found the Russian in his lab; papers, notebooks and journals before him, a pencil between his teeth, and a slide rule being deftly manipulated by knowing hands. Though Napoleon was certain his partner was aware of his presence, the bespectacled blond-haired agent did not look up.

“I brought lunch,” Solo offered.

At the sound of Napoleon’s voice, Illya did look up. “The Special must be pastrami again. I could smell it from down the hall.”

“I even brought you your own condiments, so you can’t complain about my sandwich doctoring.”

“Amazing. You actually can be trained. Thank you.” The glasses came off and Kuryakin accepted the brown bag. “I thought perhaps you and Miss Cook had lunch plans.”

Solo took a bite of his sandwich. “Is that why you took off like shot?”

“My report is finished, and for once, I was going to let you do your own paperwork.”

“Mr. Waverly said you requested vacation.”

“I think I’m entitled to some time off. Is that a problem?”

“I don’t know. Got any plans?”

“I thought I might sail up the coast to the Cape Cod area.” Kuryakin addressed his over-stuffed sandwich with a slight smile.

Solo looked at him with raised eyebrows. “Really? When are you going to leave?”

“I need a few things first.”

“Such as?”

“Oh, I don’t know. A boat would be nice. And someone to help me sail it.”

“Is this your round-about way of asking me to come along with you?”

“Only if you’re willing. I’m sure I could find other options.”

“We haven’t had the talk we need to have.”

“I’m aware of that.”

“Then, I think it’s an excellent time to sail up the coast. But I have a condition. No bullshit, evasion, or flat out refusing to answer the questions I have.”

“That’s a rather presumptuous condition.”

“Take it or leave it. You dropped a bombshell in my lap last night and walked away without an explanation. You say we are *zadushevny*<sup>3</sup>. If that’s true, then I deserved better than that from you.”

Kuryakin laid the remainder of his sandwich on its wrapper and looked up at Solo, his blue eyes apologetic. “I know you do.”

“What could you possibly think you’ve done that once I hear it, I would consider ending our partnership? Something that you believe would damage the trust I have in you?”

“I accept your condition. My only request is that you wait until we’ve set sail.”

“So I can’t walk out on you.”

Kuryakin folded the wrapper over his sandwich, no longer hungry. “Something like that.”

Solo watched him stuff it back into the bag. “And you’re afraid I will.”

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<sup>3</sup> Russian for “one behind the soul”, or confidant, but it means more than that to Russians.

“Something like that.”

“Why?”

Illya threw the bag into the trash and walked to the door. “Because I would.” He hung his lab coat on a nearby hook. “I’ll meet you at the dock at four. The tide will be going out then; I checked.”

“Do you want me to get the food and the beer?”

With his back still to Solo, Illya shook his head. “If you would, just vodka for me. And I’ll get the food. The greengrocer near my apartment has some exquisite oranges he promised to save me.”

“I could stop at the deli for that corned beef you like. And I’ll pick up some steaks.”

“That would be fine. I’ll take care of the rest. I’ll see you later.”

Napoleon watched the back of the blond head until it disappeared around a corner. It sounded like they had just agreed on the menu for a farewell dinner.

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### **Act III: “You’re not a sadist monster.”**

Napoleon hoisted a case of imported beer onto the deck of his forty-foot masthead sloop appropriately named *Pursang*. It was a prized possession, for it was the only thing he owned that gave him the ability to escape from the horrors of his day job. He greeted Kuryakin, who was climbing the several steps up from the galley. “You’re early.”

The Russian shrugged. “I saw no reason to waste time in my apartment, when I could be enjoying the breeze off of the Hudson River, even if it’s coming from New Jersey.”

“Snob,” Napoleon returned good-naturedly. This was a good marina at a good price and was fairly accessible to the points he most often cared to visit along the shore. The trip to Cape Cod was to be one of the longest voyages he and the *Pursang* had attempted. “What did you bring besides some exquisite oranges?”

“More fruit and vegetables, mostly. I never seem to lose the excitement of seeing produce that doesn’t look like it’s come from a garbage heap.”

“And not waiting in lines to get it, I’ll bet,” Napoleon finished the thought.

“I do not miss that part of the Soviet Union.”

“You’re becoming more bourgeois the longer I know you,” the American said with a chuckle.

“I didn’t ask you along on this cruise to be insulted,” the Russian retorted, but he had a slight smile as well.

“It comes with the boat. Besides you have a lot of nerve being insulted while standing aboard a rather expensive rowboat plotting a course to a rather posh area of New England.”

“Point taken. I promise not to make any blatant Socialist remarks for the entire trip.”

Napoleon smiled broadly. “That’ll be a welcome change,” he said with a twinkle in his eye.

Though he knew he was being teased, Illya scowled. “I amend that last statement to not include the present company.”

“Too late, Illya. I’m holding you to your word.”

“Fine. There are plenty of other things I can expound on, at length.”

“I can always throw you overboard. It’s a long swim back.”

Kuryakin just shook his head and picked up the case of beer to stow below in the galley. His friend was making light banter, but Illya wasn’t altogether sure he wasn’t going to be tossed off the boat eventually anyway.

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After an hour of going through the checklist, clearing the wharf at the marina under power, and hoisting the sails, the two agents were able to relax and enjoy the brisk wind in their faces and the cool of the evening.

“Looks like tomorrow’s going to be pretty nice, weather-wise,” Napoleon commented from behind the wheel. He pointed to the beginnings of a red sunset.

Illya looked to the west, then closed his eyes and turned away.

“What’s wrong?”

The Russian shook his head. “Red skies still send chills down my spine. When I was young, it was fire that made the sky glow red and orange like that.” He sighed heavily. “Sail on for about an hour, and then let’s find a place to anchor for the night.”

Solo studied his blond-haired companion. Tension was evident in the normally stoic features. “Illya, whatever this is, I’ll understand.”

“Don’t even begin to make a value judgment like that until you’ve heard me out.”

“Maybe we should look for that anchoring place now. You look like you’re ready to jump out of your skin.”

“Perhaps you’re right. I’ll start lowering the sails.” Kuryakin went forward to prepare the headsail. By the time, he had lowered the mainsail, Napoleon had maneuvered the sloop from the center of the river to a more sheltered area and was ready to drop anchor.

Napoleon went down to the galley and brought up a pair of beer bottles. He offered one to his partner, but Illya shook his head. “Some vodka?” Again, the Russian shook his head. “Should I not be drinking?” Solo asked cautiously.

“As you like,” Illya said softly.

Napoleon took one of the benches at the stern. Pointedly, Illya positioned himself in front of Solo and lowered himself to the deck, cross-legged, to sit at his partner's feet. The dark-haired agent looked down at the towhead before him. "There's some kind of significance to this, I assume?"

"If for no other reason than you believe my sincerity."

"I always do. Tell me what's troubling you, my friend."

Kuryakin folded his hands and began: "Before attempting to impersonate Nexor, I studied various acting styles. A countryman, Konstantin Stanislavski pioneered what is now called 'the method', where the actor tries to emulate his character's emotions and motivations. This seemed the quickest and best way of trying to impersonate Nexor and time was of the essence.

"I tried to visualize what sets of circumstances might have come together to mold this person into what he was."

"Was Nexor an actual clone of his father?"

Illya shook his head. "I don't believe so. While the Nazis were doing research in this area, from what I read in current research, the process is not easy. Failure rates are high even with the more advanced technology available today. I believe the woman or even, perhaps, women they used to be impregnated by the elder Nexor were Aryan with similar facial features to his. The child most closely resembling the elder Nexor's childhood pictures would be the one to undergo the training and indoctrination to take his father's place at the proper time."

"How is it that you resemble the younger Nexor so much?"

A small smile touched the Russian's lips. "I don't, really. I have the same general physical description, but you would easily tell us apart one from the other."

"But, von Etske saw the real Nexor. How did you pass his scrutiny? And what does this have to do with what you feel you need to confess to me?"

"I need to preface what I must say to you. Please, hear me out."

"I'm sensing a long oratory. I'm going to get us some tall glasses of water. Hang on for a minute."

Patiently, Illya obliged his friend. He set the glass down beside him and continued: "How did I pass von Etske's scrutiny, you ask. It was something I worried about when Brown, the THRUSH representative, insisted on confirmation by von Etske. As it turned out, my portrayal was largely a matter of attitude, rather than physical appearance. If there was any doubt in von Etske's mind it was more than compensated by a commanding presence. I had to *be* Nexor, because I radiated the *essence* of Nexor."

"And you extrapolated the essence of Nexor by this method acting technique."

"Yes. Napoleon, if this child of Nexor's went through just a portion of what the psychologists told me he would have, then despite the finished product, the boy was no less a victim of his father's tortures, than the people he killed during the war."

“The child was turned into a sadistic monster.” Solo mused, and then fully realized what his friend was saying. “But, you’re *not* a sadist monster, Illya.”

“When they brought you and Miss Cook into the control room, I wasn’t sure how we going to play it out. You knew Nexor was dead and I would be in his place.”

Solo went through the scene in his mind. “I figured a connection would give you a reason to ‘toy’ with me rather than kill me outright like Brown wanted you to do.”

“You had no way of knowing how Gurnius would respond.”

“But I was counting on you knowing. It bought us time.”

“Exactly. Time for me to torture you.”

“Yes, but, you know my limits, and I trusted you not to go over them unless there was no other way. And you didn’t.”

Illya stood up, his shoulders hunched in contrition. “I did my job too well, Napoleon. My portrayal of Nexor was too good. He was a sadistic monster, and in his likeness, I *did* become a sadistic monster.”

Solo stood as well to look his friend in the eyes. “What do you mean?”

“The definition of sadist, Napoleon. ‘One who enjoys inflicting pain on another.’ How do I say it any plainer than that?”

“You’ll have to because I don’t believe what you’re alluding to.”

With a suddenness and fury that caught Solo off guard, Illya growled at him: “*Ya muchyv vas, i ya nasolodzhuvavsya tsym!*<sup>4</sup> *Ich quälte du und ich genoss es!*<sup>5</sup> *¡Te torturaron y lo disfruté!*<sup>6</sup> *Je vous torturé et j’ai aimé ça!*<sup>7</sup> *Sas vasanísti kan kai to apólafsa!*<sup>8</sup> How many languages do you want to hear it in? I tortured you—and God help me, I enjoyed it!”

Napoleon stared at his friend, at the fearfully anxious expression on the normally placid face, and the words—

“Walk away from me, Napoleon. How can you ever trust me again?”

Napoleon sighed deeply as he tried to navigate through his own jumble of emotions, including a blossoming anger. “No, Illya. I won’t walk away. But I have to think about what you said. I’m going to sleep out here on the deck tonight. I want you to go below and use the bed. But close it off from the rest of the cabin.”

“If anyone should spend the night out here, it should be me.”

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<sup>4</sup> Ukranian

<sup>5</sup> German

<sup>6</sup> Spanish

<sup>7</sup> French

<sup>8</sup> Greek



“And if you did, how would I be sure you’d be here in the morning?”

“It would be suicide to try to swim to shore in the dark.”

“Yes, it would, but you’d do it. You’d make sure I walked away. I don’t like people making my decisions for me.”

“In the end, you must see that walking away is the only thing you *can* do.”

“You’re so quick to write yourself off.”

“And you’re being insufferably quixotic about it.”

“We’ll continue this conversation in the morning. I’m glad you got this off your chest. Sleep well.” Napoleon, though angry, tried not to make the remark sound sarcastic, but failed.

“*Ty chertov mudak,*” Illya murmured as he walked past Solo towards the galley steps.

Napoleon’s temper flared. He caught Illya’s arm and spun him around. As the Russian faced him, he slammed his other fist into the Russian’s jaw. Illya fell backwards down the galley steps, and hit the deck below with grunt of pain. “*Now, I’m a fuckin’ asshole, Kuryakin. You were determined to piss me off tonight, and you succeeded. Now, get your goddamn ass up off the floor and do what I told you do.*”

Without a word, Illya pulled himself to his feet and stumbled forward to the sleeping area, where he pulled the curtain divider across the opening. Solo heard him crawl onto one of the mattresses and lay down. Only after there was silence for five minutes, did he descend to the lower level to grab a blanket and eight bottles of beer.

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#### **Act IV: “Illya Nickovetch Kuryakin, PhD, captain in the Soviet Navy, former GRU agent”**

The sun had just peeked over the upper Hudson River area, New York City skyline when Napoleon climbed down into the cabin and pulled back the curtain from the sleeping area. His partner sat against one wall, head turned towards the small forward windows as if looking out over the bow.

“Illya, are you awake?” Solo said softly, not so much for Kuryakin’s sake, but for his own headache.

The blond-haired man turned his head. “You’re up early,” he observed with a low voice.

“I didn’t sleep.”

“I know. Neither did I. You did a lot of pacing.”

“How’s the lip?”

“It’ll heal.”

“I thought I’d find you down here, passed out from that bottle of scotch I brought along. I know it’d take more than a bottle of vodka to do that.”

“You know I detest scotch.”

“I thought, perhaps, you’d make an exception; like you did with the rum.”

“I didn’t think it was prudent to compound one error with another.”

Solo sat down on the mattress opposite the Russian. “What happened that night in San Rico to make you break the mirror?”

“I told you, I don’t remember breaking the mirror.”

“Okay then, before, when you came back from the bar and headed directly into the bathroom for a second shower.”

A small frown formed. “I could still smell the stench of that uniform on me; it made me sick to my stomach. The whole damned scenario made me feel unclean, tainted.” The blond head bowed and his right hand touched his cheek. “And I couldn’t get rid of it. No matter what I did, it was still there.”

“What was still there?”

“The scar. That despicable sign of the son’s connection to the father. They must have sliced open the boy’s cheek and instead of allowing it to heal, they reopened the wound until layers of scar tissue formed.”

“But on you it was just a prosthetic. As a matter of fact, you pulled it off just after the building blew up.”

“But when I looked in the mirror, *it was there*. I don’t know how, but it was there.”

Solo sat back, understanding now why the mirror had been broken. “What do you see in a mirror now?”

Kuryakin shrugged. “As little as possible.”

“Illya, look at me.” The expression on the face that looked back at him was a closed book. “You thought saw a scar that wasn’t there. Isn’t it possible, that when you had to convince Gurnius and Brown you were Nexor by torturing me, you thought you felt pleasure but it wasn’t really there?”

“You’re being insufferably quixotic again.”

“Don’t you think you could have gotten wrapped up in the moment, putting yourself in the place of a sadistic monster who had been abused by his keepers all his life; *thinking* like him. How could you not begin to feel what he would have felt?”

“And *that’s* supposed to justify it?”

“Something has to, or Mr. Waverly is going to pull you in for psychiatric evaluation. He gave me a week to help you find the answer on your own.”

“No pressure, there.”

"I want to help, Ilyya. We are *zadushevny*. Brothers. There isn't anything we can't say to one another."

A tiny smile tugged at the corner of Kuryakin's mouth. "Even if it gets him a clout in the mouth."

"Well, I was mad and you were baiting me. You asked for it."

"That damned optimism gets to me sometimes. Not to mention, your idealist notions."

"Something has to counter that dour Russian pessimism of yours."

"So, where do we go from here?"

"Well, not to sound too much like a shrink, I think we should go to the beginning."

"The beginning of what?"

"The beginning of you, my friend. I have you bound by your word and to be blunt, I've always wanted to know."

"Then, pick up a history of Eastern Europe after World War I. My story is there. Nothing exceptional or out of the ordinary."

"To you, maybe. We grew up half a world apart in geography, worlds apart in ideology. And still, here we are: friends, partners and brothers. I know you, but by the same token, I don't. Ilyya Nickovetch Kuryakin, PhD, captain in the Soviet Navy, former GRU agent; sometimes, I feel like I don't know you, at all."

There was an inviting smile on Napoleon's lips, but it was not the charming smile he used to entice the ladies. It was a smile of deep respect and the promise that any secrets shared would remain secret. Still, there was reluctance from the Russian.

"Oh, Napoleon, you don't need my family history to know me. How we live and what we do with our lives is who we are."

"I still have questions. There are things I'm curious about."

"Such as?"

Napoleon looked back at his friend in surprise. Was he actually offering to answer personal questions? For a moment, he couldn't even think of one. "Well, your name, for one thing."

The question was met by the raise of a single eyebrow. "What about my name?"

"It's the Russian version of Elijah, the Old Testament prophet. I thought you were an atheist like a good Soviet Communist should be."

"I had little to do with picking my own given name, Napoleon. Stalin may have outlawed the Orthodox Church, but he couldn't stifle the religious beliefs of the people. My grandparents, who raised me for a time, were devoutly religious."

"And your mother?" Napoleon said gently, for he already sensed the answer.

"I never knew my mother. She died shortly after I was born, a result of the *Holodomor*."

"*Holodomor*?"

"It's Ukrainian for 'murder by hunger', a devastating famine that lasted over two years. There are suppositions that it was one of Stalin's engineered retaliations for the rise of Ukrainian nationalism. Millions of Ukrainians died of starvation."

"It's remarkable, then, that you survived. But it also explains your love affair with food. What about your father? Nicholai Kuryakin?"

Illya looked down at his hands. "There is no Nicholai Kuryakin. I'm the result of a rape upon my mother. Her name was Nikola Vasyivna Kurakina. I, therefore, have a matronymic, albeit a little skewed, instead of a patronymic."

"Making you rather unique, I would think."

"Probably not. The *Holodomor* was literal hell for the Ukrainian people. Times like those bring out the worst in some human beings."

"So, after your mother died, Grandmother and Grandfather Kuryakin raised you in Kiev."

"Yes, but the family name is not spelled correctly in English. When I came to this country, someone in charge of my paperwork misread 'ah' for 'yah' in the Cyrillic handwriting and added a 'Y' to the spelling."

"And added an extra 'L' in your first name because they thought it looked nicer in English?"

"A distinct possibility, knowing you Americans. My family name in the Soviet Union is Kurakin, which is actually a noble name. The family was a princely line that served the ruling families in Russia for centuries."

"So, that's where you get that haughty attitude of yours. There are people who think you really *are* a prince, too." Solo said with a teasing smile.

"I'm afraid 'Ice Prince' doesn't count." Illya slid to the edge of the bed. "Prince or not, I need to relieve myself and I would dearly love something to eat."

Napoleon stood to allow Kuryakin to pass. "Why don't you slice up some fruit and I'll scramble some eggs? There are croissants and strawberry jam in the cupboard."

"That calls for tea." Illya went into the tiny bathroom, while Solo took provisions from the refrigerator and placed them on the counter. By the time Illya was finished, Napoleon had a skillet of fluffy scrambled eggs, and the teapot was nearing the boil. The Russian quickly halved a huge grapefruit, and set the table.

"Who taught you to drink your tea with jam in it?" The senior agent asked as he watched his partner stir his cup of strong tea.

"I was in University before both tea and jam were affordable enough for me to drink it this way. Before the end of the war, we were lucky if there was suitable water and bread to eat." His gaze

turned inward and he smiled fondly. “Except when I lived with the *Romani*. They had ways of getting enough food to survive.”

Napoleon looked at him with surprise. “I always wondered if the Gypsies were more than just ‘fascinating’ friends to you.”

“My mother’s mother was full-blood *tsigani*<sup>9</sup>, a *Ruska Roma*. I suspect she was the one who gave me my name. The prophet Elijah is a prominent figure in *Romani* religious beliefs. Perhaps she thought it would give me some kind of amelioration for the circumstances of my birth.”

“What about your grandfather? Was he a *Rom*, too?”

“When I was older, I learned that he had been a member of the peasant-based *Borobist* party, but I don’t believe he was a peasant or a *Rom*; not with Kurakin as a family name. My grandfather was executed for his Nationalist beliefs in the Great Purge as a traitor to the Motherland. My grandmother was sent to a labor camp. I was smuggled to live with my grandmother’s sister, who then took me to the *Ruska Romani* camps.”

“How old were you when you went to live with your grandmother’s people?”

“Eight or nine, but I looked like I was barely six years old.”

“A side-effect of not getting enough to eat.”

“I made up for it with the *tsigani*. And I learned many things from them. That time was, as you Americans say, ‘like I had died and gone to heaven’.”

Solo saw what was coming. “Then, the Nazis came.”

Illya’s demeanor sobered. “Hitler made it a point to try to annihilate my grandmother’s people. He nearly succeeded.”

“How did you escape being sent to the concentration camps?” Solo asked, knowing that his partner had no tattoo on his forearm.

Kuryakin made a sound that was a cross between a growl of distaste and a chuckle of irony. “The Nazis have to have been the most smugly self-righteous, blindly hypocritical sons-of-bitches the world has ever known. They found a Ukrainian Gypsy child who, by their twisted, perverse standards would have been a prime candidate for the camps, but because my hair was fair and my eyes blue, they saw me as a prospect for ‘re-Germanization’ back into Aryan society. *Chertov ublyudki!*<sup>10</sup>” he spat.

“Playing the part of Nexor must have been doubly hard for you then.”

“At first, it was just an assignment. I’ve had difficult assignments before. But then I began to feel a kind of exhilaration in having nearly everyone afraid of me. And playing up to Gurnius’ narcissistic ego—it was as if I could manipulate him as well. The so-called ‘fun’, however, ended when you and Miss Cook were brought in.”

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<sup>9</sup> Ukrainian for gypsy.

<sup>10</sup> Fucking bastards!

"I don't think you lost as much control over the situation as you think you did. You definitely had Gurnius eating out of your hand."

"But, I couldn't get him to leave that damn room!—I was trying to stall as much as I could—"

Napoleon laid a hand on his friend's arm, feeling the tension in the taut muscle. "I know you were."

The blond-haired agent looked up, a pained expression in the blue eyes. "At the same time, a thought flashed through my mind, that finally, *you* were the one getting hurt—not me. And there was a sense of satisfaction to it, like, a score being evened out." Illya lowered his head, shaking it sullenly. "I don't understand why I would have such feelings."

"Why shouldn't you feel a little gratified that finally, I took a turn in the pain-receiving line? Do you think I enjoy sitting at your bedside wondering when you're going to wake up from yet, another serious injury? And furthermore, why would you think, roles being reversed, that you wouldn't have the same understanding of your partner's feelings that I do?"

Solo stood up from the table. "Food for thought, my friend." He collected the used plates and utensils. "Now, if I may take leave of *Your Grace*, it's been a long, grueling night for both of us, and I, for one, could use a nap before we raise anchor and continue the voyage. If you're feeling helpful, you can take care of the dishes."

Illya nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, I will. And you can stop with the nobility references. The only reason you know, is because I promised to answer your questions."

"I never asked you if you were a count. You brought that up on your own."

"Never mind. You're going to have fun with it no matter what I say."

Napoleon grinned. "You bet I am. Are you going to sleep?"

"No, I think I'll find a shady spot up on deck. Enjoy your nap."

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The sun was overhead when Solo came up on deck. He found his friend, hair wet and matted down, sitting cross-legged on the deck, studying the map.

Illya looked up. "Good afternoon, Napoleon."

"You look like you've been swimming."

Kuryakin chuckled softly. "Very astute. You should be a spy."

"Smart ass. Have you charted a course for us?"

"All marked. If the wind stays like this, we should be able to make the Sound easily by dinner time." Illya handed the map up to his partner. "Do you want lunch first or shall I hoist the sails?"

"I'll have a sandwich later. Did you think about our talk earlier?"

"Of course."

“Did you come to any conclusions?”

“Actually, yes. I should never make blanket promises where you’re concerned.”

“I’m sorry you felt pressured. I thought it was necessary to know your background. Psychologists are saying more and more that our formative years mold who we are.” The dark-haired agent smiled. “See? I do read occasionally.”

“No doubt, it was an article in Playboy magazine.”

“They’ve got good articles, Illya!” Napoleon protested.

“I’m sure they do. So, how has my childhood molded me, Dr. Erikson<sup>11</sup>?”

“I think losing your family before you were twelve has had a profound effect on you. You’re a loner, for the most part, and you avoid forming relationships.”

“I am self-reliant and my work doesn’t allow the luxury of forming lasting relationships.”

“Everyone you ever cared for in your life left you alone to fend for yourself.”

Illya didn’t like the turn of the conversation. “It’s not like they had a choice in the matter,” he replied stiffly.

“What happened when the Germans tried to place you with a family?”

“The fact that I entered this country as a Soviet citizen should make the answer to your question obvious. And, incidentally, for the record, I’ve had quite enough of your psychoanalysis.” Kuryakin stood up and headed for the galley. “I need some lunch. I’ll help with the sails later.”

Napoleon watched his partner descend the stairs and sighed. He had pushed a little too hard and Illya had retreated into one of his Russian snits. On the other hand, what had his friend been expecting? A week with the UNCLE psychologists would make his prodding look like banter. He followed the sulking Slavic-Gypsy down to the galley.

Kuryakin looked up from his meal preparation, a “back-off” expression on his face.

“Nice little defense mechanism you have going there,” Napoleon said nonchalantly.

“What do you want from me, Napoleon? I’ve been trying to forget the joys of my so-called ‘formative’ years and you want to dredge it all up again.”

“This affair has already dredged it up. I’m thinking the Nazi attempt to make you into a good little *deutscher Knabe*<sup>12</sup> was a defining moment in your life, too. Or you wouldn’t have reduced it to a sarcastic comment. What were you, twelve?”

“Eleven,” Illya said softly. “And I don’t want to talk about it.”

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<sup>11</sup> Danish/German/American developmental psychologist

<sup>12</sup> German boy



"If you don't tell me, I can guarantee you'll be telling the UNCLE doctors. And I know if you don't talk to me now, you won't later. So, if you refuse, I'll turn this boat around and order you back to headquarters."

"Well, if you insist on playing the 'rank' card, I guess, I'll have to comply."

"Now, who's being a fuckin' asshole? Do you think I'm enjoying this?"

"In your own under-handed way, yes. You said before, you always wanted to know."

"What about a bargain, then? You can ask me all the personal questions you want to on the way back."

"I already know about your childhood, Napoleon. And if I didn't, based on your current behavior, I could extrapolate back to your 'formative' years," Illya answered, gesturing the quotation marks for 'formative'. "Don't you understand? Some things are best left undisturbed."

"And the effects subjected to a liberal 'pickling' at regular intervals."

"It's served me well enough over the years."

"I'd hate to see your liver." Solo sat down on the bench behind the table and folded his hands. "Illya," he said with deep emotion, "tell me; how is it that you can trust me with your life and your soul, but not with your past?"

The blond-haired Russian turned and stared down at his friend. "You said it yourself. 'Worlds apart.' What were *you* doing when you were eleven years old?"

"Obviously, not the same thing as you. So, what is it; shame or jealousy?"

"That's a typically American conclusion. I am not ashamed of who I am, nor am I jealous of who you are. Quite the opposite, actually."

"I apologize, it was typically American of me. I've asked you before not to hold it against me."

"I try not to." A small smile touched the Russian's lips. "Sometimes it's harder than you know."

"I appreciate the effort. So, tell me what happened when the Nazis tried to Germanize a tenacious, clever, and proud Ukrainian/Gypsy boy." Napoleon's smile matched the man standing over him.

"Napoleon, you are a thorn in my side. And a stubborn, manipulative scoundrel. But you are also *zadushevny*." He heaved a deep sigh. "And you are right. How can I not trust you with my past, when I trust you with everything else?"

"Let me finish making lunch and you grab a couple of beers. Food always has a positive effect on you."

"It's a love-affair, remember?"

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A few minutes later, the two were engaged in the demolition of a pair of thick corned-beef sandwiches and beer chasers.

Illya put his sandwich aside and emptied half of his beer in a single breath. “I just noticed; this is German beer.”

“Well, they do have quite a few redeeming qualities.”

“I know. Evil has no nationality; my own government killed my grandfather and my mother.” He finished the bottle of beer. “There were thousands of us the Nazis took; Poles, mostly, but Ukrainians, Slavs, Czechs, too; any child that *looked* Aryan. I was still small for my age and could pass for eight or nine. I was adopted into a military family in Berlin.”

“Explains why you speak German like a native.”

“My adoptive parents were given instructions to beat me if I didn’t learn the language, adopt the culture. Fortunately, by then, the Soviet Army was advancing towards Berlin. I was not aware of why, but I knew the people in Berlin were afraid. Many families were leaving the city for the safety of the out-lying country. We stayed because my foster father was in the military, but his wife begged him to leave. He finally consented, but we would have to leave without him.

“We were to board a westbound train, but when she tried to pull me on board with her, I ran away, back into the city to the house we’d lived in. He was still in the house. He asked me why I was there. Didn’t I remember him telling me that the Russians were coming and if they captured us they would do terrible things to us?”

“I looked directly into his eyes and told him that I couldn’t wait for the Russian army to come and liberate me from him. I believe now that he and his wife had no idea they had adopted a Russian-born child. I suppose, they expected me to be Polish like so many others were.

“He lifted me up by the shirt and called me a *Russische Sohn einer Hure*, a Russian son of a whore.”

“His affection ran deep,” Napoleon commented sarcastically.

“Not as deep as the Gypsy knife I impaled him on.”

Solo opened his mouth, and then shut it before the oath slipped out. More under control, he ventured, “You were only eleven and—” The eyes that looked back at him were ice-cold.

“I killed that Nazi pig—” Illya whispered fiercely and for a moment, he was that eleven year-old boy fighting his own private war. “*I ya radiy□, shcho ya zrobyv tse.*<sup>13</sup>” The boy became a man again and the man sighed softly. “It was the first time I took a human life. Needless to say, it wasn’t my last.”

“And it doesn’t make you a sadistic monster, either, Illya. You were fighting for your life.”

Kuryakin nodded slowly. “I know that.” He shrugged off-handedly. “The rest of my story, I believe, you know. The Russian army found me, and I ended up in the State schools via the State orphanages. GRU paid for my higher education; well, undergraduate and the Sorbonne,

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<sup>13</sup> And I’m glad that I did it!

anyway. UNCLE picked up the tab for Cambridge. Then I came to New York and was partnered with an obstinate, bourgeois, wealth-flaunting American who, by any stretch of the imagination, should never have accepted such a partner with ideologies so far removed from his own." The eyes that looked at Napoleon now were full of gratitude.

"I guess I like a challenge. You aren't the easiest person to get along with."

"I could say the same thing, you know."

"You do, my friend, quite often."

"So, does this relieve me of my obligation to answer any and all questions?"

"That depends. How are you feeling about the events of the Gurnius Affair now?"

"Better than I did, thanks to you. But I must admit, what we do for the sake of world peace, seems like a job only a madman or a sadomasochist would do."

"Like Mr. Waverly said, it's a dirty business and sometimes we get very dirty. So, do you think you can look in a mirror and just see your own ugly mug?"

"Better than I could seeing yours."

"Then, I'm all for getting this cruise underway." Napoleon stood. "Would *Your Grace* care to help with the sails?"

Illya sighed heavily and rolled his eyes. "*Bozhye praviy!*"<sup>14</sup> How do I ever put up with you?"

—END OF PART 1—

**Author's Note:** *That should have been the end of it, but many deep psychological wounds heal slowly and can easily be reopened. A chance encounter with the associate of a vengeful THRUSH doctor in New England thrusts both Napoleon and Illya back into the psychological maelstrom of "The Gurnius Affair".*

[...continued in Part 2...](#)



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<sup>14</sup> Good God!