

**Author's Note:** Written for the [LIFECYCLE: KNOWLEDGE Challenge](#) on [LiveJournal's Section VII](#).



It is beyond a doubt that all our  
knowledge begins with experience.

*Immanuel Kant*

## A LESSON IN PROTOCOL

BY [LAH](#)

### **Winter 1964**

“Napoleon, you are being ridiculous!” protested Ilyya Kuryakin of his superior, the relatively new CEA Napoleon Solo. “I assure you I have thoroughly perused the protocol and etiquette manuals, and it is clearly stated in such that the menu cards can indeed be placed flat on the dinner service plates.”

“Ilyya, if that is how it is done, our noble guests will definitely be suspicious and perhaps insulted. Those menus have to be set upright in stands just like the place cards.”

“That’s such an unnecessary detail and will only serve to further crowd the table settings.”

“Be that as it may, you will follow my instructions, agent,” Solo resorted to his most authoritative Chief of Enforcement manner.

“Yes sir,” Kuryakin purposely responded with return formality, though perhaps not quite hidden resentment. “Though why Section II was tagged with the responsibility for this business,” he allowed himself to give voice to his sheer frustration at the current task of overseeing the table arrangement for a dinner with several members of royalty in an emerging African nation, “I will never understand. Are we enforcement agents or caterers?”

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### ***Several Hours Earlier***

“I am going to leave this entirely in your capable hands, Mr. Solo, since I know you have direct experience in such matters,” Alexander Waverly informed his albeit somewhat reluctantly submissive CEA. “I do realize it’s not really a job for a Section II operative,” admitted the Continental Chief without hesitation, “much less my Chief of Enforcement. However, no one else within this organization can lay claim to your particular background.”

Meaning of course Solo’s upbringing within the household of a rather famed diplomat who had entertained VIPs of every stripe, including members of obscure royal families in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Napoleon understood why this task was being assigned to him, but still he didn’t really appreciate the delegation. In general, amidst the gunmetal halls of U.N.C.L.E. HQ, he kept to himself the manner of his consular rearing by his ambassador grandfather.

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### ***Twenty Years Earlier Ottawa, Canada***

Napoleon Solo watched uncomfortably, his presence totally forgotten, from a side-corner of the now empty estate dining room as his grandmother shed upset and unhappy tears. The just dawning-on-adolescence youngster hated to see any woman cry, but especially his usually so composed and controlled Mémé.

“There, there, don’t be distraught, my dear,” his grandfather, Franklin Milbourne, attempted to soothe his wife. “How was anyone to understand that these particular guests would read a possible threat in so obscure a detail?”

“Suspecting that the menu cards might have some sort of poison or drug imbued on them to infect the dinnerware just because they are laid out on the plates,” Annette Milbourne wailed disconsolately. “Is there so much treachery in their lives that they should think such a horribly calculated thing might be countenanced at a formal diplomatic dinner in an official U.S. embassy? And that I should be responsible for such a supposed breach of etiquette, one that may negatively reflect on your career, Franklin. It is all but unbearable!”

“No one knows better than I how much you strive for perfection in such matters, Annette, so do not further distress yourself in this regard,” Franklin reassured her. “We will put it all down to experience, and thus realize next time what must be done to make such noble visitors comfortable with our hospitality.”

Determinedly Annette wiped away her tears with the silk handkerchief she held and nodded with absolute resolution. “Menu cards set in stands for all formal meals from now on for any royal guests, just as a precaution.”

She was back in control and completely self-assured again in her devoted and favored role as an ambassador's wife and faultless diplomatic hostess.

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### **Winter 1964**

#### ***Several Hours after the diplomatic dinner***

Alexander Waverly was extremely pleased with how this event had turned out. Indeed, it now looked quite promising that the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement would be granted a presence in that new nation in Africa. With all the royal personages now safely escorted from the dinner venue, the Continental Chief of U.N.C.L.E. Northwest took time to express his gratitude to his Chief of Enforcement for insuring the smoothness of the venture.

"Well done, Mr. Solo," he concisely complimented the younger man.

"Thank you, sir," Napoleon graciously accepted the succinct praise given him by his superior.

A Section III from Waverly's security detail made an appearance to inform the CC that his car was ready and waiting. Nodding in acknowledgement, Alexander Waverly made his exit from the premises with a brief advisement to his Section II agents, Solo and Kuryakin, that he would expect them in his office for a quick debrief once they were back at headquarters.

"I must apologize, Napoleon," Illya conceded to his friend once their chief had made good his departure.

"What for, Illya?" asked Napoleon in some confusion.

"For debating with you regarding the necessity of putting the menu cards in stands," expounded the other man. "I spoke at some length with one of the underlings of the delegation and he confessed to me how the royal family feared poisoning at every turn. Thus I now understand why putting the menus directly on the dinnerware would have been quite the faux pas."

"Yes, well, it all turned out all right in the end," Napoleon dismissed the incident.

"I have to ask, how did you know, Napoleon?" Kuryakin inquired curiously. "I mean such isn't in any of the etiquette or protocol manuals."

Solo shrugged. "From my grandmother," he answered rather noncommittally, and somehow Illya knew that was all the specifics he was ever likely to learn on the matter.

—THE END—

