

# Enough



St. Crispin's Day Society

## ***The Hamptons, Long Island. August, 1965.***

As those who've lived on Long Island for decades all know, the Shinnecock Inlet did not exist before 1938. That was the year that a massive hurricane slammed into the South Fork and punched a hole through the barrier island that extends from the Moriches Inlet to Southampton.

Illya Kuryakin had heard the story from the locals more times than he could count, and standing at the wheel of the Pursang, he recalled it yet again as he steered the boat through the passage, past the ragged rock jetties and the thin strips of diamond white beach. The currents were tricky here, especially when the tide was strong and the wind was high as it was now, and Napoleon was scrambling around the deck, wrestling with rope and canvas, to keep the sails close to the wind and the boat on course.

Behind them, the wild Atlantic tugged at their stern, trying to drag them back, but slowly, steadily, they eased away from its silvery grasp. As the Pursang cleared the inlet, the surrounding land began to curve around them, and it was like slipping into a lover's sheltering embrace. The calmer waters of the bay stretched out before them, undulating gently in the burnished glow of the late afternoon sun

Illya wasn't usually given to romantic metaphors, but in this instance, considering how the weekend was likely to be spent, they seemed particularly apt. As the Pursang cruised through the placid bay waters, out of curiosity, he picked up a pair of binoculars and searched the shoreline. Even with the marina still a good distance away, he could make out the figures, standing on the edge of the dock, peering out to sea in anticipation. Watching. Waiting. Waiting for them.

No, Illya corrected himself. *Waiting for Napoleon.*

It had been like this every Friday since June. Whether through good fortune or simple coincidence, their missions that summer had been fewer and farther between, and Napoleon and Illya had

found themselves free nearly every weekend.

And so, each Friday morning they took Solo's boat out and sailed to the Hamptons, where they were met at the dock each Friday afternoon. Usually it was just one young woman, but sometimes it was as many as three. Today, it was two.

Illya was actually surprised to find the welcoming committee already assembled, since the Pursang had made good time, and they were arriving at least an hour or more ahead of their usual schedule. As Napoleon joined him in the cockpit, Illya put down the binoculars and surrendered the wheel. The marina was a deep one, able to accommodate the keels of small sailboats like the Pursang, but docking them was a complicated maneuver requiring more expertise than Illya could claim, not to mention a certain amount of finesse.



The marina was near now — almost within shouting distance — and as the figures caught sight of Napoleon, they began to wave excitedly and call out greetings.

“Hark, ‘tis the song of the sirens,” Illya cracked. “Shall I lash you to the mast?”

“Cute,” Napoleon muttered, his attention focused on clearing the breakwater and bringing in the Pursang at just the right angle. If he calculated wrong, they might end up crashing into a pier or another vessel, or chaffing the hull at the very least. “Is that a hint of jealousy I hear?”

“You know me better than that,” Kuryakin replied, and because Solo did, he had no need to pursue the question further.

“But I am curious, Napoleon. Exactly what do you tell them that you do for a living?” There’d been a lot of casual liaisons this summer, more so than usual.

“Writer for a travel magazine.”

“I see. And do you offer any actual details connected to your personal life, or do you simply make it up as you go along?”

Napoleon shrugged. “Most women just want to talk about themselves anyway. I listen mostly. When they ask, I regale them with stories of exotic locales I’ve visited.”

“Ah, yes: the dungeons of England, the dead drops of Eastern Europe, the wild bear pits of the Middle East, the sewers of Latin America ...”

Napoleon made a sound deep in his throat. “Why don’t you make yourself useful and finish trimming the sails?”

“Aye, aye, Captain,” Illya said and managed to do so without sarcasm. As the Russian busied himself with the mainsail and jib, Napoleon turned on the engine in order to motor the



boat into position. It is no easy task to back a sailboat into a narrow berth, and it took a few minutes for Solo to find the right spot to drop anchor and swing the Pursang around before straightening her out and finally gliding backwards into place. As Illya hopped to the dock with the temporary stern line and Napoleon cut the engine, the two young women approached, smiling broadly, suitably impressed by the demonstration of expert seamanship.

“Good afternoon, ladies,” Solo greeted them from the starboard bow as he worked to secure the more permanent mooring lines to the pilings.

“Hello, Napoleon!” the one Illya remembered as Gwen replied. Gwen had short, straight, smooth hair — rich girl’s hair — and a rich girl’s body to match. She was tall and long-legged like a model, and lean and tan from regular mornings on the tennis court. Her companion was shorter, stouter, paler and wore glasses.

Probably a grad student, Illya guessed as he continued securing the rest of the permanent mooring lines and eavesdropped on the conversation.

“I picked out your boat,” Gwen declared proudly, “because I remembered what you said about a sloop having only one mast. A yawl and a ketch both have two.”

“And what’s the difference between them?” Napoleon quizzed her, grinning as he joined the two women on the dock.

“A ketch has the shorter mast in the front and a yawl has it in the back.”

“Excellent. We’ll make a sailor out of you yet.”

Gwen beamed irrationally at the compliment, while behind them, Illya tried not to roll his eyes but didn’t succeed. Napoleon turned to Gwen’s companion. “And I hope you plan to introduce me to your very attractive friend here.”

*Call the beautiful girl smart, and the smart girl, beautiful.* Illya recognized the strategy without needing it explained to him. Counterintuitive, perhaps, but ultimately shrewd. The newcomer’s name was Marguerite — Rita to her friends — and turned out to be a librarian for a Massachusetts school district near Boston. Her family and Gwen’s were in business together, and she was visiting for two weeks vacation.

Of course, the details didn’t matter. Last week, it had been a law clerk, the week before, an intern and two campaign workers for the local congressman, and the week before that, an oceanographer who’d apparently sailed with Jacques Cousteau. The first four got a quick tour around Shinnecock Bay, but the oceanographer rated an overnight cruise to Sag





Harbor. Illya hadn't hung around for any of it and only gathered a few vague details from Napoleon on their trips back. Which was fine, since he didn't need to hear the whole story, anyway; he could fill in the blanks for himself.

As he could now, without listening too closely to the conversation. These were just two more attractions in the summertime parade, here today and gone tomorrow, or at least, by next weekend. Napoleon was acting like a kid in a candy shop, determined to sample every sweet in the showcase. No, that was too benign a description, Illya decided as he moved around the boat, testing the knots and the lines. More like a brushfire out of control, burning a swath through every yacht and country club in the central South Fork. And though Napoleon's womanizing was an accepted part of their lives, there was something different about it this summer — something deliberate, almost methodical, something obsessive. The fact that the shift from cheerful to calculated had begun in the spring, soon after they returned from Terbuf, did not escape Illya, nor did he consider it coincidental. He could not forget the expression on his friend's face when they cut the chain that had bound Napoleon to Clara, nor the way Napoleon flinched ever so slightly when she kissed him farewell on the cheek, before walking away, arm and arm, with her limping husband.

But that was Napoleon's business, as Gwen and Marguerite were now. Without a backward glance, Illya descended into the cabin to gather up his duffle bag and fishing rod, preparing to leave.

"Sure you don't want to stick around?" Solo asked as he caught the Russian coming through the cockpit. It was just a courtesy; they both knew the answer.

"No, thank you," Illya replied sincerely. He recognized the question stemmed, not from one-upsmanship, but from genuine concern. "I prefer a less, shall we say, stimulating weekend."

"Just you and the fish, huh?" Napoleon observed with a smile.

"Something like that. Have fun."

"You, too."

They exchanged the sentiments without irony.

"See you on Sunday night," Illya said, holding a hand up. He offered the two waiting women a courtly tip of the chin as he passed them, then sauntered away, heading toward the road.

From the cockpit of the Pursang, Solo watched his friend's progress with amusement. "Fishing," he muttered to himself. "Yeah. Sure." Then he went below to rip off his shorts and t-shirt and change into clothes more suitable for a cocktail party.

## 2.

"Yer early," the old man greeted Illya as the Russian circled around to the yard behind the little store located just down the road from the marina. It was officially a grocery store, but it sold everything, from peaches to pliers, from staples like milk and bread to small vacation luxuries like the Long Island edition of the Sunday New York Times.

"I know. Is that a problem?"

"Nope. Just means you can help more loading the truck."

Illya smiled and placed his duffle and pole beside the back wheel of the vehicle. Mr. Wheeler, for that was the old man's name, owned a string of stores just like this one throughout the

Hamptons. And every Friday afternoon, after the delivery trucks had all come by, Wheeler packed up his own truck and visited each of the stores to distribute and redistribute his goods in time for the busy weekend. On Sunday afternoon, after church services and dinner with his granddaughter, Wheeler made the trip in reverse.

Illya had stumbled upon this convenient situation serendipitously back in June, and in exchange for a little assistance, the old man was agreeable to giving him a ride to and from the marina.

Wheeler didn't talk much, and that was fine with Illya. They worked in silence until the truck's van was piled high with cartons and cases, then Illya put his own belongings in, climbed into the passenger seat beside Wheeler, and they were off.

They stayed away from the main highways to avoid the weekend traffic and kept to the side roads favored by the locals. For the first two stores on the circuit, Illya helped unload the designated cartons before climbing back into the cab of the truck. But at the third, after the work was done, he retrieved his duffle bag and fishing rod, preparing to part company with Wheeler.

"Here," the old man said, pushing a sack into Kuryakin's hands. The agent peered in and saw a variety of fresh fruit. "The strawberries look extra nice this week," Wheeler added gruffly. "Women like strawberries."

Kuryakin smiled. He'd never shared any of his personal life with Wheeler, so obviously, the old man was doing a little fishing himself. The agent said nothing but a sincere "thank you" for the gift, waved goodbye, and then set off to continue the rest of his journey on foot.

The road he now took was narrow and carelessly paved. He headed south, toward the ocean, with the sun at his right shoulder, past perfectly flat fields planted with potatoes and lettuce, lush truck gardens studded with ripening tomatoes, and an occasional orchard heavy with peaches and pears. And in between, there were the carpets of wild flowers — bunches of neon pink cosmos and nodding sunflowers. Because the land was surrounded by so much water, it was like sojourning in a hall of mirrors capped with a ceiling of azure blue. The light was different here — brighter, sharper, purer somehow. Objects didn't just reflect the sunlight; they seemed to glow.





Of course, such choice real estate wouldn't remain dominated by potato farms forever, and already the landscape was changing. All around him, there were huge, sprawling luxury beach houses in various stages of construction, dotting the fields incongruously and arranged haphazardly, like elephants he'd seen in Africa grazing on the open savannah.



As he ambled along, Illya felt his mind clear and his muscles relax. He liked it here. His years in the Soviet Navy hadn't developed any particular love for the sea so much as an appreciation for seaside towns. Living within earshot of the mighty rumble of ceaseless tide helped keep one's priorities in perspective. It was a constant reminder that there were things so much larger than the individual self with its mundane concerns and petty problems. Living by the sea was like living on the edge of the wilderness. Pioneers and sailors both shared a healthy respect for Mother Earth, taking from her what was necessary to survive, but paying her the proper respect in return. He could relate to that. Agents also existed on that all too vulnerable border between civilization and wilderness, even if that wilderness was symbolic rather than physical.

After walking almost two miles, he came to a familiar hedgerow, the top of which was as high as his head. They called them "privets" here — living green walls grown for privacy as much as for decoration. There was a low, whitewashed gate with a broken lock long rusted beyond repair. He let himself in and followed a path through neglected fields that hadn't been planted in years. No doubt the real estate agents were not long off, but for now, the property remained undeveloped. Here, too, beyond the gate, were more of those huge clumps of flowers growing among the beach grasses. He automatically identified them as *rudbeckia hirta*, but he'd also heard them called by a folksy nickname, a woman's name.

Ah, yes, he remembered: *black-eyed Susans*.





Eventually, a tall, boxy, turn-of-the-century farmhouse came into view, and if it wasn't for the unpainted brown shingles with aqua trim and the sound of the rolling ocean in the distance, it might have been located on an American Midwest prairie. The veranda even had a swing, though the small barn was now a garage, and the potting shed had been turned into a photographer's darkroom. As he drew closer to the house, Marion Raven was just emerging from that darkroom, and as soon as she saw him, she waved and squealed his name with delight. She didn't wait until he actually arrived at the house, but ran down the path to meet him. The Russian smiled with anticipation: Napoleon wasn't the only one who rated a welcome, though Illya's was always the same committee of one.



As soon as she reached him, Marion threw her arms around his neck and Illya went into her embrace gratefully, like a ship arriving at safe harbor. She was wearing a thin cotton sundress, and as her body pressed close to his, he could feel the familiar angles and





curves fitting against his own as perfectly as two interlocking pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Before she could say a word, he kissed her, long and deep, banishing completely, for the moment, all thought, his mind washed clean of all concerns large and small.

“You’re early!” she exclaimed when they broke apart.

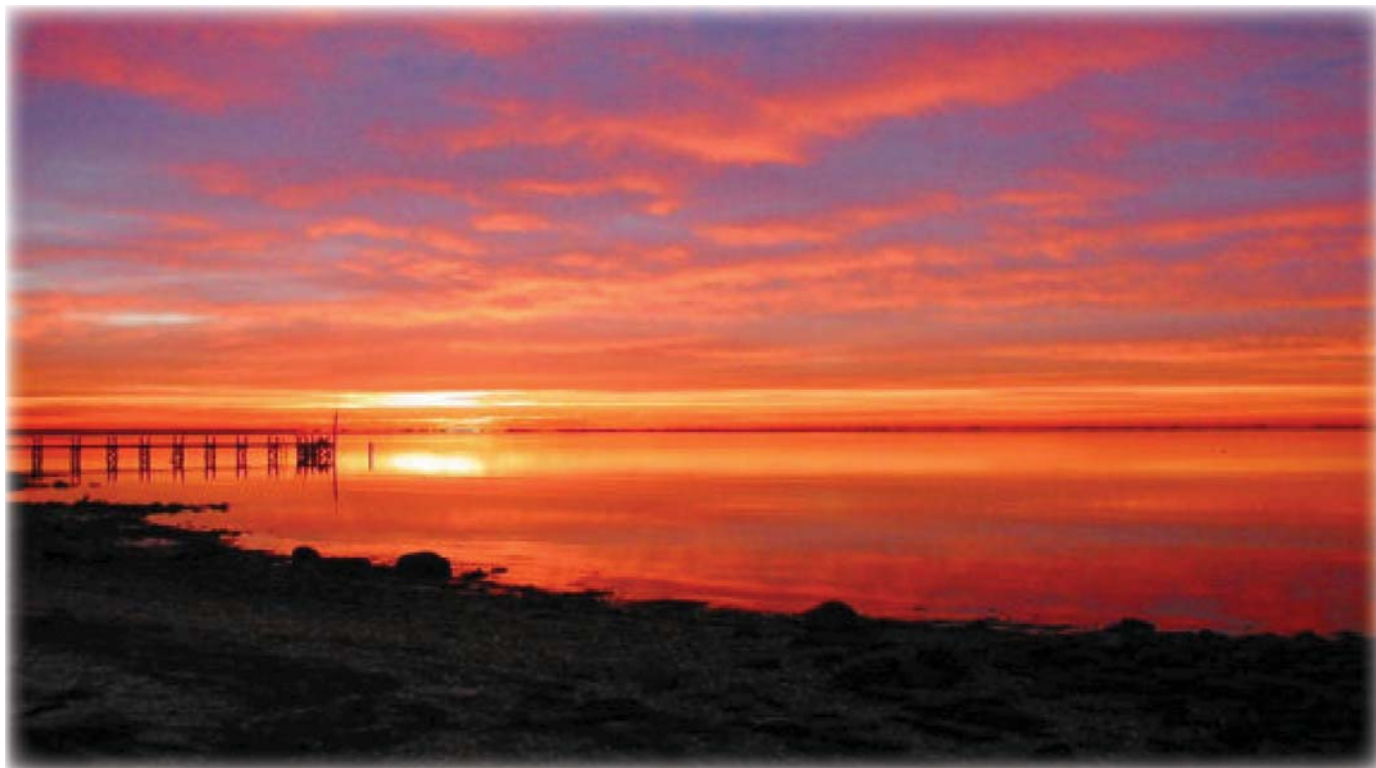
“I know,” he said, passing her the bag of fruit, and they both laughed and kissed again.

They walked the rest of the path hand in hand, and after holding open the screen door, he followed her into the house. Just inside the front hallway, he deposited the fishing rod, tucking it away in a corner, where it would remain, unused and forgotten, for the rest of the weekend.

### 3.

Later that evening, Illya lay amid rumpled sheets tangy with sex and sweat, feeling satiated if not entirely content. Beside him, their naked bodies still closely entwined, Marion studied his face, trying to interpret the meaning behind the movement of his eyes. The room was dark and

quiet, though the distant rumble of an approaching thunderstorm underscored the steady roll of the surf. The air around them was still — not even a sea breeze stirred the curtains — and heavy with humidity. Kuryakin’s eyes, barely discernible in the dim glow thrown by a light illuminating a neighbor’s deck, were as they always were: blue and placid as nearby Shinnecock Bay on a pleasant Sunday afternoon. Still, after knowing him for almost two years and dating him steadily for about a third of that time, Marion was finally learning to interpret his signals, even when they were subtle,





as they were now. She watched him scan the wall beyond her shoulder and guessed something was troubling him.

“What’s the matter?” she asked, resting her chin on his bare chest.

“That window,” he replied, his words soft, his mind occupied. “It’s a problem.”

Marion shifted slightly, turning her head, even as the fingers of his left hand continued to stroke gently, deftly, along her arm and shoulder, up and down and back again, without breaking rhythm.

“Why?” she asked, genuinely puzzled. The window in question was situated next to the bed, only a foot or two from the headboard. Since the rented farmhouse towered two stories over the surrounding beach houses, the window afforded a spectacular and unobstructed view of the ocean.

She watched as a suffused flash of lightening illuminated the clouds, etching their outline in the night sky. “I don’t understand. It’s perfect. You can lie here in bed and see all the way down to the beach.”

“That’s the problem. If we have a clear view from up here, someone with a sniper scope would have a clear view from down there.”

“Oh Illya,” Marion groaned, “please. Not now. Not tonight.” She turned back to him and pressed her cheek against his shoulder. Now she knew why, all summer, they’d never made love in this bedroom with the lamp turned on.



The weariness weighting that groan made him regret voicing his thoughts. He should have known better. His safety concerns were a continuing tension between them, particularly here, particularly during the summer. She would never be so naive or cruel as to accuse him of paranoia. After all, they’d met on a mission. She’d known from the start who he was and what he did for a living.

Still, Illya could hear the suspicion, the impatience, the irritation lurking in her voice each time the subject came up. And really, how could he blame her? It was so very agreeable to be here, so nice to relax, lounge around comfortably, to drop one’s guard. That’s why he came each weekend. For her, for this place, and for the feeling they both gave him. The farmhouse was private, isolated, almost something out of time, a tiny pocket of peace. Like this room. Like this bed.

*This bed, located perilously close to a wide-open window,* he reminded himself. It was so easy to be deceived, beguiled, lulled into a false sense of security. He enjoyed the view, too, but he wasn’t willing to die for it. Or see her die for it, either.

“Can we talk about something else?” Marion asked plaintively, desperate to change the subject, and he nodded, resolving to push the bed to a different corner of the room in the morning, if she allowed



it. "So, how did your week go?"

As Illya considered the question, his mind raced backwards through the previous five days, one of them spent in a hotel room, one in a cramped concrete cell, two more in the fetid back alleys of Mexico City, and the rest in various modes of transit, sometimes running for his life, sometimes not. He could tell her all the gory and tedious details of course, but really, what was the point? He was alive. He was ambulatory. His mind and body were intact. Even those observations, like his musing on the window, seemed too melodramatic to articulate aloud, and she was disturbed already. So he merely replied, "Reasonably well. And yours?"

"It was a very good week, actually. I had a lovely lunch with Marjorie at The Four Seasons on Tuesday."

... *the best friend*, he told himself.

"She caught me up on all the latest gossip. And then, a long meeting with Michael on Thursday —"

... *the new editor*.

"The magazine bought three of the photos I shot at the children's zoo, including the one with that cute tow-headed girl feeding the seals — remember?"

Illya nodded again. Marion had been particularly proud of that one and with good reason.

"So, what did *you* do on Thursday?" Stubbornly, she wasn't giving up.

"I crawled through sewers," he told her simply. When her eyes widened in surprise, he shrugged. "They didn't have any ventilation ducts."

*How did we manage to get imprisoned in the only Thrush satrapy in the world not equipped with heat or air conditioning?* He remembered sloshing through the muck and fuming to Napoleon who, as usual, only laughed and made a few bad jokes.

Marion's fingers scuttled along Illya's arm, finding a fresh patch of abraded skin near his elbow.

"It's nothing," he told her. "Just a few bruises. They won't even scar. Now, please: continue. I'd much prefer hearing about your week than remembering mine."

Reluctantly, Marion picked up the thread of narrative. "Michael gave me another assignment. An exclusive house party on Block Island next weekend. It sounds as if it's going to be terribly chic and glamorous. High society. Perhaps a movie star or two." She lifted her head and drew closer to his cheek so that they were nearly nose-to-nose. "You might come with me, y'know. It promises to be a lot better than crawling through a sewer."

"I might," he agreed noncommittally. It seemed rather churlish to point out that it was only a fluke that he'd had all these consecutive weekends off, and he could be on the other side of the world



by next Saturday. She looked so hopeful.

“Won’t there be a lot of paparazzi?” That was all he needed: his face plastered across the society pages of the city tabloids. The Old Man would be gnawing his pipe stem until it broke in two.

“Michael says no. The invitation came privately, through mutual friends. There’s been no P.R.” Her fingers glided along his torso, playfully dancing from rib to rib. “You and Napoleon could sail us there in his boat.”

“I don’t think so,” Illya said as gently as possible.

“Why not? It’s not so far. It —”

She caught herself. “You haven’t told him yet about us, have you?”

Illya shrugged. In truth, he hadn’t told anyone. Marion had already been vetted by Section IV a long time ago, so she had security clearance. What he did in his free time was his business. He had his communicator always with him, and it was turned on 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They could find him if they needed to. “He knows I see you from time to time.”

“But not where you go each weekend.”

There was a pause. Finally, “No.”

“Why?”

Illya repressed a sigh. He’d known this was coming.

“Are you too ashamed of what we have?”

*Too ashamed to tell Napoleon?* That prompted a harsh chuckle. Considering what was happening on the Pur-sang each weekend — what was probably happening at that very moment — well, the irony of her question was just too rich. “No, Marion, I am not ashamed,” Illya said soberly, gathering her closer. From the window, there was another lightening flash and a series of low rumbles. The thunderstorm was fast approaching.

“Quite the contrary. I treasure these days and nights so much, I don’t want to share them with anyone else but you. Not even in words. Not even with Napoleon.” And that was the truth; she could read it in his eyes as well.

Reassured, Marion kissed him, and he closed his arms around her, enjoying the sensation of her skin, still slightly



sticky with perspiration, against his. Her body was slender, and except for her full bosom, boney and angular in some places, deliciously soft in others.

“But doesn’t he ask where you’re going? Doesn’t he wonder?”

Illya shrugged again. “I doubt he even thinks about it. Napoleon has been well and fully occupied lately.” Even that was an understatement.

“Still dating all those socialites?”

Illya snorted. *Devouring them* was more like it, though he managed to resist the temptation to say so.

“It’s because of Clara, you know.”

“Perhaps,” he conceded, not wanting to discuss it further. So, she remembered their conversation, though it was months ago — a conversation that had occurred because he’d been disturbed by Terbuf, because for once, he’d wanted — needed — to talk, and there was no one else to talk with. He’d told Marion only the sketchiest details, but when it came to personal matters, women had a knack for spinning whole webs from a few meager strands.

*Shouldn’t have said so much*, he chided himself, feeling guilty. Napoleon had just as much a right to his privacy as Illya had to his.

“You should invite him to come here with you,” Marion was saying.

“No. Out of the question.”

“— we could all have dinner —”

“Marion, please.”

“— a nice evening.”

“Please. Stop.” He grasped her hands in his. “Look: Napoleon has his personal life and I have mine. We live practically in each other’s pockets as it is; working together can get downright claustrophobic. Sometimes, we just need some space — what do the Americans call it? A breather — a little time to get away from one another.” *And from U.N.C.L.E. And from guns and bombs and secret formulas and meglomaniac madmen, and from the whole damn business. Let someone else save the world for a few days.*

Marion frowned, not quite convinced. “It sounds like he’s lonely,” she observed, which made Illya want to laugh. “Oh, Napoleon is many things, but lonely isn’t one of them. Not these days. Believe me.” *If she only knew the half of it.* “He can have any woman he desires.”

“Except the one that matters,” Marion replied with a sniff. She withdrew her hands and settled back next to Illya, tucking into the crook of his arm. “You know, a person can be lonely even when they’re in bed with someone.”

*Uh-oh*, he thought, catching her drift. That didn’t sound good. Resigned, Illya turned on his side. “Are you trying to tell me something?”

**12** “Only that I’m finding it very hard to live this way. I know you have to protect yourself from the



rest of the world, but you don't have to protect yourself from me."

Before he could reply, a loud crack of thunder shook the eaves of the old house and the storm broke. Rain shushed through the open window, sprinkling the bed with a fine, cooling mist. Marion hopped to her feet to close the window and as she did, she also drew the curtains and pulled down the shade. Climbing back into bed, she observed knowingly, "You can turn the light on now." Illya smiled and reached to the nearby night table to snap on the lamp.

"All right," he said, surrendering, as she cuddled in close. "I'll tell you about the affair in Mexico, as much as I'm able to share. But first —" He leaned down and kissed her with all the passion he could muster, just the way he'd imagined he would while sitting in that cell, crouching in the sewer pipe, and later, dozing on the plane back, his hands and mouth making clear his intentions.

"You have a deal," Marion replied with a broad grin.

And as he sank into her embrace, his free hand traveling the length of her body to seek out the warm space between her thighs, he knew if he could satisfy her with sincere and elaborate lovemaking, eventually she'd forget all about Mexico, and the entire matter would go away, like driftwood floating on the outgoing tide.

And as usual, as it had happened every previous weekend, he was right.

#### 4.

The next day, Mexico never came up, but something else did.

"Why didn't you tell me last night you'd invited people over for this evening?" Illya asked, his displeasure obvious even though he was trying not to let it show. They were standing in the kitchen, side by side, preparing food for a casual dinner party, with Marion sautéing scallops at the stove while Illya shucked clams for a raw bar over the sink. The guests were scheduled to arrive in less than an hour.

"Maybe because something else was on my mind," Marion teased him coyly, but when her joke failed to prompt a smile, she drew closer and threaded an arm through his. "I'm sorry," she apologized, meaning it. "I really did forget. It's only going to be a small, intimate group. Just a few of my dearest friends. Please don't be too cross with me."

Illya sighed. Eight people were coming, which was six too many for the agent's taste, but considering the parties Marion usually threw in the city, in which the door of her apartment was left open and just about anyone could wander in and often did, this gathering could probably be called "intimate." His eyes shifted sideways, his anger fading. "And what do you suppose your friends will make of me staying here with you?"

"No one will care."

"But won't they ask where we met? What exactly did you tell them about me?" Fleeting, Napoleon's words from yesterday came back to him. Illya doubted he could pass as a travel writer.

"Oh, don't worry," Marion assured him, merry again. Withdrawing her arm, she turned her attention back to the pan on the stove. The sizzle of olive oil and the pungent scent of garlic filled the room. "I told them you were an U.N.C.L.E. agent."

"I trust you're still joking," Illya said, his voice sharp and low as he inserted the thin, flat

blade of the clam knife. Prying open the shell with a push and a twist, he cut the muscle cleanly in one smooth motion.

“But why? Why can’t they know?” Marion replied, her tone betraying a nervous uncertainty. He didn’t get angry often and she never liked it when he did. She was also trying hard not to notice how expertly and efficiently he wielded that knife. “U.N.C.L.E. isn’t a complete secret. People are aware it exists. My friends all knew my father, and I’ve told them all about that horrible business with Gervaise Ravel.”

Once more, she moved closer, playfully bumping her shoulder against his. “Besides, I didn’t want them to think I was dating a Soviet spy.”

“But you are dating a Soviet spy,” he pointed out reasonably as he reached for the last clam from the bowl on the counter.



“You know what I mean.”



Yes, he did. In U.N.C.L.E. HQ, his nationality was almost beside the point, as unremarkable as if he’d simply grown up in a different neighborhood. It was easy to forget that the America that stretched beyond that steel-walled womb was far less forgiving, but Illya never did.

“You are afraid they won’t approve of me,” he observed stiffly.





“Not exactly.” She watched him pop open the last clam with the delicate precision of a surgeon. “Some of them are probably even more Marxist than you are.”

He had to give her that. Knowing how trendy and radical some of Marion’s bohemian friends fancied themselves, she was probably right.

With the scallops now a golden brown, Marion turned off the gas and took a moment to plant a kiss on his cheek. “It’s just simpler this way,” she assured him. Then taking the pan from the stove, she busied herself at the kitchen table, adding the clams and the scallops to a pile of shelled shrimp and arranging it all with garnish on trays.

*Simpler? Being an U.N.C.L.E. agent?* Kuryakin thought with a snort. *Now, where could she possibly have gotten that idea?*



5.

Two hours later, the comfortable parlor of the old farmhouse was filled with the smell of good food, the clink of wine glasses, and the hum of convivial conversation with Frank Sinatra crooning low from the stereo. The talk naturally reflected the headlines. That week, there’d been riots in the Negro neighborhoods of Los Angeles and Chicago, the situation in Vietnam was not going well despite the statements from various U.S. officials to the contrary, and not so incidentally, NASA had just launched another manned spaceflight, planned to be the longest one to date.

These historic events notwithstanding, Marion’s guests were more interested in mundane matters, such as the fact that the Minnesota Twins had just beaten the mighty Yankees 8 to 2. They were also deeply concerned about the heat wave and the restrictions the city had just imposed on air conditioners for private use to save water during the current drought.

“We have apartments in our building as well,” complained Lyle Fox, a bald, well-fed art dealer who owned a gallery. “So which rules do we follow?” his wife, Perry, chimed in. “Private or commercial? No one’s made that clear.”

Too, there was considerable speculation about the baggage belt being installed at Kennedy airport to relieve the present chaotic system of retrieving one’s luggage from the carts. “An utter madhouse, especially if you have to go through Customs!” intoned Michael Tate, Marion’s new editor, who apparently traveled a great deal, and Illya, listening as he poured the man some wine, had to agree. Sometimes, even with the U.N.C.L.E. courtesy pass at Customs, it took Napoleon and him an hour or more just to get out



of the airport.

And there was one other subject that absorbed much of everyone's attention: the Beatles' concert scheduled for Shea Stadium the following night.

"And I have tickets! Whoo-hoo!" Marjorie, Marion's best friend, announced triumphantly, fists pumping into the air, which made everyone laugh, including the older couples, the middle-aged Foxes and silver-haired Rogers, who really had only a vague notion of what all her excitement was about.

"You remember, Irving," Sylvia Rogers reminded her husband. They were both soft-spoken, perfectly civilized, and thin as rails — a matched set. "Those English boys on Ed Sullivan — the ones with the hair," which prompted another round of laughter.

Illya listened to it all, dutifully pouring, a bottle of sparkling wine in one hand and a nice Chablis in the other, offering polite responses when he could and wondering when they'd all get tired of making small talk and just go home.

"You two look so perfect together," Marjorie observed to Illya later in the kitchen as he exchanged two empty bottles for fresh ones from the rack.

"That's right. You tell him, Marge," Marion laughed, overhearing the remark as she carried in an empty tray. "I keep saying he should live with me."

Marjorie patted Illya's forearm. "Oh, yes, definitely. You should, Illya. Mare has that nice, big apartment. There's plenty of room."

"I don't require much space," the agent replied with a shrug as he worked loose a cork. "Just a corner for my suitcase and a place to sleep."

"She has a double bed, too," Marjorie confided, lowering her voice and leaning in close. "But you know that," she added, winking. Illya exhaled a deep breath. Marion had been nagging him to give up his own apartment and move into hers for weeks despite all the reasons he offered why it would not be a good idea. Now, it seemed, she'd called in a confederate to argue her case. As Marjorie drifted away, he glanced over at Marion, but she avoided his eyes.

In the midst of the party again, his co-host duties completed for the moment, Illya found a vacant seat on the sofa to sip a glass of wine himself.

"So, you're Russian, dear?" Sylvia Rogers inquired with a gentility that was almost painful.

"I'm afraid so," he replied with a chuckle.

"And a Soviet?"

"Only when it matters." He'd expected questions like this, but at least, if he was going have to satisfy someone's curiosity, better it was this sweet, decent soul with her discretion and neat, ivory hair. Even to a house at the beach, Sylvia wore pearls.

"We'd love to visit Moscow someday," she said, and her husband, who never said much, merely nodded in agreement. "It would be so wonderful to see all those lovely theaters. Have you ever been to the Bolshoi?"

"A few times." Illya didn't know where the Rogers' wealth came from, but he'd heard they invested in experimental Off-Broadway shows. "An evening at the Bolshoi is indeed one of life's sublime pleasures," he observed, much to Sylvia's delight.

"Ah, yes. And the Maly. And the Moscow Arts! To see where Chekov was first performed —" She tilted her chin in Michael Tate's direction to include him in the conversation. "Have you ever been to Moscow, dear?" Apparently, anyone under fifty was addressed as "dear."

"No, but I've seen 'Dr. Zhivago' twice," Tate replied brightly. He was a sort of blond, curly haired version of Napoleon, personable and clean-cut, with the look of an Ivy League fraternity. "Does that count?"

Tate's gaze shifted to Kuryakin, an unspoken challenge in his eyes, and the agent suddenly realized that despite the pretty date Tate had brought to the party, the editor's interest in Marion extended beyond her photographs.

"Only if you believe in romantic fairy tales," Illya returned mildly, draining the last of his wine.

"Do you?"

"As the saying goes, the book was better," Illya said, sidestepping the metaphorical gauntlet thrown down before him. He rose with his empty glass. "Excuse me."

At the other end of the room, the conversation was focused on money and the opportunity of acquiring more. The stock market was up, and Marion and her two girlfriends — her sorority chums she called them — were pumping Lyle Fox for some free investment advice. They were named Julie and Georgette — nicknamed George, Illya remembered. "Like in Nancy Drew," Marion had told him, though he didn't understand the reference.

"Thank God for Xerox," Fox was saying, "or I'd never be getting by. I mean, they're painting dented soup cans and calling it genius these days."

"You're not a fan of modern art?" Illya asked, amused. As Marion leaned against him, he casually draped an arm around her shoulder and resisted the temptation to see if Tate was watching.

Fox shook his smooth, gleaming head. "They lost me after Picasso. I suppose I can stomach Pollock, but Warhol is trash."

"And your customers don't agree?" Illya guessed.

"A few do, but good taste is dying. And then, of course, my best client just went to jail."

"Oh no! Really?" Marion giggled. "How scandalous!"

Fox nodded sadly. "He liked the masters and spent big. A Parisian; very old school. The guy had class. I'm going to miss Dupré."

The name and the details suddenly registered with Illya. "Francois Dupré? Tall. White hair. Dark moustache?"

"Yeah," Fox asked, surprised. "Do you know him?"

*Oh yes*, Illya thought. Francoise Dupré was one of the aliases used by Victor Gervaise, chief of



station for Thrush, Paris. *He's in prison all right, Illya wanted to say, because Napoleon and I put him there.* But instead, the agent merely observed, "He has a notorious reputation — or had."

Fox nodded. "So I understand. He was in the import/export business, but I heard he dealt in arms on the side."

"Oh, he did considerably more than that," Illya informed him meaningfully.

"A real gangster, huh?" Fox said with a chuckle as if the information didn't come as a surprise. His blasé attitude annoyed Kuryakin. How could Fox be so complacent, so naive?

"A truly evil man," Illya corrected him. "You have no idea."

The gravity evident in his tone disturbed the rest of the group. The young women shifted self-consciously, exchanging quick, darting glances, while Marion offered Illya a discreet nudge to the ribs.

"Evil? Really?" Fox laughed again with obvious discomfort. "But he was such a charming fellow. Attractive to the ladies, too. I know Dupré was no choirboy, but evil is a pretty strong word."

"Nevertheless, an accurate one," Illya insisted, irritated. He could still smell the acrid scent of burning asphalt as the fire ringed around him while Gervaise and his lackeys watched. "He could murder, out of hand as easily as —"



Abruptly, Illya was interrupted by a familiar syncopated beeping emanating from the breast pocket of his shirt. *Saved by the bell.*

"That sounds like it's coming from your pen," Julie said, pointing. Embarrassed, Illya disengaged from Marion, excused himself, and retreated to the porch to take the call in private. And as he hurried away, he could hear Marion explaining sotto voce, almost apologetically, "It's his communicator. He has to carry it all the time..."

## 6.

Outside, the night was clear with a warm breeze whipping off the ocean and ruffling his hair. Illya closed the screen door softly behind him. As he clicked open the channel, he began to put distance between himself and the house, picking his way down a fenced

windbreak that wound through the dunes to the sea.

“Kuryakin, here.”

“Hi, Illya. Sorry to bother you.”

It was Sarah calling on the local channel, uncharacteristically still on duty on a Saturday night.

“That’s all right.” Illya idly toed a pattern in the sand with his shoe. “Is there a problem?” There would have to be if Sarah was calling them at this late hour.

“It’s not official yet, but I hear they’re moving up the clock on Stockholm. You and Napoleon will be leaving Tuesday, not Wednesday, and Lisa has you penciled in for a briefing with Mr. Waverly Monday morning. I knew you guys were going out to the Island this weekend, so I thought you could use a heads-up.”

“Yes. We appreciate the warning. Thank you.”

A moment of dead air passed as Sarah hesitated. “Is Napoleon with you?”

“Ummm... no.” Now it was Illya’s turn to hesitate. “No, he isn’t. Not at the moment.”

“Then, could you do me a favor in return?”

“Certainly. What is it?”

“Could you pass on the message to him? It’s kind of late and I, ah, I don’t want to disturb him.”

“No problem,” Illya assured her. “I’ll make sure he knows.”

“Thanks. See you on Monday.”

“Yes. Channel A out.”

In the faint light of their neighbor’s exterior floodlight, Illya held up his left wrist to eye level and checked the face of his watch. *Almost 10:30.* He wondered where his partner was at the moment, and more importantly, what he was doing. Was he still out in public — at a bar, a nightclub or a private deck party perhaps? Or had Napoleon returned to the boat with a conquest already in progress?

Illya sighed. Well, there was no help for it. Calling later would probably only make matters even more awkward.

Reaching the edge of the dunes, Illya sauntered along the beach. His canvas sneakers squeaked as they sank into soft sand as white in the moonlight as Sylvia Rogers’ hair. It was currently low tide and the waterline had retreated, widening the beach. In the distance, up the coastline, he could see the hazy halo of light generated by the yacht clubs and towns surrounding Shinnecock Bay. He could almost imagine the Pursang in its berth, rocking gently against the mooring lines.

*Or, perhaps, not so gently...*

*Stop,* Illya scolded himself as he thumbed the communicator, adjusting the frequency. He wouldn’t even need an U.N.C.L.E. channel. Solo was close enough to pick up his transmission pen to pen.

*Better to get it over with.*

Once more Illya heard the familiar double tone on the other end, echoing like a startled gull's cry on the beach that was silent except for the steady roll of the surf. After a moment, Napoleon's voice came back sounding thick and a little breathless.

"Solo here."

"Napoleon, it's me. Something's come up."

"Okay. Hang on. Give me a sec."

Over the communicator, there was a rustle of sheets, some whispered words, the squeezebox tone of a kiss, and a woman's appreciative laugh, low and throaty. Illya knew why Sarah had asked him to make the call. She dated Napoleon from time to time, and this was something she didn't need to overhear.

Cupping his hand loosely over the receiver, Illya muffled the incriminating sounds and tried hard not to conjure up a corresponding scene in his mind. It was none of his business, after all, and he would have wanted the same courtesy if Napoleon had caught him in bed with Marion.

A minute later, Solo's voice returned. This time it was clearer but pitched low, with the creak of deck and pier in the background.





“Illya?”

“I’m still here, Napoleon. Sarah called.” Briefly, he relayed her message.

“Hmmm...” Solo muttered thoughtfully on the other side of the transmission, silently calling up tide tables he had stored in his memory. “Well, obviously we can’t wait until Monday morning, and I’d prefer not to try to sail against the tide. Which means we can’t leave until at least noon. I suppose we’ll have to shove off around then.”

“Understood. I’ll be there.”

“All right. Anything else? I have to get back.”

“No. Have a good night.”

The sweet trill of a woman calling Napoleon’s name in the background left no doubt that he would. “You, too. Solo out.”

Illya capped his communicator and tucked it back into his pocket. He dropped down on the slope of a dune for a moment, contemplating the full moon and how it reflected on the ocean, like a flash-light beam bouncing off a warped mirror. He had no desire to go back to the party. He’d had enough of their curiosity, their vacuity. He didn’t really blame them, but sometimes, the ignorance of Innocents, like the naiveté of children, could be terribly trying.

And so he remained on the deserted beach — at the moment, a nocturnal no man’s land — idling on the border between civilization and wilderness and content to do so, knowing that, for better or worse, it was where he belonged.

## 7.

It was almost midnight when Marion picked her way down to the beach and found Illya still contemplating the surf under a starry sky that was so clear it seemed vaguely artificial.

“I thought I’d find you here,” she said as she sat down beside him. “My friends said you’d gone off on a mission, but I knew you wouldn’t leave without saying goodbye.”

“Are you so sure about that?” Illya replied, and she had to look at him twice to make certain he was only teasing.

Drawing up her knees against her chest, Marion wrapped her arms around her legs. “I’m sorry you didn’t have a good time.”

Illya shrugged. “It was all right. My problem, my baggage.”

“That man — Dupré — the one Lyle was talking about. Who is he?”

“A Thrush official who tried to kill me in the spring. After I got away, he kidnapped Napoleon and a woman from our office, looking for a special code. If they hadn’t been rescued in time, he would have tortured them to get what he wanted.”

“Was he as bad as Ravel and Bufferton?” Marion asked softly.

"In some ways, worse. He had a more powerful organization behind him. More dangerous, in any event." Sliding down the slope of sand to get closer, he circled an arm around Marion and drew her against him.

"A few people were discussing Vietnam at the party tonight, and how they expect your country to win. And I kept remembering something I'd read in the *Times* this morning. It was the contents of a note found on the body of a dead Viet Cong — a political officer. In it, he'd been writing to his family about how terrible conditions were, and how miserable he and his comrades felt. How the Americans were shelling them every day and night; how the medicine was low, the rice was sour, there was no water for washing and little for drinking; how he was sleeping just four hours a night. And yet he was determined. He believed in his cause, and he was not going to give up."

Illya turned to her. "You Americans are too content and comfortable to understand that state of mind. That's why this war will continue to drag on."

"But I do. Napoleon and I have experienced similar conditions and had similar feelings in the field. But I can't explain that to your friends; they wouldn't understand."

"You can tell me," Marion murmured. "I'll listen."

"But I don't want to tell you." When her chin snapped up sharply, he added, "Don't take it personally." He kissed her lightly on the lips. "Now, it's your turn not to be cross with me."

As she surrendered, settling back into his embrace, he explained, "Sometimes, I can't for security reasons. Sometimes, it's just too difficult to explain properly. Sometimes, I just want to forget and get on with regular life. You asked last night what I did on Thursday. On Thursday, I crawled through the filthiest sewers you can imagine, fleeing for my life. And I did it because the alternative, torture and a painful death, was so much worse. I saw Napoleon covered in excrement from head to toe. Tonight, he's out partying, dressed in his best linen sports jacket, no doubt a martini in each hand. That's our lives, Marion, his and mine, and all the other agents. I couldn't share such things



with your friends at the party tonight. Really: what am I to say?"

Marion didn't know what to say either, so she said nothing. A long silence passed between them. Then, Illya told her, "That call was from Headquarters. I have to leave in the morning. I'm sorry."

Marion nodded, accepting. Something like it had happened before. Indeed, too many times. "Do you need a ride back? I rented a car. I can take you."

"All right," Illya agreed. His regular ride with Wheeler was scheduled far too late in the afternoon.

"We could go all the way back to the city together," Marion proposed hopefully, but Illya shook his head. "No, Napoleon needs me to help him sail the boat back."

Discouraged, Marion heaved a deep sigh. "I don't know if I can go on like this."

"Why? We're happy when we're together. Isn't that enough?"

"No, it's not. I want more."

"What more is there?" Illya asked, genuinely at a loss.

Marion twisted under his arm to look at him. "I want more of you. Of us. You go off, and I don't know where. And even when I do know, I'm still terribly lonely. I spend all week, counting the hours, waiting for the weekend to come when I can see you again."

"I do, too," he admitted. "It's the best part of my life. It keeps me going."

"But you see? It's only a part. I can't be content much longer with only small pieces of you. It's like I'm being rationed. It's just not enough."

"I'm afraid it will have to be," he said.

She hesitated, not wanting to speak aloud the question that was on her mind, but she couldn't hold back, so she asked anyway. "Do you ever think of quitting U.N.C.L.E.?"

She expected him to be angry, but he wasn't, just weary and resigned. "That wouldn't solve anything. The minute I did, I would have to go back home. The only reason I'm here, in New York, is U.N.C.L.E." He looked at her. "You wouldn't want to go back to the Soviet Union with me, now, would you?"

It was a rhetorical question. They both knew the answer. Stymied, she turned her gaze back to the ocean, eyes glistening though she absolutely refused to allow herself to cry.

"Maybe you should go out on dates with other people," he offered gently, disregarding how angry she'd become when he'd made the suggestion previously.

"Michael seems interested in you."

"Oh Illya," Marion groaned. "How could you say that to me? You know how much I love you." She wiped at her eyes with the sleeve of her windbreaker. "Would you want to date someone else too?"

"No, but I'm not the one who is unhappy. Perhaps you would feel less lonely if you went out occasionally with other men."



“And that wouldn’t bother you? You wouldn’t feel jealous?”

Illya recalled Michael Tate’s eyes on Marion, and how they followed her as she wove through the guests at the party.

“I suppose I would accept it, as you have with me. You know that I meet women on missions all the time. And though I may not choose to, I will sleep with them if I must, if the job requires it.”

That was a reality that always went unspoken between them, and for a brief moment, Marion hated him for being so frank, so reasonable, in bringing it up now.

“I don’t want to talk about this any more,” she said rising. “I’m tired and I’m going to bed.” She tipped her head to look down at him. “Are you coming?”

“Do you still want me to?”

“Well, you can’t sleep out here all night on the beach, now, can you?”

“Why not?” Illya asked, and that made her smile.

“Oh, come on,” Marion said, relenting. She held out her hand to him and he took it, allowing her to drag him to his feet. “If we only have one more night,” Marion said, “let’s not waste it arguing out here.” As he stepped beside her, his arm encircled her shoulders automatically, and she allowed it. “If I’m going to have just a piece of you, I know exactly which piece that’s going to be.”

“Oh?” Illya grinned, his eyebrow arching.

“Don’t be so shocked. I can be tough and worldly, too.”

When she thrust out her chin, defiantly, he planted a kiss on it. “I remember,” Illya said, because he did. And walking back to the house, he entertained fleeting memories of their time together in Yugoslavia and Baridqua, reminding himself how and why he got involved with Marion in the first place.

## 8.

“I’ll lock up,” Illya told her as he closed the front door and threw the bolt. “You go up to bed.”

Marion nodded wearily, climbing the staircase with a heavy tread. As he listened to her footsteps overhead, Illya moved around the first floor, testing the motion detectors he had installed on every windowsill and checking each room to see if it was secure. In the kitchen, he set three locks on the back door, rinsed off the clam knife and the two plates he found in the sink, and prepared to turn out the light. Suddenly, he heard a loud crack followed by a scream he recognized all too well.

“Marion!” Illya cried. Instinctively, he grabbed the clam knife, going for the nearest weapon at hand, and then raced from the kitchen to the old roll top desk where he kept a spare .44. It wasn’t his Special, which was still waiting on the night table upstairs, but that, with the knife, would do. Then he shot up the staircase, taking two steps at a time.

Arriving on the second floor, he slowed and crawled toward the bedroom. The light was on, the window was open, and the shade was up. He found Marion sprawled on the floor in his pajama top, frightened but alive.

“Are you all right?” he whispered harshly. She nodded, raising her hand and pointing at the wall above her head. Kuryakin’s gaze followed her finger and saw a bullet hole in the flowered wall paper. *A silenced shot.* The crack he’d heard was the plaster shattering. Before he could think any further, there was the familiar popping sound of another silenced shot. This one slammed into a picture, taking out one side of the frame and the glass.



*A sniper.* It was as he’d feared the previous evening. Even though they’d moved the bed, the assassin had targeted Marion’s silhouette, seen through the open window.

“Come over here to me,” Illya ordered her. “Stay down and keep your head low.” Marion did as she was told, scuttling crab-like across the floor until she reached the threshold of the bedroom and joined him in the hall. The shadow animated by her movements invited yet another shot, this one closer and not so high.

“Oh, God,” she whimpered, and Illya could see her whole body was trembling. Judging by the marksmanship, he doubted the sniper was very adept, for which he was grateful. If the shooter had been a top professional, Marion would be dead already.

Still, given enough time with a panicked target, even a poor marksman can get lucky. There was no time to explain this to her or give her more than the most rudimentary instructions. “You can stay here in the hall. It should be safe,” Illya said. “There aren’t any windows. When I leave, lock the door and don’t let anyone back in unless you’re certain it’s me.”

As he peeled himself away, she grabbed at his sleeve. “But where are you going? Shouldn’t we call the police?”

“Not yet. Just sit tight. Please.”

And then he was gone, hurrying down the stairs and out the door. Marion followed, slamming the bolt behind him, before she crept back to find a safe corner in the hallway in which to hide.

## 9.

It was almost three hours before Marion heard a knock at the door, rapping in a shave-and-a-haircut pattern. The panic she’d felt earlier had tempered somewhat, but her heart was still beating triple time as she uncoiled herself from her hiding place and slinked down the staircase. At the door, she squeezed herself to one side and peeked out the curtain without moving it. But there was no need for caution. Illya was standing on the porch, uninjured and alone.

“You can open the door, Marion,” he said, but she hesitated before doing so, analyzing his tone first to see if there were any hidden warnings in it. Finding



none, she finally unlocked the locks and opened the door.

“Illya?”

He was standing there, the gun still in hand though the clam knife was missing, completely drenched in seawater with the front of his shirt and chinos stained with big splotches of brown that Marion suspected was blood. Fortunately, none of it seemed to be his. Indeed, except for the soaking and the sheen of sand and salt caked along the side of his body right up into his hair, he appeared to be unharmed.

“Oh, thank God,” Marion cried, and threw her arms around his neck, unmindful of the mess. Illya pocketed the gun and returned the embrace, letting her hold him until the storm of emotion broke and eventually passed.

“You took so long, and when you didn’t come back, I was so afraid that —” She didn’t need to finish the thought. They both knew what she’d feared.

“It’s all right. It’s over,” he reassured her, still holding her tightly because she needed it.

Slowly, she settled down, and soon, she was calm enough to let go of his body. Still grasping his hand, Marion asked, “You said you didn’t tell anyone about this. Not even Napoleon. How did they find you?”

It was obvious to Marion that Kuryakin was the real target. With Ravel and Bufferton long dead and gone, there was no one who might want to threaten her life.

Illya shrugged. “Tonight, at the party, I heard about Victor Gervaise just by coincidence. It can happen in reverse the same way. A piece of information, a stray comment, someone, somewhere, makes a connection. The world is a far more intimate place than we realize, and I have many enemies. Do you understand now why I can’t live with you?”



When she looked at him wide-eyed, comprehending, he gathered her close and kissed her comfortingly. “But it’s over for now. I need to clean up first, and then I’ll come to bed.”

“That’s it?” Marion demanded, “Just like that?”

It’s over? *What’s over?* Shouldn’t we call the police?”

“The proper authorities have been notified.”

“And what does *that*



mean?”

“It means what I said,” Illya replied with rising irritation, his voice growing flatter, colder, more matter-of-fact. “Everything has been taken care of. Life will go on as before.”

“But how can it? Won’t there be a court case? Subpoenas? Statements? Some *messy loose ends* lying about?”

“There won’t be any corpses washing up on the beach with the driftwood tomorrow morning, if that’s what you mean.”

“No, there wouldn’t be,” she said, taking his measure with new eyes. “You’re too good at your job for that.” The image of him gutting the clams so effortlessly earlier that evening flashed through her mind, and it made her queasy.

Illya shook his head. He was too tired to have it out between them, here, at the foot of the staircase at 3 a.m. He’d deal with her in the morning when their nerves were less frayed. “I’m going to bed,” he said wearily. He began to climb the stairs.

“You killed him, didn’t you?” she asked suddenly, her voice low and soft.

No answer.

“Didn’t you?” Marion demanded stubbornly, raising her voice.

Illya halted in mid-step and turned. “Would it change anything between us if I said I did?” he asked, his voice unexpectedly reasonable.

“No.”

“Then why ask the question?”

He had her there. Tears sprouted at the corners of Marion’s eyes, and this time, she made no effort to deny them or wipe them away. “I couldn’t pretend you were a rock or a tree or part of the furniture when we first met,” she told him. “I tried, but I couldn’t. And when you’re not around, I can’t act like you don’t mean anything to me, that I don’t miss you, that I don’t care what happens to you, that I don’t love you. Just as I can’t ignore the fact that there’s someone’s blood smeared all over your shirt.”

“I’m sorry,” he replied simply, “but you have to.”

At that, she lost it and the floodgates opened. Illya sighed: there was no help for it. Resigned, he descended the last two steps and drew her into his arms, letting her cry herself out.

“You tell me to be wary, to be cautious,” Marion managed when she could speak again, “and yet, we should act like everything’s normal, as if we lived like everyone else.”

“It’s a paradox, I know,” Illya replied, still holding her. *Welcome to my life*, he thought.

As her sobbing trailed off, Marion lifted her head and studied his face, smeared with blood and crusted with sand and dried seawater. He was handsome — beautiful, even — youthful without being boyish, like those medieval statues of seraphim she’d seen in the big European cathedrals.

Golden hair framing his head like a halo, those impossibly blue eyes, even now, calm and secretive, absorbing all but betraying nothing.

Her grip on him tightened, and all at once she said, "Make love to me."

"I need a shower first." He tried to disengage from her, but her fists on his wet clothing held him fast.

"No, like this. Right now."

"Marion, what's got into you?"

She didn't know either, but she felt wild, agitated but also excited, on the edge of hysteria. "You said I should overlook it, ignore the killing, ignore the blood —" Still holding on to him, she hauled herself up, climbing his body, and kissed him deep and full on the mouth. He resisted her at first, but she could feel his body surrendering, his arousal stirring in spite of himself.

"See?" she said, breaking away and letting him go at last. "I can do it."

"Don't be irrational," Illya said, disgusted with himself or her, he didn't know which.

"Violence isn't altogether rational, is it? But that's who you are, and I should accept that."

"No," he told her firmly. "It's only part of who I am. And I don't expect you to accept it. In fact, I don't want you to accept it. I need you to accept that you can't accept it. No civilized person can or should."

"Oh, so, you mean you want me to just close my eyes to it? Just look away?"

"Yes, and if Clara had had the good sense to do the same, Napoleon wouldn't be making such a fool of himself right now, trying to satisfy his hunger to love and be loved with the spiritual equivalent of cotton candy."

He had her again. Defeated, Marion hugged her arms to her chest and looked away. "So, let's be rational then. Everything in its place, is that it? A piece of your life here, a piece there. Separate little neat containers, like a spice rack. And where will you keep me? In a hatbox high up on the shelf?"

"No," Illya said, soberly, gently. "In my heart, with everything else I value. Treasured, protected, untainted by any ugliness that might attempt to intrude."

She looked at him, touched by the genuine emotion he was revealing to her. "Oh, Illya," she said sadly, "but life doesn't work that way."

"Mine has to," he said. "It's the only way I can remain sane."

He held out his hand to her and she took it and they climbed the stairs together, separating at the landing so that she could go off to the bedroom and he, to his shower. When he came to her afterward, his pale skin was scrubbed raw and pink with not a trace of blood or sand remaining. Even his fingernails were clean; she checked.

But Illya was wrong, Marion reflected, as she watched him ease into the bed beside her. Life couldn't be parsed and stored in neat little boxes. And as proof, when they began to make love



again, whether a fragment of the night remained in her mind or survived in his, she didn't know, but it was the best sex she'd had all summer.

10.

They drove back to the marina the next day, but because he didn't want her to accompany him to the dock, they said their goodbyes in the parking lot.

"I guess we shouldn't go back to the house next weekend," she said, settling back behind the wheel of the Chevy.

"It really wouldn't be a good idea," Illya agreed, acknowledging her disappointment. It really was a shame; he liked the old

farmhouse, too. With all the developers about, by next year, it would probably be gone.

"I suppose Marjorie can let me stay with her. There's still that Block Island party to cover. And where will you be?"

"I don't know," Illya said with an apologetic shrug.

After a moment, Marion asked, "What's going to happen to us?"

"I don't know that, either."

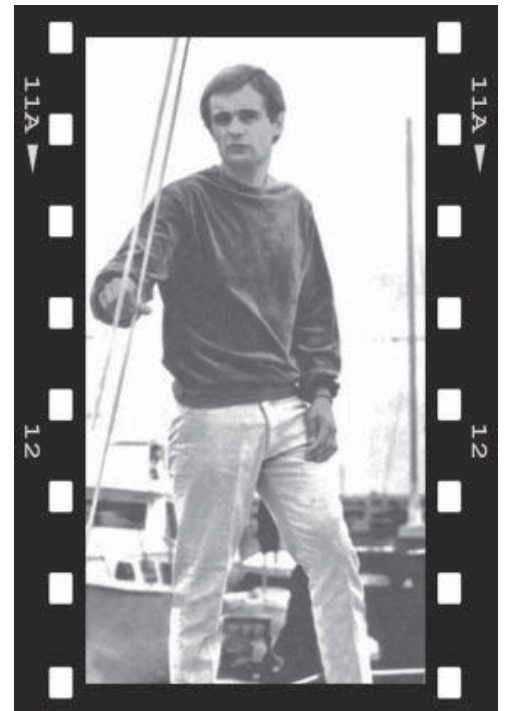
She offered him a rueful smile. "I was hoping for a better answer."

"I know you were. I'm sorry. It's the only one I have at the moment. I don't know what's possible. I only know what isn't."

"Oh, Illya." As he watched, she reached for his hand and threaded her fingers tightly through his. "I don't care how we manage it. I just want us to belong to each other."

"The problem is, I belong to too many people already," he told her frankly.

After they shared a long kiss goodbye, Illya took out his fishing pole, shouldered the duffle bag, and began the short walk back down to where the Pursang was docked. As he reached the pier, a young woman in a short black cocktail dress, her eye make-up smeared and her coiffure askew, came towards him from the opposite direction, her progress hindered by the high heels of her strappy sandals, which kept getting stuck in the spaces between the planking. Finally, disgusted, she ripped off the shoes and continued on, barefoot.







As she passed Illya, she barely offered him a second glance, but it was enough for him to realize that he didn't recognize her face from the dock on Friday afternoon, or any previous Friday. This one was new, a stranger.

"I see you brought back a little something for brunch," Illya greeted his partner as he descended into the cabin. Slumped behind the galley table dressed in boxers and a loosely belted bathrobe, Napoleon made a sour face behind his smoldering cigarette.

*And how is Marion?* he wanted to ask, but didn't. His partner probably wouldn't appreciate an educated guess aided by the Long Island real estate listings available from Section IV's infinite resources, and besides, Kuryakin liked to entertain the illusion of privacy. Still, Solo was heavily hung over and he was in no mood for sarcasm or subtle disapproval, no matter how well-intentioned.

"There's coffee on the stove," Napoleon said, gesturing with his own cup. A comma of hair hung, loose and ragged, over his forehead, his eyes and unshaven cheeks were heavily shadowed, and he looked like he hadn't slept all night. Since Illya hadn't slept much the previous night either, coffee sounded like a good idea to him, too.

"Anything to eat?" Illya asked, but that was hoping against hope. The refrigerator was cleaned out, the sink was choked with empty champagne bottles, and each of the three bunks around the cabin was unmade. There was a black lace bra peeking out from beneath the rumpled sheets on the wider bunk located aft, but Solo looked like he might kill him if made a witty comment about trophies or souvenirs, so Illya merely poured himself a cup instead and slid into the opposite bench.

"Are you okay?" the Russian agent asked after a moment. Napoleon's gaze was red-rimmed and rheumy, but more alert than might be expected.

"Sure. And you?"

"Fine."

"Are you really hungry? We could go out for sandwiches."

Illya shrugged. "I've had breakfast. I'll keep." Napoleon didn't look like he could stomach anything beyond coffee, anyway.

They huddled together for long minutes, nursing their coffee and silently reconnecting with reality and with each other.

"The Old Man called this morning," Solo remarked casually, finishing his cigarette. "Updated me on Stockholm and said he expected to see us, tomorrow morning. 10 a.m."

Illya quirked a resigned smile. "Time and tide mean nothing to Alexander Waverly."

“Yup. Thank God for Sarah.” Solo stubbed out his cigarette, drained his coffee, and slid along the bench, preparing to go in search of some clothing. “Still, it would have been nice to have had another day.”

Illya glanced around the chaos in the cabin again and bristled. *Another day?* They’d barely survived two. He suddenly felt angry, irritated, and he wasn’t quite sure why. “Oh, Napoleon, didn’t you have enough?”

Solo halted, pivoted on his heel and leaned into his friend. “No, tovarishch, I didn’t. It wasn’t enough.” For a brief moment, his voice was sober, earnest. “It’s *never* enough.” Then, he laughed, his usual good humor returning, and went off to find a clean t-shirt and shorts.

Illya continued to sip his coffee, listening to the cheerful sea chantey Napoleon was whistling, and the words rolled, unbidden, through his mind:

*...In Amsterdam, there lived  
a maid,  
Mark well what I do say,  
In Amsterdam there lived a  
maid,  
And she was mistress of  
her trade,  
I’ll go no more a-rovin’ with  
you fair maid.  
A-rovin’, a-rovin’,  
Since roving’s been my ruin  
aye-a  
I’ll go no more a-ro-ving  
with you, fair maid...*

Sitting there, listening, Illya began to review the night, the weekend, the summer, and the daily ebb and flow of his and Napoleon’s lives. And as he did, it occurred to him: one of them was willing to settle for too little; the other, desired too much. But the problem that occupied Illya, then, and for the entire trip back, was deciding which of them was which.

