

The Letter

Illya had gone somewhere, somewhere dangerous, to go by what he had taken with him. He had left letters for his landlady and Mr. Waverly and it felt like his communicator was in the letter for Waverly. That implied that he didn't expect to come back.

My hands were shaking as I opened the letter addressed to me and drew out the folded paper. It was written in Illya's small precise hand although I thought I detected a wobble or two near the end.

"Napoleon,

I am sorry to leave you without saying good-bye and after such a melancholy final affair when we had so many successful, even glorious, missions. Being worthy to be your partner has always been a challenge, but one I hope I have met with some success.

I want to thank you for being my best friend, my family, the one person I could trust in everything. Your trust and friendship have made me a better man than I ever thought I could become. I can never forget you.

You know I would not leave if I were not compelled by an obligation more important than UNCLE, an obligation even more important than you, my friend.

Please, please do not come after me. It is too dangerous. Even Waverly can't be trusted in this case. I know that if I had asked for your help, you would have given it without hesitation. In this case, I ask you to stay clear and know I can rely on you to honor this, my last request.

Прощання

Illya"

I reread it twice more. Actual information about what he was doing was almost non-existent. He had gone haring off on some dangerous quest and thought that even Waverly couldn't be trusted.

He was going to need backup, despite what he said. This was my best friend, the man who helped me with the Clara and Captain Morgan problems when he had no need to be involved. There was no way I was letting him go into whatever this was alone.

If he doesn't want anyone at UNCLE to know what he is doing that means I can't go to headquarters and try to get my hands on the "Section One Eyes Only" file that exists for every agent.

I'd already seen his regular personnel file and that was almost empty: transcripts and diplomas from the Sorbonne and Cambridge, a memorandum outlining the terms of his "loan" to UNCLE, Survival School scores. Nothing else. No family, nothing on his education in the USSR, no mention of military service, no suggestion he was ever in

either the GRU or KGB although he came with too much training to not have been in one of them, not even a copy of his birth certificate. No life in the USSR at all.

The doctors in Medical had been complaining for years that he had no medical records prior to joining UNCLE: they didn't even know if he had had childhood diseases like measles or mumps.

I knew he had been in the Soviet Navy and served on a submarine because he had mentioned it once or twice. He had also mentioned being in Kiev for some part of his childhood. He never mentioned any living family and I guessed from what he didn't say that they all died during WWII.

He wears a plain gold ring on his left ring finger, but had deflected every attempt to ask about it. When being pursued too aggressively by women, he would flash the ring at them in an attempt to discourage them. Maybe that was its sole purpose, but I had seen him twisting it when he was in one of his pensive moods.

He had a lot of books and records, but aside from a classic or two from Russia, all were from Europe or the US. The only thing made in the USSR was the box, now missing from his bureau and even that might have been bought here.

There had to be some clue about what had happened to set him off like this. I searched the apartment again, this time looking for any tiny clue about where he had gone. All his passports were missing: UNCLE, USA, USSR, UK, Sweden, and Peru. That didn't narrow things down very much. I was pretty sure UNCLE didn't know about the Swedish and Peruvian ones which meant those were probably what he was using.

Finally, I found something. A few tiny bits of paper floating in the toilet. It was important because he had torn it to shreds and then flushed it, but he had been in a hurry and the toilet had backed up a bit. I found his tea strainer and scooped out everything I could, then laid it out on his tablecloth. Mostly illegible, partly newspaper and partly office paper as far as I could tell. Three tiny bits of the office paper had legible fragments:

2 R

Coq

Yverdon-l

I headed to the library and started looking through atlases for any place that might fit the Yverdon or Coq fragments. I started with France in the hope that it might be that easy, but of course it wasn't. When the library closed, I checked out some more atlases and spent most of the night searching. Finally I found something in Switzerland – Yverdon-les-Bains.

I could be completely wrong, but it was the only lead I had. I phoned the airport for the first flight to Switzerland, using the Alvaro Martinez alias that UNCLE didn't know about,

and packed as quickly as possible. I grabbed my Spanish and “Richard Miller” US passports and emergency cash from behind the refrigerator, and was out the door.

I just hoped the “Solo luck” would hold and I’d find the crazy Russian before he got himself killed.