



Deborah M. Walsh

I "It's a Wolf in the Fold Kind of Situation ..."

Grant found himself clinging desperately to the worn brick wall for support. His heart pounded doggedly; sweat soaked his shirt, and a tiny trickle of blood oozed from the spot where Reynolds' misguided bullet had grazed him.

Misguided? No, that bullet had been meant for him, of that he was now convinced. Reynolds' eyes had been frighteningly unrecognizing, but his aim had been unerring; only his own quick reflexes had saved him from death.

A clatter in an adjacent alley startled him back to the present. Reynolds was somewhere close by. Heaving, he launched himself way from the wall, and began running once more. Have to get away, report to H ...

I can hear him, running, panting, Reynolds thought, clutching the gun in his hand, feeling its cold weight in his palm. He'll keep running, tire, he'll make mistakes; I'm in no hurry. I can wait. He'll burn himself out. I can wait ...

Up ahead -- light! A way out of this labyrinth of dark alleys, he was sure. He crept quietly toward the beacon, struggling to control his labored breathing.

A false alarm. Someone in the old brownstone had left a bedroom light burning. Frustrated, angry, he fell against the last step of the building's fire escape, sinking down onto the stair.

There had to be some way ... he searched the sky, devoid of a moon or stars. Clouds obscured the heavens, and the faint scent of oncoming rain warned his nostrils. His hand closed around the railing, absently gripping it with all his strength. Indeed, this insane chase was tiring him, playing at his sanity. His years of training were succumbing to fear. He mustn't allow that. There must be a way.

The apartment light suddenly blanked out. The alley took on an unearthly darkness. He could barely make out the outlines of the fire escape, snaking its way up the side of the building. If Reynolds were up there, he'd never see him until it was too late. Or vice versa, he realized. Cautiously, he followed the stairs to the third floor landing, cringing at every squeak and whine of the metal, and crouching down, waited, tense, silent, and not just a little afraid.

I heard something -- the sound of metal grating. Over there -- yes, over there. Not far. Not too much longer, my friend. Indeed, not too much longer at all.

Straining, he heard the sound of stealthy footfalls, making their way through the maze of alleys and deadends. He was coming -- not long now.

Then he saw him, erect, not a tremor in his stance. His head turned rapidly -- he was searching in the blackness. His own 'sixth sense' knew his quarry was nearby. The time was now -- there'd never be another.

"Reynolds! Up here!" he called, hauling himself up straight. He primed his weapon; it would have to be to the death.

Reynolds' eyes shot up, peering into the blackness surrounding Grant. He drew a flashlight from his coat pocket, and played it across the building. It hit Grant's eyes, blinding him. He hadn't bargained for that. A sneer twisted Reynolds' features. He cocked the gun, raising it to face his target.

Grant's risk wasn't paying off. In the silence of the alley, he heard Reynolds' gun prime, but his eyes were still reeling from the flashlight's glare. He raised his own gun, searching for the center of that bright beam.

"Reynolds! You can't be serious!" he urged, tension hiking his voice to a higher pitch. "It's me, Grant -- this is crazy! Give it up!"

The sound of a single gunshot invaded the city's silence. A gasp, a second shot, and a clap of thunder followed. The thud of two bodies was lost in the scream that ripped out of that apartment window.

Lightning creased the sky, illuminating the alleyways, casting quick, furtive shadows on the two bodies, one sprawled on the third floor landing, the other fallen against scattering trashcans. Light glinted on the two U.N.C.L.E. specials, as blood mingled with the heavy rain that began to pound against the concrete.

II "And where will you be, Napoleon?"

Illya placed the report on his desk, and sat there, staring at it, unaware of the bustling sounds of the offices around him. Grant and Reynolds ... both dead. It was hard to believe. Attached to the report was

a note: "Report to Waverly's office, 9 a.m. Friday."

Eight forty-five. He shuffled the papers into a quasi-pile, and set off in search of Napoleon Solo. Surely he'd have gotten a similar note -- over the years, the two agents had become like one person here, at U.N.C.L.E. New York. Much the same as Woodward and Bernstein had become at the *Washington Post*. Woodstein. Illya wondered what sort of name Bradlee might have found for "Kuryakin" and "Solo." Sometime he'd have to mention the problem to Napoleon. But not now. There would surely be no time for such a game.

Ahead, he could see Napoleon leaving his office, closing the door quietly behind him. The older man looked up, and smiled automatically at the sight of his Russian companion. Illya fell in by his side, and together, they made their way to the office of Alexander Waverly, Section One, Number One.

"Morning, Napoleon," Illya said conversationally. He knew that his friend would not speak about the two agents' deaths until they saw Waverly; every member of U.N.C.L.E. felt the death of a fellow-agent as keenly as the loss of a close friend or relative. There was no room for petty sentimentality in the multi-national organization, but there was a deep sense of brotherhood among these people, who risked their lives, in a very real sense, each day. And Napoleon had known both men, as Illya had. Still, there was no sense in falling into meaningless depression.

Napoleon smiled back, saying, "Think the old man has something planned?" Illya glanced at Solo's hands, and caught him tapping the folder he held absently.

"I should think so," Kuryakin answered, still attempting a light tone in the exchange. Leave the heavy stuff for Waverly. Somehow, he seemed to handle it all better than they ver could. Ahead, Waverly's secretary smiled a greeting, and nodded toward the door to the head of U.N.C.L.E.'s office.

Alexander Waverly was getting on in years; it seemed impossible that he had ever been young. As wrinkled as his skin might be, as bowed as his stance might seem, there was an incredible vitality about the man, which was at once demanding of respect and admiration from his co-workers. As Napoleon fell into the chair Waverly designated, he wondered if could ever fill those immense shoes when the old man left the organization. If Solo knew anything about the head of Section One, that wouldn't be until he was carried out in a crematory urn. And that healthy look on Waverly's weathered face assured him that wouldn't be for some time. He relaxed a bit, and waited, with Illya, for the old man to begin.

"Good morning, gentlemen, I trust you've had a chance to look over the reports I had sent to your homes last night."

Illya nodded. The report had arrived safely by special courier at about 9 p.m. the night before, just as we was about to leave to join a few friends. Napoleon nodded in kind, his own delivery colored by a touch of embarrassment. A certain female companion had been quite perturbed at Solo's sudden shift in interest, and had left shortly thereafter, vowing never to return.

"Yes, sir," the two men answered, almost in unison. Waverly nodded, pressing a button in the arm of his chair. The map of the world retracted into the ceiling, being replaced immediately by a television screen, bearing the split image of both Reynolds and Grant.

"As I'm sure you know, this is Carl Reynolds," he explained, pointing to the tall, dark-haired man on the left, "and Bill Grant." The other man was shorter, more muscular-looking, with graying hair. Reynolds had the slightly olive complexion that comes from Mediterranean heritage; Grant's skin was more of a golden tan, his home base being Miami.

Illya nodded silently as Napoleon stared at the images. Two healthy men, two of U.N.C.L.E.'s best operatives, two good friends. Dead.

"What you may not know, is that Carl Reynolds killed Bill Grant."

Solo made a disbelieving, choked sound. Kuryakin turned an upraised eyebrow toward Waverly. "It wasn't in the report," Solo protested.

"No," Waverly agreed, pressing a second button. The image changed to a magnified shot of two bullets. "The tracings on the bullet which killed Bill Grant match the barrel of Reynolds' gun. Ballistics assures me there can be no doubt. The bullet that killed Reynolds matches the bullet that killed Grant. Forensics explains that there is very little doubt that the wound was self-inflicted -- angle of entry, and so on." He paused to look from one man to the other, absorbing the shaken look each bore.

"Why?" was all Solo managed to get out.

"Forensics also informs me that Reynolds' blood contained some ... alien substances. And this is where the story becomes most disturbing."

Napoleon shifted uncomfortably in his chair. The story didn't need any unsettling developments. Two U.N.C.L.E. agents dead -- a murder and a suicide -- were bad enough.

Waverly drew two more folders from an unseen drawer in his desk, and pushed them across the tabletop. Napoleon accepted his slowly, and opened it, reading carefully. Illya finished his first, looking up con-

fusedly.

"The Boston Research Labs?" he asked incredulously. "But they weren't anywhere near Boston in the last few weeks. There couldn't have been a lab accident --"

"Which means that someone is exporting experimental material from the labs, and selling them to THRUSH," Napoleon finished for him.

"Exactly the thesis of Intelligence. We were not aware of any THRUSH activity on the Prescott University campus, but the possibility is not totally inconceivable. But that THRUSH has infiltrated the Behavioral Research Labs is indeed ... frightening, to say the least, gentlemen."

Illya nodded, tapping the report rhythmically. "And the labs are conducting behavioral research with an eye toward ...?"

"Control, Mr. Kuryakin. Which would tend to support the theory that the drugs in Mr. Reynolds' bloodstream came from the U.N.C.L.E. labs at Prescott University. Which is why I'd like you to enroll there as a student."

The Russian turned his head slightly, eyebrows drawn up in mild surprise. "A student?"

Waverly folded his hands over his stomach, and leaned back in his chair. "Graduate of course. A Russian exchange student, attending school on a government scholarship. You may pick your own course of study -- Prescott's curriculum is quite varied, I understand. And you'll meet your Boston contact on campus."

"And what will Napoleon be doing, sir?"

The American smiled wryly at his friend. Whatever his assignment, nothing could be as bad as returning to school as a student.

"Mr. Solo will be taken on as a visiting professor, in Political Science."

"Political Science, sir?" Napoleon asked, disappointment edging his voice. There was a punishment greater than Illya's, and he'd certainly pulled it.

"I don't believe the university is in the market for an instructor in Human Sexuality."

Illya smiled as his companion gave him a kick under the table.

"When do we leave?" Kuryakin asked, rising to go.

"You'll be leaving on the next Boston-bound train from Penn Station."

"Penn Station? Wouldn't it be simpler to go by plane?"

Waverly smiled enigmatically. "Foreign exchange students in this country rarely have the capital to support such ... frivolity, Mr. Kuryakin. It will help support your 'cover,' shall we say? Besides, accounting tells me you've overextended your expense account for this month."

Napoleon relaxed a bit, and was now perched on the corner of the big conference table, sniggering impudently at his compatriot's chagrin. Illya nodded silently, throwing visual daggers at Solo, and left the room.

"And what about me, sir?"

"You'll follow in a day or so, with a rented car -- nothing fancy, mind you. College professors are no richer than college students. Now, Mr. Solo, shouldn't you remove yourself from my desk, and pay a visit to disbursing?"

"Yes, sir," Solo answered, snapping back into formality, and following quickly in the steps of Kuryakin.

III "O Hail to thee, dear Alma Mater ..."

Illya found the coach car of the AmTrak train marginally comfortable; per Waverly's warning, disbursing had given him a pitifully small allowance for this mission, and Kuryakin had found it best to economize.

His travelling companion was a sleepy sort, preferring to snore away the four-hour trip than to take in the breezy sights. For Illya, the time was passed with college bulletins, course descriptions, and further reports from the Intelligence Section.

Waverly's admonition about the curriculum of Prescott University proved true. He had a difficult time choosing just three courses to fill out his roster. He was trapped into taking the political science course Napoleon would teach, but the other courses offered by the university intrigued him. He decided that during his time off, he might return there for further schooling.

He found the description of Napoleon's course and chuckled to himself. American Federalism. Napoleon knew about as much about that as he knew about American pop music. It should prove interesting, he promised himself.

Once in Boston, he dug out his subway map, suppressing an urge to return to New York. While the system was theoretically simpler than New York's, he was less familiar with it, and was sure he'd be thoroughly lost before lunch. He wished his contact had been instructed to meet him at the South Station.

He followed one of the lines to a changeover point, and searched the terminal for another map. From behind, he heard, "Lost or somethin'?"

The voice came from a decidedly out-of-place refugee from the sixties, complete with ragged jeans and frizzy hair. "Where y'goin'?" the stranger pursued.

Folding his map, Illya ventured, "Prescott University?"

"Cinch," the man .. or was it a boy? said. Who could tell under all that hair? "Take the green line to here," he explained, tracing the route on the map he took from Illya's hands. "And transfer over to the red line here. Take the Prescott bus, and there'y'll be. All set?"

Still a little confused, Illya nodded silently. He heard the rumble of an approaching train and looked up. When he turned back, his benefactor was gone.

Prescott University stretched out before him, surrounded by aged stone walls, overrun by ivy and lichen. The buildings were gray from the years, but some unknown prankster of an architect had replaced the original windows with modern, out-of-place smoked glass and chrome. Illya cringed; suddenly, he hoped his stay here would be short.

As he wound his way toward the Registrar, he silently thanked his unknown guardian angel for his surprisingly good directions. As he fished for his campus map, however, he became convinced that to survive this mission, he'd need a navigator.

His visit to the Registrar yielded a somewhat altered schedule of classes than he'd anticipated. As the secretary pulled the card for American Federalism, he breathed a silent thank you, and watched with interest as she located leftover cards for most of his alternate choices.

Roster in hand, he made off in search of his dormitory. Although most graduate students were not eligible for dormitory space, a little diplomatic string pulling on Waverly's part had netted him a small room with roommate, in the furthestmost wing of the men's dorm. Illya concluded that the "diplomacy" had been softened with a discreet donation to the university's building fund.

Entering the dorm quad, Illya could hear the confused strains of music from a hundred different stereos and radios. His own college days had been during a more sedate, restrained era, but he felt that this part of the assignment just might turn into an enjoyable experience.

A few wrong turns and several bad sets of directions from upperclassmen headed him toward his room. He felt the vibrations of his roommate's stereo down the hall, and admonitions of his fellow dorm residents assured him that he was on the right track.

He knocked on the door, but heard no answer. Shrugging, he picked up his suitcase, and slipped in.

"Go 'way," grumbled his roommate, turned toward the wall on the bottom bunk. "Leave me alone til class starts!"

Clearing his throat apologetically, Illya announced, "I am your new roommate."

The figure in the bed huddled closer to the wall. "Put your stuff on the other side of the room. You've got the top bunk."

"My name is Illya Kuryakin. You're --"

"Fred. And I'm tired, so keep it quiet."

Illya glanced toward the stereo, whose speakers throbbed with the music's crescendo.

"Should I turn down the music?"

Fred rolled over, unaccustomed to such courtesy in a dormitory, and revealed a familiarly well-endowed head. He flashed a grin of recognition, and said, "I thought you were a teacher, back there. Welcome to Prescott, roommie."

"Indeed," Illya replied, stowing his suitcase near the dresser he assumed as his. "How did you get here so fast?"

Rising from the bed, Fred dusted down his jeans, answering, "I already registered. Whatcha in for?"

Illya smiled. Time to try on his cover. "Post-graduate work in Political Science. Specifically American. You?"

Fred stood by the electric coffee pot, and offered Illya a cup. As the Russian refused, his roommate shrugged, saying, "If it were ten years ago, I'd say I'm in to avoid the draft. As it is, Uncle Sam is paying for me to goof off. Art, that's my major, if you could call it that."

Illya got the feeling that Fred would have fit in well with the students of ten years before. He felt a spark of kinship for this displaced flower-child.

"Hope I didn't put you off, just then," he said, nodding to nowhere in particular. "The jocks in this wing are a real pain. Always coming in here and bothering me."

"I'm afraid I don't quite fit that description," Illya said, a wry smile crossing his face. Although he was in good shape, and could hold his own with men much larger than he, his build and demeanor could hardly be called athletic.

"Nope. For once the residence coordinator did something right. You write? Take pictures?"

"A bit," Illya offered, considering his roommate critically. Over six feet tall, Fred was probably not bad looking under the hair and beard. He wore thick glasses, poised precasiously on the tip of his nose. Briefly, Kuryakin wondered how this hulk could actually fit in the tiny bunk.

"Good. Let's go."

Illya found himself surrounded by busy people and noise. Fred had pulled him along to the college newspaper office, home of the "Prescott Rag" as he called it. In reality, it was called "The Messenger," and had been the "voice of the students" for more than a hundred years.

"This here short dude is Leroy Lester, flunkie-in-chief of this rag," Fred introduced, accompanied by silent hatred from the diminutive center of his outrage. "He has visions of taking over the world one day."

Glancing from Fred to Leroy, Illya said, "Pleased to meet you."

"Likewise," came the curt reply. "You a friend of his?" he added under his breath.

"Roommate," Illya answered, following Fred to the next batch of victims.

Illya was introduced to all the department editors, and a few of the staff writers. Suddenly, one of the young women came over, and flung her arms around his neck.

"I just love foreign men!" she cooed. "Where do you come from?"

Trying to back away, Illya responded, "Russia. Uh, where do you come from?"

"Erotica," Fred returned, giving the girl a snide look.

"Hmmp!" she recoiled, giving up Illya, as he straightened his jacket.

The girl flounced out of the office, giving Illya a wistful look and a blown kiss. After she'd gone, Fred announced, "That was Terri. She just loves men."

"Obviously."

"Russia, eh?" Leroy pursued, his interest piqued. "Do any writing there?"

Illya considered his answer. He hadn't been back to Russia in years, but that a mission would not help his cover story at all. He decided on a neutral, "No, but I'd like to."

Leroy beamed. "Great. We could use some investigative reporters. Interested?"

Investigative reporter. That would help in getting to know the campus, the people. Smiling, Kuryakin replied, "Of course."

IV "The Solo Doctrine"

Comparing schedules, Illya and Fred discovered that they had one class in common: American Federalism, taught by visiting professor Napoleon Solo. Illya chuckled; having him in Napoleon's class was one thing, but

It had always been a practice at Prescott University that during the first week of classes of any tri-

mester, the teachers would wear old-fashioned collegiate robes. Napoleon found his draped over a hanger in the faculty lounge.

"The kids started this foolishness," commented a husky voice from near the coffee urn. "It appealed to Dean Fischer's sense of humor. Warped, I'd say."

Napoleon turned to see a lovely young woman as she shrugged her own gown on.

"You don't look familiar. You must be Mr. Solo."

Napoleon bowed, saying, "At your service. You are?"

"Jane Redstone. I'm head of the art department. Here, let me help you with your clasp," she offered, reaching for the closure of Solo's gown. "Can't paint worth a damn in these things," she pronounced, straightening his collar. "What're you teaching?"

Solo winced. "American Federalism." Glancing reluctantly at his watch, he added, "And I'm late. Thanks, Jane -- I'll see you later?"

She smiled. "Lunch?"

"Lunch."

Armed with his own map of the campus, Napoleon soon found his classroom, and inwardly cringed at the sound of thirty or more students tearing the room apart.

"Er, excuse me, class, I'm Mr. Solo."

"Han Solo? Where's Chewie?" called out Fred. Illya shot him an angry glance. Shrugging, Fred subsided into silence.

"Napoleon Solo. And let's hope this isn't my Waterloo."

The class laughed; the ice was broken. Solo set down his books, turning to the syllabus Waverly's men had been so kind to provide. American Federalism. Oh well, it was better than intermediate basket-weaving.

Solo found himself lecturing on the Constitutional Convention with more enthusiasm than he'd thought possible. His class was bright, and most were interested in the subject. Perhaps he hadn't pulled the worst assignment after all.

"Mr. Kuryakin," he began, and all eyes turned on Illya. "What do you think of Mr. Madison's idea that the masses would break into warring factions?"

Illya smiled. Napoleon was enjoying this. "I believe, Mr. Solo, that your Mr. Madison has been proved correct over the last two hundred years. The warring quality of your two political parties would tend to support this."

It was Napoleon's turn to smile. Illya had done his homework on his trip up here. "Fine, Mr. Kuryakin, why don't you do a short paper on that, and present it to the class, say, next week? I'd say 3,000 words would do nicely."

Illya wished he'd worn his Special to class with him. I'll get you back, Napoleon, he promised. Just wait!

A quick glance at his watch, and Napoleon announced, "Well, that's it for today. We'll meet here on Wednesday -- make sure you get your books at the bookstore, and we'll start in on our first assignment. Til then," he concluded, gathering up his own papers, as the rumbling in the room reached a crescendo. He didn't know if he'd ever get used to change of class.

Illya shot him a sideways glance as he and Fred exited the room. Later, Napoleon, he promised once more, later. Solo just grinned.

V "All the News that Fits ..."

"Excuse me, Dean, but would you say that the Food Services here at Prescott are improved by this new firm?" Illya pursued, leaning forward in the padded chair he occupied in Dean Fischer's office. His first experience as a journalistic interviewer was anything but exciting, he was discovering.

"Mr. Kuryakin," Fischer said, leaning forward in his own chair, and taking a long drag from his eighth cigarette in 10 minutes, "the thing to remember here is that the food never was below standard -- our students simply expect premium restaurant food in their cafeteria. You have to understand that it simply isn't possible to serve sirloin and keep our bills down," he concluded, blowing a stream of smoke into Illya's face.

Stifling a sneeze, Illya jotted down a few words; then lapsed into doobling. Leroy was right; the dean was boring, and spoke only in doubletalk. He quickly decided that the dean wasn't the right man to talk to,

and he'd make a visit to the cafeteria for an interview with the workers there. He had a feeling they'd know more, and supply more usable information for his first assignment -- more than the dragon man here.

Concluding the interview, and leaving the dean with a vague impression of conquest, Illya made his way toward the research facility located at the north end of the campus. Using this story as an "in" he'd try to interview the lab workers about their impression of the food services, and at the same time, get a feel for the facility.

He found that gaining entrance to the labs was more difficult than he'd envisioned. The receptionist would not accept his press card as reasonable credentials for entering the more confidential areas of the building.

"Uh, what do you think of the cafeteria here on campus?" he pursued.

The receptionist smiled. "Oh, that place. We normally don't eat there, but in town -- there's a little sub place that serves better food on their bad days than the caff. We usually eat in shifts -- maybe you could talk to the scientists at lunchtime, Mr. Kuryakin."

Illya accepted this graciously, and made his way toward the door. He turned momentarily, and caught sight of Terri, the girl he'd met in the Messenger office, rushing down the hallway, a pile of reports under one arm. He returned to the receptionist's desk, and asked, "Who was that girl?"

"Oh, her? That's Terri. She helps out in the labs -- gopher, mostly." She eyed him knowingly. "She's available, if you're interested. Terri's always available."

Glancing down the corridor where she'd disappeared, he said, "Thanks. That's good to know."

VI "Tuesday Night Fever...."

"Ah, c'mon, Illya -- stuff the paper and come with me," Fred urged from his bunk. With a wink, he added, "This place's got the best watered-down beer this side of Dorchester."

Illya looked up from his report for Napoleon. He smiled. Shrugging, he answered, "Sure. Mr. Solo can wait. I could use a break."

Grinning, Fred grabbed his roommate by the arm and they were off.

The place was small, and like all college pubs, dimly lit and noisy. Still tugging on Illya's arm, Fred wound his way toward a table near the far corner of the bar.

"Okay, roomie," Fred announced, "this is the group -- George, Kitty, and Joanne -- Illya," he introduced, and Kurakin greeted each nod in turn.

As they settled themselves, George jumped in, "So you're Leroy's latest wonder boy, eh? Saw that story you did -- not a bad piece of work. Ol' Leroy'll have you uncovering 'Prescott-gate' before long."

Kitty gave her companion an elbow jab in the ribs, and added, "That bit about the Project workers was a nice touch -- who'da thought of it?"

Fred beamed. Already, he and Illya had developed an easy rapport, and he boasted, "My roommate, that's who." Turning to Illya, he asked, "How did you swing it?"

Glancing around the room, not really paying attention to Fred, Illya caught sight of Terri, entering arm and arm with one of the researchers. Fred watched him, waiting for an answer, and shot a look in Terri's direction. He glanced back at Illya and shrugged.

A moment later, Illya returned his attention to the conversation filing the bit of information away for future use. "What did you say, Fred? Oh, just a flash, I guess -- newsman's instinct?"

Kitty smiled. She liked this newcomer. George and Joanne laughed easily, and Fred just nodded, filing information away in his own data center.

VII "You'd love my uncle..."

His paper still madway from completion, Illya made his way to Napoleon's class. After negotiating the horrendous bookstore lines, he'd picked up his and Fred's texts, and Illya rushed across the campus common, and skidded into the class as the bell was ringing.

"In the nick of time, Mr. Kuryakin?" Solo teased. Illya glared at him as he slid into his seat.

"Yes, sir," he muttered, stacking his books, and slipping Fred's over to him.

"Thanks, roomie," Fred whispered, and proceeded to scrawl his name on the fly-leaf.

"Okay, class," Napoleon began, arresting the attention of his students, "let's all turn to page 32 in the Robinson text."

The discussion on this second day of class was just as animated as the first. Illya breathed a sigh of relief as the arguments steered away from him; but soon, Napoleon zeroed in on him, and Kuryakin moved uncomfortably in his chair.

"I have an uncle who'd be quite interested in you, Mr. Solo," Illya taunted, catching a quick glint of acknowledgement in Napoleon's eyes.

Solo smiled. "We shall have to discuss that after class, Mr. Kuryakin -- if that's all right with you?"

Illya nodded silently. Fred cast a look at his roommate, full of confusion and betrayal. In his book, no good student ever met with a teacher after hours.

Illya smiled, and as class ended and emptied out, he and Fred moved toward Napoleon.

"Uh, Fred, I'll see you back at the office, okay?" Illya said, trying to be tactful. Fred opened his mouth to protest, but as Napoleon drew his arm around Illya's shoulders, he shrugged, and turned toward the door.

"Leroy's got another assignment for you, Illya -- better not keep the Newspaper King waiting," Fred added, as though trying to pry his roommate away from the jaws of death. "I'll see you later."

Illya and Napoleon walked leisurely across the common, as Napoleon nodded congenially at students, mostly female, passing by.

"So what have you found out?" Napoleon ventured, staring after a particularly fine specimen.

"Not much, so far. My position on the newspaper is a help, of sorts. I've had a chance to speak with some of the people in the Project, and most of them seem pretty straight-forward. Security seems pretty good, although I think I can get into one of the labs sometime soon. What about you?"

Solo grimaced. "Nothing. The researchers don't have much of a relationship with faculty. Separate quarters, separate lounges--don't think my position will afford much information. I can find out what the faculty thinks of them, though -- there's a meeting this afternoon."

Illya nodded. "Okay. When do we get together again? Tomorrow morning?"

"In the library -- we can work on your paper together," Napoleon grinned.

"Three thousand words," Illya grunted. "You certainly know how to lay the work on, my friend." Shaking hands, they parted, Napoleon heading for the faculty lounge, and a luncheon date with Ms. Redstone, Illya toward the Messenger office, and Leroy Lester, the Bradley of Prescott University.

VIII "Your mission, Mr. Kuryakin..."

"Illya!" Leroy called from his desk, "Thought you'd never make it. Fred said you crossed over to the enemy's lines -- you seemed to have weathered the storm pretty well. Problem?"

Kuryakin shook his head. "No, Mr. Solo was providing some advice on a paper I'm doing. Fred said you wanted to see me?"

Leroy's face broke into a sly grin, and taking Illya's arm, he drew him off to one side of the office, far from prying ears.

"You did good on the food story. It'll shake up some bureaucrats, let me tell you. I think you're ready for something a little more ... meaty, shall we say?"

Illya slid onto a desk top, and waited, arms folded. "How meaty, shall we say?"

"The Behavioral Research Project, over in Jenkins Hall."

Illya raised an eyebrow, made a low whistle. "What about it?"

"Well," Leroy continued, voice low and secretive, "I could assign this to one of the more ... seasoned reporters, but they lack the kind of, well, flair you've shown. It'll take some digging, some snooping, maybe even some spying -- breaking and entering? Interested so far?"

Smiling inwardly, Illya nodded. Spying, eh? Silently, he thanked whatever fate had placed him with Fred as a roommate, and had drawn him into this newspaper.

Leroy grinned in relief. "Okay. We've heard rumors of more than just animal research in the labs -- like a little bit of human experimentation? We'd like to know more about it -- and if they're doing

something ... un-kosher, well, we'd like to know and blow the lid off it if it's dangerous. Follow?"

George's comment came back to him now -- "Prescott-gate" Suddenly, he began to understand the workings of the modern student's mind -- the protests might be over, but there still remained a segment of youth that cared -- and fought however they could to maintain some kind of freedom. Lester wanted a story, he wanted to get the administration, but he seemed to want to accomplish something positive, as well.

"Look, I'm no anarchist," he explained, "and I'm as patriotic as the next turkey, but behavioral experimentation is ... well, scary. It's dangerous. If they could do it in a laboratory, they could do it in the college campuses, in the towns -- civil liberty and all that, you know? So, what do you say?"

Illya lowered his head. He'd come here to stop the THRUSH infiltration of the project, but not to stop the Project. Shoving the thoughts away, he nodded. "Yes, I'll take the assignment -- how long have I got?"

For the first time, Leroy looked straight into Illya's eyes. "Investigative reporting is a delicate kind of journalism. Take as long as you need -- just make it good. Don't exaggerate, but get the facts."

Illya nodded, a little stunned by his uncommon good luck. But having learned from Napoleon to "never look a gift horse in the mouth, too soon," he simply gathered up the notes and files Leroy offered him, for background material, and made his way back to his dorm room.

Once there, he began to scan the notes carefully, keeping a steno pad by his side to jot down any particularly useful information. Engrossed in his task, he didn't hear Fred enter, or flop down on his bunk.

"Leroy told me about your big scoop. Said you might need some back-up, and a camera."

Illya glanced up irritably from his reading. Fred shrugged, and laid down on his bed, his folded arms an extra pillow for his head.

"Planning the big espionage routine for tonight?" Fred pursued matter-of-factly. "Y'know, Illya, I could be of some help."

Illya was silent, preferring to work at the reports than to insult his roommate verbally.

"I know a lot more than you give me credit for knowing," Fred added, his voice tinged with hurt. "Y'd be surprised at what I can do."

"I don't think I'll need a camera, or a second person to get caught if I do break into the research facility," Illya snapped, at once ashamed of his outburst. Fred merely shrugged again, and rolled over onto his side, facing the wall.

"Suit yourself, roommie. Y'll see."

Illya returned his attention to his work, vaguely aware of Fred's presence. He was sorry he had to turn on him like that, but this mission, this investigation, was bigger, more important than his friendship with Fred. When it was all over, he'd explain, hope he'd understand.

He closed the report silently, hoping that Fred had drifted off to sleep. He rose, pausing momentarily by his roommate, and satisfied that he was asleep, turned down the light, and slipped out the door. He'd remembered to bring along his notepad, in case there might be a THRUSH plant somewhere in the dorm. THRUSH could be as resourceful as U.N.C.L.E. at times, he knew.

As he tread quietly down the stairs to the common room of the dormitory, his roommate rose from his bed, and put on a singularly quiet pair of sneakers. From his dresser drawer, he drew a revolver, and pausing at the window to check on Illya's progress, slipped out of the room himself, and headed toward the research labs in Jenkins Hall.

IX "Do Agents Really Wear Trench Coats?"

Already it was dark, hours passed by the reports. Illya moved cat-like around the building, slipping into bushes as late-night students passed by. The campus was going to sleep; inside the building, according to the reports Leroy had given him, only a handful of night-watchmen would be on duty. Nervously, he fingered the tranquilizer pellets in his pocket, touched his special for assurance. A thin shaft of moon light filtered down through leafy, new trees, and in its light, he loaded the pellets into his gun. He drew the floorplan Leroy had supplied, and marked off the first floor watchman's station with his finger. As he traced the corridors of the floor with his index finger, he decided on the second floor; no labs were on the first floor, only administrative offices.

As was his custom, he wore black jeans and a black turtleneck sweater. Pulling a black cap down over his hair, he looked up toward the second story windows -- dark, no sign of life.

Hauling himself up into the tree, he began his slow ascent, careful not to make any noise as he reached

for the next branch. A twig crackled, and he glanced down around the common below. No one was there, most of the studnets had returned to their dorms. He locked his foot on a branch below, and lifted himself up another branch. Almost there...

He tried the window; strangely enough, it was unlocked. Briefly, he wondered if the THRUSH plant had left it open for a midnight raid from one of his compatriots. Pushing the thought aside, he made a mental note to speak to the security chief about this lack of fortification, and pulled the window up.

Inside, the facility was as dark and silent as it appeared from the outside. Illya strained, and heard no advancing footfalls. Pulling his legs into the room, he lowered the window, leaving it open for a quick escape.

He paused, waiting for his eyes to adjust to the darkness. Referring to his floor plan once more, he found that he was in an auxilliary storage room, not far from the main labs. Positioning the gun in his belt, he crept toward the door, glanced down the connecting corridor, and slipped out into the blackness.

Somewhere in the building, a flashlight arced across the floor, sweeping up the walls, and peering down into the straight corridor. Nothing. The security guard, graying, yet youthfully alert, shurgged, and drew the cigarette from his mouth. "Hearin' things," he muttered, and turned down an intersecting hallway.

As his footsteps retreated, a dark-clothed figure moved stealthily from behind a doorway, and looked down the corridor after him. "They sure don't teach you that in trainign school," thought the figure, hand closing around the gun in his belt for support. "Have to talk to the instructor about that next time."

Like Illya, he was heading for the main labs. He found the second floor stairwell, and slipping the latch, opened the heavy door. He held his breath, fighting back the grunt of exertion as the door swung open with a tiny creak, and pushed himself through. "Damn maintenance people -- why don't they oil these doors?" he cursed to himself.

Illya's floorplan was amazingly precise. He wondered how the Messenger had come across such a document, and again reminded himself to speak to the security chief at the end of this assignment. Obviously, if students could get hold of such materials, THRUSH would have no trouble. He made a mental note to speak to Mr. Waverly about personnel here at the research center. Surely some replacements were in order.

Ahead, and to the left, he thought, the image of the blueprint stamped on his memory. His eyes caught sight of light, difused and dim, spilling across the floor. He froze, pressing himself against the wall, listening intently with all his strength.

Voices, low, patient, but audible. A female voice, caaxing, cajoling, commanding. A male voice, dull, automatic, almost subservient. Illya's hand went down to his pants' pocket, feeling for the live ammunition he kept there. His other hand darted for his gun, and holding it over his head like a banner, he moved slowly down the wall, glancing occasionally down the hall behind him, still listening to the voices.

"And what's the dosage, Paul? How much would you give your human subject?" came the feminine voice, almost a whisper.

"Uhn," answered the other voice. "About one cc. Depends on the body weight. If the subject is heavy, the the body tissues may require a bigger dose. Depends."

As Illya came to the door, he realized that the second voice was drugged -- and it was one of the scientists he'd interviewed the other day. As the woman spoke again, he listened carefully to her voice, to the accent that colored her words.

"And how would you increase the dosage, Paul? Hmm? How would you increase it?"

The man gave an inaudible response, lost somewhere in the darkness. The woman spoke again, and Illya's eyes widened. As she received no answer, Terri repeated her question.

"How do you administer the dose, Paul?"

Illya's hand closed over the knob, turning it a fraction of an inch. It gave easily, and he gave it more pressure, turning it all the way around. Presently, he was standing in the doorway, framed in darkness.

"I don't think you'll be finding out, Terri," he announced, his gun leveled at her heart. "Move away from him. Now." His tone was commanding. She glanced up at him, no hint of fear in her green eyes. Or were they blue? He couldn't tell in this light.

"Mr. Kuryakin," she said, still bending over the man, "I hadn't expected you so soon. What happened -- did L eroy assign you 'Prescott-gate'?"

Her face was smiling, but her eyes were cold. She glanced up to some point over Illya's head, behind his back. He shook his head.

"It only works in American spy movies, Terri. Move away from him, slowly, but do it now."

Illya felt a sharp blow to his neck, and fell dizzily to the floor. He felt the impact of a sleep dart in his left shoulder, and soon, all sounds and sensations ebbed away from him.

X "Funny, you don't look like a cavalry..."

There was pain, somewhere in the vicinity of his arms and legs. And his head. Ooh, his head. He tried so to touch his hand to the place that throbbed, only to find that his hand would not move. His eyes struggled to open, and after what seemed a losing battle, he looked around him. A closet, brooms lining the walls, a bucket here and there, and ropes around his limbs.

Further inspection found one crucial thing missing: his clothes. Terro had obviously felt that a naked U.N.C.L.E. agent was almost as good as a dead U.N.C.L.E. agent. He strained against the ropes, anger welling up inside him, just as embarrassment did.

There was a sound in the hallway beyond. A scraping, a sound of metal against metal -- a key, perhaps in the lock. The door opened slightly, and a familiar tuft of hair peaked through.

"Illya?" Fred asked, his eyes now in view. He looked at his roommate, noting his somewhat unusual condition, and slipped into the room, grinning rather sorrowfully.

"I was hoping to get to you before they did. Are you all right?" he asked, trying to avert his eyes as he worked on Illya's bonds.

Illya looked up at Fred, confused, but nonetheless happy to see him.

"How did you get in here?"

"Don't look a gift horse in the mouth," Fred advised, releasing Illya's left arm. "Bad knock on the head, it looks," he observed, touching Illya's head gingerly. "Hurt?"

"A little. How did you get in here without them noticing?" Suddenly, a tinge of fear crept up Illya's spine. He shivered involuntarily.

"I'm not surprised you're cold. Not exactly the kind of dress that's in season, you know." Illya's right arm was free, and he began to work on his ankle ropes himself.

"Right. I don't have much choice in the matter, I'm afraid."

Fred grinned again. "Terry's work, no doubt. Always was something of a B&D freak, I think."

"B&D?"

"Bondage and discipline. Kinky stuff."

"Oh," Illya answered, pulling the ropes away from his leg. "Now what?"

Fred pulled the gun out of his belt and pointed it toward Illya. "What do you think?"

Illya stared disbelievingly into the barrel of the gun, glancing nervously up at Fred's face. "What?" he asked, trying to maintain some dignity.

"I find you a towel, or something -- I think there's some lab coats in one of the closets -- and we go after her."

Illya reached up and pushed the gun aside. "I see. Didn't anyone ever tell you not to point guns in people's faces?"

Glancing sheepishly at the gun, Fred nodded. "Yeah, I guess they did. My instructor always said I was missing something upstairs."

Illya nodded in turn, and the last bonds gone, stood to face Fred. "You were talking about a lab coat?"

"I'll be right back."

As Fred turned to leave the room, Illya put out his hand, saying, "I think I'd like possession of that weapon, Fred."

Fred looked once more at the gun, then at Illya. Shrugging, he handed it over. "Never was any good at target practice, anyway."

With that, he left.

When he returned, he brought Illya a clean, white lab coat, and the agent shrugged it on gratefully.

"Now you go back to the dorm. I appreciate your help, but I can't let you get too involved. It's too dangerous."

Fred sputtered a reply, but Illya interrupted him. "The stakes are too high -- I can't risk you getting hurt, and I can't afford to protect you either. Come on, Fred -- don't get involved where you don't belong."

"But, Illya, you don't understand --"

"You could do me a favor," Kuryakin considered. "Go to Mr. Solo's apartment -- tell him his uncle needs him in Jenkins Hall. Do that for me, Fred?"

Fred nodded, his face a study in dejection. "Okay. I'll get him. But you don't understand --"

"Now?"

His shoulders sloping, Fred subsided, and silently went out the door. Escorted by Illya, he returned to the window the Russian had used to enter the building, and without a word, exited onto the tree limb outside. "I'll be back, Illya," Fred promised.

"Just get Mr. Solo."

XI "Uncle calls..."

"Oh, Mr. Solo, I do think that you're as degenerate as some of the students here at Prescott," Ms. Redstone whispered in Napoleon's ear.

"Ms. Redstone, I think you're right," he chuckled.

Pulling away from him, she added, "I think a toast is in order -- to faculty lounges and off-campus apartments."

As the glasses clinked together, Napoleon heard an insistent knock at the door.

"Who the hell could that be?" he demanded irritably, replacing his glass on a table as Jane watched him in dismay.

Opening the door, Napoleon found an exhausted, puffing Fred nearly hanging from the doorframe.

"Mr. Solo -- Illya's in the -- oh," he said, noticing Ms. Redstone. "Uh, hi, Ms. Redstone, I, uh, Mr. Solo -- your uncle needs you, over in Jenkins Hall."

Glancing reluctantly back to Jane, Napoleon nodded quickly, and moved to his dresser, which hid his U.N.C.L.E. special.

"Sorry, Jane -- duty calls -- tomorrow night?" he asked hopefully.

Staring at the gun, Napoleon's face, and Fred, each in turn, she answered numbly, "Yes, of course, Napoleon. Anything you say."

"Right. Now, Fred, where is my uncle?"

Fred grinned, taking Solo by the arm, and racing down the stairs.

"Hold on, Fred, I'm not exactly an Olympic sprinter!" Napoleon groaned, tugging backward on Fred's arm. "Why don't you just give me directions?"

Fred stopped short, and Napoleon tripped behind him, crashing into his back. "What is this? Illya tells me to get lost, you tell me to get lost -- you guys just don't --"

"Where is he? Just tell me and I'll take it from here."

Frowning, Fred gave in. "Second floor, Jenkins Hall."

"Okay. Thanks, Fred." Napoleon was running before Fred could say another word.

"Damn!"

A quick survey of the area found Illya's open window on the second floor. As Napoleon struggled up the tree, he silently cursed his smaller, more wiry partner. "Why can't he take the conventional way in?" he thought to himself, wondering just how silly he might appear to an uninformed bystander.

Hailing himself into the room, he waited until his eyes adjusted, then rushed through the darkness in search of Kuryakin.

He heard the sounds of arguing from somewhere up the hall. As he listened more closely, he recognized the faint accent of his partner, and the jeering female voice of what must be the THRUSH plant.

"I don't know how you got loose, Mr. Kuryakin, but it won't do you any good now. I've got what I came for, and one less U.N.C.L.E. agent along the way won't bother me."

Illya didn't reply, just stood there with his gun trained on Terri. The gun felt vaguely familiar in his hand, but he didn't pay any attention to it now. Terri moved toward Dr. Paul Forrester, a gun in her own hand, daring him with every move of her body.

"You don't think I'll kill him, Mr. Kuryakin? Don't be foolish. I'm not the silly little college girl I play, not by a long shot. As I said, one less U.N.C.L.E. agent, or even two, doesn't bother me. It didn't bother me in the least, disposing of your two friends."

Illya's aim was unwavering, but his senses were keenly aware of the kind of woman he was dealing with. He had a clear shot, but he had no guarantee that she wouldn't shoot the scientist, unconscious in the chair, even if he did get a good hit. He felt his hand fall a little, and Terri caught the signal.

"Just as I thought -- chicken. All U.N.C.L.E. agents are -- you're afraid to take a risk, just like the other two. Throw down the gun, Mr. Kuryakin -- push it across the floor, slowly."

He did as instructed, and she picked the gun up, her eyes still riveted on the Russian. "You too, Mr. Solo," she called to Napoleon in the hall.

Illya turned rapidly, to see his partner enter, his hands over his head, his revolver dangling from his right hand. "On the floor. Face down -- both of you."

Both U.N.C.L.E. guns in her hands, and the agents prone on the floor, she launched into a flurry of activity, as her silent assistant, all but unnoticed until now, watched over the three hostages.

"As I said, U.N.C.L.E. agents are expendable. I tested the materials on the other two -- it worked quite well, you know -- he killed his partner in cold blood. With this information in THRUSH's hands, I don't need U.N.C.L.E. having it too -- a little well-placed explosives should clean this mess up nicely."

Illya looked up at her from the floor, watching the red hair swing as she worked over the controls of a timed explosive. There was a sternness about her, an unrelenting stiffness to her spine. There was no reasoning here, and as she directed her assistant to tie the men up, Illya felt a sinking sensation of helplessness.

"One good thing," Napoleon ventured, as the THRUSH hulk pulled his arms tight behind him. "We won't be taking our friend Fred with us."

Illya's smile was crooked. "Some consolation," he sneered, grunting as the bruiser tugged at his own arms.

Terri turned to face them, her face lit up with a maniacal smile.

"It's been nice knowing you gentlemen. Too bad we can't do this again sometime. My superiors will be quite impressed -- both of U.N.C.L.E.'s best operatives down with one blow. I should get a promotion out of this assignment. I could use this," she said, tapping the small black box, "but there isn't time -- especially for you."

With a flourish, she took the arm of the giant at her side. He stood a good foot above her, dark hair, and dark skin; looking barely human. Waving coyly, she exited with him, the clattering of her heels resounding down the hallway.

A gunshot reverberated in the hallway, obscuring any other sound. A dull thud followed, then a frightened "I give up, don't shoot!" Illya looked at Napoleon, expectancy in their eyes.

"Seems like I'm always getting you out of scrapes, Illya," Fred commented, arms crossed, gun dangling from his hand, as he leaned leisurely against the doorway. "You're a bit tied up at the moment, aren't you. Want me to come back later, after all the excitement's over?"

Illya glared sourly at his roommate, and laughing, Fred dropped to his knees, untying Kuryakin's bonds once more.

"How? Fred --"

Fred drew his wallet from the back pocket of his jeans, and flipped open the credit card holder.

"Agent in training, Fred Gimble, at your service, gentlemen."

"Well, I'll be damned!" was all Napoleon could muster.

Xii "As our ship sinks slowly into the west..."

"Well, gentlemen?" Waverly asked, settling back into his chair.

Solo smiled, "Well, it was quite a surprise, sir," he suggested.

"Indeed. How so?"

"One certainly wouldn't have suspected Fred of being an U.N.C.L.E. agent, sir," Illya put in.

Waverly smiled. "No, one wouldn't, wouldn't one? And your evaluation of his performance?"

Napolean toyed with a pencil. "A little clumsy, maybe, but he certainly has all the qualities of a good agent."

"Just as his father did."

Eye-brow arched, Illya asked, "His father? Mike Gimble?"

"The same. You see, when Mike died, U.N.C.L.E. felt it necessary to make sure his wife and son were well-cared for. Young Fred showed promise early on -- his mother made sure he knew of his father's career, and when our people approached him, he was quite willing to enter training. Like father like son."

"Indeed," Illya agreed. He had worked with Mike Gimble on one of his first assignments with U.N.C.L.E. "Now what?"

"Fred will finish his education, and then he might join you and Mr. Solo on an assignment or two."

Napolean winced a bit. Illya grinned.

"And what of Terri, sir?" Illya asked.

"She's safely in prison, awaiting her trial. Seems she learned how to use some of the earlier generations of the drugs on the scientists themselves -- her credentials were more than impeccable, all forged by THRUSH, of course."

"And the facility?"

"Will be closed until some more efficient security system can be devised. I understand the students at Prescott were quite pleased. Especially a friend of yours, Mr. Kuryakin-- a Leroy Lester?"

Illya squirmed a little uncomfortably. Napolean made a low chuckle.

"Yes, Mr. Kuryakin, I understand that your stay at Prescott ushered in a new career for you. Perhaps I should contact my friends at *The Washington Post* ..."

"That won't be necessary, sir. Although I do have a request."

"Which is?"

"Well, sir, I'd like to go back and finish the courses I started at Prescott. Work out of the Boston office for a few months."

Waverly smiled again, packing tobacco into his ever-present pipe. "I think that could be arranged. Mr. Solo?"

Solo was thinking about a certain Ms. Redstone. "Oh, I think I'd like to go back for a visit or two, sir. But not as a teacher this time."

Illya stifled a chuckle behind his hand. Waverly only smiled.

"We bid 'Aloha'...."

END

Editor's note: Special, extra special thanks go to Pam Beckett, who performed well above the call of duty. Without her, this issue might never have been finished -- by six in the morning, in time to go to the printer, just a few weeks late.

Heather Firth is selling copies of our cover, for \$1.00, for the benefit of the Avengers Fan Network. For more information, please send Heather a SASE -- this is quality work, on quality stock.

And thanks to everyone, for not screaming too loud about this issue being late!
