

## THE DEERWOOD SANCTUARY AFFAIR

### *PROLOGUE*

Napoleon Solo was well briefed and truly thought he was prepared for the start of this Affair. However, when it came time to actually see his normally stoic and subdued partner screaming like his flesh was on fire it was more than disconcerting; it was horrifying. To think such a slight alteration in his brain chemistry by the UNCLE Medical staff could send the intellectual, cool Russian into this state gave Solo pause. It also made him very thankful for his own mental health.

Solo knew that the induced effect was temporary, but the idea of his friend and partner being this tortured by his own imaginary inner demons was unsettling. He swore to do his part to bring this affair to a swift and successful closure. Illya was certainly doing more than his share when he accepted the duty with no more than a raised brow of curiosity.

A voice brought the dark haired agent back into the now.

“Where to, buddy?” The winded ambulance driver’s question made Solo’s mind switch from that of worried partner to detached relative.

“I’ve all ready made arrangements for my poor cousin to be admitted to Deerwood,” Solo said in the voice of an aristocrat. “I shall meet you there to insure that admittance isn’t hindered. As you can see, the young man needs immediate treatment.”

The driver whistled. “Deerwood. Nice place.”

“Only the best for my dear cousin, my man.” Solo leaned in and spoke in a conspiratorial tone. “ I’m afraid insanity runs on his side of the family. Descendants of Van Gogh, you know.” Solo sniffed and regarded a pocket watch he pulled from his vest.

Illya’s screams were muffled significantly when the ambulance door slammed shut, but Solo’s nerves still prickled at the muted noise. He elbowed his way through the small crowd his partner’s actions had garnered and peered into the shaded window. Illya, writhing in the stiff straitjacket, was held firmly to the gurney by straps and the hands of a second beefy attendant. The driver fired up the car’s engine.

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### ***ACT I: "Please. Call Me Everett."***

Solo found himself standing alone on the sidewalk as the ambulance pulled away from the curb. With the show over and the crowd disbursed, another UNCLE affair was underway. Solo found his keys and slipped behind the wheel of the red Ferrari and followed as backup.

Once in Deerwood, Illya would be on his own. Solo's part was to make sure his compromised partner made it in and made it out; any contact in between would be an extra bonus that they knew they could not count on. Security was unusually tight for a mental health hospital, another indicator of possible Thrush involvement.

Deerwood had come under UNCLE scrutiny when colleagues of one Dr. Carl Bellows notified the agency that his family has committed their comrade. Interestingly, UNCLE found out that the family had come into a substantial amount of money soon after. Compounding the problem was the fact that UNCLE had thwarted an attempted kidnapping of Dr. Bellows by Thrush a mere two years previously. Being an expert in weapons design using spent uranium made Dr. Bellows a prime Thrush target.

Hopefully, Illya would be able to find out if Bellows' infirm state was orchestrated by Thrush, and if so, get him out of Deerwood Sanctuary. It looked easy on paper.

But try as they might, absolute ties to Thrush at Deerwood were hard to prove. Deerwood was a last ditch facility for the embarrassing relatives of the very, very wealthy. The security was impressive and the place had a reputation of being 'rumor free'; that is, no curious reporters or investigators had ever been able to glean information about any of the residents.

Solo was granted a brief tour only after he and his 'cousin' endured a thorough background check and secured two referrals from other doctors. During his tour, Solo managed to plant microphones that had proven to be useless. The communication dampening net around the place scored another point that it was, indeed, Thrush controlled.

Solo tried to convince himself that all would go as planned, but there a niggling in his gut that simply wouldn't go away. He resolved to be on his toes until the very end.

The entry to Deerwood Sanctuary was impressive. As he pulled through the massive iron gates after showing pre-approved identification to the gate guards, Solo couldn't help but notice the beauty of the old stone work surrounding the facility. It was accented with tasteful landscaping which only added to the aura of a peaceful park. With his trained eye, Solo could see that the lovely trappings covered excellent security. He followed the ambulance to the side door labeled 'Admitting'. The sign was made of

tastefully carved stone, discreetly placed and pleasantly mossy. It blended seamlessly with the rest of the garden decorations that surrounded the door.

Illya's nightmarish screams were reduced to moans and hoarse pleadings to free him of unseen torturers. He still writhed and squirmed in the bindings, his blue eyes glazed and unseeing. Sweat plastered his hair to his skull; dark bags huddled under his eyes like tormenting ghosts. It made Napoleon sick to see Illya like this, but he had to play his part as the embarrassed, at-his-wit's-end cousin. He had to fight himself to keep his hands away as the attendants pulled out and set up the gurney. It was already difficult enough to maintain his well practiced expression of disturbed embarrassment.

Solo followed the gurney through the admitting door and into the most opulent receiving area he had ever seen. The room was decorated in dark greens and lots of wood - it reminded the agent of a study in a hunting lodge or a private library. His besieged partner was immediately rolled through a pair of swinging doors that swished firmly and solidly shut behind him. When Solo tried to follow a hand on his forearm stopped him.

"Please allow your cousin the opportunity to collect himself, Mr. Van Dorn." The woman's voice was smooth and professional with the perfect edge of sympathy. Solo turned and found himself immediately smitten with the woman's speckled green eyes and calm smile. Her healthy brown hair was edged in hints of red and yellow and swept back off the nape of her long neck in a perfect French roll and topped with a white nurse's cap. The rest of her white nurse's uniform sat just as attractively on the rest of her.

Solo couldn't help but smile in return and give in to her request. "If you think that's best Miss . . . ?"

"Trueheart. I'm the head nurse for the facility." She gently led him to a comfortable chair that flanked an impressive marble coffee table. Her nurse's uniform had to be custom made to fit as it did, and Solo appreciated every tailored curve. "You must be Everett Van Dorn, Nicholas' cousin? I believe you've had a tour of our facility?"

"Why, yes I have. It is quite impressive, Miss Trueheart. I have no doubt that cousin Nicky will get all he needs here." He wanted to appreciate her fetching figure and tastefully displayed cleavage but he was distracted by the muffled moans behind the pair of doors.

She smiled pleasantly and settled into the matching chair that faced the agent. She tucked her feet together under her seat and leaned forward to retrieve the folder on the coffee table. Solo raised his brow in interest at the display before him. The moans behind the door stopped.

"There are just a few pages that need your signature, Mr. Van Dorn," she started.

"Please. Call me Everett." Solo said charmingly. "I'm sure we'll develop a working relationship quite quickly. I plan on visiting Nicky as often as possible." He took the pen nurse Trueheart offered and perused the forms, one eye on her assets and his ears straining to catch noises behind the door.

"That would be nice, Mr. Van Dorn, but I doubt it. Your cousin will be moved directly to the second floor and I will have little contact with him."

Solo glanced up as he signed. "Really? Why's that, may I ask?"

"Well, I'm sure you remember from your tour that the first floor is for admitting and patients who are ambulatory and require little supervision. They only are moved here when they are stabilized. As head nurse, that is where I spend most of my time. My

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office is the at the main desk.” Her eyes met his sympathetically. “It will be quite awhile before Nicholas is allowed down here, I’m afraid, and most of my own work is done on this floor.”

“Oh, yes, I remember.” Solo said, letting her find the next signature line for him. “The second floor is for treatment. I wasn’t shown the third floor.” He signed where her peach-painted fingernail indicated. She efficiently turned to the next page. “Will Nicky be on the third floor at all?”

“I doubt it, Mr. Van Dorn. The third floor holds the doctor’s offices and the most incapacitated of the patients. I’m afraid the third floor residents will probably never be able to leave Deerwood. It’s very sad.” She smiled as he signed the last spot. “There! All finished.” She rose gracefully to her feet. “When you return, use the main entrance. They will direct you to Nicky’s room.” She slipped her hand through Solo’s elbow and turned him to the door. “It would be best if you called first to see if your cousin’s able to have visitors.”

Solo stopped, ignoring the firm direction from her hand. “I’d like to say goodbye.”

“It’s not recommended, Mr. Van Dorn. The patient needs to settle in.” She tried to get him moving again, but he didn’t budge.

“I’m afraid I can’t do that, Miss Trueheart. I promised him I’d say good bye.” He slipped his arm from her hand and pushed the door open before she could protest, sidestepping the ambulance attendants as they shoved the gurney out. Solo saw Miss Trueheart dodge the gurney with a surprised yelp just before the door swished shut.

His partner was sitting in a wheelchair, still confined in the strait jacket. His head lolled to one side, a line of saliva trailed from the corner of his partially open mouth to his shoulder. His eyes were shut, but Solo could see his lids twitching from the motion of the eyes underneath.

Shakily, Solo slipped his hand in his pocket and carefully fit the specialized ring on his finger, avoiding the sharp point designed to deliver the serum that would neutralize the psychosistic producing drug in Illya’s system.

Solo quickly knelt beside his partner and placed his hand on Illya’s neck. The point pricked deeply, delivering the antidote. “Hey, are you all right?” Solo asked, alarmed at the blond man’s posture.

“What are you doing?”

Solo looked up and saw a slight man with round glasses and a doctor’s smock standing behind a beefy attendant dressed in white. The attendant stared purposefully toward him as Solo saw the doctor drop a used syringe on the counter top. The agent hoped the neutralizing agent wouldn’t be counteracted by whatever it was this doctor had just injected.

The attendant pushed himself between Solo and his partner. The agent stood up. “What did you give him?” Solo had to lean around the substantial orderly to address the doctor.

As the doctor began to reply, nurse Trueheart pushed her way into the room. “I’m sorry, doctor,” she apologized. Solo didn’t miss the flash of anger in her eyes as she spoke. It was gone quickly.

“No, it’s all right, Miss Trueheart.” The doctor’s face only softened slightly as he spoke to Solo. “I’m Dr. Negril. I sedated Mr. Van Dorn for his own safety and now he’ll be taken to his room. It’s best if you leave now and check on him tomorrow. By phone.” He indicated with a flip of his wrist for the attendant to take Illya from the room.

## THE MAN FROM UN.C.L.E. FANFIC BY AJB

Solo watched helplessly as his partner was taken away. Simple sedatives should be all right, he reasoned to himself, but the nagging warning that dogged him from the start wouldn't go away. He wanted to be sure. "I'd really like to see his room. You know, to put the rest of the family at ease?"

The doctor shook his head. "I'm afraid I can't allow that. It's part of the rules of admission, which you agreed to in the contract." Dr. Negril moved in smoothly and took Solo's elbow. "Really, it's for your cousin's own good. You must trust our experience in this area, Mr. Van Dorn. Nicholas is in good hands." Solo was expertly propelled back out to his car. Nurse Trueheart opened the door for him and the doctor helped Solo inside. The agent felt distinctly like he'd been given the bum's rush. "Good bye, Mr. Van Dorn."

Nurse Trueheart waved and smiled. The pair stood side by side, determinedly staying put until Solo started the car.

As Solo drove through the peaceful grounds to the exit gates, he couldn't help but notice that the few patients he saw walking in the gardens had the same, vacant stare. A chill raced through his body when the gate closed behind him and he fought to ignore his rising sense of foreboding.

***ACT II: "He Is The Vengeful Sort"***

Nothing made sense. Every part of him fought against the drifting feeling but he didn't seem to be getting anywhere. Noises ran all together for what seemed to be an endless stretch of time before he was finally able to pick out one voice clearly. He mentally latched on to it like a life preserver.

"Nicholas. Nicholas, open your eyes."

He tried to force his eyes open and form words. Finally, he saw the fuzzy outline of a face, and felt something wet caress his dry lips.

"That's right. Open your eyes, Nicholas."

Nicholas?

He blinked, and the face was clearer; a woman with a white cap. His words came out an unintelligible slur.

"It takes a few minutes for the drug to wear off," the woman said sympathetically. "It's normal."

He tried to sit up but found he was unable to move.

"Here, Nicholas, have a sip of water." A straw touched his mouth, and he turned his head away.

"I'm not Nicholas," he said slowly, fighting an uncooperative tongue. Anger began to rise. He tugged at his arms.

"Calm down, Nicholas, or we'll have to sedate you again."

"No," he grunted as he pulled harder on the restraints. "No, I . . ."

The woman turned away and pushed a door open. She called out to someone, and was joined immediately by a man in a white coat. They approached the struggling patient.

"Nicholas, stop." The nurse said sternly as she pushed against his chest. The doctor looked in the patient's eyes and consulted a chart.

"But I'm not . . ." His mind was still a chaotic swirl, but he knew the name wasn't right . . . it was . . .

"The name on your chart is Nicholas Van Dorn," the doctor said firmly as he put the chart back and pulled a syringe from his pocket. "Do you want to be called something else, Mr. Van Dorn?"

The words shocked the patient into stillness. The name 'Nicholas Van Dorn' triggered something in his mind and Illya relaxed into the mattress. He repeated the name softly out loud a few times, and each time his mind became a little clearer. Slowly, his true purpose came to the forefront in his mind. A cold feeling on his arm got his attention and he glanced down to see the doctor wielding an alcohol laden cotton ball.

Fighting down the panic, the agent forced himself to relax and smiled tiredly, allowing the preprogrammed behaviors of a sociopath to guide him.

“I think I’ve slept enough, doctor.”

The hand holding the syringe hovered over his arm. The doctor and the nurse both studied him carefully. The nurse was the first to smile. She immediately moved in and adjusted Illya’s pillow. “There he is! Hello, Mr. Van Dorn. How are you feeling?”

“Please, call me Nick. I don’t like Nicholas,” he replied wearily. Then he turned his eyes on the doctor and tried to look pleasant, but wasn’t sure his facial muscles were getting the message. “Is that necessary?”

The doctor straightened, and put the cap back on the needle. “That’s up to you, Mr. Van Dorn. Do you know where you are?”

Illya calmly glanced around, fighting the urge to tug at the restraints. “Offhand, I’d say a hospital?”

“That’s right. Do you know why you’re here?”

Illya’s mind raced, the last of the fuzziness still hanging around the edges of his brain. He frowned. “Um, I think I broke something.”

“You had an episode in your cousin’s penthouse and broke several things. You hurt yourself in the process.” The doctor pointed out some cuts and scratches on Illya’s arms. “Your family feared for your safety. They were afraid your condition was getting worse, so they brought you here.”

The agent vaguely recalled . . . something. He last remembered getting an injection from an UNCLE doctor in a penthouse - things were a bit blurry after that, but the pain that was starting to creep into his awareness made it clear he’d put on quite a show. Immediately, he fell into the persona that he’d been schooled in for the past several weeks. He smiled charmingly. “Well, as you can see, I’m perfectly fine now. How about springing me?” He rattled the restraints to get the doctor’s attention.

The doctor spoke to the nurse. “Nurse, would you get an orderly please?” She left with a nod, and he turned his attention back to Illya and unbuckled the agent’s ankles. “Nick, we are here to help you, but we can’t help you unless you want to get better.”

“Of course, doctor.” Illya’s attention was drawn to the door as an orderly the size of a grizzly bear stepped in. He stood quietly to one side as the doctor unbuckled Illya’s wrists. The agent swung his legs over the edge of the bed, sat up and rubbed his wrists. “I seem to be fine now. Would you call me a cab?”

The nurse bit her lip and took a step back. The doctor shook his head. “No, Nick, you don’t understand. You aren’t leaving for awhile.”

Illya stood, holding the bed until his wobbly knees could support him. “Excuse me?”

“Your family had you committed, Nick. You are here at Deerwood until you are certified healthy and not a danger to yourself or others.”

Illya moved stiffly between the doctor and the nurse, circled the small room silently and stopped directly in front of the mountain of an orderly. He looked up into the man’s passive face, leaned in close, and said, “Boo!” The orderly scowled. Illya chuckled and turned to the doctor. “Well, at least it isn’t as stuffy as Cousin Everett’s place. The scenery is a lot nicer, too.” He raked the nurse with a look that made her outwardly nervous then he dropped into a chair with a laugh where he began to examine his fingernails. “Once again the family money will save me,” he sighed. “When’s dinner?”

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The nurse edged her way around the orderly and opened the door. Illya winked at her, and she left in a huff. The orderly stood fast.

“It’s almost noon. You will eat in your room until you’ve been examined and we have determined that you can mingle safely with some of the other residents. We would like to withhold medications and clear your system, but your behavior will dictate that. Do you understand? It’s up to you, Nick.”

Illya saluted the doctor from his chair. “Aye, aye doc. What ever you say.” He ended the sentence with a big smile.

The doctor nodded. “Your dinner will be here soon.” He left with the orderly right behind. The click of the door lock was loud and clear.

Illya was the model sociopath patient for the rest of the day. The agent only had eyes for security, and through the small window in his door he watched and noted the shifts and shift changes. By lights out, he had his door lock figured out and a plan on how to investigate the rest of the floor.

At lights out each patient was locked in their individual room. An intercom in the ceiling was no doubt monitoring each cell and Illya noted that there was only one nurse at a main station for the night. From where the nurse sat in her glass office, each room door was visible down a long hall on either side. The day room separated the hallways.

Illya assumed the door was wired to notify the nurse if it was opened, and he decided to test that theory. With a crudely fashioned pick made from a mattress spring it only took a handful of seconds for him to pick the lock and crack the door. Through his small window, he saw the nurse’s head pop up. Quickly, he made for his bed, feigning sleep when the nurse arrived and wiggled the door closed again.

I’m going to need a distraction down the other hall, Illya thought as he settled down for the night. Let’s see who I meet tomorrow in the day room.



Meanwhile, Solo settled down for the night in his car, the gates of Deerwood in his sights, and began the tedious task of information gathering. He already had a long list of license plates in front of him taken from the vehicles coming and going from behind the stone wall. Weary and bored, he began to play with his communicator by tossing it like a tiny baton. Waiting for vehicle owner information would be so much more fun if Victoria was working right now, he thought.

By the time his relief showed up at midnight, his research had yielded only the names of a few lower level Thrush goons – not enough to prove Thrush control. Most of the cars had been legitimate employees, patient relatives and delivery trucks. No big fish so far.

Either the Thrush running the establishment is a new bird, or he never leaves the facility, the seasoned agent concluded.

Turning surveillance over to the next team, Solo wondered what his partner's nights were going to be like for the next few days.



Illya’s first night could be nothing but quiet since he was locked in his room for the duration. He was polite but guarded at breakfast, finding it east to play the elusive



sociopath. He was allowed into the day room at lunch where he noted two burly guards posted near the exit doors. The agent wandered over, sandwich in hand, and smiled at the men. A glance through the double exit door's windows revealed a hallway just outside. He spared the lock a lingering look, which made the guards nervous.

"Keep the food at the table," snarled one of the guards, his piggish eyes locked on Illya's blues.

The agent smiled coldly. "Sure," he said, turning his back to them. He was about to move off when the door clicked and swung open. Illya looked over his shoulder to see a vaguely familiar nurse.

"Oh! I almost hit you, Mr. Van Dorn. You're supposed to be eating at the table." The woman's name tag said 'Nurse Trueheart'. Illya smirked, which made the nurse frown. "Is there a problem?"

"I don't think so," he replied brightly, returning to his sandwich as he looked her up and down. Much to her credit, she did not shrink away like the nurse yesterday. Instead, she put her hands on her hips and glared at him.

"Mr. Van Dorn. Sit down. It's the rules."

Blue eyes flashed, and the agent strolled back to the table, making the sociopath behavior believable. He had the information he needed for later. Now all he had to arrange was a distraction, and for that, he looked to his fellow patients.

UNCLE had been able to glean a little information about a few of the other patients, and he had an idea of which inmates he could probably manipulate. Now that he knew what he needed to about the physical layout of the place, and he could put names to the faces he had seen in his corridor yesterday, his list of possible accomplices shortened to two. They both resided in the hallway where the agent needed a diversion after hours. Once he identified them, he went to work laying the groundwork for a disturbance later that evening.

By the time lights out came, patient Duggan was certain he was being released at midnight, whereas patient Stacey was sure his things would be taken from him if he fell asleep. Now, all the agent needed to do was wait and stay under the radar of the staff and see if his needed distraction would come to pass.

Illya kept vigil at his small window, pick ready. Around ten, he saw the nurse's head jerk up. She spoke into the intercom for a minute, and then sat back down. At ten thirty, she jumped again and this time fished the keys from her pocket as she started down the hallway.

Instantly, the agent had his door unlocked. He slipped out and closed it quietly, then made for the exit doors to the hall. They opened just as quickly with his crude pick. Easing down the carpeted hall, he identified two other wards similar to his own before finding an office. The office lock yielded as quickly as the others.

Once inside with the door secure, Illya quickly scanned the room. A diagram of the facility with the fire escapes highlighted was tacked on the wall; from it, the agent was able to memorize the layout of the elusive third floor. In the dim light, he peered into a glass encased cabinet and saw rows of drugs, but none were labeled with patient names. He moved on and checked the whole office.

It was already apparent that Dr. Bellows was probably not on the first or second floors, and a fast perusal of the office files made that idea solid to the agent. Bellows' file was not here. That left the third floor.

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The only thing the blond agent found that was in any way useful was a list of doctors' names. There was a work schedule and after hours on-call lists in one of the drawers that provided names as well as phone numbers for the professional staff. Other than Dr. Negril, one name popped out at the agent: Dr. Phillip Ellroy was already firmly connected with Thrush and listed as a contract doctor to the facility.

“Well, that’s something,” the agent murmured to himself.

Illya memorized the names and numbers within a few minutes. Not finding anything else of immediate interest, the agent exited the office and scanned the hall. He eyed the elevator and emergency stair access to the third floor, deciding if he should give it a try right now. The sound of the elevator stopping on this floor propelled him back into the office, and he knew his wandering time was about up.

Running feet traversed the hall and entered the day room in his ward. The agent slipped back down the hall to the day room doors. A glance in the window showed him the heels of two orderlies disappearing down the hallway of Stacey and Duggan, so he took the opportunity to pick the lock and let himself back into his room.

The faint sound of a struggle made him mentally voice a silent apology to his unknowing accomplices. His next step was to figure out how to get the information about Dr. Ellroy to Solo, then find, exactly, where Dr. Bellows was being kept.

The agent was convinced Bellows was here against his will; Ellroy’s name was enough to convince him that Thrush was involved. He settled into his bed and laced his fingers behind his head as he studied the all-too-familiar ceiling. Tomorrow, the third floor. Somehow, he thought as he dropped off to sleep.



Dr. Negril was livid. “Tell me again, Nurse Beckett, how things got so out of hand last night?”

Nurse Beckett managed to keep her poise, but her fingers were tightly intertwined as she stammered her report the next morning. The annoyed doctor and Nurse Trueheart listened without interruption for a second time, then the doctor excused the nervous woman with a sharp, barked order.

After she left, Nurse Trueheart said firmly, “There’s no need to put Miss Beckett on trial, doctor. She obviously wasn’t briefed on any possible problems and she handled the situation exactly as she was trained.”

“Then I suggest you find out why she wasn’t briefed, Nurse. Something must have happened to trigger those two patients’ anxieties. Now we have to re calibrate their medications so it doesn’t happen again.”

“Yes, sir.” Always the professional, Dianna Trueheart never let her distain for this particular doctor show. Something about him put her on edge. Usually, the size of the facility and his preference for not mingling with underlings was enough to keep them apart, but last night’s fiasco with patients Duggan and Stacey would put him on her back for most of the day. She intended to get to the bottom of the incident herself so Nasty Negril would go back to ignoring her again. She allowed a small smile for the nickname she’d tagged him with as she gathered her things to leave his office.

Nurse Trueheart made her way through the first floor, greeting the patients warmly as she passed them in the hall, and cheerfully telling nurses their orders for the

day. She was standing at the main desk going over notes when one of the orderlies nervously approached her.

“Miss Trueheart?” the young man said quietly. “Can I show you something, please? It’s kind of important.”

The head nurse glanced up at him with a curious smile. This orderly was one of the few that she appreciated, as he seemed to really care for the well being of the patients. “Sure, Michael. What is it?”

He showed her a film reel he had hidden under his coat. “You need to see this. I don’t know what to do. I don’t want to get Nurse Beckett in any more trouble.” Interest piqued, Trueheart stepped around the desk and the orderly guided her to the elevator. “I have the projector set up on the second floor.”

When the doors closed, she asked, “What is that?”

“You know how we have a security camera on the drug cabinet in the office? Well, it picked up something last night.”

“Other than Nurse Beckett getting medications for those involved in the . . . incident . . . last night?”

“Yeah. That’s what’s weird. It’s before that.” Michael spoke softly, for her ears only. “I was told to look at the film to make sure it was Nurse Beckett that got the medications and not the orderlies. I think Negril was looking for a reason to fire her.”

The elevator stopped and the doors opened. Michael led Trueheart to a small storage room where the projector was ready to go. “He is the vengeful sort,” she said less than diplomatically.

The young man set up the film. “Anyway, this is what I saw.” After a minute or two of uneventful darkness, there was a flash of motion on the screen. “That’s the office door opening.” The lighting was very poor, but the figure that stepped into the frame was obviously not Nurse Beckett or an orderly.

“He’s dressed in pajamas!” Trueheart whispered.

“I know! It must be a patient!”

The man was in the frame for only seconds, but the shadow-dark profile recorded was sharp and clear and the lightness of the form’s hair undeniable.

“Mr. Van Dorn!” Trueheart gasped. “How did he manage that?” Her eyes narrowed. “I had a feeling he would be a challenging patient. Thank you, Michael. I will handle this.”

Michael sighed in relief. “Thanks. Don’t get me wrong, ma’m. I know Dr. Negril is a good doctor, but he gives me the creeps.”

“It’s all right.” Trueheart gathered the tape and prepared to follow Michael from the room. “He gives me the creeps, too,” she said quietly to herself.

This day was not starting out well.



Outside, Napoleon Solo settled in for another day of stakeout. As he wiggled in the car’s seat to find a comfortable position, he hoped his partner would find a way to contact him. The American agent preferred being in the thick of things.

Illya needed to get to that third floor. They both knew that is where they wanted to be, but Solo also knew his Russian partner to be both thorough and efficient. Illya would get there only when he felt the time was right.

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The CEA sighed and propped his chin in his hand, then began to toss the communicator with his other hand. He hated waiting.

***ACT III: "This Isn't Exactly How I Thought My Day Would Go."***

Nurse Trueheart was very glad she decided to show Dr. Negril the tape while he was alone. At the moment, she thought he was going to burst a blood vessel. His face was red, his eyes hugely round, and his mouth was clamped so tight she wondered if his lips would cramp.

He was starting to scare her.

"Um, Doctor? How do you want to proceed? There's nothing amiss in the office. It seems that Mr. Van Dorn's strong personality and ego may be the problem, don't you think? He values secrets and one upmanship, as your interview records indicate?"

Dr. Negril didn't seem to be pleased that his diagnosis of the patient in question was right on the nose. "Put him in restraints immediately. Search his room. He must have gotten his hands on a key somehow."

"Yes, sir." Trueheart wasn't surprised at the order. She'd come to the same conclusion herself. The doctor's next request surprised her.

"And get me a copy of his picture, along with fingerprints. You do that personally and give them to me only. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," she said without hesitation just before leaving to fulfill his orders.



Nick Van Dorn was standing at one of the wire reinforced glass windows in the day room looking out over the gardens below when his arms were seized from behind. He'd heard them coming, but Illya Kuryakin deftly quashed his trained response to escape, and allowed himself to be dragged to his room. He wiggled in token resistance and peppered the air with angry expletives as the other residents froze, wide-eyed in amazement.

Duggan and Stacey must have spilled their guts. The agent knew he would be pegged as the instigator of the night's events eventually and already had his boastful story of 'not wanting to be bored' all planned. He expected the antic would probably get him isolation.

What he didn't expect was to be restrained to his bed. The orderlies stood silently, one cracking his knuckles, as Nurse Trueheart entered the room and closed the door. "All right, Mr. Van Dorn. Where is it?"

Illya's lip curled up in a rakish smile. "If you don't know, release me. I'd love to show you. But we don't need observers, do we?"

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The obscene suggestion failed to chip her stony look. She sighed sharply. “The key, Mr. Van Dorn. The key that got you into the office down the hall and out of here.”

Illya was surprised, but kept the façade with icy eyes and cold smile. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, but you’re free to search me, honey. In fact, I can’t wait.”

After an appraising second, Trueheart nodded at the orderlies. “Find it,” she said. Then, from a large pocket on the front of her uniform, she pulled out an ink pad and some paper. While the orderlies began to search, the nurse sat on the side of the bed and inked the agent’s fingers.

“What’s that for?” Illya said, surprised and a little alarmed.

“Fingerprints. For our records.”

The agent knew that was a lie. And in that instant, he knew his time was very, very short. They didn’t know his true identity yet, but they would as soon as the prints were examined. He balled his fists, preventing the prints from being taken and made an instant decision based solely on gut instinct.

“Wait, don’t do that. Listen to me.” The Van Dorn personality was pushed aside in an instant. Illya could see in the nurse’s face that she noticed the change. “Listen! I need your help. You can’t fingerprint me.”

Trueheart hesitated, seeming to make a decision.

“If they check those prints, my life will be in danger. Don’t do it.”

After a moment, Trueheart put the ink back in her pocket and pulled out a syringe.

Illya fought down the panic that instantly hit him. He spoke urgently in a low voice for her ears only. “I’m an UNCLE agent! I’m investigating this place!” His hope spiked when he saw that she didn’t react on hearing the term ‘UNCLE’. She’s not Thrush. I hope.

The nurse swabbed his secured arm. All the agent was able to do was open and close his hand; his arm was hopelessly secured flat against the bed with his vein easily accessible. Trueheart popped the cap on the syringe and lowered the needle to his arm. The possibility that he might not wake up again crossed his mind.

“My name is Kuryakin, Illya Kuryakin. Check with UNCLE. My boss is Alexander Waverly,” he was speaking rapidly, trying to say something to get her to believe him.

The cold sting of the needle brought home the urgency of the situation. “Miss Trueheart, I’m looking for a Dr. Bellows. He’s in danger. Don’t trust anyone here. . .” Illya could feel the warmth of the tranquilizer as it rushed up his arm and through his system. His eyelids suddenly felt very heavy. “Don’t . . . Bellows . . . danger . . .”

Trueheart withdrew the needle and kept from showing shock at what she’d just heard. How would he know about Mr. Bellows? she wondered. The sound of an orderly slamming a drawer snapped her back, and she fumbled with the ink and paper. Is he a multiple personality? That still wouldn’t explain how he’d know about another patient here – especially that one. Her hands were shaking now as she worked with the limp fingers. Was she being dragged into a crazy man’s world, or was there truth in what he said?

The usually unshakeable nurse was now filled with doubt. Everything Van Dorn had said and done up to his point was classic sociopath behavior; these types didn’t have a change of heart and suddenly worry about others. And even she didn’t believe the

multiple personality idea, especially since he'd mentioned a name he should have no knowledge of.

Finished, she stood and looked at the prints she'd just taken. Her eyes then went to the slack face of the fair skinned Van Dorn.

Or was it Kuryakin? How did he know about Bellows?

"Got it!" The orderly's voice made her jump. She turned to see a jubilant man holding a piece of bent wire aloft. "A lock pick! Don't know where he got the wire, though."

Trueheart pulled herself from her reverie and became all business again. "Ah, this patient is proving to be rather ingenious, isn't he?" she said lightly, taking the wire. Never in her time here had she seen a patient do this sort of thing.

An UNCLE agent however . . .

"Good job," she said in what she hoped was a cheery voice. "Shall we let Mr. Van Dorn rest now?"

The orderlies opened the door, slapping each other on the back in congratulations and leaving the nurse to secure the room. Trueheart paused in the doorway and gave the drugged enigma one last look as she sorted her thoughts.

First, do my job. Next, do some checking. Something here just didn't feel right, and she'd learned long ago not to ignore her gut feelings. She quietly closed the door, already composing her somewhat edited report to Dr. Negril in her mind as she left the ward.



Jacob Negril fingered the print card and photo of Nicholas Van Dorn and wondered if he was doing the right thing. Working with Thrush for the past five years had taught him one thing: If anyone on the Council ever thought you'd lost control of your mission, you disappeared instantly. That's how Negril had become the head doctor here - two doctors before had simply vanished. Negril knew he didn't yet have the contacts he needed to protect himself, and it was possible that the niggling feeling he had about Van Dorn may be wrong. The man was a bona fide psychopath. Would asking for a print check make him look bad?

He put the items down on his desk. Dr. Ellroy was dropping by for his monthly report after lunch. Negril resolved to show him the items and ask his advice. Ellroy was the only Thrush contact he trusted.



After reporting to Negril, Trueheart stated that she was taking her lunch break in town. As soon as she cleared the gates of the facility, she headed for the first pay phone she could find.

"So if this Waverly guy doesn't exist, I look stupid, but at least it's over the phone and not face to face," she mumbled as she tried to find UNCLE in the phone book. She eventually gave up and resorted to the operator. The nurse was connected with the offices of UNCLE quickly, but then was forwarded through a series of secretaries and extensions that dizzied the mind. She did realize, however, that no one denied this Waverly person existed, but no one seemed to be able to find him.

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After identifying herself for what seemed like the dozenth time, she was startled by a knocking on the phone booth door. "Oh!" she said when she recognized the dark haired gentleman knocking. The flustered nurse managed to crack the door enough to speak. "Mr. Van Dorn! I'm on hold here. . ."

Solo pushed open the door and removed the receiver from the astonished woman's hand. "It's all right, Miss Trueheart. Mr. Waverly sent me." He hung up the phone.

"What? Mr. Waverly? I didn't even speak to . . . you know Mr. Waverly? There really is a Mr. Waverly?"

Solo took her elbow and lead her to his unobtrusive sedan. He settled her in the passenger's seat then ran around to the driver's seat. When he slipped in and fired up the engine, he said, "I'm just going to park off the main road, then we'll talk."

Trueheart was speechless, not knowing what to say first. "How did you know where I was?"

"We traced the call."

" 'We'?"

"UNCLE. Waverly had them trace the call as soon as you identified yourself."

That gave the woman pause. "They know who I am?" she whispered.

"Yes. You're part of an investigation of Deerwood."

"Are you telling me that everything Nicholas said is true?" Even though her words seemed astonished, inside, Trueheart was not surprised.

"His real name is Illya Kuryakin and mine is Napoleon Solo. He's my partner, and we both work for UNCLE. I was wondering how he was going to contact me, but I wasn't expecting this so soon."

"Wha . . . what does UNCLE want at Deerwood?"

"Specifically, Dr. Carl Bellows. Generally, we want to see what Thrush has been doing there."

" 'Thrush'?"

Solo gave the overwhelmed nurse a quick overview of the Thrush organization and how Dr. Bellows may be at risk.

Trueheart frowned. "I rarely see Mr. Bellows. He's kept separate and has no contact with other patients." Her eyes narrowed. "Are you saying that Mr. Bellows may not be sick at all?"

"That's a very good possibility, and the reason my partner is in there. Illya is to get Bellows out if it looks like he's being held against his will."

"Oh, my, he has his work cut out for him, Mr. Solo. Dr. Negril has Mr. Bellows on the third floor."

Solo gave the attractive nurse his best smile. "That may be true, but you don't know my partner. And with your help we can get the job done."

"Me? Help?" At first, Trueheart was alarmed, but after a few seconds of thought, the idea appealed to her. If Bellows was being held captive, she felt it to be her duty to help him. Then she remembered how she'd left the blond agent. "I'm not sure what I can do, Mr. Solo, and I'm not sure how soon your partner will be up and around, either."

Solo's heart jumped. "What do you mean?" When Trueheart explained the film and Negril's orders, the American agent immediately started the car. "We have to get moving. Illya's cover will be blown when they check those prints. I'm pulling together an assault team right now. You have to make sure Illya can get to Bellows, understand?"



"Assault team? But there are dozens of innocent patients there! They could get hurt!"

"Miss Trueheart, I'm making it your job to make sure the patients are secured and safe. Can you lock them down?"

Thinking quickly, she nodded. "Yes, yes. I can initiate a lockdown on both the first and second floors and call it training. When?"

Solo glanced at his watch as he pulled in next to the nurse's car. "I can have a team staged by three o'clock - two hours from now. That gives Illya time to locate and secure Bellows first. When he does that, we'll enter. Can you lock down at three?"

She nodded. "Yes, yes. That will be fine." Trueheart stepped from the car. "Mr. Kuryakin should be awake by now. I'll get him to the third floor somehow."

Solo grinned again, in spite of the niggling of worry he couldn't dispel. "Don't get yourself into trouble, Miss Trueheart. Just turn Illya loose. He'll find his way."

A wan smile accented the nurse's quick nod. "This isn't exactly how I thought my day would go," she said with a nervous laugh.

"You're doing the right thing. See you at three o'clock." He gave the nurse a wink to reassure her.

The sedan's engine gunned and Solo sped from the parking lot in a cloud of dust.



Dr. Philip Ellroy was in a foul mood. Always looking for a way to gain favor from, and possibly get a seat on, the Thrush Council, Ellroy knew he had to show something from this Bellows job very soon. His methods were working, but too slowly for Ellroy's taste. Negril worked too cautiously.

Deerwood was woefully under used, in Ellroy's opinion. He was beginning to wonder, though, if his designs on the place were worth his effort. He had a year into this project, and only Bellows to show for it. Sure, there was a lot of information in the scientist's room, but Ellroy wasn't sure how to present it, as it was a jumbled mess. Thrush liked things neat.

The sudden departure of the previous two head doctors had Ellroy a little worried. Either someone else in Thrush had their eye on the place, or they were setting it up to fail and save the operating costs.

That's why he was upset. None of his contacts would tell him what was going on. Deerwood was ripe for a hostile takeover and Ellroy was on the fence about how much of a fight he should put up to keep this place under his control.

Ellroy's stomach was satisfyingly full from lunch in town, and now he marched into the facility hoping Bellows had something for him to show the Council. Negril had sounded hopeful. Ellroy just hoped it was something other than the blasted scientist's room; that place gave him the creeps.

The doctor stopped at the first floor main desk to make an appearance. Actually, he hoped to see the luscious Nurse Trueheart. The woman was an ice queen, but Ellroy was sure he could melt her resolve when he obtained the right amount of power. For now, he was willing to bide his time and admire from afar.

Trueheart breezed to the main desk slightly breathless and a bit flustered, causing Ellroy to raise his brows. He'd never seen her out of sorts before and he found it

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attractive. When she saw him, however, she pulled up short, straightened her already perfect uniform, and changed into the ice queen before his eyes.

“Dr. Ellroy,” she said politely. “Dr. Negril is on the third floor, I believe.”

“Would you tell him I’m here, Nurse?” he asked coolly.

“Yes, doctor.”

“Thank you.” He turned his back and marched to the elevator, glowing internally at her obedience. Yes, she would be a catch.

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Trueheart paged Negril’s office and announced Ellroy. With the coast clear, she nonchalantly made her way to the second floor to release Kuryakin.

She found him awake and a bit lathered, but still restrained to his bed. The nervous nurse made sure the door was secured before she began to unlock the restraints and tell him about her meeting with Solo. The blond agent looked relieved.

“I’m glad you believed me. Why did they decide to fingerprint me?” Trueheart told him about the camera on the drug case. “Stupid mistake on my part. Are there cameras on the third floor or anywhere else?”

“No,” she said. “Only on the drug cabinets.” She proceeded to give him a verbal description of the third floor layout, and the fact that Solo was storming the place in less than two hours.

“Not much time,” Illya mused. “I need to see Bellows. Is that possible?”

“I think so.” Trueheart’s pretty forehead furrowed as she thought. “Dr. Ellroy just went up there to meet with Negril. They’ll do that in Negril’s office because Ellroy doesn’t like to get too close to the patients.”

Illya rubbed his wrists. “I saw Ellroy’s name in the files. He’s Thrush.”

“And I warn you, Ellroy doesn’t hang around long so watch out for him leaving. I can pull the orderly and nurse from the floor on some red herring, which should clear the way to Bellow’s room.” She fished a key ring from her pocket and flipped through the numerous keys. “This should work on the doors.” She gave him a key. “What are you going to do, exactly?”

“Since Napoleon is on his way all I really have to do is make sure Bellows is contained, and then get Negril and Ellroy in custody before they destroy Bellows’ files. I’ll secure the files and the doctors and wait for Napoleon’s arrival.”

The nurse nodded and briefly chewed her lip. “Give me a half hour to get the floor clear before you leave here,” Trueheart said. “I’m instituting a training lock down at 2:30. Your key should still work on all the floors. Look for a steady red light near the ceiling in the hallways. That’s the signal that lock down is in effect and your partner is on his way.”

Illya nodded and gave the woman an appraising look, then grinned slightly. “You’re really taking to this spy stuff.”

Trueheart frowned. “Not exactly. I just want what’s best for the patients here, Mr. Kuryakin, and Drs. Negril and Ellroy apparently aren’t it.”

“They aren’t the only Thrush here, so be careful,” Illya cautioned.

She smiled weakly. “I can get you down the hall and in the stairwell. Let’s go now before I lose my nerve.”

***ACT IV: "Do You Know Who This Is?"***

Negril and Ellroy dropped in on Bellows in his room first. The scientist's room always dazzled Ellroy each time he entered it. The amount of possibly valuable information he saw there made his blood race with excitement.

So far, the Thrush Council was not aware of what the room held. Ellroy was in the process of selecting the appropriate individual to decipher it all. He had to find someone willing to pledge him total loyalty so the benefits of all this information would serve Ellroy's best interest. Council had to be informed soon; they were starting to question the value of the whole Deerwood project.

As Bellows sat mute on his rumpled bed, Ellroy surveyed the room with a carefully neutral face as Negril summarized Bellows' latest treatment. The visiting doctor wasn't listening. Instead, he was mentally adding up the value of the scribbling that adorned every surface of the room and how to market it. His head swam with the idea of the amount of power this information could bring him.

But then the nagging fear in the back of his mind raised its ugly head: What if all these formulae and diagrams were just the writings of a unbalanced mind? It was a possibility he couldn't ignore. The amount of experimental drugs in Bellows' system had to be considered . . .

Ellroy suddenly realized that Negril had stopped speaking. He put aside his thoughts and turned his attention to the annoying little man. Negril suggested they adjourn to his office.

Once in Negril's office, Ellroy walked to the neat mahogany desk while Negril pulled the files from a cabinet. Ellroy's eyes fell to a picture sitting on a pile of files and he quickly snatched it up.

"What's this doing here?" he said hotly, waving the photo and at Negril.

"Oh, that's just a patient I was going to ask you about."

"This man is here? Now?" Ellroy's eyes went wide with alarm.

Negril froze; a feeling of dread settled over him. "Um, yes. Second floor."

"Do you know who this is? This is Illya Kuryakin! This is one of UNCLE's top agents! How did he get by your security? Is he roaming around right now?" Ellroy clutched the photo so tightly his knuckles were white.

"He's in restraints at the moment - I knew there was something about him!" Negril wrung his hands. "What should I do?" He clutched a fat file to his chest.

As quick as a flash, a plan came to Ellroy. Bringing Kuryakin in to the Council would be quite a feat; throwing Negril and Bellows to UNCLE would be a small price to pay, especially since Negril would take the full blame.

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If Kuryakin was here now, that meant Solo wasn't far behind. This facility is as good as gone, he thought with sudden clarity, and Negril naively trusts me to save it for him. If I could use Bellows and Negril as a distraction and get away with Kuryakin . . .

"Get Bellows out of here," Ellroy said decisively. "I'll call for a helicopter. His partner, Napoleon Solo, is probably near by. You get Bellows out, and I'll meet you later."

"Where?"

Ellroy did his best to sound sincere. "You have my number. Call me when you're safe, and we'll plan from there. No need to alarm Thrush Central right now." If you make it out of here, you idiot.

Negril began to stack files on his desk, and Ellroy offered to clear the floor of personnel, leaving Negril two orderlies to handle Bellows.

Ellroy left the floor with the plan to whisk Kuryakin out before the impending raid he knew was going to happen. When he got to the ground floor main desk, he quickly began to fill out a transfer order. The goons here may not be too smart, but they did check paperwork.

His plan was disrupted by the sound of a muted alarm that made him jump. Ellroy grabbed the arm of a nurse as she hurried by. "What's that?" he demanded.

"Emergency lock down," she snapped, pulling her arm free. "Excuse me!" She then hurried down the hall.

With a sinking heart, Ellroy knew Solo was on his way and that he needed to blend in and sit tight if he was to get out of this mess.



When Illya poked his head from the stairwell into the third floor, he was pleased to see an empty hall and the red light Trueheart told him about. So far, so good. He went directly to Bellows' room and let himself in.

The scientist's room stopped him in his tracks. Dr. Bellows has been busy during his incarceration, the agent thought, turning a little circle with dropped jaw. If the little bit Illya deciphered was any clue, there was a plethora of information here that couldn't fall into Thrush hands.

Bellows himself appeared to be in some sort of catatonic state. He lay quietly on his bunk, staring at the ceiling and oblivious to all. The agent decided to leave him for now and retrieve his files. UNCLE medical would need those to counteract what ever was done the scientist. Once the agent had both Bellows and files secured together, he would take Negril, and hopefully Ellroy, into custody and wait for Solo to find them.

Illya slipped from the room and started down the hall to Negril's office. The sound of a doorknob turning made him duck into an empty patient room where he heard Negril speaking with someone. With the door cracked, he saw Negril and two orderlies heading down the hall toward Bellows' room. Ellroy must be gone already, the agent concluded.

When he lost sight of the pair, he immediately heard the sound of a door opening. After a second, a glance told him the hall was clear. Illya quickly moved to the office and began searching for Bellows' files. It didn't take him long to find them stacked on Negril's desk and he counted himself lucky. Now, he needed to stash the files and get

Negril. With the thick Bellows file secured under his arm, Illya moved to the door to check the hall.

Without warning, the office door flew open. The surprised agent acted without thinking and grabbed the lead figure by his collar and pulled him in the room, instantly recognizing Dr. Negril

Kuryakin didn't count on the stocky orderly moving so quickly. The agent was unable to disengage himself from the panicked doctor in time to avoid being placed in an impressive chokehold by the white uniformed behemoth. Releasing Negril, Illya grappled with the arms of steel. He was just about to initiate a nasty grab to the groin when the mountain of a man was joined by his equally large partner. Together, they made their own continent and soon had the Russian pressed flat to the floor with absolutely no wiggle room. Illya gasped, his breathing hindered by the mass on his back.

After a moment he felt a sharp prick on his forearm. "That should take care of him. Let me gather a few things before we take Bellows and leave."

"What did you give him?" one of the beasts panted.

"Something to distract him. Bring him along in case we need a bargaining chip."

Illya blinked hard at the odd sensation he felt trickling through his system. He tried to fight the whirling feeling in his head, but everything soon became a confusing mass of colors, smells and feelings. So enamored with the colorful visions, he didn't even feel the orderlies release him. He just lay there, his senses completely over stimulated and overwhelmed.

One of the toughs easily pulled Illya to his feet. The sudden movement both surprised and unnerved the agent. With a quick twist, he slipped from the grip and fell, his arms outstretched in an effort to maintain balance.

"Look out!" Negril jumped aside as Illya fell hands first into the glass doors of a bookcase. His forearms erupted in blood, but he didn't feel anything but exhilaration at the vivid sights, sounds, smells and tastes that the accident triggered. He began to laugh, wavering drunkenly on his feet.

The two orderlies frowned at him, then one laughed shortly. "Whoa, look at him, Deke! He's out there!"

Words only added to the bright and dancing visual display. Illya was oblivious to all but the cacophony of sights, smells and sound that surrounded him. He blinked in confusion.

The two attendants laughed and Deke grabbed Illya's elbow. At his touch, the room erupted in violent colors and hummed with sound. Illya's skin crawled and he tried to brush off the sensation. Every move brought a corresponding swirl of distracting colors and sights that totally disoriented him, but he managed to keep his feet, gaping in wonder. With the bright colors came foreign tastes on his tongue and smells that had to be savored.

The compromised agent moved to explore the sights, sounds and smells. The colors made music, and the brightest display was always just ahead. Illya stumbled forward, reaching out with bloodied arms and feeling nothing but exhilaration and unknowingly kept upright and guided by the burly orderly.



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Solo and his team moved through the lowest floor with swift efficiency. They worked on the premise of securing the exits and keeping the patients and staff calm. Trueheart proved to be an invaluable ally; the locked down rooms made the entry and follow up much more efficient. Solo nodded his thanks and left a half-dozen agents to cover the exits while he advanced to the upper floors.

Two squads worked their way up the stairs at each end of the building. The second floor was just as secure as the first, thanks to Trueheart, who was soon at Solo's side. Solo turned the floor over to Trueheart and a small team of agents.

Their ultimate goal was just above them now. Solo fully expected to find Negril in Illya's custody on the third floor and shook off the feeling of doom that had dogged him since the beginning of this affair.

"You and you, come with me!" Solo snapped. The two chosen agents closely followed their boss up the final flight of stairs, weapons at ready. They burst through the door to the third floor and scanned an empty hallway. "Stay here and cover the stairs," Solo ordered one of the pair. "Hauser, follow me." He and the Hauser began a fast and methodical check of the rooms.

The first rooms were offices, neat and orderly, decorated with stylish and expensive treatments. Solo and Hauser gave each room a cursory scan; they would follow up later. Right now they were simply looking for bodies. And with each room sweep, Solo's nerves tightened a bit more; Illya was no where to be found.

The only office that gave them pause was the one with Dr. Negril's nameplate on it. Glass from a broken bookcase littered the floor, and both agents noted blood intermingled with the sharp shards. Solo's heart rate kicked up a notch, and they pressed on.

Patient rooms started half way down the hall. The heavy doors were locked, but the contents of each room were clearly visible through the wire-meshed glass in each door. The rooms were bare with the patients either lying on the bed in a stupor or calmly pacing. Solo saw no reason to disturb them at this time. Some of the rooms were empty, and only one room was unlocked, empty and appeared to have been recently occupied. The pair of agents stepped inside.

"Bellows' room?" Hauser asked, scanning the walls in wide-eyed wonder.

"It seems so," Solo agreed in an astonished awe. The agents stood back to back as they surveyed the room.

Every surface was covered with tiny writing. Formulae equations and diagrams lined the walls, spiraled around the metal bed frame, and appeared to be hanging in mid air on the windows. The floor looked like a page in a math book with a smeared path that showed where the sick scientist paced. Even one corner of the bed sheets had lines written on it - the ink had spread as it soaked the fibers and looked fuzzy. Not even the small sink or toilet was spared.

The dark haired American tilted his head at one particularly dense area by the bathroom door and squinted. "I guess I'd have to be committed, too, if all this was in my head." He shook his head and refocused on the mission. "Come on, let's find Illya and Negril. I bet Bellows is with them."

Solo's walkie-talkie crackled to life. "Napoleon, there's a helicopter coming in!" The lead agent heard the familiar chopping sound as he acknowledged the call; there seemed to be an escape plan in progress and that fact alarmed the CEA. Where was Illya?

“Come on!” Solo charged from the room and headed to the roof access at the end of the hall. They pounded up the stairs and slammed into the metal door at the top. It flew open, and the agents burst on to the roof where Hauser was immediately grabbed by a beefy attendant and slammed into a brick wall. The agent crumpled, unconscious, to the deck. Solo managed to fire off a round and drop the giant as he turned to repeat the maneuver on Solo. The agent winced as the giant collapsed on top of Hauser.

By now, the chopper was directly overhead. Squinting into the rotor’s wind, Solo could see the craft hesitate before touching down. The roof area was small and the presence of people made the landing tricky. Solo scanned the area of the helipad through his gun sights and found a trio of figures.

“Don’t shoot!” Negril had a pistol pressed against the temple of a dazed looking Bellows, using him as a human shield. Another white uniformed behemoth was signaling the helo to land. “I’ll kill him!”

Solo froze. The aircraft touched down in a swirl of dust and the orderly ducked to open the craft’s door. Solo kept a bead on the retreating pair, waiting for a clear shot. Where the hell is Illya? He thought frantically.

The agent was somewhat surprised when he saw Negril smile coldly. “You may want to look over there, Mr. Solo!” he yelled over the engine noise, nodding his head to Solo’s right. “Your partner is about to get decapitated!”

As soon as it was said Solo dismissed the statement as an obvious bid to make him look away, but a motion in the corner of his eye made him catch his breath and turn his head.

Disheveled and uncoordinated, Illya stumbled directly along a path that led directly to the whirling blades of the copter. Solo’s heart sank when he noted the expression of detached rapture that masked the Slavic features.

“Illya!” Solo yelled, keeping his gun trained on Negril. “Stop!”

His partner was oblivious and gazed into the afternoon sun like an entranced child, completely unaware of the danger one step in front of him.

Solo’s arm was already swinging aside before the decision was completed in his mind. The single shot made Illya jerk aside from his disastrous path and fall. Blood blossomed from his shoulder like an obscene Rorschach stain.

Solo ducked and ran to him as Negril's trio rushed to the craft. The sound of the engines grew louder when the three men boarded and the pilot prepared to lift off. Solo grabbed his squirming partner’s collar and dragged him behind a large air conditioning unit, the blond agent screaming incoherently. As the craft began a careful ascent, Solo braced his legs, carefully aimed and pumped two shots into the tail rotor. Instantly, he dove next to his partner and covered his head.

The screech of the dying bird was deafening; deadly shrapnel shot in all directions, piercing everything in its path. The runners on the belly of the craft slammed to the roof in a violent spin. Solo huddled behind the air conditioning unit until the main rotors pulverized themselves against the building and the engine whined into self-destruction and silence.

Cautiously, he peeked around the unit and heaved a relieved sigh that the fuselage, even though it was lying on its side, was still intact. With a quick glance at his babbling, incapacitated partner, Solo raced to the craft. A glance in Hauser's direction revealed the dead Thrush skewered by rotor bits. Hauser was already trying to crawl from under his human shield.

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The roof door exploded open and the rest of Solo's team spilled onto the scene.

"Your timing is impeccable," Solo said dryly when they all reached the fuselage at the same time. "A few seconds sooner and you would be like him." He pointed at the dead, porcupine-like attendant. He turned the downed craft over to the team. "Recover the occupants and see to Hauser," he ordered. Solo holstered his weapon and sprinted back to his partner's location. Illya was gone.

"Hey!"

Solo turned at a team member's yell, then followed with his eyes to where the agent pointed. Horrified, his heart jumped when he saw the disheveled, bloody Russian swaying at the roof's edge, his attention fully on the glowing orb low in the sky.



***ACT V: "Tune In, Turn On, Drop Out"***

Illya Kuryakin balanced precariously on top of the low wall that marked the edged of the roof. To him, the swirling colors that had throbbed and hummed with discordant rhythm a few moments ago now pulsed in a pleasurable, beckoning swirls of muted shades and soothing music. He wanted to completely immerse his body and soul in the vision and bring his growing euphoria to a glorious peak and fly, unbound, from the chaos behind him.

Solo watched as his partner drunkenly pulled off his torn and bloody shirt with his one working arm and throw it to the wind. The injured arm drooped uselessly, the pain obviously unnoticed. Blood gushed from the exit wound with every breath; he swayed dangerously.

Solo approached carefully, waving off the agents that fell in behind. "Don't startle him," he said lowly.

"What's wrong with him?" someone asked in a hushed voice.

"I . . . I'm not sure." The CEA instinctively moved slowly and kept his eyes locked on the once familiar man before him.

It was a gruesome and surreal sight. The blond agent's torso was shiny with sweat. Blood swirled in a wild pattern across his entire body. Red spattered blond hair that was not anchored by wetness blew wildly around his joyous profile as he stood swaying in the sporadic breeze. In addition to the rosette gunshot wound Solo could now see a spider web of crisscross scratches, some frighteningly deep, stretch from Illya's fingertips to elbows.

When a grey cloud blew across the face of the sun, Solo was relieved and wondered if Illya's eyes had burned. What he could see of his partners' face, however, tensed in confusion at the sudden darkness. Illya blinked, frowned, and stretched his unhindered arm to the sky as if to pick the cotton ball clouds. He wobbled precariously when he rose to his toes.

"Do not go!" Illya uttered, quietly breathless. Just within hearing range now, Solo then heard him whisper, "I can fly to you!" His friend's intent was clear when Illya bent his knees to jump.

The instant Illya's feet left the wall Solo leaped and grabbed the back of the hospital pajama pants and yanked backwards with all his weight. Illya jerked backward and they fell to the roof top in a tangled mass with a jarring thud.

Solo wrapped both arms around his partner's slick frame from behind and pulled him into a tight bear hug. The compromised agent writhed like a snake, screaming unintelligibly. His movements were disjointed and uncoordinated, but it was still a

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struggle to control him. Finally, Solo managed to roll on top and pin his friend down. Mournful tears of bewilderment and rage streaked Illya's face as he refused to be calmed, his wails a heart wrenching mix of fear and betrayal.

Solo hung on like both their lives depended on it. Unsuccessfully, he tried to talk his friend down with constant, quiet chatter, but noise seemed to fuel the fire. It took three additional agents to secure Illya to a gurney commandeered from the facility.

Panting hard and shaking from spent adrenalin, Solo fought down the desire to stay with his partner and reluctantly stood back as he was taken away. Then the shaken agent turned his attention back to the captives.

Bellows, easily subdued and malleable, was taken from the scene with a heavy escort. The pilot and the second bear-like orderly were badly wounded and being tended to by medics. That left Negril, and Solo made it a point to take charge of him.

"What did you give him?" Solo snarled, his fist entwined in the doctor's collar.

To his credit, Negril would not be cowed. Instead he smiled and held Solo's eyes with his own. "Who?" he said with a chuckle, "Bellows or Van Dorn - oh, I mean, Kuryakin?"

Solo shook him like a rag doll as he yelled. "What's the stuff in my partner?"

"It's probably a derivative of lysergic acid diethylamide by the way his eyes look and the hallucinations." Trueheart appeared at the angry agent's side, slightly out of breath.

Solo cocked an eyebrow but didn't take his eyes from Negril. "Hallucinations?"

Trueheart nodded sharply. "Yes. Such a drug mixes up the electrical messages to the brain."

"Will it kill him?" Solo's voice was flat and direct and his dark eyes bored into Negril's.

"No, not directly. Only if he's allowed to physically hurt himself - like trying to fly." She gave him a significant look. "I've seen Negril use it on some patients before," her voice sounded disgusted. "He logs it as 'treatment'. He's altered the formula so the effects last up to 24 hours. It doesn't respond to normal treatment, either. We've tried Throazine and Vitamin C, but nothing seems to stop the effects. The best we can do is put Illya in padded restrains in a dark room to reduce sensual stimulation until it runs its course."

"How long?" he asked.

"It depends on the dose," she replied. "Like I said, it can last up to 24 hours."

Solo shook the doctor. "HOW MUCH DID YOU GIVE HIM?" he yelled, his mouth inches from the prisoner's face.

Negril's face turned to stone and he crossed his arms across his chest. "I'm not telling you anything."

In a flash of motion Solo swung his pistol across the doctor's cheek and the man crumpled, unconscious. The agent released his grip and let the man fall to the ground at his feet.

"About time someone took him down a peg," Trueheart mumbled quietly.

There was a moment of strained silence before the sound of dragging feet made Solo turn. Hauser, holding his hand against a bloody bump on his head, stopped next to his boss. Panting and swaying slightly as he glared down at the doctor, he said, "Gee, it's a shame he got knocked out in the crash, isn't it?"

A second agent guarding the pilot agreed, as did the rest of the team. Trueheart covered her mouth as she giggled. Solo smiled sheepishly in gratitude.

The nurse then took Solo's elbow. "Please, Mr. Solo, I need to get this place back to normal for the sake of the patients and your partner. Can we hurry this up?"



Bellows was placed in his room with a pair of guards posted in the hall. Solo's partner could be heard from behind the doors of an empty room, and the CEA had to muster all his reserves to enter the room.

Illya's voice was growing hoarse from screaming and Solo's head pounded with the constant onslaught, but the American managed to keep his voice calm and low in direct contrast to the way he really felt inside. It didn't take long until Solo felt his nerves were about to shatter. When Trueheart returned with some basic medical supplies and glided in with smooth, unflustered efficiency, the agent felt his burden lift a little.

The nurse smiled sympathetically as she took a blood sample then set up an IV. The bullet wound's bleeding had slowed and it didn't take long for Trueheart to bind the shoulder and secure the associated arm to the agent's torso. "No sense in trying to work on it now. He'll make that impossible, and he shouldn't be sedated. The shoulder needs to be immobilized so he doesn't make it worse." She finished off by snugly bandaging the right forearm up to the elbow.

Illya thrashed in the restraints, red faced. Gooseflesh peppered his arms and he groaned at visions unseen by his partner and Trueheart. Finished, the nurse grabbed a side of the gurney.

"There's a dark, soundproof room on the first floor in Admittance. That's the best place for him right now. Any outside influence - noise, smell, sight - will affect him." Trueheart's eyes were full of sympathy. "I'm sorry this happened."

Solo nodded tightly. "You're sure it's temporary?"

"If it's the LSD derivative I think it is, yes."

Solo's head snapped up at the acronym. "Dr. Timothy Leary."

"Tune in, turn on, drop out," the nurse replied disgustedly as she started the gurney with a shove.

Hands still shaking slightly, Solo helped to guide the gurney to the small, dark isolation room on the first floor. The hunting lodge ambience of the reception area now seemed cruelly obscene as he pushed his partner through the double doors.

He leaned over and spoke quietly to his partner. "You'll be all right, tovarisch. I promise." He plucked a towel from a small table and wiped Illya's face and neck, trying to ignore the wails his touch ignited. Finally, he stepped back. "I'll keep an eye on you."

Solo and Trueheart stepped out of the isolation room and quietly closed the door. The tortured moans could still be heard outside, muffled by the soundproofing.

The possibility that Bellows' condition was orchestrated by outsiders now looked like a reality to Solo. He set his jaw and told himself silently that he would keep his professionalism when he spoke with Negril; anything less would put the agent on the same level as the despised man.

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The UNCLE Chief Enforcement Agent had to force his fists to unclench. It became easier when he could no longer hear his partner's torment. The upcoming night promised to be a long one.

***ACT VI: "Someone Leave An Unpaid Bill?"***

Dr. Ellroy spent a long, cramped night in a linen closet on the first floor. He huddled under a large pile of dirty linens listening to the sounds of the closet being checked twice. After several hours of undisturbed quiet, the doctor finally crawled out from under and moved the pile closer to the door. This gave him a little more legroom and, from under the concealment, he could at listen to the chatter in the Admittance reception area through the crack between the bottom of the door and the floor.

Ellroy's closet was across the hall from the Admitting double doors. As the night wore on, his surveillance rewarded him with the information that Kuryakin was in the isolation room – temptingly within his reach. He also overheard the plans to have the incapacitated agent transferred to UNCLE Medical first thing in the morning.

“Well, it looks like things are falling right in my lap,” the doctor mused to himself. “Bringing in Kuryakin would do a lot to keep my hide out of the fire for losing this place. Negril can be that fall guy.”

A plan began to cook in his mind. In the darkness of the closet, Ellroy pulled together the uniform of an orderly and hoped no one would closely check the laminated Sanctuary Identification card hanging from his pocket flap. UNCLE seemed to think, according to what he could hear, that they'd already found and shipped off all Thrush personnel. As dawn approached, there was more of the usual foot traffic, indicating a return to the normal routine. UNCLE guards, however, were staying put for awhile.

Ellroy heard one voice that came around Admitting several times to check on Kuryakin and eventually realized it was the agent's partner, Napoleon Solo. It was clear that he was both worried about Kuryakin and frustrated that he couldn't do anything to help him.

With dawn came a lull in activities and Ellroy took the opportunity to slip from the closet, his arms loaded with folded linens. He crossed the hall and pushed through the Admittance double doors, only to be stopped by an armed UNCLE guard on the other side.

“You here to prepare Kuryakin?” the guard asked efficiently.

“Uh, yeah,” the doctor stammered.

“He's been quiet for awhile. I think his voice gave out.” The guard glanced at his watch. “The transport team should be here any time now.”

“Yessir,” Ellroy nodded as he put down the linens. He picked up a sheet and a light blanket and entered the darkened isolation room.

When the slice of light cut across the still form on the gurney, a guttural moan vibrated the air and the body stirred. Ellroy let the door close and waited a few moments

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for his eyes to adjust to the near dark conditions. Finally, he approached the form and gave it a quick exam. When he checked the eyes with his penlight, he chuckled.

“That old fox Negril gave you the altered Leary juice, didn’t he? That means they’ll keep you in the dark right up until they move you.”

Ellroy checked Kuryakin carefully, noting the arm bound across the agent’s chest as well as the neatly wrapped but blood spotted forearm and IV line. He double checked the restraints then covered the oblivious agent with sheet and blanket. Snugly tucked in and cocooned, the patient was ready for transport.

Now to figure out how to be part of the transport team, Ellroy thought. He stepped from the isolation room. “He’s all ready,” he said cheerily. The doctor picked up the rest of the folded linens and moved around the corner to put them away, knowing the linen cabinet was right next to the drug cabinet and out of sight from the guard. Ellroy took the opportunity stock up on syringes loaded with tranquilizers.

Ellroy hung around in the room folding linens and looking busy until he heard the arrival of the transport team. He immediately joined the small group as the man he recognized as Solo briefed them.

The suave agent looked tired. Charcoal bags of weariness hung under his hooded eyes and the perfect hair Ellroy recalled from photographs looked a bit ruffled. The doctor hoped the agent was tired enough to not notice the physical details of the team.

The transport team consisted of one doctor, an orderly and an ambulance driver all dressed in similar white coats and UNCLE hats. The doctor immediately grabbed Illya’s chart and began to read.

“I want as little physical stimulation as possible. Make sure he’s restrained and covered. Tape gauze over his eyes, also, to cut the light. I don’t want to sedate him. He should be pretty worn out by now anyway.” He flipped the papers and began to write his orders. “Let’s move, gentlemen.” Solo began to speak quietly with the doctor. The orderly moved to get the patient and Ellroy followed closely behind like he belonged there. No one stopped him.

Inside the darkened room with the door closed, the Thrushman pulled out one of the syringes. He grabbed the orderly from behind and clamped a hand over his mouth, and then jabbed the needle into the orderly’s bicep. The man crumpled after a few long seconds. Ellroy switched coats – complete with identification - and donned the UNCLE hat.

After tucking the unconscious man in a corner, he taped gauze over the agent’s eyes as ordered, then roused Kuryakin by roughly patting his cheeks and speaking sharply until the agent twitched. Then Ellroy maneuvered the gurney through the door, keeping his head down to obscure his face.

The already agitated Kuryakin began to squirm violently. His voice was hoarse and raspy from overuse as he uttered pleading phrases in a variety of languages. Everyone in the room concentrated on the incapacitated, writhing agent and missed the fact that a sole orderly exited the room.

“Let’s go,” the UNCLE doctor barked after a quick exam. “We need to get him to a quiet place.”

Orderly Ellroy nodded obediently and pushed the gurney through the double doors, his hat’s brim covering his smug grin.



Dianna Trueheart rubbed her eyes and for a second wondered how sand had gotten under her eyelids. She laughed a giddy laugh after a moment when she realized that she was now in her 21st hour of being awake. I haven't felt like this since nursing school exams, she thought with humor. I'm going to sleep forever when I leave here.

Napoleon Solo joined her at the main nurse's station, looking just as weary. Their eyes met for a moment and then they both cracked crooked grins. "Breakfast is my treat, Miss Trueheart," Solo said with just a little of the debonair edge his invitations usually held. He rubbed his eyes. "After we both get some sleep, that is."

"Deal," the nurse sighed, picking up several loose sheets of paper scattered on the desk. "I need to clean up a bit. I haven't been done a thing here since yesterday." Something in the papers caught her eye, and she paused. Frowning tiredly, her brain tried to make sense of what she held in her hand. There was something odd here . . .

Solo noted her expression immediately. "What?" he asked wearily. "Someone leave an unpaid bill?"

"No," she said slowly, studying the sheet. "This transfer order isn't complete. Your partner's name is on it."

The agent craned his neck to look at the paper. "Transfer? Into Deerwood?"

"No, out of Deerwood. The time written here is 1430 hours; that's when the lockdown . . . I recognize this writing! This is Dr. Ellroy!" Her hand flew to her mouth. Her eyes were wide now as her mind kicked into gear. "I remember seeing him now! Right after I saw you . . . if he filled this out at two fifty yesterday . . ."

Solo snapped to attention. ". . . then he never got out of here," he finished. "Dr. Philip Ellroy is a high ranking Thrush and isn't on any of our detained lists. I didn't know he was here!"

"SIR!" The guard from Admittance waved frantically from down the hall. Their weariness forgotten, Trueheart and Solo sprinted down the hall. "Our orderly is unconscious in the isolation room!"

"Ellroy has Illya," Solo realized instantly. "And he has a fifteen minute head start." He pulled out his communicator as he dashed to the exit, Trueheart on his heels.



Ellroy easily dispatched the UNCLE physician in the back of the ambulance with another tranquilizer. Then he unbuckled Kuryakin's torso in his plan to get the driver to pull over. Ellroy quickly removed the eye patches and then proceeded to rouse the agent into an over stimulated panic.

"HELP!" Ellroy yelled as he pounded the small window between him and the driver. "HE'S LOOSE!"

The driver immediately pulled over and ran around to the back. Ellroy stumbled out of the back door when it opened, covering his nose like he'd been hit. "He hit the doc!" The beefy driver stepped in with the Thrush doctor right behind. Throwing his body over the thrashing agent, the driver yelled at Ellroy to buckle the straps. Ellroy responded by pumping the driver full of tranquilizer.

Ellroy pushed the driver and drugged UNCLE doctor out of the back. Kuryakin legs were still strapped in the gurney, so it was fairly easy to restrain the one free arm to Kuryakin's torso in a similar fashion as the other arm. Next, the doctor taped the glassy

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blue eyes closed again. The agent calmed down immediately, deep in his own world of sights, smells and feelings.

Ellroy then unbuckled Illya's legs and half dragged, half led the agent to the front of the car. The Russian was quite malleable once he got his feet under him, and the Thrushman easily maneuvered him into the passenger's seat and buckled him in as snugly as a lap belt allowed.

Giddy with excitement at his success, Ellroy drove away with his catch, already hearing the praises of the Thrush Council.



Ellroy had a forty-five minute head start by the time Solo and Trueheart were picked up by the UNCLE helicopter. The nurse had insisted that she would be needed to take charge of Illya when they found him.

Solo was heartened by her use of the term 'when'. She seemed to feel his confidence that they would find the wayward agent and Thrushman. On their side was the fact that Deerwood was in the country with only a few major roadways. The circular search pattern they flew soon bore results.

"Ambulance just up ahead, sir!" The pilot's voice was tinny in Solo's ear, but the message was very clear. The agent took his Special in hand.

"Stop it before it hits a busy road."

"Yes, sir!"

Trees and telephone lines made the maneuvering tricky and heart pounding, but it wasn't long before one skid of the craft gently touched the roof of the swerving ambulance.

"Bridge ahead!" Solo yelled. The pilot managed a sideways push on the skid, which sent the vehicle into a sideways slew onto the dirt shoulder of the road.

Skillfully, the pilot pulled up and touched down, reporting their location to all units as he did so. Solo leaped to the ground among swirling dust and debris and sprinted to the vehicle, his Special leading the way.

The ambulance had jolted to a stop, the front wheels in a ditch. Before the dark haired agent got to the vehicle, the passenger door popped open. Kuryakin, his torso wrapped in a mummy like fashion, was dragged out by Ellroy, who hefted the blond agent into a choke hold and used him as a shield. Something shiny flashed in the doctor's free hand.

A feeling of déjà-vu quickly flitted through Solo as he skidded to a stop and trained his weapon on the pair. The only part of Ellroy visible was an ear and the arm choking Illya. The other arm appeared wielding a syringe, which the doctor pressed into Illya's neck just enough to draw a bead of blood.

Illya uttered a guttural noise and shimmed weakly against the pressure. His head lolled forward over his captor's forearm.

Solo was sickened by the appearance of his partner. The bandages around his upper body were dark with sweat and blood, his hair wet with sweat. Perspiration made his deathly pale face shine. The gauze patches across his eyes made him seem unreachable; Solo could always read his partner by his eyes. Illya's chest heaved with panicked breathing. His legs were unsteady.



He still wore the hospital pajama bottoms, but they were torn, dirty and spotted with blood. Bare feet didn't seem to feel the rough ground on which they stood.

"I'll kill him," Ellroy snarled. "Don't come any closer."

Solo stopped. "Don't do it, Ellroy. You have nowhere to go."

"And you have a partner to lose. Drop your gun."

Solo held up his free hand behind him to stop the UNCLE pilot and Trueheart in their tracks behind him.

Ellroy chuckled. "And you even brought alternate transportation for me. How thoughtful. Now put the gun down, Mr. Solo." He accented the request by increasing pressure on the needle; the tip was now well into Illya's neck and it began to bleed freely. Ellroy gave it a glance. "I just may puncture an artery if I'm not careful. Now put it down."

Solo slowly squatted down in a motion to lay the gun down. His movement caused Ellroy to crane his neck over Illya's shoulder so he could watch the maneuver. Ever so slowly, Solo lay the gun down.

Ellroy's chin was now well over Illya's shoulder, his face visible. Solo picked his target.

In a flash, he scooped a handful of dirt and threw it directly at Ellroy's face. Instinctively, the doctor yelped and fell backward. Illya was dragged to his knees and screamed hoarsely at the sudden stimulation. He jerked violently and wrenched free as the doctor rubbed his blinded eyes. The syringe fell to the dirt.

Solo was on top of Ellroy in an instant, swinging hard. He got in two solid, satisfying hits before Trueheart appeared at his side with a syringe. She injected the Thrush doctor with something that dropped him immediately.

Panting lightly, pushed off the limp doctor and turned his attention to his partner. The pilot had pulled Illya aside, but the agent struggled against him.

Solo wrapped his arms around his friend's body and held him tight. "Shhh, calm down, partner. You'll be alright." He kept repeating the words in a low and calming voice until his partner shuddered into stillness and melted to the ground.

*EPILOGUE*

Solo's whistled tune changed into a low wolf's whistle when he saw the amazingly transformed figure of Dianna Trueheart swaying down the hallway of UNCLE medical at the side of Alexander Waverly.

"I hope that was not intended for me," Waverly commented with a glitter of humor in his eye.

Solo stopped in his tracks and cleared his throat, embarrassed. "Um, no sir, it wasn't." His hand moved to the button of his coat and he instituted a short bow. "It was for the lovely lady in blue!"

Trueheart smiled appreciatively. "Thank you, Mr. Solo. I don't live in nurse's whites, you know."

Solo fell in beside the lovely woman as they turned down the hallway.

"Visiting our surly Russian?" Solo asked brightly, nestling a small paper bag in the crook of his elbow.

"Yes, Mr. Solo," Waverly said. "I understand he's finally free of the influence of that drug. Based in LSD, was it?"

"That's right," confirmed Trueheart. "He should be all right now. The altered formula makes it last longer, but then the occurrence of flashbacks is negated." She shrugged. "I guess that's a fair trade off."

Solo held the paper bag aloft. "I brought gifts to appease the beast, just in case he surlier than normal." He pushed the door open.

"That had better be chocolate," a low, scratchy voice said from single bed. The room was dimmed of light. Illya was sitting up looking only a bit less pale, but a whole lot cleaner. "It's the least you can offer for shooting me."

"Oh, that." Solo stopped just out of his partner's reach and offered the bag carefully. "I had no choice. It was that or use your head as a paperweight."

"I assure you, Mr. Kuryakin, the reports indicate it was necessary. I am only glad that Mr. Solo managed to miss anything major. You should be back to work in no time at all."

Illya grabbed the bag with his less injured arm and pulled out a small carton of ice cream. He frowned at it.

Trueheart instantly saw the problem and moved bravely forward. She sat lightly on the edge of the bed and pried off the lid. Picking up the spoon that came with the gift, she began to spoon feed the injured agent, who smirked at Solo when she wasn't looking.

Solo raised an eyebrow and opened his mouth to say something. Illya's glare stopped him cold.

"Dr. Ellroy has been extremely cooperative with us," Waverly said conversationally, ignoring the interplay between his agents. "We apparently stopped Deerwood from becoming a center for Thrush brain washing and such. Bellows was an ongoing experiment in extracting information."

Illya spoke with a partially full mouth. "I saw the equations on his wall. If we have pictures, I'd like to see if I can decipher some of them."

"Sounds like perfect assignment for your time off active duty, Mr. Kuryakin."

"How is Dr. Bellows doing?" Trueheart asked, dishing out another spoonful of ice cream.

"Not too much change yet," Solo said, trying to ignore how close Trueheart was sitting to his partner. "It's only been two days. He's been Ellroy and Negril's toy for almost a year."

"And as soon as the swelling goes down from Negril's fractured cheekbone, we will work on extracting information from him." Waverly sounded almost gleeful. "Well done, gentlemen. It was a successful Affair. Miss Trueheart?" The old man offered his elbow, feeding time was over. She put the carton on the nightstand.

Solo looked smugly at his partner.

"Well, back to work for me," the woman sighed. "Now that I'm in charge of the sanctuary, I can institute the changes I've always thought would enhance the patient's treatment. Goodbye, Mr. Solo, Mr. Kuryakin. Drop by sometime."

A smiling Waverly escorted the lovely nurse from the room. The two agents stared at the door as it swung shut.

Illya tried to reach the ice cream with his unbound arm, but Solo beat him to it. The American held the spoon aloft with raised brows, pantomiming his offer to feed the Russian.

Illya snorted. "I hardly think so. Anyway, I'm full." He laid back and threw the arm over his eyes with a plaintive sigh.

Solo dove in and plopped onto the edge of the bed, ignoring Illya's twitch of discomfort. "So, you still sensitive to light?"

"Yes."

"So, what you're saying is, you're not going to be able to help with the reports?"

"Apparently."

"Looks like your bad trip is now my bad trip." Solo scraped the bottom of the carton. "Well, then. I guess I'd best get going on that, shouldn't I?"

Illya's grunt was indecipherable.

Solo snorted and dropped the carton in the trash can. At the door he paused and looked suspiciously at the form in the bed. He wondered just how incapacitated his partner really was.

"Be sure to check your spelling," Illya commented a little too lightly.

As Solo frowned and turned to go, he failed to see the self-satisfied grin on his partner's lips.

**FINIS**