

THE BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR AFFAIR

ACT I: "What? No Champagne?"

Princess Carina Contessa Antonia DeNunzio stepped from the private jet into the bright glare of the morning sun and immediately slipped her designer sunglasses over her dark, sultry eyes. It wouldn't do to squint and risk any damage to her fresh make up. She paused at the top of the stairs and made her pose look unintentional. Her thigh protruded gracefully from the slit in her skirt, a skirt that was shorter than her parents would allow in their presence. The outfit they had her wear when she boarded the jet was stashed in the jet restroom.

Princess Tessa, as she was known, smugly swept her eyes over the tarmac, her lower lip in a pout and knowing every eye in the area was on her. She held her pose a bit longer.

"Kiki," she said, bored, as she let her haughty gaze return to the open hatch of the plane. "It looks like we have arrived. Are you ready?"

Kiki oozed around the corner of the hatch, her chin in a similar haughty angle. Her chest was thrown out to show off the creamy white skin that topped her straining cleavage that was framed in a low-slung neckline. Her top was like a second skin and tucked into similarly snug white bell-bottoms encircled with a belt of wide rings at the waist. She posed nonchalantly next to her friend.

"Yes, I suppose," she sighed as she tossed her long, straight hair over her shoulder and adjusted her identical designer sunglasses on her nose.

The girls were well rehearsed and the urge to giggle was well suppressed. With a toss of her aristocratic chin Princess Tessa descended the stairs. Half way down she flicked her hand lazily at a pair of uniformed attendants standing at the bottom.

"Take our bags to the car, will you gentlemen?" She said in a tone that was years older than her actual age.

"Yes, miss," one of them replied with a short bow. As Tessa and Kiki stepped to the tarmac, the attendants dashed up the steps.

The Princess turned to face a limo that approached them. Kiki's voice whispered in her ear, tight with refrained laughter. "I think I'm allergic to the tissues I stuffed my bra with. It itches!"

Tessa choked and fought to maintain her dignified expression, glad for the sunglasses that covered her eyes. "Don't make me laugh! My mascara will run!" She replied in a controlled giggle. Her lipstick was fresh and thick and she didn't want to smear any of it.

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"Tessa, if our parents saw us now we'd be grounded for the rest of our lives," Kiki said with a newly maintained bored-looking expression. She struck a pose next to her friend. They both managed to look more aristocratic than they felt.

The limo pulled up and the driver leaped out and ran around to open the door for them. Kiki slipped in and momentarily caught her heel on the door edge. Tessa surveyed the driver.

"Where's Marco?" She asked pointedly, giving Kiki time to free her heel.

"He is sick, Miss. I am his replacement, Richard."

"Richard? I wasn't informed." Tessa turned her nose up and looked back for one of the uniformed attendants. She struggled to recall the older looking one's name that had been stitched on his jacket. "Why didn't . . . Michael . . . tell me?" Inwardly she was relieved she remembered the name.

"He should have, Princess. Here he comes now."

The attendants struggled their way down the stairs with four huge bags that bordered on being steamer trunks. It was comical to watch, but Tessa maintained her composure by mentally conjugating the past tense verb forms for the German word 'play'. When they reached the bottom of the stairs, winded, she asked coolly, "Why didn't you inform me about Marco? My father will be very upset."

"Sorry, Miss," Michael gasped. "I only heard myself."

"Fine. Load the bags." Tessa slipped onto the seat next to the newly untangled Kiki and Richard closed the door. Kiki nodded toward the front seat. There was another man in the front passenger seat.

"Security," Tessa mouthed to her friend. Then, in a louder voice, "Um, excuse me. Could you raise the glass, please?"

"Yes, Princess." The man pressed a button and a thick glass slid up between the compartments.

Kiki let out a relieved giggle. "This is so decadent! I feel years older! Do my eyes still look all right?" She removed the sunglasses and touched the side of her face.

The car bounced as the men wrestled with the bags. Tessa slipped her glasses off and looked at her friend. Her eyes glittered with excitement. "They look terrific! Did you remember to pack the magazine away? I want to copy the make up on that other page tomorrow!"

"Yes, it's safe. How many days until your dad gets here? I want to find a skirt like yours!"

"We have three days of freedom, and I plan to take full advantage." Tessa settled back in her seat and looked out of the window. "New York and no one to hold us back! This will be a trip to remember, Kiki!"

The driver finally slammed the trunk and made his way to his seat, slightly breathless from the wrestling match with the bags. He shut the door and dropped the car into drive.

Tessa fingered the intercom. "Take us to Bloomingdale's, please." She asked.

The response was immediate. "Sorry, Princess, but my orders are to check you into your quarters first. Your father wants to know you've safely arrived."

Tessa sighed. "Fine." Her tone sounded more like the spoiled teenager she really was. She closed the intercom with a snap.

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

Kiki, who had been investigating the small bar, frowned. "There's not even any Champagne back here! They're more prepared than we thought. Do you think they're expecting us to try and sneak off?"

"What? No Champagne?" Her forehead furrowed in thought. "That's odd. I'm sure I convinced my dad that we'd be good girls. We'll just have to see, I guess." She grinned at her friend. "I'm sure we can out think these guys."

At the plane the attendants watched the car pull away. Michael pulled a walkie talkie from his coat pocket. "Target is on her way," he said, still wheezing from the luggage loading. He tucked the device away and turned to his partner who was leaning on the stair rail and also catching his breath. "We still need to take the driver and security men's bodies somewhere and dump them where they won't be found."

The second man tiredly fixed his eyes on Michael. "Does Thrush have any idea what they're dealing with? Those girls are going to be a handful. I know. I have a teenage daughter."

Michael laughed. "The day Thrush can't handle two little girls is the day I quit the organization. Come on." He slapped his partner on the shoulder and they moved away to complete their duties.

ACT II: "Discreet Is My Middle Name."

Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin arrived at Mr. Waverly's office within seconds of each other even though they came from different parts of the building. Illya made his way up from the bowels of the lab in steady, sure time while his partner made it from the office down the hall while obtaining lunch and dinner dates for the next few days.

They acknowledged each other with familiar nods when their paths intersected outside Waverly's office. Lisa Rogers immediately let them into Waverly's inner sanctum. Kuryakin plopped down and immediately opened the file on the table whereas Solo settled into his seat gracefully and leaned back with a relaxed air about him.

"I take it you gentlemen had a restful weekend?" The head of the New York UNCLE office stood at his desk with a handful of files. His bushy eyebrows hung over eyes that did not bother to seek out his two top agents when he heard them enter. Waverly's mind was already many steps ahead in this meeting.

"Yes, sir. At least I did," Solo replied with a smile.

Kuryakin didn't look up from the files. "Yes, sir, thank you. Is this the Prince that is coming to New York for the trade conference?" He picked up a sheet of paper and read as he spoke.

"Yes, it is." Waverly turned and set his files on the main table.

"Er, what trade conference?" Solo asked slowly as he straightened his cuff.

"The one taking place here in New York in two days," Illya said without looking up. "Don't you listen to the news?"

Solo cleared his throat. "Only if it's read to me over breakfast." The blond agent threw him a glance, then shook his head and grinned slightly.

Waverly began the brief by handing Solo a black and white 8 by 10 of a man decked in a military uniform. "Prince Antonio Carlo DeNunzio, head of the European Trade Federation, is due to arrive in New York tomorrow morning. He sent his daughter and a friend of hers ahead, thinking New York would be a safe place to see how she handled herself on her own. Apparently she has what he calls a rather strong independent spirit."

"How old is this Princess?" Solo inquired brightly. Illya passed a pair of photos from the file in front of him. Solo's eyes immediately brightened.

"Princess Carina Contessa Antonia DeNunzio is seventeen, as is her friend and traveling companion, Marika Victoria Verdano VanAdlesberg."

Solo glanced at the second photo. "I'd hate to sign those names everyday."

"Yes, I suppose. Now to the point, gentlemen. It seems the girls have disappeared."

Kuryakin closed the file and gave his boss his full attention. "In New York, I assume."

"That is what the family believes. The Princess's jet landed this morning. The clothes she was wearing when she left Europe were in the lavatory of the jet. Witnesses say a limo picked her and her friend up on the tarmac. They were supposed to be taken directly to their hotel, but never arrived."

"Is this her first time in New York?" Solo asked.

"This is her first time out of Europe," Waverly replied. "But she's well schooled in English, and would be able to get around quite well on her own. She's an aficionado of the American lifestyle, I understand. Quite enamored with American culture."

"I guess there are worse hobbies," Kuryakin commented. "So why is UNCLE involved?"

"UNCLE is being used to monitor the conference, as we are considered a neutral, international agency. Each participant has it's own security, but UNCLE is to handle the security of the conference. No one anticipated this event, and the conference board has decided to turn it over to us since we are familiar with the participants. The security man assigned to the Princess, and her assigned driver, are also missing, so the Prince does not trust his own security at this point."

"So we're to find the girls and bring them home." Solo pursed his lips. "Sounds a little too simple."

"Nothing is ever simple where you and females are involved," Kuryakin said flatly. "Where do we start?"

"The Prince's part in the conference was about regulating seaports and setting up a universal set of standards and rules for the countries in this group that use them. If someone is trying to control his vote, we need to know who it is." The Old Man drummed his fingers on the table. "It is unlikely the girl has taken off on her own, but not out of the realm of possibility. We will handle this as a kidnapping until we know otherwise. No one else in the conference knows of the disappearance, and the Prince would like to keep it that way."

The partners rose to their feet. "I guess we start with the list of participants," Solo said as he picked up the file in front of Kuryakin.

"And gentlemen," Waverly started. "I don't have to remind you to be discreet, do I?"

"'Discreet' is my middle name," Solo said brightly as he paused at the door. Illya's smirk caught his attention. "Well it's certainly not yours," the dark haired agent teased. "You can't walk two feet without tripping."

"At least I don't sound like an elephant when I walk."

"Elephant?" Solo pushed open the door. "More like a cheetah, I would think."

"One with club feet," his partner countered as they left the room.

When the door to his office shut, Waverly slowly shook his head in amazement and returned to his paperwork, glad for a moment of quiet.



Tessa and Kiki were in heaven.

"I had no idea your dad was so cool," Kiki said yet again with the same enthusiasm. "A real American spa!"

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"It is rather a surprise," Tessa sighed. "I was sure it would be one of those stuffy, old hotels again.

"This sure isn't like any spa at home. Look at the muscles on that guy!"

The girls were sitting on the small balcony of their room, which overlooked an indoor pool that was landscaped to look like a lagoon. The rooms were small but lavish, and the girls had been thrilled to find a welcome basket of fruit and champagne waiting for them.

They were already on their second glass, and feeling tingly all over.

"I guess the 'No Alcohol' order from daddy didn't make it here. We must look mature or they'd never give us this Champagne. I know my father wouldn't approve." Tessa giggled and took another swallow. "We must use makeup more often!"

"Oh, look!" Kiki nearly upset her glass when she quickly stood, but didn't notice. "I think there's a discotheque down there! I love this place!"

Tessa joined her at the rail and they giggled uncontrollably as they leaned over the railing. Next to the pool a small disco was acting as an outdoor café for the lunch crowd. The doors were thrown open to the pool and the small tables and dance floor inside were clearly visible. The girls happily commented on each and every person they could see.

"I've only been to one spa at home. You know the place - all the attendants were matronly women that looked like workhorses."

"Yeah, and the rooms were Oriental and bare. My dad said it was appropriate for my age. Remember when we went there together that one time?"

"How could I forget? We both tried to sneak out at were caught!" The girls collapsed in their chairs, laughing uncontrollably. Tessa raised her glass. "I like this stuff!!"

"More!"



Without much to go on, Solo and Kuryakin soon found that they were at the proverbial brick wall. They were in the process of trying to locate any information on two attendants that had also disappeared from the airport. Their list of missing people was growing with no clues of where they had gone.

The warbling of Solo's communicator brought an annoyed sigh from the agent. "Now what? More people to add to the missing persons list?" He twisted the silver pen. "Solo here."

"Ah, Mr. Solo." Waverly's voice was more cheery than usual. "The Prince has heard from his daughter."

"So, she's all right? Where is she?"

"Well, that seems to be the problem. He still doesn't know."

Illya frowned. "She didn't tell him?"

"Yes and no, Mr. Kuryakin. She said she was at a spa."

"A spa?" Solo questioned.

"Yes." Their boss's tone turned disdainful. "The only detail she could share was that the male employees were . . . ah . . . cute."

Solo smiled crookedly while Kuryakin shook his head in amazement. "Well, she is 17, sir," Solo commented. "I get the feeling there was more to this conversation?"

"Yes. The Prince says the girls don't know they've been kidnapped, and the Prince didn't tell them."

Solo looked at his communicator in surprise. Illya spoke before Solo had a chance. "How could she not know that and why didn't he tell her?" The Russian's voice sounded exasperated.

"As far as him not telling her, he didn't want to scare her and she seemed happy and healthy at the moment. He tried to get more details but he thinks she was drunk."

"Maybe she was poisoned."

"Then they slipped the poison in two bottles of Champagne. I don't think the poison was necessary in that case." Waverly was about as annoyed as Solo had ever heard him. "The Princess indicated that she and her friend were fine and happy and even thanked him for doing this for her."

"A bird in a gilded cage," Illya noted.

"There's more, Mr. Kuryakin. Within minutes of her call, the Prince received another call that threatened her safety if he did not vote as the caller dictated."

"Did the caller identify themselves?" Solo asked.

"Yes. It seems it involves our feathered friend Narcissus."

"Ah, yes. She would have an affinity to pampering." Solo said. "A spa is not surprising."

"At least you have a place to start now, Mr. Solo. Narcissus has promised safe return of the Princess if no one else is informed about the threat."

"The Prince must have great confidence in us, then." Solo said.

"Fortunately, yes. Our research on Narcissus indicates several real estate purchases worldwide in the past two years where she acted as the representative for Thrush controlled companies, four in the New York area. One is a commercial pier area, and one is undeveloped land. The other two look the most promising; old hotel properties. Here are the locations." Waverly read off two addresses that were about twenty miles apart in a rural area outside the city. "I will send other agents to check the other two locations just to be sure. And gentlemen, I emphasize the need for stealth on this case. If it is tipped in anyway that UNCLE is around, the girls' lives will be in immediate danger."

"Yes, sir. Solo out." He closed the pen. "Well, off to the country we go."

ACT III: "What, Exactly, Do You Do With The Cucumbers?"

Solo's pen warbling broke into his curious thoughts about the kind of hotel that would be in the area of a town called Sleepy Hollow. The vision in his head of an Ichabod Crane bellboy was vanquished with the sound of his partner's voice.

"I'm at a very well guarded front gate of an obviously no longer abandoned hotel." A squawking in the background made Solo frown at the device. Illya spoke over it. "A small sign says the place is now called The Green Door."

"The Green Door? Can you tell what's there?"

"Well, the front door for one. And it's green." The drollness of the Russian's tone was not lost on the American.

"I see your investigative training has not been wasted." The background chatter seemed to increase. "What is that noise? If it's an alarm, I'd say it needs a little maintenance."

Perched in a tree outside the massive stone wall of the old hotel Illya Kuryakin glanced at the pair of angry squirrels berating his blocking their exit from the tree. The agent was lying on a branch with one leg hooked around the main trunk of a giant sycamore. His glance made the branch wobble and the rodents' vocal distress redoubled. "It's not a man made alarm, and I'd say the only maintenance it would appreciate is a couple of nuts."

"Too bad there's only one of you," Solo replied instantly.

Finally unnerved, the squirrels made a break for it and scampered over the agent, chattering expletives all the way to the ground. "Same to you," the treed agent mumbled.

"What?" Solo asked. "Trouble?"

"No, just nature taking its course. It looks like I can get in on the other side of the building at the servants' entry. Supply trucks seem to be making their deliveries for the day. I'll let you know what I find. Any luck on your end?"

Solo had finally come to the address given him. A weathered wooden sign, peeling to the point of near obscurity, leaned tiredly to one side indicating where he should turn. "I've only just arrived. Keep your head down."

"Will do." The pen clicked into silence, and Solo replaced it in his jacket pocket.

The rutted, overgrown drive led to a clear space. He threw the car into Park at the end of the decaying drive just outside a picket fence that was once white - or blue, depending on which picket he looked at - and was now working its way back to natural brown. Flattened to the ground to resemble a dilapidated train track, the fence did nothing to keep anything at bay. Solo opened the car door and stepped out. The texture of the ground made him quickly step aside just as the smell assaulted his nose.

Green goo encased his right shoe. Disgusted, he wrinkled his nose and wiped what he could on a dewy patch of weeds nearby.

"I'd rather deal with hostile squirrels," he mumbled at the crusted calling card of a passing cow that he'd stepped in. He straightened his jacket and tried to ignore the slimy wetness of his right sock. Solo stepped over the fence and wormed his way through a now wild expanse of hedge. He heard his jacket tear and swore silently.

The only thing that greeted him on the other side was a giant hole where he supposed the hotel had once been.



It didn't take Illya long to hijack a supply truck. He dropped on the roof of a box van from another accommodating sycamore, slipped into the cab and shot the driver with a sleep dart. After a rough stop, the agent dragged him into the brush, where the man was tied and gagged then stored out of sight for later retrieval.

"Break time!" Illya said cheerily. He recovered a temporary identification card, luckily without a photo, dated for today only from the driver's pocket. The tiny Thrush insignia in the corner and the words Security Level 5 piqued the agent's interest. "I wonder what it will take to upgrade to Security Level 1?" He mused.

Luck followed him as he easily passed through the servant's gate. Bored guards mechanically glanced at the ID card and at the contents of the box van. Illya drove to the unloading area and backed in close to the building. When he opened the back of the van to unload, stacks of boxes labeled 'Tampons' and 'Sanitary Napkins' awaited him.

Kuryakin hesitated then slowly leaned aside to read the side of the box van. WOMAN'S HEALTH and SANITARY SUPPLIES was written in huge, black and bold letters.

"I couldn't read the truck first," he sighed as he turned back to see what else he could unload. Aside from the boxes were crates of sickly sweet smelling soap that gave him an instant headache. Sitting in the middle was what looked like a large cooler. Curious, the agent flipped up the lid.

Cucumbers. Dozens of cucumbers. He raised his eyebrows and studied the load.

Finally he said with a shrug, "Who am I to judge?" And dropped the vegetables. The least of three evils, Illya grabbed the cooler and made his way inside.

Busy workers, easily identifiable by their sea green togas and identical high heels, bustled behind the scenes in what appeared to be a storage/distribution area. Stacks upon stacks of towels, from washcloths to beach towels, towered on tables that lined one wall. Various bars of soaps, jars of oil and tubs of facial creams took up opposite wall. Toga clad girls hunted among the stores.

"Get out of my way, Celine. I need to get by!"

"I have dibs on that box of oatmeal soap! Don't touch it, Denise!"

"Where's the portable steamer? How can I do facials without a portable steamer?"

The chatter was as constant as the action and Illya was surprised into motionlessness. Every one of the workers was female, and each female was a beauty. The agent couldn't help but grin at his moment of good fortune. A redhead, her hair piled up in a teetering bun, spied the cooler as she picked through the face creams

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"Hey!" She barked as she quickly moved his way. When her eyes looked up to his face, she brightened with a delighted smile. "Hey!" She said again, this time in a sultry, sexy voice. She sidled up and slipped one arm through his elbow. "You're just too cute. Much better than the other guy." She tapped the box with her free hand and let her fingers do the walking up his chest. Her voice was low and husky. "Do you have what I need?"

"I believe so," he replied, hoping they were talking about the same thing.

She snuggled closer and led him out of the busy area. "You're just in time," she purred. "My special massage just isn't right without your load."

"Er - " He found himself at a loss for words. Her body firmly pressed into his side. "Ah, what, exactly, do you do with the cucumbers?"

She leaned in so her soft lips brushed his earlobe when she spoke. "Eyes. Slices reduce puffiness around the eyes." There was a moment of silence as she took in his relieved look. "Oh!" Her eyes opened wide when she interpreted his response. "Oh my!" She giggled and whacked his arm playfully. "You are a nasty one!"

Illya felt himself blush slightly. "Ah, not really. You should meet my partner."

The redhead sighed. "Lucky girl!"

He decided to stop while he was ahead. She guided him through an elaborate lobby, shiny with marble and chrome. An arched ceiling displayed a sparkling crystal chandelier and the hardwood accents glowed with a healthy polish. A fountain happily gurgled in the center of the alcove, surrounded by lush and potted greenery.

"We aren't supposed to be visible to the clients, but this is a shortcut. Hurry." The girl tugged on his elbow, keeping to the edge of the visible range of the clerks behind the counter in the entry. "The Miss isn't here right now, so we're in luck. Here."

Illya allowed himself to be led down a quiet hallway, then another, and then into a smaller storage area. "Put it there," the girl said. She pointed to an empty spot on the floor. "Would you like to stick around and help me slice?" Coyly, she fluttered her eyelashes and held up a knife.

"No, thank you. I have to get back to work." The girl pouted for a moment and pulled out a cucumber. She dropped it on a cutting board and whacked it cleanly with the very sharp knife. Illya cringed. "Er, what is this place, anyway, um," he noticed her nametag for the first time. Displayed so prominently upon her chest, how could he have missed it? "Debi?"

Debi was happily carving the cucumber, the rejection forgotten. "Oh, it's a retreat for some big company. Must be some big money in birds to afford all this."

"Birds?"

"Yeah. There's a little black bird logo on everything. Didn't you see it inlaid in the lobby floor in tile?"

"No, I didn't." He patted his pocket. "Where's the office? I need to drop off the bill of lading."

"Next to the check in desk in the lobby. But that needs to go to billing. In the basement."

"Basement. Thanks. Good bye, Debi."

She paused and threw him a dazzling smile. Perfection, like all the employees he'd seen so far. "Anytime, sweetie. Look me up next time, huh?" She winked.

"How could I not?" He backed out with a small smile and a wave of his hand, closed the door and continued his investigation. He peeked out a window at the end of

the hall and saw a jungle surrounding a pool. He craned his head to one side and saw a poolside bistro, busy with patrons. Waiters deftly maneuvered between the small tables.

"At least I don't have to wear a toga," he said, then he noticed the snug fit of the waiter's black pants and the garish ruffled shirts they wore. "Or maybe a toga wouldn't be so bad after all . . . "



Tessa groaned. "Ooo, my head hurts."

Kiki, draped across the rumpled bed face up, fumbled for one of the empty bottles beside her and turned it upside down above her eye. She shook it. "It's all gone! Now what?"

"I don't know about you, but a massage and a facial followed by a nap will do the trick for me. Then it's time for some fun!"

The girls put on their bathing suits and donned the thick robes embellished on the pocket with an embroidered green door. Kiki frowned at hers as they waited for the elevator. "What's that black thing on the door?"

Tessa glanced at it. "Looks like a crow. I don't know. Who cares?" She dragged her companion in then out of the elevator and followed the 'Massage and Facials' signs. When they entered the reception area of a small room they were greeted by a smiling blonde in a green toga. "Hello, ladies. Ready for a facial?"

"Yes, we are!" Tessa said, forgetting to sound mature.

The lady smiled. "I'm Kelly." She hit a small call bell and a redhead appeared from behind a curtain. "And this is Debi. We will be your attendants."

Debi led the way. "You ladies are lucky! We just got in some nice, refreshing cucumbers for your eyes!"

"Sounds great!" Kiki said, smiling. "I can't wait to see what's next!"

ACT IV: "Just What I Need - More Of An Open Invitation."

Solo stopped at the first sign of civilization he could find that had a public restroom to rinse his socks. Luckily, he had a pair of clogs in the trunk that would do for footwear until his socks dried and he could polish his shoes. He sighed as he slipped on the clunky shoes; at least he didn't have to mountains climb any time soon.

With his jacket dusted off and the various tears patted flat he slipped into the car again and was in the process of draping his wet socks over the heater vent when his communicator warbled. He wiped his hands dry and twisted the pen open. The first thing he heard was 'Wild Thing' and the sound of an enthusiastic crowd.

"Solo here. Is anyone there who's not having fun?"

"That would be me." Illya's voice sounded tight. "When did women become so . . . forward?"

"Not soon enough in my opinion. Have you spotted the girls?"

"No. I keep getting distracted and this place is packed. I managed to get a glimpse at the office files and discovered that this is a private Thrush resort and spa. Apparently any Thrush member and their spouses can come here to relax."

Solo's eyes opened in interest. "Well, that's a good idea! Think Waverly would go for that?"

"I'll let you pitch that idea. Hold on." The communicator was silent for a few moments. "I'm back."

"Problems?"

"Nothing a pair of handcuffs wouldn't fix. Then again, that just may excite her more." Illya's voice sounded disgusted. "I think we both need to search this place. It's rather large."

Solo grinned. "I'm on my way."

"Somehow I didn't think it would take much to get you here. I suggest arriving as a guest. Several are checking in at 6:00."

The American consulted his watch. "That gives me two hours. I'll see you then."

"Kuryakin out."

The air went dead and Solo happily pocketed the pen and examined his nails. "I wonder if there's an opening for a manicure before dinner."



Illya closed the pen with a snap and a twist then tucked it away in the waist of his uncomfortably snug pants. Small, well-placed tugs moved the garment into a more

tolerable position, but he hoped he wouldn't have to climb anything. He wasn't sure the material could stand the strain. In addition, he had to hide his gun and holster in the closet where he'd changed, and as a result felt even more exposed.

Exiting the busboy corner put him in the middle of the early afternoon throng gathering for cocktail hour. 'Wild Thing' gave way to 'Good Lovin' ' without a loss of momentum on the dance floor. The agent tried to keep to the outskirts but was forced to maneuver through the gyrating crowd. He felt hands on every part of his body as he moved along. Dance requests were as heavy as the champagne breath they were delivered on. By the time he broke free by the pool, he had to check and make sure his uniform was still intact. Other than flattened ruffles and a missing button, he was intact. Disgustedly, he noticed the missing button deepened the 'V' of his neckline to mid chest. "Just what I need," he mumbled to himself. "More of an open invitation."

He worked his way around to the far side of the pool, which was elevated enough for him to observe the crowd from a better angle while he feigned totaling up an order sheet. No sign of the girls. He turned and looked at the U shaped building surrounding the pool area. One wing was mostly administrative and housekeeping offices, and most of another wing was spa related - steam rooms, massage rooms, sauna. That left the rest of the building as guest rooms. With a sigh, he grabbed a tray with a few empty glasses and hoisted it to his shoulder. The opening beat to 'Paint It Black' urged him into the building.

He'd have to check the rooms one by one. He hoped Solo would turn up soon.



"That's just what I needed!" Kiki was ready to go back to action.

"Me too! Listen to that music! There's nothing like rock and roll to make a girl want to move." Tessa checked her make up in the mirror one last time. The massage, facial and hair styling had refreshed both of them. After a quick shower and change of clothes, they were ready to go.

Kiki wore a lime green mini-dress that could be classified as a second skin and dangling ball earrings the size of lemons. Tessa wore a patented leather mini-skirt in a hot pink and blinding yellow dot pattern and a snug yellow blouse with countless buttons from neckline to navel and gold ear rings that could double as hula hoops. They both wore knee high shiny boots in colors that complemented their wardrobe and hip hugging belts of connecting metal loops.

Kiki grabbed Tessa's hand and squealed excitedly, "Come on! The discotheque is really hopping! We can grab a bite to eat down there."

Giggling, the girls trotted to the elevator that took them directly to the pool. Mick Jagger's sultry lyrics and the pounding beat of 'Paint It Black' greeted them as they spilled into the crowd.



Napoleon Solo adjusted the bow tie of his borrowed tuxedo, pleased at the fit. He'd managed to single out one car heading to the spa that had a sole occupant, and was lucky the man was the same suit size. Well, close anyway. The agent tightened up the belt a bit and settled the jacket over the puckered waistline.

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"You need to trim down a bit, my man," he said as he checked the bindings of the unconscious Thrushman. "But that's probably why you were heading to the spa." Solo checked the Thrush identification card, thankful that the agency did not have photos on their badges. "Number 117. My favorite combination. Maybe there's a craps table somewhere in there!" He patted the head of the quiet captive. "I'll split the winnings with you if I have time. Good night!"

He emerged from the thick stand of trees and examined the scene from the road, satisfied that his sedan and the Thrushman weren't visible. He hopped into the waiting red Ferrari and gunned the engine. "I must speak to Waverly about my pay," he grumbled as he shot down the road to The Green Door.

Solo showed the identification to the guard at the gate, who matched the number to a list on his clipboard. The guard nodded thanks, and signaled for the gate to open. Solo cleared the wrought iron gates and had to admire the well-groomed grounds. He also noticed all the open space between the building and the imposing surrounding wall. Their escaped would have to be well planned.

A valet bowed to the agent as he opened the car door. "I will take care of your bags, sir. Please pick up your key at the front desk."

Solo nodded and walked up the front steps. The enormous green doors swung open as he approached, and quietly closed after he was inside. He paused. The large, black bird inlay on the floor was hard to miss. "How subtle," he breathed as he walked slowly to the front counter and carefully logged the layout of the lobby in his mind. He quickly ducked his head and angled his body sideways as he spotted and recognized the face of a passing guest - a lower level Thrush goon from an assignment three months ago. This would be tricky . . .

"Your name, sir?" The perky, toga-clad woman behind the counter smiled pleasantly. Solo was immediately smitten.

"Ah, yes. Martin Thorn." He smiled his best smile, but the woman was all business and didn't bat an eye.

"Here you go. Room 413. Your wife is waiting for you at the discotheque." She pointed to her left. "It's by the pool, that way."

"Oh. Yes. My wife." The woman's smile did not change. Solo glanced at her nametag. "Thank you, Collette."

"You're welcome." Collette whisked away without a second glance.

Solo turned to the exit and sighed, "Can't win 'em all." He headed to the pool.

Music that had been faint in the lobby painfully assaulted Solo's ears in full force when he stepped outside, which caused him to wince and pause. The crowd was unbelievably large, full of energy and incredibly loud. Thrush employees knew how to have a good time. While his hearing degraded the agent took a moment to decide if this crowd was easier searched up close, at a distance or not at all. He had to duck his face and turn his back to another recognizable foe that was leaving the dance floor with his date, smiling happily.

"Hi there!" Solo looked up to see whom he had bumped into. Bright blue eyes framed in hot pink accessories topped a toothy white smile. The busty woman took him into a dance hold. "Let's dance, handsome!" There was no room for choice as Solo was turned into the crowd just as 'Paperback Writer' spewed from the sound system. His date sang along gleefully as she pressed close and writhed in a dancing motion in his arms.

In a matter of seconds the agent was in the middle of the pressing crowd. He discovered quickly that this wasn't the best way to search for the girls. He had to bury his face in Miss Pink's ample and stiffly coiffed hair several times as he recognized faces in the crowd - all the wrong faces; faces that could identify him as and UNCLE agent. When the Beatles tune wound down and turned into the Shondell's 'Hanky Panky' Solo managed to break free of his wriggling partner worked his way out of the crowd.

When Solo turned to go he ran into a woman in a blinding yellow blouse.

"Oh, excuse me!"

Even though the woman giggled as she spoke Solo still noticed her accent and frowned; it couldn't be . . .

"My friend is very clumsy!"

When he laid his eyes on the second girl, he knew it was them. They looked so much older than the photos he was momentarily taken aback. The eye make up was thick and skillfully applied.

"No, no, ladies, my fault entirely." Solo reached to take Tessa by the arm but a waiter found his way between them.

"Ladies, Miss Narcissus would like to introduce herself. Come with me, please?"

"The owner? That beautiful woman on the pamphlets? Certainly! We would love to meet her!" Tessa smiled at Solo and slipped away. "Maybe later!"

"Bye!" Kiki fell in behind her friend.

Solo started to follow but had to step quickly back into the crowd. Narcissus was standing at the end of the pool waiting for the girls, facing his direction, and knew him from a previous mission. A confrontation while he was virtually surrounded by Thrush agents was not a good idea so he ducked his head, spun on his heel and moved quickly out to of the crowd to the building.

Getting to the girls was going to be trickier that he thought. He had to find his partner and figure out a less public place to contact them.



"Groovy place!" Kiki yelled over the crowd to the woman waiting for them by the pool.

"Yes, Miss Narcissus! I can't think of a better way to spend time in America!" Tessa agreed.

Narcissus smiled politely at the girls and wondered if these garishly bright colors would last another season; they certainly would never be considered 'classic'. She smoothed her hair unconsciously as she spoke. "I am so glad your visit here has been enjoyable so far. Now I must go. Do not hesitate to ask any attendant for what ever you need. Your father wants you to be happy." Her assignment to keep the girls occupied had been easy so far, and she didn't anticipate any problems now that she had met them. She knew what young girls wanted.

Now, Thrush Central would have to agree that her spa idea was a good one. Having her office here was perfect - daily massage, weekly facials and a stylist always on duty. Nothing could stop her now. Narcissus excused herself and moved away from the pool and gyrating crowd. She had to make sure the building was secure for the night and security squads all accounted for before she reported to her superiors.

ACT V: "I Have An Inspired Idea."

Solo slipped into the building and took a moment to appreciate the quiet. As his hearing recovered he noticed low murmurs coming from up the hall. He followed the muffled noise, which led him to a pair of swinging doors sporting oval glass windows with 'CASINO' etched into them. Unconsciously adjusting his tie with a grin, he stepped into the dark cover of the room hoping to find an unobtrusive corner from which he could call his partner.

The room was thick with smoke and tuxedos. The hooded lights over the gaming tables were aimed downward, ensuring privacy of the players. The muted rattle of dice, the snap of cards and the clink of crystal glasses were a comforting background to the agent as he quickly scanned the crowd. Satisfied, he found a shadowy corner and signaled for a drink as he sat. After the drink was delivered by a scantily clad, no nonsense waitress he pulled out his communicator.

"Open Channel D."

A moment later, his partner responded shortly, "Where are you?"

"I'm hiding out in the casino. The poolside action was a bit too hot."

Illya's voice was icy. "I'm sure it was."

Solo regarded the communicator. "I mean that there were too many familiar faces out there. I did see the girls, though."

The Russian's voice warmed up considerably. "Really? That means I can stop peeking into bedrooms."

One corner of Solo's mouth turned up in a grin. "Well, you don't have to stop if you don't want to, and we do need a quiet place to contact them away from the flock. Their room would be the best location." The quiet, sure motion of a passing waitress caught his attention.

Illya's voice was all business. "I didn't find anything on them in the office. Other than a direct assault on the registration desk, how do we find the room in a more efficient manner?"

As Solo watched the waitress deliver a tray of drinks to the craps table, he brightened with a plan. "I have an inspired idea," he said lowly, appreciating the form of the waitress. "Get to the kitchen and find the wine cellar. When the sommelier brings up a bottle of '62 Piper Heidsieck, offer to deliver it."

Illya caught on immediately. "Room service."

"Exactly. I'll call them in 15 minutes. That should be enough time for you to get there. And don't call me, I'll call you - I'm still in the middle of a flock."

"I'm on my way. Kuryakin out."



Illya found the kitchen easily with his nose; it seemed Narcissus knew excellent chefs. He sidled through the busy crowd and found the wine cellar in a quiet corner near the linen closet. He busied himself with folding napkins as he watched for the wine clerk. Several stacks of napkins later and growing more impatient, he dropped one of the linen squares. As he bent to pick it up he heard quickly approaching footsteps that stopped abruptly followed by a small gasp.

The agent stood quickly, suddenly alert. The sommelier's initial surprise changed to smiling appreciation as Illya turned to find himself the object of an admiring assessment that focused on his snug pants. The wine expert fingered the tasting cup hanging from his neck and Illya's skin prickled as the man's eyes studied him from head to toe. The sommelier's eyes finally settled on the crux of the 'V' in the agent's ruffled shirt.

"Well," the nattily dressed man breathed, momentarily at a loss for words. "Well!" He straightened, gripped the tasting cup more firmly and stepped to the wine cellar door, which placed him next to the now wary agent. He met the narrowed blue eyes squarely and smiled. "Care to join me while I pull a bottle?"

Regretfully swallowing the loud 'NO!' that tried to erupt from his throat, Illya blinked and eventually choked a quiet, "All right."

The sommelier smiled happily and opened the door. "I haven't seen you before," the man chirped as he motioned Illya to follow.

The agent gripped a dangling napkin and held it protectively in front of his crotch. "Ah, I'm new."

They descended into the cold and musty cellar on squeaky wooden steps. One tug on a chain hanging from above snapped to life two bare light bulbs suspended from the low ceiling of the cellar. Double rows of wine racks lined the walls on either side of them as they stepped to the stone floor. The sommelier stopped at the second rack and pointed to the lowest row.

"Bottom shelf. Green and yellow label. '62 Piper Heidseick." The man's eyes sparkled as he looked expectantly at the agent.

It was made obvious that refusal was out of the question. Illya sighed, resigned, and bent down to get the bottle feeling like he was in the center of a spotlight. The sommelier was smiling hugely when the agent straightened up and presented the bottle for inspection.

The sommelier took the bottle and kept eye contact. "Yes, yes. That's it." With a raised eyebrow and a teasing look, the man rubbed the bottle clean in an alarming motion that made Illya even more uncomfortable, then handed the bottle back. "Take it to room 214, please." He stepped aside to let the embarrassed blond lead the way up the stairs. Illya moved quickly, but not quickly enough to avoid the copped feel of his right buttock followed by a short, delighted laugh. He made it to the top in record time and as he exited the cellar a voice called, "Come back anytime for more!"

"Don't count on it," escaped from tight lips as a grumble. Illya tugged at the open shirt in an effort to regain his dignity and headed to room 214.



"My feet are killing me!"

Tessa and Kiki, shoes in hand and slung over their shoulders, made their way down the hall and to their room breathy with excitement.

"I'm all sweaty from dancing but I'm not ready to call it a night yet!"

"Neither am I! I heard they have a real band in the discotheque starting at 9. Want to see it?"

Tessa searched for the room key in her tiny, fringed purse. "Of course! I don't plan on sleeping at all until Daddy picks us up!" It took three tries before she finally got the key in the keyhole. "Let's hit the steam room - Daddy always said it refreshed him - then clean up and find the band. That should make us fashionably late!"

She pushed the door open and the pair stumbled into the room, tossing their shoes aside in the living area. Tessa pushed the door shut behind them.

"Hey!" Kiki said brightly. "Look at this!" She picked up the chilled bottle from the wine cooler on the coffee table.

"Wow, they sure keep the bubbles flowing."

"It's from a concerned party." The man's voice from a shadowy corner made the girls jump with a shriek. Tessa and Kiki huddled together next to the low table as a slight blond man stepped into the light. Illya held his hands out to show that he was unarmed. "You are in great danger and I'm here to help you."

"S . . . s . . . stay away from us, mister!" Kiki gripped Tessa's arm tightly.

"Yeah! I know karate, you know! I could kill you with my . . . my . . . feet! So watch it!" Tessa stood firmly on her two bare feet in a threatening stance but her wide eyes were unconvincing.

"No, listen." Illya said calmly. "I'm not here to hurt you; I'm here to help you. You've been kidnapped."

"Kidnapped?" Kiki laughed. "Are you kidding?"

Tessa sidled to the phone on the end table. Kiki stuck to her side like glue as the princess snatched up the receiver and dialed. "My daddy told me about characters like you! I talked to him today! Stay away from us or we'll scream!"

"No, don't!" Illya leaped forward to grab the phone. Kiki picked up a heavy glass ashtray from the end table and flung it at him, connecting squarely with his head. Illya stumbled in their direction, dazed. The girls shrieked again and scattered in opposite directions. They immediately launched a counter attack with all the small items in the room, screaming. The telephone receiver dangled to the floor and monitored the entire confrontation.

"GET AWAY FROM US!"

"No! You don't understand! I'm here to help . . ." The unstructured assault was fast, brutal and painful. The agent dove for shelter behind the sofa and tried to plead his case, but the screaming girls couldn't hear him. In a matter of seconds, the door flew open and two uniformed men burst in, guns drawn.

"He's over there!"

Illya leaped up and shoved the couch at the two men running at him. The lead man's legs were taken out from under him and as he flew through the air, the second man stopped and took aim. Illya ducked and grabbed the closest item from the floor that he could throw. Tessa's shoe struck the guard squarely in the forehead heel first, and was followed closely by the wine bucket spilling ice cubes like a contrail. A sound 'clang!' sent the man reeling as his partner struggled to his feet.

The balcony was the only path open to him and the agent took it. He vaulted over the metal rails, hung from the lower bar and swung to the patio below. From there he leaped to a close tree branch, shimmied down the trunk and hit the ground. Two bullets struck the trunk by his head as he ducked and ran into the darkness of the thick landscape. The loud music from the pool area covered the sound of the shots as the party continued.

Tessa and Kiki pulled themselves together quickly. The guards assured them the intruder would be caught quickly and started to leave.

"Hey, wait a minute!" Tessa called out. The princess squared her shoulders and straightened her blouse. "Call housekeeping to clean this up." The guards hesitated and looked at each other in surprise. "Well, you certainly don't expect us to do it! We have plans! Come on Kiki." She took her friend's hand and they marched to the bedrooms to change. One guard finally shrugged and moved to the telephone strewn across the floor.



Illya's head throbbed. He felt a sensitive lump forming over his right ear as he moved amidst the cover of hibiscus bushes on the outskirts of the central courtyard. A short fence stopped his progress and he took a moment to peer between the vertical metal bars. There was a cart full of pool towels next to a wooden building on the other side. A small sign on the building door said 'SAUNA'. He acted immediately.

Quickly peeling off the offensive uniform, he was not surprised that it was shredded in several places from his trip down the tree trunk. He rolled the items into a tight ball and placed it close to the fence with his communicator on top. Clad in his boxers, he hopped the fence and quickly wrapped a pool towel around his waist. He threw another over his shoulder. Next, he tucked the silver pen in his waistband, retrieved the uniform remnants and wrapped them in another towel then dropped the bundle in the dirty towel bin. With the sound of rustling brush and low voices searching for him Illya pulled open the wooden door.

Inside the door was a small vestibule to hang towels and belongings. He noted a pair of bags on a bench and some shoes neatly put aside but didn't pause. Steam and the woody smell of cedar hit him as he opened the sauna door and slipped inside. It took a moment for his eyes to adjust. He heard the low voices before he saw the two figures on the bench.

"Well hello!" A perky woman's voice greeted. "Join us!" The two forms parted and the one on the left patted the space between them. He didn't miss their eyes checking him from head to toe or the flattering fit of their bathing suits.

"Plenty of room," the second woman said with a beguiling smile.

Illya brightened and he wondered just how long he'd have to hide out here. Then he mentally extended the time by several minutes as he settled between the steamy ladies, pleased with his own inspired idea.

ACT VI: Blondes Have More Fun

Napoleon Solo shifted on his seat once again to avoid another set of eyes at the craps table near him. It was starting to get a bit tight in here; he saw at least three people that could identify him, and was thankful for the poor lighting and haze of smoke in the room. The murmur of voices and sound of rolling dice and hopeful calls for luck were things that made him feel safe. Gambling was a guaranteed distraction to the Thrush agents that surrounded him.

He glanced at his watch. Illya should have located the girls by now and told them what was going on. Casually, he stood and ducked his head as he worked his way through the crowd to a door he'd noticed earlier. It was unlocked. He slipped inside.

The small room was illuminated by a single set of lights hanging over an empty baccarat table. Obviously, a private room for high stakes gamblers that was not staffed this night, and perfect for their rendezvous with the girls. Solo pulled out his communicator and requested the channel for his partner. It took a little longer than he expected for a reply.



"What is that noise?"

The pair of ladies that flanked the sweaty Russian paused in their conversation and looked about the sauna. He replied quickly before they zeroed in on his garments.

"It's an alarm for the, ah, steam. I need to pour more water on the rocks."

"Oh! To get more steam!" The redhead's forehead furrowed. "I've never heard one of those before. Have you, Ilse?"

The second woman leaned back on her arms and looked bored. "Of course. But they only have them in Europe." The one-upsmanship between the two ladies had been an excellent source of entertainment to the agent.

Illya slipped from between them and stood, tightening the towel about his waist to smother the noise of the pen tucked between his underwear and terrycloth. "New design to America," he assured the pair, then moved to the far corner. The ladies seemed satisfied with that explanation and put their heads together to whisper conspiratorially. Their chat was strewn with admiring glances in his direction, their competition apparently put aside to compare notes.

He turned his back on them, draped his extra towel over his head like a hood, and hovered over the pile of hot rocks as he pulled out and opened the pen with a Russian curse.

"Excuse me?" his partner's voice questioned.

"My communicator is rather hot to handle right now," he said lowly, jiggling the metal pen between his fingers as he reached for the wooden bucket on the floor by the rocks. "Hold on." He dropped the device in the bucket with a clunk and said a little louder, "I need to get more water. I'll be right back."

"Okay, honey!" The redhead oozed.

"You hurry now, all right? We sure don't want to cool off in here!" Ilse added.

They both laughed lustily. The door closing behind the agent as he stepped into the vestibule shut them out. He picked up the pen. "It seems to have cooled down now," he said with a glance to make sure he was alone.

Solo's voice was heavy with amusement. "I had no idea you were a cradle robber, 'honey'."

Illya rolled his eyes. "For your information the girls had me, um, removed from their room. They weren't very receptive to the idea that they have been kidnapped."

"That would explain the guards poking their noses in here. So, they didn't believe you?"

"Correct." His voice brightened. "I have, however, found out some details about a Thrush action in Algiers and an upcoming meeting of the head financial chiefs in Barcelona!"

There was a slight hesitation in response. Solo sounded puzzled. "Where did you get that information?"

"Let's just say that there are some very chatty wives planning their wardrobe for the events and trying to out designer each other. My opinion seems to be greatly appreciated. I must appear to have a receptive nature."

"Where, exactly, are you?"

The blond agent opened his mouth reply, but the sound of someone entering the vestibule from the outside made him adjust the towel over his head and turn on the water to fill the bucket. The voices he heard were unmistakable.

"Oh, this is going to feel so good!" Tessa kicked off her shoe and it landed right next to Illya's feet. "Oh, sorry!" She giggled as she toed the shoe aside.

Illya nodded, his head slightly turned. A uniformed guard was at the door.

"Thank you for the escort. We'll be fine now." Tessa dismissed the guard and Illya heard the door to the outside shut.

The agent smiled to himself. The Thrushman was probably not used to being ordered around by a mere girl.

"My pores desperately need to breathe!" Kiki added. "And that ashtray was heavy. I think I pulled a muscle."

Illya focused his attention on the bucket as the girls disrobed and slipped into the sauna. He turned the water off and whispered into the pen. "It looks like I'm suddenly in a good position to monitor the girls," he grumbled, touching his bruised head. "And now they have a supply of rocks."

"We need to get them alone. Perhaps between the two of us . . ."

"I don't think this is a good spot," Illya said shortly. "Where are you?"

"I'm currently in a private gambling salon next to the casino, that is both empty and private. Can you get them here?"

"Not without major headaches, but I have an idea. Monitor the air for a moment."

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He tucked the open device into his waistband again, made sure his face was obscured by the draped towel, and picked up the bucket. When he stepped back in the cedar thick room, the four females were comparing manicures. Illya set the bucket down by the rocks and picked up the wooden ladle. His back was to them as he spoke. "I hate to leave the party, ladies, but I have an appointment with the blackjack dealer at the casino."

"There's a casino here?" Tessa squealed, then calmed herself to sound more mature. "Well, that's a lovely idea. Kiki, what do you think?"

"I've always wanted to try that game where you throw the dice."

"Craps, dear," Ilse informed her. "It is an alluring game. I did well in Monte Carlo."

"That's the one. Thank you. How about fifteen minutes in here to open our pores, then off to the casino?"

"Well, our pores are well opened so we will bid you good night," the redhead said. "Come, Ilse, before we wither away."

"Right behind you, dear," Ilse replied.

Illya heard the door open, then heard a voice very close to his ear. "Room 412. I have champagne on ice and the room to myself." Ilse's hand patted his butt discretely, then the door swooshed closed leaving the agent alone with the objects of his mission. Illya managed to keep from jumping and dislodging the towel draped over his head.

"I knew we'd have fun tonight," Tessa sighed. "My daddy is the best."

"You can say that again," Kiki agreed. "I don't know how our parents expect us to return to boarding school after all this independence!"

When Illya poured water on the rocks a fresh cloud of steam erupted upward and engulfed him. He used the cover to slip out of the door. "Enjoy," he said as he left. To his relief, the two older women were nowhere to be seen. He pulled the pen to his mouth. "Did you get that?"

"Well, that seemed to work quite well," Solo commented wryly. "Now we have to hope they listen to us. Unless, of course, you decide to go to Room 412 instead."

"I've had enough champagne encounters for the night, thank you. I'm not sure we will be very credible to the young ladies. I think we may have to get Tessa's father on the line to convince them."

"So, one of us will have to go through headquarters to arrange the link, which means we have to tell Waverly we can't handle two teenage girls ourselves."

Illya brightened. "'We'? That sounds like the job of the lead agent. 'Knowledge of our duties is the most essential part of the philosophy of life', you know."

"I'm sure that's true," Solo replied. "And also remember that 'the wisest have the most authority', my Russian friend."

"You can quote Plato all you want. I'm still very happy at not being the one to call Headquarters." He wrapped himself in his towels and regarded the exit. "I have to find another outfit. I don't think terrycloth is acceptable evening wear."

"I'll see you in a little bit. I won't move on the girls until you arrive. It sounds like it will take the both of us to finish this."

Illya grinned. "Again, give my regards to Waverly. Kuryakin out."

He tucked the pen into his skivvies, now damp from the sauna, and looked around for some other item of clothing without luck. He peeked outside. The guard was gone, probably very happy to leave the girls on their own. The agent didn't blame him.

He stepped outside and headed for the closest building and the closest door, which he ducked into right as a pair of guards appeared from the landscape. They were poking the bushes, still looking for their quarry.

Illya hurried down a hall and peeked into a room labeled 'Supplies'. Seeing that it was clear, he flipped on the light and slipped inside. One side of the room had a shelf full of various uniforms. The other side had spa supplies. Several boxes of hair dye caught his eye.

He pulled out the top one. 'Blondes have more fun!' it stated. He snorted and quickly put it back in disgust. "Define 'fun'," he mumbled. The next box held shades of brown; his eyebrow rose in interest. The guards were looking for a blond.



As he placed himself where he could see the main door of the Casino, Napoleon wondered how long he could sit here until he was noticed. The odds stacked higher against him with time. The seat he'd chosen was at a blackjack table. Faces he didn't recognize, much to his relief, occupied the other seats.

He'd managed to stay even with his chips for almost an hour before the two young ladies made an entrance. Solo had to stare to confirm it was they; their makeup and gowns made them look much older. He grinned as he watched them from across the room. Their youth was still clear in their movements - Kiki kept adjusting her cleavage and Tessa batted her eyelashes a little too often.

The girls took a minute to decide what to do. In the meanwhile, they obtained champagne from a passing waitress and spoke quietly with each other. Solo tiskied with his tongue. He was sure the Prince would not be happy about this whole scenario. Solo knew he wasn't.

They finally decided to move in to the craps table, where they placed themselves at one end and studied the action. Solo glanced at his watch again. Where was Illya?

He stood from the table and collected his chips. When his partner arrived, he had to be in a position to move in quickly. He strolled through the room toward the girls' table, his head bowed to hide his face, and placed himself at the table where he could see the front door and the girls, which happened to put him between a pair of buxom, classily dressed ladies dripping in jewels. Not a bad vantage point.

"Excuse me, sir."

The familiar voice over his left shoulder made him instantly relax. Finally! He thought, but when he turned to face his partner, he was temporarily taken aback by the dark hair and dealer's uniform.

"There is a problem with your credit, sir." The Russian smiled as he spoke loud enough for everyone to hear. His eyes sparkled evilly. "May I see you in the back room?"

The bejeweled ladies stepped back from Solo like he was a leper.

Solo stood straighter and adjusted his cuff. "Well, certainly, but it must be a . . ." he stopped speaking when he saw Narcissus step through the main Casino doors. He immediately turned his back to her. "Let's go," he said lowly, and quickly fell in step behind his partner.

They ducked into the private room. The American studied the Russian's hair with a smirk. "It doesn't go with your complexion."

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"One can always advise comfortably from a safe point," Illya quipped as he positioned himself at the door. "Did you contact Headquarters?"

"I'd hardly call being in the middle of a flock of Thrush a safe point." He began to assemble his communicator. "And yes, they are arranging the link."

"I won't ask how Waverly responded," Illya said glumly, rubbing his still sore head.

"Good. I'd rather not repeat that conversation. Open channel D. Solo here."

"Oh, Napoleon, good. We were just about to contact you." Lisa Roger's businesslike voice indicated to Solo that their boss was standing close by. "The Prince is on the line. We can patch him through anytime."

"Good. Hold on." He held the device to his chest. "OK, partner. Go get them."

Illya hesitated. "But they know me."

"Well, Narcissus knows me and she's standing at the same table, probably keeping an eye on those two. You're disguised."

Illya snorted. "Darkened hair is not a disguise. It's weak concealment."

The dark haired agent smiled a smug smile. "Then I invoke my 'rank has its privileges' card." He waggled his fingers at his partner. "Scoot. Or would you rather speak to Waverly?"

The pale one sighed. "You win." He hesitated for a moment at the door in thought, and slipped out into the bustling Casino.

ACT VII: Kidnapping Was So Easy When Done Correctly.

The brown haired dealer blended into the crowd like a ghost as he thought out a plan for attack. He didn't want to speak to the girls too long, or they would recognize him. The snug fitting dealer's uniform wasn't that much different from the waiter's outfit, but at least his chest was covered this time. He shouldn't get a second glance from anyone.

Narcissus was close to the pair, but not next to them. He could speak lowly and not be overheard, so he sidled up to Tessa using the press of the crowd as cover. A groan erupted from the gathering as the current thrower crapped out. Kiki stepped into the thrower's place just as Illya reached Tessa's side. She shook the dice with vigor and let them fly.

Illya leaned in to speak. Tessa suddenly squealed and jumped in excitement at her friend's excellent roll. Her shoulder caught the agent painfully in the nose. He clamped his hand over the lower half of his face as his eyes watered uncontrollably.

Tessa turned to him with an apology on her lips, but when she saw the uniform, she turned dismissive. "Pardon me," she sneered, and started to turn back to the table. "I'll take a refill." She held up her empty glass.

"You are wanted in the private gaming room." Illya gasped under his hand.

"What?" She asked, miffed at the interruption. She turned her head and glared at him. "You're mumbling!"

And bleeding, too! He thought. He lifted his hand away from his lips, but kept his hand over his lower face. "You are wanted in the private gaming room," he said slowly, loudly and clearly. Don't make me drag you, he thought. However, the idea and visual picture in his mind was pleasant and he smiled under his hand.

Tessa brightened. "Really? A private room?"

He nodded and motioned for her to follow. When his back was to her, he dropped his hand. She happily followed.

Narcissus watched the dealer lead the girl to the private room and smiled. One of her staff was on his toes and should be rewarded. When this other one finished her roll, she'd be sure to direct the girl to her friend and the private game room.

Kidnapping was so easy when done correctly.



Tessa came to an abrupt stop when she entered the empty room.

"Hey!"

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She turned to leave and found the watery-eyed dealer blocking her way.

"Hey!" She said again. Then she frowned, and shook her manicured finger at Illya. "I know you!"

"Excuse me." Solo's voice was firm and direct. Tessa turned and faced him. "But you have a call from you father." He held up the communicator pen.

Tessa glared at the pen, then at Solo. "What is that thing?"

"Carina Contessa Antonia DeNunzio!" A very angry voice thundered from the device. "You will obey these men!"

She blinked. A stunned look overtook her face. "Daddy?" Suddenly, she sounded years younger than she looked. She meekly took the device and held it delicately between the tips of her thumb and forefinger like it was a live snake. Then she moved it close to her shiny, red lips. "Is that you?"

Solo moved to his partner's side and let Tessa and her father speak in semi privacy. For once, Tessa was doing most of the listening. Solo glanced at his partner. "You all right?" He asked casually.

His nose throbbed in time with the lump by his ear. "Nothing five miles between her and I wouldn't fix," he grumbled in reply.

Tessa's side of the conversation consisted mostly of "But, Daddy!" at first, but there was lengthy, heated discussion close to the end. Then the girl was silent for a few moments. With a final, respectful, "Yes, Daddy," she handed the pen back to the agents, her mouth in a pout. "So you were right," she said to Illya.

"I know."

She pulled her wrap over her shoulders and sniffed. "I'm sorry about the ash tray," she said shortly.

"Apology accepted. Now let's get out of here. Please."

Solo's glance was split between the two as he moved to the door. "I've obviously missed something. You can fill me in later." He peeked out. "First we have to get your friend in here."



Kiki had come to the end of her winning streak. Narcissus congratulated her and directed her to the private room to join her friend and arranged for a dealer to escort her. Then she signaled the pit boss.

"Yes, missus?" He said. The pit boss had arms like sledgehammers.

"The private game was an excellent idea, Mario. Could you please see that the young ladies are provided with refreshment?"

He looked at her blankly. "There's no private game scheduled, missus."

Narcissus's eyes turned stormy. "Then check it out. Now." She fell in behind the bulldog of a man as he plowed his way through the crowd, pulling in a pair of security men as they went.



Solo let the door close then stood back. When it opened and Kiki entered, he pulled her aside and covered her mouth until the door closed again. "OW!" He pulled his hand away and hugged it to his chest.

"Kiki, don't! It's okay!" Tessa called.

Solo pulled his hand out and shook it. "She bit me!"

Illya smiled smugly. "Welcome to the club."

"Kiki, he was right." Tessa pointed at Illya. "We are kidnapped. I just spoke to daddy."

"What?" Kiki moaned. "No! I like it here!"

Solo peeked out the door. "We need to get moving. Narcissus is on to us." He grabbed Kiki and Tessa by their elbows and looked to Illya.

"This way." Illya led the way out a small door in a far corner to the employees' area of the building which Illya had explored after he'd dyed his hair. It was a maze of back hallways designed to keep the workers from walking among the guests.

"I knew this was too good to be true!" Kiki wailed.

The girls' shoes make a loud tacka-tacka-tacka rhythm on the linoleum floor. The agents moved them along quickly but it wasn't long before the door banged open behind them. They propelled the girls around a corner.

"The kitchen," Illya ordered. "There's more of a crowd to hide in."

"The kitchen?" Whined Kiki. "I'd better not get any stains on this dress!"

"UNCLE will reimburse you, I'm sure." Solo hustled them down the hall behind his partner. A few more turns kept them out of sight of their pursuers.

"We were fine until you came along!" Tessa snarled. "Couldn't you sneak us out later?"

"We tried to sneak you out earlier. It was a painful experience." Illya pushed open a door in the wake of several departing waiters delivering room service.

"I said I was sorry!"

The kitchen was bustling even with the lateness of the hour. "Thrush employees certainly have an appetite," the dark haired agent commented as he maneuvered the girls through the crowd.

"There's so much grease!" Griped Tessa. "Ooh! Are those truffles?" She came to an abrupt stop at the dessert station at the far end of the kitchen. Solo was jerked to a standstill.

"Get down!"

The deep voice bellowed from the entry of the kitchen and everyone in the room jumped and momentarily froze but didn't do as they were told. Illya shoved the girls under the dessert table, ignoring their cries of disgust. "Stay down!" he ordered, picking up an iron frying pan; his gun was still in the waiter's closet.

Solo had his gun out, but the pandemonium of the kitchen made it impossible to use. His arm was knocked aside by a pair of busboys dashing for cover, and the agent reluctantly stuffed the gun in his waistband. A shot barked from the entry and a 'poof!' sounded by his ear. Chaotic screaming deafened him and his vision was fogged by flour raining down around his head.

"Find a way out!" He yelled at Illya. Then he grabbed the ripped sack of flour from the shelf over his head and flung it on the large, cluttered counter between them and the door. Flour spewed across the table and produced a blinding, white cloud. Another shot spat; Solo heard it ping off something metal by his head. The milling crowd disappeared under a cloud of flour.

A frying pan was thrust in his hand.

"Hold that," his partner said. "It's bullet proof."

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Solo looked at the pan and saw a bullet lodged in the bottom. He turned and vaguely saw his partner disappearing around a corner. With an approving glance at the pan, he got a good grip and advanced under cover of the flour cloud. He pushed his way through the sneezing workers, crouched down below the level of the counter. The dispersing chefs and kitchen workers wore white, so when he came across a pair of legs clad in black and moving against the escaping flow, he whacked the knees with the pan. It was followed by a satisfying grunt as the man dropped. One more swing to the head put him out of the fight.

"I could learn my way around a kitchen," he said brightly as he looked for the next target. Strong arms around his neck stopped his progression; their thickness suggested the pit boss.

"Gotcha," the man growled.

Solo stomped on the arch of the man's foot. He grunted and hunched over, but his grip didn't lessen. By now the flour cloud had settled enough for one of the security guard to stick his gun in Solo's ear. A wild swing upward with the pan connected with the guard's elbow, and the gun was knocked up into the pit boss's chin. The boss's head snapped back, hit the counter and his grip relaxed on Solo's neck as the man slumped to the floor.

The remaining guard staggered back, gripping his elbow, and into a chef behind him. The both went down in a heap. A third guard appeared in the doorway and looked at the agent in surprise. Quickly, he moved in, yanked out his weapon and began to draw a bead on Solo.

Solo glanced to the counter and grabbed the closest thing at hand - a bowl of sugar - and threw it at the guard's eyes. The gunshot was wild as the guard clawed at his eyes. Solo leaned over and whacked him with the pan. Four down.

Solo rubbed his sore neck and returned to the girls. When he pulled them from under the counter, his partner appeared with his gun.

"You're a little late, as usual."

"You needed the exercise. Go," Illya said. "Turn right outside the kitchen. There's a back door. I'll cover you."

Solo pushed the squealing girls in the direction indicated. Illya took position at the corner and squeezed off a shot in response to one shot in their direction. Bullets picked at his heels as he pushed the girls out of the kitchen. He heard Illya's Special respond.

As it happened, the door was not hard to find. Several of the escaping workers led them right to it. Solo pushed the girls out, then to one side where the stream of escapees slowed to an occasional few until it was quiet.

They were standing on a loading dock. A large dumpster overloaded with kitchen detritus was the only thing parked at the dock.

"Ohh, it stinks!" Kiki wailed, holding her nose. "And my dress got chocolate on it!"

"Better than blood," Solo snapped, sizing up the area. There wasn't an escape vehicle in sight. The employees had scattered in all directions and disappeared into the darkness.

"Now what?" Tessa demanded as she brushed flour from her arms. "I can't run anymore in these shoes."

Illya banged out of the door, and kept an eye on the interior. "I think we're clear for a few minutes. Is back up is on the way?"

"Waverly is sending in a crew after we signal that we are clear. Any suggestions?" Solo waved at the empty dock. "There's too much open ground to cover to get to the wall, and I'm afraid the ladies wouldn't be able to scale it anyway. I have a car stashed in the trees to the south."

Illya bit his lip in thought as he peeked into the kitchen. "Where's employee parking? Or valet parking? There has to be cars somewhere."

"Stay here with the girls and I'll take a look around." Solo pulled out his gun from his holster.

The blond Russian gave the squirming, complaining girls one look and shook his head. "Wait. I have an idea. Here." He handed Solo his gun and the holster he'd slung around his shoulder, then yanked off the dealer's bow tie. Solo raised his eyebrows as his partner then unbuttoned his ruffled shirt to mid chest. Illya paused at the scrutiny. "Don't ask." Then he darted through the doorway back into the kitchen.

Curious, the American kept an eye out through the cracked open door. He saw his partner run his hands through his shaggy hair and then brush off his clothes, and stroll with purpose away from the kitchen where he disappeared from sight for a few moments. When he returned, he was walking and chatting in a relaxed manner with a man that wore a sommelier's cup around his neck.

Then they stopped. The sommelier didn't seem to notice the sounds of chaos behind the kitchen door next to him; his eyes were too busy traveling over his partner's slight form. Illya leaned in close and spoke in the man's ear. After a second, the wine waiter smiled hugely and reached into his pocket. He pulled out a key, which he handed to Illya with a wink. Illya smiled back, then turned to go. Solo didn't miss the affectionate pat his partner received on his backside as he walked away, even though the blond agent kept himself from jumping in surprise.

Solo stepped back to allow his partner to exit. Illya held up the key, the scathing expression on his Slavic face enough to make Solo bite his tongue.

"Blue Caddy parked on the east side. Let's go."

"Wait a minute. What did you say to get those keys?"

Illya looked at his partner in exasperation as he grabbed Kiki's elbow. "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth." He nodded to Tessa, indicating that Solo escort her in the same manner.

Tessa interpreted the head nod differently. "Are you calling me a horse? I said I was sorry!"

"He has no manners," Solo said lowly in her ear as he directed her around the back of the building. "See what I have to put up with?"

When they rounded the northeast corner, they saw several cars parked behind a high hedge.

"Employee parking." Illya scanned the lot and then headed to the sole blue Cadillac.

"Oh, wow! A convertible!" Kiki happily scrambled into the cavernous back seat.

Tessa slid in next to her in a statelier manner. "Put the top up so I don't wreck my hair."

"What?" Kiki said, shocked. "But it's a convertible!"

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"Sorry, no time." Solo jumped into the passenger side as his partner turned over the powerful engine. The multiple horses under the hood kicked to life with a roar. Kiki stuck her tongue out at Tessa then happily settled down for the ride.

Illya peeled out of the dirt lot and headed to the south exit. Outside alarms began to blare and security lights mounted on the outer wall snapped on. Illya hunkered down behind the wheel and pointed the huge hood at the entry gates. The horses growled throatily.

"I suggest you get down!" He yelled.

The girls yelped when they saw his intent, and dove for the floor. Solo leaned out of the side and aimed at the gate guards. Illya floored it.

The Caddy leaped in response directly at the closed gates. Guards on the road jumped aside, and those in the guardhouse ducked as Solo showered them with bullets. The car barely slowed as it ploughed through the iron, which barely dented the hood, but shattered the windshield. Something - bullets, Solo thought - pinged the back of the massive vehicle as it disappeared into the night.

Solo dared to peek back after they cleared the exit. Thrush security poured from behind the green doors, too late to make any difference.

ACT VIII: Case Closed. Finally.

It was ten o'clock the next morning before the paperwork was finished. They had a debriefing scheduled at 10:30, which gave them just enough time to clean up a bit and grab some coffee.

The agents entered Waverly's office, obviously tired. Illya had a slight black and blue tinge under his eyes from the blow he'd received to his nose, and Solo's hair had gray highlights from the flour. They both looked forward to hot showers and some sleep as soon as the briefing was over.

"Gentlemen, have a seat." Their shaggy-browed boss dropped into the largest padded chair at the table. The agents sank thankfully into two chairs on his left.

Solo slid the report around to his boss. "There you go. Case closed. Finally."

"This should be some interesting reading. I spoke to the Prince, and some of the comments from the girls were rather . . . intriguing. They had nothing but good words. You represented UNCLE in a most positive way."

"It's our job, sir." Solo replied with a nod. "Is the Prince still attending the Conference?"

"Yes, he is. The Princesses are enroute home as we speak."

"I guess he'd feel safer with them out of New York," Illya mused. "I know I feel safer."

"On the contrary, gentlemen. It seems he sent Princess Tessa home to pack."

"Pack?" Solo glanced to his partner, who's eyes widening slightly in fear.

"Well, after we raided the compound and cleared it out, the question of what to do with it was raised. The Prince wants to buy it, it seems."

"Buy it?" Illya repeated flatly.

"Yes, Mr. Kuryakin. The Princess convinced her father that it would be a good way for her to spend her time. She could learn business, and continue her studies there. Princess Marika will be joining her. The Prince was most excited at the prospect; his daughter never showed any interest in business before."

"Well, I guess the little exposure she had to Narcissus was positive." Solo summed up. "I hope she finds a better role models, though."

"Yes, well, it's too bad that Narcissus escaped our raid. I don't think she'll be back behind the Green Doors, however. Our intelligence puts her in Austria."

"Already? She must have had an escape plan."

"Indeed." Waverly patted the folder. "And thanks to Mr. Kuryakin's additional information received from two Thrush spouses, we've managed to close one case in

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Algiers and will most definitely receive vital financial information in Barcelona. Well done, Mr. Kuryakin."

Solo pursed his lips, chagrined by the praise of his smug-faced partner.

Waverly rose from his seat and nodded at the file. "I will read this immediately. Unless you gentlemen have anything to offer, we can adjourn and you can get some rest."

"I have a question," Illya said. "What happened to the staff? The guests were Thrush, of course, but what about the staff?"

"It seems that they were mostly Thrush. The lower levels, bus boys and maids, are regular civilians. They will be released as soon as their innocence is confirmed."

"And the rest? They are being fed while they are in custody, correct?"

Solo looked at his partner quizzically, and Waverly harrumphed.

"Of course, Mr. Kuryakin. UNCLE follows the rules of the Geneva Convention quiet closely."

"Good." The Russian rose and stretched. "I wouldn't want to break my word to the gentleman who loaned us his car."

Solo brightened. "What did you promise him?"

Illya's eyes sparkled as he turned to go. "I promised him dinner at my place."

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