

In Vino Veritas

a *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (2015) fanfic

by Rodo

for *misbegotten*

IT HAD STARTED innocently enough. Gaby hadn't really paid them any mind. Illya and Solo were quibbling all the time, no matter what they were doing, like little boys with a playground rivalry, always keen to outdo the other in whatever they were doing at the time. It was equal parts amusing and exhausting. At least they managed to contain it enough so that it didn't interfere with their missions. Unfortunately, that didn't mean it didn't, on occasion, interfere with her downtime.

"You have got to be kidding me," she said, when she stepped out of the shower in their current safe house/temporary accommodation, clad in her pyjamas with a towel wrapped around her wet hair.

When she'd left them, Solo had been reading one of his magazines, while Illya had been playing chess against himself. Now, the chess set had been relegated to the side table, and rested on top of Solo's magazine, while her two colleagues sat across from each other on the two armchairs flanking the living room table, each with a glass in front of him and a bottle of alcohol in the middle.

"This doesn't concern you," Illya growled, eyes fixed on Solo.

"But you're welcome to join us, if you'd like." Solo didn't have eyes for anyone but Illya either.

It didn't take long for Gaby to figure out just what was going on, as well as her answer. "No, thank you. I don't think your dick measuring contest could take another participant."

And so, she retreated to her room with a glass of Chardonnay and her Russian textbooks – tedious work, but necessary. Still, the more she tried to concentrate, the more intent her brain became on replaying the day's events, specifically the ones that had led to the drinking contest currently happening outside her room. Hopefully it wouldn't escalate to the point where she had to call an ambulance.

As was their usual *modus operandi* these days, Solo had been the one to infiltrate a charity event hosted by a well-connected art dealer for the Viennese high society. It had gone swimmingly – in Solo’s words – but Illya-the-Waiter couldn’t help but make a snide comment regarding Solo’s alcohol consumption.

“You must be the most high-functioning alcoholic I’ve ever met, Cowboy,” she’d heard him say over the radio when Solo started on his third glass of champagne in under an hour.

“And you’re the only Russian who can’t hold his vodka, Peril.”

No doubt, they would have continued sniping at each other, if Gaby hadn’t picked that moment to intervene. “The distraction’s ready. On my mark.”

That should have been it, really. But apparently it hadn’t been. She could hear them taunt each other, muffled enough by the door that she couldn’t pick up on the words, only the tone. *Concentrate*, she told herself.

Der Kasus des Pronomens ist vom Verb abhängig. Die Pronomen sind die Objekte zum Infinitiv. Bei nocлáмъ und дéлaмъ steht das Objekt im Akkusativ, „durch jemanden ersetzen“ heißt...¹

Oh, for God’s sake, she cursed internally when she heard a thump. What had they done now? Her Russian textbook forgotten, she swung her legs off the bed and went looking. It had been inevitable, she thought. Those two were walking chaos magnets sometimes.

Although “chaos” wasn’t really the right way to describe the scene she found in the living room. The single bottle had multiplied while she’d been failing to be productive. And of course most of them were empty now – beers, wine, brandy, whatever their hideout had to offer. Solo was leaning back in his armchair, glass in hand, eyeing her lazily as she entered the room. Illya, on the other hand, had slumped forward, face on the table, head bent at an awkward angle. His glass was rolling over the floorboards, leaving a trail of amber liquid in its wake.

“I think I won,” Solo said. He sounded tired and not in the least victorious.

Illya’s answer was unintelligible, but it sounded like vehement disagreement. He still hadn’t moved, as if he was a puppet whose strings had been cut.

“I think you’ve both had enough. We’ve still got work to do tomorrow, remember?”

1 *Langenscheidts Praktisches Lehrbuch Russisch* von Prof. K.A. Paffen, Neubearbeitung 1960, page 194

“Not. Giving. Up.” Of course he wouldn’t, Gaby thought with a sigh. Illya never gave up. If you told him to run through a solid wall, he’d continue trying until the wall crumbled. The problem was that Illya’s liver probably wouldn’t be up to his standards. One look at Solo told her that he’d come to the same conclusion.

“She’s got a point,” he said. “We can continue tomorrow, after we’ve gotten rid of the nerve gas.”

Illya’s answer was a deep, monotonous growl that could have meant just about anything. Gaby chose to believe it meant assent. She walked over to him, picked up the fallen glass and set it back on the table, then put a hand on Illya’s shoulder.

“Come on,” she said with a gentle shake. “Let’s get you to the bathroom before you make a mess.”

Illya’s shoulders tensing was the only warning she got. He heaved himself into an upright position, swaying slightly, glassy eyes glancing through the room until they settled on her. Then he stilled, his mind suddenly somewhere, although Gaby wasn’t quite sure where.

“You’re pretty,” he said. Behind her back, Solo guffawed.

“Yes, thank you,” she answered, because what else was she going to say? “Now can you get up? I’m not sure I can drag you all the way.”

“Really, *really* pretty,” he emphasised.

Gaby sighed. He hadn’t heard a word she said, lost in his head somewhere. If he remembered any of this in the morning, he’d never live it down.

“Your eyes are nice and brown and—”

She put her hands on his shoulders, and bent forward until her face was close to his. This really wasn’t the time, nor the place, and she was doing him a favour. But there was still a small, niggling part of her that wanted to know what her eyes were like.

“Can you stand up for me, please?”

Illya blinked at her. “I really like it when you touch me.”

Solo was giggling now. “Not helping,” Gaby hissed, but when she turned, she saw that he was almost as drunk as Illya. He didn’t even notice that he spilled whisky all over his fancy suit. With any luck, they’d get to hug the toilet bowl together.

“Can you kiss me?” Illya asked, and her heart skipped a beat. “I’d really like to kiss you.”

So, he’d finally said it. Gaby was surprised, although it was just like Illya to need a bucket’s worth of liquid courage to do it. She’d been aware of his crush pretty much since the beginning. She’d used it for her own ends, in fact. However, slowly but surely, he’d grown on her. It was he who she relied on the most, he who she spent her quiet moments with. And sometimes, it was his embrace she dreamed of. The only reason she hadn’t

asked him if *he* could kiss her was that she hadn't been sure he wouldn't deny her. He could be exasperating like that.

"Tell you what," she finally answered. "If you go to the bathroom now, I'll fetch you a glass of water, and once you've sobered up, we can talk about it again."

Illya mulled this over for a bit until he finally nodded and let himself be coaxed into the bathroom. And just in time. Gaby had barely enough time to fetch the promised water before he turned decidedly green around the gills, all thoughts of kisses and pretty eyes forgotten.

Until the next morning, that is. Once he'd sobered up, slept, and brushed his teeth, he was back to his usual self, even if he was a little grumpier than usual. When Gaby leaned up and pressed a chaste kiss to his lips before handing him his coffee, he froze, eyeing her in alarm. At least until his mind caught up, then he blushed.

"You only had to ask, you know?" she teased him.

Illya's blush only deepened while he tried to hide behind his coffee.

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