

Nikolay is walking down the gloomy sidewalk, his pistol in one hand, trench knife in the other. He regrets having to do this, but he has to, even if that means putting his own life at risk again. Luckily he isn't doing it alone. He knocks on the door of the house, a man in a suit opens it, bang, one down. He and his partner split up and start clearing the house. They finish up clearing the house. He then hears someone else's gun fire and a rather awkward thud on the floor followed by a yelp. Nikolay rushes to help him out. Flashback. Arkady is in his living room, he picks up his phone, a Samsung S6 Edge, and begins dialing his brothers number. He looks out the street, the San Francisco skyline is foggy as always. Yet Arkady likes it, it reminds him of his state of mind, foggy. Yet he is no longer worried about the money that he lost to gambling, that part of his life is over, no thanks to his ex-wife who divorced him and destroyed his life.

"Screw her!" He thinks to himself. His phone keeps ringing and he hears Nikolay pick it up.

"Hey Arkady, what's up?" Nikolay says over the phone.

"Hey, Nikolay." He says as his brother answers the phone

"Yea, so listen, the Sharks game starts in about hour, wanna come over and watch it with me? They're playing the Kings. I know your wife is in the hospital and all that, I just thought it might be a good idea for you to get away from it. You can drop the kids off at dad's, you know how he's always happy to see them." Arkady says to him. Hoping that Nikolay would accept his

offer. Nikolay is the only family member that he can depend on, with their mother dead for the past couple of years and the bad relations with his dad after what happened to him.

“Uhh... Ya sure, I think I can do that. I’ll have to drop her off at the hospital first though, she has to do the chemo for her cancer. Then once the kids are at dads I’ll make my way here. Shouldn’t take to long though, everything is rather nearby, half an hour tops.

“Great, I’ll see you here soon, grab some beer if you can, I don’t have much left.....
Ya, ya, I know, I drink too much, it’s not my fault that Natasha and I got divorced, I loved her you know! By the way, how’s that new car of yours?” He says as after trying to defend himself.

“The RS7? Ya, I love it, took me forever to save up for it, despite me being the head of Pharmaceuticals at Stanford. How’s your engineering going by the way? I hear you’ve been asked to oversee a construction project down in the Silicon Valley.” Nikolay asks him.

“Oh ya, it’s a new movie theater/housing project in Mountain View, they’re pulling in some really new tech. I hear the want to also get Anton Bremen to oversee the electrical engineering part of it.” Arkady says.

“Ya, I’ve met him. He’s good, still, the civil engineering you do is pretty hard. Gotta give you props for that.” Nikolay tells him.

“Ya, it has its pros and cons, still, electrical is way harder. Anyway, see you soon.” He hangs up his phone and goes to get his keys. If he and his brother are going to have a good time,

they might as well have something good to eat besides beer and chips. He drives along down to Safeway. As he is walking down along the meat aisle, a man walks up to him.

“Oh, sorry, didn’t see you there” Arkady exclaims as he bumps into him while picking up a pack of steaks.

“I work for Nathan, I’m one of his assistants, he asks when are you going to finish the assignment he gave you. You know how he is with punctuality.” Says the man.

“Oh... Ya, tell him that it will be finished soon, I’ve been having a hard time recently. Got divorced with my wife, lost a lot of money to gambling.” Arkady replies to him as he puts the meat in his cart and starts looking around to see what else he can get.

“Ya ya, he knows, you told him at the meeting, remember?” The man tells him.

“How do you know that? I don’t recall seeing you there.” Arkady questions this assistant.

“I’m not his only assistant. Nathan tells us what we need to know to get the jobs done, your information was one of the things he told me.” Replies the assistant.

“Hmm. Okay. either way, tell him what I said, he shouldn't be worried. You know how we engineers are, practical and punctual.” Arkady tells him. Arkady starts walking away towards the self checkout. As Arkady pulls up to his house he sees Nikolay’s car in his driveway.

“Wow, someone’s early!” He exclaims to himself as he parks his car.

“Hey, where you been?” Asks Nikolay as Arkady walks into the house.

“At Safeway, got some meat. Why?”

“Well, I arrived like 5 mins ago and Safeway is a 10 minute run tops.”

“Oh, ya, I..uh..I had to talk to a friend”

“Hmm.. Ok, so the game is about to start, go put the meat on, I got some beer and soda.”

“Great”

The game goes great, the Sharks ended up winning after coming into the 3rd period tied at 2-2. They scored 3 goals onto the Kings, with the tie breaker from Thornton and two goals from Braun.

“Arkady, I’m telling you, this is the kind of performance that can win them the Stanley cup!”

“Come on man, as much as I love the Sharks I’m having doubts, they never made to the Western Conference finals. Not to mention the Playoffs last year.” Arkady replies.

“Well cry me a river, you’ve always had doubts. This is the year, I feel it.” Nikolay exclaims.

“Ya, keep dreaming cupcake.”

“Man, why you gotta be such a hater? I thought you were a real fan!”

“I don’t know, the Sharks are a good team during the regular season, but that’s about it. I mean, I’m being honest right now, you’ve seen them play in the playoffs”

“Dude... whatever.”

“Alright Arkady, I gotta go pick up the kids and my wife. See you later?”

“Sure thing man! Stay safe! Everythings gonna be fine.”

“Sure thing, thanks for your support.”

Nikolay packs up his stuff and starts to leave. He is obviously worried about the future of his family as it is written all over him as plainly as a name on it’s grave. He takes his time walking out the door and getting in his car. Arkady can hear from the inside of his house the start of Nikolay's engine and him pulling out of the driveway.

Nikolay’s goes to the hospital. His wife has finished another round of chemo therapy. Nikolay walks into the waiting room of the hospital.

“Hi, how can I help you?” The woman at the desk asks him with a smile.

“I’m here to pick up my wife, Natasha Romanoff. She was supposed to finish a round of chemo therapy not too long ago.” He tells the attendant, not returning the smile, but noticing her name, ‘Consuela’. It reminds him of someone he saw on TV a couple of time, but he can’t remember where exactly it was.

“Ok, I’ll have one of the nurses escort you to the recovery room where your wife is resting.” Consuela says. A nurse by the name of Ellen comes to pick escort him, Nikolay likes her. She’s fairly tall 5’8”, and her hair, silky blonde and her blue green eyes. They stop in the middle of an empty hallway.

“Why’d you stop?” Nikolay asks her, confused about why she did it.

“You’re brother is Arkady Romanoff, is that correct?” She asks him.

“Yes, but how do you know that?” He asks her, shocked and slightly worried.

“Not important, tell him Nikita wants him to finish the job really soon, or else... Things will happen.” She replies as someone turns around the corner. “This way sir” She says, gesturing towards the end of the hall. Nikolay decides not to say anything and continue following her, better not speak up right now and draw unwanted attention. She takes him to the part of the Oncology wing. “Gosh, what a depressing place, filled with so much death, I hope my wife doesn’t end up staying here.” Nikolay thinks to himself. They get to the recovery room where his wife and a few other patients are sitting and resting after their treatments. Nikolay sits down next to his wife.

“How do you feel?” He asks her

“How about a ‘hello’ or ‘hey’ first?” She asks him in return

“Oh come on, we’re not strangers.” He replies to her questions, expecting some sort of response in return. Natasha just sighs.

“What do you expect, I feel like crap, the Chemo may be helping but it just makes me feel worse. Where are the kids?” She says as she looks around.

“I left them at my dad's, I went over to Arkady's to watch the Sharks play the Kings. I was actually going to pick them up after you.” He proclaims.

“Ok, give me another five minutes and then we can head out.” Natasha says

“Hey, we're in no rush. You can stay here as long as you want.” Nikolay comforts her as he puts his arm around her.

“No, this place is depressing, I hate it, filled with death and sickness.” She tells him as she begins to stand up and get her purse to leave.

“Oh thank God I'm not the only one! I thought that too.” Nikolay says as releases a sigh of relief and begins walking out with her. They go outside and get in the car. Before they go, Natasha tells Nikolay to not go too fast as she can still get nauseous and throw up. Nikolay recalls the last time that happened, they didn't have a bag and things got.... Messy. He shivers at the thought of that. After about half an hour of driving they arrive at Nikolay's dad's house.

“Do you want to stay in the car while I go get the kids?” Nikolay asks her.

“No, I want to come with you, I haven't seen your dad in a long time.” She replies, with a smile. Nikolay returns the smile and helps her get out. They walk up to the house and Nikolay knocks on the door. Nikolay's father, Joseph, opens it. Joseph is a tall man, he's 63 and has the

fullest beard anyone has ever seen. He grew his beard out so it resembles a beard like that of a gold miner, he takes great pride in it.

“Heyy! What a pleasant surprise! Natasha, how great of you to stop by!” Joseph proclaims!

“Nice to see you too Mr.Romanoff.” She says as she lights up a genuine smile at him.

“Oh come on, you can call me Joseph, you know how I hate formalities.” He replies.

“Okay, Joseph. Do you have any place I can sit down?” Natasha says as she leans against the door to try and stay up.

“Oh ya, of course. Here, let me help you get there.” Joseph supports Natasha to the living room where she plops down onto the couch. The triplets run down the stair, stomping around like a herd of elephants.

“Mommy!” Says Daniel, the oldest one of the three, as he jumps up onto the couch with her and begins hugging her. The other two, Sam and Nathan run up and jump onto Natasha like a pack of hungry wolves on a deer. After trying to calm the kids down, Nikolay and Natasha decide to leave. Best to get home before it gets dark. Nikolay struggles to pack the kids into the car.

“But daddy, I don’t want to go!” Cries Daniel

“Ya, dad, we wanna stay!” Yelps Sam

“OW! Nathan, stop it!” Yells Daniel

“I’m not doing anything!” Says Nathan as he pinches Sam

“Why’d you do that??” Says Sam

“Because Daniel is being an idiot!” Says Nathan

“But why me? I didn’t do anything to you!” Replies Sam

“No, you pushed me yesterday!” Says Nathan

“He didn’t push you, I did.” Daniel pitches in

“Well I’ll punch you too!” Nathan threatens him!

“Everyone, SHUT UP!” Yells Natasha

“Now, calm down and get in buckle up!” She continues

“Wow, way to take control honey.” Says Nikolay as as he smirks at her. The ride back home is as one would expect. The kids are yelling at each other, refusing to calm down. Natahsa is still feeling sick, and Nikolay, well Nikolay keeps losing his temper.

“Alright everyone out of the car, chop chop!” Nikolay says. Once again, Natasha is struggling to walk.

“Damnit, why does chemo make you feel like discoordinated giraffe that needs training wheels?” She asks, clearly not making any more efforts to get out of the car until Nikolay comes

over to help her. Nikolay on the other hand, completely caught off guard by Natasha's comment, nearly falls over in laughter. He catches himself on the car and continues laughing for the next minute as Natasha pouts in frustration that her husband isn't going to help her.

“Aren't you going to help me?” She says in frustration.

“Not just yet Mrs. Giraffe.” Nikolay replies. Nikolay continues laughing and enjoying himself for the next few minutes as the kids have gotten into the house and began raiding the fridge. He hasn't even noticed that Arkady sent him a text. After an exhausting hour of feeding the kids and getting them under control, Nikolay has some time to himself. He takes out his phone, and now sees Arkady's text. He's inviting him to go to a club tomorrow night. Nikolay replies with “You know what, why not, as long as Natasha can handle the kids”. Arkady texts him back with a “Cool, my place 8:30?”, “Yep” is Nikolay's reply. Nikolay puts his phone down on the nightstand and plops down on the bed. He starts thinking about the nurse that he met today at the hospital. It really got him thinking about Arkady. He's been really moody about his divorce recently, and he lost a lot of money, yet he never seems to run out. Does he have a large savings account? Or did he take a loan from the bank? Or even worse, does he get his money illegally? No, Nikolay refuses to think about it, his brother's business is not his own concern, he has bigger fish to fry right now. Time flies by quickly for Nikolay, next thing he knows, it's Saturday night and he's getting in his car to go meet Arkady at his house. He sits in his car for a bit, thinking to himself.

“Damn, this is the first time Arkady and I have actually went out somewhere together”
He says to himself.

“I’m surprised he still acts all normal, I mean, he divorced his wife only two months ago. Hmm, if I were him I would be devastated. Anyways, I just hope I don’t get to drunk to drive.” He continues talking to himself as he pats the steering wheel of his car. He turns on the ignition and drives away, the ride to Arkadys is roughly 30-45 mins on the freeway. As he is driving he starts thinking more about that nurse at the hospital.

“She seemed really weird, better talk to Arkady at the club, maybe he’ll spill something if he’s drunk enough. Dirty move, but the right one in this situation nonetheless.” Nikolay says to himself. Nikolay pulls up into Arkady’s driveway, with the gravel scraping under his tires. Before he even manages to get out of his car, Arkady is already walking out of his house, jacket in one hand, keys in the other.

“Let’s go baby brother” Arkady says

“You know I’m the older one right?” Nikolay reminds him

“Ya ya, by two years, three months and fourteen days, we’ve all heard the story. I just like calling you baby brother. Now are you gonna get in the car or what?” Arkady gestures to Nikolay as he gets in the driver's seat of his car. Nikolay hesitates a bit but gets in.

“Yo, so I’m thinking of getting this car tuned out, you know, modify the ECM, add a spoiler, get better tires.” Arkady says to Nikolay as they are driving down the freeway.

“Dude, It’s an Audi RS7, it doesn’t need any tuning, it’s already fast and powerful enough” Nikolay tells Arkady.

“Ya, tell that to the Ferrari that beat me on the track! Nonetheless, I should at least get rid of the automatic transmission and get paddle shifters.” Arkady exclaims. They both spend the rest of the ride arguing about Arkady's car and why he should or shouldn't upgrade it for various reasons. When they finally get to the club, first thing they do is a long tradition that started with Nikolay and his friends in college: Get a shot of vodka, a shot of whiskey followed by another shot of vodka, Nikolay and his friends called it “The Russian Sandwich”. Arkady has a blast, he ends up meeting a hot girl, dancing way too much, and most importantly (for Nikolay): Drinking a lot. Sadly, it doesn't go all too well.

“Yo, watch where you're stepping jackass!” Said a random, generic college guy as he shoves Arkady. Arkady, being the large guy he is, doesn't take threats like that kindly.

“What'd you just call me short round?” Says Arkady as he shoves the guy back who manages to trip and fall on his rear.

“Hey, cunt!” Says another college guy as he tries to punch Arkady in the face. Even in a drunken state, Arkady is still pretty fast. Arkady dodges the punch and lands one straight into the other guy's face who falls back with his face now bleeding and swollen. Now we have the college guy who fell on his rear, he gets up and instead of being stupid like his friend, doesn't attract Arkady's attention and instead kicks him straight in the jewels causing Arkady buckle over in pain. Now by this point, Nikolay has seen what is happening. As the college guy is about to continue to beat on Arkady, Nikolay walks up to him and drags him off Arkady and knocks him out by slamming his face into one of the tables. Nikolay proceeds to pick up Arkady to get him

home. They pay for their tab, luckily, the club owner has seen worse and tells them that he won't be calling the cops, but they should leave their contact info just in case.

“Hey, Arkady, I think I should drive.” Nikolay says as he examines Arkady

“No shit Sherlock.” Arkady replies with an awfully pissed tone. Nikolay helps Arkady get into the car. Now he has two sick people to worry about. Could his life get any worse? They start driving home.

“So, I was at the hospital picking up my wife the other day.” Nikolay starts off.

“Ya, I know that. What else is new?” Arkady replies, slurring his words.

“That’s not the interesting part. She mentioned you.” Nikolay tells him. Arkady has a quick flash of worry on his face.

“Ya, well you know, I get around.” Arkady says.

“Well what’s even weirder is that she mentioned some job that you had to do.” Nikolay follows up

“Oh ya, that thing.” Arkady says

“Tell me about it.” Nikolay says, almost in an orderly tone.

“I don’t wanna talk about it, something about some college junkie.” Arkady says before passing out.

“Oh shit. Not good.” Nikolay mutters to himself. He drops Arkady off at his house, puts him in bed and leaves a note for him at the side of his bed reading ‘Stay where I can find you, call me when you wake up’. For the majority of the next day Nikolay receives no word from Arkady, despite calling him an extensive amount of times. He decides the best thing to do is to go to his house and see what’s up. While Arkady may be hung over, things don’t seem to be going well for him. He arrives at Arkady’s house only to find Arkady and half of his stuff missing. He quickly glances around the house. He desperately calls Arkady only to receive no response from Arkady. He then suddenly gets a phone call from Arkady telling him that he did it and that he left town after which Arkady hangs up without waiting for a response. Now Nikolay is even more worried, his brother did something out of the blue that made him leave town, he also might have a concussion from the night before. If he does have a concussion, it has left him with a highly impaired judgement allowing him to do something awfully stupid. There’s a scratched out note on Arkady’s desk, something about him going to Vegas to meet up with some people. Apparently Arkady didn’t bother to get rid of it, but it is obvious that it was for Nikolay. Nikolay gets on the phone with his wife.

“Hey sweetie, listen, something is up with Arkady, he ditched town and is headed towards Vegas, I’m gonna go find him. Do you mind heading up to my dad’s house, tell him what happened, I’ll fill him in with the rest of the details later, he should help you out with the kids. I’ll quickly stop by the house to get some of my stuff... No, I don’t know how long it will take, that’s why I’m having you go to my dad’s”

Nikolay quickly hangs up afterwards and he leaves the house. He arrives at his house with his wife and kids already gone and many of their things have been taken with them. As he is packing up his things, he gets a call from his dad, he puts him on speaker.

“Hey dad.” Nikolay says

“What the hell is going on?” Joseph says

“Arkady got in a fight with a college guy last night, and now he’s missing.” Nikolay says.

“Ya I know that, why though?” Joseph continues questioning him

“Ok, remember when I was I came with Natasha to pick up the kids?”

“Ya, what about it?”

“Well that day when I was in the hospital, a nurse who was taking me to her told me that Arkady better finish the job. Then last night he was talking about some college junkie that he was told to take care of. I think it has something to do with the money he lost to gambling.” Nikolay says as he stuffs some of his shirts and his shaving equipment into his backpack.

“Oh shit. Alright, I gotta tell you something, is there anybody around?” Joseph in a quieter tone as you hear him walk somewhere.

“No, I’m at my house, there’s nobody here.”

“Alright, so a while back when after Arkady lost \$97k to gambling, he got about \$150k from the Russian mob when his the bank and I wouldn’t give him any. I told him not to do it, but he did.”

“Ok, but what’s that got to do with this?” Nikolay asks him with a slightly confused tone.

“Don’t you know you idiot, the mob functions on a favor basis. They wanted him to repay the favor. How? By killing that junkie, that’s why he was talking about him last night.”

“Dad, ok, how do you know this?”

“I never wanted to tell you about this, but I guess I have to now. I was in the mob myself when I was younger, that’s how I got you two guys. When I was in the mob, I used to talk a lot to your mom, may she rest in peace, who was a known associate. We used to do a lot of business together as she would help me smuggle arms and drugs to and from St. Petersburg.”

“That’s all great and all but it doesn’t help me get any closer to Arkady. You think you can help me with that?” Nikolay asks begingly.

“If anything is the same since I left then yes.” Joseph answers

“Oh thank God!” Nikolay sighs with relief.

“First thing is first, stop by my house, I need to give you some things and talk to you in person though.” Joseph says.

“Thanks Dad, I really appreciate this.” Nikolay says.

“Remember though, I’m not doing this for you, I’m doing this for Arkady, I never told you about my past because I didn’t want to end up in a situation like this. Now hurry up and get here.” Joseph says before hanging up.

“Well, at least that solves some problems. I’ll probably need some food too, just in case.” Nikolay says to himself. He packs himself some sandwiches and coffee. You always need coffee. Nikolay throws his stuff into the trunk and jumps into the car. Once he is on the freeway he speeds down it going at least 95mph. The police being the least of his worries right now. As he arrives at his fathers, he doesn’t even bother parking his car as he leaves it in the driveway as it is. He storms into the house.

“Dad? Where are you?” He yells.

“Jesus, Nikolay, calm down, the kids are asleep. Your dad told me everything, come upstairs with us.” His wife tells him as she greets him at the front door. As Nikolay walks in, he sees his dad sitting on the bed looking at a map next to which are sitting a couple of weapons. Nikolay looks at the map, it is one of Vegas with far too many streets on it.

“Hey dad, what’s with the map? Doesn’t look a normal one too me.” Nikolay says.

“That’s because it isn’t this one has every single street in the entire city labeled along with all the mobs safehouses.” Joseph says

“Where’d you get it?” Nikolay asks, looking puzzled, his dad looks up at him

“You’re kidding me right? Come on Nikolay, now is not the time to be stupid.” His dad replies.

“Sorry, bad question.” Nikolay says as he comes closer.

“Now, the head of the mob is named Nathan, he will most likely meet Arkady in the main safehouse where he will assert Arkadys job, and see if they favor is repaid. It is located here.”

Joseph points to a holding area in the western part of Vegas near a large shipping area where post and freight is delivered to be later sent out throughout the city.

“Here, take these guns. I know you know how to properly use them. You know that I do not support the use of violence, especially for someone like you. But these may be needed. Call me if you need anything.” Joseph continues.

“Thanks dad, I’ll try to not use them.” Nikolay says as he packs everything up and starts leaving.

“Hey dad, by the way, can I take the map with me?” Nikolay asks as he is about to leave.

“Yes, of course, you need it more than I do. I’ll also call up some friends there, they’ll be able to help you. They have connections with the mob so they’ll know if the meeting went down” Joseph replies, as he folds up the map and gives it to Nikolay who carefully puts it in his backpack. The drive to Las Vegas is brutal for Nikolay, it takes him nearly 10 hours to get there as the traffic in some parts is horrible. Halfway thru, he stops to fill up on gas.

“Damn, I should’ve filled up at home.” He says to himself, pissed off that he is losing time. As he is going inside to get some Monster Energy, he gets a call from his dad.

“Hey dad, what’s up? Any news?” He asks in a rather quick and demanding tone.

“Yes, I have news. First thing though, you need to calm down. Remember that class on Buddhism that you took at UC Davis?” Joseph asks him in a reassuring tone.

“Ya dad, what about it?” Nikolay says, rather perplexed that his dad is bringing up something rather unrelated.

“Use those techniques you learned there to calm yourself, I know how stressed you are right now. It is not best for you to go in being pissed off, frustrated and anxious. That is how you get yourself killed instead of walking out safe and sound.” Joseph replies to Nikolay.

“Dad now is not the best place.” Nikolay replies as his dad cuts him off.

“Doesn’t matter, do it, just because people think you’re being weird doesn’t mean you should stop doing what you’re doing. Stay on the line with me though.” He replies.

“Ok dad, whatever you say. Just let me get some food first.” Nikolay says as he pays for the Monster and some chips he got. He goes inside his car and sits down, he puts his dad on speaker and starts to meditate, after a few minutes he picks up the phone again.

“Ok, I’m done, now, what’s the news?” Nikolay asks with a calmer and more relaxed tone.

“Good, so I got a call from one of the guys, you remember Kirill, the family friend?”

Joseph asks him.

“Oh ya, uncle Kirill!” Nikolay replies as he remembers the fun he had with him when he was younger.

“So, he said the meet hasn’t gone down yet. He wants to get together with you to help. He used to be part of the mob like me, he left but he is still in good relations with them. He wants to do the right thing and fix the mess that your brother made.” Joseph replies.

“Cool, did he say where to meet him? Or should I just call him instead?” Nikolay asks as he drives away from the gas station.

“Stop somewhere and pick up a burner phone. You’ll need it. Call me with the burner once you get it, I’ll give you Kirills number, he is gonna be using one too.” Joseph tells him.

“Great, I’ll call you once I get it.” Nikolay says, he makes a quick stop at Walmart and gets a burner with 180 minutes on it. He calls his dad and get’s the contact info for Kirill.

“Hey uncle Kirill, it’s Nikolay” Nikolay says as Kirill picks up the phone.

“Hey bud, how are you?” Kirill asks him.

“Uh, worried, anxious, angry.” He replies

“Ok, how far along are you?” Kirill asks him.

“Not that far, I have maybe an hour or two to go, I’m about 85-90 miles out.”

“Ok, so they scheduled the meet up for tomorrow morning. It’s getting late, check into the Travelodge Las Vegas, I’ll meet you there at 10:30pm to help work things out.” Joseph says.

“Will do, thanks.” Nikolay replies. He checks the time, it is rather late, already 8pm.

Nikolay pulls up to the motel that Kirill told him to go to. He checks into room 21. The room is rather run down, the white paint on the ceiling is rather old and stained, the wallpapers are faded, they seem to have Japanese blossom trees drawn on them. He plops his stuff down on the bed and locks the door and closes the curtains. He checks his watch, 9:27pm. He takes out his bruner and calls Kirill.

“Room 21, knock two times, wait two seconds and then knock three times more.”

Nikolay says before hanging up. He begins unpacking his things. He takes the folded up map his dad gave him along with the guns and the bit of ammo his dad had left for them and puts it all on the nightstand. As Nikolay is unpacking his clothes, he realizes that he forgot to get some sort of face mask. He may need it. Deciding to take a quick nap, he lays down on the bed and sets his alarm for 10:20pm. After getting some sleep Nikolay doesn’t feel that refreshed, still some sleep is better than no sleep, he doesn’t know for how long he is going to stay up with Kirill. As he walking around and stretching, he hears two knocks on the door, followed by three more two seconds later. He opens the door to see a familiar face standing in front of him.

“Were you followed?” Nikolay asks

“Oh stop being so paranoid, now give me a hug” Kirill says as he walks in and closes the door behind him.

“It’s definitely nice to see a familiar face here.” Nikolay says as he hugs Kirill.

“Ok, so, where are we on this situation?” Nikolay continues as he plops down on the bed.

“First things first: Did you use a credit card when you checked in here?” Kirill asks.

“No, I paid cash for everything, including for all the food and gas.” Nikolay replies proudly

“Good thinking, don’t want to be pinned to this location if anything goes south. Either way, we need to figure out what to do and how to get Arkady out of this, especially if things go south. Nikolay and Arkady talk for a good two and a half hours after which they have finally come up with a plan. They have to get up early at 6am though to be able to carry out their plan. As his alarm clock rings, Nikolay jumps out of bed and slams it off. He starts to quickly get dressed as Kirill is only climbing out of bed.

“Chill out there, speedo torpedo.” Kirill says as he slowly climbs out of bed. He opens the window and takes out a pack of cigarettes from his jeans. He takes one and offers one to Nikolay who accepts. They both smoke out the window for a bit.

“I can’t understand why I even started doing this. It’s so horrible and disgusting!” Nikolay exclaims.

“Ya, I have to agree. At first it took the stress of for me. Now I have to smoke just to feel normal.” Kirill replies.

“Either way, we have to be at the safehouse in 30 mins. Let’s quickly pack up the stuff and go. I don’t want to be late for the stakeout.” Nikolay says.

“Ya, let’s go. By the way, you’re going to quit, right? I don’t want you ending up like me. You’ve gone thirty years without smoking, don’t start now.” Kirill says.

“Of course I will.” Nikolay says as he packs the guns and granola bars into his backpack. As they leave the motel to get into Nikolays car, Kirill stops him.

“Hold on.” He says as he pulls out a pair of license plates.

“I gotta switch yours out with these, that way, they can’t pin this car as to being yours.” Kirill continues as he starts swapping the license plates.

“If the cops run the plates, who will they pin the car to?” Nikolay asks.

“Either some random person somewhere or no one. These are license plates whose numbers weren’t in the database when I got them, if they are now, they probably belong to someone in some random place in the US.” Kirill says.

“Wow, and I thought you stopped doing illegal things.” Nikolay says

“I try, but old habits die hard.” Kirill replies with a smirk.

They arrive at the safehouse, park a couple of blocks away and hike up to a small hill nearby where they lay down in the grass and pull out some binoculars.

“Now we wait for someone to show up.” Kirill says as he checks his watch. It’s 6:33am. After two hours of waiting, they see a car pull up. It’s Arkady.

“That motherf..” Nikolay says as Kirill cuts him off.

“Shut up and don’t move. We’re not going anywhere yet. We have to wait for Nathan to come.” Kirill says as he puts his hand on the mouth of Nikolay who calms down. After a half hour of watching Arkady stand outside the safehouse, they see a black Mercedes pull up. The driver gets out and opens the rear passenger door, to a man who Nikolay presumes to be Nathan. He isn’t wrong. Nikolay sees the two shaking hands, then they go inside.

“Ok. now we move. They’ll have armed guards outside the safehouse and we’ll have to go in with guns. So let me do the talking and if I say something that you find new, false, or surprising, then just act normal and go along with it.” Kirill says

“Will do.” Nikolay says as they get up and start walking.

“Oh, and put a pistol behind your shirt, under your pants. That way you won’t have to fumble around your backpack looking for it.” Kirill says as he does what he said to himself. Nikolay follows. They get down the hill and start approaching the safehouse.

“Well well well, look who it is. If it isn’t the old man himself.” Says the first guard.

“Cut the bullcrap, I’m here to talk to Nathan.” Kirill says in a rather serious and threatening tone.

“What makes you think he’s here? And who’s this?” Asks the second guard.

“Really? You’re asking me? Your former boss.” Kirill says with a sigh.

“Fine, but he can’t go in, and we’ll have to check you.” Says the first guard.

“Nope, he’s with me, I have a proposition for Nathan. You’re not checking us because the things I have are for Nathan's eyes only. I know you guys don’t have the balls to challenge me, even Nathan doesn’t” Kirill continues. The guards hesitate, look at each other then let them in. The two walk in to see Nathan and Arkady sitting at a table, drinking vodka and talking. Nathan sees the two walk in. He’s in complete shock.

“Arkady, Nathan. This is Nikolay, I’m sure you two know about him.” Kirill says, acknowledging the two.

“Who the fuck let you two in?” Nathan asks.

“You really think those two wouldn’t let me in? You’ve gotten sloppy with your security Nathan, I’m rather disappointed. I expected better from my successor.” Kirill says.

“Uh, Nathan, what’s he talking about?” Arkady asks.

“Shut up.” Nathan says, Arkady and Nikolay flash him a look of anger. Nikolay raises his hand which gets slapped down by Kirill.

“I’m the previous boss. Nathan is merely my successor who back stabbed his way back into power after I left.” Kirill explains. Arkady looks at Nathan and Kirill with shock.

“Wow.” Arkady says.

“You’re coming with us. I’m not going to watch you become this little skanks lap dog.”

Kirill says.

“That’s not an option. What’s with this kid here?” Nathan says.

“That’s my nephew, he’s also Arkady’s brother.” Kirill says.

“That’s rather unfortunate. Because now, I’ll have to kill you both.” Nathan says.

“What?” Nikolay exclaims.

“You heard me, I can’t have a random ass nephew and some old fool get in my way now, can I?” Nathan continues as he gets up from the table. Arkady also gets up, but he walks towards Kirill and Nikolay and turns around to face Nathan.

“I can’t let you do that.” Arkady says. “While the offer you made me is rather nice, I can’t accept it if that means losing the only family I have left.”

“Well, that’s rather unfortunate.” Nathan says. Out of nowhere, he pulls out a gun and shoots Kirill who falls down on the floor dead. Nikolay and Arkady look at him and then at each other..

“RUN!” Nikolay yells as he grabs Arkady and they run out the door. They start sprinting towards the hill but Arkady goes the wrong way.

“This way!! Follow me!” Nikolay yells to Arkady who quickly turns and runs towards Nikolay, dodging more than two bullets from the guards and Nathan. They get to the car and drive away as fast as possible, only slowing down once Nikolay is assured they aren’t being followed.

“What the flipping hell was that?” Arkady yells.

“Well, this is what you get when you fuck your family over.” Nikolay says in response. Arkady has no response. They’re both devastated from this. They go to the motel that Nikolay staying in.

“Alright, now. I don’t know about you, but I’m up for a little fucking vengeance.” Nikolay says. Arkady just nods as he plops down on a chair.

“Look at the map, this is where Kirill said Nathan might go next with afterwards. It’s another safehouse in a far more rural area. It’s our best shot at finding him, and most importantly, my best shot of forgiving you and getting back at what Nathan did to our uncle back there.” Nikolay says.

“Ok, so what now then? Do we head out right now or what?” Arkady asks.

“Obviously. We’re gonna need to quickly eat something. I have a couple of granola bars and two Monsters in my backpack. Luckily Kirill only had one of the three pistols on him. So you’ll get one. We’re gonna have to go in light so we’ll also get a trench knife to go along with it, especially considering that the safehouse will be rather small.” Nikolay finishes off.

“Ok, give me the stuff, I’ll eat on the way there. Let’s go.” They head out and make their way to the safehouse in silence. They get within two blocks of it and park the car and get out. They start making their way down there. Nikolay is walking down the gloomy sidewalk, his pistol in one hand, trench knife in the other. He regrets having to do this, but he has to, even if that means putting his own life at risk again. Luckily he isn’t doing it alone. He knocks on the door of the house, a man in a suit opens it, bang, one down. He and Arkday split up and start clearing the house. They finish up clearing the house. He then hears someone else’s gun fire and a rather awkward thud on the floor followed by a yelp. He rushes to the top of the stairs only to see Arkady helping his uncle get back up who is clutching his chest. Nikolay is in shock. How could his uncle be alive? He was shot dead by Nathan. He then looks down on the floor to see Nathan's body, all bloody with a couple of holes in it.

“How could you be alive?” Nikolay asks Kirill

“Be glad I am. The shot I received wasn’t fatal since he missed my heart by a mile. In addition, Nathan buys crap ammo from the Chinese, the bullet wasn’t strong enough and stopped before it could do serious damage.” Kirill says. Nikolay releases a sigh of relief.

“Ok let's get you to a hospital, we can say that you were mugged by someone, ok?” Nikolay says.

“Sounds good.” Kirill replies. They drive to the hospital where Kirill gets treated. After a gruelling week, Nikolay gets his first night of good sleep.