

28 November, 2010

Just after midnight, nearly two hours later, Dmitri was standing outside the bar with a hand rolled cigarette in his fingers. Exhaling the smoke pulled out of the blend of burning herbs and various leaves, some more legal than others, he watched the scene that had come to be. The street was blocked off by a series of silver and blue cruisers, red and blue light spinning in flashes as flakes continued to fall and fade before they could find any semblance of rest. A pair of converted camper vans painted white and red were in the center of the scene, parked in front of the bar's entry.

Men in thick winter coats and badges were walking around with notepads, trying to get an accurate detailing of what had happened inside the bar. The recounting from the witnesses was hardly reliable, and that had a lot to do with the mixed citizenship and highly intoxicated nature of the crowd, but there were several undeniable statements. The Marines had no idea what they had gotten themselves in to. Two concussions, four dislocated shoulders, three dislocated knees, a broken arm, six broken noses, two broken ears, five broken hands, more cracked ribs, scrapes, and bruises than the paramedics could count.

And ten shattered egos.

Dmitri's reading glasses were hanging from the collar of his t-shirt while he stood there, watching the understanding of the night. A slight twitch in his cheek was used to test the soreness of the black eye that he had received, lifting his right hand up to gently touch at the dark blue spot along the eye socket. With a roll of his shoulders, he shrugged it off, took another hit from the roll-up, and dropped his hand to his side again.

When the sergeant arrived, he looked over the various reports that had been gathered. Nobody could be certain who had started the fight, but everybody was certain that Dmitri had finished it. There was no way around the amount of paperwork that this was going to cause, but the sergeant would be damned if he was going to be stuck in an office all week filling out action reports. The Russian's ID had identified him as a private security official for the massive corporation that called Moscow their home. Lawyers for the company were real bloodsuckers, and he wanted nothing to do with them. If Dmitri was put in lockup, the man would have release papers by morning. Sending the young center of the trouble on his way, the sergeant just shook his head and returned to wrapping up the damage report and getting these men to the hospital.

The walk back to the head office was a close one, so he decided to take a detour. Sneakers shuffled through the snow laden sidewalks as his eyes stared forward, occasionally wincing at the burn beneath his chest on the right side. Letting out the smoke with a soft cough, he flicked the ash to a pile of flakes that had found their home, only to be melted away by the destructive nature of his refuse. Taking a final drag, burning it down to the smallest remnants he could keep a grip on without burning his hand, he quickly smashed it up under his fingers, putting it out and causing it to crumble and drift away in the wind.

He parted his lips just enough to push the smoke out in a long, slow stream in front of him, watching it raise up constantly until he couldn't discern the smoke from the cold air trapped within his lungs. Feeling that new lung working overtime, he curled his face into a despondent grimace, drawing a slow breath in through his nose as he continued his night's walk through the quiet streets of Moscow. Each block revealed footsteps of a path taken by someone trying to hurry through the cold, to find the warmth waiting for them at home. The idea of it, of having a reason to be home, he understood that. It was what had brought him to Moscow in the first place.

Turning yet another corner as the wind whipped down the empty streets, he watched the flurry of snow starting to build. No matter which direction he turned, the white continued to grow. Soon the sidewalks would be covered, wiping out his trail, and the trails of the others that remained awake in the sleeping city, covering the tracks of tires along the roads, building up banks against fixtures and stairs.

It had been an hour since he had left *Molotki*, and if he did not head back to headquarters for his bike soon, it would be a challenging ride back to the house. Realizing that aside from a bed there was nothing waiting for him there, he found it difficult to call it home. The sound echoed off of the buildings around him, and as it built he found himself looking for the source. It took him a moment to realize that it was him. Laughing at the disparaging thought that where his things were was not—nor had it ever really been—what he thought of as home. His things, the house, they were just that.

They were not what made a home.

The cold night air was growing colder as he doubled back, but he paid it little attention past the difficulty it was giving his new lung. A soft wince on occasion as he took a long deep breath, he looked up at the building he had walked several miles away from. Ever present, and even as he moved away from it the looming building had been a monolith overshadowing everything within his reach. The jutting black tower looked to be a monument to the practices of his employers, but he gave that little thought as he inched closer through the building snow storm.

The final few blocks between him and the corporate headquarters was a deathly quiet one. He had gone past the bar, seeing the scene completely dispersed, the neon sign overwhelmed by snowflakes that refused to be melted away now that its power had been turned off. A pure sheet of white lay where the ambulances and police cruisers had been wiped the evening clean, as if nothing had happened to begin with.

Pausing for a while, staring down at the gate between him and his bike, he let out a soft sigh, starting down the snow embanked ramp towards the scanner on the left side as he fished out the security badge, waving it in front of the receiver before the speaker sparked to life through the snowy cover.

“Welcome Dmitri Kharkov, please have a pleasant day.”

“Dah, fake lift box lady voice. Did have pleasant evening.”