

## Midnights Countdown

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Blood trickling down his forehead was the last thing Nuka Vietch remembered. Sirens from the ambulance slowly grew louder as he realized he was trapped in his sister's upside down car. Shattered windshield glass pierced his skin, causing him to let out a strained groan that indicated he was in pain. Viktoriya was in the driver's seat, unconscious from the crash.

Nuka hated New Year's Eve: the partying, the guests, the staying up late to watch the ball drop at midnight. He believed that the only thing he could rely on was the food. Food couldn't get drunk, or sit and talk about insignificant topics. Nuka curled up in the center of the couch as he watched his family members absorbing alcohol faster than a sponge could soak up water. Nuka was concerned about his older sister, Viktoriya. She was his ride home. From what he knew, she should have stopped drinking around an hour and a half ago, yet he watched her chug a beer. "It's one beer, Nuka." Viktoriya dismissed his concern, despite the fact she was on the brink of becoming blackout drunk. He couldn't believe that she ignored her promise of only having a beer or two.

Around 11:20 PM, Viktoriya was finally ready to leave. She decided not to stay past 12:00 AM. Nuka had been aware that his sister seemed too drunk to be driving. "Maybe we should stay the night, you could crash on the couch or something.." Nuka spoke, his voice gentle as he heard the snow crunch beneath his feet, walking out to her car. Viktoriya laughed at him. "And risk getting my face drawn on while I'm asleep, you're funny, Nuka!" She giggled, her face flushed. "It's hot out here!" She exclaimed, fanning her face with her hand as she swayed

slightly. “It’s winter. It’s probably the alcohol making you feel warmer, Vik,” Nuka sighed. He only wanted to go home.

Nuka hesitantly got into the car once Viktoriya had successfully bribed him into letting her drive. Nuka knew letting his sister drive was irresponsible, he had a gut feeling he shouldn’t have let her. His sister, on the other hand, started the car and blasted her favorite song on the radio. Twenty minutes into the drive home, Nuka noticed his sister swerving side to side on the road as she drove. Viktoriya sped up slightly and turned a sharp corner, not realizing she had gone too fast. The car tires screeched as they gave out, struggling to stay on the tar. Nuka felt the car fly into the air and flip over, rolling onto the grass next to the road. Nuka winced and yelped in pain, his eyes widening when he realized the car was about to slam into a tree on his side of the car.

Nuka’s memory was foggy. He remembered the crash, seeing his sister panic as he was placed on a stretcher. He didn’t know Viktoriya wasn’t harmed as badly as he was. By that point, though, Nuka had gone unconscious. Viktoriya got lucky, only having a few cuts from the glass and a broken arm. Nuka had broken both of his ribs, the injury on his head caused him to lose a lot of blood in the time period spent waiting for the cops and EMTs getting to the scene.

Viktoriya blinked awake a few hours later to her mother anxiously waiting next to her bed, her eyes filled with tears. Her mother looked at Viktoriya, cupping her cheek. “Vikky, baby, can you hear me?” She spoke, her voice trembling. Viktoriya nodded, slowly sitting up. “I can, Mom.” She immediately noticed something off about how her mother acted. Rose sobbed and held Viktoriya’s hand, squeezing it tightly. She was hesitant to reveal the news to Viktoriya. “Your brother, Nuka... He did not survive the crash,” She followed her words with a broken sob. “They said he passed away at 12:00 AM.” Rose shook her head and scoffed. “Why did you have

to drive home, Viktoriya? You could have stayed for the countdown, I—” Viktoriya’s eyes welled up with tears as she listened to her mother. “If you stayed for the night, your brother would still be alive. You didn’t have to drive drunk, Viktoriya. What convinced you to do it?” Rose spoke, her voice trembling. Viktoriya couldn’t believe what her mother said to her, shaking her head in denial. She knew her mother was right, she should have listened to her brother. She should have stayed the night and now her brother was gone, and it was her fault. Viktoriya bursted into tears the second she realized she could have prevented everything that happened that night if she had stayed for the midnight countdown.