

Nadia's Dream

Nadia brushed her long blond hair then gathered it into a ponytail. It was her last day of school in L'viv, Ukraine. She wound a rubber band around her hair, and let out a sigh. She'd been looking forward to this day since she'd heard her family would be emigrating. Then why didn't she feel happier? After snapping a clip over the rubber band, she grabbed her backpack and headed to the kitchen.

The minute she stepped into the living room, she toppled a stack of empty boxes, which blocked her path. She sighed and piled them on a table nearby. There were two to three empty boxes on almost every surface. She could pack one or two before she left for school. No, she'd get caught up doing that and be late. The day would be hard enough with the nasty girls at school. They probably had their tongues sharpened. It would be their last chance to be mean to her. Two days earlier, they'd were huddled together, looking up at her every so often. What had they cooked up?

Nadia trudged to the kitchen to make breakfast. Her mother had left a couple hours ago. For years, her parent had run a small bakery a couple blocks from their apartment. They took turns getting up at 3 o'clock in the morning to start bread rising, mixing up batches of other baked items, and heating up the ovens. When her dad went in early, her mom made breakfast. With her dad staying behind in Ukraine and her mom once again working at a bakery, she'd be on breakfast duty every day.

She dropped her backpack on a kitchen chair, and sliced a few pieces of bread from a loaf and slipped them in the toaster. She yawned as she filled a pan with water for hot tea and turned the burner on high. The toast popped up and she spread peanut butter on each piece, cut and loaded two more slices. It sure felt cold, even with the heat on full blast. Nadia held her hands over the toaster and breathed in the aroma of the toast. The water started to boil and Nadia moved her hands above the pan, then rubbed them together.

Nadia poured the hot water into three mugs, bobbed tea bags into two of the cups and a scoop of powdered chocolate into a third. If they didn't have hot chocolate mixes in the U.S., her brother Davyd would not be happy. He got pretty grumpy whenever they ran out of cocoa powder. She sipped her tea.

Would it be so cold in Chicago? There was a big lake to the east of the city and in every picture, it was frozen. They had plenty of snow, too. One article she read said the snow often reached as high as a mountain and many of the people made a living shoveling it and driving trucks to dump loads of snow into Lake Michigan.

Too bad they didn't have any mountains to hold the snow and provide slopes for skiing. America sounded like a very flat country, except for a long chain of tall hills in the eastern part of the country, and the Rocky Mountains.

The name Rocky Mountains sounded kind of funny when Nadia found out what Rocky and Mountains meant. Weren't all mountains rocky? It would be like calling a large body of water the Wet Sea, or a barren wilderness the Sandy Desert. Well, better not make fun of her new home or they would get mad at her, maybe not let her stay.

Nadia took another sip of tea then moved the cups to the table. She had just set the third cup on the table when the latest toast shot up in the toaster. She spread those with peanut butter too, and poured a glass of milk for her brother Davyd.

"Davyd, Papa, breakfast is ready." Both of them answered her that they were coming.

She sat at her place, and rapidly dunked and pulled up on her tea bag. The steam rose and she inhaled it. Pulling a plate onto her placemat, she studied the maroon design on their dishes. They were so pretty. But they wouldn't be bringing them to America. They'd also be leaving their furniture, pictures, silverware, and most of their clothing. Her parents brought her home to this apartment right after she was born. It was the only home she'd ever known. But her parents decided to sell their things or give them away so her dad could move after he got out of the service, well, if he became a soldier. If the war ended, even if Ukraine won, her father would join them in Chicago. They had given up every hope of a real future in Ukraine. Meanwhile, her dad would move in with his parents.

"Good morning sunshine," her father sang out as he entered the kitchen. He bent over and kissed the top of her head then grabbed his cup of tea. He smiled at her as he added a little cream and sugar. She was going to say "Good morning, Papa," but a lump in her throat blocked any words from coming out. How had that formed so quickly? Well, she knew why but had worked hard to avoid thinking about it. This breakfast could be the last time for a long time that he had breakfast with them.

"Papa, who will get all our dishes?" she asked, then grabbed a piece of toast.

"The same family from church that bought our furniture. They paid us for all of it, except the clothing. Your mother can use that money to buy those things in America."

"Can be buy those things in America?" Davyd asked as he entered the room and dropped his backpack next to his chair.

"Of course! They have all such things and more," their father answered. "I'm sure you want to help us shop for them and decorate our new home." He smiled after he said that.

"No thanks, I will be a good son and watch sports on our new big screen television." He sipped his hot chocolate and grabbed a piece of toast. "I will write you an email every day and tell you about all the teams there. This can be my homework because there are many teams to keep track of in United States. There are football players called bears in Chicago, rams in Los Angeles of California, lions in Detroit city in Michigan, seahawks in Seattle and some kind of

animal called packers in a green colored bay in Wisconsin. I will need a big board to keep track of them all.”

“Well mister animal and football watcher, let us say grace and eat before everything gets cold.”

Nadia smiled as she said grace. Her brother had changed his mind about going to America when he learned how many sports teams were there. There weren't as many soccer teams but he would probably grow to like football. Nadia took a sip of tea then bit off a piece of toast. Football, that was another one of those funny words. How did they make a ball shaped like a foot? Or was it a ball to be kicked rather than thrown or hit with a stick?

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History class that morning seemed to last for three hours. Her two least-favorite girls in the whole school sat in front of her. They kept leaning toward each other to whisper whenever the teacher had her back to the class. A few times one of the girls looked over her shoulder at Nadia. They really knew how to be annoying and mean.

In band, the girls sat to her right. Both of them played the clarinet. Actually, they mostly held a clarinet.

When the director went to get another piece of music, one of the girls leaned back in her chair and said very loudly “Wasn't it interesting what the teacher said in history class about all the cowards leaving the country in the nineteenth century during that famine? Just like some people we know, leaving Ukraine this week to run away to Chicago, America. No matter that there is a war going on in our homeland. Not very patriotic. We don't need that kind of people in Ukraine.”

“I say bye-bye cowards, hope there is no war in Chicago.”

A couple other kids started laughing and the director had to tell them to be quiet as he passed around a new piece of music. Nadia pretended to take great interest in her flute while the girls threw out those mean words. When she looked up, she saw Sergiy looking at her and smiling. He was holding his trumpet upright with the bell resting on his right knee. He looked so confident.

After band, Nadia told him she was glad to leave the bullies behind.

“There are probably bullies in Chicago too.”

Nadia pulled her flute into sections and set it into the case. “Don't they bother you, Sergiy?”

“Sometimes, but I just hum a song in my mind when kids say stuff like that, or I make a mental list of everything I want to do when I get home from school. I hope we’ll be going to the same school.” He set his trumpet into the case, ran his hand over the bell, then smiled.

“Me too, but I’ve got a lot of English to learn before I can go to a regular school.”

“I’ll help you, Nadia. It’ll help me be even better at speaking English.”

“Good, I want you to get something good out of it too.” She snapped her flute case shut and headed for the door. “Have a good last day of school, Sergiy. See you at the airport.”

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“Our last meal in Ukraine,” Nadia reminded her mother as she stirred the large pot of borscht.

Her mother leaned over the beet and cabbage soup and sniffed. “That smells wonderful. You’ve got the spices just right. I’ve got the bread heating in the oven on low. Should be ready to serve in a few minutes.”

“What is everyone else bringing?”

“My sister is making a pork roast, my brother’s wife made a potato salad, the kind you like. Your dad’s sister bought a torte of some kind. Your grandparents are just bringing their love and, probably lots of tears.”

“All of us will be crying a lot. A very sad day.”

“God willing, we’ll return before too long.”

“But it costs a lot to fly all those kilometers.” Nadia added a little fresh, crushed garlic to the borscht, stirred it again then turned down the heat. “How did people move away all those years ago when there weren’t phones or Skype?” Nadia sat at the little kitchen table.

“It must have been even more heart-breaking to say good-bye.” Her mother turned away and opened the oven door. Had she seen tears in her mother’s eyes? Did she wonder if she’d ever see her parents again?

“Mama, will your parents be able to move to America soon?” Nadia asked as she folded the cloth napkins for the dining room table.

A moment of silence, then a sniff. She must be crying and trying to keep it from turning into sobbing. Better change the subject.

Her mother set the loaves of bread, all wrapped in foil, in a basket. Nothing compared to the smell of fresh bread and borscht.

“Let’s keep praying they will come.” Her mother wiped under her glasses as she turned to face Nadia. “And, of course, for the war to end and your father to join us soon.”

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Nadia and her family stood around their suitcases in the security area of the L’viv airport, hardly saying a thing. Sergiy and his family were just a few feet away and looked just as serious. Their last meal with all their relatives the night before had started out with lots of story-telling, passing plates and laughing. Her uncles teased her and Davyd right up until they had dessert. Then came a few sad stories. Her grandmothers both cried, then her mother and her aunts. The men all looked down, as if fascinated by their napkins or their hands.

Her father, grandparents, and uncles had all come to the airport but would have to leave when they got through security. Breaking away from her father after a long hug, Nadia started sobbing. Her mother put an arm around her and lead her to the belt where they placed their things to be scanned. Her parents hugged for a long time and her mother cried long after they left the area.

When they got to their gate and each found a seat, her mother let out a sigh and kissed Nadia’s forehead, then Davyd’s. She asked her mother when they would be able to get on the plane but her mother just shook her head and squeezed her hand.

Davyd opened his backpack and pulled out a piece of bread and cheese.

“Why did you put that in your bag?” his mother asked, her eyebrows raised.

“I heard they don’t feed us on the plane.”

Her mother laughed so hard Nadia couldn’t keep a straight face. “They will feed us,” her mom finally said. “You children really get some wild ideas. No, it’s when we get to Chicago that they don’t feed us.”

Davyd’s mouth dropped open. Their mother smiled at him and messed up his hair.

An announcement interrupted Davyd’s question about food in America. In a few minutes, they’d begin boarding for their flight. A chill ran up Nadia’s back. This was it; they were leaving their father, their home, their country, all they had ever known. She grabbed her mother’s hand and squeezed it. “I’m scared.”

“Me too, honey. Remember what I’ve been saying, Jesus is coming with us. Keep talking to Him just like I’ll be doing. We’ll be okay. He said ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ Even at 30,000 feet.”