

Nadia's Dream

Nadia brushed her long blond hair then gathered it into a ponytail. It was her last day of school in Kiev, 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 to the United States. Then why didn't she feel happier? After snapping a clip over the rubber band, she grabbed her backpack and headed to the kitchen. Maybe because there were still so many things they all had to do. There were nine or ten empty boxes on every possible surface. She could pack one or two before she left for school. No, she'd get caught up doing that and be late.

She 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 bakery, and heating up the ovens. When her dad went in early, her mom made breakfast. But when her mom went in, Nadia would make breakfast for her dad, her brother and herself.

She dropped her backpack on a kitchen chair, and sliced a few pieces of bread from a loaf by the toaster. Next, 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 for November, even with the heat on full blast. Nadia held her hands over the toaster and breathed in the aroma of the toast. With her parents working at another bakery in Chicago, that was one thing that wouldn't change. The water started to boil and Nadia moved her hands above the pan, then rubbed them together.

Would it be so cold in Chicago? That big lake to the east of the city supposedly made it colder than further inland. 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 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 finally abandoned her hand heating and poured the hot water into three cups. 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, heated up some sausages, 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, grabbed a tea bag and dunked it into her cup. The steam rose and she inhaled it. Pulling a plate onto her placemat, she studied the maroon design on their dishes were so pretty. But they wouldn't be bringing them to America. They'd also be leaving their furniture, pictures, silverware, most of their clothing, and car. Most of the things that were familiar to her from the time she first noticed anything until now. Her parents brought her home to this apartment right after she was born. It was the only home she'd ever known. Tears started to form in her eyes and she made herself think of something that got her angry so she wouldn't cry. That would be the two girls in her history class and band. She wouldn't miss Iryna or Larysa for a moment. She'd be perfectly happy if she'd never see them again.

"Good morning sunshine," her father sang out as he entered the kitchen. He grabbed a tea bag and sank it into his cup with hot water. He smiled at her as he added a little cream from the little ceramic cow on the table. Yeah, the ceramic cow for cream couldn't come with either. Who would get all their stuff?

"Papa, who will get all our things after we leave?" she asked, then grabbed a piece of toast.

"The family that is moving in here. They paid us for all of it, except the clothing. We can use that money to buy those things in America."

"What are we buying in America now?" Davyd asked as he entered the room and dropped his backpack next to his chair.

"Dishes, furniture, those kinds of things," 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 while you go shopping. When you get back, I'll report on all the games. 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 again."

Nadia smiled as she said grace. Her brother changed his mind about going to America when he learned how many sports teams were there. Not much soccer but he would probably grow to like football. 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?

#

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 the girls looked over their 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. They didn't make a whole lot of music. More whispering.

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 whenever it seems as though war is on the horizon? Just like some people we know, leaving Ukraine this week to run away to Chicago, America. 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. Maybe mean people didn't bother him.

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

"There are probably bullies in Chicago too."

"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 wish we were going to the same school."

"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. Then you can start going to my school sooner. There's safety in numbers they say."

"Yeah, and that's another reason for me to work at learning English."

#

"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. Perfect for our last meal here. 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 Chicken Kiev, 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 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 anyone be able to come visit us in America?” 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, on the cooling racks. Nothing compared to the smell of fresh bread and borscht.

“Let’s keep praying they will come.” Her mother wiped under each eye as she turned to face Nadia. “It would be the best gift I could ever imagine.”

#

Nadia and her family stood around their suitcases in the waiting area of gate #27 of the Kiev 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 grandparents had all come to the airport but had to leave when they got to security.

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

“Why did you put that in your bag?” his father asked, his eyebrows lifted.

“I heard they don’t feed us on the plane. It would weigh us down too much.”

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

Her mother shook her head. "Only the husbands go without food. More for the rest of us."

An announcement interrupted their teasing. 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 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 said, 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."