

Davyd's World turned upside down

"We've got ten more minutes until Sunday School starts, just enough time to race you downstairs, through the basement and back up here." Sergiy threw that challenge to ten-year-old Davyd, his arms crossed and tie loosened.

"But you're one year older than me, I get a five second head start," Davyd said as he looked around to see if his parents were around. Their little church in Ukraine wasn't the best place for a race but it was good enough. The coast was clear so he nodded to Sergiy and took off down the stairs. But then it got a little tricky sprinting through the basement. Someone had stacked empty boxes between tables, on the tables and on a counter top where they set out bakery on holidays.

Davyd heard Sergiy at the bottom of the stairs. Here was his chance to throw the race. He smiled as he knocked a few boxes off a nearby table to totally obstruct the path and dashed to the other side of the basement.

"What did you do, you sewer rat?" Sergiy called to him.

Davyd laughed so hard it made his climb up the stairs almost impossible. When he got to the entryway of the church, huffing and puffing, his sister stood, hands on hips, wearing her worst-ever scowl.

"What are doing Davyd? And what will Mom and Dad say about it?"

Davyd took a few seconds to catch his breath then told her "They'll say it is good to exercise. Makes big muscles."

"Davyd, you are the biggest sewer rat in all of Kiev. No, all of Ukraine," Sergiy half shouted when he got to the top of the stairs." He leaned against a wall and told Davyd's sister "Nadia, you had better get some big balls of cheese at the store this week to feed your brother the sewer rat, and maybe some rat poison too."

Nadia rolled her eyes. "Don't be late for Sunday School, either of you rodents."

Davyd imitated a rat by showing his teeth and making little biting movements. Sergiy did the same then broke into such a hard laughing spell he doubled over.

The boys headed to the room where they had Sunday School, making more rat biting movements, and almost running into Davyd's father and one of the men that sang in the choir. But Davyd's father said nothing. That was weird. Only something very serious could keep his father from correcting him.

"What's with your dad?" Sergiy asked.

"I don't know. Same thing happened a couple days ago. My dad was talking on his cell and he didn't say anything when I spilled a glass a milk on the table where Nadia was doing her

homework. She yelled so loud they could have heard her in Hungary, but my dad said nothing. Weird, really weird.”

“Hey, my dad too, just yesterday. I know my dad is worried about trouble from Russia. Maybe they think they’ll have to go back into the army.”

“I think both are dads are too old for the army.”

“Maybe not,” Sergiy said and shrugged his shoulders.

“I think my dad must stay and work at his bakery. An army marches on it’s stomach,” Davyd said and marched his way into his Sunday School room. Sergiy laughed and turned into another classroom.

The Sunday School teacher told the story of Joseph and his brothers meeting in Egypt after years of separation. But a short time later, Davyd thought what it would be like if his father went to war or if Russia invaded Ukraine. Their lives could be very bad for many reasons.

On the way back to their apartment, his dad didn’t say much and his mother didn’t even ask him about Sunday School. She hardly said anything. When Davyd asked his father if he could be forced to join the army if there was a war, his sister poked him in the arm and put a finger over her sealed lips. Davyd’s heart started pounding.

“What did you ask?” his father said when he stopped at a red traffic light.

“Oh nothing. Are we going to Grandma’s place for lunch today?”

“No, we have a meeting of sorts. Just lunch at home then me and your mother will go out.”

Davyd saw his parents exchange glances. His mother looked worried. Should he ask what the meeting was about? His sister would probably poke him in the arm again.

All that week there were more serious phone calls, a few more meetings and more serious looks between his parents. This was turning into a great mystery. He got so desperate to find out what could be happening, he even asked his sister.

“I don’t know, but it can’t be good. I saw Mom kneeling by her bed praying yesterday. I hope no one is sick.”

“Shouldn’t we ask them?”

“No, they’ll tell us eventually. You know how parents try to solve problems before they tell their kids about stuff. We should pray too.”

“How do we pray when we don’t know what is wrong?”

“Then just ask God to help Mom and Dad. And maybe pray too that Russia won’t bother Ukraine. You know how Russians boast. But God is over Russia.”

That Sunday, there were even more adults in the hallways of church after the service. Most of them were talking softly so Davyd couldn't hear what they were saying. They all looked so serious. After Bible Study and Sunday School, Davyd's father asked him to follow him to the church basement. Why would he want him to do that?

"Grab a couple of these boxes and carry them to our car?"

"What are the boxes for, Dad?"

"We'll talk at home."

Davyd lifted two boxes from the table and when he headed for the stairs, Sergiy rounded the corner.

"Do you know what the boxes are for?" Sergiy asked.

"No clue. Guess they'll tell us when we get home."

"If there's going to be a war, maybe we have to move to western Ukraine."

Davyd promised to call Sergiy as soon as he found out more from his parents. A chill went up his spine as he climbed the stairs. *Dear God, please don't let my dad go to war. We need him with us. And please keep the Russians at their homes and leaving us alone.*

Sergiy's sister, Daryna, was sitting on the steps of the church. The fall winds were strong and she didn't have a coat on. Davyd thought about dropping one of the boxes on her head but when he noticed she was shivering, he decided he'd better not.

"Don't let the wind carry you away, little girl."

"I'm not little!"

"But the wind is big and strong. It could even carry away a medium-sized girl."

Daryna crossed her arms and stuck out her chin.

Wow, if a nine-year-old girl was serious, something big was brewing.

After a silent ride home in the car, Davyd's family quietly walked up the three flights of stairs to their apartment, each of them carrying two boxes.

They stacked the boxes in their living room. Davyd's father sat on the couch next to Davyd's mother, then Davyd and his sister Nadia sat down, almost at the same instant. Davyd felt like his guts had turned into gelatin. His heart pounded and his mouth dried up in a moment.

"You both probably know something has been going on. We couldn't say anything for a little while," Davyd's father said then leaned forward. "Your mother and I have decided to move to America."

“Really?” Nadia asked, leaning forward too. “When are we leaving?”

“We don’t know right now. We have to try to get a Visa. You Uncle and Aunt in Chicago in the state called Illinois, have agreed to sponsor us. I’ll work in their bakery, and so will your mother. We need to start packing so we are ready. All of us have to learn English.”

“But we have been studying English in school for some years,” Nadia offered.

“Yes,” her mother answered, “but now we have to know it very well. We will study, study, study and try to speak only English at home. But at school, when you are with your friends, not a word about the move.”

“Can I tell Sergiy?” Davyd asked.

“Yes, but wait,” his father told him. “Sergiy and Darya are also going to move to America with their parents. But they haven’t told them yet. Sergiy’s father is an accountant so it may be hard for him to find work in Chicago.”

“They are going to Chicago too?”

“Yes, all of us are.”

“All of us?” Nadia asked.

“Yes, there’s four of us families from the church. All of us have agreed to move there, near the bakery where we’ll work. There is a Lutheran church near the bakery, so we will have church like we do here, but it’s in a big building that is just a church. It is almost as fancy as the Orthodox churches here. My uncle told me too about the stores, also in big buildings with lots of windows. We’ll all have to work hard but our future will be better in America.”

Davyd had his doubts about things being better. Kiev was the only city he’d ever lived in and they had everything they needed. They didn’t need to leave Ukraine. Big churches and big stores weren’t that big a deal. It wasn’t worth leaving Ukraine to have them. Davyd got up “To get something to drink,” he said, but really, he just wanted to be alone and think about everything. It might be a good thing for Nadia, but to Davyd, it seemed like the whole world had been turned upside down.

