

The Four Winds

"The East wind took Grandpapa."

I looked into Grandmama's eyes, creased with the wisdom of time. Like the trunk of an old tree, her wrinkles etched the warning "beware," to foolish youth. Blue sapphires like my daughter's. Timeless. I could picture her, a single mother in Belarus after her husband died in a Polish field. His body never recovered. Cold as the Kiewan Rus.

Grandmama removed a beautiful, tasseled shawl from her ancient trunk.

"My rushnyk," she whispered in reverence. "Given at my birth. Someday it will be yours. Crimson, see? The color of life. Each fold, every symbol is symmetry. Is a story."

She pointed to the shawl's corners, "North, South, West, East. The four corners of the earth. The four winds."

I studied the wavy lines, not comprehending their significance. "How can a round world have corners, Grandmama?"

"Corners are created, child, between two straight lines." She met her fingertips to show the geometry, "But they cannot stay there. Neither can the wind." Her hands dropped to her sides.

"It's hard to focus with John being incarcerated and innocent." My hand smoothed worry lines from my brow, "I don't understand anything. What do I tell little Daphne?" I swallowed hard to keep the tears inside my heart.

"Malyshka." She said my pet name fondly.

"I'm not a little girl anymore."

"No." Grandmama straightened her back, "You are ready." She gestured to the rushnyk patterns. "Since time began, even in the ancient world was the four winds." Her eyes brightened. "The South wind called Yug. He is jovial man, large." She mimicked a round stomach. "Who is always laughing, with strong drink in hand." She grasped her imaginary stein like a general." Her expression softened. "Is the good times, Malyshka. When you married, birthed your daughter. Yug is there to celebrate."

I smiled at the fairy tale.

"The North wind. K Severu." She quieted. Sadness crept into her countenance. "Is difficult. A queen of ice, seven feet tall, white like falling snow." Her eyes drifted to the ground. "Beautiful and silent, she creeps into life." With practiced strength she smiled. "Put on a *kot*, yes?"

I laughed despite myself.

"Zapad, the West wind. He is court jester. Bright, comical, making a fool." She curled her arms like an ape, acting out the strange figure. "What adventure follows Zapad, you never know. But his presence-" She nodded, "he treads with bells jingling from his crown." She laughed, shaking her head. "The unknown but wonderful of possibility."

I remembered when John and I traveled to the Colorado mountains. Walking seven hundred steps to Seven Falls and traversing the Garden of the Gods.

But with the memory came the sharp pain of reality. We weren't in Colorado. John was handcuffed at the police station, facing theft charges.

My hands were tied too.

"Thank you, Grandmama," I gave her an affectionate kiss as I turned to leave.

"Malyshka. You miss the end; you miss the dawn of understanding."

Tears threatened as I dropped into a curved Belarusian rocker.

Grandmama bent to remove a picture from her chest. A simple black and white A-frame cottage with wooden beams, more log cabin than I expected. "Our first home. You cannot see the windows, blue paint. Red window box here," she pointed with fondness. I raised four children in this house, including Marta."

Mama.

"A soldier knocked on the door. Grandpapa Eduard was gone. And that presence. It was the final wind."

"The East?"

She nodded slowly. "Veter Vostok. Hooded in black, so you don't know if he or she. But you know the chill in your blood. You don't know what Vostok will do or take or—" She choked back the emotion. Always controlled with strength and dignity. "Vostok is mystery and darkness. Unexpected and cruel. It takes and does not give back. Understand, Malyshka?"

"Death?"

"Not always, but sometimes yes." She sighed. "I say this with purpose." Her look pierced all my defenses. "You do not know which wind blows. K Severu's chill changes but a moment; Vostok changes life forever."

Hot tears ran down my face. She brushed them away.

"But whatever wind, it will change. Yug and Zapad will be your good friends again." She smiled. "Wait for the wind to change."

I nodded.

Downstairs, my daughter waited. Only five years old, she didn't understand.

"Momma? Where's Papa?" Her sapphire eyes looked up at me innocently.

"The East wind has him, Darling," I said calmly. "We'll see what happens."