

Matches
by
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There were five matches in all. Five sticks of light that reminded her of the past. She had been orphaned and looking for food, the matches the only source of income that she could think of. She had always been poor and in search of a home, her belly rumbling like the thunder from the storms that plagued the land. Snow was constantly seeping into the thin tatters of her cotton dress and torn apart boots, but she had no money to get them fixed. The matches were her last hope.

She swung her body over and over on the lamppost, yelling the same words she had day after day. “Matches! Anybody, matches?!” Her tongue was thick with the cold, but it did not matter. Only a few rubles and she could get some bread and a hot drink. A policeman, tall and sturdy, called out to the girl, voice rough like sandpaper from the cold.

“Get down from there! You may slip and hurt yourself!” He offered her a kind smile and went on his way, boots clicking on the slick ice. The girl clambered down from the light, boots muddied and cracked. The ice was pelting her skin, coating it in fine crystals. She could feel it in her tangled hair and eyelashes. When her breaths came out they puffed into the night air, and when she sucked in a breath through her nose, the airways closed. She was in the dregs of Russia and no one was going to help a poor girl out on the streets. Some people barely even had enough money for themselves, let alone a begging girl.

The matches were taunting her, their warmth stored within the heart of the igniting power. “Nyet,” she whispered to herself. She didn’t want to waste the matches for herself, spare the warmth and light. She was doing this for herself and Babushka. Her fingers trembled with cold, the tips numb with ice and snow. She held the matches in her hand tightly, away from anything that could spoil them.

“Matches!” Her voice was weak against the roaring winter wind, and her body didn’t help keep her steady. She was shaking from head to toe, body coated in the fine powder laid through the land. When she lifted her gaze high enough she could see the towering onion domes of the chapel, twisting their way up to the sky. Past the golden reflection staring at her she could see the pin point stars, one of them her Babushka staring down upon her. The inky blackness seemed to swallow her whole, and she backed away from the dark. She wanted light and sunshine to keep her from the shadows and things in the night.

The matches felt heavy in her hand, damp from her closed fist. They were so close, and yet, she didn’t want them to go away. She had kept them to earn the money for some food. Lights flickered inside houses, fireplaces lit by the power of logs keeping them alive and sparking. She could almost feel the warmth tickle her face, beckoning her closer. It was nagging at her, pushing and shoving at her conscience. With heavy regret the girl lit one of the matches against the side of a brick building. The alleyway she was in lit up in blues, whites, and reds. Her face was alight with the steady glow, and she didn’t want it to end. It felt like she was in a dream, and she didn’t want to wake up from it.

She was with Babushka, her round, soft frame covered in colorful clothing. Her face was wrinkled and soft like kneaded bread, and her eyes were the soft color of the winter sky. She had laugh lines in her skin, which was weathered from days of hard work. It was just her and Babushka against the world. The cold howled against the shutters, but the sturdy structure of the

house protected them. Babushka protected them. She was by the fireplace, warming her toes and fingers, wiggling them about.

“You’ll burn if you get any closer,” Babushka scolded from the kitchen. She was holding a wooden spoon, borshch dripping onto the floor. Her wide blue eyes held amusement, and her head was held high. She looked regal like a Fedorovna, the last family that had ruled. Her bun was a tight knot on top of her head, her cheeks rosy with a natural rouge. The pattern on top of her head was flowered and soft, and it fluttered when she walked.

“Anna,” Her voice was soft and quiet, but stern at times. Her native tongue was a sharp contrast to her voice, but she made the language sound beautiful. Babushka grabbed her and pulled her into a hug, warmth spreading from each of their bodies.

The match was burnt out, its soul extinguished. The cold was grabbing at her, and her belly was rumbling angrily. Her expression turned sour. Four more matches and no one to sell them to. The streets were empty, the footprints from early in the day drifting in the swift current of wind. Her brows furrowed, a struggle clear in her mind. There was no one, so it wouldn’t hurt to use another match. Babushka was waiting for her.

As the next match flickered yellow against her skin, she began to reminisce about the days of a holiday that she no longer got to celebrate.

Babushka was humming a tune that had no lyrics of its own. She was graceful in her movements, swaying around like the wind and snow colliding. “Anna,” she sing-songed, “Happy Birthday.” She took on a smile of her own, sitting in a chair at the kitchen table. “I made vatrushka.” Babushka produced a large plate with bread, and in its center was baked cottage cheese with sugar, jam, and condensed milk. She smelled the fruit paste and the scent stayed with her.

The match was burnt out, and she still had three more to keep to herself. She cuddled them to her chest, not wanting to let go. The hunger and cold weren’t as strong as they once were, and maybe, it was because the warmth had filled her belly. She smiled to herself, silently humming her own tune as she thought about Babushka.

“Hey you there!” The voice was faint over the cold covering her ears and the wind licking at her heels, but it was still there. She thought that she had struck another match, but when she counted, the last three were tucked into her palm, secure. She stood up on weak legs and strode over to the dark blob.

It was a boy her age, speaking heavily in their native tongue. She chuckled to herself and gave a small smile, for there was no one with the boy, and he was conversing with himself. He turned his attention to her, eyes wide and curious. His hair was black as midnight and his eyes were dark as two lumps of coal. His clothing was not much better than hers, but he had strong boots and a cloak to keep himself warm. “I saw the light; it made the snow glow like a furnace. It glowed like the stars.” He was sheepish.

He took her hand all of a sudden. “You come with me, and Mama and Papa will let you stay. You can stay with us until you get back on your feet.” His hand was worn and rough against hers from years of labor. He took the cloak off of his shoulders and placed it onto the girl’s. She was about to refuse when he said, “Da, to keep you warm while we walk.”

He placed it around her shoulders tenderly, keeping his hands firmly placed on her arms. They trudged through the snow like this, body heat from each other colliding. He was tall and muscular, maybe from days at a factory, maybe hours under the sun tending to livestock. His gaze kept flicking to hers, and soon, they were at a small cottage, candles a beacon from the

distance. Her toes were numb and her eyes were closing from the cold napping at her eyelids. He opened the little wooden door; when she walked in she had to duck.

The warmth enveloped her like Babushka's hugs, snug and cozy. She just wanted to stand there for a minute, feel the difference from the cold slashing at her legs and the warmth making her heart swell. The cloak was taken from her shoulders and a bowl of soup was thrust into her frozen hands. Her stiff, achy fingers were now warm and bendable.

"Eat up. You look too skinny." The small woman on the couch was stern, but her eyes were kind. They were like lumps of coal, the resemblance between mother and son. There were flames giving life in those eyes. Babushka used to try to fatten her up this way too. She slurped on the soup, belly filling and body warming. Soon, whatever grip this cold had on the girl diminished.

Soon her eyes were heavy and the soup was gone, having been devoured as quickly as she could allow. The snow had drained her of any energy, its angry tendrils wrapping their grip on her. Before she fell asleep she felt the matchsticks heavy in her hand, and watched the flickering candlelight dance to its own tune.

She and Babushka would dance around the parlor, music from the radio blaring, the station fuzzy from poor connection. The polkas were slow, and often danced in a manner that would suggest a waltz, but to her she was a spinning top, dizzily twirling over and over again until she dropped. Babushka's arms would waggle, the loose flesh soft. It had made her giggle then, how old Babushka had seemed.

There would be the tremble and shake of Babushka's laughter, coming deep from her belly and announcing itself in a joyous way through her vocal chords. They would be wearing colorful dresses with their aprons on, flour and egg obscuring the view of the hand-stitched floral print underneath. The candle light would be soft and inviting, the room cast in the shadows of their dancing forms. Candles would seem to be something which you could get with ease, with wax that would be remodeled in a way that gave form to shapes.

She awoke with a start, for a thin, long-fingered hand had placed itself on her arm. The boy had placed one finger to his lips, a silent request that she could follow easily. His tight packed curls were straying from atop the round shape of his head. Her own hair was a dark halo around her head, frizzy and unkempt.

"I wanted to trade names." The boy had a slight, mischievous smile that played on his lips, but she guessed that the permanent smirk was fixated on his face. She paused, her tongue rough and unused.

"How can I trust you?" The boy's rumble of laughter was quiet and reduced, but she was betting that it could easily conquer the howling of the wind, no matter how strong. He went back to the light smile, dark eyes sparkling.

"Because I am human." He put her hand on his chest, right where his beating heart was. "And so are you." She allowed the first smile she'd given in a while, a stubbornly miniscule tight-lipped smile, showing no teeth.

He grasped his hand in hers and felt the matches. He plucked one from her grasp, struck it against the wall, and watched the flame, a spark igniting the coal in his eyes. They were on fire now, alight and filled with different hues. A protest was against her sealed lips, but she couldn't help staying silent as he watched as the flame licked hungrily at his fingertips. "Lev."

"Anna." She smiled again.

10 Years Later

It was undeniably cold on the boat to America, the place for hope and a place where people like Anna and Lev could go to start fresh, start new. Their fingers were interlocked, steadfast

even through the crippling power of the cold. A thin shawl was wrapped around her shoulders and covered the mass of her dark hair. Lev's hair was ruffled and wet from the chilling rain, curls limp. His dark eyes stared out at the ocean, out where Russia once was, now not even a blip in the vast blue expanse.

His shirt was tight against the wind and salty air, and his shoes squished with the water that flowed onto the boat during one of the late evening storms. It reminded Anna of what it was like when she saw Lev for the first time, a shadow that popped out of the snow like a cartoon, looking chilled to the bone.

She held her ticket tighter than before, imagining it was one of the matches that she had kept for all of those years. It had said *New York* in big blocky letters, a stamp on one side, a date on the other. She was ready for a fresh start, ready to escape to a place where the people on the streets had told her was a ticket to all of her dreams.

She twisted the empty skin on her ring finger, where a ring should have been. When she and Lev got the money, they could both afford the rings that they had been waiting to give each other since they had eloped.

"Mamochka! Papa!" She turned to a child with pudgy fingers and rosy cheeks from the cold. Her tattered dress was oversized and worn down. There was a tight nest of curls on her head, and her eyes were as black as coal. She smiled a gap-toothed smile. Her almond shaped eyes crinkled, and her button nose wrinkled. "Are we there yet? Are we in America?"

Anna had shaken her head, laughter filling her. She ignored the question that her child had been asking for the last few days and countered with her own. "Evelina, where is your brother? Is he still playing hide and seek with you?" She giggled, her small voice almost taken by the wind. She nodded her head, curls bouncing, and walked off on small, stubby legs to find her big brother.

"Where could Misha be?" Lev's hand left hers, and he tapped his chin, where a slight stubble was growing. She would always love the sound their language made, bold and thick. They were already learning English, which had different rules and spellings than their language had. Their currency was also different, which meant that it was something that the two would have to learn in this new world to help support their family. Rough times were ahead, but things were sure to get better in the long run.

She clung to the railing, slick with rain and sweat from her aching palms. She could see the shadow of a large coppery structure she would later know as the Statue of Liberty. As the ship passed through, slicing through the water below, the fog made the statue seem like an apparition. A shrill, high pitched screech, followed by the subtle thump of boots made their way to Lev and Anna. Evelina was perched high on Misha's shoulders, clutching onto the collar of his shirt, grasping as tightly as her small fists would let her.

"Vybachte, Papa; vybachte, Mamochka." His eyes were downcast, his curly hair flopping down onto his forehead, the weight of the rain dragging the strands down. His lips were pulled down into a pout, but a mischievous one. In those eyes was a playful manner that challenged whether or not Lev and Anna's son was truly sorry. Taking Evelina by the arms, Misha put her down onto the deck and went over to peck his mother on the cheek. He gruffly hugged his father, both facing eye to eye.

The ship's fog lights ignited, casting the passengers into an eerie white glow. They could see New York, which would become a home to many aboard. To start fresh, to start new; a life where freedom was an option. Everything felt different somehow, fresher, newer. Ellis Island

came into view, where Lev, Anna, and the children would be heading. Citizenship in the Americas was just out of their reach.

The ship was filled with Ukrainians, Italians, people from around the world. There was the sight of tattered clothing and rucksacks filled to the brim with belongings, men and women holding onto the hands of young children who had a tendency to wander. When Evelina would start to wander, Anna would grab her hand and pull her back to her side. There were people waiting for them in the vast brick building on Ellis Island.

They held out their papers in turn, watching as the men's eyes barely skimmed over the paper before they let them pass through with a wave of their lightly toned hands. Before they could leave, their names were written down on long lists in hurried, inky block print. Questions were asked: whether or not Anna and Lev had children, if they were married, their nationality, their race, occupation, so on and so forth. They had translators speaking in broken Russian, waving their hands in gestures that expressed their words.

Then both Anna and Lev got their identification cards and the children's. The medical examiners were cold-faced, their eyes small and beady, hair combed neatly to the sides. They started with the feet, and followed all the way to the tops of their heads. The family could move on their own, and they were fed quite well in the time before and after on the ship. There were no specific injuries or diseases that were present, and there wasn't a lameness to any of their body parts. There was no evident disability that would ship them back to Russia.

They got to pass through as new immigrants of America, and were sent to New York City, while others around them were sent to alien places like Maine, Kansas, and North Carolina. Their fall-apart bags were searched and handed back in a fast-paced and efficient manner. Anna placed Evelina on her hip so that she wouldn't tire easily; although she was past the age to be carried, the child was small for her age, her weight a mere nothing. Misha was of teenage years, yet he still held onto his mother's hand, comforted by the familiar course bumps of flesh that made her hands rough and warm.

Their money was now of American currency and weighed slightly in their pockets. Unlike the rubles back in Russia, they had paper money and coins. They were introduced to a home called a flat, or apartment. It was one roomed with two cots, a public toilet, and a washroom in the corner. A small bulb was centered on the ceiling, hanging precariously to the wired socket. The cupboard held bread, dried apples, and rice.

The first month was the hardest, as Anna recalled. Money was tight, the children complained of hunger, and the lack of cleanliness was unnerving. They had expected this, expected complications, but not another child. Anna and Lev were expecting another child in their flat, and they were concerned. How could they take care of another when they were barely taking care of themselves? The days never seemed to end, daytime blurring together with nighttime.

It was always late when Lev came back from the factory, tired and hungry. Anna didn't have food prepared for him, and for that she was distraught. He was tired and haggard and deserved a warm dinner and the comforts of his family. Yet they were tight on food, money, and patience. Misha and Evelina were sent to school every morning, dressed in their tattered clothing, their faces dirty and their hair unkempt. The children in class said nasty things about the Russian-speaking, squinty-eyed, dirty children that they saw every day. Yet Misha and Evelina knew barely any English, and paid no attention to the crude gestures and awful sounding words.

They were in America and the good times were going to come, as long as they believed. Anna was happy as long as she had her family around her. If she began to get tired she would think of Babushka and her soft but stern smiles, her warm, doughy face and delectable foods, the

oven and days where baking would occupy a whole day. She would stare outside and look at the stars, wondering if her *roditeli* and Babushka would be watching down on her, seeing her through her journey through hardship.

Soon Anna got a job working with the seamstress one flat away from them, and they made five cents per dress mended. While Anna was walking through the city one day she stopped and got the simplest, cheapest wedding band they had. She surprised Lev with it, and even though he scolded her for wasting good money, he gave her a light, thankful kiss on her head. She felt warm all over, happy that she could provide something for him.

Her band was the same as Lev's, and he surprised her with it by handing her a bouquet of wildflowers, the band tied around the twine holding them together. They finally had the rings that symbolized their togetherness, and it couldn't have made them more overjoyed. Anna was able to get ribbons for Evelina's hair, and made her a dress from the scraps from other dresses. She made Misha a new dress shirt from the fabric as well, and patched up the holes in his shoes.

Their newest addition arrived, a baby girl with eyes the color of a cloudless sky and hair that was dark, sticking up all over the place. She was lovely, with large, curious eyes, and didn't fuss as much as the family had expected. Evelina was an excellent big sister, but sometimes got jealous when the baby took too much time away from herself. Misha held the baby with a tenderness that neither Lev or Evelina could. He would blow raspberries at her and would watch her round, chubby face contort with laughter. Her name would be Anichka, named for her grace. Anna often nicknamed her Anika.

On warm days Anna and Lev would take the children to the fields and play games of a carefree nature, doing away with worries for a few hours at a time before going back to their flat. Misha was getting older, mature for the ripe age of fifteen. Evelina was reaching past the toddler phase, and had a kind personality and playful nature. Anichka was waddling on her stubby legs, wispy hair blowing in the wind. Her giggles were loud and gleeful, filled with the innocent persona of a young child.

Sometimes when Anna got homesick she would imagine the crippling cold of Russia and snuffle in a rush of frigid air. She'd go back to the warm parlor where Lev and his family had saved her. She would turn to the memory of holding Misha for the first time and kissing a head filled with light colored fuzz. She would hold up a match and imagine its free flowing flame was the sway of the trees in the wind. She'd taste the warm dough from freshly made bread, or she'd bite into a very potatoey piece of pierogi.

Her life had changed drastically from the time she had spent on the streets, going from a poor *syrota* to a wealthy woman in the aspects of happiness. She would not take it back for a million wishes and the glow of one thousand matches. Not in a million years.

Vybachte- Sorry

Roditeli- parents

Syrota- orphan

Light

Almost two weeks had gone by and the heritage project had not been completed. The deadline was looming over her head, yet she wouldn't think to search her family on ancestry. She had no interest in people who were probably reduced to a pile of bones by now. They held no interest to her, had no meaning. They were long gone by the time Sophie had been born and she'd never been able to experience their presence. She couldn't care less.

She paused from her work, pushing the sparse notes aside and clomping down the steps of the family's small city apartment. She tied her hair into a ponytail and greeted her mother with a

kiss on the cheek. She tied a tattered apron around her waist and began to help with dinner. Tonight was lasagna; she could smell the scent of fresh herbs and boiling noodles on her way to their small kitchen space.

Sophie's mother and father scurried around, barely dodging each other with various plates of food. "Soph, could you take the noodles and drain them please? It would be a big help." Her mother smiled with pearly white teeth. Sophie took the pot of steaming noodles and dumped them into the strainer that was in the sink.

Sophie could tell her parents that she was struggling with her project, but then they'd know that she had never paid any attention to the stories that Sophie's mother would tell about her grandparents and great-grandparents. She could've made the project on her father's side, but he was too many things mixed together, and it was way too hard to pick out every single detail.

"Hey Mom?" Sophie felt timid when she asked, embarrassed that she was about to say this. But it was for the sake of the project, and to get it done she needed information.

"Yes, honey?" She felt her mother's inquisitive gaze on her.

"Do you mind if we go to Ellis Island to learn more about my heritage?" She could feel her face go red.

"Of course. When do you want to go?"

Sophie told her mother that it was best to go tomorrow, on Saturday. They were to go on a self-guided tour, looking at the historic site. She would get her paper done, having gone through all that she needed to get a good grade. Then the matter would be stuck in the recesses of her mind, letting her focus on other things.

Later that night Sophie went through the various twists and turns of Ellis Island. She tried to imagine herself in the place of her ancestors, but she couldn't. She had lived in the cushy New York City apartment for all of her life.

She stayed up late that night, thinking about all of the things that could happen during their trip tomorrow. Hopefully her mother wouldn't question this sudden and unexpected venture for information, but if she did, she'd have to make something up quick.

* * *

Early the next morning her mother woke her, so early that the sky had not turned its usual baby blue. She felt groggy and drug her feet on the wood flooring so that she didn't have to hurry. She took her time brushing each and every tooth and redid her hair multiple times. She had to wake up to waste a morning, and quite possibly an afternoon, to see dusty framed pictures and information stuck to plaques about things and people that were all in the past.

She grabbed her camera with her notebook and pen, threw on a thinly lined coat, and went downstairs to see her mother planting a kiss on her father's cheek before grabbing a banana. Her mother's eyes were shining with a certain glee that she'd never seen before.

"We better leave now before the traffic gets worse," her mother said jokingly.

As it turned out the traffic rush was already in full swing, turning their smooth sailing into a steady crawl. People in heavy coats rushed past them now that the crosswalk sign was flashing. People from different races and cultures were all around her, and more than a few were here because their grandparents or great-grandparents were immigrants.

She sat uncomfortably while her mother turned the music up, tapping the wheel contentedly. She looked out through the dim glass of the car and saw the towering skyscrapers, with their pointed tops and shining glass surfaces. She wondered how her ancestors felt when they first saw the Statue of Liberty. Her parents had taken her there not too long ago, and as it turned out, she just barely tolerated it.

She knew that living wasn't the best for them, but she still wanted to know what it was like to be in the past. She tapped on the leather upholstery, listening to the shift in position as she tried to get comfortable. She watched as people went into and out of stores with various types of clothing, makeup, and food. She tugged on her coat, suddenly feeling hot.

She waited with mild impatience as they drove, her mind on other things. She wondered what her friends were doing this weekend, and wondered if they had their projects done.

They had to get ferry tickets to be able to make it to the building. Sophie shivered when she thought of the chilly water and frigid air. They were in no condition to be chilled to the bone today.

As they stepped out of the car the wind whipped into Sophie's face, making her already testy mood dwindle even more. They went up to the ticket booth and paid for two on the next ferry available. From what Sophie could see, the ferry was already filled with various people and the occasional tourist decked out in a puffy marshmallow-shaped coat with a high-end camera dangling around their neck. Most were ready for the cold, having put on gloves, a heavy winter coat, and a woolen hat. Sophie, however, didn't realize that getting to Ellis Island would require spending too much time outside in the cold. The last trip was in summer.

The platform was slick with a thin coat of the latest snowfall. With no doubt in her mind, Sophie would watch some unsuspecting passenger slip on that snowfall and quite possibly fall.

Soon it was time to board and everyone went the extra mile to zip their coats up tighter and brace themselves for the rush of cold air. Some went about their business, sitting themselves down on one of the many benches supplied for rest. Tourists' camera shutters were clicking furiously, trying to capture every moment with the press of a button. Sophie did nothing other than stare out at the Atlantic and watch as the spray reached up to lap at her toes. The water was cold, as was the air, and it did nothing for Sophie to pull the coat tighter around herself.

Their journey wasn't as long as she thought it was going to be, and the tourists were excited to see the Statue of Liberty in all her glory. Would they know that this grand treasure was once brown and then corrupted by the weather to a green? Would they know she was a gift from France and made out of copper?

She waved at the woman holding her torch high in the air with one hand, grasping a tablet in the other. She wondered if her ancestors felt this way when they saw the towering structure, this symbol of liberty. She tried to imagine the cold and the biting of the water at their feet. She imagined worn faces that had seen too much in their lifetimes, and small children holding onto the rails, scared and excited to see the large lady in front of them.

When the ferry docked, Sophie and her mother saw Ellis Island's vast brick building, with white and red spires that reached into the sky much like a skyscraper. She felt a deep wonder that she didn't expect to feel. Her feet were dragging on the concrete, not wanting to go inside. She knew that this project was something that was worth so little, but she wanted to make the most of it after she saw the building. It made her see differently than she had before. She couldn't imagine how many people came through here, waiting to be inspected, waiting for their new life in America.

The hallways were so clean that she could see her reflection, and the pictures up on the walls depicting immigrants of all kinds gave her the chills. How would they know what to say? Did any of them know English?

They walked long, looking at various pictures and scenes showing the process that the immigrants had to go through and the types of things that they brought over. Most couldn't afford

to take much, having a rucksack to carry all the essentials. Others had suitcases, quite possibly packed under a weight limit, or stuffed to capacity.

There was one picture that really caught her attention. There was a long line of people stretching from point A to point B. Each one was waiting with their family to get into the building for their inspection. Suitcases and bags were held and carried over the shoulder by men wearing suits and different types of hats and women in long floral and plain dresses with babushkas on their heads.

Sophie thought of the Russian nesting doll with the sweet-faced old woman with puckered pink lips and rosy cheeks. The picture was black and white, but she was sure that some of the women had colorful dresses with floral print, others with worn down fabrics.

“My grandpa, your great grandpa, said that his parents brought almost nothing with them to America. They had their tickets and their family, and that was good enough for them,” her mother exclaimed with a huffed sigh. It was like she could feel how poor her family was, how hard it was to get a jump-start on life.

“How many of them were there?” she had to ask.

“There were the parents, Anna and Lev. Then the children, Misha and Evelina. The last one, Anichka, didn’t arrive until they were settled into their home in New York City.”

The two stayed silent until they reached a large book encased in glass. The handwriting was a spidery scrawl, almost illegible. There were thousands, and if you flipped the page there was sure to be more. Each entry had new information about a certain person upon arriving. The inspector probably had to write everything for record.

She could imagine her Russian-speaking ancestors and wondered how they could understand anything that these foreign people were saying. She wondered if there were translators or people giving hand signals.

Her mother came up and touched her cheek. “I know you may think this lesson isn’t important, but just ponder this for a moment. If these deceased people, these corpses you never knew, didn’t cross over to America for a free life, you may not be here today.”

Sophie did take a moment to think about it, how easy her life was now compared to these strangers in the pictures in front of her. Who knew how many were sent back to their country because they lacked the requirements to stay? She was lucky that her family was healthy enough and strong enough to get sent through.

She couldn’t imagine being as young as Misha must have been, trying to protect his little sister and his family. He probably wanted to feel brave although he felt the fear seeping into his bones. Anna and Lev wanted nothing but the best for their children, and Russia was nowhere in their plans for the children. They wanted to give their children what they didn’t have growing up, and they succeeded.

Sophie thought twice about her ancestors.

THE END