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IT'S BEEN OVER A YEAR SINCE ANYA, Ivan, and Håkon saved their village from a power-hungry Viking bent on devouring dragon magic for his own greed. Now life in Zmeyreka is peaceful . . . until Anya discovers that her papa still isn't coming back from a war he was never meant to fight in. When the trio decide to bring him home on their own, they're forced on a dangerous journey to Kiev, the kingdom's capital—where thieves stalk the woods and an unspeakable evil lurks beneath the city.

In this thrilling sequel to *Anya and the Dragon*, the girl, the fool, and the dragon will have to band together once more to outrun the secrets of Kiev and the new monsters that have found a taste for their magic.



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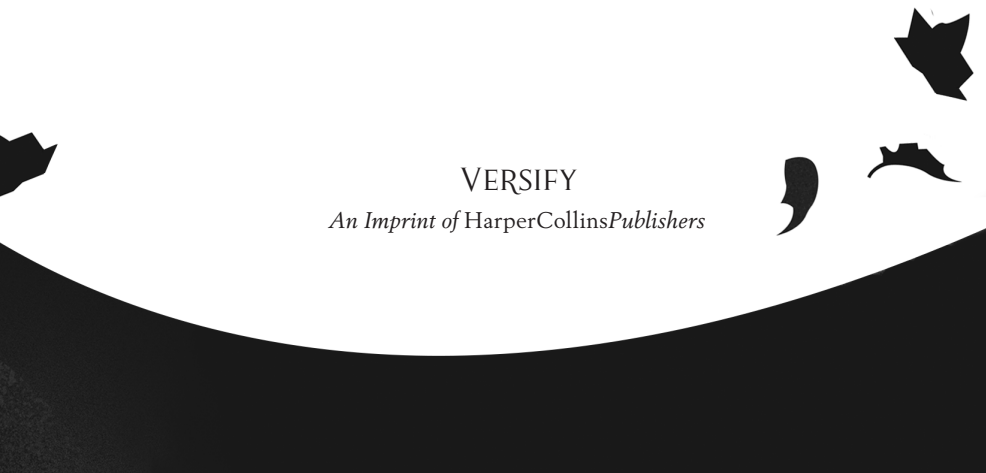


# ANYA AND THE NIGHTINGALE

BY SOFIYA PASTERNAK

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Anya and the Nightingale

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*Zmeyreka*



**Kievan Rus'**

*Kiev.*



**Patzinakia**



**BLACK SEA**



*Istanbul* **Rûm**



## CHAPTER ONE

**A**NYA'S SUKKAH was suspiciously lopsided. She had gone into the barn to get more rope for securing the posts of the booth's framework. The sukkah itself was in the field between their barn and the river since there were no trees out there to hang over it. That was one of the rules of building the booth: there could be nothing over it that would obscure a view of the sky. Since the fire the year before, there were also no trees at all where the new house and barn now stood, either. But it was tradition for the family to build the sukkah out in the field, and Anya was going to follow tradition.

The rope dangled from her fingers, and she narrowed her eyes as the sukkah gave a little shudder. She put her

fists on her hips and said, “Zvezda, get out from there right now!”

Her goat’s white horned head peeked out from around the side of the booth. He had a mouth full of the thatching she had carefully woven out of branches for one wall.

“Zvezda, no! Bad goat!” Anya dropped the rope and ran toward her half-erected booth. The goat didn’t even have the decency to run away. He just stood there, chewing on thatching, as Anya stomped up and yanked it out of his mouth. “I worked hard on this, you stupid goat!”

“*Myah,*” he said, indifferent to her anguish.

Anya threw the chewed thatching to the ground. Zvezda rolled his eyes up to her and, very slowly, very carefully, lowered his head to the ground. He slurped the thatching back into his mouth without looking away from her.

She sighed and pushed his rump toward the barn. “Go away. I need to build a great sukkah this year.” Last year had been a disaster. It had been the first Sukkot without Papa, who usually built the sukkah they would spend a week pretending to live in. Pretending, because Babulya was too old to spend too much time in it, especially at night. They definitely took meals in it, which meant it had to be wide enough to hold all of them — plus a couple



of goats, who always squeezed in whether the family wanted them to or not. Anya had built a haphazard sukkah, and then her friends Ivan and Håkon had come over to see it. Then Håkon had burned it down.

It had been an accident. Ivan never went anywhere without the staff Kin had made for him last year, so he was pretending to fight the dragon. Håkon swore he only meant to breathe a little bit of fire at Ivan. He didn't use fire much, being a river dragon, so he was out of practice. It was a *lot* of fire. It hit the sukkah and caught immediately. Ivan used his water magic to put the fire out, but by then it was too late.

That sukkah was gone, and Anya didn't have time to put up another one. She told her family that she'd set the sukkah on fire—accidentally, of course—because any excuse she had was better than the truth: that a dragon had done it. No one could know about Håkon, not even Mama and Babulya and Dyedka. The family ate outside anyway—until the sky opened up and poured rain on them. Babulya declared the rain lucky, an answer to the prayer they hadn't even said yet, but to Anya it felt like a punctuation mark to her utter failure.

Not this year.

She inspected the damage done by her stinker of a

goat. He had chewed a hole large enough for Anya to stick her arm through, but it was fixable. The other sides were untouched.

The field between the barn and the river was full of rushes and tall grass. Anya gathered some up and wove a patch for the sukkah wall, then wove its ends into the wall's ragged hole. The patch was a different color and plant species, but it worked.

Anya retrieved her rope and fortified the booth's top four corners. She made sure the poles were deep enough in the ground that a stiff wind wouldn't blow it over. Inside, she paced from one side to the other. It would be long enough to fit not only Anya's family but some guests as well.

Just a couple of guests. Anya didn't have time to build a thatch palace.

She walked a few paces away and faced the booth, one hand on her hip and one stroking her chin. She needed a roof now. But the roof couldn't just be any old roof. It had to offer shade but be see-through enough to see the stars. Papa always used pruned lengths of the roses that climbed the little house, weaving them into a very loose topping, but those roses had burned when the old house had last year. Babulya had cultivated them back, but they

reached only to the top of Anya's head. She didn't want to cut some off when they were so sparse to begin with.

She thought she could go into the woods and cut a branch off a tree, probably, but hadn't yet. The roof had to go on last, and she had to make sure everything else was perfect.

Well, it was as perfect as it was going to get. As long as Zvezda didn't come back.

With a quick peek around the side of the barn, Anya determined that Zvezda was gone. Probably back inside the barn to spend time with the other goats. None of *them* ever tried to eat Anya's things.

Anya had a knife in her pocket already—she had been using it to craft the sukkah's walls—and she figured that was all she needed for gathering branches. She went back to the sukkah for one last check on it.

A little white goat butt stuck out of the door. The wall to the left of the door rippled, and then a goaty snout pushed through. Zvezda tore another piece of the wall out, then saw Anya. He stopped chewing. He just stared at her as she clenched her fists and thought of a thousand different ways to tie his mouth shut.

*"Myah,"* he said.



## CHAPTER TWO

**Z**VEZDA HAD A ROPE around his neck, and the other end of the rope was tied around Anya's waist. She wasn't going to leave him to eat her suk-kah while she got branches for a *sechach*, the roof, so she brought him with her. In the forest, he grabbed mouthfuls of plants they walked by, chewing away with contented grunts.

She had just the type of tree in mind: a pretty birch tree with its wild orange leaves in contrast over white bark. There were a bunch of them up the river, north a little ways, so she followed the sound of the water away from her farm.

Away from the farm. Into the forest. She took a deep breath. It wasn't far. She'd be fine.

Every few steps, Anya had to tug gently on the rope to get Zvezda away from whatever plant he was nibbling on. He came easily, though he sometimes dug his little hooves in long enough to get a big mouthful of something delicious before allowing Anya to pull him along.

The goat's dawdling was stretching Anya's time in the woods, and she really wanted to get out fast. The forest made her uneasy. There might be traps along the path. The birds might be spying on her. An unseen enemy might come out of the trees at any moment. All those things had happened last year, when Sigurd the Varangian had descended upon the village of Zmeyreka like a dark cloud. He was dead, though. Anya had killed him.

Even so, the memory of him remained.

Her foot sank into the loam a little too much, and she jerked back, heart pounding. Sigurd had set a trap for her and her best friend, Ivan, last year. He had put them in a bag and thrown them in the river. She could smell the earthy bag again, could feel the cold water rushing in.

Anya stopped and shut her eyes to force away the memories.

Maybe it was his ghost. Maybe he was haunting her.

She felt a soft nose bump her hand. When she looked down, she met Zvezda's eyes.

"*Myah,*" he said, but to Anya, the tone sounded like *What's wrong?*

She patted him with a shaking hand that steadied with every stroke across his head. With Zvezda, the forest was less frightening somehow.

Even though he was just a goat.

Anya swallowed hard and looked around. The birds in the trees watched her. With ill intent? Maybe. But who were they going to tattle to? Håkon? She wouldn't mind if the dragon showed up. He was, in theory, a ferocious monster. In practice, much less so. But he could still use magic and so would be a better protector than Zvezda.

She couldn't make her feet move forward. Every glance up the path made her skin prickle. That dark cloud gathered over her. Sigurd's ghost. Anya took a step back, then another. She turned around and tugged Zvezda with her, and the goat followed without a fight.



Anya used oak branches for the *sechach*. Zvezda ate a mouthful of one, but she managed to get the branches on top of the booth before he could get much more than that.

Once the *sechach* was on, Anya stood back to look at it. It looked much better than her attempt last year, but not as good as Papa's. When he got back, they'd be able to build amazing *sukkot* together.

Last year, just before Purim, Anya's life had turned sideways when Papa had been conscripted and sent to Rûm. Then, just before Shavuot, the celebration of receiving the Torah, her sideways life flipped completely when Håkon, the last dragon in Kievan Rus', appeared in her village and saved her life. One of the tsar's knights, a *bogatyr* named Dobrynya, who had come to get rid of Håkon, promised Anya's mother that he'd send for Papa and have him brought back.

Shavuot had come and gone, and Anya turned twelve and became a bat mitzvah, which meant she was responsible for her own actions and had to answer for consequences as a result of them. Her hair was short, cut above her shoulders, as one of those consequences. She and Ivan had gotten too rambunctious practicing with the weapons Kin had given them inside her barn just after this year's Shavuot, and they'd knocked all the tools off the walls. Their house spirit, the *domovoi*, was furious, and in retaliation, he did one of his favorite punishments: knotting Anya's hair as she slept. He must have been feeling

particularly nasty that night, because he'd combined pine sap with the knots. Anya, Mama, and Babulya had tried for hours to figure out how to un-knot them. When everything they tried failed, Mama sheared Anya's hair off. That had been a few months ago, and her hair only just reached her shoulders. She and Ivan hadn't brought their weapons back to the barn since.

Anya turned thirteen, short hair and all. The months swept by. Papa still hadn't returned.

Dobrynya was a hero. He wasn't a liar. He would have done what he said and sent for Papa. So why wasn't Papa back yet? He answered the letters they sent to him with his messenger hawk, Germogen. Even with magic, sometimes it took the hawk a few weeks to get to Papa and back again. The last letter they'd gotten from him had been several weeks ago, now that Anya thought about it. The hawk had been in their barn since then. Dyedka said it was nice to let Germogen have a rest, and also didn't want to alert Papa's camp superiors that he was using a magical hawk to deliver messages. Her *dyedushka* was the only one of them who could summon or send the hawk because, like Papa, Dyedka had animal magic. Anya would suggest they send more letters tonight so she could ask how far away Papa was.



She put Zvezda in the barn and shut the door. The door worked to keep him contained only half the time, but hopefully he would forget about the sukkah and eat something else. Anya went inside the house, where Mama was standing at the stove. Since Dobrynya's promise to bring Papa home, Mama had been in better spirits on most days. Today was one of those days.

She turned to Anya with a smile on her face and said, "Oh, there you are! Is the sukkah ready?"

Anya nodded. "So far. Zvezda keeps eating it, though."

Babulya and Dyedka sat at the table. Babulya was knitting a lumpy scarf near the oven, and Dyedka was grumping his way through Papa's old history book at the table, thumping his wooden legs impatiently on the floor. Dyedka looked up and squinted at Anya.

"Well, you built it too early," he said. "It doesn't start for three days. Why'd you make it already?"

*Because last year Håkon burned it down,* Anya thought. "Just in case," she said.

He looked back down at the history book. "That goat'll eat that whole thing before morning, mark my words."

Babulya cackled over her knitting.

"I wish he'd stop!" Anya snapped.

“Ah,” Babulya said with a laugh. “Wishes. Don’t wish. Pray. Pray with your feet.”

Anya blinked long, exasperated. *Pray with your feet* was Babulya’s way of saying *Do something about your problem* with the implied *Quit complaining* attached. “Praying with my feet is going to waste all my time with that stupid goat!”

“Well, I’m glad you put it up,” Mama said. “It reminds me of your aunt Tzivyah. We used to have so much fun with your papa building ours.” She cleared her throat in that way she did when she had stumbled onto something sad. “Anyway, I have some potions to make. Would you like to help?”

Anya smiled. Babulya had been delivering salves and potions all around the village for years in secret. After the magistrate had left, the villagers found out Babulya was the mysterious potions maker. Not only were they all grateful for her help in banishing illnesses, but they insisted on paying her. So Babulya and Mama both started making the potions, and since Babulya was blind and couldn’t get around the village very easily, Anya delivered them. It seemed like, with the magistrate’s disappearance from the village, the people were less afraid to use magic.