



Safe in the Storm

A Ukrainian Children's Tale



Story by Phil Moser

Illustrations by Mikaela Schweigart

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Home

Nicolai grew up in a small village outside of Odessa on the Black Sea. He lived there with his parents and his younger sister, Natasha. Nicolai's father was often away at sea. When his father was away, Nicolai would help his mother in the garden.

Nicolai didn't love the garden; he loved the sea. He would run hard into the waves, daring them to knock him over. Then he would hold his breath and dive deep to collect brightly colored shells. Once, he swam so far away that he couldn't see the land anymore.



At times, Nicolai found his sister annoying. Especially when his friends came over. Sometimes he would look for ways to scare her.

“Nicolai!” his mother would scold, “You are to protect your sister, not frighten her. Apologize!”

“But Mother, she’s afraid of everything! Besides, it’s the big brother’s job to make her brave,” Nicolai would say, “And I’m pretty good at it.”



The Journey

Every summer, Nicolai's family would visit their grandparents on the Georgia coast. Grandpa would take them fishing, and Grandma made the best churchkhela.

One night, Nicolai overheard his parents talking. "The children will be so disappointed," his mother said. "They look so forward to the visit."

"We've only been able to save for two tickets," his father replied.

Nicolai couldn't help himself. He burst into the room. "I can take Natasha," he said. "I won't let anything happen to her. I promise."



As the ship pulled away from the pier, Natasha fought back tears.

“Natasha.” Nicolai was annoyed. “Stop crying.”

“What if we get lost? What if Grandma and Grandpa aren’t there? What if there’s a ship-wreck?” Natasha choked out. “I wish mother was going with us.”

“Don’t be silly.” Nicolai answered, “I’m a better swimmer than mother. I’m almost as good as father.”



The Ship

That night, the children's hammocks swayed gently to the rumbling of the ship's engines. The next morning, they unpacked the breakfast mother had prepared—English muffins stuffed with dry cottage cheese and sour cream.

As the crew busied themselves about the deck, the captain kept singing, "Red in the morning sailors take warning. Red in the night is a sailor's delight."

"There's a storm coming," Nicolai told his sister. "A red sky in the morning means rough seas ahead."



The cabin boy shouted at Nicolai. "Hey! Since, you know so much about the sea, come help me fix these canvases."

As the boys unfolded the canvas, a small furry face appeared. "A stow-a-way," the cabin boy exclaimed, handing a small kitten to Natasha.

"Watch that runt," Nicolai said. "He's sure to get in the way when the storm starts."

"He's not a runt," Natasha replied, as the kitten chewed playfully on her hand. "His name is Nibbles.

You're safe with me, Nibbles. I won't let anything hurt you. I promise."



The Storm

Inside the ship, the children could hear the rain falling on the deck. The ship made strange noises as it rose and fell on the waves. First, they heard the crash of the wave on the deck. Then, a hum would echo all the way back through the keel.

Crash! Hum. Crash! Hum. Crash! Hum.

Nicolai glanced over at Natasha. Swinging in her hammock, she stroked Nibble's head. The kitten purred contentedly in her arms.

His sister seemed so small in the dark ship's vast hull. Nicolai remembered his promise to his parents.



Nicolai woke up to the sound of the storm. Crash! Hum. Crash!
Hum. Crash! Hum!

As he listened, he imagined himself running into the storm's waves, knocking them down the way he did at home. "How big can they be anyway?" he wondered out loud.

His thoughts turned to Natasha and the kitten. He ought to check in on them. Slowly, he readjusted himself in the hammock, staying quiet as not to wake his sister.

Natasha's hammock hung empty.



Overboard

Nicolai dropped to his knees and began to crawl rapidly beneath the hammocks looking for his sister. When he came out from under the hammocks, he broke into a run.

His heart was beating fast. The dining room was ahead. In the dim light, he saw Nibbles skitter out of the ship's kitchen with a mouse in her mouth.

Then he saw Natasha at the top of the stairs, in the doorway—the rain beating down on her. She turned and saw Nicolai. “I can’t find Nibbles!” she screamed, but her voice was lost in the storm.



Crash! A wave washed across the deck, pulling Natasha out into the storm. Crash! The second wave lifted Natasha's body and washed her over the side of the ship!

Nicolai broke into a full run. Grabbing a life preserver, he dove headfirst over the railing. Seeing Natasha's small hand in the air, he swam hard in her direction. He pulled her close so she could grasp the life preserver.

"Nicolai!" his sister said, pointing over his shoulder. He turned. The ship was sailing away.



Natasha saw a flickering light in the distance. "It may be a ship!"
Nicolai said. Pulling her along, he started to swim towards the light.
His arms burned, his legs ached, and his lungs cried for air.

"I'm glad you're here," Natasha said in the darkness.

Between gasps he replied, "You're. Being. Brave."

"Just trying to be like my brother," Natasha replied.

But Nicolai didn't feel brave.

All he could feel was his aching legs.



“It’s not a ship. It’s a lighthouse!” Natasha cried.

Nicolai tried to swim harder, but he was too tired. The lighthouse was high on a rocky cliff. He tried to climb over the slippery rocks, but he fell, the waves kept pulling him back into the sea. He tried again and failed again. And again. And again.

Natasha cried for help. Her shrill voice pierced the darkness.

Suddenly a strong hand reached down, grabbed Nicolai’s hand, and lifted him out of the sea.



Constantine

The next morning, Nicolai awoke to people talking. The rain beat on the windows of his room. He rubbed his aching legs and followed the voices to the kitchen.

“Nicolai!” his sister jumped up from her chair at the table and ran to hug him. “We were rescued! And you finally woke up.” Nicolai stepped back from her hug.

“Sleep well?” The voice came from the older gentlemen, busying himself with a skillet on the stove. He turned, “I’m Constantine, the keeper of the lighthouse. Welcome to Snake Island. Like some breakfast?”

Nicolai nodded. An omelet appeared on his plate.

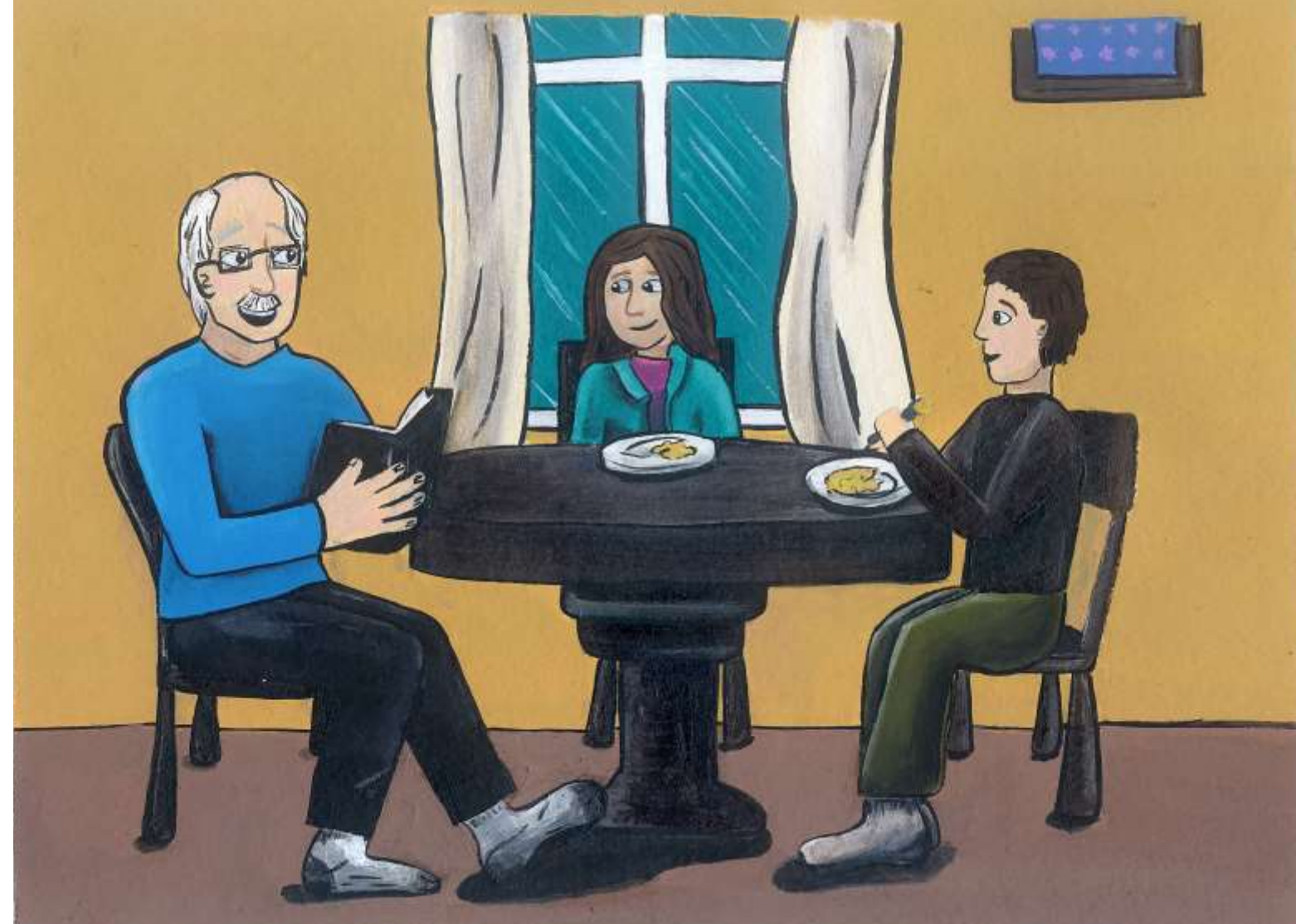


Nicolai was so hungry he ate three omelets. Constantine smiled each time he made another.

Natasha picked up a well-worn book from the middle of the table. "Ah. You found my Bible, Natasha." Constantine reached for it and added. "I always start the day off with prayer and a Scripture reading." He read "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God... Casting all your anxiety on him for he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:6-7).

As he prayed, Natasha folded her hands and listened.

Constantine said "Amen," and Nicolai said, "Can I have another omelet?"



The Great Light

“I need to check the beacon and refuel it,” Constantine said. “Would you children like to join me?”

As the storm howled outside, the children followed Constantine up the dark winding staircase.

At the top, the Great Beacon burned brightly. It was so bright that you had to look away. Nicolai could feel the heat of the Great Light on his back.

He remembered the night before. The endless swimming, the single light beckoning them on. Out in the sea, he felt small, alone, and afraid.

But in the presence of the Great Light, he felt safe. Small and safe at the same time.



The God Who Cares

After dinner, the children joined Constantine in the great room.

“I’ve been thinking about what you read this morning,” Nicolai said. “The Bible said that God cares for me. But out in that storm I was scared. I was swimming as hard as I could, and it still wasn’t enough. I felt all alone. I want to trust God, but how do I know he really cares?”

“That’s a good question,” Constantine said, stirring the fire. “I think I need to take you back to the beginning.”



“In the beginning, God created a perfect world. There was no wrongdoing, pain, or loss. God and his people were happy together. But the people God created didn’t trust him, and they disobeyed. Because of their wrongdoing, they would be separated from him forever. Thinking only of themselves, they began to hurt each other. But God had a plan to restore his people.”

“The Bible says, ‘That God so loved the world that he gave his only Son’ (John 3:16). Jesus, God’s Son, was born as a baby and grew up to be a man who did no wrong. He helped people and taught them about God his Father.”



People didn't like someone as perfect as Jesus. He and his parents even had to flee to Egypt as refugees. While some followed him, others persecuted him and eventually killed him on a cross."

"That is so wrong!" Natasha's cried.

"Yes," Constantine said, "It was wrong. But God used Jesus' death for our good. Because Jesus had lived a perfect life, his death could end the separation for everyone who has done wrong."

"For everyone?" Nicolai asked, remembering the times he'd been mean to his sister.

"For everyone who believes," Constantine confirmed. "As proof that the plan worked, Jesus came back to life three days later."



“Nicolai, why did you jump into the sea to save your sister?”

“Because I care about her,” Nicolai said, the truth dawning on him. “So, that is how I know God cares for me. Because he sent his son to save me.”

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Constantine said. “One final thing. Could you have pulled yourself from the sea?”

“No,” Nicolai admitted. “I’d given up. I knew I couldn’t save myself.”

“In the same way, you must turn from your own effort and trust Jesus.”

That very night, that is what the children did.



Praying for All Things

“Good morning, children,” Constantine spoke gently. “The power is on, and I contacted the mainland. Help is on the way.”

Over breakfast Natasha read the morning Scripture: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer...let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6).

As they combed the beach Constantine shared, “God cares about the big and the small. That’s why we are told to pray about everything. Nothing is too small to ask of God, nor is any request so large that he can’t answer.”



“So, I should pray for my friends back home to know God’s peace when they’re frightened?” Nicolai asked.

“Absolutely,” Constantine answered.

“Can I pray for Nibble’s safety?” Natasha interjected.

“Let’s do that right now,” Constantine said. And they did.

With the storm gone, the children could see ships on the horizon. Two of those boats were drawing nearer, moving towards the island.

“Looks like we have some visitors,” Constantine said with a smile.



Reunited

As the first boat approached, Natasha cried out, "Look, it's Mother and Father!"

"I don't think, I'm going to let go of you!" Nicolai cried as she hugged them tightly.

"You were so brave," father whispered, "And to think you did it all alone."

"Oh, we weren't alone," Nicolai said.

"Who was with you?" Mother asked.

"Well for that," Nicolai said, winking at Constantine, "I'd need to take you back to the beginning."



The second boat arrived, and the cabin boy hopped out on the pier.

“Natasha, I have someone who will be glad to see you.” The cabin boy opened his jacket to reveal a familiar face.

“Nibbles!” Natasha exclaimed. The kitten snuggled her furry head up close to Natasha’s neck.

That is the story of how Nicolai and Natasha came to believe in the God who really cares and to understand that you can take any concern you have to him. No matter how big, no matter how small.



Have you Met the Great Rescuer?

Nicolai and Natasha needed a rescuer. Constantine rescued them from the sea, and then he introduced them to the Jesus, the Great Rescuer who could rescue their soul and give them peace. Nicolai realized he could not save himself and so must we.

Perhaps you are afraid and feel alone. We invite you to trust Jesus. He gave his life as a sacrifice for you. He promises that if you ask, he will give you a clean heart and eternal life with Him. Commit your life to Jesus. He will restore you to God.

If you made a commitment to trust Jesus, the Great Rescuer or if you would like help in growing closer to God, please visit biblicalstrategies.com/Ukraine