Chapter 7: Trust

A heavy silence followed her words, the kind that feels thick enough to choke on. We exchanged nervous glances until I finally hit my breaking point.

"Grandma, tell us exactly when they called," I said, stepping toward her and gripping her hand firmly. My own palms were sweating.

"Yesterday. Sometime toward evening," she began, her voice trembling slightly. "Marek sounded... wrong. He was breathing hard, speaking in these short, jagged sentences. He said they were in danger, that they were heading your way but didn't know if they could make it in time. I tried to ask what was happening, what on earth he was talking about, but your mother just shouted, ‘Tereska, run. It’s started. If we survive, we’ll be in touch…’ And then the line went dead."

"And that’s it? Nothing else? They didn't call back?" I asked, my heart hammering against my ribs.

"No. Or at least, I don't think so. I don't know," she whispered, looking small. "I just panicked. I packed a few things in a rush and drove to Krysia’s."

"To Grandma Krysia? On Karpacka Street?" I snapped, frustration bubbling up. Every "answer" she gave only seemed to sprout ten more questions.

"Yes. It was the only place I could think of. You know your grandmother—her door was always open to everyone."

"STOP!" Marcel’s voice cut through the room like a blade. He stood up, his eyes sharp and analytical. "Your daughter and son-in-law call you, talking in riddles, tell you to flee for your life, and you just... pack up and leave without a single question? Can you explain that? Because it makes absolutely no sense!"

"Children, you don't understand yet. And the worst part is, I don't understand much more than you do," Grandma said, trying to steady her voice as she gestured toward the sofa. "Please, sit."

We sat. Julia turned her head toward the window, a single tear tracing a path down her cheek. I squeezed her hand, but I could feel she wasn't really there; she was somewhere far away, lost in the "what-ifs." Marcel, meanwhile, was obsessively turning his puzzle cube over in his fingers, as if trying to read a hidden code in

the plastic. Grandma sat on a stool in front of us, looking at each of our faces in turn.

"Do you remember Christmas Eve here, a few years ago?" she asked.
We all nodded in unison.

"When you went to the Midnight Mass with your grandfather, I had a conversation with your parents. Though, 'conversation' is the wrong word. It was more like a cryptic monologue from them, met with dozens of questions from me that they barely answered," she continued. "We were cleaning up after dinner when Elena asked if we could talk. I thought it was going to be about work or the house, but your father insisted we sit down. I remember the way they looked at each other—that silent communication they always had—before turning to me. 'Mom, we need to tell you something. It won't all make sense, but you have to trust us...' That’s how it started. My blood pressure was already through the roof."

She sighed, her eyes clouded by the memory. "They spoke for a long time, but it was all over the place. They kept correcting each other. They said things like: 'We’ve been assigned a very responsible task... our children will be part of it... you must let them... the danger is irrelevant.' Over and over. At one point, I slammed my fist on the table and told them to stop speaking in riddles. Your mother looked me dead in the eye and said: 'When

the day comes and it all begins, we will call you and tell you what to do. The children will receive their instructions, and their goal will be the Safe House.' They said they couldn't say more and stood up to leave. I was so angry I grabbed their wrists, telling them they weren't going anywhere until they explained. But they... they just slipped out of my grip. They left. I threatened that if they walked out that door, they shouldn't come back—even though it was the last thing I wanted. You know how much you all mean to me. But they just left. Your grandfather said they picked you up from the church without a word and drove away."

"Grandma, that was three years ago," I said, my voice barely a whisper. "Did they ever explain anything after that?"

"No. Every time I brought it up, they'd just say, 'You know as much as we are allowed to tell you.' I felt so powerless. That secret... it started to hang over this family like a dark cloud. We didn't see each other as often after that. And now, this. That's all I know, my loves. Nothing more."

In that moment, Julia seemed to "come back" to us. She looked at Grandma, then at Marcel and me. She pressed her lips together, a look of sudden, fierce determination crossing her face. She began to recount everything—from the moment our parents didn't come home yesterday, to the raid, to our frantic arrival here in Widawa. As Grandma listened, she turned paler and paler. Her hand

reached for the rosary in her pocket, her fingers beginning to slide over the beads. The tension in the room was becoming unbearable.

Julia nearly shouted, "So what now?!"

We sat in the vibrating silence for a long heartbeat.

"Darlings," Grandma said softly. "I have known your parents for a very long time. I raised Elena to be a good person, someone open to the needs of others. She never failed me. And your father—I love him like my own son. I have always trusted him. Even if I don't understand what they meant that Christmas, or what is happening right now... I know they wouldn't lie to us. We have to trust them. You have to start your journey. You have to find the Safe House."

At that exact moment, Marcel looked down at his cube. In the dim light of the living room, the object began to pulse with a faint, rhythmic blue glow.

/ This chapter was crafted with the assistance of Marcel Palczewski. /