

Chapter Five

Krystiyan

Every day he was afraid that he would be killed before he could do the work he was born to do. If there was anything good about this utterly insane war, it was the opportunity, when peace finally came, to rebuild Ukraine as one of the first countries in the world powered entirely by the sun and the wind.

Who else was going to do the job? No more Russian oil, no more Russian gas, which they could now shut off whenever they wanted to teach us a lesson. After the war, once the rubble—and the bodies buried in the rubble—were cleared, every new building was going to have solar panels on the roof, just like in Germany. Every school, every hospital, every high-tech modern factory, every new apartment building, and every new home in the little towns . . . was going to harvest the sun.

The sun would be supplemented by wind turbines along the coast of the Black Sea, and out in the sea itself, sending power into the national grid.

And the grid—ahhh, here was the beauty of it—Ukraine’s grid would connect with the global grid, so that Ukrainian wheat, in abundance, and Ukrainian electricity, in abundance, could feed and power the world. *That* was being a good neighbor.

That was the handshake of peace.

But here he was with a squad of artillery gunners, firing shells at enemy troops who occupied Ukrainian land, while those troops fired shells at Ukrainian troops who threatened the historic Russian empire. For that nonsense he could be suddenly dead within the next five minutes. Before he had planned the national grid. Before he had surveyed the offshore bottom for suitable wind farm sites. Before he had put solar panels on the roof of his mother’s hospital.

Before he had gone to a good university where he could learn how to wire his ancient country into the 21st Century.

He was just an eighteen-year-old teenager, who wanted to spend the next fifty years building one of the most innovative and prosperous and exuberant nations on planet Earth. Because after centuries of brutes and barbarians who had bludgeoned and plundered his people, their time had finally come.

The Ukrainian spirit had survived every invasion, every war, every famine, every pogrom, every book burning, every deportation, every firing squad, every

massacre. And now that spirit, like a vast field of wheat in the summer sunshine, would stand up and flourish.

He would devote his life to making that miracle happen.

Unless five minutes from now, he was suddenly dead.

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