

Baba's Kitchen

Ukrainian Soul Food with Stories From the Village

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Chapter Eleven

Winter Solstice

Koruksun, Sviat Vechir I Rizdvo (Day of the Dead, Holy Eve & Christmas)

Day of dead for Ukrainian is *Koruksun* or Winter Solstice, when sun is in sky shortest time, December 21st.

Baba love this holiday for three reason: is one more time for ancestor worship, it have lots good dancing and everyone appreciate her cooking even more than usual.

Hors is name of old sun god who is dying. He turn into brand new sun goddess, name *Kolyada*. She get dress to nine and hitch up her several golden horse to gallop across sky. This is positive gender role model for children, too. Unfortunate, someone turn powerful, generous golden goddess into Santa Claus with sleigh. Man in drag taking powerful woman place. What else new? Last time Baba went to her church, she wondering if priest have *Ferragamos* under that robe.

In meantime, Ukrainian spend ten whole day making good party. This last until New Year Eve, when it become some other kind party. We deal with that later. Baba know Canadian have short attention span from short holiday.

Children dress up in costume and go to people house to sing song about season. These beautiful song all about how Baba Spider weave universe and how special is earth,

moon, sun and star. Our kid don't yell, "Trick me or treat!" Ukrainian not too tacky people. Everyone have little gift of candy and sometime money for them.

At same time, some people believe Saint Nicholas wandering around making miracle, especially helping animal. Ukrainian not too big on almost-stranger giving present to our kid. You could say this is under emphasize. We give gift to our own and neighbor kid. Beside, we don't have stinking Walmart. How you going to hide from kid that you been carving him wood horse for six month?

Next come hugest feast time, call *Sviat Vechir*, or Holy Eve.

I know what you thinking if you not Ukrainian. "Baba, you have Hollow Weenie and Christmas all mix up!" No way. Baba is one who get it straight. I tell you how was original way. When Christianity come, they install rabbi Jesus, make holiday shorter and kick sun god Hors and Kolyada into the cheap seat.

At end October, we is still lying around groaning from extending of Harvest Festival. We have short break call *Maalox Day*, then go straight into Koruksun, which is Day of Dead. Day after Sviat Vechir would be call Christmas morning in Canada. Mostly we just nursing food hangover and talking about New Year party.

All these thing mix together make one boomerang bonanza of holiday. Ukrainian party all year long, when not putting in overtime at work.

How much you like holiday start date of December 21st depend on what you prefer, make love in day or night. Baba only care she have great lover and warm place to lie down.

Baba warning: Cold lover and cold bed is bad like sitting on cold concrete. Will give you *vovk na sraka*, wolf in bum.

Food on Holy Eve is unbefunkinglievable. Even though type of recipe and ritual vary from region to region, one thing stay always same: you have to use ingenuity to make twelve meatless dish. These food stand for out twelve lunar month and zodiac. When Christian come, they twelve say is for apostle. Hoookay, Baba say. As long is good food, she got no argument with this.

Is also for size twelve shoe *kozakachky* use to kick Nazi sraka. Don't get Baba start on that. Okay, she start herself. Was one battle in western Ukraina where kozachky defeat Nazi tank on horseback. Baba was one them, dress in man drag.

Before feast, woman spread hay all over floor and on table while everyone make animal sound. Moo, cluck, bleat. Baba has special talent for horse neigh. For some reason, this make Canadian man hot. She don't know why.

And by way, tablecloth go on top of hay, not under. Unless you some kind slob. Don't forget to put clove garlic on each corner of table. Also under cloth. Add second tablecloth for ancestor.

Seating arrangement by marry woman is to put single woman in middle of table, to help her find husband. If don't like this woman, she seat her at table corner. If she suspect this woman making floppy eye at her own husband, she seat her out in snow.

Twelve meatless dish is spread out on table. But before anybody eat, they all go out to stable to thank animal for providing everything for family rest of year: loyalty, labor, entertainment, egg, milk, meat, wool, hair and manure for crop. If guest from city, some them still try make animal noise. This don't go over so big when some guy in suit say, "Oink oink," at pig. Pig think he is stupid, because pig know fluent Ukrainian. Some is even English bilingual. We make sure of this, because English is international language of pig business.

We feed animal *kutia* (grain and honey pudding), plus mix part of our meal into their feed. They talk to us. Because Baba never eat horse, duck or goat, they talk to her every day anyway. What they say, you want to know. First, "Thank you for not eat me." Then they give forecast of political election and beauty tip. If you not have animal to honor, make big donation to animal rescue shelter. But first check their book, make sure some Communist bureaucrat not stealing money and killing nice dog. Is special place in gulag for these people.

You go see my girl Raisa, who helping me write this book. She talk to animal at www.reisastone.com

Then man of house spread his arm to sky and call *Perun*, who is thunder god. He say, "Bad thunderstorm, evil spirit, if you want my home, come get it right now." Then he wait and say, "Put up your duke right now! No? You not coming cuz you frighten cat, huh? Fine. Then don't bother come round any other time of year. You not come when I invite as guest, you not welcome anytime. You are rude."

Wife, she cross her arm and say, "And that go for me, too."

Children make chorus. They say, "Yeah."

Back at table, is one place sitting empty for ancestor. Also, *didukh* (grandfather) from harvest is in room corner. This is sheaf of wheat where ancestor live. If you have fireplace, ancestor is in fire, too. In fact, is no place you can get away. They in your house, your garden, your office, your car. Don't be worry. They close their eye when you making rude kind scratching. Unless your ancestor is maybe some kind weirdo.

We make sure to blow on and brush seat of chair so we don't sit on ancestor. This can make awkward occasion.

Because Winter Solstice is continuation of Ukrainian agricultural wheel of year, you give biggest blessing when you wish for someone large crop. In some family, father stand behind stack of wheat at dinner table and play peeking boo. He say in big thunder voice like *Perun*, "Can you seeeee me?"

Family say, "Yes *tato*, we can see top your bald head."

Father reply, "Next year, wheat crop will be so huge, you will not see me. Also, I pay for good toupee."

Child in house watch out window for first star to appear. No one can touch food till this star twinkle down. Is sign from God, mean, "Let's eat!" Star are pathway to other world. If at any time Ukrainian lucky to see falling star, it mean angel is coming to retrieve soul

from earth. Wishing on this is nother way to respect ancestor. Your wish go right up to heaven and come true.

Man throw spoonful of kutia up to ceiling. The bigger the piece that stick, the more luck family will have. If you sitting under where it fall down, you have worse luck. That stuff make hair like cement. Is kind of fashion call "kutia punk." You don't want this.

Why is Ukrainian hospitality so centre on food? For one thing, only *nychysta syla*, evil spirit, don't eat. Skinny-shminny, "None for me, thanks," kind of person scare heckola out of healthy Ukrainian. We make sign of four direction cross behind your size two skirt and skeleton arm. Meatless dish is not only to honor animal. Is only way Ukrainian can fast and eat at same time. You not going to find any those hollow eye saint around here. Our saint come in form of nice fat Baba and Didukh. Baba going to be canonize any day. She should be, all this patience she showing for you.

What kind food we can make if everything meatless? Hoo boy, table is groaning like when you making third try getting up from couch. We have saying, *a table bends from a meal*.

Just remember, you can't have no salo or other kind animal fat. Vegetable oil is okay.

We have:

Non-negotiable dish. Sometime is because is part of sacred ritual, sometime because you would just look stupid if you didn't serve:

Kutia, Chapter Twenty, is part of ritual.

Meatless Borshch, under *Soup, Chapter One*. with meatless *Vushka, Chapter Thirteen*

Verenyky (perogies)---savory kind, but without dairy or meat.

Meatless Holubtsi (cabbage rolls), Chapter Fourteen. Baba prefer *kasha* (buckwheat) filling for Sviat Vechir. Rice is good too.

At least one kind of fish. Baba suggest:

Baked Stuffed Fish (with no butter) *Chapter Sixteen*, or *Pickle Herring, Chapter Seventeen*

Fasolia: White Bean with Garlic, hot or cold dip, *Chapter Twenty*

Mushroom dish, Chapter Twelve

Kolach (braided sacred bread), below. Part of sacred ritual.

Uzvar, which is stew fruit, *Chapter Twenty Three*. You also drink juice and call it *pyva Bozha*, Drink of God. This recipe usually mark end of main meal, because someone always spill serving dish all over himself.

Not mandatory, but tasty:

Kapusta i Horokh (sauerkraut and pea casserole), *Chapter Eighteen*. This dish is delicious to have, but you won't look stupid if you leave out. If you craving *kapusta*, sauerkraut, but already have too many dish, make *kapusta verenky!*

Salata is optional, but would count as one dish. Baba know table look strange to non-Ukrainian without salad, but remember borshch is vegetable stew, anyway.

Pick some dessert to round out twelve dish:

Medivnyk (honey cake), Chapter Twenty Three. You have to start this early in season! Is non-negotiable. **Baba so generous, she give you TWO medivnyk recipe, below!**

Pampushky (filled doughnuts), Chapter Twenty Three. Is almost non-negotiable. Look, if you amateur, you might not want to attempt, even if is very traditional. Is no Ukrainian *Tim Hortonenski* outlet, so you can't just pick up bag of doughnut quick before dinner. You have other option like:

Nalysnyky (crepes) with sweet filling, Chapter Four

Perakladanets (coffee cake), Chapter Twenty Three

Makivnyk (poppy seed roll), Chapter Twenty Four

Verenyky with dessert filling, like plum or cherry, Chapter Thirteen

Horilka don't hurt, and this is time to bring out your fanciest. Like lip smack liqueur and favorite flavor vodka. Bread and horilka recipe going to be in Baba next cookbook. With exception: In centre of table is gorgeous braid bread, call *kolach*. Baba going to teach you this.

She like to give caroler *hrustychky*, which is type of crunchy doughnut with icing sugar. All them end up with white frost on face, so cute.

Another great thing about this meal is, never no leftover. By end of meal, Baba still slapping people hand so everyone get enough verenyky. When she see Canadian eat turkey sandwich for six month after Christmas, she laugh like Solstice banshee. Is sad, really. She don't understand why you making such nauseate surplus. Can't be that hard to breed small turkey. You just put together short lady turkey and short man turkey. Baba don't mind most short man, why should lady turkey be fussy?

After dinner come caroler. We sing, both with and without them. We sing so strong, would make your good eye water. Most part this *koliadka* is several hundred year old, but Baba write chorus about weaving star together. Ukrainian should feel free to pass around rest of song. Is serious copyright issue in chorus. Is going to be on television, you will see. One day we all going to honor golden goddess Kolyada again:

Before there was a world, there was

Baba Spider

Weaving the stars together

She made a web where people could live

She fed everyone

She brings all good things

There are three friends

*Caught in her web
The shining sun
The bright moon
And the light rain
To make things grow*

*Weaving the stars together
She brings all good things
Weaving the stars together
She brings all good things*

© BABA. Don't you forget!

*Baba Spider weaves the web of life
She gives us the beauty of her designs
So all people can be together
Be kind to spider
And she will bring you good luck*

*Weaving the stars together
She brings all good things
Weaving the stars together
She brings all good things*

© BABA. Don't you forget, too!

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Baba friend Raisa write entire book call “Rosie's Spider”, all about this legend. Is very good bedtime kind of reading. You buy some book, okay? Is sample chapter at www.ukrainiansoulfood.com

You didn't sing loud enough, you. Baba once read, “Sing like no one listening, dance like no one watching.” Why is this, you have rotten teeth and no fancy pair red boot? You sound like poor thing. Here is TWO Winter Solstice/Koruksun recipe to cheer you up, because Baba so sympathetic:

Honey Cake (Medivnyk)

Ukrainian invent honey cake because we have most and biggest honey bee in world. Buzz buzz buzz, they so cute. Look like chubby little stripe *kozak* kissing flower as if pretty girl.

Best kind this cake, you get honey from buckwheat. This strong Ukrainian taste. Clover honey is weak kind, meant for tea only. The darker is honey, the more good mineral it have inside. Baba know you not always obey her. Your loss, for sure. Just make sure honey is liquid for *medivnyk* recipe.

Baba law: also get honeycomb and chew this like gum while you cook. It give you right rhythm for good cake. When you visit bee keeper, get me bottle honey wine, or I want to know why not.

Make sure you going to be home while cake bake. Is not okay to run to boyfriend down hallway in meantime. This not some ugly powder thing from box with woman in bad haircut smiling because she make so much money from you. This serious project from sacred ingredient.

Make honey boil, then let cool. Watch honey whole time. It not take long to boil, and you don't want burn.

Heat oven to 350 F.

Make cream brown sugar and soft butter. Not this slimy “margarine” thing.

This next thing sad, but have happy ending. Tell four free range organic egg, “I have to separate you, but only for little while.” Do it, even if they cry. If egg have blood spot, this good. Mean is fertile and came from smiling chicken. Put four egg yolk, one at time, into sugar and butter. Beat up.

Pour cool honey into batter and beat more. You chewing that honeycomb like Baba tell you? Rhythm, rhythm!

Sift cake flour with baking soda, baking powder, salt from Black Sea, cinnamon.

Baba tell you secret of why her cake better than neighbour cake: add nutmeg and ground clove. Sifting dry thing also important. Make batter fluffy and well-mix.

Add to batter one cup dry thing, then half cup *smetana*, or sour cream. Another cup dry thing, half cup *smetana*. Pay attention to TOTAL: one cup *smetana*, three cup dry thing. Because last time I check, you can't do math. Last cup dry thing. See chapter on *smetana*. Nowhere but *verenyky* (*perogy*) recipe is it more important that *smetana* come from farm in jar. Sure, you can use this white jello from stupormarket and cake will turn out. But *smetana* make big difference.

If you like walnut, date, dry currant or raisin, you can stir in one cup of one kind or mixed kind. One cup total. But not necessary to real good honey cake. Peanut no good.

This where you keep promise to egg for reunite. Use egg beater in white part until your bicep swell. Egg will look like snow drift. Mix into batter.

Grease pan with butter. **Best kind pan is with tube thing in middle, so honey cook even.** Pour in batter.

Next Baba trick for honey cake: Oven start at 350 F for first fifteen minute only.

Cake will bake total of fifty or fifty five minute. Turn oven down to 325 F and bake here for next fifteen minute. Then turn oven down to 300 F for final twenty or twenty five minute.

Honey burn real easy, so make sure you listen to Baba about this. Playing with temperature will also make nice crunchy crust on cake.

Check with knife. If middle still sticky, put back in oven five more minute.

Honey cake get better as it age, just like woman. You will not resist taste when you first bake, but try mostly control yourself. Or you can do like Baba, and make two in first place. Don't lie to self about appetite, poopchik. This is big part of life pleasure.

Wrap first cake in foil or plastic, and put up on high shelf where no one else can touch. At Christmas, Baba make one month ahead so honey have "cure" taste, just like good horilka. Remember honey is living thing, come from living creature who work hard. Medivnyk is evolving thing, not ready-mix.

If you made two, go back and start eating first one before children get home.

Serve with *Uzvar* fruit stew, on side. Or with my special *Plum sauce*, *Chapter Twenty Two*. Also good with real whip cream.

Drink with glass cold goat milk. If unpasteurize, even better. I prefer from brown goat, but you can't have everything. In Canada. Big surprise: also very good with plain taste rice or almond milk.

Your option:

For many present to friend, make bigger recipe and spoon batter into clean, greased coffee can. Or even little soup can. I know, I know, Baba wrong to even suggest you not making all soup from scratching. Take out cake from can before giving to friend.

Ingredient List:

- Buckwheat honey, one cup
- Butter, one half cup plus enough to grease pan
- Brown sugar, one cup
- Eggs, four large
- Cake flour, three cups
- Baking soda, two teaspoons
- Baking powder, one half teaspoon
- Salt

- Cinnamon, one teaspoon
- Nutmeg, one half teaspoon
- Ground cloves, one half teaspoon
- Bundt pan. Absolutely necessary so cake bakes evenly.

Chocolate Medivnyk (Honey Cake)

Baba have big confession to make to you. She not always as sincere and honest as you know her. During terrible time in Soviet regime and Holocaust---because Ukraina always get best of both world---Baba have hard time letting go of some habit. Like living.

Then she come to Canada. When little granddaughter Rosie old enough to walk to drugstore, her favorite thing is chocolate Easter Bunny. She so cute, always point to biggest one on shelf, kind who make wide candy eye. Unfortunate, Baba is poor. It break her heart she cannot buy Rosie this major chocolate rabbit.

Here come bright side to starvation in Europe: Baba can carry entire live turkey in her bloomer. Chocolate is literal piece of cake. She just point and say, "Look over there, Rosie!" and pow! Rabbit is swoop under long skirt.

Baba limp little bit going home, but she tell Rosie straight up that arthritis in knee is pretty bad today. Someone have to teach child honesty.

Baba teaching you to make chocolate medivnyk. She give you lucky break. This recipe only require one big fist full unsweeten chocolate. Should be plenty room in your bra, from what Baba see is diet situation in Canada.

You ready for this honey and chocolate extravaganza? **Here we go:**

Leave hunk of butter on counter overnight so you don't have to argue with next day. Baba is sure you going to forget, then try to make soft in goofy microwave. Here is what will happen. Butter will get melt in puddle partway, and stay cold and hard partway. This is terrible disappointment. Avoid, I am telling you this.

Melt chocolate in double boiler, not fry pan where you make bacon. What is double boiler, you want to know. Is one pot go inside other, like that crazy dead Russian Katerina. She think she so great. She absorb part of Ukraina, then part of horse. She think they go together like *rama lama lama ka ding a da ding de dong*. Mix of guilty conscience and heavy horse kill her in end. Double boiler is lots more functional.

You boil water in bottom of boiler to melt delicate thing on top part. Good chocolate burn easy, so is good idea to invest in chocolate protection. Mix in liquid honey, but don't taste. If you sincere about becoming Ukrainian, get buckwheat honey. Is very strong taste, so if you don't want to overwhelm taste bud, go slow. Baba know honey and chocolate together is irresistible, but control yourself or you going to burn off your good lip. Then how you going to lie to *fascista*? Put boiler aside so honey chocolate can cool.

Turn oven to 350 F.

Make sifting with flour, baking soda, salt and bake powder. Do this twice, and don't get amount of each powder thing mix up. You been back to that honey chocolate with finger, and your head already spinning. Put dry thing aside.

Make creaming with butter in huge mix bowl. Everything heading in this direction now, okay? Mix in white or brown sugar little bit at time, so butter have time to adjust to new relationship. Butter and sugar is one of best love match in world. Add good splash vanilla. Can substitute *Four Rose* whiskey, Baba find out the hard way.

Beat in two egg, one at time.

Pour in that wild honey chocolate. Can you believe we in world where all these thing can make life together?

Have cake flour and buttermilk waiting. Add hand full flour, then splash buttermilk. Hand full flour, splash buttermilk. Keep going and mixing till each ingredient is used up. You can lick spoon now. As if you waited.

Butter eight inch by eight inch baking pan. Pour in batter.

You can also double recipe and bake in bundt pan.

Bake forty minute. Follow temperature instruction in medivnyk, above.

Is second good ending to this Easter Bunny story. Baba not know this till recent, but Jewish family who own drugstore actual see her take chocolate. They send bill to her children every time. Nobody want to embarrass woman who survive everything Baba has, especial in front of little Rosie. This was in Winnipeg, where is excellent refugee and immigrant community. In BC, they would probably hold Baba hostage to be drug mule.

Ingredient list:

- Buckwheat honey, two thirds cup
- Bitter chocolate, three ounces
- Baking soda, one teaspoon
- Baking powder, one half teaspoon
- Salt, one half teaspoon
- Butter, one half cup
- Brown sugar, two thirds cup
- Vanilla, one teaspoon
- Eggs, two medium
- Cake flour, one and three quarters cups
- Buttermilk, three quarter cup

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