ANTHOLOGY24



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INTRODUCTION

Before dawn on February 24, 2022, Russia's military attack on Ukraine began. These events forced the whole world to react decisively: most countries condemned the actions of the aggressor and took a number of measures in favor of the Ukrainian side—some support with kind words, some give weapons and money. A much smaller number of states have supported the war, and only a few are trying to sit on two chairs without renouncing relations with either Ukraine or Russia.

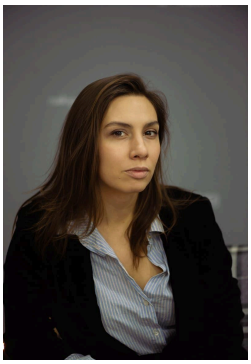
The only ones who cannot stay out in this situation are, of course, Ukrainians. The life of every inhabitant of Ukraine has changed fatefully and irreversibly: now everyone, even those who have declared their existence "outside politics", have a new bitter experience before them. The lives of tens of thousands have already been cut short. And while military actions can be followed through news feeds, the changes in the lives of individuals, whose destinies will determine the destiny of the nation, can only be grasped by giving these people a voice.

The team of the Anthology24 project seeks to convey to the outside world what is happening in our land by collecting creatively rethought evidence of this tragedy. At the beginning of April we announced an open call for texts for the theater; in two-and-a-half weeks we received more than a hundred works. Over the following two weeks, we reviewed them all and identified the 23 texts that make up this collection. We stipulated almost no restrictions concerning the type of text—it was important for us to get the latest imprint of events, as it is right now. What we received was colorful, uneven, but absolutely true and wild. After all, language, a way of speaking about war, is born right now. And we strive not only to observe this process from within, but to make it a witness (and, if possible, an ally) for others around the world.

The anthology includes plays, essays, diary entries, field notes, and poetic commentary created by both experienced playwrights and novice authors. Together, these texts form a map of events from February 24 to late April, the deadline for submission of works. They will be translated into several languages for readings and possibly performances in theaters around the world.

A FEW WORDS FROM THE TEAM

In this section you will find information about the readers and other participants in the project—their short bios, as well as answers to why they decided to join the project, what their hopes for it are, and how their own lives have changed since the outbreak of the war.



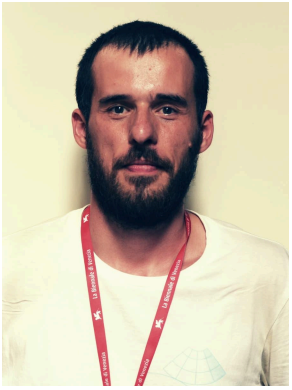
Veronika Sklyarova (Kharkiv, initiator of the project). Producer, cultural manager from Kharkiv; temporarily based in Germany. Program director of the intersectoral festival "Parade-fest", theater critic, arts journalist. Initiator of the educational project "Safe Theater: Laboratory of New Rules of the Game". Curator of the urban research project "Plant. Expeditions ", which aimed to draw back the Iron Curtain from giant Soviet-era factories using the methods of contemporary art. Producer at the Dollmen Theater of "Crimea, 5 am", a multidisciplinary project on the human rights situation in occupied Crimea.

“It was not difficult to initiate this collection. Almost every day I received inquiries from colleagues in Europe and America who wanted to stage plays and stage performances of Ukrainian contemporary drama. In the process of work and negotiations with the readers of the project, the question of genre definition arose, because with plays - it is a longer process. At the same time, the texts written after February 24, which I saw on the UkrDramaHub portal, were more like essays—the language was so fast and expressive. Personally, I was very interested to see what kind of response we would get to this call, how much attention we would receive from various authors, because the open call was crazy in terms of the window of time, only two weeks. The answer, which spoke to the desire for an opportunity to be heard, was extraordinary: We received more than 100 texts. My hope was that the vague genre framework would allow for the opportunity to hear new voices—and that's what happened. I am infinitely grateful to all the authors of the texts.

“I am the director of the ART DOT NGO and the cross-sectoral festival, Parade Fest. Before the war it was a festival "about the right to the city", i.e., about the opportunity to be part of democratic change in society, to feel comfortable in your space; a festival on issues related to inclusion and Russian propaganda. In my opinion, and in the opinion of my team, art and culture in a broad sense are nonviolent tools that can help Ukrainian society grow in cohesion and harmony.

“In the first week of the war, we began working together to help Kharkiv artists evacuate their own collections and archives. Later, the world-famous museum of the

Kharkiv School of Photography was evacuated, and sometimes we also evacuated the elderly and retired original avant-garde artists themselves who started this movement in Ukraine. We organized the logistics of transportation, packaging and storage of these facilities in Lviv. Ours and my own personal mission now is to strengthen Ukraine's identity through culture and art—through their preservation and production. This is the only thing in my life that has remained the same."



Piotr Armyanovsky (Kyiv, project reader) Born in Donetsk in 1985. Performer and director, co-founder of Pic pic. He studied theater and performance art in Kyiv and Lviv, including Janusz Baldyga's School of Performance and Marina Abramović's *The Artist Is Present*. After the war, in his hometown of Donetsk, he worked mainly as a documentary film and theater director. He is the winner of numerous artistic awards and distinctions, in particular, inclusion in the Biennale of Young Artists in 2017 and 2019, Docudays 2018, and MUHi 2019.

"I know from experience that it is much easier to write when you know that someone is waiting for your text, that it will not be just a post on Facebook, but something more thorough, which may give a name, words, to the fact that we live now.

"On the one hand, I have no expectations. It is good if someone writes a text for the theater thanks to our proposal. On the other hand, the result of such a collection can be readings and performances in theaters in Ukraine and around the world. It is a way to turn our pain and vulnerability into empathy and strength.

"Until February 24, I was working on several projects in the field of virtual reality, documentaries and audio tours about Kyiv cinemas. For example, at the end of February we had to present a virtual tour of the National Museum of Folk Decorative Art, and it turned out that this work became an important archival document. After the full-scale Russian attack on Ukraine, I volunteered and took pictures in my spare time. I also told foreign journalists and viewers online at charity film screenings about what is happening in Ukraine and the historical reasons for this. Now, on the 83rd day of the war, I am again mainly engaged in art projects that aim to tell the world and ourselves what we are going through."



Oksana Danchuk (Lviv, project leader) Cultural manager and curator, playwright. In 2012 she received a master's degree in cultural studies from Ivan Franko National University of Lviv. Since 2013 she has been a member of the Drabyna Art Workshop NGO and curator of the Drama.UA

Play Contest. Since 2016 she is head of the literary and dramatic part of the Lviv Academic Drama Theater, named after Lesya Ukrainka.

“For a long time, Ukrainian voices in the world sounded very quiet. They were shouted at and silenced by Russia’s imperial cries. Maybe someone didn’t want to hear them. Today, those whose weapon is the written word must direct it to the eyes and ears of the world. It is our duty to strengthen these voices. I do not expect ingenious texts. We already have them. I do not expect the discovery of talents—we also have them and always have. I expect that the final anthology will record the reaction of Ukrainian artists to the full-scale invasion of Russia and receive its due attention in European theatrical circles. After February 24, our theater instantly became a humanitarian headquarters and a shelter for internally displaced persons. I was lying at home and was sick with my first bout of Covid-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. When the disease passed, I joined my colleagues. Instead of rehearsals and performances, we met and welcomed people, alternating there around the clock; we prepared food, transported it to the station, and received, sorted, and sent humanitarian goods of various sizes. Now, on the 83rd day of the war, we are trying to combine humanitarian tasks with new performances and planning a new winning season.”



Svitlana Bazhenova (Kharkiv, project leader) Cultural Project Manager, theater expert, grantwriting and budgeting expert. Coordinated the work of several audiovisual projects, is a member of the Union of Theater Actors of Ukraine. It was she who came up with the project for the evacuation of art archives and heritage, which is currently being carried out by the Parade-fest team, also working with Cultural Agency A and PLAN B fest.

“The war in Ukraine is not only about death and suffering, it is, first of all, about life and the future. That is why now, together with military victories, it is necessary to build the future of Ukrainian culture, to include Ukraine not only in military textbooks, but also in world culture. After all, every cultural project is a victory in the battle for the consciousness of Ukrainian society. These texts, created here and now, are an instant creative imprint of reality, and it is very important to record them as theatrical texts. After all, the theater needs words to talk about our history. I expect that the texts sent to us will be translated into many languages for productions not only in Ukrainian theaters, but all over the world. The anthology of the best works is a construction of a new narrative in which the whole of Ukraine is really united. In this tragedy there is no east and west, supporters of different political forces,

nationalities: I believe that this is a new starting point for the entire Ukrainian culture. A common story that affected absolutely everyone. With the beginning of the war, my planning horizon changed: on the first day it was "for a few hours", in the first week, "for a day or two", and now, in the third month of the war, I can plan for a month. This is a very good sign. We are learning to live in new conditions. The evacuation with the family to another city in Ukraine completely shifted the daily focus of attention to domestic and psychological problems within the family. Along with all this uncertainty and panic, there was a feeling that something needed to be done right now and as soon as possible. And now I understand: I have to do what I do best—cultural projects and support of our public organizations and other volunteers."



Elizaveta Bannikova (Kharkiv, compiler of the collection) Director (graduated from KhDAK in 2007), author of stagings for plays, compiler of texts for the book "Crimea, 5 am" in the project dedicated to political prisoners in Crimea.

> "I WANT OUR WAR TO CEASE TO BE AN ABSTRACTION, ESPECIALLY FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE EU.

"I want our war to cease to be an abstraction, especially for the people of the EU. Yes, anyone endowed with imagination and the ability to empathize will feel horror when they see footage from Bucha, Mariupol, Kramatorsk. However, it is necessary for it to start working for our protection and benefit. The artistic word can be the motivation for such actions, because it multiplies the power of documentary evidence, allowing you to hear and feel someone's grief. And then the question, "What can be done here?" turns into, "What exactly can I do?" and still becomes an actual action.

"I know that now thousands of caring, wonderful people abroad are volunteering, helping with money, organizing rallies in front of their own government buildings, and sincerely welcoming our refugees into their homes. But it is necessary that this flow does not subside and becomes wider, all-encompassing. In the autumn, I had the honor of being involved in the "Crimea, 5 a.m." project about Crimean Tatar political prisoners who are thrown in jail for huge terms for disagreeing with the actions of the occupying authorities. In an informational video about these events, we wrote: 'Local lawlessness is a common responsibility.' So people need to see that this lawlessness is becoming less local and more horrible every day.

"Ever since the war began, we have had to harden our spirits every day. That is, to do a lot of things that I would not dare in other circumstances—to spend the night in basements and other strange unsuitable places, to lose the number of hours spent in

cars and buses, to weave camouflage nets, to cross borders unexpectedly for oneself, to drag one's family everywhere, and most importantly to work, even when one lacks strength and inspiration. Because I consider it my first duty to pay the "Victory Tax": the income should be to transfer part of it to the needs of the Armed Forces and volunteers."



Oleksandr Fomenko (Kharkiv, coordinator) Actor, director, theater and film producer, public figure. Co-founder of the drama competition Week of Current Play, Theater of Immigrants, socio-cultural project Class Act: East-West. Co-organizer of the revitalization of the cultural center of Art Bratislava. Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Kharkiv Municipal Fund of Culture and Creativity.

"Until February 24, I was the director of the art space "Circle of the Forest" in Kharkiv, which we created with like-minded and caring people by revitalizing the complex of buildings of the first Kharkiv Telegraph. The art space was opened on December 26, 2021, and in two months of its existence we managed to organize more than 30 art events, performances, lectures, parties, and contemporary music concerts. On February 24, the art space ceased to function. My family and I moved to Lviv and joined the volunteer initiatives of the Lesia Ukrainka Lviv Theater, including a shelter for IDPs and a logistics staff for humanitarian aid. It's where I work to this day.

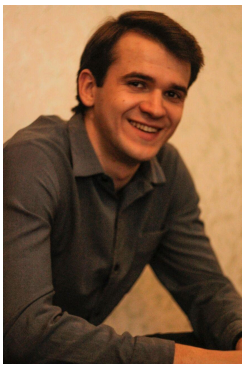
"From the first weeks, the nature of this colonial war was revealed. Prior to the full-scale invasion, intelligence released data that the Russian army had driven mobile crematoria to parts of the border and prepared 45,000 plastic bags for corpses. We all then joked that they would destroy themselves, bury them, and go home. But after the first battles, shellings and bombings of purely residential buildings and after information about Russian atrocities in the occupied territories, it became clear that their goal was to destroy as many Ukrainians as possible. And those 45,000 packages were for us.

> ANTHOLOGY24 WILL BE A TOOL FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO TALK ABOUT THE WAR IN UKRAINE.

"At the moment of realizing this, it became clear that we should start collecting evidence in the form of texts for the theater as soon as possible and transmit them to the whole world. We are witnessing the greatest genocide in central Europe in decades. Anthology24 will be a tool for those who want to talk about the war in Ukraine. And it will be able to convey to readers and listeners a reliable emotional

experience of the events of the first months of the full-scale invasion of Putin’s horde in Ukraine.”

EPIGRAPH - ALEXANDER LEVITSKY "COUNTER"



Alexander Levitsky. He was born on November 19, 2000, in Staraya Sinyava, Khmelnytsky region. Then he made many mistakes. He learned to correct them, to prevent their repetition, made mistakes again, learned lessons again. So the 22nd year already. Not bored. It's scary to look for something new, because it's always out of your comfort zone, but it's almost always unbelievable. More emotions. More and more new emotions. Positive. And negative. Yes, all the emotions that life gives are all beautiful. Of course, he fell in love, cooled down, lit up again, but never — thank God — never disappointed in Love. It is eternal, as is Silence.

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

“Values changed after the war. Like everyone else. You appreciate the family, mom’s smile, a clumsy and in her own way cute picture of a seven-year-old niece, flowers in the yard, silence, a kiss from a loved one, useless help, everyone’s "thank you", everyone’s "happiness", everyone’s "I love you so much". After the war, words acquired different colors, different shapes, different temperatures. After the war there will be peace, of course, otherwise thousands of the smartest physicists and mathematicians throughout human history have erred in one simple formula: life is a sine wave. And for those who do not quite understand what it is, I will be happy to tell you after the Victory by the river with a guitar and currant-mint compote.”

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aklychiL (Counter/retnuoC)

Ten. Nine. Eight. Seven.

Burning house in heaven.

A cartridge is full of deceptions.

Slyness. Blackmail. No exceptions.

Red reflections.

Reviewing eternal senses of life.

‘Destroy,’ ‘Forget.’ ‘Deprive.’

Six. Five.

‘Burn down’ church choirs plea.

There is nowhere to flee.

Four. Three.

To the abyss of suffering, we have run.

Two. One.

The war has begun.

ANTHOLOGY24 Artists

1. NINA ZAKHOZHENKO "ME, WAR AND THE PLASTIC GRENADE"



Nina Zakhozhenko . She is a philologist by education. For the last 10 years I have been working in the field of modern theater as a project manager, digital artist, translator and playwright. Dramaturgy:

2016, staging "In the very heart" based on short stories by L. Pirandello, New Theater in Pechersk, Kyiv;

2019, script "Theatrical walk through Sofia Kyivska", New Theater in Pechersk as part of the Bouquet Kyiv Stage festival;

2020, the play "Seven first works of Alina" (shortlist of the competition "Week of Contemporary Drama", Grand Prix of the competition "July Honey");

2021, the play "Cops against snails" (shortlist for the competition "Week of current drama");

2021, co-author of the play "People's Commissariats", Publicist Theater, Kharkiv;

2022, playwright in the project "Witnessing U", theater-laboratory VIE and De Toneelmakerij, the Netherlands, 2022.

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

“The last few months have been extremely turbulent. Shock from the beginning of the war, reception of refugees in Lviv, temporary departure from the country. So far, I have returned home and am gradually building a ‘new normality’ for my family, which is still extremely fragile and not very normal in every sense.

“Over the months, I’ve learned not to feel sorry for anything but people. Live with background anxiety. Writing plays on my mobile (laptop was too heavy for my little suitcase). Communicate daily with a bunch of distant and close relatives and live with a large family in a small space. To feel incredible love and connection with

barely known people from different parts of Ukraine and the world, who in different ways joined the network of struggle and mutual assistance.”

I, the war and a plastic grenade

1. LET TODAY BE YESTERDAY

Lviv

Lika 32 years old.

Anton 35 years old.

4:40

ANTON

I studied at the Faculty of Philology, read Homer and Ovid, and ancient Greek and Latin were on my wish list. Well, who the hell wanted to go to the army? This is not the army, they said. This is just to be on the safe side, they said. We did push-ups, ran cross-country and tried to meet qualifying standards. We were given the Kalashnikov rifles and taught to assemble and disassemble them. We bandaged heads, clamped arteries and made stretchers. We played the game of mummies and zombie uprising. We were sure we would never need it. We were convinced that we were killing time for nothing. It was because we were unlucky to be born boys and have two extra hours on our schedule. It was because once upon a time there was a great war, which will never happen again, but the memory of it lives on in the minds of contused soldiers who fish us out of the library, make us crawl on our elbows, make bandages and throw plastic grenades. To be on the safe side. What the hell is that? I clutch a plastic grenade in my hand and throw it at imaginary enemies. And then I turn around and run away, run away, run away, run away.

5:00

ANTON: Wake up!

LIKA: What?

ANTON: Air raid siren!

LIKA: It’s a training siren.

ANTON: It’s not training.

LIKA: They said yesterday…

ANTON: It’s 5 am. It’s not training.

LIKA: Are they here?

ANTON: They are in Kyiv.

LIKA: But not here.

ANTON: Get up, Lika! We need to do something!

LIKA: What?

ANTON: To buy food and withdraw some money.

…

LIKA: I need to brew coffee.

5:30

LIKA: Where are all these cars going?

ANTON: To the border.

LIKA: Is this queue going to the border?

ANTON: From here to the border.

LIKA: But it’s impossible.

ANTON: There has been a call for mobilisation. Everything will be closed soon. Nobody will be allowed to leave the country soon.

LIKA: Anton…

ANTON: It’s the last chance for me.

LIKA: But 60 km!

9:00

LIKA: That’s how it is. There is a queue up to the petrol station, after that it is free.

ANTON: Men are not allowed to leave.

LIKA: This queue is up to the petrol station.

ANTON: Men are not allowed to leave.

LIKA: It’s not to the border. It’s up to the petrol station.

ANTON: You will go alone. With kids.

LIKA: I won’t go.

9:30

LIKA: Today, a war started in my country. It came at 5 am with sirens wailing and bombs falling on airfields. Massive columns of tanks crept into my country from all sides, biting into its body like a bloodthirsty caterpillar. But my city is in the west of the country, which is safe.

I withdrew money from an ATM, I bought coffee, croissants, avocado and salmon. It’s not precisely what one buys when war breaks out. But soon money will lose its value and I will not buy this kind of food again. So, today I am having croissants for breakfast. With avocado and salmon. I am looking out the window. Cars are not queuing up: the petrol station has run out of fuel. The sun came out. Now the children will wake up and we will go to the park. So far so good. It’s safe here for now. For now.

12:00

ANTON: Pack the bags, there are two places in the car. You are leaving in an hour.

LIKA: No.

ANTON: They are waiting for you.

LIKA: No.

ANTON: I’ve arranged everything.

LIKA: No.

ANTON: Lika!

LIKA: Anton?

ANTON: Are you stupid?

LIKA: It’s safe here.

ANTON: When it’s dangerous here, you won’t leave! There will be panic. There will be a crowd. Will you fight your way through the crowd with the kids? Are you ready to push? Walk over the bodies of old ladies, children and pets? There will be a shortage of everything. It won’t be long before the food runs out. Will you collect roots? Eat rats? We don’t even have leather belts. It is enough for them to bomb one power plant and we will have no light, no heat. Can you make a fire? Are you ready to roast rats on the fire?

LIKA: Pigeons.

ANTON: What?

LIKA: We have a bow. We’ll hunt pigeons. (Pause) Just kidding.

ANTON: You have to think about the kids.

LIKA: It’s a toy bow.

15:00

LIKA: We were sitting in the bathroom; I was watching the news.

…

My son asked me: why are you crying? Who has offended you? Has somebody offended you?

…

And my daughter said: he offended her. The most stupid one. That one; the most stupid one. The one who sends rockets. He also insulted me. I am so angry with him. I am so offended. I didn’t go to kindergarten because of him. Because of him, we have to sit in the bathroom. Because of him, my mother always watches the news. Because of him and because of his stupid rockets. Because of his tanks, his soldiers. I saw, saw, saw these tanks. I saw, saw, saw these rockets. In stupid news. I hate that stupid one. I hate it. I hate it.

…

My son said: what rockets? He likes rockets. My son loves rockets that go to space, go to the moon, and good rockets. He didn't seem to understand everything else, he understood only rockets. He understood that the rockets offended his mother. …

Stupid rockets, my daughter said. Stupid, the most stupid. Bad rockets. I will shoot down these rockets, my daughter said, I'll catch them, yes, I'll catch them, yes. I'll catch the most stupid one. I will bite his hand. I want to bite him. I want to bite his hand off. Oh yeah. My daughter said. And bit me.

…

Like this, like this, said my son. He was catching imaginary missiles and biting my hand. He liked this game.

16:00

ANTON: I want you to leave. I want you to be safe. I want my kids to be in a safe place. I'll feel better. I'll manage. I'll survive if I'm alone. We won't be able to feed four people. You won't manage without water, electricity and heating. You won't have water to wash your bottom or to drink. There won't be any croissants.

LIKA: I'll survive without croissants.

ANTON: I will join the army, take weapons and live at checkpoints, if we are defeated, we will retreat to the mountains and become partisans.

LIKA: You didn't want to fight... You wanted to go abroad.

ANTON: I don't want to. But I have no choice while you have.

LIKA: Shall we get divorced?

ANTON: What?

LIKA: Divorced. You will take the kids and go abroad. I will join the army, take weapons, and live at checkpoints. If we are defeated, we will retreat to the mountains and become partisans.

ANTON: At such a moment you are telling me that you want a divorce?

LIKA: And you are telling me that you want to put me on the bus without a return ticket. Then we will get married again. If we want.

ANTON: What if we don't want to?

LIKA: If we want. Or if we don’t want to.

19:00

LIKA: Fondue!

ANTON: What?

LIKA: Fondue! We haven’t made fondue for ages!

ANTON: So you decided to make fondue today?

LIKA: I adore fondue!

ANTON: Now I get it.

LIKA: Finally!

ANTON: You’ve gone mad.

LIKA: Thank you for your support! Anton, it was you who brought home 6 loaves. Tell me why. They spoil in two days. They are covered with mould. What was I supposed to do? I dried rusks. We had some aged cheeses, some wine, and herbs de Provence. In a French restaurant, such a dinner would cost 100 euros.

ANTON: Lika... My incredible Lika! Do you know what I think? I think it’s wonderful. I think you are a culinary genius. We will do it this way. We will now eat this fantastic fondue, drink a glass of wine, dance and play board games. And tomorrow morning you will pack the bags, take the children and get on the bus. A nice comfortable double-decker bus. You’ll just board it. If you want to go to France, go to France. Fondue, herbs de Provence, croissants. They will meet you there, find housing and a job for you, and send the children to kindergarten — for free, you will be free, you will be able to realise all your talents.

LIKA: I don’t want to realise my talents.

ANTON: What the hell do you want?

LIKA: I want to trudge along in this hole. Without light, water and food. Without money and prospects. In fear and danger. I want you to stop putting me on the bus and eat this fantastic fondue before it cools down!

22:00

ANTON: There was a curfew and we turned off the lights.

LIKA: “Are we playing hide and seek?” asked my daughter.

ANTON: “I can’t see anything,” said my son.

LIKA: “Let’s turn on the flashlight,” I said.

ANTON: And I will be a crocodile. (*makes a shadow with his hands*) Click click click.

LIKA: “And I will be a bird and fly,” (*makes the shadow of a bird*) said my daughter.

ANTON: “And I will be a deer and get you on the horns,” (*the same*) said my son.

LIKA: “And I will build a shack,” I said.

ANTON: “Right in the hall,” I said.

LIKA: “And we will live in it,” they clapped their hands.

23:00

LIKA: What the hell do I really want? I want you to hug me. I want us to lie pressed to the floor in the small hall of our small apartment in our small town as two small specks on the body of a huge country of a huge planet of a huge universe. In which bombs explode, volcanoes erupt and stars collide. Burning everything around, turning to ashes, ruining cities, destroying destinies. But now we are together, we are in our home, and there is love between us, and our world is still holding on. We were given a one-day delay. Our tomorrow has already begun, but we are still here today. Let today be yesterday. Tomorrow, I promise, I will get on a bus full of crying children and women to stand in line for 24 hours and cross the border. But today I am here. We are here. We are all here. Today.

4:40

ANTON: Darkness is coming from the East. There is death, destruction, poverty, hunger and despair. Little by little, kilometre by kilometre, the darkness is moving towards my house. And there are cruise missiles. Missiles that fly hundreds of kilometres in a few minutes and hit any house in any part of the globe. But in my imagination, they hit my house, a nine-story panel building, where my wife and children sleep in the hall, illusively protected by two solid walls. The house collapses covering them with debris.

…

Let’s be honest: I’m a bad warrior. I am not made for this. I fight well in Total War. I am a good strategist. But I’m not good at shooting. I’m afraid that if I try to shoot at someone, my ligaments will be torn apart. This is what our military commander said, that there is a shock wave that hits the one who shoots. A person who has never shot in his life cannot shoot. Not everything happens for the first time. There are things that should never happen. I don’t even eat meat. I am not made for this. It will be easier for the army without me than with me.

…

And I don’t want to die at all. Not heroically, not just like that. I just don’t want it. I want to live. To take out a mortgage to buy a house. To hang a hammock in the garden and arrange an open-air cinema. I want to travel. I haven’t been to many places, although I still could, I could go to a club in Berlin and dance the night away, learn to deep dive before global warming destroys coral reefs, take a pilgrimage route of the Camino de Santiago in Spain…

…

But today I can’t sleep. I’m fighting darkness I can’t control. I am reading the news. I’m listening to the sirens. I am thinking about phone calls, buses, trains, about humanitarian aid, about cats left in locked apartments, about the purchase of medicine, about the bombing of Kharkiv, about the parents I lost contact with, about the pre-medical assistance, about the barricades. About the right to bear arms. About shooting training. About the fact that I will be able to press the hook, at least once, even if it tears my ligaments apart, I will be able to do it once. I can.

2. I AM OK

The suburbs of Kyiv

Mike, Sasha, Liza, I — 17 years old.

Mike wrote: whoever runs away is a traitor.

I wrote: bullshit.

Sasha wrote: my windows are shaking.

Liza wrote: my parents are packing. We are leaving in 10 minutes. I don’t know where. I’ll write later.

Mike wrote: you have to stop them

Liza wrote: I can’t

Sasha wrote: these are bombs!!

Mike wrote: I thought we agreed

Liza wrote: don’t be a jerk. They decided without me. They didn’t ask me.

Sasha wrote: lie on the floor

Liza wrote: I’m leaving

Mike wrote: I can’t believe it

Sasha wrote: if that fucking bomb hits, we’ll be buried under the wreckage

I wrote: can you hear it?

Sasha wrote: we are fucked

Mike wrote: You are a rat, Liza. Don’t come back.

Sasha wrote: shut up. Her parents decided for her.

Mike deleted the last message.

Sasha deleted the last message.

Mike wrote: how are you?

Sasha wrote: I’m in the ass.

I wrote: I am OK.

———————————

The teacher wrote:

There will be no classes today. Stay safe. Mind the sirens. Go down to the shelter. Pack a backpack. Bandages and iodine. Other medications you may need. A bottle of water. Biscuits. A flashlight. A needle with thread. Money. Documents. A power bank. A mobile phone.

Write your name/surname on your hand. Your blood group. Relatives' phone number. If the explosion is close, run to the bathroom.

Keep in touch. Breathe deeply.

This will go down in the history books.

Mother said:

What we all feared happened. Dad went to the ATM and got some food. It is all quiet at Grandma's. There are explosions at Aunt Valia's. The president says to stay at home. The worst thing is panic. The worst thing is the way to nowhere. I have my patients. It is worse for those who are to give birth soon. We are not in the worst situation. Have breakfast and let's go and check where the basement is.

Father said:

There are queues everywhere. An hour to the ATM. An hour to the store. A fight at the petrol station. The worst thing is panic. The main thing is not to panic. How are you?

I said: I am OK.

———————————————

I wrote: I'm in the basement

Mike wrote: my dad joined the territorial defence

Sasha wrote: what is he saying?

Mike wrote: he's saying it's hot. Landing forces in Hostomel. If they break through, they will be in Kyiv in half an hour

I wrote: it's scary here. Dusty. Hard to breathe. There's nothing to sit on.

Sasha wrote: we have a parking lot

Mike wrote: don't stay there

Sasha wrote: try to find another place. There might be a better shelter somewhere. You will be staying there for a long time.

I wrote: I don’t want to stay here. There are too many panicking old ladies here.

Mike wrote: old ladies and Sasha

Sasha wrote: shut up

Mike wrote: if they throw a bomb, the basement will be ruined. I have more important things to do

Sasha wrote: what things?

Mike wrote: I am helping to build checkpoints

Sasha wrote: your dad is an idiot if he lets you do that

Mike wrote: say it again about my dad and I’ll kick the shit out of you

Sasha deleted the last message.

Mike deleted the last message.

I wrote: the siren stops

_____

Liza wrote:

It’s hell. We’ve been on our way for two days; we’ve only come to Lviv. Traffic jams are everywhere. I can’t stand it. My parents don’t allow me to write to anyone. They switched their mobiles not to send signals. Not to become targets. They have paranoia. There are millions of cars here in full view. But they think that there is a strike aircraft, a fucking cyber–drone which is hunting for mobile signals and starts bombing once it’s detected. It’s freakish. To bomb the mobiles! I asked to go to the toilet to drop you a couple of lines. I am in the ass. How are you?

I wrote: sirens, basements. Otherwise, I am OK.

Liza wrote: I miss you

I wrote: it’s been half a day

_____

The teacher wrote:

When you hear popping sounds, don’t be afraid, these are not rockets. That is our air defence shooting down missiles. When you hear firework sounds, these are rockets, move away from the windows and hide behind the walls. When you hear whistling

sounds, that is a plane. The plane carries bombs. Lie on the floor and cover your head. Open your mouth to avoid contusion.

If the wound is deep, apply the pressure above the wound, write down the time of application and try to find a doctor.

If you have a panic attack, don't breathe deeply. Breathe in the package. Or hold your breath. 4 times 4. Wrap yourself in a blanket. Hug yourself tightly. Solve a maths problem. Don't forget about your exams.

Life is priceless. The war will end.

Eat sweets to replenish calories.

———————————

Sasha wrote: don't listen to Mike. This is not an adventure. Stay in the basement. We had a lot of people killed in Donetsk in 2014. I know it well. Soon, it will be the same here. It is better to leave the city before it is too late

I wrote: those who leave are traitors

Sasha wrote: to die is stupid

I wrote: my parents are doctors. They will not leave; they have a lot of work.

Sasha wrote: what about other relatives?

I wrote: they are all far away. My parents believe there is no reason to panic.

Sasha wrote: we are leaving in a couple of days when the roads are not so cramped. If you want, there's one free place in a car.

I wrote: are you kidding me?

Sasha wrote: when the soldiers come, you won't be able to leave.

———————————

Mike wrote: come to me. I have some work for you

I wrote: what work?

Mike wrote: to make cocktails

Sasha wrote: my parents won't let me go

Mike wrote: you aren't going to stay in the basement until the end of the war, are you?

I wrote: in 15 minutes

_____

1⁄3 motor oil

2⁄3 petrol

A rag

A cork

Scotch tape

Thirty beer bottles

I: Where did you get so many bottles?

MIKE: My dad and I were collecting.

I: I see you've prepared well.

MIKE: Do you want a cigarette?

I: Why not?

MIKE: It's best to aim at the barrel of the tank. This is the most vulnerable spot. If you hit it — BOOM! They are screwed!

I: Do you think we will win?

MIKE: I'm sure. Our soldiers won't give up. Never. At every checkpoint. We will fight.

I: Damn, the siren again.

MIKE: I don't give a fuck.

I: Should we go to the bathroom?

MIKE: It really pisses me off that they want us to be afraid. It pisses me off. I hate it all. If a rocket is really flying here, I'm gonna fuck that rocket. Fuck you, rocket. (*Shows the middle finger to the window*) Get out of here, rocket! Fuck, fuck!

I: You will be seen, Mike! (*Laughing*) The whole district can hear you.

MIKE: Let them hear, I'm not ashamed. I don't want to hide. Do you want to hide?

I: I don't want either.

MIKE: So don’t be hiding.

I: I am not hiding.

MIKE: So don’t be hiding.

I: I am not hiding.

A kiss

MIKE: How are you?

Я: I am OK.

———————————————

Sasha wrote: are you sleeping?

I wrote: I’m not

Sasha wrote: what are you doing?

I wrote: I’m in bed. And you?

Sasha wrote: I’ve just woken up

I’m fucked up

I’m going crazy

I’m shaking

I had a dream about our apartment in Donetsk

The soldiers come

I want to run away

they catch me

they tie me up

they shoot at my stomach

I have a hole in my stomach

a real hole

I wake up

in my bed in Irpin

but I’m cold

something bangs behind the door

I go to check

I open the door

there’s a hole instead of a house

the hole caused by an explosion

I am on the ninth floor, I look down

my house disappeared

my apartment disappeared

I am dizzy

I fall down

I wake up

I crawl across the field

quietly, on the elbows

I know that the soldiers are nearby

I have to crawl a little

and I will be safe

but out of the corner of my eye, I notice a trip-wire mine

and I don’t have time to take my hand away

and I touch it

and then I explode

and I burst into pieces

I wrote: Damn it. You are crushed

Sasha wrote: exactly

I wrote: did you write your name on your hand?

Sasha wrote: on the hand. On the leg. On the shoulder. On the stomach. On the neck

I wrote: good, it means you will be put together

Sasha wrote: oh, now I feel better (*smiley*)

I wrote: I'm not a psychologist

Sasha wrote: I'm not asking for that

I wrote: sorry

Sasha wrote: everything is fine. Don't tell Mike

I wrote: why should I?

Sasha wrote: just don't tell him

I wrote: I won't

Sasha wrote: Parents are packing things. Should I call yours?

I wrote: I am staying here

Sasha wrote: you can go crazy here

I wrote: I am OK

Liza wrote:

We are in Germany. In the middle of nowhere. Some kind of farms. Fields. Chickens. Pigs. The city is 15 kilometres away. They gave us bicycles. Parents ride to and fro to buy food. A lot of food. The bread is tasty, I put on two kilos. They also bring some humanitarian aid. Some clothes. There's a good chance we'll stay here for a while. That's why we need clothes. I haven't tried them on. I don't want humanitarian aid. I want to go to Zara. To buy something good. They won't let me. They make me study German. I told them I wouldn't.

Do you think the war will last long?

Don’t you want to come here?

It would be fun.

I wrote: fuck you

_____

Sasha wrote: that’s it. They are here

Mike wrote: it can’t be true

Sasha wrote: tanks are going down our street

Mike wrote: dad doesn’t answer

Sasha wrote: it’s the occupation

Mike wrote: we’ll keep fighting

Sasha wrote: it’s really really bad

Mike wrote: they’d better not come here

Sasha wrote: clean up the phone, they check your messages and photos

Mike wrote: fuck’em

Sasha wrote: it’s stupid to resist

Mike wrote: I’ll treat them to a cocktail

Sasha wrote: how?

Mike wrote: from the balcony

Sasha wrote: don’t do that, Mike, they will shoot you

Mike wrote: it’s banging hard

Sasha wrote: go down to the basement. It’s close

Mike wrote: I want to treat these bitches to a cocktail

Sasha wrote: don’t do it, Mike

Mike sends a burning fire smiley.

_____

That night, I slept in the basement. It banged all night, but I didn't wake up. When I woke up, it was pitch dark, and I didn't know what time of day it was, and I couldn't remember where I was and even forgot that there was a war.

Mother said: They are already in town. We need to sit quietly. They walk around the apartments.

Then I wrote: how are you, Mike?

I also wrote: hey, how are you, Mike?

I also wrote: Mike, are you here?

I wrote: don't do that, Mike. Don't throw the cocktail. Wait for your dad.

I also wrote: don't throw it, please. Hide it in the pantry. Hide it as far as possible.

I wrote: they walk around the apartments. If they find it, you are dead.

I also wrote: take care, Mike

Then I wrote: write to me, Mike. Write to me, please

I wrote: it was cool to be with you, Mike

I also wrote: write to me, Mike

I was sitting and waiting for him to read it. We never call each other, we just write.

I was thinking: perhaps the phone was discharged. Perhaps, the network was dead. Maybe dad took him to the territory defence and they retreated to Kyiv. Maybe he

threw the cocktail and hit the place where the tank's head is attached to the body. Maybe he will be given a medal and a pension for it. As a veteran of hostilities. I imagine how he will flaunt it. His photo will be on the board of honour: Mike Putylo — the pride of the school who destroyed the troops of enemy occupiers.

Then, the network was gone. Then, the phone got discharged. And I did not write anymore.

We lived in the basement for a week, eating crackers and drinking water. Then my mother and I walked to Kyiv. Through a destroyed city, a destroyed bridge, and a bombed-out road. Then, we were picked up and put on a train to Poland.

Dad stayed in the hospital.

In the hostel where the volunteers put us up, I charged my phone and turned on the messenger.

Nothing from Liza.

Nothing from Mike.

Sasha wrote: on the twelfth day, we left along the 'green route'. I wanted to pick you up, but I didn't know where to look for you. I am worried. Write how you are

I wrote: I am OK

3. DON'T ASK, DON'T SAY

checkpoint in a residential area of Kyiv

Roma 30 years old

Slava 33 years old

ROMA *(carries a small cupcake with a candle)*: Happy birthday to you…

SLAVA: Romka?

ROMA: Happy birthday to you…

SLAVA: Enough!

ROMA: Happy birthday dear Slava. Happy birthday to you…

SLAVA: What the hell?!

ROMA: Many happy returns!

SLAVA: I asked to do without it.

ROMA: Make a wish!

SLAVA: Did you shave your hair off?

ROMA: Well, I'm a warrior.

SLAVA: Your ears stick out.

ROMA: Blow it out.

SLAVA (*blows out the candle*): That's it. Enough! I'm on duty.

ROMA: By the way, I've baked it myself.

SLAVA: They don't have to see us.

ROMA: What are we doing?

SLAVA: We are distracted from our duties.

ROMA: Will you taste it?

SLAVA: I don't eat it when I am on duty.

ROMA: Then we will throw it away.

SLAVA: Give it to me, don't get offended.

ROMA: Well, this is not what I expected.

SLAVA: Just… I am on duty.

ROMA: You have said this already.

SLAVA: I want to do everything right.

ROMA: Am I distracting you?

SLAVA: Well, sorry. (*Tastes the cupcake)* Delicious. What's that?

ROMA: Fig.

SLAVA: I like it.

ROMA: It wasn't easy. There's nothing in the supermarket.

SLAVA: Do you want me to tell you what wish I made?

ROMA: It won't come true then.

SLAVA: It won't come true anyway.

ROMA: I thought it was about the end of the war.

SLAVA: About the liberation of Crimea.

ROMA: Well… we'll see.

SLAVA: To swim in the sea, eat peaches, and listen to jazz in Koktebel. And there are no shitty little green men and red passports. To never see them again in my life.

ROMA: We need to wait a bit…

SLAVA: It's the only place where I want to marry.

ROMA: Marry me, I hope.

SLAVA: Marry you. Officially. To invite friends and parents, arrange a big party, exchange vows and take beautiful photos for Instagram.

ROMA: To throw a bouquet.

SLAVA: We can do without a bouquet.

ROMA: We can do with a bouquet.

SLAVA: Without a bouquet?

ROMA: With a bouquet?

SLAVA: With a cake.

ROMA: And two black swans made of gum paste.

SLAVA: Why not unicorns?

ROMA: And the first dance to the song by “Okean Elzy” … Hug me, hug me, hug me... so gently, and don’t let me go ... (*starts dancing)*

SLAVA: I would also like …

ROMA: Hug me, hug me, hug

SLAVA: … to tell the commander that I’m gay.

ROMA: Are you fucking crazy?

SLAVA: Did you hear what he said yesterday?

ROMA: He said a lot yesterday.

SLAVA: But you heard what he said.

ROMA: What did he say?

SLAVA: When I brought that man…

ROMA: A subversive?

SLAVA: The one who marked the polyclinic. When I noticed him. I…

ROMA: Beat the shit out of him.

SLAVA: I was confused. I’ve never beaten anyone before. I shouted: Stop! He had to stop. I thought he would stop. But he ran. I ran after him. And when I caught him up, I slapped him with the butt. And he turned around and almost took the gun from me. My gun. What kind of soldier am I if I lose my gun? And I kicked him. I kicked with all my might. And he fell. And I took the gun. And I kicked once more. I shouted at him. I screamed in fright. I almost lost my gun.

ROMA: But you caught him.

SLAVA: I was lucky this time.

ROMA: You did what you had to do.

SLAVA: And then I brought him. And the commander said: you’ve beaten the fuck out of this arse bandit.

ROMA: Did he say so?

SLAVA: He said so.

ROMA: He did not think well.

SLAVA: He said: look at this smelly arse bandit in a woman's skirt. He is neither a man nor a woman. That's what he said.

ROMA: He is a Muscovite. A terrorist. Also, a subversive.

SLAVA: And I was clutching the gun and looking at this guy. And the commander. Why an arse bandit? Why in a skirt? And it seemed to me that he was talking about me. That he knows everything.

ROMA: He doesn't know.

SLAVA: The commander says that it is not a sin to finish off an arse bandit. A man in a skirt deserves to be killed.

ROMA: I've never seen you wearing a skirt.

SLAVA: I almost lost my gun. I was so scared. I am not a man at all. I don't feel like a man. I just want him to know we're here too.

ROMA: Don't ask. Don't say.

SLAVA: Dreams must come true.

ROMA: Well, that's enough.

SLAVA: I approached him and said: "Please do not use hate speech against the gay community in relation to the enemy, because it offends the gay community that defends our state and that wants to live in it freely and openly."

ROMA: And what did he say?

SLAVA: And he said, "What kind of gay community?"

ROMA: And you?

SLAVA: And I said: "Me and Roma".

ROMA: What?

SLAVA: Me and ... you.

ROMA: Why me?

SLAVA: So you have nothing to do with it, right?

ROMA: Don't ask. Don't say. We agreed!

SLAVA: He started first. About an arse bandit. He was the first to say.

ROMA: You set me up.

SLAVA: We've been together for eight years!

ROMA: I joined the armed forces to fight for the city I was born in, not for all the problems of the world.

SLAVA: But the problems still exist.

ROMA: We must win this war.

SLAVA: And the other one?

ROMA: The other one will come later.

SLAVA: What if there is no 'later'? There won't be Crimea, there won't be jazz, there won't be weddings and black swans if I am killed in a land mine blast, get shot or if our checkpoint goes to rack and ruin tomorrow? And I will be gone and no one will tell him that the stupid guy who died in the first month was a gay man from Crimea. No one will ever remember. And I am also starting to forget. I'm just a machine, a cog of war, who comes on duty, checks cars, digs trenches, covers the rear…

ROMA: You didn't tell him anything, did you?

SLAVA: Don't ask. Don't say. Bitch. I didn't manage.

ROMA: He didn't want to say that.

SLAVA: But he said.

ROMA: He just said so.

SLAVA: And I kept silent.

ROMA: Eat the cake, or I will get offended. Do you feel the lemon zest? It is very important. I always add zest, this smell, you can't confuse it.

SLAVA: I feel like I'm disappearing, that I'm getting smaller every day. I'm not here.

ROMA: You are here, here, with me. No flour, no eggs. No milk. But you are here.

SLAVA: Don't stand by. I don't want them to see us together.

ROMA: Slavka, I…

SLAVA: I'm on duty.

4. TONIA, ASIA AND A PLANE

Kharkiv metro station

Tonia 18 years old

Asia 22 years old

TONIA: We're all going to die. We will be buried under the wreckage.

ASIA: Babies are not crying, but you are.

TONIA: You saw it! Saw it! Saw it! Saw it!

ASIA: We have to wait until it's all over.

TONIA: This plane. This shadow. This sound. This explosion.

ASIA: It was far away.

TONIA: But then it turned around.

ASIA: And that's why we hid.

TONIA: But it's still there!

ASIA: And we are here.

TONIA: It was flying right at us…

ASIA takes out Snickers and hands it to TONIA.

ASIA: Take it. It should help. Now listen: the metro is a fortress. Our fortress. If we are here, we are lucky. You and I are alive. We are in a safe shelter. Here you can survive a nuclear winter. We are safe here. No one will touch us here. We'll stay here until it's over.

TONIA: Do you promise?

ASIA: I promise. (*Pause*) Now I am going to call Alik.

TONIA: And Mom.

ASIA: And Mom.

———————————————

TONIA (*or just her voice*):

This silence. It’s so strange. When you’re upstairs, you hear everything. Engine roaring. Wind blowing. People screaming. Come here quickly. The air raid siren. Where is Aunt Liuda? She is downstairs. The slamming of the door. The whistling of shells. The explosion of bombs. The cracking of the wreckage. TV news reports that the city has come under fire again. And here is silence. Only people are coming. They gurgle in a silent voice so that words cannot be heard. They shuffle and cuddle, trying to keep warm. Time is measured by the steps of the duty officer at the station.

What’s going on upstairs? Are the people still there? Are the wounded moaning? Are the tanks screeching? Is the plane flying? Like a huge owl looking for prey. And we are like mice. We are stuck in holes and are afraid to give a squeak. Not to betray oneself...

———————————————

ASIA: Mom is crying, she wants to come.

TONIA: I picked a place for us…

ASIA: I told her to stay in Italy…

TONIA: …the cookies and all the food will be here...

ASIA: ...it’s dangerous on the roads, but we’ll manage.

TONIA: ... and we’ll sleep here...

ASIA: Alik joined the territorial defence.

TONIA: … will we sleep in turns or head-to-toe?...

ASIA: Alik says we have to get out.

TONIA: … like when I was a child...

ASIA: Because it will keep getting worse.

TONIA: …come on, get in…

ASIA: We will think tomorrow.

TONIA: ...because it’s damn cold here.

ASIA: Give me a hug. Is it warmer?

TONIA: Yeah, a little.

ASIA: I told you that a winter coat should cover your ass.

TONIA: I didn’t think I’d have to live underground.

———————————————

ASIA: Tonia, let’s go. We need to brush our teeth.

TONIA: I didn’t take…

ASIA: People brought everything there.

TONIA: What kind of people?

ASIA: The zombie apocalypse is cancelled. There are still people outside.

TONIA: And they brought us toothbrushes?

ASIA: Looks like.

TONIA: I think I’m sick. Everything hurts. I dreamed that I... forgot the flashlight. There is shelling in the district, we run to the shelter, and I think: if the electricity goes out, we need a flashlight, and I don’t have a flashlight, it was hanging in the Epicentre, a black and yellow battery-powered flashlight, 230 hryvnias and 20 for batteries, and you will scold me for not buying it. And I run to the Epicentre and I see people carrying full trays, the Epicentre is being emptied, I have to make it, but I run so slowly... And I notice a speck, a black speck in the sky, my legs are like cotton wool, and the speck grows, it’s a plane, it roars, it flies too low, 10 metres above the city, and I fall to the ground and I’m overwhelmed. I press my ear to the ground. And I hear voices, there, inside. They laugh and listen to music. And I am outside, and I cannot get to them. And I hear the bomb come off the hanger. And I wake up. Can I not brush my teeth?

———————————————

ASIA: Truth or dare?

TONIA: Truth.

ASIA: Did you buy a flashlight when I asked?

TONIA: Eh.

ASIA: What the hell, Tonia?

TONIA: I went to buy it. I went to the Epicentre and looked for a flashlight. Scotch tape. And wire. And I found a coffee table. So cool and stylish. Red, metallic. And I thought... I thought...

ASIA: Did you buy a table?

TONIA: Delivery is tomorrow.

…

TONIA: Truth or dare?

ASIA: Truth.

TONIA: Did you sleep with Alik?

ASIA: Well… once.

TONIA: In our apartment!

ASIA: We couldn’t resist.

TONIA: On our couch! I will not sit on it again.

ASIA: We were in the kitchen.

TONIA: Well, you’re a whore!

…

ASIA: Truth or dare?

TONIA: Truth.

ASIA: Do you envy me?

TONIA: You’re kidding!

ASIA: Did you like him?

TONIA: Well, no.

ASIA: Did you have sex with anyone?

TONIA: I don’t envy you. Here is my answer.

ASIA: Did you have sex?

TONIA: It’s my turn.

ASIA: Be honest, are you a virgin?

…

TONIA: Truth or dare?

ASIA: Truth.

TONIA: When will it all end?

ASIA: Dare.

TONIA: Do you think it will last long?

ASIA: Dare.

TONIA: Will Mom come?

ASIA: I said, dare.

TONIA: Do you think our apartment survived?

ASIA: Dare, I guess.

TONIA: But are they still shooting there?

ASIA: How do I know?

TONIA: What should we do?

ASIA: Tonia, dare.

ASIA takes out Snickers and gives it to TONIA.

———————

TONIA: Where have you been?

ASIA: Sorry, you were asleep.

TONIA: Where have you been?

ASIA: I was going out to the city.

TONIA: We agreed to stick together.

ASIA: We are sticking together.

TONIA: Did you go to see your boyfriend?

ASIA: I’m fed up with you.

TONIA: Did you go?

ASIA: That plane was shot down.

TONIA: What?

ASIA: The plane. Which we saw on the first day. It was shot down. It burnt. It is not there. Everyone saw it.

TONIA: Are there others?

ASIA: Others will be shot down too. One by one. I gave Alik clothes and blankets. He says that the boys are in a fighting mood. They fight like gods. And today this plane. It’s a real feast.

TONIA: You have lipstick on.

ASIA: So what?

TONIA: I thought you wouldn’t come back. I thought you were already dead. I imagined how I would put you together. You know, the sight of blood makes me sick. I will not put you together. Your intestines will lie around the city until they’re eaten by dogs. Along with lipstick. I warn you.

ASIA: Thank you very much.

TONIA: I thought you died.

ASIA: I can’t sit like this and do nothing.

TONIA: You just can’t live without your Alik.

ASIA: When was the last time you looked in the mirror?

TONIA: Why should I look in the mirror?

———————

ASIA: Latte!

TONIA: Latte?

ASIA: Guess what, coffee shops have opened.

TONIA: Did you bring Snickers?

ASIA: It’s sunny outside. The snow is gone. A boy plays the guitar in the square.

TONIA: Did you bring me Snickers?

ASYA takes out Snickers and gives it to TONIA.

ASIA: Do you hear? He plays the guitar! The monuments are covered with sandbags.

TONIA: Did you go home?

ASIA: Take it.

ASIA takes out the clothes.

TONIA: Finally! (*changes her clothes*).

ASIA: They are looking at you.

TONIA: I don’t give a shit.

ASIA covers her.

ASIA: Alik says we need to get out...

TONIA: Well, if Alik says so…

ASIA: We can’t live in the metro.

TONIA: People live here.

ASIA: People are leaving the city. The station is open. If you are afraid to stay in Ukraine, let’s go to Italy...

TONIA: …Bombs are falling outside...

ASIA: …How many people have already left…

TONIA: …Windows are flying to bits…

ASIA: …They will help us…

TONIA: …People are dying under the debris…

ASIA: ...let’s go to Mom...

TONIA: ...They shoot at the bread lines...

ASIA: …Evacuation trains are still running…

TONIA: …Without warning, they shoot from the air.

ASIA: That plane was shot down!

TONIA: Another one will come.

ASIA: I can’t do this anymore. I can’t come down here anymore. This is half-life. And for what? The sun is outside. Spring. We can still go. Without Alik. Together.

TONIA: We can live here too.

ASIA: No, we can’t.

TONIA: You said we’d be here until it ended.

ASIA: What if it doesn’t end?

TONIA: How can it not end?

———————

TONIA *(or just her voice)*:

Time stopped. And it doesn’t move anymore. Time was shot with air bombs. Time was raped. Collectively and deliberately. Time lies in the well and waits for the spring waters to bring its body to the surface. But the spring water does not come. Because time does not exist anymore. And there is no spring. And there is no water to come. And there is no sun to rise and set. There is endless February. And we are all in it. Children lose the ability to walk. They forget the words. They cling to their mothers as if they want to return to the womb. But there is no way back. And there is no way forward. There is an infinite now. And the damn plane endlessly circles, and circles, and circles, even though it was shot down a long time ago. But it is still there, in the sky above us. The new sun of the new world.

———————

ASIA: I got a job in the kitchen.

TONIA: You? The kitchen?

ASIA: What's so funny?

TONIA: I hope you are feeding the enemies.

ASIA: How witty. I am cutting vegetables. It's very therapeutic. Others cook.

TONIA: What happens when the rocket is flying?

ASIA: Well, the rocket is flying. Boys need to eat.

TONIA: So these are boys.

ASIA: And the girls too. Everyone needs to eat.

TONIA: Girls cook, boys fight. Then everyone gets fucked.

ASYA: By the way, someone brings you food too. Although you do have arms.

TONIA: I'm glad you and Alik found each other.

ASIA: I haven't seen him for a week.

TONIA: But you dream of seeing him. You will cook him borsch and then leave. A great volunteer of the kitchen movement. It's all because of him, right?

ASIA: You know how to spoil everything.

TONIA: We used to tell each other things like that.

ASIA: You didn't act like a bitch before.

_____

TONIA: Why are you here?

ASIA: I brought you Snickers.

TONIA: We are fed here.

ASIA: By the people who go outside.

TONIA: What do you want?

ASIA: I want you to talk to a psychologist.

TONIA: Fuck you.

ASIA: You have a problem.

TONIA: And you have Alik.

ASIA: Alik doesn’t respond.

TONIA: What’s wrong with him?

…

ASIA: Tonia, you’ll never get out of the metro...

TONIA: You promised you’d be with me.

ASIA: I’m here.

TONIA: You promised we’d be here until it was safe.

ASIA: Yes, it will no longer be as it used to be.

TONIA: We have to wait.

ASIA: The coffee table will not come. Neither today nor tomorrow.

TONIA: I need guarantees.

ASIA: There are no guarantees and there never have been. We just didn’t know it. And now we know. At any moment, a missile can hit any part of the globe. And we can’t do anything about it.

Terrorists hijack a plane to crash into a skyscraper.

Crazy teenagers buy guns on the Internet and shoot their classmates.

Ruined Syria is starving, but worried clerks have already put down the newspaper and are finishing their sandwiches.

This is all happening in reality. It’s just that now it is happening to us as well.

You have to adapt. Do you understand that?

TONIA: I don’t want to adapt to it.

…

ASIA: I’m leaving.

TONIA: Will you come on Tuesday?

ASIA: I won’t come.

TONIA: On Wednesday?

ASIA: This is unbearable.

TONIA: Will you get me Snickers?

ASIA: Bye, Tonya.

TONIA: Okay, on Friday. Two Snickers and a latte? Do you hear? All right? On Sunday. Monday. I will wait... On Tuesday. Wednesday. I don’t count them. Come in whenever you want. I’ll wait here a little longer. This is my fortress. I can’t leave it. I am very lucky to be here, safe. That I live. It is very important to live. I think Mom will be happy to hear that. Do you hear me, Asia? Call Mom! Ask her to come here. And you and Alik. We will live together. You won’t have to go out. I won’t have to recognize you by your lipstick and pick up your leftovers. Blood makes me sick. Do you hear, Asia?

2. HUMENNY DAY "AIR RAID ALARM"



Humenny Day . Executive director of the Center for Performative Education, curator of the interdisciplinary laboratory PostPlayLab and the international program "Citizens' Theater", playwright, performer and teacher.

Humenny has been involved in political-critical theater and social participatory practices for more than ten years, working with IDPs and those who remained in the frontline cities of eastern Ukraine for seven years. Key performances about the experience of the trauma of forced resettlement and the war in eastern Ukraine: "Gray Zone", "Militia" and "Girls-Girls". Key performances about the deportation of Crimean Tatars and torture in the occupied Crimea: "Grass pierces the earth", "DEVAM" and "Experience of freedom".

Since 2019, curator of the Ukrainian-German project Misto to Go. This is an international theater project with schoolchildren in eight cities of Donbass, which is supported by the Eastern Partnership program of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany.

Dan Humenny has co-authored and curated more than 50 plays and performances in Ukraine, Georgia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Austria and Germany. Dan's dramatic texts have been translated into English, Georgian, Czech, German and Polish.

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

“On the second day of the full-scale invasion, my wife, Yana Humenna, and I were forced to evacuate our children from Kyiv to the West. First in Lviv, and then in Chernivtsi. There, Jana and I volunteered at the IDP Shelter. Within a week, Jan and the children left for Germany, and I stayed and volunteered in this Shelter. Now I am a ‘child crisis psychologist’, providing first aid to both children and their parents. At the same time, I am taking courses in psychosocial support from the Ukrainian Red Cross Society. At the same time, I am trying to return to my profession, have an online residency and joint projects with the multicultural center of the social theater ‘Thespis Zentrum’ (Bautzen, Germany). Together with Georg Zheno and Yana Humenna we are doing a big project, ‘HeimaTraum--theater for displaced people’. So it turns out that my life goes on in several parallel realities, none of which I have the strength to accept. And this short text in the collection is probably the first small step towards adoption.”

AIR RAID SIREN
A text for the theatre

Half past one in the morning
Let’s go, air raid siren! Wake up, siren! Hurry up, siren! Siren, get up, get up, get up! Siren!

In the sixth ward of a camp for internally displaced people, this coordinated warning system is a complete failure. “I’m not taking the kids anywhere! I take responsibility for whatever happens to us.” A mother and her two small children. I write down their bed numbers in a notebook. “It makes it easier to identify the bodies,” I tell them.

At 6am, as soon as the curfew lifts, this woman will be going to the Romanian border. She still doesn’t know if they’ll let her cross because in Ukraine now they won’t let women with children leave the country unless they have written permission from their father. The father of these two children is serving in the armed forces outside Kharkiv. How (the fuck) could he

provide written permission?

But right now, at half past one in the morning, she turns over onto her left side and sleeps peacefully under the siren's roar.

I'm typing this text right after the siren has ended, and in my head a phantom siren is blaring. Psychologists say you should focus on reality and on your own body, in order to make the sound of the siren go away.

ONE – "Ground Yourself." Talk to the people close to you about your stress. Splash your hands and face with cold water. Sit down and make a list of the objects you see in the room. Touch your body, return yourself to reality.

TWO – Meet your basic needs. Eat something warm, drink something hot. Try to get some sleep (fuck). Hug the person who is closest to you (fuck, fuck, fuck, motherfucker, fuck).

Psychologists also recommend preserving time for yourself without reading the news on your phone, and to ask your family in advance to call you in the case of an alarm (motherfucker).

THREE – slow down. FOUR – Try to take control of the situation.

This fourth point is even more fucked up than the tips that come before it. It's the same fucking bullshit as "return yourself to reality." My reality is that the war is now in its 66th day. For the past 58 days I've been volunteering from morning until night in a camp for IDPs. I've been living here for 55 days. For 55 days my wife and our two children have been in Germany. And for the past 55 days, it's been tearing me to pieces. At the IDP camp, I work with kids. My official title is "crisis psychologist." This work helps pull me back together somewhat.

Several times a day and several times a night, I take 250 women, children, and elderly people down into the cold of the bomb shelter. Dear colleagues, please can I kindly not return to this reality? Fuck those sirens. Let them ring.

Pause

I touch my left earlobe, move my cold toes, pinch myself hard on the chest – the sound of siren disappears.

The sound of the siren disappears, and in its place comes fear, then – despair, then – anger and rage. Then I fall asleep.

At 5am I get up again, because all over Ukraine the air raid sirens are blaring again.

(Spring, 2022)

Translated by Molly Flynn

3. JULIA NECHAY "TURY-RURI"



Julia Nechay . She was born on November 18, 1986 in the city of Chernihiv. In 2009 she graduated from the Kharkiv State Academy of Culture (Department of Theater and Film, Television Arts, specialty "Director, teacher of specialized disciplines"). She worked at the Chernihiv City School of Arts (teacher of the theater department, 2008-2013), at the Nizhyn College of Culture and Arts. M. Zankovetskaya (lecturer at the Department of Directing, 2012-2013). Internship in Poland (Work of Non-Governmental Organizations, Business and Culture, 2017-2018).

In 2012, she opened her own theater studio (White Suitcase Theater Studio) in Chernihiv, which lasted for 10 years, until it was destroyed by a shock wave from a bomb dropped by Russian aircraft during the attack on Chernihiv (war, March 2022). During the years of the studio's existence: hundreds of plays have been staged and shown, thousands of theater trainings, master classes have been held, education and art work with many children and youth has been conducted, dozens of social projects and public activities have been implemented, many certificates, diplomas and awards and training courses.

In 2019 she became a finalist of the All-Ukrainian program of the British Council Ukraine and a Scholar of the President of Ukraine as an artist in the field of theater.

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

“I was forced to live in a bunker, I learned what bombing, shelling and blockade were, I lost my job and my theater studio, my apartment was damaged. But now I know what courage and devotion of people is, I felt what real support and help is, I saw heroes and heroines, I know that there will be life and light will overcome darkness.”

Turi-ruri

The play is based on real events. The names and locations of the heroes have been changed.

The play is a work of art and personal impressions of what happened during the blockade in the city of Chernihiv

Characters:

Nina – a woman with a baby, Stas's wife.

Stas – Nina's husband.

Alla – a woman aged 40-45, who has a big black dog named Black.

Matvii – a 17-year-old son of Alla.

Tolia – Alla's husband, Matvii's brother.

Lida – a pregnant woman with a small dog Lucky.

Vika – a student, an asthmatic sufferer.

Hrysha – an old man aged 80 with a cat Murzyk.

Nadia – the mother of Vlad and Oleh.

Oleh – a boy aged four, Nadia's son (Turi-ruri).

Vlad – Nadia's son, 18 years old.

Grandma Halia – a woman aged 70 from a village near Chernihiv.

A Ukrainian military officer.

Other people in the shelter (speaking in the darkness).

February 24, 2022. North of Ukraine. The City of Chernihiv. A flat. Six in the morning. Stas receives a message from a friend on WhatsApp:

“Well, how are you, Chernihiv? Kyiv speaking.”

“We are fine, why so early?”

“The war has begun.”

“?”

“Didn’t you hear the explosions? Today at around 5 in the morning, they started bombing Kyiv, they say Chernihiv too.”

“I don’t know, we are sleeping. I haven’t heard anything, now I’ll check the news... Damn it... they say it really started. They are already here! God, the border with Russia is about 80 km away from us, that’s an hour by car! Belarus is also nearby…”

“Take care!”

“You too, thank you.”

“Keep in touch!”

“Sure.”

February 24, 2022. It’s around two in the afternoon. A shelter in one of the buildings. People sit here and there on the floor and on the chairs. Stas carries a pram. Nina has a child in her hands.

Stas (pointing to a spot on the floor): Is this place occupied?

Vika: I don’t think so.

Stas (to Nina): Now I will bring a chair and sleeping pads, wait here.

(Tolia, Alla and Matvii come in)

Tolia (to Nina, pointing to a spot on the floor): Is this place occupied?

Nina (rocking the baby): We’ve just come, I guess not.

Tolia, Alla and Matvii lay things out.

Nadia (with Styrofoam boards for building insulation): Hello, take it if you need it, because it’s cold.

People take Styrofoam boards. Vlad enters carrying other boards.

Tolia: Where did you get them? Maybe you need help?

Vlad: No. That’s all we have (comes out).

Nadia: Where would we take it? All the shops are already closed. This is our Styrofoam, we wanted to insulate the house.

Nina: What house are you from?

Nadia: We live next door, behind the store (lays things out).

Nina: That green one with the beautiful metal fence?

Nadia: Yeah. You are always welcome. Just not now. Because we have neither a basement nor a shelter. Stop by when it's all over!

Vlad: (leading his younger brother Oleh, brings things in): What house are you from?

Nina: Next door, the 27th. I'm Nina, by the way.

Nadia: Nadia. And these are my sons — Vlad and Oleh. (Points to them. Vlad exits).

Oleh (comes to Nina): Hello, my name is Oleh. And you?

Nina: Nina.

Oleh: I love cars. Do you want me to show you my cars? I have different cars, I will bring them now.

Nadia: Nina, I wouldn't agree if I were you. Oleh is terribly talkative (laughs).

Nina: Not a problem, I'll manage.

Oleh carries the cars and quietly tells Nina about them.

Stas comes back with things leading Lida.

Stas: A siren wails over the whole city and explosions are heard. They say that the suburbs are being hit.

Nadia (sees Lida with her dog): Take the Styrofoam, it's cold.

Lida takes the Styrofoam and lays things out. Stas also arranges things and then comes out. Grandfather Hrysha enters with a cat in his arms and a chair.

Hrysha: Hey, folks, if I put chairs here, won't an old man like me disturb you?

Tolia: Of course not. Maybe, I can make the bed for you? We will move a bit.

Hrysha: Well, I'll sit while they shoot and then go home. I survived the Second World War and I will survive this war. They've picked on the wrong person (puts a chair

down, the cat jumps out of his hands and growls at the dogs which do not react). Murzyk, don't irritate the dogs! Are you immortal or what? (takes the cat).

Vika (coughs a little): What house are you from?

Hrysha: This one.

Vika: I am from the opposite one, the yellow one. If you need anything, tell me. My name is Vika.

Hrysha: Thank you, I am Hryhoriy Ivanovych. You can call me Hrysha.

Vika (to everybody): Do you think it will last long?

Hrysha: Only God knows…

Nadia: And Putin.

Lida: They will leave when our army knocks the hell out of them.

Vika: I think that they will frighten us for a day or two and that's it. Who starts full-scale wars these days? Especially in the centre of Europe? It's very stupid and pointless. In the age of the Internet! I think they will throw a couple of bombs, say again that we attacked ourselves, or that they eliminated Bandera, boast in their media and that's it. I give them one day, and then I am going to my mother's on Saturday (laughs).

Lida: Where does your mother live?

Vika: Near Novhorod-Siverskyi.

Nina: It's impossible to go in that direction: the bridges have been blown up there. They've also mined everything. The only exit from the city is the bridge to Kyiv.

Vika: No way! Who told you that? They didn't mention it in the news…

Nina: My husband and I wanted to go pick up his mother, her house is not far from the city, we were sent back to the checkpoint. They said that there were no bridges. The russians are moving from that side.

Vika: My Mom is there! Alone in the village. What can I do?

Nina: Pray…

Stas enters with a sledgehammer.

Stas: Listen, we should make the second exit, just in case. Who will help?

Vika: Do you think we will be buried under the wreckage? (coughs)

Stas: I think it is wise to make one more exit.

Tolia: I'll go with you. My name is Tolia (points to his son), and this is Matvii.

Stas: Stas.

Alla (to her dog which ran to Lida's dog): He is polite, he will not bite. Black, come here! (takes Black).

Lida: A boy? I have a girl. Everything will be fine. Do you have food, just in case? I went out to buy some but the shops were closed.

Alla: He eats porridge with meat. I tried to give him dog food, but he doesn't eat it. We found him on the street when he was a puppy.

Lida: Really? He's such a big boy. What's his name?

Alla: Black.

Lida: My girl's name is Lucky. What's your name?

Alla: Alla.

Lida: I'm Lida.

Vlad comes in.

Vlad: There is a toilet at the end of the hallway, or rather... a hole in the floor. I checked it. There used to be a toilet, and there is a hole at the bottom. I put a bucket and made an improvised door out of a bedspread. We need to bring water here. Just in case.

Everyone thanks. Tolia comes in.

Tolia: The emergency exit is along the hallway to the left behind an iron door. We made an extra exit. You should go and see where to run in case something happens. But it won't work with things, just have your passport and money with you. I am going to bring some water. Oh! Maybe somebody knows an electrician? Then we can have light here, not only in the hallway. Or, maybe, one of the neighbours knows how to do it? And we need to have at least one outlet...

Hrysha: The brain may be old, but my hands remember everything! I will try to do something. I had been working as an electrician for 45 years.

Hrysha leaves. Tolia leaves, Stas comes in.

Stas (to Nina): I'll try to find some petrol.

Nina: Listen, withdraw some cash if you can. Take care (kisses him).

Lida: If there is dog food somewhere, buy it (gives money).

Stas leaves. In several days. Round-the-clock shelling continues. Everyone stays in the shelter and constantly looks at their phones.

A message to Alla:

How are you?

We're alive. Tolia joined the military because he wanted to join them and fight, they said that they were all manned up and he wasn't needed. I calmed down a bit because I was very nervous.

Do you have food and water?

We still have everything, but there is nothing left in the stores.

A message to Lida:

Tell everyone in the shelter: once it calms down, let them remove the street names and house numbers. Everything that can be a guide in the area. And they should also turn off store signs. Take care of yourself.

Lida (to everyone): Our boys are asking to remove the numbers and street names from the houses. Turn off store signs and hide any guides.

Men rise to do it.

Vlad: Stop! Stay here for now. Matvii and I will be on duty at the door because the news said that russians can go around. The door will be closed. The password is 'Smachna palyanytsia'.

Men go out to take down signs.

Nadia (cooks food, washes the dishes in basins. Oleh eats bread, and watches a cartoon in which they say "Turi-ruri, the car went to bring sand"): Oleh, where's the sausage? Why do you eat only bread?

Oleh: I gave it to Black, Black was hungry.

Alla: Black, don't be begging. You have eaten today. (To Oleh) Don't give him anything else, okay?

Oleh: Black loves sausages, and it's warm to sleep with.

Alla: Every dog loves sausages, and it's really warm to sleep with him here.

Oleh: Why does he have a tail?

Alla: This is how he keeps his balance, talks and shows his mood.

Oleh: Why don't I have a tail?

Alla: Because you keep your balance and show your mood in a different way.

Oleh (starts playing with Black): I want a tail, I want a tail. Then I can talk to Black.

Nadia (puts a plate with porridge on the chair): Oleh, let's eat, and then you'll play. (Oleh runs to eat, Nadia continues to cook) Can you imagine, they think that 'palyanytsia' is 'polunytsia'! (Everyone laughs).

Alla: At first, I thought it was a joke that they couldn't pronounce 'palyanytsia'.

Nina: No, my third cousin was born in Moscow, he really can't.

Hrysha: And what is the mood in Moscow?

Nina: I don't know, we don't communicate with him. He tries to prove to me that there is no Russian army here, and they only destroy military facilities.

Lida: God, he's wasted...

Nina: I ask him: "Is my friend's house a military facility?". I send a photo of the destroyed house and their equipment, and he tells me: "Take photos of Russians shooting." I say, "Are you a moron? How do you imagine this? Airplanes are flying with bombs, rocket launchers are shooting, and I will be running to make a video for you?". He doesn't believe me, but the TV. Z means zombie.

Everyone: Russian warship, go fuck yourself.

Nina: That's what I said, that's why we don't talk anymore.

Alla: When we win, we will set a big table in the yard, bring food and have a good time!!!

Lida: Without fireworks, I hate fireworks now. In general, any noise scares me now...

Nadia: It scares everyone, and I didn't understand fireworks even before the war.

Oleh (Repeats: "Turi-ruri, the car went to bring sand"): Mom, are you going to buy a car to bring sand?

Nadia: Why do you need sand?

Oleh (gaily): To cover up the soldiers who are shooting at us with sand, turi-ruri! (The adults looked at each other).

Vika (wakes up from sleep): What time is it? The phone got discharged...

Alla: 5 pm, the curfew is starting soon. Good morning (laughs).

Vika (coughs): I always sleep when I'm very nervous.

Lida: Listen, share some sleep with us. You will feel fine - and we will get some sleep. Nobody can sleep except you. Share with us and have mercy!

Everyone laughs and Vika coughs.

Vika: Before the war, I was afraid to sleep, I dreamed all the time that we were being bombed.

Lida: I also had a dream about war, about a month ago.

Alla: Me too, a week ago.

Vika coughs.

Nadia: Vika, you need to have your lungs checked, you are coughing more and more...

Vika (coughing): I think it's an asthma attack: I had it once in childhood, but then I felt fine. It's very similar. It's too humid here, there's not much air, and I'm all wet.

Alla: Is there any medicine?

Vika: Of course, there is none.

Men come running. Explosions are heard. The light turns off and on. In several days.

A message to Lida:

Do not go anywhere: they change locations and they will bomb you.

A message to Stas:

Why don't you go away?

I have no petrol, only a few litres. We have no fuel in the city at all.

Go to my mother's house which is near Chernihiv. It's quiet there. I will bring you the rest from Kyiv. Do you have enough to get there?

Fine. If there is no shelling. We have one bridge left, and this road is being shelled. No, we cannot leave, no, nobody comes to us. We are under occupation.

A message to Nadia:

How are you?

We are alive, everything is fine.

Valia died. She was near the school that was bombed. She carried food to the soldiers.

In several days.

Alla: What day is it today?

Nina: The 12th.

Alla: No, the date? (to everyone) What date is it today?

Vika (coughs a lot): Wait, I'll take the phone... (Looks at the telephone). March 7.

Alla: I don't know how to count the days. But I already know which weapon is active.

Nadia (making porridge for Oleh): That's true, me too. I also know who shoots, the enemies or our soldiers.

Vlad enters.

Vlad: They brought bread and pasta (everyone rises)... there is a queue - maybe, a kilometre, on the frosty street, mind it!

Almost everyone leaves.

Lida: It seems to have started.

Nadia: Oh my! We don't have a car. Stas! He has some petrol (runs away).

Lida (writes a message): "I know your phone is off. When it turns on, you should know that you have become a father. I have labour pains. Please take care of yourself, my hero. I love you". (Nadia runs in with Tolia and Alla).

Nadia: We don't know where Stas and Nina are, do you have their contacts? (rubs Lida's back).

Lida (moans): No-o-o…

Alla: I'll heat some water and get the sheets.

Tolia: A few kilometres away, there was the checkpoint, maybe it is still there... they have a car. I'll go there (bumps into people running to the shelter).

Vika: Tolia, get back! (pushes him) There is shelling! Tolia, I am saying — they are shooting there!

Tolia: Lida is in labour!

He runs out.

Vika: Does anyone know how to deliver a baby?

Hrysha: I once helped a horse in labour.

Vika: Eh... that's something...or not?

Shelling is heard and the lights go out.

Vika: That's a nightmare…

Nadia: Bring candles, don't discharge your phones.

The light turns on.

Vika: Damn it, why scare us like that? (picks up a chair)

Tolia runs in with a military officer.

Tolia: This woman is in labour!

A military officer: Glory to Ukraine!

Everyone: Glory to heroes!

A military man (to Lida): Will you manage to go up to the car?

Lida: I will. Feed Lucky. There is enough food for a week. (to the dog) I'll be back.

Nadia: Don't worry, Lida. (Lida takes a bag and leaves.)

Nadia addresses Tolia: Where did you find him?

Tolia: I ran out onto the road and saw a car driving. I started running right at it and waving. They stopped. The boys will return, they asked for some warm dry socks, pants, and food if any. Humanitarian aid cannot come to the city. Orcs are shelling all the roads.

Nadia: I'll try to find something.

Vika: There are warm socks with flowery patterns, is that OK?

Tolia: The main thing is that the leg fits in, put it in (shows the place).

People put in what they can share. Stas enters.

Stas: (with bread) I brought some bread. Pasta is gone. Who needs some? Make breadcrumbs before the bread grows mouldy.

Vika: Is there a line near the store?

Stas: It's huge.

Vika: Why? There was shelling.

Stas: This is not a reason to lose your place in the line. The shelling is every 15 minutes. You either stand under fire or you don't have food. It's your choice.

In several days. Internet and telephone signals are suppressed.

A message:

How are you?

Alive. Everything is fine.

A message:

How are you?

Alive. Everything is fine. Planes fly and I hear bombs being dropped. I pray there will be no direct hits in our house. There hasn't been gas or heating for a long time. We cook on the fire in the yard. I hear the walls shaking.

A message:

How are you?

Alive, everything is fine (not delivered).

Alive, everything is fine (not delivered).

Alive, everything is fine (not delivered).

Explosions are heard all the time. The light turns off. There is no water. No telephone communication. Then, the events take place in the dark.

Oleh: Turi-ruri!

Nadia: Son, I can’t show you the cartoon now. Let me tell you a tale!

Oleh: Turi-ruri, I need a car.

Nadia: Where are you going, Turi-ruri?

Oleh: Turi-ruri, a car.

Nadia: Let’s get some sleep. (catches him and puts him down)

Something falls and everyone screams.

Vika: What was that?

Hrysha: I knocked something off, a chair or something like this (everyone exhales).

Vika (coughing, suffocating): How humid it is here, I’m all wet, I think I have a fever. It’s cold…

Oleh: Turi-ruri!

Alla: The guys made a fire outside. You need to drink tea. It seems to be quiet there now, the shooting is in another district. Should I ask them to boil some water?

Vika: If possible, thank you. I have some anti-fever powder.

Alla comes out.

Vlad comes in with a garland that barely flickers.

Vlad: There is a Christmas garland and batteries. That should do for a while.

Everyone: Wow, cool!

Nina: Vlad, why didn’t mom leave the city with Oleh?

Vlad: But how? We don’t have a car. Our acquaintances do not have seats available either.

Everybody is trying to take their relatives away. And my mom said that she would not go anywhere: we have relatives to support.

Nina: Got it. Where is your dad?

Vlad: He died.

Nina: Sorry to hear that, I sympathise.

An explosion. Everybody rushes to the shelter.

Stas: Holy shit! The rocket hit the neighbouring house! Fuck it! There was no siren! Fuck! Fuck!

Explosions are heard at a distance.

Nina: Which house?

Stas: The yellow one, over there. Fuck...

Vika: Across the street?

Alla: Yes, across the street.

Vika: It's my house! It's mine … it's mine (crying).

Oleh: Turi-ruri (Nina's baby cries).

Alla: Vika, you're alive, that's all that matters!

Stas (to Nina): They say there will be a chance to leave tomorrow. As our soldiers queued for bread, I heard that many people came under fire when evacuating, several people were also killed by mines. But our soldiers pushed the Rashists further from that road. Tomorrow we will go to my friend's mother, while there is a chance. She lives near Chernihiv. It's quiet there. From there, we will call a friend, he will bring some fuel. I will take you to Western Ukraine or to Poland, and I will come back to take people out and deliver humanitarian aid until I am called into the army.

Nina: I won't go under fire.

Stas: Nina, are you sane or not? We are sitting in a damp, cold basement with no water, electricity, heat or food! It's been minus 11 outside for days. How much longer do you want to be here? We did not go because the situation with the road wasn't clear, but now there is an opportunity. You have to leave!

Nina: One of my classmates was shot on the way out - is this what you want for me and my son? I am scared.

Stas: Aren't you scared to stay here? We are besieged. The outskirts of the city have been reduced to ashes. Glory to the Armed Forces of Ukraine for holding them back! If the orcs come to the city, everyone's screwed. Have you heard about the cities they came to?

Nina: I have…

Stas: Are you waiting for this? Are you waiting for the last bridge to be bombed so there will be no chance to leave? Are you waiting for a rocket to fly into our shelter, or for our supplies of water and food to run out? Well, it won't take long. Old Hrysha

is already melting the snow to get some water; will you feed the little one with melted snow? If something happens, doctors are hard to find. There is no medicine, humanitarian aid hasn't arrived. Maybe tomorrow some will come. But will it reach our area? Think about the worst. Are we waiting for this?

Nina: I hope for the better…

Stas: Everyone does, but we also need to consider the worst option. It is reasonable and pragmatic. Nina, I'm begging you!

Nina: Give me some time to think it over…

Oleh: Turi-ruri, sh-sh-sh, sh-sh-sh (plays with his toy car)..

Matvii and Tolia run in, visibly concerned.

Matvii: Hey folks, we captured a spotter!

Alla: What spotter?

Tolia: That bastard drew some mark points.

Matvii: Dad and I rounded him up and took him to our soldiers. This son of the bitch runs fast.

Tolia: But they say that russia sent its agents to us a year ago. They lived here, among us, and we had not the least inkling...

Matvii: Is Vika asleep again?

Alla: Where did you get him?

Tolia: Close to the place where we treated Black.

Alla: Damn it! What did you do in that area?

Tolia: Volunteered.

Alla: Tolia, are you kidding? Why did you take Matvii?

Matvii: Mom, I'll be 18 in a year! I'm an adult!

Alla: You are a child.

Matvii: Dad, tell her. I'll be volunteering!

Tolia (to Matvii): Have some rest, I want to have a word with your mom. (to Alla): I met the Petrenkos from my work — tomorrow Kolia will be taking his family out. They

say it will be safer on the road. There is one place. They are going to relatives in the Carpathians. Matvii will go with them. Tomorrow at seven, the guys from the security forces will tell him about the situation on the road. If everything is fine, he will be with us at eight. We must be ready. They also promised to take Black. There will be a convoy going tomorrow.

Alla: Does Matvii know?

Tolia: No, not yet.

Alla: Is this an official evacuation?

Tolia: Don't expect the official one yet. They cannot come to an agreement with the occupiers, and no one will officially do so at their peril. That's what the mayor and the governor said.

Alla: Got it. Don't take Matvii with you to volunteer!

Tolia: I didn't. I told him to go to the shelter, and he came later.

Alla: No way I can handle it anymore (to Matvii) Let's go out. We need to talk.

They leave. In the other corner, Stas and Nina's conversation can be heard.

Stas: This is a wise decision, everything will be fine, I promise.

Nina: I hope so. And where will we live in Western Ukraine? We have no money. We didn't get a salary and spent our last money on furniture for the child.

Stas: We couldn't have known. There are many shelters for refugees. It's better than staying here.

Nina: There are three seats available — we have to offer them to Alla, Matvii and Vika.

Stas: Why not Nadia?

Nina: We've discussed it with her — she is not going to leave.

Stas: Vika is asleep. She is a happy person. (Matvii's irritated voice can be heard).

Matvii (a voice in the darkness): No! If something happens to dad, who will be with you? I don't agree.

Alla (a voice in the darkness): I'll come to you soon, I promise.

Matvii (a voice in the darkness): Who will help Vlad to guard the door?

Alla (a voice in the darkness): Well, Vlad is not alone here. We'll help him!

The voices grow quieter. Stas turns quietly to Tolia:

Stas: Tolia, do you hear me?

Tolia: What?

Stas: They say there will be a chance to leave tomorrow. We want to go to a friend who lives in the village near Chernihiv. There, we will wait for another friend from Kyiv to bring fuel and then we'll go west. We can take your family. Talk to Alla!

Tolia: How many seats will you have?

Stas: Three. We wanted to take your family and Vika.

Tolia: Listen, tomorrow at eight my colleague should come to pick Matvii up. He has one seat available. Well, maybe my family will go with you, just to be together, and Vika too, if she agrees. And we'll send someone else with a colleague?

Stas: I don't mind. Won't your colleague object that a stranger will go instead of Matvii?

Tolia: Of course not, the man is adequate.

Stas (to Hrysha): Hrysha, Hrysha! Hryhorii Ivanovych, are you asleep?

Hrysha: What? Are you talking to me?

Stas: Yes, to you. They say it will be possible to leave tomorrow. We are planning to leave. Are you coming with us?

Hrysha: Me? Take the young ones! Nadia and Oleh, Alla and Matvii.

Stas: We have already agreed: they are leaving. Nadia seems to have refused...

Hrysha: Well, Nadia, why don't you want to leave?

Nadia: My mom is in a wheelchair and my sister has had a stroke — how can I possibly go? I can't leave them here.

Stas: You see, Hrysha! Let's go!

Hrysha: Well, if there's a place for me, I'll go.

Oleh: Turi-ruri!

Vika: What time is it?

Tolia: Good morning, sleepy-head. There will be an evacuation tomorrow. Will you go?

Vika: Really? Officially?

Stas: Don't count on it! I'll be driving. Tomorrow at eight. Will you go?

Vika: I will (coughs).

Nadia: You need to have your lungs checked.

Vika: Where can I do it? Everything is closed, and the hospital is packed with the injured.

Vlad: The Internet is working!!!

Everybody rushes to their phones. Hrysha's telephone starts ringing.

Hrysha: Is it mine? (looks for the telephone for a long time) Is it really mine? (telephone rings for a long time. Hrysha finds the telephone and fails to believe that it is a call for him (picks up the phone) It's mine! Hello. I am alive, hello, hello. Glad to hear you (goes out to the hall to talk).

Vika: Damn it, I don't have a connection. Not a single line…

Nadia: You just need a phone like Hrysha's. With buttons, from the ancient era. Those do get connected unlike the modern ones - fuck them!

Lida enters.

Oleh (happily): Turi-ruri!

Lida: Good evening, we are from Ukraine!

Lucky runs to Lida. Everyone comes to hug.

Nadia: Who? (points at the baby).

Lida: A boy, Ivan. Welcome him!

Nina: We'll be glad to welcome him! How was it?

Lida: Natural delivery, fortunately, without complications. The little one is a real Cossack! How are you doing here?

Nina: We are going to leave tomorrow.

Hrysha comes back from the hall, unnoticed.

Lida: Leave the city?

Tolia: Yes. They say we can try tomorrow. Lida, where is your husband?

Lida: At the front line since February 24.

Stas: Well, listen, the four of us will fit in. Lida, will you go?

Lida (points at the baby): Five of us!

Stas: Sorry. Sure. Tomorrow at eight!

Lida: How will we fit in? I still need to take a few things for the baby... and for the dog...

Hrysha: Hey, folks, my brother called. I'm not going with you tomorrow, thanks for the invitation, I'm going with them at nine.

Stas: Cool! Lida, then everyone will surely fit in. It's good it has turned out this way…

Oleh (happily): Turi-ruri!

Everyone: Turi-ruri!

Morning. The shelter. Everyone hugs. They stand with bags near the exit. Men carry things to cars.

Nadia: Oh, my dear! Take care!

Nina: You too, please call me when there is a connection.

Nadia: Call me when you arrive!

Alla: Sure. We've packed food for you into the red bag. Take everything you need, don't be ashamed.

Nadia: What about you?

Lida: We'll buy something. There's food in other cities.

Nina: Clean water is under Hrysha's chair.

Nadia: Where is he?

Vika: He must be packing things. He might be at home.

Tolia: All right, Nina. Take care of yourself and the kids. (hugs her)

Stas: We are sure to meet soon!

Oleh: Turi-ruri!

Lida: Turi-ruri, give me five!

Oleh gives five and they hug.

Nadia: Oleh, say ‘goodbye’. You can do it!

Oleh: Tur-ruri!

Stas: Let’s go! Nina, Lida, Alla and Matvii get into my car. Vika, you will go with Tolia’s friend. Don’t be offended, there are mothers with children here. Lida needs help. But you will go to the west right away because we will still be getting around the region for a while.

Vika: No problem. If you say so.

Alla: God help us! Let’s go!

Everyone hugs and leaves. Cars are heard driving. Nadia enters the shelter with Oleh.

Nadia (to Oleh): Oleh, say ‘mama’.

Oleh: Turi-ruri.

Nadia: Say ‘mama’!

Oleh: Turi-ruri.

Nadia: I am begging you, Oleh, to say something different.

Oleh: Turi-ruri!

Nadia hugs Oleh and cries. Hrysha enters.

Hrysha: These monsters are shelling us again.

Nadia: Didn’t you manage to pack?

Hrysha: What for?

Nadia: What do you mean? Your brother is coming to pick you up at nine…

Hrysha: Nobody is coming to pick me up. My brother and his daughter packed things and left in the first days of the war in an empty car.

Nadia: Without you? Did they leave you alone? How is it possible?

Hrysha: Things happen.

Nadia: Who called you then?

Hrysha: Oh, then? One lady from a dance club. She’s got sick. She asked me to buy some bread and bring water if possible. It will calm down a bit and I'll go to the shop and then to her. Nadia: You are a cool guy! Do you go to a dance club?

Hrysha: Sure thing! I might even get married! (Laughs). Our soldiers seem to be shooting. Ok, I’ll go.

Nadia: I’ll go to visit my mother and sister. Oleh, put on another hat. (Tolia comes in).

Tolia: At last, I’ll join the territorial defence. (packs his things).

Hrysha: Take care, son! (He leaves. Nadia silently hugs Tolia and leaves too).

In some time. Evening. It is dark. The garland doesn’t work.

Nadia: …(Suffocates, breathes very deeply).

Oleh: Turi-ruri!

Other people in the shelter: Nadia, do you feel bad?

Nadia: I can’t breathe. This darkness... (Suffocates, breathes very deeply).

Other people in the shelter: Take my electronic watch, it glows.

Nadia (takes a watch that gives some light): Thank you, it’s better. I feel as if I were inside a coffin.

Vlad: Mum, I was told that you feel bad.

Nadia: Everything is fine. It’s fine. It turns out to be 2 am.

Vlad: I’ll be guarding the door then.

Nadia: Vlad, has Hrysha come back?

Vlad: I haven’t seen him.

Nadia: He went to the shop. I don’t know which district. I hope he wasn’t among the people who were shot queuing for bread today. Why didn’t he come? He always comes back….

Vlad: He might have stayed with the woman he was going to visit.

Nadia: Vlad!

Vlad: What?

Nadia: And why didn’t the others write when they arrived?

Vlad: Maybe, there is no connection.

Nadia: I had a connection for 7 minutes today. No message and they are all offline. Everyone…

There is a knock at the door and someone is shouting in the yard. There is panic in the shelter.

Other people in the shelter: God! I hope these are our soldiers, not russians!

Vlad: Keep silent! (shouts through the door). Password?

Grandma Halia: Open the door, I’m a friend!

Vlad: Friends don’t go out after curfew!

Grandma Halia: Our village was bombed. I barely escaped. At midnight, the entire village was razed to the ground. Everything is on fire. I was walking to the city, people, what are you doing, don’t let me die!

Vlad: Do you have the passport? With registration?

Grandma Halia: I do, I do.

Other people in the shelter: Don’t open the door. The russians might be with her. She might be a spy.

Vlad: What if she is a friend? Will we let her die in the street?

Other people in the shelter: We need to check if she is local!

Vlad: Say ‘palianytsia’!

Grandma Halia: Palianytsia.

Other people in the shelter: They already know how to pronounce this word after so many days. We need something else...

Vlad: Answer quickly. What is ‘balsanka’?

Grandma Halia: A plastic bag.

Vlad: ‘Laiba’?

Grandma Halia: Maybe a bike maybe, I don’t know.

Vlad: Guys, I am opening. She is local. These are local words. (He opens the door and uses a flashlight) Your passport!

Grandma Halia: Here you are (gives her passport).

Vlad: She's local! Everything is fine.

Other people in the shelter: Thank God and the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Grandma Halia: Thank you, friends. I didn't believe I would be able to come here. You can't imagine what's going on there!

Nadia: Where?

Grandma Halia: Novoselivka is destroyed, Bobrovytsia is destroyed. There is nothing there. Our village is on fire… They are the devil's children. They shot the neighbour's husband, took the washing machine and my cow! (Grandma Halia trembles).

Nadia: Your cow? Vlad, bring some water!

Grandma Halia: Yes, my cow. Why do they need a cow? Where will they take it?

Nadia: What's your name?

Grandma Halia: Halia.

Nadia: The main thing is that you are alive, grandma Halia, that you are alive!

Oleh (sadly): Turi-ruri…

The days pass by. Nadia sends a message:

"How are you, have you arrived?" (not delivered)

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"How are you, have you arrived?" (not delivered).

Nadia: Vlad, didn't Hrysha come?

Vlad: He didn't, mom.

Nadia: Murzyk came. He'd never come without Hrysha before.

Vlad:...

Nadia: Our friends haven't written anything. How many days has it been?

Vlad: Maybe a week, I don't know. What day is it today?

Nadia: I don't know. We need to look for a generator again. My phone is dead.

Vlad: I turned mine off. There was still 10 per cent of the charge, I thought we might need it for something urgent.

Nadia: How urgent it is to know what day it is today?

Vlad: Urgent enough.

He switches the phone on. A message from Nina comes. He reads it to himself.

Vlad: They are alive! (He reads it out loud: "Vlad, we can't get through to your mother. We are sending a copy of the message to you as we understand that there is no connection. I hope you are all right (to the extent it is possible). Drop a line about how you are. So. We are alive. We came under fire. Our windshield was broken. We drove this way. But it is not important. We arrived in the village and called a friend. It was quiet there, and then they started shelling. We didn't have enough fuel but we went on, we called a friend to tell him that we would wait in a neighbouring village. We took his mother with us because the house was hit. There were 7 people and dogs. Our soldiers stopped us, they said that everything was mined and there were 30 tanks going to the city, but their electricity went out, the power banks ran out and the thermal imagers didn't work. We gave them our power banks. They hid us. The battle began. Thanks to our power banks, they broke the column of tanks going to Chernihiv. When it became quiet, we moved to the meeting place. Everything is fine now. We are in the Carpathians, at the house of Lida's acquaintance. But I don't know if everything is fine with Vika. We saw that their car overturned while leaving. It was impossible to stop and help, they were shooting a lot. I'm terribly worried. Let me know if she gets in touch. Stas did go to take people out. For now, to the East, because in the North, cars are being shot at a lot. I hug everyone tightly. Turi-ruri. Everything will be Ukraine."

Nadia: They're alive. Vika...Vika hasn't been in touch…

Vlad (announces to everybody in a loud voice): They say in the news that the bridge has gone.

Nadia: That's awful. We are trapped. When did it happen?

Vlad: Tonight. Now it's sure - no medicine, no humanitarian aid - nothing.

Grandma Halia: Dear Lord! Forgive us, sinners, have mercy for us (makes the sign of the cross).

Vlad: I'll try to find a battery (comes out).

Nadia: I'll cook porridge. There is still half a loaf of bread and a kilo of millet. It will last a week.

Oleh: Turi-ruri!

Days pass by.

Nadia: What day is it today?

Grandma Halia: 37th.

Nadia: What day?

Grandma Halia: 37th.

Vlad comes in bringing water.

Vlad: I've brought some water. They say our soldiers have driven them off. They are pulling the troops back.

Grandma Halia (gets up quickly): Who is saying that?

Vlad: People in the queue. I heard all the news when I was queueing for water.

Grandma Halia: Let's pray it is true.

Vlad: I saw Tolia. He is alive. Everything is fine.

Nadia: Thank God!

Vlad: I'll go and help the guys dig...

Nadia: What are you digging? One more toilet?

Vlad: Graves (leaves).

Grandma Halia: We need to boil some water. It's cold (leaves).

Vika comes in. Her clothes are torn and she is dirty and covered in mud.

Nadia (sees Vika): Vika... Alive. My girl! (Rushes to hug her)

Vika: Do you have some water?

Nadia: For drinking? Here, take some (gives a bottle. Vika drinks. Nadia wipes her.)

Vika: I managed to escape. Then I went through the forests and gardens.

Nadia: Where from?

Vika: From the orcs. We were hit. Everyone died. I miraculously survived, they captured me... Everything is destroyed near Chernihiv.

Nadia: Are you hungry? We have millet.

Vika: Millet!

Nadia: I am so happy to see you! I am so happy you are alive! (hugs her)

Vika: Millet!

Nadia: I'll bring it in a sec. They are cooking it somewhere here (goes to the exit).

Vika: Nadia! (Nadia stops) Do you think there are still gynaecologists in Chernihiv?

Nadia: Why do you need a gynaecologist? Vika? (looks into her eyes and understands everything).

Vika: I think there should be some…

Nadia: Vika...

Vika: I was asleep, so I don't remember anything.

Nadia: Vika... (tears roll down her cheeks)

Vika: Please don't tell anyone (Nadia stands still as if she was frozen).

Nadia: I won't.

Vika: Bring the millet (Nadia leaves. Oleh comes to her).

Oleh: Turi-ruri!

Vika: Turi-ruri.

Oleh: Turi-ruri?

Vika (tells the story of captivity, speaking with different intonation): Turi-ruri, turi-ruri,

turi-ruri, turi-ruri.

Oleh: (sympathetically, gently hugs Vika) Turi-ruri…

According to the city administration, during the 40 days of Chernihiv's blockade,

about 700 people were killed and 70% of the city was destroyed.

The data were announced in early April 2022 in the mass media.

4. KIRA SITNIKOVA "WHAT IS AFRAID OF RUDY"



Hello! My name is Kira, but you know me by the pseudonym "Kiko". I'm 14 and I love simple things. I study at SHSTSN in the theater department. I left Kharkiv on the first day of the war, but I still love it.

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

"What has changed? I think my thoughts. Thoughts about the world, about people, about myself. I began to respect those around me and miss those who were not with me. I began to rejoice in the military at checkpoints. I started crying because I can't see my family. I can't hug my friends. I can't let go of my past life.

"I want to go home. Go to school, where I understand everything. Go to the theater department, then buy your favorite chips and go home. I want it all back."

What Rudy's Afraid Of

Who knows if it was just life, or if she was screwing it all up herself, but Rudy had never been a lucky person. She lived according to the idea that there is no such thing as happiness without sins. And in any case, who knows what tomorrow will bring. Maybe success? Or maybe just another day in a string of failures. In general, she understood that no matter what, she had to live for the moment.

Rudy was an optimist and a very trusting person. That's what saved her on sad days. The past month had been crazy happy. She hadn't argued with her mother, not even once. She hadn't been sent home with a single teacher's note. She even managed to get up on time every morning. Yes - and even this same Rudy - the one who can be pure evil if she hasn't eaten, felt a sense of at the sight of the sun.Spring was on its way, it seemed to her. She and her best friend even agreed to go to school in skirts on the first day of spring. That was the life. That's the way life should be.

Rudy understood that the time would come when she would have to pay the price for such a a gift of luxury.

Revenge would soon catch up with happy Rudy. There was no escape.

Everyone used to ask Rudy about her goals in life… She would answer casually and joyfully: to live as long as possible and to enjoy her emotions.

Rudy was very emotional. She was so emotional that fear could completely paralyze her, which is exactly what happened that night.

She had a dream. Rudy often had dreams, but this one was different from the ones she'd had before. She was standing in a field of flowers. A ray of sun shone down upon her face. In front of her stood a house. Unsurprisingly, the house was on wheels. Rudy loved that. She had always dreamed that when she grew up she'd go on a trip together with her friends. She loved everything unknown. And so she couldn't help but enter the house. The house was empty and old. Everything was covered in dust. The paint on the walls was at least a hundred years old. Rudy didn't like it. She quickly had a look around the first floor, orienting herself. Among the dirt and the cobwebs there was a butterfly. It was preserved in glass.

"Who could have made this? The poor butterfly was suffocated by the glass." Rudy tossed the glass with the butterfly in it into her bottomless pockets and went upstairs.

It was rather unusual, this house on wheels. Upstairs a veranda was waiting for Rudy decorated with fairy lights and small blankets, just as she had long dreamed of. The thought flashed through her mind of how much she'd like to hang out there with her friends. But something wasn't right. She was becoming increasingly afraid the longer she stayed in the house. She was just a teenager, and a young one at that, completely alone, in the middle of a field. Rudy understood that she needed to leave. There was just one thing left that she needed to take with her..

Where her desire for simple things came from, Rudy had no idea. She sighed and turned around. Right in front of her were stairs up to the attic. Time was running out. Soon she

would be overcome by fear. Rudy opened the creaking door and all of a sudden pigeons flew out. “How did they get in there? Who locked them in? Could they lock me in as well?”

You couldn’t say that Rudy was claustrophobic per se. It’s just that her heart was fluttering in her chest from what she saw there. Many different boxes stood before her, filled with all kinds of junk. Among the boxes was a picture. In the photo was her grandfather, her father, and her friends. They seemed to be drifting away from her. They were all disappearing, farther and farther and farther… It was as if they were being pulled over to the other side by someone who was laughing with anger.

Rudy’s legs went weak. Was she about to start crying? Could this be the end? No. This is definitely not the end. She’s strong.

Rudy trembled a bit as she stood up, drying her eyes with her hands. She didn’t have much time left to escape this dark and gloomy house. The small lilac box. That’s what Rudy wanted to find. The box in which Rudy kept all of her memories. All the little gifts her friends had given her: letters, candy wrappers, bracelets. Everything that brought her joy. Everything that made her smile on sad days. Everything her little heart desired.

It was nowhere to be found. Rudy searched every corner of the attic. It can’t be. She can’t have lost the things that bring her the most happiness. Rudy was absolutely sure - the box had to be here.

To the left of her a mouse appeared and ran past her legs. It made sense that there were mice living in an abandoned building. Rudy wasn’t afraid of mice. She just wanted to know where the mouse had come from.

But then, there it was. There among the cardboard boxes and the old wooden crates was her very own lilac box. Could she really have found it? She understood that as soon as she had hold of the box - she could leave this house. Rudy grabbed it and ran towards the door. And that’s when the miracle happened.

The house began to renew itself. The walls became white. All the furniture became new. Everything around her became so beautiful. Rudy’s hair began to grow. Her old dress turned into a glamorous white ball gown. The butterfly in Rudy’s pocket flew away, freed from its glass.

But for some reason, Rudy didn’t like it. She wanted to get out of that house. She used all her strength to pull open the door, but then… there were no longer any flowers around her. The sun was no longer shining. The green grass didn’t tickle her legs.

A strong wind shoved her back into the house. Rudy was afraid. She was terrified. Only one thing saved her: that small lilac box, which she held close to her, as it warmed her heart. Rudy had never been so worried about holding onto her memories.

She was losing her strength. She could no longer grip the box in her hands. The wind was getting stronger with every passing second. Rudy let go of the box. She let go of everything. She no longer felt anything. She succumbed to the wind as it carried her far far away…

Rudy woke up in a cold sweat. She understood what was happening, and became even more frightened. Her body was shaking at the thought that in this moment it could all come to an end. Everything she'd ever dreamed of, might never come to be.

You might be thinking that this was just a regular dream. But no. It could have been, if it weren't for Rudy's mother who called her daughter in the middle of that night, to tell her not to worry, to pack her things and wait for her.

There was the first explosion, not far from Rudy's building. Soon after was the second and the third. Rudy knew she couldn't go to the window, but she couldn't believe her eyes. She was staring at what was going on right outside her window. Rudy's mind flew far away from what she was watching, just as her body had been blown away by the wind in her dream.

"Can it be that all the recent news was true? Can it be real? I don't believe it. It can't be." The same thoughts were spinning around in her head. Who would have thought that the little Rudy saw would have such an affect on her. She was completely changed. Good days and bad days were transformed into the same kind of neutrality. The need for new clothes (or whatever else teenagers desire) was transformed into the need for a place to live.

She literally grew up right before the eyes of her family.
Fear. That's what she was afraid of.
Eventually, Rudy managed to get hold of herself and drag herself from the cold dark ditch. Yes, she had changed, but that young innocent girl, who had lived a carefree life and found joy in small gifts, continues to amuse Rudy, now grown and wise.

Translated by Molly Flynn

5. ANNA GALAS "CHRONICLES"



Anna Galas . Translator, researcher, playwright. She was born in Lviv, studied at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Lviv National University. Ivan Franko, majoring in translation. She later continued her studies at Oxford University (UK), where she studied contemporary British drama. She participated in the School of Postmodern Drama (Edinburgh, Scotland) thanks to the John McGrath Scholarship in Theater Studies. After returning to Lviv, she began teaching and

research activities at LNU. Ivan Franko in the field of theatrical translation.

Actively works as a theater translator, manages the project "Laboratory of Theater Translation". She made her debut as a playwright in the II Drama Laboratory, organized by the National Union of Theater Actors of Ukraine. The finale of the laboratory included the play "Dreamcatcher", which was presented at the Festival of Modern Drama. Other plays were included in the long and short lists of drama competitions "Week of current play. Fraction","July Honey"," Korniychuk Readings", "Batum International Festival of Monodrama".

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

“Everyone was talking about a possible war, but no one believed until the end that Russia would start it. The bombing of cities at dawn seemed like a scene from a black-and-white war film that no one is happy about anymore, but is watched from time to time because it’s a classic of the genre. It turned out, however, that there are far more people in the neighboring non-fraternal state who like to rummage through the waste of the past and extract the worst that has ever happened there than those who look ahead. Branding themselves with the letter ‘z’, these new barbarians decided that they had the right to change the ‘circumstances of life’ of the Ukrainian people.

“For some, they changed these circumstances once and for all, taking away their lives, for others they destroyed their homes so that they could not live well, and for others, like me, they forced me to radically change my life trajectory. Suddenly it turned out that the only real value in life is the safety of my loved ones; all I really have is my knowledge and skills; my home where my children can sleep peacefully and not be afraid of explosions. At first there was animal fear for the children, then numbness, then the swing began—I’m glad to be alive, then I feel guilty about it. I no longer look beyond the horizon of prospects, I live here and now. Immersion in work temporarily saves from constant pain for shattered cities and tortured people.

“Anesthesia does not last long: as soon as I emerge from the work routine, a new wave of despair awaits me. Then I remember Mariupol, and it becomes a shame. I can’t change the proposed circumstances, but I can probably try to change something in myself. Ukraine has just won Eurovision! May this little victory be the beginning of the great victory!”

CHRONICLES OF THE EVACUATED BODY AND THE LOST SOUL

Characters:

I-BODY: emotionless, insensitive shell; refers to oneself using third-person pronouns

I-SOUL: emotional and empathic substance; refers to oneself using first-person pronouns.

I-BODY:

On the sixty-fourth of February, the body woke up later than on previous mornings.

The body got out of bed, made coffee, took a sip and, not feeling the taste, put the mug on the table.

Then the body went to the bathroom, looked at itself in the mirror, saw nothing and turned on the tap.

The sound of the water had no effect, so the body didn't even try to take a shower.

The body went outside.

The body heard the birds singing; saw a cherry tree — or maybe it was a sweet cherry? — which intended to bloom; noticed how a squirrel jump overhead; paid attention to how the ducks were loudly quarrelling on the lake nearby.

The body did not react in any way and returned home.

I-SOUL: (interrupts)

No, NOT HOME! Just to the house.

I-BODY:

The body has been living in this house for a month. Or maybe a year?

The body has lost all its settings and it is difficult for it to keep track of the days.

But it performs its main functions.

It takes care of three children, whom it carried for nine months under its heart, and then released into this world.

The body feeds children three times a day. Sometimes two or one.

It does the washing-up. It washes children's clothes once they are covered with a layer of dirt.

That's all.

No, not all.

The body works a lot too.

The body can work online and its help is now needed by other bodies.

Helping others saves the body from rusting.

I-SOUL:

Once upon a time, when my body and I made one whole, I decided to become a translator.

Thanks to years of practice, my body can now translate documents for other bodies, meaning people fleeing war, without my intervention.

I-BODY:

The body can work autonomously.

I-SOUL:

I am trying to recall the moment when my body gave up on me.

When did it throw me out like a rabid plague-stricken dog?

Was it on the first day of the war, when bombs were exploding all over Ukraine?

Maybe at that very moment when my confused son came into the bedroom in the morning and announced that there would be no lessons at school because the war had started?

I know for a fact that when my body tried to take the children out of the city, I was no longer in it.

At that moment, I was next to my late great-grandmother, who ritually stroked the red bedspread on our old sofa with her wrinkled hand and told me how she had hidden her small children from the bombings in freshly dug graves in the cemetery in Zhmerynka, covering them with pillows and blankets, because who would drop bombs on the cemetery?

I used to listen to her stories about the war in silence, but now I was asking her for advice: “Grandma, what should I do? How do I protect children from war?”.

She was the kindest person I knew in this life.

How did she manage?

How did she manage not to hate humanity after her father had disappeared, and she had been thrown out of their home somewhere in Bila Tserkva by the soldiers of the newly formed Soviet army stationed there, after the world war had driven tanks through her young years, had sent all her brothers and her husband to the grave, after losing her little son because there was no way to treat him... I can’t count how many times she had lost her home in order to create it again and again in a new place...

Grandma, how did you manage to get through this and not lose faith and humanity?

I’M LOSING IT…

With each new page of this senseless war, the last drops of my faith are drying up.

Kharkiv, Chernihiv, Kyiv...

The sounds of a siren are heard: Kyiv! Air raid siren!

I-SOUL covers her ears with her hands and squats down. I-BODY stands motionless. The siren stops. I-SOUL gets up.

I-BODY:

The body’s tear-producing function is broken.

There was not a single tear shed by it throughout the war.

Sometimes the eyes were covered with wet chaff, but they dried quickly, probably saving moisture, because the body forgets to drink.

The body was not at a loss.

It began to relieve pain through the skin.

With a pimpled face and neck, the body became more like a teenager, especially in the hoodie borrowed from the eldest son, because the body brought things only for children.

I-SOUL:

The house we live in has become a shelter for refugees.

People stop here temporarily to take a breath of air and move on.

Away from death, hunger and suffering.

Most of them do not know where they are going, but they understand where they came from.

Behind them, there are destroyed houses, tortured relatives, the fear of death, and ahead - the unknown.

With most of them, we wouldn’t meet in peaceful life.

We lived in different bubbles that never met in the flight of life.

The war stuck red-hot needles into our big and small bubbles and brought us all to the ground with a thud.

Some were lucky enough to fall on the haystack and remain unharmed, some had their ribs crushed, and some were torn to pieces.

All of us, like blind moles, will crawl on the earth in search of a warm human soul, whom we can hug and feel alive.

Regardless of who one was in the past, it became entirely irrelevant. Now we are soulmates.

I-BODY:

The eldest son shaved half his head.

He approached the body and stood near it for a long time, hoping that the body would notice the changes and react.

The body did not notice and did not react.

It was washing the plate.

I-SOUL:

If I had been around, I would have definitely paid attention.

Perhaps, I would have scolded that the unshaven strands were sticking out.

Perhaps, I would have praised him for his creativity.

But I was far away at that time: in Bucha, in Irpen, in Hostomel.

I looked at all the atrocities that took place there and screamed in pain and helplessness.

I-BODY:

The body hugged the youngest daughter, who fell and hit herself hard.

The daughter hugged the body tightly and cried.

I-SOUL:

I listened to her sobs and thought of those children who would never be protected by such a soothing mother’s body again.

The sounds of a siren are heard: Lviv! Air raid siren!

I-SOUL covers her ears with her hands and squats down. I-BODY stands motionless.

I-SOUL:

Today, for the first time during the entire war, the body was forced to walk the streets of the city.

I had to be close to it because the body cannot be controlled by automatic settings in a new place.

Without me, it would have been under the wheels of some white jeep in an instant, and then what was the point of saving it from the war?

While my body and I walked down the street and looked around, I caught myself thinking that the colour white annoyed me.

How can you be dressed in white now?

The world should be mourning every day, and not put on white coats or walk in white boots on the dusty roads, while in Mariupol, there is no undamaged spot left on the torn body of the city.

The trees are also beginning to bloom, and for some reason, with white flowers. They should be covered with red withered flowers, and their trunks should be covered with crimson resin.

But no! White coats! White flowers!

I-BODY:

“Mom, can you laugh?” asks the youngest daughter.

“I can,” answers the body.

“Show me how,” insists the little one.

The body tries to reproduce joyful laughter but does not find the necessary function in its program. The body makes a sound: honk – honk – honk.

“No, that’s what geese say, not mothers.”

I-SOUL:

We are lucky that we were born far from the border with Mordor.

It’s just a coincidence that allowed us to survive in the meat grinder of war, for which I feel guilty. They say it’s normal to feel guilty about being a survivor… Survivor’s guilt… Let it be…

In front of me, there is a woman who miraculously escaped with her son from the hell in Chernihiv.

My body treats her with lunch while I hug her tightly and listen intently.

I am ready to listen to her as much as she wants to talk.

It’s three o’clock. For the fifth time, a reheated lunch is on the table in front of her.

We did not believe until the last moment that they would come to kill us.

Even when cannonades could be heard on the next street.

We thought they would pass by our house and go on.

We sat in the basement without light at a temperature of -5 for three weeks.

We learned to distinguish the sounds of different rockets.

There was almost no chance that we would manage to escape.

At first, it was very scary, but then we became indifferent.

It is impossible to be afraid all the time.

Bombs were dropped from planes several times a day according to schedule.

The rocket hit the neighbour’s kitchen but did not explode.

So it is still there.

You see, this is a piece of a rocket that fell nearby.

It flew above my ear and stuck in the wall.

I took it as a souvenir. I probably have a guardian angel.

I feel sorry for my son. He stopped talking.

I look at her boy and I want to howl like a wolf. He is the same age as my son. How can he live with it now?

The sounds of a siren are heard: Chernihiv! Air raid siren!

I-SOUL covers her ears with her hands and squats down. I-BODY stands motionless.

I-BODY:

The middle daughter draws a castle.

“Mom, do you like my drawing?”

“Yeah,” the body answers.

“Would you like to live in such a castle?”

“Yeah.”

“And how many rooms would you like to have?”

“Yeah.”

“And if our house is bombed, where will we live?”

“Yeah.”

“Can you hear me?”

“Yeah.”

“Mom’s program froze again.”

The body silently hugs the daughter. This is all that the body is capable of.

I-SOUL:

Kramatorsk! Railway station! A toy horse covered in blood!

God, how do you allow this?

I’m falling apart.

How can parents live through it if they are alive?

At this moment, I am afraid to look in the direction of my children.

It’s good that the body lives its own life and at this moment, it can hug its daughters, who draw fairy-tale castles with yellow and blue flags on the towers.

I-BODY:

Today, the body has a lot to do.

Another group of people arrived. They are hungry and tired.

I-SOUL:

A huge man sits in front of me and cries like a small child.

It was not the war that made him cry, but an old woman who wanted to give him the last food, because she was going to die soon anyway, and he still had to live to raise grandchildren.

A former Afghan soldier, a war invalid, almost blind in one eye, was going to his daughter.

He wanted to go to war, but he was not accepted.

He says that orcs do not know how to fight and that their command officers are stupid.

And I believe him. I want to believe him.

I-BODY:

The body listens to a concert in Stockholm.

The orchestra performs “Plyne Kacha”. On the screen, there is footage of russian atrocities in Ukraine.

Everyone cries and gives a standing ovation.

Collective catharsis.

They were relieved and they went home with a sense of complicity in the grief.

The body just states the facts.

The sounds of a siren are heard: Odesa! Air raid siren!

I-SOUL covers her ears with her hands and squats down. I-BODY stands motionless.

I-SOUL:

The world becomes black and white during the war.

A simple dichotomy works: you are either alive or dead; either a friend or a foe; either human or not.

The Orcs of Mordor send trophy gifts to their wifies and moms.

Some Lyuska from Muhosransk will wear the bloody panties of a raped Ukrainian woman.

What can we do with it?

I would prefer not to hate anyone.

This feeling is not mine, it is alien to me.

In my life before the war, I never hated anyone, I found excuses even for those who hurt me on purpose.

Now hatred drains all the blood, all the energy and love that I should give to my children, my husband, my parents and my friends.

It filled every atom of my soul and, like the invaders of Mordor, expelled everyone who lived there before.

Will it always be like this?

Will I never be able to restore the integrity of my soul?

Will this occupation with hatred continue until the end of my days, whenever that end comes?

I-BODY:

Today, it was warm and the body went outside.

Before the war, the body loved such days.

The body always wanted to sit in the forest under a pine tree and write.

It thought it was very pleasant.

Now the body sits under a huge pine tree.

Fingers quickly run across the keyboard.

The body does not feel anything, and for some reason, even the rays of the sun do not warm it.

Every day, the body listens to many stories from people fleeing war, but cannot write about them. It can only record what it sees around.

I-SOUL:

I am connected to this world with one thread.

Sometimes it thins and almost breaks off, sometimes, on the contrary, it becomes so rough and strong that it makes me believe that this planet still has a chance to be saved.

This thread is complete strangers who reach out to you and pull you out of the abyss.

It is not so important whether they let you into their home, bring homemade pies to your children, or just stand by when you howl because of helplessness and the impossibility of changing something.

This thread stretches to me and from me, connects me with those who happen to be nearby by chance, but remain in life forever.

Someday, I will tell my grandchildren about the war, as my great-grandmother told me. I will write about those stories that were told to me in the evenings by complete strangers, who turned out to be so close. Now, I can only write about what I feel at this moment. Everything else hurts too much and does not allow me to express myself in words.

Also, I will definitely talk about Saint Peter, who let us into his home, about Saint Anna and Basil, who surrounded us with their care, and about many other Saints who gave us light and did not allow us to fall into eternal darkness.

And maybe one day, when we return home, my body will allow my soul to return as well.

And then we will hug the children together and try to find the lost laughter.

My grandmother often laughed, so maybe I can too?

6. YULIA GUDOSHNYK "CAREFUL, MINE"



Julia Gudoshnik. Author of the novel "God [I] am free" and co-author of several collections. She studied in Germany and Denmark, and has worked in Europe, USA and Asia.

In 2016, after returning to Ukraine, she joined a humanitarian project in Donbass as a communication specialist. For the last few years he has been conducting storytelling workshops for public organizations.

Organizer of "Free Evenings", where she reads her prose and creates stories on the go. He does the same in the telegram channel "Before going to bed". Researches, writes and speaks on the themes of freedom, happiness, awareness and humanity. When he is not writing, he listens carefully to the world and thinks about what to create from what he has heard.

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

“My circumstances changed back in 2016, when I was sent to Severodonetsk to inform about mine danger. During several years of working in Donbass in various projects (in the liberated territories and in the gray zone), I received shock after shock and was never able to recover. A happy comfortable life in Kyiv or Lviv seemed to me a sin of indifference to how Ukrainians survive in the east. Some kind of parallel reality within one country. I had two realities and could live in both, but peaceful always seemed to me an illusion.

“Therefore, if we talk about my changes in 2022, there were no significant ones. The war has plagued me for many years, and now this pain has simply become more visible. It hurts a lot that everything we did in Donbass came to naught. It hurts a lot that people are forced to flee the war again, and it is catching up again. And that this is some endless story with which I have long been associated and which is not going to let go.”

BEWARE OF A MINE

A mono-play

Characters:

Nadia – a woman aged 25-30. She wears combat boots and an overall.

The stage behind is fenced off with red and white striped tape and “STOP. MINES!” signs. In the front, in the free space, Nadia dances with her eyes closed, humming some melody to herself. The woman notices the audience and slowly stops the song/dance, stepping forward.

This story should be unfolding somewhere in Somalia. In Syria. In Afghanistan. Well, in short, somewhere where such stories should happen — in hot spots. In those places where the fire of war is constantly burning. Places to which the world waved goodbye a long ago. Let them send each other to the graves there. We will accept their refugees — no problems. But no more than that. Let them fight, we have nothing to do with it.

I sometimes think that if I had not been born in Ukraine, but in those hopeless regions, I would have turned out to be a cool suicide bomber. Because it is better to blow yourself up early — of your own free will — than to watch others die year after year. Those who did not have a bargain with death. Who did not want to die, who still had something to do on Earth...

Damn it, I was not born in Afghanistan, but in Ukraine, and I am still a suicide bomber. Still a damn suicide bomber. I found a way to walk on the edge of life, to deal with death every day, to play “who will outwit whom”... I joined the sappers.

Yes, yes, I see your surprise. What? A female sapper? Who took you on, it's a boys-only job. But no, guys, women are also taken on. They warn us that the work is not for the faint of heart, that no one will carry the tools for us and will not indulge us either. Everyone is equal, no favours. In short, this work is for the strong and hardy. And I am like that. Yes, I am. Maybe you can't tell by my look. But what can you say about a person by appearance? What? Just a set of some nonsense stereotypes. Like "you should play the piano with these hands". Hm. I dig funnels with these hands. Who would have thought? Who would think to say: "You should dig funnels with these hands", huh? That's it. But I do. Much better than others. The commander says: "We don't have anybody as efficient as Nadia." Got it? That's not what you thought. Okay, so let's not talk about pianos.

To tell the truth, I believe that one day I will find not a mine, not a detonator and not shell fragments, but some kind of treasure. The truth is, I want to find a real treasure. Maybe a ring from Scythian times. Why not? Here, in the Donetsk region, Scythians lived too. Or a box with letters from a century ago. When people wrote to each other in long sentences. They wrote a lot. They confessed to something and asked for forgiveness. There was so much life in those letters, probably... Well, this is a dream from the realm of fiction. How could those letters survive... But something makes me want to think that this land protects something more than human remains and unexploded ammunition.

She kneels and presses her ear to the ground.

My land... My land, what is it? My land, tell me, did you want this? To claim lives? To hide death in yourself? What did you say to those scum who buried mines in you? What did you shout to them? Were you silent... You were probably silent. Because if you had screamed, those bastards would not have dared to penetrate you with their dirty hands. Your holy depths. Your body. They would have heard your voice and got scared... they would have crossed themselves and fallen on their knees in front of you: "Holy earth, holy earth, forgive us sinners who dared to wrap death in your sacred clothes. Forgive us, the earth, forgive us, sinners!"

But you were silent, my Mother. You were silent and accepted them. You accepted all those crooks. You absorbed evil in order to kill your own people with it. Those who just recently threw the seeds of New Life at you. Who idolised you. Who prayed to you. Who trusted you. Who you breastfed...

Nadia gets up and continues the dialogue with the Earth

A mother kills her children. It's scary. It's so fucking scary... Are you quiet? Quiet, huh? You also want my death, right? You want it because you put me here with a shovel so that I could dig a hole for myself. But there is no need to beat around the bush. You are my accomplice; you fulfil my wishes. I wanted to die. I wanted to die when my friends started dying. When a shell flew into Lera's car. When Pashka was blown up by a roadside bomb. When Max was torn apart by the POM-3 "Medallion" ... When... damn it, how many has it been? How many more are to come? These Leras, Pashkas, Maksyms? How many are there in my entire country? From Mariupol to Chernihiv, from Sumy to Bucha? How many of you are there?

So, I asked myself, or rather, the Earth, why I wasn't taken with them. More precisely, why was I dead inside for a long time, and I have not been still buried? What is this, damn it, what kind of game is this? They bombed your Home, killed your friends, raped your Earth, and then said "Live". Live, baby. Live…

When I was 12 years old, my father took me to his place in Crimea for the summer. He lived in Hurzuf, a small village near Yalta. There were few people and there was a lot of seawater. Large amounts of seawater. And the air was super salty.

We went to Yalta several times during the summer. Oh, there was plenty of space for me, a little girl, to run around. Maybe that's why dad didn't want to go there too often, so as not to spend a lot on all my whims. Well, just think — there is a McDonald's, which I had only seen in a movie before, and a huge observation wheel — you get on it and there is "wow". You close your eyes, cling tightly to your father's hand and squeal with delight that you are at such a height.

And on the embankment — oh, I couldn't take my eyes off all those attractions and TV screens on which oceans were shown and karaoke lyrics were played. By the way, my first and only portrait was painted on that embankment. Well, like a cartoon: I'm there with a long nose and huge ears. It was so funny. I looked like a baby elephant. It has been 20 years and I keep that picture as the most valuable souvenir

of that time. It still seems to smell like the cotton candy I ate afterwards and left my sticky fingerprints on the paper…

I don’t know why I recalled it. Maybe I want to bring everything back? The way it was 20 years ago? To have that cotton candy and hold hands with dad on the Yalta embankment? Can I have it back, please? Hey, up there, can you do it? And may I be there — forever there. By the sea, with salty hair and sweet fingers.

“You will grow up, earn money and come here. Every summer if you wish. And you will do whatever you want,” my father told me then. That was the only time he lied to me.

We have to be very efficient. Every millimetre counts. So, everything is careful, thorough, diligent and calculated. The sapper has no right to make a mistake. When I see all these memes about “being in the moment” on the Internet, I think that they are 100% made up about us. Well, as soon as you thought of some Yalta, wanted to be hugged, dreamed, failed, that’s it – there is a problem. In your personal file, they can write “death due to negligence”. They will probably write it that way. I don’t know what the organisation’s policy is for recording disability and death. The only thing I know for sure is that my life is insured.

If I blow up, my parents will be compensated. Yeah, you know, they’ll be paid a hefty sum if I am gone. So I’m thinking: what cover letter will this news come with? Like “We have two pieces of news for you — a good one and a bad one. Let’s start with the bad one: your daughter was killed in the line of duty. Please accept our deepest condolences. But it’s not all bad, there’s good news: her death has made you rich”.

What an irony, don’t you think? And this irony makes me happy for some reason. Well, I can’t leave my parents with a doodly squat and a photo in a black frame. No, there is a legacy, so to speak. Dad will get less, I’m sorry, but you didn’t raise me. For the summer in Crimea, your winnings from the jackpot make 30%. The rest is for mom. I’m not kidding about interest. We do fill out forms where we indicate how much interest and to whom to transfer in case of death. Business is business, everything must be calculated. What did you expect? Everything is clear.

Such a gift would be a huge surprise for my parents. They have no idea what I do. Yes, yes, I didn't tell them. For dad, Nadia just works somewhere and lives somehow. Yes, we speak once in a couple of months, so there is no need to worry about it. And my mother... My mother is a very nervous person, she immediately needs sedatives for anything. Well, the war since 2014 — a lot of things have happened, she has seen a lot, she has been displaced twice, you know... Now she needs to be protected from new stresses. So, for her, I am just office plankton who deals with papers. I sit in my office, sip coffee and fill out tons of reports. Safe tediousness, in a word. So, there is no reason to worry about me.

The phone rings. She responds:

"Hello, mom, hello. How are you?"

Pause. She listens.

"What did you read on Facebook?" *Pause*. "Were a woman and a child blown up in Soniachnyi?" *Pause*. "The child was left without legs... And what about the woman?" *Pause*.

"It's clear, it's clear, mom... Well, that's how it is, that's how it is, mom. There's nothing we can do. Remnants of the war are everywhere. Make sure to take care of yourself, okay? Be careful, okay? Well, you know what I'm going to tell you."

Pause. She listens

"Me? I'm watching TikTok. From Crimea. It's so funny. Aha. I'll send it to you now. Yes, everything is calm with us. I'm sitting here like a stub at the computer. I am entertaining myself with videos."

Pause.

"Aha. Aha." *Pause*. "Well ma, let's not start this. I will come, I will come home. Yes, I don't know when yet. Maybe you need something? Money, medicine?" *Pause*.

"I don't. I don't need anything, I'm fine. Okay, mom, come on, read less news. You don't have to worry." *Pause*. "Yeah, well, kissing you, bye."

They say you can't lie to your parents. Generally, cheating is bad. I don't object, really. But it's more peaceful to live like this, you know? It's easier for me to live like this when I know that she doesn't bury me in her thoughts every day.

Moms-moms, our worried ones. I sometimes think that they are not worried about us, but about themselves. Because if something goes wrong, if you lose control over your children – even adults – it will be the same as losing some of your property, won't it? And once it is yours, it means losing yourself... And then how is it possible to live on – without yourself?

But some other part of me — the part that always cuts to the bone mercilessly — that part says that my mother lost me a long time ago. For the simple reason that my life bore little resemblance to what she wanted for me. Or rather for herself. In her version, I should get refugee status somewhere in Poland-Germany, get married, have children and eat sausages somewhere on the lawn of a European park. This is the minimum plan. The maximum plan is to do the same in America. That would be really cool in her eyes. Some kind of ranch; tanned, white-toothed son-in-law in a chequered shirt. Ooooh, that would be cool. The American dream has come true: the child is well settled.

And the child got settled in a different way. The child carries bags with all sorts of stuff weighing more than herself. She wanders with a metal detector from morning to night, catches signals underground, digs, pulls out and reports. But anyway, there are a lot of tanned guys around. Maybe not as white-toothed as the Americans. And they are not in-laws, but colleagues, but they are there. And there is almost a ranch – the base on which we live together when we are away. A kind of farming in the Donetsk region (*she pronounces it with an American accent*). But instead of planting something in the ground, we pull all kinds of rubbish out of it.

When will I tell my mom who I really am? Well, never. If something happens, the notification about the inheritance will tell everything for me. And until then — nobody will tell her. Nobody needs the truth. There are too many problems with it. It is uncomfortable, damn it.

But, you know, I desperately want to be honest. Not to make up any stories, but to tell the truth as it is. To be as I am. And when I feel bad, not to lie that I'm fine. And when I'm torn apart from the inside, not to pretend that everything is hunky-dory.

She pulls out the phone. Into the phone:

I'm falling apart, mom... I'm falling apart, do you hear? I am blowing up like the ammunition that still kills people here.

And I saw torn bodies, mom. More than once.

And it hurts so much, mom.

And it's so hard to look for these cursed, still unexplored treasures day by day and know that it might be too late. That they will find someone faster...

And I cry, mom. I cry at night when I dream of all those who were taken away by this war. When I hear their voices. And I often hear them, mom.

And, you know, it seems to me that I am no longer here either. That this war also took me away. Do you understand, mom? I was torn apart a long time ago, like that explosive remnant of war.

And I'm scared, mom. It is scary that this land will never be cleansed.

That we will not have time to do our work.

That the war will chase us, will send shells to us.

And believe me, mom, I would like to sit on some porch, play with the children and eat sausages. As you wanted for me. I would like to…

But I can't. There is a war, mom, there is still a war here — inside me, around me. It continues. It is still here; I can hear it breathing.

Am I imagining things? Tell me it's all a dream and I'll wake up. Let's do it, shall we? Come on, tell me!

A long pause.

You won't say anything. And that's why I won't tell you the truth about myself. And about the war inside me.

A long pause.

It's okay, mom. Everything is cool. The sun is shining.

She squints, smiles, and hides the phone

I didn't tell her about Paul, the white-toothed American who came here last summer. A real cowboy. Even more: a ranger, a superhero. He travelled through Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen and Syria — all hot spots where such superheroes have a lot of work and are paid handsomely for it. Now, Ukraine is on this list too, so Paul reached us

as well. More precisely, he was hired by our donors – to assess whether we are clearing mines well, whether the locals are satisfied with us, whether we are not embezzling the money of the great American people, and so on.

So, a representative of the “great people” came to our small base. He is a lanky fellow, almost two metres high. Everyone looked at him either with suspicion or with fear. Well, he is a spy — what good can you expect from him? There will be a lot of asking, poking around and worming out. Whether we will receive money for another three years depends on what he sees and writes. In short, this person is important. An important person... Supposedly. As soon as I saw this ranger, I immediately felt sorry for him.

Well, seriously, just think: how is it possible to live when you are a guest everywhere; moreover, an uninvited one? He fought who knows when and for what. Now, he makes money from countries mutilated by wars, where he does not understand anything and does not want to understand. A person has no permanent place of residence, no family and no children. There was no need to google him — he said it himself. On the third day of the audit, Paul approached me with some kind of questionnaire. We talked about workload, results, technical needs and risks for me as a woman. He clearly wanted me to say something — like harassment or discrimination. This is from the section on gender issues – it is important for the report. But there was nothing like that to report. Apparently, it disappointed him a little. Because Americans are extremely concerned about the freedom and equality of Ukrainian women. And that’s why Paul decided to finish it off:

Paul — the recorded voice/offstage

“I read that demining was a forbidden profession for women in Ukraine until recently. How does your husband feel about you working as a sapper?”

“He doesn’t feel anything because I have not found the man who needs a mine-woman at home.” *Pause*. “And how does your wife feel about you doing such things?”

I bit my tongue. This is arrogance. What did I allow myself... He is asking the question here, not me. But let it be... His question was also, to put it mildly, incorrect. Who compiled that gender section for him... He didn't move a single muscle and calmly said:

"We broke up a long time ago. Now my job is my wife."

I looked at him intently for a moment and then blurted out, again without thinking.

"What makes you happy, Paul? Besides work?"

He looked somewhere inside himself. And then, in that short moment, I understood why I felt sorry for him. There appeared to be a little boy inside the superhero inspector. Well, don't get me wrong: he is a man, of course. Two metres tall, mountains of muscles... But this man is childishly unhappy. He is lonely. Desperately lonely.

He finally came to his senses and answered. In a politically correct manner, as befits an American:

"I am glad to have the opportunity to travel and meet different people. People like you. People who do their job well."

Nadia squints and smiles slyly

I could have hooked up with him. I could have taken advantage of his glaring loneliness and need for affection. Hoping that I will tame him and anchor him, and he will become my ticket from the East of Ukraine to the West of the world. Just like my mother wanted: Nadia picked up a ranger in a chequered shirt. Maybe it could be like that if I wanted to.

But what is love for a man? What kind of man can you love? Every woman has a list of demands. Come on, girls, cough it up. You want the one who served in the Armed Forces, went through hell and high water and saved the cat from the burning house. We have an image of a macho guy in our heads. But my list vanished when I began to see men as just people. Do you understand what I mean? Well, those are just people who are afraid, shy, hide and want to look better than they really are. They feel lonely but pretend they don't. They do not sleep well at night, have nightmares and get torn by their own hurricanes. Those who are lost, those who are searching — so desperately looking for some refuge, some support, some certainty that everything is okay with them. That someone needs them. That there is some sense in their existence.

Paul stayed with us for a week. We showed him maps and photos, boasted about the pace of our work, drove him around the fields and took him to talk with farmers. Well, we are not the bosses, we did our work in the field. I saw him several times during this period. And every time, I noticed that look of a lonely hungry wolf pretending to be full. He might even be a little jealous of us. Because we have a collective, we have a team. And where does he belong? Who is he? An individual consultant. One. Singular.

Paul shook everyone's hand in farewell. Somehow, I was also there. And when my palm touched his hand, I blurted out, "You'll be fine." Well, holy hell, what's the point? I don't know. But he seems to have understood. He squeezed my hand tighter. Yes, as if he wanted to show his gratitude. Or maybe I am just imagining things.

She keeps her hand extended for a handshake and starts to dance slowly as if she had an invisible partner

I have been dancing since I was 5 years old. An award-winning ballroom dancer. I spent my childhood in competitions and training. That's why I got used to discipline. They made me a floor fighter. And it worked. At 17, I got my coach's licence. A couple of years later, I opened my own ballroom dance school. And then it seemed that it was a happy ending — I achieved success. Everything in life will now go smoothly. It will keep going smoothly — like on a polished floor. I will boss around dancers, as they did to me when I was a child. I will open branches in Sloviansk, Mariupol, Severodonetsk. And I will dance-dance-dance...

She stops moving and freezes

And then comes the year 2014 and the war. And that's all — who needs dances? I lost my business and had a brain freeze for about a year. I could not pull myself together and understand what to do next. My whole life — the way I imagined it to be — fell apart. And it was necessary to build something new. Either on the ruins of the old one. Or from scratch.

I decided to start from scratch in the sphere where I can be useful. I found this vacancy on the job search site — in the "humanitarian sphere" section. I am not kidding. Just in case someone thinks that to start working in the minefield you need to know what strings to pull or know the right people. No. If you want to get stuck in the mud, you apply, go through training, and you are welcome. Especially women – we need more for gender balance. This is important for the donor. So, new vacancies come up from time to time, and we are expanding. Moreover, few people stay here for a long time. It's hard work, as you may guess.

A voice from behind the stage announces in an elevated tone: Nadia Kovalenko and her Body are invited to the minefield

Nadia starts dancing. Without music. It's like getting to know your body for the first time. At first smoothly, then the movements become rough, sharp, aggressive

I dance when no one is watching. Without music. I just listen to my body. Now, this is my partner. I follow it. And it is the best partner I have ever dealt with. All my trained plasticity, artificial grace, posture — the hell with it. It doesn't like it. It wants something else from me — the awakening of the elements. The pure, true elements. The wild, untamed elements. Which get angry, hate, rage, tear and break. For those who lost their lives, who lost their loved ones, who lost the past and lost the future too.

Yes, it is better not to watch such dances, because I will be diagnosed with a personality disorder and removed from all tournaments in my lifetime. No, my dear, this is not a disorder... And what kind of personality is that? What is your personality for you? Workforce? Passport? CV? An autobiography on an A4 sheet? Instagram

profile? Could the elements inside me destroy my quiet reputation? What have you come up with about my personality, about this set of qualities, responsibilities and achievements?

And I deny all this! De-ny. I tear off all these wrappers — qualities, responsibilities and achievements!

There is something dangerous inside everyone. We hide it and pretend that our mind and body are a calm, safe territory. And there, life, wildlife, flows inside. There is a minefield.

I am the Earth. I am Fire. I am Air. I am Water. I am an Element! I have an element, you hear? She is breaking free, she is alive. And he wants to talk — flow, wail, shout, growl, blossom, dance.

And yours wants too! You just don't listen to her. You're just pretending to be decent, obedient automatons. Defused ammunition. Don't lie to yourself. Don't lie to yourself...

She slows down and gradually stops moving

Do you remember the myth of Persephone? She was the queen of the underworld of the ancient Greeks. But until a certain period of time, she was such an innocent, carefree, sweet young lady who "walked in the garden and picked flowers". So, she once went for a walk and Hades kidnapped her. He dragged her under the ground and said: "That's it, now you will reign here with me." What about Persephone? She cried and sobbed, and then agreed. Moreover, she fell in love with Hades — this dark force. And she became the mistress of darkness.

Well, once I had a dream that the ground in the minefield was opening up, and I was also being pulled down by something – some unknown irresistible force. And you know what is the most interesting thing? I did not want to prevent it. I gave up. Somehow, I gave up so joyfully... I fell there — into the complete darkness. And it turned out that there was no death under the ground. No, no. I became more alive there.

You don’t see anything, but you feel everything. You feel it very keenly. And above all, you feel the presence of that force — the One who took you here, to this realm of sensuality. And I knew, well, I had a gut feeling that I was safe. It is not going to kill me. It loves me... What a wonder... It loves me...

I woke up in such peace, I hadn’t felt it for a long time. And I thought about that dream all day. Well, how can you be calm after such a thing? How? You were dragged into the underground kingdom. There is no will, there is nowhere to go... But, believe me, I felt so good in that dream. It was so easy. You could relax there — for the first time in a long time, I could relax. There was someone I did not see, but I knew — it was protecting me.

And here I have a question: how can you get high from the fact that you belong to someone and someone limits you? I don’t know... But it wasn’t captivity, it was some new freedom in the tight embrace of darkness. I can’t explain it in words. I was just fine there, and that’s it. I felt at home there, you know? In safety. And then I remembered the Greeks and their myth about Persephone. And a day later, I broke up with Anton.

Anton is my ex, we were together for a year and a half, and everything was great. Except for one thing: he gave me complete freedom. And for some time, it was good, very good, even perfect for someone like me. And then they announced at work that there was an opportunity to go to Afghanistan on a contract.

It will be necessary, of course, to undergo another certification, because the demands are higher there. If I go, it will not be just a sapper, but a team coordinator. Career advancement, so to speak. And I understood that this is a chance to grow. And to see the world a little. And to feel that I am moving somewhere, and not stuck here in one place. That’s hardcore there — you can learn so much!

But after the first wave of euphoria, a slippery thought crept in: what will happen to me after this hardcore? Who will I become after all this if I come back? Even more cynical and evil? And what about Anton — I don’t believe in a long-distance relationship. A lot can happen in a year. No, it’s probably better to take care of myself and take care of us. That’s it, he will say the same thing.

At least, that’s what I thought. And on the same evening, I announced the news. Well, there is an opportunity to go to Afghanistan, a contract for a year, I will coordinate there, there is a social package and all kinds of perks. I spoke calmly, without any special emotions. And I wanted so much, I wanted with my whole body that he would say: “Are you crazy, Nadia? Don’t you have enough risk here? What kind of Afghan?! I need you alive and well!”

But Anton said something else (*recorded voice offstage*): “Oh, at least you can make some money there, cool! Congratulations!”

Pause

He gave me complete freedom. He was absolutely supportive of all my crazy ideas. Everything was okay with him. Go the hell to Afghanistan, melt in your armour vest from the heat and thirst, screw yourself, blow yourself up. You are free, baby, you are free! Destroy yourself as much as possible.

I always wanted so much that no one told me how to live and what to do. And my wishes were heard somewhere there — higher or lower, I don’t know. And when I got what I wanted and finally saw it, it hurt so much... “Take my hand tightly. Say: “I won’t let go!” Tie me to you with something, do not let me destroy myself! Save me from myself!” That’s what I wanted to shout at Anton. But I didn’t shout. Just at one moment, I felt that we have no love, but a business partnership. I give you sex and money, you give me sex and the support of my career. The hell with it. The hell with such a barter. I don’t want to exchange packages anymore. I am a woman. Damn it, I am a woman. I am not a robot, not a demining and money-earning machine. I am a woman...

It’s so weird to say it out loud. I don’t even know what to do with this sentence. What does it mean? I am a woman... What does that mean? Something terrible that you don’t even want to touch, because, God forbid, it will explode...

She begins to retreat

There is too much fuse inside, there is some unknown terrible power. Beneath the softness, there is hardness, and there is the breath of fire, and I feel it. All the elements are there, and all the four directions of the world are there. There are angels and demons, there are winds and waves, there are merciless storms and calmness... All in one. Who can endure so much? What man is able to accept everything in a woman — all her strength, all her freedom? All her elements? Who would willingly want to deal with Persephone? Probably only the god of darkness... Yes, probably only him...

Rumbling, as if it was an earthquake. The light goes out.

Translated by John Farndon

7. ANDRIY BONDARENKO "SURVIVOR'S SYNDROME"



Andriy Bondarenko - Doctor of Philosophy, playwright, culturologist.

He works as the head of the literary and dramatic department at the Lviv Puppet Theater. Co-founder of the Playwrights Theater in Kyiv. Since the beginning of the war he has been a participant in the Worldwide Ukrainian Play Reading project. Member of two Drama Laboratories from NSTDU. In 2009 he defended his doctoral dissertation at the Marie Curie-Skłodowska University (Lublin, Poland). He worked as a researcher at the Center for Urban History of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as a journalist on TV channel "24" and in the publication "Options".

He wrote several plays that were shortlisted for major Ukrainian drama festivals.

Productions based on his texts were staged at the Golden Gate Theater in Kyiv - "Asshole" (2020); Lesia Ukrainka Theater in Lviv - "Interview with a Friend" (2019), "Macbeth" (2020); Zaporizhzhya New Drama Theater in Zaporizhia - "Interview with a Friend" (2017). Participated in documentary theater projects - "City with you"

(Mykolaivka - Kyiv - Lviv - Kharkiv - Berlin, 2020); "Class Act: East-West" (Kyiv, 2017); "Where is the East?" Where is the West? ” within the framework of the BorderCult: GaliciaCult Forum in Kharkiv (2016).

His creative work also includes the short film "Night with Natalia" (based on the play "Interview with a Friend"), on which he worked as a director and screenwriter. The film was screened as part of the National Competition of the Kyiv International Film Festival "Youth" (2018), as well as at the festival "Week of Ukrainian Cinema - 2018" in Prague (Czech Republic).

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

After the war, I stayed in my hometown of Lviv. Then I work in the Lviv Puppet Theater, where we are currently preparing a "black tragicomedy" about life in wartime. If we talk about changes, they are more about psychological and existential moments - the feelings of a person living in a country where there is a brutal war. This is the maximum uncertainty about the near future - his and his family and friends, constant mental pressure and anxiety, changes in worldview and self-perception.

Survivor's Syndrome

Translated from the Ukrainian by John Freedman with Natalia Bratus

A play commissioned by a grant from Philip Arnoult's Center for International Theater

Development (U.S.)

The End

Every one of us was killed already that

morning.

We are no longer

what we were then.

We died.

On February 24

of the year 2022

a neighboring country killed us all.

The old world went up in flames and

smoke, splintered and disintegrated.

Hundreds, thousands, millions of our

worlds disappeared, destroyed forever,

irreversibly.

That week I had decided to go on a date.

Winter was coming to an end, but it was

still gray and cold. I wanted finally to

change something.

We made the date for the day after

tomorrow, February 24, the year of 2022.

We were to meet in the center of town, sit

at a cafe, walk the streets.

That day, the day after tomorrow, never

came.

Something else entirely came about and

ruined that day. You think you want to go

for a walk?! There was no city in which to

meet and have a coffee, there were no

more streets. Something else entirely

happened. Other lives of other people

now.

We'll have to become acquainted again,

set a new date, meet at another time.

Everything will have to be reassembled,

piece by piece. And the pieces

themselves will be completely new. But

when will that be?

Who will I be?

Who will we be? Where will we be? What

will our purpose be?

The apocalypse has come.

Everything that was

is no longer.

What remained were vestiges, shadows.

We used to watch TV series, drink beer and cognac, we stayed out late at coffee houses, visited friends, bought paperback books, hugged, talked about art, played cards, laughed, danced to music on our phones. We went to the movies, drinking beer and eating nuts.

This all disappeared one gray cold morning, swept into the dark abyss by the sound of an air siren. This is how worlds

disappear. Like a day that ended and never came again. Like a flower that clamped its petals shut under a gust of wind and never opened again. Like a laptop suddenly disconnected from an outlet. Like a sun that set in the west but never rose again in the east. Like a man stabbed in the heart from behind. This is how worlds disappear - like a light bulb going out, like water draining from a bath,

like eyes being shut on a dead man's

corpse.

Our world was no better than a light bulb.

Just as fragile and finite. That's how it

turned out. Our world was imperfect. It

was alive.

It was killed.

The Apocalypse now

has come.

There is no fear.

He whom we feared

is now long gone.

Traces, remnants, shadows - we have

retreated to another side, an Atlantis

beneath the surface of the sea - we still

see it, but the image grows weaker.

Our life now is a graveyard of all the

plans, desires and aspirations that we

had before February 24, in the year of

2022.

We now live in a world in which our world

no longer exists. How can that be? It just

is. That happens too.

Forests through which we used to wander

are mined, and devastated by tanks.

Bridges we used to take to visit relatives

are destroyed, our relatives are dead or

gone crazy. Friends are held captive in

captured cities, or have left for where they

never had any intention of going.

Theaters are bombed to dust.

Theater actors guard checkpoints with

machine guns in hand.

What kind of world is this? This is a world

of war. And what is war?

It is something that cannot be. Ever. But it

is. How can that be? It cannot be. We live

in a world that cannot be. What could not

happen has happened. The unspeakable

has happened, the unreal has happened.

Are we alive at all,

we who survived?

Who am I now?

How did I survive those first days? I

remember little, those days are already

buried under some big, impenetrable

pillow. All we did was wave our arms as if

they were wings, so as not to fall into the

abyss that our lives had become.

It turned out we had wings — those of us

whom we now have become.

I still don't understand - where are we?

We are in different places at the same

time, like ghosts. Like foggy clouds, we fly

wherever our thoughts lead us - to where

our friends, family and loved ones now sit

in basements, shuddering from rocket

attacks, or just frozen in fear for

someone's life.

We now hover over all of Ukraine like

ghosts. Our bodies obediently remain

where we left them. We are only half of

our bodies, or a third. We are carried here
and there by the invisible winds of war
Our bodies are like children. We
command them to be polite and obey
their elders. Sit still, hold this backpack
with documents, carry us onward, until
our thoughts and souls carry us to those
who are dying beneath the bombs.
Where are we? Our places and spaces
have been replaced, spread out,
confused. Train stations function, but they
are no longer train stations. Cafes
function, but they're not cafes. People sit
and drink, but that is no longer drinking.
A drunken friend called me recently. He
was sitting with another friend. His friend
had a bottle, they both got drunk. My
friend got very drunk, sat there drunk and
happy, listening to music on his phone,
remembering funny stories, and then he
went home and suddenly woke up. He

remembered everything. Dark, empty
streets surrounded him on all sides, and
his windows were taped shut.
A territorial defense patrol stood under
the bridge. My friend called me. What
should I do, he asked, I was drunk, I had
fun and suddenly I woke up. There's a
war going on.
It's very scary. There is a patrol under the
bridge. Why did I get drunk? What's so
fun about getting together with music and
funny stories if there's a war going on?
Don't worry about it, I said. Just hang up
and go home quick. Curfew starts in five
minutes. You'll be stopped by a patrol.
And you're drunk. Damn, he said. Curfew!
And I was so happy half an hour ago
when I was drunk! Go home quick, I said.
And don't drink anymore. I won't, I won't,
fuck, I won't, he said and hung up.

Those who have no tomorrow should not drink vodka. It's pointless. After all, your hangover will come today, it won't be postponed 'til morning. We have no tomorrow. There is only one, big, swollen today. Heavy, gray, swollen clouds spread over the entire horizon, in all directions, filling all the cracks.

No matter how much you drink, you'll still come back to this today. Nothing lies behind the gray clouds. The road to the future is gone. It must be found again, just as we look for... What? For nothing. Finding your future is finding your future, nothing more.

Who knows how to look for it? We must learn this from zero, from scratch, from the emptiness of the day's eternal gloom. Just as we learned to fly over the abyss by the power of wings we previously did not have.

Hanging over the abyss bifurcates or

even trifurcates you.

I went for a walk. It was around mid-

March, a bright, high, dazzling blue sky,

the warmth of the sun falling on shrunken

faces, caressing them like a mother's

hand. A light breeze blows, children's

laughter wafts in from somewhere. And

your body responds, it responds to this

spring around you. Your gait relaxes, a

faint smile appears on your lips. But it's

just your body, you yourself don't

respond. A smile on one side of your

mouth, sadness on the other. Like an

ancient mask.

On the one hand, you absorb spring, but

on the other, it is not spring, it is a

battlefield, a fiery death. Fighters with

machine guns now run beneath the big,

blue, dazzling sky, the warm sun
illuminating an enemy tank hiding near a
ruined cottage.
A car with refugees is shot up beneath
this sun, people buried under concrete
walls are dying in the shadow of this sun.
Tanks, helicopters, cars, people, the earth
are all burning beneath this sun with a
transparent fire.
As such, you see around you two suns,
two skies, two springs. You are here and
there all at the same time, you are
bifurcated, trifurcated, for some part of
you is neither here nor there, but hangs at
this moment over the dark abyss, the
abyss of the Apocalypse.
You now have three heads, for you must
watch two suns and one abyss at the
same time.

But you have just two hands. And they

must carry you like wings.

Your world is destroyed, you are dead,

you are flying somewhere, a stranger in

every world on which the sun now shines.

You still breathe, but you know not what

that means. I breathe - so what?

Am I still breathing? Am I breathing for

now? Am I breathing already? Did I

inhale? Did I exhale? Is this a pause, or is

it the end, or the beginning? Who can

say?

At this very moment the Ukrainian

mathematician Konstantin Olmezov sits in

a Russian prison.

He specializes in

additive combinatorics, a field of

mathematics that studies finite sets and

their relationships.

When, on February 24 in the year 2022,

one finite set in which he was currently

located, attacked the other finite set to

which he belonged, Konstantin Olmezov could not believe in such a new relationship between these two sets, nor could he accept it as a fact of mathematics, or as a fact of life, and just two days later he both believed and wished to escape the finite set in which he was located at the time, but it was too late, and on his way in the bus he was arrested because he was recognized, some element of his present finite set handed him over to the police, and the police arrested him for the simple reason that he wished to escape from the finite set in which he was located, although that was no crime, and yet, they still imprisoned him, because he had said out loud that one finite set was wrong to attack another finite set.

Now Olmezov sits in a prison cell, hanging over the dark abyss. He sits and

sits and sits. He sits some more, then sits more still, sitting, sitting, sitting, sitting, sitting, sitting, and sitting... But stop! No more! No more sitting.

His hands could bear it no more.

Konstantin Olmezov, a Ukrainian mathematician, detained and imprisoned in Moscow for trying to go home, committed suicide while in a prison cell.

At least that's what the news said.

His wings could not bear the weight. More precisely, they were clipped.

Thousands are falling into the abyss at the moment that I write these words. Why do I write about the mathematician Konstantin Olmezov?

Probably because he had been there, in someone else's finite set, it is much more frightening than here. Although, I don't know that. It's scary everywhere. At the

precise moment that I write these words,

people in Mariupol are praying not to die

deaths as horrible as their neighbors

have already died.

They want to die instantly. They have no

doubts that they will all fall into the black

dark pit to which they currently cling.

Their spring right now consists of nights

spent living underground, without heat,

without food, without water. Their spring

consists of days of death under bombs,

days of burying corpses beneath the

entry to a high-rise building.

The Apocalypse continues. The

Apocalypse is constant. Apocalypse now.

Today. Already.

There is no tomorrow.

My world is gone, I have no sense of life,

I am carried away by an invisible wind,

my body is as obedient as that of a child

sitting in a safe space in a basement, or

between two load-bearing walls, carrying
a backpack with documents and money.
With obedience and fear my body waits
for me to return from the fiery spaces of
spring, where people are dying, people
dear to me, though I don't know them all,
people who no longer have the strength
to fly above the black abyss, whose limbs
have been cut off, who fluttered like wings
to the bitter end in the emptiness of the
Apocalypse.
But arms and hands
are not wings.
Why do I go back, why do I still see the
sky and spring, why do I hear the air raid
alarm and go outside to buy bread,
cabbage, and tomato paste, why does the
sun still caress me like my mother's warm
hand on my face, why does the right

corner of my mouth rise in a strange half-

smile? I have no idea. This is a strange

thing, one of those that is already happening in the Apocalypse.
For example, no longer are there kilometers between Lviv and Mariupol, 1250 kilometers, there are corpses, the distance between Lviv and Mariupol is 1250 corpses of civilians and that is only according to official statistics today, which always underestimate everything, so as not to tease the Apocalypse, so as not to look it in the eye.

In fact, there are many more corpses, we understand that perfectly well, but I do not tell that to my body, which obediently sits where I tell it to sit. The body does not need to know everything. Let it think it is alive. But I know a terrible secret - we are not alive, we are flying over an abyss, for

our world was killed and we are carried

here and there by invisible winds blowing

between life and death.

I can move my body where distances are

still counted in kilometers, where it is still

spring, and not a fiery battlefield.

But the hot winds will reach me there too.

I shall see the dark abyss every time I

close my eyes, even if I just blink for a

moment.

My world is gone.

Sleep, body, sleep, it's not easy for you

either, you truly suspect something. After

all, you smile with just one corner of your

mouth, you wake up every day at dawn,

because you hear the ghostly sound of a

siren, you do not taste food, you fear

blinking, so as not to see the darkness I

do not tell you about, dear body, so that

you won't forget that you must breathe.

For I have forgotten about that for a very

long time. Because on February 24, of
the year 2022, I found myself in a place
where there is no air, where there is no
atmosphere — it all had disappeared as if
it had never existed, the sky went black
as an abyss, even in daytime, let alone
evening and night.
The first and last panic attack in my life
came when, on the fourth day of the war,
I returned home in the evening and
looked up at the dark sky - and did not
see a sky there. At all. How could a sky
be there? Were there a sky there,
Russian bombs and missiles could not fly
through it, it would hold them back.
But they do fly there, so there must be no
sky, it is gone. No world - no sky. What
could it cling to? There are no iron pillars,
no green forests, no cherry orchards. I
stopped, puzzled, my breathing stopped, I
was bent low like grass, only my legs

moved on and in that way I did not fall,
but rolled on. When I rolled up to the wall
of my house, my body began to breathe
again. But I do not.
This combination, "is not," holds a certain
magic for me, I repeated it over and over
so that at least something will be. If you
repeat "is not" a thousand times, it is as if

there is something there, at least some
crumb of dust that you can hold onto.
I love street sparrows and even pigeons. I
feel solidarity with them. If they live, so
can I. If the sun shines for them, then
maybe it does for me? Maybe I'll catch
their sun if I don't have my own. Maybe
their sky will cover me a little, at least a
little?
Sparrow sky! Cover me and all those I
love, think about and remember all who
fly with me into the black abyss. We are

like those sparrows - we fly, although we do not know how. We are like those sparrows - we die by the thousands, in the dust and ashes, homeless, restless. Sparrow sky! Chirp-chirp-chirp!

Memories of those who were and died still swirl about me like dust. But there are fewer and fewer of them. I don't remember living the first three days of the war. An impenetrable pillow. That is, I know how - I sat in front of a laptop screen, unable to break away from the news. I posted hysterical appeals on Facebook, I called people, I questioned and passed on important information, forced myself to fall asleep, listened to the siren at dawn, started to read and immediately threw the book away, experienced despair and love, I know it all - but I do not remember it.

What about who I was before the war? I

know him - but I don't remember him. All I

know is that it was someone else. He

went to the bathroom differently, lived in

my house differently, spoke differently,

looked out the window differently.

He was and he disappeared.

God be with him. I haven't time for him

now.

Mariupol.

Bucha.

Gostomel.

Irpen.

Vasilkiv.

Sumy.

Okhtyrka.

Chernihiv.

Izium.

Popasna.

Volnovakha.

Kharkiv.

Kherson.

Mykolaiv.

Bashtanka.

Voznesensk.

Makarov.

Chernobyl.

Energodar.

Donetsk.

Lugansk.

Crimea.

Bakhchisarai.

Dzhankoi.

Simferopol.

Sevastopol.

Melitopol.

Berdiansk.

Kramatorsk.

Slaviansk.

These are the words I remember now.

Which I will not forget.

I will not forget anything or anyone.

Nothing and no one. Nothing that

happened in the dark and in the fire. This

is my sole bridge across the abyss now,

and without me already.

Therefore, yes. I whisper these words

before bed.

Mariupol.

Bucha.

Gostomel.

Irpen.

Vasilkiv.

Sumy.

Okhtyrka.

Chernihiv.

Izyum.

Popasna.

Volnovakha.

Kharkiv.

Kherson.

Mykolaiv.

...

These are word-cities, in them live all the people who have died, who disappeared, who were left homeless. This is my geography now. I do not know what will happen next. I know nothing, as my friends the street-sparrows know nothing. But I am sure of one thing - we will forget nothing. Nothing that happened. Ever. We shall remember to the depths of our bones and blood. Until we're calloused and full of holes. To the sparrow sky.
As those remember who have nothing but this to remember. From whom everything else was taken away.
Thus shall we traipse through the Apocalypse now.

This is not a memory of us who came before, of those who lived, died and perished with the old world. God be with them.

It is a memory of wings, love,

fearlessness and burning pain.

It is the memory of what happened when

there was nothing left.

When we were ghosts.

When the dead were alive and the living

were dead.

This memory is what we are now.

To hold it, we must build a new world.

And we will build it.

And there will be a new sky over it.

We shall remember everyone killed, every

house destroyed, every street destroyed,

every motionless face.

We shall watch TV series, drink beer and

cognac, sit late into the night at coffee

houses, we shall visit friends, buy

paperback books, hug each other, talk

about art, play cards, laugh, dance to

music on our phones. Go to the movies

and drink beer with nuts.

But before that I'll go on a date.

***

And it will not be me.

Not the one who survives.

It will be the one who will be.

Who will live.

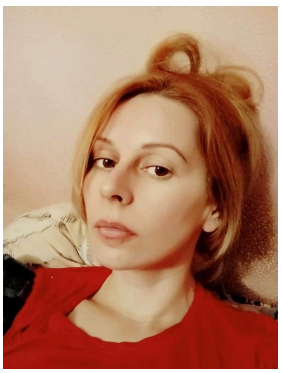
Who will remember.

Who will love.

Who, ultimately, will despair.

The Beginning

8. LENA LYAGUSHONKOVA "CHANSON"



Lena Lyagushonkova is a Ukrainian playwright and screenwriter. Author of the trilogy "PGT", "Mother of Gorky", "My banner promised a pussy", plays by Hernan Cortes and others, "Chapaev and Vasilisa", "Plague" and others. Laureate fuck

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

“How has my life changed?

“Changed and not changed. I no longer have a home. But this is the second time. My mother wants to poison me for taking her to the evacuation and not letting me go to

the occupied village. But she was still hysterical. One of the three cats remained with me. I have no more relatives. They are all alive but dead. I live in someone else's apartment. But strangers also live in mine. They wear my things. Take my makeup. They read my books. I swear I don't have so many things left that I can't pack them in five minutes. I know that a woman with two cats was not allowed in the nearby bomb shelter and she was standing under the porch with two carriers in her hands when the sky was red at night. I wouldn't want to know that. But outwardly, I also write and go to work."

CHANSON

a quest

/to get through it, you need to download google maps and a playlist/

You are Aliona.

You are here
https://www.google.com/maps/place/%D0%A6%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B9+%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%BA/@48.565266,39.308471,15z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x0:0xf2ecaee63b1a4792!8m2!3d48.5652814!4d39.3086514

This is the Central Market. It is the summer of 2014.

You are 24 years old. You limp because one of your legs is injured.

You walk through the market, the alley where kittens used to be sold in playpens — now there is garbage, an overturned playpen, banana boxes and empty bottles. You walk along Soviet Street, past "Luhansk City Centre " and the shopping mall "Central". You turn to Young Guard Square. You go down.

You have earphones in your ears. You are listening to music

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1BIBXZcino&list=RD6HUW2Zcpdlk&index=2

For two minutes and sixteen seconds, you go to the address Red Square, 1. You hold a boy by the arm. Behind his back, there is a machine gun.

You are at your destination. Here is the casino “Red Square”. Employees call it “Red Horse”. Even now, several jeeps are parked near it. There is a game going on in the hall. But you return to the yard.

This is your home.

A concierge greets you at the entrance. Her face always looks as if a piece of shit had been shoved under her nose. She feeds the dogs and looks askance in your direction. You listen to what she says.

CONCIERGE:: Chair, hanger, pantry, stool, grandma’s pancakes are so cool; water, water, waterway, fill the well and come what may; smell the bread, my little pal, smell whatever comes as well; your head is not an ass, tie something around and lie; heat breaks no bones; lice like warmth; we’ve never had a good life so why start; you are used to cleaning johns, so smell some shit; birds of a feather flock together; she is ugly as a sin — limping through the city; rouble twenty, rouble twenty — aren’t you ashamed? your mother works as a prostitute in Moscow, and you are the daughter of your mother!

The concierge used to call you “a prostitute”. Now she sees the machine gun and decides to remain silent. You enter the hall and show a fuck to her.

Darkness covers the city so much hated by the prosecutor.

You wake up. The books “The Captain’s Daughter” and “The White Guard” on the shelf make you understand that you are at home. There is no shelling, but there is a habit of waking up early. You hear voices. People in the street start queueing for bread. You don’t eat bread – you are on a diet. You don’t go to the basement because you don’t want to greet your neighbours.

Not right away, but you notice a naked man next to you on the bed. On the floor, there is your pink underwear and his camouflage. His underpants — “Army of Russia” — make you understand that he is russian. According to his documents, he is from Kursk. You have enough time to read that he is a captain. His surname is Yermakov. You notice an empty brandy coffee bottle rolling on the floor.

While you are trying to remember how you met, Captain Yermakov fucks you.

FLASHBACK

It’s not a joke, you met on a bus and spoke. It was going from Stanytsia where your grandma lives.

It’s hot at the checkpoint. There is a flag at the checkpoint. “Orthodox Cossacks”.

There is a song at the checkpoint

/the song is banned in the Russian Federation/

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=chWm4uz1PLQ

Oh, Allah, the world is shrouded in a heavy mist!

War is followed by war with a vicious twist.

A terrible age, an era of misfaith and vice!

Oh, Allah! Life in jihad is clear and wise.

Two Cossacks in keffiyehs ask for your documents. These are the Don Cossacks, please do not confuse them with the Zaporizhia Cossacks. Your documents are given back to you, and you and the other women return to the bus. A boy from Rovenky is kept at the checkpoint. The bus leaves without him. You pass the monument to Prince Ihor, the one from “The Tale of Ihor’s Campaign”. Let’s enjoy the scenery for a few minutes, because we don’t know when it will be possible again

https://www.google.com/maps/place/Monument+to+Prince+Igor/@48.6218941,39.4974372,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x411fc8f150604cf5:0xe2560ed7011cff5d!8m2!3d48.6218941!4d39.4996259

Those who are not willing may not look at the St. George’s ribbon on the driver’s side mirror and how the plush dog near the windshield nods its head.

The bus is shaking in the Solnechnyi quarter.

Before you can understand what happened, someone pulls you to the exit and lies on top of you. Something bumps into your leg. You think this is a dick. But this is a gun. You see a solarium. A broken window above the solarium. You hear a song

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11TWL3Rugoc

People carry blankets. They cover the people lying on the ground. You see a foot. On the foot, there is a shoe from “Season Five”. You didn’t have enough money for these shoes because you work as a waitress. What’s more, you were taken on out of pity. Because one of your legs is injured.

It was an explosion. The bus is on fire.

Captain Yermakov saved you.

END OF FLASHBACK

You hear water dripping from the tap. You sit down on the edge of the bed to go and fill the flasks with water, Captain Yermakov misunderstands your actions. He says “What’s up?” He pulls you back and fucks again.

This time it doesn’t last long. Naked, he goes to the bathroom. You can tell by the sounds that he is pissing into the sink. He comes back. He picks his camouflage from the floor. He gets dressed. He comes out.

You go naked to close the door behind him and think that he has disappeared from your life forever, like dozens of others.

But Captain Yermakov comes back. He takes his machine gun. He kisses you. He says that he is an honest person and you will get married.

You open the window. You are naked. You see the smoke over Kambrod, people who are loading coffins and taking them towards Vasniov’s house. The flag of the “LPR”. You think about love. But not to Captain Yermakov.

Music is playing inside you https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvvGLg93DxY

You think about love, but about your limping too.

That you cannot separate one from the other.

That you are the daughter of the mother who sends money from Moscow, where she makes a living, and text messages: Glory to Ukraine.

That you are the granddaughter of the grandmother who is not accepted into the Cossack choir because of her quarrelsome nature.

That you were taken on to the casino out of pity. For the day shift. Because you live nearby.

That your lame legs were licked by the security chief of the “Central” mall in the storeroom for audio/video. When you worked there. While his wife was buying curtains for the nursery.

That your legs were spread on the shell-like couch by the audio/video seller. Because he heard from the chief of security in the kitchen about the source of free sex in the “Greenstone” shop. “Greenstone Cave,” he said. “I didn’t put in the plastic windows for you,” his mother used to say. When she kicked us out to the lobby. But for a girl with normal legs. My son will marry her on City Day, and the mayor will give them a kettle. They are taking pictures near the hotel “Friendship”, and you are fucked off. A prostitute.

That with these legs, when they were not limping, you danced the hopak in embroidered shirts in “Voroshilovets” pioneer camp. Then backstage, you were pawed by a PE teacher. All the girls of your group from the orphanage took off their panties and did squats in this teacher’s office. One of them complained. And the director of the orphanage was the head of Yanukovych’s election campaign. A month later, she ate lime white from the walls. In a mental institution in Hostra Mohyla area. The others did squats in silence.

You didn’t love any of those men.

There is a suspicion that they didn’t love you too.

You think about Zhenia.

But these thoughts are so dear to you that you are afraid that if you think about all of them now, they will end. You lie down on the floor. To be closer to Zhenia, who can now be dealing cards or spinning the roulette on the first floor of the casino. And you call your grandmother.

Because there is no one else to call.

There is a connection. There is a ringing tone on the phone. But there is a feeling of offence in this tone. At you. The last time, the grandma said: Everything is on me! It’s about strawberries. And you came back to the city.

Because of Zhenia.

But you will marry Captain Yermakov.

And also, you feel hurt because of strawberries. That it must grow at such a time and in such a place. Grandma does not like to dig in her garden. But everyone must suffer. This is sadomasochism.

What do you need to know about your grandmother?

Your grandmother does not throw away plastic bottles, old newspapers, mayonnaise jars, yoghurt containers, old calendars and egg shells. She poisons mole crickets with them. She pushes this poison with noble fury into their hollows underground. If there is a discount on an item, the grandmother reduces or increases to the required size. She wears a t-shirt of the Party of Regions in the garden, and new underwear – only for seeing the doctor.

Her life is a marathon from one social security department to another.

In 2007, the grandmother learned about the monument to the Estonian soldier.

World imperialism was lifting its head again.

“How is it possible?! We freed them – what about them?”

Grandma displayed her civil position for the first time – she joined the protest near the regional state administration:

Alyosha is standing on the mountain - Bulgaria’s Russian soldier!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3clJ4R_cb4Q

The grandmother sang, waved a Soviet flag and held a poster “FOR THE ESTONIAN BOY”.

But all the remains were reburied on the Tinismägi hill.

And then the grandmother started waiting for rescue.

When Putin comes and kisses her navel.

At seven in the morning, she turned on the TV and was happy. She was happy for Crimea, arrests and beatings, passions for Bandera, Cross Processions under the Security Service and the relics of St. Matrona; in her reality, the president of a neighbouring state galloped across the rainbow on a pony with a bare torso. The Coal Switzerland. Grandma sang along to all the bullshitters on TV,

BUT

Borsch broke her down.

Grandma crept down the doorway when she heard:

- Aliona, granddaughter. Borsch is not Russian. What are they talking about? My mother killed Borka after the war and said: I will cook borsch. Because there was hunger. At least eat before you die. My mother was Ukrainian. And Borka was our dog.

And the world turned upside down.

If they lied about the borsch, maybe they lied about Crimea which is not ours? That is, not theirs? Is there no gay Europe? And gays don't want to capture everyone and send them to brothels? And there is no Matrona? No encephalitis ticks that transmit AIDS and homosexuality? And not everyone will be saved, the unkissed one will perish.

She went to Stanytsia, outside the city.

Where there is no TV.

And hostilities.

But the grandmother had time to mess up with the neighbour. A neighbour picked up a sick stork. She treated its leg. Grandma shouted that it was snatching things from her garden. The neighbour named the stork Vasya. She said: "The stork is a bird of peace." A war broke out in Stanytsia.

You stayed. Because you were waiting for Zhenia to come.

Because

It's hard for me not to wait for you, not stepping aside from the door all day.

You wake up to a call. You just fell asleep on the floor. You dreamed that you were being shaved naked in the "House of the Collective Farmer" pavilion, where there are high ceilings, a worker and a peasant woman and pig snouts on meat rows look in your direction with the eyes of a concierge.

And you understand that you will marry Captain Yermakov.

The phone is silent. Grandma doesn't answer.

Someone rings the doorbell.

You put on shorts and a T-shirt.

At the door, there is a man in camouflage. In his hands, there are packages from ATB.

UNPACKING

‘Officer’s’ cookies, cheese product, milk product, spread identical to natural, juice product, pine-tar soap, ‘Guard’s’ chocolate, waffles ‘Hello’, Krakow sausage, Moscow sausage, sprats ‘Riga’s gold’ – not a package, but the friendship of peoples.

At the bottom, there is an envelope with money. “Baby, buy yourself something.”

Now you have to go downstairs — past the concierge, past the people still standing in line, past the concierge’s hungry dogs, past the people cooking on bricks in the courtyards and boiling water – and go to the shop called ‘Paris’.

And buy a dress.

The saleswoman is packing: they will be taken to Kyiv. She advises you to go too. You shrug your shoulders and choose the best dress. The saleswoman says that her owner wanted to work until the end, but then people came with guns, put them on the window sills and the owner fined her. He likes order. Then he decided to leave.

You try to light the last cigarette with the smell of mint next to the ads ‘I will buy hair’ and ‘Fast credit’. A woman with a dirty face and matted red hair approaches you and wants to sell you a cream. ‘Oriflame’.

You recall that N. uses Oriflame, but you feel guilt towards the woman. You hand her a banknote.

The hryvnias in your hands turn into roubles.

The woman spits and throws the banknote on the pavement. You are left with the cream in hand.

You buy a small bottle of ‘Luha Nova’ vodka. This vodka is produced in Luhansk. You enjoy its taste. The saleswoman with coal-black eyebrows sticks out her chest from the stall and looks around.

Something is flying.

The saleswoman closes the stall.

You return home. There is no one at the service entrance to the casino. That is, there is no Zhenia. Some people are standing there. There is no concierge either, and there is no one to call you a whore. Only dogs are running.

At home, you also hear something flying, and you are now sure that it is flying behind you.

You go to the bathroom. You sit down in it and drink ‘Luha Nova’.

You recollect the last time you were here with Zhenia.

Then something was also flying and then hit the centre. But he didn’t want to go. You were only able to drag him here by promising to let him bust on your face. He was drunk, could not come off for a long time and fell asleep in the bathroom.

Then the money disappeared.

You leave the bathroom drunk and in a dress. Before that, you rubbed yourself with cream and the dress does not fit well. You try to booze from the bottleneck and fasten the zipper on the side at the same time. The phone is ringing. You run to answer and fall on the floor. A rack with books falls behind you, where “White Guard” and “Captain's Daughter” stand.

But this is not Zhenia.

This is Captain Yermakov.

He tells you to get ready as a person will come to pick you up and you will celebrate the wedding. You walk from one corner to another in the apartment. You go into the bathroom. You get out. You go into the hallway. You take your grandma’s clothes out of the wardrobe. Linen with the stamp “Railway Hospital” and “Donetsk Railway”. Towels. Your childhood clothes. Family photos. You call everyone — grandmother, mother, girls from work, from the casino, from the shopping centre, from the university — everyone should know that you will get married, go to Kursk or Moscow, you will have a family, a protective husband, and no one else will allow you to be thrown out of the apartment like garbage. You will have children and they will become cadets. You will be making shellac.

Lastly, you call Zhenia.

He doesn’t pick up the phone. No one does.

But Zhenia never picked it up. He came when he wanted.

FLASHBACK

In the morning after the night shift at the casino, you go to the monument to Voroshylov. You sit there and booze some alcopop. Above you, there is a commander on a horse, whose eggs are painted for Easter. The horse’s eggs.

Zhenia is smashed and says that it seems to him that the horse is alive.

You feel sorry for him. He feels it and allows you to take him to your home.

At home, you put him on your grandma’s bed. But you wake up when he climbs on top of you.

You understand that this is love.

At work, when you enter the hall where Zhenia works, he doesn’t greet you.

You understand that this is a very strong love. Because he is afraid to scare it away.

Six days later, he comes to your door drunk. You don’t talk.

He loves you silently.

This is repeated several times.

You are happy.

Then N. appears.

N. is beautiful. She dyes her hair in a natural colour and buys clothes online. She probably wears new tights under her pants.

You understand everything about N. and Zhenia when you see how N. breaks a tray with vodka and drags a rag across the floor with bare feet. You can see that Zhenia is ready to lick the liquid from her cherry-coloured fingernails.

Zhenia comes to you in the same way. And he is just as silent. But you feel that he loves N.

Your love for him makes you suffocate and you wish N. died under the tanks.

You don’t leave the town when the opportunity arises.

He comes to you only once. And the money your mother left you for living disappears.

(accompany this flashback with the music that you associate with strong love, Zhenia loves Vysotskiy very much, then I advise you to

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ht308RzUYkA)

END OF FLASHBACK

You stick out from the window. Further. Further. Almost to the waist. But you call Zhenia once again. Much to your surprise, he answers. He says that he is on shift and cannot speak.

You know that he is not on shift at “Red Horse”. You call Captain Yermakov.

You say you love him very much, you will stand behind him, if the whole world is against him, you will supply the cartridges; that you will wash his feet and drink water, that you are his neck and will eat all ‘Hello’ cookies, you will help his mother, make canned food and clean the carpet, wash the floor with a rag, because if you do it with a mop, you are not a woman, and the toilet will be my face, but I won’t have mine.

Captain Yermakov agrees to everything.

A car comes to pick you up.

You go down. You pass the concierge, people heating water on bricks, dogs and casino workers smoking near the service entrance.

You walk as if you were on the red carpet.

You have won. You will not be called a whore.

You sit in the back. The driver looks like a rook. You turn around. There is a weapon behind you. When you drive through Horodok, there is a body lying in Gorkiy Square.

The rook turns on the radio https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Njywne4GbPU

You get out of the car here https://www.google.com/maps/place/%D0%9A%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%B7%D1%8C%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B9+%D0%B4%D0%B2%D1%96%D1%80/@48.5593285,39.3634574,15z/data=!4m12!1m6!3m5!1s0x0:0x6defcc105fc24d5e!2z0JrQsNCy0LrQsNC30YzQutC40Lkg0LTQstGW0YA!8m2!3d48.5593285!4d39.3634574!3m4!1s0x0:0x6defcc105fc24d5e!8m2!3d48.5593285!4d39.3634574

You are met by two men in camouflage. One is called Frol — he has a beastly grin because of a crooked tooth. You remember seeing him in Green Grove when you were on holiday in “Voroshylovets” pioneer camp. He is local.

The second one is called Belyi. He really is white. That is, without a face.

You also see Coca-Cola — their commander. He calls himself khokhol, but he came from Pskov. You see Rinat, the owner of the establishment, whom you know because you used to come here to deal cards. Back in the spring. Rinat didn’t know if he wanted a sushi bar or not, but he bought a barbecue in the shape of a steam locomotive and karaoke.

You finally see your fiancé, Captain Yermakov. But you look at Zhenia.

Zhenia is nobly offended.

A pleasant bonus for you is that N. brings barbecue from the yard.

It’s like conquering Crimea.

Other people remain nameless to you.

Participants drink from time to time and sing songs loudly, you can use this playlist

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=%D0%BA%D1%80%D1%83%D0%B3+%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BE%D0%BA%D0%B5

or this one

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=%D0%BA%D1%80%D1%83%D0%B3+%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BE%D0%BA%D0%B5

No one notices that you are limping, and Captain Yermakov picks you up.

N. pours you some vodka. You look over and notice she’s wearing the red shoes from ‘Season Five’. For the first time, you note it without envy.

Then, everyone plays cards and Coca-Cola constantly says: “Jacks are like cops — they move in pairs all the time, our password is ace-king, two jacks, and that’s it, let your dick grow on your forehead,” this is to Zhenia when a bad card comes to him.

For the sake of Zhenia’s look, you are ready to endure captain Yermakov’s slippery lips.

But suddenly a person with a face like Belyi’s, but a little whiter, enters the hall, everyone gets up and leaves.

When there is no one in the hall, except for you, Zhenia and Belyi — he was left with you — to entertain, N. goes to the bar and starts her playlist

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%B0+%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0

Belyi says that he worked as a security guard at ‘Luhanskcentrokuz’, took out a loan, and then another one to pay off the first one. And then another one to pay for the second one. And then he took a machine gun at Security Service showing his passport. And there is no need to pay the loan.

He told me that he has a sick stomach and that he must eat well and not drink. And Coca-Cola is the father of soldiers. And he sang in the folk choir.

You notice Belyi’s ragged slippers. And it becomes a little uncomfortable for the first time. Zhenia gives you signs with her eyes that he needs to go out and talk.

But Belyi is already telling you how he found the cat in the mined closet.

You wonder what’s wrong with the cat, but they all come back.

They start playing cards in silence. And you only hear “fourth hospital”, “power station”, “without a head” and “let your dick grow on your forehead”.

Coca-Cola throws cards at the dealer, that is, at Zhenia and shouts to Rinat to bring some good booze.

It makes you uncomfortable. Captain Yermakov is talking to his men.

You go outside to call your grandmother.

Captain Yermakov tells you to come back soon because Coca-Cola will give you a wedding gift and you can ask for anything — even an apartment.

You say you want to smoke.

He laughs and says that the mother of his children should not smoke.

You light it up. This is the last thin mint cigarette.

This is an ordinary Ukrainian night. You hear footsteps behind you. Without turning around, you understand that it is ZHENIA.

He says that he loved you all his life and he needed N. to understand that. That he loves you, as Vysotskiy loved Vladi.

He bought her polar fox skins. And the worms ate the skins.

So what?

And you — nothing?

He didn’t understand.

Animals died but didn’t even make a fur coat

... you listen to Zhenia’s long and extensive stories that there are few people left today who are capable of truly loving. You want to ask where the money is, but you hear noise in the hall.

You hear the music https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0k-OWxInG,

a bunch of all kinds of sounds, blows, clanging and shouting. And words that cannot be understood.

N. comes out of the hall and picks up a stone lying near a fountain with garden dwarfs. She throws it into the glass door. Frol shouts something. Red shoes fly into N.

She silently stands on her heels. She asks two rebels in the yard to light a cigarette. They silently light it. They are not surprised that N. is naked and beaten. She exits through the gate of ‘Caucasian Yard’.

N. walks along the route named after Semen Mykhailovych Budyonyi.

Zhenia also smokes silently and watches you get on the motorcycle. Exactly the one from which they fell and began to limp.

Where are you going?

You think for a moment.

To Paris.

Do you think it will be better there?

And it won’t be any better for me.

And you go in the opposite direction from Paris.

Where the fog and smoke will cover N., the Parkhomenko factory, the dead concierge over whom the dogs roam in the yard, the Central Market, ‘Crystal’ shopping centre, Kambrod and the man with the torch.

CHANGE OF POV

You are Lena Lyagushonkova.

You are here — https://www.google.com/maps/@48.5686616,39.3075593,18z

A woman is walking towards you in the direction of the Shevchenko monument. She is wet and dressed in a belly dance outfit. She dances and laughs.

You walk down to the train station through an almost empty town. You see only dogs and occasional Cossacks.

You show your ticket to the conductor. You get into the carriage. You climb the upper berth. You turn your back to the wall.

You go this way to the final stop. Kyiv, Warsaw, Berlin, 2020, 2021, 2022 are rushing past the window.



9. SERHIY SHINKARCHUK "LOVE, WAR"

Serhiy Shinkarchuk is a Ukrainian poet, novelist and essayist. Born (May 9, 1991), lives in Ivano-Frankivsk. Author of the poetry collection "Storm" (2016, publishing house "Discourse"). In 2020, a collection of Java works was published by Krok Publishing House, which includes the author's works written during 2014-2020: poetry, prose, philosophical essays, literary explorations and essays.

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

“War, in addition to affecting the material and physical, primarily affects consciousness. Therefore, perhaps, first of all for me the perception of the world, reality, inner being began to change. As paradoxical as it may sound, war opens the door to eternal human values that make a person human: compassion, mutual assistance, dignity, love, mutual responsibility. Apparently, for my inner feeling, this has resulted in a cascade of conflicting emotions, where one's own life—again an interesting remark—becomes less important than the life of the country, the life of this great and mysterious universal ‘something’ that always tells you: there is something more than human life, but at the same time, there is nothing more important than life itself. Therefore, the beginning of the war in my life is a mixture of growing up, especially on a mental level, growing up as an individual, as well as a common feeling (perhaps a premonition) of the maturity of the entire Ukrainian people; searching for your true self through a painful and frightening experience is a memory that makes you more and more whole, and at the same time involved in something very important, even grand, in the light that is already beyond this war.”

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10. RENAT SETTAROV "MUSIC OF WAR"



Renat Settarov . He was born in 1985 in the city of Zaporizhia, in the family of the Crimean Tatar Settarov Salavat Rizayovych and the Ukrainian Settarova (Zabolotna) Lyubov Mykolayivna. After graduating from the Lyceum of Water Transport (then - Vocational School №5) at the age of 18 he got on a ship, where he worked for two years. At the age of 20 he moved to Kyiv and entered the Ivan Karpenko-Kary Kyiv National University of Theater, Film and Television at the Faculty of Acting in the studio of Bohdan Stupka. After graduating from university he received an invitation from the master to the troupe of the theater. Ivan Franko, where I still work.

Author of the book "Cockroach for a dollar", in his spare time I write poetry (not yet published). "Music of War" was created with a very strange feeling. When life and death are incredibly close. When you do not have the strength to believe in reality. When in one day your life and the life around you changed! This is an observation of how love was born. How people with weapons in their hands and a trident in their hearts stand for this love. All these feelings made me write "Music of War" «

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

“No one was ready for that. My family and I are no exception.

“Values have changed. As, probably, for all. Live—and thank God!

“Plans have changed. I do not mean plans for the future, it goes without saying. The first plans and the second plans ... In the foreground—to save lives. The lives of relatives and friends. Help those who need help. As pathetic as it may sound now, the love for Ukraine has become even stronger. As well as admiration for the heroes who defend our land from Russian evil spirits. A low bow and endless gratitude to the parents of all soldiers! I can't imagine how they live these days…

“Of course, circumstances forced all people to look for parallels. If you are not at work, and your profession is now on pause, you are mastering something new for yourself. Because, in spite of everything, you have to move! To each his own. And the strength comes from somewhere, and the desire to survive, too. It is difficult for everyone now. But truth and freedom are behind us! That’s why we will win, that’s why we have already won…”

THE MUSIC OF WAR

1

A wise general does not like to fight.

A skilled warrior does not like to kill.

The one who knows how to win does not attack first.

The one who knows how to rule does not humiliate people.

Toyotomi Hideyoshi

Daytime. A 25-year-old guy is running along the village street. He is a military officer. Machine-gun fire, screams and explosions can be heard around him.

The guy's name is Ian. He is half Polish (on his grandfather's side) and half Ukrainian.

He is followed by waves of explosions that help him run, firmly pushing him forward.

Vivid memories flash before Ian's eyes, filling the entire surrounding space. These memories confuse him. Why right now, when he needs to be as focused and careful as possible, does he recollects how at school, he and other boys surrounded a boy and bullied him? Volodia was very funny, it was a sin not to make fun of him. He was God-gifted: he could compose poems on any topic, about any person:

"Hey, say something about me!!" Pasha shouted to him.

"Pashok, here is a poem for you, don't be shocked:

'You are so strong, there is no doubt,

You wear jeans and trendy tops

But I would like to say aloud

That you love boys -

You are a faggot!

Don't get offended, friends are here.

They will make fun and laugh at you,

For me, they too will make it clear.

Then, they want to start it all anew'."

2

The boys flocked around Volodia, laughed at him, kicked his ass and laughed again. They asked him to recite a poem about someone again, he recited it, everyone laughed and kicked his ass again. And so they took turns.

I wonder who he is now? Such people usually become someone important...

Ian is running down the alley, past the guys like those who surrounded the boy... Do they not see what is happening? Their laughter can be heard through the explosions. Ian, catching his breath, shouted:

“Guys, run away!!!! Run away from here!!! It is dangerous here…”

But the boys interrupted him with loud laughter and one of them answered:

“Run yourself!”

Run, run, don’t look back!

A bullet will hit a fool in the ass!

A slut awaits you at home!

Run to her, don’t hesitate!

I’m running. But not home. Home. What is home?

These, of course, are not walls. This, of course, is not a roof. It is a place where there are no boundaries, no rules and no fuss. It’s peaceful. I run, I run past the end of the street, which turns into an earthy track that abuts into the forest. I don’t feel tired, I get picked up by waves of explosions, I don’t care! I want to survive!!!

The main thing is not to stop. The forest resembled a fairy tale. Everything was here. Giants, witches, wizards and dwarfs and even kikimoras. And they were all on my side. They told me where to run. Tree branches scratched the face, drawing their mysterious map. Ian ran as hard as he could until a missile landed not far from him.

“Lord! Don’t take me away. I haven’t finished yet. I still have a lot to do here.” Before Ian’s eyes, there were pine trees and the sky.

“Angels. Angels will probably come now.”

3

But no one came. Another missile flew nearby, which forced Ian to get up and look carefully at himself: are there any injuries?

“Unwounded. Only the ringing sounds in my ears,” he said out loud and quickly ran on.

Ian was troubled by only one thing: he did not remember when he started running and from where. “So, what happened this morning?” he thought.

The commander gave the order to scout out the situation in the area. We left. They left at night. It was 5 kilometres away from the designated site. I really wanted to sleep and it was cold. We made our way through a field and a wood line, some kind of cemetery and an abandoned farm until we came to the right point. Our task was to scout out the situation. What are the positions of the enemy, what equipment do they have and, in general, how many enemies are there?

We split into pairs. Andriy (a call sign ‘Sailor’) and I were told to go to the school, through a parallel street, and find out whether enemy equipment is situated in this square.

Andriy liked to smoke. When we were alone, the first thing he said was:

“Oh, I’d like to smoke now!”

Of course, he smoked. He lit a cigarette, very heroically, loudly flicked the lighter, took a puff and said just as loudly:

“Eh, now I want some coffee!”

“Would you like some croissants with almonds?” I whispered in such a tone that it was clear that it is not very cool for me to talk loudly now and pretend to be a superman who is not afraid of anything and will now defeat everyone. I wanted only one thing: so that we arrive at the point as soon as possible, transmit the information by radio and return to the base. Yes, I was afraid. For some reason, I was more afraid of being captured than of being killed. All troubles are caused by humiliation. Such an injury leaves a scar that cannot be washed away or healed by anything. It’s better to die. But every bullet has its billet.

4

We approached the school and Sailor, looking carefully through the binoculars, said:

“These bitches are sleeping.”

“What is there? Any military equipment?”

“Yes. One armoured personnel carrier and one rocket launcher ‘Grad’.”

“Fine. Let’s go, then we’ll move 500 metres away and transmit it on the radio, everything according to the instructions.”

“Don’t be a wimp, Ian! Come on, let’s mine all this shit while they are sleeping!”

“Are you crazy?! There was a clear order! Watch and report! We have clear instructions!”

“It will take 10 minutes! We will be heroes! It’s a free ride and you are mumbling! Stay here, I’ll be back.”

Half-bent, Sailor went towards the armoured personnel carrier, and Ian, looking at the radio and then at Sailor, thought that he was no hero and that he could not act like his comrade.

Automatic gunfire was heard. Sailor could not be seen, there were only sounds:

“Run away! My leg! Bitch! I am injured! Run!!”

Ian ran. As he ran, he followed the route he and Sailor had taken to come here.

Suddenly, he realised that he got into a very, to put it mildly, complicated story. He was afraid and his priority was always to survive! But now he could not run in the opposite direction from Sailor.

Ian stopped. He heard screams and shots. He suddenly wanted to laugh. He sat down to laugh. His stomach hurt, he wanted to vomit and laugh. Not knowing what to do, Ian ran.

He ran towards his friend. Only the cries of Sailor gave an approximate guide to where he was.

“Get back, Ian! I am telling you to get back!”

Ian still didn’t notice where Sailor was shouting from, he just heard his voice and shots.

Suddenly, he saw Sailor at the fence 20 metres away. He was lying, shooting back and shouting something unintelligible. His stomach and leg were wounded.

“Back, I said! You won’t pull me out! Run!”

Ian ran...

A forest.

“God, I can’t go back, I left my brother and ran away. What shall I do? Run! Fuck it! Run and that’s it! Sailor is to blame! It was necessary to strictly follow the instructions! And now that’s all... What a free ride, Sailor! The hero, fuck it!”

Suddenly, he heard music. It was the violin playing. Ian ran, but the violin played louder and louder. He couldn’t make out where the sound was coming from, but he was clearly aware that it was somewhere nearby.

Running out onto the meadow, Ian saw a boy sitting on a chair and playing the violin. The boy was playing, and when he saw Ian, he smiled at him and said:

“Don’t worry, everything will be fine!” and continued to play.

“Isn’t this boy scared at all?” Ian thought. “Why is he here, in the forest, alone?” Headache coupled with thoughts gave a strange sense of protection. Something was protecting him. That “something” was intuition or music. He had already run far, and there was nothing to fear, but the music, or something encoded in the notes, told him to run. And he ran.

“Not the dead, but the living must be feared!” his grandfather used to tell him as a child when they visited his friends at the Polish cemetery. I was desperately afraid of cemeteries. In this place, a place of peace and longing, I always saw ghosts. All the photographs and images on the monuments came to life and spoke to me.

They told how they miss their relatives and that they are looking forward to meeting them. One old lady, who died back in the 80s, constantly complained that none of her relatives came to her to clean up. Everything is overgrown with weeds, damn it!!

“Maybe you and your grandfather will clean up a little at my place? It’s a shame it’s so messy!”

Suddenly, it could be heard from all sides: “My place, my place, my place, please!”.

“Come to me!” shouted a 15-year-old boy. “I’ll treat you to sweets! Chocolate candies! My favourite ones.”

And someone answered him:

“Your relatives come to you almost every day anyway! Better come to me! Grandfather will find 50 grams of vodka here, and you, little one, will have a bagel.”

6

They are strange, the dead! It seemed that their life was not over, but just beginning! Maybe so...

Suddenly, before his eyes, Ian saw two men digging a hole.

They also noticed him:

“Where are you running in such haste?”

“There!” Ian pointed in the direction of the endless white monuments.

“What is it there?”

“There are our…”

“God bless you, son!”

“I feel pity for the boy,” said one of the men, “he’s so young…”

Ian ran as hard as he could along the cemetery so as not to hear those voices that echoed from all corners of the old cemetery.

“Run here, Ian! Run here! I will hide you here!”

“Well, no, thank you! No need to hide me here.”

“Run here, Ian! Have some rest!”

“Come to me!”

“Come to me!”

“Come to me, run here!”

“Shut up! Shut up!”

Ian plugged his ears with his fingers and only then noticed that he had lost his machine gun somewhere. Probably, it happened in the forest when he fell after the explosion.

7

The cemetery was far enough away from him and it was safe to relax. Ian stopped. He took a heavy, greedy breath and smelled the sea. Amazingly. The sea was geographically very far from him, but the smell was distinct as if it was making noise over there, over the hill.

Looking around him, he fervently hoped to see one of his fellows, but there was not a soul, except a red cat, which suddenly ran out of the bushes and, purring, went in his direction.

“Hello! How did you come here?” Ian took the cat in his arms and, looking into its sunny eyes, said:

“I am sure you are hungry” The cat answered him briefly:

“Meow…”

“Will you come with me?” The cat poked its wet nose at his elbow and began to purr even louder.

Suddenly the radio hissed. The cat got scared, jumped from the hands and ran into the same bushes from where it came out.

“Guys, where are you? Pick up!” hissed the radio, almost unintelligibly.

Ian didn’t know what to say. He was afraid. He was terribly ashamed that he was alive, that he had lost his weapon, and even more that he had left his brother behind.

“Guys, Sailor, Nike? How are you there? Pick up!”

I had the call sign ‘Nike’. I didn’t like wearing combat boots, they were heavy and rubbed my feet. Instead, the commander didn’t mind that I wore my comfortable trainers. So, this is how I got my call sign.

“Sailor’is gone…”

“Please repeat your call sign. Pick up.”

“Call sign Nike, I am repeating, Sailor is gone.”

The radio fell silent. It seemed that everyone on the other side had turned their backs on him, and this silence was devouring Ian. “Probably, they are thinking about what to do with me,” flashed through his mind before suddenly he heard:

“Call sign Nike, Patron is speaking, can you hear me? Pick up!”

“Call sign Nike. I can hear you. Pick up!”

“Your coordinates, pick up.”

Before Ian could answer, he heard the roar of a car engine.

8

He had to hide. There was a wood line near the earthy track, so Ian ran there. He did not have time to take even five steps when a sign appeared in front of him with the inscription “Caution! Mines!”.

“As if that wasn’t enough! Well, come down, there are bushes!” Ian hid in the thick bushes two metres from the road, quickly covering himself with branches and last-year leaves.

The bushes smelled very bad. The noise of the car was getting louder. It was not clear who was in that car: maybe friends, maybe foes. Everything will become clear soon. The car drove very slowly and was already close to the bushes where Ian was hiding. This hum seemed to last forever. Ian felt someone touch his leg.

“Devil have you! How did you end up here?”

“Meow!” answered the cat.

“Sit quietly! Because of your ‘meow’, you and I will…”

The car stopped almost opposite the bushes.

Two soldiers with white armbands came out.

Ian managed to see them. One was short with narrow Asian eyes, and the other was black-bearded, stocky, with a Caucasian appearance. In a word, both were russians.

“The two said that one of them ran in this direction, we needed to search the area, he couldn’t have run far.”

“Let’s not take prisoners, we’ll shoot him on the spot, so he doesn’t mess around…”

“Don’t boss around, damn it!!!” said the short man. “I hope he didn’t have enough time to join his fellows. Do you have a cigarette?”

They lit a cigarette, went to the bushes and began to urinate.

As deep as possible, Ian buried his face into the ground so that it seemed that he would now fall under it. The earth was soft, like a grandmother’s feather blanket. Ian held his breath, and the cat produced a meek:

“Meow!...”

9

“Ugh, damn it! I almost shitted my pants!!! What are the cats doing here? Go check it out!” said the short man.

“Why go? Let’s check this way…”

The stocky man cocked the trigger on his Kalashnikov and fired a burst through the bushes.

“It stinks here!” Ian thought. He felt one of the bullets sink into the ground next to his hand. “I won’t be so lucky the second time. That must be the end. Is that how it ended for me? Is this my finale? Here? In the bushes? Pissed on by an enemy, with my face in the ground? Well, that’s not how I imagined it…”

The occupiers fired a couple more times, got into the car and drove off, while Ian lay motionless and listened for another half hour. He looked around, searched for the cat and carefully raised his head, and then stood up. Surprisingly, the cat was nowhere to be found, it probably ran away immediately. Where he lay, there was fresh soil, on which there was a dent in the shape of his face. Such a sad theatrical mask. Where the hand lay, he saw a hole. Probably the one left by the bullet. For some reason, he

wanted to dig it up. “It will be my mascot!” Ian thought and began to search for the lucky bullet with his fingers.

“Oh! I think I’ve got it! Damn it, it doesn’t want to get out!”

Ian took a crowbar and started ploughing the soil with it. In a minute, he managed to reach the bullet, but something prevented it from getting out. He firmly grasped this ‘mascot’ with his fingers and finally pulled it out. It wasn’t a bullet; it was something that stank. A little finger. Someone’s little finger... The whole hand appeared after it. Ian felt nauseous. He ran so fast that he raised dust around him. From afar, it was impossible to see what kind of natural phenomenon it was. Because of the dust, he was almost invisible and it seemed that it was some kind of thick grey cloud flying along the road in an unknown direction. He remembered that he was running in the direction where the occupiers had gone, and immediately turned into a wood line. Then he remembered how he had put his face into something soft while he was lying in the bushes. It must have been someone’s face. He felt sick again.

10

Clearing his throat, Ian ran on, completely forgetting about the sign that warned that everything there was mined.

“Nike…shhhhhh. Nike, pick up!” the radio hissed.

“Nike, can you hear me?”

“Nike, respond…”

“Yes, I can hear you, pick up…”

Ian ran out to the abandoned farm and, looking around, tried to recall the area. He decided to rest a little, hiding in some abandoned cowshed.

“Nike, pick up!”

“Yes, I’m here, pick up! I am at an abandoned farm, heading to the starting position, pick up!”

“Thank you, Nike! We are coming to you! We thought we’d lost you!”

“I am in an abandoned cowshed, pick up, can you hear me?”

“I can hear you, Nike! 2 minutes and we are coming…”

“That’s good. The boys are close.” But then I wanted to cry.

God, just a month ago I was hanging out in the cafes, walking around Kyiv at night, smoking weed and planning a summer trip to Cyprus with my beloved.

And the only thing that was stressful was the vaccination against the coronavirus, because without it, you were not allowed to go abroad, and you were not allowed anywhere at all. And now? Who cares about vaccinations? What the hell is a coronavirus!!? The main virus is sitting in the Kremlin! And it’s not just a virus! It’s herpetic haemorrhoids, a threat to all mankind! A bastard, a vile bastard who attacks civilians at night without sparing anyone! God, you see everything! Does humanity really have to go through this? Did we really deserve it? You see how much grief this killer brings to Ukrainians! Well, take him to you! Don’t you need such ‘happiness’ too? What to do then? Can someone there be helped to prepare a separate cauldron for him, the one that can be covered with a lid and welded tightly, so that he will be boiled there forever? I know you can do everything.

“Meow!”

“Oh, a ginger-head cat! How did you end up here? That’s it, you’ll go with me, they’ll pick us up soon.”

11

The cat carefully looked at Ian, and then hissed...

“Well, what’s wrong with you, what’s wrong? You’ll be fine, we will give you a name. Which one would you like? Maybe Rudik?”

The cat suddenly looked in the direction of the road from where Ian came, hissed and suddenly rushed in the opposite direction.

“Hey! Where are you going??”

Somewhere in the distance, the hum of an engine was heard, the same hum that was... Stop! Who was I talking to...

“Shhhhhhhhh... Nike, pick up! Nike, come out, we are here!”

“Are you afraid? We are brothers, Nike!”

Ian realised that he had screwed it up. “Idiot. I am such an idiot!”.

Somehow, they found out his frequency and call sign...

“Sailor? Is he alive? It’s good if so…”

“Get out, you can’t escape anyway!”

“I have to turn off the radio!” he turned off the radio with a trembling hand and ran towards Rudik. Well, didn’t the cat run there just like that? This is what Ian was most afraid of — to be captured. The sound of the engine was getting closer, and it was not clear from which side the car with the orcs was coming. He needs to get to the wood line, it’s only 100 metres away. Everything is mined there, but it is better than being captured. There is at least some chance. The engine stopped. He could hear those two orcs, the smaller one shouted:

“Admit that you got caught! Your friend betrayed you! You have two options: either you go out now with your hands up and stay alive, or, I swear, you won’t have a second chance!”

Ian knew that, in any case, he would be shot. “One hundred metres! Only 100 metres! They will not go into the wood line.” The heart was beating like crazy, making it difficult to breathe. “Breathe! Breathe, Ian, breathe, now there will be a race with obstacles, like in childhood... Everything is like in childhood…”.

At the other end of the cowshed, he saw a figure with a machine gun.

It was that stocky orc. He walked carefully, listening.

Ian hid behind the feeder: “Either run out of the window now, or this orc will find you and shoot you... There are only 5 seconds. Just count to 5 and run to the window...One...Two…”

“Meow!”

“Shit, Rudik! How did you get here?”

Ian jumped over the feeder, passed 5 metres and jumped out the window. A stocky orc started shooting in his direction and running after him.

“Stop! Stop, Ukrainian bastard! You will not leave!”

Having jumped into the window, Ian ran as fast as he could. Behind him, the gunfire could be heard, mixed with the roar of the engine and the unintelligible screams of

the orcs. “50 metres more”, Ian thought and began to pray out loud. But instead of a prayer, for some reason, a song broke out:

“Oh, in the meadow a red kalyna has bent down low...

Our Father, Who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name.

... our glorious Ukraine is in sorrow...

...Thy Will be done…”.

Music. He hears music. The violinist stood in front of the wood line, which was 20 metres away, and played this melody with a smile and with his eyes closed.

“I said, stop!” The orc shouted, climbing through the window of the abandoned cowshed.

But having passed by the violinist, Ian was already in the zone where pines and mines were the only salvation. The orcs started shooting. Ian ran with his eyes closed, while the sounds of a violin, the roar of a car and the whistling of bullets could be heard... Ian ran and prayed, or rather, sang a prayer. The violinist was still playing, and Ian had already run far enough for the orcs to lose sight of him. The music stopped and then, Ian stopped too and opened his eyes.

For the first time, he was not afraid. It seemed to him that only now did he understand what all this was for: “We are ants, we are molecules, we are energy, we are music! Everyone has their own song. Until you find it, you will not die. That’s why you dive into your ‘string theory’ — so that your energy will lead you to the only and unique range in the universe, where you will finally sing.

We will win! We have everything for that. All tools. It is not for nothing that dark forces want to take possession of these tools.

These scumbags call themselves an army! Attacking at night, killing and raping women, children!! This is not an army! These are nits, and they must be crushed! And also, when the war is over, we need to buy tons of natural shampoo to wash the earth from this russian filthiness!

Something has changed in Ian. His thoughts were clear and now he wanted only one thing: to get to his friends as soon as possible and get a new task.

He was a few kilometres away from the base. His legs were made of foam, and his chest and stomach hurt. A familiar village was ahead, right before the location of our soldiers. Ian smiled and cried and then whistled his tune. There was no one around, not a soul. There was only silence and his melody.

Having come to the village, he did not recognize it at first. Maybe Ian made a mistake and entered the wrong place? “Oh no! There is a store, here is a stop. The radio, damn it, has broken down.” There was no one on the street.

He had to get to the school, where his platoon was temporarily stationed. Gathering all his strength, Ian ran. Suddenly one of his brothers caught up with him. He ran so fast and quietly that, having overtaken Ian by surprise, he confused him a little.

“Vetal, where are you going? Wait!”

Vetal turned to him, bit his lips angrily and silently shook his head.

Ian ran after him. But Vetal ran so fast that a minute later he vanished behind the turn, which was 500 metres away.

When he reached the turn, he saw destroyed houses from which smoke was coming. Vetal was not around. Someone shouted:

“Lie down!”

In a second, something powerful and invisible swept Ian from his feet.

14

Daytime. A 25-year-old guy is running along the village street. He is a military officer. Machine-gun fire, screams, and explosions can be heard around him.

The guy’s name is Ian. He is half Polish (on his grandfather’s side) and half Ukrainian.

He is followed by waves of explosions that help him run, firmly pushing him forward.

“I have to get there, I have to…”.

Having reached the place, Ian saw an enemy armoured personnel carrier with the letter “Z” near the school, and two dead soldiers near it.

Ian approached the first one and couldn’t believe his eyes: “Andriy whose call sign was ‘Sailor’. How? Are you here?”.

There was no belief in his mind and no thought in his head.

Ian could only watch and understand nothing.

It seemed to him for a moment that the guys had faked it out and that it was some kind of joke. He even leaned over to the body, gently shook the bearing vest and said almost in a whisper:

“Andriy!”

Then he checked the pulse on his neck and realised: “Andriy is gone…”

How did he end up here? He was killed, and then the body was brought here and thrown away? What’s the point?”

His thoughts intertwined with pain and silence.

Ian approached the second body. The fighter was lying face to the ground, in a pool of his blood. Having squatted, Ian carefully examined the body and tried to guess who it could be from his brothers.

Suddenly, he heard:

“Meow!”

“Rudik, is that you?”

The cat was just as red as the one he had already met both in the wood line and at the farm.

“Or maybe not you?”

15

“It’s me”, replied the cat.

“Why are you following me?”

The cat jumped on the back of the murdered man, sat opposite Ian and said:

“Because it is essential…”

“Hmm, is it essential? For whom?”

“Both you and me…”

The cat straightened up and slowly stepped on the back, then the leg of the dead soldier, reached the foot, looked at Ian, yawned and then added

“And to him!”

He jumped to the ground and disappeared from sight.

Now, Ian noticed the shoes of the murdered man. These were trainers, the same as his.

“shhhhhhhhhhhh…..Call sign Nike, pick up!”

Suddenly, a broken radio hissed.

“Call sign Nike, pick up! shhhhhh…”

Ian clicked on the radio and answered:

“Call sign Nike here…”

“Call sign Nike, pick up! The base here. shhhhhh….”

Ian answered again:

“Base, call sign Nike here! Pick up!”

“Call sign Nike, what’s wrong there? Why don’t you answer? Pick up!”

“Base, call sign Nike here, we have two soldiers killed in action here, pick up!”

“shhh...Call sign Nike, the base here, pick up!!”

Suddenly Ian realised that the commander’s voice was not coming from his radio...

Taking the murdered man’s shoulder, Ian carefully turned him over onto his back...

“Don’t look!” someone’s childish voice said loudly.

A boy stood in front of him, smiled at him and repeated again:

“Don’t look, let’s go with me…”

Ian stepped over the body and followed the boy. He recognized him, it was a violinist.

“Where are we going?”

The boy gave him a hand and said:

“We are following the music…”

“My name is Ian.”

“I am Rudik…”

16

“They walked along the road, in quietness and still,

A dog with wings and feathers was waiting on the hill.

The stray and gentle souls have saddled it at once,

And on an endless journey, departed at a glance!”

- shouted that boy, surrounded by a circle of peers to laughter and kicks...

The end.

11. IRINA FEOFANOVA "OUTSLANDER"



I am Iryna Feofanova, I was born in Kyiv, I studied to be a psychologist, I did not work as a psychologist, but I use the knowledge gained at the university when writing scripts for movies and TV series. Since 2007, she has written more than 20 screenplays for documentaries, series, detective stories, and has experience in reality shows. I never called myself a playwright, I tried to write plays, but it wasn't very serious, I always thought that mine was television, not theater. However, with the beginning of the war I understood: I cannot reflect on what I have experienced, felt, seen and heard in scripts, but I can in plays.

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

“Until February 24, I lived in Irpen with my daughter, husband and our white dog. We walked a lot in the woods, dreamed, sang songs and created: I wrote scripts, and my husband was a designer. And yet, we built a house in Irpen, made repairs and on April 14, my husband’s birthday, had planned to celebrate the housewarming. Instead, on April 14, we already knew that our house was left without windows and doors, in the walls of the hole from shots and debris, on the gate the inscription ‘Mine’ in Russian, which the Russians left when fleeing from Irpen. Our city, our district, is in a terrible state. The first photos and videos we saw struck me to the heart. Our dreams, our hopes, our streets, the park where my daughter took her first steps… The Russians trampled, destroyed them. ‘But we will rebuild everything and we will be happy!’ —so says my husband, I believe him. With the beginning of the war, he joined the Armed Forces and became a border guard, and my daughter and I are now in Yaremche; we are protected by the mountains, protected and inspired to write. The play ‘Chuzhesranka’ was written in Yaremche, on the banks of the Prut River, under the elephant rock. Everything will be Ukraine!”

OUTSLANDER

one-act tragicomedy

Scene one

Winter. There is snow in the fields here and there. A turn from the asphalt road to the off-road. Before the turn, there is a bus stop, on top of which there are letters

wrapped in black polyethylene. MARYNA (35, thin, short) and her two children — MARK (6) and ZLATA (4) sit at the bus stop. On the bench, there is a carrier with a cat; under the bench, there is a bright plastic suitcase on wheels, once new and shiny, but now scratched, with a crack after a fall. The children huddle close to their mother — it's cold, and Maryna adjusts their scarves and hats. A cart with firewood, pulled by a horse, drives along the asphalted road. GRANDPA PETRO (80) sits on the cart. The cart is going to turn off-road. Maryna jumps up and waves her hands in front of the grandpa.

MARYNA: Stop, please!

GRANDPA PETRO: I'm going... to Kalynivka.

MARYNA: So are we!

GRANDPA PETRO: Where from?

MARYNA: From Bucha...

GRANDPA PETRO: Why didn't you tell me right away, child?

Grandpa Petro briskly jumps out of the cart, puts a suitcase and a carrier with a cat on the cart in one fell swoop and gently helps the children to get on, saying:

GRANDPA PETRO: God, God, what grief, the devilish monsters, what have they done!? And you, children, cover your ears, don't listen to the stupid old grandpa. (*to Maryna*) And where is the father? Not with you?

MARYNA: In the Armed Forces.

GRANDPA PETRO: Fighting? Oh God, oh God...

Grandpa Petro wants to help Maryna too — he offers her a hand. Maryna looks suspiciously at the grandpa's hands dirty from hard work but agrees to get help and climbs into the cart.

MARYNA: Thank you…

Grandpa Petro also sits on the cart, pulling in the reins.

GRANDPA PETRO (*to the horse*): Come up!

The horse slowly moves from its place. The cart turns onto the road and moves on, a small village can be seen in the distance. Maryna silently hugs the children, while the grandpa sighs heavily and begins after a pause:

GRANDPA PETRO: Is there anyone waiting for you in Kalynivka?

MARYNA: My aunt, my mother's sister. Olha Vasylenko.

GRANDPA PETRO: The land surveyor?

MARYNA: Do you know her?

GRANDPA PETRO: Who doesn't know Olka the surveyor, everyone knows her, she wanted to be a village head and she even fought with Mykhalych's wife.

MARYNA: Who?

GRANDPA PETRO: Mykhalych, the village head, Olka tore his wife's braids because she was giving out buckwheat to the villagers ...

MARYNA (*with a sad smile*): You have fun here.

GRANDPA PETRO: Oh yes, we do...

MARYNA: It's quiet here. (*listens*) Unusually quiet.

GRANDPA PETRO: Because we have a navel buried here. In that war, the Germans bypassed us, and the Russians will bypass us now.

MARYNA: It would be good —- we have nowhere to go.

GRANDPA PETRO: God willing, the war will end soon, and you will come back to your Bucha.

MARYNA: There is nowhere to come back...

GRANDPA PETRO: Did they hit it? No home?

MARYNA: No Bucha…

The cart arrives at the village, passes by the first house, the owner of the estate PYSANCHYHA (50, plump, ruddy, in a beautiful head scarf) and GRANDMA NYURA (75), who was riding down the street and got off her bicycle to talk, talk over the fence. Seeing the cart, Pysanchykha and Grandma Nyura freeze, examining Maryna and her children with interest.

MARYNA (*to Pysanchysa and Grandma Nyura*): Good afternoon.

GRANDMA NYURA (*cordially*): Hello!

PYSANCHYHA (*through gritted teeth*): Hello.

The cart goes on; Pysanchyha and grandma Nyura keep their eyes on it.

GRANDMA NYURA: They are probably refugees. I wonder where they are going.

PYSANCHYHA: They suddenly remembered about the village, you see, why didn't you come in peacetime, huh?

GRANDMA NYURA (*squinting and looking at the cart*): To the surveyor, I guess.

PYSANCHYHA: She is so proud of herself; did you see it? She looks down at us. (*mocking*) "Good afternoon".

GRANDMA NYURA: Right, to Olka the surveyor...

PYSANCHYHA: An outslander (*spits*).

Scene two

A country house, a living room, simple but clean: a new sofa, white curtains, a well-ironed tablecloth on a large dining table, a sideboard with beautifully displayed serviettes and Soviet-style figurines. No dust anywhere. OLHA (55) brings a suitcase and a carrier with a cat from the street, followed by Maryna, Mark and Zlata, who seem to be embarrassed.

OLHA (*puts the suitcase and carrier on the floor*): We are not rich, but you are welcome to all we have…

MARYNA: Don't bother, Aunt Olia, everything is fine.

Maryna opens the carrier and the cat jumps out. Olha casts an appraising look at him. Maryna notices this look and hurriedly explains:

MARYNA: This is Hraf, he is neutered and well-behaved, he won't do anything.

OLHA: Okay, let him get used to it, and when it warms up, he'll go outside.

MARYNA: As you say.

OLHA (*pointing to the sofa*): You will sleep here, the sofa is good, two by one metre sixty, I bought it last autumn — as if I had know known we might need it. You have to pull here to unfold it (*unfolds the sofa in one fell swoop*). Enough space for you?

MARYNA: Yes, yes, everything is fine.

OLHA: Here is a kitchen (*points to the door*), there is my room, a toilet, sorry, but it's village-style, on the street...

MARYNA: Everything is fine for us, don't worry.

The cat jumps behind the couch.

OLHA: Won't he be scratching the sofa?

MARYNA: His claws are cut off.

OLHA: Well, you know, it's new. It would be a pity. But most importantly, as they say, make yourself at home (*she leans towards the children and caresses their cheeks*). Deal? Mark, Zlata? Do what you want, stand on your head, if you wish, Aunt Olia allows everything.

Olha laughs, and the children remain just as tense — they cosy up to Maryna and they don't even smile.

MARYNA: Thank you. For everything.

Maryna moves sharply and hugs Olha, Olha freezes in surprise, and then puts her hands on Maryna's back, but somehow stiffly and hesitatingly. Then, some recognizable sounds are heard: the cat scratches the sofa.

Scene three

A country house, a kitchen. Mark and Zlata sit at the table with empty porcelain plates with floral patterns in front of them. Maryna takes out a cauldron from the stove and puts potatoes and meat on the children's plates, the children squeal and start eating before it cools down.

MARYNA: My kitties, wait, it's hot...

Olha enters the kitchen with bags full of food.

OLHA: Well, the game is over. Svetka from the store says: there will be no delivery, everything that is on the shelves will no longer be available. (*sees the fire in the stove*) Wait, did you burn wood?

MARYNA: I cooked potatoes with meat in a cauldron as the grandmother used to do, will you try?

OLHA: You mustn't use the stove, I warned you, it's not that simple...

MARYNA: I saw how you did it and I did it the same way….

OLHA (*sharply*): Don't touch the stove again!

MARYNA: All right... I meant well.

OLHA (*looking at the plates on the table*): And add less meat, we need to save.

MARYNA: I'll walk to the city to buy meat.

OLHA: We have meat, we may slaughter a boar if needed, but why should we put so much for the children? They won't finish it anyway!

MARYNA: Aunt Olia, I can give you some money for groceries, just tell me, I have...

OLHA: God, what's the use of money here? Did you hear what I told you about the store? It's not the right time, and you didn't come to the resort... Just don't be offended.

MARK (*putting the plate away*): Mom, I don't want to eat anymore.

OLHA: Oh, what did I say?!

ZLATA: And I don’t want either.

Olha looks eloquently at Maryna. Mark gets up from the table and touches the plate — the plate with the remains of potatoes and meat falls to the floor breaking with a thud. Mark and Zlata get scared and fall to the floor, Marina rushes to them — tries to lift them up and hugs them.

MARYNA: No, children, no, everything is fine, it’s just a plate... and get up, there’s rubble here... Mark, Zlata...

MARK: I’m sorry, Mom...

MARYNA: Don’t worry, it’s for good luck…

Olha takes a sip, bites her lip so as not to blurt anything, and picks up rubble from the floor.

MARYNA (*shaking off the pieces of porcelain from the children, addressing Olha*): I will buy, I will buy the whole set...

OLHA: I will buy it, I will buy it. You are used to measuring everything with money in the city, but do you know how old this one is? It got through so many things, but not your children.

MARK: I didn’t want to...

OLHA: Of course. And you didn’t want to paint over the wallpaper, and the cat scratching your sofa - you didn’t want it either, right?

MARYNA: Aunt Olia, please, don’t.

OLHA (*cutting herself with a piece of glass*): Damn it!

Scene four

A village, a street. It’s sunny, the snow is gone and the mud has dried up. Maryna, Mark and Zlata walk down the street in the direction of Olha’s gate, dressed as warmly as in the first scene, they are clearly hot — they unbuttoned their jackets and put the hats off, carrying them in their hands.

MARK: Mom, will we leave Kalynivka when the war ends?

MARYNA: Of course, son, we are here for some time.

MARK: Is that why Aunt Olia is praying for the war to end soon? So that we leave?

Maryna rumples Mark's hair with a sad smile.

MARYNA: Aunt Olia is nice, just... just she is used to living alone, and here we come.

MARK: And our cat.

MARYNA (*smiling*): Yes, Hraf also seems a little stressed, he is obsessed with that sofa...

Tipsy VALIK (25) walks crookedly down the street. Maryna talks to the children and does not pay attention to Valik, but he stares at her from afar.

MARK: And when the war is over, will dad come to pick us up? Right?

MARYNA: I don't know, dad and I haven't talked about it yet, we'll come up with something...

VALIK (*sharply*): Who are you?

Maryna and the children stop and look at Valik in surprise.

MARYNA: What?

VALIK (*comes closer*): Where are you from?

MARYNA: We came from Bucha. Any problem?

VALIK (*taking another step towards Maryna*): To whom?

Maryna takes a step back and instinctively grabs the children's hands.

MARYNA (*starting to get annoyed*): Who are you and why are you asking?

VALIK: Now, I will tell you why...

Valik pulls out a black pistol from his belt. Maryna gets scared and hides her children behind her back.

MARYNA: What are you doing? Put the gun down!

Valik points a gun at Maryna.

VALIK: Who did you come to?

MARYNA: To... To Aunt Olia... Olha Vasylenko...

VALIK: The surveyor?

MARYNA: Yes, I... put it down!

MARK: Mom…

Mark looks from behind his mother's back and Zlata begins to cry quietly. Maryna trembles, holding her children behind her back. Valik pays attention to Mark's frightened eyes and puts the gun down.

VALIK: Are you sure you are not a hit squad?

MARYNA: What? No!

Valik hides the gun behind his belt and goes where he was going. In fear, Maryna watches him go. Olha peeps out from the yard.

OLHA: Haven't you seen a white chicken? It was sitting on eggs, now it's gone... Hey, what are you doing?

MARYNA: Aunt Olia, he has a gun...

OLHA: Who?

With a trembling hand, Maryna points at Valik, who walks unevenly.

OLHA: Valik?

MARYNA: He... threatened us...

OLHA: Threatened? Children? I'll give him hell!

Olha immediately runs out of the yard and runs after Valik.

OLHA (*shouting*): Valik! Stop! Stop, bloody bastard! Valik!

Valik turns around, sees Olha and quickens his steps. Olha turns to Maryna and the children, who are still standing there, scared, with tears in their eyes.

OLHA (*to Maryna*): Go to the house! (*runs further down the street, shouts*) Valik! I will tear you apart for the children! Valik!

Scene five

A country house, a living room. Maryna, Mark and Zlata sit on the sofa. Zlata cries, Mark calms her down, and Maryna is frozen, looking at one point on the floor. Next to them on the couch, there is a cat, licking itself. The door swings open sharply — a startled, gasping Olha runs in from the street.

OLHA: What a jerk!

Maryna comes to her feet.

MARYNA: What? What did he do to you?

OLHA: What can he do to me? He is afraid of me, everyone in Kalynivka is afraid of me, that's why he rushed to his mother. I shout to him: "Stop!" — and he takes something out of his pants...

MARYNA: A gun!

OLHA: This bastard was pointing it at me! I shook my fist at him, and he rushed to his mother in the yard and then into the house. And Pysanchykha came to the threshold and bawled her eyes out, I said to her: "Look, what's going on?". Your empty-headed son runs around the village with a gun and threatens kids. And she said: "It's me he was going to kill". Then do something, you stupid head, you gave birth to a bastard, raised an alcoholic, and he scares my children.

MARYNA: Did you take the gun away?

OLHA: No! She didn't let me go further than the yard! She said: "Private property." But it's all right, I've called the police, they'll come right now and sentence him to ten years in prison, it's high time. It's wartime, and he loiters here and gets drunk in the middle of the day... I am so wildly angry. I'll teach him a lesson!

MARYNA: You are so fearless, Aunt Olia, you rushed after him right away.

OLHA: Was it possible not to rush?! You can't let him go unpunished. Where did he get that gun? Or maybe they gave it to him? They should think about who they can give guns to...

MARYNA: Maybe you want some tea? Shall we all have tea? Lime tree tea?

OLHA: Oh no, I would rather drink some vodka. But it's wartime, so we can't.

Olha sits down on the sofa, mechanically stroking the cat. Maryna hugs the children and wipes the tears from Zlata's cheeks.

MARYNA: Everything is fine, everything is fine now.

MARK: Mom, he's russian, right?

OLHA: Valik? God forbid, no, he is one of us, from Kalynivka.

MARK: Then why did he want to kill us?

MARYNA: Son, he thought we were strangers.

MARK: But you said that in Ukraine we are related...

MARYNA: I thought so, Mark, earlier.

MARK: And now? Don't you think so?

Maryna sighs, but does not have time to answer — Olha, hearing a noise outside the window, jumps up from the sofa and looks out the window.

OLHA: Look, he's walking, he's barely dragging his feet, but he's walking.

Maryna also looks out the window, and the children also look with interest.

MARYNA (*tensely*): Is he going into the neighbouring house?

OLHA: Don't worry, the police will come, they will make it hot for him...

MARYNA: But is he... your neighbour?

OLHA: This is his late father's house. When he quarrels with Pysanchyha, he lives and drinks here and brings friends, but I was putting up with everything, and now it's enough!

MARYNA: But... how can we live here now if he is a neighbour? Aunt Olia, I'm scared.

OLHA: Stop it, now the police will take him away, he was threatening children, no one will forgive that (*looking out the window*). Oh, they have arrived! They are quick, well done. Kids, you will stay here, and you will come with me — give some witness statement, or something like that...

Olha rushes out and Maryna follows her. Mark and Zlata stay on the couch. Zlata looks sadly at Mark.

ZLATA: I wanna go home...

MARK (*sighs*): Me too.

Scene six

In a village, there is a police car near Valik's yard. The gate is open. Near the gate, there are Olha, embarrassed Maryna, who is nervous and does not know what to do with her hands, and several neighbours — grandma Nyura, KATERYNA (45), VASYL (50).

OLHA (*to the neighbours*): So, he was hiding behind his mom's skirt and then returned. He thought he would lock himself inside the house and that's it. But no — now the police will take him out in handcuffs, and I'll spit right in his ugly face, I swear to you people, I'll spit!

KATERYNA: I said a long time ago that Valik would end badly, so that's what we have now.

VASYL: He'd better join the territorial defence forces so that he doesn't goof around.

KATERYNA: But who would need him in the territorial defence?

GRANDMA NYURA: They are staying there too long. Are they beating him or what?

OLHA: I hope they are! Let them wallop the living daylights out of him so that he remembers it for the rest of his life!

The door to Valik's house opens and POLICE OFFICER ONE (45), POLICE OFFICER TWO (35) and POLICE OFFICER THREE (35) come out, wearing uniforms, armour and weapons. The first policeman clenches something in his fist. With serious facial expressions, they leave the yard in a hurry. Olha and Maryna take a step to meet the policemen, and they, without saying anything, open the door of the police car and are about to get in.

OLHA: Hey, where are you going, guys?

MARYNA: Do I need to sign anything?

GRANDMA NYURA: And Valik? Is he alive?

POLICE OFFICER ONE: He is, what could happen to him?! Why are you standing here? Go home! (*to the police officers*) Let's go.

MARYNA: Won't you explain anything to us?

OLHA: He threatened the children! My niece! With a gun!

POLICE OFFICER ONE: Here's your gun.

Police officer one opens his fist and spills the remains of a red plastic gun on the ground.

VASYL: Is it a toy or what?

POLICE OFFICER ONE: What did you think? Where could he get the real one? There is a war in the country, and you are playing idiots.

Maryna picks up the fragments of the red gun.

MARYNA: But... it was black…

POLICE OFFICER: Lady, thank us for not issuing a fine for a false call, we were rushing from the district centre. (*to the police officers*) That's it, let's go!

The policemen get into the car and start the engine. The neighbours look at Maryna and Olha with a smile and leave. Maryna looks at the fragments of the gun in her hands, and Olha looks at Maryna with her hands on her sides, annoyed.

OLHA: A toy gun? Are you kidding?

MARYNA: It was black, I swear, and heavy, I saw it — he pulled it out from his belt, not like something light as a toy, but like something heavy...

OLHA: Do you even understand what will happen to me now? You will leave, and he will burn down my house.

MARYNA: But he... not me...

OLHA: God, I was running around the village like an idiot...

MARYNA: You said that he pointed a gun at you too!

OLHA: Can I see that far? He pointed something at me, maybe the middle finger? I caused a stir, and the police...

MARYNA: It was a real gun! I'm sure!

OLHA (*getting more and more annoyed*): Are you an expert? Do you know anything about guns?

MARYNA: No, but...

OLHA: That's where we had to start! (*shouting*) That's it, go inside, quickly!

MARYNA: Don't talk to me like that! I am not guilty of anything!

OLHA: Guilty, not guilty, just don’t step out of the yard. You’ve had enough of walking!

MARYNA: Aunt Olia, what are you saying? We will not stay at home with the children, we have not done anything wrong!

OLHA: Well, you won’t be staying at your home, but while you’re at my place, I’ll decide what to do! (*shouts*) Go inside! Now!!!

Maryna shudders from Olha’s screaming.

Scene seven

A country house, a kitchen. It’s evening, it’s dark outside the window. Sad Maryna, Mark and Zlata sit at the table. Olha is irritated and bangs the dishes — pours soup into plates, puts spoons and bread without saying a single word.

MARYNA: Aunt Olia... well, let’s stop that, how long can you be giving us a silent treatment?

Olha does not answer, sits down at the table and starts eating. The children also eat, and Maryna looks sadly at Olha.

MARYNA (*sighs*): Why do *I* feel guilty, why do I have to justify myself and prove something?

OLHA: Good, I don’t want to hear anything about it, forget it, full stop.

MARYNA: It doesn’t look like a full stop.

OLHA (*raising her voice*): Lord, I’m talking to you, what else do you want?

MARYNA: I want you to believe me…

Someone knocks on the window and the children startle.

MARYNA: Don’t be afraid, it’s a visitor to Aunt Olia. (*to Olha*) To you, right?

Olha looks out the window.

OLHA (*sighs exasperatedly*): Hell with you!

MARYNA (*frightened*): Is it him? The neighbour?

OLHA: His mother... Pysanchykha...

Olha puts a scarf on her shoulders and leaves in a hurry. Mark and Zlata look questioningly at Maryna.

MARYNA: Go on eating, I'll be back...

Maryna leaves the kitchen.

Scene eight

Maryna, muffling herself up in a jacket, leaves Olha's house. Olha and Pysanchyha (a little drunk, ruddy and loud) stand by the kitchen windows.

PISANCHYHA (*shouting*): Police to my son! For a toy? You didn't hit your head, did you?

OLHA: Was I supposed to be silent?

PYSANCHYHA: You had to turn on your brain! Where could Valik get the gun? He is stupid, but not to such an extent!

MARYNA: He has a gun, it's real.

Olha and Pysanchykha look back at Maryna's voice. Pysanchykha looks over Maryna with disdain.

PYSANCHYHA: Speak of the devil! An outslander!

MARYNA: Out what?

OLHA (*to Maryna*): Don't pay attention, go inside.

PYSANCHYHA (*to Maryna*): I will slit your throat for my son, do you get it, outslander?

OLHA: Don't call her that!

PYSANCHYHA (*to Olha*): You housed some random people and the whole village is suffering!

OLHA: Who is suffering? Keep an eye on your Valik! What if it's a toy gun, it's not normal to walk around and wave it during the war!

MARYNA: It was not a toy gun, it was real!

PYSANCHYHA: Maybe, you have a real one? Maybe you threatened my Valik?

MARYNA: What?

PYSANCHYHA: Prove that it is not so! I will call the police now!

OLHA: Are you sick?

PYSANCHYHA: And you?

Pysanchykha takes a step toward Olha, Olha retreats and Pysanchykha waves her hand in front of Olha's face.

OLHA: My God, you smell of booze!

PYSANCHYHA: I'm sober as a judge, look at yourself!

OLHA: What are you saying? Sober as a judge? Like mother, like son. The family of drunkards!

PYSANCHYHA: What did you say?

OLHA: You heard me!

PYSANCHYHA: Say it again!

OLHA: What if not?

PYSANCHYHA: You'll see!

Pysanchysha attacks Olha with her fists and Olha attacks back — she grabs Pysanchysha's hair. They shout and fight, while Maryna tries to pull them apart.

PYSANCHYHA: Oh, you're a reptile!

OLHA: Damned whore!

PYSANCHYHA: I will... Let me go!

MARYNA: Stop!

OLHA: So that you know, bitch!

MARYNA: Come on! Aunt Olia! Let her go!

PYSANCHYHA (*squeals*): Let go!!!

Scene nine

A village shop. SVETA (35, with bright makeup and neatly styled hair) is at the counter. There is a small queue — grandma Nyura, Maryna, and behind her — Pysanchykha with a black eye (after a fight with Olha).

GRANDMA NYURA (*pointing to the display case*): And half a kilo of those yummies.

Sveta unhurriedly weighs the candies. Grandma Nyura packs what she bought (cereals, sugar, bread and candies) into a bag.

SVETA: Eighty hryvnias...

Grandma Nyura counts the money, and Maryna comes closer to the counter.

MARYNA: Good afternoon, four packs of ice cream for me, please, premium…

Sveta pretends not to notice Maryna and turns to Pysanchykha.

SVETA: What's for you, godmother?

PYSANCHYHA (*pointing to the shelf with bread*): Give me two loaves, Sveta...

MARYNA: Wait, but it's my turn, could you give me the ice cream, please or can I take it from the fridge myself?

SVETA (*rudely*): You'd better get out of here, outslander.

MARYNA: Won't you sell me the ice cream?

SVETA: I won't sell you anything.

PYSANCHYHA: This is a shop for the locals, do you get it?

MARYNA: Are you serious?

PYSANCHYHA: The newcomers are trying to lay down the law.

MARYNA: What law? I came to buy ice cream!

SVETA: You will buy it and then say that we sold you drugs here.

MARYNA: Are you crazy? What drugs?

PISANCHYHA: She will do it, and she'll call the police, as she did to my Valik...

SVETA: An outslander.

Sveta, Pysanchykha, and grandma Nyura look at Maryna with disgust; she barely holds back not to cry and retreats back to the door.

Scene ten

A village, Olha's yard. Olha weeds flower beds. A tearful Maryna enters the gate from the street.

OLHA: And now what? I said: stay at home.

Olha drops her digger and hurries to Maryna. Without a word, Maryna throws herself into Olha's arms.

OLHA: Lord, what happened?

MARYNA (*barely able to speak because of tears*): They call me an outslander...

OLHA: Pysanchyha? I'll make her second eye black!

MARYNA: They all call me so... you can't beat everyone...

Olha sighs and pats Maryna on the back. A long whistling can be heard overhead. Maryna sharply pulls away from Olha.

MARYNA (*shouting*): On the ground!

Maryna falls to the ground and covers her head with her hands. Olha looks at Maryna in surprise, and then a loud explosion is heard in the field. Olha falls next to Maryna.

OLHA (*whispers*): What the hell is this?

MARYNA: It... it's already here.

OLHA: What?

MARYNA: War...

Scene eleven

A village school, a class. The desks are pushed aside, the windows are covered with sandbags. A camouflage net is attached to the wall — it was not finished. VILLAGE HEAD (50, tall, plump, business-like) stands near the board, half the village has gathered around him — grandpa Petro, grandma Nyura, Pysanchykha (the bruise under his eye has already disappeared), her son Valik, Kateryna, Vasyl, Olha and other villagers.

VILLAGE HEAD: As a village head, I urge you not to panic.

OLHA: Not to panic? We need to make some decisions — the russians are coming to Kalynivka!

VILLAGE HEAD: Don't shout, Olka, they're not coming yet!

OLHA: The bridges are blown up, they have only one way to Kyiv — through our village!

VILLAGE HEAD: It's not definite, maybe they will go through Berezivka or through Horodeshcha, there are many options!

OLHA: They occupied Berezivka and Horodeshcha, they announced it on TV! They are already there, wake up, Mykhalych!

VILLAGE HEAD: But they won't attack us!

GRANDPA PETRO: What if they do come to us, God, God...

VILLAGE HEAD: We have territorial defence units and police...

OLHA: Have you gone nuts? We are cut off from everyone!

VASYL: That's right, we are encircled, their way to the highway is through the village, Olka is right.

PYSANCHYHA: And there's a column, Valik rode there on a bike to have a look. Fifty tanks... Tell them, Valik!

Pysanchykha pushes Valik to the side. Valik nods: yes.

PYSANCHYHA: You see?!

OLHA: We can't let them go to Kyiv!

GRANDMA NYURA: They can't come to us! The russians burned down Stepanivka, there's not a single house left undamaged.

OLHA: That's what I'm talking about, people!

VILLAGE HEAD: Oh, my God, nothing has happened yet, and you are shouting!

OLHA: You have to think now, not when it happens!

KATERYNA: But what can we do? Grandpa Petro has one gun for the whole village...

GRANDPA PETRO: It doesn't work, it gets blocked.

PYSANCHYHA: So that's it. We can't do anything. When they come, we'll go home and pray.

OLHA: Letting them go to Kyiv?

VASYL: Do you have other options? Should I lie down under the tanks?

VILLAGE HEAD: No one will lie down! We will come up with something, we'll try to talk...

OLHA (*bursts with laughter*): To whom? To rashists? Talk to them?

GRANDPA PETRO: We need to finish them off, Lord, forgive me.

VILLAGE HEAD: We are peaceful people; the russians will not hurt us!

GRANDMA NYURA: All of Ukraine is peaceful, but they are hurting them!

OLHA: Mykhalych, you are so naive!

PYSANCHYHA: Yes, but what can we do to tanks with bare hands? They will run over us and move on, right?

KATERYNA: So, what's the point of dying just like that?!

PYSANCHYHA: I don't want to die like that too!

GRANDPA PETRO: Then let's die for something!

VILLAGE HEAD: Well, that's enough, stop shouting! Let's make some suggestions! Who has something specific to suggest?

The village head looks around waiting for answers, everyone is silent, even Olha lowers her eyes. From the side of the entrance door, one can hear:

MARYNA: I have suggestions.

Everyone turns and sees Maryna at the open door.

OLHA: I asked you to stay at home!

PYSANCHYHA (*quietly*): Wherever you go, this outslander is everywhere…

Maryna comes closer to the board.

VILLAGE HEAD: This is a meeting for the villagers.

OLHA: Let her say. (*to Maryna*) Say, just be quick.

MARYNA: First, the village must be blocked off — tractors, excavators, whatever you have — we will dig around the perimeter. We'll put felled trees, fences of any kind and other things, so that the russians do not enter the village.

VILLAGE HEAD: Well, you're funny, outslander, they'll go around the field!

MARYNA: That's what we need. Look!

Maryna takes the chalk and makes a sketch on the blackboard — tentatively draws the village, circles it and draws how the tanks will move from the side of the village.

MARYNA: They won't go through the forest — that's clear. But they will pass through the field and get stuck in the ravine, and there we will be waiting for them.

OLHA: Us? Waiting for them?

MARYNA: With Molotov cocktails. Sveta is preparing empty bottles at the shop, I told her, we have foam, and I think we will find oil and fuel somewhere in the village.

VILLAGE HEAD: You have watched too much TV, girl, not everything is so easy.

MARYNA: We stopped the first convoys in Bucha with cocktails.

PISANCHYHA: Come on, did you stop them?

MARYNA (*with pride*): I targeted one tank, it flashed like a candle.

Everyone looks at fragile Maryna in surprise, and she continues with more and more confidence:

MARYNA: In short, let's stay here (*points to the board*) and wait for the convoy. We will let the first ones go, and the fuel trucks will go last, so we'll put them on fire. No fuel — no tanks.

VILLAGE HEAD: Then the convoy will stop, and the russians will go to the village to search, they are not stupid — they know that we have something.

MARYNA: Let them come, we will give them fuel.

PYSANCHYHA: Aren't you crazy, outslander? Maybe we should feed them?

MARYNA: Of course, we will feed them. But before that, we'll add arsenic to food, and some oil and salt to fuel. They will go and stop on the way to Kyiv, forever... That's the plan.

VILLAGE HEAD: Who do you think will do all that?

VASYL: I can dig trenches, I have a tractor, no problem.

GRANDPA PETRO: I will dig with my hands!

GRANDMA NYURA: I will prepare borsch. I'll gladly poison them.

KATERYNA: I may bake some pies for them.

GRANDMA NYURA: Let's treat them to pies.

MARYNA: I'll make the Molotov cocktails.

OLHA: I'll help you.

VILLAGE HEAD: How foolish of us... We'll shit our pants, but we won't give up. I am with you.

VALIK (*taking a step forward*): Me too.

Everyone looks at Valik in surprise.

Scene twelve

A ravine behind the village. At the top of the ravine, in the bushes, Maryna and Valik sit on padded jackets. Nearby, there are boxes filled with Molotov cocktails. Valik eats a sandwich, keeping a bag with a couple more sandwiches on his lap. Maryna stares intently into the distance. Valik takes out another sandwich from the bag and hands it to Maryna.

VALIK: Are you sure you don't want it?

MARYNA: I am sure, thank you.

VALIK: It will be funny, of course, if they don't come during our shift. I will not forgive myself if I do not burn at least one tank.

MARYNA: Is it a question of who will burn the tank?

VALIK: Well, I would like to. Did you tell the truth about the tank?

MARYNA: I did.

VALIK: Was it so easy to hit it?

MARYNA: That wasn't easy. Ten cocktails missed the target before that.

VALIK: I played basketball at school — I will definitely hit it.

MARYNA: Why aren't you playing now?

VALIK (*waving off*): Ah, well... there is no incentive…

Valik continues to eat a sandwich, there is a pause.

MARYNA (*after a pause*): Will you be honest with me?

VALIK: Huh?

MARYNA: Was it a real gun?

Valik chews and nods: yes.

MARYNA: Where did you get the toy?

VALIK: My mother's attic is full of such goodies, when I was little, my father used to pamper me — he would go home from work and always bring something...

MARYNA: Where is that gun now?

VALIK: Where? With me.

Valik takes out a black gun and shows it to Maryna.

MARYNA: Hide it!

VALIK: Well, it's for... self-defence.

MARYNA: Yes, I have already seen your self-defence.

Maryna and Valik laugh.

MARYNA: Is he really working? Are there bullets?

VALIK: Would I buy it without bullets?

MARYNA: Have you bought it?

VALIK: Ooops, mom is coming, don't say a word to her.

Valik hides the gun. Pysanchykha approaches with a three-litre can of milk and two cups and sits down next to Maryna and Valik.

PYSANCHYHA: I've brought you some milk, it's fresh, still warm...

Pysanchykha pours milk into cups.

MARYNA: I won't drink milk, I'm lactose intolerant, thank you.

PYSANCHYHA: I don't know what kind of intolerance you have, and no one has yet refused my Angelica's milk...

MARYNA: Did you name the cow Angelica?

PYSANCHYHA: Yes! And my bull is King.

Maryna laughs. Pysanchykha hands her a cup of milk, Maryna looks at the cup doubtfully, but still takes it and drinks it little by little.

PYSANCHYHA: By the way, what is your name?

MARYNA: Mine?

PYSANCHYHA: It's somehow inconvenient to call you Outslander now and we don't know your name...

Maryna does not have time to answer — a rumble is heard. Maryna, Pysanchykha and Valik jump up and look ahead, trying to see something.

VALIK: They are coming.

MARYNA (*to Valik*): Do you remember everything? You light it and let it burn for a couple of seconds, then you throw it.

PYSANCHYHA: Holy Mary, should I throw them too?

MARYNA: Not now, we are waiting for the fuel tankers.

They squat and hide. Maryna and Valik grab a cocktail, and Pysanchykha whispers a prayer and crosses herself.

PYSANYCHIHA: Lord, Jesus, Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Lord, Jesus, Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner...

VALIK (*tightly clutching a Molotov cocktail, shouting over the roar of tanks*): Maybe it's time?

Maryna cautiously peers into the ravine.

MARYNA: Too early.

PYSANCHYHA: And if it doesn't work out?

MARYNA: It will work.

VALIK: Then, don't slow down, mother, go right away.

MARYNA: Yes, to the forest, as agreed.

PYSANCHYHA: Where exactly? I don't know what you agreed on...

MARYNA (*looking into the ravine*): And now it's time.

With lighters, Maryna and Valik set fire to the Molotov cocktails they were holding.

PYSANCHYHA: Is it the right time? Is it? What should I do?

MARYNA (*handing Pysanchyha a lit cocktail*): Count to five and throw.

PYSANCHYHA (*in a trembling voice*): One, two...

VALIK: Five!

Valik throws his cocktail into the ravine.

PYSANCHYHA: I... I can't...

Valik takes the cocktail from Pysanchyha and throws it into the ravine as well, while Maryna is already serving the next one. Valik throws cocktail after cocktail, Maryna

serves them to him, and Pysanchyha trembles and crosses herself. Valik throws another cocktail and the bottom of the ravine catches fire.

VALIK: Got it, did you see it? Got it!

MARYNA (*hands Valik a cocktail*): Another fuel truck, come on!

Valik throws the cocktail, Maryna throws hers too — the bottom of the ravine flares up again.

VALIK (*jumping for joy*): 2:0!

MARYNA: And now let's go! Run!

VALIK: Mom, get up!

Maryna and Valik pick up Pysanchyha and the three of them run away in the direction of the forest. Shots are heard behind them.

PYSANCHYHA: Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy...

There are more and more shots, bullets whizzing over the heads of Maryna, Valik and Pysanchyha. Valik lags behind, takes out his gun and turns in the direction of the shots. Maryna notices that Valik has fallen behind and turns to him.

MARYNA: Valik!

VALIK: Run, I'll cover you!

PISANCHYHA: Son, what have you come up with?

VALIK: Run!!!

Valik fires in the direction of the shots. A grenade falls at his feet. Valik looks at the grenade in confusion, Maryna rushes to Valik, pushes him to the ground and covers him with her body. There is an explosion. Everything is engulfed in darkness. A cry is heard in the darkness:

PYSANCHYHA: Outslander, get up! Get up! Outslander!

Scene thirteen

A hospital ward, everything is white and bright — walls, ceiling, windows. Maryna lies on a white bed on a drip. Her head is bandaged, her face is scratched and Maryna looks pale and thin. Mark and Zlata sit on the bed on either side of her, Olha fusses around — tucking Maryna's pillow and straightening the blanket.

OLHA: And then, as you, as they say, predicted, they stopped in the middle of the motorway (*adjusts the pillow again*). Is it convenient? And these soldiers, the second army in the world, ran into the bushes — Nadia's pies did their work, and the equipment — well, it went up in smoke. Then our artillery worked, Mykhalych sent the coordinates to the right place, and now they've made mincemeat of that army...

MARK: Poisonous mincemeat...

OLHA: Well, that's true, Valik rode there on a bike — he took a video for us, he may show it to you too.

MARYNA (*to Mark*): Did you watch this video?

ZLATA *(with pride*): I watched it too!

Maryna reproachfully looks at Olha and Olha shrugs her shoulders.

OLHA: Well, there was nothing awful there.

Olha winks conspiratorially at Mark, who smiles and nods. The door of the ward opens and Pysanchyha cautiously looks in.

PYSANCHYHA: Knock-knock, may I?

MARYNA: Come in.

OLHA: You can't stay long — she's still weak...

Pysanchyha enters the ward, followed by Valik, Village Head, Kateryna, Vasyl, grandma Nyura, and grandpa Petro. The village head has a framed certificate in his hands.

OLHA: Is the whole village here? I said: she's just come to her senses...

MARYNA: Aunt Olia, everything is fine...

OLHA: What is fine about it? The doctor will now see and...

VILLAGE HEAD: Don't grumble, Olka, we're here on business...

The village head twirls a certificate of appreciation in his hands, clears his throat and begins a solemn speech:

VILLAGE HEAD (*to Maryna*): We discussed it and decided that you are now an honorary resident of our village. We have a certificate of appreciation and 10 acres of land for you just... there is a problem...

PISANCHYHA: We never learned your name, but Olka (*looks at Olka*) is stubborn: she will tell you everything herself.

OLHA: I didn't know why you were asking!

VILLAGE HEAD: That's why we wrote that...

The village head hands Maryna a certificate, now one can see that it says: "Certificate of Appreciation. Outslander is awarded…"

PYSANCHYHA: Outslander... But it's with love!

Maryna takes the certificate with weak hands and laughs. Pysanchyha hugs Maryna, everyone else approaches and hugs her too. Huge collective hugs.

The end.

April 2022, Yaremche, Ukraine.

12. LUCIA "CHRONOLOGY"

Lucia *

I am an artist and poet, born in 2001 in Kyiv and appeared as a person in Lviv. I work for myself and a small audience of 2,000 subscribers on the TV channel. For me, art is a cry, I am frankly non-technological and non-technological frank :) Poetry for me is about squeezing emotions, about the voice, the sound of which declares that you

are alive. I am currently writing about the war, out of time about identity, femininity and childhood. I write about living.

_____

* Communication with the artist was cut off, we did not receive consent to hold public readings of her text. It seems important to the project team to publish these poems, but only in an introductory format. We hope all is well with Lucia.

Chronology

0.
you don't need to conceive to birth a killer
goldilocks sit in blue screens
in the background are carpets and the sounds of a dripping tap
and they shout about khokhols and biological weapons
about the great empire and a mythical freedom
from the mass market of sugar and paper
does war not have a woman's face?
the mother will justify the deaths of three sons
"they died for my russia"
war has a female outrage
we are not on the sidelines
but they are not like us
you do not need semen
to create a new organism
and with words the old is transfigured into the new
"bioweapons, black magic, khokhol nature"
they are not on the sidelines
they are holding the rear defense

1.
I have
thirty-four feet
to get over myself
more than a month

how they are comforted by the greenery
the shepherds
before hanging themselves

on Easter

yes, I have
thirty-four hands
to hold on to all
the handrails at once

the next station is
osokorky
my weary concrete kyiv
how beautiful you are

2.
the refugees have heavy backpacks
they carry chernihiv and lviv
in their breast pockets
sumy kharkiv
burning sour disgust
they carry kyiv
in their blood
and breathe bucha’s remains
now
each of us
is but a metal wire
for thousands of miles
transmitting current
to the lowlands of the burning dnieper
from the carpathians to donbas

3.
on the count of two I give things away
pieces of cloth not worth a coin
instead of a jacket, I roll
in green moss warm myself
around this cobblestone
when the flood catches me
in the red bar
with cigarette butts sticking out
of my ears and swears
from my furious red mouth
and I stomp my shoe
muddied in the dirt
when the flood catches me
I will not drown but will even

breathe among the dawn-flooded
rows of houses
that the tech guys got from the aristocrats
and I will give away my cup
and trousers
socks
rings
I will end up empty
the train moves along the junction
kyiv-lviv
I will marry
because I really want a
divorce

4.
schoolboys who have another week to live
vacuum with dusty faces
the grey sea and give in to naive habits
their hands reach for the “toy” on the asphalt
and they scatter like beads of mercury in the wind
on mondays
history students drink moonshine
in basements and cellars
all around
is this fucking history
a timeless hangout
the shrinking body is sucked
into permanent capture
voices
above ground
release
the palm trapped in the silence
and finally
get some sleep
they’ll shoot postmodern
after the revival
history students
do you still want a part in it?

5.
I buy black coffee and a croissant
I look at the whiskey
I look at the whiskey again
how perfectly it fits in the corner of the mini bar

“could you add 100ml to the coffee?”
or 150
and I look at the black foam
at the shades of gold in the faceted glass
I look at the field and at the man
I sat next to
he is silent and holds a bottle
of gin
he is graying and gloomy
there are many reasons
and I look at
a list of gay bars
in the next tab are memorials
for the previous
world war
and I’m addicted
but really
it’s only to
escape

6.
two thousand twenty-two
you, poor man, got lost in the field
whose side is this?
the commander of your platoon
escaped, promised a wooden coffin
for a friend but he
rests in the swamp
you could shoot or not shoot
take off your soaked white shorts
fantasize that someone is waiting for you
until the knife reaches your snout

7.
start packing
we’re going to the statue
how can I hint to it casually
about my irresistible desire
to lie in a container with clay and
bury myself
as in the sand on the beaches of crimea
I’m acting like an animal again
an earthworm
start packing

we’re fleeing the country
bandages painkillers passport
a wedding ring for memory
a sketchbook
a plaster
start packing start packing start packing
stupid question
are you sleeping again?
do you think I woke up?

8.
talk about something else!
I have nothing more.
don’t watch the news!
I insistently absorb it into the pores of my skin, through the walls.
distract yourself!
oh my dreams are sweet:
I’m on a train, the sun is setting in a bright flare. It seems I
mistook a bomb for the sun.
and I’m on the floor
of the aisle. it is already
eight in the morning. I will go to a painting class.
aren’t you fucking tired of only painting this?
all else which was in me
the war digested
into a drowsy flare

9.
I’ll fall to the ground and feel
my eyes pulsate
with life - an attribute of age
the body works like a bee
oh to have enough sense
not to run in the march sand barefoot
I can stand still as a lantern
maybe for a day or even a decade
I can toil away shift after shift
at the factory
can bare my hands and kill a person
can travel half the world with no money in my pocket
can eat grass and roots
can drink dirty water from puddles
can melt all the ice
but I lie on the sofa

count the chairs, fill the bath
blood boils, milk flows out
only in safety will I be weak
only until further notice
of war

10.
outstanding brave soldiers
with pockets full of condoms
stuffed with red kolovraty
guardians of a peaceful life
with unwashed dicks stuck
under children's backs
this is the one thing that unites all nations
it doesn't matter, the colour of the uniform
or of the tanks
I vote for compulsory castration
in the photographs of the dead, the men are clothed
the women and children are scattered naked

men of high morals, undoubtedly spiritual
fight for the idea of freedom and
rape
rape
rape
they hide their dog faces
I should be grateful for the defense
and I am grateful for the defense
and I'd cut off their balls with nail scissors
and I'd shove medical needles into their urethras
the children and women in the photographs are dead and naked
I hope that before the main event
they were allowed to die

11.
ave
cruelty violence cadmium
red ave
the north wind, droplets
of blood, it is not clear whose
ave
reason is but a nasty disease
a taut thread
the head of five

and probably the fifth
you're definitely the fifth
I must be drunk already
since today
is a great national holiday
the thousands dead
sing the ceremonial
songs
it's worth keeping someone
in touch through pigeon mail
it's worth being somewhere
being with someone
the loneliness of migrant women is so similar
to the usual one
I don't miss you
I miss the teahouse
near the puppet theater

12.
some Kyiv woman tells me
let me lick
you in the bathroom
says "he couldn't get it up because the bombs were falling"
I see her in the red light
next to my neighbour, who yesterday wrote to me, "I like you"
I so want a warm tongue between my thighs and I so want
to have a conscience

13.
and probably at home
the windows are still covered with cupboards
pills are crammed in the drawers
above the figurine, for almost a month
the lamp has not glowed
my paintings have probably already dried
and the glass of oil has grown a film
and the floor has forgotten the rhythm of my feet
there, nobody dances and the windows don't blink
the smell of spring laps at the front door
the fridge shuts its eyelids
it no longer hums
the bed is getting bored
the bathroom is like a white desert
and the lonesomely turning ceiling

nobody burns
with their calm gaze
with their peaceful gaze
at home there is soulless
lead
instead of fresh branches of sagebrush

14.
don’t worry about me, better to
take the photo naked
I’m so good at lying to everyone
“I’ll call you later”
when rusty nails poke into buttock flesh
when masturbating opposite each other and
there’s a call on the phone from “mother”
when I leave in the morning without saying goodbye
and the curtain is open, the apartment is in smoke
when I see dogs in people
who do you feel sorry for - the animal’s torn paws
headphones in both ears
how the government will work it out
how children will die
the entire country will see
their limbless photos
and some of them wanted
to be famous
and someone was born
to a mother killed in the middle of childbirth
and someone was conceived under fire
I only think about this when
it is as if
mile-long fingers
reach my uterus I
yelp
you try to hold me
feel half a litre of fluid
lead me down the stairs
let’s fuck in the lift
I see severed arms in the mirror
while you caringly lick
there is not enough air
I hear sirens and screams
I ask you to write me a will
bury me near snopkiv park

you feel it too
in the lift
does it smell like lungs?

15.
I say - killing is good
for the purposes of the twisted ideologies
of the patriarchy.
I say - you're happy
you have to be
with my knife beneath your ribs.
I say - move closer to me
with your hips.
in circular motions.
I say - a lie is a guarantee of
trust,
I say - eat sand to your heart's content,
drink your oil.
grandma will make jam
from the remnants of cosmonauts.
modern heroes are too posthumous,
the villains are living,
birches are green.
in the ceilings of red bars,
in clubs, stinking of weed,
every mouth smacks of blood.
every dream is an echo of home.
and my excitement falls,
I'm on the stairs again,
some old tobacco remains,
ashes rise from my knees
to the sky
far away, all of us
just for a moment, pause
in the engine.
an emergency brake,
I'm fined,
I'm a wreck,
I'm an enemy and a brother,
I'm smoke,
a flower bud,
and I'm only air.
open your light.
and I will blow up everything there.

16.
war does not have a woman’s face
I’d be lying if I said the machine gun
doesn't suit you but it
divides
your body in two and air
escapes, a terrible flood
flows toward you
I’d be lying if I said
that in your words I hear myself
because I got scared and you
stand immovable with chipped
nail polish under the sleeves
of a green uniform
war does not have your face
but it has your hands

17.
where else should I kiss you?
you saw, on the treetops
instead of sneakers hang machine guns.
you saw, instead of paintings I look
at fresh corpses.
how can we embrace without sex?
where then, should I put my hands?
you say you don’t see the cruelty
in my heart,
my cruelty is subtle
a sharpened blade,
and it goes
sideways.
the road is long,
my boots are cold,
like a wounded bird I’ll fly
through security.
I’ll pick up crumbs,
break the fence and scream
collapsing in front of the embassy.
the yellow walls are talking to me,
I beg forgiveness from the sun

18.
tomorrow was the war

today exists within an hour
yesterday the coffins smoked
today the graves bloom
to dissipate completely naked
to fall asleep in a strange apartment
to exchange bodily fluids
for these forty minutes
you are my family

19.
is slavery is just as free
as a train to Poland and giving birth
on the last platform at seven o’clock?
as the mothers who swing their fists
and thirteen hours standing in the aisle
of a motionless train
with despair and hope for a peaceful destiny
hearing children’s cries for half the day?
I think if I would have been braver
would have taken up arms
It wouldn't be so embarrassing
I just want
out of carnality and stupidity
to get to Warsaw and fuck
someone from the homeland
and from the bed, to go volunteer

20.
I enjoy the pictures of mutilated bodies
and have completely lost my shame
people whose hands are stuck in flowing blood
lie in pieces on the soil sprinkled
with our grief
my sociopathic tendencies have become
understood by all
cats and mothers cried
a new sea
rivers of doubt were dispelled by yesterday’s storm
I enjoy leg chunks
and to every fallen bastard
freedom above all
the nation at the gate
a nation with three hundred and sixty-seven revolutions
my brothers and sisters

keep me sane
grief has woven us all
into an impossible knot, living
bodies
into a volcano of barely living
dreams
into stones and an eternally burning
flame

Transleted by Anna Nunan

13. HANNAH UNKNOWN THE HUNGRY WALLS



Hannah Unknown, a writer from Donbass. I was born in a small town among factories. When I was very young, I didn't think there was anything higher than a heap and deeper than a quarry that was close to home. Even now, when I got acquainted with the Carpathians and visited many fluffy peaks, I sometimes ask myself: "Is this grief really higher than a heap?".

In 2014, the war threw me out of Donbass, and I saw many other cities and towns. But I was always drawn back to the mounds and steppes, to the abandoned gray factories and tall brick pipes. I returned as soon as the opportunity arose and realized that the heart forever belongs to this land and I will dedicate my works to it.

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

“The war turned my life around and made it more painful. It took away from me things and people that were very important to me. But at the same time, I realized that I would not survive and find a place in this new world if I did not build resistance within myself. And I found it—it’s my creativity, imagination, and the tools that help to sculpt works from it all. And another goal: not to allow Donbass to be culturally and spiritually abandoned for others, to create a mystical and strong image that will look at us through all the wars and not be erased.”

ANGRY WALLS

Synopsis: We all remember Anne Frank's diary. Heartfelt, creepy and so relevant in our modern times. The war in Ukraine turned Donbas, which was occupied 8 years ago, into a real field for experiments, where no one cares about people's interests or desires. They became the raw materials for this war. They are human beings, however. Alive human beings who feel everything.

Now, imagine a small apartment and an ordinary miner's family of four different people, where the father rejoices in the war, the son is afraid of it and hides from mobilisation, the daughter hates it, and the mother is torn between them and cannot find a place for herself among her relatives. The war inside, behind the four walls, is raging at the same time as everything is burning around. The illusion of security is destroyed when it becomes clear that they don't need bombs and missiles to destroy each other.

This story is about how important it is to nurture a human being in yourself while you are devoured by such a monster as war.

Isolated districts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, known as ORDLO. A small town in Donbas, surrounded by waste piles and pipes of dead factories. An ordinary two-room apartment in a Soviet-type block of flats where a family of four lives: a mother, a father, a brother and a sister. War in Ukraine, March 2022.

Act one — Day one

8:00 am. Brother and sister's room. A narrow single bed on which a girl sleeps. On the floor, at the side of the bed, a boy in a long T-shirt and shorts sits on the mattress, looking at the window, listening and nervously biting the nails on his hand. The window is covered in two layers of curtains so that almost no light penetrates into the room, except for a narrow ray of the sun.

Alya woke up from two things at the same time. From a soft push of the sun on the face and a harder, persistent one on the shoulder. When the push repeated, she opened her eyes, lazily brushed everything off and covered her face with the blanket.

ALYA: Zhenya, leave me alone, I want to sleep!

ZHENYA (*with obvious anxiety*): Alya, Alya, wake up. Look out the window. It is important! You need to look now. Quick!

ALYA (*tiredly*): Oh, I'm fed up, Zhenya. It's all clear to me, but…

Outside the window, which began immediately behind the thick curtain, old ladies crowded with five-litre water bottles. They were vividly talking about something, but there were no military officers among them. All of a sudden, a crazy and rather cruel thought occurred to Alina.

ALYA (*carefully looks out the window through a narrow gap between the curtains and shouts in a half-whisper*): Zhenya, Zhenya! Quick! Lie down before they see you!

At that very moment, Alya jumped away from the window and crept under the bed in a crouching manner. Zhenya immediately rushed to the room door, then flew into the bathroom and quietly latched the door.

Having lied under the bed for some time inhaling dust, Alya rolled out from under the bed and climbed onto the mattress. She looked at the dust that danced in the narrow ray of the sun and listened to the muffled conversations of the ladies outside. Soon, they also died down. Alya stayed there a little longer, then sighed deeply, got up and left the room. She approached the door to the bathroom and tapped softly with two fingers.

ALYA: Zhenya, can you hear me? Forgive me, it was a little joke. All clear — no strangers. Get out quickly before dad wakes up. You know him...

But as soon as she stepped away from the bathroom, the door to the parents' room opened and she heard a metallic clang: the wheelchair of their father, Valeriy Mykhailovych, appeared first, then, his feet in grey chequered slippers and sweatpants, carefully placed on special steps, came into sights, and finally, he showed himself — with a gloomy and stern face. Having overcome the jagged doorstep with some effort, he cursed quietly.

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH: Has he been using the bathroom before everyone else again? (without waiting for an answer, he shouted) Come on, get out of there, no one has come for you yet! They wouldn't even take you as a gift. You'd better take the garbage out, your mother is tired of dumping your shit.

Zhenya, red and pale at the same time, opened the door and rushed into his room. His sister closed the door quietly behind them. The guy sat down on the mattress again and cast his usual look at the window.

ZHENYA: Look, he won't understand that I am not going to take the garbage out, go to the store, or go out to fetch water. This is not because of laziness, but because they are catching men everywhere now. You go to get bread — you are taken to the recruiting station. You take the garbage out — you fall right into the hands of the commandant... I'm like an animal here. A sick cow attacked by wolves.

ALYA: Zhenya, I understand everything. You know. No one wants to deal with freeing the free. I have never seen dirtier work in my life.

Alya shook her leg sadly, pushing the backpack that was hanging on the chair and repeating well-learned soothing phrases. The same scenario occurred every day, and sometimes it seemed to her that all of them, like actors on stage, were rehearsing the same sad roles.

ZHENYA: Alya, do you know what's the worst thing about this? Your close people can betray you. That's what happened to Mishka. He went to work until his neighbour ratted him out because she has a son — THERE. She had not seen him for more than a month. And now, instead of feeling sorry for the other one, she ratted him out... She called somebody and they came to pick him up.

Zhenya's voice became colourless as if he were recounting the plot of a long-known but little-loved film... Behind the door, there was a rustling — the father of the family was moving around the apartment, making his way between the furniture and cursing quietly. Suddenly, the screeching of wheels sounded very close — behind the door, and then it opened wide: behind it, there was the father in his wheelchair. His face was still angry and sullen.

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH: Listen, my son, our protector. I haven't seen you doing something, except staring at the phone, for a long time. Did you come to us? You did. Are you eating my food? You are. You use electricity and water, but we don't take a penny from you. So be so kind as to help your father at least once a week. Come on, get up, take away all the pots, bags and junk from my way so that I can move normally. It's worse here than in the mine (*he cursed loudly to lend his speech more credence*).

Suddenly, behind the father's back, their mother Mira appeared silently. Her faded yellow robe gleamed in the darkness of the hallway like a rescue flag. She really came to the rescue. As she has always done in this house for almost two months since the beginning of the war and forced mobilisation.

MIRA: Valeriy, why are you getting hot? Why are you getting at the kids? Come on, you better go to the kitchen, I made you coffee and toast there.

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH: The defender barged in... (*the father waved his hand angrily, fell silent, and then suddenly pulled out his index finger and poked it at Zhenya*). You, come on, clean the rooms so that your father can move around the house. And you (*he pointed his finger at Alya*) go to the store, buy what your mother says.

Everyone began to move little by little. Alya was changing her pyjamas to trousers and a jacket, Zhenya started moving chairs, taking out bags, shoes and everything else that prevented his father's heavy wheelchair from turning around. Mira and

Valeriy went to the kitchen and the fragments of their dialogue could be heard from time to time.

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH: Do you think that I wanted all this? I wanted to live freely... But this war has been going on for so many years. Who have I brought up — one is a coward, the other is... a Nazi.

MIRA: Valeriy, what kind of Nazi? They are still kids. They grew up in another epoch. You'd better eat and drink. The price of coffee has gone up.

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH: So, what do you suggest? Not to buy coffee? It's wartime, so it's natural. Everything is getting more expensive. It's good that the bread is still at the old price, and they will decrease it later. Don't worry, we will have a good life. I am telling you.

MIRA: Well, thank God we are not bombed. There are so many killed soldiers, though. These are all mostly young boys. And what are you saying to Zhenya?

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH: If everyone is hiding, who will protect the homeland?

MIRA: To protect from whom, Valeriy?

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH: From the Nazis. What, are you with them too? Don't you know what we are fighting for? The more of them die, the calmer it will be for us.

MIRA: Oh, Valeriy. I am a mother, and mothers never wish death on anyone. There is a saying: if during the war you wish death for someone else, be ready to give the life of your son. And I'm not ready.

The conversation flows smoothly to the crunch of the toast and the sipping of coffee, but no one draws any conclusions. The atmosphere of questions with no answers prevails this morning. Boxes were moved quietly in the hall and rooms, and the rustle of a broom could be heard. Suddenly, the lock clicked and Alya rushed into the flat shuffling with packages.

ALYA: Fuuuuuh! Spring is there! The flowers are everywhere!

She cheerfully looked at Zhenya and jokingly winked at him. At that moment, Zhenya was tense and was not looking at Alya, but at what was behind her. There was no one there, but his tension subsided only after the front door closed tightly, cutting off the wet walls of the entrance hall and the danger it was hiding inside.

Alya, pulling on her sneakers one by one without using her hands, immediately dragged the bags into the kitchen, shouting loudly:

ALYA: Mom, the sausage price went up, so I bought another one. I also bought bread, cabbage, millet, oil and candles just in case...

In an instant, the girl put the food onto the table, simultaneously looking at her father's face and trying to capture his mood. But he was leaving the table and manoeuvring silently towards his room. When Alya and Mira stayed in the kitchen alone, their conversation immediately turned to whisper.

ALYA: Mom, they are catching everyone near "Zirka" and near the shop. I hear they go around the private houses and take the guys up .

MIRA (*clapping her hands*): Well, what's to be done? First shelling, then this! They've gone totally crazy. They use us here the way they want.

ALYA *(leaning closer to her mother*): Listen, mom. I want to go to Serhiy. I haven't been to his place for five days. He turns off the phone — he's afraid... Well, I also have to take food, sandwiches, and water to him. He goes completely crazy there, it's good that he doesn't drink vodka.

Mira silently agreed and glanced at the kitchen door: it was locked. Alya immediately started cutting sausage and bread and putting them together. She carefully wrapped everything in baking paper and took apples and some potatoes.

ALYA: ... it seems he still has some cereal. I've recently bought some. But I'll take more...

The girl was packing her bag and thinking that she was terribly tired. She felt like a stranger in her home, family and, even more so, in her city and region. Her friends were on both sides of the frontline, fighting or hiding at home. In her soul, hatred and thirst for revenge reconciled and lived side by side with pity, empathy and the desire for an end to the war. But it was still far from the end, moreover, peace did not come even in her own family.

There was a strange feeling prevailing in the girl's soul. It exuded impotence, but at the same time, this was what stimulated her to action. Alya tried to do at least something not to feel so senseless and useless, not to lose her identity and not to lose the feeling that she is a human being.

Finally, she gathered everything she thought was necessary: bottles of water, cans, and packages of food sticking out through the bag.

ALYA: Mom, I'm leaving. I'll be back in an hour.

Four hours later. It's evening time. Alya returns from her friend Serhiy and hears screams from her apartment from afar. There is light coming from the windows and the curtains are open everywhere, which is suspicious. From a distance, it is impossible to make out what they are shouting about, but Alya instantly figures out what it means. She immediately rushes into the flat, opens the door wide and a while later looks around searching for her brother with her eyes.

Alya ran into the kitchen and spotted something odd. On the floor, dumplings were scattered everywhere, covered with narrow strips of mayonnaise and ketchup. It looked like a picture painted by an abstractionist artist who suffered a sudden attack of inspiration.

ALYA (*whispers*): Did Van Gogh come here?

MIRA (*hearing what Alya said*): This is not Van Gogh. Your father's gone mad!

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH: Have I gone mad? Seriously? Women are completely stupid, I see! One hides under the skirt, another takes sausages to a similar namby-pamby, and the third one covers everyone. I have a good family, all defenders of the homeland. But if they weren't THERE, we would have been completely destroyed by now!

ALYA (*can't stand it*): What homeland? What protection do we need? We lived a good life, I had a country! The whole country, and now I have nothing!

MIRA: Valeriy, Alya, stop it, why are you...

ALYA: Ask him! He is our father but treats us worse than strangers. He has pity for no one. He had pity neither for himself working in that mine, nor for you, mom, nor for Zhenya and me!

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH: Hey you! You snotty youth! I did everything for you, I did it for this country, and what do you do to me?! I barely got my pension from this cursed country, and you say..!

ALYA: And what did this 'new' country give you? More than usual? Are you still waiting for

'cutlets in the canteen for 10 kopecks'?

The curtains and even glass in old wooden window frames tremble from cursing in the kitchen. In this scream and noise, the family does not notice how a green military vehicle quietly drives into their yard and stops at the nearby entrance. It is exactly where Alya came out five minutes ago twisting an empty bag in her hands.

Soldiers get out of the vehicle and go straight to the house. In some time, they come back, leading a tall thin man by the arms.

ALYA (*pressing her nose against the glass*): That's... That's Serhiy... But how?

MIRA (*approaches Alya*): It's okay, sweetheart (*pats her daughter on the back*). There is nothing you can do, they got him.

ALYA: But how is it possible? I just went to see him.

They both look out through the dirty glass. They see how the man suddenly stops and asks something. They untie his hands and one of the soldiers reaches into his pocket and hands a cigarette to Serhiy. He raises it to his mouth, says something, even smiles, when suddenly he is hit in the stomach and bends in half. The cigarette falls out of his mouth. The man is dragged into the car. The doors close, the engine roars, and after a couple of minutes, things are as usual in the yard: children are playing football, old ladies are humming on the bench, and the first bees are buzzing near the blossoming apricot trees.

Alya squats by the window, hugs the cold battery and begins to cry. Suddenly, she hears her father's voice behind her.

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH: They finally got this idiot. I remember how nasty he was with me last month when I asked him to help me with the electric shield. He was so arrogant and now look at him. He was turning up his nose at me. A big shot.

ALYA (*sobbing and rubbing her nose, turns to her father*): Did you rat him out? He will die there. But you, you, you... How could you?!

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH (*cursing Alya*): How could you, how could you... I could! They took him away. He should do good and not offend the cripple.

ALYA: It's you! YOU! You need to be taken there! I wouldn't wait and ask where you are and what you are doing there. Even rockets won't hit someone like you!

ZHENYA (*quietly, almost to himself*): Serhiy has trouble with his legs as well...

ALYA (*hearing Zhenya's words*): Does he care about anyone other than himself?

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH: I raised bastards! I raised traitors. Go to your Ukraine, stand against your father, against your mother! And you... You won't be sitting here if you were a real man.

There is a rising tide of horrible insults once again. Different beliefs of family members cross like swords. They cross not just words, but flags, their views on life and on the world. They hate each other forgetting that they are a family. Forgetting that they are human. Suddenly, one quiet sound brings them to their senses. The entrance door closes carefully. The lock is being bolted and quiet steps are heard down the concrete stairs.

ALYA (*as if coming to her senses*): Mom? Is it you? Where are you?

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH: Where is she going?

ZHENYA: Where has she gone? It's 9 pm! It's curfew time.

ALYA (*opens the door and runs out to the entrance, then to the street*): Mom! Mom! Where are you, mom?

The yard greets her with darkness and evening chill. It is empty and there is no one there.

ALYA (*confused, throws words into the darkness*): Mommy, Mommy...

Act two — day two. Night turning into the morning.

It's a deep night. No one is sleeping in the flat, everyone is sitting in their rooms. Father Valeriy, having thrown his clothes into the wheelchair, is lying on his bed and looking at the light of the lantern — the only one in their yard. His face is tired and haggard. Every wrinkle and every grey hair seems to be highlighted. His legs lie a little unnaturally, without moving, like the legs of a broken bird.

Alya is lying in the room she shares with her brother and looking at the ceiling. Zhenya is doing the same. It may seem that they are looking at the same place — at a small dark spot that stands out against the white background. But they both see their own picture.

ALYA: Do you remember that we called it a bunny?

ZHENYA: I do. I even remember where this spot came from.

ALYA: Yes, our neighbour Olena flooded us and mom kept explaining to me that it was the rain that came to visit us. "It will just come for a short visit and leave!" — she was trying to soothe me.

ZHENYA: Will come for a visit and leave. Well, it left, didn't it? But the bunny stayed with us. Our mother is a great tale-teller.

ALYA: At five in the morning, I will go to look for her. She had never done this before. We made her do it...

ZHENYA: I'm going with you. Don't try to persuade me, I've already made up my mind.

ALYA (*tiredly*): Where are you going? You must have forgotten how other people look.

Zhenya (*after a pause*): You know, that's right. I forgot. Recently, I fantasised about going to the store and buying wine.

ALYA (*interrupts with interest*): Wine, why?

ZHENYA: I don’t know why. Probably, this is a sign of a prosperous life for me. Of having a healthy and free life. So, I imagined how I would go to the cash register to have the product scanned, and I would pay for it. Or maybe it will be a small shop and I will put crumpled banknotes in the window with the phrase “Give me…”

Alya and Zhenya suddenly finish the sentence together, in unison: “...a bottle of that red Chateaux Rouge!” (*they pronounce the last word with a clear French accent*).

ZHENYA (*laughing*): You remember everything, I knew it. Well, I’m trying to say that I wouldn’t be able to go into the store now, I wouldn’t be able even to peep into the store under the house. It’s like… Over these two months, I forgot how to do such simple things. It probably sounds silly, because there, at the frontline...

ALYA: It’s not your fault. But yours too. By staying here, we all supported what was happening and approved of the new government. But you know, this is still our land, no matter who is at the helm. It is as it is, just like the people here are who they really are.

ALYA (*keeping silent*): I won’t be able to sleep. I will wait until five in the morning and will try to find her. You stay at home, it would be too much to lose you too.

They both tossed and turned in the absolute darkness of the room, trying to fall asleep and not think about where their mother was wandering. Suddenly, they were brought out of their half-asleep by a sharp and distinct knock on the door. More knocks followed immediately. Someone was knocking hard and confidently and it was definitely not their mother.

From behind the door, they heard: Open the door, people’s militia! (and again a loud knock).

ALYA: Lie down, hide, I’ll open.

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH (*opened the door of the room and hissed*): Don’t come to the door, I’ll open it. Where is Zhenya?

ALYA (*hissing back*): Just try to rat him out.

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH, without even looking at Alya, went to open the door. Behind the door, in the dim light of the porch lamp, there were two tall men in military uniform with weapons, and between them, a hunched, small and sad Mira was staring somewhere into the void.

MILITIA: Yours?

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH: Yes, this is my wife, I will bring the documents now.

MILITIA: You don’t need to go anywhere, stand still. Is there anyone else in the house?

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH: Well, my daughter Alina (*points to the depth of the hall, Alya comes closer*).

MILITIA: Are the men of legal age?

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH: No, the three of us live together, the son works away from home.

MILITIA: So can we have a look? (*the man takes a step towards the threshold*).

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH (*in a shaky, uncertain voice at first, but then in a firm and clear voice*): N-n-no, there are only the three of us here. Me, Mira and Alina. My wife and I had an argument, so Mira left at night.

MILITIA: What did you argue about? Different political views? (*with a biting smile*).

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH: No, it’s just... I was wrong. I made a big mistake.

ALYA (*startled*): Mother, come in. Maybe you will come in too? Let’s drink tea!

MILITIA: No, we are on duty. Bringing home all kinds of women. How many of them are still walking the streets? And you (*addresses Mira*) don’t go out after nine o’clock, and better after seven o’clock in the evening. Otherwise, you may not live to see the morning. It’s wartime, but you decided to take a walk.

When Mira entered the house, and the door closed behind the people in green uniforms, everyone felt relieved. The relief fell with an almost audible sound, splashing across the old floorboards and splattering everyone in the room. Valeriy Mykhailovych relaxed in a wheelchair, Mira leaned against the wall, and Alya went down the wall and hid her face in her knees. The pause lasted a long time until the door opened and Zhenya came out.

ZHENYA: Mom, dad... Let’s go drink tea. I’m tired, I’m really tired.

This startled everyone. Mira unlaced her boots and walked into the kitchen, and in a minute, she heard the hissing of an electric kettle and the soft crunch of sliced bread. Everyone reached for the light of the kitchen lamp and the smell of food, for that eternal maternal magic that all loving mothers are capable of. The smell of butter, green tea with lemon, black bread, the warmth of a native home — all this filled the kitchen to the brim and made people real and honest with each other.

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH (*turning to Alya*): Alina, it wasn’t me. I didn’t tell anyone about your Serhiy. I wouldn’t be able to.

VALERIY MYKHAYLOVYCH (*after a pause)*: I would like you to go to Ukraine, Europe, or any other place. And you, Zhenya, when everything calms down, too. You, young people, have nothing to do here. There is nothing to die for.

ALYA: No, father, now we will all be here as one family. One family. And while war gnaws at us, we will strive for peace inside.

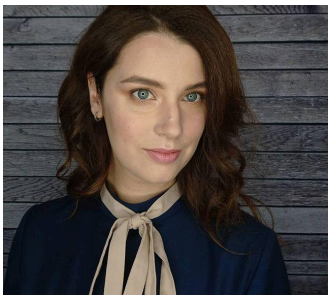
There is a pause, which is diluted only by the murmur of tea pouring into cups.

MIRA: I saw three hedgehogs on the street, can you imagine? They were running one after another near our house!

ALYA: Oh, Mom, Zhenya and I were talking about the bunny on the ceiling. Do you remember what you said then...

The conversation stretches on and is interrupted only to drink hot tea, bite into crusty bread and smile. Overhead, over five-story buildings, Russian fighter jets fly one after another and carry death, clutching it in their steel teeth, further and further. They fly over one scorched piece of land to destroy another. Darkness descends, leaving behind only frightened people, broken houses and empty hopes. Will this small Donbas family succeed in defeating the darkness in themselves, or will they devour each other for different desires and views? It is unknown. They may have won one round, but there are many more to come.

14. KATERYNA GODIK AND YAROSLAVA MURAVETSKA "GOOD BOYS LIKE TO DISPERSE RIOT POLICE"



Godik Kateryna. She was born in 1989. Ukrainian writer and literary critic. Her debut collection of poems "Lost Memory" was published in 2012. Winner of literary prizes of Smoloskyp publishing house. In 2019, Kateryna visited the author's residence "House of the Author" (Zakynthos Island), where she wrote the novel "Ithaca and Other Stories".

For the past seven years, she has been researching the topic of human self-destruction in Ukrainian and Russian literature. The title of her dissertation is "The Concept of the Devil in the Works of Russian and Ukrainian Writers of the First Half of the 20th Century." She noted that the human tendency to self-destruction in various forms is manifested in the literature of many other countries.

Because of the war, Catherine was forced to leave Kyiv. She now works at the Hermann-Lenz-Stiftung writers' residence in Munich. He is working on a selection of poems, as well as on the publicist book "Four Conversations about Pain or How We Got to War". Kateryna is also researching the UPA archives at the Ukrainian Free University.



Murovetskaya Yaroslava. Literary critic and writer, therefore, I write both works and works. She was born on November 22, 1991 in the city of Kryvyi Rih. In 2009 she graduated from the Kryvyi Rih Regional Boarding School (KOLIS), humanitarian class; in 2015 she received a master's degree in "Literary Creativity, Ukrainian Language and Literature", Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. In 2019 she defended her dissertation on the theory of literature on "Visual forms of representation in realistic prose (based on the work of Ivan Nechuy-Levytsky)", since then she has been a junior researcher in the Department of Literary Theory, Taras Shevchenko Institute of Literature Of Ukraine.

Winner of the "Pen Test" competition (2009); published in the magazine "Classmate" (2005); in the collective collections of poetry "Pen Test" (2009), "All-and-Dance" (2012, 2013), "Connector" (2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015), "Language of Heaven" (2019, bilingual, Ukrainian -Georgian edition); in the newspapers "Literary Ukraine" (2012), "Literature and Life" (2014). She has worked in the art residencies "House of the Author" (Zakynthos, Greece, 2019), "Hermann Lenz" (Munich, Germany, 2022). I am currently publishing works on the Poetry of the Free portal, as well as on my own Facebook page, working on a series of poems "Jesus was born in Bucha" and editing the monograph "Visual Code of Realism of Ivan Nechuy-Levytsky".

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

“Frankly speaking, the war for me did not begin on February 24, 2022, but, metaphorically outlining, the emptiness in my soul the size of the Crimea, Luhansk and Donetsk regions increased to the area of the whole of Ukraine. But, along with sadness, despair, and rage, there was hope that this time we will win. We will win forever, without ‘repetitions’ of the notorious ‘lessons of history’, without regular ‘special operations’, without the dominance of the ‘Russian measure’, without theses about ‘fraternal peoples’.

“In fact, the more you delve into Ukrainian literature, into Ukrainian history, not distorted by imperial discourse, the more you realize that the struggle for the freedom of Ukraine has never died down. And you understand that in order to win, everyone must reject the ‘inferiority’ imposed by Russia. After all, will a really strong state kill the citizens of another country, destroy culture, destroy museums and temples, burn books or exchange them for sugar? Will generations destroy artists if their works do not carry deadly meanings for the empire?”

GOOD BOYS LIKE TO DISPERSE ANTI-RIOT POLICE

He was a good boy, he liked to disperse rallies

(from obituary)

Characters

A boy who liked to disperse anti-riot police.

A boy who liked to disperse rallies.

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse rallies.

Chorus of a concerned society.

Blind justice.

Citizen Sk in the role of prosecutor.

A man from the secret laboratory.

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse anti-riot police.

A nameless Pole in the role of a lawyer.

Archivist.

French politician.

The Pope.

A man from Tver, who saw with his own eyes.

The wife of a boy who liked to disperse anti-riot police.

Lukashenko.

The court clerk is in cahoots with common sense.

Act one. The prosecution

Blind justice: All rise for the court!

Clerk: We are hearing a case about the murder of a boy who liked to disperse rallies by

a boy who liked to disperse anti-riot police. This matter is obvious to me, so I am asking

the prosecutor, a disrespected Citizen Sk who plans to inflate it to an international scale, to read it out loud.

Citizen Sk: They crucified a boy in panties.

Clerk: We have been considering this case for eight years.

Citizen Sk: Objection! Oh no, I've brought the wrong papers.

Lukashenko: I have a word to say. They were preparing an attack on Belarus. I will show you four positions on the map from which they were supposed to attack us. If there hadn't been a pre-emptive strike done 6 hours before that...

Clerk: Who gave the old man these pills again? Get him out of the courtroom.

Citizen Sk: Objection! It's an open trial.

Lukashenko: We didn't start this war. But there will be no trial without us. I will not let them make decisions behind our backs.

Clerk: Let's get back to business.

Citizen Sk: Well. On March 20, this drug addict and nationalist committed an unprecedented atrocity. This man entered the house on Peace Avenue and saw the

victim, who was peacefully loading the coffee maker. The victim politely greeted him and asked how he was doing. In response to this, this sadist grabbed a knife and stabbed him 25 times without any hesitation. After that, he did not call an ambulance and went away. The victim died in agony, as far as I understand. And without a doubt, he got to Paradise. On the same day.

The Pope: They don't admit to Paradise so quickly.

Citizen Sk: This was an unprecedented case.

The Pope: Well, yes, yes.

Citizen Sk: The victim had a mother, a sister and two dependent children. He had no savings, the last thing they received from this wonderful man was 60 kilograms of things. Some are very worn to holes. It testifies to the good nature and natural modesty of the victim's family. They never asked too much of him. But now they have nobody to ask even for so little. The state, in order to ease their plight, provided a 20% subsidy for cold water and garbage collection. They just need to have their house put on cold water supply. Please give the floor to his mother.

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse rallies: My son was a kind and sensitive boy. He

served in the Russian Guard and liked to disperse rallies. On holidays, he went to the Divine Service. Recently, he got promoted for overdoing the beating plan. Beating people, I mean. We were very proud of him. Sometimes, he brought various gifts from work. It could be a phone or sometimes earrings. My daughter was always happy about it. You know, his work was difficult. Sometimes people complained or sometimes he had to work during holidays. Especially the last couple of years. Someone posted something and he had to stand there in the frost. Beating, then packing to the police van - it's so hard. You know, grave risks. These extremists sometimes walk around with pepper spray. One old woman knocked off three of his friends like that. They wanted to get compensation from her, but the truth is nowhere to be found.

Chorus of a concerned society: Lord, what hard stuff are you consuming?

Citizen Sk: Shut your filthy mouths! You are always trying to fence your cronies off.

Chorus of a concerned society: We don't have any cronies here. And if we had, sometimes your cronies aren't yours at all.

Clerk: But that question is rhetorical. Let's get back to the case.

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse rallies: Yes, I have more to say. He was my third son. The other two are considering quitting their jobs. Taking into account

what is going on in the Russian Guard, what can they hope for? They came to rescue, but they were killed instead of being greeted with flowers. I don't know how to live on. Maybe the children will go to Poland after forty days of prayers. They will pick strawberries. Maybe they won't be killed there.

Chorus of a concerned society: You can't know for sure. You can't know for sure.

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse rallies: The bastard didn't even ask for forgiveness. He said that we robbed him. Oh Lord, how is it possible? My son came to save him, but he didn't want to be saved. How should I live now?

Citizen Sk: Tell us about the main thing.

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse rallies: Yes, yes. It is important that we are relatives. They are cousins. Everything happens in a family, you know. Well, he did mess up his face, but it was because of love. We all knew that there, they used drugs to become nationalists. My son had to save his cousin. In such a situation, to give a punch in the face means to bring to senses.

Chorus of drug addicts: Recommend a good dealer.

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse rallies: Before that incident, we all went to

church. There, the priest said that bringing relatives to senses is a God-pleasing deed. Even if by showing a good example.

The Pope: Have a heart!

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse rallies: And now I see my sister who gave birth to this freak. And she doesn't apologise either. It used to be different. When she went to France or to Germany, she always brought us something. We were very close as families. Everything had been perfect until 2014 when they all got addicted to drugs and became nationalists. After that, she sent money to us, some small gifts for our birthdays and some trifles to my granddaughters. Well, why couldn't they tolerate that their relatives could have a different point of view? Why kill? (*she bursts into tears*).

Citizen Sk: As you can see, the case is clear. He must be sentenced to life imprisonment with full confiscation. I would take away not only the coffee maker but also the toilet and maybe even the identity.

Blind justice: Is there anything to add to the accusation?

Chorus of a concerned society: This murder raises our concerns. We don't know what to think. They lived in peace for three hundred years until they were bedevilled. You can't think of any other explanation.

French politician: Dear judge, why are we listening to this? This is a family affair. What if one person kills the other one? They are cousins, it happens.

Clerk: The court shall now have a break.

Act two. The defence.

Blind justice: All rise for the court!

Clerk: We have already listened to the prosecution. Now let’s listen to the defence.

Citizen Sk: You haven’t heard everything yet. We still have something to say.

Clerk: You will say it later. A word to the Polish lawyer.

Lawyer: Your honour, with all due respect to the court, this is absurd. It’s a clear-cut case. The man came home, saw that his wife was beaten and tied up, and there were no children around. It’s good that the neighbours hid them. And the deceased... I have to say only good things about him. Actually, only because he is dead. He was packing the things that belonged to the accused. My client rightly believes that the coffee maker would not be the last thing on this list. I must note that he did not immediately attack the deceased with a knife. He first asked what was going on because they had known each other for a long time. And he said that he came to release him. However, he later clarified that for this he had to be killed. And his wife - it would depend on the situation.

Citizen Sk: Objection! Sometimes death is liberation. He would have gone to heaven. Now,

he will definitely be in hell.

The Pope: We have a common cross to bear.

The Representation of the Satan Church: But there is nothing to be afraid of. It was worse in Bucha.

Clerk: Let’s get back to the case. So, what happened next?

Lawyer: Then my client saw broken dishes and scattered clothes. He realised that the deceased had been at his house for a long time. It also seemed to him that his wife was unconscious. He wanted to help her, at least untie her. But when he tried to approach her, the deceased threw a knife at him. He missed, though…

Citizen Sk: Because he did everything so that civilians would not be harmed.

Lukashenko: It was simply a pre-emptive strike. I know what I'm talking about.

Lawyer: Then a fight broke out between them. My client was also injured and now has to undergo a rehabilitation course. As for the victim's death, it did not come immediately. He died in the ambulance, which was called by my client.

Citizen Sk: If it was so, they would have saved him. Unless you only have drug addicts working in an ambulance.

Chorus of a concerned society: We have repeatedly appealed to them. The state doesn't give it out to them.

Lawyer: By the way, talking about drug addicts. The examination showed that the deceased was under the influence of a narcotic substance. We don't know where he got it. He probably brought it with him.

Citizen Sk: This is slander.

Clerk: It is not. The expert opinion is attached to the files.

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse rallies: This cannot be true. We are Orthodox. We go to church every Sunday. While fasting, we do not eat sausages. There can't be any drugs.

Clerk: Being Orthodox doesn't prove anything.

The Pope: Be courteous. They have a common cross to bear.

Clerk: Lawyer, do you have anything else to say to the court?

Lawyer: Yes, I have materials that confirm the involvement of the deceased in the systematic beating of citizens of different, I am emphasising this, neighbouring states. His employment references are undoubtedly exemplary. The management notes that more than once, they issued him bonuses and thanks for the tension and high risks. He was awarded the employee of the month title more than once. They are now going to name a street in his honour.

Not in their city, however. No complaints since 2014 at his workplace. But after we started this case, I received over 50 letters from people he allegedly beat. We will figure it out. I can add copies of statements, X-rays and MRIs to the case.

Clerk: Could you clarify it for the court what kind of references he had prior to 2014. He was old enough to have some other jobs before that.

Lawyer: The reference from his previous job is also attached to his files. The city of Kyiv, special police units, Ukraine. In fact, everything is the same. But with spelling

mistakes. Apparently, the human resource manager did not understand Ukrainian well.

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse rallies: Yes, he changed his place of work in 2014 when Yanukovych left. There was a coup there. What else was he supposed to do?

Lawyer: In addition, it was established that the victim managed to take out more than 60 kilograms of things, including 10 kilograms from my client's apartment. There are no complaints from others, but we are still looking for them. I am also attaching a video shot made by a hidden camera at the crime scene.

Clerk: Bring the video to the studio.

The court watches the video. A woman opens the door for the man, he hits her with his butt, ties her up and starts actively taking things away. He smokes something and periodically drinks from a bottle, probably alcohol. Then a second man comes and tries to help the woman, a fight begins, then one of the men gets up, phones somewhere and provides help to both the attacker and the woman. Then the attacker is taken away by an ambulance.

Secretary: Any questions?

Citizen Sk: You saw, the woman voluntarily opened the door for him.

Lawyer: They knew each other well.

Citizen Sk: If she had felt threatened, she wouldn't have let him in. As there is no sound in the video, we can assume that she said something to him that provoked him.

Lawyer: But the fact of robbery.

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse rallies: What robbery? We are relatives. Don't you know that relatives have everything in common? They lived a little better than us, so they had to share.

Lawyer: What do you mean?

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse rallies: I'm telling you, we're relatives, they're cousins. My son could have had a better life if he hadn't been forced to move to Russia. And he moved because of him. Because in 2014, this bastard wrote a statement about the beating. Allegedly, during the dispersal of the rally, my son injured him and his young wife. These shameless people brought certificates and even some X-rays. But it's a family matter, why was it necessary to wash dirty linen in public? I could understand it if he had beaten a German or a Frenchman. But these are relatives. They could have come to an agreement as family members.

Lawyer: I would like to give the floor to the wife of the accused. She is a witness in this case.

French politician: That's right because not everything is clear yet. Everything is highly ambiguous.

Clerk: The floor is yours.

The wife of the boy who liked to disperse anti-riot police: Your honour, thank you for providing me with the opportunity to speak. We have a really complicated family history. My husband and I met in 2012. In 2013, we went to the Maidan protests together. In general, everything was good. They had good relations with the deceased and with his mother, too. They were very supportive of Yanukovych. I personally didn't like it, but you know, in the family people don't talk much about politics. Everything was fine until November 2013. The deceased and I met informally, so to speak. Actually, I didn't recognize him right away. In just a week, it turned out that he was part of the special police unit which dispersed our protests. My husband, then still a boy, met him after that, they had a fight, and then there was enmity between them all the way to the end of the Maidan protests.

Citizen Sk: It was then that Nazism was conceived among them.

The wife of the boy who liked to disperse anti-riot police: Since that time, my husband likes to disperse various kinds of anti-riot police. We resumed communication with the deceased in 2016, we had to save his mother. We helped them with a small amount of money. We decided not to talk about the past at family gatherings, as it was a family matter. They are cousins.

The Pope: They have a common cross to bear.

The wife of the boy who liked to disperse the anti-riot police: It was like that until the end of 2021. Sometimes we talked, and more and more often, the deceased was picking at us because of various nonsense. For example, he was obsessed with drug addict squads in our country.

Citizen Sk: He knew what he was talking about.

The wife of a boy who liked to disperse anti-riot police: The Nazi president was his great concern. Then NATO or rotting Europe. Somehow, everything was our fault.

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse rallies: So what? Doesn't the child have the right to his opinion? He gave you some advice as an older family member. There is nothing bad about it.

The wife of the boy who liked to disperse the anti-riot police: I thought so too, until February 2022. It all started with threats at the beginning of the month. He wrote to

us urging us to surrender. Then he asked to send some money because his salary got delayed. Then he asked for money to buy flowers for his mother. Then he disappeared. He came to us on the same day. My husband had left some time before. I opened the door for him only because I recognized his voice. It's clear that I thought he wouldn't do anything bad to me because he's a cousin. But he called me a Bandera's bitch and hit me on the head. I don't remember anything else. Later, my husband helped me come to my senses.

Chorus of a concerned society: We are deeply concerned. These family stories are so horrible. So many skeletons in the closet. We will never know the truth.

Lawyer: Maybe there is a question for the witness.

Citizen Sk: How long have you been on drugs?

The wife of the boy who liked to disperse anti-riot police: I don't do drugs.

Citizen Sk: Do you understand that you provoked the victim? If you had been communicating with him in the right way since 2013, nothing would have happened. He wouldn't have lost his job in Ukraine. Your actions turned him against you.

The wife of the boy who liked to disperse the anti-riot police: Could you tell me, please? You annoy me too. Can I hit you for that? Moreover, you constantly insult me and my family. Can I give you the same answer?

Citizen Sk: No, because the truth is on my side.

Clerk: We are done with the questions.

Lawyer: I would like to speak to the defendant's mother.

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse anti-riot police: Honourable judge. I watched that video 80 times. My heart bleeds for my sister and my children. But they could not do otherwise. That fool would have killed them. Maybe I shouldn't say that, but a similar story happened with our friends. They decided to obey their elder family members. It's been nine days since they were buried. Take into account that we had more than a month of the war. That the relative of ours was from the invading army.

Citizen Sk: Objection! They are liberators.

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse anti-riot police: Yes, they freed us from mobile phones, water supply and garbage disposal. To put it briefly. Under these conditions, it was only self-defence. Moreover, my son managed to call an ambulance. He would have been saved if his friends had not fired that ambulance at the checkpoint.

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse rallies: It wouldn’t have happened if he hadn’t attacked him with a knife.

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse anti-riot police: It wouldn’t have happened if your son hadn’t gone around other people’s houses with a machine gun.

Clerk: Everything is clear. Let’s give the floor to the accused.

The boy who liked to disperse the anti-riot police: I don’t regret that it happened. I regret that we resumed communication after 2014. So, he had the impression that someone was waiting for him there. That someone here would still listen to him. And if I had broken his jaw back then in 2014, he would have become disabled and now he would be alive and drinking beer at home. And yes, we would have kept all their lives. And it would have cost us less.

Clerk: The court shall now have a break.

Act three. Public opinion

Clerk: All rise for the court! It’s time for others to speak.

Chorus of a concerned society: We are deeply concerned. The story is shocking. Back in 2014, we expressed concern about such conflicts. Maybe we should have acted earlier. Before the crime of murder was committed.

Lukashenko: I said, it was a pre-emptive strike, four positions, I’ll now show them to you on the map.

Clerk: The court shall now have another break.

Chorus of a concerned society: No, no, we’re too concerned. We can’t wait any longer. What led these two good guys to such a final? Let’s figure it out. There must have been some problem.

Clerk: The floor is given to a citizen of Tver.

A man from Tver: I have never been to Ukraine, but I saw everything with my own eyes. They bullied us there. They always hated us. Because of them, we could not get up off our knees. Because how can you get up off your knees when someone in a neighbouring state is cooking scrambled eggs on the monuments of the liberators?

When they rename streets. I saw on TV that they walk with torches. And their holidays are also imported, there is nothing sacred there.

Lawyer: Did you communicate with the citizens of this country yourself?

A man from Tver: What for? Everything was so clear. They are non-humans. They can exchange a brother for a coffee machine.

Lawyer: So why, in your opinion, did the deceased go to Ukraine?

A man from Tver: So that NATO does not come.

Lawyer: How could he help?

A man from Tver: Well, he didn't allow it. And then, they had nuclear weapons there. And bio laboratories to exterminate people. I saw it myself.

Lawyer: By the way, you will be interested, there is a representative of these laboratories here.

A man from Tver: Well, we always knew it.

Clerk: The floor is yours.

A man from the secret laboratory: Your honour, the defendant is my nephew. I really work in the bio laboratory of the National Academy of Sciences. We have had a lack of funding for ten years. But even with the lack of funding, we remain people with common sense and a connection to the real world. Including a scientific one. We have never heard of such delusions as those laboratories. Especially about pigeons that spread the disease.

Citizen Sk: But theoretically this could be done.

A man from the secret laboratory: Theoretically, with such technology, we would poison ourselves.

Citizen Sk: But the neighbours would also be affected

Lukashenko: Yes, they could hit us. Something had to be done.

French politician: Yes, everything is ambiguous.

A man from the secret laboratory: Everything is clear here. Take our reports, everything will become clear to you. That you and I are not like pigeons. I submitted the reports to the judge. But I can also send them to you.

Citizen Sk: Are they in Ukrainian? This is extremism.

A man from the secret laboratory: I translated them into Latin for you.

The Pope: That's right.

Citizen Sk: And how should I read it?

The Pope: That's your cross.

Citizen Sk: OK, the question regarding bio laboratories is off the table. There are 200 pages of the report. They didn't have time to work.

A man from the secret laboratory: We fulfilled the plan. But I'll tell you about it some other time.

Chorus of a concerned society: We are deeply concerned. As it turned out, there were no laboratories. What about nuclear weapons?

A man from the secret laboratory: Physicists had no money for travel at all. But if you don't believe them, go to Kyiv, they will show you everything. Just drive through Irpin.

Chorus of a concerned society: So, there are no nuclear weapons either.

Lawyer: I will tell you more, they are not admitted to NATO. I am one of them.

French politician: They are not admitted to NATO. But it is not so clear.

Clerk: This question is off the table.

Chorus of a concerned society: So, what did that man die for? What did they fight for?

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse rallies: He should have set him on the right path.

Lawyer: In what way? The deceased lived much worse than them.

Citizen Sk: Honest people live in poverty. He cannot afford to buy different things with a small salary. All kinds of American coffee makers, toilets, etc.

Lawyer: The coffee maker was German.

Chorus of a concerned society: Did the coffee maker cost him his life?

Lawyer: There was no objective reason for the deceased to believe that his life could have been endangered. If he had gone to my client's apartment without beating his wife, no one would have harmed him. Moreover, there is confirmation that money was actually sent to him in February. That is, theoretically, he could have gotten help in this house.

Chorus of a concerned society: We are deeply concerned. Maybe he was tricked, maybe he followed an order.

Lawyer: Apparently not. Because he sent the looted property without any order. He knew where he was, what he was doing, and what was the state of affairs in the country. It is because of family ties. It seems that the burglary was the only motive.

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse rallies: So, my son died just for a coffee maker?

Chorus of a concerned society: Your son was killed for a coffee maker. He accepted his death for the coffee maker...

The Pope: I have a word to say. These women actually bear one cross. A big holiday is coming soon. I suggest that they come to the Vatican together and carry their cross together to reconcile. The whole world will understand.

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse rallies: I will not carry anything with her. They are disgusting to me. They don't respect us. They do not instil respect for older relatives in their

children.

A man from the laboratory: Oh, go to hell.

The mother of a boy who liked to disperse rallies: That's what I was talking about.

Archivist: I brought one interesting document (*hands it to the clerk*).

Clerk: Oh, you are not relatives. The mother of a boy who liked to disperse rallies was adopted in 1982.

French politician: This fundamentally changes the case. But we still need to conduct an examination. Not everything is clear. We don't know the truth. We should not make hasty conclusions.

Chorus of a concerned society:

Your son was killed for the coffee maker,

There's an embargo on coffee in your village.

No more coffee for you.

Citizen Sk: I am against such consideration of the case... There is not only brotherly love, even towards non-relatives. One has to be a truly great man to love non-relatives in a brotherly manner! There is nobility in that. But there is still love for

the motherland. He loved it, he served it and he died for it. And if his motherland gave him such an order, he had to fulfil it.

Clerk: There was no order to steal coffee machines. You limited yourself to genocide.

Citizen Sk: Yes, even more so. This is a great sign of humanity - not to kill, but to steal. His friends were less human and they returned home intact. Without warning, though.

Clerk: Warning of what?

Lukashenko: I said about a pre-emptive strike. They were right. They did everything on time! I will show you four points from which this defendant had to strike Belarus.

Clerk: He committed the murder with a knife.

Lukashenko: Of course, because we made a pre-emptive strike.

Chorus of a concerned society:

We are very concerned about this man’s health

Where in his head is that pre-emptive strike?

Their son was killed for the sake of a coffee maker.

The same awaits those who returned home.

Clerk: The court will now take the matter under advisement.

Act four. Announcement of the sentence

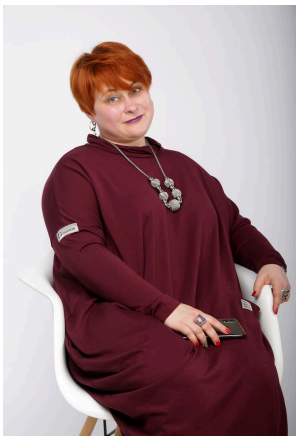
Blind justice: All rise for the court! I ask the defendant to stand up for the announcement of the sentence. Since you suddenly turned out not to be relatives, many facts of dishonesty were established on behalf of the prosecution, as well as facts of violence against your family and facts of robbery. Yes, the post office of Belarus provided us with invoices and a photo report. The court dismisses the charges against you in this case. It was statutory self-defence. The family of the boy who liked to disperse rallies will be charged compensation that will cover the value of all looted and damaged property.

Citizen Sk: We will file an appeal.

French politician: Yes, not everyone understands yet.

The Pope: Everything is obvious, but they still have to bear their cross.

15. JULITA RAN "TWO SKETCHES ABOUT THE WAR"



Yulita Ran (real name Yulia Taranenko)

She was born in Kharkiv in 1977. She worked on TV, in the print media, was a screenwriter, journalist, host of the author's TV program, studied at the Kharkiv Law Academy. Yaroslav the Wise. In 2007 she graduated from Kharkiv National University of Arts. I.P. Kotlyarevsky; by profession - director of drama theater, master of theatrical art. She taught at this university, worked in private and children's theaters, including her own. As a director and / or playwright she has collaborated with independent and state theaters, creative groups in Kharkiv, Poltava, Dnipro, Chernivtsi, Turin. As a writer, translator, and literary editor, she constantly collaborates with several Ukrainian publishing houses, including Ranok, Chitarium, Assa, and Georges. Author of more than 25 books for children "Magic Things", "Traveling Tales", "Don't be afraid", "Stories of Princesses", series "Fairy Adventures of Fairies", "Detective Cat Alf", "Squirrel looking for his job" and others), more than 40 texts for the theater, embodied on various stages. UKF expert of two terms.

In 2020 she won the competition of librettists within the First All-Ukrainian Music and Theater Laboratory EAST-OPERA for the libretto of the opera "Green Circle" (composer - Dmitry Maly). In the same year, the play "On the Wave" (drama and direction - Yulita Ran) Poltava Regional Academic Puppet Theater won the nomination "Best Play for Children" All-Ukrainian Theater Festival-Competition "GRA".

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

“How has my life changed since February 24, 2022? The war started for me 8 years ago, and I was sure that sooner or later it would turn into a full-scale offensive, but of

course I was not ready for it to be such a full-scale and such a brutal offensive. I spent 48 days in Kharkiv during the constant shelling and bombing of the city, trying to help everyone I could and do what I could at the time. In mid-April I left for Poltava, where I am now, collaborating with the Poltava Puppet Theater and engaged in active volunteering.”

TWO SKETCHES ABOUT THE WAR

This text was written for the Kharkiv Puppet Theatre as a basis for a performance that can be performed in front of children in bomb shelters and the subway because during the war it also turned into a huge bomb shelter. However, it (the text, not the subway, of course) can be read and staged anywhere.

Combat bird battalion

Characters:

SERGEANT-GOOSE

GEESE

SPARROWS

LITTLE DUCK

SNAILS

SERGEANT GOOSE and GEESE appear.

GEESE: Hey, winged creatures, let us fly!

We will take it to the sky!

It will help us light the way!

SERGEANT: What is that?

GEESE: Faith in victory each day!

SERGEANT: Eyes front! Attention! At ease! Battalion! Are you ready to accomplish the assigned mission?

GEESE: Always ready!

SERGEANT: Let’s get over the briefing! If we see an enemy plane in the air, we…

FIRST GOOSE: Take off!

SECOND GOOSE: Surround it!

THIRD GOOSE: Attack it!

SERGEANT: Training time! Let’s get started!

A plane appears. Geese surround it.

FIRST GOOSE: Listen, don’t you think you’re a little lost?

AEROPLANE: Err...

SECOND GOOSE: Your route is that way! Following the ship, see?

AEROPLANE: Uh-uh-uh…

THIRD GOOSE: What are you babbling? I can’t get it. Guys, let’s help the plane!

GEESE pick up the plane, twist it in the air, turn it upside down and throw it away.

AEROPLANE: Ah-ah-ah!

GEESE: We’ve closed the sky! High five, bro!

SERGEANT: So, guys, hit the road! Watch the sky over Kharkiv and other Ukrainian cities! To the ghost of Kyiv our goose...

GEESE: Greetings with a feather!

SERGEANT: As you fly past Taras, tell him to put his cover on.

FIRST GOOSE: Which Taras, sergeant?

SECOND HUSAK: Our Shevchenko, the Kharkiv one. He keeps putting his cover off all the time. He wants to see when it will all end.

SERGEANT: Well, actually, tell him to cover himself while the people - with the help of birds - fulfil his will!

Snails appear, slowly crawling to perform some important tasks.

THIRD GOOSE: Sergeant, let me ask!

SERGEANT: You may ask!

THIRD GOOSE: Who is crawling there?

SERGEANT: Tssss! Don't scare them! This is SOF - the special operations forces of Ukraine, a special unit of secret service snails. Their slogan is: we came quietly - we left quietly. You guys, if needed, give them cover from above.

THIRD GOOSE: At your orders, we'll give them cover!

SERGEANT: The last briefing - and it's time for you to board! Oh, what do I see? (*to the audience*) We have newcomers! So, will you join us, friends? I don't hear! Will you join us? Well, let's fly!

THE SERGEANT AND THE GEESE play a game with the audience, showing the children what they need to do with active movements.

SERGEANT: Do you know what's our strength?

Spreading wings at whole length!

We become tough guys at once

Waving wings is like a dance! /*they wave their hands like wings*/

Train your neck day and night,

Left to right, left to right.

Back to forth, back to forth

It's for better, not for worse. /*they make appropriate neck movements*/

If you are a decent goose,

Train your bottom not to lose!

One-two-three, one-two-three,

Move! Now freeze like a tree! /*they perform movements in the “twerk” style*/

All my orders follow now!

I’ll show you what and how!

Wings! Neck! Wings! Bum!

Neck! Bum! Wings! Wings!

We can do so many things! /*they do everything in turn*/

GEESE fly away to fulfil the tasks.

SERGEANT: There is always a queue of volunteers willing to join our bird battalion. So, who is there today?

Sparrows fly in.

SERGEANT: Oh, well done, sparrows. Do you have combat experience?

SPARROWS: Yes, sir!

SERGEANT: How can you prove it?

SPARROWS: Have you heard the story of how one woman shot down an enemy drone with a can of tomatoes?

SERGEANT: Who hasn’t heard it?

SPARROWS: Actually, it happened this way!

An honourable lady was sitting on the sofa,

or rather, on the balcony, she was sitting once.

The drone of the enemy was flying all around,

the secret information it may have tried to find.

The lady wasn’t startled, but just a bit surprised.

Why are you searching there? What have you, brat, devised?

She quickly grabbed tomatoes and made a random shot!

The flock was flying closely and saw how hard she fought!

We caught the can in seconds - the target was attacked!

SERGEANT: All right! I'm taking you to the bird battalion! You will work together with the tractor battalion.

SPARROWS: With a tractor one? And what kind of battalion is this?

SERGEANT: The tractor battalion is responsible for everything that lies in the wrong place. Or stands. Or floats. In a word, as soon as some combat tractor notices an accidentally forgotten orc tank, what does it do? Right! On the hook - and into the corner!

SPARROWS: What's our task?

SERGEANT: Your task is to conduct an air survey and report to the tractors if something stands in the wrong place. Or lies. Or floats. Is it clear?

SPARROWS: Yes sir!

Sparrows fly away.

LITTLE DUCK appears.

LITTLE DUCK: Is this a recruiting centre of the combat bird battalion?

SERGEANT: A secret biological weapon! Finally! We have been waiting for so long! Battalion, come here!

The sparrows come back and line up with the geese.

SERGEANT: So, ready to go?

LITTLE DUCK: Aww, you're all so strong, what if I get lost?

GEESE: We'll catch you up!

LITTLE DUCK: Ahhh, you're all so brave, what if I get scared?

SPARROWS: We'll cheer you up!

LITTLE DUCK: Aww, you're all so skilful, what if I can't do it?

GEESE: We'll teach you!

LITTLE DUCK: Ahhhh, what if we don’t win?

SERGEANT. The combat bird battalion always wins! Because we have spring in full swing! We still have to make nests and raise chicks here, on our native land. There is no doubt about it!

BIRDS: Victory will be ours!

The bird battalion goes on a mission singing its song.

BIRDS: Hey, winged creatures, let us fly!

We will take it to the sky!

Biological weapon!

LITTLE DUCK: What?

BIRDS: Hey, winged creatures, let us fly!

We will take it to the sky!

It will help us light the way!

LITTLE DUCK: What?

SERGEANT: What?

BIRDS: Faith in victory each day!

Faith in victory each day!

Volunteer cats

Characters:

KITTY WITH PHONES

KITTY THE COOK

GREY CAT (in boots)

CAT THE DRIVER

The action takes place in the volunteer hub with the sign ‘RAT’. The hub is full of boxes, packages and bins.

KITTY THE COOK washes the dishes and purs under her breath:

Furry kittens, volunteer cats,

Grey, striped and white,

Working day and night,

Furry kittens, volunteer cats!

KITTY WITH PHONES appears. She holds several phones (at least three) and uses each in turn.

KITTY WITH PHONES: Tourniquets? We’ll do it, I’ll write it down. Armour vest? No doubt, we’ll do it. A radio? No problem. Elven steel? Excuse me, but why do you need elven steel? Ah, it lights up when orcs approach. Just a minute.

KITTY WITH PHONES turns to KITTY THE COOK. Listen, do you know where we can find elven steel?

KITTY THE COOK: Do you remember when someone brought us a unicorn horn? It seems to be someone from Poland.

KITTY WITH PHONES: Okay, who do we have in Poland?

KITTY THE COOK: Now we have half of Poland in Poland.

KITTY WITH PHONES (*into the receiver*): We’ll do it, no doubt. Glory to Ukraine! (*turns off the phone, but the other one rings immediately*). Hello! Humanitarian hub. What happened? It can’t be true! Seriously, the loads got mixed up? Did the colouring books go to the National Guard and the load-bearing vests go to the children in the bomb shelter? Hell’s bells! Oh, sorry, I wasn’t talking to you. Don’t worry, we’ll fix it. (*turns off the phone, to KITTY THE COOK*) Listen, how could this happen? Well, I remember for sure: cardiac medicine went to old ladies, diapers and baby food to mothers, potatoes and carrots to the Territorial Defence kitchen, hay and nuts to the zoo, colouring books to... Sure thing! Colouring books - to the National Guard, and load-bearing vests — to the kids. Hell’s bells, they got everything mixed up!

KITTY THE COOK: That’s not a big deal, we’ll build our volunteer chain now and fix everything.

KITTY WITH PHONES: Who are we going to build it with? All our volunteers left with loads!

KITTY THE COOK: Anyone can be a volunteer. (*to the audience*) Friends, would you like to volunteer for a moment? Help us? You see, things have gotten a little mixed up at our volunteer warehouse, and shipments can go to the wrong place. Please help us sort the humanitarian aid boxes properly, okay?

KITTY THE COOK and KITTY WITH PHONES play the game “VOLUNTEER CHAIN” with the audience. The cats create a “volunteer chain” of children, in which children pass boxes to each other. Boxes may have different inscriptions such as “MEDICINE”, “CLOTHES” and “FLOUR”, or may differ in colour or size. The children’s task is to sort the goods into two or more piles according to certain characteristics and to stack these piles as neatly as possible.

During the game, CATS sing a song.

Furry kittens, volunteer cats,

Grey, striped and white,

Working day and night,

Furry kittens, volunteer cats!

This box goes to the left, this box goes to the right,

Help is not a miracle, help is a great delight!

We’ll neatly pack the things and deliver them on the wings!

Helicopters, belts and vests — we respond to all requests!

Furry kittens, volunteer cats!

KITTY WITH PHONES: Thank you, dear volunteers! It has been a long time since our warehouse was so beautiful and orderly.

CAT THE DRIVER appears. He carries a pile of boxes.

CAT THE DRIVER: Good afternoon, is this humanitarian hub ‘RAT’? I brought you some humanitarian aid!

CAT THE DRIVER dumps his boxes right in the middle of the place which has just been cleaned.

KITTY WITH PHONES: I haven’t seen you before. Well, tell me the password.

CAT THE DRIVER: Palyanytsia.

KITTY THE COOK: This password has been invalid for a long time, you would better wrap yourself in yellow tape. (*to KITTY WITH PHONES*) Well, kitty, call 102!

CAT THE DRIVER: Girls, what’s wrong? I am a friend. I forgot the password. Wait for a second: a red-haired, pretty vixen put on a short skirt, baked a crumbly palyanytsia, uses Ukrzaliznytsia and spouts complete nonsense!

KITTY WITH PHONES and KITTY THE COOK: It’s our cat! Well, why didn’t you say it right away? Are you hungry? We have coffee and sandwiches!

KITTY WITH PHONES: What did you bring us? What’s in these boxes?

CAT THE DRIVER: You’d better ask what is not there!

KITTY THE COOK: New planes from NATO?

CAT THE DRIVER: I’ll tell you a secret - they are there.

KITTY WITH PHONES: But they don’t give them to us.

CAT THE DRIVER: Yew! Why do you need volunteers? But we already bought everything in Lviv and brought it to you. The only thing is that the cats from Territorial Defence disassembled them a little. It’s now like a LEGO constructor. They hid it in the humanitarian aid: something is among the diapers and something is wrapped in socks. In a word, disassemble, assemble it, and I am leaving — I still have food for dogs to deliver in two districts.

CAT THE DRIVER leaves.

GREY CAT in boots appears.

KITTY WITH PHONES and KITTY THE COOK: Grey Cat! Dear! Are you hungry? We have coffee and sandwiches!

GREY CAT: No time for sandwiches! Our flags fly over the city, and our brothers need a warhorse for the front lines. I mean a car.

KITTY WITH PHONES: I am ordering it right now. (*dials a number*)

GREY CAT: There is no money.

KITTY THE COOK: I'll launch a fundraising campaign (*texting on two phones at the same time*).

GREY CAT: We have to sell something at the auction... Oh! Right! You can sell my boots!

KITTY THE COOK: Oh no, Grey Cat, these are the legendary boots. The whole world knows you as Cat in Boots.

GREY CAT: I hoped that the world would know me as a Cat the Poet. But no... Okay, it's already warm, I can wear trainers. And I'm putting the boots up for auction! The starting price is 1000 hryvnias! We need to collect 50,000! So! Boots of the Grey Cat the Poet. 1000 hryvnias - one! 1000 hryvnias - two! 1000 hryvnias...

KITTY WITH PHONES: (*all this time was typing texts on phones at crazy speed*). The fundraising campaign is closed!

KITTY THE COOK: What?

KITTY WITH PHONES: That's it, you said you need to collect 50,000, your boots were bought for 50,000. Warrior cats will have their own car!

GREY CAT: And all of us — we are getting one day closer to victory! Well, now we can have coffee and a sandwich.

KITTY THE COOK: What sandwich! There are three hundred hungry kittens sitting in the subway, we need to bring them hot borsch, and it won't cook by itself!

GREY CAT: Friends, it's time to cook volunteer borsch!

KITTENS and CAT conduct the game "VOLUNTEER BORSCH" with the audience.

The cats show the children different products, the audience shouts "Yes" or "No", and the cats put only what they need into the pot.

If you want to eat a lot

We will need a cooking pot.

In the pot, we'll cook for groups

/*turns to the audience*/ Borsch — a famous beetroot soup!

Well, let’s cook borsch!

Volunteer soup is delicious,

Fragrant and nutritious.

But how can we choose

What to add not to confuse?

Cabbage? Walnuts? A tail of fish?

Will little honey spoil the dish?

Carrots? Lard or kidney beans?

Ice-cream? Chocolate or some greens?

Chunks of ruby red beetroot?

Crispy salad or dried fruit?

Juicy veggies or ripe berries?

Apples, pears, or sweet cherries?

Do not forget tomato sauce!

If you dare, add sea moss.

Salt or sugar - up to you!

Help the cat to make this stew!

Tell us what we might forget

The soup is boiling! And we bet

We have added to the pot

Everything that we’ve brought.

KITTY THE COOK: Thank you, friends. It wasn’t just borsch — it was a dream!

GREY CAT: A dream... Do you know what I dream about? I dream of how we will all celebrate the victory together — all the volunteer cats and those whom the volunteers help.

KITTY WITH PHONES: I dream that after our victory we will rebuild our city. And no one will say: I can’t, I have paws!

KITTY THE COOK: (t*o the audience*) What do you dream about? And you? And you? And you?

The audience responds.

GREY CAT: May all our dreams come true!

The volunteer cats come again to disassemble the boxes and create miracles by singing their little song.

Furry kittens, volunteer cats,

Grey, striped and white,

Working day and night,

Furry kittens, volunteer cats!

Is there something that you lack?

Have you suffered the attack?

Who is hungry, cold or wet,

Facing great and constant threats?

We may help you right away!

There is always will and way!

Water, fish, cereals, shoes,

Hammers, nails and bolts, and screws.

Oranges, tomatoes, salt,

Stocks will never come to halt.

Ladders, wires, strings and tape,

Pots and plates of any shape.

Shirts for toddlers, books for kids,

Fire guns and first-aid kits.

Helicopters, helmets, vests -

We continue our quest.

Furry kittens, volunteer cats,

Grey, striped and white,

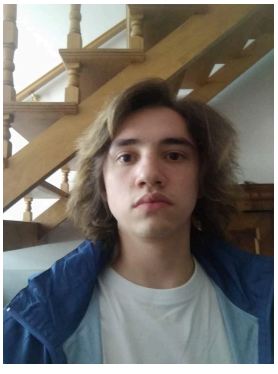
Working day and night,

Furry kittens, volunteer cats!

The end

April 2022

16. OLEKSIY MINKO "ROLE"



Oleksiy Minko

was born in Berdyansk in 2000. He was educated as a puppet theater actor at the Dnipropetrovsk Theater and Art College.

Author of texts on culture and contemporary art. Film director, exconcept maker.t theater company and Theater. Lars von Trier. Explores theatrical and performative practices. From 2015 to 2017 he was involved in actions in Berdyansk and the Dnieper. Author of the films "Torture with a Pink Package" and "Rent". Author of the telegram channel "How many olexies do you see in the picture". Curator of the VULUN educational festival in Berdyansk. Fellow of the Scholarship of the President of Ukraine for Young Artists (theater).

Recent theatrical works:

Reading of the play by Yulia Kholevinskaya “Katyn. Theory of Colors "at the Parade-Fest 2021.

Performance" leave it like this "(2022).

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

“At the age of 13, I enjoyed watching the Revolution of Dignity on television. I was less happy to watch the stories about the war at 14. Apparently, this is due to the fact that I watched them in Berdyansk, near Mariupol. The city was too close to the cities on TV. Studying at the school I was graduating from was an echo of building a new ideology that turned into an ugly monster as a result of symbiosis with Soviet teaching practices. At that time, there was nothing better for me than to fight against any ideology. During several years of war, in the information grinder, I tried everything: from defending the usefulness of the return to Donbass to calls to capture the Kuban. The only thing that united my radicalisms was the desire to become Europe as soon as possible, to meet the level of the European Union. Eventually, I became more pragmatic and patient in this regard, and studying in another city completely shut down the electricity that filled the brain in Berdyansk in the first years of the war. A full-scale war led to the opposite. Idealized Europe has become a sponsor of those who will take away my apartment in Berdyansk at any time for the needs of the inhabitants of the puppet republics. Now I would like not so much to Europeanize Ukraine as to Ukrainianize Europe—to make the protection of Ukraine’s sovereignty the central task of the European Union in all possible ways. But without radical ambitions, just to survive. Since the start of a full-scale war, I survive in order to survive in the European Union after the war. I’m looking for money to rent a room, food, clothes. Almost nothing has changed. But the return to the teenage paradise of the electrified desert of Berdyansk has become more unattainable.”

AMPLUA

Shelter in one of the Lviv theaters. There are mattresses with blankets on the floor. In the corner of the room there is a table with cookies and a kettle on it. A girl:
Maklena Grasa, Maklena Grasa, Maklena Grasa, Maklena Grasa. Now. Maklena Grasa, Maklena Grasa, Maklena Grasa, Maklena Grasa, Maclena Grasa. Here it is.

I have been waiting for an interview in which I will tell you all the nuances. The actress from Mariupol talks about the intertwining of her latest role with Ukrainian reality. CNN. Four minutes of glory.
(imitating the interviewer) How do you feel? Tell us how bad you feel, how much grief you have experienced, tell us about the dead children.
(from herself, with passion) Remember the futurists? War is a part of acceleration, part of technical and then philosophical leap into a fundamentally different future from the current moment. This time is different. Diplomacy is being degraded, Russian equipment is hitting civilians, breaking down, stopping, retreating, freezing together with personnel, being abducted by civilians. Information troops are failing, there isn't almost any new information case. Disappointment in Western politicians, irrevocable break with Russian culture. The war is almost one to one: russian military against Ukrainian civilians. A few days before the invasion I had been performing something similar. The financial crisis of the 20s. Hunger. A tenant tries to ruin a local capitalist, and then tries to kill himself because the bank in which he saved money all his life has gone bankrupt. He tries to kill himself with the hands of a poor family that rents his basement. In a booth nearby there an old romantic lives who is disappointed in his former revolutionary spirit. The main character of Maklena Grasa runs to make a revolution, although she is only 13 years old. She tried to become a prostitute, but eventually chose to become a murderer. Death to all classes, to all class society. Literally. There is no future. It is smeared in blood. This is the Ukrainian dramaturgy. And this is the dramaturgy of Ukrainian history. Three stages of despair. There is no one who can be saved in the play, everyone is doomed to failure. First, the idea of revolution is discredited at least by the fact that it is represented by a typical 13-year-old child. Secondly, the Ukrainian avant-garde is disenchanted with the Soviet future. The promised country's autonomy was a lie, so the work of a lifetime to create an intellectual basis for the young Ukrainian socialist republic is meaningless. Industrialization instead of prosperity leads to hunger, people die on the streets. And the death of the authors themselves within some two to five years. Hopelessness. That is why Kurbas does not give Kulish's sun at the end. Graza had to run east to the Soviets and east to the sunrise. Kurbas just gave a blackout. From the Polish famine to the Holodomor. And the third layer is the layer from under the rubble of Mariupol, Chernihiv, Kharkiv. Even from under the ruins we see the Evil. And it is now also everywhere, from all sides. The best ideas are discredited. And there is no resource to rebuild all the Evil into the Good. There is no will to consistently pursue the alternative. Nowhere in the world.

In such a hopeless situation, I am acting pointwise, like a partisan. What can I do as an actress? I can play. The question is: whom? What is my part?
What is my part? Maclena Grasa is not enough anymore. I want to give more. It's a dead end, I don't know what my part is. Who does society see as a hero? When I want to know what opinions exist in society, I talk to my mother. Mom, who do you see in front of you? Who are your heroes?
Olaf Scholz? That's a very difficult part, Mom. Angela Merkel turns into Olaf Scholz to survive God's test of conscience. Your nation had the main goal of turning Ukrainians into slaves in World War II, but your moral conscience makes you apologise towards Russians who are doing the same! Imagine, that your grandfather killed Ukrainians, and you are forced to blaspheme in front of the heirs of those grandfathers, because otherwise your bloodthirsty nation will have to stay without gas and petrol for a while. In the end you find out that you were wrong and you are torn with guilt. Either you unite with Putin and divide

Ukraine in half, as Hitler wanted, or you play the role of a powerless moron to the end. Maybe someone else, Ma?
LDNr's (The Luhansk People' Republic) "Bagheera"? Russian sniper. Ukrainians got her captured. The story is about how she heroically survives interrogation by the Ukrainian Nazis, gets out of captivity like in the movie Oldboy, goes into a world that was destroyed by a US nuclear warhead and turns into Golum. They look quite similar, by the way.
Mom... Maybe you would like to see me as one of ours? Refugee to Crimea from Berdyansk. Rescued by the Russian army. Mommy, those rescued by the Russian army are lying raped and burned in Bucha. And a voluntary refugee to Crimea can be in a story about principal blindness and deafness. No resistance. What is the conflict then?
Your parts don't suit me, mom.
What should I play?
What did I use to played before the war? The theatre. Now there are mattresses everywhere and a queue at the sockets. Instead of stages, I find shelters. Everywhere I find bodies instead of roles. They sleep, eat, register, get treated, go further or back, stand in queues, register again.
And all of this right there in the theater. I remember the Ukrainian theater before the war. It was a strange place, where even when the PR-man dared to use the word "contemporary", they were making mediocre and bland things that could not start either an internal discussion or discussion in the media or social space. Now the palaces of culture, galleries, cinemas, theaters have turned into humanitarian centers. Do we lose much from this? The theater now, as before, from Mariupol to Lviv, remains a temporary collection of bodies.
Bodies! I am very close to that. This is an actor's theme. People who don't deal with bodies now only encounter liters of blood, which surround their words. Like in the Gospel: the word became a body.
I am learning the language of war. It is the language of dead bodies. Contemporary Ukrainian drama is written by dead bodies. Maybe I have no part to play now, but in this case, there is one monologue for me.
I would like to play all those bodies that gather in places like this place. Or in the Mariupol theater. I would like to play the diversity of bodies that gathered in the Mariupol theater. Yes. I have no choice. This is the only thing I can play. This is the future that I already know. I will play a mass grave.
When I was preparing for the role of Maklena Grasa, I was constantly crying coming across the history of Kulish and Kurbas. Old colleagues after a series of disappointments in the ideals of life, deportations and several years of concentration camps met in front of the pit that became their grave in Sandarmos. I am now in a similar one. I am the heir to the mass graves. That is who I will play. I am handed the treasure of thousands of graves. I solemnly accept it and become part of it myself.
What did Kurbas say to Kulish? Did he mention their "Maklena Grasa"? Did they smile? Did they believe that they could get out? We in the Mariupol theater, for example, did not smile. And we did not think that we would get out. When we listened to the whistle, we just looked at each other and tensed up.
Is there a future? We should ask the past.

Translated by Veronica Skliarova

17. LYUDMILA TYMOSHENKO "My Mum’s Oblivious"

Lyudmila Tymoshenko



Born in North Kazakhstan in 1978. Candidate of Philosophical Sciences, Doctor of Political Sciences. Playwright, screenwriter, artist, lecturer at the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine. Lyudmila's plays have repeatedly been shortlisted for Ukrainian and foreign drama competitions and festivals, including Current Play Week and Topical Play Week. Her drama "Five Songs of Polissya" (2021) won the Grand Prix at the competition "July Honey", won the competition "Transmission.UA: drama on the move". United Kingdom ”from the Ukrainian Institute and was shortlisted for the Drama.UA play competition. In February-May 2022, two premieres were scheduled at the Kyiv and Lviv theaters, which did not take place due to the war.

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

“With the beginning of this war, life changed for all of us. It’s like a turning point in a play, after which nothing will be the same as before. Traumatized, destroyed fate of the whole nation, lives taken away, divorced families. The only thing left for us playwrights to do is to shout about what is happening so that the whole world can hear. I used to write funny lyrics, but now they are scary. You know, I once started writing plays to correct mistakes that happened in my life. My characters do things I never could. And all the bad people I’ve come across also get what they deserve. So now I’m winning the war. And this victory will be devastating, because the truth is on my side.”

My Mum’s Oblivious

My mum’s oblivious. She forgoes all the benefits of civilisation – gadgets, credit cards, electronic tickets. Instead, she smokes normal cigarettes, reads printed newspapers, does crosswords, watches TV. She did not want a smartphone and we were unable to persuade her. For eight years, my mum used an Alcatel push-button telephone, and when it started playing up, she told us that she wanted the exact same one because she had no interest in getting used to a new one. Two months ago, we bought her a new older model Alcatel. Its battery lasts three days.

Mum lives in Irpin. She won her apartment in the ‘Lotozabava’ national lottery. This is just one of mum’s obsessions. She is a risk taker like Phil Ivey. Well, in the sense that she does not gamble in casinos, and she is always collecting bottle caps, ribbons from cigarette packs, milk labels and takes part in everything. Her apartment is littered with blankets, towels, mugs, and other less-needed items she has won. It's not that she's lucky all the time, just that she is someone who plays all the time and happens to win something now and then.

The story of the apartment is really uncanny. My brother, Serhiy, moved away with his family to Kyiv, and then my family and I also moved to the capital. Mum remained in Lviv and was sad. She tried living with us at first, and then with my brother, but she couldn't because she had got used to her ‘way of life’. So she returned and continued to solve her crossword puzzles, watch her TV series and smoke under the extractor fan, rereading Dostoevsky and Tolstoy for the hundredth time. Then, all of a sudden, my mother won an apartment in Irpin.

The whole family helped her to do it up: put up wallpaper, hung curtains and installed lights, a washing machine and a boiler, placed geraniums and fig plants on the window sills. Rugs, towels and other less important things were put in their places. From there the drive to me is forty minutes, to Sergei it is twenty minutes. Mum was happy. She was near her children, and she did not need to change her daily routine. Now and then she chatted happily to us about some open park or square or other that was good for walks and she invited people over to her place.. And she came to us every week. She was happy with the ancient Irpin pines she saw from the window. These pines are the symbol of the city. She said that in all her life she felt the happiest right there and then.

When the war started, mum refused to move in with us. Her habits are sacred. Round one corner is a shop, around the other is a church, a little further is a square and a library, where my mother took a book out once a week. She always puts her newspaper here, and here are her pills, and there is a religious icon.

“Who even needs me? I am an old woman, I have nothing worth stealing. No one will lay a finger on me.”

Then they began to bomb Hostomel, which is very nearby.
“I’m still not going anywhere. There’s a military airbase in Hostomel’, but we don’t have anything like that, just parks and squares.”

Then they began to bomb Irpin.
“Children, leave me in peace, no one will touch peaceful civilians. They need a route to Kyiv. You should move in with me.”

Then, in Irpin they blew up a bridge and damaged the electricity supply. There was no longer any connection to Kyiv.
“Mum, have you charged your phone?”
“Yes, I have.”
“Don’t make any calls, just send texts in the morning and in the evening.”

Then they turned off the water.

“Mum, have you stored some water?”
“Yes, I have.”

Then reports began to come through about the shooting of residents from private homes and photos of bombed-out residential neighbourhoods.
“Mum?”
A day passes without any answer. They start evacuating from the village of Romanivka. It’s a forty minute walk from my mum’s building to Romanivka. There people are led under the bridge on wooden crossings and taken away on buses.
“Mum, you need to get to Romanivka. Go out along the road to the left of the supermarket. Don’t take anything with you, just your documents.”

A day passes without any answer.
“My daughter, I’m fine. I have gas, I’ve boiled potatoes and eggs. All my neighbours who’ve stayed in the building are spending the night because they have an electric stove and I have gas. They feed me red fish and sing and drink cognac.”
“Mum, you need to get to Romanivka urgently, otherwise Serhiy will come to get you and he’ll be killed on the way”.

A day passes without any answer. Photos from Ipin news show families gunned down in their own cars; they tried to break the city blockade and there are reports of numerous explosions in residential areas.
“Mum?”
“Nothing’s changed for me”.
“If you don’t leave today, Serhiy will come for you”.

Two hours pass without any answer.
“My daughter, my neighbours and I left, but they started shooting. We went back home”.

After another three hours.
“They’ve turned off the gas”.

I look at the weather in Irpin. At night, it is minus 9˚C. What the fuck. The next morning I wrote:
“Mum, today is the 8th March. The government of the Russian Federation made a statement that in honour of the holiday they will allow all green corridors for evacuation. Go to the village of Romanivka urgently”.

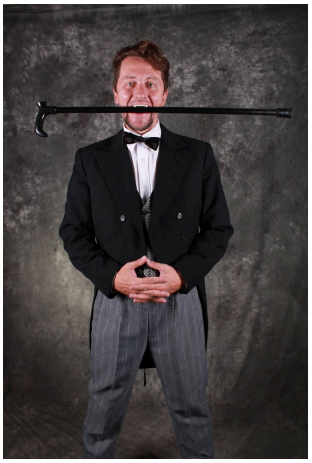
Mum and her neighbours passed through this green corridor during the holiday on the 8th March. The only way the others in my mum’s building were able to keep in touch with the outside world was through her phone. Their smartphone batteries had long since died.. I look at photos of charred pines and houses with vacant eyes. Mum can’t deal with this: she doesn't have a smartphone, and I won't show it to her. Let her remain oblivious.

10.03.22

P.S.: My mum’s building was bombed on the 23rd March.

Translated by Paul Dicks.

18. VICTOR SOLODCHUK "WHERE WE WERE 8 YEARS AGO"



Victor Solodchuk

Writer, poet, screenwriter, translator. He was born on November 10, 1971, in Odessa. He graduated from the Odessa Institute of National Economy (now ONEU). During his studies he was the screenwriter of the KVN institute team.

During the nineties he worked as a specialist in securities in commercial banks and at the same time took an active part in the literary life of Odessa.

Under the pseudonym Victor Mbo was one of the organizers of the countercultural literary magazine "PLI" (1998-2000). He published a number of short stories in the magazine "NASH" (2000-2001). For zero years he lived in Moscow, worked in the field of glossy journalism and participated sluggishly in the literary life of Moscow.

He published a number of short stories and a fantasy novel "Sovpalych", for which he almost received the "Russian Prize" in 2012, at least the book was in the long list.

In 2011 he returned to Ukraine. Engaged in copywriting and UX-editing. Created content for Bosch and Chrysler (2013-2015), wrote 700 lyrics for Apple Music.Participates in the literary life of Odessa, collections and poetry readings. He translated into Ukrainian a number of songs for Odessa musicians.

Since 2015, he has focused on screenwriting. He took part in pitching of the State Cinema of Ukraine.Lives in Odessa.

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

“Life has changed just like for all Ukrainians. The main thing that has changed for me, as an author: increased responsibility. When every poem, story, word can be the last in your life, you try to write as best you can.”

WHERE HAVE WE BEEN FOR EIGHT YEARS

A three-act play

Characters

A n d r i i — paramedic, 25 years old, wiry, 2014 model camouflage, a cap with embroidery - a red cross on a black square background, medical tactical backpack.

Z h o r a — Andrii’s brother, 29 years old, fat, sexy, not without a devil.

D a d — Andrii and Zhora’s father, 60 years old, a stupid, narcissistic man.

P r i e s t — a priest, 33 years old, long-limbed, with a thin beard and sweet eyes.

M u s a — neighbour, 50 years old, patrol policeman.

A s i a — Musa’s daughter, 22 years old.

F i r s t m a n, S e c o n d m a n, W o m a n w i t h a c h i l d,

P o l i c e o f f i c e r s, M a n w i t h a b a n n e r, T a x i d r i v e r, B u t c h e r,

C r o w d.

PROLOGUE

An acquaintance volunteered to join the army. He returned in six months. It is unknown where he was. He does not say what he is afraid of. But he is afraid of something. It may even seem that he is afraid of everything. He left being a normal person. He liked talking too much, though. About everything in the world. About everything that he caught sight of. But he came back completely different as if someone had taken away his old tongue and given the other one in return. He sits all day long on the bed and listens to the demons in his head. The first demon is ferocious, generating burning heat and demanding punishment for all the living. The second demon is humble, talks about forgiveness, speaks quietly and touches the heart with hands smeared with black earth. But the third one is the worst. It agrees with both of them. He agrees and does not object. The headache starts after he hears its voice.

(Serhiy Zhadan)

ACT I

Odesa Region, the year 2014.

Scene one

Railway station. On the platform, the police take two men out of the train car after a fight. A woman with a wailing child follows them, lamenting.

W o m a n. Take the handcuffs off! My husband is the victim! He didn’t start it.

S e c o n d m a n. Who then? Definitely not me! I have a witness! Where is the guy in the uniform?

Scene two

Andrii keeps kicking the medical tactical Backpack on the floor in the empty compartment. There is an insistent knocking of the attendant on the door.

A t t e n d a n t ’ s v o i c e. Soldier! How long will you be fidgeting? Everyone is waiting. You are a witness!

Still breathing heavily, Andrii listens to the noise on the platform.

A t t e n d a n t ’ s v o i c e. Come on, I’m going to bring a policeman.

Andrii waits for a second, grabs his Backpack and runs out of the compartment.

Scene three

On the platform, Andrii slows down his running but walks quickly. Man with a banner ‘Housing by the Sea’ blocks his way.

M a n w i t h a b a n n e r. Hey, guy! Are you tired of living?

Andrii shakes his head in denial. Taxi driver approaches with keys and a cup of coffee.

T a x i d r i v e r. Need a taxi?

Man with a banner turns and hits Taxi driver with the banner. Taxi driver spills the coffee on himself.

T a x i d r i v e r. Are you blind?

M a n w i t h a b a n n e r. Shut up, jerk!

Taxi driver grabs Man with a banner by the shoulders, a fight is about to start, Andrii runs on.

Scene four

Public toilet of the station. Andrii secludes himself in a cabin. With trembling hands, he takes out a syringe, draws up a solution, injects it into his Backpack and lights a cigarette. A smartphone vibrates in his pocket.

A n d r i i. Hello brother. I'm at the station. No, don't come here. I will go through the 'Pryvoz' market to meet you. Plus.

Scene five

The "Pryvoz" market. Meat pavilion. Sparrows chirp under the ceiling. Andrii examines the hanging carcasses.

B u t c h e r. Neck? Fillet? Shoulder?

A n d r i i. Do you have a heart?

B u t c h e r. Boy, what would you need a heart? I'll cut a piece of pork fillet. For free. You need strength.

A n d r i i. Thank you. I need a couple of hearts.

B u t c h e r. Well, as you wish. My nephew is in the 28th brigade. He called me last week and said something hellish had started.

A n d r i i. It’s over already.

Unexpectedly, a raven flying nearby touches Andrii with its wing. Andrii instinctively falls, covering his head with his hands, but quickly gets up.

B u t c h e r. Wow! A raven! It’s clever, damn it. I’ll treat it to some tendrons when it comes back.

A n d r i i. It will not come back.

Andrii grabs the bag of hearts from Butcher’s hands and quickly leaves.

B u t c h e r (following). May God save you.

Scene six

Zhora drives an old pickup truck. Andrii sits next to him, holding his Backpack on his lap.

Z h o r a.... the season started well. Those who used to spend holidays in Crimea, go to Odesa now. Full house! Every cloud has a silver lining, as they say. Listen, something smells in the cabin... Like a rotten egg. Can you smell it?

A n d r i i. It can be from me. It’s been a while since I washed.

Z h o r a. To put it simply, the clients keep coming! But also, you know... Three months are like one day. I need to organise Wi-Fi, hand out bed linen, take them to

the city, the children misbehave... I am responsible for all that. Unless Asia comes. She silently helps, without saying a word about you. But, to tell the truth, I thought about you a couple of times... I was on the beach one and a half times, and that was at night... I barely got to bed in the evening... No, that’s not an egg, a different smell, like blood. Maybe from your backpack?

A n d r i i. What about dad?

Z h o r a. Dad is a different story. First, you dropped your studies... I don’t blame you, brother. It is as it is. Dad didn’t sleep for weeks, watched streams, and tried to spot you on Maidan. At the same time, he was kicked out of work. Because of his awful character, of course. It was when you joined the army. He then called you once and that was it.

A n d r i i. What was it?

Z h o r a. You will see. He is now a believer. He cut down the trees and demolished the bungalows. He is now building a temple. That’s what it is. In the same place where we had a shed — under the old nut tree. The one he burned when he caught us with a pipe, remember? Of course, you remember. How can you forget it? He doesn’t seem to be a good teacher. I’ve been smoking since then, by the way.

Zhora lights a thin cigarette. The car goes out onto the free road leading out of the city.

Z h o r a. He is the shame of the whole village. He is building the temple out of garbage. The temple! Out of garbage! Whatever junk he finds or whatever the sea throws out, he drags home. Customers mocked him - he kicked them all out. The only support he gets is from the priest. He conducts service even there. Of course, to make money.

A police car goes by. Zhora throws a cigarette butt into the window and hits the gas pedal.

Z h o r a. I think he is going nuts little by little. Do you know what he got up to? He was tipsy, but you know... What you have on the tip of your tongue is what you have on your mind… I blurted out that I was thinking of going to work in a normal hotel. A friend of mine promised to get me a job in the hotel ‘London’. That’s a decent level! And dad says: if you are not interested in the family business, just like your brother, I will go to the monastery. And I will give the land to the church. Just think for a second — fifty acres next to the sea! The first line! The priest even choked on vodka because of joy. Since then, he has been following dad like a dog. The devil takes them both!

The sound of a police siren grows louder from behind. Zhora hits the gas pedal to the maximum.

Z h o r a. Maybe you can tell me. How can one be like him? In thirty years, thirty years! He never spoke to me in a human way! Frankly! Zhora there, Zhora here! Damn it, I hate it!

A police car catches up with the pickup truck and orders it to stop. Zhora angrily hits the brakes and gets out, slamming the door.

Scene seven

Left alone, Andrii takes out a bag with hearts and unties the Backpack. The space is filled with the sound described in the Apocalypse: “The noise of its wings is like the clatter of chariots when many horses run to war…”. Andrii puts the hearts into his Backpack and quickly ties it back. There is silence. The reflections of the police flasher walk around the cabin. Andrii presses the audio system button.

R a d i o p r e s e n t e r ... there is an unexpected stagnancy. The Ministry of Defence confirms that yesterday and today in the area of the anti-terrorist operation, not a single...

Andrii turns off the radio. Soon, Zhora is back behind the wheel.

Z h o r a. Oh, what day is today? Okay, let's go. Shall I open the window? The air on the street is pure honey. Indian summer, brother.

ACT TWO

Scene one

A spacious dining room in a folk style. On the wall, a portrait of a young woman in an embroidered dress shows the late mother of Zhora and Andrii. Dad sits at the head of the table, Priest is on the right and Zhora is next to him. On the left, there is Musa in a police uniform and Andrii. A big dog circles around nearby and Dad throws some tasty pieces of food. On the table, there is fried fish, cheese, homemade palianytsia (a loaf of bread), and jugs of red and white wine. Dad and Zhora are drunk, Priest tries to stay sober. Dad and Priest sing beautifully in two voices, Zhora joins in off-key.

The bird is flying home

Having such a need

In the open heavenly dome

It is dashing at full speed.

And on the earth….

Asia comes in and puts roasted chicken and potatoes on the table.

D a d. Asia, join us at the table, daughter. Sit down next to Zhora.

M u s a. She will sit down with her father. Asia, come to me. Andrii, move a bit.

Dad starts the song again, swinging a chicken wing. Priest picks up.

The bird is flying home

Having such a need

In the open heavenly dome

It is dashing at full speed.

And on the earth….

The dog managed to snatch the wing from dad's hand.

D a d. Ah, you bastard! Zhora, get him out of the house. Go away! Musa, are you a policeman now? And why didn't you stay in the firefighting department?

M u s a. It didn't want to sit like that. Because it's boring. There were no fires for two years. Working for the patrol police means movement. Every day brings something new.

Z h o r a. Yesterday, your fellows stopped me on the highway. I thought it was for speeding, but they claimed that I had thrown a cigarette butt out the window. I said I'm your neighbour, Musa. The issue was resolved immediately. They respect you.

M u s a. Don't do that again. A butt may cause the fire.

D a d. Zhora! Are your ears stuffed up? I asked you to lock the dog in the kennel! And to feed it.

Zhora goes out to get the dog. Dad tries to sing.

The bird is flying home...

In the yard, a terrible scream, growling and moaning can be heard. Zhora enters.

Z h o r a. It tore the cat.

A n d r i i. How?

Z h o r a. Like a rag. They have been friends for so many years and now... You left your backpack on the porch. Apparently, Murchyk wanted to get in there. It’s a cat, you know. And the dog attacked it. It’s a pity, the cat was so nice. Your backpack has a bad smell. Don’t you want to throw it in the washing machine?

Andrii quickly rises and leaves.

D a d. Do whatever you wish, but I will finish the song.

A lark, a stork,

An oriole, a linnet

A bird flies from afar

It may die every minute.

Andrii returns with his Backpack.

D a d. Andrii, don’t you sing? You used to be such a good singer... why are you silent?

A n d r i i. I am thinking.

D a d. It is thinking. You had to think earlier. Look here, Father. The return of the prodigal son. I am telling you the truth. The end of time is coming.

P r i e s t. And those people will look for death, but will not find it. They will beg for death, but it will bypass them. The locusts were like horses ready for battle. On their heads, there were something like golden crowns, but similar to human ones.

Priest coughed under Andrii’s watchful gaze and fell silent.

A n d r i i. The locusts’ hair resembled women’s hair, and their teeth were like those of lions. The chests of the locusts were covered with iron shells, and the noise of their wings resembled the rumble of chariots rushing to battle and drawn by many horses. The locust king was an angel of the abyss named ‘Abaddon’.

Z h o r a. Wow, bro! That was cool! Where did you learn that?

A n d r i i. There was a chaplain in the battalion. He read the Apocalypse to me from the Bible. And also - ‘Book of the Dead’, ‘Tao de Ching’ and ‘Hidden by the Leaves’.

P r i e s t. What kind of chaplain is this? Which church?

A n d r i i. I have no idea. But he is a good person. He did not take money for prayers. And also, he said that he who does not look death in the eye every day knows nothing about God.

Dad laughs theatrically. Priest supports him.

A n d r i i. Do you think I’m funny?

D a d. You were funny. When you were a kid, you ran around with a wooden sword. And when you covered yourself with a shield made of plywood from bullets in Kyiv. When the whole world was watching that shame with me. And now you’re not funny. You are scary. I thought you would study and become a doctor.

P r i e s t. While travelling from city to city, Peter happened to visit the believers who lived in Lydda. There, he found a man named Aeneas, who had been infirm and bedridden for eight years. Peter said to him: “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and make your own bed.” And he immediately got up.

D a d. Father, stop it! I’ll figure it out myself. Without snotty-nosed boys. I gave birth to him... (turning to the portrait of the mother). Did you want such a son? Look at him now. Listen, people. I will now tell you something that I have never told you before. After Zhora, we could not have children. But she had a dream. Dream! That another son will be born, and he will do a lot of good to people. You see, my dear, sometimes a dream comes true the other way around. He appeared for the first time in a year... Damn it. I don’t need such a son. Go away! So that I don’t hear or see you here in the morning!

Andrii takes the Backpack and leaves.

D a d. Father, tomorrow we will serve matins in the church, go to the notary and arrange it with the land. Zhora, you will take us there. And now — let’s have a drink. You have a magic touch.

Scene two

The Temple in the centre of the land plot is similar to the Eiffel Tower: seven metres high, assembled in a circle around a tall old walnut tree from different things: pallets for bricks, varnished doors from old cabinets, bed nets, fire shields, marine ropes... Around the Temple, mountains of unused building materials are piled up.

Andrii examines the Temple, raising his head. Asia appears.

A s i a. That’s how I remembered you. You never look ahead. Only to heaven.

A n d r i i. Forgive me.

A s i a. I won’t forgive you until you explain. We are honest with each other, have you forgotten?

A n d r i i. What exactly do you want me to explain?

A s i a. All. Why did you come?

A n d r i i. I was transferred to the reserve. Severe post-concussion syndrome.

A s i a. Well, no, you won’t play the fool with me. I am asking once again. We were supposed to get married in May when you finished your medical school. Why did you come now? In October?

A n d r i i. Where am I supposed to go?

A s i a. Well, I do not know. Do you have someone? How else can you explain it: for six months — no calls, no messages. Do not turn away, look into my eyes. You never lied to me. Tell the truth. Do you have someone?

A n d r i i. Yes. But it’s not what you think...

A s i a. Well, it’s okay. Father told me to forget about you. And I am an obedient girl. I just wanted to see it first. And hear. I have the right to know why I am treated this way. Tell me. From the very beginning. So?

A n d r i i. From the very beginning? All right. You see, Europe is a knight. His helmet is Britain, his shoulder pads are Spain and Norway and his boots are Italy and Greece. And Ukraine is the shield of that knight...

A s i a (slaps Andrii). Don’t you dare! Don’t you dare to treat me like that! I am no longer the girl who listened to elf fairy tales with her mouth open! I am an adult woman! For! Whose sake! Did! You! Forget! Me! Lose your home! Family! Mind! Everything! For what?

A n d r i i. (points to his Backpack). For this reason.

A s i a. So...What’s next?

A n d r i i. Let’s just stand here so that you can see my eyes. To know that I am not lying. And let’s go on without slaps: I don’t care, but you’ll slap your hand away. So. I went to Kyiv to study. Then Maidan protests began. Then Crimea was occupied, the guys went to war, and I followed them as a paramedic.

A s i a. You dropped out of medical school in the last year. Next.

A n d r i i. Do you know how many people I took out from the front? Broken, burnt... I don’t even remember how many. My fellows and the orcs too. They are alive, you know? Those who did not survive left this world without pain.

A s i a. Next.

A n d r i i. We have one chaplain in the brigade. That is, we had... He is no longer alive.

A s i a. Is a chaplain a military priest?

A n d r i i. Yes. But not a simple priest. An exorcist. The one who casts out demons. And he made a kind of trap out of this backpack: first, he read prayers over it for seven days, and then he instilled something there in the grey area. And locked inside. I don’t know exactly what it is. But from that day on, the war seemed to subside - in all sectors. Except for the place where the backpack is. It somehow attracts aggression, you know? You cannot leave it in one place for a long time. The chaplain drove back and forth, and then a sniper shot him. I was there, but what can you do if it’s a direct shot in the heart? Then I started carrying a backpack. Well, not really carrying. I hid in the plantings while the trees were green. Because there are people around. Where there is a backpack, there is discord, fights, swearing... You saw it yourself. I came here as a hitchhiker and I got into three accidents. Well, what’s in my eyes?

A s i a. I don’t know. But at least you believe what you’re saying. Well, what are your plans?

A n d r i i. I don’t know. It is growing. I weighed it. Ten to fifteen grams per day. The chaplain said that a backpack would keep it inside for seven or eight years.

A s i a. Now it’s 2014... but what will happen in 2022?

A n d r i i. I don’t know.

A s i a. I know. I know that you were sent to the reserve by a psychiatrist. My father told me everything. And I also know that in 2022, I will be thirty. So, listen. I don’t know what will happen in eight years but now come with me.

A n d r i i. Let’s go. Where?

A s i a. Let it be one night, but it will be our night. Only ours. Without your backpack.

A n d r i i. I can’t leave it. There are people around.

A s i a. Oh, yes. Hide it in your dad’s temple. There will be no one here until morning.

A n d r i i. Okay.

A s i a. Follow me! The world is not all bad, Mr Frodo.

Andrii hides the Backpack in the Temple. Asia takes his hand and their figures melt in the darkness.

Scene three

Night. Full moon. Priest walks along the land plot, measuring the perimeter with steps. His steps become more and more solemn and ceremonial. In the end, Priest extends his hand in a Roman salute.

P r i e s t. And the Lord’s anger was kindled against Israel, and He delivered them into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim, the king of Aram of the two rivers. And the sons of Israel served Cushan-Rishathaim for eight years.

Scene four

Early in the morning. Before dawn, Zhora approaches the Temple with a fuel can. He pours fuel on the left side of the Temple and strikes a match.

ACT THREE

Scene one

Flashback. 2001. The children made a hut around a tall old walnut tree in the centre of the land plot. Andrii is 12 years old, Asia is 9, and Zhora is 15.

Zhora, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and holding a staff, approaches the hut, humming.

The road’s running to the fore

My aim is far away,

My journey started from that door

I cannot go astray.

Andrii and Asia run out of the hut.

A s i a. Gandalf! Gandalf has arrived!

A n d r i i. You are late!

Z h o r a. A wizard is never late, Frodo Baggins. Never too early either. He appears exactly when he was going to come.

A n d r i i (hugs Zhora). Gandalf, how glad I am to see you!

Everyone sits down in front of the hut. Zhora takes out a pipe and lights a cigarette.

Z h o r a. This is the best pipe potion in all of the Shire!

The children take turns taking a puff and then cough for a long time. Dad appears with a fuel can.

D a d. I said: I will see that pipe again - I will burn your hut!

Zhora jumps up and grabs the staff.

Z h o r a. You will not pass!

A n d r i i. Gandalf!

Z h o r a: Run away, fools!

Andrii and Asia run into the hut.

Dad pours fuel from the can on the right side of the hut and strikes a match.

Scene two

The hut and the temple are on fire. Zhora stands on the left, Dad stands on the right. A church bell rings, accompanied by a police siren. Musa in a police uniform and Priest appear. They silently look at the fire.

Andrii and Asia come out of the fire. They are both dressed in camouflage clothing, holding the Backpack together.

A n d r i i. I warned you.

A s i a. Where are we going with this? To whom? Where will we be in eight years?

A n d r i i. Wherever we go. People are around.

A s i a. Maybe to some desert?

A n d r i i. Someone lives in the desert too.

A s i a. Listen. If we are a shield... Where is that knight’s heart?

A n d r i i. I do not know. Maybe he doesn’t have a heart.

EPILOGUE

(Translated by Anna Halberstadt)

A bird flies home,

because it feels like a need

without feeling tired,

across the open sky.

And on earth hopes

get mixed with curses.

The bird flies over Kyiv,

it flies over Kherson.

A lark, a stork,

an oriole, a linnet.

A bird flying from afar

does not expect treachery.

And on earth down there —

reactive volleys and threads of tracers.

The bird flies over Rivne,

flies over Cherkasy.

Where it is going to land

in that vortex– God knows.

Souls circulate in a vortex,

birds fly home.

(Translated by Kat Podlypska)

A bird is flying home,

It has such a need, as we all.

Not even tired once

It glides over uncovered skies

But on earth all the hopes

Seems to be mixed with the curse

A bird flies over Kyiv,

A bird flies over Kherson.

A lark and a stork,

an oriole and a linnet.

A bird had a very long way

It does not expect a betray

But down there on earth

Reactive volleys and bombs

A bird flies over Rivne,

A bird flies over Cherkassy

The journey’s end, sadly, in the vortex

For the bird remains unknown.

The souls are flying to Iriy,

A bird is flying home.

Odesa

April 2022

During an air raid siren

19. VALERY PUZIK "NOTEBOOK OF WAR"



Valery Puzik

Ukrainian artist, writer, director. He is an artist-designer by education. He worked as a journalist.

In January 2015 he volunteered for the front. He took part in the fighting in the Donbass as part of the battalion of the Ukrainian Volunteer Corps of the Right Sector (DUK PS).

Participant in exhibitions of paintings and graphics in Ukraine and abroad, in particular, "Incubation period", "Echo", "Ghost Zone", "My Army". To see with the heart ".

Winner of literary competitions, texts awarded the "Torch", "Granoslov", Oles Ulyanenko Literary Prize.

Author of the books "Homeless Dogs", "Monolith", "I saw him alive, dead and alive again", "Mine. Morning Report ", co-author of the book" Our Cats. Blindage "and children's books" Delphi and the Wizards ".

Director of documentary short films and video poetry. Until February 24, 2022 he worked as a screenwriter.

He is currently in the ranks of the Armed Forces.

THE NOTEBOOK OF WAR

THE LAST DAY OF FEBRUARY

Yesterday, I put Ira, Orest and our kitty Josya on the train. I entered the station and stopped. I looked at the people standing there. I looked at pumped-up guys my age with backpacks waiting for their train, at other men. Later, walking home through deserted streets during the curfew, I thought: what the hell are you doing there? There, at the station? At the time when on Kanatna Street, an old man with a cane

helps the territorial defence forces with everything he can. Where are you guys going? And when will you return?

Can’t you think of ten simple reasons to stay and give a drubbing first to the Russians and then to the local traitors?

Ten simple reasons:

— the sand in the Black Sea Yacht Club,

— the dawn on Sobachka beach,

— a warm cappuccino on the way to the sea,

— a cat that meows in a carrier,

— a gym,

— streets,

— the city,

— the country?

ANOTHER BOOK ABOUT WAR

A little over a year ago, I told myself that I would no longer write about the war, I would rather write fantasy for children.

And that’s what I did.

The last story called ‘Little Wooden Guns’ was written in the second half of 2020, and was to be published in the collection ‘What he is silent about’ (Creative Women Publishing) this year.

I thought: what else?

The title of the book is symbolic.

The last story is about the war.

I write fantasy.

The cycle ‘Delphi and the wizards’ and the new one — ‘Black T-shirts’ (the first book is almost finished; if it were not for the war, I would have already submitted it to the publishing house).

The plans for the year are being arranged.

But...

It’s spring again.

Artillery attacks again.

War.

We are sitting on the backpacks, waiting for the combatant.

The boys crack a joke:

“Have you really written ten books?”

“Yeah.”

“Will you write about us?”

“We’ll see.”

“What does ‘we’ll see’ mean?”

“What can I write about?”

“About everything. Here’s a pen and a notebook. Write. This is an order.”

A siren blares.

Shots ring out.

I want to smoke.

DAY 12. WITH LOVE, DAD

Hello son!

I am finally writing to you.

I was constantly going to do it, but I couldn't put the words together.

They scattered like beads on the floor and I could not collect them.

Lately, I have been constantly thinking about our games, our serene Black Sea, its sand, calm streets, and plans for spring, summer, and autumn.

We will undoubtedly do everything: we'll catch pigfish in the Black Sea Yacht Club, as we planned; we'll go camping with a tent; we'll eat those one hundred and fifty 'summer' ice creams, and maybe two hundred; and also, you will learn to swim and ride a bicycle.

We will do everything, but we need to wait for a little while.

Yesterday, while looking at our photos, I caught myself thinking that it all seems to be in a past life.

You have grown so much these days.

It was hard to let you go with mom. However, you are safe now.

But this distance is tormenting.

The house is empty and cold without you.

Now, when I come back, there are phantoms everywhere: our cat meets me, I hear your laughter and your mother's voice somewhere. Sometimes, especially in the first days, I caught the smell of food. It's a strange feeling. As if I was half asleep. As if it wasn't happening to us. As I am writing this, a siren is blaring and several explosions have been heard in the city.

But I want to say the following…

In fact, every soldier has his child's smile on his smartphone screen saver and everyone is motivated to give russians a hard time.

Now, everyone is working for the front and for victory. It seems that if you need to find a pink unicorn, it will be found in a few hours. Everything works as one

mechanism. Within their capabilities, everyone does what is possible, but there are no indifferent ones. There is no doubt that we will win.

Someday, I will tell you about everyone I met during these days.

About old men with Molotov cocktails, about night patrols, about dawn and empty streets, about people who sleep two hours a day so that no bastard would sneak in and, even more so, harm somebody, about our anti-aircraft defence and jokes in bunkers.

Someday, I will tell you everything...

But now I want you to know:

There are many of us left.

We stayed, and we will not give up a single piece of our coast, we will not give up the sea, the streets, and, even more so, we will not give up our bookstores (I know they mean a lot to you and they are under reliable protection).

This is our city, our country, our land and our sky.

All this is worth loving and protecting.

We stayed and will fight.

Remember: this country is invincible.

Love you.

Kiss mom.

I will try to write more often.

With love, dad!

P.S. After the victory, we will turn on our favourite Kalush songs and dance until we drop.

March 7, 2022

DAY 13. FOR YOU

Ira, I wrote these poems about you and for you.

Happy Birthday.

Everything will be fine.

I love you.

I.

at dawn she smiles in her sleep

the current takes her dreams into its streams

fogs paint her name on the coast

she flies like a bird over the seas and oceans

I remember her voices, pure and deep,

from each song

that she sang in her sleep

all these consonants and vowels

every pause is like a string

all these sounds and words

where does this language come from?

The one she speaks at night?

dawn breathes with warmth

absorbing the last snow

rays paint on her face

marine navigation maps

she smiles in her sleep

the sea in a shell

making noise

the ocean is outside the window

the world is in her dreams

so fragile

flows into the sky channel

I.

God

and even these wounds

which you smear with salty sand

of black coast

gained a blissful colour

of her eyes

salty sea God

in her hands

turned into a warm blanket

the snows of the fiercest winters

she approached God

weaving stars into braids

hiding the night behind her belt

saving ships

she said God

walked barefoot

the mist lay at her feet

and even these wounds

did not bleed God

and even your clock

stopped its move

I.

a river flows through her heart

through her dreams

and through touch

snowdrifts come out

at dawn

when dew

on her lips

wakes up

the world stops

when she smiles

I.

every autumn

brings love back to this city

every shadow

remains on the yellow leave

every day

strokes her hair

with a salty south wind

kisses her lips

and

time

hides between the lines

a voice thirsty for silence

and the sea is noisy in the off-season

‘a little more a little more’

sea foam

and sand between the words leaves

its foggy

trace

on your fate:

every autumn

inspires hope

every shadow -

echoes of people

every day -

deep as the sea

every day -

the ocean

and the dawn?

dawn is She

THERE IS A CITY I SEE IN MY DREAMS

I don’t know what day it is today. The war zeroed out all calendars and everything has changed over these weeks. At night, the city is frozen as if it were a desert, the city is waiting. In the dark, patrols are formed, briefings are held, passwords are called and people with and without weapons go out into the street.

I remember the first night.

There are several thousand men in the shelter (let’s call the place that). The National Anthem of Ukraine is playing. General’s words. Distribution by districts. The sounds of yellow tape being wound around sleeves. Weapon clicking. And then a long cold night in the city centre. Yellow lanterns and overturned tables from terraces served as a shelter for fighters and posts.

The cold penetrates the bones.

We have a clearly defined route.

The cobblestones on Deribasivska Street glisten beautifully.

The night singing of birds in the City Garden echoes. Someone says that the nightingales have returned to Ukraine.

Then there were no anti-tank “hedgehogs” there, and the sand on our beaches was untouched by this war. Now, there is less sand. It has been packed into sacks and put at checkpoints. It smells of nostalgia for the sea and seaweed. Then, it was untouched and kept children’s footprints. I heard the conversations about the

construction of fortresses, confessions of love and plans for the future. Now, this sand is a fortification. Perhaps, it should be so. After the victory, it hopes to go back.

We walk in an almost empty city, our city.

Phrases are short. Meaningful. Details are not essential. The whole picture is clear.

There are long pauses. These pauses speak louder than hundreds of words.

A salty smell fills the air.

A thin layer of ice covers the skin on the face.

We detain a man without documents. He wanted to run away as soon as he saw us.

An hour later - a woman in police pants. Also, without documents. She is nervous, she is shaking, she says that the documents and the phone were stolen. We take her to the police department. She drags a suitcase behind her. She asks for a cigarette. Her hands are shaking.

We send home drunk Turks who got lost looking for shawarma.

We warm up in the office.

We drink instant coffee in the only operating stall nearby.

“I don’t want Russia to be here,” says the saleswoman looking out of the small window of the stall.

“That is why we are here!” answers the policewoman. Victoria.

Another pause.

Tears glisten in the woman’s eyes.

She bites her lip.

In the afternoon, she sent her two young children, aged less than three years old, to a quieter and safer place.

The most difficult choice in life, she admits.

“My house is empty and quiet now, but I don’t cry anymore. I’m on duty, I’m at home, I’m doing the assigned tasks.”

We go further.

We see how the fighters of the Armed Forces of Ukraine fortify their positions.

We listen to how air defence works.

The night crawls slowly, like a snake sneaking up on its prey.

THSh

A few days ago, during an air raid siren, one fighter of Odesa Territorial Defence recited Taras Shevchenko's poems for more than an hour. Without the book 'Kobzar' and the Internet. He learned everything by heart.

Then he said: next time I will recite Ivan Franko.

Odesa is Ukraine.

DAY 20. CONSERVATION

The sun peeks out from behind the dark clouds for a few minutes. Its yellow strands fall on houses, cars, wet broken asphalt and cars.

Fighters and volunteers near the barracks stop and look up.

It's pure beauty.

A little further, near the garage, there are eight tables in a row, and all of them are covered with burlap. Some guys come there. They are volunteers of the territorial defence brigade in the Odesa region.

"Can we clean the guns?" they ask.

"Please, do," we answer.

They stand at the tables. These men, whose hands are red from the cold, hold weapons.

They put load-bearing vests, paper-wrapped packs of cartridges and bayonets on burlap.

Steam appears around the faces of the guys as they smile.

The guys twirl their weapons. They look at each other with uncertainty. Someone murmurs behind the back:

“The last time I held it was in the army, back in the early nineties.”

Another one asks:

“How do you disassemble it?” he seems to be no more than twenty years old. There are two tattoos on his face. Black curls peek out of an olive-coloured cap. It looks like he has black nail polish on his nails.

“Stand in twos and threes at the tables, now we’ll show you everything.”

“Are you the instructors?”

“Yes! We are waiting for you.”

The men group up.

Serhii, a former lawyer, conducts the training:

“A muzzle brake... the cover of the receiver... bolt carrier and bolt... gas tube…”. While he is talking, more and more fighters approach the tables. They also freeze and listen. People of different ages. Both old and young. Old gentlemen, students, carpenters and drivers. Everyone is different and Ukrainian unity suits everyone. As someone finishes drinking instant coffee, someone else finishes smoking a cigarette. Everyone listens carefully. “Remember, friends, you have to merge with it. It is an extension of your body. The gun should always be with you. Sleep with it at night as if it was your beloved one; have lunch; walk; never, you hear, never leave it unattended…” (*pause*) “They waited for a long time and they waited for you guys.”

There is a second of silence, after which the first fuse clicks.

Then one more and one more.

How many are there?

Ten, twenty, thirty, fifty? More…

I look at the hands of these men.

Hands can tell everything about a person. Almost everything.

I see the hands of an artist, a programmer, a carpenter, a student, a musician and a lawyer.

I see tired fingers from hard physical work. Dozens of hands. Thousands of fingers.

The guys are cleaning their weapons and lubricating the mechanisms. They are looking inside the barrel.

“It should shine.”

The hours fly by.

Some leave and others come to replace them. Laughter can be heard. Movements become more skilful. Someone assembles and then disassembles the gun in order to remember how to do it. They repeat it over and over again. Someone is watching carefully. The fabric is torn. Everyone cleans their weapons. An endless flow. From morning to evening. The guys are smiling. The guys are handsome and tired. The guys are getting ready.

DAY 23. GRADUATES OF THE SCHOOL OF LIFE

A school. There are desks in the hallway. Men put mattresses in the classrooms. It’s noisy. Cocoa-coloured walls and stickers with state symbols of Ukraine: the coat of arms, the anthem and the flag. The lockers are sealed with red tape and on the shelves, there are folders with scripts for holidays and performance journals. There are two rows of mattresses along the walls and windows. The men put their backpacks next to each other. They take off their shoes. They lie down to rest. Different people. Different characters. Some of them were called to arms, while the others volunteered. Some are in their twenties, some are in their fifties.

On one of the walls, there is a poster “Life of our class”.

“There, in the hallway, you can take sunbeds,” says someone and stumbles into the room with a sunbed. The sand falls on the floor. “From Langeron. They still smell like the sea. When would I lie on them again?”

And that’s true.

I’m sitting by the wall. The poster “Life of our class” is right in front of me. I read: smile, believe in yourself, dream, create, be yourself, learn, explore, act, make friends and fantasise... Many more different words, in different colours, the colours of the rainbow.

What class is this?

“Look, there are so many owls!” There are stickers and acrylic paintings with glitter. Owls were everywhere. On the door, on the other hand, there is a sign “Primary School Office”.

“I studied here. Three minutes to go home. I may go home and bring the kettle, coffee and sugar. To have fun.”

“You’d better go tomorrow. No one is being let go today,” answers the commander.

“As you say. Let it be tomorrow. Where can we smoke?”

“In the courtyard.”

“I’ll have a smoke,” this is Kostyan. He looks to be in his forties. He is tall and black-haired. He actively gestures with his hands. He must be choleric. Kostyan cannot sit still. He moves non-stop and searches all around. “Anyone else? I’ll treat you!”. He takes out a pack of cigarettes of an unknown brand from his pocket. Several fighters lazily get up from the sunbeds and quickly leave the room.

It’s getting dark outside.

You can hear the wind hitting the windows.

There are sixteen of us in the class. Others from our unit are in the neighbouring one. The school is completely filled with military personnel.

It’s warm here.

An air raid siren starts wailing.

Even now, when I am writing this.

...five missiles were launched from the sea, but none of them hit the target.

It would be good to know where they were aiming.

Several explosions were heard.

“The windows in the neighbour’s house were smashed”

What about the summer cottage?

“The neighbour says that it seems to be intact. The fence is damaged.”

The Russian army is trying to put psychological pressure on the city’s residents and is shelling the coastal strip.

Their ships always appear on the horizon.

After arrival, people adjust to new surroundings for a long time. The plume of civilian life drags along like a lizard’s tail. A tail that is about to be lost.

Someone talks about a hundred beehives that must be taken to the field so that the bees do not die; someone talks on the phone, trying to cling to the recent pre-war past with his voice; someone wants to break away from our location for a few minutes and breathe the sea air of their hometown; someone sighs; someone sleeps.

There is a sense of anxiety when transitioning from a peaceful lifestyle. The tension is in the air. War. War. War. War. War. There are many questions. There are few answers.

What’s next?

What to do?

Will they give out bulletproof vests?

Can we expect a first aid kit?

What will be the locations of the positions?

After Odesa, where will they end up?

Anticipation.

Long and slow.

Expectations and uncertainty.

The hours are long.

Anticipation.

I write down my thoughts reluctantly.

What should I write about?

No words. They do not combine into sentences. There is only a lump of silent hatred and anger in my throat and tears from what is happening.

Irpin. Bucha. Mariupol. Hostomel. Forzel. Kherson. Mykolayiv. Volnovakha. Kyiv. Other cities.

Mass graves. Killed children. Raped women. Shot pensioners and families in cars. Tortured people under the rubble. Crushed houses. Graves in yards and playgrounds. Bodies along the roads.

Black ashes of war on the streets. Smouldering ruins.

Words lose their meaning. What can they change? They will not bring people back. They will not bring back ruined houses.

An air bomb strikes the maternity hospital. A bomb strikes the theatre. Phosphorus bombs in Kyiv. Children from Mariupol are evacuated to Russia.

They destroy everything that gets in their way. What can we call them? Orcs? An army of marauders and rapists? They are not human beings. Who are they? What kind of animals?

Fucking russians...

I am lying and staring at the ceiling. The halogen lamp is blinking wildly. The air raid siren is wailing in Odessa. In the darkness, someone’s voice says: Sanzheika and Zatoka. Any victims? There is no information.

Several explosions in Yuzhne.

Did you hear? I ask an acquaintance during a phone conversation.

What should I hear? he answers. A pause. Are you talking about the explosions? I did.

Is everything all right?

Okay, he answers.

Another pause.

Anticipation.

When will this long day end? I want to wake up.

Don’t sleep, wake up! Please wake up.

Shelling of a military unit in Mykolaiv. There are victims. Some people are wounded.

The lamp is flashing. A butterfly beats against the lamp shade with its small wings.

This is not a dream.

This is a new reality.

We must survive. We must win. We will win. We have a lot to lose. This is our land. We are here to protect it. Protect Ukraine. Our freedom. Our family. Our children.

On the wall, I noticed a sticker in the form of an umbrella with the inscription ‘Our birthday children’. Below, there were photos of the schoolchildren. Smiling girls and boys. Small children. They were not at school today. They were not here yesterday. And they will not be here tomorrow. And most likely, they will not come here for a long time. It’s wartime. Where are they?

I want to close my eyes. I want to remember the last day before the invasion.

I see martins on our beach, I see my son, I see my girlfriend. She smiles. Everything will be fine, I whisper. Everything will be fine. We feed the birds with bread. The wind blows gently, and strands of her hair freeze as if on the photo. It was sunny. The

sand was warming up. Spring should have come in a while… But then came fierce February, long and fierce March, fierce April, fierce day, fierce night.

Kostyan storms into the room. Everyone to the hallway, he says. Cartridges are given out. The guys get up from the sunbeds. Someone swears. Someone says: that's all, the jokes are over.

Inside my head, I can hear the words from the song by Kalush 'Waves' ft. Jerry Heil:

... Because, sooner or later, all people

will graduate from the school of life.

And then barely audible:

We are like waves that do not know

Their beginning and their end

When they cover us, when we disappear

Promise not to forget the features of my face.

The wooden floor creaks. Legs shuffle.

And we walk down a dark hallway. Into the night. Tomorrow will be tomorrow, and today is war.

DAY 25. THE WAY HOME

Snow is falling gently.

For the first time this spring, I enjoyed a leisurely stroll through Odesa.

For the first time, I walked for a long time to look at the streets: blue and yellow flags are visible through the whiteness of the snowfall. It is very beautiful.

I bought coffee for the first time and had no one to share it with.

For the first time, I turned to the right several times to pass the drink to my Iryna, but she was not around. Before, we always bought one cappuccino for two. Always.

I stopped.

Snowflakes landed on my hand and melted.

I smiled, remembering how my son and I went sledging last winter.

For the first time, we are missing such a heavy snowfall. For the first time, we are not together at the beginning of spring. The more days pass by, the more ‘the first time’ moments there are.

And I don’t want it.

I want it to be as usual.

But can it be...

“Everything will be as usual”. I whisper under my breath. And I try to open my eyes wide to see the sky.

The snow blinds me.

The snow ‘bites’ me.

The sky is there.

DAY 27. THE SPINDLE IS SPINNING

The spindle is spinning. I slept three hours last night. Two hours in a row and two times for thirty minutes. My dreams are more like three-dimensional slide pictures. Here: the house, the kitchen, a Turkish coffee pot, she, her smile. Here: the sand, the son's hands, he looks at the sea, the wind blows, his hair.

I can hear voices. The siren is on. In a dream, you talk to those who are not around. The beehive hums. Bees buzz around. It's like summer. Hands smell of grease. "How are you?" - "I am okay".

The trees are making noise. The night sparkles with lonely dim lights. The city is sleeping. The sea is roaring. There are still a few hours until morning. From my pocket, I take out the last chewing candy I took from home. It is strawberry flavoured. These are my son's favourites. He left me a handful before leaving almost three weeks ago. This is the taste of his childhood.

The engines hum. Two minibuses are going to 'Riviera'. We are getting inside. I have a constant feeling of deja vu. Everything repeats itself. The headlights are off. Stops. Checkpoints. Sandbags. Crates with weapons. Anti-aircraft defence is at work. Someone is reading the news aloud. The spindle is spinning.

DAY 33. I'M HERE TO PROTECT MY MOM

Ira bought a machine gun for our son.

"I'll show you the secret," Orest says and disappears from the video for a moment.

Then he breaks in again and demonstrates it.

It's wooden. It's big.

"Looks like a real one," I say.

"Yeah. Here is the cartridge. There are bullets inside. Look. A belt. I wear it like this."

He puts a belt around his neck.

He puts it on top of his hands.

He lowers the muzzle down.

"I'm here to protect my mom."

Orest is 5 years and 2 months old.

Good morning, we are from Ukraine!

DAY 33. COCOON

My sleeping bag is a dark olive cocoon. It has a rain cover with a hood in which everything is packed.

I smell it, and it smells like hay in my childhood, as if it had been lying for a long time in the attic of my grandmother in the village.

This thing came into my hands in February, two thousand and fifteen. Someone opened the door of the room and shouted: who doesn't have a sleeping bag?— I don't! — Take it. It has just arrived from the battlefield. It has been delivered from Pisky.

I slept in it for six months. It was with me in Vodiane, Opytne, at a position near the mine and at Butivka itself. The sleeping bag is good, warm and seems to be made for me. It rolled over the ZIL truck and lay on the concrete, on the ground of granaries, trenches and dugouts. It lay on-site — drying in the sun after the rain. It still had traces of clay and grease on it.

It probably heard all the phone conversations. It watched all my dreams. It knows all about my military service. And then it came with me to Odesa.

Even then it travelled with us. It visited various places in Podillia and at the Obyrok farm. My Zen teacher and I warmed ourselves in it while looking at the stars in the Universe. The eye of the moon seemed to be watching us. It heard all the words and promises. It absorbed the scent of wormwood and the smoke of the night fire. It

travelled in sleeping cars. It listened to the night and the names of the stations. It listened to the conductor’s voice and the screeching of cars at the crossings and tracks of the South-Western Railway.

This sleeping bag, as a trusted combat partner, will never let you down. You know all its pros and cons. No matter how long you don’t talk to it, it will keep your sleep warm and peaceful if required. Every second, it is ready to wrap your tired body in its cocoon, and then whisper dreams in your ear and lull you to sleep.

This sleeping bag seems to be woven from memories. If it did not exist, then it would definitely have to be invented.

I don’t know where else we will have to sleep this spring, but I do know: it is with me now. Warmer than ever. It warms with experience. It warms with reminders and promises. It warms with the frozen voice of my Zen teacher. It warms with the fire of the Obyrkiv fire. It warms with the upcoming trip to the sea with my son and night fishing in Yuzhnyi.

Fall asleep, it whispers in your ear.

You can feel the sand of the Black Sea with your fingers.

DAY 35. HOW IS HE?

Ivanovych is worried.

He calls his neighbour every day and asks: how is he?

“I changed the water. I put in more food. I stroked Marquis.”

Ivanovych is sixty. He came as a volunteer. Now he sits and cleans the gun.

Marquis, he says, appeared a year ago. He lived in his country cottage. A good cat.

Last week, after the explosion, Ivanovych took a ‘day off’ to bring him to Odesa; to bring him so that someone could look after him.

He says: “He feels more secure that way, and if something happens, the neighbour will take care of him.”

Ivanovych loves his cat.

DAY 40. PRAYER

Father

I have never had so much hatred and anger

Father

I really want everything to be fair

so that the orc race weep blood

so that all shit asses

had their mouths sewn up with rough stitches

so that their eyes could see only black

inexhaustible indescribably ugly

so that they all become fertilisers

may the land feel

not as feathers

but hard concrete

so that the worms

eat their bodies alive

so that they

feel phantom pains

more and more and more pain

for each person killed

for every unborn child

for everyone

do you hear Father

don’t forgive

remember

all their sins

remember

all the pain they brought

to our land

remember everything for hundreds of years

repay it a hundredfold

send anger

grief

and fierce angels

which instil fear in them

and the memory of the fact

that they also call themselves Christians

do you hear Father

I send this prayer

to You

and the Son

and the Holy Spirit

and let them burn in hell

the whole family of theirs

now

and all the time

and forever and ever

Amen

DAY 42. With love, Dad!

Hello!

I don’t even know where to begin, son.

It’s probably better to start with good news. They say that storks have returned to Ukraine. I haven’t seen them myself, but it makes me happy. The nights are cold. Fog in the morning is beautiful. It’s bird song time.

A small shaggy dog came to us yesterday. It’s very funny. We called it Soldier Pundyk. You would like it. Pundyk, a small and warm ball of wool, wants to play and eat all the time. It’s pretty cool. It entertains us.

There’s bad news too.

Today is the 42nd day of the invasion.

42nd day of the long month.

42 days of this phase of the war.

And I don’t know what will happen next.

I don’t know where we will be tomorrow and how.

But I know one thing: we will persevere. We have a lot to fight for.

There is nothing I miss more than you and mom.

I had a dream recently.

We went hiking in the mountains, warmed ourselves by the fire, and watched the sunrise.

Dreams are like some series with a continuation. Every time something new, something we had or planned to do. And they are usually very short and fragmentary. You don’t want to wake up.

However, there are others that I won’t disclose.

I had a dream: to order a lot, a lot of pizza, sweets and fruits, and sit by the screen and watch cartoons all day. About Petson and Findus, about Kaya, about Ryder and his puppies, and then...

watch our movies

Once again - your favourite about Super Mykola and laugh at the moment when the Boar says:

“And who are you?”

“I am Orest.”

And you will say again:

“Look, he is also Orest.” And you will laugh at the way children throw snowballs at the scoundrel.

Such is the dream.

You know,

whenever I imagine our meeting, my chin trembles and my eyes well up with tears.

It’s probably because I don’t know when it will happen or if it will happen at all.

I thank you for these wonderful years.

For happiness, smiles and voices.

For walks by the sea, for conversations, playing football, reading books together, going to the cinema, for “Dad, wake up, it’s time to play”.

For all.

Thank you!

I really miss you and mom.

Hugging you.

With love,

Dad.

DAY 43. IT WON’T BE SHOWN IN THE NEWS

“I won’t go to the hospital again. I’d better stay in the trenches. I don’t want to.”

We stand in front of the exit: we smoke and finish drinking our coffee.

A bus approaches. Then, the second one. They stop. “Hey, take the injured.” — “What?” — “The injured”. We run to the cars. We open the door, and there...

He takes another puff and immediately exhales. Through a cloud of cigarette smoke, the sun’s rays draw a three-dimensional pattern.

... there is blood all over. Someone is lying, someone is sitting. We take them in. Another bus stops. Our hands are covered in blood. Our clothes are covered in blood. Thirty men, damn it. You carry them, run to and fro and suddenly you hear “we are late” and look at the boy who “was late”. He’s young. Younger than me. Eyes closed. Then I stand in the hallway, and the floor is red. All fucking red. My hands are shaking. I’m in awe. The first day. I’ve just arrived. Fuck it. I did not eat for a day after that.

Another puff. He takes the shovels.

“Let’s go! Don’t throw butts on the ground. There is a bucket.”

We slowly move beyond the location. We go to the place where we need to dig. A lot of digging. Deep digging.

“If something happens, there is a pipe behind the bridge. I will show it. It needs cleaning. The homeless lived there. It’s a good pipe. Maybe someone will be saved.”

DAY 44. RUSLAN

When I was a child, I had a friend who died when he was about to turn 13 years old. It was the summer of 2004.

Childhood. We played war games, went to the river to catch fish with our hands, rode bicycles and played football together. Every summer, we were together from morning to evening.

He died three days before his birthday.

It is spring 2022. It's wartime. And I met a guy who looked a lot like him. So similar that even the name is the same, and the month of birth, even the date is close.

"Ruslan."

"Valeriy."

We shook hands.

And there was something in it from those times. Twenty years ago.

Reeds rustled nearby. In the sky, a crescent moon rose. The clouds froze as if they were expecting something. A fox howled somewhere. We're providing perimeter protection.

We talked about everything in the world and shared cigarettes and candies, sunflower seeds and Snickers bars. Everything we could find in our pockets.

The village where Ruslan lived is forty kilometres from the border with Russia and twenty kilometres from Kharkiv. It is now occupied. He said that on the first day, when the Russian army entered the territory of Ukraine, he saw a tank and infantry, that he lived with his girlfriend in basements, that shells flew overhead, that he barely got out of there through the fields to Kharkiv, that he sent Zhenya abroad and went to the Military Commissariat directly from the Odesa railway station. He spoke about all this calmly. He tried to smile. Now he is a grenade launcher. RPG-7 behind his shoulder, ammunition at his feet.

We sit and chew sweets. The night continues.

He feels cold wearing trainers. I say I have winter gumboots, right here, and some gloves.

I bring things.

“Put them on to get warmer.”

Ruslan refuses.

“It’s an awkward situation,” he says.

“Don’t talk nonsense,” I answer.

Ruslan put them on.

We walk to warm our cold winter boots. We try to joke.

“It won’t be the same anymore. I will not return home. There is nowhere to go,” he says. “If I don’t die, I will get married. I will live here. I will go to the seaside with my children.”

We listen to the night. The reed rustles. The fog creeps low over the ground.

Six hours before dawn, we learn about everything that has happened since 2004.

I tell him about my life and Ruslan tells me about his.

At dawn, we exchange phone numbers, and for the first time in twenty years, a name that has not been there all these years appears on the contact list.

He has grown up, I think now.

But is this possible?

Day 47. ARTSYZ-OCHAKIV

April 11, 2022, Monday

It is cloudy with clearing in Odesa.

Light rain in the morning, no significant precipitation in the afternoon.

The wind is northwest, 15-20 m/s.

The temperature in the morning is 5-7° and in the afternoon 8-10°.

1.

Liosha. Odesa.

“Hello. How are you?”

“Hello! Hotsy totsy. We are shelling the holy fuck out of them. The dudes are leaving in a hurry. They are not picking a fight. That’s it. How are you?”

“There were two patrol shifts from the evening of the 9th to the evening of the 10th. I left a couple of hours earlier because I have to go to work today. It is all right in most cases. You can eat at a petrol station, but it’s expensive... Coffee, energy drinks, hot dogs. The engine begged to give it a rest.”

On the second day, it was so warm that I had to stand in a queue in the petrol station restroom to take off my underpants, thermals, and sweaters that stuck to me.

We moved to the Porto-Frankivsk branch because there are fewer people and more freedom, which made it possible to drive around the entire perimeter and beyond.

“That’s cool. Our freedom is over. We can’t go home for a day.”

Army food sucks. Barley stinks with fat, cocoa is like milk diluted with water. A fucking hell of water. You can’t even feel the taste of cocoa. It’s good that there is a store nearby. You can pop in to buy something.

“These are army weekdays amidst the news about the valour and bravery of soldiers... The expression ‘In flip flops with RPG’ will stick in my memory for a long time.”

“It is better to go to the field and cook for yourself. That makes it easier. And these military packs make you have the runs. Sorry for the toilet stories.”

“I get it. During the morning patrol, we were accompanied by a cop girl, Natalie. But that didn’t stop us from chasing the devil. So, we took combat duty in a bright yellow Volkswagen convertible. Luxury patrol.”

“Did they give you some kind of weapon? Is it your own?”

“They didn’t give a fucking thing. The coach. If you happen to know him. He enrolled in the reserve of the Ukrainian Volunteer Corps, and there he received a Kalashnikov gun... I wonder how it is... I need to ask him somehow.”

“What is the password? Is it still Artsyz-Ochakiv?”

“Yes!”

“Thank you!”

2.

The cook. Mariupol.

“What do you know about the Cook? They say he is in Mariupol.”

“Good evening, yes, I’m in Marik.”

“Can I call?”

“The connection is bad.”

“Tell me something. How are you? Wounded?”

“We’ve been under siege for 40 days. We send russians to hell in hundreds. The sensations are strange, I lived another life in 40 days. The situation is difficult but it’s under control.

We are waiting for the lifting of a blockade. If it’s fast, then yes. I am alive and healthy, with chronic fatigue.”

“Come on Bro!!! We pray for you and everyone. Stork is next to me and he says that if Marik persists, all the Cyborgs will be ‘put down’.”

“The war continues, so there will be many difficult situations. I don’t see us doing anything heroic, it’s more PR than reality. Just do your work, and we do it well.”

“They say that the marine infantry surrendered.”

“That’s right. The bastards from 503 surrendered.”

“These are the remains of 503 that stayed on the Permanent Duty Station. Those who did not want to go to the frontline and the supply unit. That’s why it happened. Some of them changed clothes and escaped as civilians.”

“I got confused: did only 501 surrender? 501 and the supply units of 503?”

“I’m sorry, it was 501.”

“Well, at least two dozen were captured in Popasna as well.”

But in different battles.

I am still on the flank — the attacks started moving in our direction only today.

Before that, the war was mainly academic — hiding from the barrel guns, hunting for the rocket launchers...

There are very few rifles — it’s not good for casualty shooting - we just make them nervous. The carriage broke on the new Ukrainian lightweight 82 and 23 (both far-ranging weapons). Shock absorbers are good for nothing. Without bags on the plate and paws, it drags on! You can shoot only with bags!!!

3.

Ira. Kamianets-Podilskyi.

The dawn is breaking. I am writing to her:

“I miss you. I miss your fingers, hugs. Your smell. I want to hug you and not let go, I want to look into your eyes, kiss your lips, hands and neck. I want to smell you. And let your hair stick to my clothes. I think about you all the time. I love you. Thank you for being there for me. You are the best in the world. The most wonderful and the most beautiful. I miss you very much. You are my sun. I love you”.

Day 48. THIS IS

This is when everyone is doing their best.

This is when the Kharkiv workshop makes combat boots under shelling.

This is when the necessary things are transferred from hand to hand along the Charlotte — New York — Paris — Warsaw — Ternopil route in a day, and the next day they are brought to the addresses in Odesa, Mykolaiv, Kherson, Kyiv and Kharkiv.

These are drivers who, like blood in their veins, circulate on the roads of the country, transporting people and humanitarian aid.

These are people who stand firm for you and when something is needed, solve the problem in a couple of hours.

This is when a car stops at a checkpoint, women's hands give a thermos of coffee and children bring sandwiches.

These are children who play the game of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and at the age of 11 go to the military to enrol in territorial defence.

These are the 'iron men' of the Ukrainian Railway Station who work non-stop twenty-four hours, seven days a week.

These are mothers who protect their children and sing lullabies far from home. They smile when they really want to cry.

These are fathers and mothers fighting until the last breath.

These are liberated cities and villages.

These are people raising blue and yellow flags in front of a column of armed invaders.

It is resilience in the darkest of times.

This is when one person says: "Glory to Ukraine!", and millions respond: "Glory to the heroes!"

This is the land of people with big hearts.

These are Guardian Angels that you can hug.

This is Ukraine.

This is US.

Free.

We will win.

Day 48. THREE, THREE, IT’S TIME TO GET FREE

War devastates. It eats away from the inside, leaving only a dulled sense of reality. The one that was ‘before’.

Our spring was stolen. Flowers which will explode around us in a little while are stolen too. They steal our smiles. Cities. Life. They want to erase us. All of them. No residue.

Sometimes, I fantasise: what will we do after victory? How will we hug our relatives? When will it be?

I am making creative plans: to complete the fantasy for children ‘Black T-shirts’ and ‘Delphi and the Wizards’, to republish the complete collection of works ‘Our Cats’ and ‘Paranoid’, to compile a book of poems and to complete a film script.

I fantasise about presentations. Selfie by the sea. About games with my son. Long conversations with My Dearest, about kisses, her hair and her fingers. About her ear, so that I can whisper: I love you and I want to be with you until the end of my days. And never let her go again. One breath for two. One coffee for two. One life...

And the more I fantasise, the more I grow into a new reality.

I’m getting used to fatty barley porridge, to instant coffee with condensed milk, to the additional weight of ammunition, to weapons that are nearby, permanent (temporary) positions and trenches, to conversations about the present: where did it explode? how? is everyone alive? where are we sent? for how long?

The war puts a cartridge in me and pulls the shutter.

You don’t want to sleep on trips, but you force yourself to lie down for a few hours when you have free time, so as not to become a zombie.

In the barracks, you sleep during the day as if you are charging your batteries as if you are turning on the ‘energy saving’ mode.

Sometimes, when there is free time, I force myself to write. About everything in the world. At least something, a few paragraphs, something short and complete - in one sitting, because you simply may not have time to finish a long story. I write in short sentences. I put a lot of full stops to avoid commas. The words pour out. I erase. I write again. What for?

I would like to say as two months ago: three-three, it’s time to be free. And forget about this war. Change the entourage. Go to the balcony, open the laptop and create a new document to write another story full of spells and magical creatures.

What’s next?

Then to kiss My Beloved and be with her until the end of my days.

Day 49. THEY ARE WATCHING FROM HEAVEN

War is mud that you stir with your feet.

It is the stench of corpses, sweat and socks. This is a pain in the muscles, in the back and in the heels. These are bleeding blisters and teeth that deteriorate and ache more and more every day.

War is pain and loss. The names and faces of friends and acquaintances who will no longer be older: they are smiling and joking and, in a moment, there is a photo and a candle. How? What? He died on the battlefield. A shell fragment wound. A sniper. A mine explosion. An ambush.

I remember everyone. From Maidan until now.

Tank, Sailor, Cat, North, Crowbar, Rain, Myth, Witch…

The night will not be enough to write down everyone’s call signs.

It’s raining outside. The ground is swampy. A piercing cold wind is blowing.

They are smiling. They are watching from heaven. They are saying something. How are you, friends? Are you looking down on us from heaven? We are here, stirring the mud. We carry iron weapons and boxes to the shelter. We clean the shells. We write your call signs with markers on the mines.

For Malva.

For Ruf.

For Ryzhyk.

For Dwarf.

For Vaska...

We will take revenge for each and every one.

And more...

For Ilovaisk.

For Kruty.

Mariupol

Kharkiv.

Crimea.

Irpin.

Hostomel.

Bucha.

For every town and village.

We remember everything. Each grain of 1933. Deportations. Mass shootings and the ban on the Ukrainian language.

And this pain in the muscles, in the back, in the heels. These bleeding blisters... we know why we carry iron weapons and clean shells.

Look, brothers and sisters, we’re going to turn their machinery into rusty metal.

We will burn them and drive them out. And all the Russian invaders will rot in our land. Tourniquets will not help them. No one will help them. They are fertilisers.

Let our land be their hell and concrete.

Day 56. TEETH OF WAR

Guys say:

“I have a toothache. I need dental treatment.”

“You’d better take a pill.”

“The fillings are gone.”

“Take a pill.”

“But they will hurt every time I eat candy.”

“Take pills.”

“Stop repeating ‘pills-pills’?”

“Do you need perfect teeth here? Do you want to die being handsome?”

“I’m not going to die.”

Day 56. THE WIZARD FROM KHARKIV

There is a wizard living in Kharkiv and his name is Oleh Kadanov. He composes music, writes poems and performs in theatre and cinema. He also finds things that do not exist.

“Hello, Cossack. I know you have other things to do right now, but maybe you know where you can get a tripod for an artillery aiming circle?”

“Hello, brother! I’ll try to find it, but I can’t promise.”

“Thank you. I know it’s hard to find.”

“Do you have the aiming circle?”

“We don’t. I think it’s easier to assemble it in parts. It’s not available on the websites either.”

“As much as possible, I will look for both. It requires magic.”

“Magic... Magic...”

...

“Where should I send it? I found several options...”

...

“Hello. I don’t know how to thank you. It’s top-notch... The circle head is new.

They say: “the sweat of the gunner protects the blood of the infantry.”

So thanks mate for the sweat-cure.

I am grateful to all our wizards and everyone who helps. It would be very difficult without YOU.

Day 57. IT WOULD BE BETTER IF IT DIDN’T EXIST

I probably wrote my most famous text.

It has less than 70 letters. Four lines. It seems to be everywhere. In three days, it was translated into ten languages. And I think: It would be better if it didn’t exist.

Here’s how it sounds:

I won’t have a name

I won’t have a family

I was due in April

Somewhere in Irpin

Indeed, it would be better if it didn’t exist.

Day 59. UNSEEN LUXURY

We woke up early. We made pancakes. She was putting on a dress and lip-glossing. Our son was listening to music.

When we went outside, it was raining.

We got into a taxi.

We got married.

We celebrated: we played billiards, table football and hockey with our son, ate croissants and played catch-up games.

We watched as a woodpecker was making a hole in the trunk of a cherry tree, which burst into fragrant blossoms.

We looked from the window at the Kamianets-Podilsky fortress.

We walked through the canyon.

“Is it real? Military?”

“Yes, it is!” I answer.

The son clutched the binoculars and tried to look through them.

Then:

“I want to tell you a secret...”

I lean.

He whispers:

“Will you give me your chevron?”

“Which one?”

“The one you have on your arm.”

I take it off and give it to Orest. He smiles. He’s a little shy. He grew up and learned to pronounce the letter “r”.

“What is written here?”

“Welcome to Ukraine.”

Orest wears a uniform and a wooden automaton. He is happy with the chevron and attaches it with sticky tape.

We walk around the city. There is a drizzle. The floral fragrance fills the air. There is the sound of birds singing.

It is an unseen luxury to whisper in her ear “I love you” and to drink one cappuccino for two. To look in the eyes. To sink into their abyss. To call her name. To embrace. To kiss.

We are happy.

And then there was the air raid siren.

Then: rockets hit Odesa. Where did it hit? Are you alive? Injured? I am writing: how are you? They answer: we are sitting in the basement. Everything is O.K? We are alive.

Pillars of smoke. Residential buildings.

Then: as a result of a rocket attack, 18 were injured and 5 died, among them a three-month-old baby.

Silence.

Easter is coming.

Our unseen luxury will last for a few more days.

DAY 64. PEPSI

It’s long past midnight.

The night crawls slowly at the station. Trains are late. People in military uniform stand by the information board waiting for their trains. Children sleep on wooden benches. Parents, like tired butterflies, step from one foot to another, walk near the walls and talk languidly. Trains carrying goods clatter along the tracks. They illuminate the silhouettes standing on the platforms and their shadows creep along the asphalt cracks, deforming and elongating.

I don’t want to go back.

The station and bus are behind. The road, checkpoints and document verification. I don’t want to go back! — I whisper involuntarily into the dark streets of Khmelnytskyi emptied by curfew. I take out another cigarette from my pocket. I smoke. I read the news: a missile attack on Shepetivka, two ‘incoming strikes’ in Kyiv, repeated explosions in Odesa — and this happened while I was dozing off on a bus.

There are two more stations and a train ahead. Conductors, the creaking of train cars, the direction board, which I got tired of looking at, and half a pack of cigarettes.

This night is an eternity.

I wander around the train station like a stray dog. But — no! Not a stray dog! If I were homeless, then I would just go to the city and walk until the morning on Proskurivska Street, meet the dawn and I would not be alone.

I am on a leash. I'm wearing a war collar. Whether you like it or not, you have to go back.

Slap-slap!

Voices and coloured spots break through the dope in the eyes.

"You won't catch me! You won't catch me! I can hear my son's voice, his laughter and his steps in the puddles."

"Catch me!"

"Stop!" I answer.

"You won't make it!"

I get it. It's not now. It was a hundred kilometres back.

And there are still five hundred and sixty ahead, it seems. But mentally I go through it again: stop! — and I run after him along the wet cobblestones in Kamianets-Podilsky. He is wearing rubber boots and happily jumping in deep puddles.

"It feels so strange!" she whispers. There is a wedding ring on her ring finger.

I can hear the sound of a siren.

After the rain, the air is moist, everything around is fresh. I breathe in her skin, hair and perfume — I try to absorb more smells.

"You won't catch me! You won't catch me!" the son's voice is there again.

Slap-slap!

Clattering sounds come from the tracks. The car sways like a paper boat on the water. The next station...

“Wake up!” they push me to the side.

“What?”

“It’s the time!”

I open my eyes. This is not a car or a train. We are in the basement. In the dark, there are a few marks from the flashlights. I look at Ruslan. He is wearing a helmet and body armour and holding a gun. His thirteen-year-old body looks strange in combat gear. He is thin, tall for his age, his eyes shine and he smiles. I understand and want to say: you died...

“Why are you here?” I ask.

“Follow me,” he says.

“Why are you dressed like that?”

“Let’s go faster.”

I get up sluggishly. As if it were something unnecessary, I put on my armoured vest over the uniform and the helmet on my head.

“Where?”

“Follow me.”

And we walk along the hallways. We pass by one staircase and then another one.

“Where are we going?”

“I want to show you something…” he answers without looking back. “Here is the threshold. Be careful!”

I step over it.

Ruslan is in a hurry.

Eventually, we go out into the night.

A thick fog hovers low over the fields. There is a ravine, pine trees, a river and an apple orchard.

I know where we are. I know.

“I promised that I would write a book about you.”

“Have you written it?”

“No!”

“No problem.”

“I was going to...”

“Forget it.”

“I…”

Dry reeds rustle. There is a strong smell of smoke. A lot of smoke. It crawls across the entire landscape in clubs. Black smoke. Black...

“Someone set the fire again.”

Towering tongues of fire are visible from behind the willows.

“No one could ever extinguish this fire.”

The fire is spreading. It envelopes the banks of the river. It envelopes the bridge.

Near the field, smoke and fog envelop us.

Everything is grey.

“Let’s go!”

I follow Ruslan. I see his back. On his plate carrier, in the area of the shoulder blades, there is a drawing. I can’t figure out what kind of symbol it is. Where have I seen it before? We are approaching the wall.

A mine explodes somewhere. Based on sound, the calibre is 120.

I know this wall. The cemetery is behind it. In the fog, crosses appear to be greying between the trees.

“I do not want to go there.”

“Come on, lose your fear. We have been here more than once. Dead people don’t bite. Do you want candy?” he takes a chocolate bar from the grave. I didn’t even

notice how Ruslan jumped over the stone fence. The fog thickened, it now became white as milk. “We are almost there!” he said.

I followed him, followed the voice, and then…

... I felt a look at myself.

It was me, looking at myself from the tombstone.

“I want you to know.” Ruslan pointed his flashlight at the date: 23.06.1987. “Some rubbish stuck. Look!”

I lean over the grave to peel off the Pepsi label to see the second date.

Drop! — right in the eye. I wipe the water with my sleeve. I wake up reluctantly. The roof of the car is leaking. The morning is greying outside the window. Raindrops on the glass.

The car sways like a paper boat on the water.

Cigarette smoke fills the air.

The train is two hours late.

Slap!

Slap!

The next station is war.

DAY 67. CHECKPOINT UKRAINE

Good evening, checkpoint Ukraine welcomes you and today the music of the last days of April is on the air on our radio station.

The sky is cloudy in Odessa. During the day, the thermometers warmed up to +16 °C. No precipitation is expected.

Under the blissful sunlight, lying on the sidewalks, city cats enjoy their lives. Dolphins are swimming again near the shores of our city. The beaches are mined. A “prolonged” two-day curfew is ahead.

Checkpoint Ukraine pulsates like a vein in the neck: cars with cargo; trucks with fuel and food; buses with people; on the back seats of cars, there are children smiling at the soldiers.

Checkpoint Ukraine is working: Victory is ensured by every ant, which stands guard in an enhanced mode.

There are no gods of war here.

Here, ordinary people pull the strings of this war from morning to night. Men, women, children - that day is approaching as a result of everyone’s efforts.

And it will come.

The anthill is a living thing.

After the strikes, the engines of the planes roar above them. People stop and raise their eyes to the sky. They ask:

“Friends or foes?”

“Friends.”

Springs run high:

“Greetings! Where are you going?”

“To the maternity ward.”

The expectant mother is smiling in the back seat.

A woman on a bicycle:

“Boys, here’s milk and apple pies. They are still warm.”

A little girl is holding her older brother by the finger of his left hand:

“Uncle, do you want candy? It’s chocolate.”

Ukrainian army’s pickup truck:

“We are going to Kharkiv.”

“No. Not there. The opposite way.”

“Really?”

“Angelina Jolie is now in Lviv. Turn around!”

“We took a picture,” they laugh. “We are coming back.”

‘Ritual service’:

“How are you, guys?”

“We are fine.”

“Do we have to turn the engine off?”

“Thank you, but not today. Drive through!”

As the sun goes down, it reaches the horizon. An orange glow is visible through the camouflage net. Blue and yellow flags are fluttering.

Checkpoint Ukraine exhales warmth:

“It’s not a basement, but a five-star hotel. Flat white with condensed milk. Six dogs and three cats.”

The blood of a country flows through its vein-like roads.

The directions are embroidered in red and black colours.

Boys carry heavy and not very heavy things.

A new day has begun.

We exist.

We are closer to victory.

“Lullaby for the Occupier” by Mykyta Moiseiev is on the air.

Day 73. WITH LOVE, DAD!

Hello!

My son,

It seems like a lifetime has passed since I left.

My mind constantly wanders back to our days, our important and not-so-important affairs. How difficult it was to leave you at the station to the sound of sirens, get on the bus and leave. Leave again.

It was great to see you and mom, hug you and do the usual things. We had fun playing with your new toys, our walk was wonderful, and you grew up. You are not “the little one” anymore, you are a grown-up little boy. Yes, yes, I know, you will say: phew, I’m not little - and it’s true. Your stories are mature and you still want to be a soldier. You are almost five and a half years old and for most of your life, you’ve wanted to be a soldier. You will probably become one. :)

There was so much I wanted to do in the days we had and it seems we managed to do everything, but the feeling that I have forgotten something persists.

I know one thing: in my life, I will never forget the flow of Smotrych and the calmness of this river.

I want to tell you the following:

Be kind and the world will smile at you.

Be kind and you will meet the best people on the planet.

Be kind, but remember: don't let people use you. Because of your kindness, there will be a lot of selfish people around.

Behave as your conscience tells you. Know that if your intentions are pure, the truth is always on your side. Avoid fights, but if the situation requires it, be able to strike.

Do not be afraid to lose, but fight to the end and with honour if you choose to fight.

Stand up for truth and your views. You can lose the battle but win the war. You can lose the championship but beat your opponent (this has already happened more than once).

Help those who need help.

Don't laugh at the flaws.

Respect all the people you meet in your life (except, of course, russians — they are not people).

No matter how old you are (six, ten, thirty or fifty), be a dreamer, learn, set goals and achieve them. What you do today determines who you will be tomorrow.

Love and hug the people you care about. All we have is love. You can't buy it for money. It is priceless. Don't be afraid to show it. Sometimes a silent hug is worth a thousand words.

Where we are, it is relatively calm. Russian drones are flying. Tonight, for example, there were fewer of them. They will no longer be in the air because they have become scrap metal.

It was beautiful to see the planes circling in the morning. Ghosts of Ukraine, as you say. Our heroes. Despite being loud, they are incredibly beautiful. They flew so low that you could see the drawings.

I look at the sky.

It is pure and limitless.

I am fine. Everyone is alive and well. Hope to see you soon.

I miss you so much. Take care.

I:

Thank you for everything.

Thank you for having you.

You're the best.

With love, Dad.

P.S. Orest, I have a request for you: hug mom and kiss her on the cheek while I'm here. Hug her instead of me.

The first days of May 2022

DAY 73. MISSILE DANGER

Missile danger! Missile danger! Stay in shelters!

“The fucking strike was close.”

Clouds of smoke rise up.

The missile threat is now very high. Do not neglect safety rules! Stay in shelters!

“Hello, where are you?”

“Rockets flew over us.”

“Let’s go to the basement.”

“But it’s just…”

“Go to the basement and stay there for an hour.”

“Fine!”

“Sure?”

“Sure!”

Black clouds of thick smoke rise up. There is an unpleasant smell in the air. Military vehicles are driving. Aviation is buzzing above us.

“How many rockets?”

“Six.”

“One was shot down.”

“The boys say two.”

“And the others?”

Dust rises on the earthy track.

I am sick and tired of inhaling it. The nose is blocked. It is bleeding.

The street dogs that we come across are whining and running away.

Air raid siren!

Missile danger!

73rd day.

The sky is scaffolded by thick black smoke.

DAY 73. IRA

5 hours have passed since I read your letter to him and now he told me to write you a letter:

Dad, I know you’re not with me, you can’t see me, but I love you.

With love, Orest.

DAY 75. THE GAME OF SPRAT

Night.

Whoop!

The ball hits the floor in the gym.

Whoop!

“Bitch, fuck!” a voice echoes in the darkness.

Whoop!

“What is happening here?”

“Fuck you, idiot!”

“What?”

“Fuck you. I’ll kill you all now. Everyone, you bastards.”

Whoop!

The fuse clicked. The figure in the darkness turned around.

“Hey, hey, take it easy, brother.”

“I am not your brother.”

“Put down the gun. Don’t stir the pot. It’s been too much booze for you. Go to bed.”

“No, no. You’re dead meat,” his laughter resembles a bird’s cry. “Me too. Everyone!!!”

A siren sounds outside.

“My son and I played sprats. Do you know this game?”

“No!”

“There are two types of cards in the game - ‘Cans’ and ‘Fish’. The players take the ‘Fish’ cards, and the ‘Cans’ cards are placed with the backs up in the middle.

The ‘Can’ card is turned over for a few seconds. In this period, you need to remember the types of fish depicted on it and lay out your cards with the corresponding fish.

A fine is imposed for a mistakenly displayed card, which was not in ‘Can’.”

“What’s the point?”

“Point? This is a children’s game to develop attention and memory.”

(*pause*)

“Do you know what we call the strikes which kill many people at the same time?”

“What?”

“Sprats.”

...

“We also play Sprats. But this is an adult game in the new reality.”

He yielded all our positions to the enemy. He gave them the coordinates of our barracks. Look at the phone. Look! Screenshots. Emails.

“You are all dead meat!”, he lies on the floor with a broken nose and laughs. In the light of a flashlight, a basketball rolls near the wall.

“Bitch, fuck…”

Fuck the bitch.

A siren sounds.

“What are the differences between fish?”

“They are different in colours and small elements. Fish-in-the-hood-and-cane, Fish-sailor, Fish-clown, Fish-in-spectacles, Fish...

We sleep under the open sky. The stars sparkle above us. Firefighting vehicles can be heard passing by. One, two, three. Fish cars float through empty city streets. The smell of cigarette smoke creeps with its thin tongues between the pine trunks.

“What kind of fish are we?”

...

“Make sure not to become sprats. Ahah.”

I put the card on the table. I am trying to preserve the voices of my relatives. I want them to sound in my head. Smiles. Eyes. Moments. Remember, bitch. Don’t let them fade. Take care of them like the apple of your eye.

“Dad, can fish fly?”

“Yes, they can.”

“Do they have wings?”

“They do. But we don’t have them in Ukraine. They live only in the rainforests.”

“Is there a film about them?”

“I don’t know.”

“Let’s have a look!”

“Come on.”

“I want to see a fish fly.”

We watch this film: the traitor is in a cage. We pass by this bastard. We pass by. Fucking-bitch, his teeth are all intact. Who beat him like that? Who? The teeth should be on the floor. He gave everything out. All the positions, training grounds and barracks. Everything. And his teeth, though rotten, are intact. From beneath his forehead, he casts glances. We walk through the hallways. We smoke outside. We lie down in the grass under the trees. We listen to birdsong.

We can hear fragments of someone’s conversations. Who are we? ‘Cans’ or ‘Fish’?

Remember:

Fish’s ability to fly evolved as a way to escape from the pursuit of predatory fish, but in the air, another danger awaits them:

they become the prey of large sea birds:

albatrosses and martins.

A siren sounds. We look at the sky. Missile danger!

...please go to the shelter.

Russian troops have increased the intensity of aviation over the waters of the north-western part of the Black Sea. The city witnesses more and more attacks.

“Do you want me to tell you how we put him down? You know,” he says, “it’s a little scary when a drunk dick pokes you with a gun.”

...

“The bastard cleaned his phone and reset it to factory settings. But I’m good at it, I’m working with it. I restored everything. When we looked in the messenger, there... The whole thing: photos, locations, maps, emails... Do you want me to tell you? You can write about it. A book, huh? You can write…”

“You’ll tell me later,” I say.

I’m lying in the grass.

The sky is magnificent.

Remember it.

Remember, these clouds, the trail of a missile and the smoke of anti-aircraft defence.

A siren sounds.

Whoop!

“This is a strike.”

“This is not the sound of a strike.”

“Has it been knocked down?”

“It’s been knocked down.”

“Ahh.”

“It would be better not to take us back here. It is better to be cold at night in the middle of nowhere than to wait for nobody-knows-what.”

Six ships and two submarines of the Russian Federation are ready to launch missile strikes, reports Operational Command ‘South’.

R-i-n-g!

Message:

do you need any help? I’m in Kyiv. I can forward/transfer something.

It seems like we don’t need anything. Thank you!

FLOWERY KIDS

1. ALISA

I am Alisa

I am four years old

I live in a shelter

With the military officers

I don’t like it in this city

I want to go home

to my toys

I want to go to my grandparents

I want to go to kindergarten with my friends

I haven’t seen my mom for three days

My dad is lying in the yard

My mother says: Dad is in heaven

He looks at me and smiles

But I don’t want him to be in heaven

I want: to be near, to be now, to be at home

and all together

I want to welcome our guests -

it was my birthday yesterday

Second birthday

Uncles say: this is what happens when there is a war and they shoot

Uncles say: we’ll break through! — and they don’t smile

I want dad not to smile either

not to smile

but to be nearby

I don’t want him in heaven

and I don’t want trees to grow from him

I want to be near

to be now

to be at home

Mom and dad and me

Grandfather and grandmother

The dog Lakhmatik

And our happy family

2. MAKARII

I am Makarii

I’m seven years old

And I don’t have a home

We live with my mother and grandfather in the basement

We eat ready meals and save water

We use a bucket as a toilet

We have nothing

We have only us

My dad disappeared a few weeks ago

When he went to look for a car

We can’t leave town —

Mariupol has been surrounded for fifty days

And our car burned down on the street

It seems to be in the past life

3. MARICHKA

I am Marichka from Bucha

I was twelve

I was told to stand

They tied my hands and eyes

Mom, where are you? Mom?

Mother was taken to the house

Dad, where are you? Dad?

Dad is lying in a puddle

Grandpa and grandma are on the street

Shot in the head

I remember the dog

That fled into the forest

I didn’t want to die

My brother didn’t want to, either

I dreamed of becoming a doctor

And my brother wished to score goals

I am Marichka from Bucha

I was killed by a butcher:

we

were told

to go

we

were led

there

There will be crosses

And red flowers to mark the losses

4. SOFIA

My name is Sofia

And I have a dream:

I want all Russians

To die in this world

I’m ten years old

I am from Kherson

I am writing a letter to you, God

And I am asking you very much:

I want I want silence

I want a good night’s sleep

I promise I won’t weep

Don’t let the war go deep

5. A SON

I won’t have a name

I won’t have a family

I was due in April

Somewhere in Irpin

I will not become my mother’s boy

I will not become my father’s son

I will never see them

I only heard voices

I was travelling in my tummy

She whispered to me:

Everything will be fine, kitty...

.....

.....

.....

I died in early spring.

***

If I die

my beloved

Know that I am always by your side

I don’t need more

I’m behind you

I’m next to you

I will be the dew

The wind and the clay

I will be the fog

I will...

If I die

my beloved

Know that I am always by your side

***

lead me lead me

to the end of this war

lead me lead me

to the end of this long age

lead me lead me

to the dawn and a clear sky

to the warm sea

to the spring

where peaceful dreams are seen

where there is no morning news

where the sirens don’t sound

take me to the river

which cannot be exhausted by words

to the boat

that floats between the islands

take me to the bridge

behind which our cities stand

take me home

where all the relatives live



20. IRYNA HARETS "PLANTING APPLE TREES"

Iryna Harets

Head of the Theater of Modern Dialogue in Poltava, playwright, writer, screenwriter, director, psychologist. Finalist and laureate of Ukrainian and international drama and literary competitions, trainer on: "Civic competence"; "Creation of social theaters"; "Non-formal education for children and adults", etc. Author and curator of social projects, including theater. Founder of the All-Ukrainian Library of Modern Drama UkrDramaHub. One of the founders of the Theater of Playwrights (Kyiv).

How have the circumstances of your life changed since the beginning of the war?

“I don't know what to write about change. Everything seems to have changed: from daily rituals to the way of thinking. But what confuses me is my hatred, which I can’t control. Previously, it seemed to me that taking a person’s life is the worst act, it is a great sin for the soul. That it is not washed away by anything, never worked out, not softened, not begged. I use religious terms, although I have never believed and still do not believe in God. Now it seems to me that she is capable of killing. I just feel that I can and want to. I want to kill as well as give birth to a new one, create around

life, plant, care for, nurture. And the rest, like everyone else, are scared, helpless and at the same time full of love for their people, for their land.”

Translated from the Ukrainian by John Freedman with Natalia Bratus

A play commissioned by a grant from Philip Arnoult's Center for International Theater

Development (U.S.)

Planting an Apple Tree

Dwarf breeds of apple trees. They take up less space, and they match my height. They

bloom and smell wonderful in the spring, when I can approach them and smell their

blossoms without climbing up on a ladder. In the fall I will collect their sweet fruits.

Sources on the Internet say the trees will bear fruit in the third year after the seedlings are

planted. I'll wait. The main thing is to talk with my neighbor. He has a tractor, and we have

abandoned, overgrown land. We recently bought a house with land in a village. We threw

all our efforts into remodelling the house but never touched the land. We spent a long time

thinking about what would grow here.

The distance between trees should be three meters, the depth of the planting hole seventy

centimetres.

Can you imagine, says my husband, they are just children playing war. We stand calmly on

this starry night, and suddenly hear sirens – an air-raid alarm. "Drones, drones," men

shouted and began running to their cars all over the village. I say, “People, those are stars,

twinkling stars.” The boys correct me, "Drones, drones, they're moving." I found an article

on Wikipedia for them about the twinkling of stars, and I dropped it in the general chat of

the territorial defense. We'll see what they write now. My husband laughs and hands me a

phone with a chat open in Viber, where the men from territorial defense check their duty

time, their team, and share the news.

In fact, I'm ashamed to go to our neighbor and ask point blank: Will you plow our land? Of

course I'll pay you. Those who sold us the house, the former owners, said you always

helped. Please help us. I didn't dare even when my three-year-old granddaughter and I saw

him as we passed by his hut and tractor. I just said hello. People greet each other in this

village with such affection. Children say, "Happiness and health" instead of hello, or good

afternoon. Adults add, "God grant you health." I still say, "Good afternoon," or "Good

evening." But I will learn. My Varya and I were out for a walk, and we came upon a

neighbor, said hello, and encountered a worm. A long, fat one crawling across the road.

My daughter decided it was in danger because cars were driving past, and we watched for

almost an hour as the worm slowly squirmed along, and we asked cars to go around it.

Finally the worm got to the other side of the road and climbed under a leaf. Varya happily

continued our walk. She is very smart for her age. She is capable of saying marvelous

things.

“Where is your mommy?” she asks me,

“She died,” I answer.

“Then, who is going to hug you and pity you?”

Then she said she remembered what it was like to be dead. Varya says she was dead, she

couldn't move her legs and arms. And she saw nothing.

I don't cry, no tears flow, I just feel a fierce anger. My imagination paints a picture of a

cluster bomb flying into the high-rise building where my children live, and killing my son-

in-law, daughter, my Varya and my little Orchik, who is less than a year old.

Discard the top layer of soil separately, then mix the soil with peat and humus, add to the

mixture some superphosphate and wood ash. Hammer a peg into the middle of the hole,

then add the soil mixture. Over that sprinkle earth from the topsoil. Place a seedling in the

center of the hole and separate its roots. It is very important that the roots do not touch the

fertilizer, for it can burn the tree's delicate roots.

And, my husband says, rumors reached his soldiers that a party of Russians had landed.

There was general excitement as plans were made to neutralize it. Then came the

realization that they did not even have guns. They began thinking about what to do. I

offered to stick a pitchfork upside-down in the ground, pointing upwards. Let the assholes

plant themselves on that.

I will come to you on a tank, says my uncle from Moscow, you are fascists and Nazis. You

must be destroyed. Oh, yes, Uncle Sasha, women with babies in the maternity ward in

Mariupol are your greatest enemy. You have destroyed the heart of fascism and Nazism in

our country. And the grandmothers who sit in the basements of Okhtyrka, and the small

children you killed, and people with disabilities who do not have access to medicine.

I don't cry. They say it's easier when tears flow, even more useful.

We have a quiet region, sirens ring out periodically, but we haven't been bombed yet. I

even feel guilty that my sister is being bombed in Kharkiv, and my family is being bombed

in Kyiv. I try not to think about the many places where people are on the verge of a

humanitarian catastrophe, without water, food, medicine, and where children die of

dehydration. I take in refugees almost every day. Tired people with frightened eyes. A

five-year-old boy asked to watch cartoons. He sat quietly, watching, suddenly the cartoon's

music imitated the sound of a siren, and the child dashed and scrambled under the bed.

"Mommy," he cried plaintively. Later there were many other such children and adults. I do

not have time to air out the bed, I never finish the process of cooking. I am running out of

internal resources.

Fatigue. I don't cry. No tears flow.

After planting it in the ground, you tamp down the soil around the seedling, and at a

distance of half a meter from the trunk, you build a hill fifteen centimeters high. In the

resulting depression you pour in twenty-five to thirty liters of water.

I'm ashamed to admit it, but on the first day of the war I had diarrhea and was sick to my

stomach. I thought I had been poisoned by something. I thought if a bomb flew into the

house, I would die awkwardly, pants down on the toilet. A silly death. The days go by like

years, it seems like a peaceful life is something distant and unattainable. But I have an

abundance of patience and anger. I also have an abundant supply of pills that I cannot live

without. If they run out, I will die a nasty death over a period of three months. The Internet

says I eventually will just fall asleep. At least I'll finally get some sleep. I don't want to

cause problems that might make my relatives worry. I do not want to be a weak link, a

burden, if our city is surrounded. I do not know how people live with my diagnosis, and

without pills when surrounded by an enemy. Be patient, my dears. Be patient, we will win.

I try not to think about those who need insulin. Their situation is much worse than mine.

They don't have three months left.

Since the root system in this kind of apple tree clings to the surface... Today, again,

diarrhea and nausea. I just went to vomit. But what about the apple trees? Aha, we must

not let the roots dry out. Constant watering and mulching. I need to note everything down

in writing. That will be my witness when I forget.

My nephew in Moscow, five-year-old Andriusha, stayed with his nanny, found a portrait of

Putin, took scissors, cut it into small pieces and said, "Die, scum!" The nanny was

frightened, scolded her parents, and warned him not to do that in kindergarten.

One needs love and humanity in these days of rage and hatred. My youngest daughter is

pregnant and terribly frightened. She called to tell me there was an air raid alarm, and

because she was on the street and did not know where to hide, my arms and legs began to

tremble. But it's no big deal, no big deal, I repeat to myself constantly. It's nothing, you

just must wait, struggle, and suffer the pain. It's like giving birth. Then you look at the

baby and think, Wow, good for me! I did it! We will cope. I want to balance anger with

love and tenderness. My pregnant Dasha picked up a little mutt named Bun at the shelter.

Bun entertains my child and relieves some of the anxiety. My husband and I have a second

dog, Squirrel. We love our little one, although, to be honest, she looks like a little bat. Most

important, the formerly homeless Bun and Squirrel are full of love for us. You need

balance.

My grandmother, who is half Tatar, was supposed to inherit a huge apple orchard from her

Tatar grandparents. But she didn't. First, the Soviet government took away the apple

orchard, and destroyed the trees. Second, even if she had managed to inherit it, she would

not have been allowed to do anything, acquire a profession or earn a living.

I think, could it be my fault that the war started? Maybe my thoughts about the new apple

orchard were interpreted as some absolute evil, a kind of Mordor that rejects everyone who

loves, creates, and generates something. That destroys for centuries anything that is

capable of creating happiness and giving life?

When watering the apple tree, take care with the supports under the fruit-laden branches.