

Author	ua	Оксана Гриценко
	en	Oksana Grytsenko
Play original name / translated	ua	Як не стати кацапом
	en	How Not to Be a Katsap
Translator	en	John Freedman with Natalia Bratus
Language of translation	English	
Copyright of original text belongs to	name	Oksana Grytsenko
	e-mail	grytsenko.o.o@gmail.com
Copyright of translation belongs to	name	John Freedman with Natalia Bratus
	e-mail	jfreed16@gmail.com

Here you can read only a fragment of text. In order to get access to the full text or to receive permission for staging the text, please, contact the copyright owners of the text and translation.



ukrainian
institute



ukrdramahub

The project is implemented with the support of the International Relief Fund of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany and the Goethe Institute within the project "Theatrical windows. Work in progress" implemented by the NGO "Teatr na Zhukah" (Kharkiv).



Auswärtiges Amt



GOETHE
INSTITUT

How Not to Be a *Katsap*

By Oksana Grytsenko

Translated by John Freedman with Natalia Bratus

The first time I heard the phrase “a good Russian” was in the spring of 2022 from my friend Ruslan. He sent me a picture of a corpse with a caption. Something like, “the only good Russian is a...” You get the point.

The corpse lay somewhere in a field in the Kyiv region. And Ruslan, who served in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, complained that the local residents were finishing off wounded Russians with shovels. Ruslan said: “You can’t do that.” And the locals said: “We don’t give a fuck.” Of course, after what the Ruscists did in the Kyiv region, we understood why the locals didn’t give a damn about humanitarian treatment.

Then my boyfriend and I had a good laugh about good Russians. He is also a good Russian, by the way. In the sense of “Russian liberal.” He moved to Ukraine in the spring of 2014, and received refugee status here. He said there was no hope for anything in Russia anymore. He was one of the few people in Moscow who went out to protest the annexation of Crimea. He knew he might never go home again.

Although I know every Russian liberal will sooner or later will reveal that they harbor some sort of imperial bullshit, I haven’t seen this in my liberal yet. It may yet show up. I’ll have to keep my eyes open...

So, at the beginning of 2022, when we all thought the Big Russian Prick was bluffing, my liberal called that into doubt. We sat in bars a lot, drank, and discussed options. Mostly we scoffed at the options, because no one in their heart believed a big war could happen.

But one day, over a beer, another of my friends – let’s call him Taras – said to us, as you might expect of a good Russian: “Things are getting dirty. I would get married if I were you.”

So we sat down that evening and talked things over. And we took our application to the registry office. We went to the central office in Kyiv because nobody else knew what to do with refugees. There’s a woman there with a big beehive on her head, and she said: “No problem.” She took our application and gave us a month to think about it.

We didn’t have a month.

In February, I saw two articles by US military analysts on Twitter. They explained in great detail that the Russian army had assumed such positions that it could no longer help but attack.

I went for a beer with a friend to calm down. My good Russian bought two tickets to Chernivtsi and took me there for a couple of weeks to let things settle down. I asked him, “Why are we hiding?” And he said: “Get your parents out.”

We had a terrible quarrel. And when the Ruscists finally attacked, I silently went with him to Romania. That’s when I first felt what it’s like when you might never go home again.

In those first dark days, when I was mostly crying and drinking, the woman from the

registry office called.

She said, "Your wedding is tomorrow."

I said, "WHAT?"

And she said: "But we were bombed. We can't do it tomorrow. We're closed for now."

I didn't know what to say.

She said, "When everything gets better – and everything will definitely be fine – I'll marry you."

I just thanked her.

My Russian liberal said, "Who is this iron woman with a beehive"? Maybe she just didn't read American analysts, but her confidence gave us the strength to stumble on ahead.

I returned to Ukraine about a month later. I worked as a journalist in the liberated Kyiv region. Everywhere I came across traces of what Russian soldiers had been up to.

Burned-out tanks, ammunition, hats, boots, vests, cigarette butts, empty bottles of booze...

Bandages, harnesses, helmets, belts, washing machines, pieces of dead and partly-eaten animals...

Trenches, mines, blood on gates, blood on stairs, blood on concrete basement floors...

Bodies on roads, bodies in the dirt, in wells, in pits, bodies in bags...

In black plastic bags with the words "Lena," "Grandma Masha," and "Aunt Valya."

They left behind all those traces, but you can't put a hand on the Russians themselves. Fuck.

Naturally, I often wanted to haul off and whack my Russian liberal. For everything. For all the burned-out houses and cars, for all the crippled people, for the dead animals on the roads, for my tantrums. For not being able to return to my native village in the South. For my village that was occupied by Russians.

But I didn't do that. Because he ragged on the Big Russian Prick as much as I did. And he was doing it alongside me.

We soon got married. Right there in the central Kyiv registry office. In a huge, empty hall with weirdly twisted curtains.

My marriage certificate gives my address in the occupied territory. And in the column for my husband's address, they simply wrote: "Russian Federation."

We hid that document away. I didn't want anyone using that official information when on a hunt for enemies.

However, my husband's passport is now Israeli. For some reason, every Russian opposition leader is part Jewish. So now, as soon as I want to accuse him of being a Ruscist, he accuses me of being an antisemite.

But even if you solve the Russian problem in your head, and in your family, it will definitely catch up with you somewhere abroad.

The streets of Bucharest, Tel Aviv, and Dubrovnik are visited by many people whom I suspect of being Russians. You would think these are the ones you want to reach out to. But I won't go near them. On the contrary, I walk away. I only exhibit passive anger.

My husband said: "Maybe they're Ukrainians?" I said: "The hell they are. I can tell a *katsap* by the crotch. Ukrainian refugees are twitchy, sullen, and stuck in their phones. Russians are calm, neat, and red-cheeked as if they had just taken a swim in oil...

But damn it, that isn't always true. My crotch and accent test failed me more than once. Because Ukrainians speak Russian, too. The woman at the registry office does. And this is their right.

But, there must be some behavioral signs that can help you recognize a *katsap*. I've known the word *katsap* as a reference to Russians ever since I was a child. For many years I tried not to use it because it's very rude. According to one version, it makes a comparison between Russians and goats. According to another, it compares them to butchers. That notion is very much in vogue these days.

For me the word *katsap* does not apply to Ukrainian Russians, or to Russians who support us. It is a brand name. It refers to the majority of the Russian population. Almost the entire population.

So I came up with some definitions of what it is that makes a *katsap*. And how they differ from our way of life. Because I believe that modern Ukrainians are defined not by their origins, but by their choices. Anyone who shares these choices can declare themselves a Ukrainian.

So, here are my criteria:

Katsaps will say everything they think while sitting in the comfort of their kitchen. The Ukrainian way is to say it to an armed soldier.

A *katsap* supports the war, but avoids mobilization. Being a Ukrainian means hating the war, but volunteering.

Katsaps root for their own kind on TV.

The Ukrainian way means buying your fighters drones, armor, uniforms, helmets, vehicles and everything else they need.

The *katsap* way means watching TV and believing it, because it's TV.

The Ukrainian way means watching news on all channels, reading Telegram, talking to neighbors, and coming to the conclusion that everyone is lying.

Here you can read only a fragment of text. In order to get access to the full text or to receive permission for staging the text, please, contact the copyright owners of the text and translation.

Marseille, November 2022