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Auswärtiges Amt



GOETHE  
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I DON'T KNOW  
Olena Hapicieva  
Translated by John Freedman with Natalia Bratus

I wake up in a soft, warm bed in an 11th-century Benedictine monastery. Sleepy and relaxed. I take my phone off charge and immediately read the news.  
Someone spent the whole night huddled in the earth under fire, someone was injured, someone died, someone lost loved ones and was raped over night. While I was sleeping.

"Good morning" – I see a message from my husband, and exhale with relief.

Fighting is underway in the Kharkiv, Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions.

"Get up, get up, time to go to school" – I wake the children, cook eggs and make cocoa.

There is a Ruscist ship in the Black Sea with 19 powerful missiles.

I pour milk into cups.

The enemy's heavy equipment sometimes exceeds ours by a ratio of 20 to 1.

"Mom, I'm not hungry today." "It's a long way to dinner, so try to eat your egg."

"Ukrainian soldiers shot down a jet that was conducting reconnaissance over Izium" – like, heart.

"Mom, I want to wear shorts." – "Get your blue ones in the closet." – "Where are they, Mom?"  
"You're an adult, look."

"In the Kharkiv region, the Ukrainian Security forces detained a man recruited by Russian special services. In Bakhmut, they arrested a woman who was aiding Russia's missile strikes."

Children eat ripe cherries – red juice flows down the youngest's face.

A six year-old boy was killed in Lysychansk.

"Bonne journée" – I take my son to his classroom, the door of which opens directly onto the street. Bright walls, lots of books and games. A variety of old bicycles in the yard. "Aujourd'hui – piscine," the director reminds all. The children are taken to a pool in Rouen twice a week.

"Up to 1,000 people injured and killed every day is a disaster," writes a blogger.

I'm learning French. "Gare" is a railway station. "Guerre" means war. Sound changes essence.

My sister in Saint-Nazaire: "yesterday we went to the ocean, burned like crayfish, and the water was cold. I dream of our late grandmother, grandfather, and mother every day. They say – 'Go home,' then — 'Stay in France.' I have a toothache."

The Ruscists are firing at the border communities of Sumy and Chernihiv regions again.

The son-in-law of a school teacher from the Sumy region is in the Russian military, should she report that to the Ukrainian Security forces?

Miron takes the phone out of my hands: "Give it back, give it back to your mother."

There are intense battles in Severodonetsk. The Ruscists are firing at the Azot plant, where people are in hiding.

In the summer of 2016 we were working on a production, and walking through the streets of the town of Sever. Peter, the project's producer, showed us houses built by German prisoners after World War II.

I'm pregnant with my eldest son – I eat mulberries right from the trees on the street.

The Ruscists are attempting to turn the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant over to Russia's RosAtom... they export steel from Azovstal, solar power plants, and grain... they sing Ukrainian songs... they steal washing machines, boilers, tools, toilets, and even a doghouse.

That Russian song, "Someone came down the hill..." is actually the Ukrainian "White asters in the autumn garden." Did you know that? I didn't.

I stroke my youngest son's back and he falls asleep, squinting sweetly. Swallows and turtledoves coo on the monastery ruins...

The front now stretches for two and a half thousand kilometers.

HUSBAND. "Olya, 200-300 soldiers are killed every day. Think about it, every day. I saw a kid recently, he was stoned, he couldn't get his family out of Kherson. He had escaped from Mariupol then went back to the front line."

I look at my sleeping child. In my head are pictures of tortured people and torn bodies. Bucha. Irpen. Mariupol. The apperception of perception.

"I went to enlist at the military enlistment office," writes a blogger from Lviv, a mother of two children.

I go to a French school to pick up my eldest son. "Bonjour, ça va?" the French ask. And they answer themselves, "Ça va." That is, "everything is going, everything is okay." They smile.

"Some European Factories, Long Dependent on Cheap Russian Energy, Are Shutting Down" – a headline.

Will the attitude of Europeans change when their standard of living falls?

Sviatomir is six years old, the age of that boy from Lysychansk. He accelerates and races down a hill on a scooter. "Watch out, a car!" – "L'attention!"

"Are you from Ukraine?" an elderly Frenchwoman asks, and shakes her head ruefully.

Fields hollowed out by rockets. A burnt field of peas.  
How do you harvest anything?

The children grab the scooter, each pulling in their own direction.

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