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## Dialogues

Tasia Pugach

Translated by John Freedman with Natalia Bratus

I sit in your kitchen and say I don't like the word "refugee," so instead I use the expression "in exile." Naturally, we speak English. Because we don't understand each other's languages without Google translation.

I spend the whole evening with you, and for the first time since 24 February, I am absolutely happy. We run around after each other in the rain, then you suggest playing a game: I speak Ukrainian, and you speak German, and we will see if we can understand each other. I'm saying, I really, really like you. I look into your eyes and smile, and I'm not afraid to admit it, because you didn't understand a thing I said.

Then in your apartment you hug me, and I stroke your arm, before falling asleep alone in your room, thinking it would be nice to just lie together with you in your arms.

I'm having my first absolutely happy evening in three months.

In the morning, of course, I feel shame and guilt.

I start talking about the war a lot to drown out this feeling.

I sense you're in a bad mood.

You change the subject.

Can we feel joy, happiness, lightness, or any other range of joyful emotions right now?

While Ukrainians are being killed, tortured, captured, raped in their homes, and our apartments and houses are being destroyed?

At the end of March, the world learned about Bucha.

On that day, I woke up in the house of my friend, next to whom I always feel calm and good. It's Sunday, and I don't read the news.

I go for a walk around Alexander Platz and Potsdam Platz, my favorite Berlin squares, and I post pretty pictures on Instagram.

The world is discussing Bucha and the 350 peaceful men and women shot dead on the street, the bodies of whom Russian soldiers left lying in the middle of the road.

And I'm posting photos.

I won't know about Bucha until Monday morning.

Time-space is wrapped in a strong film of memories and hopes.

Pebbles on the Belosarai Promontory near Mariupol.

Flash.

Windows looking out at the so-called People's Republic of Luhansk in a school in Popasnya.

Flash.

Grad missiles in Debaltsevo in 2015.

Flash.

Volleys flying toward the Troyeschyna region of Kyiv in February 2022.  
Flash.

But I won't mention any of this as your 1979 camera flashes, and you take pictures of me.  
I'll recall all of this on the Deutsche Bahn train.

We sense life especially acutely on trains, the sensation spreads through the train car with the smells of boiled eggs, children crying, large suitcases in the aisles, and the meowing of cats in carriers.

In 2022

A friend of mine left for Italy from Mariupol;

Another went to Germany from Sumy;

A third remained in Kyiv;

A fourth spent a week traveling to Europe only to spend a night all alone in the middle of Berlin.

On 23 February, two of my best friends and I discussed how difficult it would be if bars in the Podil neighborhood were to close at ten p.m.

On 25 February, my friend and I discussed how many blankets to take to the bomb shelter.

In mid-March, I discussed with my new German friends the fact that the city had finally relaxed its COVID quarantine restrictions...

When you light a cigarette with a lighter, you see blue and yellow light.  
Smoking is a good way to drown out feelings of guilt.

I fall asleep in a Polish hotel with a smile on my lips, because I imagine that in a month you will come to my room and we will have sex.

But most likely, this will never happen, just as the I that existed before 24 February will never be again, and just as Bucha will never again be whole, and dawns will no longer be carefree in Podil, and much more besides.

However, I will be.

And I probably will be for a long time.

This is another thing we must do something about.

*May-June 2022, Berlin-Krakow.*