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Play

**PUSSYCAT IN MEMORY OF DARKNESS**

Original name /  
translated

**КИЦЬКА НА СПОГАД ПРО ТЕМІНЬ**

Translator

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Language of  
translation

English

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*A farewell monologue for Donbas*

*Translated by John Farndon*

#### **CAST**

##### **SHE**

*a woman in her forties. Dressed modestly, but with taste. In sunglasses. With a basket for transporting cats, and a price tag. She is selling kittens in some inappropriate place and talking to imaginary buyers.*

**SHE**

Would you like a sweet little kitten? ... No, sorry; they're for sale. If they weren't pedigree, I might just give you one. I'd want to know who I'm giving them to, though. Documents? You still talk about documents! I haven't even got my own papers, yet I still rescued them. You don't think I saved them by bothering about paperwork! An animal is chosen with the heart. You see it once - and you fall in love. You don't need paperwork to see the truth. You can tell from the fur. They're not Persians, they're Scots. Their pelt is so plush, so soft... And they can

stand on their hind legs. Such a wonderful breed. No, I'm not going to show you now – they're sleeping. And actually they won't stand to order - they are very independent minded. Cats are freedom-loving. Colour? Look you've got three choices - one white, one gray and the other black. The white cat I call Mary Stewart... Look, she woke up... No, you can call her what you like, but she is a true queen, very noble in my opinion, like my mother. Show you my mum? ... Yes, I have a photo, but I'm not going to show you... No, why should I? Why are you so suspicious? I'm wearing dark glasses when there is no sun!?! Huh. No, I'm not blind... But I do have a reason for wearing them... Take off my glasses? No way. You're either buying or you're not. Look! I can see your daughter is getting bored – and you really like the kitty, don't you? See, she trusts her completely... I'm talking about the kitten. Oh, so you don't trust me? Because of my dark glasses? Are you buying a cat or my eyes? What if I take off my glasses, will you trust me? ... Ah, you'll think about it. Well, then I'll think too... Let your little girl choose the kitten. Well. Ok – you pay for the kitten and I'll take off my glasses. Deal? Fuck it, you first. (*SHE takes the imaginary money and takes off her glasses, revealing two huge black eyes from being hit*). Scary, eh?

You want to know how I got these? (*Touches eyes*). Well, it's a long story. It's not one little turd – it's whole steaming mountain of shit. I take off my dark glasses, and it's still dark. Not so long ago, I was as white and fluffy as this cat. Everything ok: husband, two children, a cat and a dog, a house, a job, a car, a bank account, holidays by the sea... I had my own hairdressing salon, too, and my husband had a company making windows. You know, I sometimes complained about the hard work, the stress – but it turns out it was paradise... Our son really is smart - he got a grant to study in Kyiv to become a computer scientist... That's where it all started... He went there in Maidan... Well, my son's phone suddenly had no connection, and that's when my connection with life broke too... Every night I lay awake as if in a nightmare. What can you see online? Fires? Beatings? Attacks? I knew he was there, but what could I do? My husband said – you know the apple never falls far from the tree...

Oh yes. I was there myself a long time ago, before independence – in the first revolution, on hunger strike. The Revolution on Granite<sup>1</sup>, they called it. ~~Our revolution in October, on October Revolution Square. I was studying in Kyiv. I felt – I need to be here. I was the first nationalist on the course, even though I was from Donbas. Grandma spoke Ukrainian, Mum Russian, Dad Ukrainian, and Grandpa Russian, so how do you choose?~~

The first day of the hunger strike was difficult – but I soon got used to it. We fed on fantasies: 'Let's talk about what we will eat when we stop starving...' We laughed. We were children... What can you buy children who refuse even food? How can you scare children who are not afraid to be unarmed surrounded by armed adults? How can you seduce children who, with smiles and peace, commit slow suicide in front of millions for the sake of truth? Then came the euphoria of victory. We were completely seduced by the illusion...

But after a while a KGB guy came knocking. Yes, totally absurd pretext. I realized we'd all been identified and were now being checked.

A year later – we had independence... But there was always a feeling that it was stolen from us. False independence, fake Ukraine, fake democracy. So I promised myself - never again. Still, I'm 100% convinced that without our revolution, the independence of Ukraine would never have happened.

And after the Maidan, I realized they can do anything with your child – your smart, talented, honest child! They can beat him. They can torture him. They can maim. Arrest. Kill. And not

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<sup>1</sup> The first Maidan student protest in 1990

only with complete impunity - but get paid for it! So I rushed straight to Kyiv. I walked right into the Maidan. ~~Such a strange feeling. As if I were a guest. Yet kind of nostalgic.~~ It's not terrifying here at all; it's terrifying behind the screen. I remember once my son was bitten by a dog, and after that he was scared of all dogs. So we bought him a little puppy we called Ralph - and the fear went. It was the same here.

So, are you taking a kitten? Take it for your little girl. Be gentle with it, because she's suffered ... (*Puts the glasses back on*). What? My documents? I don't have any. I'm in the process of applying... So now I don't exist... Ah, it's illegal... Of course, selling illegal kittens in an illegal place is illegal... Could it be legal for a small amount? How much? (*Shows some cash*). Do you want to fight for legality? Then forget these poor kittens... I was robbed. What was stolen from me? ... Almost everything... Home, land, work, friends, faith in goodness... Everything but these little kittens... Can you get it all back for me legally?

Did you prefer the grayish one? Oh look, they both woke up. See, he likes you. Pick it up, don't be afraid... Oh, oh, just be careful... They stubbed a cigarette out on him. The gangsters... Actually, I don't know what to call them...

This kitty eats anything: vegetables, bread... No, not because he was starved. They're Scots... Did you know the Scots people were once so pressed by the British they had to eat mice, and their cats ate husks – just to survive... They're 'brothers' like us... Brothers share; never steal. Simple. Like those who stole Crimea from us – they'll never be brothers again. Crimea is not Russian, nor Ukrainian, nor Turkish. Crimea is Tatar, they even call themselves 'Crimean' because they have no other land, but there are so many names for the Tatar. When Russians moved into empty houses in Crimea they walked over corpses and bathed in despair...

My cat started squealing. And my daughter was complaining: "Mum, I found her a fiancé, let's try again." But the cat is already nine years-old. So I thought - she isn't fertile, and gave up. And we got another dog, Ralph the Shepherd. But my daughter, she's 14, persisted: "Come on, mum, let's give it a try – I've found a super cat – a month later it turned out that kitty did indeed like this unruly pagan.

When the men in khaki first appeared, I felt icy cold. I'd seen already how it ended in Crimea... And my neighbour Raya tells me: "Hey it's nothing! The main thing is that those Americans didn't come from NATO." I say, "What kind of Americans do you mean? Oh! You mean the Americans that took Crimea from us? Or was it the English? Where did you see them?" "Yes, they paid for the Maidan." I say: "The people of Kyiv paid for it. They brought food and things... Do you know how many of them gathered on Sunday? More than a million!" "No, no, this is just a montage." "What about the installation? I saw it with my own eyes!" "It doesn't matter," she says, "The junta should not be allowed; it's illegal." "What junta? The president fled, so the deputy chairman of the council was appointed. And who else, in your opinion, is legal?" "Well, I don't know... What about the right-wingers?" – "So, where did you see them?" And she says: "Well, no because our guys stopped them..."

But when they chased away the tanks, the foreigners came... Not to defend, but to kill... An old acquaintance from the university called. She's judge and has a son in the army - Maxim. She asked me: "Will you look out for him?" So I went there. What are men without women? They just want a cosy home and chat. I started bringing things for them – first food, then warm clothes... And then other women joined me...

One day on my way there I meet Raya. She looked at my bags so suspiciously... "Where are you going?" she asks. I avoided answering. "Oh," I say, "I'm in a hurry, sorry. Later." And she suddenly said: "Do you know your fan is now big in the militia?" I froze: "What fan?" "Wolfy,

our neighbour, the one who ran into you ..." "I don't remember any Wolfy..." Then I remembered... I was just 10-11 years old. And Wolfy 'ran into' us literally – on his bicycle. We were playing and he was riding toward us... Everyone screams, jumps away. And he was aiming for me. I stand stock still. He's riding too fast, and there's fear in his eyes. I don't move until the last moment, then step sharply to the left, turn and push him sideways with all my might. What a squealing! I thought he wouldn't get up. But yeh, he's alive but bruised.

I was with my daughter when I saw him. And he fixed his eyes. First on me, and then on her. So... slimey... Wolf. Exactly. They said, he was done for theft or hooliganism - something like that. And I heard the alarm bells in my head. Oh dear God, my girl, Inga, my beloved ladybug, my princess, bright, kind, gentle... No-no-no-no!!! Not this! I didn't run away, but oh he was watching... I went straight home and said to my husband: "Mikhas, we have to pack up everything. We have to run." He resisted at first, but I pleaded and cried, until he relented. He would face fire and water for his daughter, I knew that.

I started to pack. I threw in some things, took them out, put in others... The suitcases would not close. I burst into tears... Then our pussycat began to give birth. That's it. It took all night but we gave birth to three kittens: one gray, one white and the other black and very small.

Early in the morning I fell asleep. I woke up at seven, with the kittens whining piteously next to me. Then I realized: I'm not going anywhere. How could we run with a mother cat and three helpless kittens? And how could I leave her? And I say to Mikhail: "You go, and take Inga. I'll stay here for now and let the kittens grow up a little bit. Don't worry. I'll join you." So I gave them money, cards, and kept a minimum. I took them to the bus, sat Inga down, and then they called every half hour - until they were away from our territory...

So I was left alone... Or rather, with Ralph the dog, pussycat Esmeralda and three kittens. And our soldiers. Some products had already disappeared from the shops, and there was no money from ATMs. From time to time, I could hear shots... My hair salon was empty - almost no customers, two of the best girls had left, and a third stayed at home. One after another, my neighbours left too. A couple of them left me keys - to water the flowers, the garden, to feed the animals...

And then they targeted that passenger plane. Oh god, there were so many children on board... I looked at the photos. There were little babies! One blonde just like mine... And three children flying with their grandfather. Can you imagine that?! Three!

Finally some new oak camouflage came, and I had big bales of it. As I was pushing it all into the car, Raya came out with burning eyes. "What, are you helping the oppressors?" There was no point in denying where I was going, so I say, "What oppressors? No, this is for our guys, defending their land. These are ours." "These are not ours! Ours are militias, but this is the Kyiv junta." "Aren't I your friend anymore?" And she smiled so slyly. "Can you help another old friend, too?" "What is it? She got out a card, a bank card, but not one of ours. And she says: "You have a son, a computer scientist – could he help me with the code? I lost it somewhere – just can't seem to retrieve them – and you know the banks..."

I picked up the card - and suddenly a terrible realization burst into my head. She'd been looting among the corpses of... the children... from that plane. I shuddered, as if the card was hot as fire or cold as ice. I understood - this is blackmail. But I couldn't go through with it... So I tell her: "I don't think he can; he's not a hacker, just a programmer, a student..." I saw the verdict in her eyes: condemned. I was scared, I was shaking, I wanted to kill her...

I ran to our guys with those bales. My heart began to pound: "Where is Maxim?" Sighs, tight lips... Then they showed what was left of him. They just asked, "Can you tell his mother? You'll probably manage it better." I understood this... I walked home in a daze, then looked at the phone – but could not....

I went indoors, and fell into bed. I wanted to fall asleep. But the cats squealed, and the phone rang. But how could I tell her the worst possible thing, the thing I fear the most? How could I? How? Then in the morning I received a call from another phone. It turned out to be an investigator. She was dead – from poison. And my phone was the last one she dialed – 28 times. When he learned that her son had died, he sighed with relief. No-one had killed her... But maybe I had? What if I'd told her then maybe I could have offered words of support... But I didn't know those words! Guilt crushed me under a concrete slab. I lay for a day utterly crushed, shattered. So when they came the next morning, I could not resist or object - nothing. The dog went wild, barking, defending me. So I shut him in so they wouldn't kill him. And the little gray kitten, with barely open his eyes, clung fiercely to the guy's leg. Can you imagine? Clung on hard! Protecting me! So they burned him with a cigarette, bastards... Then they found my tablet - with photos of our soldiers, and weirdly photos of Chechens and Ossetians – which made absolutely no sense since I am ours entirely. (*To imaginary buyers*). Here take this kitten, for half price.

*She hands over the kitten, kissing him goodbye, and picks up the black one*

Will you take this little black one? Look how pretty he is, this boy. Oh, are you afraid of him? Ah, a black cat – bad luck if it crosses your path... Have you any idea what bad luck really is? This kitten – it brings joy, and at least some comfort. (*Hugs the invisible kitten*).

They took me to a basement and started beating me... You know, I'm not a heroine... I tried to explain that I'm not a fascist or a gunner, I'm just a woman... I begged and begged... It only wound them up... I looked into those eyes and knew there was no point in saying anything. In those eyes I saw utter darkness. Then they swore they were going to rape me... How many times would you like it - 10, 20? But they didn't rape me, just said everything they were going to do. And it was all so disgusting and disgusting that I became numb. And my body has succumbed to continuous pain...

Where they after names? Yes, of course, but that was not the main thing. They needed card PINs. So I told them. Fortunately, I had only one... At night I had some respite - I lay on the cold concrete, hungry and cold, and thought about God and death. Because there was nothing else to do. About death - to end the suffering. And I thought about God. Lord, why did you create this horror? Why is the world so awful? You know you are a loser, you are incompetent, God. You made up some bullshit.

Raya came in the night. There was excitement in her eyes, and I suddenly realized that she'd betrayed me. Of course. "Can I bring you something?" she said "Yes, poison. Do you have any?" "No. Or maybe you want to give me something for your man or your children?" "Betray my husband and children, like Judas?" She suddenly smiled. "Mikhail and I are lovers. Didn't you know?" "You're lying..." "I'm not lying. Why would I lie? You're obsessed about your business, and politics... But a man needs a simple woman. "Have you already buried me? At least wait until the funeral." "Maybe I could bring you something to eat?" "Not for me, but for my pets. Especially the cat, she has kittens." "Maybe I'll drown them?" "Don't you dare!"

In the morning, I was taken to the city. I was wrapped in a flag and left standing with a sign... They all beat, and spat, and mocked. And women beat me. No-one intervened. I closed my

eyes. Then I heard English. Flashes. I started listening... Yes, journalists. And I suddenly hoped... I opened my eyes - and saw... Wolfy. I closed them again. I opened them a little, and he just looked at me... He barked out an order, and I was taken back to the basement.

I was allowed to shower, and at night they brought me food to eat. For the first time in four days. But I could not. And here he was - Wolfy. I realized that he recognized me. Saw me as a child. He began to say something: that he did not want to be with me... I was silent... "I want to help you..." he said "Help me?! Then kill me, please. He left in silence... And I lay down and prepared for death... But I suddenly thought about my daughter, my Inga. Oh god! My son will be ok, and my husband... But Inga. And Esmeralda, Ralph, and the three kittens... No, I was not ready to die... He came back with clothes. And I suddenly realized that I might not be killed. Wolfy said that I could go, but only if I signed a document saying I had no claims against them, including property... Property? ... Then... "Wait, I must get the animals!"

I came to my house... It was clear as I reached the doorstep it was no longer mine. They'd taken everything valuable out. Ralph the dog was howling terribly. So I let him out, but he ran right past me...

Esmeralda's cold body lay at the door. She had waited for me until the last. My faithful friend. Ralph jumped around and tried to lift her sunken body with his snout... TI'd no idea where fate would hit me next, but to see her like this... No one will ever feel me the way she does, all my pain, all my sadness. Never. And then Wolfy approached me with his idiotic piece of paper - 'I don't have claims'. "I need to bury her..." "Ok... if you like..." Oh god, what about the kittens? I rushed around but they were nowhere to be seen. Had they really drowned them? ... Then suddenly I see them, peeping out from under the cupboard! One white, one gray and this is little black omen. All of them alive! I pushed them in a bag. Then Wolfy returned with a shovel... I dug a hole in the garden and wrapped Esmeralda's body in a blanket ... Then I saw Raya behind the fence, crying. She approached and asked casually: "Who are you burying?" "Esmeralda." "My little one was blown up by a mine." "Alive?" "Alive, but his hand was torn off..." "These mines were not planted by our soldiers, do you understand?" "I understand... Forgive me..." I looked up in surprise... "God forgive me - I'll take care of the house..." "You can live here, because I will never come back." "Where will you go?" "I don't know, the world is big..."

I do not have hatred in my heart. But I say to those who sowed all this. You have no idea how worthless these passions of yours are - your desire for power compared to the horrible black hole you have opened, the appalling abyss into which our land is flying at breakneck speed. I saw the face of this darkness. I don't want to be human... I'd rather be born a cat...

So, are you going to take this black kitten? No? I understand, you're afraid of bad luck... You look at us as if we are diseased. Yes, we are, allegedly. Is it better to be killed? Maybe... But I'm not afraid anymore... I don't believe that what happens there will be worse than what happens here (*Takes the kitten*). He doesn't even have a name... You know, I'll call him Ukr. And I'll keep him myself. (*Removes glasses*). And I'll leave you the glasses. They'll help you get used to the darkness... (*She leaves*).

*CURTAIN.*

*The play uses documentary facts and evidence, but the character of SHE is fictional*

