

Author	ua	Володимир Сердюк
	en	Volodymyr Serdiuk
Play original name / translated	ua	Gamarjoba
	en	
Translator	en	Written in English
Language of translation	English	
Copyright of original text belongs to	name	Volodymyr Serdiuk
	e-mail	huzulster@gmail.com
Copyright of translation belongs to	name	Volodymyr Serdiuk
	e-mail	huzulster@gmail.com

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A One-Person Play by Volodymyr Serdiuk
Written especially for the Theatre Festival in Batumi, Georgia 2022

English edited by John Freedman

Editors note: This text may be too dense with Georgian/Ukrainian references to make sense to everyone. But we include it in the program as a document of wartime Ukraine.

Character: An elderly man.

Scenography: A part of a bar, chair, and table.

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ACT ONE.

SCENE ONE

(Man addresses a barwoman standing in the dark behind the bar.)

... Hello! It smells like coffee in here! Do you still have coffee? It's disappeared everywhere else in Kyiv already!

Really? You DO HAVE coffee? I'm in luck! All other cafes have a serious problem with coffee these days – you can't find it anywhere. And, unfortunately, we're not expecting any deliveries. Our city is blocked almost on all sides – from Vasylkiv, from Brovary, from the Troyeshchyna and Obolon districts. Battles are raging everywhere, near Vyshgorod and on the Warsaw highway too...

Yesterday traders were handing out their goods for free in the Troyeshchyna district where I live. They were giving away vegetables, potatoes, and fruit. All the sellers shared their goods for nothing: Uzbeks, Georgians, and Azerbaijanis, they all handed out fruit and vegetables for free. Because on February 25, 2022, someone spread the rumor that Russians would occupy Kyiv soon. I asked a Georgian friend why he was giving his goods away. "I must get rid of all of it as soon as possible," he said.

"But you're a trader, this is your specialty," I reminded him. "Who else will man the market in place of you?"

"I'm a soldier now," he said, "The responsibility I feel for the goods weighs heavily on me. I feel responsibility and respect for the people who grew this fruit. I can't just leave it to rot. I will give it to anyone who needs it so that they can survive the Russian blockade of Kyiv."

"And where will you go?"

"To the army."

"Which army?"

"Don't you understand Ukrainian? The Armed Forces of Ukraine, of course!"

"But you're from Georgia."

"Obviously. But Homeland is my homeland too. My first marriage was here; My children were born here. Ukraine sheltered me in bad times. I will now repay my debt to Ukraine."

"Ukrainians say: fulfill your duty..."

"That's what I'll do, sir." And then he said with emphasis, "We now clearly see that we have a common enemy, and not only in Georgia and Ukraine. Russia is the enemy of Europe, of the whole civilized World."

(PAUSE)

... That day eggs from the poultry factory in Vasylkiv were sold in Kyiv for half price. The Russians bombed the local poultry farms, so people got their eggs wherever they had been sent before the bombing began. Most of them had been sent to Kyiv.

I bought four egg trays. The vendors helped me wrap them with adhesive tape and I carried them home.

I hope I will have enough to last me until the Ukrainian army liberates Kyiv. I'll only eat them once a day.

(PAUSE)

... No, this is the first time I've been here. I usually drink coffee near to where I live – about a mile away.

Why do I go there? First, because my doctor told me to go for walks every day.

I said, "Doctor, what is the point of these walks?"

He said, "For the good of your own health. Go for a walk every day."

"But it's not easy to go for walks without any goal. I need a goal, doctor, to get me out of the house. I'm already at an age when I don't want to leave the house."

"So come up with a goal for yourself," the doctor said.

"That's a real problem for me!"

"What's something you love," the doctor asked.

"Coffee," I said.

"Then set yourself the goal of walking to a coffee shop every day, one which is not too near you.

Have your coffee there, and go back home."

"How far do I need to walk?"

"Ten thousand steps. And not just around the house or yard, but with a firm gait, in a joyful mood – because wherever you go, delicious coffee will always be waiting for you!"

"So I can drink coffee?"

"Once a day you can. It won't make anything worse," he said.

(PAUSE)

And so, I do as he recommended. In addition, since the war began, I started calling these walks "my patrol," and "my shift."

I walk around the local area looking at what's going on where, and how. I patrol without weapons, of course. I have a mobile phone and a flashlight. I thought about carrying an electric shocker with me. And maybe a pistol with rubber bullets. Then I thought, "If I shoot at the Russians from a distance of ten meters I will definitely be dead. They will definitely shoot me with their machine guns and, with the noise of Russian missiles exploding, no one will even hear the crackle of machine gun fire."

Is one more confident carrying weapons?

I doubt it. I visited several warehouses, and military registration and enlistment offices, and I asked for for a Makarov pistol at least, if not a Kalashnikov assault rifle. They wouldn't give me one.

"Why?" I asked.

"You're already an old man," they said. It's true, I am already 65. Still, I could have finished off two or three invaders from Moscow.

So, how did it all end?

Well, it was like this – I also visited a few district police stations. I shouted: "The President promised to distribute weapons to everyone as long as they show a passport with a local residence permit!"

Did I make an active effort to find myself a weapon?

Of course, I did. As soon as I heard President Petro Poroshenko's announcement on television, I

walked all the way to Polar Street, No. 1, in Kyiv in search of a machine gun. But, the message was aired in the evening, and it was already dark. As such, I went the next morning. And since the city transport wasn't working, I went on foot. By the time I reached the Obolon District, a Russian armored column had already encircled the factory territory, and I wound up in the middle of a battle before I even reached the warehouses on Polar Street. I dropped down, and sort of whimpered behind a wall, because the shooting there broke out in earnest.

A Russian armored car ran over one pensioner's car. Some of the Russian soldiers were dressed in the uniforms of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

"What? What?"

What happened to the pensioner, you ask? Well, pensioners are indestructible. That pensioner climbed out of his shabby, flattened little "Zaporozhets" car and joined up with a group of local petty Ukrainian thugs who had already roughed up some Russian soldiers, lay them out on the ground, and disarmed them! In a word, true Cossacks! What can I say? Armed guards from the nearby warehouses came running, Ukrainian National Guardsmen, and the rest of the Russian soldiers were killed right there. Everything happened surprisingly fast, and in our favor.

That day, I was convinced that we Ukrainians would defeat the Russian army and repel the armed offensive of the Russian invaders.

(PAUSE)

Day after day, everywhere I went in official institutions, this was the answer I got: "We heard," they said. "We heard the President's speech on TV ourselves, but we personally have not yet received direct instructions. Go home. Stay at home. You'll do more good that way."

I said, "I'm already patrolling my area. Twice a day and twice a night. At least give me the phone number of some of your officers on duty so I can tell them if I find something suspicious. This is a people's war. Everyone should do all they can to achieve victory as soon as possible."

They gave me their telephone number. And when I found some suspicious marks on the sidewalk which were not there yesterday, I tried to inform the police. What if these were signs or targets for Russian missiles? There were some big circles and arrows painted their in fluorescent paint. They say that stuff glows. Maybe rockets have hit apartment blocks, focusing on signs like this.

So what happened next? An answering machine told me to press another button, don't you know. I never did get through. It was impossible to connect with my officer. One can't speak to a machine, can you?

Since they just gave me a general police phone number, I imagine how many hundreds of calls are directed there every hour.

(PAUSE)

Did I give up? No. I am a wily soldier. I took two kilograms of apples and a couple of carrots, and I went to the nearest police station. I also planned to take them some coffee in a thermos, but then I thought better about it. What if they think I had poured poison in there? They wouldn't take it.

Because there had already been cases of our soldiers being poisoned by Russian traitors. So I only took them apples and carrots.

The police officers asked, "Why did you bring us this?"

I said, "It will give you something to chew on during the night watch. It will keep sleep at bay. I used to do this before taking exams when I was as student. If you cannot sleep at night because you have an exam the next morning - you chew really hard - your head shakes, and drowsiness passes."

You can also use nuts for the purpose, but I had no nuts at that moment.

Naturally, they accepted my gift gladly after such a professional explanation. For two days I delivered gifts to them, until the shift supervisor said, "Okay, old man, I'll give you a combat phone." And he gave me a piece of paper with a phone number on it.

"Who's going to answer me there?" I asked.

"I will," said the shift supervisor, "I'll answer you personally."
"So it really is a combat telephone?"
"It really is," he said.
"I know discipline," I tell him, "I won't bother you again. Only in the case of emergencies."
"Call all you want," the captain replied. "Since you're on duty with us..."
"I'm patrolling!"
"Since you're already on patrol, you can count on the immediate arrival of a mobile group in response to your calls"
"My warnings," I emphasized.
"That's right, we're a team now. Don't be shy," the captain laughed.

(PAUSE)

...You have delicious coffee here. Thanks. No, I am not on patrol right now. I'm returning from our district territorial defense headquarters. They enlisted me in the territorial defense.
Of course, they accepted me! So far, they have enlisted me in the reserve #112 Autonomous Battalion of the Kyiv Territorial Defense.
The nickname they gave me is "Mushroom 9."
...You may laugh. Go ahead, laugh. It is not because I am already an "old mushroom," but because the platoon to which I was attached is called the "Mushrooms."

(PAUSE)

To make it even funnier, I'll tell you that those headquarters officers lack all imagination and ingenuity! All they wanted to know when I submitted my questionnaire to the headquarters was:

- Do I have a driver's license?
- What weapons I can operate?
- Did I serve in the army?
- What were my duties?
- What, where and how much?
- Was it active service?

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huzul@ukr.net