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## FIVE SONGS OF POLISSYA<sup>1</sup>

### FIRST SONG

#### BABA MACBETH FROM GLADKOVYCHI (EARTH)

AGAFIYA – 55 years old. A stern robust woman.

ADAM – 57 years old. A robust man with extinguished eyes.

*The year is 1940. A tidy rural homestead. In the background are the doors of a shed, the barn, and the white-washed cottage, as well as a laid hedge, overgrown with flowers. Clay pots are drying upside down on the stakes of the hedge. To the side is a dog-house; there is a dog-chain on the ground, but no dog. From the barn come animal noises: oinking, mooing, the bleating of sheep. ADAM (57) is sitting on a tree stump and chopping forage in a tub. A ripe pear falls from above and splits on the ground. ADAM stands up, picks up the pear, throws it into the tub, grinds what's left of it into the ground with his foot, and sits back down to his job. Baba AGAFIYA (55) comes out of the cottage, carrying a copper tub with laundry. She puts the tub on a tall stool and starts rubbing a rushnyk<sup>2</sup> with a bar of brown utility soap. Steam rises above the tub. For a while, the man and the woman do their work in silence, monotonously.*

AGAFIYA

You done burying Rex?

ADAM

Not yet.

AGAFIYA

Bury him after dark. Take him to the forest and bury him there.

ADAM

I'll bury him in the orchard.

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<sup>1</sup> Consider “Five Psalm of Polissya”

<sup>2</sup> A traditional Ukrainian embroidered towel.

AGAFIYA

In the orchard where?

ADAM

Under the guelder-rose.

AGAFIYA

I'll show you guelder-rose! Don't you know you can't do that?

ADAM

It won't hurt the tree.

AGAFIYA

The tree will die. Ivan and Zakhar planted that tree before they went off to war. When it blooms in the spring, the scent of it—brings back their eyes.

ADAM

I'm burying Rex in the orchard. If not under the guelder-rose then under the cherry tree.

AGAFIYA

That cherry tree ought to have been cut down a long time ago. I keep spraying it, but it's no use: all the fruit has worms in it. Can't make anything with it, and can't eat it either. You look at a cherry and it's perfectly whole, but open it, and there's a worm in there. How does it even get inside?

ADAM

Maybe the cherries are wormy because our Hanna hung herself on that tree?

*AGAFIYA stops washing, looks at ADAM for the first time.*

AGAFIYA

Since when is she “our”? She's not ours. And never been.

*ADAM stops chopping, looks at AGAFIYA.*

ADAM

She was Ivan's wife. Which means, our daughter-in-law.

*For a while they look at each other in silence. Then AGAFIYA resumes her washing, and ADAM goes back to chopping.*

AGAFIYA

You cut down that tree, pull out the stump, and then bury whoever you want in that hole—Rex, or me. Better go bury whoever it was that poisoned your dog.

ADAM

Rex died because he was old.

AGAFIYA

Nonsense! You found him by the dead bitch back in 'thirty-three. Eight years is not old for a dog. He was a good dog. Barked when needed and didn't bother the chickens. People from the village, when they go past our gate, always spit—so he barked at them. That's why they poisoned him.

*AGAFIYA wrings out the rushnyk, shakes it off, puts it on the laundry line, picks up another rushnyk, starts soaping.*

ADAM

Rex had nothing to do with why people spat at our gates.

AGAFIYA

And who did? Hanna? No one gave a hoot about your Hanna. Ivan married her an orphan with nothing. Neither a sack to carry nor a kerchief to cover her head she had. She lived here in a warm house, and had soup every day, had potatoes every day. She hung herself all on her own—no one made her.

ADAM

And you didn't let a day go by that you didn't begrudge her that soup.

AGAFIYA

What had she ever done to earn it? She lay about lazy, wouldn't go tend to the pigs, wouldn't go tend the cow. I did the washing for her, and the cooking for her, and worked in the garden for her...

ADAM

Hanna was ill. Not lazy. After Ivan was killed, she worked for three, never mind she was gravid. And later, when Dmytryk was born, she worked. Tended to the pigs as well as the cow. And you took her dress, and her head-scarf. Gave her a potato-sack to wear so she couldn't ever go out.

AGAFIYA

Like she would've! With a baby at home... that she got from who knows whom...

ADAM

What are you on about, old fool?

AGAFIYA

You're the fool here. You just won't get it, will you? How many times have I counted months for you?

ADAM

You do that for everyone...

*Adds more greens to the tub and keeps chopping.*

AGAFIYA

I count and you should. Ivan brought Han'ka home in December, didn't he? He went off to war in May, right? And the kid was born in early August, when we were digging beets. Are you counting?

ADAM

He had Ivan's eyes.

AGAFIYA

This whole village has Ivan's eyes. That's just the way it goes. She was on the way already, and he took pity on her. Because that's how kind he was... or he didn't know... Was fooled.

*Wrings out a rushnyk, shakes it off, puts it on the line.*

AGAFIYA

And then got killed. Left us with that lazy tramp. And the little bastard.

ADAM

She was not lazy. She gave birth early because you worked her like a horse. And grieved for Ivan the whole time. She spent her days on her knees in your vegetables and cried at night.

AGAFIYA

She went to the orchard at night to pick off our cherries.

ADAM

And you begrudged her even that.

AGAFIYA

Whatever I felt, that tree was the only one of its kind in the whole district. No one else had yellow cherries. Any time I went to market, I hardly put my basket down before I sold out. Come back with the next cart, I would. With five rubles in my kerchief... And she'd get up in the middle of the night and go graze on it.

ADAM

Good Lord, how many could she have eaten?

AGAFIYA

Well, I could tell you—I saw it. A dozen at a time she'd eat, wouldn't she. She'd hide the pits, thought I wouldn't know where she put them. Go plant your own cherry tree, see it through, and then graze on it. She just showed up and stayed here, all nice and warm.

ADAM

And now you have wormy cherries. And people spit on our gates. And they'll keep spitting. And the dog's got nothing to do with it.

AGAFIYA

Neither does Han'ka.

*AGAFIYA wrings out another rushnyk, shakes it off, puts it on the line.*

AGAFIYA

'Tis because of Dmytryk.

*ADAM gives AGAFIYA another long look. He stops chopping. Then he stands up, chopper in hand. AGAFIYA feels ADAM's eyes on her back and freezes. ADAM goes to the shed and brings back a barrel. He pours the chopped-up greens from the tub to the barrel. AGAFIYA resumes her washing. ADAM pours new greens into the tub, starts chopping.*

AGAFIYA

Bury the dog in the woods once it's dark.

ADAM

I'll bury my dog where I want to.

AGAFIYA

You'll bury him where I tell you.

ADAM

I've been doing what you told me my entire life.

AGAFIYA

And how did that turn out? Look at this house. Look at this homestead. We've got pigs and a cow.  
And sheep. We're the only ones with sheep. Everyone in the district buys wool from us.

ADAM

Everyone in the district has children and grandchildren. And we don't even have a dog now.

AGAFIYA

Well, you should've made more kids.

ADAM

You were the one who said two sons were enough. That it makes right to divide the homestead in halves. One half for Ivan, another for Zakhar.

AGAFIYA

And when Ivan was killed, what made you give his half to Dmytryk? How do I know he was Ivan's and not someone else's?

ADAM

Ivan is gone. Dmytryk is gone. Zakhar is gone.

AGAFIYA

The war took Ivan. The pond took Zakhar. And *you* were the one sent him there.

*ADAM stops his work, stares into the tub.*

ADAM

I did not send him there.



AGAFIYA

You came and said Dmytryk disappeared while you were untangling the net. You came and said  
Dmytryk drowned.

ADAM

I did not send him there.

*AGAFIYA wrings out a rushnyk, shakes it off, hangs it on the line.*

AGAFIYA

You mightn't've sent him, but you told him. Why didn't you pull Dmytryk out?

*AGAFIYA returns to her washing.*

ADAM

*(starts chopping again)*

I did not because I could not find him.

AGAFIYA

Then you should've said he ran away into the forest. Zakhar wouldn't have gone into the water then.

ADAM

Hanna rushed in. Zakhar went after her.

AGAFIYA

That tramp had her claws sunk into my Zakhar too. Wormed her way into our home with lies.  
Buried one of my sons and set her sights on the other. And you were as good as blind. I saw the way  
you looked at her. I told you to drown Dmytryk—and what had you done?

ADAM

I did not drown him (chops harder).

AGAFIYA

Then what did you do with him? What did you do that people found our own son drowned and caught in your nets, and not a trace of that little bastard?

ADAM

I did nothing.

AGAFIYA

*(washes hysterically)*

And if you had done as I told you to do, you'd have pulled him out of the water yourself. And Zakharko would be alive now.

*ADAM gets up with the chopper and wipes the blade on the edge of the tub. Gives AGAFIYA a third look. AGAFIYA finishes washing the last rushnyk, wrings it out, hangs it up. Lifts the laundry tub off the stool and looks at ADAM.*

AGAFIYA

Han'ka had a worm inside eating at her for everything she'd done to us. That's why she'd gone and hung herself. And your dog got poisoned. You'll bury him in the woods once it's dark.

*She pours the soapy water under ADAM's feet, then shakes off the tub and goes back into the house. ADAM puts down the chopper and goes into the shed. He comes back out carrying the dog's body wrapped in a rushnyk. He is holding it as if it were a baby. He begins to rock it like a baby.*

END of the first song.

**SECOND SONG**  
**A COAT AND A WATCH(AIR)**

GEORGIY – 24 years old. Tall, skinny, solicitous.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH – 41 years old. Of average height, robust, sensible.

*1959. A prison cell. Bunks. GEORGIY (24) and DMYTRO IVANOVYCH (41) sit opposite each other. On a table are tin mugs and two apples. DMYTRO IVANOVYCH picks up a mug, surreptitiously pours something into it, then does the same to the other mug. While he does this GEORGIY looks nervously at the cell door.*

GEORGIY

It's a pleasure doing time with you, Dmytro Ivanovych.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

That is because I am not an average person, Georgiy.

GEORGIY

I know, I know.

*DMYTRO IVANOVYCH offers GEORGIY a mug.*

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

And do you know, Georgiy, what we are drinking to today?

GEORGIY

To the complete triumph of socialism?

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

Socialism had triumphed back in January. And “not just completely, but finally”! Do you understand, Georgiy?

GEORGIY

I do, Dmytro Ivanovych.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

Plenty has already been drunk to that. *(raises his mug)*. Today, we drink to the fact that the Soviet space rocket Luna-2 crashed onto the surface of the Moon.

GEORGIY

Fuck me!

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

Mind your language, Georgiy, I am trying to make a cultivated person out of you. When you get out of here, and go work as a teacher, what then—you'll stand in front of the class and say, Fuck me! What will the children think?

GEORGIY

But why did the rocket crash?

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

It's not a bad thing that it did. In fact, it is another great accomplishment of the Soviet Union, Georgiy. Just think: there's now a man-made object on the surface of the Moon. And it was made not just by any man, but the Soviet man.

GEORGIY

And how do you know this?

*DMYTRO IVANOVYCH pulls a crumpled newspaper from his pocket.*

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

Nikiforovna wrapped the apples in the Zoria for me. *(smooths out a page)*. Just think, an object on the moon! That's not just launching monkeys into orbit.

*DMYTRO IVANOVYCH raises his mug to GEORGIY, they clink, drink. They take bites of the their apples, then put the apples back down.*

GEORGIY

*(gasps)* That is some good booze! Gets you right through!

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

Nikiforovna makes hers from her White Transparent apples. Such a great wife I've got, a Jane of all trades. *(winks at Georgiy)* We'll find you one too. I've got my eye on this one lady from Sholomkivsk. She's from a poor family, but a hard worker, she is. And the ass on her...

GEORGIY

*(sighs)* By the time I get out of here, she'll be collecting a pension, Dmytro Ivanovych. And her ass won't be the same...

*DMYTRO IVANOVYCH gives GEORGIY a fatherly look, picks up the mugs from the table, again surreptitiously fills them. GEORGIY looks at the door nervously. They raise the mugs, clink.*

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

When they put me here a month ago, you were Gosha. And now you are Georgiy. Soon, you'll be Georgiy Pylypovych.

*(they drink)*

GEORGIY

I'll be Georgiy Pylypovych when the big boss in court reads me the sentence.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

Look, Georgiy. It's my fifth time in here. And do you know, not once had the big boss read me the sentence. There's this person called a lawyer. And this thing called money. And when you give a lawyer money, there is no court and there is no sentence.

GEORGIY

Your case is different. For a murder, this won't work.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

But you didn't kill anyone, did you?

GEORGIY

No, I didn't. But I don't have any money either.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

You're right about that, Georgiy. Murder takes a lot of money. The lawyer's gotta share with the boss. But!

*They clink again.*

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

But! Now you have me. And I am not an average person.

GEORGIY

I know, I know.

*They drink, take bites of the apples, put the apples back down.*

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

Have I told you how it is that I don't have children?

GEORGIY

I've been wanting to ask but it didn't feel right.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

Yes, it's a delicate business. I've got everything in working order, you know... Nikiforovna's happy. We went to see a doctor. He was a good doctor. He said Nikiforovna used to work in the tobacco factory after the war—that's why we can't manage any babies. I even quit smoking, you know.

GEORGIY

It might still be possible, right, Dmytro Ivanovych? If you keep trying.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

The Doctor said not to. Because the babies might come out retarded.

GEORGIY

That's certainly unpleasant. We had one such boy in our village. Korniy was his name. He went around showing his pisser to everyone.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

See, I don't want my son to showing his pisser around.

*DMYTRO IVANOVYCH sighs, refills the mugs.*

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

I look at you Georgiy and wonder. You are a good lad. You could have been my son. We'd do great things together.

GEORGIY

Such things you say, Dmytro Ivanovych—make me want to cry. No one has ever said anything like this to me. At the home, they just beat us and swore at us. In the army they did not curse—just beat us. Cracked my skull with an iron pipe once—you could see the brains through the hole. And now the hair won't grow on that spot.

*Points to a spot on his head. DMYTRO IVANOVYCH looks at it carefully.*

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

A crying shame... They wrote a lot about your case in the Zoria. They could have mentioned this, but didn't. Just carried on about that coat and the watch.

GEORGIY

What about that coat?

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

That lad's Mom kept wailing at the funeral, "My Vasylo got killed for a coat and a watch. And it wasn't even his coat, and the watch wasn't either."

GEORGIY

Did the boy, like, stole the coat and the watch from someone?

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

He didn't steal them, he borrowed. It was his graduation day at school and he was due to the Army three days after. And he had this girl at school, Mariya. He had a mind to marry her after the army. You know how it goes. So he went to our photographer, Yakov, and borrowed the coat and a Swiss-made watch. A trophy. Worth a hundred rubles at least. Or more.

GEORGIY

What'd he want with a watch like that?

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

Well. He wanted to make a proper impression at the graduation. So Mariya would remember him. And wait for him to come back.

*DMYTRO IVANOVYCH refills the mugs.*

GEORGIY

And? Did they write all that in the Zoria?



DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

What they didn't write in the paper, people talked about in bread-lines. The whole town's talking about this story.

GEORGIY

Oh, no.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

It's just bad luck, Georgiy, that's all. Everyone loved that Vasyl lad. He got all As, never mind he was poor. And you ain't from here. No one knows you. That's why they blamed you. No one local would've killed Vasyl.

*They clink, drink, eat.*

GEORGIY

I've come looking for a better life, and it'll be the end of me.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

People are wicked because they are hungry, Georgiy. And who doesn't want to punish a murderer? You just have to prove to them you did not do it.

GEORGIY

How could I ever do that? I've got no evidence at all.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

For the last few years, at the Officers' Hall, they judged collaborators. The ones that worked for the *Polizei*. One after another, every Saturday. Everyone went to those hearings. No concerts needed. They'd leave that Hall thinking, that man will get the firing squad. Every one, every single one who was a bastard during the war would get it. Thoughts like that put a man's soul at peace. Means, there's justice in this world. In the old days, people went to church, you know?

GEORGIY

Uh-huh.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

They closed the church this year. But we have the Officers' Hall. And the just punishment will catch up with every evildoer. If not God's than the Soviet government's.

*Refills the mugs.*

GEORGIY

A wonder of a bottle you have. I am drunk already and there's still booze.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

It's because we have no food. (*clinks*). You just caught a bad break, Georgiy. It's not just that you're not from here, the town's run out of collaborators. Been a whole month without anything at the Officers' Hall. People got bored. And then—a murder!

GEORGIY

They'll put me against the wall, Dmytriy Ivanovych.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

Well, you may not have proof, but neither do they. They'll put you in prison, that's for sure, but they won't shoot you. If you could just give money to a lawyer. Like, two hundred. To share with the boss. A hundred a piece...

GEORGIY

Where would I ever find that?

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

All the bosses wear my beaver hats. Everyone knows I've got a manufacture—illegal, of course. I kill those beavers by the hundred at the dams. Nikiforovna cures the pelts and does the sewing. She's handy like that. (*winks*). And that's not like making brooms or selling dried mushrooms in Leningrad—a world of fuss but zero profit.

GEORGIY

Who's ratting on you then?

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

People get jealous. My hats paid for a summer kitchen and for fixing up the house. It's really nice.  
So they report on me. People just won't remember any good you'd done them.

GEORGIY

But the bosses know, don't they?

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

They do, but they say they have to keep me here for a while, for appearances' sake. If there's a report—they've got to take measures. But I don't mind doing time, especially in good company.

*Refills the mugs.*

GEORGIY

*(picks up a mug and an apple)* They'll let you out soon, and I'll be left all alone.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

Want to come work for me?

*They clink.*

GEORGIY

I do!

*They blow their breaths, drink. GEORGIY and DMYTRO IVANOVYCH are both very drunk. It is obvious from the way they speak.*

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

Then let's think...

GEORGIY

Let's!

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

They found that Vasyl lad next to his house with his skull cracked. His sister found him in the wheat. Or in the rye. There was an iron pipe there, bloodied. Which means the killer hit him and left the weapon.

GEORGIY

And what does that get me?

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

Well, it means it could have been anyone. It'd be different if they had caught you with that pipe. You'd be done for then.

GEORGIY

I didn't have no pipe on me.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

Well, then we just have to find two hundred rubles and you come work for me. We'll set you up with that girl from Sholomkivsk county. You can live in my summer kitchen for a start. Until you can raise your own house...

*He refills the mugs. They've eaten the apples down to the cores.*

GEORGIY

Where am I ever going to find two hundred rubles?

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

*(clinks)* Well, I can raise you a hundred. I can't do any more than that—I've got to get out of here myself.

*They drink, blow.*

GEORGIY

I don't even have a hundred. I spent my last on the ticket here. Got here, and here we are.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

The animals! Threw an innocent, unfortunate man in jail!

*Moves to Georgiy's bunk. Hugs him around the shoulders.*

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

If they only knew, Georgiy, if those animals only know... who I am.

GEORGIY

*(hiccups)* But they do, don't they? They've all got beaver hats.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

Naaah, Georgiy. If they only knew *WHO* I was.

*Refills the mugs. Both men's hands are shaking.*

GEORGIY

You, Dmytro Ivanovych, are not an average person!

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

If they only knew, Georgiy! *(leans in and whispers into Georgiy's ear)* I was the head of the *Polizei* here during the war!

*GEORGIY looks at him frightened. DMYTRO IVANOVYCH puts a finger to his lips and makes the 'shh' sound.*

GEORGIY

*(whispers)* How has no one reported you?

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

Only the Germans knew. And they are all dead.

*They clink and drink.*

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

So many dead, so many, Georgiy. Those were the times. The times...

GEORGIY

The times... I mean, the watch. The Swiss one. Could it fetch a hundred rubles.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

Even a hundred and twenty, Georgiy. I've got connections, you know.

GEORGIY

I, Dmytro Ivanovych, hid it in the tank. And the coat too.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

*(looks at Georgiy as if not understanding)* Which tank, Georgiy?

GEORGIY

The monument there, at the cross-roads. When I ran from them, I climbed in. That's where I left it. If someone could go get it and sell it... It'd be enough for the lawyer and the boss, right?

*DMYTRO IVANOVYCH stands up. Looks at GEORGIY. GEORGIY sits on his bunk rocking from side to side. DMYTRO IVANOVYCH goes to the door of the cell and starts banging on it with his mug. The door opens very quickly.*

VOICE FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR

Seems to have taken you longer this time, Ivanovych.

DMYTRO IVANOVYCH

*(in a sober voice)* Your wife's moonshine helped. He hid the evidence in the tank. You can send people after it.

*Leaves the cell, not looking at GEORGIY. The door is closed, with much clanging of many locks. GEORGIY looks at the door in silence.*

End of the second song.

**THIRD SONG**  
**THE DAY OF THE TANK DRIVER**  
**(WATER)**

ILARIONIVNA – 43 years old. A robust woman with kind eyes.

SAFONIVNA – 45 years old. A robust woman with flinty eyes.

*The year is 1973. A bath-house. Wooden benches with zinc-covered metal tubs on them. Water pours into the tubs from the faucets on the wall. Several naked women, most of them of advanced age, with sagging, heavy breasts, rub themselves with soaped loofahs and wash off by scooping water out of the tubs with special dippers. There are sounds of the dippers clinking against the tubs, the sounds of water. The glass in the windows is painted white. A small section of a window is open at the top, and steams escapes through it out into the street. ILARIONIVNA (43) shuts off a tap, picks up the tub full of water and places it on the bench. SAFONIVNA (45) enters, carrying an empty tub and a tote-bag with her washing things. The women see each other.*

ILARIONIVNA

Safonivna, I was starting to wonder if you were coming today. Who would I ask to rub my back, I wondered.

SAFONIVNA

I had to take Yulichka to Marusia's place.

ILARIONIVNA

Why didn't you bring Yulichka to wash?

SAFONIVNA

She's got this cough... I thought better safe than sorry.

The whole last night she just oughed and oughed.

*SAFONIVNA pours water into her tub. She puts the tub on the bench. She takes a loofah, a bar of soap and shampoo out of her bag.*

ILARIONIVNA

Give her raspberry jam. Just let her eat half a jar straight up. Then under a comforter and let her sweat it out. How on earth did she catch a cold in summer?

SAFONIVNA

Who knows. She went to listen to the brass band at the House of Culture on the Tank-driver's Day, had some ice-cream there. Might have caught a draft or something, who knows.

ILARIONIVNA

Oh, hey, did you hear what we had happen on the Tank-driver's Day?

SAFONIVNA

How could I not. I near ran here to get the story straight from you.

*Throughout the conversation, the women are soaping up and rinsing off with the water from the tubs.*

ILARIONIVNA

You just never know with people, do you? Such good neighbors they were, and then this.

SAFONIVNA

You can never know what people want.

ILARIONIVNA

You said it, Safonivna. The house so fine. Valya would ask me to watch her kids sometimes—I'd always go. Our house is cold, and theirs so warm. And the bath and toilet indoors. And the kids so nice. The girl, Nastya, she is five, and the boy is just little.

SAFONIVNA

And where would she herself go while you watched her kids?



ILARIONIVNA

To the market. And she'd always give me something of what she bought, an egg, or a bit of butter. And you know how it is—when you have an egg, you can make pancakes or varenyki, you manage.

She is not tight at all, that Valya, never mind she is very beautiful.

SAFONIVNA

Right, to the market. As if. She went off to see this one officer. Marusia told me. He lives over at the Kysils, right next to her. Mind giving my back a rub, Larionivna?

*Holds out a soaped-up loofah for ILARIONIVNA, braces against the bench. ILARIONIVNA starts rubbing her back.*

ILARIONIVNA

Valya is a handsome woman, for sure. When she walked down the street, every dog would turn to look. And have you seen her dresses? She's got cloth from Germany, enough to make a new one every year if she wants. She gave me a length for a blouse. Polka-dots. I already know what pattern I'll use.

SAFONIVNA

Get it good there between the shoulder-blades, there, thanks!  
I've always said, no good comes of being rich. You've got children, you've got husband, you've got your garden—what else do you want? A normal person wouldn't want nothing more.

ILARIONIVNA

You get used to good things fast. I know how it is. Going back to nothing—that is very complicated. When my Zakharovych died, me and the boys ate nothing but turnips for two years. I went around begging from any kin I had. Looked into their bags, I did, to see what they could give of. 'Till I got my room and they gave me that job. Things were hard then. Still are.

SAFONIVNA

Things, Larionivna, are hard all around. We survived the war. And those people—they never knew what that was like, and get all kinds of nonsense into their heads. They ought to just live and enjoy the peace. Oh, thank you! That was a good rub!

*Takes the loofah back from ILARIONIVNA, rinses it in the tub, wrings it out. Picks up the tub and douses herself with the water. Puts the tub under a faucet, fills it again.*

SAFONIVNA

Marusia said, there were big bosses come all the way from the oblast?

ILARIONIVNA

Well, it's an incident of oblast significance, wasn't it? Yura was not just a common officer. He was the head of communications. Got Lieutenant-Colonel last year.

SAFONIVNA

OK, you go in order now.

*SAFONIVNA picks up a pair of scissors, starts clipping her toe-nails.*

ILARIONIVNA

This Yura and Valya both moved here three years ago. 'Twas the year they shot at Brezhnev. He is from Bryansk originally.

SAFONIVNA

How did she get her fabric from Germany?

ILARIONIVNA

Her father had served there. Valya said he brought back a whole train-carriage full of trophies.

SAFONIVNA

Well, there you have you. Valya's used to living large, isn't she.

ILARIONIVNA

They already had Nastya when he got transferred, didn't have the boy yet. Got the best house in the street. Before the revolution, the notary used to live there. Once they settled a bit, Valya had the boy right away a year and a half later.

SAFONIVNA

Sure, why wouldn't she—in conditions like that!

ILARIONIVNA

And they lived peaceably, didn't fight. Yura, he liked to drink sometimes, but not like on a binge or anythings. Like a normal man likes. Whenever he drank, something would come over him. He'd be sitting at home, like always, and then would just get up, slam the door and leave. He'd walk and walk. Then come back and go to sleep. Never said a word.

SAFONIVNA

Something was eating him.

*ILARIONIVNA braces against the bench with her back at SAFONIVNA.*

ILARIONIVNA

Now, you give me a rub... That day, I was sitting with the kids too. Valya and Yura went to the concert. The whole tank division was there, in the first row. She had this beautiful dress on: the red one, to her knees, with the low neck. Nastya was memorizing a poem. The boy slept almost the entire time. So I had a breather with them. And then they came... Oh, and between the shoulder-blades too!

*SAFONIVNA rubs vigorously.*

SAFONIVNA

Were they quarreled?

ILARIONIVNA

No, but Valya seemed kind of down. She did bring back three sandwiches with Finnish sausage, thought. For Nastya and the boy, and one for me.

SAFONIVNA

And Yura?

ILARIONIVNA

*(sits down on a bench)* He just smoked outside the house. Said 'good night' to me when I left and wished me a happy holiday, and that's all. I saw his face, though—it was as red as that dress.

SAFONIVNA

Meaning, he'd had a drink.

ILARIONIVNA

I took the sandwich home to my boys, then read the Zoria some. And then I was going to see the Berstein woman. They're sending me to a sanatorium for my sciatica, but I don't have a suitcase to pack into. So I thought, I'd borrow one from the Bersteins. That's when I heard the sirens out in the street. One van from the medical unit came up to the check-point near my house, and then the police, too. It took me a minute to come out, and by the time I did, all was quiet. A bad kind of quiet, you know?

SAFONIVNA

*(crosses herself)* Good Lord...

ILARIONIVNA

Down the street I went, and there was the Berstein woman at her gate, looking out. I says, "I'm come to see you about a suitcase," and she looks at me with these terrible eyes and says, "You, Larionivna, better come in."

*All of a sudden, there's a teen-age boy's face in the open section of the window. All women shriek and cover their chests and loins with loofahs, dippers, whatever they have. SAFONIVNA, decisive, scoops up a dipper-full of water and splashes it at the window. The boy's face disappears.*

SAFONIVNA

Shame it's not boiling. Would have scolded the bastard's mug.

ILARIONIVNA

At least he had his eyes on our faces, not the tits. The delinquent.

SAFONIVNA

Shame the water wasn't boiling. That 'un hadn't seen war, don't know what real hardship's like.

ILARIONIVNA

Come, Safonivna, it's a good thing he hadn't seen it.

SAFONIVNA

That's why his head's full of nonsense—from the good life. If he'd had his face scolded, he'd know better than to go peeping. Want some shampoo?

ILARIONIVNA

Sure! Makes my hair soft.

*Both shampoo their hair, and takes special care to wash their ears.*

ILARIONIVNA

So, in I come to the Bersteins, and right away she puts drops into a shot-glass for me, says, “Take this, Larionivna,” then starts telling me. Just as I left with my sandwich, Yura went into the house and said to Valya, “Give me some soup.”

SAFONIVNA

Did he? What, he didn't have enough sausage at the concert?

ILARIONIVNA

Valya then serves him some, and he just sits there, not touching it. He sits like that for a minute, then jumps to his feet and grabs the boy. “Who am I?” he asks. And the boy says, “Daddy.” And he says, “I thought I was your Daddy too, but the whole division knows your Daddy is Major Myerkúlov!”

SAFONIVNA

That's the officer who lives by Marusia! I told you so!

ILARIONIVNA

The boy, of course, got scared. Started to cry. And Valya says, what are you scaring the child for?

And then Nastya started to cry too. She's crying and saying, "Daddy, Daddy..." And he says to Nastya—*Your* Daddy is Colonel Trofimov! The whole division in Bryansk knew it. Then Valya started to cry too.

*SAFONIVNA washes the shampoo off her face and looks at ILARIONIVNA. ILARIONIVNA does the same.*

SAFONIVNA

Did he hit her then?

ILARIONIVNA

He'd never! He wouldn't hurt a fly.

SAFONIVNA

Should've hit her just the once. Thing might've turned out okay.

ILARIONIVNA

He rushed out of the house, slammed the door. Five minutes later, he calls from the check-point. Says to her, Are you listening? Valya say, I am. And he says, Listen then. And shot himself in the head.

*ILARIONIVNA and SAFONIVNA sit for a moment on the benches in silence.*

SAFONIVNA

Rinse me off, Larionivna.

*ILARIONIVNA douses SAFONIVNA with a tubful of water.*

ILARIONIVNA

And you me.

*SAFONIVNA pours a tubful of water over ILARIONIVNA. They sit back down side by side.*

ILARIONIVNA

The Bernstein lady said it was all true.

SAFONIVNA

Which part? That the kids weren't his? Everyone knew that.

ILARIONIVNA

Well, you know how people talk. But the Bernstein woman said he'd gone to see her daughter-in-law in the medical unit. He had something about his man-stuff that he couldn't have kids at all.

SAFONIVNA

Wasn't a man, then.

ILARIONIVNA

Such a shame about the kids. They are so polite.

SAFONIVNA

Valya will be fine. Women like her land on their feet.

ILARIONIVNA

She will, that's not it. The day after the funeral, that Major came to see her. Said he would take her to Samara with him—as long as she sends Nastya to live with her parents in Bryansk. He'd take the boy in, but not Nastya.

SAFONIVNA

What difference does it make? What kind of man is he?

ILARIONIVNA

So she asked her parents to come from Bryansk. And soon as they did, she packed up all her dresses, and her furs, all the jewelry, all the savings in the bank. Got on the train and left.

SAFONIVNA

With the officer?

ILARIONIVNA

Alone. Left the children behind. And no one has heard anything about her since.

*The women sit in silence, staring at the floor.*

SAFONIVNA

You want to stop by at my place—have a cup of tea?

ILARIONIVNA

I can't. I've got to pack—I'm off to the sanatorium tomorrow. To see about my sciatica. I'm glad I got all cleaned up. I'll go as shiny as a new penny.

End of the third song.



## THE FOURTH SONG

OXSANKA

(FIRE)

OXSANA – 15 years old. A chubby girl with a pretty child-like face. ANDRIY – 16 years old. A skinny, gangly, awkward teenager.

*The year is 1997. An abandoned army barracks flooded by sunlight. In the corner is a soldier's iron cot with a mattress. Part of the window-pane is knocked out, and birdsong comes through the hole.*

*OXSANA (15) lies on the cot. Her hands are tied to the head-rest; there's a gag in her mouth.*

*OXSANA is not scared. She is looking serenely out the window. Suddenly, she hears someone's approaching steps and looks at the door. The door opens, and ANDRIY (16) comes in, carrying a tote-bag. OXSANA spits out the gag.*

OXSANA

Dude, I gotta go, like, now.

*ANDRIY quickly walks across the room and unties OXSANA's hands. OXSANA gets up and almost runs to the door.*

OXSANA

*(along the way)* Sheesh, I've gone numb all over, what took you so long?

ANDRIY

I had to wait for grandma to leave, so I could make you a sandwich.

*OXSANA leaves the room. ANDRIY looks around, then pulls out a sandwich and a bottle of water from his bag. He places the food and water on the bed, then goes to the window and looks out cautiously. OXSANA returns.*

OXSANA

Dude, I can't go on like this. Spent the whole night having to pee—I didn't know how I'd hold it. You shouldn't have tied me up if you can't come back on time. Do you know what it's like to hold it when you don't know how long you gotta' hold it for?

*ANDRIY offers her the sandwich. OKSANA bites in hungrily, washes it down with water.*

ANDRIY

I told you not to drink so much water last night.

OKSANA

You try sleeping here in this heat. And the mosquitoes came out like crazy. Those other days there weren't any. I had to kick them away. They bit me all over. You didn't have anything besides the butter for the sandwich?

ANDRIY

I put a bit of salt on it. There's nothing in the fridge. I could've poured some soup into a jar but everyone would see right away when soup was missing. Grandma said yesterday I'm eating too much bread, too many potatoes. She's started to look at me all suspicious-like.

OKSANA

Basically, don't tie me down no more.

ANDRIY

Right, and if someone finds you like that, what are you gonna say?

OKSANA

I'll pretend I fainted.

ANDRIY

Like we haven't tried that. You keep giggling.

OKSANA

I'm not laughing now. I smell. I'm bored. Last night, there were men out there drinking. They threw bottles against the wall. They crawled all around the barracks, drunk. D'you know how scary that was?

*OKSANA finishes the sandwich, looks into the bag to see if there's anything else.*

ANDRIY

There's nothing else. I'm telling you—Grandma's onto me.

OKSANA

And what am I supposed to do now, starve?

*OKSANA starts crying. ANDRIY stares at the floor in silence.*

OKSANA

*(through tears)* How's Mom doing? And Dad?

ANDRIY

I've not seen them for two days. Yesterday, there was an ambulance at your building. The neighbors said it was for your folks.

*OKSANA cries harder.*

OKSANA

I can't do this no more.

ANDRIY

You want to get me arrested?

OKSANA

You said no one would suspect you. You promised it'd be over in a couple of days. And I've been here for a week!

ANDRIY

You liked it at first. You said you felt like you were in a movie.

OKSANA

*(wipes her tears angrily)* You came more often at first!

ANDRIY

How am I supposed to come here when I'm constantly at the station with my parents? Do you realize what risk I take when I come here? We're lucky no one even comes here and the weeds are waist-tall.

*OKSANA gets up, goes to the window.*

OKSANA

You brought me ice-cream and lemonade at first.

ANDRIY

Oksanka, come on, step away from the window.

OKSANA

I won't. Let someone see me for a change.

*ANDRIY goes to her, embraces her and maneuvers her away from the window.*

ANDRIY

You just gotta cope a little longer.

OKSANA

How long?

ANDRIY

Just a tiny bit.

*He tries to kiss OKSANA, and she leans away from him.*

OKSANA

I haven't brushed my teeth for six days. I stink to myself.

ANDRIY

You don't stink.

*ANDRIY tries to kiss her again. OKSANA pushes him away.*

OKSANA

Get away from me. I've decided: I'll be here until tomorrow and that's it. You can deal with it. And I won't let you tie me down for the night.

ANDRIY

I'll figure something out.

OKSANA

I don't care. I'm leaving tomorrow.

ANDRIY

If you parents had just put the money into the dog house right away, it would all have been easier. I didn't know they were gonna call the police.

OKSANA

You should have put it clear in the note what you would do to me if they called the police.

ANDRIY

You were the one who wrote the note—why didn't you make it clear?

OKSANA

You were the one who dictated it to me! I thought you knew how this was supposed to be done.

ANDRIY

Right, like I go kidnapping chicks every day. I was right to tell you to write with your left hand. Your parents would've known your writing right away otherwise, and the detective's made me write the same note with my right and left hand. Made my Mom and Dad do it, too.

OKSANA

What I want to know is why they thought it was your family. Why not the Nevmerzhytskys? Their uncle Petya has done time twice for thieving.

ANDRIY

The Nevmerzhytskys were visiting friends that night. And the friends proved it.

OKSANA

Yeah, but why you and not someone else?

ANDRIY

They said they suspect everyone, especially close friends. Because it's the closest friends that do something like this most often. And we've been friends how many years now?

*Tries to embrace OKSANA again and places his hand on her breast. OKSANA throws away his hand, moves away.*

OKSANA

Don't touch me!

ANDRIY

You never minded before, but you mind now, is that how it is?

*OKSANA digs into the wall plaster with her fingernail. The plaster comes off in several large chunks, makes a loud noise, and covers OKSANA in dust. She starts dusting herself off.*

ANDRIY

They're thinking my Dad did it, because he borrowed money from your parents a year ago. We didn't know any of that.

OKSANA

So, like, my parents didn't put anything into the dog-house because they'd given all their money to your Dad?

ANDRIY

You said there were wads of Germans marks at home. That they'd pay right away if we asked for a thousand.

OKSANA

I don't know why they did not leave any money. Mom has so much gold in her jewelry boxes.

*Oksana starts wailing again. ANDRIY comes to her, hugs her. OKSANA resists, but it's clear she'd rather cry while being held.*

ANDRIY

Well, maybe it's like they have gold, but no cash?

OKSANA

*(through tears)* Yeah, right. They've got the vacation saved for, and Mom's new fur coat saved for, but none for me. They don't care at all that I could get killed.

ANDRIY

The detective told them not to pay the ransom. Said the kidnappers would take the ransom and then kill you anyway. And that the sentence for kidnapping is steep, so the kidnappers don't leave any witnesses.

OKSANA

What makes them think there were more than one?

ANDRIY

Because you are chubby. One man couldn't have taken you very far. The detective said he suspected me at first, but then looked at how skinny I am and decided I didn't do it.

*OKSANA frees herself from his embrace, goes to the bed.*

OKSANA

Do you know how much your Dad borrowed?

ANDRIY

A thousand.

OKSANA

We should've kidnapped you then! I'd at least have brought you better sandwiches.

*Laughs in a mean way.*

ANDRIY

Dad got a concussion in Afghanistan, they had to take a shard out. He borrowed money to pay for the surgery. My parents told me nothing about it.

OKSANA

He's concussed in the head, is what your Dad is.

*Laughs in a mean way.*

ANDRIY

Stop it.

OKSANA

Stop what? He's a concussed bozo!

*ANDRIY's hands gather into fists. He comes closer to OKSANA.*

OKSANA

What? Are you gonna hit me? Like your Dad hits your Mom on weekends when he'd had a drink?  
Go ahead, try! I'll go tell you were the one who kidnapped me.



ANDRIY

No one will believe you.

OKSANA

You go ahead and guess which one of us they're gonna believe.

ANDRIY

I wasn't going to hit you.

OKSANA

Right, because I'd hit you back so hard, you'd fly through  
that window.

*ANDRIY suddenly releases his fists; his whole body becomes limp. He sits down next to OKSANA.*

ANDRIY

Dad wasn't always like that. It was after Chernobyl, when the military all left, and he lost his job.

OKSANA

I don't give a hoot about your Dad!

ANDRIY

Oksanka.

OKSANA

*(shouts)* Oksanka what? What do you want me to do?

ANDRIY

Just... okay, give me a while. I'll think of something.

OKSANA

What are you going to think of? You've done plenty of thinking already! We thought we'd take the money, go to the market in Zhytomir, go to a night-club. And there's now ambulance come for my Mom. Did you know she's got a bad heart? A congenital defect?

ANDRIY

You never told me...

OKSANA

I didn't. Because that's not something people tell.

ANDRIY

Don't shout like that.

OKSANA

I will if I want to!

ANDRIY

Alright. Let's do this. I'll tie you down.

OKSANA

Like heck you will.

ANDRIY

Listen first. Nothing's going to change tomorrow or the day after. Your parents won't give any money. There's a man in civilian clothes watching that dog-house all the time. So they couldn't put it there even if they wanted to.

OKSANA

Why haven't you told me this?

ANDRIY

Because you've been crying or screaming the entire time.

OKSANA

And what are we suppose to do now?

ANDRIY

That's what I'm trying to tell you, but you keep interrupting. *(takes OKSANA's hands)* I'll tie you down now, for the last time. Don't interrupt, please. I won't gag you. And you scream.

OKSANA

No one will hear me.

ANDRIY

Sooner or later someone will. You said there were some guys here last night.

OKSANA

And what if they're drunk again? They'll see me tied up here and do god knows what to me.

ANDRIY

I'll hide here nearby. I'll run for help if anything. Someone'll find you, and you tell them you'd been kidnapped but don't know who it was because they'd blindfolded you. And that's it.

*OKSANA looks at ANDRIY. ANDRIY kisses her hands.*

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.

*Kyiv, April-May 2021.*

*Translation by Nina Murray*