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Play

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(tr. by Iana Gudzenko, ed. by Paulien Geerlings)

ANTON, 35y

LIKA, 32y

4:40

ANTON: I was 18, I was standing in the square with the other guys.
I studied philosophy, absorbed the texts of Homer and Ovidius.
I wanted to learn ancient Greek and Latin.
I didn't want to be trained for the army.
They said: This is not an army. This is just in case.
We were given Kalashnikovs and were taught to assemble and disassemble them.
We bandaged our heads, pinched our arteries and made stretchers.
We pretended to be mummies crushing a zombie rebellion.
We were sure we would never need this for real.
We were convinced that we were just killing time.
We were just unlucky to be born as boys and have two extra hours on the student schedule.
Because there was a big war that was never going to happen again.
But the memory of this war lives in the minds of injured soldiers.
They caught us from the library and made us crawl on our elbows.
They taught us how to make bandages and throw plastic grenades.
Just in case. In what fucking case?
Soon, men who can fight will be banned from leaving Ukraine.
In my hands I clutch a toy grenade and throw it at invisible enemies. And then I turn around and run, run, run, run.

5:00

ANTON: Wake up!
LIKA: What?
ANTON: Siren.
LIKA: This is just a test.
ANTON: It is not a test.
LIKA: Yesterday they said...
ANTON: It's 5 o'clock in the morning. This isn't a test.
LIKA: Are they already here in Lviv?
ANTON: They are in Kyiv.
LIKA: But not here.
ANTON: Get up, Lika! We need to do something!
LIKA: Do what?
ANTON: Buy food and withdraw money.
LIKA: I need to make coffee.

8:00

LIKA: Where do all these cars go?
ANTON: To the border.
LIKA: A traffic jam from here to the border?
ANTON: From here to the border.
LIKA: But this is impossible.
ANTON: Mobilization was announced. Soon they will close the border.

LIKA: Anton...

ANTON: Soon men won't be allowed to cross the border. For me, this is the last chance.

LIKA: But it's a 60 kilometers of traffic jam!

9:00

LIKA: Listen, a traffic jam is just to the gas station.

ANTON: Men are not allowed to leave Ukraine.

LIKA: This is just a line to the gas station.

ANTON: Did you hear me? Men are not allowed to leave.

LIKA: They won't go to the border.

ANTON: You will go alone. Just with the children.

LIKA: I will not leave.

9:30

LIKA: The war started in my country today. The war is coming with wailing sirens and sprawling explosions at airfields at 5 a.m. Many kilometers of tanks, columns, crawled into my country from all sides, biting into her body like a bloodthirsty creature. But my city is on the west, on the safe side. I withdrew money at an ATM, I bought coffee, croissants, avocados, salmon. I eat breakfast. I look out the window. There is no queue of cars anymore - the gas station is out of gas. The sun has risen. Now the children will wake up and we will go to the park. So far so good. It's safe here for now. It's safe.

12:00

ANTON: Pack a backpack, quickly, they have two seats in the car. Departure is in an hour.

LIKA: No.

ANTON: They are waiting for you.

LIKA: No.

ANTON: I arranged everything.

LIKA: No.

ANTON: Lika!

LIKA: Anton.

ANTON: Please don't make this difficult.

LIKA: It's safe here.

ANTON: When there is a real danger, you won't have a chance to leave! It will be a mess. It will be too crowded. Are you going to break through the crowd with the children? Are you ready to walk over the bodies of elder people, children and pets? There will be no food soon. Are you ready to eat rats?

When they just bomb one power plant, we won't have light and heat anymore. Do you know how to make a fire? Are you ready to cook the rats on the fire?

LIKA: Pigeons.

ANTON: What?

LIKA: We have a bow. We will hunt pigeons. (*Pause.*) I'm kidding.

ANTON: You have to think about the children.

LIKA: This is a children's bow.

15:00

LIKA: We were watching the news in the bathroom.

My son asked: Why are you crying? Why are you crying? Who has hurt you? Did someone hurt you?

And my daughter said: He hurt her. The stupidest. The stupidest one. One, who send these stupid rockets. He hurt me too. I'm so mad at him. I'm so hurt. Because of him I did not go to kindergarten. Because of him we must sit in the bathroom. Because of him, mom is watching the stupid news all the time. Because of him and because of his rockets. Because of his tanks and his soldiers. I saw, I saw, I saw these tanks. I saw, I saw, I saw these rockets. In this stupid news. I hate the stupidest. I hate him.

My son asked: What rockets? He loves rockets. My son loves rockets that fly in space, fly to the moon. Good rockets. Everything else he does not seem to understand, only rockets. He understood that the rockets offended his mother. And my daughter said: Stupid rockets. Stupid, stupidest. Bad rockets. I'll shoot these rockets down, yes, I'll catch them, yes. I will catch the stupidest. I'll bite his hand. I want to bite him. I want to bite off his hand. Oh yeah. That's what my daughter said. And she bit me.

Yes, yes, said my son. He was catching imaginary rockets and was biting my hand. He liked this game.

16:00

ANTON: I want you to leave. You should be in a safe place. To keep my children safe. It will be easier for me. I can handle it by myself. It will be easier to survive alone. We can't feed four mouths. You can't stand without water and electricity. There will be nothing to wash asses, there will be nothing to drink. There will be no croissants, Lika.

LIKA: I will survive without croissants.

ANTON: I say it will be easier for me without you. I will enlist in the army, take up arms, live at checkpoints, if we lose this war, we will retreat to the mountains, we will become partisans.

LIKA: I thought you didn't want to fight. I thought you wanted to leave Ukraine.

ANTON: I don't want to fight. I have no choice. But you have.

LIKA: Ok, then let's divorce.

ANTON: What?

LIKA: Let's get divorced. You will take the children and go abroad. And I will enlist into the army, take up arms, if we lose this war, we will retreat to the mountains, we will become partisans. Let's divorce.

ANTON: So, do you want to divorce, right now?

LIKA: Then we will get married again. If we want.

ANTON: Or won't want.

LIKA: Or won't.

19:00

LIKA: Fondue!

ANTON: What?

LIKA: Fondue! One hundred years have not cooked fondue!

ANTON: And you decided to cook a fondue today?

LIKA: I love fondue!

ANTON: Oh, now I get it.

LIKA: Finally!

ANTON: You're crazy.

LIKA: Thank you for your support! Anton, it was you, who brought home six loaves of bread? Tell me why? Bread will be moldy after 2 days. What am I supposed to do? I dried them. We still have some cheeses, wine, and Provence herbs. In a French restaurant, such a dinner would cost 100 euros.

ANTON: Lika... My incredible Lika! Do you know what I think? I think that's great. I think you are a cooking genius. Here's what we'll do. Now, we are eating this fantastic fondue, drinking a glass of wine, dancing and playing board games. And tomorrow morning you will pack your ass, take the children and get on the bus. Beautiful, comfortable double decker bus. If you want to go to France, go to France. Fondue, Provence herbs, croissants, you have always liked that. You will be sheltered, find a job, the children will go to kindergarten for free. You will have your hands free. You will get to realize all of your talents.

LIKA: I don't want to "realize my talents."

ANTON: So what the hell do you want?

LIKA: I want to stay in this dump. Without light, water and food. Without money and future. In fear and danger. I want you to stop putting me on the bus and eat this fantastic fondue before it's frozen!

22:00

ANTON: It was curfew and we turned off the light.

LIKA: Are we playing hide and seek, my daughter asked?

ANTON: I don't see anything, my son said.

LIKA: Let's turn on the flashlight, I said.

ANTON: And I will be a crocodile. (*Makes a shadow with his hands*) Click click click.

LIKA: And I will be a bird and fly (*make a shadow of a bird*), my daughter said.

ANTON: And I will be a deer and hit you with my horns (*same*), my son said.

LIKA: And I will build a hut, I said.

ANTON: Right in the hallway, I said.

LIKA: And we will live in it, they shouted.

23:00

LIKA: What the hell do I really want? I want you to hug me. To huddle together on the floor of our tiny hallway of our tiny apartment in our tiny town like two tiny dots on the body of a huge country of a huge planet of a huge universe. In which bombs explode, volcanoes turn, stars collide. Burning everything around, turning to ashes, destroying cities, destroying destinies. But now we are together, we are home, and there is love between us and our world still holds. Tomorrow I will get on a bus full of crying children and women to stand in line for 24 hours to cross the border. But today I am here. We are here. Today.

4:40

ANTON: Darkness is coming from the East. Death, destruction, poverty, hunger and despair. The hours crawl by, and mile by mile,