

# ONCE UPON A TIME THERE LIVED A ROOSTER

*Written in Ukrainian by ANNA HALAS in 2022*

*Translated into English by ANNA HALAS in 2024*

## **Characters**

**Rooster**, a ceramic statuette of a rooster, Vasylykiv majolica

**Grandpa Zakharii**, 93 years old

**Tonya**, Zakharii's daughter, 55 years old

**Levko**, Tonya's son, 14 years old

**Russian soldier**, a conscript soldier, 19 years old

## **Voices from the radio**

### *Scene 1*

#### **Grandpa Zakharii:**

I officially became a fourteen-year-old yesterday.  
Mom invited some people over.  
The gang included my sisters, Aunt Halia, and Grandpa Hryts.  
He stayed out of the war 'cause he was blind.  
We ate bread with sugar.  
No clue where Mom managed to snag that sugar.

#### **Levko:**

I officially became a fourteen-year-old yesterday.  
Mom baked an apple pie.  
I invited my friend Zhenya.  
Uncle Seva was supposed to show up too.  
But he went to the neighbouring village a few days ago.  
He wanted to scope out the situation.  
He ran into a mine.

#### **Grandpa Zakharii:**

Dad's out there fighting in the war now.  
Mom's got this gut feeling that he's gone.  
But I believe that he is alive.  
No notice of his death showed up.  
Aunt Halia received two.  
First, for her husband.  
Then for her son.  
They said no way for me to go to war.  
They said I was too young.

#### **Levko:**

Zhenya's old man's serving in the war.  
He's really freaking out about him.

I'm glad I don't have a dad.  
I would worry about him too.  
Mom's feeding me tales left and right.  
She tells me my Dad was a firefighter who died a hero's death.  
But Uncle Seva got drunk one day and told me everything.  
Mom was getting on in years and didn't have a husband.  
She wound up pregnant with me somewhere in the city.  
So she wouldn't end up alone in her later years.

**Grandpa Zakharii:**

Our district was occupied by the Nazis.  
They came to our village once.  
They looked around.  
There were only women and my blind grandfather.  
They left.  
They're located in the district centre.  
They're closing it in from all sides.  
Nobody can get out.

**Levko:**

Our district was occupied by the Russians.  
They didn't manage to get to our village.  
Uncle Seva reckons they aren't here  
'cause this village has changed its name so many times,  
even the devil couldn't track it down.  
Soon as he caught wind they were coming,  
he split and trashed the road signs.  
Seva was a chill dude, even though he hit the bottle pretty hard.

**Grandpa Zakharii:**

Mom's thinking we won't get the death notification 'cause  
the post ain't up and running.

**Levko:**

The Russians must've wrecked the tower.  
No phone service, no internet.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** It's 1943. We're living under occupation.

**Levko:** It's 2022. We're living under occupation.

*Scene 2*

*A room in a village house. **Grandpa Zakharii** sits at the table and holds a spoon in his hand. Above his head on the shelf is a **Rooster**. **Tonya** brings a plate of borsch and puts it in front of **Grandpa Zakharii**. **Grandpa Zakharii** eats one spoonful of borscht, then another. He looks at **Tonya**.*

**Grandpa Zakharii:** Tonya, what's this?

**Tonya:** It's borscht, Dad.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** What's up with this borscht? Your Mom used to whip up better stuff for the pigs. And where's the sour cream, huh?

**Tonya** (*quietly*): Where do you want me to dig up that sour cream for you?

**Levko** (*looks at Tonya, then at Grandpa Zakharii*): Grandpa, UNESCO has recognised borsch as a cultural heritage without sour cream!

**Grandpa Zakharii:** To hell with UNESCO! What gives them the right to say if I can have borsch with sour cream? (*addresses the Rooster*) Have you seen this? They're completely out of their minds! (*Grandpa Zakharii continues to mutter under his breath but starts to eat*).

*Tonya and Levko move away from Grand Zakharii so that he doesn't hear their conversation.*

**Tonya:** I just had this gut feeling that selling the cow was a bad move.

**Levko:** It stank.

**Tonya:** It stank! What do we eat now?

**Levko** (*shrugs his shoulders*): From now on, it's veggies-only for us.

**Tonya:** I want to see how long you'll last on the grass. You'll be the first to howl!

**Levko:** Don't worry, I'll handle it. Our soldiers will show up and wreck those Russians.

**Tonya:** When's that gonna happen again? Valka was telling me yesterday how they had tanks just rolling around the district like it was nothing.

**Levko:** How's she supposed to know? We've been cut off from the world for weeks, no internet or phone. Valka's just fabricating tales, and you're all ears.

*Somewhere in the distance, the sound of cannon fire is heard.*

**Tonya:** Do you hear the shots being fired?

**Levko** (*decisively*): I've decided to join the partisans.

**Tonya:** What? You've barely weaned, and you're going to join the partisans!

**Levko:** Grandpa Zakharii told me how, at fourteen, he was a messenger for the partisans hiding in the forest. Why can't I do the same?

**Tonya:** Times were different then.

**Levko:** Why?

**Tonya:** Just because! And if you keep on talking, I'll lock you in the pantry and leave you there until we win. Better get on with your games. Look at him, a partisan!

### *Scene 3*

*On the stage stands an antique radio with elegant legs. Rooster stands atop it, and Grandpa Zakharii adjusts something on its side. The radio emits a hum, a whistle, and various other sounds.*

*Grandpa Zakharii removes the top cover and adjusts something again. Tonya and Levko enter.*

**Tonya:** Dad, leave that old machine behind. It won't work anyway.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** What's your suggestion? To perish in silence? Television doesn't function, and your bragging Internet doesn't either. What does the government think?

**Tonya:** There's a crisis in the country. They're slashing budgets left and right.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** Where do regular folks even get their news these days? Maybe there are school shootings happening in America again, and we're completely unaware. (*Turns to **Rooster***) Don't you think?

**Tonya:** Okay, try to spin it. (*to **Levko***) Who knows, maybe he'll really spin something. After Uncle Seva... (*gestures to **Levko** showing how Uncle Seva exploded on a mine*), we have a... What do you call it? An informational blackout!

**Grandpa Zakharii:** What are you saying? Seva just hung out with us. He seriously wanted to be your godfather, but we weren't into it. He's been drinking with everyone since he was young.

**Tonya:** I didn't say godfather. I said we can't put up with the noise at Uncle Seva's place any further.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** The old bastard's drunk and raging again.

**Levko** (*to **Tonya***): Should we let him know about Uncle Seva?

**Tonya:** Don't even think about telling him!

*The radio crackles, and then voices appear. **Grandpa Zakharii** puts his ear closer to the radio and listens intently. **Tonya** and **Levko** listen intently too.*

**A man's voice:** When we got there, we saw Ukrainians lying there. We were told to knock them off on our way through.

**A woman's voice:** Mm-hmm.

**A man's voice:** There was me and this other dude. I was thinking of slitting someone's throat. So I did it. The other dude did the same. I felt like crap afterwards.

***Levko** begins to bite his nails nervously.*

**Tonya** (*to **Levko***): Stop biting your nails!

**A woman's voice:** Did you slit his throat?

***Grandpa Zakharii** puts his palms over **Rooster's** ears. He listens attentively.*

**A man's voice:** Yeah, it was right at the start. Like, the third day of the "party".

**A woman's voice:** Wait, so you're saying you just felt like it, so you cut his throat? Did you torture him?

***Levko** starts biting his nails again. **Tonya** silently slaps his hands.*

**A man's voice:** I just cut his throat. When would I ever do that again? That's what I thought.

**A woman's voice** (*laughs*): Why do you have such twisted thoughts, huh?

**A man's voice:** Don't tell anyone.

*The conversation is interrupted. Phone tones come from the radio.*

**Grandpa Zakharii:** What did I tune into? A radio show or something? I got that someone was trying to stab someone, right?

**Levko** (*blushing with rage, clenching his fists*): A radio show, grandpa?

**Tonya**: Shut up! (*loudly*) Must've been some kind of detective story.

**Grandpa Zakharii**: That's what I figured. I just couldn't get what the motive was.

**Tonya**: No motive, Dad. He's just a psycho.

**Grandpa Zakharii**: Who's that chick? His girlfriend? Never heard of maniacs having girlfriends. (*to Rooster*) Writers make that stuff up. (*Clutches his stomach*) Oh, my stomach's acting up. Gotta run.

*Grandpa Zakharii runs out of the room.*

**Levko**: Grandpa's deaf as a rock, but look at him run.

**Tonya**: What was that?

**Levko**: Looks like Grandpa caught a phone call. Racist bitches.... Fucking freaks.

**Tonya**: Watch your mouth!

**Levko**: But aren't they bitches?

**Tonya** (*waving at him*): Bitches, son.

**Levko** (*looking at the radio*): What kind of device is this? (*sees the inscription*) Looks German...

**Tonya**: Grandpa traded it with Uncle Seva for moonshine.

**Levko**: Where did he get it from?

**Tonya**: He said it was a trophy. Seva's dad brought it back from Berlin after the war.

**Levko**: So he nicked it.

**Tonya**: Can you keep quiet? How many times did I tell you not to talk about the war to Grandpa? Wasn't it enough for him? He still shouts "Hitler kaput" at night.

**Levko**: When I lied about not drinking with Zhenka, you took my phone. And you lie to Grandpa about the war

**Tonya**: I'm not lying. I'm protecting his heart. Let him live out his last days in peace.

#### *Scene 4*

*It is evening, and Levko walks over to the radio in his underwear and T-shirt, trying to get it to work. There is some noise, and after a while, he starts hearing men talking.*

**A man's voice 1**: So, what's new?

**A man's voice 2**: Our guys are going nuts at the front line.

**A man's voice 1**: How come?

**A man's voice 2**: They're getting bombed every day. First off, they're like all old men now. Secondly, they're like rabbits in burrows, you know? A little whistle and they're already underground.

**Levko**: Rabbits? You're stinking skunks!

**A man's voice 1:** Getting old, aren't you, guys?

*Tonya comes in, dressed in her coat and holding a big, stuffed bag. She stands next to the radio and listens.*

**A man's voice 2:** They've got some nutcase heading their way, you know what I mean.

**Tonya:** What did you think? We'd roll out the red carpet for you?

**A man's voice 1:** No offensive moves planned from our side, right?

**A man's voice 2:** What's the point? You roll in, you get screwed in the trenches. These guys have been fighting for eight damn years. They got their positions locked tight. Hitler would be green with envy.

**Tonya:** They feel like their asses are about to catch fire.

**A man's voice 1:** So we gotta keep them hiding underground.

**A man's voice 2:** Call Volodya, let him know.

**Levko:** Hah! Call your bunker grandpa Volodya! Let him come rescue you, you damn freak!

**A man's voice 2:** And the people? Who are they? All peaceful during the day, but at night, it's a whole different ballgame. You can't trust anyone around here. Maybe some grandma shows up with pies... but come nighttime, she's an artillery spotter.

*The conversation is interrupted.*

**Levko (to Tonya):** Where you headed at this hour?

**Tonya:** Going to Valka's. She needs a jab.

**Levko:** What kind of jab?

**Tonya:** It's for her high blood pressure.

*Levko notices the bag in her hands.*

**Levko:** What's in the bag? (*sniffs*) Smells like pies.

**Tonya:** What kind of pies?

**Levko (sniffs again):** Potato ones.

**Tonya:** No pies here. Grandpa left his borsch. Taking it to Valka's pig. Turned sour.

**Levko:** Definitely pies.

**Tonya:** Get to bed. Grandpa snores like a freight train.

**Levko:** You coming back soon?

**Tonya:** Right after you hit the hay. I'll lock up the door just to be sure.

**Levko:** What if the Russians show up?

**Tonya:** Why would they bother? Our toilet's a relic, and we ain't got anything worth taking. Well, Well, I'm off. (*Tonya kisses Levko on the forehead, he turns away*).

**Levko:** Let's not do that.

**Tonya:** Alright, alright. Not here in front of everyone.

### *Scene 5*

*Evening. Tonya's alone in the room. "Stefania" by Kalush Orchestra comes through the radio static. Tonya starts dancing and singing along.*

**Tonya:**

If women ran the world,  
there'd be no wars.  
A mom can't send her kid to die,  
The one she carried inside her,  
Nursed at her breast, and soothed when they had a stomach-ache.  
The one she kissed a million times.  
Used iodine on their scraped knees,  
Read bedtime stories about a magical goat.  
She even put bunny ears on boiled eggs,  
Just to get them to eat.

*Levko comes in and watches his mother in silence for a while. Tonya notices him and stops.*

**Tonya:** Nice song I caught there.

**Levko:** You dance really well.

**Tonya:** When I was younger, I used to dance like mad!

*Women's voices come from the radio. Levko and Tonya look back at the radio.*

**A woman's voice 1:** God can't save you now. Putin's gonna shoot you for all the crap you've been talking! Glory to Russia! They'll catch you soon enough. Prepare yourself, bitch!

**A woman's voice 2:** Mom...

**A woman's voice 1:** Rot in hell! Banderite bitch! You're not my daughter! Burn in hell! The gallows are ready for you.

*Tonya looks at Levko in horror.*

**Tonya:** Oh my God, that's awful! It's your baby, an otter!

**Levko:** Mom, just tell the truth. Would you have sent me straight to hell too?

**Tonya:** Don't be ridiculous.

**Levko:** Would you?

*Tonya silently shakes her head no and hugs Levko. He does not resist. Grandpa Zakharii enters, wearing a long white shirt without trousers. He looks at Tonya and Levko.*

**Grandpa Zakharii:** Seriously? He's out there chasing girls, and you're treating him like a kid. When I was his age!

*Levko instantly gets up and walks away from Tonya. Grandpa Zakharii heads for the exit.*

**Tonya:** Where are you off to?

**Grandpa Zakharii:** Here comes the watchdog. Won't let me take a step. I'm going to see Seva.

**Tonya** (*thinking fast*): What Seva? It's the middle of the night.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** He hasn't come by in a while.

**Levko:** Grandpa, it's late. Seva's asleep.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** He doesn't go to bed this early. He has insomnia. I can't sleep either.

**Tonya:** Oh! I just remembered! Seva went to the city to see his son!

**Grandpa Zakharii:** Damn it! For how long?

**Tonya:** Forever. He said, "I'm old, I'll die and no one will know." So he left.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** That old bastard! Didn't even say goodbye!

**Levko:** The car was in town. He asked me to say hi to you. I forgot.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** He forgot! Who cares about the old man! (*Waves his hand at him and leaves*)

## *Scene 6*

*Morning. Grandpa Zakharii enters the room.*

**Grandpa Zakharii** (*looking around and then shouting*): Maruska! Maruska! (*walking around the room, checking all corners, then turning to Rooster*) Where's she been since this morning? That old woman can't sit still at home.

My Maruska is a live wire.  
She used to be like that in her youth.  
When I first saw her, I was totally into her.  
Brown hair down to her waist.  
When she looks at me, it's like a gut punch.  
Check out those boobs!  
I spied on her once, washing in the river.  
Caught me staring, splashed water in my face.  
She clocked me, but I couldn't take my eyes off those boobs.  
That's how we ended up married.  
Had kids too.  
A son, you can't live without a son.  
Then a daughter came along.  
My boy moved to the city long ago.  
Doing big things there.  
And Tonka's here with us, with my grandson.

Maruska! Maruska! Where the hell is she? Maruska!

*Levko enters.*

**Levko:** Grandpa, what are you doing?

**Grandpa Zakharii:** Seen Maruska around?

**Levko:** The kitty?



**Grandpa Zakharii:** Not the kitty, you dummy! My Maruska!

**Levko** (*surprised*): Granny Mariia?

**Grandpa Zakharii:** Who else?

**Levko:** But she passed away.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** What're you talking about? Passed away?

**Levko:** It's been a while, grandpa. I was like three.

*Grandpa Zakharii stands still and looks at everything around him, whispering something under his breath.*

**Grandpa Zakharii:** (*affirmatively*) She's gone. Laid out in a coffin right here. (*To Rooster*) Our Maruska is gone. We're the only ones left. (*To Levko. Points to Rooster*) Maruska handed it over to me.

**Levko:** I know, grandpa.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** On the anniversary.

**Levko:** Yeah, you mentioned.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** She said it would bring me good luck.

**Levko:** Yeah.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** And then she was gone.

*Grandpa Zakharii puts his hands over his face and sobs. Levko stands next to him and puts his hand on his shoulder.*

### *Scene 7*

*The room is dim, lit by moonlight coming through the window. Tonya's figure creeps toward the front door, lugging a big bag. Just as Tonya is about to open the door, the lights flip on. Tonya yelps in surprise, and Levko notices.*

**Tonya:** Damn! I thought it was the Russians.

**Levko:** Going somewhere?

**Tonya:** Yeah, to see Valka. Gotta give her some injections.

**Levko:** You came back in the morning last time.

**Tonya:** You know how it is with women chatting away. Valka's a talker. Once she starts, she doesn't stop.

**Levko:** What's in the bag?

**Tonya:** Just some old dresses for Valka. I don't fit in them anymore.

**Levko:** Why do the dresses smell like pies?

**Tonya:** Beats me! Maybe I cooked in the dresses. They absorb odours.

**Levko:** Mom, tell me, are you seeing the partisans?

**Tonya:** What partisans?

**Levko:** The ones hiding in the forest.

**Tonya:** There are no partisans there.

**Levko:** Yes, there are. I saw them myself.

**Tonya:** What do you want me to do? Leave them starving?

**Levko:** I'll go with you.

**Tonya:** No, you won't!

**Levko:** Yes, I will.

**Tonya:** Fine, but only with me. Don't go alone.

**Levko:** Let me carry the bag.

*Tonya and Levko leave in silence.*

### **Scene 8**

*Grandpa Zakharii sits at the table with Rooster in front of him. He strokes it gently.*

**Grandpa Zakharii:**

You know, I still don't get it.  
Why does the Lord keep me hanging around?  
Maruska's been gone forever.  
And I'm still hobbling around.  
What's the point?  
What good have I done?  
When I die, folks will walk by the house.  
What'll they say?  
Here lived Zakharii who... what?  
Nailed rabbits for Baba Zosia?  
Dug a well for the neighbour?  
Had a son?  
Maruska went through so much.  
How much effort did I put in?  
Three minutes, maybe.  
As a kid, I wanted to be a hero.  
Save the land from Nazis, kill Hitler.  
Even got a gun.  
But never became a hero.

*Tonya enters.*

**Tonya:** Where's Levko?

**Grandpa Zakharii:** How should I know? He doesn't report to me.

**Tonya:** Who were you talking to?

**Grandpa Zakharii** (*points to Rooster*): Him.

**Tonya**: That little rascal. I told him not to go without me.

**Grandpa Zakharii**: Look at him. Tall as a lamppost. Fists like boulders, and you're still babying him.

**Tonya**: Oh, Dad.

**Grandpa Zakharii**: A man needs to grow up, not be tied to his mom's apron. What's gonna happen to him? He'll get roughed up a bit. Anyway, I'm off to bed.

*Grandpa Zakharii leaves. Tonya nervously paces back and forth, looking at her watch. The door opens.*

**Tonya**: (*shouting*) Where the hell have you been?

*Levko walks through the door in a strangely bent position. He is followed by Russian soldier who holds Levko's hand and holds a gun to his temple. Russian soldier is small, wearing an old army uniform and one boot. Tonya rushes towards them, but Russian soldier stops her with a gesture and a shout.*

**Russian soldier**: Stop or I'll blow your maggot's brains out!

*Tonya stops.*

**Tonya**: Let him go.

**Russian soldier**: Anyone else in the house?

**Tonya**: No. Just me.

**Russian soldier**: Alright, then. I'm starving. Get to the kitchen and cook something. We'll stay here with the kid. No funny business, or he's dead.

**Tonya**: I have some potato pies.

**Russian soldier**: Hell no. Keep your pies. I know what your women do with those. Got any dumplings? Whip those up fast.

**Tonya**: No, just buckwheat.

**Russian soldier**: Ugh, buckwheat is awful. Fry up some potatoes.

**Tonya**: Okay, I'll start now.

*Grandpa Zakharii enters the room. He holds a gun, which he points at Russian soldier.*

**Russian soldier**: Who the fuck is that?

**Grandpa Zakharii**: Who's this? A burglar?

**Levko**: (*shouts*) A Russian.

**Grandpa Zakharii**: A fascist?

*Grandpa Zakharii freezes for a moment, then looks around and confidently takes Russian soldier in his sights, aiming at his head.*

**Russian soldier:** Alright, old man, quit showing off. Hand over the gun.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** What?

**Tonya:** He's nearly deaf. Can't hear a thing.

**Russian soldier** (*shouting*): Give me the gun!

**Grandpa Zakharii:** You want the gun? Fascists run out of guns?

**Russian soldier:** Hey, mother, tell the old man to quit messing around.

**Tonya:** Your mother's in Ryazan, waiting for money for a car. I'm not your mother, alright?

**Russian soldier:** Look at you. Idiot. Ukrainians left you. We're in charge now, get it?

**Tonya:** Don't count your chickens.

**Russian soldier:** What?

**Grandpa Zakharii:** (*to Tonya*) Don't worry, Mom. I'll protect you. Found a dead German in the woods and took his gun.

*Tonya and Levko look at each other in surprise.*

**Russian soldier:** What the hell is he talking about? A German? So they were right, NATO is running the show here. You're all just a bunch of corrupt jerks.

*Russian soldier lets go of Levko for a moment and steps towards Grandpa Zakharii, reaching out to take the gun from him.*

**Grandpa Zakharii** (*closes his eyes in fright, screams*): Hitler kaput! (*pulls the trigger once, then twice, the gun does not go off*).

*Tonya quickly grabs Rooster from the table and hits Russian soldier on the head with a swing. Russian soldier falls unconscious. Grandpa Zakharii opens his eyes and sees Russian soldier on the floor.*

**Grandpa Zakharii:** Mom, I killed the Nazi. I saved you.

*Levko wants to say something, but Tonya stops him with a gesture.*

**Tonya:** Well done, son! You're a real hero! Come on, heroes need to rest.

*Tonya leads Grandpa Zakharii out the door. Levko stands over the body of Russian soldier with a gun in his hands. Tonya returns. She still holds Rooster.*

**Tonya:** (*confused*) Is he dead?

**Levko:** As they'd say where he's from, he's "permanently asleep".

*Tonya crouches down next to Russian soldier and tries to feel for a pulse with disgust on her face.*

**Tonya:** Thank God, he's still breathing.

**Levko:** You feel bad for him?

**Tonya:** Why?

**Levko:** Then why say "Thank God"?

**Tonya:** If he kicks the bucket, his family gets cash for a new car. If he lives, we trade him for one of our guys. Make sense?

**Levko:** Yeah, it does.

**Tonya:** We gotta keep him alive till then.

**Levko:** We barely have enough food, and you want to feed him?

**Tonya:** You want him to starve? Tie him up tight. I'll talk to the partisans and bring back some pies. They might know how to hand him over to our military. Can you handle it?

**Levko:** I got this.

**Tonya:** Keep an eye on Grandpa. He's not all there. Don't let him go hunting Hitler.

*Levko carefully takes the gun from Russian soldier's hands and puts it in his trouser pocket.*

**Tonya:** Are you crazy? What if it blows your bits off?

*Levko pulls out his gun and puts it next to Rooster.*

**Levko:** I'll find a better spot later.

### *Scene 9*

*Russian soldier sits on a chair, his hands tied behind his back, his feet bound, his mouth taped shut.*

*Tonya enters.*

**Tonya:** Alright, I'm gonna untie your mouth, but here are the rules! No swearing, no singing your crappy songs, no shouting to me. Got it? Nod if you do! If you misbehave, you won't get any food.

**Russian soldier** (*shouting*): They tricked us! Said it was just a drill!

**Tonya:** Listen to him whining!

**Russian soldier:** I'm serious! They dumped us in hell and ran off!

**Tonya** (*mocks sympathy*): Poor little soldiers.

**Russian soldier:** We were given junk gear to fight with. Our commander, when things got hot, pretended to be sick and bolted, you know?

**Tonya** (*acting sympathetic*): I get it, oh, I get it.

**Russian soldier:** I even tried to break my own leg to get sent back. Jumped into a pit from a height.

**Tonya** (*pretending to be sympathetic*): Must've hurt like hell.

**Russian soldier:** It did, but my bones didn't break. Then I fell out of a tank. They just left me, you understand? Abandoned me!

**Tonya** (*in a mock sympathetic tone*): What an injustice!

**Russian soldier:** It's good you understand. I'm innocent. Will you let me go?

**Tonya** (*sharply*): Yeah, right.

**Russian soldier:** Untie me, please.

**Tonya:** You really think I'm gonna let you go, you Russian scumbag? You came here to kill my kids, ruin my home, and you want mercy?

**Russian soldier:** Let me go. I didn't kill anyone, I swear! We're brotherly nations.

**Tonya:** Who do you like better, a squirrel or a rat?

**Russian soldier** (*surprised*): Squirrel, of course.

**Tonya:** Why? They're brotherly creatures. Paws, eyes, tails.

**Russian soldier:** Squirrel's got nice fur.

**Tonya:** You could dress a rat in fur, still a rat. Rats invade homes, chew up furniture, and crap everywhere. Got it?

**Russian soldier:** No.

**Tonya:** You read your Pushkin and other poets, but you still don't get it.

**Russian soldier:** Actually, my grandma on my dad's side was Ukrainian.

**Tonya:** I don't care! Born a Muscovite, die a Muscovite.

### *Scene 10*

*Russian soldier sits tied to a chair. Tonya makes dough for pies.*

**Russian soldier:** My grandma used to bake pies too.

**Tonya:** Zip it, or the dough won't rise.

**Russian soldier:** Bet they taste amazing.

**Tonya:** Not for you to find out.

**Russian soldier:** Who are you making all those for?

**Tonya:** For our guys. To give them strength to crush the devils.

*Levko flies in, holding a mobile phone.*

**Levko:** Mom, the network's up! I got through to Uncle.

**Tonya:** Seriously? Where is he?

**Levko** (*looks at Russian soldier*): Safe. He said our guys are on their way.

**Tonya:** What do they say online?

**Levko:** The Internet's barely working.

**Russian soldier:** Let me at least call my mom.

**Levko:** Yeah, sure, right now.

**Tonya:** Your mom or your commander?

**Russian soldier:** My mom, I swear.

**Tonya:** Give me the number. Levko, dial it. We're gonna chat with his mom.

**Russian soldier:** 7-495-387-21-34, no, wait... 35... *(closes his eyes, recalls)* no, 34.

*Levko puts Russian soldier on speakerphone. Dial tones can be heard. Mother picks up the phone.*

**Russian soldier:** Mom, it's me! I'm alive! They captured me!

**Mother's voice:** What do you want?

**Russian soldier:** Mom, it's me. Your son.

**Mother's voice:** Who said I have a son?

**Tonya:** Hey, is that really your mom?

**Russian soldier:** I swear on my mom! It's her!

*Tonya picks up the phone.*

**Tonya:** Listen up, mom. We have your son.

**Mother's voice:** You called the wrong number.

**Tonya:** I'm gonna cut off his ear.

**Mother's voice:** I don't care.

**Russian soldier:** Mom, save me! Mom! I want to live!

*The phone tones can be heard.*

**Tonya:** Maybe she's not your mom?

**Russian soldier:** She is... definitely... she always says 'what' like that...

**Tonya:** What kind of trash raised you?

## **Scene 11**

*Levko and Tonya weave camouflage nets.*

**Levko:** How much longer do we have to babysit this asshole?

**Tonya:** Until our guys show up.

**Levko:** He smells worse than a pigpen.

**Tonya:** Russian stink all over him.

**Levko:** Shouldn't we just dump him in the forest with the partisans? Let him dig their shitholes.

**Tonya:** They've got their own shit to deal with. Just hold out a bit longer.

**Levko:** Think they'll trade him for one of our soldiers?

**Tonya:** Who knows? Worth a try.

**Levko:** Let's toss his eating stuff in the trash when he's gone.

**Tonya:** Why mess up our place? He can take his crap with him.

**Levko:** You believe him? About not killing anyone?

**Tonya:** Not a chance.

**Levko:** What if they come looking for him?

**Tonya:** Who needs him? One more, one less. Their moms will have more kids.

*Grandpa Zakharii enters.*

**Grandpa Zakharii:** What's that you're making?

**Levko:** A net for kikimora.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** What kikimora? Never heard of these evil creatures around here.

**Tonya:** Must've blown in with the wind from Moscow.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** Gotta catch 'em quick or they'll mess up the forest.

**Tonya:** Where you off to?

**Grandpa Zakharii:** Just gonna sit outside a bit, get some air.

## *Scene 12*

*Levko and Tonya weave camouflage nets. Grandpa Zakharii enters and quickly runs up to Tonya.*

**Grandpa Zakharii (to Tony):** Hey, Mom, something strange happened!!

**Tonya (to Levko):** Grandpa's gone off again.

**Grandpa Zakharii (speaks quickly):** I stepped out for a stroll, started clinking cans with stones, then I heard this howling.

**Levko:** Could be a wolf in the woods?

**Grandpa Zakharii:** A wolf? Nah.

**Tonya:** Then who was it?

**Grandpa Zakharii:** That's what I'm trying to figure out. Who was it?

**Levko:** You're half deaf, Grandpa!

**Tonya:** Let him finish, Levko.

**Levko:** So, what happened next?

**Grandpa Zakharii:** It's in our barn, where Zorka used to hang out.

**Levko:** Zorka, who?

**Tonya:** That was my Mom's cow.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** Opened the door, no Zorka in sight.

**Tonya (nervously):** Then what?

**Grandpa Zakharii:** Found a soldier, all tied up. Thought he was a damn fascist.



**Levko:** A fascist, who else?

**Grandpa Zakharii:** Untied his mouth, asked him, “Wie heist du?” He just says, “I don't understand.”

**Tonya** (*nervously*): What happened next?

**Grandpa Zakharii:** Turns out he's one of ours, so I set him free.

*Tonya and Levko immediately hurry outside.*

**Grandpa Zakharii:** He's already taken off. Says he's joining our partisans.

### *Scene 13*

*Grandpa Zakharii sits in the house, wiping Rooster. The sounds of thunder are heard. Tonya runs in, soaking wet.*

**Tonya:** Has Levko come back yet?

**Grandpa Zakharii:** No, he hasn't.

**Tonya:** Oh my God, where could he be?

**Grandpa Zakharii:** Why are you causing panic again?

*Tonya sits down next to Grandpa Zakharii.*

**Tonya:** Dad, focus. Look at me.

**Grandpa Zakharii** (*looks closely*): You look just like my Maruska.

**Tonya:** Dad, we're at war. We're occupied.

**Grandpa Zakharii** (*hesitates for a moment*): Yeah, Mom, I know. I'm not a kid, I get it.

**Tonya** (*in despair*): Oh my God, Dad! This is a new war!

**Grandpa Zakharii:** I killed a Nazi. He was right there on the floor.

*Tonya hugs Grandpa Zakharii and cries. The door opens. Russian soldier enters first, followed by Levko, who holds a gun to Russian soldier's temple.*

**Levko:** I caught the bastard.

**Tonya:** Where did you find him?

**Levko:** He got stuck in the mud. Doesn't know the area at all.

**Tonya:** Why don't you say something, Red Soldier? Think you're smart, huh?

**Russian soldier:** You Ukrainian bitch.

*Levko knees Russian soldier in the backside.*

**Levko:** Shut the fuck up!

**Tonya:** Take him to the barn.

*Levko, Tonya and Russian soldier leave.*

**Grandpa Zakharii (to Rooster):** I'm worn out. Gonna sleep before Maruska shows up. She hates when I loaf around.

#### ***Scene 14***

*Levko enters the room with a gun in his hands. He points it in different directions, imitating the sound of gunfire.*

**Levko:**

It's a piece of cake to kill an enemy in a game.  
Real life? Way more tangled.  
My grandpa's gone a little nuts.  
He just let the Russia go.  
I chased after him.  
Took me ages.  
He's a quick little devil.  
I know this place like the back of my hand.  
Found him stuck in a swamp, waist-deep.  
Another ten minutes, he'd be a goner.  
He saw me and begged for help.  
I froze.  
Just stood there watching.  
Part of me wanted him to drown in that mud.  
Wanted to see it clog his nose.  
No one would ever know.  
Just gone.  
Then I thought of Zhenya.  
His Dad's in captivity.  
Maybe we could swap him for this guy.  
I pulled out a gun.  
Then target.  
Threw the stick.  
I pulled him out.

#### ***Scene 15***

*Levko sits on top of a ladder that is attached to the house. Tonya holds the ladder. Levko tries to make a call.*

**Tonya:** Levko, what's up with that?

**Levko:** It's barely working. Let me try again.

*Levko dials the number.*

**Levko:** Hello! Hello! It's Levko. We're alive. All of us. Grandpa's still kicking. What about our soldiers? I can't hear you! Are they coming? Hello? Hello!

**Tonya:** What happened, son?

**Levko:** The call dropped.

**Tonya:** What did he say?

**Levko:** They said to hang tight. Our guys should be here in a couple of days.

**Tonya:** Thank God! Let's hope they don't forget about us!

*Sounds of cannon fire can be heard nearby.*

**Levko:** That was a big one! I wish I knew who's firing.

*Levko looks up at something.*

**Levko:** Hold on tight. I'm getting off.

**Tonya:** What's going on?

**Levko:** Grandpa's running around the house with his Rooster. We better get to him before he does something crazy.

### **Scene 16**

*Tonya, Levko and Grandpa Zakharii sit in the semi-darkness. They are exhausted and hungry.  
Grandpa Zakharii holds Rooster in his arms.*

**Levko:** Mom, remember when I used to dump porridge down the toilet?

**Tonya:** Oh, I remember. Everyone thought kids had to eat porridge. Why did we push it on you?

**Levko:** I'd love some right now.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** I'd whip up Maruska's borsch with sour cream.

**Tonya:** I've always wanted to try oysters.

**Levko:** When we win, I'll take you to the best oyster place in the city.

**Tonya:** Do you know how much that costs?

**Levko:** Doesn't matter, I'll earn the money.

**Tonya:** Maybe they've forgotten about us. Maybe our soldiers have already chased the Russians away, and we're stuck here in the middle of nowhere.

**Levko:** Or maybe it's the other way around?

**Tonya:** Don't even think about that!

**Levko:** I don't.

**Tonya:** It's been so quiet these days. You can hear the mosquitoes buzzing.

**Levko:** That silence is driving me crazy.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** Want me to tell you a fairy tale? About a Rooster.

**Tonya:** What kind of fairy tale is that? I don't remember.

**Grandpa Zakharii:** Just listen.

Once upon a time, there was a Rooster.

He never crowed too loud.  
Didn't bother anyone.  
Did his chores around the house.  
In the nearby forest, there was a Bear.  
Dirty and smelly.  
Everyone in the forest was scared of him.  
So they brought him food.  
Berries. Mushrooms. Honey.  
He got tired of it all.  
Remembered his predator instincts.  
Decided to eat the Rooster next door.  
Feathers and all. Guts too.  
He roared loudly.  
Slapped the ground with his paw.  
The ground shook.  
The Rooster got scared.  
Fussed around.  
Then took a deep breath.  
Calmed down.  
Sat on the fence.  
Pretended to sleep.  
The Bear came crawling over.  
The Rooster jumped up.  
Pecked the Bear's eyes out.  
He roared in pain.  
Ran away.  
Fell into a pit.  
Fell apart.  
And died.  
The forest animals cheered.  
Thanked the Rooster.  
Cheers to a new life.  
To a free land.  
And that's the end of the story.  
Whoever listened, good on you!

*As soon as **Granddad Zakharii** finishes the story, voices and noise are heard from the courtyard.*

**A voice:** Hey!

**Tonya:** Who is it?

**Levko:** I don't know.

**A voice:** Is anyone alive?