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Not about that Raccoon

Iryna Harets

Translated by John Freedman with Natalia Bratus

Arkhipovich - 46 years old, Lida's husband

Lida - 47 years old, Arkhipovich's wife

Tamara - 27 years old, eldest daughter

Masha - 22 years old, youngest daughter

Squirrel - 10 months old, a cute mongrel

Bangs - 7 years old, beautiful thoroughbred Husky

Soldier.

Action takes place in a car pulling a trailer. There are winter tires in the trailer. Arkhipovich is at the wheel, Lida sits next to him. Squirrel lies at her feet. Bangs sits in the back seat.

ARKHIPOVICH: Someone's door is not closed, check your doors.

Lida opens hers, slams it shut.

Arkhipovich (*reproachfully*): Lida, Lida. Good God.

They start. They're going.

ARKHIPOVICH: It's bad enough that we overslept. It's too bad we didn't change the tires.

LIDA: It's great that we slept well. I got a good night's sleep.

ARKHIPOVICH: Yeah. You tossed and turned until 2 a.m. I couldn't sleep.

LIDA: The news and the road. It's always like that. You don't sleep when you're hitting the road in the morning. And then my deadline. I have to write.

ARKHIPOVICH: You need to sleep. This news is unending.

LIDA: Well, we did get some sleep. And the news, as I said, it makes me feel like I'm in control of what's going on. I feel better that way.

Lida opens the Telegram channel in her phone to a group called, "Our Homeland is the Glorious Ukraine."

LIDA writes: "Family. Roll Call."

MASHA writes: "Did you just leave? You guys are crazy. When will you arrive? At night? All's good here. Kolya's temperature is down, he feels better. Ania is good, too. Today will be her first proper meal."

Masha sends a photo of six-month-old Anya.

ARKHIPOVICH: What you got there?

LIDA: Ania in a high chair with a spread in front of her: broccoli, meat, carrots.

ARKHIPOVICH (*smiles, drives*): Is she eating?

LIDA: We'll see... I think a photo report is coming soon.

A message arrives. Lida looks at chat. There are photos of happy Tamara and Nikolai.

TAMARA writes: "Can you guess who the happiest parents are? Yes! We just took the kids to kindergarten. Both of them! This is our first time alone."

ARKHIPOVICH: What you got there?

LIDA: They took the kids to kindergarten. They're free for a few hours.

Arhipovich smiles and drives.

LIDA: I remember those feelings when I took them to kindergarten. Such freedom!

Lida looks at a map of air-raid alarms. Calmly closes the phone. Sets it aside. Strokes Squirrel.

LIDA (*to Arhipovich*): We didn't feed you, did we?

BANGS (*from back seat, offended*): No, you didn't.

LIDA: Because she's salivating. She'll definitely vomit. Sorry, Squirrel. We have a long way to go.

ARKHIPOVICH: We'll get there. We'll heat the stove. The wood is dry there. We'll go for mushrooms.

LIDA: Greenfinches.

ARKHIPOVICH: Maybe...

LIDA: Black mushrooms.

SQUIRREL: I feel sick. Can we not talk about food?

ARKHIPOVICH: Shit.....

LIDA: You forgot something.

ARKHIPOVICH: The gas cylinder...

LIDA: Shit.

ARKHIPOVICH: We'll cook on the stove, on wood. It'll be delicious.

LIDA: Okay, we can hold out for two days. It's even kind of romantic.

She picks up her phone and writes.

LIDA: Listen, how can I tell these Europeans why I hate *rusnya*,¹ when we have said everything there is to say. We've done it rudely, we've done it gently, we've done it with reason, we've done it every way possible. They will still say I am a radical and there is no black and white in the world. There is only gray. But real understanding comes with rockets and funerals.

ARKHIPOVICH: Write something else. You've been saying the same thing for weeks.

LIDA: I even wrote to my colleagues last night and asked them for help. Either with inspiration or a swift kick.

ARKHIPOVICH: And!?

LIDA: Yeah, they laughed. I said I was going to write about that raccoon. The one that was stolen from Kherson. They said that topic's been done.

ARKHIPOVICH: Shit.

LIDA: What else did you forget?

ARKHIPOVICH: The dog food.

BANGS: Shit.

SQUIRREL: Can we not talk about food?

LIDA: We'll buy them meat pies in Pyriatyn. They'll survive until morning. Then we'll go to the store.

SQUIRREL: Can we...

Lida picks up the phone and opens a warning message.

LIDA: Incoming fire from the East.

ARKHIPOVICH: How nice to hear from our dear neighbors.

¹Rusnya (not capitalized on purpose, as a sign of derision) is a collective, pejorative reference to Russians or anything Russian. It is pronounced with the stress on the final syllable: rusNYA.

LIDA: Raccoon... Listen, first I thought I would enter into dialogue with the Strugatsky brothers. Remember their *Wild Swans*? There, in the end, the kids abandoned their adults. They didn't want to live with such thick-headed people. So, I thought, let's say this generation went to another planet, and now it turns out they grew up and came back and are shooting at us, looting, raping and destroying everything.

ARKHIPOVICH: And they say everything is so vague.

LIDA: I told Liuda about it, and she said that by creating a dialogue like this I would give voice again to the Strugatskys, and reintroduce them to our informational field... raccoon.

ARKHIPOVICH: Write about the raccoon.

LIDA: A raccoon family. Once upon a time there was a raccoon. It made borscht. It had a magical vat that it rinses words in. To make them honest. You've seen all the memes on the internet. It wasn't a raccoon that was captured, it was a saboteur demonstrating to rusnya how to taunt Ukraine.

Arkhipovich smiles.

LIDA: Maybe it could be about a raccoon and an animal rights activist from Europe. Maybe animals would help them understand...

Arkhipovich is silent, drives.

LIDA: Or Pushkin. Say, Pushkin steals a raccoon. Pushkin falls in love with it, offers to become its lover, but won't marry it because he already has a wife.

ARKHIPOVICH: Natasha.

Lida writes on her phone. They drive in silence for a while.

LIDA: What do you know? Autocorrect switched Pushkin to Rushkin. Let him be Rushkin.

Writes. Arkhipovich turns on jazz radio. From the speakers: "Radio Jazz – be yourself."

Lida is distracted and looks at the air-raid alarm map.

LIDA: The damn thing's growing. At least, gas stations aren't closing due to air-raid alarms. Want a quick latte?

SQUIRREL: I asked ages ago...

Squirrel starts drooling and trying to jump out of the car.

LIDA: Arkhipovich, stop! Stop! Or there will be an accident on my white sneakers.

Arkhipovich stops the car. Squirrel jumps out of the car followed by Lida.

ARKHIPOVICH: And we can pee.

BANGS: Awesome. Me too.

Everybody does their thing.

LIDA: I'll give Rushkin a horse.

ARKHIPOVICH: Pegasus.

LIDA: Who farts rockets.

BANGS: Awesome.

LIDA: And Rushkin is like that with his poems, poems about the Great Russian soul, and how to gang rape a girl. The horse rips open the raccoon's hut, who's setting up a machine gun to build fortifications for itself.

ARKHIPOVICH: The raccoon has a son or nephew who steals the horse.

LIDA: How Gypsies stole a tank. Then there's this old woman who hides Rushkin's sword. A lot of swords. Like that old woman did near Kherson. She had a barn full of stolen weapons. Did she ever put one over on them!

ARKHIPOVICH: She pinched 'em. Let's go.

SQUIRREL: Oh, no! Oh, no! No, no, no!

Arkhipovich gets behind the wheel and starts the engine. The speakers say, "Radio Jazz – be yourself." Everyone takes their seats. The car starts off. Lida looks at her phone.

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LIDA: Ania sent a photo. She's all dirty, broccoli on her forehead, carrots on her feet. The baby is happy.

Lida looks at the map of air alarms.

LIDA: Arkhipovich, air-raid alarm in Kyiv. They write that 100 missiles were fired from different

directions.

ARKHIPOVICH: Oh, great. We're not far away. One-hundred missiles. They're fucking with us.
What fake channel are you watching?

LIDA: Well. We'll see. They also write that today is International Day of Rest and Relaxation.
Anyway... Rushkin challenges the raccoon to a duel, because it refuses to be his lover, or mistress, whatever. The animal rights activist agrees to be his second. Rushkin arrives with a huge artificial phallus and a toilet bowl. A toilet bowl is essential.

ARKHIPOVICH: A dildo.

LIDA: Yes! And it pokes him everywhere, the animal rights activist too. Tries to rape the raccoon.
The animal rights activist expresses her concern.

ARKHIPOVICH: And the raccoon bites off Rushkin's prick. A real rushkin prick.

SQUIRREL: And doesn't eat it... it spits it out.

LIDA: Good. Then Rushkin goes with the zookeeper to Europe and tells everybody he has Ukrainian roots. Attacked in the libido, he now supports peace, and is wearing an embroidered Ukrainian folk shirt. And all the financial revenues that should have gone to support Ukrainian raccoons, now will be used to finance his poems.

ARKHIPOVICH: Here's where we fall into a trap.

LIDA: Okay, what.

ARKHIPOVICH: First, once again you're providing informational space to a Russian poet, and secondly, everyone will say Rushkin suffered because the raccoon bit off his prick. Sympathy will be on Rushkin's side. And the animal rights activist will tell everybody how radical raccoons are.

BANGS: That's a fact.

Lida grimaces and looks at her phone. Puts it down, looks at the road.

ARKHIPOVICH: Look, your favorite ravine.

LIDA: The ravine. Damn, how beautiful. We're near Zhytomyr. Damn, now the road will really get started. It always affects me emotionally.... It's like I see...

Looks at the road. Dilapidated houses and garages. Boarded-up gas stations. Many houses with boarded-up windows.

LIDA: Bastards. Damn bastards... I can't handle it. These pictures of naked corpses of women they planned to burn ... these tires, these children... Arkhipovich, why don't these Europeans

understand our pain? They don't see what we see. You need to feel it with your own skin, then it makes sense. No plays, no conversations, no videos. They don't understand that...

Looks at her phone.

LIDA: Arkhipovich, there is an air-raid alarm all over Ukraine. Lviv, too.

LIDA writes in the family chat: "Report back, is everyone sheltering?"

MASHA writes: "We just left the store with Ania, we didn't have time to buy anything. We were already at the checkout when the siren went off. We're heading for cover."

TAMARA writes: "We just managed to pick up the young one from kindergarten, because he only goes half a day. We planned on picking up Vera in the evening, as usual. The teachers will take them down to the shelter now. Kids are no longer afraid in the shelter. They just goof around down there."

LIDA: Shit, Arkhipovich. They didn't pick Vera up, she went down to the basement. You remember how she started pooping her pants after those basements?

ARKHIPOVICH: Hopefully they'll call the alarm off soon.

Lida looks at her phone.

LIDA: They write there are explosions in Zaporozhzhiiia.

All are silent.

LIDA: Explosions in Sumy.

All are silent. Arkhipovich drives on.

SQUIRREL: Look at the speedometer. I'm going to be sick.

BANGS: You feel sick the first five years, then you get used to it. They're always going somewhere. They bought a dacha 800 kilometers away. If only they'd just stay in one place... but, no, they've got to... got to... It's your first time at the seashore. The Kinburn Peninsula, for example. There you puncture your paws with thorns for the first time. Then you fry your paws in the hot sand and cool them off in the salty estuary. And these guys (*points at Lida and Arkhipovich*

with his muzzle) think their Renault Kangoo is a Jeep, and they get stuck in the sand. Good and tight. They pull out some plastic plates and dig themselves out. The sand is hotter than hell, your paws are killing you, and they're laughing...

SQUIRREL: Don't start up that hurdy-gurdy of yours. It makes me sick, too.

ARKHIPOVICH: Google GPS is leading us astray, we have never gone past Kyiv this way before.

LIDA: Explosions around Chernihiv.

ARKHIPOVICH: No, why go this way? Why go through the center? Oops, traffic jam.

Lida looks around. Suddenly notices something in the sky. It's a missile. Looks at Arkhipovich.

LIDA: I love you. I thank you for these 22 years. We had a great life.

Arkhipovich looks at Lida. Kisses her on the forehead. Hugs her.

BANGS: Squirrel... Sorry you never had the chance to get used to it...

SQUIRREL: So what I never made it to the Kinburn Peninsula? Or dunked my paws in the estuary.

Life was interesting as it was, but way too short.

An explosion. A missile hits a high-rise building near the car. A column of smoke rises. The car shakes. Parked cars begin leaving in a panic. Arkhipovich dodges among them and keeps driving on.

ARKHIPOVICH: I'd like to get to the bridge.

LIDA: They write about a second explosion. Did you hear anything?

ARKHIPOVICH: No. Let's go. Why did I take the trailer with those ragged old tires?

The car rushes through Kyiv.

LIDA: They write about explosions in Lviv.... The kids!

Lida writes in the chat: "Write something!"

Silence.

LIDA: They're silent. Come on, write already! I'll call.

Lida calls her daughters. They don't answer.

LIDA: Fuck.

They ride on in silence.

SQUIRREL: Fear has calmed my stomach. Five years... Five years.

Lida strokes Squirrel. A message arrives.

Masha writes: "Mom, that was scary. It hit very close by, our house shook. Electricity is down."

Tamara writes: "Very close. Poor Vera. She probably heard it too, but I'm not there with her."

Lida writes: "Is she sheltering?"

Masha writes: "Of course!"

Tamara writes: "Mom! Of course!"

Masha writes: "Where are you? They write there are explosions in Kyiv."

Lida writes: "We are almost out now."

LIDA: Fuck.

ARKHIPOVICH: Are they all right?

LIDA: Alive. Waiting. Sheltering. Only Vera's still in kindergarten.

Watches her news feed.

LIDA: Explosions in Zhytomyr. Explosions in Odesa. Explosions in Rivne. Explosions in Vinnytsia. Explosions in Kovel... Explosions in Kryviy Rih...

Watches her news feed.

LIDA: Explosions in Khmelnytskyi. Explosions in Ivano-Frankivsk. Explosions around Poltava.
Dad!!!

Calls her father.

LIDA: Dad, is everything all right? Phew.. Don't go out! Don't go out...

Lida finishes the conversation and follows the news.

LIDA: You heard that, didn't you? He's fine.

Arkhipovich nods. Concentrates on the road.

LIDA: Explosions in Ternopil. Electricity down everywhere.

ARKHIPOVICH: We're out of Kyiv. Five hours left.

LIDA: Electricity out in Moldova.

ARKHIPOVICH: Maybe their grid was tied into us somewhere.

LIDA: Kyiv again.

ARKHIPOVICH: Bastards.

SQUIRREL: I'll be quiet.

BANGS: I need to pee.

ARKHIPOVICH: Patience, friends.

Everyone rides in silence.

LIDA: Explosions in Kryviy Rih. Miners can't leave their mine. Five hundred sixty-six people.

ARKHIPOVICH: I hope they have ventilation. I mean, backup sources of some kind. As long as they have air.

LIDA: Trains are stopped in many directions.

ARKHIPOVICH: We're going to stop, too.

Stops the car.

ARKHIPOVICH: I'll follow the news myself. Let's take a breather.

Everyone gets out of the car. Arkhipovich looks through the news feed. Swears. Squirrel eats grass.

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