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**ukrdramahub**  
портал сучасної української драматургії

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**23.24.25.**

Andriy May

Translated from the Ukrainian by John Freedman with Natalia Bratus

I swim and as I do I think only about the fact that I am surrounded by water. I am in a pool. It is divided into six lanes, each of them 25 meters long, and nothing prevents me from moving.

I swim 45 laps of 25 meters each and I think: my age is 45, and 25 meters is a fairly short distance that allows you to swim without much stress.

I can always pause because I'm just swimming in a pool, and every time one can set a new record.

I swim with my son, who is seven. He never lags behind. On the contrary, he tries to get ahead of me.

This evening, as always, he succeeds.

We believe we have set our new swimming record of 1,125 meters.

After we shower, we get on the scales.

I weigh 186 pounds, and I say I want to lose weight.

My son weighs 55 pounds. He says he wants to gain weight, because, considering his height, this is too little.

We have seven minutes left before the free bus departs, and we hurry to collect our things.

We are home in 15 minutes. We eat dinner, memorize Vladimir Sosyura's poem "To Love Ukraine," and play lotto and table hockey. Then we go to our own rooms, and, for the first time in a week, I fall asleep almost instantly, succeeding in reading 35 pages of the book *House at the End of the World*. It is 23 February 2022.

I dream I meet my wife who died two years ago, and her father is dissatisfied with something. I am guilty of something. She smiles and I can almost feel her touch.

Two minutes later I wake up, and look at the clock. It is 7 a.m.

The sun shines outside. I hear the usual hum of a trolleybus passing by, and I decide to sleep another 30 minutes because my son's school starts at 8.30, and there is still time.

I casually log onto Messenger, and I see a single message from a friend in Mykolaiv – a city 60 km away from me: "Hey! What's your situation? I haven't slept since 5 a.m. Take care of yourself."

I lie there and I don't move.

I've been doing that all this last week when I wake up:

I lay there and I don't move.

I listen to the sounds of the city. I listen to see if I can hear the trolleybus – this sound always gives me confidence that everything is good, that peace reigns outside my window.

My body still smells a little of bleach from the pool. This always happens when you swim for a long time.

I don't move.

**War**

A trolleybus passes by.

I open a cardio program on my phone that counts my heart rate.

114 beats per minute.

It was 146 in the gym yesterday, and, I think, I'm not too worried.

Last week I went sleepless every night. I wrote Facebook posts to my Russian colleagues, asking them, "Why are you silent?" They weakly replied, "If you're so smart, give us the recipe for what we should do."

Between 16 and 23 February, I received several emails from friends abroad.

All of them suggested I leave urgently, they offered to let me stay at their homes, and to live there as long as necessary.

In response, I shot videos in playgrounds, videos on the embankment, videos of soccer matches, and of the park where we always go walking with my son and my mother, from all the places where we feel comfortable and good, where our home is.

Teresa wrote from Prague almost every day asking if everything was good.

All's good.

All's good.

All's good.

All's good.

All's good.

That's the standard response. Seven days.

The refrain of war.

I lie down again and I don't move.

I listen.

The trolleybus has passed.

I receive a message from a mother in a school chat for parents: "I don't want to cause panic, but will the children go to school today?"

A bell rings.

It's an unexpected call from the grandmother of my son's classmate. She was once the deputy mayor.

"Andrei, what do we do, they're bombing everywhere, what to do?!"

I reply, "Go or stay, depending on the answer you get when asking yourself, 'Why am I here?'"

The alarm goes off at 7.45 a.m., and my son, as always, happily runs to me.

He always runs in in the morning, and gets under the covers so that we lie still with our arms around each other for 10 minutes before he goes to wash and get ready for school, and I make breakfast for my mother, who is almost paralyzed as she lies in her room where she has been silent for seven years following a stroke.

Every day, yes, but not today.

"Dad, why are you still in bed? It's time for school!"

"Unfortunately, there will be no school today."

"Why?"

I don't know what to say to my son. I remember yesterday's record of 1,125 meters, and I say we must wait.

I'm looking at a Buddha I brought back from Sri Lanka in 2012.

He is calm.

He stands by my bed and I wait for an answer.

On one day when humanity was waiting for the end of the world in bewilderment, I sat by the ocean and imagined a huge wave engulfing me.

On this day I bought a Buddha.

He is silent.

I meditate on his tranquility and I wait.

There is no answer.

I had my first rehearsal in Mykolaiv yesterday afternoon.

I talked at length with teenagers about tolerance, and building territories of trust.

I suspect they didn't go to school today either.

How do I tell my seven year-old son that war has begun?!

The Buddha is silent.

I can barely feel the pool chlorine, but I take a shower.

1 minute cold

1 minute hot

1 minute cold

1 minute hot

10 minutes of a high pressure, contrast shower.

We have breakfast.

"Son, war has begun."

"What do you mean?"

"It's war. The enemy attacked us."

"Russia?"

"Yeah."

“What do we do?”

Gautama Buddha is silent.

He knows everything will pass, but we don't know when.

I call our housekeeper. A few days ago, she went home to her village 60 kilometers from Kherson, not far from Crimea.

“The Russian army is here already! We left because there is a dam in our village, and they started blasting. If they blow up the dam, the village will be washed away.

Buddha is silent.

We go to the supermarket during the day because we have no food in the house. There are almost no lines, and people politely fill their baskets leaving food for others.

I buy the ingredients for borscht.

I cook borscht as I simultaneously look for a taxi that can take us out of the city.

All taxis refuse.

I cook borscht

I cook borscht

I cook borscht

I cook borscht

All's good.

The website of the Ukrainian railway shows there are three tickets available for the 6:13 p.m. train.

We have lunch and get ready.

A neighbor will drive us there in his old car.

We are at the train station in 10 minutes.

It's dark. Crowds of people. Everyone waits.

There is not a single railway worker at the station, everything is closed.

Everyone waits.

There is still no train at 8:15 p.m.

There are explosions outside the city. The sky lights up with radiance.

There is no taxi to take us home, so we just walk out onto the road – two suitcases, two backpacks, my mother in her wheelchair, my son and I.

A blissful 17-year-old guy standing next to the taxi drivers who wouldn't take us anywhere for any price says let's go, and I accept.

We drive down the main prospect to the central square, Freedom Square, and my son starts crying.

“Dad, I don't want to die tonight, I'm still very young. I'm only seven years old.”

I hug him as tightly as I can.

I feel the warmth and wetness of my son's cheeks and I think about the pool yesterday.

We swam together in lane number 4. We swam together for 1,125 meters and nothing got in our way, we set our own record. Such was our small world of daily joys.

Our world.

Our blessed driver is waiting. The sky sparkles with explosions.

The Buddha is silent.

I hope he cries like me so that no one sees it.

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