

## MY HELL

by Oksana Savchenko  
translated from the Ukrainian by Hanna Leliv

### Cast of Characters

- OLENA: 33-35 years old, set designer, Ukrainian refugee, speaks German with a strong accent, making occasional mistakes.
- MARYSIA: 15 years old, Olena's daughter, Ukrainian refugee, a 'difficult' teenager, speaks German with an accent.
- HELENA: 55-57 years old, a German woman trained as an art teacher, vegan, hosts Olena and Marysia at her home.
- LUKA: 25 years old, Helena's son, works as a volunteer for the suicide prevention hotline.
- PAUL: 60-65 years old, a very scrupulous and vigilant neighbour of Helena & Luka who loves writing complaints to the co-op board. He also doubles as ED, a Russian soldier who haunts Marysia in her nightmares.

### Place

Helena and Luka's home in Heidelberg, Germany

### Time

Late spring–summer 2022

## Scene 1

April. Easter. A train station in Heidelberg, Germany.

A young woman stands in front of the glass door in the train doorway. She sports a stylish short haircut and wears an elegant coat, her makeup impeccable, resembling a model from the cover of a fashion magazine. It's OLENA, a Ukrainian refugee. She knocks on the glass, first gently, then harder and harder, but the door won't open. She feels as if she's trapped in a prison cell, desperately trying to escape. Despair is evident on her face as she keeps knocking. Finally, the door opens, and OLENA, a cigarette between her teeth and a bright yellow suitcase in hand, almost tumbles out. OLENA clicks a lighter on and lights a cigarette. She takes a long drag, exhaling into the sky.

OLENA

Stupid doors! Where are you, **sontse?** (*sohn-tse*; \*Ukr. for 'sweetie')

MARYSIA (*voice only*)

Don't call me that!

*MARYSIA emerges from the train: a slender teenage girl with her hair dyed yellow, dressed in the style of an anime character. She carries a small backpack adorned with a blue and yellow ribbon. MARYSIA nearly knocks OLENA's suitcase over. OLENA quickly grabs her suitcase and clutches it tightly to her chest.*

OLENA

Watch your step!

MARYSIA

You embarrassed me in front of the whole train!

OLENA

Why didn't you tell me I had to press the green button?!

MARYSIA

Because you told me to back off!

OLENA

I said that?!

MARYSIA

You did!

OLENA

I didn't! And I kept pressing the red button like a fool!

MARYSIA (*feeling vengeful*)

You always press the red button.

Scene two

Heidelberg. A cozy-looking duplex. HELENA and LUKA reside in one section, while PAUL, a gray-haired retiree wearing glasses and sporting a neat medium-length haircut, lives in the other. In front of the house is a small garden divided in half by a low fence, with an apple tree planted on HELENA's side, with branches reaching over to PAUL's. It's April, so the tree is in blossom and is decorated with painted eggs—but only on HELENA's side.

PAUL is sweeping up non-existent trash near his porch as HELENA enters. She wears jeans, a baggy coat of a nondescript color, and comfortable yet ugly sneakers. She wears no makeup, and her hair is tangled as if she has just woken up. She is followed by LUKA, a young man dressed stylishly like a hipster with a trendy haircut, and then OLENA and MARYSIA. LUKA is wheeling Olena's yellow suitcase, clearly displeased with the task.

OLENA (*to HELENA and LUKA*)

So, yes, we speak German—thanks to my father, God rest his soul. He made me learn verb conjugation, and I was so angry but now (*sighing heavily*) it's useful.

*PAUL sees the newcomers and forces a friendly smile.*

HELENA

**Hallo** (*ha-looh*) Paul! These are our friends from Ukraine, Olena and Marysia.

PAUL (*with a friendly nod*)

I feel sorry for you.

MARYSIA

You don't need to.

*OLENA nudges Marysia.*

PAUL

We've already met today, Helena.

HELENA

We have?

PAUL

When you were lingering by your mailbox. I called out '**hallo**' to you.

HELENA (*royally*)

That wasn't me.

PAUL

It was around six in the morning.

HELENA

I never wake up that early.

LUKA

You bet she doesn't.

*HELENA gratefully strokes LUKA's arm.*

PAUL

Hmm, but that person loitering by the mailbox looked just like you. I did wonder why you didn't respond.

HELENA

Because I was in bed, asleep.

PAUL

Mmm-hmm. Then it's fortunate I did not vent about the washing machine to that lady.

HELENA

What happened to your washing machine?

PAUL

Nothing. It works just as perfectly as yours. But I heard yours working last night after ten. It was so loud! Swish-swish! Thump-thump! My ears were ringing! And it was three minutes past ten!

*HELENA (glancing anxiously at her watch)*

Maybe my watch is broken?

*PAUL (almost affectionately)*

Please be so kind as to check it. You know how much we value peace and quiet in this building.

HELENA

We value peace and quiet as much as you do. It won't happen again.

*A large flock of green parakeets swoops across the sky making apocalyptic screeches.*

MARYSIA

Holy shit! It's like in the jungle! I didn't know you have parakeets here.

LUKA

They're from Africa. A local legend says they escaped from the zoo.

MARYSIA

Do they feel at home here?

HELENA

Heidelberg welcomes everyone.

OLENA

We came for just a bit.

HELENA

You can stay with us for as long as you need.

MARYSIA (*jokingly*)

We'll assimilate and breed like those parakeets that fled from the zoo.

*HELENA and OLENA walk into the house. The door behind them closes. Then HELENA turns around and cracks the door open.*

HELENA

Luka, dear, please don't forget to check the mailbox.

*She closes the door.*

MARYSIA (*whispering to Luka*)

Umm, I don't get it. Did that guy freak out at your mum just because of laundry?

LUKA

Kind of.

MARYSIA

Is he nutso?

LUKA

All people are a bit nuts. It's just that in Germany we have **Ruhezeit** (*roo-ye-tsayt; German 'quiet hours'*). You're not supposed to make noise from ten pm to eight am.

MARYSIA

**Scheisse!** (*shy-ss-eh; German 'damn'*)

LUKA

It's **schei-ss-e**. (*shy-ss-eh*).

MARYSIA

That's what I said! (*Pause*). What about fucking? Can people fuck at night?

*Pause.*

LUKA

It doesn't apply to sexual intercourse.

MARYSIA

Where can I throw away trash?

LUKA

See those bins?

*Leaving the yellow suitcase in the yard, LUKA takes MARYSIA over to a row of neat, colorful garbage bins (yellow, green, brown, blue). There's a mailbox attached to the gate next to them. MARYSIA reaches into her pocket and pulls out a moldy sandwich in a plastic bag. She stares at the bins in confusion.*

MARYSIA

Where should I put this?

LUKA

The yellow one is for plastic, and the sandwich goes in the green one.

MARYSIA (*sounding unsure*)

I'm all for being eco-friendly, but this sandwich stinks so much, even inside the bag, that I'm scared to take it out. It's like Ukrainian biological warfare!

*LUKA laughs, turning towards PAUL who pretends to be sweeping but is actually watching them closely.*

LUKA

You can't just toss it like that.

MARYSIA

Come on. I know all that. (*Theatrically*) Unsorted trash rots in the landfill, pollutes the soil and oceans, and destroys eco-systems. But I don't think my tiny sandwich is capable of that.

LUKA

Personally, I don't give a damn. (*He nods towards Paul*). But he's gonna raise a fuss.

MARYSIA (*half-heartedly*)

Cool. In this country, even old farts are fighting to save the world.

*MARYSIA turns the sandwich in her hands with hesitation. She heaves a sigh.*

MARYSIA

I've been carrying it around for a week.

LUKA

Did you forget to throw it away?

MARYSIA

No. When mama and I were on this evacuation train, some cross-eyed granny shoved it into my hands. "Here, sweetie," she said. "Take this chicken sandwich. I raised that chicken—and I killed it. When Russian tanks were on their way. I didn't want Russians to eat it." And then she was like, "I know you love chicken. You must be cold in heaven. No proteins or carbs. Only ambrosia all the time."

LUKA

And what did you do?

MARYSIA

Nothing. I just took it. She was a loony.

LUKA

Why didn't you eat it then?

MARYSIA

I just told you—that granny was a loony! And I can't stand meat, anyway.

LUKA

So why did you take the sandwich?

MARYSIA

So she'd get out of my face!

LUKA

You tricked her.

MARYSIA

Not on purpose. At first, I wanted to eat it. That chicken died for it, right. Chickens grow fast. Theoretically, that chicken could've been just as old in its chicken years as I am now—fifteen. Do you know how to count chicken age?

LUKA

You've got me there. I have no idea.

MARYSIA (*looking at the sandwich*)

You were living your life. And then—boom!—you're chicken filet in a sandwich with like three hundred calories! (*She continues almost desperately*) But there must've been at least some meaning in that chicken's life?!

LUKA

I don't know. I guess, yeah, there was some meaning.

MARYSIA

And what was that?

LUKA

Think about it.

MARYSIA

Playing Buddha, are we, smarty pants?

LUKA (*laughing*)

I'm a snooze. And I'm as old as that tree.

*LUKA points towards the apple tree by the fence. PAUL is sweeping right next to it, keeping a close eye on MARYSIA.*

MARYSIA

What kind of tree is that?

LUKA

It's an apple tree. Dad planted it when I was born. Twenty-five years ago. I celebrated my silver jubilee just yesterday.

MARYSIA

Wow. Happy birthday! And where is he now?

LUKA

Who?

MARYSIA

Your dad.

LUKA

He's far away.

MARYSIA

Where?

LUKA

In Alaska. He studies northern lights.

MARYSIA

How long has he been there?

LUKA

As long as I can remember.

MARYSIA

How do you communicate?

LUKA

Through postcards. He sends them twice a year—for Christmas and for my birthday.

MARYSIA

And have you ever met him in person?

LUKA

Nope. Alaska is too far away.

MARYSIA

**Scheisse!** (*shy-ss-eh*). Does it hurt?



LUKA

I don't care.

*MARYSIA wrinkles her nose and stretches her hand with the sandwich as far away as possible.*

LUKA

Let me just throw it away.

*LUKA takes the plastic bag and carefully removes the sandwich. He throws the bag into one bin, the sandwich into another one, and slams the lid.*

LUKA

There goes that meaning.

MARYSIA

Should we go inside?

LUKA

One sec. Let me finish something.

*LUKA, looking doomed, reaches into the mailbox and takes out a postcard.*

MARYSIA

Is it from Alaska?

LUKA

Yep.

MARYSIA

Are you going to read it?

LUKA

Later.

*MARYSIA and LUKA walk towards the house, leaving the yellow suitcase behind. PAUL, grinning, continues sweeping imaginary trash. A green parakeet flies above him and shits on his head. PAUL looks up towards the sky.*

PAUL (*shouting*)

Green **scheisse!** (*shy-ss-eh*)

*PAUL wipes his forehead and glances around. With caution, he opens the gate separating his side of the yard and HELENA's. He tiptoes to the suitcase and opens it. What he sees inside causes him to recoil in shock and press his hand against his heart.*

Scene three

The same day. HELENA's house, cozy and inviting. In the living room, paintings adorn the walls, mostly featuring mediocre landscapes with shepherds. Among them, stands out a portrait of a bearded man in a warm sweater with a rifle over his shoulder and the body of a Siberian tiger lying at his feet. A large chandelier hangs from a massive hook. From the living room, a hallway leads to a spacious eat-in kitchen, its walls adorned with decorative plates. The table is set for a festive dinner. In particular, there is a large wooden plate with painted eggs made of papier-mâché.

HELENA is wiping down a faucet with a green cloth, while OLENA watches her.

OLENA

Do you always wipe away the drops?

HELENA

Yes. That's our house rule.

OLENA

Why?

HELENA

It's a sign of self-respect. And respect for your home. It prevents limescale, too. Is it hard for you to wipe away the drops?

OLENA

No, no. It's a great rule.

*OLENA sets a bowl of salad at the edge of the table but HELENA moves it to the middle.*

HELENA

It's a better spot.

OLENA

Yes. It looks more aesthetic this way. I tell you this as a set designer.

HELENA

It's just easier for people to reach it when it's in the middle. I tell you this as an art club teacher.

OLENA

You cooked so much food.

HELENA

It's just our regular lunch.

OLENA

Can I ask you something? You're vegan, but you're also religious. What about eggs?

HELENA

What about them? They are unborn babies of birds. Their lives were taken just because people decided they need protein.

OLENA

But a painted egg is a symbol of Easter. It's... how do we say this?... Ceremonial food! You keep painted eggs on the table.

HELENA

They're made of papier-mâché. Kids from my arts club made them.

OLENA

Oh God! I'm glad you warned me.

HELENA

I thought you don't eat meat and eggs. Or do you?

OLENA

Yes! No! I just (*picking up a painted egg*) remembered playing with painted eggs on Easter when I was a child. You had to choose an egg, clutch it in your hand, and knock it against your friend's egg. If your egg cracked, you lost. It was a stupid game, but it's so nice to remember those times. When things were quiet and clear. No responsibility for anything. I always won because I chose the strongest egg.

HELENA

How did you know it was strong?

OLENA

I asked mama to boil it longer than the rest. A hard-boiled egg—that was my secret. And when this moment comes when you have to knock your egg against another egg, you just put your fingers around it. Like that. (*She demonstrates the gesture on a papier-mâché egg.*)

HELENA

I see. And I always lost that game. I bet on the smallest egg. But at least I was honest.

*The egg in Olena's hand yields to pressure and cracks.*

OLENA

Oh no! I'm so sorry!

*There's an awkward pause.*

HELENA

The children worked so hard on this. Throw it into that bin. No, not the yellow one. It's for paper.

OLENA

But it's papier-mâché.

HELENA

It goes into the green bin.

OLENA

Okay, **frau** (*fruh-oo* = 'lady') captain!

*OLENA throws what's left of the egg into the green bin.*

HELENA (*as if justifying herself*)

I just want my home to be a safe place. But if you find it hard to stop eating meat, you can still eat it—outside the house.

OLENA (*laughing*)

You mean a safe place is a place without meat? But all of us are meat. Sorry, it was a bad joke. Actually, I can't even look at meat since I saw that burned.... umm... corpse.

HELENA

When was it?

OLENA

When Marysia and I were fleeing Irpin. There was a dead **katsap** (*cuts-up; Ukr. derogatory for 'a Russian'*) lying in the middle of the road near the tank. 'A Russian,' as you say.

HELENA

Didn't you feel sorry for him?

OLENA

What? Are you serious?

HELENA

He was someone's son.

OLENA

So what? Okay, I was also surprised I didn't give a shit about him. I always feel sorry for people. But this time? No. Compassion is a moody lady. It quickly runs away if someone wants to kill you. (*She laughs nervously*). He lay there by the tank like a grilled chicken. It made my heart happy but upset my stomach. Now I feel like throwing up whenever I even look at meat. Especially grilled meat. Yuck.

*Grinning, she shows Helena photos in her phone.*

OLENA.

There he is. **Padlo**. (*puh-d-loh; Ukr. for 'scum'*) That's what we call them in Ukrainian!

*OLENA bends her knees and positions her feet so her toes point toward each other. HELENA stares at OLENA, petrified. OLENA keeps her eyes fixed on HELENA. Someone knocks on the door. PAUL comes in with the yellow suitcase. He looks pale as a ghost.*

PAUL

You left this outside.

*OLENA dashes to her suitcase.*

OLENA

That's mine! **Danke!** (*duh-n-kah* = 'thank you')

PAUL

Did you see the news?

HELENA

I'm on digital detox.

PAUL

They found another bomb.

OLENA

Oh God!

*HELENA (defiantly)*

In Germany, they find bombs every other year. We're used to it.

PAUL

This time it is in Heidelberg. Next to the train station.

HELENA

And what's going to happen now?

PAUL

Evacuation.

OLENA

Oh no! Not again!

PAUL

They are evacuating residents of the buildings in the vicinity of the train station.

HELENA

It has nothing to do with us.

PAUL

I didn't say we would be evacuated.

OLENA

Phew. But where do *you* get these bombs?

HELENA

They've been here since the Second World War.

PAUL

This website that tells the truth—the *real* truth, not the 'truth' our government is brainwashing us with—published some disturbing information about refugees. They said they sell body organs.

*OLENA stares intensely at PAUL. HELENA doesn't notice her stare.*

HELENA (*laughing heartily*)

Have you been perusing the website of those crazy anti-vaxxers again?

PAUL

The future, Helena, will show who was right.

HELENA

I'm sorry but we're about to have lunch.

PAUL

I'm leaving.

HELENA

Please do.

*PAUL leaves.*

HELENA (*to Olena*)

You can call the kids.

Scene four

HELENA's house. Eat-in kitchen. Lunchtime.

HELENA, OLENA, LUKA, and MARYSIA are finishing their lunch in the eat-in kitchen. Everyone feels ill at ease. MARYSIA has a piece of quiche on her plate. She picks at it with her fork while studying the collection of decorative plates on the walls. Everyone except MARYSIA drinks wine.

MARYSIA (*eyeing the quiche on her plate*)  
I'm wondering how many calories it has.

HELENA  
I don't know. Does it matter to you?

MARYSIA  
I was just curious.

OLENA  
Marysia is obsessed with healthy food.

MARYSIA  
That's not true!

OLENA  
I just meant you're a great cook.

MARYSIA  
No, you didn't. You said I'm *obsessed!* That's not the same.

OLENA  
You didn't let me finish.

HELENA  
Marysia is right. It's important to be mindful of what you eat. I spend hours shopping for the right food.

*MARYSIA flashes HELENA a grateful smile.*

LUKA  
And my mum never allows me to cook.

OLENA  
Why?

LUKA  
Because she's *obsessed* with cleaning.

HELENA

People must live in a clean house.

MARYSIA (*laughs*)

Mama's gonna get you in trouble!

OLENA

But I clean the house!

MARYSIA

You never cleaned the house. Natasha always did all the cleaning.

OLENA

Because I was always busy at work. Sometimes, I worked on *three* projects at once! Natasha and I helped each other.

MARYSIA (*addressing everyone*)

The poor woman spent the past two years clearing our Augean (*aa-gee-uhn*) stables.

HELENA

Augean stables? What's that?

MARYSIA

It's when your house is a total mess, and you hire someone to clean it for you. We hired a refugee from Donbas. Krasnyi Luch. That was the name of her city.

HELENA

I've always cleaned my house by myself. Even when I taught art in school.

OLENA

You worked in school? Why did you leave your job?

HELENA

I inherited some money. Working at the art club is enough for me now.

MARYSIA

I love painting. But mama never taught me how to paint.

OLENA

Because I was working, **sontse** (*sohn-tse*)

HELENA (*to Marysia*)

You should join our art club!

LUKA (*googling on his phone*)

Krasnyi Luch. I've never heard about that city.

MARYSIA

Me neither, until Russians attacked us in 2014.



HELENA

Are you saying that the war started in 2014?

MARYSIA

It's a well-known fact. Tons of refugees arrived in Kyiv.

OLENA

It wasn't '*tons*.'

MARYSIA

Mama also dumped a pile of clothes she didn't need on Natasha.

OLENA

No, I gave her *good* clothes.

MARYSIA

This is exactly what those people in Austria thought as they ditched their second-hand stuff on us. All those oversized things their fat...

HELENA

Sorry, we don't say 'fat.' We say 'strong.'

MARYSIA

Sorry. All those things their strong—*very* strong—women were wearing. But why would you give me a pair of jeans that are so big I could fit my whole body into one leg? So I would just carry it around wondering where to donate them?

LUKA

You could've just said no.

MARYSIA (*pronounces the German word sarcastically*)

Well, but you have to give people a chance to show how freaking **fantastisch** (*fun-tus-tee-sh*) they are!

OLENA (*loudly*)

This quiche is so tasty! Marysia, why don't you finish yours?

MARYSIA (*to Helena*)

Is that the German cross on your china?

*OLENA and HELENA shudder. OLENA stomps MARYSIA's foot under the table.*

HELENA

Why would it be there?

MARYSIA

We had this plate with the German cross. They always made me eat porridge out of it.

HELENA

Where did you get that plate?

*MARYSIA is just about to say something, but OLENA interrupts her. While OLENA and HELENA look at each other as OLENA explains, MARYSIA quickly shoves her piece of quiche into her pocket.*

OLENA

My great-grandfather bought it at this market where they sell old things... umm... at the *flea* market. He collected plates.

MARYSIA (*in the original she says the following lines in Ukrainian*)

You're talking shit, mama! **Baba** (*Ukr. 'grandma'*) Nina said her father schlepped it home from Germany after the Second World War, when they looted German homes. I told her it was pure robbery. And **Baba** Nina said everyone was doing that—they were *winners*! Just like Russians in Ukraine do now. They snatch whatever they can. One **katsap** (*cuts-up*) stole my friend's toilet but, curiously enough, didn't touch her keyboard. **Hondon!** (*Ukr. 'scum'*) And now I will forever associate porridge with the Third Reich—because of that plate with the cross!

OLENA (*in Ukrainian*)

Can you just stop it? Why are you trying to scare this kind woman away? You're not like that. You're my good girl! **Moye sontse!** (*Ukr. 'my dear'*)

MARYSIA (*in Ukrainian*)

Because I hate eating with other people. And I'll have to do it here.

HELENA

Is something wrong?

OLENA (*to Helena*)

Nothing. Marysia is just tired and is asking me when she could go to her room.

HELENA

As soon as she finishes her quiche.

MARYSIA

But I'm done with it. It was super delicious. And super nutritious. That quiche was just great. The greatest quiche of all quiches in the world.

*MARYSIA waves goodbye to everyone and leaves. As the rest of them finish their lunch, MARYSIA goes outside. She walks over to the trash bins, takes the piece of quiche out of her pocket, and throws it out. PAUL watches her through a spyglass. MARYSIA turns around and bumps into LUKA. She almost jumps.*

MARYSIA (*exclaiming in Ukrainian: 'Oh God!'*)

**O Bozhe!**

LUKA  
Can't handle it anymore, either?

MARYSIA  
What?

LUKA  
That stupid conversation at lunch.

MARYSIA  
Um-hum. Everyone only pretended to be interested. Deep down, they couldn't wait for lunch to be over. Everyone was uneasy. I could see that.

LUKA  
I saw what you just did.

MARYSIA  
I have no idea what you're talking about.

LUKA  
You threw out your piece of quiche. Why didn't you just say no if you weren't hungry?

MARYSIA  
Do you really have to poke your nose into other people's life?

LUKA  
It's a professional thing.

MARYSIA  
Is your last name Freud?!

LUKA  
Freud is not in my league. Take it up a notch—I work for the crisis hotline.

MARYSIA  
And how do people here usually finish themselves?

LUKA  
Finish themselves?

MARYSIA  
I mean.... umm... take their own life.

LUKA  
There're many ways. They take pills. Or jump off bridges. But it's not easy in Heidelberg.

MARYSIA  
Why?

LUKA

It's hard to be alone. Someone is always running by.

*PAUL, wearing sweats, runs past MARYSIA and LUKA. He waves hello at LUKA. LUKA puts on a fake smile and waves back.*

MARYSIA

One guy I knew tried to strangle himself with a scarf I gave him as a gift.

LUKA

Did he succeed?

MARYSIA

He changed his mind.

*LUKA takes out a business card.*

LUKA

These are the hotline numbers.

MARYSIA

What makes you think I'll take that?

LUKA

You take everything, to not hurt other people's feelings. You're a good person.

MARYSIA

Nope. I'm a bad person. You can't even imagine how bad I am.

LUKA

Would you mind telling me what happened? I'm not much of a therapist but I know how to talk to people.

MARYSIA

So now you're feeling sorry for me? Right! It totally slipped my mind. There's *war* in my country. I'm so '*traumatized.*' What would you like to know? Some horror stories? You can always just come to a support group meeting for Ukrainian refugees.

LUKA

I did that.

*Pause. LUKA pulls out a pack of cigarettes and offers one to MARYSIA. She shakes her head. LUKA lights a cigarette.*

MARYSIA

And how was it?

LUKA

Everyone there was extremely unlucky. I heard so many terrible stories. One girl said all of her friends were killed. A woman had her leg blown off. And they talked and talked about it, and at some point, I... Okay, it's a wrong thing to say. But I felt as if I was watching some kind of a competition on a sliding scale of misery—where the most miserable wins.

MARYSIA

Exactly. I'm fine compared to others. I only saw one dead Russian. We were evacuating from Irpin in mama's friends' car. And then I look there and I see a burned Russian lying in the middle of the road. And his tank. Mama snaps a photo, and I'm in kind of a haze. And his feet are bent sort of unnaturally—the toes turned towards each other. And I... Can I have a drag?

*MARYSIA takes a drag. She starts coughing but takes another puff.*

LUKA

Did you feel scared?

MARYSIA

I felt like a piece of shit. You know why? Because I felt sorry for the guy. That scumbag came to kill us, and I... I hate myself!

*LUKA gently pats MARYSIA on the shoulder.*

LUKA

I don't have a dad in Alaska.

MARYSIA

No? Where is he then?

LUKA

Have you heard of sperm banks?

MARYSIA

Yep.

*LUKA (punches his chest)*

Well, I'm the product of one.

*MARYSIA stares at LUKA.*

LUKA

I wish you could see your face now. I'm kidding! But seriously, I have no clue who my dad is.

MARYSIA

So, who's sending you those postcards? *(Pause)* Your mum!

LUKA

Exactly.

MARYSIA

Does she know that you know?

LUKA

She has no idea.

MARYSIA

How can you live with that?

LUKA

It's hell.

MARYSIA

When did you figure it out?

LUKA

I was ten when I saw her dropping a postcard into our mailbox. Then I snooped in her desk, and there was a whole stash of them. And a stamp with the word 'Alaska.'

*MARYSIA whistles.*

MARYSIA

Why didn't you...umm... confront her?

LUKA

It's complicated. She's been lying about it for so long that she seems to have convinced herself that the story is true. But it gets completely fucked up when she shows me my dad's portrait. That dude with the tiger.

MARYSIA

Maybe that's really him.

LUKA

Oh yeah. The dude painted in the nineteen thirties... Let's go.

*LUKA stubs out his cigarette. They walk back into the house, each to their room.  
In the kitchen, OLENA and HELENA are halfway through their second bottle of wine.*

OLENA (*warmly*)

... Until my Yurko would come and wake me up. (*Lovingly*) Oh, how he did that. Whatever was going on in the world, I always knew I was waking up for love. He woke me up when the war started, too. He pressed my head against his chest and wouldn't let go. I struggled to breathe. Let me go! I yelled, I can't breathe!

*OLENA falls silent.*

HELENA

And then what?

OLENA

He took his backpack and his papers and went to this military center...*recruitment* center. Then he called me. "Take Marysia and go," he said. "Russians are encircling Kyiv." And I was like, "No, I can't leave without you." But he said, "Bunny, I need you to be alive and well." So I left. We haven't seen each other since.

HELENA

And where's the bunny?

OLENA (*pointing at herself*)

He called *me* that. He called me bunny.

HELENA

I don't understand.

OLENA

In Ukraine, we call those we love our 'sun,' our 'bunny,' our 'kitten.' All these cute names. How does your man call *you*?

HELENA

Nothing. I don't have a man.

OLENA

Oh, sorry.

HELENA

We broke up. Luka's dad is a famous researcher. He lives in Alaska. He loves Luka so much. He sends him postcards. He's so proud of his son!

OLENA

And my man and I text each other on messenger. Once every three days. He texted me today. He said he was going on some important mission. He's so handsome. Look. (*She shows HELENA Yurko's photos on her phone*).

HELENA

Nice. (*Then in a drunken whisper.*) Olena, would you like to see Luka's dad?

*OLENA nods. HELENA rises from her chair, takes Olena's hand, and guides her to the living room. They stop before the portrait of the man with the killed tiger.*

OLENA

That's him?

*HELENA nods.*

OLENA

His son is his copy!

*HELENA nods.*

*OLENA (deeply moved)*

Helena, **sontse!** (*sohn-tse*) We'll soon get ac...ac...accustomed to each other! We'll get used to each other like... like animals! Have you seen those videos on TikTok? A cat with a dog? Like hugging him? A chick with a duck? A kitten with a tiger?

**HELENA**

I'm afraid I never have.

*OLENA quickly taps on her smartphone and shoves a typical TikTok video under Helena's nose. It shows a puppy hugging a duck, a chicken with a dog, a dog with a cat, and a cat with some small animal, a hamster or a mouse. A 'cute,' bittersweet melody plays in the background. OLENA and HELENA stand, hugging each other, facing the portrait, their backs to the audience. OLENA rests her head on Helena's shoulder, mirroring the duckling resting its head on the puppy.*



Scene five

MARYSIA's nightmare.

MARYSIA is running through the city. She hears explosions.

MARYSIA

Where's the bomb shelter? Where's the bomb shelter?

*She runs behind the wall of a building and starts doing pushups to the sounds of explosions.  
Another explosion.*

MARYSIA

If I do three reps before the next explosion, then...

*MARYSIA does push-ups as fast as she can until she collapses to the ground, exhausted.  
She closes her eyes. PAUL / ED appears, wearing sweats the colors of the Russian flag.*

PAUL / ED (*speaking Russian*)

**Privet!** (*Pree-viet; Rus. 'Hi'*)

MARYSIA

Who are you?

*PAUL / ED presses his gun to MARYSIA'S temple.*

PAUL / ED

Name?

MARYSIA

Marysia.

PAUL / ED

Age?

MARYSIA

Fifteen.

PAUL / ED

Height?

MARYSIA

Five six.

PAUL / ED

Weight?

MARYSIA

One hundred five.

PAUL / ED

You're fat! Get up and follow me!

MARYSIA

Who are you?!

PAUL / ED

Get up and follow me!

MARYSIA (*getting up and following PAUL / ED*)

Who are you?

PAUL / ED

Stop! A hundred squats!

MARYSIA

Why should I...?

PAUL / ED (*interrupting her*)

Or I'm gonna kill you!

*MARYSIA does squats as PAUL / ED presses his gun against her temple. While doing that, she says, speaking like a news anchor:*

MARYSIA

“In late August, Yale University in the US published a report titled, “System of Filtration: Mapping Russia’s Detention Operations in Donetsk Oblast.” The researchers identified at least 21 filtration camps.”

BLACKOUT.

Evening. HELENA’s house.

MARYSIA wakes up, panting. OLENA is cleaning up the kitchen. She wipes the table, takes the plates from the dishwasher, and puts them back on the rack, mismatched by size. She does not hold the door as she leaves the kitchen, and it slams. HELENA is in the living room. She is lovingly putting large albums, one by one, onto the shelf, arranging them by size. She shudders when she hears the kitchen door slam. HELENA walks into the kitchen. She looks around, shaking her head, and thoroughly wipes down all the surfaces that OLENA has just wiped. She rearranges the plates by size. LUKA is in his room. He pretends to strangle himself with a scarf in front of the mirror. MARYSIA, wearing headphones, is working out in her room. She does push-ups and jumping jacks, thumping loudly on the floor. PAUL, whose bedroom is adjacent to MARYSIA’s room, shakes his fist and pulls at his hair in frustration. He then drops to his knees and raises his hands in a pleading gesture.

PAUL

Dear co-op board, I implore you on my knees. (*He lowers his head and, after a brief pause, continues*) Please grant me justice! Make the walls thicker so I don't hear their constant slamming of doors! The thumping of their bare feet! The moving of furniture, the sound of their hair dryers, and their showers after ten pm! (*A long pause.*) My ears are as big as an elephant's. I can hear their every breath. These two women are horrible creatures. They're so noisy, especially the younger one. How can someone speak on the phone so loudly?! Or thump their feet like that? The older one chain-smokes in the yard and talks to someone without using earphones. If it keeps up much longer, I'll soon be fluent in Ukrainian. She's searching for someone and shouts hysterically at whoever she talks to. I signalled with my eyes that she should stop it. I even pointed at her ears, but she just smirked and kept yelling. Dear co-op board, if you can hear me, if you recognize me, if you see me, a humble and kind person, a good citizen who has never crossed the street against the light, never put trash in the wrong bin, and always swept the yard when it was his turn! If you can hear me, please spare me from hearing them ever again! She's stamping her feet again! Dear co-op board, I beg you—please have mercy on me so I don't hear them ever again. So I don't hear them... breathing. I've already sent you a detailed letter describing the various types of noises they make. I eagerly await your response. Best regards, PAUL KITZLER.

*PAUL pounds on the wall. LUKA hears the knocking and stops strangling himself with the scarf. He walks into the kitchen. HELENA, visibly annoyed, stares at the tablecloth.*

HELENA (*to Luka*)

She's made another stain!

*LUKA takes some food out of the fridge and starts chewing it without any appetite.*

LUKA

Paul is pounding on the wall again.

HELENA

And yesterday, she tossed just two blouses into the washing machine and set it to the quick cycle! I told her, "Olena, how many times do I have to say it? We don't run the machine for just two items; it's a waste of electricity! You've been with us for just a month, and our water and electricity bills have tripled!" And she said, "But I used the quick cycle!" And I said, "It's even more expensive!" And she said, "I don't understand the logic."

LUKA (*apathetically*)

I don't understand it either.

HELENA

And then she said: "Let me pay for laundry. Let's split utilities."

LUKA

Fair enough.

HELENA

But she's dirt poor! She relies on money from the job center! How could she afford it?

LUKA

Then just drop it.

HELENA

I'm trying to. Oh, and one more thing. We agreed that she'd be home waiting for the gas man. And what do you think happened? I came home, and she wasn't there!

LUKA

Um-hum.

HELENA

She forgot about it and snuck away to have her nails done! And I warned her a month ago—the gas man is coming, I have an appointment with the dentist, I can't be there, so please stay home. Or I'll ask Luka if you can't.

LUKA

I wouldn't have been able to.

HELENA

I know. Why is that, by the way?

LUKA

I was advising railway workers on what they should do if anyone tries to commit suicide by jumping in front of a train.

HELENA

Goodness gracious! How often do these things happen?

LUKA

I didn't study the statistics. But Robert Enke's example haunts people to this day. (*He's lost in his thoughts*). Only I wouldn't trust the schedule of the German railway if I wanted to kill myself. I spent a few hours at the train station today, watching trains. Half of them were late. And what if someone gets up the nerve, but the train doesn't arrive on time...

HELENA

But you said you were advising? Why did you watch the trains?!

LUKA

Have you heard of the term 'field study'?

HELENA

Of course, I have! Stop messing with me. I know what you were doing there!

LUKA

Mum, I'd never...

HELENA

You just didn't want to stay at home and wait for the gas man because you can't stand talking to strangers!

LUKA

Exactly! You figured me out.

*HELENA starts polishing the faucet with a cloth.*

HELENA

Alright. You're young, and you have your head in the clouds. I get it. But she could be contributing to the life of our family, right?! It's just beyond me how she can squander forty euros each month on her nails if she's living off the money from the job center?! Did you know that she gets a mani every single month? I won't be surprised if she starts going for pedis, too!

LUKA (*looking bored again*)

You knew what you were in for when you opened your home to them.

HELENA

I did. But now I really *know*! Yesterday, she asked me for the contact info of my cosmetologist. Imagine that! Do I look like an idiot who goes to a cosmetologist?

LUKA

Positively not.

HELENA

Are you saying I'm ugly?

LUKA

Mum, you're perfect.

*There's a knock on the wall.*

HELENA

It's Paul again!

LUKA

He's an asshole.

HELENA

Perhaps he is, but that girl, Marysia? No, I like her, but she's *jumping* after 10 pm! And Olena? She's barely looking after her child. She's been shuffling like a zombie these past few days! The girl's jumping, and Paul doesn't even say hello to me anymore.

LUKA

How awful.

HELENA

It's not funny. (*She gestures toward a pile of cans.*) I've set those cans aside. Could you please take them to the refugee center?

*LUKA inspects the cans.*

LUKA

Hmm. You might want to toss half of these out.

HELENA

Why?

LUKA

They're past their expiration date by about a year!

HELENA

That's a shame... Oh, and Frida and Ella are coming over tomorrow.

LUKA

They're still alive?

HELENA (*strictly*)

Don't be late for lunch. They've been really missing our dear boy. (*She affectionately pats Luka on the head.*) I'll whip up something for dessert with those pears. Look at how gorgeous they are.

*HELENA shows him four pears. She puts them on a nice large plate. Then she glances toward OLENA's room—the lights are on.*

HELENA

She's wasting electricity! And what's with all the whispering and screaming coming from Marysia's room? Don't you find it odd?

LUKA

I didn't hear anything.

HELENA

You never hear anything. That girl cries out at night, and our caked-up queen just yells at her for it.

LUKA

If she yelled at her, I would've heard it.

HELENA

She yells in a whisper. And I can't make out what they're talking about.

LUKA

Mum, have some chamomile tea, okay? You're overthinking it.

HELENA

Something's off here. One of them is constantly weighing themselves on the scale.

LUKA

How do you know that?

HELENA

Every morning, I find the scale shifted towards the cabinet. I always align it neatly against the wall at night, but it's always moved in the morning.

LUKA

I weigh myself every day, too.

HELENA

But not like every single day.

LUKA

Actually, every single day.

HELENA

So, how much did you weigh today?

LUKA

Why are you grilling me? I forgot.

HELENA

You're covering for them!

LUKA

Mum, maybe you could entertain Frida and Ella on your own, without me? I feel like my head's weighed down with concrete.

HELENA

You're just coming down with a cold from all that loitering at the train station! Don't be late tomorrow!

*LUKA goes to his room, passing MARYSIA's door. He hears something, stops, listens, then continues to his room. MARYSIA sits on the bed. OLENA paces the room, stomping her feet.*

OLENA

**Sontse**, we need to make a decision. She was so welcoming. And now she hates us. It's not like I'm not wiping down those faucets on purpose. I'm just in a daze.

MARYSIA

She doesn't hate 'us.' Speak for yourself.

OLENA

And you jumping. Paul is furious. Could you please stop jumping? **Bud laska!** (*bood-lus-kuh; Ukr. 'please'*)

MARYSIA

Should I stop breathing, too?

OLENA

No one's trying to restrict your freedom. But there's no need to jump during this... What do they call it?

MARYSIA

**Ruhezeit.** (*roo-ye-tsayt*)

OLENA

Exactly! Helena walks around the house with her lips pursed. I don't even know how to talk to her anymore. I tell her something, and she goes all poker faced. I only get texts from her. Even the letters from the job center don't make me as anxious as her texts. "Olena, you ran the machine for just two blouses, and electricity is very expensive. Olena, the lights were on in your room at two am!" **Bozhe**, (*Ukr. 'oh God'*) what kind of life is that? It's total control. I can never relax.

MARYSIA

Do you know what's for lunch tomorrow?

OLENA

I have no idea.

MARYSIA

Can you ask Helena?

*OLENA stares at Marysia.*

OLENA

Didn't you hear what I just said?!

MARYSIA

I did. So, will you ask her or not? **Ta chy ni?** (*tuh chy nee; Ukr. 'yes or no'*)?

OLENA

My relationship with Helena is strained. Why do you need to know what she's cooking for lunch?

MARYSIA

I just want to know!

OLENA

Something bland and healthy, what else? How are things at school, by the way?

MARYSIA



Fine.

OLENA

Have you made any friends yet?

MARYSIA

No.

OLENA

Is anyone giving you a hard time?

MARYSIA

I'm not talking to anyone at school.

OLENA

No one wants to talk to you?

MARYSIA

Stop twisting my words! I said I'm not talking to anyone because I don't feel like it! Helena thinks I should switch to an alternative school. Like Waldorf or something.

OLENA

Oh, *Helena* thinks that? But those schools don't offer much education. You'll grow up stupid.

MARYSIA

How can you be so sure? Have you even checked them out? Why do you always judge things you know nothing about? You did this back home, and you're doing it here, too! You do it everywhere! You *always* have an opinion about everything. Why don't you at least give some thought to the idea that Helena might actually know what's best for me?

OLENA

Oh, so now you're friends with Helena?! **Klas.** (*cluss; Ukr. 'cool'*)

MARYSIA

At least she cares about me and my life! Can't say the same for you!

OLENA

I don't have the energy to justify myself to you right now. I know—it's an awkward age, and there's a war going on, but I'm a human, too! (*Her voice cracks*). Yurko hasn't called me in two weeks!

MARYSIA (*apathetically*)

Sorry to hear that.

OLENA (*lost in her emotions, not fully present with Marysia*)

He's been redeployed. He just texted me about it, and that's all.

MARYSIA

Just give it some time.

OLENA

We agreed to call or text each other once every three days. I feel like a fly trapped in a web. I keep forgetting things. Today, I let Helena down. I completely forgot about the gas man coming. I went to this Ukrainian woman who does nails just to have someone to talk to, to stop catastrophising about Yurko. My insides twist up when I think about him.

MARYSIA

You should've been honest with Helena.

OLENA

So she'd take pity on me? How would that help find Yurko?

*OLENA checks her phone and then flops down onto the bed.*

OLENA

He'll be alright, won't he?

MARYSIA

Did you call the enlistment center?

OLENA

They don't know anything. They said the cell signal is bad where he is. They told me to wait.

*MARYSIA suddenly hugs Olena tightly. Olena strokes her head absent-mindedly.*

OLENA

I'm sorry. **Vybach.** (*vyh-ba-ch; Ukr. 'sorry'*) You need my support, and I'm failing you.

*As she puts her phone back, she finds something else in her pocket.*

OLENA

Oh, I completely forgot! Do you remember that cute little shop that sells good coffee?

MARYSIA

The one downtown? With that friendly lady?

OLENA

Mm-hmm. They also sell this quirky artisan chocolate.

MARYSIA

And there's a heart made of twigs hanging in the corner.

OLENA

I somehow missed the heart, but probably yes. Well, **trymai!** (*tryh-my; Ukr. 'there you go'*)

*She pulls a chocolate bar out of her pocket.*

OLENA

It's with salted caramel and flower petals or something.

*MARYSIA stares at the chocolate bar.*

OLENA

What? Is anything wrong? I just wanted to make you happy. I think you said you wanted to try it.

MARYSIA (*feeling doomed*)

**Kruto.** (*croo-toh; Ukr. 'cool'*) It's just a bit pricey.

OLENA

It's surely not as pricey as having my nails done.

*MARYSIA takes the chocolate bar and studies it.*

MARYSIA

Quiche. That's what she likes.

OLENA

Who?

MARYSIA

Helena. Get her a quiche. Apologize for running the washer for just two blouses. And things will get better. Yurko will get in touch sooner or later. You said he's a lucky guy.

*OLENA smiles sadly. She kisses Marysia on the forehead and leaves. MARYSIA smells the chocolate bar. She turns it around, then unwraps it and takes a bite. Then she tosses it on the floor. She falls onto her bed and cries. The light switches from warm to cold (signalling that Marysia is dreaming). PAUL-ED approaches her, wearing a Russian military uniform.*

PAUL / ED (*speaking Russian*)

Why are the lights on? **Pochemu**?! (*Po-che-moo; Rus. 'why'*) You're wasting money!

MARYSIA

I'm turning it off now.

PAUL / ED

Speak Russian!

MARYSIA (*speaking Russian*)

**Da! Da!** (*Rus. 'yes'*) I'm turning it off.

*She walks towards the switch.*

PAUL / ED

Stop! What's that lying on the floor?

MARYSIA

It's not mine!

PAUL / ED

You're a shameless liar! You're so pathetic. You think you deserve food? Fatsos must not eat chocolate.

MARYSIA

I didn't eat it.

PAUL / ED

Who are you trying to fool? You took a bite! A whole big bite. Do you even realize how many calories it had?

*MARYSIA nods grimly.*

PAUL / ED

I didn't realize you're so pathetic. I thought you were strong. What's your weight?

MARYSIA

It was eighty-eight pounds this morning!

PAUL / ED

You can do it if you want to! But now you're fat. You ate chocolate. But chocolate is for normal people, not pathetic, wimpish scum like you. You have to work it off!

*During the conversation that follows, PAUL / ED marches, and MARYSIA does push-ups.*

PAUL / ED

It's not Ukraine here for you. It's the Russian Federation.

MARYSIA

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia has deported more than 19 thousand Ukrainian children.

PAUL / ED

Now you're gonna live in Russia. Russia will teach you to love order. We'll give you a lobotomy. A lobotomy. A fucking awesome lobotomy!

MARYSIA

The researchers organize filtration camps into four categories. Registration points. Camps and other holding facilities for those awaiting registration. Interrogation centers. And, finally, camps for interned persons.

PAUL / ED

Not a step to the right, not a step to the left! Learn the Russian anthem by heart! (*Humming the melody of the Russian anthem*) Russia is our sa-a-a-acred sta-a-a-te... What's the next line?

MARYSIA

Russians use electric shock and physical abuse. They forced a 16-year-old boy to clean up the torture chamber. He said later that Russians tortured civilians and soldiers alike.

PAUL / ED (*humming*)

... our sa-a-a-acred sta-a-a-te ... What's the next line? (*Humming the melody of 'The Sacred War,' a famous Soviet song of World War II*) Ari-i-ise, vast country! Ari-i-ise for the fight to the death!

MARYSIA

They insert needles under their fingernails and hook them to the power outlet.

PAUL / ED (*humming*)

Against the dark Banderite force, against the cursed horde!

MARYSIA

A 24-year-old civilian was tortured for two days.

PAUL / ED (*humming*)

Let noble wrath boil over like a wave!

MARYSIA

They took off his pants and sent electric shock through his genitals. The captive tried to hang himself in the cell but the 16-year-old boy saved him.

PAUL / ED

This is a sacred war. You're a fat swine! Rat-tat-tat!

MARYSIA

The boy gave an interview to RTS, a French-speaking Swiss TV channel.

PAUL / ED

You must control yourself. You must count calories and report to me every day. You are fat!

MARYSIA

I'm fat.

## Scene six

Helena's house.

OLENA opens her yellow suitcase and retrieves a glass jar containing an object that resembles a human heart floating inside. She also takes out a military jacket and presses it against her face.

OLENA

**Pryvit, sontse.** (*Pry-veet, sohn-tse* = "Hello, dear").

*She lies down on a yoga mat and covers herself with the jacket.*

OLENA

Breathe. Relax. Breathe. Throw the fear out of your heart. You are relaxed. You and Yurko are in a nice place. Everything will be alright.

*She jumps to her feet.*

Fuck! What the fuck am I saying?!

*She carefully places the jacket on the floor and picks up its sleeve as if taking someone by their hand. Gently, OLENA says:*

I start every day with scrolling through Telegram. I wish you'd text me a single line, like, "I'm ok, how are you, baby?" My love. You are so far away. I don't know if you had anything to eat or drink. I imagine looking at you. I remember that stork that flew above us that first spring we were together. And how we got matching tattoos afterwards. Here. (*She points at her collarbone*). I scroll through Russian accounts on social media. I'm scared of seeing you in one of their videos. As a hostage. Flashbacks swarm in my head: the geometry of our streets and your cheekbones; the geography of your tattoos, your lips, your eyes. A painting in our bedroom. As if different fragments of us tell me about me and you. I feel like I'm very sick. I live with strangers. I can't paint at all. I feel like I'm a nobody. I feel as if my wings have been cut. I feel like I'm dying online. I know you're in the grip of your duty to the motherland, and I'm in the grip of motherhood.

*OLENA throws the sleeve of the jacket away and continues:*

I wish you hadn't gone to this goddamn war! Many men didn't go. No, forget about it, I'm sorry! But did you even think about me?! What would happen to me if you.... (*She presses the jacket to her body.*) Shut up, Olena! You have to be strong! Everything will be alright. He will call you. The very next minute, you'll get a text from him: "Hi, bunny, how have you been?" I only need to count to ten. One, two, three... What the fuck?! Grow up, for God's sake! I have to do something. (*She stands up and paces the room.*) A woman in the group chat suggested I should call the central tracing agency of the Red Cross. Perhaps they know something? What if he's really in captivity? Or... Stop! Don't think about bad things. Okay. This is their number. But it's late now. Or maybe not? This agency was set up to help people. And people need help anytime. Especially at night, when the entire world sleeps. And Fear

grows huge like a skyscraper and visits you with his best friend, Anxiety. I wish I could smoke in my room. To call or not to call? I'm fucking sick of this eternal question.

*OLENA dials the number of the Red Cross. The line is busy. She tries again. She hears ringing on the other side and is redirected to the voicemail.*

OLENA

Hello! It's Olena Ponomarenko from Ukraine. My partner's name is Yurko Honchar. He is 39. He's a soldier, and he hasn't been in touch for two weeks. Please call me back if you have any information about him.

*OLENA puts her phone down and stares into the distance. She heads to the kitchen, pours herself a glass of water, and drinks it. She spots the pears on the plate. She grabs one, takes a bite, and returns to her room.*

Scene seven

Morning. Helena's kitchen.

HELENA is furious. OLENA and HELENA stand on opposite sides of the table, where three pears lie on the plate. A half-finished cup of coffee sits next to OLENA.

HELENA

I specifically mentioned that my friends were coming, so I bought four firm pears to make a desert. And when I came in this morning, there were only three!

OLENA

I took one without thinking.

HELENA

I thought we agreed to keep our fruit separate—yours in the round bowl and mine in the square one!

OLENA

Let me just quickly run to the supermarket and buy some more pears.

HELENA

They don't sell them at the supermarket! I got these pears from the farmer's market! These are organic, without pesticides! And I'm not asking you to buy more. Fine, I'll just bake something else. But from now on, could you please ask before taking what's not yours?

OLENA

Okay! I promise—I won't touch anything on your table again! (*Speaking aside or in a whisper*): I can't stand this bland vegan shit you're cooking anyway!

HELENA

I'm happy to share my food with you!

OLENA

Maybe we should cook separately so you won't have any problems with me!

HELENA

Are you suggesting I'm being cruel to you?!

OLENA

I'm just suggesting a solution.

HELENA

It's not a solution! Last night, the lights in your room were on again. My electricity bill has tripled!

OLENA

But I said, let's split the bills!



HELENA

And where would you get the money to pay your share? Those cents you get from the job center?! What about your amazing, smart daughter! You're always yelling at her! And you allow her to spend the whole day glued to her phone!

OLENA

What does the way I raise her have to do with the money?

HELENA

You're ruining her mental health! Your girl is so talented! She's great at painting. She could've been studying at an alternative school instead of that prep school. Prep school only stresses her out! She's sleepy all the time.

OLENA

She's adapting.

HELENA

I try not to interfere. That's your business. But why don't you take her to the doctor? She's not eating well.

OLENA

*(Speaking aside)* I can't eat your cooking either. *(Continues as usual)* She's fine! You have a son—why don't you take care of him instead?!

HELENA

I never had any troubles with Luka. I brought him up just right. He knows he can always talk to me. I know everything about him! He's a good boy!

OLENA

Only he isn't a *boy* anymore! He's a grown man. And he still lives with his mommy! He doesn't have a girlfriend. He barely ever goes out!

HELENA

It's his business. And your daughter is jumping every night!

OLENA

Workouts never hurt anyone.

HELENA

They hurt me. Do you know that Paul churned out a freaking pile of complaints against me for making noise after ten pm? No one has ever complained about me! Until you moved in with us!

OLENA

Fine. Maybe we should just move out!

*OLENA grabs her cup and rinses it vigorously, causing water drops to scatter everywhere.*

HELENA (*calmly*)

We're trying to save water.

OLENA

I can't hear you! Water's running!

*Unable to tolerate it any longer, HELENA turns off the tap.*

HELENA

It's more efficient to wash dishes in the dishwasher!

OLENA

For God's sake!

*OLENA breaks into tears, startling HELENA.*

HELENA

No one is telling you to move out. Did I upset you?

OLENA

It's not about you. My Yurko is missing.

HELENA

Did you try calling him?

*OLENA nods.*

OLENA

A hundred thousand times. No one answers. I even called that stupid Red Cross. I don't know why the hell they even exist. Left this thing... a voicemail... and all the ways I can be reached. They never called back.

HELENA

Perhaps you should give it some time?

OLENA

I can't just sit around waiting.

*HELENA takes a seat beside Olena.*

HELENA

How about we get a bottle of wine and talk tonight?

*OLENA nods, and they embrace each other.*

Scene eight

In the men's room at the Heidelberg train station.

PAUL is seated on the toilet in a stall, holding a marker in his hand, and scribbles on the door (*the phrase is shown close-up on the screen*):

“Vaccines kill! No effect! All lies!

Make peace without weapons = no arms delivery to Ukraine.”

PAUL exits the stall, still holding the marker, and bumps into LUKA.

PAUL (*coldly*)

What a coincidence. (*Washing his hands*) Are you traveling?

LUKA

No. Are you?

PAUL

I was planning to, because my nerves can no longer tolerate the noise your ‘guests’ make. But some swine jumped in front of the train—and to hell with my plans.

LUKA

Did the person survive?

PAUL

It was a woman, and she was drunk. Her hair was tangled, and her tit fell out of her bra. She could barely stand on her feet. She was obviously a refugee. Who else could she be?

LUKA (*sarcastically*)

I didn't realize you're a refugee expert. You know them when you see them, huh?

PAUL

What was there to see? She was dark-skinned. From Syria or Pakistan or Iran—whatever, I can never tell them apart. Fucking Americans. It's all their fault. They create a shitshow in the world, and poor wretched Germany has to take in refugees by the truckload as if it's made of rubber. And all this scum lives off our taxes!

LUKA

If I remember correctly, you don't work anymore.

PAUL

I was *born* here!

*PAUL turns to leave but then turns towards LUKA again.*

PAUL

I wish all those suiciders dead! They're not living themselves, and they're not letting others live either. If you want to die, go into the fucking supermarket, get a piece of rope, and hang yourself as many times as you please. But don't count on the services of the German railway!

*LUKA steps towards the stall. PAUL quickly hides the marker in his pocket.*

PAUL

Oh, and one more thing. Someone vandalized the door. While I might sympathize with their message, I cannot stand it when people damage public property. Take care.

*LUKA enters the stall and notices the scribbling. LUKA'S phone rings. Someone's calling the crisis line. He answers the call.*

LUKA

Crisis line. Hello. How can I help you?

*The caller, MARYSIA, is heard sobbing.*

MARYSIA (voice only)

I need to talk about food.

LUKA

May I ask your name and where you are right now?

MARYSIA (voice only)

It doesn't matter.

LUKA

Alright. Can you tell me what's going on?

*LUKA tries to wipe off the scribbling on the door.*

MARYSIA (voice cracking)

I'm just so tired. Tired of constantly controlling my food.

LUKA

What do you mean—'controlling your food'?

MARYSIA (voice only)

I count calories all the time. Today, I had an extra slice of bread.

LUKA

It's okay. I had a whole pizza. What about it?

MARYSIA (voice only)

Now I feel like finishing myself because of that slice!

*LUKA gives up his attempt to wipe off the scribbling.*

LUKA

‘Finishing yourself’? I’ve heard that phrase before. You’re not from around here, are you?  
Are you from Ukraine?

MARYSIA (*voice only*)

Screw off!

*MARYSIA hangs up. LUKA takes out a different marker from his pocket and adds another scribbling beneath Paul’s: “Paul K., a smug shithead.”*

Scene nine

MARYSIA's nightmare.

MARYSIA sits in lotus pose, facing a slice of bread on a plate. PAUL-ED, wearing a Russian military uniform, sits opposite her. MARYSIA begins slapping herself on the cheeks, first with one hand, then the other. Each slap grows louder and quicker until she stops abruptly, just before it escalates too far. She stands up, strides to the mirror, and points at her reflection.

MARYSIA

What's wrong with her?! What's wrong with her?! What's wrong with *you*?!

*MARYSIA sits cross-legged facing the plate again and takes out a pair of scissors. She cuts a strand of her hair and starts chewing it along with the bread. PAUL / ED applauds her. HELENA enters wearing a mask, holding a piece of rope. She advances on PAUL / ED and strangles him. He collapses lifelessly.*

HELENA

This is what happens when the Red Cross proves utterly impotent—like a feeble old man!

*She kicks PAUL / ED in the side, then exits.*

BLACKOUT

Scene ten

Evening. Helena's kitchen.

HELENA stands before the fridge, her expression furious. OLENA stands beside her.

HELENA

Could someone please explain what this quiche is doing in my fridge? A quiche with eggs and cream cheese! In our vegan kitchen!

OLENA

I bought it. I thought it might make you happy.

HELENA

Are you aware by any chance that this quiche contains milk and eggs?

OLENA

Sorry, I grabbed it by mistake. I thought it was vegan.

HELENA

There's nothing on its package indicating that it's vegan! Absolutely nothing! I've had a rough day, and this is the last straw. I come home, and what do I find? The product of animal cruelty sitting in my fridge where I store my food!

OLENA

Why are you going crazy over this?! You think I did it on purpose?

HELENA

No! I don't think you did that on purpose. But I do think you've been checking ingredients for the whole past month, and I can't imagine how come you thought it was vegan! Or, rather, I can imagine! You're just an irresponsible person, and you couldn't care less about other people's feelings. You only care about yourself!

OLENA

That's not true! Someone put it in the vegan department by mistake!

HELENA

So it means you never actually checked the ingredients! I had only two expectations when I agreed to host you. One—that you'll respect the fact that we're vegan. And two, that you'll wipe away drops after taking a shower. It makes me so sad when I come home and see this.

*She points at the fridge. Olena removes the quiche from the fridge.*

OLENA

I'll throw it away.

HELENA

No! Don't throw it away—just give it to someone. But please remove it from my house! I know things are rough for you now. But I just can't! I can't! I can't tolerate the thought that it's here, in my home, which is supposed to be my safe place.

*OLENA walks outside, holding the quiche. PAUL stands on the porch, looking enraged.*

PAUL

I am sick of it! You are making noise every day!

OLENA

Oh, it's you now. What do *you* want from me?

PAUL

I know there is war in your country. I understand it! But there is no need to drag your war here! We have no war!

OLENA (*gripping the quiche even more tightly*)

Do you know why you have no war? Because *we* have it! Our people are dying there so it doesn't reach you here!

PAUL (*starts yelling*)

Nonsense! It sounds even dumber than that fairy-tale that vaccines protect from Covid! Germany has plenty of problems without you! Every year, people drag their butts here and disturb our peace and quiet! You're worse than the parakeets!

*HELENA comes outside.*

HELENA

Stop it!

PAUL

Helena, you're going to get into trouble! I can promise you that!

OLENA

Get the fuck out of here, asshole, or I'll shove this quiche up your butt!

PAUL (*to Helena*)

This is a direct threat! You'll be held accountable for hosting this criminal! She smuggles body organs in her suitcase!

*HELENA stares at OLENA.*

OLENA (*to Helena*)

Let's go to my room. I'll explain everything.

*OLENA and HELENA go to OLENA's room. PAUL withdraws to his side of the house.*



PAUL (*yelling from behind the fence*)  
And trim the branches of your apple tree! They're trespassing on my territory!

*OLENA and HELENA enter OLENA's room. It's messy, with clothes scattered on the floor.  
HELENA looks around with an expression of disgust on her face.*

OLENA  
Watch your step.

HELENA  
It's okay.

OLENA  
You just stepped onto my Gucci dress.

*OLENA walks towards her yellow suitcase. She drags it from under the pile of clothes.*

OLENA  
Please don't think I'm a... how do they say it? A pervert!

HELENA  
I'm ready for anything!

OLENA  
I have to explain something first. Marysia and I took this train.

HELENA  
Which one?

OLENA  
From Ukraine to Slovakia. It was an evacuation train. And it was packed.

HELENA  
'Like sardines in a can.' You told me that.

OLENA  
I did, but that's not the end of the story. We had just crossed the border when an old woman sat down next to us. She had crossed eyes. She asked me to follow her to the toilet.

HELENA  
And how did you reach the toilet, may I wonder?

OLENA  
On our feet!

HELENA  
But the train was packed!

OLENA

We just stepped over people! Are you trying to say I'm lying? I'm not! People pressed into the wall to let someone pass... Anyway. She and I are standing by the restroom. She stares at me, or more like through me, and says (*Olena changes her voice, speaking like an old woman*): "Keep this heart. Put it in the ground wherever you arrive, and each will get their own." And she gives me this... this jar.

*OLENA places the jar on the table. There's a big heart floating inside (it's not immediately clear whether this heart belongs to a human or an animal). HELENA screams in horror.*

HELENA

Olena! Do you realize this is not normal? And I asked you! I begged you! No meat!

OLENA

Can I plant it in your garden?

HELENA

No! No! No! And... please, I feel sorry for you, but you should look for another place to stay.

*HELENA leaves the room. OLENA presses the jar with the heart to her chest.*

Scene eleven

Morning. MARYSIA's room.

OLENA, wearing Yurko's jacket, and MARYSIA, wearing a thick sweater, are packing their things.

OLENA

**Sontse**, if you don't want to take something, just leave it.

MARYSIA

Helena will be mad.

OLENA

I don't care.

MARYSIA

Where will we go?

OLENA

We'll stay at a hotel for now. And then we'll see.

MARYSIA

What about money?

OLENA

We'll figure it out.

MARYSIA

Can you find me a therapist? I'm struggling. I control my food all the time. Yesterday, I got a salad at the café, I ate it, but when I realized it was dressed with mayo, I had a panic attack.

OLENA

**O Bozhe.** (= *oh God*) Just stop panicking. I think we have enough troubles as it is.

MARYSIA

Forget about it! You're driving me crazy!

OLENA

You're driving me crazy, too! "Can you find me a therapist?" What a softie, as your **baba** said!

MARYSIA (*yelling*)

Get out of my room!

OLENA

We both have to get out of it!

*PAUL knocks on the wall.*

OLENA

Oh, there's our 'peace keeper.' Haven't heard from him in a while.

MARYSIA

I don't want to go anywhere. You're the one who fought with Helena—so you leave. And I like her.

OLENA

Marysia, I've been having it so rough. You can't even imagine how sick I am of having to control all of that all the time. I'm fed up with constantly expecting the worst day after day—like another slap in the face. I'm sick of getting all these letters from the job center, writing all the responses, feeling dumb at job interviews, searching for doctors, therapists, support groups! The man I love is missing! It's a disaster. And you're bugging me with this!

MARYSIA

Have you tried calling the Ministry of Defence?

OLENA

I've reached out to everyone possible. Still no news.

MARYSIA

Have you checked social media? Those videos of hostages Russians post?

OLENA

Yes, I looked on YouTube.

MARYSIA

How about 'Kill the Ukie'?

OLENA

What's that?

MARYSIA

It's a Telegram channel where that Russian scum posts videos of Ukrainians.

OLENA

Show me.

*MARYSIA and OLENA sit down right onto the clothes they've just packed. Sounds of the video fill the room, mostly Russian cursing and beatings. As OLENA watches, she winces and shudders at each blow.*

OLENA

Hold on! **O Bozhe**. Is that him? Or not? It's too fuzzy. Can you play it back? No. It doesn't seem like him. Or does it?

MARYSIA

It looks like him here, but here—not so much. His face is pretty beat up.

OLENA

No, it's not him. *(She touches the tattoo on her collarbone).* See, there's no tattoo.

*There's a pause as OLENA scrolls through the videos on the phone.*

MARYSIA

Mama.

OLENA

What?

MARYSIA

What's going to happen to us?

OLENA

I don't know.

MARYSIA

Do you want to go back home?

OLENA

I just want to see Yurko. I want to hold him.

MARYSIA

And what about me?

OLENA

I see you every day.

MARYSIA

Can you hold *me*?

*OLENA looks into Marysia's eyes.*

OLENA

Come here, **sontse**. *(sohn-tse)*

*OLENA hugs MARYSIA tightly, her hand stroking her back. Then her hand pauses, as if bumping into something, and she pulls away.*

OLENA *(her voice changing)*

How much do you weigh?

MARYSIA *(immediately gets defensive).*

Why do you care?

OLENA

Take off your sweater.

MARYSIA

Why would I do that?

OLENA

Take off your sweater. **Vzhe.** (*Ukr. 'now'*)

MARYSIA (*hissing*)

You're violating my boundaries.

OLENA (*loudly*)

I don't care what I violate or not. Take it off, or I'll do it myself!

*MARYSIA pushes OLENA away, but OLENA persists, and they struggle, falling to the floor. MARYSIA kicks and fights to break free as OLENA forcibly removes her sweater. OLENA freezes, struck by what she sees. Pause. MARYSIA covers her body with her hands.*

MARYSIA (*yelling*)

How dare you?!

*OLENA stares at MARYSIA with apprehension.*

OLENA

**Sontse.** (*sohn-tse*) Are you sick?

MARYSIA

I'm cold, mama!

*OLENA looks at MARYSIA's feet. She's wearing woollen socks.*

OLENA

Why are you wearing woollen socks?!

MARYSIA

Because I'm cold!

OLENA

It's damn hot in here!

MARYSIA

I'm cold! Give me my sweater! Go away! **Idy!** (*ee-dyh; 'go away'*)

*MARYSIA bursts into tears. OLENA steps aside.*

OLENA

When I saw my child almost naked for the first time in months, I forgot all about the war, Yurko, and the rest of the world. I saw a skeleton. And that skeleton was my daughter. My daughter has stopped eating. I don't know how many months it's been since she stopped eating. I don't know how she manages it—and how she managed to fool me for so long. But at that moment, I realized how close the war had come to me. War is trying to take away not

only my home and my man but also my child. Fucking anorexia. When someone loses control over their life, they try to control what they still can. Like, their weight. They stop eating and, this way, they get rid of their anxiety. They get rid of their anxiety. Such a simple, primitive explanation. But an eating disorder is not about food at all. Sometimes it seems to me that the entire world suffers from an eating disorder. People are afraid to look into the face of the truth and instead gaze into the ugly snout of lies. They maintain neutrality while others sacrifice their lives on their behalf—just so people here don't get the shit beaten out of them. People believe they won't be affected. But the world operates as one system. Sooner or later, everyone will be fucked. Even me. I thought I could only endure so many slaps in the face. But clearly it's far from over!

Scene twelve

Marysia's room.

Freaked out, HELENA and OLENA stand before Marysia, who's visibly furious, her tousled yellow hair sticking out in different directions like rays of a small sun. A thin, translucent scarf is wrapped around her neck.

MARYSIA (*to Olena*)

Stop! Don't you dare come any closer! You want to land me in prison! I'd rather slit my wrists than go to the hospital!

OLENA

Wait!

MARYSIA

Take one more step, and I'll scream! And that jerk behind the wall will call the police. Just one more step, and I'll flood this room with my blood!

*MARYSIA grabs a paper knife she uses to sharpen her pencils and presses it against her wrist. OLENA takes a step back.*

HELENA

Sh-sh-sh, baby. We'll do whatever you say.

MARYSIA

Don't send me to the hospital!

OLENA

But I have to!

HELENA

We have to!

MARYSIA

I don't want to go to the hospital!

OLENA

You have to get treatment.

MARYSIA

What kind of stupid treatment are you talking about?! There will be kids there, and they yell all the time. I hate kids! And nurses? They'll force me to eat! They'll force me to eat!

HELENA

But you *have* to eat!

MARYSIA

I don't want to! I won't be able to work out there.



OLENA

You shouldn't be working out anyway!

MARYSIA

So what am I supposed to do there all day long?

HELENA

I can give you the password to my Netflix account.

OLENA

That would be awesome, Marysia!

MARYSIA (*cursing in Ukrainian; equivalent of 'fuck off'*)  
**Idy nakhuy, mama!** (*Ee-dyh nuh-hooy*)

OLENA

It's not you talking. It's your disease.

MARYSIA

I am not a disease. I'm your daughter. I remember you saying one day that you regret having me.

HELENA

You said that to your child?!

OLENA

I didn't mean it.

MARYSIA

You said it.

OLENA

I love you.

MARYSIA

I *hate* you.

OLENA

Let's just go to the hospital.

MARYSIA (*screaming*)

I don't want to!

*There's a knock on the wall. MARYSIA starts strangling herself with her scarf. HELENA walks over to her.*

HELENA (*calmly*)

Please, don't do this.

*HELENA bends over MARYSIA. She talks to her for a long time, as if reciting a mantra. Slowly, MARYSIA calms down. HELENA gently takes the scarf away. She pulls MARYSIA close and strokes her on the head. Wrapping her arm around her shoulders, she leads her towards the door. She gestures to OLENA to follow them. The three of them walk outside into the yard.*

HELENA

Let's go to the car.

MARYSIA (*to Olena*)

Don't let them do this to me.

OLENA

You'll get better.

MARYSIA

Step back.

OLENA

Marysia, **sontse**. (*sohn-tse*)

MARYSIA (*cursing in Ukrainian; equivalent of 'fuck off'*)

**Idy nakhuy!** (*Ee-dyh nuh-hooy*)

*MARYSIA and HELENA leave. OLENA stands there, lost, then turns around and walks down the street in the opposite direction.*

### Scene thirteen

On the street in Heidelberg.

OLENA, wearing Yurko's jacket, walks down the street.

OLENA

Yurko, I can't take it anymore. I'm scared for you. I'm scared for her. I just can't go on like this. Pain is the dark side of love, and loss is the continuation of pain. But I refuse to accept that! I don't want to lose anyone! I just can't! She's fallen sick, and you're missing in action. 'Missing in action' is also a diagnosis. Fucking hell. I've been calling the Security Service. I've been calling the General Staff. I've been calling the Ministry of Defence. I've been submitting requests. But they tell me you're not on the list of hostages. There are no records. The Ministry recommends calling the Red Cross. But it's like calling a telephone pole. I'm scared. There are many tall bridges in Heidelberg. As I pass them, I force my thoughts to halt. I feel as though I'm speeding in a car even though I don't have a driver's license. I don't want to hit the brakes even though I've been without them for a while now. I imagine plunging into the waters of the Neckar. I imagine hitting concrete slabs. Water flows through my fingers. It cools my brain. Water carries my body past other people's lives. I feel utterly lost. So weak. Where is my voice as it used to be? Confident and bold. "This nasty world will bend around us," that guy sings. For fuck's sake! Where's my boldness? Adulthood gobbled it up. Life carves out your personality—through your wrinkles and scars and tattoos and pain and grief. Some people emerge stronger. Others, like me, feel like jumping into the waters of the Neckar. Screw it! So many fucking joggers in this town!

*She stands on the bridge, gazing into the water, her fists clenched.*

I ask you only one thing. Come back. Please. I will accept you just as you are—even if you're missing a leg or an arm. You never did shit around the house anyway. Even if you're totally messed up—it's alright. Just come back alive. Please. I can deal with anything. Please, just give me a sign that both of you will be alright. I won't handle it if something happens to either of you. I just won't!

*OLENA grips the bridge railing. A large group of storks appears in the sky. OLENA gazes upwards and watches the storks fly by for a long, long time.*

Scene fourteen

Helena's house. The living room.

LUKA stands on a chair, fastening a rope to the hook from which the chandelier hangs. The portrait of the man with the tiger, hanging on the wall, is askew.

LUKA

They all left just in time. I should write a note. Or maybe type it? What do people say in this situation? Perhaps I should scribble something on my 'dad's' portrait? Nah. That would be stupid. Any Freudian would later spout with a smug look that makes my stomach turn: "He did it because his father was missing from his life." But it's rubbish. I only want one thing—I want the darkness that governs my thoughts to disappear once and for all.

*LUKA tugs on the rope to ensure it's secure, then hops down from the chair. He switches on a camera on his phone. His image appears on the screen at the back of the stage. LUKA forces a crooked smile. He peers closely at his own image and notices a gray hair. He plucks it out and scowls.*

LUKA

What an ugly face.

*He starts the recording, contemplating what he should say. A range of emotions, from anger to despair, reflects on his face.*

LUKA

I'm so sick of living in fear of each new day... There's no joy at all.... Screw it.

*He turns off the camera. He climbs onto the chair and puts a noose around his neck. Just as he's about to jump off the chair, OLENA enters the room, tears streaming down her face, her hair tousled. She sees LUKA and screams.*

OLENA

Stop! I'm here for you!

*She dashes towards LUKA and grabs his feet. The light goes out.*

LUKA

Hey! Easy! It's my crotch.

OLENA

Oh God. I'm sorry!

LUKA

Don't shake the chair. Please.

OLENA

I've got it!

*The light comes back on. OLENA kneels, gripping the legs of the chair on which LUKA stands, frozen like a monument. His arm reaches towards OLENA'S face, almost touching her forehead.*

LUKA

How are you?

OLENA

Better than you. And you?

LUKA

Better than *you*.

*OLENA stands up. LUKA unfastens the rope and clumsily climbs off the chair, stepping onto OLENA's foot.*

LUKA

Sorry, my legs are shaking.

OLENA

My hands are shaking, too.

LUKA

Should we sit down?

*LUKA sits on the floor. OLENA sits on the chair. There's an awkward pause. LUKA sneezes loudly. OLENA laughs. LUKA starts laughing, too. There's a loud knock on the wall.*

OLENA (*cursing in Ukrainian; equivalent of 'fucker'*)

**Pidar!** (*Pee-dur*).

LUKA

What did you say?

OLENA

I don't know how to translate this.

LUKA

Don't tell my mum anything, okay?

*HELENA enters the room. She looks tired. She nods towards LUKA.*

HELENA (*to Olena, in her everyday voice*)

I talked to the doctors. You'll have to sign a few papers tomorrow.

OLENA

Are they going to help her?

HELENA

This crisis center is a good one. And she's a strong, smart girl. She'll manage.

*HELENA notices that the chandelier hangs crooked.*

HELENA

What happened to the chandelier?

LUKA

The bulbs burned out. I was trying to replace them.

HELENA

Hmm. But I replaced them just recently. I should have receipts somewhere.

*(She rummages in the cabinet.)* Ah, here they are. I'll go back to that shop and ask what kind of rubbish they sold me. But why did you need a rope?

*Pause. HELENA looks at LUKA. OLENA picks up the rope and throws it over her shoulder.*

OLENA

Oh, that's mine. I bought it. I want to teach myself how to do shibari. For Yurko. This Japanese thing, you know? When you tie someone with rope.

HELENA

Is this a kink?

OLENA

Mmm...I guess so.

HELENA

You're all nuts. And Luka, why is your dad's portrait hanging like that?

*HELENA adjusts the portrait.*

LUKA

I bumped it as I was dusting the room. But do you know what happened while you all were out?

HELENA

Did Paul come?

LUKA

Paul comes here every day. No. Dad called. The cell signal is finally up in Alaska.

*HELENA stiffens, pressing against the wall.*

HELENA

Is this a joke?

LUKA

No. He asked me to say hi to you.

OLENA

Helena? Is everything alright?

LUKA

My mum's okay, Olena. It's just that she is feeling like the heroine of that play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*? Right, mum?

OLENA

I haven't read it.

HELENA

How long have you been aware of this?

LUKA

It doesn't matter.

HELENA

Would you like to know who your real father is?

OLENA

Sorry, I'd better go.

*HELENA leaves followed by LUKA. OLENA goes to her room, retrieves the jar with the heart, and heads outside into the yard. She looks around, then takes a shovel from PAUL'S side of the garden and begins to dig a pit. She removes the heart from the jar.*

OLENA

I'm putting a spell on you. Do my will: May each of us get what we want. Marysia, Yurko, Luka, Helena, me, and even that stupid fool, Paul. May he get what he wants, too. Amen.

*She places the heart into the pit and covers it with dirt. Suddenly, a loud explosion is heard in the distance.*

*BLACKOUT*

Scene fifteen

Late summer. Helena's garden.

LUKA, HELENA, MARYSIA, and OLENA sit under the apple tree with heart-shaped apples. OLENA is eating an apple.

HELENA

Have you packed your suitcase?

LUKA

I have. And you?

HELENA

I did that a week ago. Did you remember your hat?

LUKA

I did.

HELENA

And a toothbrush?

LUKA

Uh-huh.

OLENA

And I always leave everything to the last minute.

MARYSIA

I've got a bunch of manga.

OLENA

That's fine. We can mail your books.

HELENA

Are you sure about moving to Berlin? Why not stay here?

OLENA

I never turn down a project offer. Plus, Marysia will have a great time there. She'll find new friends. Or even a boyfriend.

MARYSIA

Don't worry. I already have someone I love.

OLENA

That's news! Who is he?



MARYSIA

It's a 'she.'

OLENA (*choking on her apple*)

You like girls?!

MARYSIA

I like *my* girl.

OLENA

That's okay. I'm fine with whatever choice you make. Does she live around here?

MARYSIA

She's in Japan.

*MARYSIA shows a picture of an anime heroine.*

OLENA

But it's an anime character.

MARYSIA

Well, that's my choice.

HELENA

Let me see. She's cute.

OLENA

Mm-hmm. She's got pretty red hair.

*MARYSIA (looking at the apple tree)*

Are these apples heart-shaped, or am I seeing things?

*HELENA throws a suspicious look at OLENA.*

HELENA

Yes. This year we have an unusual harvest.

OLENA

They're delicious. Would you like to take a couple for the road?

HELENA

No, thanks.

*LUKA (flipping through the newspaper)*

Oh, our dear neighbor, Paul, has become a local celebrity. (*Reading; the tone of the newspaper gets sarcastic at times*): "Local resident Paul Kitzler fell victim to an explosion. He was walking past the shooting range when combat engineers blew up more than a hundred shells dating back to the Second World War. Herr Kitzler said he did not realize that the

shooting range was located at the shooting range and came there searching for peace and quiet since parakeets in Heidelberg are especially noisy at this time of year. He found himself at the epicentre of the explosion. However, Herr Kitzler was born under a lucky star, as they say, since he was unharmed physically. He only went deaf. Herr Kitzler submitted a complaint against the combat engineers and filed a claim against the Government. The trial is still ongoing. Since Herr Kitzler has not learned sign language yet and insists on his right to speak only German in Germany, he addresses the court in written form, which slows the proceedings. Herr Kitzler hopes to receive one million euros as compensation for his loss of hearing. He also wrote a complaint to God, leaving it at the church, and organized a solo protest after God did not respond to his complaint within a week.”

## Epilogue

PAUL

The government compensated me for my loss of hearing, which was good. But for someone hard of hearing, controlling peace and quiet becomes even more challenging. I found a workaround, though—no one has ‘cancelled’ vibration yet. The whole world vibrates, as if populated only by elephants. There you go—some bastard is thumping on the floor again. Can you hear it?

HELENA

And I went to Alaska. For half of my life, I lied about it, researched it, and sent postcards—so why not go there now that I’m all alone? There they were: the northern lights twinkling. Twinkle, twinkle, all green—like the wings of the parakeets in Heidelberg. Twinkle, twinkle—like my life or non-life. And then I met him. A Santa Claus. He worked as one. It turned out he was one of us, a German from Manheim. I’d never met an awesome guy like him in Germany. All those years, I sent postcards ‘from Alaska,’ as if I knew something!

LUKA

Where I am now, people couldn’t care less about drops on the faucet. Halt! At ease! Forward march! Maybe no one else would appreciate it, but the darkness in my mind has dissipated.

MARYSIA

When I was at the crisis center, I’d just lie on my bed, staring out the window. There was this weirdo who would jump outside every single day, trying to grab a branch and then hop over the fence. In my mind, he still keeps jumping there, up and down, up and down. He doesn’t realize the branch won’t hold the weight of his body. I guess he’s a real nutjob. But what matters to me is that I’m now on the other side of the fence.

OLENA

I was told that all the soldiers who were with Yurko on the day he went missing were either killed, taken hostage, or declared missing in action, like him. Relatives recognized some of his fellow fighters in photos and videos on Russian Telegram channels. They’re in captivity. Russians took the bodies of the dead soldiers onto occupied territory, returning some when the bodies were swapped. None of their DNA matched Yurko’s, which gives me hope that he’s still alive. One day, I was just losing it, having no idea what was happening to my love, and this refugee girl who lost her father tried to console me. She said: “Even those who left us forever stay with us forever.” I just shut up when I heard that. Yesterday, my therapist asked me what I want. I want the impossible. I want my old life back.