

Three Years, One Journey

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Characters

Thunder - an engineer sent into military service as a drone operator

Diana - a determined war journalist; chose to stay in the country when many fled the war

Daryna - a nurse, risks everything to help people through dangerous territories

SCENE 1

(A dimly lit café in once-thriving DIANA's, DARYNA and THUNDER's native city, now a hollow place. A small table with three chairs stands in the centre. THUNDER is already seated, her face pale and worn. DARYNA enters first, followed by DIANA.)

DIANA

I don't believe it. It's you.

THUNDER

Diana... and Daryna? What - ? This is... impossible.

DARYNA

Three years... and now, here we are. Together.

DIANA

In our old city. Of all places. On the third year since... since this all began.

THUNDER

The war started three years ago? Feels like... a lifetime.

DARYNA

Three years since it began. And we're still here.

DIANA

This place... I barely recognized it. Remember when it used to be packed with students and musicians? Now it's like a graveyard.

THUNDER

A graveyard with coffee.

DARYNA

Thunder...

THUNDER

I can't believe this. Three years. And here we are. It feels... strange.

DIANA

Last week, I was interviewing evacuees near the border. And now? I don't know why, but something pulled me back here.

DARYNA

Me too. I was in the south. I don't even know how I got away. The roads are barely passable. But something told me - come back.

THUNDER

I shouldn't even be here. I'm stationed... far away. But they called off operations this week. I thought, just for a moment, I could breathe.

DIANA

And then we all ended up here. On the same day. In the same place.

DARYNA

You don't think... it's a sign?

THUNDER

A sign, a coincidence, sheer luck. Who knows? But it's good to see you both. It's been... too long.

SCENE 2

(The café is quieter now.)

THUNDER

It's not like people think. Operating a drone isn't a video game. It's precision. Strategy. You're controlling something that's miles away, above the clouds. Every move, every click - it all matters.

DIANA

So, what exactly do you do? Like... step by step?

THUNDER

Okay. First, we get the bird in the air - what we call the drone. Could be a *Bayraktar*, maybe a smaller one. Depends on the mission.

DARYNA

Wait - *Bayraktar*? I mean I know it. But don't know much about how it works.

THUNDER

Big. Powerful. Carries missiles. You see those viral videos of pinpoint strikes? Probably a *Bayraktar*. But we also use smaller drones - no weapons, just cameras.

DIANA

And your job is to... fly it?

THUNDER

Not just fly. I monitor everything - altitude, speed. Then there's the live video. The cameras are high-resolution; we can see a cigarette in someone's hand from 900 meters.

DARYNA
That's terrifying.

THUNDER
It's war. Terrifying is the norm.

DIANA
But how do you control it? From... here?

THUNDER
(Laughing)
Not here. We're stationed in a control centre. A room filled with consoles, screens, joysticks. You're sitting in a chair, drinking coffee, while the drone you're piloting is halfway across the country. Maybe more.

DARYNA
But how do you know what to look for?

THUNDER
Intelligence. Command briefs us before each mission. But sometimes, we find things on our own. You wouldn't believe what you see from up there. Once, we spotted a hidden truck. Turns out it was carrying anti-aircraft missiles.

DIANA
And then what?

THUNDER
If it's marked hostile, we make the call. Line up the shot. Release the payload.

DARYNA
You mean... you fire missiles?

THUNDER
Sometimes. Depends on the drone. But even when I'm not firing, I'm watching. Guiding artillery. Every movement we track could mean saving - or losing - lives.

DIANA
That's heavy. How do you deal with it?

THUNDER
You don't think about it. You focus on the mission. One time, I spent six hours straight following a single vehicle. Six hours. They stopped three times, changed direction twice.

DARYNA
But it's just... a screen. Doesn't it feel... detached?

THUNDER
Detached? No. Not when you know what's at stake. You see the aftermath. The fire, the smoke. Sometimes... bodies. It's not detached. It's right there, in front of you.

DIANA
Do you ever doubt it? The decisions?

THUNDER

All the time. You wonder - what if it wasn't a threat? What if you were wrong? But you can't let that stop you. Doubt in this job gets people killed.

DARYNA

I don't know how you do it.

THUNDER

It's not all doom and gloom. We've used drones to drop medicine, food, even leaflets.

SCENE 3

DIANA

You know, it's funny. I spent years dreaming about covering fashion shows in Milan or Paris. Instead, I'm standing knee-deep in mud, trying to get a story out before the network goes down.

DARYNA

It's not just funny - it's absurd. You were obsessed with fashion. Every time I saw you, you had a new magazine. Remember that ridiculous scrapbook you kept?

THUNDER

Yeah, pages of glossy photos. You'd cut out outfits, shoes, handbags - like some kind of luxury wish list.

DIANA

That scrapbook's probably buried under the rubble of my old apartment. And even if it weren't... what's the point? What's the point of any of that now?

DARYNA

There's still a world outside the war, Diana.

DIANA

Not for me. Not anymore. This is what matters. This is what's real.

THUNDER

So, what's it like? Being out there?

DIANA

It's chaos. Everywhere I go, there's a story - and danger waiting right behind it. Last month, I was in the east, near the frontlines. I spent three days with a family living in their basement because their house was shelled to pieces. The mother was rationing potatoes like they were gold. Their youngest? A six-year-old girl? She had this little toy dog she wouldn't let go of. Kept telling me it was her "lucky charm." I don't know why they were still there.

DARYNA

That's heartbreaking.

DIANA

Heartbreaking doesn't begin to cover it. And then, two days later, their street was hit. I don't even know if they're still alive.

THUNDER

And you just keep going?

DIANA

I have to. The world needs to see this. Needs to know what's happening. Like the time I followed a group of evacuees trying to cross into a safe zone. There were maybe twenty of them - families, kids, old folks.

DARYNA

What did you do?

DIANA

I hit the ground and prayed, honestly. We crawled for hours to get to cover. But I kept my camera rolling. It went viral. Made headlines everywhere.

THUNDER

And you think that makes it worth it? Risking your life?

DIANA

Yes. Because if I don't tell these stories, who will? If people don't see what's really happening, they'll forget. And we can't afford to let them forget.

DARYNA

But... don't you ever think about something else? Like... when this is over?

DIANA

I can't. There's no "after" for me until this ends. Until people can go home. Until that little girl with the toy dog can sleep in her own bed.

THUNDER

You're all in?

DIANA

You're one to talk, Ms Drone Operator. But yes. I'm all in. Fashion spreads and glossy photos? They feel like a lifetime ago. This is what matters now. This is where I belong.

DARYNA

Don't lose yourself in this.

DIANA

I already have. And honestly? That's okay. Because people like that family, those evacuees - they're worth it. You know, if someone had told me three years ago that I'd be here - sitting in this broken café, talking about drone strikes - I'd have laughed in their face. Life's funny that way, isn't it?

THUNDER

Yeah. Hilarious.

DARYNA

Rather tragic.

SCENE 4

DARYNA

You know, I didn't choose this. I became a nurse because I liked helping people. It was supposed to be about healing, about life. Now? It feels like all I do is try to stop people from dying.

DIANA

You are helping people, Daryna. You're saving lives.

DARYNA

Not enough. For every one I save, there's another I can't. And those are the ones that stay with me.

THUNDER

Like who?

DARYNA

There was this soldier... just a few weeks ago. He was brought in during a chaotic day - shelling, wounded flooding in, no time to think. He'd taken a piece of shrapnel to his chest. We tried everything - surgery, transfusions. But...

DIANA

He didn't make it?

DARYNA

No. And the worst part? He had just become a father. Only a few weeks before. He showed me a picture of his baby while we prepared him for surgery. He was so proud, so happy.

THUNDER

That's rough.

DARYNA

It's not just rough, Thunder. It's unbearable. Knowing that little baby will grow up without a father. And I keep thinking - what if I'd been faster? What if I'd done something differently?

DIANA

Daryna, you can't blame yourself.

DARYNA

Can't I? Every time I close my eyes, I see his face. The way he clutched that photo, as if it could keep him alive. That moment will follow me until the end of my life.

THUNDER

You're not the reason he's gone. The war is.

DARYNA

I know. But it doesn't make it easier.

DIANA

You're doing everything you can. More than most. You're risking your life to save others.

DARYNA

I keep telling myself that. That I'm helping. That every soldier I save means one more person fighting for us, one more chance to win. But then I think about the ones we lose. The ones I can't bring back.

THUNDER

You said you didn't choose this. But you stayed. You could've left, gone somewhere safer. Why didn't you?

DARYNA

Because I couldn't. Because every time I see a soldier's face, I think of my brother. He's out there, somewhere, fighting. And if something happened to him, I'd want someone like me there - someone who wouldn't give up, no matter how hopeless it seemed.

DIANA

You carry so much, Daryna.

DARYNA

We all do. That's the thing about this war. It's not just the soldiers. It's all of us - dragged into this, trying to hold on to whatever pieces of ourselves we can.

THUNDER

And losing a little more each day.

DARYNA

But I'll keep going. I have to. For that soldier's baby. For my brother. For every life I might still save.

DIANA

You're stronger than you realize, Daryna.

DARYNA

Maybe. Or maybe I just don't know how to stop.

SCENE 5

(Three years ago. DARYNA's cozy apartment is warmly lit. A small coffee table with a bottle of red wine, glasses, and a platter of cheese. The three friends sit comfortably on a couch and chairs, laughing loudly.)

DIANA

(Laughing)

And then - get this - the guy thought I was the designer! Can you imagine? Me, Diana, the "up-and-coming fashion mogul."

DARYNA

It's because you dress so well! Even your "casual look" says, "I have opinions about *haute couture*."

THUNDER

You could've fooled me, too. You could probably talk about stitching and I'd believe anything.

DIANA

Stitching?! That's what you think fashion is about? You're hopeless, dear.

DARYNA

It's Thunder to you. Don't ruin her perfect call sign.

THUNDER

Exactly. "Thunder" is a name of power and mystery.

DIANA

Oh, please. Your nickname came from tripping over that microphone cord during karaoke.

DARYNA

Yes! You *thundered* to the ground!

THUNDER

Mock me all you want. When I'm famous for my... engineering or whatever, I'll remember this betrayal.

DIANA

Famous? You're going to be locked in some lab while we're out in the real world.

DARYNA

Well, not too real. Thank goodness we live in the safest place imaginable.

DIANA

Exactly. We've got wine, cheese, and peace. What more could anyone want?

THUNDER

Well, peace can be overrated. Maybe a little excitement wouldn't hurt?

DIANA

Excitement? Like what? A parade? A firework show?

DARYNA

Oh, I know! Maybe those "tough guys" over the border will decide to show us what they're made of.

THUNDER

(Mock-serious)

Right, their worn-out tanks and outdated planes are a real threat.

DIANA

(Giggling)

Oh no! Not their fearsome tractors! What will we do?

DARYNA

To our brave and terrifying enemies, who clearly don't stand a chance.

ALL THREE

(Laughing loudly, clinking their glasses)

DIANA

(Thoughtfully)

But really, war seems so... impossible, doesn't it? I mean, it's just noise. Propaganda. No one's actually going to start something.

DARYNA

Of course not. People aren't that stupid.

THUNDER

It's all talk. We've got better things to worry about.

DIANA

Like fashion shows.

DARYNA

Or karaoke night.

(Suddenly, a faint wail cuts through the air - the distant sound of an air raid siren. The three freeze, their laughter dying instantly.)

DARYNA

Is that... an alarm?

DIANA

No... no, it's probably a test. They do tests, don't they?

THUNDER

They do. But not at this hour.

(Before anyone can say another word, the sound of a distant explosion rumbles through the air. All three freeze, their faces a mix of confusion and fear.)

DARYNA

What... what was that?

THUNDER

That sounded like...

DIANA

No. It's nothing. It has to be nothing.

(Another, louder explosion shakes the apartment. The three stare at each other. Lights dim slowly, leaving them frozen in place, their wine glasses forgotten, their laughter now a distant memory.)