

**'A CONVERSATION THAT HAS NEVER HAPPENED'**

**By Anastazie Toros**

CHARACTERS:

OLD MAN — an old man in his late 80s - early 90s

YOUNG BOY — a boy, 6-8 y. o.

WITNESS 1 (*Caribbean*) — Female in her late 60s

WITNESS 2 (*Irish*) — Male in his early 40s

WITNESS 3 (*Syrian*) - Female in her late 20s

WITNESS 4 (*Indian*) — Woman in her early 30s

WITNESS 5 (*Ukrainian*) — Male in his late 30s

WITNESS 6 (*Japanese*) — Female in her early 40s

WITNESS 7 (*Vietnamese*) — Female in her 30s

WITNESS 8 (*French*) — Male in his early 40s

WITNESS 9 (*Mexican*) — Female in her 30s

WITNESS 10 (*Argentinian*) — Female in her 40s

WITNESS 11 (*American*) — Female in her early 50s

WITNESS 12 (*Nigerian*) — Female in her 50s

MAN 1. — Male in his late 50s

MAN 2. — Male in his late 30s

INTERVIEWER — Male in his early 50s

JOB APPLICANT — Male in his late 30s

CHARACTER — Male in his 40s to 70s (can also be a voice)

## SCENE 1.

### Part 1.

*Interior of a crumbling shelter — dim, airless, suspended in a twilight that never fully breaks into day. A room half-swallowed by time and ruin: plaster peeled from the walls, a ceiling bowed and cracked like a forgotten promise. The remnants of a life linger — a broken kettle, a twisted metal chair, a child's shoe turned on its side. A narrow slit of light filters through a boarded-up window, catching particles of ash that hang, unmoving, like dust.*

*Centre stage: a low mattress or bench, threadbare and stained, its stuffing spilling out at the seams. Nearby, a rusted cabinet with chest of drawers perpetually ajar — inside, old papers, fragments of photographs, cutlery, clothes. Pipes moan quietly overhead, and somewhere deep in the structure, the slow, rhythmic drip of water. The soundscape is hushed but layered: the distant hiss of a broken ventilation system struggling to exhale, the occasional crash from above — as if the world above them is still falling in increments.*

*The boy sits beside the old man, both wrapped in worn blankets, backs against the crumbling wall. A small, battered toy rests beside the boy — its colour long faded. The old man stirs, eyes closed. Stillness hums like a held breath.*

LITTLE BOY: Wake up!

OLD MAN: Oh... right, right. Where were we?

LITTLE BOY: You were telling me about the Little Boy who travelled across the Big Land!

OLD MAN: Ah, yes. No need to rush, little one.

LITTLE BOY: But you fell asleep. Again!

OLD MAN: I wasn't asleep, I was... resting my eyes. That's different.

LITTLE BOY: You say that every time!

OLD MAN: Well, good stories take time. And naps.

LITTLE BOY: But I need to know how it ends!

OLD MAN: All right, all right... now where were we?

LITTLE BOY: The Big Land!

OLD MAN: Yes, of course. The train was carrying the Little Boy across the vast land, from one city to another...

LITTLE BOY: Was it a comfy train?

OLD MAN: Very comfy.

LITTLE BOY: I like that.

OLD MAN: He sat by the window, watching the world rush by, holding a small toy close.

LITTLE BOY: I only know the story where the boy sits in train corridor... packed with people.

OLD MAN: Yes. That story exists too.

LITTLE BOY: With old people, young people, baby boys... baby girls...

OLD MAN: We'll get to that part, when you're ready.

LITTLE BOY: I don't think I want to.

OLD MAN: Then let's stay here for a while, on the window seat, with the toy.

LITTLE BOY: Was it a nice toy?

OLD MAN: A bit scruffy... but it had travelled far, just like the boy. That's why they got along so well.

LITTLE BOY: I like that. (A small pause) Can you keep going? Just the happy part... for now?

OLD MAN: For now, yes. The train kept moving, and so did our story...

## *Part 2.*

LITTLE BOY: How did they meet?

OLD MAN: Who?

LITTLE BOY: The boy's parents.

OLD MAN: Ah... that happened a very long time ago.

LITTLE BOY: We've got time, haven't we?

OLD MAN: Time... (*pauses*) It's never enough when you need it, and it runs too fast when you're happy.

LITTLE BOY: So?

OLD MAN: So?

LITTLE BOY: Are we happy now?

OLD MAN: You just said we've got time, didn't you? (*pauses*) I'm sorry. Where were we?

LITTLE BOY: The boy's parents.

OLD MAN: Ah yes. You like that one, don't you?

LITTLE BOY: I want to hear it again.

OLD MAN: Well then... Once, the boy's mother went to visit an old friend of hers...

LITTLE BOY: How old?

OLD MAN: Old.

LITTLE BOY: Like you?

OLD MAN: Like me. *(The boy grins, satisfied)*

LITTLE BOY: I haven't met anyone like you.

OLD MAN: I know.

LITTLE BOY: What was her name?

OLD MAN: Hmm... What would you like her name to be?

LITTLE BOY: You choose this time.

OLD MAN: No, you.

LITTLE BOY: Let's... let's just call her Mother. *(pauses)* I miss my mother.

OLD MAN: Mother was visiting her dear old friend...

LITTLE BOY: Where?

OLD MAN: Where?

LITTLE BOY: Where did she visit?

OLD MAN: In England. Right here, in London, actually. Her friend lived in an old house — very old, but full of charm. Full of soul.

LITTLE BOY: Can a house have a soul?

OLD MAN: Oh yes. That's where all the stories live. Every object holds one — a tale tucked into every chair, every cupboard, every creaky stair. This house had ancient rugs, carved wooden toys, fireplaces, and a staircase that twisted like a tree. And outside, a great green lawn where trees whispered, and planes passed overhead like dreams. Trains too! When the heavy ones rolled by, the whole house would tremble like it was alive. *(He leans in, mock dramatic)* It would wake you right out of your sleep! *(nudges the boy gently)*

LITTLE BOY: I wasn't sleeping!

OLD MAN: Just resting your eyes?

*(The boy frowns in mock annoyance, then breaks into a smile.)*

LITTLE BOY: So she visited?

OLD MAN: Every summer. Back to that old house, to see her friend. She was curious, bright, full of questions, full of spark that could make even a grumpy old man laugh. *(pause)* Those... were happy days.

*Part 3.*

LITTLE BOY: Do you remember the war?

OLD MAN: Which one?

LITTLE BOY: Not this one.

OLD MAN: I can never forget that one. 80 years have passed, but it's still in me.

LITTLE BOY: Do you think I'll ever forget?

OLD MAN: I hope you'll forget the bad things that happened to you.

LITTLE BOY: But *You* are a good thing that happened to me. I'll remember you forever. *(pauses)*

OLD MAN: I survived the Blitz in London, back in the 1940s. I spent a lot of time in underground stations, hiding from the bombs.

LITTLE BOY: Just like me in Kyiv!

OLD MAN: *(pauses)* Yes, just like you in Kyiv.

LITTLE BOY: Did you sing songs and play games? Did you sleep on an airbed? Did you have lots of blankets and biscuits? I loved biscuits. I could have eaten them all day and all night, then again the next day. It was fun.

OLD MAN: We didn't have biscuits. But we had milk. They used to deliver milk to our doors. I liked the one with the red cup; it felt like a real treat.

LITTLE BOY: I want some milk now.

OLD MAN: There's no milk now.

LITTLE BOY: Where did it all go?

OLD MAN: (*gently*) Shhh... we don't ask those kinds of questions. You know that.

LITTLE BOY: War makes me sad.

OLD MAN: It makes everyone sad.

LITTLE BOY: Why do people fight? Why was my room bombed? Why did I lose all my toys and my mum? Why did my dad go to the front and never come back? Why did my aunt put me on that train and leave me with strangers? Why did I travel day and night to other countries? Why do people die? I want my home back. I want my mum back.

OLD MAN: (*softly*) I think I can find you some milk.

LITTLE BOY: I don't want milk.

OLD MAN: When was the last time you had milk?

LITTLE BOY: I don't remember.

OLD MAN: What happened to us?

LITTLE BOY: I don't know.

OLD MAN: What's the last thing you remember?

LITTLE BOY: I remember... I remember the smell of wheat, and the sunshine, and my mum.

OLD MAN: That was after.

LITTLE BOY: After what?

OLD MAN: After the war.

LITTLE BOY: How did the war end? Who won?

OLD MAN: No one really won.

At first, people opened their homes to each other. They shared food, clothes, and shelter. They wanted to help. But then, more people came — families with nothing. People fleeing from

everywhere. And even though the world tried to hold on, others kept the war going. It spread, like wildfire.

Panic spread across borders. Economies collapsed. Places of safety disappeared. Fear took over. People turned against each other — angry, desperate, starving. Then the sickness came. No food meant weaker bodies. Diseases spread. And the climate changed. Droughts. No water. No hope.

LITTLE BOY: I can't hear you! It's not true! Tell me a better story, a different story! One where we have biscuits, and milk, and toys, and a bed.

OLD MAN: *(softly, with a sad smile)* I wish I could, my boy. But I'm just an old man.

LITTLE BOY: I don't want to die. I want to live.

OLD MAN: I'm sorry you had to see so much... so soon in your life.

LITTLE BOY: Is it easier for you? For the old?

OLD MAN: No. Not really. *(pause)* You said you remembered your mum.

LITTLE BOY: I do.

OLD MAN: That memory... it came after the explosion?

LITTLE BOY: What explosion?

OLD MAN: The one that started the Third World War. At least, that's what they called it.

LITTLE BOY: Who caused it?

OLD MAN: A terrible, terrible man.

LITTLE BOY: Why didn't anyone stop him?

OLD MAN: People didn't believe he would do it. Or maybe, they were just too late.

LITTLE BOY: But where is he now?

OLD MAN: We don't ask those questions here, remember? But we keep going. That's what matters. We keep going, no matter what.



*Part. 4.*

LITTLE BOY: Can we go back in our story to Kyiv? I want to visit McDonald's again.

OLD MAN (*performing a story*): Every summer, the little boy would travel to Kyiv with his mother, father, grandmother, and little brother. It became tradition: a Happy Meal with a toy inside. The grown-ups would speak softly, their voices low and careful, while the children laughed, their joy bouncing off the sun-soaked asphalt. The city buzzed — so different from the quiet fields where he was born.

There were trips to Pushcha-Vodytsa, glimpses of golden domes catching the light, and the gentle rhythm of the night train carrying them back to their town. Then came the waiting. Waiting for summer to return. Waiting for another visit, another Happy Meal. Summer meant reunion. Summer meant family.

LITTLE BOY: Do they still go to that McDonald's in Kyiv?

OLD MAN: No... It was destroyed in the bombing. And the family — they're no longer there.

LITTLE BOY: That's okay. We still have McDonald's in London.

OLD MAN: We had.

LITTLE BOY: I'm not hungry anyway. (*He starts singing softly Ukrainian Lullaby — first just sounds, then words*)

OLD MAN (*joining in, but then changes to the following*): "Hitler has only got one ball,  
Göring has two but very small,  
Himmler is rather sim'lar,  
But poor old Goebbels has no balls at all..."

*Boy and OLD MAN begin to full around with joy. People (9 females, 3 males) arrive (different nationalities, various age) with all sorts of chairs (1 person carries 1 chair), different make, quality, comfort. They join in with the song as a choreographed dance of shared rhythm and absurdity. )*

*Repeat song again louder and louder. Then stop and people create a sound of nature, birds, water, sound of wind.*

LITTLE BOY (*singing and jumping*) : Qua qua qua qua, psh psh psh psh pshhhh... huff huff huff... These sounds — all together — they're like a song I used to know. It sounds like... home. Like my real home.

(*12 people are starting to make gradual noise with chairs so the lines cannot be heard*)

OLD MAN: (*shouting*): But no one else can hear it. They all went deaf.

(*Noise stops*)

LITTLE BOY: Like... (*pause*) everyone forgot the sounds of home. (*pause*) How many balls do you have? Can we play a football? Tennis? Basketball? Who is Hitler? (*As he speaks, we hear them less and less*)

OLD MAN hugs LITTLE BOY and they walk and sit together in the back corner. The light went off from them and we no longer see them. 12 people put chairs on front stage, trying to sit down, then looking for a new position of the bodies on chairs. Change 5 times. It is a Choreographed sequence. Finally stopped. Everyone has a different position, even someone is laying on the floor, while also sitting in the chair.

## **SCENE 2.**

*A modest, repurposed basement or community shelter. The walls are thick concrete, painted once but long faded, scuffed by years of wear. Exposed pipes run along the ceiling. A few fluorescent lights flicker uncertainly overhead, buzzing faintly. The air holds a trace of dampness and detergent — it has been cleaned, but not recently.*

*With light we see one wall is covered in taped-up papers: scene breakdowns, rehearsal notes, fragments of text in different languages. A cork-board leans against a stack of more chairs.*

*A few mismatched chairs are arranged in a semi-circle, others piled in the corner. One corner holds another kettle, half-used tea bags, can of sugar. Someone has laid out a threadbare rug near centre stage — a soft spot for sitting, stretching, or resting during long runs.*

*There are no mirrors, no curtains, just coats and some other clothes hang on nails hammered into the wall.*

*Part 1.*

WITNESS 1 (*Caribbean*): Back home I used to cook more often. I loved cooking. Wherever I go, I always cook this meal, it is like a connection with people and home. (*She describes with a precision and a slightly exaggerated intriguing gestures, with details and sounds*)

“First, you peel the potatoes. Then a pinch of this... a splash of that... stir it round, give it a little sizzle, take it off, slice this, wait.. then a sprinkle here... a sprinkle there — pong! And then — shhh... (*the rest of 11 people sitting and slowly moving to her tempo of speech, it may be just a nod or a wrist move, then they make a sound - ‘mmm’ - referring to the tasty meal, after which all simultaneously change the position of their body (not the chair) as if ready to eat and freeze while looking at WITNESS 1*) Voila. It's ready. (*pause, looking to the audience*) I've always lived in the city. Nature feels like a postcard someone sent me once. But then, Guatemala... Cool forests like hushed cathedrals, springs so clear they reflect your soul.

(*during the following paragraph the rest of the group begin to make choreographed rhythmical sounds, gradually building as if waiting for the meal*)

WITNESS 1 (*Caribbean*) (*elderly woman*): That was the first time I thought — maybe the world can be beautiful and dangerous at once. Still, my favourite place? The kitchen. It's the room where things begin. Ideas, meals, laughter — That's my forest. That's my spring.

WITNESS 2 (*Irish*) (*male*): (*steps from the chair to the middle of the stage*) I was raised among northerners and remember icy winds.

(*sound stops, and all the rest of the cast is slowly in one tempo-rhythm creates a setting as if in the restaurant - chairs opposite each other in group of 2, 3, 3, 3 while the following lines are delivered*)

But my heart speaks another language, soft and sun-soaked. Every summer, we travelled to an island in Greece, one place, the same one every year. The sun there doesn't just shine — it wraps around you, and the sea knows how to keep your secrets. It's a place for thinking, for breathing, for remembering. I have learned to carry home in my pocket, like a folded map. Every place I've lived, I've unpacked my habits, adjusted my taste, learned the rhythm of new sidewalks, new skies. But the restaurant — our restaurant in Greece (*makes a tiny gesture towards the creation from the chairs where the cast already sits still as if in the restaurant*) — is the only place time stands still. The tables know our voices. The walls still smell of the sea. And under water, I forget the weight of being unrooted. Down there, I float where I do not belong — and feel somehow whole. (*tables start to liven up, some background conversation, then the round bread is brought and broken with hands into pieces and people eat and someone sings a Syrian song*).

WITNESS 3 (Syrian): *(steps towards the front)* If you asked me where I feel most at home, I'd say: in the sound of family laughing around a table. In a room full of soft voices and shared food. Where I can close my eyes and forget the borders. *(softly, with tenderness)* That's where I want to be. That's where I feel safe. I am from Syria *(pause)* *(everyone stands up and throw their chairs to the floor, all simultaneously)*

EVERYONE: And she has no home left. *(WITNESS 3 leaves, while everyone pushed chairs to the sides, make a circle and begin an Indian wedding dance - WITNESS 4 in the middle, transition is very fast, not necessarily choreographed, a bit chaotic)*

WITNESS 4 (Indian): Home began in the heat of the earth, in India — a country full of colours and noise and sacred stories. A desert stretches wide where my ancestors once walked, where borderlines are just breath-lines in the sand. *(she starts to spin)* There, with my grandparents, time moved differently. I carry that desert with me. *(suddenly stops the spinning, a male WITNESS 5 comes towards her, they stand in the middle, everyone else sits on the floor)*

WITNESS 4 (Indian): *(Says to WITNESS 5, looking in his eyes)* And in that vast, wild forest I saw a white tiger. He looked straight at me, as if he already knew my name. That moment... He is...

WITNESS 5. *(looking at WITNESS 4, takes her hand)*: She is...

WITNESS 4 (Indian): He is... the heartbeat of home for me.

WITNESS 5. *(male)* (Ukrainian): She is my home.

*(slowly turn with touching their backs to one other)*

WITNESS 5. *(male)* (Ukrainian): I once lived in a small village by the sea. *(she slowly walks away)* The kind of place where the wind always knows your name. Now, I live somewhere else — quiet, east, but no matter how far I travel, there is my sea I always return to. A silent, familiar place. I stand there, everything feels whole. That's where I remember who I am.

WITNESS 6 (Japanese): I was born by cherry blossoms. Japan — my beginning, my bones. So I wonder — is it the land that makes a place home? Or the hands we hold in it? For me, it's always been the people. Family. They carry the melody of home, and wherever we gather, that's where I belong.

Still... my nana used to tell me about 'her' home — a home I never knew, but could almost see through her words. I stood in her same room years later. Not quite the same anymore, I suppose:

walls changed, paint faded, but the window still opened toward the garden. That view... of cherry blossoms, it knew me, it knew her, it knew war.

WITNESS 9 *(Mexican)*: I like looking after elderly people.

*(Before the interruption, everyone was slightly getting tired by shifting in their chairs. Someone sighed softly. A few yawned or folded their arms. The romantic nostalgia had stretched too long).*

WITNESS 8 *(male) (French)* : And why? *(suddenly showing interest in WITNESS 9)* What does it make you feel?

WITNESS 9 *(Mexican)*: I think I've got that from the time when I looked after my mum, for long time. So after she passed on, I just... continued. With others. So I'm not alone.

*(WITNESS 8 (male) (French) loses interest in WITNESS 9 by changing his body position to the previous one)*

WITNESS 4 *(Indian)* back to WITNESS 6 *(Japanese)* : What is your favourite place?

WITNESS 6 *(Japanese)* : My house. Just... my house. Simple. Mine.

WITNESS 4 *(Indian)* : And mine is my bedroom.

WITNESS 1 *(Caribbean)* : When your man is there?

WITNESS 12 *(Nigerian)* : Or isn't?

*(Laughter from the others)*

WITNESS 7 *(Vietnamese)* : Maybe home is the place you miss before you even leave it.

WITNESS 11 *(American)* : Are we rehearsing or keeping ourselves distracted?

*Everyone ignores this question, but WITNESS 2*

WITNESS 2 *(Irish) (male)*: I didn't get to finish my story.

WITNESS 8 *(male) (French) (almost angrily)*: Home is not a place. It's a moment! It's a glass of wine. It's a long lunch with bread still warm, and someone passing the cheese like it's gold.

*(pause)* My vineyard — soil and sweat and stories. That's home! When the sun hits your back, or someone says your name like they've said it a thousand times. That's home! That moment. That's it. Home.

WITNESS 1 *(Caribbean)* to WITNESS 8 *(male) (French)*: *(half-laughing)* You're getting poetic.

WITNESS 8 *(male) (French)*: I'm allowed to be poetic. I haven't seen France in years.

WITNESS 7 *(Vietnamese)* : I haven't seen Hanoi for 19 years, but sometimes I still hear it. The streets, the scooters, the way the buildings breathe ...

WITNESS 8 *(male) (French) (interrupts her, lightly teasing)* : The buildings breathe?

WITNESS 7 *(Vietnamese)* : Yes. And the noise — it's not noise. It's music, it's language. I understood myself there.

WITNESS 8 *(male) (French)* : Of course.

WITNESS 9 *(Mexican)* : I moved around a lot as a kid. Didn't have vineyards or noisy streets. But I had my grandmother's guest room. So I made a home out of the guest room in my grandmother's house in Monterrey Mexico. It was small, quiet, and full of dreams.

WITNESS 10 *(Argentinian)* : I come from Argentina. I grew up in Rio de Janeiro, home for me is everywhere in nature, maybe that's because I'm always between places — and nature doesn't ask for passports. *(pause)* Seventeen apartments later, my mind still wants to return there.

WITNESS 11 *(American)* : And I grew up in Virginia, shall we continue our rehearsals?

WITNESS 2 *(Irish) (male)*: I could just add...

*Everyone ignores this question again, gets up creating the following scene with creation from chairs.*

*Part 2.*

WITNESS 12 *(Nigerian)*

*She sits on a chair, facing the audience. The rest of the group sits opposite her, their backs also turned to the audience.*

WITNESS 12 (*Nigerian*) (*softly, with a smile*): I see myself... ten years old maybe. Wearing that skirt — like what the Scottish wear. My favourite. Twirling in it every Sunday after church. And those plastic shoes — Chung shoes, we called them.

One step up to the corridor, then inside the house.

Box TV in the corner, not the smart kind — just box TV. My papa's radio playing news, always news. And the smell... gran soup, rice, and fried fish — my favourite. That smell meant home.

The house was always full of animals. Dogs, cats — meow, meow, every time the cat saw me. I didn't like that cat. 'Get out!' I'd say.

Mama would laugh, 'The cat has done nothing to you!'

I remember when my breasts started showing. I was shy, always covering myself. I thought the whole world was looking at me.

But then... I started liking things. Makeup. Perfume. I wanted to travel.

Mama said no.

'You must be in this house.'

So, I kept sneaking out. My friends would call me.

Then—crash!—someone broke my window.

Trouble had begun.

University came. But something in me wanted to see the world.

Malaysia. I'd never even heard of the place.

I stared at the wall map. 'Where is Malaysia?'

I pointed. 'There. That's where I'm going.'

Eighteen hours in the air. Wahala started.

You know 'Wahala'?

'Wahala' Means 'Trouble'. (*also shows it with the hand-gestures up and down*)

Should I cry?

No. Be strong.

Tears fell anyway.

They were racist there. If you weren't Muslim, you are finished. If you didn't speak Malay, you are finished.

Life was hard. You know the word 'Chop Aduro'? To seek asylum. (*pause*) But that's a story for another day.

I'd give anything to return... but home doesn't look the same anymore — the war changed everything.

(*Everyone starts assembling the pyramid of chairs - building barricades from chairs. Lots of chairs, different quality and comfort*)

### SCENE 3.

*Dozens of chairs are scattered across the stage — mismatched, some broken, some ornate. Stacks of books and other things and belongings spill across the floor. A quiet hum. People begin to shift chairs (as if books). They place them centre-stage, beginning to build... something. A pyramid, a barricade, a shelter — we don't yet know.*

CHORUS of WITNESSES (*softly, overlapping voices: with each '/' there is a change of who speaks the line, its rhythmical*) :

WITNESS 1 (*Caribbean*): I brought this chair from my kitchen/

WITNESS 7 (*Vietnamese*): It squeaks when you lean back. /

WITNESS 9 (*Mexican*): This one held my mother's body when she was too tired to stand./

WITNESS 11 (*American*): This chair... was never mine. /

WITNESS 9 (*Mexican*): was never yours /

WITNESS 6 (*Japanese*): (*placing a chair*): I brought it because it reminds me of the room I left behind. /

WITNESS 9 (*Mexican*): Not the whole room. Just my corner. /

WITNESS 5 (*male*) (*Ukrainian*): (*stacking books inside the barricades of chairs*): This is a library. /

WITNESS 8 (*male*) (*French*): No — it was a library. /

WITNESS 12 (*Nigerian*): Now it's a shelter. /

WITNESS 5 (*male*) (*Ukrainian*): Now it's a bunker. /

WITNESS 1 (*Caribbean*) (*gently*): They told us: 'we have to get rid of books to save people's lives'<sup>1</sup>. /

WITNESS 11 (*American*): So we began to move them. /

WITNESS 10 (*Argentinian*) : One by one. /

WITNESS 3 (*Syrian*): This is a massive pyramid of books. /

WITNESS 11 (*American*): How many have we moved? /

WITNESS 12 (*Nigerian*): 'Someone said: 5300.'<sup>2</sup>/

---

<sup>1</sup> MYKHED, O. (2024) *The Language of War*. 1st edn. UK: ALLEN LANE an imprint of PENGUIN BOOKS

<sup>2</sup> MYKHED, O. (2024) *The Language of War*. 1st edn. UK: ALLEN LANE an imprint of PENGUIN BOOKS



WITNESS 5 (male) (Ukrainian): (*cold, cutting through*): 'That morning, they said 5,300 soldiers were dead...' <sup>3</sup>/

WITNESS 4 (Indian): 'Now we know exactly how many that is'. <sup>4</sup>. /

WITNESS 3 (Syrian): 'Bodies measured in books'. <sup>5</sup>

(*A silence. Chairs continue to move. The pyramid rises.*)

WITNESS 2 (Irish) (*to audience, slowly*): The chairs don't match. /

WITNESS 10 (Argentinian): Some wobble. /

WITNESS 3 (Syrian): Some collapse. /

WITNESS 9 (Mexican): But together — they hold. /

WITNESS 2 (Irish): Together they become... something stronger. /

WITNESS 5 (male) (Ukrainian): A barricade. /

WITNESS 4 (Indian) A prayer. /

WITNESS 6 (Japanese): (*placing a final chair*): This chair was in my grandmother's garden. /

WITNESS 4 (Indian) This one came from the church. /

WITNESS 7 (Vietnamese) : This one was never meant to leave the school. /

(*The pyramid of chairs is finished. WITNESSES crawl in front of it almost lean against it.*)

WITNESS 6 (Japanese) (*emerging from the centre*): It's not just wood. /

WITNESS 10 (Argentinian): Or books. /

WITNESS 3 (Syrian): Or nails.

WITNESS 6 (Japanese) : It's stories. /

WITNESS 8 (male) (French) It's memory. /

WITNESS 4 (Indian) It's home, /

WITNESS 12 (Nigerian): rebuilt from what we carried.

*The pitching sounds very slowly but gradually builds over the next scene:*

---

<sup>3</sup> MYKHED, O. (2024) *The Language of War*. 1st edn. UK: ALLEN LANE an imprint of PENGUIN BOOKS

<sup>4</sup> MYKHED, O. (2024) *The Language of War*. 1st edn. UK: ALLEN LANE an imprint of PENGUIN BOOKS

<sup>5</sup> MYKHED, O. (2024) *The Language of War*. 1st edn. UK: ALLEN LANE an imprint of PENGUIN BOOKS

#### SCENE 4.

*Two Men emerge from each side of the theatre stage. Their faces remain hidden. Their movements are calm, deliberate. Each takes position at opposite front corners on theatre stage, where both have an access to the nuclear launch mechanism — an array of buttons, computer screens, and layered security measures combining physical switches. Between them stands a long table — reminiscent of the one in Putin’s office — with two of the most comfortable chairs positioned on either side. The men sit on either side, their backs turned to the audience.*

*From the shadows, the WITNESSES begin to step forward, one by one. Their voices do not clash in argument, but rise together in truth. Behind them, a tall barricade — a sculptural installation of chairs — looms, underscoring the gravity of the moment.*

WITNESS 2 (*Irish*): Táimid bailithe anseo - dhá ghlór déag, aon domhan amháin. Ní chun éileamh a dhéanamh, ach chun seasamh a ghlacadh.

WITNESS 11 (*American*): We rehearsed it really well.

*(pause, no one objects to it)*

WITNESS 8 (*male*) (*French*): Nous ne sommes pas des politiciens. Ni des présidents. Ni des généraux. Nous sommes des gens. Venus de quelque part.

WITNESS 6 (*Japanese*): そして私たちは言います。血で刻まれた国境はもういない。他国の土地に突き刺された旗はもういない。

[Soshite watashitachi wa iimasu. Chi de kizama reta kokkyō wa mō iranai. Takoku no tochi ni tsukisasa reta hata wa mō iranai].

WITNESS 3 (*Syrian*): (*softly*): لسنّا بحاجة إلى أراضٍ جديدة، بل إلى المكان الذي وُلدنا فيه. هذا كل شيء. [lasna bihajat 'iilaa arad jadidatin, bal 'iilaa alماكن aladhi wulidna fihi. hadha kula shay'in.]

WITNESS 10 (*Argentinian*): Esa colina, ese río, el árbol fuera de la ventana.

WITNESS 8 (*male*) (*French*): Les mains de mon grand-père dans la terre.

WITNESS 9 (*Mexican*): La voz de mi madre en la cocina. Eso es mi hogar. Eso es suficiente.

WITNESS 11 (*American*): We were told to bring our stories. To convince the jurors.

WITNESS 5 (male) (Ukrainian): Щоб зупинити цю війну.

WITNESS 3 (Syrian): لتغيير مصيرنا. كنتُ مخطئاً في تقدير الناس طوال حياتي، وما زلتُ كذلك. كنتُ أعتقد أن أحدهم سيوقف هذا. شخصٌ ذو سلطة، شخصٌ ذو قلب [litaghyir masirna. knt mkhtyan fi taqdir alnaas tawal hayaati, wama zlt kadhalika. knt 'aetaqid 'ana 'ahadahum sayuqif hadha. shkhs dhu sultati, shkhs dhu qalbi].

EVERYONE: They didn't.

WITNESS 4 (Indian): (together with WITNESS 5, holding hands). हम बच गए। [ham bach gae].

WITNESS 5 (male) (Ukrainian): але ми вже не ті що були колись.

WITNESS 11 (American): We are not here to accuse. We are here to remind.

EVERYONE: (quietly, together, echoing) Our memory is our home. And our roots remember everything.

*The two Men seated in the chairs glance toward the audience — at the CHARACTER who is sitting among the audience (the audience doesn't know about him yet) — then turn to each other, trying to whisper something across the big table. Unable to hear one another clearly, they stand up and gradually begin to laugh and start pressing buttons on each side of a stage. Meanwhile, all WITNESSES move in a choreographed fashion, their bodies frozen but their heads turning sharply to the right and left sides of the stage watching the two Men. Just as the Men reach for the final switch:*

WITNESS 11 (American): Wait — please — just give us a chance! We'll learn your language, rewrite our stories, erase our borders. We'll become what you want, shape ourselves in your image — just... don't do this. Not like this. Let us show you how we can be together!

*From the shadows, one by one, the WITNESSES step forward again. The scene is played exactly as from the beginning of the SCENE 4, all mises-en-scene are the same, gestures the same, just the language is now English.*

WITNESS 2 (Irish): We are gathered here — twelve voices, one world. Not to make a claim, but to make a stand.

WITNESS 11 (American): We rehearsed it really well.

*(pause, no one objects to it)*

WITNESS 8 *(male) (French)*: We are no politicians. Not presidents. Not generals. We are people. From somewhere.

WITNESS 6 *(Japanese)*: And we say: No more borders carved by blood. No more flags stabbed into someone else's soil.

WITNESS 3 *(Syrian)*: *(softly)*: We don't need new lands. We need the place where we were born. That's all.

WITNESS 10 *(Argentinian)*: That hill, that river, the tree outside the window.

WITNESS 8 *(male) (French)*: My grandfather's hands in the soil.

WITNESS 9 *(Mexican)*: My mother's voice in the kitchen. That is home. That is enough.

WITNESS 11 *(American)*: We were told to bring our stories. To convince the jurors.

WITNESS 5 *(male) (Ukrainian)*: To stop this war.

WITNESS 3 *(Syrian)*: To change our fate. I have been wrong about people all my life, and still am. I believed someone would stop this. Someone with power. Someone with a heart.

EVERYONE: They didn't.

WITNESS 4 *(Indian)*: *(together with WITNESS 5, holding hands)*. We survived.

WITNESS 5 *(male) (Ukrainian)*: But not as we were before.

WITNESS 11 *(American)*: We are not here to accuse. We are here to remind.

EVERYONE: *(quietly, together, echoing)* Our memory is our home. And our roots remember everything.

WITNESS 11 *(American)*: See, that's much better now!

*The two Men seated in the chairs glance toward the audience again — at the CHARACTER who is sitting among the audience (the audience doesn't know about him yet) — two men stand up, then turn to each other, look at each other, no laughing this time. They then move toward the mechanisms on either side of the stage and begin pressing buttons rapidly. Pause before the final switch, — and then, they pressed it. Meanwhile, all WITNESSES move in a choreographed fashion, their bodies frozen, first their heads turning sharply to the right and left sides of the stage watching the two Men, then they all start shaking and after the last switch WITNESSES fell on the floor.*

A voice of a LITTLE BOY (calls): 'MUM' 'MUM'

*blackout*

## **SCENE 5**

*The WITNESSES remain lying on the floor, surrounded by scattered barricades made of chairs and various objects; somewhere among the disarray, WITNESS 4 and WITNESS 5 still sit on the mattresses.*

*A couple (WITNESS 4 together with WITNESS 5) sit close, looks like they didn't fell.*

WITNESS 4 (*Indian*): Do you remember the scariest sound you've ever heard?

WITNESS 5 (*male*) (*Ukrainian*): Yes. A child. Calling for his mother. Just after the explosion.

WITNESS 4 (*Indian*): 'You once told me — through the doors is where they shoot first. That the first one in...' <sup>6</sup>

WITNESS 5 (*male*) (*Ukrainian*): Usually dies. Yeah. That stayed with you?

WITNESS 4 (*Indian*): Everything you said stays.

WITNESS 5 (*male*) (*Ukrainian*): 'Have you ever thought... about the last sunset you'll ever see?' <sup>7</sup>

WITNESS 4 (*Indian*): (*softly*) Every day. And it always feels like... maybe this one.

---

<sup>6</sup> PSHENYCHNA, O. (2024) *Where The Sun Sets [Tam, De Zakhodyt Sonce]*. 2nd edn. Kyiv: Laboratoria

<sup>7</sup> PSHENYCHNA, O. (2024) *Where The Sun Sets [Tam, De Zakhodyt Sonce]*. 2nd edn. Kyiv: Laboratoria

WITNESS 5 (*male*) (*Ukrainian*): 'I remember these shoes you sent me to the frontline. Sturdy, thick-soled. I had this awful thought — what a waste it would be to bury me in them. And I hated myself for thinking it'<sup>8</sup>.

WITNESS 4 (*Indian*): That's not hate. That's survival. When they gave me your death certificate... They called your name wrong. I didn't correct them. As if it wasn't you who was dead.

WITNESS 5 (*male*) (*Ukrainian*): The train stations still work?

WITNESS 4 (*Indian*): Technically. But they don't take people home anymore. Just away.

WITNESS 5 (*male*) (*Ukrainian*): 'And the cafés — they still serve coffee?'<sup>9</sup>

WITNESS 4 (*Indian*): Yes. But no clinking of cups. No laughter.

WITNESS 5 (*male*) (*Ukrainian*): Tell me — what am I still doing here?

WITNESS 4 (*Indian*): (*whispers*) Our story ... (*They look at each other*) You owe me that last sunset, remember? Just one more time... I will sit with you until it disappears.

WITNESS 5 (*male*) (*Ukrainian*): Then you leave, you board that train!

*She stays. The sun sets. They lay down together.*

## SCENE 6

### *Part 1.*

*Two Men enter the stage. They move the bodies of WITNESSES into different positions on stage, sometimes placing a leg on the chest or just creating a 'collage' or 'installation' of bodies. Then carefully place two chairs somewhere in between. One man remains standing, scribbling into a small notebook. The other moves — raising a wrist, tilting a head — almost tenderly, as if adjusting museum pieces.*

MAN 1. (*scribbling, without looking up*): Let's hear their cases again. What did this one do wrong?

---

<sup>8</sup> KHROMEYCHUK, O. (2023) *The Death of a Soldier Told by His Sister*. 1edn. Kyiv: Vichola.

<sup>9</sup> BONDARENKO, A. In FREEDMAN, J. (2022) *A DICTIONARY OF EMOTIONS IN A TIME OF WAR*. 20 SHORT WORKS BY UKRAINIAN PLAYWRIGHTS. 2nd edn. Egret: Chapel Hill, USA.

MAN 2. (*lifting an arm of WITNESS 4, inspecting it*): Too much love for freedom. It made people nervous. A dangerous idealist.

MAN 1. (*nodding*): Ah, yes. That one's easy to file. And this one *pointing towards WITNESS 4*)?

MAN 2. (*adjusting a spine*): She was a real dreamer, and thought she could change the world.

MAN 1. (*stops writing, raises an eyebrow*): O dear, that's unthinkable. (*He writes again, slower*) Hope-ful. Visi-o-nary. Imme-dia-te risk.

(*Man 1 points towards another body*)

MAN 2. (*pauses, gestures vaguely toward another body*): That one? I don't know. Wrong place, wrong time. We needed to keep the balance.

MAN 1. (*writing*): Statistical necessity. Doesn't matter who was for or against the war. They're all equal now — dead. (*Sighs deeply*) I'm exhausted...

*Then two men sitting opposite each other on previously placed chairs.*

MAN 2. (*leaning back*): I'm bored. So — what's next on the list?

MAN 1. (*looking through papers, silent, yawns*)

Man 2 (*leans back, eyes not quite here*): You know... I used to think boredom was the worst thing. But lately, it's the quiet I can't stand.

MAN 1. I could use some quiet now actually.

MAN 2 (*ignores him*) I am hungry. Quiet makes it worst, I can almost smell my mother's kitchen. The metal pots, the hot stone floor. The sound of radio and boiled tea. (Pause) The way the dust floated in the afternoon light. And the air smelled of garlic, and rain. I didn't even like it much back then. Funny what hunger does to you.

MAN 1. (*nods, looks through papers, busy*).

MAN 2. (*remembers something, longer pause*): Sometimes the quiet turns on me. It scratches at the inside of my head. It says things like: You should've gone back there. You should've stayed ... for her ... You should've done more than just survive.

*(Small breath, getting more relaxed, and doesn't control what he says)*

The thing is — sometimes her problem was just... talking to me. 'For others, I knew it was because I'm from Russia'<sup>10</sup>. (Gordeeva)

*(Shrugs.)*

I asked her once — 'Is it because I'm Russian?' And she said — 'It's because I don't know you'<sup>11</sup>.

*(Laughs)*

She was right. I don't even know myself anymore.

*(MAN 1 watches, passive, but friendly. Begins to write, but then stops. MAN 2 goes on)*

MAN 2: *(sits on the chair and his legs swinging, almost like a child)*: 'You know the cockroaches left. When the war began, they just disappeared. We lived on the ground-floor. The cockroaches knew something we didn't. Turns out we're dumber than cockroaches. We stayed'<sup>12</sup>, well, at least at first, and then we left.

*(He laughs and gets up, walks through bodies)*

MAN 2: 'One morning it was freezing. The kind of cold that cracks your bones open. And for some reason, I looked up. I thought maybe I'd see God — or maybe just the sky, something bigger. But all I saw was grey murk, and black snow falling like burnt paper onto our heads. The taste of burning... is still in my throat'<sup>13</sup>.

*(MAN 1 watches, almost through MAN 2, still, like a statue. Listening.)*

---

<sup>10</sup> GORDEEVA, K. (2024) *Take My Grief Away. Voices from War in Ukraine*. 1st edn. London: WH Allen, Penguin Random House UK

<sup>11</sup> GORDEEVA, K. (2024) *Take My Grief Away. Voices from War in Ukraine*. 1st edn. London: WH Allen, Penguin Random House UK

<sup>12</sup> GORDEEVA, K. (2024) *Take My Grief Away. Voices from War in Ukraine*. 1st edn. London: WH Allen, Penguin Random House UK

<sup>13</sup> GORDEEVA, K. (2024) *Take My Grief Away. Voices from War in Ukraine*. 1st edn. London: WH Allen, Penguin Random House UK



MAN 2 (*voice softening, cracking*): I think — I think I'd give up all of this— all these ledgers, all these names... I want to hear her sing that awful song. Just once more. (*Starts singing and dancing Tom Jones's Green Green Grass Of Home (possible)*):

*The old hometown looks the same*

*As I step down from the train*

*And there to meet me is my mama and papa*

*Down the road I look and there runs Mary*

*Hair of gold and lips like cherries*

*It's good to touch the green, green grass of home*

*Yes, they'll all come to meet me...*

MAN 1 (*takes a gun out the pocket and fires a single gunshot, killing MAN 2, then puts the body towards the rest and then softly, almost kindly*): Ah, I was really one body short. This one? (*looking at MAN 2*) War-tested, management-approved... but a nostalgic romantic. Dangerous.

(*The recording of the song is still playing while MAN 1 assembles the body, whistles and leaves*)

## *Part 2.*

*The WITNESSES remain lying on the floor, surrounded by scattered barricades made of chairs and various objects; An OLD MAN and A LITTLE BOY come between them. An OLD MAN chooses a wooden chair and sits in it, opens a notebook in his lap. A small boy sits cross-legged on the floor, listening.*

LITTLE BOY: Read me a letter from my father, again!

OLD MAN (*gently, reading*): 'Your second summer passed like a single day.

I close my eyes — and there you are. Running barefoot toward the Black Sea... Your mother chasing you, laughing, never fast enough. We painted boats on the sand. You asked, 'Should we paint Mum?' I said yes. Then we also painted a cat' <sup>14</sup>.

LITTLE BOY (*smiling*): Did it have stripes?

---

<sup>14</sup> PUZIK, V. (2023) *With Love — Father! [Z Lyubovyu — Tato!]* 1edn. Kyiv: Laboratoria

OLD MAN (*chuckling*): 'Blue ones. You insisted. You always loved trains, too. Fell asleep to their rhythm. Tu dum... tu dum... Tu dum... tu dum... And the squirrel book — that was your favourite'<sup>15</sup>..

LITTLE BOY: What happened next?

OLD MAN (*pausing*): 'Later... I stopped writing, because it was all about war. Tried to make up stories instead. For you. On the day forty-two of the war, we found a dog — named him Soldier. He made us laugh, even when we had no reason to'<sup>16</sup>..

LITTLE BOY (*quiet*): Did you dream?

OLD MAN: 'Of pizza. Of peace'<sup>17</sup>. Of your smile.

(*Pause. He looks down at the notebook.*)

There are no words left now. Words can't stop the bombs. But I close my eyes — and I see a cherry blossom, and the sea... Our Black Sea...

(*The OLD MAN gently closes the notebook. Silence. The boy crawls up into his lap*)

LITTLE BOY (*placing the calendar down carefully*): I brought it in. The calendar.

OLD MAN (*without looking up*): Thank you.

LITTLE BOY (*looking over the page*): But this is the end. The last day.

OLD MAN (*softly*): Yes. It is.

LITTLE BOY: Do you have another one? A different calendar?

OLD MAN (*shaking his head, gently*): No.

LITTLE BOY (*after a pause*): So what's going to happen now?

OLD MAN: No one knows.

---

<sup>15</sup> PUZIK, V. (2023) *With Love — Father! [Z Lyubovyu — Tato!]* 1edn. Kyiv: Laboratoria

<sup>16</sup> PUZIK, V. (2023) *With Love — Father! [Z Lyubovyu — Tato!]* 1edn. Kyiv: Laboratoria

<sup>17</sup> PUZIK, V. (2023) *With Love — Father! [Z Lyubovyu — Tato!]* 1edn. Kyiv: Laboratoria

*(The boy looks down at the calendar, then clenches his fist.)*

LITTLE BOY *(urgently)*: Then make a different story. Please. Don't let them die. Don't let him go, don't let them disappear. Change it. Please.

*(The OLD MAN watches him — pause. The boy's eyes are filled with something deeper than his age.)*

OLD MAN *(quietly)*: You think it's that simple?

LITTLE BOY *(almost whispering)*: You can do it! For me?

*The OLD MAN takes the calendar, turns it slowly. Then, with trembling hands, he tears out the final page.)*

OLD MAN: Alright. Let's try again.

*(He closes his eyes. In the silence that follows, all bodies begin to move — start to get up: quiet silhouettes — standing. Alive. The boy watches them)*

LITTLE BOY *(happy)*: They're getting up...

*(LITTLE BOY sees WITNESS 4 and WITNESS 5 and runs towards them)*

LITTLE BOY *(happy)*: MUM MUM... DAAAAAAD....

*(They all hug)*

OLD MAN *(doesn't move)*: Yes. They're leaving with you now.

LITTLE BOY to an OLD MAN: I will never forget you - here *(gives an OLD MAN his toy)* you can remember me too!

*(The boy joins WITNESS 4 and WITNESS 5 and the rest of the WITNESSES, while they reassemble the chairs into the office setting. The OLD MAN waits until they disappear into the fading light, then opens his eyes)*

OLD MAN *(to himself)*: Maybe at least this time, the story ends differently.

*Then he transfers into a different character - THE INTERVIEWER*

## 7. (ALMOST) FINAL SCENE

*A sparse office. A desk with a computer. A man in a suit INTERVIEWER types. Opposite him, sits the JOB APPLICANT, slightly nervous but with a strange confidence, holding a portfolio.*

JOB APPLICANT *(earnest, hopeful)*: So... this game I've been building — it's not just entertainment. Players can build a life, a world. Their own story. Let's say someone had a difficult childhood — they could reimagine it, rewrite it. Make it beautiful. Healing. Autobiographical, but with choice. In this game, pain transforms. You choose how to remember.

INTERVIEWER *(flat, unimpressed)*: Right. I hear you. But we've just come out of COVID. This... doesn't seem relevant.

JOB APPLICANT: Ah. Yes. No. I understand. But... my wife, she has this sixth sense about things. Or seventh. She told me it was going to be a difficult year. *(Shrugs, awkward chuckle)* I didn't believe her.

INTERVIEWER *(stares)*: Really?

JOB APPLICANT *(leaning in, passionate)*: Listen, the brilliance of the game is this: you're not forced into a storyline. You get to shape it. You build your home. Your losses don't define the outcome. Imagine politicians playing it — maybe they'd see where different choices lead. Maybe homes wouldn't have to be destroyed.

INTERVIEWER *(cuts him off, turns screen to face applicant and audience)*: Let me stop you there. This? *(This moment — screen reveals surveillance footage: MAN 1 killing MAN 2)* This is unacceptable. A simulation of violence doesn't teach, it numbs.

JOB APPLICANT (*trying to explain*): But — but you see, that's the point. When ordinary people play, they choose differently. They don't kill. The outcome changes. It's not just a game — it's a test. A reflection. A warning.

INTERVIEWER (*voice sharpens*): Are you calling me a killer?

JOB APPLICANT (*defensive, fast*): No, no — of course not. I'm just...

INTERVIEWER: This is a game of violence. You can't just blow someone's brain out and call it therapy. Let me give you a piece of advice: forget this project. We're in the 21st century. There will be no more wars.

(*A pause. The JOB APPLICANT exhales*)

JOB APPLICANT. What's the date today?

INTERVIEWER (*checks screen*) February 23rd, 2022.

JOB APPLICANT (*nods slowly*) Right. Yeah, my wife said I should come tomorrow. But I had more time today. Anyway, if you change your mind... give me a call.

(*He stands, leaves. The INTERVIEWER watches him go. Then picks up the resume, drops it in the bin. Typing resumes. Cold fluorescent light hums overhead*)

Slow fade to black.

[*SOUND: distant sirens*]

*Projections 30s max:*

- Missiles falling on Ukraine
- Hamas firing
- Gaza burning
- Bodies on streets.

*Then complete darkness.*

*A phone rings.*

JOB APPLICANT (*offstage, in total darkness*): Hello?

*Blackout. Silence.*

## **FINAL SCENE 8 - 'A CONVERSATION THAT HAS NEVER HAPPENED'**

*General lights on. Just as the audience begins to believe the play is over and starts to rise from their seats — a figure emerges from the crowd, steps onto the stage, climbs a table, stands still. Then shouts*

CHARACTER: You all, sit down! Now!

*He controls the audience and does anything so they come back to their seats.*

CHARACTER: Comfortable? (*Pause, a teasing smile*) Good.  
(*Pause. Almost playful*) (*spotlight on him*)

Let's call it... Part One: *Brothers?* — No, that's a lie.  
Part Two: *Power.* That stays.  
I think I'm finally ready now —  
to tell *my* story.

We spent months — No, 22 years exactly developing this plan.  
It was precise. Surgical. Beautiful.

The longest job of my life.  
My biggest project.

But before we could get to the 'boom' —  
We had to secure the world.  
Lock it down.  
Make it... quiet.

(*steps forward. Lower voice, intimate but electric with menace*)

It was supposed to be over in three days.  
But it got fucked up.

Something always does, doesn't it?

*(Tone dips into something godlike — messianic and deranged.)*

I was supposed to become God.

And I... I gave you exactly what you feared.

You were waiting for me.

To save you.

And so — I arrived.

You scared of me?

And the best part? I haven't even started yet... *(laughter) (walks back stage, messianic scream)*

*(Blackout.)*

*In Memory of my dear friend Andriy Synyshyn (1998 – 2025), call sign ‘Absurd’.*

*Andriy stood out as the most gifted acting student I ever taught. He graduated in 2021, and in the early days of the full-scale invasion in 2022, he joined the Ukrainian army.*

*He is currently listed as ‘missing in action’, near Junakivka, in the Sumy region. There is no body to confirm his death. He and all his fellow soldiers were hit by an enemy strike while traveling in a vehicle. Twice. Nothing was left.*

*As of May 2025, the area remains too dangerous to search. The fact that he is officially missing gives us hope — fragile but alive — that perhaps, somehow, he is still out there.*

*Andriy had a big heart and a bright future on the theatre stage. He was a friend, a warrior and a dreamer.*

*‘You’re out there somewhere, and I’ll keep your memory alive — just like you promised to join my productions when we’ve won this war!’*



This play was developed through extensive research and creative collaboration with communities across the UK, centred on the themes of home, memory, and belonging. While each narrative in the play has been fictionalised, they are grounded in authentic voices and experiences gathered during a series of Applied Theatre workshops I facilitated — inspired by my own reflections on displacement and identity, especially in the wake of the war in Ukraine.

These workshops were held in partnership with Barons Court Theatre in London, Baobab Women's Project in Birmingham, Mistra Conference in Uppsala, and Loughborough University. The workshops became spaces of collective storytelling — where participants explored personal stories through objects tied to home.

Using narratives such as 'What kind of objects or places here in the UK remind you of home?' individuals shared intimate fragments of their journeys. Recipes, jewellery and everyday items surfaced again and again — reminders of identity, resilience and continuity.

Voices came from across the UK — London, York, Loughborough, Basingstoke, Stanmore, Clay Cross — and from all corners of the globe: Hanoi, Tehran, Sharjah, Lagos, Atlanta, Buenos Aires, Kyiv, Monterrey, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Botswana, Greece, Japan, Thailand, and beyond.

In addition, I have engaged with a range of literature produced in Ukraine and Russia after 2022. Only a small selection of these works has been incorporated into the play, and they are referenced both within the main text and listed in the following bibliography.

### **Bibliography:**

BONDARENKO, A.: FREEDMAN, J. (2022) *A DICTIONARY OF EMOTIONS IN A TIME OF WAR. 20 SHORT WORKS BY UKRAINIAN PLAYWRIGHTS*. 2nd edn. Egret: Chapel Hill, USA.

GORDEEVA, K. (2024) *Take My Grief Away. Voices from War in Ukraine*. 1st edn. London: WH Allen, Penguin Random House UK

KHROMEYCHUK, O. (2023) *The Death of a Soldier Told by His Sister*. 1edn. Kyiv: Vichola.

MYKHED, O. (2024) *The Language of War*. 1st edn. UK: ALLEN LANE an imprint of PENGUIN BOOKS

PSHENYCHNA, O. (2024) *Where The Sun Sets [Tam, De Zakhodyt Sonce]*. 2nd edn. Kyiv: Laboratoria

PUZIK, V. (2023) *With Love — Father! [Z Lyubovyu — Tato!]* 1edn. Kyiv: Laboratoria