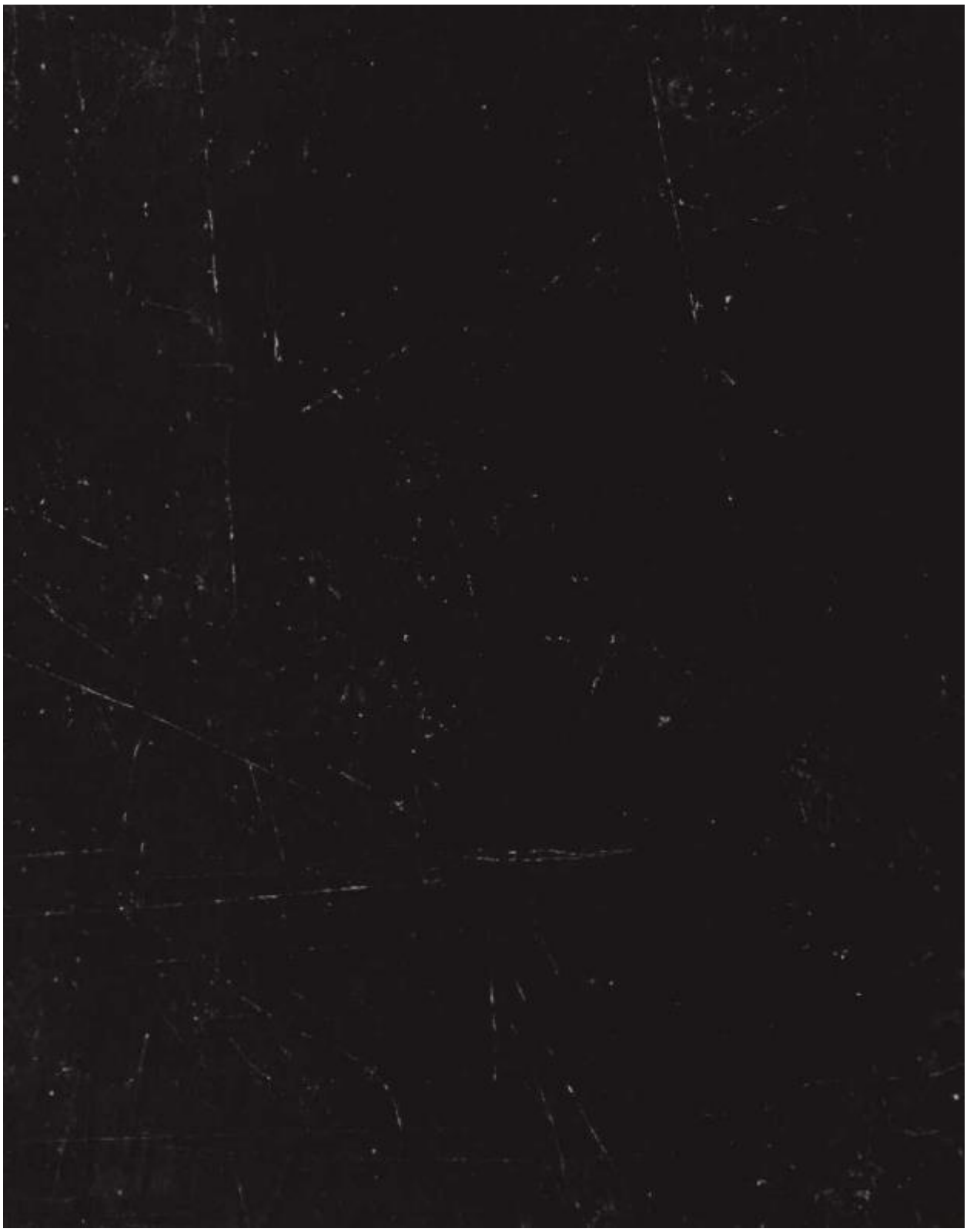
One-way Suitcase

20 real stories from Ukrainian refugees during the first days of Russia's invasion

CARTIER



Dear readers,

My family has been on the move for thousands of years. Wars, economic and political conditions that led to persecution and edicts, meant we were always packing our bags. We grew up listening to the countless stories that our relatives and friends would tell; what they endured, and how they survived. How can I not understand and sense what the Ukrainian refugees' are now feeling, knowing what my own family went through.

As we turned into 2022, I listened to the Western leaders. First it was President Biden. They warned of a possible war. Many people did not believe it, but I did, and this helped us to prepare for what was to come.

When the wave of refugees from Ukraine hit the small Republic of Moldova, we knew we had an obligation to act properly. With thanks to God and all the people in our midst, our staff, hundreds of volunteers from Moldova, the USA, Israel, Great Britain and other countries stepped up. Together we worked around the clock, as one, and we responded to the most acute and the most basic needs. Everything and everyone mattered.

I am deeply thankful and grateful to all who answered our appeals and helped - both financially and through the giving of personal time and deeds. I am sure, in some sense, it is more important for us who offer help and support, than for those whom we help.

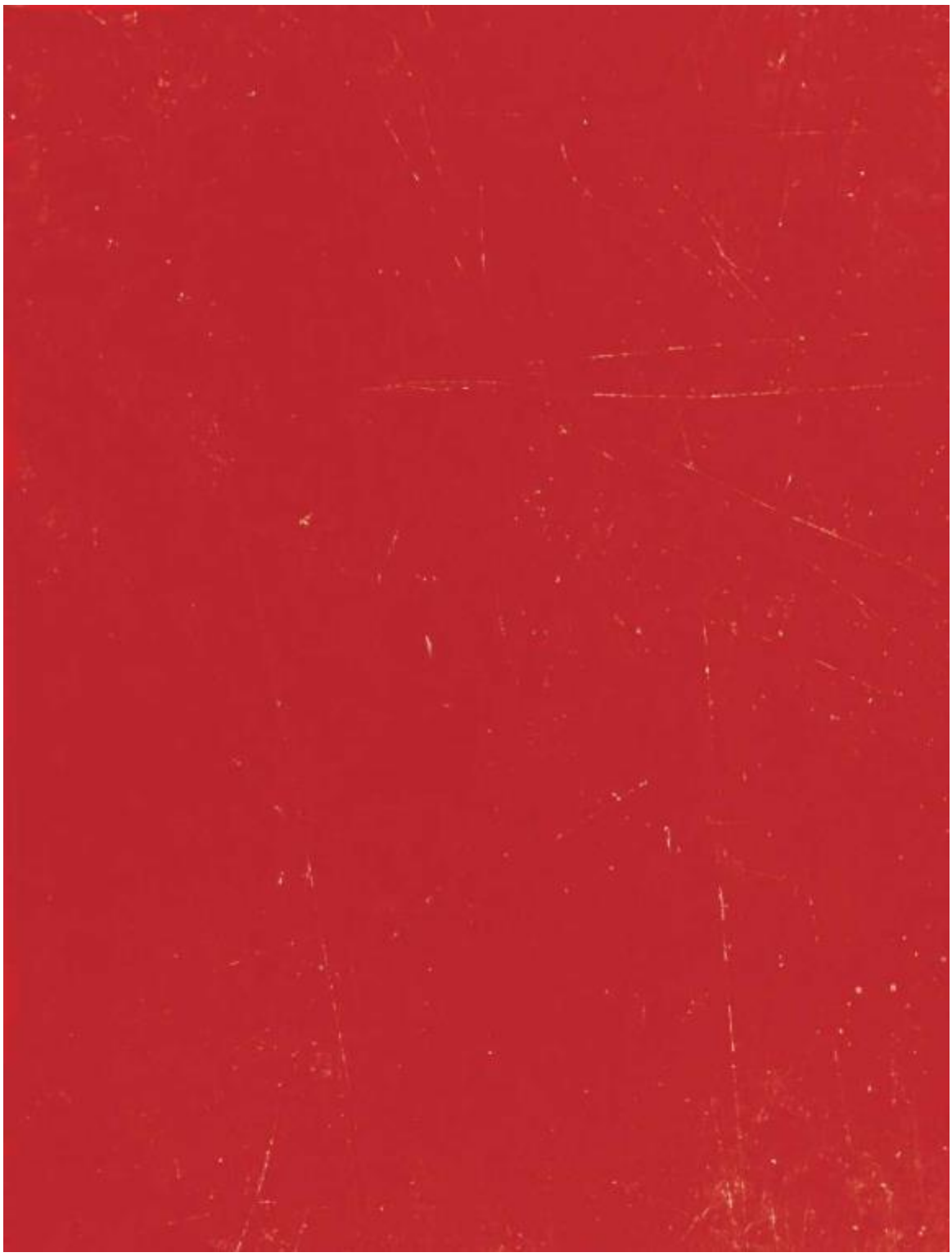
Being a Jewish Orthodox Rabbi, I had to announce a working regime on the first Shabbats in February and March as we faced a situation of "pikuach nefesh" (life preservation) - the moment when saving lives becomes more important than observing strict religious rules. There was never a thought about who these poor people were, who contiued to pour over the border on those cold evenings and nights. It didn't matter whether they were Jewish, Ukrainians, Gipsy, religious or secular. It was simply heartbreaking to see so many children, women and elderly, lost, crying, silent...

Then we even did not think of finding professionals who would somehow record these personal stories, destinies, moments, feelings and emotions. So many of them will only be preserved in our souls and in our memories.

I would ask you, while reading these stories and looking at these pictures, to look into yourselves, and to think 'where and what would be your place in this', as it is

said “.love your neighbor as yourself”.
Now as always I pray for peace and for our human unification, not only in times such as this when there is war, calamities, tragedies and disasters. It must be something we continue to pray for in times of peace. Only in this way can we develop, create, progress and grow.
I wish all of you peace, health and prosperity. Thank you for your attention to this unique edition!

Sincerely, Rabbi Pinchas Zaltzman, Chief Rabbi of Moldova, Head of Agudath Israel in Moldova



Overview

Wrenching moments and incredible tragedies plagued hundreds of thousands of people forced to run from their homes in Ukraine to elsewhere - to nowhere that they knew. Despair, frustration, and despondency suffused the Ukrainian refugees, who were torn from their peaceful lives by Russian rocket explosions, tanks, and machine guns. Their ordinary lives collapsed within moments.

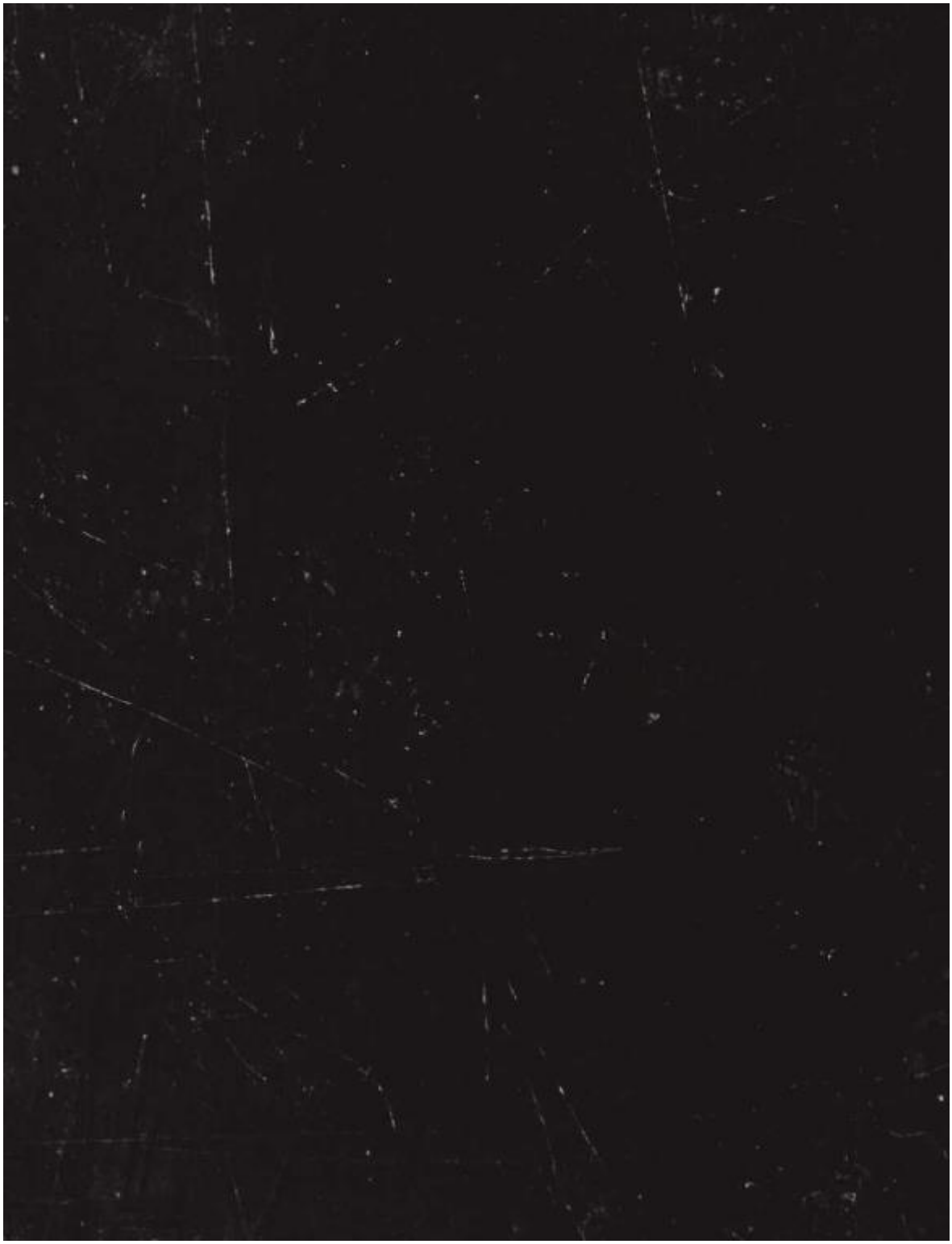
February 23, 2022 was a typical day for our Jewish community center in Chisinau, the capital of Moldova, a friendly little country in Eastern Europe located between Ukraine and Romania. We were planning upcoming Shabbat lectures and meals, as well as the next month's schedule of events.

Around 5:30 AM the next morning all community managers including Pinchas Zaltzman, Chief Rabbi of Moldova, received messages and calls along a similar thread: They attacked us. What shall we do? Can you receive us? For how long? How can we reach you quickly? Is it safe? By that very evening, queues of vehicles and people, pushing to exit Ukraine into Moldova, grew into tremendous multi-kilometer columns - full of pain, bewilderment, and despair.

During the first three weeks, we served over 15,000 refugees of myriad nationalities: Jewish, Ukrainian, Armenian, Belorussian etc. In spite of our preparedness and willingness to help, what we experienced has far surpassed any expectations. All of our volunteers who were in contact with refugees at different stages felt the personal sting of war and came head-to-head with terror and uncertainty.

This book contains the twenty most heart-wrenching stories among hundreds that we encountered working with refugees. Families, children, the lonely elderly, the handicapped, even abandoned dogs and cats who lacked documents allowing them to cross the border... All of the stories are unique and previously unpublished, collected and revised by professional journalists specifically employed for this work.

Heartfelt stories are accompanied by unique photos taken in numerous interactions with refugees. They spoke vulnerably, baring their souls about the ache of the experience, lost belongings, destroyed property and businesses, crippled dreams, and vanishing goals. Their words were vital and we listened carefully, supporting them through incredible fatigue: it all seemed like a terrible dream but it was a new reality, a new world bursting with tragic turns.



About The Author

Author of texts: Yulia Semyonova is a talented journalist with over 25 years experience. She was contracted specifically by “Agudath Israel” to record the most interesting and heart-rending stories of people who escaped from Ukraine under Russian aggression. Co-author: Elena Zadorozhnaya.
Translation into English: Natalia Alhazova. Special gratitude to The Together Plan (UK Charity 1154167) for assistance in editing the book’s materials.
Compiling editor: Michael Finckel Photos by: Iosif Pizelman (Moldova), Maya Oshri Meshel (Israel), Andreea Campeanu (Romania), Adri Salido (Spain)

The New York Times HAMODIA

Agudath Israel is the primary Jewish religious and cultural organization located in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova since 1991, under the supervision of Chief Rabbi Pinchas Zaltzman. From the first days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we opened the largest refugee center in the middle of Chisinau city, with the support of the Governments of Israel, Moldova and the Mayor of Chisinau.
Learn more about our mission for Ukrainian refugees from the article by Patrick Kinsley in “New York Times” from March 8, 2022: **https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/world/europe/ukraine- israel-moldova-jews.html**
Read “Hamodia” article from March 03, 2022 about dramatic challenges that we faced from the first day of Russian invasion:
https://hamodia.com/2022/03/03/moldovas-chief-rabbi-to-hamodia-every-hour-we-deal- with-50-new-refugees/
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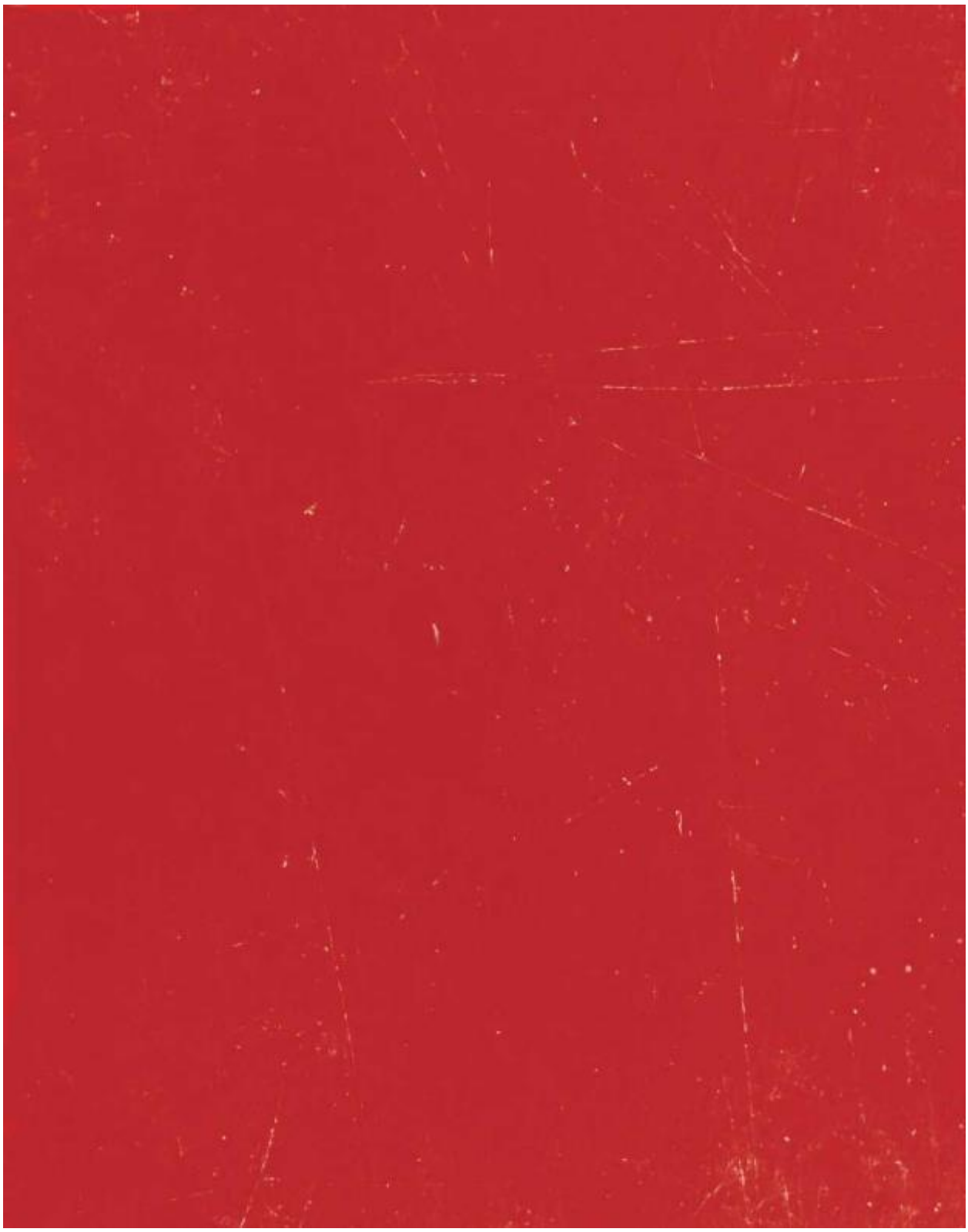
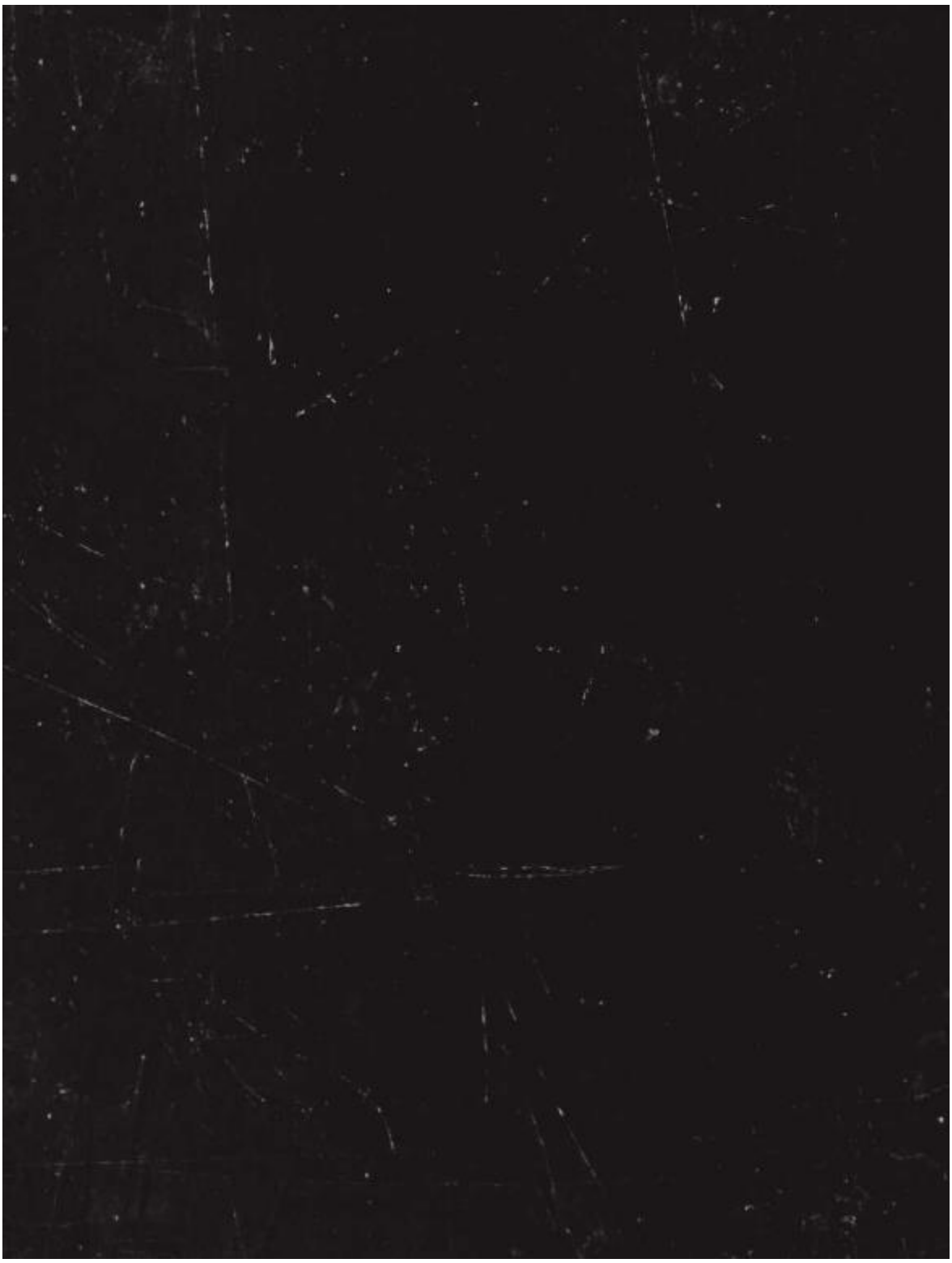


Book Contents:



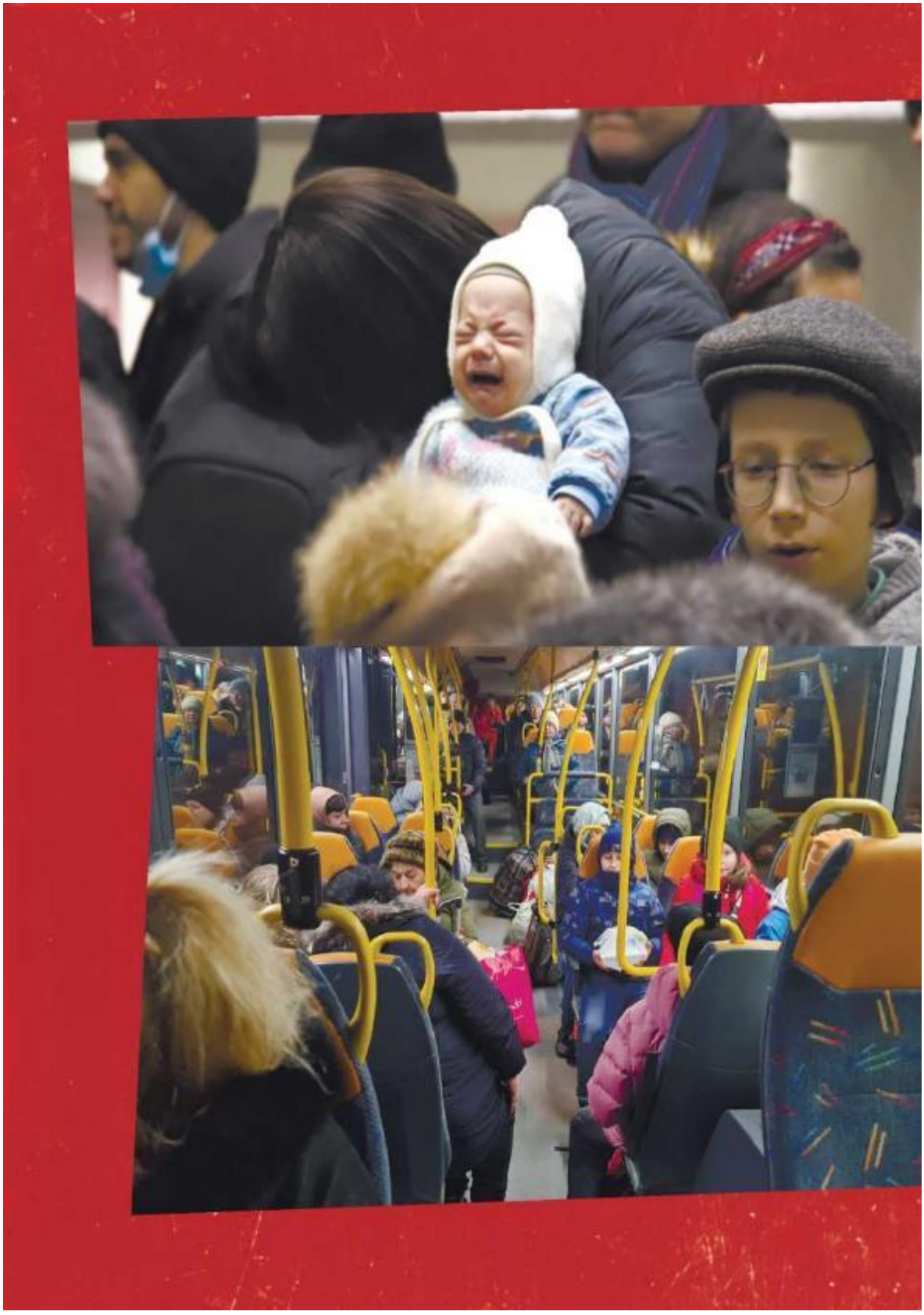
Chapter 1

The Day the War

Started

FEBRUARY 24

From the address of Vladimir Putin: The decision has been made by me to conduct a special military operation. Its goal is to protect people who have been subjected to bullying and genocide by the Kyiv regime for eight years. This is our aim after the demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine...
Volodymyr Zelensky: We are introducing martial law throughout the entire territory of our state. Today, we need calm from each and every one of you. Please stay home as much as possible.



The Doctor changed by the War

The doctor is very young. If you don't know that he has several years of experience working as a surgeon in the Chisinau Center for Maternal and Child Health, you might mistake him for a student. Recently, he became the father of a baby boy for the first time. Amos Sender Ohr - that's the name of the doctor - took paternity leave when the baby arrived, but didn't have time to fully enjoy it. A war broke out in the neighboring country, Ukraine, and a wave of refugees poured into Moldova.

"On February 27, Rabbi Zaltzman[1], called to invite me to the Hay Synagogue," says Amos Sender. "Here I met up with an American doctor, Rabbi Zeev Urman, and his sons, too. With their help, we equipped a first-aid post, installed a medical bed, portable ultrasound machines, and heart monitors with defibrillators. We brought drugs, syringes, everything necessary for blood and urine tests. We are lucky to have this special equipment to get results on the spot".

"And where did all this equipment and these drugs come from?"

"From America and from Israel. Everything was delivered through Romania as the sky over Chisinau was closed"

"How did you do the ultrasound? Surely you need specialists who know how to use the equipment and look at the pictures correctly, and how to decide a diagnosis?".

"We worked with Israeli doctors online using video. And we have equipped a mini-operating room. On the very first day I had to perform an operation to remove an ingrown toenail. The female patient had an abscess before she started her journey and all the time she was traveling Ukraine to here, she had been experiencing the devil of a pain. She couldn't walk! Well, in early March waves of refugees poured in here, and they brought a need for multiple operations with them."

"For example?"

"I have performed several operations on diabetics who have developed gangrene. Refugee journeys from Ukraine to Moldova take several days. If someone started having tissue necrosis before leaving, then the absence of hygienic conditions on the way facilitated its further progress. What should a person who is in Chisinau in transit do? There could be a plane to Israel a day or two later, for example. But then the skies over Moldova are restricted to special flights. Who knows when the

[1] Rabbi Pinchas Zaltzman is the Chief Rabbi of Moldova and Head of Agudat Israel in Moldova,

next one could be? They have to be ready"

"It was therefore impossible to take the patient to the hospital and keep them there for several days. I had to carry out necrotomy, cleaning out dead tissue, there and then. I did the initial treatment and then the patient was taken to the consul, who processed the documents quickly and we evacuated the refugee further. If the evaluation was to Israel, then after the paperwork was completed, the consul arranged which clinic in which city could immediately accept the patient. We had representatives here who dealt with this."

"Did you send people for treatment only to Israel?"

"No, we didn't. There were patients who went to clinics in Austria or Germany - using the same procedure. Basically, those were non-Jewish people who passed through our center. We have helped them and are helping everyone."

"What about the hospitals in Chisinau? Were there any problems when, for instance, you have a patient with serious problems who needs an urgent intervention, but you are told that the Ministry of Health has not yet given permission?"

"Never. Colleagues have always come to the rescue. Always. Somehow, at the beginning there was an arrangement made where the Ministry of Health had already given orders to receive refugees, but the formalities on how to do it were still unclear. We had a retired mother with a seriously ill young son. He was paralyzed and he did not speak and after all the shocks of the road he was experiencing 12 epileptic seizures a day. An ambulance took him to deal with a hypertensive crisis".

"In the evening, there was a call from the emergency hospital. "We have addressed the acute condition and he can be discharged back to you. But I have nowhere to put him! People are sleeping in the prayer hall of the synagogue, and even in the yard! When I explain this to the colleague from the hospital, he says, "Okay. I'll officially discharge him today, but we'll keep him in the hospital. Tomorrow I will transfer him to the rehabilitation department." And so he did".

"Or, for example, there were many people who needed hemodialysis. You know, it is normally done in hospital conditions, but what are the conditions of a refugee? People were brought in in a critical condition. We negotiated with hospitals in Chisinau and urgently sent our patients there. This is what happened many times. We took the patient for hemodialysis to the clinic, and then from there to the consulate for a document check. From there, we returned to the clinic. In the morning the patient again had their hemodialysis, and then in the afternoon we

sent him or her to Israel, to Germany, or wherever else".

"Local colleagues were so involved in the situation; they helped with such an open mind, it's beyond words!"

"And after the departure of the American doctors, did you remain in the center as the boss?"

"Well, I wouldn't put it that way. I was forced to take command. Dr. Zeev was shuttling. For two or three days he was here, then he went to Ukraine, then again a day here and then there again. The rest of the volunteers were medical students. How can you shift the responsibility onto their shoulders?"

"The hardest time was early March, when thousands of people, tens of thousands, came here. We slept a couple of hours a day. I was coming home at 3 a.m, going to bed and rising at 5 a.m, woken by a phone call informing me of the arrival of buses with more refugees. Welcome to a new day!"

"Someone fell ill on the road. Someone was just out of the hospital, but forgot to take the doctor's prescription. Someone got hysterical. All this is so sad and hard..On top of the medical issues, refugees are agitated. Someone is worried about an abandoned apartment. Someone's dacha has been destroyed. Someone is trying to find their lost relatives".

"Imagine a person who is living a normal life, and then it suddenly ends. The person hates being evacuated anywhere. He or she will have some business scheduled for tomorrow, an operation, for instance. But the neighbor's house was blown up, so they have to flee in order to survive. People come to our center not out of desire, but to save life - their own and those of their loved ones. My minor at university was in clinical psychology. It came in very handy - to calm people down, return them to their normal state".

"The newspaper *Vesty Israel* wrote that here, in the Hay Synagogue, you circumcised one of the refugees?"

"I did", the doctor smiles. "A young Jewish man from Ukraine came for further evacuation to Israel. And while he was waiting for the consular check, he expressed a desire to be circumcised. I received permission from the Rabbi, and performed the ceremony. Right here, in the refugee center. All antiseptic rules were observed, everything was performed as during a normal operation. The boy took a Jewish name and moved on."

"Do you have the right to perform such operations?"

“Yes, I do. I did an internship in Israel as a mohel[2], the person who does circumcision. I know Halacha[3], the set of laws that transforms you from an ordinary surgeon into a mohel. That was not the first time I have performed such a ceremony.”

“Did you discover anything special during these days?”

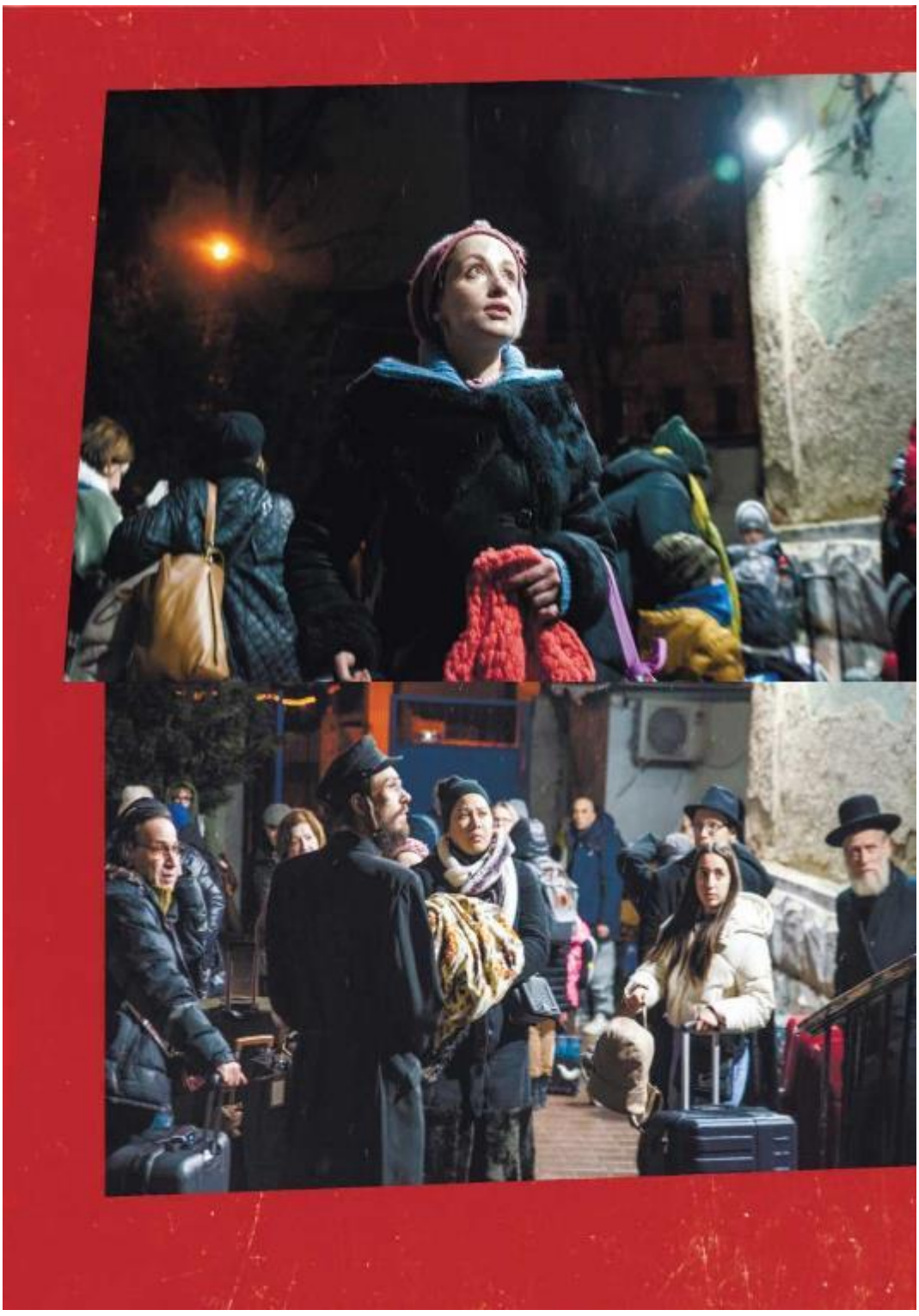
“A good question. I realized that in an extreme situation a person gets a second wind, a flow of inexhaustible energy. It happens when you give something to others - experience, knowledge, compassion. In ordinary life, something seems unbearable and it looks like you cannot cope with it. But necessity is the mother of ability”.

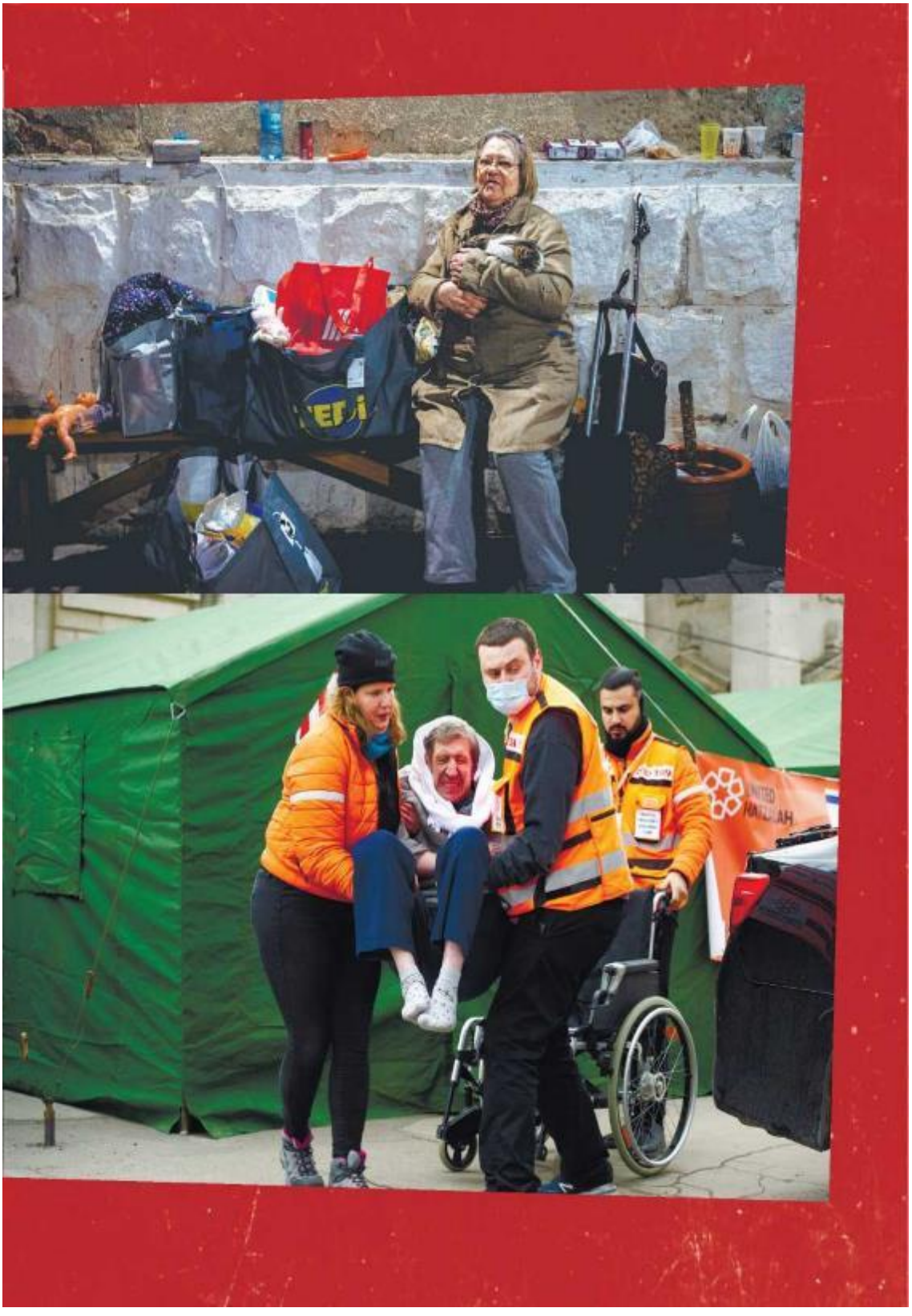
“What have you discovered in yourself?”

“That I can be tough. In the crowd here, amidst the hustle and bustle, sometimes I have to raise my voice, to demonstrate authority. The psyche of people is broken and they behave in different ways to the way they would under other circumstances. Somebody becomes depressed and whiny. Somebody is rude and arrogant. Somebody believes they are being bypassed in everything and starts demanding impossible things. All this takes place simultaneously. Meantime people need to be received and registered. Sometimes, someone needs to be immediately provided with emergency assistance. Yes, I have had to shout at someone, refuse someone who rushed to the office with a scratched finger, when I was doing a cardiogram”.

“Then, when the main wave of refugees subsided and there was time to relax a little, I analyzed my actions and thought that I had not been like that before. In the hospital, after all, the classic situation is mostly polite patients seeing a white coat and accepting a kind of subordination. But here everything is different. And I’m different. The war has changed me”.

[2] Mohel - a person who performs ritual Jewish circumcisions
[3] Halacha - Jewish law and jurisprudence, based on the Talmud.





It was Real Hell

Elena from Kharkiv, speech therapist, 40.
Practically all of our neighbors left in the very first days of the war. On the 12th floor it was just us, the tenants in the apartment above us, and one lonely man. He seemed to be going crazy. We saw him on the day of our departure: he shouted something, made faces, laughed - behaved inappropriately. He had never been like that before.
I didn't want to flee - I'm not timid. Why should I leave my city, abandon my home? I didn't change my mind on February 25th, when a rocket hit a luxurious mansion next to our apartment block. Because of the explosion, a line of garages caught fire, with all of this happening before our eyes. Then it got scarier.
Our district, Severnaya Saltovka, turned into a dead zone. In other parts of the city, transport somehow circulated, some things functioned, but where we were - nothing, from the first day.
Already on February 24th, the nearest small grocery stores closed. There was a huge line in the neighboring supermarket, the shelves were emptied as soon as the place opened. At noon it closed altogether, and the next day - for good. Chain supermarkets were 30-35 minutes away. Each shopping trip was under mortal threat. Besides, there was almost no food there. Once I managed to buy 5 broken eggs (there were no others), a bag of pearl barley, Chinese cabbage, and a couple of cucumbers. Another time, when my son went for food, he managed to buy supplies for only three days. Before the war, the money spent on that shopping would have been enough for a week's sustenance. Prices had skyrocketed!
To be honest, I didn't even feel like eating due to the stress. We pitied our animals - we had three dogs and five cats. I had to cut back on their diet drastically.

There were a lot of problems with them. The pets went literally crazy when sirens and explosions started. Dogs needed to be walked at least twice a day, but what if we couldn't get outside? They are intelligent dogs - they endure, but they cannot do their business indoors. I began to pretend that we were going for a walk, to put on collars with leashes, and lead them as far as the exit from the house. Dog excrement wouldn't worsen the garbage scattered around, burnt window frames, countless glass fragments - all of the windows had been shattered by explosions! So, I walked them a few floors down, then a few up.
On March 28th, bombing from aircraft began. Oh yes, bombing of residential areas, not military installations. In front of my eyes, in the fourth staircase, several

floors were destroyed. Just walking with the dogs along the porch, I heard a noise and looked through one of the holes in the wall. In the space where a window used to be, I saw a falling shell breaking through the roof of the house, then frames, glass, stones flying in the air ... As I was standing on broken glass, down I dropped onto it. Strange as it may seem, there was not a scratch on my body. After a while, I was able to stand up, and what did I see? In the fourth entrance, half of the apartments were gone as if they had never existed. Smoke was pouring out, camouflaging the destruction.

A huge wave of rage surged in me! If I were a man, I would be at the frontlines now! With my bare hands, I would tear to pieces those bastards who warped our lives!

We went on living in our apartment for a couple more days. The bombings would begin out of the blue: everything was quiet, and in a second - ba-baah! No matter where we were, my son and I landed on the floor. Once I was going to the kitchen to put the kettle on, and I had just managed to fill it up, as the bombing started! In a moment, I was on the floor, crawling to the door of the apartment, to the stairwell, when I saw my son crawling from the room in the same direction.

Soon a cluster bomb flew from an airplane into our staircase. If it were a rocket bomb, we would no longer be in this world. That one broke through the roof, went through an apartment on the 11th floor, and got stuck above us, on the 10th. A blood curdling scream broke out as there were still people in that apartment. I was delirious, couldn't rise and go up to the floor above to see what was happening there. I was lying and looking at a concrete wall of the house. A crack ran along it. I thought, if at that moment the wall did not fall on us, then we would leave.

It didn't. However, there were three hellish days of continuous bombing between the decision to leave and the departure. When internet connection appeared in fits and starts, I was on social networks. Until my life's end, I will be grateful to strangers who sent money to my card. Without their help we wouldn't have got out. From everywhere they made transfers - from Ukraine, from Russia itself, from the USA, from Brazil. I was looking for transport. No one - neither volunteers, nor taxi drivers - wanted to come to our neighborhood. No wonder, it could turn out to be a one-way trip.

Finally, I found a daredevil who was ready to take us along with our animals to Chernivtsi - I figured to go there. On the expected day of departure, he asked to wire money onto his card for gasoline. Then he asked for more, for food. And then he disappeared! He stopped getting in touch and, of course, he didn't come for us. Still I managed to find another taxi driver who picked us up from home and drove

to the railway station. This trip cost about the same as a week's vacation at the sea in peacetime. Of course, we didn't bargain.

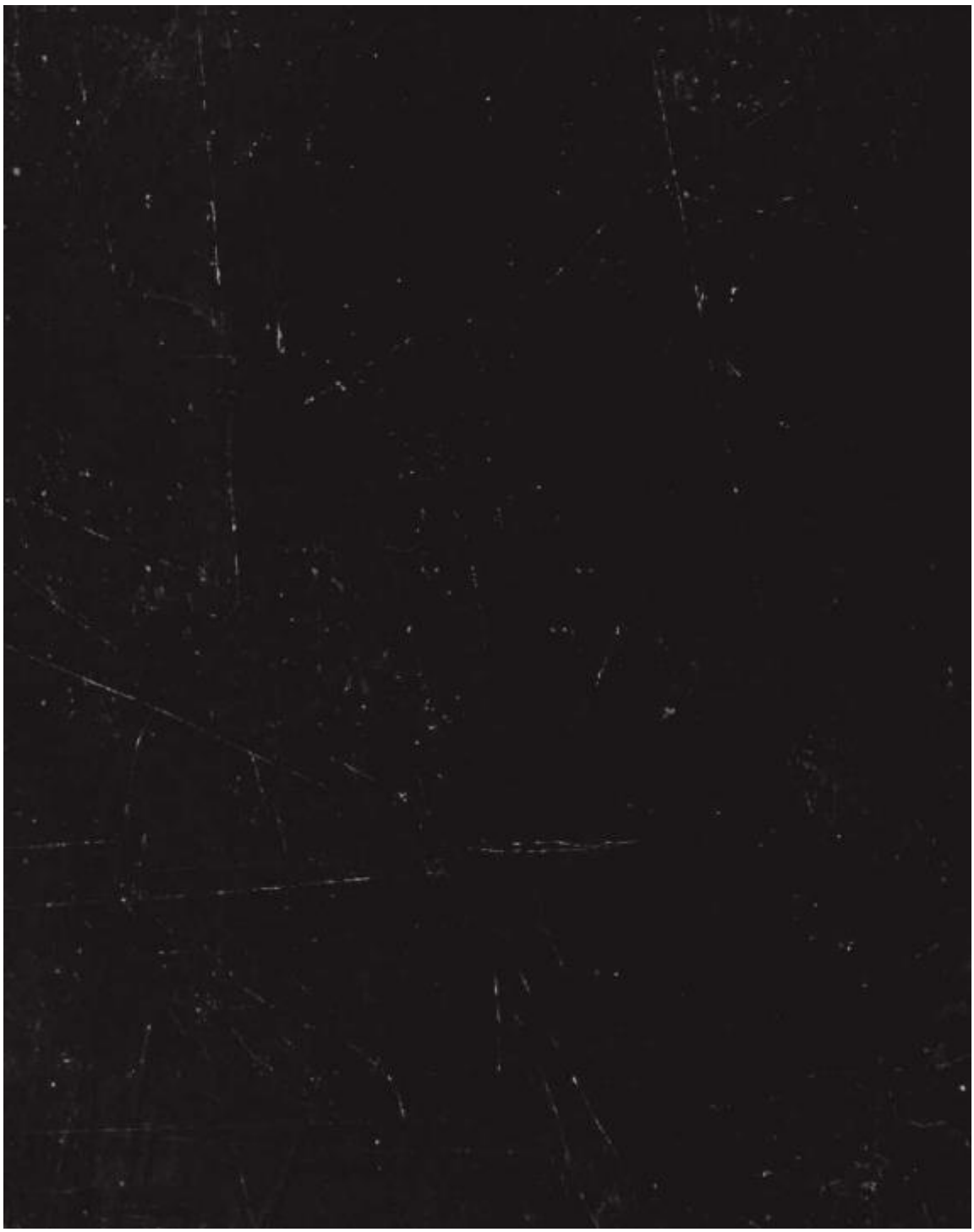
We found total pandemonium at the station, a crush on the platforms. To get on the train to Poland was to go through a meat grinder. Some were lucky to take a seat or settle on the floor in the aisle, but many stood on tiptoes the entire way. They didn't let us board two trains as we were with animals. We had to spend two nights at the subway station, with hundreds of people crowding underground. Volunteers distributed food - loaves of bread and tea. We shared the bread with our pets, soaking it in water for them.

At some point a woman came up to me and asked where we were going with cats and dogs. "To Chernivtsi," I replied. "Are you out of your mind?" she screamed. "It will be bombed in two weeks!" Then - no! I won't survive another bombing and evacuation. I recalled that someone on Facebook invited us to Moldova, I didn't remember who. Another woman gave me a link to the people who dealt with refugees in Chisinau - a city that I didn't know much about and had never considered as a place of residence. I decided that we would go through Odessa to the border with Moldova, come what may.

There were fewer people on the trains to Odessa. They took us with the animals. We even managed to get seats. Volunteers handed out small food rations. The train moved slowly, just crawled. I don't know how many hours it took. I was in a daze. I only remember that we walked 12 kilometers to the border along the line of cars. By that time, somebody had sent me the Chisinau address of the people who were ready to shelter us for a while upon arrival.

The Moldovan border guards welcomed us. Passing the control, we immediately saw a taxi. The driver asked for a huge sum, but we didn't bargain, as we hadn't in Kharkiv. Later I was told that we shouldn't have rushed. At the border there were many volunteers with cars who transported refugees for free. So what? We didn't cry over spilt milk!

This is how we ended up in Chisinau. We are renting an apartment, and I have a job. Sometimes we get in touch with two of my friends who remained in Kharkiv. With several other acquaintances who stayed there, we have no connection - I don't know why. I don't want to think bad thoughts.



Chapter 2

The First Civilian Victims

FEBRUARY 28

At least 102 civilians, including seven children, were killed in the past five days, according to the UN, but the numbers could be much higher, said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet.

President Putin ordered the Russian deterrence forces to be put on special alert. These forces include, among other things, nuclear weapons.

Enough that Adults are Fighting

“The first refugee children from Kyiv were brought to us in the first days of the war”, Alina Shishkina, Deputy Director of the Chisinau Theater Lyceum recalled. “There were three of them - 15-year-old Vera and her brothers - 12-year-old Ostap and 7-year-old Askold. The youngest coped best with the sudden change in his life: for him, a forced flight from home was just an exciting adventure. He liked everything about our school. He particularly loved the drama lessons. During the short time that he stayed with us, he managed to get a role in a play, winning applause from the audience, which he was very proud of.

For the two older children it was more complicated. Ostap, a 6th grader, found his new classmates too noisy and the teachers too strict. Vera was embarrassed to go to the canteen for free lunches. Other girls seemed to be whispering behind her back, discussing her, although in fact the children treated her and her situation with understanding, trying to surround her with care, cheer her up, and involve her in their company.

Teenagers are suspicious by definition; it seems to them that the whole world is watching them and how they behave. Besides, everything is absolutely new - the country, culture, language, organizations ... There is no familiar environment, beloved toys, favorite pajamas and slippers ... Even adults need time to fill in these gaps, let alone teenagers.

In the second or third week of the war, Ukrainian schools began online classes. Vera took time off from our classes and went to the library, where she communicated with Kyiv teachers and classmates via Zoom. To be honest, I don’t know whether this is a good or bad thing, because the children exchange updates, and often this is very sad. Later Vera shared with me the latest news about her friends. I heard about a classmate whose family remained in Kyiv because of her father’s restaurant. At some point this restaurant was bombed, and the family were left with no livelihood.

Another friend was stuck besieged in Slavutych. The girl was hiding in bomb shelters, without light, food and water. Her happiest day was when “foreign food

was suddenly brought into the city". All this information upset Vera, as well as her classmates, I'm sure. It's like rubbing salt into the wounds. I don't know how to protect children from this negative flow of news nowadays and whether it's even possible.

We now have Ukrainian children in almost every class. Some have been studying for over a month. Some attend the Lyceum for a week or two, then disappear. Most children go on with their parents to other countries.

There was the case with a child who was brought to study at our school, and after a couple of days he was transferred to a Lyceum which offered lessons in Ukrainian (there is one in our city). As the mother stated, for her it is a matter of principle that her child will not learn "the damned Russian language". Another teenage girl attends all our classes, except for the Russian language and literature ones. She explained that her mother forbade it, although I am not sure if that is true. The girl's mother and grandmother remained in Ukraine. She fled to Moldova on her own to her father, without any documents, just a photo of her birth certificate on her phone.

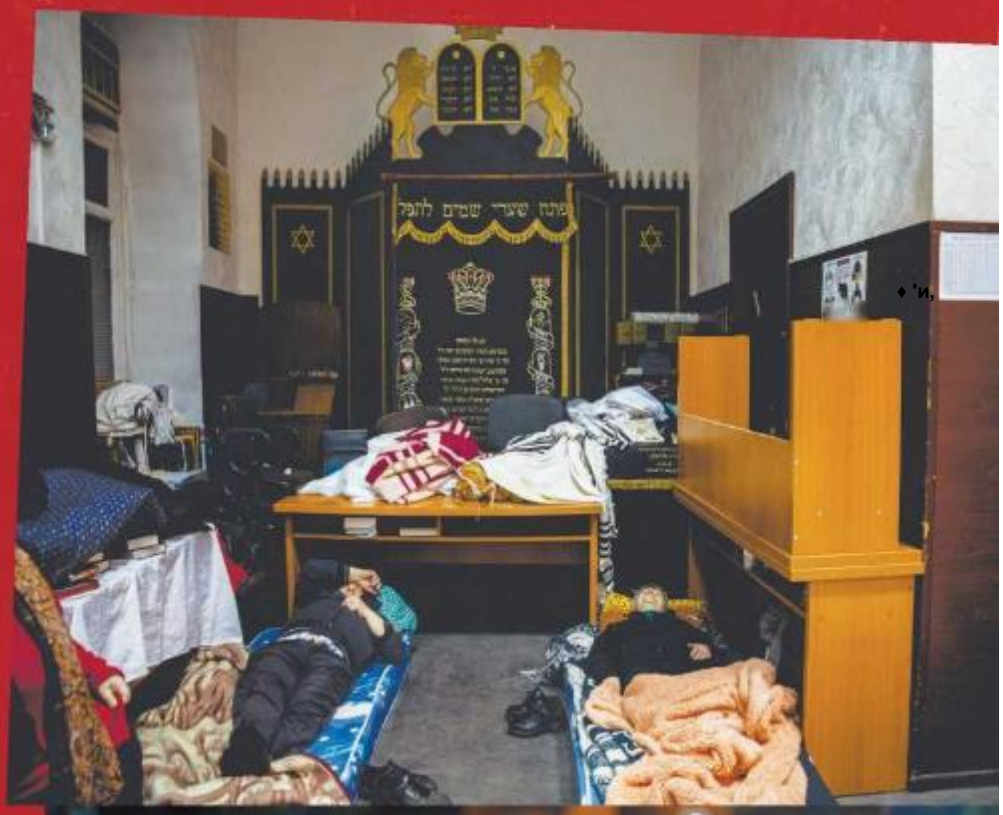
Both teachers and classmates try not to ask the children too much about their experiences. We try to address their pain by helping a child switch back to a normal and peaceful life. Our children are instructed not to bring up the topic of war in conversations. Firstly, so that the newcomers don't have to recount the horrors and hardships that they have had to endure. Secondly, our society is diverse, different families have different views on who is right and who is wrong in the armed conflict. We don't know what children hear in their homes. We only know that if we allow discussions on this topic, it will not lead to any good. It is enough that the adults are fighting.

Teachers, certainly, do not raise the topic of war either. They try to treat new kids exactly like the others, not drawing attention to them. Of course, we make concessions. Well, how can we expect these children to have any knowledge of the Romanian language or grammar having never studied it? How can one insist on speaking Russian correctly if a child comes from a Ukrainian family and went to a Ukrainian school? But in fact, these concessions are minimal.

I have already said that in our Lyceum, besides general education subjects, we teach drama and theater studies. Each class has a drama teacher. Despite the fact that at the moment everyone is under pressure - examination performances are taking place - our drama teachers are trying to find at least tiny roles for beginners. If there is no such role in the play, it is invented.

Joint creativity is a huge psychological support - it is invaluable! Well, the truth is

that beauty will save the world! I sincerely believe that art heals, that it is a balm for wounded children's souls. However, I have never imagined I would live to see this in our Lyceum. Never!"


פתח שערי שמים לחפל

What to Do with the Grief You are Saturated With?

At 10 a.m. on February 24, the Director of the Chisinau branch of Hillel, the largest international Jewish youth organization, Daria Bobok arrived at the volunteer headquarters of the Hay Synagogue and has been there ever since. Together with other Hillel volunteers, she helps in receiving and settling refugees, filtering kilometers of tragic stories and human troubles through her soul . Though we met on the 62nd day of the war, Daria recalled a story from the 2nd day, saying it still gave her goosebumps:

It was on the night of February 25. A mother came from Odessa with five children. The youngest, a one-year-old, was sleeping in the mother's arms. Three older children looked exhausted; they were silent, not fully understanding what was happening. The eldest, a 5-year-old daughter, kept pulling her mother's skirt: "Mom, why is daddy not with us? He's coming tomorrow, right? Mom, where will he sleep? Are there enough beds in the hotel?" Mom turned away. "He will come, of course, he will. Yes, enough beds. Don't pull me hard, dear!" But the girl wouldn't give up: "Call him, tell him that I left my doll. Let him take it with him. He went back for things, right? "Oh yes, for things," mother nodded.

How do you explain to a 5-year-old child that daddy won't come, that perhaps she will never see him again? The Ukrainian guards didn't let him cross the border. Literally a couple of hours before they approached the checkpoint, a decree was issued in Ukraine prohibiting men of military age from leaving the country. The girl's father and about 20 other men were deployed at the border and sent back.

Yes, it is a sad story...one of many. There are others about those who managed to escape from Ukraine, so to say, by secret paths. Let's change the subject. You said the children who arrived on the first night didn't really understand what was going on. Do those who are coming now understand it better?

Oh, yes. Some teenagers, starting at around 13 years old, are the most embittered and closed off. They are like hedgehogs sticking out their spines. Many get offended when we begin by speaking Russian to them: "Не бажаю розмовляти

щею мовою, говоргть украшською - I don't want to speak this language, speak Ukrainian." When refugee children were brought to classes at the Manger Library, some were indignant: no Ukrainian literature! We had to explain that it is a Jewish library. There are books in Hebrew, Romanian and Russian - the languages used in Moldova.

In fact, we must chat with these children for a long time and very kindly, so that the "hedgehogs" put away their "spines" and open up.

Is it easier with adults?

In a way. The first refugees were mostly deeply confused. Many fled the country without money, necessary documents, or warm clothes. Now some newcomers are in extreme emotional distress, unable to understand and accept what is happening. They weep and cry, have fits of hysteria, kick up a row, demand the impossible. It takes two to three days for them to recover.

Currently the majority are calm and focused. People depart their homes with a plan for further action, with the required documents and essential items. I am not necessarily talking about such hot spots as Mariupol, for example, where residents, if they managed to get out, ran out just as they were. I'm talking about the cities of Ukraine where it is relatively quiet today - Kyiv, Odessa...

It is clear what you were doing in the first days and weeks of the war - settling people, purchasing food, providing medicines, etc. What are you doing now when incoming refugees are fewer?

The same. Only, unlike in the first month, now everything is more or less organized. We receive the information on when and how many people will arrive in advance, we know how and where to accommodate them, we have learned how to properly organize meals. There is a whole range of services that we can offer them, including arranging further travel abroad.

I know that since the first days you have helped people to go further - to Israel, to Europe...

We continue doing it. Those who - for one reason or another - cannot or do not want to repatriate to Israel and do not want to stay here are referred to other countries. For example, yesterday a mother and daughter were sent to Austria. They lived in Belaya Tserkov[4]. The father, a halachic Jew[5], remained in Ukraine.

[4] A city in the Kyiv region

[5] Jewish through his mother's line

He could not confirm his Jewishness as no necessary documents had been preserved. So, his daughter couldn't repatriate to Israel. His wife and daughter arrived in Chisinau and did not know what to do. They didn't want to stay here and, in the end, we managed to send them to the West.

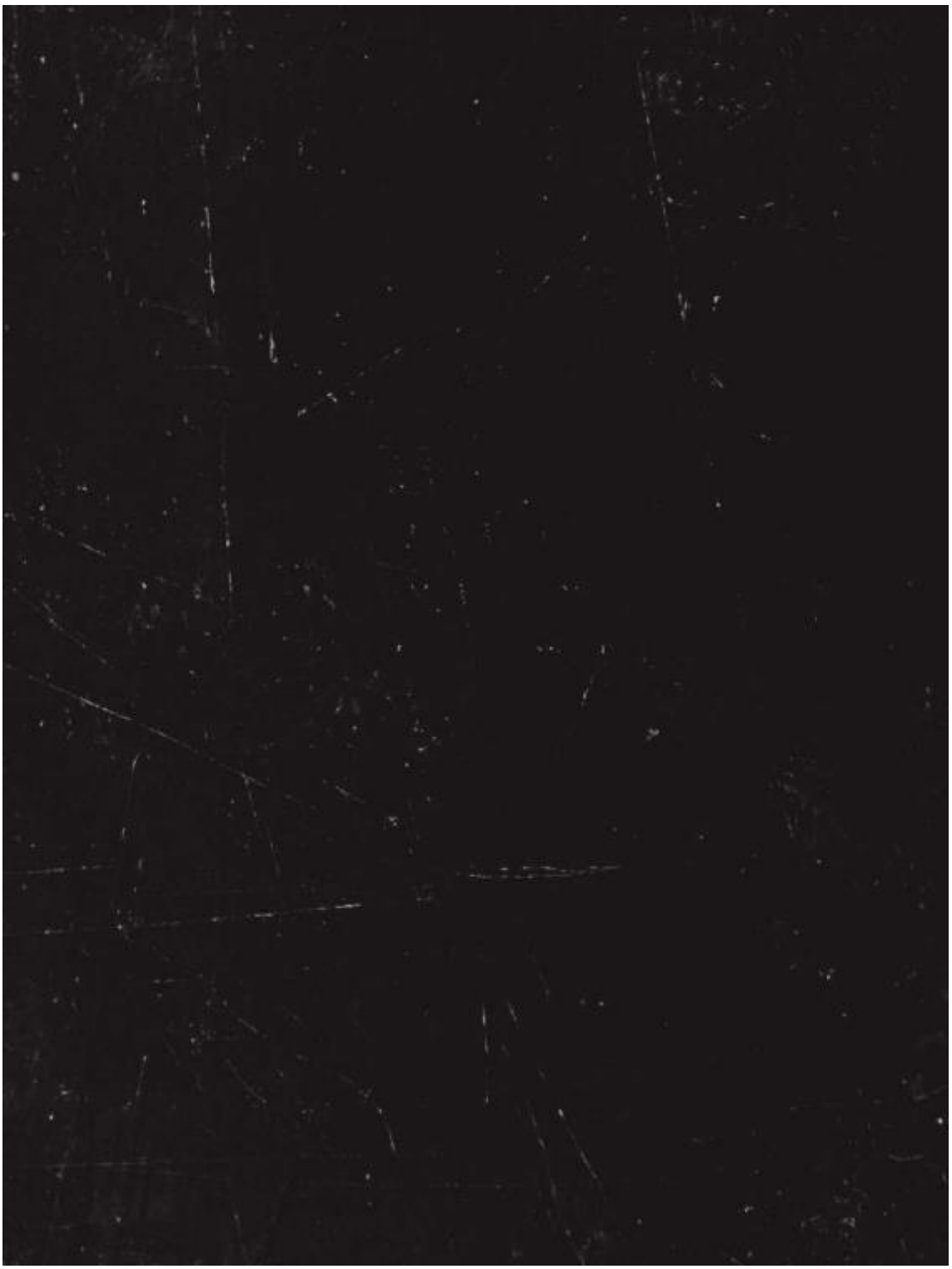
How?

It all started when we made an acquaintance with an Austrian couple that visited the Hay Synagogue. The woman was Jewish, her grandmother had been a victim of the Holocaust. Her husband worked in an Austrian crisis center here in Moldova. They informed us that Austria had allocated a quota for Ukrainian refugees - 2000 places, and they could help us refer some people there from our end. They put us in touch with the Austrian Embassy in Moldova and we had the opportunity to send people to Austria and Germany.

You have been doing this work for over two months. It's very hard psychologically. How do you cope with it yourself?

Well, it's a little easier now. The most difficult were the first two weeks, when we were deluged with people. The human flow seemed to never end. During the day, you hold the fort because you have to, but you come - or rather, crawl - home in the evening, and there it gets you. The mind switches off, giving space to emotions. You don't know what to do with the grief you are saturated with.

Now you come to understand that your work, your time, and all of your deeds are connected to a bigger goal, even though it sounds pathetic. You provide security for people in need. This is what keeps you afloat.



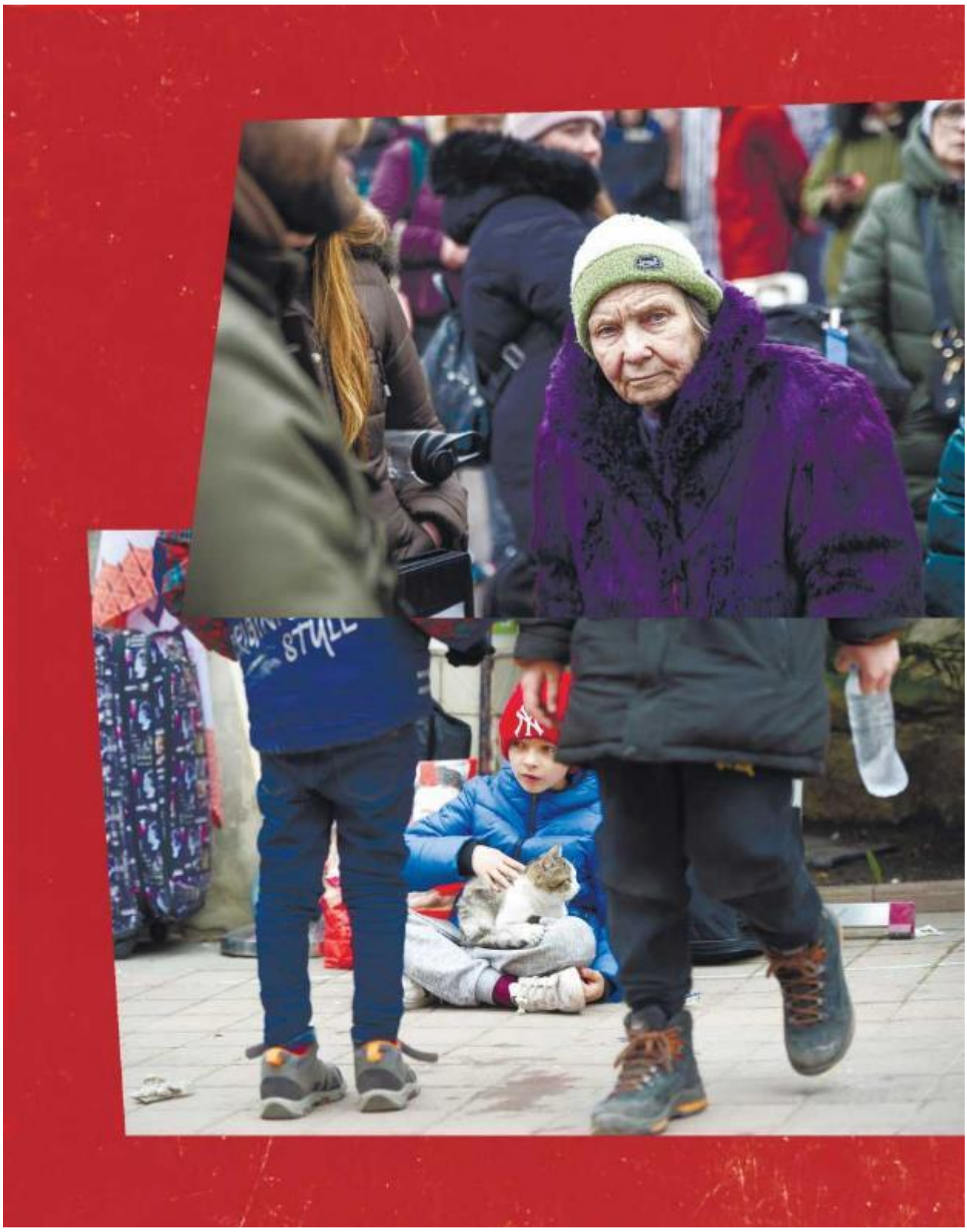
Chapter 3

Losing All but Memory

MARCH 2

"We strongly reject the Russian government's cynical abuse of the term genocide, the memory of World War II and the Holocaust, and the equating of the Ukrainian state with the Nazi regime to justify its unprovoked aggression. This rhetoric is factually wrong, morally repugnant and deeply offensive to the memory of millions of victims of Nazism and those who courageously fought against it, including Russian and Ukrainian soldiers of the Red Army."

From the Statement by Scholars of Genocide, Nazism and World War II



Remember Us Sometimes

I didn't even have time to get dressed. I remained in my nightgown, Lyosha just put a coat on my shoulders. He carried me down the stairs in his arms, like a bride. Inna fell silent. She has no more tears to cry.

They are both disabled. Inna is without both legs. Her son, thirty-three year old Alexey, has only one kidney. As a result, he was excused from compulsory military service and never served in the army. However, on the first days of the war, together with other volunteers, he went to the checkpoint to stop cars entering the area and check if they had weapons. It was not something he let his mother know of - there was too much grief around.

As the war progressed, air raid sirens sounded more and more often, the news on the television became more and more tragic and there was less and less food in the stores. A curfew was introduced in Kyiv. Alexey understood that they needed to be evacuated, or at least his mother did, but where to? To her daughter in the US? How could it be done in her state of health? He racked his brain, but could not find a way.

The solution came suddenly and unexpectedly in a telephone call from a friend of his called Sasha. He had decided to leave and was ready and willing to take Alexey and Inna with him. "Right now, hurry up! It's now or never".

It was then that Alexey carried his mother out of the apartment in his arms, like a bride.

Sasha was already waiting in the car. His mother was sitting next to him, clutching a heavily stuffed bag.

"They were taking out money, a lot of money", Inna explained, "Only later did we realize this, and that they were simply taking advantage of us. My disability was a cover for them".

Inna had a very hard time enduring the road. Traffic jams stretched for miles. To go around them in the oncoming lane, Alexey stuck his mother's prosthesis out of the window - to indicate that they are transporting a disabed person who is unable to walk. The second prosthesis was visibly attached in front of the windshield. When the police stopped the car, the travelers pointed to the legless woman in the back seat, and the car was let through without any checks. Thus, by the evening,

they managed to get to the Ukrainian village near the Moldovan border where Sasha's mother owned a house. That was the end of the journey for Alexey and his mother - the end of friendship for those who had no further use.

It was then that Alexey realized that their purpose was fulfilled. They were not welcome in the house. Inna was now, suddenly, considered a burden. Alexey decided not to abuse the 'hospitality'. They needed to reach Moldova as soon as possible and then plan where to go next - perhaps to Israel, or to his sister in the USA.

The next morning, Sasha took Inna and Alexey to the frontier post. After a long wait standing in line with his mother in a wheelchair, Alexey handed their passports to the officer. The latter looked at them with disgust and threw the documents in Alexey's face.

"Don't you know that men under 60 are not allowed to leave the country? Smart aleck, yeah, hiding behind your mother? Go fight! Next!"

Alexey was confused

"But I have a white ticket."[6]

"A white ticket! How much did you pay for it? I know your kind. Save your skin and let others fight for you, yeah?"

Alexey felt his temper rising.

"I'm saving my skin, REMF[7]? You bastards charge 8,000 bucks to let healthy men leave the country thinking no one knows? It's an open secret! If you don't let me out, at least let her out!"

In desperation, Alexey pushed the wheelchair with his mother forward, but the border guard blocked the passage, and the wheelchair rolled back. Alexey could hardly hold it. Inna was crying.

Alexey was shaking, literally ready to kill. But then suddenly it was as if a switch was flipped and the man in the uniform spoke politely.

"Young man, tomorrow morning report with all your documents to the local military registration and enlistment office. Do you have a place to spend the night?"

Stunned by such a sudden metamorphosis, Alexey looked around. He discovered that some Canadian journalists stood behind them with a camera, filming the whole scandal.

The following morning they started completing the required papers. They went to

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[6] A white ticket is a document exempting a man from military service.

[7] REMF - slang meaning Rear-echelon motherfucker; a soldier far from the front line, especially during the Vietnam War.

the military registration and enlistment office, and then on to the clinic to confirm his disability. More documents, which had been left at home, were required. Thanks to neighbors who had been given the keys to their apartment, they were forwarded.

The process seemed never ending. They had to stay at Sasha's mother's place whilst they waited. One late evening, Inna's stress led to a hypertensive crisis. Alexey wanted to call an ambulance, but the mistress of the house would not allow it.

"God forbid something happens to your mother, I don't need corpses here! Take her to the hospital yourself or go to a care home. They are now open 24/7."

"Over my dead body will my mother go to a care home. She will always be by my side!"

"So, you can get a job there as a nurse. There will be a roof over your head, and you will be given food. You have enough skill to help the disabled."

The hostess wanted to add something else, but, looking over at Alexey, she broke off, and muttered angrily through her teeth:

"Get out together right now". she finished. "Wherever you want to go, it's none of my business."

Sasha was embarrassed by his mother's behavior, but did not argue with her. He ran to see some neighbors and asked them to offer shelter for Alexey and Inna for the night. The refugees were offered a huge room with a fireplace, however it had not been stoked for years. Alexey did his best to warm the room, at least taking the chill off the room. When it got warmer, he fell asleep, exhausted. In the morning, the owners of the house brought them breakfast.

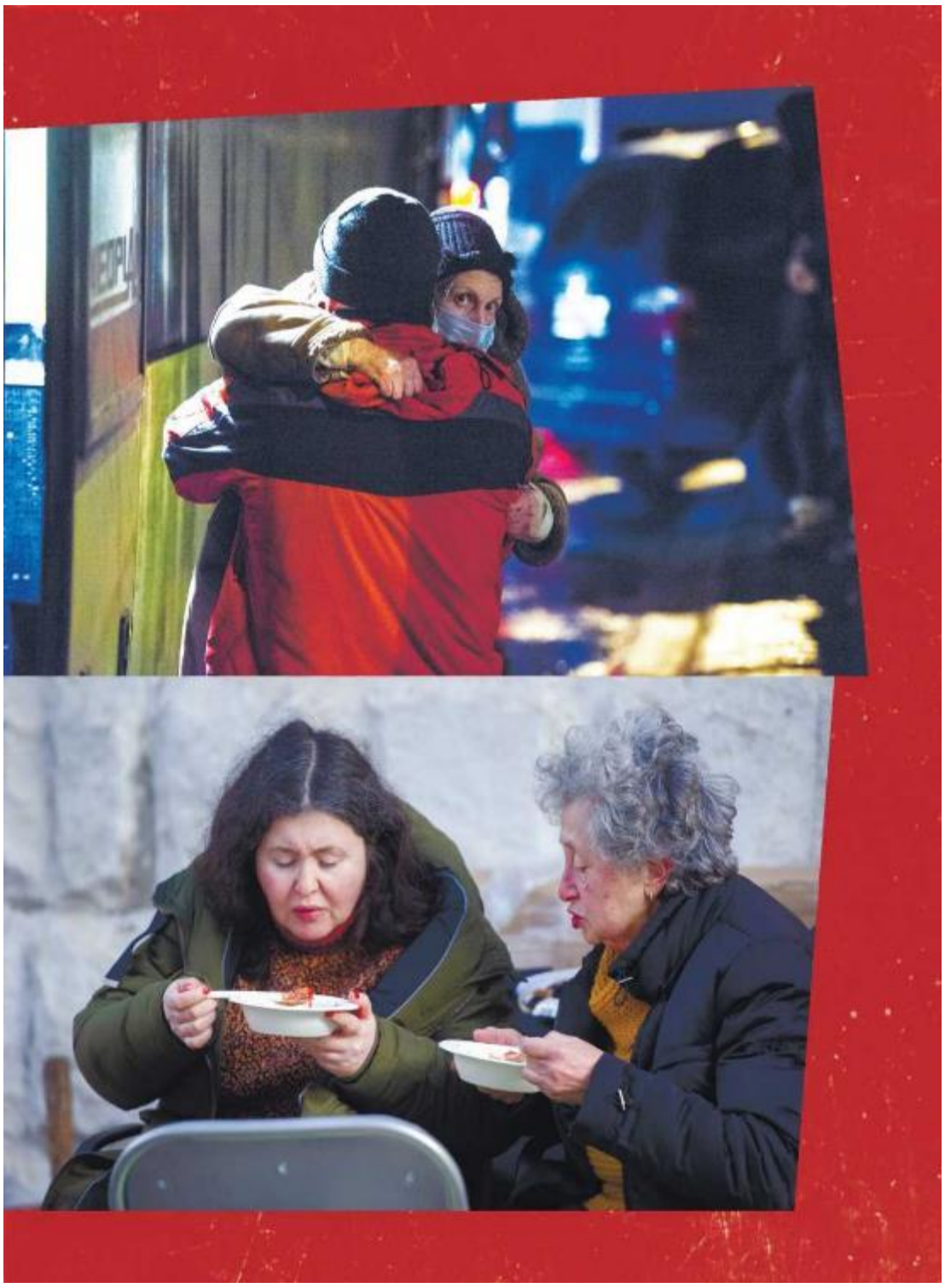
"I will pray for these people to my dying day". Inna joins in the conversation. "They have a big problem of their own. Their mother has been paralyzed for nine years after a stroke. Still, they allowed us into their home and treated us like family."

Alexey continues:

"I sat next to Aunt Natasha, talking to her for hours. She was crying and I wiped her nose. I felt no aversion, not at all. Aunt Natasha's parents had saved three Jewish families during World War II. They hid them under the barn in the yard. They then destroyed the barn at night, throwing hay all over the place. It never occurred to anyone that people were hidden there and every member of the

families survived."
He doesn't try to hold back his tears.
"That's fate. During one war the parents saved Jews, during another their daughter did the same".

In the meantime, Alexey's sister in the United States had raised the alarm, making calls to every organization she could. Alexey got a call "from some Jewish organization, I don't even know the name".
A young woman said: "A person has flown out especially to meet you. Tomorrow he will be in Chisinau. He will come and pick you up."
The next day, they found that a car with a doctor and a nurse was waiting for them at the Moldovan border when they arrived.
"We went to Chisinau like kings", Inna laughs, "And we got here!"
Now they are living in a local yeshiva, whose classrooms have been equipped as rooms for accommodating refugees. Alexey is busy transferring his mother from the bed to the wheelchair.
"We're going to the coolest salon to have a haircut. It's Mom's birthday today". He points to a huge bouquet of roses on the bedside table. This is how we live now.
"What's next?"
"Israel. We are waiting here for the results of the consular check to be completed. As soon as the documents are ready, we will leave. We won't return to Kyiv. I gave up my apartment there. I called the neighbors with whom I had left the keys. I said, "It's time for you and your three children to stop roaming around renting apartments and wasting money. Go into ours and live. Take advantage of everything that's there. We don't need any money from you. Live, rejoice, and remember us sometimes."



I don’t Know Where I’ll End Up Tomorrow

Everyone knows her in Kharkiv where she was born and raised. With her two higher education degrees - in music and in law - she became an influential and successful lawyer. She took up and won the most complex cases, ranging from first level domestic courts to the European Court of Human Rights. She participated in international symposiums and conferences, had publications in respected periodicals and shone at diplomatic receptions. A high achiever who is respected and recognised. Even now, at 77, she remains active, maintaining an amazing clarity of mind and liveliness of speech. Even now, at 77, despite illness and disability, including several episodes of heart surgery, Lyudmyla remains a beautiful woman with a straight posture and a charming smile.

She lived in the very center of Kharkiv, on the sixth floor of a prestigious Stalinka[8] together with her dog - her friend, companion, and family member. On February 24, she woke up to the sound of explosions. The house was shaking as if in an earthquake. The windows were vibrating and the half-blind Spitz was rushing around the room and barking in a frenzy. This is how the war began.

And then Lyudmyla lost track of days. She knew that each day could be the last one of her life. The air raid warning howled over the city several times a day. When it did, she had to go down to the elevator shaft - the safest place in the house. She gathered and waited along with other frightened people, listening intently to what was happening outside, exchanging information and rumors. And then when it was over they dispersed. And this happened 5 or 6 times a day.

It was scary to stay in the house, especially when the lights went out.

It was no less frightening to get outside, and the shortages had started. Drugs disappeared from pharmacies. Hundreds of people lined up around grocery stores. There was a lack of potable water. The news grew more disturbing every day. First the Russians blew up the Opera House, in the basement of which adults and children were hiding at that time. A shell hit a school building. High-rise buildings on the outskirts were under intense fire. The toll of civilian casualties continued to mount.

[8] Stalinka are multi-storied buildings erected in the Stalin era

Suddenly, when it seemed that her heart could no longer withstand such stress, Lyudmyla received a call from the local synagogue. A humanitarian corridor had been opened, and there was one seat available on a bus going to Moldova. Departure would be in 45 minutes. The bus was waiting.

Lyudmyla started rushing around. How to be ready in time? What should she take? What to do with the dog?

She grabbed Spitz, found her key documents and chose some possessions and threw them into two bags. She ran downstairs and stopped in indecision. There was only 15 minutes until the departure of the bus. There was surely no way to make it.

"But the Almighty helped me," Lyudmyla is sure.

A man appeared out of the blue. She did not know him, although she had occasionally seen him on the street, walking his dog.

"Give me your Pomeranian. I live in a house on the ground floor. He will soon get used to us and will be fine", suggested the stranger. "And take a seat, I will give you a lift to the bus". He opened the car door, "Don't worry, we'll make it."

Saying goodbye, Lyudmyla entrusted him with her dog and handed him the keys to the apartment, explaining where to find food and when to pay the utilities.

The bus traveled for two days. The journey was difficult. They moved carefully along country roads and often stopped and stood for a long time, because, as Lyudmyla believes, there had been shelling nearby. Progress was slow and cautious.

"We were dropped off at the Ukrainian border and then went ahead on foot. No one met us, and our escape was not organized. We walked along together, part of a bigger crowd, and the main thing was not to lose sight of our group. I felt lousy and struggled to drag my two bags along. I was scared to death to fall behind. What would I do alone? But again, the Almighty saved me. I must have done something right in this life."

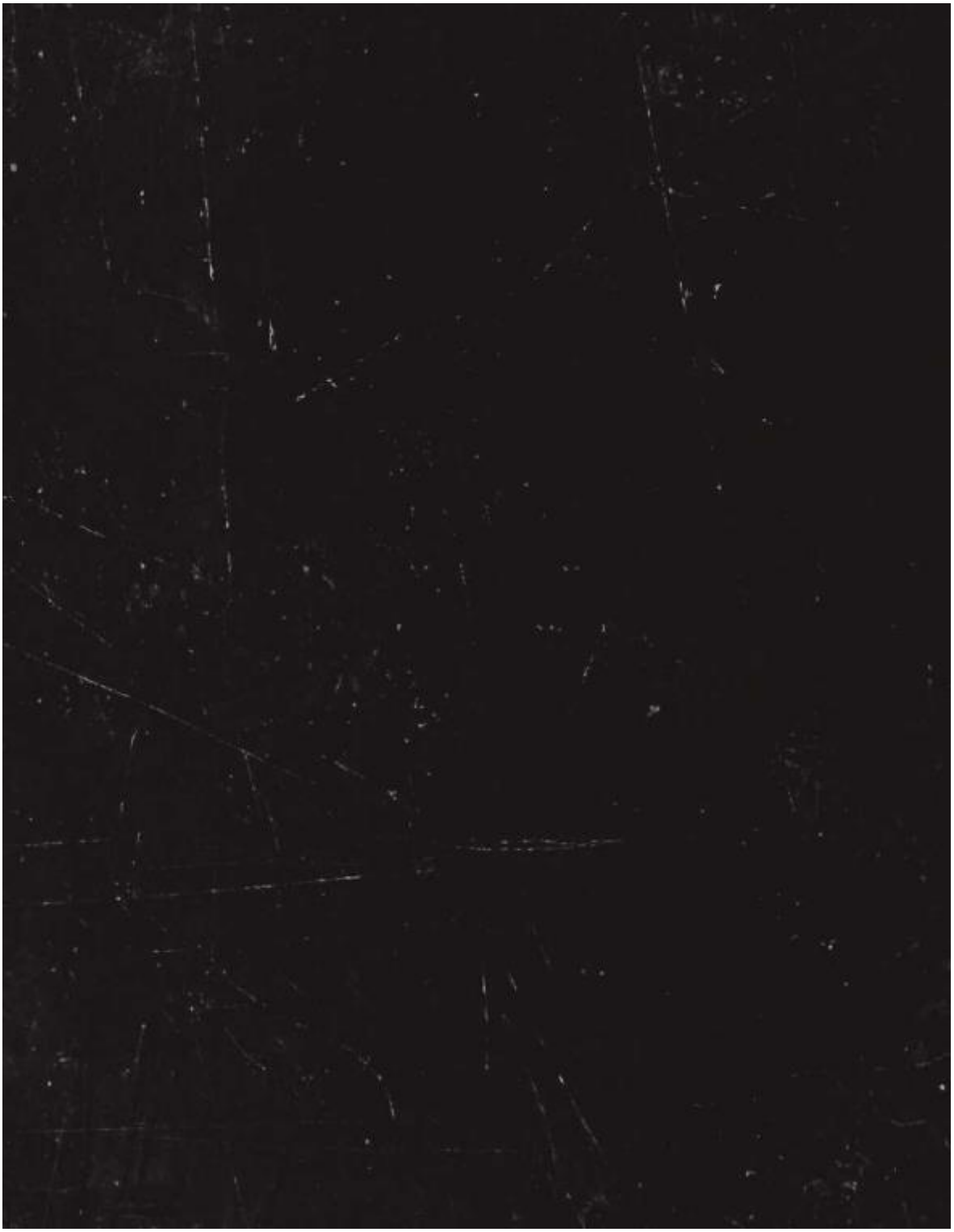
Just as her strength seemed to have been completely exhausted, an unfamiliar young woman approached Lyudmyla and picked up her bags, calling her by her first name and patronymic.

"You know me?" Lyudmyla was surprised.

"Certainly. I'm from Kharkiv too. I was in class at school with your grandson. You came to our school to give a lecture. We wanted you to stay with us instead of

the class teacher whom we couldn't stand!".
The young woman helped Lyudmyla to reach the Moldovan border, and helped her through the checks and formalities. She made sure she got on the bus, which took her to Chisinau.
Lyudmyla was more fortunate than many other refugees. When she got to the Hay synagogue, there were still free rooms available. She was able to live "almost like a queen" sharing her room with only two other people. The refugees who arrived shortly afterwards had to sleep in the yard, even though it was February, as all rooms were occupied.

However, a few hours after she arrived she felt intense pain and an ambulance took Lyudmyla to the Institute of Cardiology.
"I thought it was the end, I wouldn't survive. But the doctors pulled me through. They were very good doctors and very caring people. And the hospital was in good condition, with the equipment and medicines needed. And someone brought me a cozy blanket from home, someone baked pies and there was fruit compote. And I was given other people's clothes to wear, as mine remained in Kharkiv.".
She shivered.
"Here, they gave me a warm jacket and boots, see? Just before the war, I bought a luxurious coat for spring, chic and expensive. Perfect for this weather. Yes, who would have thought? I have worked all my life and even now the cases that I was working on remain in the courts. I made good money. I didn't lack anything and I could afford anything. And now? I'm a refugee in a foreign country relying on the synagogue. I used to look after myself, but now I completely depend on others. I don't know where I'll end up tomorrow. It's a terrible nightmare, I couldn't dream that everything would turn out like this. I have lost everything. Everything. Everything."



Chapter 4

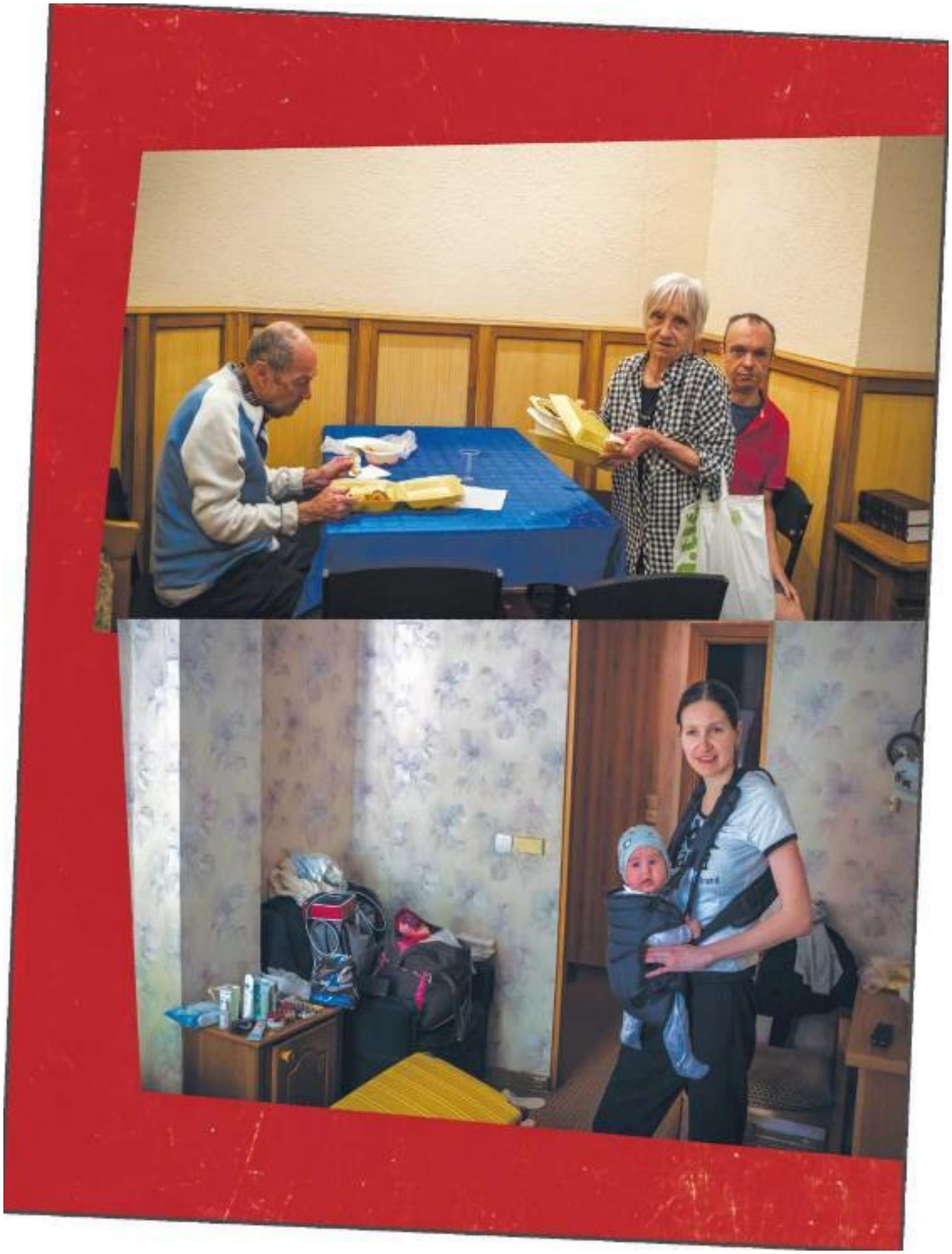
Fates Changed Forever

MARCH 3

"After the initial analysis of the situation in Ukraine, my office saw sufficient reason to believe that crimes within the jurisdiction of our court could have been committed. Specific cases, which could potentially be considered as such, have already been identified and will form the basis of the investigation," said Karim Khan, Chief Prosecutor of the ICC.

President Maia Sandu signed an application for Moldova's accession to the European Union. It is addressed to Emmanuel Macron, President of France. In a few days, the application will be presented in Brussels.

"We have learned our lessons and take responsibility for our future. Dear citizens, while some decisions take time, others need to be made quickly and decisively. It is necessary to act urgently when circumstances require this. Today we are signing an application for Moldova's accession to the EU. It is addressed to Emmanuel Macron, President of France, the head of the state, which today presides over the Council of the EU."



“Anya, Are you Alive?”: War in Children’s Chat

Being 15 now, Anya and Galya have been friends since childhood. Both are studying in the 9th grade of a Kyiv high school and both participate in ballroom dancing. On the last peaceful weekend of February, Anya went to visit her grandfather in Slavutych, a small town 120 km from Kyiv, 100 km from the Russian border and 12 km from the Belarus border. Slavutych was built after the Chernobyl accident for the employees of the nuclear power station. Anya didn’t manage to return home, because the war broke out, and Slavutych was besieged by enemy troops.

Galya left Ukraine for Moldova together with her mother and younger brother. She snatched the opportunity and contacted her friend. With the girls’ permission, we present excerpts from their correspondence.

Galya (02.24.2022, 06.02)
Hey! The Russians attacked us! The war has really started!

Anya (02.24.2022, 06.03)
Yeah, I know. Mom called in the morning, hysterical
She told me to stay with grandpa. He says it’s safe here

Galya (02.24.2022 07.12)
Mine’s hysterical too. Wants us to leave

Anya (02.24.2022, 07.13)
Where to?

Galya (02.24.2022, 07.14)
Don’t know.
I don’t want to go anywhere. You’re scared?

Anya (02.24, 07.40)
No. Grandpa says it’ll be over soon. I mean, the war
XXX

Galya (02.25.2022, 08.20)
Guess what, we went to Chisinau
Told Bogdan (younger brother - author’s note) that we were going on vacation.
Such traffic jams!

Galya (02.25. 2022, 22.38)
We haven’t reached the border yet. Millions of cars

Tired and want to go home
Someone called my mom - the Russians launched a rocket bomb in Kyiv... it exploded. Shrapnel hit the house next to ours
XXX

Anya (02.26.2022, 12.48)
Arrived?
Guess what, the Russians besieged us. Grandpa says Slavutych is cut off from the world

Anya (02.26.2022, 21.37)
Gal! Are you alive?

Galya (02.26.2022, 22.19)
Alive, sure! There was no internet

Anya (02.26.2022, 22.20)
Where are you?

Galya (02.26.2022, 22.12)
In Chisinau. Just moved in
Some guy left us an apartment
His apartment.

Anya (02.26.2022, 22.13)
Will you live there?

Galya (02.26.2022, 22.14)
Yeah. It’s such a mess. No light in the bathroom

Anya (02.26.2022, 22.15)
And we had an air raid in the afternoon
Everyone ran to the basement. Grandpa and me didn’t
It stinks down there!
We collect water. They said it would be cut off
The worst thing’s no light
Sit in the dark

Galya (02.26.2022, 22.19)
How do you charge your cell phone?

Anya (02.26.2022, 22.24)
In grandpa’s car
XXX

Anya (02.27.2002, 12.12)
Hey! We had a lot of shots today

Galya (02.27.2022, 12.13)
Scary?

Anya (02.27.2022, 12.14)

Oh, yeah! But bombed outside the city
Galya (02.27.2022, 12.15)
Is everything good up there, on the surface?

Anya (02.27.2022, 12.16)
Yes. Only we've been in the basement since morning
Grandpa made me sit here. An air raid again
XXX
Anya (02.27.2022, 16.43)
Galya, I can't sit here anymore!
I'm already hysterical
Really pisses me off
I'll kick off!
They also said we'd sleep here!

Anya (02.28.2022, 07.42)
Cannot stand it! Got outside
Didn't sleep at all
They don't seem to shoot
Want to eat
No food

Galya (02.28.2022, 09.12)
Why?

Anya (02.28.2022, 10.03)
We are besieged
Roads are mined
No delivery to stores
Run out of stocks
There are three shops in the city. Or four

Galya (02.28.2022, 10.07)
What do you eat?

Anya (02.28.2022, 10.09)
First, we ate canned food, grandpa and me
Then he decided to save it for a rainier day
Now when there is no shelling, we cook in the yard., .porridge, wheat
The grits are running out
They promised to bring potatoes and milk
XXX
Galya (03.03.2022, 12.31)
Hey! Where've you been?
We were enrolled in school today
Put me in 10th grade
They study here for 12 years!
Bogdan's in the 1st grade

I didn’t like the school. Kind of dark, and small
See you tomorrow
XXX

Galya (03.07.2022, 10.20)
Anya, where are you?
Galya (03.07.2022, 12.23)
Anya, are you alive?
XXX

Anya (03.08.2022, 10.18)
Galya, I congratulate you and your mother on March 8[9]! I wish you happiness, health and success in everything! And let these orcs get out of Ukraine as soon as possible!

Galya (03.08.2022, 10.20)
Thank you! I wish you the same. Why didn’t you write?

Anya (03.08.2022, 10.21)
Communication’s just back
Charged my cell phone
All neighbors charge theirs from grandpa’s car
Or go to the communication tower. There are three hour queues there
They shoot here, it’s scary. I want to go home!

Galya (03.08.2022, 10.23)
Mom can’t pick you up?
Anya (03.08.2022, 10.24)
How? Roads are mined! She just calls and cries
Bridge bombed in Chernihiv
2 cars tried to break through Chernihiv, were shot at
But one somehow left
Do you want a joke? The Russians entered the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and soldiers nicked all the tea and coffee from the offices. Ha-ha!
Neighbor told grandpa, he works there

Galya (03.08.2022, 10.39)
Here are the freaks!
Bogdan got sick with a fever. I have a stomach ache too
The doc says - it’s nerves
Hate going to this school. It’s not like ours!

Anya (03.08.2022, 10.43)
No one goes to school here
Everyone is looking for food
Neighbors brought some kind of potatoes, slime! Ugh, yuck!

[9] March 8th - International Women’s Day

They are going to eat it
I'm wasting away
XXX

Galya (03.12.2022, 10.12)
Hey! Marya wrote to you about lessons online?

Anya (03.12.2022, 10.14)
Yeah. At least some occupation, or I'll go nuts
Grandpa keeps me on a short chain
Not to be killed or raped

Galya (03.12.2022, 10.40)
The guy who gave us the apartment just called and said we have to move out
Wants to live here himself
Jackass! Why say we can live as long as we want?
No housing here now
Or terribly expensive
XXX

Galya (03.14.2022, 12.23)
We live with my mom's friend, very far from school
Mom said no renting any apartment in Chisinau
Let's go to Germany
They promise housing there
XXX

Anya (03.17.2022, 03.14)
Celebrating! Humanitarian aid came
foreign food
delicious canned food
I'm full for the first time in a while. Not cool

Galya (03.17.2022, 05.14)
Why? Good food's always cool

Anya (03.17.2022, 07.14)
Bored! Missing mom.
XXX

Anya (03.25.2022, 13.08)
Russians in the city!
Everyone's told to stay at home.
XXX

Anya (03.26.2022, 10.42)
Grandpa went to the city center
Rally against invaders

Locked me up at home
I'm scared!
XXX

Galya (03.27.2022, 17.04)
We are in a refugee camp
In Niedersachsen
They screwed us over. Didn't meet, didn't give housing
Everyone sleeps in a big hall
many Syrians
Mom is crying, Bogdan is furious. Why did we leave Moldova?

Anya (03.28.2022, 09.34)
Yes, you should have stayed
Yesterday the orcs started shooting at the rally. Three people were killed

Galya (03.28.2022, 09.45)
Terrible! What about your grandpa?
Anya (03.28.2022, 09.46)
Managed to escape earlier
Yelled at him; I was so worried!
XXX

Anya (03.29.2022, 17.20)
Two Russian orcs came to us today. Evil as dogs

Galya (03.29.2022, 17.21)
To your house? What for?
Anya (03.29.2022, 17.22)
Looking for weapons
Grandpa said there's nothing.
Let them search
One went to the kitchen, opened the fridge and a cabinet
Only tea, tea leaves
Out they went

Galya (03.29.2022, 17.25)
Awful!

Anya (03.29.2022, 17.28)
Yes. Was so scared, my heart pounding
Thought it would pop out
They searched the neighbors, all's upside down
Took a package of corn
When they left, Uncle Tolya cursed them, we all could hear it

Galya (03.29.2022, 17.33)

Tomorrow we are leaving the refugee camp
Some of my mom's friends rented an apartment for us near Berlin

Where are they now? How are they?

Galya lives in Germany, not far from Berlin. She studies at a local school and is again engaged in ballroom dancing. In Slavutych Anya was given the status of a war child without parental care. She could be transported to Kyiv, to her mother, only in mid-April, when Slavutych resumed Ukrainian life. Anya's family could not leave Kyiv - no money. The girls are still friends and correspond, mostly about the war and their survival.

We’re Learning the Psychology of War First Hand

Irina Leonenko, a psychologist by profession, left Odessa with her family on the second day of the war. Some ten days later, a wave of refugees poured into Moldova from Odessa and Kyiv, Kharkiv and Donetsk, Mykolaiv and Mariupol, as well as from other cities and villages of Ukraine. Local volunteers worked day and night, receiving, accommodating, and encouraging these exhausted and confused people. This was when Irina began helping in a volunteer center. Before she processed the shock of this sudden twist in her life, she found herself delivering food, making beds for newcomers, consoling and comforting them.

- Never ask refugees what they felt when leaving their homes. Don’t push into their minds! When ready, they will open up. At first, they just need to get warmed up so that they can calm down, understand that they are safe - advises Irina.

What struck you most when you were working with refugees? What made the biggest impression?

Probably, the old people. Those who are over 80, who once already went through all of this in childhood, during the Second World War. Like my mother, actually. But my mom has me and her grandchildren - we came together and not to an empty place.

What I saw and learned in my volunteer work breaks my heart. Some people, who had not communicated with one another for many years, were now thrown further apart to different countries by the fate of war. Suddenly when the war began, many old people found themselves lonely and helpless, sick and disoriented under the shelling, in bomb shelters. People fled in despair, not even knowing where TO - only away FROM the war.

In one case, there was a very elderly woman who came to Chisinau absolutely alone - to a strange city with no home, no friends, no acquaintances. She said that she had a cousin in the USA, but no contact information for him. She only knew the name of his son. She cried all the time, saying that she wanted to die. But they did find her cousin!

How on earth?

The head of our center, Tanya - I admire this woman! - sought him out online through Facebook, other social networks, knowing only the name of the cousin’s son! She found the company where he worked, contacted the call center by phone,

explained what had happened, leaving her phone number. Then the relative of the old woman called from the USA and later took her to him.

There are dozens of dramatic stories connected specifically with lonely elderly people. One old man arrived as an absolutely capable person; he certainly had chronic health problems but his memory was okay. He stayed in our center for several days while his documents were under consular verification. He was waiting to go to Israel and finally was invited to the consulate. He went there alone and ... disappeared. The police looked for him for several days and, in the end, found him somewhere on the street. He had transformed into a vagrant! Absolutely beyond himself. He didn't remember his name or where he lived. Apparently, when he was going from Ukraine to Moldova, he pulled himself together and still retained the remnants of his memory. Then everything he had been through caught up with him.

Another story: two women from Kharkiv, both very advanced in age, both well over 80. For several days, when the city was shelled they lived in the basement; then with the help of the Jewish community, they managed to be evacuated. One had Alzheimer's disease - no idea who she was, or where she was, or what was going on. Her daughter came from Israel to Chisinau to take her. The young woman cried, asking me what to do, how to take her mother out, what to do if the old woman resisted and didn't recognize her children. Sad!

However, it is not only the very old people who are in a state of shock. One day, a bus with refugees arrived and the receptionists asked us - doctors and psychologists - to talk to a married couple. They were not very old people, and having just come, wanted to go back immediately. The woman was hysterical: "Where did we arrive? What for? I hate to leave our home, let's go back." Neither sedatives nor persuasion helped. They took a taxi and drove back to Ukraine. I believe they are from the Odessa region.

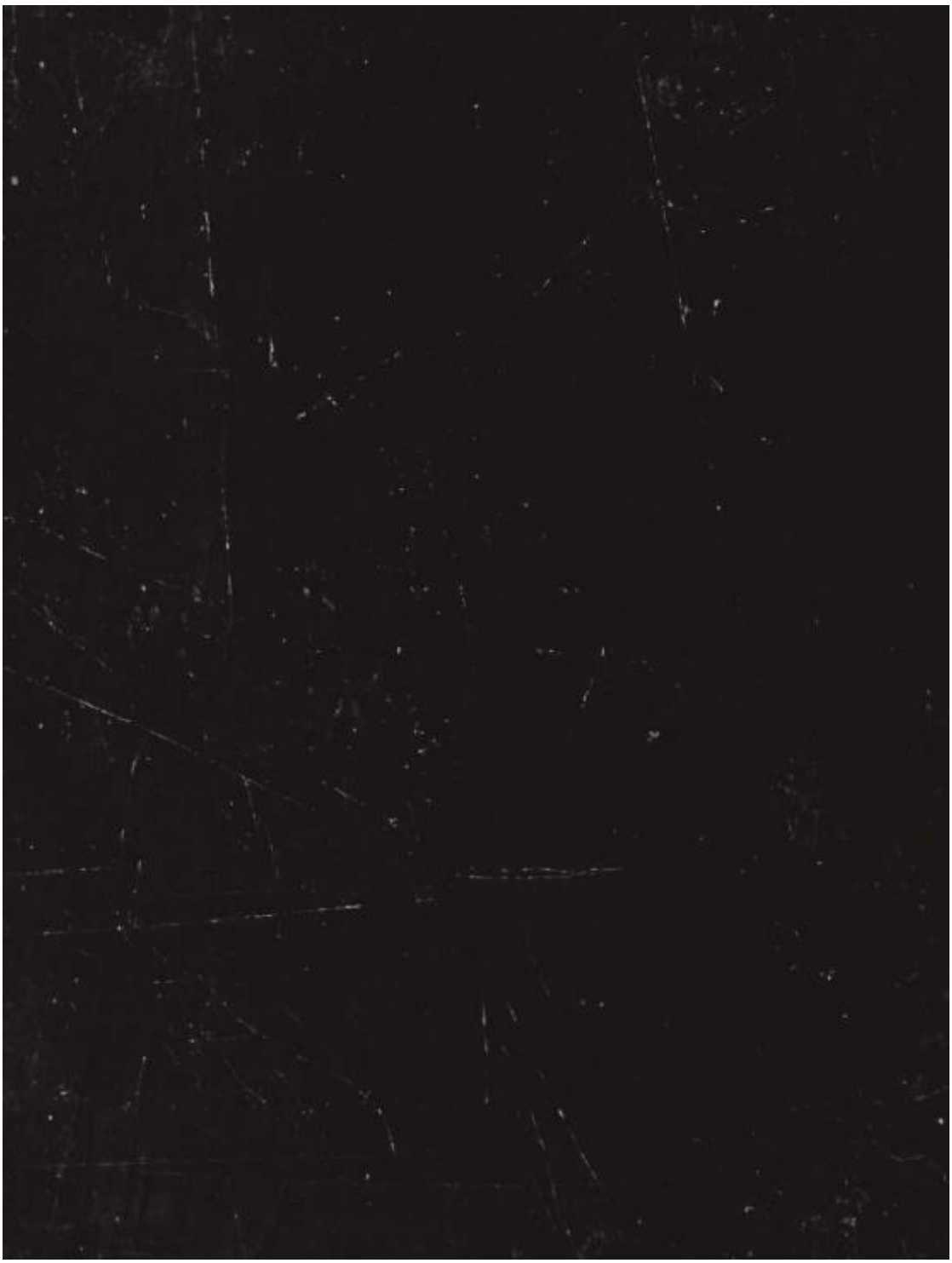
I don't even know what to call this syndrome. People have come a long way. They have waited in painfully long and dreary, sometimes freezing traffic jams for hours and now, having finally gotten to a safe place, they go back, possibly under bombardment and shelling. And as far as I know, such cases are not rare. Later psychologists will classify all this, sort it out, and give it a name. So far, perhaps, it can be called acute war trauma.

What about children? For their fragile psyche this is a huge shock, isn't it?

Oddly enough, children, according to my observation, manage to endure the flight from home and the hardships of the road better. You would assume that after all these experiences children would become closed off or aggressive, or insomniac.

In a word, they would have to face the problems of child psychology, but no! Even those who had to hide from shelling in the basements got through it somehow easier than adults...
There were many children when I worked at the center. I noticed how calm they were when their parents were calm; in any case, they held themselves together, didn't bear what was going on in their souls. Here we must pay tribute to their mothers, who were - I wouldn't dare call them 'perfect' - very adequate and well-organized. They understood that they were saving children, and this probably gave them strength.

Volunteers from different countries, primarily from Israel, came to Moldova to help refugees from the first days of the war in Ukraine. They were well-trained, which is easy to understand: their country is, so to say, in a constant military or pre-war situation. The locals here don't have such training. And how do you protect yourself, your psyche, from all the grief that falls on you with every new refugee who arrives?
The psychic reserves of volunteers aren't limitless. Therefore, they must be specially taught to prevent burnout syndrome. It is physically very complicated to accept and accommodate such a number of people, and psychologically it is even more difficult. Refugees talk, share their troubles, seek support and help - and we lend our shoulder, reflexively or deliberately.
At crisis centers, psychologists usually work in teams. They have a certain shift - let's say six hours, then rest. It's absolutely necessary! They also need emotional relief after work - talking and even complaining to someone. After all, during the day they - we - accumulate this human pain in ourselves, and then? What do we do with it? So, there must be people who are trained to help the volunteers.
Courses and training for volunteers - at least minimal - should be carried out in advance, before they start working, in order to prevent burnout syndrome.
A new branch of psychology is being shaped here - the psychology of war. We're learning the psychology of war firsthand.



Chapter 5

Run Without Sleep

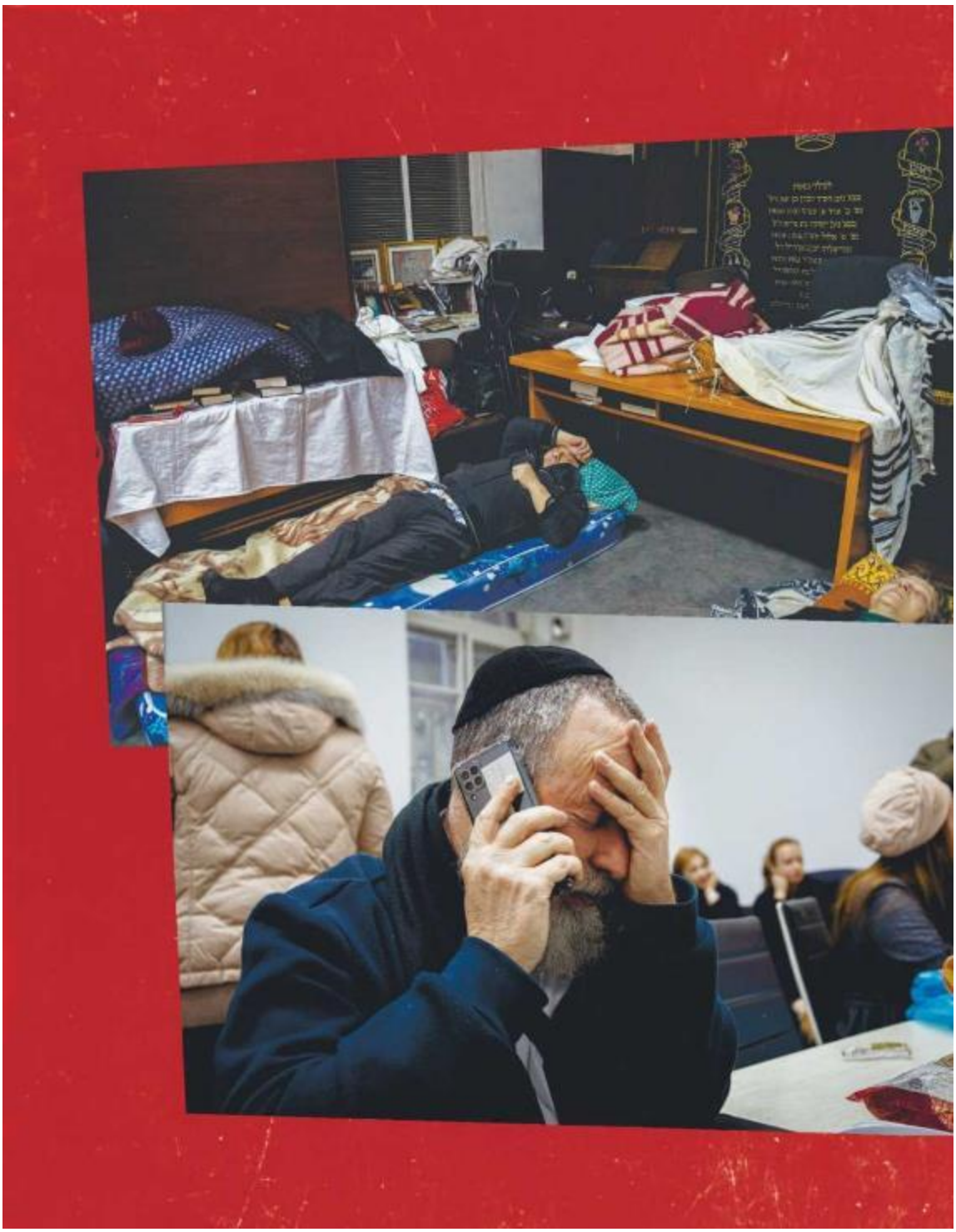
MARCH 8

Statement by Dr HANS HENRI P. KLUGE, WHO Regional Director for Europe

Copenhagen, 8 March 2022

Good morning, good afternoon,

“It is now 13 days since the military offensive began in Ukraine, and today within the country we see a health system under severe pressure, and beyond its borders the fastest growing refugee crisis in Europe for more than 75 years.”



What the Hell is All This For?

I am Ivan, a forty-year-old driver from Odessa, father of two children.
On February 24, we were woken up at 5:30 a.m., not by explosions, but by my partner, for some reason, was yelling into the phone in a wild voice: “Documents, money, the most necessary things - and out of there! Where from? What’s going on?”
I say to my partner “I’m on vacation! Can I sleep at least until 8 a.m. on the first day of my vacation, please?”
The house is quiet. My three-year-old son is sleeping in the crib, his legs up as always. My wife is peacefully snoring, though she always reproaches me for that. My older son - I checked - is in his bed.
Once I’m up, while making coffee, I look through the news - maybe there’s something on the internet? A minute later, it’s me who’s yelling: “Lena, get ready quickly! Where are all the documents?” Now, a month later, I can use more literary expressions, but that morning the words were pretty rough.
It is clear that the war has begun. No, we still don’t realize it, but it’s in the news. There is a problem with the documents: my wife has an expired passport, which won’t let us get far. In any case, we’re leaving Odessa and going to my mother in Bolgrad. There are no bombings there. We’ll sit it out there for a couple of days. We’ll wait for the ‘special operation’, as they call it in the Russian media, to be over.
It was easy to get to my mother’s. There were no checkpoints on the roads on the first day, not like today. Halfway through, we remembered that we had left behind the potty. That was a shame, but let that be our biggest problem!
Here we are, the destination is reached. Relatives and neighbors come running: “How are you? What’s going on there? Bombing in Odessa? No way! It’s quiet here, stay as long as you wish.”

We get settled and go to bed. No time to sleep enough though. At dawn there’s an air raid. Everyone down to the basement!
My friend calls. Usually he’s as calm as a cucumber, but now it’s like he just snapped: “Why the hell are you sitting there? Waiting for it to get you? Go to Chisinau, all of our folks are already there.”
I don’t have a car; I drive a service car, but that’s not the problem. Will they let my wife in without a passport? What about me? And what are we going to do in Chisinau? I don’t speak Romanian, or any other language. My son speaks English;

why would we need it?
Everything's in doubt. We've recently brought furniture into a new apartment, and we are getting ready to move in. And now!?
My persistent friend urges me again and again: "If you don't leave immediately, you'll stay there forever. The guys who have already crossed the border say having no documents is okay, but there is a 15-kilometer line."
Decision made. We stop at McDonald's, load up with tons of food and set off for the border! Hour after hour passes as if time has stopped. We eat up all our food supplies; 12 hours passes without any car movement. No border in sight! Some cars are turning around to drive back, drivers and passengers give up. Not us!
20 hours pass. Everyone around us is eating and drinking and running into the bushes ...
Finally, we arrive at the border post. The first question we are asked is - "does the wife drive?"It is clear that they no longer let men out of Ukraine. "No, she doesn't drive." "Then, - says the border guard, - "take them to where you are headed and then go back home!" What about documents? Passport expired?"You'll fix it in Chisinau. "What are you carrying? Personal items, hamburgers and a pink potty borrowed from someone. Goodbye!"
5 a.m. in Chisinau. To the hotel and to bed. At least a wink of sleep. At 7 phone calls start: some of ours are not allowed in; some are turned
away; a house was blown up in Mayaki near Odessa, and even in Odessa it's not quiet. My friend calls again: "Will you stay in Chisinau? Should I find an apartment for you?" I can't answer immediately and I ask: "What are the options?" My friend: "I'm in Berlin. To be more exact, I will definitely be in Berlin in some five days, come here!"
"That's two more days in the car. No, we'll stay in Chisinau for now. Just to stretch our legs and take the kids out for a walk. Oh, it's so cold here, and they say it's always warm and sunny in Moldova!"
Going to a cafe for breakfast. We take our seats and get the menu. The waitress asks in Russian:
"Are you from Ukraine?" I didn't understand how she had figured that out.
"Yes, from Odessa."
"Our cafe treats Ukrainians."
"I can pay for myself. Only I don't have Moldovan money. Do you accept credit cards?"
"Yes, but the order is free for you."
"Well, if it's free, let's enjoy some cakes with tea and coffee. This is a nice

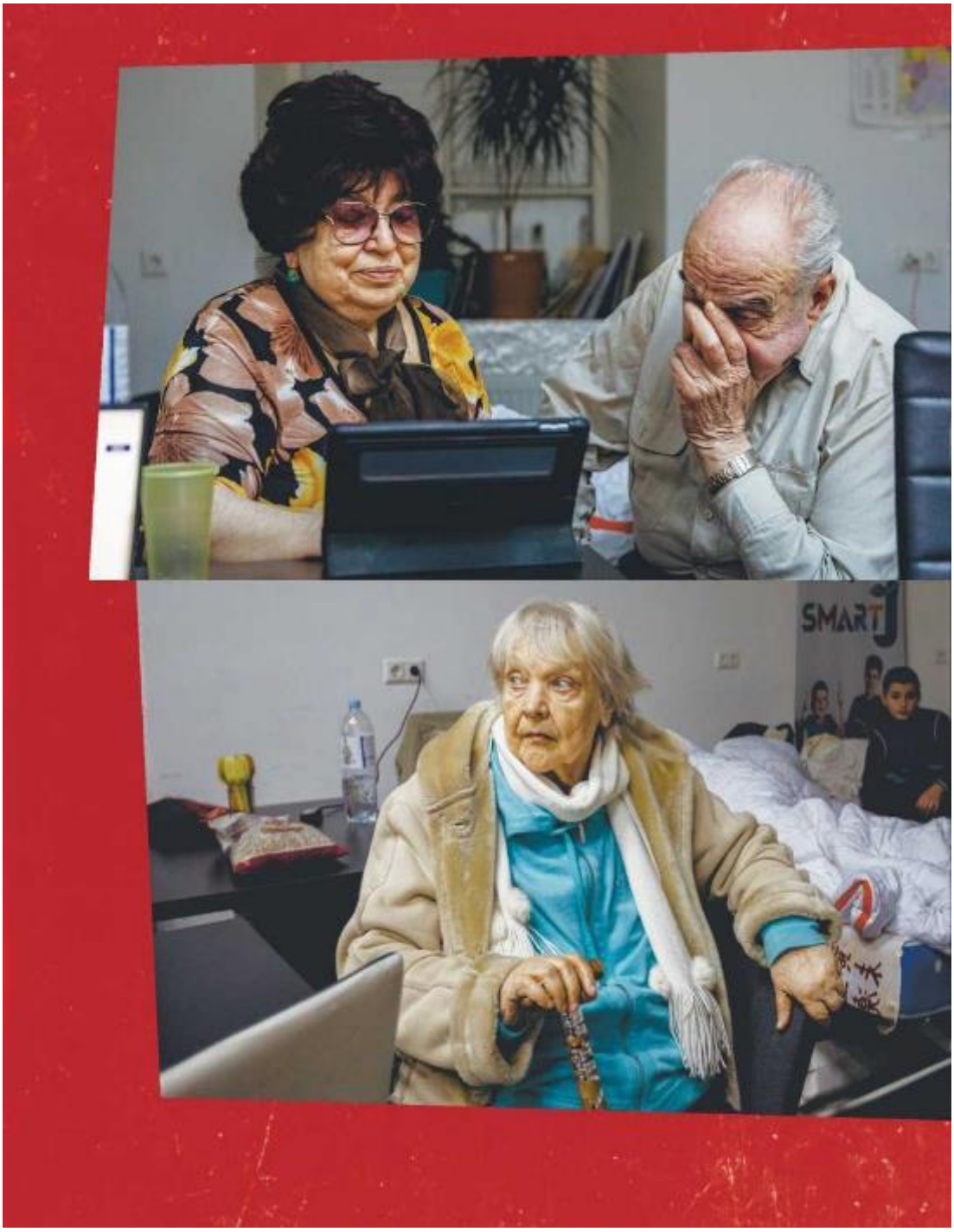
bakery.”

It’s not that I’m dying to go for a walk, but I need to withdraw some money from an ATM. The exchange rate is strange and suspicious - I should have received more money. For one hryvnia they give just a few kopecks - Moldovan banuts[10].

A passer-by recommends changing money in a bank - to get a better rate; he explains how to get there. Thanks, let’s go to the bank. It’s better, but not by much. How can we live on this tiny sum, I wonder?

My caring and persistent friend calls again: “What did you decide? Are you staying? If yes, there will be a job for you, kindergarten and school for the kids. Now three or four schools are already enrolling our children, and there is a Ukrainian one right in the center - Kotsiubynsky Lyceum” ...

[10] Banuts - coins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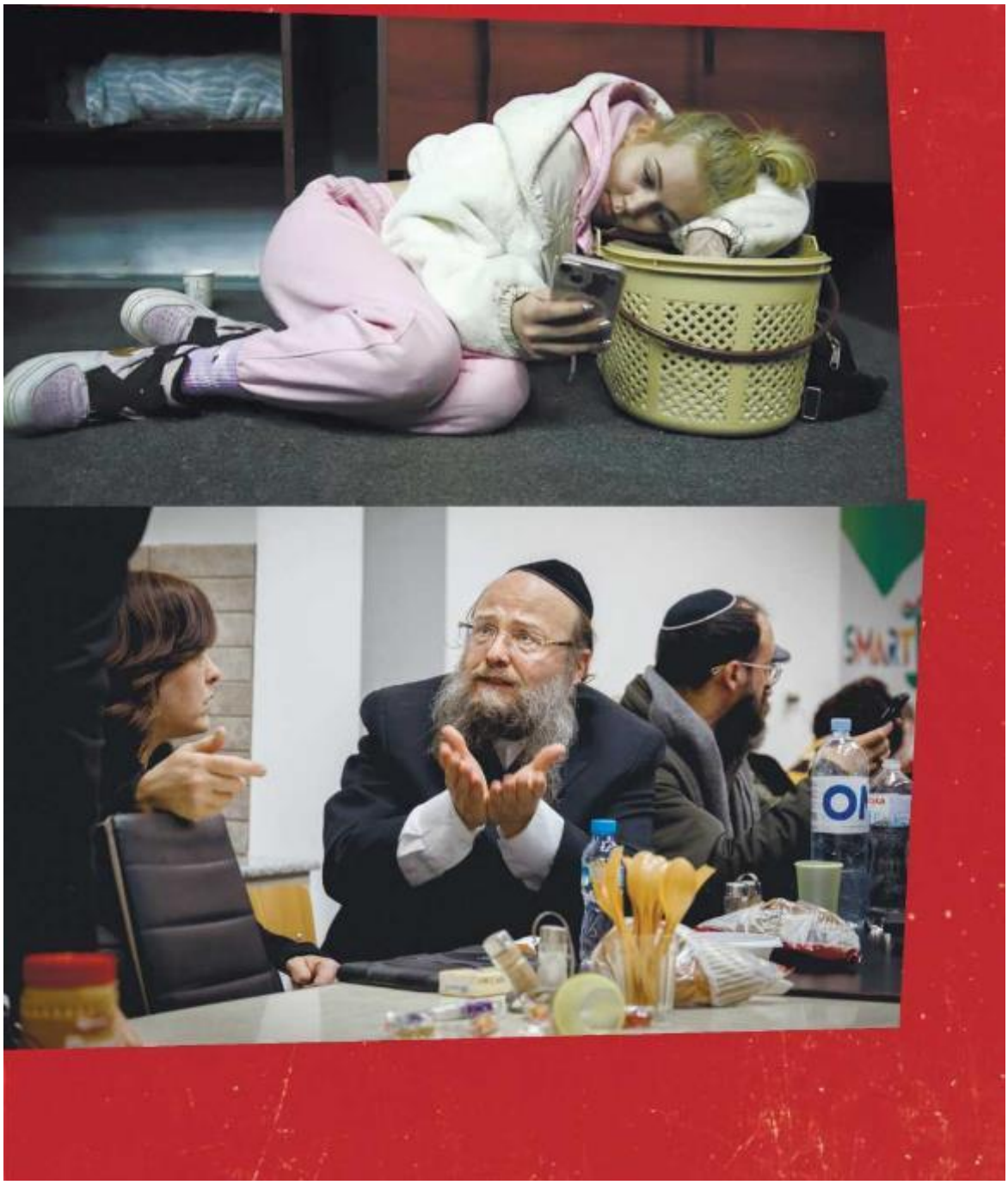


I’m at a loss and don’t know what to do. I call my friends. Those who managed to leave are already far from here - Madrid, Warsaw, Munich. Several families are in Berlin. I ask my wife: “Maybe Berlin?”. “Berlin”, she repeats. Just as she repeated after me “Bolgrad”, “Chisinau” ... She is still not in any state to discuss anything. She’s been in some stupor since the first day, talking only to our kids. All this time, imagine?

If I knew what road was in store for me, I would have stayed in Chisinau for a couple of days. Or, maybe for good. It’s very nice, almost like Odessa - so many compatriots! But we pack again - for the third time. Hit the road Jack!

The first stop was at the Romanian border. Of course, the line was not 15 km as on the way to Moldova, but it took us 4 hours. And then - oops! Though not because of my wife’s expired passport.

“How” - they ask - “did you manage to get out of Ukraine?”

“By car, with my children”

They told me to step aside and wait.

A volunteer runs up. I don’t know if he’s local, from Moldova, or Romanian. “What’s the problem? Why are you and your children being kept?” Well, who can say? “We’re going to fix it”, he says. “I’ll call the police,” he says. “And there are journalists here.” “Hold on, buddy! Let’s do without the police and journalists. Why piss people off? I just want to get to Iasi and have a nap. I haven’t had a wink for 4 days.”

The volunteer was restless, running around, gesticulating with his arms ... But he did it - they let us through. To the hotel and sle-e-ep!

At 5 a.m. there was the first phone call. They put into uniform the only son of my friend’s widow. The second call came from my mother: she had slept down in the basement; the air defense works. Intermittent air raid alerts in Odessa...

The weather couldn’t be worse for a trip along the Romanian serpentines - snow and ice. We decided not to go directly to the border with Hungary, but put up for a night at a local hotel. We had a snack at 11 p.m. and went to bed. Up at 2 a.m., a young woman from Ukraine was insisting in Romanian that we had taken her room. I called my friend who spoke some Romanian for him to explain it was, in fact, our room! There was obviously something wrong with the woman. Anyway, at 4 a.m. we were asked to leave the hotel if we didn’t want problems. What did they mean, I wonder?

We passed through Hungary quickly, no questions asked about how and why. We spent the next night in Austria and even had almost enough sleep. Finally, we got to Berlin. To take the wheel in the near future - no way! I refuse point blank, just as my son refuses to use that pink potty.
Now the question that haunts me is: “What the hell is all this for?”

Escape and Bad Luck are Left Behind

Ever since the war began, people have been divided into two camps. Some packed their things and left their native country for someplace safe as soon as the first attacks hit the cities of Ukraine. Others remained convinced that nothing terrible would happen and that they could remain at home, yet when the alarms sounded, they ran to the shelters. Gradually, people from the second camp began to move into the first, and at the end of February, Galina decided to take her two-year-old daughter out of the city.

... The car has been waiting for an hour and a half, but they still haven't come out. The driver gets nervous as curfew approaches. It's getting dark, and in another half-hour it will be impossible for them to leave. He calls Galina again: "Are you coming?" She cries that her husband has forbidden her from leaving and has hidden the child's birth certificate. How can she take the child away without any documents?

A colleague calls from Chisinau to reassure her: you can travel without documents now, no one cares. Half of the refugees don't have proper papers—elderly women have expired passports, while children have none. Whatever you have, grab it and leave.

It takes another half-hour to negotiate. The colleague, who works for the same company as Galina, is coordinating evacuation to Chisinau for the employees who have decided to leave (but only as a temporary measure), and of course, everyone will return home as soon as they can.

Finally, Galina is out of the house. She is driven to customs by a company car; employees from her company's Chisinau office will meet her on the Moldovan side of the border.. It's a good thing she doesn't have her own car; otherwise she would have to spend a day or two waiting for border control. Now the best solution is to put on warm clothes and cross the border on foot. At eight o'clock in the evening, Galina, her friend, and her two-year-old daughter reach the Moldovan border. There is a line there too, though it is moving quickly. It is very cold, but the border guards distribute blankets and offer tea to the refugees. An hour and a half later, their documents are finally verified, and they are ready to go. It turns out that the car sent from the Moldovan capital did not wait for them. It picked up another family with small children and left.

There are plenty of volunteers with cars. They can take you to any region of the

republic, free of charge, but Galina is afraid of sitting next to a stranger. She calls her colleague in Chisinau, who suggests that she find the driver with the most intelligent face and hand the phone to him. The driver's name is Vasily. He is from Causeni, in central Moldova, but since the woman is with a child and it is night, he offers to take her to Chisinau for free. Galina hesitates, and only agrees to get into the car after sending a picture of his passport and license plate number to her colleagues in Chisinau. The driver is not offended and understands that she must be in some degree of shock.

At three o'clock in the morning, Galina arrives in Chisinau. The company has booked a hotel for her and her dependents. In the morning, she will get a phone card. Moldovan telephone operators are providing service to refugees free of charge. They just need to go to the office of any telecom operator with their Ukrainian passport to get a Moldovan number.

But at 10 a.m., a hotel maid knocks on the door of their room: "Sorry, you have to move out." "What? How so? Why? The room was booked for us." "I don't know," the maid says, "The booking is under a different last name..."

Chisinau hotels are in high demand these days, and are often overbooked. Colleagues help Galina move to another hotel, but the next day, they are evicted again! On the third day, the story repeats itself... What bad luck! They are evicted a couple of times because Galina's last name does not match that of the person who paid for the room; another time because there is a new reservation for the room; and the last time, because they have three people staying in the room (herself, her daughter and the friend she left Ukraine with) instead of one adult and one child...

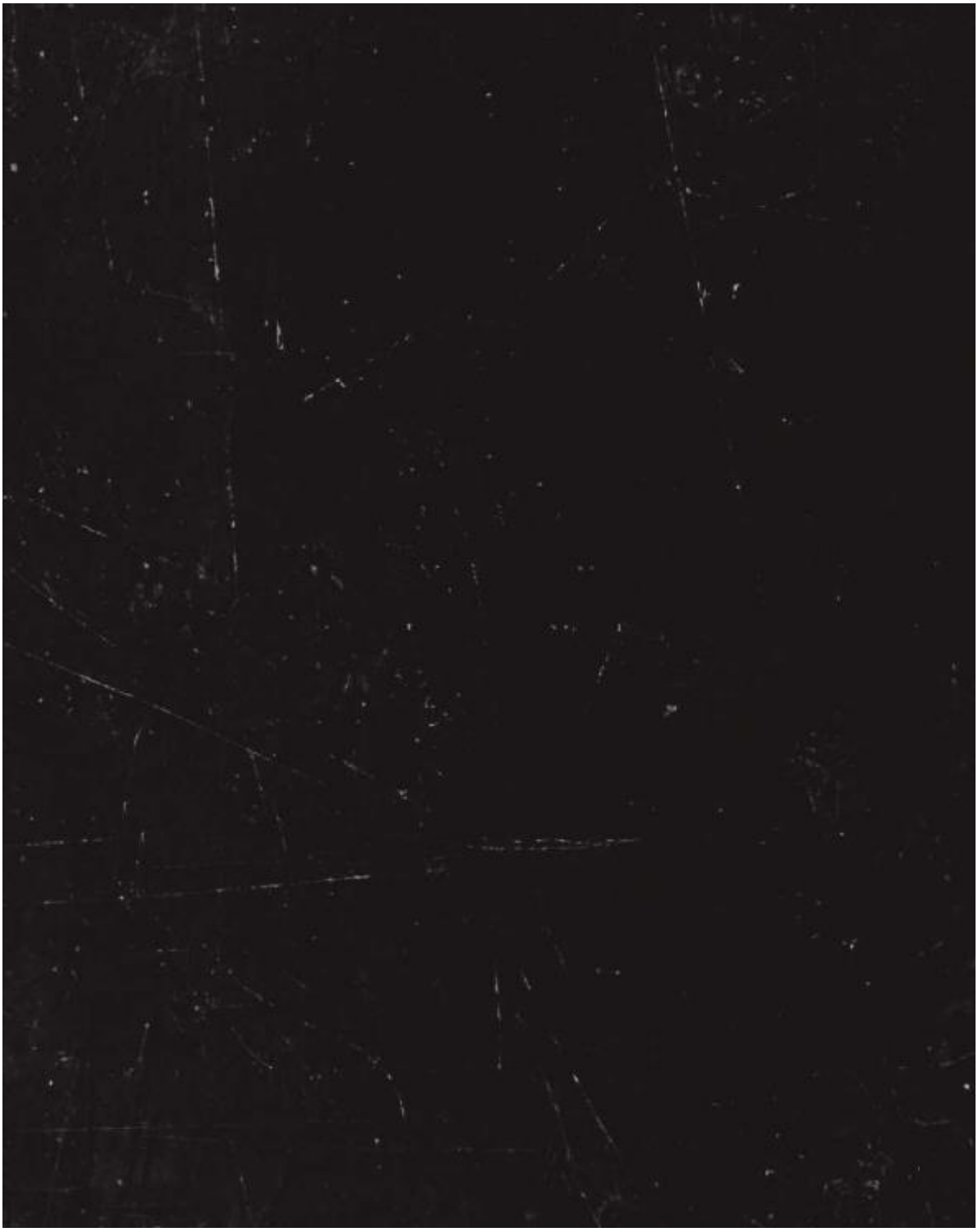
On top of that, her husband calls several times a day, threatening her and demanding her immediate return home to Odessa. Galina panics. She is already afraid to stay in Chisinau: firstly, because of her husband, who can force her to return to a country at war, and secondly, because of the rumors. They say the Russian army is already near Chisinau; they say Transnistria is helping Russia; they say the next attack will be against Moldova, etc. Galina is nervous and believes everything they say. She no longer feels safe in Moldova.

She is told that documents for the child can be issued at the Ukrainian Embassy in Chisinau and, it turns out to be easier than she expected. No, it's not a problem that the father hasn't given his consent for the child to

leave. A day later, the baby's passport is ready. The Embassy of Ukraine works quickly in Moldova: no lines, and everything is by appointment.

The documents are necessary for their move to Germany. Galina is an assistant director of the company, which is headquartered in Berlin and has branches in Chisinau and Odessa. Galina has to fly there from the Romanian city of Iasi, since Moldovan airspace is still closed to civil aviation. The line at the Romanian border stretches for several kilometers, so they have to wait in the car for 15 hours, but they still manage to make their plane on time.

Galina's journey ends in Berlin. She and her child are given an apartment with a permanent registration—they will not be evicted. Like many Ukrainian children, Galina's daughter is given a place in the kindergarten. A month later, memories of the escape from Odessa, the frosty night under the blankets on the Moldovan border, and the ordeals in the Chisinau hotels make Galina smile sadly. She really hopes that all the bad things are left behind.



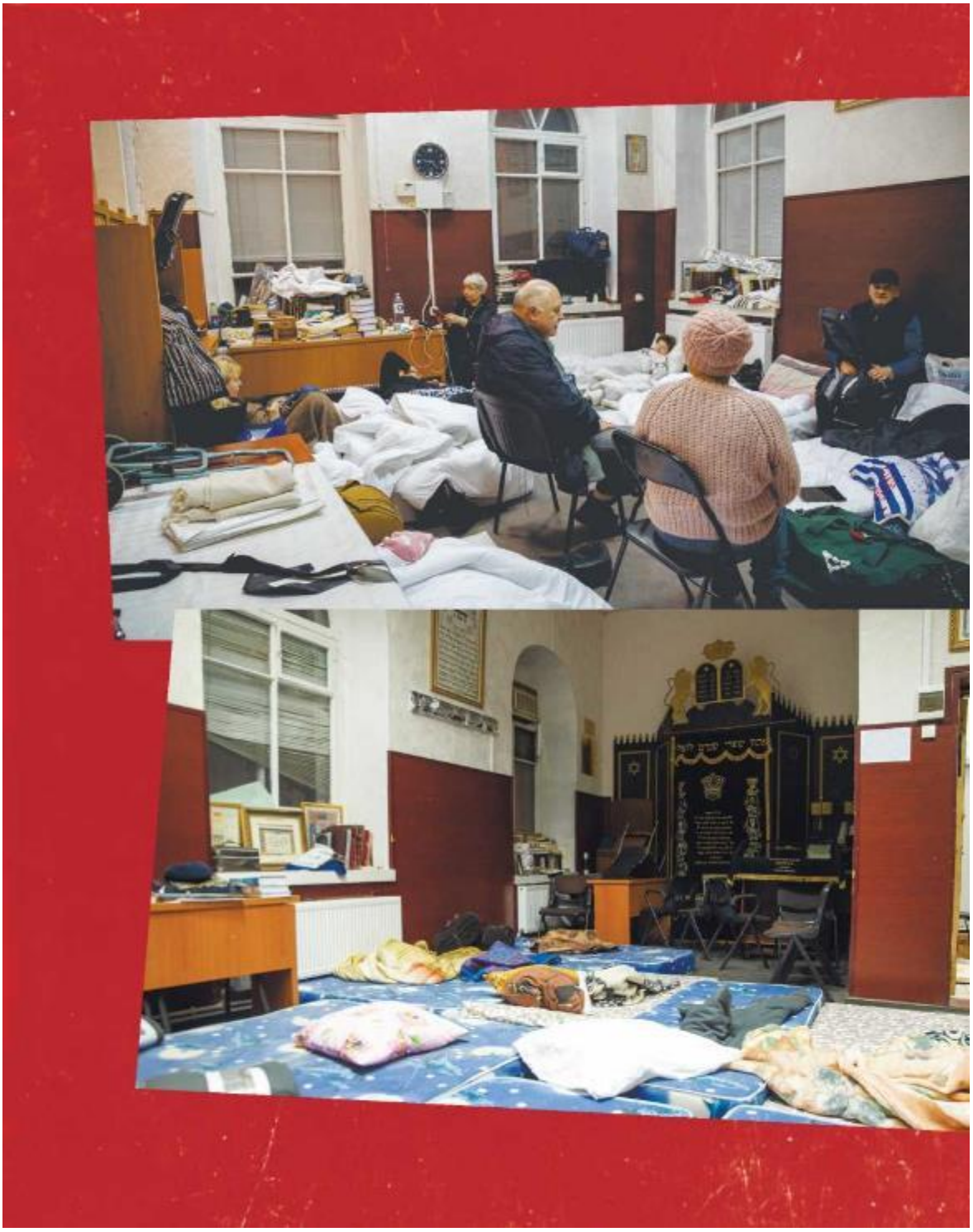
Chapter 6

It All Went Wrong

MARCH 28

More than 7,000 sanctions have been imposed against Russian individuals and companies, which is more than any other precedent in history, including against Iran, Syria and North Korea.

Key sanctions were imposed in the areas of finance, energy, trade, technology, information, as well as against companies and individuals, including personally Vladimir Putin for the first time.



Since February 24 Everything Has Gone Wrong for Us

Christina is a refugee from Odessa.

“Early in the morning of February 24, I was woken by the voices behind my wall. Olesya, a close friend of mine, who came from Kyiv to visit me for several days, was talking to her boyfriend. From him we learned that the war had started. To be honest, I wasn’t very surprised, as the situation had been escalating for a long time. But this conversation and this day will certainly remain in my memory forever.”

“I stayed in the city for quite a while after the war began,” Christina continues. “Both I and my friends delayed the departure, as we didn’t see a big threat. As long as there is no fighting directly in the city, we are safe. Besides, like many others, I thought this wouldn’t last long; the politicians would soon come to an agreement and there was no point in moving anywhere.

Nevertheless, time passed and the war developed. Bombing came to other cities, there were casualties among the civilian population. Information from the sites shocked us. It was getting more and more scary. For relatives, for myself, for the future. I wanted to return to peace so much that I finally decided to leave. My relatives refused to abandon the city, point blank. Neither requests, nor tears helped.

There were three of us - my friend and I, and my Doberman Louis. At the last moment, a colleague of mine joined our small group, which made me very happy. I thought it would be easier to drive together. After all, we might face many frightening things - they could stop us, take the car, rob us, kill us. Yes, it was scary to set off, but it was even worse to say goodbye to our loved ones. We parted with great longing to see each other again.

We drove towards Moldova in order to get across to Romania. Warned about huge lines at the border, we were lucky: we stood for ‘only’ five hours. From time to time, big off-road vehicles drove up to the line, people in military uniform got out of them and checked the cars, looking for men of military age, who were forbidden to leave the country. A man aged 40-45 was forced out of the car in front of us. He furiously demonstrated some documents, shouting that he had the right to leave, but he was taken somewhere anyway. A woman in that car took the steering wheel, crying. Apparently, she was his wife.

An endless stream of people passed by us, mostly women with children of different ages. Many had cat carriers in their hands or were leading dogs on

leashes. These were refugees who crossed the border on foot, without their own transportation.

When we finally got through all the formalities on the Ukrainian side of the border and made it to the Moldovan one, we were pleasantly surprised by how we were met. To those who had no cars, volunteers offered a ride - for free! - to any city or region of the country. Those who had nowhere to go at all were offered accommodation for several days, though not in Chisinau, but in villages and townships. We decided to go to the Moldovan capital and stay there for a few days, or even for a longer period if we found suitable accommodation.

While leaving Odessa, I didn't book anything in Moldova, realizing that anything could happen on the road and that I would have to quickly change my plans. In early March, Moldova was already packed with refugees. We didn't want to overwhelm our acquaintances from Chisinau - we knew that from the beginning of the war, they had received a huge number of people. Therefore, we looked for a shelter ourselves. Hotels were overcrowded, apartment owners refused to rent housing for a week, only for long term and for a lot of money. Those who were ready to accept us changed their minds as soon as they learned that we had a big dog.

In the end, we found shelter in a private house in a suburb of Chisinau. The hosts welcomed us cordially, fed us, gave us drinks, and settled us in for the night. We spent several quiet days in the village. At first, we considered staying for longer. Importantly, there was internet connection, which meant I could continue working. However, we decided to leave Moldova. Life is very expensive there: everything - food, medicine, utilities - is more expensive than in Odessa, while salaries and pensions, as we learned, are lower. Additionally, for us, accustomed to the hustle and bustle of the city, it felt too quiet in the village.

On the day of departure, the hosts provided us with plenty of food for our journey. Taking a bit for the road, we parted from them as family and moved toward the Romanian border, aiming for Brasov. I had been in this beautiful Romanian city four years ago and had always wanted to return, but who knew that it would happen under such circumstances?

We started looking for housing in Brasov, which turned out to be a real challenge. No matter how much Europeans love animals, they don't rent apartments to dog owners. The breed and dimensions of a dog don't matter - whether it is a Yorkie, a Spitz, or, as in my case, a Doberman. If they agree, they ask twice as much.

Back on the road! Since the head office of the company I work for is located in Germany, our next destination was Berlin. Here the situation with renting as pet

owners was a bit better. Still, out of 100 available apartments, maximum 20 would welcome a quadruped (by the way, it is not customary to hire realtors here, almost all contracts are made online).

Eventually, we got lucky with suitable accommodation for a week. I believed that seven days would definitely be enough to find somewhere to settle for longer. But no, it turned out that no one wanted to take Ukrainians, even though I offered the full amount of requested rent. I don't blame anyone, I understand there are reasons for the reluctance. We decided to look for an apartment away from the city, in the hope we would have better luck.

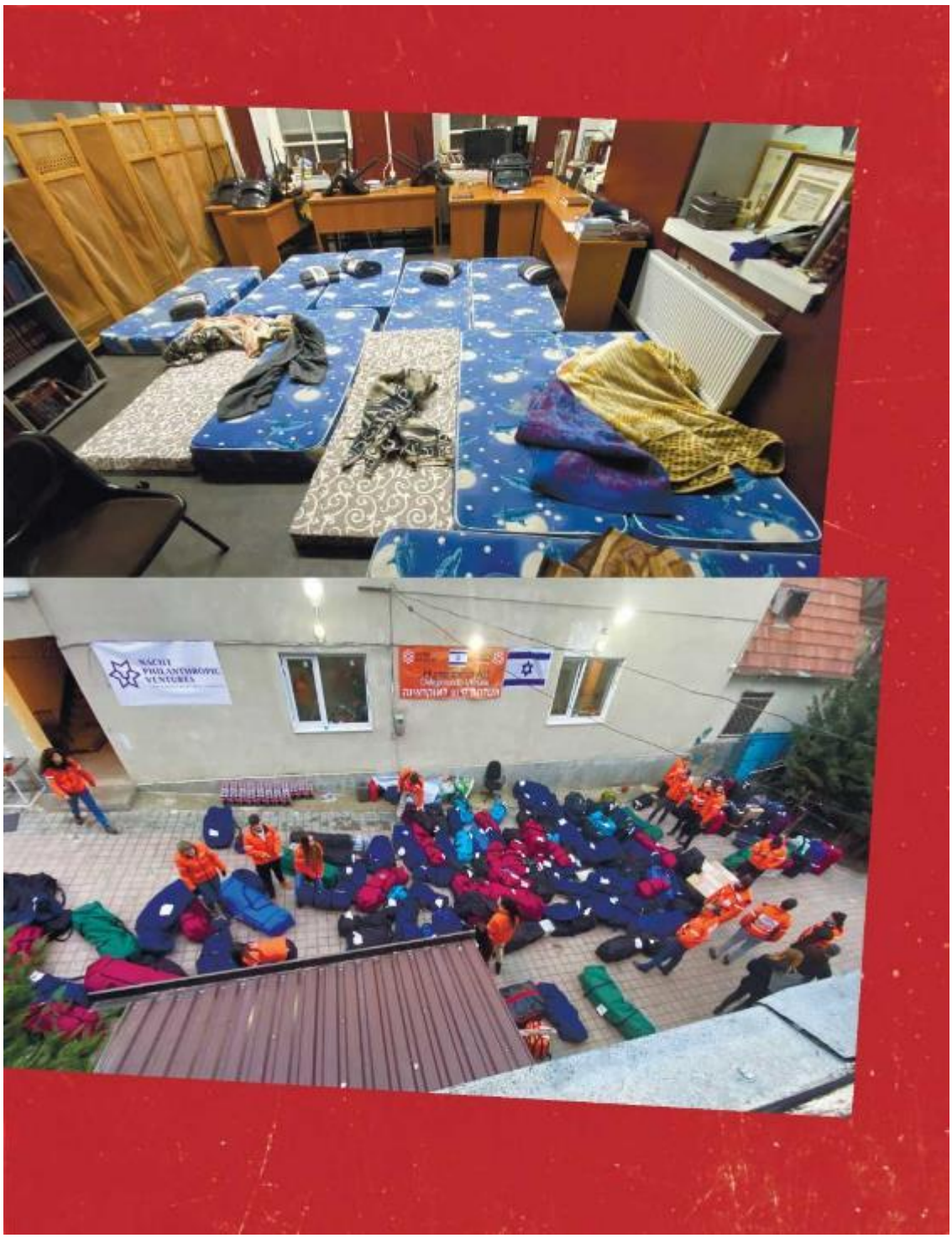
I'd like to note that the German government is helping refugees a lot. Along with other initiatives, they are organizing free subway transportation and free visits to attractions, so that people can be distracted from gloomy thoughts and feel like fully-fledged members of society. Nevertheless, the bureaucratic machine is complex. And I say this before trying to legalize my stay in Germany.

If you assume that all refugees are welcomed, that they are pitied and understood, you are grossly mistaken. Local residents, accustomed to comfort and certain benefits, face overcrowded cities and, in some cases, even food shortages. This is why many are angry at the come-in-large- numbers Ukrainians and may behave quite harshly. On the other hand, others are excessively friendly and look at us with the eyes of the cat from the Shrek cartoon, which also makes us uncomfortable.

Also, I must admit that some refugees feel that they are on vacation and expect five-star hotel service. Their demands are too high and they refuse to understand that they are not at home. When you are a guest, you should behave accordingly, not to offend your hosts.

Today I am grateful that I have a job, that I can be somewhat useful to others, that my dog has endured all of these moves. I know that there will be more red tape in obtaining a resident's permit and with other day-to-day problems. But I'll do my best not to give in to despair.

Since February 24 everything possible has gone wrong for us, Ukrainians."



My Boyfriend Missing in Mariupol

“Our shift ended at 4 a.m. Before the manager closed the cafe, each of us cleaned a corresponding section: I, the waitress, cleaned the guest room, my boyfriend Sasha - the bar, the other guys - the kitchen. The cafe is located in the very heart of Odessa, a stone’s throw from Catherine Square, so well-known to tourists. Now it is a military zone with authorized entrance for residents of nearby houses only; anti-tank hedgehogs line up from the Square to the Opera house, and the monument to Catherine is heaped upon with sandbags to protect it” I am Vika and I am 24.

“Sasha and I went home to the Village of Kotovsky[11]. At 8 in the morning, he and his younger brother were supposed to go to their parents in Mariupol. It was February 24th.

Suddenly our manager Lena called. She practically ordered Sasha to postpone his trip for a couple of days depending on how the situation would develop. After several years of joint work, we turned into one family with Lena as the Mom: she teaches, scolds, and consoles us. Now she insisted that Sasha should stay in Odessa. But as it was his father’s birthday in two days, and since it was agreed, no postponement was possible! Sasha is kind, but very stubborn. I also believed that everything would be okay: something exploded, there were some vague reports of a ‘special operation’, but it was over there - in the east.

At exactly 8 o’clock, Sasha’s younger brother picked him up, and they left. A few hours later, Sasha called me and said in a changed voice: “We got here all right, everything is fine, relax, I’ll call tomorrow.” Next morning his call was even more unintelligible: some guys he knew were

[11] A remote residential area of Odessa

going to Chisinau - it's better to go there; well, he was talking some kind of nonsense! The connection was interrupted constantly. I couldn't make head or tail of it, but staying alone in a rented apartment felt scary. I packed some things and went to my mother's.

I wish I hadn't! Mom was panicking, she had itchy feet, and she talked non-stop. In the evening, she announced that we would sleep in the basement. I refused and we quarreled, and then I tried again and again to get through to Sasha. No use - I couldn't reach him.

Next morning a message came. He wrote that the communication was jammed and shelling was heard; they were sitting in the basement, only going upstairs to catch the internet when the shelling stopped; and the connection was lousy. There were no explosions in Odessa at that time and what he wrote seemed unrealistic.

Before March 3, it was possible to contact Sasha in fits and starts. He begged my mother and I to go to Chisinau and flatly refused to answer any questions about how things were in Mariupol. He only said that if the Russians landed in Odessa, it would be better for me not to be there.

It was then that we left for Moldova. Upon arrival, we were placed in a house with 7 more women and three children. Still there was room for everyone. Volunteers constantly brought food.

As of March 3, Sasha stopped communicating. I called and wrote to his friends in Mariupol, but it was only two days later that I managed to get some information about him on Facebook. Sasha's classmate wrote that they lived in different parts of the city, and in his area all communications had been turned off. She last saw him alive with friends on February 28th. And then she wrote that the girl who was with them had died ...

From that moment on, I stopped understanding or doing anything. I was lying in bed. I did not sleep, but could not get up. On the fifth or sixth day a female volunteer came - a psychotherapist. The woman tried to talk to me, but I had no wish to speak and couldn't force myself to reply.

In the end, she and my mother convinced me to go to the hospital in order to be examined and I was prescribed antidepressants.

It was terribly difficult for me to answer the doctor's questions. At the end of the appointment, he asked me if I was going to leave Moldova. I replied that I didn't know.

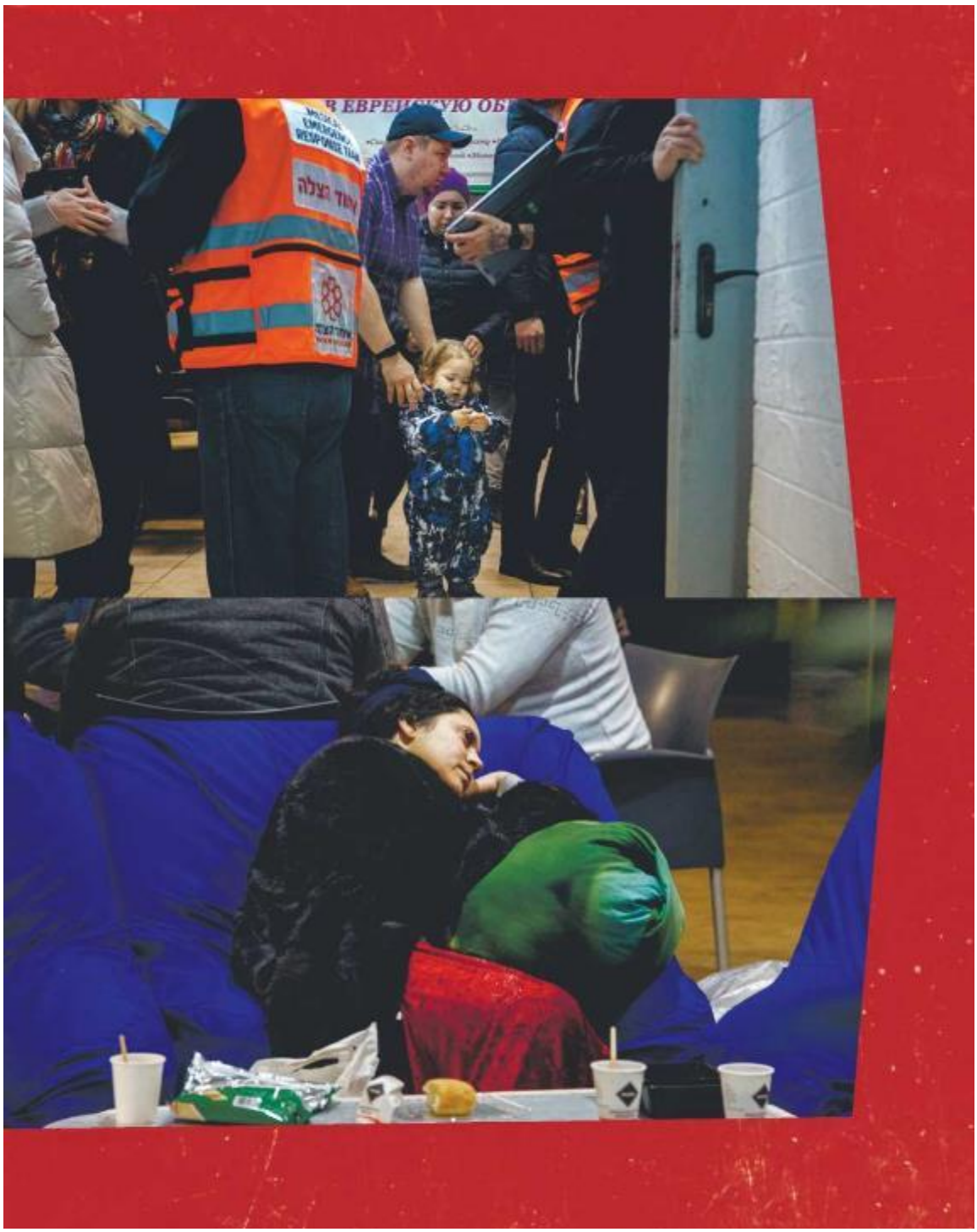
At home, I went back to bed and lay there for several days. My poor mother even tried to bake something - a cake or a pie - to somehow cheer me up. The psychotherapist Alena came in the evenings. She told stories and tried to distract

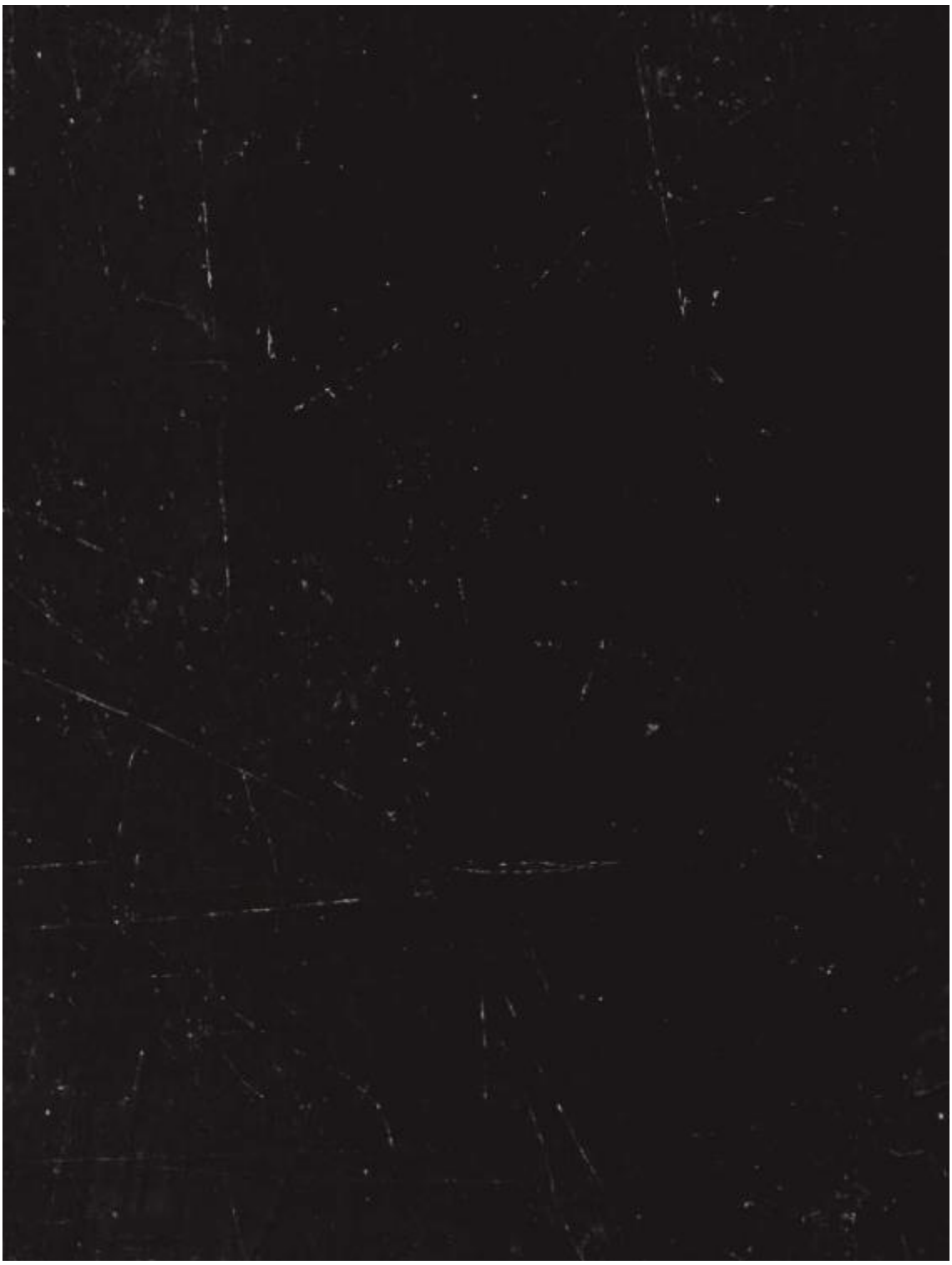
me. She persuaded me to drink medicine and eat.

It had been like that for probably a week before I wanted to get up and talk to someone. Almost everyone who had come simultaneously with us had now moved on to other countries. Strangers were having breakfast in the kitchen. They offered me to join, but nothing came into my mouth. I was obsessed with the thought that I was drinking tea here, while people were dying there. I couldn't even breathe properly. Only by the end of March did my condition improve a little. The psychotherapist explained to mom and I that it was depression and survivor syndrome. You know, this is the feeling of guilt that appears when a person manages to survive after a terrorist attack or a disaster, or an accident. In my case it was a war.

Now my mother and I are in Poland, where her brother lives with his family. I keep in touch with friends in Odessa. In our cafe, my colleagues cook for the guys from the territorial defense. Lena did not go anywhere, because her parents are in Odessa, as well as our fluffy cat Fedya that lives in the cafe and needs to be fed.

Instagram is full of reposts about Sasha being missing. Lots of people - not only friends and acquaintances - reposted the message about his disappearance. I want to believe that he is alive, hiding in the basements, or, when there was an evacuation from Mariupol, he managed to escape. The other day there was information that his car was seen near Kyiv, but it's a small probability. It's just like a straw that I try to hold onto. But I hope against hope."





Chapter 7

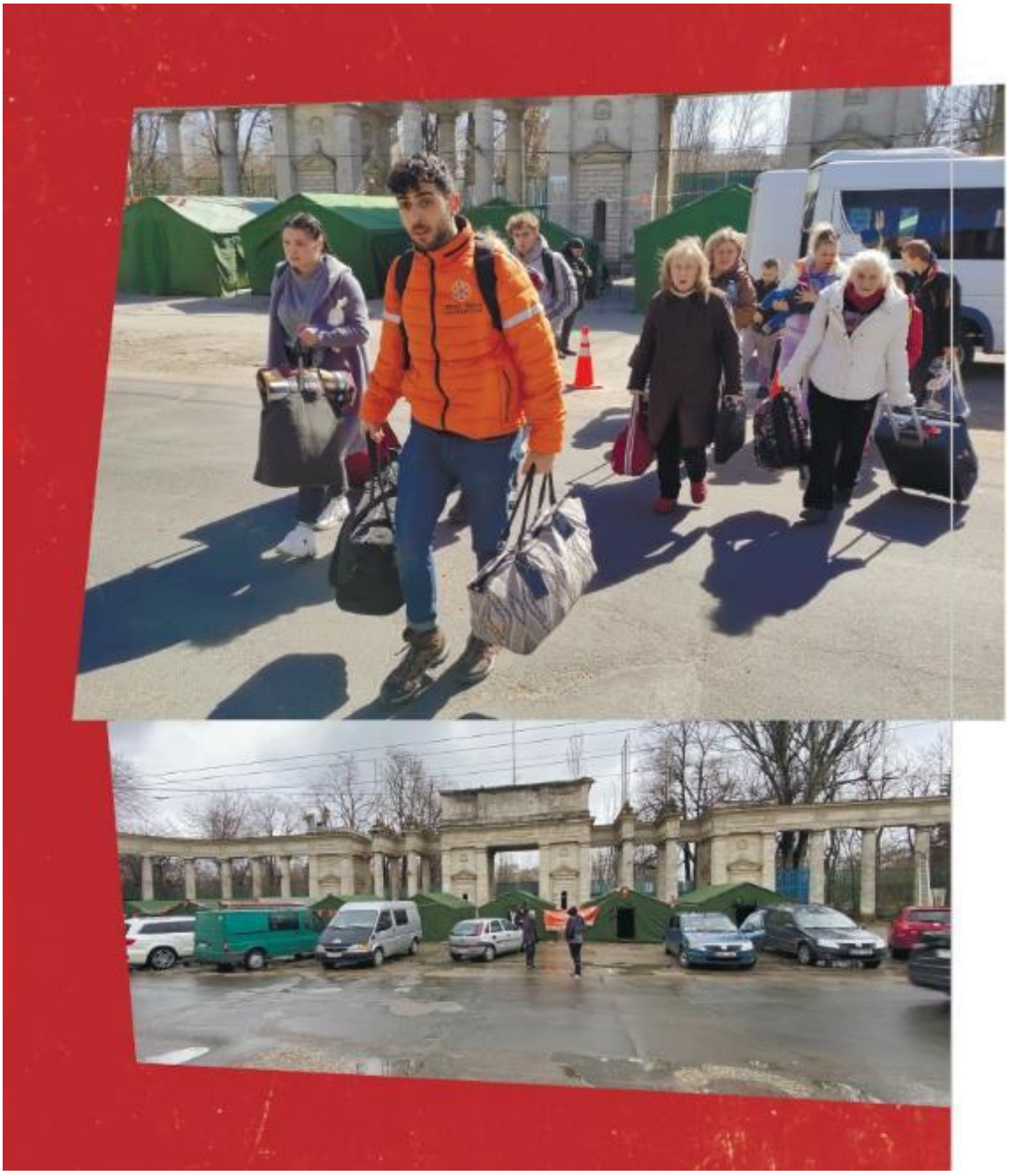
Horrors of the Road

MARCH 30

More than ten million people have now fled their homes in Ukraine because of the Russian invasion, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

As well as the four million who have left for neighboring countries, another estimated 6.5 million people are thought to be displaced inside the war-torn country itself.

Moldova, which has by far the largest concentration of refugees per capita, has also appealed for international help in dealing with the numbers arriving.



War is When You are Deprived of Everything You are Used To

On that day, from the very morning, I felt there was something wrong. The two-legged companions of Basya and me - Misha and Dasha - woke up bright and early, which was unlike them, and they were definitely nervous. Dasha was tossing things into a suitcase, while Misha was calling somewhere all the time. Neither of them petted us when we were rubbing against their legs. Even worse than that, I spotted two cat carriers near the front door. Trying not to look in that direction, I darted under the sofa and called Basya; she joined me.

But humans are cunning!

"Ozzy"- Dasha's voice was oversweet, - "come here, baby! Look, I have a goodie for you!"

She was so persuasive that I got out from under the sofa and followed her voice. In a wink, I found myself inside a large plastic box. As the door slammed shut behind me, I realized it was a trap.

I was meowing at the top of my voice, growling and trying to open the damned door, but all in vain. Through the latticed window in the box, I saw our bipeds performing the same trick on Basya. Poor thing did not even try to get out of the trap, but hid in the corner, her eyes sad and scared.

What if... no way, but what if... what if they wanted to take us back to the orphanage from which they had taken us a year ago? (There it was rumored we were only kept to be fed to a boa constrictor in the Odessa snake museum or in the zoo. Why on earth?)

I was gripped by panic. I yelled, calling for help, but these bipeds - usually so caring - pushed us into the car. Dasha's mother and grandmother were already inside, also with a cat carrier on their laps. Two unfamiliar cats - black and gray - were sitting there quietly; the black one only growled petulantly when the car started off.

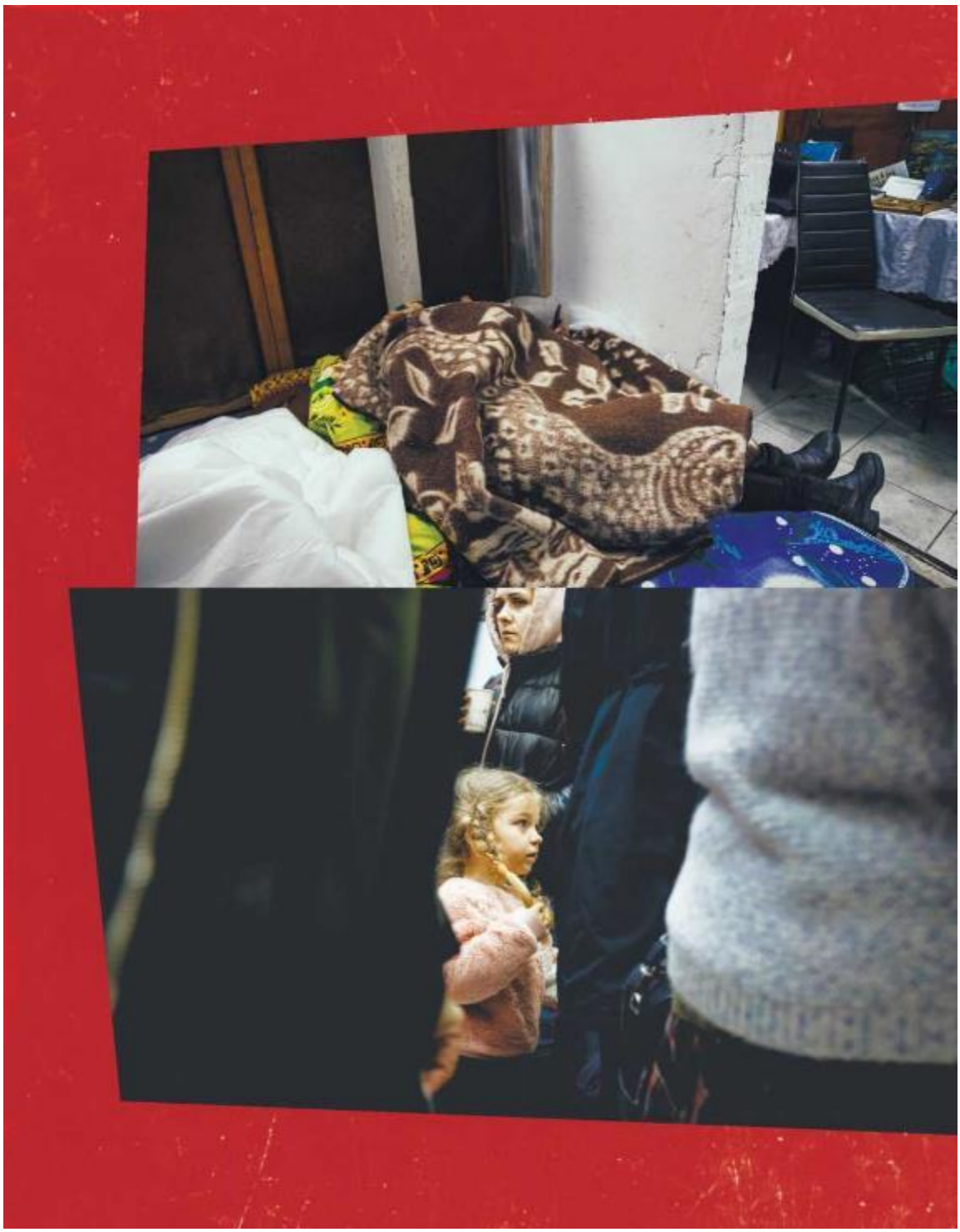
The people were silent. Dasha was tapping softly on the top of my plastic prison and kept saying:

"Don't be afraid, Ozzy! Everything will be okay; you are with us."

We drove for a very long time and slowly. Stopping all the time, the two-leggeds were talking about terrible traffic jams. I gathered we were moving to a place called Chisinau, as we could no longer stay at home, in Odessa. Dasha told her mother that she had thrown random stuff into their suitcase, hadn't taken any

paper or paints, and the sketchbook remained in the studio where she would go to work every day. Her mom reassured her, saying that she could buy all those in Chisinau; still you need to save money, because nobody knows how long it will last. And grandma said that once, as a girl, she had been evacuated, during that war. She repeated that war and this war several times; there was something terrible in the word - something that made you want to run in any direction.
“Here we are at last” Misha said and began to unload us all from the taxi. He picked up the women, suitcases, bags and carriers with cats; then everyone set off on foot. From behind my bars, I saw a never-ending line of cars. Adults and children were sitting in them, young women with babies in their arms and very old people. Some people got out for a breath of air. Some held large dogs on leashes; others held small ones. I also saw several cats with their bipeds. Few people talked, no one laughed, everyone was very tense.

“Refugees, like us,” - Dasha’s grandmother sighed. - “War. Trouble.”
We moved and moved along the car line. Later Misha said that they had walked four kilometers to the border with Moldova. It was the hardest for Dasha’s grandmother. She is 87 years old, you know. But she did not complain and even tried to crack jokes.
Then the bipeds put us in the car and took us somewhere again. I was completely exhausted when, finally, we arrived at someone’s house, and we - Basya and me, and the two unfamiliar cats - were released from the damned cages. It was awful there! Alien smells, faces, voices... We immediately dashed inside and under the sofa.
From there I saw people hugging, kissing, crying and laughing at the same time. When they sat down at the table, more people arrived - a woman with three kids. And again, everyone began to hug, kiss and cry. From their conversations, I understood that those people had come from Kyiv, traveling for two days without a wink of sleep at night. Hiding behind the suitcases in the hallway, Basya and I watched what was happening at the table. The two-leggeds were very noisy, interrupting each other all the time. Then someone asked: “What will happen next?” and all at once everyone fell silent.



By evening, everyone was assigned to apartments. When Misha offered to help the Kyiv woman carry her suitcase, it turned out to be almost unliftable. “Here are the papers of eleven generations of my family that have lived in Kyiv. For some reason, I grabbed the archive, but not my own things”, - the woman shrugged her shoulders. - “Okay, I’ll get by somehow. Maybe, it won’t take long...”

Basya and me, together with Misha and Dasha, stayed in the house where we had arrived initially. It turned out to belong to Misha’s relatives. Gradually, we got used to them. The hostess did baby talk with us, but wouldn’t let us get on the table and the stove; the host would not let us rub against him. He kind of ignored us, but never offended, and we were thankful for that. When you live in someone else’s house, you have to endure.

We were luckier than others, as we had a roof over our heads on arrival. Some of our kin - canine and feline - went through terrible ordeals! The hostess read on the internet about a woman who fled from Odessa with a whole cat shelter - 12 of them - and for a long time could not find a house in Chisinau where she would be accepted. Very often, people called our hosts and asked them to find housing for families with animals; it looks like not everyone wants to take in refugees with pets! Once I could not sleep all night: that evening Dasha was looking at photographs of abandoned dogs and cats; their bipeds left them behind, running away from the war.

Life in a new place in Chisinau was normalizing. Basya and I were no longer annoyed by other people’s smells or voices; we stopped startling at every sound. Some two weeks later, Misha returned from the store with two new cat carriers. Dasha sighed and went to pack their suitcase. It was announced that we were leaving for Germany.

I think now I know what war is. This is when you are deprived of everything that you are used to. When your destiny is controlled without asking if you want to live like this. When love and fidelity remain the only support.

I don’t Understand How to Cope with the New Reality

“I don’t even know where to start,” says Irina, 40, a refugee from Odessa.

“There are things that I could never have imagined, not even in a nightmare. Or rather, there WERE such things, now they are nonexistent... I work in a family as a nanny. On February 24, I was with them 5,000 km away from home, in Dubai, where we had arrived two days before the war. When I heard about the explosions in the morning, the first thing that came to mind was that they were from some kind of quarry mining in Moldavanka, a district in Odessa. It was impossible to believe that a war with Russia had begun. My employers suggested that I fly home right away and take my family to Chisinau. But on that day, my husband, father and I were sure that everything would end very quickly. The parties would come to an agreement, and nobody would lay a hand on our dear Odessa.

“A few days later, it became clear that it would be better to leave Odessa, at least for a while. But men under the age of sixty were no longer allowed out of Ukraine. Who would be able to take my ten-year-old daughter out of the city, if not her father?

“My employers bought me a ticket to Bucharest, since Moldovan airspace closed on the very first day of the war. They also arranged for a driver from Chisinau to take me to the border between Moldova and Ukraine. According to our plan, I was supposed to meet my husband there, and he would hand my daughter over to me.

“Then the news came that chances were slim that my husband would still be allowed to enter Moldova through the southern border with our daughter, 10, and son, 18. This was still the best plan for us: anything could happen during my journey, which would last about a day, and I wanted the whole family to be together. Unfortunately, though, my 70-year-old dad flatly refused to go anywhere, saying he would wait for us in Odessa, as he had things to do. He is a monitor in a kindergarten, you know.

“My husband and two children went to Moldova with their bags, a dog, and two cats. The children and animals coped with the road perfectly. It was my husband who showed weakness—lost his nerve, apparently. He was very worried that he would have to go away not just for a few days, but indefinitely. He decided he would return to Odessa after leaving the children in Chisinau. However, my persuasive words, tears and screams with threats over the phone did their job, and in the end he made up his mind not to part with the rest of the family.

“The cats and the dog were handed over to my employers’ relatives, and the family settled in a hotel. It was the third day of the war, and the issue of accommodating Ukrainians in Chisinau turned into an acute problem. Some hotel owners inflated prices by two or even three times. The apartments that friends, colleagues, and acquaintances could provide were filled with their relatives, friends, and colleagues from Ukraine. Our family was lucky: on the first day of the influx of refugees, my employer’s father decided that it would be useful to book rooms in several hotels in Chisinau in advance.

“People said that things were even harder with the apartments. No one—neither the hosts nor the refugees—expected a long stay. Everyone was sure that after a day or two, this horror would come to an end. When it became clear that all this would go on for a long time, the Ukrainians left without housing and without work and they began to think about where to go next.

“On the whole, to say that the Moldovans helped us would be an understatement. At the borders, day and night, there was a huge number of volunteers with cars, ready to take refugees to any part of Moldova. Hot drinks, food, blankets, and warm clothes in sub-zero temperatures for the tired and confused people were not only a material support, but a signal that gave people (many of whom had children) hope for the best and confidence that they would be assisted—with food and housing, with strollers and toys. Our daughter Eva was given a teddy bear. It became a symbol of peace, home, and warmth for her. Tha bear cub is still with her in Berlin.

“In Chisinau, many cafes and restaurants offered free lunches and dinners. They did not throw us a bone; instead, they offered sincere hospitality. People created chats and groups on Instagram, Telegram, and Facebook where they offered assistance—from household items to free travel to anywhere in Europe. Medical centers and private clinics offered their services to refugees free of charge. A peculiar detail: food was brought for the animals every day, special food for each breed, and toys for pets. On top of that, veterinarians provided pet examinations and issued documents to take pets across the border free of charge. Under the circumstances, Ukrainians were generally treated as warmly and cordially as possible.

“I know that the refugees who stayed in Moldova found a second home there for themselves and their families. When it came to our family, though, there was no reason for us to stay. I decided that it would be best for me to follow my employers’ family, who moved to Germany.

“Several days later, my relatives flew to Berlin. I finally reunited with my

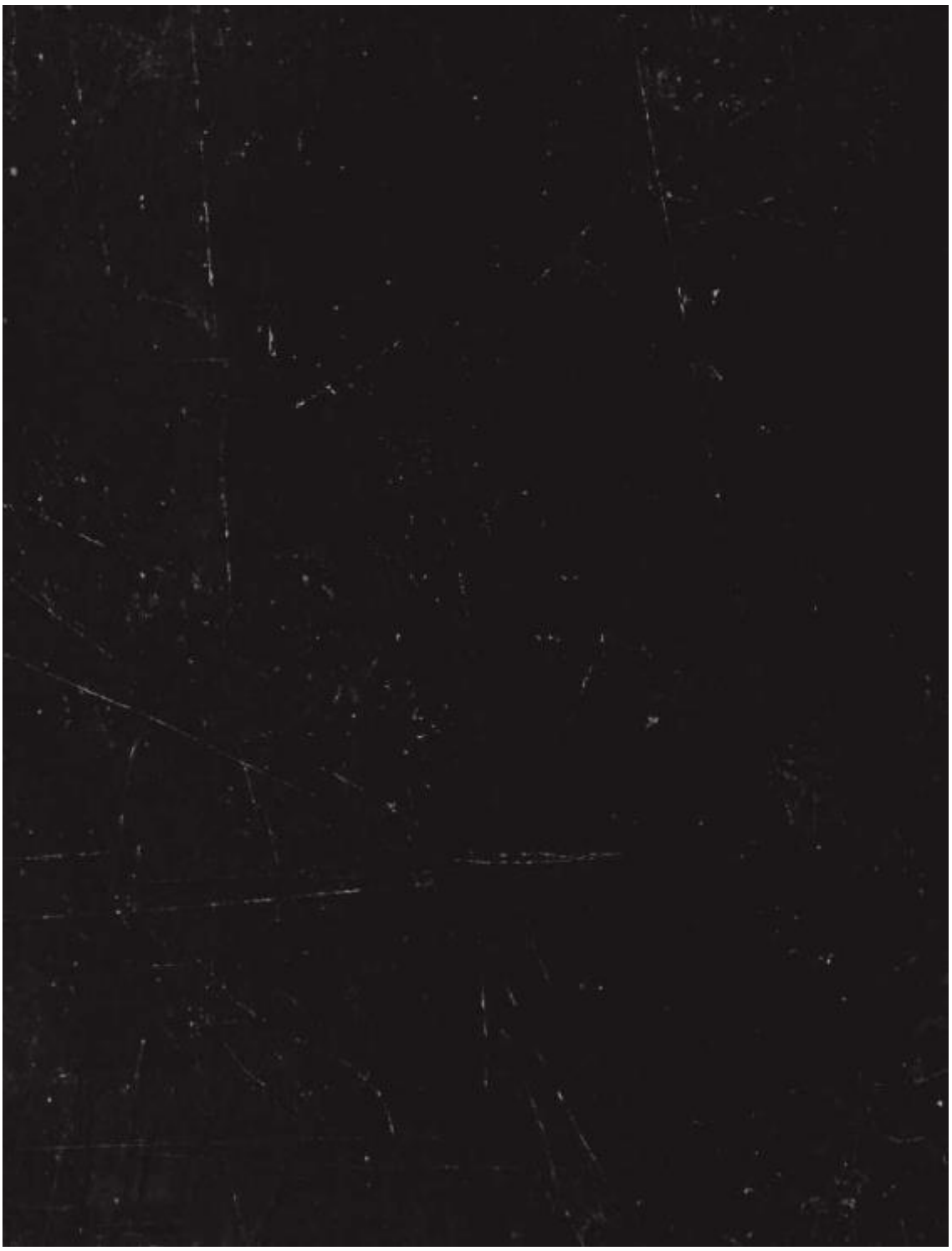
husband, daughter, and son. These two weeks of separation due to the war felt like two years to us...

“In Berlin, we settled in a hotel. I suppose hotels will be our home for a long time: it is next to impossible to find an apartment in under two to three months. But we do have work. Mine is the same—nannying for the same family as before, while my husband and son work at a warehouse, loading, packing, and delivering goods. Our daughter was placed in a German school. The first day was a tearful one: she did not understand a word of German. By the second day, it got easier: the teachers started speaking to her in English, the language she had studied at school in Odessa, and within a week, other children from Ukraine arrived at the school.

“Shortly after, we were officially registered at the refugee center. It was full of people. An overwhelming majority were women with children, as men had not been allowed out of the country. The refugees are from many places—Kyiv, Chernihiv, Dnipro, Kharkiv, Odessa, Lviv... Not far from the main building, there is a temporary camp where women and children with their few belongings wait to be relocated throughout Germany. The social service also finds out what kind of work can be offered to refugees.

“The other day, we received a visa for two years. I have a work permit. Soon we will be relocated to an unfurnished rental apartment.

“Our family is lucky, but the thought of returning home once everything is calm has not left us. We don’t yet understand how to cope with the new reality, and judging by our conversations with Ukrainians in Berlin, no one does.”

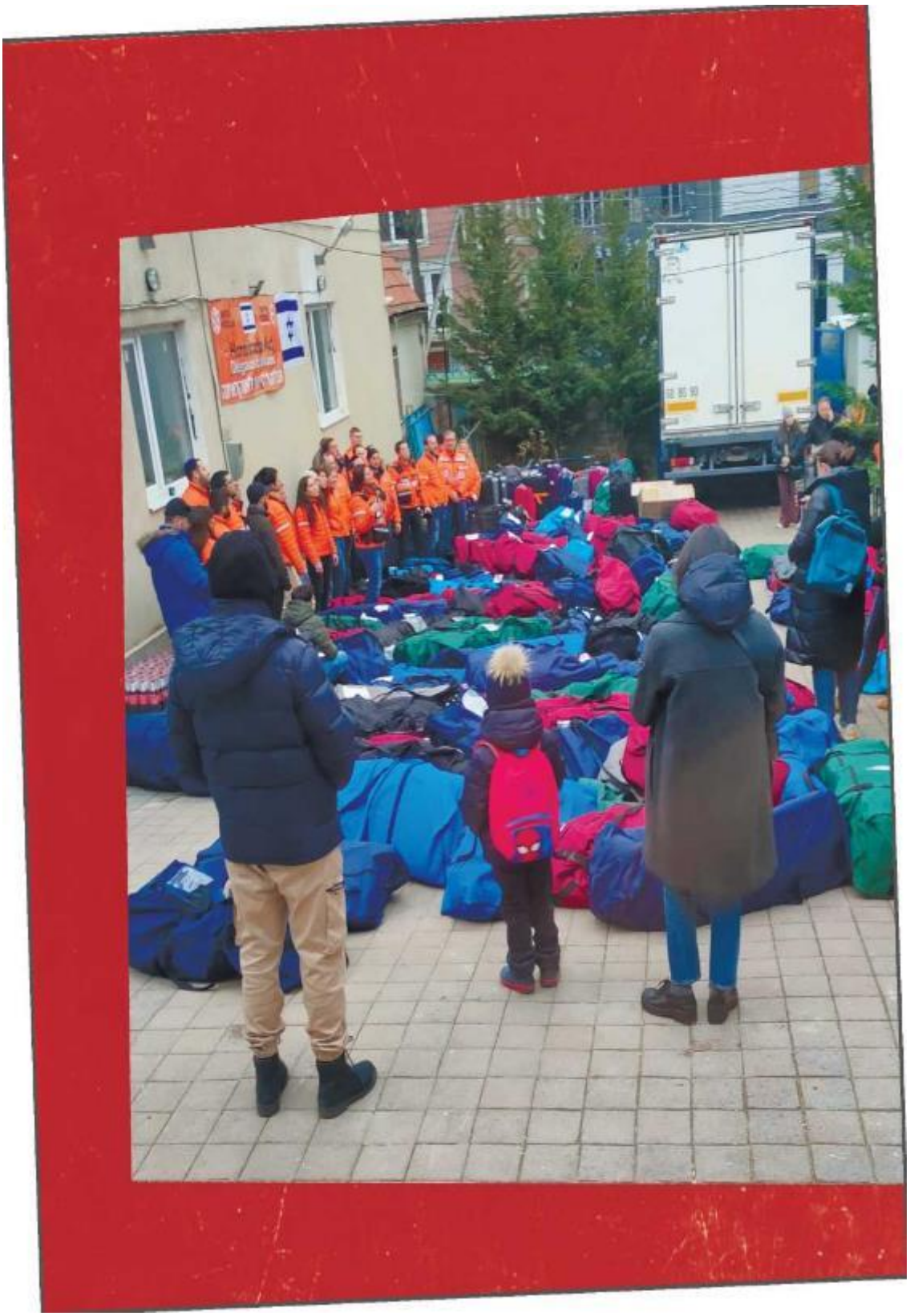


Chapter 8

Leaving to Live

APRIL 2

More than 500 largest companies have stopped working in Russia. This list includes Visa, MasterCard, Exxon, Shell, Deutsche Bank, Goldman Sachs, Nestle, McDonald's, Adidas, Bloomberg, Netflix, Google, Amazon, Disney, Qualcomm, Microsoft, PayPal, eBay, Sony, Spotify, Western Union, Apple, Airbus, Boeing, Dell, Samsung, DHL, FedEx, UPS and many others.



I Am Only 1% of My Former Self

Who could imagine this war would start? Who could believe that Russia would attack us, that we would become refugees and lose our homes, businesses, regular way of life - everything? Who could believe that we, so prudent and venturous, would be brazenly robbed and left without money? Olga wipes her tears. Can someone explain to me what all this is for?

I am the mother of four kids, this is my story. Usually I get up very early, before six. Otherwise the morning will pass in an endless rush: feeding three (one of them being a baby with its own schedule), sending two to school and one to the kindergarten, having a cup of coffee and starting work. I have my own small business in Odessa, a cosy little pastry shop. After the pandemic reduced staff to a minimum, I became a jack of all trades: a manager-accountant-buyer-delivery agent.

On the morning of February 24, I woke up before dawn and was basking in bed before getting out of it, when the first explosion broke the silence. It was so scary! I felt paralyzed; I couldn't move an arm or a leg. It was some alien kind of fear, sticky...

My imagination immediately drew bomb craters, falling buildings, smoke from conflagrations ... And, what about us? What about the children? I don't have a husband. In there is bombing, who will help?

My mother's voice on the phone - and I am out of bed. She is screaming: "Pack up the children and stuff! Come to us immediately!" My parents live in a private sector on the outskirts of the city. What's the plan? My parents say we will figure it out when you are here.

I woke up the children and started rushing around the apartment, collecting things. Where are we going? For how long? When will we get back home? What to take, what to leave? Where to put everything? After running around the apartment for half an hour, I didn't really manage to collect anything, except for a stroller and a baby bag with diapers and bottles. I sat down in confusion. Then the older children - 14-year-old Lesya and 10-year-old Miron - announced they knew better what they would need; 15 minutes later their full backpacks were already at the door. The kids' composure sobered me up. I packed 5-year-old Dasha and 1-year-old Vanya according to the weather, that is, I took mostly warm clothes, a few toys and an album for drawing on the way. For myself, I took two tracksuits, some underwear, a laptop, two phones and a charger. My documents are always ready in one place; I just had to get a folder and throw it into my bag.

By the way, we don't have any suitcases. The only suitcase was taken by my ex-husband six months ago, when we decided to separate. Now he called and asked if there was anything we needed. I proudly rejected his help, though soon understood how stupid it was. I had some money deposited in my account, seemingly enough for a month or two. As to cash, there were only hryvnias, but on the very first day they were worth nothing - not even to buy a loaf of bread.
The pastry shop - the thought of it flashed through my confused mind as we left. Thus, we made a detour to stop at my dear little business to close the shutters, as if something could save it from explosions.
Dad called: he told us, turn towards the border with Moldova - we are all leaving Ukraine, meeting at the border crossing. We moved as slowly as a garden snail; the whole city seemed to be getting out in that direction.
The kids were unusually quiet. No one argued with me, no one was capricious. Even little Vanechka seemed to understand - there was no interfering with his mother in this moment of time. Already at home, I had told my eldest about the war breaking out. Now they were sitting depressed and silent, no questions. I made no comment either only to say that grandpa asked us to leave the city for a while.
Standing in line at the border took us two hours. Later I was told that that was quick and that others would spend days there! While waiting, we watched folks walking by. These were people without personal transport who decided to cross the border on foot. The stream flowed slowly, like at a funeral. Women, children, old people... Some were transported in wheelchairs. Many with pets. We noticed several children tied with a rope attached to the hand of a woman so that they would not get lost. They passed by in single-file. In the crowd, everyone looked disoriented - nobody knew what would happen next.
Finally, we went through all the formalities and ended up on the Moldovan side. Dad asked me to wait for him at the nearest gas station. In the end, all the relatives arrived in two cars: my parents in one and my brother's wife with two daughters in the other. My brother decided to remain in Odessa.
Next was the question of where to stay. On arriving in Chisinau, we started hotel hunting. One hotel, the second, the third - everything was full. The kids were tired and lost heart. In the fifth hotel, it became clear we would never find four rooms for nine people. The plan was changed: we somehow rented two rooms in different hotels, while my parents sheltered for a couple of days with old friends.
Two days passed like in a dream. We would only leave the hotel for a snack. From early in the morning till late in the evening we were watching news from Ukraine.

What the Russians called a ‘special operation’ turned out to be a full-scale war. No way we would be back home in a week. I didn’t want to move further from Moldova; in my heart of hearts there was hope they would come to an agreement, end hostilities, and we would return to Odessa - sooner or later.

On the third day of our life as refugees, dad suggested renting a house. We all rushed to look. But the offers, which were available on the first day of the war, evaporated. There were neither houses, nor large apartments - nothing! Ukrainian refugees had rented everything they could in Chisinau and were filling neighboring towns and villages.

Someone suggested that it was useless to search on our own - that we needed to hire a realtor. Friends of acquaintances recommended ‘a reliable person who would do everything right’. Indeed, Vyacheslav turned out to be a very pleasant man. He told us everything, sympathized that the prices for rent had gone up, explained what to pay attention to so as not to be deceived. He showed us photos of several houses in Chisinau and its environs. He said that it would be better to immediately sign a contract and give a deposit because of the high demand. The documents were in Romanian, Vyacheslav translated them for us, and we agreed to the terms. We gave him a deposit - 1500 euros - which was a big sum for us, even before the war, let alone now. Vyacheslav promised to take us to the rented house the next day. Promising to call, he said good-bye.

In the morning we were evicted from the hotel. The whole day we sat in a near-by cafe, waiting for Vyacheslav to get in touch with us, but he didn’t. He didn’t answer our calls either. However, we didn’t lose hope.

Closer to the evening, we resumed the hotel search and, with difficulty, found rooms, but only for one night. The next morning we discovered that the phone of the ‘reliable’ realtor was blocked. Both the realtor and the deposit were gone. At our emergency family council, we argued whether to go to the police or not. The conclusion was ‘no’: red tape would take time, while we had nowhere to live. That was how we decided to move on right there and then.

The question was - where to? I remembered how in the past life, a few days before the war started, I whined that I wanted to live in a warm country near the ocean. Now we jumped to the conclusion that Portugal might be the place to go.

With a very heavy heart, we moved further and further away from Ukraine, passing through Romania, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, France and Spain. Because of the kids, we stopped in each country for a day or two. The money went easily

because of the cost of gasoline and hotels, though we tried to save as much as we could. Finally, we reached our destination.

It is our first day in Portugal, seven o'clock in the morning. I'm walking towards the desired ocean; the baby's babbling in the stroller; it's stunningly beautiful around, but I'm filled with an animal fear. We still have enough savings for food, but I'm very, very lonely - no friends, no acquaintances. Everything is foreign. My parents are talking of returning to Ukraine, but I'm still afraid. For myself and for the children. Because the most precious thing for a person is life, and for a parent - the childrens' safety.

Speaking about me, I seem not to exist most of the time. It's like I am not me. Some unfamiliar woman sleeps, shuddering at every sound. The woman-stranger brushes her teeth, applies cream to her face, chooses clothes to go out. Some alien mother rushes with a stroller along the embankment or changes diapers for the baby, does the laundry and cooking. Some not-me mother argues with teenage children, then puts up with them. This woman neither works, nor rests in any way; she dreams of nothing, counts on no one, seems to no longer believe in anything. I feel not the one I used to be. I am only 1% of my former self.


MOLDOVA

Life under Occupation

Dasha, 28, is now in Chisinau, with her husband and daughter. She removed the TV-set from the wall, trying not to watch or read the news on the internet and avoiding as much as possible talking about the war. She knows she can't resume her former life and attitudes.

Everyone was talking about the possibility of war at the end of February - participants of various TV-shows, neighbors, acquaintances. Dasha brushed it off: "Are you out of your mind? What war? No, Russia will never attack us. Never ever! It will not attack its own citizens; many people in Ukraine are Russians, and even have Russian passports. Especially here, in Odessa".

On February 20, Dasha took her one-year-old daughter Sandochka and went to visit her parents who lived near Kherson. A few days later, the war began.

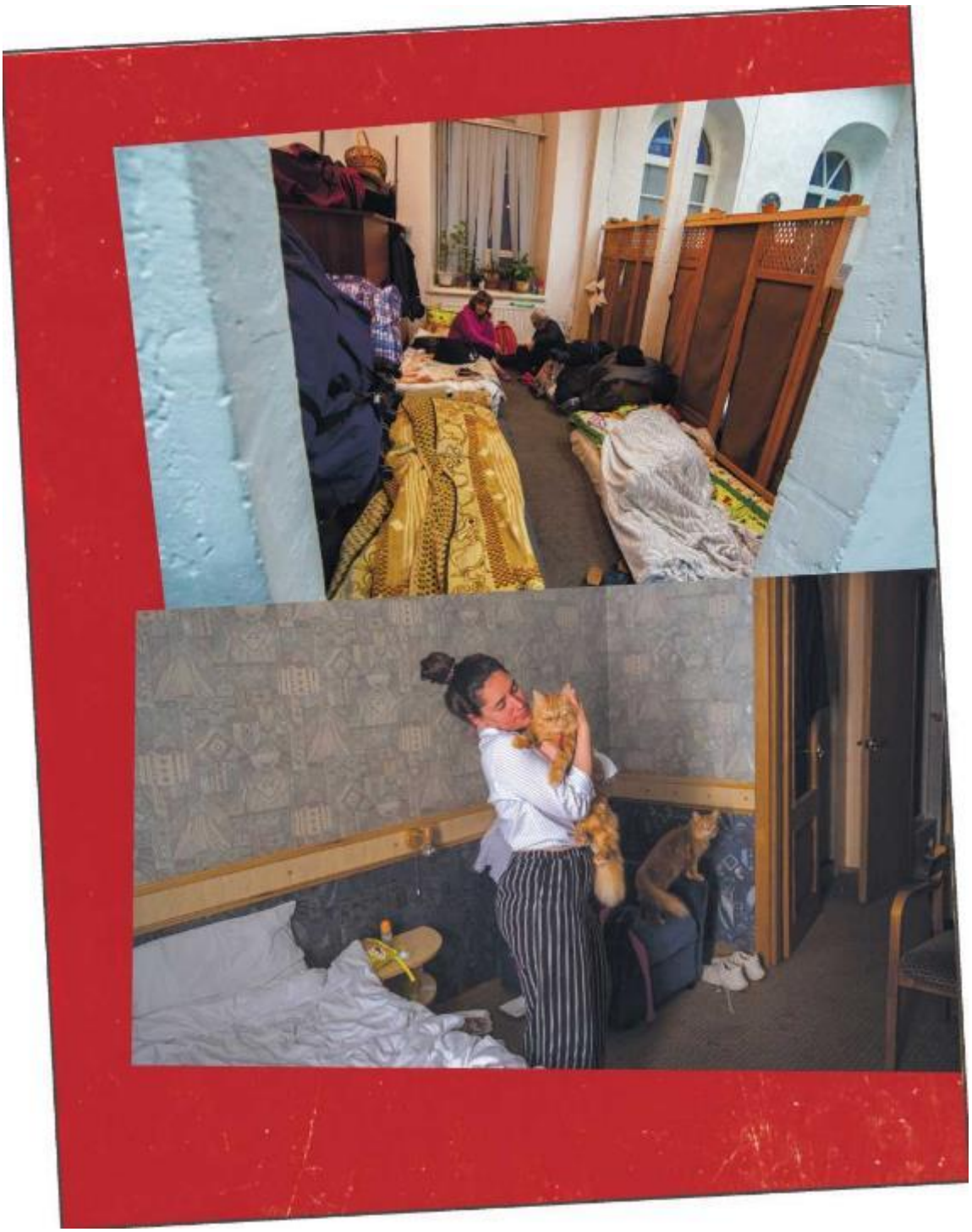
"At first, almost no one could believe it, like me. There were a few alarmists, but mostly people behaved as usual. If you don't watch the news on TV, then nothing bad seems to be happening," she said.

"My husband called me from Odessa. He said that explosions were heard in the city early in the morning. Now everything is quiet. The Russians announced they would only destroy military installations. But it is safer for me and Sandochka to stay with my parents. And he will come as soon as possible".

A couple of hours later, when Dasha called him back, he had already completely changed his mind. "Many people are leaving," he said, "some for Chisinau, some for Lviv. There are rumors that Odessa will be bombed." He was going to get enlisted in the territorial defense. "What do you mean - territorial defense!?" Dasha was alarmed. "Firstly, they won't take you because you are a Moldovan, you have Moldovan citizenship. Secondly, I won't let you go!" Dasha kept persuading him; her husband was stubborn, but in the end, he agreed to leave for Moldova, where there was a branch of his company.

So, the day passed in calls and negotiations. "In the evening, the light was cut off in the whole village, once and for all. There was no electricity or water for two weeks. Well, my parents had a small supply of water and diesel for the generator. If it were not for this, I daren't think of the possible consequences," recalls Dasha. She woke up at night to the sound of explosions. Dasha grabbed the sleeping Sandochka, threw a blanket over her, put on a coat, and went down to the cold cellar together with her parents. Her mother was weeping and crossing herself, while her father was self-controlled and businesslike. "We'll be okay here," he said, looking by the candlelight at the cellar full of home-made canned food. "We

just need to bring water and bread."
Explosions ceased in the morning to resume at noon.
"The first week we slept in outerwear; day and night. Things were constantly being blown up all around us. Sometimes the explosions were so strong and so close, that our doors shook. My toddler shuddered and cried; she was frightened. It seemed to me that this horror went on forever. I couldn't believe that this was happening to me."
A few days later, Russian tanks entered. It was scary to see military equipment with the Z symbol on the narrow streets of a peaceful and quiet village. The military stated that if there were no provocations, they would not touch anybody. They might as well not have made the warning! People were so intimidated that they were afraid to stick their nose out into the street."
"There is a playground about 200 meters away. Previously, it was noisy - all the mothers with their children used to gather here. I played there with my daughter in the first days of the war. Now nobody competes for the swings, the place is deserted even on warm days. Everyone walks alone in their yards. Neighbors are afraid to talk even amongst themselves," says Dasha.



Drones and helicopters were flying over the village and explosions were heard from time to time.

“Once two Russian soldiers came to our house. They asked about fellow villagers who had signed up for the defense of Kherson. They wanted to know where the nineteen-year-old neighbor and his father had gone, whether they were serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. I suspected that my father knew something, but he acted stupid and pretended that he never talked to that family. The military were not rude, but I could feel their aggression. If they hadn’t liked something about my father’s behavior, tone, or body language, they could have hit or arrested him. When they left, my mother had a heart attack.”

In early March, it was announced that Kherson surrendered almost without any fighting. “The TV began to transmit Russian news. In our region, the Russians did not commit atrocities, as in Bucha or Irpin. They neither killed people, nor robbed houses, but positioned themselves as overlords, and it was humiliating.”

When rallies began in Kherson against the new Russian authorities, father was ready to join in. “We worked hard to persuade him to stay at home, we almost kept him by force. It was a good job that we did. The rallies were dispersed, there was some shooting, and someone was wounded.”

After the seizure of Kherson, many of the soldiers left the village. The howl of planes was replaced by the roar of cars. “It was also scary when huge KAMAZ trucks loaded with equipment and soldiers moved along the streets. There were few military men left - patrolmen and administration. It was assumed that the Kherson region was now a territory of Russia, though everyone in our village wants to live in Ukraine - this is our homeland.”

Dasha lived in her parents’ house for the first two long months of the war. During that time, she tried to talk her parents into moving away. They refused point blank: why should they leave their home and change their way of life at their age? Her parents, in their turn, tried to convince Dasha to stay, but she could not accept the new situation. Moreover, her husband was waiting for her in Chisinau.

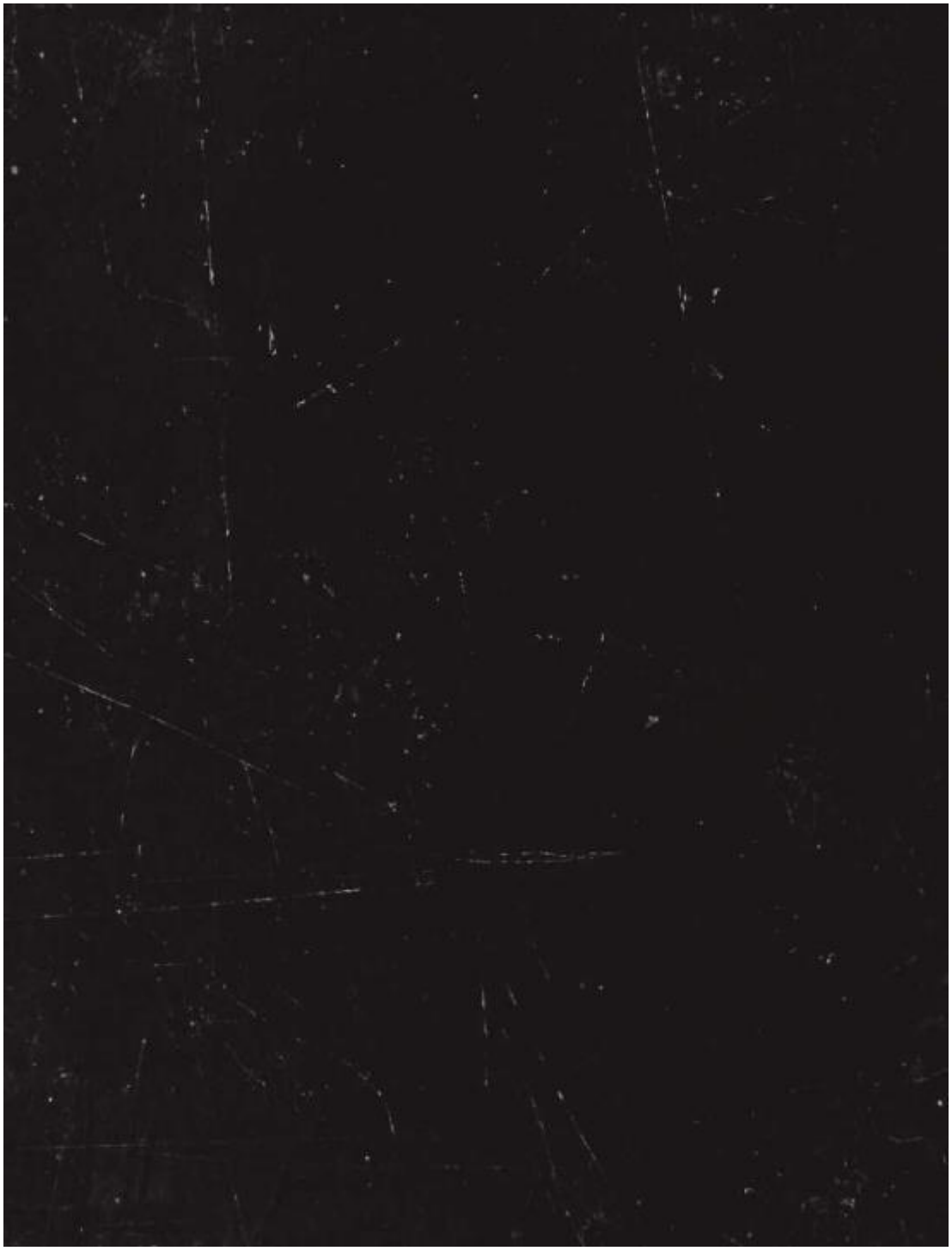
“It was difficult to leave my childhood home. It was even more difficult to make this decision,” she admits. “This is where my parents are, they have always helped me, and now I have to help them. What if Kherson really becomes a Russian territory? What if Russia pulls down the iron curtain and we will never see each other again? What if the war lasts for years? What if my village becomes the front line? I tossed and turned all night, I thought about what I should do. Finally, the decision was made, thanks to one of my female friends who persuaded me to go! Thanks to my husband who supported me all the time. Thank you, dad, for taking

us out of Kherson. Dad is my hero!"

On the road anything can happen. We had to go through the line of fire, through areas where battles were constantly being fought. Sometimes we had to wait somewhere for hours, then turn into country roads, and drive through dozens of checkpoints and go through numerous checks. Instead of the usual three hours, it took 13 hours to get to Odessa. From there, they grabbed a few necessary things, before Dasha and her daughter left for Chisinau, where her husband had rented an apartment.

"I don't know what is in store for us next, but there is no point in leaving Chisinau now. Here we have friends, and my husband has a job. However, the situation is changing so quickly that we may soon need to depart again," Dasha sighs.

The day after we met, there were explosions in Transnistria - an unrecognized republic that is part of Moldova. The regional authorities classify these explosions as provocative acts, but people, frightened by the terrible experiences they have gone through in Ukraine, have begun to pack 'go-bags' just in case.

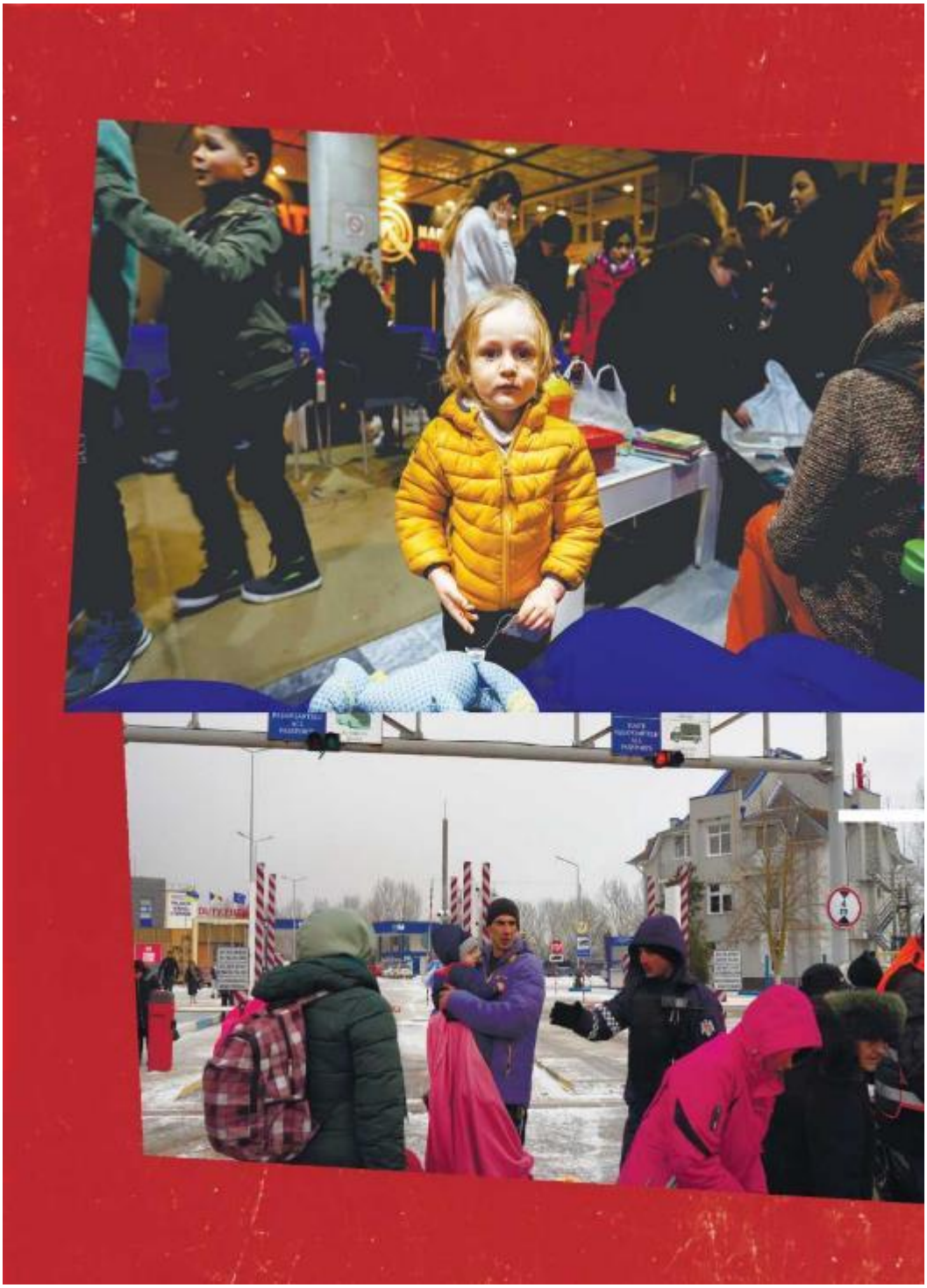


Chapter 9

Beyond the Limits

APRIL 3

The world's largest news agencies have published shocking information and footage about the tragedy in Bucha, a suburb of Kyiv, where dozens of civilians were brutally killed. This information caused a surge of indignation among leaders of countries and civil society, as well as new diplomatic and sanction measures against Russia.



Mothers Will Never Let the World Forget the Tragedy of Ukraine

“I still don’t believe that all this is happening to me, to us, to my country. That the cities of my country lie in ruins, and I myself, an 11th generation resident of Kyiv and the Editor-in-Chief of a well-known newspaper, was forced to flee, grabbing three children in my arms and abandoning my house, life, country, to their fate under the caterpillars of war tanks.” These are the words of famous Kyiv journalist Yanina Sokolovskaya.

“On February 24, I woke up to the sound of explosions. It was 5 a.m. in Kyiv, 4 a.m. in Moscow. I had already decided to leave the country. Primarily, because of the kids. Staying in the city was dangerous.

We hit the road the next morning. There were terrible traffic jams. We managed to get to the highway by noon.

When we were escaping from Kyiv, Russian tanks were moving towards the city. We tried to drive along rural roads, through forests and fields, avoiding big roads, while Russian aircraft fired at the cars of my compatriots. When we got out of the forest and reached asphalt roads, we saw columns of Russian military equipment. We were rushing towards Kamenets-Podolsky, one of the most beautiful cities in Ukraine, which is under UNESCO protection as a historical monument. Fires howled around the city as bombed-out gas stations burned. At the still functioning gas stations, men were fighting to refuel their cars, because the gas was already running out. You were allowed to buy only 20 liters per car, which was hardly enough to get to the Moldovan border. For the first time I regretted that there were no adult men in my family - I could not participate in those fights for fuel, I wouldn’t have had any chance. However, I was lucky. My car has low fuel consumption, and it was enough to reach the border.

Driving between fires and shelling, in an endless column, it took us 17 hours, though usually the journey would normally take 5. Our fellow travelers were sent a video in which a direct-fire missile flew into their apartment. It was the first house in Kyiv hit by a cruise missile and the final argument in favor of me going abroad. I realized there will be no peace anywhere within Ukraine.

From Kamenetz-Podolsky, tired and exhausted, we moved to the border with Moldova. Hundreds of Ukrainian mothers with children had already gathered there. They had said goodbye to everything that was dear to them - home, familiar life, relatives, and friends. Sobbing could be heard all around the crossing point;

this is not a figure of speech, but a sound that I will never forget and haunts me at night ...

Mentally I remained back at home even after passing the border control and ending up in Moldova, where friends found housing for us and provided everything we needed to live and survive... “

Yanina decided to settle in Chisinau. In the early days of the war, it was not that difficult to find an apartment for rent. She was offered housing by a total stranger who was abroad at that time. The young man had been renting his apartment and was ready to sublet it for free, except for utility bills. So Yanina began to equip her new home. She called a plumber and an electrician, who fixed everything and put it in order. She arranged for her children to go to school, found a professional job, and also began helping to evacuate those who hadn’t managed to leave earlier.

“One night a call woke me up” - she recalls. “An unknown woman, Olga Tokar, was screaming over an inhuman roar on the other side. Several families - with newborns and a 92-year-old disabled old man without a wheelchair - were sitting in the basements of Irpin and could not get out because of the shelling. She cried that there was no chance of survival for them unless help came from outside. She explained that in order to call me (I still don’t know why me and where she found my phone number), she had to get out of the basement shelter to the roof of the house, which was under shelling.

The rescue of those three families developed into an operation to evacuate the inhabitants of Irpin, which finally involved the leadership of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, volunteers and lots of brave people who risked their own lives to save strangers. The evacuation was completed - by cars, buses and other vehicles. Among the survivors there was no Olga Tokar, who had begged for salvation. She left the basement, but did not reach the buses. Dead? Gone missing? I don't know anything about her fate and it breaks my heart".

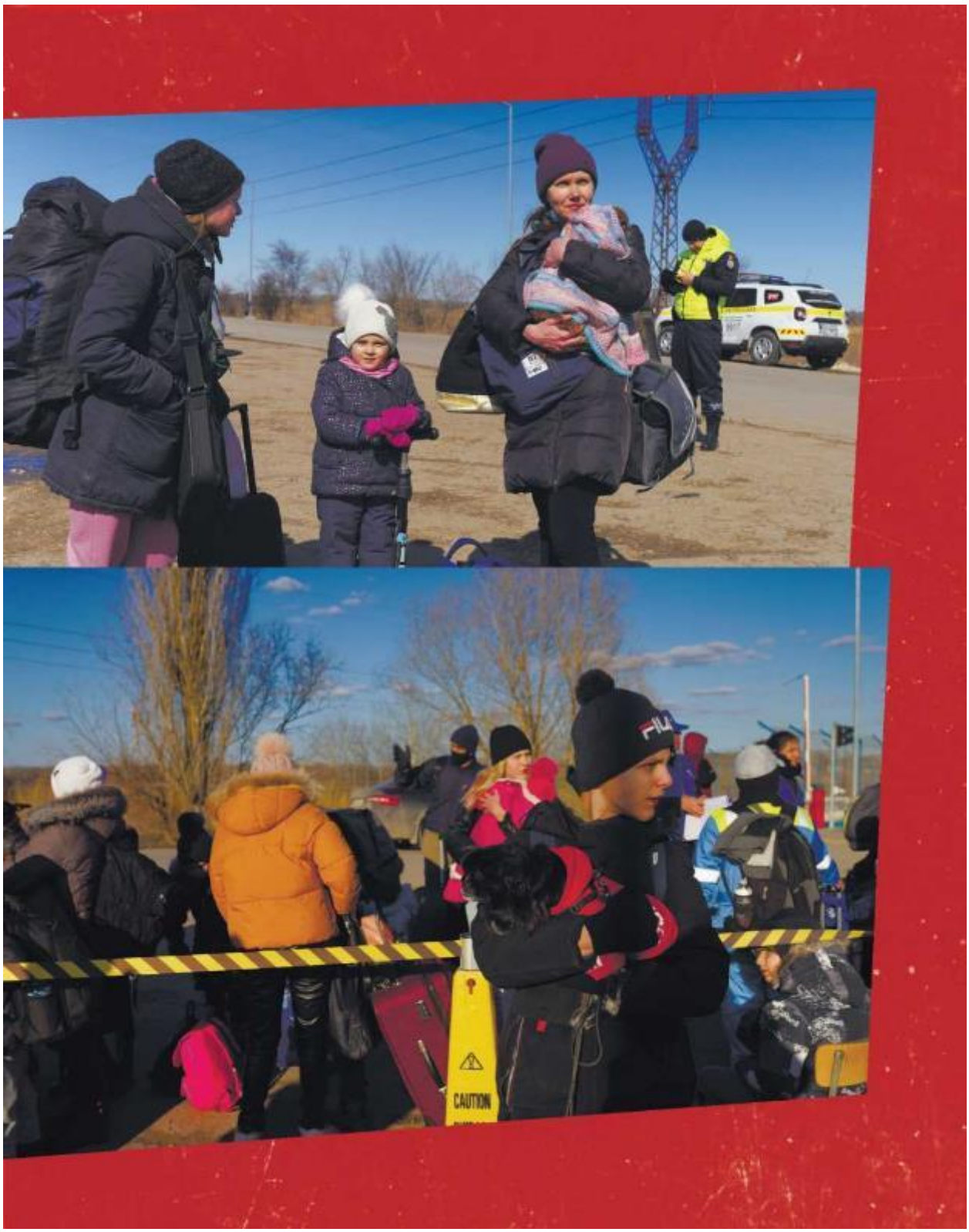
Yanina has received a lot of appeals from both friends and strangers from Ukraine. Some were asking about the best way to leave Ukraine, others begged her to connect them with a doctor in Kyiv, many requested help in finding shelter in Chisinau...

Yanina herself suddenly lost her apartment. The guy, who had originally offered that she could stay in his apartment 'as long as it's necessary' suddenly demanded her immediate eviction. She offered him money so that he could rent another place for himself (isn't it easier for a single young man than for a refugee with three children?), but in vain. She had to move out and start all over again and find a new home.

At that time, in mid-March, renting became much more complicated than it had been in late February. About 100,000 Ukrainian refugees have already settled in Moldova, most of them in Chisinau. Despite the fact that a vast majority of local residents treated the Ukrainians with great sympathy and understanding, the real estate market reacted harshly. Many enterprising landlords doubled or even tripled their rental prices. Finding an apartment for a reasonable price became next to impossible. An apartment was finally found for Yanina, but it was too late. Yanina gave up and succumbed to her friends' persuasion to go further to the West.

She yearns to return home and she believes that she will someday. Then, when everything is over, she promises, "we will hear the stories of refugees, millions of exhausted mothers who were forced to leave their homeland, saving their most valuable treasures - their children. These mothers will never forgive and will never forget it. Moms will never let the world forget the tragedy of Ukraine."


STOP


CAUTION

Life Won’t Begin Until the War is Over

“On the first day it was quiet in Irpin. In Gostomel - a few kilometers from Irpin - yes, there were explosions and spurts of gun fire. There is an airfield there, not a military one, but used by transport planes. We all heard those sounds, but we didn’t want to believe what was happening,” - admits Yuriy, 62, a refugee from Irpin, a suburb of the Ukrainian capital.

“Even when the bombing began, we didn’t hide in the first few days,” he continues.

“We didn’t realize what was happening... We had never been at war before... There was still hope that everything would end quickly. That hope vanished when planes and helicopters started to fly directly over us and artillery began shelling right next to us.

But even at that point we didn’t think of evacuating, even then! People from our street were leaving. In the end, only two families remained - our neighbors’ and ours.

Till early March, there was both gas and electricity. Then, one by one, we all got cut off: first the electricity, communications, the internet; after that, a couple of days later, there was no gas, then no water ... Well, we managed to make a water store - 150 liters ... When we were leaving, some water was still there.

When everything disappeared, we cooked food in the yard. We had emergency storage - cereals, canned food, pasta ... Besides, the neighbors, before they left, brought us their food. There was no problem with firewood either. We lived in a private house; we had a stove and a supply of firewood, of course.

Cooking took most of the day - from morning to 5-6 p.m. Everything dragged: you make the fire, boil the water, cook the soup, wash the dishes

... My wife and I are night owls, we are used to going to bed late and getting up late, but we developed into early birds. At 7 in the evening it was already dark; we went to bed at 8 o’clock to get up at 6 or 7 in the morning.

Often at night we had to run to the basement to hide from the bombing. It could also happen during the day, but less often. We heard a bang somewhere far away and we did not hide. Though there was no guarantee that in a couple of minutes a bang could be next door.

During the bombing, our dog Pirate refused to go down to the basement with us - he was afraid, pulled out of our hands, and howled. He hid in remote corners of

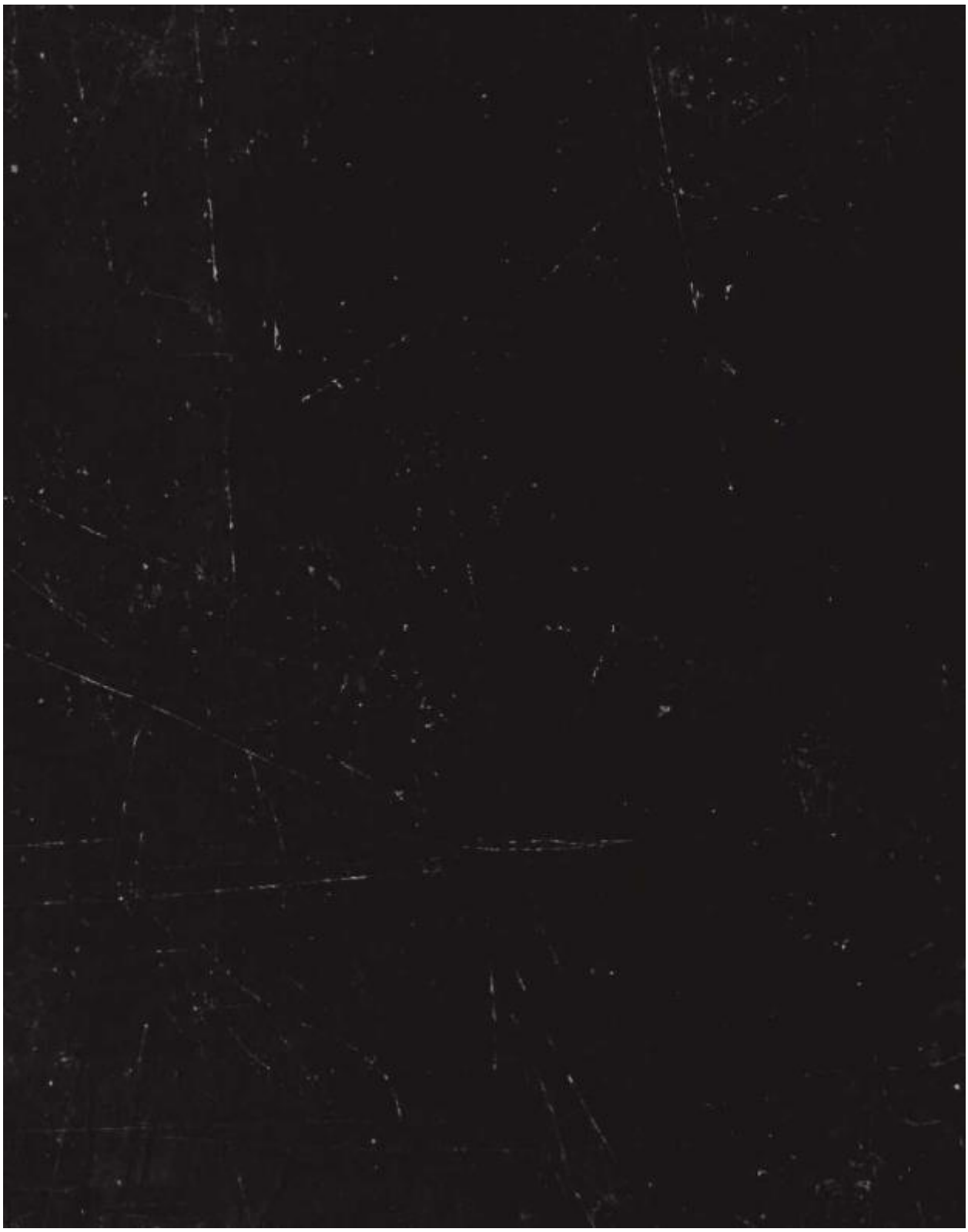
the house, in closets. Sitting in the basement, we worried for his safety.
The night of March 18-19, covered us with grad ("Grad" - a multiple launch rocket system - author's note). The neighbors, who had no basement, came running to us to hide. So, we all spent the night sitting side by side. Actually, I was mostly standing, holding the window so it did not shatter. We could hear the house shaking and the windows breaking. Our house was strong, with a good foundation, but you know...
In the morning, when the shelling was over, we went out of the basement. The roof had collapsed, all the doors and windows were broken, the plaster in the rooms had crumbled, the curtain-rods had fallen off the walls together with the curtains ... The devastation was complete and it was clear that our house was beyond repair. We now had nowhere to live.
There was a rescue center nearby, in the building of the Baptist seminary which we ran to. We were told that between 10 to 12 o'clock buses would be taking people out of the disaster zone. There was little time left. We rushed to grab key necessities, but we were confused about what to take and what to leave. Of course, in such a hurry we forgot to take the things which are dear to us - photographs, for example, and even some of our documents. We carried our remaining food out into the street for domestic animals. There were many abandoned animals that people couldn't take with them, for example our neighbor's dog and two cats. When everything was over, that neighbor came back to have a look at his house. There were no cats anymore and the dog was lying motionless, dying from dehydration...
We were delivered to Romanovka to find out that the bridge had been blown up. We got to the other side on foot, walking on the boards. From there we were taken to Kyiv; after staying there for two days, we went to Chisinau by a bus that was organized by the synagogue ...
If we hadn't escaped then, we wouldn't be alive. A day after our departure, the rescue center in Irpin was blown up. They say, there was a terrible bombing on March 20-24. Our house was turned into utter ruins... No stone was left unturned. Yet, property is nothing compared to human life. They say we are lucky to have survived. Others have been less fortunate; did you see what happened in Bucha? In our community people were killed too. Just on the streets. My kum - son's godfather - was killed in Vorzel, a town near Irpin. He had just completed constructing a new house and was bringing in his furniture. Inside the house they killed him; shot him in the back. Then they poured gasoline over him and set him on fire. It was in early March; I know this because this is when we lost touch with

him. When the invaders were pushed out and the town was liberated, his brother went there to find out what had happened. That's when it all came out...

My kum was a doctor, a very famous homeopath in Kyiv - Vladimir Popov, 54 years in life, 30 years in medicine. He lived alone after his divorce, with no children. By the way, he was a Russian-speaker, not Ukrainian at all. Is this how Russian soldiers fight the Nazis? They broke into the houses of peaceful people, killed, tortured, raped... Lots of stories - thousands. I don't know how to live after all this, I don't know.

Our son is in Kyiv. In the first days of the war, he joined the territorial defense and his wife started volunteering. Then he took the oath and became a member of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, although he had never served previously, because he had been exempt from military service. But now they can send him anywhere - Kharkiv, Odessa, even to the Donbass... We are in constant fear for him.

And who are we now anyway? Vagabonds, with a trampled past, an obscure future. We don't know where we'll be tomorrow, what will happen in a week, in a month life won't begin until the war is over, and when will this damned one end?"



Chapter 10

When the Hell Will it End?

APRIL 6

“We have seen no indication that President Putin has changed his ambition to control the whole of Ukraine and also to rewrite the international order, so we need to be prepared for the long haul,” NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg warned. “We have to be realistic and realize that this may last for a long time, for many months or even years.”


AMBULANCE
Ödrex

Planning Our Lives for No More than a Day

“As if in slow motion, I run home with my gym bag at the ready. The air raid siren is howling, something repeatedly explodes somewhere; I burst into the lobby, rush upstairs to my apartment. My wife and our two children are there. This is Odessa, March 2022.” Deja vu.

Dmitri is visibly upset. He’s reliving over and over again what he had already experienced once. Or rather, twice.

“Donetsk some eight years ago. Only then we had one daughter - little Sonya. I still see how I’m returning home, and suddenly shelling begins, from behind and somehow in a fan-shaped way.

I was running with all my might towards the house, praying for the bullets not to catch up with me. My wife and two-year-old Sonya were sitting in an empty bathtub. Their heads were covered with a blanket. “The safest place,” said the wife, “get in.” The three of us were sitting still until it got dark. We didn’t turn on the light; it was already quiet on the street, then there was an explosion, but judging by the unshaken windows, it was far away. At six in the morning my wife, daughter and I were already going south.”

They fled from that war, with a couple of hastily packed bags. First, they went to Rostov-on-Don, but three months later returned to Ukraine. Not to warring Donetsk, but to sunny and carefree Odessa. They didn’t have a single acquaintance in the whole city. In those eight years, they seemed to have become acquainted with half the town.

“Friends appeared very quickly - Odessans are sociable people,” Dmitri goes on. “In no time it’s clear with whom you will communicate in the future. Business also went pretty well. My partner and I scraped up enough money to open a fast food cafe near Privoz[12]. On the whole, everything was okay. We invited our parents to move in with us. We settled down. There was housing, there was work, the grandkids were waiting, but all our parents refused to come... They are still in Donetsk ...”

[12] The famous Odessa market

The terrible past seemed to have remained far away. Life became stable, with good prospects. Neither Dmitri and his wife, nor anyone from their acquaintances believed in the possibility of a war with Russia. As they say, “it can’t be, because it can never be.” But they were wrong.

“On February 24, explosions at five in the morning brought us back to that day in Donetsk. We followed the news with horror, called friends. Several families, like we had done in Donetsk, left the city that same day. We now had a second daughter, a one year old, and my wife and I decided not to rush this time, because nothing else happened after that morning’s explosions. A few days later, a curfew was introduced, tension was already felt in the city.”

Dmitri is silent for a long time.

“A week later, everyone took the sounds of sirens and our air defense for granted. People even stopped going down to basements and shelters. Moreover, in our house it is actually impossible to hide in the basement - there is a heating system, as in most other houses. The military mined the beaches - in case of a Russian landing from the sea. Deribasovskaya[13] was lined with anti-tank hedgehogs. Not far from the opera house there was a tank.

People were getting used to the new reality. At the request of volunteers, we even opened a cafe to cook lunches for the defense and ZSU[14] soldiers. Pedestrians returned to the city streets; many cafes, salons, bars opened, though a little further away from the very center,” continues Dmitri.

Reports from the front reminded people of the war. The news came that Mariupol and Kharkiv were almost wiped off the ground. That Ukrainian troops drove the Russians out of the Kiev region. That negotiations between the two warring countries have stalled. In early April, terrible photographs from the liberated Irpin and Bucha reached the newspapers around the world. Nobody could see them without being shocked!

“By that time, I had already sent my wife and daughters to Moldova,” Dmitri carries on his narration. “In the middle of, or end of March, it nevertheless hit the Odessa region. The news rumors which spread varied considerably as to where it hit - the oil depot and/or the military unit.

At that point, I sent my family to Chisinau, a little farther away. I myself decided to stay - neither to run anywhere, nor to hide in the fields to cross the border illegally, nor to bribe the border guards to be released into Moldova. The main

[13] Famous Odessa street
[14] Anti-aircraft self-propelled gun

thing for me was that my wife and children were safe. As for me, Odessa needed me, at least to feed the people."

According to Dmitri, their best friends are from Chisinau, although recently they had lived in Odessa. When the war began, they returned to their homeland. It was they who housed Dmitri's wife and girls. "In fact, my wife and daughters are now completely in the care of their friends. Their dependency bothers me, and how long it will last - I don't know" ...

The elder daughter went to a Ukrainian school in Chisinau, while the younger is with her mom somehow getting used to the new place of residence. "Employment is out of the question for her so far. My wife's profession is very specific: she is a police officer and is unlikely to be able to find a job other than volunteering. The problem is that there is no money for a nanny. The already meager savings have to be saved."

"Volunteers brought a lot of new things including toys. They offered psychological help, which my wife decided to use only now. I believe this is the main support all refugees need ... When are we going to have a family reunion? Will it ever take place? The condition of the people is getting worse every day."

The other day we learned that the father of Dmitri's wife, who remained at home, is most likely now a prisoner of the Russian military. "He had worked all his life in the policeforce in Donetsk and he point blank refused to leave the city. This news completely knocked my wife; she has not been able to talk to anyone for three days. I hope the psychologist will help her get through this. I don't know what is in store for us all. We are now accustomed to planning our lives for no more than a day. Everyone is just waiting for the war to end."

War and Peace of Uri Lifshits

Uri and his parents missed each other. In the first weeks of the war, when crowds of refugees poured out of Ukraine, he rushed from Israel to his native Dnepropetrovsk (this city's modern name is Dnipro) to help his mother and father evacuate. But he didn't manage to contact them. He flew to the Romanian city of Iasi, from where his plan was to leave for Chisinau and then to somehow get to Dnipro.

En route to Chisinau he received news from his relatives: "We are already on our way. To the west". Only later did he learn that, almost by miracle, they got on one of the last evacuation trains. They sent Uri a photograph. Seventeen people were traveling in a compartment designed for four. Adults, children, pets, stuffed bags and suitcases. Chaotic and uncomfortable, it was overcrowded and stuffy, no communication and no water. The train made slow progress with long stops between the stations, waiting for the shelling somewhere ahead to cease. However, it got them to their destination.

Uri still doesn't know what that destination was. Probably Lviv. Then, somehow, his parents got to Romania from where they flew to Israel. The important thing is that they are safe. During these last two months, Uri simply has not had time to sit down and talk to them. He is practically never at home. He returns to Nof-a-Galil where his family lives from time to time, but most of the time he is in Chisinau.

Uri Lifshits is the informal leader of the volunteer headquarters at the Hay Synagogue in Chisinau. It wasn't planned that way - it just happened. He has huge experience. During the second Lebanese war[15] Uri worked in a similar headquarters in Jerusalem where volunteers collected food and other essentials and sent it by trucks to the north of the country, along the way feeding the inhabitants of cities that were being shelled. They delivered food, water and hygiene products for adults and children.

In Chisinau, he has put the skills he developed at that time to good use. Neither the state structures of Moldova, nor its non-governmental organizations, were ready to receive the intense flow of refugees that the war has generated. Volunteer headquarters have been organized, for the most part, spontaneously. The volunteers who help have had no formal training and at the start did not know how to receive people, where and how to settle them, or how to cook food for them. Everything has been learned on the job. There was limited time or energy to focus

[15] The second Lebanese war was an armed conflict between Israel and the Hezbollah terrorist group in July-August 2006

on planning in advance, and development of the practical response to what was happening has been undertaken in real time.

However, the volunteers from the headquarters at the Hay Synagogue have had help. The Jewish community Agudat Israel under the leadership of Rabbi Pinchas Zaltzman had pre-booked rooms in several hotels, buses for transporting people and infrastructure for cooking. Their plan was agreed with the government of the country, though such coordination did not seem necessary until the very day the war broke out in Ukraine.

However, by early March, there were no free rooms left in the hotels. Buses sent by the Jewish communities of Ukraine from different cities arrived at the Hay Synagogue day and night. Up to 1000 people arrived daily with 1000 different stories, destinies and tragedies.

“We hardly slept,” recalls Uri Lifshits.

A chain of faces. Sobbing women, crying children, bewildered older people. When the hotels ran out of rooms, people began to settle right in the synagogue and yeshiva - Jews and non-Jews shared these spaces together. They slept in classrooms, in the canteen, in the administration office, even in the prayer hall.

“And women too?” I ask. “How so?”

“Yes, women too. Because it was about saving people’s lives.”

The Moldovan capital has become a transit point for many people. Some have traveled onwards to Western Europe, some have wanted to emigrate to Israel and some have tried to leave for the United States. Others have remained in Chisinau, hoping for a quick end of the hostilities in their homeland and a return to their homes. All of these people have had to be settled and fed. Many fled in the clothes they were wearing and needed clothes appropriate for the season. They have all needed help with paperwork and documents to enable them to travel further and to deal with a range of other personal and administrative needs.

Uri shared a story that has touched him profoundly. A female doctor called Elena was evacuated with her daughter from Kyiv to Chisinau. From their conversation at the synagogue headquarters, Uri learned that she was a highly qualified medical specialist with many years of experience.

Before she left for Israel, Uri contacted the head physician of a well-known clinic who needed such specialists. She was asked to send her CV and was accepted into a job. When Elena arrived in Israel she sent Uri a message to say that she had been hired with a probationary period and that the clinic had even provided accommodation.

“I don’t know when and how I can thank you and the other people from the

synagogue," she wrote.

She didn't have to wait long to make her own contribution. On her very first shift, Rabbi Pinchas Salzman's father was brought to the clinic with a stroke. His condition was critical and he needed immediate attention. It was not about hours - just minutes. Elena and her team were able to stabilize the elderly man's condition, quite literally saving him from death. He is making a recovery and is no longer in danger.

When, at the end of March, the flow of refugees to Chisinau began to decrease, Uri was able to go home to his family for a week. Early in April he returned to Moldova, this time accompanied by his wife and three children. They all became his assistants in the refugee center.

Uri and his wife took care of adults - accepting the newcomers and helping to prepare their documents for the Israeli consulate, whilst the children helped their peers to settle and learn how to communicate. They taught little Ukrainians some basic Hebrew and popular Israeli games and went on trips together.

"More than that," says Uri. "When, with the end of the vacation, my wife and children returned to Israel, they continued to volunteer at home. Some of the refugees who passed through our center here and repatriated to Israel came to us in Nof-a-Galil. My wife is a teacher; she instructs children and helps them and their parents adapt to new conditions. My son was transferred from the 6th grade to the 7th in the middle of the academic year. A boy appeared in their school, a refugee from Ukraine who does not know Hebrew. But my son speaks both Hebrew and Russian. So, he does peer teaching helping the beginners learn the new language".

"Wow, you have a dynasty of volunteers!"

"We certainly do," Uri nods. "My parents became volunteers too. Dad is a Hebrew teacher, he opened an Ulpan for refugees in our city. Mom, who taught Jewish traditions in Dnipro, now helps Ukrainians prepare documents for various structures and is engaged in translating. Actually, it's hard for her in Israel. The climate is different and difficult to get used to; people have a different mentality, which takes time to get used to as well. She wants to return home. Mission impossible! Of course, the city of Dnipro cannot be compared with Kharkiv or Mariupol in terms of destruction today, but no one knows what will happen there

tomorrow."

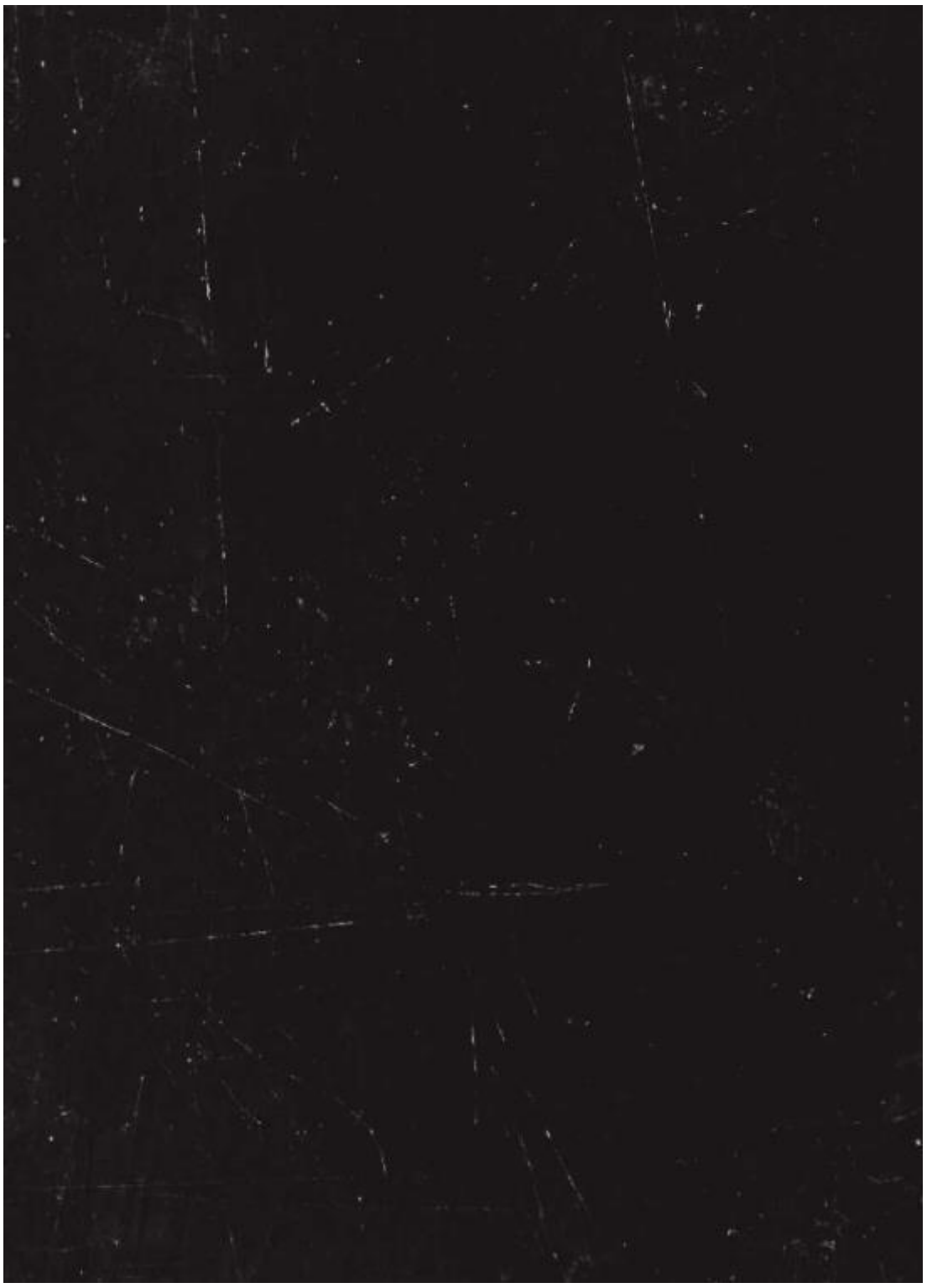
As for Uri himself, he can only dream of returning home. Although he can leave at any moment, he plans to stay in Chisinau for an indefinite period until he can no longer help. 63 days after the war started, fewer refugees are coming from Ukraine to Moldova, but they are still coming every day.

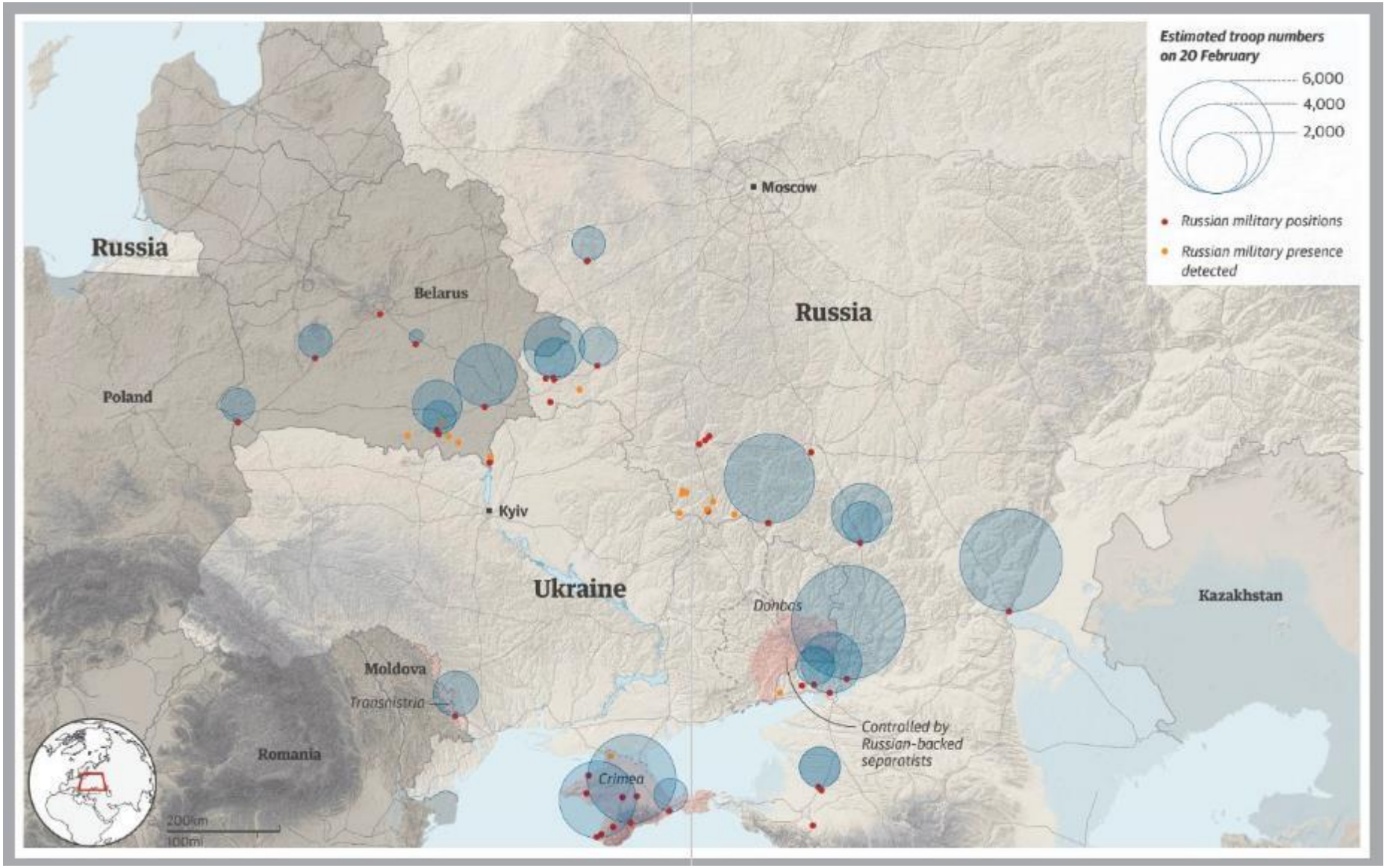
"And it is still uncertain what will happen to Transnistria", says Uri. "The situation is complicated in the region; several people have already come to us from there".

Before saying goodbye, I asked Uri some final questions. What is keeping him here? Why doesn't he go back home to his family? Doesn't he feel sorry that his real estate business has been closed? After all, he will not be compensated for his own material losses.

Uri paused for thought and then said:

"We are saving people here. Of course, financial profit and material losses count, but not as much as human life. It is about the system of human values. Everyone decides personally what to do in such situations. I made my decision this way. And I'll earn money later. After all, the war will end someday."




Estimated troop numbers on 20 February
6,000
4,000
2,000
Russian military positions
Russian military presence detected
Moscow
Russia
Belarus
Russia
Poland
Kyiv
Ukraine
Donbas
Kazakhstan
Moldova
Transnistria
Romania
Crimea
Controlled by Russian-backed separatists
200km
100mi

1. Kharkiv - Artillery pounds city as Russian forces focus on east of country

2. Luhansk - Authorities urge civilians to evacuate 'while it is safe'

3. Vuhledar - Donetsk governor says civilians killed in artillery strike on aid distribution point

4. Mariupol - Civilians who want to leave told to use own vehicles after efforts to get buses to besieged city repeatedly failed

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20 real stories from Ukrainian refugees during the first days of Russia's invasion

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