

“Why do they do it?”

“I don’t know. Lots of reasons.”

“And it’s all censored, right?”

“No, mom, it’s not...it’s not censored. But most of it isn’t that bad. It’s all cell phone footage. You can’t really see anything.”

“I just don’t want you to be so affected by it,” she said.

“I’m not that affected by it, mom,” Stacey said.

“I just want you to remember that you live a peaceful life, you’re very lucky.”

“I know I’m lucky,” Stacey said. “That’s why I like doing this work.”

“You’re getting paid?”

“No, just. Effort. Why I like making this effort.”

“Keep your distance, Stace,” her mom said. “The world is hard enough, without involving yourself in misery because you’re bored.”

“I’m not bored,” she said.

“Just be careful.”

Her mom was sleeping better, even though she still insisted on the couch and Stacey having the bedroom, so Stacey kept the headphones low as she worked at the kitchen table. Stacey didn’t smoke cigarettes — she hadn’t smoked cigarettes, before the war — but there was one video, where she watched a familiar young yefréytor lean against the overturned stand just before the roundabout, kick at the brooms painted in blue and yellow, try on a ladies’ straw hat, and flint his Prima just before he disappeared in a flash of compression artifacts. She recognized him — 2nd Platoon, maybe? She wanted a cigarette.

Sifting through the aftermath of the ambush, she watched him drag a starshiná from the carapace of a BTR. Tracers were going wide across the fields in the background. Death, closeup on the computer screen — closer than she’d yet seen, maybe — had the same stuttery sheen as any other selfie, TikTok, or early spring thirst trap she had scrolled past. “Попрощайся!” the yefréytor said. The other guy was already gone, mumbling, shaky hand trembling down. “Я отнесу это твоей маме. Попрощайся! Попрощайся!”