Long lost brother

It was a beautiful morning in the spring of 2014, the birds were tweeting, the sun illuminating the city, liberating the corners from the dark shadows of the night. "This really is the paradise", Vladyslav thought. But wait, what was that? Wind came up, dark clouds were approaching the city. He could hear thunder in the distance: "Vladyslav, wake up, you're late!" Vladyslav wondered, why was the wind speaking to him? Suddenly, everything was so glaring.

"VLADYSLAV LEONID PARLOCHENKO, the bus will be there in 5 minutes, get up!" Vlad immediately woke up, his mother Ludmila had suddenly ended his dream. It was still dark outside; the only sound outside were car noises. "Why are you always late? Your little brother Grigori is already preparing himself to leave the house, hurry up!" His mother left the room, Vlad jumped out of the ped and put on his clothes: Jeans, socks, his Star Wars hoodie, nothing unusual.

As he came down the stairs Grigori was already waiting: "Seems like there'll be no breakfast for you", he smirked like the brat he was. Ludmila gave him a clap on the neck "Don't be so mean", and as soon as Vlad hap put on his shoes and grabbed his jacked. Both vanished into the dawn. They ran and luckily arrived on time at the bus station, Vlad, already being 15 years old, took the line seven to Sevastopol-middle-school, Grigori the line two to the basic school at the outskirts of Sevastopol. They were both young but already mature enough to drive alone, so they waved each other and entered their busses.

But this day was different. Vlad noticed that there was something in the air, unrest, a little fear, at least something unusual. The bus stopped and Vladyslav headed out, standing directly in front of his school, an old Soviet-era building, maybe a bit dilapidated but still standing. As he wanted to enter the building, someone grabbed him from behind. "What do you want?" he asked annoyed as he turned around. But sanding there was no kind of bully or annoying classmate, it was his father, Vadym Parlochenko, in his Uniform. "No time to ask questions son, we need to go", he said and pulled Vlad in his car. Vlad loved his father, although he was a bit harsh at times. He was the Commander of the 31st mechanized brigade of the armed forces of Ukraine. "We need to leave; the Russians have crossed the border and are occupying the city. Your mother and brother are also informed and hopefully already have left the city." Vlad was shocked, the Russians? Occupying Crimea? He couldn't believe it. "But why, aren't they our friends and neighbours?" he asked in a concerned way. "Not anymore, not anymore…"

The whole city was in a hurry, no one knew what to do. Vadym had received orders to move his unit to Pavlograd in the western Donetsk Oblast, a safe place now. The car entered the checkpoint of the military base, the guardian and Vadym greeted each other, his unit was already prepared to leave, the brigade of BTR-80 armoured personnel carrier was ready to head out. Vlad would accompany them. His father, the commander, stood in the middle of the yard. "Today, we may leave under pressure of our now opponent, but we shall return!" "SLAWA UKRAINA!", the soldiers yelled as the mounted their vehicles. Vlad was allowed to sit beside the driver, very exciting for him, and as Vadym has entered the vehicle, the engines started. And off they went.

The armoured column quickly left the city, Vlad saw people packing everything in their cars, it was chaos. The unit was fast and swiftly reached the border to the mainland Ukraine, and after a long drive they finally arrived in Pavlograd. He crawled out of the APC, his back hurt a bit after the long ride. His father hugged him suddenly, he was just glad to have secured his son, but an officer approached them. "Brigade Commander Vadym Parlochenko, I am sorry to inform you, that Miss Parlochenko and the boy Grigori are stuck in Sevastopol. The Russians have closed the border." Vadym turned pale, Vlad was shocked and swore to himself, that he will return his mother and brother.

Vlad looks on his phone, the 13th of September 2023, it is getting cold. In early 2022, the Russians had escalated the war in Ukraine with a brutal offensive from Crimea, the Donbass and Belarus. Vladislav had gone to the paratroopers when he was done with school in 2020. He and his father had fought the whole years in Kharkiv, Bakmuth and took part in the huge counter offensive that retook Mariupol, Donetsk, the right bank of the Dnipro. Now Vlad was at the outskirts of Sevastopol, back again. He also didn't know anything about Ludmila and Grigori, nine years had passed.

Six o'clock, Vlad's platoon of eight fighters was clearing the houses at Pavlinka's street. The last weeks were like hell, but they were winning, moral was high. Now they needed to clear a big old building with many apartments, scouts

had reported enemies which did hide here. Vlad opened the house door and the soldiers stormed in, giving each other cover. The floor was clean, one of Vlad's soldiers was about to go upstairs as Vladyslav heard footsteps, dark, heavy ones, right above him. "GET IN COVER", he shouted, his soldier ran away the second someone fired down the stairs. "Pashol Nahui, you have no chance swine!", Vlad shouted at the enemy. "Die you fascist!", the enemy screamed back. "But wait, I know this voice", Vlad thought. "Grigori Parlochenko is that you?", he said full of hope, breathing heavily. "Vladyslav Leonid Parlochenko, Brother, is that you?" Vlad, although he was hardy, began to cry: "ДА! Drop the weapon brother, let me hug you!" It was Grigori, forced into conscription and indoctrinated by propaganda into thinking, Ukraine would be a fascist dictatorship, stumbled down the stairs in tears.

The soldiers took down their guns, Grigori and Vlad were crying and hugging each other. They were separated for nine years and finally reunited. Grigori thought Vlad and his father might have died in one of the many missile attacks. Vlad had thought that Grigori might had been killed when getting drafted and sent to the frontlines as cannon fodder. "Where is mom?", Vlad asked as they both had calmed down a bit. "She is fine, and safe, her quarter already got liberated by our forces."

Vlad hugged his brother tightly like he would never ever let someone separate them ever again. "Where is father?", Grigori asked in fear that he might receive bad news. "He is currently leading the charge to liberate the last pieces of our territory in Donbass.", Vlad answered, and both broke out in tears. Vladyslav whispered: "We have won back our freedom, my long-lost brother."