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Mrs. Lopez

World Literature-Honors

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### The Warrior

“Breakfast is ready!”, I exclaimed. It was a sunny Thursday morning, and the kids were getting ready for school. “What’s that noise?”, said my first son, Lyaksandra. It sounded like an explosion. My husband, Borysko, approached me. “I have a bad feeling about that sound, Vasylina. What if it’s the Russians?” I replied, “Why are you worrying? Mr. Zelenskyy has assured us that the Russian threat is a mere rumor.” He reluctantly agreed.

Later that afternoon, Borysko received a call informing him that he was being mobilized. It seemed like the rumors were true and Russia was invading, but there was no confirming this suspicion. When the kids get home, on a normal day, we watch cartoons. However, this was not a normal day. I pressed the “POWER” button on our old remote. An emergency broadcast message was playing. “...emy forces are drawing near to Kyiv. All citizens should stay in their homes after dark or else they will be considered as an enemy. It is likely that some hostile forces have already infiltra-” I hit the button again.

A golf ball formed in my throat. *What will we do? Can we escape? Will my husband live?* Questions raced through my mind as I ran for the phone. I dialed my brother’s line. No response. *He must not be home. Maybe he already left for the base...* At that moment, Borysko entered the room. I embraced him, and could not hold in the tears. “Why are you crying, принцеса?” he muttered. I sniffled. “The Russians are invading. They are already here. We have to leave.” My voice started to crumble. **“But you have to fight... and we will be separated... I don’t know if I’ll**

ever see you again.” At this point I was bawling. “Don’t think like that. I will be fine. You must leave. You and the kids get to Poland, you will be safe there.” He handed me a bill. “500 hryvnia for your travels.” I accepted the reality of the situation, and we said our goodbyes.

Lyaksandra, Matvikyo and I left that afternoon, before the curfew could begin. We were fortunate to have a car. I don’t think we could have made it the whole way if we walked. Nonetheless, traffic was heavy. Horns honked for miles on end. “Where is dad?” asked Lyaksandra. “He is going to defend our country.” I said, hastily. “We have to go to a safe place now.” He nodded in reluctant agreement.

It was dark now. Our little Skoda had failed to trek through the vast forests of the west. We ran out of gas, and there was no station for 50 miles in this stretch of the forest. We abandoned the car and went on foot, carrying only the clothes on our backs and the small bit of money we had left. Lyaksandra muttered, “Mama, I’m hungry.” I looked him in the eyes and put my hand on his shoulder. “I know my little ангел. We will be there soon.” I had to leave all that food I bought in the car. We couldn’t carry it with us. As the sun rose over the treeline we stopped to rest.

When I woke up the sun was already setting. After all, the previous day had been stressful. We gained some ground but I decided to stop once the sun had set some hours later. The next morning we started up again, and by that afternoon, we encountered Polish border guards near the road we had been following. Two of them transported us to a refugee camp. “Refugee? No, no, no, we are not refugees. My husband told us to get here so that we-” The worker checking us in interrupted me. “Calm down. You are going to be fine. We will get you some food and fresh clothes now, OK?” I obliged.

I am stroking Matvikyo's little head and watching him eat his soup. I have no idea what the future holds. My husband is probably fighting right now; fighting the enemy which has fractured our family. I can only hope and pray that we will reign victorious in our struggle for independence. I can only hope and pray that my husband will be okay. And I can only hope and pray that my two sons can rebuild our lives, our country, and our future; that my little Lyaksandra will be a warrior, valiantly defending our people.