

ONCE UPON A TIME

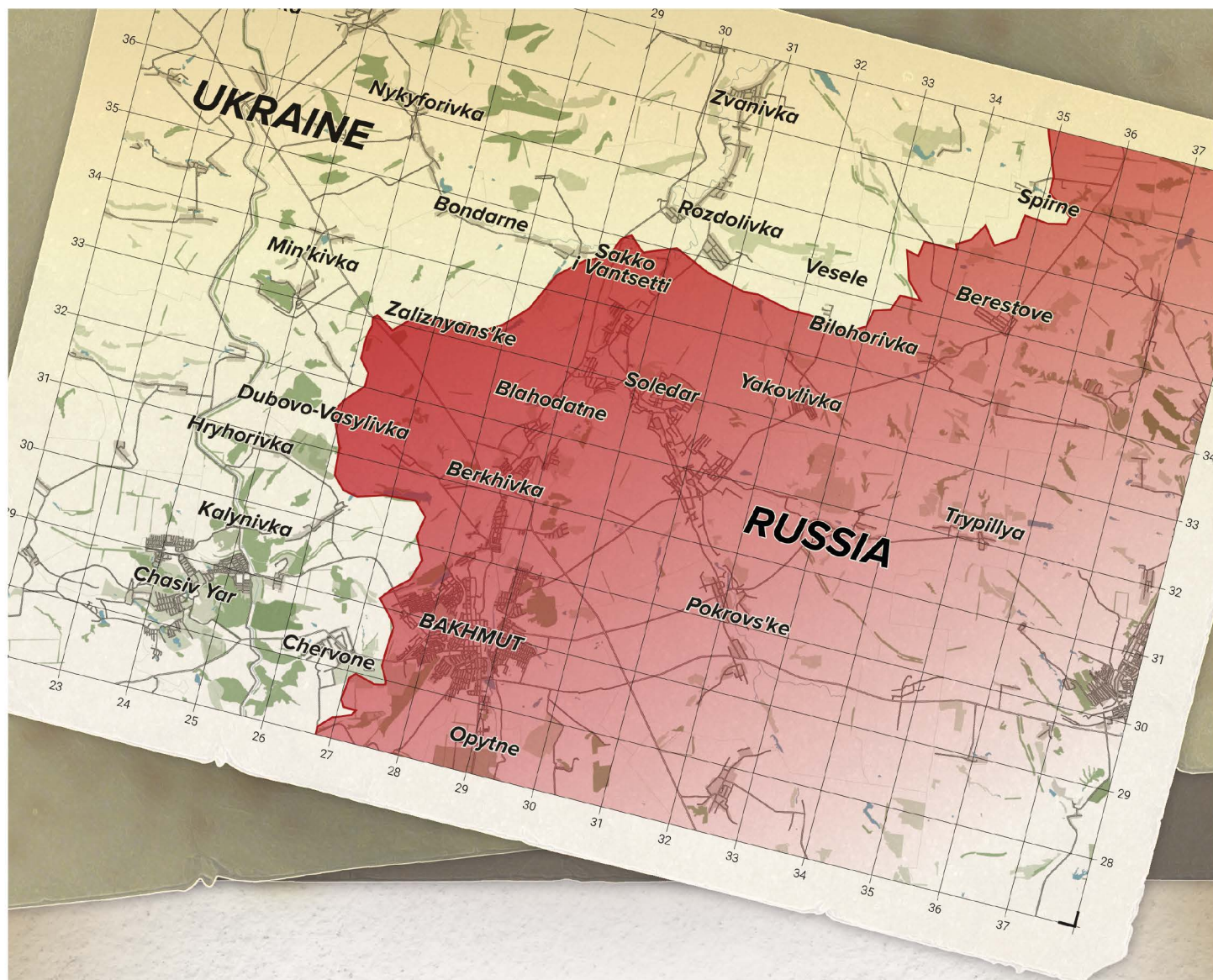
IN THE GREY ZONE

COMICS FROM
THE RYBAR TEAM
ISSUE NO. 47
MAY 2025

ADVENTURES IN COUNTRY-404

 @RYBAR





**Excerpt from
the operational
summary**

In a Ukrainian village live **two sisters, their husbands,** and the younger sister's small son. They celebrate the arrival of 2014 at the same table, arguing passionately about the future of the country: some sincerely believe in the benefits of the EU and "Eurointegration", others speak of a shared future with Russia.

When it comes to Maidan and **war breaks out,** disguised as an "anti-terrorist operation" in Donbas, disagreements turn into **true enmity.** And ten years later, war fully arrives in their village. It destroys homes, scatters and kills neighbors, and forms a **"grey zone."**

Artillery is active, gunfire and mine explosions are heard. The skies belong to drones, and on the ground roam the **"White Angels"** searching for children. The relatives must decide who is a friend, who is an enemy, and whether they're ready to let go of their differences to try to survive...

СОБЕРИТЕ
СЕРПЕТНО

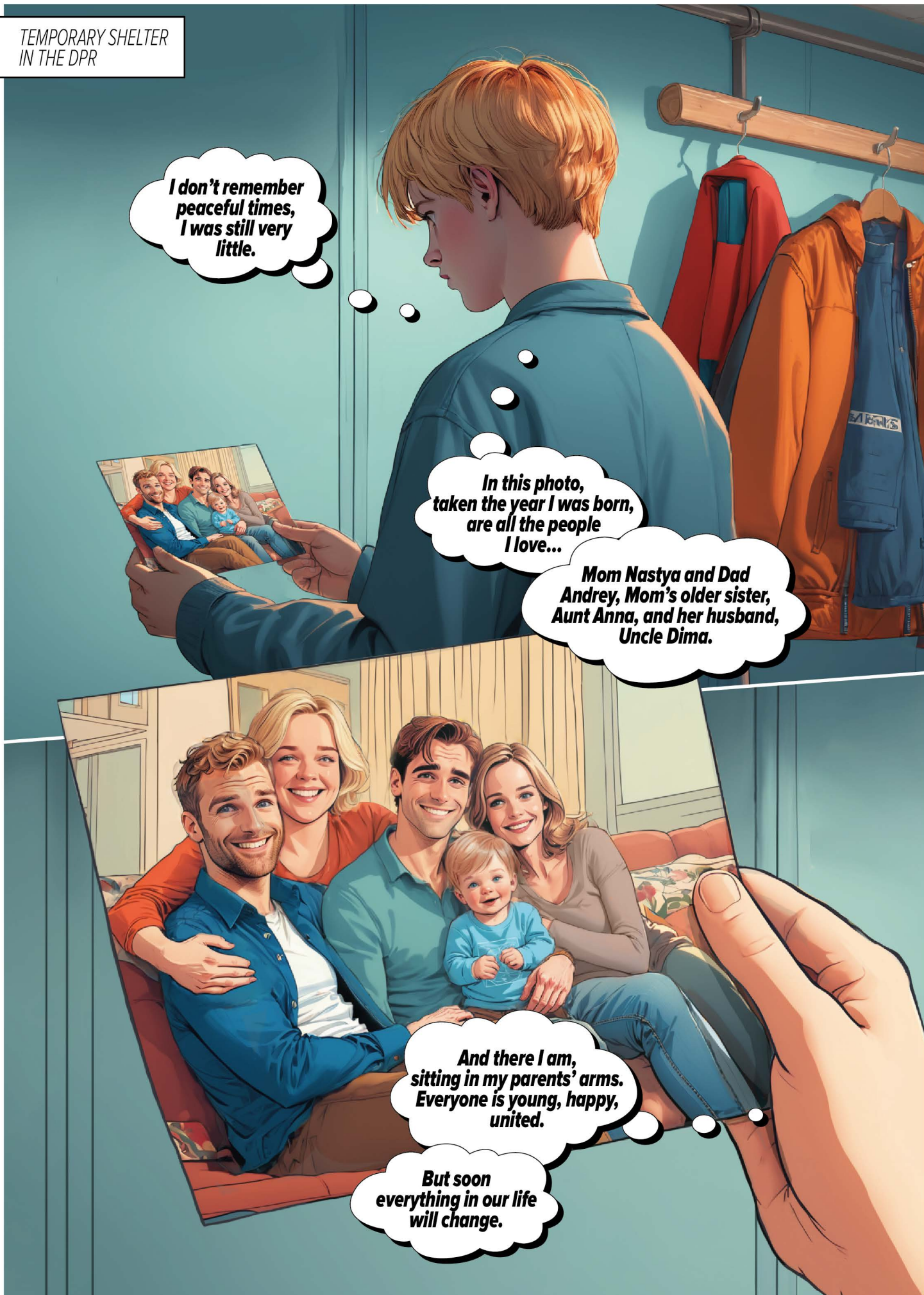
I don't remember peaceful times, I was still very little.

In this photo, taken the year I was born, are all the people I love...

Mom Nastya and Dad Andrey, Mom's older sister, Aunt Anna, and her husband, Uncle Dima.

And there I am, sitting in my parents' arms. Everyone is young, happy, united.

But soon everything in our life will change.



DECEMBER 31, 2013

The Ukrainian people's protest grew into a massive, round-the-clock demonstration...

People just want the government to hear them...

We need the EU!

We'll live like Europeans!

Europe will help us!

That's a trap! We'll have high taxes, and utilities will skyrocket!

You keep saying "they will help", but what will they demand in return?

Better to unite with Russia and Belarus!

Better to hang ourselves, right?!




MAY 2014

You'll thank her when you're eating that canned stew!

My wife keeps saying there's going to be a war. She's stocking up the basement! Ha-ha-ha!

Careful, you'll jinx it!

Nothing will happen. They'll crush the Russians quickly and it'll all calm down!



Mine's gone off the rails too. Says he's going to Donetsk to fight. He can't watch this anymore.

And I said: "Dima, what about the garden? What about me?"

And I said: "What if the village finds out you went over to the separatists — what will they say to me at work?!"

Father Bandera is ours, Ukraine is our mother...





END OF FEBRUARY 2022



Well, now
that canned stew will
come in handy.



Surrender,
damn orcs!

Well, I didn't
prepare! They told us there
wouldn't be a war!



We pushed
it too far!

My dad will
go to war and beat
everyone!



The guys at work are joining the territorial defense. They won't be sent to the front — just guarding checkpoints.

I told mine to go sign up, but he won't — he resists.

No need to join anything. The Russians will come, and everything will be fine.

Nastya, may your tongue wither for saying that!

They're beasts — you know what they'll do here?!

They eat hedgehogs too!

I'm Russian — am I a beast?



Nastya, you were always a bit slow. Saying that now, here...

You've lost it! I can handle it, but if others hear you — what will happen to you...

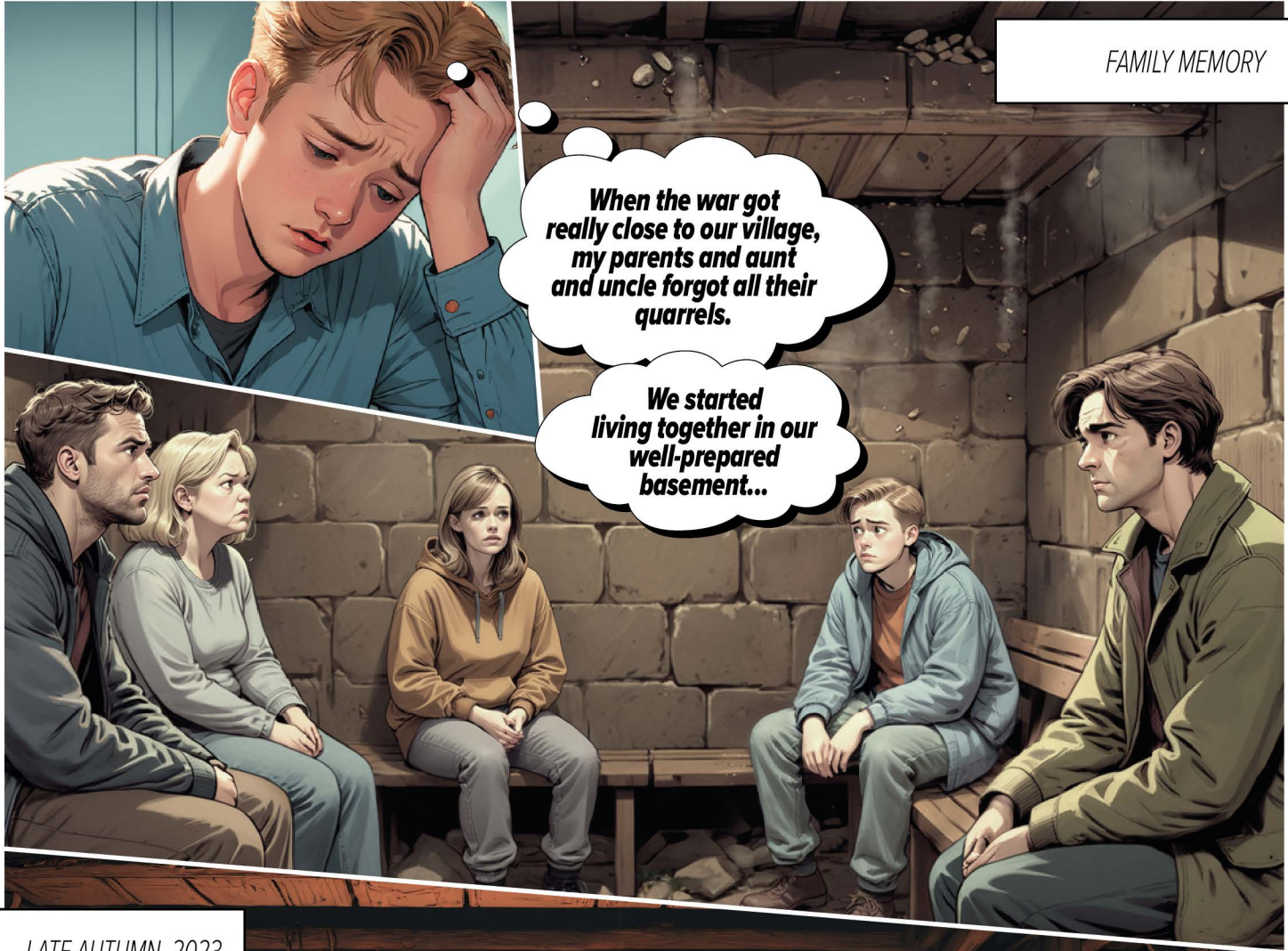
Then go find someone else to talk to. Don't come to me!



Dad, are the Russians really coming?

Are you afraid of them?

As if! You said yourself they're all short like gnomes — so we'll see who's who!



When the war got really close to our village, my parents and aunt and uncle forgot all their quarrels.

We started living together in our well-prepared basement...

LATE AUTUMN, 2023



Seems like it's quieted down.

It really has.

The generator's dead — what now?

We'll wait for the Russians.



**Let's go to Ukraine!
When the volunteers come
again, we'll go!**

**When was
the last time they came?
Six months ago?**



**Mom, can I go
to the bathroom?**



**Come on,
I'll go with you.**



**Let's go smoke
together — what
the heck...**



**Last week
the "White Angels"
drove down our street again,
looking for kids. How can the earth
carry those bastards?**

**They steal children
from their own people — to sell
them abroad! And who knows
to whom, or why...**

**We're well hidden.
They won't find us.
And there's no one left
to report us anyway.**

**Nastya's still
waiting for the Russians.
What are you going to do
when they come?**

**I'll join
the Russian army.
And you?**

**I'll think
of something...**



**Look, there's
someone there! Let's
drop it on them.**

**There are no Russians
yet, just civilians.**

**So what?
We'll drop it and report
it as a sabotage
group.**





АHHHHHH

**Mom,
do something!**

АHHHH

**No,
I can't take
it anymore!**

**Nastya,
I'll catch up!!**

AFTER A LITTLE TIME

**Help!
Someone help!**

Help!

**You're yelling so loud
they can hear you from
far away.**

**Stop yelling —
they might kill you.
What happened?**

AHHHH



TWO DAYS LATER



WHRRRR

**Run
to the basement,
drones!**

WHRR

TWO DAYS LATER

**I can get
you to safety.
To our side.**

**From there, you can
go to a temporary shelter
behind the front line.**

**But the journey
is very dangerous —
I'll say it right away.**

**We have
to go, Anya.**

**If we stay,
we'll be killed. If we go,
we'll be killed. What's
the difference?
Let's go.**

**And you,
kid, what do
you say?**

I'll go!





**Look,
the Russians
are evacuating
people!**

**So what. Three civilians —
women and a kid... Not like
we're gonna hit them...**

**What do you mean
"not hit"?! They're going to
the Muscovites! They should
wait until we liberate
them!**

**Drone! Run
to the forest!**



WHRRR

This is for me!

Go! Go! Go!

Rain's starting!

RATATAT

While the rain's falling, drones won't fly. We have to use the chance and go as far as we can.

Thank you!

Thank you, you saved my son!



**You're new, huh?
Where you from?**

**Yeah,
from Razdolovka...**

**Never heard of it...
Must've gone through
a lot there, huh?**

**Is your village
under our control
now, or not yet?**

No one's.

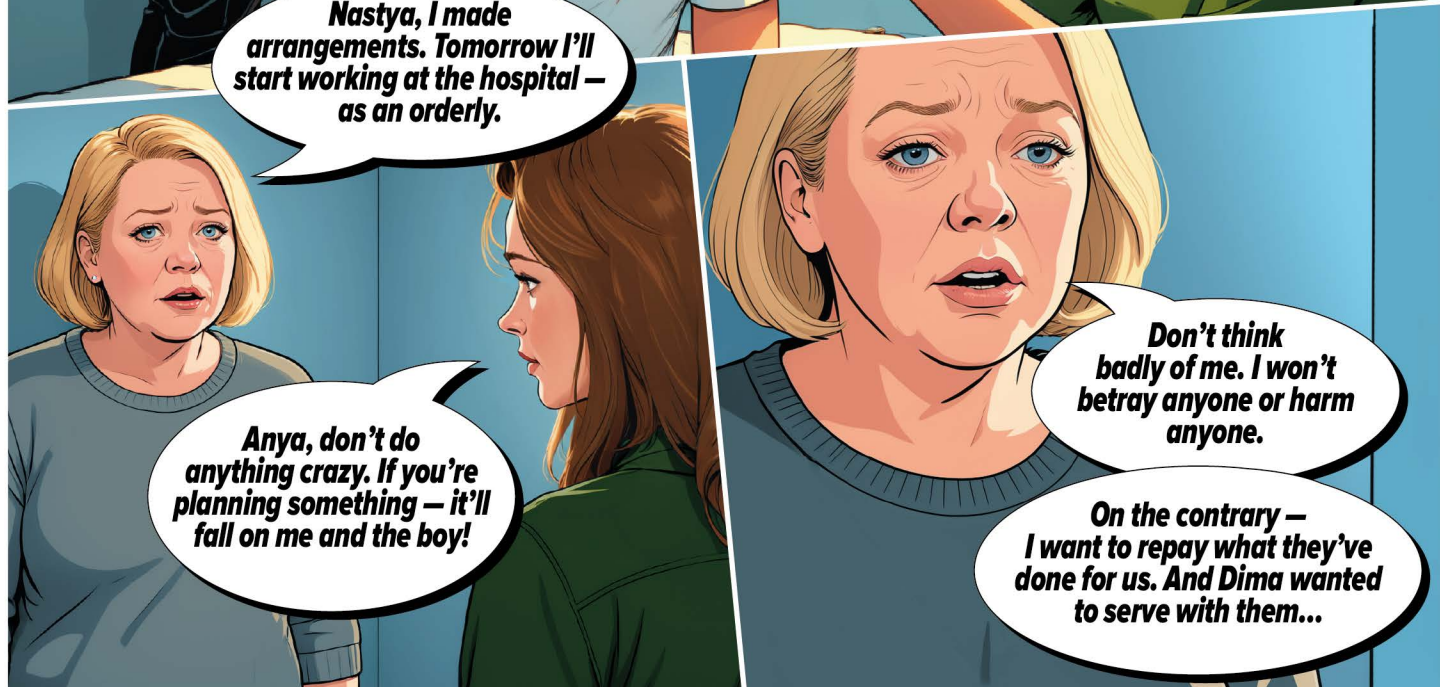
**I see,
it's in the "grey zone"...
That's rough...**

**And why's
the boy not eating?
Is he sick?**

**Yeah,
he got a cold
in the rain.**

**Well, don't worry.
Call the doctor — he'll
treat him. Treatment
is free here.**

**If anything,
I'm in room 20 — I've got
some medicine if you
need...**





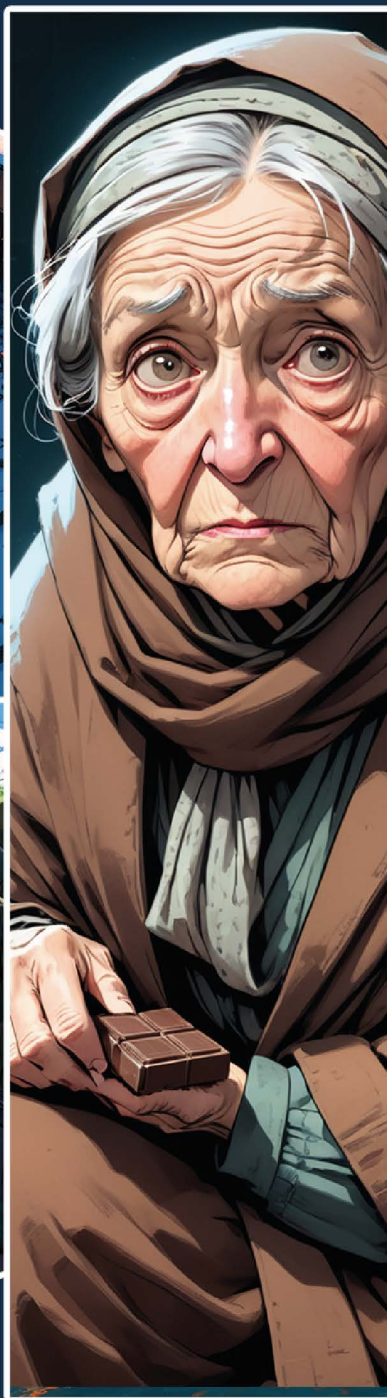
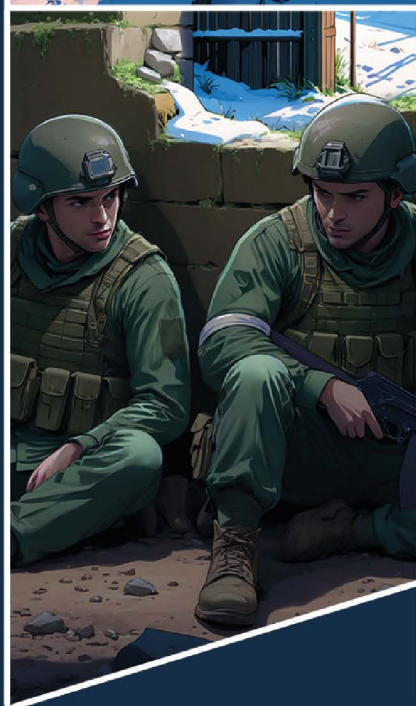
**Mom, look,
a hedgehog! And no one
ate it—and no one will!
That was all silly talk.**

**Mom, will we go back
when the Russians liberate
our village? Or maybe it's better
to live here now...**

QUITE OFTEN, CIVILIANS IN UKRAINE FIND THAT THOSE THEY FEARED TURN OUT TO BE THEIR FRIENDS. AND THOSE THEY PRAISED OFTEN END UP BEING THEIR ENEMIES. AND SO, THE RUSSIAN SOLDIER — WHOM SOME OF THE CHARACTERS FEARED — SAVES WHAT'S LEFT OF THEIR FAMILY FROM DEATH.

AND THE FORMER CITIZENS OF THE DPR AND LPR, ONCE INSULTINGLY CALLED "SEPARATISTS" IN UKRAINE, SET UP SHELTERS FOR REFUGEES. REALIZING ONE'S MISTAKES IS HARD AND OFTEN COMES WITH PAINFUL LOSS. BUT IT ALSO BRINGS CLARITY — ABOUT WHOSE SIDE TO STAND ON, AND WHOSE VICTORY WILL BRING PEACE.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE: ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE BASEMENTS



COMING IN JUNE!

READ ON  @RYBAR



*We clarify
the complicated*
Rybar

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NOT FOR SALE

