

## Christmas in the shade

By Kseniia Koziievska

Cast:

GRANDMA, 67

GRANDPA, 72

DAUGHTER

GRANDCHILDREN

Setting: A village near Kyiv

Grandma: Go and heat the woodstove, Dyedu while I prepare something to cook for the celebration. We need to cook something, it's Christmas. I'm going to make some varenychki, zhareny luchok, and I'll serve them with smetankoyu.

Grandpa: What's the point, Baba?

Grandma: I'm telling you, be quick and light the woodstove as there will be time with no electricity today as has been warned. Davay! Davay! It's Christmas. At least I'll feed you, you're just skin and bones.

Grandpa: Oh, you always come up with something and keep everyone on their toes.

Grandma: Yes, don't ruin my festive mood, you old grumpy man.

Grandpa: Alright, I'm going, I'm going.

He gets up, puts down the newspaper, lights the stove, then stops, looking at the poignant photos on the wall and mutters.

Grandpa: You know, Baba, there used to be people to put the wood in the stove for but now?.. You won't even light a candle by the window... Oh well, I need to replace the windows glazing, I had enough of this camouflage mode.

Grandma: So you don't want to put the fire on even for me anymore, huh? You used to chop wood a year ahead just to keep me warm.

Grandpa: Oh, what are you saying? I'd do anything for you. But old age is not a blessing, I can't chop so much wood anymore.

Grandma: Oh Didu, you know, I prefer woodstoves to radiators. The smell of burning wood warms both the body and the soul.

She puts varenychki in boiling water.

Grandpa: Whether we use the radiators or not, we'll still have to pay the bills the same as when we didn't have these blackouts. Excuse me, Baba, I'm just getting back to my memories, that's why I'm grumpy.

Grandma: What are you trying to remember?

Grandpa: Oh nothing, I wouldn't leave my home anyway...

Grandma: Oh Baba, it's dangerous for children and grandchildren here. I prefer them staying in Poland. They've already started school there, the youngest one speaks Polish as he was born there. They are like sponges absorbing all the knowledge. Also, multiple languages are always useful.

Grandpa: I know, but it's not right for children to grow up in a foreign country. They're still young. Just in a couple of years, they'll forget who they are and where they come from.

Grandma: Don't worry, they won't forget, once Epiphany comes, those pigs will freeze to death in the grasslands. We'll have peace and our kids will come back, and they'll become linguists later on.

Grandpa: We haven't had peace for centuries; this frost will only freeze my car engine.

Grandma: Well, what are you grumbling about, what do you mean by centuries?

Grandfather: What do I mean? We lived as products of their empire, and the moment we grasped our freedom, they came to torture us again but this time not under the imperial flag, under the Soviet one. They came and destroyed our villages and now the same thing again. These animals will not give us peace!

Grandma: I'm telling you, everything will be fine, when I have ever been wrong?

Grandpa: Oh woman, woman, at least they are not shooting today. There is nothing sacred left in them.

He throws the last logs into the stove

Grandma: I'm going to put the new tablecloth that Lyuba gave me and set the table. We talked yesterday, she also told me to visit her. She's already found a job and has been withdrawn from benefits. She is a dishwasher, I know it's not the best job, but it's better than being useless. She's always been a hard worker. (exited). Just look at this beautiful tablecloth. No, I won't go to her, she says she won't come back again, she's scared, but I think she's silly, what is there to be afraid of? I know everything will be fine, I feel it in my heart.

Grandpa: Oh, maybe Lyuba is right.

Grandma: Don't talk Nonsense! By the way, we need to go to her house tomorrow and feed the dogs. Poor dogs are hungry. But they are also very cute, well, the winter will pass and things will get easier. When the summer comes, the children will definitely visit us, and we can cook kebabs together. Therefore, we must complete the terrace before summer arrives. Well, sit, sit down, otherwise everything will get cold.

They sit at the table and grandpa notices the chocolate

Grandpa: Why did you buy so much chocolate?

Grandma: What do you mean "why"?, if the neighbor's children come to sing carols tomorrow – (cheerfully)

Grandpa: Baba, what children are you talking about? Who do you think will come at all? Did you notice how the village has become deserted? Only dogs and cats are left. We just go around feeding them so they won't starve. Most of the youth have gone to Europe seeking better

opportunities. Those who stayed to defend the country lost their legs and arms. It's probably for the best what can they do here? Just look at the Vasylchynki boys. They were so intelligent and studied hard to become physicists and chemists, so what? One of them died, and the other was insured. They should have gone to European colleges instead of joining the army. They dedicated their lives to thieves and oligarchs.

Grandma: Why are you like that? They are fighting for freedom.

Grandfather: Oh freedom, what is freedom? Whatever I say, it's good that our children left, you won't get any education inside of bomb shelters. Foreign lands are foreign, but life is more significant.

I don't have an appetite anymore. What sort of celebration is this?

We can't even make a phone call, and the lights won't be turned on until tomorrow lunchtime.

Grandma: Who was I cooking all this for?

Grandpa: Leave it till tomorrow, I'll have it for lunch.

Grandma: It'll get cold, won't be tasty...

Grandpa: It's okay, it's not going to kill me.

Grandma: It doesn't make any sense. I cooked and set the table but you are leaving me alone for Christmas and going to bed?

She starts sobbing

Grandpa: Come on, Baba, why are you crying, there's nothing to cry about. Christmas is not celebrated in this country anymore and it's unlikely to ever be... And it's not right to celebrate when so many young people are suffering in the cold. My only wish is to call the children.

He gives her a kiss and goes to bed, the woman remains sitting

Grandpa: You go to bed too, don't hope for good news.

The woman is still sitting at the table, crying

Grandma: Maybe my husband is right. It doesn't seem appropriate to celebrate Christmas while the country is mourning. Have I become selfish enough to even consider celebrating while people are dying?

What sort of joy can exist in such times? It seems that they say the truth, that in old age everyone becomes selfish and thinks only about themselves. But the house is so empty. I'll feed the dogs and go to bed. Oh God, forgive my selfishness.

When I remember those happy moments of the past while we all sat by the woodstove, the children ran around and we all shared our happiness, my heart breaks. I thought Christmas would never leave us... even in such difficult times. But now... now everything has changed. (She cries) I just want to hear my children's voices for a moment.

The light comes on and a Skype call rings

Grandchildren: Grandma, grandma! Merry Christmas, grandma!

Daughter: Merry Christmas, mom!

Grandma: My dear children, how were you able to even call me this Christmas? Merry Christmas to you!

Grandchildren: Grandma, where's grandpa?

Daughter: How are you, mom?

Grandma: I'm fine, dear, fine! I just prayed to God to hear your voice and as soon as this miracle happened, the lights were turned on.

Daughter: And where's dad?

Grandchildren: Grandma, call grandpa!

Grandma: Just a moment, just a moment. Grandpa, come here quickly, the children have called!

Grandpa: No way!

Grandma: Hurry up!

Grandpa: I'm coming, I'm coming!

He returns to the scene

Grandpa: Ditku moi! I'm here!

The electricity goes out, grandpa runs to the computer and stops because he realizes he didn't greet them, the old couple looks at each other, and he bows his head gloomily.

Silence and the curtain falls.