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Participation Required

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No one was surprised by the fight in the bar. At 20:14, two guys were fighting, but almost no one noticed. By 20:22, a significant part of the bar was already fighting, and those who didn't fight argued and soon joined in.

"Urgent! Send us fighters from other bars to calm the conflict!" the bartender shouted into the phone.

The bar owner and his old creditors immediately stepped in. After their explanations, it quickly became clear that if everyone didn't take part in the fight, the bar would cease to exist.

The crowd split into those who continued using everyday language and those who used the formal language of the menu. At some point, the bartender announced that from now on, everyday language would be considered a violation. Those who disagreed tried to leave the bar, but it turned out that from the very beginning of the fight, the owner had signed a decree banning men aged 18 to 60 from leaving. Soon, rumors appeared that this decree had been prepared in advance, but no one knew how to verify it.

"If the opponents stop fighting, then the fight will end. If we stop fighting, we will lose the bar."

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<https://ikharkow.substack.com/p/writing-is-betrayal>

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People fell to the floor. Lost consciousness. The owner of a British pub from a distant district came to watch the fight. They say that if it weren't for this visit, the fight would have ended long ago. But ordinary visitors had no way to verify that either.

The waiters insisted that everyone involved in the fight was participating voluntarily. Meanwhile, two kitchen workers approached me and forced me to sign a document obliging me to take part in the fight within 24 hours. Refusal meant two years of forced labor with no possibility of leaving the bar's basement.

The bartender kept demanding louder and louder that other bars send beer glasses, wine glasses, and champagne flutes. According to him, without breaking dishes, the fight wouldn't last long. Other bars promised a lot but fulfilled their promises slowly. Meanwhile, more and more fighters were collapsing and falling asleep. For the fight to continue, new fighters were needed. Otherwise, the bar would be gone. More glasses! More fighters! Whoever is not with us is against us!

The fight lasted so long that a friend of mine managed to give birth to a child. But she said she would speak to her child only in the language of the menu. I told her it hurt me, because then I wouldn't be able to talk to her child when he grows up. I said it was reckless, because the language of the menu is different in every bar, while everyday language allows you to communicate with more people. But instead of arguing with me, she sent part of her money to support the fighters. When I asked why, she said she wanted her child to grow up in a peaceful bar, and so she gave her money to those fighting so they wouldn't allow a new fight to start.

The bar owner announced that now only men aged 25 to 60 were forbidden from leaving the bar. Meanwhile, women who had visited other bars began to return, saying that our bar was the best bar in the city. They cried on camera and sent money for glasses, cried and sent money.

And suddenly the bartender shouted again: "We will not allow the fight to end with a truce. We need only victory. Otherwise, after a truce, the enemy will regain strength and start a new fight."

Big news. A beaten fighter caught two men kissing in the restroom. The men were declared traitors to the bar because they were engaging in forbidden acts instead of defending it.

I still managed to get out of the bar. And sitting in another bar, I wrote: "Every fight begins with the promise to end all fights." I sent this message to all the neighboring bars. I tried to warn them. I thought that other bars simply didn't know what was really happening.

I wrote: "If peace requires continuing the fight, then it is no longer a path to peace. It is its cancellation."

The bar owner traveled to neighboring bars demanding the return of male visitors who had escaped.

I wrote: "No one knows how to end the fight. But everyone knows why it cannot be stopped."

News began to appear that other bars had also started local fights.

I wrote: "When participation in the fight is called a duty, refusal becomes the last form of freedom."

They didn't believe me. Instead of arguments, they threw insults at me. They accused me of simply being afraid to fight. They said it wasn't necessary to fight, you could help the fight in other ways: transporting glasses or cleaning the floor so the fight could go on safely.

In the end, I understood only one thing – peace always looks like weakness from inside a fight.