

Translations from Ukrainian of the poems written after February 24, 2022

by Lada Kolomiyets

Natalka Marynychak

instead of the bibles and psalters, we hold our telephones
which reveal to us all the signposts and all the obstacles
and we pray clutching in our fists a piece of plastic and iron
muffling our deep groans and recollections
in the thicket of brushwood days
instead of bread and wine, we long for hardtack and drinking water
save me and my freedom
from every corner
from every scaffold
from every phone
save me O Lord
because I will stand here until the end
keeping the defense of this city
holding the shield over this place
who are you He asks
and I don't know what to say
I am the one who cannot sleep nor eat
I am the one who finds the light in places
where it is dreadful to stand and sit
I am the one who collects oneself and goes
the one who loves too much
this factory this country and this city *

05/16/2022

* The bombed-out Ukrainian city of Kharkiv is meant. Nataliya Marynchak, a poet from Kharkiv, never left her hometown during the war and currently lives there.

our embroideries
are like notches red on a white body
as if the wounds cut by glass
by fragments of iron
by pieces of concrete
look right here is a little bird
bloody-red
a shell hit
and my great-grandmother remembers it
here's a stitch of black
such a long groove
of the black burn of black sowing
my great-great-grandmother's black longing
because of my longing

and over there my roots speaking
above the slashed red
over the burnt black
as over a mutilated and murdered body
we'll plant the best
the most painful flowers
and I resist awhile
then take a thread and a needle

and start embroidering

here's is my land

this is my long roadway

this is a hill in flowers

this is the water we shouldn't have lost

this is the melted snow that we drank

this is the fire that gave us life

this is my blood

reaching the old world

this is my body

leaning over

O Lord

I will continue to be

an embroider

all the pains my people

have lived through

are all strung on this thread

here's a red mark of my unbowed will

here's a black mark of my strength

and all my victorious flowers

that can cover up both the earth and the heart

with their delicate petals

thin shoots soft stems

transparent coverlets

strong ribs

04/06/2022

every night I say the names in prayer
of everyone I know
protect them O Lord give them full strength

take care of Maksym Serhiy Andriy Artem
Oleh Serhiy Serhiy Savva
Oleksandr Maryana Anna Maria
newborn Dmytro
sick Olena
unwell Oleksiy
take care of them all
of all to whom Your hand can reach
of everyone for whom You are the last hope
and of Nadiya, who is expecting a baby and whose
name means hope take care too
take care of them all do You hear me

a whole country of ripe names that should withstand
resist and survive
give them firm ground under their feet
give them the strongest embrace
and those who will not surrender give them
let them be with these reliable ones
let them not become prey

every night majestic walls grow out of the names

the walls of houses and streets villages and cities

what is there in our broken villages and cities

Anna Iryna Horpyna

They are no more there

what is there in our burnt buildings

there are toys left in the gardens

whose toys are these

Serhiy's Evheniy's Maksym's

Tetiana's Olena's Sara's

what is it under the stooped heavens

it's the last fear dying

whose was it

Serhiy's Artem's Oleh's

Olha's Maryna's Maria's

06/07/2022

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Halyna Kruk

all you can do is to say a prayer,

death may happen to make an error –

not recognizing who is hers

here she goes along the field paths,
her heart is rock-dry, congealed in hardness,
her sickle dulled

unbridled grasshoppers are chirring up,
and summer unlocks the safety belts, but
do not let it beguile you

don't be lulled by the aroma of rustling herbs,
by the abyss of sky and, above the shadow, a bird,
striving up and up

those shadows and silences in the steppe are brief,
snuggle your body into the land you love, relieved,
past she goes, does not see, gone

let there be someone to beg for you from death,
let a wounded grasshopper carry you away,
let it bring you alive:

in the blazing summer, you crawled out of glow,
to those clean waters and wild grass unmowed,
having lived through everything there

and Jesus went up to the Mount of Olives

in the town of Bucha, in the town of Irpin,
in the urban village of Hostomel, in the village of Motyzhyn,
and the urban village of Borodianka,
in the city of Chernihiv, in the city of Kharkiv,
in the long-suffering city of Mariupol
and asked God the Father –
let this cup run out on me

crucified on a pectoral cross
from the breast of an unidentified body
Anno Domini 2022
in a heartless world

heaven and earth are passing by

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Lada Kolomiyets

My story of the day February 24, AD 2022

In my childhood, I had the same nightmarish dream several times. It was the worst nightmare in which I heard the increasing roar of the airplane and understood that this plane was bringing imminent death to me, my mother and father, all of us, because in a moment it would drop a bomb on us, causing a painful death. It was only a child's dream, but it turned out to be prophetic. I woke up to this nightmare in the early morning of February 24, 2022. We live in the center of Kyiv, the capital city of Ukraine. It wasn't even the explosions of bombs that were heard somewhere nearby that woke me up, but the bright light in the room turned on at half

past five in the morning and the soft voice of my husband: "I'm sorry, I had to wake you up, but I don't know how to tell you about it: they are bombing Kyiv. We have to gather up and go". A familiar feeling of imminent death from my childhood nightmare paralyzed my will for several minutes and made my whole body tremble. Seeing this, my husband went to wake up our children, twin 12-year-old boys, and I heard him say to them, "Guys, pack up quickly, take only the essentials, a spare pair of underwear and socks. And help your mom pack up." As it turned out later, the boys decided that the keys to our apartment and laptops are the most essential, and they deliberately took old underwear and worn socks so that it would not be a pity to throw them away, but so that everything new and nice remained at home. So we went to the bomb shelter: with laptops in our backpacks, and I also took educational materials for my university students, because there were to be online classes on that day.

It was the last time we left our apartment on the corner of Khreshchatyk Street and Taras Shevchenko Boulevard. We went to the bomb shelter to my husband's work place, in the north-western district of Kyiv called Akademmistechko, where the research institutes of the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine are located, because my husband works in one of these institutes, and there they set up a spacious bomb shelter with supplies of water and food for employees. When we got there, we realized that we were in hell, because fierce battles were being fought for the Hostomel airport, which was very close to Akademmistechko (Academic Town) district. There was a heavy smell of burning in the air, smoke was rising into the sky and explosions could be heard. My husband said that it is necessary to get to the railway station and try to get on some train going to the west of Ukraine. I didn't understand why we had to leave Kyiv, but my husband, who was born in Siberia and knew Russia, briefly explained to me: "Because the Russians will enter every house if they break into Kyiv and kill our children just because they speak Ukrainian." My brain refused to accept this, but as a historian of literature I well remembered the lessons of history, in particular, how the assault of Kyiv by Bolshevik-Moscow troops ended up in February 1918, when the Russian military shot everyone in the streets of Kyiv, who was wearing a Ukrainian embroidered shirt or talked in Ukrainian.

That day we managed to get on the train. Then, Ukrainian Railways, Ukrzaliznytsia, tried to take everyone, especially women with children. But we had to walk several hours from

Akademmistechko to the station, because the subway and all ground transportation stopped. I remember a stranger drove us to the subway in his car and refused to take money for that. We hoped the underground part of the metro would work, and it did, but later. While we were walking through the almost empty streets of Kyiv, we saw a convoy of Ukrainian military vehicles moving towards us. A group of young girls, whom we passed by, started taking pictures of them. I remember I couldn't hold back and shouted at the girls: "You fools, what are you doing!" Because the photos could show the enemy the location of our troops.

While we were moving to the station, we met fewer and fewer people, only passenger automobiles. The hum of an approaching airplane was heard again, but already in reality. We sped up as if we could run away from the plane. The hum was growing from behind. Suddenly, an airplane appeared just overhead – so low that it seemed to be flying between houses and even the pilot's cockpit could be seen. The plane seemed huge to me. But there was no fear. Instead, there was some intuitive feeling that it was a "good" plane. Even an absurd thought that the plane was protecting us flashed by.

It was a Ukrainian plane that really tried to hide between the houses. And this plane was really protecting us! It was piloted by one of those ace pilots who defended Kyiv and the Hostomel airport. They were able to circle at a very low altitude, hiding from the enemy and, returning again and again, inflict devastating blows on Russian aircrafts. It was our famous "Ghost of Kyiv"! A legendary pilot who shot down dozens of enemy planes and protected my native city.

Today they say that this is a collective image, that it is a myth created by Ukrainians. Yes, it was more than one hero, and the pilot of the plane, whom I think I could even see in his cockpit, because he was flying so low, may not be the only legendary "Ghost of Kyiv". But for me he is absolutely real, and it was he, the Ghost of Kyiv, who protected me and my children from death on that fateful day.

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