

# first poetry front

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Ukraine  
2022

# Ana More

## **The kremlin has declared they will protect russian citizens in Donbas in case of provocation**

in an interview with a Swedish journalist for a Danish civil radio, I repeat what analytics are saying: it will blow over, they're playing high politics, comparing their balls

## **The United States handed over SMAW multirole grenade launchers to Ukraine**

pressing 'on' on the coffee grinder. the beans' cracking is scratching my scruff with anxiety

## **Lufthansa has changed the schedule of overnight flights to Kyiv, fearing a russian attack**

googling what to put in an 'anxious suitcase', if women are accepted by territorial defence forces, trying to remember how to apply a tourniquet from a first medical response course at 15

## **Canada considers sending small arms to Ukraine**

bingeing Ru Paul's Drag Race season after season, making a hair dyeing appointment, planning a city break in Berlin, tripping over 'who can the cat stay with if...'

## **UK foreign office says kremlin is planning to install a pro-russian leader in Ukraine**

being angry at myself for every 'what about my books' migrants from Donetsk and Luhansk regions and Crimea are burning a hole in the back of my head with glimmers of a lost home

Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Karabakh, Yemen, South Sudan, Syria, Libya, Central African Republic

war, war, war, right now, war

Ukraine, war

**in Donbas, the militants have wounded a Ukrainian soldier  
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in an interview with a Swedish journalist for a Danish civil radio, I explain that the question 'are you afraid the war is actually going to start?' is bullshit

the war in Ukraine is a third-grader

as of 31 January 2021, over 13 thousand people have died in the russo-Ukrainian war, the UN reports  
the Armed Forces of Ukraine add: 84 more by the end of 2021

and there's no Hollywood Tom Hayden, nobody to read out the names of the dead, like in Sorkin's movie 'The Trial of the Chicago 7'

but the numbers have faces, the news have faces  
diplomacy has got faces that talk, regrettably, too much

I lower the sound, cracking eggs on my pan, the crackling is scratching my scruff with anxiety

the game of big politics played with small people cannot be paused, cannot be unplugged

I put my fried eggs on a plate, I pour coffee in a glass, all the while big boys keep playing our lives

**even those closest to Putin don't know how serious he is in considering a full-fledged war with Ukraine — The New York Times**

what do I know? breathe in for 3, breathe out for 6, breathe in for 3, breathe out for 6

I am so fucking done with russia

I eat my breakfast in silence

these are the news for

23 January 2022

# Morty Black

air raid sirens in Kharkiv

'and I feel pain in my stomach'

I feel pain scrunching up my insides

breathe in. breathe out.

in the sky over Kharkiv, they fight, while we,

exhausted by alarm, are trying to hold onto what is real,

because they say there'll be fire at 3 AM, and sleep isn't an option.

it's scary going to sleep, not knowing what the day you wake up will be like.

this morning I woke up at 6 to the sound of explosions by my window,

for the first minutes, trying to cling to the hope of another reason,

but within, you know it for sure,

it's been engraved inside you by the past weeks of ominous signs.

is it a bed creaking somewhere, or explosions growing heavier yet?

is it vegetables hitting a salad plate, or should I rush to the bathroom, not to add more people to the shelter?

'and again and again I feel screeching in my stomach,'

I do know that this is how anxiety works in my body, I calm myself down again.

the people I know keep asking in English, russian, Belarusian if I'll leave this city, my city

if I'm going to leave the country, my country, my home.

panic filling up the ether, I breathe in again. I breathe out.

24 February

# Alisa Shampanska

diptich II

I calibrate my careful ear  
the window's open for the first time since war  
I hear the sirens of fire trucks and ambulances  
the cars; I can't hear any rushing or bustling,  
I hear the explosion at ten-fifteen  
a bit later on, you'll tell me: there's news it was a military building  
on promyslova street  
I hear your heartbeat

I calibrate my careful eye  
a dog carrying a stick in her mouth  
a baby playing in her stroller  
they have no idea what's going on  
do I?

a joke from Bufet: all that happened has happened already,  
except for what may come tomorrow  
a fortune for you: a word can keep you warm for years

24 February

I calibrate my careful eye  
I see a queue for the meat store  
I guess it's not the time to be vegan, say anything or even think  
about it  
I wonder if Vegetus is open  
what an inappropriate thought, considering people in Kyiv  
caught in the streets, at home or in bomb shelters, stuck there in  
a curfew of 38 hours  
vodka with tomato juice and lemon, 'the cocktail of 25th  
february,' do you realise it attacked right after their defender of  
the fatherland day, what a hangover, what a perspective in terms  
of history  
the 26th, the 27th  
now every reporter is a war reporter  
you're made to wonder if Tarasik will pay the subscription to  
Ororo, but maybe he shouldn't if it's russian

I calibrate my careful ear  
two mornings in a row, there is news of landing groups being  
neutralised near Koblevo, Yuzhne or the Black Sea region  
an oil depot is burning (my nose), there are also nitrogen,  
ammonia, NPPs  
Dynamo, the hoods-hoods, every dog stands up in defence of  
their country  
I call on the cats to set up their own resistance, I believe they'll  
help us, they have their own network  
'Turkish ships are welcome to dock, russian ships, you can fuck  
off'  
the first Sunday since the full-scale invasion, if you remember  
Maidan, you remember what these Sundays are like  
what a chancy moment for your protest music track, what a  
chancy moment for spring to come about  
there will be no rf or 'OPR' here  
for Ukraine, for Maidan  
hello to all the dudes, the girls, the non-binary folks,  
a fortune for you:  
there will be no rf here,  
no pasaran

27 February

# Taras K.

Well, first wartime poem

Going to sleep in the end with the thought 'Wish I'd die' you realise you could add 'for Ukraine.' Leaving a village house with what has to be my 5th spliff of the day, heart filled with mourning, anger, depression, bargaining, wounds from 2021 as aftereffects in this new reality. I go down to the black-dark garden and remember how scared I was of it as a child, war is here, and I still wound myself by not being in a relationship, my wife has moved forward and is with someone in Lviv, once upon a time this was how our relationship started at the start of Covid, I had a call yesterday from an old ex, we smoked, commiserated, laughed at old jokes... she's in Catalonia, since we last spoke I got married, divorced, russia started a full-scale war, her mum in Obolon went and got herself a gun for self-defence. I'm too ashamed to text my exes while I'm not on the frontline, Kyiv is as close to my heart as Franyk or Kosiv. I am kinda donating my savings, writing posts encouraging my friends abroad to donate, talking to many, organising hosts for my friends and refugees, but this is too little, as Skoro Forte sang, I am sitting on the reserve bench and cheering inside, waiting for my turn, hoping it won't come, not going to the frontline to be here in some way, but I want to be there, and maybe I should.

27 February



# Ana More

'russian warship, go fuck yourself'

we don't get taught how to survive war  
don't get taught how to wake up at 5 AM with your father's call:  
'it started, russia is bombing airfields, it's war'

'russian warship, go fuck yourself'

we don't get told that none of the backup plans in case of  
invasion will work  
because textbook war doesn't growl with fury, it doesn't wail  
with sirens  
because textbook war doesn't take your voice away

'russian warship, go fuck yourself'

first, newswriting, then going live on foreign air  
ceaselessly documenting crimes of the russian federation  
they really are shooting vehicles with civilians  
feed my cat, put together my documents and some underwear  
they really are striking residential blocks  
Thursday, 24 February, it's sunny and warm in Kyiv  
it's the first day of war  
nothing will ever be the same  
every message saying 'how are you?' equals 'I love you, stay alive'

'attention! air raid sirens'

my first bomb shelter: under the office of Hromadske Radio in  
the centre of Kyiv  
they will supposedly bomb government buildings  
every familiar face means a hug  
every video from Donetsk and Luhansk regions, Kharkiv, Sumy,  
Chernihiv, means fury, fury  
how is my body capable of containing so much fury?  
there is no correct reaction to war, I defend myself while packing  
for Lviv  
my cat demands attention while I, fully dressed in my bed, listen  
to the President's address



for the next one, I'll be on the floor of a metro station  
it's safe below ground, calmer to work, easier to write news  
first night

'attention! air raid sirens'

thinking I don't want to live in these times

my body refuses to sleep

what if... missiles?

is this even real? is it definitely 2022? colonisation of Mars? HIV  
vaccines? or a 'Grad' shower targeting houses?

'russian warship, go fuck yourself'

thought I'd cry a lot, thought I'd be able to sleep leaning on my  
cat's carrier on the floor of the Vokzalna metro station

instead, my fury only grows stronger

my heart beats in the rhythm of the shaking city

'attention! air raid sirens'

the guys on Zmiinyy island stand their ground

'russian warship, go fuck yourself'

near Kharkiv, 18-year-old conscripts destroy russian tanks

'russian warship, go fuck yourself'

Vitalii Skakun blows up the Henichesk bridge with himself

'russian warship, go fuck yourself'

an unarmed civilian woman yells at an occupant to put some  
seeds in his pockets so that sunflowers will spring

'russian warship, go fuck yourself'

pride and anger

pride and anger

no other emotion

even my cat keeps quiet while sitting in my lap on the train

another one next to me meows

mum texts she's in her shelter

dad texts there's a russian APC under his window

an 8-year-old girl's dog barks behind me

second day of war, third day of war, fourth day of war

a CNN journalist at the train station asks me: 'how does it feel to  
be running from your own city?'

there is no correct reaction to war  
there is no correct reaction to war

I tell her: 'I'm too anxious in my flat in the capital's centre'  
I'm thinking: 'you should be preparing Molotov cocktails instead  
of writing news out of the safe-so-far Lviv'  
my cat wriggles in her carrier, this is her longest journey: 7 hours  
in the metro, 8 more on the Kyiv-Lviv train  
she definitely needs the bathroom  
are we really fleeing?

'russian warship, go fuck yourself'

is it even possible to feel so much love and hate at the same  
time?  
does war even rhyme with love?

'attention! air raid sirens'

Armed Forces, National Police, the rescuers, Territorial Defence,  
the volunteers, Diaspora Ukrainians, the government, the  
deputies, the President  
so much pride and love  
who could have thought?  
all issues with our people are suspended until after the war

'russian warship, go fuck yourself'

sounds in the streets of Lyon, Vienna, Berlin, London and  
Toronto  
it's snowing in Lviv  
spring comes tomorrow  
today was the fifth day of war  
we're unafraid  
and we'll never forgive  
not anymore

'russian warship, go fuck yourself' is our new national motto  
don't be shy with the swearing  
even if there are kids around  
it's war in Ukraine  
and now the whole world knows it

'attention! air raid sirens'

of chairs the UN, no surprise

'we're not firing at civilians'

fucking scum

then why, every time I close my eyes, do I see the shot of a family trying to get out

Russians open fire on their car, the dog howls, the woman screams, the bullets go through the windshield

another shot: a winged missile on the floor of a Kharkiv flat

yet another: the face of Sofiya, 6 years old, shot to death near Nova Kakhovka

'attention! air raid sirens'

should have taken off these long-ass nails beforehand

now every day I observe the growth of war on my own hands

'Fevral' — February in Russian — means 'month of cleansing', from Latin

'Liutyy' — February in Ukrainian — means 'harsh, angry, violent', from Proto-Slavic

in my friend Pivden's calendar, tomorrow's March means streams from the mountains

streams from the mountains

as we say here, home, in Ukraine

so, Moscowian killers, I suppose you know what awaits you on our land

28 February

# Taras K.

pain rips through my insides, I type into search on youtube, 'i feel very sad', and out of many video options, I see one: 'Usyk funniest moments', which starts with the question 'how is your English', the answer 'perfecto', a light smile, but it doesn't change the fact the russian army has brought war to Ukraine, the fact I am divorced, the fact my dad died from Covid, all of this happening quickly, suddenly, painfully. I smoke my stash of cannabis on an empty stomach on a riverbank, a light panic, disappointed in myself, powerless, some actions which won't be enough, innocent and deceived people dying, my empathy overloaded, beloved Kyiv and Kharkiv with the red flashers, the sirens, the explosions, the gunshots. Wish I'd die for Ukraine, I've had so much of everything I don't want any more. Maybe I'll trade my life for somebody's husband or dad, take the hit, brother for brother. Lay to rest and see what happens, if death is dreams up to a point, they will be the result of one's life, but I'll wait until they stop, too.

28 February

# Morty Black

the fires of our cigarettes pave the way between our hearts,  
the kitchen's dark: turning on the light seems unsafe now.  
bedroom windows are boarded up, on the 5th day it seems  
natural, on one of the boards my friend wrote: "fuck war"  
my heart has only just started feeling the heaviness of its  
beating, it's torn up by pain for our ripped-apart city, for our  
eviscerated life-roads.

you get out to the shop, unable to handle staying home  
anymore,

and later find out that at the very same time, in the next  
neighbourhood, people just like you were blown to pieces by the  
shelling of somebody else's hatred and fury.

there's special romance in drinking oolong under the shelling,  
cooking to the songs of resistance, packing your things to okean  
elzy.

this line is missing, full of profanity about how I could've done  
without it: spectacularly.

this line is crossed out, full of hate for you-know-which nation  
that's obviously doing not nearly enough.

this line is full of boundless love and gratefulness to my brothers  
and sisters doing more than they can, don't punish yourselves  
for not having energy.

my heart is swelling with pain  
when I look at my whole life

fitting into a few backpacks, even containing unconscionable  
amounts of faith.

end of existential report from kharkiv.

we'll stay in touch.

1 March

# Alisa Shampanska

I calibrate my careful eye

the screen next to where video was filmed says: “ruskii korabl, idi nahui”, the same billboards are all over the city and next to our previous home

martial law, alcohol sales forbidden, a local beer shop is working — I am their regular: disgusting, but I’m used to confessing to horrible things

the mayor of Kherson spoke yesterday about occupiers’ demands, they came to the city council with weapons: people walking alone or max two by two, taking a car into the city is only allowed if you’re carrying food, medicine, other sorts of help what peaceful fucking protest can be staged here? what are the prospects for the discordant and the partisan? who’s going to hear my jno pasaran!?

in my head, my own inaction is buzzing like a hive, some stupid expectation for my own fate, sorry for asking, but I can’t understand: what’s easier, dying with a weapon in your hands or living on? I do remember you’re supposed to fear the living

for the first time, I think: what if, having calibrated my careful ear, I’ll hear familiar names in the lists of heroes of ukraine or the lists of the deceased, which are almost the same, since most of these titles get awarded posthumously?

I hope the whole Kherson region is full of the discordant.

troops in Voznesensk, Yelanets, Nova Odesa; an air strike on Ochakiv

fortune for you: Malevych, Kruchonykh, Ilf and Petrov are Ukrainians, and even Bulhakov, that opponent of independence, is a Ukrainian too

3 March

# Morty Black

do you know the feeling of something inside you going empty?  
when your friend's pet rats die one by one, not surviving  
evacuation from Kharkiv

when you walk a peaceful city, reading how another city is being  
methodically destroyed, wiped off the face of the earth, the city  
where you left your heart:

it couldn't fit into any one of the evacuation trains, stuffed to  
the brim with the frightened, the full of hope or despair, love or  
pain, others' hearts.

inside, my chest is scary and empty, when I look at a numb little  
body:

the first one left behind somewhere in the dark of the endless  
passage between Kharkiv and Kyiv,

the second one we buried today, rushing to make curfew.

thinking we were lucky to run away from the war, but it's  
catching up again, turning inside out all your pain and your  
bitterness.

as always, at times like these, I think karma for sure is a bitch,

but if it's governed by the law of justice,

let it justly hand out this pain to every accomplice.

6 March



# Taras K.

You have the right to listen and ignore, I still have the right to talk. It looks like being a peaceful pacifist isn't trendy in Ukraine.

I always thought war was a game of elites, and there is no war when no one participates, no one.

But what choice do you have when there is a need to protect the ones that've been sleeping without guns, the ones who in someone's words have no right to be a nation, the ones in someone's words in need of russian protection. What choice do I have when my neighbours are voluntarily waiting for days in military recruiting centres. What choice do I have when my mum doesn't want to leave home, and my friends already left their homes in Kyiv. Where will my mum go if a certain someone decides to remove Ukraine?

6 March

# Ana More

Valia always used to be generous  
back in the USSR, she used to send her little sister,  
to Ukraine, chewing gum and bananas  
there used to be plenty of everything in moscow  
while in Chechelnyk, Vinnytsia region, the little sister traded  
bananas for tights for her daughter, my mum

Naum, Valia's husband, used to love coming to Chechelnyk in  
August  
tomatoes were just ripening  
he'd perch his thick-lensed square glasses on his nose  
and set out on a pathway down to the valley, looking for the best  
ones  
we still have a picture where Naum, wearing only shorts and with  
belly red from the sun, just like a true villager, has my brother in  
his lap  
while my brother — a tomato in his hand, huge and red just like  
that belly

Valia used to love listening to us speak ukrainian  
"ukrainskii takoy krasivyi, pochti kak russkiy"  
(Ukrainian is almost as beautiful as russian)  
Naum didn't understand Ukrainian  
at least until the third shot of grandpa's moonshine  
because then, at the garden table, accompanied by  
grasshoppers' creaking, they'd sing 'Oy u luzi chervona kalyna'  
'brother', Naum used to say to grandpa  
although it was their wives who were sisters

since 2014, family contact got reduced to phonecalls  
'ah, we miss the village so much, wish we could come again'  
it was agreed not to talk about politics, to keep from arguing  
'do come, the tomatoes are ripe'  
'it's scary, we're russians, you have so many nazis'  
they did, however, invite me to moscow every spring  
'our city is so beautiful'  
reminisced about how I was 5, watching teletubbies in the tiny  
flat near ostankino

and set my foot down on the red square, saying I'll grow up and come visit often

I haven't been to moscow since

Valia and Naum haven't been to Ukraine for 8 years

on 24 February 2022, the first day of genocide

Valia messaged her sister:

'dierzhytes', my s vami. mirnykh bambit' nie budut, no vayennykh vashykh pieriebiut'

(hold on, we're with you. they won't bomb the civilians, but your army will be done with)

to which she got replied with videos of central Kharkiv being bombed, photos of a mass grave in Mariupol, destroyed homes in Zhytomyr region, evacuated people from Irpin being shot up

to which the sister from moscow replied to her sister from Ukraine:

'praydiot niemnoga vriemieni i vy pridiotie k vyvodu shto vsio byla sdielana pravilna'

(some time will pass and you're realise everything that was done was right)

'I vy zazhyviotie ishcho luchshe'

(and you'll live even better)

'Imieyu v vidu ukrainskiy narod, a banderavskaya svolach uydio s paliticheskay arieny navsieгда'

(I mean, the Ukrainian people, the Bandera scum will leave the political arena forever)

'my vas liubim, tseluyem, vsiem priviet'

(we love you, sending kisses, say hello to everyone)

will Chechelnyk live even better after cruise missiles from the neighbouring Transnistria?

will the tomatoes ripen in March if they're sprayed with civilian blood?

one thing doesn't require that much time to make one conclusion:

we don't have any family in moscow anymore

though, who am I trying to fool?

I haven't had either grandma Valia or grandpa Naum for 8 years already

although I do still have their gifts until the first bombing, at least

13 March

# Morty Black

I weed the garden beds of my thoughts, tasting them on my tongue,  
scrolling through like an old record, every one of them, in circles.  
each one has a thorn  
feels like it's stuck in my lungs somewhere:  
'I thought we'd have more time' —  
I tell myself packing a backpack for the unknown.  
'I thought we'd have more time' —  
I hear in my head on an evacuation train.  
'I thought we'd have more time' —  
I tell myself, running ever farther west in Ukraine.  
'I thought we'd have more time'  
and all the anxieties, pain, broken heart and personal drama  
seem so minuscule in this garden bed  
in the light of the fact we never had enough time,  
nobody had enough time to prepare.  
I sit, weeding the garden beds of my thoughts, and think about  
the fact the entire Universe doesn't have enough time,  
so letting these thoughts grow inside me  
doesn't make any sense.

14 March

translation: Maryna Dubyna  
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fortune for you:  
go out and visit the nearest  
of your places