

Vertep based on texts about war.







## **SMALL ORTHOPEDIC SANDALS** Vertep based on texts about war

*This composition is made up of poems written during the time of war (with certain exceptions).*

*The composition consists of an introduction and three parts (inspired by the poem “Flip-Flops and Combat Boots”). It is divided into:*

- Flip-flops — poems by people who are not at the front;*
- Combat boots — Mars Field — poems by soldiers;*
- Orthopedic sandals — Christmas — children.*

*At the same time, on another level, it functions as an apocalyptic nativity play, in which shepherds, angels, kings, Rachel, Death, warriors, Joseph, and Hope for the future come to the girl Mary.*

## **Annunciation**

**“The prayer”** — Mary (*Nataliia Hudzyk*)

**“She is 15”** — Angel (*Anna Smyrnova*)

**“The birds are talking”** — Angel (*Sofia Kostiuk/Diana Vashchuk*)

## **Flip-flops**

**“Life of Mary”** — Angel and Joseph (*Yuliia Huz, Roman Voloshchuk*)

**“Take”** — Angel (*Yuliia Huz*)

**“God, give me another heart”** — Angel (*Sofia Kostiuk/Diana Vashchuk*)

**“Snails”** — Joseph (*Roman Voloshchuk*)

**“Nastia”** — Refugee (*Olesia Vdovych*)

**“Because even our darkness is different”** — Refugee (*Anastasiia Vlasova/Anastasiia Shemeyko*)

**“From the north”** — King (*Roman Voloshchuk*)

**“A song”** — King (*Anna Smyrnova*)

**“My grandfather”** — Refugee (*Anastasiia Vlasova/Anastasiia Shemeyko*)

**“I live on a war”** — Rachel (*Diana Vashchuk*)

**“Where’d you come from, my loathing?”** — Refugee (*Dariia Hrynko*)

## Combat boots

- “The moment of truth” — Death (*Olesia Vdovych*)
- “Mom, I was killed” — Warrior (*Anastasiia Shemeyko*)
- “Someone is such a 20-year-old rookie” — Warrior (*Yuliia Huz*)
- “The numbers of losses” — Weeper (*Nataliia Hudzyk*)
- “We overload the body V” — Warrior (*Roman Voloshchuk*)
- “And what will remain?” — Rachel (*Diana Vashchuk*)
- “I’ll turn my life around” — Warrior (*Anastasiia Vlasova/Anastasiia Shemeyko*)
- “Soldier’s boots” — Joseph (*Roman Voloshchuk*)
- “Lord, tell me” — Weeper (*Sofia Kostiuk/Diana Vashchuk*)
- “There is no God” — Warrior (*Dariia Hrynko*)
- “I see how inside this poem” — Weeper (*Sofia Kostiuk/Diana Vashchuk*)
- “To tell about silence” — Angel (*Anna Smyrnova*)
- “If God hears me” — Warrior (*Dariia Hrynko*)
- “Put the scythe down” — Angel (*Yuliia Huz*)
- “A canary” — Rachel (*Diana Vashchuk*)

## Sandals

- “Flip-flops and combat boots” — Mary (*Nataliia Khudzyk*)
- “St. John Paul II” — Mary (*Nataliia Khudzyk*)
- “This is our city” — Joseph (*Roman Voloshchuk*)



## **1. Yuriy Izdryk** **When the world turns it's back on you**

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when the world turns it's back on you  
and between us again are distance and walls  
talk to me  
talk to me  
even if nothing will change by these words.

and when around you everything smells like war  
and when the first battles unfold  
talk to me  
talk to me  
because you can also love with a word

There's only a thing I grasped and now know for sure  
and I ask you quietly, awkwardly, timidly:  
talk to me  
talk to me  
and may your word become incarnate.



## **2. Serhiy Zhadan She's fifteen**

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She's fifteen, sells flowers at the train station.  
Sun and berries sweeten the oxygen beyond the mines.  
Trains stop for a moment, move further on.  
Soldiers go to the East, soldiers go to the West.  
Nobody stays in her city.  
Nobody wants to take her with them.  
She thinks, standing in the morning at her spot,  
even this territory, it turns out, may be desirable, dear.

It turns out, you don't want to leave it for a long time,  
in fact, you want to hold on to it for dear life,  
it turns out, this old train station and an empty  
summer panorama are enough for love.

Nobody gives her a good reason for this.  
Nobody brings flowers to her older brother's grave.  
In a dream, you hear that motherland forms in darkness,  
like the spine of a teenager living in a boarding house.

Light and darkness are formed, take shape together.  
Summer sun flows into winter.  
Everything that happens today, to everyone, is called time.  
The main thing is understanding that all this happens to them.

Her memory is being formed, consolation formed.  
Everyone she knows was born in this city.  
At night she recalls everyone who left this place.  
When there is no one left to remember, she falls asleep.



### **3. Kateryna Mikhalitsyna** **The birds are talking**

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They wake up in the morning  
And immediately ask about home.

Here — a magpie is swinging its nest  
On an old birch tree.

Here — tits are twittering,  
trying not to show where their home is,  
as who knows what could happen.

Here, here, under the cornice —  
it's sparrows now.

On the little roof a pigeon is cooing —  
And it doesn't matter that he does it awkwardly.

They wake up in the morning  
And immediately ask about home.  
And they answer themselves  
With an infinite number of voices.

And only there, where a russian missile made a crater,  
Silence reigns.  
It shifts from foot to foot,  
Caresses a burnt antenna of a may bug  
Looking for an answer to their question  
Amidst the black debris.



#### **4. Serhiy Zhadan Life of Mary**

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— Where are you coming from, black caravan, flock of birds?  
— We, chaplain, are residents of a city that does not exist.  
We came here, we brought you obedience and fatigue.  
Tell your people that there is no one to shoot at anymore.

Our city was made of stone and iron.  
Now each of us has a suitcase in our hand.  
In each suitcase there are ashes collected at gunpoint.  
Now even in our dreams it smells like burnt.

The women in our city were loud and carefree.  
Their fingers touched the abyss at night.  
The springs in the city were deep, as if alive.  
Churches were spacious. We burned them down ourselves.

Headstones will tell you best about us.  
Can you just talk to us?  
Give us your love, squeeze your grip.  
You, chaplain, were taught to hear confessions and give communions.

Tell us why our city was burned.  
At least tell us it was not done on purpose.  
Tell us, at least, that the guilty will be punished.  
Say at least something that will not be said on the news.

— Okay, let me tell you what a loss is.  
Of course, a worthy retribution awaits all the guilty.  
And later, by the way, it also awaits the innocent.  
It awaits even those who have nothing to do with it.

Why did you end up in the dark streams?  
You should have read the books of the prophets more carefully.  
You should have been avoiding the hellish holes.  
The most important for a parishioner is not to see  
symbols of faith in action.

Remember what the prophets said about pain and suffering,  
About birds falling onto cities like stones?  
That's when the losses begin.  
In the end — it gets really bad, — I won't even tell.

What is the difference between us?  
Like between consonants and vowels.  
Everyone is ready to accept death if it doesn't happen to them.  
No one will ever escape retribution in this life.  
I always talk about it when I have nothing to say.

I don't know anything about the inevitability of redemption.  
I don't know where you are supposed to live now and how to be.  
I am talking about the things that are inherent to all of us,  
If you only knew how unlucky we all are.



## **5. Serhiy Zhadan Take**

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Take only what is important. Take letters you own.  
Take only the things that you can carry alone.  
Take the family cloths and icons, take the silver that gleams,  
take the wooden crosses, the little gilded waxwork figurines.

Take bread and some vegetables, and then you must leave.  
We will never again come back this way after this eve.  
We will never again see our cities shine under the sun.  
Take the letters. Take all of them. To the last angry one.

It is not for us to come back to that little cigarette store.  
It is not for us to dry that well anymore.  
It is not for us to find a familiar face in sight.  
You and I are runaways and we must run all through the night.

It is for us to run along sunflower fields and to creep.  
It is for us to flee dogs and hide among cattle to sleep.  
We must catch the water with our hands in the camps where we must wait,  
annoying the dragons on battle flags hung at the gate.

You will not come back, and friends will be lost in the mobs.  
There will be no smoky kitchens, there will be no normal jobs,  
there will be no porchlight that warms every person it greets,  
there will be no green valleys and barren suburb streets.

There will be sun smeared past trains that never pull in on time.  
There will be a cholera pit covered in lime.  
There will be blood that leaks from women's shoes as they go,  
exhausted guards of gray borderlands buried by snow,

the murder of mailmen who carry an empty sack,  
the priest with the carefree laugh that's been hanged and lies dead on his back,  
the silence of graveyards, the noise of one's post,  
lists of the dead that the editor read once at most,

so endless there is not even time, and gets boring,  
to look for your own name in them every morning.



## **6. Kateryna Mikhalitsyna Lord, give me another heart**

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Lord, give me another heart  
I beg You, I pray.  
mine is breaking apart  
like a little crystal vase  
in the cupboard of a granny from Rubizhne  
for inside is not jam, but fire.  
like the windows of buses with crosses  
of the evacuation columns.  
crushed, shattered —  
even though they carried lives within themselves.  
nailed with rusted nails,  
cats and dogs...  
a torn children's toy —  
that's what my heart is.  
it's like soil ploughed by a tank —  
defenseless and soft.  
like a nest burned by an explosion —  
completely empty.  
that is what my heart is like, oh Lord —  
it's a crater, rust, mud.  
it's like a cloud above Mariupol —  
wherever you touch it, it weeps.  
riddled with holes, starving, peeled  
that's what my heart is.  
it is frozen in helplessness

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*Translated by Anastasiia Shemeyko*

and furious, not soft at all.  
like people in the basements of Popasna,  
like people awaiting death in Kreminna.  
prayers can't fit in there,  
even though it's Maundy Thursday today,  
it's dirty there. People gather in these places  
to sing for those who have died  
to eulogize those who were never born  
on this black war.  
I beg You, I pray —give me another one.  
the answer I hear is “No”...



## **7. Serhiy Zhadan** **Snails/ A day that shouldn't be**

\*\*\*

People are waiting for the evening, looking like snails,  
Who sleep so bitterly in train stations, and so deeply.  
The broken borderline is like a pine branch.  
The road is hard when you carry your home and your  
past on your back.

Stubborn snails of helpless Europe.  
Women who left clean bedding at home.  
Children who do not let go of their mother's hand  
like branches grafted onto an apple tree do not leave the warm trunk.

We need a wonder; we need lollipops of hope,  
touches of joy, rays that break through the darkness.  
What will you take, little snail, getting out of the burnt house?  
Foremost, the belief that you will definitely return to it.

The pacified time of madmen and escapees.  
The fierce faith of those who got out at the exile station.  
To always remember the furniture layout in a parent's home.  
To hide the keys in a pocket like a pressed flower.

The road is now marked by stillness,  
these overnights are travelers between rain and silence.  
Be brave, snails, be worthy of this journey,  
you are devoid of home, but not devoid of heart.



## **8. Vasyl Mulik** **She lives in Lviv**

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She lives in Lviv. She is nearly sixteen. Her name is Nastia.  
And now she knows for sure the location of the city Shchastia.  
Now she knows all of southern and eastern cities,  
But in February in Shchastia her father was killed by a landmine.  
Half a year ago Nastia was happy and wanted to be a lawyer.  
Now the difference between the mundane «200» and «300» is known to her.  
When the air alert is on, she runs to a shelter no more,  
She walks there slowly and whispers the words of curse.  
One week she goes to school, another—studies at home.  
There is no desire to study at all, only anger and exhaustion.

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*Translated by Anastasiia Shemeyko*

At least she has a laptop—a present of father’s comrade Oleh.  
Oleh is missing one leg—thanks to the same landmine.  
Oleh is a good man, but sometimes Nastia wants to ask him:  
    Why have you lost just a leg and I—the whole father?  
In such moments she wants to yell and she doesn’t feel sorry for Oleh at all,  
    And the only thing that holds her back is a bracelet  
        made of paracord by her dad.  
It’s dirty and melted—it is almost slipping off her wrist  
But Nastia won’t take it off and won’t give it away—never and to no one.  
Father’s belongings have a smell of his «Fahrenheit» - tender, scary and sweet.  
It seems that inside Nastia’s soul there’s nothing but a black frost.  
And her eyes—so unchildlike—look like a pair of blue scalpels.  
Nastia doesn’t want to be a lawyer now—she prefers the job of a sniper.



## 9. Ostap Slyvinsky Because even our darkness is different

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Because even our darkness is different.  
You can slice our darkness with a knife and feed it  
to the sick, the lonely, the crippled, the exiled, and the weary.  
Our darkness is like impossible acoustics, which will finish  
    the song even if the voice falls silent.  
Our darkness smells like the skin of those who are no longer with us,  
    we embrace it as we fall asleep.  
Our darkness is like a dolphin emerging from the pitch dark of the  
    ocean floor to expose its back.  
Our darkness is the dimness of alleyways where we kissed,  
the darkness of the bedrooms where we rocked our children.

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*Translated by Tetyana Savchynska*

When the last light fades, our darkness glows up with a light  
out of nowhere, steady like a voice.  
Our darkness amplifies the cries of the murdered,  
the tortured, and all those who call for revenge.  
It cannot be turned against us.



## **10. Oleksandr Irvanets**

### **From the north the horde is breaking through**

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From the north the horde is breaking through  
And there's no shelter for civilians.  
A ford through Romanivka 's river  
Is our pathway from death to life.

Kyiv stands! Kyiv stands strong.  
And like a thread made of mist—  
A stream of people crossing Romanivka 's river:  
The young and old are trudging on.

Water floods their boots.  
Dogs and cats are pulling and whimpering.  
The ford through Romanivka 's river—  
The gates of hell, where souls wail.

May these busurmans be cursed  
With their vile bald-headed Führer.  
I did cross that ford at Romanivka.  
I remember it all—and I 'll speak of it!

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*Translated by Anastasiia Shemeyko*



## 11. Artistka Chuprynenko I have a barrel instead of head

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I have a barrel instead of head, overwhelmed by information  
Something humid covers my face - like acacia's covering valleys

It usually blooms at the end of May  
You can eat if it's not on the roadside  
I'm lying on the floor  
Mum's birthday falls on the 20th day  
My region is under occupation

Next to courage and bravery, I see looters of my blood  
People who profit from war  
I see those who are sick but still share their pills  
Those who sing Ukrainian anthem  
In the Hungarian choir  
I see weather is changing  
Spring is in full swing outside

Planes fly over my head, no sirens  
I stay in Slovakia  
I hear how God's crying

How He meets first-graders, professors, and drunkards  
How He shows cartoons without ads  
So that nobody could take their eyes off the screen

There are no songs about captives in the heaven  
As well as the words «palyanytsa» or «javelin»

I wonder what makes this particular piece of land feel like home  
I wonder why this almond-shaped eyes woman does not look like me

Why all the shades of my face can be found between  
Hladkivka and Hola Prystan  
Somewhere in the field

Why any berry now seems sour, as if it was eaten after an ice cream  
I think a lot about faith,  
That russian soldiers don't deserve to be called by the name of any beast  
Beasts should not be offended like this  
As any Ukrainian, many different thoughts disturb me

For example, why until recently I did not care about the war in Syria  
I was carelessly listening to music Instead  
And now I demand from others active involving Ironically  
How can you live when my people are under a threat

Although over the past 8 years  
I have not done anything to stop the war  
I feel guilty for this

I'm sorry, my beloved one  
I'm only hiding behind you  
There's not enough metal in my voice to make a weapon or to raise a  
wall

But I sing only about you  
And you can only sing through me



## **12. Darina Dvoretzka My grandfather**

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My grandfather had both legs amputated. I have no conscious memories of how he taught me to walk. He was always pleased with my drawings and even when they spent a lot of money on me — he was ready to praise me.

My grandfather had both legs amputated and, probably because of this, I visited somebody more often than somebody visited me. I told him stories from art school and tried to teach him an abc, which he already knew anyway. Nobody asked me, but from time to time something whispered in my ear: “What is it like to live in a house where there is an atmosphere of death all the time?”

My grandmother showed love in a strange way and almost never praised me for achievements. She ignored illnesses and pain, always tried to carry out her calling to the end. She shouted at me over multiplication and logarithms, in this way she tries to tell me: “I love you”. So offensive and already not strange at all. My grandmother spent half a year dying of kidney cancer. She refused to drink water from anyone’s hands but mine or my mother’s. No one asked, but if we are all already fully honest, in people’s eyes one could read: “What is it like to live in a house where there is an atmosphere of death all the time?”

Yesterday I found out that in Donetsk in 2014 people also went out to rallies. Hundreds of thousands. I am still bewildered that this was

not broadcast in my news. Back then I came to school where classmates said that the Berkut were acting rightly. I say: “And where exactly is that rightly?” And they: “They were killing for the common good.” Recently eyewitnesses told me a story of how a girl was tortured for the Ukrainian language. And it, damn it, does not fit in my head how such a thing is even possible? This story of Ukrainian artists Semenko, Bahriany, and the «Slovo» House I try on myself. And still I don’t understand what it is like to live in a city where there is an atmosphere of war all the time?

All those who survived occupation, artillery shelling—rarely talk about it. All those who tremble at a distance—do not raise these topics. No one asked, but in the eyes of the children who grow up there and the people who grow old there one reads, painful and loud: “I understand.”



### **13. Kateryna Mikhalitsyna** **I live on a war**

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I live on a war.  
Here I wash my hands, read the news.  
I collect water from a gutter to drink.  
(Previously we collected snow in the park and two of us were killed)  
I pray for our daily rain  
And for an incredibly wet spring.  
I live on a war.  
I howl with a dog on a neighboring moon.  
I do it with no sound at all,  
He—with all his heart.

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*Translated by Anastasiia Shemeyko*

The poor thing is more scared, then me.  
He can be eaten—he knows that,  
While I was only raped.  
That's why I do it quietly.  
That's why I am shaving my head bald.  
That's why...  
Actually, who cares?  
Will it really save me?  
I live on a war.  
I am told that I am insane.  
Because I share my crumbs  
Instead of taking them away.  
From a jaybird and two grey sparrows.  
The jaybird was somewhere here, but she got lost.  
“A fool”—the wind scares me through empty window sashes.  
“A psycho”—hosphorus hisses burning out.  
I think it's better than  
“Look! It's a hohlushka over there!”  
And I go out in the evening  
To bow to crocuses—  
That is saffron,  
The most expensive seasoning  
To death.  
I live on a war.



## **14. Svyatoslav Vakarchuk Everything will be fine**

\*\*\*

Where'd you come from, my loathing?  
I never gave my phone number to you.  
I didn't invite you over.  
Shut the windows in my heart, the terrace too  
Where'd you come from, my loathing?  
I didn't wake you at night.  
I didn't bring you food.  
Didn't leave my keys in the door.  
What hell did you crawl out of, monster?  
Where do the howls to the sirens come from?  
Right into the heart of my heart,  
Carrying millions of strangers' names.

How do I live now, loathing?  
How do I write letters to Spring?  
How, having forgotten nocturnes with hailstorms,  
Is "Someone Like You" possible to sing?  
You've made me black and white,  
You've made me simple, without gradient or shade.  
Now don't howl for my mercy,  
Now don't ask for my forgiveness, my restraint.  
I won't stop so easily this time,  
I'll blow up every bridge.  
I'll destroy you, my hatred,

And Earth's crosses will twitch.  
I'll destroy you in the streets,  
Destroy you in the sky and on the land.  
Destroy your spoiled curses,  
Destroy your every ship and every tank.  
And when my anguish subsides,  
The sun will glimmer through,  
I'll crawl to God in tears,  
And sing "Someone Like You."



## 15. Halyna Kruk

### The past does not exist, nor does the future

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the past does not exist, nor does the future.  
there are consequences to the causes. there is the sequence of  
meanings.  
the surface, the square root of evil  
that grows, and discriminates everything around it.  
equivalence, the one whereby between two opposite sides  
life erases the better one,  
there is a zero point, upon which rain falls like a god,  
on your dry lips. on your empty body.  
there is a degree, and then you are drunk, there are a thousand, they  
hit them.  
glasses rotting, forearms asleep.  
a light that doesn't give you shade.  
a bullet that always reaches you

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*Translated by Alessandro Achilli and Yarina Grusha*



## **16. Vasyl Golovetskyi Mom, I was killed**

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Mom, I was killed in Irpin  
In a battle under enemy's fire  
So forgive, forgive me  
I'll not be visiting you anymore.  
I would plant potatoes in a garden  
And some tasty raspberries for you  
We'd decorate a house for Christmas Eve  
But now I really can no more.  
Alas, I didn't get to bring home  
My girlfriend looking just like you  
So you could too have grandkids...  
Forgive me, I can't do that too.  
Here, in a mass grave, are all of us  
I lie on the edge, on patrol.  
If you may, mom, visit me  
Because that I can no more.



## **17. Ulyana Halych** **Someone is such a 20-year-old rookie**

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Someone is such a 20-year-old rookie  
That he has never even tried to smoke  
He tells you: “Our history is a river  
On whose waves the bodies float”.  
And you feel ashamed that you have never been on the other bank.  
And you want to tell everyone about this floating smoke  
That is above the waters  
And there’s something so strange about it—  
Something magical that enchants you and allures to kill everyone.  
And then may God judge you and save you  
Let it be as it has to be—but—  
But through the thick smoke each time grows something little and  
green  
Through the pain and silence, through a muffled scream  
An angel’s melody drifts in, which no one among the locals is used to  
hearing.  
They say: “We will not make it to the end”.  
Someone is such a 20-year-old rookie  
That he remembers the face of The Father.  
He answers them: “It’s not a time for crucifying yet”.  
And he will order them to stay and watch  
And they indeed will stay,  
holding the riffles, machine guns and RPVs.  
Never perished, as you can see.

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*Translated by Anastasiia Shemeyko*

Still lives.  
And apparently will live for quite long,  
So that everyone who is here would understand:  
The good is universal as it doesn't put up, but strikes without wait.  
Someone is such a 20-year-old rookie  
That he could be your son  
He says: "God is with us, so shoot, my comrade-in-arms  
Do not worry about what's out there in the darkness  
Our children will be born wise and armed,  
Our children will know who is our enemy and who is our brother  
Finish up your coffee, load a gun..."  
And it doesn't matter now who is 20 and who is 42  
Through the ashes of yesterday a grass starts to grow  
In empty villages now live wolves and rabbits  
The river will wash the bodies ashore—  
Good fertilizer for soil.  
The sun will dry up the tears.  
The winds will have held the funeral services.  
Some among you will definitely return home—  
to your wives, mothers or sisters.  
Someone will tell a story or even a part of it  
About everyone and each one.  
And about those, who were never forgiven.  
Someone is such a 20-years-old rookie  
That he has never even died how one should.  
He starts his war not even having finished the university.



## **18. Victoria Amelina** **The numbers of losses...**

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The numbers of losses of our army are classified  
Until the end of the war there will be no numbers  
There will be a neighbour, the husband of an eccentric woman,  
    who planted red flowers  
    A friend who did not warn anyone  
    A lecturer whom we loved so much  
    And that girl who irritated everyone  
    An artist whom everyone always liked  
    but it seems he loved that girl  
    In the name of a state secret  
    I swear I will not count the dead  
    I will not count them to madness  
    And until the end of the war  
Actually, I was counting - just miscounted.



## **19. Maxym Kryvtsov We overload the body “V.”**

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now it's about 50 by 50 centimeters  
wrapped in a stretcher  
the size of a big backpack  
the body “D.V.” has swelled  
like dough  
120 kilos in life and I don't know how much now  
“P.” with a torn-off leg  
“A.” even looks whole  
the boys wrapped in black bags  
into the last, terrible darkness  
not much room in the armored truck  
you have to touch the bodies  
they are warm and soft  
like clothes.

I look at myself in the mirror  
a face split in half  
no left arm  
a leg gone  
a human disappearing  
dissolving  
like a flower.

I want to scream  
stop!  
enough!  
just stop!  
But that's not how it works!

I wanted  
to pick up a child from school  
pick up a girl after work  
pick up a jacket from dry cleaning  
but someone says:  
no no no  
that's not how it works  
you have to pick up good boys  
50 by 50 centimeters.

Maybe  
I've written the most horrifying poem  
but my hands still smell far worse  
I rub them with mint  
maybe  
it'll drown it out.

The boys will go home  
to light and to memory  
to sun and sea  
to leaves and grass  
to wind  
to silence.

I look in the mirror and see: nothing.



## **20. Yulia Musakovska** **And what will remain?**

\*\*\*

And what will remain? The agitated birds  
On a January morning that isn't similar to winter.  
Last year snow is like unforgiven sins.  
Blurred visibility and impossibility to speak.  
The darkness thickens, glued to the windows.  
Trees stand along the roads like milestones.  
The Magi, as they leave, will remember the year that has passed:  
how it was born, how it grew up and how it became a man.  
Where to go now? It's not time to turn back.  
They haven't smelled like peace for a long time —  
it's gunpowder and blood.  
The warmth from pea jacket from soldier's shoulder  
spreads over the earth like a blanket.  
The surviving stars sway in it,  
and below, the roses near the temple squinted.  
Will we forget who we were  
when we arrived here with unexpected gifts?  
A trail of blood flows from the year, deep as a moat:  
Words will not contain it, and a photograph cannot show it.  
One dance around the sun — and in the new ones  
Perhaps we will dissolve into landscape.



## 21. Maxym Kryvtsov I'll turn my life around, I promise

\*\*\*

«I'll turn my life around,  
I promise.»  
Written with a marker on the wall of a  
popular spot in Kyiv,  
There is coffee, pastries, stylish clothes, music,  
and balconies with an incredible view.  
I've seen  
how the fog embraces the skyscraper  
gently and quietly.  
«Love doesn't exist,»  
written on another floor of this spot.  
Nor does the sea,  
nor does air,  
nor do dreams,  
nor me,  
but the coffee here is good.  
Someone added below:  
«Sunshine, what made you think that way?»  
Listen, I'll tell you what:  
the swamp, through which reaching the dugout is tough  
shells falling nearby,  
a frozen rope tightly knotted around a neck  
parts of a person  
scattered  
lost in the field

---

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whimsically and unkempt  
a dream that forces you to scream  
rain when you have a few days left to wait for change  
and the sunshine  
that descends into the basement  
because of the air alarm  
indeed,  
who made you think that way, sunshine?  
A short vacation,  
a few days on the road,  
I meet friends,  
mold clay,  
for the first time in two years, I bake a cheesecake  
which turned out just OK,  
with my friend, we watch  
as the winter cat catches a street mouse  
holding on,  
I can breathe  
a girl crosses the road  
holding a big skinny dog on a leash  
the last floors of Khrushchyovka apartments emerge somewhere  
like butterfly swimmers  
twinkling with garlands  
a little more  
and I wish to become a part of  
the ordinary city again  
walk a big dog  
fry some eggs  
drink coffee in charming bookstores with tall shelves  
it's dangerous  
it's very dangerous  
a calm life is an illness

throw away those thoughts  
like worn-out slippers  
run away from here  
to your dugout  
to your swamp  
to your shells  
I'll turn my life around  
I'll turn my life around?  
I promise.



## **22. Serhiy Zhadan**

### **Soldier's boots — made for these stone roads**

\*\*\*

The Lord drilled you twenty years, watched over your loads,  
kept you in barracks, in infantry ranks,  
taught from His own mistakes — from the Bible and from tales.

The Lord breathed life into your combat gas mask.  
All you have is the choice to die for each of us,  
all you have is the freedom to fall in the fight.  
The Lord will take your dog tag and forgive all your guilt.

The Lord will take off your boots, cut the laces with a knife.  
Boots belong to the living; we'll keep them for life.  
In these swamps, on this land — where would you go without solid soles,  
without staff-room corruption, without artillery's sheltering role?

As long as courage's in your throat, as long as law's in your heart,  
trumpets, trumpets — infantryman, here is your Jericho's start.  
Walls will fall and banners will fall when they hear your horn.  
You'll weep in shattered blocks, not knowing why you mourn.

It's all the trumpet — somehow they placed it into your hands.  
Its golden palate, its killing, cold command.  
Feel something touching your heart? That's the roots of the grass.  
The soil changes its chemistry by the bodies it lets pass.

It's all the trumpet, you see yourself — the point is the horn.  
Better to row on galleys, better to rot unborn  
in prison, than to trumpet and watch fire devour cities whole.  
Every life — impossibly complex —  
ends in death — astonishingly simple in role.

Soldiers' souls — just right for His camps.  
He always delights in whoever in darkness inclines,  
delights in each chance to be among all of us here.  
That's why this weightless trumpet rests in your hands, my dear.

He always tries to teach us how to hold to the earth,  
how to bypass the traps, how not to lose our worth,  
how not to fear darkness, how not to fear the height.  
I think He himself doesn't know how to help us fight.



## **23. Yuliya Musakovska** **Lord, tell me**

\*\*\*

Lord, tell me  
that you were holding his hand  
until the very end,  
that you were kneeling beside him,  
when the hot summer sun  
was pressing him into the ground  
like a burning anvil,  
when stray dogs were circling around him,  
smelling blood,  
having forgotten who they are

Tell me you  
have been playing  
the most beautiful movie for him,  
with bright snapshots of his childhood and youth:  
here he is rolling down the hill  
on a bicycle with its frame too high,  
flying and falling headlong into the grass,  
painfully bruising himself,  
but is laughing so loud  
Like he never would again

Here he is cupping  
a tender woman's face  
with his hands,  
then her shoulders and thighs,  
joining his body with hers,  
moving until a sweet explosion

Here, in the range of his gun,  
he sees armed strangers  
on his land,  
shrinks into a lump,  
and hits the target on first attempt

But he hadn't had time for more  
because you measured it for him  
with a horilka glass, so scantily,  
that he was bound with embroidered towels,  
not for a wedding,  
but for agony,  
for death  
lengthy, like a first-grader's road home  
at night through the woods

And how did it help, Lord  
that you were there?...



## **24. Maryna Ponomarenko** **There is no God**

\*\*\*

“There is no God,” says this man at confession.  
He tries to fit his memories into words.  
There is a whole sea of words; he is drowning in this endless sea.  
“There is no God,” he repeats. “There is no God.”

A man in camouflage, in mud-splattered combat boots.  
He speaks about a woman, and he speaks about the heart.  
His voice is quiet, but his military training can be heard.  
He’s saying: “Her heart was like a book.  
Like this one, that you are holding in your palms, Father.  
There is a cross on the cover — she would have replaced it with a sunflower.  
She was like a sunflower — so bright on the outside,  
but inside - with black seeds.

All of her speaks of the possibility of salvation,  
of the reality of love, of the necessity of hope,  
of everything that no longer exists, or at least doesn’t work.”  
The priest is used to saying: “God’s will be done».  
Now he feels that he can’t say something like that.  
He is silent for a long time, and then sighs.  
“There is no God,” the man repeats. “There is no God.”

Then he says: “They killed her for a long time, they killed her so  
terribly.

How is it written in the book — to drain the lees?

She did it, Father, she drain the lees to the very bottom.

Why did so much suffering fall to one woman?

I saw her body, Father, I saw her eyes, veiled with bluish smoke.”

The priest says: “The ways of the Lord are inscrutable.”

The man asks: “Father, what does your book say about wars?

This war has made me terrifyingly free.

There is no God, Father, and this is the first cause of freedom.

If you believe in Him — merciful, white-bearded — pass on my  
repentances to Him.

And also tell Him — I will take no more captives.”

The man leaves.

His steps are heavy; instead of a heart — a bloody clot.

The priest looks into the book. Inside, it's empty.



## **25. Anya Yutchenko** **I see how inside**

\*\*\*

I see how inside this poem  
grows a huge hole  
I can't cover it with anything  
I can't hide it in any word  
I can't find any name for it  
it grows wider and wider  
deeper and deeper  
it's like all-consuming silence  
on the bottom of a burned tree  
a moment before  
it seems that now  
there is finally room for God



## **26. Anatoly Dnistrovj To talk about silence**

\*\*\*

to tell about silence  
you have to forget the words  
we have already seen so much  
visions won't help us  
memory is like snow  
it will fade  
but exhaustion is the same  
in the middle of the night  
or in the morning  
or at midday  
you don't know how long will fear last  
you don't know if there will be any water in the morning  
the hand will write in the darkness  
uneven  
stingy lines  
the soul won't know its own  
last words



## **27. Lala Tarapakina If God hears me**

\*\*\*

If God hears me, I want to speak directly to Him:  
Lord, sit for a minute, hold my phone, read the war  
Our texts may be simple this time  
But read it and tell everyone about us.  
And a miracle happens — God sits and reads the word  
And mumbles — I have never read such a thing:  
“Sorry”, “Thank you”, “I want to go home” and sympathies —  
The endless number of candles lit surely not for health.  
“How are you?”, “Where are you?” and “Don’t worry, I’m OK”  
Card numbers, card numbers, card numbers...  
A dachshund went lost. A father died. A grandfather is in captivity.  
There is a queue to the rainbow — the last in it is a grey cat.  
God is sitting and reading, the phone is shaking in His hand.  
He says: “How much these tireless Ukrainians thank me!”  
He shakes his head and while I am bringing him a cup of tea —  
He asks me: “Who are these 3CY?”  
Your people pray every morning to 3CY and to me.  
So we are your two Ukrainian gods, aren’t we?  
God finishes his book of hundred days and vanishes in a second...  
I become quite reckless, grab his hand and say:  
“While our murdered children go to bed in a heaven,  
I want you to perform last rites for each one of them,  
to tell everyone about them.  
I demand, God, that you sit at the gates Yourself  
And that you don’t ever overlook any one of us.

---

*Translated by Anastasiia Shemyko*



## **28. Kateryna Babkina Put the scythe down**

\*\*\*

Put the scythe down — let the grass grow from them  
Memory is something as simple as the first words,  
is something out of the deep pockets, out of the old drawers,  
something that is itself a life, like a forest or a garden.  
Depart now—there is no need to carry them anywhere,  
they have already been taken.  
From the deafening emptiness, out of which they still try to climb up,  
like a fisherman take their souls now.  
Your faceless dark thin persona doesn't scare them—fear is actually half drunk,  
dressed in a cheap soldier's uniform;  
it's not a boat, not a crow, not a blind tunnel —  
the real death carries the belongings from the houses of strangers.  
Where have you been when they were shot at for fun?  
Their blood now flows in the rivers underground.  
The wind carries their echoes among the burned houses in prayers  
from the elders mouth, in a babble of a child.  
What do you know about how it is to melt snow in your hands,  
to gather the words of farewell from the mouth of a stranger,  
to make up the lists of the dead,  
to carry the bodies of the dead to the far corner of a shelter,  
to inhale the last hope like the most dangerous poison of all,  
to fail to wait till the last day or the last minute of this winter?  
Death, you know nothing, so mourn, say sorry and accept it.



## **29. From the collection of testimonies «Dictionary of War» complicated by Ostap Slyvynsky Canary**

\*\*\*

Olia, Irpin

When we were leaving Irpin, there was this moment when it became so quiet. Nearby was a house that had been hit. All of the windows were broken, and something blocked the entrance. And in the silence I heard a canary through one of the windows. I kept a canary as a child, so this sound is unmistakable to me. They must have gone down to the bomb shelter and hadn't come back up yet. So much happened before and after that, but I can't forget that canary.

---

*Translated by Grace Mahoney and Taras Malkovych*



## **30. Iryna Tsilyk Flip flops and combat boots**

\*\*\*

Those in flip flops vs. those in combat boots.  
Although no, no “versus” here.  
No contradiction.  
People in flip flops wait  
for people in combat boots,  
measuring each step, each day —  
three hundred sixty-five, three hundred sixty-four ...

Or they don't wait.  
Pack bags for a trip to Greece.  
School break, summer.  
No one's to blame, after all.

Or they don't wait and pack bags for a trip to Greece,  
yet they wire, they wire money  
for all the Achilleses for new summer combat boots  
made of nubuck and cordura.  
To make it breathable.  
To protect.

Variants are innumerable.  
All of them right or wrong.

In the evenings people in combat boots  
take off the ballast  
and crawl backwards, hiding in their shells —  
their sleeping bags.  
Scroll for some time through  
concurrent lives in smart phones,  
feel slightly surprised.  
“Greece. That's cool. Once I too...”  
And then short unbearable dreams come to them  
about bacchantes or sirens  
with voices of honey.

Sleep, my sweet.  
You know, close to the morning  
one always dreams  
about those dear to us, in flip flops,  
and those others,  
in little orthopedic sandals.



### **31. Artur Dron St. John Paul II**

\*\*\*

St. John Paul II  
In the old free-of-charge times  
Said in Lviv:  
«The rain is falling—the children are growing».

St. John Paul II,  
I was raised under this rain.  
But now the winter is such  
And everything demands such a price,  
That only snow and soldiers are falling.  
«The soldiers are falling—the children are growing».  
«The soldiers are falling—the children are growing».

---

*Translated by Anastasiia Shemeyko*



### **32. Serhiy Zhadan Here is our city — standing in the east of the country**

\*\*\*

Here is our city — standing in the east of the country  
Here we are, here is our secret language.  
On Christmas we step out of our houses and smash shop windows.  
We send off our king toward the west, toward Bethlehem.

---

*Translated by Serhiy Zhadan*

We say to him: king, it's time to leave the east.  
Time to head west and get out of this bind.  
There everyone speaks so confidently about our freedom,  
as if they truly know what to do with it.

They talk about our freedom on lecterns and stages.  
Go there, away from the usual chaos and ruin.  
There, around the savior, surely a crowd of locals waits.  
Say you've come bearing gifts — they'll let you through.

Listen to what they'll tell a man like you.  
Then you can explain to us all how we should live here,  
what to do with our faith — so absent, so hollow,  
how to grasp its symbols at all.

They're fine there, sunlight glowing in window frames,  
and children's laughter filling the hallways.  
They likely won't need you with your gifts.  
They don't believe anything good can come from the east.

They speak of themselves as if scattering seed into soil,  
they speak of justice as if driving a beast into a corner.  
But what is their knowledge of salvation worth  
without us — people of the east, who believe in nothing?

Now in the west they're preparing for winter.  
Winter Carpathians cut across them like scars in the skin.  
But this child was born so that we might understand  
that one way or another we must dig our way out together.

He will explain everything once he learns for himself,  
he will walk through the night fields to reach us.  
Let our faith be broken, like a collarbone,  
yet still — no one ever taught us another.

In the city now there is so much joy and anxiety.  
In the city the old orders are working well.  
The King from the East walks, asking all for directions.  
He walks,  
trampling snow,  
singing carols.



### **33. Arthur Dron** **The First Letter to the Corinthians**

\*\*\*

Love is patient. Love is kind.  
It is not jealous, is not pompous.  
Love is terrified like a beast  
but it perseveres.  
Love could give up and abandon it all  
but it perseveres  
Sometimes, love has gunshot wounds to  
its legs or bullet fragments lodged in them.  
Tourniquets squeeze love's legs,  
or it has no legs anymore.  
Then love's friends carry love.

Love digs trenches and lives in them.  
It gnaws ice from the bottle cut in half  
when it gets thirsty at negative four.  
Love takes up combat duty,  
gets into position  
with hernias, fevers, prostatitis,

---

*Translated by Hanna Leliv*

with blast injuries,  
asthmas and allergies,  
with a high probability  
of not making it back,  
with thoughts about  
the most significant one.  
It bears all things, believes all things,  
hopes all things, endures all things!

Love can distinguish by ear  
the shots of rocket launchers,  
the strikes of mortar shells, and  
the movement of tanks.  
Love's eyes hurt when it stares into the  
thermal imager for too long.  
Love wakes up at night  
when the mice in the dugout crawl under its field coat.  
Sometimes, love vomits long in the trees after heavy combat.  
Every now and then, it closes the eyes of its friends.  
Love wraps them up in sleeping bags and carries them away.

Love never fails!  
But where there are prophecies, they will cease;  
where there are tongues, they will be stilled;  
where there is knowledge, it will pass away.  
For sometimes, the shelling is over,  
and friends close Love's eyes,  
wrap it up in a sleeping bag,  
and carry it away.

And then it passes to the living.



## SMALL ORTHOPEDIC SANDALS Vertep based on texts about war

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**SMALL ORTHOPEDIC SANDALS**  
Vertep based on texts about war

**Translators of poems from Ukrainian**

*Anastasiia Shemeyko*

*John Hennessy and Ostap Kin*

*Eugenia Oshurko*

*Serhiy Zhadan*

*Jean Goncharoff Toropoff*

*Tetyana Savchynska*

*@darywzc (on lyricstranslate.com)*

*Natalia Bilska*

*Alexandra Kutovoy*

*Alessandro Achilli and Yarina Grusha*

*Sofia Kostiuk*

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*Olena Jennings*

*Grace Mahoney and Taras Malkovych*

*Iryna Tsilyk*

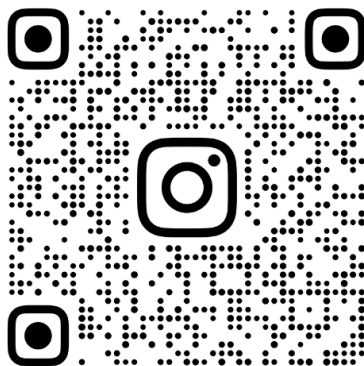
*Hanna Leliv*







Our Instagram:



**NA\_SYMONOVYKH\_STOVPAKH**