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SHADOWS OF WAR



Kyiv

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P12

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Who are the shadows of war? Would you recognize someone familiar among the characters, perhaps even living amongst you? Could the heroes be you yourselves? Or perchance, you may unveil previously unknown heroes who have vanished into obscurity, becoming unseen? "

Shadows of War" is a collection of novellas, tales, and short plays that immortalize the misdeeds of the Russians within texts, embellished with accompanying photographs. These are the tales from various corners of a wounded Ukraine. Through the narratives, societal and cultural issues echo – the reverberations of war..

Dedicated to all partisans, to the unsung fighters for Independence.

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Photo 1. "Lesya" Mural by Christian Guemy (known as C215), Borodyanka (Kyiv Region), Central Street – a residential building destroyed by Russian invaders. Author: K. Chornomorets, 2023.

SHE (THE PLAY)

Lesya: I did not call you, so leave, go away from my land!

She: Did you not call? Yet your people waited for me here for centuries, never relinquishing their struggle!

Lesya: Waited for you?! So you could drop bombs, shower the bodies of my compatriots with stones, and burn the fertile black soil! You foul, untilled harlot, who mixed earth with blood!

She: I implore respect! You, Young Lady, you might see me, but only from the heights of your high-rise. It's not for you to judge me yet...

Lesya: But your truth is steeped in sorrow and blood! While mine is etched in words!

She: Girl, listen: I know you were a national hero for generations, but now you're just a surviving piece of stone here.

Lesya: Calling me stone... Yet even you couldn't destroy me. True heroes never die.

She: But know this: your words and the words of your brothers birthed me. You shouted from your graves, and with your texts, you stirred not only the mighty Dnipro but also generations and the thresholds of crags. All of you, fighters of independence unknowingly gave rise to me. For the enemy won't die without a death.

Lesya: I still have no desire to believe your words!

She: Don't believe, just observe. Look upon me from your stony prism. You're here immortalized by an artist, so your eyes might see through the ages...

Lesya: Yet I wish for you to depart!

She: Yes, I ignite with fire, pelt with stones, and shatter fates, sowing the land with graves. However, girl, remember: there is no other path. Ukraine can only win its freedom through a harsh, unyielding battle. And it's not only freedom from external foes.

Lesya: Can there truly be no other way to divide the world in this new millennium without bloodshed? Why the laws and papers? Why do so many wise men gather around round tables?

She: There isn't one yet, not one... For the world sleeps, and only we, you and your brothers and sisters, can awaken it. Illuminate this darkness. So that they come to their senses, and not march into the abyss. The people of Herod

have indeed opened their jaws over the heavenly land, and I promise to punish them for eternity.

Lesya: But why do you inflict this torment upon those who are innocent? Why must children mourn their parents, burying them? What purpose does this serve?

She: Such is the cost. Such is the cost of your paradise and dominion upon this land. Here, I will divide souls between hell and heaven according to their deeds. So that the chosen people, unburdened by fear, may obtain the source of life.

Lesya: Damn you, deceitful and foul! Now you merely juggle with innocent mortals!

She: The rotten apple on the ground is not just stench and flies, it's also the seed that will sprout into new life. Thus, thanks to these unpleasant processes, a wondrous garden with fruit will flourish. For where there is death, there is also life.

Lesya: Defying you, I will stand unwavering on guard here, even if I weep stone tears. But

I will remain here until the end until I witness the promised freedom we shall attain!

She: And it is not granted to all, only to the strong of this world... Yet we still share a common truth, you and I.



Photo 2. "Lesya" Mural by Christian Guemy (known as C215), Borodyanka, Central Street – the same building destroyed by Russian invaders. Author: K. Chornomorets.

THE LUCKY ONE

Children's drawings adorned the walls of the cultural centre, but it seemed that children hadn't been there for a while. The space was filled with boxes of pasta and potatoes, containers of household chemicals and diapers. A mix of useful and less essential items. At the exit, multi-tiered packages of water bottles were stationed. In a far corner, a woman sat at a table, distributing kits. People lined up, about twenty of them, spanning the whole room, reaching the stairs and spilling onto the street. Mostly women of different ages, a few elderly men, and children. Amidst the queue at the humanitarian aid station stood just one young man. He seemed to be the centre of attention, a magnet drawing gazes toward himself, inadvertently sparking whispers in the crowd. He was

dressed in a tracksuit, hiding his eyes under a cap. A worn backpack was slung over his shoulder, presumably a small assault pack, but completely shabby. His left hand remained in his pocket, while his right hand clung to his phone. The queue moved forward, bringing the young man closer to the table. He paid no heed to the glances, engrossed in his gadget.

“Let the woman with the baby pass!”¹ Someone protested in the queue near the stairs. Everyone began to shuffle aside, making way. The young man with the phone also took a step toward the wall. But suddenly, he dropped his phone and stepped back to pick it up.

“Man, do you have any compassion?!”² The blonde with long nails and in a short skirt raised her voice.

“Compassion? What does that have to do with this?” asked the young man, without taking his left hand out of his pocket, picking up his

¹ t/n: translated from russian

² t/n: translated from russian

phone with the other hand, and making way for the mother with the baby.

"You cad! Just look at him!"³ The ambitious blonde waved her hands provocatively at the audience. Women nodded their heads, bowing to "Compassion."

Another beauty with cosmetic lips pulled out her phone and began filming everything.

"Look, here, at the humanitarian aid station, women with children have come, and this gentleman is not letting them through!" she commented to her followers.

"Yes, yes, our men are fighting," another from the queue spoke from the "tribune of justice," trying to get into the frame.

"Excuse me, is there a rule here that restricts entry for men?" a calm voice spoke, looking at the elderly man.

"Ladies and gentlemen! Assistance for Ukrainian citizens affected by the war," the wom-

³ t/n: translated from russian

an who sat at the main table stated, "for everyone who needs it!"

After her words, everyone fell silent. No one was making noise anymore, but murmurs buzzed like bees behind the man's back.

"Well, in fact, the aid is primarily for those from the occupied cities,"⁴ quietly added the woman who shouted, to give her the way.

"Oh, my husband didn't want to go, but they took him. So terrifying, so terrifying. What will happen – whether he'll come back whole and alive..." added the woman who was leaving with full bags.

"We fled from Donetsk with my husband back in 2014. And now we fled from Irpin. When will this war end? Now what is left is only to go abroad. There is better assistance for the children."⁵

"Those who are scared should make arrangements..." the blogger interrupted herself.

⁴ t/n: translated from russian

⁵ t/n: translated from russian

People in the crowd were humming to themselves, and the young man approached the table to get his ration.

"Do you have a place to cook?"

"No."

"Then you get bread and vegetable preserves today. Take as much water as you need. Can I see your passport, please?" sternly spoke the woman at the front of the hall.

He handed over his passport and showed his registration in Borodyanka. In the meantime, a woman carefully slid a box of canned stew under the table.

"Thank you."

Finally, he pulled his hand out of his pocket. However, it was missing fingers and a part of the hand. He tucked a small box with food provisions under his armpit and took a package of water in his other hand, fitting everything into his backpack.

The man went to the remnants of his apartment, hoping to find some of his belongings. The building now looked like a box with window

openings, and the human dwelling itself had burned from the inside. Entering the hole that used to be the entrance, he cautiously stepped over the remains of doors and went to the kitchen. There, from everything, only the recognizable burnt electric stove remained. On its black charred surface, as a contrast, lay a white, intact cup with the word "Lucky" written on it.



Photo 3. "Surviving Fragments" – a residential building destroyed by Russian invaders, Borodyanka. Author: K. Chornomorets.

The cup miraculously remained intact, seemingly the only thing that managed to survive amid the local chaos. The young man carefully wiped it from the dirt with his hand.

“Lucky,” he spoke to himself and smiled. “My wife gave me this cup once. My ex-wife... Right before I headed to the Debaltseve Cauldron. Intact... It’s a shame I didn’t take it with me back then – maybe I would have been intact too...” He placed it inside his backpack.

In the corridor, among the debris of tiles, glass, and wood, lay scattered clothing, tossed around by the explosive blast. Amidst all this mess, he managed to dig out a pair of rubber Chinese flip-flops that were still usable. The rooms were almost gone – they had turned into a hole two stories deep. The young man stood deep in his thoughts at the very edge of the abyss, staring into the emptiness beneath his feet. His gaze was indifferent. Bits of concrete crumbled from under his boots and fell downward; he leaned over the sharp edge of a concrete slab.