

For Refugee Sunday

TAKE ONLY WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT by Serhiy Zhadan, 2015

Take only what is most important. Take the letters.
Take only what you can carry.
Take the icons and the embroidery, take the silver,
Take the wooden crucifix and the golden replicas.

Take some bread, the vegetables from the garden, then leave.
We will never return again.
We will never see our city again.
Take the letters, all of them, every last piece of bad news.

We will never see our corner store again.
We will never drink from that dry well again.
We will never see familiar faces again.
We are refugees. We'll run all night.

We will run past fields of sunflowers.
We will run from dogs, rest with cows.
We'll scoop up water with our bare hands,
sit waiting in camps, annoying the dragons of war.

You will not return and friends will never come back.
There will be no smoky kitchens, no usual jobs,
There will be no dreamy lights in sleepy towns,
no green valleys, no suburban wastelands.

The sun will be a smudge on the window of a cheap train,
rushing past cholera pits covered with lime.
There will be blood on your heels,
tired guards on borderlands covered with snow,

a postman with empty bags shot down,
a priest with a hapless smile hung by his ribs,
the quiet of a cemetery, the noise of a command post,
and unedited lists of the dead,

so long that there won't be time
to check them for your own name.

translated from the Ukrainian by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps