

HE: When people ask me what the hardest part was, back during those days on the Maidan—and it's usually foreigners who ask (Gustav is not the first), usually just to be polite, just to be asking something, because the only thing they remember from their press and cable news is that more than a million people (no one knew exactly how many, anyway, and I bet no one'll ever find out) came out into the streets of Kyiv and stood there, in the freezing cold and under snow, and you know they picture the Ukrainian winter as something out of the vast Asiatic steppes: birds frozen dead in mid-flight, tongues stuck to metal spoons—so when they ask about the hardest thing they're hoping to hear Hollywood-worthy horror tales of frostbitten cheeks and amputated limbs, a la Jack London's go West, my son, go West, my country, since a conquest of the West (and they're certain that's what we fought for—a piece of the West!) must need, in their mythology, be accompanied by purely masculine sacrifices; they ask in full anticipation of having you tell them what they have already imagined so that they can nod sympathetically and say, Wow—when people ask me this question and I try to answer, every time I feel like I come up against a solid wall inside myself, a profound lack of desire to explain anything, muddling in my inadequate English, to mutter that “hard” is not quite the right word, and it doesn't really fit what we experienced during those three weeks. That, actually, it was later that things got “hard,” after everything was over, the rush was over, and we all had to go home, and become again anonymous strangers passing each other in the street, so that no matter how many times you clicked your busted lighter in the middle of the sidewalk in a hopeless attempt to light your cigarette, there would be no solicitous onslaught of helpful hands with ready flames offered you from every direction. I remember how utterly lost I felt the first time this did not happen: after those three weeks I had forgotten completely what it was like to be alone in a mass of people, and this was only a few days later, and Khreshchatyk looked like the same street, and the people looked like the same people, only now they hurried along on their holiday errands and no one gave a damn if some loser could use a light—that was the moment when I, stunned for an instant by the chill of the sudden emptiness in the space that was only recently, days before, bubbling with thick familial, intimate warmth, a void not unlike the one left by the death of a loved one, understood finally and undeniably that it was all really over: we had begun to fall apart again, to segregate into the composite elements of a pedestrian mass, no different from a crowd in any city in the world, and one had to learn to live as before, as if one had never known a different life. That was really hard—it was like coming home from war, albeit victorious (for some reason, this particular metaphor strikes me as especially apt), like coming back from the front, Gustav, you see? Gustav nods and grunts a low, respectful Ja, he's alright, only, of course, he doesn't have a clue, this guy who looks in every way like a storybook Dutch skipper: with his red side-burns straight out of a cartoon, all he needs is a pipe; Sweetie, when she first saw him, cracked, “The Flying Dutchman!”—he's really a walking stereotype, but I'm sure there are tons of stereotypical-looking people in any nation, it's just our deeply inculcated distrust of national stereotypes that makes them seem like a rarity. Gustav has come for one thing and one thing only: pictures—and pictures is what he really understands, no arguing about that.

He's got a good eye, instantly grabbing onto the shots he wants me to pull up to full screen, and really, I could very well shut up and not try to explain anything at all, because the pictures do speak for themselves, but I can't shake the suspicion that they are telling him something different from what they say to me. He wasn't in Kyiv back then and all he's seeing now is untold numbers of people in the city streets, under the snow. A few angles are really nice (especially when I managed to climb a tree and took shots of Grushevsky street—a bright orange human sea as far as the horizon, seen through the latticework of snow-covered tree limbs), and so are the wide angles, of course—the people's faces are beautiful, old, young, inspired, smiling, with happy tears in their eyes, with mouths open in joyful cries (Gustav skips over a grinning gap-toothed boy in a black stocking cap—that's from further up the hill, next to the building of the Supreme Council, I got a few good shots there too; while I was hoisting myself into the tree, and my buddy Vovchik held my camera, the boy volunteered to guard my coat; the women standing around fussed over me, tutting that I'll freeze, that I can't go without a coat, Vovchik retorted sternly that it's nothing, the love of the motherland will keep me warm, and the boy, with his head tossed back, watched me from below, his face glowing with that spell-bound grin that seemed glued to so many people's faces in those days: the mouth beatifically stretched from ear to ear, the expression one gets standing on the top of a mountain or riding up a rushing wave on a surfboard—the awe inspired by the magnificence of a force greater than what can be accommodated by human imagination. That boy had come to Kyiv from Rivne, on the very first day, and told us what it was like: the highway was lit bright as daylight, all cars speeding to Kyiv, it seemed the whole of Ukraine had picked up and rushed to Kyiv, horns blaring, and along the road the villagers stood by the blazing fires and waved them on with flags and banners. "I won't have another night like that in my life," the boy said, and if I were to translate this for Gustav now, the Dutchman would probably think that's how men speak of a night with a woman, but we wouldn't have thought of it that way at the time because what the boy was talking about was also our night, belonging to all of us who listened, in a single, oceanic wave that furled and crested for hundreds of kilometres around the capital and rushed through the darkness with the ascending thunder of an elemental force breaking through a dam, smashing anything stupid enough to stand in its way, and we were as proud of it as that boy, so I asked to take his picture and there it was—a common snapshot of a boy in black stocking cap, with a beatific smile on his face, nondescript but for the orange ribbon, but then again, everyone had orange ribbons, so we move on. Sweetie comes in to ask if we want coffee and, getting a no, makes herself scarce. I wish she'd stay and help me—she speaks English much better than I do—but she leaves me to suffer alone, with Gustav who says ja and doesn't get it. The only people who got us—really got us—were the Poles; with them we had a complete and utter ja, and didn't have to explain anything: the Poles lived it as their second youth, their second Solidarno, I knew it on the first day, when their parliamentarians came and I spotted one of the women on TV, the way she stood on the stage on the Maidan with the same expression as our older people, and held her hand in the air with two fingers in the sign of victory like a blessing for all of us. I knew right away the Poles were alright; even the young people, who were born after the Solidarity movement, knew how to recognise the same thing in what they saw in Kyiv; they had received a key from their parents, the score for this opera, and they knew how to read it.

The Germans also sort of got it, the Ossies—they could rely on their own analogies: the year eighty-nine, the Wall coming down, Wir sind ein Volk, but for them it was all more on the emotional level, without the grasp of the subtexts; all the others just hung out, wandering through the crowds, getting high on the pure scale of the human force around them, riding their own adrenaline rush—free thrills, a revolutionary vacation in the capital of a vaguely-known ex-Soviet republic located somewhere on the Asiatic plains between Albania and Belarus. These other foreigners were sincerely thrilled with their ethnographic discoveries on this new territory ("Your city is really large," a British cameraman, with whom I spent half a day shooting shoulder-to-shoulder, kept saying in utter astonishment), such as the fact that we did not, actually, warm ourselves with vodka in the cold weather, and remained strictly alcohol-free for the entire three weeks of standing in the streets (that's what made it clear to these folks that we were different from Russians); that we did not break windows, or windshields, and generally, against all odds, did not break or smash anything or anyone, and did not produce a single bloody nose that could be presented (Exhibit A) to the powers that be in Moscow or Washington who insisted on alarming the wider world with predictions of a civil war in this obscure country between Albania and Belarus, the new Balkans. So, in the end, just by doing what we did and without any particular intention, we screwed things up for more constituencies than just the Russians—it's just that the Russians were clumsy as a bear in a tank and couldn't get away fast enough, while the quick-witted American diplomats, who sat out the whole thing on the sidelines waiting to see who would win and did not leave their Embassy even on that very tense night when our tent city expected to be attacked and asked all accredited missions in the city to let their personnel come out onto the Maidan and form a 'sanitary barrier' around the protesters—the Americans, one must give them credit, figured things out in a blink, and before Khreshchatyk even had a chance to cool down from the crowds, trumpeted to their press another success in their endeavours to teach us, Albanian-Belarusians, about democracy and the rule of law. As I'm thinking this, Gustav scrolls past another picture that doesn't tell him anything: a shot of an apartment building window in which one glimpses a hand holding up an orange tea-kettle. He'd have to zoom in to see that it is a very old and desiccated hand, resembling a chicken paw: it belonged to a very old little lady who couldn't even walk any more, and had only this symbolic means of joining the column of protesters that passed under her window. I remember I heard people ahead of me (I was walking in that column) chanting a new slogan that turned out to be "Grand-ma! Grand-ma!"—someone had spotted that teakettle, and the feeble hand holding it, a shaky orange blot in the window, and heads began to turn one after another, people pointing—What's there? Look!—and I shouted too, "Grand-ma!" and pointed my camera, blinking off tears. Old ladies had a special power to bring me to tears in those days: the little old ladies that shambled and tottered to the Maidan day and night, slipping on the steep hillside streets, and carrying their treasured possessions, steeped in the smell of old-age poverty: knitted scarves and socks from their ancient dressers, or a few hot boiled potatoes wrapped in a clean kerchief, which the tent-city's wardens accepted almost reverently, many with a lump in their throats, never mind that just a minute earlier those same wardens were practically begging women in mink coats and a French restaurant owner who drove in a Landrover loaded to the roof with prepared dinners, "Please, don't bring any more food, we've got more than we could eat already!"

Looking at these old ladies, at their stubborn, taciturn tenacity (I'll never forget the one who kept bringing tea in a tiny, 18-oz thermos: in the crowd, it took no more than three seconds to pour out the three cups of tea it contained, and the grandma would turn and crawl back home up the steep, iced-over Mykhailivska street to brew another thermos-full, and I wondered, how many trips did she make every day?) I was truly touched, for the first time, by their frightening, primordial almost, elemental life force that could not be cowed by starvation, wars, or labour camps—by any of the horrors, including the destitute old age, that befell them, as if the inhuman labour of enduring through it all was a mere nightmare of history, a scam, a foolish bet, as folks would say, Devil wagering Job against the Lord—and the Devil lost it all, because these little old ladies, who certainly could teach Job a thing or two, on their deathbeds, when they had no more hope of being themselves rewarded with the brooks of honey and butter, gathered their last strength and raised feeble hands to salute freedom through their windows. It occurred to me then that if one went looking for a single image of this revolution, for our own “Liberty leading the People,” the young beauty with the orange carnation facing the shields of the riot police would not do no matter how awesome she looked on posters—it would have to be that hunched-over, inconceivably old, indestructible and uncowed old lady from the Maidan, with her three cupfuls of hot tea—Here, children, warm yourselves, God bless you—now, that would be the real truth about us, but who'd ever want that old flesh to be their revolution's allegory?

SHE: I can tell Sweetie's miffed at me for leaving him alone with that Dutch dude, but what can I do if I can't stand to talk about the same stuff for the millionth time! I just can't do it. The more you talk, the more you repeat yourself, and the next thing you know, you have lost any trace of your real experience of those days—you just have words, units of meaning, and they come out pre-recorded, and then the entire conversation degrades back to politics, the talking heads on TV, oil prices, the government crisis, the fight against corruption, all that bullshit. Thank you, but no thank you. Mr. Gustav can shape his Eastern European album with its chapter on “Revolutionary Kyiv” however he sees fit. Without my help. I'm glad to see Sweetie's pictures put to use, else he wouldn't get around to doing anything with them for another year, but that doesn't mean I have to participate. You boys are on your own. I have my own book of visions, but no one would ever want it. The world has determined to live exclusively in the present—for however long whatever is on TV stays there. Time has not sped up—it has simply disintegrated. The only reality is what can be touched. A problem of attention span, I think they call it. We have the attention span of a puppy, at best. Today there's a revolution in one country, tomorrow in another, on a different continent. And if it's not a revolution, it's a terrorist attack, or a hurricane, or another calamity which we will forget as soon as they switch to the next story on the newscast. We just want to make sure there's something new being beamed at us every minute, and we're not being asked to hold anything in our minds for any length of time at all. We don't want to go into the trouble of making connections between the past and the present, because, you know, that requires effort. And we are not being encouraged to exert ourselves in any way; we are being taught to relax. Leaf through a photography book on the coffee-table, at best, move your eyes left to right a few times, up and down. That's just a smidge better than channel surfing. Or the internet: snippets, tweets,

fragments. Where did I read that?—Screw it, who cares! Don't worry about it. And here's the interesting part: I'm a historian by training, and what, I ask you, was all that training good for, inclusive of a graduate degree and a thesis on the Russian government's suppression of the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius in 1847 (which was nothing less than our very first bourgeois-democratic revolution, nipped in the bud), and the hours spent in our gutted archives, and my trip to Moscow in pursuit of the documents the KGB, in their panic to cover up the tracks, was culling from the Ukrainian archives back in the fall of 1991, in that short window of opportunity after Ukraine had already declared independence, but before the USSR officially fell apart—what was all this professional preparation good for, if it took even me until November, until the days of the Maidan, until the climax of the most significant Ukrainian political movement since the 17th century, to begin, laboriously, to realise, as if a heavy door was creaking slowly open on rusted hinges inside my brain, this is for real—and to recognise it, incredulously. For the longest time, I simply could not believe that everything I had known through archival records and books was real, and very much alive, and happening to us—and none of us knew what it was. I actually needed a hint, a nudge, which I got from a German reporter, I think (there were so many of them, it feels like they had their own tent city in my head), the one we took along the frontlines—from Institutska street to Bankova, to the riot police detachments in front of the President's Administration building, to Shovkovycha, and from there onto the Lutherans' street and back to Khreshchatyk. We sat down to warm ourselves at one of the mobile canteens, and a man from the Sumy region told us how in their small town before the second round of elections, groups of shaved-headed men went from bar to bar and made everyone drink to the health of the ruling government's candidate and beat up whomever refused to do so with such violence that a friend of this man's ended up in intensive care. I interpreted, the excited German scribbled furiously in his notebook, and then later he said to me, delighted as a boy, Isn't it amazing, just think about it, your people never knew democracy, or justice, they'd been ruled by despots the whole time, the Russian tsars, with terror, persecutions, violence—and here the people are, risen to defend their rights, It's a miracle! I remember I all but choked with surprise: what do you mean, never knew democracy? Do you people not read? Andreas Kappeler, Kurzgeschichte der Ukraine—doesn't ring a bell? Were you not aware that the Ukrainian head of state, the Hetman, was always an elected position, since times immemorial, that was what gave it legitimacy? Or that we lived for three hundred years according to the Statutes of Lithuania, the most democratic code of law, if you'd care to remember, of its time? The Russian Tsar cancelled it, of course, but not before 1840, and village courts continued to use it all until the beginning of the 20th century, there's even a special genre of charms in Ukrainian folk magic—judicial magic, spells to affect the outcome in court. Kyiv obtained the Magdeburg rights in 1494, and other Ukrainian cities had them, too—so how do you figure, your people never knew the rule of law? I blurted all that out in one gasping fit of patriotic outrage. The German was a little surprised. He thought about it for a moment, and then said, Oh, was that when you were a part of Poland? “The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,” I corrected sternly, as if he were a C-student in one of my classes. And we also had our own army—nothing to sneeze at, I assure you. And a mercantile middle class, we always had a strong middle class. A nation of small bourgeoisie, you know. Which is

one of the reasons, by the way, that Stalin hated us as much as he did. But all of this was a very long time ago, he objected, visibly disappointed: I think he really wanted to see a miracle and my academic prissiness was getting in the way. "Today's generations don't remember it anyway," he said. We were having this conversation while walking down the Institutska street, sucked into the massive, unanimous whirlpool of people around the Maidan: as we were descending towards the square in one current, another ascended towards us; the sidewalks were filled with people, the street studded with the myriad flickering lights—people carried candles set in plastic cups, and the whole scene resembled a vast vigil under the eternally dark December sky, lit up from below by the burning fires, flame-like orange clothes and pennants. I was shaky with lack of sleep, with exhaustion, tension, cold, and noise, and the answer slipped from my lips before I even realised what I was saying: "As you can see," I said, "we very much do."

It came out very dramatic, like in a movie. My German just sort of stopped mid-smile, stunned, and I realised—moments after I said those words—that I'd spoken the pure and holy truth. It was true: a sort of deeper, collective memory had come alive in us, who weren't even aware of it—it was like a dam had burst open, our horizons fell back, and in one instant millions of people discovered themselves to be in possession of knowledge and instincts they never suspected existed, of which they had never thought themselves capable. Perhaps, that was the law of history: when a nation acts as a single collective soul, its collective memory, by some incomprehensible means, proves to be greater than the sum of its constituent parts. And everything then comes naturally and easily, as if people had known in advance how they ought to behave—and are, in fact, obeying the same, century-old norms that had guided their ancestors. The warden at the tent city who, checking through the donated food, pulled out a bottle of vodka from a plaid bag with a trained motion, said, peaceably, "Didn't we ask you not to bring alcohol?" then opened it and poured the stuff into the nearest trash can, was doing exactly the same thing as his Kozak great-great-grandfather would have done on a boat setting out to sea. Except back in those days, they would've thrown the bringer of said vodka overboard too... but the point is, the warden's hand knew to grab the drink in that forgotten three-hundred-year old motion all by itself, and the man knew he was doing the right thing. If you must have a miracle, then this was it: this ability to step into the current that flows beyond common time, through time, to be buoyed by it and to know that you are doing everything exactly right. And those kids who lined up in front of the Cabinet building on the hill and stood there, day in and day out, beating on steel drums—thump-thump-thump! Thump-thump-thump! A signal, and the apocalyptic drumbeat scatters into a hail of quick, sharp bangs that get under your skin, and then shifts again, guttural, menacing—thump-thump-thump! Thump-thump-thump!—those clueless undergrads, from the Circus college, from all over, who found the discarded oil-drums near the Dynamo stadium and decided to put them to this use, who stood on that hill for three weeks and never once stopped drumming can be counted on to have been ignorant of the fact that this was exactly how the Kozak army used to be called together in the Sich, and the job they had taken upon themselves used to have a name—dovbysh—and that's exactly what those drummers would've done: they'd climb a hill, stand by a post and begin sending their signal, with tympani and tambourines. And just as back then, these were the drums of war: war declared on those who'd secured themselves in the Cabinet building—and everyone understood this, without a

need for explanation, without the knowledge of historical facts, without textbooks, knew it from the sound itself that had come from the ancient depths of memory and was recognised by all, and the drivers of the passing cars tooted their horns to the same beat. Things like this—they were everywhere you looked. The law of the preservation of memory. A country that had previously existed only on yellowed medieval maps—Ucraina terra Cossacorum—suddenly came to the surface. It hadn't disappeared at all, we realised—it was just hiding all this time, somewhere deep. Underground, but alive and invincible. There was no miracle at all; we just had to discover that countries do not disappear, no matter how many times the maps are redrawn—just as a person doesn't vanish just because his picture is destroyed. Were I talking to Gustav about his book, I would tell him to put two maps, next to each other, on the frontispiece. In the morning after the first round of the election, when the TV showed the electoral map with the regions coloured orange and blue, and we were all calling each other with congratulations because we'd just glimpsed a real hope out there (in the streets of Kyiv, people began to smile again—the same people who days before had been glum and silent in the shops and on the metro), I got a call from my former department head. In the voice of a man on the verge of a great discovery, he said:

*"You know, I was just looking at Cornetti's map..."*

*"Which map?"*

*"Vicente Maria Cornetti, the Italian who came through in 1657, you remember. The one with the embassy to the Hetman's government from Emperor Ferdinand III.*

*The cartographer? He made a map of Ukraine?"*

*"I'm with you now. And?"*

*"You know, it matches. I'll have to check it against other sources, of course, but it looks like all the orange regions—that's what was Ukraine in 1657. Eastern Sarmatia. If you go further south-east, that's the Wild Fields, Piccola Tartaria as Cornetti called it."*

I hung up and checked the maps. They did match. That's when I knew we've won. Two maps, Gustav. Just two maps—one from 1657, the other from 2004. Without them, your readers can't understand what all those millions of people in fire-coloured scarves in the pictures are doing in the streets, and it's the easiest thing in the world to think it's all about the president they elected and whose name they are chanting. But that's not it, that's just a phantom, misdirection. What they are doing, in fact, is getting their country back—the one that sank to the bottom of history three hundred years earlier. And the amazing thing is—they know that's what they're doing, know it in their guts with a sudden and undeniable immediacy. That's why they are so happy.

HE: Gustav takes a close look at almost every picture I took on Bankova street, in front of the Presidential administration (in the Soviet times, the building housed the Communist Party's Central Committee, I tell him, and he bats his copper-coloured eye-lashes at me, excited as a kid, Is that so? For him it must feel like glimpsing a dragon's lair straight out of a story book and discovering that you could get a guided tour in there), where the riot police stood in a solid wall behind their gray shields, and chooses many, lots, almost all of them, to be copied to his discs, although, to my mind, they are not that interesting. But I know why he wants them: this show of naked force—government

against its own people—it gives one pause. By virtue of physical presentation, Sweetie prompts in English (she came back, not with coffee, but with chips and nuts—she knows, my good girl, that I will chew anything when I’m nervous, like a demented rat, so I can’t pout at her any longer). That’s well said, I wouldn’t have come up with that, only things weren’t as dire as Gustav must be thinking looking at the pictures now: turned out, my pal Vovchik went to school with a guy who was now one of the special forces officers; my fourth-floor neighbour’s beloved nephew was also among those soldiers, and the woman went looking for him on Bankova, with sandwiches, because her sister had called and cried that the boys weren’t getting any food, and didn’t get to come off their shift, as they were supposed to, every hour, and stood there in the cold for four hours straight, and had to piss into their own boots. Gustav goes after a picture of an infantry colonel grabbing at the shields from the protesters’ side: the colonel is square-shouldered in a precise, disciplined way, you can see he’s unaccustomed to bowing his fierce head as he had to do at the moment, to peer at the troops’ faces under their visors—it’s a good shot, a lucky one; everyone seemed to be snapping pictures of that colonel, as he spoke to the soldiers, “Sons,” he pleaded in an utterly non-commanding voice that made all of our throats catch, “sons, boys, don’t shoot, listen to me, don’t shoot... I’ll beg you on my knees.” I know I wouldn’t want to be one of those boys who sniffled wordlessly behind their visors, while the human sea in front of them chanted, “I’m brother to you, you’re brother to me—lower your shield!” and the girls sang love songs and put sandwiches on the pavement before them. “What the fuck you think you’re doing there? They’re not dogs!” Vovchik’s school-pal the lieutenant yelled on the cell-phone from the other side of the line, as if the sandwiches were Vovchik’s personal fault, as if Vovchik personally managed the entire process of the sandwich offering, or at least knew the person who did—as if anyone was managing anything at all, in those early days, when no one had a clue what they were supposed to do and just did whatever seemed necessary at any given moment, and things turned out splendidly—so Vovchik just came up, as he was, camera in hand, to the teenagers that were prancing before the soldiers and passed on his pal’s words, minus the obscenity, and in two minutes the sandwiches disappeared, never to be seen again. The lieutenant called Vovchik again in the small hours of the night and told him, “There are Russians standing behind us,” inside the Administration building, he said, like NKVD’s anti-retreat forces at Stalingrad. Others had spotted them too—these were the Russian special forces, gloried by their “clean-ups” in Chechnya—and the suburbs and the city were abuzz on the internet following the route of their arrival: from a rural military airfield, the second or third where they requested landing (or so the rumour held, saying that the main base, in Vasylkov, refused them, and the commander of that base did it early enough for the government to boot him off the job), through the base in Irpin where they stopped God knows why (they could have been issued the Ukrainian uniforms to change into just as easily back in Moscow). Old-timers immediately recalled how much this resembled the Kremlin operation in ‘68 in Prague; we grabbed our cameras and rushed to where the internet reports had pinned these troops, but all we managed to catch was a string of large vans with blacked-out windows, parked in a side alley next to Mariyinsky Park. Someone had incautiously leaned out the back door of one of them, for a breath of air, and we took our shots of the open door and the inside of the van that looked more like a spaceship’s cockpit, dense with control panels; then a few phrases were spoken, we heard an angry

command—in Russian, as it is spoken by Russians: in hard, clipped syllables—the doors slammed shut, and that was that. There were just unidentifiable black vans without licence plates parked in an alley, and the very sight of them aroused unease; that’s not something you can capture in a picture—the different feel you get from an empty van and a muffled van, full of people silently waiting for something. As we pointed our lenses, gaping like mouths opened in surprise, at the vans, it really felt like they pointed something back at us; they were watching us back, only they were doing it through the optics of guns—I could feel it on my skin, and that was when, for the first time, I got really scared. Maybe it’s because I’ve always been sort of, as Sweetie puts it, knuckle-headed, but I was never really scared throughout that entire autumn—the glum, hard, half war-like autumn of my country when we all lived in a thickening fog of rumours, threats, raids, and demonstrations; I was not scared even though I photographed the blood on the pavement next to the Central Electoral Commission on the night of the 24th of October (and that was the first time I’d ever seen puddles of human blood on the asphalt, its spellbinding gleam in the streetlamp’s light, silky and black like oil), and I’d seen plenty of similarly menacing caravans without licence plates, brought to the city and tucked away on small streets—there were so many before the first, and the second round of elections, I must’ve gotten five Gigs worth of pictures: sand-loaded dump-trucks manned by immobile shadows and inter-city buses with curtains drawn on their windows. The men who sat hidden in these buses sometimes came out to the stores to stock up on vodka and beer, and carried away several bottles at once, tucked under their arms with practised skill, while opening beer cans with their teeth as they walked—churlish, brusque men, with shaved heads, all dressed in track suits under fake leather jackets and reeking of meanness and alcohol. They had come up from a darker underside of life, from prisons, people said, and were full of vengeful hatred of our comfortable, brightly lit city with all its cafes, young mothers, baby carriages, supermarkets and orange ribbons tied to cars’ antennas (and sure enough, the mere sight of a lens pointed at them was enough to throw them into a rage—once I almost lost my camera!). I bet they didn’t do it just for the money, and the free drink—I bet they enjoyed doing what they’d been brought here to do: slashing tyres on those orange-beribboned cars, attacking polling stations at nights, smashing the ballot boxes and setting them on fire—I bet they got a vicious, deep pleasure from the shock they inspired in Kyiv’s law-abiding citizens, who shied away from them in supermarkets, snatching children out of the way. But when the revolution began, and they ventured out into the light of the Maidan—tentatively, in small groups, instantly recognisable by the way they bristled all over like a hunting animal that wandered into someone else’s territory—they were somehow instantly annihilated, disarmed like old warheads, dissolved without a trace like drops in an ocean. When people called out to them from the fires: “Hey, boys, come over, we’ll get you something warm to eat!”; when people asked, “Where are you from, boys, do you have a place to sleep?” they retreated, squinting with suspicion and showing teeth, these nocturnal animals, used to people throwing rocks at them, not offering food, used to traps waiting for them behind kind words—and vanished back into the darkness, breathing their heavy breath, not finding any spoils at someone else’s banquet. And unexpectedly a few peaceful souls emerged from their midst as well—those, who, instead of showing teeth, cracked open in the warmth, whose souls unburdened such depths of old injustices and rightlessness that I didn’t have it in me to photograph them and lowered my camera. I

have only this one picture of an old man, skinny as a bug, in a blue-and-white scarf, surrounded by the Maidan folks like a patient in a knot of concerned nurses: when they poured him a cup of tea and got him a sandwich, the man broke down crying; he just stood there and wept, shaking all over and unable to stop, and kept showing us, like some kind of exonerating evidence, his hands—a pair of black, gnarled wooden things, palms up. “All my life..,” he sobbed, in Russian, “all my life I worked in a mine... with these hands... and what for... for a piece of bread... the director promised a hundred hryvna... they brought us here, keep us in the railcar, haven’t brought any food for three days...” and kept thrusting those hands at people, with their unbending stubs of fingers, like proof of his clear background—the only thing he had to identify himself. No, not once did I get scared of anything, even when the city was full of troops, armed to the teeth (who started to take our side pretty much right away, battalion after battalion)—I only felt indignation boiling up in me, blood hammering angrily in my temples—Fuckers! They think they can do anything!—but there, in the side alley next to the Mariyinsky Park, for the first time, I saw death. It was there, and it was real. I couldn’t ever tell Sweetie about this, or anyone else; I’d much rather not have learned this about myself at all: that there’s something in me, deeper and larger than your basic physiological instinct of fear in the face of danger, something beyond the natural human fright that makes your mouth go dry and your muscles cramp—something else, much more oppressive, a long, twisting spasm of memory. It was sickening, literally, gut-wrenching; it felt like I was recognising something I had never experienced, something that had to come back to me from my Soviet childhood, back from the sight of my old man using a pencil to dial a phone number because for some reason he believed that’s how you blocked the “surveillance”, from my mom’s anxious shushing whenever I blurted out some especially inappropriate question while we stood in line in a store—all those unmarked black cars, middle-of-the-night interrogations, floodlights aimed onto one’s face, fingers jammed in doors, genitals crushed under boots, everything that had gone on seventy years earlier right here, around the corner, in the palatial building on Institutska street which was now filled with protesters sleeping on the floor under the many warm blankets donated by kind-hearted Kyivites (and Sweetie was there too, waiting in line to give a bag of warm clothes, and was so happy that she remembered to bring her old winter boots that went to a big woman from Polissia—the woman, on the first trip to the nation’s capital in her entire life, dressed in her very best, and after spending a day in the freezing cold shod in her fancy booties, was ready to schlep back to her village, two hundred miles away, to get her old padded coat and a pair of valenki). Seventy years ago this was, almost forty years before I was born, and yet somehow I knew it, I recognised this apprehension that was deeper than fear: like you’re strapped to an operating table watching a mad surgeon raise his knife above you (I recognise this “operating table” look in a young kid from the Donetsk branch of the pro-opposition Pora group: he’d been kidnapped before the first round of the elections and thugs who did it promised him they’d rape his sister if he doesn’t quit—I remembered his face), and this version of myself—an adult man who knows this—was not a version I could or wanted to love, so there was no way I could share it with my precious Sweetie, my all-seeing and all-understanding little hawk, because she wouldn’t be able to love this version of me either. Nor was there a chance I could not live with that version of myself, and so, one leg knee-deep in the snowdrift in front of that silent black convoy, I suddenly knew, clear as day,

that all I had left to do—all any of us had left to do—was to stand our ground to the end, and to do our men’s work: to fight a good fight, and, when needed, to die an honest man, and that’s that. I had no idea how one went about doing that, and none of us did; none of us had ever wielded anything more damaging than a camera, so we just walked from that alley to the “Hunting and Fishing” store, where they kindly told us, You, boys, are a little late, we sold everything we had on the first day—and we marvelled at that, and thought ourselves total losers, shaking our heads, swinging our snow-laden hats from side to side like a bunch of demented snowmen—the snow came down berserk, ran, melting, in rivulets down our faces, and we wandered away from the store armless but feeling initiated into an invisible warrior brotherhood whose presence we could feel vibrating all around us in the air, making us giddy, so we kept ribbing each other—Can you believe that? Sold out, you’d never thought of that, you’re such a total nerd, it never occurred to you, did it? You fucking wimp... This triggers another un-photographed moment from my memory. I think it happened in the same 24-hour interval, or maybe the next day, it all ran together because I couldn’t really tell you where and how we slept during that first week, but here it is: we’re in the brightly-lit, crowded fast-food restaurant in the underground mall below the Maidan, where we had staggered in to warm up, after we had run out of tape and film and froze solid; the waitress, also semi-conscious with fatigue but still smiling, said, boys, I’m out of everything, except green tea, I’ll pour you some, on the house, alright?—and that’s when Vovchik’s cell phone rang. It was his school buddy from SOF, calling to tell him that they—the officers—had made their decision: if they were ordered to open fire, they would turn their men around and face the Russian anti-retreat troops, making themselves into a human shield to protect the people on the square, that’s what they decided--our men, our officers, commanders who would lead us and whom we would follow to wherever they say, to take over armouries and depots, to take our defiled country back—and on this note, while Vovchik, on his feet, delivered the word to the entire restaurant, which exploded in triumphant cries and applause, I blacked out, face onto the table, next to my unfinished tea, I don’t know for how long, a minute, a couple of minutes. When I came back, I found that someone had slipped a folded up woollen scarf under my cheek, my own scarf that someone had carefully taken off my neck and placed onto the hard table-top for me, all without me knowing it; the mug of tea, still steaming, stood right there, and I stared at the gleaming Formica top, at the woolly orange blob of my scarf and the white mug reflecting the bright overhead light as if I had become, all in one instant, this mug, and the light, and the scarf, and every single soul in that restaurant, and all of us at once who were outside, and everything and everyone that was around me and I knew in my heavy, warming body that this—all of this together—this was freedom, and I would remember this moment for the rest of my life, because, as that boy from Rivne had said, I won’t have another one like it.

SHE: Our Dutch man is getting into it now, flashing his eye-glasses, pointing and nodding quick as a squirrel, and Sweetie’s excited too, a little flushed even: they can’t point at the screen fast enough; they exclaim things; they jump up on the couch, a little like fans at a soccer match. They grab handfuls of nuts from the plate and then, forgetting, wipe their fingers on their trousers. They have a complete understanding, no words needed, intra-verbal communication, that’s what it’s called. Like children. All men of the world are our children.

Except during wars, of course. Or popular uprisings. Also, revolutions. Then they are different. All visible history belongs to them, to men—they know how to band together. I could see it: Sweetie would grab his camera and go to the Maidan every day like he were going to the front lines. They all banded together in what seemed like a single instant; they have the instinct of the pack, a boys' gang. Men's work. A man jumps off the bed, pulls on his pants, throws on a coat, blows you a kiss, I'll call, Sweetie, don't worry, and is out the door. On the very first day, when Liona's husband called—not Liona herself, as always!—to say that the police had been ordered to prevent protesters from the regions from reaching the capital, there were road-blocks and checkpoints on the Odessa highway, and several thousand people were sitting there in their cars, unable to go forward, they sent word on the internet, my man—he, mind you, who commonly needs an hour to achieve consciousness in the mornings, with coffee and a shower, who would not be roused for any tea in China once he'd gone to bed at night—this man was at the door in three minutes, eager as a bird-dog, car-keys in hand: "I'm going, Sweets, get on the phone, call everyone we know with cars, we've got to get these people to the Maidan." In just over three hours, they got it done, he came home happy and fell asleep almost before he pulled off his clothes and threw them all over the floor. They made their strike, they got their people, they dispersed. Done. There was something of the medieval chronicles in this lightning-fast banding-together, these instantly organised efforts that resembled military manoeuvres, something from Samyilo Velychko's seventeenth century "Tale of the Kozak War," from Sarmatian tactics—something of the Gaidamaks, of the Kozaks, something that belongs to our long line of rebels. Somehow, overnight, history ceased being the past, and I could see how things worked back then—exactly as they did now, except with different technologies. One no longer needed to light the fire atop the watch-tower because we had satellite communications. That was on the second day: I hailed a cab to go to the Maidan, and dropped into the front seat with the first words that all of us had for any new person, "What do you hear?" The driver (orange flag stuck to the rearview mirror) had the radio turned to Era, and we both listened to the broadcast: they were reporting an attempt to break into the Presidential Administration building, and about the Russian Special Forces, and because Sweetie was also there somewhere, with his camera, I cried out, "Good God, what's next?" War is what's next, the driver said, sounding certain and game for it, words not so much spoken as bitten out of the air, and that's when I really looked at him. I looked and got even more scared: he meant it. The man was probably in his mid-thirties; olive skin, dark hair, a sharp profile fit to be cast in bronze, a hooked nose, a stubborn chin. All he needed was a pipe in his teeth and a Kozak haircut. "War? God forbid, what are you saying," I fretted, but the man wasn't listening: he looked at the road ahead and spoke his mind—slowly, dropping words one by one like a miser who'd been saving them for three hundred years, like the words had ossified inside him and he had to chip them out—spoke hefty words of a man profoundly ill at ease with intellectuals' endless blabbering: "What's they got to do with us, huh? No, excuse me just a minute,"—that was him preemptively shutting my peacemaking mouth that was ready to spew platitudes he didn't want to hear—he knew his answer.—"Why are they bothering us? This is my home. I decide how I want to live here. What's they to do with it? They'll get what they deserve. All of it. We'll go to the woods if we have to. Fight a guerrilla war." I wanted to say, Don't!—but I didn't dare. The man's Tatar, squinting eyes (his family was from the Kyiv region, he said, from Skvyra) gleamed with a menac-

ing fire. I felt all the folk-song romanticism of Kozak-Gaidamak uprisings evaporate from me together with quick-drying cold sweat of my fear. Of course, that's how it's always been: Sarmatian steppes, consecrated knives, woods and hideaways, the fierce, blood-chilling beauty and might that inspired such holy awe in our romantic souls. "Who desires to suffer for the sake of our Christian faith, who wants to be impaled, quartered and drawn, who yearns to be martyred for the holy Cross, who's not afraid of death—join us!" Good God indeed. The driver's walkie-talkie sputtered on its own frequency, and I listened to the cabbies' chatter: Alright, Sanya, my shift's over, you gone to the Maidan yet? They all did free runs to the Maidan at the end of their shifts—to take people home. They were our cavalry, the city's sleepless guard, like in the Middle Ages—you stop one of them, tell him you need help, and in fifteen minutes you've got half of Kyiv's motorpool there, and who will be out day's Velychko to write about them, what Dutchman, flying or otherwise, could fit them into the pages of a coffee-table book, this winged cavalry of our metropolis, Kyiv's triumphant cabbies of 2004? On the regular radio, meanwhile, the host asked a well-known poet to pick a song for them to play, to help lift the tension a little, and the woman asked to please put on "Let my People Go." Yes, please, I agreed in my mind, riding toward the rising million-throated drone of the crowd, the lights, the thickening human mass in the flickering of orange—a whirl of faces like leaves tussled and spun in the November wind, lit by a magnificent, Rembrandtesque light, and I heard a voice say in my mind, clear as a bell, "These are my people," and felt my breath catch in my throat—please, and Louis Armstrong's coarse voice on the radio was asking for the same thing, please, and the poet, and the radio show host in his studio, and the people who were walking towards the Maidan, candles in their hands, to join others in singing the national anthem, hands awkwardly placed on their heart, please, let my people go. Lead them out of Egypt. Lead them out of this darkness before the winter, the darkest time of the year. Lead them to the quiet waters, to clear skies. To the christened world, to the blessed land. A pizzicato note, a breaking voice, a sob.

HE: Actually, he's a good soul, this Gustav, and he's got his head screwed on right: I'm beginning to see, from what he chose (and he's picked at least twice as many shots as he'll need), the narrative of the book that he's building in his mind—he is really interested in the Maidan itself, the people on the square and the streets around it, and not the Maidan's stage, populated by the politicians and 'rock-stars'. As an expert visual story-teller he grasps instinctively what has remained hopelessly beyond the reach of common, politics-obsessed journalists: that there was never a direct, simple connection between the stage and the Maidan; that all those people there, whose number exceeded a million every single night, spent all those weeks living and organising themselves independently, with their own centres of gravity and energy meridians, and the stage served as a sort of temporary centre, to which we looked for instruction, the symbolic capital of our temporary nation—yes, a country, I tell Gustav, a Promised Land, and Gustav laughs, not taking this as a joke but waiting, eyes eager and curious, for further explanation. Well, I tell him, we basically lived for three months, how should I put it?—with a growing sense of brotherhood or something like it (I'm short of words again, where's Sweetie when I need her?), we all loved our neighbours as ourselves—and this started even before the elections, before the first round, when just the sight of a bravely displayed orange ribbon was enough to make your day,

as if you'd seen the dearest old friend, and you walked down the street or drove literally awash in love, among people smiling kindly at you, people waving at you, honking their horns in greeting, and you felt yourself lifted above the earth, eager to hug and kiss everyone—they were all so dear, so good and beloved, and so beautiful, I've never seen so many beautiful people in the streets! I remember one day, in the middle of October, when the ribbons were still hard to find and people were just beginning to get orange scarves and stuff, I saw a young woman walking down Khreshchatyk: fire-red hair loose in the wind, she proudly carried in both hands a huge bunch of fire-colored leaves, like a lit torch, her own firebrand, and I kicked myself for not having the camera with me as I watched her march—this Nike, a priestess of freedom—and the rest of Khreshchatyk also watched, awed and instantly in love, and this unassailable force-field of warmth, gratitude and trust spread wider and wider, we were the City of God, we lived as men are supposed to live, as people should be living all over the world, all the time, you see? So when hundreds of thousands of people flooded the city from other towns and villages, the doors of our homes flew open like open arms, and we all marched down, in hundreds and thousands ourselves, to the Maidan, to the Trade Unions' Building that housed the organizers, and said, I have a room, and I have two, I have a country house that's sitting empty, I could put forty-fifty people there, I want to give money, and I have ten sacks of potatoes, and I have nothing so give me a broom to keep this place clean... The slogan "Love Will Overcome All!" appeared on walls and cars, and it did—and who would have thought we had so much love in all of us, all we needed was to be freed of fear, to break it, like a dam, and our love that was held back for who knows how long and dispensed in miserly trickles for the closest friends and family spilled out in an ocean of light, illuminating the darkest time of the year. After we won, this city of three million people functioned for an entire month without a single road accident, people fell over themselves to be solicitous of each other, and the crime went down ten-fold, and folks smiled to each other in the streets as if we all lived in a village where everyone knows everyone and says hello to strangers; it lasted for weeks, this feeling—that you could say hello to anyone and he would respond happily, as if he'd been waiting to see you—there was so much love that for a while it seemed we could fill the entire world with it, never mind that horde of shaved-headed slaves under their different banners (which they shed, throwing them onto the ground, as soon as their slave-drivers looked the other way). I'm just sorry I don't know how to communicate all of this in English, but it also seems that Gustav somehow understands anyway, he's on the same brain-wave, so I say, Why—because I can't hold it in anymore, I've been carrying this question inside me since that very day on Khreshchatyk when I stood there lost with the unlit cigarette in my mouth and realised it was all over—Why can't we live like this all the time, why is the world so fucked up that we cannot, and then again, if we had been able to live like that—for months!—and we weren't a handful of saintly Mother Therasas but millions of perfectly common, regularly stressed out and busy people, then it must be possible at least in principle? Mustn't it? And it wasn't hard at all—it was as if you've been drifting down your life year after year, working hard to shove the shit that's floating around away from you, to stay more-or-less clean, and then suddenly you hit this current, a massive underwater Gulfstream and it grabbed you and carried you with impossible speed, with a thunderous, mighty roar (The sound! That's what's missing from these pictures, damn it! The round-the-clock hum of the crowd, the clapping

thunder of chants that echoed from the buildings' walls and reverberated to the far shore of the Dnieper and, after several days of booming insomnia, began to rumble inside your own head; we all went around, especially during the first week, with that inside soundtrack, the thrill of ascension, as if your blood had been wired to a woofer and rolled down your veins with a growl, like the mass of people stomping down the streets and the metro tunnels, as if you yourself expanded to the size of the entire city, and all of this should have very well short-circuited and if it didn't, it was only because you yourself, with your separate, individual life, had temporarily ceased to exist—everything that belonged to you, and nobody else, had been pushed to the background, suspended like a piece of software waiting for an upgrade—there was no room left to hide in the face of the danger we were up against, neither at home, nor at work, so we came out, all together, not just into the streets from our individual apartments, but out of our individual lives, crossing the thresholds of our I's—and there, once we had all stepped beyond our limits, it opened up and embraced us—the limitless ocean of love. We saw our Promised Land among its waves—we glimpsed it, real and tangible, for a few weeks, and then it began to fall apart, to grow distant again, sinking in the muddy political swirl of negotiations, agreements, bluffs, turf-battles, the everyday pageant of human flaws). The thing is, I say, that all of this proved to be within our reach, only apparently separated from us, as if by a wall, as if it existed in a different dimension, but I now know it exists, it's reachable—our country of the possible—like an underwater current, a subterranean river. We had brought it to the surface; we had cracked its path open, with one titanic blow, and it had flowed through us, searing us with its living flame, only to fall from our sight again, like a myth, like that Sarmatia my Sweetie talks about, our ideal motherland, in which we were supposed to live and for which we were ready to die—so why can't we keep it forever? Why is it that the most we are capable of is to glimpse it once and then just keep telling stories of that one miraculous appearance, until the end of time, twisting our testimony, patching up the truth with lies, re-writing, re-painting things, faking small details, photoshopping until we're left with something glossy and hard, like a piece of candy, that no one can believe and we'll have to start all over again, looking for the Promised Land from scratch?

SHE: "Our culture has no fear," Gustav says. "No memory of fear." Sweetie and I just sort of stare at him, startled by this apparent non-sequitur. "We're more open to manipulation," he explains. "We have no immunity. We don't know how to recognize real danger." We stare. Take advertising, he says, as an example. There's so much illicit violence in it: a girl throws her boyfriend out of a boat, a kid throws his parents out of a car—all to take possession of their potato chips. This is understood to be humorous. When you mention visual fascism, people look at you like you're crazy. They all believe that fascism, Communism—that's all gone and forgotten. People don't see that they're being manipulated with the same methods. They don't see they're being herded into the prison of virtual reality. When something really happens, we are defenceless as children. Like those kids who get into an argument, fight, and kill their classmate and then stare at the body and cannot understand why he is not getting up, because in their computer games, you come back to life even if you've been shot. There is no death, only simulacra. We are being trained to live in simulacra, and we are

not afraid. We have no antidote. We don't say anything; what could you say "That, of course, is a small example," Gustav says, apologetically.

I feel I'm beginning to understand.

He's looking for immunity, this dear soul. He's wandering the world, very much like the Flying Dutchman, shooting and publishing his Middle-Eastern, Balkan, East-European and who knows what other books—all in his quest for a way to find reality. He wants to juxtapose real sweat and blood, love and hate to the avalanche of simulacra. He wants to see for himself and to show others the world in the gaps and holes in the opaque sticky film of information: where the true, non-created nature of things shows itself like raw flesh in a wound. "You know," Sweetie says suddenly, "our former President, the one who sat out the revolution at his dacha, he, people say, also couldn't believe what he was looking at when he saw Maidan on TV. He was convinced it was SGI." We laugh, all three of us, united in a shared impulse of wordless understanding and strange relief. It feels like we have accomplished something here tonight, like we have won some small victory. We've defended something, a patch of reality, we've washed a window clean—and are basking in the sunshine. Boys, I say, isn't it time we had a drink? "Tya-koo-yoo," Gustav butchers the only Ukrainian word he'd learned, and we all laugh again. The boys get up to wash their hands; I glance at the screen before shutting down the computer. The shot there, taken from a low vantage point looking up, shows the line of shields and below them—flowers and burning candles, and it looks as if they are bursting straight from the earth itself, breaking through the asphalt and the tamped down mass of millennial snow—small agglomerations of light surrounded in the picture with uncannily bright halos.