

This is the sixth letter we received

Today's post will ramble, meander. No way around it. Clothe yourself in mercy before you attempt what follows because I'm struggling to find the words and hoping that typing will help.

Where to start? Last night, Russia bombed Europe's largest nuclear power plant – the Zaporizhia Atomic Energy Station. The plant has 6 nuclear reactors and produces around 20% of all the electricity in the country. It sits in Enerhodar, an 'energy town' of 50K residents on the Dnieper River about an hour's drive from Zaporizhia, a city of 750,000 or thereabouts, maybe a 7-hour drive south of Kyiv. If we haven't all learned it yet, it's time: the radioisotopes released in a nuclear explosion don't care much about driving distances. Or international borders.

They bombed a nuclear power plant. The biggest one in Europe. Let that sink in.

This morning, I read that the fire at the power plant is out. I'm failing to reign in my cynicism right now because I expect the Russians are not done bombing things that are better left at peace.

So far, that list includes kindergartens, hospitals, train stations, apartment blocks, dormitories, neighborhoods, rural townships, public squares and, at last count, one major university.

If this is what "Russian liberation" looks like, I'll take slavery.

When we think about Russia vs Ukraine, I hope we're not getting the mental picture of a hockey match. This ain't that. It might be true that "there are no winners in war" but one thing for sure: there is also no second place. There will be no silver medal in this fight.

"Russia vs Ukraine", it turns out, is also NOT about a lot of other things.

For example, despite their best attempts to make it so, it's not a story that Twitter junkies can boil down to a meme. It's not a "take" that social media influencers (I just vomited in my mouth a little) or traditional media types can manipulate to build a career or, dear God, a "following". Though I'm sure neither will bat an eyelash before they try. It's not a toy to toss around like we've managed to do with every other serious social problem. It's not a competition in the Victimhood Olympics, or the Gender Tournament, or the Race Sweepstakes. And conflating it with those, well, shame on you.

No.

Ukraine v Russia is a bloodbath. It's lives shattered in what was a largely peaceful, if struggling, country. It's the disruption of a nation resolved to build the institutions necessary for any functioning democracy. And above all, it's the masturbatory fantasy of a psychopath who owns more 40-foot-long tables than any decent person should ever possess. Is Putin worse than Hitler? Don't know. Does it matter? Is that a race, too? All we know are facts. He doesn't blink at bombing a nuclear reactor or a kindergarten. Six of one, half-a-dozen of the other.

So, media and wannabe media: Grow up. Snark from the privileged who've never known a day's want in their lives is beneath contempt. Save the drama for your opera career, the comedy for your Netflix romp, the irony for your rave. And another thing: I get that the folks here who are under attack in Ukraine are not your target audience, nevertheless, we're kinda busy right now. Too busy to click on your shit, anyway. My advice is get a hobby to burn up all that excess energy. Or get into another profession, because you're bad at your job.

Enough of that. Here is what this war is. I'll stick to what I know first-hand.

It's our friend, 6-months pregnant, and her husband trapped in a small town with their great grandparents, both in their mid-90s. They've decided to try and run--driving out tonight because the shells stopped falling two days ago. My wife, my diamond, is sick with fear for her friend.

It's our other friends, dynamic, beautiful sisters both in their 7th month, sitting at the edge of Kyiv with their parents. When will the gas lines, the water lines, the electricity in their town fail?

It's our upstairs neighbors in Kyiv, the godparents of our younger boy. The husband is about my age. He sits at the entrance to our building all night, ready to sound the alarm if the marauders roaming the streets would approach. With Kyiv now under strict curfew—lights out at 8—he sits in the dark.

It's a friend's entire home-village out east where the locals fill a road to stop a column of tanks that wants to pass through, screaming at them in Russian (so the invaders can understand) "Domoi Poka Zhyvoi" - Go Home While You Can Still Draw Breath", until the tanks turn around.

It's our friend in Siberia who writes: "my heart bleeds. I understand why you hate us. I can't justify Svetlana Vladimirovna" She used an old Soviet code: Svetlana Vladimirovna, or SV, is slang for Sovetskaya Vlast - or The Soviet Authority.

She is afraid to write the word "Putin" in her message to us. Let that sink in.

Recently in a series of interviews looking his 20 years in power in Russia, Putin disparaged people like our friend, calling them "barigi" – kind of know-it-all-uncle Russian epithet for "an independent businessperson". Kind of. (Space prohibits fuller explanation of this dystopia. Another day maybe.) Anyway, it's not a nice word. It's ignorant. It's a word used by people who pine for the days of the smashing success of state-run, state-owned, state-regulated, state-distributed Soviet style economics.

This is not a fair fight, let alone a necessary one. But it's the fight Ukraine has been handed and these people will fight it. They are coming at it with courage, unity, and an efficiency and determination that is otherworldly. Unfortunately, they're not coming at it with much else.

Will it be enough? Enough to bloody the nose of this bully and send him home? Will courage be enough given the Russian capacity, and apparent appetite, for wanton destruction? Why can't I get the image of Ralphie fighting Scut Farkus in "A Christmas Story" out of my head?

We, the four of us, are trying to make decisions. But unlike the choices you face when walking into a Starbucks, we don't know what's on the menu. Not now, not six months from now.

How far will they go? Will they hit our building, our neighborhood? And even if they don't, even if it withstands this like it withstood the Russian Revolution, World War I and World War II, will there be a home to go back to? If Putin succeeds in hanging Zelensky and installing his puppet in Kyiv, would it even be possible to go back? Would it be wise? Would you, if you could?

Here endeth the ramble. Yikes. For a guy with no words.

Peace from Ukraine

p.s. We missed our wedding anniversary. Just plum forgot. It was three days ago--the night we slept in the railway station. Wonder what we'll do next year? The good thing is Liliya seems to have forgotten, too.

Our boy's school wall with grafitti commentary on global economic systems.

Four months playing brass