

This is the eighth letter

We're about to make our way to the border. Don't know what to expect there. Reports range from "30-hour wait to cross" to "not all that busy". If I had a choice I wouldn't be leaving at all. I can't put my wife and my boys at risk for the sake of my principles. Ukraine is home: we'll be going back when this is over.

Choice? None. Welcome to Putin's world. It feels as if we've been stripped of all agency. It's felt like that for a while now, if I'm honest.

To be completely honest: if it weren't for Mark Slouka (dare I call a writer of that heft a "colleague"?), we're not quite sure what we would do. Our options were clear. Become a refugee and become a burden to somebody else. In our case that was relatives in Slovakia, some government or foreign aid agency, or the Slouka clan. Flipped a coin, Mark, and you lost.

With luck, with grace, we'll be in Prague in two days' time. And then what. The only thing I know is that we are at a point where we depend heavily on some combination of the EU rule of law, the good will of nations, and the kindness of strangers. Mostly on the latter.

My sister and brother in the US have been privy to detail of what that means for us practically. And apparently, they've acted on their insider status. They say some of you have sent money to help us out already. I don't even know what to say about that. "Thank you" is not enough word to describe how we feel. I can't lie: I am floored, humbled, and devastated all at once. That it would come to this.

I can be pretty sanguine when the situation calls for it, but this isn't one of those. When we've settled we'll be doing paperwork, looking for work, decompressing - probably in that order. And the whole time we'll be leaning on the goodness of others.

The fact that you all read what I write, well, it's the gold standard for a writer. I can only say thanks. You lift us up. We know we're not alone.

One other thing: I'll keep writing these, keep trying to put a picture of the lives of these people before you.

July 13th would have marked my 27th year in Ukraine. Crossing the border feels like sailing off the end of the world. Between Covid and this my hair's gone solid silver this year. Hey, I earned it.

My heart is too heavy these days.

Peace to you from Nenka Ukraina