

## Our future has been taken away.

*Marina Karachova*

They pulled the carpet from under our feet, took away the solid ground on which we all stood, stole the horse from under our asses. I don't know if it's just me, but I see no way ahead - only a faint hint of a path, overgrown with hogweed.

Yet no one thinks that we used to have a past - and they took that away, too. All those things that stored memories within: a gigantic velvet-bound photo album; the two orchids that have grown out of their pots over the years, each gifted by my godmother on the days my sisters were born; the cat-gnawed corners of my favorite children's book; the pink geranium I planted with my nanny when I was four; the chess set that lost its white knight with my dead grandfather's signature etched on the inside of the wooden box.

Not only the material things - they took away the feeling of

belonging, the walls of the house and the streets of the city. They set up barricades between me and my childhood hometown - between me and the centuries-old bridges which I passed under on a small boat in the summer. I reach out to touch the water of the gulf, but it's a mirage. My skin is always dry from the lack of humidity.

They haven't spared a childlike love for my country, either. They killed the urge to stand up during the national hymn; the dream of traveling the Golden Ring and to the world's deepest lake; the proud smile that appeared when my family's cheers for the national football team 'helped' them score a goal. They stole that love, abused it, poured gasoline over it and set it on fire.

The white, blue and red flag is a trigger. I want to take it in my hands and wash off the old,

dried, ingrained blood so that the sky-blue river and the snow surrounding it are the only things left on it.

No more coming back. No more walking along the alleys of the island-bound park, no more drinking coffee at my favorite coffee shop with baristas I had known since 9th grade. No more stroking stray cats, no more inhaling the smell of bird cherry in the spring, no more hearing that familiar sound of a key in the door.

They took it all away. Smearred it with oily hands as gleeful smirks split their Botox-filled mugs, trampled on the most important things, on the basics.

Only memory is left, but then again, it's unreliable - and it's weak. Memory gives up in the face of greed. How else can the war be explained?

Babies fall out into the world sinless and pure. Those who are childish don't understand much, but they are very interested in everything. And they don't know what will happen next, yet they know that another day will

come. "It can't be that nothing happens - something, surely, will," as my father, who grew up in a village, used to say.

And we - we are without the fulcrums but with the experience of losing them. Traumatic experience.

Beaten, poisoned. Floating and purposeless. As if reborn, but mom is not around, we're not at home, and there is no soft blanket around our shoulders.

Maybe we didn't have a future to begin with. Or maybe we were convinced of that by the brazen-faced, by the ever-hungry, by those lucky enough to end up near the gravy train.

There's no yesterday, today we're missing and misplaced, and tomorrow is uncertain.

And this is my youth. My best fucking years. I feel old, even though I am yet to have something in my life.

Something good.

Mariia Karacheva