

## Soldiers 2

because they inch slowly towards their deaths

they are

slightly, slightly, so very slightly less innocent than you

you, who sitting in a pushchair in Kiev

felt the petals of awakening life fly off the stem

you, who serving cocktails above the Donbas

found the cabin gone and yourself grasping at air

you, who nodding on the autobahn, braked

sideways into flashing headlamps and a screaming horn

oh yes, they are only slightly, slightly, slightly less innocent than you

because they are pushed inch by inch, trembling, praying,

in metal boxes about to be filled with flame

in grey fatigues through fields draped with bones

in metal birds ripe to be blown from the sky

mumbling, sweating, clutching a photo of a girl

in Moscow or Kiev, a letter, a lucky rabbit's foot

yes, in whatever manner of coffin we have decided

to launch them to do battle on the ocean of our raging discontents

they are only slightly, slightly, so very slightly less innocent than us.

yes, slightly, slightly, slightly

but so very slightly

that all the sunlit uplands of our righteous innocence

can never atone for their pain

and Dostoevsky spoke the truth,

nothing is more foul than that

one should decide the hour in which another is slain.

*Ben Thompson, August 2022*