

MILITARY PROSE

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WOMAN OF WAR

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Preface

War... Woman... It should seem, these two are incompatible manifestations of human existence. War is often believed to have an unwomanly face. Not really! It does have a woman's face. In most languages it is conventionally regarded as female. The war and the woman are closely intertwined. This concerns women's rights in the military environment and the gender policy in the armed forces. It is a pressing, relevant, and highly charged problem on the agenda of the present-day global humanitarian space.

In Ukraine, the relationship between war and women has been counting for centuries. Has anyone studied the history of women in the war? Not yet. None special work has been published. However, this history exists and must be written to be preserved.

In the Trypillian epoch, husbandmen of Rus-Ukraine defended their land, with women firmly holding weapons and bringing to men new spears and swords instead of broken ones. At the time of Kyivan Rus, Duchess Olha led her host in the battles to protect the integrity of the state and the strength of Kyiv from pretensions of feudal dukes. In the era of Hetmanate, there were no women in Zaporozhian Sich. However, they were preparing strategic provisions for the Cossacks. Women played a very important

role in World Wars I and II. Then they became a real military unit bearing arms against enemies and saving lives of soldiers.

In the Ukrainian-Russian war, the woman has taken combat positions boldly declaring herself a volunteer, a doctor, and a soldier. And here an acute problem of equal rights of women and men in the war arose. They have equal rights to death. Consequently, all other rights must be equalized too.

This book is the first attempt to write a page of the history of Ukrainian women in war. These are reflections about how, at the beginning of the 21st century, Ukrainian hero women are defending the independence and integrity of Ukraine and proving their natural right to be a guardian of their Homeland, on a par with men. This is an important step towards levelling the rights of military men and women soldiers.

The previous edition of the book contained 25 stories and the third edition supplemented by six new tales. It is not documentary prose, but each story is based on real-life events narrated by real-life women – paramedics, volunteers, journalists, and service women who have gone to the front line to fight for their Homeland. The author tells their hard fates, but at the same time, each heroine is a composite character displaying life and emotions of many female warriors. The women are a speakers of Ukraine. Their voice is worth hearing and paying heed to.

Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the Heroes!




*Alisa
Kotyk*

*You will always be fond of me.
I represent to you all the sins
you never had the courage to commit.*

Oscar Wilde

The Picture of Dorian Gray

ome of us constantly edge-walk, but never actually fall. War is the edge of the abyss. It looks at the person even when he or she walks away hundreds of kilometres...

Each child is gifted. The luckiest ones are those who, when born, get a “golden” pen into their tiny plump hands. The gift of writing is inborn and given to the chosen ones. Still, when the person really takes the advantage of the talent is the matter of time and circumstances that always interfere in human lives. From the early years, our heroine Alisa Kotyk was an avid reader, and she has always known that one day she would start writing. Alisa went to an elite gymnasium, where she was in an experimental class with its special curriculum.

The first qualification was not enough for the curious girl. So within nine hours, a fast train Ivano-Frankivsk — Kyiv bought her to the capital, which would open a variety of opportunities. Without any hesitations, Alisa entered the university majoring in PR technologies.

It was new education, new knowledge and new passions. Her previous life was over, and the young lady decided to stay in Kyiv. Alisa Kotyk made her professional debut on the radio. Then she worked as a PR director in a well-known production centre and met Ukrainian show business celebrities. Though starting her own business after a while, the work in the production centre gave Alisa a most important encounter in her life — she met Kuzma.

Together they made a lot of joint programs, recorded videos, communicated professionally and personally. While shooting a video, Kuzma offered Alisa to join his team as a press secretary. At that moment Alisa's eyes could not but shine. She had been dreaming of this work and the cooperation turned out to be highly productive.

Informally, Alisa Kotyk was called the band PR director. She assumed the responsibility of communicating with the media and journalists; she wrote texts and was a copywriter, organized conferences, arranged interviews, live shows, press releases and other information materials.

The strong and tall, nearly two-metre high Kuzma and a slim short, a hundred-and-fifty-six-centimetre-tall Alisa became best friends. Kuzma could call her at any time of day and night if that was important. Alisa would jump up to her feet, take a taxi, go to Vitriani Hory area, where Kuzma could be waiting for her proposing... to have a beer. Those night talks were fruitful and would often create great ideas. Alisa Kotyk recalls working with Kuzma as one of the happiest periods in her professional life. She could deal with the projects that she hadn't even dreamt about. It was her vocation that also bought her a sincere friend. Although Kuzma once stopped Alisa from going to Maidan, the path of resisting the main enemy of the country, the Russian aggressor, would begin for Alisa Kotyk in due time. Probably, Kuzma knew about that and, therefore, he tried to keep and protect her. One can always go to war, as they are numerous worldwide.

"Wait when the time comes. It will one day", Alisa still remembers Kuzma's words. She shares her memories saying that many people, who knew Kuzma personally, noticed his extrasensory skills. He could read a person within a few seconds, scan him or her and understand who was in front

of him — an angel or a demon, a brave-heart or a coward, a sincere person or a fraud, and whether the person was feeling happy or blue.

Kuzma once got the idea of shooting a “friendly video” with friends only. Alisa often watches it, as there she is laughing and enjoying herself. Those days will never be forgotten. In that life all of them were together and happy — Kuzma and all his nearest friends. Kuzma... alas.

Maidan. The Revolution of Dignity. The phenomenon of Maidan will be studied by historians, psychologists, sociologists and political experts. Maidan was our way of protecting freedom and our civil rights. It was our awakening and beginning of fighting for the real independence of Ukraine.

One morning, Alisa had a strange feeling. She re-watched the news, looked at the faces of the people in Maidan and, she was struck with the idea: “They would never be the same again. They would never live as they had done it before Maidan. They are different”.

Alisa Kotyk changed too. “It is time now”, she said to herself and plunged into volunteering.

Volunteers. That word became a household term for Ukrainians with the start of the ATO. Alisa could not stay aside any longer, she could not stop or act otherwise. She would always be one hundred percent committed to her favourite business, immerse into what she was fond of and do her best. Volunteering became her life’s work.

Naturally, war is not the thing to live for. However, Alisa could not resist. She volunteered not only in her spare time, but she actually devoted all her health and efforts to that. Everybody is born talented and protected by an angel. So it was then that those dangerous days there appeared

a person who cared for Alisa. It was Andrii, her husband-to-be, whom she met at the first waves of mobilization at the end of 2014.

Bearded uniformed men smelled gunpowder and dirt. Then Alisa could not memorize any face since there were so many of them... But Andrii spotted her at once. He had been dreaming of this kind of woman all his life. They met several times, but Alisa was so dedicated to what she did as a volunteer, that she would not notice the bearded guy with those deep blue eyes. He would come back home for rotations, would ask his battalion commander for leaves just to meet and conquer Alisa. But the woman would ignore him. The man kept monitoring all the news of the volunteer centre and, finally, at one of the events he drew attention of his future wife.

Generally, volunteers' events involve mainly women. So Alisa immediately attended to a big strong tattooed guy, accompanied by a similar-looking small boy, Andrii's son.

The bearded man started knowingly organizing the nativity play and traditional motanka dolls. They actually went home together, as Andrii turned out to be a neighbour of hers. They walked and talked. That evening Alisa told him about her plans to go to the east on a volunteer mission. That moment, seemingly calm Andrii grabbed Alisa by the hand, looked into her eyes, as if into her soul, and cried: "Alisa, dear, don't go there! You can't imagine what the war is!" Alisa recollects those words with a smile, since she acted like a popular cartoon character, who was told: "Don't go there, as troubles are waiting for you", and said: "How can I stay if they are waiting for me?.."

Though Alisa had heard various stories from "there", she was eager to go and see that with her own eyes. She was not

scared of either lack of military ammunition, or of elementary conveniences and comforts. It was also life threatening. She might not believe but strove for sharing that burden.

Alisa Kotyk recalls her first journey to the war with a smile, though it involved more than a serious incident. She was left by her colleagues-volunteers... Unfortunately, these things happened too. Volunteers' destination was Andrii's brigade, in the eastern wolf's den. The guys were brought an all-wheel drive vehicle as a present. Alisa, forgotten by the volunteers, was at a loss, but her angel still protected her. Andrii's division was leaving the front line. Therefore, Alisa was returning with Andrii and his brigade; he confidently introduced the pretty blond as his wife. Alisa went to war being single but came back already married...

Andrii was nicknamed Eastern Wolf, and wolves make stable couples once and forever. They stay faithful to each other. Alisa's father loved her mother till the end of his life. When he had a blot clot detached, his final words were: "Darling, do you love me?"

Similarly, passionate love story was the one between Alisa's grandparents. A poor young man fell in love with a girl from a well-off family, but he could not propose at once and left to work away. He came back wealthy but exhausted, but she had been waiting for him, refusing everybody asking her to marry. All Alisa's family generations managed to keep their feelings lifelong. Alisa confessed that Andrii strongly resembled her father.

She came home on 8th March. That quiet morning Alisa was walking up the stairs when she met her neighbours. They congratulated her on the occasion. Alisa smiled back, though she wanted to jump with happiness, put on shoes and sneakers at the same time, dance, stroll and hug the whole world. It

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