

Benak

UKRAINIAN EPIC

Volume 1

ECHOES FROM CRIMEA

1.

In the vast steppes of Ukraine, where the sky melded with the earth, an enchanting glow radiated from fields of grains and sunflowers, swept by unpredictable winds. The tumultuous year of 2020 left an indelible mark on this land—an amalgam of nostalgia and resolve, of melancholy and optimism. The cities, once bustling with energy and creativity, seemed to retain within them echoes of bygone centuries. Kiev, timeless and sumptuous, showcased golden domes of Orthodox shrines gleaming under an azure firmament. The Dnieper, this majestic river, perpetuated its flow, oblivious to human turmoil, mirroring a history that shaped the nation.

During this troubled year, tensions in eastern Ukraine intensified, adding a dark undertone to the melancholic beauty of these territories. The distant rumbling of artillery resounded like a grim echo, a constant reminder of a tragedy unfolding not far away. Families, fragmented by the conflict, sought solace in mutual affection and clung to values and traditions that had always united their community.

It was in the heart of the hamlets, where modernity and traditions coexisted, that Ukraine's soul manifested most intensely. The babushkas, these grandmothers with piercing eyes and calloused hands, ceaselessly kneaded bread, a symbol of an existence that endured despite adversities. Their lullabies, filled with romanticism and lyricism, serenaded starry nights, recounting their experiences, passions, and afflictions.

Ukraine was a country of paradoxes, where past and future intertwined in a hypnotic waltz. Medieval fortresses stood next to Soviet buildings, silent witnesses of a chaotic past. The younger generations, overflowing with hope and aspirations, looked to the future with determination, resolved to write a new chapter in their epic tale.

During this dark year of 2020, the conflict also inflicted indelible scars. Returning military personnel carried the specter of war in their eyes, while their loved ones, in a movement of immeasurable tenderness, sought to heal invisible wounds. The children, though too young to understand the gravity of the situation, nonetheless felt a change, an insidious weight that infiltrated their play.

The artistic community, this sanctuary where the soul found comfort, also played its part in these troubled times. Writers, hunched over their desks, crafted stories that wove the fantastical with reality,

offering escapism to those who immersed themselves in the pages. Musicians, inspired by their nation's trials, composed melodies that transcended linguistic and geographic boundaries. Their works became unofficial anthems of collective resilience.

Local markets, full of colors and aromas, spread an atmosphere of reassuring simplicity. Vendors, whose stalls overflowed with ripe fruits and fresh vegetables, chatted with passersby in a mix of Ukrainian and Russian, momentarily eclipsing political divisions. Vodka and borscht were served on all occasions, symbolizing a cultural heritage that scoffed at external turmoil.

It was in these places that anonymous heroes revealed themselves. Volunteers, often young and idealistic, worked tirelessly to bring aid to the displaced and needy. Their dedication reminded everyone that solidarity was not a forgotten virtue but a light that still burned, even in the dark.

The youth, especially, fueled hopes for renewal. Students, sometimes restless but always passionate, looked to the future with dogged optimism. Their peaceful protests, environmental initiatives, and drive for innovation characterized a generation that refused to succumb to fate.

In the west, the city of Lviv embodied an example of pluralism and tolerance. It blended the grandeur of Austrian and Polish

architecture with the hearty character of its inhabitants. Cobblestone streets, where trams paraded peacefully, were lined with cafes and bookstores that invited reflection and debate.

In schools, teachers strove to maintain an environment where education focused not only on traditional subjects like mathematics or language but also on character development and civic awareness. Students, often very curious, posed challenging questions, pushing their teachers to think of answers that satisfied not just the mind but also the heart.

In hospitals, doctors and nurses served with a compassion that went beyond their professional duty. They treated the injured and sick, and sometimes, when medicine reached its limits, they offered a listening ear and a comforting hand.

Farmers, for their part, plowed the land as their ancestors had done, cultivating corn, wheat, and vegetables that fed not only their families but also their communities. In their fields, scarecrows served not only to ward off birds but also to remind that the earth was an ally, not an enemy.

Families, gathered around wooden tables laden with homemade dishes, shared meals and stories that wove the very fabric of their identity. The elders, keepers of wisdom and memory, told tales that were not just entertainment but also life lessons. Children listened

with a respect mingled with curiosity, absorbing the values that would shape them as adults.

The cities, once teeming with energy and creativity, carried within them remnants of the fervor of past centuries. Kiev, eternal and sumptuous, where the golden domes of Orthodox churches glittered under a sky of blue, presented a contrasting tableau. The Dnieper flowed peacefully, as if to underline the constancy of nature amid human uncertainties. The bridges that spanned the river were not just thoroughfares, but also symbolic links between the different facets of this diverse country.

Yes, Ukraine was a blend of contradictions and challenges, but it was also a mosaic of opportunities and promises. Each day brought its own set of difficulties, but also moments of grace that reminded us that the future was a still-unwritten book. And in this push towards an uncertain destiny, a people stood united, shaped not by their trials, but by their determination to build a better future.

But in this tumultuous year, conflict in eastern Ukraine was intensifying, adding a touch of melancholy to the intrinsic beauty of these lands. The distant booms of artillery echoed, a constant reminder of an ongoing drama not far away. Families, torn apart by the conflict, sought comfort in each other's arms, clinging to the values and traditions that had always bonded their community.

It was in the villages, where modernity met folklore, that the soul of Ukraine was most powerfully revealed. The babushkas, those grandmothers with piercing eyes and calloused hands, still kneaded bread, a symbol of a life that persisted despite adversity. Their melodies, steeped in romanticism and poetry, would lull the starry nights, telling their story, their loves, and their sorrows.

Ukraine was a land of contrasts, where past and present danced in a mesmerizing embrace. Medieval castles stood beside Soviet buildings, mute witnesses to a turbulent history. The younger generations, full of optimism and resolve, looked to the future with determination, committed to writing a new chapter in their history.

But in this dark year of 2020, the conflict also left indelible marks. Soldiers, returning from the front, had the shadow of war in their eyes, and their families, in an overwhelming outpouring of affection, tried to heal invisible wounds. Children, too young to understand, nonetheless sensed that something had changed, and in their play, a note of gravity had crept in.

Ukraine was also a land of generous and wild nature, where the Carpathian Mountains rose like a natural fortress, keepers of ancestral secrets. The forests, dense and mysterious, sheltered legends and mythical creatures that still lived in the collective imagination.

And at the heart of this diverse landscape, love bloomed, both fragile and robust. Young couples held hands in public squares, hopeful for a better future, and weddings, celebrated with pomp and passion, symbolized as many promises of happiness to come.

Ukraine in 2020 was a country of dreams and realities, of splendors and sorrows, of poetic inspirations and pragmatism. It was a land that attracted, seduced, captivated, and sometimes, brought tears.

In moments of contemplation, facing a blazing sunset, one could feel the soul of Ukraine, this living and eternal essence that told a story of love and conflict, of life and death, of hope and despair. And in this narrative, every Ukrainian found their place, actors in a drama and a romance unfolding in parallel, in a silent symphony that would resonate through the ages.

Despite the challenges it faced, Ukraine remained a land of opportunities, aspirations, and hopes. Culture, infused with folk songs and dances, literary traditions, and spiritual heritages, constituted the foundation on which rested the will for change. And while the year 2020 left its scars on this country of poignant beauty, it was clear that Ukraine would not be defined by its wounds, but by its ability to rise, persevere, and flourish.

2.

Kiev, that splendid Ukrainian capital where history and modernity mingled in a delicate ballet, was like a beautiful woman wearing the stigmas of her past on her radiant face, yet with a dignity and grace that commanded admiration.

The streets of Kiev were once imprinted with carefree joy, where children's laughter echoed in the air and lovers held hands under the benevolent shade of chestnut trees. But war changed everything, leaving an indelible mark on the city and its inhabitants.

Conflict loomed at the city's gates, and in the air floated a mix of hope and apprehension. The grandeur of the past still lived within the golden walls of St. Sophia's Cathedral, while an uncertain future was reflected in the eyes of the residents, filled with quiet determination.

The banks of the Dnieper, that majestic river crossing the city, were the stage for silent contemplation. Old fishermen, their faces weathered by time, cast their lines into the tranquil waters, lost in memories of a bygone era. Their stories, full of nostalgia and wisdom, paid tribute to the resilience and beauty of their land.

On Maidan Square, the beating heart of Kiev, one could feel the pulse of the nation. Protests, full of passion and conviction, were a cry for freedom and justice. The young and the old, men and women, all united in the same thrust, singing anthems to the love of the homeland.

The boulevards, once animated by commerce and simple pleasures, were now marked by newfound gravity and solemnity. Shops, still open, were run by women with soft yet firm gazes who, despite hardships, continued to serve their customers with a smile and unshakeable dignity.

The parks of Kiev, these green oases at the heart of the city, remained a refuge for those seeking peace and serenity. Lovers walked there, hand in hand, exchanging tender and conspiratorial glances, as if to defy the prevailing sadness.

And amidst all of this, churches and monasteries, these bastions of faith and hope, continued to watch over the city. Their golden steeples shone in the sun, like lighthouses in the storm, guiding lost souls toward a haven of peace.

Music, too, played its part. Traditional melodies, passionately played in the streets, were a balm for wounded hearts. They spoke of love, loss, joy, and pain, in a universal language that touched each individual.

Kiev was a complex and moving symphony, composed of a thousand and one nuances. It was both the mother and daughter of Ukraine, carrying within her the legacy of a glorious past and the dreams of a better future.

In her streets, squares, churches, and in the eyes of her inhabitants, one could read the full richness and depth of the Ukrainian soul. A consciousness that, despite trials and pains, continued to believe, love, and hope.

Kiev was, and will forever remain, an ode to life, love, and freedom. An unforgettable city, whose beauty and strength lie in her ability to embrace her past, confront her present, and dream her future. A city that, in its silence and dignity, sings an eternal melody—the melody of humanity itself.

As Kiev continued to exist in this atmosphere of mingled grandeur and sadness, the echoes of conflict at the borders resonated in people's minds, but failed to dent the pride and determination of its inhabitants.

In the city's cafés, where writers and artists once gathered to share dreams and inspirations, the conversation had turned more serious but no less passionate. Discussions revolved around the homeland, freedom, and what it means to be Ukrainian in these troubled times.

Schools continued to educate, and children, those little guardians of the future, listened in awe to their teachers' stories about history, courage, and the importance of truth.

The theater, that living soul of Ukrainian culture, still performed its plays—both as an escape and as a reflection. Actors, with their graceful movements and powerful voices, told stories that resonated deeply in the hearts of those who watched. They spoke of love, sacrifice, pain, and redemption, in a language that transcends all barriers.

Markets, colorful and lively, were a hymn to the simple pleasures of life. Vendors, with their stalls brimming with fruits, vegetables, and traditional dishes, served their customers with the warm human touch that characterizes the Ukrainian people. Exchanges, although shaped by economic realities, were still marked by that camaraderie and generosity that nourish the soul as well as the body.

Museums, those silent guardians of history, were places of pilgrimage. Visitors, touched by the beauty and tragedy of the displayed works, lost themselves in contemplating what was and what could have been. They were both a mirror and a window, reflecting reality while opening onto a realm of infinite possibilities.

The streets of Kiev, illuminated by the soft lights of street lamps, were a place for strolls and contemplation. Passersby, whether alone

or accompanied, walked in silence, lost in their thoughts, or sharing whispered confidences. The rustle of leaves under their feet was like soft music, a melody speaking of change, of cycles, of renewal.

The churches, with their masses and prayers, were a refuge for those seeking comfort and guidance. The priests, with their soothing voices and wise words, were lighthouses in the night, guiding the faithful toward inner peace, even in the midst of the storm.

And through all of this, Kiev continued to live, to breathe, to love, and to dream. Its beauty was a strength, its history a lesson, its pain a trial, and its hope a promise.

Kiev was an unfinished symphony, a work of art in progress, a story that tells itself. It was a city that speaks to the soul, touches the heart, and awakens the mind.

In its streets, in its buildings, in its past and in its present, Kiev was a love song to life, an ode to humanity, and a prayer for the future.

An unforgettable city, which, in its eternal dance between joy and sorrow, beauty and pain, continues to inspire, to educate, and to please. A city that, despite everything, remains true to itself—beautiful, proud, and free.

3.

Time, that eternal warrior and everlasting victor, has requisitioned the age-old treasures of history contained in its fabulous memory. As the absolute lord seated atop the universe, it posed the grand question of Crimea. History, head bowed and seated in the defendant's chair, began to speak:

— Oh, noble Time, my master and my judge! How can I defend myself before you, witness to all my deeds and holder of all my secrets? Nevertheless, if I must speak of Crimea, said History, lifting her eyes, let my voice be heard.

— Crimea is not simply land; it's a vast ocean of memories, she continued. Each wave holds its own murmur, each echo its own tale. Empires and peoples have drawn upon this precious canvas their ambitions, dreams, and also their tears.

— I've seen the Tauri, the Cimmerians, and the Greeks set foot on her shores, added History, breathing into her their legends, cultures, and hopes. The Black Sea, like a benevolent mother, has

listened and carefully kept tales of the Bosporan Kingdom. Rome's protective mantle extended over her, offering some of its grandeur.

— But, oh Time, History's voice tinged with emotion, you've also been witness to a timeless love story: that of Elizaveta, noble daughter of the Genoese, and Aslan, proud son of the Tatars. In the whirlpool of my tales, their love blossomed like a rare flower in the desert.

— Hidden from the world, they confided in the sea, she revealed softly, and under the cover of stars, their vows merged with the infinite.

— Their romance, alas, sighed History, faced the torment of societies and traditions. Just like Crimea itself, torn between desires and ambitions of many conquerors. Through their adventures, they reminded everyone that this land, beyond the conflicts, is a cradle of unity, love, and coexistence.

— Oh grand Time, History concluded, looking into the eyes of her eternal judge, I am but a reflection of man's actions and desires. I record, I preserve, but I do not judge. Crimea, with all its stories, remains a vivid example of the power of coexistence and love amid challenges.

And with these words, History raised her head, her eyes filled with eternal sorrow, hoping she had done justice to this land, this jewel that is Crimea.

On the shore of the past, where the sea of history meets the vast expanses of time, a silent conversation unfolds.

— History, you who are the witness of ages, tell me about Crimea. What secrets do you hold in your pages about this peninsula that has seen so many civilizations born and die? Time asked, his eyes as old as a thousand eons scanning every facet of her face.

History, thoughtful, looked at Time and responded in a voice that was soft, melancholy, yet resolute:

— Ah, Crimea, this jewel nestled in the heart of my vast tale. She is a mosaic of colors, cultures, wars, and loves.

— But who are they, these lovers you mention with such tenderness? Who are Elizaveta and Aslan, whose whispers still mingle with your songs? Time queried.

— Elizaveta, the daughter of the European wind, carries within her the essence of the Genoese. Aslan, the son of the steppes, embodies the richness of Tatar tradition, History replied. Their love is an ode to Crimea itself, a fusion of worlds, a dance between the stars and the waves of the Black Sea.