

ELENA ULANOVSKY



**NEW
APOCALYPSE**



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BOSTON • 2022

Elena Ulanovsky New APOCALYPSE. *A novel*

Translated into English by Isabel Quintana

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ISBN 978-1950319961

Published by M•GRAPHICS | BOSTON, MA

📄 www.mgraphics-books.com

✉ mgraphics.books@gmail.com

Book Design by M•Graphics © 2022

Cover Design by Larisa Studinskaya © 2022

Cover Art by Maryna Daykovsky and Pilar Quintana

Text Illustrations by Maryna Daykovsky

Author Photo on the Back Cover by Igor Shraybman

Printed in the U.S.A.

Dedicated to my husband Alexander Ulanovsky,
my parents Vita Aronovna and Mila Moishevich Miroshnikov,
my brother Alexander Miroshnik,
and my children, Misha, Katya, Danik, and Karina.
Without them, this book would not exist.

I express my sincerest gratitude to
Isabel and Pilar Quintana for their unprecedented
and sincere assistance with the translation
and adaptation of this book into English,
for the time and the strength of spirit they shared,
as well as for their moral support
throughout this long journey.

Elena Ulanovsky

Chapter One

THE SMALL PLAZA AT the port of Haifa was densely packed with people. An observer might have thought the scene peaceful, at first glance. Women and children waiting to board a cruise ship to Greece with their suitcases, trunks, and bags. It would have seemed so, if not for the oppressive silence—everyone, even the children, spoke in whispers—and the complete absence of men in the crowd. And the cordon of mujahideen with Kalashnikov assault rifles.

The Special United Muslim Corps brought to mind old Soviet films of the Russian Revolution in the Central Asian republics, with their exotic appearance, or, in more modern times, the war in Afghanistan. To Alina, the people gathered in the plaza resembled a crowd of Jews awaiting passage to a concentration camp. And even someone lacking her imagination would have had to acknowledge the similarity.

In truth, their reality was not so bad. If war could ever be considered “not so bad.” Civilians were being evacuated from areas under the control of the mujahideen in accordance with an agreement with the United Nations. The actual conflict would begin afterwards. The whole of northern Israel, including Haifa, had been surrendered to the Special United Muslim Corps without firing a single bullet, in accordance with the same agreement, and by personal order of the President of the United States. The Israeli government had had no right to vote on such issues for years now.

The Israeli Defense Forces, consisting of all males from 17 to 60 years of age, were mobilized and stood near Tel Aviv,

just 60 miles from Haifa. As a result, the mujahideen were engaged in the evacuation of the civilian population in Haifa and the north.

Alina would never have left of her own free will, since she had two sons, a husband, and a brother in the army, and her father was in the civilian defense unit. But she could not sentence her younger children to life in a war zone, and so she had packed their suitcases.

Only women with children would be allowed on the first ship out. And you needed permission to board. Fortunately, Alina knew Louise, a Christian Arab woman who got a pass for Alina and her friend, Oksana.

Louise had founded a center to combat abortion on the premises of a former bar that specialized in “girls” for foreign sailors. That bar, once run by Gosha, an old friend of Alina’s, was on the same block as Alina’s former office. Louise’s husband, Angelo, was an important port supervisor, and enjoyed some privileges in the newly-established regime because he spoke Arabic, although he was a Christian.

Louise and her two younger children—her eldest having been mobilized to civil service—were about fifty yards ahead, closer to the ship. She waved vigorously across the distance at Alina and Oksana, trying to get their attention. Alina furtively whispered something to Oksana, whose white fingers squeezed her son Davidik’s shoulder as she listened and nodded. She was to remain with the suitcases.

Alina tore across the thicket of bodies and baggage towards Louise, her hands firmly clutching those of her children. These she would not let go of.

A few minutes later, she was listening to Louise’s distraught whisper, peppered with Arabic words although she was speaking Hebrew. Angelo had managed to slip a note to Louise informing her that the Christian mission in Israel, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Consul were being allowed to fly their constituents out of the county to Greece or Russia. Only Jews would remain here.

At this point Louise stopped, sobbed convulsively, and covered her mouth with a corner of her kerchief. Angelo had heard two high ranking officers from the mujahideen speaking amongst themselves with his own two ears. They said that the ship sitting placidly in the harbor before them—the ship they were waiting to board—would be blown up as soon as it reached neutral waters.

Turning on petrified legs, Alina looked back at Oksana, who waved the pink form that she had received from a guard across the distance. Louise held a similar form. Alina tried for several seconds to read the writing, but the script blurred before her eyes until she realized that the form was in Arabic. Louise translated, “Here, you see ... this is my surname, this is my religious affiliation, this is the number of children under 16...”

The pink passes had apparently been done up in a hurry. The names of the children were not entered, only the number of children belonging to the parent. And ... what a stroke of luck! The number was in Roman numerals. A clear II was entered on Louise’s form. “Hold my bag,” Alina said, handing her bag to Louise. Alina’s mind raced as she began unbuttoning her blouse.

Louise watched her machinations with large round eyes, fully convinced that Alina had snapped. Without wasting time on explanations, Alina unfastened a pin in the lining of her bra—following in the footsteps of past generations—and took out a sack made out of a Kapron stocking held together with a safety pin. It held some gold jewelry—not royal pendants, of course, and not hereditary diamonds, but rings and earrings given to her by her lover, now husband, on her birthday and other occasions. She quickly poured out half of the gold trinkets and hid them in her pocket. She then took the now-lighter sack and fastened it with the same pin to the chain around her son’s neck, removing the dog tag which had been hanging there with his name on it.

Alina stuck her hands down her jeans, pulled out a bundle of bills, and counted out two thousand dollars, which was

exactly half of what she had. She slipped the money into a stunned Louise's hand as she took back her bag.

"Lastly ..." Alina whispered. Reaching for a pen, she carefully added a line next to the number of children on Louise's pink "pass to live" so that it read III. "Ron will be your third child. I'm not asking for anything. Just keep him sheltered. Just keep him alive."

Alina put her son's little hand into Louise's. "Aunt Louise is your mother now until I return. Don't let them see that you don't know Arabic, because they'll kill you." She nodded in the guards' direction. "We will meet again soon."

Realizing that this was not the time to cry, Ron nodded seriously and bit his lip. Then Alina kissed them—Louise on both cheeks, and her little son on his forehead—and, lifting her daughter into her arms, she began to make her way back to Oksana. Only once did she turn around, to see her child against the background of her friend's Arab family.

How fortunate that she had decided to shave his head before school started, Alina thought. The top of his head was tan, and he was almost chocolate colored, having spent so many days with his grandmother by the sea. He had his father's bright blue eyes, but they were fashionably covered by the sunglasses—"like the pilots wear!"—that he had begged for when shopping for his school clothes. He sported a striking McDonald's visor, which came with the purchase of a giant hamburger. Ron also had his father's appetite. He looked just like Louise's son, and dozens of other children in the port plaza wearing similar outfits.

"Long live interculturalism and globalization!" Alina snickered, comforting herself that even now her sense of humor remained intact, as she bumped up against her own suitcase beside Oksana. Mashenka, still silently pressed to her cheek, coughed a thin, pitiful chuckle.

Oksana held her pink pass at arm's length as if it was a rattlesnake, and, furrowing her red eyebrows, struggled to make out what was written on it. "They shouted my passport num-

ber in English and my surname, and when I responded, one of the guards made his way here, thrust this into my hand and started to drag us out. I resisted,” Oksana winced with fear and disgust, “so he quickly left me alone.”

“Of course, he did,” Alina grumbled bitterly. “He gets a couple of extra corpses.”

“Corpses? What are you talking about? ... What are you doing?”

Lowering her daughter to the floor, Alina had begun to take her remaining “treasures” from her pocket and unceremoniously shove them into Oksana’s bra. She then took the dog tags off her daughter, and added an extra “I” to Oksana’s pink pass. She patted Davidik’s head. “Now Mari-Mashenka will be your sister,” she said. “Take care of her.”

Oksana was speechless.

“You’re the minority,” Alina explained, “the gentile. But lo and behold, justice will prevail. You get to fly to Russia on a special chartered plane. And we? ... Kaboom!” Alina motioned an explosion with her hands.

Oksana was Russian, but she had married a Jew, whether because of her magnanimous nature, which rendered her incapable of prejudice, or perhaps because she had felt sorry for him, treated as a second-class citizen in his native Ukraine. In Russia, her daughters were considered Jews, because of their father, so immediately after perestroika the family decided to emigrate to Israel. Oksana did not want to leave her mother, as her father was dying. Nor could she bear to leave her sister, who had a disabled husband. But she had to do this, for the sake of the children.

In Israel, her daughters magically transformed from being Jews to being Russians. The dash on their identity cards made it clear that they were not Jews, since their mother was not Jewish. As Pushkin would have said, they were “not a mouse, not a frog, but some unknown animal.” The IDF, however, accepted them willingly. So now her girls were soldiers, sitting in stifling tents on the Negev Desert, listening to the radio broad-

cast from neighboring Jordan. Fortunately, they had studied Arabic diligently in school.

But their mother had not even had a chance to say goodbye to them before this fateful day of separation.

“And what about you?” Oksana dropped to her knees and began rummaging in a suitcase. “Well, where is it? ... Ah, here, found you!” She held something up to Alina. “You know I’m not a believer, and my mother isn’t either, but my grandmother believed. She was from a remote place, Kostroma. This icon, according to her, protects you from death. Take it...”

“I’d rather have an explosion-proof vest...” Alina sneered gloomily.

Trying not to burst into tears, Alina watched as her daughter shuffled behind Oksana on her plump little legs, clutching at Davidik’s hand indifferently, not even looking back, so confident was she that her mother would be there, as always. Only now did it hit Alina that she would probably never see her daughter’s chubby legs again. But now that her children were safe, she could break away from here—break through the cordon, creep along on her belly if necessary—nothing and no one could force her to step on that suicide ship.

Alina began to make her way slowly to the plaza, which was fenced in with temporary wire. It was not barbed wire, thank God, nor was it electrified. But every twenty meters there was a guard behind the fence, with the desiccated face of an Egyptian mummy and a machine gun at the ready. Moving slowly along the edge, past the mujahideen spaced out like fence posts, Alina gradually lost hope of finding a loophole in the impenetrable man-fence.

In the midst of all this tension, Alina found herself contemplating the morality of fleeing when several hundred women and children were being led to slaughter, like a herd of cows in a slaughterhouse. She pushed the thought from her mind. What would she accomplish if she tried to warn the others of the fate about to befall them? The mujahideen did not know

Russian—there was no danger on that front. But the people—would they believe her?

It had always been difficult for Alina to comprehend how, in every Soviet World War II film she had ever seen, a mere hundred Gestapo—even armed— could force a crowd of thousands into death camps. It seemed that people, even when they knew what awaited them, obediently walked on, although they could have crushed their torturers with their sheer numbers if they had tried. And if their foes had used their automatic weapons on them? That would only have hastened their inevitable deaths.

But people believe in miracles, Alina thought. They believe they can get out of a bad situation. It's that simple. Alina herself did not intend to give up, although she had already walked almost the entire periphery. If she could get close to the ladder and slip into the water ... that might work. She could swim, after all...

She could picture the scene in an action movie: the main character in the water, automatic gunfire causing the water to burst in spots as it mixed with blood, the body of a beautiful woman bobbing up (face up, of course), her clothes clinging to her body, torn in all the right places... A very romantic death scene. Alina critically examined herself and sighed.

But no. Hollywood could not fail her today of all days. And main characters never die—this she had learned from her husband, a great devotee of thrillers...

At that moment, Alina noticed that one of the mujahideen “tin soldiers” near her was behaving strangely. In contrast to the others, he was looking very carefully at the women and children crowding in front of him, as if he were listening to their muffled conversations, which merged into a monotonous rustle, like the sound of the surf. He seemed to catch some familiar sounds, and he smiled with his eyes only. Then he whistled a touching, familiar melody. It couldn't be! *Moscow Nights*...

Alina pushed her way through the crowd to the guard. “You speak Russian? You studied in the Union? In Moscow?”

“No, in Kyiv...”

“In Kyiv!” Like all people from Kyiv, Alina forgot everything else when she heard the name of her native city spoken in a foreign land. “Where did you live?”

“On the steep side of Andreevsky Spusk...”

“Oh, my aunt lived on that hill! I remember in autumn it was impossible to catch the chestnuts rolling down... Yes ... but there weren’t any student dormitories there...?”

“I lived with a friend. We were going to get married...” The guard took something out of his pocket. It was a smooth chestnut, almost merging in color with the palm on which it rested. On the polished shell, the letter “A” was thickly scratched and, scarcely discernible, a heart pierced with an arrow.

“Her name is Ann?” Alina asked, choosing a name at random.

“No, Alona. And her hair was ... how do you say it in Russian ... like this chestnut ... no, even redder.”

“A redhead?”

“Exactly.”

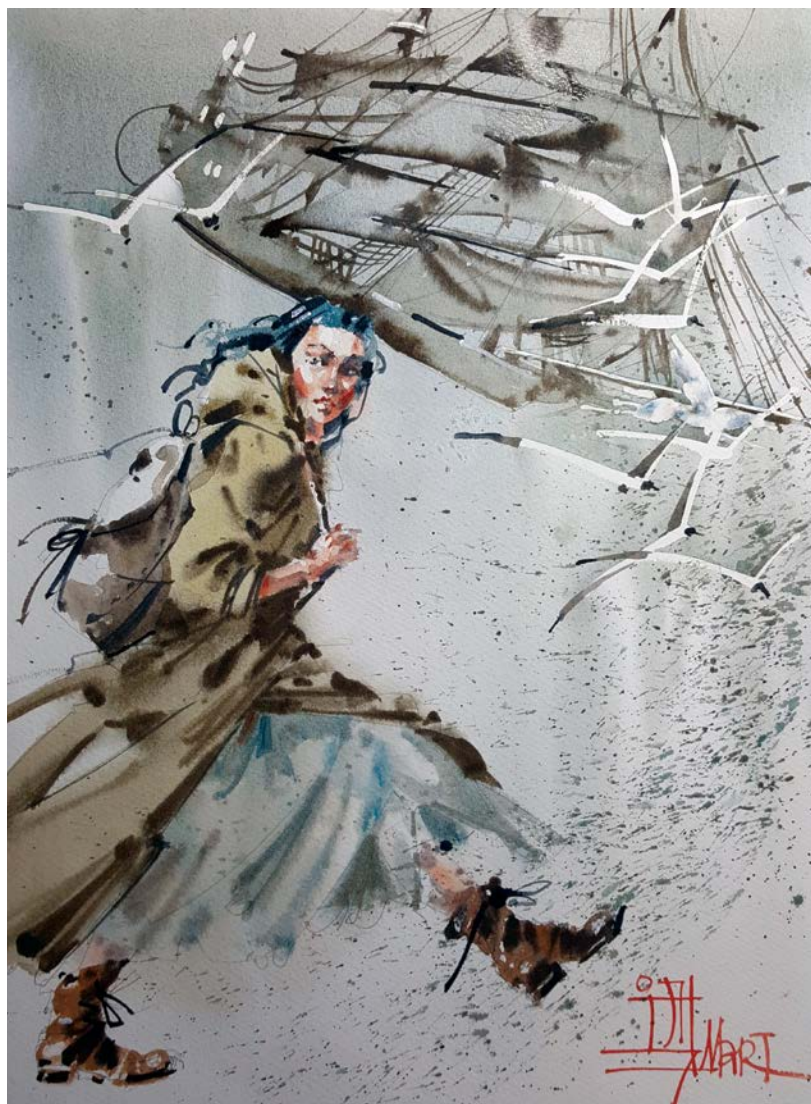
Their soft nostalgia was interrupted by a rude hail in Arabic. The mujahideen’s face instantly became impenetrable, and his body stretched like a taut string. Alina looked back. Around the fence, behind the sentinel guards, a second chain was being stretched out to block in the area.

Alina glanced at her watch—they would be boarding in ten minutes. There was only one option now—to dive into the sea. She turned to the ladders behind her, trying to figure out how best to lose her jeans and sneakers, which would hinder her ability to swim, when someone touched her shoulder. It was the Russian-speaking mujahid. Looking around anxiously, he handed Alina a coveted pink pass.

“Take it,” he said. “This person didn’t show up, and I’ve been wondering who to give this to. So sorry.”

“Do you know there’s a bomb on the ship?”

The guard nodded silently; his dark eyes desperate. Only now did Alina notice how young he was, almost a boy, probably the same age as her eldest.



“What are you doing here anyway,” she asked. “You studied medicine, probably.”

“Yes, not that it matters. In Gaza there is no work, and in Israel they won’t give me a job—the war. And because of this, Alona did not come with me. But we all need to eat... And my relatives were saying, ‘don’t you want revenge for a brother, for a nephew, for a neighbor?’ My mother was against it, crying... I got shoved into a suicide unit. I was barely able to break out and join this mujahideen detachment. Here the chances of staying alive are better. Well, for a war...”

“Now about this ship ... come, I’ll take you where they won’t scrutinize the documents. If you get out quickly, maybe you can warn someone. There are twenty hours left.”

He climbed over the wire and began to lead Alina through the crush of people. She fought to stay right behind him, practically shoving her nose into his thin back. Her liberation was literally two steps away when the ship’s powerful whistle blew, and almost simultaneously she heard guttural Arab cries and the screams of women in Hebrew: “It’s leaving. The ship is leaving!”

Alina turned and saw the strangest thing—the ship was sailing away from the pier without a single passenger. The cries and lamentations of the women and children merged into a desperate cacophony.

“Calm down!” Alina cried out, her voice breaking from the effort to scream. “Calm down! They knew; they knew everything! A terrorist attack was planned, and the ship was going to explode! It’s a blessing that it left. This is your salvation!”

Her voice was largely drowned out by the noise of the crowd, but those standing near her heard. And Alina discovered the true strength of a crowd when people believe what they want to believe, when they refuse to listen to the voice of reason, because it contradicts their faith, their belief.

They turned on her—these women, exhausted by unmet expectations, who had just been deprived of any hope of delivering their children from the hell of war. They grasped for her

and hissed like wildcats, shouting that this must be some Russian mafia scam—after all, it was a Russian ship—and that Alina was trying to profit from the grief of others. That ship would take people to safety alright, but only those who could afford to pay more, in some other port, and the likes of Alina would get paid highly, and take the best cabins on the ship for themselves.

Her entire day had been a surreal ordeal, but through it all, Alina had never been as frightened as she was now. The young mujahid could not understand what the women were shouting in Hebrew, but he quickly assessed the situation and fired off a short burst into the sky. Alina was certain that if he had not, the distraught women would have torn her limb from limb.

Her relief was short lived, however, and she found herself brought abruptly back to reality as the mujahid pulled her pink pass from her hand.

“This pass won’t help you anymore,” he said. “They’ve announced that everyone, without exception, will be taken hostage. In a few minutes they will start transporting everyone to a temporary camp. But,” he concluded, “it’s better than having taken off on that vessel.” And turning, he took his place in the line of soldiers tightening around them.

Alina looked around. The women, now hushed and exhausted after the hurricane of emotions they had experienced, and their long list of fruitless expectations, had settled on the ground, or sat on their suitcases. The children mostly sat on their laps. It was almost peaceful, but Alina was sad. Now that the worst of the danger was over, she regretted parting with her children. What would she say to her husband, and where would she find them? She remembered stories she had heard of hostages taken by Muslims. She realized that any “happy ending” was still very far away. So she comforted herself with the thought that the decision to send the children off with Louise and Oksana had been the right one—no matter what the consequences.

Chapter Two

THE HOSTAGES WERE BROUGHT to an abandoned school. It was empty like many public buildings and private houses in Haifa. Almost all of the Jewish population had “got up and left,” having learned that the city would be handed over to the combined Muslim detachments. Whoever could had gone abroad to stay with relatives. Those who couldn’t leave had moved to the tent camps which had sprung up around greater Tel-Aviv.

The streets of the city were empty, as if a neutron bomb had exploded. Only in the Arab part of the city was there some glimmer of life. Yet even there, Israeli Arabs had mostly left the city to wait out the hard times with their relatives in the villages away from the turmoil, fearing the mujahideen more than the Israelis.

Alina stood at the window of an empty classroom, where the desks were perched one on top of the other along the walls, and mattresses were dumped in the center. The hostages were brought in by two elderly Arabs, the first Alina had seen that day without guns, who were probably quartermasters.

Ironically, Alina found herself at the school which her older children had attended when they had first arrived in Israel. And the building they had lived in stood nearby on the opposite side of the street. She remembered how, over ten years earlier, in the same dense yet empty dusk—they had said that the next day a war would officially start—their taxi, having

circled for almost an hour along the narrow streets of Haifa, had finally stopped. And the swarthy driver had sighed with relief, having finished an endless dialogue with the dispatcher in an incomprehensible language that she had yet to learn.

In her new apartment, rented from someone who she later discovered was a drug dealer, there were two remarkable sights: a metal front door with a small window (apparently for dispensing drugs), and a pentagonal room with a balcony, the windows overlooking the sea. The next day she had put on her gas mask amidst the howling of the sirens. Alina now remembered how the first thing she had learned upon her arrival was that it was best to lay her children near the inner walls during a bombing, because the external walls were the first to be destroyed when a bomb hit. And yet, there was the view of the sea...

That building, which she had not visited since that time, was associated in her memory with yet another war. A friend of Yoram's, an old acquaintance of Alina's who had fought in the Haganah in 1948, had told her that it was this very street that had been the front line, the border between the Arab and Jewish parts of the city. His younger brother had died, wearing a backpack full of explosives, when he had gotten caught in a crossfire of searchlights, and was taken out by a sniper on the roof of her house. And that boy was killed at eighteen... Where were her soldier sons?

Alina commanded herself to immediately stop her reminiscing. This was not the time for sentiment, but the time to return to her reality. As if in response to her thoughts, a very real, booming female voice behind her said, in clear Russian, "Come on, move! It's bedtime for the children. What do you think, that we women will be carrying these mattresses ourselves?"

The voice seemed familiar to Alina. She turned ... of course, it was her old friend, Marina. A large woman, with wide hips, she deftly maneuvered between groups of people on mattresses, despite her size, while simultaneously commanding the two elderly Arabs. Not understanding a word, and being in fact the ones in control, they nevertheless obeyed the blond fury

unquestioningly, removing the desks near the window. Either they had their own special instructions from their superiors on this score, or they simply felt they had to respect such a beauty.

Spotting an empty corner, Marina, rejoicing at seeing Alina, pulled Alina to her side and enjoined her to make this space their own. Two children, literally clinging to Marina's skirt hem, followed them. One was a fair-skinned girl of about 11, and the other a swarthy-looking boy, around 6, which was the age of Alina's son. As the classroom was already filled with angry women and children—who were willing to fight tooth and nail for a better spot in the room—Alina pulled Marina's children to herself, and gently stroked the girl's cheek. The girl had her mother's eyes, but the smile and her oval face came from her father, Victor.

Victor was charming. He had had many entanglements with women, and he always came out on top. But now that he was with Marina, he let her take the lead. Alina was glad that Marina had someone now. Although Alina knew that the girl was Victor's child from a previous relationship, the boy, in all likelihood, was their son. Their older children were, of course, also in the army, like Alina's. Alina tried to talk to the little boy, but he was wary and silent.

"Do not try," the girl suddenly said, "he doesn't know Russian, and his Hebrew is pitiful. He has just arrived from Romania and is afraid of everyone."

"I see," Alina replied, and didn't press the issue, as if children arrived from Romania on a daily basis during this war. Marina approached, having won her battle for territory in the classroom. She solemnly showed Alina a rather cozy corner of desks and mattresses, enclosed by suitcases, near a window.

"You seem to be settling in for the long haul," Alina smiled.

"For a long time, for a short time. It doesn't matter. We will live as people, no matter how long we have to sit here," Marina answered, as she gathered her luxurious blond hair into a ponytail. "As for the children," she continued, "they have to have the best."

“Yeah, the very best!” Alina couldn’t resist using sarcasm as she looked at the classroom around them.

Those who had been able to capture decent spots were already going to sleep, and the losers, among whom Alina would certainly have been if she hadn’t met her old friend, snapped at the others, who were demanding that the lights be turned off.

Alina glanced at the walls—flyers, drawings—an ordinary school. And in the middle, a huge poster, all scribbled in and painted with congratulations to the teacher, whose portrait was in the center, along with her birthday, exactly a month ago. Alina automatically made the calculation in her mind—the teacher was a Scorpio.

“Well now, tell me, where are your children? Why are you alone?” Marina, having settled the children on a mattress, poured some coffee from a huge thermos for Alina. Marina had always been the target of jokes among mutual friends for her resourcefulness and housekeeping skills.

In the past, when Marina had gone on picnics with friends, she had always managed to load her entire car with blankets, pillows, and other provisions. Her friends had mocked her for this because she had only had herself and her ten-year-old son with her. But now her tendencies had become advantageous.

The pseudo-idyllic scene was interrupted by guttural shouts in the corridor. The door swung open and a commander, surrounded by a retinue of translators and guards, made his first rounds.

The translator, shouting over the cries of newly awakened children, said that first they would search all suitcases and remove mobile phones and radios, as no contact with the outside world was allowed; second, toilet trips would be conducted by only one mother and child at a time, and they would be accompanied by a guard; third, the windows could be opened, but it was forbidden to look out. In fact, guards were under command to shoot without warning if anyone loitered by the

windows. Any questions would have to be written down and submitted to a guard.

“Oh, now I feel like I’m in a democratic country,” Alina thought sarcastically, “I could even invite my lawyer here...”

She felt a rabid anger at the prohibitions, and immediately wanted to escape at any cost. The anger kept her up all night, despite her fatigue. Since Marina could not sleep either, they talked all night while finishing the entire supply of coffee.

Marina monopolized the conversation. “Dana, as you probably guessed, Victor’s daughter, has lived with us for five years. The girl is very attached to me, although at first it wasn’t that easy between us. I refuse to marry Victor, so as not to make him too comfortable in our relationship. Every Friday he offers me his hand and his heart, accessorizing his proposal with flowers and gifts. And I keep him in suspense and refuse. I keep him on a short leash by keeping his focus on marrying me, instead of chasing other women. You remember how many he’s had. For example, your sister...”

Marina threw Alina a knowing glance. Alina lowered her lashes, as pictures from her past came to her: her first meeting with Victor at her office, where she created astrological charts for her clients. He had come in hoping to learn about his fate, since he was entangled with two women. His chart had clearly shown the sign of an “unnatural death,” which ended up being the death of his unhappy wife at the time. Then Dina, Alina’s sister had passed. And perhaps now Marina? And, to be honest, her own short affair with this charismatic womanizer would count too, wouldn’t it?

However, Marina and Victor had been together for five years, and nothing had happened yet. And this morning, Marina and Alina had miraculously avoided death during the terrorist attack. Maybe the stars were a little tired? Alina looked up.

“And this boy, Jonathan,” Marina pointed at the young Romanian citizen, “could have been your son...”

Alina shuddered wondering how much Marina knew of the affair.

“Yes,” Marina continued somewhat confrontationally, “you remember how that seventy-year-old man offered to support you and your endeavors if you married him, had his child, and signed a contract stating that you would never divorce him?”

Alina breathed a sigh of relief. She was talking about Yor-am. “So, what happened to him?”

“Well, he went back to Romania, and now thrives there. In fact, he married a woman who bore him a child.

“A month ago, he decided to visit his daughters in Israel, and bring his son to meet his family. Well, he got into trouble! All of a sudden, one could not go back to Romania, as all flights were canceled. He discovered that women and children would be allowed to leave on this ship. So, he ran to me and put the boy’s hand in mine, while shoving a stack of dollars in the other.” Here Marina lowered her voice to a whisper, and absentmindedly ran her hand over her ample bosom, checking for the treasured package. “Then he ran to sign up for the civil defense squad. Who needs him there, tell me?”

“And how do you communicate with the boy, in what language?”

“This is how I communicate,” Marina answered, gently stroking the sleeping boy’s cheek. Her face brightened. “We find a common language.”

Alina averted her eyes as her throat tightened.

“Why are we only talking about me?” Marina exclaimed suddenly.

Alina briefly described all that had happened to her that day, ending with her getting the pink slip too late.

Marina jumped in, “When I heard my name and passport number, I was too frightened to answer.” Marina sighed, her dismay rising as she glanced at the sleeping children. “To think they would have been sleeping in the Hotel Russia—would have been in Red Square—if I hadn’t been so overwhelmed this morning. I wasn’t going to step forward for anything. I know what these people...”

“You should be grateful that you didn’t board the ship.” Alina understood now whose pink pass the mujahid had thrust at her. After all, the ways of the Lord are inscrutable.

“Okay, let’s go to bed. It’s four in the morning. Tomorrow, or rather today, will be a busy day. Listen...” Alina began to read out the schedule which had been distributed to all the prisoners during the authorities’ visit. “Rise: 07:00. Food: three times a day. Wash: from 14:00 to 17:00, one person at a time each room. From 17:00 students from madrassas, accompanied by translators, will visit the cells—oh sorry—the classrooms, and give lectures on the topic “The Role of Islam in World History.” This place will be a regular country club!”

Alina had made up the lectures to see if she could cheer Marina up a bit. But Marina, annoyed at herself for having lost the opportunity to be away safely with her children, in Moscow no less, had already turned to face the wall, pretending to be asleep.



ELENA ULANOVSKY grew up in Ukraine and emigrated to Israel, later relocating to the United States. Her life journey inspired her to become a writer, and provided her with ample material for her books. Her novels *Palms from the Asphalt*, *New Apocalypse*, *Formula of the Family*, and *Town where the Apricots Bloomed* were first published in New York City and Israeli magazines, then released as books. In Israel, her debut book *Palms from the Asphalt* is read as an encyclopedia of the great post-soviet Aliyah to Israel.

Her novel *New Apocalypse* which has been translated to English for the first time, focuses on the story of a woman protecting her children in a phantasmagoric geopolitical setting. The novel won the Nikolai Gogol International Literary Prize "Triumph" in 2020.

... From the very first pages, Elena Ulanovsky's *New Apocalypse* draws us into an intriguing, dynamic, world full of detective details. And although the events of *New Apocalypse* are fictitious, and the twisted plot does not give the reader direct references to current reality, the story still creates a complete sense of the reality of what is happening in the world. With familiar characters from previous works of the author smoothly integrated into new circumstances, the story continues and follows our most principal character—Alina. This book whimsically intertwines countries and continents, people and religions, military conflicts, and specific human destinies. . .

Natasha Gasteva, The New Review Literary Magazine, New York

... Once upon a time, humanity trembled in fear of the prophecies of the Apocalypse and, in order to avoid punishment, tried to become more spiritual, kinder, and fairer. Those days are long gone. Every new day of our life is filled with pestilence, terror, discord and chaos... Alina, the heroine of Elena Ulanovsky's story *New Apocalypse*, finds herself in the epicenter of this "cauldron" of world history. Crossing borders, conflicts, and languages, she painfully tries to escape from the madness of a united Europe and the massacre of the Middle East, in order to find her children, scattered by war and the pandemonium of peoples.

"In England, after the assassination attempt on the royal family and the death of all other heirs a year ago, only the daughter of the prince survived... In Belgium and Holland, terrorist detachments seized public buildings ...and held several hundred hostages ...old Europe was on the verge of great changes, and she no longer had to complain about boredom and satiety ...In America, they bandished their firearms and tried to shout something about revenge, their tone somehow uncertain..."

Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is not entirely coincidental; the story of Alina, an immigrant from the former Soviet Union, echoes the journeys of thousands of victims of the 21st century. The forces of evil press inexorably against human civilization. Today Elena Ulanovsky's story no longer sounds like a warning. . .

Marina Adamovich, editor-in-chief, The New Review Literary Magazine, New York



ISBN 978-1-950319-96-1

