
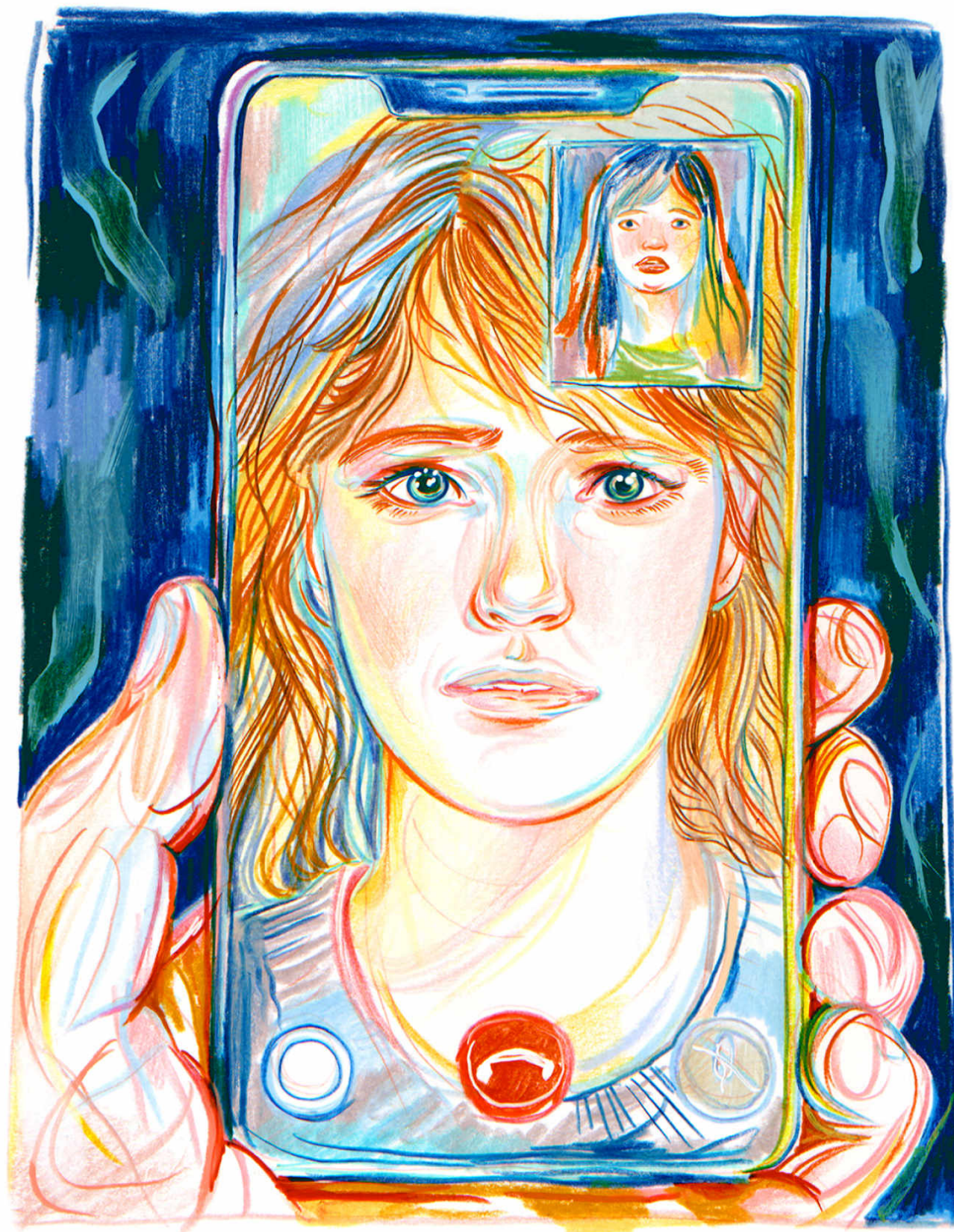


'Today is the darkest day of the entire war in Ukraine': The diary of two sisters separated by the war in Ukraine

 lemonde.fr/en/m-le-mag/article/2022/04/11/today-is-the-darkest-day-of-the-entire-war-in-ukraine-the-diary-of-two-sisters-separated-by-the-war-in-ukraine_5980275_117.html

Subscribers only



ALINE ZALCO FOR M LE MAGAZINE DU MONDE

Olga and Sasha are two Ukrainian sisters. Olga is 34 years old and works in a wine shop in Paris, where she has been living for seven years. 32-year-old Sasha lives in Kyiv. At the beginning of the war, she moved with her mother, her partner, Viktor, her dog and her friend Y., into a building with an underground parking lot. As the sirens and explosions thunder, everyone goes back and forth between the apartment and the basement. Since the beginning of the conflict, the two sisters agreed to keep their diaries for *M*. In France, Olga has caught Covid-19. Back home, Sasha is preparing to return to her home. Both were shocked by the discovery of the horrors committed by Russian forces in Bucha.

Tuesday, March 29th

Olga: I thought I had a bad case of the flu, but it turned out to actually be Covid. The whole package: coughs, fever, headache. I was so exhausted that the virus saw me as an easy target! I went into self-isolation.

Sasha: I woke up early to make breakfast for everyone: eggs, sausages and even (frozen) croissants. I feel good, the weather was beautiful. I sit on the terrace to read a book. I also listen to some podcasts. All day long, I could hear explosions in the distance. Some say that our army is holding its positions while Russian troops are moving to the eastern and southern regions following the talks in Istanbul. Still, we don't really feel relieved, we don't trust the Russians. No way. Life here is going to be hard even if there is no more danger coming from the sky. Vigilance will be the key word for 2022.

Wednesday March 30th

Olga: My life is like being stuck in a vicious circle. The weeks have been repeating themselves non-stop since the beginning of the war. On Mondays, I don't feel well, I want at all costs to bring the people I love here. On Tuesdays, I lose it, especially in the morning. On Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, I pick myself up, I'm just about okay. On Sundays, I start to relapse. Every week, I relive the same emotions and feelings. It's a pretty preposterous phenomenon. Plus this virus is stealing all my strength and energy! All day long, I listen to interviews with analysts, political scientists, journalists. It acts like anti-anxiety medication for me. Otherwise, I think too much, and I don't want to think anymore.

Sasha: This morning, we couldn't get food or even coffee. We don't have electricity anymore. There was an accident apparently unrelated to the military operations. Repairmen are coming to the building today. I deleted Facebook and Instagram from my phone, I'm tired of seeing the same things everywhere. My mind needs privacy and quiet. I have only kept a few chats on Telegram to get news quickly. I force myself to read them only three times a day. I also check *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and, back home, *Ukrayinska Pravda* and *Radio Svoboda*. I also like Tom Cooper's posts, he is a military analyst. I've always been an avid reader of the press. It was part of my job as a public relations specialist. Before the war, I read about ten newspapers a day.

Olga has caught Covid for the first time... I think her body is tired from all the stress, it wasn't able to protect itself. I have already caught it twice despite the vaccines. Here, we have almost forgotten about this virus. I hadn't even thought about it since the beginning of the war. Now it is our turn to ask Olga how she is managing in her struggle against this harrowing disease.

Thursday, March 31st

Olga: This thing is stubborn. I thought I would get better, but I have even less strength than before. Luckily, my boyfriend is here to help me. I am staying isolated in my room. I only think of one thing: Putin's death (with a lower case, I insist). I realize that I am unable to think in anything but black and white at the moment, but I can't do otherwise. They are destroying my country.

They are moving from Kyiv, but on social networks some people say that when you leave they loot all the houses, they steal cars, furniture, appliances, TVs... On Instagram, on Telegram, on the president's account, on official channels of the government or the Kyiv city hall, there are photos, videos of horrible things which everyone reposts. I absolutely have to stop looking at it... I'm getting nauseous and going crazy with all this.

Today I had another "my family needs to leave" crisis. Now I don't hesitate anymore, I write to them. Even though it's getting tiresome and ridiculous, it's become a habit. I am no longer able to think about leaving. When I get better, I'll think about it.

Sasha: Last night we were watching *Captain America* when we heard a deafening and horrible noise. Apparently it was a bomb going off, but we don't know where. I woke up early this morning, I made a little video to wish a friend a happy birthday. He's an architect, he used to live in Kharkiv. They are refugees in Lviv with his wife; he volunteered to join the army.

It smells like spring. I spent all morning in the courtyard with my coffee, listening to the birds singing. I am starting to dream. I want to put on my best outfit, my favorite Bimba Y Lola bag, my sunglasses and the Hermès lipstick Olga gave me for New Year's Eve. I want to go for a walk with my dog in Podil [Kyiv's historic district] while listening to science fiction audio books I love: *Foundation* by Isaac Asimov or *Solaris* by Stanislas Lem. Today, it's just a nice daydream; before, it used to be my reality, my life. Although these are normal life wishes of a young girl from the center of Europe.

Friday, April 1st.

Olga: In the Ukrainian media, I read that the Russians had snatched thousands of people by force to Russia and put them in buses. They might be backing down, but I don't have any trust in them. Zero. Every day humanitarian corridors are agreed upon, but they never keep their word. They shoot buses bringing food aid... and people. At the same time I understand that diplomatic negotiations are the path we must take. Aside from that, I had nightmares.

This damn virus is still here. I have to hold onto the wall to get to the bathroom. I think about the day when I will come back to Kyiv and take my sister, my mother, my father, my grandmother, my aunt and our dog in my arms! It will be the happiest day of my life.

Sasha: Kyiv is starting to come alive again. Restaurants and cafés are opening, businesses seem to be getting used to the new reality. We bought a good bottle of wine for tonight (the sale of alcohol resumed today). We don't do much cooking for the soldiers anymore. Everything is very well organized now. Mom continues to bake her cakes because everyone thinks they're beautiful. I'm starting to think about going back home to my apartment. I have to find a job, resume my projects. Viktor is also trying to restart his architecture business. I set April 10 as the date after which I take my decision. My friend Y., who lives with us, is I think a little tired of us. Viktor and I have made up a little bit. Things are bearable.

I don't find that war brings people together. Maybe it's different when the situation is tougher than ours is. I imagine that it's quite different when you're under the bombs and on the battlefield. Besides that, nothing special. I spent Friday watching Netflix. It was very cold and I crawled under the blankets. There were no sirens, we think it was because Roberta Metsola, the European Parliament president, was visiting. Dad stopped by grandma's house. Everyone is okay. The day passed very quickly, I was glad I could go to bed without hearing the sirens.

Saturday, April 2nd

Olga: I have been to Russia several times in my life. For me, Russian is a native language, like Ukrainian. I have been speaking Russian with my mother and sister since the day I was born. But tonight I remembered one particular trip: when I was 18 or 19, I went there with my Ukrainian choir. I was welcomed into a Moscow family. The mother, father, babushka [grandmother] and daughter were really nice. One day, at the dinner table, the father took me back and told me that my "accent" was very funny. He laughed and added that it was normal for "khokhol"... The informal and contemptuous nickname Russians gave to Ukrainians.

In that moment, I felt like I was considered as someone who was inferior, that I could not pretend to be on their level, to be part of a great people who speaks the real language with the right accent. I remember the feeling of inferiority I felt, and I understood that even in a family of such nice Russians, they would always consider us to be a lesser people. A younger brother who is also a little slow. My paternal grandmother reminded me today that under Stalin they were not allowed to speak Ukrainian. Before that, they were also persecuted: my great-great-grandfather was a landowner, he was deported to Russia and the party stole everything he had. Then our family became poor.

Sasha: Olga woke me up last night at 4 o'clock when she called us to tell us that there were sirens and a risk of rocket attacks. We knew about it of course, it's been the case every single night for 37 days! We know what to do. I don't understand why she doesn't trust us. This morning we went shopping with Y. and Viktor, we even went for a coffee in the city center.

Kyiv is really coming back to life, but for me, the real end will be the Kremlin's fall, the end of autocratic leadership in Russia. Because even when we win, we'll always be under the threat of attack as long as Putin and his criminal gang are in power.

Sunday, April 3rd

Olga: Today, photos of liberated northern Kyiv are showing up all over the social networks... It's horrific. The dead, the dead, the dead. Everywhere on the roads. Tortured. I cry for every soul of my dear compatriots. Inhuman monsters tortured, looted, shot civilians in the back of the head and buried hundreds of them in pits. Reality is horrifying. "This is the price we pay for no longer having any illusions," a friend told me this morning. It is a price that is far too high.

Sasha: Things are okay at home. But what was discovered in Bucha and its region is awful. Today is the darkest day of the whole war.

Monday, April 4th

Olga: When I woke up, I felt a very deep pain in my heart. I went back to immersing myself in the news. All of Ukraine is waiting for reactions from the West after these massacres in Bucha, Irpine and Hostomel. I read that France and Germany are the countries which have sold the most weapons to Russia since 2014. Maybe these contracts were signed before the annexation of Crimea and the EU embargo, but why did they fulfill them?

Sasha: This morning, I'm fighting with Viktor again. We can't seem to talk to each other. Sharing a life with your partner during a war is very hard, even though he's very close to you. We'll go back home at the end of next week, because Y.'s sister is coming here with her family. There will be no more room for all of us. As the situation is starting to clear up, we're going to risk going back home, even if there is no basement, unlike here.

Today, in his former studio, Y. welcomed a family from Ivankiv, a city in the Kyiv region near Bucha... A woman doctor and her two 14-year-old daughters. They have long, knee-length hair. Discovering the pictures of the liberated cities near Kyiv has been an irreversible moment for everyone. We don't know how to live with the fact that human beings can do such things... just for... fun? My God. Today the house was very quiet. We cry without shedding tears.

From now on, I decided not to capitalize "russia" and "russian" any more, not to respect this rule. russians are no longer a people for us. We don't have any respect for them anymore. Since languages are living systems, they must reflect reality.

Elisa Mignot

