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Author

ANNA HALAS

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The Chronicles of the Lost Soul

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ANNA HALAS

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CHRONICLES OF THE LOST SOUL

Anna Halas

Characters:

I-BODY: emotionless, insensitive shell; refers to oneself using third-person pronouns

I-SOUL: emotional and empathic substance; refers to oneself using first-person pronouns.

I-BODY:

On the sixty-fourth of February, the body woke up later than on previous mornings.

The body got out of bed, made coffee, took a sip and, not feeling the taste, put the mug on the table.

Then the body went to the bathroom, looked at itself in the mirror, saw nothing and turned on the tap.

The sound of the water had no effect, so the body didn't even try to take a shower.

The body went outside.

The body heard the birds singing; saw a cherry tree — or maybe it was a sweet cherry? — which intended to bloom; noticed how a squirrel jump overhead; paid attention to how the ducks were loudly quarrelling on the lake nearby.

The body did not react in any way and returned home.

I-SOUL: (*interrupts*)

No, NOT HOME! Just to the house.

I-BODY:

The body has been living in this house for a month. Or maybe a year?

The body has lost all its settings and it is difficult for it to keep track of the days.

But it performs its main functions.

It takes care of three children, whom it carried for nine months under its heart, and then released into this world.

The body feeds children three times a day. Sometimes two or one.

It does the washing-up. It washes children's clothes once they are covered with a layer of dirt.

That's all.

No, not all.

The body works a lot too.

The body can work online and its help is now needed by other bodies.

Helping others saves the body from rusting.

I-SOUL:

Once upon a time, when my body and I made one whole, I decided to become a translator.

Thanks to years of practice, my body can now translate documents for other bodies, meaning people fleeing war, without my intervention.

I-BODY:

The body can work autonomously.

I-SOUL:

I am trying to recall the moment when my body gave up on me.

When did it throw me out like a rabid plague-stricken dog?

Was it on the first day of the war, when bombs were exploding all over Ukraine?

Maybe at that very moment when my confused son came into the bedroom in the morning and announced that there would be no lessons at school because the war had started?
I know for a fact that when my body tried to take the children out of the city, I was no longer in it.

At that moment, I was next to my late great-grandmother, who ritually stroked the red bedspread on our old sofa with her wrinkled hand and told me how she had hidden her small children from the bombings in freshly dug graves in the cemetery in Zhmerynka, covering them with pillows and blankets, because who would drop bombs on the cemetery?

I used to listen to her stories about the war in silence, but now I was asking her for advice: "Grandma, what should I do? How do I protect children from war?"

She was the kindest person I knew in this life.

How did she manage?

How did she manage not to hate humanity after her father had disappeared, and she had been thrown out of their home somewhere in Bila Tserkva by the soldiers of the newly formed Soviet army stationed there, after the world war had driven tanks through her young years, had sent all her brothers and her husband to the grave, after losing her little son because there was no way to treat him... I can't count how many times she had lost her home in order to create it again and again in a new place...

Grandma, how did you manage to get through this and not lose faith and humanity?

I'M LOSING IT...

With each new page of this senseless war, the last drops of my faith are drying up.

Kharkiv, Chernihiv, Kyiv...

The sounds of a siren are heard: Kyiv! Air raid siren!

I-SOUL covers her ears with her hands and squats down. I-BODY stands motionless. The siren stops. I-SOUL gets up.

I-BODY:

The body's tear-producing function is broken.

There was not a single tear shed by it throughout the war.

Sometimes the eyes were covered with wet chaff, but they dried quickly, probably saving moisture, because the body forgets to drink.

The body was not at a loss.

It began to relieve pain through the skin.

With a pimpled face and neck, the body became more like a teenager, especially in the hoodie borrowed from the eldest son, because the body brought things only for children.

I-SOUL:

The house we live in has become a shelter for refugees.

People stop here temporarily to take a breath of air and move on.

Away from death, hunger and suffering.

Most of them do not know where they are going, but they understand where they came from.

Behind them, there are destroyed houses, tortured relatives, the fear of death, and ahead - the unknown.

With most of them, we wouldn't meet in peaceful life.

We lived in different bubbles that never met in the flight of life.

The war stuck red-hot needles into our big and small bubbles and brought us all to the ground with a thud.

Some were lucky enough to fall on the haystack and remain unharmed, some had their ribs crushed, and some were torn to pieces.

All of us, like blind moles, will crawl on the earth in search of a warm human soul, whom we can hug and feel alive.
Regardless of who one was in the past, it became entirely irrelevant. Now we are soulmates.

I-BODY:

The eldest son shaved half his head.

He approached the body and stood near it for a long time, hoping that the body would notice the changes and react.

The body did not notice and did not react.

It was washing the plate.

I-SOUL:

If I had been around, I would have definitely paid attention.

Perhaps, I would have scolded that the unshaven strands were sticking out.

Perhaps, I would have praised him for his creativity.

But I was far away at that time: in Bucha, in Irpen, in Hostomel.

I looked at all the atrocities that took place there and screamed in pain and helplessness.

I-BODY:

The body hugged the youngest daughter, who fell and hit herself hard.

The daughter hugged the body tightly and cried.

I-SOUL:

I listened to her sobs and thought of those children who would never be protected by such a soothing mother's body again.

The sounds of a siren are heard: Lviv! Air raid siren!

I-SOUL covers her ears with her hands and squats down. I-BODY stands motionless.

I-SOUL:

Today, for the first time during the entire war, the body was forced to walk the streets of the city. I had to be close to it because the body cannot be controlled by automatic settings in a new place. Without me, it would have been under the wheels of some white jeep in an instant, and then what was the point of saving it from the war?

While my body and I walked down the street and looked around, I caught myself thinking that the colour white annoyed me.

How can you be dressed in white now?

The world should be mourning every day, and not put on white coats or walk in white boots on the dusty roads, while in Mariupol, there is no undamaged spot left on the torn body of the city.

The trees are also beginning to bloom, and for some reason, with white flowers. They should be covered with red withered flowers, and their trunks should be covered with crimson resin.

But no! White coats! White flowers!

I-BODY:

"Mom, can you laugh?" asks the youngest daughter.

"I can," answers the body.

"Show me how," insists the little one.

The body tries to reproduce joyful laughter but does not find the necessary function in its program. The body makes a sound: honk – honk – honk.

"No, that's what geese say, not mothers."

I-SOUL:

We are lucky that we were born far from the border with Mordor.

It's just a coincidence that allowed us to survive in the meat grinder of war, for which I feel guilty. They say it's normal to feel guilty about being a survivor... Survivor's guilt... Let it be...

In front of me, there is a woman who miraculously escaped with her son from the hell in Chernihiv.

My body treats her with lunch while I hug her tightly and listen intently.

I am ready to listen to her as much as she wants to talk.

It's three o'clock. For the fifth time, a reheated lunch is on the table in front of her.

We did not believe until the last moment that they would come to kill us.

Even when cannonades could be heard on the next street.

We thought they would pass by our house and go on.

We sat in the basement without light at a temperature of -5 for three weeks.

We learned to distinguish the sounds of different rockets.

There was almost no chance that we would manage to escape.

At first, it was very scary, but then we became indifferent.

It is impossible to be afraid all the time.

Bombs were dropped from planes several times a day according to schedule.

The rocket hit the neighbour's kitchen but did not explode.

So it is still there.

You see, this is a piece of a rocket that fell nearby.

It flew above my ear and stuck in the wall.

I took it as a souvenir. I probably have a guardian angel.

I feel sorry for my son. He stopped talking.

I look at her boy and I want to howl like a wolf. He is the same age as my son. How can he live with it now?

The sounds of a siren are heard: Chernihiv! Air raid siren!

I-SOUL covers her ears with her hands and squats down. I-BODY stands motionless.

I-BODY:

The middle daughter draws a castle.

"Mom, do you like my drawing?"

"Yeah," the body answers.

"Would you like to live in such a castle?"

"Yeah."

"And how many rooms would you like to have?"

"Yeah."

"And if our house is bombed, where will we live?"

"Yeah."

"Can you hear me?"

"Yeah."

"Mom's program froze again."

The body silently hugs the daughter. This is all that the body is capable of.

I-SOUL:

Kramatorsk! Railway station! A toy horse covered in blood!

God, how do you allow this?

I'm falling apart.

How can parents live through it if they are alive?

At this moment, I am afraid to look in the direction of my children.

It's good that the body lives its own life and at this moment, it can hug its daughters, who draw fairy-tale castles with yellow and blue flags on the towers.

I-BODY:

Today, the body has a lot to do.

Another group of people arrived. They are hungry and tired.

I-SOUL:

A huge man sits in front of me and cries like a small child.

It was not the war that made him cry, but an old woman who wanted to give him the last food, because she was going to die soon anyway, and he still had to live to raise grandchildren.

A former Afghan soldier, a war invalid, almost blind in one eye, was going to his daughter.

He wanted to go to war, but he was not accepted.

He says that orcs do not know how to fight and that their command officers are stupid.

And I believe him. I want to believe him.

I-BODY:

The body listens to a concert in Stockholm.

The orchestra performs "Plyne Kacha". On the screen, there is footage of Russian atrocities in Ukraine.

Everyone cries and gives a standing ovation.

Collective catharsis.

They were relieved and they went home with a sense of complicity in the grief.

The body just states the facts.

The sounds of a siren are heard: Odesa! Air raid siren!

I-SOUL covers her ears with her hands and squats down. I-BODY stands motionless.

I-SOUL:

The world becomes black and white during the war.

A simple dichotomy works: you are either alive or dead; either a friend or a foe; either human or not.

The Orcs of Mordor send trophy gifts to their wives and moms.

Some Lyuska from Muhosransk will wear the bloody panties of a raped Ukrainian woman.

What can we do with it?

I would prefer not to hate anyone.

This feeling is not mine, it is alien to me.

In my life before the war, I never hated anyone, I found excuses even for those who hurt me on purpose.

Now hatred drains all the blood, all the energy and love that I should give to my children, my husband, my parents and my friends.

It filled every atom of my soul and, like the invaders of Mordor, expelled everyone who lived there before.

Will it always be like this?

Will I never be able to restore the integrity of my soul?

Will this occupation with hatred continue until the end of my days, whenever that end comes?

I-BODY:

Today, it was warm and the body went outside.

Before the war, the body loved such days.

The body always wanted to sit in the forest under a pine tree and write.
It thought it was very pleasant.
Now the body sits under a huge pine tree.
Fingers quickly run across the keyboard.
The body does not feel anything, and for some reason, even the rays of the sun do not warm it.
Every day, the body listens to many stories from people fleeing war, but cannot write about them. It can only record what it sees around.

I-SOUL:

I am connected to this world with one thread.
Sometimes it thins and almost breaks off, sometimes, on the contrary, it becomes so rough and strong that it makes me believe that this planet still has a chance to be saved.
This thread is complete strangers who reach out to you and pull you out of the abyss.
It is not so important whether they let you into their home, bring homemade pies to your children, or just stand by when you howl because of helplessness and the impossibility of changing something.
This thread stretches to me and from me, connects me with those who happen to be nearby by chance, but remain in life forever.
Someday, I will tell my grandchildren about the war, as my great-grandmother told me. I will write about those stories that were told to me in the evenings by complete strangers, who turned out to be so close. Now, I can only write about what I feel at this moment. Everything else hurts too much and does not allow me to express myself in words.
Also, I will definitely talk about Saint Peter, who let us into his home, about Saint Anna and Basil, who surrounded us with their care, and about many other Saints who gave us light and did not allow us to fall into eternal darkness.
And maybe one day, when we return home, my body will allow my soul to return as well.
And then we will hug the children together and try to find the lost laughter.
My grandmother often laughed, so maybe I can too?