



I Will Die in a Foreign Land

Kalani Pickhart

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The 2014 Crimean war becomes the backdrop of a more personal drama in Kalani Pickhart's novel *I Will Die in a Foreign Land*.

In late 2013, Ukraine explodes into political violence, which is made worse when Russia annexes the Crimean peninsula early the next year. In Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, injured protesters converge on St. Michael's Monastery for protection and care at the height of the conflict. Among those working or sheltering at the church are four individuals whose lives become entwined in ways they never could have predicted. They are Katya, an American doctor who seeks to forget one tragedy by burying herself in another; Misha, a widower who keeps falling for women he cannot have; Slava, an activist who begins a relationship with a woman journalist; and The Captain, a mysterious old man who was injured while playing piano for the protesters. Each is scarred by betrayal, lost chances, and premature deaths, but they still struggle to find purposes for their lives, as well as the people they are meant to be with.

The narrative is interspersed with established facts about the protests and Ukrainian history, as well as with poems about past atrocities and lists of victims who died in the war at its center. This contextual work puts the characters' troubles in perspective—not by diminishing their pain, but by allowing them to be part of a tragic but proud national heritage. The novel shows that Ukraine and its people have suffered at the hands of a bevy of invaders; its leads are the latest in a long line of people who loved, lost, evolved, and endured there.

The historical novel *I Will Die in a Foreign Land* is a love letter to Ukraine, its people, and its ability to rise up from piled catastrophes.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (November / December 2021)

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