



★ **The Rooster House: My Ukrainian Family Story**

Victoria Belim

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The Rooster House, Victoria Belim's poignant memoir, unveils the Ukrainian roots of a family mystery.

Born in Ukraine, Belim moved to the United States with her family when she was fifteen. Decades later, while living in Brussels, she still felt lost between worlds. Russia's 2014 invasion and annexation of Crimea, and reports of the deaths and disappearances of Ukrainian defenders, called to mind the 1930s disappearance of her uncle Nikodim, who was taken in the night and never seen or spoken of again. Determined to learn the truth of her family's past, she left for Ukraine despite Russian troop mobilization along the border. Along with her grandmother's warm welcome and the kindness of neighbors, she encountered a legacy of trauma and fear. "The stories I sought for comfort fell apart in my hands," she wrote.

Thwarted in her painstaking search for clues to Nikodim's disappearance, Belim turned to the much-feared "Rooster House," its mocking name an allusion to the mythical sirens flanking its doors. The beautiful mansion had housed the KGB. Somewhere within was the truth of Nikodim's fate—and the possibility of healing for her family.

Belim's book, and her work with Ukrainian refugees in Brussels, honors Ukraine's vibrant culture and the resilience of its people. Its tumultuous history includes the Bolshevik Revolution, Civil War, the Red Terror, forced collectivization, the 1932-1933 Great Famine, the purges of 1937-39, two world wars, political and economic difficulties, and a continuing fight for the nation's survival. Her book speaks of hope, in time with those Ukrainians who continue to plant their gardens and await the arrival of "the cucumber whisperer" whose spell guarantees a bountiful harvest.

The Rooster House is an intimate, down-to-earth memoir that reveals the corrosive effects of secrets and the healing power of truth.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July / August 2023)

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