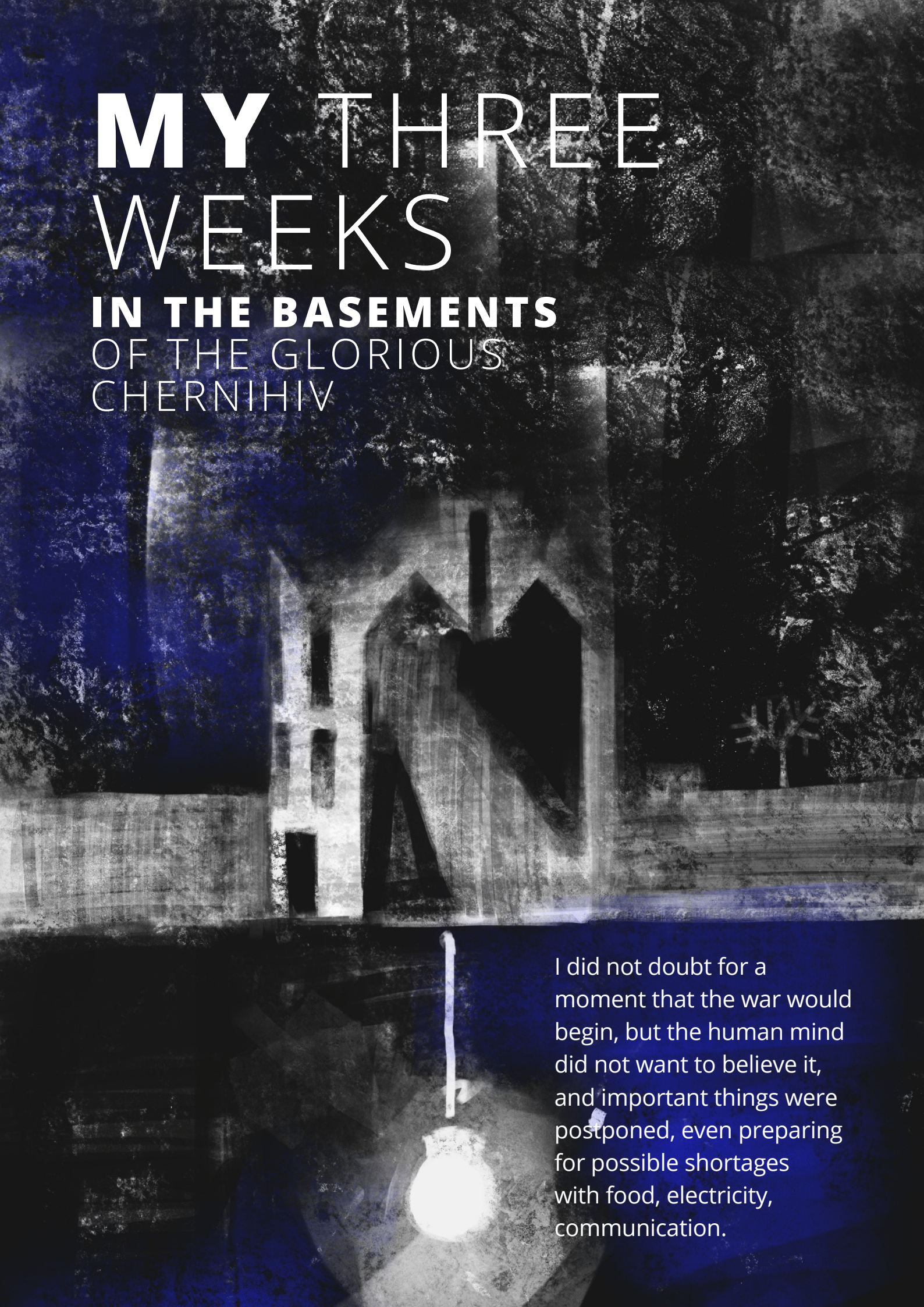


# MY THREE WEEKS

**IN THE BASEMENTS**  
OF THE GLORIOUS  
CHERNIHIV



I did not doubt for a moment that the war would begin, but the human mind did not want to believe it, and important things were postponed, even preparing for possible shortages with food, electricity, communication.

On that day, February 24, I woke up early, at 4 o'clock in the morning, I was anxious. A cousin from Kharkiv called and said that they were bombed: «Sveta, this is a war!» I turned on the TV and saw terrible footage in the news — Ukrainian cities being destroyed. There was a daze. But for some reason there was no fear or despair.

Then I decided to stock up a little and withdraw cash in the bank, because I didn't have lots of cash. But I went looking for ATM on the next day. There were queues. But wherever I was, there was no panic. People were quietly buying things, doing their things. Some were preparing to leave the town, other were stocking up for a difficult life in the city. I was among the latter. I did not want to turn into a stranger in an unusual situation. I thought that I could be useful to people in our city, because our NGO has always helped people.

My son's family decided to leave two days after the shelling with «Hrad». They came to me and said I had 2 hours to gather my things, but... I refused. It was a difficult decision for me, but I felt that my city needed it. Little did I know then. I couldn't even imagine these barbarians would bomb and destroy cities and kill people so brutally.

For the first time, I got afraid of bombing and shelling the next day. The 5-storey panel house was shaking, the glass in the windows was ringing. I climbed into the bathroom, laid on the mat and prayed. We were shelled with «Hrady». I stocked up on water, charged all the devices, prepared for the difficulties of wartime, I understood then we could be occupied. But I didn't leave then. I taped the windows with scotch, turned off everything, and prepared for wartime life.

On the next day my inlaws came and took me to their large private house on the outskirts of the city with a solid large basement. I took my cat, guinea pig, a few things — and left.

We could never imagine this area near the Epicenter store would be the epicenter of the fighting. The shelling was constant. We learned to identify incoming and outgoing shelling. First, we were running to the basement with the first shells. On the first day there was heavy shelling. Something around our house rumbled loudly several times. The ground was shaking and it felt like the house would fall apart. I realized that any time the shell could destroy our house. We were looking at each other and praying.

WHEN WE CAME OUT  
AFTER THE SHELLING, WE  
SAW THAT **SHELLS HIT  
HOUSES ON THE STREET,  
20 METERS FROM US AND A  
LITTLE FURTHER.**

Several people died and houses burned to the ground. We were sorry for the people, their homes. Some of them have been building them for many years and in one minute everything has been destroyed. The scary thing was that the dead could not be reached. The dead remained in the destroyed houses. Firefighters could not come, it was unrealistic — the whole city was on fire.

The problem was that we had a lot of animals, but there was no food for them. One day we went out into the city, and to our delight, the pet store was selling out. The queue was enormous, people were

talking about the destruction, casualties, looting of shops, but everyone was calm, no one left the queue despite the shelling nearby — because the animals needed to be fed.

Many people walked around the city, there were checkpoints, wires, trolleybus lines, broken glass, burnt house windows were lying around. I walked and thought, «Once upon a time there was life here, people dreamed, made plans, and now the world has turned upside down.»

## **BUT THE WORST THING HAPPENED WHEN PLANES STARTED FLYING AND DROPPING BOMBS ON THE CITY. I AM STILL AFRAID OF THEIR SOUND, I'M TRAUMATIZED.**

How did we live? It was cold because the electricity was turned off, the boiler was not working, and the generator was used every two days to maintain refrigerators and charge mobile phones. The fireplace was saving us. We cooked food and kept it warm with it. It is good that we had enough firewood. The sirens were blaring all the time, but we didn't always go down to the basement because it was so cold there. But even then we tried to joke, played cards, solved scanwords, cleaned and arranged the basement. We were collecting puzzles with my in-law Zina (we never managed to complete them). But we joked a lot, supported each other, understood that together we could survive.

The only source of information was the radio, because mobile communication often disappeared, and eventually disappeared

altogether. Our relatives in Transcarpathia (where they received shelter) were in despair, because they knew that we were in a dangerous place, and there was no connection with us. The news from Chernihiv was disappointing. Yes, we saw it ourselves.

Every day there was destruction. But the worst thing was the enemy planes dropping bombs on Chernihiv and black smoke and fires approaching us closer and closer. There were already a lot of casualties, the shops were almost closed, we understood that in the near future our stocks would run out, and the front line was getting closer to us. We learned to distinguish when our artillery was working and when the "orcs" were bombing us. Surprisingly, when our people were shelling them, it was not scary. With each our shot we were saying: «Sons, just beat the hell out of these maggots.»

I learned to sleep wearing winter shoes, jacket and hat: firstly, because it was cold, and secondly, so I could pick up in seconds and run to the basement. Every morning I heard drones flying, explosions, and then planes coming and explosions of terrible force. With each passing day, the internal tension grew, there was a feeling of irreversibility and the possibility of death.

Of course, fatalism was present all the time, as the frequency of shelling increased, food and firewood became scarce, and planes with enemy drones became more and more arrogant every day. Sometimes, there was a feeling that this was not happening to us, it was all a nightmare. The weather was so sunny and beautiful, and all around was war, smoke from fires, and destruction.

Particularly the news of the war and the atrocities of Russian executioners were

frightening. The outskirts of the city were completely destroyed, many died. It was very painful for the people, for our beautiful city. So many destroyed trees, for which we fought before the war. The city was surrounded by the Russians. Our glorious soldiers, without sparing their lives, defended the borders of Chernihiv and destroyed the Russian invaders. Our governor V. Chaus and mayor V. Atroshenko with their teams and volunteers, and caring Chernihiv residents did everything possible and impossible, and most importantly, their daily videos with updates calmed me down. I believed in victory.

What was the hardest thing for me? My civic inaction. I wanted to help people, the city, but I lived on the outskirts, and it was impossible to get to the center, where work was in full swing, because of the distance and constant shelling. For me, an activist, it was unbearable. After all, there was so much interesting work before that, there was even more ahead, and at one point everything fell apart. Life began with a new scary page.

It was important for me to maintain personal hygiene and cleanliness of the room, although it was difficult in those conditions. By no means I could ever stop believing or taking care of myself.

At the same time, all three of us came up with the thought it was time to evacuate with all our animals, because the city was almost surrounded, the «road of life» was permanently shelled by the “orcs” (Note: This is how Ukrainians call Russian soldiers) and there was a risk the bridge could be blown (which happened exactly two days after our departure).

We left, drove for a long time, almost 24 hours, experienced problems with diesel fuel, but everything got resolved. We drove to Vynohradovo in the Transcarpathian region, received shelter, and then my grandson and I went to Spain, where we now live in a wonderful and responsive family.

But this is a completely different story. In forced emigration, everything goes according to the classic script: guilt, inability to help my compatriots, because I'm not an independent person now, no money, work, knowledge of the language. Life in a foreign language environment, without relatives and friends is another test. But they are alive and well. Every morning I wake up and read the news from the front, Ukraine, our city. It is very difficult for me to accept all the atrocities, the destruction of our country, but I am inspired by all our people. We cannot be defeated.

I am still afraid of loud noises, noises and the hum of planes. I do not know what my life will be like, where I will be, but I want this horror to end as soon as possible and peace to come.

I believe that Ukraine will win thanks to our glorious and courageous soldiers (women and men), volunteers and all those who care about our victory every day!

We will win! Everything will be Ukraine! Glory to Ukraine!

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