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KYLA'S

WAR

DECLASSIFIED

1939 ~ 1945

Memories of an Uncertain Future

Kyla Jankowska

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INTRODUCTION

Kyla's War is a one-hour dramatic action/adventure series that brings into focus a time in history when the world has gone mad.

Tense, precarious, and always moments away from disaster, a twelve-year-old girl leads a life she never intended to lead but one which has been repurposed by her immutable desire for revenge.

The Nazis have invaded Kyla's beloved country but her family is safe for the moment because her surgeon father is cooperating with the invaders to provide world-class medical care for them.

Kyla, on the other hand, has formed a one-girl Resistance and in her quest for revenge continues to wreak havoc on the occupying Nazi forces. And because she has been so successful, she has now managed to recruit a band of like-minded kids and has enlisted the aid and support of several grownups as well.

It is at this point that we join *Kyla's War*.



THEATRE of OPERATION

Massed on the border between Poland and Germany, the Nazis concocted a preposterous deception wherein they faked attacks on German-owned radio stations near and along the border, disguising sick or mentally ill patients from nearby asylums as German citizens and themselves as Polish soldiers. They murdered the “radio station operators” and blamed Poland for the attacks.

This gave them a pretext for invading the country on September 1st, 1939. There is a classic misunderstanding that the Polish army, fighting exclusively on horseback, was quickly overwhelmed as a result of their woefully inadequate defense. In fact, the Poles were master horsemen, excellent marksmen, and literally rode rings around the invading soldiers. Their defeat was not a result of “quality.” They were overwhelmed by “quantity” – the sheer size of the invading German army.

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It is likely KYLA JANKOWSKA, age twelve and the middle of three daughters of a wealthy Polish surgeon, would have sat out the occupation in the comfort of her sumptuous home.

But the young man who we would today consider her “boyfriend” was assassinated by the Nazis for his role in trying to stop the invasion. Stefan Kaminski was only fourteen and most – probably including Kyla herself – considered that when they got older, he and Kyla would marry.

Kyla was devastated and vowed to exact revenge for Stefan's murder.



THE DILEMMA

So, armed with a cantankerous WWI bolt-action rifle, Kyla begins a one-girl “Resistance” battle against the occupying Nazi forces. An excellent horsewoman and fortunate to have a stable of horses to choose from, Kyla is nearly infinitely mobile.

The problem is that, like any child, she can't exactly go to her parents and tell them what she's doing. Not if she wants to keep doing it. She is aware of the danger but, like anyone her age, believes herself to be invincible.

So in order to keep raising havoc with the Nazis and, in the process, search for her dear friend's assassin, Kyla must lead a double life. She knows that if she's caught, not only would her family lose their relatively unmolested lifestyle, it's likely her parents and sisters would be imprisoned... or worse.

But revenge and hatred of the Nazis is a powerful motivator. Except it turns out that Kyla has a trusting heart which does not make for a totally reliable clandestine warrior.

To further complicate matters, the “real” Resistance catches wind of Kyla's exploits and begins a crusade to stop her. They're worried she could expose the far broader and potentially more important efforts they're undertaking.

And they don't trust Kyla. When her father agreed to provide medical care to the Nazis, his standing in the community dropped substantially. People understand he's doing it to save his family, not to mention his lavish estate, but there is no avoiding the fact: He's helping the Nazis.

So is Kyla really part of the Resistance or is she – and possibly even her parents – undercover operatives and informants for the Gestapo?



THE STORY

In the early days of WWII, a young girl leads a dangerous double life in which she risks not only her own life, but also the lives of everyone she holds dear.

Just a few months ago, Kyla was living the pampered life as befits the daughter of a world-class surgeon. Her castle-like home is large enough to host a party for several hundred guests. Kyla, her little sister, OLA, and her teenage sister, ELENA, want for nothing. The problem is: It's December, 1939. And Poland, where Kyla lives, was overrun by the Nazis only a couple of months ago.

Many of her and her family's friends were killed in the invasion. But it is the brutal and senseless murder of her oldest and dearest friend, along with the friend's entire family that outrages Kyla beyond all reason. So Kyla decides she must lead a double life. To her parents, classmates, and remaining friends she is the same perky young "princess" she's always been. Optimistically full of life. Attending parties. Practicing dressage on her sleek horse. Laughing with her friends.

But to the invading German army and the fiendish Gestapo, Kyla becomes the most feared, hated, and vigorously hunted Resistance fighter ever known.

Kyla's claim to fame is her uncanny marksmanship and near mystical ability to sense impending danger. But she's a wisp of a girl and ill suited to the life she's chosen. And leading this sort of double life is truly exhausting. It forces her to go from ambushing a Nazi Major to a party hosted by her parents for some of the very same German officers, then out to the railroad tracks to try to blow up a train – all in the same day. And any injury she might receive would immediately give her away.



THE STORY (cont'd)

Aware of both her delicacy and her fierce determination is her small circle of friends – some near her own age, some grownups. And each knows that the life expectancy of a Resistance fighter is often measured in hours or even minutes. And because so many of them are so young, they often make potentially deadly mistakes.

And Kyla is continuously at odds with the “elder statesmen” of the Resistance who fear her brash and often ill-conceived adventures will soon get all of them killed.

The German Army knows there is a dangerous and heretofore successful group of individuals creating a series of continuously escalating problems for them, but they have no idea who they are. And they definitely don't know they're pursuing children. Even executions of local townspeople fail to produce their antagonists and the German high command is becoming impatient.

In the series' Pilot Episode, “*Snow Angels*,” Kyla and her friends ambush a high-ranking SS Officer but are nearly caught in the process. Later, they attempt to blow up a train, but fumble the detonator in the cold and fight – like the children they are – over whose fault it is, even as the train races toward them. At the end, Kyla sights down the barrel of her rifle only to discover she's aiming at the young German officer who befriended her at a family party.

As the series progresses, Kyla is pulled deeper and deeper into the dangerous life she's chosen, knowing full well that every time she goes out, she risks not just her own life, but the lives of her family and friends. Is this any way for a young girl to grow up?



THE STORY (cont'd)

Because Kyla's War is closely tied to historical events, should the series continue, we will see Kyla becoming involved in sheltering downed pilots and helping them to escape. We will experience the Holocaust from Kyla's perspective and have her undertake that cause. Poland has a seacoast and was home to many significant scientists. It is likely Kyla would find herself active in moving people in and out of the country.

We will also come to learn that while Kyla has been keeping her life in the Resistance a secret from her parents, they in turn have been keeping their own involvement in that same Resistance a secret from everyone – including their staff and family.

We will watch as a succession of Oberführers whose job it was to manage and contain the Resistance are sent back to Berlin in disgrace and essentially disappeared. That particular job has become the least desirable assignment. So when the latest “victim” turns out to be a Major highly placed in the Gestapo and who has a long ruthless history of identifying and eliminating his enemies, the Resistance, and especially Kyla, is in serious trouble.

Kyla may have just met her match.

Kyla's War presents a group of ill-equipped children and adults who are forced to develop skills they never knew they had in a desperate attempt to free their land from its Nazi captors. It raises the timeless question: How far would you (or could you) go to rescue your country and the people in it?



STRUCTURE

For the purpose of this presentation, we will view *Kyla's War* as a ten-episode limited series with franchise potential. As such, this first season will be structured much like a theatrical feature. However the ending will remain somewhat ambiguous in that our main character will come to both an operational and a philosophical “fork in the road” and must make a choice. That choice will be obvious if the series continues into additional seasons. It will remain undetermined if the series ends after the tenth episode. Either way will provide a satisfying experience for our audience.

ACT ONE (episodes 1-3) will introduce us to Kyla and her strengths and weaknesses. We will see an unusually young girl from a wealthy family who is leading a double life as a clandestine Resistance fighter. We will meet her young accomplices and grownup supporters. We will see how far Kyla must go to keep her exploits a secret. We will experience the frustration of the occupying Nazi forces and see the extent to which Kyla is upsetting their plans.

ACT TWO (episodes 4-7) will show the Nazi high command becoming increasingly frustrated and escalate their efforts. They will install yet a fourth officer to manage the hunt for Kyla, only this time it is a member of the Gestapo. We will see growing distrust over a new member of Kyla's gang. We will see Kyla have more and more difficulty in keeping her exploits a secret from her parents. The “grownup Resistance” will come down hard on Kyla and demand she stop. Kyla will continue to hunt for Stefan's killer(s) but gradually begin to realize finding the culprits is a far more difficult and dangerous undertaking than she ever imagined. But in the attempt, Kyla will gradually come to understand her efforts to thwart the Nazis have a far greater significance than personal revenge.

ACT THREE (episodes 8-10) will have Kyla closing in on the person she thinks killed her friend, Stefan. But when her beloved Hermann, her family estate's caretaker, is taken in for questioning and ultimately held prior to being shipped off to Berlin, Kyla plans a bold rescue mission. In the process both she and Jozef are wounded and ironically must avoid the one person who could help them – Kyla's father. While her parents' involvement in the Resistance is only hinted at, Kyla is now forced to decide: Stop everything and simply be the adored young princess or go back into the fight and dramatically increase her efforts.

TONE & STYLE

The pacing of *Kyla's War* will vary from intense to pastoral. The importance of that is the desire to contrast what Kyla's life *could be*, had her country not been invaded, versus what her life has become. Much of what the Resistance fighters accomplish takes place at night. So the rich visual contrasts and dramatic reveals possible in such an environment will serve to heighten the viewing experience.

I feel the series could be filmed in one of two very different styles:

1. Lush color and lighting, often reminiscent of the Dutch Masters and/or Rembrandt, or...
2. Grainy and gritty black & white, reflecting some of the war footage from the era.

I know that color is way more appealing, but I somehow keep seeing this series in black & white. Most folks who were young at the time remember WWII as "black & white" because the bulk of the feature films about that period, coupled with the on-scene footage which made it onto the weekly newsreels shown in theatres was black & white.

The soundtrack should be modern but referential to the period from the early 1930s to the mid-1940s. Although *Kyla's War* is an action/adventure series, it has strong dramatic overtones and the music should reflect that. Songs from the period should be included and should inform the overall score.

Kyla's War should also provide a rich auditory experience beyond its music score. The level of intrigue requiring much activity "in the shadows" offers an opportunity to tell the story with sound as well as with visuals.

As well, *Kyla's War* is an ideal series to film in Eastern Europe – Hungary, for example – where production costs may be lower and in-period locations are still plentiful. That also opens the door to the possibility of an international cast.



SUSPENSE

The suspense which saturates *Kyla's War* comes both from the knowledge of the historical stakes on a global level and the visceral experience of being “on the ground” with many of the key players who have been relegated to obscurity in the history texts.

Like the story of *Romeo & Juliet*, we all know how WWII ends. We know who the players are and what they did or did not do. However this knowledge does not diminish our anxiety over those events. So, too, with *Kyla's War*.

Because the series is a glimpse into the more-or-less microscopic world taking place during a worldwide armed conflict, we will get to experience the joys, sorrows, successes, and failures in a far more personal form. In many ways, *Kyla's War* will humanize the conflict in ways which have been gradually disappearing.

Kyla and her band of youthful Resistance fighters are at constant odds with the adult Resistance fighters. The kids are seen as impulsive, disorganized, and lacking in all the necessary skills. Of course, we will quickly discover that's far from the truth.

Kyla is clearly seeking revenge. Her dearest friend, Stefan, an older boy who may very well have become Kyla's love interest as she grew older, was executed along with his immediate family. Kyla could easily bask in the easy life provided by her surgeon father, a man who chose to cater to the Nazi's medical needs rather than risk losing his family and extensive property.

We should wonder why he does this and also if he, too, may be leading a double life. Is Kyla's father subversively engaged in battling the occupying German army?

The revenge motif should be the cause of problems for Kyla and others (as a result). Revenge can make someone blind to reality and Kyla is no exception.

Kyla is not physically strong. She compensates with having developed skills – her extraordinary marksmanship, for example. She also has an uncanny sense of approaching danger, though not always exactly what that danger is.

THE KIDS

KYL A JANKOWSKA is twelve and the middle child of three daughters. She has been formally trained in competitive horseback riding and informally trained in marksmanship. Up until the Nazi invasion, Kyla enjoyed the pampered lifestyle which befits the daughter of a world class surgeon. She is principled and likes things the way she likes them. But she is far from “spoiled.” She adores her younger sister and endures her older sibling. Kyla had grown extremely close to Stefan, an older boy, whose death at the hands of the invading army has ended up sending Kyla on a quest for revenge. She is quietly confident and is turning out to be a surprising and dedicated leader. As her desire for revenge becomes less important compared to her need to save her country and protect her family and friends, she will grow into a young woman whose daring exploits will be read about in history books for decades to come.

JOZEF LASKA is fourteen and the oldest member of Kyla's band of Resistance fighters. He is the same age as Stefan was and both were good friends. He is wary of getting too close to Kyla, lest she think he's trying to take Stefan's place. Though we suspect that's exactly what he'd like to do. His conflicting emotions often put him and Kyla at odds and he feels she takes far too many unnecessary risks. Nevertheless, Jozef constantly watches out for Kyla and tries a bit too hard to keep her safe. And in doing that, he will eventually put his own life at risk in a way which may end badly.

JAN NOWAK is eleven and the most agreeable and quiet Resistance fighter. He is very much like the middle child in a large family who is often overlooked. Though he can deal with being thought of that way, there is some concern over how much anger and resentment may be bubbling beneath his calm surface facade. He is perhaps a bit too easy to control and like a dormant volcano, no one really knows when or even if he might erupt.

LUBEC MALINOWSKI is ten and the youngest member of Kyla's gang of disruptors. Always ready for a fight, Lubec often needs someone to calm him down. He may be a bit too young to fully understand the seriousness of the activities the Resistance engages in. His belief in his invincibility often puts him in “hero mode”, thus becoming a danger to himself and everyone else. Kyla always tries to give him seeming important things to do but Lubec too often tries to extend his reach way beyond his grasp.

THE KIDS (cont'd)

ELENA JANKOWSKA is sixteen and Kyla's older sister. Very much the teenager, Elena has chosen the “middle ground” and often chides Kyla for her bravado. Elena is very much interested in boys but the invasion has severely limited her freedom. She resents the ease with which Kyla can gain the interest of a boy without seeming to even try. Even though she believes she is all-knowing with respect to affairs of the heart, Elena has yet to learn that what is so appealing about her sister is not her looks – though Kyla is attractive – but rather her control, her confidence, and the fact she often comes across as mature beyond her years. This dilemma often turns into jealousy which can lead to far more serious problems for Kyla than mere romantic discord. Despite all this, Kyla manages to enlist Elena's aid on several occasions and there is some question about whether or not Kyla appreciates the risks to her wellbeing and even her very life Elena takes.

OLA JANKOWSKA is six and is Kyla's adored little sister. Ola looks exactly like a younger version of Kyla – which is another reason Elena may resent Kyla – and the two bonded long ago when Kyla would wheel Ola in her pram in the park. Kyla worries about the sort of world Ola is growing up in and that worry adds to the fire of Kyla's resolve. She is incredibly protective of Ola and though twice her age, Kyla and Ola seem to share a commonality which Elena does not. The need to protect Ola will end up getting Kyla into quite a bit of trouble.

Zinaida Portnova, 17



Masha Bruskina, 17



THE NEW KID

When thirteen-year-old HARALD GURSKI seems to evolve out of thin air, begging to join Kyla's Resistance gang, everyone is suspicious. Jozef is immediately jealous and the presence of a seeming intruder makes everyone nervous. Harald says his family fled to the country from Warsaw and claims he has "his reasons" for wanting to fight the Nazis. Kyla realizes her small group is over worked and over tired and one more person could make a huge difference. Nevertheless, Harald remains a suspicious addition.

THE NAZIS

OBERLEUTNANT KLAUS VOLKER, late thirties, is Kyla's proximate nemesis. He is a career officer in the Wehrmacht. He has been given the task of hunting down and capturing or killing the rascal who has been creating havoc with the occupying forces. Lt. Volker and his superiors believe they are searching for an older teen boy and are, for the present, completely unaware of Kyla or her involvement in the Resistance.

KURT DORFMANN is a nineteen-year-old junior officer who has taken a fancy to Kyla after encountering her at one of her family's parties. He is a planner and a schemer and plays the "long game." Seven years her elder, Kurt nevertheless knows a good thing when he sees it. Kyla's family money, her father's prestige, and Kyla's seeming lack of child-like behavior provide a strong attractant. Also, an age difference of this magnitude is not altogether unheard of during this time period. While Kurt fully realizes Kyla is certainly not yet of a marrying age, he, as always, looks to the future.

MAJOR ARNOLT SCHMIDT is second in command of the occupying forces in Poland. Lt. Volker is under his command and Volker's lack of success in putting an end to the Resistance is now reflecting badly on Maj. Schmidt. Schmidt is the third officer to be assigned this task and would prefer to not join his predecessors – wherever they may be. Because of this, he will continue to escalate the hunt for Resistance members, especially this new and elusive trouble maker, throughout the series. If he fails in this, it is more than likely the Nazis will reassign the task to the Gestapo which will severely escalate the danger for Kyla.

NOTE: More characters will likely be added to this roster as the series develops.



THE RESISTANCE

FEODOR RAMAN was born in Hungary and grew up on a farm as the eldest of seven children. For most of his life, his parents were stretched to their limit working the land, so Feodor became the operational “father figure” to his six younger siblings. So it is no wonder that the now sixty-year-old squire should take it upon himself to lead the Polish Resistance.

HERMANN STURM, seventies, is the caretaker of the Jankowska family estate. Born in Berlin, he is a formally-trained and talented painter and sculptor and possesses a unique understanding of the Nazi psyche. In fact, his twin brother, Artur, is still in Germany and an enthusiastic supporter of the Nazis. Hermann is a key player in the Resistance and is cautiously aware of Kyla's exploits. He keeps this knowledge from Kyla's parents as well as members of the “real Resistance” for many reasons (see below).

DR. HENRI JANKOWSKA is father to Kyla, Elena, and Ola and husband to Mara. He is a world-renown surgeon who has developed unique procedures and published many works. He is respected for the physician he is and though quite wealthy, continues to contribute to the wellbeing of his community. However, he has currently fallen much out of favor because of his decision to minister to the medical needs of the occupying forces – in particular, the officers and their families. Kyla's father endures this diminished stature as best he can, all the while concealing his own involvement in the Resistance. Even Kyla is unaware of her father's clandestine activities, as he is unaware of hers.

MARA JANKOWSKA is a dozen years younger than her surgeon husband. She is elegant as befits her role as mistress of their castle-like estate and hostess to the world which often comes to their door. For now, she must at least pretend to accept the Nazi occupation and perhaps even tacitly support it. Though she, too, is an active participant in the Resistance. And as with Kyla's father, her mother keeps that a secret and is also unaware of Kyla's exploits.



PEDIGREE

Kyla's War - Pilot Teleplay - "Snow Angels"

- Semi Finalist -- 16th Annual People's Pilot Competition (2016-2017)

"The judges, all veterans of the TV writing and/or producing wars, loved the concept and the characterization, and a couple of them responded to reading the pages like kids back when I grew up watching a Saturday matinée."

Larry Brody - Writer/Producer/Executive Producer

- Finalist -- 5th Annual "High Scribe" Competition - 2017 Sun Valley Film Festival

"I loved the first script you submitted five years ago and loved this one too!"

Emily Granville - Screenwriters Lab Organizer

- Second Rounder -- 2017 Austin Film Festival

"At the center, we have the young Kyla, a resistance fighter who happens to be the daughter of a wealthy surgeon. She makes for a fascinating, complicated character that you cannot help but root for."

Austin Film Festival – Reader

"The idea of a 12 year old Polish freedom fighter in 1939 Poland is quite the premise. Original, automatically engaging and something that I think would resonate with audiences. This time period and specific geography is ripe with drama and stakes and has the legs for many seasons for a show."

Austin Film Festival – Reader

SCORECARD

- 2022 Wiki: The World's Fastest Screenplay Competition - Winner - Best TV Pilot
- 2022 Page Turner Screenplays - "First 15" – Quarterfinalist
- 2021 Coverfly - “Top 2%”
- 2021 The Script Lab - Semifinalist
- 2020 Ermantourage - “Top-50”
- 2020 Screencraft Virtual Pitch Festival - Semifinalist
- 2018 Creative World Awards - Quarterfinalist
- 2018 Inroads Screenwriting Fellowship - Finalist
- 2018 Nashville Film Festival - Semifinalist
- 2018 ISA Fast Track - "Top-50"
- 2017 Hollywood Hills Awards - Finalist
- 2017 International Independent Film Awards - Diamond Award (screenplay)
- 2017 Sun Valley Film Festival - Finalist (one of only three)
- 2017 Austin Film Festival Screenwriting Competition - 2nd Rounder
- 2017 People's Pilot - Semifinalist
- 2017 World Series of Screenwriting - Finalist
- 2017 WeScreenplay Diverse Voices - Semifinalist
- 2017 North American Film Awards - Winner - "Best Script"
- 2016 Shore Scripts Screenwriting Competition - Finalist
- 2016 Table Read My Screenplay (London) - Semifinalist



FRANCHISE POTENTIAL

Kyla's War is a one-hour TV series which *could* exist as a limited series but is really envisioned as a franchise. WWII was fought from 1939 to 1945. We join that conflict at the end of 1939, so the ongoing history of the period will drive the background narrative for approximately six years. This will have our main character deliver up a true coming-of-age experience – from age twelve to age eighteen. Audiences will be able to watch her transition from an impulsive child to a thoughtful individual on the cusp of womanhood, but still be worried in every episode about whether she will indeed survive to the next one.

My goal for this series is to create a young female protagonist who doesn't know how strong she actually is and to have her likely fail more than succeed. I don't want to present the cliché – the all-knowing, always-successful champion of the underdog.

Despite the mature role Kyla is forced to play, she is still very much a child. As a result, she often makes bad decisions and ignores advice. She almost always believes she knows the exact right way to do something. Also, her belief in her invincibility will often lead her into serious trouble.

As well, given the global nature of the underlying story and the many groups who participated, there is a nearly infinite reserve of potential characters and their stories. An example of how that concept was used well in a TV series is the series, *Lost*. You may recall that the story revolves around an unexplained plane crash on a mysterious island. There was an initial ensemble cast whose stories we followed. But there were also several dozen other passengers who existed in the background as well as in the as-yet-to-be-located “tail section” of the plane. At any point, one of those no-name background characters could come forward, engage in action or conversation, then essentially join the ensemble cast. I think that is a brilliant concept because each unknown person in that group still had a stake in the overall story.

So with that in mind, *Kyla's War* has these groups to choose from:

- The “grownup” Resistance fighters
- The Jankowska family servants
- Dr. Jankowska's patients and family friends & acquaintances
- The people in one or more towns and cities
- Prisoners in concentration camps and similar situations
- The German Army, SS, and Gestapo soldiers and officers
- Kids at or near Kyla's and the other young Resistance members' ages

