

THE WHITE LILY

*Short synopsis of a screenplay
by Vladimir Alenikov and Mathew G. Crisci*

*Based on the book, inspired by real events,
Call Sign, White Lily, by M.G. Crisci*

WHITE LILY is a dramatic love story between two unlikely war heroes: a daring young Russian female pilot, Moscovite LT. LILIA LITVYAK, the world's first female-fighter ace, and an American commanding officer, MAJOR GREGORY MORTON, from New York. Lilia completes 268 missions and registers 15 solo kills--records that still stand today--before dying in 1943 at the age of 21. Tragically, she waits 47 years to receive her just due. President Mikael Gorbachev posthumously awards her the country's highest military honor, Hero of the Soviet Union, in 1990.

The story begins at a secret training facility in the rural community of Elizabeth, North Carolina, in the summer of 1941. Hitler's surprise invasion through the Eastern Front has destroyed 80 percent of the Russian air force. America agrees to build thousands of deadly P-39's, and train a number of elite squadrons of Russian aces to fly them. The first squad consists of ten aces--9 men and Lilia--from the elite 473rd Regiment under the command of the highly respected flying ace, Captain Alexi Solomatin. Morton is flabbergasted at the presence of such a young woman.

In a matter of days, Morton becomes convinced Lilia is like no woman he had ever met: determined yet respectful, an accomplished flyer, a fearless competitor, a decorated war hero, and the daughter of a loyal citizen, VLADIMIR LITVYAK, who was executed by firing squad after being wrongfully accused of spying. Morton also senses Lilia and Solomatin, are far more than just military comrades.

As Lilia gets to know Morton, she realizes he is intelligent, romantic, and deeply sensitive to her feelings. As the training comes to a close, they exchange pledges of love on the dance floor of a local lounge with a jealous Solomatin observing. During a soulful parting, Morton promises to write at every chance to keep their flame burning bright, till they reunite after the war.

Solomatin's squadron returns to Engel's Air Base in Krasnoyarsk. There, Lilia befriends the outspoken KATYA BUDANOVA, who she trains as her wing person. Shortly thereafter, Lilia's squadron engages in a vicious air battle with the notorious Nazi ace, ERIC HARTMAN. Lilia's acrobatic skills generate two solo. An embarrassed Hartman vows reprisal. In her few private moments, Lilia is deeply disappointed she has not heard from Morton. She wonders if their love was a fleeting wartime moment. Ironically, Morton has kept his word, but all his mail has been deemed suspicious by the base Police Commissioner, and placed in a special file.

As the war rages, Lilia, Solomatin and their squad register one air victory after another. Stories and posters of her exploits appear in Pravda depicting her patriotism and unique accomplishments as a woman. She is nicknamed "The White Lily," in tribute to longtime love of the flower. The stories reach an infuriated Hitler who places a bounty on her head, and, Morton, who realizes Lilia is becoming a Nazi public relations' nightmare. He decides to tell his fiancée, a prominent Pennsylvania socialite, that he loves another. She scoffs at the preposterous, improbable union. Undeterred, Morton convinces his commanding officer to allow his group to fly to Krasnoyarsk to train the Russian aces on important new P-39 operating enhancements to extend their growing air superiority.

Before Morton arrives, the war takes a tragic toll. Hartmann shoots down Katya, and Lilia cheats death after being surrounded by group of Messersmitts. Over a fireside chat, an angry Lilia promises Solomatin she will bring Hartmann down. Two days later, Lilia performs a daring mid-flight maneuver that forces Hartman to land in enemy territory. During his interrogation, Hartmann learns he was downed by The White Lily, and, in disgust, throws his watch at her, which she of course refuses to take. Yet another poster is broadly distributed of Hartman's embarrassment.

Driven by the uncertainty of war and Morton's absence, Solomatin proposes marriage, pledging to love Lilia as no man has ever loved a woman. Lilia, now bitterly disappointed by Morton's prolonged silence, accepts Solomatin's proposal, believing he will make an excellent life-partner. The war stops for a few fleeting moments as they are married by commanding officer, MAJOR NICKOLAI BARANOV, in front of the entire 473rd. During the ceremony Hartmann escapes from the brig.

The story of Lilia's romantic wartime marriage to another famous Russian pilot appears in Pravda. Morton accidentally discovers the story during a refuel stop on the way to Krasnoyarsk. He is upset, and wants to abort the mission, but he knows it is impossible given the convincing story he invented with his commanding officer.

Less than twenty-four hours after the marriage ceremony, Hartmann strafes the 473rd airbase. The sky is filled with planes from both sides. Solomatin is seriously wounded in front of Lilia's eyes. He tries to parachute to safety but is ripped to shreds by Hartman's relentless machine guns. Lilia is wounded and bleeding profusely as she struggles back to base.

Morton arrives in the middle of the night as the war-weary Lilia rests in a hospital bed. He discovers Solomatin has perished and Lilia was wounded but alive. A relieved Morton nears her bed wearing a surgical mask. He does a humorous surprise reveal. Her instinct is to embrace every part of his being, but not before he provides an explanation for his silence. The base is rocked by enemy fire. Every plane is ordered to the air. Lilia dresses as Morton protests. She tells Morton she will return before he knows it.

An angry, impatient Lilia carelessly pursues the enemy into a cluster of dark, dense clouds. She finds herself surrounded. Morton helplessly screams skyward. Hartmann recognizes the white lily on Lilia's fuselage. He sneaks up behind her with both cannons blazing, turning her wings into Swiss cheese. Baranov arrives with reinforcements. Hartmann, now vastly outnumbered, attempts to retreat. Baranov positions himself under Hartmann plane, shooting straight up. Hartmann explodes into a fiery mass.

Lilia, unable to regain full control of her plane, attempts a forced landing on the runway. She bounces off the tarmac into the nearby woods and bursts into flames. Morton runs there, pulls her from the plane and carries her motionless body to a nearby bed of wildflowers. Morton tenderly whispers her name. Lilia's eyes open for a brief instant. She smiles at Morton. Her eyes close slowly for the last time. Morton sobs uncontrollably.

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Property of:
Vladimir Alenikov and Mathew G. Crisci
7113 Tatler Road
Carlsbad, CA 92011
(760) 804-7360
mgcrisci@mgcrisci.com