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BOOKS

VALERIE GROVE *lives in London and writes for The Times*

Ghosts by Daylight: A Memoir of War & Love; Janine di Giovanni (Bloomsbury, £16.99), 288pp

Most women journalists lead relatively comfortable lives. Sitting at home, scribbling columns about this and that, or out to lunch with a famous person: well, that requires no courage. Janine di Giovanni is a real life-or-death reporter: the adrenaline kicking in at the first whiff of conflict – a coup, a massacre anywhere in the world and off she would go for *The Sunday Times* or *Vanity Fair*. She spent her youth in flak jacket, khaki trousers, heavy linen shirt and desert boots, in Kosovo, the Gaza Strip, Mogadishu, Grozny, Bora Bora. She's been marched into woods with a gun at her back; had an AK47 pointed at her heart in Africa. Many horrors she has witnessed: mass graves, children with amputated limbs, from landmines or from deliberate acts by 'insane rebels fighting a war no one understood', and random senseless and inglorious deaths, including those of colleagues. These wars, she says, always came down to the same thing: 'government troops against a ragtail army, usually composed of kids.'

When Bruno Girodon, a gorgeous French cameraman, first spotted her in Sarajevo he fell to his knees before her: a hint of the dramatic extremes ahead. 'Love in those days was so very easy,' she writes. After a brief fling they returned to their live-in loves in Paris and London. The years between sent them separately to

Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Balkans, at the mercy of global unrest. But five years later they had a tryst in Paris (steak and frites at La Coupole; breakfast in the Café Bastille) and met again in Algiers, where the danger was a knife at the throat (a slit from ear to ear, known as 'the Algerian smile'). One night he gave her the words to Jacques Brel's *Ne Me Quitte Pas*.

Their life together started in Abidjan in Ivory Coast, where civilised champagne receptions at the French embassy descended overnight into chaos. But states of emergency never alarmed her. It was real life, 'with its vast responsibilities and wells of insecurities' (and things like cocktail parties in London and checking her bank account) she found frightening. On the front line in Sarajevo or Pristina, she could leave real life on hold, along with 'bills, pensions, marriage, divorce, loneliness, debt'.

After 10 on-off years with Bruno, she was in Somalia when he proposed, via satellite phone, that they should marry. She was 39. No more begging for visas, bribing officials, landing in wild places at the mercy of strangers, drugging herself to sleep in terror of robbery or rape. Marriage and motherhood would surely be simpler. They settled in Paris, pregnant (after three miscarriages) with their son Luca. A seventh child herself, Janine cherished her baby, and life promised to be sweet. Instead it was tormented. From 12 years in war zones, she'd seemed to emerge unscathed, even escaping from Chechnya disguised as a deaf mute, or living three days in a Kosovo trench under shelling that drove

some men mad.

But now, motherhood and domesticity brought terrible nightmares, panics. She saw the unknown Paris, where displaced immigrants live desperate lives, riot and burn cars. Astonishingly, when Luca was six months old she returned to Baghdad; just to get it out of her system.

Alas, Bruno's post-traumatic disorder was far worse. He was an alcoholic. Now she says AA stole her husband away: he's sober, but they live apart. So it is not a happy ending. In fact, part three of the book is tough: editorially a mess, and a painful narrative. But the route there is thrilling, dramatic, and the whole is the fine testament of a brave woman and an elegant writer.

