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Dancer, Daughter, Traitor, Spy



Synopsis

A new breed of spy novel combines classic thrills (The Americans, John Le Carre, and Alan Furst), Bolshoi intrigue, and elements of the paranormal. Marina is born of privilege. Her mother, Sveta, is the Soviet Union's prima ballerina: an international star handpicked by the regime. But Sveta is afflicted with a mysterious second sight and becomes obsessed with exposing a horrific state secret. Then she disappears. Fearing for their lives, Marina and her father defect to Brooklyn. Marina struggles to reestablish herself as a dancer at Juilliard. But her enigmatic partner, Sergei, makes concentration almost impossible, as does the fact that Marina shares her mother's "gift" and has a vision of her father's murder at the hands of the Russian crooks and con artists she thought they'd left behind. Now Marina must navigate the web of intrigue surrounding her mother's disappearance, her ability, and exactly whom she can and can't trust.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Gr 8 Up Marina studies as a dancer in the Soviet Union's prestigious ballet corps. Her mother's role as the prima ballerina of the company gives her family a certain prestige most Russians would love. Unfortunately, living in the spotlight also means that when Sveta stumbles on some important government information, she is taken away. When Marina and her father learn that Sveta is being detained, they flee the country with not much more than the clothes on their backs, landing in the Brighton Beach area of Brooklyn. Overwhelmed by culture shock, they find that the Russian mafia controls most of the area. Marina and her father try to adapt; she makes some

friends at school and gets an audition at Julliard while her father finds a job as a driver. Things seem better for a while, except for his continuing insistence that someone is spying on them. This compounds the troubling visions Marina continues to have; at one point she "sees" her father's death at the hands of a shadowy someone. Is it Sergei, her handsome dance partner? Could it be one of the crooks who constantly seems to be following her father? The story starts slowly but picks up speed as it moves to an unexpected conclusion. The descriptions of the former Soviet Union in the mid-1980s give some fascinating background information but might not be enough for readers who lack the historical perspective. The twists and turns, as Marina tries to decide whom she can really trust, keep readers guessing right up to the end, just as a good spy novel should.

—Diana Pierce, formerly at Leander High School, TX (c) Copyright 2013. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

Starred Review Marya is a talented dancer like her mother, Sveta, but they are government pets in a strictly controlled society full of secrecy, where one small misstep can lead to sudden and permanent consequences. When their ruler dies and Sveta vanishes, Marya and her father plot an escape. But this is not a dystopian fantasy. Marya lives in Moscow in 1982, and like many Jews during the Cold War, she and her father immigrate to Brooklyn, settling in Little Odessa under assumed names. When Marya's uncle Gosha arrives, bringing with him a suitcase full of potentially dangerous secrets, Marya weighs the value of the information against the ease of staying under the radar, all the while doubting her father's grip on reality. But in a world where nothing makes sense, what is sanity? Despite the dire circumstances, Marya's passion for music and desire for a normal teenage life shine through. Flipping through new record albums is just as suspenseful and full of discovery as a chase scene with guns drawn. This atmospheric, suspenseful story is one of devotion and deception, innocence and independence, friendship and love, music and dance, immigration and coming of age. With its language and overall sense of unease, this debut should have multifaceted appeal. Grades 8-11. --Heather Booth

This book is intended primarily for young adults, but as a 74-year-old I found it an excellent read. Ms. Kiem has a deep knowledge of Russian culture, particularly during the cold war era and the stresses/issues relating to being Russian at that time. She gives us an in-depth and educational perspective of the world (particularly America) from a Russian teenager's perspective. She has woven together a fast paced story that combines romance and suspense with interesting and diverse characters while treating us readers to an uncanny ability to communicate to us a rather

complicated plot. If I were as talented with words as Ms. Kiem, I would be better equipped to tell you what a good book it is and how much I enjoyed reading it. I do hope there will be a sequel(s) because I'll be among the first in line to purchase it. Well done!

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. While possibly written for a demographic that I am no longer a part of, it was very enjoyable, suspenseful and gripping. Will definitely recommend it.

Given as a gift.

A fascinating glimpse of worlds I know nothing about... ballet, Russian language and mass transit, America from an immigrant's perspective. And a very entertaining story line. The author clearly knows her subjects. More to come?

The fall of the Soviet Union. 80's music. Intrigue. Loyalty. Suspicion. Elizabeth Kiem's debut had it all. I can't wait to see what happens if and when Marina crosses the ocean once again...

A very unique story. At times it got confusing, but it's like nothing else I've read.

Great story, lots of background info, unexpected twists and turns of the plot. Excellent job, can't wait for the sequel!

Needed more dancing or more spying or maybe both. I wanted to enjoy this and had been intrigued by the reviews and buzz generated when the book was released, but something about it the novel was unfulfilling. I'm not sure if it ended too soon, or if I just wanted to see more of the before parts in Russia. Either way it was unsatisfying at the end of the day.

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