



Despite The Falling Snow

Shamim Sarif

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The action of *Despite the Falling Snow* moves between present day Boston and 1950s Moscow. After an early career amongst the political elite of Cold War Russia, Alexander Ivanov has lived in the States for forty years. Here he has built a successful business; and here he has managed to bury the tragic memories surrounding his charismatic late wife, Katya - or so he believes.

For into his life come two women - one who will start to open up the heart he has kept protected for so long; another who is determined to uncover the truth about what really happened to Katya all those years ago. The novel's journey back to the snowbound streets of post-Stalinist Moscow reveals a precarious, dangerous world of secrets and treachery.

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Despite The Falling Snow Details

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Author : Shamim Sarif

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From Reader Review Despite The Falling Snow for online ebook

Carol says

Review to come. I'm not objective at the moment.

Nicki says

This was a slow-moving book, with the story split between 1950s Communist Russia and 1990s Boston. For my money, most of the Boston story could have been edited out and it would have made for a stronger, more intriguing story.

The main thrust of the story is the mystery surrounding how Katya, wife of Russian defector Alexander, died in the late 1950s. In 1998, Alexander is a successful businessman trying to sell his catering company, but he is still haunted by the death of his wife forty years ago. Although we know Katya died young, we don't know how. Neither, it transpires does Alexander.

In the 1950s, Alexander meets Katya and is immediately smitten. But Katya has a tragic backstory and a secret.

The story flits between the two timelines, but it moves at a glacial pace. The author could have lost all the stuff with Estelle and her husband without losing anything from the main story. It was just an unnecessary distraction.

I wasn't in the least bit surprised by the villain of the piece or what actually happened to Katya. I can't help but feel that there is a much better story in this than the one we've got.

Ulla says

I love this novel! It's beautifully written, dramatic, tragic and has a great insight into the 50's history of the then Soviet Union. Shamim Sarif amazes me!

And just as good on second reading!!! Can't wait to see the film!

Carla says

Despite the fact that the story was a little bit predicted, it is an amazing book!

I love the way Shamim writes, how she describes every emotion and characterizes a character.

It is impossible not to feel anything while reading this book. I probably looked like a crazy in the train: laughing, crying, angry face, sad.

I can't wait to watch the movie!

Breakaway Reviewers says

The story moved me to tears

And believe me that doesn't happen very often. This novel is beautifully written with sensitivity and intelligence which make this a truly compelling read.

The story spans decades and continents as it unfolds in the Moscow of the 1950s and Boston, USA at the end of the 1990s.

In Boston, Alexander Ivanov is negotiating to sell his highly successful food business to the sharp and incredibly focussed Melissa Johnson, when, whilst taking a break he meets her mother Estelle. He is surprised to find himself drawn to this woman and a friendship develops between the two. Alexander trusts Estelle enough to tell her a little of the wife he lost many years ago, Katya, who still haunts him from beyond the grave.

Switch to Moscow in 1956 and Alexander, a 'good' communist and Government employee is persuaded by his friend Misha to go to a party, where he first meets Katya. He is immediately entranced, but at first Katya is only interested in him for information she can feed to the Americans, through her 'handler' Misha. Despite her best efforts Katya finds herself falling in love with Alexander and decides that she will no longer work for Misha once she is married. But Misha has a hold on her, a hold he is not prepared to release.

Back to 1998, and Alexander's niece Lauren, the daughter of Katya's brother Yuri, decides that for Alexander to move on he needs to know what really happened to Katya. She resolves to go to Moscow with Estelle's daughter, Melissa, to talk to Misha who she has learned is still alive.

Sarif interweaves the past and almost present and the relationships of those involved into a heart breaking tale of life in Cold War Russia and its echoes in modern Boston. His characters leap off the page and from the first page the reader is captivated.

This is a story of great courage, great love and pitiless betrayal in both time frames. In Moscow it is set against the climate and life is lived 'Despite the Falling Snow'. In Boston, life is more comfortable but there is still suffering as Alexander is unable to assuage his guilt at leaving Katya to die alone. At the same time Estelle is coming to realise that her 'good' marriage is less than she deserves, but is afraid of taking a leap of faith to be with Alexander.

This is not simply a good book, it is an artistic masterpiece which defies the reader to put it down. I commend it to all lovers of 'serious' literature; this is that, but it is also very readable.

Pashtpaws

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to review.

Evelina says

I loveeee this book beyond words. Shamim Sarif's writing is beautiful and delicate and the story line hooks

you in so you feel like a character in the novel! Amazing book.

Kgwhitehurst says

I shake my head. How can something that's so overwrought from an emotional standpoint be so overwhelming generic at the same time? It's supposed to take place in Boston and Moscow in two different time periods, but neither place or time feels different or authentic. Is this an example of international literary fiction that is, as Tim Parks decries, written a faux universality designed for the translation market?

Jade says

I read this book in more than a week, which for 350 pages is quite a long time for me. This is because despite the aura of mystery, Communism and international spying, I never found it fascinating enough to read for long stretches at a time.

Fastidious is probably the word that describes it better. It seems that Shamim Sarif wants you to think exactly what she herself thinks about all her characters. Her descriptions are very detailed, with many adjectives, but apply mainly to the characters' psychology, which means you get very little descriptions of Khrushchev-era Russia for instance. Well yes, I have to admit, among other things it was the setting that attracted me to this book, and in this respect I was disappointed by the lack of information.

The fact that every scene is so minutely detailed means that the pace of the action is very slow and laboured. You know that everything, however innocuous, will be recounted for at least a few lines, sometimes a few paragraphs. After some time I just wished the author would get to the point already.

I also found that all characters, except for Estelle, were lacking in depth--even Alexander, the main protagonist, but this was especially true for Melissa and Lauren, who seemed only to represent one characteristic each. Melissa was the hard businesswoman, Lauren the loving niece. I cannot understand how it is possible to spend such great lengths of time to describe every action of your characters and yet have them remain almost completely shallow.

I am trying to find a way to conclude this review by saying something positive, but the truth is, neither style nor plot made this book a great or even particularly good one for me.

[Cross-posted my Tumblr]

Burcu says

Everyone should read this book!!

I'm surprised this book is so little known, because it's just a heartbreakingly lovely story, I loved it.

The backdrop for this novel is Russia in the 1950's; the beautiful Katya spies on the idealistic politician Alexander. Tragically she falls in love with him.

The story switches back and forth between Boston in 2000 and Moscow in the late 1950's; that is, every uneven chapter takes place in Boston and every even chapter takes place in Moscow. This pacing actually

works out very well. We get to see what Alexander makes of himself after he has defected from his home country of Russia and lost his beloved wife Katya. And we gradually find out the events that led to his defection and with Alexander we find out what happened to Katya.

The characters of Katya and Alexander are the highlights in this book, they are very well written and make the story come to life. Katya is bold, intriguing, but at the same she's damaged and struggling with herself and the path she has chosen. Alexander is introverted, idealistic, but it is his quiet and overwhelming love for Katya that makes him so compelling.

This book is by no means perfect; the final conclusion is a bit predictable. However that didn't take anything away from the story. This novel relies more on the narrative and characters than on the plot, but that is harder to do right and Shamim Sarif did it brilliantly.

This is a book that wil get you emotionally invested and remind you why you love reading so much. I would recommend it to everyone!

Denise says

This has been such a great book to read. I practically read it in one sitting. The backdrop for this story is the 1950's Russia. It gives us a good idea of what living in a totalitarian state was like. And it even comes short to what it truly was like I assume. It's full of suspense, and you put together the puzzle with every other chapter.

The pace is right on, the travel in time back and forth works nicely for the story, and the story is really good. I could really connect with the main characters emotionally and intellectually. It is a beautiful love story from cover to cover, with a spy agenda of course. It's an interesting ride through the twisted and pleasurable roads of love, with some detours into less pleasurable emotions such as hate, guilt, and betrayal, as well as a glimpse into relationships in general.

It's great to see what this man, Alexander, makes out of his life even as an older man, despite of his losses and pain. And Katya, whom the whole story revolves around, is truly an intriguing character. She's seductive, secretive and mysterious, and yet very human. I loved it!

Chelsea says

I have seen several lesbian genre movies based on Sarif's novels and then found this book. What a wonderful and tragic love story alternating between modern day Boston and Moscow in the throes of the 1950's Cold War just the rule of Stalin comes to a close. I highly recommend this book to anyone who loves a good love story mixed with politics.

Rachel Levy says

3.5 rating

This is a story of love and tragedy, moving back and forth between Boston in 2000 and Moscow in the late

1950's, during the Cold War. It portrays what living in a totalitarian state was like.

The main focus of this story is that of Russia and the mystery of what happened to a woman, Katya, who was attempting to defect to the United States. Set against this is the story of her husband, Alexander, who after defecting became a successful businessman in Boston. He has never known the exact fate of the wife he left behind in Soviet Russia and finally is confronting the past.

The think the characters are well written and convincing. It is a good book to anyone who enjoys a love story that is mixed with politics.

I did not like the way this book ended. I felt that it was an abrupt end considering the readers are left with both a tragedy and perhaps a beginning?

Alisa says

Simply beautiful. I enjoyed every page and can highly recommend it.

Blodeuedd Finland says

It could have been a sad book, but I never felt that sadness, cos you just knew from the start. Fine I admit, I had some foolish notions of hope. But you need hope!

The book takes place in Boston in -98 and in 50s Soviet. Where you can understand life is crap. In Soviet Alexander and Katya meet. Alexander works for the government, and that means a better place to live, in the city, and other perks. Yes communism sure was good for everyone, not. Katya is a spy and I sure got why. Her parents were killed by the regime. She wanted to fight back (and then she fell in love with the man she spied on.) In a way I should be angry at her, but she loved him, and from early on. But yes she put both in danger.

Then we have Boston. Alexander has a successful catering business- But he is alone. What happened to Katya? In this story his niece and an author tries to solve the puzzle.

I did like the Soviet parts the most, because those had an air of danger and despair. Because in Soviet Russia bread eats you. Ok that makes no sense, I forgot how to do those. Soviet was not a good place to live in. Your neighbor would sell you out for a piece of bread. Anyone would stab you in the back. And she sure lived on the edge. I also liked how he started to see the cracks in the system.

While the Boston parts were just sad, because she was not there!

It was a fast read and I read on to see what would happen. It was interesting and not sad, but a bit melancholic because

Diane Brown says

Easy to read. Interesting plot but the movement between one time period to another on each chapter began to bother me. In the end a good story line

