



Sofia Petrovna

Lydia Chukovskaya , Aline Werth (Translation)

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Sofia Petrovna is Lydia Chukovskaya's fictional account of the Great Purge. Sofia is a Soviet Everywoman, a doctor's widow who works as a typist in a Leningrad publishing house. When her beloved son is caught up in the maelstrom of the purge, she joins the long lines of women outside the prosecutor's office, hoping against hope for good news. Confronted with a world that makes no moral sense, Sofia goes mad, a madness which manifests itself in delusions little different from the lies those around her tell every day to protect themselves. *Sofia Petrovna* offers a rare and vital record of Stalin's Great Purges.

Sofia Petrovna Details

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Author : Lydia Chukovskaya , Aline Werth (Translation)

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Download and Read Free Online Sofia Petrovna Lydia Chukovskaya , Aline Werth (Translation)

Even though a translation, Aline Werth does a masterful job in creating this feeling of fear and hopelessness, that big brother is always watching.

In my quest to read women authored books from around the globe, I came upon the works of Lydia Chukovskaya. Russia is not known for its female authors, yet Chukovskaya managed to leave the west the only detailed account of the great purges written during the same years. Even though *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* is better known, *A Deserted House* puts the reader right in the middle of the purges, in a feeling of constant fear and vigilance. Unfortunately most of Chukovskaya's work is not available in English or never published. *A Deserted House* was a necessary read, for which I rate 4 stars.

Nataliya says

USSR. 1937. *Enemy of the people*. These short words might as well be - and often were - a death sentence. For you. For your friends. For your family. For anyone connected with you. For **millions and millions** of the Soviet people that have perished in the Great Purges, courtesy of the terror state run by paranoid and fanatical Comrade Stalin (*)

(*) Little-known fact: "*Joseph Stalin, the Secretary General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1922-1953), was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1945 and 1948 for his efforts to end World War II.*" From www.nobelprize.org (**)

(**) Who would nominate such a standup guy for the Nobel Peace Prize??? Hitler???

Enemy of the people. The dreaded doorbell rings in the middle of the night, uniformed people drag you away from the crying family into a nondescript black car outside. You think it must be a mistake, a misunderstanding; desperately try to explain that you are a good worker from an honest peasant family. Prison cells, vermin, hunger, torture, forced confessions. Realizing that everyone else here has gone through the same thing. Seeing your loved ones on the other side of the bars, lying to them that you'll be alright. Exile to concentration camps if you are lucky, shot in the night otherwise.

Sofia Petrovna sees the other side of the Purges. An apolitical middle-aged woman, she goes from being a proud mother of a promising young engineer to being a mother of an "enemy of the people". And yet she still fails to understand that those *other* political prisoners ("poisoners, spies and murderers") are innocent victims of the Stalin regime just like her son Kolya. She fails to make the connection. After all, USSR does not detain the innocents. After all, the Party and the Party newspapers don't lie.

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Thank you, dear Stalin, for our happy childhood!

Thank you, indeed...

This is a chilling, gripping story of one of the darkest times in Russian/Soviet history. Written in a detached voice, it succeeds in conveying the suffocating terror, deceit and disbelief the Soviet people lived in. And all I can think when reading it is - please don't let me *ever* live through anything like this. Ever.

By the way, if you want to know more about the Soviet Great Purges of 1930s, here is a handy Wikipedia link and another one as well.

Brian says

One of (the only, perhaps?) the narratives actually written during the Stalin-era purges, Chukovskaya's long-suppressed novel detailing the terror of living in Leningrad in the '30s is a nightmare. The reader feels the State's fist slowly closing over all areas of life - leaving nothing but ground up lives in its clutch.

The author wrote this book in a school exercise book and kept it hidden in a desk drawer - a certain death sentence if it were to be found. Some very real skill in characterization and story telling is displayed here - I felt the bafflement, frustration and soul crushing hopelessness right alongside the heroine of the story.

Ben Winch says

For what it is, this is good. What is it? The social realist, small-scale, human, *truthful* drama of a woman coming to terms with the abduction, by the Stalinist state, of her son. Its power lies in its mundanity?in its view of workplace politics, of state-sponsored peer pressure, of mothers queuing for hours/days/months for the merest tidbits of information. It has every appearance of complete truthfulness to life. If I prefer my fiction a little *less* truthful to life, that's no fault of Lydia Chukovskaya's. Maybe it could have gone further, though? If its aim (as stated by its author in the afterword) was to show its protagonist's descent into madness, I don't think it *quite* gets there, but there's enough here to at least suggest how that descent might have proceeded. As a reminder of what depths people can sink through propaganda and political coercion, and the ways in which that coercion manifests itself at street level, this is powerful. If nothing else it'll help put your Platonov, Zamyatin and Akhmatova in context.

Edward says

Author's Note

--Sofia Petrovna

Afterword: From 'The Process of Expulsion'

Nick says

Kafka's "The Trial" is almost an allegory, if an unusually powerful one. "Sofia Petrovna", by the Russian writer Lydia Chukovskaya, gives the Kafka story flesh. Sofia Petrovna is cursed by being the mother of an exceptional but conventionally Marxist son and a friend and fellow-typist in a publishing house who has the misfortune of being born to a disgraced middle-class. It is a world in which apparatchiks run publishing houses, where evidence of skill is the mark of being insufficiently proletarian. The foundation of law and justice is the systematic denial of information and access, with the whole charade papered over by Marxist

slogans. It is a system designed to crush not only those who are implicated by innuendo, or those who think for themselves, but anyone who doesn't belong to or appear loyal according to the whims of the clique in power. The results are that the patriotic are jailed, the healthy are driven to suicide, those whose only crime is to love their relatives are driven mad. The characters are not drawn with particular clarity, but that adds to the power of the book--this insanity could descend on any skillful typist, any patriotic member of the Communist youth, any devoted mother. The fate of the book resembles the fate of its characters: accepted for publication in the post-Ivan Denisovich world, in which criticism of the Stalinist madness was encouraged, it fell victim to one of those sudden shifts of ideological wind--enough criticism of Stalinism had already been published. As if enough criticism of Stalinism could ever be published. I cannot leave this theme without quoting the poem of the great Anna Akhmatova (friend of Chukovskaya's) from the opening to the magnificent "Requiem." In it, Akhmatova, who spent many years in the same lines of people searching for their relatives as Sofia Petrovna, is asked by another woman if she could describe it. When Akhmatova replies that she can, she writes of the woman who asked her the question, "something that looked like a smile passed over what had once been her face."

Sepideh Salarvand says

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