



Between Shades of Gray

Books Reviewed:

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[Nicholas Tucker](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

This searing novel, based on all too true real life events, starts with 15-year-old Lina, her mother and young brother given 20 minutes to leave their comfortable home in Lithuania. Their persecutors are the invading Soviet forces in 1941 and their crime is to be middle class. They never see their university teacher father again, and have to endure a terrible journey by cattle truck before ending up near the Arctic Circle in a forced labour camp. As Lina's father once observed, Hitler and Stalin were indeed two devils who both wanted to rule in Hell. Criminally over-worked and underfed, more often than not freezing and treated pitilessly by oafish NKVD guards, Lina somehow survives, although her mother dies along with many others.

This is necessarily a tough and unrelenting read. But Lina's courage and determination to survive is both inspiring and shaming for readers who might recently have found themselves kicking up a fuss over a comparatively minor problem with their own physical lot. Some relief from Lina's day to day torment is provided by scenes remembered from her contented past, interspersed throughout the story. There is also one outspoken older prisoner whose blunt speaking, however unwelcome by others, does act as a safety valve for expressing totally negative feelings at a time when everyone else is trying so hard to be as optimistic as possible. Sparsely written, unflinching in detail and passionately on the side of a small nation mercilessly bullied by its bigger neighbour, this is a novel crying out to be read. The voices of those who once suffered so dreadfully in this dismal and still largely unreported episode in the last war deserve to be heard, and this fine novel should ensure that they will never be forgotten.

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