

It's the End of the World, My Love

Alla Gorbunova

Elina Alter, Translator

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Dark and supernatural forces affect many lives in Alla Gorbunova's novel *It's the End of the World, My Love*.

Russia is a vast, contradictory place. For all its natural beauty and cultural traditions, its troubled history often causes strife and confusion. Substance abuse, mental illness, physical and sexual violence, and repressed desire plague its citizens' lives. No one can escape their fate; in rare cases, this may be a positive.

The narrative begins and ends with a woman whose youth was a whirlwind of drugs, relationships with men and girls, and transient friendships with fellow misfits. As she moves from home to home and from school to school, only her love of poetry remains constant.

The book's middle section consists of stories that resemble fairy tales. A few, like "What Has Value in Heaven," are charming morality tales, while others, like "The Sailor's Wife" and "Cast to Earth," are glimpses into possessive personalities, made all the more horrifying by how casually, even facetiously, they are treated. Some stories are connected by common characters, while others have no obvious connection, bolstering the book's dark, mysterious atmosphere. The characters inhabit a range of memorable locations: a forest where supernatural events are the norm; a market where young people go to drink and gossip with shopkeepers, the unemployed, and the unhoused; an idyllic dacha where one character grows up around her less than idyllic family.

It's the End of the World, My Love gathers vignettes from the tumultuous transition from the USSR to the post-Soviet era. Covering a vast array of topics, the novel is often fantastical and always unforgettable, with striking, bizarre imagery that lingers.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (September / October 2022)

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