

Spring in Siberia

Artem Mozgovoy

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In Artem Mozgovoy's heartbreaking historical novel *Spring in Siberia*, a gay man comes of age in a post-Soviet land.

In the same year that Mikhail Gorbachev launches the *Perestroika* and sets the Soviet Union on the path toward its own demise, Alexey is born in an isolated Siberian factory town, Taiga. Living through the death throes of the Soviet Union and the reconstitution of the Russian Federation as a nascent democracy, the one constant in Alexey's life is his grandmother, who feeds the family with her garden when food is scarce and money has lost its value.

An introvert with a passion for poetry, Alexey grows up feeling alienated from his surroundings, an experience that deepens when he, as an adolescent, discovers that he is gay in a country where homosexual people are being persecuted. Still, when Alexey meets Andrey and falls in love, his life begins to make sense for the first time. But his happiness is soon shattered: Andrey is taken away by the authorities and is never heard from again.

Struggling to build himself a future, Alexey turns to journalism. He finds that the promise of a brave new world is a lie: journalism school turns out to be a Soviet holdover. Meanwhile, Vladimir Putin exploits the Russian people's implicit trust in television to spread propaganda. Watching his beloved grandmother fall under Putin's spell and his parents adapt to the corrupt capitalism of the day, a bone-chilling realization seeps in: the only way for Alexey to survive may be to leave Russia forever.

Written with the precision and insight of autofiction, *Spring in Siberia* is a chilling coming-of-age story about everyday helplessness and being forced to adapt or founder when the merciless wheels of social change begin to turn.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (May / June 2023)

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