

## The Freedom Factory

**Ksenia Buksha**

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In poignant and lyrical prose, Ksenia Buksha's *The Freedom Factory* renders the history of a real military factory in St. Petersburg.

This collection of vignettes blurs the line between realism and poetry. Separate personal histories form a narrative portrait of the Freedom Factory during its tenure as a Soviet manufacturing facility and into its inevitable decline. The narrators are mostly made anonymous, identified only by their jobs and a single initial. Each perspective relates experiences within the factory that are sometimes humorous and at other times heartbreaking.

The initial narratives are full of promise and productivity during the Soviet era. Daily operations are performed with machine-like efficiency, particularly in the narrative "Four Mimosas by November 7th," in which evocative dreams of submarines color F's laser focus on his important project. Though the factory is primarily a designer and manufacturer of military equipment and weapons, there is a surprising addition of a cancer-fighting initiative in the form of the Golden Globe, designed by an engineer, X, who wanted to transform the factory's purpose.

One of the most striking sections is "May Day," a description of celebration tinged with darker reminiscences of sadness and depression beneath the false veneers of Soviet happiness and prosperity. This veneer begins to crumble as the book nears its end, and the factory's future as a viable facility is drawn into question.

It becomes increasingly clear that the people themselves are the factory: as machines break down with age, so do people. The final narrative, "Engineer H," is hopeful and optimistic anyway, as a young engineering student goes to the Freedom Factory as part of a university project. Within the factory's walls, he discovers purpose "as if he'd subtly turned a key."

Eschewing a black-and-white presentation, *The Freedom Factory* acknowledges the hardships of life in Soviet Russia while also acknowledging the strength and resiliency of human beings.

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