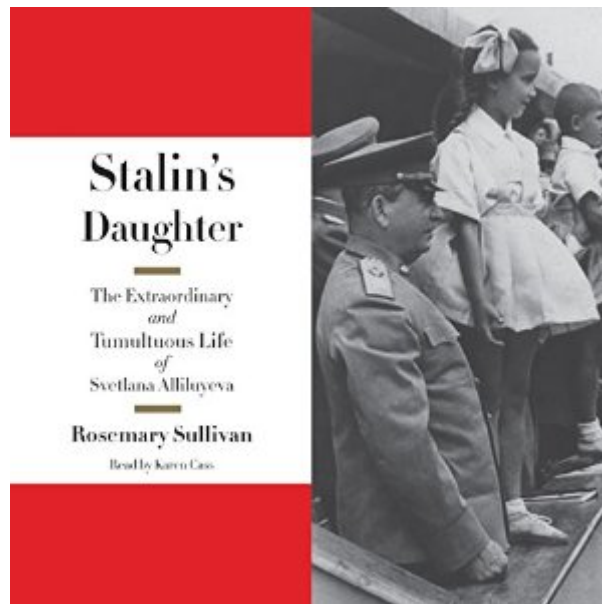


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Stalin's Daughter: The Extraordinary And Tumultuous Life Of Svetlana Alliluyeva



Synopsis

The award-winning author of *Villa Air-Bel* returns with a painstakingly researched, revelatory biography of Svetlana Stalin, a woman fated to live her life in the shadow of one of history's most monstrous dictators-her father, Josef Stalin. Born in the early years of the Soviet Union, Svetlana Stalin spent her youth inside the walls of the Kremlin. Communist Party privilege protected her from the mass starvation and purges that haunted Russia, but she did not escape tragedy-the loss of everyone she loved, including her mother, two brothers, aunts and uncles, and a lover twice her age, deliberately exiled to Siberia by her father. As she gradually learned about the extent of her father's brutality after his death, Svetlana could no longer keep quiet and in 1967 shocked the world by defecting to the United States-leaving her two children behind. But although she was never a part of her father's regime, she could not escape his legacy. Her life in America was fractured; she moved frequently, married disastrously, shunned other Russian exiles, and ultimately died in poverty in Wisconsin. With access to KGB, CIA, and Soviet government archives, as well as the close cooperation of Svetlana's daughter, Rosemary Sullivan pieces together Svetlana's incredible life in a masterful account of unprecedented intimacy. Epic in scope, it's a revolutionary biography of a woman doomed to be a political prisoner of her father's name. Sullivan explores a complicated character in her broader context without ever losing sight of her powerfully human story, in the process opening a closed, brutal world that continues to fascinate us.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A child both petted and coldly dominated by one of history's most brutal dictators, Svetlana

Alliluyeva's life would veer between passion and loneliness. As depicted here in a lengthy, deeply considered biography, she can be seen as a person, but will always remain a symbol of the desperation of a former captive to gain and enjoy true freedom. Award-winning author and poet Rosemary Sullivan (VILLA AIR-BEL, LABYRINTH OF DESIRE) takes on the task of bringing this remarkable journey into close focus within the colossal panorama of history. Alliluyeva's infamous father is frozen in collective memory as someone who could not possibly have been a loving parent, but he did, to a limited extent, accord his only daughter a certain gruff affection. She retained a sense of her very early years as a happy, golden realm. But after her mother's suicide, the exact truth of the incident unknown, the little girl became a servant to paternal whim and, like all good servants, strove to please, to avoid punishment and scorn. Sullivan --- who interviewed Alliluyeva's daughter, Olga (now known as Chrese Evans), among many others, and pored through voluminous archives --- finds few periods of true contentment in her subject's "extraordinary and tumultuous life"; perhaps Olga herself was responsible for what tranquility there was. Arguably the 20th century's most noted defector, Alliluyeva could recall, for example, only one happy hour in her several-year relationship with Olga's father, Wesley Peters. Peters was an American architect who, goaded by his overbearing mother, all but forced marriage on Alliluyeva and then systematically leached away most of the small fortune she had garnered from her autobiography.

Vacation is a special time for me. I hunker down to read things I would not have the time for given my ordinary time constraints. And this vacation in particular found me reading (I should say devouring) two very different but powerful and enjoyable books. Both a bit lengthy, and both wonderfully rewarding. I wish to recommend them both, and whet your appetite for either just a tad. Though I was reading them simultaneously (along with snatches of 4 or 5 others) I began and ended first with the very recently released "Stalin's Daughter: The Extraordinary and Tumultuous Life of Svetlana Alliluyeva" artfully and captivatingly penned by Rosemary Sullivan. As you might imagine, tracking down details and personages both in the former Soviet Union and in a number of other places around the globe was a monumental task. Collating that material in a narrative form that neither misses anything crucial nor allows itself to be bogged down in unnecessary detail must have been staggering. Staggering just to contemplate, let alone actually accomplish. Sullivan does it with a keen and insightful eye, sympathy without gloss and accuracy without judgmentalism nor cruelty. It is "reporting" of the first order. I could not put it down. I grew to have a strong attraction to this wounded, but mostly undaunted and rare creature Svetlana.

I wish so much that I could have known her. And that, in the full light that in her brokenness, she could often alienate those who delighted in her most. Not out of a native cruelty to others as much (at least as it seems to me) as a certain lack of emotional filters never allowed to be cultivated in her odd environment and collection of extreme circumstances. The human soul craves.

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