

RED RETURNING²

*Red
Dawn
Rising*

A NOVEL

SUE DUFFY

 Kregel
Publications

Red Dawn Rising: A Novel

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To my family

Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1

The Moscow night had frozen in place. But at three in the morning, a lone figure hurried along the back streets and alleys of a worn and grizzled neighborhood, leaving tracks in fresh yet impure snow. It was the safest hour for Evgeny Kozlov to surface from his warren. Once a warrior spy for Soviet intelligence, he had fallen to his own conscience and the conviction that everything he'd believed in was a lie. Now, the liars hunted him.

Where an alley emptied onto a main boulevard, Evgeny stopped and peered cautiously through the brittle light of a streetlamp. He would have to cross the street to reach the bookstore where, in a back room with shades drawn, the only person he could trust waited for him. He resisted the urge to sprint headlong to safety. Instead, he pulled the hood of his coat lower over his face and emerged slowly from the alley onto the sidewalk, nearly colliding with an old woman long past sobriety. Ragged and absent-eyed, she hardly looked his way as she shuffled around him, hunched and rattling in her breath. He watched after her a moment and wondered how many others like her might perish this forbidding night, within reach of the gilded Kremlin, home of the government charged with tending even the least of its people.

He veered into the street, ambling in the fashion of the old woman, his

heavy boots slurring against the pavement, the backpack that never left his side slung over one shoulder. To anyone watching, his boozy charade would make no impression. They wouldn't see the gun he gripped firmly inside his coat pocket.

When he reached the front of the bookstore, he was about to turn into the alley running toward the shop's back door when a face stopped him. In the display window lit by the streetlamp was a rack of CDs. He knew better than to linger in the exposing light, but he couldn't move. The face on one of those CD covers wouldn't let him. She was a striking young woman in a shimmering green gown seated at a concert grand piano, her long amber hair cascading over one shoulder. The title read *Liesl Bower Plays the Russian Masters*.

He stared into the eyes that couldn't see him. Eyes that had, on three occasions, flashed with terror for what he might do to her. Now, gazing at her fixed, radiant smile, Evgeny brooded. *Liesl, forgive me. I did not know the ones I served then. But now I do.*

He remembered his last words to her. He'd slipped into her dressing room at Avery Fisher Hall just moments before a performance and warned her about those he would serve no more. "Never stop watching them," he'd told her. Regrettably, though, he had.

After a quick scan of the street, he darted into the alley. At the back of the shop, he tapped lightly on the door and waited. When it opened, the spidery hand of Viktor Petrov reached to pull him inside. "Hurry! They are near!"

"They found me?"

"Yes. You cannot return to the apartment."

Evgeny searched the older man's face, the hollows beneath his fierce eyes, the sagging jowls that belied the ramrod strength that had sustained his double life. The old-guard member of the KGB secret police had transitioned easily into that agency's post-Soviet successor, the Federal Security Service. Viktor Petrov had served the new Russian Federation with exemplary dedication—while secretly plotting with other revolutionaries to overthrow it.

But no longer. He and Evgeny had penetrated the heroic, all-for-the-

people venerate of Vadim Fedorovsky's anarchist movement to discover its corroded underside. Fedorovsky and his mounting legion of Kremlin and military recruits had so dazzled themselves with the promise of a powerful new Russian empire that they had cultivated a callous disregard for the everyday plight of their own people.

"But how?" Evgeny rasped as he slipped inside the store, his joints protesting the cold. "No one ever finds me." He raked his fingers through his dark, thinning hair. His fifties had pressed hard against him, and he'd felt himself begin to wither.

"My friend, you are not as invisible as you once were," Viktor said. "Somehow, you left a trail. And now you must flee. But first, there are things you must know." He motioned for Evgeny to follow him to a small room in the back of the bookstore where they'd met several times before. Viktor had once saved the store's owner from arrest and certain imprisonment for his part in a riotous demonstration against the sitting president. The owner had given Viktor a key and unrestricted access.

Without turning on a light, Viktor set a small flashlight on a shelf and aimed its beam toward the wall, allowing only a dim glow in which to see each other. "Sit," Viktor instructed. "We do not have long."

Evgeny pulled a straight-backed chair beneath him and waited. Viktor eyed him gravely. "It is far worse than we thought. I have just struck the richest vein of intelligence yet. Hear this. For all his authority, Fedorovsky is only a puppet and always has been, even before he went to prison." When Evgeny's brow arched, Viktor held up a hand to halt interruption. "Just listen. There is someone else who commands Fedorovsky and his coconspirator Pavel Andreyev. Someone who is the mastermind of it all. He is called the Architect by the few who know he even exists, a man removed from Russia but whose roots are deep in her intelligence network. He has immense wealth and power beyond our own president."

Viktor paused long enough for Evgeny to respond, "Do *you* know this man?"

"No."

"Where is he?" Already, Evgeny's mind calculated the inevitable mission of stopping him.

“It is believed he operates from the sea, headquartered on one vessel or another within his fleet. He could be anywhere in the world.”

“Fleet?”

“This is a man of uncommon means. He—” Viktor quickly raised a quieting hand and looked toward the open door to the room. “Listen,” he whispered.

Evgeny leaned far enough to peer through the doorway, but he saw and heard nothing. Then a beam of light pierced the front window and arced through the store. He jerked back out of sight and glanced at the flashlight above him. Dousing it would only signal that someone was in the room.

Already hidden, Viktor remained still, but Evgeny could hear him wheeze. When the light retreated and didn’t return, Evgeny leaned forward in his chair and whispered, “A policeman making rounds.” It was both a statement and a hope. Surely his skills hadn’t failed him so miserably that he’d led others of his own trade to this place and to his trusted compatriot.

A cautious interval passed before either spoke again. Then, “There is something else,” Viktor said, his shoulders sagging. “Your uncle and cousins.”

Evgeny stopped breathing. But he already knew, in the way that assassins such as he knew death and those who forced it on others.

“They are all dead,” Viktor announced bitterly.

“When?” Evgeny struggled to ask.

“Last night, as they slept.”

Through the years, others had met the same fate at Evgeny’s own hand. How dare he mourn now. But how could he not? These innocent peasants had died for no other reason than their tenuous kinship with him. A solitary spy, Evgeny had long since severed the distant and fragile ties to family, to spare himself and them any harmful entanglements.

Fedorovsky had ordered their execution even from prison, Evgeny was certain. His late mother’s brother and his two sons, the last of his family, had scraped a bare living from the soil with no hope of improving their lot. Evgeny was certain they had never heard of Fedorovsky, never knew

of the man's raging quest to overtake their country. They wouldn't have cared anyway. Their country could fail them no worse under his reign than at the hands of all the despots past.

"I am very sorry," Viktor offered.

But Evgeny had already shifted from the hateful news to something within his control. Vengeance. "I must go," he told Viktor as he rose from the chair.

"Where?"

"Someplace where Fedorovsky's people will not look for me." Evgeny hoisted his backpack to his shoulders. "His house."