



The Winter Palace: A Novel of Catherine the Great

Eva Stachniak

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NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY

The Wall Street Journal* • *The Washington Post

From award-winning author Eva Stachniak comes this passionate novel that illuminates, as only fiction can, the early life of one of history's boldest women. *The Winter Palace* tells the epic story of Catherine the Great's improbable rise to power—as seen through the ever-watchful eyes of an all-but-invisible servant close to the throne.

Her name is Barbara—in Russian, Varvara. Nimble-witted and attentive, she's allowed into the employ of the Empress Elizabeth, amid the glitter and cruelty of the world's most eminent court. Under the tutelage of Count Bestuzhev, Chancellor and spymaster, Varvara will be educated in skills from lock picking to lovemaking, learning above all else to listen—and to wait for opportunity. That opportunity arrives in a slender young princess from Zerbst named Sophie, a playful teenager destined to become the indomitable Catherine the Great. Sophie's destiny at court is to marry the Empress's nephew, but she has other, loftier, more dangerous ambitions, and she proves to be more guileful than she first appears.

What Sophie needs is an insider at court, a loyal pair of eyes and ears who knows the traps, the conspiracies, and the treacheries that surround her. Varvara will become Sophie's confidante—and together the two young women will rise to the pinnacle of absolute power.

With dazzling details and intense drama, Eva Stachniak depicts Varvara's secret alliance with Catherine as the princess grows into a legend—through an enforced marriage, illicit seductions, and, at last, the shocking coup to assume the throne of all of Russia.

Impeccably researched and magnificently written, *The Winter Palace* is an irresistible peek through the keyhole of one of history's grandest tales.

Praise for *The Winter Palace*

“A majestic and splendidly written tale of pride, passion, intrigue, and deceit that is brought alive from the first page to the last.”—Rosalind Laker

“At the same time baroque and intimate, worldly and domestic, wildly strange and soulfully familiar, *The Winter Palace* offers a flickering glimpse of history through the gauze of deft entertainment.”—*The Washington Post*

“A thrilling point of view . . . Readers are treated to a firsthand account of the young princess's slow ascent to the throne, a path deliciously strewn with discarded lovers and sanguine court intrigues.”—*Minneapolis Star-Tribune*

“[A] brilliant, bold historical novel . . . This superb biographical epic proves the Tudors don't have a monopoly on marital scandal, royal intrigue, or feminine triumph.”—*Booklist* (starred review)

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