

Give Me: (Songs for Lovers)

Irina Denezhkina

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Shortlisted for Russia's national bestseller prize and translated into twelve languages, *Give Me* marks the debut of a literary wunderkind, a gifted writer with a fine-tuned ear and unforgettable voice. The stories in *Give Me* are bracingly authentic and deeply felt -- vibrant snapshots colored by vodka, drugs, and young love that capture life at a certain age in a specific part of the world while reflecting the universal emotions of a generation. Too young to identify with life in the Soviet era, the frank, funny, appealingly tough characters in *Give Me* are forced to find their identities in the chaotic atmosphere of a country recovering from systemic collapse. They reach out to each other in ways that are sometimes affectionate, sometimes cruel, and always desperate for connection.

A young soldier on leave from the Chechen war laments the meaninglessness of civilian life -- "all that goddamned self-expression" -- while his girlfriend ponders the elegant arch of her best friend's eyebrows; a teacher at a summer camp is appalled, disgusted, and frightened by her out-of-control charges and the retribution she could suffer at the hands of their powerful parents; love and loyalty become entangled as a young woman sleeps with friends of her unattainable object of desire to feel closer to him; a suicidal teenager finds salvation in the unlikely duo of a beefy security guard and his Rottweiler; the object of a university student's crush unknowingly pushes her buttons from afar when he neglects to return her anonymous love notes; and Death visits an Internet chat room after politely accepting the offer of a cup of tea.

Full of electricity, humor, controversy, and above all, humanity, these pitch-perfect stories put to use the possibilities of language and perception to give a glimpse of Russia's youth and their struggle to grow up, find their way, and, ultimately, love.



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