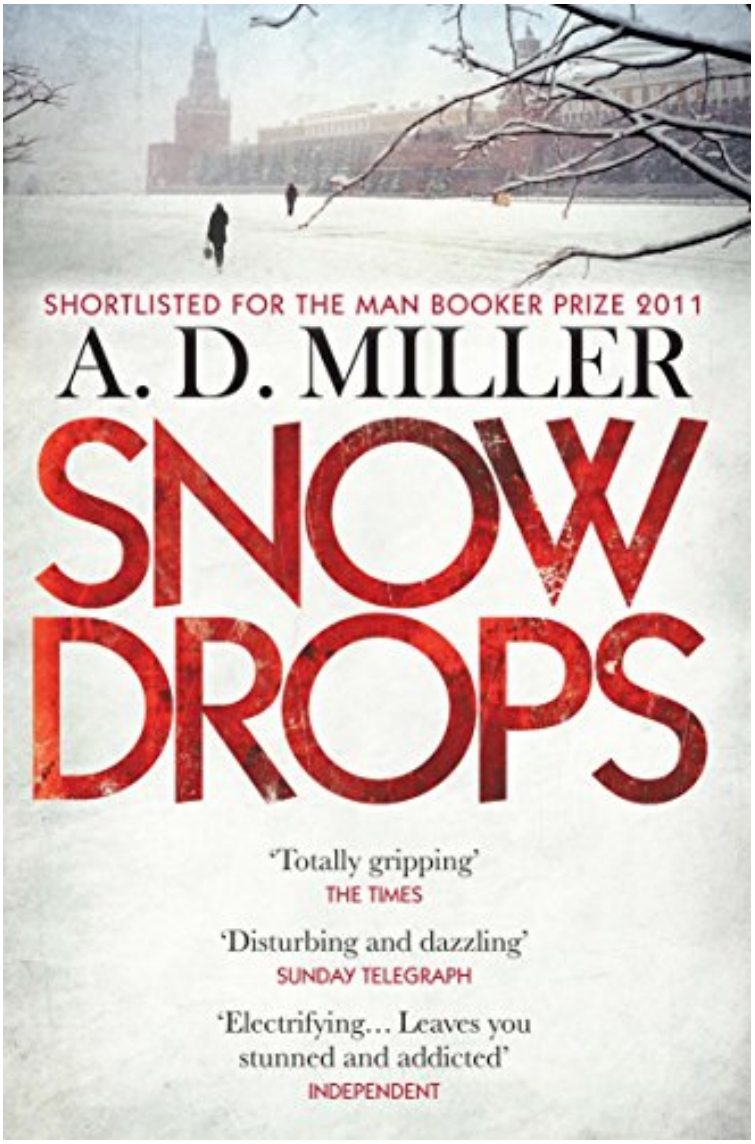
Snowdrops (English Edition)



Par A.D. Miller
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Par A.D. Miller : Snowdrops (English Edition) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Snowdrops (English Edition):

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurSHORTLISTED FOR THE MAN BOOKER PRIZE 2011Snowdrops. That's what the Russians call them - the bodies that float up into the light in the thaw. Drunks, most of them, and homeless people who just give up and lie down into the whiteness, and murder victims hidden in the drifts by their killers.Nick has a confession. When he worked as a high-flying British lawyer in Moscow, he was seduced by Masha, an enigmatic woman who led him through her city: the electric nightclubs and intimate dachas, the human kindnesses and state-wide corruption. Yet as Nick fell for Masha, he found that he fell away from himself; he knew that she was dangerous, but life in Russia was addictive, and it was too easy to bury secrets - and corpses - in the winter snows...Extrait1I can at least be sure of her name. It was Maria Kovalenko, Masha to her friends. She was standing on the station platform at Ploshchad Revolyutsii,

Revolution Square, when I first caught sight of her. I could see her face for about five seconds before she took out a little makeup mirror and held it in front of her. With her other hand she put on a pair of sunglasses that I remember thinking she might have just bought from a kiosk in an underpass somewhere. She was leaning against a pillar, up at the end of the platform where the civilian statues are--athletes, engineers, bosomy female farmhands, and mothers holding muscular babies. I looked at her for longer than I should have.There's a moment at Ploshchad Revolyutsii, a visual effect that happens when you're transferring to the green line from that platform with the statues. You find yourself crossing the Metro tracks on a little elevated walkway, and on one side you can see a flotilla of disc-shaped chandeliers, stretching along the platform and away into the darkness that the trains come out of. On the other side you see other people making the same journey, only on a parallel walkway, close but separate. When I looked to the right that day I saw the girl with the sunglasses heading the same way.I got on the train for the one-stop ride to Pushkinskaya. I stood beneath the yellow panelling and the ancient strip lighting that made me feel, every time I took the Metro, as if I was an extra in some paranoid Donald Sutherland film from the seventies. At Pushkinskaya I went up the escalator with its phallic lamps, held open the heavy glass Metro doors for the person behind me like I always used to, and made my way into the maze of low-slung underground passages beneath Pushkin Square. Then she screamed.She was about five metres behind me, and as well as screaming she was wrestling against a thin man with a ponytail who was trying to steal her handbag (an ostentatiously fake Burberry). She was screaming for help, and the friend who had appeared alongside her--Katya, it turned out--was just screaming. To begin with, I only watched, but the man drew back his fist like he was about to punch her, and I heard someone shouting from behind me as if they were going to do something about it. I stepped forward and pulled the thin man back by his collar.He gave up on the bag and swung his elbows at me, but they didn't reach. I let go and he lost his balance and fell. It was all over quickly and I didn't get a good enough look at him. He was young, maybe four inches shorter than me, and seemed embarrassed. He stabbed out a foot, catching me painlessly on the shin, and scrambled up to his feet and ran away down the underpass and up the stairs at the far end that led to Tverskaya--the Oxford Street of Moscow, only with lawless parking, which slopes down from Pushkin Square to Red Square. There were two policemen near the bottom of the steps, but they were too busy smoking and looking for immigrants to harass to pay the mugger any attention."Spasibo," said Masha. (Thank you.) She took off the sunglasses.She was wearing tight, tight jeans tucked into knee-high brown leather boots, and a white blouse with one more button undone than there needed to be. Over the blouse she had one of those funny Brezhnev-era autumn coats that Russian women without much money often wear. If you look at them closely they seem to be made out of carpet or beach towel with a cat-fur collar, but from a distance they make the girl in the coat look like the honey trap in a Cold War thriller. She had a straight bony nose, pale skin, and long tawny hair. With a bit more luck she might have been sitting beneath the gold-leaf ceiling in some hyperpriced restaurant called the Ducal Palace or the Hunting Lodge, eating black caviar and smiling indulgently at a nickel magnate or well-connected oil trader. Perhaps that's where she is now, though somehow I doubt it."Oi, spasibo," said her friend, clasping the fingers of my right hand. Her hand was warm and light. I reckoned the sunglasses girl was in her early twenties, twenty-three maybe, but the friend seemed younger, nineteen or possibly even less. She was wearing white boots, a pink fake-leather miniskirt and a matching jacket. She had a little upturned nose and straight blond hair, and one of those frankly inviting Russian-girl grins, the ones that come with full-on eye contact. It was a smile like the smile of the baby Jesus we once saw--do you remember?--in that church in the village down the coast from Rimini: the old, wise smile on the young face, a smile that said I know who you are, I know what you want, I was born knowing this."Nichevo," I said. (It was nothing.) And again in Russian I added, "Is everything okay?""Vso normalno," said the sunglasses girl. (Everything is normal.)"Kharasho," I said. (Good.)We smiled at each other. My glasses had steamed up in the cloying year-round warmth of the Metro. One of the CD kiosks in the passageway was playing folk music, I remember, the lyrics choked out by one of those drunken Russian chanteurs who sound like they must have started smoking in the womb.In a parallel universe, in another life, that's the end of the story. We say good-bye, I go home that afternoon and back to my lawyering the next day. Maybe in that life I'm still there, still in Moscow, maybe I found another job and stayed, never came home, and never met you. The girls go on to whoever and whatever it would have been if it hadn't been me. But I was flushed with that feeling you get when a risky thing goes well and the high of having done something good. A noble deed in a ruthless place. I was a small-time hero, they'd let me be one, and I was grateful.The younger one carried on smiling, but the older one was just looking. She was taller than her friend, five nine or ten, and in her heels her green eyes

were level with mine. They are lovely eyes. Someone had to say something, and she said, in English, "Where are you from?"I said, "I'm from London." I'm not from London originally, as you know, but it's close enough. In Russian I asked, "And where are you from?""Now we live here in Moscow," she said. I was used to this language game by then. The Russian girls always said they wanted to practise their English. But sometimes they also wanted to make you feel that you were in charge, in their country but safe in your own language.There was another smiling pause."Tak, spasibo," said the friend. (So, thank you.)None of us moved. Then Masha said, "To where are you going?""Home," I said. "Where are you going?""We are only walking.""Poguliaem," I said. (Let's walk.)And we did.It was the middle of September. It's the time of year Russians call grandma's summer--a bittersweet lick of velvety warmth that used to arrive after the peasant women had brought in their harvests, and now in Moscow means last-gasp outdoor drinking in the squares and around the Bulvar (the lovely old road around the Kremlin that has stretches of park between the lanes, with lawns, benches, and statues of famous writers and forgotten revolutionaries). It's the nicest time to visit, though I'm not certain we ever will. The stalls outside the Metro stations were laying out their fake-fur Chinese gloves for the coming winter, but there were still long lines of tourists waiting to file through Lenin's freak-show tomb in Red Square. In the hot afternoons half the women in the city were still wearing almost nothing.We came up the smooth narrow steps from the underground passages beneath the square, arriving outside the Armenian supermarket. We crossed the gridlocked lanes of traffic to the broad pavement in the middle of the Bulvar. There was only one cloud in the sky, plus a fluffy plume of smoke flying up from a factory or inner-city power plant, just visible against the early evening blue. It was beautiful. The air smelled of cheap petrol, grilled meat, and lust.The older one asked, in English, "What is your job in Moscow, if it is not secret?""I am a lawyer," I said in Russian.They spoke to each other very quickly, too fast and low for me to understand. The younger one said, "For how much years you have been in Moscow?""Four years," I said. "Nearly four years.""Are you liking it?" said the sunglasses girl. "Are you liking our Moscow?"I said that I liked it very much, which is what I thought she'd want to hear. Most of them had a sort of automatic national pride, I'd discovered, even if all they wanted for themselves was to get the hell out of there and head for Los Angeles or the Cte d'Azur."And what do you do?" I asked her in Russian."I am working in shop. For mobile phones.""Where is your shop?""Across river," she said. "Close to Tretyakov Gallery." After a few silent paces she added, "You speak beautiful Russian."She exaggerated. I spoke better Russian than most of the carpetbagging bankers and mountebank consultants in the city--the pseudo-posh Englishmen, strong-toothed Americans, and misleading Scandinavians the black-gold rush had brought to Moscow, who mostly managed to shuttle between their offices, gated apartments, expense-account brothels, upscale restaurants, and the airport on twenty-odd words. I was on my way to being fluent, but my accent still gave me away halfway through my first syllable. Masha and Katya must have clocked me as a foreigner even before I opened my mouth. I suppose I was easy to spot. It was a Sunday, and I was on my way home from some awkward expat get-together in a lonely accountant's flat. I was wearing newish jeans and suede boots, I remember, and a dark V-neck sweater with a Marks Spencer's shirt underneath. People didn't dress like that in Moscow. Anybody with money went in for film-star shirts and Italian shoes, and everybody without money, which was most people, wore contraband army surplus or cheap Belarussian boots and bleak trousers.Masha, on the other hand, was authe...Revue de presse'Snowdrops assaults all your senses with its power and poetry, and leaves you stunned and addicted.' --Independent 'A superlative portrait... Snowdrops displays a worldly confidence reminiscent of Robert Harris at his best'--Financial Times'Reads like Graham Greene on steroids... Miller's complex, gripping debut novel is undoubtedly the real thing'--Daily Mail'Miller brilliantly showcases Moscow as his novel's strutting, charismatic star... disturbing and dazzling' --Sunday Telegraph 'Tight, compelling... A totally gripping first novel' --The Times 'A tremendously assured, cool, complex, slow-burn of a novel and a bleak and superbly atmospheric portrait of modern Russia' --William Boyd 'Superbly atmospheric... Elegantly written, and spot on its detail' --Observer 'A chilling first novel about the slide from relative innocence into amorality. I love the honesty of the writing, and the way the furious cold of a bitter Moscow winter gradually emerges as a character in its own right' --Julie Myerson 'Intoxicating... It will whirl you off your feet and set your moral compass spinning... A.D. Miller's sophisticated and many-layered debut novel skewers the relationship between victim and abuser, self-delusion and corruption, love and moral freefall' --Spectator