

## My Mother's Secret

**Alina Adams**

History Through Fiction (Nov 15, 2022)

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Love is the driving force in Alina Adams's intimate novel *My Mother's Secret*, set in Josef Stalin's Soviet Union.

A firm believer in communism, Regina dreams of building a socialist Jewish society in Birobidzhan, the designated Jewish Autonomous Region in Siberia. Escaping the state police, Regina arrives in Birobidzhan without permission to relocate. She struggles to survive in Birobidzhan's inhospitable environment, and her communist convictions begin to crumble.

In the power struggle between local leaders, Regina sides with Aaron and falls in love. Their plans to marry are thwarted when Aaron, who's accused of anti-Soviet activities, is sent to the front to fight against Nazi Germany. To keep Aaron safe, Regina trains as a nurse and joins him. Their time together is limited, but Regina still becomes pregnant with their daughter, Lena.

Later, Regina locates Aaron in a prisoners' camp in Poland, where she assists Tommy, an American dentist. Once the war is over, Regina marries Tommy to avoid being sentenced to a gulag for fraternizing with Americans. They move to the United States, and Aaron disappears into the Soviet Union. Decades later, Lena rummages through Tommy's papers and stumbles upon Aaron's name. Once again, Regina is forced to make a choice that will change her and Aaron's lives.

There are anachronistic terms in the book that impede immersion in its narrative, though, as well as problematic descriptions of Jewish characters that emphasize their physiognomy. Still, Regina's love for Aaron is the driving force of this vibrant story about people navigating their way through the maelstrom of world events. Taking place in a paranoid Soviet world of broken dreams, *My Mother's Secret* is an intimate historical novel in which love equals survival.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (November / December 2022)

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