



## Forty Rooms

By Olga Grushin

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### Forty Rooms By Olga Grushin

**The internationally acclaimed author of *The Dream Life of Sukhanov* now returns to gift us with *Forty Rooms*, which outshines even that prizewinning novel.**

Totally original in conception and magnificently executed, *Forty Rooms* is mysterious, withholding, and ultimately emotionally devastating. Olga Grushin is dealing with issues of women's identity, of women's choices, that no modern novel has explored so deeply.

“Forty rooms” is a conceit: it proposes that a modern woman will inhabit forty rooms in her lifetime. They form her biography, from childhood to death. For our protagonist, the much-loved child of a late marriage, the first rooms she is aware of as she nears the age of five are those that make up her family's Moscow apartment. We follow this child as she reaches adolescence, leaves home to study in America, and slowly discovers sexual happiness and love. But her hunger for adventure and her longing to be a great poet conspire to kill the affair. She seems to have made her choice. But one day she runs into a college classmate. He is sure of his path through life, and he is protective of her. (He is also a great cook.) They drift into an affair and marriage. What follows are the decades of births and deaths, the celebrations, material accumulations, and home comforts—until one day, her children grown and gone, her husband absent, she finds herself alone except for the ghosts of her youth, who have come back to haunt and even taunt her.

Compelling and complex, *Forty Rooms* is also profoundly affecting, its ending shattering but true. We know that Mrs. Caldwell (for that is the only name by which we know her) has died. Was it a life well lived? Quite likely. Was it a life complete? Does such a life ever really exist? Life is, after all, full of trade-offs and choices. Who is to say her path was not well taken? It is this ambiguity that is at the heart of this provocative novel.

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## Forty Rooms By Olga Grushin Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #178858 in eBooks
- Published on: 2016-02-16
- Released on: 2016-02-16
- Format: Kindle eBook

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This newest work from Grushin, winner of the New York Public Library Young Lions Fiction Award, is an enchanted meditation on poetry and life in which a child of the Moscow intelligentsia rejects a “small life consumed by happiness” in America and a life driven by “the divine standards of art.” But her path veers wildly in the New World, when she is seduced by and marries a successful young businessman whose “capable presence” she finds relaxing. The narrative then switches from the first to third person, and we witness the choices and conflicts for the young poet, known to readers only by her married name, Mrs. Paul Caldwell, as she has children and finds material comfort. “Perhaps, she thought, if you lived in a place like this, you would get to live longer too, and you would then be more willing to forgive yourself any mistakes, any spiteful wishes any wrong turns along the way. You would have more time to fix everything.” Grushin best captures the nagging regrets of her tortured artist in a magically lyrical pair of conversations with her bitter and bowed husband. At the end of life, Grushin concludes that the impossible, irresistible path of art is what’s most joyful—and memorable. (Feb.)

Review

### Praise for *Forty Rooms*

“It is author Olga Grushin’s tantalizing storytelling device that pulls her readers through the narrative as if wandering through an architect’s blueprint of a home still very much under construction. In “Forty Rooms” she has found an original storytelling device that should add to her growing acclaim.” — *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*

“[An] ingenious and original conceit...*Forty Rooms* is a deft, engaging novel written with rare eloquence. But a ferociously uncompromising morality play lurks within it.” — *Wall Street Journal*

“The structure of Olga Grushin's FORTY ROOMS is ingeniously simple...there is enough material to warrant hours of contemplation...The reader's impulse to grapple with the text, to wrestle it down and to raise objections or to attempt to identify her own place in the context of the story, is a sign not of weakness, but of Grushin's genius. There is no redemption story to relax into here, and no easy answers...This novel reminds us that to pursue her dreams, a woman is working against the establishment, not with it. To the young women into whose hands I will most certainly be putting Grushin's novel, I will say this: You can do it all, but together we can create a world in which we might be able to do more. Because if we don't keep working for greater gender equality, it's not in the best interests of the current power brokers to stop us from continuing to spend more than a fair share of our lives elbow-deep in soapsuds whether we choose to or not.” -- Alexandra Fuller, *New York Times Book Review*

“Grushin is too sly to be bound by cliché. If Mrs. Caldwell fails to be true to herself—and that “if” is sincere—this is because there are real questions about who that true self is. These are questions that women, especially, will recognize. Honest, tender, and exquisitely crafted. A novel to savor.” — *Kirkus*, starred review

“[A]n enchanted meditation on poetry and life... Grushin best captures the nagging regrets of her tortured artist in a magically lyrical pair of conversations with her bitter and bowed husband.” — *Publishers Weekly*

“This book is captivating in both concept and execution. It's a collection of 40 short stories that follow a woman through her life, one story for each room she inhabits, from her childhood home to her college

apartment to her first house and beyond. We're with her when, as a young girl, she talks with a mermaid in her mother's bedroom, and when, as a grown woman, her marriage begins to crumble. Filled with beautiful and surreal moments that perfectly capture the magic that can exist in real life, this book has extraordinary depth of imagination and emotion." — *Bustle*

"A young female poet, shedding Soviet Moscow for an American education, wants only "to live in a timeless poem." But time catches up to her with brutal stealth, and before too long she's "Mrs. Caldwell," a wealthy suburban housewife without a stanza to show for it. Grushin, the Russian-American author of the extraordinary *Dream Life of Sukhanov*, spins a *Bovary* plot into a mystical tapestry, complete with ghostly harbingers, jarring shifts in perspective, and linguistic fillips most native-born writers would envy. She also crafts a feminist response to Joyce's Stephen Dedalus — an artist navigating life backwards in heels." —Boris Kachka, *Vulture*

"Grushin is after something beyond the conflict between artistic expression and the aspirations of well-to-do suburbanites, or even the question of whether Mrs. Caldwell has sold out. The genius of *Forty Rooms* is instead its suggestion that a betrayal of childhood dreams can still allow for a life filled with meaning, one that is contradictory, replete with loss, contentment, regret and its own definition of purpose. *Forty Rooms* is a beautiful, moving novel of dreams that reflects life as it is lived." —Jeanette Zwart, *Shelf Awareness*

"Sly and devastating...Full of original and quoted poems, this heartbreaking novel is an invitation to contemplate whether the richness and ambition of one's life has to correspond to the proportions of one's landscape." — *O Magazine*

"Grushin beautifully renders a riddle of our time" — *Chicago Tribune*

"Lyrical and poignant, this is an ideal read for artists who seek answers to life's biggest questions." — *Bookish*

"*Forty Rooms* is a sensitive and exquisitely told meditation on the pleasures of art." — BookPage

"But this novel isn't after perfection, either of life or work. Rather, it shows how life is built out of adjustment — dreams tempered and poetry transformed into prose." — *Boston Globe*

### **Praise for *The Dream Life of Sukhanov***

"Grushin's beautifully constructed puzzle is a triumph of singular yet universal genius." —Boris Kachka, *New York* magazine

"Make no mistake about it: *The Dream Life of Sukhanov* is the work of a true artist . . . in its expansiveness, its refusal to dwell on the tiny palace of self, it harks back to the great Russian masters. In so doing, it breathes new life into American literary fiction." —Jonathan Yardley, *The Washington Post Book World*

"To write a novel as good as this, you have to be very talented. And Grushin is." —*Financial Times*

"Ironic, surreal, sometimes stunning . . . Gogolesque in its sardonic humor." —Richard Eder, *The New York Times*

"Grushin raises the bar for first novels. Like all excellent works, it does one unusual enough thing: It fills one with joy, because it works at every level." —*The Irish Times*

“[A] stunning fictional debut, and a book which reminds us of what a superb contribution the Russian tradition has made, and can still make, to the literary art, compared with our own fallen and humdrum literary world.”—*The Independent* (UK)

“Grushin’s haunting dreamscape of her native land is a debut to be cheered here, there and everywhere.”—Dan Cryer, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

“In Grushin’s wonderful novel, the incandescent wealth of Russia’s literary heritage blazes.”—Ruth Scurr, *Daily Telegraph*

### **Praise for *The Line***

“Utterly brilliant . . . recommended ecstatically.”—*Library Journal*

“A writer of tremendous talent.”—Elif Batuman, *The New York Times Book Review*

“If you missed Grushin’s first book, [this] is your chance to catch a rising star as she establishes herself in the top ranks of American authors.”—*Garrett Kenyon, LitKicks.com*

“I’m not sure which is the bigger accomplishment, Grushin’s ability to depict the tumult, disappointment and daily grind of life in post-revolution Russia, or the light touch of her style. The city her characters inhabit may be oppressive, but *The Line* is not.”—Jessa Crispin, “What We’re Reading,” NPR.org

### About the Author

**Olga Grushin** was born in Moscow in 1971. After studying art and journalism in Moscow, she was awarded a full scholarship to Emory University in 1989. Her first novel, *The Dream Life of Sukhanov*, earned her a place on *Granta*'s list of Best Young American Novelists and won her the New York Public Library's Young Lions Award; it was also a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Best First Novel award and for Britain's Orange Prize. In 2002 she became an American citizen. She lives in Potomac, Maryland.

### **Users Review**

#### **From reader reviews:**

#### **David Pimentel:**

What do you about book? It is not important along? Or just adding material if you want something to explain what you problem? How about your extra time? Or are you busy person? If you don't have spare time to complete others business, it is give you a sense of feeling bored faster. And you have spare time? What did you do? Everyone has many questions above. They have to answer that question due to the fact just their can do that. It said that about guide. Book is familiar in each person. Yes, it is correct. Because start from on jardín de infancia until university need this specific Forty Rooms to read.

#### **Elaine Roberts:**

Spent a free time to be fun activity to perform! A lot of people spent their spare time with their family, or their particular friends. Usually they carrying out activity like watching television, going to beach, or picnic

within the park. They actually doing same every week. Do you feel it? Do you need to something different to fill your current free time/ holiday? Can be reading a book may be option to fill your no cost time/ holiday. The first thing that you will ask may be what kinds of reserve that you should read. If you want to attempt look for book, may be the reserve untitled Forty Rooms can be good book to read. May be it is usually best activity to you.

**Lorenzo Lowe:**

Forty Rooms can be one of your basic books that are good idea. Many of us recommend that straight away because this book has good vocabulary that will increase your knowledge in language, easy to understand, bit entertaining but delivering the information. The article author giving his/her effort to get every word into pleasure arrangement in writing Forty Rooms however doesn't forget the main stage, giving the reader the hottest and also based confirm resource data that maybe you can be certainly one of it. This great information can drawn you into new stage of crucial imagining.

**Laurie Cales:**

Guide is one of source of know-how. We can add our information from it. Not only for students and also native or citizen want book to know the up-date information of year in order to year. As we know those textbooks have many advantages. Beside all of us add our knowledge, can bring us to around the world. From the book Forty Rooms we can take more advantage. Don't you to be creative people? To get creative person must love to read a book. Just choose the best book that ideal with your aim. Don't end up being doubt to change your life with this book Forty Rooms. You can more desirable than now.

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