

Russian diaspora literary fiction

# Coincidences

**Trilogy.** 3 Novels. AST. Moscow 2023. approx. 350 pages each

The contemporary part of the first two books takes place in Russia (Moscow) and Belarus (Minsk, Polesie) 2019-2021. The historical part begins in 1924 in Belarus, and continues in 1926 in Algier, Paris, Moscow. The modern part of the third book is happening 2022 in Russia. The historical part (1930s-1950s) of the third book takes place in Russia (Moscow, the Far East), Belarus (Minsk, Polesie) and Germany. All plot lines are intertwined.

## Vol. 1 Veronica's Nets

Ancestors who have long since disappeared into the darkness of time affect us much more than we think. However, thirty-year-old Alesya does not have time to think about such abstract things. Working as a nurse in a Moscow hospital, she barely has enough strength to support her family back home in Polesia. But the past is becoming more and more evident in Alesya's character. Her career choice is no coincidence either – her great-grandmother Veronica became a nurse during the First World War and had to make the big decisions in life amidst many dangers. When the son of a deceased nursing patient proposes to Alesya, she asks for time to think it over.

## Vol. 2 The Sand Rose

A silver necklace with a sand rose goes to Sonia Artynova as a legacy. And it seems that this coincidence changes everything ... But Sonia does not know that such sudden turns in fate are a family legacy. Her great-grandmother once had to trade Germany for Russia, Crimea for Bizerte, an archaeological expedition for Tuareg captivity, Algeria for Paris... And it's not about wanderlust, it's about responding to evil in an effort to protect the most important values in life. From the 20s of the 20th century the heroes are thrown into the 20s of the twenty-first century, which only at first glance have nothing in common. In fact, then as now, a person must defy fate in order not only to save himself and his loved ones, but also not to lose respect for himself.

## Vol. 3 The Golden Rhein

Ada's son lives in Moscow with his father, a top manager of Russian television working on propaganda. This led Ada to divorce him in 2014. Ada has since returned to Germany, but continues to visit Moscow, including after February 2022. She tries to convince her son to leave with her, not knowing that it is love that keeps him in Moscow. The historical line about Ada's grandfather and grandmother, Sergei and Xenia, takes place in 1938-1945: Gulag in the Far East, flight to Vladivostok, escape on a merchant ship going to Hamburg. Working for the British Secret Service, Sergei cannot take his wife Xenia and their adopted daughter with him, so he settles them in a convent on a Rhine island where they become witnesses of tragic events. The fate of loved ones later becomes Ada's main motivation to study the history of this period. And it also allows her to deeply understand the new war. Irreversible changes have also occurred in the life of Igor, a native Muscovite. He and Ada save each other from the despair they both feel at having to live with a redrawn past.



THE AUTHOR

sample available

English

Anna Berseneva was born in 1963. She graduated from the Journalism Department of the Belarusian State University, and later from the Gorky Literature Institute Moscow where she then became associate professor. Since 2022, she has been a professor at the Free University, established in Europe by political emigrants from Russia. She is a writer, scriptwriter and literary critic. To date, she published more than 40 books in the genre of psychological novels. Total circulation in Russia - about 5 million copies. 15 novels have been filmed in Russia. In 2022 she was subjected to political persecution in Russia for publications on socio-political topics and was declared a foreign agent. Berseneva is Member of PEN-International. Since 2020 she lives in Germany.

# Anna Berseneva

Russian diaspora

## PRESS REVIEWS

"What Anna Berseneva writes is rare in Russian literature - it is upscale entertainment literature that does not require kitsch and has believable characters. The family saga „Veronica's nets" is nowhere near as dark as a book dedicated to history could be - and yet it is honest and presents the past in three dimensions using the example of a family saga."

ALEXANDRA BERLINA

"We are experiencing a very complex, terrible reality right now and we are struck by the repetitions, the rhymes of history. These rhymes sound in the novels of Anna Berseneva, they sound in the scale of countries, historical events, as well as in the fates of the main characters, intertwined in a bizarre knitting, penetrating the layers of eras."

SIMA VAILIEVA, artist (UK)

"In Anna Berseneva the plot is only a construction in which a huge amount of historical, philosophical, emotional material is placed. These are very complex and multi-layered themes and statements. And her texts are a great material for visualization, for cinema and for TV. In general, she has created a huge and multilayered world in which you can live for years. And it's also very valuable that her texts about very complex things can be accessible to a mass audience. They are democratic."

LARISSA BELZER, cultural critic, professor at FU (Berlin)

# Anna Berseneva

## LONG SYNOPSISES

## Vol. 1 Veronica's Nets

The modern plot line relates to Alesia: Returning from friend's hospitable dacha, Alesia sees a man who is buying a blackberry from a wino. Noticing the girl's gaze, he excuses himself: „To the beggar, give!“ An introduction occurs. Igor, who learns that Alesia is a nurse, invites her to visit his mother, who is in need of medical care. She agrees. The benefits are obvious – she is offered a place to live along with her job. A friendly relationship develops between her and one day Igor proposes to Alesia to live with him. The girl takes a pause to think. And with this she leaves for Pinsk, to her parents and her son from an affair with a married man who had seduced young Alesia. When Alesia rushes to find her son lost in the marshes of Polesie, she navigates the terrain as if she inherited her great-grandmother's topographical memory. She finds him with a fishing rod on a hard spot, not daring to take a step because the swamps are all around. When they return home together, Alesia realizes that she will not marry Igor.

The historical plot line relates to her great-grandmother Veronika: In Bagnici, a farmstead located in Polesie, where the sea of Herodotus once was, near Pinsk, in the family of a Polish nobleman lived a girl Veronika, who was raised by two elements: the cultural – the father's, associated with Latin, philosophy, poetry, and the natural – associated with oral folk art of Polesie. Meanwhile, during World War I, Veronika leaves her college studies in Minsk and goes to work in a hospital as a nurse. There she meets a young Polish man, who proposes marriage to her. She accepts him, but leaves the connection for the time when her work at the hospital is over. And that time comes during the civil war. The groom, through her aunt, gives Veronika money for an escort to take her across the border. The escort man, Sergei, is wounded during the crossing. Veronika does not leave him. She saves him at the expense of her marriage. She takes him to the house where she rented a room trying to rescue him. When Sergei proposes to Veronika to leave for Moscow she is dissolved in love but also understands that Sergei holds some kind of great position in secret service. Soon it becomes clear to Veronika will not link her life with a man whose hands are splattered with the blood of innocent people. Sergei tries to explain, but has no right to give away the secret that he is a spy, working in intelligence.

Just like her great-grandmother, Alesia does. Once being among a crowd of protesters against the arbitrariness of the Russian authorities, she gives first aid to a man who has had an attack of epilepsy. She is helped in this by a man, Zhenia, who turns out to be an employee of an international company „Doctors Without Borders“. Alesia suggests to hide for a while and to go with her to Bagnici. A harmonious relationship develops between them, in which there is also a place for her son. In Bagnici they find the statue „Veronichka“ carved out of wood. The fact that the figure was preserved in the attic of the Bagnici house, turns out to be related to the great-grandmother, who is so similar to Alesia, reminding of the abyss of life, of the darkness of its impenetrable. Returning to Moscow, Alesia realizes that Evgeny, with whom she was bound by passion, does not consider her and her son as a future family. And she puts a period to their relationship. She rents an apartment outside Moscow. She is saved from a rapist by Evgeni, who only upon returning home suddenly realizes that he can't live without Alesia. But she has already moved out of her dangerous rented apartment. Evgeni picks up all the connections and in the end finds his beloved.

# Anna Berseneva

**Vol. 2 The Sand Rose**

The modern line is connected with Sonia: her life is like anabiosis: she is not deeply touched or affected by the kitten handed to her by the neighbor boy; nor by Maxim, the man with whom Sonia spends her free time; nor by her work in a business literature publishing house; nor by social and political events. And even the meanness of her partner, who was frightened and did not protect Sonia from the thief who threatened her life, does not cause her strong feelings. Sonia wasn't like that before. But for eight years now, she has been like a blindfolded and ear-blinded person. The reason is the burn of her first love. Her chosen one was Boris Shakhovsky, a gloomy, handsome man and director of the Shakhovsky Publishing House holding company. A rich man of intelligence, brilliantly educated, he, unable to counteract the system, was forced to cover the false elections positively. Unable to forgive himself for this, he lashes out at Sonia and literally crushes her. During the pandemic, the parents of Sonia die. By taking a job as a nurse at a covid hospital where her brother and his wife Alesia are working, Sonia regains the meaning of her life. While working, she meets Roman, who is literally dragged out of the afterlife by doctors. And she decides to help her brother and his wife by bringing their son from Minsk. In Belarus, Sonia discovers that evil has tipped the scales. The regime's massacres of peaceful citizens who prefer freedom and democracy are tantamount to a slaughter of orcs. But all is not well in Russia either: the police think they can arrest Alesia, who is eight months pregnant, just because she does not have a passport: it was stolen. In the midst of the fear that the old life will no longer be, that one is helpless in the face of mass evil, Sonia becomes ill. She is helped by Roman who rescues her and Alesia during a police brutality. He turns out to be the man in whose presence Sonia feels safe and secure. Love flares up between them.

The historical line is connected with Sonia's great-grandparents Ksenia and Sergei: Xenia buries her mother, who died of consumption at a resort in Europe. Her father takes her to Crimea. But from there they are forced to flee with the Red Army commissars. The father is an archaeologist. He gets the French Society of Archaeologists to sponsor excavations in western Sahara. When he suddenly dies there Xenia is left alone in the Sahara. Alone with the eternal sand. When she is rescued from the hands of Tuareg brigands, she realizes that she has fallen from one captivity to another. The Tuareg want to sell her as to a port brothel. A Russian wanderer, Sergei, intercedes for her, and they sail off to El Jezair. Sergei buys her documents. A spark flares up between Ksenia and Sergei. But, as the girl later realizes, Sergei's passion is more a release of tension than love. He shuns the girl, while at the same time caring for her. They arrive in Paris together where they enjoy some weeks. Before Sergei tells her that he has finally solved all his problems and tomorrow they will leave for England, where Sergei spent his childhood, Xenia is approached by the Russian secret service who want her to return to Russia. The option of not taking his „wife“ with him is impossible for Sergei – the NKVD knows what and who can be manipulated. First they unload in Minsk where they meet friends and where Xenia finds out that she is pregnant. Back in Moscow they are lodged in a service apartment, where the janitor and the driver are watching them. Sergei gives Xenia some information that she may one day use to possibly save themselves. While Xenia gives birth to a son, Sergei disappears for ten years. Coming back he confesses to her that he is, in fact, a murderer, that she should give up on him completely. But Xenia confirms her love, saying that she is ready to follow him even to hell. Sergei disappears again trying to help his friend in Belarus who is tortured by the NKVD. At the end Xenia blackmails the NKVD with the special information she has got about the activities of the NKVD organs in Europe. They tell her that Sergei is in Ussuriysk. The necklace with a sandy rose that Sonia inherits from Ksenia, had once been chosen by Sergei as a gift to Ksenia.

# Anna Berseneva

**Vol. 3 The Golden Rhein**

This novel is the concluding novel in the trilogy begun by the novels *Veronica's Net* and *The Sand Rose*. It can easily be read as a standalone work. The present-day portion of the action takes place from December 2021 to October 2022. Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine is the central event. It defines the dramatic events in the personal lives of numerous characters.

The protagonist Ada (45 years old) travels from Germany to Moscow in December 2021 to spend Christmas with her son (18 years old). After the complicated vicissitudes of his parents' divorce, he lives in Moscow with his father, a top manager of Russian television. The story of acquaintance and joint life of Ada and her husband (early 2000s) is given by flashbacks, which are built into the composition so that through them the characters of the heroes are revealed.

Ada is a person of peace. She is a British subject. Her father is a Frenchman of Iranian origin. Her mother is a Jewess, born in the USSR and brought to England as a teenager under unusual circumstances. Ada grew up in England and wrote her master's thesis on the history of Germany during World War II. Her early marriage brought her to Moscow, where she lived for 7 years, working as director of a contemporary art gallery. The year 2014 was a turning point not only for Russia, but also for her family. Working on propaganda television destroyed her husband's identity and led Ada to divorce him. Ada has since returned to Germany, but continues to visit Moscow, including after February 2022. She tries to convince her son to leave with her, not knowing that it is love that keeps him in Moscow.

After 7 years living in Moscow, Ada understands Russian life from the inside. However, she is not part of that life and does not try to justify those who think it is possible to ignore the war. The parallels between Hitler's Germany and contemporary Russia became obvious to her long before 2022. Since the outbreak of the war, she has worked extensively with Ukrainian refugees. Therefore, the contrast between Ukraine's massive grief and Moscow's absolute nonchalance makes a particularly heavy impression on her.

Both contemporary and historical events are shown in the novel through the family events and relationships of the characters past and present. Ada's grandfather and grandmother, as well as Ada's mother, had to survive the most acute dangers of the twentieth century. Some of them are described in the two previous novels of the trilogy. But the new ones turn out to be no less, and even more dramatic. They take place in 1938-1945. Ada's grandfather and grandmother are Sergei and Xenia. Previous events in their lives have led to Sergei's arrest. Ksenia went looking for him in the Gulag of the Soviet Far East. In the new novel, she finds him in a camp in Vladivostok (the one where the poet Osip Mandelstam died) and rescues him with the help of a peasant who removes the bodies of the dead from the camp. Ksenia and Sergei hide for a while in the basements of Vladivostok's historic urban slums. Then they manage to get on a merchant ship going to Hamburg. Once in Germany, Sergei continues his activities as a secret agent of British intelligence. He is sent to North Africa. During the Second World War, he participates in important intelligence operations in this strategic region. Before leaving, Sergei settles Xenia and their adopted daughter in a convent on a Rhine island. They were to be taken out of Germany, but this was prevented by the war, so they become witnesses and participants in the tragic events that took place on the island. To describe them, the novel uses documentary chronicles that are unknown to the general reader. The fate of loved ones later becomes Ada's main motivation to study the history of this period. And it also allows her to deeply understand the new war, which dramatically changed the lives of her husband, her son and her own. Irreversible changes have also occurred in the life of Igor, a native Muscovite. He and Ada save each other from the despair they both feel at having to live with a redrawn past.

Past and present events in the novel constantly intertwine and shade each other. Guilt, responsibility, and individual ways of confronting a greater evil are its central themes.

# Anna Berseneva