



# The Madonnas of Leningrad: A Novel

*Debra Dean*

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Bit by bit, the ravages of age are eroding Marina's grip on the everyday. An elderly Russian woman now living in America, she cannot hold on to fresh memories—the details of her grown children's lives, the approaching wedding of her grandchild—yet her distant past is miraculously preserved in her mind's eye.

Vivid images of her youth in war-torn Leningrad arise unbidden, carrying her back to the terrible fall of 1941, when she was a tour guide at the Hermitage Museum and the German army's approach signaled the beginning of what would be a long, torturous siege on the city. As the people braved starvation, bitter cold, and a relentless German onslaught, Marina joined other staff members in removing the museum's priceless masterpieces for safekeeping, leaving the frames hanging empty on the walls to symbolize the artworks' eventual return. As the Luftwaffe's bombs pounded the proud, stricken city, Marina built a personal Hermitage in her mind—a refuge that would stay buried deep within her, until she needed it once more. . . .

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