

PDF | The Winter Palace: A Novel of  
Catherine the Great

by Eva Stachniak



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From award-winning author Eva Stachniak comes this passionate novel that tells the epic story of Catherine the Great's improbable rise to power—as seen through the ever-watchful eyes of an all-but-invisible servant close to the throne.

Her name is Barbara—in Russian, Varvara. Nimble-witted and attentive, she's allowed into the employ of the Empress Elizabeth, amid the glitter and cruelty of the world's most eminent court. Under the tutelage of Count Bestuzhev, Chancellor and spymaster, Varvara will be educated in skills from lock picking to lovemaking, learning above all else to listen—and to wait for opportunity. That opportunity arrives in a slender young princess from Zerst named Sophie, a playful teenager destined to become the indomitable Catherine the Great. Sophie's destiny at court is to marry the Empress's nephew, but she has loftier, more dangerous ambitions. What Sophie needs is an insider at court, a loyal pair of eyes and ears who knows the traps, the conspiracies, and the treacheries that surround her. Varvara will become Sophie's confidante—and together the two young women will rise to the pinnacle of absolute power.

“A majestic and splendidly written tale of pride, passion, intrigue, and deceit that is brought alive from the first page to the last.”—Rosalind Laker

“At the same time baroque and intimate, worldly and domestic, wildly strange and soulfully familiar:*The Winter Palace* offers a flickering glimpse of history through the gauze of deft entertainment.”—*The Washington Post*

“A thrilling point of view . . . Readers are treated to a firsthand account of the young princess's slow ascent to the throne, a path deliciously strewn with discarded lovers and sanguine court intrigues.”—*Minneapolis Star-Tribune*

“[A] brilliant, bold historical novel . . . This superb biographical epic proves the Tudors don't have a monopoly on marital scandal, royal intrigue, or feminine triumph.”—*Booklist*

(starred review)

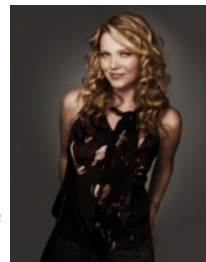
Amazon.com Review

## Tasha Alexander Reviews *The Winter Palace*

Tasha Alexander is the author of the bestselling Lady Emily series. She attended the University of Notre Dame, where she signed on as an English major in order to have a legitimate excuse for spending all her time reading. A confirmed Anglophile from birth, she and her husband, novelist Andrew Grant, divide their time between Chicago and the UK.

Like most lovers of historical fiction, I'm on constant lookout for a book into which I can completely disappear, one that will engulf all my senses and, in effect, turn my couch into a time machine. I want the history to be accurate, the characters to be compelling, and the story to make me reconsider preconceived notions about a period outside the area of my expertise. Eva Stachniak's *The Winter Palace* does all that in spectacular fashion.

The scandal, luxury, and political unrest rife in eighteenth century Russia provide a rich backdrop, and Stachniak takes full advantage of all of it without sticking to the ordinary and expected. Instead of presenting Catherine the Great at the peak of her powers, she gives us the infamous empress during her youth, when she was Sophie, a young German duchess betrothed to the future Tsar Peter III. A not entirely welcome foreigner, Sophie is thrust into a court full of corruption and deceit, where nothing is more important than have a source of reliable information. It is by taking advantage of this circumstance that Stachniak gives her novel extra depth. Catherine is not the protagonist of *The Winter Palace* Stachniak tells her story through Barbara, a young woman whose heartbreaking life has led her to employment as an ill-treated seamstress at the palace.



Until someone realizes she'd make a better spy.

Stachniak's well-chosen protagonist enables her to give the novel a full and satisfying depiction of the Imperial Court, seen not only through the eyes of the privileged nobility, but through a woman who is keenly aware of what goes on above and below stairs. She brings to life the plight of the less fortunate and the delicate balance of truth and lies necessary to survive in the murky labyrinth of Barbara's world. Stachniak fills her novel with intricate details--the opulence is all but tangible--but never does so at the expense of her story, which moves along at a clipped pace. Her prose, lush and evocative, is as elegant as the fabled Amber Room at Catherine's summer palace.

*The Winter Palace* should secure Stachniak a place among the best historical novelists. It is one of those rare books that grabs the reader and won't let go, one that begs to be read again, one that lingers pleasantly in the mind long after the finishing the last page. And for me, it proved itself in a more simple way: the minute I closed the book, I wanted to get my hands on everything else Stachniak has written.

### Product Description

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