



About the author:

NATALIYA MESHCHANINOVA was born in 1982, is an acclaimed Russian film director. She has written screenplays for numerous feature films and TV shows, including *Another Year* (2014), *Arrhythmia* (2017), *Anna's War* (2018), and *Storm* (2019). Meshchaninova made her directorial debut in 2014 with *The Hope Factory*, which follows a group of troubled twenty-somethings in the industrial town of Norilsk. Her feature film *Anna's War* received the best film award from all major national film prizes. The autobiographical book *Stories of a Life* is Meshchaninova's first prose work. Originally written as a series of viral Facebook posts, then released as a cult hit in St. Petersburg, Meshchaninova's memoir-novel was nominated for the 2018 Russian National Bestseller Prize and became a finalist for the 2018 New Literature Award, receiving a heated response from the critical community and readers alike. Today it is almost unanimously considered a pillar of the #metoo movement in Russia.

Selected Bibliography

2017 — **Stories of a Life**, *novel*

Finalist of the **Firecracker Award in Fiction 2023**

Winner of the **PEN/Heim Translation Fund Grant 2020**

Nominated for the **National Bestseller Prize 2018**

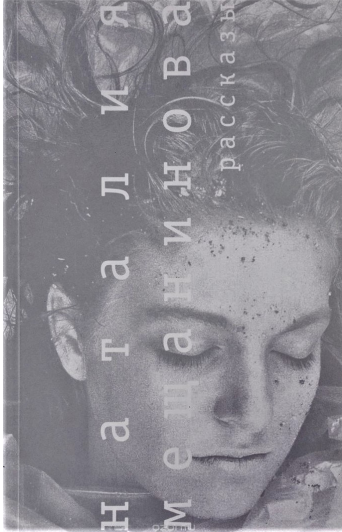
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Seans

Novel, memoir, 2017
128 pp

Translation rights sold

World English Deep Vellum
Bulgarian Janet 45

Audio book rights

Vimbo Publishing

Complete
English translation
available

Stories of a Life

From one of Russia's most celebrated film directors comes a book of raw, honest, punch-in-the-gut autobiographical stories about coming of age in a provincial town in the early 1990s. With unflinching honesty, grit, a close eye for the tiniest detail, and darkly tinted, self-deprecating humour that recall the work of David Sedaris, Meshchaninova produces devastatingly confessional prose about nonchalant teenage cruelty, domestic violence, and sexual abuse. *Stories of a Life*, however, is not just another contribution to a #MeToo choir — Meshchaninova's brisk and authentic tone turns her stories into a powerful tool to fight back against abusive realities.

Stories of a Life is shaped by the narrator's conflicting and knot-tight relationships with her mother. Meshchaninova worries about her mother's bad heart so is afraid to upset her; she is afraid of not being like her mother and is tortured by the fear of not being her real biological daughter... Natasha is facing the unnerving and harrowing truth about her mother's awareness of what Natasha's stepfather did to her, stalking the nine-year-old girl, whom he molested and raped at the age of twelve. At the book's end, in a story entitled Mom, Nataliya directly addresses her mother in a heartbreaking ode that accepts and embraces her mother's real self. Extremely frank and private, *Stories of a Life* is also a book of unvarnished portrayals of provincial life in Russia during the early 1990s. Meshchaninova documents a reality where a teenager must navigate a community with diffused borders and a sense of freedom reminiscent of *A Clockwork Orange*, plagued by mundane crime, addiction, and violence. Her text serves as

a coping mechanism that the narrator herself calls "literary exhibitionism". The book grows into the struggle of a girl coming of age in an aggressively non-congenial society. Meshchaninova does not offer commentary on her feelings and emotions, and she doesn't overstate the harsh experiences she had to cope with. In a laconic, raw, and minimalistic manner, she states her story and calls her readers as witnesses. Refusing to be a victim — though her experience as a 12-year-old teenager who was sexually abused by her stepfather is nothing less than being the victim of a crime — or a part of these brutal realities, Nataliya seeks power in the word, molding a different world in her texts, avenging her foes in diaries and notes, and watching her often graphic hatred-infused images come to life. Quite eerily the author states in the text, "whatever you write will come true".

Selected quotes

(*Stories of a Life*) ... is a thinly veiled family memoir disguised as a fictional bildungsroman. Set in late-'90s, post-Soviet Russia, the novel explores the experience of growing up alongside everyday abuse — almost always gender-based, primarily sexual, just as often psychological as physical.

LARB

Tearing herself free with screams, taunts, and something very much like poetry, Meshchaninova has given us an obscenely private text as frightening as the novels of Stephen King and as sharply formed as the tragedies of Racine... it's not every year that a voice so pure and powerful emerges in Russian literature.

Galina Yuzefovich
meduza.io

Meshchaninova's scenarios are skin torn to blood, pink glasses discarded as unnecessary, truth uncomfortable for the inhabitants of parallel reality.

Elena Tanakova
Gallerix

The author, in general, is not trying to shock, she is simply not afraid to say. But this simultaneous openness and ruthlessness strikes with unexpected force and long action. Leads the reader out of their comfort zone. Makes him an involuntary and seemingly guilty observer.

Elena Makeenko
Gorky Media

It is not often that people are ready to open up, and only the willingness to open up distinguishes real literature.

Aglaya Kurnosenko
scriptwriter

This story is not about disaster, but about what happens to the survivors... This is the new Russian prose.

Vladimir Pankratov
a literary critic, founder of Fiction35 Prize