



There Once Lived a Mother Who Loved Her Children, Until They Moved Back In: Three Novellas About Family

Ludmilla Petrushevskaya , Anna Summers (Translation)

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The masterly novellas that established Ludmilla Petrushevskaya as one of the greatest living Russian writers—including a new translation of the modern classic *The Time Is Night*

“Love them, they’ll torture you; don’t love them, they’ll leave you anyway.”

After her work was suppressed for many years, Ludmilla Petrushevskaya won wide recognition for capturing the experiences of everyday Russians with profound pathos and mordant wit. Among her most famous and controversial works, these three novellas—*The Time Is Night*, *Chocolates with Liqueur* (inspired by Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Cask of Amontillado”), and *Among Friends*—are modern classics that breathe new life into Tolstoy’s famous dictum, “All happy families are alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” Together they confirm the genius of an author with a gift for turning adversity into art.

There Once Lived a Mother Who Loved Her Children, Until They Moved Back In: Three Novellas About Family Details

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From Reader Review There Once Lived a Mother Who Loved Her Children, Until They Moved Back In: Three Novellas About Family for online ebook

Ksenia Anske says

You think you know horror? Think again. The uniquely Russian domestic hell described in this book is what I lived through myself or heard about from others, and I can tell you that every bit of it is true, but in Petrushevskaya's words it becomes more than true. It screams in your face right off the page. Now that's real horror and real writing rolled up in one. In other words, a treasure. But read the introduction last—it summarizes all three novellas, and so it takes away the pleasure of guessing.

Brenda says

Although the title of Ludmilla Petrushevskaya's *There Once Lived a Mother Who Loved Her Children, Until They Moved Back In: Three Novellas about Family* may not appear to promise as grim an outcome as the titles of her previously translated volumes (*There Once Lived a Woman Who Tried to Kill Her Neighbor's Baby: Scary Fairy Tales* and *There Once Lived a Girl Who Seduced Her Sister's Husband, and He Hanged Himself: Love Stories*), the fictions in this latest collection leave behind a bitterer aftertaste. The reader may close the book feeling slightly nauseated, worried that she's been poisoned by exposure to such unpleasant fictional beings.

Although "Chocolates with Liqueur" is the only one of the three stories to boast a villain extreme enough to have been lifted directly from melodrama, I found its plot less harrowing. Somehow, literally murderous characters are less dispiriting than the ones who metaphorically poison each other a little each day.

The dysfunctional characters from "The Time Is Night" and "Among Friends" make the casts of American reality television seem like well-adjusted representatives of humankind. Half-starved females endure privation and humiliation to feed ungrateful children. Impoverished mothers and grandmothers might seem pitiable at first, but prove manipulative and mean. Adult males tend to be brutes, their treacherous finagling motivated by the desire to get registered at a Moscow addresses.

American readers who seek confirmation for their perception of communism as an inevitable producer of stolid misery will likely feel validated by these tales. Can we blame ideology alone for the manifestation of such degraded personalities? Or are people petty everywhere regardless of the dominant belief system? Readers seeking stories that privilege triumphs of the human spirit should look elsewhere.

But, hey, I'm grateful to First Reads for providing me with the opportunity to review this book—and not only because I didn't pay money for it. I've read all three of the titles by Petrushevskaya that Penguin has published thus far—and I would subject myself to more. I don't need to like characters to enjoy reading about them. In fact, I much prefer to expose myself to vanities and depredations of the human psyche when they are safely ensconced in pages of imaginative literature so long as I don't have to watch people embarrassing themselves on "reality" TV.

Trish says

Not long ago I reviewed a short memoir published by Petrushevskaya, *The Girl from the Metropol Hotel: Growing Up in Communist Russia*, in which I mused about rumors of her talent, never having read any of her poetry, stories, or novelettes. Petrushevskaya has a savage humor borne of long deprivation. Her work bears signs of torture of the spirit; she recognizes how to cannily exploit human weakness to stay alive. But she also has a huge umbrella of compassion which she holds over those she loves. Reading her work is a breathtaking experience.

This collection is comprised of a novelette, "The Time is Night," and two shorter stories. The work altogether expresses every feeling of love, desperation, hope, and bitter despair that a mother can feel about her children in any country in any time. It is an epic, deeply funny, excoriating look at how the deprivations in Russian social, political, and economic life have worked loose the traditional bonds of family. It is compulsive reading. The work was published in Germany before it could be published in Russia, having been banned there.

"It all seems like yesterday. I look back on my life—men are like road signs, children mark chronology. Not very attractive, I know, but what is, if you look closely?"

A proud poet finds herself destitute in late middle age. Her son is in prison for theft (and maybe murder) and her daughter keeps showing up pregnant and wanting more than the poet has to spare. The poet takes her daughter's first child to care for and continues to suffer ungrateful visits from her children whenever they need something. Anna Summers, translator for this series of stories, tells us in the Introduction that

"...her heroines are tired, scared, impoverished women who have been devastated by domestic tragedies and who see little beyond the question, How to raise a child? How to feed it, clothe it, educate it when there is no strength left and no resources?"

When "The Time is Night" was finally published in Russia, it came out at the same time as the third piece, "Among Friends." "Time..." is a novelette, its length over one hundred pages; "...Friends" is less than thirty pages, outlining a grotesque collection of viperish friends and former spouses, all calculating how and what they can score from knowing someone but paying no attention to the larger world outside their immediate purview. The incestuous theft and jealousy rife within the group is ghetto poverty: no one can break free of the poisonous atmosphere because they *need* each other. The story is a short quick shard that cleaves the heart, and leaves the reader gasping: it speaks directly to what some feel they must resort to "protect" their children.

The second story, "Chocolates with Liqueur," is the one written the most recently (2002). Summers tells us it was written as a tribute to Edgar Allen Poe. The story itself is broken into five parts; I thought the story was complete after the first part which contains the most horrendous and coruscating engagement scene I have ever encountered, without us knowing it is just a continuation of the theme of how difficult it is to find a place to live. The atmosphere gets thicker, darker, and heavy with motive as befits a Poe tribute, and finishes pointing to "The Cask of Amontillado," thought to be Poe's best short story. In that story Poe created a family motto suggesting that the family history is filled with acts of revenge: "*Nemo me impune lacessit*" (No one attacks me with impunity). Find Petrushevskaya's story somewhere and read it. It feels positively ancient, as though this were a story written at the dawn of time.

The twist in the nature of marriage and family comes from the search for a safe place in a society where food, lodging, dignity are in short supply. Petrushevskaya is controlled She has seen it all and still gives us art. I don't know which of these stories I like the best. She deserves all the awards and all the adulation. She is extraordinary.

Blue Cypress Books says

Ludmilla is perfection.

J. says

Petrushevskaya's writing is dark and bitter: she treads well past Dostoevsky's bleak territory and stops - barely - just before Solzhenitsyn's overtly political works. Banned in the Soviet Union, Petrushevskaya offsets the domestic sphere with the relentlessly disturbing. With touches of black comedy, her three haunting novellas in this collection ("The Time is Night"; "Chocolates with Liqueur"; and "Among Friends") explore the inner/personal struggles of women set against the political backdrop of the Soviet Union. Petrushevskaya examines the darker crevices of the human character. In her use of "extremal" literature, Petrushevskaya's novellas defiantly stare down and address that which was considered beyond all but the faintest of gossipy whispers: poverty, pregnancies, abusive relationships and broken marriages, communal apartments, lack of privacy, the threat of informers, and imprisonment.

Of the three novellas in this collection, "The Time is Night" and "Among Friends" are the better selections. "Chocolates with Liqueur," while exhibiting the same economy of prose in Petrushevskaya's other stories, has a disproportionate ratio of ornamentation to plot focus - it feels a bit lopsided.

"The Time is Night" presents a portrait of a babushka/grandmother with a complexity that makes for an interesting character. Anna, a desperate woman by any measure, has a painfully burning sense of pride, martyr and messiah complexes, and is frustrating in her contrariness. Yet, beneath these layers, the pulse of family and love for family is a steady ground note.

"Among Friends" continues this study of a deeply hidden and gnarled sense of love and duty toward family, while examining the pressures of living between quicksand and bound-hands of life in the USSR. While the protagonist is quick to point out the flaws, hypocrisies, and pettiness of her "so-called friends," she is blind (figuratively, though she is also literally losing her eyesight) to her own similarities. The tension unrelentingly presses downward until the novella's shockingly unsettling end: familial love surfaces from a calculated play of violence. Brutality is the chessboard on which Petrushevskaya's characters plot their every move with the intention of keeping survival, love, and sanity in the endgame.

Highly recommended - I plan to pick up other volumes of Petrushevskaya's work.

I received a copy of this book (as an ARC) through a GoodReads First Reads giveaway.

Kathrina says

Grim, grim, grim. As Anna Summers says in the introduction, "All that immense quantity of suffering and squalor would be lost, would disappear into a historical void, if it hadn't found a laureate in her (Petrushevskaya). Suffering is bad enough, but permanent invisibility is even worse. It mitigates the horror, in some mysterious way, when it is witnessed, recorded, transfigured" (p. xx). I'm glad Petrushevskaya has given voice to these lives, as I am glad that Levi and Weisel and Solzhenitsyn gave voice to the holocaust

experience, as the tragedies and inhumanity are equally grave and monstrous, though Petrushevskaya's world remains opaque. This is an important book, especially for feminist historical perspectives of the Soviet era of stagnation. Fortunately, this is also a short book, so you won't run out of oxygen before you turn the last page.

Aj Sterkel says

This review is for the English translation of a Russian novella collection.

This is the second Ludmilla Petrushevskaya book I've read, and **I've come to the conclusion that I just don't understand what's great about her writing.** These three novellas are intriguing enough that I finished them, but I can't say I liked them or enjoyed the reading experience. **They're just so rambley! It's infuriating.**

The first novella, *The Time Is Night*, is written stream-of-consciousness style. The main character is a poet who seems to hate the women in her family. She put her mother in an old folks' home and doesn't get along with her daughter or granddaughters. However, she'd do anything for her grandson and her criminal son. (Even though she kind of hates them, too?) She's basically an all-around horrible person. She's been so beaten down by living in constant poverty that she's mostly given up on life. **The stream-of-consciousness writing style makes the story hard to follow.** It jumps around in time without warning and rambles on for over 100 pages. **The characters are mildly interesting because they're all horrible, but there isn't a plot.** This is my least-favorite novella in the book.

I had slightly better luck with *Chocolates with Liqueur*. It's mostly linear, so it's easier to understand. It stars a father who feeds poisoned chocolates to his wife and children, but they fail to die. What follows is a weird and suspenseful tale of a woman trying to protect her children from her psychotic husband. This is my favorite story in the collection, but I didn't love it. I have a hard time with Petrushevskaya's writing style. **There's so much distance between the characters and the reader that I was never able to connect with the characters.** I just didn't care about them.

The ending of the final story, *Among Friends*, caught me off-guard. This novella is about a group of friends (or, more accurately, frenemies). The story covers a long stretch of time and shows how relationships change as people get older. Near the end of the story, one of the friends is diagnosed with a deadly illness. She goes to great lengths to ensure that her friends will care for her son if she dies. Honestly, I considered giving up on this novella. Similar to the first story, **it rambles.** I didn't feel like it was going anywhere or building to anything. **The ending is great, but getting to the end was a struggle.**

My favorite part of the book is the introduction. The translator gives background information that is very helpful for readers who are not familiar with life in Soviet Russia. Writing these stories could have gotten Petrushevskaya in trouble with her country's government because they show Russians in a negative light. Her characters are poor, overworked, starving, mentally ill people who live in crowded communal apartments. The stories are full of hopelessness and casual violence. I appreciate the bravery it took for Petrushevskaya to show her country in an honest way, but **this book wasn't for me.**

Mobyskine says

Three novellas with a woman narrator. Love all three regardless of how tragically unhappy it was.

"The Time Is Night"

The book title did actually tell the right thing about what to be expected. The development of the story was insanely interesting-- straightforward, a bit humorous, totally wicked. I did sigh a lot for the tantrum and conflict, the mess and family drama but I love how Anna telling me the story from her perspective (although I felt like being dragged into such a hassle). Nothing good about all character's personalities, the miseries were tremendous but the realness and 'crisp', emotions, and frustration been presented so well throughout the narratives. I love the author's writing style it feels like she just blurted out each point into a sentence, giving it a soul, developed each into a paragraph, pinch of thoughts and feelings, honesty and disclosure. Might be too stressful and tiring to some, psychotic too but however the story goes not every family is a happy untwisted family, anyway.

"Chocolates with Liqueur"

Another harsh and hysterically insane story of a family. Chocolates with liqueur and a hidden motive. The characters always giving me such a headache, so troublesome-- Nikita especially, and his sister too. Loving the way of narration and unexpected plot at the end.

"Among Friends"

Uniquely various characters with such interesting personalities. A story among friends living in an absurd communal life, such a bizarre friendship. A fast and rush narratives, with every problem a person could encounter in a life, trying to survive. From a messy and complicated relationship to family problems, and someone secretly trying to fix all the things before death coming knocking on the door.

Such macabre and grotesque vibe, a slight of social and economic issues depicted as well. Overall, it grasp my attention about the author and her writings. Probably would read another few books by her.

Sophie says

Στον αντ'ποδα του Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn ο οπο'ος ?γραψε για συλλ?ψεις, ανακρ?σεις, πολιτικ?ς φυλακ?ς και στρατ?πεδα και του Andrei Platonov που ασχολ?θηκε με τον εμφ?λιο π?λεμο και την επαν?σταση των Μπολσεβ?κων, τα θ?ματα με τα οπο?α καταπι?νεται η Petrushevskaya ε?ναι β?βαια ακρα?ες ιστορ?ες για τη ζω? στη Σοβιετικ? ?νωση, ωστ?σο μοι?ζουν πιο κοντ? στον μ?σο αναγ?στη και στα βι?ματ? του.

Η μαγε?α των διηγημ?των της Petrushevskaya εντοπ?ζεται στην αποτ?πωση των καθημεριν?ν ανθρ?πων και των τραγωδι?ν που διαδραματ?ζονται στους κ?λπους της οικογ?νειας· οι ηρω?δες της ε?ναι κουρασμ?νες, φτωχ?ς γυνα?κες, που ζουν ασφυκτικ?, στο φ?βο, που δε βλ?πουν τ?ποτα π?ρα απ? τα ερωτ?ματα Π?ς να μεγαλ?σει ?να παιδ?; Π?ς να τραφε? ?να παιδ?;, που ταλαν?ζονται ζ?ντας απ? μ?ρα σε μ?ρα μ?σα σε πανομοι?τυπες καταστ?σεις ?νδειας, που υποφ?ρουν την προσωπικ? -και οικογενειακ?- τους κ?λαση σιωπηρ?. Η οικογ?νεια και η φιλ?α φ?νεται να ε?ναι αφεν?ς αναπ?φευκτοι και φυσικο? δεσμο?, εν?, αφετ?ρου, υπ? συγκεκριμ?νες συνθ?κες, φρικτο? και ψυχοφθ?ροι.

Η νατουραλιστικ? πρ?ζα της συγγραφ?ως, η εμμον? της στην λεπτομερειακ? καταγραφ? των ?σων βι?νουν οι ηρω?δες της, αναμειγν?εται με την προθυμ?α της να προσπαθ?σει να μετατρ?ψει ακ?μα και τον ακρα?ο π?νο και τον ξεπεσμ? σε διαυγ?, συμπονετικ? τ?χνη.

Kirsty says

There Once Lived a Mother Who Loved Her Children Until They Moved Back In: Three Novellas About Family is the newest work published in English by Russian author Ludmilla Petrushevskaya. The New York Times believes her to be ‘one of Russia’s best living writers... her tales inhabit a borderline between this world and the next’.

The blurb of *There Once Lived a Mother...* states that in these ‘darkly imagined’ novellas, ‘both cruelty and love dominate relationships between husband and wife, mother and child... Blending horror with satire, fantasy with haunting truth, Ludmilla Petrushevskaya’s newly translated tales create a cast of unlikely heroines in a carnivalesque world of extremes’.

Anna Summers has translated the book, and has also penned its informative introduction. At the outset, she sets out the ‘story-swapping culture’ which exists in Russia, and goes on to inform us that ‘the three novellas in this volume tell extreme stories that couldn’t be heard for many years – censorship wouldn’t allow it’. Summers believes that Petrushevskaya is incredibly important within the Russian canon, describing, as she does, ‘in minute detail how ordinary people, Muscovites, lived from day to day in their identical cramped apartments... She spoke for all those who suffered domestic hell in silence, the way Solzhenitsyn spoke for the countless nameless political prisoners’.

Of the author’s protagonists, Summers says the following: ‘Reading Petrushevskaya is an unforgettable experience. This testifies to the exceptional power of her art, because her characters, by their own admission, don’t make particularly fascinating subjects. In this volume, her heroines are tired, scared, impoverished women who have been devastated by domestic tragedies... Such women are boring even to themselves’.

The three novellas within *There Once Lived a Mother...* are entitled ‘The Time Is Night’, ‘Chocolates with Liqueur’ and ‘Among Friends’ – Petrushevskaya’s best-known and highly controversial story – and were published in Russia in 1988, 1992 and 2002 respectively. Each story is unsettling, and they are quite stylistically similar too. Despite the lulling and almost simplistic narrative voices used in *There Once Lived a Mother...*, the sense of foreboding is incredibly strong from the start. Atmosphere is built up marvellously through Petrushevskaya’s use of sparse wording, which gives the reader an immediate indication that something is not quite right.

In these stories, cruelty nestles into every crevice of life. The narrator of ‘The Time is Night’ is a poet named Anna, who looks after her young grandson, Tima. He is a young boy who at first appears ‘jealous’ of her ‘so-called success’, and she consequently blames him for all of the problems in her life. As the tale goes on, however, one realises that Tima is the only thing which she is living for. Her existence is bleak; her paralysed mother has been in hospital for seven years, and her son has been in prison. Her daughter, Tima’s mother, is living away with ‘baby number two’, her ‘new fatherless brat’, and taking all of the money which should be Tima’s. Anna, whilst headstrong, is rather naive, and despite her poor quality of life, there is something in her narrative which prevents any sympathy being felt for her.

The brutality and violence within *There Once Lived a Mother...* seem senseless after a while, making the stories rather a chore to read. The cast of characters are not quite realistic; their foibles and traits sometimes sit oddly together, and any believability is therefore diminished.

Vincent Burgeon’s cover design is striking and rather creepy, and certainly sets the tone for the words within. *There Once Lived a Mother...* is stark and oppressive, and whilst the tales are certainly not for the faint-hearted, Petrushevskaya does give a moderately interesting insight into a stifling regime. The novellas

here are stranger than her short stories, and far more disturbing. Summers has done a good job of translating the work, but there is something oddly detached within the tales, even when the first person narrative perspective has been used. Emotion is lacking in those places which particularly need it, and whilst it is harrowing, the narrative style – particularly in the second story, ‘Chocolates and Liqueur’ – does not suit.

TheSkepticalReader says

The writing of this collection feels a bit convoluted. None of the characters felt real and it was incredibly hard, even when they are at their most pathetic state, to feel sorry for them. The translator seems to have done a good job making this book as readable as possible so I feel confident that it is the author’s writing here that I did not enjoy.

The first story is about a struggling poet who is taking care of her grandson after her daughter abandons him. There are sudden jumps in her story that make it difficult to follow what’s happening when. There are times when multiple conversations she’s having (or had in the past) are jumbled into one long paragraph without quotations or breaks that made the entire story feel incoherent. I wanted to feel bad for Anna but she’s such an unlikable person that it’s difficult to care about what happens with her. All in all in this story, the only voice I felt bad for was Tima and the other two children.

The second story is about a woman abused and abandoned by her husband who tries to protect her children from him. This story is a bit easier to follow but something about the stiff nature of the structure again kept me from feeling anything towards the main character. It reads precisely like a ‘this happened, then this happened, and then that happened’ narrative.

I managed to complete the first two novellas but then just couldn’t be bothered with the last one. The book was abandoned at 154 pages (which is saying something).

Brooke says

There Once Lived a Mother Who Loved Her Children, Until They Moved Back In is a set of three novellas, written by Ludmilla Petrushevskaya and translated to English by Anna Summers. Petrushevskaya is a Russian author, whose work was censored and suppressed for decades by the Soviet government. While I do not in any way agree with censorship, it is easy to see why the government did not want Petrushevskaya’s work published, as it provides a brutally honest look at everyday life in Russia. She does not shy away from the adversities, poverty, violence and other harsh realities, making these novellas very grim.

Having never read work from or set in Russia, I found these novellas quite interesting, albeit disturbing. I can’t say that I *enjoyed* them – they aren’t the type of story you are supposed to like – but I appreciate them for what they are. Of the three (“The Time is Night,” “Chocolates with Liqueur,” and “Among Friends”), my favourite was “Chocolates with Liqueur.” The other two rambled and were a bit hard to follow, although I was stunned (in a good way) about the ending of “Among Friends.”

Raven says

Super grim and blackly hilarious, Petrushevskaya delivers again. If you want to see why her work was

banned in Russia, this is the collection for you. It requires a morbid sense of humor and the ability to see horror and familial affection in the same sets of actions; her characters coexist with themselves in a complexity not often seen. For people who do trigger warnings, trigger warnings for everything.

Jay Hinman says

Sub-heading: "Three novellas about family", and that's precisely what we get from Russia's foremost modern chronicler of the burdensome human condition. These are stories that were suppressed by Soviet and post-Soviet authorities in their time, presumably for being too "real", as they contain zero explicit anti-government samizdat. I loved the other Petrushevskaya collection I read last year, "There Once Lived A Girl Who Seduced Her Sister's Husband, And He Hanged Himself", and this one's nearly in that league, albeit in overall abbreviated form, making for an exceptionally quick read. It's really just one long short story called "The Time Is Night", along with two short stories - each a haunting overview of a middle-aged Russian woman in a degraded and pitiful state. I certainly mean pitiful as in "have pity", which you will need to find plenty of in exploring the harrowing inner lives of women struggling with familial, state and communal oppression. Yet Petrushevskaya's also a wonderful black humorist, and she limns her litanies of domestic horrors with absurdities that, if they don't make one laugh out loud, at least lessen the crushing existential burden somewhat.

"The Time Is Night" is truly the centerpiece of this one, and is by far the best of the three stories. A 50-year-old would-be poet, Anna, recounts in "writings that were left behind" how she tried to keep life from unraveling while trying to care for her grandchild, whom her daughter Alena had abandoned at her doorstep while being herself abandoned by two husbands. Her son also comes and goes into her life after getting out of prison, all the while pursued by thugs who are looking to administer some serious post-lockup beatdowns for god knows what. Anna moves from soaring, poetic calls to her higher nature to the day-to-day mundane and drab realities of Russian life, with a dying mother, a bare refrigerator and not a whole lot of money. She's an invisible woman - a common complaint of the middle-aged in any society - but even more acute in a society teeming with alcoholic, misogynist men and chronically unemployed children who hate you.

Petrushevskaya gets her digs into societal absurdities where she can, such as when Anna picks up some journalistic work for an acquaintance: "I urgently covered her back when she needed a piece on the bicentennial of the Minsk Tractor Plant" (a plant, which, suffice to say, had not been in existence for 200 years). Anna, who barely has anything to cling to in life, suffers a series of emotional indignities that culminate with the removal of even the last bits of joy in her fragile life. There's a lot of societal guilt-by-association implied by these tales. It's clear that Petrushevskaya was chafing in a big way, and still is, even after the glorious transition from Communism to Putinism.

The other two stories are good, but are slightly lesser works. The best of the two is "Among Friends", which details the incestuous inner workings of an adopted "family" of sorts, a collection of codependent adults who get together once a week to drink and talk. These apartment gatherings were as close to "civil society" as individuals within the Soviet Union ever came, but when our narrator finds circumstances spinning out of control and that threaten to ruin the life of her son, she engages in an absurd bit of violent self-sacrifice that, through this catalog of emotional horrors, Petrushevskaya almost makes sound banal, normal and wise. I'll never be a lonely and overburdened middle-aged Russian woman, but I think I've got a pretty decent sense of what it might be like to be one via this author's unsettling and highly textured writing.

Julie says

There Once Lived a Mother Who Loved Her Children, Until They Moved Back In is a set of three novellas about family, written by Russian author Ludmilla Petrushevskaya. These are stories of the everyday lives of women who are dealing with many adversities in post-Soviet Russia. In addition to the struggles they face in the society in which they live, these women also deal with husbands and children who treat them poorly in many ways.

The Time is Night is the first novella and it takes up more than half of the book. It's about a woman named Anna who is caring for her daughter's child, has a mother who is about to lose her bed at a hospital and may end up back at home, and has a son who has just been released from prison. This story was a bit confusing to follow, but it all made sense in the end. This was my first taste of Petrushevskaya's writing style, and it is a bit shocking in terms of the language she uses and the actions of her characters, most of whom are not nice people.

Chocolates With Liquor is about a young nurse named Leila and her horrible marriage. It was inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado." In this short novella, Leila deals with a husband who is abusive, mentally ill, and trying to kill her and her children. This was my favorite of the three novellas as it was a suspenseful story, albeit quite bizarre at the same time.

Among Friends is the final novella. It is about a group of friends who meet every Friday night over many years. The friends' relationships change over time, marriages fail, new relationships emerge. This one gets more into the politics of the time, the fear of informants and the profound impact friends can have on one another. Yet again, the story is bleak and depressing, yet something draws the reader in and it's hard to put it down until the shocking end.

These are the types of stories I feel that I need to read over and over in order to appreciate them more. Each time I came to the end, I wanted to go back and re-read to see how we got there. The language is harsh, yet real. It's certainly not for everyone, but if you're looking for something different, try *There Once Lived a Mother Who Loved Her Children, Until They Moved Back In*. It will give you a glimpse into the dark world of post-Soviet Russia and the horrifying realities in which some families live.
