



Black Earth City: When Russia Ran Wild (And So Did We)

Charlotte Hobson

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A young woman's heady encounter with the new Russia, as she and the country thrill to their first taste of freedom

It is September 1991 and the dismantling of the Soviet Union is under way. In Voronezh, a provincial town famous for its loamy black earth, a sense of lightheartedness-part fear, part exhilaration-pervades. The people conquer uncertainty, hunger, and -20 degree temperatures by drinking huge quantities of black-market vodka and reveling in their new-found sexual freedom.

Black Earth City is Charlotte Hobson's record of this tumultuous time. An irresistible guide, she brings us into the cramped, rundown Hostel no. 4, where international students and locals congregate. We meet Yakov, who blows half-a-million rubles on a taxi to see a girl in Minsk; Lola, who sleeps with her peers for a share of their dinner; Viktor, with his brutal memories of military service; and Mitya, Hobson's wild and optimistic lover whose gradual disillusion-and dissolution-mirrors his country's dramatic lurch from euphoria to despair.

At once loving and sharp-edged, tender and brave, *Black Earth City* reveals a world and a woman as they open up to life.

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