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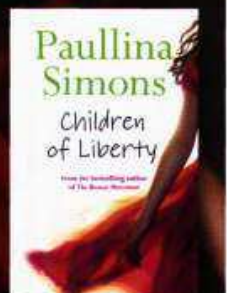
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PAULLINA SIMONS

**TALKS ABOUT HER
LATEST NOVEL
CHILDREN OF LIBERTY**



Answered Prayers

When American-Russian author **PAULLINA SIMONS** was writing her much-loved 'The Bronze Horseman' trilogy, she prayed that someone else would feel even half of what she felt when she wrote it. If book sales are any sign, then Paullina's prayers were answered many times over. But now she's turned her attention to a new young couple - an American man and an Italian woman - in Boston at the turn of the 20th century, as **ALESHA EVANS** reports.

As a young girl growing up in the USSR during the 1960s, all Paullina Simons wanted to be was a writer. Living in a tiny apartment with her family in Leningrad, Paullina dreamt of being able to make others feel the way that she felt when she read a book that she loved.

'Everyone in Russia wants to be a writer; they don't know how to be anything else,' says Paullina, talking with me by phone from her home in Long Island, New York. 'They drink vodka and they grow up with these dreams of being Fyodor Dostoyevsky.'

In the early 1970s she moved to America, where she struggled to learn a new language and adapt to an unfamiliar culture. All this time Paullina clung to her dream of becoming an author, and in 1994 she published *Tully*, her first novel that would become an international bestseller. Paullina's star continued to rise as she racked up numerous bestsellers and thousands of fans worldwide. She is incredibly grateful to those who helped to nurture her budding career, which she largely credits to Australia.

'My entire career is built on what happened in Australia,' Paullina explains. 'When *Tully* was published in Australia, they didn't print many copies. Suddenly, they sold out and they had to print them again and again. There was no promotion and no publicity. It was just a word-of-mouth thing, but it was on word-of-mouth that my career was built.'

Paullina is genuinely grateful to her readers for their support. She tells me that the most gratifying aspect of writing is the connection that she shares with her many fiercely dedicated fans from around the world.

'Meeting the people with whom I have accidentally and providentially made this connection has fuelled my work and has enriched my life in so many ways,' Paullina says. 'I don't quite understand it but I also don't question it. It's very special.'





Paullina Simons

When **gr** last spoke to Paullina back in 2006, she was struggling to cope with life after her 'The Bronze Horseman' trilogy had ended. 'There was a mourning period but I have managed move on, though not well, because I keep coming back into that universe. There are still stories there that I haven't explored,' says Paullina.

'The feeling that I had when I wrote *The Bronze Horseman* is like nothing else I've ever had in my entire life. As I was writing it, I was praying and hoping that someone else might read this and feel half of what I felt when I wrote it.'

Paullina's prayers were well and truly answered. 'The Bronze Horseman' trilogy, a tragic love story of a couple continually brought together and torn apart by war, is easily Paullina's most loved work and has often been awarded the title of the greatest love story of all time.

'It's a beautiful thing to hear when people say *The Bronze Horseman* is their favourite book of all time, but once I got a letter that said, "I read up to the part in *The Bronze Horseman* where they got married and then I stopped reading. I didn't want to read the end. It looked like it was going to be a downer for me,"' Paullina says with a laugh. 'For every time you get your feathers all puffed up and you think you're doing so well, you get brought right back down to earth.'

But Paullina has good cause to puff her feathers up. She is about to realise her other childhood dream, now that *The Bronze Horseman* has been optioned for development into a major feature film. Eager fans have sent Paullina their headshots and resumes, but it's not just Paullina's fans who are excited.

'I have been choosing dresses for my Academy Awards night for the last 30 years. I hadn't even written a book at the time, but I was always dreaming about going there! Nothing would satisfy me more than having a film made of *The Bronze Horseman*.'

But Paullina hasn't been sitting around waiting for the movie to be made. She's written a new novel, **Children of Liberty**, which tells the story of Harry and Gina Barrington, the parents of Alexander in 'The Bronze Horseman' trilogy. Despite her enduring attachment to 'The Bronze Horseman' books, Paullina had not initially set out to write the story of Harry and Gina.

'It was something that I was not meaning to do at all. My original idea was to write a love story about life in 1920s America leading up to the stock market crash and the Great Depression. That's when I said, "Oh my goodness, I have the story! I can write about when Alexander's mother first came to Boston and fell in love with Alexander's dad." The irony, of course, is that **Children of Liberty** ends in 1905, so it doesn't even go into the 1920s. So you'll have to wait until the next book!'

Like *The Bronze Horseman*, **Children of Liberty** is a story of love against the odds. The book explores the consequences of love against the background of a society dominated by suffocating rules of propriety and class consciousness at the turn of the century.

Gina Attaviano, a young Italian immigrant, comes to Boston with her family in search of a better life. Harry Barrington, a privileged and wealthy member of the Boston elite, is searching for meaning in his own life. As the two grow closer, they must

contend with conflicting social expectations, the betrayal of those that they love and their own forbidden passions.

'Love chooses you. Sometimes you wish that you could choose love, but think about how many times we love people who are completely wrong,' Paullina says.

To bring this heartbreaking love story to life, she conducted detailed research into early 20th-century Boston. The exhaustive research has paid off, because Paullina has breathed life into early Boston, taking the reader through the developing city, from the hustle and bustle of the docks to the rattling of trams as they trundle down busy streets and through the scent of garlic and tobacco sold by Italian shopkeepers. Paullina also examined the complicated relationships between men and women of the era.

'I had a scene in which Harry and Gina meet to discuss a business proposal at a tavern. Very late in the writing process I accidentally found a 1922 book called *Emily Post's Etiquette*,' Paullina explains. 'So this is 22 years after the events in **Children of Liberty**, and Emily Post writes that no man could ever be seen in a public restaurant alone with a woman unless they were married to each other. I thought, *Oh my god, no!* There were very strict rules for behaviour that I just didn't know, so it was a real labyrinth to go through.'

While there are certainly echoes of *The Bronze Horseman* in **Children of Liberty**, it is very much its own book. As Paullina confirms, you don't have to know anything about 'The Bronze Horseman' trilogy to enjoy Harry and Gina's story. 'At the end of **Children of Liberty**, I want people to take a deep breath with trepidation and with excitement as to what's to come. I want people to get that feeling of "I can't wait to see what happens next," which is the best thing you could say to a writer.' **gr**

Children of Liberty by Paullina Simons is published by HarperCollins, rrp \$29.99.

