

Book of the Day

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The love that led to Dallas

MARINA AND LEE. By Priscilla Johnson.
McMillan. Harper & Row. 527 pp. \$15.

By ROBERT FRIEDMAN

If ever there was a pair of star-crossed lovers, it was Lee Harvey Oswald and Marina Prusakova. Implausible as was their encounter, the misfit American ex-Marine, briefly a defector to the Soviet Union and the Russian girl, an illegitimate child with a harsh stepfather, there was nothing unlikely about their union once they met.

Oswald wooed her because another Russian girl spurned him. Marina was flattered that she had won this quintessential outsider, this exotic foreigner. Each had self-ish reasons for their marriage, each called it love and by labelling it so, believed it, and for a time it was.

Priscilla McMillan has called her book "Marina and Lee" and not the other way around. Oswald may have entered the pages of history with his murder of John F. Kennedy but it is Marina's voice we hear, it is through her eyes that we see all that preceded, the culminating events of Nov. 22, 1963.

Priscilla McMillan knew Kennedy as a Senator, interviewed Oswald when he sought haven in Russia in 1959 and, Russian-speaking, she is the only writer to whom Marina has fully told her story. After a flood-tide of Kennedy-Oswald books, "Marina and Lee" is not likely to be surpassed as a convincing explanation of how character and events led Lee Harvey Oswald inexorably to the assassin's role.

That Lee slew Kennedy is a fact which Marina does not dispute and which has not been toppled by the evidence despite the conspiracy theories which abound.

The author, who interviewed Oswald's family, friends and acquaintances, describes a young man who hungered for freedom but who had a passion to dominate; who despised dictatorship, but who had a history of explosive violence; who regularly, beat his wife yet was capable of great tenderness; whose ambivalent feelings toward a grasping, uncaring mother became inextricably interwoven with his attitudes toward men with su-

preme authority.

Oswald, though scantily educated, was not stupid. He saw clearly defects in the social systems of both great powers and, in observing in his notes upon his return to America that "true democracy can be practiced only at the local level," he was anticipating, as the author suggests, the activists of the later 1960s. "The trouble," she concludes, "lay not with his ideas but with the emotions underneath."

But even the ideas were ambiguous, contradictory. If he was to channel his unfocused anger into an act of political murder, it was doubtless because rage, like most everything else, needs its reason for existence.

Devious, a liar to Marina and others even when it appeared there was little value in it, it was as if Oswald used falsehood not only to cover his tracks but to hide his self.

News stories in advance of publication of "Marina and Lee" may have diminished the impact of its revelations:

But "Marina and Lee" does not depend on sensation for its impact. It is a compelling story told with a mature authority. Without detracting from the horror of the act, it forces us to confront the human face of the assassin.

Do we learn anything useful from the life of Lee Harvey Oswald? Probably not much. The mark of Cain still stains the brows of men, and no one yet knows how to rub it off.