



Eight Pieces of Empire: A 20-Year Journey Through the Soviet Collapse

Lawrence Scott Sheets

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A two-decade journey, panoramic in scope yet intimate in detail, through the hopes, sorrows, and conflagrations of an unraveled empire and the people living in it.

Not with a bang, but with a quiet, ten-minute address on Christmas Day 1991: this is how the Soviet Union met its end. Lawrence Scott Sheets, who was then living in Moscow as a young foreign correspondent, went to the center of the capital to witness the response. “In the streets around Red Square,” he writes, “life went on as usual. One would not have known that 300 million people had just become citizens of other countries.”

But in the wake of that one deceptively calm moment, conflict and violence soon followed. Some of the emergent new countries began to shed totalitarianism, while others sought to revive their own dead empires or were led by barely or totally unreformed ex-Soviet leaders who built equally or even more repressive political machines. Since the late 1980s, Sheets lived and reported from the former USSR and saw firsthand the reverberations of the collapse of empire across Russia, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Ukraine, and Chechnya. *Eight Pieces of Empire* draws readers into the people, politics and day-to-day life in the region, painting a vivid portrait of a tumultuous time.

On the 20th anniversary of the fall of the USSR, Sheets’ stories about people living through these tectonic shifts of fortune—a trio of female saboteurs in Chechnya, the chaos of newly independent Georgia in the early 1990s, young hustlers eager to strike it rich in the post-Soviet economic vacuum—reveal the underreported and surprising ways in which the ghosts of empire still haunt these lands and the world.

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