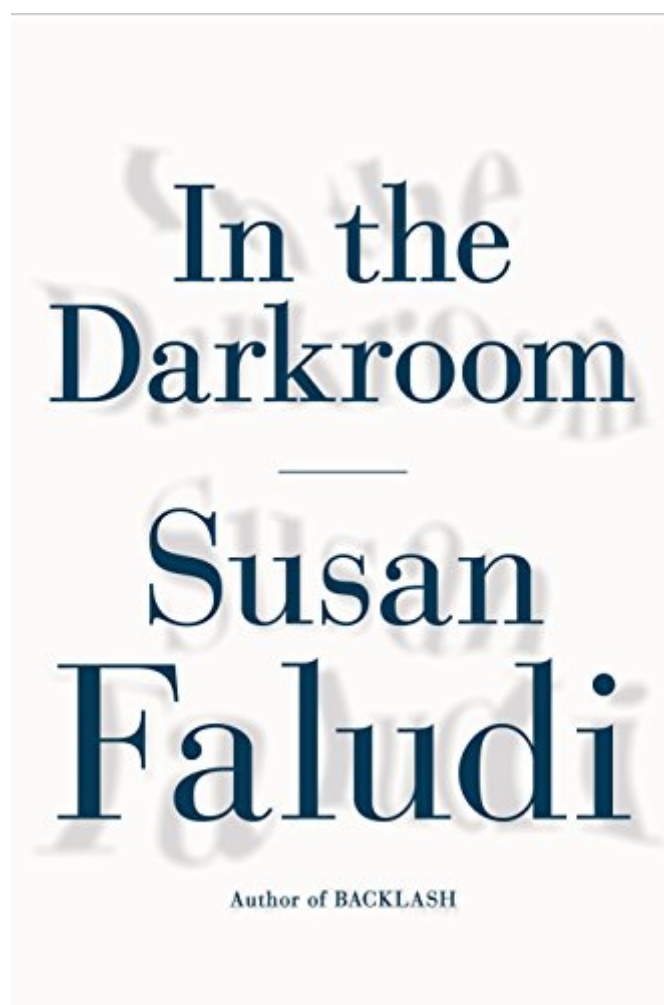


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In The Darkroom



Synopsis

From the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and bestselling author of *Backlash*, comes *In the Darkroom*, an astonishing confrontation with the enigma of her father and the larger riddle of identity consuming our age. In the summer of 2004 I set out to investigate someone I scarcely knew, my father. The project began with a grievance, the grievance of a daughter whose parent had absconded from her life. I was in pursuit of a scofflaw, an artful dodger who had skipped out on so many things—obligation, affection, culpability, contrition. I was preparing an indictment, amassing discovery for a trial. But somewhere along the line, the prosecutor became a witness. So begins Susan Faludi's extraordinary inquiry into the meaning of identity in the modern world and in her own haunted family saga. When the feminist writer learned that her 76-year-old father—long estranged and living in Hungary—had undergone sex reassignment surgery, that investigation would turn personal and urgent. How was this new parent who identified as a complete woman now—connected to the silent, explosive, and ultimately violent father she had known, the photographer who'd built his career on the alteration of images? Faludi chases that mystery into the recesses of her suburban childhood and her father's many previous incarnations: American dad, Alpine mountaineer, swashbuckling adventurer in the outback, Jewish fugitive in Holocaust Budapest. When the author travels to Hungary to reunite with her father, she drops into a labyrinth of dark histories and dangerous politics in a country hell-bent on repressing its past and constructing a fanciful—and virulent—nationhood. The search for identity that has transfixed our century was proving as treacherous for nations as for individuals. Faludi's struggle to come to grips with her father's metamorphosis self takes her across borders—historical, political, religious, sexual—to bring her face to face with the question of the age: Is identity something you choose, or is it the very thing you can't escape?

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Customer Reviews

Author and feminist Susan Faludi has written a memoir, "In the Darkroom", about her father. This is not a simple, loving memoir about a beloved father, but rather about a father who seemingly was at war with the world, including the world of his family. Faludi's father, born in Budapest in 1927 as Istvan Friedman, and died in Budapest in 2015, reinvented as Stephanie Faludi. It was the life between the birth and death that Susan Faludi writes about. Istvan Friedman seemed to be a man who lived a life with few "constants". Born of Jewish parents in inter-war Hungary, he was not close to his parents, though he rescued them in 1944 in Budapest when they had been taken by the Arrow Cross. After living through WW2, he touched down in Copenhagen and Brazil before settling in New York City, where he changed his name to Steven Faludi, married and raised a family in 50's, 60's, before being divorced in the mid-1970's. Susan's home life while growing up with him in the house was volatile, to say the least. Father and daughter split for many years after Susan became an adult and Steven moved back to Budapest. In 2004, she received an email saying that "Steven Faludi" was now "Stephanie Faludi" - her father had had a sex-change operation in Phuket, Thailand. In the years between 2004 and Stephanie's death, Susan and her father tried to understand each other. She spent time with him in Budapest, where the two wandered the city as Susan attempted to recreate her father's life in understandable fashion. From my reading of the memoir, Stephanie Faludi seemed to be a person in a lifelong search of his identity. Was he Jewish?

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