



The Red Leather Diary (P.S.)

Lily Koppel

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Rescued from a Dumpster on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, a discarded diary brings to life the glamorous, forgotten world of an extraordinary young woman.

For more than half a century, the red leather diary lay silent, languishing inside a steamer trunk, its worn cover crumbling into little flakes. When a cleaning sweep of a New York City apartment building brings this lost treasure to light, both the diary and its owner are given a second life.

Recovered by Lily Koppel, a young writer working at the *New York Times*, the journal paints a vivid picture of 1930s New York—horseback riding in Central Park, summer excursions to the Catskills, and an obsession with a famous avant-garde actress. From 1929 to 1934, not a single day's entry is skipped.

Opening the tarnished brass lock, Koppel embarks on a journey into the past, traveling to a New York in which women of privilege meet for tea at Schrafft's, dance at the Hotel Pennsylvania, and toast the night at El Morocco. As she turns the diary's brittle pages, Koppel is captivated by the headstrong young woman whose intimate thoughts and emotions fill the pale blue lines. Who was this lovely ingénue who adored the works of Baudelaire and Jane Austen, who was sexually curious beyond her years, who traveled to Rome, Paris, and London?

Compelled by the hopes and heartaches captured in the pages, Koppel sets out to find the diary's owner, her only clue the inscription on the frontispiece—"This book belongs to . . . *Florence Wolfson*." A chance phone call from a private investigator leads Koppel to Florence, a ninety-year-old woman living with her husband of sixty-seven years. Reunited with her diary, Florence ventures back to the girl she once was, rediscovering a lost self that burned with artistic fervor.

Joining intimate interviews with original diary entries, Koppel reveals the world of a New York teenager obsessed with the state of her soul and her appearance, and muses on the serendipitous chain of events that returned the lost journal to its owner. Evocative and entrancing, *The Red Leather Diary* re-creates the romance and glitter, sophistication and promise, of 1930s New York, bringing to life the true story of a precocious young woman who dared to follow her dreams.

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