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Hidden Lives: Eleanor and Franklin

Carlyle Johnson



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An engrossing account of the secrets behind the Roosevelt marriage---the story of the individual struggles of Eleanor and Franklin to find happiness, despite the destiny forced upon them. In the fall of 1918, when Assistant Secretary of Navy Franklin Roosevelt returned from a European inspection tour, his wife, Eleanor, found in his luggage a bundle of love letters from her own social secretary, Lucy Mercer. Eleanor offered a divorce, and Franklin wanted to take it, but there were obstacles: Franklin's mother threatened to cut him off without a penny, and his political career would be ended by scandal. An agreement was reached: they would remain married in name only. Franklin would never see Lucy again. In 1921, Franklin came down with polio in both legs. His heroic efforts to pursue his political goals, while keeping his paralysis a secret, would consume him for the rest of his life. (Privately, he always believed he would walk again.) About this time, he hired a secretary, Missy LeHand, who was—according to son Elliott—probably his mistress as long as she lived. Eleanor, with five children, and servants to look after them, involved herself in women's politics, and charitable causes. In the twenties, she enjoyed the friendship of many single women, some of whom were lesbian. She herself had a long, intimate relationship with Lorena Hickok, an AP reporter Franklin and Missy spent several winters in Florida for the warm waters, and ultimately built the Little White House in Warm Springs, Georgia, where Franklin, in 1945, suffered a stroke while having his portrait painted. Eleanor flew to Georgia, where she was to learn a secret which everyone in the White House knew---except her.

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