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French Lessons: A Memoir

By Alice Kaplan

University Of Chicago Press. Paperback. Book Condition: New. Paperback. 232 pages. Brilliantly uniting the personal and the critical, French Lessons is a powerful autobiographical experiment. It tells the story of an American woman escaping into the French language and of a scholar and teacher coming to grips with her history of learning. Kaplan begins with a distinctly American quest for an imaginary France of the intelligence. But soon her infatuation with all things French comes up against the dark, unimagined recesses of French political and cultural life. The daughter of a Jewish lawyer who prosecuted Nazi war criminals at Nuremburg, Kaplan grew up in the 1960s in the Midwest. After her father's death when she was seven, French became her way of leaving home and finding herself in another language and culture. In spare, midwestern prose, by turns intimate and wry, Kaplan describes how, as a student in a Swiss boarding school and later in a junior year abroad in Bordeaux, she passionately sought the French r, attentively honed her accent, and learned the idioms of her French lover. When, as a graduate student, her passion for French culture turned to the elegance and sophistication of its intellectual life, she...



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