



Lessons in French: A Novel

Hilary Reyl

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It's 1989, the Berlin Wall is coming down, and Kate has just graduated from Yale, eager to pursue her dreams as a fledgling painter. When she receives a job offer to work as the assistant to Lydia Schell, a famous American photographer in Paris, she immediately accepts. It's a chance not only to be at the center of it all, but also to return to France for the first time since she was a lonely nine-year-old girl, sent to the outskirts of Paris to live with cousins while her father was dying.

Kate may speak fluent French, but she arrives at the Schell household in the fashionable Sixth Arrondissement both dazzled and wildly impressionable. She finds herself surrounded by a seductive cast of characters, including the bright, pretentious Schells, with whom she boards, and their assortment of famous friends; Kate's own flamboyant cousin; a fellow Yalie who seems to have it all figured out; and a *bande* of independently wealthy young men with royal lineage. As Kate rediscovers Paris and her roots there, while trying to fit into Lydia's glamorous and complicated family, she begins to question the kindness of the people to whom she is so drawn as well as her own motives for wanting them to love her.

In compelling and sympathetic prose, Hilary Reyl perfectly captures this portrait of a precocious, ambitious young woman struggling to define herself in a vibrant world that spirals out of her control. *Lessons in French* is at once a love letter to Paris and the story of a young woman finding herself, her moral compass, and, finally, her true family.

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