

Loving Eleanor

Susan Wittig Albert

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The relationship between Lorena Hickok and Eleanor Roosevelt is poignantly explored in this intelligent love story with historical roots.

A story gleaned from the lines between the scandalous correspondence of writer Lorena Hickok and first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, *Loving Eleanor* is an affecting, reflective examination of a romance and friendship that grew at the edges of social acceptance.

In the early thirties, barrier-breaking AP reporter Lorena Hickok was asked to write about Eleanor Roosevelt, the spotlight-shy wife of a rising political star. That meeting began a lifelong friendship that set tongues around America wagging, particularly following rumors that their connection was more than platonic. Best-selling author Susan Wittig Albert's fictionalized presentation of their relationship, told from the point of view of lovelorn Hick, is a sensitive and complex treatment of the women's complicated connection.

Albert begins the story of Hick and Eleanor at its most conclusive end, after Eleanor is laid to rest in a Hyde Park grave. Aging, herself, Hick resolves to protect her love story from historical revisionists and headline-thirsty vultures by donating their letters to FDR's library, but with explicit instructions that they not be read until a decade has passed. The curator encourages her to do this act one better: write a biographical account to accompany the letters, he says. Give them context.

If their letters weren't careful to conceal their affair—lips missing lips, unbridled affection—Hick's manuscript is even less so. She relates Eleanor's magnetism, comparing her appeal to a celestial gravitational force. She falls hard, and is thrilled when the soon-to-be first lady returns her affections.

Predictably, though, when you love the first lady, all is not easy. Hick finds herself contending with presidential frustrations and poisonous rumors, fighting her journalist's instincts, and eventually being shipped off on a Washington assignment designed to keep her far from Eleanor. The novel includes her illuminating coverage of Depression realities in visceral, heartbreaking detail. So too does it account for the inevitable changes in her love affair with Eleanor.

Albert captures the turbulent thirties and forties with affecting detail, writing a novel notable not only for its emotional authenticity, but for its careful historicity. The nuances of Eleanor and Hick's relationship are both moving and involving. *Loving Eleanor* is an intelligent love story with huge historical appeal.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (Spring 2016)

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