

## Swearing off Stars

**Danielle M. Wong**

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*No relationship is easy to maintain, but this story is a heartfelt exploration of the ways in which relationships are absolutely necessary.*

Danielle M. Wong's *Swearing off Stars* details the life of Lia Cole, an American studying abroad in 1920s Oxford. Exposed to a new world of political unrest and changing social norms, she is soon introduced to the women's rights movement by Scarlett, an aspiring actress whose beauty and wit attracts Lia instantly.

The two engage in a passionate, secret relationship, though the romance is short-lived. The political landscape shifts, and the movement changes. Years pass, and the two embark on vastly different paths. Lia remains cognizant of Scarlett's life only through public advertisements for her new films. The possibility of a romantic rekindling is presented unexpectedly with the discovery of a cryptic letter hidden years before.

Wong's style is imagery-laden and captivating, with floating, seamless prose. Compelling characters drive the story forward, each contributing in some way to the timely advancement of the plot. Lia and Scarlett are inherently relatable, dealing with the pitfalls of lost love and the minutiae of everyday life in the best ways that they can, until fate brings them back together.

Though Lia and Scarlett are the book's primary focus, secondary characters receive the same dynamic treatment, helping to establish the turbulent time in which the couple lived. The text explores the intense struggle that Lia's parents face while trying to accept and protect their daughter from public scrutiny; it is both a rage-inducing and tragic problem. Characters grapple with sexuality in a time when such things were not discussed.

The novel's nuanced look at different types of love is a great credit to it—from the close bonds of friendship to the passion of romance, and finally the often harrowing familial responsibilities that bring people together. No relationship is easy to maintain, but this story is a heartfelt exploration of the ways in which relationships are absolutely necessary.

AMANDA ADAMS (Debut Fiction 2017)

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