

The Journal

R. D. Stevens

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In this philosophical mystery that exposes life's hidden beauties and corruption, Ethan travels from London to Cambodia in a desperate attempt to locate his free-spirited sister, Charlotte, who has disappeared. He is unprepared for the color and chaos of Southeast Asia and relies on a bevy of questionable new friends while tracking her down.

The unexpected discovery of Charlotte's journal gives Ethan tantalizing clues to her whereabouts, but her heartfelt words cause him to reevaluate everything he thought he knew about his sister.

The journal is a veritable travelogue of tourist hot spots and hidden gems. Charlotte's impulsive wandering takes her—and later, Ethan—through the crowded streets and lonely villages of Cambodia, the jungle back roads of Laos, and the exotic markets and beaches of Thailand.

Vivid scenery and native cuisines and customs greet travelers from around the world, while the horror of the Killing Fields stands in stark contrast to their carefree, pleasure-seeking lifestyle. As a darker, seedier side of the tourist trade and drug subculture emerges in the text, suspense and a sense of urgency builds, and Ethan's fear for Charlotte's safety pushes him beyond his limits.

Conversations with truth-seeking locals, peers, and expats young and old reveal a multitude of perceptions, and their unique personalities keep the weightier dialogue fresh and intriguing.

Ethan's quiet introspection plays next to Charlotte's dramatic personality, highlighted through flashbacks of a cold and structured childhood, and in particular of Charlotte's volatile relationship with her insensitive, austere father. Ethan's adoration of his wild older sister is evident, and as he steps into the uncomfortable role of leader rather than follower, it becomes apparent that perhaps Charlotte is not the only one who is lost.

A mosaic of aphorisms and exotic sights and sounds, *The Journal* contains a thought-provoking commentary on the power of family and relationships.

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (March/April 2018)

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