

The Year of Necessary Lies

Kris Radish

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Feminism and activism go hand in hand in this romantic novel about women's empowerment and living life to the fullest.

Kris Radish's tenth novel, *The Year of Necessary Lies*, highlights women's role in the Audubon Society campaign to eradicate feathers from ladies' hats. Her fictional heroine is a composite portrait of the many courageous women who stood up to plume hunters and the fashion industry alike in the early years of the twentieth century.

Julia Briton has just suffered a third miscarriage. Accepting she might never have children, she seeks another purpose and finds it among the ladies of the Massachusetts Audubon Society. On long seaside walks, they convince her of the cruelty of slaughtering birds to adorn hats. Although her wealthy husband's millinery empire thrives on the plume trade, Julia agrees to sail alone to southern Florida, heart of both conservation and hunting, to write Associated Press articles raising awareness. Despite many dangers, she finds her real home and true love.

The story of Julia's adventurous year (1904 to 1905) comes through her own first-person narration recorded on 1950s cassette tapes, as well as the recollections of her great-granddaughter Kelly, who is writing a PhD thesis about Julia's role in history. While the near-contemporary framing story adds little, it does not distract from the central theme of women's bravery and achievement.

Radish creates an authentic Southern atmosphere dripping with sweat and packed with rattlesnakes and egrets. Julia's raucous boat journey, punctuated by an erroneous stop at a Savannah brothel, is a highlight. She is a compelling protagonist, ably supported by an eccentric cast of ex-hunters and coastal hermits. Cameos from historical figures ranging from William Randolph Hearst to Mark Twain help place Julia in a convincing turn-of-the-century context of change and creativity.

"I did not simply want to survive, but to live with great passion and to do something that made a difference in the world," Julia declares. Recommended to fans of Anita Diamant's *The Boston Girl* and Sue Monk Kidd's *The Invention of Wings*.

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