



American Daughter: Discovering My Mother

Elizabeth Kendall

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In this beautifully crafted book, Elizabeth Kendall tells the story of a family, of a passionate attachment between a mother and a daughter and the sudden tragedy that tears it apart. **American Daughter** is also a brilliant portrait of wellborn women's lives in cities and towns in the post-World War II era, as Kendall evokes how difficult it was to become anything other than an American daughter, which meant being a dependent woman.

Occupying a coveted place in St. Louis's privileged high society, Henry and Betty Kendall seemed to be the American dream come true: six children, a sprawling house, a legacy of higher education at Harvard and Vassar. Yet underneath lay the flawed marriage of an idealistic young woman who made her eldest daughter her best friend and turned civil rights into her salvation. Elizabeth maintained the family silence as eccentricities began to appear in her father's behavior, along with whispers of financial difficulties. She accompanied her mother back to Vassar for a summer program on the home and family, then came into her own, away from her family, at the haven of a girls' summer camp and at Radcliffe. From the war-torn 1940s, when young men in uniform, home on leave, went to debutante parties, through the seismic social changes of the 1960s, Kendall tells the intertwined story of her mother and herself, of their powerful bond and how both shaped their lives in response to it.

Unrelentingly honest, rich with humor and insights into families and women's lives, **American Daughter** is both a poignant portrait of American life at the middle of the twentieth century, and a dual coming-of-age story of a mother and a daughter, united by commitment and love, separated by a fatal accident-and by the vastly different birthrights of their generations.

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