

RED-HEADED WOMAN

by KATHARINE BRUSH



eglantyne books

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Katharine Brush was the most successful female writer of fiction in America for more than twenty years. She died in 1952 at the age of only 49. Her writing style took no prisoners.

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Fiction

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Red-Headed Woman was a sensational best-seller, and it is believed that during the height of the Great Depression, the author earned more than a million dollars in royalties from it. It was made into the film *Red-Headed Woman* (1932) with Jean Harlow playing the role of the anti-heroine Lillian Andrews, who in the book is aged 19 to 21 during the two years, 1929-1931 when the story is set. (Harlow was aged 21.) F. Scott Fitzgerald and Anita Loos both worked on the screenplay. The resulting film was considered so shocking that it was officially banned in the United Kingdom. Lillian has no heart whatever, she wants money, she wants things, she wants social status. From Ohio to the highest levels of Manhattan society, we follow her relentless trail of ascent, spellbound and unable to avert our eyes. It is the ultimate portrait of an entirely amoral gold-digger. She has such overwhelming sex appeal that no man can resist her, and all the women hate her. Brush writes with a direct style resembling that of Hemingway, never using an unnecessary word. She focuses on everything with the intensity of a dentist's drill. The result is that Lillian mesmerises the reader just as she does every man she meets. She comes from the wrong side of the tracks in a northern Ohio town called 'Renwood', the true identity of which was East Liverpool, Ohio, where the author lived for several years. But the author's searing and savage attack on the hypocrisies of the town's 'upper class', or 'Country Club Set', are unsparing and draw much blood. Meanwhile, they are mocked and defied by Lillian, who parades herself in fantastic costumes to cause outrage in the streets and in the town's theatre. Every detail is given, and as Lillian rises in the world and buys more expensive clothes than an empress, we are given meticulous descriptions of them all. We should all be horrified, but we cannot be, because the author shows clearly how much worse than she is many of the people around her are. This story contrasts the rise of a little minx who drives men wild with the society which produced her.

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