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In the early 1900s the "computers" at the Harvard University Observatory were women, paid 25 cents an hour to pore over photographic plates taken with the university's telescope and to catalogue changes in the sizes and locations of stars. Henrietta Leavitt was an unmarried clergyman's daughter who began working at the observatory soon after graduating from Radcliffe. The director quickly recognized her skill and made generous allowances for the long absences occasioned by her apparently delicate health and family problems. New York Times science writer Johnson (Strange Beauty) relates that Leavitt's singular contribution to astronomy came when she recognized that cyclical changes in the size of Cepheids, giant variable stars, could be correlated with their luminosity. Once luminosity was known, a star's distance from Earth could be calculated. Leavitt wasn't interested in pushing her discovery to its logical conclusion, but other astronomers quickly grasped the ramifications for calculating the size of the Milky Way and the universe. In recent years, Leavitt has joined Rosalind Franklin in receiving long overdue recognition. Scant documentation exists for Leavitt's life aside from correspondence with the observatory, so readers shouldn't be surprised to discover that this excellent book is more about the search to measure the universe than about Leavitt's life. Nevertheless, it's a fine tribute to a remarkable woman of science.