

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, events, places, and incidents are either a product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Where real-life historical persons appear, the situations, incidents, and dialogue concerning those people are fictionalized and are not intended to depict the actual persons, events, or change the entirely fictional nature of this novel.

Copyright © 2023 by John F. Andrews. All rights reserved.

Second Edition 2.3, republished on 3/15/2025

The direct quotes from *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum with pictures by W. W. Denslow, 1900 edition of the book are not subject to this copyright. That novel is in the public domain.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, used for artificial intelligence purposes, or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, scanning, recording, or otherwise without express written permission of the publisher.

ISBN-13: 979-8-9893835-0-4 (digital)

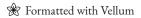
ISBN-13: 979-8-9893835-1-1 (paperback)

ISBN-13: 979-8-9893835-5-9 (hardcover)

Cover design by More Visual Ltd.

The Paris background photo for the cover was used with permission from the World War One photo collection, Living Conditions, photo 022, Archives Branch, United States Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA, USA.

The back cover photo is the work of the author.



AWARDS

Kirkus Reviews STAR AWARD.

2023 Foreword Indies Awards: Bronze winner, War & Military

2024 Eric Hoffer Award Finalist

2024 International Book Awards: Finalist: Best New Fiction

18th Annual (2024) National Indie Excellence Awards:

Finalist: Historical Fiction Finalist: Military Fiction

2025 Colorado Author's League Awards: Finalist: Historical Fiction: post 19th Century

2025 Independent Press Awards: Distinguished Favorite: Historical Fiction













REVIEWS

Fans of inspiring war narratives will find much to love in this novel. Rousing historical fiction with a feminist bent.

KIRKUS STAR AWARD. "Get It" recommendation.

---Kirkus Reviews

As a historian of WW1, I found this wonderful book to be a well-written fictional account of the period. The Marine Corps references were accurate and brought some of the memorable characters of the war to life. Enjoyed it. Looking forward to the rest of the series.
---Col. William T Anderson, USMC (Ret), author of numerous WWI historical works.

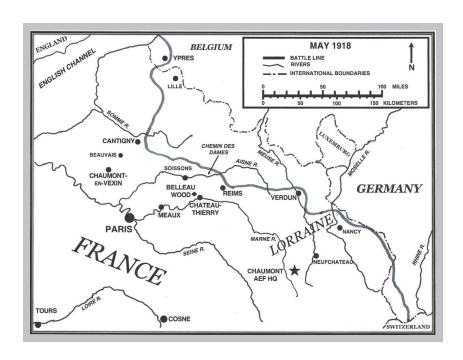
American Nurse in Paris is a great read. . . . John Andrews knows the power of story to educate and entertain, how to put readers on the edge of their seats and keep them there with great characters, crisp writing, and rich detail of the time and place. Andrews puts the reader in the sexism of the time side-by-side with a nurse who proves herself more than a match for her antagonists. Andrews did a fabulous job with his debut.

---Scott Hibbard, author of Beyond the River Gila

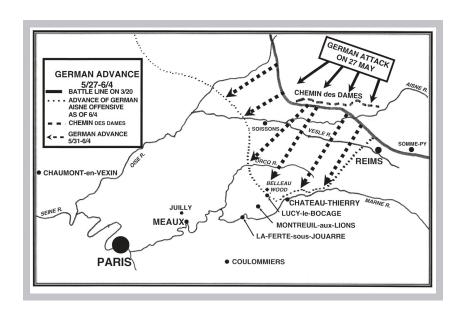
This is a sweeping saga of war, sexism, honor, regret, and finally retribution, that you will find hard to put down! ---Mike Torreano, award winning author of *Fireflies at Dusk*, and others.

Set in France during World War I, this is an enthralling story of a young nurse's quest to be a war reporter when women weren't welcome at the front. . . . Alice Simmons is engaging, stubborn, and ambitious, but we love her because her actions are tempered with a nurse's sensibility and a young woman's vulnerability. She's beset with adversaries, but also allies, all of whom are fascinating characters in their own right. I thoroughly enjoyed every page! I'm looking forward to the promised sequels. ---Margaret Rodenberg, award winning author of *Finding Napoleon*.

Map of France, May, 1918



Map of the region of France where the novel takes place



Novels of the Great War

Chapter One

Alice Simmons

Paris, France, Friday May 24, 1918

They don't need to paint a target on me. I wear a skirt. The only one in the American press corps in France.

This straight-backed wooden chair has tormented me since my arrival at twelve thirty for my meeting at one. It's three thirty.

My bladder is making me regret the extra cup of coffee I had for lunch.

I still my restless right leg. This waiting room is a cubbyhole—hot, humid, and redolent with fumes from the chinless, chain-smoking private sitting behind a metal desk. Germany will have nothing to fear if all the clerks type with one index finger like this fool.

Snick...

This is so typical of things since I arrived in Paris. Six male journalists have come and gone since I sat down in this accursed chair. One gave me the familiar smile usually reserved for fashion columnists—the only reporting job most of them think women are suited for. The others ignored me as they passed through. All of them went straight in.

Everything I've done since I arrived in Paris boils down to this one meeting. I was scheduled to meet Colonel McCabe. When I arrived, the

one-finger-typing private told me McCabe is out of town. My meeting is now with Major Richard Martel, whom I've never met. They don't *invite* me to the routine briefings he gives the other reporters.

This won't make me give up. I've come too far to quit.

So, this is it—I'll be off to report on the war if this meeting goes well. If not, I might as well hop on the next ship and head back to the States.

Pure professionalism dictated my attire for the day—tan blouse under a dark brown jacket and a summer-weight woolen skirt. The hemline is longer than the mid-calf ones many of the women in Paris wear. I decided to not play an intimidation game with my height, so on went the tan flats. Hell, I'm taller than half the men here and eye to eye with most of the rest. No makeup, of course, and hair in a modest bun—tight ones make the angles of my face look too severe.

I push my glasses up. Damn things—been with me since I was a kid. The good thing is that they make my oddball eye color less obvious. I call them hazel, but there are bits of green and blue. It's as if my parents' genes couldn't make up their minds and compromised on . . . whatever color you want to call them. Today they're hazel. Tomorrow? Maybe greenish.

Someone with less self-respect would doll herself up with makeup, mascara, a little perfume here, and, perhaps, one button less. A touch of elegance? I'd only be kidding myself if I tried. In high school, the homecoming queen wished me a successful career as a librarian as I sat, reading, in a corner by myself during prom. That's who Alice Simmons is—who I am. I don't mind it. Much.

Truth is—it gets lonely. I can only count two close friends in this world. One is in an office a floor below me—Ira Cunningham. The other, his daughter Trudy, is on her way here to work as a nurse. I've got to see Ira after I'm done here. If I'm ever done. If Major Martel will even see me.

"Private?" I ask.

"Lady, you blind or what? Can'tcha see I'm workin'? Count yaself lucky Major Martel'll see you at all." He slaps the carriage return with a ding.

The back door opens. A reporter I don't recognize emerges wearing

an expression like he's just eaten an unpeeled lemon. The phone rings on the clerk's desk. He speaks quietly, with a sidelong glance toward me. "Yessir, she's still here." He hangs up. "Simon. Front and center. Major Martel'll see ya. Got two minutes. Make it snappy."

"It's Simmons. Miss Alice Simmons."

The clerk leads me down the hallway and knocks on a closed door.

"Come," says a resonant baritone. The clerk stands in the doorway, leaving just enough room for me to shimmy through sideways. The door clicks behind me. A dribble of sweat trickles down my right side.

Major Martel could have starred in the movies. The term "matinee idol" had been just a whisper before the war, but he fits. Mid-to-late thirties? Brilliantined black hair swept back, wisps of gray at the temples, brooding brows over coal-black eyes, with a pencil mustache above a chiseled chin. I'm not sure about his cologne, but it's not cheap. A partially smoked cigar rests in his cut crystal ashtray. A small silver bifold picture frame lies closed next to a Montblanc fountain pen set. My father has the same set.

Major Martel's eyes flash over me. The quick assessment of an experienced army officer or something else? I pull the lapels of my coat closer before thinking. He spreads his hands, palms up. "Alice, I'm so sorry to make you wait. This is a very busy afternoon. What can I do for you, sweetheart?" Martel's accent flows like Louisiana molasses.

An apology?

Sweetheart?

He doesn't motion me to sit. "I came to request a pass to permit me to report outside Paris. I've written all the stories I can find here. I'm a medical reporter. As far as I know, the only reporter with a medical background here. I trained as a nurse while getting my journalism degree and offer a unique perspective to the folks back home. And I speak fluent French. My problem is that the French won't let me in their Paris hospitals, and all of ours are outside the city. Now, I'm not asking to go anywhere near the fighting, just to the base hospitals, to report on the human side of the medical effort here."

Martel frowns and rubs his hands. No wedding band, but a large golden class ring adorns his right. "Our French *amis* will never approve a *laissez-passer* for a non-accredited reporter."

"Sir, reporters who arrived after me have been going to those places without accreditation. I've served my time here in Paris, been responsible. All my articles comply with your censorship rules. The French have relaxed their earlier restrictions, according to the others." I smile, straightening my shoulders an inch. For all the bad things I've heard about the man, he seems to be listening to me. The flattering glint in his eyes is astonishing. Men don't look at me this way. It's unsettling, and something else—alluring? He's also the most handsome man I've ever met.

"Alice, I regret to inform you that there is simply no opportunity for you to work outside Paris. To go farther afield would be excessively hazardous for a gentle lady like yourself. Current circumstances and the French leave me no choice but to deny your request. Now, mind you, this isn't from me—it comes from on high." He gazes up toward the ceiling as if he gets his orders from God.

"Sir, if I may, I'd like to explain my proposal further—"

"As you can see . . . I'm a very busy man. But I'd like to hear more—under less formal circumstances . . ." The glint reappears.

My ears are on fire. Is he asking for a date? Is this a genuine offer, or just a come-on? Does he care about me, or is he just looking for *female companionship*? "I'm not sure I understand."

"Well, it's fairly simple, my dear. I'm usually free in the evenings around suppertime. Perhaps . . ." His gaze drifts down to my chest and lingers as though weighing my breasts.

I push the glasses up. "Major, I \dots I'm dumbstruck. His eyes trickle down to the space between my legs, as though seeing through my skirt. I shift an inch to my left.

A frown gathers on Martel's face, and his eyes cloud. "Alice, I'm sorry, but if there's nothing else, I must get back to my other duties."

"If only you'll reconsider . . ."

"Consider this, Alice." Martel stands and walks around me. I hear the door open. Martel stands beside the doorframe. He cups my left shoulder. "I'm much more . . . attentive . . . after work hours. Your cause may not be lost." A friendly smile grows on his face. A warning rattles underneath my schoolgirl blush.

Chapter Two

Alice Simmons

y heart hammers and blood hums through my limbs on the way to the ladies' room. I close the door and lean against the wall, breathless. He refused my request, but his idea of further discussion leaves me wondering. He was flattering, but a little . . . invasive. And he was so familiar, using my first name—not in a denigrating way, but a friendly one. My mentor and friend, Ira Cunningham, works under Martel and doesn't like him. He's always danced around the reasons for his opinion. Ira's office is the next stop after this. We have to talk.

Ira's office is room 223—I hope he hasn't left for the day. I pop my head in the door and smile at Ira's clerk, Stan.

"Major Cunningham's busy, Miss Simmons." Stan looks up from his typewriter at a small wooden desk next to a closed inner door. His smile is that of a friend.

"I can wait if he isn't going to be tied up too long . . ."

"Talking to a reporter. Take a load off."

The padded cloth seat is a welcome relief. Stan's a good egg. He must have taken the advanced army typing course—he uses both index fingers on his Royal. The anteroom is well ventilated through the transom above the door—with the aroma of the fresh coffee steaming in

the brown mug next to Stan's typewriter. I pull out my notebook to look over the scribbles from my morning interview with an industrialist's wife. What sort of vanilla drivel will pass the censors tomorrow? Paris, May 24, 1918. While the flower of French youth march toward the battlefield, their mothers, sisters, and sweethearts toil in smoky factories, stores, and government offices to keep the home fires burning. With chins raised and smiles on their faces...

Thoughts of Martel keep intruding while I struggle to concentrate. No man has ever treated me with such deference, other than Ira. Courtesy was the last thing I expected, having never gotten it from the army before. But then, the way his eyes seemed to play with me, and his offer to meet . . . after work.

I touch the locket Grand-Mère Elise gave me in my distress when I was ten. Nervous habit. "Remember, *mon lapin*—you are swift like the wind. And strong. Let this remind you," Grand-Mère had said. I smile. *Mon lapin*—"my rabbit"—her nickname for me. I was a fast runner, then.

The inner door opens, breaking my reverie. Ira Cunningham pokes his head out and starts to say something to Stan. A smile grows on his face. "Alice. Come in. There's someone I want you to meet." Ira has an uncanny way of making me feel expected.

He's been "Mr. Cunningham" to me since he came into my life when I was twelve, when he and his family moved into the house next to ours in Minneapolis. It seems awkward to call him Major. Now, at twenty-four, I'm privileged to use his first name when we're alone, though it feels a bit like calling my parents by their first names. He stands two inches taller than my five-ten, with short graying brown hair rimming his bald head and a tight mustache. He looks like the newspaper editor he was before the war—serious eyes, jowls that tighten under pressure, and a few pounds too many from all the time he spends at the desk he describes as his "command."

Ira motions me into his office with a flourish of his hand like a royal invitation. A middle-aged man in a brown two-piece suit with a fedora balanced on his knee sits in a guest chair. A battered leather portfolio leans against a chair leg. The man rises and stands eye-to-eye with me as he extends his right hand. "Howard Enright, *Detroit News*."

"Alice is my protégé, Howard," Ira says. "Wisconsin State Journal's rising star. I like to think I taught her everything she knows, but I'm pretty sure she surpassed me a while ago."

"Been here long?" Howard asks.

"Five months." I take a seat.

"Must know your way around by now."

"I spent several summers here when I was a kid, and then a semester in college." At the time it had felt more like exile—a way to get me out of my parents' sight when my very presence seemed to repel them. Grandmother and Paris were my saviors.

"Getting much work?"

I huff and roll my eyes. "I've interviewed every matron who hasn't fled the city."

"While a war rages just out of earshot." Howard shakes his head.

He has a medium build with broadish shoulders, trim, not paunchy like Ira. I'm bursting to tell Ira about the meeting, but not in front of a stranger.

"Better shove off," Howard says. "Why don't you both join Emily and me at the New York Bar Saturday evening. Pete and Mary Sloan'll be there. Say, about nine?"

"I can't, sorry," Ira says. "Alice, if you ignore Howard and his bombastic friend, you'll find their wives delightful."

"If you say so. I'll be there," I say. Howard leaves, closing the door with a soft click on his way out.

Ira's chair squeals as he leans back. "Trudy'll arrive tomorrow or the next day."

"Where's she going to work?" I haven't seen my best friend in over six months.

"American Red Cross Military Hospital One in Neuilly-sur-Seine."

"Penny for your thoughts?" I know that look. Something's eating him.

"Feeling a little guilty, truth be told."

"Go on." I pull a handkerchief from my purse and polish my glasses.

"I got you into this."

"You didn't make me come here."

He loosens his tie. "I played my part in convincing you to be a journalist instead of a nurse."

I twirl my glasses by one earpiece. "If I'd done that, I'd be with Trudy, working as a nurse, about to arrive." Ira's face is painted with worry. He's been more of a father than mine, more of a friend than my mother.

"If I knew you'd have to deal with Martel and our esteemed fellow journalists, I would have told you to join the Nurse Corps, like Trudy."

"If you were me, would you have listened when you were my age?"

Ira shrugs, then gives me a sheepish grin. "Hell, I was only five years older than you are now when the coppers came gunning for me. The first time." His mouth twitches.

"Sometimes you have to take on city hall, no matter the consequences."

"No." Ira's face pales, his mouth tight. "Consequences matter. If I learned anything in St. Paul, it was that." He pauses to take a deep breath. "Sometimes you have to take a different angle."

"How did that go?"

"O'Connor's still St. Paul's police chief." Ira stands. "And my family and I are alive."

That was unfair of me. Ira had rooted out the corruption surrounding the St. Paul chief of police. He had reported on the bribes Chief O'Connor took to look the other way when wanted criminals holed up in St. Paul. Ira nearly died for the effort more than once. His courage had changed nothing. But he had been courageous, nevertheless.

"How'd things go with Martel?"

I slip my glasses on and stand. "Let's talk over a drink. I need the sage advice you usually only offer after I ply you with scotch. Maybe two."

Chapter Three

Alice Simmons

I ra leads the way out of the building. Neither of us speak as we walk north three blocks, then take a right toward our favorite bar. I'm still digesting my encounter with Martel. There's something about Ira's eyes that belies his otherwise composed demeanor. He's probably replaying an old memory too.

A horse-drawn carriage clatters by, the aroma of the black mare's sweat strong in the breeze. A taxi pulls up to the curb to let out an elderly couple—the only taxi in sight in a city that was jammed with them the last time I was here. Paris isn't a ghost town, but it seems ghostlike in comparison with its pre-war glory. A woman wearing a tattered brown skirt and blue shirtwaist hurries by, her eyes meeting mine for a moment, forlorn and frightened. The few others on the sidewalk wear muted clothing, a far cry from the colorful Paris of my youth.

The bar is a comforting refuge filled with cigarette smoke, murmurs, quiet friendships, and confidences. The dark wooden bar on the right side of the narrow space has been polished by a half-century of elbows. The few bottles behind it are orderly and clean. Wartime sparse. Patrons sit at tables and a few in the booths that line the opposite wall. We settle into the back booth, Ira facing toward the front door, something he's

done as long as I've known him. *Never turn your back on the door*, he warned me years ago. It saved his life in St. Paul.

The owner, Jean-Luc Talbot, drifts over and wipes our table. "Mademoiselle Alice. The usual?"

"Oui, merci. Same for this doddering soldier."

"Thanks a lot," Ira mutters.

"Anytime." I smile through my tension, hoping the Famous Grouse will help.

Jean-Luc brings tumblers of scotch—two fingers, neat. Ira taps the rim of my extended glass, and I take a long, slow swig. The burn feels wonderful all the way down. I take another sip and then set the glass down. Of all the things Ira has taught me, sipping scotch is one of the best. Famous Grouse. Nothing haughty or exotic. Solid.

"Tell me, I'm dying to hear," Ira says.

"Well..." I take a sip. "He's not what you led me to expect. He apologized for making me wait. Courteous, suave, friendly. Never said a bad word. Used my first name from the get-go. Not in that deprecating way the other reporters use." I tell him the rest. Ira's face reddens at the end of my account. "I'm a bit flattered by his offer to meet outside work." Ira's expression tells me I struck a nerve. His judgement about others has always been on target, but I hope he's wrong this once. "I got the feeling I might have a chance to get through to him in a . . . less official setting."

Ira's face hardens. "Don't be misled by his use of your first name. He does that to all the other reporters too." Ira downs the rest of his scotch. "Watch out. Don't take him up on his proposition." He looks me straight in the eyes. "He gets around. He may be a deacon at his church at home, a family man, but his reputation is anything but holy here. He'll just use you."

I stare into my glass. It's hard to imagine a man that handsome being attracted to me. But Ira has it in for Martel. He would have chafed under the command of anyone other than the editor or owner of a major newspaper. The irony is that the man who replaced Martel in the artillery, Robert McCormick, owns and publishes the *Chicago Tribune*. He's the only army officer in France Ira would work for without grousing. So I have to leaven Ira's opinion.

"You notice the photographs on his desk?"

"No."

"Small silver bifold picture frame next to his ashtray. Come on, I know you never miss a detail like that."

"It was folded, lying flat."

"He has it up, facing the guest, when I'm in the room. Picture of his wife and two children standing in front of a church. As if saying, *lookee here, y'all, ah'm a family man*. She's quite attractive, by the way. Belle-of-the-ball type pretty, his wife. He probably didn't want his marital status to influence the only female reporter on this side of the Atlantic. Don't suppose he had his wedding ring on."

My face is hot with a blush. "No."

"The man's a predator."

"That's not my impression. He's so . . . considerate. Well, other than the three-hour wait." I take a sip. "Problem is—I'm dead in the water without his approval."

"Looks are deceiving in this case." Ira takes a deep breath. "You're an adult. Make your own mind up. I'm just saying—he's not one of the good guys. So he won't let you out of town?"

The scotch trembles as I drain the glass while stilling a shaking foot. "No."

"Remember what I said about finding another way? Howard Enright's wife, Emily, will be Trudy's boss. One of the senior nurses at the hospital in Neuilly. Something you might consider." Ira narrows his eyes.

"I don't want to give up reporting."

"Not saying you have to." Ira points at his glass when Jean-Luc walks over with a refill for me. "Can I offer a bit of advice without getting a fat lip?"

I've never punched anyone, neither friend nor foe. Well, there was this one boy in fifth grade, but . . .

"You're as good a journalist as any of the men here. Better than most. The whole point of you going to nursing school was to give you a better angle on medical and science reporting, right? To make you so unique that gender wouldn't matter."

"Well, in part. I have a little secret I never told you. Promise you won't tell my folks."

Ira mimics closing a zipper over his lips.

"The other reason I did nursing was to keep the money flowing. My trust fund didn't kick in until I was twenty-two. That and the fact Trudy and I could do it together. It made Mom and Dad happy, for a change—their remaining daughter following in their medical footsteps."

"Your dad would have preferred you go to medical school."

"I want to be a reporter, not a doctor. Your wife convinced me to get the nursing degree."

Ira raises his left eyebrow.

"One time she, Trudy, and I were out for lunch. Ethyl understood my dream to be a journalist. She told me how much hostility I would run into as a woman—and she was right. She urged me to study nursing so I'd have something practical to fall back on. I may have aced the curriculum, but I have no intention of working as a nurse—I'm a journalist."

Ira smiles. "So back to my point, young lady. What better way to get the inside scoop on the medical side of the war than under a nurse's cap? Here's the silver lining: Martel's not in that chain of command. American nurses are in our base hospitals outside of Paris. Who knows? As our part of the war ignites, you might get closer to the front than you like."

"Nurses pull long hours. I might not have time to write."

"I'm not saying the idea is perfect. Talk to Emily Enright. She's a gem. Mind you, she's like my wife—high expectations and no tolerance for mediocrity. Think about it."

"But how will I get my stories out? I'm sure Martel will blackball me if I don't accept his *proposition*."

"Let's worry about that later."

"I'll consider it. What about you? Will you still be here to back me up?"

"Now it's my turn to say mum's the word."

I make the sign of the zipper over my mouth. This is more holy between us than the sign of the cross is at the Vatican.

"Requested a transfer. To somewhere else inside Intelligence. Super-

vising press censors is killing my journalistic soul. And you know how I feel about Martel. With Trudy coming, though, I don't want to be too far away."

"I'll be glad to see her."

"Me too, sort of," Ira says.

"Sort of?"

"Glad to see her. But there's a war on. I'm worried."

Chapter Four

Major Ira Cunningham, US Army Reserve

Saturday, May 25

The aroma from the café two doors down wafts through my office window. An early morning shower scrubbed the stench of horse manure from the street. The sun beams across my desk, and I pull out my handkerchief to wipe off the skein of dust. My stomach reminds me of the time. Most of the coffee in Paris is what they call <code>ersatz</code>—the pleasant European euphemism for phony crap—but the java at that little joint comes from Brazil, courtesy of another major in the building with the right connections in supply. Same with the pastries. Real flour without the usual French sawdust. Time to mosey over to the source of my temptation now that I've finished the morning dispatches. I read the final redacted versions of two press reports my censors submitted earlier. Pure tripe—but that's what my career has withered down to. The business with Alice kept me up last night, worrying. Sure, she's not my daughter, but she is as dear to me as Trudy, truth be told.

I tell Stan I'll be back in thirty and walk down the two flights and out the front door. The Germans may not have reached Paris yet, but if I didn't know better, the drab clothing and dour faces would have fooled me. They're a lot like the people I saw while visiting Berlin before

the war. In fact, the Germans were more colorful than those I pass. I wend my way into the café, order three eclairs—two in a bag for later—and a coffee. I take a seat at one of the window tables and watch the traffic between crosshatched window tape. Businesses have paper-taped their windows to limit the risk of flying glass shrapnel if a German bomb hits their buildings. Instead of just slapping the tape on like merchants would have at home, they created intricate patterns like lacework. Parisians. I admire their defiance and panache.

The coffee is strong this morning, as though the chef knows I need it. I'd really like to add a shot of something to it, but the army frowns on that and I know Martel would love to fire my ass back to the States. So I linger, enjoying the morning. The rest of the day looms ahead under a cloud.

My chest tightens as I reenter the headquarters lobby. Neck hairs come alive with each step like antennae receiving a wireless signal. Major Dick Martel is a problem that can only be solved with a transfer. Mine or his. I know he wants out, but word is that the artillery doesn't want him back. My request will probably be approved, but with the army you never know until the ink is dry. I doff my hat and run my hand over my head. Where's it gone—the time, the hair? At least the pastry's only put on a little paunch. Pershing is on a mission to root out the fat and unfit among his officers. I'll cut back and walk more. Tomorrow.

Stan looks up when I enter the office. "Sir, Major Martel wants to see you in his office about the daily reports."

"Dandy." That isn't what I want to say, but I can't put Stan in the middle. "I'll be indisposed for a few minutes." I lay an eclair on Stan's desk. "Here's your cut."

"Thanks, sir. If he calls, you're on the phone with a colonel."

I close my door and open the bag. Martel can wait. The man is proof that there are more horses' asses in the army than there are equines. I take my time eating, wishing I'd brought a second coffee. Alice's naiveté gnaws at me. How can she be so gullible? To be taken in by Martel—it's disgusting, in two ways. One is the obvious. The other is Alice's maddening sense of being the ugly duckling. Her parents were never very supportive, regardless of how well she did in school or anywhere else. She was a tomboy when I first met her, all arms and legs, elbows

and knees. She thought all that made her plain and unattractive. She should look in the mirror with objective eyes.

After the last bite, I grab a stack of files and make my way to Martel's office. Typewriters clatter and doors creak as I pass harried staffers in the main hallway. My shoes click on the terrazzo floor as a janitor works a mop. I walk into Martel's waiting room. The clerk smokes a cigarette while practicing his version of Chinese water torture on his typewriter one . . . letter . . . a . . . time. "Major Martel ordered me to report." The notion that Martel can order anything beyond beignets is a disgusting thought.

The clerk looks up. "Major's expecting you, sir."

I roll my neck and straighten my tie before knocking on the doorframe.

"Come."

"I have those reports for you, Major," I say.

"How're my censors doing?"

Martel's voice irks me. It might be Yankee prejudice, but I envision him calmly ordering a lynching with his mellifluous Southern cadence. His eyes are discordant. Soft as snow at moments. Hard as a Klansman burning a cross the next. How much is act and how much genuine? And what does he mean by *my censors*? I do all the supervisory work. They answer to me. "Quite well. The men before them made a word salad out of coherent writing. These boys passed freshman English, so at least it doesn't come out chopped to pieces."

"And our so-called esteemed Paris-based correspondents?" Martel sneers.

I continue to stand in the hope of making this short. "Frosty over the censorship. No journalist worth their salt wants anyone to change their final product."

"Which is where you come in, am I right? They'll mind you a tad less." Martel snorts. "They're lucky they were allowed off the boats, so far as I'm concerned. Bane of my very existence."

"Since Washington loosened the rules, we've had a migration of reporters, some better than others. I don't get to interact with them as much as you. Regarding my work, sir, there's a big difference between

being a newspaper editor and what I'm doing here." The thought chokes me.

"What do you want? To be their . . . welcoming committee? Give them all hugs and pats on the back?" Martel scowls.

I look at the photographs on the desk as I compose my response. A small silver bifold frame shows the family photo I'd told Alice about on one side and a wedding photo of Martel and a woman I assume is his wife on the other. "It might be a better use of my time, sir. Lieutenant Green is doing a fine job. Needs very little supervision. And I'm a journalist by trade. I know their ways. Can tell good from bad in a few moments."

"Meaning you don't think I am capable of doing that work properly?"

Martel's eyes are shotgun barrels aimed at my face. "No, sir."

Martel breaks the stare. I slide the censored files across the desk. Martel ignores them. "Heavens to Betsy, man, they're even sending over womenfolk who think they can do a man's job. Next thing you know, I'll be expected to accredit Communists." He puts a special emphasis on the u.

"Sir?" I tilt my head and raise my left eyebrow.

"Hell's bells, man. What's our world coming to? Shoulda seen the fancy tart that marched in here yesterday. She was full of herself, carrying on and on."

Here it comes. Keep my face flat and don't look in his eyes.

"Well, I'll tell you, she was a fine filly, she was, if you catch my meaning. I can see right through her, though. Wears those stupid glasses to look smart. Behind them lurks the brain of a suffragette. A muckraker."

"Sounds bad, sir." I frown. Damn this man. But I want to find out more. It reminds me of the way I baited an alderman in St. Paul one time. "Communist?"

"No doubt whatsoever. Very typical of the type, really. Only thing missing is that she does not appear to be a Jewess." Martel's eyes narrow. "Though some are quite sneaky. Heavens—war's a man's game. Women have no business here. No business a'tall." Martel pulls out and relights the cigar from his ashtray. His face is red. He dabs his forehead with a

handkerchief. "I escorted her out—her all high and mighty, chin in the air. Nearly called the guards."

"It sounds like she needs a good editor to sit down and counsel her."

"What she really needs is a man with a crop." Martel's lips curl up at the corners.

"What paper does she work for?" I'll string Martel along a bit longer. Sun Tzu wrote: *know your enemy*.

"Some rag in Wisconsin. The state's brimming over with Krauts, for God's sake. Should be evicted from the Union, far as I'm concerned. Or maybe walled off. We don't need troublemakers like Miss Alice Simons mucking up the war effort. Sending an upstart girl to do a man's work? Sometimes I don't understand civilians. Leastways those from the North."

"No, sir." I pause while Martel takes another pull from his cigar. Transfer. Definitely a transfer, before I go stark raving mad. "Is there anything else you want from me, sir?"

"No. Dismissed."

A new stack of reporters' dispatches fresh from Lieutenant Green lies on the desk when I arrive at my office. I shake my head as I slump into the creaky wooden chair and gaze at the photos next to the pile. One shows a younger me, with a full head of thick brown hair, my arm around Ethyl's shoulders on our honeymoon in the mountains of Vermont. The next photo shows Ethyl and me standing next to Trudy and Alice at their college graduation. Trudy is a cute black-haired peanut next to her best friend. Alice's wavy auburn hair stands out from a face that seems like a failed attempt to imitate a librarian. She's too tall and trim to fade into the crowd. Not pretty like Trudy—striking would be the word, with a straight nose and a strong angular jaw. And while Trudy was always a bit of a flirt, Alice seemed awkward around the boys. She needed the glasses for her nearsightedness, but I think they're a sort of shield. Her emotions have been a battened-down ship as long as I've known her.

The third photo had been taken the same day—Trudy and her fiancé, Bill Stevens. Like Trudy, Bill is headed here, an army private despite his college degree and the offer of a commission. Bill has a sort of

noble yeomanry about him, reflecting his upbringing on a farm, a real throwback to an earlier era.

It leaves my chest empty. The soldiers of Bill's Second Division are going into the fight soon. They're slated to go north to back up the First Division's fight near Cantigny, but I hear disturbing rumblings that may send them east.

One thing *is* certain. This war is much worse than the one reported at home, thanks to me and my censors.

The truth terrifies me.

Chapter Five

Alice Simmons

olden cirrus wisps streak the sky as I make my way past other Americans on Rue Daunou. Before the war, this street would have been filled with Parisians decked out for a night on the town. Tonight, however, the men under sixty wear either American uniforms or the suits of reporters thirstier for a cocktail than a scoop. The women appear to be wives or girlfriends. The crowd gravitates toward two destinations—the Hotel Daunou, with the hottest jazz club in Paris, and the New York Bar across the street. The bartender, Harry MacElhone, possesses an uncanny understanding of his clientele—remembering names and their preferred libations.

I stop a few doors away and watch patrons enter the bar, recognizing several reporters. A clarinet hits a high note deep inside the club across the street. A car passes by, leaving a trail of blue smoke that makes me cough. No rush to go inside. The place will be full of reporters. I've been here a few times for drinks, but the reporters I'd gone with ended up wanting dates rather than the shop talk I had hoped for. What will this one be like? Howard seems okay. And Ira vouches for him. Deep breath, square my shoulders, and make my way toward the bar.

If *Vogue* ever did a spread on the Librarian Look, I'd be a shoo-in. Except maybe my brown calf-length Russian boots with one-inch heels

An American Nurse in Paris

and square toes. I want the added height and threat tonight. The boots are comfortable, solid. A high-necked blouse, a brown cotton skirt, and a light raincoat over my arm complete the look.

Most of the men of the American press corps who can afford it will filter through the New York this evening. An American woman wearing a flowered ensemble that seems out of place glides by, leaving me a wall-flower in her wake. But I've never been a head-turner other than for my height. I've come to terms with that. For the most part.

Voices fill the humid, smoky air. A rattle draws my eye. Harry smiles and gives me a wink while shaking a cocktail. "Miss Alice. Lovely evening," he says in a Scottish brogue. "Grouse, neat?"

"It sure is, Harry. And no—vin rouge. Howard Enright here?" Harry pours a martini with a flourish. I figure there are two reasons he knows me—I'm the only female journalist here, and he's a hell of a bartender. His partner, wearing a white shirt with arm garters, stirs a concoction and pours it into a Collins glass.

"Mr. Enright and party are in the lower bar. I'll send your wine down." Ragtime piano plays below me as I descend the narrow, winding staircase. The piano and a small bar are on my right. I pass a table of US Army officers on my left and see Howard and three others at a back table. Women are a distinct minority, most of them decked out, making my plainness seem to shout out its mediocrity.

Howard Enright stands when I approach, followed by the other man, whose back is to me. Howard smiles and shakes my hand. "Miss Simmons. Glad you could come. This is my wife, Emily, and our friends Pete and Mary Sloan. Pete's a reporter for the *Chicago Evening Journal*, recently arrived."

"We beat away a couple of thirsty reporters to save the seat," Emily says as she stands to make room between their chairs, facing the back wall—not the spot Ira would approve of, but my only choice. Emily's in her forties, about four inches shorter than me, with gray eyes, wire-frame glasses, and a straight nose. She looks imposing, but not in a threatening way. Mary Sloan appears to be in her early thirties, a few inches taller than Emily, slender and attractive.

"Please, it's Alice. And thank you."

John F Andrews

A waiter delivers my glass of Bordeaux. The others at the table have a variety of cocktails and a bowl of bar nuts.

"That's a lovely locket, Alice," Emily says.

"Thank you." I take off my locket and open it. After a moment I hand it to Emily. "My grandmother gave it to me when I was ten, just after my sister, Justine, died. The photo is of the three of us, taken the year before."

"How did she . . . " Emily hands the locket back.

"An accident." I don't want to talk about this.

"Where do you hail from, Alice?" Pete is an inch shorter than me, a wiry man with a five o'clock shadow on a tanned face with wavy black hair.

"Minneapolis." Thank you, Pete, for changing the subject.

"Go to school there?"

"U of M. The new nursing program and journalism." I go on to tell them about my decision to get a nursing degree and registry even though my goal was always journalism. Several conspiratorial glances pass between Mary and Emily as I rattle on.

"Some of the correspondents have probably been less than welcoming," Emily says. She frowns across the table at Pete. "That last soiree we all went to was like a stag party."

"It's like I'm beating my head against a brick wall." I shrug. "They won't let me out of Paris, and our soldiers are everywhere but here."

"Truth is," Howard says, "that's the case for most of us. Only a handful are fully credentialed. They're the only ones Pershing'll let near the troops. They're not necessarily much better off, since the army insists that they base themselves in Neufchâteau. That's a long way from the action. The army's press section keeps a tight rein on everyone. I'm curious, though. How'd it go with Martel?"

"Not sure," I say. "He is charming, handsome. But Ira warned me about him. I have the impression my only hope for a pass out of town is to let him make a pass at me."

"Friend of mine told me they brought Martel in a few months ago. A genuine ass," Howard says. Emily shoots Howard a sour look.

I take a sip. The friend must be Ira.

Raucous laughter draws my eye to the table of American army offi-

An American Nurse in Paris

cers near the piano. The bartender works on a shaken cocktail as three of the reporters at the bar stare toward the officers. One of the army men slaps the back of another, and then the two clink their beer glasses and down them both.

"Howard and I publicly act like we don't know Ira since he's the head censor," Pete says. "He's mentioned you in conversation. How'd you come to know him?"

"His daughter, Trudy, and I are chums. We went to school together from seventh grade on through college. I consider Mr. Cunningham—uh, Ira—my mentor."

"Still, how'd he become your inspiration?"

"Courage. Intelligence. And his integrity. I sensed those right away when I met him. They moved into our neighborhood after the St. Paul police shot Trudy's dog and left it on their porch with a message. I've never met anyone as brave."

Pete nods. "Taking on Chief O'Connor was . . . well, noble. Maybe not the smartest thing in the world."

"That was the spark," I say. "Mr. Cunningham convinced me to specialize in medical reporting since nobody else does it, at least nobody who knows anything about medicine. Being a girl—that didn't matter as much, at the start. It seemed like a good angle to be the only reporter with an RN. We thought it would open doors, or at least unlock a few."

"That work?" Emily asks.

"In Milwaukee. Not here."

"How'd you pull off Paris?" Pete eats the olive from his empty martini glass.

"My mom's parents are from Allier, east of Bordeaux. We spoke French at home. I spent several summers here as a kid." It seemed like such an adventure then. Now I realize they wanted me out of the house. "When I presented the case to my editor, I told him it would cost the *Journal* nothing more than my base salary to send me here. I'm the only French-speaking reporter he has. The rest speak German—well, it is Milwaukee. He took me up on the offer."

"We need nurses more than journalists," Mary says.

Another sip of wine. I catch the eye of a waiter and ask for a water. I need to keep my head clear.

John F Andrews

"Now please don't take this to be patronizing, because that's not how I'm offering this, okay?" Howard says. "You're not beating your head against one wall. There are at least two. The easy one is the press corps. They don't like trailblazers. And even those who support suffrage? Ply them with enough liquor and they'll tell you a woman's place is in the home." Emily touches Howard's sleeve. His face flushes, and he looks around the bar. "The press is like an athletic club. But it pales next to the army. Their wall's a rampart most civilian *men* can't crack. Mary's right. Think about nursing."

Mary and Emily exchange a glance. Mary says, "Emily and I both work at the American Hospital in Neuilly. Emily is the chief surgical nurse, and I run one of the surgical wards. We're desperate for nurses."

"Won't I have to join the army?" I ask.

"Not necessarily. The lines between the Red Cross and the army are . . . complicated. You could come in under the Red Cross banner if your credentials check out."

"Are you registered in Wisconsin?" Emily asks.

"Sure." I hadn't expected to be recruited tonight. It's not what I want—or is it? It would mean giving up my dream. A sip of water quenches my dry throat. "What would I need to do?"

"Do you have your diploma and certificates?" Emily asks.

"I didn't think I'd need them when I came here."

"That'll slow things down. I can cable our Chicago headquarters. They'll check with the Wisconsin board. Think about it. Come by the hospital and we'll see what we can work out."

"When?"

"Monday's not too soon," Emily says.

"Sure. How about mid-morning?"

Emily nods.

Howard and Ira might be right. But isn't that like throwing in the towel, admitting the old boys' club has won? I slip off my glasses and clean the lenses with my handkerchief.

Shattering glass catches my attention. I put my glasses on and turn around. The army officers sound well into their cups. A broken beer glass lies on the floor. A small captain wearing his hat at a cocky angle smooches at me, followed by a leer that showcases brilliant white teeth.

An American Nurse in Paris

Then the shrimp winks. My face warms, and I break eye contact. Damn him. I take a sip of water, not sure if they're getting louder or if I'm just paying more attention. I shift my eyes to a reporter playing a passable Scott Joplin tune on the piano.

Conversation around the table drifts between journalism and nursing and life stories—mine the shortest and least interesting, by far. It's time for me to take off, but I need to visit the powder room and make a point of not looking at the army officers on the way.

As I leave the restroom, an arm blocks my path. Major Martel, his red eyes struggling to focus, a leer on his face. I hadn't noticed him earlier—did he come in after me? "This is your opportunity to take me up on my offer, Alice." His smooth baritone comes out slurred.

"I don't understand your meaning, sir." My face flushes. I don't want this. But refusing means I go nowhere but home unless Emily hires me. That is suddenly very clear. Why can't they let me do my job, as a reporter? But how can I slide out of this *opportunity* without provoking Martel?

"Let's just say the safe play would be to let me walk you home—to my apartment—for a nightcap." Martel struggles to stand up.

"Major, thank you so much for your very sweet offer. But, with respect, I'm out with friends tonight. Now, if you'll excuse me." I push past him. The others at Martel's table laugh. One whistles in my wake.

Part of me wants another drink, but the prudent part of me wants to get out of here, now. Another glass won't help.

"You look angry," Mary says.

"That man with his back to us, at the table making all the noise? Martel. He could barely stand."

"Yeah, that's him," Howard says. The waiter brings another bottle of mineral water for our table.

We continue to visit for the next quarter hour. "I hope you'll all excuse me, but it's getting late."

"Need a lift? I have my car," Pete says.

"No, I need the air." And Pete's in no condition to drive.

Laughter makes me glance back at the table with the army officers. Martel is staring at me like a hawk eyeing a rabbit.

ALSO BY JOHN F. ANDREWS

DOGS DON'T CRY - NOVELS OF THE GREAT WAR

A dog's devotion, courage, and intelligence stand between two French teens and despair. Love and determination sustain the threesome as they flee the tidal wave of war. A story of hardship, peril, resilience, and hope.

Abby is the Durand family dog, a companion for fifteen-year-old Marcel and his sister, Geneviève. Marcel is plagued by doubts about his courage as he approaches military age. Geneviève has severe pneumonia and is convinced she will soon die. Evacuation is ordered as the German army barrels toward their home village. The doctor tending to Geneviève warns their mother that the rigors of evacuation will kill the young girl on the eve of her thirteenth birthday. Their mother waits until the last moment to leave their home in search of shelter.

A disastrous escape leaves them orphaned and alone.

Marcel and Geneviève must find a distant relative, Cousin Henri, who lives near Paris. However, they have never met him, are not sure of his last name, and don't know his address. Abby is the key—Henri is her former owner, though she begs to differ on the "owner" concept. If anyone can find him, she can. The teens confront their worst fears while seeking refuge amid the chaos of war, armed only with their faith in Abby.

Purchase links to Dogs Don't Cry - Novels of the Great War

OUR DESPERATE HOUR - NOVELS OF THE GREAT WAR

A father's search for his estranged son plunges US Army Major Ab Johnson into the pivotal First World War Battle of Belleau Wood. The fate of Paris and the outcome of the war balance on a knife's edge. This is a story of honor, courage, commitment, a father's love for his son, and the bonds of combat.

Ab Johnson has one last chance to reconcile with his son, Jack, a marine second lieutenant who is heading into the worst conflict in human history. Second lieutenants don't last long in the killing fields of France. Ab volunteered to rejoin the army and come to France for a liaison job far from the fighting, only to be transferred to the Paris Medical Group. His quest leads him from the backrooms of Paris, through command posts, and to the front lines during the Battle of Belleau Wood. He confronts French petulance and American inexperience as he struggles to help organize an army medical system swamped with casualties during his desperate search.

Ab's story intertwines with three others: an arrogant surgeon who sees war as opportunity; a navy corpsman searching for his place in the world; and a marine private full of fighting spirit and patriotism. They confront their destinies in a grueling fight filled with chaos and heart-stopping fear. Each joined the war effort for his own reasons—now all they hope for is to survive.

Purchase links to Our Desperate Hour - Novels of the Great War

PURCHASE, WEBSITE, AND NEWSLETTER LINKS

Thank you for reading this sample. I hope you enjoyed it and want to read more!

You can purchase this novel and the others in the Novels of the Great War Series in paperback or hardcover at your favorite bookstore (they can order it through Ingram), through the purchase link on my website(below), or through Amazon, Apple, or Kobo this novel and the other novels in my *Novels of the Great War Series* with the links below:

My website has a purchase link: https://johnfrederickandrews.com/ where-to-buy

Amazon: My Book -Apple Books: My Book -Kobo:

PURCHASE, WEBSITE, AND NEWSLETTER LINKS

My Book

Please consider signing up for my newsletter. I publish it monthly with occasional announcements and I keep it to the point and nonpolitical. https://46-north-publications-llc.kit.com/743a603dd0

You can find my author pages at the following: Author website: https://johnfrederickandrews.com/ Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/JohnAndrewsFiction Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/johnandrews63/ Amazon author page: https://amazon.com/author/johnf.andrews Goodreads: https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/46743900. John_F_Andrews

ABOUT JOHN F. ANDREWS

John F. Andrews is the award-winning author of the *Novels of the Great War Series*, including *Our Desperate Hour*, *An American Nurse in Paris*, and *Dogs Don't Cry*. He writes from the perspective of a service family member and critical care physician to craft unique stories based on real events. His characters struggle shoulder-to-shoulder with some of the real heroes of WWI as well as showing the plight of civilians caught in one of the most horrible conflicts in human history. His novels are stories of struggle, survival, hope, resilience, and love.

