TITLE INFORMATION

AN AMERICAN NURSE IN PARIS
John F. Andrews
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BOOK REVIEW

In Andrews' historical novel, an American journalist faces misogyny as she travels to cover American soldiers fighting in the Great War.

Alice Simmons, a young reporter from St. Paul, Minnesota, follows her mentor Ira Cunningham to Paris to write about the ongoing war in 1918. (The novel's action takes place over the course of that year's summer, when United States troops began to arrive in Europe.) As a female journalist, Alice is repeatedly blocked from covering serious matters, while her male colleagues are able to leave Paris and report from the front lines. After she fights off an assault by her commanding officers, Major Richard Martel and Captain Ralph Buck, Ira convinces her to join his daughter Trudy (who is Alice's childhood best friend) as a nurse in the hospital. While she has always aspired to be a reporter, Alice was convinced to go to school for nursing as a backup career option; she excelled, partly due to her parents' medical careers and the access that came with them. At the hospital, Alice faces more roadblocks when she discovers her credentials will need to be sent for before she can fully enlist as an army nurse—she must work as an aide until they arrive. The head nurse Marion Pickler has a strong prejudice against aides, and, regardless of the fact that Alice is actually a nurse, is harsh and abusive toward her, along with the other aides ("Well, I can't keep you out of this hospital, but you're not welcome here"). Alice's standing becomes even more dire when Martel and Buck take revenge by accusing her of espionage. In spite of everything, Alice cheerfully tends to the wounded soldiers in her care. Andrews writes the two narrators' voices distinctively, making it easy to tell whether it's the young, passionate, and optimistic Alice or the hardened and pessimistic (yet still idealistic) Ira who is speaking. Though most characters in the novel are men, Alice has plenty of her own agency and tends to save herself rather than wait for someone to save her, making her an engaging and powerful character. Fans of inspiring war narratives will find much to love in this novel.

Rousing historical fiction with a feminist bent.

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