

American wife

By Curtis Sittenfeld

First published in 2008



Genre and Subject

Romance fiction

Political spouses

Synopsis

A kind, bookish only child born in the 1940s, Alice Lindgren has no idea that she will one day end up in the White House, married to the president. In her small Wisconsin hometown she learns the virtues of politeness, but a tragic accident when she is seventeen shatters her identity and changes the trajectory of her life. More than a decade later, when the charismatic son of a powerful Republican family sweeps her off her feet, she is surprised to find herself admitted into a world of privilege. And when her husband unexpectedly becomes governor and then president, she discovers that she is married to a man she both loves and fundamentally disagrees with—and that her private beliefs increasingly run against her public persona. As her husband's presidency enters its second term, Alice must confront contradictions years in the making and face questions nearly impossible to answer

Author Biography

Curtis Sittenfeld is the bestselling author of six novels: Prep, The Man of My Dreams, American Wife, Sisterland, Eligible, and Rodham. Her first story collection, You Think It, I'll Say It, was published in 2018 and picked for Reese Witherspoon's Book Club. Her books have been selected by The New York Times, Time, Entertainment Weekly, and People for their "Ten Best Books of the Year" lists, optioned for television and film, and translated into thirty languages.

Her short stories have appeared in The New Yorker, The Washington Post, and Esquire, and in the Best American Short Stories anthology, of which she is the 2020 guest editor. Her non-fiction has appeared in The New York Times, Time, Vanity Fair, The Atlantic, Slate, and on "This American Life." A graduate of Stanford University and the Iowa Writers' Workshop,

Curtis has appeared as a guest on NPR's "Fresh Air," CBS's "Early Show," and PBS's Newshour; and four times been a Jeopardy!

Discussion Starters

1. What The novel opens and closes with Alice wondering if she's made terrible mistakes. Do you think she has? If so, what are they?
2. Alice's grandmother passes down her love of reading to Alice. How else is Alice influenced by her grandmother?
3. Why does Andrew remain such an important figure to Alice, even decades later? Do you think they would have ended up together under different circumstances?
4. To what do you attribute Dena's anger at what she calls Alice's betrayal? Do you believe her anger is justified? Are there other issues influencing Dena's decision regarding their relationship?
5. After her confrontation with Pete in her early thirties, Alice states, "Long ago, I had become my own confidante." What does she mean by this?
6. Is Charlie a likable character? How did you feel about Alice's decision to stay with him despite the problems they encountered in their marriage? Why do you think she continues to love him even though they are so different in so many ways?
7. Alice states that she lives a life in opposition to itself. What does she mean by this statement, and do you agree with it?
8. Does Alice compromise herself and her ideals during her marriage, or does she realistically alter her behaviour and expectations in order to preserve the most important relationship in her life?
9. Were you surprised by the scene between Alice and Joe at the Princeton reunion? Why do you think it happened?
10. What would you have done in Alice's situation at the end of the novel? Do you think it was wrong of her to take the stance she did?
11. How do you think Laura Bush would react to this novel if she read it?
12. How is this book different from Sittenfeld's previous two novels, other than in its subject matter?

If you liked this book, you may also like...

- *Sorrow and bliss* by Meg Mason
- *Love & virtue* by Diana Reid

Author biography from <https://curtissittenfeld.com>

Discussion starters from <https://curtissittenfeld.com/books/american-wife/discussion-questions/>

Read-a-likes from <https://www.goodreads.com/book/similar>