

Alice B. Toklas Is Missing

Robert Archambeau

Regal House Publishing (Nov 28, 2023)

Softcover \$18.95 (264pp)

978-1-64603-385-0

In Robert Archambeau's inventive novel *Alice B. Toklas Is Missing*, a bizarre kidnapping mystifies the artistic circles of 1920s Paris.

Ida Caine is an aspiring American painter living in Paris with her husband, Teddy. Though Teddy has keen literary ambitions, he doesn't enjoy writing—or even reading—fiction.

The Caines venture to poet and author Gertrude Stein's famed salon, where they also meet Gertrude's "birdlike" lover, Alice B. Toklas. Imposing and obdurate, Gertrude presides over the gathering like a "corpulent barefoot empress in a brown corduroy dress."

Soon after the salon meeting, Alice is abducted while walking her dog. Gertrude is shocked by the crime and desperate to find her beloved partner; Teddy claims to be a private detective and promises to solve the case. But Teddy has no actual investigatory experience. Instead, he takes a boozy jaunt to Cairo and Algiers with an aviator friend.

Left alone in Paris, Ida befriends the American poet Tom Eliot, better known as T. S. Tom becomes quite fond of intelligent, attractive Ida, and a diffident romance develops. As they investigate Alice's kidnapping, Tom and Ida are lured into a maze of surrealist subterfuge and explosive cultural anarchy.

The novel explores futurism, surrealism, and other creative movements with kinetic finesse. Amid the celebrated exuberance of 1920s Paris, it reveals the era's various poseurs; there are those who come to Paris for alcoholic adventures, and there are dedicated artists like Ida, who hope to craft meaningful work. The character roster includes Marcel Duchamp, James Joyce, and Ernest Hemingway. Ida and Tom are accompanied on their quest by agitated yet punctilious futurist F. T. Marinetti, while painter and writer Wyndham Lewis assumes villainous menace.

Traveling from macabre Parisian catacombs to the staid Louvre, *Alice B. Toklas Is Missing* is a spiraling and scintillating mystery.

MEG NOLA (November / December 2023)

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