



## Summary

*Women can be heroes.* When twenty-year-old nursing student Frances “Frankie” McGrath hears these words, it is a revelation. Raised in the sun-drenched, idyllic world of Southern California and sheltered by her conservative parents, she has always prided herself on doing the right thing. But in 1965, the world is changing, and she suddenly dares to imagine a different future for herself. When her brother ships out to serve in Vietnam, she joins the Army Nurse Corps and follows his path.

As green and inexperienced as the men sent to Vietnam to fight, Frankie is over-whelmed by the chaos and destruction of war. Each day is a gamble of life and death, hope and betrayal; friendships run deep and can be shattered in an instant. In war, she meets—and becomes one of—the lucky, the brave, the broken, and the lost.

But war is just the beginning for Frankie and her veteran friends. The real battle lies in coming home to a changed and divided America, to angry protesters, and to a country that wants to forget Vietnam.

*The Women* is the story of one woman gone to war, but it shines a light on all women who put themselves in harm’s way and whose sacrifice and commitment to their country has too often been forgotten. A novel about deep friendships and bold patriotism, *The Women* is a richly drawn story with a memorable heroine whose idealism and courage under fire will come to define an era.



## About the Author

Kristin Hannah is the award-winning and bestselling author of more than 20 novels. Her newest novel, *The Women*, about the nurses who served in the Vietnam war, will be released on February 6, 2024.

*The Four Winds* was published in February of 2021 and immediately hit #1 on the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, USA Today, and Indie bookstore's bestseller lists. Additionally, it was selected as a book club pick by the both Today Show and The Book Of the Month club, which named it the best book of 2021.

In 2018, *The Great Alone* became an instant New York Times #1 bestseller and was named the Best Historical Novel of the Year by Goodreads.

In 2015, *The Nightingale* became an international blockbuster and was Goodreads Best Historical fiction novel for 2015 and won the coveted People's Choice award for best fiction in the same year. It was named a Best Book of the Year by Amazon, iTunes, BuzzFeed, the Wall Street Journal, Paste, and The Week.

*The Nightingale* is currently in pre-production at Tri Star. *Firefly Lane*, her beloved novel about two best friends, was the #1 Netflix series around the world, in the week it came out. The popular tv show stars Katherine Heigl and Sarah Chalke.

A former attorney, Kristin lives in the Pacific Northwest.

Courtesy of the author's website

## Discussion Questions

- Why was *The Women* the right title for this novel?
- For those who lived during the Vietnam War, can you share your memories of that era? What most sticks out to you? How did it feel reading about that era?
- And for those who weren't yet born, how much knowledge did you have about the Vietnam War and this time period prior to reading the novel? What was your impression reading about this time period?
- Do you feel you learned something new by reading *The Women*?
- What are your thoughts about Frankie, as the protagonist? Let's talk about her growth journey from the beginning of the novel to the end.
- Her brother's friend, Rye, who will play a bigger role in the novel, says to her "women can be heroes." Why did that struck such a chord with Frankie?
- Why did she decide to serve as a nurse during the war? What was she hoping to achieve?
- How did her brother's death in Vietnam impact both Frankie and her family?
- As soon as Frankie arrives to Vietnam, she learns the war is very different than what's presented to the American public. It's chaotic, scary and changes every minute. What were your thoughts as you read all the hospital scenes?
- Frankie develops a close friendship with her fellow nurses, Barb and Ethel. Let's talk about how they bonded through their war experiences.
- Frankie also gets close to a married doctor, Jamie. What were your thoughts on their dynamic and budding romance?
- After Jamie seemingly dies, Frankie is eventually transferred to another hospital and she runs into Rye again. While she's resistant at first because Rye is engaged, he tells her the engagement is off and they start a romance. Did you trust Rye or did you have your suspicions about him?

## **Discussion Questions cont'd**

- Both Jamie, and we come to learn Rye, are married but still pursue Frankie. While Jamie is more honest, and it does seem he's in an unhappy marriage, Rye completely lies to Frankie. Why does it seem that infidelity was common (at least in the story's context) during the war?
- Why did Frankie decide to extend her time in Vietnam instead of come back home?
- When did Frankie start to realize what the public was being told about the war was not true?
- This book is divided into two parts, during the war and the aftermath. Let's first talk about Frankie's return home and the unhero's welcome. What were your thoughts as you read the horrible treatment she received? Why were her parents not supportive of her time in the war?
- While the male veterans also received the harsh treatment, they at least could band together. But the women of the war were not considered veterans and not able to receive the same benefits as veterans. Why did society try to erase women's involvement in the war?
- Frankie holds on to hope that Rye will soon return home, but she finds out from his father that he was killed in action. She soon falls into a deep depression as a result of her grief but also undiagnosed PTSD from the war. Why was it important the author showed the reader Frankie's experience with PTSD?

## Review

### Kristin Hannah's New Novel Puts Combat Nurses Front and Center in Vietnam

By Beatriz Williams

February 1, 2024

A few chapters into “The Women,” I experienced a wave of *déjà vu* — and it wasn’t just the warm Tab and the creme rinse. If you grew up in the 1980s, the Vietnam redemption arc was imprinted on your gray matter by a stampede of young novelists and filmmakers coming to grips with their foundational trauma: patriotic innocence shattered by the barbarity of jungle warfare; the return home to a hostile nation; the chasm of despair and addiction; and finally, the healing power of activism. This was the generational narrative, told and retold in classics like “Born on the Fourth of July” and “The Things They Carried” — the ballad of the boomer, a masculine coming-of-age *cri de coeur*.

Now Kristin Hannah takes up the Vietnam epic and re-centers the story on the experience of women — in this instance, the military nurses who worked under fire, on bases and in field hospitals, to patch soldiers back together. Or not.

The familiar beats snare you from the outset. When the sheltered San Diego debutante Frances “Frankie” McGrath’s adored older brother is killed in action in 1966, she’s inspired to enlist as an Army nurse. “Women can be heroes, too,” her brother’s friend tells her.

Frankie laughs. Her flag-waving, emotionally constipated parents are not amused.

Dumped in-country without adequate training, Frankie learns the ropes from seasoned nurses and battle-scarred male doctors who propel her past internalized insecurities with barks of no-nonsense encouragement: “Damn it, McGrath! We don’t have time for fear.

You’re good enough. Do it!”

Indeed, there’s something special about Frankie. Within months, she becomes an experienced trauma nurse, confronts the horrors of gut wounds and napalm with courage and compassion, rages against the naïve indifference of her family and friends back home — and attracts the devotion of handsome, tormented, unexpectedly married men.

Hannah is in top form here, plunging the reader into the chaotic miseries of the combat zone. She deploys details to visceral effect, whether Frankie’s performing an emergency tracheotomy during a mortar attack or sipping Fresca in the O Club afterward, while an evocative soundtrack of the Doors, the Beatles and the Turtles plays in the background. (“Music followed the smoke, infusing it with memories of home. ‘I wanna hold your ha-aa-aa-nd.’”)

## Review

With Hannah confidently in control, we swoop above the jungle canopy in a Huey chopper, peppered by sniper fire, and skid across the Mekong Delta on a pair of water skis. The historical scenery is rendered with such earnest authenticity that the few millennialisms — “girl squad,” for instance, snapped me back to the present day, as did a pair of kids named Kaylee and Braden — jar precisely because the author otherwise recreates this world so convincingly.

But Hannah’s real superpower is her ability to hook you along from catastrophe to catastrophe, sometimes peering between your fingers, because you simply cannot give up on her characters. If the story loses a little momentum after Frankie completes her second tour — slingshot to the finish by a series of occasionally strained plot twists — well, isn’t that the way it went for so many veterans returning home? Without the imperatives of war, you stumble along until you find your way.

In the end, I was struck not by the way “The Women” radically reshapes the contours of our Vietnam narrative, but instead by how vividly the novel affirms them. Hannah may not offer any revolutionary takes on the war and its aftermath, but she gathers women into the experience with moving conviction. And maybe this story’s time has come again. Over dinner one night, I described “The Women” to my college-age daughter — a young woman with her finger on the cultural pulse — and she perked right up. “Wow, the Vietnam War,” she said. “You don’t see much about that.”