

Mrs. S**K Patrick**

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In K Patrick's novel *Mrs. S*, a woman navigates a new job far from home, as well as her growing feelings for an older woman.

At an old-fashioned girls' boarding school in England, the new matron is anything but traditional. She's a butch lesbian from Australia, charged with looking after students not much younger than she is. While many at the school suspect her sexual orientation, almost none know for sure. One of those in the know might be Mrs. S, the beautiful but distant headmaster's wife. Thus begins a careful dance between the two women: getting closer but not too close, hinting at secrets without giving anything away, and enjoying their happiness while they can.

The unnamed narrator struggles with her place in the school and in the affections of the enchanting Mrs. S. She wants to do what is right for her students, yet she remains forever at a distance, held back by both the truth of her identity and by the rebellious charges who push the school's strict, unforgiving rules to the limit. The loneliness she feels around these people who do not share her identity and experiences is palpable—as is the thrill of finding even a single individual who does understand.

From the start, it is clear that the love between the matron and the headmaster's wife, as exciting and fulfilling as it is, cannot last. Mrs. S has too many responsibilities and lingering traditional views to commit, as the narrator discovers in a stunning, heartbreaking scene. When it is time to part, the narrator can take with her only fond memories of an ephemeral love, as well as a far more permanent keepsake: hard-earned comfort in her own skin.

Mrs. S is a novel in which a different kind of love—self-acceptance—conquers all.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (May / June 2023)

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