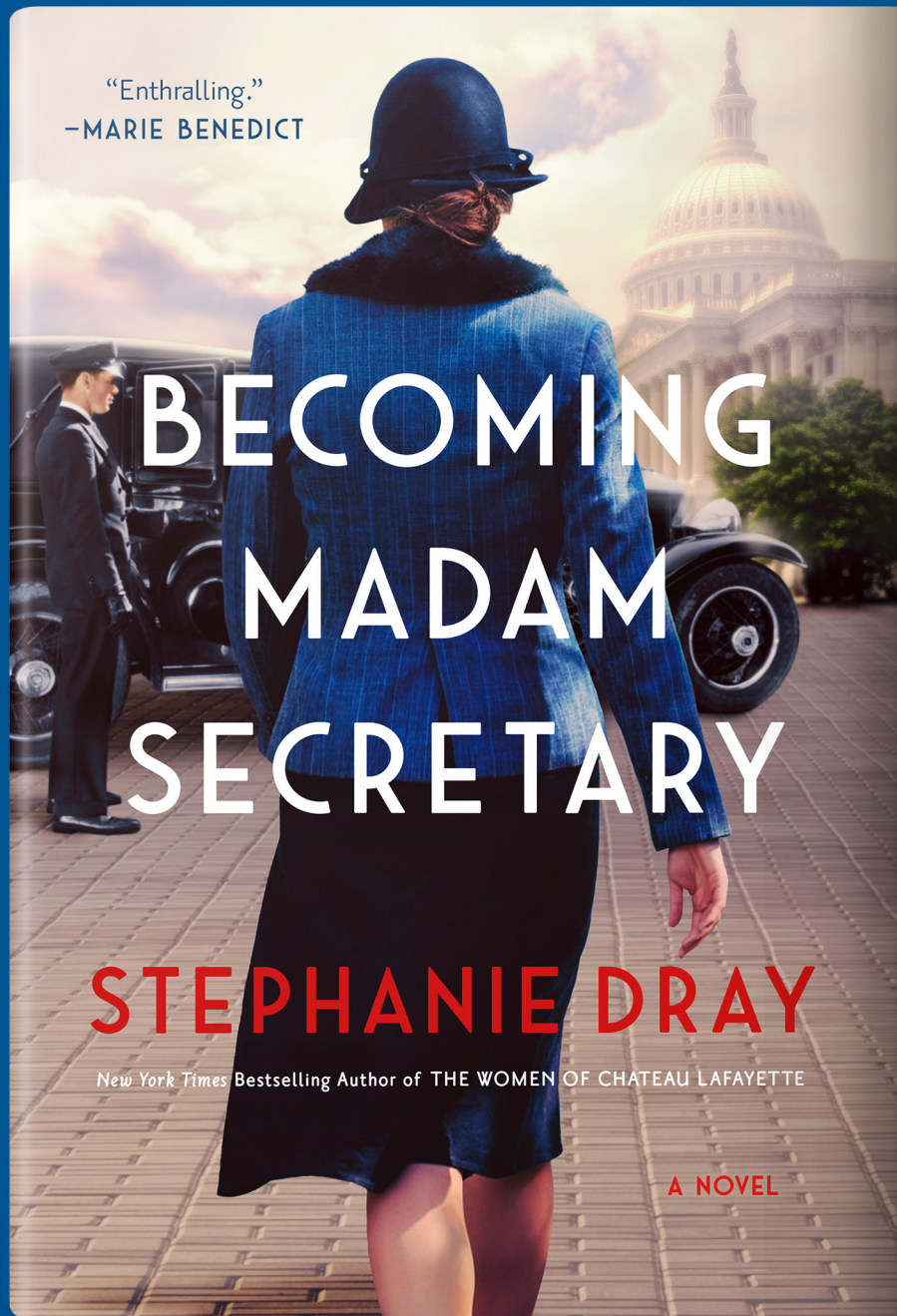


Book Club Kit



BERKLEY

Dear Reader,

This novel is not just the product of over a year of intensive research; it's also a culmination of a lifetime steeped in storytelling and a deep fascination with American history.

Unlike the heroine of this novel, my family's roots in America are relatively recent. My ancestors came to this country in the early twentieth century, fleeing poverty and persecution in Europe. They were new additions to the "American experiment," a nation still figuring itself out.

They were survivors who found opportunity here, but they struggled, too. My grandparents, who came of age during the Great Depression, told stories that were both inspiring and heartbreaking. They spoke of hunting frogs and foraging wild mushrooms to survive. But their tales also had darker chapters; my grandfather lost his older brother in a desperate attempt to steal coal from a passing train to keep the family warm during the harsh winters.

The frugality my grandparents developed during those dark days stuck around. When I was a kid, my grandmother was always on the hunt for a bargain at garage sales. As the oldest grandchild, I found myself in the back seat of her lime green Ford Fairlane, with the mission of entertaining my sister and younger cousins during these expeditions. It was there that I honed my storytelling skills, weaving tales like Scheherazade to keep the back seat peace.

But I wasn't just a teller of tales; I was an eager listener, too. My grandfathers, both of whom enlisted right after the attack on Pearl Harbor, taught me about the values that this country was built on and instilled in me a respect for how fragile any democracy is. Their stories kindled my fascination with revolutions and republics, with ordinary people rising to extraordinary circumstances. These are themes that I return to, again and again.

So it was only natural that I would be drawn to write about the era of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who revolutionized America and inspired our greatest generation

to rise and meet the global threat of totalitarianism. Roosevelt was more than just a president to my family; he was a beacon of hope. Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps provided my grandfather with the opportunity to support his family. Roosevelt was the commander in chief for my grandfathers. And after the war, when polio struck my father, my paternal grandmother found inspiration in Roosevelt's own battle with the disease. She believed that if Roosevelt could lead a nation from a wheelchair, her son could also have a bright future.

But while Roosevelt was a household name in my family, Frances Perkins was a figure I only discovered later in life. As Roosevelt's Secretary of Labor, Perkins was instrumental in lifting people like my grandparents out of poverty and providing them with a dignified retirement. Yet she was more than just a political figure; she was a vibrant, adventurous woman who played a pivotal role in shaping modern America.

Delving into Frances Perkins's life, I reviewed the five-thousand-page transcript of her oral history, read her papers and poems, and looked at her family pictures. I scoured appointment books and historical newspapers where she made headlines. I even listened to recordings to capture her unique voice, and had the privilege of interviewing people who knew her, including her grandson. All this was done so I could paint a vivid picture of this extraordinary woman whose programs transformed our nation.

Writing this novel has been a journey of discovery for me, not just about Frances Perkins but also about the complex relationship she had with Roosevelt. Chronicling their friendship, their debates, and their shared vision for America has been incredibly rewarding. She was an extraordinary woman whose story deserves to be told and celebrated.

I know you'll come to appreciate Frances Perkins as much as I do, and if you haven't already, please consider [subscribing to my newsletter](#) for more stories and insights into American history.



***Warmly,
Stephanie Dray***

Discussion Questions

1.

Frances Perkins considered herself the descendant of revolutionary patriots. How did this image of herself and her place in the American story influence her career choices?

2.

The Triangle shirtwaist factory fire profoundly impacted Perkins. Can you think of other examples from the novel where a single event changed the direction of a character's life?

3.

How did Perkins navigate the discrimination she faced as a woman? What instances in the book struck you the most about this struggle? What scenes most effectively demonstrate her resilience?

4.

Frances Perkins's family struggled with mental illness in a time when bipolar disease was not well understood. How might things have turned out differently for her, and for the country, if her husband's illness could have been effectively treated?

5.

Frances Perkins often believed that she had to compromise to accomplish her goals. What did you think of her decisions in this regard and were those compromises effective?

6.

How did the portrayal of Frances Perkins's difficulty in balancing her personal and professional life make her more relatable as a character and a human being?

7.

Frances Perkins struggled with the accusation that she may have been a better American patriot than she was a mother. What are your thoughts on that?

8.

The evolution of the complex relationship between Perkins and President Franklin D. Roosevelt is a central plot point in the novel. What surprised you about this relationship? How did it shed light on history?

9.

Perkins was the driving force behind the Social Security Act. How does the novel's portrayal of this landmark achievement heighten your understanding and appreciation of it?

10.

Perkins's legacy continues to live on in our society today. From the five-day workweek, fire and food safety regulations, unemployment insurance, and social security, can you name the ways your own life or the lives of your family members, have been impacted by Frances Perkins?

Facts about Frances Perkins

SHATTERING CEILINGS

Frances Perkins didn't just work in the White House—**she broke barriers as the first female U.S. Cabinet member.** Who says a woman's place isn't at the table?

FRONT-ROW WITNESS

Frances was present during the horrific Triangle shirtwaist factory fire. **This tragedy ignited her lifelong quest for workers' rights.** She was a woman driven by justice.

MOTHER OF SOCIAL SECURITY

Imagine writing the blueprint for America's social safety nets. The Social Security Act of 1935? That was Frances Perkins's brainchild. **She's the mother of your retirement plans!**

UNDERCOVER CRUSADER

In her younger days in Philadelphia, **Frances posed as a naive young woman seeking maid work to expose fraudulent employment agencies involved in human trafficking.** This was a daring act for a daring woman.

A NAME OF HER OWN

Born as Fannie Coralie Perkins, she later chose to go by Frances. A self-made woman in every sense, **she even chose her own name.**