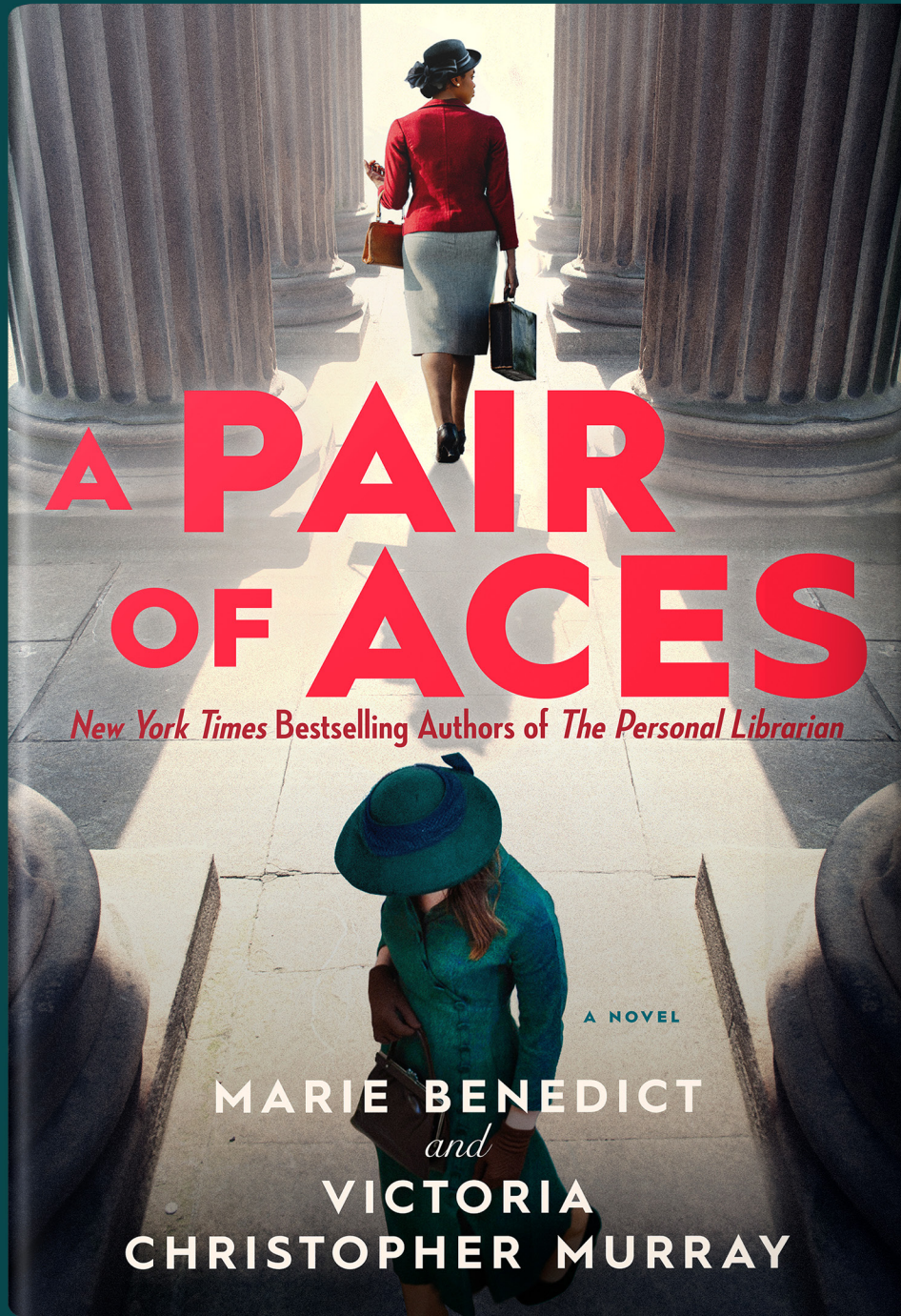


Book Club Kit



A PAIR OF ACES

New York Times Bestselling Authors of The Personal Librarian

A NOVEL

MARIE BENEDICT
and
VICTORIA
CHRISTOPHER MURRAY

BERKLEY

A letter from the authors

MARIE BENEDICT

and

VICTORIA CHRISTOPHER MURRAY

Dear Readers,

Two women. One Black. One white. Not friends, but compatriots.

Working together, but alone. Is it possible that, against all odds, they could cross the divide between their very different worlds to effectuate great change?

This was the question that nagged at us while on our book tours, first for *The Personal Librarian* and then for *The First Ladies*. We saw that readers were fascinated not only by our novels, but also by our desire to collaborate on stories that uncover the real women from the past who crossed boundaries of race, class, and circumstance to alter the course of history. Through reader questions, we encountered a deep hunger for and curiosity about stories that illuminated the power of women forming alliances to make an impact, even when it seemed impossible and even when their work had to be undertaken in secret.



We began to wonder: What if two such women came together with an urgent desire to transform society, but were never friends, never even friendly? Could they really unite against a common enemy and change the world?

From this, *A Pair of Aces* was born. And we're so excited and proud to share our new novel with you. This is the story of Eunice Hunton Carter, the first Black female prosecutor in New York City, and Polly Adler, New York's most infamous madam, and how these two women—one sworn to uphold the law, the other defined by breaking it—forged a perilous alliance to bring down the notorious Mob boss Lucky Luciano in the 1930s.

A Pair of Aces tells the story of how women from vastly different worlds found common ground to accomplish the impossible. It is a novel that proves that history has not been made by powerful men alone, but also by brave women who dared to stand up and take risks.

As you read, we hope you'll feel the same awe we did in discovering the legacy of these two women and the power of their contributions. Thank you, as always for championing stories that restore women to their rightful place in history.

Warmly,

Marie Benedict and Victoria Christopher Murray

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1.

As an assistant district attorney for the City of New York and Manhattan's first Black female prosecutor, Eunice Hunton Carter achieved incredible success. What personality traits led her to achieve this success?

2.

Polly Adler became the most infamous madam of her time. What life circumstances led her to that position? What qualities led her to thrive in that role? How does her profession reflect the limitations imposed on immigrant women in the early twentieth century, as well as the attitudes about them?

3.

Eunice Hunton Carter and Polly Adler were well-known figures in 1930s New York. Were you familiar with either of them before reading *A Pair of Aces*?

4.

Lucky Luciano was the most notorious mobster of his time, known as the boss of bosses. Had you heard of him before reading *A Pair of Aces*? Lucky, Eunice, and Polly were all prominent figures in their time. Who do you think is the best known of the three of them today? Why do you think that is?

5.

Both Eunice and Polly had to sacrifice a lot to achieve their positions. What trade-offs did they have to make? Do you think it was worth it?

6.

Eunice and Polly both faced a lot of challenges in their lives. How were their struggles similar and different?

7.

Eunice and Polly formed an alliance to achieve a common goal even though they were on opposite sides of the law. What characteristics helped them to set aside their differences and work together?

8.

Do you think Eunice and Polly influenced each other's lives? Do you think they learned anything from one another? How did their relationship change over the course of the book? What factors led to this transformation?

9.

At one point in the book, Eunice and Polly discuss whether race or class shaped their hardships more profoundly. Did you better understand each woman's perspective after this conversation? Did it shift your own view of race and class?

10.

Special Prosecutor Thomas Dewey gave Eunice incredible career opportunities, like appointing her to his team, but he also initially

didn't give her the same level of responsibility as the other lawyers on the team. How did you feel about Eunice's working relationship with Thomas Dewey? What did you think of his decisions throughout the book? Do you think his view of Eunice changed by the end? Do you think Eunice would face the same sorts of issues if she was in this role today?

11.

How did you feel about Eunice's relationship with her mother? In what way did her mother's accomplishments influence Eunice's life choices? Did she inspire her? Or did Eunice feel more pressure to succeed because of her mother's achievements?

12.

How would you describe Polly's relationship with her parents? Was her relationship different with her mother than her father, and if so, how? Why did she feel more animosity toward her father, and do you feel that was justified?

13.

Polly had a complicated relationship with the women, like Virginia, who worked for her. How did her relationship with these women influence Polly's decision to work with Eunice? Do you think the women like Virginia felt like they were family to Polly?

14.

What did you think of Polly's relationship with the Lion? Why do you think the two women were so close?

15.

How did you view Eunice's relationship with her husband? Why do you think there was so much tension in their marriage?

16.

Did anything surprise you about the trial of Lucky Luciano? Why do you think Dewey didn't want to prosecute Luciano for running a prostitution ring? Do you think this perspective would still be in evidence today?

17.

Eunice and Polly formed an unlikely alliance to take down Lucky Luciano. What qualities are required to make these kinds of alliances successful? Can you think of other situations where women from different backgrounds came together to achieve a common goal? What lessons can we derive from Eunice and Polly's relationship, and how can we apply them today? Have you ever formed this type of strategic alliance in your life? Can you envision a reason or issue that might inspire you to do so?