

BOOK CLUB KIT



"Huge congrats to Camille Aubray for a terrific read! *The Girl From the Grand Hotel* is a delicious romp through the south of France, filled with a cast of Hollywood legends and wrapped in a tense spy thriller. I loved her dead-on depictions of bold-faced names of the day like F. Scott Fitzgerald and Charles Laughton, and was swept away by the fast-paced story and canny twists. An exhilarating ride!"

—Fiona Davis, New York Times bestselling author of *The Spectacular*

"Hollywood movie stars mingle with Nazi spies in a feverish atmosphere combined with a touching love story. An intense page-turner you won't want to put down!"

—Jacques Pépin, celebrity chef and New York Times bestselling author of *Cooking My Way*.

Book Club Kit
for
THE GIRL FROM THE GRAND HOTEL

CONTENTS

Discussion Questions

Q & A with author Camille Aubray

Camille Aubray's Movie List

Camille Aubray's Cocktails

About the Author

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. We first meet Annabel in her summer job at a Grand Hotel on the French Riviera in 1939. What makes a Grand Hotel special? What is her uncle's Code of Standards? How do the newly arriving guests challenge such standards? What are Uncle JP's plans for Annabel's future? Do his plans conflict with her hopes and dreams?
2. How does Annabel's past experiences with her parents, her grandmother, her boyfriend, her education and her secretarial work affect her attitude toward the work she is now doing in France? What does Annabel yearn for?
3. Discuss Annabel's first impressions of the screenwriter. What are the common misperceptions of Scott at this time in his life? How would you describe Annabel's evolving relationship with Scott?
4. What are the first signs of trouble brewing when Annabel meets the Hollywood guests at the pool area? And, when she takes Uncle JP's granddaughter Delphine to the garden? What could the garden itself represent?
5. What were your first impressions of Jack Cabot and T ea Marlo? What does Jack represent to Annabel? What does Jack reveal to Annabel about the screenwriter?
6. Why is Annabel wary of the young heir Rick Bladey? What did you think of Rick when he met Delphine?
7. There are many mysterious people at the hotel: the tennis player, the English couple, the Polish secretary, Marta the receptionist, the German guests, and many movie stars. What secrets are eventually revealed about each of them?
8. There are many startling events that started out looking ordinary: when Annabel is asked to deliver two telegrams, when she sits in on a script meeting, when she is invited to parties, when she works with the actors and the screenwriter. Discuss each of these, examining the ominous signs that trouble is brewing in both the personal lives at the Grand Hotel and the politics of the time. How does Annabel cope with this turmoil?
9. What was the most significant thing that happened when Jack, Annabel, and T ea went off together to the little "village in the clouds" called Sainte Agn es? What does the Maginot Fort represent, both to the characters on a personal level, and to France itself?
10. What do we learn about the family of Sonny, the man who runs Olympia Studios? What is his family's dynamic? How do Cissy and Alan in particular affect Annabel's actions?
11. At the last party at the Grand Hotel, the tensions that have been brewing all along erupt in various ways. How does the thunderstorm become a breaking point? What is the metaphorical significance of the lobsters?
12. How does the outbreak of the second World War affect Annabel's life—her personal choices, and the speed with which she must make life-altering decisions? What would you have done if you were in her place?
13. Many people assume that the first Cannes Film Festival took place in the 1940s. They also assume that the festival was always held in the springtime. Yet the first one was planned for September 1, 1939. What was the original purpose of the festival? What were your assumptions about the Cannes Film Festival before you read this novel? Now that you know its origins, what do you think of its history and its present-day legacy?
14. When you look back on the novel, which character was always in the most danger? Is this different from what you first thought when you were introduced to the characters?

Q & A with author CAMILLE AUBRAY

Q. What inspired you to write THE GIRL FROM THE GRAND HOTEL?

A. I always think that inspiration is like a wheel with many spokes that meet in the center. So for this novel, my background in film in television, my familiarity with the Côte d'Azur for both its breathtaking scenery and its cultural and political legacy, my fascination with discovering the overlooked "golden nuggets" of history that are hiding in plain sight, and, most of all, the French people whom I've come to know and love over the years, all came together in this novel.

Q. What in particular made you want to write about the first Cannes Film Festival?

A. Because it was scheduled to take place during one of the most tumultuous times in the history of the 20th Century. And here, the spokes of the wheel came together into a terrifying center as Europe plunged itself into yet another horrible World War. So you have Hollywood movie stars arriving on chartered ocean liners, the rich jet-set and politicians summering in the lap of luxury, French cultural leaders trying to create a beacon for peace and tolerance, and fascist spies lurking around every corner—yet the summer parties went on and on as people turned a blind eye toward their own fates!

Q. Where did your American heroine come from?

A. I think every young woman who hopes for an exciting life but finds herself in a dead-end job can relate! Also, the American girl abroad is a time-honored literary tradition. Think of Henry James, Edith Wharton and F. Scott Fitzgerald. The young person venturing out into the big bad world has no idea where the land mines are planted, and her elders can't entirely protect her. So she has to use her wits, intelligence, heart and soul to survive.

Q. It's quite an art to blend fiction and history. How do you do it?

A. You have to have a very strong feeling about why you want to write about a particular period or incident or locale—by that I mean, an author has to have a very personal desire to do so. For me, this is not about autobiography. It's about something you know deep in your heart about people in general and about your fictional characters in particular. Then, of course, you do your research. I look into not only the histories and period biographies, but the trends, fashions, music, movies, art and cuisine and culture of the time. I always say that writing a novel is like a bird building a nest, weaving bits of the branches of history and the leaves of life!

Q. How much of the story really happened?

A. Well, a Hollywood studio really did send its actors in a chartered ocean liner to the French Riviera; and, there really was a giant cardboard replica of the Cathedral of Notre Dame on the beach in Cannes to promote *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Without giving too much away of the story, I can say that the "English couple" in my novel, who do something very daring toward the end of the book, was inspired by a mission that a French husband-and-wife pair of actors actually carried out to help "the cause of freedom." Also, there really was a hairdresser in Cannes who was spying for the fascists while visiting his illustrious clients! And Marlene Dietrich really did have her own special recipe for suntan oil.

I've also drawn from personal experience in that I've spoken to many sources about the stories behind several legendary hotels on the French Riviera. I made the trip up to the Maginot fort and the village of Sainte Agnès, and I was almost as terrified of the heights as Téa was! And finally, the incident with the lobsters really did happen, but not in France—it actually happened in my own lifetime, at a farmers' market in Connecticut!

CAMILLE AUBRAY's Movie List

All Quiet On the Western Front (1930, Lew Ayres)

Three Comrades (Robert Taylor, Margaret Sullavan)

Gone With the Wind (Vivien Leigh, Clark Gable)

My Little Chickadee (W.C. Fields, Mae West)

Morocco (Marlene Dietrich and Gary Cooper)

Desire (Marlene Dietrich and Gary Cooper)

Destry Rides Again (Marlene Dietrich and James Stewart)

The Wizard of Oz (Judy Garland)

Only Angels Have Wings (Cary Grant, Jean Arthur)

The Hunchback of Notre Dame (Charles Laughton and Maureen O'Hara)

The Bride of Frankenstein (Elsa Lanchester and Boris Karloff)

Jesse James (Tyrone Power)

The Mark of Zorro (Douglas Fairbanks)

The Barretts of Wimpole Street (Charles Laughton and Norma Shearer)

Rebecca (Laurence Olivier and Joan Fontaine)

Jamaica Inn (Charles Laughton and Maureen O'Hara)

Dark Victory (Bette Davis)

Rembrandt (Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester)

The Private Life of Henry VIII (Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester)

Each Dawn I Die (George Raft and James Cagney)

The Roaring Twenties (Humphrey Bogart and James Cagney)

The Last Time I Saw Paris (Elizabeth Taylor and Van Johnson)

Witness for the Prosecution (Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester)

The Big Clock (Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester)

CAMILLE AUBRAY's Cocktails

My "Sidecar Cocktail"

I love the 1920s cocktail called a "sidecar." There are several stories of how it came to be invented, but the one I like most is that it was created by an American army captain during the first World War. He named it after the sidecar attached to the motorcycle that army captains sat in as they scooted through Paris and then stopped at the Ritz bar for refreshment. I use armagnac, because you only live once, and armagnac is far more sublime than cognac, but you can use either. The same goes for Cointreau, which I prefer instead of Triple Sec or curaçao.

2 oz of armagnac (or cognac) per person

1 teaspoon of Cointreau per person

1 fresh orange

Pour the first two ingredients into a large cocktail glass. Cut one thin slice of the orange for garnish, then freshly squeeze the rest of the orange and put 1/2 of the juice into each glass. Add lots of large ice cubes (not shavings) to fill the glass (the more ice you use, the faster it chills and you won't water it down). When the glass feels frosty and cold, carefully remove the cubes and stir (do not shake!)

My "Classic Champagne Cocktail"

This is the cocktail that Annabel drank. I advise you not to let someone like Téa be your mixologist!

a splash of cognac or armagnac

a squeeze of fresh orange or lemon juice

enough dry (brut) champagne to fill the glass

ice, as described above

Pour brandy into champagne glass. Add the champagne slowly to let the bubbles settle. Then add juice and ice. Remove ice after the glass is cold and frosty.

My Non-Alcoholic Cocktail (Just Mix and Enjoy!)

1-2 tablespoons of unsweetened cranberry or cherry juice, preferably organic

the juice of half a lemon or lime

sparkling water to fill the glass two-thirds of the way

ice (to be removed after the glass is frosty and cold)

About the Author



Camille Aubray is the IndieBound bestselling author of *Cooking for Picasso* and *The Godmothers*. Her novels made the “best books” lists of *People*, *Newsweek*, *BuzzFeed*, *Parade*, the *Boston Globe*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Fodor’s Travel*, *Veranda*, The Indie Next List for Reading Groups, and Amazon’s Celebrity Picks. Aubray was an Edward F. Albee Foundation Fellowship winner, a writer in residence at the Karolyi Foundation in the South of France, and a finalist at the Eugene O’Neill Playwrights Conference, and she has written television drama and documentary. To hear about her novels, recipes, and the locales that inspired her, visit her website at www.CamilleAubray.com.