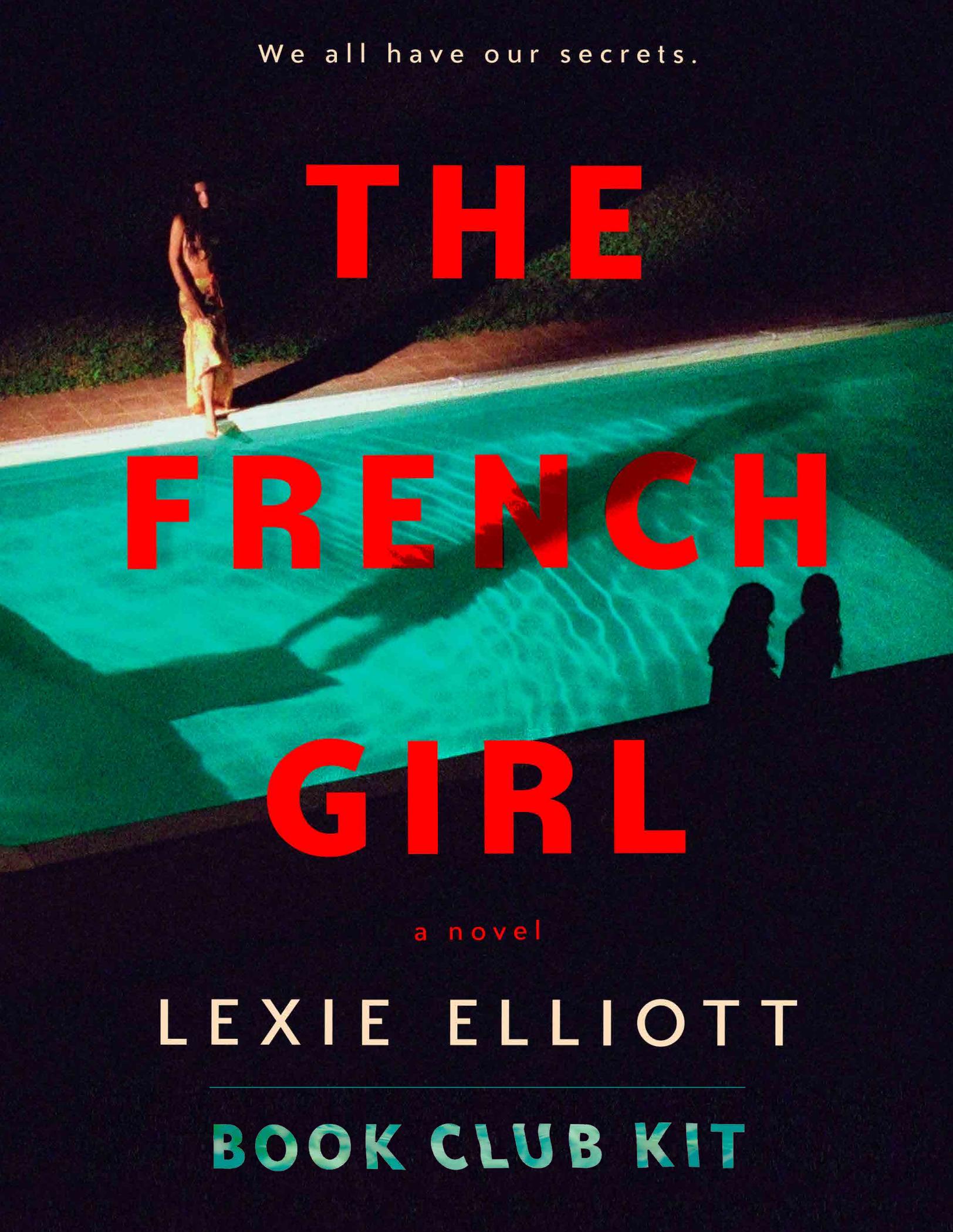


We all have our secrets.



**THE
FRENCH
GIRL**

a novel

LEXIE ELLIOTT

BOOK CLUB KIT

A portrait of Lexie Elliott, a woman with long, straight, light brown hair and green eyes, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. She is wearing a light-colored, textured sweater. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

A CONVERSATION WITH LEXIE ELLIOTT

What compelled you

to write *THE FRENCH GIRL*?

Where did you find inspiration for this story?

I've always wanted to be a writer and I've always written, though how much and how often was dictated by whatever else was going on in my life. I went on vacation to a farmhouse in France with friends one summer when I was doing my PhD, and whilst I was there I had the idea that ultimately became *THE FRENCH GIRL*. The idea rolled around in my head for a good many years before I felt able to make a start on it; I think perhaps I knew I needed a bit more maturity as a writer to be able to tackle it properly.

Do you closely relate to the story's narrator, Kate?

Kate is not me. For one thing, she's much more entrepreneurial; I think she's enormously brave in that regard. She also tends to keep her feelings under wraps, which I am almost incapable of. But I do relate to her in that she's Northern which is actually very important in the context of her story (I'm Scottish rather than from the north of England, but both are "other" in terms of what one might think of as the typical Oxbridge background), and a strong woman working in a mainly male environment—all of which is to say she often feels like an outsider, and I certainly relate to that. She's also immensely loyal, a characteristic which is vitally important to me—and resourceful, which I like to think I am too. Kate and I would be friends; very good friends, in fact. We would drink an awful lot of Chardonnay together!

This story is about a group of friends. Were any of the characters based on or inspired by people you've met?

None of the characters are based entirely on people I know. I'm sure I've included certain aspects of many people I know, but my characters tend to present themselves to me as fully formed beings. I see them in my head, I know how they move, what they choose to wear, how they think, where they grew up, what kind of child they were—a hundred little details that never make it into the book.

The story explores changing relationships between lovers and friends over time. What do you think is a key takeaway from the interactions in the book?

The book deals with a number of themes, including whether you can ever truly know a person, and the gap between who we thought we would be when we had the whole world ahead of us and who we actually become. I think that by the end of the novel Kate has found the courage to be true to herself, and has found a way to have faith in those around her. That's probably as good a takeaway as any.

Are any of the settings and places in the story based on your experiences?

Very much so. Kate went to Oxford University, as did I. Kate lives in London, as do I; she's often in and out of the London Square Mile area, as am I. The bars and restaurants she and her friends visit are the kinds of places I also frequented in my early thirties. And the farmhouse in France is largely based on one I stayed in in my early twenties, with the notable addition of a well!

Kate struggles to find her place in the working world and to grow her own business after finishing school. Did you have a similar experience? Did you ever expect to become a novelist?

My first job after university was working for Goldman Sachs (an investment bank) in London. I had student debt to pay off and I thought I would only do it for a couple of years; ultimately I was there for over five more than that, during which time I learnt an enormous amount. Did I expect to become a novelist? I always wanted to be a writer, and I always wrote. I always believed there would come a time in my life where I could finally concentrate on writing (it turns out there is no such mythical time—you just have to do it anyway!). I certainly didn't expect to become a published novelist, but I absolutely hoped, longed and yearned for it.

Severine, the "French girl" that the book is named for, is a powerful force even after her death. Why did you choose to write Severine the way you did?

I didn't intend to write Severine like that at all. When I first started the book, I expected her to be merely a set of bones, but she wasn't having any of that; she was rather insistent about wandering through the manuscript and expanding her role! I think I miss writing her the most out of all the characters. Certainly I think she will always occupy a little corner in my head.

How do you feel about publishing your debut novel, and what are you currently working on?

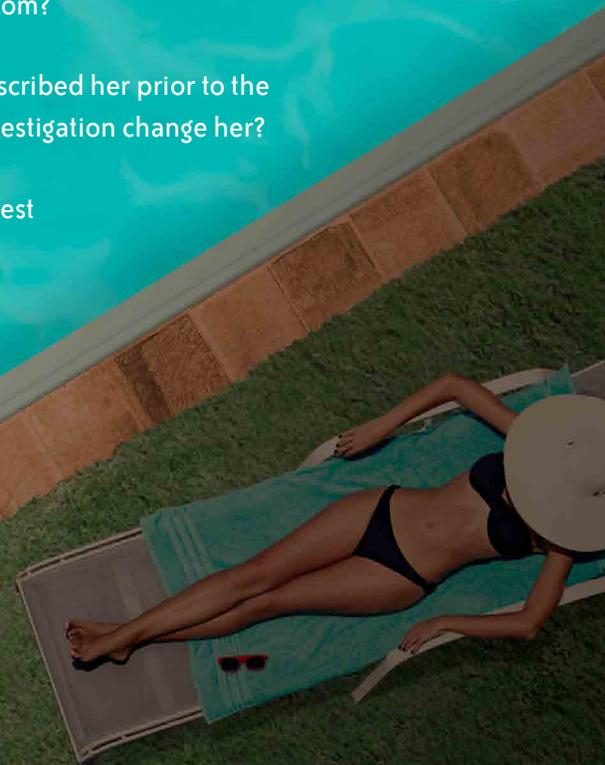
Thrilled beyond measure. Extraordinarily proud. And very grateful and very lucky: there are so many wonderful writers out there who may never have this opportunity. And a teeny bit sad that my mother (who has Alzheimer's) will never quite grasp what is happening. I am working on my second book, which is a psychological suspense novel set in Scotland (where I grew up). I can't say much more than that right now because it hasn't entirely taken shape in my mind yet.

Are there anecdotes in connection with the writing of your book that might be of interest?

I only realized after I had finished the book that I had named the victim after my husband's first girlfriend—seeing as she is dead by page two, I suppose there is something Freudian about that!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 When we meet Kate, she is a very isolated character. Do you think this was also the case during her university years, or is it a more recent development?
- 2 Lara is unashamedly promiscuous. How does Kate feel about that aspect of her best friend? Is there anyone in your friendship circle who behaves in a manner that causes conflict among the group?
- 3 Why do you think Caro chose to work for the same firm as her father? Kate holds Gordon at least partly responsible for Caro's difficult personality. Do you think this is fair of her?
- 4 Tom's friendship with Seb would be more straightforward if they were not also family. Do you have a complicated relationship with a family member of a similar age?
- 5 What do you think it was about her break-up with Seb that left such a lasting impact on Kate?
- 6 Why do you think Theo took the out-of-character step of joining the army?
- 7 The characters in the book all appear to have changed from how Kate remembered them during their university years. Do you think they have really changed, or were her memories unreliable? Or did she not know them as well as she thought?
- 8 Do you think Kate is right when she says how "important it is to get the right fit when you hire someone?" How can a company or organization change traditional, entrenched views without bringing in agitating viewpoints?
- 9 Were you surprised that Tom didn't suggest that Kate should consult a doctor when she told him about seeing Severine? What would you have done if you were Tom?
- 10 How would Kate's close friends and business associates have described her prior to the discovery of Severine's body? In what ways does the murder investigation change her?
- 11 Do you think a person knows him- or herself best or that our closest friends have a clearer idea of who we are at our core?
- 12 Who was your favorite character in *THE FRENCH GIRL*?



WHAT DO YOU THINK HAPPENED?

See if you can fill in the missing pieces from the investigation. Try to answer from as many different perspectives as you can.

Warning: Spoilers ahead!

When Caro left Kate's house after drugging her, she immediately began to call Alina.

How do you think Caro would have gotten rid of Alina in order to be with Seb? Do you think her plan changed once she found out Alina was pregnant?

When asked if Caro could have disposed of Severine's body herself, Modan says he doesn't know for sure, "but I would think she must have had help."

Who could have helped Caro? What would the motive have been to help?

Kate is convinced that Severine was the one who called Tom for help when she was unconscious.

Do you believe Severine made the call?