

"A raucous anthem to a remarkable woman."
—KATE QUINN, author of *THE ALICE NETWORK*

AMERICAN PRINCESS



A NOVEL *of* FIRST DAUGHTER
ALICE ROOSEVELT



STEPHANIE
MARIE THORNTON

BOOK CLUB KIT



DEAR READER,

One of my favorite quotes—and the one that sits proudly enshrined above the whiteboard in my classroom—is Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s famous maxim, “Well-behaved women seldom make history.” Ten years ago, when I began writing my first novel, an early critique partner reminded me that my historical heroine couldn’t be too assertive or too ambitious, that she had to become a powerful woman simply because there was no other option, or else risk alienating modern readers. I disagreed and have since made it my career to seek out the stories of women who did assert themselves and didn’t always behave as society expected. As a result, these incredible women left an indelible mark on history.

I’ve studied many women from ancient history, be they Egyptian pharaohs or Byzantine empresses, but it wasn’t until after my daughter was born that I became fully introduced to the hellion that was Alice Roosevelt. While escorting a group of high school students to Washington DC, I stumbled upon the picture book *Mind Your Manners, Alice Roosevelt*. I was shocked that no one had yet written a novel about her! (Of course, I purchased a copy for my daughter, who is now twelve and has firm plans to become the first female president of the United States.)

Theodore Roosevelt famously said, “I can be president of the United States or I can control Alice. I cannot possibly do both.” He wasn’t kidding—teenaged Alice became an overnight national media sensation for carrying a garter snake in her handbag (which she sometimes released in the State Dining Room during White House events), jumping into a swimming pool fully clothed while on a diplomatic junket to the Far East, and cutting her wedding cake with a sabre borrowed from a military aide. Alice was a woman who, even from a young age, made no apologies for making waves!

Alice Roosevelt refused to follow the rules throughout her astounding ninety-six years, coming of age during her father’s turn-of-the-century presidency and dying only a few months before Ronald Reagan’s 1980 election. Throughout those many decades, she truly did become the *other* Washington Monument, using her acerbic wit to help thwart the League of Nations and later mounting a full-scale political assault against her cousins Franklin and Eleanor. Entrée to her salons and dinner parties was a surefire way to gain access to Washington society, as Richard Nixon and the Kennedys discovered. Daughter to one president and cousin to another, wife of a congressman and mistress to a senator, this story of a woman who was a gatekeeper to Washington’s elite begged to be told.

American Princess is a tale of love and family, political triumphs and personal grief, and the legacy of one firecracker woman and her entire family on the landscape of America. I do hope your book club loves it!

HAPPY READING!

Stephanie Thornton

DELETED SCENE FROM AMERICAN PRINCESS

JUNE 1909

The following summer often found me curled up on a settee in the early morning sunshine, a pile of books at my elbow and at least one open on my lap. I'd made it my goal to match Father's pace of finishing at least one book a day, so aside from my love of poetry, I'd recently devoured Mendel's and Darwin's works, and penned several letters to Father in Africa to ask his opinion on their evolutionary theories. The rest of my time was split between astronomy, botany, and consulting my new copy of the *Oxford Book of English Verse*. Since our European honeymoon I'd found that no matter how deep American patriotism ran in my veins, there was a hidden Anglophile streak in me too, so much so that I'd planted the seed in Mother's mind that perhaps next spring we might meet Father in England after his African safari, for I was already feeling restless for another international trip.

I'd content myself stateside until then, and find new hobbies to occupy my time. After my morning read and habitual six-mile walk, afternoons were dedicated to stretching my wings.

Or so I hoped.

All of Washington was agog with word of the Wright brothers and their new flying machine. Uncle Will—it still seemed wrong to think of him as President Taft—had invited the two brothers to the White House after their first successful flight at Kitty Hawk. Since then, Wilbur and Orville had relocated to nearby Fort Meyer to construct a new winged contraption that could remain airborne for extended periods of time. I hightailed it to Fort Meyer as often as I could and wasn't shy about elbowing my way through the crowds so I could learn from the Wrights firsthand.

My father had been the first president to be photographed in an electric car and the first to ride in a submarine. But I was determined to beat him to flying in an aeroplane.

"This is a biplane, isn't it?" I asked Orville one muggy afternoon. He was fiddling with engine parts that didn't look too different from those of my automobile.

"It is indeed, Mrs. Longworth," Orville answered. "Although some just call it a flying chicken coop." The younger Wright reminded me of my brother Ted with his sprightly step. However, Orville listed a bit when he walked, a lingering injury from a recent crash that had also killed his passenger.

But I wasn't going to ruin such a fine day with macabre thoughts.

"I'm a bit of a car connoisseur," I said to Orville. "What I know about planes could fit on the tip of my pinky finger. How many horsepower does she have?"

"Forty." Orville lifted his hat and wiped his forehead, yet his eyes sparkled like a proud father describing his son's first steps. "And I think she's going to hit forty miles an hour when I take her up next month."

“Really?” That was just a hair faster than my red roadster. “Any chance I could book the passenger seat?”

I knew I’d asked the wrong question even before Orville’s eyes darkened and he returned to tinkering with the engine. I could well imagine the crash from last summer replaying in his mind. “I’m afraid not, Mrs. Longworth. I no longer take passengers.”

“Well, a girl never gained anything from not asking.” I ran an appreciative hand over the fuselage. “She is a beauty. I daresay it won’t be long before the Army gets its hands on her.”

That seemed to steer the conversation back into safer waters and Orville’s mouth quirked up in what might have been a smile. “That’s our most fervent hope, Mrs. Longworth.”

“Call me Alice,” I said. “I’m happy to be on a first-name basis with anyone who flies faster than I drive.”

Quentin tagged along with me on my next trip to Fort Meyer. His eyes lit up at the sight, for my youngest sibling loved anything with an engine. Or, more accurately, he loved to disassemble those same engines. In fact, I’d offered him this excursion as a way to deflect his hopes of picking apart my roadster’s engine. “I’m going to fly one day, Sissy,” he said, his eyes bigger than dinner plates as he ogled the Wrights’ plane. “Soar into the sky and maybe never come down.”

“Silly boy.” I kissed his temple; at twelve years old he was almost as tall as me. “We’d miss you if you never came down. And I’ve seen how much you eat; you wouldn’t last more than an hour without having to come down for a hamburger.”

He only grinned, his eyes still full of blue sky and dreams of flying.

Quentin was at my side along with Uncle Will when the Wrights’ newest machine finally left the ground and circled the field from a hundred feet in the air. I squealed and clutched Uncle Will’s hand, then whooped and hollered louder than any of the men. Only Quentin’s voice bested my own. “Can you believe it?” I yelled to Taft. “Look at them go!”

Uncle Will laughed, his great stomach shaking with the effort. “I’m surprised you didn’t strap yourself to the wings just so you could join them.”

“I would have if I’d thought of it.” I rocked on my heels as if that might help me take flight. “I’ll blame you if Wilbur and Orville discover me clinging to the rudder on their next flight. Just imagine, maybe one day we’ll be able to fly from America to Asia or Europe!”

“Speaking of exotic locales,” Taft said, shielding his eyes as we watched Orville circle around. “I heard from the German ambassador that Emma Kroebel has published a memoir. Do you remember her from the Far East junket?”

Fraulein Kroebel, who flirted mercilessly with my husband and almost succeeded in breaking us apart? As if I could forget the blond German with perfect dimples.

I shook my head, parsing out a couple of nickels for Quentin to get us iced teas from the nearby lunch cart. “I can’t place her.”

“Well, apparently she included reminiscences of your time together in Korea. I missed out on that portion of the trip so I’ll be interested to read what she has to say.”

“As will I,” I mumbled, my mind racing. Surely the fraulein wouldn’t publish anything damning, would she?

RECIPES FROM ALICE'S LIFE

SAGAMORE HILL PECAN SANDIES

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup butter, softened
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup cake flour
- ½ cup finely chopped pecans

DIRECTIONS

In a large mixing bowl, cream butter and sugar; stir in vanilla. Add flour; mix on low until well blended. Stir in pecans; mix well. Chill for 30 minutes.

Roll into 1-in. balls; place on a greased baking sheet. Bake at 350° for 15-18 minutes or until bottom edges are golden brown. Cool on a wire rack and enjoy!

NICK'S CUBAN DAIQUIRIS

INGREDIENTS

- 2 ounces light rum
- 1 ounce, plus one teaspoon freshly squeezed lime juice
- ½ ounce simple syrup

DIRECTIONS

In a cocktail shaker filled with ice, combine rum, lime juice, and simple syrup. Shake vigorously until chilled, then strain into cocktail glass.





THEODORE ROOSEVELT'S FAVORITE FRIED CHICKEN

INGREDIENTS

1 quart water
1/3 cup plus 1 teaspoon kosher salt
1/4 cup packed light brown sugar
4 large garlic cloves, smashed
4 thyme sprigs
1 tablespoon cracked black peppercorns
1 3 1/2-pound chicken, cut into 8 pieces

Vegetable oil, for frying
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1 1/2 teaspoons cornstarch
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper



DIRECTIONS

In a large, deep bowl, combine the water with 1/3 cup of the salt, the brown sugar, garlic, thyme sprigs and black peppercorns and stir to dissolve the salt. Add the chicken pieces, submerging them in the brine. Refrigerate the chicken overnight.

Preheat the oven to 300°. In a large, heavy pot, heat 2 inches of oil to 325°. Drain the chicken and pat dry with paper towels.

In a large bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, cornstarch, black pepper, cayenne and the remaining 1 teaspoon of salt. Set a rack over a large rimmed baking sheet near the stove. Dredge half of the chicken pieces in the spiced flour, then shake off the excess. Fry the chicken pieces for about 10 minutes, or until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of a thigh registers 160°. Reduce the heat if the chicken browns too quickly. Transfer the chicken pieces to the rack and keep them warm in the preheated oven while you coat and fry the remaining chicken pieces. Serve the fried chicken hot.

ALICE ROOSEVELT'S DEBUT BALL COCONUT PIE

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 cups whole milk
1 cup sugar
3/4 cup sweetened shredded coconut
2 large eggs, lightly beaten



3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon butter, melted
1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 unbaked pastry shell
(9 inches)

DIRECTIONS

In a large bowl, combine the milk, sugar, coconut, eggs, flour, butter and vanilla. Pour into pie shell.

Bake at 350° for 50 minutes or until a knife inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool to room temperature. Refrigerate leftovers.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In a country without royalty, the press dubbed Alice Roosevelt with the title *Princess Alice*. In what ways did she use the press to her advantage, and how did this sometimes backfire?
2. As portrayed in the novel, how would you describe Alice's relationship with her father? Was Roosevelt a good father? Did he change as a father over the course of the novel? Was Alice a good daughter?
3. Alice struggles with forming lasting female friendships throughout *American Princess*. Her falling-out with Maggie Cassini happens early, and she is good friends with Cissy Patterson before they fall out with each other later. How do Alice's friendships with these two, along with those of Ruth Hanna McCormick, Mary Borah, and Eleanor Roosevelt, transform over the years?
4. Throughout her early years, and even beyond, Alice craves attention and will go to great lengths to get it, most especially from her father, but also from her friends, Nick Longworth, and even the press. Yet there are some societal rules even she isn't willing to break. How does this juxtaposition affect her relationship with Nick throughout their years together?
5. What did you think of Alice's choice to marry Nick? Why did she make that decision? What viable alternatives did she have?
6. Cissy's marriage to Count Gizycki serves as a warning to Alice throughout the story, and both women engage in affairs after their own marriages fall apart. How was divorce looked upon in those days, and how did Alice's views differ from Cissy's?
7. Alice is constantly at odds with her parents during her teenaged years, yet she also struggles as a parent herself after Paulina is born. What lessons did she learn from her parents, and what mistakes did she make? How did she learn from those mistakes after she takes custody of Joanna?
8. "*Blackbirds rarely sit behind the shoulder of one whose pace is fast enough.*" Over the course of her long life, Alice experiences many terrible losses. How did her father's attitude toward the loss of her mother—Alice Lee—affect her own ability to grieve? In your opinion, is this a good way to deal with loss?
9. Alice was famous for her caustic wit, and her embroidered couch pillow—*If you can't say something good about someone sit right here by me*—is well-known. When was that wit put to good use? Are there times when Alice should have curbed her tongue?
10. Alice Roosevelt Longworth lived a very full ninety-six years, from 1884 to 1980, to become the *other* Washington Monument. What most surprised you about her very long life? What did you learn about her that you didn't know before?

MORE ABOUT STEPHANIE MARIE THORNTON



STEPHANIE MARIE THORNTON has been obsessed with the stories of history's women since she was twelve. She is the critically acclaimed author of four novels set in the ancient world: *The Secret History*, *Daughter of the Gods*, *The Tiger Queens*, and *The Conqueror's Wife*. Her latest novel, *American Princess*, reimagines the life of Theodore Roosevelt's wild child daughter Alice, and she is currently at work on her next book, which reimagines the story of another famous American: iconic First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy.

In addition to being a writer, Stephanie is a high school history teacher by day and lives in Alaska with her husband, daughter, and three-legged rescue cat, where she spends her free time running, traveling, and baking. You can read more about Stephanie at stephaniethorntonauthor.com.

Author photograph by Katherine Schmeling Photography



As a young debutante



With Nick Longworth



With the infamous pillow

**PHOTOS OF
ALICE
ROOSEVELT**