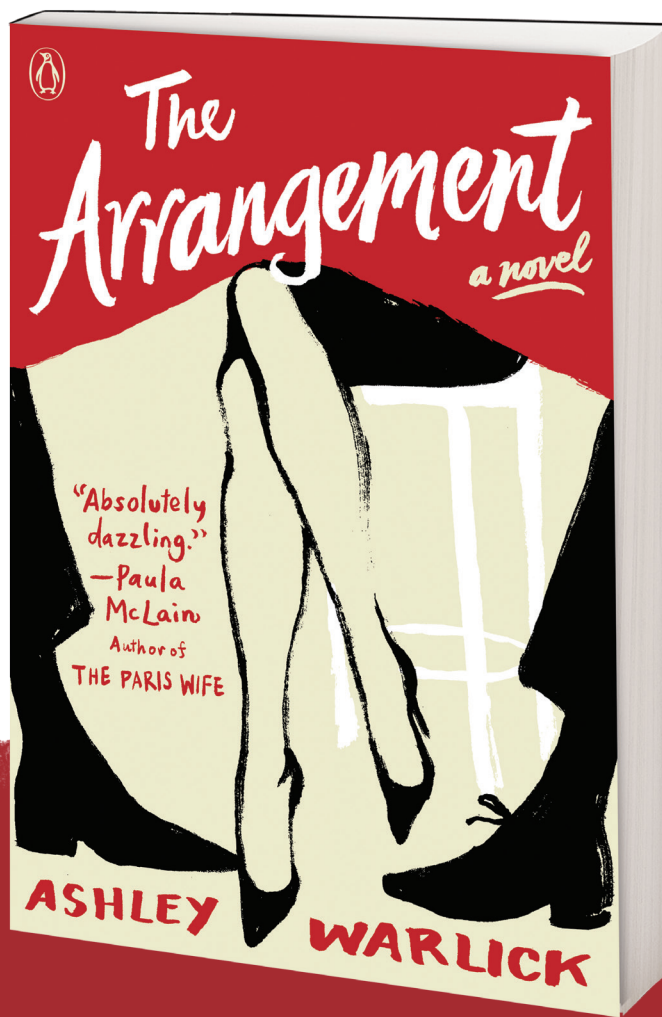


An irresistible novel of food and desire,

based on a real-life love triangle between
a young woman, her husband, and his best friend.



Los Angeles, 1934. Mary Frances is young, restlessly married, and returning from her first sojourn in France. She is hungry, and not just for food: she wants Tim, her husband Al's charming friend, who encourages her writing and seems to understand her better than anyone. After a night's transgression, it's only a matter of time before Mary Frances claims what she truly desires, plunging all three of them into a tangled triangle of affection that will have far-reaching effects on their families, their careers, and their lives.

Set in California, France, and the Swiss Alps, *The Arrangement* is a sparkling, sensual novel that explores the complexities of a marriage and the many different ways in which we love. Writing at the top of her game, Ashley Warlick gives us a completely mesmerizing story about a woman well ahead of her time, who would go on to become the legendary food writer M. F. K. Fisher.

**“Filled with food and passion . . . If you love historical fiction,
you’ll fall hard for this one.” —*Bustle***

Praise for *The Arrangement*

"If you love historical fiction, you'll fall hard for this one. . . . Filled with food and passion, this is the perfect book to accompany a candlelit dinner." —*Bustle*

"The sensual adventures of food writer M.F. K. Fisher will keep the pages turning."
—*Parade.com*, "10 Romantic Reads for Valentine's Day"

"If you occasionally partake in culinary pleasures, you'll probably enjoy digging into Ashley Warlick's novelization of beloved food writer M. F. K. Fisher's life." —*InStyle*

"A delight. . . . Though *The Arrangement* is about marriage and friendship in the 1930 and 1940s, the novel's story of a woman and her work is timeless." —*Charleston Post & Courier*

"[*The Arrangement*] offers a lovely, affectionate portrait of the complicated woman who would become M.F.K. Fisher." —*Bookpage*

"[Warlick's] writing is smooth and elegant. The love and anguish experienced as marriages unravel is palpable and painful to the reader." —*Historical Novel Society*

"Stellar . . . A beautifully written treatment of love in its different forms." —*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"Food writing fans may want to check out a novelization of the life of M.F.K. Fisher, focusing on . . . the more salacious personal details of the beloved food writer's life." —*The Millions*, "Most Anticipated Books of 2016"

"A ravishing depiction of the time when M.F.K. Fisher was giving herself over to her essential appetites—for language, food and consuming passion. Ashley Warlick's prose, sharp and true as the edge of a honed blade, is a revelation. Absolutely dazzling." —*Paula McLain*, author of *The Paris Wife*

"Written in language both sensuous and evocative, *The Arrangement* is the story of a woman who hungers to experience everything in life. A compelling story about the costs—and risks—of being true to one's self, and the courage it takes to live against convention." —*Kim Edwards*, author of *The Memory Keeper's Daughter*

"I devoured and loved every word of Ashley Warlick's audacious imagining of M.F.K. Fisher's great love affair. *The Arrangement* is a powerful, enthralling, delectable thrill." —*Kate Christensen*, author of *The Great Man*

"A sophisticated and unapologetic tale of wayward desire that I read far too long into the night, worrying about how M.F.K. Fisher could possibly solve her excruciating dilemma—a dilemma that is at once impossible, seductive, and heartbreaking." —*Robin Oliveira*, author of *My Name is Mary Sutter*

"Ashley Warlick spins a beguiling tale of a complicated woman, sensuous and multi-layered as the food she chronicles. A scrumptious treat." —*Janice Y. K. Lee*, author of *The Expatriates*

Recipes

M.F.K. Fisher's Gingersnaps

This recipe comes from a letter Fisher wrote to her biographer, Joan Reardon, that's basically a run of apologies—for not getting back to her more quickly, for not being in touch before the holidays, and for not sending the gingersnap recipe, which is the recipe from Irma Rombauer's *The Joy of Cooking*, but with triple the ginger. "They are wonderful for parties at the end of any long meal or drinking bout...better than anything else for traveling whether one is queasy or not." She also specifies that these should be made very small.

INGREDIENTS

- 3/4 cup butter, softened
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 2 eggs, well beaten
- 1/2 cup molasses
- 2 teaspoons vinegar (We used Champagne vinegar, but apple cider would work well, too.)
- 3 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
- 6 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 325°.

In a large bowl, cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Add eggs, molasses and vinegar; beat well.

In a separate bowl, whisk together flour, soda and spices. Gradually stir into wet ingredients, mixing to blend.

With floured hands, roll into inch balls and place on ungreased cookie sheets. Bake 10-12 minutes, longer for crisp cookies, less for chewy.

Makes about 15 dozen tiny cookies.

Shrimp Pâté

This recipe appears in *How To Cook A Wolf*, Fisher's book on surviving wartime rationing, urging Americans to shift their expectations at the table. "Balance the day," she says, "not each meal in the day." More than just make-do attitude, she underscores how the scarcity of something can make us truly appreciate it when we taste it, and with that appreciation, make us better people.

This recipe comes from the final chapter "How To Practice True Economy," wherein she recognizes enough will be enough at some point and we will have to "throw discretion into the laundry bag," and make one of these indulgent recipes. Or until that day comes, and things like shrimp and butter are readily available again, maybe just remember.

INGREDIENTS

- 4 pounds fresh shrimp, cooked and shelled
- 1 medium onion, minced
- 1 cup melted butter
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 2 teaspoons dry mustard
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Whatever other spice you want (I used 1/4 cup fresh minced parsley and 2 tablespoons minced chives, but if you're keeping for longer than a few days, consider dried spices. I bet a good curry powder would be great.)

DIRECTIONS

Working in batches, grind shrimp and onion in a food processor until a fine, pebbly mix. (No, Fisher didn't use a food processor. She calls for mashing shrimp and onion together with a potato masher. If you have that patience and upper body strength, we're sure sure it will result in a slightly different texture. We could not seem to gather enough of either after the first potato masher bit the dust.)

In a large bowl, mix ground shrimp mixture and melted butter with a wooden spoon until thoroughly incorporated. Beat in lemon juice and mayonnaise; it will become a stiff paste. Add herbs and spices and season to taste. (Fisher says to season highly, as it will be served cold.)

If you're lucky enough to have a pâté mold, pack it into that. If not, we used half pint mason jars, packing tightly by spoonfuls and pressing out air bubbles. Refrigerate at least 24 hours, and up to one week. Serve with crackers, crostini, or thinly sliced brown bread.

Makes 6-8 half pints.

An Inanimate Martini

Fisher was a good drinker, and her work is full of references to beautiful wine and classic, elegant cocktails, none so lovely as her classifications for Martinis: “the safe, the perfect, and the intimate (and therefore pluperfect).” The first, you drink with strangers. The second, you order out at a restaurant from a barman you trust. The third kind, she says, “should never be served in public, nor to any but the one or two people you know in the world. It should never be drunk when weariness or the moon’s tides or the press of worldly business is too evident, nor when red wine is to follow. But given an easy, airy evening, a pleasurable quitting of the day’s chores, and the prospect of uninterrupted and peaceful communion with the One, it can be a fine thing indeed.”

INGREDIENTS

- 4 parts London-dry gin
- 1 eyedropper of vermouth (An eyedropper is a little less than half a teaspoon)

DIRECTIONS

Add gin and vermouth to a shaker or pitcher full of ice. Stir until very cold, and strain into a generous wine goblet.

Makes one.

Music

I do listen to music while I write, often the same album over and over, until it becomes texture rather than sound, a thing to focus me. I don't think I'm very unique in that, amongst writers or inmates or penitents either. Previous books have all had their unlikely soundtracks: Mary Chapin Carpenter, Tom Waits' *Small Change*, Palace Music. In general, single albums played again and again and again.

What happens when you write something for the better part of a decade is that the trick wears thin. You get really really sick of the draft, the desk, and most of all, whatever damn song is playing. So I skipped around more than ever before. *The Arrangement* was different, too, in that it's set in the 1930s, in Los Angeles and Europe, a landscape as lost to us as the Jurassic. Music was something of a moody tool to make scenes with.

Here's a selection of the decade's greatest hits:

THE THINGS WE DID AND DIDN'T DO, The Magnetic Fields: Basically the whole book could be scored by Stephen Merritt and I would happily just stretch out on the rug and listen for three days straight. This song, "Busby Berkley's Dreams", "The Book Of Love"— all so off-center romantic, so lovely and lush in their own weird and rather timeless ways.

A RECORD YEAR FOR RAINFALL, The Decemberists: This is one of those songs that I can catch in my phrasing, certain lines that made it all the way to the book, or knocked around in scenes for four or five drafts to be cut away in the end, even though I can still hear them in the space that's left behind. In particular: "temper set for tender," and "to remember you in the entire." There's something so old-school, loosened-tie-and-dinner-jacket suggestive about remembering someone in the entire. The entire what, darling?

A LITTLE SUGAR IN MY BOWL, Nina Simone: This is song is sexy like a woman on her third martini. There's not much guessing to be done here. It's a song with some layers to it for me though, as I came to Nina Simone late in life, after college, when my best friend began dating a woman who liked to have Nina Simone playing in the bedroom. She was the sort of woman who called him "Captain" in private, and that's about the only thing I know about what all they did in private, which would have been the first time he kept anything private. Which some twenty-five years later, still makes me blush a little bit. Or something like that.

LET'S DANCE, M. Ward: This version is the kind of reimagining I love, in that it takes something that was once dialed up high with teenage angst and middle school electricity, and makes it soft and romantic and sad and even a little eerie. The way the chorus resolves sweetly, instead of racing towards hysterical the way it does in Bowie's hands. Plus, dancing. My mom always said she that's what she thought you did on dates from a childhood of growing up with Hollywood musicals, you danced and you sang to each other.

CALGARY, Bon Iver: The summer this album was released, it stayed in my headphones constantly. The line here is "one piece swimmer stuck to you." It's just so tactile. There's a moment in *The Arrangement* when Mary Frances offers her husband an afternoon swim, and it's kind of an olive branch, a possible distraction from the blackness that's swamping him, the best she can offer at the time. That swimmer, that suit sticking, that physical reveal became part of how I saw it.

ROMANCE IN THE DARK, Dinah Washington: The sway of this song is just bone-deep powerful. But too, I think Dinah does a perfect job of getting at the isolation, the privacy that makes for a really passionate love affair. The darkness encapsulates. “It’s just you and I. There’s not a sound, and there’s not one sigh. There’s just the beat of my poor heart...”

LATE NIGHT GRADE HOTEL, Nancy Griffith: When I was a kid, and we’d get dressed up, my dad used to tell us we looked like Greta Garbo. Which was just a thing to say, of course— no real live girl ever looked like Greta Garbo, but there’s this tender overlay of an extended compliment when I hear this song. And late night, lonesome hotels go with love triangles like peanut butter and jelly.

OLD PERFUME, Weeping Tile: One of the things I became fascinated with while writing *The Arrangement* was the perfume reviews of Chandler Burr in *T* magazine. It’s so hard to describe sensory experiences. It was something Fisher was gifted at, and Burr in another, more fabulous, florid way. The description that sticks with me was a gentlemen’s scent where “the tar and smoke were transformed into a fascinating manliness with a touch of engine oil, like the cold air clinging to a leather-clad guy who’s just dismounted his Moto Guzzi in December.” Do I know what a Moto Guzzi is? Do I wear perfume myself? I don’t have to.

ANOTHER ONE GOES BY, The Walkmen: Again, this is a song that just physically sways you. And that drive of piano keys pushing forward... This is less like the private world Dinah Washington makes and more about taking up your own space, spreading out, that last summer of freedom for Tim and Mary Frances before the war, before the leg, before it all began to come apart.

LIVED IN BARS, Cat Power: I listened to this album a lot at the beginning of writing *The Arrangement*. This song sticks for the throaty bedroom quality of her voice, and the table dancing. I always knew there’d be a table-dancing scene in this book.

WORK HARD, PLAY HARD, Palace Music: And this is the song that makes me want to make something. Every time I hear it, and for the past 20 years, it just makes me want to write. I hope that feeling never wears thin.

A conversation with Ashley Warlick, Author of *The Arrangement*

Q: What inspired you to make M.F.K. Fisher the subject of your novel?

I'm a passionate, obstinate home cook, as happy to read a cookbook as a novel. They strike me as fairly equal acts of imagination, and escape. I had always known M.F.K. Fisher's writing in that light, but quickly came to admire her as a line-by-line stylist. When her first big biography came out (Joan Reardon's *Poet of the Appetites*, 2004) I had just finished working on my third novel, and I was grateful to fall into the life of someone else.

Fisher is fascinating and enigmatic, in the way of many who seem to choose themselves as their principal subject. And she was arguably the first woman to write about her own life through the lens of food, at a time when the only outlets women considered in this arena were cookbooks and housekeeping manuals. Even by today's standards, Fisher's essays are intimate and sexy, flirtatious, lush. Her path to finding her own voice was instantly compelling. I finished the biography and ordered all her books in print.

Q: Other than reading Fisher's own writing, how did you research for the book? How much of her story is based on biographical information, and how much is fictional elaboration?

Research can be a slow process of filling a novel's pockets with stones. Even as I'd never written historically-based fiction before, I knew there's certain safety in history, and as the idea to use real life as material began to take shape, I knew that I had to be careful.

I was also stalled by Fisher's gatekeepers. Her papers are only available with permission, and when I began the project that would become *The Arrangement*, they were not available to me. Exclusive rights had already been promised to an author at work on another biography.

Initially, this was crushing. There's an incredible drive to get the details right, and I felt hamstrung by not having everything at my fingertips. The internet will do that to you, I think. But slowly, as I began to focus more carefully, I understood how this divide was vital. Much of my book is concerned about the boundaries between private and public, truth and invention. It was a line that Fisher skated. Rather than report what I found, I wanted to wring the truth from what she crafted of it.

One of the things that made this period of her life so compelling was the lack of primary sources. This decade comprises about 40 pages of Reardon's biography, and it's not for lack of event or significance. Fisher was a religious keeper of journals, and a beautiful correspondent, but after Tim's death, a lot of paper went up in flame.

Q: The love triangle between Mary Frances, Al, and Tim is very complex. Did you always plan on making these tangled relationships central to the book, or did it grow out of your research?

The relationships were what drew me to the story. There's a famous essay in *Serve It Forth* called "The Standing and the Waiting" about a meal M.F.K. shared with Chexbres, the name she gave Tim in her writing. After reading her biography, I had a timeline that made for surprising context. This dinner happened on the tail end of Tim and M.F.K.'s interlude in France, and I now understood she would return to Al and her marriage after sharing this moment with her lover, in a Dijon restaurant that was sentimental to her and Al, where they'd celebrated anniversaries, where she had learned about the cuisine that was the basis of her gastronomic education. The understory of that essay is how she's showing Tim her truest self, but in many ways, it's also the truest betrayal of her marriage to Al.

And to further devolve the moment, Tim was instrumental in helping her shape her book. He would have read and commented on this essay while the three of them were living together at Le Paquis...

And there's moment after moment like that. I began to see the ways the elasticity of marriage was perhaps for M.F.K. something similar to the elasticity of storytelling. The truth is what you make of it.

Q: You describe many mouthwatering meals in the book. Are you a good cook? Have you made any of the dishes you write about?

I am a dedicated cook. I don't come from cooks. I come from eaters, and I taught myself to cook at a young age, and I taught myself in part through travel. I recognized this same trajectory in Fisher's education— her mother, as a late Victorian, hired cooks and Fisher understood the importance of the table as a child, but it was her stretch in Dijon with Al that shaped her life in the kitchen.

It was my stretch in central Pennsylvania that shaped me. I was newly married, then newly pregnant, and if I wanted Mexican food like the Mexican food I'd had in Mexico, I was on my own. We lived through one winter where it snowed every Wednesday from October through May. I learned how to make tamales, crepes, rillettes, jam, salsa, pastry. And I learned how to immerse myself in cooking. In almost all ways, making a meal is more satisfying than making a book, but it uses the same energy. It's a wonderfully immediate outlet.

I've made many of Fisher's recipes over the last ten years. Her shrimp paste is exceptional. Her description of what she would serve to seduce a lover wonderfully instructive. Her gingersnaps come straight from *The Joy of Cooking*, but she triples the ginger. I learned that in one of her letters.

Q: Was it unusual in Fisher's time to be a woman writing and publishing her own work, particularly about something that would be seen to reside in the "women's sphere?"

There were certainly women writing and publishing in the 1930s, when Fisher came of age. However, most women writing about food were writing cookbooks. Fisher was always after something more universal, which I think was unusual.

Gender is an interesting question when it comes to Fisher. She told the story several different ways of how her first editors thought her initials represented a man's name, and how surprised they were to find a woman at the helm of these essays. And yet she would go on later in life to live very independently, to

make radically independent decisions when it came to her children, to live with another woman, to go and do and be exactly who she wanted to be at the time. It's easy for me to imagine she didn't think about her place as a woman overmuch. She just was.

Q: The novel's setting includes Los Angeles, France, and the Swiss Alps. Did you do any traveling to these locations before or while writing the book?

I've been to all the regions mentioned in the book, but probably sometime in the 1980s. I love to travel, and planned several times to go to Switzerland, to get a clear, first-hand picture of what would have been Le Paquis. But really what I wanted was a picture of a countryside long gone. Old Hollywood, Laguna, even Dijon— none of these places exist as they did for her. I think that lent an inherent sense of longing to the settings of *The Arrangement* I was lucky to be able to draw upon.

Q: This novel has some steamy romantic scenes. How did you approach writing love scenes for such a well-known writer?

This book was always going to be about sex and food. And that comes straight from Fisher's writing— her persona on the page is earthy and flirtatious and sensual, and I think that's born of the way she sort of sprang into independence with her first book, from her well-heeled, tight knit family, from her marriage to Al. So the approach began, as with all things, with her work itself.

But too, I understood her relationship with Tim had been a sexual awakening, and that sex was a vital part of their connection, their physical conversation. The scenes between them were effortless to write, and changed little in the process of editing this much-edited manuscript. You know what's hard? Figuring out what happens before and after. Just what makes a smart woman circle back on an evening and invite herself into the bedroom of a man who's not her husband? Once she gets there, there's only one thing left to do.

Q: You recently opened a bookstore in Greenville, SC. How has this adventure changed your perspective on books and writing?

I am terribly proud to be a bookseller. It makes me more sympathetic to everyone involved across the spectrum of publishing. Readers want to be compelled to discover, writers want to be loved, publishers want both these things to happen. It's the bookseller who's at the juncture.

I'm the buyer for M. Judson. We're a focused bookstore, and we carry cookbooks and food books, children's books, and books about the South or written by authors from here, along with a very tight selection of new releases of all kinds. My job is to fill a dream bookshelf.

At the same time, I now know there's something on order of 150,000 adult titles published through the usual channels every year. There was a Tuesday last October that saw the release of 2,000 books. One day! What I choose to represent in my store is vitally important.

Q: The book, with its lush settings in Europe and old Hollywood, has a cinematic feel. Can you imagine a movie based on your novel? Who would play Fisher?

I think every writer alive has imagined how their book might translate to the movies. And too, I became very interested in the atmosphere in Hollywood at the time, the changes that were shaping that industry, and the ways in which Fisher was living against them.

She was such a distinctively beautiful woman. The May Ray photographs of her are just stunning— you can see all that cleverness and tease in her face, her magnificent eyebrows!

I think Carrie Mulligan would be a great Fisher, or perhaps Rachel Weisz. Benedict Cumberbatch could be Tim, but I might just be fantasizing now. He has that intensity, and that same off-center attractiveness. Al was handsome and tousled and soft, until he wasn't. Poor Al. Joseph Gordon-Levitt.

Q: What do you hope readers will take away from *The Arrangement*?

I hope everyone will read *The Gastronomical Me*. It is a flat masterpiece of autobiographical storytelling.