Discussion Questions: The Personal Librarian
Folger Book Club—September 2023

1. What are your first impressions of the novel? If asked, what would you say this novel is about?

2. In the author’s note they acknowledge that Belle and Bernard’s “connection lasted for decades, but we perhaps chose to end the relationship as we wished Belle had” (327). What do you make of this kind of author intervention/projection? What do you think Belle would make of it?

3. There is an extraordinary amount of Belle’s papers and correspondence pertaining to her work at the Morgan and little pertaining to her personal life, yet that is what the authors chose to focus on in their treatment of her story. What do you think a book more focused on her time as a librarian would be like? Would you be more or less interested in such an approach?

4. Did you wonder about any of the veracity events that you were reading? When approaching a work of historical fiction, do you assume most things are true or most things are fabricated?

5. What did you make of the relationship between Belle and Anne? Were you ever concerned Belle’s secret would be revealed? Do you think J.P. Morgan ever suspected her true identity?

6. What did you think of Belle’s relationship with her family? Do you think her mother or her father had a more formative impact on her and her choices, and why?

7. There are so many fascinating aspects of Belle’s story. Which were you most drawn to? Are there elements you wish had been expanded on? What did you learn that surprised you?

8. By taking a first-person perspective as Belle da Costa Greene, the authors put a lot of the exposition/context in her words. How did this work for you? Does this make the exposition more real or less?

9. The collections Belle worked with at Princeton and the Morgan, and the Folger’s collection, were very Euro-centric. What does this say about cultural views at the time? How have these views changed or remained consistent with time?

10. What should a person do to protect and advance themselves in an unjust world?