FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
On sale January 30, 2024

Advanced Praise for The Mayor of Maxwell Street:
“A debut novel everyone will be talking about, The Mayor of Maxwell Street is outstanding. Filled with intrigue, suspense, and a cast of characters I both adored and wanted to strangle, this novel kept me flipping the pages and holding my breath!”
—Victoria Christopher Murray, New York Times bestselling author of The Personal Librarian

“I was transfixed from the first page. Readers will feel transported to another time and confront issues and characters that feel eminently prescient. This is not one to miss.”
—Nathan Harris, New York Times bestselling author of The Sweetness of Water

“A riveting, dynamic page-turner that transported me through time. At a moment when so much of our history is being willfully obscured yet again, this impeccably researched, sweeping novel is an absolute gift.”
—Brittany K. Barnett, author of A Knock at Midnight

Debut author and Memphian, Avery Cunningham to launch ‘The Mayor of Maxwell Street’ at Novel Bookstore

Novel Bookstore (387 Perkins Extd) is proud to host the official publication party for the highly-anticipated debut novel THE MAYOR OF MAXWELL STREET by Avery Cunningham – a native and resident of Memphis, TN – on Tuesday, January 30. Doors open at 5:00PM, and the official launch will start at 6:00PM.

“A debut novel everyone will be talking about,” THE MAYOR OF MAXWELL STREET (on sale January 30, 2024; Hardcover), is “a triumph,” an epic love story, and “a tale of intrigue, racial tension, and class warfare, set against the glamorous and gritty backdrop of early 20th century Chicago.”

The launch will feature a reading, book signing, and a conversation with Tara M. Stringfellow, author of the national-bestseller, Memphis: A Novel. All are welcome to join.

ABOUT THE MAYOR OF MAXWELL STREET:
When a rich Black debutante enlists the help of a low-level speakeasy manager to identify the head of an underground crime syndicate, the two are thrust into the dangerous world of Prohibition-era Chicago.

The year is 1921, and America is burning. A fire of vice and virtue rages on every shore, and Chicago is its beating heart.

Nelly Sawyer is the daughter of the “wealthiest Negro in America,” whose affluence catapulted his family to the heights of Black society. After the unexpected death of her only brother, Nelly becomes the premier debutante overnight. But Nelly has aspirations beyond society influence and marriage. For the past year, she has worked undercover as an investigative journalist, sharing the achievements and tribulations of everyday
Black people living in the shadow of Jim Crow. Her latest assignment thrusts her into the den of a dangerous vice lord: the so-called Mayor of Maxwell Street.

Born in rural Alabama to a murdered biracial couple, Jay Shorey knows firsthand what it means to be denied a chance at the American dream. When a tragic turn of fate gave Jay a rare path out, he took it without question. He washed up on Chicago’s storied shores and forged his own way to the top of the city’s underworld, running Chicago’s swankiest speakeasy, where the rich and famous rub elbows with gangsters and politicians alike.

When Nelly’s and Jay’s paths cross, she recruits him to help expose the Mayor and bring about lasting change in a corrupt city. But Jay also introduces a whole new world to Nelly, one where her horizons can extend beyond the confines of her ivory tower.

Trapped between the monolith of Jim Crow, the inflexible world of the Black upper class, and the violence of Prohibition-era Chicago, Jay and Nelly work together and stoke the flames of a love worth fighting for.

Debut novelist Avery Cunningham’s stunning novel is at once an unforgettable love story for the ages, a riveting historical drama, and a brilliant exploration of Black society and perseverance when the ‘20s first began to roar.

AVERY CUNNINGHAM is a resident of Memphis, TN, and a 2016 graduate of DePaul University’s Master of Arts Writing & Publishing program. She has over a decade of editorial experience with various literary magazines, small presses, and best-selling authors. Avery grew up surrounded by exceptional African Americans who strived to uplift their communities while also maintaining a tenuous hold on prosperity in a starkly segregated environment. The sensation of being at once within and without is something she has grappled with since childhood and explores thoroughly in her work of historical fiction. When not writing, Avery is adventuring with her Bernese Mountain Dog, Grizzly, and wading waist-deep in research for her next novel. She aspires to tell the stories of complex characters fighting for their right to exist at the fringes of history. THE MAYOR OF MAXWELL STREET is her debut novel.

TARA M. STRINGFELLOW is a former attorney, Northwestern University MFA graduate, and two-time Pushcart Prize nominee whose debut novel and national bestseller MEMPHIS was a Read with Jenna pick and longlisted for the Women’s Prize in Fiction. A cross-genre artist, the author was Northwestern University’s first MFA graduate in both poetry and prose and her work has appeared in Collective Unrest, Jet Fuel Review, Minerva Rising, Women’s Arts Quarterly and Apogee Journal, among others. After having lived in Okinawa, Ghana, Chicago, Cuba, Spain, Italy, and Washington, D.C., she moved back home to Memphis, where she sits on her porch swing every evening with her hound, Huckleberry, listening to records and chatting with neighbors.