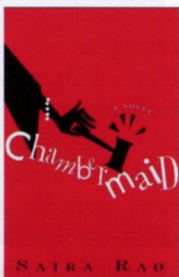


## Chambermaid

Saira Rao

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**A**s a former clerk for the federal judiciary (with Philadelphia's Judge Dolores Sloviter of the Court of Appeals), Saira Rao knows of what she speaks when she says that there is a "bizarre—and enormously powerful—



world" that most members of our democracy know relatively little about. In her comic debut novel, *Chambermaid*, Columbia Law graduate Sheila Raj comes up against the cold reality of this world when she leaves her rent-controlled apartment in the West Village for Philadelphia to clerk for the demented Federal Judge Helga Friedman. Aimed squarely at fans of *The Devil Wears Prada* (those who take an interest in the law, anyway), *Chambermaid* follows Sheila as she makes her way through a year's worth of adventures under the crazed despot, while also trying to negotiate a new city, the eccentricities of her fellow employees and, oh yes, understand the details of a very public death-penalty case. "As a law clerk, I found the culture of secrecy to be totally antithetical to everything I'd learned in life up until that point, namely the importance of the free flow of information," says Rao. "Obviously, it was important to remain mum as to case deliberations. But why did everything in chambers have to stay in chambers? What did these people have to hide? It turns out, quite a bit. And so *Chambermaid* was born." Though she quit her law-firm job to write full time, Rao sees overlap with her former life. "As an associate there would be many days when the only person with whom I'd converse was the coffee lady across the street," she says. "At least now I can talk to myself all day—openly, loudly, and nobody has to know!"