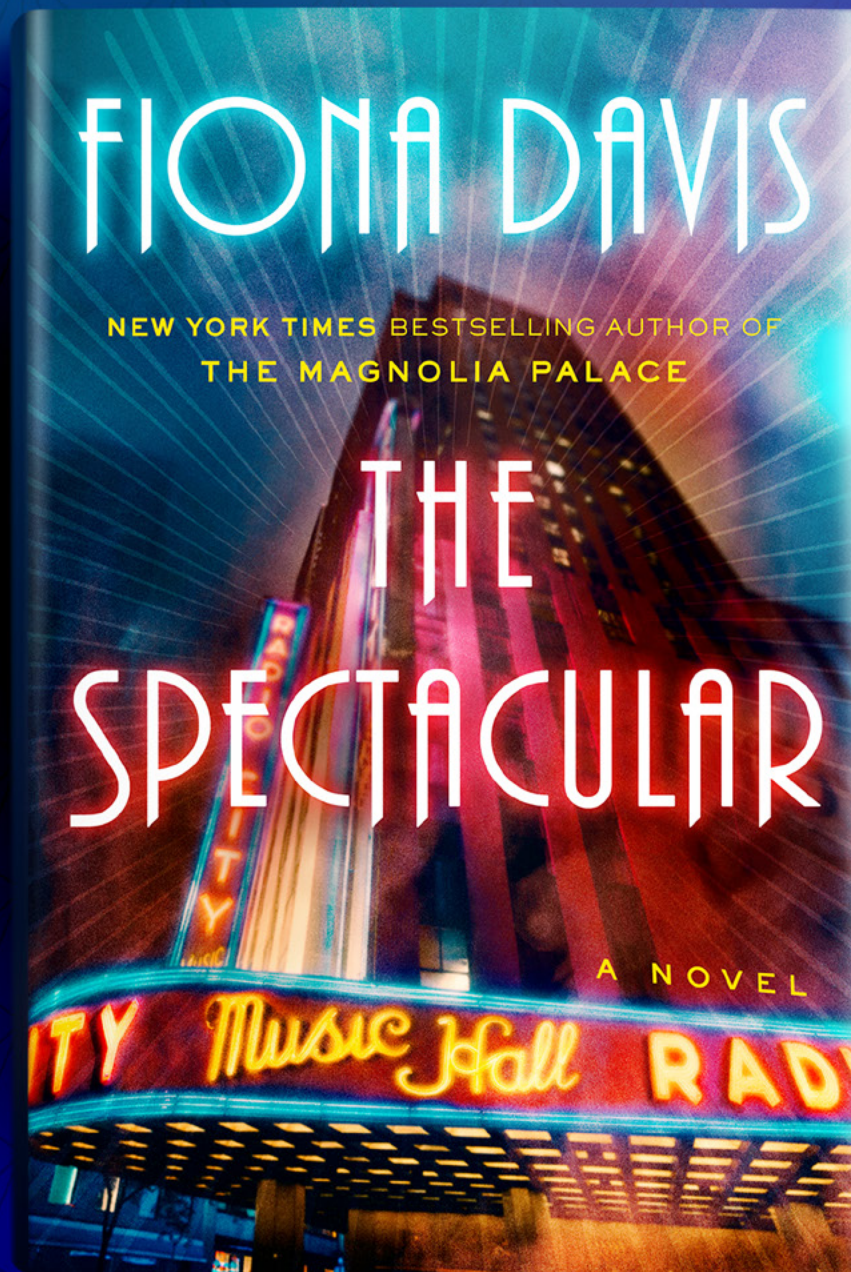


BOOK CLUB KIT



DUTTON

As *New York Times* bestselling author Fiona Davis was contemplating her next book, she received an intriguing letter from one of her readers.

The below note sparked the creation of *The Spectacular*, a new novel that transports us back to 1950s Manhattan and the glamorous Radio City Music Hall....

Dear Fiona,

I have read every one of your books and loved them all. Writing historical fiction stories about all the great places in NYC is a special gift that not all authors have.

I was gifted also with the art form of dance. I was a Rockette at the spectacular Radio City Music Hall in the late '50s and early '60s. I even met my future husband there. He ran the theater's stage lighting for the stage shows. We were both nineteen and are now in our eighties. We have many wonderful memories there.

Anyway, I would just love for you to write one of your wonderful historical fiction stories about this fabulous show place that we almost lost in the 80s. I know there are many floors, rooms, and hidden secret places in that magnificent, Deco-styled place that the public does not know about. Even Russell Markert, who was the originator and dance master of the Rockettes, is almost forgotten by people of today. Very sad. I give talks about the RCMH down here in Hilton Head, S.C. And people who have never been able to travel there love it. So I know they would love the subject and I would personally promote the book!

Thank you for reading my story and I can't wait for your new book.

—Sandy

A NOTE FROM
FIONA DAVIS
ON THE HISTORY BEHIND
THE SPECTACULAR

As I was researching New York City during the 1950s—specifically 1956, when *The Spectacular* takes place—I learned that, as the year drew to a close, there was a huge push by the police to track down a man known as the “Mad Bomber,” and that he was finally arrested in January 1957. I had never heard of the Mad Bomber, even though I’ve written books set in New York for many years now and lived in the city for more than thirty. It turns out a man had been setting pipe bombs all over the city for sixteen years, at iconic locations like Grand Central Terminal, the New York Public Library, and 30 Rockefeller Plaza. He hit Radio City Music Hall twice, which was what made me consider merging the story of an up-and-coming Rockette with that of a hunt for a bomber.

Even more interesting, I learned that the case was cracked using criminal profiling for the very first time, led by a psychiatrist and criminologist named James A. Brussel. He studied the letters the Mad Bomber had mailed over the years and determined that the man would be in his midforties or fifties, of medium-to-tall height and well-proportioned, very neat, clean, shaven, methodical, and prompt. The psychiatrist decreed that he was from Eastern Europe and Roman Catholic, unmarried, and probably lived with an older female relative. When caught, said Brussel, the Mad Bomber would be wearing a double-breasted suit and it would be buttoned.

When a man named George Metesky was eventually arrested on charges of being the Mad Bomber, all of the above were found to be true, and the science of criminal profiling was born. I hope you enjoyed reading this story—a mix of romance, thriller, and mystery—as much as I enjoyed writing it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1.

Discuss Marion's path to Radio City Music Hall. What direction do you think Marion's life would have taken if she hadn't show up to the Rockettes' audition?

2.

What does Marion's pearl necklace symbolize? When Simon confiscates the pearls, what does his actions reveal about him and the relationship he has with his daughters?

3.

In the 1950s, it was unheard of for psychiatrists to be involved in a police case. If you were in the position of the police officers, what would you make of Peter's character analysis of the suspect?

4.

The novel raises questions about the cost of suppressing one's own creativity and individuality for the good of the greater whole, whether as a dancer in a kick line or as an employee of a large corporation. What are the consequences of doing so for Marion and for her father? How do they differ in their responses to the pressure to conform?

5.

How did the novel's two timelines impact your reading experience? How do the past and future inform each other?

6.

"It was as if she'd internalized the idea that people would find her disappointing and abandon her and then made it happen in real life." (page 184). Do you agree that the events up until this point were a consequence of Marion's decisions? Why or why not?

7.

Later in the novel, Marion learns a disturbing truth about Lucille's life and choices. Do you believe that Marion should have been told earlier? How could it have affected her relationship with her father?

8.

Did your opinion of the bomber shift after his history was revealed? Why or why not?

9.

How did your understanding of Simon change throughout the novel? Were there moments when you sympathized with his choices?

10.

What did you make of Marion and Peter's relationship as the novel progressed, and what did you think of Peter's confession at the end?