

# The Magnolia Palace

by Fiona Davis

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## About the Book

**Fiona Davis, the *New York Times* bestselling author of *THE LIONS OF FIFTH AVENUE*, returns with a tantalizing novel about the secrets, betrayal and murder within one of New York City's most impressive Gilded Age mansions.**

Eight months since losing her mother in the Spanish flu outbreak of 1919, 21-year-old Lillian Carter's life has completely fallen apart. For the past six years, under the moniker Angelica, Lillian was one of the most sought-after artists' models in New York City, with statues based on her figure gracing landmarks from the Plaza Hotel to the Brooklyn Bridge. But with her mother gone, a grieving Lillian is rudderless and desperate --- the work has dried up and a looming scandal has left her entirely without a safe haven.

So when she stumbles upon an employment opportunity at the Frick mansion --- a building that, ironically, bears her own visage --- Lillian jumps at the chance. But the longer she works as a private secretary to the imperious and demanding Helen Frick, the daughter and heiress of industrialist and art patron Henry Clay Frick, the more deeply her life gets intertwined with that of the family --- pulling her into a tangled web of romantic trysts, stolen jewels and family drama that runs so deep, the stakes just may be life or death.

Nearly 50 years later, mod English model Veronica Weber has her own chance to make her career --- and with it, earn the money she needs to support her family back home --- within the walls of the former Frick residence, now converted into one of New York City's most impressive museums. But when she --- along with a charming intern/budding art curator named Joshua --- is dismissed from the *Vogue* shoot taking place at the Frick Collection, she chances upon a series of hidden messages in the museum: messages that will lead her and Joshua on a hunt that not only could solve Veronica's financial woes, but could finally reveal the truth behind a decades-old murder in the infamous Frick family.

## Discussion Guide

1. If you could meet any of these characters and have a conversation with them, who would it be? What would your conversation be about?
2. When Miss Helen meets Lillian, she says, "I like to make things difficult for other people. You should know that right off: I'm known to be difficult." How does their relationship evolve over the course of the book?
3. While trying to convince Lillian to pose for his statues, Mr. Konti says that if the people of New York "walk by one of my statues and look up and see something beautiful, an idea or person who inspires them, then I have done my job. I do this not for me. It's for humanity." What do you think of this statement? Does it resonate with you and the role public art plays in your life? Why or why not?
4. Miss Helen seems disconnected from reality, and is frequently oblivious to the feelings and motives of those around her. Why do you think that is? How do you think her wealth and position have altered her worldview? How did it affect the way she treated people like Lillian, or the way her father regarded people like Bertha?
5. How do Joshua's experiences as a Black man in the art world affect the way he views the art at the Frick? Do his experiences alter your views of art history in any way?
6. How do Lillian's and Veronica's experiences working as models in two different decades compare? In what ways does the novel explore the difference between being looked at versus being seen?
7. The tenuous friendship Joshua and Veronica build during their stay in the Frick Collection is almost destroyed when Veronica betrays his trust. What are the stakes for each of them in that moment? What makes Veronica's actions dangerous for both, and how do their situations differ? What would you have encouraged Veronica to do with her find?
8. Did the ending surprise you? How do you think the truth of what really happened to Henry Clay Frick and the Magnolia diamond affected the different characters at the end?
9. If you could go back in time to one of the eras Fiona Davis writes about in *THE MAGNOLIA PALACE*, would you? Which would you choose?

## Author Bio

Fiona Davis is the *New York Times* bestselling author of eight historical novels set in iconic New York City buildings: *THE STOLEN QUEEN*, *THE SPECTACULAR*, *THE MAGNOLIA PALACE*, *THE DOLLHOUSE*, *THE ADDRESS*, *THE MASTERPIECE*, *THE CHELSEA GIRLS* and *THE LIONS OF FIFTH AVENUE*, which was a "Good Morning America" Book Club pick. Her articles have appeared in publications like *The Wall Street Journal* and the *Oprah* magazine.

She first came to New York as an actress, but fell in love with writing after getting a master's degree at Columbia Journalism School. Her books have been translated into over 20 languages, and she's based in New York City.

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