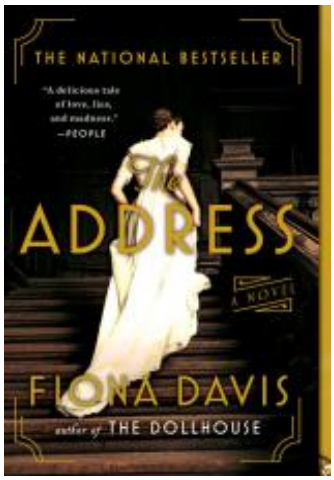
# The Address

by Fiona Davis




## About the Book

**Fiona Davis, author of THE DOLLHOUSE, returns with a compelling novel about the thin lines between love and loss, success and ruin, passion and madness, all hidden behind the walls of The Dakota, New York City?s most famous residence.**

After a failed apprenticeship, working her way up to head housekeeper of a posh London hotel is more than Sara Smythe ever thought she?d make of herself. But when a chance encounter with Theodore Camden, one of the architects of the grand New York apartment house The Dakota, leads to a job offer, her world is suddenly awash in possibility --- no mean feat for a servant in 1884. The opportunity to move to America, where a person can rise above one?s station. The opportunity to be the female manager of The Dakota, which promises to be the greatest apartment house in the world. And the opportunity to see more of Theo, who understands Sara like no one else...and is living in The Dakota with his wife and three young children.

In 1985, Bailey Camden is desperate for new opportunities. Fresh out of rehab, the former party girl and interior designer is homeless, jobless and penniless. Two generations ago, Bailey?s grandfather was the ward of famed architect Theodore Camden. But the absence of a genetic connection means Bailey won?t see a dime of the Camden family?s substantial estate. Instead, her ?cousin? Melinda --- Camden?s biological great-granddaughter --- will inherit almost everything. So when Melinda offers to let Bailey oversee the renovation of her lavish Dakota apartment, Bailey jumps at the chance, despite her dislike of Melinda?s vision. The renovation will take away all the character and history of the apartment Theodore Camden himself lived in...and died in, after suffering multiple stab wounds by a madwoman named Sara Smythe, a former Dakota employee who had previously spent seven months in an insane asylum on Blackwell?s Island.

One hundred years apart, Sara and Bailey are both tempted by and struggle against the golden excess of their respective ages --- for Sara, the opulence of a world ruled by the Astors and Vanderbilts; for Bailey, the free-flowing drinks and

cocaine in the nightclubs of New York City --- and take refuge and solace in the Upper West Side?s gilded fortress. But a building with a history as rich --- and often tragic --- as The Dakota?s can?t hold its secrets forever, and what Bailey discovers in its basement could turn everything she thought she knew about Theodore Camden --- and the woman who killed him --- on its head.

With rich historical detail, nuanced characters and gorgeous prose, Fiona Davis once again delivers a compulsively readable novel that peels back the layers of not only a famed institution, but the lives --- and lies --- of the beating hearts within.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** Sara?s mother projects many of her hopes and dreams onto Sara, expressing great disappointment when Sara ends up working as a maid and following in her footsteps. Ironically, Sara and her mother wind up in similar stations in life for almost identical reasons. Why do you think they choose to avoid sharing their experiences with each other? What does their silence say about women?s lives at that time? How does it speak to the relationship between mother and daughter? If this scene was set in contemporary times, would they have been more likely to relate to and open up to one another? Why or why not?

**2.** Part of Theo?s charm is his ability to provide Sara access to experiences that someone of her social class would normally never have access to. Was there anything inappropriate about their first encounter in her office when Theo came to thank Sara for saving his daughter?s life? Why or why not? As Theo?s advances toward Sara grew bolder, how did the uneven power dynamic show itself in their relationship? Did you feel that it was fair to Sara? Why or why not?

**3.** Bailey, Renzo and other tenants of the Dakota view Melinda?s renovations as disrespectful to the history of the building. How do you feel about renovating historic buildings? What value, if any, do you think there is in preserving the original architecture and design of historic buildings? What value is there in updating and modernizing facilities, amenities and possibly even aesthetic?

**4.** Kenneth?s stories reflect another facet of the Dakota?s history, when ?they began letting in the artistic types? who were known to throw wild parties that offended ?the snooty old guard? of the building. He is the Dakota?s unofficial historian, yet he continues to be looked down upon by the other residents because he originally worked as a butler in the building. Why do you think Kenneth stays at the Dakota? Have cultural attitudes toward certain custodial professions shifted over the past century? Do you know anyone who works at a job that others might consider beneath them? Have you spoken to them about their experience of the job? If so, how do they feel about it?

**5.** Fiona Davis based Sara?s experience at Blackwell?s Island Insane Asylum on historical accounts of conditions at in-patient mental health institutions in the 1800s. Were you surprised that patients were treated so poorly at the asylum? What practices or treatments were most affecting? In what ways has society changed (or stayed the same) in its understanding and treatment of mental illness? Do you have any personal experiences from your own life, anyone you know, or even from the media, that inform your views of mental illness?

**6.** Nellie Bly appears in THE ADDRESS as a fictionalized portrayal of the real journalist who went undercover to expose the brutality and neglect at the women?s lunatic asylum on Blackwell?s Island, which she described in a series of

articles in the *New York World* and later in her book TEN DAYS IN A MAD-HOUSE. Were you aware of Bly?s work prior to reading this novel? What impression were you left with of her after reading THE ADDRESS? What role does her character play in the development of the story? Is she a major or a minor character, and why?

**7.** Sara decides to keep her pregnancy secret during her time on Blackwell?s Island, despite the additional health risks for her and her child. Why do you think she makes that decision? What would you have done? Is there a moral or ethical element at play?

**8.** Bailey has a complicated relationship with her father. In what ways are they similar or alike? Why does Jack resent the Camdens? Why do you think he is so hesitant to look more closely into their family?s past? Put yourself in his shoes. How would you feel about this situation? Does your opinion of Jack change or stay the same as the story unfolds?

**9.** Both Sara and Bailey are drawn to situations that have the potential to damage their reputation and future. Though both suffer to some degree as a result of their choices, Bailey is able to turn her life around, while Sara is not. What might this indicate about the differences in class fluidity, cultural morality standards and gender norms in their respective time periods?

**10.** What do you think about Mrs. Camden and her relationship with Theo? Do you truly believe she was relieved that Sara and Theo had an intimate relationship, as she implied? Why or why not? Why do you think she agreed to raise Christopher as her ward? Do you think she, Theo or both of them are to blame for their unhappy marriage? Did your opinion of her change throughout the novel? Why or why not?

**11.** Finally, why do you think Sara decides to take the blame for what happens to Theo? Did she have another choice? Why or why not? What would you have done?

## 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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