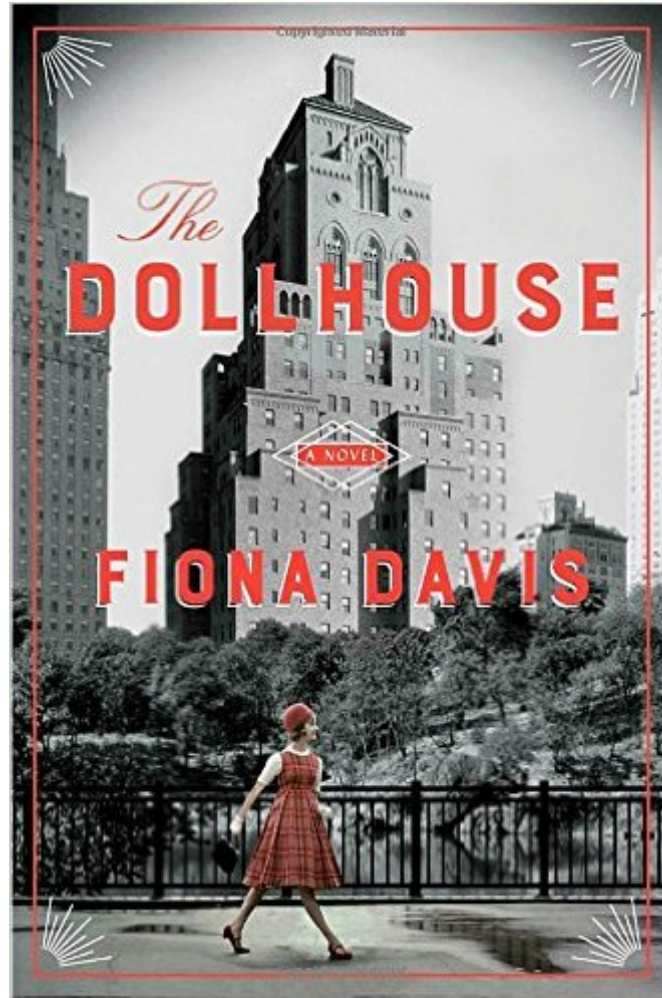


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The Dollhouse: A Novel



Synopsis

"The Dollhouse. . . . That's what we boys like to call it. . . . The Barbizon Hotel for Women, packed to the rafters with pretty little dolls. Just like you." Â Fiona Davis's stunning debut novel pulls readers into the lush world of New York City's glamorous Barbizon Hotel for Women, where in the 1950's a generation of aspiring models, secretaries, and editors lived side-by-side while attempting to claw their way to fairy-tale success, and where a present-day journalist becomes consumed with uncovering a dark secret buried deep within the Barbizon's glitzy past. Â When she arrives at the famed Barbizon Hotel in 1952, secretarial school enrollment in hand, Darby McLaughlin is everything her modeling agency hall mates aren't: plain, self-conscious, homesick, and utterly convinced she doesn't belongâ "a notion the models do nothing to disabuse. Yet when Darby befriends Esme, a Barbizon maid, she's introduced to an entirely new side of New York City: seedy downtown jazz clubs where the music is as addictive as the heroin that's used there, the startling sounds of bebop, and even the possibility of romance. Â Over half a century later, the Barbizon's gone condo and most of its long-ago guests are forgotten. But rumors of Darby's involvement in a deadly skirmish with a hotel maid back in 1952 haunt the halls of the building as surely as the melancholy music that floats from the elderly woman's rent-controlled apartment. It's a combination too intoxicating for journalist Rose Lewin, Darby's upstairs neighbor, to resistâ "not to mention the perfect distraction from her own imploding personal life. Yet as Rose's obsession deepens, the ethics of her investigation become increasingly murky, and neither woman will remain unchanged when the shocking truth is finally revealed.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is a good summer read, written more like a USA Today story than a novel. To be sure, the author has a well-structured story, an interesting landmark in the Barbizon Hotel for Women and its storied residents (even though my favorite, Sylvia Plath, only lived there a month, the fact of which the reader is reminded often -- too often), but I got the feeling that the author was handed an unassembled Å©bauche of watch parts and told to put them together in a book, making sure that all of the parts were working and the whole thing ticked. In that she was successful in spades. The only spark of passion was the interaction between Darby (from the 50s) and her mother, and the love of her father by the 2016 journalist, Rose. The process of getting dumped by her boyfriend (Rose) and being lured back by his ex-wife was full of feeling, as well. Good stuff that would have been welcomed in the rest of the book. However, the story was based more on the diametrically different bad choices women had in the 1950s. They could be smokin' hot models and snag some guy on the fast track to cooperate or professional success or they could be career girls with crappy jobs like typists being trained by a Sturmbannführer left over the WWII. It wasn't quite that simple, but those were the outlines. (In places like NYC, the lines were far blurrier.) The story itself, though, is quite good as long as you're willing to work with characters teeter-totting on stereotypes. The modern girl working in journalism in a changing journalistic world -- makes one nostalgic for Lois Lane working for the Daily Planet--and the old fashioned girl that conservatives think was really happy back in the day. Nobody's happy; then or now. There're just different things to be unhappy about.

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