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New York Times bestselling author of *The Paris Architect*

The FALLEN
ARCHITECT



a novel

Reading Group Guide

1. Imagine you are Douglas Layton watching the theatre you designed fall to the ground. How would you feel in that moment? What part in the tragedy does Layton play? Do you think he deserved to go to prison for it?
2. Why was it so easy for Layton to shed his skin after he was released from prison? Describe what it must have been like to grow up within England's strict social classes. How did that influence Layton's decisions both before and after prison? If you were to shed your identity, what job or lifestyle would you take on?
3. How does social class come into play later in the story? Does social hierarchy have as much influence today as it did then? Explain.
4. Layton has an emotional connection to music halls, and they bring him back to happy memories from his childhood. Do you have a place that instantly brings your childhood to mind? What is it like to be there again as an adult? How do you think Layton feels returning to a theatre for the first time after the accident?

5. Describe the characters at the theatre house. Which were your favorites? Did you find any shocking or offensive in today's society? Do you think theatres still serve the same purpose today, to help people forget about their lives?
6. Why do you think Layton decides not to tell anyone after he discovers the first skeleton? What about the second? When he discovers that the dead men both worked on the Britannia Empire Theatre, how does Layton react?
7. Describe Cissie and Layton's relationship. How does it change after she discovers the mystery behind the Britannia collapse? Do you think they make a good team?
8. How does Layton's past come back to haunt him throughout the story? Why do you think he cannot escape his reputation? Do you think anyone is ever able to rise above public perception?
9. Layton finds multiple suspects for the Britannia collapse. How does he discover the guilty party? What ultimately drove them to commit this horrible act?
10. How does Layton's life change after news of the real story behind the Britannia breaks? How has he changed as a person throughout this whole ordeal? Is his life better off after all the misfortune?

A Conversation with the Author

What inspired you to write *The Fallen Architect*?

The Bridge of San Luis Rey by Thornton Wilder. As several people are crossing a rope bridge, it fails and they plunge to their deaths. They are strangers to each other and just happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. A balcony in a building could collapse killing strangers, but I thought what if the failure wasn't accidental and these victims have something in common.

When writing historical fiction, what kind of research do you do beforehand? Are there details you pay extra attention to while writing to set a realistic scene?

I spend a few months looking through books and newspapers before writing. It was important to describe the theatre setting and the different types of acts accurately.

What quality do you admire most in Layton?

His resilience and determination to start a new life when most men would have given up hope and killed themselves.

What drew you to a music hall setting?

I had seen a TV program on the BBC that re-created the

music hall experience and saw how much people enjoyed themselves, especially singing along with the performers. Also, the wonderful architecture of the old British music halls.

Which character did you find the most difficult to write?

Layton's father.

How has your writing evolved from your first book to now?

I think I'm better at character development.

If you had one piece of advice for prospective writers, what would it be?

Write what you know. It'll be easier.

When you're not writing, how do you like to spend your free time?

I still practice as a historic preservation consultant, so my free time is taken up by the writing.

What's currently on your to-read list?

The short stories of John O'Hara.

What do you want readers to take away from *The Fallen Architect*?

That no matter how bad life crushes you down, you can still pick yourself up and start again.