

# Debra Spark

Media Kit



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# Selected Praise

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“***Discipline***, Debra Spark’s propulsive new novel, held me in its grips from page one. By weaving together three storylines, each linked to a missing masterpiece and spanning nearly a century, **Spark** illustrates how art connects and transforms us. An immersive, insightful exploration of wealth and poverty, husbands and wives, mothers and sons, love, lies, and loneliness, ***Discipline*** is a literary page-turner that stuns with its beauty and grace.”

—Jillian Medoff, bestselling author of *When We Were Bright and Beautiful*

“[Debra Spark’s] new novel brilliantly concerns itself with the intersection of art and relationships, the ways in which works of art live in the world as lightning rods for human passion, rage, love, and loneliness, and the ways in which this dynamic quality of art shapes the loves of people who come into intense contact with it. ***Discipline*** is one of those rare books I want to tell everyone to read immediately.”

—Kate Christensen, author of *Welcome Home, Stranger*

“A wonderfully intricate, suspenseful—at times harrowing—and provocative novel about how a trio of eerily powerful paintings alter the lives of a host of wildly different people. ***Discipline*** is the best kind of mystery: full of surprising turns, compelling characters, and web-like connections slowly revealed over time. The meditations on art add to the vibrant complexity. Debra Spark is a terrific writer.”

—Suzanne Berne, author of *The Blue Window*

“Paced like a mystery-thriller, ***Discipline*** is a marvel to behold: its twisty plot and richly detailed characters never take a false step in this fascinating exploration of art and trauma and what happens when the legacies of each intersect. Meticulously researched and impeccably written, this is a masterful novel written by a truly gifted artist. I was almost cheering by the end.”

—Liam Callanan, author of *When in Rome*



# Selected Past Media Attention

"... a smart, sprightly, sex-drenched, and neatly plotted novel about Midwestern high-school administration politics ..."

—Alan Cheuse, *NPR's All Things Considered*

"Spark is at her sly, funny, and cutting best in her third novel, a clever and affecting variation on the biblical story of Esther (...) with agile dialogue, escalating weirdness and menace, and tricky questions of lust, love, fear, stereotyping, and hate underlying each hilarious, caustic, and unnerving scene."

—Donna Seaman, *Booklist*

"A+++ writing."

—Liberty Hardy, *All the Books*, a podcast from *Book Riot*

"In 'Unknown Caller,' a sharply hooked premise and well-conceived structure drive the considerable emotional suspense."

—*New York Times Book Review*

"Erudite and entertaining."

—*Foreword*

"A page turner—a break in the often artful yet sluggishly paced ranks of literary fiction."

—*Newsday*

"A gorgeous novel... as richly imaginative, wildly sensual and wisely unsettling as they come. Real world magic."

—*Washington Post Book World*

"An excellent debut novel that examines the nature of love, the power of family and the inexorable pull of the past... Spark uses her intricate, multilayered structure to deliver a myriad of entertaining scenes and marvelous insights."

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

# Introduction



One day, Reggie Rupo is called out of his Spanish classroom for a punishment that takes him to northernmost Maine, and eventually the orbit of a famous painter. Decades later, Gracie Thomas, dealing with her own misbehaving son, goes to appraise an art collection on a Maine island, only to discover the pieces she most wants to see are missing. ***Discipline*** tells the story of the absent paintings—how they were made and what happened to them—while weaving between eras to examine the discipline of art and the art of discipline. Inspired by real people and events, the novel uses multiple mysteries to explore Reggie and Gracie’s relationship to art, ambition, family happiness, and love.

# About Debra Spark



**Debra Spark** is the author of four novels, two collections of short stories, and two books of essays on fiction writing. Her most recent books are the novel *Unknown Caller* and the essay collection *And Then Something Happened*. With Deborah Joy Corey, she co-edited *Breaking Bread*, a book of food essays by Maine writers to raise funds for a hunger nonprofit. Four Way Books will publish her fifth novel, *Discipline*, in 2024.

Her short work has appeared in *Agni*, *AWP Writers' Chronicle*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Cincinnati Review*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Epoch*, *Esquire*, *Five Points*, *Food and Wine*, *Harvard Review*, *Huffington Post*, *Maine Magazine*, *Narrative*, *New England Travel and Life*, the *New England Review*, the *New York Times*, *Ploughshares*, [salon.com](http://salon.com), the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Washington Post*, *Yankee*, and *Yale Alumni Quarterly*, among other places.

In addition to writing book reviews, fiction, articles, and essays, she spent a decade writing about home, art, and design for *Maine Home+Design*, *Decor Maine*, *Down East*, *Dwell*, *Elysian*, *Interiors Boston*, *New England Home*, and *Yankee*. She writes a monthly book review column of French books in English translation for [Frenchly.us](http://Frenchly.us). She has been the recipient of several awards including Maine's 2017 READ ME series, a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, a Bunting Institute fellowship from Radcliffe College, Wisconsin Institute Fellowship, Pushcart Prize, Michigan Literary Fiction Award, and John Zacharis/*Ploughshares* award for best first book. A graduate of Yale University and the Iowa Writers' Workshop, she is a professor at Colby College and teaches in the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College.



# from **Discipline**

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Something had gone wrong.

Gracie Thomas had arrived on the island just when she said she would, on the final ferry of the day, the winter light dimming over the course of the two-hour journey east, and she too preoccupied to enjoy the drama of the ocean, the air too bitterly cold for standing on deck, the filthy windows cloudy with condensation. A more avid lover of the great outdoors would have braved the temperatures, but when Gracie had to choose between the natural world and comfort, she opted for the latter. Camping or a flush toilet? The world's greatest invention wins in a landslide!

By late afternoon, the question of the view was moot anyway, the day dark as midnight. Gracie's mind was back in Boston, instead of on the Atlantic, her focus Jeremy, her 16-year-old son, the child whom she'd waited and waited and waited for, through one, two, three, four miscarriages, the one who was so, so, so *wanted*.

He had run away from home.

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