ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

# An Inconvenient Wife

by Megan Chance




## About the Book

With **Susannah Morrow**, Megan Chance proved herself a writer of extraordinary talent, one whose evocative prose brilliantly conjured up the past. Now she has written an unforgettable novel that illuminates the cruel injustices of an age when a woman was forced to be docile and obedient, to deny her passions, to forgo her dreams.

**An Inconvenient Wife** You're too sensitive, Lucy. You need to know your place. Be a wife to your husband. Find your duty. Happiness will follow. For young Mrs. Lucy Carleton, it's becoming harder and harder to be the perfect wife, to feign pleasure at the elegant soirees and glittering balls, the elaborate gowns and endless gossip. While other women revel in the rigors of the Season, she feels overwrought and increasingly suffocated?until her only escape is the blessed darkness laudanum brings.

Her husband, William, is deeply concerned. He has taken his beautiful, fragile wife to doctor after doctor, hoping to find someone who can cure her of her headaches and fits of hysteria, with no success. But now a brilliant and controversial new healer has arrived in New York City. Victor Seth is a doctor of neurology. He is also a hypnotist, maybe a charlatan.

At first, Lucy is reluctant to see him. There is something about the way he looks at her, something improper and slightly dangerous in his gaze that makes her afraid of him, afraid of the secrets he might uncover. And yet, Victor Seth holds out the promise of salvation. Or does he? For the compelling doctor has his own agenda. In the fascinating Mrs. Carleton, he perceives an opportunity he cannot resist, and soon his actions will set off a chain of events that will have shocking repercussions no one can foresee, Lucy least of all.

Heartrending and suspenseful, disturbing and darkly erotic, **An Inconvenient Wife** is a masterful blending of historical detail and flawless storytelling that shows how a woman can be driven to the edge of sanity, driven even to the ultimate betrayal.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** The life of a woman in the nineteenth century, especially among the upper class, was fairly constricted. As a product of that culture, was Lucy justified in her actions? What part does culture play in dictating what is morally right? Does the concept of right change as culture changes? Should it? How would you have lived in that era? Could you have been happy as a woman then?

**2.** How much did Victor's patients and their husbands understand about his treatment? Do you think he deliberately misled them? If he did, was he right to do so? Why? Is there ever a time when such lying is justified?

**3.** Victor was on the cutting edge of scientific theory in the nineteenth century. He believed that one day the continent of the mind would be fully mapped. Most scientists feel they are on a quest to find the ultimate truth. Is there such a thing? Should a search for truth trump morality?

**4.** Did Victor plant the suggestion that Lucy murder her husband, and was she acting on that suggestion, or upon her own desires? Were those desires conscious or unconscious? What do you feel really happened?

**5.** Women's lives have changed a great deal since the late nineteenth century. In what ways have women's lives not changed?

**6.** Do you think Lucy was truly ill? Why or why not? How much responsibility should Lucy take for her own behavior and illness?

**7.** William thought of Lucy as a child and thought of himself as a benevolent father. Do you feel this is a dynamic that can work in a marriage? How did Lucy take refuge in William's parental role?

**8.** Lucy calls her inability to stop or control her emotions a "flaw." Do you think it is? How do you think this "flaw" contributed to her dilemma and her cure?

**9.** Do you find Victor a likeable or sympathetic character? Why or why not? What about Lucy? William? Do you need to like characters to enjoy a book? Is there an ultimate villain in the story? Who is it? Why?

**10.** How does the opening quote by Carl Jung, about love being an elastic concept, relate to the theme of the story?

**11.** In the nineteenth century, men routinely dictated the course of women's lives. Is William morally wrong in dictating the path for Lucy? Do you believe he truly loves her? Do his manipulations show his love as real or unreal?

**12.** How does the historical detail of the period support the story? Could it have been set in another time and still have the same effect? How does the author use the historical detail to enrich and deepen the story?

**13.** Does William deserve his fate?

**14.** Does the book have a happy ending? Imagine Lucy's life after the novel. How does it unfold? What role will Victor play in that life? Is Lucy truly free at the end?

**15.** Women in the nineteenth century were taught that passion was an evil in any form. What part does discovering passion play in Lucy's metamorphosis?

## Author Bio

Megan Chance is the critically acclaimed, award-winning author of more than 20 novels, including THE VERMILION SEA, GLAMOROUS NOTIONS, A DANGEROUS EDUCATION, A SPLENDID RUIN, BONE RIVER and AN INCONVENIENT WIFE. She and her husband live in the Pacific Northwest with their two grown daughters nearby.

## Critical Praise

"A gripping historical" and says," Chance ends this lightening-paced narrative with a clever twist underscoring the risks one woman takes to be her own person."

---


**An Inconvenient Wife**

by Megan Chance

**Publication Date:** April 22, 2004
**Hardcover:** 416 pages
**Publisher:** Warner Books
**ISBN-10:** 0446529567
**ISBN-13:** 9780446529563