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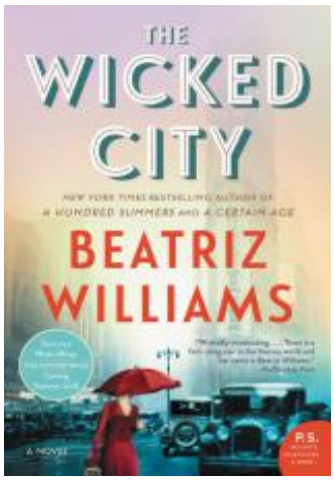
The Wicked City

by Beatriz Williams



About the Book

In the first book of a breathtaking new trilogy by bestselling author Beatriz Williams, two generations of women are brought together inside a Greenwich Village apartment --- a flapper hiding an extraordinary past and a modern-day Manhattanite forced to start her life anew.

When she discovers her banker husband has been harboring a secret life, Ella Gilbert escapes her SoHo loft for a studio in Greenwich Village. Her charismatic musician neighbor, Hector, warns her to stay out of the basement after midnight, when a symphony of mysterious noise strikes up --- laughter, clinking glasses, jazz piano, the occasional bloodcurdling scream --- even though the space has been empty for decades. Back in the Roaring Twenties, the basement was home to one of the city?s most notorious speakeasies.

In 1924, Geneva ?Gin? Kelly, a quick-witted flapper from the hills of western Maryland, is a regular at this Village hideaway. Caught up in a raid, Gin lands in the office of Prohibition enforcement agent Oliver Anson, who persuades her to help him catch her stepfather, Duke Kelly, one of the biggest bootleggers in Appalachia.

But Gin is nobody?s fool. She strikes a risky bargain with the taciturn, straight-arrow Revenue agent, and their alliance rattles Manhattan society to its foundations, exposing secrets that shock even this free-spirited redhead.

As Ella unravels the strange history of her new building --- and the family thread that connects her to Geneva Kelly --- she senses the Jazz Age spirit of her exuberant predecessor invading her own shy nature, in ways that will transform her existence in the wicked city.

Discussion Guide

1. What do you make of the advice Ella gets from her mother about ?starter marriages?: ?It?s nothing to be ashamed of.

As long as you haven?t got kids, you just move on. Move on, move up.? Is she just trying to make her daughter feel better about a bad situation, or is this advice Ella should take?

2. Ginger observes at first that Anson and Duke Kelly are exactly the same: ?You just want to get a little something out of me, whether I like it or not, and you don?t ever mean to pay me back for my trouble.? Are there similarities between Anson and Duke Kelly? Between Duke and Ginger?

3. Why does Ella observe that ?she hadn?t chosen this apartment, after all. The apartment had chosen her??

4. Why do you think the same enameled box makes its way into Ginger?s and Ella?s hands? The meaning of the box?s contents will be revealed in future books, but if you had to guess, what?s their significance?

5. Carl Green tells Ginger that while he doesn?t love Duke Kelly, ?I don?t hold with no government men, either, telling us what we can drink and not drink.... I would surely ruther take my orders from Duke Kelly than from some rich fellow in Washington, some swell with the dough to fill up his cellar before the axe set to falling, enough booze to last him until kingdom come.? Do you agree? Would Ginger agree, if it weren?t for her hatred of Duke Kelly?

6. Ginger says she?s never recognized as the Redhead of the infamous nude postcards because ?I guess people see what they want to see.? Is that true?

7. Despite the radical difference in their backgrounds, Billy offers Ginger marriage, a comfortable home, and an easy life, even though he knows his family would oppose their union. Is she right to turn him down? Would you have done the same?

8. When we meet Ella?s thrice-divorced elderly Aunt Julie, does she seem like the same vivacious party girl Ginger Kelly befriended in the 1920s? How is she changed? Or not changed?

9. Was Ginger right to take her sister Patsy with her when she and Anson fled River Junction?

10. What do you think will happen to Ginger and Ella in THE WICKED REDHEAD, the next novel in this series? What clues did the author leave you in this novel?

Author Bio

Beatriz Williams is the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and internationally bestselling author of HUSBANDS & LOVERS, THE SUMMER WIVES, THE SECRET LIFE OF VIOLET GRANT, A HUNDRED SUMMERS, the *Wicked City* series, and several other works of historical fiction, including five novels in collaboration with fellow bestselling authors Karen White and Lauren Willig.

A graduate of Stanford University with an MBA in Finance from Columbia University, Beatriz worked as a communications and corporate strategy consultant in New York and London before her first novel was published in 2012. Beatriz?s books have won numerous awards, have been translated into more than a dozen languages, and appear regularly in bestseller lists around the world. Her essays have appeared in magazines such as *Real Simple* and *Southern Living*, among others, and she regularly reviews fiction for the *New York Times Book Review*.

Born in Seattle, Washington, Beatriz now lives in southeastern Connecticut with her husband and four mostly grown children.

Critical Praise

?Wickedly intoxicating? There is a fast-rising star in the literary world and her name is Beatriz Williams.?

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Publication Date: December 26, 2017
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction, Women's Fiction
Paperback: 384 pages
Publisher: William Morrow Paperbacks
ISBN-10: 0062405012
ISBN-13: 9780062405012