



City of Ash

Megan Chance

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Chicago socialite Geneva Langley is a woman used to pushing boundaries. When she inadvertently pushes too far, she finds herself banished, along with her husband, to Seattle, Washington Territory. In 1888, Seattle is a city on the cusp of greatness, but there Ginny feels stifled and alone, suffocated by her husband's forgiveness, always cognizant of her need to atone.

Beatrice Wilkes is an actress who has lived by her wits since she first set out on her own at the age of fifteen. She has learned not to trust, that in the theater friends rarely stay friends for long. She longs for a career as a leading lady on the stage, although that dream seems to grow less possible with every passing hour. When she meets Geneva Langley, Bea pegs her correctly as the kind of woman who has had everything handed to her, who understands nothing of real life.

Fate—and the great Seattle fire of 1889—will bind these two different women together in a dark and perilous alliance. Neither suspects that their relationship will challenge everything they know about themselves, or that it will set them on a path that must lead to either redemption or damnation.

City of Ash Details

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Author : Megan Chance

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From Reader Review City of Ash for online ebook

BRNTerri says

The heroine, 29, is in a dysfunctional marriage. She comes from wealth and her husband, Nathan, married her for it. He comes up with a plan to get his hands on even more of it. I think her father, not knowing of Nathan's plan, helps him.

Geneva learns of the plan and devises a plan of her own. She asks Nathan's mistress, Beatrice, to help her and help her she does. Plans change when she can't get access to money. The new plan is silly and really farfetched, totally unbelievable and I was real disappointed in it. Despite that, I was interested in watching it all unfold.

My favorite character is the actress, Beatrice. She's twenty-eight and has been an actress for thirteen years. Sadly, we didn't learn anything of her background. She's a jealous, self centered person and it was very surprising that she'd help Geneva out.

Geneva didn't seem that interesting to me. I didn't like that out of nowhere she wanted to become an actress. I also thought it strange that she didn't seem too bothered by the fact her husband was cheating.

Overall, I was happy with this book but was disappointed by the plan and how it all played out during the last third of the story. I grade this a B+

Kaye says

This would be a really great book except for language. The author did her research on the time period and locale but the language is bad. I emailed and asked her why she used that in her book. She said the characters in that time period would have talked that way. I think she could have written it without the crappy language and it would have been a great book. Avoid it if you hate F bombs.

Kacey says

I couldn't finish this book, and maybe I will come back to it at a later time, but it had a strong start & after getting more than halfway through, I felt like it took a nose dive. Maybe I'll come back to it later??

Joan Carmichael says

Excellent storyline. Two well created main characters, the nemesises socialite, Geneva Langley and actress, Beatrice Wilkes. Three quarters of the way through I was ready for it to wind down. Some unrealistic situations, especially toward the end.

Renee says

Outgoing society girl and art patroness Geneva Langley and her husband Nathan are forced to move from Chicago to Seattle because of her scandalous reputation. In Seattle, their lives became entangled with an actress, Beatrice Wilkes, itching to take the leading role at her theatre. Geneva struggles for acceptance in Seattle society, while Beatrice is forced to take on a patron (and basically become a prostitute) to out another backstabbing actress from the lead. And with the Great Seattle Fire of 1889, everything changes and the two women come together in a common goal.

If you overlook the very far-fetched plot and just roll with the unbelievability, this is an entertaining book. I love historical stories and I didn't know anything about the Seattle Fire of 1889, so it was interesting to learn about it as well as the behind-the-scenes lives of theatre workers in the 1880s. The characters were unique and well-rounded for the most part. I liked Sebastian DeWitt and Geneva best. Beatrice and Geneva's plan was far too risky to be believable and I highly doubt it could have all worked so smoothly, but I didn't really care. It was a fun book, like all of Megan Chance's historical fiction. I prefer "The Spiritualist" and "An Inconvenient Wife," but this was good too. Just don't take it too seriously.

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Wendy says

City of Ash tells the story of two women in 1880s Seattle, alternating between the viewpoint of Geneva Langley and Bea Wilkes. Geneva, or Ginny, is a wealthy socialite who flaunts convention by associating with artists, actors and writers. She has a talent for discovering and popularizing artists, launching many careers until she unwisely decides to pose for a nude sculpture in an attempt to force her gold digging husband to leave her. Her plan backfires when her husband, Nathan, offers her the choice between moving to unsophisticated and frontier-like Seattle or being committed to an asylum. She chooses Seattle. There, she attempts to behave and fit in, but her reputation precedes her and polite society won't receive her.

Bea Wilkes is an actress in a local theater who catches Nathan's eye. Bea thinks that she's found a wealthy patron who will at last give her the edge she needs to land the leading role in her theater group. What she doesn't know is that Nathan has other plans for her as he schemes for a way to get rid of his wife but keep her money.

Bea and Ginny become acquainted as part of Nathan's manipulations and the two are bitter rivals. Ginny discovers his plan just before the great Seattle fire. After the fire, she sees an opportunity to escape and is forced to try to convert her enemy, Bea, into her ally to overthrow Nathan and give both women what they want: freedom.

This was a real page turner for me. The author keeps the plot moving at a quick pace while layering in the schemes and dreams of each of the main characters, drawing them all closer until they are bound together. The setting is rendered very realistically, conveying a sense of time and place, and the characters, major and minor, all come alive. My only criticism is the fact that this story runs a very strong parallel to her previous book, *An Inconvenient Wife*, which I also enjoyed. It's fine to go back to the well as long as you don't draw the same bucket of water each time.

KatieDMD says

What a stunning, beautiful story whose characters came ALIVE like no other author's. The plot was heartbreaking, clever, intricate and almost flawless. The characters were so modern and contrasted sharply with the old-fashioned setting of 1889 Seattle, WA. Their dialogue was pithy and carefully crafted; every single word had a meaning and provided context to their actions. Reading *City of Ash* was like watching a film in my mind. Very quickly the core plot unfolded and all I could do was read/watch in exhilaration and horror as Bea and Ginny carried out their diabolical plan. Yes, diabolical but oh so understandable, especially as Ms. Chance describes the horrendously manipulative character of Nathan, the resident psychopath and Ginny's husband. My only reluctant critique was the role that Sebastian played in the story. Yes, the tragic hero, that was quite clear - you could smell the traditional Greek themes of the tragic hero emanating from every fiber of Sebastian's being, from the tattered coat to his long hair to his burning eyes. The old-fashioned hipster, starving artist, melancholy genius. But who was his love? Was it Ginny? Bea? I couldn't quite figure it out. What a thoroughly enjoyable read, an amazing story.

Penny says

I picked this book up on a whim from the library and I'm so glad! LOVED it! Great characters and writing! The end was particularly good. A GREAT book club pick!

Liz Parissenti says

Great concept, boring delivery. Ginny is a spoiled heiress who enjoys bringing artists out of obscurity in the late 1800s. When one of her "projects" ends in notoriety, she and her semi-estranged husband Nathan are banished to newly-established Seattle to ride out the scandal. They both become entangled with Bea, a brilliant and unappreciated actress, using her in various schemes.

"City of Ash" could have been a lot better with 100 fewer pages. The narrative was boring and hard to push through, even when foreshadowing suggested exciting things to come. I didn't enjoy reading the book, but I did want to know what would happen next. If I had found a wikipedia article with the plot summary, I doubt I would've finished it.

Sara says

I really enjoy Megan Chance's historical fiction, and this book was no exception. The interaction between the main female characters was great—they were forced together, but absolutely determined not to like each other. The relationship that they created was fascinating and felt very real.

Cedric Rose says

My Kirkus Review:

The fates of an ambitious young actress and an exiled society lady intertwine in 1889 Seattle when the Great Fire nearly burns the fledgling city to the ground.

Geneva Langley, daughter of a wealthy railroad tycoon, has it all, inviting the greatest artists of the day to her Chicago salons. All, that is, but a happy marriage. She poses nude for a sculptor, calculating that the ensuing scandal will force her husband Nathan to divorce her. Instead, she's sent to Seattle, where her husband smells political opportunity in the soon-to-be state. Seattle's cultural life pales beside Chicago's, but it does host theatres where Geneva, shunned by society, seeks solace and meets talented young playwright Sebastian DeWitt. Mrs. Langley, an art patron, is thrilled when her husband begins underwriting the production of a play DeWitt has written to showcase the acting of Beatrice Wilkes, whom he admires. Frustrated to have been thrown over for many a leading role and lacking qualms about using sex to gain advantage, Ms. Wilkes becomes Nathan Langley's mistress. The love triangle grows a fourth corner when lonely Mrs. Langley gravitates toward the playwright and her husband encourages their relationship, going so far as to suggest she take the stage, and in the very part meant for Ms. Wilkes, a complete reversal of mind given that he had previously forbidden such scandalous behavior since it caused their exile. Does Mr. Langley's interest in the theatre have more to it than lust for an actress resembling his wife? Mistress and wife ally against Nathan Langley's nefarious schemes, intricately developed against a scorched backdrop. Strangest of all, real life mimics DeWitt's play as they find themselves living parts to rival Hamlet's drama and deception.

With an Art-Nouveau-and-absinthe sensibility, tight plotting and stagecraft complete with traps and twists, Chance (Prima Donna, 2009, etc.) breathes a vitality into her frontier characters à la David Milch's Deadwood.

Marilyn says

This is one of my favorite books of all time. I loved it. A Chicago socialite is miserable in her marriage and steps over a line. Her wealthy father banishes her and her husband to the Seattle Territory in 1889. She is very remorseful for her behavior in Chicago and strives to be the kind of wife that will make her husband happy but it is not to be. He has ulterior motives. Enter the theatre crowd of 1880's Seattle. Our socialite is invited to be part of an acting troupe (engineered by hubby) and becomes inmeshed in that life. She is given the female lead in a play and the role is taken away from a great actress and she is very unhappy about it. There is great tension on the set. Meanwhile hubby wants to be rid of his wife to take over her inheritance and comes up with an ingenious plan to make her appear crazy and to have her father commit her. The Socialite figures out what he is doing just as the Seattle Fire of 1889 strikes and destroys much of the city, including the theatre. The actors, including Ms. Socialite barely escape but Geneva (socialite) and Beatrice (Good Actress) become bound together trying survive the aftermath. Hubby thinks Geneva is dead and the two ladies come up with a plan to make him think he is crazy. Absolutely ingenious. This is one of the few books I have ever read that I would read again.

Charlie says

Another wonderful passionate suspenseful read from chance.

Vibeke says

Megan Chance is quickly becoming my favorite author. Partially because my other favorite author contenders are writing too slowly or not at all, but mostly because she's so damn good. Her books have it all: beautiful prose, vivid and interesting characters, and gripping, often on-the-edge-of-your-seat plots. She's an excellent writer *and* storyteller. Anyone who's read a lot of books in their life should know how rare that is. This book is no exception. I absolutely loved it. I had some minor quibbles not worth mentioning and a bigger problem, namely that elements in this story reminded me too much of all three of her recent historical novels--there was a lot that felt familiar here. But ultimately it was unique enough that it didn't diminish my enjoyment overall. Highly recommended for fans of historical fiction.

Chelsea LaVere says

Completely hypnotic. It's what Chance does best even when it tugs at hard-to-swallow themes and plots and makes you want to dislike the story, but you get swept up into the world.

Nathan was a true villain, and I loved Bea the most. It's funny how the most real characters Chance creates are the ones who professionally play other characters.

The author is a brilliant writer, and her writing alone is 5 stars. It's the storylines that make it 4 stars for me though. Like a Facebook relationship status, it's complicated. I love the female empowerment themes but I don't love the way it gets there.... though it's necessary and seamlessly told. It's a complete personal preference, and yet I'll be devouring her other novels like always.
