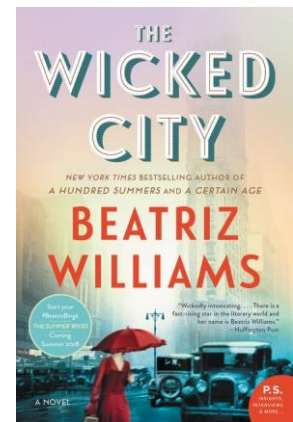


The Wicked City
William Morrow

By Beatriz Williams
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Introduction

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.

Questions for Discussion

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 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 the significance of the box’s contents?

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 rather take my orders from Duke Kelly than from some rich fellow in Washington, some swell with the dough to fill up hi 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 flee 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?