

The Orchid Hour

Nancy Bilyeau

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In Prohibition-era New York, a young widow plunges into a world of vice, gangsters, and political corruption in Nancy Bilyeau's novel *The Orchid Hour*.

After she loses her job at the library, Zia's prospects are bleak. No one wants to hire an Italian American. Worse, people Zia knows keep dying: the deputy mayor and her loving father-in-law are shot in quick succession. Convinced the murders are connected, Zia goes undercover at the Orchid Hour, a new speakeasy that seems to be at the heart of the trouble. What she learns will bring both justice and ruin.

In the process of investigating, Zia breaks away from her conservative family for the first time. The life she finds outside the library is as exhilarating as it is dangerous. As she explores the enticing underworld of speakeasies, celebrities, flapper fashion, and independence, she faces yet another threat: the club's temperamental yet handsome manager, who makes Zia feel more alive than she has since her husband's death.

Despite her excitement, Zia's family-oriented goals—to find her father-in-law's murderer and to secure her son's future—never waver. The sequence depicting Zia's shock over her father-in-law's murder is surreal and heartbreaking. But she cannot afford to mourn for long. With the reluctant help of a police lieutenant, she pries free every secret that the luxurious, dangerous Orchid Hour has to offer in search of the one answer she needs. When answers do come, they are not what Zia expected or wanted. Nonetheless, they are all she will ever get, so she finds a way to be content with what remains: a newfound understanding of herself and her place in the world.

The Orchid Hour is an enticing mystery novel about the elusiveness of justice during a period of historical turmoil.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (July / August 2023)

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