



Fire

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An historical romance based on the Ballantynes Department Store Fire in 1947 that killed 41 people, most of them store employees trapped in controversial circumstances. Set in an unnamed NZ city in 1953, Fire tells the story of four working class friends, all employed at Dawsons, one of the country's most glamorous and sophisticated department stores. The girls are Nancy, a salesgirl in the dress department, Kay who works in lingerie, Louise, a typist in Accounts and Judy, a milliner in the workroom out the back. The story takes place a week before Christmas, in the period leading up to Christmas as the country prepares for a Royal Visit by the young Queen Elizabeth. When the store is full of wealthy shoppers smoke is discovered drifting from the basement lift shaft. While the fire brigade is called, the store owners make a crucial error and decide not to raise a public alarm until it's too late - exits are cut off by the fire and the ground and first floors are ablaze, trapping staff and customers on the upper floors.

Fire Details

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Author : Deborah Challinor

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From Reader Review Fire for online ebook

Jenn says

I thought this was a really well written book. I found it a compelling read that made me reflect on the history I know about the Ballentynes fire that happened in Christchurch which is what this book was inspired by. This book gave a personal view point of a terrible event - even if these particular views are fictional.

Lesley says

I picked this book up at a thrift store because I am too cheap to buy books and I was pleasantly surprised. It is a historical fiction, based on the Ballantyne Department store fires in Christchurch in 1947. I usually enjoy period historical fiction most and was a bit dubious about more modern historical fiction, however I was quickly drawn in to the lives of the working class girls and their friendships. The account of the fire was fairly gripping and the account of Maori land loss was interesting as I know little about New Zealand's history. The book is a quick and easy read... good for a rainy Sunday afternoon. I will be looking out for Challinor's historical trilogy Tamar, White Feathers and Blue Smoke.

Narnia says

An easy, quick read that I just couldn't put down. I enjoyed all the little stories, but I especially loved the ending. It was so exciting and so sad. I cried and cried. I look forward to reading more books by this Kiwi author

Jillian Higham says

A totally absorbing read

I love historical fiction where the author takes an event and weaves a fictional story around the bare facts and Deborah Challinor does this beautifully. I was totally invested in the characters of the four women, Allie, Irene, Louise and Daisy and found the story riveting. Was surprised at the blurb at the introduction which claimed the fictional department store to be called Dawsons instead of Dunbar and Jones.

Amelia says

An interesting read.

A huge amount of complexity and some super fast relationship changes for a book that spans only about 5 days!

Based on the Ballantynes fire, but set in an imaginary Auckland department store.

Carolyn says

Read in one day at the beach, very realistic NZ story based on historical facts

Erica Mangin says

I've had this book on my shelf for a few years but kept putting it off...mainly because I really dislike this cover. But I'm so glad I finally picked it up. I felt like I was reading a kiwi version of Mr Selfridge but with the primary focus on four young ladies working in the department store. Really well-written, good pacing, and just engrossing story. Need to read more Deborah Challinor - she never disappoints!

Elizabeth says

Because I am a absolute fan of Ken Follett's and Geraldine Brook's historical fiction any other historical fiction often doesn't cut it for me. However I have read Isle of tears and being a New Zealander it made for an interesting read providing me with some knowledgeable background to Maori culture and Maori wars in the North Island.

Fire provided me with a very real depiction of what it must have been like for the employees of a big store on fire and I enjoyed the relationship she wove at the beginning of the book so they became real when the fire started. Also Deborah introduced the Orakei area of Auckland and the Maori history surrounding that area and the pain and sorry Maori felt for the loss of their land and home. So I enjoyed this book too. She just has a different way of writing to Ken Follett and I am beginning to like the style.

LaVerne Clark says

Before reading this book, I'd never heard of Deborah Challinor. Shame on me! And I call myself a proud New Zealander :)

Ms. Challinor made me a fan for life with this book. The character build-up of each girl was fantastic, with each girl holding their own when gracing the page. The relationships with each other were beautifully and realistically portrayed, with all the ensuing irritations and bitchiness that can happen when women are in close proximity to each other. Over the course of the book, they learn to accept each other for who they are, and their true characteristics shine through eventually when faced with extreme trauma.

In short, I LOVED this book and have devoured many others by Deborah Challinor since.

Natalia Maria Donattela Wakelin says

Must read

Based from true story. Too slow but nicely written. I love the characters in the story. It felt like I have met them. Well done.

Emma says

weak writing, story ok, but good insight into life in 1950s Auckland and what the Ballantynes would have been like to experience as shop staff.

Alice says

A good easy read, would definitely recommend.

Toni Kenyon says

I'd been meaning to read 'Fire' for such a long time. I found it again on the shelf at the bach and decided this was a chance to get to 'the end'. I'm so glad I took the time to read this NZ author. Deborah did a lovely job and I so enjoyed knowing the places that she talked about in the book. The smatterings of New Zealand history were great as well.

I read into the early hours of the morning (joy, no work when I'm on holiday, so I could) and I wasn't disappointed that I missed my 'bedtime' ;-)

If you love an insight into recent New Zealand history and the social 'norms' of the 50's, then you'll love this book.

This was the first book of Deborah's that I have read and I'll be looking for more.

Linda says

Well written lighter novel, good characters and interesting social and factual history.

Kylie says

Loved it, nice easy quick read.
