



Taking a Chance

Deborah Burrows

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This historical romance/crime is set in Perth during the Second World War. Nell is an Australian journo, and quite the fashionable lady, and Johnny is a captain with the American Press Corps who has a bit of a shady romantic past.

Johnny's ex-lover, Lena Mitrovic, has been convicted of the murder of caddish artist Rick Henzell. Convinced of Lena's innocence, Johnny ropes Nell in to help him find the truth. During their investigation, they uncover a seedy and unsavoury side to wartime Perth. British, Australian and American servicemen are in the city looking to have a good time and many of the local girls are seeking excitement and romance. What they find is less wholesome. Some of these young girls fall into prostitution and become "Lost Girls".

Nell hopes to improve conditions for these Lost Girls and for the women in Fremantle Gaol. Johnny hopes to find the true killer of Rick Henzell. The chemistry between the two main characters is immediate. They are both attractive, witty, sassy and willing to throw themselves into the fray. But Nell is "engaged" to an Australian lawyer and suspicious of Johnny's reputation. As well she might be...

Taking a Chance Details

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Jill says

'Taking a Chance' by Deborah Burrows is set in Perth in 1943, focussing on the impact the visiting American servicemen had on the lives of the people and especially young girls during the war. I enjoyed this because Perth is my hometown and I loved the descriptions of the city and its familiar landmarks; my daughter even lives in a street in Shenton Park which is similar to the one featured. Despite the often simplistic writing I enjoyed the different plot streams: the murder and the efforts of a Perth journalist and an American war correspondent to uncover the truth, the story of underage girls and their often sad fate, the rescuing of one such girl, the plight of women in Fremantle gaol, and of course, the whirlwind romance between the journalist and the American which mirrored many such liaisons at the time. The characters were well drawn and believable and the era painstakingly recreated, though sometimes it felt as if the author had researched something so it had to go in. But I couldn't put it down. Even the romance was lovely - and believable, because we know it happened so often in wartime.

Dale Harcombe says

Four and a half stars.

I read A Stranger in my Street the first book by Deborah Burrows and really enjoyed it. That is why I was attracted to this book.

The time is 1943. Nell Fitzgerald is unofficially engaged to Rob who is away with the war. Nell writes a fashion column for the newspaper. But she has ambition. As a last resort when others are not available she is sent to cover the murder trial of Lena Mitrovic convicted of murdering her artist lover. In the court room Nell meets Johnny Horvath, an American Pulitzer prize winning journalist.

I liked the character of Nell. She is ambitious yet despite outward appearances of confidence, strangely shy. She also has a caring streak in her. When she and Johnny are thrown together by the newspaper to work on a feature article, she finds mystery abounds and not everyone is quite as they seem.

This story is very readable. It had me turning pages and wanting to keep reading. I loved the insights into Perth at the time and the little details about dress, fashion and making do. Aunty May is a lovely character and Evie, a fourteen year old orphaned girl, is more complex than she first appears. The story has a murder trial, a mystery or two, missing young girls, romance, dubious rumours and a cast of fleshed out characters. While I enjoyed A Stranger in my Street, I enjoyed this one even more. Well worth reading

Marg says

Last year I read and reviewed Deborah Burrows' debut novel A Stranger in My Street. There were numerous things that I enjoyed about the book, not the least of which was the fact that it was set in my home town of Perth during WWII. Once again Burrows has turned to this time frame and setting to give us a story that is a strong combination of history, mystery and romance.

Nell Fitzgerald is a journalist who works for one of the more sensationalist of the newspapers in Perth. Whilst she worked hard to become a journalist, she is quite content in her current role where she writes the fashion column, the highlight of which is a weekly column advising how to rework hats in this time of austerity. It's not that Nell isn't ambitious - deep down inside she is - but more that she feels that she is

helping to raise spirits and she knows what her own future holds namely marriage to a good man, her lawyer fiancé, who is currently on duty in Melbourne.

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Lauren K says

4.5 stars

Taking a chance is Deborah Burrows second novel set in Perth, Australia during wartime featuring an intriguing crime element. It's the 1940's and Nell Fitzgerald is an aspiring journalist, currently working on a fashion column for The Marvel.

Nell's quite content with life, writing her column and awaiting the return of her boyfriend Rob until she meets war correspondent (and her idol) John "Johnny" Horvath at a local murder trial where they are both reporting on the outcome of the defendant, Lena Mitrovic. There's an instant connection and attraction between Jonny and Nell even though Nell doesn't want to admit it at first. The two inquisitive minds agree to work together to uncover the truth behind the murder of Lena's wife and to delve into the Perth underworld to discover the "Lost Girls".

During their investigations Nell and Johnny discover brutes, runaway young girls and a prostitution ring. Nell and her Aunt adopts the "uncontrollable child" Evie whose an orphan and at risk of detention. Some dangerous situations draw Johnny and Nell closer together as emotions run high and there's pressure to not only solve the case but potentially save some young women's lives.

Nell's increasing attraction to Johnny and their obvious connection on an emotional level and an intellectual level causes her much confusion. Her head tells her to marry the sensible, financially secure Rob, but her hearts telling her to follow the passion and uncertain future that Johnny could offer. He's a bit of a flirt and she has her reservations about whether she can really trust him.

Nell and Johnny are great characters. With Nell who hides her shyness behind her sophisticated attire, she fears failing the big feature story and she's seriously reconsidering what she wants in a relationship, does she want to be sensible or does she want passion? Nell is strong and ambitious but also feminine and nurturing. Then there's Johnny who is quite vague about his past but he is completely open about his feelings for Nell at the outset and he proves time and time again that he is reliable and trustworthy and will treat Nell as his equal. Once I got past the first chapter of adjusting to the first person viewpoint, I was hooked.

If you enjoy old school mysteries and examining a time period where so much societal and political change around women's rights and roles was taking place, then take a chance on this book (pun intended!). I really enjoy Burrows' writing style and how she brings her characters to life. After reading her first novel *A Stranger in My Street* and now *Taking a Chance* I think it's safe to say that she's making a stand in the historical genre and drawing on elements of mystery, suspense and romance to make it even more enticing.

I'm looking forward to what she brings out next!

Jenny says

Taking a Chance is a historical crime mystery set in Perth Western Australia during the second world war. Eleanor (Nell) Fitzgerald was fashion writer for Perth Newspaper until one day her boss ask her to cover the murder trial of Lena Mitrovic. However, during the trial of Lena Mitrovic, Nell meets American War Correspond, Johnny Horvath which changed her life forever. Taking a Chance continues to follow the Nell and Johnny investigation into clearing Lena Mitrovic name, intertwine with the blossoming romance between Nell and Johnny.

Taking a Chance will highlight the blight for young orphan girls during the war era. Also, about the interaction between American Soldiers and young Australia girls and the problems that produce for all governmental authorities.

Due to food rations during the war years, the readers of Taking a Chance will learn about how to make soap and shampoo. Taking a Chance will help the readers to learn about how to become a investigated journalist.

Taking a Chance is the first book I have read of Deborah Burrows, and I enjoyed the way she highlights to readers the way people lived in Perth during the war years. Also, I like the way Deborah Burrows brought her characters live for her readers.

I recommend this book.

Bree T says

It is 1943 in Perth, Australia and Eleanor "Nell" Fitzgerald is a journalist, working for a local rag. She primarily writes the women's page, providing helpful fashion advice and frugal ways to repurpose old hats in this time of rationing, where money for luxuries is almost non-existent. She plans to marry her lawyer boyfriend as soon as he returns from service, but then everything changes.

The court reporter for her paper is away and her boss sends her on the final day to hear a verdict of guilty and sentence to hang passed down to Lena Mitrovic who is believed to have murdered her lover by way of rat poison. After the conclusion, Nell meets Johnny Horvath, an American war correspondent. Johnny is handsome, charming, smart and believes that all might not be as it seems with this case. He wants Nell to help him investigate and help him get Lena out of the hellhole that is Fremantle Gaol.

Working with Johnny could give Nell the boost she needs to be able to break into features writing. The more they dig around the more they uncover about the less savoury side of wartime Perth – there are some unscrupulous American soldiers preying on teenage girls, plying them with food and alcohol to get what they want, girls running away from home, drawn by the talk of the soldiers and the gifts they bestow, countless girls marrying Americans they've known only mere weeks, some situations ending up in the divorce court. And they are chipping away at the story that Lena murdered her lover in cold blood too.

Nell finds herself torn between the choice she has made to marry a good, safe, solid and honest man and the passion and heady feelings she knows that she would be able to experience with Johnny. Security is

important to Nell and she finds herself mystified by the Australian girls that are marrying the American servicemen after knowing them mere weeks. She doesn't understand how they can throw caution to the wind like that, marry someone they barely know and think that it will work out later. Does she have the courage to be reckless and take a chance on the handsome American? Or will she let something exciting slip by?

I recently read Deborah Burrows' first novel, *A Stranger In My Street* and immediately requested her second novel, also set in Perth around a similar time, from the library. This one introduces us to 24 year old Nell, an Irish orphan who was taken in as a child by her uncle, who had migrated to Australia, his wife and their rowdy pack of children. Nell was given the opportunity to stay and finish school, almost unheard of for women at the time during the tail end of the Depression and she also went to University as well. She now writes for a weekly doing the women's page and although this is a good, secure job that pays enough to help her aunt, it's not particularly challenging and sometimes, Nell just wants more.

When she meets Johnny, the sparks fly between them immediately, despite Nell's sort of (unofficial) engagement to local lawyer Rob who is serving in the war effort. He's been in Guinea and now he's in Melbourne and they communicate via very formulaic letters. Nell knows that although her aunt likes Rob, she doesn't really approve of the match – Rob is not a Catholic and her aunt just doesn't think he's the man for her, perfectly lovely though he may be. When Nell brings Johnny home, she sees the way her aunt lights up and knows that she's going to have a hard time convincing her that nothing is going on. It seems like everyone thinks that there's something going on between her and Johnny and either they're encouraging it, like her aunt or trying to warn her off with stories of what a playboy he is.

Nell has also found herself the surprise guardian of a teenage girl named Evie, who she "rescues" from some American soldiers who were most likely going to take advantage of the intoxicated girl. Evie is a challenge – at almost 15, she's still a child in the ways of the world but she wants to grow up too fast. She's stunningly beautiful and isn't above using that to attempt to get what she wants. Flirting has become second nature to her and sulking has as well. I have to admit, at times the character of Evie irritated me. On one hand I did feel sorry for her, she was an orphan for all means really with very few prospects. But some of the choices Evie made were just not good and she often shows a lack of gratitude to Nell for essentially hauling her out of potentially ending up incarcerated. Nell also has to let go the idea of parenting Evie, who doesn't need a mother, and just be a friend but sometimes I didn't blame Nell for her frustration. I did really like the bond that developed between Evie and Nell's aunt, who proved that you can 'parent' for lack of a better word, effectively without smothering.

The chemistry between Nell and Johnny is very appealing and the fact that we never see the mysterious semi-fiancé in Melbourne makes it easy to forget his very existence. To be honest I didn't find the search for the real killer all that interesting but I did enjoy the descriptions of life in Fremantle Gaol and also Nell's attempt to document the lost girls, young teens who run away to Perth for a better life and find nothing of the sort as well as her fascination with the girls who have the courage to throw caution to the wind and marry someone they barely know.

Taking A Chance is a very enjoyable book, giving me a further taste of Perth in the war time that I came to love when I read *A Stranger On My Street*. I hope that Deborah Burrows has plenty more stories set here to enjoy in the future.

Sally Williams says

I really liked this book - 4.5 stars. It was a fascinating excursion into an exciting time in Australia's past. Nell is a fashion and beauty journo who gets involved in solving a murder mystery with a handsome American

war correspondent. I enjoyed the mystery aspect, and I didn't guess 'whodunnit'. I thought that the romance was sweet and I loved the descriptions of the fashion of the time. (One reviewer hated this - each to her own, I guess! :-)) Some women just don't like fashion, but Nell IS a fashion journo after all.) I'm fascinated by the 1940s and Australia at war, and by the lives of the women who held the homefront together.

C.A. says

An interesting look at life in Perth during the 1940's when the American's were here during the WWII. Nice and easy to read, but has lots of interesting characters.

Deborah researches the news papers from the time and other historical books about the period to add some historical relevance to fictional piece of work. She even quotes some books and research material in the back of the book for those who are history buffs and want to read more about this time in Perths' history

I got a copy of this autographed by the Author for a birthday present

Steve says

3.5 stars. I enjoyed this book, but to me, it seemed to be trying to be both murder mystery and romance, and doing neither of them well. It certainly focused more on the romance side of things, and that was okay, but I found that side to be rather predictable. The mystery side of the coin was more interesting, and I didn't work out the final reveal, but it was then immediately overshadowed by romance news. I would have preferred a little more resolution to both sides of the story.

Carolyn Mck says

I obviously chose the wrong books to take on my recent holiday as this is another one I gave away early (after flipping through it to see if it improved). I can't believe writing as shoddy as this actually gets published. If the author used the word 'nice' one more time I thought I would scream. The story (a combination of murder mystery and social history) had some merit but the writer pulled too many strings too obviously and I couldn't get past the flatness of the prose.

Alicia Mikulandra says

I absolutely loved this book. This is the second one iv read by this author and she does not disappoint. I particularly like how her books are set in Perth (my home) so I can really relate to it. I was also pleasantly surprised that in this book the character lived in the exact same street in Shenton park as my grandparents lived. I spent a lot of time there growing up and found the author describes the street exactly as it was. Aside From all that. I loved the story line and I could not put the book down. Five stars?????

Emily says

Loved this book! Nell was such an enjoyable character, she is really relatable, due to her ambiguous and determined nature. The story was fast-paced, full of intrigue, humour and romance.

I enjoyed the family dynamics between Nell, Aunty May and Evie, the author did a good job at bringing warmth and depth to them.

Also, LOVED, LOVED, reading about the descriptions of all the amazing 1940's clothes, jewellery and perfume Nell wears.

Finally, I enjoyed the dynamics between Nell and Johnny, the author made their growing relationship fun and interesting to read until the end.

This has to be my favourite book written by the author so far!

Shelleyrae at Book'd Out says

For some reason I had expected that the characters from *A Stranger in My Street*, Deborah Burrows debut novel, would reappear in *Taking a Chance*, instead, the author introduces two new protagonists at the center of another mystery in wartime Perth, Australia.

In *Taking a Chance*, twenty four year old journalist, Eleanor "Nell" Fitzgerald, reluctantly becomes involved with a convalescing American war time correspondent's crusade to prove a woman, tried and convicted for her lover's murder, innocent. Captain Johnny Horvath is charming, handsome and persuasive and Nell, with ambitions of using her degree in English Literature for more than penning an admittedly popular fashion advice column, agrees to assist him with his investigation.

Proving Lena Mitrovic innocent forms the bulk of the mystery plot as Nell and Johnny investigate the victims life, looking for evidence that could exonerate the woman. As they follow a trail of heartbreak, jealousy and greed in the artist's commune where Lena and her lover lived, they encounter small town bullies, a woman crazed by grief and uncover a story of four missing young girls.

For me, the most fascinating part of the story is Burrows expose of the less desirable result of US servicemen flooding into Perth. Young, naive women, thrilled by the attentions of the exotic, cashed up visitors and swept away by the idea of wartime romance were vulnerable to exploitation. The lucky ones found themselves married to someone they barely knew, the unlucky found themselves left behind, humiliated, with their reputation in tatters, the very unlucky became 'Lost Girls', tricked or forced into prostitution. The plight of these young girls becomes part of Johnny and Nell's investigation when clues point to two of the missing girls from Lena's community being involved in the murder and becomes of personal interest to Nell when she and Johnny rescue fourteen year old orphan Eve from a couple of drunk and belligerent sailors.

I really liked the way in which Burrows developed the relationship between Nell and Johnny, she allows it to evolve quite naturally despite the intensity of their situation and Johnny's imminent return to active service. Nell is determined to ignore her growing attraction to Johnny, who has a reputation as a bit of a 'cad'. She expects to marry her long time boyfriend, a lawyer, when he returns from his wartime secondment but finds it increasingly difficult to resist Johnny's charm. Nell is worried that taking a chance on Johnny's affections

being true will leave her another heartbroken and humiliated statistic.

Just as in *A Stranger in My Street*, I really enjoyed the blend of mystery and romance in *Taking A Chance*. I loved revisiting wartime Perth (my hometown) and was once again impressed by the author's ability to seamlessly integrate the historical detail of time and place. With all of that, combined with strong characterisation and a well crafted plot, I can only recommend you 'take a chance' on this entertaining and engaging novel.

Terri-lee Toni says

A wonderfully mysterious & endearing read. Loved it more than *Stranger in My Street*. I'm going to miss Nell & Johnny.

Paula Clark says

A wonderful historical look at wartime Perth and the influx of American servicemen. A very enjoyable storyline with a bit of intrigue, murder, mystery and of course love.

I particularly enjoyed the developing relationship between Johnny and Nell and especially Nell's constant bantering with herself over how it would never work! What can I say about Aunty May - such a wise, perceptive and caring woman. Everyone needs an Aunty May :)
