

City of Light

By Lauren Belfer

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City of Light

The year is 1901. Buffalo, New York, is poised for glory. With its booming industry and newly electrified streets, Buffalo is a model for the century just beginning.

Louisa Barrett has made this dazzling city her home. Headmistress of Buffalo's most prestigious school, Louisa is at ease in a world of men, protected by the titans of her city. But nothing prepares her for a startling discovery: evidence of a murder tied to the city's cathedral-like power plant at nearby Niagara Falls. This shocking crime--followed by another mysterious death--will ignite an explosive chain of events. For in this city of seething intrigue and dazzling progress, a battle rages among politicians, power brokers, and industrialists for control of Niagara. And one extraordinary woman in their midst must protect a dark secret that implicates them all…

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
City of Light is quite simply electrifying. Not that there's anything simple about this rich novel, which is first and foremost an examination of illusion, invisibility, and power--physical and personal. Set in the spring of 1901, as preparations for the Pan-American Exposition would seem to promise Buffalo, New York, a permanent place in the world, Lauren Belfer's book is narrated by the never-married headmistress of a fashionable girls' school. At 36, Louisa Barrett does her best to free her charges from their societal shackles. "I'm rather ashamed of all the things I've been able to give my students through the subterfuge of training them to be better wives," she says proudly. What Louisa is most concerned about, however, is her 9-year-old goddaughter, Grace Sinclair, who has grown increasingly unstable since her mother's sudden death. Meanwhile, Grace's father is heading up Buffalo's hydroelectric power plans with dangerous zeal--much to the chagrin of local conservationists who oppose any exploitation of Niagara Falls. Will Tom's intensity, which smacks of fanaticism, extend so far as murder?

But this offers only the barest idea of Belfer's complex grid. In 500 fast pages, she creates a fascinating, disquieting world in which nothing is what it seems. As Louisa battles against her instinct for self-preservation, her past--particularly a vile encounter with the corpulent Grover Cleveland--threatens to undermine her carefully created persona and loose her greatest secret. Looking back on the events of 1901 from the safety (and disappointment) of 1909, Louisa is the most astringent and intriguing of narrators. To Lauren Belfer's endless credit, *City of Light* is panoramic, subtle, and very physical. In her first novel, she makes us feel the rush of water, the thrill of light, the snap, crackle, and pop of social tension, and--alas for Louisa--the despair of tragic inevitability. --*Sophie Atherton*

From Publishers Weekly
A gift for social nuance and for authoritatively controlled narration shapes this compelling debut, which sets one young woman's extraordinary fate against the backdrop of the political struggles over the burgeoning electric industry as it began to harness the power of Niagara Falls at the turn of this century. Louisa Barrett, headmistress of a prestigious girls' seminary in Buffalo, N.Y., operates in the city's social circles with a freedom generally not accorded to other women. People assume her to be "without passion or experience," she observes, and she proceeds to tell her story with the clarity and restraint of a Jane Austen heroine. Louisa gradually reveals the great secret and sorrow of her life: having been raped by a high-powered politician (readers will gasp at the implications of his identity), Louisa secretly gave birth to a daughter nine years earlier, and arranged for the baby's adoption by her best friend, Margaret Sinclair, who has recently died. When Louisa visits her daughter Grace's father, Tom Sinclair, the idealistic businessman spearheading the building of the newest powerhouse at the Falls, she overhears an exchange between Tom and a famous engineer that arouses suspicion when the first of two murders of power company engineers occurs soon afterward. The city is embroiled in a battle between environmental preservationists protesting the diversion of Niagara's waters, and industrialists inspired by the benefits of electricity, and Louisa begins to understand the desperate measures to which each side will resort. Meanwhile, she is poised for a time to choose between two men: a prominent reporter who falls in love with her, and Tom, marriage to whom would make her legally Grace's mother. Belfer's delineation of society's power structure, deftly portrayed in the controversy over the Falls and the city fathers' preparations for the Pan-American Exposition, undergird a many-layered zinger of a conclusion. The rich mix of fictional and historical figures includes a family from Buffalo's black middle class, presidents Cleveland and McKinley, and immigrant power-station workers who risk life and limb. With the assurance of an established writer, Belfer delivers a work of depth and polishAan unsentimentalized story complete with dangerous liaisons, gorgeous descriptions of the Falls and a central

character whose voice is irresistible to the last page of her tragic story. $200,000 ad/promo; BOMC main selection; simultaneous BDD audio; author tour; foreign rights sold in U.K., Germany, Italy, France and Sweden. (May) FYI: Belfer has been selected for B&N's Discover New Writers program.
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From Library Journal
In "the city of light"--Buffalo at the turn of the century--headmistress Louisa Barrett walks a tightrope between her ideals and the demands of the wealthy class she serves. Through her we get a panoramic view of the city's classes--but we're also drawn into Louisa's struggles. What's remarkable about this grand, thundering novel is its ease in balancing the social and the personal. (LJ 5/1/99)
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Detra Satterwhite:

People live in this new day of lifestyle always try and and must have the free time or they will get large amount of stress from both daily life and work. So , once we ask do people have free time, we will say absolutely yes. People is human not a robot. Then we inquire again, what kind of activity do you have when the spare time coming to a person of course your answer can unlimited right. Then do you try this one, reading textbooks. It can be your alternative with spending your spare time, typically the book you have read is actually City of Light.

Tara Thornton:

Playing with family inside a park, coming to see the water world or hanging out with close friends is thing that usually you will have done when you have spare time, then why you don't try factor that really opposite from that. 1 activity that make you not sensation tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition details. Even you love City of Light, it is possible to enjoy both. It is fine combination right, you still would like to miss it? What kind of hangout type is it? Oh can happen its mind hangout people. What? Still don't have it, oh come on its named reading friends.

Timothy Pace:

Within this era which is the greater person or who has ability to do something more are more valuable than other. Do you want to become among it? It is just simple approach to have that. What you need to do is just spending your time almost no but quite enough to enjoy a look at some books. One of several books in the top collection in your reading list is usually City of Light. This book and that is qualified as The Hungry Inclines can get you closer in turning out to be precious person. By looking up and review this publication you can get many advantages.

Anna Baron:

A lot of people said that they feel weary when they reading a publication. They are directly felt the idea when they get a half areas of the book. You can choose typically the book City of Light to make your own reading is interesting. Your current skill of reading proficiency is developing when you such as reading. Try to choose very simple book to make you enjoy to see it and mingle the opinion about book and examining especially. It is to be 1st opinion for you to like to available a book and study it. Beside that the e-book City of Light can to be your friend when you're sense alone and confuse using what must you're doing of the time.

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