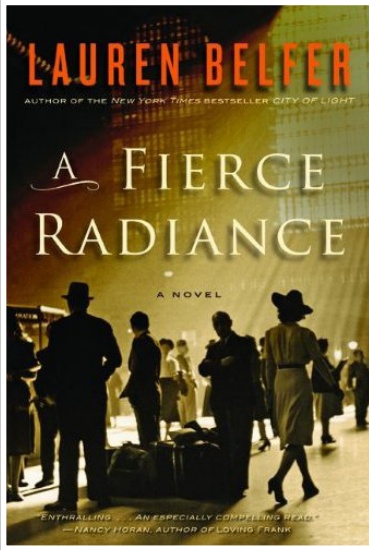


❖ A FIERCE RADIANCE

Lauren Belfer, HarperCollins, 2010, \$25.99, hb, 544pp, 9780061252518



the wonder drug; danger to herself and her young son; and the possibility of family and legacy via an estranged and ruthless father who wants to profit from the research.

This fulsome tale of a modern marvel, and what life was like before it became ubiquitous, crackles with twists and turns, including the paths of Detective Kreindler, as he infiltrates the fifth column, and Dr. Stanton, who finds links to Claire's father that lead to murder. Once again we're reminded that no great fortune was made without government assistance at its beginnings. The novel is inhabited by the radiance of lost souls, too: from Claire's daughter, whose death haunts her, to the patients who succumb, to wartime casualties, to haunting memories of parents lost in the flu pandemic that followed the last war. It's also a beautiful valentine to 1940s New York City and its neighborhoods, painted with great affection. Although a more careful edit would have made a tighter reading experience, *A Fierce Radiance's* life, humanity, and crack mystery was worth the wait. Highly recommended.

Eileen Charbonneau

EDITORS' CHOICE

Set on the home front of New York City during World War II, Belfer's second novel (after the acclaimed *City of Light*) follows the development of penicillin to be used in the war effort. Though it's told from many viewpoints, we mostly follow photographer for *Life* magazine Claire Shipley. Her journey begins at the bedside of a hopeless patient at the Rockefeller Institute who has a miraculous recovery followed by a swift and agonizing death once the antibiotic runs out. Without a happy outcome, her boss kills the story, but Claire is soon embroiled in intrigue, murder, betrayal and espionage surrounding its continuing development. She also finds love with James Stanton, a physician developing

sidekick 352 Jenkins are in Matabeleland. Accompanied by his redoubtable wife Alice, Fonhill is acting on behalf of Cecil John Rhodes, who is keen to open the territory to the benefits of Victorian civilization. However, the court of King Lobengula is a dangerous place and the intrepid trio find themselves involved in a dangerous game of politics, when the ambitions of Rhodes collide with the colonial ambitions of the Portuguese envoy, Manuel de Sousa. When friction develops between Rhodes and the Matabele king, Fonhill finds himself drawn into war, which culminates in the Shangani River massacre.

As with all his previous Fonhill novels, John Wilcox provides an exciting story of derring-do. All the characters are well-drawn and believable. The Matabele War was a virtual sideshow in the history of Victorian military history, but it provides an excellent framework for more rip roaring action against a background of Victorian colonial expansionism. Action, humour, a murderous

villain, military heroism and stupidity, all grounded in strong research – what more could you ask for. Recommended.

Mike Ashworth

STOLEN PROMISE

Lisa Marie Wilkinson, Medallion, 2010, \$7.95/C\$8.95/£6.99, pb, 327pp, 9781605420691

The story begins in England in 1806 when Jade, a Romani girl, runs away from an unwanted betrothal. She falls in with Evan Dark, a visiting American who turns out to have close ties to the Romani himself. When Evan returns her to her clan, they judge her disgraced, saying no Romani would want her, and force Jade to marry Evan in a Romani ceremony. Jade makes a bargain with Evan to accompany him to America, posing as his indentured servant. Once in Charleston, Glorianna, Evan's arrogant betrothed, and his resentful half-brother Colin provide obstacles for the growing attraction between Evan and Jade.

While I like to learn new things via reading historical fiction, the author's Romani language lessons were too heavy-handed. There are ways to better integrate vocabulary into the story without being so didactic. Either the printer made mistakes and omitted asterisks between certain paragraphs, or else Wilkinson needs to work on transitions. Several times I was confused about where (or whether) the plot was suddenly jumping. The main characters weren't very likeable, and I thought some of the plot points strayed too far into melodramatic territory. Nice try regarding the unusual Romani setting, but I can't recommend this historical romance.

B.J. Sedlock

| 20th century |

INFAMOUS

Ace Atkins, Putnam, 2010, \$25.95/\$32.50, hb, 416pp, 9780399156304

George "Machine Gun" Kelly was one of the well known, but curiously now forgotten gangsters of the lawless Midwest in the 1930s. His weapon of choice earned him the colorful nickname and notoriety as Public Enemy Number 1. Ace Atkins was drawn to this larger than life character, however, for the role his erratic wife Kathryn played in his meteoric rise and equally speedy fall.

The two are certainly far from the stereotypical gangster duo one has come to expect. *Infamous* is a finely crafted historical adventure owing to the author's keen grasp of building suspense into a story populated with some of the most fascinating characters this side of Elmore Leonard. The tale revolves around Kathryn and George Kelly's kidnapping of Charles Urschel, a wealthy Southwestern oil baron who is both victim and twisted personality at one and the same time.

The husband and wife kidnapers are a study in contrasts. George Kelly is seemingly challenged by original thought and talented only in consuming alcohol while Kathryn appears to be an intelligent but untrustworthy schemer only concerned with herself and her hardscrabble family. Their up-and-down relationship will leave the reader guessing. Leading the FBI's pursuit is Gus T. Jones, a lawman who seems to belong in the time of Wyatt Earp and Billy the Kid rather than in the Depression in hot pursuit of machine gun carrying outlaws. Oilman Urschel and the criminals the Kellys encounter (principally a bank robber named Harvey Bailey) join with Jones, Kathryn, and George to bring the tale of 1930s lawmen and Public Enemy #1 to life.

I doubt very much any reader will regret riding along with Machine Gun Kelly and his wife on their journey to fame and disaster.

John R. Vallely

MAP OF THE INVISIBLE WORLD

Tash Aw, Spiegel & Grau, 2010, \$25.00/C\$32.99, hb, 336pp, 9780385527965 / Fourth Estate, 2010, £7.99, pb, 400pp, 9780007349982