



# City of Promise: A Novel of New York's Gilded Age

*Beverly Swerling*

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**City of Promise: A Novel of New York's Gilded Age** Beverly Swerling

**Beverly Swerling's critically acclaimed epic saga continues as New York emerges from the Civil War into the Gilded Age—a city marked by soaring expansion and teeming with unbridled ambition and dazzling glamour.**

It is 1864. The South's surrender is inevitable, and Manhattan is at the heart of the recovering nation's surge to prosperity. On its bustling streets crowds hustle from place to place amid a maelstrom of carriages and horse-drawn trolleys. Vanderbilt's new Grand Central Depot and the glittering Ladies' Mile shine as beacons of the city's burgeoning wealth.

Joshua Turner returns home from the War with only one leg, but his ambition intact, and sees opportunity in the exponential growth of vital city workers—the managers and clerks who churn New York's economic life. This new middle class must live in dreary “family residences,” where everyone eats in a shared dining room and no woman can have a key to her own front door. Manhattan, Joshua realizes, has limited land but unlimited air. He aspires to build the city's first apartment houses for everyman, a daring vision that will make him New York's first true real estate titan but will also attract the dangerous attention of a shadowy figure from Josh's days in a notorious Confederate prison.

Meanwhile, the irresistible and clever Mollie Brannigan, raised by her extraordinary Auntie Eileen in perhaps the toniest bordello in town, is resigned at age twenty-two to spinsterhood . . . till Joshua finds her at Macy's, the city's largest emporium, and takes her coaching in Central Park, while explaining why the millionaire mansions that line their route are not how he sees the future. In Joshua's love Mollie finds a world of possibilities she had not dared to dream, but it is her aunt's intervention that makes them real. How ironic, then, that a secret Eileen thought left behind in Ireland will force Mollie to employ all her wits to protect not just her chance at happiness but her life.

This is New York at a time of unyielding progress and technological wonder, a bustling metropolis coming into its own, as its skyline is transformed by the proliferation of ever-taller buildings and the Brooklyn Bridge slowly rises out of the East River. Vividly imagined and awash in period detail and the unforgettable characters that only Beverly Swerling can conjure, *City of Promise* delivers a historical adventure of suspense and intrigue, daring plot twists and bitter rivalries, and the captivating love story of two people struggling to forge their own destiny.

## City of Promise: A Novel of New York's Gilded Age Details

Date : Published August 9th 2011 by Simon & Schuster

ISBN : 9781439136942

Author : Beverly Swerling

Format : Hardcover 432 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, New York

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# From Reader Review *City of Promise: A Novel of New York's Gilded Age* for online ebook

## Jennifer says

This is a great beach book. A few holes in the plot, but not enough to sink it. It has a good pace, good twists, accurate history, and the guys in white hats prevail.

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## Catherine Tanaka says

I've only given this book 3 stars, not because it's not well written and engaging, it's just that the reader has to be interested in New York and how it developed, and I have limited interest in that topic. However, for an interested reader I think it'd be a 4-5 star book as Beverly Swerling is a great writer and her stories very engaging.

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## Liene Stevens says

Cumbersome. I like historical fiction, and made it about 3/4's through hoping the writing and story would get better, but stopped reading because it became even more unbelievable and ridiculous towards the end.

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## Holly Weiss says

### Rollicking Fun and Intrigue on the Streets of Old New York

*City of Promise*, fourth installment in Beverly Swerling's acclaimed New York City saga, spans the time from the Civil War to the Gilded Age of the 1880s. The stories of the Turner and Devrey families continue. The book brims over with the city's explosive expansion, gripping characters and a plot that highlights 19th century social mores. The book cover features fireworks over the newly erected Brooklyn Bridge, but the real sparklers are within its pages.

We have followed Beverly Swerling's characters and their descendants through two centuries since the New York City saga began in *City of Dreams: A Novel of Nieuw Amsterdam and Early Manhattan*. In this latest installment, Josh and Mollie Turner negotiate the ups and downs of their marriage almost as well as their dream to build "French flats," leased one-floor apartments stacked into a high rise well north of the city. We sense a collision course will ensue with the project but seeing how it unfolds is revelatory. Along the way we bump into arsonists, brothel owners, real estate tycoons, blackmailers, kidnappers and spies.

The real star of *City of Promise* is New York itself. Swerling's ability to cram period detail into an absorbing plot makes you feel you're walking the city streets along with the characters. Grand mansions spread northward, subways threaten to run underground, and apartment buildings stretch skyward. Ride a steam-driven Otis elevator. Attend the opening of the Metropolitan Opera. Stay on top of events with the *New York Times*, an upscale newspaper. Learn about Edison's improvements to the Bell telephone, steel-girded

apartment buildings and a fashion revelation called the maternity dress.

Beverly Swerling loves New York, evidenced by her five superbly researched novels about its history. Her next novel (coming from Viking in 2013) is set in London in both Tudor and contemporary times. Several of her early books, originally published as written by Beverly Byrne and Beverly S. Martin, will soon be available as eBooks.

Swerling expertly creates fascinating characters that inform us of history. Her knowledge of New York City's history and geography illuminates and concretizes her subject. *City of Promise* is so absorbing and suspenseful that when the last page is turned, the reader is unaware that he had a history lesson to top that of a college classroom.

No worries if you haven't read the other books in the series, as the last one stands on its own. How refreshing to see authors take a different tack than in previous books. Swerling has upped her game in *City of Promise*. Instead of relying on surgical procedures and salacious scenes, she turns her beloved Big Apple into a hero. Intrigue and entertainment are its close friends to the last page. In this reviewer's mind, it is the best book of the series.

Simon and Schuster graciously provided the review copy. The opinions expressed are unbiased and entirely those of the reviewer.

Reviewed by Holly Weiss, author of Crestmont

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### **Erin says**

I'd already read one of Swerling's books and enjoyed the historical fiction so I thought I'd check out more. This book was great. It captivated me from the start. The characters are actually descendants from *City of Dreams*. The book is set in the late 1700s as Manhattan is moving farther north. The main female character lives with her aunt in a whorehouse and is destined to be a spinster (at 21!!). She moves to a boardinghouse and takes a job at Macy's in an attempt to find a husband. She had been altering pants for a man who presumably lost his leg in the civil war (actually lost it after the war getting caught in an animal trap escaping from being a POW). The man wants to thank her and they meet and fall in love and marry. He has grand dreams of building apartments in upper NYC. But he has enemies and others who to piggyback off his success. The couple goes thru many trials and tribulations, meeting interesting characters such as a dwarf, a Jewish pawnseller, an eccentric old woman, and more. The story was packed with action and I didn't want to put it down. You were rooting for the couple the whole time! Everything culminates in a bit of a surprise ending that had me tearing up.

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### **Mellanie C says**

I registered a book at [BookCrossing.com](http://www.BookCrossing.com)!  
<http://www.BookCrossing.com/journal/13132180>

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## **Shannon says**

If you're looking for a good book about Gilded Age New York, read *Savage Girl*. It's much better.

This book has a lot of potential, and I think if the author followed another family in addition to Josh and Mollie, it would have been four or even five stars from me. By far the biggest lack was in the medical detail. There was none. Pretty much literally. There were doctors/physicians in the family, but we pretty much never heard from them. That is what I think made this series so great, is seeing the medical knowledge increase and expand with every time jump or new book. But that was missing in this book.

Instead, we got a mostly annoying main character in Josh who can be downright rude to his wife at times, yet charming at others. His personality just didn't work for me. Very few things about him made me like him. I liked Mollie well enough though.

The beginning of the book, with the courting and all that, was fairly interesting, as was the climax, but the soggy middle was just that--soggy. The stuff with the Brooklyn Bridge and the first apartments, etc, are very interesting historical events, sure, but they can't support a book of this length.

If there were a few more characters, or if the main characters had more interesting lives, it might have been four stars. But as it is, it was just too boring for that.

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## **Kim Faires says**

This book is part of a series but I didn't know that. It worked as a stand alone too. I was drawn into it and enjoyed it. The intrigue component seemed to be a little drawn out in my opinion though.

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## **Emily says**

No where near as good as the previous books in the series.

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## **Robbie Sparrow says**

I had not been previously introduced to Beverly Swerling's "City of..." series; in fact I picked this book up at the library because it looked rather interesting (insert remark about "judging a book by its cover" here). This book is the second of the series, which likely explains why I was more confused than I had anticipated when beginning the book--some characters seemed to already know one another in very intimate ways. However, after the second chapter this book transitioned into its own story, and not having previously read the first book became a non issue.

This book was very well written--one of the best historical fiction novels I have read, though my experience in the genre is rather limited. I enjoyed the way that the characters all maintained a sense of independent spirit in the book (at least the main characters, anyway). Each of the main characters is multi-dimensional, and none of them operates with a single-track mind. For example, even the female lead Mollie was very

independently-minded considering the time period of the book. She was neither a completely submissive housewife, nor was she of the mindset that she needed to always prove her independent spirit and bring about social change. In fact she was my favorite character in the book because she could be so full of surprises--she might be damsel in distress to comfort her husband (and help boost his confidence) while at the next moment assert herself and her sharp mind (and wit!) to accomplish the task at hand.

Furthermore I appreciated the amount of detail and historical reference this book made to the real New York City circa mid-1800's. Hearing the opinions and attitudes of citizens about the "impossible structure" that would become the Brooklyn Bridge, understanding the need that brought the elevated (and underground) trains to the city, and watching how Edwardian traditions still play out in everyday life were all themes that enhanced this story.

All in all a great story. I believe I will be returning to this series in the future so that I may find out what happens to these characters in the end.

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### **Oletta says**

Fascinating microcosm of early New York history.

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### **Erika says**

3.5 stars

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### **Denise says**

5.0 out of 5 stars -- I love this series and I hope this is not the last one! Historical fiction with characters you "live" with -- so many emotions. Very interesting saga of the settling and growth of New York. This book was set during the "Gilded Age" (1864-1883) when electricity and underground trains came to the city and things were changing as rapidly as the economy would bear. Futures and fates hung on the decisions of a powerful few!

I am recommitting this to everyone I know -- and I am keeping my fingers crossed that one day it will be a mini series or movie!

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### **Rio Ippoliti says**

Disappointed after having read City of Dreams but I managed to stay stuck with Swerling for the rest of the series which must mean something.

Started off great, thought we would have a strong female role model paving her own way but that turned right into Mollie becoming fully reliant on her husband, turning into a deep depression when they couldn't have children, letting her husband rape her and not speaking for something like five years? Trash.

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## Angie says

I haven't read any of Swerling's other novels, but this one was typical for a historical novel: rich with history, somewhat lacking in plot, and stock full of flat characters. It took me a very long time to get into the book, and for the first couple hundred pages I kept debating with myself whether it was worth my time to finish it.

However, it did get better; either that, or I simply got used to Swerling's writing. It was interesting to experience the mid-1800s life through the eyes of a childless mother and a prosperous businessman in a thriving metropolis. Swerling captured the time period very realistically. Among her strengths, setting is perhaps Swerling's strongest.

I felt like the story itself, however, needed a few more rewrites. Many of the transitions were choppy and unconnected, many of the characters felt the same to me (with the exception of Aunt Eileen), and the Clifford plot never interested me--he was more of a wild card that just wouldn't go away. The prologue was completely unrelated to the rest of the book, and the wedding night scene was a bit overly descriptive.

However, the ending was very satisfying, which redeemed the book quite a bit for me. I was left with hope for the characters, and not simply because Clifford was dead and Mollie was finally given a chance to be a mother; it wasn't an ending, but rather a beginning. Life goes on.

City of Promise is a promising idea for a novel; however, it wasn't as good as I think it could have been.

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