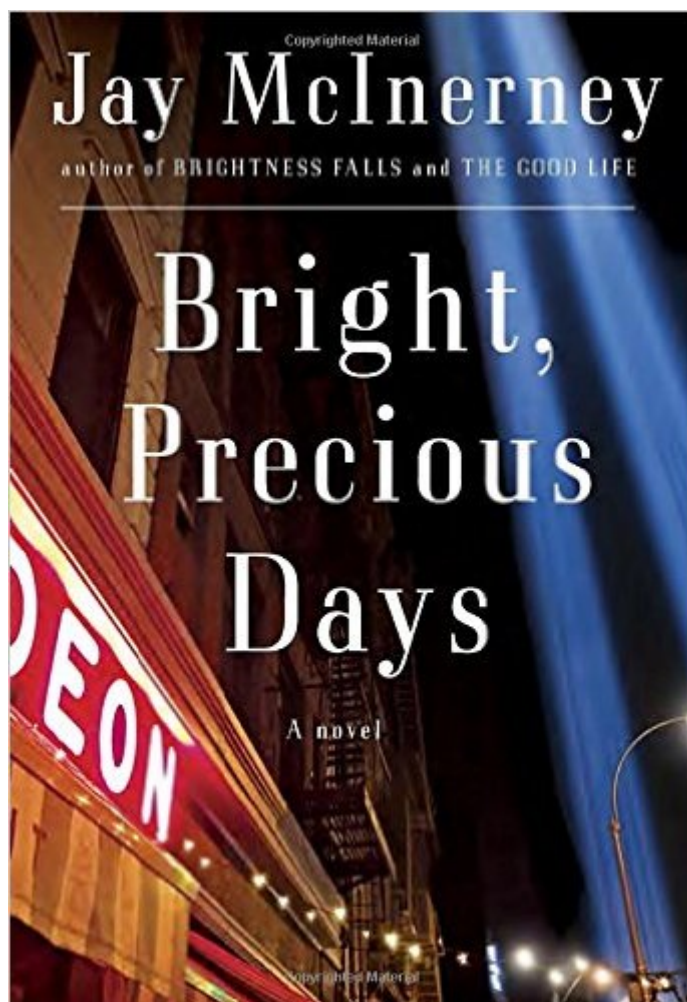


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Bright, Precious Days: A Novel



Synopsis

From the best-selling author of *Bright Lights, Big City*: a sexy, vibrant, cross-generational New York story--a literary and commercial triumph of the highest order. Even decades after their arrival, Corrine and Russell Calloway still feel as if they're living the dream that drew them to New York City in the first place: book parties or art openings one night and high-society events the next; jobs they care about (and in fact love); twin children whose birth was truly miraculous; a loft in TriBeCa and summers in the Hamptons. But all of this comes at a fiendish cost. Russell, an independent publisher, has superb cultural credentials yet minimal cash flow; as he navigates a business that requires, beyond astute literary judgment, constant financial improvisation, he encounters an audacious, potentially game-changing or ruinous opportunity. Meanwhile, instead of chasing personal gain in this incredibly wealthy city, Corrine devotes herself to helping feed its hungry poor, and she and her husband soon discover they're being priced out of the newly fashionable neighborhood they've called home for most of their adult lives, with their son and daughter caught in the balance. Then Corrine's world is turned upside down when the man with whom she'd had an ill-fated affair in the wake of 9/11 suddenly reappears. As the novel unfolds across a period of stupendous change--including Obama's historic election and the global economic collapse he inherited--the Calloways will find themselves and their marriage tested more severely than they ever could have imagined.

Book Information

Hardcover: 416 pages

Publisher: Knopf; 1 edition (August 2, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1101948000

ISBN-13: 978-1101948002

Product Dimensions: 6.7 x 1.4 x 9.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars See all reviews (33 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #12,570 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #151 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Urban Life #412 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Women's Fiction > Domestic Life #643 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Family Life

Customer Reviews

Jay McInerney's new novel, "Bright, Precious Days", is like *Sex and the City* only with married

people rather than singletons. Russell and Corrine Calloway met in college (Brown), and as the novel opens, set in New York City in 2006, Russell is a book publisher and Corrine runs a non-profit food charity; they have eleven-year old twins. As the novel progresses it flashes back to the 1980s when the couple's college friend, Jeff, was living the "Bright Lights, Big City" life of sex, drugs and rock 'n roll, excess. (A working knowledge of NYC - the boroughs and neighborhoods - is an asset while reading this novel, but not a necessity.) Then there is Luke, whom Corrine met serving in a soup kitchen immediately after 9/11. They part after a brief (90 days to be exact) affair; Luke moving to South Africa to run a vineyard. But has that fire really been quashed or will Corrine succumb to temptation when Luke returns to NYC? And just how heavy is Russell's editorial hand? I could make the argument that this novel is a work of historical fiction - recent history, to be sure, but rich in subject matter. The narrative revisits the drug-fueled "preppy bohemian" life of the 1980s; with that setting as well as the first few years after 9/11 (the "aughts"), we, the readers, know things about the future that Corrine and Russell do not...for example, the financial crash of 2008 loomed large in my mind as McInerney describes lavish spending and high real-estate prices. We know that those "bright, precious days" will not last. "Bright, Precious Days" is well-paced and it was great fun to read about how the "other half live" in NYC lofts, dining at exclusive restaurants and attending charity galas.

Disclaimer: This is the first book I have read by this author. I understand that this is the third novel featuring Corrine and Russell Calloway as the protagonists. The preceding novels are entitled "Brightness Falls" and "The Good Life." I provided the disclaimer because I might have felt more invested in the characters had I been tracking their lives, and specifically the trajectory of their relationship, through three novels. With that said, I did not particularly enjoy or care about this couple. They are not the most likeable or sympathetic people and in many respects their problems were clearly of their own making. Having lived my whole life on the West Coast, my experience of reading about the New York City lifestyle seemed like exploring a foreign culture. The Calloways live in a rarified subculture of writers and publishers characterized by charity benefits, museums and art galleries, and summers in the Hamptons. At age 50, Russell is the owner of an independent publishing house that is teetering on the brink of bankruptcy when he makes an ill-advised decision to take on a controversial author that nearly costs him his livelihood and his reputation. Corrine, of like age, is struggling with an attraction to a wealthy man she met following the falling of the twin towers on 9/11. Amidst their own marital challenges, the relationships of their close friends are dissolving over issues of infidelity. All this takes place with the backdrop of the 2008 election bids of

John McCain and Barack Obama and the meltdown of Wall Street and, ultimately, the economy. I found the writing style very uneven. At times it felt pondering, then the momentum would build, only to slow down again.

At one point, midway through this novel, Russell Calloway reflects, angrily, that "he refused to believe that the city no longer had room for people like themselves, refused to concede New York to the Power and Money team." In a nutshell, that's the backstory to this phase of life for Russell and his wife Corrine. At the age of 50, they find themselves in the New York of 2007 where power and money rule, and where there no longer seems to be room for people like themselves -- much less the kind of people that Russell dreams should inhabit his ideal creative city, like chorus line dancers, professional waiters, bassoon players, dog walkers, used bookstores and their employees and so on. The crunch is reflected, as always, in real estate: their apartment may go condo and the Calloways won't be able to afford to buy, even as Corrine yearns for more than one bathroom for them and their 11-year-old twins to share. Meanwhile, with Corrine heading up a food nonprofit, delivering produce to food deserts, and Russell only one poor literary judgment away from driving his boutique publishing firm into the ground, they're flirting with financial disaster. But then, it's 2007, and so is the entire gilded world on the fringes of which they live -- the financial crisis is about to smite them all...McInerney has done an excellent job of capturing a certain demographic of New Yorkers -- those who take the jitney (never call it a bus...) to the Hamptons on weekends and embark on a frenzy of gala-going in the late fall and early winter. (I've been on the furthest outer fringes of that world.

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