



City of Refuge

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In the heat of late summer, two New Orleans families—one black and one white—confront a storm that will change the course of their lives.

SJ Williams, a carpenter and widower, lives and works in the Lower Ninth Ward, the community where he was born and raised. His sister, Lucy, is a soulful mess, and SJ has been trying to keep her son, Wesley, out of trouble. Across town, Craig Donaldson, a Midwestern transplant and the editor of the city's alternative paper, faces deepening cracks in his own family. New Orleans' music and culture have been Craig's passion, but his wife, Alice, has never felt comfortable in the city. The arrival of their two children has inflamed their arguments about the wisdom of raising a family there.

When the news comes of a gathering hurricane—named Katrina—the two families make their own very different plans to weather the storm. The Donaldsons join the long evacuation convoy north, across Lake Pontchartrain and out of the city. SJ boards up his windows and brings Lucy to his house, where they wait it out together, while Wesley stays with a friend in another part of town.

But the long night of wind and rain is only the beginning—and when the levees give way and the flood waters come, the fate of each family changes forever. The Williamses are scattered—first to the Convention Center and the sweltering Superdome, and then far beyond city and state lines, where they struggle to reconnect with one another. The Donaldsons, stranded and anxious themselves, find shelter first in Mississippi, then in Chicago, as Craig faces an impossible choice between the city he loves and the family he had hoped to raise there.

Ranging from the lush neighborhoods of New Orleans to Texas, Missouri, Chicago, and beyond, *City of Refuge* is a modern masterpiece—a panoramic novel of family and community, trial and resilience, told with passion, wisdom, and a deep understanding of American life in our time.

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