



A Light of Her Own

Carrie Callaghan

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A Light of Her Own is a beautifully crafted story set in seventeenth-century Holland, in which two women navigate the law, destiny, and their unstoppable ambition.

Painting is Judith Leyster's passion and calling, and she will not be dissuaded from it. Though there are many who scoff at notions of women working—or even participating in what is regarded as a man's profession—she does not back down. Meanwhile, Maria de Grebber's Catholic faith guides her through life, even though it, too, is disdained in Holland.

Carrie Callaghan imagines a profound friendship between the historical women, and Judith and Maria's stories weave together and apart, their fates carrying them. Judith struggles to keep painting in the face of adversities, including those related to her gender. Her brother brings shame to the family name, and teaching apprentices comes with fees and difficulties. Meanwhile, Maria battles a secret that weighs her down.

Holland is developed as an alluring and distinctive place. Descriptions cover every moment; they are eloquent and elegantly detailed, down to the most commonplace things, as with a mention of the light shining through the petals of a flower. The time is established through examinations of the developing art scene and the immense worth of tulips. Art and beauty are priorities in this world, and intricate descriptions capture it: of Judith's house where she paints, of lepers in a safe house. Sensory details evoke the light, the feel, and the smell of the setting.

A Light of Her Own is a riveting fictionalized account of Judith Leyster and Maria de Grebber's connections.

HANNAH HOHMAN (November/December 2018)

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