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The Cottery Winner

ALVIRAH AND WILLY STORIES

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BY MARY HIGGINS CLARK

The Lottery Winner: Alvirah and Willy Stories

Remember Me

I'll Be Seeing You

All Around the Town

Loves Music, Loves to Dance

The Anastasia Syndrome and Other Stories

While My Pretty One Sleeps

Weep No More, My Lady

Stillwatch

A Cry in the Night

The Cradle Will Fall

A Stranger Is Watching

Where Are the Children?

MARY HIGGINS CLARK

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ALVIRAH MEEHAN made her debut—if you can call it that—as a character in my novel *Weep No More, My Lady*. A cleaning woman in her late fifties, she and her plumber husband, Willy, had won forty million dollars in the New York State Lottery. Alvira immediately decided to satisfy her long held dream of going to the Cypress Point Spa and mingling with the celebrities who frequented it.

Unfortunately for Alvira, she was too smart, got on the track of a killer and became a victim herself. In the early drafts of *Weep No More, My Lady*, poor Alvira did not survive to the last page.

Then my daughter Carol Higgins Clark read the manuscript and protested, “You can’t do that. Alvira is much too funny. Besides, haven’t you knocked off enough people in this book?”

“She has to die,” I said firmly.

But Carol was so persuasive that I brought Alvira back from death’s door.

I’m certainly glad I did. I count her and Willy as dear friends. They are my only continuing characters, and now I hope you enjoy reading about their adventures as much as I enjoy writing about them.

Thanks, Carol.

For my siblings-in-law and friends,

June M. Clark and in memory of Allan Clark
Ken and Irene Clark
Agnes Partel and in memory of George Partel

Dear companions of my salad days,
aren't we all still twenty-two?

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*The Body
in the
Closet*

If Alvirah had known on that July evening what was waiting for her at her fancy new apartment on Central Park South, she would never have gotten off the plane. As it was, there was absolutely no hint of foreboding in her usually keen psyche as the plane circled for a landing.

Even though she and Willy had been bitten by the travel bug after they won forty million dollars in the lottery, and had by now taken a number of exciting trips, Alvirah was always glad to get back to New York. There was something heartwarming about the view from the airplane: the skyscrapers silhouetted against the clouds, the lights of the bridges that spanned the East River.

Willy patted her hand, and Alvirah turned to him with an affectionate smile. He looked grand, she thought, in his new

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blue linen jacket that matched the color of his eyes. With those eyes and his thick head of white hair, Willy was a double for Tip O'Neill, no mistake about it.

Alvirah smoothed her russet-brown hair, recently tinted and styled by Dale of London. Dale had marveled to hear that Alvirah was pushing sixty. "You're funning me," he had gasped. She knew such compliments were probably hollow, but she liked to hear them anyway.

Yes, Alvirah reflected as she watched the city below, life had been grand to her and Willy. In addition to allowing them to travel at will and to buy all the creature comforts one could desire, their newfound wealth had also opened new doors of opportunity in unexpected ways, such as her involvement with one of the city's major newspapers, the *New York Globe*. It all began when a *Globe* editor talked to her and Willy after they won the lottery. Alvirah had told him that she was realizing her longtime ambition to be a guest at the elegant Cypress Point Spa, and it wasn't just the makeover she was looking forward to—it was also the chance to be mingling with all the celebrities she loved to read about.

The newspaper editor, obviously spotting in Alvirah some special talent for sniffing out news, plus the perseverance to pursue it to the end, persuaded her to take on an assignment for him. He asked her to keep her eyes open and her ears alert, with the idea in mind of writing an article about her experiences at the exclusive spa. And to further aid her in the process of gathering news and impressions, he gave her a lapel pin in the shape of a sunburst that actually contained a tiny recording device. That way she could record her impressions while they were fresh, and she might even pick up a few bits of conversation from those very people she was so anxious to meet.