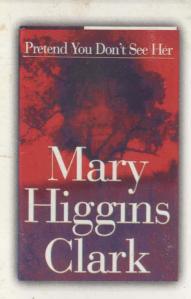
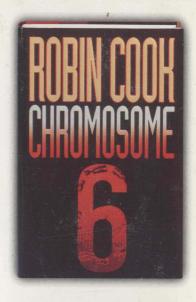
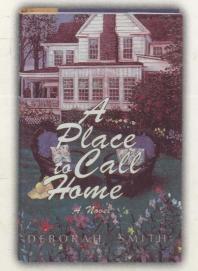
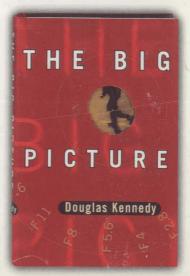
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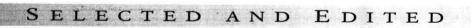
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Pretend

Mary Higgins Clark Lacey Farrell
knows something
that could cost her
her life.
It's already cost her
her identity.



ATER Lacey tried to find comfort in the thought that even if she had arrived seconds earlier, she would not have been in time to help. She would have died with Isabelle.

But it didn't happen that way. Using the key she had been given as real estate agent,

she had entered the duplex apartment on East Seventieth Street and called Isabelle's name in the exact instant that Isabelle screamed "Don't!" and a gunshot rang out.

Faced with a split-second decision to run or to hide, Lacey slammed the apartment door and slipped quickly into the hall closet. She had not even had time to fully close that door before a sandy-haired man came running down the stairs. Through the narrow opening she could see his face clearly, and it became imprinted on her mind. In fact, she had seen it before, only hours ago. The expression was now viciously cold, but this was the same man to whom she had shown the apartment earlier in the day: affable Curtis Caldwell from Texas.

She watched as he ran past her, holding a pistol in his right hand and a leather binder under his left arm. He flung open the front door and ran out of the apartment.

Lacey knew that Caldwell would realize immediately that whoever had come into the apartment was still there. A primal instinct made her rush out of the closet in order to shove the front door closed behind him. He wheeled around, and for a terrible moment their eyes locked, his pale blue irises like steely ice, staring at her. He threw himself against the door but not fast enough. It slammed shut, and Lacey snapped the bolt just as a key clicked in the lock.

Her pulse racing, she leaned against the door, trembling as the knob twisted, hoping there was no way Caldwell could get back in now.

Isabelle! Lacey thought. Fearing what she would find, she raced up the thickly carpeted stairs, through the sitting room, and into the bedroom. Isabelle lay crumpled across the bed, her bloodied hand frantically pulling at a sheaf of papers that had been under a pillow beside her.

Lacey dropped to her knees. "Isabelle," she said. She wanted to say that she would call an ambulance, that it would be all right—but the words refused to pass her lips. It was too late. Lacey could see that Isabelle was dying.

CHAPTER 1



T WAS the week after Labor Day, and from the steady ringing of the phones in the offices of Parker and Parker, it was clear that the summer doldrums were over in the Manhattan co-op market. Now things would start moving again.

"It's about time," Lacey told Rick Parker.

"I haven't had a decent sale since June." She reached for the coffee he offered. "Thanks. It's nice to have the son and heir wait on me."

"No problem. You look great, Lacey."

Lacey always felt as though Rick were undressing her with his eyes. Spoiled, handsome, and the possessor of a phony charm that he turned on at will, he made her distinctly uncomfortable. She wished his father hadn't moved him from the West Side office.

Her phone rang, and she grabbed for it with relief. "Lacey Farrell," she said.

"Miss Farrell, this is Isabelle Waring. I met you when you sold a co-op in my building last spring."

Lacey's mind went into its search-and-retrieve mode. She'd sold two apartments in May on East Seventieth—one an estate sale where she hadn't spoken to anyone except the building manager, the other the Norstrum apartment just off Fifth. She vaguely remembered chatting with an attractive fiftyish redhead in the elevator, who had asked for her business card.

Crossing her fingers, she said, "The Norstrum duplex?"

Mrs. Waring sounded pleased. "Exactly! I'm putting my daughter's apartment on the market, and I'd like you to handle it."

Lacey made an appointment with Mrs. Waring for the following morning, hung up, and turned to Rick. "What luck," she said. "Three East Seventieth. That's a great building."

"Three East Seventieth. What apartment?" he asked quickly.

"Ten B. Do you know that one by any chance?"

"Why would I know it?" he snapped. "Especially since my father, in his wisdom, kept me working the West Side for five years."

Rick left for his own office, which overlooked East Sixty-second Street. Lacey's windows faced Madison Avenue. She reveled in the constant traffic, the hordes of tourists, the well-heeled Madison Avenue types drifting in and out of the designer boutiques.

Lacey had inherited her love of New York City from her father, Jack Farrell. From the time she was little, they had explored the city together. She had inherited Jack's Irish coloring as well—fair skin, blue-green eyes, and dark brown hair.

A musician, Jack Farrell had worked in the theater, usually in the orchestra pit, although he sometimes played in clubs and the occa-

sional concert. Growing up, there wasn't a Broadway musical whose songs Lacey couldn't sing along with her dad. His sudden death just as she finished college had been a shock.

After his death her mother, a pediatric nurse, bought a condo in New Jersey. She wanted to be near Lacey's sister, Kit, and her family. Once there, she'd taken a job with a local hospital.

Fresh out of college, Lacey had found a small apartment on East End Avenue and a job at Parker and Parker Realtors, one of the biggest real estate/building management companies in Manhattan. Now, eight years later, she was one of their top agents.

Humming, she pulled out the file on the Norstrum duplex she'd sold at Three East Seventieth. Nice-sized rooms. High ceilings. Now to find out something about Mrs. Waring's place.

Lacey liked to do her homework on a prospective listing. To that end, she'd learned that it helped to become familiar with the people who worked in the buildings her firm handled. It was fortunate now that she was friends with Tim Powers, the superintendent of Three East Seventieth. She dialed his number.

According to Tim, Isabelle Waring was the mother of Heather Landi, a young singer and actress who had just begun to make it in the theater. The daughter as well of famed restaurateur Jimmy Landi, Heather had died the previous winter when her car plunged down an embankment as she was driving home from skiing in Vermont. The apartment had belonged to Heather.

When Lacey got off the phone, she sat for a long moment, remembering that she had seen Heather Landi last year in an off-Broadway musical. In fact, she remembered her in particular.

Heather had it all, Lacey thought—beauty, stage presence, and that marvelous soprano voice. A 10, as Dad would have said.

ON TUESDAY morning Isabelle Waring walked through her daughter's apartment, studying it as if with the critical eye of a real estate agent. She was glad that she had kept Lacey Farrell's business card. The day they'd met in the elevator, she had taken an instant liking to the young woman, who reminded her of Heather.

Admittedly, Lacey didn't *look* like Heather. Heather had had short, curly, light brown hair with golden highlights, and hazel eyes. She had been small, barely five feet four, with a soft, curving body. Lacey, on the other hand, was taller, slimmer, had blue-green eyes and darker, longer, straighter hair, swinging down to her shoulders, but there was something in her smile and manner that brought back a very positive memory of Heather.

After months of brief trips to New York from her home in Cleveland and making stabs at going through the apartment's five huge closets and the many drawers, and after repeatedly meeting with Heather's friends, Isabelle knew she had to put an end to this searching for reasons and get on with her life.

The fact remained, however, that she just didn't believe Heather's death had been an accident. She knew her daughter; Heather simply would not have been foolish enough to start driving home from Stowe in a snowstorm, especially so late at night. The medical examiner had been satisfied, however. And Jimmy Landi, Isabelle's ex-husband, was satisfied. If he hadn't been, he'd have torn up all of Manhattan looking for answers. But he refused to see anything sinister or suspicious in Heather's death.

Isabelle, though, couldn't accept it. At the last of their infrequent lunches, she had told Jimmy about a troubling phone conversation she'd had with their daughter just before her death. "Jimmy, Heather wasn't herself when I spoke to her. She was terribly worried about something. I heard it in her voice."

The lunch ended when Jimmy, in complete exasperation, had burst out, "Isabelle, get off it! Stop, please! This whole thing is tough enough without you constantly rehashing everything. Please, let our daughter rest in peace."

Remembering his words, Isabelle shook her head. Jimmy Landi had loved Heather more than anything in the world. And next to her, he loved power, Isabelle thought bitterly—it's what had ended their marriage. His famous restaurant, his investments, now his Atlantic City hotel and casino. No room for me ever, Isabelle thought. Maybe if he had taken on a partner years ago, the way he

has Steve Abbott now, our marriage wouldn't have failed. She realized she had been walking through rooms she wasn't really seeing, so she stopped at a window overlooking Fifth Avenue.

New York is especially beautiful in September, Isabelle mused, observing the joggers on the paths that threaded through Central Park, the nannies pushing strollers. When Heather was a baby, I used to take her to the park on days like this, she remembered.

What happened that night, Heather? Isabelle asked herself yet again. What made you take that drive? Or who made you? After that accident when you were a child—when you saw that car skid off the road and crash—you were always terrified of icy roads. Why then would you have driven over a snowy mountain at two in the morning?

The buzzing of the intercom jolted Isabelle back from the pangs of hopeless regret. It was the doorman announcing Miss Farrell.

LACEY was not prepared for Isabelle Waring's effusive, if nervous, greeting. "Good heavens, you look younger than I remembered," she said. "How old *are* you? Thirty? My daughter would have been twenty-five next week. This apartment was hers. Terrible reversal, don't you think? The natural order of life is that I'd go first and someday she'd sort through *my* things."

"I have two nephews and a niece," Lacey told her. "I can't imagine anything happening to any of them, so I think I understand something of what you are going through."

Isabelle followed her, as with a practiced eye Lacey made notes on the dimensions of the rooms. The first floor consisted of a foyer, large living and dining rooms, a small library, a kitchen, and a powder room. The second floor, reached by a winding staircase, had a master bedroom, sitting room, dressing room, and bath.

"It was a lot of space for a young woman," Isabelle explained. "Heather's father bought it for her when she came to New York after college. Now he wants me to sell the apartment. It's hard to let it go, though. . . ." Her eyes filled with tears.

"Are you sure you want to sell?" Lacey asked.

She watched helplessly as the stoic expression on Isabelle Waring's face crumbled. "I wanted to find out why my daughter died. I thought I might find an answer here, either in the apartment or from one of her friends. But her father wants me to stop pestering people, and I suppose he's right, that we have to go on, so yes, Lacey, I guess I want to sell."

Lacey covered the woman's hand with her own. "I think Heather would want you to," she said quietly.

THAT night Lacey made the twenty-five-mile drive to Wyckoff, New Jersey, where her sister, Kit, and her mother both lived. She hadn't seen them since early August, when she had left the city for a month away in East Hampton. Kit and her husband, Jay, had a summer home on Nantucket and always urged Lacey to spend her vacation with them instead.

As she crossed the George Washington Bridge, Lacey braced herself for the reproaches she knew would be part of their greeting. "You only spent three days with us," her brother-in-law would be sure to remind her. "What's East Hampton got that Nantucket doesn't?"

For one thing it doesn't have you, Lacey thought with a slight grin.

Her brother-in-law, Jay Taylor, owner of a successful restaurant-supply business, had never been one of Lacey's favorite people, but, as she reminded herself, Kit clearly is crazy about him, and between them they've produced three great kids, so who am I to criticize? If only he wasn't so pompous, she thought. Some of his pronouncements sounded like papal bulls.

As she turned onto Route 4, she realized how anxious she was to see her family, especially the kids—Todd, twelve; Andy, ten; and her special pet, shy four-year-old Bonnie. Thinking about her niece, she realized that all day she hadn't been able to shake thoughts about poor Isabelle Waring and the things she had said. The woman's pain was so palpable. She had insisted that Lacey stay for coffee and over it had continued to talk about her daughter. "I moved to Cleveland