

MARY
HIGGINS
CLARK



Deck ^{the} Halls

CAROL
HIGGINS
CLARK

Deck the Halls



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BOOKS BY MARY HIGGINS CLARK

Before I Say Good-Bye
We'll Meet Again
All Through the Night
You Belong to Me
Pretend You Don't See Her
My Gal Sunday
Moonlight Becomes You
Silent Night
Let Me Call You Sweetheart
The Lottery Winner
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?

BOOKS BY CAROL HIGGINS CLARK

Twanged
Iced
Snagged
Decked

Mary Higgins Clark

and

Carol Higgins Clark

Acknowledgments

Now that the tale is told, we are frequently asked, "Was it hard to work together?"

The answer is "No." It was fun. By the time we got to the closing pages, we were so in tandem that if we were searching for a descriptive word, we often would come out with the same one in the same breath.

Of course the journey was made smoother by the help and encouragement of others.

And so we joyfully deck the halls for our editors, Michael Korda, Chuck Adams, and Roz Lippel.

A glittering ornament for Lisl Cade, our publicist.

Silvery garlands for Associate Director of Copyediting Gypsy da Silva, copy editor Carol Catt, proofreaders Barbara Raynor and Steve Friedeman, and at Dix!, Account Executive Kelly Farley, keyboarder Dwayne Harris, and proofreader Barbara Decker.

Candy canes for our agents Gene Winick, Sam Pinkus, and Nick Ellison.

A cup of cheer for our law enforcement experts, Sgt. Steve Marron and Detective Richard Murphy, Ret., New York District Attorney's Office.

A holiday kiss for Santa's helpers, better known as our family and friends, especially John Conheeney, Irene Clark, Agnes Newton, and Nadine Petry.

And a holiday greeting to our readers. May your days be merry and bright.

God bless . . .

*In the spirit of this shared journey,
we, Mary and Carol,
are dedicating this book to each other
with love.*

Deck the Halls

Thursday, December 22nd



Regan Reilly sighed for the hundredth time as she looked down at her mother, Nora, a brand-new patient in Manhattan's Hospital for Special Surgery. "And to think I bought you that dopey crocheted rug you tripped on," she said.

"You only bought it. I caught my heel in it," the well-known mystery writer said wanly. "It wasn't your fault I was wearing those idiotic stilts."

Nora attempted to shift her body, which was anchored by a heavy plaster cast that reached from her toes to her thigh.

"I'll leave you two to assess the blame for the broken leg," Luke Reilly, owner of three funeral homes, husband and father, observed as he hoisted his long, lean body from the low bedside armchair. "I've got a funeral to go to, a dentist's appointment, and then, since our Christmas plans are somewhat altered, I guess I'd better see about buying a tree."

He bent over and kissed his wife. "Look at it this way: you may not be gazing at the Pacific Ocean, but you've got a good view of the East River." He and Nora and their only child, thirty-one-year-old Regan, had been planning to spend the Christmas holiday on Maui.

"You're a scream," Nora told him. "Dare we hope you'll arrive home with a tree that isn't your usual Charlie Brown special?"

"That's not nice," Luke protested.

"But it's true." Nora dismissed the subject. "Luke, you look exhausted. Can't you skip Goodloe's funeral? Austin can take care of everything."

Austin Grady was Luke's right-hand man. He had handled hundreds of funerals on his own, but the one today was different. The deceased, Cuthbert Boniface Goodloe, had left the bulk of his estate to the Seed-Plant-Bloom-and-Blossom Society of the Garden State of New Jersey. His disgruntled nephew and partial namesake, Cuthbert Boniface Dingle, known as C.B., was obviously bitter about his meager inheritance. After viewing hours yesterday afternoon, C.B. had sneaked back to the casket where Luke had found him stuffing rotted bits of house plants in the sleeves of the pin-striped designer suit the fastidious Goodloe had chosen as his last outfit.

As Luke came up behind C.B., he heard him whispering, "You love plants? I'll give you plants, you senile old hypocrite. Get a whiff of these! Enjoy them from now until Resurrection Day!"

Luke had backed away, not wanting to confront C.B., who continued to vent verbal outrage at the body of his less-than-generous uncle. It was not the first time Luke had heard a mourner telling off the deceased, but the use of decaying foliage was a first. Later, Luke had quietly removed the offensive vegetation. But today, he wanted to keep an eye on C.B. himself. Besides, he hadn't had a chance to mention the incident to Austin.

Luke considered telling Nora about the nephew's bizarre be-