Moonlight Becomes You

ANOVEL

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A NOVEL

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Manufactured in the United States of America
ISBN 0-684-81038-7

MARY HIGGINS CLARK

By Mary Higgins Clark

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?



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

How can I thank thee? . . . Let me count the ways.

No words are sufficient to express my gratitude to my longtime editor, Michael Korda, and his associate, senior editor Chuck Adams. A story, like a child, thrives best when it is encouraged, helped, and guided in a wise and caring atmosphere. Again and always . . . sine qua non . . . I love you guys.

Gypsy da Silva, who has been copy supervisor for many of my manuscripts, remains a candidate for sainthood with her eagle eye and cheerful patience. Bless you, Gypsy.

Kudos to my pal, author Judith Kelman, who has repeatedly gone on the Internet, the mystery of which I have not fathomed, to procure information I needed immediately.

A thousand thanks to Catherine L. Forment, Vice President of Merrill Lynch, for willingly and knowledgeably answering my many questions about stock investment and confirmation procedures.

A grateful tip of the hat to R. Patrick Thompson, President of the New York Mercantile Exchange, who interrupted a meeting to answer my inquiries about temporary restraining orders.

When I decided that it would be interesting if funeral customs became part of this story, I read fascinating books on the subject. In particular, they were Consolatory Rhetoric by Donovan J. Octs, Down to Earth by Marian Barnes, and Celebrations of Death by Metcalf Huntington.

The Newport Police Department has responded to all my phone calls with great courtesy. I'm grateful to everyone who has been so kind and hope that the police procedure contained in these pages passes inspection.

And finally, loving thanks to my daughter Carol Higgins Clark for her infallible ability to pick up my unconscious idiosyncrasies. Do you know how often you used the word decent? . . . No thirty-two-year-old

would say it like that... You used that same name for a different character ten books ago...

And now I can happily quote the words written on a monastery wall in the Middle Ages: "The book is finished. Let the writer play."

For Lisl Cade
and
Eugene H. Winick
—my publicist and my literary agent—
and both my very dear friends.

Tuesday, October 8th

Maggie tried to open her eyes, but the effort was too great. Her head hurt so much. Where was she? What had happened? She raised her hand, but it was stopped inches above her body, unable to move any farther.

Instinctively she pushed at the overhead barrier, but it did not move. What was it? It felt soft, like satin, and it was cold.

She slid her fingers to the side and down; the surface changed. Now it felt ruffled. A quilt? Was she in some kind of bed?

She pushed out her other hand to the side and recoiled as that palm immediately encountered the same chill ruffles. They were on both sides of this narrow enclosure.

What was tugging at her ring when she moved her left hand? She ran her thumb over her ring finger, felt it touch string or cord. But why?

Then memory came rushing back.

Her eyes opened and stared in terror into absolute darkness.

Frantically her mind raced as she tried to piece together what had happened. She had heard him in time to whirl around just as something crashed down on her head.

She remembered him bending over her, whispering, "Maggie, think of the bell ringers." After that, she remembered nothing.

Still disoriented and terrified, she struggled to understand. Then suddenly it came flooding back. The bell ringers! Victorians had been so afraid of being buried alive that it became a tradition to tie a string to their fingers before interment. A string threaded through a hole in the casket, stretching to the surface of the burial plot. A string with a bell attached to it.

For seven days a guard would patrol the grave and listen for the sound of the bell ringing, the signal that the interred wasn't dead after all...

But Maggie knew that no guard was listening for her. She was truly alone. She tried to scream, but no sound came. Frantically she tugged at the string, straining, listening, hoping to hear above her a faint, pealing sound. But there was only silence. Darkness and silence.

She had to keep calm. She had to focus. How had she gotten here? She couldn't let panic overwhelm her. But how? . . . How? . . .

Then she remembered. The funeral museum. She'd gone back there alone. Then she'd taken up the search, the search that Nuala had begun. Then he'd come, and . . .

Oh, God! She was buried alive! She pounded her fists on the lid of the casket, but even inside, the thick satin muffled the sound. Finally she screamed. Screamed until she was hoarse, until she couldn't scream anymore. And still she was alone.

The bell. She yanked on the string . . . again . . . and again. Surely it was sending out sounds. She couldn't hear them, but someone would. They must!

Overhead a mound of fresh, raw earth shimmered in the light of the full moon. The only movement came from the bronze bell attached to a pipe emerging from the mound: The bell moved back and forth in an arrythmic dance of death. Round about it, all was silent. Its clapper had been removed.

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I hate cocktail parties, Maggie thought wryly, wondering why she always felt like an alien when she attended one. Actually I'm being too harsh, she thought. The truth is I hate cocktail parties where the only person I know is my supposed date, and he abandons me the minute we come in the door.

She looked around the large room, then sighed. When Liam Moore Payne had invited her to this reunion of the Moore clan, she should have guessed he would be more interested in visiting with his cousins-by-the-dozens than worrying about *her*. Liam, an occasional but normally thoughtful date when he was in town from Boston, was tonight displaying a boundless faith in her ability to fend for herself. Well, she reasoned, it was a large gathering; surely she could find someone to talk to.

It was what Liam had told her about the Moores that had been the factor that made her decide to accompany him to this affair, she remembered, as she sipped from her glass of white wine and maneuvered her way through the crowded Grill Room of the Four Seasons restaurant on Manhattan's East Fifty-second Street. The family's founding father—or at least the founder of the family's original wealth—had been the late Squire Desmond Moore, at one time a fixture of Newport society. The occasion of tonight's party/reunion was to celebrate the great man's one hundred fifteenth birthday. For convenience's sake, it had been decided to have the gathering in New York rather than Newport.

Going into amusing detail about many members of the clan, Liam had explained that over one hundred descendants, direct and collateral, as well as some favored ex-in-laws, would be present. He had regaled her with anecdotes about the fifteen-year-old immigrant from Dingle

who had considered himself to be not one of the huddled masses yearning to be free but, rather, one of the impoverished masses yearning to be rich. Legend claimed that as his ship passed the Statue of Liberty, Squire had announced to his fellow steerage-class passengers, "In no time a-tall I'll be wealthy enough to buy the old girl, should the government ever decide to sell her, of course." Liam had delivered his forebear's declaration in a wonderfully broad Irish brogue.

The Moores certainly did come in all sizes and shapes, Maggie reflected as she looked about the room. She watched two octogenarians in animated conversation, and narrowed her eyes, mentally framing them through the lens of the camera she now wished she had brought. The snow white hair of the man, the coquettish smile on the woman's face, the pleasure they were obviously taking in each other's company—it would have made a wonderful picture.

"The Four Seasons will never be the same after the Moores are finished with it," Liam said as he appeared suddenly beside her. "Having a good time?" he asked, but then without waiting for an answer, introduced her to yet another cousin, Earl Bateman, who, Maggie was amused to note, studied her with obvious and unhurried interest.

She judged the newcomer to be, like Liam, in his late thirties. He was half a head shorter than his cousin, which made him just under six feet. She decided there was something of a scholarly bent reflected in his lean face and thoughtful expression, although his pale blue eyes had a vaguely disconcerting cast to them. Sandy haired with a sallow complexion, he did not have Liam's rugged good looks. Liam's eyes were more green than blue, his dark hair attractively flecked with gray.

She waited while he continued to look her over. Then, after a long moment, with a raised eyebrow, she asked, "Will I pass inspection?"

He looked embarrassed. "I'm sorry. I'm not good at remembering names and I was trying to place you. You are one of the clan, aren't you?"

"No. I have Irish roots going back three or four generations, but I'm no relation to this clan, I'm afraid. It doesn't look as though you need any more cousins anyhow."

"You couldn't be more right about that. Too bad, though, most of them aren't nearly so attractive as you. Your wonderful blue eyes, ivory skin and small bones make you a Celt. The near-black hair places you among the 'Black Irish' segment of the family, those members who owe some of their genetic makeup to the brief but significant visit from survivors of the defeat of the Spanish Armada."