



The Lost Years

By Mary Higgins Clark

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Now in mass market, the latest suspense from #1 *New York Times* bestselling author and Queen of Suspense Mary Higgins Clark, where a biblical scholar is found murdered shortly after discovering the most revered and holy document in human history, which has now gone missing...

Dr. Jonathan Lyons, a seventy-year-old biblical scholar, believes he has found the rarest of parchments—a letter that may have been written by Jesus Christ. Stolen from the Vatican library in the fifteenth century, it was assumed to be lost forever.

Under the promise of secrecy, Jonathan attempts to confirm his findings with several other biblical experts. But on the eve before his own murder, he confides to Father Aiden O'Brien, a family friend, that one of those whom he trusted most is determined to keep it from being returned to the Vatican.

The next evening Jonathan Lyons is found shot to death in his New Jersey home. His daughter, twenty-seven year old Mariah, finds her father's body sprawled over his desk in his study, a fatal bullet wound in the back of his neck, and her mother, Kathleen, an Alzheimer's victim, hiding in the study closet, incoherent and clutching the murder weapon. The police suspect that Kathleen, who in her lucid moments knows that Jonathan was involved with a much younger woman Lily Stewart, has committed the murder.

But Mariah believes that the key to her father's death is tied to another question: Where is the missing parchment? Whom, among his close circle of friends, might he have consulted? And did one of them kill to keep possession of the letter?

What Mariah doesn't know is that there was an eyewitness to the murder, someone whose unwise attempt to blackmail the killer begins a new circle of death, with Mariah as the ultimate target of one person's obsession with a priceless historical treasure.

With all the elements that have made her a worldwide bestseller, Mary Higgins Clark's *The Lost Years* is at once a breathless murder mystery and a hunt for what may be the most precious religious and archeological treasure of all time.

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The Lost Years By Mary Higgins Clark Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for Mary Higgins Clark's *The Lost Years*:

“Once again Mary Higgins Clark affirms why she is the ‘Queen of Suspense’... Ms. Clark has another winner for her readers to enjoy getting us there with this entertaining taut tale in which the suspense spins from family violence to biblical archeological violence.” --*Mystery Gazette*

“At once a breathless murder mystery and a hunt for what may be the most precious religious and archeological treasure of all time.” --*BookReporter.com*

"Clark, known rightly as the queen of suspense, performs her usual magic...An intriguing blend of religious history and contemporary mystery, “The Lost Years” confirms Clark’s status as a writer who is willing and able to bend her formula – and to do so successfully—to address topics not often found in the genre.”
--*Richmond Times Dispatch*

“If you’re someone who enjoys sharing novels with others, though, beware: lend this book and you may never get it back. That’s because, for mystery fans, ‘The Lost Years’ is truly a keeper.” --*Pittsburgh Tribune*

About the Author

The number one *New York Times* bestselling author Mary Higgins Clark has written thirty-five suspense novels; four collections of short stories; a historical novel, a memoir, two children's books, and most recently partnered with Alafair Burke to collaborate on a new series: *The Under Suspicion* novels. With her daughter Carol Higgins Clark, Clark has co-authored five more suspense novels. Her books are international bestsellers with more than one hundred million copies in print in the United States alone.

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1

Today is the day of my father’s funeral. He was murdered.

That was the first thought twenty-eight-year-old Mariah Lyons had as she awoke from a fitful sleep in the home where she had been raised in Mahwah, a town bordering the Ramapo Mountains in northern New Jersey. Brushing back the tears that were welling in her eyes, she sat up slowly, slid her feet onto the floor, and looked around her room.

When she was sixteen, she had been allowed to redecorate it as a birthday present and had chosen to have the walls painted red. For the coverlet and pillows and valances she had decided on a cheery red-and-white flowered pattern. The big, comfortable chair in the corner was where she always did her homework, instead of at the desk. Her eyes fell upon the shelf that her father had built over the dresser to hold her trophies from her high school soccer and basketball championship teams. He was so proud of me, she thought sadly. He wanted to redecorate again when I finished college, but I never wanted it changed. I don’t care if it still has the look of a teenager’s room.

She tried to remind herself that until now she had been one of those fortunate people whose only experience

with death in the family had been when she was fifteen and her eighty-six-year-old grandmother had passed away in her sleep. I really loved Gran, but I was so grateful that she had been spared a lot of indignity, she thought. Her strength was failing and she hated to be dependent on anyone.

Mariah stood up, reached for the robe at the foot of the bed, and slipped into it, tying the sash around her slender waist. But this is different, she thought. My father did not die a natural death. He was shot while he was reading at his desk in his study downstairs. Her mouth went dry as she asked herself again the same questions she had been asking over and over. Was Mom in the room when it happened? Or did she come in after she heard the sound of the shot? And is there any chance that Mom was the one who did it? Please, God, don't let it turn out to be that way.

She walked over to the vanity and looked into the mirror. I look so pale, she thought as she brushed back her shoulder-length black hair. Her eyes were swollen from all the tears of the last few days. An incongruous thought went through her mind: I'm glad I have Daddy's dark blue eyes. I'm glad I'm tall like him. It sure helped when I was playing basketball.

"I can't believe he is gone," she whispered, recalling his seventieth birthday party only three weeks earlier. The events of the past four days replayed in her mind. On Monday evening she had stayed at her office to work out an investment plan for a new client. When she got home to her Greenwich Village apartment at eight o'clock, she had made her usual evening call to her father. Daddy sounded very down, she remembered. He told me that Mom had had a terrible day, that it was clear the Alzheimer's was getting worse. Something made me phone back at ten thirty. I was worried about both of them.

When Daddy didn't answer, I knew that something was wrong. Mariah thought back to that seemingly endless drive from Greenwich Village as she had rushed to New Jersey that night. I called them again and again on the way over, she thought. She remembered how she had turned into the driveway at eleven twenty, fumbling for her house key in the dark as she ran from the car. All the downstairs lights were still on in the house, and once she was inside, she went straight to the study.

The horror of what she had found replayed in her mind as it had been doing incessantly. Her father was slumped across his desk, his head and shoulders bloodied. Her mother, soaked in blood, was cowering in the closet near the desk, clutching her father's pistol.

Mom saw me and started moaning, "So much noise... so much blood..."

I was frantic, Mariah remembered. When I called 911, all I could scream was "My father is dead! My father has been shot!"

The police arrived in minutes. I'll never forget how they looked at Mom and me. I had hugged Daddy, so I had blood all over me too. I overheard one of the cops say that by touching Daddy I had contaminated the crime scene.

Mariah realized she had been staring unseeingly into the mirror. Glancing down at the clock on the vanity she saw that it was already seven thirty. I have to get ready, she thought. We should be at the funeral parlor by nine. I hope Rory is getting Mom ready by now. Rory Steiger, a stocky sixty-two-year-old woman, had been her mother's caregiver for the past two years.

Twenty minutes later, showered and her hair blown dry, Mariah came back into the bedroom, opened the door of the closet, and took out the black-and-white jacket and black skirt she had chosen to wear to the

funeral. People used to be draped in black when there was a death in the family, she thought. I remember seeing pictures of Jackie Kennedy in a long mourning veil. Oh God, why did this have to happen?

When she was finished dressing, she walked over to the window. She had left it open when she had gone to bed and the breeze was making the curtains ripple on the sill. She stood for a moment looking out over the backyard, which was shaded by the Japanese maple trees her father had planted years ago. The begonias and impatiens he had planted in the spring ringed the patio. The sun made the Ramapo Mountains in the distance shimmer with tones of green and gold. It was a perfect late August day.

I don't want it to be a beautiful day, Mariah thought. It's as if nothing terrible has happened. But it *has* happened. Daddy was murdered. I want it to be rainy and cold and wet. I want the rain to weep on his casket. I want the heavens to weep for him.

He is gone forever.

Guilt and sadness enveloped her. That gentle college professor who was so glad to retire three years ago and spend most of his time studying ancient manuscripts had been violently murdered. I loved him dearly, but it's so awful that for the last year and a half our relationship has been strained, all because of his affair with Lillian Stewart, the professor he met from Columbia University, whose very existence had changed all of our lives.

Mariah remembered her dismay when she came home a year and a half ago to find her mother holding pictures she had found of Lillian and her father with their arms around each other. I was so angry when I realized that this had probably been going on while Lily was with him on his archaeological digs to Egypt or Greece or Israel or God knows where, for the past five years. I was so furious that he actually had her in the house when we had his other friends, like Richard, Charles, Albert, and Greg, over for dinner.

I despise that woman, Mariah told herself.

The fact that my father was twenty years her senior apparently did not bother Lily, Mariah thought grimly. I've tried to be fair and understand.

Mom has been drifting away for years, and I know it was so tough on Dad to see her deteriorate. But she still has her somewhat good days. She still talks about those pictures so often. She was so hurt knowing that Dad had someone else in his life.

I don't want to be thinking like this, Mariah said to herself as she turned away from the window. I want my father to be alive. I want to tell him how sorry I am that I asked him only last week if Lily of the Nile Valley had been a good traveling companion on their latest jaunt to Greece.

Turning away from the window, she walked over to the desk and studied a picture of her mother and father taken ten years ago. I remember how loving they used to be with each other, Mariah thought. They were married when they were in graduate school.

I didn't make my appearance for fifteen years.

She smiled faintly as she remembered her mother telling her that as long as they had had to wait, God had given them the perfect child. Actually, Mom was being more than generous, she thought. Both of them were so strikingly handsome. And elegant. And charming. Growing up I certainly was no head-turner. A mop of

long, straight black hair, so skinny that I looked undernourished, beanpole tall, and teeth that I grew into but were too big for my face when they first arrived. But I was lucky enough to end up being a decent composite of both of them.

Dad, Daddy, please don't be dead. Be at the breakfast table when I get there. Have your coffee cup in hand, and be reading the *Times* or the *Wall Street Journal*. I'll grab the *Post* and turn to "Page Six," and you'll look over your glasses and give me that look that means a mind is a dreadful thing to waste.

I don't want to eat anything, I'll just have coffee, Mariah decided as she opened the door of the bedroom and walked down the hall to the staircase. She paused on the top step but didn't hear any sound from the connecting bedrooms where her mother and Rory slept. I hope that means they're downstairs, she thought.

There was no sign of them in the breakfast room. She went into the kitchen. Betty Pierce, the housekeeper, was there. "Mariah, your mother wouldn't eat anything. She wanted to go into the study. I don't think you'll like what she's wearing but she's pretty insistent. It's that blue and green linen suit you bought her for Mother's Day."

Mariah considered protesting but then asked herself, What in the name of God is the difference? She took the coffee that Betty poured for her and carried it into the study. Rory was standing there looking distressed. At Mariah's unasked question she jerked her head toward the closet door. "She won't let me leave the door open," she said. "She won't let me stay in there with her."

Mariah tapped on the closet door and opened it slowly while murmuring her mother's name. Oddly sometimes her mother answered to it more easily than when Mariah called her "Mom." "Kathleen," she said softly. "Kathleen, it's time to have a cup of tea and a cinnamon bun."

The closet was large, with shelves on either side. Kathleen Lyons was sitting on the floor at the far end of it. Her arms were wrapped protectively around her body and her head was pressed against her chest as though she was bracing for a blow. Her eyes were shut tight and her silver hair was falling forward, covering most of her face. Mariah knelt down and embraced her, rocking her as if she was a child.

"So much noise... so much blood," her mother whispered, the same words she had been repeating since the murder. But then she did let Mariah help her up and smooth back the short, wavy hair from her pretty face. Again Mariah was reminded that her mother had been only a few months younger than her father and would not look her age if it weren't for the fearful way she moved, as though at any minute she could step into an abyss.

As Mariah led her mother out of the study she did not see the baleful expression on the face of Rory Steiger or the secret smile she permitted herself.

Now I won't be stuck with her much longer, Rory thought.

Users Review

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