

***maggie's
mirage***

***jeanine
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Maggie's Mirage

by Jeanine Collins Malarsky

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CHAPTER 1

The Stain of Guilt

Late November, 1962

I'm desperate!" Under the heavy blanket, Maggie Kearney cupped her hand to the phone and spoke in a hoarse whisper. "You're my best friend. Please ask your brother," she begged Maisie Sullivan. "He got his girlfriend out of trouble. He knows somebody. I can't go through with this. I'll end up just like your sister." Maggie took a deep breath and clutched her quivering stomach. "Remember all our dreams, Maisie? All our plans? I should have listened to you. A baby will ruin everything."

"Murderer!" Maureen Kearney screamed as she burst into her elder daughters' bedroom and ripped the blanket off Maggie's head. "What are you doing? Trying to get an abortion?" She flung the homemade quilt to the floor, yanked the receiver from her frightened daughter's ear, and threw the phone into the upstairs hall. "Harlot!" Flecks of spittle sprayed the air as Maureen spat her angry words into her cowering daughter's face. "Baby killer!"

A cluster of young girls gathered at the doorway, drawn by the crashing of the phone and the bleak ring of its bells as it slammed against the far wall.

From her bed, Maggie stared at her curious sisters, then back down at her crossed legs outlined beneath her threadbare nightgown. An icy claw gripped deep into her gut. This had been her greatest fear: her mother finding out she was pregnant. A film of cold perspiration crept over her skin. Droplets of moisture trickled from her armpits tracing shiny rivulets down her trembling ribs.

“Get back to your rooms,” Maureen Kearny ordered, reaching for the door and slamming it shut. “What are you trying to do?” she cried, whirling back to Maggie. “Shannon says you’re pregnant.

“Are you?

“Look at me!”

Maggie looked up, blinking into the bright ceiling light above her mother’s head. In the black silence that beat against her eardrums, Maggie detected her older sister cowering behind their mother. Red blotches of guilt and shame rendered Shannon’s homely face more horrid in the glare.

“How could you?” Maggie shrieked at her sister. “How could you rat on me? You swore!”

“An evil swearing in the eyes of God,” their mother said, lapsing into a slight Irish brogue in her rage. “An evil promise made for an evil purpose.”

“I won’t have it. I can’t have it!” Sobs wracked Maggie’s slim body. She buried her face in her small hands. “It will ruin my life.”

“Your life?” her mother said in a low voice. “Your life?” She leaned closer and allowed her voice to rise. “You would take another life to spare your own misery? To your sins of greed, selfishness and fornication, you would add murder?”

Maggie gulped, took a deep breath, and turned off her tears. “I won’t have it,” she said quietly into her damp hands. “I won’t ruin my life like you did.” She paused as a hiccup jarred her youthful body. “I won’t lie about my wedding date so my first daughter’s birthday comes out right. I’m not going to sacrifice my happiness and work like a slave until I’m old and worn out.”

Looming over Maggie’s bed like a rogue wave, Maureen grabbed Maggie’s black ponytail, yanked her head back and slapped her tear streaked face. She gripped her fifteen-year-old daughter’s arms and lifted her into the air. Eyes blazing like the flames of hell, she shook Maggie until her teeth rattled. “You defiant, insolent, slut!”

Maureen sucked air deep into her lungs and brought her face within an inch of Maggie’s.

“There will be no killing in this house.”

She held Maggie for another second then dropped her limp body back onto her pillow. “You will have that baby.”

Maggie’s mother backed away from the bed and cast her weary eyes about the sparsely furnished room, spying a wrinkled red ribbon carelessly draped over a crucifix on the wall. “You’ll burn in hell forever, you will.” She snatched the offending ribbon from the brass Jesus, slapped the light switch off and exited the room, yanking the door shut behind her.

Maggie sat like a pillar of salt in the darkness, listening to the thunk as her mother replaced the phone on its small wooden stand in the hall. A faint creaking of the banister relayed her mother’s progress down the stairs. Maggie knew her mother would labor over her sewing basket late into the night and then conclude her exhausting day on her knees praying for the salvation of her sinful daughter.

Shannon felt her way past the foot of her sister’s bed, tripping over a small hand-braided rug as she crawled into her own. Diffuse light from the street lamp seeped through the water-stained window shade and outlined her body as she pulled her blanket up to her chin and turned toward Maggie.

“I’m sorry,” Shannon whispered. “I had to tell.”

“No, you didn’t.” Maggie leaned over the edge of her bed, retrieved her quilt and spread it over her sheet. “You made everything worse.” She folded the frayed edge of her top sheet over the edge of the quilt to keep the scratchy wool from her face. “Now she’ll drag me to see Father Donovan like she did when I stole that dress. She’ll chastise me and punish me and make me kneel and pray with her until I’m crippled. But it won’t work this time.” Maggie slid under her blanket and slammed her head down on her pillow. “No bastard baby is going to wreck my life.”

END OF SAMPLE CHAPTER 1 from MAGGIE’S MIRAGE



About the Author

Jeanine Collins Malarsky was born on the shores of Cayuga Lake in upstate New York in 1944. The middle daughter of a peripatetic dairy farmer, she was moved from house to house and state to state east of the Mississippi. She left home to attend college in New England where she met her husband and found a permanent home near Boston, MA.

Ms. Malarsky spent thirty-six years in business management, focusing on financial accounting and computer systems, including twenty-two years operating her own company. Following years devoted to gourmet cooking, sewing, and raising two children, she is now retired and living with her husband, a retired airline pilot.

She has traveled extensively including most of Europe and the Far East, indulging in her love of history and learning. An avid life-long student of human behavior, she now devotes her energies to travel, reading and writing.

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