



MARY HIGGINS CLARK

## READING GROUP GUIDE

### The Shadow of Your Smile

By Mary Higgins Clark

This reading group guide for **The Shadow of Your Smile** includes an introduction, discussion questions, ideas for enhancing your book club, and a Q&A with author **Mary Higgins Clark**. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

#### **Synopsis**

Elderly Olivia Morrow knows she doesn't have much time left, and faces a momentous choice. Should she reveal a family secret—that her cousin, Sister Catherine, a nun about to be beatified by the Catholic Church, had once been violated and had given up her baby for adoption—or should she take the secret to her grave? Catherine's attacker, a world-renowned doctor and scientist, made a vast fortune for his medical inventions. Catherine's granddaughter, Dr. Monica Farrell, is his rightful heir, but Olivia would have to betray Catherine's wishes to reveal Monica's parentage. There are, however, people aware of Olivia's impending choice—those now squandering the money. To silence Olivia and prevent Monica from learning the secret, one of them will stop at nothing—even murder.

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. Olivia Morrow has strong memories of Catherine, her cousin, even as a young girl. Why was she so drawn to Catherine? What about her did Olivia admire?
2. Why was Dr. Clay Hadley involved in the attempted murder of Olivia? Why is keeping her secret so important to him especially? Did his remorse for the crime in any way change your opinion of him?
3. Dr. Monica Farrell is good with children, and is especially drawn to neglected Sally. How does their connection foreshadow much of the story?
4. Do you agree with Olivia's decision to attempt to share with Monica the details of her birth parents? Why or why not?
5. When she was seventeen, Catherine said she felt called to God rather than to Alex Gannon (34). Is it possible to understand one's future at that age? Did Catherine really know what she was doing? Did it end up being the right decision?
6. What did Olivia expect to gain by visiting Catherine's grave? She kept asking questions aloud; who did she expect to answer them? What was she trying to figure out?
7. Monica has trouble believing that a miracle could cure Carlos Garcia's cancer. Why is accepting a miracle so difficult for her?
8. Greg Gannon says he'll no longer help "the butcher, the baker or the candlestick maker" and will take on only large clients, unlike his father (46). How does this attitude lead him into his current trouble

with the government?

9. The novel is titled *The Shadow of Your Smile*. What does this mean in the context of the story? Whose smile does it refer to?

10. The socialites—the Gannon family, Renée Carter—though rich, are mired in trouble. The assistants and working-class people in the novel are viewed more sympathetically as levelheaded and honest. Discuss this class distinction.

11. Scott Alterman's goals were to either marry Monica or, if not, to represent her in court and get a piece of the Gannon family fortune (72). What does his attitude say about his character? Does he seem like a trustworthy person? Does your opinion change after his death?

12. Peter Gannon, the failed producer, claims he blacked out and didn't have a recollection of the night Renée was killed. When you first heard this, did you believe him? When did you realize he didn't commit the crime?

13. The police say Pamela Gannon claimed she gave the instruction to kill Olivia and Monica. What was her motive? Why was it so easy for the men around her to follow her instructions, even if they included murder?

14. Monica and her grandmother, Catherine, appear to have many things in common, as shown in the lives they lived. What are some areas in which they are similar? How are they different?

15. If the story were to continue, do you think Catherine would reach sainthood? Why or why not?

#### **Enhance Your Book Group**

1. There are many who have been sainted throughout history. Research the process and steps to become a saint. Find out information about sainthood and how it started with the group. Talk about a saint you are drawn to, and why. What area of life does he or she represent?
2. Olivia takes a drive to her childhood home shortly before her death, and reminisces about the past. Share pictures with the group of your childhood landmarks and share some memories.
3. Peter Gannon was a failed Broadway producer. Do you have any favorite Broadway shows, or favorite flops? Share them with the group or get together to see a show or watch them on DVD.
4. Mary Higgins Clark novels are always full of suspense. Discuss how this story ranks with your all-time favorites.