

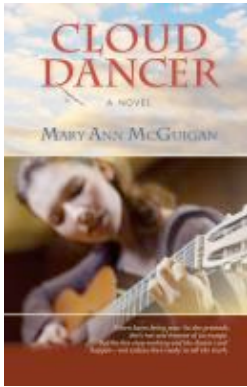
CLOUD DANCER

A NOVEL

MARY ANN MCGUIGAN



Bileen hates being poor. So she pretends she's not and dreams of an escape. But the lies stop working and the dream can't happen—not unless she's ready to tell the truth.



Eileen hates being poor, so she pretends she's not and dreams of an escape—having a guitar. Her mother struggles to support the family, and they're forbidden to mention their brother Neal's stuttering. Liz, a college student, offers a guitar and help for Neal. Eileen earns the money for both, but unless she can tell the truth about who she is, her dreams can't come true. But for Eileen, trusting someone is a dangerous thing.

Cloud Dancer

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What the Critics Say

About *Cloud Dancer*

Originally published in 1994 by Charles Scribner's Sons

~New York Public Library Best Books for the Teen Age

Eileen resents her family's poverty and, unlike her downtrodden mother and older sister, knows she must find money for a guitar and guitar lessons and for therapy to correct her younger brother's stutter. A street musician named Liz helps Eileen find the courage to maintain her determination. Polished writing heightens the poignancy of Eileen's small, but significant, inroads against hopelessness.

—*The Horn Book*

About *Where You Belong*

~National Book Award Finalist

~New York Public Library Best Books for the Teen Age

“McGuigan limns the territory between divergent inner and outer landscapes and how individuals learn a tremulous courage to trust themselves and their experiences, despite the physical and psychological violence of the adult world. With sensitivity, empathy, and insight, McGuigan shows us that the young have

the character and emotional acumen to recreate themselves and, in doing so, recreate history.”

—National Book Award judges

“In this deeply moving novel, McGuigan demonstrates a wonderful talent for creating emotionally complex characters, believable situations, and closely observed, realistic settings. That some of the plot situations remain unresolved reinforces the feeling of real life, which is one of the book’s singular strengths. As for Fiona, she is an unforgettable character with a first-person voice that is marvelous in its understated artfulness and compelling in its emotional authenticity.”

—Michael Cart, *Booklist* starred review

“The urban setting is nearly a character in itself. . . . McGuigan’s characters are fully realized and emotionally complex, and they do not lend themselves easily to stereotyping or standard bearing. Any social commentary is given from the perspective of a young adolescent who has already received too many hard knocks from an unkind world, and who is seriously questioning where her loyalties lie.”

—*The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*

“An insightful glimpse into the ravages wrought in an alcoholic family and the social pressures of the time. The characters are so well drawn and the story so engaging, it’s obvious why this was a National Book Award finalist. *Where You Belong* will stay with you long after you close the cover.”

—*Telegraph Herald*

***About Morning in a Different Place, sequel to
Where You Belong***

~Junior Library Guild Selection

~Paterson Prize Honor Book

“The stage is set for a classic moral battle, but the results are never didactic. McGuigan’s writing is spare and low-key, and her metaphors are acute: “When you’re not wanted somewhere,” she writes, “the feeling fills the place like a smell.” History buffs will appreciate the visceral reminder of how much Kennedy’s beliefs meant to the black community, and how devastating was his death.

—Daniel Kraus, *Booklist*, starred review

“McGuigan is as adept at evoking the class consciousness and racial politics of ’60s New York as she is the horrors of adolescence, including insecurity and helplessness. With the twin evils of domestic violence and President Kennedy’s assassination looming in the background, the author’s portrait of the chameleonic nature of teenage girls builds aggressively to a powerful finale.”

—*Kirkus*

“McGuigan has created rich characters and tackles several uncomfortable social issues. Fiona’s voice reverberates through a range of emotional highs and lows in this story of friendship, loyalty, trust, racism, and coping that culminates with the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Like Shana Burg’s *A Thousand Never Evers*, the novel offers insight into a turbulent era.”

—*School Library Journal*

Also by Mary Ann McGuigan

Where You Belong
Morning in a Different Place
Crossing Into Brooklyn

CLOUD DANCER

Mary Ann McGuigan

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ISBN 978-1-63490-121-5

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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BookLocker.com, Inc.
2015

First Edition

For Gil, Matthew and Douglas,
who made room for my crazy dream

For Mama, Junie and Eddie,
and for everything we shared

Acknowledgments

My thanks to JoAnne Kanaval for her patience and her artistry in solving the riddles of the jacket design.

Thanks so much to my niece Kathleen Breheny-Lugo—and her trusty assistant, my sister June Nicora—for the hours spent at the keyboard retyping the manuscript.

The envelope in the mail from Eileen's father had twenty dollars in it and a sentence scribbled on a cocktail napkin that still bore the impression of his glass. He wanted another visit.

It was late February. Cold. The snow on the sidewalks had been there and been there. Dirty layers marked the winter's passing like tree rings. Eileen McDonough and her big sister, Deirdre, and her little brother, Neal, trekked up the hill to the bus stop in so many layers of flannel and wool that they all but lost the use of their movable parts. Eileen's parents had separated last summer—the summer of 1980—but her father didn't ask to see them until December, so their visits were made in boots and leggings and scarves and hats and merciless layers of sweaters, each one donned obediently under the eye of the hawk—Deidre.

The bus ride to their father's was an endurance test. The heat had one setting: intense. So for half an hour Neal and Eileen sat as close to the accordion doors as they could and prayed for someone to flag the bus down or get off at the next stop so they could feel some air against their cheeks.

The visits weren't fun. They never laughed. They hardly spoke. He'd forget they were coming and answer the door wearing the undershirt he'd slept in. Later he'd peek over his sports pages to ask them how they were doing, so they'd make

stuff up. They watched TV and he gave them popcorn, but not always. Sometimes he had licorice, and they'd dig out tiny bits of it from their cavities all the way home on the bus.

That day he took them to Gerrity's Tavern for hamburgers and potato chips. They had to walk several blocks down Kennedy Boulevard in the cold, wind ripping across the side streets. Eileen didn't mind the walk because they'd pass Sweet Notes, the music shop that had her guitar in the window—the guitar she'd wanted since the Fall Music Festival, when Mr. Glatt, the music teacher, had chosen her from all the other eighth-graders in the chorus to sing solo. He'd practiced with her nearly every day, and nearly every time they practiced he told her she had a good strong voice, with professional potential, and that she should learn an instrument to accompany herself. The guitar was the most practical choice, he said.

Eileen ran ahead of the others to look in the window. The light against the glass turned it into a mirror. She hated mirrors, mostly because they were so uncompromising about what she looked like. Her hair was mousy brown, thick and straight, uncurlable and totally disobedient. Her eyes were green but small and sad. Everything about Eileen was small. She was already fourteen, sneaking into adolescence with the body of a ten-year-old. She touched her chin, exploring the pimple that had arrived that morning. It was going to be a big one. When there was no mirror around, Eileen could pretend her skin was smooth and her hair glorious. She brought her face closer to the window to see the guitar and be rid of her reflection.

Her father's giant silhouette came up behind her, with Deidre and Neal beside him. He was very tall, though he never seemed to be standing his full height, always slouching or leaning. He had wide shoulders and the slim waist of a man half his age. Sometimes Eileen thought he was handsome, when he wasn't angry. "I bet you'd like to sing a song with that on your knee," he

said. He knew she would. It was no secret. Eileen told him how much she wanted it every chance she got. He put his hands into his trouser pockets and jingled his change. The wind took his graying hair this way and that, mocking the swagger of a pose he was trying so hard to strike. “Well, suppose I send your mother the money next week to buy it for you?” He glanced at Deidre to see if he’d made an impression. But Deidre had already stopped believing in such things, had no patience for fantasies.

They walked back down their block late that afternoon with a big orange sun setting in between the long shadows of the apartment houses at the bottom of the hill—at least Deidre did. Eileen flew down, sliding behind Neal along every patch of ice. When they reached their building, Deidre called after Eileen again, saying not to get her hopes up. But Eileen bolted up the five flights, tearing off layers as she climbed, and found her mother ironing in the kitchen. She couldn’t get the words out fast enough. “Daddy’s buying me the guitar. The guitar in Sweet Notes’s window. He’s sending the money next week.” Her mother hardly caught a word, so Eileen told her again.

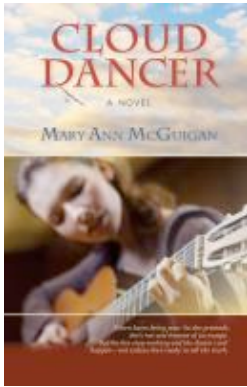
“Well, that’s wonderful,” her mother said, but she didn’t seem to be listening; she was concentrating on a sleeve. Deidre came in and gave her mom a look.

“That guitar is a hundred and fifty dollars,” Deidre said.

Eileen could see that Deidre didn’t believe he was buying any guitar. Neither of them did, and she was afraid they would jinx it before it had a chance to happen. Eileen left them, went into the bedroom. She took her leggings off, threw them into the corner, remembering too late that her ship was still in the pocket. He’d made it for her at the tavern, folding a paper napkin into a sailing ship, a toothpick for a mast. He’d put it on the bar when he was finished, told her it was magic, whispered in her ear. “This will take you anywhere you want to go,” he said, and pushed it gently along the bar. Eileen stood eye level with it and

Mary Ann McGuigan

watched it journey behind the bar's rim—a smooth, dark wave—to a spot where the stubborn early-afternoon sun had pushed itself through the tavern's tiny square window, a prisoner's cell of a window, and lit the fragile sail.



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