



## So Happy Together

*Maryann McFadden*

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*Everyone needs a dream . . .* Claire Noble gave up on her dreams a long time ago. A single mother and respected history teacher, she has also been caring for her aging parents. But now it's finally Claire's turn. She has fallen in love with Rick Saunders, who is offering her both security and the opportunity to travel. Before their fall wedding, she will be leaving for a summer on Cape Cod, where the fabled light has been luring artists for a century; and the chance of a lifetime to study with one of the most noted photographers in the country. But just as Claire is about to step into her new life, her estranged daughter suddenly shows up with a backpack full of problems. Claire's father reveals a fifty-year-old secret that threatens to unravel their family. Her mother confides that at seventy-eight years old, she's still waiting for the love of her life. And a chance encounter with an environmental writer results in an intriguing new relationship, undermining Claire's certainty that she's found the man with whom she hopes to spend the rest of her life. In the midst of all this turbulence, Claire begins to question everything she thought she wanted. And surprisingly, so do her mother and her daughter. Set in the lush, rolling hills of northern New Jersey and the romantic, windswept dunes of Cape Cod, *So Happy Together* is the story of three generations of women who find their lives, and dreams, suddenly transformed in ways they never could have imagined. But ultimately, it is the heartbreak and joyful journey of one woman who comes to realize that when you're a mother, or a daughter, you are never truly free.

## So Happy Together Details

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## From Reader Review So Happy Together for online ebook

### Jackie says

Claire Noble is a member in good standing of The Sandwich Generation. Most of her life so far has been spent being a single parent to her daughter and taking care of her aging parents. But now, in her early 40s, it seems that her life is turning around. She's engaged to be married to a very successful man, her daughter is out on her own (though that was the result of anger and her whereabouts are not quite known except for the occasional phone call), and she's got a chance to take a special summer seminar in photography that will be the beginning of the career she has always wanted. While not perfect, her life is still looking pretty darn good.

Until just a few days before she leaves for Cape Cod, her estranged daughter shows up and gives birth to a tiny baby girl in the upstairs hall, both of her parents' health issues flair up under the stress, and her fiance begins to selfishly freak out about all of it. Claire feels devastated and trapped once again. Then she comes up with a desperate plan to do it all that changes her family forever and gives Claire far more than she ever dreamed of in the magical light and sea air of Cape Cod.

This is a fabulous story about the strength of love over time, generations and circumstances. With a moral that we all could stand to remember--it's never too late to change or dream. This is a great summer read (or anytime, really) full of strong women and interesting relationships that is so picturesque in its writing you'll long to head to Cape Cod yourself.

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### Mary says

Claire Noble is a single mother and a respected history teacher, who has also been caring for her aging parents. Everyone may need a dream, but Claire gave up on hers a long time ago. But her dreams apparently never gave up on her - and now, Claire finally has a chance to experience something that she has always wanted.

She has fallen in love with Rick Saunders, who is offering her both security and the opportunity to travel. Before their planned fall wedding, Claire will be leaving to spend the summer on Cape Cod, where the fabled light has been luring artists for a century; for the chance of a lifetime to study with one of the most noted photographers in the country.

But just as Claire is about to step forward into her new life, the previous one begins to change dramatically. Her estranged daughter suddenly shows up with a backpack full of problems. Claire's father reveals a fifty-year-old secret that threatens to unravel their family. Her mother confides that at seventy-eight years old, she's still waiting for the love of her life. And a chance encounter with an environmental writer results in an intriguing new relationship, threatening Claire's certainty that she's found the man with whom she hopes to spend the rest of her life.

In the midst of all this turbulence, Claire begins to question everything she thought she wanted. And

surprisingly, so do her mother and her daughter. Set in the lush, rolling hills of northern New Jersey and the romantic, windswept dunes of Cape Cod, *So Happy Together* by Maryann McFadden is the story of three generations of women who find their lives, and dreams, suddenly transformed in ways they never would have imagined. However, ultimately, it is the heartbreak and joyful journey of one woman who comes to realize that, when you're a mother, and a daughter, you are never truly free.

In my opinion, this was quite a book. The plot and story were very believable, and the family dynamics were just the type that I enjoy reading about. This was actually the first book that I've ever read by Maryann McFadden, and it was a book that Mareena chose for me when we went to our local library's perpetual book sale back in April of this year. I think that Mareena chose wisely - I give this book an A+! and will definitely put Ms. McFadden's two other books - *The Richest Season* and *The Book Lover* - on my Wish List.

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### **Jodi says**

Claire is 45 (same age as this reviewer) and her life is finally taking off. She's met and is engaged to a wonderful man. She's finally taking her photography to the next level. At last her life is hers. But then her estranged daughter comes home bringing with her pent up anger and frustration and gives birth the day Claire is supposed to leave for Cape Cod and an exclusive photography workshop. Suddenly Claire's life is unraveling. Sometimes you need to unravel a bit before you can go forward. At first, the characters were not particularly likable but they all grew on me in their own ways and as they all began to find themselves, Claire, her daughter and her mother, it was a triumph to the idea that life begins at any age, at any time. In the end, an uplifting book.

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### **Windward says**

I was fortunate enough to get an ARC of *SO HAPPY TOGETHER*, and I consider myself very fortunate to have received it. I read Maryann McFadden's *THE RICHEST Season* and \*absolutely loved it\*. She got into the heads and personalities of three amazing characters. In *SO HAPPY TOGETHER* she takes that gift to a new level. It's a more in-depth story with a family of characters. The way she intertwines the stories is skillful and compelling. Her character development is outstanding -- each character is fully conceived and developed in his/her own right. Her setting of Cape Cod, Massachusetts is so amazingly captivating. At once, I felt like I was there...and longed to be there. Once I got going, I COULD NOT PUT THIS BOOK DOWN. Maryann McFadden exceeds the outstanding writing of her first novel, and take *SO HAPPY TOGETHER* to entirely new levels of development, writing, and character development. HIGHLY recommended!!!

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### **Sherri says**

I really loved this book! I hated for it to end. The characters were so believable. I want to go to Cape Cod now-LOL!

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## **Loredana Ingenito says**

I couldn't even finish the book. I got up to pg. 203 and started skipping to other chapters and realized this book has no REAL subject matter what so ever!! I started to notice a pattern with each chapter and the pattern didn't stop. Every chapter repeated the last one and there was no real time moving forward. It was as if I were living every single hour with the characters and it got boring. Nothing changed, not the scenery, not the story, not even anyone's behavior. There was no rise to this story. No middle part where there's that turning point and you think 'oh man I need to finish this to see what happens.' So I did what I hate to do, I shut the book and told myself I didn't need to suffer through it and moved on to the next one, happily and content.

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## **Donna says**

I haven't read a book in a long time that I could truly relate to, but Maryann McFadden changed that with *So Happy Together*. As Claire Noble, I am also dealing with aging parents and rebellious teen grandchildren. It seems I am running from one to the other on a daily basis and it leaves you wondering if you will have time to ever follow your own dreams. Ms McFadden's book gives me hope that these hurdles can be jumped and there is hope for a successful ending! I am also a photographer so the storyline just enveloped me from all angles. I loved the story, Ms McFadden's writing style, and will be keeping an eye open for more from this author.

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## **Margaret says**

Clare Noble, against her parents' advice, fell for the bad boy Liam when she was a high school freshman. Near the end of her junior year, she found herself pregnant--but that was ok. They were planning to get married, right? Seems like being a father and/or a husband wasn't for Liam after all. With help from her parents, Clare managed to get through college, take a job as a history teacher and be a single mom; until her own daughter, Amy, became a party girl rather than complete her college education. She kicked Amy out, thinking that after a cool down period, Amy would return and the two of them would work things out. Instead, Amy disappeared for nearly two years.

In that two years, Clare has once again found her passion for photography and a passion for a man who truly loves her. Plans for marriage are in the making once Clare returns from a chance of a lifetime--attending a workshop on Cape Cod to study with one of the great photographers there. Clare is finally on her way to following her dreams.

Of course, that doesn't happen. Clare's daughter returns unexpectedly with an unexpected dilemma. Her father has become seriously ill and her mother's health is declining as well. Her brother is involved in his own life problems and her fiance is less than understanding. Waffling between what she should do and what she wants to do and what is best for all concerned, Clare at long last makes a decision and it is one that changes her life completely upside down.

I didn't really get all that involved in the story until Clare finally made a decision. I grew impatient with her, but in her place, I'm not sure what I would have done either. I just found it dragging out a bit too long. However, once Clare showed her determination, the story picked up and she became a fully fleshed character

for me--one that I could sympathize with and cheer for.

I loved McFadden's lovely description of Cape Cod and her obvious love for and knowledge of the plight of the sea animals. I can't give much away here, but I became a visitor to Cape Cod through McFadden's eyes as she used her words to portray not just the images of the location, but of the feelings of the people who live and breathe the Cape Cod way of life. I ended up loving this book and admiring Clare's decision to continue to be a mother, a daughter, and an individual in her own right.

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### **Lisa says**

I had a hard time putting this book down. I related to the main character, Claire, in that she is in her mid 40's and trying to reinvent herself. Her daughter has left on poor terms, her parents are getting older and her father has been diagnosed with Parkinson's. But she thinks she is all set -- she has met Rick and he's going to change everything. They are going to move to Arizona (from NJ) and while he golfs she can take all the pictures she wants. But then her daughter returns, pregnant, and her father takes a turn for the worse, and her mother chooses to move into a retirement home so that she won't be a burden to her daughter. But that move sucks all hope from her and she begins to fade. It was such a wonderful layering of generations and their problems, with no pat answers. Just the hope that they will somehow figure it out. So they all go Cape Cod, where Claire is taking a photography workshop, and she leaves her parents and daughter to figure things out while at the same time not completely abandoning them. It was real. The fiancee is quite obviously ill-suited as he wants nothing to do with her family, and then there is of course THE GUY ... but not overly done. All in all I completely enjoyed this book and was sad to see it end.

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### **Diane says**

Claire Nobel is a 46 year old single mother and history teacher who is close to early retirement. Claire thinks she may finally be able to start enjoying her life. Having spent the last several years working hard, and caring for her elderly parents (her father has Parkinson's disease), her parents have seemed to settled into new accommodations that will require less of Claire. She is planning to pursue her interest in photography for the summer on Cape Cod, and, she is even planning for her fall wedding to Rick Saunders. Just as everything seems to be falling into place, Claire finds herself being stretched even further.

Claire's adult daughter, Amy, comes home after being away for several years. Claire and her daughter have had a tenuous relationship in the past, and now additional strains are put on their relationship. Amy is single, pregnant, and soon she surprises her mother as she gives birth to a baby girl. Claire finds that her life is not her life at all, in reality she is part of what is now referred to as the "sandwich generation". She soon learns that even the best laid plans do not always work out as we dreamed they might.

From New Jersey, to the beautiful dunes of Provincetown, MA, Maryann McFadden weaves together a tender tale of three generations of women. Many middle age women will be able to relate to this tender tale. The writing style really appealed to me, and the cover art was just gorgeous. So Happy Together was an enjoyable summertime read. Unfortunately, in real life most stories that we hear about the "sandwich generation", do not have a story book ending like this one did. If you are looking for an enjoyable beach read, give this one a try.

I'd also like to recommend Maryann McFadden's earlier book: *The Richest Season*, which I really enjoyed and reviewed in 2008.

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### **Heather says**

Mary Ann McFadden's first book was actually her master's thesis. She realized she had something good and decided to self-publish 'The Richest Season'. After selling 2,000 copies and immersing herself in a book tour she decided to look for an agent. She was quickly grabbed by an agent who took her book to auction. Hyperion books bought the rights as a two hardcover deal and 'So Happy Together' was born. She is now working on book three.

'So Happy Together' is a book about love, acceptance, freedom, family, lies and secrets.

The three women of the Noble family are all in different phases of life. Claire Noble is a mid-forties, history teacher who longs for freedom to live her dreams, doing something that is purely for her and makes her happy. All of her adult life she has put others' needs and wants first and shelved her own. Now she wants to change that, but can she?

Amy Noble is Claire's early 20's daughter who has a rocky relationship with her mother. Amy searches aimlessly for her purpose in life and where she fits in to her family dynamic. Raised as an only child by a single mom she can't seem to figure out who she is.

Filomena "Fanny" Noble, Claire's mother is in her late seventies. Fanny knows that she is old and is fighting to keep what freedoms she still has even though she knows she is unable to be completely self sufficient. Fanny is now sifting through the life she has lived and what she wants from life now wondering if it is possible to start again at her age.

I really enjoyed reading this book and found the story lines to be very plausible. I felt that the author did a good job of building these characters and the struggles that each one faced. I think that women both young and old will be able to identify with this story.

I was given a copy of this book for the purpose of writing a review.

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### **I love books says**

Bello. Una storia che parte in sordina, per poi esplodere. Avete presente i motori diesel? Ecco l'idea è quella: ci vuole un pochino di tempo per partire, ma quando poi si sono riscaldati non li ferma nessuno. Per me questo libro è stato un vero diesel. Ma andiamo con ordine: la storia parla di 3 donne che rappresentano 3 generazioni diverse. La protagonista principale è Claire, 45 anni, una figlia che non vede da troppo tempo e un fidanzato prossimo a diventare marito; intorno a lei ruotano le vite dei suoi genitori, Joe e Fanny, segnati dal tempo e da una storia d'amore tormentata. Tutto per Claire sembra andare bene, fino al ritorno di Amy, sua figlia, divenuta ormai una giovane donna: Claire non sa dove lei abbia vissuto, con chi, a che prezzo, sa solo che non vuole perderla di nuovo. Ma non sa che con l'arrivo di Amy tutta la sua vita andrà apparentemente in pezzi: la giovane infatti è riuscita a tenere nascosta una gravidanza, e in men che non si dica Claire si ritrova ad assistere alla nascita della bambina (di nuovo una femmina!) sul pavimento di casa sua. Iniziano a sorgere le prime complicazioni, Claire rinuncia al tanto desiderato corso di fotografia a Cape Cod, i suoi genitori si devono trasferire in una casa di riposo perché Joe soffre per il Parkinson, Rick (il promesso sposo) mostra segni di insofferenza nei confronti della situazione.. Insomma, non sto a raccontarvi

proprio tutto, diciamo che la svolta arriva quando Claire decide di frequentare la sessione autunnale del corso, portando con sè la figlia, la nipote e i genitori. A Cape Cod Claire, Amy e Fanny troveranno la pace, chi nella cucina di un ristorante, chi su una barca per avvistare le balene, e sullo sfondo non mancheranno le grandi storie d'amore.. Un finale coinvolgente, i colpi di scena si susseguono fino all'ultimo capitolo; i personaggi sono ben delineati, ognuno ha una storia personale alle spalle che lo ha segnato profondamente. Lo stile è assolutamente scorrevole, in certi momenti la storia ha un'evoluzione forse un po' troppo affrettata, ma nel contesto la vicenda è ben descritta, così come sono descritti in maniera affascinante i luoghi, gli animali, la "luce" di Cape Cod.. Lo consiglio a chi vuole vivere 3 storie d'amore intense ma non sdolcinate, niente termini zuccherosi per la McFadden :)

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### **Idelle Kursman says**

So Happy Together was an ironic title because throughout the story, most of the characters have miserable relationships. The men are either moody and brooding, self-centered, or unwilling to settle down and face responsibility. Still, the story was about troubled lives and failed relationships that many people experience. Claire Noble, the main character, is in the sandwich generation, dealing with her difficult adult daughter while taking care of her aging parents. At forty-five, Claire is a single parent who has worked hard all her life and seeks love and fulfillment even though she is weighed down with tremendous responsibilities. Most of the story takes place in Cape Cod where Claire is studying photography, a long-held dream of hers. She has also brought along her parents, daughter, and infant granddaughter. In this change of scenery, their lives are transformed in the midst of both happy experiences and turmoil. A great read that captures obstacles in everyday life. Love the Cape Cod setting. I also agree that a change of scenery can do wonders for people.

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### **Cindy says**

It's never too late! Never too late for a new dream, to embrace a new life, to change your mind or feelings about things, to smile, laugh, until your last breath: it's never too late!

This was an enjoyable book with a great moral. For that reason, I am giving it 4 stars. However, to say there was a lot going on is an understatement! Some events were a little over the top, some seemed unnecessary while some could have been expanded on.

Claire has always put herself last until now. She is engaged to Rick and is planning a new life in Arizona. At last, life seems to be changing for Claire, or is it?

#### **\*\*\*SPOILER ALERT\*\*\***

Her estranged daughter Amy unexpectedly returns just as Claire is ready to leave on a much anticipated photography workshop in Cape Cod. And as the taxi is honking outside, Amy suddenly collapses on the floor letting out a painful scream. Imagine your daughter giving birth to a tiny baby girl right there in the hallway. Needless to say, this event changes everything.

When Claire finally returns home from the hospital, she is in for another surprise. She has temporarily rented her house out to John which she has forgotten amidst all the turmoil. To make matters worse, he refuses to give up his lease on the house until Claire agrees to do a photography shoot for him.

Fast forward a few chapters; daughter and baby come home, a decision is made by Claire and her brother for

their parents to move into an assisted living facility which throws their mother into a depression, Amy is bitter about her father and takes her anger out on Claire for his desertion while being secretive about her time away and the father of baby Rose, Claire's 'wonderful' fiance Rick is no support, and then the workshop in Cape Cod has an opening. Claire packs up the entire family; Amy, baby Rose, and her parents, to stay in a rental house for the duration of the workshop.

John, of course, is in Cape Cod where he is working on an environmental story concerning whales which become Claire's focus in her photography. Claire's father Joe has been harboring a secret for years which has caused her mother Fanny to doubt his love for her their entire married life. The answers are found in the ocean town that happens to be the place Joe was stationed during the service. Fanny renews Amy's interest and passion in cooking from the old Italian recipes that have been handed down for generations. Rick calls off the wedding but has a change of heart when he suffers from a health scare. However, it comes too late for Claire who finally realizes John is the man for her.

\*\*\*END SPOILER ALERT\*\*\*

Excerpt:

"The river took a sharp bend to the left, and the blacktop followed. This river that had once defined her life. She had gone far up that river, beyond its reach, and tasted a different world. A different kind of life. All of them had been touched by the magical light of Cape Cod."

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### **Tomasen Carey says**

Claire Noble was the epitome of a 40 something year old trying to find her way in the world. Straddled between responsibilities to her daughter and her new granddaughter as well as her failing parents makes any move she makes seem selfish. She decided to follow her bliss, blow off her fiance and take her family with her to Provincetown to discover and work on her dream of being a photographer. Of course there is John who she works with on a magazine project and then who wants her to work on yet another project about the whales and we watch Claire fall in love without her even realizing it.

I read this book on Siesta Key in Florida and it was a great beach read!!

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