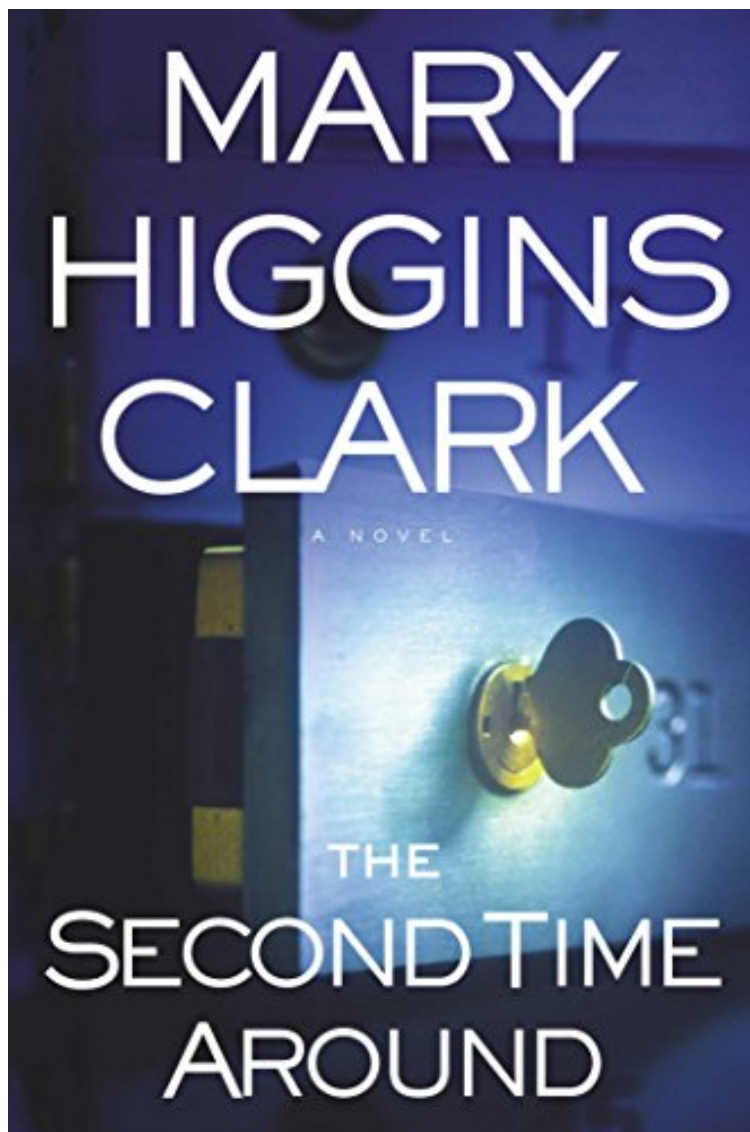


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The Second Time Around: A Novel (English Edition)



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Description : Description du produit Nicholas Spencer, charismatic head of the medical research company Gen-Stone, involved in the development of an anticancer vaccine, suddenly disappears. Early results of the vaccine seemed highly promising. Yet, coinciding with Spencer's disappearance is news that the FDA is denying approval. Then comes the shocking revelation that Spencer had looted Gen-Stone of huge sums of money. Marcia "Carley" DeCarlo, a columnist for Wall Street Weekly, is assigned to cover the story. Carley is the stepsister of Spencer's wife, Lynn, an aggressive PR woman and socialite, whom she dislikes and distrusts. As Carley proceeds with her investigation, she is confronted by seemingly impenetrable questions: Is Nicholas Spencer dead or in hiding? Was he guilty or set up? Why the sudden reversal in medical opinion of the vaccine from recognition to condemnation? As the facts unfold, Carley becomes the target of a

dangerous group involved in a sinister and fraudulent scheme.

Presentation de l'auteur
In a novel that reaffirms her reputation as "America's Queen of Suspense," Mary Higgins Clark delivers a gripping tale of deception and tantalizing suspense. Nicholas Spencer, charismatic head of the medical research company Gen-stone, involved in the development of an anticancer vaccine, suddenly disappears. His private plane crashes en route to Puerto Rico, but his body is not found. Early results of the vaccine seemed highly promising. Yet, coinciding with Nicholas Spencer's disappearance comes news that the FDA is denying approval. Then follows the shocking revelation that Spencer had looted Gen-stone of huge sums of money -- including the lifetime savings of people who had risked every penny they had. Marcia "Carley" DeCarlo, the thirty-two-year-old columnist for the Wall Street Weekly, is assigned to cover the story. Carley is the stepsister of Spencer's wife, Lynn, an aggressive PR woman and socialite, whom she dislikes and distrusts. The day after news of her husband's disappearance rocks the financial and medical world, Lynn attends a meeting of the stockholders of Gen-stone, flaunting expensive clothing and jewelry. Accused of having participated in the scam, she appears indifferent to the anger and despair of the people attending, among them a man whose child has cancer and who is now about to lose his home. That night, she narrowly escapes death when her mansion in Bedford, New York, is set on fire. She turns to Carley, begging her to use her investigative skills to prove that she was not her husband's accomplice. As Carley proceeds with her investigation, she is confronted by seemingly impenetrable questions: Is Nicholas Spencer dead or in hiding? Was he guilty or set up? Why the sudden reversal in medical opinion of the vaccine from recognition to condemnation? And as the facts begin to unfold, she becomes the target of a dangerous group involved in a sinister and fraudulent scheme. The Second Time Around is Mary Higgins Clark at her best, telling a story that intertwines fiction with the stuff of real-life headlines in a novel of breathtaking suspense and surprises.

Chapter One
The stockholders' meeting, or maybe the stockholders' uprising is a better way to describe the event, took place on April 21 at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Manhattan. It was an unseasonably cold and wintry day, but suitably bleak considering the circumstances. The headline two weeks earlier that Nicholas Spencer, president and chief operating officer of Gen-stone had been killed in the crash of his private plane while flying to San Juan had been greeted with genuine and heartfelt grief. His company expected to receive the blessing of the Food and Drug Administration for a vaccine that would both eliminate the possibility of the growth of cancer cells and bring to a halt the progression of the disease in those already afflicted -- a preventive and a cure that he alone was responsible for bringing to the world. He named the company "Gen-stone," a reference to the Rosetta stone that had unveiled the language of ancient Egypt and allowed the appreciation of its remarkable culture. The headline proclaiming Spencer's disappearance was followed in short order by the announcement from the chairman of the board of Gen-stone that there had been numerous setbacks in the experiments with the vaccine and that it could not be submitted to the FDA for approval in the foreseeable future. The announcement further said that tens of millions of dollars had been looted from the company, apparently by Nicholas Spencer.

I'm Marcia DeCarlo, better known as Carley, and even as I sat in the roped-off media section at the stockholders' meeting, observing the furious or stunned or tearful faces around me, I still had a sense of disbelief in what I was hearing. Apparently Nicholas Spencer, Nick, was a thief and a fraud. The miracle vaccine was nothing more than the offspring of his greedy imagination and consummate salesmanship. He had cheated all these people who had invested so much money in his company, often their life savings or total assets. Of course they hoped to make money, but many believed as well that their investment would help make the vaccine a reality. And not only had investors been hurt, but the theft had made worthless the retirement funds of Gen-stone's employees, over a thousand people. It simply didn't seem possible. Since Nicholas Spencer's body had not washed ashore along with charred pieces of his doomed plane, half the people in the auditorium didn't believe he was dead. The other half would willingly have driven a stake through his heart if his remains had been discovered.

Charles Wallingford, the chairman of the board of Gen-stone, ashen-faced but with the natural elegance that is achieved by generations of breeding and privilege, struggled to bring the meeting to order. Other members of the board, their expressions somber, sat on the dais with him. To a man they were prominent figures in business and society. In the second row were people I recognized as executives from Gen-stone's accounting firm. Some of them had been interviewed from time to time in Weekly Browser, the syndicated Sunday supplement for which I write a financial column. Sitting to the right of Wallingford, her face alabaster pale, her blond hair twisted into a French knot, and dressed in a black suit that I'm sure cost a fortune, was Lynn Hamilton Spencer. She

is Nick's wife -- or widow -- and, coincidentally my stepsister whom I've met exactly three times and whom I confess I dislike. Let me explain. Two years ago my widowed mother married Lynn's widowed father, having met him in Boca Raton where they lived in neighboring condominiums. At the dinner the evening before the wedding, I was as annoyed by Lynn Spencer's condescending attitude as I was charmed by Nicholas Spencer. I knew who he was, of course. The stories about him in Time and Newsweek had been detailed. He was the son of a Connecticut family doctor, a general practitioner whose avocation was research biology. His father had a laboratory in his home, and from the time that Nick was a child, he spent most of his free time there, helping his dad with experiments. "Other kids had dogs," he had explained to interviewers. "I had pet mice. I didn't know it, but I was being tutored in microbiology by a genius." He had gone the business route, getting an MBA in business management with the plan of owning a medical supply operation someday. He started work at a small supply business and quickly rose to the top and became a partner. Then, as microbiology became the wave of the future, he began to realize that was the field he wanted to pursue. He began to reconstruct his father's notes and discovered that shortly before his sudden death his father had been on the verge of making a major breakthrough in cancer research. Using his medical supply company as a base, he set out to create a major research division. Venture capital had helped him launch Gen-stone, and word of the cancer-inhibiting vaccine had made the company the hottest stock on Wall Street. Initially offered at \$3 a share, the stock had risen as high as \$160, and conditional on FDA approval, Garner Pharmaceutical contracted to pay \$1 billion for the rights to distribute the new vaccine. I knew that Nick Spencer's wife had died of cancer five years ago, that he had a ten-year-old son, and that he'd been married to Lynn, his second wife, for four years. But all the time I spent boning up on his background didn't help when I met him at that "family" dinner. I simply was not prepared for the absolutely magnetic quality of Nick Spencer's personality. He was one of those people who are gifted with both inherent personal charm and a genuinely brilliant mind. A little over six feet tall, with dark blond hair, intensely blue eyes, and a trim athletic body, he was physically very attractive. It was his ability to interact with people, however, that came through as his greatest asset. As my mother attempted to keep the conversational ball going with Lynn, I found myself telling Nick more about myself than I had ever revealed to anyone at a first meeting. Within five minutes he knew my age, where I lived, my job, and where I grew up. "Thirty-two," he said, smiling. "Eight years younger than I am." Then I not only told him that I had been divorced after a brief marriage to a fellow MBA student at NYU, but even talked about the baby who lived only a few days because the hole in his heart was too big to close. This was so not like me. I never talk about the baby. It hurts too much. And yet it was easy to tell Nicholas Spencer about him. "That's the sort of tragedy our research will prevent someday," he had said gently. "That's why I'll move heaven and earth to save people from the kind of heartbreak you've experienced, Carley." My thoughts were quickly brought back to the present reality as Charles Wallingford hammered the gavel until there was silence -- an angry, sullen silence. "I am Charles Wallingford, the chairman of the board of Gen-stone," he said. He was greeted with a deafening chorus of boos and catcalls. I knew Wallingford was forty-eight or forty-nine years old, and I had seen him on the news the day after Spencer's plane crashed. He looked much older than that now. The strain of the last few weeks had added years to his appearance. No one could doubt that the man was suffering. "I worked with Nicholas Spencer for the past eight years," he said. "I had just sold our family retail business, of which I was chairman, and I was looking for a chance to invest in a promising company. I met Nick Spencer, and he convinced me that the company he had just started would make startling breakthroughs in the development of new drugs. At his urging I invested almost all the proceeds from the sale of our family business and joined Gen-stone. So I am as devastated as you are by the fact that the vaccine is not ready to be submitted to the FDA for approval, but that does not mean if more funds become available, further research will not solve the problem -- "Dozens of shouted questions interrupted him: "What about the money he stole?" "Why not admit that you and that whole bunch up there cheated us?" Abruptly Lynn stood up and in a surprise gesture pulled the microphone from in front of Wallingford. "My husband died on his way to a business meeting to get more funding to keep the research alive. I am sure that the missing money can be explained -- "One man came running up the aisle waving pages that looked as though they had been torn from magazines and newspapers. "The Spencers on their estate in Bedford," he shouted. "The Spencers hosting a charity ball. Nicholas Spencer smiling as he writes a check for 'New York's Neediest.'" Security guards grabbed the man's arms as he reached the dais. "Where did you think that money was coming from, lady? I'll tell you where. It came from our pockets! I put a second mortgage on my house to invest in your lousy company. You wanna know why? Because my kid has cancer, and I believed your husband's promise

about his vaccine."The media section was in the first few rows. I was in an end seat and could have reached out and touched the man. He was a burly-looking guy of about thirty, dressed in a sweater and jeans. I watched as his face suddenly crumpled and he began to cry. "I won't even be able to keep my little girl in our house," he said. "I'll have to sell it now."I looked up at Lynn and our eyes met. I knew it was impossible for her to see the contempt in my eyes, but all I could think was that the diamond on her finger was probably worth enough to pay off the second mortgage that was going to cost a dying child her home.The meeting didn't last more than forty minutes, and most of it consisted of a series of agonized recitals from people who had lost everything by investing in Gen-stone. Many of them said they had been persuaded to buy the stock because a child or other family member had a disease that the vaccine might reverse.As people streamed out, I took names, addresses, and phone numbers. Thanks to my column, a lot of them knew my name and were eager to talk to me about their financial loss as well. They asked whether or not I thought there was any chance of recouping some or all of their investment.Lynn had left the meeting by a side door. I was glad. I had written her a note after Nick's plane crashed, letting her know I would attend a memorial service. There hadn't been one yet; they were waiting to see if his body would be recovered. Now, like almost everyone else, I wondered if Nick had actually been in the plane when it crashed or if he had rigged his disappearance.I felt a hand on my arm. It was Sam Michaelson, a veteran reporter for Wall Street Weekly magazine. "Buy you a drink, Carley," he offered."Good God, I can use one."We went down to the bar on the lobby floor and were directed to a table. It was four-thirty."I have a firm rule not to have vodka straight up before five o'clock," Sam told me, "but, as you're aware, somewhere in the world it is five o'clock."I ordered a glass of Chianti. Usually by late April I'd have switched to chardonnay, my warm weather choice of vino, but feeling as emotionally chilled as I did after that meeting, I wanted something that would warm me up.Sam gave the order, then abruptly asked, "So what do you think, Carley? Is that crook sunning himself in Brazil as we speak?"I gave the only honest answer I could offer: "I don't know." "I met Spencer once," Sam said. "I swear if he'd offered to sell me the Brooklyn Bridge, I'd have fallen for it. What a snake oil salesman. Did you ever meet him in the flesh?"I pondered Sam's question for a moment, trying to decide what to say. The fact that Lynn Hamilton Spencer was my stepsister, making Nick Spencer my stepbrother-in-law, was something I never talked about. However, that fact did keep me from ever commenting publicly or privately on Gen-stone as an investment because I felt that might be considered a conflict of interest. Unfortunately, it did not keep me from buying \$25,000 worth of Gen-stone stock because, as Nicholas Spencer had put it that evening at dinner, after this vaccine eliminated the possibility of cancer, there would someday be another to eliminate all genetic abnormalities.My baby had been baptized the day he was born. I'd called him Patrick, giving him my maternal grandfather's name. I bought that stock as kind of a tribute to my son's memory. That night two years ago Nick had said that the more money they could raise, the faster they would have the tests on the vaccine completed and be able to make it available. "And, of course, eventually your twenty-five thousand dollars will be worth a great deal more," he had added.That money had represented my savings toward a down payment on an apartment.I looked at Sam and smiled, still debating my answer. Sam's hair is a kind of grizzled gray. His one vanity is to comb long strands of it over his balding dome. I've noticed that these strands often are somewhat askew, as they were now, and as an old pal I've had to resist saying, "Surrender. You've lost the hair battle."Sam is pushing seventy, but his baby blue eyes are bright and alert. There's nothing babyish behind that pucklike face, however. He's smart and shrewd. I realized it wouldn't be fair not to tell him of my somewhat tenuous connection to the Spencers, but I would make it clear that I'd actually met Nick only once and Lynn three times.I watched his eyebrows raise as I filled him in on the relationship."She comes through as a pretty cool customer to me," he said. "What about Spencer?" "I would have bought the Brooklyn Bridge from him, too. I thought he was a terrific guy." "What do you think now?" "You mean, whether he's dead or somehow arranged the crash? I don't know." "What about the wife, your stepsister?" I know I winced. "Sam, my mother is genuinely happy with Lynn's father, or else she's putting on one hell of a performance. God help us, the two of them are even taking piano lessons together. You should have heard the concert I got treated to when I went down to Boca for a weekend last month. I admit I didn't like Lynn when I met her. I think she kisses the mirror every morning. But then, I only saw her the night before the wedding, at the wedding, and one other time when I arrived in Boca last year just as she was leaving. So do me a favor and don't refer to her as my stepsister." "Noted."The waitress came with our drinks. Sam sipped appreciatively and then cleared his throat. "Carley, I just heard that you applied for the job that's opening up at the magazine." "Yes." "How come?" "I want to write for a serious financial magazine, not just have a column that is essentially a financial filler in a general interest Sunday supplement. Reporting

for Wall Street Weekly is my goal. How do you know I applied?" "The big boss, Will Kirby, asked about you." "What did you tell him?" "I said you had brains and you'd be a big step up from the guy who's leaving." Half an hour later Sam dropped me off in front of my place. I live in the second-floor apartment of a converted brownstone on East 37th Street in Manhattan. I ignored the elevator, which deserves to be ignored, and walked up the single flight. It was a relief to unlock my door and go inside. I was down in the dumps for very good reasons. The financial situation of those investors had gotten to me, but it was more than that. Many of them had made the investment for the same reason I had, because they wanted to stop the progress of an illness in someone they loved. It was too late for me, but I know that buying that stock as a tribute to Patrick was also my way of trying to cure the hole in my heart that was even bigger than the one that had killed my little son. My apartment is furnished with chattels my parents had in the house in Ridgewood, New Jersey, where I was raised. Because I'm an only child, I had my choice of everything when they moved to Boca Raton. I reupholstered the couch in a sturdy blue fabric to pick up the blue in the antique Persian I'd found at a garage sale. The tables and lamps and easy chair were around when I was the smallest but fastest kid on the varsity basketball team at Immaculate Heart Academy. I keep a picture of the team on the wall in the bedroom, and in it I hold the basketball. I look at the picture and see that in many ways I haven't changed. The short dark hair and the blue eyes I inherited from my father are still the same. I never did have that spurt of growth my mother assured me I'd experience. I was just over five feet four inches then, and I'm five feet four inches now. Alas, the victorious smile isn't around anymore, not the way it was in that picture, when I thought the world was my oyster. Writing the column may have something to do with that. I'm always in touch with real people with real financial problems. But I knew there was another reason for feeling drained and down tonight. Nick. Nicholas Spencer. No matter how overwhelming the apparent evidence, I simply could not accept what they were saying about him. Was there another answer for the failure of the vaccine, the disappearance of the money, the plane crash? Or was it something in me that let me be conned by smooth-talking phonies who don't give a damn about anyone but themselves? Like I was by Greg, the Mr. Wrong I married nearly eleven years ago. When Patrick died after living only four days, Greg didn't have to tell me that he was relieved. I could see it. It meant that he wouldn't be saddled with a child who needed constant care. We didn't really talk about it. There wasn't much to say. He told me that the job he was offered in California was too good to pass up. I said, "Don't let me keep you." And that was that. All these thoughts did nothing but depress me further, so I went to bed early, determined to clear my head and make a fresh start the next day. I was awakened at seven in the morning by a phone call from Sam. "Carley, turn on the television. There's a news bulletin. Lynn Spencer went up to her house in Bedford last night. Somebody torched it. The fire department managed to get her out, but she inhaled a lot of smoke. She's in St. Ann's Hospital in serious condition." As Sam hung up, I grabbed the remote from the bedside table. The phone rang just as I clicked the TV on. It was the office of St. Ann's Hospital. "Ms. DeCarlo, your stepsister, Lynn Spencer, is a patient here. She very much wants to see you. Will you be able to visit her today?" The woman's voice became urgent. "She's terribly upset and in quite a bit of pain. It's very important to her that you come." Copyright 2003 by Mary Higgins Clark From Publishers Weekly There's something special about Clark's thrillers, and it's not just the gentleness with which the bestselling writer approaches her often lurid subject matter (in this one, for instance, there are numerous killings, but all occur off-page). Special above all is the compassion she extends to her characters—heroines, villains and supporting cast alike. In this latest effort, she conjures empathy even toward a mass killer, whose murderous spree has been sparked by a corporate crime. The smoothly told tale is narrated partly from the third-person perspective of the killer, and partly from the first-person point of view of Wall Street Weekly correspondent Carley De Carlo. Carley is the stepsister of Lynn Spencer, whose charismatic husband, Nicholas, dies in the crash of his small plane as he is fleeing arrest for looting the medical company he founded, which had made claims of a cancer cure, now proved false. Myriad investors have lost much, sometimes everything; one is Ned Cooper, whose beloved wife died as a consequence of Nicholas Spencer's thievery, and who determines to take revenge, setting off on a killing spree. Assigned to do a feature about the Spencer case, Carley digs deep, uncovering clues to a conspiracy within Spencer's medical company, as well as to the possibility that the cancer cure worked after all. Can she get to the bottom of the mess before Ned Cooper, or the possible conspirators, take her out? Clark's fans know the answer to that question, but what the novel lacks in suspense it makes up for in grace, charm and solid storytelling. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information,

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