

An interview with Colleen Coble, Author of *Mermaid Moon*



Shame can cause people to make drastic, sometimes life-altering decisions. When they experience the consequences of failure, whether at their own hands or at the hands of others, their instinct can be to retreat to avoid experiencing hurt again. That knee-jerk reaction can strain relationships and lead to isolation. This is one of the themes award-winning author Colleen Coble chose to examine in the second book in her Sunset Cove series, *Mermaid Moon* (Thomas Nelson/January 12, 2016/ISBN: 978-1401690281/\$15.99).

Q: *Mermaid Moon* is the second book in the Sunset Cove series. How is the series tied together? Is there a specific theme that runs throughout?

I wanted these books to examine the various ways we all come to family. Some are born into the family, some are adopted, and some create their own family with friends.

Claire's story (*The Inn at Ocean's Edge*) is continued as a subplot through the story as well, so I think readers will like that!

Q: Did something personal inspire the storyline of *Mermaid Moon*?

I've always wanted to explore the turmoil adopted children feel as they try to decide if they will search for their birth family.

Q: What do you love so much about Down East Maine, where *Mermaid Moon* is based? Why is going there a little bit like stepping back in time?

I love the wildness of it and the way you won't find big superstores in all the little towns dotting the coast. The communities exist by being close-knit and supportive of one another. Many still earn their living from the sea the way their ancestors did. It's a wonderful place to be!

Q: Despite its sleepy setting, *Mermaid Moon's* plot is packed with action and intrigue. Why did you choose to juxtapose those two characteristics?

I do that in every book. I love creating a setting that's homey and somewhat remote so my characters have to learn to be strong and overcome the obstacles in their way. It's also what I know. I've never lived in a big city (and don't want to!), and I love the way a small town operates.

Q: What are some of the challenges involved with writing a mystery?

You have to keep the reader guessing and engaged. I want the reader to stay up until two in the morning because she couldn't put the book down. It's also challenging to keep each book fresh. After writing as many books as I have, I have to think hard about plot and character before starting a new book.

Q: Your main character, Mallory, left behind her small hometown and a string of strained relationships after her mother died. Why does our struggle with personal shame have such a strong impact on our relationships?

When we are hurt and fail, it makes us want to retreat and not take the risk of getting hurt again. Personal shame strikes at our core because we feel we can never make up for that failure. We fear the relationship can never be mended. When the shame and guilt run deep, it takes God to bring the necessary healing too.

Q: Family relationships can be the trickiest relationships of all. Why do you think that is?

Our family relationships have the deepest thread of love running through them. When you are hurt by someone you love that much, a sense of deep betrayal can make us put up our guard. It strikes at the core of who we are because the family relationship helped form us into who we are.

Q: Why do you think women, particularly single mothers, will find a kinship with Mallory?

Mallory had a lot to overcome in *Mermaid Moon*, but she didn't let her circumstances keep her from doing what had to be done. Single moms have so much on their shoulders, and I have a lot of empathy for them (though I've never had to go through that myself). I want them to know God is there for them, and they can find the strength to do what needs to be done every day.

Q: What is so bad about being a perfectionist? Isn't striving for your best a good thing?

Too often a perfectionist bases her worth on doing things right. Any failure to perform perfectly leaves her feeling she isn't good enough. Of course we want to give anything we do our best, but our character isn't damaged when we fail or when we mess up. People can love us even if we aren't perfect.

Q: When Mallory finds herself in distress more than a decade after leaving home, her first instinct is to reach out to her first love. Why does our first love often have such a lasting impact on our hearts?

I think we never forget our first love. Everything is new and wonderful, and it seems perfect to our young and impressionable selves. Sometimes first love is the only time we throw ourselves fully into a relationship. It shouldn't be that way, but if the first love ends badly, it can affect how much of ourselves we are willing to give to a future relationship.

Q: When is it appropriate to give others who have hurt us a second chance, and when should we leave them in the past?

I think you have to look at their character. Did they hurt you because they simply messed up? We all mess up. Or did they hurt you because they didn't care enough to be faithful and devoted? Is the offense likely to happen again? Did they habitually hurt you? If that's the case, it's not really wise to put yourself in that position again. You have to forgive them and not hold onto bitterness, but it's foolish to think they will change if you just love them enough.

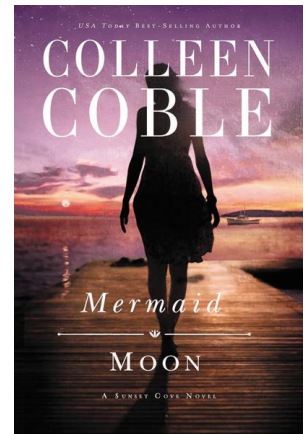
Q: The death of a loved one often leaves us thinking about how to live without regrets. In what ways can we take that sentiment too far?

Some people can take that in a wrong direction and live for themselves only. They give no thought to other people and the future. It's much wiser to take that loss as a chance to make sure you care for your loved ones as best as you can. The worst regrets are when a loved one dies and you know you could have done better in showing them your love and care.

Q: Without giving away too much, at one point in *Mermaid Moon*, Mallory cuts her hair off, even though she'd been growing it out for 20 years. What was the symbolism in that act? Have you ever done anything similar to mark a big decision?

I wanted the reader to see Mallory was not being weighed down with the past any longer. Much of her decision to grow it out was rooted in the past, and she was ready to let go of that. I used to have hair as long as Mallory's, but mine was only cut off to shorten time spent on it so I could use that time with my new son.

Q: What is the main impression you want to make on readers of *Mermaid Moon*?



It's usually harder to forgive ourselves than to forgive others. God doesn't want us to carry around that burden of guilt and shame. We can be free of it if we realize He forgave it long ago. We're the one still lugging it around.

Q: What do you have planned next for the *Sunset Cove* series?

I'm working on *Twilight at Blueberry Barrens*. This is Kate's story, and she witnesses two bodies going off a cliff in the first scene. The authorities rule it a murder/suicide, but the brother of one of the victims believes it was murder. Kate gets drawn into the danger when she takes charge of the two girls orphaned by the deaths.

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