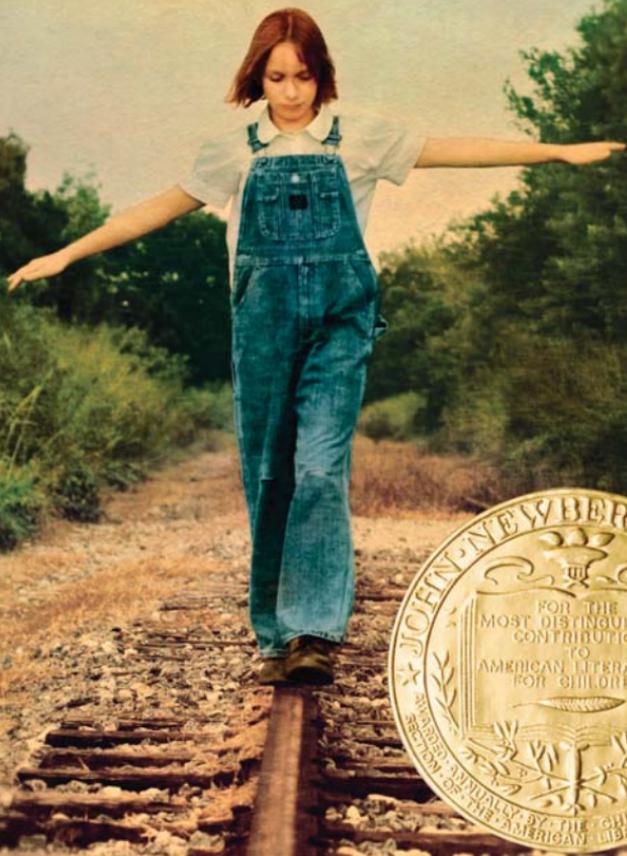


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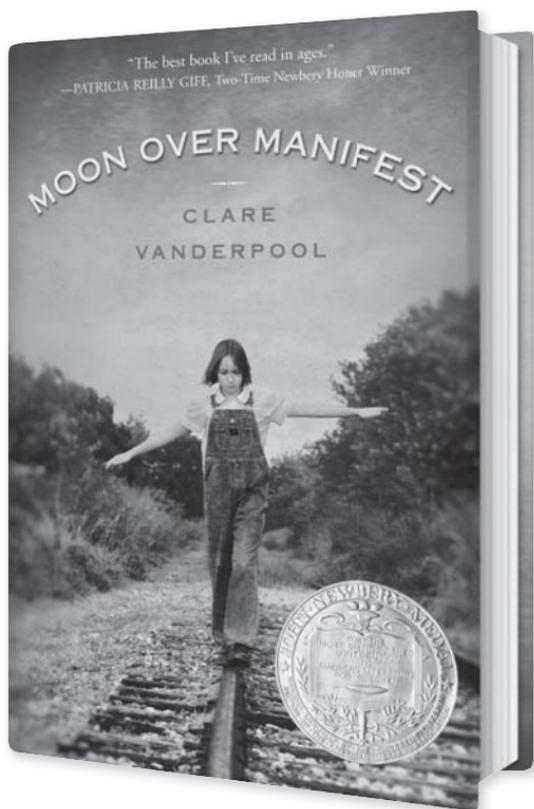
MOON OVER MANIFEST

CLARE
VANDERPOOL



CHAPTER SAMPLER AND Q&A WITH AUTHOR!

**THE NEWBERY MEDAL-WINNING
AND DEBUT NOVEL
FROM CLARE VANDERPOOL!**



A bilene Tucker wants to learn about her father's boyhood when she jumps off the train in Manifest, Kansas. She is disappointed to find a dried up Depression town, but intrigue quickly takes hold when a hidden cigar box sends her on a spy hunt to learn what role her father played in Manifest's secret history.

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**MOON
OVER
MANIFEST**



CLARE VANDERPOOL

DELACORTE PRESS

KEEP READING FOR A SNEAK PEEK . . .

First Morning

MAY 28, 1936

*W*hat kind of addlepate starts school on the last day? I'd been asking myself that question since waking to the sound of pans clanking downstairs and the smell of bacon and coffee rising upstairs. My stomach growled, reminding me that Hattie Mae's meat loaf sandwich had become a too-distant memory.

Then I remembered the Lucky Bill cigar box. With a buzz of anticipation, I sprung out of bed and found the loose board, only to have Shady call upstairs.

"Miss Abilene, you're burnin' daylight. Breakfast is ready."

As much as I was itching to get more than a moonlit look at what was in the box, I knew better than to keep a cook waiting. I left the box under the floorboard for safekeeping and checked to make sure the compass was still around my neck. I put on my one change of clothes, a blue dress with

yellow daisies. The daisies were a little faded but not so bad you couldn't see them. Then I splashed some water on my face and ran my fingers through my hair. It felt like straw but was the color of a rusty nail. Wearing it short, I never fussed with it much, but I did look forward to that "proper bath" Shady had mentioned the night before.

The stairs emptied into a small back room. More of a porch, really, with a black cookstove, a washtub, and a cot. It appeared Shady could do his eating, bathing, and sleeping all in one place. There was a plate of biscuits, slightly burnt, and bacon, just as warm and pleasant as you please, on the cookstove. Having someone cook my meals made me feel like I was at a fancy hotel.

"There's some of Velma T.'s blackberry jam in the cupboard," Shady called from the big room with the bar top and pews. I spread on a modest amount and set it on a pink glass plate, the kind that came free in bags of sugar or flour or laundry soap.

Since there was no table, I took my pink plate into the big front room. With the light of day shining through those stained-glass windows onto the gleaming bar top, I didn't know whether to kneel down or belly up. Shady was tinkering at his workbench as I ate my breakfast. He was looking real close at a tiny something, cleaning it off with a wire bristle brush. "What're you working on?"

"The letter *L*," he said, squinting at his task at hand. "Hattie Mae's been writing her column for almost twenty years; it's no wonder that typewriter's about give out." He blew on the metal key and eyeballed it from a distance. Wiping off the piece with a cloth, he placed it beside the typewriter.

“Now she can get back to her whos, whats, and wheres and I can get the *L* out of here.”

Gideon hadn't told me that Pastor Howard had a sense of humor. Seemed nobody had told Pastor Howard either, as he didn't let on like he thought it was funny.

I finished off the last of my biscuit. It was hard going down, as my mouth had gone dry. Maybe if I made myself useful, I wouldn't have to go to school. I'd been in and out of schools before, but I'd always been in the protective shade of my daddy. Here I was alone and exposed to the heat and clamor of the day.

A bell started clanging from a distance, jarring me out of my thoughts.

“Better get on over to school. You don't want to be late.” He studied the splayed-out typewriter in front of him. “Here's a couple things for you to mind while you're there.” He handed me the letters *P* and *Q*.

I studied them. “If I took these, it'd sure leave Hattie Mae in a pickle and a quandary and she wouldn't be able to type either one.”

Shady smiled a half smile. As I put the letters back on the table, I noticed that day's newspaper lying off to the side. It was folded open to “Hattie Mae's News Auxiliary.” I picked it up and read the line at the bottom. *All the whos, whats, whys, whens, and wheres you never knew you needed to know.*

I headed out, giving the cowbell above the door a mournful clang as I left.

Sacred Heart of the Holy Redeemer Elementary School

MAY 28, 1936

You'd have thought I'd be used to this by now. Being the new kid and all. I'd been through this umpteen times before but it never gets any easier. Still, there's certain things every school's got, same as any other. Universals, I call them. Walking into the schoolhouse, I smelled the familiar chalky air. Heard fidgety feet rustling under desks. Felt the stares. I took a seat near the back.

My one consolation was that I knew these kids. Even if they didn't know me. Kids are universals too, in a way. Every school has the ones who think they're a little better than everybody else and the ones who are a little poorer than everybody else. And somewhere in the mix there's usually ones who are pretty decent. Those were the ones who made it hard to leave when the time came. And sooner or later, it always came.

I guessed I'd never find out who was who around there,

it being the last day of school and all. The books were already stacked on shelves for the summer. The blackboard was just that: black. No math problems. No spelling words. Then a girl with a rosy round face spoke up.

“I bet you’re an orphan.”

“Soletta Taylor!” a skinny, red-haired girl scolded. “Why would you say such a thing?”

“She came in on the train without a mama or a daddy, didn’t she? It was all the talk at the five-and-dime.”

“Well, maybe you shouldn’t be listening to ‘all the talk.’ Besides, that doesn’t mean she’s an orphan.” The girl twisted one of her red braids and looked at me. “Does it?”

My face was hot and probably red, but I squared my shoulders. “My mother’s gone to that sweet by and by.” I said it loud enough for everybody to hear, since they were all ear cocked anyway. Some gave kind of sympathetic looks for my loss. I didn’t figure it was a lie, since who knew for certain what the sweet by and by was? Most folks seemed to think it meant she had died and gone to a better place. But in my book it just meant she had decided that being a wife and mother wasn’t all it was cracked up to be, and when I was two, she joined a dance troupe in New Orleans. But since I had no memory of my mother, it was hard to miss her.

“But,” I continued, answering their next question before they could ask it, “I got a daddy.” I’d often been asked about my mother, but until now, I’d never had to explain the whereabouts of Gideon. It wasn’t fair, him putting me in this predicament. “He’s working a railroad job back in Iowa. He says it’s not fit living for a girl my age, so I’m here for the summer.” I didn’t say that the railroad had been fit living for

me pretty near my whole life and I didn't see why this summer was any different. "But he's coming back for me the end of the summer." For some reason my words rang a little hollow. I wasn't sure if it was the look Hattie Mae and Shady had exchanged the day before or the look of pity on some of those kids' faces just then. Maybe they knew of someone else who got left for good, but Gideon *was* coming back for me and I'd have a few choice words for him when he arrived.

"See, Lettie? I told you she's not an orphan," said the red-haired girl. I figured Lettie must be short for Soletta.

"They're cousins," said a freckle-faced boy in overalls, as if that explained everything. "Your daddy ever seen anyone get flattened by a train?"

"Now what kind of question is that?" It was Lettie who said it. "Come on, Ruthanne, you jumped on me for asking a dumb question. What about Billy's?"

"It ain't a dumb question," Billy said. "My granddad used to work at the depot and he tells a story about how a fella got hit by a train in Kansas City and, dead as he was, he stayed on that engine car all the way to the Manifest depot. Nobody wanted to peel him off and since he had a round-trip ticket, they left him there all the way back to Kansas City."

"I heard a story like that," Lettie said, "only it was about a boy who rode a three-legged horse all the way to Springfield and—"

"Would you two hush up with your stories and let the poor girl tell her own?" Ruthanne scolded.

All eyes were back on me. "I don't suppose I have any story to tell. But my name's Abilene."

"That ain't a name. That's a place," said Billy. "You from the one in Kansas or Texas?"

“Neither.”

“It doesn’t matter where she’s from,” said a girl with fancy curls that looked like they were done in a beauty parlor. She raised her eyebrows and looked down her nose at me. “The fact is she’s living in a saloon and a stone’s throw from that spooky Miss Sadie’s Divining Parlor. My mother says that place is nothing but a den of iniquity.”

The only places I’d seen within a stone’s throw from Shady’s place were the cemetery and that broken-down shack of a house with PERDITION written on the gate. Truth was I didn’t know what a divining parlor or a den of iniquity was but you can bet I planned to find out.

“Shut up, Charlotte, and give the girl a chance to talk,” Ruthanne said again. “Well, where *are* you from? Where’s your home?”

That question always came up real quick. It was a universal. And I was ready for it. “All over. My daddy says it’s not down in any map. True places never are.”

Another voice, an older voice, spoke from the back of the room. “I see your father is well versed in the works of Herman Melville.”

Suddenly, chairs scooted back and the whole class stood. “Good morning, Sister Redempta.”

“*Moby Dick*, to be precise. Good morning, class. I see you’ve had ample time to meet your new classmate and welcome her with tales of dead bodies and dens of iniquity.” She raised an eyebrow to the class.

I gathered it was a woman, since they called her Sister, but since she was covered in black with only her face peeking out of what looked like a little white box, it was hard telling.

Gideon says a rose is a rose. But when it comes down to

it, there's some more rosy and some more thorny. I didn't know yet if she was rose or thorn, but one thing I knew for sure. She wasn't any universal.

She was a towering figure, gliding solemnly to the front of the room. Her posture was straight and formal; the only movement about her was the swaying of a long strand of wooden beads wrapped around her waist and extending down to her knees. I caught the scent of lye soap as she walked past. Strong as it was, she must be a believer in cleanliness being next to godliness and she wasn't taking any chances.

It did occur to me to find it strange for a Baptist minister to send me to a Catholic school. Sometimes religious folks draw pretty deep lines in the sand. But having seen Shady's place, which was also part church, saloon, and workshop, I could tell his lines were a bit fuzzy.

Sister Redempta placed a stack of papers on her desk. "I'm sure you are eagerly awaiting your final report cards." There was a good amount of moaning and shuffling. "Rest assured you have all received marks that are fair and representative of your work throughout the past year." She picked up the first paper in the stack. "Billy Clayton."

Billy walked to the front. "Sister." He nodded, accepting the paper. As he shuffled back, those freckles got lost in the red rising in his cheeks.

"Charlotte Hamilton."

Miss Beauty Parlor pranced to the front of the room. "Thank you, Sister." She smiled at everyone on her way back, but hearing the yelp she let out afterward, I thought she'd sat on a tack. Her hand shot up. "Sister Redempta, I'm afraid there's been a mistake. There is a B marked beside catechism."

"I am aware of that, Charlotte. I graded your final exam,

and among other things, I do not believe that wearing black to a funeral or giving last year's feather bonnet to your sister can be classified as corporal works of mercy. Mae Hughes," she continued. "Ruthanne McIntyre . . . Noah Rousseau . . . Soletta Taylor."

It was almost worth having to go to school just to see everybody itching and squirming. After looking at her report card, Lettie Taylor slouched in her seat and whispered to Ruthanne, "Charlotte better air out her black dress for a funeral, because my mama's gonna kill me."

I was sitting pretty as each name was called, knowing mine would not be among them.

"Abilene Tucker."

I must have been smiling for a while, because all of a sudden my mouth hurt from changing positions so fast.

"You *are* Abilene Tucker." Sister Redempta said it as if I'd been wondering about that for some time. "I understand that you have just arrived, and unfortunately, that leaves me with no basis on which to give you a grade for this term."

"Yes, ma'am," I said. *Ain't it a shame?* I thought.

"Therefore, you will have a special assignment to complete during the summer."

"Assignment? Summer?" A rose is a rose, but she was sprouting thorns, all right.

"I am pleased that your ears are in such able condition. Let us put your mind to the test as well. It seems everyone is fond of a good story, dead bodies on trains notwithstanding. Therefore, your assignment will be to write a story of your own. You may select the topic and it will be graded for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and creativity. It will be due September first."

She didn't wait for any ifs, ands, or buts from me. Good thing, too, as I couldn't think of a thing to say. But I didn't have any plans of still being in Manifest come September.

"If you need help getting started"—she peered out of her white box at the class—"I am quite certain there are some students who would be happy to offer their assistance."

There was a god-awful quiet as nobody even looked my way. Then Lettie Taylor chanced to shoo a fly off, and quicker than an auctioneer, that woman pegged her.

"Thank you, Soletta. Perhaps your mother will allow you a stay of execution for a few months."

Ruthanne laughed behind her hand.

"And, Ruthanne, a kind gesture on your part. As for the rest of you"—she shot an evil eye at the class—"it would do you well to remember for next term that acts of charity and kindness are also taken into consideration in one's overall grade."

Charlotte's hand shot up again. "I'd be happy to help the poor girl, Sister." She gave me a pitiful look. "I'll even help her find some more suitable clothes. Something a little less traveled."

"That won't be necessary, Charlotte. I'm sure Abilene will have quite enough help. Now let us stand for prayer."

The class stood and Charlotte flipped her hair around. "No matter," she whispered over her shoulder. "I'm spending most of the summer with relatives in Charleston. You know, South Carolina." She was suddenly talking with a Southern accent. "Pity, though. I would have thought clothing the poor in taste would have been a fine corporal work of mercy."

Snooty rich girl. A universal.

Fort Treeconderoga

MAY 28, 1936

Fortunately, the last day of school was brief. Just long enough to hand out report cards and clean out desks. After lunch, when Shady said I could use the old tree house out back for having friends over, he was off on two counts. First, I didn't have any friends. Second, that conglomeration of half-nailed boards could hardly be called a tree house. Oh, it was in a tree, all right. Thirty feet up with nothing to climb on except skinny branches and a rope ladder that looked to be holding on for dear life.

But I'd spent part of the afternoon helping tidy up around Shady's place and now I wanted to be alone to look through the Lucky Bill cigar box I'd found under the floorboards. That tree house looked to be as alone as I could get. So I stuffed the box in my satchel and climbed, one creaky step at a time.

The daylight coming through the floorboards was enough

to make me wish I had a little fat on me so I wouldn't slide right through to the ground. Inside, I looked out a jagged hole that was pretending to be a window. I could see everything from up there. The *Manifest Herald* on one side of the hardware store, Koski's Diner and the Better Days Funeral Parlor on the other. Across the street were the bank, the post office, Dawkins Drug and Dime Store, Cooper's Barber-shop, and the Curly Q Beauty Emporium. And those train tracks that Gideon was at the other end of.

Then I saw Lettie and Ruthanne run into Dawkins Drug and Dime. I'd stood on the outside, looking in, on my way home from school. It had a soda fountain and jars of lemon drops, licorice whips, and candy buttons. I must have been steaming up the window, because a stern-looking woman, probably Mrs. Dawkins herself, had shooed me off. I wondered what treats those girls were getting. Maybe Gideon'd take me there when he came to get me. Again I felt a little off balance, like I'd felt in the newspaper office the day before. But who wouldn't feel a little wobbly in a rickety tree house so high above the ground?

Enough goosenecking. I had a look around the tree house, figuring what I'd haul up with me next time. Food, for one thing. I'd skipped lunch and the afternoon was heading from mid to late.

There wasn't much left in the tree fort from previous dwellers. Just an old hammer and a few rusted tin cans holding some even rustier nails. A couple of wood crates with the salt girl holding her umbrella painted on top. And a shabby plaque dangling sideways on one nail. FORT TREECONDEROGA. Probably named after the famous fort from Revolutionary

War days. Anything else that might have been left behind had probably been weathered to bits and fallen through the cracks.

No matter. I'd have this place whipped into shape lickety-split. First off, I picked out the straightest nail I could find and fixed that sign up right. Fort Treconderoga was open for business.

Kneeling in front of one of the crates like it was an altar, I opened the cigar box and let the contents tumble out. There was the map. Not a folded-up road map, but a homemade one on faded paper with worn edges. It was a hand-drawn picture of places around the town, labeled with names. Up top in a youthful hand were the words *The Home Front*.

Then there were the keepsakes. Little things kept for the sake of something. Or someone. A cork, a fishhook, a silver dollar, a fancy key, and a tiny wooden baby doll, no bigger than a thimble, painted in bright colors, with a face and everything. To me they were like treasures from a museum, things a person could study to learn about another time and the people who lived back then.

Then there were the letters. I selected one and held the thin paper to my nose, wondering, hoping that I'd smell something of Gideon as a boy. Maybe smells like dog, or wood, or pond water. I felt like I was floating in my daddy's world of summer, and hide-and-seek, and fishing when I opened the paper and read the greeting. *Dear Jinx*, it said in an unfamiliar penmanship.

My heart sank like a five-gallon bucket full of disappointment. The cigar box and letters didn't belong to Gideon. But I kept reading.