



★ **Watersong**

Clarissa Goenawan

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A fortune teller issues a warning against three women with water-related names in Clarissa Goenawan's dark, atmospheric novel *Watersong*.

Arai has been plagued by nightmares of drowning since childhood. A fortune teller's dire warning casts a dark veil over his future. Then Arai's mysterious, secretive girlfriend, Youko, gets him an interview for a job as a "listener." He is hired to attend to clients, maintain strict confidentiality, and refrain from advising or getting personally involved with people. Drawn by compassion into an emotional relationship with a client who's the wife of a prominent politician, Arai learns that her husband is abusing her, and that she is unable to act on her own behalf.

The book reveals that Arai—scarred by physical and emotional abuse at the hands of the man who lives with his mother; hiding his role in a tragic childhood event—is well aware of the corrosive effects of secrets and lies. Fearing for his client's safety, he is unable to remain a passive listener; this puts his and Youko's lives at risk. Separately, the couple flees to Tokyo, where Arai engages in a desperate search for Youko, despite ominous warnings to let her go—and his increasing awareness that his every move is being watched.

Luminous prose, emotional insights, and subtle, meticulous attention to small details contribute to this rich, exciting, and sympathetic story. As the fortune teller's frightening prediction unfolds, not even the beauty and traditions of Japanese culture can mask life's harsh realities. Arai and Youko are ensnared in fateful events beyond their control, and water is revealed to be both a giver of life and a means of death.

Watersong is a haunting, complex novel about the power of hidden secrets to shape the future.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July / August 2022)

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