

# THE LACY AFFAIRS

of

## GERMANTOWN

by

charles savary

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*Eternally, for Jamie*

## CHAPTER ONE

*“Are you frightened? Are you afraid, Lacy?”*

*“Oh, my God, yesss! Oh, my God, I’m so afraid! I’m so, so afraid!”*

## CHAPTER TWO

Lacy Knight sat in a remote clearing at the edge of the Mississippi River near Memphis, Tennessee. She'd gone there a lot recently to sort things out, and she always went alone.

It wasn't as if anyone missed Lacy, though. They might have pretended to, but most folks were content not to deal with her these days. Everyone was emotionally drained from the toll that doing so took on them. Because whoever's life she touched wasn't the same once she became involved with them.

Lacy was like a whirlpool, disrupting calmer waters before drawing everything into itself. Love from the people who cared for her, a few of whom had offered it to her unconditionally. Envy when they competed for her attention, and resentment when she didn't give it to them. And then anger. Ferocious, unyielding, retaliatory anger. Nothing escaped. It all swirled together like as much debris before getting sucked into the blackness.

So many things could have turned out differently for the girl whose family had abandoned her. No, they didn't drop her off at an orphanage or leave her on anyone's doorstep. But ever since coming into the world, the baby who stared up longingly into her mother's eyes, searching for that assurance that she was safe and that no one would be allowed to harm her, had to champion herself.

Instead of being nurtured and reassured in life, she had to create emotional triggers in others to bolster her self-image. She'd gotten pretty good at doing that.

Lacy never had the opportunity to develop emotionally, psychologically, or in any other way that might've helped her become a confident, self-assured, beautiful young woman for which she had every ounce of potential to be.

Instead, Lacy faced each wave that rolled into her life without help from anyone. There was no one to encourage her, no one to offer her advice, and no one to congratulate her when she managed to get things right. She was left alone to figure everything out.

Lacy was beautiful because her parents were beautiful, albeit only in the most superficial ways. They also had demanding careers and tunnel vision that obstructed the view of all the disturbing goings-on in their little girl's life that might ordinarily trigger the concern of a loving parent.

There'd been no romance between her parents, no lightning strike, nor any planning beyond a scheme. There weren't any salad days or scrimping to make ends meet until they struggled to the next phase of life. They didn't engage the world as a team, reinforcing each other and facing life's challenges with a unified front.

Money flowed like the Mississippi River a few feet from where Lacy was sitting, and, as a result, she had no want for material things because they were only the presentation of an American Express card or the punching in of an ATM code away.

None of that mattered now, though, as Lacy's glossy, troubled eyes reflected the Memphis lights that shone on the cold, dark water in front of her. None of it mattered one damned bit.

In a rare show of vulnerability, Lacy had cried, though. Although she knew it wouldn't do any good, she cried and cried.

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A few hundred yards away, Jerome parked his Suburban and looked over at his wife, Ardella, who was asleep on the passenger's side. He knew she was exhausted because she'd worked a double at the front desk of the Days Inn.

"Baby? Baby. Baby," Jerome said, tapping Ardella's shoulder and waking her up, "we don't have to come down here tonight. We can go home and get out here early if you want. Those cats ain't goin' nowhere."

Ardella came to life then and sat up straight, taking in her surroundings, relieved she hadn't fallen asleep behind the front desk.

"No, no, baby. I'm good. I just can't go nowhere in a car when I'm tired. You know how I am," Ardella said, stretching forward in her seat.

Then, Ardella and Jerome started the tasks that came with a night of catfishing. Jerome grabbed his fishing pole and their cooler, full of Snapple and bottled water. Ardella would tote her pole and their picnic bag of tuna fish sandwiches and Andy Capp's Hot Fries.

"You go on, sugar," Ardella said, "I'm gonna call and see where Lil'J is."

"Okay, Momma," Jerome said before he turned and shuffled off toward the shore.

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"Gat-damn," Jerome said, noticing the pitiful little white girl sitting in one of the sling chairs he kept hidden for Ardella. He stashed that and his tacklebox in a thicket behind the posted signs about ten yards away. That was easier than driving back to the house whenever he'd forgotten them.

The girl's back was to Jerome, and she hadn't noticed him yet. So, he could've easily tiptoed back to the truck and driven off with his wife. But he knew Ardella wouldn't have gone for that. Not when she'd come off a double, helped him load up, and ridden across town to go fishing with him.

Ardella and Jerome hadn't seen her in a while, but the girl sitting in their chair had haunted their fishing spot for the past few months, and it always seemed to have been at the least opportune times. Jerome thought she should've had better things to do than hang out with a middle-aged black couple on a Friday night, so her presence always begged several questions.

Jerome and Ardella were friendly to the girl just the same. They both felt sorry for her. A girl that pretty, dressed that well, spending a Friday night by herself? It was a damned shame. Something really must've been wrong in her life.

"Unh, unh, baby! I ain't gon' let you steal my spot, now!" Jerome kidded.

The girl didn't say anything back, though. She just continued to stare out at the river. Clearly, she was in no mood to carry on any small talk.

She was probably on something, just as Jerome and Ardella had always suspected whenever she came around. Nobody rattled on like that girl could, talking ninety miles an hour about nothing and flittering from one emotion to the next without any notice or reason. Jerome imagined he was probably witnessing the aftermath of one of those awful binges as he stared at her. But whatever emotional state she was in, he could tell she didn't want to talk to him.

"Ok, then," Jerome said, "but what'd you do with my tackle box, baby?"

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Ardella heard her husband scream out from the distance. She dropped her phone and pole and started tearing through their picnic bag until she found Jerome's pistol. Then, she hurried toward the darkness he'd disappeared into moments before.

"Jerome?! Jerome?! Jerome!!" Ardella shouted, getting no answer.

Once Ardella started down the gentle slope to the waterline, she saw Jerome kneeling on the sandy mud, shaking his head, and holding the hand of someone who said something horrible to him. It was a woman. Whatever she said as she bobbed her head up and down, she said it with a lot of emotion.

Ardella got closer to them and saw that Jerome wasn't in danger. Nevertheless, she raised the pistol and pointed it toward the ground in front of him and the woman. As she approached the two, she recognized the female as being that crazy-ass white girl who came around sometimes. She couldn't imagine what the girl was saying to Jerome being so horrible that he'd screamed out how he had. But Ardella had always felt like that girl was trouble.

For starters, the girl was a chatterbox. She never stopped talking. She jumped from topic to topic and went from laughing and cutting up to crying or getting angry before you knew it. Never at them, though. It seemed she reserved her most intense emotions for the other people she always talked about. Her parents. Her brother. Her boyfriend. Her other boyfriend. And then about some big girl that bullied her at school all the time.

Sometimes, the girl told Jerome and Ardella how beautiful their lives seemed and that they were just like she wanted hers to be. Then she'd prattle with no break in her chain of thought. She'd tell them about things in a stream, speaking as they occurred to her.

She wanted a man—a good man like Jerome—to take care of her and protect her. Then she wanted a son, too. She wanted a little

boy to dote on and dress up as a little soldier or in a football uniform. She wanted a small house but didn't want it to be in the city or anywhere close to Memphis. She thought she'd like Mississippi, though. Yes. That was it. Mississippi. That was where she was going to move. Mississippi. She'd move to Mississippi in the country somewhere. She'd get married, and she'd have a little boy. Stuart. She wanted to name him Stuart. And Stuart and her husband would go fishing together like Ardella and Jerome did. They'd fish. And they'd play backgammon. And she'd make them dinner. It was all going to be perfect. Just perfect. Life in Mississippi with Stuart and her husband was going to be perfect. She, her husband, and Stuart would have a wonderful life together in Mississippi. It would be just like "that black lady's from *Instant Mom*."

"What the hell is goin' on?" Ardella demanded.

Jerome looked up at Ardella, and it stunned her to see he was crying. He shook his head and gasped as if trying to find words, but he never spoke.

That's when Ardella realized what was going on. That damned girl had threatened Jerome. She'd pretended he did something to her and was going to try and have him arrested. That's why she'd been jawing so much when Ardella walked up.

Lacy didn't intend to cause any trouble, though. She didn't mean to intrude on their good time or blather about little to nothing. Lacy assured Jerome about that before Ardella arrived, which is what had upset him so terribly. But her assurances hadn't come with words. Rather, they'd been delivered through a glance and her body language.

And that's because Lacy couldn't speak. And Lacy couldn't speak because someone had removed Lacy's tongue.

Whether or not Lacy had been alive at the time wouldn't be determined until her autopsy—as would the origins of the clubbing that the back of her head had sustained. That was also when they'd analyze the fluorocarbon test line her murderer had used to sew her eyes open. The forensics team would conclude that her killer used those things available at the scene and that they hadn't brought with them.

As Jerome tried to jar Lacy from what he had presumed was a comatose state, he entangled his hand in the fishing line, which her killer had also rigged to hold up her head. But when Jerome yanked his hand away, the gesture turned her into a macabre marionette whose head jerked back and forth before it finally tilted backward and stared at Ardella.

“No! No! Stop! Don't come down here!” Jerome hollered. “Call the police, Ardella! Call 911! Dial 911!” he sobbed as he accepted the reality of what was seated a few inches away from him.