

Winning  
is all that matters –  
and Lucky Santangelo  
plays the game  
better than  
anyone



# Jackie Collins

*Lucky*

Jackie  
Collins

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PAN BOOKS



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# *Lucky*

Jackie Collins is one of the world's top-selling writers, with over four hundred million copies of her books sold in more than forty countries. Her twenty-three bestselling novels have never been out of print. She lives in Beverly Hills, California.

Visit her at [www.jackiecollins.com](http://www.jackiecollins.com)

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# PROLOGUE

*May 1984, Los Angeles*

The jury filed silently into the courtroom. The judge made his entrance a moment later, and a hiss of expectation raged through the packed room.

Lucky Santangelo stood tensely in the dock. She stared straight ahead. Impassive. Wildly, darkly beautiful. In spite of everything.

The judge took his place, adjusted his heavy horn-rim glasses, and cleared his throat. 'Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, have you reached your verdict?' he asked tersely.

The foreman of the jury stepped forward. He was a sallow-faced man with a facial tic. 'Yes, Your Honour,' he said indistinctly, causing the judge to bark an irritable, 'Speak up!'

'Yes, we have, Your Honour,' the foreman repeated, his nervous tic becoming distractingly obvious.

'Then pass your verdict to the court clerk, if you please,' snapped the old judge waspishly.

The foreman did as he was bade. The clerk accepted the folded verdict form and took it directly to the judge who peered at it intently.

An expectant hush hung over the crowded courtroom. A silence so heavy that to Lucky it seemed more like an accusing roar.

She did not look at the judge, but she saw him read the paper, saw him pass it back to the court clerk, and she closed her black opal eyes for one brief moment of secret prayer. She, Lucky Santangelo, was accused of murder, and the next few minutes would decide her fate.

She tried to breathe evenly and deeply. Tried to remain calm, to concentrate, to think only positive thoughts.

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The court clerk began to speak.

Oh God! This couldn't be happening to her. Not to Lucky Santangelo. NOT TO HER.

She held her head high. She was a true Santangelo. Nothing could get her down. Nothing.

After all, she was innocent.

Wasn't she?

Wasn't she . . .

# **BOOK ONE**



*The Summer of 1978*





# 1

**Lennie Golden** had not set foot in Vegas for thirteen years, even though it was the city of his conception, birth, and first seventeen years of life.

He looked around as he stepped off the plane, sniffed the air and took a deep breath. The place still smelled the same.

The airport was doing a roaring trade in visiting gamblers, tourists, and middle America out to have fun. Fat male butts waddled alongside peroxide plump ladies in polyester pant suits and fake jewellery. Small children whined and complained. Travelling hookers in halter tops, hot pants tightly outlining their crotches, arrived to do business. Swarthy foreigners clutched black leather attaché cases and breathed garlic over accompanying yellow-haired mistresses.

Jess was there to meet him. Startlingly pretty, five foot tall, she still had the air of a tomboy about her, which is what she had been at school. She had always preferred to hang out with the boys. Especially Lennie. They had been best friends since first grade, their somewhat unexpected and platonic relationship surviving and getting stronger every year – even though they didn't see much of each other since he had moved from Vegas to New York.

They made an ill-assorted couple. Lennie, so tall and lanky, with dirty blond hair and ocean green eyes. An overgrown Robert Redford with more than a touch of Chevy Chase. And Jess, petite and wide-eyed, with a mop of orange hair, freckles, and a *Playboy* centrefold body in miniature.

She hurled herself into his arms. 'It's so good to see you! You look fantastic. For a guy who spends his life screwin' around I don't know how you do it!'

'Hey ...' He swung her in the air like a rag doll. 'Look who's talking!'

Jackie Collins

She giggled and hugged him tightly. 'I love you madly, Lennie Golden. Welcome back.'

'I love you too, monkey face.'

'Don't call me that!' she screeched. 'I'm married now. I'm respectable. I got a kid, the whole bit. So c'mon, Lennie - treat me like a lady.'

He burst out laughing. 'If you're a lady I'm Raquel Welch.'

She grabbed his arm. 'You got great tits!'

Laughing, they strolled towards the exit.

'So how was the flight?' she asked, trying to grab his battered suitcase.

He wrestled it away from her. 'Long and boring. If God had meant us to fly he'd have given us more stewardesses.'

'Didja score?' She winked knowingly.

'Affirmative.'

'Really?'

'Would I lie to you,' he dead-panned.

She laughed. She had a maniacal guffaw which caused people to turn and stare. 'You'd lie to the Pope if you thought it would get you through the day.'

'And there she goes . . .' he sing-songed.

'Who? Where?' Automatically she turned to check out his conquest. A nun walked serenely by.

'I told you my tastes are changing,' he said gravely.

'Very funny!' She aimed a punch at his stomach.

He held up a protesting hand. 'Lay off. I just had surgery of the tongue.'

'Huh?'

'Remember the taping of the Lee Bryant show? The one I told you I was doing?'

'Yeah.'

'They cut my four-minute spot to thirty seconds. If you fart you miss me.'

She frowned. 'Schmucks. They know from nothin'. Anyway, you're back in Vegas now. Your kind of comedy schticks gonna kill 'em here.'

'Oh sure, in the lounge of the Magiriano Hotel I'm really going to cause a riot.'

'It's a change of scene. Could be just what you need. Who knows *what* it'll lead to.'

'C'mon, Jess. You sound like my agent. Do this shit - that

## Lucky

piece of crap, and before you know it you'll have a regular spot on Carson.'

'Your so-called agent is a New York jerk-off artist.' She wrinkled her nose. 'You're a *great* comedian. I should be handling you. I mean I got you this gig, didn't I?'

'What do you want – ten percent?'

She laughed wildly. 'You think I wanna give up the title of best blackjack dealer in Vegas? You think I'm crazy or somethin'? Stick your commission where the sun don't give you a tan!'

They were passing a ladies room. 'Wait a sec,' she said. 'I'm so excited to see you I gotta take a pee.'

He laughed, and leaned against the wall while she dashed inside. Jess was a friend indeed. He had called her two weeks ago and said he had to get out of New York.

'No problem,' she replied without hesitation. 'Matt Traynor, the entertainment director of the hotel I work at has the hots for me – send me a tape and I'll get him to hire you.'

He had sent the tape. She had come through with the gig. Some good friend.

Idly he watched a dark-haired girl in black leather pants and a red shirt stride by. She cut through the crowd as if she owned the place. He liked her style, not to mention her body.

Jesus! Was he free yet? He and Eden had split six months ago, yet every time he saw an attractive woman he couldn't help comparing them. He was *still* doing it. Eden Antonio and he were unfinished business, why didn't he just face it?

Jess emerged from the ladies room and squeezed his hand. 'It is *sooo* great to have you here,' she said. 'I want to hear all about everything.'

'Hey – everything is a career going nowhere and a fucked-up sex life.'

'Sounds exciting. So what else is new?'

They were outside now and the desert heat enveloped them.

'Jeez!' he exclaimed. 'I forgot how hot it is here.'

'Aw, stop bitching. You could do with a tan. You look like nightclub Charlie.'

They approached a dented red Camaro waiting in the parking lot.

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'I see you're still an ace driver,' he remarked dryly, throwing his suitcase in the boot.

'I didn't do that,' she replied indignantly. 'My old man can't drive around the block without gettin' into trouble.'

He wondered what kind of man took on crazy Jess for a wife. Someone special he hoped.

'C'mon,' she said, sliding behind the steering wheel. 'Wayland is makin' lunch. The baby's makin' noise, and Lennie, you are gonna love it here. It always was your kinda town.'

He nodded grimly. 'Yeah. That's what I'm afraid of.'



Lucky Santangelo stood out as she strode briskly through the crowd at the airport. She was a strikingly beautiful woman of twenty-eight, with an unruly mass of jet curls, black gypsy eyes, a wide sensual mouth, deep suntan, and lean loose-limbed body. She wore soft black leather pants, a red silk shirt casually unbuttoned to the limit, and a wide belt studded with silver. From her ears hung plain silver loops, and on her right hand was a square-cut diamond of such size and brilliance that one would be forgiven for thinking it was not real. It was.

No conventional beauty, she had a style and bearing all her own. Confidence wafted from her like the exotic scent she drenched herself with.

'Hey, Boogie.' With affection she greeted the skinny, long-haired man in army fatigues who stepped forward to greet her. 'How's everything?'

'The same,' he said, low-voiced, slit eyes darting this way and that, observing everyone and everything as he took her black leather tote bag and the check claim for the rest of her luggage.

'No exciting news? No gossip?' she questioned, grinning, delighted to be back.

He had gossip, but *he* didn't want to be the one to give it to her.

She talked excitedly as they walked toward the stretch Mercedes limousine parked on a red line.

'I think I put it all together, Boog. The Atlantic City deal is ready to fly. And I did it. Me! All I need is an okay from Gino and the record'll spin. I feel *great!*'

## *Lucky*

He was pleased to see her in such a good mood. He nodded and said, 'If you want it you'll get it. I never doubted you.'

Her eyes gleamed with excitement. 'Atlantic City,' she said. 'We'll build a hotel to beat everything!'

'You'll do it,' he agreed, opening up the rear door.

'Hey,' she complained, 'you know I always sit up front with you.'

He switched doors, settled her in the passenger seat, and loped off to get the rest of the baggage.



Gino Santangelo awoke with a start. For a moment he was disoriented, but only for a moment. He might be old, but he certainly wasn't senile, thank God. Besides, seventy-two nowadays was not exactly fertilizing oranges time. In fact, last night, in bed, he had felt like a kid again. And why not, with Susan Martino for company.

Susan Martino. Widow of the late great Tiny Martino, a multi-talented veteran of television and the movies. A comedian whose name ranked alongside Keaton, Chaplin and Benny. Tiny had died of a stroke two years previously. Gino had attended the funeral in Los Angeles, conveyed his respects to the widow – and not seen her again until she turned up in Vegas three weeks ago at a charity benefit. Now he was waking up in her bed for the fifth morning in a row, and feeling no pain.

As if she knew he was thinking sweet thoughts about her, Susan entered the room. She was an attractive, well-groomed woman of forty-nine, who looked at least ten years younger. Her eyes were pale china blue, cheekbones high, skin white and smooth. Her silver blonde hair was neatly drawn back in a chignon, even though it was only nine in the morning. She wore a white silk peignoir on her understated but perfect body, and carried a tray with a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice, a soft boiled egg, and two pieces of lightly buttered toast cut into thin slices.

'Good morning, Gino,' she said.

He struggled to sit up, pushing his hands through his unruly black hair, which although greying at the temples, was just as thick and curly as it had been in his youth. He

## Jackie Collins

was still a man to be reckoned with. Age had by no means dulled his vitality and ceaseless energy – although a nearly fatal heart attack a year ago had slowed him down a mite. Like Susan, he did not look his age.

‘What’s all this?’ He indicated the laden tray.

‘Breakfast in bed.’

‘And what did I do to deserve it?’

She smiled. ‘What *didn’t* you do.’

He grinned, remembering. ‘Yeh. Not bad for an old man, huh?’

She placed the tray in front of him, and sat on the edge of the bed. ‘You’re the best lover I ever had,’ she said gravely.

He liked that. He liked it a lot. Susan Martino was no tramp, but she’d had a reputation of sorts before marrying Tiny Martino twenty-five years earlier. The Aly Khan, Rubirosa, even Sinatra were rumoured to be in her past. Enough for Gino to feel more than flattered by her compliment.

Not, of course, that he had ever questioned her about her past, just as she had never asked him about his.

‘I wanna know somethin’,’ he said, interested enough to start finding out.

‘What?’ she replied, carefully peeling the shell from his egg.

‘When you were married to Tiny – you ever cheat around?’

She did not hesitate. ‘Never,’ she replied firmly. ‘Although *why* I should tell you . . .’

He suddenly felt possessive of this woman. This classy blonde *lady*. And how many of *them* were there around today?

Women. Love ‘em an’ leave ‘em had been his life’s motto. With very few exceptions. In the last year taking them to bed had become boring. Another body. Another pretty face. Another thousand dollar bill for a trinket because he didn’t like to dismiss them empty-handed. When they left Gino Santangelo’s bed he wanted them to *know* they had been somewhere. Not that he had to pay. Never. The very thought was crazy.

‘Can we spend the day together?’ Susan asked, dipping a sliver of toast into the egg and feeding it to him.

He was just about to say yes, when he remembered. Lucky was coming back today. His daughter. Beautiful wild

## Lucky

Lucky – with *his* eyes and *his* deep olive skin and *his* jet hair and *his* zest for living. How could he have forgotten? She had been away for three weeks on a business trip to the East. He would be missing her badly if it weren't for Susan.

'Why don't we make it tomorrow. I got things to do today,' he said, pushing the spoon away.

'Oh.' She looked disappointed.

He wondered how Lucky would feel about Susan joining them for dinner, and knew instinctively that she would hate it. He could understand. After all, it was her first night back, and they would have a lot to talk about.

There was time enough to introduce Susan into their lives, and he fully intended to. Susan Martino was too much a lady to be just a one week stand.



During the drive from the airport Lucky continued to fill Boogie in on her trip. He was more than her driver and sometime bodyguard when the climate indicated she was in need of protection. He was her friend, and she trusted him implicitly. In times of trouble Boogie came through. As he had proved in the past he was loyal, smart and usually silent, unless he had something worth saying – which suited Lucky just fine.

He drove her to the front of the Magiriano Hotel on the Strip. She got out of the car and stood for a minute feeling the usual thrill of coming home to *her* hotel.

The Magiriano – a combination of her parents' names – Maria and Gino. Gino's dream, put into being by her while Gino sweated out a seven-year tax exile in Israel. She would always be proud of her achievement. The Magiriano was very special.

In the lobby there was the usual *mêlée* of tourists and noise. The casino was crowded with morning gamblers. No windows. No clocks. Twenty-four hours non-stop fun.

Lucky did not gamble. Who needed to play the tables when it all belonged to her and Gino anyway? She strode across the lobby to her private elevator concealed behind an arrangement of potted palms, and inserted a code card to gain entry.



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It was good to be back.

She couldn't wait to see Gino. She had so much to tell him.



Jess did not live in luxury, but the small tract house she stopped the car in front of at least had its own tiny swimming pool. 'This place is okay, but we're movin' on soon,' she explained airily, opening up the front door. 'We've seen a development in Lake Tahoe we're lookin' to buy into.'

'Yeah?' said Lennie, and wondered who was looking to buy into it. From the small amount of information Jess had divulged about her husband, it seemed he didn't do much at all except look after their ten-month-old baby while she brought in the money.

'Anyone around?' she called out, as a scruffy mongrel dog appeared and wagged its sorry-looking tail. She bent to pet the animal. 'This is Grass,' she explained. 'Found him dumped in the garbage when he was a pup. Cute, huh?'

Wayland appeared, or at least Lennie presumed it was he. From the look of him Jess had found herself another stray. He was dressed in grubby white chinos, a loose embroidered shirt, and his dirty feet were bare. He had shoulder-length yellow hair with a centre part, and a long pallid face. Jess - who wrote wonderful letters - had mentioned that he painted. Exactly what he painted she hadn't gone into.

'Greetings, man,' said Wayland, stoned to the eyeballs. 'Welcome to our home.' And he extended a thin shaking hand.

'Where's the baby?' Jess demanded.

'Asleep.'

'You sure?'

'Go see.'

For a moment her pretty features clouded over and Lennie sensed all was not well in this year-old marriage. That's just what he needed, to be stuck right in the middle of some miserable scene. He had enough problems of his own.

Lunch turned out to be a large bowl of brown rice and some wilted lettuce coated with stale yoghurt. Jess tried to conceal her aggravation - she had been at work all night and had left instructions for Wayland to fix something special -