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McNALLY'S  
BLUFF

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LAWRENCE  
SANDERS

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BLUFF

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*An*  
*Archy McNally novel*  
*by Vincent Lardo*

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.



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The publisher and the estate of Lawrence Sanders have chosen Vincent Lardo to create this novel based on Lawrence Sanders's beloved character Archy McNally and his fictional world.

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M<sup>C</sup>NALLY'S  
BLUFF

# I

**T**HE LADIES SHRIEKED IN DESPAIR; THE GENTLEMEN moaned in frustration. Couples, chosen by the luck of the draw, gasped as they turned a corner and collided with the friends they believed they had lost at the last cul-de-sac.

Wives cast furtive glances at passing twosomes to see if their husbands were hot on the trail of or suspiciously detained in a leafy nook with some mysterious young beauty. Shouts, giggles, expletives, raucous laughter and sighs were the order of the night, presided over by a crescent moon and a sky full of tropical twinklers.

A bacchanalian orgy? The Shriners' annual scavenger hunt to benefit gout-suffering millionaires? An out-of-hand church bazaar? Not at all, folks. The huffing and puffing, snorting and shouting, guffaws and wails were nothing more than the Palm Beach Smart Set traversing the Amazin' Maze of Matthew Hayes.

As a native of this island where, according to our chamber of

commerce, the tropics begin, I thought I had seen it all—from Arabian princes with blond bimbos on each arm to zillionaire computer moguls who are publicly bicoastal and privately bisexual.

Now any of the above, and their ilk, who can afford the price of a luxury villa on Ocean Boulevard usually settle for the swimming pool, tennis court and nine-hole golf course that comes with the house. Be that as it may, self-proclaimed impresario Matthew Hayes chose to scuttle his backyard playground and erect a garden hedge maze which, so the Amazin' Hayes boasted, was designed by no less a person than a student of the renowned maze designer Adrian Fisher.

The scuttlebutt (created and perpetuated by Hayes's publicity factory, of which he is the sole employee) had it that the maze, one hundred and fifty feet in diameter, was fashioned after the hedge maze at Hampton Court Palace where Sir Walter Raleigh gallantly covered a muddy patch with his cloak so the first Elizabeth would not have to soil the soles of her royal boots as she and her court searched for the center of the maze—or the goal, as it is known to maze aficionados.

This doubting Thomas, otherwise known as Archy McNally, Discreet Inquirer for the family firm of McNally & Son, Attorney-at-Law, is paid, when requested, to deflect the indiscreet foibles of the Palm Beach rich before they become fodder for the tabloid press. As one whose livelihood depends on keeping a finger on the pulse of the community, I thought it prudent to delve into the life and times of Matthew Hayes. This Johnny-come-lately would not be the first upstart to descend upon our Elysian Fields preceded by his reputation and a pocket full of

ready cash, hell-bent on becoming one of *us* without waiting the required half century to prove himself worthy of the honor.

Going to the delightful Lake Worth library, I perused *Labyrinth—Solving the Riddle of the Maze* by the maestro himself, Adrian Fisher. I learned that there was indeed a noted hedge maze at Hampton Court Palace; however, it was planted at the behest of William of Orange in 1690, or approximately eighty-seven years after the demise of Elizabeth Tudor. So much for the amazin' facts of Matthew Hayes.

Frankly, it's what I expected from the man who likes to bill himself on par with the brothers Ringling who, as the world knows, put Sarasota on the map; it is now home to the Ringling Museum, which pays tribute to the circus and the creators of the Greatest Show on Earth. If Hayes hoped to erect his own memorial to the less than reputable—some would say sleazy—world of traveling carnivals in Palm Beach, he has to be stopped at all costs.

I BRUSHED UP ON MATTHEW HAYES VIA OUR RESIDENT gossip columnist, Lolly Spindrift. Lolly can be coaxed into telling what he knows over an expensive dinner, provided the seeker of salacious prattle picks up the bill. Lolly tattles in direct proportion to the cost of the meal, the quality of the wine, and the popularity of the beanery.

I chose Acquario on the Esplanade, a favorite of Lolly's and, I will admit, mine. We started with the cold seafood sampler of Maine lobster, stone crab, shrimp, cured gravlax (a boned salmon marinated in dill) and smoked trout before continuing with the five-course tasting menu. As the evening was strictly business, I

had no reservations about charging it to my expense account under Business Dinners—as opposed to Miscellaneous Expenses, which accounts for an alarming ninety-nine percent of my day-to-day expenditures.

The only thing Lolly enjoys more than a posh restaurant is a love affair with one of the working class. Blue, it's been said, is the color of distance and royalty. In Lolly's case, it's the color of his latest boyfriend's collar.

"Did you get me here to pick my brain or compromise my virtue?" Lolly asked as a gorgeously garnished yellowtail snapper was placed before him.

"I thought you lost your virtue to the mixologist from Bar Anticipation in West Palm."

"He's history," Lolly informed me. "I gave the ingrate a taste of society and, tit for tat, society got a taste of him. He left me for a woman, of all things."

"You're a soft touch for a pretty face, Lol," I sympathized. "What you need is willpower."

"I had a Will Power once and would have him again if I knew where I could reach him. Are you still seeing that policeman?"

I put down my fork. Camping with Lolly Spindrift in the line of duty has its limitations. "Georgia O'Hara is a *policewoman*, how many times do I have to remind you of that fact?"

Lolly shrugged as if gender differences were too trivial to take seriously. "And where does this leave Connie Garcia, with whom you were this close to marrying not too long ago, may I ask?" "Thisclose" was about a half inch between Lolly's thumb and forefinger. With that, he spooned up a dollop of Bali risotto. It seems other people's love affairs are a tonic to the man's appetite.



Lolly is a smallish fellow who can eat twice his own weight without an ounce of it turning to fat. Go figure.

"One more question and you'll pay for the dinner, Lol," I cautioned.

"As you wish, but before we leave the subject of our respective, however diverse, love lives, may I impart a word to the wise?"

"Let's have it," I answered, knowing I had no choice.

Like a cat about to lap up a dish of cream, Lolly meowed, "The widow Taylor has been seen in Miami on two occasions in the company of the hunk, Alejandro Gomez y Zapata."

It riled me that no one was able to utter Alex's name without preceding it with a descriptor—like hunk, gorgeous, dreamy or handsome. It riled me further because it was true. Last, and certainly not least, it riled me because Connie had taken up with Alex at about the time I had taken up with Georgia, thereby closing an open relationship Connie and I had more or less enjoyed for years.

By the widow Taylor, Lolly was referring to Carolyn Taylor. She is the second wife of the late Linton Taylor, a man who came into millions upon the death of his first wife, the daughter of a Texas oil baron and Chicago meat-packing heiress. Talk about being well connected.

In addition to the money, Carolyn also inherited a bungalow on the Boulevard that compares in style and scope to its neighbor, Mar-a-Lago. She is also an archenemy of Lady Cynthia Horowitz, a septuagenarian with more money than sense whose interest in young men is on par with that of Lolly Spindrift. In fact the two share during the lean summer months, when the pickins are slim. Connie toils as social secretary to Lady C, which

brings us full circle to Lolly's "word to the wise." My ex's *au courant* might be getting matey with a rich, recently widowed PB socialite who is also a rival of my ex's lady boss. It had all the ingredients of a *crime passionnel*, causing Lolly to devour all five courses with unprecedented speed.

Connie is a beautiful Latina with a temper to match. Were I Alejandro Gomez y Zapata, I would safeguard my fountain of testosterone. I speak from experience.

"Your source?" I inquired.

"Sorry, my informant spoke under a guarantee of anonymity."

Lolly reports the local gossip in the manner of a Washington correspondent for *The New York Times* reporting the next Watergate. "They were seen," he hinted as he scooped up a taste of the osso buco, "at a marina in Miami."

Lolly's pal Phil Meecham operates off his yacht which is berthed here in PB, but is known to make excursions to South Beach in search of grist for his indiscriminate libido. Confiding in Lolly Spindrift is tantamount to giving a press conference. While Carolyn Taylor is a familiar personage on our tight little island, Alex is a Miami boy who has appeared in our midst only since he's taken up with the lovely Consuela Garcia. While Meecham would certainly notice Alex, it was a wonder he knew his name.

As if reading my mind, Lolly said, "Alejandro is fast becoming a political force in Miami and points north. They say he's the odds-on favorite should he choose to run for mayor."

Alex is first-generation American and has vowed, via his column in a popular Miami daily with a tremendous Cuban-American readership, to return to Cuba, rout Castro and reclaim his heritage. The Gomez family harvested sugarcane and the Za-

patas exported rum. Alex isn't clear as to just how he is going to accomplish this mission, but those who hear him at political rallies (or see him bumping and grinding on the conga line) never think to ask. He is young, he is handsome, he is hope personified and that, it seems, is more than enough for his numerous followers—including Connie. Alex has mastered the art of politicking—you can fool all of the people some of the time and you run with it when that time has come.

Lolly sees all liaisons as potential love affairs so it would not occur to him to even suspect a political aspect to his informant's sighting. I refrained from voicing this interpretation for fear that Lolly would formally announce that the widow Taylor was financing an armada of luxury yachts for Alex's Cuban conquest. At this time I had no way of knowing how right I might be, nor could I predict the lethal consequences of my association with Matthew Hayes—but I get ahead of myself.

Carolyn and Alex? Curious. This very afternoon I had sat in on a meeting between her stepson, Linton Taylor, Jr., and my father. In his quest for legal counsel, Laddy, as he is known locally, told my father that Carolyn Taylor had taken up with a young man so soon after the demise of Linton, Sr., it was obvious that the affair had been going on long before old man Taylor met his maker by way of myocardial infarction. The young man, who is not Alejandro Gomez y Zapata, had moved into the Taylor abode, Flamingo Run, as the funeral cortege had filed out. This rather theatrical description of the comings and goings at Flamingo Run is taken, verbatim, from the mouth of Laddy Taylor. Client confidentiality, and the sensitive nature of this meeting, forbade me from mentioning it to my dinner companion lest he would devour the plates, glasses, table linens and silverware for dessert.

Again exhibiting his prowess in reading my mind, which was getting scary, Lolly stated, "I understand Laddy Taylor is seeking the help of McNally and Son. Do you want to confide in Lolly?"

I would rather confide in a convention of investigative reporters. So much for trying to keep a secret in Palm Beach. "Where did you hear that?" I foolishly asked.

"From Laddy Taylor, who else?" Lolly answered. "He's screaming his head off to anyone who will listen. Big Linton left it all to Carolyn, lock, stock and barrel, and Laddy Taylor is threatening to contest the will. Correct?"

An Inofficious Will, my father the lawyer had termed it. A will inconsistent with the moral duty and natural affection of the testator. You see, as the money came from Laddy's natural mother, he felt it should have been passed on to him rather than to his stepmom, Carolyn. But there were extenuating circumstances, not the least being that Laddy Taylor and his father had been estranged for years and Junior had returned to Palm Beach just in time to see Carolyn's stud enter and the cortege exit.

However, to show her heart was in the right place, Carolyn offered Laddy Taylor his late father's wardrobe, which included a dozen pairs of silk boxer shorts, all emblazoned with the image of a flamingo on the run. This did nothing so much as set the perfect stage for a crime of vengeance.

I did not want to discuss our meeting with Laddy Taylor, no matter how obliquely. Determined to get what I was paying for, I abruptly shifted gears and asked, "What do you know about Matthew Hayes, Lol?"

Lolly dropped Laddy Taylor and picked up on Matthew Hayes without missing a beat (or a bite). "Finally, the reason for your

largesse,” he sighed. “Did you get your invitation to the opening of the maze?”

“How did you know I was invited?”

“I worked with Hayes on the list of invitees.”

Besides his gab column, Lolly does obits, weddings and bar mitzvahs for extra cash. He is also available for “consultation” for those wishing to break into Palm Beach society, which is comprised of three strata. The old-money folks, who speak only to each other and shun trendy restaurants, dining only at their clubs, the Everglades and the Bath and Tennis. The new-money people, who will speak to anyone who is kind enough to notice them and dine out, ad nauseam, at trendy restaurants. And finally, there’s the Smart Set, made up of the offspring of the former and the latter, with a soupcon of young boys and girls whose entrée is their youth and comeliness.

Don’t tell father, but the McNally money is too new to be considered old, but old enough not to be labeled *nouveau*. Hence we transcend the system, which is a boon to business.

“What’s the poop on Matthew Hayes, Lol?” I repeated.

“You want the official bio, or the awful truth?”

“The awfuller the better, Lol.”

OVER AN OUTRAGEOUSLY EXPENSIVE BOTTLE OF BEAUJOLAIS Nouveau (it doesn’t age so well, like we humans, the younger the better), Lolly imparted what I had come to hear.

To wit: Hayes was a second-generation carny who began his professional life as a human cannonball. His stature, five-feet-four in heels as high as a man could don without arousing sus-

picion, made him not only suitable for the job but also had his father eyeing Manny the Midget with malevolent scorn.

Hayes was literally catapulted into the big time when the cannoneer, who was not licensed to kill, misdirected his missile, sending Hayes over the net and head first into the amazin' bosom of Marlena Marvel. To be sure, at the time of this encounter of head and heart, she was plain old Molly Malone, but unlike her namesake of song, this modern Molly did not proffer mussels and cockles, alive, alive, all. This Molly proffered alcoholic beverages in downtown Des Moines where she was affectionately known to her loyal customers as Stretch, due no doubt to the fact that she stood six-feet-two in her stocking feet. When Molly ambled about in her work shoes, towering red satin high-heeled slides, she resembled an L.A. Lakers center in drag.

Molly settled the disoriented cannonball on her lap as an enterprising photographer took a snap. When he sold it to the local press, who ran it beside a shot of the popular dummy of yore, Charlie McCarthy, seated on the lap of his creator, Edgar Bergen, a star was born.

Hayes talked Molly into joining his traveling carnival. To ensure that she didn't stray, he married her in a very public ceremony. Ever aware of photo ops, the groom climbed a ladder in order to plant a kiss on his blushing bride's cheek. The newlyweds billed themselves as the Amazin' Matthew Hayes and the Marvelous Marlena Marvel: he as the carny pitchman and she as the show's main attraction. They owned the carnival after two seasons on the road. Devoid of talent, hubby made the most of Marlena's six-two frame, flowing red mane and, naturally, the ample bosom that saved his life.

Marlena was presented as Venus de Milo before a black cur-

tain that cleverly made her appear armless. She rode a white horse as Lady Godiva, wearing nothing more than a long red wig. She mounted a drugged tiger as Sheena Queen of the Jungle, clad in a leopard-skin sarong. As the Elephant Girl she rode—you guessed it—wrapped in the animal's ears.

Marlena Marvel was the perfect draw for the men Hayes fleeced with rigged games of chance, illegal gambling, and sex shows. A petting zoo and rides kept the wife and kids occupied while daddy lost a week's pay to Matthew Hayes's exchequer.

Now retired, rich and infamous, the couple had arrived in Palm Beach to baffle us with their hedge maze because they were unable to dazzle us with their brilliance.

"I understand," Lolly concluded, "that Amazin' was often caught in the sack with cuties he liked to pick up on the fairway while Marlena was shivering inside the elephant's ears. She threatened to sit on his lap if he didn't mend his ways."

"ONE FINAL WORD TO THE WISE," LOLLY INTONED AS I gasped at the bill just presented. "I told you the Adonis I rescued from Bar Anticipation left me for a woman."

"Yes," I said, surrendering my credit card with great reluctance.

"The woman was Carolyn Taylor."

Well! One never knows, do one?





LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, GOOD EVENING AND WELCOME to Le Maze.” Our host stood on a black drum about three feet high, which I imagine was once festooned with bunting. Matthew Hayes, dressed in a tux and sporting a red cummerbund and matching carnation, had a fine head of gray hair and piercing blue eyes. His lean figure could easily fit into the trousers and blazers offered in the prep department of better men’s shops. His voice, that of a true carny hawker, belied his spritely appearance and immediately commanded the attention of the crowd of perhaps twenty couples milling about the great room of the house just christened Le Maze.

I think the former owners of the villa on Ocean Boulevard would have been amazed to see what Amazin’ Matthew Hayes had done with it. The furniture, strictly rental, was a potpourri of this (early hotel) and that (late motel). The art, twelve-by-six four-color posters, depicted scenes from Hayes’s former carnival