



Lace: A Novel

By Shirley Conran

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"Which one of you bitches is my mother?"

Four elegant, successful, and sophisticated women in their forties are called to New York's Pierre Hotel to meet Lili -- a beautiful, young, and notoriously temperamental Hollywood movie star. None of the women knows exactly why she is there; each has a reason to hate Lili and each of them is astonished to see the others. They are old friends who share a guilty secret and who have for years been doing their best to keep that secret quiet. Their lives are changed forever, however, when Lili suddenly confronts them. When the women refuse to answer her, Lili proceeds to travel around the world through the playgrounds of the rich and famous, seeking to answer the question that has obsessed and almost destroyed her.

From Paris to London, from the boardroom to the bedroom, *Lace* takes the reader into the rarified world of five unforgettable women who are as beautiful, as complex and as strong as...lace.

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Editorial Review

Review

Lace is glamorous careers...movie stars, Greek shipping magnates, French and British aristocrats, Arabian royalty, and mind-boggling sex.... Rapture!" (*Harper's*)

"More than just a racy tale...Most of all, in contrast to its modern-day equivalent, the bland *Fifty Shades of Grey* and its sado-masochism by numbers, *Lace* is exuberantly, fabulously over-the-top." (*The Guardian (UK)*)

"*Lace* gave me prolonged pleasure." (Helen Fielding, author of *Bridget Jones's Diary*)

"A high-paced, globe-trotting novel...crammed with exotic locations, high-pressure career decisions and loads of sex." (*Los Angeles Times Book Review*)

About the Author

Shirley Conran has worked as a design consultant, journalist, and editor for *The Daily Mail* and *The Observer*. Her first book, *Superwoman*, sold more than a million copies worldwide and was followed by eleven bestsellers. She currently lives in London.

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It was a warm October evening in 1978 with the distant skyscrapers sparkling in the dusk as Maxine glanced through the limousine window at the familiar New York skyline. She had chosen this route for that view. Now, in the discreet, hushed comfort of the Lincoln Continental, they stood stuck in traffic on the Triboro Bridge. Never mind, she told herself, there was plenty of time before the meeting. And the view was worth it -- like diamonds sprinkled across the sky.

Her neatly folded sable coat lay beside the maroon crocodile jewel case. The nine maroon-leather suitcases -- all stamped in gold with a tiny coronet and the initials M de C -- were stacked beside the chauffeur or stowed in the trunk. Maxine traveled with very little fuss and at enormous expense, usually someone else's. She took absolutely no notice of luggage allowances; she would say, with a shrug of the shoulders, that she liked comfort; so one suitcase contained her pink silk sheets, her special down-filled pillow, and the baby's shawl, delicate as a cream lace cobweb, that she used instead of a bed jacket.

Although most of the suitcases held clothes (beautifully packed between crisp sheets of tissue paper), one case was fitted as a small maroon-leather office; another carried a large medicine box packed with pills, creams, douches, ampoules, disposable syringes for her vitamin injections and the various suppositories that are considered normal treatment in France but frowned on by Anglo-Saxons. Maxine had once tried to buy syringes in Detroit -- *mon Dieu*, could they not tell the difference between a drug addict and a French countess? One had to look after one's body, it was the only one you were going to get and you had to be careful what you put on it and in it. Maxine saw no reason to force terrible food on the stomach merely because it was suspended thirty-five thousand feet above sea level; all the other first-class passengers from Paris had munched their way through six overcooked courses, but Maxine had merely accepted a little caviar (no toast) and only one glass of champagne (nonvintage, but Moët, she observed with approval before

accepting it). From a burgundy suede tote bag she had then produced a small white plastic box that contained a small silver spoon, a pot of homemade yogurt and a large, juicy peach from her own hothouse.

Afterward, while other passengers had read or dozed, Maxine had taken out her miniature tape recorder, her tiny gold pencil, and a large, cheap office duplicate book. The tape recorder was for instructions to her secretary, the office duplicate book was for notes, drafts and memos of telephone conversations; Maxine tore them off and sent them on their way, always retaining a copy of what she had written; then when she returned to France, her secretary filed the duplicates. Maxine was well organized in an unobtrusive way; she didn't believe in being too well organized and she couldn't stand bustle or hustle, but she could only operate when things were orderly; she liked order even more than she liked comfort.

When Madame la Comtesse booked a reservation for a business trip, the Plaza automatically booked a bilingual secretary for her. She sometimes traveled with her own secretary, but it was not always convenient to have the girl hanging round one's neck like a pair of skates. Also, as the girl had now been with Maxine for almost twenty-five years, she was able to keep an eye on things at home in Maxine's absence; from the condition of her sons and her grapes to the times when Monsieur le Comte returned home and with whom.

Mademoiselle Janine reported everything with devoted zeal. Since 1956, Mademoiselle Janine had worked hard for the Château de Chazalle and she shone in the reflected glory of Maxine's success. She had first worked for the de Chazalles twenty-two years ago, when Maxine was twenty-five and had opened the château as a historical hotel, museum and amusement park, before anybody (except the locals) had heard of de Chazalle champagne. Mademoiselle Janine had fussed around Maxine from the time her three sons were babies, and she would have found life intolerably dull without the family. Indeed, she had been with the de Chazalles for so long that she almost *felt* like one of the family. But not quite. They were -- and always would be -- separated by the invisible, unbreakable barriers of class.

Like New York, Maxine was glamorous and efficient, which was why she liked the quick pace of the city, liked the way that New Yorkers worked with neat, brisk speed whether they were serving hamburgers, heaving garbage off the sidewalk or squeezing fifty cents' worth of fresh orange juice for you on a sunny street corner. She appreciated these fast-thinking people, their tough humor, their crisp jokes, and privately thought that New Yorkers had all the *joie de vivre* of the French, without being nearly so rude. She also felt at home with New York women. She enjoyed observing, as if they were another species, those cool, polite, impeccable women executives as they operated under the merciless pressure of the grab for power, the lunge for money, the lusting after someone else's job. Like theirs, Maxine's self-discipline was colossal, but -- at the age of forty-seven -- her grasp of people-politics was even better. Had it not been so, she would not have been traveling to meet Lili.

That gold-digging slut!

But Maxine was undoubtedly intrigued by Lili's offer and it was partly her curiosity that had brought her all the way across the Atlantic. Again she wondered whether she would accept the job. She would have thought that Lili -- who must be about twenty-eight years old by now -- would never have wanted to see Maxine again. Maxine remembered that long-ago expression of startled pain in the flashing chestnut eyes of the troublemaker whom the press had nicknamed "Tiger-Lili."

She had been amazed to receive the telephone call, to hear that low, sensual voice sound so astonishingly humble, as Lili had asked Maxine to meet her in New York to decorate Lili's new duplex on Central Park South. Lili wanted her new home to be a showpiece, a conversation-stopper, and she knew that Maxine could supply the correct blend of erudite elegance and spirited style. The budget would be as large as was necessary, and of course all expenses for Maxine's trip to New York would be paid whether or not she

decided to accept the commission.

There had been a pause, then Lili had added in a penitent voice, "I would also like to feel that something no longer has such painful memories for you. For so many years I have lived unhappily with my conscience, and now I dearly wish to do whatever is necessary to be at peace with you."

After this apology there had been a thoughtful pause, then the conversation had turned to Maxine's work. "I understand you've just finished Shawborough Castle," Lili had said, "and I also heard about the stunning job you did for Dominique Fresanges -- it must be wonderful to have a talent such as yours, to rescue historic houses from decay, to make so many homes beautiful and comfortable while they still remain a heritage for the world...."

It had been a long time since Maxine had enjoyed a holiday in New York by herself, so eventually she had agreed to make the journey. Lili had asked Maxine to tell nobody of the meeting until after it had taken place. "You know the press won't leave me alone," she had explained. And it was true. Not since Greta Garbo had there been an international movie star who so intrigued the public.

As the limousine started to crawl forward, Maxine glanced at her diamond wristwatch -- there was plenty of time before the six-thirty meeting at the Pierre. Maxine was rarely impatient; she disliked being late, but assumed that everyone else would be. That was life today -- undependable. If a situation could be improved, Maxine would generally do it with a slight, one-sided smile, a look that combined conspiratorial charm with a hint of menace. If a situation could not be improved, then she folded her hands in her lap and imperturbably accepted *la loi de Murphy*.

She happened to catch sight of herself in the back mirror of the limousine and leaned toward it, lifting her jaw above the cream lace jabot and poking it sideways at her reflection. It was only five weeks since the operation, but the tiny scars in front of her ears had already disappeared. Mr. Wilson had done an excellent job and it had only cost a thousand pounds, including the anesthetist and the London clinic bill. There was no tautness, no pulling at the mouth or eyes; she simply looked healthy, glowing and fifteen years younger -- certainly not forty-seven. It was sensible to have it done when you were still young, so that nobody noticed, or, if they did, they couldn't pin you down; today you never saw an eyebag on an actress over thirty, or on an actor, come to think of it. Nobody had noticed her absence; she had been out of the clinic in four days and had then spent ten days in Tunisia where she had lost seven pounds, a satisfying bonus. She simply could not understand why some people went all the way to Brazil and paid heaven knows what for their lifts.

Maxine was a firm believer in self-improvement, especially surgical. One *owes* it to oneself, was her justification; her teeth, eyes, nose, chin, breasts, all had been lifted or braced until Maxine was a mass of almost invisible stitches. Even so, she was no great beauty, but when she thought back to her girlhood and remembered the prominent nose, the horselike teeth and her painful self-consciousness, she was grateful that years ago she had been persistently urged to do something about it.

It had not been necessary to do anything about her legs. They were exquisite; she stuck out one long pale limb, rotated an elegant ankle, smoothed the blue silk skirt of her suit, then opened the window and sniffed the air of Manhattan, oblivious to the strong carbon monoxide content at street level. She reacted to New York as she did to the champagne of her estate -- with happy...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Joshua Rodrigue:

The book *Lace: A Novel* gives you the sense of being enjoy for your spare time. You need to use to make your capable more increase. Book can for being your best friend when you getting strain or having big problem along with your subject. If you can make reading through a book *Lace: A Novel* being your habit, you can get far more advantages, like add your capable, increase your knowledge about a number of or all subjects. You are able to know everything if you like open and read a book *Lace: A Novel*. Kinds of book are a lot of. It means that, science publication or encyclopedia or other people. So , how do you think about this guide?

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