

Curse of the Whiskey House: When Life Is the Principle and Death Is the Practice

Marc Lacy

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Lacy's ear for the colloquial makes for a perfect backdrop to the gruesome events of this thriller.

In Marc Lacy's *Curse of the Whiskey House*, citizens of the troubled Lazarus, Alabama, contend with corrupt politicians, dark secrets, and rampant violence that centers around the town's nefarious whiskey house. The novel's strong setting, buoyed by the colloquial narration, provides a detailed backdrop for the over-the-top, graphic events that follow.

Detective Brock Taylor is a clean-cut officer who wants his superior, Lieutenant Charlatan, to let him take on some of the cold cases in the town, specifically those that have to do with Lazarus's whiskey house. Everyone knows of the whiskey house's dark reputation, but too many people—including powerful businessmen, politicians, and religious leaders—have an interest in maintaining its secrets. But after some scheming between Brock's girlfriend and the troubled Ace Honeycutt, Brock finds himself thrust into the heart of the whiskey house and all its dangers.

Curse of the Whiskey House uses very colloquial narration; early on, the narrator, Rufus, states that, "I guess when the whiskey died, it left a bad spirit. An' that spirit is doin' somethin' to this town." Lacy has a good ear for the rhythms of this particular style, though it can sometimes slow down the novel and make it difficult to read, especially in places where the text consists of long, unbroken paragraphs written in stream-of-consciousness style. Although Rufus is narrating the story, the text occasionally jumps perspectives, as when the narration slides between the thoughts of Brock, Brock's girlfriend, and Ace before circling back again. A few times, there are tense shifts, like in the interrogation scene late in the book, which switches in its last few lines to present tense to narrate the action. Overall, though, Lacy maintains a consistent, steady voice throughout.

The novel's events are dark and violent, and Lacy does not shy away from depicting gang rape, molestation, and necrophilia. The violence is constant throughout and at times is gratuitous and difficult to read. Characters' reactions also sometimes seem out of place, as when the women forgive Brock for an act in the first half of the novel shortly after he commits it. From there, the violence only increases, including some disturbing retribution scenes.

Though the story itself is at times difficult to get into, and the violent world of Lazarus, Alabama, is not for the squeamish, *Curse of the Whiskey House* would interest those intrigued by the way Lacy uses language to create a unique, well-rounded setting. The novel is the first book in the Whiskey House trilogy.

STEPHANIE BUCKLIN (May 26, 2015)

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