



Jackie
FRENCH

Lilies, Lies
and Love

From the bestselling author
of *Miss Lily's Lovely Ladies*



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and Love



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Chapter 1

*I have always told you the truth, my dears, but never the whole truth.
Have I ever told anyone the full truth? Will I ever? I do not know.*

The words Miss Lily thought but did not say to her four young
'lovely ladies' in the spring of 1914

SHILLINGS ESTATE, ENGLAND, SEPTEMBER 1936

The two planes flew above the trees, machine guns chattering, dark shapes within a darker night. Death erupted in the sky. The old man stared as night melted into flame.

His mind screamed. It was 1917 again, the hail of gunshot, metal burning green and yellow. But this was over England, not Belgium or France, the plane's wreckage falling onto Shillings Hall. The victor's wings waggled as it headed after further prey.

Was the falling aircraft the enemy's or one of theirs? The old man didn't care. Everyone he loved was in that Hall. He tried to run, but could not move. His heart cracked. He could not bear it. Not again ...

A shadow ran across the gardens.

'Help them!' the old man shouted desperately. But his cry made no sound. Then the screams of others, and timber falling.

The shadow reached the burning door, and pushed it open. Flames licked the air. The old man heard a voice he knew above the crackling fire. 'Albert, grab my hand!'

'Grandpa! Grandpa, wake up!'

The old man blinked. He found himself in bed, sheets tangled, Gladys at his side.

‘You were moaning in your sleep, Grandpa. Are you all right?’ She began to tidy up his sheets.

A good girl, Gladys. He touched his cheeks and found them wet, but there was no need to weep. ‘It’s all right now,’ he whispered.

‘What is, Grandpa?’

‘Shillings Hall is burning. But he’ll save them.’

Gladys glanced through the window at Shillings Hall. A single light shone serenely in the butler’s pantry. Albert was probably checking the household accounts. Her son, Albert Hereward, the Shillings butler, Gladys thought proudly.

She took the old man’s hand. ‘Grandpa, there’s no fire. You had another nightmare, that’s all.’

War had burned nightmares into her Albert’s mind, too, the kind of nightmares his dad might have had, if he’d ever come home from the Somme. Life was full of nightmares after the Great War. Gladys thanked God there’d never be another one.

Old Mr Hereward shook his head. ‘You don’t understand. It’s war, girl!’

‘The war has been over for eighteen years, Grandpa,’ she reminded him gently. Her father-in-law had told the authorities he was only thirty-eight, instead of well over fifty, to join up in 1916, that year of anguish when it had seemed impossible England would survive.

He gazed at her, part of him still far away. ‘His Lordship!’ he muttered. ‘The old Earl, Master Nigel. Master Nigel was there, among the flames!’

‘Grandpa, don’t you remember the earl’s funeral? The young master is ten now and living way off in Australia. He’s safe. The family is safe. And so are we! See, look out the window. There’s no fire at the Hall. It’s just a dream.’

The old man looked at her. ‘It’s coming again,’ he said. War is like a wolf, he thought, creeping silently before it leaped to swallow you. ‘I saw it, girl. Shillings will burn. England will burn!’

And yet the earl had been there. Old Mr Hereward lay back and closed his eyes, suddenly comforted. Danger, yes, but rescue too. 'He'll be back again,' he whispered, as Gladys straightened his quilt. 'He'll be here for us.'

The earl would never let his people down.