

On the surface, Lost River is a typical Georgia town in 1949, but underneath, it's a whole different story.

Lost River

By Grace Hawthorne

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Grace Hawthorne



On the surface

Lost River is a typical Georgia town in 1949,

but underneath,

it's a completely different story.

A few words from readers about *Lost River*

Lost River is a snapshot in time.

Lost River flows swimmingly.

Lost River took me back to my childhood.

Lost River was a fun read.

Lost River could be a small town anywhere in 1949.

“Loved the back stories of the characters. *Lost River* really got me to thinking about my small town in Arkansas and wondering what hidden stories lurked there.”

B. Davis

“*Lost River* could easily have been my home town. I grew up in upstate New York. My father’s partner in his medical practice was a Dr. Nichols. My dog, Chudney was just like Boot. My parents were friends with a Conti family. Our mayor embezzled a sizeable amount of money from the village and skipped town. It was all there just with a southern accent.”

P. Pritchard

“Your writing is a dichotomy of seriousness and humor that works superbly together. I’d recommend *Lost River* to anyone who is curious about small towns and interested in people.”

E. Herscher

“The back stories filled out the characters and showed how people cope with the many vicissitudes of life and manage to survive.”

J. Mason

Also by

Grace Hawthorne

Shorter's Way

Waterproof Justice

Crossing the Moss Line

Thunder and White Lightning

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LOST RIVER DIRECTORY

A

B

Daniel Barlow, General Manager of Stubbs Sawmill and
Lumber Yard

Earlene, wife

Sonny, oldest son

Archie, younger son

Percy Barns, Deputy Sheriff, Operation 23

Waylon Sidney Bethune III, CPA from Valdosta, GA

Robert Blalock, Pastor, Bethel Baptist Church

Prim, wife

Matt, son

Boot, Town dog

Leroy Brown, Lucille's boyfriend in Chicago

C

Carmelina Conti, Matriarch

Anthony, (Tony), son, Conti's Grocery Store

Sophia, wife

Salvador (Sal), son, Conti's Ford Dealership

Nina, wife

Vincent (Vinnie), son, Conti's General Store

Isabella, wife

Adam, son, deceased

Sidney Cumberland, President of Lost River Bank and Trust

Florence, wife, president of Episcopal Church Women

Sonny, son

D

E

F

Morris Fullerton, Bataan Death March survivor

G

Hazel Goodman, Mayor's secretary

H

James Henshaw, Pastor, Wesley United Methodist Church
LouAnn, wife

I

J

K

Leon Kirkland, Kirkland's Print Shop, *Lost River Herald*
Helen, wife
Inky, adopted son
Andrew Knox, Pastor, Trinity Episcopal Church
Annabelle, wife

L

J.W. Latham, Sheriff
Trudy, wife, Do-or-Dye Salon
Curtis Leland, Leland's Funeral Home
Mildred, wife

M

Agnes Mackie, Mayor
Warren, Jr., son
Gibby Moon, co-owner Moon's Diner
"Granny," mother
Eudalee Munson, First-grade teacher

N

Dr. S. I. Nichols, GP
Victoria (Vickie), wife and nurse

O

Junior Ottley, Mechanic at the Gas & Grill

P

Q

R

Charlie Russo, Gambler from New Orleans

S

Harvey Skaggs, City Council candidate

Sly Slonacher, Principal Lost River School

Zachary (Zach) Stubbs, Stubbs Sawmill and Lumber Yard

Eden, wife

Hank, son

Father Sullivan, Priest, Saint Philip's Catholic Church

Mike Sweeney, Former Mayor

Rebecca, wife, deceased

Obadiah Sweeney, Mike's great, great grandfather

T

Texas Bill, Hobo

Remy Thibodaux, Med student in New Orleans

Eugene Talmadge, Three-time Governor of Georgia

Herman, son, Georgia Governor 1948-1954

U

V

W

Lucy Washburn, Sheriff's office manager

Ethyl Williams, Manager of G&G Restaurant (Lucille)

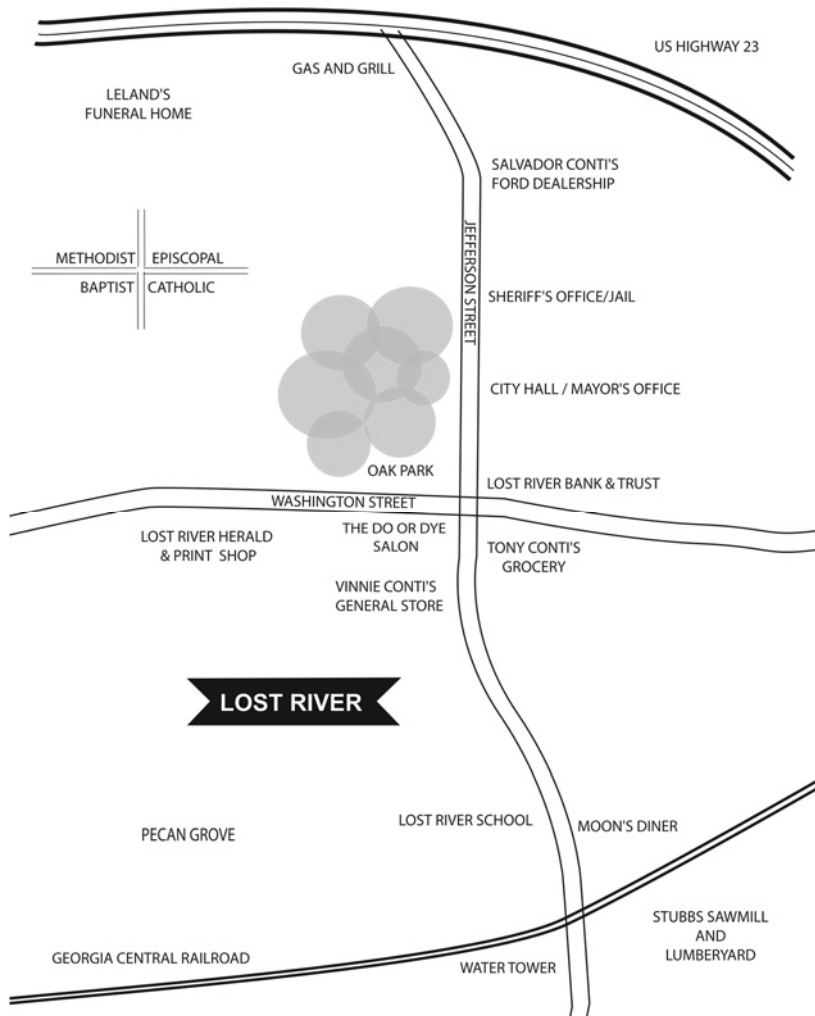
Church Directory

Bethel Baptist Church, Robert Blalock, Pastor

Saint Philip's Catholic Church, Father Sullivan, Priest

Wesley United Methodist Church, James Henshaw, Pastor

Trinity Episcopal Church, Andrew Knox, Pastor



The Naked City, 1949

“There are eight million stories in the Naked City and this is one of them.” As the narrator’s voice ended, the screen faded to black.

The air was warm and heavy with the smell of scorched popcorn and stale butter. Hank, Sonny and Matt pulled on their coats and headed toward the exit. In the half-light, their feet made small ripping sounds as they walked across the slightly sticky floor.

“Man! That was a great movie. I wish I lived in New York City,” Sonny said.

Hank scuffed his feet on the sidewalk. “Yeah, Georgia’s got to be the most boring place in the world.”

“You can say that again,” Matt added. “Nobody in Lost River’s got a story worth telling.”

Story #1, Mrs. Conti (Sicily 1860)

Most of the time, Carmelina slept through the noise of the gun shots. They were part of the air like the bees buzzing through the wild flowers and the olive trees. The bees were a nuisance, but not dangerous unless you aggravated them, then their sting was deadly. Sicilians were accustomed to invaders with guns. The old women in their long black dresses rattled off the island history like beads on their rosaries. They had seen and survived it all.

“Everybody’s tried to rule us starting with the Greeks, then the Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, French, Spanish, Napoleon, and now those Italians.” It was 1860, and the current trespassers from Italy were the last straw.

For years the war had been going on in little towns nearby, but when her home town of Palermo revolted, Italy sent ships to shell the city and soldiers to deal with the trouble-makers. They executed hundreds, put many more in prison and deported others. Absolutely no one was safe. Carmelina’s family talked about escaping before they could be rounded up.

Her papa made the final decision. “We’re leaving. We’ll each take one suitcase and you have to carry it yourself. No help.” Her mother insisted that although the weather was hot, they each wear two of everything. In addition, they packed two sets of underwear, a change of work clothes, one nice outfit, three pairs of socks, an extra pair of shoes, a sweater, a heavy coat and one “special thing.” Carmelina, who was six, took a book.

On the day they were to leave for America, her papa went to work at his little shop to avoid suspicion. Carmelina and her mother went to the courthouse to pick up some papers. As they were leaving to go back home, they saw soldiers dragging the school principal, Mr. Esposito, by his feet over the cobblestones in the square. They stood him up by the fountain and shot him in the head. He fell into the water and it turned red with his blood. Women screamed. Men turned their heads in disgust and shame.

“Run home! Hide!” her mother whispered.

Carmelina obeyed. She expected to see friends or neighbors along the way, someone who might help her or at least explain what was going on, but the street was completely empty and deadly quiet. When she got home, she reached out to open her front door, but she couldn’t turn the knob. It was slippery. She looked at her hand; it was covered with blood. She quickly wiped it on her dress. “I’ve ruined my good school dress. Mama will be so angry.” With no help in sight, Carmelina hid under a bush and waited for her mother to come home and let her in.

She finally got there and the family waited all night for Papa to come home, but by daybreak he still hadn't arrived. Her mother fed Carmelina and her two older brothers some milk and bread for breakfast. "Put the rest of the bread and some cheese in your pockets," she said, "and be quick about it."

As fast as they could, they left for the docks, but the streets were already crowded with people. They finally got to the port, but there was no boat in sight and it started to rain. The family found shelter in a doorway where they waited all day and through the night.

People were cold, hungry and frightened, but they were strangely silent. Even the babies were quiet. Daybreak finally came and with it a ship.

"Oh my God." The look on her mother's face was more frightening than the soldiers who roused people and hurried them up the gangplank. They were directed down into a large open area at the bottom of the boat.

The crossing took ten days and the cheese and bread they brought was soon gone. Some days they were given food, some days only dirty water. People got seasick and threw up where they were. There was nowhere else to go. Slop buckets overflowed adding to the general misery. Her family found an almost dry space and huddled together expecting to die.

On the tenth day of the trip after what seemed like an eternity, the passengers were ordered to come up on deck. No one knew what was going on. "Maybe they're going to throw us all overboard," an old man said.

Carmelina was standing next to a sailor who smiled at her. "No one is going to throw you overboard," he said. When he got no reaction, he realized she couldn't understand him. With a smile, he pointed to a large round building on the southern tip of Manhattan Island. "Castle Garden," he said, "America."

Carmelina smiled. "America! Mama, we made it."

Well, not quite yet. First the passengers were loaded onto tug boats that took them ashore. There they were met by one government official after another, each one asking questions and scrutinizing them from head to toe.

Carmelina's mother didn't understand English, but she heard the same questions over and over and guessed at what the questions must be from the answers she heard in Sicilian.

What is your name? Where did you come from? Where are you going? What is your trade?

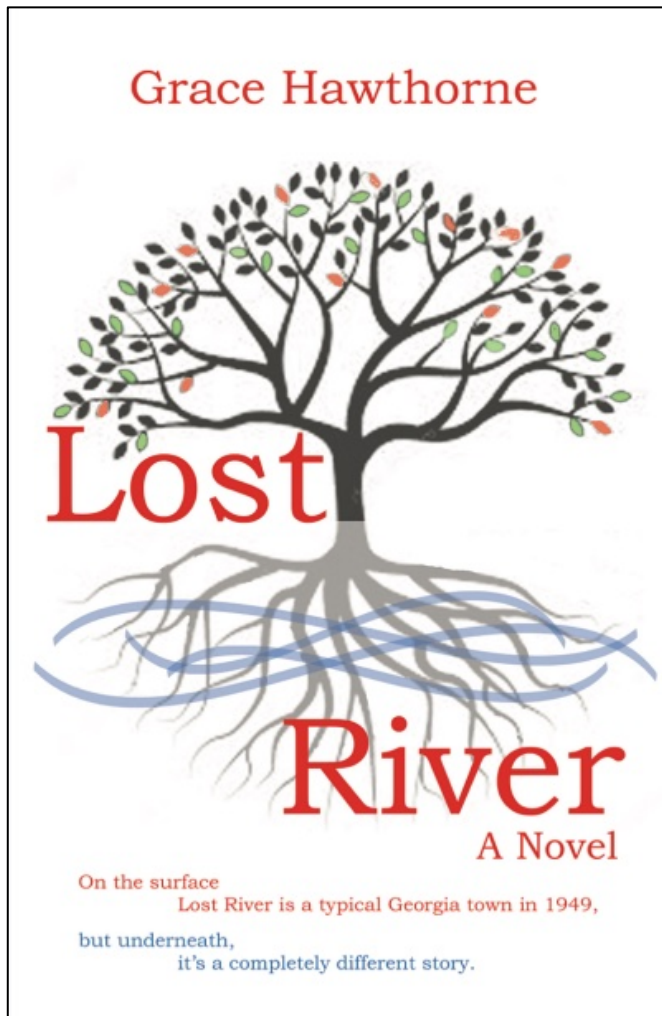
Throughout all the questions and the medical examinations, the family stayed close to friends from Palermo. Eventually they were released and sent with their luggage to an Italian community in East Harlem. They did their best to survive, but they were fishermen and their skills were useless in the steel and concrete of New York City.

The one place where workers were needed was the rural south. The Civil War had all but wiped out a generation of young men. Recruiters combed the streets of Harlem offering jobs to anyone willing to move south. And so Carmelina's

family moved to Lost River. Two brothers and some of their friends went to work logging.

When she was 15, Carmelina married Adamo Conti who had been on the boat with her family. They had three sons, Anthony, Salvador and Vincent. They were a handsome lot, those Conti boys. They took after their mama. Dark hair, dark eyes, well built. By the time she was in her 80s, Carmelina's family was a vital part of Lost River. Even into her 90s there were still traces of the young girl with flashing dark eyes and hair blowing in the wind.

Over the years, she had lost track of most of the twists and turns of her life. She had learned English, but as she got older, it was just easier to revert to the language of Sicily she had spoken as a girl. She was now one of those old women in their long black dresses. She had forgotten many things, but she never forgot the blood on the doorknob of her house back in Sicily.



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