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### Who killed Jacky Jarvis?

The protagonist in the novel 'On Agate Hill' by Lee Smith is Molly who was an orphaned teenager. She lived with her widowed uncle Junius in the estate known as Agate Hill that belonged to the uncle. Molly lost her family in a civil war and got education in spite of her background and the unpleasant headmistress. Her life's secrets are revealed by the words that she made as well as the letters and ballads that she wrote. The paragraphs below argue that Molly probably killed Jacky Jarvis.

The first part of the novel is narrated through a diary of Molly. Her life involved hiding in the roof space, playing pixie and being commanded by the housekeeper who finally got married to her uncle. The second part shows how Molly attended school with the help of Simon who made himself Molly's benefactor. Unfortunately, Molly was so much hated by the headmistress who always despised her and this made her drop out of school. Molly's diary acts as the framework for the novel. She met Jacky Jarvis, a banjo player, during a house party at Martha's house. Jacky persuaded Molly to take her to a cliff that was located beyond the bone valley. As soon as they arrived, there came a lightning storm that made them to escape by entering a cave, which was found in the man-bone rock. After a few days, Molly followed Jacky to his tree which was hollow. Surprisingly, they lay down together and what followed was Jacky's proposal to Molly, who definitely agreed.

In part four of the novel, 'Black Jack', Jacky's brother, gave evidence on crime which took place about twenty five years before, and the crime was associated with certain events that took place during that time. For instance, it is the time when Jacky brought Molly back to the rag mountain. Molly attracted everyone especially when working in the store that belonged to Jacky. In addition, she acted as a nurse. Unfortunately, Molly's four children died and the children's gravestones made Jacky say, "What a fine crop of babies I am raising" (Smith 111). Ultimately, Jacky initiated a relationship with Hinshaw and black Jack showed his love for Molly. After a few days, Jacky passed away in a fire that burnt his store building and the story concludes that Molly had gone to the building when it was burning so that he could offer aid to Jacky.

Molly might have killed Jacky because it is not apparent whether he had gone there to rescue Jackie or he is the one who lit the store. There is a possibility that Molly killed Jacky because he left her and developed another relationship with Icy Hinshaw. Therefore, she might have decided to revenge.

In part five, Molly got freed from jail and went back home since she had been accused of killing Jacky. She decided to offer his house to Icy and her children, who belonged to Jacky. According to me, Molly decided to give Icy and her children the house since she felt guilty after killing Jacky. Agate hill estate had already been bought by Simon, who later died. Simon had written very many letters to Molly on how he adored and treasured her.

Molly also wrote letters in 1927 that answered questions on how Jacky's death occurred as well as how fate occurred to other characters. It means that Molly knew everything about Jacky's death and that is why she could write letters on how the death occurred. So, she might have been involved in it.

In the novel, Lee Smith, clearly shows how orthodox Christianity was oppressive and not fulfilling to women. Traditional Christianity in the novel has been associated with negative feelings and thus the characters do not follow any God's teachings. This can be seen clearly when Molly calls the local minister "an old sourpuss Presbyterian" (Smith 200). To make it worse, she continues to say that "he has got a poker up his ass" (Smith 200). This clearly depicts negative characters of Molly thus indicating that she was capable of doing anything unpleasant including the killing of Jacky.

The most common themes in this novel are loss and survival. The theme of loss has been portrayed in many parts of the novel. To start with, Molly lost both her parents and all her siblings when she was still young. This made her believe that she lived in a house that was full of ghosts. She later lost her uncle and was left in the hands of her aunt who really despised and tortured her in front of other people.

Molly survived the hard times but was lucky to join a boarding school whereby the headmistress was so tough on her. She eventually dropped out of school thus lost her education opportunity. Moreover, Molly lost her first boyfriend after she met a charming handsome man, Jacky Jarvis. Unluckily, the man left her after sometime because she was giving birth to stillborn babies. The author emphasizes this by describing the tiny graves where the babies were buried by saying that, "just a row of rock babies up on the mountain like a little stone wall" (Smith 250). Since the theme of loss dominates in the novel, Jacky Jarvis's death was also part of the theme after she got burnt inside her building.

Another theme used by Lee Smith in the novel is love. Molly wanted to love somebody who could provide security for her as well as a man who could assist her in coming out of the

state of being a 'ghost girl' to a real person. She promised to 'give all her heart' (Smith 287) to a man who would love her and continued to say that "live as hard and love so much I will use myself all the way up like a candle" (Smith 287). Unfortunately, she always made wrong choices and never got a man who truly loved her. All her hopes were in Jacky who later divorced her. This made Molly very bitter thus might have been involved in the death of Jacky.

Besides, Lee Smith uses the theme of betrayal in the novel. To start with, Molly was betrayed by her strange benefactor since he raped her. This creates a very sad mood in the novel since the benefactor, Simon, volunteered to assist the girl financially so that he could take advantage of her. Secondly, Selena, Uncle Junior's wife did not marry him out of love; rather, he wanted to inherit property after his death. Surprisingly, she treated Molly like an animal and after the death of Uncle Junior she did not pay the slaves who decided to leave unpaid. Moreover, betrayal is portrayed by Jacky when he divorced Molly because she was giving birth to a child of still babies. Actually, she felt more than betrayed since she had rejected another rich man's proposal so that she could get married to Jacky who was a poor musician. This affected Molly emotionally because she could not imagine the love of her life in the hands of another woman. As a result of that, it might have triggered Molly's mind in making the worst decision of hitting back by killing Jacky.

In characterization, Molly is an adventurous girl since she took the risk of dropping out of school due to how she was mistreated by the headmistress and became a teacher. Additionally, she later became a wife but quit the marriage after she met Jacky Jarvis, who was very charming. This depicts how Molly was daring because she never feared to take risks. To support my argument on the killing of Jacky Jarvis, I suspect Molly killed him because she already had the

courage of taking risks and thus could have killed Jacky Jarvis as a means of revenging the divorce that he caused between them.

Molly was a spunky girl who always made wrong choices that landed her into problems as well as to a better comprehension of her life. For instance, she could not have been accused of killing Jacky if they were not in a relationship previously. The blame went to her since the death occurred not long after their divorce.

The headmistress was known as Mrs. Mariah Show who was very rude and cruel. Her sister, Agnes, was unrealistic and very naïve. Since Agnes was Molly's friend, she might have advised her on how to get rid of Jacky after they divorced because she did not make any realistic decision.

In conclusion, the plot in this novel helps the reader to change perspective. The diary for Molly is a view on childhood but the use of a third person enables the reader to understand her private life and comprehend the characteristics of other people used in the novel. Smith has used the plot in such a way that the reader is able to understand different changes that occur. For instance, the aftermath of the civil war, which led to the death of almost all those people who were related to Molly made her life very miserable life. Additionally, the author has used the plot to show damaged as well as very hard lives that occurred in those ruined days. The civil war shows that the novel was written in a country where racism was rampant since the war was caused by the differences that existed between the blacks and the whites.

Works Cited

Smith, Lee. "On Agate Hill". *Novel*. 2006.

<<http://www.worldcat.org/title/on-Agate-hill-a-novel/oclc/067384282>>