

J E A N F E R R I S

JEAN



# O N E

I knew what my father was going to say before he said it.

“You’re turning out just like your mother.”

Good, I thought. At least she knew how to have fun. She hadn’t sat at home moping and thinking up new rules to make things hard for everybody else the way he did.

“You tell me that all the time,” I said, my hands on my hips, my heart rate in overdrive. “Like it’s a crime. What if I think it’s a good thing?”

“Then you’re seriously wrong,” he said, standing in front of the door, blocking my exit. “And seriously misguided. Don’t forget she was drunk when she cracked herself up in the car. At three in the afternoon. With the guy from next door, who should have been at work so he could support his wife and kids. You can’t tell me that’s a good thing.”

I was only four when she died. All I could remember of her is how she smelled and the jingle of her silver bracelets and the way things felt more exciting when she was around. Even then I think I understood that she knew what a good time was all about, while my father wouldn’t know one if it came bow-tied and special delivery. Okay, so maybe she overdid it, but she managed to get in a lot of living before she ran out of time.

I wondered if she knew how much trouble she'd left behind.

"You're not leaving here tonight," my father said. "I know you're going to meet that boy. He's bad news and you know it. I've been telling you that for the last six months, from the day you met him. If you leave here, you're admitting what you want is to get into trouble."

He was right. Ray *was* bad news—but that was part of his appeal. And I probably would get into trouble. But when I was with Ray, things happened. There was excitement and action, filling me, proving I was there. At home, at school—when I managed to get there—everything seemed to be in slow motion and muted colors. I felt hollow and barely visible.

Ray called it *skating* when we did the crazy things—grabbing an old lady's purse when she cut through the park in the late afternoon. Hot-wiring a fancy car for a joyride after midnight. Boosting stuff from stores. Ray liked to take cigarettes. Me, I was so good, I told him I could get away with the sales clerk's pantyhose. I had a drawer full of clothes and jewelry I'd taken but wouldn't wear. It was the skating, not the stuff, that I liked.

The one skaty thing I really didn't like was the way Ray sometimes insisted on sex in public places: quick, up against a wall, in an alley in the daytime, or slow, on a golf course at night, even when it was cold out. But I knew he'd be in a good mood after, happy with me, and that made it worth it.

"You're not Ray's favorite person, either," I said to my father. "He says your rule book must be a foot thick."

"Just like his skull. Why don't you understand that what I'm trying to do is protect you? I know what a mess somebody like your mother leaves behind her, and I don't want your life to be as messy as Dixie Lee's."

Dixie Lee. I loved my mother's name. It sounded spirited

and lively. I knew it must have been her idea to name me Dallas. Dear old Dad would never have thought of something like that.

“Well, you picked her,” I said. “Don’t blame me.”

“And I’m paying for it,” he said, almost inaudibly. “I don’t care if you are only sixteen; if you leave this house tonight, I’ll take no responsibility for what happens to you next.”

“Great,” I said, pushing my way around him to the door. “That’ll be a relief to us both.” I ignored the sick lurch my stomach always took when he said he’d had enough of me, even if I didn’t think he meant it. I’d go meet Ray. We’d do some skating. I’d sleep at Pam’s, the way I’d done plenty of other times, until he calmed down. I’d be okay.

Ray was at the café where we usually met. Pam, my best friend for the past two years, and Sonny, her boyfriend and Ray’s best friend, were with him, drinking coffee and working on a big plate of fries. Pam and Sonny had fixed me up with Ray, and since then I’d finally had a feeling of belonging somewhere, of having my own group. I didn’t ever want to be without them.

“Hey, babe,” Ray said to me, snaking his arm around my waist and pulling me into the booth. “We figured you were duking it out with your old man.” He dragged me up against him. He was warm and solid and for that moment I felt safe. “You win?”

“I’m here, aren’t I?” I said. “What’s happening?”

“As far as Pam’s folks are concerned,” Sonny said, his arm around Pam’s shoulders, “she’s baby-sitting. Too bad your old man’s not as easy to fool as they are.”

“I’m a much better liar than Dallas is,” Pam said.

She looked like a second-grader, with her cute short haircut and her little white blouse, so it was no big job to see why she

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