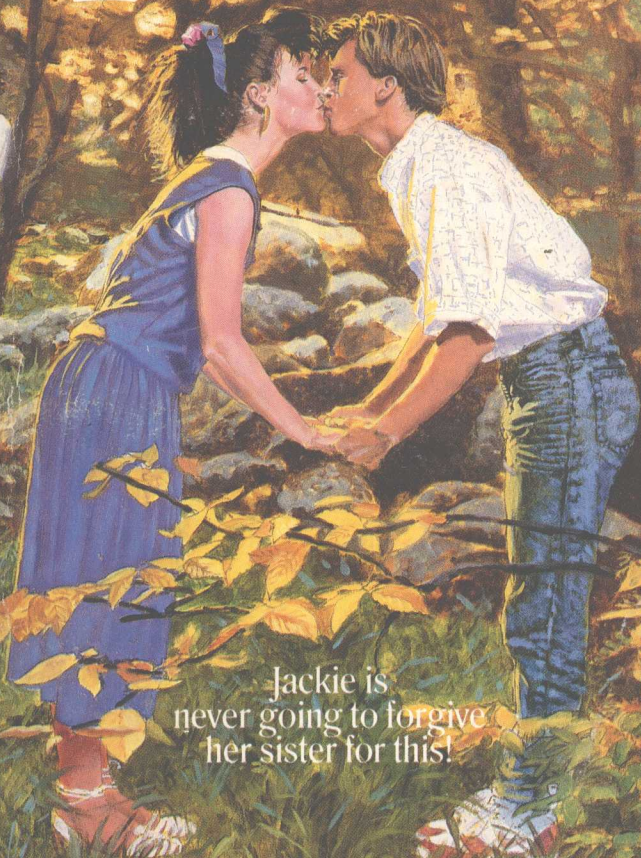


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# MY SISTER THE TRAITOR



Jackie is  
never going to forgive  
her sister for this!

Candice F. Ransom

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SCHOLASTIC

# —MY— SISTER —THE— TRAITOR

Candice F. Ransom

—AN—  
**APPLE**  
PAPERBACK

SCHOLASTIC INC.  
New York Toronto London Auckland Sydney

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*For my mother,  
who should have had me first*

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## Stunned

Russell was supposed to fall madly in love with Jackie in this romantic setting. Instead he seemed more interested in her sister, which wasn't fair, because Sharon already had a boyfriend. A minor detail Sharon probably neglected to mention to Russell.

Jackie stopped abruptly, guarded from view by a veil of willow boughs.

Russell and Sharon were kissing. Not a sprightly little isn't-this-a-pretty-day peck, but a real kiss. A long, long kiss, too long to qualify for casual friendship.

Jackie was stunned.

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# Chapter 1

The summer following the Great Sister War promised to be one of the worst ever.

Jackie Howard sat on the well-cap in their front yard, glumly listening to her sister Sharon describe the perfect life, which neither of them would have, even if they lived to be a hundred.

Boredom stretched between the two girls like cobwebs. School had been out almost a month. There wasn't anything to do or anyplace to go or anyone to talk to except each other.

Jackie was glad her sister was around and not away for the summer like her friend Natalie, who was visiting her grandparents in Seattle. Sharon never said she was glad Jackie hadn't gone off like her boyfriend Mick, who was working as a camp counselor in the Blue Ridge mountains, but Jackie believed her sister was grateful for her

company. Who else would listen to Sharon's rambling monologue of the perfect existence?

Central to Sharon's requirement for a perfect life was a car, ideally red and turbo-charged, but then cars had occupied a lofty position as a topic of conversation ever since Sharon had learned to drive.

"I'd hop in that car and head east without stopping," Sharon said now, wistfully watching the traffic cruise up and down Lee Highway.

"You'd run into the Atlantic Ocean," Jackie pointed out.

"West, then. Or south. It wouldn't matter, just so I got out of this hole."

Jackie's own desires were much fuzzier. A few weeks ago she had celebrated her thirteenth birthday, if you could call a birthday cake ineptly baked by Sharon and homemade chocolate ice cream so runny it had to be drunk through a straw a celebration.

Still, thirteen represented a magic number to Jackie. Back when Jackie was eleven and chafing with impatience to be a teenager like Sharon, she asked her mother when her life would get started, now that her childhood was officially over.

"Thirteen," her mother had answered.

Jackie had not been satisfied with the reply. "Thirteen! That's two whole years away! What about eleven? And twelve? If I'm not a kid anymore and I'm not a teenager yet, then what am I?"

Her mother had smiled. "Well, you could be a *tween*-ager. How's that?"

"I think it's stupid," Jackie scoffed. "Whoever made up the names for those numbers? It should be eleventeen and twelveteen so kids could know exactly what they are. None of this in-between stuff."

"Be glad you have a few in-between years," her mother said. "When you get to be my age the numbers all sound alike as the years roll by faster and faster."

They weren't rolling by fast enough for Jackie, but deep down inside she knew her mother was right. She wouldn't be a real teenager until she was thirteen.

Now that she *was* thirteen, wonderful things should be happening to her, sort of like being allowed to buy clothes at a discount at Memco after showing your card at the door. She was breathlessly waiting for the glories of adulthood to shower upon her. So far, though, she hadn't seen a trace of a single solitary glory. Jackie doubted she'd even recognize a glory if one fell from the sky.

Instead, she faced a summer of sitting on the well-cap with her sister, watching the world go by.

Jackie traced the old powder burns in the cement top — "snakes" they'd set off on past Fourth of Julys. Maybe she was being unrealistic. Maybe expecting wonderful things to happen was too far-fetched, like hoping she'd wake up one day and look like her sister. Jackie and Sharon had the same coloring — brown eyes and brown hair. But Sharon was beautiful, with the fine, even features seen in oil paintings,



whereas Jackie felt as if she'd been scribbled with a blunt crayon.

"Remember when we did these?" Jackie said, wishing she had a box of the slow-burning black pellets. She and Sharon used to see whose "snake," actually coils of ash, would be the longest. This year, of course, they were both too old for fireworks.

Sharon nodded. "We'd write our names with sparklers, too. You had trouble spelling yours."

"I did not," Jackie said, bristling a little. "It was just too long. The sparkler would fizzle out before I could print Jacqueline Howard."

"This summer is certainly a fizzle." Sharon drew up her knees and rested her chin on them. "I can't believe we're looking at the cars going up and down the road, just like we did years ago! Doesn't anything ever change around here?"

The Sister War had certainly changed things, at least for a while. The previous fall, Jackie had had a lot of problems with her older sister, whom Jackie thought was too mean for words. Then Sharon declared war on Jackie. The house was divided into separate territories, even the bathroom the girls shared, and they didn't speak to each other. The war finally ended when Jackie managed to bring Sharon and the boy she liked together.

"If one thing changed around this place, I'd faint," Sharon declared. "Just one!"

Across the highway, a man emerged from the side door of Nate's Garage. "Mr. Perkins

changed his undershirt," Jackie observed with a giggle.

Sharon laughed, temporarily teased out of her bad mood. "It must be June," she added and they cracked up. Nathan Perkins, who operated the garage, wore what Jackie called "armhole" undershirts winter and summer, with dress slacks.

In summers past the garage provided a little drama when smashed cars were towed into the fenced area behind the building. Sometimes an argument between Mr. Perkins and an irate customer could be heard clear across the road and up the hill. When nothing was going on at the garage, Jackie would bet Sharon that the tenth car going toward Fairfax would be a blue station wagon or a white two-door, or whatever. Sharon made up fantasies about the people in the cars and the glamorous places they were going.

But they were beyond counting cars now, just as they were too old to set off fireworks.

Sharon said, dramatically pulling her hair, "If I don't get out of here, I'll go insane!"

"We can always go get the mail," Jackie suggested reasonably. "After the mail-truck comes."

"Yippee." Sharon's tone was acid with sarcasm.

"Well, it's *something* to do."

"I'm supposed to turn handsprings over getting the mail?"

"I can't help it that there's nothing to do!"

"I know," Sharon agreed, contrite. "I'm not blaming you. I can't afford to lose the only per-

son close to my age within a forty-mile radius. We're so far from town. I despise living out in the sticks."

This was an old complaint. Sharon griped continually about where they lived, a rural section of Fairfax County, Virginia. Washington, D. C. was only twenty-six miles to the east, but the city might as well be on the moon.

Before she started junior high, Jackie was perfectly content at home. Their brick rambler wasn't fancy, but the surrounding five acres the Howards owned consisted of a vast yard, a garden, and woods bordered on one side by a creek and on the other side by a rail fence that dated back to the Civil War. But the year before, when Jackie began seventh grade at Sidney Lanier Junior High, she understood her sister's grievance. Most of the kids who attended Lanier were from the suburbs, tightly-knit communities with tennis courts and swimming pools. Suburb kids hung out after school, instead of riding the bus home the way Jackie did. Living in a development, Jackie quickly discovered, was the key to having lots of friends.

"I had big plans this summer," Sharon muttered. "First I was going to get a tan and then I planned to have a summer romance, like in the movies."

"A summer romance? But you're going with Mick!" Jackie couldn't believe her sister was considering being unfaithful to Mick Rowe, not after all Sharon had gone through to date him.

"Well, he's not around." Sharon wasn't even wearing Mick's class ring or the mustard-seed

necklace he had given Sharon for her sixteenth birthday. "I'm sure he's not pining for me. You know what they say, 'out of sight out of mind.' "

"I thought they said 'absence makes the heart grow fonder.' "

"That, too. It doesn't really matter. Mick's up in the mountains with a bunch of beautiful girl counselors in short-shorts while I sit here like a bump on a log. Even Linda has a job." Linda Taylor was Sharon's best friend.

"You could still get a tan."

Sharon lifted her long hair off her neck. "It's too hot. You can't get a good tan sweltering in the backyard. I need to be at the *pool*. Or the beach."

"How about if I spray you with the hose?" In the old days, before the summer of their discontent, they'd take turns spraying each other with the hose their father used for rinsing vegetables from his garden.

Sharon sighed. "It wouldn't be so bad living here if I could *drive*. I've had my license six whole months and Dad still won't let me take the car out by myself."

With a twig, Jackie stirred a doodlebug crater, a funnel of finely-ground silt, at the base of the well-cap. Her father once told her that if she called "Doodlebug, doodlebug, come out," nicely, the little bug would obligingly appear, but she found a twig worked better. This doodlebug crater was apparently vacant.

"I had plans, too," she said, snapping the twig in tiny pieces.

Sharon arched an eyebrow, a gesture she had

recently developed to make herself seem older than sixteen and a half. "You had plans? Like what? Fooling around with that club you and Natalie started in school?"

In seventh grade, Jackie and Natalie organized the Lanier Leopards, a club that was a huge success. But then school ended and the Leopards disbanded.

"No, that's over," Jackie said. "I kind of thought — well, things would happen to me when I became thirteen."

"What things?"

"You know, boys, parties . . . why isn't anything *happening*?"

Sharon snorted. "Don't expect miracles."

"You can talk. You already know how to dance, and you're on the drill team, and you've had at least five boyfriends." Jackie ticked off her sister's achievements,

"Yeah, but none of that came overnight, believe me. If reaching a certain age in life meant you'd get to do stuff, do you think I'd be sitting here? I'd be out in my own car, with the top down, looking for a cute summer boy."

"You've got a cute boy," Jackie insisted. "What's this summer romance business?"

"I'd just like to have one," Sharon said blithely. "The idea of a having a guy wild about me for just the summer sounds neat. In September, I'd go back to Mick." Her tone hardened again. "But how can I meet any boy stuck out here?"

Jackie thought it sounded underhanded to lead a boy on like that, cold-bloodedly planning



to ditch him at the end of the summer. Sharon was unconcerned because she was pretty and confident and opportunities were forever dropping in her lap. Jackie considered herself lucky to have a boy *look* at her for a few seconds. But what boy? Sharon's argument against living in the boonies, where the pickings were limited to Nathan Perkins in his undershirt and the flunkies who drove his tow trucks, had a lot of merit.

A breeze rustled the leaves of the big maple that shaded them from the hazy sun. Molehills heaved upward in miniature mountain ranges. The warmth soaked into the rough concrete of the well-cap, making Jackie drowsy. She could almost forget her problems.

"It's a conspiracy, you know," Sharon said suddenly.

Jackie roused herself. "What is?"

"The way our parents practically keep us prisoners from June till September. That's the main reason Mom and Dad won't let me use the car. They believe if they chain me to the house, I'll never grow up."

"You really think so?" Jackie had never examined her sister's situation in that light before.

"I know so. And what's more, it'll happen to you, too. They'll hold you back just like they're holding me back."

Jackie looked at her sister with new respect. Sometimes Sharon was so *deep*. Jackie just bopped through life, waiting for things to happen, but Sharon didn't take anything for granted. Sharon worried about more than not

being allowed to drive — she had analyzed their parents' motives and arrived at a shocking conclusion.

By comparison, Jackie's own worries seemed trivial. This morning, for instance, she agonized over who would get the last Coke. She worried about it so much, she finally drank the Coke and hid the bottle behind the soap powder on the laundry porch.

Or sometimes at night when she couldn't sleep, she worried that the days ahead would all be the same, the way her reflection repeated endlessly when she gazed into two angled mirrors. Once, seeing Jackie mesmerized by the mirror trick, Sharon informed her she'd stumbled on the concept of infinity. Now her worry had a nametag, but that didn't erase her fears that her life would go on and on like the image in the mirrors with no change. Lying in bed, she tried to peer into her future, but couldn't see a thing. Was this because her parents were holding her back? If Sharon's theory were true, both their futures were at stake.

A rusty red Jeep stopped at their mailbox. A hand thrust a bundle of mail into the box and swiftly closed the lid, as if feeding an alligator.

Jackie stood up, glad for some diversion. "Mail's here! Race you down the hill!"

"I'm not running down the hill like a hoodlum for everyone to see me," Sharon said primly.

"You go."

"Come with me. It's no fun by myself."

"You're only getting the *mail*, for heaven's sake."

"You just don't want anybody to see you without your makeup," Jackie said.

"I do not. It's — undignified to walk down that long dusty old driveway and have everybody stare at me. I'm only sitting here because we're so far back from the road, nobody can really see us."

Jackie scratched a mosquito bite. "I thought you liked having people stare at you."

"There's staring and then there's *staring*. I hate waiting for the bus right on the highway. People are always honking at me. It's so common, standing at the road."

"I guess," Jackie said. But she still thought her sister's prissiness was the prime motivating factor. Sharon wouldn't be caught dead at the Safeway unless she was wearing a sequined evening gown and tiara.

Jackie walked to the mailbox alone. The mail contained the usual assortment of bills, a letter from Aunt Geneva . . . and something else. She scanned the single sheet, then ran up the hill, whooping and waving the paper.

"Look at this!" she cried when she was close enough for Sharon to hear. "Now we know what they're building behind that fence down the road! It's an amusement park!"

Sharon snatched the circular. "'Old Virginia City,'" she read out loud. "'The frontier town of the East. Pony rides, cowboys, all the thrills of the Old West.' Oh, brother!" She wadded the paper and threw it on the ground.

"What's wrong with it?" Jackie demanded. "You wanted excitement! Here it is."

"A kiddie park is hardly what I had in mind." Slipping into her flip-flops, Sharon shuffled back into the house, presumably to mope in her room.

Jackie picked up the crumpled circular and smoothed it across the surface of the well-cap. Old Virginia City, the frontier town of the East. Okay, so it wasn't Disneyland. But the park just might be the wonderful thing she'd been waiting for since her thirteenth birthday.

It had to be better than counting cars.