

RICH

BEAUTIFUL, TALENTED,
WEALTHY, AND POWERFUL.
THEY THOUGHT
THE CALIFORNIA SKIES
HELD NO LIMITS FOR...

FRIENDS

JACQUELINE BRISKIN

Best-selling author of DREAMS ARE NOT ENOUGH



EVOCATIVE AND MOVING... AN ABSORBING STORY THAT TOUCHES
ALL TOO CLOSE TO HOME." — Publishers Weekly

**RICH
FRIENDS**
A NOVEL BY
Jacqueline Briskin

A DELL BOOK

Published by
Dell Publishing
a division of
The Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.
666 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10103

*This, with all our love, is for Rich, Liz, Donna, Ralph,
who have brought us much joy.*

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ISBN: 0-440-17380-9

Reprinted by arrangement with the author

Printed in the United States of America

New Dell edition

June 1983

10 9 8 7 6 5

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THEY WERE THE CALIFORNIA DREAMERS .

MA REED—She would sacrifice everything to give her sons what she had missed, but she could never have calculated the results.

DONALD AND VLIET REED—As twins they shared dynamic looks, talent, and popularity, but their different ideas about love would threaten everything they had ever believed in together.

CAROLINE MATHENY—For a checkbook and unlimited shopping sprees she'd traded something she now desperately wanted back in her life.

TRICKET MATHENY—Caroline's strange, baby-faced teen-age daughter, whose quiet exterior masked a shocking sexuality unbridled by society's taboos.

BEVERLY SCHORER GROSSBLATT—As tormented as she was beautiful and gifted, her recognition of her roots could rock her world and everyone in it.

ELIX SCHORER—Beverly's even more beautiful daughter, who trained herself to laugh instead of cry, though the worship of strength would prove her undoing.

UNTIL THE DREAM BECAME A NIGHTMARE, AND THERE WAS NO HELP, NO SANCTUARY IN . . .

RICH FRIENDS

"A FASCINATING AND POWERFUL STORY."

—*The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, Ky.)

"A FASCINATING STORY TOLD WITH SKILL AND SENSITIVITY."

—*Press-Telegram* (Long Beach, Cal.)

Then

Chapter One

1

On this particular blazing Saturday afternoon in June of 1946, the cloudless sky above Glendale appeared a deeper blue than normal. The air held crystal clarity. Sound traveled immense distances, and you could hear a faraway whistle of the Southern Pacific passing through, hear the tinkle of a Good Humor truck with its trail of excited children's voices.

Glendale is one of the numerous suburbs that form Los Angeles. It is barricaded on the north by the tall, gloomy San Gabriel Mountains, which sometimes in a cold winter have a gravel of snow and after a hot summer will turn dry and black. As if to deny this living harshness, the eternal green necropolis of Forest Lawn coils in the heart of Glendale. Westward sprawls the San Fernando Valley—in those days a cheap whore selling her body without plan to GI housing tracts and factories. Driving east over the tall Arroyo Seco Bridge—nicknamed Suicide Bridge—puts you in wealthy Pasadena. Large homes separated and hidden by acres of pruned shrubbery. In Pasadena lived some of the Van Vliets, the supermarket Van Vliets. (The family was large, intertwining through Los Angeles with other good families rather like royalty.) Pasadenans did not look down on Glendale. They were oblivious of the neighboring suburb.

In Glendale, houses were small, edged with well-watered grass. Trim Protestant spires rose through billowing summer

green of elm, sycamore, birch. If that afternoon you had ventured onto the wide, sunstruck business streets, no crowd would have jostled you, you wouldn't have been annoyed by the hot dog- or chili bowl-shape stands seen in other areas—there was a local ordinance against such extrusions.

When movie studios wanted a middle-class reaction, they held a sneak preview at the Alexander. For Glendale, wedged into a city already known as futuristic, oddball, home of lotus eaters, was a core of insular America. Here, people overlooked the terrible chasm of the recent war, gazing back to our earlier time of naiveté. Glendale was the honest, true place that Kate Smith's hearty voice sang of, the unambiguous good life that Norman Rockwell's *Saturday Evening Post* covers had graven on our hearts. Teachers here enthused about equality to white faces. And the people did believe they dwelt in the best of all possible melting pots—refusing to admit within the boundaries of their suburb any evidence to the contrary. A few veterans might privately brood on implications of their recent horrors, but for the most part a man adjusted, slipping his ruptured duck in his wide, civvy lapel, returning to clear up his desk. Glendale had no use for the foreign craze of fifty-minute hours.

The young faced the future as the young always have everywhere, as a new chapter to be written, dice yet to be thrown. It was impossible for them to gauge how marked the pages, how weighted the die, in this Truman era, in the dawn of the atomic age.

Beverly Linde, who was eighteen, stood in the hedged drive of a tile-roofed bungalow. She was lighting a cigarette. In the back garden Em and Sheridan Reed's wedding reception had been in full, sweaty swing for almost two hours. Em (née Wynan) was the elder sister of Caroline Wynan, Beverly's best friend. And Beverly knew she had only a few minutes' grace before Caroline came and dragged her back. In the green shade of the ivy hedge, though, Beverly was freed of the crowd, able to forget her self-consciousness, forget that she was so different from the other young people whose voices she could hear. Sometimes she thought she was dif-

ferent because she was Jewish. Since this was a fact she never mentioned unless pressed to the wall, she hadn't been able to discuss it, not even with Caroline. Or maybe, more simply, it was because she enjoyed being alone. Sketching. Painting. Before she had started school, when she was very young, she had been happy. That was before she knew it was contemptible to enjoy solitude.

She was a slender girl with soft brown hair. Her mouth, under the too-dark lipstick of the time, gave an impression of great gentleness. She wasn't pretty, but that didn't matter, not once you noticed the eyes. The eyes were memorable. Amber eyes that darkened when she was upset, eyes that one would swear could see things invisible.

She wasn't a real smoker. She puffed, gazing dreamily through the wisps. Cordell Road was lined with eucalyptus: with their sad, moulting bark, the trees reminded Beverly of a parade of elderly circus camels.

A pod clunked on a well-kept-up prewar Nash that undoubtedly belonged to one of Dr. and Mrs. Wynan's family friends. (Dr. Wynan's lackluster dental practice was drawn from these friends.) The battered jalopies were owned by dates of the Omega Deltas, the bride's sorority sisters who were also Beverly and Caroline's sorority sisters. The Lincoln Continentals, the Cadillacs with jump seats, had borne Mrs. Wynan's relations, the Van Vliets, from Pasadena and other wealthy sections. The black Daimler with the colored chauffeur leaning against the hood belonged to Mrs. Hendryk Van Vliet, the bride's grandmother. The limousine was far too aristocratic for Cordell Road. *The Van Vliets, you know, Van Vliet's supermarkets*, Beverly had heard other guests whisper. *Mrs. Wynan is one—her mother is the real big shot*. And they would throw awed glances at Mrs. Van Vliet, a tiny, imperious old lady who wore her hazelnut-size diamond and huge emerald as if they sprang from the bones of her wrinkled, elegant fingers.

Beverly took another puff. I shouldn't be out here. Why aren't I in back, drinking champagne and laughing and enjoying myself like everyone else? Why? Nobody sneaks away from parties. I'm the most abnormal hermit. Why solitude

. . . These thoughts were too vague to put into words. They were more like a haze of guilt surrounding that mysterious element: her dislocation from other people.

She gazed around, hugging the perfect California summer afternoon to herself. In desert clarity, the purple-creased San Gabriel Mountains seemed touchable. Shadows half-covered the Wynans' house, painted for the occasion, and on this side, rough stucco didn't appear its brutal new salmon but a deep, lovely garnet. Again Beverly examined the eucalyptus. They really are pathetic, she thought, and went over to trace shaggy bark with two fingers, as if she were petting an animal. Her smile was dreamy, gentle. And agonizingly vulnerable.

2

Behind the house, the reception. In russet shadows of the liquid amber trees, hatted women chatted and laughing men held flanged glasses. Across the lawn two small girls pirouetted, organdy skirts ballooning. A young masculine voice shouted, "Charge!" and a burst of laughter rose from the patio. Here, despite the blazing slant of afternoon sun, young people crowded. A waiter with growing dark half moons under his white sleeves dispensed tepid California champagne, slowly and ungenerously—he was down to three bottles. Nearby, another damask-covered picnic table, this dedicated to food. Hot sun had hardened circles of bread into shells around pastel spreads that gave off sharp odors of anchovy and deviled ham: green and white mints stuck together and napkins no longer fanned to show silver-imprinted names. MARILYN AND SHERIDAN. Caroline Wynan maintained less hours had been spent negotiating the entire Japanese peace treaty than deciding whether to print her sister's given name or the initial by which she'd always been known. Mrs. Wynan and Em finally had opted for MARILYN. Van Vliets would be in attendance, and therefore, they had concluded, utmost formality was in order.

The long, wavery line had kissed the bride, congratulated

the groom, exclaimed to Dr. and Mrs. Wynan how lovely the ceremony at St. Mark's Episcopal had been, and now the couple stood by themselves on the path leading from the patio to the barbecue.

Em, a short, small-boned girl, was surprisingly ample of bosom, an endowment she disguised. Her rayon-satin wedding gown was ruched in the matronly style of Princess Elizabeth. Under Max Factor pancake were the ghosts of wrinkles to come, slight parentheses from the corners of her tilted nose to her mouth: her sandy hair had been permanented two days earlier—the froth of tulle mercifully hid most of the resulting frizz. Yet Em, in her diminutive way, was appealing, especially when she smiled. And she was smiling up at Sheridan.

Em always had been popular with girls. With boys, not so. The men her age—twenty-two—had spent four years of their lives making democracy live, yet from her infrequent blind dates with servicemen, she knew, just knew, she didn't have the same flirtatious knack as her high-handed younger sister. With men sometimes Em was afflicted by a nervous stammer. She had met Sheridan a few weeks after he had started USC on the GI Bill. Newspapers and magazines might be full of statistics, the returned warriors marrying at an unprecedented rate, but Em—how could Em see this wedding as anything short of a miracle? From time to time she reassured herself by gripping Sheridan's hand, the left one with the gold ring, size 9, \$12.50. Her size 4 had cost him the same. When she had asked the jeweler why, he had thrown in the engraving: TO S, FOREVER, M and TO M, FOREVER, S. If Em had known how to politely rephrase the question, she would have asked again. She liked rational explanations. She liked fairness. It was irrational and unfair, both, making Sheridan pay the same for half the amount of gold.

Sheridan's double-breasted, rented tuxedo stretched across wide shoulders. Under close-cropped dark hair, his big features might easily have been considered homely if it weren't for a tautness across his cheekbones and around his full, dark lips. It was this brooding tension—actually a kind of anger—

that gave Sheridan tremendous SA, or so the Omega Deltas agreed. (That he was attractive to other girls excited Em almost as much as it worried her.) He had two more years until he was a pharmacist. She had just graduated and her teaching credential was going to help support them—so many girls were putting GI husbands through school nowadays, and Em in her serious way had decided this was a tremendous advance over Mother's time: she would be an equal partner in Sheridan's career.

Sheridan glanced around. "The kissing's over," he said, lifting his free hand, glancing at his steel watch. "We can hit the road."

She gripped his fingers tighter. "There's still the cake."

"Let 'em eat cake," Sheridan said with his short laugh, "when we're gone."

"I have to c-cut it."

"Bring it on, then."

"I can't. I mean, the bride sh-shouldn't," little Em stammered. How could she argue with Sheridan?

He bent swiftly, saying in her small, flat ear, "If we stick around too long, they'll get the idea we're not eager."

Darts like needles stuck downward in the pit of Em's stomach. She wasn't. Eager. She was terrified. She had taken the blood tests, Mazzini and Kahn, and afterward Dr. Porter had given her premarital counseling. Which meant he'd examined her on a leather table with spread metal stirrups (pure torture) and said he'd fit her for a diaphragm after the honeymoon, when the hymen was broken. Back in his office he had penciled male and female organs. Em stared at his memo pad, hypnotized. In cramped second-floor bedrooms of the Omega Delta house she and her friends often discussed aberrations like the man and woman not fitting or getting stuck and remaining that way until separated by the fire department. Dr. Porter's voice was cheerful, easy, yet his words were infinitely more disturbing. This was about to happen. Happen to her! "Orgasm," he had paused, then gone on to tell her she would know she'd achieved it when she felt an urge similar to the need to urinate. And she wasn't even one for petting!

RICH FRIENDS

Sheridan's muscular arm snaked around her and she felt his warm, dampish side pressing affectionately against her. Again she was overwhelmed by the miracle. They were married. She would be a good wife, she vowed earnestly. Would, would, would.

"I'll find Caroline. She'll get Lucidda to wheel it out."

"Atsmygirl."

Em rose on her grass-stained white shoes. Nearsighted, she had refused to wear glasses on her day of days. She squinted to find her sister, who was also her maid of honor.

Near the pyracantha hedge stood Caroline, face shadowed by a wide-brimmed horsehair hat, gesturing and chattering with Van Vliets. The Family, the entire group dressed with impeccable simplicity for a garden wedding, adults and children alike endowed with a terrifying (to Em) air of self-possession that said they owned any bit of earth that they chose to stand on. Em grew nervous, awkward with her wealthy Van Vliet relations, all of them, even her grandmother.

Em gathered her bridal train under one arm, and veiled head high, tugged Sheridan's hand. At the same moment Caroline, seeing her, patted her grandmother's arm in farewell and came over with the forthright confidence of a prima ballerina. Em heaved a sigh of relief. She wouldn't have to talk to Them.

Tiny beads of sweat stood out on Caroline's forehead, and her normally pink cheeks were crimson. Almost nineteen, she was a tall girl with a healthy, full-blooded Edwardian handsomeness. And great style. Despite her maid of honor's dress with its dowdy sweetheart neckline (the bride's choice) Caroline managed to look chic. Or *chick*, as she purposefully mispronounced. Caroline's black hair was set in a loose pageboy with a few strands permitted to drift casually onto her forehead, drawing attention to her sparkling blue eyes and the color in her cheeks, to her blue eyes and cheeks so rosy. Her graduated pearls were knotted to the fashionable choker length. In Caroline's attractive presence, Em felt her bridal splendor disappear. Em, shrinking and fading like a rag doll washed in the Bendix. She was used to it. The only time she

let it get to her came when she saw Caroline with the Family. This alone she envied her sister: her ease with Them. Sheridan slowed, his hand tightening on hers, an unspoken admission that They unnerved him, too.

"Hot!" Caroline fanned herself vigorously. "Sweaty the bride, and so on." She laughed. Caroline's laughter was a rare gift. People melted on its receipt. It emerged from deep in Caroline's chest and had an almost raucous note like a caliope, a joyous, golden invitation to have some fun. Em couldn't help smiling. Tall Caroline embraced her short elder sister with one arm while with the other she drew Sheridan closer, breathing a champagne-scented kiss in the air between them.

"The cake," Sheridan said.

"Cake?" Caroline fluttered black lashes.

He made a cutting gesture.

"Oh *that* cake. Luv, it's about time. The bubbly's run dry." Caroline laughed again, and Em, anxious as she was, couldn't keep back an echoing chuckle. "Mother!" Caroline exclaimed. "Why on earth she kept *insisting* we didn't need another case! We children were meant to be blotting up the fruit punch. Remember, Em, I—"

Sheridan interrupted, "We'll get it cut now."

"Aye aye, sir." Caroline's salute tilted her wide-brimmed hat.

And she started for the patio, moving with agonizing slowness, or so it seemed to Em, pausing to smile, laugh, speak, touch an arm, an eternity before a wisp of pink skirt narrowly escaped being trapped by the screen door.

3

Caroline leaned against the Bendix, staring at the three-tiered cake. Stiff it was, and less digestible-looking than the china bride and groom simpering under a quadruple arch of tightly folded fabric flowers. Trust Em and Mother! In their conventional minds a wedding cake *must* look like this. Caroline, tossing her hat to the linoleum, started to unfold cloth flowers.

These impingements of the family (or, as her parents and Em capitalized, the Family—like the Holy One) grated on Caroline's healthy nerves. The house was wildly neat, the arrangements so faw-ncy that something inevitably went wrong. For example, at her eighteenth birthday tea last August 13, the Wynans' ancient golden retriever had lifted a leg to Uncle Richard's white flannels. Of course the family—and Caroline—had thought this hilarious, and—equally of course—any mention of the great pee incident still reduced Mother to quivering middle-age curds and apologies. Poor Mother. As if any act of a Glendale dog could disturb them.

Caroline glanced through the uncurtained service porch window and saw Van Vliets standing apart from other guests. The family. Handsome. Witty. Descendants of the hard-working little Dutchman who in 1858 had traveled from New York by steamer to Panama, losing three fingers to snakebite as he crossed the Isthmus on his journey to the fly-infested village of Los Angeles. Here, everything profited him. His original stock of tea, bottles of spice, yeast powders, and dishes (along with the flour that the china had been packed in) he parlayed into a thriving grocery business near the Plaza. The village grew into a town, Southern Pacific railroad ties were laid, he opened another shop, and another. His lush, black-haired bride was heiress to the Garcia land grant. The resulting Van Vliets came in two sizes. Dark, tall, rosy ones, like Caroline. Little ones, like Em, who generally were fair. The small blond ones, strangely, all had narrow, pinch-tilted noses as if God had taken thumb and forefinger, tweak-ing to give His little Van Vliets distinction.

Mrs. Wynan alone had the size of a dark one with the light hair and tilted nose of a small one. On her broad, flat face, the Van Vliet nose spread too wide. She resembled a shy Hereford. She was the oldest child, but that didn't prevent her from being terrified of her two worldly brothers and their elegant wives. And of her cousins, so many years younger. Even of her own mother. They in turn were amused. She was so Glendale. No other life would have fit Mrs. Wynan as well as this, with her squirrel-jawed, loving, unsuccessful dentist husband, her two daughters, needlework of some kind eternally in her large, doughy hands.

Poor Mother. Caroline pushed at a shining black strand. Poor Mother. But Caroline knew *she* herself didn't fit in smug, snug Glendale. She never mentioned her mother's patronymic—wild horses couldn't drag the name from her—yet in her rare bad moments she had a rune to cast: I am a Van Vliet of the Van Vliets.

The china bride and groom teetered.

"Omigawd," Caroline muttered, hastily grabbing to save it. She mangled a wire arch of flowers and crushed two rosettes. Glaring at the damage, she leaned forward, searching the garden for Beverly. Seventy guests with insects swarming above them. She scanned the view beyond the screen door. Attended by their crew-cut boyfriends were her dowdy Omega Delta sisters. (She had been bid by good houses, Tri Delt and Theta, but it never had entered Caroline's loyal head to pledge a different house from Em.)

Caroline hurried through the square kitchen, opening the back door. Garbage cans overflowed with torn silver wrapping, ribbons, and excelsior. She saw Beverly.

"Ah-hah!" Caroline cried. "Caught you!"

Party noises funneled down the narrow drive. Beverly didn't hear. Purse under her arm, head bent on long, slender neck, she lit a Tareyton. She really is unique, Caroline thought. Why *must* she be so antisocial?

Though totally dissimilar, the two had been best friends since a cold, clear afternoon when Miss Marron, the gray-haired witch who ruled third grade, had dispatched them with a note to the principal. *Making a disturbance*, Miss Marron had written. Belching, she meant. Beverly hadn't. Caroline had. As they walked, Beverly murmured her admiration of Caroline, surely the world's champeen ventriloquist belcher, and Caroline praised Beverly's heroism, not snitching. When they reached the slotted shade of the pergola, Caroline said, "Let's be best friends." "You mean that?" Beverly's soft voice raised in surprise. "Sure." "Honestly and truly?" "Forever and ever," Caroline vowed. Surprisingly, they *had* remained a joint force during the wars of adolescence. And unknown to Beverly, Caroline had gotten her pledged to Omega Delta in an epic chapter-room session. "I don't give a damn about the alums and their tacky prejudices! She's witty and talented and

better than anyone else we're bidding and she's *my best friend!*" Small Em, always striving to be fair-minded, had risen from her president's desk to agree with Caroline. This past year Caroline hadn't seen quite so much of Beverly. Nothing planned. She still felt as warm, but the best-friend season was past. They were growing up. So, Caroline wondered as she watched Beverly take that first drag, why should she feel this sense of loss? Well, who else knew how unguarded Beverly was?

Beverly realized she was being watched. "Sneaking one," she said, holding up the hand with the cigarette. "You know Mother."

"I know you." Caroline deepened her voice. "I want to be alone." She decided her Garbo was definitely lesser Wynan. She remembered something. "Lloyd's here."

"He is? But he said after five."

"A tall V-12 paying his ree-spects to your parents. Anyone else fit the description?" Caroline shook her head. "A real hardship case you've got there."

Beverly stubbed out the fresh cigarette, starting for the garden.

"Hold on! I need you."

"But Lloyd—he must be ready for a transfusion." Beverly's soft voice trembled.

Lloyd was shy, true, but the depth of Beverly's sensitivity got to Caroline. "Your fine artistic hand, luv, is unique," she asserted. "And the cake's a horror."

So Beverly, the art major, loosened cloth flowers with slender, deft fingers while listening to Caroline's gossip about the guests, joining in the infectious laughter.

"Interested in the destination?" Caroline asked.

Beverly looked up, her mouth opening a little. Surprised. Em had kept everyone, including her sister and parents, in the dark about the location of her honeymoon.

Caroline smiled tantalizingly, holding a long Fire and Ice fingernail to her matching magenta lips. "Don't breathe a word. Sequoia. Keep working. Sheridan's bought a double sleeping bag from the Sears catalog." Caroline winced. "Imagine. Sears! Em's going to lose it under the open sky."

"Like Olie de Havilland and Charlie Boyer in *Hold Back*