A woman in a dark, flowing dress is shown from the waist down, her body angled towards the right. The dress is long and voluminous, with a deep V-neckline. The background is a deep blue with some lighter, wispy patterns, suggesting a sky or a studio backdrop. The overall mood is dramatic and artistic.

"A masterpiece filled with intriguing, multidimensional characters, an enthralling, sweeping plot, and some of the finest writing you'll ever read."

—*Chicago Sun-Times*

T. JEFFERSON  
**PARKER**

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

**CALIFORNIA GIRL**

EDGAR AWARD WINNER, BEST NOVEL OF THE YEAR

**T. JEFFERSON  
PARKER**

**California  
Girl**

HARPER

NEW YORK • LONDON • TORONTO • SYDNEY

## HARPER

This book is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents, and dialogue are drawn from the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental. All other characters, and all incidents and dialogue, are drawn from the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real.

A hardcover edition of this book was published in 2004 by William Morrow. A rack-size edition of this book was published in 2006 by HarperTorch.

CALIFORNIA GIRL. Copyright © 2004 by T. Jefferson Parker. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information address HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022.

HarperCollins books may be purchased for educational, business, or sales promotional use. For information please write: Special Markets Department, HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022.

FIRST HARPER PAPERBACK PUBLISHED 2009.

*Interior text designed by Elizabeth M. Glover*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available upon request

ISBN 978-0-06-187489-5

09 10 11 12 13      OV/RRD      10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

**"One of the 10 best mysteries  
and thrillers of the year."**

*Chicago Tribune*

**Resounding acclaim for**

**T. JEFFERSON PARKER**

**and**

***California Girl***

"An artistic breakthrough . . . first-rate . . . From the John Birch Society to the war in Vietnam to the destruction of the citrus groves to drive-in churches, Parker has taken it in and nailed it onto the page. Parker does seem to get better with every book, but with *California Girl* the leap was quantum. Read this."

*San Diego Union-Tribune*

"An ambitious and absorbing book in which the lives and destinies of the central characters keep crossing, leading eventually to a surprising conclusion . . . This one will definitely keep [Parker] in the game."

*Denver Post*

"An evocative trip back to the days of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, hippies, LSD, Charles Manson, peace protests, and the rising anger against the war in Vietnam. Parker perfectly captures the turbulence of the times . . . The result is a delicately crafted look back at an era that shaped a generation."

*Orlando Sentinel*

**"LOVE, LUST, MURDER, BETRAYAL . . .  
BRILLIANT!"  
*Kirkus Reviews***

*"California Girl* is wound tight as a spring and filled with characters you won't soon forget. Parker is superb."

Janet Evanovich

"His most ambitious [book] . . . [Parker moves] beyond the parameters of the detective story . . . Anyone seeking to while away a few hours . . . with something a bit more substantial than a solidly plotted whodunit need look no further than this cleverly conceived, smartly executed, utterly satisfying novel."

*Los Angeles Times Book Review*

"[A] multigenerational story of family feuding, revenge, and redemption played out against the lush but changing backdrop of California's Orange County in the '50s and '60s . . . [Parker] masterfully plumbs his well-drawn characters' motives as he tosses them about like socks in a dryer. There are a lot of surprises in *California Girl*."

*Raleigh News & Observer*

"Timothy Leary, the birth of televangelism, closet homosexuality, John Birchers, Richard Nixon—the book has them all . . . [Parker is] far superior to most other authors . . . Better than most anything else out there."

*Kansas City Star*

**"ONE OF THOSE RARE THRILLER WRITERS  
WHO HAS MANAGED TO GROW  
WITH EACH NOVEL."**

***Washington Times***

"Grade: A . . . Peopled with compelling characters, all fully realized, and set in a startling place and time, *California Girl* once again showcases Parker's creatively entertaining talent."

*Denver Rocky Mountain News*

"Subtle—and effective . . . as much a family saga as it is a crime novel. It's also set in 1968 and is true to the values of the time. (It contains some fun fictional cameos, including Timothy Leary and Charles Manson.) . . . An abundance of richly drawn characters. Parker does a good job . . . of keeping various plotlines on track . . . *California Girl* [has] surprising depth."

*San Francisco Chronicle*

"Parker's drum-tight prose and richly layered characters borrow a bit from Raymond Chandler's hard-boiled L.A. noirs as well as the more psychologically lurid novels of Dennis Lehane, but *California Girl* easily earns Parker his own spot on the shelf between those two masters. Grade: A."

*Entertainment Weekly*

"If you want to feel the beat of the '60s again, all wrapped around a good mystery, then T. Jefferson Parker's *California Girl* is for you."

*Providence Journal*

**"T. JEFFERSON PARKER WRITES  
WITH A KEEN EYE AND  
AN INCANDESCENT MORAL EDGE"**

**Robert Ferrigno**

"[A] standout work . . . a brilliant, epic story of the growth of Southern California from orange groves to sprawling suburbia . . . Publishers try to promote books with statements like 'If you read only one mystery novel this year, this should be it!' In the case of *California Girl*, it's absolutely true."

*Chicago Sun-Times*

"Masterly plotting, smart prose, and memorable characters. Another excellent work from the author of *Cold Pursuit*. Highly recommended."

*Library Journal*

"I rank the crime novels of T. Jefferson Parker right up there with the best . . . I'm one of his most enthusiastic fans!"

Sue Grafton

"This solid California storyteller creates a credible set of characters and amplifies their stories with signs of changing times . . . [A] book with a good deal on its mind . . . [it] has its own brand of gravitas and its own vivid geography . . . *California Girl* delivers well-chosen blasts from the past."

*The New York Times*

**"ABSORBING, RICHLY DETAILED . . .  
DRAMATICALLY SATISFYING!"**  
*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

"If you love the classic crime story, as it has evolved from, say, Raymond Chandler to John D. MacDonald to Michael Connelly, then don't miss Jefferson Parker."

*Washington Post Book World*

"A family drama carefully wrapped around a mystery . . . Parker introduces a wide variety of quirky period characters, from stoned-out hippies to Dick Nixon and his conservative cronies . . . [An] intricately plotted tale."

*Publishers Weekly*

"One of the most entertaining tough-guy writers."

*Esquire*

"T. Jefferson Parker writes the kind of hard-hitting cop novels that win awards and bring him legions of loyal readers."

*Toronto Sun*

"If T. Jefferson Parker has any shortcomings as a writer, it is only that he can't pen them as fast as I can read them."

*BookPage*



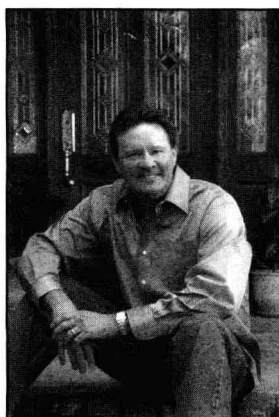


Photo by Bill Ahrend

---

## About the Author

---

T. Jefferson Parker is a recipient of both the Edgar Award and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for his novel *Silent Joe*. He is the author of eleven previous novels, including the bestsellers *Red Light*, *The Blue Hour*, and *Cold Pursuit*. His most recent work is *The Fallen*. Mr. Parker lives in Fallbrook, California.

**Books by T. Jefferson Parker**

*Storm Runners*  
*The Fallen*  
*California Girl*  
*Cold Pursuit*  
*Black Water*  
*Silent Joe*  
*Red Light*  
*The Blue Hour*  
*Where Serpents Lie*  
*The Triggerman's Dance*  
*Summer of Fear*  
*Pacific Beat*  
*Little Saigon*  
*Laguna Heat*

*For Tyler and Thomas*  
*Long may you run*

# 1

## HERE AND NOW

**I DROVE PAST THE OLD SUNBLESST PACK-**inghouse today. Nothing left of it. Not one stick. Now there's a bedroom store, a pet emporium, and a supermarket. Big and new. Moms and dads and kids everywhere. Pretty people, especially the moms. Young, with time to dream, wake up, and dream again.

I still have a piece of the flooring I tore off the SunBlesst packinghouse back in sixty-eight. When I was young. When I thought that what had happened there shouldn't ever happen anywhere. When I thought it was up to me to put things right.

I'm made of that place—of the old wood and the rusted conveyors and the pigeons in the eaves and the sunlight slanting through the cracks. Of Janelle Vonn. Of everything that went down, there in October, 1968. Even made of the wind that blew that month, dry and hot off the desert, huffing across Orange County to the sea.

I have a piece of the picket fence from the grassy knoll at Dealey Plaza, too. And a piece of rock that came not far from where *Mercury 1* lifted off. And one of Charlie Manson's guitar picks.

But those are different stories.

\* \* \*

**LATER I MET MY BROTHER ANDY AT THE FISHERMAN'S**

Restaurant down in San Clemente. Late August. The day was bright as a brushfire, no clouds, sun flashing off the waves and tabletops. Andy looked at me like someone had hit him in the stomach.

"It's about Janelle," he said.

Janelle Vonn in the SunBlesst orange packinghouse in Tustin.

Thirty-six years ago, two brothers who didn't look much alike, staring down at her and across at each other while the pigeons cooed and the wind blew through the old slats.

A different world then, different world now.

Same brothers. Andy stayed thin and wiry. Tough as a boiled owl. Me, I've filled out some, though I can still shiver the heavy bag in the sheriff's gym.

San Clemente, and you have to think Nixon. The western White House, right up the road. I picture him walking down the beach with the Secret Service guys ahead and behind. Too many secrets and nobody but the seagulls to tell them to. Andy's newspaper ran a cartoon of him once, after he'd been chased out of office, and the cartoon showed him walking the beach with a metal detector, looking for coins. Thought that was a funny one. I kind of liked Dick Nixon. Grew up just over the hill from us. He was tight with my old man and his Bircher friends for a while, used to come to the house back in the fifties when he was vice president and in the early sixties when he'd lost for governor. They'd sit around, drink scotch, make plans. Nixon had a way of making you feel important. It's an old pol's trick, I know. I even knew it then. In fifty-six I graduated from the L.A. Sheriff's Academy and Dick Nixon sent me a note. The vice president. Nice handwriting. It's still in my collection of things.

But that's a different story, too.

"You don't look so good, Andy," I said.

Brothers and we still don't look much alike. An old cop

and an old reporter. There used to be four of us Becker boys. Raised some hell. Just three now.

I looked at Andy and I could see something different in his face.

“What gives?” I asked.

“Listen to me, Nick. Everything we thought about Janelle Vonn was wrong.”

# 2

1954

**"BECAUSE THE VONNS ARE DIRECT DE**scendants of murderers, that's why," said David Becker. "One of their relatives got hung in Texas. And I saw Lenny Vonn bust a brick with his bare hands once. One chop. That's exactly what he'll do to Nick's head. The Vonns are crazy."

The Becker brothers. Four of them, walking down Holt Avenue in Tustin for a rumble. June and still light out, the sun stalled high above the groves like it didn't want to come down. Air sweet and clean with the smell of oranges.

Nick was second oldest. He imagined Lenny Vonn's hand crashing into his skull. Wondered how a skull compared to a brick. Nick was sixteen and strong, had played Tustin varsity football as a sophomore, started both ways. Not a talker.

Andy was the baby. Twelve, skinny, buck-toothed. He wasn't officially a part of the rumble but figured there was no way Lenny Vonn could crush Nick's skull. Nick was God.

David, the one who had seen Lenny Vonn break the brick with his hand, was eighteen. He was the oldest and smart but graceless and unformed.

"I'll yank Casey Vonn's head off and piss down his neck." This from Clay, fifteen. He smiled at each of his brothers in

turn, a clean, straight-toothed grin that was both knowing and mean.

Clay had gotten them into this. Grabbed dumb Casey Vonn's new baseball cap and tossed it over the fence to the German shepherd that snarled and snapped and threw himself at the chain link every time the school kids came past. Clay laughed while the dog tore it to shreds. Told Casey he'd throw *him* over next time. Casey so dumb he believed it.

The next day at school Casey's big brother Lenny shoved David hard against the lockers and said it was rumble time for what happened to Casey's cap. Lenny was large and chinless, with an enormous Adam's apple and sideburns like Elvis. Brothers, said Lenny, three-on-three, the packing-house, no weapons. On David's face, breath like coffee and cavities. David asked Lenny to forgive Clay, said he'd pay for a new hat. Lenny spit in David's face.

The Becker brothers angled into one of the grove rows, walking along the irrigation ditch, clods of earth throwing them off-balance and doves whisking through the sky above them. Nick led the way.

"The Vonns got two sisters," said Clay.

"Can they fight?" asked Andy.

"Maybe I'll *make out* with them when we're done beating up their brothers," said Clay.

"They're seven and five," said David. He knew right from wrong and wrong angered him. He was going off to college in September. He stopped and shook out a Lucky Strike and tapped it on the side of his lighter. Nick saw his hands shaking.

"Gimme a cigarette," said Clay.

David gave Clay the pack and lighter. He lit one and put another behind his ear.

"Me, too," said Andy.

"No," said Nick.

"I don't want to do this," said David. He coughed. He'd spent hours the night before praying for courage.

"Fine," said Nick. "It'll be me and Clay."



"I can fight," said Andy.

"No," Nick and David both said.

Clay's cigarette looked good so Nick plucked it out of his mouth and took a puff.

Nick saw by the look on his face that David didn't want his baby brother to see him get his ass kicked.

"Keep your hands high," Nick said. "If we stay back-to-back we'll be all right." Like there was a science to this kind of thing.

The SunBlesst packinghouse sat behind the railroad tracks in the middle of the grove. The tracks marked the city limits but everyone thought of the packinghouse as being in Tustin. It was a big wooden building with a metal roof and twenty-foot-high metal sliding doors that let the conveyors swing out to the freight cars. The wood was black with creosote. On one of the doors was a giant painting of one of the SunBlesst orange box labels. It showed a raven-haired beauty holding out a perfect navel orange and smiling. Behind her were rows of orange trees. The sky above the trees was indigo blue and the words *California Girl* charged out of it in bright yellow letters. Once someone had left a flatcar of labels outside and the Becker boys threw them into a Santa Ana wind that blew them all over town, onto the lawns and streets and school yards, and everywhere he went for a week Nick saw that pretty woman offering him an orange.

The Vonns were waiting for them by the railroad tracks. Lenny had his T-shirt tucked in tight and his cigarettes rolled into his right shirtsleeve, Levi's cuffs rolled into two-inchers, work boots. His brothers more or less the same. Black hair and big round ears. Lenny flicked his smoke into the gravel and stared at Nick.

Nick figured it was him against Lenny, Clay against Casey, and David the oldest against the middle Vonn kid, Ethan. "What do you say, Lenny?" he called out.

"I say fuck you."

"That's all?"

"And your whole ugly family."