



Checkered Flag
CHRIS FABRY



RPM

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Checkered Flag

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Summary: While high schoolers Tim Carhardt tries to make sense of his auto-racing father's death, seventeen-year-old Jamie Maxwell deepens her relationship with God and becomes the youngest driver to qualify for a NASCAR event.

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***This book is dedicated to Kaitlyn
Nicole Fabry, who is—and forever
will be—our Kaity Belle.***

**“I think a learning driver is
a winning driver.”**

Dale Earnhardt

**“Boogity, boogity, boogity!
Let’s go racing, boys.”**

Darrell Waltrip

“To finish first you must first finish.”

Rick Mears

“Success is being happy with yourself.”

Kyle Petty

**“The good Lord doesn’t tell you what his
plan is, so all you can do is get up in the
morning and see what happens next.”**

Richard Petty

JAMIE MAXWELL STARED at the scoring pylon, and her jaw dropped. The second car to qualify was passing the start/finish line—engine screaming. Her thoughts clouded as she stared at the Rocky Mountains against a clear blue sky in the distance and tried to recall the track record. She had run the simulator at the experimental school many times, but the numbers jumbled in her head. She thought she remembered the record, but her time was almost a second faster.

“That can’t be right,” she muttered, unbelieving. “What’s the track record here?”

T.J. Kelly, her dad’s crew chief, smiled. “You blew it away in the first lap and went faster in the second. Your dad’s gonna jump out of his skin when he hears this.”

Chapter 1

Denver

The second car's time wasn't even close to Jamie's. "I knew we had a good car, but to get under the track record . . ."

Crew members ran over to her, and it was obvious they expected to see Dale getting out of the car. When they saw it was Jamie, they looked at the scoring pylon and then at her.

Scotty, the Maxwell spotter, patted Jamie on the back. "Good job."

"Think it'll hold up?" she said.

The third car had passed the start/finish line and the speed flashed.

Scotty shook his head. "I wouldn't be surprised if it held up today and all the way to the next time you qualify here." He winked at her.

A camera crew hurried over, and a reporter shoved a microphone in Jamie's face. He shouted a question over the engine noise on the track, something about her dad not being there. Jamie could barely hear him, but her training at the school came back. It didn't really matter what the question was—they wanted something fresh and with emotion.

"My dad got hung up, and he asked me to qualify for him. I just put my foot down and went as fast as I could."

"What's it feel . . . broke track record?" the guy said, his voice going in and out with the noise.

“This track hasn’t been here that long,” Jamie said. “And my dad says that records are made to be broken. I just hope he gets a good starting position.”

Jamie noticed Butch Devalon’s crew chief talking with one of the officials, pointing toward her and shouting.

The reporter asked her something else, and she asked him to repeat it. “How long before you’re out here taking over for your dad?” the reporter said.

Jamie laughed. “You don’t know my dad. They’ll have to use a crowbar to get him out of that #14 car. I want to do anything I can to help him get into the Chase.”

“Well, it’s clear you’ve given him a good chance at that,” the reporter said.

Jamie followed T.J. back to the hauler, getting pats on the back from crew members of other teams. A bunch of them shook their heads and chuckled as she walked past as if they’d never seen a female go that fast.

Back at the hauler, T.J. shut the door and turned to her. “How’d it feel?”

Jamie couldn’t hold it in anymore. She pumped her fist in the air and shouted, “That was the best thing that’s ever happened to me! It was like I was part of the car and there wasn’t anything holding me back and . . .” She continued for another minute, trying to explain.

T.J.’s cell phone rang, and he handed it to her. “You talk to him.”

“Dad, did you hear?” Jamie said.

Her dad’s voice was strained, and she guessed it was from the stress of being snookered by Butch Devalon. “I called home, and your mom watched the whole thing on SPEED. You really know how to get her to pray.”

“It was great out there.”

“Well, you can thank Butch Devalon for this. And it looks like you can thank him for stirring up a hornet’s nest about your age.”

“What?”

“They’ve filed a protest about you even being out there on the track.”

“Already? This was a setup. They knew you wouldn’t be able to qualify since they took you away.”

“I know. Don’t worry. I don’t think it’ll stand up. Besides, now they have to contend with people who’ll say they’re afraid of racing against a girl. You have a license, and it’s the track’s choice about whether to let you on it or not. They did. That settles it.”

When Jamie’s dad reached the track, a mob of reporters met him at the front gate. Jamie watched the coverage on the hauler TV. Her dad could have driven straight through the crowd, but he got out, which told her he wanted to talk.

“Looks like he’s enjoying himself,” T.J. said.

Jamie nodded. "It's been a while since anybody's wanted to interview him other than to ask about his sponsor problems."

Her dad listened to the questions, the microphones reflecting in his sunglasses, the sun beating down. "I got some bad information about the qualifying time, so I asked my daughter to sit in for me. I hear she did a pretty good job."

"Was it Butch Devalon who gave you that bad info?" a reporter said.

"I can't blame anybody but myself," her dad said. "I'm just glad I had a backup to sit in the seat for me. And from what I've heard, it looks like I got the pole position."

"What do you think about the controversy over your daughter's age?" another reporter said.

"I'll let the officials haggle over that one, but I will say this: if all of these manly men are afraid of what a little 17-year-old girl can do on the track, they'd better get ready, because the Tigress is coming."

"I can't believe he said that," Jamie said.

"Has a ring to it," T.J. said. "Tigress Maxwell."

"So you're not going to get into the controversy?" a reporter pressed.

"She earned her license. It's legit. They let her onto the track. She outraced every car out there. I think that settles it."

“So you’re saying her time ought to stand.”

“I’m saying if she’d have qualified 44th or worse, whoever is making a stink about this wouldn’t have a problem in the world. They would have enjoyed it. But since she’s beaten them, they’re concerned about the rules. Jamie accomplished something out there on the track, where it counts. Of course it should stand.”



CHRIS FABRY is a writer, broadcaster, and graduate of Richard Petty Driving Experience (top speed: 134.29 mph). He has written more than 50 books, including collaboration on the Left Behind: The Kids, Red Rock Mysteries, and The Wormling series.

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