



A NOVEL

WHEN
THROUGH
DEEP
WATERS

RACHELLE
DEKKER

CHRISTY AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF THE CHOOSING

PRAISE FOR RACHELLE DEKKER

“The strong female heroine will appeal to teen readers, and adults and teens alike may also enjoy the themes of corruption and religion, absolute human power, and government as God. . . . Dekker’s debut is worth choosing.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY ON THE CHOOSING

“The story vacillates between the sweetness of a tender coming-of-age romance and moments that almost resemble a Dean Koontz thriller. . . . At times frightening but often beautiful, [*The Choosing*] will leave readers eager for the next book of this new series.”

SERENA CHASE, *USA TODAY*

“[*The Choosing*] is an amazing debut novel full of heart, drama, and complex believable characters . . . with a detailed plot and gripping truths that pierced my heart.”

THE BOOK CLUB NETWORK INC.

“A swiftly moving plot puts readers in the center of the action, and the well-described setting adds to the experience. Deeper themes of value and worth will appeal to both young adult and adult readers.”

ROMANTIC TIMES ON THE CHOOSING

“Whatever expectations you have of debut author Rachelle Dekker, go ahead and put them aside. Rachelle, daughter to bestselling author Ted Dekker, is carving out a space of

her own. Her debut novel, *The Choosing*, is a rich statement about the author's future and her impact on Christian fiction."

FAMILY FICTION

"Ripe for discussion, [*The Choosing*] may inspire some readers to open up about the social pressures that they feel both in and out of their faith community. Expect it to appeal to dystopian fans of all ages."

FOREWORD REVIEWS

"Readers will find Dekker's storyline somewhat akin to her father's works in terms of action, adventure, and unpredictability. *The Choosing*, though, explores more the inner workings of her characters and how they feel about their lot in life. I look forward to more dystopian titles from Dekker in the near future."

BOOKREPORTER.COM

"*The Choosing* is an inspiring tale that reaches in to the hearts of men and women, showing both the love and the darkness that can lurk within."

FRESH FICTION

"Marrying the themes of the popular Kiera Cass Selection novels with the action danger of *The Hunger Games*, Dekker asserts a strong imaginative voice that had me gulping down sentences and events as quickly as they were relayed on [the] page."

NOVEL CROSSING ON *THE CHOOSING*

“[*The Choosing*] is part adventure, part romance, part mystery, and it works. The writing is wonderful. It flows in such a way that it keeps the reader turning page after page . . . more than likely long into the night to find out what happens!”

RADIANT LIT

“In her stunning debut novel, Rachelle Dekker plunges readers into a unique yet familiar-feeling dystopian society, where one girl’s longing for acceptance, identity, and purpose becomes a mind-bending, pulse-pounding journey that’ll [leave] you breathless and reeling. A superb story!”

JOSH OLDS, LIFEISSTORY.COM

“This intense dystopian read was reminiscent of the *Divergent* series. Christian themes of God’s love and forgiveness are woven throughout [*The Calling*].”

CBA RETAILERS + RESOURCES

“[Dekker’s] strong storytelling voice and ability to convey her ideas comes through nicely in this book.”

STRAIGHTOFFTHEPAGE.COM ON *THE CALLING*

“Dekker pens another striking science fiction thriller including a well-developed dystopian society and strong depictions of good versus evil that can be easily read as a standalone.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY ON *THE RETURNING*

“Rachelle Dekker completes this series elegantly. . . . the perfect conclusion to the *Seer* series.”

CHRISTIAN LIBRARY JOURNAL ON *THE RETURNING*



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The California afternoon sun pierced down across Alicen McCaffrey's toes, and she slid them up the cushioned pool chair into the safety of shade. She had the Redyington Social dinner event tonight, and the last thing she needed was a funky tan line across her feet. Criticizing eyes would be out for blood, and her toes had done nothing but offer her adequate support her entire life. They didn't deserve to be led to slaughter.

Her stomach growled under her lightweight black sundress, and she glanced at the gold watch that hung loosely from her bony wrist. 3:15 p.m. Only a couple of hours till dinner. She thought of the Marc Jacobs hanging under its

plastic sheeting in her closet. It hugged every inch of her slender frame and had been a stunning find. It was worth starving for.

“Mom, Mom, watch!”

Alicen turned her eyes to the bouncing blonde five-year-old beauty happily tiptoeing up to the side of their home pool. Her baby-blues shimmering in the light, her red one-piece bright against her sun-kissed skin.

“I’m watching,” Alicen said and reached for her glass of red wine. It was her second, which was a bit much for midafternoon, but she shook off the warning voices in her brain. She would keep it to two. She was drinking her calories so as not to bring any shame to the Marc Jacobs.

The child gave a little squeal of excitement before squeezing her button nose closed with her fingers and launching herself into the crystal waters. The impact sent ripples across the oblong pool and produced tiny waves that lapped the stone edge. She disappeared under the surface for several long seconds before her tiny head popped back up and she took a deep, giggling breath.

“Did you see?” the girl yelled, wiping water from her face and frantically paddling to the edge.

The sliding-glass door behind Alicen creaked, and she diverted her attention to see Serra, the housekeeper, poking her head through. The middle-aged Colombian woman was small in stature with round, soft features and a welcoming smile. She had been with the McCaffrey family for the last couple of years, and Alicen considered the woman as close a thing to a friend as she was allowed to have in this sunny

city of Santa Monica. Not that she would ever admit that out loud, of course.

“Your mother is on the phone,” Serra said in her strong accent.

Alicen immediately felt her back straighten and her chest squeeze. An uncomfortable annoyance ticked inside her brain. She had no patience for that woman today.

“I thought she was in Costa Rica with Brad,” Alicen said.

“Apparently there is some trouble in paradise,” Serra said, a mocking gleam in her eye.

“Shock,” Alicen said, downing the rest of the wine in her glass as Serra huffed. This was her mother’s regular pattern. Find the man of her dreams, swear this time was different from the dozens before, run away with him to whatever corner of the earth he resided in, and then end up back at Alicen’s door when the man of her dreams turned out to be just a man.

“Mom, did you see what I did?” her daughter said, plopping her wet figure down on the end of Alicen’s chaise longue. Droplets of water splashed across Alicen’s knees, and she brushed them away.

“Jane,” Alicen scolded, “you’re all wet, honey.”

“Sorry,” Jane said, popping off the seat. “But did you see?”

“See what?”

“My huge jump,” Jane said, spreading her short arms toward the sky, eyes wide with her own wonder.

More water flung off the girl and touched down on Alicen’s skin. “Jane, please—I’m trying not to get wet!”

“Mrs. McCaffrey, your mother is still waiting,” Serra said.

“Grandma? Is she coming to visit again?”

“No. Now please step back. If you’re done with the pool, then—”

“No, no, I’m not!” Jane said.

“We’ve been out here for over an hour; maybe it’s time to go in,” Alicen said.

“Mom, no. I never want to leave. I want to live in the water. I want to be a mermaid.” Jane spun in a small circle and dragged her arms across the sky.

“You’re not a mermaid; you’re a girl, and all this chlorine isn’t good for your beautiful hair.”

“Evie says I can be whatever I want,” Jane said.

Alicen bit her tongue and tried not to show her disapproval at the mention of Jane’s longtime imaginary friend. She was going to be six in a couple of months, and Alicen thought maybe she was getting too old to still believe in such things.

The phone chirped inside, signaling that her mother was still on the line. One would think that after minutes of waiting she would have hung up, but Alicen’s mother was nothing if not relentless.

Alicen turned to Serra. “Tell her I’ll be right there.”

Serra chuckled at Alicen’s clear lack of enthusiasm and left to deliver the message.

“Jane, it’s time to go in,” Alicen said, unwrapping her legs and slipping them into the thin flip-flops that rested next to her chair.

“Please just a couple more minutes?” Jane begged, her blue eyes bright and occupying the majority of her tiny round face.

“Jane—”

The girl dropped to her knees and clamped her hands together, her face doused in agony. “Mom, please. I’ll do anything!”

Alicen tried not to smile at her daughter’s flair for the dramatic and reminded herself that it was a trait inherited from the woman waiting on the phone. It wasn’t Jane’s fault her grandmother didn’t have any positive traits to hand down.

She sighed and shook her head slightly before giving in. “Ten minutes. Once I’m off the phone with Grandma, you’re coming in.”

Jane bounced up with glee and rushed toward the pool, her long blonde locks swinging damply behind her.

“Don’t run; it’s slippery,” Alicen called and watched her daughter slow. Barely. She turned to head inside as Jane’s voice filled the sky with a song about transforming into a mermaid. Clearly a self-made number. Alicen couldn’t help but smile. They were going to have to cure that dramatic streak before it was too late and Jane became Alicen’s mother.

She stopped just before stepping inside and glanced at the dark wood luxury poolside furniture perfectly placed throughout the backyard. An image of her husband’s annoyed face flashed behind her eyes as she briefly recalled the fight it had taken to get what she wanted. A wide smile broke over her lips, and a shiver of satisfaction rumbled beneath her skin. Winning was always sweetest when she was battling her beloved. Active as Allen’s wandering hands were, Alicen deserved ten sets of luxury furniture.

She stepped inside, leaving the glass door open just a bit so

she could still hear Jane's sweet notes, and walked across the marble tile to where the phone rested on the small built-in desk just inside the kitchen. The red light on the device blinked every couple of seconds to signal someone was on hold.

Alicen took a deep breath before picking it up off the receiver. "Betty," Alicen said, forcing a mildly pleasant tone.

"Oh, Alicen, dear, how are you?" her mother asked.

Alicen knew from the fake delight laid over the older woman's words that the "trouble in paradise" was far past repair. "How's Costa Rica? I hear it's beautiful this time of year." She glanced over her shoulder at the half-empty wine bottle sitting atop the massive kitchen bar. A prick of conscience inside her head reminded her she'd made a vow, but if she was going to deal with her mother's endlessly failing love life, she could afford another glass.

"It's beautiful," Betty said. "I mean, some crazy down-pours, but in a romantic sort of fashion, you understand."

"Right." Alicen crossed the large, beautifully tiled kitchen in a couple of long steps, bracing the phone between her shoulder and ear, and reached for the bottle.

"But you know I miss you all terribly. How is my favorite grandbaby?"

"She's decided she wants to be a mermaid." Alicen poured a healthy serving of red wine into her glass.

"Mermaid," Betty laughed. "She gets all that drama from you, you know."

"Oh please. We both know where it comes from."

"No, dear, you were just like that at her age. Thankfully, you had a strong mother who knew what was best for you."

Alicen ground her back molars and took a large swig from her glass. A moment of silence filled the phone line.

Her mother didn't do well with silence. "How is that lovely Allen?"

Alicen held back a cackle at the absurdity of the words *lovely* and *Allen* in the same statement.

"Alicen, don't rock the boat," Betty said.

"I didn't say anything."

"No, but I can hear your mind wandering."

"Things with Allen are the same," Alicen said.

"The same is perfect. The same is the life you deserve, the one I always wanted for you."

At this, Alicen did let a sharp chuckle escape her mouth.

"The same, child, gave you that sweet baby girl, and the same will make sure she never wants for anything. Don't you want that for her?"

Alicen closed her eyes for a moment and nodded to herself. Jane was the only reason Alicen continued to offer herself up to a man who saw her as just another thing he possessed. Jane was the only reason Alicen did anything. "You know I do," she said.

"Then keep that boat steady, dear," Betty said.

"Did you call me just to remind me of something I already knew?"

There was a beat of silence on the other end before her mother cleared her throat and continued. "I was thinking of coming by for a few days to see everyone."

"Oh yeah? Will Brad be joining you?" Alicen already

knew the answer, and mentioning him was cruel, but the wine was beginning to think for her.

“No, I think it’ll just be me from now on.”

“Betty, I’m not sure this is really a good time—” Alicen started.

“Alicen Ray, I am your mother. You just can’t imagine what I’ve been through the last couple of days.”

Alicen inhaled and took another large gulp from her glass.

“I’ll be there tomorrow,” Betty said.

Alicen knew there was nothing that could be done. She clenched her eyes, trying not to get lost prematurely in the pain she’d be forced to face with each motherly interaction.

“Alicen?” Betty said.

Alicen swallowed. “I’ll have Serra fix up a room for you.”

“Wonderful! Well, I have to run. Give kisses to that darling sweet girl of ours.”

Alicen’s mother’s proclamation of joint ownership over Jane grated at her chest, but she bit her tongue and let it go. She just wanted to be finished with this conversation. “Mmm-hmm.”

“Be good, dear,” Betty said.

Alicen pulled the phone away from her ear and clicked it off. Betty ended all of their conversations with those three simple words. Words that no matter how Alicen tried she couldn’t run away from. “*Be good, dear.*” As if she were still a gangly, twelve-year-old, walking disappointment. As if that was all she’d ever be.

Alicen shook her head at the notion. She glanced around the large, sparkling kitchen with its pristine white cabinets,

glistening marble countertops, and state-of-the-art appliances. More than anyone would ever need and all that anyone could ever want. She had done this, made this kind of life a reality. Not Betty.

The uncomfortable wave of self-doubt washed away, and she walked across the cool floor to place the phone back in its cradle. She took a small sip from her glass and calmly went back to where the sliding door stood open. She stepped out into the warm air. A breeze ruffled the large palm trees planted along the side of the yard. She was going to be fine, she told herself. She would handle Betty with ease. Everything would be fine.

Alicen walked to the edge of the outside covering, still under the safety of shade. “Jane, it’s time to come in,” she called.

She glanced down at her watch. 3:35 p.m. It was nearly time to start preparing for the evening’s events. She glanced back at the pool and took a step forward. “Jane, I mean it. You’ve been out here long enough. Let’s go.”

Only the soothing rustle of trees and trickling pool water. Alicen stepped out onto the hot stone deck that surrounded the pool, using her free hand to shield her eyes. “Jane!”

A sliver of panic blossomed in her chest. Alicen looked back and forth across the yard, the manicured grass and well-kept flower beds. She spun around and scanned the large, covered sitting area, trying not to let her anxiety get the best of her. “Jane Ann, if you’re hiding from me, you’d better come out now.”

She moved farther out toward the water’s edge, squinting

against the reflecting sun, heart thundering. The water was still, and Alicen tore her eyes across every corner, a frantic sense pressing into her bones. Something caught the edge of her vision, bobbing in the corner where the pool curved up to make a small rock waterfall, hard to see. Something still. Something red.

Alicen's breath froze. The world stilled. The glass from her hand crashed to the stone, shattering shards pricking her bare feet. Her lungs exploded her daughter's name. Then she was running. When she reached the corner, she collapsed to her knees, thrust her long arms into the water, and dragged the small body from its clutches.

"Jane! Jane!" Alicen could hear her voice but hardly felt the words. She twisted the girl skyward. Jane's face was pale, her lips slightly blue. "No, no, no! Jane!"

Alicen laid her daughter out and pressed both hands into her chest. She pulsed the heels of her hands with force over and over as Jane's body jerked with each compression. "No, no, baby, please." Hot tears blurred her vision. She swept away the stringy locks from Jane's face, placed her mouth over her child's, and exhaled. Rest. Exhale. Back to compressions.

Nothing.

"Help!" Alicen screamed, "Help! Oh, Jane, come on."

"Mrs. McCaffrey, did you—oh my, oh my gosh," Serra said, peering through the back door.

Alicen didn't have to say anything as Serra disappeared inside to call for help. She couldn't have formed words anyway. Her body was forgetting how to function. Her mind melded with a pain so sharp her vision dotted in and out.

She pressed Jane's chest hard, the small rib bones cracking from the pressure.

Alicen opened her mouth to beg her daughter to wake up, to plead with her not to leave her alone, but only cries of agony escaped. She leaned down again, exhaled into Jane's mouth. Rest. Exhale. Back to compressions, her hands shaking, her tears dotting her daughter's face.

Nothing.

The small body was limp and lifeless. A perfectly crafted baby doll. Her baby. Her dead baby.

Alicen's mind snapped and she began to scream at the sky. Her entire body shook with pain, the world around fading into darkness so only the broken image of her sweet girl remained.

No, no, no, no, her mind wailed against itself. Jane was everything, all she had, her reason for sanity. *No, no, no*. How was she supposed to function in this life where she'd sold her soul for acceptance and ended up in agony with only Jane to keep her from despair? *Oh no, no, baby, no*. Jane was her only salvation, her light, her center; she'd be lost without her.

"I'll be lost, I'll be—" Alicen choked out, beside herself.

Somewhere in the haze soft sirens punctured the air, but Alicen knew it was too late. She could feel Jane's absence already. As if a part of her own soul had been taken. She pulled the lifeless form into her arms and buried her head into the girl's neck. The darkness thickened, blocking out everything except the ravaging ache of loss. The ravaging ache that ensured nothing would ever be the same.

