

LBRIS

We know  
books

Also by Lynn Painter

*Better Than the Movies*

*The Do-Over*

*Betting on You*

*Nothing Like the Movies*

# FAKE SKATING

LYNN PAINTER



SIMON & SCHUSTER

London New York Amsterdam/Antwerp Sydney/Melbourne Toronto New Delhi

**LBRIS**

We know  
books

# FAKE SKATING





## PROLOGUE

## Alec

There was no way it was actually happening.

Dani Collins was moving to Southview.

“Impossible,” I muttered to myself as I stomped on the gas pedal.

An hour ago life had been normal. I’d walked through the front door after practice, inhaled a few bowls of goulash while my dad talked about his buddy’s new duck boat, and I’d been just about to leave the table when my mom gave me the news.

She’d excitedly filled me in on the details of how Dani’s parents were getting divorced and now Dani and her mom were going to move in with her grandpa. She squealed about how incredible it was going to be to finally have them close by.

*Just imagine how often we can see them now!*

I smiled and nodded like a good boy while trying not to lose my ever-loving shit at the thought of having to see her every day.

Dani Collins.

Was moving.

To fucking. Southview.

I made up an excuse to get out of the house as soon as possible, because I needed air—and music—while I tried to wrap my head around this unexpected turn of events. I had a cousin who neurotically made playlists for every waking moment of her life, and that slightly obsessive habit had rubbed off on me to the point that I couldn’t deal with the

harshness of reality anymore unless I trolled it around in music first.

So I got in Burrito (my piece-of-shit '03 Olds Alero) and just drove, cranking "Escorpião," the Brazilian song that I didn't understand but fucking loved. I knew the translation was something along the lines of "I love you' is bullshit," so that seemed good enough for me.

But almost as if Burrito had a mind of his own, I found myself turning down the barely there dirt road that wound through the woods next to the pond. I drove over the snow-packed path until I saw the old, abandoned shed that had once been "our spot."

*What the fuck am I doing?*

The night was quiet, the deep snow insulating the world so all I could hear was the crunch of snow under my shoes as I got out of the car and walked toward the structure. It'd always looked like it was five minutes from collapsing, and that hadn't changed since the last time I'd been there.

The summer after seventh grade.

I pushed in the door of the abandoned shed and stepped inside, half expecting a pack of raccoons to fly at my face. It was darker than dark, but when I turned on my phone's flashlight, it felt like I'd taken a puck to the chest because how could it still look the same?

The actual chairs we'd stolen from my dad's shop to furnish our ridiculous little shed were still there, and so was the massive hole in the roof that we called our skylight.

*Holy shit.*

I swallowed and looked up at the moon. Everything about "our spot" remained the same. And, who was I kidding, so was the memory of her. Of Dani.

And the last time I saw her.

## Five-ish Years Ago

"I don't want to go home."

I looked at Dani's profile as she stared up at the moon and couldn't believe she was already leaving. We were sitting side by side on a blanket in the pond shed and I uttered the understatement of the century when I said, "This sucks."

Dani and her mom came for one month every summer, one month where our mothers (best friends) hung out twenty-four seven and we got to do whatever we wanted, every single day. We rode bikes, went fishing, walked endless miles while debating *everything*, hung out at the pool . . . it was summer perfection.

It'd been an annual event for longer than I could remember.

*Literally.*

The reason for their annual visit was to see Dani's grandparents, but since she spent most of her time with me at our house (or in our shed hangout), it always felt like *our* vacation.

And it was hands down the best part of summer break.

Because for one month of the year, she was my best friend.

We screwed around and laughed our asses off for thirty days, and then she went back to whatever Air Force base her dad was stationed at until the next season of the fireflies.

But now they were leaving after only two days. This time their visit had been for her grandma's funeral, and this time her prickish dad—the *colonel*—had come with them.

Which was a big mistake, because his presence made everything blow way the hell up.

It was epic in the worst way.

Mick—Dani's grandpa—lost his shit on her dad after the funeral, saying it was Mr. Collins's fault that her grandma died of a broken heart because he took Dani's mom away and moved her all over the country.

Then Mick told them—in front of everyone—to go back to “wherever the hell you're stationed now” and get out of his sight.

Yep—nightmare.

And now they were leaving in the morning.

Which meant we wouldn't be walking to Kriz's Bakery, where we were supposed to sit at a sticky table outside and try to guess which donuts the customers were going to order by what they were wearing.

One of our (many) annual traditions.

“I know it makes me a garbage person,” she said, looking at me with brown eyes that were too sad, “but I think I'm more bummed about not getting my month here than I am about the whole family-fight thing.”

And then I saw it.

She had tears in her eyes.

Seeing anyone with tears in their eyes made me uncomfortable; I wasn't good with serious. But seeing the most sarcastic person I'd ever met, looking sad?

It was a little gutting, to be honest.

“Collins,” I said, bumping her shoulder with mine, needing to nudge her back to a comfortable spot. “If you cry, I swear to God I will toss you out of this shed and into the pond.”

She coughed out a laugh, and her voice was thick when she said, “Such a little badass, threatening me when we both know you couldn't, come on.”

“You're so mean,” I teased.

“And you're so short,” she teased back, a painless joke because I wasn't short; she was just taller than everyone else.

“You're not a garbage person, by the way,” I said, noticing that her eyes still had that emotional shimmer that made me want to kick her grandpa's ass for being a dick. “You're allowed to be sad that you don't get to stay.”

She swallowed and bit down on her lower lip, like she was trying to hold it together.

“I mean, *I'm* sad,” I admitted, my voice cracking because I *was* sad. How was I supposed to summer without running all over town with Dani?

“You are?” she asked, her voice so quiet it was almost a whisper. Her eyes moved all over my face. “Really?”

I nodded and felt a stabbing pain in my chest when I watched a tear escape, because Dani Collins couldn't be crying.

She *couldn't*.

Suddenly everything in the universe shifted, and I just needed her to stop. Immediately.

Everything was wrong if she wasn't happy.

Because Dani was sparkling eyes and contagious laughter. Dani was happiness.

Before I knew it, my thumbs were on her cheeks, brushing away the tears, and I struggled to swallow as she stared at me like she was trying to figure out what was happening.

“I don't know either,” I admitted, because we'd always been able to read each other's minds, and I had no idea why I suddenly wanted to kiss her. “I don't know what this is.”

"Same," she said, nodding. Her eyes went down to my mouth, and in an instant my pulse was pounding.

"Should we?" I asked—no, *breathed*—as I realized my thumbs were still sliding over her soft skin.

*Did I seriously just ask (without saying it) if we should kiss?*

*What the hell is happening?*

"I mean, we have to have our firsts *sometime*," she said, reading my mind about the kiss and getting that look of resolve in her eyes that meant she was all in on something.

No one committed to scheming like Dani. She was game to do nearly anything. I always wondered if that was just the "vacation" version of Dani, or if she was like that at home, too.

"So maybe we . . . should?"

She said it with a question in her voice, and I had no idea how we'd gotten here.

Holy *shit*.

"Are you serious?" I managed, my voice coming out a tiny bit strangled. *Should my hands still be on her face?*

What the hell?

Why did this sound like a great idea when it was *Dani*?

"I think I am," she said, her eyes dancing, pushing away the sadness.

I might've been able to reverse it, to pretend for the sake of our friendship that we hadn't contemplated it, but then she looked at me like *that*, and it was over.

She looked at me like she wanted me to kiss her. Like she was *waiting* for me to lean in.

And, God help me, I'd dreamed of kissing her far too long for me to be strong.

"Then come closer, Collins."

I inhaled through my nose as my brain rewound crystal-clear memories of lying back on that blanket and losing my mind with her. The smell of the shed—a mix of dirt and cedar and nostalgic longing—wasn't helping, either. The scents were so fucking familiar that it felt like I should follow the walls over to the tiny section in the corner where we'd written nonsensical bullshit with paint markers, just to see if our long-forgotten artwork remained.

But the second that popped into my head, I remembered the rest.

And then I didn't want to remember at all anymore.

Because even though it'd been years, I was still pissed. Logically, it should've been water under the bridge by now. *I should be over it.*

But as I drove home, I realized that I wasn't.

Like, at all.

We might be older, and it might be illogical, but I still hated Dani Collins for what she did after the night we kissed.

*"Te quero bem" é o caralho  
Eu vou acabar contigo*

Or, in English:

*"I love you" is bullshit  
I'm going to end you*