



Unbridled

Samantha Elphick

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Before they witness a suicide Burton Mike and Danny are more comfortable with their surfboards and skateboards than with emotional honesty or personal responsibility. But while skating in a parking lot one afternoon the dudes watch an attractive woman getting out of her car and entering a seven-story chapel tower. Minutes later they discover her body.

Jessica Peters' suicide is pivotal for all three boys but *Unbridled* is Burton Phillips' story. Her death propels his quest to find out who she was and why she jumped. Her death also begins a growing-up process for Burton. He moves from California to a Boston suburb where he takes up polo the sport that Jessica was passionate about. He eventually plays polo and works as a groom and right-hand man for a wealthy stockbroker and polo club owner. Burton's work takes him to polo venues in Florida Argentina and Australia. While he learns the polo business he interviews some of Jessica's old associates in an attempt to write her biography and becomes obsessed with the image of the wild and attention-seeking athletic and beautiful Jessica. And he identifies with the violent mood swings that marked her life. Burton's father left his family when Burton was only six and he was raised by a vengeful mother who died when he was fifteen. Burton himself attempted suicide when he was sixteen. As he begins to piece Jessica Peters' life together Burton must confront his own anger and self-absorption and he must learn to understand and forgive his father a wealthy publishing firm executive who wants to build a relationship with his son. Burton's father also wants to reveal the truth about his long absence from Burton's life.

After emigrating from Australia to America Samantha Elphick raised a family ran several beauty salons chains and even created a Boston-area television show. She has played polo for many years; for eight years she operated a sixty-acre polo ranch in Florida. Elphick's first novel is inspired by the life and death of Deborah Couples who played tennis and polo and was once married to pro golfer Fred Couples. Elphick's interest in Deborah Couples is mirrored in the narrative by Burton's fascination with Jessica Peters. The Jessica of Burton's quest is "loud aggressive and provocative" just as Deborah Couples was often described. One polo player Marcello who knew Jessica tells Burton that his nickname for Jessica was "Cabrona"—"bitch" in Spanish. Marcello also refers to her as "the Madonna of polo."

Burton's rage and his obsession with the living image of Jessica threaten to subvert his growth and incite another suicide attempt. But as he begins to understand why Jessica killed herself and as he sees dramatic examples of the will to live and to let live there is hope that Burton will lift the mask of his defenses.

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