



Going Too Far

By Jennifer Echols



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How Far Would You Go?

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All Meg has ever wanted is to get away. Away from high school. Away from her backwater town. Away from her parents who seem determined to keep her imprisoned in their dead-end lives. But one crazy evening involving a dare and forbidden railroad tracks, she goes way too far. . .and almost doesn't make it back.

John made a choice to stay. To enforce the rules. To serve and protect. He has nothing but contempt for what he sees as childish rebellion, and he wants to teach Meg a lesson she won't soon forget. But Meg pushes him to the limit by questioning everything he learned at the police academy. And when he pushes back, demanding to know why she won't be tied down, they will drive each other to the edge -- and over. . .



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Going Too Far By Jennifer Echols Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #171865 in Books
- Brand: MTV
- Published on: 2009-03-17
- Released on: 2009-03-17
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.00" h x .70" w x 5.00" l, .41 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 245 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"A brave and powerful story, searingly romantic and daring, yet also full of hilarious moments. Meg's voice will stay in your head long after the intense conclusion." -- R. A. Nelson, author of *Teach Me* and *Breathe My Name*

"Naughty in all the best ways...the perfect blend of romance, wit, and rebelliousness. I loved it!" -- Niki Burnham, author of *Royally Jacked* and *Sticky Fingers*

About the Author

Jennifer Echols was born in Atlanta and grew up in a small town on a beautiful lake in Alabama—a setting that has inspired many of her books. Her nine romantic novels for young adults have been published in seven languages and have won the National Readers' Choice Award, the Aspen Gold Readers' Choice Award, the Write Touch Readers' Award, the Beacon, and the Booksellers' Best Award. Her novel *Going Too Far* was a finalist in the RITA and was nominated by the American Library Association as a Best Book for Young Adults. She lives in Birmingham with her husband and her son. Visit her at Jennifer-Echols.com.

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1

That's the worst idea I ever heard," I told Eric. Then I took another sip of beer and swallowed. "Let's do it."

"Meg," Tiffany called after me. But I was already out the door of Eric's Beamer. My beer sloshed onto the gravel as I led the way across the dark clearing to the railroad bridge.

Eric caught up with me. His hand circled the back of my neck, stopping me at the end of the bridge. We shared a hungry look. He'd been mad when I told him Tiffany and Brian were coming along tonight. And I knew why he was angry. If we weren't alone, we couldn't do it. If we couldn't do it, what were we hanging out together for?

Now, without sharing a word, he and I understood we would do it after all. The four of us were drunk past the point of needing privacy.

In the light of the full moon I searched his handsome face a moment longer, marveled at his carefully mussed black hair. He was hot. We turned each other on. We were about to screw on a railroad bridge. It was a shame we didn't like each other very much.

I gazed to the far end of the bridge. "It's not long enough for those kids to have gotten killed on it. Seems like they could have run to one end or the other when they heard the train coming."

"You don't believe that story," he said.

"Party pooper. Why do you want to cross the bridge if you don't believe the story? It's not a daring deed unless you think it's dangerous."

"The girl got her shoe caught in the tracks," Brian said behind us. "That's what I always heard. And the boy got killed, too, because he went back to help her."

"That's so romantic," Tiffany cooed. She sounded like she actually meant it. She was completely wasted on her first three beers ever, way too drunk to produce sarcasm.

"And then, blammo!" I said. "Very dangerous. That's more like it." I swirled my beer in my cup. "Maybe we should take our shoes off."

Despite his party pooping, Eric took his shoes off. We all left our shoes at the base of the sign that proclaimed *No Trespassing* and offered the number of the city ordinance we were breaking. We stepped in our socks across the railroad ties, toward the center of the bridge -- Eric and me, with Tiffany and Brian behind us.

Through my cotton socks, gradually I began to feel the cold, hard ties. The air seemed colder, too, as we walked farther from the riverbank.

I heard Tiffany trip, then laugh. Brian probably thought tonight was The Night, and maybe it was. He'd been bugging me for months in the back of calculus class about how to take his relationship with Tiffany to The Next Level. I had told him I wasn't that close with Tiffany anymore. I wasn't that close with anyone. He said it didn't matter. He seemed to think I was an expert on sex in general.

What did I expect? Good news traveled fast.

And I was pretty much getting what I asked for from Eric. I looked the part. As the only teenager in Shelby County, Alabama, with blue hair, I was everybody's goto girl for bad behavior. Tonight I wore a low-cut T-shirt that said *Peer Pressure* in the hope of luring Eric into another sexcapade. As if he needed any luring. He was pretty much self-luring.

As we reached the middle of the bridge, he steered me by the neck to the metal wall of the trestle. I didn't mind being held around the back of the neck, but I minded being steered. The rich, dirty scents of rust and tar made me dizzy. I was about to shake him off when he slid his hand down to my butt and parked me against the wall.

I sipped beer and gripped the rusty wall with my other hand, looking down at the reflection of the white moon in the black river so far below us. Trees clung to the sides of the gorge, their tiny spring leaves glinting white with moonlight. People had said the view from the bridge was beautiful, but no one seemed to have actually seen it. Now I had seen it.

Now I had seen *everything*. Brian Johnson, salutatorian, math team captain, had Tiffany Hart, valedictorian, yearbook editor, sandwiched against the bridge wall in front of him. At least he'd taken the precaution of putting his beer down. He wore all the wrong clothes, a sure sign his parents didn't let him watch TV. She wore the right clothes, clean version, no skin in sight. His hands moved up her sides toward a risqué area and I almost laughed. Every few seconds, he glanced over at Eric and me as if he needed instructions.

Oblivious to Brian's groping, Tiffany shook her blonde windblown curls off her face and asked, "Why didn't those kids just jump over the side of the bridge? Is that a stupid question? I can't tell what's a stupid question." She was *so drunk*. I began to regret letting her and Brian, innocence incarnate, tag along tonight on my walk on the wild side.

"We're really high up," Brian said in the tone of the Professor from *Gilligan's Island*. "Hitting the water from this height would be like hitting concrete."

"Getting hit by a train is painful, too," I said. "But the girl got her shoe caught, and the boy wouldn't leave

her. So they were stuck up here anyway."

"I'm telling you," Eric said, "that story can't be true. What kind of dumbass would let himself get hit by a train because his dumb girlfriend got her shoe caught?" Immediately after declaring that true love was something he couldn't fathom, he proceeded to kiss the back of my neck and work his way toward hickeyville.

I tried to enjoy him, despite the irony. The cold March wind kissed my cleavage as he kissed me. A tingle of excitement spread through my body, and I tilted my head down to expose more of my neck for his mouth.

I'd grabbed him like a life preserver to float me through my last three months of high school. He wasn't much, but he was the only thing that kept me moving, besides anticipating my spring break trip to Miami one week from tonight. I would live as high as I could that week, which would tide me over until I graduated in June and moved to Birmingham for college. It was only twenty minutes up the interstate, but at least I was getting out of this tiny town. In the meantime, I was seventeen, a boy wanted to do me on a railroad bridge in the middle of nowhere, and I knew I was alive.

For the moment.

"Stop. Shhh." I pushed Eric's shoulder to detach him from my neck.

"What is it?" Brian asked over Tiffany's giggle.

"Shhh. Hush, Tiff." I leaned against the rusty wall, out over the distant black water, which stirred in the wind and distorted the reflection of the moon. My eyes strained, searching the dark for the source of the low hum. "Do y'all hear that?"

"No," Brian said.

My heart pounded in my chest. I hated being the cautious one. I couldn't help it this time. I looked one way up the tracks, but I didn't see the terrifying headlight of a train rounding the bend. I looked the other way down the tracks. Blackness. I considered setting down my beer and putting my ear to the railroad tie to listen for vibrations, like in an old Western. "Suddenly, I am full of fear."

Eric put both arms around me and massaged my boobs, too hard. "You're just stoned," he whispered so Brian and Tiffany couldn't hear. Even in their inebriated state, they would have been truly horrified at a mention of *marijuana*.

That buzz had worn off an hour ago, or so I'd thought. But Eric must be right. I was paranoid from the pot, and now I was drunk, too.

None of that explained the low hum in my ears.

The clearing at the end of the bridge exploded with the blue lights of the police.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Marina Rutt:

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