

Define Normal

Julie Ann Peters

The BMW pulled up to the curb fifteen minutes later. I felt betrayed. When Jazz got out to let me in up front, I snarled at her, "I didn't mean your mother."

Jazz glared at me. "My Corvette's in the shop."

"So, where are we off to?" Mrs. Luther asked cheerfully

I slid in and gave her the address I'd copied from the phone book. As we headed toward the highway, my breath got shorter and shorter. My whole body shook. Even though the heater was blasting, I pulled my jacket tight around me.

Mrs. Luther chattered at me over the CD player. After a while, after I didn't answer her a couple of times, I guess she gave up. Jazz just stared at me from the backseat. I could feel her eyes drilling black holes in my head.

My stomach felt queasy. If that lobster dinner hadn't cost forty dollars, I would've upchucked on the leather seat. No kidding. What was going to happen when we got to the hotel? Discovery Disaster.

Everything was going to come crashing down. I bit my trembling lip. A gush of salty blood trickled over my tongue.

"And Jazz plays the piano. Did you tell Antonia about your music?"

Jazz said, "Yeah, when I introduced myself. I said, 'I'm Jazz Luther. You know, the famous pianist.'"

Her mother ignored her. "She plays beautifully. Her teacher says she has the talent to attend Juilliard. But Jasmine refuses to compete or give a public recital."

"No, I don't," Jazz said. "You won't let me."

Jazz played the piano? That got my attention. I tried to envision her at the keys, playing a recital, going to Juilhard. The image wouldn't stick.

Mrs. Luther went on, "She's going to have to act more mature if she ever plans to audition for Jui~iard."

Jazz clucked. "Who says I do?"

Listening to them bicker was better than the war raging inside my head.

The flickering neon sign was exactly as Michael had described it The A and Y were burned out. It wasn't a hotel, though. Just a rundown, sleazy motel off the highway ramp. I'd forgotten to ask Michael what room. It didn't matter. He was huddling outside one of the red doors.

I took a deep breath. "You can just pull in over there." I pointed. "By that kid."