

ROBIN
JONES
GUNN



Only You,
Sierra

BOOK 1 IN THE

SIERRA
JENSEN

SERIES



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one



SIERRA JENSEN GAZED out the train window at the cold, wet English countryside. In an hour she and her friends would be back at Carnforth Hall with the other ministry teams that had spent the past week in various European countries. She wedged her hands between her crossed legs, trying to warm them against her jeans. Endless pastures, frosted with winter's ice, flashed past her window. Sierra let out a sigh.

“What are you thinking?” Katie asked, uncurling from her comfy position on the train seat next to Sierra. Katie's red hair swished as she tilted her head to make eye contact with Sierra. Even though Katie was two years older than Sierra and they had met only two weeks ago, they had become close during the week they had just spent together in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

“About going back to the States,” Sierra said. Her silver, dangling earrings chimed as she turned to Katie and smiled her wide, easy smile, but she was really looking past Katie. In the seat across the aisle from them, their team leader,

Doug, was sitting next to his girlfriend, Tracy.

“This whole trip went too fast.” Katie folded her arms and settled back against the upholstered seat. “I’m not ready to go home yet.”

“I know,” Sierra agreed. “Me neither.” She noticed that Doug was now slipping his arm across the back of the seat. Tracy slid closer to him.

“I’d like to come back,” Katie said. “Maybe next summer.”

“Me too,” Sierra said, watching Tracy snuggle up to Doug.

“It would be great if our whole team could be together again for another trip.”

“Me too,” Sierra said. Tracy was tilting her heart-shaped face toward Doug’s, giving him a delicate smile that, by the look on his face, was melting him to the core.

“What do you mean, ‘me too’? Of course you would be on the team.” Katie looked over her shoulder to see what had distracted Sierra. Turning back to Sierra, Katie leaned forward and quietly said, “Don’t they just make you sick?”

“Katie,” Sierra said in a hushed voice, “I thought you guys were all best friends and had been for years—you, Doug, Tracy, and Christy. Why would it make you sick to see those two together?”

“We’re all best friends. It’s just...well, look at them! They’re totally in love.”

“I know,” Sierra said, casting another quick glance at the couple who were now talking softly and looking deeply into each other’s eyes. “I can’t imagine ever being in Tracy’s place and having a guy look at me like that.”

“Are you kidding?” Katie pulled back and let her bright

green eyes do a quick head-to-toe scan of Sierra. “Have you ever looked in a mirror, girl? First, you have the hair going for you. You have great hair! Wild, blond, curly. Very exotic.”

“Haven’t you noticed?” Sierra said, tugging at a curly loop of her long hair. “Straight, sleek hair happens to be in right now.”

“Oh sure, this week. Wait a few days. Everyone will be running out for perms so they can look just like you. And your smile happens to be award-winning, in case you didn’t know. Blue-gray eyes that change with the weather are also quite popular. A few freckles. That’s good. Fantastic clothes, all very original. And I don’t ever want to hear you complain about your body.”

“What body? I’m shaped like a tomboy.”

“Better to be shaped like a tomboy than a fullback.”

“You’re not shaped like a fullback,” Sierra protested.

“Okay, a halfback.”

“You’re both beautiful,” Stephen, the German guy on their team, inserted into the conversation. He was sitting directly across from them and had appeared to be sleeping.

Sierra felt her cheeks blush, realizing Stephen had overheard their conversation. He was the oldest one of their group, and his beard added to his older appearance.

“Why do women find it a sport to criticize themselves to their friends?” Stephen asked, leaning forward and taking on the tone of a counselor. “You both are gorgeous young women on the outside and fantastically beautiful here,” he patted his heart, “where it really counts.”

“Then you tell us why all the guys aren’t falling at our feet,” Katie challenged.

“Is that what you want?” Stephen asked, and in an uncharacteristic move, tumbled to the floor and bowed at their feet.

Sierra burst out laughing.

“Get out of here!” Katie said. “You’re making this a joke, and I’m serious.”

Stephen returned to his seat, a satisfied little grin across his usually serious face.

“You’re a guy; tell us what you’re attracted to in a girl,” Katie said.

Stephen took a quick look at Tracy and then back at Sierra and Katie. “Well,” he began, but it was too late. His unspoken message seemed clear.

Katie threw her hands up in the air. “I knew it! You don’t have to say anything. You men are all alike! You all *say* it’s the personality and what’s on the inside that counts. But the truth is your first choice every time is the Tracy-type, the sweet, helpful, cute ones. Admit it! There’s little hope in this world for the few individualists like Sierra and me.”

“On the contrary. You’re both very attractive. To the right man, you will be a treasure. You just need to wait on God.”

“I know, I know,” Katie said. “And until then, we have our own little club, don’t we, Sierra?”

Sierra remembered when she and Katie had formed the Pals Only Club at the beginning of their trip. She slapped Katie a high five and said, “P.O. forever!”

“That’s right,” Katie said. “We may have lost Tracy, but it’s you, me, and Christy from here on out.”

“You women do not need a little club,” Stephen said. “Perhaps a caveman with a big club might be helpful...”

Instead of laughing at his joke, the girls gave Stephen a tandem groan and twisted their expressions into unappreciative scowls. He folded his arms against his chest, closed his eyes, and pretended to go back to sleep. But a crooked grin was on his lips.

“Come on,” Katie said. “Let’s get something to drink.”

Sierra followed her down the rocking aisle that led to the back of the train car. They passed through the sliding doors and headed for the compact snack bar at the end of the next car. After buying Cokes, they stood to the side by the closed windows.

“Guys like Stephen really bug me,” Katie said. “First they’re all sweet and full of compliments, and then they make stupid jokes. You never know if they’re serious about all the nice stuff or not.”

“I think he meant it,” Sierra said, shifting her weight from one foot to another. She was wearing her favorite old cowboy boots that she had worn for most of the trip. They were actually her dad’s old leather boots. Very authentic. She had found them in the garage last summer when they were cleaning out stuff for a garage sale. Her mom had wanted to sell them and said, “I can’t believe we still have these old boots! Howard wore them on our first date.”

That’s when Sierra knew they couldn’t be cast off to some stranger at a garage sale. She tried them on, and to her amazement, they fit. She had worn them constantly ever since, much to her mother’s dismay.

“Enough talk about guys,” Katie said. “Let’s talk about something else.”

“It’ll be great to see all the other teams tonight and hear about everything that happened to them.”

“Yeah.” Katie agreed. “I can’t wait to hear about Christy’s week in Spain.”

“I still can’t believe they pulled her off our team at the last minute and sent her all the way to Spain after the rest of the Spanish team had already left. I don’t think I could have done what she did, traveling all by herself for two days and then joining up with a team of people she barely knew.”

“It’s like I kept saying,” Katie said, making a muscleman pose. “She is Missionary Woman.”

Sierra smiled. “I felt as if I was just getting closer to her, and then they shipped her off on a moment’s notice. It must have been even harder for you to see her leave like that, since you guys have been best friends for so long.”

“I’m sure it was a God-thing.” Katie finished her drink and tossed her can into the bin marked “rubbish” as if she were shooting a basketball into a hoop. She made the shot and with two fingers gave herself a score of “two points” in the air.

Sierra finished her Coke and aimed her can at the rubbish bin. Her shot banked off the side. When she scooped it up, Katie said, “Try it again.” Sierra did. This time she made it.

“All right!” Katie said, slapping a low five behind her back. “We’re unstoppable.”

Sierra thought about how much had happened during their week of ministry at the church in Belfast. Sierra and Katie had worked with the children, performed in a drama group, gone out street witnessing, prayed with teenagers when they said they wanted to give their lives to God, and had visited some elderly women of the church who treated them to tea and cakes. It had been a life-changing experience

for Sierra, and she was glad Katie had buddied up with her.

“You know,” Katie said, as they headed back to their seats, “I’m sure God had a reason for taking Christy off our team. If nothing else, it let me get to know you, and I’m really glad for that.”

“I am too,” said Sierra. “I’m just starting to feel depressed now that it’s almost over.”

“Not so fast! We have two more days before we have to leave,” Katie pointed out.

“Next stop is ours,” Stephen said when they reached their seats. “Hey, Doug, we’re almost there. Next stop.”

Sierra watched as Tracy uncurled herself from Doug’s shoulder and Doug resumed his role as team leader. He was a great guy. Sierra admired him, especially after all they had experienced together as a team this past week. She could easily see Doug and Tracy married and working together in ministry.

The group members gathered their belongings, as they had done dozens of times during their travels, and helped with each other’s luggage. It was a familiar routine.

Sierra fought off the sadness that crept in when she realized the next time she boarded a train in England it would be to go home. Something caught in her throat every time she thought about returning to the States.

She hadn’t been able to talk about it to Katie or anyone else. Maybe she should. Whenever she mentioned her situation, it had been with her usually cheerful, adventuresome spirit. No one knew that deep down she was nervous, knowing that everything in her life was going to be different when she returned home.

While Sierra was in England, her family had moved.

Instead of flying back to the small mountain community in northern California where she had spent her life, she was flying to Portland, Oregon, her new home.

The train came to a stop, and the group shuffled off and made its way through the station and then out to the small parking lot in front. A van was waiting for them in the late afternoon drizzle. They climbed in like a bunch of robots, all so accustomed to travel and so tired from their latest adventure.

Sierra sat in the back next to the window, curling and uncurling her cold toes inside the leather cowboy boots. She still had two more days in England, two more days to think through all the changes that were about to take place in her life. She wasn't ready for any of it. The nervousness about the move bothered her. Sierra had always been the bold, free-spirited type. But then, her whole foundation of home and family had never been rocked before.

Tracy slid into the van and plopped down next to Sierra. Doug sat in the front and patted the driver on the shoulder, thanking him for the ride.

Tracy said, "I can't wait to see Christy! I hope she had a good time in Spain."

Sierra smiled and nodded in agreement. She couldn't help but like Tracy. Everyone did. And of course Sierra was happy for Tracy that she and Doug had gotten together on the trip. Still, something made Sierra feel a little hurt and left out. Maybe it was jealousy that Tracy was getting one of the few truly wonderful guys left in the world.

The van wound around the narrow streets through the small town and then hit the country road leading to Carnforth Hall. The scenery looked exactly as it had a week

ago when they left, with the exception of a few wild, purple crocuses popping up through patches of thawed earth. Sierra decided that if any more guys like Doug existed in this world, they certainly weren't in Pineville, Sierra's old hometown. And they certainly weren't on this trip.

"Tracy, by any chance does Doug have any brothers?"

"Does Doug have any brothers?" Tracy repeated with a skeptical look. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, no reason. Never mind."

The van stopped in the gravel driveway at the front of an old castle, Carnforth Hall. Standing in front of the huge wooden doors was a tall brunette under an open umbrella. She waved wildly at their van.

"It's Christy!" Katie shouted, standing up in the back of the van and pounding on the closed window. "Hey, Missionary Woman!"

Sierra watched as Christy struck a muscle-bound pose with her right arm. Something on her wrist caught the glow of the amber porch light and sparkled brightly.



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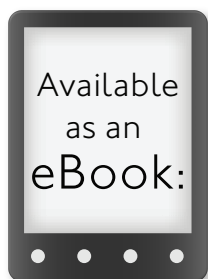
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