

Christy  
Miller



DEPARTURES

Two Rediscovered Stories by Robin Jones Gunn

SIERRA  
JENSEN





Christy  
Miller

DEPARTURES  
*Two Rediscovered Stories by Robin Jones Gunn*

SIERRA  
JENSEN



MULTNOMAH  
BOOKS

DEPARTURES

PUBLISHED BY MULTNOMAH BOOKS

12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200

Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

In *Now Boarding at Gate 10*, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved. In *In the Event of a Water Landing*, all Scripture quotations or paraphrases are taken from the New American Standard Bible®. © Copyright The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995. Used by permission. ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org)).

The characters and events in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to actual persons or events is coincidental.

ISBN 978-1-60142-346-7

ISBN 978-1-60142-347-4 (electronic)

Copyright © 1999, 2011 by Robin Jones Gunn

*Now Boarding at Gate 10* and *In the Event of a Water Landing* copyright © 1999 by Robin Jones Gunn

**[cover copyright info to come]**

Published in association with the literary agency of Janet Kobobel Grant, Books & Such, 5926 Sunhawk Drive, Santa Rosa, CA 95409.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House Inc., New York.

MULTNOMAH and its mountain colophon are registered trademarks of Random House Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Departures : [two books in one].

p. cm.

Summary: A collection of stories which feature Christy Miller and Sierra Jensen gaining new understandings about faith and themselves during trips to various destinations.

ISBN 978-1-60142-346-7

1. Christian life—Juvenile fiction. 2. Children's stories, American. 1. Christian life—Fiction. 2. Short stories. I. Gunn, Robin Jones, 1955— *Now boarding at gate 10* II. Gunn, Robin Jones, 1955— *In the event of a water landing*.

PZ5.D45 1999 99—6738

[Fic]—dc21 CIP

Printed in the United States of America

2011—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To my parents,  
who left Baraboo and the dairy farm  
to move to California when I was five.  
May your memories of summer picnics  
fifty years ago at the Dells  
be as bright as a sky full of fireworks  
on the Fourth of July.*

*And to Tammi Scheetz,  
with fun memories of when  
we rode the Ferris wheel at Nickelodeon Universe  
and searched the Minneapolis–St. Paul International Airport  
for cinnamon rolls so we could share a Sierra moment.*

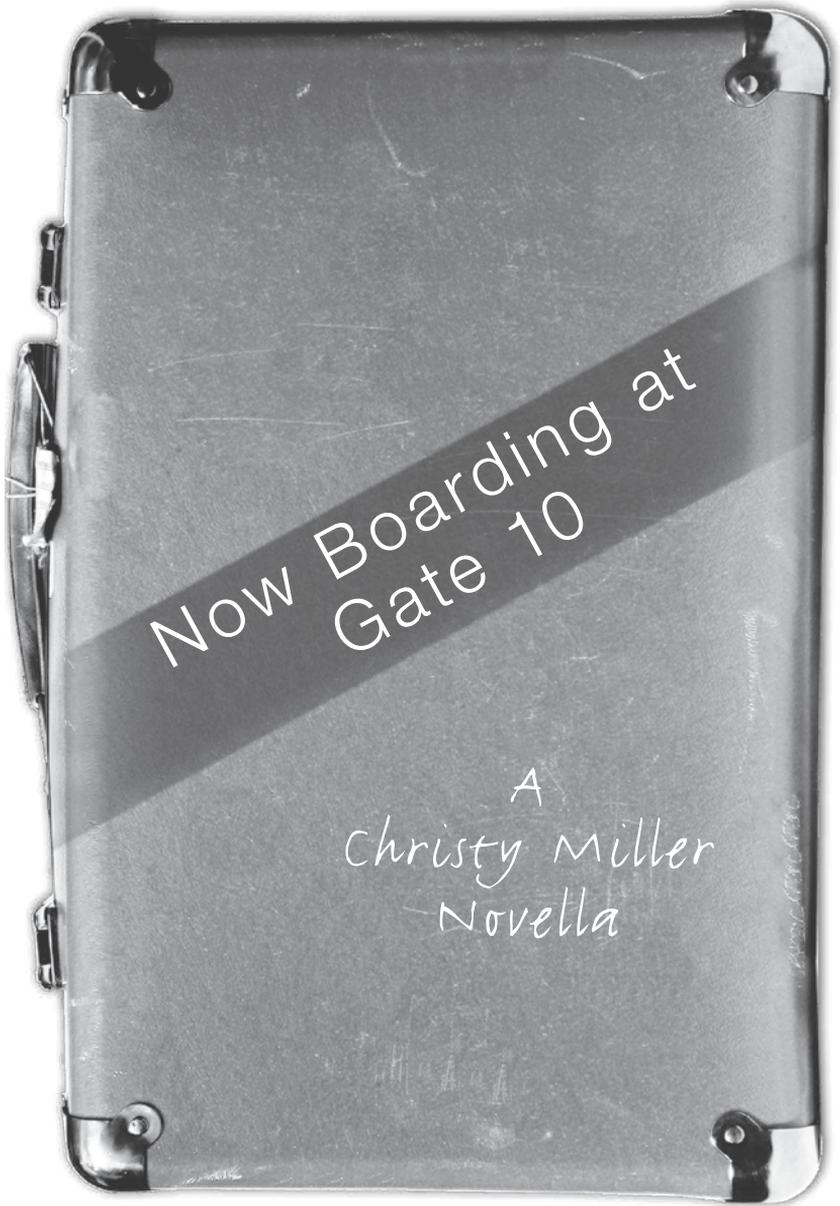
# CONTENTS



Now Boarding at Gate 10 . . . 1



In the Event of a Water Landing . . . 97



Now Boarding at  
Gate 10

A  
Christy Miller  
Novella



As beads of perspiration dripped down her back, Christy Miller lifted her long, nutmeg brown hair to try to get some air on her neck. She didn't know why her parents had dashed so quickly off the plane when it landed at the Minneapolis–St. Paul International Airport. They had more than an hour before their connecting flight left for Madison, Wisconsin.

“Would it be okay if I went to the snack bar for something to drink?” Christy asked her dad.

“Sure,” Dad said, reaching into his pocket for some money. “Buy something for your mother and me—and take your brother with you.”

Christy tried to hide her lack of enthusiasm over thirteen-year-old David's tagging along. This was the first vacation her family had taken in a long time, and she didn't want to be the one to start an argument.

“Can we play one of those video games?” David asked, pushing up his glasses. He was big for his age, just as Christy had been, and he resembled their red-haired father more every day.

“No. We're only getting something to drink.” Christy led her brother through a maze of small round tables. The two of them were almost to the counter when David tripped over a girl's foot that was

sticking out from under a table. She was wearing large clunky boots and had her dark hair up in a clip. David stumbled and bumped into her chair, causing the girl's backpack, which had been slung over the chair's back, to fall to the floor.

"Sorry," Christy said, apologizing for her brother and urging him to move on quickly.

The girl and her friend, who was sitting next to her, were probably a year or two younger than Christy was, yet they appeared to be traveling by themselves. At that moment Christy wished she were traveling with her best friend, Katie. A summer adventure would be so much more fun with a friend than with her family.

When Christy had graduated from high school two weeks ago, several classmates went on senior trips to exotic locations like Mexico and Hawaii. This was Christy's exotic trip—a family weekend in Brightwater, Wisconsin, population 832.

Two days ago Katie had told Christy, "You shouldn't complain. At least you're going *somewhere*—unlike *some* people we know." Katie then had flopped onto her bed and let out a sigh. "If you come home on Monday and find me here, in this same position, call the Guinness Book of World Records."

Even though Christy knew better, she asked why.

"Because I will be the first person in history who will have died from boredom."

Christy had argued that her grandparents' fiftieth wedding anniversary in Brightwater, the town Christy had grown up in, would be twice as boring, but Katie didn't buy it. She reminded Christy that more than once mystery, romance, and adventure had found her when she had least expected it.

Then Katie had lifted her head and added, “And don’t forget. You happen to be very available at the moment.”

Yes, Christy thought while handing David his drink, *this would have been a much more exciting trip with Katie along*. Christy directed her brother to a nearby exit she had spotted where he would have less human traffic to navigate through. With each of them holding two full drinks, Christy knew the chances of disaster with David were pretty high.

They had just made it through the café when Christy caught sight of a flash of sandy blond hair that looked so familiar. She held her breath and watched a guy enter the bookshop next to the café.

“David,” Christy said, “stay right beside me. I want to check on something in that bookstore.”

“That’s not fair. You wouldn’t let me play video games.”

Christy’s heart pounded wildly as she caught another glimpse of the broad shoulders and a tan neck. He wore a white T-shirt with a familiar surfing logo on the back.

“Hurry up, David,” Christy said, walking faster.

“Where are we going?”

Christy couldn’t answer her brother. She was too absorbed in not screaming out “Todd!” at the top of her voice and running to the guy who was now standing with his back to her, looking at a magazine.

With cautious steps and protecting the drinks she held, Christy blinked away sudden tears from her blue-green eyes. She now stood only a few feet from the person who had held a special place in her heart. Only two months ago, as they watched the sunset at the beach, Christy had said good-bye to Todd. She never dreamed she would be saying hello to him so soon.

“Hello,” she said aloud before she had a chance to think of a better greeting.

When he didn’t turn around, she stepped closer, her heart pounding loudly in her ears, and said, “Hi.”

“Christy?” David said. “What are you doing? Who are you talking to?”

The guy turned to face both of them, and Christy nearly dropped her drinks. This guy, who stood only inches from her, was definitely not Todd Spencer. He was good-looking, but he wasn’t Todd.

“Oh, sorry,” Christy mumbled. She turned before her crimson cheeks painted her whole face a bright red.

“What were you doing?” David asked, following her fast stride out of the bookstore. “Who did you think that was?”

Christy ignored David, trying to calm her emotions. How could she have made such a fool of herself?

“Did you think he was someone you knew?” David asked, trotting to keep up with Christy.

“Yes,” she answered. “From the back, he kind of looked like Todd.”

“Todd?! He didn’t look like Todd at all. You should have asked me before you went up to him. I could have told you it wasn’t Todd.”

Christy was about to turn and tell David to just drop the whole thing, when a voice over the loudspeaker announced, “Flight 73 to Madison, Wisconsin, is now boarding at gate 10.”

“Come on, David, that’s us.” Christy strode through the terminal, leading the way to gate 10. When they entered the waiting area, their parents were anxiously looking for them.

“Where have you been?” Mom asked, taking her drink from Christy.

“Christy thought she saw Todd,” David announced for the whole world to hear. “She followed this guy into a bookstore and started to talk to him.”

“David!” Christy scolded.

“Well, you did.”

Christy grabbed her backpack and started for the line of passengers boarding the plane. Mom stopped her. “We have to wait. They’re only boarding rows 15 and higher. We’re row 14.”

David tugged on the strap of Christy’s backpack and said, “Hey, look! There he is.”

The guy from the bookstore had entered their waiting area and stood in line to board the same plane. Christy tucked her chin and turned her head so he wouldn’t see her.

“He doesn’t look at all like Todd, does he?” David said.

“David, lower your voice!” Christy pleaded.

“Come on,” Dad said. “They just called our row.”

Christy slowly followed as her family stood in line. The guy was only two people ahead of her mom.

“He’s looking at you,” David announced, punching Christy in the side.

“David,” Christy threatened through clenched teeth. “Don’t you dare say another word. I mean it!”

David pretended to lock his lips with an invisible key. He stood with his shoulders back, playing the role of the model child. Christy moved along behind him with her head down, avoiding eye contact with any of the passengers, especially the tall blond surfer who was definitely boarding the same plane.



Once her family was seated, Christy nonchalantly began to look around to see if the guy was sitting near them. Fortunately, he wasn't. She settled back and buried her nose in a magazine.

Since the flight was short, Christy didn't expect to have any more awkward encounters. She knew it was ridiculous to have thought he could be Todd. What would Todd be doing in the Midwest? Most likely he was off on some tropical island, sipping coconut juice, surfing the world's most remote beaches, and telling the natives about God. As long as Christy had known Todd, that had been his dream. And now he was living it.

She quickly tried to push her thoughts on to other things. Her mind and heart had been over this a thousand times. She had made the right choice when she broke up with Todd. She knew it. It was time for her to move on.

The Fasten Seat Belt sign came on overhead, and Mom tapped Christy's arm. "David has been in the rest room an awfully long time. Since you're in the aisle seat, would you mind checking on him?"

Checking on David was the last thing Christy wanted to do. But since Dad was napping and Mom would have to crawl over her, Christy reluctantly unfastened her seat belt and made her way to the

rest room. Of the two doors, only one had the Occupied sign up, indicating that someone was in it.

Christy self-consciously looked to the right and left, hoping no one was watching. Leaning closer to the door, she said in a low voice, “Are you almost done in there?”

When she heard no answer, Christy knocked and said in a louder voice, “We’re about to land. You need to come back to your seat. You better not be playing with the soap.”

The door’s handle moved, and Christy stepped back to make room for David to come out. With her hand on her hip, she said, “What took you so long?”

When she looked up, she saw David wasn’t the person who emerged. It was the blond guy from the bookstore.

“What’s with you?” he asked, glaring at Christy.

“I thought—I didn’t... My brother was... I’m...”

Just then the door to the other bathroom opened, and David joined them in the tight area. The guy turned with a shake of his head. Christy spouted, “David, you’re supposed to lock the door.”

“I got sick, Christy,” he said, holding his stomach.

“Oh, great,” she muttered. “Do you need to go back in the bathroom or can you make it to your seat?”

“I think I can go to my seat.”

Christy ushered David down the aisle ahead of her and turned him over to Mom as soon as they reached their row. David moaned and complained, but fortunately he didn’t get sick again during the landing.

As Christy and her mom collected their luggage at baggage claim, Dad stood in line at the car rental desk. David sat on a bench looking

forlorn, with only a cold can of 7Up to keep him company. But it seemed to be good company for him, because half an hour later, as they left the airport in their dark blue rental car and drove north on Highway 12, David started to point out places he recognized.

Christy was just glad to be away from the airport and from the blond guy, who had practically run in the other direction when he saw her at baggage claim.

As they left the suburbs and traveled down the country road, Christy watched the blur of green fields against the fresh blue summer sky. Every quarter of a mile or so a weathered barn accompanied by a farmhouse would appear. Some homesteads had kids' toys in the front yard, some had gardens along the side, and some were partially hidden from the road by huge shade trees planted long ago.

Fields of cornstalks stood at attention in orderly rows. Christy knew that in a few weeks the corn would be ready, and nothing she had ever tasted was better than corn fresh-picked, boiled immediately, and smothered with butter and salt. Her mouth watered just thinking about it.

Not much seemed to have changed since Christy had last watched all this landscape roll by. She wondered if she was right in thinking that Wisconsin had stayed the same while she had changed so much.

"Can we go to our old house?" David asked.

"Maybe tomorrow," Mom answered quickly.

Christy hadn't asked that question, even though she had thought it, since seeing the farm might be a difficult memory for her parents. They'd had to sell the farm and leave family and friends behind three years ago when it became apparent they could no longer make it financially. Her dad had decided he wanted to work for someone else rather

than be his own employer. So they had moved to California, and he had found a job at Hollandale Dairy. The move had been a wise choice, even though Christy got the impression that some of their relatives still disagreed with the decision.

“Do I have to sleep on the floor at Grandma’s?” David asked.

“I’m not sure,” Mom said. “But try to make the best of it, no matter where we end up sleeping, all right?”

“Are we going to eat when we get there?” David asked.

“I don’t know,” Mom said. “I’m glad you feel like eating again. We’ll make sure you get some food as soon as we can, David.”

Dad drove nearly an hour before arriving in the small community where Christy’s grandparents had lived all their married lives, which, by tomorrow, would be fifty years. *Half a century*. The thought sobered Christy. *What a long time to live in the same place with the same person.*

Her parents’ old farm was only a ten-minute drive from her grandparents’ home in Brightwater. She watched David look at the turnoff as they passed it and kept heading straight on the country road for town.

“Our old house is down that road,” David said.

“That’s right,” Dad agreed, but that’s all he said.

They were only a few blocks inside the city limits when Christy saw the flagpoles and then the front of George Washington Elementary School.

“That’s my old school!” David announced.

“Mine too,” Christy said softly. So many memories collided at once. First days of school and Mom taking Christy’s picture every year in her back-to-school clothes. Fire drills with the students lined up on

the grass. The harvest festivals with the school transformed into a wondrous carnival of clowns, ring-toss booths, and cakewalks. She even remembered the cafeteria's aroma on pizza day and the table where she and Paula met every day for lunch.

And Christy remembered her first crush. Her heart skipped a happy beat when she silently mouthed his name: Matthew Kingsley. From third grade all the way through junior high, Christy was hopelessly gone over Matthew Kingsley.

George Washington Elementary School and Matthew Kingsley. What a rush of childhood memories were connected with those two names.

Ever since her family had moved to California, the Kingsleys had sent a family photo with their Christmas card. Every year Christy looked closely at Matthew in the photo. He was a high school graduate now, just like Christy. And he still lived in Brightwater.

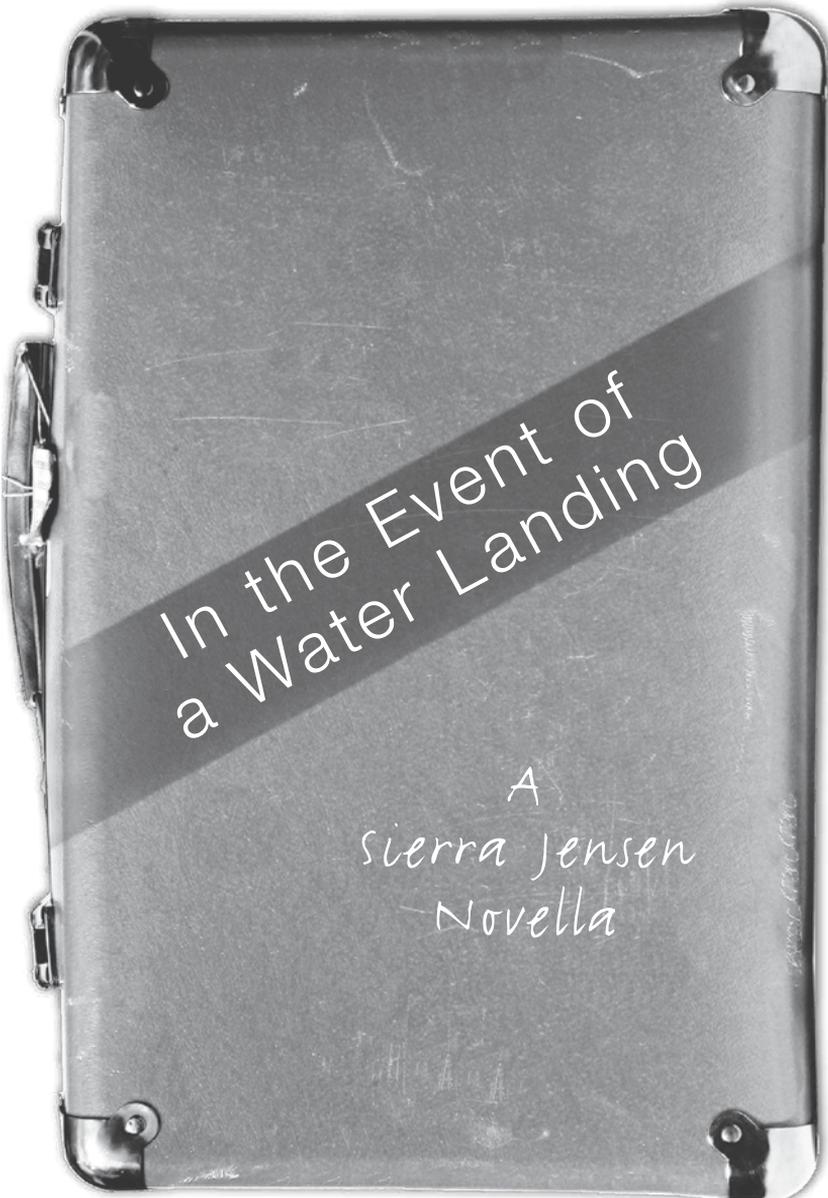
Before they drove another block, Christy had to ask, "Mom, do you think we'll see any of our old friends while we're here?"

"Yes. Who did you have in mind?"

"Oh, no one in particular." Christy couldn't bring herself to ask about Matthew Kingsley. The last thing she needed was to arm her brother with ammunition he could use all weekend to tease her. The Todd un-look-alike incident was bad enough.

No, if Christy was going to see Matthew Kingsley this weekend, it would just have to be a nice surprise. Or as Katie always said, "a God thing." And what was it that Katie had said about mystery, romance, and adventure finding Christy when she least expected it?

Christy leaned back and smiled. She was ready for anything.



In the Event of  
a Water Landing

A  
Sierra Jensen  
Novella



Sierra Jensen stuffed the last of a granola bar in her mouth and surveyed the airport waiting area that had become way too familiar during the past hour. She brushed back her long, wild blond hair and asked her friend Jana, “When do you think the guys will be back?”

“I don’t know,” Jana said, her brown eyes looking past Sierra’s shoulder for the hundredth time. “Maybe the airline they went to check on doesn’t have any openings on its flights to Montana.”

“Then what do we do?” Sierra asked.

“Don’t ask me,” Jana said. “I’ve never been the victim of an airline strike before.”

Sierra tapped her foot in time to the song that had been stuck in her head for several hours. “Why did they have to go on strike on a holiday weekend? There should be laws against that.”

This was the first time fifteen-year-old Sierra had traveled anywhere without her parents or one of her five brothers and sisters. The plan had been a simple one. Jana’s parents were driving to their family cabin on a lake near Glacier National Park to spend some time alone. A week later Jana, her older brother, Gregg, his friend Tim, and Sierra would fly up for the Fourth of July weekend.

None of them expected the connecting flight in Seattle to be

rerouted to the central terminal in Minneapolis. Now the group was on its own, trying to find a flight to Montana.

“Isn’t there a big mall in Minneapolis?” Sierra asked. “If we can’t catch a flight, we could hang out at the mall.”

Jana looked wary. Her short brown hair was tucked behind her ears and off her face, which meant her thoughts were easily read in her open expression. Jana was physically larger than Sierra and six months older. They had been friends for several years in their small northern California town of Pineville. Sierra and Jana were both top students in their class, and they both loved sports—although Jana often complained that Sierra had an unfair athletic advantage because she was thinner and faster. The friendly competition they shared was one of the foundation stones of their friendship.

Jana was the cautious one of the two, and she didn’t seem to think the mall was such a great idea. “All I know is that we’re supposed to wait here for Gregg and Tim, and when they come back, we’re supposed to call my parents to tell them what we found out.”

“Do you think it would be okay if I went to that café over there to buy something to drink?” Sierra asked. She ran her tongue over her back teeth, releasing bits of oats left over from the granola bar.

“I don’t know if you should leave,” Jana said.

“I’ll only be gone for a few minutes, and you can run over and get me if the guys come back.”

Jana looked around, as if calculating all the factors, before nodding to Sierra.

“Do you want anything?” Sierra offered.

“Lemonade, if they have it. No sugar.”

“What if the lemonade already has sugar in it?”

“That’s okay. Just don’t add any.”

“Okay. I’ll be right back.” Sierra grabbed her backpack and took off mumbling to herself, “Like I would go around slipping sugar into her lemonade!” Sierra knew it wasn’t fair to be critical of Jana’s concern over calories just because Sierra had never had to concentrate on her weight.

Walking around relaxed Sierra. She decided to make a quick detour into the bookstore next to the café. An interesting magazine might help her friend relax a little too. Who knew how long they might be stuck here.

The bookstore was small, and the space was so tight Sierra took off her backpack and balanced it at her feet. A tall, good-looking guy walked in and stood next to Sierra at the magazine rack. He had sun-bleached blond hair and was wearing a white T-shirt with a surfing logo on the back. While Sierra flipped through one of the magazines, she decided to conduct an experiment with this unsuspecting guy. She had tried this before but never with satisfying results; maybe today would be different.

The goal was to see if the guy would notice her without her trying to draw attention to herself. She felt ready to move beyond her image of a freckle-faced tomboy and to be noticed by guys the way her gorgeous older sister, Tawni, was. The tricky part was figuring out if guys thought she looked interesting enough to pay attention to her.

Sierra flipped through the magazine and tossed a subtle, sideways glance toward the guy. About two minutes into the experiment, the results were zilch.

Then Sierra heard a girl greet the guy. “Hello” was all she said.

Sierra kept her head facing the magazine while doing her best to

see what was going on out of the corner of her eye. The guy didn't respond to the teenage girl's hello.

Then Sierra heard the girl say, "Hi," in a more decisive tone. Sierra couldn't see the girl's face, but she could see that the guy had turned to look at her. When he did, the girl broke into a string of stammering words. It appeared to be a case of mistaken identity.

Sierra had to look. She turned nonchalantly toward the guy just as the girl hurried away. The tall girl had long, nutmeg brown hair, and a tagalong boy beside her was loudly giving her a hard time. The boy reminded Sierra of her two younger brothers and how they often acted around her.

She was glad that even though she was stuck at the airport, she was with her friend and not her younger brothers.

Just then the guy next to Sierra tried to move past her and said, "Excuse me."

Sierra stepped aside and kicked her backpack out of his way. *So does that mean he just noticed me? At least he was polite. I'd score this experiment as a three out of ten. Maybe a four. No, a two and a half. Yeah, a two and a half. I still have a long way to go before I catch a guy's attention—and not because I'm in his way.*

Sierra gave up on the magazine. Jana would have to come pick out what she wanted. As Sierra reached for her backpack, her bracelet caught on a thread in her skirt, and she had to stand there a minute trying to untangle it. Her mom had helped her make the skirt, but her sister thought it was dreadful, which was probably one of the reasons Sierra liked it so much. Made from a collection of her dad's old ties, the skirt was distinctive. Each of the wide ties was opened up and sewn together at the sides so that all the pointed ends came to just above her

knee. Sierra liked being unique. But more than once her bracelet had caught on the worn-through part of a blue tie on the right side.

With her bracelet released, Sierra headed for the café. She had just stepped outside the bookstore when she heard her name called from across the open area. Looking up, she saw Gregg waving from the entrance of the waiting area where she had left Jana.

Gregg had dark hair like Jana's. His eyes and eyebrows were darker than hers were and more striking so the first thing a person noticed about him were his warm eyes. Even if his mouth was serious, his eyes made him look as if he were about to start laughing.

He was four years older than Jana, just like Sierra's brother, Wesley, was four years older than she was. It was another one of the similarities Sierra and Jana shared. Sierra thought Gregg was good-looking. She liked his quick wit and casual approach to life.

Gregg's buddy Tim was more serious and, according to Jana, more intelligent than Gregg was. He appeared easygoing because he dressed in loose shorts and old, beat-up sandals. Tim's strawberry blond hair would be a lot curlier, Sierra decided, if he let it grow longer. But he kept it short and often hidden under a baseball cap, as it was right now.

"What did you find out?" Sierra asked, catching up to the two guys.

"We exchanged all four tickets at no charge," Gregg said, "but the flight leaves later tonight. We won't get to Kalispell until a little after midnight."

"Does Jana know?" Sierra asked.

"No," Gregg answered. "I happened to notice your skirt as we were going by, and since there probably weren't two of those in the airport, I figured it was you."

“There probably aren’t,” Sierra said brightly. She noted Gregg’s sarcasm, but it didn’t bother her.

“We better break the news to Jana,” Tim suggested. “It’s going to be a long day and night.”

“Unless,” Sierra said, grabbing both guys by the arm before they had a chance to walk away, “we make a little detour out of the airport. We could all pitch in for a cab and go to the mall for the day.”

“The Mall of America?” Tim asked.

Gregg’s eyes lit up. “Perfect! I like the way you think, Sierra.”

Sierra smiled. “Good. Now you get to convince Jana.”



Sierra crawled into the backseat of the cab next to Gregg. She couldn't believe the huge argument Jana and Gregg had gotten into when he told her they were going to the mall. At one point, Gregg said they would leave Jana at the airport and the three of them would go. That only made things worse. Then Sierra had told Jana to "lighten up" and "live a little," but Jana became so mad her face turned red.

Sierra hadn't realized how inflexible Jana was; this trip was turning out to reveal aspects of her that had remained hidden as long as they were safely tucked away in small-town Pineville.

Tim was the one who finally had convinced Jana to go. He had sat down next to her and had explained that the alternative would be to spend the whole day and half the night at the airport. Tim had suggested they call Jana's parents. She liked that safety precaution. After Mr. and Mrs. Hill had given their blessing, along with a handful of cautions and instructions, Jana was willing to leave the airport.

Sierra thought Jana's parents were more lenient than her parents would have been in the same situation. Although, if Sierra had been with her older brother, Wesley, she guessed her parents would have been fine with the arrangements. Wes had always been responsible, and Sierra imagined Gregg to be the same way.

Sierra considered calling her parents from the airport as the group made its plans. Her parents might appreciate knowing that she wouldn't arrive in Montana as scheduled. However, her parents had left that morning with her younger brothers to drive up to Portland to see Granna Mae. They probably were still on the road. She decided she would rather call them tomorrow, after her parents had arrived at Granna Mae's house, to let them know she was safely in Montana. Until she could make that claim, she didn't want to call.

Not until the driver dropped them off at one of the many mall entrances did Sierra realize what a gigantic place they were about to enter. Even though they had a good eight hours before they had to be back at the airport, they wouldn't be able to take in all this huge complex had to offer.

"We need a plan," Jana said. "We need a meeting place in case we get lost."

"Why don't we just all stay together?" Sierra suggested. "Then we won't have to worry."

"I don't know if the guys want to be with us the whole time," Jana said.

"Like we have a choice," Gregg said. "Don't you remember that was one of the rules Mom laid down? I'm responsible for both of you the entire time. So come on; I don't want to stand here wasting time. Let's find those rides the taxi driver told us about."

This was Sierra's idea of fun—a spontaneous detour to a mall with an amusement park. Jana looked miserable. She kept glancing to the right and then to the left, as if someone were lurking in the shadows, ready to jump out and steal her backpack.

"What are you so nervous about?" Sierra asked her.

"I'm not nervous."

"You're acting nervous. Or scared or something."

"I am not!" Jana snapped.

Sierra backed off. She fell into step with Gregg and let Jana walk with Tim.

"Don't let her get to you," Gregg said to Sierra. "She's like that whenever she's out of her comfort zone."

*I guess I haven't seen Jana out of her comfort zone very often. This may be a more challenging weekend than I thought. What if she ends up being mad at me the whole time?*

The four of them headed toward the complex's center. As they rounded the corner, a wide, open area of the mall stretched out before them. Sierra stood next to Gregg at the railing and looked down one level to survey an entire amusement park with a roller coaster, log ride, Ferris wheel, food stands, trees, and at least half a dozen other rides.

"Look at that!" Sierra exclaimed. "It's Disneyland in the middle of a mall."

"It's not Disneyland," Tim corrected her, pointing to the right. "See the sign? It's Nickelodeon Universe."

Sierra laughed. "Come on. I have my camera. Let's go take some pictures."

"I don't think so," Jana said.

"Come on," Gregg said, pulling his sister by the arm. "Lighten up and have some fun, will you?"

Jana glared at Gregg, as if to say, "You too?" She yanked her arm from his grasp and said, "Can't we get something to drink first?" Jana cast a glance to Sierra. "I never got my lemonade."

Sierra tried to brush off Jana's biting words. Sierra's sister, Tawni,

acted the same way when she was out of her comfort zone. Sierra knew it was best not to react or it would only make the conflict grow.

“Okay, food and drinks first, then the roller coaster,” Sierra suggested.

“Not food,” Jana said. “Who wants to go on a roller coaster with a full stomach?”

“You decide, then,” Gregg challenged his sister. “What’s it going to be? Ride first or food first?”

Jana reluctantly gave into the consensus and headed toward the rides. She found a drinking fountain along the way and stopped for what Sierra thought was a dramatically long drink.

But then they were off. Tim figured out the ticket machine, and they each fed money into the slot at an alarmingly fast rate and then received in return a small ticket with a credited amount encoded on a thin magnetic strip.

“So much money,” Gregg remarked, “and all we get is this!”

“What should we go on first?” Sierra asked.

Tim made the decision; they headed for the Backyardigans Swing-Along. In the center of the ride was a huge tree with individual swings hanging from the ends of the reinforced limbs. Riders sat strapped in the seats, and the tree spun them in a great circle.

The four of them stood in line, watching as the centrifugal force pushed the riders away from the base of the tree and outward in a spin. Some riders made their swings twist and buck as they spun around. Sierra noticed that most of the riders were little kids, but she didn’t care. It looked like fun.

“Come on,” Sierra said to Jana when it was their turn to ride. “This should put you in a better mood.”

Jana turned to Sierra with a hurt look and said, “And what’s wrong with my mood?”

“You’re a little grumpy, that’s all.”

“I am not!” Jana snapped.

“Are you two going to stand there and fight or get on the ride?” Gregg asked.

Sierra and Jana stared at each other as people walked past them and scrambled to grab what could be considered the best seats on the ride.

“I’m not going on this ride,” Jana announced, walking to the exit gate and leaving Sierra to stand there alone.